

**A STUDY OF INDIAN SPRING FESTIVALS**

**FROM ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL SANSKRIT TEXTS**

**A Study of Indian Spring Festivals  
From Ancient and Medieval Sanskrit Texts**

**By**

**Leona Anderson, B. Ed., B.A., M.A.**

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**Author:** Leona Anderson, B. Ed., B.A. (University of  
Calgary, Calgary), M.A. (McMaster University,  
Hamilton)

**Supervisor:** Dr. Phyllis Granoff

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis reflects an attempt to arrive at a full description of the ancient and medieval Indian Spring Festival (Vasantotsava) on the basis of descriptions found in Sanskrit texts and an analysis of the ritual activities of which this festival is composed. The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first contains a discussion of some of the problems encountered in studying the Spring Festival such as the time at which it was celebrated, differences in the manner in which it was celebrated and various sources which describe the festival. Chapter Two contains a description and analysis of the festival on the basis of five primary texts, the Ratnāvalī, the Kathāsaritsāgara, the Vikramacarita, two chapters from the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, and the Virūpākṣavasantotsavacampū. Chapter Three provides a general concluding statement pertaining to the Vasantotsava and examines Vedic precedents often cited for this festival as well as selected descriptions of modern manifestations of this festival.

The classic Ratnāvalī, written by Śrī Harṣa in the seventh century A.D. in central India, not only contains a detailed and vivid description of the Spring Festival but was written to be performed on this occasion as well. The Ratnāvalī, in its description, emphasizes the rowdiness which characterizes this festival. Participants engage in drinking, singing, and dancing as well as the ritual of powder throwing. The Ratnāvalī also gives us information regarding the ritual worship of Kāma, the Hindu god of love.



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This thesis reflects an attempt to arrive at a full description of the ancient and medieval Indian Spring Festival (Vasantotsava) on the basis of descriptions found in Sanskrit texts and an analysis of the ritual activities of which this festival is composed. The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first contains a discussion of some of the problems encountered in studying the Spring Festival such as the time at which it was celebrated, differences in the manner in which it was celebrated and various sources which describe the festival. Chapter Two contains a description and analysis of the festival on the basis of five primary texts, the Ratnāvalī, the Kathāsaritsāgara, the Vikramacarita, two chapters from the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, and the Virūpāksavasantotsavacampū. Chapter Three provides a general concluding statement pertaining to the Vasantotsava and examines Vedic precedents often cited for this festival as well as selected descriptions of modern manifestations of this festival.

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The Kathāsaritsāgara and the Virkamacarita are both collections of stories written down in North India in the eleventh century A.D. Both of these texts are significant for our discussion in that they highlight the role played by kings in the celebration of this festival. The Vikramacarita in addition gives us information on a variety of deities worshipped at this time.

Two chapters from the Bhavisya Purāna relate myths in association with this festival. The first chapter (135) contains the myth of Kāma's destruction by fire issuing from the third eye of Śiva and tells us that the Vasantotsava celebrates his revival. The second chapter (132) relates the story of the demoness Ḍhaundhā/Pūtanā/-Holākā and her destruction by fire during the Vasantosava.

Finally the Virūpākṣavasantotsavacampū is a fifteenth-century text which hails from South India. This text describes the Spring Festival as a temple festival revolving around the worship of Śiva and his consort Pārvatī. The festivities include a Car festival, a Hunt festival, and a Marriage festival.

Having arrived at a full description of the Spring Festival as it was celebrated in ancient and medieval times, Chapter Three briefly reviews some of its essential characteristics. Spring celebrations are multi-sectarian, seasonal, and fertility festivals; fire and marriage are here central motifs. This final chapter moves to a description of earlier celebrations and concludes with an outline of some modern versions of the festival of spring.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgements . . . . .	vii
Chapter One . . . . .	1
Chapter Two:	
Description of the Vasantotsava . . . . .	36
The Ratnāvalī . . . . .	39
The Kathāsaritsāgara and Vikramacarita . . . . .	145
The Kathāsaritsāgara . . . . .	149
The Vikramacarita . . . . .	165
The Bhaviṣya Purāṇa . . . . .	181
Chapter 135 . . . . .	182
Chapter 132 . . . . .	208
The Virūpākṣavasantotsavacampū . . . . .	232
Chapter Three . . . . .	256
Appendix One . . . . .	285
Bibliography . . . . .	296

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE INDIAN SPRING FESTIVAL: AN INTRODUCTION

The Indian calendar is marked by a series of festivals. Among these festivals is the Vasantotsava which is celebrated in the spring. Although this festival is not celebrated today in its original form, the Vasantotsava was a major event in ancient and medieval times. This is evidenced by the lengthy descriptions of it in Indian literature. Despite its pivotal position within the Indian religious year, however, no full length study of this festival exists. This thesis, an in depth investigation of the Vasantotsava from religious and secular Sanskrit literature, thus fills an important gap in our knowledge of ancient India.

The central focus of my study of the Vasantotsava is twofold: first to arrive at a full description of the festival on the basis of descriptions found in Sanskrit texts; and, second, to analyze the ritual activities portrayed in these diverse sources. My primary research material is drawn from a broad range of Sanskrit literature including the purāṇas and ritual texts,<sup>1</sup> folk tales, drama, poetry, and narratives in mixed prose and poetry (campūs). Generally, there are two kinds of information to be gleaned from Sanskrit texts dealing with the Spring

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<sup>1</sup>Ritual texts include those belonging to the Grhyasūtras, Śrautasūtras, Nibandhas.

Festival: first, information regarding the celebration of the festival from a popular perspective in which the majority of individuals, including the upper castes, took part; and, second, information describing the festivities from an orthodox, ritual perspective.

Ritual texts and purāṇas provide information as to what rituals are to be performed, how they are to be performed and who is to be worshipped.<sup>2</sup> These sources contain valuable information descriptive or prescriptive of rituals and procedures which are undertaken and ought to be undertaken by individuals to gain merit. These texts also contain important information regarding the mythological exploits of the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. Written in Sanskrit, they give us a picture of the Spring Festival as prescribed or accepted by the elite of the Hindu tradition, as opposed to the folk tradition.<sup>3</sup> The information from this first group of texts (ritual texts) is naturally enriched by drawing on material from the lively descriptions of this festival in popular literature. One such text is the Kathāsaritsāgara<sup>4</sup> which is a collection of stories written in the eleventh century A.D. Although the Kathāsaritsāgara is a relatively late compilation it contains

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<sup>2</sup> Although purāṇas often contain idiosyncratic material they do give us information regarding orthodox ritual prescriptions and they often form the basis of orthodox ritual manuals (Nibandhas).

<sup>3</sup> Although the purāṇas clearly preserve popular rituals, they do so in a form filtered through the orthodox perspective.

<sup>4</sup> Somadeva, Kathāsaritsāgara, ed. Pandit Durgaprasad and K.P. Parab (Bombay: NSP, 1899) and Somadeva, Kathāsaritsāgara or The Ocean of the Streams of Story, trans. C.H. Tawney (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1880).

stories dating back to very early times.<sup>5</sup> Another such text is the Vikramacarita<sup>6</sup> or the Simhāsanadvātrīṃsika. This is a collection of thirty-two tales in praise of Vikramāditya. It is alleged to have been discovered by Bhoja of Dhāra in the eleventh century and was probably written for or under him.<sup>7</sup> These texts often provide information as to popular rites which were not necessarily codified in the purāṇic literature. Thus, the initial examination of descriptions of the Vasantotsava, will make use of both ritual and non-ritual texts. Having revealed a general picture of the festival I shall bring this picture into focus, first by analyzing the various elements of which this festival is composed and, second, by examining some of the major themes which the festival embodies. Since many modern spring festivals still performed in India may ultimately have their source in these more ancient festivals, this study may provide the background through which modern spring festivals may be more readily understood. The modern

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<sup>5</sup>M. Krishnamachariar, History of Classical Sanskrit Literature, (3rd ed.; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974), pp. 419-20.

<sup>6</sup>Vikrama's Adventures (Thirty-Two Tales of the Throne), ed. and trans. F. Edgerton (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926).

<sup>7</sup>There are various versions of this text attributed to Kālidāsa, Rāmacandra, Śiva, and the Jain, Śiva Siddhasena Divākara Ksemankara. The Jain version is the latest and dates to the fourteenth century (Krishnamachariar, pp. 428-9). Vikrama's adventures are also the subject of a variety of other works including the Viracarita of Ananta, the Vikramodaya, etc. (A Berriedale Keith, A History of Sanskrit Literature [Indian ed.; Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1973] pp. 191-3.)

Holī festival is, in fact, one of the few spring festivals described in ancient and medieval texts to survive into modern times.<sup>8</sup>

This initial chapter deals with some of the problems involved in such a study, including such questions as a preliminary determination of when exactly the festival was to take place, and defining the geographical area in which it was popular. Chapter Two contains a detailed description of the Vasantotsava drawn from a wide variety of texts and an analysis of the particular elements involved in the festival as they appear in the descriptions. The discussion here, centres on the role of mythological figures such as Kāma, Śiva, Kṛṣṇa, and the demoness Dhaundhā; the central role played by kings, women, and children in the celebrations; and an analysis of the activities which make up the festival, such as lighting a bonfire and circling it, swinging, and throwing colored powder. Finally, Chapter Three examines themes which recur throughout descriptions of this festival. Here fertility, seasonality, and marriage motifs are discussed. This concluding section also examines various parallels with modern-day festivals.

### The Date of the Vasantotsava

Although it is clear that the Vasantotsava was the major Spring Festival in classical India, texts describing it are not unanimous as to

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<sup>8</sup>See Appendix One for a description of some other modern spring festivals.



precisely when in the spring season it was to be celebrated. Nor are they consistent in their descriptions of what actually occurred. Confusion is due, in part, to the number of similar festivals which appear to cluster around the vernal equinox. The texts themselves sometimes refer to a Vasantotsava without sufficient specificity. This is particularly true when the focus of a text is not festivals as such, that is, when a festival is merely mentioned in the context of some other event in a story. In these cases, rarely is a date mentioned even though the name of the festival and a description of it may occur.

Another difficulty which arises is with regard to the Indian calendar. There is more than one Indian calendar and more than one way of indicating time with those calendars.<sup>9</sup> One very common way of calculating time used in ancient India is the lunar calendar. The lunar calendar is used in all parts of India and lunar months are the primary reference for Hindu religious festivals.<sup>10</sup> For our purposes (i.e., seasonal festivals) the lunar calendar is a very awkward instrument for measuring time. The reason for this is that it is the sun's movement, not the moon's, which determines the succession of the seasons and the Vasantotsava is first and foremost a Spring Festival. The twelve-month

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<sup>9</sup>Sukhamay Sarkar in his article "The Hindu New Year's Day", Hinduism, LXXXIX (1980), describes three ways of measuring time in India: the solar, lunar, and sidereal methods. He maintains that all three methods are found to be adopted in some form or other in different provinces of ancient India (p. 14). See also G. Welbon and G. Yocum, Religious Festivals in South India and Śrī Laṅkā (Delhi: Manohar, 1982), p. 6.

<sup>10</sup>K. Merrey, "The Hindu Calendar", in G. Welbon and G. Yocum, ed., Religious Festivals in South India and Śrī Laṅkā, p. 1.

solar year lasts  $365\frac{1}{4}$  days while each lunar month is made up of thirty days or two fortnights. Each fortnight includes fifteen lunar phases (tithis). The fifteenth tithi of the bright fortnight (the period between the new moon and the full moon) is the full moon and the fifteenth tithi of the dark fortnight (the period between the full moon and the new moon), the new moon.<sup>11</sup> The twelve-month lunar calendar is thus shorter than the twelve-month solar calendar while the thirteen-month lunar calendar is longer. Hence some confusion arises in the dating of the festival. Each lunar month in the twelve-month lunar calendar<sup>12</sup> falls behind in the twelve-month solar year and over a period of time, passes through all the seasons. Thus if the lunar calendar alone is employed, it is conceivable that the Spring Festival could fall at any month during the year. Again, despite the obvious point of reference that the Spring Festival is located in spring and not in any other season, the calculation of when exactly spring begins according to the lunar calendar itself allows for some variation. Indians have long recognized the need to synchronize the shorter lunar year with the longer solar one. In this regard at least two complex and detailed systems have been described.<sup>13</sup> Concerning lunar calculations, E.J.

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<sup>11</sup>Merrey, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup>Pāṇini describes the year as comprising six seasons each of two months' duration (hence, a twelve month period). V.S. Agrawala, India As Known to Pāṇini (A Study of the Cultural Material in the Aṣṭadhyayi) (Lucknow: University of Lucknow Press, 1953), p. 179.

<sup>13</sup>The two systems are described in the Kālatattva Vivecana and the Brahmā Siddhānta. See R. Sewell and S.B. Dīkshīt, The Indian Calendar, p. 27, cited by Merrey, p. 4.

Bickerman in Chronology of the Ancient World suggests that in using ancient dating systems one must take into account the possibility that the beginning of the year was not standardized but left to local choice.<sup>14</sup> In the case of India this is misleading; Indian calendric calculations tend to be precise; there is no choice, the exact date for Indian festivals is determined by local tradition. Hence although there may be some variation regarding when the Spring Festival was to be celebrated in a pan-Indian sense, little variation was possible regionally.<sup>15</sup>

An additional difficulty with the lunar calendar is the variety of possible ways of calculating each lunar month. A lunar month may be calculated between new moons or it may be calculated a fortnight later between full moons. A calendar which begins with the new moon is prevalent in South India, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Nepal. This is known as the amānta system.<sup>16</sup> A calendar which begins with the full moon is prevalent in North India and Telangana. This is called the pūrṇimānta system.<sup>17</sup> Hence the two systems share the same month's

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<sup>14</sup>E.J. Bickerman, Chronology of the Ancient World (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 89.

<sup>15</sup>Even given this possibility of variation, Merrey remarks that festivals in India were celebrated more or less synchronously. (p. 7).

<sup>16</sup>M.M. Underhill, The Hindu Religious Year (Calcutta: Association Press, 1921), p. 22.

<sup>17</sup>K. Merrey, "The Hindu Festival Calendar", in G. Welbon and G. Yocum, ed., Religious Festivals in South India and Śrī Laṅkā, p. 2; and P.V. Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra, 5 vols. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1930-62), V 5, pt. 1, p. 641.

name only during the bright fortnight (śukla pakṣa). During the dark fortnight (kṛṣṇa pakṣa), the pūrṇimānta system is one fortnight in advance of the amānta system.<sup>18</sup>

To return to the Vasantotsava. The time period which is of importance for this festival is the end of the lunar month of Phālguna (February-March) and the month of Caitra (March-April). It is during this period that the vernal equinox occurs. This marks the advent of spring and hence the occasion of the Vasantotsava.

According to modern folk usage as described by Lawrence Babb in The Divine Hierarchy the vernal equinox in Chhattisgarhi in North India falls on the first day of the light half of Caitra (i.e., the day of the new moon, March/April).<sup>19</sup> This day officially begins the lunar year. Considering that the months are usually calculated in North India according to the pūrṇimānta system beginning with the day after the full moon day, the first day of the year then, according to Babb, begins on the fifteenth day of Caitra (the new moon day, March/April). Hence:

month	days	description	event
Phālguna	1-15	dark half	new moon (15)
	16-30	bright half	full moon (30)
Caitra	1-15	dark half	new moon (15)
	16-30	bright half	full moon (30)

<sup>18</sup>Merrey, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup>Lawrence Babb, The Divine Hierarchy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), p. 124.

Textual scholars have noted however that the Vasantotsava was to be celebrated not on the fifteenth day of Caitra as Babb suggests, but on the full moon day of Caitra (i.e., the last day of Caitra).<sup>20</sup> For example, Chattopadhyaya, who makes this assertion, bases his analysis on the Kathāsaritsāgara which originates in North India. Hence one may assume that the same system of calculation (pūrṇimānta) should also have been in effect. This date, however, is two weeks after the vernal equinox as calculated by Babb, using the pūrṇimānta system.

Let us examine the primary textual material on this question. One text in the Tantric tradition and dating to medieval times, the Nityotsava,<sup>21</sup> confirms that the Vasantotsava is to be celebrated on the full moon day. Hence:

Caitrapūrṇimākṛtyam asyāmeva pūrṇimāyām Vasantotsavo 'pi vihitah

(The Vasantotsava is also to be performed on the full moon day of Caitra [It is a festival of the full moon of Caitra].)

The primary texts suggest at least one other date for the celebration of this festival. The Vasantotsavanirṇaya is a medieval text devoted almost entirely to the question of when the Vasantotsava is to be celebrated and is hence of great importance to our study. According to

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<sup>20</sup>See, for example, Aparna Chattopadhyaya, "Spring Festival and Festival of Indra in the Kathāsaritsāgara", in Journal of the Baroda Oriental Institute, XVII (Dec. 1967), part 2, 137-41.

<sup>21</sup>Umānandanātha, Nityotsava, ed. A. Mahadeva Śastri (Baroda: GOS, 1948), 108.7.

both this text and the Varsakṛtyadīpakā the celebration is to occur on the first day of the dark half of Caitra (the day after the full moon in Phālguna and the first day of Caitra).<sup>22</sup> The Vasantotsavanirnaya reads as follows:

Caitrakṛṣṇapratipadi vasantotsavaḥ: s̄a caudayikī grāhyā  
pravṛtte madhumāse tu pratipadyudite ravāu/

(The Vasantotsava is to be celebrated on the first day of the dark half of Caitra: specifically, when the sun rises. As it is said, on the first day in the month of Madhu [Caitra, spring] when the sun first comes up at the new fortnight.)

The Varsakṛtyadīpakā<sup>23</sup> reads exactly the same. It thus identifies the date of the Vasantotsava as the first day of the dark half of Caitra or the day after the full moon in Phālguna.

In addition, other methods of calculating the festival date are often employed. One such method is the solar year which is calculated with reference to fixed stars (the sidereal year).<sup>24</sup> Such a calculation seems to be employed by another text, this time in the Tantric tradition belonging to the Pañcaratra sect, the Paremeśvarasaṁhitā.<sup>25</sup> It tells us

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<sup>22</sup>Vasantotsavanirnaya, (np.,nd.), p.1f and Nityananda, Varsakṛtyadīpakā (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, Kashi Sanskrit Series #96, 1967), p. 117.

<sup>23</sup>Varsakṛtyadīpakā, (A Treatise on the Hindu Rites during the Year), Kashi Sanskrit Series 96 (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, 1967), p. 117.

<sup>24</sup>Merry, p. 2

<sup>25</sup>Śrīgovindācārya, Paremeśvara Saṁhitā (1953), 17.564-6.

the Vasantotsava should be performed in the month of Caitra when the punarvasu stars are present. Hence:

Caitre māsi punarvasvoh/  
vasantotsavam ācaret/

(The Vasantotsava should be performed in the month of Caitra on the occasion of the punarvasu star)

Now these stars belong to the fifth and seventh lunar mansions and are usually associated with Viṣṇu or Śiva.<sup>26</sup> We may surmise, as the text is Vaiṣṇavite, that Viṣṇu is the deity. When the punarvasu star occurs in the month of Caitra, the celebration of the Vasantotsava is prescribed. The common way of synchronizing the lunar and sidereal calendar is to take the star (in this case, punarvasu) nearest after the full moon. In other words the lunar calculation gives a block of time, the sidereal calculation a precise time. Celebrating the Vasantotsava on the full moon of Caitra is not required, but it is lucky when the full moon happens to coincide with the day of the punarvasu star. The Vasantotsava, then, is celebrated in the month of Caitra on the occasion of the punarvasu star.

In addition to this information a variety of texts tell us simply that the Vasantotsava is a festival celebrating the advent of spring (vasantasamayotsava or vasantārambha[varṣa]).<sup>27</sup> Further, a large number of texts mention a festival specifically called the Vasantotsava but do not actually tell us when it is to occur. One such text is the

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<sup>26</sup>V.S. Apte, Sanskrit-English Dictionary, 3 vols. (Poona: Prasad Prakashan, 1958), II.1030.

<sup>27</sup>Varṣakṛtyadīpakā, p. 287.

eleventh-century Jain Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritamahākāvya.<sup>28</sup> This text gives us no precise date for the festival but rather seems to indicate that it is a festival which is looked forward to with eagerness, and comes but rarely.

ko 'pyavācāhi bhagavan! grhānyanugrhāna nah/  
vasantotsavavad deva! cirādasi nirīkṣitaḥ//

(Oh honored one, come to my house. It has been so long since I've seen you - as long as the Vasantotsava itself. You are welcome after such a long time, i.e., the eagerness in looking forward to the visit of a seer is like the eagerness one experiences in looking forward to the Vasantotsava.)

Texts, then, are by no means unanimous on the question of when this festival is to be performed. Some, for example the Nityotsava, say the festival is to occur on the full moon day of Caitra, whereas others like the Vasantotsavanirṇaya and the Varṣakṛtyadīpakā tell us it is to be celebrated on the first day of the dark half of Caitra.

### The Nature of the Vasantotsava: One or Many

A further difficulty which arises concerns the number of festivals which cluster around this period. Festivals which are to be celebrated at this time include the Vasantotsava, Holākā (Holī),

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<sup>28</sup> Hemachandra, Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritamahākāvya, 2 vols. (Bhāvnagar: Śrī Jaina Atmanānanda Sabha Series, 1936), VII. 1.3.253 (parvan, sarga, śloka).



Phālgunotsava, Caitrotsava, Phaggu, Madhūtsava, Madanamahotsava, Madanatrayodaśī, Anaṅgotsava, Madanadvādaśī, and Kāmotsava. The Spring Festival is called the Yatramahotsava of Madana in the Śṛṅgāramañjarīkathā, the Kāmamahotsava in the Kāvyaviveka, the festival of Madana in the Ratnāvalī and the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, and Madanatrayodaśī in the Nīlamata Purāṇa.<sup>29</sup> In the Bhāvaprakāśa it is called the Madanotsava of Vasanta.<sup>30</sup> In the Dayabhaga and the Kāthaka Grhya Sūtra it is referred to as Holī or Holākā.<sup>31</sup> According to the Deśīnamāmālā it is called simply Phaggu (Spring Festival).<sup>32</sup> In the Ratnāvalī it is also called Caitrotsava and in the Gāthāsaptaśatī<sup>33</sup> and the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa it is called Phālgunotsava and Madanamahotsava. The problem of whether or not all of these names refer to one festival could be 'solved' in a number of ways. The first way is to assume that all the other terms are in fact synonyms of the Vasantotsava and that there is only one Spring Festival. In fact this seems to be true for many of the terms in the list. Thus the

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<sup>29</sup>B. N. Sharma, Festivals of India (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1978), p.17.

<sup>30</sup>Sāradatanaya, Bhāvaprakāśa, ed. B. Bhattacharyya (Baroda: GOS, 1930), 111.99.18.

<sup>31</sup>Jīmūtavāhana, Dayabhaga, trans. H.T. Colebrooke (Calcutta: Sreenauth Banerjee and Bros., 1868) and Kāthaka Grhya Sūtra, ed. Dr. W. Caland (Lahore: Dav College, 1925), 73.1.

<sup>32</sup>Hemachandra, Deśīnamāmālā, ed. R. Pischel (Bombay: The Department of Public Instruction, 1938), VI.82.

<sup>33</sup>Hāla, Gāthāsaptaśatī, ed., intro., trans. R. Basac (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1971), 4.69.

Kamotsava, Anaṅgotsava, Madanamahotsava, Madanatrayaśī, and the Madanadvādaśī are probably all the same festivals, festivals in which Kāma, the God of Love is worshipped. Anaṅga, Madana, and Kāma all are names of the God of Love. Similarly, the Madhūtsava and the Caitrotsava would seem to be synonymous with the term Vasantotsava. Vasanta and Madhu are both words for spring, and the month of Caitra is also called Madhu. From these various titles only three potentially distinct festivals or groups of festivals appear to emerge. These are the festivals designated simply as spring festivals, the festivals of Kāma, and those called Holī. As to the relationship between these three groups, the simplest hypothesis is to assume that the Vasantotsava is the closest to a generic festival and covers the widest variety of observances with some structural similarity but many regional variants. There would appear to be no one normative Vasantotsava, then, but a variety of Vasantotsavas, sometimes designated by the general term, "Spring Festival" or "Vasantotsava" but at other times given a more specific designation such as "Kāmotsava" or "Holī". The Kāmotsava refers specifically to the worship of Kāma while Holī refers to the throwing of colored powder.

Scholars are in general agreement that there may be separate components to the spring festivals, or separate festivals that cluster around the spring season, though often their statements reflect some confusion about the general nature and names of the spring festivals and they do not agree amongst each other as to the exact nature and number of the festivals. For example, Raghavan lists the Vasantotsava (Madanotsava or Madanatrayaśī or Anaṅgotsava) and Holī as separate

festivals and describes the Madanotsava as only a part of the Vasantotsava.<sup>34</sup> Hence under the heading of the Vasantotsava Raghavan says:

This is the Spring festival proper, for celebrating the advent of Spring, the most pleasant of the seasons.... People drink and rejoice in the company of women, throw water through Syringes, and coloured powder, on each other. (p 86)

Under the heading of Madanotsava or Madanatrayaḍaṣī, Raghavan says:

This is the worship of the God of Love and comes off on the 13th of the bright half of the Caitra-Śukla-Trayaḍaṣī—and is hence is called Madana-trayaḍaṣī. Manmatha and his spouse Rati, as also their friend and aid, the Spring, Vasanta, are worshipped on this day by ladies. (p. 86)

An excellent picture of this festival is in the same play Ratnavālī (Act I) where the Queen performs this worship. It is part of the Spring festival and the series of happy celebrations. (p. 87)

Under the heading of Holī Raghavan remarks:

We may notice lastly a festival which completes the cycle of the year and brings us back to the Spring festival of the God of Love with which we began. (p. 193)

He goes on to describe the destruction of the demoness Holākā as outlined in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa and the general powder throwing characteristic of this festival. Then he remarks:

In much later times, the earlier phase of the anti-child demoness and her killing recede completely. The worship of the God of Love, which follows on the next day becomes prominent, and Holī and its bonfire coalesces with the story of the God of Love being burnt in Śiva's third eye. (p. 201)

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<sup>34</sup>V. Raghavan, Festivals, Sports, and Pastimes of India (Ahmedabad: B.J. Institute of Learning and Research, 1979), pp. 86 - 88, 193 - 203.

There is some confusion in these statements. The worship of Kāma by Raghavan's own admission is on the thirteenth day of Caitra, not on the day after Holī (Caitra 1). If we take the worship of Kāma to occur on the Vasantotsava (Caitra 1) then what is the distinction between the two? Again, Raghavan describes both Holī and Vasantotsava as festivals of general merriment and powder throwing popular among women. If it is not possible to distinguish these festivals in terms of time or content, how, then, are they to be distinguished?

Sharma also makes a distinction between the Vasantotsava and Holī. At the same time he identifies the Vasantotsava with the Rtūtsava which is described in the Raghuvaṃśa by Kālidāsa (fifth century A.D.), the Yatramahotsava of Madana as described by King Bhoja in the Śṛṅgāramañjarikathā (eleventh century A.D.), and the Kāma-mahotsava as described by Jīmūtavāhana.<sup>35</sup> Thomas describes the Spring Festival as Holī and omits any reference to the Vasantotsava or the Kāmotsava.<sup>36</sup> A. Chattopadhyaya in "Spring Festival and Festival of Indra in the Kathāsaritsāgara" argues that Holī and the Vasantotsava are different festivals.<sup>37</sup>

It is clear from the above that in addition to a tendency among scholars to differentiate between various spring festivals, there is also

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<sup>35</sup> B. N. Sharma, Festivals of India, pp. 14, 12.

<sup>36</sup> P. Thomas, Festivals and Holidays of India (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons and Co. Private Ltd., 1971), p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Chattopadhyaya, "Spring Festival and Festival of Indra in the Kathāsaritsāgara", p. 139.

a tendency to equate some of these festivals. Raghavan, as noted above, seems to equate the Vasantotsava and the Madanatrayaḍāṣī or Madanotsava or Anaṅgotsava. Sharma clearly equates the Vasantotsava, the Rtūtsava, the Yatramahotsava, and the Kāmamahotsava. Basham in The Wonder That Was India equates Holī and the Vasantotsava of ancient times.<sup>38</sup> What follows is an attempt to assess these conclusions in the light of more extensive textual evidence than has been used by previous scholars.

### The Vasantotsava and the Worship of Kāma

As has been noted just above, many scholars equate the Vasantotsava and the festival of Kāma. Under the title of 'festival of Kāma' we may include the Madanamahotsava, Madanatrayaḍāṣī, Madana-dvādaṣī, Anaṅgotsava and the Kāmotsava. Both Raghavan and Chattopadhyaya describe the festival of Kāma as associated with the Vasantotsava. Raghavan assumes the Madana festival to have been part of a larger festival, for which he retains the title Vasantotsava. Chattopadhyaya sees the two as essentially the same. He describes the Vasantotsava as a festival of love with the worship of Kāma as its main distinguishing feature (Kāmotsava). Now the Madanadvādaṣī is to be celebrated on the twelfth day of Caitra, the Madanatrayaḍāṣī on the

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<sup>38</sup>A.L. Basham, The Wonder That Was India (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1959), p. 207.

thirteenth. Neither of these dates agrees with the dates given for the Vasantotsava by Raghavan (Caitra 1) or Chattopadhyaya (Caitra 30).

A possible solution to this problem is that the Vasantotsava is a festival which is celebrated over a long period of time. Some texts, in fact, describe the Vasantotsava as lasting for more than one day. The Ratnāvalī of Harṣa which dates in the seventh century A.D. contains an important description of this festival. It is a romantic play and will be dealt with at length in the following chapter. It describes a festival which appears to last for at least three consecutive days.<sup>39</sup> The Ratnāvalī is very often cited by scholars as containing an exhaustive description of the Vasantotsava.<sup>40</sup> In this text the festival is specifically called the Vasantotsava, Madanamahiyaṅs (Madana's festival), Madanamahotsava, and simply Madhu, lending support to the interpretation cited above that equates the festival to Kāma with the Vasantotsava.<sup>41</sup> This text is not explicit regarding the date of the Spring Festival but seems to give us yet another date in Caitra for its commencement. C.R. Devadhar and N.G. Suru, in their introduction to the text, tell us that the festival probably commences on the thirteenth day of the bright half of Caitra (i.e., Caitra 27) and lasts through the

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<sup>39</sup>Śrī Harṣa, Ratnāvalī, trans. C.R. Devadhar and N.G. Suru (Poona: Shri D.K. Gōṇḍhalekar of the Poona Oriental Bookhouse, 1954), Act Iff.

<sup>40</sup>For example, Raghavan, Chattopadhyaya, Sharma, and Thomas cite this text in reference to the Spring Festival.

<sup>41</sup>Ratnāvalī, pp.4,8,10,12 respectively.

full moon day. The entire drama comprises five or six days.<sup>42</sup> In the Ratnāvalī there is no transition from one festival to another and no procedural distinction is made between the celebrations described. The festivities in the Ratnāvalī under the rubric of the Vasantotsava include what are described elsewhere as separate festivals.<sup>43</sup> So we can see that the Madanatrayaḍaśī or the day set aside for the worship of Madana (Kāma) is described in the Ratnāvalī as part of the Vasantotsava,<sup>44</sup> while the overall festival is called either the Vasantotsava or the Madanamahotsava.

Other texts also equate these festivals outright, or indicate their close link. Among these we may include the Kāmasūtra which indicates that the Madanamahotsava is the Vasantotsava.<sup>45</sup> The Kathāsaritsāgara describes a festival very similar to that of the Ratnāvalī which it identifies as either Madhūtsava or simply 'Madhu'.<sup>46</sup> The Jain Kathākośa is a compilation of Jain folklore and contains a story of Sanatkumāra which describes a festival called the Vasantotsava. In the

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<sup>42</sup>Ratnāvalī, p. 15, 21.

<sup>43</sup>That is to say that festivals like the Madanadvadaśī as described in texts like the Matsya Purāṇa (154) are not specifically described as part of the Vasantotsava. Rather, they are mentioned without reference to it. See also the Nilamata Purāṇa which describes Madanatrayaḍaśī without reference to the Vasantotsava. Nilamata Purāṇa, trans. Dr. Ved Kumari, 2 vols. (Srinagar: J. and K. Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1973), II. verse 679.

<sup>44</sup>Ratnāvalī, Act I, p.4.

<sup>45</sup>Vatsyayana, Kāmasūtra, Chowkhambha Sanskrit Series (Benares: Vidya Vilas Press, 1929), I.IV.42.

<sup>46</sup>Kathāsaritsāgara, XXXV.6, IV.35, X.87,88,98, LXXIX.6.

last lines this text equates at least the details of this festival (earlier referred to as the Vasantotsava) with those of the Madanotsava of spring. The last line of the text reads:<sup>47</sup>

āpānakelīḥ śakrārcā vasantamadanotsavāḥ/

(The festivities of the Vasantotsava and the Madanotsava involve drinking and the worship of Indra.)

The Bhavisya Purāṇa calls a similar celebration Madanamahotsava.<sup>48</sup>

Other texts refer to the spring celebration simply as Caitramahotsava but similarly show its connection with the worship of Kāma. In this category we may include the Pārijāta-Maṇjarī which is a play transcribed from an inscription dating in the twelfth century.<sup>49</sup> It describes the festival variously as the Vasantotsava or Caitrotsava. The festival consists simply of the worship of Madana.<sup>50</sup> In Rajasthan during Cauhan rule, one of the most important festivals was the Vasantotsava or Spring Festival, celebrated in honour of Madana or Kāma.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Kathākośa (Lahore: Pt. Jagdish Lal Sastri, n.d.) 23.11 (page, line). This story may also be found in Kathākośa tr. C.H. Tawney (Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corp, 1975), pp.31-32.

<sup>48</sup> Bhavisya Purāṇa (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagara Press, 1959) chapter 135.

<sup>49</sup> Rāja-Guru Madana alias Bāla-Sarasvati, Pārijāta-Maṇjarī alias Vijayaśrī, ed., trans. S.K. Dīkshīt (Bhopal: S.K. Dīkshīt, 1963).

<sup>50</sup> The description of the festival begins I.3,13. For the dating of the play see the introduction to the Pārijāta-Maṇjarī alias Vijayaśrī, p. vii.

<sup>51</sup> D. Sharma, Early Cauhan Dynasties, p. 266 as cited by Chattopadhyaya, "Spring Festival and Festival of Indra", pp. 138-9.



We see thus that ancient authors in dealing with a Spring Festival (Vasantotsava, Caitrotsava) stress the worship of Kāma, often explicitly calling the Spring Festival the festival of Kāma.

Complicating further the present discussion is the existence of yet another festival, the Śrīpañcamī, which is usually associated with the worship of Lakṣmī. However, according to the description of it in the Varsakṛtyādīpakā, it is the Vasantotsava.<sup>52</sup> It is described as the day set aside for worshipping Kāmadeva and his consort Ratī and is to take place on the bright half, fifth day of Magha. The text reads as follows:

māghe 'sukla pañcamī śrīpañcamī / asyām ratikāmayoḥ  
pūjanādinā vasantamahotsavaḥ kāryaḥ

(On the fifth day of the bright half of māgha is the Śrī-pañcamī. On this day the great festival of spring [Vasantotsava] is to be performed by worshipping Ratī and Kāma and other activities.)

The Haribhaktivilāsa also describes the Śrīpañcamī.<sup>53</sup>

167. māghasya śuklapañcamyām mahāpūjām samācaret/  
navaiḥ pravalaiḥ kusumair anulepair viśeshataḥ//

170. kṛtvā vasantapañchamyām śrīkṛṣṇārcanotsavam/  
syād vasanta iva preyavanavihāriṇaḥ//

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<sup>52</sup>Varsakṛtyādīpakā, p. 288. Raghavan in Festivals, Sports, and Pastimes in Ancient India, p. 187, also notes the equation in this text.

<sup>53</sup>Gopala Bhatta, Haribhaktivilāsa (Bengali script [Transliteration provided for me by Dr. P. Granoff]), p. 733.

(On the bright fifth of Māgha one should perform an elaborate worship ceremony with new shoots, flowers, and unguents.

Having performed this worship of the image of Kṛṣṇa on the spring fifth one becomes beloved of that one sporting in Vṛṇḍavana, just as the spring is beloved of him.)

This is a Vaiṣṇavaite text written before the middle of the sixteenth century and describes the festival as a festival of spring.<sup>54</sup> The festival is celebrated on the fifth day of spring, and Kṛṣṇa is the object of devotion. Kāma does not appear in this version.

To summarize the above, what we have then is a festival to Kāma which is sometimes included as part of the above Vasantotsava and sometimes equated with the Vasantotsava. In addition, in at least one instance the Madanadvādaśī is transformed into a sectarian festival where Kṛṣṇa, worshipped as lover (madanagopāla), assumes the function of Kāma. Finally a festival called Śrīpañcamī is also associated with the Vasantotsava.<sup>55</sup> Even according to the Haribhaktivilāsa, in which the Śrīpañcamī does not focus on Kāma or Lakṣmī, it is still a festival celebrated on the fifth of spring (Vasantapañcamī). It is thus clear that the identification of the Vasantotsava and the Madanotsava has support from the ancient texts; even in those cases where one cannot assert the absolute identity of these two festivals it is clear from the texts that

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<sup>54</sup> S.K. De, Early History of the Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Bengal (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1961), p. 139.

<sup>55</sup> For example, the Varsakṛtyadīpakā above.

the worship of Kāma was very intimately linked to the celebration of spring.

### Holī and Vasantotsava

Many modern scholars who accept the equation of the Vasantotsava and the Madanadvādaśī, including Chattopadhyaya and Raghavan, refuse to accept the equation between Holī and Vasantotsava. One of Chattopadhyaya's arguments for this is that the two celebrations are a month apart (Holī is celebrated on Phālguna 30, Vasantotsava on Caitra 30). This time lapse, however, did not deter him from equating the Kāmotsava and the Vasantotsava which are anywhere from thirteen to seventeen days apart. Raghavan's argument for the same position (i.e., Holī and Vasantotsava are different festivals) is that the Holī celebrates the end of the year and Vasantotsava celebrates the beginning of the new year. Hence Holī is celebrated on Phālguna 30; Vasantotsava on Caitra 1. Again, Raghavan's position, based on a difference of dating, is not entirely consistent; a time difference did not deter him from identifying the Madanamahotsava and the Vasantotsava as the same festival. Let us again consult the texts regarding the relationship of Holī and the Vasantotsava.

First, a large number of texts specifically equate all or several of these festivals named above. As previously noted, texts as early as the Kāmasūtra<sup>56</sup> equate the following: Holākā, Vasantotsava (or

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<sup>56</sup>Kāmasūtra, I. IV. 42.

suvasantaka), Madanamahotsava, Caitrotsava, and Phālgunotsava. Often texts simply equate Holākā with the Vasantotsava. According to Mayuravamālī's commentary on the Mīmāṃsaka text, the Śāstradīpikā, the Vasantotsava is Holākā.<sup>57</sup> Hence:

holāketi/ vasantotsava holāko

(Holākā is a Spring Festival [Vasantotsava].)

Another Mīmāṃsaka text, the Nyāyamālāvistara specifically describes Holākā (the modern Holī) as the Vasantotsava.<sup>58</sup> Hence:

holākādattaḥ prācyair eva kriyante/  
vasantotsava holākā

([Festivals] like Holākā are performed only by easterners.  
Holaka is a Spring Festival [Vasantotsava].)

One might consider also the section in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa entitled Phālgunotsava.<sup>59</sup> This text tells us that the Phālgunotsava (or Holākā) takes place on the fourteenth and fifteenth day of the bright fortnight in Phālguna (i.e., the full moon of Phālguna) and the day following the full moon (Caitra 1). It refers to the Phālgunotsava as Phālgū.<sup>60</sup> In addition, the Deśināmamālā, a lexicon compiled in the eleventh century,

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<sup>57</sup>Śāstradīpikā, Commentary of Mayuravamālī (n.p., n.d.), 1.3.8.

<sup>58</sup>Jaiminīyanyāyamāla, Nyāyamālāvistara, ed. A. Samskrta (np., 1946), 35. 10-18.

<sup>59</sup>Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, 132.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 132.32.

also speaks of a festival called Phaggu.<sup>61</sup> The scholar Deshpande has commented that the description given of the festival indicates that it is a counterpart of the Spring Festival described in the Ratnāvalī.<sup>62</sup> Holī is to be celebrated according to the Nārādīya Purāṇa<sup>63</sup> on the last day of Phālguna; Holī, Phālguna, and Vasantotsava are thus cognate festivals. Finally, when the Varṣakṛtyadīpakā and the Vasantotsava-nirnaya describe the Vasantotsava, which occurs on the first day of the dark half of Caitra, they both cite the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa as the evidence for its performance. The section of the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa which they cite is the section describing the destruction of Holākā.<sup>64</sup> Many texts, then, equate the two festivals and, as will be shown in subsequent chapters, the Spring Festival of ancient and medieval times survives, thematically, as the modern Holī. Significantly, among the Spring Festivals described in ancient texts, Holī is one of the only ones to have survived.

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<sup>61</sup> Hemachandra, Deśīnāmamālā, vi. 82.

<sup>62</sup> Deshpande, "Some Observances (Vratas) and Festivals (Utsavas) mentioned in the Deśīnāmamālā", AIOC XVII, 1955 (Annamalai University, Proceedings and Transactions, 1958), pp. 483ff. The translation of the relevant passage is:

Oh shameless one! Why are you wielding like a shield that twig of a cotton bush, that you have held in your hand? For in the vernal festival when creepers abound, the arrows, which are discharged by love, do not miss their aim.

<sup>63</sup> Nārādīya Purāṇa, 1.124.81, cited by Raghavan, Festivals, Sports, and Pastimes, p. 199.

<sup>64</sup> Varṣakṛtyadīpakā, p. 117; Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, 132. vs. 36, 37.

Unfortunately, however, to regard Holākā simply as a synonym for the Vasantotsava occurring in other texts is not sufficient. There are texts that at first seem to imply that Holākā is not the 'Vasantotsava' but rather simply a 'Vasantotsava' (Spring Festival). Some texts indicate that the festival was local and confined to the East where it was called Holākā (e.g., Nyāyamālāvistara).<sup>65</sup> In any case, however, the festival (Holākā or the Vasantotsava) is given general authority and is said to be enjoined for all Hindus. In conclusion, it is difficult to maintain a strict distinction between these two festivals as they are described in the Sanskrit sources. We may conclude that the Vasantotsava is, in fact, a festival which, depending on the appropriate region takes a variety of forms; Holākā would be one such form which, according to the above texts, was largely confined to the east. This seems to hold true today where Holī is celebrated primarily in north and northeast India. That is to say that Holī is the Vasantotsava of north-east India.

To conclude this discussion, then, it would appear that the term "Vasantotsava" is used in the sources as an umbrella term, a general term for festivals occurring in the spring season. Often these festivals include the worship of Kāma; at certain times in history and in certain places, the Vasantotsava is a Kāmotsava, or contains a Kāmotsava. Given the prominence of the worship of Kāma in the Spring Festival described in the Ratnāvalī, we might suggest here that the

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<sup>65</sup> Nyāyamālāvistara, 35.10-18.

Kāmotsava represents a Central Indian version of this festival.<sup>66</sup> In other times and places the Vasantotsava is Holī, a festival, as we shall see, associated with the burning of a demoness. In all cases the term Vasantotsava is applicable to such local festivals. In no cases is it strictly definable as one limited term.

Thus we have considered so far the problems of the exact date of the festivals of spring, their number and nature and their interrelationship. An additional question is their antiquity. The name Holākā is found, in fact, in the Atharvaveda Pariśiṣṭas.<sup>67</sup> The Pariśiṣṭas are early, ritual texts which follow the Śrauta and Grhya sūtras. Pariśiṣṭa means 'addenda'.<sup>68</sup> This seems to indicate that Holākā is an old celebration and not simply a modern outgrowth of the ancient Vasantotsava. In conclusion, then, there is evidence from the texts to regard the Madanotsava and/or Holī as Vasantotsavas or spring festivals. There is likewise some indication that the celebration of a Spring Festival belongs with the earliest ritual observances of Hinduism.

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<sup>66</sup>The Ratnāvalī hails from Central India. We might suggest further that a southern version of the Spring Festival is the Paṅkuni festival. This festival is described by P. Younger in "Ten Days of Wandering and Romance" in Modern Asian Studies and F. Clothey in "Paṅkuni Uttiram: A Festival of Marriage."

<sup>67</sup>Atharvaveda Pariśiṣṭas (The Pariśiṣṭas of the Atharvaveda) (Varanasi: Chaukhambha Orientalia, 1976) and Raghavan, Festivals, Sports, and Pastimes, 194.

<sup>68</sup>M. Winternitz, A History of Indian Literature, 2 vols. (Reissue; New York: Russell and Russell, 1972), I. p. 281.

Regional Characteristics of the Vasantotsava and the Question  
of Scriptural Authority

One further possibility which we might entertain and which might dispel some of the confusion surrounding this festival is the possibility touched on above that the Vasantotsava was largely a regional celebration, and was therefore strongly colored by local customs. This would, at least in part, account for the variety of descriptions and names of this festival. There is, in fact, no simple way to prove or disprove this hypothesis. Some texts seem to tell us that the festival was a local festival confined to certain regions of the subcontinent. In other places we read that it is to be considered an all-India celebration imbued with generalized authority. Texts including the Śāstradīpikā indeed suggest both of these – that the Vasantotsava was in practice a local event<sup>69</sup> and that it was supported by scriptural authority valid for people living in all parts of the country. The Śāstradīpikā tells us that Holākā is not performed by everyone but only by those in the East (prācyā).<sup>70</sup> Hence:

Holākādayo hi kaiścideva prācyādyabhimānibhir anusthīyante  
na sarvāiḥ/

(Festivals like Holākā are performed by those who consider themselves as coming from the east and not by everyone.)

However, in another section of the Śāstradīpikā there is a discussion on the question of the scriptural basis for festivals like the Holākā or

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<sup>69</sup>Śāstradīpikā, 1.3.8.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.



Vasantotsava.<sup>71</sup> This portion begins with a purvapakṣa, an objection stating that because the Vasantotsava is not recorded in Manu or in the Vedic texts, there is no basis for observing it. The reply is given that though it is not recorded in the Veda, it is observed by people accepted as śiṣṭhas, i.e., those who, in the matter of their conduct, strictly adhere to Vedic injunctions. Hence, because it is observed by śiṣṭhas, it is to be inferred that it has Vedic sanction. The fact that it is not mentioned specifically in Manu is here considered to be irrelevant; Manu did not write everything down, for then the text would have been overwhelmingly long. The next natural question is to whom this scriptural injunction applies. The Śāstradīpikā finally declares that the Spring Festival is to be sanctioned by Vedic authority and that, in another section of his Bhāṣya on the Pūrvamīmāṃsa Sūtra, Śabara declares that this Vedic authority is a general one, applicable to all people even though the actual performance of Holākā is limited to certain regions in the country.<sup>72</sup> To summarize Śabara's arguments, Śabara says that in fact we observe only Easterners performing Holākā. Now the question arises, what is the scriptural basis for the Spring Festival? Śabara answers that it must be some Vedic text. Further on he treats the problem of what kind of scriptural injunction we may infer. Since only Easterners practice Holākā are we to assume an

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Jaimini, Pūrvamīmāṃsa Sūtra (chapters 1-3), trans. Mahamahopadhyaya Ganganatha Jha (New York: AMS Press Inc. 1974), III. VII. 1.3.15-23.

injunction that is specific to Easterners? The pūrvapakṣa says this is the case; Śabara replies that this is impossible since we see that it is impossible to define the term 'Easterners'. Does it mean people living in the East? Well, not all people living in the East do Holākā. Some are immigrants from the South, for example, and they do not observe Holākā. Does it mean people born in the East? Well, in that case think of Easterners who moved away generations back and are now living in the North. Their grandchildren, though born in the North still do Holākā. Therefore there is no satisfactory way to define a limited injunction and we must assume a general injunction, i.e., one that says all people must do Holākā. That they do not must be due to other causes. Śabara thus regards Holākā as a Spring Festival and a local one, specific to the East. This implies the possibility of other spring festivals occurring elsewhere under other names.

It is necessary to evaluate the information provided by Śabara in the light of all of our many other texts. Śabara regards the Spring Festival as equivalent to Holākā and as a regional celebration which, though backed by a generalized Vedic injunction valid for everyone in the country, was in fact observed only by Easterners. It is interesting to note that Śabara is correct about Holākā itself, for modern ethnographic information corroborates his statement that it is a festival of the East.<sup>73</sup> But the other texts available and used for this study

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<sup>73</sup>For example, Festivals of India (Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1977), pp. 12,20.

broaden greatly the regional base of the Vasantotsava and confirm the accuracy of Śabara's second presupposition: the Vasantotsava could indeed be celebrated by people all over the country. For example, the Nārādīya Purāṇa and the Kathāsaritsāgara, both of which describe the Spring Festival, originated in Kashmir confirming the existence of a spring celebration there. The Ratnāvalī hails from central India, while the Dolayatraviveka was written by a Bengali and the Virūpākṣa-vasantotsavacampū concerns Vijayanagar.<sup>74</sup> Thus texts record the practice of this festival all over India. Śabara's equation of Holākā with the Vasantotsava and the fact that Holākā is specific to the east led him to conclude wrongly that the Spring Festival was a purely regional phenomenon. The modern scholar would be more accurate to conclude instead that the festival differed greatly from place to place, a fact that led ancient scholars like Śabara to identify the observances with one purely local manifestation of the festival and fail to recognize the existence of related celebrations.

In addition texts indicate that the festival, for which Śabara was at such great pains to establish Vedic authority, was celebrated equally by non-Vedic religions, Jainism and Buddhism, and by those normally taken to fall outside the purview of Vedic injunctions, the lowest castes or Śūdras. Hence, in Burlingame's Buddhist Legends

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<sup>74</sup>Śulapani, Dolayatraviveka, cited by Kane, History of Dharma Śāstra, V. 238; and Ahobala, Virūpākṣavasantotsavacampū (Dharwar: Kannada Research Institute, 1953).

Buddhists also play Hoī.<sup>75</sup> The festival is called Bālanakkhatta (Bālanakṣatra) and is observed for seven days. During this time the lower castes smear their bodies with cow dung and ash, engage in coarse talking and insults, and extract money from each other. According to this text it was so crowded that at Śrāvastī the Buddha was unable to enter the city for seven days (the duration of the festival).

In Jain literature, as well, references to the Spring Festival are found. The Kathākośa contains a description of it.<sup>76</sup> Sanatkumāra, the son of the king, goes into the forest on the occasion of the Spring Festival. And again, in the same text, King Sāgarachandra is described going to the Spring Festival adorned with royal splendor. Jains even today observe special fasts on the full moon of Caitra and, if possible, go on pilgrimages. Tradition has it that at Caitra Punema (the full moon of Caitra) the chief disciple of Ṛṣabhadeva, Puṇḍarīka Gaṇadhara, obtained kaivalya along with fifty million monks. Jains also fast on Phālguna Punema (the full moon in Phālguna) and decorate their temples. Jains celebrate Oli or Āmbella which occurs eight days before the full moon in Caitra. Great fairs are held at the chief places of pilgrimage and these are attended by Jains from all over India. At this time men and women take special vows as to what they will eat,

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<sup>75</sup> E.W. Burlingame, Buddhist Legends (London: Luzac and Co., 1969), p. 310 in Raghavan, Festivals, Sports, and Pastimes in Ancient India, p. 200.

