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Revealing Śiva's superiority by retelling Viṣṇu's deeds: Viṣṇu's manifestation myths in the Skandapurāṇa

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Citation

Dokter-Mersch, S. (2021, April 15). *Revealing Śiva's superiority by retelling Viṣṇu's deeds: Viṣṇu's manifestation myths in the Skandapurāṇa*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3160305>

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Issue Date: 2021-04-15

*tubhyaṃ viṣṇo mayā dattaḥ puṇyo hy eṣa varaḥ śubhaḥ |
ayonau sajjamānasya svayonau pratipādanam ||*

“Oh Viṣṇu, I have given you this auspicious and glorious boon:
the return to your own birth, when you cling to an unnatural birth.”

Skandapurāṇa 71.68

4 And they lived happily ever after... or not? A new ending for Viṣṇu's manifestation myths

All three manifestation myths of Narasiṃha, Varāha and Vāmana revolve around the central problem that the cosmic order has been disturbed, because the king of the Daityas has taken over control of the universe, and the gods have lost their homes and power. The solution is provided by Viṣṇu, by manifesting himself as Man-Lion, Boar or Dwarf and conquering the Daitya king in question. The manifestation myths generally end here; that is, with Viṣṇu's heroic deed of conquering the king of the Daityas, returning the power over the universe to Indra, and, although not always stated explicitly, Viṣṇu leaving his manifested form and taking on his own divine body again³¹⁸.

In the *Skandapurāṇa*, on the other hand, the story does not end there. Viṣṇu continues to live in his manifestation, twice voluntarily, once against his will. This creates a new problem: as long as Viṣṇu does not return to his normal self, the cosmic order is not entirely restored. This new problem demands a new solution, provided by Śiva or one of his attendants. Since these new endings, containing an afterlife of Viṣṇu's manifestations, are the topic of this chapter, a summary of each of them is in place.

Narasiṃha myth. As soon as Narasiṃha kills Hiranyakaśipu, all remaining Daityas flee to Rasātala, Indra regains power, and the gods return to their own kingdoms (SP 71.47). Everything is back to normal, except for one thing: Viṣṇu does not give up his Narasiṃha form, so Indra goes to Śiva to ask him whether he can make Viṣṇu leave this body (SP 70.11—14). As a solution, Śiva becomes a Śarabha, a mythical being, and approaches Narasiṃha (SP 71.49—51). Narasiṃha attacks the Śarabha, but the latter does

³¹⁸ Although the Varāha myth is sometimes followed by a myth of creation (as demonstrated in section 2.2), the latter is a separate story that can be read individually.

not even flinch, which makes Viṣṇu realize that the Śarabha is Śiva and he starts praising him (SP 71.52—66). Śiva is pleased by this and tells Viṣṇu that he will always help Viṣṇu “to return to his own birth” (*svayonau pratipādanam*, SP 71.68). The Śarabha steps on Narasiṃha and reunites Viṣṇu with his divine body (SP 71.71). Before departure, Śiva gives Viṣṇu the boon of “slaying Daityas” (*daityaghnam*, SP 71.72).