<sup>76</sup> Kathākośa, 30.

promising, for instance, to eat only one kind of grain throughout the day and to drink only boiled water. Oli is the fast par excellence of women, for at this season a royal princess, Mayanā Sundarī, by worshipping the saint-wheel, won health and restoration to the kingdom for her husband, Śrīpāla, who had been a leper. Ever since the days of this princess, women who want a happy married life have been specially diligent in observing this fast, giving up (for the time) any food they particularly like, such as melted butter or molasses, and eating only one sort of dish.<sup>77</sup>

The Lokāyatikas and the Kāpālikas, according to D.R. Shastri, observed a year which was full of festivals. They made it a rule to meet twice a year specifically for enjoying pleasures with full freedom. These were the Vasantotsava and the Kaumudīmahotsava.<sup>78</sup>

According to Raghavan, among the multiple elements of this day's sanctity are the Brāhmanic tradition of its being the birthday of one of the fourteen Manus and the Buddhist tradition of the Sun, Moon, Sumeru, and the Himalayas having been created on this day.<sup>79</sup>

Raghavan also suggests that the unbridled behavior typical of the Vasantotsava underlies the fact that the festival has a special vogue

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<sup>77</sup>Margaret Stevenson, Jaina Festivals and Fasts, cited by Sharma, Festivals of India, p. 142.

<sup>78</sup>Dakshina Ranjan Shastri "The Lokāyatikas and the Kāpālikas" in Indian Historical Quarterly, VII, (1931).

<sup>79</sup>Raghavan, Festivals, Sports, and Pastimes of Ancient India, p. 200.

among lower castes.<sup>80</sup> Also, it is interesting that in some parts of the country there was a practice of the higher castes ceremoniously touching the lower castes and then bathing. The Vasantotsava, it seems, was a festival celebrated all over the country and by all castes. According to Khare in The Hindu Hearth and Home some popular Hindi books classify major festivals in terms of the varna classification. Here Holī is for Śūdras, Dīvalī for Vaishyas.<sup>81</sup>

What emerges from the above is that the Vasantotsava was a festival composed of a wide variety of elements and differently described in the texts which sometimes equate the Vasantotsava with the Madanamahotsava, at other times identify the Vasantotsava with Holī. In addition, the texts make clear that the Vasantotsava was celebrated differently in different regions of India. Depending upon the text one reads it also appears to have occurred at various times. It was a festival which in some texts overlaps both chronologically and in composition with other festivals. The two primary festivals with which the Vasantotsava overlaps are the Madanamahotsava and Holākā, where these festivals are not specifically equated. There is, in fact, in the texts and amongst modern scholars much confusion as to what exactly makes up the Vasantotsava. Most modern scholars refer to the description of it in the Ratnāvalī. This description includes the Madanamahotsava. If we separate the Madanamahotsava from this text we are left with a

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p. 198.

<sup>81</sup> R.S. Khare, The Hindu Hearth and Home (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1976), p. 147.

description of general merriment and powder throwing (i.e., the usual description of Holī). In fact, there is a dearth of descriptions of the Vasantotsava that contain no reference to Kāma-worship or Holī. Given the wide discrepancies in descriptions it may be suggested that the Vasantotsava was not, in fact, a specific Spring Festival composed of specific ritual practices to be celebrated at a specific time but, rather, that the term Vasantotsava was a generic term meaning simply and literally 'Spring Festival'. That is, the Vasantotsava is a term which may include a large number of festivals celebrated in the spring and it may or may not itself be treated as a festival separate from these other festivals. This would account for the tendency of the authors of Sanskrit texts to combine a variety of festivals of different names under the term Vasantotsava. Once it is accepted that the Vasantotsava is a term to be understood in a generic sense then it is easy to reconcile the discrepancies in the descriptions of it. Some of these differences must clearly be regional differences – spring is celebrated differently in different regions. Others may be due to historical change in patterns of worship and sectarian differences. Often, if not always, there does occur a clear connection between Hindu mythology proper and the Spring Festival. Sometimes Kāma and his destruction by Śiva are associated with the Vasantotsava, while Kṛṣṇa and his destruction of Holākā on other occasions are the event the Vasantotsava celebrates in other texts.

The following chapter is an attempt to arrive at a full description of this festival. For this purpose a variety of texts has been consulted.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A DESCRIPTION OF THE SPRING FESTIVAL

Descriptions of the Spring Festival abound in Sanskrit literature. As noted in the previous chapter, there is a great deal of difficulty involved in isolating the Vasantotsava from the variety of festivals described in these texts which occur with the advent of spring. Evidence suggests, in fact, that certain of these festivals are intimately related and should legitimately be examined under the title 'Vasantotsava.' The following excerpts are drawn then from Sanskrit texts which describe the Spring Festival variously as Vasantotsava, Madanotsava (including Madanatrayaḍaṣī and Madanadvāḍaṣī) and Holākā, and have been chosen as they each highlight a particular aspect of the festival. These texts, when examined in toto, give us a broader description of the celebration of the Vasantotsava than any single text affords us.

Five texts have been chosen here in pursuit of a fuller picture of the Vasantotsava. Appropriate to initial consideration in attempting to describe the Spring Festival would be the classic Ratnāvalī. This



play, written by Śrī Harṣa in the seventh century A.D.,<sup>82</sup> not only contains a detailed and vivid description of the Spring Festival, referring to it directly as Vasantotsava, but, according to the prastāvana, it was written to be performed on this occasion as well. The Ratnāvalī, in its description, emphasizes the rowdiness which characterizes the festival and gives us information regarding the ritual worship of Kāma, the Hindu god of love. The Ratnāvalī is also particularly important because it is one of the few texts which gives us a relatively complete picture of this festival as celebrated in a specific time and a specific place (the seventh century in the central Indian city of Kausāmbī).

The descriptions below, following those from the Ratnāvalī, are drawn from the Kathāsaritsāgara and the Vikramacarita. These are both collections of stories written down in North India in the 11th century A.D. The descriptions of the Vasantotsava in both the Kathāsaritsāgara and the Vikramacarita are typical of descriptions of the Spring Festival in that, although the festival is described only briefly, it sets the tone for the story. These festival descriptions are also significant for our discussion as they both tend to highlight the role played by kings in its celebration.

Following these excerpts are two chapters from the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa. This text is difficult to date<sup>83</sup> but adds to our picture of the

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<sup>82</sup>Ratnāvalī, p. 2.

<sup>83</sup>Parts of it may be as late as the 16th or 17th century A.D. while others are probably earlier, dating to the 8th or 11th century

Vasantotsava through the emphasis placed on the myths related in association with this festival. These chapters thus link the Vasantotsava with the tradition of Hindu mythology. Finally, the Virūpākṣavasantotsavacampū will be examined. This text dates from the fifteenth century and describes the Vasantotsava as celebrated in Vijayanagar. This information is location specific and adds a new dimension to the festival: the Vasantotsava described here is a Śaivite temple festival. Only those portions of each text relevant to this study will be discussed.

Following each textual description there will be a discussion of the important elements highlighted in these five major sources. In each discussion I have drawn upon a variety of supplementary texts for additional information regarding the specific ritual festival activities described. These supplementary texts enlarge our picture of the Vasantotsava. For the most part they also contain descriptions of the festival, but of a very brief nature, and it is for this reason that they have not been included in full. These supplementing texts are large in number and, as they only mention the Vasantotsava in passing, their significance lies in that they either confirm or contradict the information contained in the various more complete descriptions of the festival summarized in this chapter.

### Ratnāvalī

The Ratnāvalī of Śrī Harṣa is one of the many texts in which the popular King Udayana of Vatsa is the central figure. He is a pleasure-seeking monarch and the security of his kingdom lies in the hands of his counsellor Yaugandharāyana. In the case of the Ratnāvalī, it is Yaugandharāyana's task to arrange, and see to its conclusion, the political alliance through marriage of the king and Ratnāvalī, a princess of Sindhala. This is accomplished through a series of intrigues which begin with Ratnāvalī being promised in marriage to Udayana and being brought into the palace in disguise. She subsequently falls in love with Udayana and wins the favor of the queen, Vāsavadattā. The love of Ratnāvalī and Udayana is mutual and the play concludes with their marriage under the auspices of the queen, Vāsavadattā.

The play is of interest to us in that it is to be performed on the occasion of the Vasantotsava and it contains a lengthy description of occurrences during the festival. The time interval suggested by the activity indicates that the festival was celebrated over a period of at least three days.

For the purpose of examining the Spring Festival as it is described in the Ratnāvalī, it is useful to divide our account into four units. The first is a general outline of the play. Then follow two accounts of the festival: one focusing on the festival as it was celebrated in the city streets, and a second part focusing upon the festival as it was celebrated in the garden. These accounts in fact occur in different scenes of the play, and each will be described in

detail. In each of these settings the Spring Festival takes on distinctive characteristics: in the city the celebrations are characterized by the free and sometimes wild behavior of the citizens, while, in the garden, the celebrations focus on the worship of the deity Kāma. The final unit contains an examination of the ritual significance of the play itself. Insofar as the Ratnāvalī was written to be performed on the occasion of the Vasantotsava we may assume that this play itself had some importance in the celebration of the festival. In fact, as we shall see, plays of this type were commonly performed on this occasion.

#### The Ratnāvalī: The Plot<sup>84</sup>

Ratnāvalī, the princess of Sindhala, was destined by a prophecy to become the wife of a universal sovereign; and on that account Yaugandharāyana, the minister of King Udayana, solicited her hand for his master. The ship in which the princess had embarked on her journey to her new home was, however, wrecked. Catching hold of a plank Ratnāvalī safely reached the shore and was brought to King Vatsa's capital by a merchant of Kausāmbī, where Yaugandharāyana placed her in the keeping of the queen without disclosing her identity. Here the king saw her, and forthwith was enamored of her. Sāgarikā,

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<sup>84</sup>The following summary is taken from the Ratnāvalī, trans. C.R. Devadhar and N.G. Suru (Poona: Poona Oriental Bookhouse, 1954), p. 13-14.

the name given the princess after her emergence from the ocean, was already fascinated by the king's beauty, and began now to pine for him. A meeting of the lovers was soon arranged in which Sāgarikā was to come disguised as the queen; but the intrigue was discovered by the queen herself, who, in her jealous anger, had Sāgarikā bound and clapped in prison. The astute Yaugandharāyana was, in the meantime, watching the progress of his designs. A magician was sent to the palace, who by his craft created the illusion of fire, and the queen, now aghast, requested the king to rescue Sāgarikā from imminent peril. At this instant, Vasubhuti, the minister of Simhala, who had accompanied the princess and escaped from the shipwreck in which the Princess Ratnāvalī was thought to have been lost, was ushered into the royal presence and recognized Sāgarikā as Ratnāvalī who was pledged in marriage to King Udayana. The queen, who now learned that Sāgarikā was her own cousin, accepted her as a co-wife; and just at this moment, the joy of the occasion was doubled by the happy news that Rumanvat, the victorious general of king Udayana, had subdued the rival monarch of Kosala.

#### The Vasantotsava: An Urban Festival

It is specifically stated in the prastāvanā of the Ratnāvalī that the play is to be performed on the occasion of the Vasantotsava. The play itself is set at the time of the festival and descriptions of what occurs at this time are found throughout the text. The following excerpts are examples of the description of the festival in the first part

of the text. The description of the festival, as celebrated in the urban context and in the context of the garden, appears sequentially in the text, rendering this division inherent in that work itself. These excerpts describe the festival in the urban context.<sup>85</sup>

Since in front rises the hum of people's merriment sweet with music played to the accompaniment of a mellow drum, I believe that His Majesty is proceeding to the mansion to witness the rejoicing of the citizens, intense because of Madana's festival (madanamaha).

-Yaugandharāyana p.9

Observe the charm of this Love's festival which interests one with the citizens who are dancing at the touch of water from syringes. Citizens are voluntarily seized by lovely women now under the exhilaration of wine. The openings of the road all round are singing with the swelling music of wild songs, and all the quarters are rendered yellowish red with a mass of fragrant powder scattered about.

-Yaugandharāyana pp. 11,13

Oh how excessive has been the merriment of the people. Thus the scattered heaps of fragrant powder, tinted yellow with saffron dust, create (an illusion of) daybreak. This Kausambi whose wealth, manifest from her attire, seems to outvie the treasures of the lord of wealth, appears one yellow mass, as though her sons were dressed in molten gold. Moreover the pavement in front is reddened by the people with the tread of their feet. It is pink with vermillion tints that drop from the cheeks of boisterous women in the yard which is flooded all over with ceaseless flow of water spouted by fountain - jets and where they are sporting in mud that is created by the heavy crush (of hurrying feet).

-the King p. 13

Dear friend, behold the sporting of courtesans who are charming on account of the hissing uttered when struck by water from syringes discharged by naughty gallants.

-Vidūṣaka p. 13

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<sup>85</sup>These excerpts are paraphrased from the translation of N.G. Suru and C.R. Devadhar in, Ratnavali, pp. 9-15.

Look, Look, friend. Here comes Madanikā with Cūtalatikā.  
She is dancing the spring dance in an unsteady manner as  
she is under the influence of love.

-Vidūṣaka p. 15

The above quotations typify descriptions of the Spring Festival in a variety of ways. They indicate, firstly, that the festival is celebrated in an urban environment (here, specifically in the streets of the city of Kausāmbī). Music, song, dance, drinking wine, general sporting of the citizens with syringes filled with water, and the throwing of yellowish-red powder are the dominant components of the festivities. It has often been noted that at festival times there is a general freeing of social restrictions amongst citizens.<sup>86</sup> To this the Vasantotsava is no exception: the tone of the Spring Festival, as described above, is one of unabashed merriment. The entire city is full of with color, music, and song. The sporting of courtesans is depicted as a prominent feature of this festival, as is the participation of the observing king.

The merriment evidenced during the celebration of the Vasantotsava is made up of a variety of components. These have been noted above and will be dealt with in detail below. Each of these components appears, to a greater or lesser extent, in a variety of descriptions of this festival in addition to that contained in the Ratnāvalī, and these alternate descriptions will be mentioned below to confirm details from the Ratnāvalī. Occasionally the information in the Ratnāvalī itself is only briefly sketched and we must, therefore, turn to

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<sup>86</sup>See, for example, McKim Marriott in "The Feast of Love", in M. Singer (editor), Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 200-212.

other texts mentioning similar attributes in order to flesh out our picture of the Vasantotsava as a whole. In other cases the description in the Ratnāvalī varies in relation to that found in other texts. For example, the merriment, as evidenced by song, dance, and drinking, borders on the extreme in the Ratnāvalī and corroborating texts like the Varṣakṛtyadīpakā.<sup>87</sup> One cannot account for the behavior of the participants solely in terms of their general high spirits. When carried to the extreme these activities evidence the breakdown of social structure. Thus, certain types of restrictions prohibiting physical contact between castes are no longer operational at the point in the Ratnāvalī where the crush on individuals in the festivities is uncontrolled and therefore unpredictable. Those individuals who do retain some degree of social status are spatially removed from the celebrations. In the above description the king does not participate directly in the street celebrations, but, rather, observes the festival from his mansion a safe distance above the crowd. With respect to social hierarchy, descriptions of this festival tend to highlight the role played by all members of society without regard for caste, and by women. This large and highly unstructured group and women, in fact, are often the focal point for the merry making. In other texts, such as the Nāṭyaśāstra,<sup>88</sup> the description of the merriment is not as extreme and may be interpreted simply as part of the gay spirit of spring which

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<sup>87</sup> See, for example, Varṣakṛtyadīpakā, pp. 287-8.

<sup>88</sup> See below, 'Drama As a Component of the Vasantotsava.'



occasions this celebration. In order to understand fully those descriptions of the festivities which are milder than the Ratnāvalī's portrayal, we shall return to the Ratnāvalī as a guide. It is necessary now to turn to a detailed consideration of the individual elements of the festivals according to the Ratnāvalī.

### Throwing Powder/Syringes

Perhaps one of the most widespread and unusual characteristics of the relaxing of social restrictions, specifically associated with the Spring Festival, is that of the reciprocal throwing at each other, or shall we say drenching of one another, by the participants with such substances as mud, colored powder and/or colored water. This activity is vividly described not only in the Ratnāvalī but also in many other accounts of this festival.

We find descriptions of this activity in relatively early accounts of spring celebrations. For example, the Taittirīya Āraṇyaka which forms part of the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa gives evidence of the ritual activity of throwing colored water in Vasant (spring).<sup>89</sup> This is probably the earliest instance in which this activity appears. In the Kāmasūtra (c. 4th century B.C.), the spring festivities are accompanied by powder throwing. Thus, although the Vasantotsava, as

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<sup>89</sup>Taittirīya Āraṇyaka, 1.3.4. M. Winternitz, A History of Indian Literature (Reissue; New York: Russell and Russell, 1972), I. pp. 235-6 tells us that this is amongst the oldest of the Brāhmaṇas.

described in the Ratnāvalī, is not to be found in that form in Vedic texts, a spring sacrifice akin to it is described which mentions the throwing of colored water. A precedent then, for such activities, more deliberately described in medieval texts, such as the (Ratnāvalī) under the name of Vasantotsava, exists in texts describing Vedic rituals.

As well, one can observe, through the texts, an historical growth of the popularity of this same activity as a popular pastime outside of the context of festival or ritual activity.<sup>90</sup> Beginning with the Kāmasūtra, the throwing of colored water is described as a separate spring pastime called 'Udakaksvedika' or, in Jayamañgalā's commentary, 'Śrṅga kṛidā.'<sup>91</sup> The tendency to more and more elaborate descriptions of this activity continues with Someśvara in the tenth century, where it is described as 'Secana kṛidā' or drenching each other with colored and fragrant water with the aid of syringes (śrṅgas).<sup>92</sup> It is a spring pastime, but divorced from any specific ritual context. Further evidence of the playful erotic sport of drenching each other with water outside a festival context appears in poems and prose works like the Śiṣupālavadhā, the Kādambarī, and the Āvantisundarī.<sup>93</sup> In these latter texts one also encounters more and more detailed descriptions of

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<sup>90</sup>i.e., outside of the context of a specific spring celebration.

<sup>91</sup>Kāmasūtra, I. iv.46.

<sup>92</sup>Someśvara, Mānasollāsa or Abhilasitārthacintāmani, ed. B.J. Sansesara (Baroda: COS, no. 138), p. 102; Raghavan, Festivals, Sports, and Pastimes, pp. 74-5.

<sup>93</sup>Raghavan, Festivals, Sports, and Pastimes, p. 200.

increasingly elaborate mechanical devices for throwing the water or powder. For example, in Someśvara's Mānasollāsa, the horns of wild bulls or their silver and gold replicas are mentioned as vehicles for the water, and the activity is not confined to any festival occasion.

In addition to drenching each other with water the throwing of flower-balls, or balls made of silk threads, forms part of the overall merriment of springtime.<sup>94</sup> In some manuscripts of the Kāma Sūtra a festival called Yavacaturthī is mentioned: Jayamaṅgalā explains it as a spring rite of throwing fragrant yava dust on each other. This links this festival ritually with the common ritual of throwing powder. In his eleventh-century work, the Śrīṅgāra Prakāśa, Bhoja of Dhārā mentions the Yavacaturthī as a spring ritual revolving around yava twigs.<sup>95</sup> During this ritual, which is also referred to as Kundacaturthī, women spread yava twigs in the garden and roll on them. According to Vatsyayana, people on this day sprinkle each other with yava flower dust. The context in which we find this activity must surely have some bearing on our understanding of it. We have evidence that the throwing of a substance was a popular activity in medieval times, both as a mere pastime engaged in for the sake of sport and as a festival activity as well. Indeed, its oldest connotation is as a festival activity, and if one may take the substances thrown as representative of flower dust, then one meaning of the activity emerges. As we shall see, when

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<sup>94</sup> See, for example, V. Raghavan, Bhoja's Śrīṅgāra Prakāśa (3rd. revised edition; Madras: 1978), pp. 628-33.

<sup>95</sup> Raghavan, Śrīṅgāra Prakāśa, pp. 631-2.

the Vasantotsava is celebrated in the context of the garden, physical contact between performers (especially women) and flowers and trees is especially emphasized.<sup>96</sup> At this point, however, we might interpret the throwing of flower dust (pollen) as an activity which aims at effecting a transference of the fertile powers of flowers (which blossom in spring) to the performers on whom the flower dust is thrown; more generally, however, it visually symbolizes man's affinity/unity with nature. This by no means, however, exhausts the symbolic potential of this activity.

The Ratnāvalī, as we have seen, contains evidence of the prominence of substance-throwing in the spring and describes the material to be thrown during the festival as colored water, mud, or powder. The Nīlamata Purāṇa prescribes the throwing of mud on this occasion, the Sarasvatīkanthābharana names the substance as powder (kṣanapiṣṭhād hūsarastāni) and in the Śāstradīpikā it is water (kriyamāṇaḥ paraśparajalaseko vasantotsavaḥ) and texts including the Varsakṛtyadīpakā give vivid descriptions of this activity.<sup>97</sup> In this latter text men and women smear their bodies with ashes and red powder, then sing, dance, and roam the streets behaving like ghosts

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<sup>96</sup> So, for example, mango blossoms are ingested and trees are touched by women to make them flower. See the description of the Vasantotsava in the garden setting.

<sup>97</sup> Nīlamata Purāṇa, trans., intro. Dr. Ved Kumari, 2 vols. (Srinagar-Jamu: J. and K. Academy of Art, Culture, and Language, 1968, 1973); Dhareśhvara Bhojadeva, Sarasvatīkanthābharana, commentary of Ramsimha and Jagaddhara, ed. P.K. Sarma and W.L.S. Pāndurang Jāvājī (Bombay: NSP., 1934), 314.12 (page, line); Varsakṛtyadīpakā, p. 288.

(kṛīḍitavyam piśācavat).<sup>98</sup> The Gāthāsaptāśatī tells us that on this day (Phālgunotsava) decorative mud is to be flung, especially at women.<sup>99</sup>

Hence:

Why do you wash off the decorative mud flung by someone innocently during the vernal festival (phalguksana) even when it (mud) has been wiped away by sweat rolling down from the tips of your jarlike breasts. (4.69)

The above information goes hand in hand with dissolution motifs typical of end of the year rituals and described by scholars like Eliade and Turner.<sup>100</sup> Here there is a breakdown of normal boundaries and social distinctions: men and women smear their bodies with mud and powder, removing visible social distinctions. One of the most important boundaries that dissolves at these crucial times, as Eliade points out,<sup>101</sup> is that between the living and the dead. The living enter the world of the dead and so, as in the Varsakṛtyadīpakā above, people roam about behaving like ghosts. The powder is symbolic of pollen/semen/blood, a medium of contact between life and death. These rituals emphasize the liminal or marginal features of this transitional time of year: it is neither winter nor spring. In the liminal realm, unexpected and illegal activities often occur. The sexual overtones, for

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<sup>98</sup> Varsakṛtyadīpakā, p. 301.

<sup>99</sup> Hala, Gāthāsaptāśatī, ed., intro, trans., R. Basak (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1971), 4.69.

<sup>100</sup> M. Eliade, Cosmos and History (New York: Harper and Row Pub., 1959); V. Turner, The Ritual Process (Reprint; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 94f.

<sup>101</sup> M. Eliade, Cosmos and History, pp. 61, 62f.

example, which are clear in the Gāthāsaptasatī and the Ratnāvalī above, become even more explicit as we continue our investigation of the literature describing the Vasantotsava. Not only is this behavior indicative of dissolution through its contravention of social mores but it also signifies and asserts the renewed vitality of the oncoming spring. Hence the division between the old year and the new year, between winter and spring, is not distinct and neither of the two competing cycles is given ascendance over the other. Rather, these rituals are transitional and signify both the waning winter and the burgeoning spring.

A vivid and sexually charged description of this behavior is to be found in the Pārijāta-Mañjarī or the Vijayaśrī of Rāja-Guru Madana, alias Bāla Saraswatī.<sup>102</sup> This is a text known only by an inscription found in Dhār and dates to the twelfth century A.D. The following excerpts, describing this festival in terms of the pure and playful mood of eros seem relevant for this discussion:

(20) Look at it! At some places the vermilion flies sky high with the peals of reverberating laughter; at others (it is) quantities of musk-powder, and at (still) others (it is) the whiff of the powder of the sandal-wood. With the showers of the waters of the desara (or kumkuma) thrown up high from the outlets of the syringes, the Spring Festival, that has been started by the town-folk at will in numerous ways, has now become tumultuous. Again,  
 (21) the ladies of the town, with their bodies made charming by flowery ornaments, now wearing at pleasure at their foreheads streaks of vermilion, that have turned their hair reddish, and dancing in an intoxicating and faltering manner, so as to cause a confusion in the lilt (of the music), look

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<sup>102</sup>Rāja-Guru Madana alias Bāla Saraswatī, Pārijāta Mañjarī alias The Vijayaśrī, re-edited S.K. Dīkshīt (Bhopal: S.K. Dīkshīt, 1963).

smilingly at the faces of their lovers, the drummers in sports. (p. 9)

As the king and queen, featured in this text, watch the festivities of the citizens from the uppermost rooms of the palace, the queen's handmaiden surreptitiously slips the queen a handful of vermilion. The queen throws the powder into the king's face. With this the handmaiden and the 'Vidūṣaka' (the court wit) throw vermilion at each other and the Vidūṣaka advises the king to throw musk powder at the queen. The king says:

(25) the southern wind (lit., the wind of the hill of the sandal-wood, i.e., the Nilgiris) blows, bringing (with it droplets of) tears of joy, that have come out of the shutting eyes of the musk deer, that got wet at the soft touch of the horns of the female deer, meeting him with an ardent pining for copulation; and dexterously removing the perspiration due to exertion in the sports of love, in which were engaged the wives of the Kinnaras (heavenly musicians), that were seated, singing, in solitude.

-p.11

The musk, derived from the Sanskrit muska (testicles) with which the king smears the queen, is a clearly sexual substance. The sexual overtones in the above description are unmistakable.

We find, then, in medieval times this ritual (of throwing) described as an essential component of the Vasantotsava and of amorous behavior outside a given festival context. Multi-valent in its meaning, the throwing of substances thus has overtones of fertility, sexuality, and liminality.

The modern Spring Festival of Holī continues this ritual with all its meanings. This is confirmed in secondary sources like Kane's History of Dharmaśāstra where the importance of water and colored

powder in the spring celebrations is discussed.<sup>103</sup> As well, field studies such as those of Lawrence Babb in the Divine Hierarchy<sup>104</sup> touch upon similar behaviors in Chhattisgarhi on this occasion as does McKim Marriott in his study of the Holī festival.<sup>105</sup>

The popularity of throwing of powder, especially red powder, is in fact one of the most dominant characteristics of the Holi festival in modern times. McKim Marriott reports the following experience in Kishan Garhi in northern India during the 'Spring Festival' in this respect.<sup>106</sup>

The state of the clothes in which I ultimately fell asleep told me the next morning that I had been sprayed and soaked repeatedly with libations of liquid dye, red and yellow. My face in the morning was still a brilliant vermilion, and my hair was orange from repeated embraces and scourings with colored powders by the bereaved and probably by many others.

What remains common throughout history is that this activity is performed as a component of the seasonal festival celebrating spring.

Bhattacharyya says:<sup>107</sup>

The most important rite of the festival of Holi is the use of a red powder (abir or phāg as it is generally called) which is to be smeared on the bodies of friends and relatives and even on the bodies of strangers. Sometimes water is colored red with this powder and is sprinkled on human bodies.

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<sup>103</sup>Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra, V. 237f.

<sup>104</sup>Lawrence Babb, The Divine Hierarchy (New York; Columbia University Press, 1975).

<sup>105</sup>McKim Marriott "The Feast of Love" in Milton Singer (ed.), Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes, p. 204.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid.

<sup>107</sup>N.N. Bhattacharyya, Ancient Indian Rituals (Delhi: Manoharlal Book Service, 1975), p. 121.



Now-a-days young men and women also use other colours, but the approved colour is red.

It is clear that the throwing of colored powder and water forms a part of ancient spring rites as well as modern spring festivities. As it is described in the texts, it belongs with a group of non-specific activities like dancing or singing which are typical of occasions of merriment.<sup>108</sup> On the other hand, the detachment of this ritual from the festival context as a general erotic sport suggests certain overtones that imply a more specific meaning in its ritual context than its simply being a result of overflowing enthusiasm. It is to a more detailed analysis of this meaning, touched on above, that we now turn.

Particular note must be taken here to emphasize the color of the substances thrown, which seems to bear a number of symbolic associations. The most straightforward and, in many ways, the most appropriate symbolic interpretation is the association of red with blood and hence life, fertility, and vigour. Although throwing things at others is essentially an aggressive act, in the present context it will be argued that the blood is not symbolic of the blood of combative violence but the blood of nurturing and that what we see here is a substance symbolic of menstrual flow. As we shall see later, the abundant promiscuity licensed during the festival and the numerous references to

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<sup>108</sup> This activity is not only recorded in texts but also has been identified as the subject of various paintings. At the Vijayanagara temple at Hampi there is a depiction of young lovers surrounded by damsels who are soaking them with water from syringes. (Sharma, *Festivals of India*, p. 13, fig. 10.) There are also several instances of this festivity illustrated in Rajput and Moghul miniature paintings (cf. Raghavan, *Festivals, Sports, and Pastimes*, p. 200).

female sexuality must link with each other and the color red, in a configuration which somehow binds all these facets together under the umbrella of the associative components of a Spring Festival. The ritual throwing of colored powder, water, or mud on each other may be interpreted in several ways in the context of the festival and some suggestions for the interpretation of this activity follow.

The most obvious starting point for the interpretation of the red powder is this link between the color red (blood) and fertility, a link particularly evident with respect to women. In cultures outside India as well, the sign of blood imparts vital energy. Thomson writes:<sup>109</sup>

It is a worldwide custom for menstruating or pregnant women to daub their bodies with red ochre, which serves at once to warn the men away and to enhance their fertility. In many marriage ceremonies the bride's forehead is painted red... a sign that she is forbidden to all men save her husband and a guarantee that she will bear him children...

Red powder is employed during female puberty rites in India and other parts of the world. S.C. Bose in Hindus As They Are describes the puberty rites of women in India (specifically in Bengal).<sup>110</sup> He says that women are for four days secluded and then led to a tank accompanied by five married women. Here they are smeared with tumeric water.

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<sup>109</sup>G. Thomson, Studies in Ancient Greek Society, pp. 209-10 cited by Bhattacharyya, Indian Puberty Rites, pp. 17-18.

<sup>110</sup>N.K. Bose, Hindus as They Are (London: 1881), p. 86 cited by Bhattacharyya, Indian Puberty Rites, p. 7.

According to Briffault, menstruation in certain societies is regarded as the effect of sexual intercourse.<sup>111</sup> Precocious sexual behavior is therefore permissible, encouraged, and enjoined.<sup>112</sup> Thus blood and red (its symbolic or metonymic counterpart) may be linked with the licentious behavior which accompanies the throwing of powder in our descriptions of this festival. The Bhils, for example, prior to sowing their crops, smear stones with vermilion.<sup>113</sup> According to Saraswati, vermilion stands for menstrual blood and the act of smearing it on the stone implies the infusion of productive energy into the earth. The relationship between vermilion and production has been described at length by Briffault.<sup>114</sup>

A red substance is also featured in certain cases of the worship of goddesses. This is particularly true regarding the menstruation of the goddess. Often the temples of the goddess are closed for this period. In Assam the temple of Kāmākhyā which is dedicated to Pārvatī is kept closed during this period. A red liquid is sold to devotees as her blood.<sup>115</sup> In Tantric literature menstrual blood is a prescribed offering to the great goddess. The blood of a virgin is the most

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<sup>111</sup>R. Briffault, The Mothers, 3 vols. (Reprint; New York: Macmillan Co., 1969), II, p. 447.

<sup>112</sup>N.N. Bhattacharyya, Indian Puberty Rites, p. 6.

<sup>113</sup>W. Crooke, Religion and Folklore of North India (3rd. ed.; New Delhi: S. Chand, 1926), p. 250.

<sup>114</sup>Briffault, The Mothers, II, pp. 412-417.

<sup>115</sup>N.N. Bhattacharyya, Indian Puberty Rites, p. 16.

desired substance for worshipping her. If it is not available, the blood of a Cāṇḍālī or outcaste woman is prescribed. If this is unavailable, red sandalwood paste may be used as a substitute.<sup>116</sup> O'Flaherty describes sandalwood paste as a substance symbolic of fertility.<sup>117</sup> The smearing of an erotic substance (blood, red powder, ashes, sandalwood paste) on cult objects is an essential feature of many forms of Hindu religious rituals. Hence red, the color of blood, was regarded as sacred and employed on cult objects for sanctifying purposes especially when the object of worship is the female and her sexual essence.

It is to be recalled that red powder throwing may be replaced in the Spring Festival by the drenching with liquid. That this is an activity equally associated with fertility and sexuality is clear from the following ritual described by Badyanath Saraswati in Brāhmanic Ritual Tradition and performed during the marriage rites. After testing the bride she is washed and sprinkled with surā (wine) and the following mantra is recited:<sup>118</sup>

Kāma, I know your name, 'You are intoxication by name.  
Bring him (the bridegroom so that he may be here) together

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<sup>116</sup>c.f. Mundamālā Tantra, Pātala II, cited by Bhattacharyya, Indian Puberty Rites, p. 17.

<sup>117</sup>W. O'Flaherty, Śiva, The Erotic Ascetic (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 246. The basis for this identification is the use of sandalwood paste on the bodies of females (especially Pārvatī) to enhance their sexuality. This is seen particularly in opposition to Śiva who smears his body with ash.

<sup>118</sup>Gobhila Grhya Sūtra, 1.1.10 cited by Saraswati, Brāhmanic Ritual Traditions (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1977), p. 185.

with the bride. To thee there was surā. Here (may there be) the excellent birth. O Agni you are created from penance, hail!

According to Saraswati this ritual symbolically causes passion. Following this a relative of the bride washes her private parts, reciting the following verse:<sup>119</sup>

I unite this generative organ of yours with honey. This is Prajapati's second face. With that you, who are your own mistress (and) an excellent queen triumph over all men who are self-willed, hail!

Clearly this is a ritual aimed at procreation and in this context the sprinkling of the bride with wine is equated with fertility. During spring, ladies are enjoined, also, to spit wine on certain trees to initiate blossoms. This is called Puṣpāvacāyikā by Bhoja and Vakulavihāra by Śāradātanaya, and ladies, having prompted trees to blossom, deck themselves out with these flowers.<sup>120</sup> In fact, the wine may be symbolic of semen in which case we might also suggest that the powder and liquid throwing, characteristic of the Spring Festival, is also symbolic of semen and the syringes symbolic of the phallus.

Finally, the visual change brought about by smearing one or another's body with color must have some bearing on our understanding of this activity. As mentioned above, visually the color glosses individual differences. All of the participants look alike. If one defines social structure as the organization of individuals into distinct and functional groups which work together, then that structure, so

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<sup>119</sup>Gobhila Grhya Sūtra, 2.1.10 also cited by Saraswati, Ibid.

<sup>120</sup>See Raghavan, Bhoja's Śrṅgāra Prakāśa, p. 631.

important to the continued existence of society, breaks down as the distinct identities of the individuals are lost. The powder conveys the idea of societal dissolution. Further, as symbolic of blood (particularly menstrual blood) powder is one of the greatest pollutants. At the same time it is one of the most ritually potent of substances.<sup>121</sup> The potency of blood renders it an effective substance in effecting fertility, which is one of the primary aims of the Spring Festival.

Parallel to the temporary loss of social distinctions, there is yet another component of the red powder throwing that merits our attention and further connects with one more important theme of the festival: the Vasantotsava celebrates the destruction of winter. This loss of social distinctions and the throwing of symbolic blood, here, of death, reflects this theme of destruction. As the participants, in the Ratnāvalī, are one indistinguishable mass covered with red and performing rites of the Vasantotsava, so too is this one indistinguishable mass covered with red and performing rites celebrating the death of winter. Like the Spring Festival itself, red powder is a multi-faceted symbol suggesting fertility and eroticism as well as destruction and death. The concept of the Vasantotsava as a rite connected with death is strengthened by the evidence given below.

Although it is clear that the substance to be thrown is powder in most descriptions of this ritual, in the context of the Vasantotsava

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<sup>121</sup> See, for example, Mary Douglas, who argues that the most polluting substances are also the most ritually potent. Purity and Danger (London: 1979), pp. 7f.

(or otherwise), there are two texts in which participants are enjoined to smear themselves with ashes. In the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa no mention is made of the throwing of color. Rather this text records the spring celebration in connection with the burning of a demoness called Dhaundhā. It is the ashes from the cremation pyre of Dhaundhā that are worshipped as holy on this day.<sup>122</sup> Further, in the Varṣakṛtyadīpakā one is enjoined to smear ashes as well as color. This suggests, symbolically at least, that the changing of the color of one's skin by means of powder and the changing of the color of one's skin by means of ashes are related and even interchangeable activities. Since the substance (ashes), the usage (smearing), and the visual result (change in physical appearance), found in descriptions of the Vasantotsava, are fundamentally the same as in the case of the Hindu deity Śiva, we might shed some light on the significance of this activity, as characteristic of spring, by examining the meaning of Śiva's ashes and the activity of his smearing himself with ashes.

Indeed the significance of Śiva's ashes in Indian culture has been remarked upon at length by Wendy O'Flaherty in Śiva the Erotic Ascetic (1981). She notes:

On an explicit, superficial level, the ashes are ascetic, disgusting (being the ashes of corpses), and simply anti erotic. (p. 245)

Ashes as symbols of death are not unknown in Indian religion. Fire destroys, ashes signify destruction. This is the case not only with

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<sup>122</sup>Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, 132.37.

regard to objects, but, more importantly in a society such as Indian society where human bodies are disposed of by means of cremation, fire signifies the end of human life. Ashes, then, may be understood as symbolic of destruction. Thus Śiva's ashes are the ashes of destruction. But not only do Śiva's ashes signify death, they, in addition, because of this association with death, are inauspicious. Ashes in fact are peculiar to Śiva as the god of destruction. They serve as a constant reminder of that aspect of his personality to his devotees. In the context of the Vasantotsava, the covering of participants with ashes is also symbolic of death. In the Bhavisya Purāṇa and Varsakṛtyadīpakā the ashes are the actual ashes of the demoness Dhaundhā: evidence of her destruction.

Ashes as symbols of death, however, are not merely opposed to the other associations we have discussed for red powder as the symbol of fertility and life. In fact, as W. O'Flaherty has noted, ashes are also indicators of fertility and eroticism, as well as of destruction and asceticism. In the case of Śiva the erotic significance of ashes is clearly discernible in that his erect phallus, smeared with ashes, is worshipped by his devotees. If we accept O'Flaherty's interpretation of ashes as both erotic and ascetic, then a thematic link between fertility and decay may be established in the context of Śiva's ashes and in the ashes featured in the Vasantotsava. We might also comment here that while for the female, red (menstrual blood) is her fertile output, for the male it is a white residue of his fire – the male, so to speak, "dies" in the act, while the female "takes birth." Raghavan, citing the following evidence in the Bhavisya Purāṇa, goes as far as to suggest



that the powder-throwing typical of the festival, and which we have seen primarily as a fertility rite, could also be an extension of covering oneself with the ashes from the Holī fire.<sup>123</sup>

The motif of ashes in the Vasantotsava appears in greater detail in the episode of Indian mythology in which Kāma is destroyed by fire issuing from the third eye of Śiva. In the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa this episode is narrated specifically in connection with the Vasantotsava. It is, particularly, in the context of the Kāma myth that both the creative and erotic significance of the ashes is apparent. The ashes are linked with the destruction and the resurrection of Kāma. Like seeds, ashes may be understood here as the essence of a living thing, beyond which it can be reduced no further, but from which it will re-emerge. It is this myth which evidences, for O'Flaherty, the erotic symbolism of ashes, ashes being the seed of Kāma or lust. She remarks, finally, that the erotic use of Śiva's ashes is more than a late poetic fancy for it is inherent in the nature of the ash itself.<sup>124</sup>

In addition, while the ashes as described above are symbolic of Kāma's death (and hint at potential resurrection) the account in the Matsya Purāṇa tells us something else about their role in the Vasantotsava by referring again to the same myth.<sup>125</sup> In this latter text Rati, the wife of Kāma, overcome by grief, smears herself with the

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<sup>123</sup>Raghavan, Festivals, Sports and Pastimes, p. 198.

<sup>124</sup>O'Flaherty, Śiva, The Erotic Ascetic, p. 247.

<sup>125</sup>Matsya Purāṇa, 154, pp. 259-274.

ash remains of Kāma. The physical contact of Rati's body and Kāma's ashes can and indeed probably ought to be understood as erotic. Here, in the act of smearing her body with ashes, we find the union of male and female, husband and wife, life and death.

In the Ratnāvalī above and in several other texts there is no mention of throwing ashes on one another or smearing ashes on one's body. In most of these texts the theme of eroticism and fertility is carried exclusively by the red or yellow powder which is dispersed freely at this time. The red powder is a symbol of the creative forces. Red is the color of blood and hence life itself. Red powder or liquid, we have seen, is smeared on various objects in fertility rites in Indian culture as are ashes. This cognate use of ashes allows for the parallels made in other texts between throwing powdered substances and smearing ashes.

### Music, Song, Dance, Drinking

Dancing and songs, music, and liquor are all variously described in the Ratnāvalī as typical and necessary aspects of the festival. Dance is specifically mentioned in the Ratnāvalī as the dance of spring (vasantābhinayam). Moreover, it is performed by women (specifically by Madanikā and Cūtalatikā).<sup>126</sup> The Nāṭyaśāstra, a text

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<sup>126</sup> Ratnāvalī, p. 14, line 2,5.

whose primary concern is dance, elaborates on this description<sup>127</sup> and identifies the dance specifically as the lāsyā dance imitative of the activities of ordinary people (laukikavṛtta).<sup>128</sup> The popularity of this dance amongst common folk suggests that the spring festival celebrations do not revolve specifically around any one social group. Another medieval text, the Daśakumāracarita, helps us further to particularize the nature of the spring dance by suggesting that the lāsyā is a dance of love. That is, it is a dance in which the emotions of love are represented by means of various gesticulations and attitudes and postures.<sup>129</sup> The rhythm of the music and motion of the dance suggest that the whole notion of the dance of love is one of enticement and beckoning. On the occasion of the Vasantotsava such 'seduction' is more than welcome and, indeed, represents on a smaller scale the anticipated fecundity of the natural order.

The same textual reference in the Ratnāvalī mentions the role of song in the festival. These festival songs are described here and in

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<sup>127</sup> Nāṭyaśāstra, commentary of Abhinavagupta, ed. G.H. Bhatt (Baroda: COS, 1954), III.67.15 (vol. page, line) specifically cites the Ratnāvalī in this respect.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. The lāsyā dance is also, according to Basham, a dance representing a story or part of a story and is regarded as the prototype of the profusion of independent popular ballets which has always accompanied the more serious and classical theatre of India. A Cultural History of India, ed A.L. Basham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p 172. Further, this is the dance which Kali dances in her dance contest with Śiva. O'Flaherty, Women, Androgynes and other Mythical Beasts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 141.

<sup>129</sup> Daśakumāracarita, 2.5. cited by V.S. Apte, Sanskrit-English Dictionary, III. 1365.

other texts as caccarī (or carcarī), Holī and Hori. Texts on music specify and define the exact qualities of these songs. Someśvara in the Mānasollāsa tells us the songs are sung by women (yosit).<sup>130</sup> The Saṅgītaratnākara which dates to the twelfth century tells us that the songs of the Spring Festival are Prakṛt songs<sup>131</sup> and according to the Vāsavadattā the dancing and mass singing of vulgar songs, typical of this occasion, were performed most often by women. Raghavan reports that in North India musical compositions called Holī and Hori are derived from songs sung by common folk during the Holī festival.<sup>132</sup> He also tells us that in southern India on the day after Holī (Kāmandī), the new year is celebrated in the common Marathi mode.<sup>133</sup>

Following from the merriment engendered by these songs and dances, another element of this festival is described in the Ratnāvalī which could be characterized as general licentiousness: the consumption of intoxicating beverages, the entertaining of courtesans, and sexual license. The drinking of alcoholic beverages is commonly mentioned in festival literature and adds to the picture we are forming of the merriment of this occasion.

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<sup>130</sup>Someśvara, Mānasollāsa, 297.16.

<sup>131</sup>Sāṅgadeva, Saṅgītaratnākara, 5 vols. (Madras: Adyar Library, 1959), V. 291. For the date of this text see Krishnamachariar, p. 120.

<sup>132</sup>Raghavan, Festivals, Sports and Pastimes, p. 194.

<sup>133</sup>Apte, The Sacrament of Marriage, p. 71.

The Ratnāvalī describes drinking of wine in mixed gatherings of men and women in the streets, an activity given sanction only on festival days and particularly on Spring Festival days. Other texts confirm that this, indeed, is characteristic of this festival. Liquor is mentioned in Bhoja's eleventh-century text, the Sarasvatīkanthābharana, as being consumed on the occasion of the Vasantotsava as a reasonable means of intoxication. Hence:<sup>134</sup>

kṣanapiṣṭadhūsarastani madhumadatāmrākṣī/  
kasya kṛte cūṭamañjari putri tvayā maṇḍito grāmaḥ//

(Oh Cūṭamañjarī whose breasts are smeared dusty with colored powder and whose eyes are red from intoxication with liquor, for whose sake have you graced our village?)

In Śāradātanaya's Bhāvaprakāśa, which dates from the thirteenth century, drinking bouts occur as a part of the regular festivities at the Madanamahotsava.<sup>135</sup>

udyanā-salila-kṛīḍākusumāpacaya-kṛīyā/  
āpānakeliḥ śakrārcā vasantamadanotsavāḥ//

(The Madanotsava and spring festivities are attended with plucking of flowers, sports in the pool of the garden, drinking bouts, and worship of Indra.)

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<sup>134</sup> Sarasvatīkanthābharana, 314.12.

<sup>135</sup> Śāradātanaya, Bhāvaprakāśa, ed. B. Bhattacharyya (Baroda: GOS, 1930), III.99.18. For the date of this text, see Krishnamachariar, 837.

The ritual consumption of liquor, the entertaining of courtesans, and general merriment are not unprecedented behaviors. Evidence suggests that similar behaviors date back to Vedic times and occurred during ritual sacrifice (yajña). For example, during the autumn Sautrāmanī sacrifice drinking and the entertaining of courtesans are prescribed components of the celebration.<sup>136</sup> According to descriptions of the Mahāvratā sacrifice, such as those found in the Aitreya Āraṇyaka, Śāṅkhayana Āraṇyaka, Taittirīya Saṁhitā,<sup>137</sup> licentious behavior of a type similar to that found in the Vasantotsava was common.

The general merriment engendered by drinking, dancing, and singing could be characterized indeed as licentiousness. Festivals which condone sexual license are frequently associated with the fecundity of nature. Briffault comments on this feature of the Spring Festival in India as follows:<sup>138</sup>

The Holi festival, which is celebrated in every part of Hindustan in honour of the goddess Vasantī is an occasion on which "the most licentious debauchery and disorder reign throughout every class of society. It is the regular Saturnalia of India. Persons of the greatest respectability, without regard to rank or age, are not ashamed to take part in the orgies which mark this season of the year." Phallic emblems operated mechanically are carried, and the loves of the gods are represented in 'tableaux vivants' on stages and chariots. In ancient times the festival was called Basantotsava, and the noblest princesses danced in public in

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<sup>136</sup>Raghavan, Festivals, Sports, and Pastimes... p. 15.

<sup>137</sup>A.B. Keith, Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanisads, 2 vols. HOS 31,32 (Second Indian Reprint; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), 31. pp. 349f.

<sup>138</sup>R. Briffault, The Mothers, III, pp. 198-199.

honour of the god of love. The original intention of the carnival, says Mr. Crooke, is to promote the fertility of man, animals, and crops. In Chota Nagpur, among the Hos, the harvest is the signal for general license, and such license is looked upon as a matter of absolute necessity. Men set aside all conventions and women all modesty, and complete liberty is given to the girls. In Orissa, among the Bhuiyas, during the spring festival called Magh Porai, "all respect for blood relations and husbands is set at nought." The Parganait, a caste of husbandmen in the Rājmaḥal Hills, have a great yearly agricultural festival, acalled Sohrai, at which the unmarried of both sexes indulge in promiscuous sexual intercourse. In Jeypore promiscuity and changes of partners last for a month at the new year festival of the Punjas. The Kotas of the Nilgiri Hills have a similar festival of continuous licentiousness. In Assam spring festivals are observed by all the tribes, and women are allowed complete freedom without "any stain, blemish, or loss of reputation." Similar festivals are observed in Khondistan, among the wild tribes of Manipur and of northern Burma.

The connection between the ritual consumption of wine and fertility rituals has been noted by Crooke in Religion and Folklore of North India.<sup>139</sup> There is also a connection between wine and marriage rituals which are performed to sanctify the union and to effect the fertility of the couple in various world cultures.<sup>140</sup>

### The Participants

The description of the Vasantotsava in the Ratnāvalī is similar to other accounts of this festival in that, in the main, the main role players are women (often courtesans), and kings. At the same time,

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<sup>139</sup> Crooke, Religion and Folklore of North India, p. 100.

<sup>140</sup> See, for example, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, V., pp. 79-80 cited by Bhattacharyya in Indian Puberty Rites, p. 93.

however, there is an abundance of references by Harsa to the activities of all members of society regardless of caste and without specific reference to their function in the Vasantotsava. References, as noted above, to dances which are laukikavṛttam (activities of common people) and songs sung by the common folk in common dialects (i.e., non-Sanskrit) suggest that all strata of society participated in the festival. Nonetheless, a few groups emerge as dominant.

### Women

Women emerge as one dominant identifiable group in this festival. This is the case in the above description from the Ratnāvalī as well as in a variety of other texts. It was women, it will be recalled, who were the primary targets in the matter of throwing powder. As well it was women who appeared as singers and dancers during this celebration. Other texts support the assumption that the role of women was important. As an example of the centrality of the activities of women during the Vasantotsava, we read from the Kāvyamīmāṃsā:<sup>141</sup>

mano adhikam cātra vilāsalāsyē preṅkhāsu dolāsu ca  
sundarīnām/  
gīte ca gāuricaritāvataṃse pūjāprapañce ca manobhavasya//

(The minds of women on this occasion [i.e., Vasantotsava] should be on graceful dance, swinging in a swing, singing

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<sup>141</sup> Kāvyamīmāṃsā, ed. C.D. Dalal and R.A. Sastri (3rd. ed.; Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1934), 104.



and on the hearing the stories of Gaurī and on worship of Kāma.)

This text illustrates the prominence of women and in this case makes specific reference regarding their worship of Gaurī and Kāma. Gaurī (Pārvatī) is often said to be worshipped at the advent of spring.<sup>142</sup> The worship of Kāma by women is a prominent feature of this festival according to many medieval descriptions. The above quotation from the Kāvyamīmāṃsā specifically connects women with particular activities and from other texts we may see that it is primarily the women participants whose dances, songs, and worship create the ambiance we may view as typical of this festival.

Textual descriptions of the worship of Pārvatī by women during the Spring Festival shed further light on the significance of this festival by linking its performance with specific goals much in the manner of a kānya rite or vrata designed for a specific end. The Jain author Nemichandra in his Ākhyakamanikośa, for example, specifically describes this ritual as a fertility ritual wherein ladies worship Gaurī on the Vasantotsava for conjugal happiness.<sup>143</sup> The Holikāmāhātmya, which is a late text appended to the Matsya Purāṇa, describes the ways of worshipping the goddess on this day.<sup>144</sup> Rajasekhara in the

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<sup>142</sup>See sections on the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa (135) and the Virūpākṣavasantotsavacampū below.

<sup>143</sup>Sharma, Festivals of India, p. 17 cites this text. See note no. 208, below.