Varāha myth. When Varāha has beheaded Hiraṇyākṣa (SP 107.41) and has rescued the earth from Rasātala, carrying her back to her original place (SP 108.14—16), Varāha returns the power over the universe to Indra and promises that he will kill other Asura kings whenever needed (SP 108.17—18). The gods ask Varāha: “having resorted to your own form [again], please become like before” (*svām mūrtim āsthāya yathā pūrvam tathā bhava*, SP 108.19cd). Varāha replies that he wants to enjoy this boar-form a little longer but that he will become a god again after some time (SP 108.20—21). The gods return to their kingdoms, and Varāha holds a victory festival (SP 108.22—end). Meanwhile, Varāha and his wife Citralekhā get a son called Vṛka (SP 109.1). Vṛka goes out roaming around and arrives at Skanda’s palace, where he wrecks the entire garden (SP 109.2—6). Since Skanda is at Mount Mandara to visit his father Śiva, he appoints one of his Gaṇapas, called Kokavaktra, to watch over the palace. Kokavaktra finds Vṛka and catches him (SP 109.21). As soon as Skanda returns, he orders Kokavaktra, on the advice of his father, not to release Varāha’s son (SP 109.27—31). Nārada, the messenger of the gods, sees this and goes to Varāha to inform him about the situation (SP 109.34—38). When he finds out what is done to his son, Varāha gets furious and sets off to Skanda’s palace (SP 109.39—end). When Varāha arrives, a big fight takes place between Varāha and Skanda with the help of Kokavaktra (SP 110.4—10). Skanda finally takes his Saṃvartikā spear, which he had received from Śiva during his visit earlier, and pierces Varāha’s heart with it (SP 110.11—14). As a result of this hit, Varāha leaves his body and “stands with another body” (*dehenānyena tasthivān*, SP 110.15d), taking on his “old body” (*deham [...] paurāṇam*, SP 110.16ab). Viṣṇu goes to Śiva (SP 110.16cd), who is pleased with Viṣṇu’s devotion and achievements and wants to grant Viṣṇu a boon (SP 110.26). Viṣṇu asks Śiva to teach him and the gods the *pāśupatavrata*, “the Pāśupata observance”, so that they become victorious in battle against the Asuras (SP 110.27—28).

Śiva consents to Viṣṇu's request and goes to Mount Meru to instruct the *vrata* (SP 110.29—end).

Vāmana myth. When Bali has returned to Pātāla, and the gods have regained their kingdoms thanks to Viṣṇu's trick to become Vāmana (SP_{Bh} 117.20), the gods praise Viṣṇu (SP_{Bh} 117.23—27). Because of this eulogy, Viṣṇu becomes exceedingly proud and therefore loses his highest *yoga*, “power” (SP_{Bh} 117.28—29), and a Pāpmā, “Sin”, enters him (SP_{Bh} 117.30). Pāpmā turns Viṣṇu into a Dwarf again (SP_{Bh} 118.1). Since Viṣṇu is unable to kill enemies in this state, he should bathe in *tīrthas*, “holy bathing places”, perform a horse sacrifice together with the gods and visit Śiva, who will purify him and release him from Pāpmā (SP_{Bh} 118.12—14). The gods take Viṣṇu on a pilgrimage (SP_{Bh} 118.15—119.105) and make him perform a horse sacrifice on the top of the Himavat (SP_{Bh} 119.106—7). Śiva arrives there and grants the gods a boon (SP_{Bh} 120.21). The gods ask Śiva to complete the sacrifice and to release Viṣṇu from sin (SP_{Bh} 121.4). Śiva consents to their wish: he concludes the sacrifice and splits Mount Himavat with his lance, so that streams of water start flowing that purify Viṣṇu, releasing him from Pāpmā (SP_{Bh} 121.5—7). The gods return to their homes, but Viṣṇu stays on the mountain to praise Śiva for 1,006 years and six months (SP_{Bh} 121.13—14). Śiva, being pleased with Viṣṇu's devotion, tells Viṣṇu to ask for a boon (SP_{Bh} 121.15). Viṣṇu wants to know how he will not be contaminated by sin or *tapas* (SP_{Bh} 121.16). Śiva tells Viṣṇu to perform the *mahāvrata*, “the great observance”, which is qualified as a *pāśupatavrata* (SP_{Bh} 121.17). When Viṣṇu has performed the *mahāvrata* for twelve years, he obtains “supremacy” (*paramaiśvarya*), and Śiva gives half of his body to Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu thus reaches union (*yoga*) with Śiva, and his body becomes “Viṣṇuśaṃkara” (SP_{Bh} 121.18—20).

Whereas each manifestation and each storyline demand a different approach³¹⁹, all three manifestation myths follow the same pattern for the two parts in which the afterlife episodes can be divided. The first part concerns the above-mentioned new problem that arises when Viṣṇu clings to his manifestation. The cosmic order is only truly restored when he has taken on his own form again. The solution is provided by Śiva or

³¹⁹ For example, whereas Viṣṇu simply continues to live as Narasimha and Varāha, this is not possible for his Vāmana manifestation. After all, it is a fixed part of the general storyline that Viṣṇu leaves his dwarfish body. Therefore, the *Skandapurāṇa* composers designed an alternative implementation of the new problem with Viṣṇu returning to his Vāmana manifestation.

one of his attendants by proxy, Skanda in this case. Śiva (or Skanda) makes him return to his original body or provides Viṣṇu and the gods the right solution how this can be effectuated. This new problem-solution pattern is in each manifestation myth implemented differently, adjusted to the requirements and characteristics of the manifestation in question. I start this chapter (4.1) by examining this pattern and exploring which choices are made per manifestation. I take a comparative approach by looking for the origins of particular narrative elements and the reasons to include them. Why, for instance, is a Śarabha chosen as the appropriate opponent of Narasiṃha; why does Skanda fight with Vṛka and Varāha instead of Śiva himself; and why should Viṣṇu be taken on a pilgrimage to expiate Pāpmā? It should not come as a surprise that across all these well-chosen opponents and practical solutions there is one consistent factor: Śiva is behind all solutions and he is the ultimate saviour here.

The second shared part of the afterlife episodes is the fact that Viṣṇu receives a boon from Śiva. First, he obtains the important cosmic task of being the slayer of the Daityas and then, he receives the *pāśupatavrata* twice, the highest teaching for Pāśupata Śaivas. How does this task fit Viṣṇu's character; and what does it mean that Viṣṇu performs the *vrata* twice, both in a practical sense (is there a difference between the two?) and in a theological sense? These questions are addressed in the second part of this chapter (4.2).

Besides these content-related questions, I will also address the question why the *Skandapurāṇa* composers changed particularly the endings so radically. Whereas changes and additions are common practice in the retelling of the manifestation myths, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, such radical innovations as the afterlife episodes show are unknown from earlier and contemporary retellings in the epics and the Purāṇas³²⁰. As I will argue in the introduction to section 4.1, based on the structure of the

³²⁰ To the best of my knowledge, only three other later Purāṇas add an afterlife to Viṣṇu's manifestations. The *Śivapurāṇa* (ŚiP *Śatarudrīyasamhitā* 10—12) and the *Liṅgapurāṇa* (LiP 1.95—96) add an afterlife to Narasiṃha and allude to an afterlife of Varāha. The *Kālikāpurāṇa* (KāP 29—30) adds an afterlife to Varāha, within which Narasiṃha has an afterlife as well. Since these are the only Purāṇas with an additional episode, I give a summary of them, highlighting some details that are relevant in light of the *Skandapurāṇa*.

ŚiP *Śatarudrīyasamhitā* 10 and LiP 1.95: When Narasiṃha has killed Hiranyakaśipu, Viṣṇu does not return to his own body. He stays in his Man-Lion form, causes terror among the gods and is a real threat. Brahmā and the gods go to Śiva for help. Śiva promises the gods that he will take care

Narasimha myth, it is possible to see that the *Skandapurāṇa* composers put much emphasis on the story told in the afterlife episode. I will argue that the composers made the deliberate choice to convey this message at the very end of the narrative, because it is

of Narasimha. ŚiP *Śatarudrīyasamhitā* 11 and LiP 1.96.1—59: Śiva calls Vīrabhadra to mind, who immediately appears before Śiva. Śiva orders Vīrabhadra to make Viṣṇu return to his original form. Vīrabhadra tries to convince Narasimha to give up his manifested form; for example, by reminding him of Śiva's glorious deeds and his attendants' victories. One of the arguments is that “the enemy of Tāraka” (*tārakāri*), i.e. Skanda, had slain Viṣṇu in his Varāha form (ŚiP *Śatarudrīyasamhitā* 11.50 and LiP 1.96.47cd—48ab). This is a clear reference to an afterlife of Varāha, which above all includes the same conclusion as Varāha's afterlife in the *Skandapurāṇa*. ŚiP *Śatarudrīyasamhitā* 12 and LiP 1.96.60—end: Vīrabhadra's speech only makes Narasimha even more angry, and Narasimha attacks him. Vīrabhadra leaves, and Śiva arrives in his turn, having become a Śarabha. By the sight of the Śarabha alone, Narasimha becomes weak, and the Śarabha starts a fight. Narasimha then praises Śiva and asks for mercy. The Śarabha does not listen and kills Narasimha. The gods go back to their abodes, and the universe and the distribution of power returns to normal.