<sup>144</sup>A. Chatterjee, Padma Purāṇa - A Study (Calcutta: The

Karpūramañjarīsara mentions a festival of swinging in honor of Gaurī which ends on the full moon of Phālguna.<sup>145</sup> Here the festival is prescribed for women only. And in modern times women fashion an image of Pārvatī out of the ashes of the Holī fire. Mrs Sinclair Stevenson in Rites of the Twiceborn tells us that participants in this celebration then place the image of Pārvatī in the centre of a circle and circumambulate it for fifteen days. The purpose of this is to gain a good husband.<sup>146</sup> Clearly this collective evidence of the classical texts and modern observances suggests that one of the primary aspects of this celebration is that it was an auspicious opportunity for women to worship specific gods or goddesses in order to secure marital bliss, which is synonymous in traditional India with fecundity.

What emerges, in such descriptions of the Vasantotsava, is that during the spring celebrations when renewal is of vital concern, the responsibility of ensuring that life will be forthcoming and productive falls to a large extent on women and extends, through women and their central participation in rites, to all of adult society. Women are in direct contact with the reproductive processes: they bear children. Renewal and productivity are essential for the maintenance of society,

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Principal, Sanskrit College, 1967), pp. 181-182.

<sup>145</sup>Rajasekhara, Karpūramañjarīsara, ed. S. Konow, trans. C.R. Lanman (2nd. ed.; Delhi: Motilal Banārsīdāss, 1963), Act III.

<sup>146</sup>S. Stevenson, Rites of the Twiceborn (2nd ed.; New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corp., 1971), pp. 281-7.

and thus it is that the ritual role of women in this festival is paramount.

## Kings

Although women are the dominant identifiable participants in the Vasantotsava as it appears in the urban context, the festival, even in medieval times, was not their exclusive domain. Kings, too, are identified in several descriptions. Their role in this urban phase of the festival, however, appears to be relatively minimal. The above description of the Vasantotsava from the Ratnāvalī describes the king proceeding to the mansion of Madana to watch the citizens celebrate the festival of Madana. The king is, by and large, removed from the celebrations in the streets. He is an observer and overseer. Śulapani tells us in the Dolayatraviveka that Holaka was instituted first by King Indrayumna in Vṛṇḍāvana.<sup>147</sup> He does not engage directly in the festival activity but plays an important role in its supervision. This is confirmed also by texts like the Kathāsaritsāgara wherein Prince Naravāhanadatta amused himself by watching the festivities of the citizens who danced without restraint at the Spring Festival.<sup>148</sup> In other texts, however, such as the Pārijāta Mañjarī, the king and queen

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<sup>147</sup> Śulapani, Dolayatraviveka, ed. S. Banerji in the volume of papers presented to Kane, pp. 56-62. Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra, p. 238.

<sup>148</sup> Kathāsaritsāgara, XIV, 58.

engage directly in the ritual of throwing powder and musk, though this is done in isolation, in one of the uppermost rooms of the palace, far above the crowds (Act I).

The presence of royalty indicates that the Vasantotsava is celebrated under the auspices of the king, who is functionally and theoretically the primary representative of order in the social system. The king is responsible not only for order in the kingdom, but also for the prosperity of the citizens. As overseer of the festival he represents that order; as convener he establishes the legitimacy of the celebration.

Further, the king's very participation in this festival may also be understood to guarantee its effectiveness. His participation in the Vasantotsava in the garden context, as we shall see, is vital, there he is the central object of devotion and, indeed, it may even be that the festival celebrates his fertile powers. Indeed, even titular kings represent the entire community and epitomize their people's life and destiny. Misconduct or debility on the king's part always impairs the fertility of the soil and the general welfare of the people.<sup>149</sup> More than this, the king can be seen, by his stature, to embody a position akin to that of the gods and it is by his position, actions, and good graces that the community thrives. Hence, his virility is essential: he furnishes the breath of life to his people.<sup>150</sup> His prominence here, in

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<sup>149</sup> See, for example, T. Gaster, Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 481.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid. p. 827. The celebration of fertility of the king is not

celebration of spring, is indicative of his essential role in ensuring the efficacy of the celebration, and thus the continuity of life. We shall return to a more complete consideration of the role of the king in the Vasantotsava in our discussion of the festivities in the garden according to the Ratnāvalī.

### Brahmins

One might also note that, although the festival is sanctioned by the king and appears to be sanctioned also by tradition and custom there is an absence of mention of Brahmins. One encounters, in fact, only the occasional reference to the participation of Brahmins in the celebrations. For example, according to the Varsakṛtyadīpikā, the Vasantarāga should be listened to after the worship of Kāma and Rati is completed. Thus:<sup>151</sup>

tatra dine brāhmaṇamukhena vasantarāga śravanam

(On that day the Vasantarāga, sung by Brahmins, should be heard.)

At this stage in the celebrations, Brahmins are the active participants while others passively listen to the music of spring. References like this, however, are comparatively rare and, one suspects, somewhat

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unknown, either, in Indian rituals wherein one might cite the Horse Sacrifice as a ritual aimed at enhancing the fertility of the king. See, for example, W. O'Flaherty's analysis of this sacrifice in Women, Androgynes and Other Mythical Beasts, pp. 149 ff.

<sup>151</sup>Varsakṛtyadīpikā, p. 289.

artificial. More common are descriptions of the festival which do not mention Brahmins as critical participants in the celebrations. Rather, most accounts, as noted above, describe the participants as an amorphous mass with no distinctions in regard to social position. (Refer to the section on powder throwing.) Hence, although Brahmins probably did participate in the festivities the lack of direct textual reference suggests that their identity as Brahmins, i.e., authorities in religious matters, was probably, in this context, unimportant. In further explanation of the minimal role of Brahmins, it might be restated at this point that according to some, the Spring Festival is a festival particularly appropriate for Śūdras.<sup>152</sup>

### The Vasantotsava: A Garden Festival

From the description of the festival, in the urban setting, where we see citizens celebrating the festival in the streets, our focus now changes to the garden. In the Ratnāvalī, as in several other texts, it is the Queen Vāsavadattā who performs a ceremony in honor of Kāmadeva. Her instructions to King Udayana are as follows:<sup>153</sup>

I am going today to the Makaranda garden to offer worship to the image of the flower-armed deity who stands at the foot of

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<sup>152</sup>Khare, Hindu Hearth and Home, p. 147 and Chapter One, above.

<sup>153</sup>The following is paraphrased from C.R. Devadhar and N.G. Suru's translation of the Ratnāvalī, pp. 23-31.

the red Aśoka tree; so my lord will be pleased to be present there (p. 20)

Both king and queen and their respective retinues proceed to the garden separately. There follows a description of the garden by the king and his attendant (Vidūṣaka) who arrive first.

This Makaranda garden seems now to hail your approach with a silk canopy formed by a mass of pollen from the opening blossoms of mango trees which are waving in the Malaya breezes. The garden is charming with the choirs of Koil's sweet song which blends with the humming of the giddy bees.  
-Vidūṣaka, p. 23

The trees yonder appear to be drunk with the wine offered at the Spring Festival. They are glowing red with the new leaves which have the lustre of sprouting coral; and they seem to talk in an indistinct manner because of the sweet murmur of the bees; and they seem to swagger, and reel as their branches struck by the Malaya breezes, are ever and anon waving. The mouthful of wine sprinkled at the root of the Bakula trees seems now to be flavoured with thick dripping blossoms by the Bakula trees; and the Campaka flowers bloom even while the moon-like faces of young damsels are flushed with wine; while the bees give back in harmony and thus seem to imitate the music of the anklets ringing loud as the delicate feet are raised against the Aśoka trees.  
-Udayana, p. 23

The queen queries her attendant, Kāñcanamālā, as to the whereabouts of the Raktāśoka tree where she is to pay her offering to Madana (p. 25). Finding it, she commands Kāñcanamālā to "place the divine Pradyumna at the foot of the Aśoka tree."<sup>154</sup> The king arrives and is asked to take a seat. Kāñcanamālā then directs the queen to adorn the Aśoka tree with flowers, saffron, sandal, and unguents

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<sup>154</sup>This is a reference to an image of Kāma (Pradyumna) which is placed at the foot of the tree.

offered by the queen's own hands and to worship the divine Pradyumna. She hands the materials of worship to Vāsavadattā who commences the ceremony. The king observes the queen worshipping Pradyumna (Kāma) and remarks to her:

While thus employed in worshipping Kāma, you resemble a creeper twining round a tree with fresh foliage, the border of your robe shines bright with the dye of the Kusumbha flowers, and your complexion is remarkably bright from the fresh bath. Moreover the Aśoka appears to have put forth a new and lovelier shoot, while your hand, engaged in the worship of Smara, rests upon it. (p. 31)

Vāsavadattā's attendant, at the end of the ceremony, directs the queen to worship her husband. This Vāsavadattā proceeds to do with flowers and unguents. Finally Kāñcanmālā offers to Vasantaka, the king's attendant, flowers, unguents, and ornaments which he accepts. At this point in the festivities the sun is setting.

The second act takes place a day or two after the first. The festival of Kāma is still being celebrated. The portions of this act relevant to this study also take place in the Makaranda garden. Specifically, this act mentions the application of a preparation which prompts flowers to bloom out of season. The king administers this potion to his favorite jasmine tree (p. 39). The procedure is successful and the branches of the jasmine become covered with thick blossoming flowers. Secondly, Ratnāvalī, who has at this point become infatuated with the king, draws a picture of him in the guise of Kāma. Susāṅgatā, a handmaiden, happens upon Ratnāvalī and remarks that the portrait is incomplete. She fills it in by drawing the likeness of Ratnāvalī in the guise of Rati, the consort of Kāma (p. 41-45). The



portrait arouses love in the heart of the king for Ratnāvalī and confirms that the love is mutual.

Now, just as the initial description above of the Vasantotsava in the Ratnāvalī, as it is described in the urban setting, is indicative of some of the typical activities engaged in during this festival, the description of the Vasantotsava in the garden also illustrates the prominence of other elements of this festival which do not appear in the celebration of the Vasantotsava in the city streets. The festivities as described in the section of the text at hand, exhibit, in fact, a marked dissimilarity to those found in the previous section. The celebration itself, here in the garden, rather than revolving around the general populace, centers on the king and/or queen and her handmaiden. As well, the activities in the garden focus on the ritual worship of Kāma.

In fact, the garden is not an uncommon setting in general for the celebration of the Spring Festival. This is the case not only in the Ratnāvalī, but in a number of other texts as well. Several stories in the Kathāsaritsāgara which mention the Vasantotsava describe it in the context of the garden setting. The royal gardens appear in this text as the primary setting for the Vasantotsava. For example, the garden in the city of Pratiṣṭhāna is the setting for the festival in one of the stories in the Kathāsaritsāgara.<sup>155</sup> This garden is the setting for the

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<sup>155</sup> Kathāsaritsāgara, VI. 108-9 (trans. p.36-7). This particular garden is special in a number of respects. According to the text, it came into existence under the auspices of the goddess Durgā. The story tells us that the goddess gave a Brahmin devotee, who sacrificed

mutual attraction is legitimized by marriage and it hence becomes socially acceptable. King Udayana, in the Ratnāvalī, falls hopelessly in love with the Princess Ratnāvalī and she with him, a love which will eventually gain public sanction.

Functionally the garden as a setting stands in opposition to the urban setting. Of course this 'contrast of place' is a common dramatic device used to impart meaning. If we follow the notion of opposition by characterizing the settings as they appear in the play we find two parallel lines diametrically opposed descriptively, yet equally rich connotatively. The urban scene is, as we would expect, set in a man-made environment, the garden scene in a natural though man-made environment.<sup>159</sup> The urban scene is bustling and crowded with an indistinct mass of all manner of men. The garden scene is peopled by only three specific individuals who directly or indirectly are part of the privileged classes. And most importantly the city scene is active while the garden scene is passive. Despite these contrasting elements or rather as a result of these contrasting elements we form two different pictures of the same theme: in both, it is the element of fecundity and love which unifies and clarifies the settings.

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<sup>159</sup>The garden is, of course cultivated and not a natural environment in the sense of wild nature but, rather, this is only to say that it appears here in sharp contrast to the urban environment.

## Flowers and Trees

The garden is inherently rife with burgeoning fecundity. Rituals which are related to specific flowers and trees are understandably typical of spring celebrations. In describing each of the seasons, Sanskrit authors follow certain rules regarding vegetation. In the spring the key flowers and trees are the Mango (Magnifera Indica), and the Aśoka (Saroca Indica). Both are the harbingers of spring and, as such, regularly appear in descriptions of the Vasantotsava. Spring rituals which revolve around vegetation are said to incite love and/or lead to reproduction. A variety of these rituals are described in association with this season. The close association of the worship of certain plants with this festival is evidenced in texts like the Śāstradīpikā. According to the commentary on this text, family groups are described as worshipping specific trees during this festival.<sup>160</sup> In the Nityotsava one is to offer Damana flowers and perform the Vasantotsava at the same time.<sup>161</sup> Primarily, however, it is the Aśoka and the Mango that are featured in our descriptions of the Spring Festival and it is to an examination of the rituals associated with these that we now turn.

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<sup>160</sup> See Chapter One above.

<sup>161</sup> Nityotsava, 108.7.

## Aśoka

The Asoka is a small evergreen tree considered to be one of the most sacred trees of the Hindus, which because of its beauty and the perfume of its flowers is much used in temple decoration.<sup>162</sup> The Aśoka tree is associated with eroticism (it is dedicated to the god Kāma), fertility (Siddhartha Gautama's mother Māyā, gave birth under the Aśoka tree) and chastity (Sītā, the wife of Rāma, when abducted by Rāvana, the king of Laṅkā, escaped from the caress' of the demon and found refuge in a grove of Aśoka trees).<sup>163</sup>

Aśoka blossoms play an integral role in the Vasantotsava as recounted in the Ratnāvalī where people wear Aśoka wreaths and worship the Aśoka tree with flowers and sandal unguents. During the Vasantotsava the trunk of the tree, in the Priyadarśikā, is decorated with saffron fingerprints. In Rājasekhara's Karpūramañjarī, composed in the tenth century in the Western Deccan, the queen plants an Aśoka tree on this occasion, near the door, and thereby invites prosperity into her home.<sup>164</sup> The Ratnāvalī itself links this tree with the worship of Kāmadeva: an image of Pradyumna (Kāma) is placed at its foot and

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<sup>162</sup>The Aśoka motif is found not only on Hindu temples but also in abundance at Buddhist sites like Sanci as well. (S.S. Gupta, ed. Tree Symbol Worship in India (Calcutta: Indian Publishers, 1965), p. 95.

<sup>163</sup>B.C. Sinha, Tree Worship in Ancient India (New Delhi: Books Today, 1979), p. 19.

<sup>164</sup>Rajasekhara, Karpūramañjarī, ed., trans. C.R. Lanman (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1963), 1.47.

then worshipped.<sup>165</sup> Kāma is associated with dohada, a ritual which is intimately linked to trees and which is often described in the context of the Vasantotsava.

Dohada means 'pregnancy longing' and trees are represented in this context as feeling, like women, such a longing that they cannot blossom until they are satisfied. The term dohadikā is given in the Sāhityamīmāṃsā for different ways of fulfilling the yearnings of trees which in turn result in the blossoming of the tree.<sup>166</sup> The Ratnāvalī describes the Bakula tree which, according to the conventions of poets, desires a mouthful of wine to be discharged at it; and when this longing is fulfilled, it puts forth flowers. The Campaka craves to hear the loud laughter of a beautiful damsel (I.18). The Aśoka longs for a kick from the foot of a beautiful woman. Ratnāvalī, in the above play, is described as performing the aśokadohada<sup>167</sup> during her worship of Kāma. The king describes Vasāvadattā in this context as follows:

While thus employed in worshipped Kāma, you resemble a creeper twining round a tree with fresh foliage, the border of your robe shining bright with the dye of the Kusumbha flowers, and your complexion remarkably bright from the fresh bath.  
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<sup>165</sup> See also the Priyadarśikā, ed, intro., trans. N.G. Suru (Poona: N.G. Suru, 1928), Act I and the Daśakumāracarita, trans., notes M.R. Kale (Reprint; New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979) for an image of Kama which is to be placed at the foot of the Aśoka tree.

<sup>166</sup> Sāhityamīmāṃsā, p. 151 cited by Raghavan, Festivals, Sports and Pastimes, p. 89. This is a twelfth-century text according to Krishnamachariar, History of Classical Sanskrit Literature, p. 765.

<sup>167</sup> This is also referred to as the Aśokottamsikā. See Raghavan, Festivals, Sports, and Pastimes, p. 89.

The Aśoka appears to have put forth a new and lovelier shoot, while your hand, engaged in the worship of Kāma, rests upon it.

-p. 31

Aśokadohada also appears as part of the spring festivities in the Raghuvaṃśa and the Mālavikāgnimitram of Kālidāsa.<sup>168</sup> In this latter text Mālavikā first has her foot decorated with red powder, then adorns her ear with a shoot of the Aśoka tree, and finally kicks the tree. The foot, which has intimate knowledge of the earth, is first covered with red powder, symbolic of life-blood, and the power associated with and attributed to that blood is subsequently transferred from the foot of Mālavikā to the tree blossoms. This kick effectively wakes up the tree from its slumber and sets nature's spring cycle in motion. Mālavikā thus fulfills the longing of the Aśoka. The ritual has a corresponding effect on the king. He says:

This person also has not been putting forth similar flowers in the form of peace of mind since a long time; with the nectar of touch, fulfill the longing of this one also who has no taste for anything else (that is, is devoted to you alone).

-p. 60

In Kālidāsa's Meghadūta, the exiled 'Yaksa is described as longing for his wife no less than the Aśoka desires her foot.<sup>169</sup> The Karpūramañjarī further links this ritual (aśokadohada) with Kāma. It tells us the ritual only works if "Kāma abides in you." The

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<sup>168</sup> Kālidāsa, Mālavikāgnimitra, trans., ed., notes R.D. Karmakar (4th ed.; Poona: R.D. Karmakar, 1950), Act III; Kālidāsa, Raghuvaṃśa, commentary of Mallinatha, ed., trans., Nandagirkar (6th ed.; Bombay: NSP, 1917), VIII.62.

<sup>169</sup> Coomaraswamy, 'Yaksas, p. 35.

qualifications for this presence are youth and beauty, and it occurs in spring.<sup>170</sup>

According to Coomaraswamy the dohada motif is very ancient. He cites as evidence for its antiquity a railing pillar (J-55) in the Mathura Museum which represents a woman (or yakṣī) performing this ceremony.<sup>171</sup> He remarks further that the motif survives in sculpture to the 18th century. These rituals may, further, be related to the prolific appearance of the Sālabhañjikā on Indian temples.

Aśokadohada is clearly a ritual which effects fertility through the union of woman and nature (trees): by striking the tree with her foot a beautiful woman leads a tree into blossom. The dohada motif suggests a connection, moreover, a transference, between natural fecundity and human life, a continuity between human and botanical fertility. Here, women play a central and mediating role between man and nature: women are both figures of eroticism, as their relationship to the tree is sensual, and they are figures of fertility in that the tree blossoms.

Spring rituals associated with the Aśoka tree are performed not only as positive rituals in order to prompt new growth but also as negative rituals performed to remove obstacles. In this context we might cite the aśokāṣṭamī, a spring ritual in which the festivities focus

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<sup>170</sup> Rājaśekhara, Karpūraṁjarī, 1.47.

<sup>171</sup> A. Coomaraswamy, 'Yaksas (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1971), p. 35.

upon the Aśoka tree<sup>172</sup> and which is often described as part of the spring festivities. It is celebrated on the eighth day of the bright fortnight of Caitra and consists in part of the drinking of eight buds of the Aśoka tree. As well, it is referred to as aśokakalikābhaksana (drinking Aśoka buds) in Anantadeva's fourteenth-century Nibandha, the Smrtikaustubha. Participants recite the following mantra on this occasion.<sup>173</sup>

tvām aśoka harābhiṣṭa madhumāsa-samudbhava/  
pibāmi sokasamtapto mām aśokaṁ sadā kuru//

(O Aśoka! you are the favorite of Hara [the Provider], and you are born of Caitra [spring] I drink thee, Make thou me, who am oppressed with grief, ever griefless.)

In Orissa the śokāstamī is associated with Pārvatī doing penance to attain Śiva at the foot of the Aśoka tree.<sup>174</sup> Here it is prescribed for

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<sup>172</sup>According to Raghavan there are two of these festivals. One features the worship of the goddess and is performed in autumn and the other celebrates spring. Festivals, Sports, and Pastimes, p. 83. See also Bhavisya Purāṇa (135) below for the overlapping of spring and autumn rituals.

<sup>173</sup>Anantadeva, Smrtikaustubha (Bombay: NSP, 1909), p. 422. Translation by K.C. Ray in "Aśokastamī," in The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland (1901), pp. 127-40, p. 127. The date of this text is difficult to ascertain though it seems to be later than the Bhavisya Purāṇa. Raghavan, Festivals, Sports, and Pastimes identifies it as a Nibandha (p. 203).

<sup>174</sup>See also Nīlamata Purāṇa, 787-90, which tells us that Aśokāstamī involves the worship of Umā for conjugal happiness



women to get rid of suffering.<sup>175</sup> The aśokalikābhaksana in this light becomes a ritual of purification aimed at cleansing the participants of sorrow through the ingestion of new blossoms and, as we shall see in the following section, is associated with mango blossoms which, too, are often consumed at this time. The relationship between the Aśoka flowers and the removal of grief is based on a play on words in Sanskrit, "freedom from grief" or "aśoka" being the name of the flower. Such word plays often motivate magic rituals in the Atharvaveda.

### Mangos

Although not mentioned specifically in the Ratnāvalī, Mango-rituals appear often enough in descriptions of the Vasantotsava to warrant our attention at this point.

Mangos, like Aśoka trees, are symbolic of the advent of spring. In addition to the ingestion of Aśoka buds during the spring festivities, some texts prescribe the āmrakuśamāsana (eating mango blossoms). Described by Raghavan as occurring on the day after Holī, the ritual enjoins women to drink mango water on the morning of the New Year day after worshipping Kāma in a pūrṇakalāśa (full pitcher). Palm, sandal water, and fresh mango blossoms are to be consumed on this day. The auspiciousness suggested by eating new mango buds on the

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(Raghavan, Festivals Sports, and Pastimes, p. 83).

<sup>175</sup>Kunjabehari Das, Study of Orissan Folklore (Santiniketan: Visvabharati Series, no. 16, 1953), cited by Raghavan, op. cit.

first day of the new year must be noted here. This is even prescribed in the Almanacs of today.<sup>176</sup> It is recorded in Ancient Indian Festivals that on Vasanta Pañcamī wandering bards present each other with mango blossoms.<sup>177</sup>

The description of the Madanamahotsava in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa contains an injunction prescribing the eating of mangos at daybreak in the courtyard before making the offering.<sup>178</sup> This also is described along with things to be observed on the New Year's Day (Caitra Śukla Pratipad) in texts which seem to draw on the descriptions contained in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa. These include the Smṛtikaustubha of Anantadeva which prescribes the recitation of certain verses when taking the mixture of mango blossoms and sandal paste.<sup>179</sup> Another Nibandha which also postdates the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, the Purusārthacintāmaṇi of Viṣṇubhatta, says the performer must be smeared with sandal paste before he swallows the mango blossoms.<sup>180</sup> This is done in honor of

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<sup>176</sup>Raghavan, p. 201.

<sup>177</sup>A.C. Mukerji, Ancient Indian Fasts and Festivals (London: Macmillan and Co., 1932), p. 30.

<sup>178</sup>See Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, ch. 132, below.

<sup>179</sup>Raghavan, for example, cites the following verse:  
 "cūtamagryaṃ vasantasya mākaṇḍa\_kusumaṃ tava/  
 sacandanam pibamyadya sarva kāmārthasiddhaye//"  
 and comments as follows: "As mango-blossoms usher in the spring season and form also the arrows of Kamadeva, they are now taken. As the days warm up now and as it is the season of enjoyment, sandal paste comes into use." (p. 204)

<sup>180</sup>Purusārthacintāmaṇi (Bombay, NSP, 1927), p. 81-82 cited by Raghavan, op. cit. p. 203.

Kāma. The eating of mango blossoms is mentioned as part of the Vasantotsava in the Vasantotsavanirnaya.<sup>181</sup>

The Pārijāta-Mañjarī as well describes mangos in its account of the Vasantotsava. Here the queen offers the king a twig with the blossom of the mango tree at the beginning of the festival. The king responds as follows:

This off-shoot of the mango-tree, which is being offered by you and which is the arrow of the god of love (literally 'the flower-armed one'), is being accepted by me as a mark of submission to your commands. (p. 7)

The above description corresponds to descriptions of the spring rite of Cūtalatikā or Navalatikā in which, according to the Deśīnamāmālā and Bhoja of Dhārā's Śrngāra Prakāśa, men and women choose their lovers.<sup>182</sup> Ladies take mango twigs or new Palāsa twigs in their hands and go about asking each other who their lovers are and the lady so accosted points out her lover by striking him with the mango twig. Regarding the use of spring twigs in seasonal festivals, Gaster remarks that originally, these 'May-boughs' symbolized the entire wealth of that fertility which nature had now brought to birth, and they were believed to be endowed with specially beneficent properties by virtue of the power dwelling in them.<sup>183</sup> The mango-twig ritual is a reversal of the above-mentioned dohada in which the tree is struck. Here, the lover is struck by the tree (twig). In both cases there is a recognition of

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<sup>181</sup>Vasantotsavanirnaya, 1f.

<sup>182</sup>Raghavan, Festivals, Sports, and Pastimes, p. 93.

<sup>183</sup>Gaster, Thespis, p. 382.

power: the woman wakes up the tree; the tree wakes up the woman's lover.

The role of Kāma in these rituals is significant. Kāma is traditionally armed with five arrows. These are the lotus, Aśoka twig, mango, jasmine, and lily.<sup>184</sup> The rearmament of Kāma takes place at the beginning of spring and is to be undertaken by young ladies who pluck the mango blossoms, offering them as arrows to Manmatha. Kālidāsa in the Śākuntala also describes this feature of spring festivities as follows:<sup>185</sup>

tvamasi mayā cūtāṅkura dattaḥ kāmāya grhītadhanuṣe/  
pathikajanayuvatilakṣyah pañcamyadhikah saro bhava//  
(act VI. 130)

(Oh, mango bud, I offer you  
To Kāma, grasping now his bow.  
Be you his choicest dart, your mark  
Some maid whose lover wanders far.)

The emotional implications of the Mango-as-arrow is clear. In Kālidāsa's Rtu Saṁhara the mango is central to the spring season: he describes the mango tree bent with clusters of coppery red leaves and branches covered with yellow fragrant blossoms shaken by the March breezes, which kindle the flame of love in the hearts of women. Here, then,

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>185</sup> Kālidāsa, Śākuntala, Vi. 130. Translation by A. Hjalmar Edgren in "Shākuntala" in Six Sanskrit Plays, ed. H. Wells (London: Asia Publishing House, 1964). p. 256.

love, new growth, ingestion of new blossoms, the rearmament and worship of Kāma form a cluster of meanings in the context of the spring and its festivals.

Further illustrative of the overlapping of natural and human domains at this time is the Pārijāta-Mañjarī which tells us that after the king and queen have witnessed the powder throwing of the citizens, the queen, as part of the celebration, retires to the garden to "marry the creeper of Mādhavī to the Mango tree." The king, on seeing the newly wedded couple (i.e., the Mādhavī creeper and the Mango tree) says:

(45) blessed, indeed, is the handsome youth (of) the Mango tree, who, (as) a lover, impelled by the to-and-fro movement of the breezes of (the month of) Chaitra, longs to climb to his beloved (the creeper), resting on his left. (Vāmāṅga-viśrambhinī virtually means a vāmāṅgī or wife). (Blessed is) also this young creeper, the betrothed one getting often low, and turning away in the face of (the lover's) pressing request, does not countenance (even) the idea of boldness (of the lover) (i.e., she is too coy to submit to the bold demands of her lover). (p. 19)

As a parallel to this in more recent times one might cite the practice amongst certain tribal groups in Bengal of marrying trees, particularly trees which yield edible fruits. K.N. Sahay in "Tree Symbol Worship in India" tells us that among the Oraon and Kharia it is considered essential to marry trees before they bear their first fruits (in their virginal state).<sup>186</sup> Unwedded trees are believed to be likely to breed worms. Very often this practice occurs concurrently with the wedding

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<sup>186</sup>K.N. Sahay, "Tree Symbol Worship in India," in Tree Symbol Worship in India, ed. S.S. Gupta (Calcutta: Indian Publications, 1965), p. 73.

of a member of the family which owns the tree. Sahay tells us also that the marriage of trees and people also is recorded in recent times amongst the Mundari tribes of Bengal and occurs during the actual course of the marriage ceremonies. The bride and groom, having been anointed with tumeric, are taken and wedded to two trees, very often to mango trees. They are made to touch the tree with vermilion and then clasp it.<sup>187</sup>

Notable here is that again the distinctive boundaries between man and nature become blurred and vague: humans marry trees, trees are personified and become wedded couples, and hence, the fruit they bear is good to eat (e.g., as among the Oraons and Kharia above who will only eat fruit of trees sanctified in this way). The underlying symbolism of the marriage of trees lends itself easily to sexual imagery creating what might be called a sustained double entendre. There is here always the movement of power between the human realm and the trees, both imparting fertility to each other and sanctifying the respective unions. Marriage rituals, both human and arboreal, are thus central acts in spring festivals.

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid. One might also note here that Brenda Beck records the spring marriage of Māriyammaṃ in Kannapuram in Tamilnadu to a demon which is represented by a tree. The marriage of the tree and the Goddess is dissolved at the end of eight days and the tree uprooted. During these eight days, however, the Goddess is extremely dangerous and unpredictable. (B. Beck, "The Goddess and the Demon" in *Purusartha* [Paris: Centre d'Etudes de l'Inde et de l'Asie du Sud, 1980], pp. 3f.)

In addition, with the inclusion of Kāma in flower or vegetation rituals, the boundaries between the temporal and divine become similarly blurred. In the context of the flower rituals, Kāma becomes a mythological counterpoint to the tree. Kāma's connection with the mango tree and spring rituals is notable above and is illustrated further in the Matsya Purāṇa. Here Śiva sets Kāma afire and, for the sake of the universe, divides this fire among the mango, spring and the moon, flowers, bees, and cuckoos.<sup>188</sup> Hence, the mango tree is Kāma reborn. Frequently also, Kāma is pictured as a tree whose sprouts are women. Śākuntalā's hand is said to be a new sprout from the tree of Kāma and Pārvatī, making love to Śiva, is said to be a new sprout from the burnt tree of Kāma.<sup>189</sup> Placing the image of Kāma beneath the Aśoka tree in the Ratnāvalī emphasizes their associations, and the association of divine, natural, and human roles in the continuity of life. It remains now to turn to Kāma and the gods in this exploration of the Spring Festival in the garden.

### Kāma

Amid the natural beauty of the garden Kāma is worshipped. Texts such as the Ratnāvalī with which we are concerned clearly

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<sup>188</sup> Matsya Purāṇa, 154, 250-2, cited also by O'Flaherty, Śiva, The Erotic Ascetic, p. 158.

<sup>189</sup> O'Flaherty, Śiva, p. 159.

illustrate the centrality of Kāma's role in the Vasantotsava. Now it must be remembered that Kāma is a relatively minor deity in the Hindu pantheon. Typically, he is described in Hindu mythology as the god of love. His sphere of influence is severely limited. He figures in relatively few Sanskrit texts and those in which we find him mentioned confine him primarily to spring-time events. It is in this context that ritual worship of him occurs. Although he is not worshipped today to any great extent, the following evidence suggests that he was at one time a figure of some importance. In fact, in addition to the many texts which specifically describe the worship of Kāma in connection with the Vasantotsava, several texts describe some form of ritual worship directed towards Kāma which cannot strictly be associated with the festival itself. We may include the Sanatkumāra Samhitā, Matsya Purāṇa, and Kalidasa's Śākuntala in this group of texts which make mention of the worship of Kāma in the spring, but do not make reference to a specifically named festival.<sup>190</sup> The inclusion of these texts in our study may help us to understand much of who this mythological figure is and the nature of the ritual homage paid to him regardless of its specific context.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Sanatkumāra Samhitā, ed. P.V. Krishnamacharya (Madras: Adyar Library, 1969), pp.128-131; Matsya Purāṇa, ed. B.D. Basu, trans. a Taluqdar of Oudh, SBH 17 (2 Parts) (New York: AMS Press, 1974), 7. 154; Kālidāsa, Śākuntala, trans. H. Edgren in H.W. Wells, Six Sanskrit Plays, pp. 221-329, Act IV.

<sup>191</sup> See the section on the Bhavisya Purāṇa, ch. 135, below for further details on these texts.



## Related Kāma Rituals: the Matsya Purāṇa and the Sanatkumāra Saṁhitā

While it is not possible to examine all of the rituals dedicated to Kāma in full detail, a few will be described here in order to provide a basis for an understanding of the god Kāma and to have a clear point of departure for an examination of his role in the Vasantotsava. I hope it will become clear from the following discussion that there is a definite link between these Kāma festivals and the Vasantotsava - a link which has led me to suggest earlier the essential identity of Madana festivals and the Vasantotsava.

Let us examine, then, two rituals which center around Kāma: the Madanadvādaśī and the Kāmayāga. Inclusion of descriptions of these two rituals, by virtue of their length and detail, is a result of a consideration of a number of factors. First they illustrate that Kāma was, in fact, a figure of greater importance than he is today. Secondly, these two rituals are similar to each other and moreover to the ritual activities performed during the Vasantotsava.

The Madanadvādaśī is described in the Matsya Purāṇa.<sup>192</sup> The worship of Kāma here commences in spring on the twelfth day of the bright fortnight of Caitra. In the context of this description, it is mentioned that the ritual was performed by Diti (the mother of the demons) who, subsequent to her correct performance of this ritual,

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<sup>192</sup> Matsya Purāṇa, ch. 7.

gave birth to the Maruts. The entire ritual spans the time of one year.<sup>193</sup> It is described as follows: -

One who observes this fast should place a jar of gold, silver, copper, brass or earth - according to his means - on an earthen platform, after filling it with different fruits, pieces of sugar cane, and white rice. Before placing the jar on the platform, it should also be painted with white sandal and covered with two pieces of white cloth. After this, a small plate of copper containing some fruits, gold and raw sugar should be placed on the top of the jar. Above it should be placed a plantain leaf, bearing an image of Kāma, and to the left of it should be placed the image of Rati made of sugar. After this, the worship of Kāma and Rati should be performed in the following manner. The images should first be bathed with incense and water, then white flowers, rice and sesamum should be offered. Afterwards, the aṅgapujā (body worship) should follow, as indicated below: - After pronouncing 'Om Kāmāya', worship the feet; after pronouncing 'Om Saubhāgyadāya', worship the legs; after pronouncing 'Om Smarāya', worship the thighs; after pronouncing 'Om Manamathāya', worship the waist; after pronouncing 'Om Svaschodarāya', worship the stomach; after pronouncing 'Om Anaṅgāya', worship the breast; after pronouncing 'Om Padmamukhāya', worship the mouth; after pronouncing 'Om Pañchasarāya', worship the hands; and after pronouncing 'Om Sarvātmane', worship the head. On the completion of this worship, sandal and incense should be offered, and then prayers should be sung accompanied by music. In case there is no one to sing prayers and play the music, then the glories of Kāma and Keśava (Viṣṇu) should be narrated and listened to. On the following morning, the jar should be given to a Brāhmaṇa. After making over the jar to a deserving Brāhmaṇa, the worshipper should feast a number of Brāhmaṇas with devotion, and afterwards he should have his own meal devoid of salt. Then, the invited Brāhmaṇas should be dismissed with presents, and the following prayer should be uttered before giving them presents

"O lord Janārdana (Viṣṇu), in the form of Kāma!  
Who brings bliss to every soul, be pleased with thy  
devotion"

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<sup>193</sup> It should be noted at the outset that this is not the only myth which records the birth of the Maruts. Rather, this is one version of their birth; Kāma is not central in all of the versions

The same routine of worship should be observed each month, on the twelfth day of the bright fortnight, and continued on for a whole year. The worshipper should observe a fast on the 13th day of the bright fortnight and worship Viṣṇu. On the 12th day of every bright fortnight, he should live only on fruits and sleep on the floor. At the beginning of the thirteenth month, he is to finally complete his cycle of fasts by performing worship as mentioned before, and on its completion he should worship the golden image of Kāma. Afterwards, white sesamum mixed with clarified butter, should be poured into fire and at the time of each sacrificial offering the various names of Kāma, already mentioned, prefixed with 'Om' and suffixed with 'Svaha', should be pronounced. At the close of the sacrifice, the worshipper should also worship the officiating priest and his consort, and then dismiss all his Brahmana guests after feasting, garlanding, and giving them presents of clarified butter, cows, decently-arranged beds, clothes, ornaments, sugar cane. The golden image of Kāma should be given to the officiating priest along with other presents mentioned above, according to the means of the worshipper.

One who observes the Madana Dvādaśī fast in this way becomes liberated from evils and begets worthy children and finally passes away in peace, for Viṣṇu and Smara are the same.

The second ritual in honor of Kāma that we will look at is called the Kāmayāga and is described in a text belonging to the Pañcarātra sect of Vaiṣṇavism, the Sanatkumāra Saṁhitā.<sup>194</sup> The ritual is prescribed for the thirteenth day of the lunar month<sup>195</sup> and is as follows:

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recording this myth.

<sup>194</sup> Sanatkumāra Saṁhitā, vs. 293-317, pp. 128-131.

<sup>195</sup> The thirteenth lunar day is often cited as auspicious for Kāma. See, for example, the Rajadharmakhanda of Lakṣmīdhara in Kṛtyakalpataru (Baroda: GOS, 1944) wherein this day is set aside for the worship of Kāma by kings.

In the middle of the village or in a corner one should make a place<sup>196</sup> for Kāmarpa (Kāma). Having constructed a sacred area<sup>196</sup> with the door facing west, one should mark this area with those items which are special to Kāma, namely, the Trident,<sup>197</sup> the Aśoka, and the Makara (fish banner). One should then make an image nine talas high and adorn it as follows: it should be yellow, the corner of its eyes white, and it should be adorned with red clothes. It should also be smeared with red sandal and adorned with red flowers, a garland of red Aśokas, and the palms of its hands and the soles of its feet should be red (vs. 296-7). The image should appear wearing a crown made of various gems and wearing a cloth over both shoulders. The image should have a thin belly, a slender waist, and a broad chest (vs. 298). It should look like a sixteen-year-old, carry a bow and arrow of flowers, and resemble molten gold in its color (vs. 299). The image should be seated on a throne or in a chariot with right foot folded under the left leg and the left foot resting on a pedestal (vs. 300).

The image should be attended by the images of two female attendants who stand behind him. They should hold whisks. They are Halī (ploughshare) and Vāruṇī (wine). Images of Vasanta and Soma should be placed on his sides (302). Images of Rāga (with red garlands) and Mada (with white garlands) should appear standing at the back wall. The five arrows of Kāma should be painted on this wall. They are called Tapanī (burning), Mohinī (delusion), Mardani (destruction), Pramāthini (harrassment, tormenting), and Harinī (stealing). The arrows should be drawn in the form of women who have their heads adorned with flowers. Tapanī (fire) should be red in color and wear in her hair the red Aśoka flower (vs. 304). Mohinī (delusion) should be yellow and wear the red lotus flower (raktāśoka). Mardini (destruction) should be green and wear the red lotus (raktotpala) (vs. 305). Pramāthini should be pale yellow and wear a blue lotus (kumunda) and Harini should be a smokey color and wearing blue lotuses (utpalā) (306). The images should be placed beginning in the South and ending in the north. In front of the temple one should prepare a place for the Makara (fish banner) (vs. 307). The image of Kāma should be installed with Śāntihoma and the Gāyatri Mantra which is:

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<sup>196</sup>The sacred area is described here as hastiprsthā, the meaning of which is obscure.

<sup>197</sup>My thanks to Mr. Venugopalan for his suggestion regarding the reading of pratimāśūla as trident.

Let us know Kāma, think of Kāma, let Kāma impel us  
on (manobhavāya vidmaha pancabāṇāya dhīmahi  
tannah kāmah pracodyāt). (309)

One should worship Kāma with a diagram of a lotus while concentrating on the Gāyatri Mantra. In the centre of the diagram one should place a branch of the Aśoka tree uttering 'Om'. The branch of the Cūta, or Mādhavi tree also may serve the same purpose (311). Then, invoking Kāma with Gāyatri Mantra, one should place the image on the platform and then perform nyāsa (laying on of hands) accompanied by the utterance of seven syllables which are contained in the phrase "praise to the flower arrowed one" (312). With this same mantra places of protection should be created. Vasanta should be on the east, Mada on the south, Raga on the west, Soma on the north, Rati on the SE, Vāruṇī on the southwest, Makara on the northeast, and Usas on the northwest. Then one should give water for the feet with the same seven syllables. Following this one should worship Kāma with unguents, red flowers, rice covered with sugar, and bowls of dal. One should fast day and night on the thirteenth lunar day in order to gain control of all women (317).

These descriptions characterize Kāma worship and contain within them aspects of importance in our study of the Vasantotsava. In fact we can find descriptions akin to those of the Matsya Purāṇa and the Sanatkumāra Saṁhitā in the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, Nārada Purāṇa, and the Kāvyamīmāṃsā.<sup>198</sup> Many of the characteristics of the ritual worship of Kāma from these descriptions suggest a commonality of

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<sup>198</sup> See Sanatkumāra Saṁhitā and Matsya Purāṇa above and Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa (Bombay: Venkatesvara Press Publication, 1834), III. 183; Nārada Purāṇa, 122.16-18, cited by D. Nambiar, The Nārada Purāṇa: A Study (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1968), p. 327; Kāvyamīmāṃsā, ed. C.D. Dalal, R.A. Sastri (3rd. ed.; Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1934), p. 104-6.

approach. First, by worshipping Kāma in the prescribed way Diti is able to give birth to the Maruts; the ritual is a fertility ritual. Second, Diti is the primary figure to worship Kāma: Kāma is worshipped primarily by women in this capacity. Third, the ritual commences in the spring: Kāma's most auspicious season is spring. And, finally, worshipping Kāma may also be a rite connected with sexual prowess and performed by men - it results in winning over women.

### Kāma's Association with Spring

From the above it is clear that even texts not specifically associated with the Vasantotsava still tell us that Kāma's worship is usually associated with spring. Many of Kāma's characteristics make his worship particularly advantageous at this time and particularly germane to this festival. Numerous texts connect the worship of Kāma with spring and further identify the Spring Festival with the festival of Kāma.<sup>199</sup> As we shall see, iconographically and in the myths Kāma is intimately associated with the spring. A variety of sources, purāṇic and poetic, helps us to confirm this intimate link. For example,

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<sup>199</sup> See, for example, the tenth-century text, the *Tilakamañjarīśāra* of Pallīpāla Dhanapāla, ed. N.M. Kansara (Ahmedabad: Bharatiya Sanskriti Vidyamandira), p. 52. See also *Śrīngara Mañjarī* of Bhoja, p. 20-1 and Haricandra's *Jīvadharacampu*, as cited by Raghavan, *Rtu in Sanskrit Literature* (Delhi: Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Kendriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha, 1972), p. 92. Also see the discussion in this thesis, Chapter One.

Kālidāsa tells us in the Kumārasaṁbhava<sup>200</sup> that spring is an aid to Kāma's effectiveness. Here Kāma replenishes his armory after the passage of spring, his chief rearmament season. By contrast, the winter season is said to inhibit his activities. According to the Gangāvatarama of Nilikantha Dikṣita,<sup>201</sup> Kāma's characteristic weapons, his arrows, are destroyed by the winter season. The intimate connection between Kāma and the season spring is further strengthened by his often being accompanied by Vasanta (Sanskrit for spring). The Kālikā Purāṇa<sup>202</sup> records the birth of Manmatha (Kāma) together with Vasanta (spring). In this text Vasanta is born out of a sigh of Brahmā in order to augment Kāma's power. According to the Vāmana Purāṇa Vasanta is introduced in the account of the penance of Nara and Narāyana.<sup>203</sup>

Kandarpaśca sudurdharṣascūtankuramahāyudhaḥ/  
samam saha careṇaiva vasantenāśramam gataḥ//

(And the extraordinary unassailable Cupid [Kandarpa, Kāma], armed with the mighty weapon of tender mango shoots and accompanied by his companion Spring entered the hermitage.)  
(Vamana Purāṇa 6:7)

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<sup>200</sup> Kālidāsa, Kumārasaṁbhava, trans. S.R. Sehgal (Delhi: 1959), XVI, śloka 50, 66.

<sup>201</sup> Nilikantha Dikṣita, Gangāvatarama, Canto four, cited by Raghavan, Rtu, p. 93.

<sup>202</sup> Kālikā Purāṇa, ch. 4, cited by Raghavan, Rtu, p. 23.

<sup>203</sup> Vāmana Purāṇa, ed. A. Gupta, trans. S.M. Mukhopadhyaya, A. Bhattacharya, N.C. Nath, V.K. Verma (Varanasi: All Indian Kashiraj Trust, 1968), 6. 7.

Vasanta and Kāma together disturb the penance of Śiva in texts like the Kumārasaṃbhava<sup>204</sup> and the Matsya Purāṇa.<sup>205</sup> In this latter text Indra directs Kāma as follows:

Array yourself with Madhu, the vernal season, the king of the all seasons.

There is thus more than ample evidence to suggest that spring is the most common season for Kāma's mythological exploits.

### Kāma and the Ladies

The second characteristic which emerges with respect to Kāma worship is its popularity among women. That Kāma rituals are to be performed by women is confirmed in a variety of texts. An example is the description of the Vasantotsava in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa. In this text Kāma worship in the context of the Vasantotsava is specifically prescribed for ladies. Thus:

A woman should honor her husband with ornaments and garlands and clothes, thinking of him as Kāma with her mind full of happiness. (135.27)

It will be remembered too that, in the descriptions of the Vasantotsava in the Ratnāvalī, it is the queen who performs the ritual worship of Kāma at the advent of spring.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>204</sup>Kālidāsa, Kumārasaṃbhava, III.25-7

<sup>205</sup>Matsya Purāṇa, 154.111

<sup>206</sup>Ratnāvalī, Act 1.



The Nārada Purāṇa<sup>207</sup> describes the worship of Kāma called Ratikāmvrata. It has for its aim a long married life and prolific progeny. It is prescribed for women. A woman or girl undertaking the fast is to worship gold, silver, copper, or mud images of Rati and Kāma. The next day she is to offer the images to a Brahmin couple along with food and other gifts. The ritual is to be performed annually for fourteen years.

Another text, the Akhyananakamanikośa, prescribes the worship of Kāma for ladies who wish to find a husband.<sup>208</sup> According to Bhoja of Dhārā women from villages go to it bedecked with flowers and their eyes red with drink.<sup>209</sup> In the ritual of āmrakusumāśana (eating mango blossoms) the worship of Kāma on New Year's day is performed specifically by women (see flower festivals, above). Kāma is worshipped in a pitcher of plenty (pūrnakalāśa).<sup>210</sup> In the Kāvyamīmāṃsā, Kandarpa (Kāma) along with Gaurī is worshipped by women.<sup>211</sup> Also in Siddharsi Suri's Upamitibhāvaprapaṇcākathā women worship an image of Kāmadeva and his consort Rati sleeping on a

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<sup>207</sup> Nārada Purāṇa, 122. 28-32.

<sup>208</sup> Sharma, Festivals of India, p. 17, cites this text but gives us no further information as to its date. Krishnamachariar in History of Classical Sanskrit Literature, p. 235, lists Nemichandra as a Jain author. The text dates to 1073-1083 A.D. (ed. Prakṛt Text Society, Varanasi: Vol. 5 of the Prakṛt Text Series, 1962).

<sup>209</sup> SKA, p. 575, cited by Raghavan, Festivals, Sports and Pastimes, p. 88.

<sup>210</sup> Raghavan, Festivals, p. 201.

<sup>211</sup> Rājasekhara, Kāvyamīmāṃsā, 104-6.

cushioned bed with pillows.<sup>212</sup> This worship is prescribed in order to fulfill one's desires. Unmarried women worship Kāma for a husband: married women worship him to secure long life for their husbands. Ladies of noble families were to dance publicly. In the Matsya Purāna courtesans are to worship Kāma to avoid the sin inherent in their occupation.<sup>213</sup>

An exception to the active role generally played by women in rituals related to Kāma is the description of Kāmayāga in the Sanatkumāra Saṁhitā, above. Here the participants engaged in the ritual play reversed roles: men perform the ritual rather than, as found previously, women. The results of this ritual, however, are the same for men as we have found for women elsewhere. Women worship Kāma to gain control over men (a good husband and children): here men worship Kāma to gain control over women. The worship of Kāma can thus be turned to advantage regardless of one's sex.

The ritual as men perform it also has decidedly tantric overtones. The worship of a diagram of a lotus with a branch of an Aśoka tree placed in the centre corresponds roughly to the tantric practice of yantra. Kane in History of Dharmaśāstra defines yantra as a diagram or figure engraved, drawn, or painted on metal, stone, or paper. It is similar, he says, to the mandala but is employed for

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<sup>212</sup>Sharma, Festivals of India, p. 16. This text dates to the tenth century and contains much folk material. It is a lengthy allegory. Krishnamachariar, A History of Classical Sanskrit Literature, 233.

<sup>213</sup>Matsya Purāna, ch. 70.

the worship of a particular deity or for a particular purpose.<sup>214</sup> The use of such a diagram, the practice of nyāsa or equating parts of one's own body with the body of god, and the utterance of mantras all have counterparts in Tantric ritual practice.

Further, Bharati, in The Tantric Tradition, tells us that the Tantras do not teach one to subdue the senses, but to increase their power and then to harness them in the service of the achievement of lasting ecstasy, the target of these methods thus being the same as that of the orthodox.<sup>215</sup> Kāma's association with eroticism and the creative powers of the universe renders him a particularly appropriate focus of meditation in this tradition. Further, that Kāma is worshipped in a specifically Tantric context is confirmed by the sixteenth-century work, the Śrītattvacintāmaṇi, the author of which was a rāḍaya Brahmin and a great Tantric sādhaka.<sup>216</sup> This text describes the worship of Kāma along with Rati and Prīti, and Spring (Vasanta).

The description of Kāma worship, in the Sanatkumāra Saṁhitā, finally, despite the fact that it is performed by men is overwhelmingly feminine. Kāma is surrounded by damsels - his arrows are even to be fashioned in the form of women. Kāma here is flanked by the maiden

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<sup>214</sup>Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra, V. 1021.

<sup>215</sup>A. Bharati, The Tantric Tradition (New York: Anchor Books, 1970), p. 290.

<sup>216</sup>Paramahansa Pūrṇānanda, Śrītattvacintāmaṇi, intro., P. Bagchi, notes, C. Bhattacharya, Calcutta Sanskrit Series XIX (Calcutta: Metropolitan Printing and Publishing House, Limited, 1936), pp. 806-7.

wine (Vāruṇī) and the ploughshare (Halī): the first is indicative of intoxication (eroticism) and the second of the fertility of the soil (planting, the tilling of the soil). Both of these figures are appropriate companions to the god of love, especially at this time (spring), when fertility and eroticism are central.

### Image Worship and Images of Kāma

To return to the Ratnāvalī, another important feature which this text describes with respect to Kāma is the worship of an image of him. It tells us that one is to adorn an Aśoka tree with flowers, saffron and sandal and worship an image of Pradyumna (Kāma) which is to be placed at its foot. Evidence both in descriptions of the Vasantotsava and descriptions of Kāma worship in general tells us that images of Kāma of some form were a common feature of these rituals. It should be noted in this respect that images of Kāma are not worshipped to any extent today and so it is only this textual evidence which suggests that in previous times these images did exist. An image of Kāma of some type is common in descriptions of Kāma-worship generally and specifically of the worship of Kāma in the Vasantotsava.

The Priyadarśikā gives the following description of the worship of an image of Madana on this occasion:

On the full moon day of spring an image or picture of Madana was placed in the garden under an Aśoka tree. The trunk of the tree is to be decorated with saffron finger prints. The deity (Kāma) is worshipped with offering of flowers, tumeric, perfumes, rice, silk, clothes, etc. (Act I)

The commentary of Jayamaṅgalā on the Kāmasūtra<sup>217</sup> tells us an image of Madana was to be made and worshipped with Damana flowers.<sup>218</sup>

madanotsavo madanapratikṛtipūjanam, damanabhanjikā  
parasparam damanaka puṣpāvataṁsanam

(The festival of Madana is worshipping an image of Madana. This adorning with Damana flowers on each other is the sport of Damana)

In the Mālatīmādhava and the Tamil Silappatikāram separate temples to Kāmadeva in a garden called madanodyāna are described.<sup>219</sup> In the Jain Kathākośa, the maiden Kesarā is described performing the worship of Kāma on the day prior to her marriage. It is the custom, the text tells us, that such worship be performed alone and in the temple of Kāma.<sup>220</sup>

The above passage from the Matsya Purāṇa describing the Madanadvādaśī tells us that it is a golden image of Kāma which was worshipped. This is confirmed in a similar description of Kāma worship in the Nārada Purāṇa.<sup>221</sup> The Bhaviṣya Purāṇa also describes an image of Kāma which is worshipped during the Vasantotsava. It is to be

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<sup>217</sup> Kāmasūtra, I.iv.42.

<sup>218</sup> The Damana is usually associated with Viṣṇu. This relationship will be examined further in the section on the Vikramacarita, below.

<sup>219</sup> Bhavabhūti, Mālatīmādhava, ed., notes, intro. R.D. Karmarkar (Poona: R.D. Karmarkar, 1935), Act I; Raghavan in Festivals, Sports, and Pastimes, p. 88, cites the Silappatikāram.

<sup>220</sup> Kathākośa, trans. C.H. Tawney, p. 75.

<sup>221</sup> Nārada Purāṇa, 121. 2-16.

painted under an Aśoka tree along with similar images of his consorts Rati and Prīti. Other figures to be drawn include his assistant, spring (Vasanta), and Śiva.<sup>222</sup>

In the Sanatkumāra Saṁhitā an image of Kāma is constructed to celebrate the Kāmayāga. The description of the image gives us some insight into the nature of Kāma - it is to have the look of a sixteen-year-old, i.e., eternally young and virile, and it should be attended by women - the Hālī (the ploughshare) and Varuṇī (wine). He is also accompanied by Vasanta (spring) and Soma. He possesses five arrows called fire (tapānī), delusion (mohinī), destruction (mardinī), torment (pramathinī), and loss (harinī).

Thus it is clear that images of Kāma and, in some cases, temples housing those images were constructed. These images appear also in the specific context of the Vasantotsava. The fashioning and worship of images of Kāma, often accompanied by an image of his consort, Rati, proceed in a manner typical of image-worship throughout Hinduism. That is, the images are bathed with incense and offerings are made to them. Certain phrases (mantras) are uttered as the images are worshipped. So, for example, in the Matsya Purāṇa, one is enjoined to worship the feet of Kāma, and utter 'Om Kāmāya,' and to worship the legs of the Kāma image and utter 'Om Saubhagyadāya'.

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<sup>222</sup>Bhavisya Purāṇa, 135, 19-20.

If we look at the archaeological evidence we find very few representations of Kāma. There is an image of Kāma found in Assam from Sibsagar. It is made of sandstone and the deity is standing dvibhaṅga pose on a lotus pedestal. He is wearing a conical cap and jewelry (bracelets [hara, keyūra, kaṅkana] and earrings [kuṇḍala]). The image conforms to the dhyāna of the Matsya Purāṇa (ch. 261 v. 54) and the Kālikā Purāṇa (ch. 80 v. 131) and belongs to the 11/12th century.<sup>223</sup> This suggests a connection between Purāṇic textual descriptions of rituals and actual images.

Coomaraswamy traces Kāma's iconographic origin to that of a yakṣa whose characteristic mark is the Makara. There are images of Kāmadeva and Rati at Bādāmī where Kāma is identified by his makaradhvaja and also at Kailāsanātha and Elūra. Further, Coomaraswamy maintains that the makara, which generally means waters and virility, is an appropriate symbol for any fertility deity. Kāmadeva is a yakṣa.<sup>224</sup> Yakṣas were essentially fertility figures and as such were the objects of worship. Coomaraswamy's description of yakṣa shrines and of the worship of yakṣas is reminiscent of the shrines and worship of Kāma as described in our texts.<sup>225</sup> In a large number of

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<sup>223</sup> Arun Bhattacharjee, Icons and Sculpture of Early and Medieval Assam (Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1978), p. 50.

<sup>224</sup> R.D. Banerji, Bas Reliefs of Bādāmī, p. 34, and Burgess, A.S.W.I., V, 1883, pl. xxvi, 2, cited by Coomaraswamy, Yakṣas (New Delhi: Munishiram Manoharlal, 1971), p. 54.

<sup>225</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, Yakṣas (New Delhi: Munishiram Manoharlal, 1971), pp. 22-27.

cases yakṣa worship took place in a caitya which may have been a building of some sort but also was often probably no more than a sacred tree. The essential element of a yakṣa holystead is a stone table or altar placed beneath the tree sacred to the yakṣa. In the above accounts of images of Kāma they are all placed beneath trees. This suggests a connection between the worship of yakṣas and the worship of Kāma as described in the context of the Vasantotsava. Both are worshipped in association with trees and for fertility purposes. In fact, Kāma may once have been a yakṣa and yakṣa worship may have been characteristic of spring. Yakṣas are essentially fertility figures and appear in scenes of abundant vegetation throughout the history of Indian art.

#### Drama as a Component of the Vasantotsava

A common expression of festival activities in the ancient, medieval, and modern eras is the public performance of drama. Although it is not possible to examine the Indian art of drama at length at this time, certain features of the Sanskrit dramatic tradition add to our understanding of the spring festival. The following sections, then, deal first with plays such as the Ratnāvalī, specifically written for performance, as they were, on the occasion of the Vasantotsava, and second with a detailed examination of how the content of these particular plays expresses the underlying themes of this celebration.



In a third section, some general questions raised by the performance of dramas specifically on this occasion will be raised and explored.

The Ratnāvalī, Mālavikāgnimitra, Priyadarśikā, Pārijāta-Mañjarī

Śrī Harṣa's Ratnāvalī and Priyadarśikā, written in the seventh century, Kālidāsa's Mālavikāgnimitram, and the Pārijāta-Mañjarī of Madana are all plays written to be performed during the Vasantotsava and the settings of the plays revolve around the festival itself. All of these plays revolve around a similar plot concerning a plan to effect a politically advantageous marriage of a king. In order to bring about this marriage the permission or at least the approval of the chief queen is required.

In each play the proposed wife arrives on the king's doorstep in disguise and is given a menial position in some capacity responsible to the queen. Importantly, the king and his chief queen are unaware of the true identity of the princess. One might also note at this point that the princess herself seems to suffer a temporary loss of memory in this regard. For example, when she arrives at the palace, she assumes

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<sup>226</sup>There is some controversy regarding the date and authorship of the Ratnāvalī and the Priyadarśikā. C.R. Devadhar and N.G. Suru's introduction to the Ratnāvalī contains an overview of the evidence on this question (pp. 1-4). The same can be said regarding Kālidāsa's Mālavikāgnimitram. See R.D. Karmarkar's translation of this text for an outline of this controversy (pp. i-xvi). For the date of the Pārijatamañjarī, see the prefix to Dikshit's translation (pp. i-xvii).

a different name. No attention is drawn to her sudden inability to recall who she really is. She acts, until the final scenes of the plays, as if she were, in fact, a servant of the queen. Even when she remembers who she is there is no mention made of this memory loss and subsequent recovery, either by her or anyone else. Often this inexplicable amnesia of the princess is essential to the development of the plot. All of the primary characters are portrayed as happily oblivious of her true identity. If the king and queen knew who she was, the drama would fail to proceed. If the princess knew who she was she would not undergo the humiliation of serving the queen.<sup>227</sup>

The play progresses and the young lady and the king meet or catch a glimpse of each other in the garden during the spring celebrations and they fall instantly in love. The queen, though fond of the princess, assumes she is unworthy of the king's attentions and, upset by the king's displays of affection towards this serving girl, attempts to remove her from his attention. Eventually the queen is appeased, the true identity of the princess is discovered, and the two lovers are united in marriage.

As we have examined the Ratnāvalī at length above, let us look, very briefly, at the plots of the other three plays.

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<sup>227</sup>The sudden loss of memory is a plot device not uncommon in Indian stories in general. See, for example, Śakuntala.

## Priyadarśikā

The Priyadarśikā, according to the prastāvanā (prologue), is to be performed on the occasion of the Spring Festival.<sup>228</sup> The play proper begins with praise of Gaurī and Śiva, in Indian myth the paradigm of married bliss. The marriage of Priyadarśikā (the daughter of Drd̥havarman) and King Vatsa Udayana of Kausāmbī has been arranged by her father. The king of Kalinga had wanted to marry Priyadarśikā and, being rebuffed, had waged war upon Drd̥havarman and taken him captive. During the confusion Priyadarśikā is rescued and sheltered in the forest by King Vindhyaketu, an ally of her father. King Vatsa Udayana then, unaware of the whereabouts of Priyadarśikā, marries Vāsavadattā and then wages war with Vindhyaketu who is slain in the battle. Among the spoils of the war is the maiden Priyadarśikā who is given to the queen to educate. The identity of the princess is unknown. The queen, a year or so later, dispatches the girl to the palace garden to gather lotuses. There, the king sees her and is attracted to her. She, in turn, is attacked by bees and falls into his arms. In the third act we learn that a play on the subject of the marriage of King Vatsa and Vāsavadattā is to be performed and that Priyadarśikā is to play the part of the queen. The Vidūṣaka arranges for the king to play himself. The queen watches the performance but

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<sup>228</sup> According to the introductory notes the occasion is either the Spring or the Autumn Festival (Kaumudimahotsava). For further details on the overlapping of spring and autumn rituals, see Bhavisya Purāṇa, 135 (below).

the intense love making of the two on stage arouses her suspicions. She leaves the hall and finds out that the king and Priyadarśikā are the chief performers. She has the latter thrown into prison. Priyadarśikā poisons herself while incarcerated, the king administers a magical potion which cures her, and the queen is appeased. Priyadarśikā's true identity becomes known, Vāsavadattā rejoices, having found what turns out to be her long lost cousin, and the marriage between King Vatsa and Priyadarśikā is approved.

### Mālavikāgnimitra

The sixth or seventh century Mālavikāgnimitra has often been attributed to Kālidāsa. The setting of the play is the Spring Festival, and the play is to be performed on this occasion as well. As the title suggests the girl Mālavikā and the King Agnimitra are the two soon to be united in this adventure.

The princess, Mālavikā, arrives at the palace incognito and takes up a position as a servant of the chief queen of Agnimitra, Dhārīnī. In this capacity, Mālavikā appears in a group portrait of the queen and her entourage. The king, seeing her in this portrait instantly falls in love with her. He asks his court wit (Vidūṣaka) to discover some means of seeing her again. Mālavikā has been given dancing lessons and the Vidūṣaka conveniently arranges a quarrel between two dancing masters, one of whom is Mālavikā's teacher. A dance contest is arranged to determine who is the superior teacher. The queen, Dhārīnī, becomes suspicious after she sees Mālavikā dance

and, fearing that the king will fall in love with the beautiful servant girl, refuses to allow the king to witness the performance.

The next scene is set in the garden. Dhārinī has had a minor accident on the swing and asks Mālavikā to perform the dohada ritual in order to prompt the Aśoka tree to blossom. The king arrives in the garden with his second queen, Irāvati. They watch the performance until Irāvati notices that the king is in a swoon over Mālavikā and decides to send Mālavikā away. Dhārinī, the chief queen, on hearing the news, has Mālavikā locked up. The king arrives and falls asleep. The Aśoka tree blossoms.

In the last act Mālavikā is recognized by one of the court visitors. Apparently there had been a prophecy that Mālavikā would remain for a year as a servant before she could marry a suitable husband. The queen recognizes Mālavikā and gives her to the king in marriage.

#### Pārijāta-Mañjarī alias Vijayaśrī

This is a play dating to the 13th century and known only from an inscription. The last two acts are missing. The proposed alliance in this text is between the king, Arjunavarman and Pārijāta-Mañjarī, a bud from the tree of paradise (Pārijāta) which fell upon Arjunavarman during battle and was miraculously transformed into a beautiful maiden. A voice from heaven tells him to marry her. (The author of the introduction to the translation of this text suggests that Pārijāta-Mañjarī

was probably the daughter of a Chalukya king whom Arjunavarman had just defeated in battle and killed.)

The play opens with a discussion by the manager of the play who has been instructed to write a play to be brought to the stage on the full moon day of Caitra and performed at the temple of Sarasvatī. The wonders of spring are described, the recent war is described and we find out that the king has handed over the girl to the superintendent of the royal gardens. The gardener, in turn, houses the girl in the emerald pavillion in the royal gardens. The king, having taken care of the girl, retires to the uppermost room of his palace to witness the citizens celebrating the spring festival. Here the king and queen throw powder on each other and then the queen goes off to the garden to perform the marriage of the Mādhavī creeper and the mango tree. All this while Pārijāta-Mañjarī has fallen in love with the king and is pining away for him. In the midst of the spring celebrations the king too is overcome with pangs of love for her and feels compelled to go to the garden. The king catches sight of Pārijāta-Mañjarī through the reflection of one of the queen's ornaments and she, in turn, notices the king's glances. The queen then becomes suspicious and leaves the garden in a huff. The king promises Pārijāta-Mañjarī that he will return and goes off to console the queen.

Unfortunately, these two acts are all that remain of the play. From the plot thus far, however, it is not difficult to guess the ending, i.e., Pārijāta-Mañjarī and Arjunavarman get married.

It is clear that all of these plays, spanning several hundred years and written in different parts of India, share a clearly discernible pattern. Indeed, the fact that their plots are remarkably similar suggests that this scenario holds a particular significance for an understanding of the Vasantotsava. It remains now to examine the themes of these plays with reference to the Spring Festival on which they were performed.

### Underlying Themes: Fertility and Marriage

The central motifs of both the Vasantotsava and the above outlined plays cluster around the complex of themes associated with fertility and procreation. That the themes of the Vasantotsava as described in the Ratnāvalī are fertility themes has been shown above. In terms of the play itself these themes are doubly resonant: people celebrate a festival of renewal by watching a drama which itself revolves around the themes of renewal. In all of the plays examined above, the storyline is the same and in every case the end result is that the king and a young girl fall hopelessly in love. Given the common plot development of all of these plays and their apparent popularity we need now comment generally on the content of the plays and the ways in which they might be thematically appropriate to this occasion.

Significantly, all of these plays result in marriage. The plot of these plays suggests that the marriages must be love marriages and not

simply advantageous political alliances. Hence, first the king must be aroused: just as all of nature is waking up and coming into blossom, so too is the king, the central figure in the kingdom, brought to new life when he catches a glimpse of the princess in disguise. The provocation of the sovereign is engineered in all of the above stories by the introduction of the bride-to-be as a lowly servant girl. The love triangle here is very intriguing; it involves two generations, two kingdoms, and two social classes in each instance. The king's attentions are directed towards the princess who is, first of all, an outsider, and, secondly, 'apparently' of low birth. We might suppose, then, that the princess is not a suitable match for the king (the principal queen, herself, does not approve of the match). At this point in the plays, one is reminded of the function of strangers or foreigners in fertility rituals. Gonda, for example, in "Ascetics and Courtesans" tells us, in his analysis of the Magadha (outsider) in Indian ritual, that:<sup>229</sup>

Strangers or foreigners were looked upon as ritually impure and as bearers of unknown power, for which reason they were duly 'respected' by keeping one's distance. Dangerous tasks such as certain affairs connected with harvest were not rarely assigned to them; that is why fertility and purificatory rites often require the lifting of certain taboos with regard to them. Instances showing that they were even killed as representatives of the 'corn-spirit' or were forced to be a substitute for a man who had to die are not rare.

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<sup>229</sup>Gonda, "Ascetics and Courtesans" in Adyar Library Bulletin (1961), p. 86.



We might also remember, in this connection, the erasing of class distinctions that we saw earlier in the powder-throwing rituals of the Spring Festival. That the king falls in love with a low-caste girl is in itself such a denial of the validity of caste restrictions. To recapitulate, then, it is central to these dramas that the king is sexually and romantically awakened, just at the moment when nature is also awakening. The object of his desire is an outsider, who is by this status particularly powerful and particularly suited to effect his invigoration. In addition, the theme of the princess' memory loss echoes yet another major concern of the Spring Festival, that of death and renewal. The princess suffers by her memory loss and status change a kind of death; in fact she is in many cases believed to be dead. She exists in the palace in a kind of liminal realm, neither who she was (unmarried princess) nor who she is to become (married queen). Like the old year, she is gone and not yet reborn. Like Kāma, she is dissolved and awaits resurrection which comes forth as recognition and marriage. The plot of these plays thus closely reflects the concerns of the festivals in which they were performed. In addition, the culmination of these plays in marriage with its implied procreative course likewise links up with the Spring Festival. In fact the ritual links between marriage, the object of our plays, and the Spring Festival, the setting of the plays and the occasion for their performance, are striking. Below is an examination of the ritual parallels between marriage ceremonies and the Spring Festival which would suggest that they are integrally linked.

There are a number of texts which detail the rites of marriage in the Hindu tradition. It is, however, primarily from the Grhyasūtras, Dharmasūtras, and the Smrtis that the following material is drawn.<sup>230</sup> These texts date approximately from the 800 B.C. to 900 A.D. and are diverse in their treatment of material pertaining to marriage.<sup>231</sup> Further there are two kinds of rituals involved in the institution of marriage: the śāstrāchar rites or those rites performed according to Śāstric (textual) injunction; and the lokāchar rites or those rites which are transmitted orally and practised generally by women.<sup>232</sup> Generally śāstrāchar rites are required to legalize the marriage and legitimize the children while lokāchar rites represent the customary and regional components of the ceremony handed down from generation to generation in any particular region. Further, the marriage rites evidence a great deal of diversity and change over time and from region to region and are, hence, complex amalgams and sets of rituals.

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<sup>230</sup>Of the Grhyasūtras the Gobhila Grhyasūtra and the Āśvalāyana Grhyasūtra are perhaps the oldest. There are also a large number of Paddhatis and Prayogagranthas or marriage manuals written for specific regions describing marriage customs. See B. Saraswati, Brāhmanic Ritual Traditions (Simla: Institute of Advanced Study, 1977), pp. 165, 175 ff.

<sup>231</sup>The Grhyasūtras date from 800-400 B.C. (i.e., the Gobhila Grhyasūtra, Āśvalāyana, Āpastamba being the oldest); the Dharmasāstras from 500-300 B.C.; and the Smrtis: from 200 B.C to 100 A.D. (Manusmṛti); 100 A.D. to 300 A.D. (Yājñavalkyasmṛti); 100-400 A.D. (Nāradaśmṛti); 300-500 A.D. (Bṛhaspatismṛti); and 600-900 A.D. (the metrical Smrtis). [Saraswati, Brāhmanic Ritual Traditions, pp. xvix, xx; and U.M. Apte, The Sacrament of Marriage in Hindu Society (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1978).]

<sup>232</sup>Saraswati, pp. 164-5.

To begin, then, marriage must be solemnized at an auspicious time during the Indian calendar and spring is a favored time for such an event.<sup>233</sup> The Grhyasūtras are unanimous in maintaining that the marriage rites should be performed during the northern course of the sun, i.e., spring. The waxing moon was most popular and the full moon, in particular, still remains an extremely auspicious time for such a ceremony. Hence, the Vasantotsava is a perfect occasion on which to celebrate a marriage, both demanding the same auspicious moment for their performance.

Secondly, a notable feature of the Vasantotsava, as described in the Ratnāvalī, is the worship of Kāma. A variety of gods and goddesses are in fact invoked at various stages during the marriage ceremony, including Indra, Viṣṇu, Agni, and the goddess Indrāṇī. But one finds that Kāma is directly associated with marriage and has been since early times. According to the Atharva Veda the following verse is quoted in the marriage ritual.<sup>234</sup>

Kah idam kasmai adāt kāmāḥ kāmāya adāt/  
kāmo dātā kāmāḥ pratigrahitākāmāḥ samudram āvivesa/  
kāmena tvā pratigrīhnāmi Kāma etat te/

(Who hath given this, and to whom? Kāma has given it to Kāma [the fulfiller, of desire, has given it to desire] Kāma is the giver [i.e., the inspirer, or fulfiller of desire]; Kāma is the receiver. Kāma has entered into the ocean. Through Kāma I receive thee, Kāma, this is thine.) (III.29.7)

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<sup>233</sup> Apte, The Sacrament of Marriage, p. 71.

<sup>234</sup> Text and translation by J. Muir, Original Sanskrit Texts, Vol. 5 (Amsterdam: Oriental Press, 1967), p. 403.

According to the Gobhila Grhyasūtra, as cited earlier, the bride-to-be is washed and sprinkled with surā (wine) while the following mantra is recited:<sup>235</sup>

Kāma, I know your name, You are intoxication by name.  
Bring him (the bridegroom) so that he may be here together  
with the bride. To thee there was surā. Here (may there  
be) the excellent birth. O Agni you are created from  
penance, hail!

Kāma's affiliation with intoxication and passion is well known in Hindu myth. In the Sanatkumāra Saṁhitā (302) he is attended by Varuṇī (wine), Rāga (love, affection, amorous or sexual feeling), and Mada (intoxication, drunkenness). The procreative possibilities of marriage are crystallized by the sprinkling of the bride with wine and with the accompanying mantra invoking Kāma, thereby symbolically generating or awakening passion.

Thirdly, the throwing of colored powder, which has been analyzed above as belonging to a fertility ritual, is found as part of the marriage ceremony. The throwing of some kind of substance, whether it be wheat, rice, water, wine, or confetti, is common throughout the human history of marriage. In the Hindu marriage ceremony, this ritual behavior finds articulation in several ways, only some of which are discussed here.

During kanyādāna, or the rite when the father of the bride orally agrees to give the hand of his daughter to the selected bridegroom, the bride or the bride and groom are anointed with various

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<sup>235</sup> Gobhila Grhya Sūtra, 1.1.10, cited by Saraswati, p. 185.

substances. According to the Kauśītaka Grhya Sūtra,<sup>236</sup> the father or brother of the bride sprinkles ājya (ghee) over the bride's head. Another mantra, recited during the marriage ceremony and as recorded by Saraswati, suggests a comparison between sexual union and melted butter and, further, suggests that melted butter is the symbolic equivalent of semen. Hence:<sup>237</sup>

Observing secrecy the sages consider the generative organ of women as Agni consuming flesh; so they consider (the semen) of the male generative organ (triśringa) presided over by Tvastr, as melted butter. May that be put in you, hail!

The Vārāha Grhya Sūtra (p. 11) describing this rite tells us that after the bath, the priest offers oblations and takes the remaining ājya and smears the bride's face with it. Then he recites two mantras:<sup>238</sup>

"priyām karomi pataye..." and "saubhāgyena tvā saṁsrje..."

(I make you beautiful for your husband, I make you sexually desirable for your husband.)

The anointing of the bride with ājya is associated thus with sexual union.

Another substance handled in this way and of similar import is surā (wine). After the rite of Kanyādāna it is customary for the bride to be bathed and, according to the Gobhila Grhya Sūtra (1.10.9-10),

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<sup>236</sup>Kauśītaka Grhya Sūtra, 1.8.13, cited by Apte, Marriage, p. 90.

<sup>237</sup>Saraswati, p. 186.

<sup>238</sup>quoted in Apte, Marriage, p. 87.

"her friend should besprinkle her with surā on her head three times till her body becomes wet." Following this the groom washes the bride. The Gobhila Grhya Sūtra tells us in verse 1.10.10 that this washing should be done by her female relatives.<sup>239</sup> The Kāthaka Grhya Sūtra also mentions that the husband should bathe the bride. Hence:

On the night before the day and night when the marriage is to take place, when the morning is nearing, he (the husband) should bathe her .... (Apte, p. 87)

At the end of the Saptapadī, or the rite of the seven steps which usually marks the end of the main marriage rite, the head of the bride and groom are sprinkled with water. All of the sūtras, according to Apte, require this ritual.<sup>240</sup> The Kāthaka Grhya Sūtra says that the ācārya brings the couple together and then sprinkles water on their heads. Among Gujar Brahmins, upon the arrival of the bride at her new home her feet are washed with colored water and her wet feet mark the footprint of Lakṣmī (the goddess of fortune).<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>239</sup>Apte, Marriage, p. 86. According to Apte the Gobhila Grhya Sūtra instructs the groom to wash the 'private parts' of the bride. This is in agreement with Oldenberg's translation of this text, though the reference is Gobhila Grhya Sūtra II.1.10. As the Sanskrit text itself is unavailable to me I am unable to verify this translation although it seems doubtful that the groom would actually be permitted to touch this area of the bride, at least prior to the marriage rites. See The Grhya Sūtras, trans. H. Oldenberg, SBE. XXX. Part 2 (Reprint; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), p. 43.

<sup>240</sup>Apte, Marriage, p. 103.

<sup>241</sup>Sarasvati, p.188.

Although the order of the marriage rites in the Grhya and Dharma Sūtras is not rigidly standardized, the rites of kanyādāna and bathing the bride are usually followed by madhuparka.<sup>242</sup> The word literally means a ceremony in which honey is shed or poured. The madhuparka ceremony consists of pouring honey into curds, mixing the two ingredients, sprinkling the mixture in all three directions (east, south, and north) and then eating it. Madhuparka is not exclusive to the marriage ceremony. Often it is accorded to guests and as such it is a ritual of reception. In regard to the marriage ceremony the bridegroom deserves this special honor. In the Vasiṣṭha Smṛti<sup>243</sup> the friends of the couple hold a pot of water in their hands and sprinkle it on the couple with kuśa blades. At the end of the ceremony the couple sprinkle unhusked grains on each other's heads.

The rituals in which akṣata or unhusked grains are thrown indicate that this substance helps sanctify the marital union and facilitates the future productivity of the couple. Grain itself is symbolic of fertility, the abundance of the vegetative world, a parallel for which is sought in the human world (see above pp. 46f.). A pot filled with water, akṣata grains, and sometimes gold is touched by the 'wooers' of the bride and the bride's father (once he has given his

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<sup>242</sup>For the order of these rites as prescribed in the Grhya Sūtras see Saraswati, pp. 172-174.

<sup>243</sup>Vasiṣṭha Smṛti, (2), IV. 43-44, cited by Apte, Marriage, p. 137.

consent to the union).<sup>244</sup> The couple sprinkle each other with akṣata to symbolize their unity, and insure their fertility. In the Laghvāśvalāyana Smṛti,<sup>245</sup> during kanyādāna the bride scatters akṣata grains on the head of the groom and then the groom scatters akṣata grains on hers. Following this, they exchange places and she again sprinkles akṣata grains on his head. Then follows a recitation of verses in which the groom is requested not to abandon the bride with respect to dharma, artha, and kāma and then again akṣata grains are placed on their heads. Saraswati describes the akṣataropana as the sitting of the bridegroom in a heap of rice (the bride and bridegroom have thrown rice on one another). It is a rite of laukika or popular origin and hence belongs to the lokāchar tradition. He also tells us that pouring seeds of rice on the heads of the couple is practised all over India among Brahmins belonging to a variety of schools and, further, that it is practised by the Mundas of Chotangpur wherein the bride and groom throw rice on each other.<sup>246</sup> In more recent times akṣata has been replaced by husked rice which is colored with tumeric and red powder (the blood of nurturing, see above).

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<sup>244</sup>Ibid., pp. 83, 196.

<sup>245</sup>Laghvāśvalāyana Smṛti, XV. 20, cited by Apte, Marriage, p. 134.

<sup>246</sup>Saraswati, pp. 175, 205.



According to the Atharva Veda, after the consummation of the marriage the bride was to change her clothes and then scatter pūlya (roasted) grains.<sup>247</sup> Pūlya grains and akṣata grains seem to be interchangeable. The Mānava Grhya Sūtra, for example, prescribes the use of akṣata grains during the marriage rites, while the Kauśītaka Grhya Sūtra prescribes pūlya grains. The mantras employed here request that the couple be blessed with long life, progeny, and prosperity. The Grhyasūtras also describe a pre-marriage ritual in which the bridegroom is received by the female relatives of the bride. The couple is anointed with darbha stalks. Sarasvati describes this as part of the lokāchar rites as follows:

The bridegroom is received by female relatives who hit him with a sinki (type of grass). He pierces the sinki grass.

This activity is now performed by all of the people attending the marriage ceremony. In some cases, the rice has been dispensed with altogether and the throwing of red powder only remains as part of the marriage rites.

Among other sources for this powder-throwing ritual as part of the marriage ceremony we might cite Someśvara who, in his twelfth-century text, the Mānasollāsa, tells us that powder throwing is a prominent part of the Vasantotsava but that it also is a feature of festive occasions like marriage and royal victories. According to him

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<sup>247</sup> Atharva Veda cited by Apte, Marriage, pp. 87f.

the throwing of powder in the context of the Vasantotsava and marriage rites is to be done in late afternoon with musicians and dancers in attendance.<sup>248</sup> Throwing of color is recorded also in the Nāgānanda as part of the marriage ceremony. Also, direct reference to this activity in the marriage ceremony is found in Bengal where the throwing of Halud (red tumeric powder) is integral. The name of this ceremony, during which the bride is anointed is "Gaye Halud."<sup>249</sup>

These rituals usher in and prepare for the impending union of the male and the female and correspond to the similar activity of throwing powder described as part of the Vasantotsava in texts like the Ratnāvalī. According to the above texts on marriage, a number of incidents of this behavior-type take place prior to the actual marriage ceremony. They form part of the pre-marriage rituals, and as such they can be understood to prepare the liminal environment typical of such rites of passage and appropriate to the marriage ceremony where bride and bridegroom are on the threshold of new social identities. This is especially true for the bride who must leave her home and move into her husband's house. The future fecundity of the bride and groom is but one focus of these marriage rites which also serve as protection from evil spirits. The sprinkling of the bride and groom after the saptapadī signifies as well the newly established unity of the couple (they are now united as one) in the same way as we have

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<sup>248</sup>Raghavan, Festivals, p. 73.

<sup>249</sup>Samirayet P. Mukhopadhyay, "Sarmilar Patigrhe Yatra" in Desh (July 9, 1983).

argued above that the throwing of substances in the Vasantotsava serves to remove individual distinctions and thus negate caste divisions. In summary, then, integral to the marriage ritual as it was to the Vasanta celebrations and the dramas is the throwing of some substance, with all the rich symbolic overtones that we saw for spring festivals: fertility, union with the abolishing of distinctions, and liminality.

Fourth, the general merriment and licentious behavior characteristic of the Vasantotsava is described in several texts, as also characteristic of the marriage ceremony. Singing, dancing, and drinking wine form part of the pre-marriage rituals. According to the Śāṅkhāyana Grhya Sūtra,<sup>250</sup> after the bathing of the bride-to-be, four or eight women who are not widows are regaled with wine (surā) and food. They dance four times. Among Nepali Brahmins the ladies keep awake all night singing and dancing. Intoxicated by the wine, they act in ways both unpredictable and impulsive, quite often indulging in vulgar, sexy jokes and pranks.<sup>251</sup> At these times, vulgar and ribald songs are also usual among Maithil Brahmins.<sup>252</sup> In the Kāthaka Grhya Sūtra<sup>253</sup> the bride plays musical instruments which are besmeared with

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85. <sup>250</sup>Śāṅkhāyana Grhya Sūtra, 1.11, cited by Apte, Marriage, p.

<sup>251</sup>Saraswati, p. 170.

<sup>252</sup>Ibid. p. 187.

86. <sup>253</sup>Kāthaka Grhya Sūtra, 11.5.2 cited by Apte, Marriage, p.

water and their friends engage themselves playing music as well, for either one or two days and a night. The excitement and gaiety of the festivities are further described in the Kauśītaka Grhya Sūtra and in the Mānava Grhya Sūtra wherein a dance of eight avidhavās (not widowed women) is followed by the feasting of Brahmins.<sup>254</sup> The Vasistha Smṛti tells us that after the father agrees to give his daughter in marriage the groom goes to her house accompanied by married ladies with children singing and playing musical instruments. Apte records three formulas recited at the time of playing musical instruments (none of which could be traced, by him, to the Vedic texts which suggests a popular non-Vedic origin of these rites). The musical instruments, he remarks, were played in order to bestow on the bride auspiciousness, progeny, beauty, and pleasantness.<sup>255</sup> Even today in the Punjab, ladies sing and dance to the beat of the drum in the bride's house on the night before the marriage.

This merriment so typical of the Vasantotsava and the marriage ceremony has precedent in the Taittirīya Saṁhitā,<sup>256</sup> where a passage describes general licentiousness, song, dance, and swinging in the context of the Mahāvratā sacrifice.<sup>257</sup> Here a screened shed is raised

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<sup>254</sup>Kauśītaka Grhya Sūtra, 1.7; 1.11; Mānava Grhya Sūtra, 1.9.28; Apte, Marriage, pp. 87-88.

<sup>255</sup>Vasistha Smṛti, (2) IV. 16; Apte, Marriage, p. 178.

<sup>256</sup>Taittirīya Saṁhitā, VII.5.9.

<sup>257</sup>The Mahāvratā is a Vedic celebration and will be examined in detail below in Chapter Three.

and sexual intercourse between the man and woman was to take place there. Perhaps, as Sarkar maintains in Some Aspects of the Earliest Social History of India, the Mahāvratā was the Brahmin counterpart of the popular spring celebration which finds its way, in later times, into both the Vasantotsava and the marriage ceremony.<sup>258</sup>

Finally, one might note that certain additional elements which form part of the marriage ceremony are also central to the Vasantotsava although not as it is described in the Ratnāvalī. For example, the worship of a goddess or group of goddesses and the centrality of fire are features of both types of rites. Circumambulation of the fire is first mentioned in association with marriage in the Yajur Veda (15.53) and has remained a prominent feature in most texts describing marriage rituals. The goddess Dākṣāyaṇī is worshipped after the Saptapadī ceremony according to all of the Śāstrakāras. Laugākṣi requires that the bride should worship Gaurī, Sacī, and other goddesses before kanyādāna and, according to Apte, this type of worship by the bride is still in vogue in Maharashtra where it is known there as Pūjā of Gaurī and Hara.<sup>259</sup> According to Sarasvati, Gaurīpūjā and Sacīpūjā are rites which appear for the first time in texts which postdate the Grhyasūtras and introduce certain modifications in the Grhya rituals, the Paddhatis and the Prayogas.<sup>260</sup> Indrāṇīkarma, the worship of the

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<sup>258</sup>Sarkar, Some Aspects of the Earliest Social History of India (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 82.

<sup>259</sup>Apte, Marriage, p. 161.

<sup>260</sup>Sarasvati, p. 167.

goddess connected with conjugal love, is recorded in the Śaṅkhāyana Grhya Sūtra and in the Kāthaka Grhya Sūtra.<sup>261</sup>

Insofar as these dramas revolve around marriage and insofar as the rites of marriage correspond in many details to the rites of the Vasantotsava, these dramas of marriage can be understood as appropriate entertainments on the occasion of the Vasantotsava. Drama and the function of particular dramas at specific festivals are further explicable if we look to the Indian dramatic tradition in general and the manner in which it arose.

### Origin of Drama

Although it is difficult to determine when exactly in Indian history the drama came into existence, there are certain texts and parts of texts which mention drama and hence give us a clue as to both the date and context of its origin. If we look to the origin of Indian drama as an art form we find that it, like the plays we have just examined, also probably arose in a festival context although when exactly this occurred is not clear.

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<sup>261</sup>The Atharva Veda, XIV. 2. 31 compares the bride waking from the nuptial bed to Indrani. See Apte, Marriage, p. 128, note #6; 85.

## Nāṭyaśāstra

Although the history of drama (Nāṭya) in India may date back to very early (Rg Vedic) times, the oldest specific account of this art is contained in the Nāṭyaśāstra which, according to Keith, dates no earlier than the third century A.D.<sup>262</sup> What we find in this text is a description of regular court drama in a fully developed and elaborate form complete with a body of specialized rules governing its creation and production.

According to the Nāṭyaśāstra the dramatic art arose in the context of a specific religious festival. It tells us that the first dramatic performance revolved around the story of the defeat of the demons by the gods. The occasion for this performance was the festival in honour of Indra (Indramahotsava). The demons disliked the celebration and created trouble. They were, in turn, beaten off by Indra with his pole which is consequently revered at this time (during the Indramahotsava). Keith in his The Sanskrit Drama in its Origin, Development, Theory and Practice notes that at the preliminaries of plays generally there is special attention devoted to the salutation of Indra's banner staff decorated with colours and bunting.<sup>263</sup> The Indramahotsava is indicative of yet another motif of renewal, that of ritual combat. As we shall see below there is a textual and a thematic connection between the Indra festival described in

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<sup>262</sup>A. Berriedale Keith, The Sanskrit Drama in its Origin, Development, Theory and Practice (Reprint: London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 13.

<sup>263</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

ancient texts and the Vasantotsava as we find it in classical texts such as the Ratnāvalī.

### Other Contextual Evidence

In the Konkan districts of Maharashtra there is a tradition of dramatic performances known as Daśāvatarī which are plays enacted at the time of annual festivals connected with local deities. Further, a variety of the folk drama of Maharashtra known as lalita was formerly enacted on the last day of Navarātra.<sup>264</sup> Tarlekar, an authority on the Indian drama, suggests further that plays were always either performed in the courts of kings or in connection with religious festivals. Hence:<sup>265</sup>

From the prologues of the plays we know that the plays were performed by the troupes during the religious festivals in temples before the public. At the courts of the kings also the dramas were produced before the appreciative audience. Festive occasions like the Spring Festival were the most common for the performance.

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<sup>264</sup>G. Tarlekar, Studies in the Nāṭyaśāstra (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975) pp. 50, 51. For the connection between the autumn ritual of Navarātra, see Bhavisya Purāna, 135, 132, below.

<sup>265</sup>Tarlekar, p. 216.



Such an intimate connection between drama and festive celebrations has prompted cultural historians like Rawlinson to cite the importance of festivals in the genesis and performance of Indian drama. Hence:<sup>266</sup>

From Vedic times, Indians were fond of dancing and recitations, and dramatic representations at religious festivals are referred to in Aśoka's inscriptions. No doubt the first plays resembled the yatra still popular in Bengal, and on occasions such as the spring festival, episodes such as the death of Ravana, the abduction of Sitā, the binding of Bali, the slaying of Kaṁsa, or Krishna's adventures with the Gopis were crudely enacted. Panini (c. 400 B.C.) speaks of actors as singing, and specifically mentions dramas as represented both by action and declamation, the theme being recited off stage and accompanied in mimic pantomime.

As a form of ritual behavior, drama can be seen as part of the religious tradition of India: just as kings celebrated happy occasions like the advent of spring with the performance of sacrifices, they also celebrated them with the performance of plays. The tradition of dramatic performances at festivals represents a tradition similar to the dancing and gaiety associated with sacrifice.<sup>267</sup>

#### Indramahotsava<sup>268</sup>

There is, as noted above, a certain amount of evidence which

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<sup>266</sup>H.G. Rawlinson, India: A Short Cultural History (Reprint; New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), p. 134.

<sup>267</sup>See P. Kale, The Theatric Universe (Bombay: Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd., 1974), pp. 43,44.

<sup>268</sup>This festival is referred to variously as Śakrārcā, Indramaha, Indramahotsava, Indradhvaja, Indrayanna, and the Indradhvajocchraya.

connects the origin of drama with the festival of the god Indra. There is also some textual evidence specifically connecting the worship of Indra (the Indramahotsava) with the Vasantotsava. The central myth underlying the celebration is Indra's defeat of Vṛtra, the demon of drought. The theme of ritual combat between the old year and the new, life and death, and rain and drought, as Gaster points out, is one of the most common themes in seasonal festivals.<sup>269</sup> He lists it as a myth of invigoration and he maintains, further, that festivals which celebrate such myths do so in order "to procure that new lease of life which is imperative for the continuance of the topocosm."<sup>270</sup> The Indra festival, like the Vasantotsava, is a festival of renewal and this thematic connection lends itself easily to actual and literary connections. We shall begin here with a discussion of the Indramahotsava's links with the Vasantotsava and pass from there to an outline of the Indra Festival.

In turning to the relationship between the Vasantotsava and the Indra festival we encounter at least one problem: the Indra festival is an autumn festival<sup>271</sup> and the Vasantotsava is a Spring Festival. Yet Bhoja of Dhārā in his Sarasvatīkanthābharana and Śrṅgāra Prakāśa,

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<sup>269</sup>Gaster, Thespis, pp. 37f.

<sup>270</sup>Ibid. p. 26.

<sup>271</sup>Raghavan cites a variety of text mentioning the Indramahotsava as an autumn festival including the Kauśika Sūtra, Atharvaveda Parisistas, Rāmāyana, etc. Festivals, Sports, and Pastimes, pp. 120f.

directly links both Sakrārcā (the worship of Indra) and the Vasantotsava (which Bhoja refers to as suvasantaka) by labelling them love festivals.<sup>272</sup> Given this association, the celebrants of the Vasantotsava and of the Indramahotsava engage in a certain amount of licentious behavior. The mythical precedent for this licentiousness in the context of the Indramahotsava is to be found in the Skānda Purāna which connects the Indramahotsava with the story of Indra's misbehavior with Ahalyā and the sage Gautama's curse on him. Raghavan paraphrases this passage as follows:

Gautama also cursed that if Indra dared to appear on the earth for receiving any pūjā, he would go to pieces. Indra had to live in shame and hiding and at Brahmā's request, Gautama withdrew his curses on Indra, restored to the latter his normal appearance, and to rehabilitate him, allowed a five-day festival on earth in his honour. This Indra-festival gave the people freedom from disease and bestowed on them prosperity and well-being. (p. 130)

More than just this suggested connection between the Indramahotsava and the Vasantotsava, however, is the evidence in some texts specifically equating these two festivals. Some of these simply record the Indramahotsava as taking place in spring. Raghavan, in Festivals, Sports, and Pastimes, cites the Tamil epic Silappatikāram and the Manimekhalai in which the Indra festival was on Caitra Purnima (the full moon day in the spring month of Caitra). He also tells us that a small South Indian compilation from the Dharma Nibandhas called the Vinayākādisarvapūjāpaddhati mentions Caitra Śūkla Pratipad as the

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<sup>272</sup>Raghavan, Festivals, Sports, and Pastimes, p. 128.

date for its celebration (the first day of the bright half of Caitra, i.e., the traditional date for the Vasantotsava).<sup>273</sup> In Nepal, there is a smaller Indradhvaja festival in spring and a larger one in the autumn. Further, Kane notes the prevalence in the Deccan of the practice of raising a Bamboo staff (probably a vestige of the Indradhvaja celebration during which a pole was raised in honor of Indra) on the first of Caitra.<sup>274</sup>

Among the texts which equate the Indramahotsava and the Vasantotsava directly we may include the Jain Kathākośa. It contains a story set in the context of the Spring Festival and surprises the reader when, in the last line of the text we read:<sup>275</sup>

apanakelih śakrārcā vasantamadanotsavaḥ

(the festivities of the Vasantotsava and Madanotsava involve drinking and the worship of Indra)

The description of the Vasantotsava in this text is typical in all other respects. That is, it conforms in all respects to descriptions found in the texts we have discussed previously. So too does the Bhavaprākāśa of Saradatanaya include Śakrārcā (worship of Indra) as part of the Spring Festival.<sup>276</sup> We should not hesitate, then, to investigate the Indramahotsava further.

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid. p. 150.

<sup>274</sup> Kane, History of Dharmasāstra, II. ii. p. 826; and Raghavan, Festivals, Sports and Pastimes, p. 153.

<sup>275</sup> Kathākośa, (Lahore: Pt. Jagdish Lal Sastri, n.d.), 23.11 (page, line). See also my Chapter One, p. 17.

<sup>276</sup> Saradatanaya, Bhavaprākāśa, III. 99.

Celebrating the deeds of Indra, the Indramahotsava is a popular festival about which we have an abundance of information. A.K. Chatterjee, in Ancient Indian Literary and Cultural Tradition, suggests that it was, in all probability, the earliest festival celebrated by the people in general (i.e., a popular festival).<sup>277</sup> It is mentioned in Vedic texts such as the Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa and the Pariśiṣṭaparvan of the Atharvaveda.<sup>278</sup> Raghavan in Festivals, Sports, and Pastimes of India has written a lengthy section on this festival in which he also suggests that it dates to Vedic times. We find further mention of this festival in a large number of texts including the Harivaṃśa, Buddhacarita and the Kathāsaritsāgara.<sup>279</sup>

Raghavan in describing this festival tells us it was primarily an agricultural festival having as its object an increase in the productivity of the land. The Harivaṃśa confirms that Indra has agricultural overtones and tells us, in some detail, that Indra is the lord of clouds and as such, a special favorite of farmers and shepherds. In the south he is responsible for the river valley region. According to the Harivaṃśa, as well as to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and Bhāgavata Purāṇa, the Indramahotsava was extremely popular among the

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<sup>277</sup>A. K. Chatterjee, Ancient Indian Literary and Cultural Tradition (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1974), p. 162.

<sup>278</sup>Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa, 140.16; Pariśiṣṭaparvan of the Atharvaveda, no. 19.

<sup>279</sup>For texts describing this festival, see Raghavan, Festivals, Sports, and Pastimes, pp. 117f.

gopas (cowherds) of Mathura and Vṛṇḍāvana.<sup>280</sup> The Bālacarita of Bhasa also refers to the Indra festival of Mathura (Indrayanna).<sup>281</sup>

Further, the celebration of this festival is particularly important for kings. The Mahābhārata tells us that it was King Uparicara Vasu, the Cedi monarch, who had first introduced the worship of the yasti (stick or pole) of Indra.<sup>282</sup> This is confirmed in the Brhatsamhitā. This text further tells us that a king, desirous of victory, must observe the Indra festival.<sup>283</sup> Lakṣmidhara in his 'Rājadharmakanda' (the duties of kings) of the Kṛtyakalpataru, a twelfth-century North Indian text, describes this festival in some detail.<sup>284</sup> The festivities commence with an excursion into the forest to search for a tree suitable to serve as Indra's Pole. At daybreak the next day, having found and worshipped an appropriate tree in a prescribed manner, one should cut it down and carry it back to the city, and install it with the accompaniment of dance and song. The tree is to be wrapped with cloth of various colors which serve as flags. The text tells us that, as long as the pole stands, the women of Indra (apsarases) will remain happy. People should also stay awake all night reciting the deeds of

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<sup>280</sup> Harivaṁśa, II. ch.15; Viṣṇu Purāṇa, V.10.16ff; Bhāgavata Purāṇa, X.24.1 ff.

<sup>281</sup> See Chatterjee, pp. 166-169.

<sup>282</sup> Mahābhārata, 1.63.18-19.

<sup>283</sup> Brhatsamhitā, 43.55.68 cited by Raghavan, Festivals, p. 141.

<sup>284</sup> Lakṣmidhara, Kṛtyakalpataru, 'Rājadharmakanda' ch. 17, pp. 284-90.

Indra. A king who performs this festival will destroy all of his enemies and ensure the prosperity of his realm. Kings celebrate this festival, then, not only to ensure the future productivity of their realms, but also to gain victory in battle.

Of central importance in this festival is the Indra-Pole. The celebrations revolving around the dhvaja, or flagstaff, of Indra resemble the spring rites of 'Old England' during which the familiar May Pole is the focal point.<sup>285</sup> The major feature of the May Day festivities is the bringing in of the May Pole from the woods at the close of the winter. In India the close of the rainy season marks the beginning of a new agricultural season and the Indramahotsava thus celebrates this new season. The Indra Pole is a powerful phallic symbol representing the anticipated productivity of the realm and potency and power of the king. Kings are required to celebrate this festival and in so doing guarantee the safe continuum of their kingdoms. The sexual prowess of the Indra-Pole is intimated in the Krtyakalpataru above which tells us that as long as the pole stands, the women of Indra will remain happy. As the king is the centre, the support, and the source of fertility of the kingdom, so too, the Indra pole can be seen as the axis mundi or cosmic pillar resting on the earth and thrusting upward to the sky.<sup>286</sup> The suggestion here is clear: the world revolves

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<sup>285</sup>Raghavan, Festivals, p. 154, also notes the similarities as does Frazer, The Golden Bough, pp. 119-154.

<sup>286</sup>For the king as the personification of the axis mundi in Vedic

around this vertical shaft. This pillar must be annually rejuvenated or undergo a new birth and it is this rebirth and the centrality of the king's role in this process that the festival, through the symbol of the tree, celebrates. The erection or resurrection of the Indra-Pole, like that of the May Pole, follows closely upon its death or felling in the forest. The tree is cut down with much pomp and ceremony only to be reinstated (reborn) as the central component of the festival.

The Vasantotsava is thus intimately associated with the performance of dramas. In fact the Nāṭyaśāstra suggests a ritual context for the origin of the drama, namely the Indramahotsava. An examination of that festival links it with the Vasantotsava. The Vasantotsava and the drama have been tied together from earliest times, although in the earlier times it was the ritual combat motif of renewal that dominated (in the Indramahotsava), and later on it is the marriage-fertility motif that comes to the fore.

As related in the Ratnāvalī, the Vasantotsava was celebrated by a mass of the citizens who witnessed dramatic performances. The description of the audience in the Ratnāvalī (i.e., a mass of citizens) leads us to suggest that the drama was probably appreciated by a cross section of the population. This accords with the traditional account found in the Nāṭyaśāstra wherein drama was created by the god Brahmā

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ritual see Heesterman, The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration (The Hague: Mouton and Co. Publishers, 1957). p. 101.



for the benefit of all varnas. The four traditional Vedas were modified and adapted and from them the four components of the 'Nāṭyaveda' arose. The dramatic art became full-fledged when women (originally apsarases) were employed to portray the sentiment of love.<sup>287</sup> This fifth Veda, then, was created by Brahmā for the use of all castes (including women).<sup>288</sup>

It is notable that the language to be used in drama, according to the Nāṭyaśāstra, is twofold: Sanskrit and Prakṛt. Sanskrit is to be used by those of superior and middling characters. Those possessed of lower spirits, and females, are to use Prakrit. Women, as a rule, do not speak Sanskrit, although in the case of ascetics, courtesans and sometimes queens, Sanskrit is permissible.<sup>289</sup> The use of both Prakrit and Sanskrit as media of communication in these plays suggests that both languages were intelligible to spectators. Keith accounts for the use of Prakrit in Indian drama by suggesting that if the drama was to be popular then the humble people who figured in it must have been allowed to speak their own vernacular.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>287</sup>See, for example, G.H. Tarlekar, Studies in the Nāṭyaśāstra (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), pp. 2ff; Pramod Kale, The Theatric Universe (A Study of the Nāṭyaśāstra) (Bombay: Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd, 1974), pp. 8ff; and, A. Berriedale Keith, The Sanskrit Drama (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 9ff.

<sup>288</sup>Pramod Kale, The Theatric Universe, p. 9.

<sup>289</sup>Tarlekar, Studies in the Nāṭyaśāstra, pp. 33-34.

<sup>290</sup>Keith, The Sanskrit Drama, p. 45.