The afterlife of Varāha in the *Kālikāpurāṇa* is an intricate story with many cross-references and (parts of) myths combined. KāP 29: Śiva tells Varāha that it is time to leave his boar-form because he has completed his task—returning the earth to her original position—and because it is a harmful body. Viṣṇu as Varāha promises to cast off his boar-form, and both Varāha and Śiva leave. However, Varāha continues to live in the mountains and starts a sexual relationship with the earth, who is in “the form of a boar” (*potrūrūpa*, KāP 29.26a). They get three sons: Suvṛtta, Kanaka and Ghora. The boys are wild animals and wreck the earth, but Varāha does not try to stop them. Nor does he show any sign of abandoning his manifested form. KāP 30: the gods take refuge with Nārāyaṇa (KāP 30.2d; apparently, the Boar manifestation is separate from Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa). They complain about Varāha and his three sons. Viṣṇu asks Śiva to make him abandon the boar-form because he is not able to do it on his own (KāP 30.32) and asks him to kill Varāha (*śaṃkaro hantu potrinam*, “may Śaṃkara kill the boar”, KāP 30.33d). To accomplish this, Śiva becomes a Śarabha (the form that in the *Skandapurāṇa* fights with Narasimha instead) and starts a battle with Varāha and his three sons. The entire world is destroyed, and the three sons and the Śarabha are on the verge of death. Brahmā goes to Varāha to beg him to leave this boar-form. Viṣṇu then assumes the form of a Fish to carry the seven sages and the Vedas, as they have sunk into the water along with the entire earth. Then Viṣṇu, called Varāha again (KāP 30.86c), sees the Śarabha still fighting with his sons. Varāha calls his earlier Narasimha form to mind. Narasimha arrives and gives his *tejas* to Varāha. The fight between the Śarabha and the boars continues with more boars joining the fight. In reaction to that, the Śarabha creates numerous Gaṇas. Varāha's party of boars is on the losing side, so Varāha decides that it is time to leave his Varāha body and at that moment, the Śarabha splits Narasimha into two. Nara arises from his human part, and Nārāyaṇa from his lion part (KāP 30.124—26). Viṣṇu, in the form of Varāha, asks the Śarabha to kill him as well (KāP 30.132). In his speech, he further announces to become Varāha (again) when the earth has sunk (again), and then, Śiva's son (*te sutaḥ*, “your son”, KāP 30.139b), i.e. Skanda, will make Varāha leave his form, as soon as Varāha's job is done (KāP 30.138—39, N.B. this has again a parallel with the *Skandapurāṇa*). After this speech, the Śarabha kills Varāha and his three sons. Śiva's Gaṇas fight with Varāha's attendants and kill them all. KāP 31: each part of Varāha's body is cut, and the parts become various sacrifices and sacrificial elements.

It would go beyond the scope of this dissertation to study the possible influence of the *Skandapurāṇa* on the *Śivapurāṇa*, *Liṅgapurāṇa* and *Kālikāpurāṇa*; for this topic, see Granoff 2004.

the most defining part of a story. It is what lingers in the minds of the audience and what is remembered most vividly. If one changes the end of a narrative, one can essentially change the message of the entire story. Composers can therefore take most control of a narrative, when they put their most important message—i.e. the message they want the audience to remember—at the end. I call this “the principle of end weight”. I adopted the term “end weight” from the field of grammar, where end weight refers to the principle that the new, heavier, longer and more important part of the sentence is placed at the end. This principle will be central in this chapter to identify the reason why the *Skandapurāṇa* composers changed the end in a much more radical fashion than the main story³²¹.

The principle of end weight, in particular the idea that one can take control of a narrative by taking control of its end, may additionally provide one of the reasons why the manifestation myths were incorporated into the *Skandapurāṇa* in the first place. This possibility is based on one of the few systematic studies on the importance of endings of narratives, by Timothy S. Miller in his doctoral thesis called *Closing the Book on Chaucer*³²². Miller addresses the same questions on both the importance of endings and

³²¹ This is in addition to the theory of anchoring innovation. As explained in section 3.6, for the sake of acceptance, the content of a retelling should not be removed too far from what the audience knows. There is, in other words, a limitation to the amount and size of innovations, in particular, so it seems, in the main story of a narrative.