Whether everyone understood both languages or whether some understood the Sanskrit portions of the drama only by means of the movements of the actors, it is clear from the Nāṭyaśāstra that the drama was designed or adapted for the enjoyment of everyone. The multifaceted audience is described in the Nāṭyaśāstra as follows:<sup>291</sup>

The young people are pleased by the depiction of sensuous desires. Some others are interested in matters of worldly importance. Those who turn away from worldly life are interested in attaining release of their soul from bondage. Brave warriors take pleasure in the depiction of the heroic. Old men, on the other hand, are interested in stories and myths with religious import with little or no violent battles in them. So every man who enters the theatre hall, however different he is in personal qualities and likes and dislikes, becomes a spectator in the true sense only by recreating the Modes in his own experience.

In terms of the plays specifically examined in the context of the Vasantotsava, the above evidence accords well with what we have established earlier. The Vasantotsava was a festival enjoyed by a very generalized audience. Indeed, the production of a drama which is by nature appealing to everyone, would be an appropriate part of this festival. The ritual production and observance of these dramas revolve around renewal and marriage, themes apparent in the Vasantotsava and the earlier festival of Indra.

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<sup>291</sup> Nāṭyaśāstra, XXVII: 54-59, cited by P. Kale, The Theatric Universe, p. 73.

This concludes our section on the Ratnāvalī, a section which has gone far beyond the boundaries of that one text in order to make sense of the rituals details it preserves. In sum, the Ratnāvalī, by its plot and presence in the spring celebrations, gives us a picture of the Vasantotsava as a popular public festival celebrated by the citizens of the city as well as a private elitist festival celebrated specifically by the king, his harem, and nature. As we move into another text, our picture of the king and his role in this festival is further augmented.

### Kathāsaritsāgara and the Vikramacarita

The Kathāsaritsāgara and the Vikramacarita belong to the same literary genre, the fable. Both contain interesting descriptions of the Vasantotsava and hence add much to the picture we are forming of this festival. They will be treated below consecutively.

#### Kathāsaritsāgara

The Kathāsaritsāgara is a collection of stories written by the Kashmiri Brahmin, Somadeva, for the amusement of Queen Sūryamatī.<sup>292</sup> Dating from the eleventh century A.D. the Kathāsaritsāgara is, by the admission of Somadeva himself, a condensed Sanskrit version of Gunādhyā's Brhatkathā. This latter text was written in Paiśācī Prākṛit and is the first known Indian text of stories. Its date cannot be placed with any certainty before the fifth century A.D.(90).<sup>293</sup> The fame of the Brhatkathā is evident in that it is praised by such authors as Subandhu and Bāna. Although this text no longer survives, we know of its content through the Brhatkathāmañjarī of Kṣemendra, written at the beginning of the eleventh century A.D., and the Kathāsaritsāgara of Somadeva.

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<sup>292</sup>Keith, A History of Sanskrit Literature, p. 281.

<sup>293</sup>Hence, although Somadeva's text is late many of the stories are undoubtedly much older. See, Krishnamachariar, p. 419.

A great deal of the material in the Kathāsaritsāgara is drawn from the Brhatkathā. The text itself begins by telling us that Gunādhyā wrote the Brhatkathā while wandering in the forest in the Vindhya region.<sup>294</sup> Somadeva also seems to have incorporated some other material such as that found in the Pañcatantra. The Kathāsaritsāgara altogether is 21,000 stanzas long and is divided into eighteen Lambhakas with 124 Taraṅgas.<sup>295</sup> In addition to the main frame story, and very often obscuring that story altogether, is a large amount of material of almost every kind. The task of deciding how far this additional material belonged to the original of Gunādhyā is difficult, if not altogether impossible.<sup>296</sup>

The frame story of the Kathāsaritsāgara revolves around the adventures of Naravāhanadatta, the son of Udayana. Naravāhanadatta, in his adventures, collects some twenty-six wives, but the heroine is Madana Mañjukā. Krishna Chaitanya in his New History of Sanskrit

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<sup>294</sup>It should be noted that the Ślokaśaṅgraha tells us that Gunādhyā lived in Mathurā. See A. Berriedale Keith, Classical Sanskrit Literature (Calcutta: Association Press, 1927), pp. 89-90.

<sup>295</sup>K. Chaitanya, A New History of Sanskrit Literature (Reprint; Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975), pp. 366f; and Keith, History of Sanskrit Literature, p. 281.

<sup>296</sup>See, for example, Keith, A History of Sanskrit Literature, pp. 368f; Classical Sanskrit Literature, pp. 96f.

Literature remarks on Naravāhanadatta's escapades as follows:<sup>297</sup>

The adventures build up a bourgeois epic, a rich blend of romance, fairy tale and winning of wealth and women and conclude with the prince becoming the emperor of the Vidyadharas. From the literary point of view, Soma Deva's version is the best. We come across an incredible variety of middle-class types. We meet the poet whose verses, unfortunately, make no impression upon the grocer, the taxgatherer whose palm is as capacious as his sympathies are narrow, the loquacious barber, the astrologer who makes lavish announcements of wealth to come, the hoarder of gold who starves by day and feasts his eyes upon his coins by night. There are plenty of fools to give comic relief..... Rogues also appear in plenty.....

The collection contains several stories which mention the spring festival in a variety of contexts. Some of these references have already been cited in the previous section yet the following selection has been chosen for further examination as it is set during the celebration of the Vasantotsava and the focal point of the narration is the festival itself.

The longest and most important book in the Kathāsaritsāgara for our purposes is Book Twelve. Included in this book is the Vetālapañcaviṃśatikā (the twenty-five tales of a Vetāla) in full detail. This latter section is found in both versions of the Brhatkathā (i.e., the Kathāsaritsāgara and the Brhatkathāmañjarī) but may have originally formed an independent cycle. These stories are not, for example, found in Buddhasvamin's Brhatkathā Ślokaśaṃgraha.<sup>298</sup> The

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<sup>297</sup>K. Chaitanya, p. 368.

<sup>298</sup>The Brhatkathāślokaśaṃgraha is another text retelling the

Vetālapancavinsatikā exists independently in a variety of recensions. The most important of these recensions is probably that of Śivadāsa who dates from the fifteenth century.<sup>299</sup> The Vetālapañcaviṃśatikā's general popularity is attested to by its inclusion in both Kashmiri versions: Somadeva's Kathāsaritsāgara and the Brhatkathāmañjarī and its numerous independent recensions.

The frame story of this collection is simple: King Trivikramasena receives a fruit from an ascetic every year and he finds that the fruit conceals a gem. In gratitude he calls on the ascetic who asks him to go to a cemetery and fetch a corpse hanging there on a tree. The corpse is needed for some religious rite. The king is warned that the success of his mission depends on absolute silence. Accordingly, the king goes to the cemetery and recovers the corpse which is hanging from a tree there. As he is carrying the corpse from the cemetery to the ascetic, a vetāla (demon or ghoul) which has entered into the corpse, tells the king a story. At the close of the tale the vetāla puts a question arising from it to the king, who, naturally enough, falls into the trap and answers, thereby breaking the requirement of silence essential to the success of the mission. The corpse escapes and goes back to the tree. This happens twenty-five times with the result that King Vikramasena's task has to be done all

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stories of the Kathāsaritsāgara, discovered in Nepal in 1893. See the edition edited by F. Lacôte (Paris, 1802-29).

<sup>299</sup>Sivadāsa, Vetālapañcaviṃśatikā, ed. H. Uhle (Leipzig, 1884), cited by K. Chaitanya, p. 473.

over again. Finally, in the last story, the king is unable to solve the riddle and the vetāla reveals to the king that the ascetic is really planning to sacrifice the king and usurp his place. The king returns with the corpse and the ascetic asks him to prostrate himself before it. The king innocently asks the ascetic to show him how to perform the prostration. The ascetic obligingly shows him and the king promptly cuts off his head.

Kathāsaritsāgara: Book XII, Number 17<sup>300</sup>

As the number of this story suggests, this is King Trivikramasena's seventeenth journey from the cemetery, corpse in hand. The tale the vetāla tells is as follows:

The vetāla begins with a description of the city Kanakpuram whose righteousness is praised. The city is ruled by a king - Yaśodhana, by name. He, one day, is approached by a merchant who wishes Yaśodhana to marry his daughter, Unmādinī, "the intoxicator." The king sends his Brahmin advisors to look her over and the Brahmins, seeing her great beauty, fear she would corrupt the king as she would simply be too great a diversion for him. They then return and inform the king that she is exceedingly ugly. By the king's order, the merchant gives his daughter to the commander of the army.

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<sup>300</sup> Somadeva, Kathāsaritsāgara, ed. P. Durgaprasad and K.P. Parab (Bombay: NSP, 1899) and Kathāsaritsāgara or Ocean of the Streams of Story, trans. C.H. Tawney (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1880).



The slighted Unmādinī thinks contemptuously of the king because he has rejected her.

Spring arrives. The king mounts an elephant and rides out into the city at the head of a procession in order to see the spring festival. All the women residing in the city remain inside their apartments.<sup>301</sup> However, Unmādinī shows herself whereupon the king sees her and becomes disturbed by the sight of her great beauty. The king is here described as "Kāma" who looks "on her form which is a weapon of victory" and he becomes infatuated. When he finds that he had rejected her, he banishes the Brahmins who had told him she was ugly. The king however refuses to marry her himself because it would go against dharma: she is already married to the head of the army. The king even refuses when the head of the army offers her to him as the risk to dharma is too great. Sunk in sorrow, he leaves the city.

Having related this story to King Trivikramasena the vetāla asks him who is more virtuous, the king or his army chief. The king replies that King Yaśodhana is more virtuous. Trivikramasena's response to the question breaks the condition of silence necessary for the success of his mission and the vetāla, along with the corpse, disappears and returns to the tree.

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<sup>301</sup> It is not clear why women are required to remain out of view of the king. Perhaps it is simply a question of remaining safely inside. The sight of the king, who is exceedingly attractive, might simply be too much for women to bear. Hence when the parade drum is heard, signifying the king's arrival in the procession, women remain hidden.

### Other Versions of this Story

Other versions of this story contain dissimilar particulars. In a Hindi version, the Baital Pacisī which, according to Keith, rests on Śivadāsa's version and describes the argument between the king and the commander of the army, the latter threatens to turn Unmādinī into a prostitute so she can no longer be considered his wife.<sup>302</sup> He will thus lead her to the palace as a gift to the king. However, in the end the commander of the army and Unmādinī both throw themselves on the the king's funeral pyre.

In a Tamil version cited by Tawney, the king sends for a soothsayer to look at the girl's horoscope. He reports simply that the king would lose his kingdom if he married her.<sup>303</sup>

The Pāli Jātakas and the Sanskrit Jātakamālā both contain noticeably condensed versions of this story which likewise differs slightly from the text of Somadeva. Brahmins, who are sent to see Unmādinī's auspicious marks, completely lose their self-control on the sight of her. In the Pāli Jātaka they describe her as a witch and advise the king against accepting her as his wife. Unmādinī takes revenge by showing herself to the king on the occasion of the Kāttika festival. In the version in the Jātakamālā, she does this during the Kaumudī

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<sup>302</sup>Keith, Classical Sanskrit Literature, p. 98fn.

<sup>303</sup>Tawney, trans. Kathāsaritsāgara, p. 241.

festival. Here we find a thorough description of the town under the spell of festival celebrations:<sup>304</sup>

Its streets and squares had been sprinkled and cleansed; their white ground was strewn with many coloured flowers; gay flags and banners were floating aloft; everywhere there was dancing and singing, representations of burlesques, ballets and music; the mingled scents of flowers, incense, odoriferous powders, perfumes, garlands, strong liquors, also of the perfumed water and the ointments used in ablutions, filled the air with fragrance; lovely articles were being exposed for sale; the principal streets were thronged by a merry crowd of townsmen and landsmen in their best dress.

The king here is subsequently overcome with passion and only after a long conversation with her husband, the commander of the army, is he pacified and able to overcome his infatuation. Finally, the husband is appeased by the unwavering constancy of the king and pours praises on such a virtuous ruler.<sup>305</sup>

This above story in the Kathāsaritsāgara and its variants introduces certain new elements to our picture of the Spring Festival and furthers our knowledge of some spring observances by describing a situation not present in the Ratnāvalī. This concerns the role of the king. The king in the Ratnāvalī festivities was the convener and supervisor of the festival; in the Kathāsaritsāgara he is far more. He is here the central participant, much as he is in the drama plots themselves (as opposed to his role in the ritual activities the dramas

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<sup>304</sup> J.S. Speyer, Jātakamālā, SBB, vol. I (1895), no. 13, p. 14 et seq., cited by Tawney, Kathāsaritsāgara, p. 243.

<sup>305</sup> Tawney, Kathāsaritsāgara, pp. 243-4.

merely describe). In the Kathāsaritsāgara the centrality of the king's sexual desire is brought out by showing a case where that desire cannot be fulfilled. The king's impotence, then, threatens his realm, just as his sexual vigor insures its prosperity. To avert the final calamity in this version the king chooses exile or death, echoing perhaps a ritual of expulsion or sacrifice to prevent the declining powers of the king from being the cause of the decline of the realm. It remains now to review the role of the king in the spring festivities to assess the Kathāsaritsāgara story in its full significance.

## Kings

### Festival Obligations

It might be fruitful at this time to look more closely at the part of kings in festival literature. They play a special role in many of the festivals celebrated both in ancient and more modern times. Indeed the chief performer in the festival was traditionally the king.

We have ample evidence in Sanskrit texts of kings functioning in this capacity. The king's duty is to see that the celebrations, which were responsible for the joy and prosperity of his country and of his people, be celebrated correctly. Raghavan notes this as follows: "Whether in the Veda, Atharva Parīśistas and later Dharma Nibandhas

or court dramas we see clearly the king's role and responsibility."<sup>306</sup>

In keeping with this general notion regarding the duties of kings we find in the Gautama Dharmaśāstra the following verse:<sup>307</sup>

He (the king) shall perform in the fire of the hall the rites ensuring prosperity which are connected with expiations (santi), festivals, a prosperous march, long life, and auspiciousness; as well as those that are intended to cause enmity, to subdue (enemies), to destroy (them) by incantations, and to cause their misfortune. (vs. 17)

Haradatta further remarks on this verse that, though, according to the text, the king must perform these rites, he is, in reality, only to give the necessary orders, and to furnish the means for their performance. The purohita is to officiate as priest.<sup>308</sup>

With respect to festivals in general the Rāmāyana tells us that the absence of a king leads to anarchy. When this occurs, festivals and festive gatherings, both of which contribute to the prosperity of the kingdom, do not flourish.<sup>309</sup>

nārājake janapade prahr̥stanātānartāḥ/  
ūtsavāsca samājāśca vardhante rāṣṭavardhanāḥ

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<sup>306</sup> Raghavan, Festivals, p. 5.

<sup>307</sup> This particular verse is found in The Sacred Laws of the Aryas, SBE II, Part 1, trans. G. Buhler (Reprint; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1969), II.1, p. 236. The Gautama Dharmaśāstra is one of the oldest of the Dharmaśāstra texts, SBE, II, p. lix.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid. note 17.

<sup>309</sup> Rāmāyana, II.67.15, paraphrased above by Raghavan, Festivals, p. 5.

One might suppose, then, that the mere presence of the king is sufficient to ensure the success of the festivities. Kings convene the Spring Festival in texts such as the Ratnāvalī, Daśakumāracarita and the Jātakamālā. Śulapāni tells us in the Dolayatraviveka that the Spring Festival, Holākā, was instituted first by King Indrayumna in Vṛndāvana.<sup>310</sup> In the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa King Raghu, in order to protect the world, must find out how to destroy Ḍhaundhā. Raghu's purohita tells him how this can be done: "The sin of a king," the purohita says, "is not protecting the earth." The king must protect the earth from the demoness. He does so by convening the Spring Festival; hence, the purpose of the festival is to rid the world of Ḍhaundhā (Holākā). The king is told in this text that if he observes the rites of the festival he will gain prosperity and the world will be free of sickness for the duration of the year.<sup>311</sup>

The Kṛtyakalpataru of Lakṣmidhara, a text outlining the deeds of kings, lists certain duties required of kings which, if unattended, lead to drought, famine, and pestilence in the kingdom.<sup>312</sup> Aimed at averting such calamities, one of the king's duties is to insist on the due performance of the worship of the gods at prescribed times during the year. By inaugurating the celebrations, he upholds dharma.

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<sup>310</sup> Śulapāni, Dolayatraviveka, ed. S. Banerji in the volume of papers presented to Kane, in History of Dharmaśāstra, p. 238.

<sup>311</sup> Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, 135. 31, 32.

<sup>312</sup> Lakṣmidhara Bhatta, Kṛtyakalpataru, Part XI "Rājadharmakāṇḍa" (Baroda: GOS, 1944).

In the previous description in the Ratnāvalī, and in the above from the Kathāsaritsāgara, the duty of kings during the festival was actively to convene and generally oversee the celebrations. However, they played only a minimal role in the festival as celebrated in the urban context. In the garden festival in the Ratnāvalī the king was the object of the worship of the queen, but it was Kāma who was central: the king was worshipped insofar as he represented Kāma and then only after Kāma-worship proper had been performed.<sup>313</sup> In the garden scene in the Ratnāvalī, all the king did was fall hopelessly in love with the princess. That this happens, however, and that it is central to the development of the plot not only in the Ratnāvalī but in the Priyadarśikā and Pārijāta-Mañjarī as well, leads us to the suspicion that it is more than a mere device of plot. We have found one of the most prominent features in the Spring Festival pattern to be the arousal of desire and it is this feature with respect to the king that we shall examine in detail below. The simple act of falling in love at the Spring Festival, which in the Ratnāvalī leads to his marriage, is the cause, in the Kathāsaritsāgara, of his downfall and these consequences of his emotional state are highly significant for the citizens. The Kathāsaritsāgara, then, enhances our understanding of the king's role, by providing a glimpse of a king's desire gone awry.

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<sup>313</sup>Notably, King Naravāhanadatta, one of the prominent players of the Spring Festival, is understood as an incarnation of Kāma. See Agrawala, The Matsya Purāna: A Study (Varanasi: All India Kashiraj Trust, 1963), p. 50.

## Kāma/Dharma

Kāma or the satisfaction of physical/sexual desires and dharma or one's duty vis à vis society are seen as two of the four aims of life in the Hindu tradition.<sup>314</sup> Kāma and dharma are positive and necessary conditions for the happiness of men. The underlying structure of the festival according to the description in the Kathāsaritsāgara, seems to be a healthy balance of kāma (love) and dharma. Kingly dharma is primarily concerned with artha which, to turn, is vital in and supportive of kāma. Figuratively speaking the satisfaction of kāma on the part of the king extends to the citizens in his realm. Ancient rituals as, for example, the Horse Sacrifice, aim at securing prosperity for the king and, via the king's prosperity, for all of the citizens.<sup>315</sup> The ideal of dharma, too, extends from the king to all society. A dharmaic king is necessary to ensure the ongoing stability of society. In the Hindu tradition there need not be any conflict between these two ideals. The fulfillment of kāma, in part, at least, is the dharma of the householder. A married king may satisfy both kāma and dharma without difficulty.

Hence the satisfaction of kāma in itself is not problematic - even for kings. We have many instances of individuals involved in love play during this festival. The throwing of colored powder as noted previously, for example, is an erotic sport. There are many cases in

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<sup>314</sup>The other two aims are artha (power) and mokṣa (release).

<sup>315</sup>See for example, O'Flaherty, Women, Androgynes, pp. 10f.



which kings are depicted as satisfying their desires with their wives during the Vasantotsava. It is in this sense (love sports with their wives) that kings may be understood as participating directly in the festival. In another story in the Kathāsaritsāgara, for example, King Dharmadhvaṇḍa of Ujjayini goes to the palace garden with his wives to amuse himself; Prince Naravāhanadatta amused himself by watching the festivities of the citizens who danced without restraint on the spring festival.<sup>316</sup> Later, this same prince is found enjoying the festival of spring in a garden along with his ministers; King Yaśodhana of Kanakapura mounted an elephant and went out to see the high festival of spring in his city; and, it was on the occasion of the festival of spring that King Vikramāditya married the princess of Siṃhāla.<sup>317</sup> Both the Daśakumāracarita and Priyadarśikā describe princes joining the celebrations of the Vasantotsava with their beloveds.<sup>318</sup> In the Tilakamañjarī of Dhanapāla the king on the occasion of the Vasantotsava is expected to participate with his wife in the general merrymaking characteristic of the festival.<sup>319</sup> In the Kathākośa the son of King Sanatkumāra goes into the forest on the occasion of the spring festival.<sup>320</sup> According to Someśvara, kings engage in swinging with

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<sup>316</sup> Kathāsaritsāgara, XIV. 58, p. 98.

<sup>317</sup> See Chattopadhyaya, "Spring Festival and Festival of Indra," pp. 1f.

<sup>318</sup> Priyadarśikā, Act I; Daśakumāracarita, pp. 24-5.

<sup>319</sup> Tilakamañjarī, pp. 68-9.

<sup>320</sup> Kathākośa, 66.

their beloveds on this occasion and, in some paintings, kings are shown playing Holī with syringes in the palace.<sup>321</sup> It will be recalled that in the Ratnāvalī the king satisfies both kāma (desire for the princess) and dharma (social duty) by marrying the princess. The arousal of the king, which is central in the above descriptions, is a common and even a necessary ingredient in the spring celebrations. It has been suggested elsewhere that the condition of the king is intimately related to the conditions of the country; and that the generative power of the king is also intimately bound up with the fertility of men, cattle, and crops.<sup>322</sup> We might interpret the above accounts of the king's sporting activities and his marriage during the Vasantotsava as not only a matter of enjoyment but more as publicly verifying that he is still hale, hearty, and, above all, sexually potent. This sexual potency, moreover, is essential to the security of the kingdom.

What happens when for some reason the king cannot fulfill his sexual needs, when he is impotent, is the real subject of the Kathāsaritsāgara story. The Kathāsaritsāgara attributes the king's impotence to a conflict between kāma and dharma, rather than to any physical imperfection of the king, perhaps because by definition kings had to be physically perfect. In fact, the very name of the woman involved suggests the source of the conflict. The woman is "Unmādinī", she makes men crazy, she causes them to lose their normal

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<sup>321</sup> Someśvara, Mānasollāsa, 102 and Raghavan, Festivals, p. 74. See also Thomas, Festivals and Holidays of India, fig. 12.11.

<sup>322</sup> Frazer, The Golden Bough, p. 354.

mental balance. Sexual desire is essential for the running of the world, and the king's sexual potency is necessary for the fertility of his realm, but his addiction to sexual pleasures to the exclusion of his other duties would be a disaster. It is those keepers of the sacred notion of duty or dharma, the Brahmins, who here recall the king from the brink of the fault of excess by preventing his union with Unmādinī. Even given the probability of Brāhmanical retelling of the story, the point of the festival is that the king's potency spills over to the beautiful maidens of the realm. The reconciliation of kāma with the realm of social order (dharma) is woven into the festival celebration. References to dharma, the king's duty, abound in this moral parable of the Spring Festival, a parable in which it is acknowledged that lust is life and lust is death, in much the same ambiguity of another religious symbol often associated with the Spring Festival, ashes.

The introduction to the story emphasizes the dharmic qualities of the kingdom's citizens. The king himself is bound by dharma. His Brahmin advisors seek to prevent the union of Unmādinī, "the Intoxicator" and the king: the implication being that, by virtue of her beauty, Unmādinī would be too great a distraction for the king. How could he attend to his dharmic duties with such a wife? The king's advisors fear that he would become obsessed with kāma. Hence:

The Brahmins went and saw that matchless beauty of the three worlds, and were at once troubled and amazed, but when they had recovered their self control, they reflected; "If the king gets hold of this maiden the kingdom is ruined, for his mind will be thrown off its balance by her, and he will not regard his kingdom, so we must not tell the king that she possesses auspicious marks. (Tawney, Kathāsaritsāgara, p. 319)

The implication is that dharma would consequently suffer if the union were effected. By virtue of her physical beauty, Unmādinī, like Ratnāvalī and Mālavikā in the Ratnāvalī and Mālavikāgnimitram, is an inappropriate and undesirable match for the king from the perspective of dharma. In one version of the Kathāsaritsāgara story, the ministers themselves are rendered senseless by the beauty of Unmādinī – one is unable to speak, one unable to control his body. If these Brahmins are unable to control themselves, how could the king, a mere ksatriya, be expected to resist her?

Unmādinī, however, is not to be slighted and, at an opportune time, shows herself to the king for the specific purpose of engendering the passion of the king. Although it is only by 'chance' that the king catches a glimpse of Unmādinī (all women of good family being kept inside, out of his view), the story indicates that Unmādinī herself is well aware of the potency of the season in giving birth to passionate emotions. The king falls hopelessly in love with Unmādinī after seeing her at the Vasantotsava only to discover she is already married. The object of his kāma is the wife of another. Marriage is sanctioned by dharma. It represents a legitimate structure within society: a structure which encourages the satisfaction of kāma, a dharmic outlet for kāma. It would hence be unwise and inauspicious for the king, as the upholder of dharmic order, to upset that order and satisfy his desires with respect to Unmādinī. The situation is problematic for the king and for his subjects as well. Dharma cannot be circumvented; Unmādinī is already married.

The king is the representative of dharma in spirit as well as in practice. Even when the legitimate husband of Unmādinī freely offers her to the king, he does not accept. He says:

How could I, being a king, do such an unrighteous deed? If I desert the path of right, who will remain loyal to his duty? (p. 320)

This is further emphasized when the husband suggests turning Unmādinī into a prostitute and by doing so giving the king dharmic access to her. He says:

I will abandon her in the temple here, then, king, there will be no sin in your taking her to yourself, as there might be, if she were a matron.

Prostitutes may, obviously, legitimately satisfy kāma outside of the institution of marriage. Yet even this solution is unacceptable to King Yaśodhana, perhaps because it implies that one can circumvent dharma by what amounts to legal maneuvering. The king replies to the commander of the army:

And how can you, though devoted to me, urge me to commit a crime, which will bring momentary pleasure but cause great misery in the next world? And if you desert your lawful wife, I shall not allow your crime to go unpunished, for who in my position could tolerate such an outrage on morality? (p. 320)

As the representative of dharma, the king cannot, without endangering himself and, by extension, his citizens, give way to kāma not sanctioned by dharmic injunctions. Yet kāma also is determinative. The king is under kāma's influence and unable to overcome his passion for Unmadini. Finally, the conflict between the two is unresolvable: the king cannot uphold dharma, he is afflicted by kāma; neither can he give way to kāma, this would be un-dharmic. The solution to the problem, death or leaving society, tips the scales on the side of

dharma. It is a dharmic solution; rather than give way to kāma the king either leaves the city or commits suicide. Hence the king says at the close of the story:

So death is for me the best course...former (ones) of noble character lose their lives sooner than abandon the path of virtue... Accordingly the king's body was gradually consumed by the fire of the grievous fever of love, and only his name and fame remained. (p. 320-1)

### Kings, Kama, and Unmādinī

Although the source of the king's problem seems to lie with the Brahmin advisors who originally prevent the union of the king and Unmādinī, the woman Unmādinī, 'the intoxicator,' is not above reproach. The story suggests that she consciously chooses the day of the Vasantotsava to reveal herself to the king and, in so doing, anticipates the king's hopeless infatuation. Slighted by the king's refusal, this is her revenge. Unmādinī is apparently well aware of her beauty and the power that beauty wields.

Unmādinī....showed herself to the king on the roof of her palace, to revenge the insult he had offered her by refusing her and when the King saw her, looking like a flame shooting up from the fire of love when fanned by spring and the winds from the Malaya Mountain, he was sorely troubled. (p. 320)

Unmādinī's actions are appropriate to the Spring Festival: kāma is in the air; even the king is not immune to its mood; her power is now manifest. Unmādinī, as her name 'Intoxicator' suggests, may be understood as a locus of kāma. As such, she is evidence of the erotic spirit of the season.

The thwarted union of Unmādinī and the king and his subsequent dethronement and death reflect yet another modification on the theme of the death and rebirth which dominates the Spring Festival. The death of the old is necessary to make way for the new. In other parts of the world, as Frazer tells us, kings are not allowed to grow old lest, with their diminishing vigour, the cattle should fall sick and the crops rot.<sup>323</sup> One of the fatal symptoms of decay was taken to be the incapacity to satisfy the sexual passions of women. The failure of the king to satisfy his lust with respect to Unmādinī might, hence, involve a corresponding failure in men and plants and animals. By extension, it is important that such a king not be allowed to die a natural death as the power he wields must surely degenerate as well effecting a corresponding degeneration in the realm. He must be put to death, therefore, while he is still healthy, or exiled. The Kathāsaritsāgara is the only evidence available for such beliefs in classical India, and as such deserves special mention. That the king's death is due directly to the interpretation by Brahmins of the cultural form, dharma, is also significant and implies the interweaving of social order imposed by Brahmins and fertility rites. The rationale given in the story for the king's demise is his inability to uphold dharma and this, in turn is intimately related to his failure to satisfy his lust.

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<sup>323</sup>Frazer, The Golden Bough, pp. 351f.

### The Buddhist Recension

Interestingly the Buddhist recension of this story resolves this problem under the over-arching structure of dharma, and, at the same time, shifts the festival context from spring to autumn. In the Jātakamālā the tension between dharma and kāma is lost, the king is able to overcome his infatuation and continue to rule successfully. Infatuation, in the Buddhist tradition, is generally considered a vice which can be overcome; hence a final solution is possible. He can overcome his desire, a feat perhaps in keeping with a festival season, autumn, that celebrates the rest from procreation. In the Jain version the tale becomes a vehicle for the presentation of Jain doctrines, further divorced from ritual concerns.

### Vikramacarita<sup>324</sup>

The Vikramacarita or Vikrama's Adventures is a collection of thirty-two tales in praise of Vikramāditya. There are several versions of this text attributed to various authors. It appears broadly in two recensions: the northern, which includes a version from Bengal attributed to Vararuchi, a short anonymous version, and a Jain version attributed to Śiva Siddhasena Divakara Kṣemankara; and the southern, with a prose version and a metrical rendering, both anonymous. The Jain version is the latest and dates to the fourteenth century. The

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<sup>324</sup>Vikrama's Adventures (Thirty-Two Tales of the Throne), ed. and trans. F. Edgerton (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926).



northern recension is generally known as the Siṃhāsanadvātriṃsika and the Southern, Vikramacarita. Vikrama's adventures are the subject also of a variety of other works including the Vīracarita of Ananta and the Vikramodaya.<sup>325</sup> The text is alleged to have been discovered by Bhoja of Dhārā in the eleventh century and was probably written for or under him.

The frame story tells us how Bhoja, the eleventh-century king of Dhārā, discovers a buried throne which had originally been given to King Vikrāmaditya by Indra. Around this throne are thirty-two statues which really contain the spirits of thirty-two maidens who had been cursed into immobility by Pārvatī. Bhoja wants to use the throne, but as he ascends the steps, one of the statues comes to life and cautions that only a person who was as magnanimous as Vikrāmaditya can mount the throne. The statue then relates a story to bring out the greatness of the dead king. Each time Bhoja tries to mount the throne one of the statues comes to life and tells a story. In the end, Bhoja does mount the throne and the maidens are released from the curse by Pārvatī.<sup>326</sup>

There are three versions of this text that are to be examined in the following section: a prose recension, a metrical recension, and also the Jain recension.

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<sup>325</sup>Keith, History of Sanskrit Literature (Indian ed.; Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 292-3.

<sup>326</sup>See K. Chaitanya, A New History of Sanskrit Literature, pp. 371-2.

Story Number 16 "The Spring Festival and the Brahmin's Daughter"<sup>327</sup>

The story in question, then, is narrated by a statue. It opens with the introduction of King Vikrama who has successfully completed a military campaign against the kings of the four quarters. Vikrama returns to his city laden with booty but is prevented from entering by a soothsayer who advises him to wait four days for an auspicious moment to make his entry. The king accordingly retires to a nearby pleasure grove. There he builds a tent of cloth. The time is spring and the season is described at length: swarms of bees, mango blossoms, lotuses are typical features of the landscape at this time of year. Sumantra, the minister of the king, suggests that the king should worship spring. Sumantra promises the king that if he were to do so all the seasons would be kindly disposed to him and there would be prosperity in his kingdom. The rites in honor of spring are thus described: The minister builds a very beautiful assembly pavilion and summons women who are learned in dance, music, and song as well as Brahmins learned in the Śāstras and Vedas. Others come by their own volition. A throne inlaid with nine gems is placed in the pavilion. Upon the throne two images, one of Lakṣmī and one of Narāyana (Viṣṇu), are installed. For the worship of Lakṣmī and Narāyana, musk, incense, aloe wood, jasmin, camphor, and six types of flowers are brought and the king himself has the sixteenfold service

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<sup>327</sup>Vikrama's Adventures, pp. 133-141.

performed.<sup>328</sup> Following this the king honors the Brahmins and others who are trained in the arts with clothes and gifts. The celebrations are accompanied by music - specifically the vasantarāga which, as we have seen, is an appropriate tune at this time of year. The king, who is noted for his generosity, bestows lavish gifts of gold upon the poor.

A Brahmin with a daughter approaches the king and says to him:

I have a request, I have eight sons and no daughter. I prayed to the mother of the world for a daughter and said I would call her Ambikā and give both her weight in gold and my daughter herself to a suitor learned in the Vedas. Now is the time and I want to give her to you.

The king then gives the Brahmin her weight in gold and eight crores of gold in addition. The Brahmin goes home with his daughter and, at an auspicious moment, the king enters the city.

#### Metrical Recension of No. 16

This recension is much the same as the first version. Some alterations may be noted as follows. The king returns to the city to honor spring and to worship Maheśvara (Śiva). The pavilion is described as covered with blossoms and cloth and housing a jewelled throne. The king honors Umā and Maheśvara, Lakṣmī and Narāyana, Spring, and Madana (Kāma) and Rati with camphor and Aśoka blossoms. He also honors the Brahmins. All this is accompanied by the singing of

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<sup>328</sup> No further details are given regarding this ritual.

the vasantarāga. An old man with a girl approaches the king with much the same story as in the first version. The king grants him eight crores of gold and ornaments made of jewels.

#### Jain Recension

There is also a Jain recension of this text which omits any mention of a Brahmin and his daughter. The advent of spring is the occasion for the king to retire to his gardens and to engage in religious conversation with a preacher. After the discussion which revolves around the philosophical questions of the dangers of saṃsara, the king bestows upon the preacher eight crores of gold.

The Virkrāmacarita adds to the picture we are forming of the spring festivities first by adding further details to our description of the role of kings and second by describing the worship of a variety of figures from Indian mythology as part of the celebrations.

The Vikramacarita verifies the importance of the king during the Spring Festival. Although the picture here of the regal presence differs from that in the Kathāsaritsāgara in some important respects, we still are given the impression that the king dominates the celebrations. The description of the king in the above text is traditional in that he possesses many of the characteristics desirable in a king – military prowess (he has just returned from a successful campaign), generosity

and willingness to follow the advice given by his Brahmin advisors. It is to the king's generosity that we now turn.

### Good Kings are Traditionally Generous Kings

Gift giving, in general, is a duty required of kings not only during festivals but on other occasions as well.<sup>329</sup> If we look to the Padma Purāṇa we find that gift giving is typical of all religious vratas.<sup>330</sup> Not only kings, but other members of society as well, ought to be generous during these times. In the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa (135.26) gifts are given to Brahmins in return for services rendered (dakṣiṇā). (Also according to the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa (135.27) wives are to give new clothes to their husbands on this day.) The king is required, both by virtue of his position and by virtue of the occasion, to bestow gifts generously. Generosity at this time though, is not, as one would expect, an inconvenient duty for a king who has just returned from a successful military campaign. With all his booty the king gives lavishly: he gives both to the poor and to the rich alike. In the above story, moreover, he bestows eight crores of gold on one particular Brahmin who offers the king his daughter in marriage.

The king is obliged to be generous and this obligatory action is a manifestation of his position in terms of social responsibility. The

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<sup>329</sup> See, for example, Lakṣmidhara, Kṛtyakalpataru, "Rājadharmakhanda," ch. 15.

<sup>330</sup> Padma Purāṇa, VI. 32f.

recipients of the gifts (both above and below himself in the social/religious hierarchy) are now in the king's debt; they now owe him allegiance. This allegiance substantiates the king's power and that power, in turn, ensures that social order is maintained. In this way the king's duty towards other members of society, as well as his position vis à vis other members of society, is emphasized and the bond of mutual dependence between them cemented.

The giving of gifts by the king may also have apotropaic qualities in disposing of impurity which might have accrued during his campaigns and his absence from the realm. This, as we shall see in our analysis of the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa (132) below, is a typical scenario: pollution accrued here during the king's foray into foreign territory is erased by purification. Heesterman in his analysis of dakṣinā remarks as follows:<sup>331</sup>

Now the dakṣinā, like the gift in general, establishes or seals a bond between giver and donee. In the case of the dakṣinā it is even possible further to define this bond as a marriage-like union. This union enables the sacrificer not only to dispose of the impurity of death, the remainder of the birth process, but also to make it productive again.

The generosity of the king during the Vasantotsava can be understood, then, in a quasi-magical sense as a prelude to the prosperity the new year will bring, a ritual of purification and renewal. The wealth and abundance possessed by the king are sign posts and

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<sup>331</sup>Heesterman, Vratya and Sacrifice, pp. 26-7. See also Mauss, The Gift for a discussion of gifts in this context.

harbinger of the coming prosperity within the reach of all members of society. A prosperous kingdom extends from a prosperous king. Generally a requirement which upholds the religious/social hierarchy, gift-giving on the occasion of the Vasantotsava specifically renews the king's role at the top of the social hierarchy.

### The Seclusion of the King

Curiously, although King Vikrama has just returned from a glorious military campaign and is desirous of assuming his new position as "Lord of the Four Quarters" in his capital, he is prevented from entering the city by Brahmin advisors, and is unable to celebrate his conquests and display his booty within the city walls. The time, he is told, is inauspicious for him to enter his capital: it is the occasion for the Vasantotsava. Now as we have seen in the urban context in the Ratnāvalī, inside the city there is a temporary breakdown of social order. The citizens celebrate the festival en masse in the city streets. Although one is given no indication of the state of the celebrations inside the city in the Vikramacarita, one can only suppose that it is in a similar state as that described in texts like the Ratnāvalī wherein citizens are engaged in ritual revelry and powder throwing. The king, the representative of social order, is refused entry and he is required to undergo a period of temporary ambiguity in status much as the residents of the city from which he is barred are concurrently undergoing a similar temporary modification in status. He is a king without subjects, a governor without a capital, a ruler without

authority. The ritual worship the king subsequently performs outside the city walls is not described in detail in the Vikramacarita, but, from the little information the text does give, it seems to be a rather extensive and solemn affair. The special pavilion and the sixteen types of worship required of the king indicate the ritual is strictly regulated. At the end of the prescribed period of worship the king re-emerges, invigorated, and, entering his capital, is restored as head of the realm. This occurs only when the festival is over and the stability, both of the city and of the king, is reestablished. The ritual pattern endemic to the Vasantotsava already established elsewhere is conformed to here where the king's regeneration corresponds to a regeneration and invigoration of his whole kingdom. The Vikramacarita seems to suggest that his seclusion and personal celebration of the festival outside the city walls are a requisite for his ability to maintain the social order. The king's power itself is not permanent, but rather requires renewal and re-affirmation with each coming year.

#### Deities Worshipped During the Vasantotsava

A further notable aspect of this description is that a variety of deities appear as objects of ritual worship in various readings of the story. Hence we find Lakṣmī and Narāyaṇa, Śiva, Pārvaṭī, Kāma, and Vasanta as central objects of worship. Of these deities Kama is the only one we have encountered in previous descriptions. The manner in which various deities replace each other in this text suggests that the Vasantotsava is a festival which is not rigidly standardized with respect



to the objects of devotion and that the festival has a broad multi-sectarian base, i.e., it is celebrated by a variety of individuals regardless of their religious persuasion. Several deities may be worshipped and the names of these deities seem to be simply inserted into the same ritual formula outlined in the Vikramacarita. The Vasantotsava may thus be celebrated equally by devotees of Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī, Śiva, Pārvatī, or Kāma.<sup>332</sup>

This multi-sectarian nature of the festival highlights the importance of the thematic underpinnings which remain constant irrespective of specific versions, regardless of who one worships and suggests, further, that the festival does not celebrate the activities of one of the great gods alone in the Hindu pantheon: rather and more importantly, it celebrates an interval of transition during the calendar year. Thus we see that in all of these descriptions the activities revolve around fertility and it is upon this thematic basis that elaborate structures of myth and ritual and their corresponding Śaivite, Vaiṣṇavite, and non-sectarian Kāma components are erected. The Vikramacarita illustrates the manner in which one structural setting can serve multi-sectarian purposes and also at the same time, highlight an important interval in the calendar year.

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<sup>332</sup>We might also note that in the Jain recension of this text all mention of worship is omitted and the festivities center around the discussion of philosophical questions of importance in the Jain tradition, i.e., in this case, the dangers of samsara. The story here is considerably condensed, becoming simply a framework for teaching a doctrine.

Two major Sanskrit deities, Viṣṇu and Śiva, as well as the minor deity, Kāma, appear in the above text (depending on the edition) as central to the celebrations. Further a variety of other texts describing this festival illustrate, beyond question, that the festival was celebrated by devotees of both deities. The appearance of these deities in the texts is extremely varied: the context may be mythical or ritual. With respect to Śiva and Pārvatī, for example, texts like the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa both highlight the centrality of these two deities and give us a mythological context in which we may understand the festival. Other texts like the Virūpākṣavasantotsavacampū are ritually oriented, describing this festival in elaborate detail as a temple festival centering around Śiva and Pārvatī (Umā). Texts like the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa and the Virūpākṣavasantotsavacampū tell us a great deal about the Śaivite variations of the festival. Here, Śiva, Pārvatī, and their domestic life are the major components in these celebrations.

The deity Kāma, his consort Rati, and his companion Spring (Madana), appear in the Vikramacarita, and, as we have seen, Kāma is especially central to the Vasantotsava in descriptions elsewhere. Further, Kāma does not have a following equivalent to that of Śiva or Viṣṇu. Although he emerges as important in certain texts as an object worthy of devotion at this time, he is rather easily subsumed by Viṣṇu and Śiva. Conveniently, Kāma is associated with both Śiva and Viṣṇu in connection with the spring rituals. Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas alike can honor him without endangering their sectarian affiliations.

For example, Kāma's association with Viṣṇu in the Matsya Purāṇa's description of Madanatrayaśī is clearly articulated. Kāma

and Viṣṇu are worshipped on the 13th day of the bright fortnight. Kāma is a form of Viṣṇu. Hence in the propitiation the devotees say: "O lord Janārdana, in the form of Kāma" and in the final line describing this ritual the text tells us: "Kāma is Viṣṇu." This is corroborated in the Nārada Purāṇa<sup>333</sup> wherein at the end of the Kāma ritual one is to present a Brahmin couple with a cow uttering the following "May God Hari in the form of Kāma be pleased" as well as later on in the Matsya Purāṇa where courtesans are to utter the following mantra:<sup>334</sup>

As I do not make any difference between Viṣṇu and Kāma,  
so O Lord Viṣṇu, be pleased to always fulfil my desires.

We find this equation too in the Padma Purāṇa, where prostitutes worship Viṣṇu as Kāma.<sup>335</sup> Kāma may also be worshipped by Śaivas. His association with Śiva is, as we shall see, clear from descriptions in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, etc.

As we will be examining the Vasantotsava's Śaiva and Kāma components in detail when we look at the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa and the Virūpākṣavasantotsavacampū below let us now turn to the Vaiṣṇava versions of this festival which corroborate the centrality of Viṣṇu to the Spring Festival as suggested in the Vikramacarita.

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<sup>333</sup>Nārada Purāṇa, 121.2-16.

<sup>334</sup>Matsya Purāṇa, 70.52.

<sup>335</sup>Padma Purāṇa, ed. V. Narayan (Poona: M.C. Apte, 1893-4), Srstikandha, ch. 23.

Narāyana<sup>336</sup>

Although certain texts historically link the worship of Viṣṇu and the Spring Festival, it is primarily to the modern period that we turn in our examination of the Vaiṣṇava Vasantotsava. In North India, especially in Bengal and Orissa, the Spring Festival (Holī) is a well known modern festival.<sup>337</sup> Several sources confirm that the key figure during the spring celebration is Kṛṣṇa.<sup>338</sup> A Spring Festival to Kṛṣṇa is known in early times. Further a link between Kṛṣṇa and Indra, their ritual combat, and the rejuvenating effect this ritual has on the universe occurs in the Harivaṁśa, an early text which dates to the second or third century A.D. In the Harivaṁśa is a myth linking the worship of Kṛṣṇa and Indra in yet another mode of the Spring Festival. Here and in a variety of other texts as well, Vasudeva Kṛṣṇa is painted as an opponent of Indra and described as opposed to the holding of the Indra festival.<sup>339</sup> We find a further reference in Patañjali, the author of the Mahābhāṣya (c. 140 B.C.), to a ritual

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<sup>336</sup> In addition to the male Vaiṣṇava associations cited here, there are certain texts which connect Lakṣmī with the Spring Festival. This evidence, by and large, associates Lakṣmī, via Kāma, to the Vasantotsava and, hence, will be examined in the section dealing with Kama in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa (132).

<sup>337</sup> This corresponds to information found in the Vikramacarita (above) and the Paremeśvarasaṁhitā, 17.564-565 (as noted in Chapter One).

<sup>338</sup> See Sharma, p. 66; Thomas, p. 7.

<sup>339</sup> This is also a common theme in Indian iconography. See H. Zimmer, The Art of Indian Asia, 2 vols. (2nd edition; New York: Bollingen, 1960), II, pl. 291.

combat in dramatic performance in which Kṛṣṇa (the son of Vasudeva) slays Kaṁsa.<sup>340</sup> Now, interestingly, this passage tells us that the followers of Kṛṣṇa adorn themselves with red, and the followers of Kaṁsa with black, and engage in mimetic combat. Ritual combat is central to the Indramahotsava as it celebrates Indra's destruction of demons. Such combat persists in the Vaiṣṇava supplanting of the Indra festival and finally into the modern 'love battles' characteristic of the Holi.

The Kṛṣṇa festival has been examined previously in the section dealing with the Indramahotsava with respect to the motif of ritual combat and the corresponding theme of renewal which that motif entails. The festival is characterized by various elements which further link it to the celebration of the Vasantotsava. Its major characteristics are licentiousness, throwing of colored powder, and the breakdown of social order. McKim Marriott in his well known study of this festival in Kishan Garhi in Uttar Pradesh reports that according to the participants, it was Kṛṣṇa who first played Holi with the cowherd boys, Rādhā, and the gopīs.<sup>341</sup> Even given these assertions by those celebrating Holi, Marriott suggests that the association of Kṛṣṇa with the Spring Festival, in its modern form, is not earlier than the seventeenth century. It was at this time that the Gosvāmins, missionaries of the Kṛṣṇaite devotional movement, immigrated to Mathurā

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<sup>340</sup> Patanjali was a grammarian and gives this as an example to illustrate a grammatical point. This reference is cited by Keith, Classical Sanskrit Literature, pp. 31-2.

<sup>341</sup> See McKim Marriott, "The Feast of Love" in Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 201f.

and transformed it into a centre for Kṛṣṇa devotion. McKim Marriott remarks as follows on Kṛṣṇa theology of love battles:<sup>342</sup>

At least the Krishnaite theology of the "love battles" in Kishan Garhi, and possibly some refinements of their rustic hydrology and stick work, seemed to have been remodelled according to the famous and widely imitated public performances that had been visible in villages for the past three centuries.

In postulating the antiquity of the festival irrespective of sectarian understandings (Marriott seems to regard the association of specific mythological figures with this festival as superfluous) he says:

Even if only some of such festivals had had the puckish, ambiguous Krishna as their presiding deity, and these only in recent centuries, many seemed since the beginning of our knowledge to have enshrined divinities who sanctioned, however briefly, some of the same riotous sorts of social behavior. (p. 210)

Although the Kṛṣṇa-Gopī complex in association with the Spring Festival is relatively recent, not appearing even in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, of greater antiquity is the association of the Holī festival with Kṛṣṇa via the myth in which Kṛṣṇa slays the demoness Pūtānā or Holākā. This demoness, as we shall see when we look at the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, is an important figure in certain descriptions of the Vasantotsava. Finally, the association of the Spring Festival with Kṛṣṇa attains a further dimension in modern times by the fact that the full moon is the birthday of Śrī Caitanya.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid. p. 208.

<sup>343</sup> Raghavan, Festivals, p. 197.

To summarize, then, the Vikramacarita's contribution to our knowledge of the Spring Festival, it gives us further information on the role of the king who, secluded, performs elaborate rituals on this day, and a purificatory ceremony of gift giving. Moreover it establishes that various deities were worshipped concurrently at this time thus highlighting the broadly pan-sectarian character of the festival.

### Bhaviṣya Purāṇa

The Bhaviṣya Purāṇa is one of the eighteen Mahāpurāṇas or major purāṇas. These texts deal with a wide range of subjects and give us information regarding ritual prescriptions and the myths associated with such ritual data. Due to the diversity of the material in all of these texts they are difficult to classify specifically. In fact, there are a variety of traditional ways of distinguishing these works. According to one system, each purāṇa aims at exalting one of the three major deities in the Hindu tradition - Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva.<sup>344</sup> The Bhaviṣya Purāṇa falls under the Brahmā category as it imparts instruction from Brahmā via the Sun god Sūrya, to Manu.<sup>345</sup>

Altogether, the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa is comprised of fourteen thousand verses, the bulk of material in it dealing with Brāhmanical ceremonies, feasts, and duties of caste, as well as containing a few legends.<sup>346</sup> The title bears little relation to the actual contents of the text, i.e., future events. Although the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa is referred to as an early text in sources like the Āpastambha Dharmasūtra<sup>347</sup> the extant work does not seem to correspond to the original work referred

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<sup>344</sup>Kṛṣṇamachariar, History of Classical Sanskrit Literature, p. 75.

<sup>345</sup>V. Mani, Purāṇic Encyclopaedia (4th ed; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974), p. 128.

<sup>346</sup>Winternitz, A History of Sanskrit Literature, I. 567.

<sup>347</sup>S.C. Banerji, A Companion to Sanskrit Literature (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971), p. 159.



to therein. Our text is, in fact, almost impossible to date accurately: some sections may be as early as the eighth or eleventh centuries, others are much later.

Two chapters in this text are relevant for our study: the "Madanamahotsavavarnam" (Chapter 135), and the "Phālgunapūrnimotsavavarnam" (Chapter 132). The first chapter to be considered contains a description of the Vasantotsava under the title of Madanamahotsava. It occurs on the thirteenth day of the bright half of Cāitra (i.e., Madanatrayaḍaśī).

#### Bhavisya Purāṇa 135: "Madanamahotsavavarnam"

1. Having married Gaurī, Śiva took the Paśupata vow. The husband of Umā, Paśupati, became intent on meditation.
- 2,3. Kāma was sent by Brahmā and the other gods who, delighted, had gotten together and decided that he alone was fit to shake Śiva from his meditation; they wished to fulfill Gaurī's desire for a son. Then the deadly one (Māra), the one who leaves behind memories (Smara), the god of love (Kāma) went to the hermitage of Śiva.
4. He was accompanied by lust, love, wild abandon, and the beauty of spring (Vasanta). <sup>348</sup> He was surrounded by wine, pride, and amorous gestures.
- 5,6. Kāma's crest was made of Aśoka and mango trees. His headpiece was made of Jasmine. His best messengers were the female cuckoo and the music of drums and lutes, and song. His treasury official was the sound of musical instruments and drums, his marvellous councillor was the

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<sup>348</sup>The meaning of "nidhāna" here is unclear. It could, however, be appropriately read as "nīdhuvāna" in this context.

spring  $\bar{r}\bar{a}\bar{g}$ <sub>349</sub>and he rode on women who were intoxicated with drink.

7. And so, like a King of great kings,  $\bar{K}\bar{a}\bar{m}$ a came into the presence of Hara.  $\bar{K}\bar{a}\bar{m}$ a was rich with the smell of the south wind, showering sidelong glances.
8.  $\bar{K}\bar{a}\bar{m}$ a, having drawn his bow of flowers, hurled an intoxicating arrow at the slayer of the three cities, in order to cause the interruption of his meditation.
9. Rudra knew him and knew that intention of his. With anger blazing from fury, Hara sent forth fire from his forehead through his third eye.
10.  $\bar{K}\bar{a}\bar{m}$ a, when looked at by that glance, was reduced to ashes in a flash. Seeing  $\bar{K}\bar{a}\bar{m}$ a burnt up, Rati and  $\bar{P}\bar{r}\bar{i}\bar{t}\bar{i}$  were frozen in grief and wailed piteously.
11. Everyone else rushed off in another direction. Then  $\bar{G}\bar{a}\bar{u}\bar{r}\bar{i}$ , seeing  $\bar{K}\bar{a}\bar{m}$ a burning, with a heart pained from grief, said to Rudra:
12. "O lord, you have burnt  $\bar{K}\bar{a}\bar{m}$ a because of me. Look at the two wives of  $\bar{K}\bar{a}\bar{m}$ a, why should they weep so?
13. Be kind to Rati and  $\bar{P}\bar{r}\bar{i}\bar{t}\bar{i}$ , O lord of Gods, O bull-bannered one, revive  $\bar{K}\bar{a}\bar{m}$ a. O  $\bar{S}\bar{a}\bar{m}\bar{b}\bar{u}$ , give him form again."
14. Having heard that,  $\bar{S}\bar{i}\bar{v}$ a was pleased and said to  $\bar{P}\bar{a}\bar{r}\bar{v}\bar{a}\bar{t}\bar{i}$ : "The whole world was oppressed by  $\bar{K}\bar{a}\bar{m}$ a when he had a body.
15. How can I revive the burnt  $\bar{K}\bar{a}\bar{m}$ a? But dear one, I shall respect your words, I shall do as you ask.
16. In this very time of the year, the spring, in the bright half of the moon on the thirteenth, O  $\bar{D}\bar{e}\bar{v}\bar{i}$ , he who is mindborn ( $\bar{K}\bar{a}\bar{m}$ a) will become embodied.
17. Indeed the whole world, with him as the cause, will find delight." Having granted this boon to  $\bar{K}\bar{a}\bar{m}$ a, O  $\bar{Y}\bar{u}\bar{d}\bar{d}\bar{h}\bar{i}\bar{s}\bar{t}\bar{h}\bar{i}\bar{r}$ a!

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<sup>349</sup> In these verses  $\bar{K}\bar{a}\bar{m}$ a is described with all the attributes of a king, i.e., wearing a crown, headpiece, having messengers, treasures, councillors, and riding an elephant.

- 18 The beloved of Pārvatī went to the top of the Himalayas to Kailasa. O king, I have told you the story of Kāma.
- 19, 20, Now I will tell you about the other part - the ceremony of  
21. worship. Listen to that. Having bathed on this 13th night, one should paint the Aśoka tree with paints made from sindura and then make an image of Kāma and Vasanta, either out of gold, out of wood, or painted. The image should have Rati and Prīti along with it. The god, Kāma, should be horseheaded and fish-bannered and accompanied by groups of apsarases, proud, walking in langorous, sensuous steps.<sup>350</sup>
22. Kāma should be intent on listening to music, songs and plays. He should be accompanied by an auspicious sign (svastika), Rati, Prīti, Kṛīḍā, Nandyavartī, and Vidhyadhāras.
23. A man, along with his wife, at midday should worship the image, with devotion, offering food, incense, and clothes and garlands and reciting this mantra.
24. "Praise to Vāma, Kāma, the lord of lords, the embodied one who causes agitation in the hearts of Indra, Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Brahmā"
25. Having done that and praised the god of gods, Kāma, then one should place sweetmeats, which are a pleasure to the mouth, in front of him.
26. And one should give various kinds of foods saying "May Kāma be pleased with me." Then one should take leave of the Brahmins having given them a pair of bullocks with the dakṣiṇā.
27. A woman should worship her husband with ornaments and garlands and clothes, considering him to be the god Kāma and with her mind full of happiness (i.e., thinking truly of him and not of someone else).
28. In the abode of Kāma the man of the house (sacrificer) accompanied by friends should keep an all night vigil in such a way that the night passes in pleasure.

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<sup>350</sup> I have read here "vājivakram" as an epithet of Kāma, "Horse-headed." Coomaraswamy connects the iconography of horses with the yakṣa motif, telling us horses (normally, fish-tailed, or water horses) are commonly found as vehicles of yakṣas and yakṣīs. He, further, includes Kāma in his descriptions of yakṣās. (Yakṣas, II.31.)

29. In the night the festival should occur. Offerings of areca nuts, sandal, and a paste of saffron and camphor and food of various types should be made.
30. Dancing should also occur, as should the shining of lights and public shows and repetition of dramas which are pleasing to see. The great festival, O Partha, should occur every year.
31. In the city, the king who is delighted and pleased when the time of spring comes, celebrates this festival thus, every year, O Partha, ensures that <sup>351</sup>for the whole year his subjects will be free from sickness.
32. Clouds will rain at will, in his kingdom there will be abundance, welfare, health, prosperity, the highest pleasure, and no disease.
33. The god having three eyes is greatly pleased as are Kāma, Viṣṇu, Prajāpati, and Vasanta.
34. Also Candrar, Sūrya, and all the planets, all Brāhmaṇical sages, Yakṣas, Gandharvas, Danavas, are pleased.
35. Asuras, Yātadhanas, Garudas, birds and Nagas are pleased and bestow the highest happiness on the performer, of this there is no doubt.
36. On the Caitrotsava, having praised Kāma with Rati, whose friends are the wind from the mountain Malaya and Vasanta, a man together with his wife will gain fortune, a son, beauty, and fertility.

Of first importance, this excerpt from the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa describes the Vasantotsava as a festival which celebrates the revival of Kāma. It specifically links the Spring Festival with the myth in which Kāma is reduced to ashes by fire issuing from Śiva's third eye. The revival of Kāma occurs on this festival day. The text thus associates

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<sup>351</sup>The subject seems to switch in this verse; perhaps the text is simply bringing out that the king must also celebrate this festival.

the Vasantotsava with a well-known event in mythology and makes much the same type of correlation as those which associate holy sites with mythological events to emphasize their sanctity. Further investigation into the connection between this myth and the festival reveals that motifs which we have seen are central to this celebration (passion and love) are also central to this larger mythology of Kāma. Kāma emerges in the Bhavisya Purāṇa (135) (and in other texts as well), not only as a figure directly associated with the Vasantotsava but as a symbol of eroticism par excellence. As such, Kāma is also intimately connected with fertility. In this mythological event, Kāma's encounter with Śiva is a prelude to the production of a son from the union of Śiva and Pārvatī, or as other texts have it, in their marriage and their son. The significance of the marriage motif in this festival has already been discussed and it is thus not surprising to encounter it here, in the divine realm, in this description in the Bhavisya Purāṇa. There is a clear connection of the myth with reproduction and fertility, a theme which is at the core of the Vasantotsava.

A second element which bears investigation relative to this study of the Bhavisya Purāṇa 135, is the ritual procedure, kojāgara, or 'staying up all night.' This is a ritual intimately connected with the worship of Lakṣmī. According to this text, however, it is performed on the Vasantotsava, in honor of Kāma. We shall return to this again.

## Kāma's Mythology and the Vasantotsava

The conflict between Kāma and Śiva and the ultimate victory of Kāma as recorded in texts like the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa reflect thematic motifs fundamental to the celebration of the Spring Festival. It is Kāma's fertile powers which are invoked during Vasantotsava. Kāma is desire, a symbol of creative, life-giving powers. Stella Kramrisch says:<sup>352</sup>

Kāma was the urge in the creative mind toward manifestation, condensation, and substance. The arrows of Kāma- of which the Purāṇas speak-were directed hitherward..... The arrows of Kāma flew toward this world; they would wound but not kill, they would incite passion.

He is desire incarnate. According to the Śiva Purāṇa:<sup>353</sup>

Brahmā created all the gods and all the Prajāpatīs, including Dakṣa. Then a beautiful woman named Sandhya was born from his mind. Her beauty, which deluded the hearts of sages, aroused Brahmā, but he was paralysed by indecision, realizing that his sons were present. Then from his mind was born Kāma, with his five marvellous flower arrows. Dakṣa and the others were excited by desire and could not remain calm, but Brahmā regained control of his emotions and said to Kāma, 'Enchant men and women with your five flower arrows and your own beauty, maintaining creation eternally. No one will be able to withstand you - not even Viṣṇu and Śiva and I.'

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<sup>352</sup>S. Kramrisch, The Presence of Śiva (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 218.

<sup>353</sup>Paraphrased from the Śiva Purāṇa, ed. J.L. Shastri, trans. by a Board of Scholars, 4 vols (Reprint: Delhi: Motilal Banarisdass, 1977), 2.3.17-42.

Kāma's primary function in Hindu myth is to arouse his victims sexually. As early as the Atharva Veda Kāma is referred to as the god of sexual love.<sup>354</sup> Like Eros of the Greeks and Cupid of the Romans, Kāma is armed with a bow and arrow; however his bow is made of sugar cane, its string made of bees, the tips of his arrows made of flowers. His vehicle is a parrot and the sign on his banner, a fish. Amongst men, animals, and plants, as well as gods, he usually accomplishes his task of arousing desire by shooting one of his love arrows at his victims.

As long as his arrows are directed towards ordinary worldly mortals, Kāma's work is relatively unobstructed. His victims are both male and female and he seems to afflict them indiscriminately, especially during the spring and, in this capacity, he is well known in the Indian tradition. His form is one of irresistible beauty. Suffice it here to give a few examples of Kāma's expertise in accomplishing this task. Kāma wields his power among hermits in the Kumārasāmbhava:<sup>355</sup>

34. The hermits, dwelling in the forest of the Immovable One, seeing this untimely advance of spring, scarcely remained masters of their minds, whose agitation they with difficulty repressed.

35. When the God of Love with flower-bow ready strung, together with Rati, came to that place, the loving couples revealed by their actions their state of mind, pervaded with the delight of love which had reached its peak.

From the same text, his potency is felt in the animal kingdom as well:

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<sup>354</sup> Atharva Veda, III.25.

<sup>355</sup> Kālidāsa, Kumārasāmbhava, translation, notes, and introduction by M.R. Kale (Sixth edition; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967), Canto III. pp. 93f.

37. From joy of love the female elephant gave to the male a spray of water scented with lotus-pollen. The Cakravaka bird honoured his mate with the gift of a half-eaten lotus stalk.

38. In intervals of song, the Kinnara kissed his beloved's face, whose paint-marks were a little smeared by the drops of toil-born sweat, but bright with eyes swimming from flower-liquor.

Kāma's arrows are fired not only at potential lovers but at married couples as well. So, for example in the sixteenth century Gujarati poem, the Vasantotsavavilāsa, we read:<sup>356</sup>

1.7 Kāma, having opened the doorway of love and pride, entered the heart of married couples.

Notable in these passages is the passivity of Kāma's targets. The responsibility for desire (Kāma) rests conveniently with Kāmadeva. He intrudes into the world of men; his victims are helpless in the face of his arrows, unable to curb the passion which is thus engendered. Humans, particularly, seem unequipped to counter the onslaught of his arrows. Kāma has little difficulty when 'swaying' his mortal victims.

Kāma is worshipped in the above capacity during the Vasantotsava, as, for example, in the Ratnāvalī by the queen and, as prescribed for celebrants in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa above. He is invoked in order to engender amorous sentiments and to win conjugal felicity. Descriptions of the Vasantotsava highlight the sexual nature of the festivities and Kāma is clearly an appropriate figure for worship in this context. But it is not simply Kāma's ability to instill passion amongst

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<sup>356</sup>Vasantavilāsa, ed. trans. intro. W.Norman Brown (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1962), I. 7.



mortals, but also his ability to do so amongst the gods that we find as central in the description of the Vasantotsava found in the Bhavisya Purāna. In fact, even though Kāma plays the vital role of Cupid amongst the gods in Hindu myth, in comparative terms his exploits here are quite limited: he appears in the Hindu canon primarily in connection with Śiva. Śiva is Kāma's most famous adversary. Kāma's attempt to arouse sexually this great ascetic god, Śiva, is typical of his primary characteristic here and elsewhere, that of inciting love.<sup>357</sup>

The position of Śiva relative to Kāma in this myth is first of all, one of opposition. Kāma is creative, Śiva, destructive. O'Flaherty in Śiva, the Erotic Ascetic says:

Śiva is the natural enemy of Kāma because he is the epitome of chastity, the eternal brahmacarin, the very incarnation of chastity. When Himalaya tries to bring his daughter Pārvatī to Śiva, Śiva objects with the traditional misogynist argument:

This girl with her magnificent buttocks must not come near me. I insist upon this. Wise men know that a woman is the very form of Enchantment, especially a young women, the destruction of ascetics. I am an ascetic, a yogi, so what need have I of a woman? An ascetic must never have contact with women.

Because of his chastity, Śiva is considered to be the one man in the universe who can resist Kāma. (p. 141)

If we examine Indian mythological literature we find that the above described episode is multi-form, recounted, with some variation,

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<sup>357</sup> Though Śiva is the best known of Kāma's victims he is not the only powerful figure to be on the receiving end of one of Kāma's arrows. According to the Vāmana Purāna, the penance of Nara and Narayana was, on one occasion, disturbed by Kāma.

in most purāṇas and in a fair number of other texts as well. Details of it appear in the Kathāsaritsāgara, the Kumārasaṃbhava, and in the Vāmana Purāṇa.<sup>358</sup> The Śiva Purāṇa, for example, gives us a detailed account of this episode. Here, too, Kāma's encounter with Śiva occurs during the spring season. Vasanta (Spring), indeed, is Kāma's constant companion. The Kumārasaṃbhava also tells us that spring accompanies Kāma. With spring and his consort Rati, Kāma seeks out Śiva in his hermitage in the Himalayas. As they approach the hermitage the features of the spring season begin to appear in the forest. Hence:

25. While the sun, transgressing his ordained course, began to go towards the quarter guarded by Kubera, the south exhaled a scented breeze, likened to a sigh of sorrow.

26. The Asoka tree at once gave birth to flowers and tender shoots, right from its trunk; it did not wait to be touched by the feet of beautiful women, their anklets tinkling, etc. (Canto III)

In a deviation from the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa where it is Brahmā who sends Kāma to Śiva, in the Śiva Purāṇa it is Indra who performs this task. Indra sends Kāma also in the Skanda Purāṇa (5.3.150.7-35), and Indra and Brahmā join forces to accomplish the deed in the Linga Purāṇa.<sup>359</sup> The centrality of Indra in this myth is indicative of the

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<sup>358</sup>O'Flaherty gives thirty-four different references for this event in Sanskrit literature (p. 321). See also Śiva Purāṇa, II.3.17, 9, 19-24; 11.3.18.39; 11.3.19. 6-8,14,15,17; 11.18. 3,5,35,38. Kathāsaritsāgara, III. 69-72. A similar event takes place in the Buddhacarita with Māra and Gotama Buddha (XII.2; 1.22,53; XIII.1.6,7). The similarity of the two encounters (the Buddha and Māra; Śiva and Kāma) is striking and suggests the antiquity of the motif.

<sup>359</sup>Skanda Purāṇa, 5.3.150.7-35; Linga Purāṇa, ed. J.L.

common characteristics of Kāma and Indra; both are erotic, anti-ascetic figures. Traditionally Indra is an enemy of ascetics and the Kāma/Śiva incident probably, as O'Flaherty suggests, finds precedent in the episode of Indian mythology in which Indra, fearing the powers of ascetics, sent apsarasas (beautiful women) to dissuade holy men (ascetics) from the religious quest.<sup>360</sup>

Other texts like the Matsya Purāṇa confirm the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa above and tell us it is Brahmā who commissions Kāma.<sup>361</sup> The Matsya Purāṇa traces the origin of this event to even earlier times. It tells us how Kāma came to be burnt by Śiva: Brahmā lusted after his daughter Aṅgajā and felt ashamed at not being able to suppress his passion (Kāma) and so he cursed Kāma to be reduced to ashes by Śiva. And, further, in even another rendition, the conflict between Śiva and Kāma can be traced to Brahmā who gives Kāma this commission out of revenge against both Kāma and Śiva.

In any case, whether Kāma is the emissary of Brahmā or Indra, the results are the same. All three figures (Brahmā, Kāma, and Indra) are concerned with the maintenance of their world and not with the destruction of it, particularly at the hands of a troublesome ascetic like Śiva. Even Brahmā, though cursing Kāma to destruction, promises that Kāma will be revived, hence effectively voiding his curse and putting

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Shastri, trans. Board of Scholars, 2 vols. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), II. 561.

<sup>360</sup> O'Flaherty, Śiva, p. 120.

<sup>361</sup> Matsya Purāṇa, IV.12.

even Śiva's ascetic powers to test. As O'Flaherty points out, although Śiva is primarily an ascetic, he also has an erotic side.<sup>362</sup> Destruction thus encompasses potential renewal, a theme essential to the myth of Kāma and Śiva, and indeed, to the festival of the Vasant with which the Bhavisya Purāna associates it.

This theme of renewal central to the Vasantotsava is stressed, in fact, in all the myths of Kāma. Kāma not only succeeds in arousing Śiva's desire which would have been sufficient for the purposes of the overall myth, but, in addition, he must die and be reborn, in an enactment of seasonal renewal.

Kāma's death is the first step towards the production of Śiva and Pārvatī's son. The course of his actions which lead to his end is a result of his forgetfulness, his stridency, and his lack of fear. The Kumārasāmbhava portrays Kāma as overwhelmingly confident in his prowess in influencing human and godly affairs.

4. "Who, desirous of position, has aroused your envy by prolonged austerities: He will straightaway become obedient to the command of this my bow with its arrow held ready.

5. Who is it who against your will has set out on the path of Salvation, from fear of the pains of rebirth? Let him stand long bound by the love-glances, charming with arching of brows, of beautiful women.

6. Of what enemy of yours, say, - be he taught Right Conduct by Usanas himself - shall I, commissioning passion as my envoy, oppress the Wealth and Righteousness, like to a swollen flood the banks of the river?

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<sup>362</sup>O'Flaherty, Śiva, pp. 141f.

7. What lovely woman, of sorrowful mien through her vow of wifely fidelity, who has entered your wayward mind by her tender beauty, do you desire, that free from shame she should in spontaneous embrace twine her arms around your neck?

10. Through your grace, though armed with but a flower, and taking Spring as my sole comrade, I shall bring low the steadfastness even of Hara who wields the bow: what are other bowmen beside me?" (Canto III)

And in the Liṅga Purāṇa we read:

31-33. Thus advised by Brahmā, Paremeshthin, Brhaspati of good holy rites bowed to the lord of Devas. Accompanied by Devas including Indra, he went to the peak of the mountain Meru and remembered Kāma. On being remembered by the preceptor of Devas, Kāma came along with his wife Rati. With palms joined in reverence, he spoke to Brhaspati sitting along with Indra, O excellent Brahmins.

34-38. "O Brhaspati, since I am remembered by you I have come here in your presence. Tell me what I have to do." Thus, he who was summoned by Brhaspati spoke to him. Lord Indra, too, honoured the fish emblemed god and said: "Unite Umā happily with Śiva today whereby the bull emblemed lord can sport with her. Take adequate steps for the same along with your wife Rati. Mahadeva, if pleased, will grant you excellent boon. He is already separated from her. On acquiring Umā the daughter of the lord of the mountain he will be delighted." On being told thus, Kāma bowed to Indra the lord of Saci and of Devas and decided to go to the penance grove of the lord of Devas in the company of Rati. (1.101)

In the Śiva Purāṇa, Kāma, having accepted the commission of interrupting Śiva's meditation, is confident in his ability to succeed, completely forgetting the curse of being burned by Śiva which hangs over him. Ironically, it is often Kāma's wife, Rati, who is responsible for Kāma's apparent memory lapse. Hence, after the curse:<sup>363</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> Śiva Purāṇa, 2.2.4.1-31, cited by O'Flaherty, Śiva, p. 119.

Then Brahmā vanished and Dakṣa said to Kāma, "Take this daughter of mine for your wife." Seeing her beauty, Kāma forgot the terrible curse that Brahmā had given him, and a great celebration took place.

Rather than shunning Rati, Kāma is unable to resist her as his very nature is desire. Kāma undergoes, then, a period of temporary amnesia reminiscent of that suffered by Ratnāvalī, Priyadarśikā, Mālavikā, and Pārijāta-Mañjarī in our dramas. There we included the memory loss with those rituals that are characteristic of transition. Here, too, we find Kāma is about to undergo a change in state: from life to death.

Even further, when Kāma is cognizant of his peril, the gods are able to convince him that his course of actions cannot be otherwise. Even Śiva himself deludes Kāma into thinking he can succeed in the Śiva Purāṇa.<sup>364</sup> In the Matsya Purāṇa when Indra commissions Kāma to rouse Śiva from his meditation, Kāma reacts as follows:

"Lord of the universe! Lord Śiva is unconquerable by my resources which are terrifying to the Munis and Danavas and do you not know this? You know the glory of the mighty Śiva very well. Perhaps the blessings and wrath of the great are also great, there is always greatness in the great. You have thought of your advantage in the enticement of Śiva. This is not right, for, such schemes against Išvara, launch one into utter ruin. It has been witnessed many times before that. The intentions of the beings become known and those who are over anxious to gain their ends, do not attain their ambition." (Matsya Purāṇa 154. 212-6)

Nonetheless Kāma does of course accept the challenge and succeeds in interrupting Śiva's meditation. Just as inevitably though the plan backfires when Śiva emerges from his trance angry and he reduces Kāma to ashes. On one level Kāma's death may be understood

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<sup>364</sup> Śiva Purāṇa, I. 3.9.18-31.

in Gaster's terminology as a ritual of purgation and essential to the pattern of renewal.<sup>365</sup> The evil (see the quotation below) which Kāma represents and its "noxious contagion" which might impair the prosperity of the cosmos are removed by means of his death. It is only after the old, used up, worn out material of the universe has been destroyed that the new can be created. Kāma represents a fusion of all of this material. Śiva, himself, in the context of this cycle of myths tells us :

The universe must continue without Kāma, for it was he who caused all the gods, including Indra, to fall from their places and to become humble, and it is Kāma who leads all creatures to hell. Without Kāma a man can do no evil, and even Tāraka will be without desire from now on, although he used to be evil. I burnt Kāma in order to give peace to all creatures, and I will not revive him, since he is the evil at the root of all misery. (Skanda Purāṇa 1.1.21.82-99; cited and trans. by O'Flaherty, Śiva, p. 144)

The repercussions of Kāma's death, however, are felt throughout the universe. In the Skanda Purāṇa the gods respond as follows:

"Without Kāma the whole universe will be destroyed." (O'Flaherty, Śiva, p. 144)

Or, again, hearing the news, everyone becomes depressed, saying:

"Everything proceeds by intercourse, and without Kāma all creatures are drying up." (O'Flaherty, Śiva p. 151)

Kāma's death is accompanied by the mourning cries of Rati.

Hence in the Śiva Purāṇa:

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<sup>365</sup>Gaster, Thespis, p. 26.

24. Lamenting thus and crying out various piteous words she (Rati) beat with her hands, kicked with her legs and plucked her hairs.
25. O Narada, on hearing her lamentation even the beasts and residents of the forest, nay all the immobile trees and bushes became miserable. (Rudra Saṁhitā, 19)

The durgā sung by Rati over Kāma's death is due to her mortification over his annual disappearance from the earth. Gaster tells us that howling and wailing are frequently associated with the rites of certain deities or spirits of fertility and are well attested at seasonal ceremonies throughout ancient civilization.<sup>366</sup> All that remains of Kāma is ash, and ash, in the Indian tradition, is a powerful symbol of death as well as life. The sages in the pine forest are enjoined to cover their bodies with ash to burn away sin. Śiva says:<sup>367</sup>

"The supreme purification of the entire universe is to be accomplished by ashes; I place my seed in ashes and sprinkle creatures with it. One who has done that which is to be done by fire will master the three worlds. By means of my ashes, my seed, one is released from all sins... Let a man smear his body until it is pale with ashes and meditate upon Bhava in his heart, and then,,, by bathing in ashes, he becomes a leader of my hosts, receives all sacrifices and grasps the supreme ambrosia."

Just as Kāma's suspension in ash marks the end of one cycle, so too does it mark a new beginning, a fresh start. Śiva is inevitably persuaded to reinstate Kāma. In the Śiva Purāṇa it is ash, the essence of Kāma, that is preserved by Rati under the instructions of the gods:

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<sup>366</sup>Gaster, Thespis, pp. 30-31; See also Bhavisya Purāṇa, 132 (below).

<sup>367</sup>Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa, trans. by O'Flaherty, Hindu Myths, pp. 147-9.



The gods said:

27. "Take some ashes and preserve them. With effort check your fear. The lord will resuscitate your lover. You will regain your lover again.
28. There is none who gives us happiness or misery. All enjoy and experience the fruit of what they do. In vain do you curse the gods."

It is, further, in the same text, on the occasion of Śiva and Pārvatī's marriage that Śiva, by merely glancing at the bag of ashes, restores Kāma to life.<sup>368</sup>

Finally, Kāma is revived and it is his rebirth at the beginning of the year which, in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, is cause for the Vasantotsava, anticipating the prosperity of the new year and guaranteeing ongoing creation. Kāma is reborn, in the Skanda Purāṇa, in an even more powerful form:

Śiva gave Kāma a body, and Kāma performed tapas until Śiva, pleased, made Kāma's body more beautiful than ever before and removed all obstacles for him. (trans. O'Flaherty, Śiva, p. 151)

Further some versions of this story connect Kāma to Kṛṣṇaite tradition. They tell us Kāma is to be reborn as Pradyumna. Hence in the Śiva Purāṇa:

Śiva said:

38. The Lord Kāma, the husband of Rati, shall remain bodiless till Viṣṇu incarnates as Kṛṣṇa on the earth and marries Rukmiṇī.
39. Kṛṣṇa will beget Kāma in Rukmiṇī when he goes to Dvaraka and begins to procreate children.
40. His name will certainly be Pradyumna. The demon Sambara will abduct the boy at the time of his very

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<sup>368</sup> Śiva Purāṇa, "Rudrasaṃhitā," 51.7.13-14.

birth.

42. O Rati, you shall stay in his city .. There alone you will get back your husband Pradyumna.
43. Kāma in the name of Pradyumna will regain his wife....O gods, he will be happy thereafter.

The connection here between Kāma and Pradyumna relates the Spring Festival to the present day Holī celebrations in which Kṛṣṇa plays a central role in some areas of North India.

The myth of Kāma's death and rebirth clearly represents what Eliade calls the "collective regeneration through repetition of the cosmographic act."<sup>369</sup> Each celebration marks Kāma's death but also reiterates Kāma's revival. The Vasantotsava, then, celebrates Kāma's revival, the temporary restoration of the tension between Śiva and Kāma, the ultimate victory of Kāma and through him the continued creation and maintenance of the universe. The prelude to this creation is destruction; both are essential to the mythology of Śiva and Kāma and essential to the Vasantotsava celebrating, as it does, the end of the old year and the beginning of the new year. These parallels extend beyond myth directly into the intricacies of the Vasantotsava ritual as well. As the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa tells us, the death and resurrection of Kāma is a cosmic affair and as a rite it is symbolically re-enacted at the Vasantotsava every year.

Raghavan (p.204) notes that at the South Indian festival of the new year called Kāmandī (burning Kāma) a pole (stambha) is set up in an enclosure to represent Kāma. The pole is set on fire and the people

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<sup>369</sup>Eliade, Cosmos and History, p. 78.

are divided into two parties. They sing respectively "Kāma is burnt" and "Kāma is dead." The Naradīya Purāṇa tells us that the fire consumes an effigy of the old year. It reads as follows:

saṁvatsarasya daho ayam kāmadaḥo matāntare/

(This is the burning of the old year; others say it is the burning of Kāma.) (1.124. 81)

This text thus connects Kāma's destruction with the old year and further exemplifies the manner in which the symbolism of Kāma and the fire is connected to the new year ritual. P.V. Jagadisa Ayyar in South Indian Festivals describes this well known episode, known in Hindu mythology as the background material for this celebration which is also known as Kāmadahanam (the burning of Kāma) in South India.<sup>370</sup> Kāmadahanam is part of the larger celebration of the Paṅguni Uttaram festival, celebrated on the full moon day of Phālguna (Tamil Paṅguṇi and hence the Vasantotsava) in order to win conjugal felicity. In this version of the myth, Rati solicited the aid of Viṣṇu following the destruction of Kāma, who advised her to go to Sundara Tirtan (a large tank in front of a Śiva temple at Kāmararavalli) and perform a sacrifice to Śiva. Rati did as advised and underwent severe penance for about forty days. She succeeded in having Kāma restored to life with the condition that he be visible only to herself.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>370</sup>P.V. Jagadisa Ayyar, South Indian Festivals (Madras: Higginbothams Ltd., 1921), pp. 61-4. See also, P. Younger, "Ten Days" in Modern Asian Studies.

<sup>371</sup>There are a variety of representations of this Kāma myth in South Indian art, evidencing its popularity. A bronze representation of Rati appealing to Śiva exists in the temple of Kāmarasavalli in

## Marriage

The Bhaviṣya Purāṇa provides an important context from the well known corpus of myths for the occasion of the Vasantotsava. This myth cycle closes with the soon-to-be fruitful love making of Śiva and Pārvatī. We might draw attention here to the revival of Kāma which coincides with the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī.<sup>372</sup> We have encountered the marriage motif elsewhere relative to the Spring Festival and it is noteworthy that marriages of the gods are not uncommonly associated with spring. The Virūpākṣavasantotsavacampū provides us with a description of the Vasantotsava which includes the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī and it is in that section of this chapter that the marriage of the gods will be examined.

## Jāgarana

Finally, the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa prescribes the ritual of jāgarana (maintaining an all night vigil) in honor of Kāma. An all night vigil is described in various texts and, like the Vasantotsava itself, it is

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Trichinopoly. The whole scene of Kāma's destruction is depicted in the portico near the tank in the Ekambareśwarer temple at Conjeeveram. Further, in the Adipuriśvara temple at Tiruvorriyar, there is a record of King Rājakeśarivarman alias Tribbhuvanachadravartin Rājādhirājadeva (1172-1186) which mentions that this king was present at this festival during Paṅguni Uttiram. (See, Ayyar, South Indian Festivals, p. 64.)

<sup>372</sup> Śiva Purāṇa, "Rudra Saṁhitā", 51.7.13.14.

referred to under several titles.<sup>373</sup> It is a ritual of some antiquity, being detailed fairly early in Sanskrit literature.<sup>374</sup> Descriptions of jāgarana appear in several Purāṇas wherein it is most often prescribed in honor of Lakṣmī. The Spring Festival, being a particularly auspicious event in the calendar year, seems to become laden with many associative mythical events and multiple ritual procedures. Jāgarana is one such ritual. As we shall see there is some degree of overlap here with respect to the focus of this particular ritual and other important ritual days.

Jāgarana is among the various rituals which we have come to associate with the Vasantotsava, and forms part of the coherent body of transitional rituals of spring. Specifically, it is a ritual which upsets the everyday routine, requiring of its observers, instead of remaining awake during the day and sleeping at night, that they remain awake all night. This disruption of order occurs at and signals the end of a ritual period (winter) creating, in Eliade's terms, a temporary return to chaos.<sup>375</sup> In turn, the ensuing renewal and rejuvenation extends from the following day into the coming year.

The inclusion of jāgarana in this text highlights two important and interrelated aspects of this festival. First, the overlap of ritual:

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<sup>373</sup>So, for example, it is called Jāgarana, Ko jāgara, Kaumudījāgara, and, simply, Kaumudī.

<sup>374</sup>Vātsyāyana, for example, in the Kāmasūtra refers to this ritual as Kaumudī, 1.4.27.

<sup>375</sup>Eliade, Cosmos and History, p. 68.

jāgarana is typically performed in honor of Lakṣmī; here it is included as a ritual of Kāma. Lakṣmī is a figure in Hindu myth who imparts prosperity; Kāma is worshipped during this segment of the festival for prosperity. With respect to the apparent overlapping of rituals associated with Lakṣmī, Kāma, and the Vasantotsava, we cite also the Śrīpañcamī (usually the worship of Lakṣmī) which is sometimes given as the worship of Kāma and Rati (see below). Second, jāgarana is usually performed in the autumn.<sup>376</sup> We have seen on previous occasions that autumn rituals are sometimes mentioned in conjunction with rituals of spring. Thus it will be recalled that the Indramahotsava, although essentially an autumn festival, is given, in certain texts, as a festival of spring.

#### Lakṣmī, Jāgarana, and the Kaumudīmahotsava

The commonality of these autumn rituals and rituals of spring might be traced to the popularity of the traditional days which are marked for the celebration of, respectively, the end of winter and the beginning of spring on the one hand and the end of summer and the beginning of winter on the other. This overlapping of rituals is emphasized by the Indian calendar itself. Two important periods divide the year into two parts and these parts correspond roughly to the

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<sup>376</sup>See, for example, The Goddess Lakṣmī, pp. 170-1.

vernal and autumnal equinoxes. These periods are both known as navarātra (nine nights). The first of these periods occurs during the first nine days of the bright half of Caitra and the second during the first nine days of the bright half of Kārttika. Navarātra, then, refers to the name of a cognate ritual period twice a year; we would expect the rites to be the same or similar in each case.<sup>377</sup> Raghavan tells us that in all the Nibandhas and also in practice, a Vasanta (spring) navarātra and a Śarada (autumn) navarātra is prescribed.<sup>378</sup> So, for example, in the Nirnayāmrta, the Durgotsava (festival of Durgā) must be celebrated both during the bright half of Asvina as well as during the bright half of Caitra.<sup>379</sup> It will be recalled, too, that the Indramahotsava was prescribed in certain texts as an autumn ritual and in others as a spring ritual. In Nepal, at Bhaktapur, there is a smaller Indradhvaja festival in spring and a larger one in autumn.<sup>380</sup>

This information confirms Gaster's contention that seasonal festivals are often made to coincide with the solstice or equinox.<sup>381</sup> He says, further, that the re-emergence of the sun in spring was an obvious date from which to reckon the renewal of the world's vitality and the decline of the sun in autumn was a natural occasion from which

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<sup>377</sup> Babb, The Divine Hierarchy, p. 132.

<sup>378</sup> Raghavan, Festivals, p. 150.

<sup>379</sup> Nambiar, The Nārada Purāṇa: A Critical Study, p. 463.

<sup>380</sup> Raghavan, Festivals, p. 150.

<sup>381</sup> Gaster, Thespis, p. 47.

to date the eclipse of such vitality.<sup>382</sup> In India, however, where two agricultural periods are not uncommon, both of these ritual periods may mark renewal: one at the close of the rainy season in September/October and one at the beginning of spring proper in March/April.

The Spring Festival (Vasantotsava) and the autumn festival (Kaumudīmahotsava) both mark particularly auspicious periods in the calendar year; both festivals are seasonal in their import and perhaps it is due to their 'seasonality' that they are often related and sometimes even equated.

Usually jāgarana forms part of the glorification of the autumn moon (Kaumudīmahotsava) and its concomitant worship of Lakṣmī.<sup>383</sup> Although jāgarana or kojāgara is described in a variety of purāṇas and other texts, the time when this festival is celebrated, however, varies considerably.<sup>384</sup> The Bhaviṣya Purāṇa and the Padma Purāṇa tell us that the Kaumudīmahotsava is celebrated on Kārttika Amāvasyā (Dīpavālī).<sup>385</sup> Kojāgara pūrṇimā, otherwise called Kaumudīmahotsava, is observed in the autumn on the full moon day of Āśvina (September/October) or

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>383</sup> Sabdakalpadruma, II, pp. 200-1, cited in The Goddess Lakṣmī: Origin and Development, p. 171.

<sup>384</sup> Raghavan in Festivals, cites the Skanda Purāṇa, Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, Padma Purāṇa, and authors of Smṛti digests like Hemadri and Raghunanda in describing this ritual. (p. 177)

<sup>385</sup> Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, 140.6.60; Padma Purāṇa, 6.124.61f., cited in The Goddess Lakṣmī, pp. 170-4.



the first day of the bright half of Kārttika (Oct/Nov).<sup>386</sup> The festival is pre-eminently a Lakṣmī vrata and those who observe it are blessed with offspring, wealth, and a long and prosperous life.<sup>387</sup> The Nārada Purāṇa describes this ritual in some detail. Here Lakṣmī is worshipped for prosperity, by keeping a jar of gold, copper, or mud in her honor and lighting lamps, and staying awake all night.<sup>388</sup> She is said, here, to offer good luck to those who remain awake on this night. The danger during this night is that Lakṣmī might visit the house and find the inhabitants asleep, and hence not offer them good fortune.

In present day Bengal and Assam jāgarana is a ritual which is associated with Lakṣmī and connected to the worship of Durgā. Here it is usually performed on the full moon after the Durgā Pūjā celebrations. An all-night vigil is recommended in honor of Lakṣmī and the goddess is believed to ask at midnight: "ko jāgartti" ("who is awake?"). As Handiqui suggests, the term kojāgara is probably a contraction of kaumudījāgara (staying up all night on the full moon ['kaumudī']).<sup>389</sup>

Kojāgara or Kaumudījāgarana, then, is a ritual which has multiple associations with various other important deities and ritual days. As well as belonging to the rituals of autumn it appears, here,

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<sup>386</sup> Padma Purāṇa, 6.124.61f., in The Goddess Lakṣmī, pp. 170-1.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid. p. 173.

<sup>388</sup> Nārada Purāṇa, 124.47.55 cited by D. Nambiar, Nārada Purāṇa: A Critical Study (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1968), p. 415.

<sup>389</sup> K. Handiqui, Yaśastilaka and Indian Culture, p. 403, note 2. See also Śabdakalpadrūma under kojāgara.

in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa and in the commentary on the Kāmasūtra as a ritual of spring.<sup>390</sup>

Lakṣmī, Kāma, and the Vasantotsava

The Śrīpañcamī is another case where individual rituals associated with Lakṣmī, Kāma and the Vasantotsava become mixed. The Śrīpañcamī is a festival which is usually associated with Lakṣmī,<sup>391</sup> although it is given as celebrating Kāma and Rati in the Varsakṛtyadīpakā and the Haribhaktivilāsa. The Śrīpañcamī is usually a ritual of prosperity, celebrated on the fifth day of spring and therefore included in the Vasanta Navarātra (the nine days of celebrations in honor of Durgā, Lakṣmī, and Sarasvatī).<sup>392</sup> It is called the Vasantapañcamī in the Purāṇasamuccaya.<sup>393</sup>

The inclusion of Lakṣmī rituals (jāgarana and Vasantapañcamī) as one of the prescribed activities honoring Kāma at the time of the Spring Festival, indicates a degree of reciprocity with respect to the function of these two deities. It is apparent that both Kāma and

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<sup>390</sup>Kāmasūtra, 1.31.31.

<sup>391</sup>See, for example, Hemādri, Caturvargacintāmaṇi, pp. 184-90.

<sup>392</sup>Varsakṛtyadīpakā, pp. 287-288. See also Raghavan, Festivals, p. 187 and De, The Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith in Bengal, pp. 448f.

<sup>393</sup>Raghavan, Festivals, p. 252.

Lakṣmī are worshipped for prosperity and offspring. Both become figures of the renewal.

### The Bhaviṣya Purāṇa - chapter 132

The second chapter of the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa to be considered is chapter 132, the 'phālgunapūrnimotsavavarnam'. It describes a festival called Phālgunotsava which falls on the full moon day at the end of Phālguna. According to the Purāṇa this festival is celebrated in all villages and cities in the world. The Bhaviṣya Purāṇa below tells the story of a rākṣasī (demoness) who performs great tapas and receives a boon from Śiva. The catch clause in the boon is that she will meet her downfall from children. Fearing children, she torments them. A solution is sought by the villagers whom she oppresses. They petition the king, who, in turn, is instructed to direct children to build a fire and dance, unafraid, around the flames waving pieces of wood (verse 25-28). In this way the demoness will be destroyed, i.e., by 'unseen' blows from sticks waved by the children who circle the fire. The text reads as follows:

#### Bhaviṣya Purāṇa 132: "Phālgunapūrnimotsavavarnam"

Yudhiṣṭhira said:

1. Why, on the day of the full moon, O Kṛṣṇa, in Phālguna, is a festival celebrated in all villages and all cities in the world?

2. Why do children in all houses jabber away without restraint and why does Holikā burn at the end of Phālguna? What is said regarding this?
3. And why do the wise say 'āḍāḍa' and 'hot and cold'? What god is worshipped on this day and why has this one been made to come down to earth? What is done, O Kṛṣṇa on that day?, tell me in detail.

Kṛṣṇa said:

4. In the Kṛta Yuga, O Partha, there was a king of men named Rāghu, who was brave, possessed of all good qualities, learned, and the speaker of pleasant words.
5. He conquered the whole world and subjugated the kings of men, he protected his subjects according to dharma as it they were his own sons.
6. There was no famine and no illness and no one died before his time while he was ruling. The citizens had no taste for adharma, O Partha.
7. While King Raghu who was devoted to performing his royal duties ruled the kingdom, all the citizens arrived one day and said: "Protect us
8. There is a rākṣasī named Dhaundhā in our homes. She comes night and day and torments our children without end.
9. She is not to be controlled by those great teachers knowing mantras, or by medicine or by protective magical devices."
10. Having heard the words of the citizens, Raghu became astonished, his heart became filled with wonder and he said to his purohita,
- 11,12. "Who is this rākṣasī named Dhaundhā? What type of power does she have?" The king asked; "How can this one who performs evil deeds be controlled by me? A king is called a king because he must protect, and because he protects the world he is a lord. The sin of the king is not protecting the earth. (i.e., a king who does not protect his subjects is sinful)." The purohita replied: "It is because of her tapas, O highest of the twiceborn!"

Vasistha said:

13. Listen, O king, to a secret which has never been told before. This rākṣasī named Dhaundhā is the daughter of Mālin.
- 14,15. Formerly, Lord Śiva, worshipped by her, was pleased with her great austerities and said: "Choose a boon, O one who takes vows, I will give you what your mind desires without hesitation."
16. Dhaundhā said to Śiva: "If you are satisfied with me, O lord of the three worlds, make me incapable of being killed by asuras, etc. or men, O Śaṅkara!"
17. Make me not able to be killed by weapons and missiles. May I be free from danger in the time of cold, heat or rainy season, inside or outside, during the night or day through your favor. May I be free from harm at all times through your divine favor. Let that be the boon, O Maheśvara!"

Sankara Said:

18. Having said "so be it" Śankara, the bearer of the trident, again said to her. "O fortunate one! The danger will come from children and mad ones, you shall be afraid of these in every season-cold, hot, rainy-but do not despair."
19. So, having granted this boon to her, the blessed one, who put out the eye of Bhaga, whose words are ever true and who had appeared to her in a dream, vanished.
20. So that rākṣasī, taking on a form at will, obtained a boon. Every day she, remembering the words of Śiva, torments children.
21. Thus the wife of a householder says the Siddhamantra 'ādāda' in her house and thus Dhaundhā in this world is called 'ādāda'.<sup>394</sup>
22. All these are the activities of Dhaundhā which I have told you. Now I will tell you how she can be killed.
23. Today is the fifteenth of the bright moon of Phālguna, O King of Men, when winter passes. and tomorrow will begin the hot season.

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<sup>394</sup>The use of 'ādāda' is fairly obscure. It is a Prakrt word meaning "to exercise strength, to bully, to be highhanded."

24. People should be protected in such a manner that, unafraid they can enjoy themselves happily today and be content, laughing.
25. Children should go forth happily with pieces of wood and sticks in their hands like warriors to battle.
26. Children must be caused to gather heaps of stones and dried wood. Then they must kindle a fire according to the rules and with the mantras which will kill the demoness.
27. Having circled the fire three times let them make the sound 'kilākila'. They should sing and laugh with sounds of joy, clapping their hands with pleasure.
28. Let all people chatter at will without being afraid of anything. By these sounds and by this oblation, the evil one will be expelled. With an invisible blow from children the rāksasī will be destroyed.

Kṛṣṇa said:

29. "Having heard the words of the seer, that king, O son of Pandu, did all that was told to him by that wise one.
30. The rāksasī was destroyed by the fierce ritual and from that time on she (the demoness) became known in the world as 'ādāda.'<sup>395</sup>
31. A Homa ceremony which wards off all evil; and grants the cessation of all sickness is done by Brahmans on that day, O Partha, therefore the day is known as Holikā.
32. O Yudhisthira, this was once a day more important than an other day and because it was so important it was called <sup>396</sup>Phalgu (beautiful), bringer of the highest bliss.
- 33-34. Children are to be protected and they are to be kept inside, O Partha, on this day at the advent of the night (at twilight). In the courtyard of the house in

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<sup>395</sup> I have read ādādākhyatim as a compound "known as ādāda."

<sup>396</sup> See also the eleventh century text the Deśīnamāmālā, (VI.82), of Hemachandra which describes this festival as "Phaggu."

which is a rectangular diagram and which is smeared with cow dung, one should cause to gather men, swords in hand, along with all children. And these men, touching the children with sticks and singing them songs that make them laugh, will guard the children. They should be given molasses and cooked rice.

35. Thus the harm due to Dhaundhā will be averted. Therefore protecting the young from her ought to be done at dusk.
36. At daybreak, O Lord, what should be done by people who strive for happiness beginning in the month of madhava, on the first day of the rising sun (i.e., on the first day of spring)?

Yuddhisthira said:

37. One should do the obligatory duties (i.e., daily rites). Having pleased the fathers, one should prostrate oneself before the ashes of Holikā to ward off evil, (i.e., the ashes from the Holikā fire).

Kṛṣṇa said:

38. In a decorated smeared courtyard, anointed with ground rice paste one should make a rectangle with pure, full rice grains and paints.
39. In the middle of the rectangle one should make an altar covered with the best white garments and place in front of it a full pot brimming over with young sprouts.
40. Having put gold inside it and rice grains smeared with white sandal paste in front of the pitcher, one should offer sandals and fine cloth.
- 41-47. The husband should sit on a seat to the sound of the Vedas, while his wife, of faultless body and auspicious marks, wearing a red bodice and clothing of delicate silks, should anoint him with sandal, and pour ghee with curds and grain seeds on his head, all so that he may have long life and health. Then that wise man should drink liquor made from mango flowers with sandal. This is the way of worshipping Kāma. Those who, at the onset of spring, drink (liquor) made from mango flowers with sandal paste mixed in it fulfill the desires they have in their hearts. Next the man should give gifts to Brahmins, bards, panegyrists, and chanters saying 'may Kāma be pleased with me.' Then,

when it is time to eat, he should eat first rice that was prepared the previous day; after that he can eat to his heart's content. Whoever does this, as it is said in the Śāstras, performs the festival of Phālguna.

48. All wishes are then easily attained. Curses and sickness are destroyed immediately.
49. A man joined with his sons and grandsons lives happily.
50. This has been told to you, O Partha, this is the tithi which is the greatest of lunar days, propitious, pure, victorious, destroying all obstacles.
51. It occurs when the cold season has passed on the fifteenth day of the bright moon.
53. At daybreak, in spring, then a man should eat mango and sandal paste and thus attain happiness.

The description of the Spring Festival in the above text is clearly strikingly different from those in previous descriptions we have considered. In addition to Kāma, this text introduces a demoness as the central component of the festival and its celebration. Although Kāma is worshipped in the Bhavisya Purāṇa, his invocation is confined to the domestic ritual (vs. 44-46). The above text evidences, however, a continuity in its thematic units representing the festival. Just as Kāma's burning during the Vasantotsava was detailed in the Bhavisya Purāṇa (135), here, in Bhavisya (132), the celebration revolves around the burning of the demoness. The death of the demoness, like the death of Kāma, implies the death of the old year. As we shall see, certain texts articulate an explicit connection between the destruction of the demoness and the end of the old year. In addition, the theme of renewal is reiterated in this portion of the text. Renewal was seen in



the myth of Kāma: Kāma is revived on this day. The death of the demoness also implies renewal in that children live (childhood disease attributed to the demoness is destroyed with her destruction); the death of the old year implies renewal as the new year follows upon the old. In addition to and synchronous with motifs of renewal, there is a clear indication that these rituals are designed to ward off evil and to protect those who perform them. Just as in the Kṛta Yuga (132.4), Ḍhaundhā was destroyed, so too, Brahmins are advised to observe Holākā by performing a homa ceremony which wards off all evil and grants the cessation of all sickness (132.31) and to re-enact the destruction of the demoness (132. 32-5). It is only after her destruction that rites of renewal commence (132.38f). Hence it is here that we find the conventional ingredients of renewal: a full pot brimming over with young sprouts, the worship of Kāma, and drinking mango flowers and sandal paste.

In the Bhavisya Purāna (132) the demoness is referred to as a rākṣasī and is called, variously, Ḍhaundhā and Holākā. In other texts, as well, we find not only this demoness, but also a demoness of a similar type and in a similar context called Pūtanā whom we shall discuss below. All of these rākṣasīs, Ḍhaundhā, Holākā, and Pūtanā have certain associations in common and may be considered functionally analogous. They appear primarily as female daemonic beings who afflict children and who are destroyed by the shouting of obscenities and by fire. Often their destruction, as in the Bhavisya Purāna (above), is re-enacted at the Spring Festival.

Dhaundhā, Holākā, Pūtanā

Dhaundhā is the appellation of the rāksasī least frequent in descriptions of the Vasantotsava. It occurs in the Bhavisya Purāna and in Hemadri's Caturvargacintāmani which describes this festival in the same manner as does the Bhavisya Purāna.<sup>397</sup> According to Hemādri, however, when the rāksasī is slain, she falls directly into the fire. She is, in this latter text, unable to bear the abuse of men and women who shout obscenities in their own language while circling the fire three times. The reason for the persecution of Dhaundhā given in the Caturvargacintāmani, as in the Bhavisya Purāna, is that she used to carry away children.

A variety of descriptions of the Vasantotsava record the adventures of this demoness under the name Holākā and detail her destruction at this time. The term 'Holākā' as found in these descriptions is, in fact, fairly obscure in meaning. It is found in the Bhāvaprakāśa where it means a half baked grain of śamī roasted by the mild and brief fire of grass.<sup>398</sup> According to the Carakasamhitā Sūtra, Holākā is a particular way of Śvedana or steam bath in which a person lies on a couch under which dung cakes are burning.<sup>399</sup> The smoke is

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<sup>397</sup> Hemādri, Caturvargacintāmani, cc. vrata ii, pp. 184-90 quoted in Raghavan, Festivals, p. 177.

<sup>398</sup> Śāradātanaya, Bhāvaprakāśa, III.99.18.