³²² Most studies on endings deal with the definition of “end” (e.g. McQuillan 2000, 318), the importance that a story has an end (e.g. Kermode 1967/2000), or the formal devices on how to end a story, such as formulae, morals, prayers or deviating meter (e.g. Zeelander 2011). An exception to these works, besides Miller 2014, is *Closure in the Novel* by Marianna Torgovnick. She acknowledges the importance of the end by stating that “an ending is the single place where an author most pressingly desires to make his point—whether those points are aesthetic, moral, social, political, epistemological, or even the determination not to make any point at all” (Torgovnick 1981, 19). One of the reasons for this, she argues, is the fact that “[i]n long works of fiction, [...] it is difficult to recall *all* of a work after a completed reading, but climatic moments, dramatic scenes, and beginnings and endings remain in the memory and decisively shape our sense of a novel as a whole” (ibid, 3—4). This confirms my assumption that the end is remembered most vividly. Nevertheless, this work by Torgovnick will be not used otherwise because it deals with new novels that are not based on earlier versions. This differs from my comparative approach to retellings.

Within the field of Indology, the issue seems to be little raised as well, with the exception of A.K. Ramanujan. In his article on the many tellings of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, he notes various differences, including the fact that “there are two endings to the story. [...] Each of these two endings gives the whole work a different cast. The first one celebrates the return of the royal exiles and rounds out the tale with reunion, coronation, and peace. In the second one, their happiness is brief, and they are separated again, making separation of loved ones (*vipralambha*) the central mood of the whole work. [...] With each ending, different effects of the story are highlighted, and the whole telling

the importance of changing endings on the basis of a comparative study of the works of Chaucer. The works of Chaucer do not always have an ending, and this void was occasionally filled by later authors. Miller notices that “[t]his study [on endings] will confirm our intuitive but rarely theoretically-articulated sense that the ending stands as the primary site of control in narrative, or rather the locus of attempts to control a given narrative, the place where competing voices and discourses struggle to regulate the reception and future use of the text” (Miller 2014, 9). Since the ending is the place of control, Miller continues, this also means that “[t]o change an ending will change what the text means in a given time and place; to reinterpret an ending can have the same effect” (ibid, 10). This was done, for example, by Scottish authors who “completed” those works of Chaucer that had no ending. Miller calls the result of this completion “a “Scotticization” of the Chaucer tradition effected through rewritings of the poet’s endings. [...] Through the mediation of the endings, Chaucer becomes the property of the Scots” (ibid, 46). By adding Scottish endings to Chaucer’s works, the Scots try to claim the works as their own.

This study on Chaucer does not only confirm my assumption that the endings are the most defining parts of a narrative and that changing those narrative parts can have a great effect, it may also shed a light on why Viṣṇu’s manifestation myths were incorporated by the *Skandapurāṇa* composers. If Chaucer’s works became the property of the Scots through Scotticization of the works in general and their endings in particular, could it be the case that Viṣṇu’s manifestation myths likewise became the property of the Śaivas through Śaivization of the myths in general and their endings in particular? In order to be able to answer this question, it is important to know what the core message of the afterlife episodes is, what the role of Śiva is exactly, and whether we can qualify the endings as a process of Śaivization. The answers to these questions will be presented in the final part of this chapter (4.3).

alters its poetic stance” (Ramanujan 1991, 39—40). Ramanujan’s conclusion that the ending can have an effect on the telling as a whole fits my argument expressed in the main text. However, unfortunately, Ramanujan does not investigate the effect and the role of endings further or in a more systematic manner and continues instead with how the beginnings of the various tellings of the *Rāmāyaṇa* can set the tone for the rest of the text (see note 323).

4.1 An additional problem and solution

The Narasiṃha myth is the first of the three manifestation myths that introduces an afterlife of Viṣṇu's manifestation. The audience does not know yet that the text will present a new, alternative account of the manifestation myths. Since the *Skandapurāṇa* is the first text with an afterlife episode, this may even be the first time the audience hears about an afterlife of Viṣṇu's manifestations at all. The Narasiṃha myth seems to have been used to determine three constants that feature in all three manifestation myths, either by setting them straight right at the beginning of the narrative or by presenting it as a given all along. First, the Narasiṃha myth introduces the new problem and stresses its importance by introducing the afterlife episode before the main story. Second, it includes the underlying solution that was present all along. Third, of all three manifestation myths, the Narasiṃha myth puts Śiva most clearly forward as the problem solver. Since these constants are applicable to all three myths, they are surveyed here first, before each individual manifestation myth is examined further.