<sup>399</sup> Carakasamhitā Sūtra, 14.61.3 cited by Raghavan, Festivals, p. 198.

called Holākā. Raghavan suggests that this explains the name Holākā for the festival whose central feature is the burning of an effigy made of cow dung and other materials.<sup>400</sup> The etymology, I think, is obscure. Whatever her origin, Holākā is some sort of chthonic deity associated with diseases of childhood. In the Mahābhārata, Pūtanā is described as a Grahā (Grasper, i.e., a disease).<sup>401</sup> Haridas Mitra suggests that Holākā, Pūtanā, and Ḍhaundhā all seem to be personifications of infantile epidemics. Pūtanā is connected to 'pu' ('to suppurate'), puyate, and 'pus'. Ḍhaundhā also, he suggests, stands for some disease, to which infants were susceptible and possibly producing suppuration, 'pus'.<sup>402</sup> This is in character with the demoness who is especially dangerous to children. It is very likely that the Pūtanā/Holākā/Ḍhaundhā complex is some kind of children's disease as Mitra suggests.

In the Vasantotsavanirnaya the burning of Holākā takes place on the full moon evening of Phālguna. On the following day the Vasantotsava is celebrated using the ashes from the fire of the previous night. The ashes are impure: they are cremation ashes; they represent the dead Holākā. Yet, these ashes of Holākā are said to appease all misery when one pays homage to them. Lawrence Babb in the Divine Hierarchy confirms the information in the Vasantotsavanirnaya telling us

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<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> Mahābhārata, trans. van Buitenen, II. p. 834, note 25.

<sup>402</sup> H. Mitra, The Fire Works and Fire Festivals in Ancient India (Calcutta: Abhedananda Academy of Culture, 1963), p. 23.

that in modern times in Chhattisgarh the demoness is burnt in the fire. It seems Holākā's ashes are germane to the celebration as her ashes are smeared on devotee's bodies and washed off at the noon bath on the next day.<sup>403</sup> The Varsakṛtyadīpakā tells us that the ashes from the fire in which effigies have been thrown are to be smeared on one's body and left there until the following day if one seeks to avoid trouble in the coming year. Even in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa (132) the ashes of the Holākā fire are said to ward off evil.

The propitiatory and fertilizing power of the ash is clearly articulated in the myth of Kāma in which Kāma is revived through the medium of ash (Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, 135). Here, in Bhaviṣya Purāṇa (132) children too remain vigorous through the medium of ash. Mrs Sinclair reports that after the fire has been put out it is customary for women to gather up the ashes and spread them in a circle. Fashioning an image of Pārvatī out of the remaining ashes and placing it in the centre of the circle, they then draw another circle around the image in various colors and circumambulate it every day for fifteen days. This is done to gain a good husband.<sup>404</sup> The ashes are Holākā's ashes, the ashes of death, and hence they are, under ordinary conditions, highly contaminating. Yet, instead of treating them as such, those celebrating the festival are directed to pay homage to them. A quality of ambiguity is lent to the celebrations by this act and is a

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<sup>403</sup>Babb, The Divine Hierarchy, pp. 168f.

<sup>404</sup>S. Stevenson, Rites of the Twiceborn, p. 280.

further example of unacceptable and undesirable conditions becoming legitimized under ritual conditions. Moreover, just as the participants go about behaving like ghosts (see above), so too, do they roam about the streets covered with ash of the crematory. Although they act as if they are alive (i.e., they are ambulatory), they have taken on the mask of death.<sup>405</sup> Hence, they appear to be both dead and alive or neither dead nor alive. The normal boundary between life and death becomes blurred then with the smearing of one's body with ash.

Some sources equate Holākā with the year and her destruction with the end of the old year. According to the Nāradiya Purāṇa Holākā is the sister of Samvat (the year). The worship of Holākā (Holākā pūjā) is performed on the full moon day in Phalguna also, according to the Nārada Purāṇa.<sup>406</sup> At this time Holākā or 'samvatsara' (the year) is burnt. On the evening before the full moon in Phālguna, an effigy of the old year is made in the form of a man, a ram, or a bamboo hut and it is subsequently burnt.<sup>407</sup>

The story of Holākā is assimilated in the tale of the demon king Hiranyakaśipu and Prahlāda.<sup>408</sup> The ancestry of Holākā, according to

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<sup>405</sup> Ash, too, is the garb of ascetics, and symbolized renunciation. This also represents a 'break' with life.

<sup>406</sup> Nārada Purāṇa, 124.76.

<sup>407</sup> Nāradiya Purāṇa, 1.124.81 cited by Raghavan, Festivals, p. 199.

<sup>408</sup> This seems to be a more recent interpretation of the festival. Raghavan does not give a textual reference for it (Festivals, p. 196).

this account, is Vaiṣṇavite: she is the elder sister of the demon Hiranyakaśipu who seeks her assistance in destroying his son Prahlāda. In this tale, the problem with Prahlāda is that he is a devotee of Viṣṇu. Holākā here takes Prahlāda onto her lap and sits in the flames. With the objective of deterring the child from worshipping Viṣṇu, Holākā attempts to set fire to the lad. By the grace of Viṣṇu, however, the boy endures the flames unhurt while Holākā is completely consumed by the fire.<sup>409</sup> In modern times, the spring celebrations revolve around the activities of these two figures: obscene and 'phallic' songs are sung and people circumambulate a fire five times. Dung cakes are thrown into the fire. Each year at Holī, a fire is prepared in each village in commemoration of this event. The women of the village burn the witch Holākā and to prevent other witches in the neighborhood from hearing her screams, all the men and children gather round the fire and shout loud obscenities and sing vulgar songs. The preparation of the fire is rather elaborate: the area is swept clean, a pit is dug, a pot of water and grain is buried in the pit and then fuel is stacked up to five feet high. A flag (green or red) is placed on the top, along with garlands of dung cakes. Participants circumambulate the fire three, five, or seven times throwing dates and dung cakes into the blaze. Spectators sing obscene songs to show their hatred of the witch.

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and in S. Stevenson's Rites of the Twiceborn (p. 288) it is given in the context of village India. Babb in The Divine Hierarchy (pp. 169f.) gives it in the context of Chhatisgarhi.

<sup>409</sup> Mrs. Stevenson, Rites of the Twiceborn, p. 280.

According to Mrs Sinclair the fire is a purifying symbol: every Brahmin baby that has been born since the previous Spring Festival is carried round the fire dressed in white garb. The fire has the capability of warding off disease: individuals desiring this end take home the dung cakes and touch their livestock with them. This is said to prevent disease in the coming year. The fire is also clearly a fertility symbol: the direction in which the smoke blows marks the most fertile land in the coming year. Also, when the fire is out and the pot of grain is dug up, the degree to which it is cooked indicates whether or not there will be sufficient food for the coming year.

Fire has the power of transformation. In the description of this festival in chapter 135 of the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, we found that the being who is burned is transformed. Thus Kāma is actually strengthened while the death-dealing demoness is transformed into a life-giving force. The ashes of the fire are coveted for their fertilizing powers. Even though fire is destructive, through its medium evil turns into good, the impure into the pure. The importance of this mythical event in the ritual context of the Spring Festival is evidenced in some texts which describe or imply that an effigy of some sort is ceremonially placed in the fire and consumed. The destruction of the effigy again is a symbolic and ritual re-enactment of the end of misfortune (as represented in our myths as Kāma and Ḍhaundhā). Even the fire for the next day's cooking of food is also to be taken from the pyre of Ḍhaundhā. All of this is done in order to avoid trouble in the coming year.

Kane in his History of Dharma Śāstra reports that the fire, at this time, is a constant throughout India with the exception of Bengal. Sometimes this fire has Brāhmanical overtones. Priests, he says, are engaged at this time to do pūjā in which coconuts are offered to the fire.<sup>410</sup> The Dolayatraviveka maintains that a fire should be kindled on the first day and preserved throughout the festival.<sup>411</sup> Other texts like the Varsakṛtyadīpakā<sup>412</sup> and the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa above (verse 26) describe the importance of the fire in what appears to be a popular context. Here the fire is not a sacrificial fire in the traditional sense, but rather the spring fire is built by children. The Varsakṛtyadīpakā tells us further that the fuel for the fire is rubbish and that the fire for lighting the heap of rubbish is to be brought from a candālas house, specifically from the lying-in chamber and by a child. With this fire, the most impure fire imaginable, they light the Holī fire, in a typical ritual reversal whereby the most impure becomes pure (p. 216).<sup>413</sup>

Children are central in this description of the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, and their primary function is the destruction of this demoness who, herself, is associated with some sort of childhood disease. In the above text they are to circle the fire with sticks and speak 'at will' in order

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<sup>410</sup> Ibid. V. p. 237.

<sup>411</sup> Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra, V. 238.

<sup>412</sup> Varsakṛtyadīpakā, p. 301.

<sup>413</sup> Varsakṛtyadīpakā, p. 287.



to destroy the demoness. In other texts as we shall see they perform a similar function. Their role, in fact, is vital to the success of this festival (i.e., the destruction of the demoness). By performing the ritual correctly, children help ensure the future prosperity of the kingdom. Hence, while children are most vulnerable to the whims of the rākṣasī they are, at the same time, also central in eliminating her. This theme continues to remain important in Bengal and Orissa where the Spring Festival celebrates the child Kṛṣṇa's victory over the demoness Pūtānā. It might further be noted that mad people are also threatening to the demoness (Bhaviṣya Purāṇa 135.18). Children and mad ones are amongst the weakest members of the social order and we might turn here to the work of such theorists as V. Turner for assistance in interpreting the function of these figures in our myths.<sup>414</sup>

Turner places much emphasis on the ritual power of the weak and those who are hierarchically inferior (children and mad ones). He describes children as 'mediators' between the dead and the living. Children are not long from the womb which is a place equated in many cultures with the tomb and, moreover, both of these are associated with the earth as it is both the source of fruits and receiver of leavings.<sup>415</sup> We might here identify children and mad ones as liminal, marginal creatures whose power is due to a sort of status reversal which occurs during the festival. We might, as well, identify children and mad-ones

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<sup>414</sup>Turner, The Ritual Process, p. 172.

<sup>415</sup>Ibid.

as non-logical and imaginal beings who are unfettered and unencumbered by pre-determined, rational thought processes (e.g., a pot becomes a hat, a box becomes a house). The power which resides in them is, then, their ability to 'understand' and easily become amalgamated into the non-logical world of the gods. They can, it would seem, stand in mediation between the world of gods (in this case the demoness) and the world of men. The non-logical and highly symbolic nature of ritual worship, created by both gods and man, reveals to children and mad-ones a depth of meaning not capable of being understood by rational men. During ritual time, according to Turner, the weak become strong; children and mad ones alone, in the Bhavisya Purāṇa, are capable of warding off the demoness. Their function is purificatory, protective, and aggressive.

The children engage in noise making and wild behavior to effect their goal. This is carried over into the adult community in texts like the Nīlamata Purāṇa which tells us that people engage in playing jokes on one another and use abusive language in order to frighten the Piśacas or demons who were believed to enter the houses on the day of the Spring Festival. The Caturvargacintāmani (vrata II, p 184-90) has already been mentioned in this context. This tradition of crudity and verbal obscenity in the context of fertility festivals dates back, at least, to the Vedic Mahāvrata ceremony as well as to the Horse Sacrifice wherein male and female and priests and queens respectively engage in

similar dialogue.<sup>416</sup> Obscenity and abusive language are, according to Frazer, typical of fertility-type festivals.<sup>417</sup> In the Bhavisya Purāṇa above it becomes a weapon hurled against a being whose base characteristic is destructive. The sort of ululation engaged in by the participants in this festival becomes an aggressive onomatopoeic cry of battle transforming children into front-line warriors. Hence they loudly cry 'kilākilā' and brandish sticks about in the air. At the same time, wives of householders repeat 'ādāda' to keep the demoness away. All of these elements suggest a return to chaos, a purging of the world of contamination in anticipation of renewal.

We might relate this battle described above to the tale in the Varsakṛtydīpakā which quotes the Jyotinirbandha concerning the fire in the midst of which an effigy of Dhaundhā is to be set up consisting of a five colored banner. This banner is reminiscent of the Indra-Pole and the festivities which revolve around the Spring Festival of Indra. Indra's banner is referred to as jarjara in the context of Indian drama and is traditionally explained as an instrument of destruction, used to chase away the enemy.<sup>418</sup> It is also called vaijayanta. Again, in the

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<sup>416</sup>cf. O'Flaherty, Women, p. 159. See Chapter Three for a description of the Mahāvratā.

<sup>417</sup>Frazer, The Golden Bough, p. 845.

<sup>418</sup>Bhāratiyanāṭyaśāstra, 1.53f. as cited by Gonda, "The Indra

Nāṭyaśāstra, one should offer pūjā to the post for attaining success at the performance and pray as follows:<sup>419</sup>

'Thou art Indra's weapon killing all the demons, thou hast been fashioned by all the gods, and thou art capable of destroying all the obstacles; bring victory to the king and defeat to his enemies, welfare to cows and Brahmins...'

The Indra Pole, then, is a weapon used to destroy demons, much as the burning of the Ḍhaundhā banner destroys the evil witch.

In addition, Holākā attains a further dimension when she is given the attributes of a warrior and is called Devī, Holā, Kālī, Candī, and Māheśvarī. In the Holākāmāhātmya,<sup>420</sup> for example, she appears as victor over the asura, Virasena. This text describes the grandeur of the fight. The Goddess emerges victorious and the whole world is delighted and grateful. At the end of the battle, the Devī narrates the different sizes of the liṅga, i.e., her male counterpart. The deity in the Holākāmāhātmya is clearly Śaivite and here the festival revolves around her defeat of demons, and not her own defeat by worshippers. This is usually the mythic material of the navarātrī, popular in the

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Festival According to the Atharvavedins," in J. Gonda, Selected Studies (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), p. 208.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

<sup>420</sup> The Holākāmāhātmya is a text which purports to belong to the "Pātāla Khanda" of the Padma Purāna but, in all probability does not. Chatterjee, in A Critical Study of the Padma Purāna, concludes that, because of the numerous references in this text to Kalinga (Orissa), it is a work composed there. Unfortunately this text is unavailable to me but is given briefly in A. Chatterjee's text. (pp. 181-2)

south, and dasarah, popular in the North.<sup>421</sup> Of primary importance here is Durgā's defeat of the buffalo demon (mahisa). Holā in the Holākāmāhātmya is thus translocated into the Śaivite tradition and her worship made relevant in both the contexts of the Holī festival and the Navarātra.

In another text from South India, the Vināyakādisarva-pūjapaddhati, Paraśurāma and Holākā are worshipped on this day.<sup>422</sup> Paraśurāma is famed for his destruction of the Kṣatriya (warrior) caste. The connection between Paraśurāma and Holākā is unclear, although as Holākā is famed for her destruction of children, so too is Paraśurāma occasionally, on his rampage, credited with destroying the embryos of Kṣatriya women.<sup>423</sup>

A further manifestation of this demoness in an explicitly sectarian context is found in the myths of Bengal and Orissa. Here Kṛṣṇa kills a demoness, called either Pūtānā or Holākā, on the occasion of the Spring Festival. Pūtānā is a demoness who appears in the Agni Purāṇa, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, and the Skanda Purāṇa.<sup>424</sup> Pūtānā is described by S.M. Gupta in From Daityas to Devatas<sup>425</sup> as a female rākṣasī; the daughter of Bali; one of the

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<sup>421</sup>Raghavan, Festivals, p. 156.

<sup>422</sup>Cited by Raghavan, p. 196.

<sup>423</sup>Mani, Purāṇic Encyclopaedia, pp. 568f.

<sup>424</sup>Agni Purāṇa, 12.14-17; Viṣṇu Purāṇa, V.5; Bhagavata Purāṇa, p. 155; Skanda Purāṇa, 10.6.

<sup>425</sup>S.M. Gupta, From Daityas to Devatas in Hindu Mythology

mothers (matrs) attending Skanda; a Yoginī; and a disease in children.<sup>426</sup>

Pūtānā was sent to Vraja by Kṛṣṇa's arch-rival Kāṁsa in the guise of a beautiful woman in order to destroy the child Kṛṣṇa. She is described as a hawk (śakunī) perched on the wheel of a wagon, before she assumes the form of a beautiful woman having poisoned breasts.<sup>427</sup> She is supposed to suckle the child Kṛṣṇa, and, because her breasts are filled with poison, to kill him. Kṛṣṇa, however, wise to the ways of Kāṁsa, changes form and himself sucks the life out of Pūtānā. In the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, the killing of Pūtānā by Kṛṣṇa is noted as follows:<sup>428</sup>

The ogress Pūtānā, a devourer of children, was sent to kill the infant Kṛṣṇa. She assumed a charming form and let him suck her breast, which she had smeared with a virulent poison. But Kṛṣṇa, pressing her breast hard with his hands, angrily drank out her life's breath with the milk and killed her, having cut off her breasts.

O'Flaherty, commenting upon this myth, suggests an implicit connection exists between blood and the 'life's breath.' Hence, "just as Pūtānā reverses the fluid that she intends to give him, changing milk to poison, so he too effects a reversal, changing poison to blood, which

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(Bombay: Somaiya Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1973), p. 69.

<sup>426</sup>S.M. Gupta, From Daityas to Devatas in Hindu Mythology (Bombay: Somaiya Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1973), p. 69.

<sup>427</sup>Harivaṁśa, 50.20 cited by O'Flaherty, Women, p. 182.

<sup>428</sup>Bhāgavata Purāṇa 10.6.1-44; Harivaṁśa, 50.22; Padma Purāṇa, 6.245; Viṣṇu Purāṇa, 5.5, cited by O'Flaherty, Women, p. 41.

he sucks from her."<sup>429</sup> O'Flaherty further cites an interesting myth in a Śaktā text from Bengal wherein Kṛṣṇa, in the form of Kālī, killed Pūtānā. Thus:

The gods begged Kālī to rid the realm of demonic kings, and she agreed to become incarnate as Kṛṣṇa. Śiva prayed to Kālī and was given permission to become incarnate as Rādhā, in order to enjoy intercourse in reverse. 'Kṛṣṇa' resumed the form of Kālī temporarily in order to kill Pūtānā. At Śiva's wish, Rādhā's husband became impotent immediately after marriage.

There are also several paintings of the killing of Pūtānā in which Kṛṣṇa is depicted as a small male child perched on top of Pūtānā's protruding, phallic tongue. In some of these drawings Pūtānā herself is depicted in two forms: scenes across the top of certain manuscripts depict her alternately as a beautiful woman and a hideous ogress.<sup>430</sup>

In a scenario similar to Kṛṣṇa's encounter with Pūtānā (i.e., sitting on Pūtānā's lap as a child) one finds Śiva depicted as a child of the goddess sitting on Pārvatī's lap and, further, in the Liṅga Purāṇa Śiva takes the form of a baby to suck the anger from the breasts of the goddess after she has slain the demon Dārūka.<sup>431</sup>

Pūtānā appears in the context of Śaivism also as one of the seven Mothers who raised Śiva's son Skanda. The story of the birth of Skanda is complex and appears in several variants. In what amounts to a postscript to the main story, the troop of Mothers who nurture the

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<sup>429</sup> O'Flaherty, Women, p. 342.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid. p. 334.

<sup>431</sup> Shulman, p. 235.

child ask to be given control over all creatures (such control is presently allotted to another set of Mothers).<sup>432</sup> Skanda refuses but offers to grant any other request that they might desire. The Mothers ask for the following:<sup>433</sup>

We want to devour the offspring of those Mothers - give them to us, them and their Gods who are different from yourself. (15-20)

To this request Skanda replied:

Afflict the young children of men in your various forms until they are sixteen-years-old. I shall give you a Rudra-like immortal soul, and you shall dwell with it in complete happiness, being much worshipped. (20-25)

Then out of the body of Skanda came a fiery being who was bidden by Skanda to assume a terrific form. One form the being assumed was the grahā (grasper, disease demoness) Pūtānā, described as 'an awful Stalker of the night, evil in her ghastly shape.' In the Epic, then, Pūtānā is one of the disease demonesses, a foe of children, and a member of Skanda's attendants.<sup>434</sup> The Mothers are therefore considered demonesses that seize children and make them ill.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> According to Nilakantha (3.230.16 of the Vulgate) these are the Śaktis of the gods Brahmā, Maheśvara, etc. Van Buitenen suggests that these mothers are the real mothers of the infants preyed upon by the Mothers of Skanda. The Mahābhārata, trans. ed. J. van Buitenen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), II. p. 834.

<sup>433</sup> Mahābhārata, trans. van Buitenen, 3.219.14-58.

<sup>434</sup> Hopkins, Epic Mythology, p. 229.

<sup>435</sup> D. Shulman, Tamil Temple Myths (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 245.



There are, in fact, several links between those who threaten children and Skanda. In the Mahābhārata (3.213-18) the gods fear Skanda's power and send Indra to kill him. Indra, in turn, having sent the band of Mothers unsuccessfully to kill the child, casts his thunderbolt at Skanda, splitting open his side. From the blow of the thunderbolt young men and maidens were produced who snatch away children.<sup>436</sup>

It is clear from the above that a demoness may be intimately associated with the Vasantotsava. She, like Kāma in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, is destroyed by fire. Fire, though it is not mentioned in every description of the Vasantotsava, is yet, as we have seen, an important element, even in modern times. The effect of the fire is clear: fire purifies and it removes obstructions (the major obstructions being the demoness, Kāma, or simply the old year). The ash is symbolically fertilizing and it represents the victory of life over death in that it remains after the process of destruction is complete. The demoness inflicts death; she is symbolic of death. Her primary victims are children, i.e., new life. Her destruction thus marks the destruction of death, and the triumphs of new life. The annual ritual re-enactment of her death at the Spring Festival ensures thus the victory of life over death. With her annual destruction the fertility of the earth takes its normal course, children are protected and prosperity ensues. The demoness Dhaundhā/Holākā is associated with a

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<sup>436</sup> Ibid. p. 244.

multiplicity of myths and although her appearance is diverse, the myths themselves exhibit a commonality of structure. In all cases she inflicts death, in all cases she is burnt with some eclat, and in all cases her death results in renewal concomitant with spring.

Virūpāksavasantotsavacampū<sup>437</sup>

The final text describing the Spring Festival selected for this chapter is Ahobala's Virūpāksavasantotsavacampū. The festival is set in the city of Hampi in the ancient Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagara. Here the Spring Festival is an elaborate affair performed in honor of the god Virūpākṣa (Śiva).<sup>438</sup>

The description of the Vasantotsava here is regional and pertains specifically to the festival as celebrated in Hampi. This city is the ancient part of the city of Vijayanagara and is situated in the Hemakuta Hills on the southern banks of the Tungabhadra river. The name Hampi is generally believed to be a later Kannada form of Pampā which is another name of the Tungabhadra. Pampā is also a local name for the consort of Śiva.<sup>439</sup> The Vijayanagara kings, who founded the empire in the first half of the fourteenth century A.D., are noted for their military prowess and display of powers during feasts and on festival days. The empire lasted approximately three centuries (from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries A.D.) and is known as a force preserving Hindu culture and tradition from the destructive invading

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<sup>437</sup> Ahobala, Virūpāksavasantotsavacampū, introduction by V.R.S. Pañchamukhi (Dharwar: Kannada Research Institute, 1953).

<sup>438</sup> "Virūpākṣa" is one of Śiva's epithets as, for example, in the Kumārasambhava of Kālidāsa. It is also the name of two members of the royal family who ruled Vijayanagara in the fifteenth century. See R. Sewell, A Forgotten Empire (Reprint; Delhi: Director, Publications Division, 1962), pp. 94, 95.

<sup>439</sup> Marg, p. 41.

forces of Islam.<sup>440</sup> Finally destroyed by Islamic forces in 1570 A.D., Hampi was left in ruins.

The antiquity and religious sanctity of the city goes back to the epic age. Hampi is, in fact, a city of some importance in the religious tradition of Indian literature. It is associated with the Rāmāyana wherein it is known as Kishkindha, the city ruled by the monkey chiefs Sugrīva and Vāli. After Sugrīva was driven out of the city by Vāli, legend has it that he took refuge on the Matanga hill, south of the Tungabhadra. Rāma, in search of Sītā, who had been abducted by Rāvaṇa, killed Vāli and restored Sugrīva to his kingdom. It was here also where Sītā bathed to remove the impurities accrued in Laṅkā. The city is prominent in Śaivite lore as well: here Pārvatī is said to have done penance inside a cave to please Śiva. Śiva, in turn, appeared before her and invited her into his nearby cave on the Hemakuta hill also on the southern banks of the river. In these hills, Śiva's marriage with Pārvatī is said to have been celebrated. After the wedding, the area came to be known as Pampākṣetra or simply Hampi. Because Śiva in the form of Virūpākṣa dwells here, it is also called Virūpākṣatirtha (the sacred spot of Śiva).<sup>441</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> M.R. Anand in "The Rise and Fall of the Vijayanagara Empire" in Marg (1982) remarks that both Harihara and Bukka having gone through the conversion back from Islam to Hinduism, naturally wished to prove themselves as more intense defenders of their mother-father faith, to inspire their followers to believe in them, to encourage hope of flourishing after centuries of decay. (p. 21)

<sup>441</sup> For the mythological background to the city of Hampi, see, G. Michell "History or Myth," Part I in Marg (1982), p. 41.

In its early days Hampi was a small urban agglomeration extending eastward from the Virūpākṣa temple to the Matanga hill and from the river to the Hemakuta hills. Central to our description of the Vasantotsava as contained in this Campū is the temple of Virūpākṣa. The Virūpākṣa temple is considered, even today, to be the most sacred of all the structures at Hampi.<sup>442</sup>

The place of Hampi as a sacred site in the sacred geography of the region is referred to by Ahobala throughout the Campū. He calls it, famously, the Southern Kāśī, the Kailāsa of this world, built by Siva, the city of Indra (pp. 12, 14, 55).

The Virūpākṣavasantotsavacampū is illustrative of yet another genre taken by the Indian Spring Festival. The main purport of the poem is not to tell a story but rather to describe the Vasantotsava and, more than likely, to extol the virtues of the king, Harihara I (or Narayana), the eldest of the five sons of Sangama, who was himself a powerful chieftain and founder of the Vijayanagara empire. Harihara succeeded to the Vijayanagara throne in 1336 and it was probably during his reign that the Campū was composed.<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> Ibid. p. 47.

<sup>443</sup> Raghavan, "The Virūpākṣa Vasantotsava Campū of Ahobala" in Journal of the American Oriental Society (XIV) tells us the Campū was written under the rule of Harihara I (1336-1356). For the date of the ascension to power of Harihara, see, Raghavan, "The Rise and Fall of the Vijayanagara Empire" in Marg (XIV), p. 21.

prominent features of the Spring Festival as described in this text are as follows: intercaste rivalry, the centrality of Śiva and Pārvatī, Śiva the Hunter, Śiva the husband, and the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī.

### A Brief Summary of Chapter Three

The extant portion of the final section of the Third Chapter of the Virūpākṣavasantotsavacampū opens with a description of the people who have gathered to witness the car festival (Rathotsava) and who offer fruits for worship. The weather is hot and many take advantage of the cool river, seating themselves on slabs of stones in the river. The Rathotsava opens at the command of the rtvigs (priests) who first offer an oblation into the fire and then proceed to offer bāli in honor of the moveable, festival image of Śiva which has the form of the liṅga (capalam śivaliṅgamurtim).<sup>446</sup>

The great decorated chariot of Śiva is described. It is adorned with a high central pillar on top of which a jar of gold is placed, which gives the impression of the full moon rising behind a mountain.<sup>447</sup> The great car has four carved doors, all of which are painted and decorated with doll-like female images (sālābhañjikā) and five types of men and

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<sup>446</sup>Bāli is traditionally offered as a rite of protection and is a common feature of many Hindu rituals.

<sup>447</sup>The image, here, indicates the timing of the festival (i.e., the full moon).

lions.<sup>448</sup> The female images are described as the army of Kāma on account of their beauty. People begin to decorate the chariot with flags suggestive of the power of the god Virūpākṣa and they also bring ropes by which the car is to be pulled.

Śaiva Brahmins then return from making the bāli offering and after having performed some unspecified services for the people who had gathered there, again offer an oblation into the fire.

It is noon and very hot. People are warming up for the main festivities. In the bazaar articles to propitiate Śiva and his consort are being sold (ghee and a variety of foods) and Brahmins are paid to enter the temple to perform devotions for Pampādeva. Ahobala takes time out to describe the crowd which has assembled to witness the festival. Several Brahmins of variable character are in attendance or are just arriving. Some of the Brahmins are wealthy and greedily take advantage of the crowds, anticipating the gold coins they will receive as dakṣina for performing services (abhiśekha) for the crowds.<sup>449</sup> One such Brahmin, when he discovers some of his relatives are coming from a nearby village to attend the festival, worriedly contemplates the expense of entertaining them. To build up his capital this Brahmin hires out his services to wealthy merchants, but rather than buy the necessary accoutrements for worship he offers the image only water. Outside the temple he is apprehended by the merchants (who expected

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<sup>448</sup>The text reads here pañcājana and pañcāśya. These may be explained here as protective images. (p. 2)

<sup>449</sup>i.e., gifts of food and flowers.

flowers and prasāda) but he manages to slip away. Other Brahmins are indifferent to the proceedings; some bask in the shade awaiting the main events; some are busy visiting the other holy sites in the environs surrounding the city; still others are busy in their houses donning silk clothes and other festive garments. A number of kings are also in attendance and their royal chariots line the streets. Monks, forest dwellers, and yogins, wearing garlands of rudrākṣa beads (beads sacred to Śiva) and covered with ashes, are in attendance. They are described as desirous of mokṣa (p. 12), or as simply collecting merit, performing prescribed Vedic rituals like the Agnihotra; and as donating money and worshipping Virūpākṣa by dancing. Śiva is described as the universal teacher, the substratum of the world, the teacher of the Tāraka Mantra (p. 12).

The beating of the drums and the ringing of bells commences at the command of the temple priest and this indicates the beginning of the festival proper. Hordes of people rush to the temple. Those who are members of the fourth caste (turīyavarna), i.e., Śūdras, are prohibited from entering the city streets and so remain on the terraces of tall buildings outside the city, on the city walls themselves and even in trees. White flags are brought out and waved until the city is awash with them like the foam from the churning of the ocean of milk. The kings in attendance are described here in some detail. They line the streets of the city waiting for the festival of the chariot to begin.

The images of Śiva and Pārvatī are adorned and brought to the door of the temple. Brahmins wave lights (artika) before the images and circumambulate them three times. At the same time other officials



strike sticks together and fan the images. Offerings of fruits and flowers are made through the priest (devārcaka) and prasāda and flowers are then distributed to the crowd.

The car is then brought out of the temple and the image of Śiva is placed onto a pedestal on the car. The pedestal is secured inside the chariot: it is made of gems on which a pillow is placed. The image and the pedestal are hoisted onto the car by means of pulleys: the ropes are described as aids to devotion, strings of bhakti which drag the god nearer to the devotee; hence even Śiva, though hard to attain, can be drawn nearer by the thread of love: lifting the image onto the cart in itself is a form of sādhana, a meditation. All of the people fold their hands in reverence when they see the image rising. The priest secures both images (Śiva and Pārvatī).

The teacher Vidyāranya<sup>450</sup> joins Śiva on the car accompanied by his pupils and worships the images. As Brahmins take up the rope to pull the car, people throw offerings of fruit, coconuts, and water at the image until the car is completely covered.

Śaiva Brahmins try to pull the car but are unable to make it move. The king is consulted and asked to assist in pulling the car:

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<sup>450</sup>Vidyāranya was a Smartha Brahmin who became an ascetic, performing severe penances. Legend has it that Harihara I once met Vidyāranya, while hunting in the forest, and was advised to build his empire at Hampi. The capital city of the Vijayanagara kingdom was Vijayanagara (the city of Victory) or Vidyanagara in honor of the philosopher Vidyaranya. Vidyāranya was also a well known advaitin philosopher, teacher, and prolific writer is said to have written some sixty works including the Jivanmuktiviveka. (See Michell, Marg, (1982), p. 47.)

O lord, if you come near the car, bow with respect and offer fruit, it will surely move. (p. 21)

He descends from his palace and prostrates himself completely in front of the chariot (eight parts of his body touching the ground), makes an offering and himself takes up the rope. The car moves, stopping and starting through the city; the drums beat furiously, bugles blare, hands clap, the crowds shout 'Mahadeva!'. Sometimes the crowd is too thick for movement. The king himself mounts a bejewelled elephant and joins the procession. His elephant is decked out in finery and jewels. Other important personages ride horses. Some members of the crowd are hurt by the fruits thrown by the people and slow down the movement of the chariot. Layers of heavy dust have arisen from the fervor with which these Brahmins pull the car. The car, in fact, appears to be moving on its own through the clouds. The Brahmins pulling the car shout 'Śiva!', 'Śankara!', 'Lord!', 'Great God!' and begin running to keep up with the growing momentum of the car until finally they are unable to stop it. Only when an appeal is made to Śiva are they able to stop the car. The crowd immediately surrounds the car bringing fresh water for the Brahmins, who drink it greedily and begin fanning themselves with the ends of their garments. The Brahmins, now rested, recite the words of holy texts (Śrūtis) and engage in learned conversation.

Meantime, while the Brahmins are thus engaged a wealthy merchant, Pampārya, is making preparations for his own car festival. He has built his own car, consecrated it by rites in accordance with the Śaiva Agamas, and placed two images of Śiva and Pārvatī on it. He has recruited merchants and Śūdras to pull it. This latter car proves very

fast and rapidly approaches the Brahmin car. Finally, the Brahmins who are busy cooling themselves with fruit and drink notice the car dragged by Śūdras. They jump up and try to make their car move.

The Brahmin car, pulled now by Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava Brahmins, proves to be faster and they finally reach their destination which is a boulder on the Matanga hill where there is an image of Nandi.<sup>451</sup> Nandi is praised as a devoted follower of Śiva, one who warns Śiva of the Daityas who live beyond the Matanga hills (the heretics are referred to, in the text, as Bauddhas).<sup>452</sup> There are also a variety of heretics who have gathered there to ridicule Śiva, and they are described. They are quickly hounded out by the devotees. The movers of the two cars engage in a verbal battle and Kṣatriyas (in alliance with Brahmins) attack these enemies of Śiva, i.e., merchants who had come only for money and Śūdras who hated Śiva. In this they are assisted by Vaiṣṇava Brahmins (p. 23). During the verbal combat there is much clapping and snorting by the crowds. The ropes of the car are removed and attached to the other side. The images are also turned around so that they face the temple. Here we are told that the image of Siva is five faced. It is evening and the car returns to the temple with great pomp. The streets are crowded and so the movement is slow. The merits acquired during this festival are described, i.e., the

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<sup>451</sup> This may refer to the large Nandi image at the eastern end of the Virūpākṣa temple street. (See Michell, Marg (1982) p. 47.)

<sup>452</sup> This reference to Bauddhas is probably an anachronism as Buddhism had all but died out in South India by this time.

four goals of men (kāma, artha, dharma, and mokṣa) can be achieved simply by celebrating this festival. Sunset is described. The king of Vidyanagara goes around the car three times and takes prasāda. After pūjā and distribution of prasāda the idols are brought down and taken into the temple. A rich merchant provides lights which now light up the adjoining hills. The waving of lights is performed for the idols to remove any impurity incurred, more offerings are made, courtesans (vāravanitā) dance and make offerings of pots of gold, and the idols are taken into the sacrificial hall (yajñaśālā) and worshipped. Everyone goes home.

### Comment on Chapter Three

We know, from previous textual descriptions, that kings play an important role in this festival. It is difficult to discern whether the emphasis placed on the king here is a result of the vital role he has to play in the proceedings and the power that is inherent in his stature or whether Ahobala, in his description, is being somewhat adulatory. Nevertheless the role played by the king cannot be discounted and, in fact, he is one of the principal players in this Chapter. The festival proceeds and succeeds because of his participation and under his auspices. Further, this is in keeping with the royal tradition associated with Vijayanagara kings.<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>453</sup>The Vijayanagara Kings are noted for their tendency to display their royal powers in religious guise. Michell in "History or Myth," Marg (1982), pp. 43f.

The power of this king extends both to the temporal and non-temporal orders. Royal symbols abound; displaying his prominence; his army and his flags are everywhere, he leads the procession on a royal elephant, his fellow kings are submissively in attendance. There is no question on whom the life, prosperity, and safety of this city depend. Although this king among men alone is necessary and able to move the car housing the great god Śiva and his consort Pārvatī, he completely and publicly submits to Śiva (he literally prostrates himself before the chariot). The king takes on the role of servant and devotee in recognition of Śiva's great power. In so doing he serves first as a role model for his subjects (as an ideal devotee) and second, he illustrates the supremacy of his power in that only his actions produce results (the car moves). This establishes the king as not only the focal point of his kingdom but also as central to cosmic order: he mediates between men and gods.

The festival chariot housing the icons of Śiva and Pārvatī is at length described. Although the form taken by Pārvatī is not detailed, it is the form of Śiva, here a liṅga, which is worshipped. This icon is clearly a representation of Śiva in his creative mode. The liṅga is a symbol of life and creation. Indeed, this is augmented by the high central pillar on the chariot upon which a jar of gold is placed (p. 2). The text alludes to this imagistically as the full moon rising behind a mountain; both the moon and the jar of gold contain amṛta, the nectar of immortality, the drink of life par excellence. In addition gold is connected in alchemical texts with long life, while the moon is a classic symbol of renewal. Further, the icons are surrounded and protected

by paintings of female figures representing the army of Kāmā. This conjunction of images is clearly a potent statement of renewal and rejuvenation themes which are the very substance of the festival.

In addition, in the description of the festival Ahobala emphasizes the segregation and conflict between castes, something distinct from all other descriptions examined to date. In the beginning of the text, Śūdras, although eager to participate in the festival, are required to remain outside the city walls, excluded from the celebrations. As a united front, Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava Brahmins marshal their strength, revoking for the moment sectarian divisions, and join forces with one another against the Vaiśya chariot. Ahobala describes a broad range of Brahmins attending the festival: low ones, hard ones, charitable ones, and pious ones (p. 21). Hence the festival, while blurring sectarian divisions, is not immune to other sorts of social antipathies. The inter-caste rivalry, in this case between Brahmins and merchants, manifests itself in a race between the two festival chariots.<sup>454</sup> The theme of dueling chariots becomes a ritualized re-enactment of battle and it is clear, at the beginning of the race, that it is the sanctified temple chariot that will win. The race reflects, of course, the victory of one caste over another and hence the victory of the status quo (Brahmins over Śūdras and Vaiśyas), but more than this, in the context of the Vasantotsava, it may be symbolic of the ultimate victory of Spring. Finally, the rigid reinforcement of caste

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<sup>454</sup>The text gives us very few details regarding this merchant-made chariot.

divisions accords well with what we know of extreme Vijayanagar orthodoxy. Strengthening caste lines seems to have been a common response to threats from outside (e.g., Islam) in Indian religious history, the Sena dynasty in Bengal providing an earlier example.

#### A Brief Summary of Chapter Four

The Fourth Chapter of the text describes the Hunt festival. It takes place on the following day. It is the Uttāraṅga (last phase) of the car festival. The god leaves for the hunt on a horse vāhana alone, without Pārvatī.

Previously, while waiting for the Hunt Festival to begin, the son of the minister of the Śirasi chief attending the festival and a Brahmin poet had crossed the river in order to see the great temple of Śiva on the other side. To get to the temple they must pass through a forest. They lose their directions and find themselves lost in the forest. The Brahmin is afraid due to the wildness of the forest and prays to the God Virūpākṣa to save him from wild beasts. The forest is described as a young girl with claws of a tiger, as a world dug up by the tusks of the great Boar (Vāraha) at the time of the deluge (pralāya), as the city of Rāvaṇa, broken up by the gangs of monkeys led by Hanuman, as a place of death where great buffalos, ridden by Yama, roam. The warbling sound of the cuckoos in the forest is like the raving of someone mad and its odors like those of a courtesan. (pp. 60-62).

Realizing that much time had passed the two rush back to see the Hunt festival, but, a tiger crosses their path. The frightened poet prays to God Virūpākṣa. A rider suddenly appears on his horse, in the dress of a royal horseman, sword in hand, and saves them.

Ahobala tells us at this point that the idol of Virūpākṣa on the horse-vāhana and carried by Śaivites, has started, in the moonlight, for the Hunt festival.

Back to the poet and his friend. The poet extols the horseman as god himself, and the latter gives him a signet ring inscribed with the name of Virūpākṣadeva. The poet requests Virūpākṣa to escort them safely to the river separating the forest from the city. On reaching the river their divine escort vanishes. The poet now understands it is God himself who saved them, and the ring with the God's name on it confirms his suspicions. They cross the river and stop for twilight rites (sandhyāvandana).

They overhear, at this time, the voice of Śiva sporting with heavenly women (apsarases); the latter entreat him for company, i.e., sexual bliss (suratotsavānanda). They describe Śiva as the husband of Pārvatī; half male, half female, destroyer of Kāma and lord of love (Kāmeśvara); and Kāpālin (one who bears skulls). Śiva dismounts from his horse, creates the seasons, and takes on forms appropriate to each of the women respectively and simultaneously (p. 71). Śiva sings and generally enjoys Himself, diverted by the ladies. He is Kāma. In this līlā the river Gaṅgā asks Śiva to give her a lift and Śiva bears her on his head. The moon has risen and, taking leave of the ladies, Śiva mounts his horse and rushes back to Pārvatī whom he has now



neglected for some time. As he rushes past, the poet and the minister's son recognize him and they then proceed to the street in front of the temple where Śiva's idol in Hunter's form is stationed.

It is here that the idol of Śiva is described: it is an image with all the markings of kingship, i.e., umbrellas, fans, jewels, and royal garb.

Śiva now returns to the temple to find Pārvatī who refuses to see him. Śiva runs after Pārvatī who retreats into a sacred hall prepared especially for the festival. The image of Pārvatī is hidden and Śiva and his party try to force their way in. The two parties throw sweets at each other and Śiva and Pārvatī engage in verbal battle. The author describes this battle at length. At first the reluctance of Pārvatī to see Śiva is explained by her shyness which is natural, we are told, to one who is inexperienced in marital life. Śiva (the male) and Śivā (the female) are inseparable; both are androgynous. Śiva and Pārvatī are then worshipped separately. The stories of Śiva are retold all night long.

The next day is the last day of the festival. Pārvatī is seated on a swing which attendants push. Śiva and Pārvatī's argument continues. Śiva knocks at the door; Pārvatī asks who it is. Śiva replies variously, trying to impress her with his great accomplishments. He reminds her he is Nilakantha (the blue throated one), Grīsa, Trīśulī (bearer of the trident), Sthānu (the firm one), and 'Lord of ghosts.' Each time Pārvatī responds with a rebuke: "Are you the one who wears snakes, the one who killed the elephant, the one who sports with women in the forest? If so, go back to the forest!". Śiva then resorts

to praising Pārvatī. He describes her beauty, her fidelity, and her innocence. When Pārvatī still refuses to open the door, Śiva plays on her sympathies. "I have just returned from the Hunt, I am bruised by the claws of a tiger, my clothes are in disarray due to the battle." Pārvatī begins to mellow; "your lies" she says, "are told in an appealing way." Śiva now admits his dependence on this Goddess; without her He is without support, He has no form, He is unable to create progeny. He suggests that he become androgynous. Finally, Pārvatī opens the doors. The two are reconciled, Śiva becomes ardhanārīśvara (androgynous), and the two images are placed on the same pitha. They are sprinkled with flowers and colored powder. The priest throws powder on Brahmins attending the festival. The images are then taken to the river, and bathed (p. 81). The king is praised, Brahmins recite holy texts. Offerings of akṣata (grains) are made and the priest places these grains on the heads of those attending the festival. The grains are also given as prasāda. Various mantras are recited, the images are garlanded and anointed with ashes and sandal, and then taken through the streets of the city with great eclat, stopping at every house to accept presents. The procession is led by temple dancers and the streets are filled with devotees. The images return to the temple where they are 'de-pitha-ed,' and more offerings are made.

The author adds that Śiva, returning to the temple, sees Pārvatī and smiles. Now it is dawn. Music, dance, waving of lights, and offerings of fruits are made to Śiva. The priests perform the sacrificial rite of homa, japa, abhiśekha, and bālī. People stream

through the temple to see Śiva. Purifying rites are performed and the festival is over. It is celebrated for offspring, good crops, and happiness.

The text closes by telling us that the Vasantotsava is a yearly festival done on the full moon day of Madhu (Caitra).

#### Comment on Chapter Four

In this section of the Campū we are given a description of the Vasantotsava comprising the following elements: the Hunt Festival, in which Śiva appears as a central player; an excursion into the forest; the swinging of Pārvatī; a quarrel between Śiva and Pārvatī; and their marriage. A wealth of Śaivite mythology is drawn upon here and is referred to in the context of the Spring Festival. Śiva appears in two forms concurrently, one as a festival image (the Hunter) and, two, as an active agent in the forest. It is almost as if Śiva 'comes alive' when the festival begins.

Śiva is described as the Hunter. He is dressed, mounted upon a horse and sent off to the forest. The history of Śiva in this form can be traced back to Rudra. Stella Kramrisch tells us that Śiva is the

'Wild Hunter' in the 'pre-cosmic wilderness' and as such, he aims his arrows against creation.<sup>455</sup>

The primordial, paradigmatic myth of Rudra is told in the Maitrayani Saṁhitā of the Black Yajurveda. Father Heaven, henceforth acting under the name of Prajāpati, Lord of Generation, desired his daughter Usas, the Dawn. She became a female antelope, he became an antelope and pursued her. While he was taking his perverse pleasure in her, he suddenly turned around toward one who was aiming his arrow at him. Addressing the Archer, Prajāpati in fear exclaimed; "I make you lord of the Animals." "Leave me." Thus his name is Paśupati, Lord of Animals. The first seed that fell was surrounded by fire produced by Agni. (p. 7)

Thus he came to be, and everything in existence. When he approached shooting, he howled. Hence his name is Rudra, the roarer, according to popular etymology. He has two natures; or two "names": the one cruel and wild (rudra), the other kind (Śiva) and tranquil (śānta). These he assumes at will. They are interconnected, spring from the same root hidden deep in this god. Rudra is Śiva. (pp. 6-7)

The Wild hunter is Rudra, the raging flame, lashing out, letting the arrow fly at the critical moment. Yet he neither prevented nor did he undo the act of the Father. Only in part did he frustrate it; or was he himself part of it? Rudra is Agni. The fire flames in him. (p. 21)

The primordial discharge of Rudra's arrow against the Father marked the direction of his operation in the cosmos. The arrow aimed at the act of generation. It flew in the opposite direction of the generative emission of the Father. (p. 31)

Life on earth began with the shot at the Father in the procreative moment. The seed fell to earth. (p. 8)

Creation is an act of violence that infringes upon the Uncreate, the undifferentiated wholeness that is before the beginning of things. (pp. 3-4)

This state (of wholeness) is beyond words, indescribable and inaccessible to the senses. It is neither non-being nor being (RV. 10..129.1). In its pre-cosmic, preconscious totality,

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<sup>455</sup> S. Kramrisch, The Presence of Śiva (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

everything is contained, including consciousness and nothing. Metaphysically, it did not cease when the cosmos came into existence, for it is not subject to time. Mythically, its wholeness had been injured. Rudra, the guardian of the Uncreate... avenged the infringement of that wholeness. He became the avenger of the descent of its substance, the semen, the "heavenly soma" into the cosmos. (p. 20)

Creation departs from the perfection of the unconditioned state. Creation was flawed from the moment of its origin... Rudra, the fierce god, the guardian of the Uncreate, arose himself as protector of the sacred order - the guardian of cosmic rhythms and human rites. (pp. 30-31)

The information thus links Śiva the Hunter to the creation of the cosmos. The Hunter, for Kramrisch, is Creator. In our description Śiva appears in the form of a Hunter linking the festival to the creation of the universe and thus relating it to cosmic events. Each year the Hunt is re-enacted; each year Śiva appears as Creator and, by extension, the creation of the cosmos is reproduced.<sup>456</sup> This creation is highly aggressive: Śiva the Hunter is strong, virile; he dominates the proceedings, both in the forest as well as in the city. In this light he is pre-eminently 'male' and the obvious deity of choice for the Vijayanagara kings. Śiva as Hunter confronts nature as Vijayanagar kings confront their enemies.<sup>457</sup> Śiva the Hunter is effectively on the offensive against nature.

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<sup>456</sup> Eliade, Cosmos and History.

<sup>457</sup> G. Michell in Marg, tells us "Even the briefest survey of more than two centuries of Vijayanagara's history reveals an astonishing number of wars with neighbouring Muslim kingdoms as well as a host of disputes, intrigues, rebellions, coup d'etat, murders and general political upheavals." (p. 42)

He ventures into nature (the forest) confident of his success in pursuit. It is here that he illicitly encounters the apsaras women. We are told that he is overheard sporting with them, fulfilling their desires. Indeed, Śiva is constantly under suspicion of having extra-marital affairs.<sup>458</sup> In a similar episode, he attracted the sages' wives to him in the Pine Forest and his conduct with them was scandalous. This myth is recounted in many sources, the following is taken from the Brahmānda Purāṇa.<sup>459</sup> Here Śiva enters the forest:

His body was pale with the ashes smeared on it; he was naked, and all his identifying marks were defaced; his hair was disordered and loose; he had enormous pointed teeth; his hands were busy with fire-brands, and his eyes were red and tawny. His penis and testicles were like red chalk, the tip ornamented with black and white chalk. Sometimes he laughed horribly; sometimes he sang, smiling; sometimes he danced erotically; sometimes he yelled again and again. As he was dancing, their wives became bewitched immediately and stood in his way as he came into the hermitage and begged for alms over and over again. (Hindu Myths, p. 142)

Śiva thus takes form as a highly erotic figure. His relationship to Gaṅgā is of the same ilk. Gaṅgā's descent onto Śiva's head in the forest further sanctifies this virgin wilderness.<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>458</sup>O'Flaherty tells us that "Pārvatī calls Śiva an adulterer, and his lascivious behavior causes as much trouble with her as does his asceticism,...he is guilty of adultery, incest, and general profligacy. He refers to himself as a voluptuary, and, on several occasions, Parvatī calls him a woman-chaser." (Śiva, p. 226.)

<sup>459</sup>The story of the Pine Forest sages is retold in O'Flaherty, Hindu Myths, pp. 141-149.

<sup>460</sup>See O'Flaherty for this myth, Śiva, p. 230. She interprets the image of Śiva and Gaṅgā as a both a marriage motif and an adultery motif.

The forest is clearly Śiva's territory and he is given due recognition. The text tells us that the son of the minister of one of the kings attending the festival and a Brahmin poet venture into the forest just prior to the Hunt festival. The two come upon a Bilva tree, touch it and circumambulate it. The Bilva tree is sacred to Lakṣmī who worshipped Śiva with its leaves in order to win the love of Viṣṇu. After getting a place on Viṣṇu's chest, Lakṣmī offered the Bilva tree itself to Śiva. In fact, the worship of the tree is a gesture of sectarian unity. The fruits of a Bilva tree represent the Śivaliṅga; by going round a Bilva tree, one attains the merit of worshipping Śiva and by simply touching the fruits of the tree one will gain fruits (pp. 61-2). In addition the tree belongs to Lakṣmī and the Vaiṣṇava tradition.<sup>461</sup>

In addition, here we encounter the familiar tree motif which remains constant throughout our descriptions of the Vasantotsava. In the Campū, however, the connection between eroticism and Śiva is direct; the fruits of the Bilva tree are the liṅga.

It is also here in the forest that Śiva manifests himself in human form as saviour of the Brahmin poet and the chief's son when they are confronted by the tiger. Here, Man meets God. And the exchange is beneficent: Śiva subdues nature in aid of men, he shoos the tiger away.

Śiva's dalliances in the forest with the apsaras women do not impress Pārvatī. Her presence in the festival serves to remind both

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<sup>461</sup> Ahobala tells us that this information is in the Skānda Purāṇa, pp. 61-2.

Śiva and the celebrants of the Vasantotsava of Śiva's dependence upon her. She, after all, is a great Goddess.<sup>462</sup> Their symbiotic relationship is about to be cemented through marriage. Śiva's marriage is a 'domesticating' or 'civilizing' process; He now takes on the responsibilities of married life, now he has a place in the ordered cosmos. Pārvatī is the medium through which this occurs. The ritualized confrontation of Śiva and Pārvatī is thus a pre-nuptial affair. Śiva, fresh from the forest, is still in an aggressive mood and attempts to force his attentions on Pārvatī.<sup>463</sup> He succeeds in reconciliation when in either an a-sexual or highly sexual act, he becomes Ardhanārīśvara (half male, half female). This androgynous image can be understood as either male and female fused as in the sexual act or as neither male nor female and hence not obviously sexual. In the former state, the image is appropriate to the festival as a prerequisite

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<sup>462</sup>In fact, if we look at other sources describing the Vasantotsava we find that sometimes only Pārvatī is mentioned in connection with it. The Holakāmāhātmya, for example, describes the ways of worshipping the goddess alone on this day. We are reminded here also that in modern times women fashion an image of Pārvatī out of the ashes of the Holī fire and that they then place it in the centre of a circle and circumambulate it for fifteen days in order to gain a good husband. In the Kāvyaṁīmāṁsā (p. 104), Gaurī (Pārvatī) appears as an object of worship along with Kama during the Vasantotsava.

<sup>463</sup>Ahobala mentions in passing that Pārvatī is swung and we might not be wrong in interpreting these seductive gyrations as a passive feminine counterpoint to Śiva's aggressive assaults. The history of the Swing Festival in the Indian context begins as early as the third century B.C. and can be traced as a popular spring pastime right through to the present day wherein the bolotsava is celebrated for Kṛṣṇa in Orissa during Holī. See Bose for a description of the history of this festival in connection with the Vasantotsava. Bose, Culture and Society in India, pp. 79-82.



act for offspring and ensures the ongoing creativity of the universe.<sup>464</sup> The androgynous Śiva most often appears in Hindu myth in the creative act.<sup>465</sup> In the latter state, the image represents the transcendent god, having overcome the duality of male and female. It also gives the festival a transcendent point of reference, lifting the events in the phenomenal world to the divine plane and thence to the plane of the undifferentiated absolute.

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<sup>464</sup> Ahobala gives us very few details regarding the marriage ceremony and it might be suggested here that this fusing of Śiva and Pārvatī is, in fact, part of the wedding rite.

<sup>465</sup> See O'Flaherty, Women, p. 310f.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CONCLUSION

The above descriptions of festivals of spring in Sanskrit texts attest to the variety and complexity of the rituals and mythology associated with this season in ancient and medieval India. The time period during which the Vasantotsava is celebrated spans the end of winter and the beginning of spring. Degeneration and regeneration form the thematic basis for our Spring Festival and these two themes acquire specific meaning and form, both ritual and mythological, depending upon the milieu in which they are celebrated. A variety of symbol systems are here in evidence; various texts harness symbols of death and birth and combine them in complex and interlocking ways, allowing us to gain an image of a thematically unified generic festival, a Vasantotsava, which is made manifest in numerous local forms. Our descriptions, although disparate in many respects, give evidence of considerable overlap and complex interweaving of mythological and ritual symbol systems. We have evidence of such notable overlap in terms of the ritual components of the festival but also, as noted explicitly in the first chapter of this work and throughout the second chapter, in the variety of titles by which the Spring Festival is known. All of these, the Phālgunotsava, Caitrotsava, Phalgu, Madhūtsava, Madanamahotsava, Madanatroydaśī, Anaṅgotsava, Madanadvādaśī, Kāmotsava, Śrīpañcami,

Yatramahotsava, and Holākā are intimately and fundamentally related; all may be analyzed as individual manifestations of the same phenomena.

As we have seen throughout our study, certain Vedic celebrations are often cited as precedents to this festival (specifically the Mahāvrata and the Cāturmāsyā). There are also clear links between the Vasantotsava our texts describe and the modern celebration of the Spring Festival, establishing a continuous tradition of spring celebrations. This chapter begins with a brief review of some of the essential characteristics of the Vasantotsavas we have been studying, then moves to a description of earlier celebrations, and concludes with an outline of some modern versions of the festival of spring.

### The Vasantotsava: A Brief Review

With respect to the fundamental characteristics of the Vasantotsava as found in the above Sanskrit texts, we can fruitfully focus our attention in four general directions. Firstly, the Spring Festival crosses sectarian boundaries. It is a popular festival celebrated by several sects as well as outside any readily identifiable sectarian context. No main deity or group of deities is here the consistent object of devotion; the Vasantotsava may be celebrated by all, regardless of private or public devotional affiliations. Second, the element of fire appears in some context in almost all descriptions of this festival: it is a symbol of death, renewal, transformation and purification. Third, the significance of the marriage motif with respect to the Vasantotsava is indicated by a number of texts including the

Bhaviṣya Purāṇa (as previously noted). The marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī is paradigmatic: it provides a model for householders. As Śiva and Pārvatī are wed in the spring (indeed, as we have seen, other divine couples tie the marital knot during this season as well), so too are human marriages often solemnized during the spring. Fourth and finally the rituals of the Vasantotsava revolve, to a greater or lesser extent, around sensuality. The festival is a fertility festival and erotic motifs from both the mortal and the immortal realms are freely combined with fertility motifs. These four components of the Spring Festival will be treated in turn in the sections that follow.

### Multisectarianism

To return for a moment to the deities associated with the Vasantotsava and the sectarian interests which these deities represent, we find the exploits of a variety of gods, goddesses, and demonic beings linked with the celebration of spring. Textual evidence indicates that the festival could be, depending upon the orientation of the celebrants, either a Śaivite or a Vaiṣṇavite festival. Sometimes the festivities revolve around the exploits of relatively minor deities in the Hindu pantheon, as, for example, the demoness Holākā and the god Kāma. Or, indeed, as in some cases, it was not even required to have a deity worshipped at all. Evidence in the Buddhist Jātakas and the Jain Kathākośa suggests further that this festival was celebrated by the Jains and the Buddhists as well as by the worshippers of Hindu deities. Further, the mythological framework of the Spring Festival varies in the texts we have consulted in Chapter Two. It is this variation along

with the nature of the mythology associated with this festival, that we shall examine here.

Amongst the most prominent deities worshipped at this time is Kāmadeva. Although Kāma does not appear in all of our descriptions, where he does appear he is clearly an important figure in the festival. Kāma as well as his consort Rati were regularly invoked during this festival and, in fact, Kāma seems to be the deity most often worshipped: his temple is visited, according to the Mālavikāgnimitra, he is worshipped in a prescribed manner by householders and women (Bhavisya Purāṇa), as well as by royalty (Ratnāvalī). His stories are retold. His rebirth on this tithi explains the origin of the Vasantotsava. If we examine the various contexts in which Kāma appears in our descriptions as, for example, in the Ratnāvalī, Bhavisya Purāṇa and the Virūpākṣavasantotsavacampū, we find that the mythological framework underlying this festival is remarkably flexible and that it is easily susceptible to sectarian re-workings.

It must be remembered that in the Sanskrit context Kāma's mythology is minimal. He is the god of love whose only duty in the majority of texts is to incite passion. In this regard, his most famous exploit is his endeavor to bring together Śiva and Pārvatī for the purpose of procreation. In this myth he is destroyed by fire issuing from Śiva's third eye. Yet despite this clear association of Kāma with Śaivite mythology, in many of the texts such as the Ratnāvalī such sectarian links are absent and this myth is not even mentioned. It is most often Kāma's general association with fertility, sensuality, and abundance in nature that is stressed in such texts. We might recall, at

this point, Coomaraswamy's contention that Kāma was initially a yakṣa.<sup>466</sup> In Indian religion yakṣas are figures associated with nature and the fertility of nature. The Vasantotsava, as we have seen, is largely a fertility festival. It might not be improbable to suggest that the popularity of Kāma during this festival stems from the ancient and popular tradition of yakṣa worship. The worship of Kāma in the Ratnāvalī does not differ substantially from what we know of the worship of yakṣas. It is precisely Kāma's sectarian mythology that distinguishes him from other yakṣas in the Sanskrit tradition, and this mythology is not a component of the description in this text. Kāma appears here as a distinctly non-sectarian deity with essentially no definitive mythology.

To turn to a contrasting case, although Kāma is not the focus of sectarian devotion of one sect exclusively, in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa Kāma does emerge as a figure clearly associated with Śaivite mythology. He is subordinate to Śiva (destroyed by the fire of Śiva); he is dependent upon Śiva for rebirth. In this text, both Kāma and spring are reborn concurrently. That Kāma appears in this text in direct association with Śiva is significant. The mythological framework underlying the Spring Festival here, in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, is specifically defined. In the Ratnāvalī, the mythological framework was relatively undefined. In the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, Kāma has been given a more attractive role vis à vis the sectarian tradition: now he is no longer a non-specific deity worshipped simply in association with nature and fertility but by

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<sup>466</sup> Coomaraswamy, Yakṣas, pp. 43f.

his exploits becomes a Śaivite deity with a broader range of associative connotations. Here, then, sectarian interests begin to enter the festival of spring.

In at least one case, however, when the Vasantotsava becomes explicitly a sectarian festival focusing upon one of the major Sanskrit deities, there is no mention of Kāma. In the Virūpākṣavasantotsavacampū the festival revolves around the worship of Śiva and Pārvatī alone. The Vasantotsava is here described as a temple festival specifically sectarian in its orientation; the textual tradition of Śiva (Śiva the Hunter, the Householder, the Great Cosmic Deity) and regional Śiva-lore are freely drawn upon and give context to the celebration. In the Campū it is Śiva, the sexually aroused Hunter, who takes on the central role we have already found applicable to Kāma. One cannot but notice the similarities here between Kāma, the sexually potent Hunter armed with the arrows of love, and Śiva, the sexually potent Hunter roaming the forest in the Campū. Surely this connection facilitates the mythic transition from the Vasantotsava as a popular festival centering around Kāma to the Vasantotsava as a Brāhmanical festival whose major concern is the worship of Śiva. This text thus illustrates the manner in which the festival undergoes mythic re-working as the context in which it is celebrated changes. To summarize, then, the Vasantotsava is a multi-sectarian festival. Often centering on Kāma, it focusses on his general aspects (Ratnāvalī), capitalizes on his major Saivite connotations (Bhaviṣya Purāṇa), and through a process of association allows Kāma to be replaced entirely by a sectarian deity of like personality.

Regarding the myth cycles associated with the Spring Festival in the Ratnāvalī, Bhaviṣya Purāṇa (135), and the Campū, two other inter-related themes are evident. In all these festivals we see a complex power play of dominance and submission; Kāma confronts the king in the Ratnāvalī, Śiva dominates Kama and Kāma eventually triumphs over Śiva, re-emerging in the cosmos in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa. Similarly Śiva conquers the apsaras women and Pārvatī (in the Campū). These conquests seem to complement the celebration of the natural order of yearly, seasonal cycles, where one season also 'conquers' another.

A further characteristic of this festival's mythology related to the above is that it seems to support a given hierarchical power structure. In the Ratnāvalī the main player is the king and it is part of the purpose of the festival that his marriage and thus fecundity are celebrated, ensuring thereby the fecundity of the kingdom. In the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, Śiva's power and dominion over Kāma and, indeed, the cosmos, are established. In the Campū the locus of power on display at this time is both cosmic (Śiva) and mundane (the king). That our two other major sources detailed in Chapter Two, i.e., the Kathāsaritsāgara and the Vikramacarita, fail to make significant mention of Sanskrit mythology and that the stories in these two texts are dominated by kings would suggest that the festival here is concerned most obviously with the maintenance of political power alone. Indeed, an interpretation of the festivals in the Campū and the Ratnāvalī as primarily of political import is not without evidence. It might be suggested then that the Spring Festival in the Sanskrit context has, as one of its dominant concerns, the upholding of the power of the king



and his Brahmin officials. Sanskrit mythology is here subordinated to these concerns and adapted to this purpose. The mythology of the Spring Festival becomes a vehicle for the sanctioning of state authority.

The mythology of the Vaiṣṇava tradition as it is associated with the Spring Festival is more complicated. The primary Vaiṣṇava celebration of spring, Holī, revolves around the worship of Kṛṣṇa. The main deity connecting Holī and our texts is Pūtanā/Holākā, the demoness. She, like Kāma, is a minor deity in the Sanskrit tradition who may or may not appear in a sectarian context and also, like Kāma, the demoness is a yakṣa (yakṣī). Both Kāma and the demoness are destroyed by fire. In the Vaisnava context Kṛṣṇa is responsible for Holākā's destruction. The link here between this sectarian variant and other versions of the Spring Festival is not only the destruction of Holākā and the end of the year but also the motif of fire. It is to this, our second general point, that we now turn.

### Fire

Fire appears in a wide range of descriptions of this festival. This fire destroys but also gives precedent for renewal, a new beginning. Hence with the destruction of the old year, the new year is ushered in. Thus fire may be understood as a destructive, a creative, and a transformative force. Although Kāma is burnt, we know that deities in the Indian mythological world are rarely dead for long (just

as we know that the arrival of spring is inevitable).<sup>467</sup> Kāma will be reborn as the New Year is reborn and in an even more powerful form. The transformation of Kāma from death to life is the focus, in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa (135), of the festival as mentioned above. The fire which destroys the demoness, Holākā (Bhaviṣya, 132), must be regarded as analogous to the fire which destroys Kāma. Holākā and, more clearly in this version, the evil which her tormenting of children represents are destroyed by the fire and subsequent prosperity is ensured. The Vasantotsava here celebrates Holākā's destruction and in so doing anticipates future prosperity, just as the destruction of Kāma implies his regeneration in an even more powerful form.

The destruction of the old thus marks both an end and a transition. Fire may be seen to separate life from death. This tension between life and death is emphatic. It often manifests itself in the festival as a battle between two realms of human and cosmic experience, as a battle between order and disorder (Indra versus the demons, Kṛṣṇa's love battles, and chariot contests), between death and life (Holākā dies, children live; Kāma dies, Kāma is reborn), between winter and spring (the burning of the old year makes way for the new) and between the ascetic (Śiva, tapas) and the erotic (Kāma).

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<sup>467</sup>One might cite, for example, the death of Sati, the consort of Śiva, and her rebirth as Pārvatī or the destruction of Gaṇeśa, the son of Pārvatī and his reinstatement. See these stories in the Śiva Purāṇa, Skanda Purāṇa, and the Mahābhārata.

At the same time fire links the polar categories of life and death (the old must die for the new to be born). With fire, life turns into death and this death turns into new life. Fire thus represents a primordial source out of which the regenerated world of multiplicity will emerge. In keeping with this pre-formed stage, in the festival normal social categories are reversed and, hence, social barriers are broken down, people go about "behaving like ghosts," bad qualities become good, kings are excluded from their capitals, women take on dominant roles, and children become warriors. It is also possible at this time for mortals to influence immortals (children destroy the demoness); immortals descend to the world to influence the lives of men (Śiva appears in the forest); and men can influence the patterns of nature (kicking a tree brings it into bloom).

### Marriage

The Vasantotsava is a festival of renewal and the motif which most clearly suggests social regeneration is that of marriage. The Śiva/Pārvatī myth in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa (135) establishes the significance of the marriage motif. Kāma is explicitly connected with their marriage. In the first myth in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa (135) Kāma's revival by Śiva is indicative of Śiva's change in heart with respect to Pārvatī. He is now attracted to her and, as a token of his affection, grants Kāma his life. In most of the Purāṇas, Śiva's attraction to Pārvatī is the prerequisite for their marriage and the subsequent birth of a son necessary to defeat the demon Tāraka. Kāma's revival signals the success of his mission. This event is celebrated annually as

detailed in the Virūpākṣavasantotsavacampū. The marriage motif is further emphasized in the ritual activity prescribed in chapter 135 of the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa. The wife is to worship first Kāma and second her husband as if he were Kāma himself. By so doing the marriage relationship is reinforced and positive results of long life, fortune, and prosperity guaranteed. Also in the Ratnāvalī we find a lengthy description of the Vasantotsava which culminates in the marriage of an earthly king which, though politically arranged, is a love marriage. Marriage, as a major theme in both the description of the Vasantotsava and the Phālgunotsava in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, is transitional and reflects a change in 'state.' So too the Vasantotsava celebrates a change in the yearly cycle of the seasons.

The theme of struggle implicit in this festival seems also related to marriage. The struggle is to bring the potency of the wild or natural order into the civilized world world of social order. The male (be he mortal as in the case of the king in the Ratnāvalī or immortal as, for example, Śiva in the Campū) is sexually excited by an outsider. In the case of the Ratnāvalī, the outsider is a low class, foreign girl; in the case of Śiva, it is forest maidens (apsarases) who play this role. The young girl in the Ratnāvalī is brought into the social order or 'domesticated' through the discovery of her true origins and her marriage to the king. The energy of the king, aroused by the young princess Ratnāvalī, is redirected along socially acceptable lines. The apsarases, in the Campū, are abandoned for the more proper wife, Pārvatī. In this latter case, Śiva, the wild Hunter, is himself domesticated, or brought to the level of regulated, acceptable, social

existence. The medium through which his domestication occurs is Pārvatī. He brings with him to their relationship sexual excitement from the forest. The battle between Śiva and Pārvatī reflects a struggle between Hunter motifs (conquest of nature, aggressive sexuality) and agricultural motifs (fertility of the earth, seasonal cycles, and women). Śiva represents the romanticized Hunter while Pārvatī represents female fertility. In both cases, the Ratnāvalī and the Campū, there occurs a transference of erotic energy from the wild or untamed, natural order into the civilized realm of men and gods and it is this transference which is celebrated during the Vasantotsava.

As stated above, in these two texts the marriage motif is further linked with political regeneration. Indeed, the king most often supervises springtime renewal: it is his duty to ensure that the festivities take place and in turn his condition is intimately related to the survival and growth of his kingdom. A flourishing king as in the Ratnāvalī effects a flourishing kingdom; a debilitated king as in the Kathāsaritsāgara must be deposed.

The susceptibility of this festival to political re-interpretation is most obvious in the case of the Vasantotsva in Vijayanagara where the supreme position of the king is seen to be sanctioned by the great god Śiva. The festival celebrates no mere human marriage, not even of the king, but the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī. Regeneration, effected by this marriage on the cosmic level, is generalized to the political level where the king becomes the mortal counterpart of Śiva, effecting the stability of his realm. The political stability of the Vijayanagara empire at this time was, indeed, highly dependent on the personage of

the king. That his rule here is connected with Śiva surely adds credibility to his claims to political power. What we find here is a connection established between the cosmic and mortal realms of existence and articulated during the Vasantotsava. The Vasantotsava focuses the participant's attention on renewal and rejuvenation that is both cosmic (in the case of the marriage of the gods) and temporal (in the case of human marriages). In either case marriage is the prelude to fertility, our next general point.

### Fertility

The Spring Festival is obviously one of fertility and seasonality. The rites of spring have clear fertility overtones. At the prompting of Pārvatī, Śiva revives Kāma and by this act the cosmos is renewed and rendered productive. Women worship Kāma for prosperity and children. The role of the queen, here, is particularly important. The activities of women prompt trees and flowers to blossom. The garden is often the setting for the performance of the rituals of the Vasantotsava, where specific plants are made to flower by a ritual touch. Spring is a time of renewal both in the vegetative kingdom as well as in the human kingdom and renewal is found throughout the Vasantotsava to be transferable from nature to human society, from human society to nature, and within human society from the king to the people.

Productivity is, therefore, one of the major concerns of this festival as the rituals outlined in the previous chapter indicate. This

productive period is preceded by a period of decay (winter). Hence, not only do the ritual symbols described above imply production and creation but, implicitly, also destruction and decay. There is thus a sense of ambiguity in the system of symbols around which the festival is composed. Ashes convey the meaning of death and renewal. Red powder conveys the meaning of fertility and potency as well as taboo and pollution (uncleanness). There is also ambiguity in the social context of these rituals.

The ambiguity is highlighted particularly with respect to the social status of participants. Powder throwing has a levelling effect: it reduces all participants to one common denominator. On this occasion there are no visible caste distinctions - individuals are indistinguishable from one another: everyone is covered with powder or mud. This visual loss of structural identity is reminiscent of other rituals involving transitions from one state to another. In this case the transition is a predetermined annual event. It does not involve the passage of an individual from one stage to another but, rather, of an entire society from winter to spring.

The eroticism of the spring celebrations as found in the Ratnāvalī is characterized by a certain amount of social freedom and licentiousness. Thus the Spring Festival is a peculiar mix of control and freedom: the festival occurs within the city under the auspices of kings and Brahmins and at the same time social barriers are purposefully broken down and the erotic permeates the ritual. The breakdown of social relationships is indicated by rituals such as playing 'Holī' (throwing colored powder), mixing of castes and men and women

in the streets, sex, licence, and powder. Eroticism and sexual licence as brought out in the throwing of powder and dancing which comprise this festival reflect the sexual potency of the season.

Our textual descriptions thus give us a picture of the Vasantotsava as a solidly established festival figuring prominently in Sanskrit texts and taking a variety of forms depending upon the specific text in which it is described. At the same time, as we will point out, the festival consists of certain rituals which, although linked in textual descriptions, cannot be traced consistently to the Brāhmanical, Sanskrit speaking, literate tradition. The question now to be addressed is whether or not the Vasantotsava has its roots in similar Vedic celebrations, or belongs more with lokācarika, or folk rites.

### Vedic Precedents

The seasonal sacrifices (cāturmāsyāni) and the Mahāvrata are two Vedic celebrations characterized by certain distinctive elements we have come to associate with the Spring Festival. The rituals which make up these sacrifices are similar, as we shall see, in many respects to the medieval Indian spring celebrations. The festival (utsava) tradition in India did not develop in cultural isolation but, rather, reflects a general shift in the Indian tradition from the sacrifice (yajña) of the Vedic period to the 'festival' of the medieval and modern period.

Various frameworks exist for interpretating this shift of emphasis. Redfield, for example, in Peasant Society and Culture



interprets Indian culture in terms a Great Tradition and a Little Tradition; M.N. Śrinivas refers to a Sanskrit and a non-Sanskrit tradition and speaks of Sanskritization as a means by which non-Sanskrit traditions filter upward into Sanskrit-speaking traditions; McKim Marriott refers further to 'universalization' (movement upward into a Sanskrit tradition) and 'parochialization' (movement downward into a folk tradition).<sup>468</sup> The categories of Sanskrit (Brāhmanical) and non-Sanskrit (popular) traditon are useful to some extent in understanding the various features of the Vasantotsava. That the Vasantotsava is subject to change and adaptation regionally is clear from our examination of this festival in Chapter Two. Whether or not the Vasantotsava as we find it in classical texts developed out of a tradition of Vedic sacrifice or, rather, is a festival reflective of popular celebrations that existed concurrent with Vedic celebrations, may never be fully resolved. We cannot, however, fail to note the parallels existing between the Vasantotsava and Vedic sacrificial rituals.

Firstly, the celebration of specifically seasonal festivals such as the Vasantotsava has its counterpart in more ancient times. Just as many purāṇas and Dharmaśāstra texts deal with the seasons in order,<sup>469</sup> so too are the seasons connected to the temporal sacrificial cycle. In this context, it is the four-monthly sacrifices

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<sup>468</sup>See Singer, When a Great Tradition Modernizes, pp. 7f.

<sup>469</sup>Someśvara, who, in the Mānasollāsa, describes festivals treats them in order of the seasons. See, Raghavan, Festivals, p. 61.

(Cāturmāsyāni)<sup>470</sup> which are relevant. The Vasantotsava is a seasonal festival: it is a festival which marks the advent of spring; the cāturmāsyas were sacrifices corresponding to seasonal changes. They are described in the Kauśītaki Brāhmaṇa as follows:<sup>471</sup>

The four-monthly sacrifices are sacrifices of healing: therefore are they performed in the joinings of the seasons, for in the joinings of the seasons pain is born. (v.1)

With reference to these sacrifices generally, Heesterman remarks as follows:

The cāturmāsyas can therefore be summed up as the ritual evocation of the universal process of maturing and birth in the vegetable, animal and human spheres through the year; this process is represented as a victorious course through the universe both in respect to time (seasons) and in respect to space (the three worlds), by which the sacrificer encompasses and even becomes the whole of the universe. (p. 29)

Spring is the foremost of the sacrificial seasons according to the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa and the spring sacrifice (Vaiśvadeva cāturmāsyā) is performed at the beginning of the year on the full moon of Phālguna, i.e., at the end of winter and the beginning of spring.<sup>472</sup> Hence, in the Kauśītaki Brāhmaṇa, we read:<sup>473</sup>

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<sup>470</sup> Although these sacrifices were, according to Heesterman, optional, the caturmāsyā sacrifices become an integral part of the Rājasuya. See Heesterman, The Ancient Royal Consecration, pp. 27f.

<sup>471</sup> cited by Keith, Rigveda Brāhmaṇas, p. 371.

<sup>472</sup> Keith, Rigveda Brāhmaṇas, p. 370.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid.

He who prepares the 4 monthly sacrifices begins on the full moon night in the Phālgunis. (v. 1)

The spring sacrifice (Vaiśvadeva), like the Vasantotsava, was a sacrifice aimed at promoting fertility. In this light Heesterman comments:<sup>474</sup>

The first consideration is the relation of the year to the ripening of the crops and the procreation of man and cattle: 'by means of the year (Prajāpati) caused offspring to be born from him'; as TB.1.6.2.2, dealing with the cāturmāsya, has it. Prajāpati, the Lord of offspring, is as a rule equated with the year. Further the year is considered the full term of pregnancy. The same idea is brought out by SV 5.2.4.1ff, where the cāturmāsya are summed up as follows: by the vaiśvadeva sacrifice the creatures are brought forth,...

The seasons mark off the calendar year. The Vedic spring sacrifice, like the Vasantotsava, celebrates renewal. The actual rituals of the cāturmāsya, however, are totally different from anything we have seen in the Spring Festival of later times and this may well reflect a shift in social and political concerns. Vedic people were primarily pastoral and their rituals centered around elaborate sacrifices. The Cāturmāsyañi are comparatively minor sacrifices and textual descriptions of the seasonal sacrifices are not as frequent as descriptions of other sacrifices nor are the rites of the cāturmāsyañi as elaborate. The ritual of our medieval Vasantotsava, however, does seem to be an elaborate affair as it is described in several texts. The centrality of fertility of the earth,

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<sup>474</sup>Heesterman, The Ancient Royal Consecration, p. 28.

and women, and the emphasis on existing political and social structures (i.e., kingship and marriage) as essential to this fertility suggests that the Spring Festival our medieval texts describe was of particular concern to a stable, stationary society dependent upon agriculture for its livelihood.

Second, the rituals of the Mahāvrata are often cited as precedent to the Vasantotsava. This celebration is part of the Sattra or Sacrificial session. All performers are consecrated brahmins and all share in the benefits of the offering. After an initial period of ten days of preparing soma the Mahāvrata takes place. It is performed variously as a one day rite or a Sattra and is described in the Taittirīya Saṁhitā (VII.5.9) in itself. Keith describes it as follows:<sup>475</sup>

It is clearly an old festival of the winter solstice and not even originally, as Hillebrandt holds, of the summer solstice, when the strengthening of the sun was an essential duty. There is beaten an earth drum, doubtless to scare away the demons who might attempt to overthrow the power of the sun; the Hotṛ sits on a swing and is swung to and fro, to represent the path of the sun in the sky, and strengthen its power to perform it; ritual abuse is exchanged for fertility purposes, between a student or, in a later usage, a Magadha, and a hetaira; there is actually carried out sexual intercourse; the consecrated persons are alternately praised and reviled; there is a mimic fight between an Aryan and a Śūdra for the possession of a white round skin which is declared to be a symbol of the sun; the skin of an unfruitful cow is hung up or stretched out and warriors pierce through it with arrows, perhaps as a rain spell. Women celebrate to the sound of the lute in the south the patrons of the ceremony; maids dance round the fire with water pitchers, while the stotra is being

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<sup>475</sup> Keith, Religion and Philosophy of the Veda, p. 351.

performed; they pour the water on the fire, and their song shows that they desire richness in milk with water for the cows. The desire of heat and rain seems clearly united; the position of the sun nearest earth is indicated by the priest, who touches the board of the swing and the earth with one hand, and says, 'the God hath united with the Goddess.'

Almost all aspects of this description are part, at some point, of our Spring Festival, as described in Chapter Two. In both early and later descriptions of the Spring Festival there is music, women participate extensively, and swinging takes place. Both the Mahāvratā and the Vasantotsava are characterized by licentious behavior. One interpretation of the Mahāvratā as given by Sarkar is that this celebration is the Brāhmanical counterpart of the popular Spring Festival (Vasantotsava).<sup>476</sup> Other scholars interpret the Mahāvratā as a folk festival of antiquity which became attached to a Sattra or Vedic sacrifice, begging thus the question of exact Vedic sources for late festivals. Some scholars find the existence of such a festival sanctioned by the Vedas an embarrassment altogether. Thus Apte, for example, says that the Mahāvratā specially pertains to Prajāpati's creation of the world and the intercourse between men and women which takes place in a screened shed is probably symbolic of this same creation. In this light he remarks that it therefore 'cannot be justifiably maintained that the intermingling of men and women ran into extremes of promiscuity during this sacrifice'.<sup>477</sup> Yet, as we have seen

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<sup>476</sup> Cited by Apte, Marriage, p. 55.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid.

in the case of the classical Spring Festival (Vasantotsava), the motif of sexual creation spans both cosmic and temporal spheres. Certainly the licentious behavior here has symbolic meaning but at the same time our evidence suggests that such behavior was actually carried out. Hence, the mortal counterpart of cosmic sex (Śiva and Pārvatī, Prajāpati's creation; Śiva's revival of Kāma) is not to be denied.

It ought to be noted that there is a considerable time gap between the initial appearance of the Vasantotsava in Sanskrit texts (Kāmasūtra [3rd c. B.C.]) and the fairly elaborate descriptions of this festival in texts like the Ratnāvalī (7th c. A.D.). In early texts mentioning this festival it is dealt with only briefly: this shows only that it was known to Sanskrit authors. It is not inconceivable that the Vedic sacrifices described above were performed concurrently with other spring celebrations, and that elements typical of these spring celebrations were incorporated into 'Brāhmaṇical' rituals and, indeed, 'Brāhmaṇical' elements were incorporated into popular celebrations. The relationship between Vedic and popular rites is not linear nor mono-directional but a much more complicated organic one. In later texts the Spring Festival becomes important subject matter for Sanskrit authors and a pivotal subject for depicting various Sanskrit themes (e.g., Kālidāsa and Harṣa incorporate the Spring Festival in establishing a mood or sentiment). What is recorded, then, in the texts reviewed in Chapter Two, reflects the intertwining of both popular and Brāhmaṇical rituals. Our sources are Sanskrit accounts of what undoubtedly included also non-Sanskrit elements. They show the manner in which popular rites may be incorporated into the Sanskrit

tradition becoming, in turn, imbued with meaning in the context of the Sanskrit literature and religion.

### Recent Accounts of the Vasantotsava

By comparing our textual descriptions to the accounts of this festival from modern times, we further flesh out our picture of the Vasantotsava and highlight the richness and varied components of the festival as it is celebrated regionally today. The diversity with which this festival is now celebrated corresponds to what we find in our texts as does its thematic components. Although it is not the intent here to examine these modern celebrations in any detail the chart below outlines the most frequent elements of which this festival is composed both in our texts as well as in recent accounts of this festival. Our chart is further supplemented by Appendix One which gives a more specific overview of the festival in its modern manifestations. This appendix is not meant to be definitive but represents a sampling of accounts, both first and second hand, gathered by N. K. Bose and published in Culture and Society in India.<sup>477</sup> These twentieth century descriptions contained in Appendix One confirm the commonality of elements which are known under the rubric of the Spring Festival and which we more broadly encountered in our pre-modern textual descriptions of the

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<sup>477</sup>N.K. Bose, Culture and Society in India (Reprint of 1967 ed.; Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1977), pp. 36-84.

CHART \*

INCIDENCE OF SPRING FESTIVAL MOTIFS

IN MODERN ACCOUNTS

	Bonfire	Effigy	Brahmins	Ashes	Image	Swing	Powder	Songs etc	
Calcutta	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Midnapur	x			x					
Bankura					x		x		
Rajshahi	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Mymensingh	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
F. and Dacca	x			x	x	x	x		
Pabna	x	x	x			x	x		
Barisol	x			x	x				
Jessore	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Puri	x	x			x	x	x		
Puri	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Orissa	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Gaya	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Various	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Gorakhpur	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Bankura	x	x							
Murshidabad	x	x							
Gujerat	x	x	x	x	x		x		
Central P.	x		x	x			x		

\* See Appendix 1, p. 285



Vasantotsava. As the Chart shows, the actual performance of spring rites varies from province to province and a number of motifs appear no matter where the festival is situated. Some locales perform an almost 'classical' celebration, while others only a minor form. This suggests not only the mutability of spring rites depending on location and circumstance, but also the pan-Indian application of these spring rites. As our texts themselves suggest, the Vasantotsva is a popular rite celebrated at all levels of society in whatever is an appropriate form. There are a variety of elements which are common to our texts and the modern celebrations. The throwing of powder, singing, dancing, and general merriment appear to be ubiquitous, pervading this festival in its many descriptions.

A feature which dominates the Spring Festival in recent accounts is a bonfire. A fire of sorts is a prominent feature of the Vasantotsava as it is found in the Bhavisya Purāṇa wherein it is associated with both Kāma (135) and the demoness Holākā (132). This association is found in recent accounts outlined by Bose only in Bihar where we find Holākā directly linked with the bonfire. Nowhere, here, are the exploits of Kāma mentioned.<sup>479</sup> The paucity of accounts in which these deities appear would suggest either that both the worship of Kāma and the destruction of the demoness so popular in our medieval texts have been mainly forgotten, at least in North India, or, that the

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<sup>479</sup>Our recent accounts are incomplete in the sense that the most detailed accounts hail primarily from North and Central India. There is some evidence to suggest that Holākā and Kāma are still a feature of this festival in both Maharastra and South India.

worship of Kāma and/or Holākā was never central to this festival in these locations. In some areas the worship of Kāma and the killing of Holākā have been superseded by the worship of Kṛṣṇa. Specifically, a few modern descriptions link Kṛṣṇa's destruction of the demoness Pūtānā with the bonfire. Just as frequently, however, the relationship of the deity with the rite is unarticulated and there is no mention of a demoness at all. As Marriott points out, the association of Kṛṣṇa with this festival is late historically and is textually sanctioned only after the fact (Kṛṣṇa's exploits are adapted to the Spring Festival) by Kṛṣṇa's destruction of the demoness Pūtānā.<sup>480</sup> It is the effect of the bonfire, though, that completely overshadows that of the deity. Hence the image of Kṛṣṇa is brought out and carried around the fire but the full impact of the festival is only felt when the fire is lit and the dancing begins. This would suggest that though the bonfire is a standard feature of the Spring Festival, the mythology associated with this festival is flexible and subject to change.

The bonfire appears in all of the modern descriptions save two. The bonfire here described is similar in many respects to the fire typical of European spring and midsummer fire festivals. The bonfire is imbued with magical properties and is renowned for its ability to enhance fertility of the crops, men, and nature. Regarding these, Frazer in The Golden Bough remarks:

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<sup>480</sup>M. Marriott, "The Feast of Love" in Singer, (ed.), Krishna: Myths, Rites and Attitudes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 207-210.

The custom of kindling great bonfires, leaping over them,...would seem to have been practically universal throughout Europe,... And as the ceremonies themselves resemble each other, so do the benefits which the people expect to reap from them. Whether applied in the form of bonfires blazing at fixed points, or of torches carried about from place to place, or of embers and ashes taken from the smouldering heap of fuel, the fire is believed to promote the growth of the crops and the welfare of man and beast, either positively by stimulating them, or negatively by averting the dangers and calamities which threaten them from such causes as thunder and lightning, conflagration, blight, mildew, vermin, sterility, disease, and not least of all witchcraft.(p. 840)

Here fire determines the fertility of the soil (Midnapur, Puri, Chapra) and renders the natural world fertile (in Chapra and Muzaftarpur wood burnt in the Holī fire is thrown over trees to render them more fertile). The power of the fire can be turned to account for healing purposes as in the Central Provinces where ashes cure disease, in Midnapur and Bihar where fruits are burned in the fire to heal sores in the mouth (especially in young children), in Rajshahi where ashes kill bugs and cure itches, in Mymensingh where charred wood from the Holi fire prevents fire, and in Dacca and Barison where it prevents fire, and kills rats and white ants. As well, in Gorakhpur and Gujerat ashes from the fire are symbolic of good luck. The bonfire may be understood not only as regenerative and curative but also purificatory and transitional as well. Often the bonfire is composed of purposefully impure substances: last year's refuse or mixed up articles. (In Bihar and Gorakhpur boys carry away all sorts of combustibles.) There is ample evidence here to suggest that the rites associated with the fire during the Spring Festival in modern India have much in common with the rites associated with the fire described by Frazer in Europe.

As noted above in our general discussion of the Spring Festival, the bonfire is a central component and a thematically appropriate symbol for the spring celebrations. It is a prominent feature of the festival as described in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa. At the same time we cannot fail to note that this fire is absent in many classical descriptions of this festival including the Ratnāvalī, Vikramacarita, Virūpākṣavasantotsavacampū, and the Kathāsaritsāgara. This would suggest either that the bonfire was of little or no interest to earlier Sanskrit authors and hence omitted from their descriptions of the Spring Festival, an unlikely supposition, or that the bonfire was not everywhere a central component of the festival rites, but rather a component of the festival in one of its regional variants. Keeping in mind the Śāstradīpikā's assertion that Holākā was a local, Eastern custom, we might have here an example of a custom of interest to literary authors in the East which spread out in time over all of India, and appropriately so, for the bonfire with its rich symbolic association is easily linked to the general themes of the Spring Festival more usually articulated in the texts through Kāma.

We might examine the prominent players in this festival. By far the most important officials in our texts are kings and not Brahmins. The king, as we have seen in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa (135), Virūpākṣavasantotsavacampū, Ratnāvalī, Vikramacarita, and the Kathāsaritsāgara, is the chief performer in the festival or the one who inaugurates it. His duty is to see that the Vasantotsava, which is responsible for the joy and prosperity of his people and country, be

celebrated correctly. Kings appear in the Vasantotsava not only as conveners of the festival but, according to various descriptions, as participants in it. In this respect one finds them cavorting with their queens or various other females in the pleasure gardens. There seems, further, to be a connection in our texts between the presence of the king and the efficacy of the ritual. In the Virūpāksavasantotsavacampū the king alone makes the car of Śiva and Pārvatī move. The arousal of the king's passion as illustrated by the Ratnāvalī and the Kathāsarit-sāgara reflects an intimate relationship between the mood and the general success of the festival and the mood and general success of the king. Given modern political changes, the centrality of the king is obviously not reflected in our modern accounts. However this general lack of mention of Brahmins in our texts is verified by modern accounts. Although some descriptions include a homa sacrifice at which Brahmins may officiate, it is more often the case that they are not mentioned as taking an official role during the proceedings. The insignificance of Brahmins and the prominence of low castes, women, and children during the festival, as described in our texts from Chapter Two and in Appendix One, and the absence of a fire sacrifice in other modern descriptions (especially amongst tribal groups like the Gonds, Tharus, and Labaras), has prompted scholars like Bose to suggest that the festival was not originally a part of Brāhmaṇical culture. Our authors, understandably, emphasize the king's role; yet there seems to be a fair bit of evidence that the festival itself was 'popular' and went on at all levels of society in whatever was an appropriate form. As we have seen, the

relationship between the Spring Festival and Brahmanical orthodoxy has been a complex one throughout history. For further details of the modern festivals the reader is referred to Appendix One.

### Conclusion

Clearly the celebration of spring manifests itself in many ways. The ritual activities of which such celebrations are formed combine in various patterns, each emerging as a distinct whole, a coherent entity centered amidst the fundamental themes of death and rebirth. The Vasantotsava is the general term applied to the variety of festivals, of which each is a legitimate Spring Festival but none is exhaustive of the possibilities of celebrating spring. Individual festivals have always been described in Sanskrit literature as clustering around spring (see, for example, the Kāmasūtra). Such festivals often coalesce, forming larger more specific units (Madanamahotsava and flower festivals) which, in turn, may be further absorbed into yet larger events, occasionally giving rise to an elaborate Vasantotsava consisting of a composite of multiple elements. It might further be said that these celebrations survive at least thematically as the modern Holī. From our descriptions there emerges a pattern: spring celebrations are pan-sectarian (many sects separately celebrate them, sectarian interests may or may not dominate the festivities); seasonal (marking the end of winter and the beginning of spring); and they are fertility festivals (focussing on productivity - of the land, political community, and of individuals).

No one ritual and no one ritual figure appears invariably. A variety of elements appears in different descriptions and the festival contains several multivalent symbols in systems which correspond to the themes underlying the celebrations and could exhibit various shifts. The essential focus of the festival is regeneration: the goal was to ensure the future productivity and stability of the land, the community, and individual persons within that community. Further, the Vasantotsava incorporates a broad spectrum of human concerns: in the sphere of politics, it can be turned to account to celebrate and reinforce the power of the king; in the social sphere, it is a time for general entertainment and merrymaking indicative of the annual renewal of society through the breakdown and temporary reorganization of societal structures; and in the sphere of religion, it celebrates the exploits of the gods and establishes a link between the activities of gods and men, human marriages echoing divine marriages, human worship renewing divine intention in the creative cycle of the universe.

## Appendix One

### Common Features of the Spring Festival<sup>\*\*</sup>

	WEST BENGAL (Calcutta)	WEST BENGAL (Midnapur)
1. Bonfire	in front of the Kṛṣṇa temple	one or many bonfires, at least one in a nearby paddyfield
2. Effigy	human	none recorded
3. Officials	homa performed by a brahmin priest in the temple	
4. Uses of ashes/fire	ashes applied to the forehead	ashes applied to the forehead. Fruits are thrown into the fire and then eaten (it is believed they cure sores in the mouth). Whichever way the bonfire falls, the fields lying in that direction are believed to be most fertile.
5. Image/myth	image of Kṛṣṇa or Śālagrām worshipped and carried around the fire seven times.	
6. Swing	image of Kṛṣṇa swung	
7. Powder	in conjunction with swinging*	
8. Songs, obscenity, etc.	in some villages	

<sup>\*\*</sup>Derived from Bose, Culture and Society in India, pp. 59-84.

\*one does not play Holi with one's superiors but it is etiquette to place some colored powder on their feet and salute them.



	WEST BENGAL (Bankura)	NORTH BENGAL (Rajshahi)
1. Bonfire	not stated	yes, hut burnt.
2. Effigy		sheep effigy burnt.
3. Officials		priest performs homa, reads <u>mantras</u> , and lights fire.
4. Uses of ashes/fire		ashes are preserved in the house to kill bugs and it is believed that a paste of ashes cures itches
5. Image/Myth	idols of Hari are carried through the streets with fireworks	<u>Śālagrām</u> carried around the fire.
6. Swing		Every house that burns a sheep's hut also performs the swing celebration*
7. Powder	in conjunction with the procession powder is thrown on Brahmins	powder ( <u>abir</u> ) is sprinkled on the image ( <u>Śālagrām</u> ) and powder is placed on the feet of one's superiors in return for blessings
8. Songs, obscenity, etc.		
9. King of Holī		King of Holī smeared with dirt

\*The swing festival is celebrated, here, in commemoration of Viṣṇu's victory over the demon Mera. (The lord became tired after his fight so the gods seated him on a swing in order to please Him.)

EAST BENGAL  
(Mymensingh)

NORTH BENGAL  
(Faridpur and Dacca)

- |                       |   |  |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| 1. Bonfire            | for three days, hut is burnt  | yes  |
| 2. Effigy             | burning of a sheep's effigy   | sheep's effigy or effigy of a female form  |
| 3. Officials          | priest worships image ( <u>Śalagrām</u> ) and lights fire with matches and purified mantras. Homa performed by priest | none stated  |
| 4. Uses of ashes/fire | charred wood is kept in the house to prevent fire in the coming year  | charred wood prevents fire and kills rats and white ants   |
| 5. Image/Myth         | Kṛṣṇa   | priest circumambulates the hut with the image. Image is also carried in procession through the village |
| 6. Swing              | swinging of Kṛṣṇa   | swinging of <u>Śalagrām</u> on a mud platform of three layers. Image is swung with Lakṣmī and Govinda  |
| 7. Powder             | in conjunction with swinging  | in conjunction with swinging and in conjunction with procession through the village.                   |

## EAST BENGAL

(Pabna)

## EAST BENGAL

(Barisol)

- |                       |   |   |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| 1. Bonfire            | hut burnt   | hut burnt.                                    |
| 2. Effigy             | sheep   |   |
| 3. Officials          | priest worships image of Kṛṣṇa or <u>Śālagrām</u> and then sets fir to the bonfire.             |   |
| 4. Uses of ashes/fire |   | charred wood to keep away bugs and white ants |
| 5. Image/Myth         |   | <u>Śālagrām</u> worshipped in the hut         |
| 6. Swing              | swinging of Kṛṣṇa and Lakṣmī and Viṣṇu on ornamented platform                                   |   |
| 7. Powder             | Red powder only on the day of the swing festival. On the other days colored water is permitted. |   |

## JESSORE

## PURI (Orissa)

1. Bonfire

yes

yes

2. Effigy

sheep's effigy.

3. Officials

priest circumambulates  
the hut seven times  
and sets fire to it.  
The image is carried  
around the fire and  
then brought back  
and carried around  
seven more times.

5. Image/Myth

Śalagrām

image of Govinda and  
Lakṣmī and 5 other Śiva  
images carried in  
procession through the  
village

6. Swing

Kṛṣṇa

Govinda and Lakṣmī and  
earth goddess.

7. Powder

in conjunction with  
worship of deity

image covered with red  
powder

## PURI

ORISSA  
(Cutback)

- |                       |  |   |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| 1. Bonfire            | straw shed, central pole and straw, dung, blankets, wood, etc, piled on the fire                               | fire is obtained from the blacksmith  |
| 2. Effigy             | priest touched a lamb with the flames, then lights fire  | sheep burnt in front of the temple  |
| 3. Officials          | priest brings out images, performs <u>homa</u> and lights fire from the <u>homa</u> . Priest circles the fire. | priest performs homa and lights the fire. Kings representative officiates at the <u>homa</u>                    |
| 4. Uses of ashes/fire | belief that the fields lying on the side of the bonfire towards which the flame leans will bear a heavier crop | next morning married girls come to the spot and sweep away the ashes and make decorative drawings on the ground |
| 5. Image/Myth         | surrogate forms of Jaganatha carried around the fire in procession (everyone joins in)                         | images of Radha and Kṛṣṇa carried round the pile  |
| 6. Swing              | Kṛṣṇa  | Kṛṣṇa   |
| 7. Powder             | in conjunction with swinging. Also in conjunction with the procession of the King of Holī                      | in conjunction with swinging and on the king of Holī  |

	BIHAR (Gaya)	BIHAR (Various reports)
1. Bonfire	yes. boys steal combustibles for it	<p>-heaps of articles.</p> <p>-Combustible articles stacked to resemble a temple.</p> <p>-The branch of a tree is planted in the ground and wood piled around it.</p>
2. Effigy	bamboo post set in centre and betel nuts suspended from it.	
3. Officials	Brahmin priest performs worship and sets bonfire on fire	<p>-Brahmin recites mantra and circles the fire and makes an offering.</p> <p>-the oldest inhabitants of the village set fire to it.</p> <p>-five men (one of whom must be a Brahmin) light the fire.</p> <p>-anyone whose father is dead (or a simpleton) can set fire to it.</p> <p>-only one born at a specific time can set it on fire.</p> <p>-only a Brahmin born at a specific time.</p> <p>-only a very low caste Hindu.</p>

- |                                 |                                      |  |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| 4. Uses of<br>ashes/fire        | not recorded                         | <p>-offerings burnt in the fire are recovered as a remedy for diseases of the teeth.</p> <p>-people carry ears of wheat and rice and singe them in the fire.</p> <p>-a belief that if a child is given the parched grains to eat, it would not suffer trouble during teething.</p> <p>-the prospects of the coming year are divined from the way in which the burning pile falls down.</p> <p>-burnt pieces of wood are thrown over the trees to render them more fertile.</p> |
| 5. Image/Myth                   |                                      | <p>-traced to Holākā and Prahād.</p>   |
| 7. Powder                       | colored powder<br>offered to Magadeo | <p>some places before the fire, others after the fire, some not at all.</p>  |
| 8. Songs,<br>obscenity,<br>etc. | men and women abuse<br>each other    | <p>sometimes men and women abuse each other.</p>   |

## UNITED PROVINCES

## General

## Gorakhpur

- |                              |                      |   |
|------------------------------|----------------------|---|
| 1. Bonfire                   | yes                  | boys gather anything<br>combustible they can find   |
| 2. Effigy                    | no information given |   |
| 3. Officials                 |                      | priest performs homa and<br>circles the fire five times   |
| 4. Uses of<br>ashes/fire     |                      | men parch a linseed plant<br>and hang it upon the main<br>entrance to the house for<br>good luck. Boys sprinkle<br>ashes on everybody.<br>Tumeric and betel nut and<br>a copper pice is burried<br>underground and a post is<br>set up over the fire<br>(representing the old<br>year). |
| 5. Image/Myth                |                      |   |
| 6. Swing                     |                      | Rama and Sītā swung in<br>the houses of the wealthy   |
| 7. Powder                    |                      | powder and mud flung at<br>each other. See also<br>ashes  |
| 8. Obscene<br>songs,<br>etc. |                      | Kabir songs and indecent<br>amusement among the lower<br>castes   |

## BANKURA

## MURSHIDABAD

- |            |  |                |
|------------|--|----------------|
| 1. Bonfire | yes  | yes            |
| 2. Effigy  | burning of a human<br>effigy in a ceremony<br>called "Chanchari" | sheep's effigy |



## UNITED PROVINCES

## RAJPUTANA

(Benares)

- |                           |  |                                       |
|---------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Bonfire                | altars raised on public roads made of wood and straw piled in a heap and garlands, powder etc. thrown on it  | yes                                   |
| 2. Effigy                 |  |                                       |
| 3. Officials              |  | Brahmin lights it and performs a homa |
| 4. Uses of ashes/fire     | See powder   |                                       |
| 5. Image/Myth             |  | central pole represents Prahlād       |
| 6. Swing                  |  |                                       |
| 7. Powder                 | people throw ashes   |                                       |
| 8. Songs, obscenity, etc. | people dance around the fire. Two figures made of wood representing a male and female in the sexual act and worked mechanically, indecent jokes with women and men etc. People worship the fire and stay up all night singing and dancing. Young men wander about the streets in gangs, singing and dancing. |                                       |

## GUJERAT

## CENTRAL PROVINCES

- |                       |  |  |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| 1. Bonfire            | from the kitchen.<br>Several fires   | two fires per village (one for the villagers called Holī and one for the Mahars called Holā) |
| 2. Effigy             | idol made of rags and phallic symbol burnt   |  |
| 3. Officials          | fire set by ruler (if no ruler the leaders of the Holākā players light it)   | manager of the house sets the fire. Worship etc. by priests                                  |
| 4. Uses of ashes/fire | smoke must go straight up. If it tumbles to one side this is bad luck. Virgin girls mix ash with clay and prepare images of Gaurī. Also ashes are preserved for good luck    | ashes cure disease   |
| 5. Image/Myth         | image of Śiva carried round the fire and worshipped  |  |
| 6. Swing              |  | none   |
| 7. Powder             | syringes and color in Vaishṇavite temples, nothing in the Śaiva temples. Powder scattered on the floor of temples and walls. Powder flung especially at newly married women. | dust and powder thrown   |

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