The Narasiṃha myth immediately introduces the first constant, *viz.* that a new problem has arisen, by starting with an announcement of the afterlife episode before the myth itself has even begun. This “foreshadowing”, as it is called in narratology, is a narrative technique to let the audience know what significant future event can be expected³²³. This announcement can be therefore considered as what the story will essentially be about.

³²³ “Foreshadowing: A technique whereby a significant event in the future is hinted at in advance” (McQuillan 2000, 318). Foreshadowing is a common technique in epic and Purāṇic literature. When foreshadowing is used in different retellings of the same narrative, it is occasionally possible to determine the main differences between those different versions right at the beginning of the story. This has been shown by A.K. Ramanujan in the case of some of the tellings of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. For example, Vālmīki opens with a frame story in which a hunter kills “one of a happy pair of lovebirds. The female circles its dead mate and cries over it. [...] The incident of the death of a bird and the separation of loved ones becomes a leitmotif for this telling of the Rāma story” (Ramanujan 1991, 40). This start can be contrasted with the beginning of the Tamil telling of the *Rāmāyaṇa* by Kampan. “It describes the waters as they are gathered by clouds from the seas and come down in rain and flow as floods of the Sarayū river down to Ayodhya, the capital of Rāma's kingdom. Through it, Kampan introduces all his themes and emphases, even his characters, his concern with fertility themes (implicit in Vālmīki), the whole dynasty of Rāma's ancestors, and his vision of *bhakti* through the *Rāmāyaṇa*” (ibid, 43). In other words, “the opening sections of each major work set into motion the harmonics of the whole poem, presaging themes and a pattern of images” (ibid, 40). The difference between the beginnings of the examples provided by Ramanujan

The foreshadowing is done in the form of a request from Indra, Śaśāṅka (“Moon”) and Vāyu to Śiva, with Indra asking the following³²⁴.

SP 70.11—14:

hiranyakaśipuṃ hantum asurendraṃ mahābalaṃ |
yac cakāra vapur viṣṇur nārasimhaṃ bhayānakam || 11 ||
taṃ hatvāpi sa daityendraṃ viṣṇuḥ parabalārdanaḥ |
tad rūpaṃ naiva samtyajya svaṃ veśam akarod vibho || 12 ||
tena rūpeṇa deveśa krūreṇāpi piśitepsunā |
na vayaṃ nirvṛtā bhūtvā trāsāt tiṣṭhāma śaṃkara || 13 ||
sa yathā simharūpaṃ taṃ parityajati mādhabaḥ |
prasādaṃ nas tathā kartum arhasi tvaṃ surottama || 14 ||

“11. In order to kill the very strong Hiranyakaśipu, the lord of the Asuras, Viṣṇu made that terrifying body of a Man-Lion. 12. However, having killed the lord of the Daityas, Viṣṇu, the destroyer of the army of the enemies, did not give up this body and did not take on his own form, oh lord. 13. Because of that cruel body, which longs for meat, we are not at ease because of fear, oh Śaṃkara [i.e. Śiva]. 14. Please do us a favour, oh best of gods, so that Mādhaba [i.e. Viṣṇu] will leave his lion-form.”

The fact that the afterlife is introduced right at the beginning of the narrative suggests that the *Skandapurāṇa* composers added much value to it: this future event is so new and important that it should be made clear immediately. Two problems are central in this future event. First, specific for Narasiṃha, he forms a threat to the universe. He is *piśitepsuna*, “longing for meat”, which suggests that he devours all kinds of living creatures, even though this is not made explicit anywhere in the rest of the narrative. This

and the start of the Narasiṃha myth in the *Skandapurāṇa* is that the former introduce recurrent themes across the entire work and the latter announces one specific future event.

³²⁴ The other two gods make a request for themselves. Vāyu does not want to be “bodiless” anymore (*aśarīro*, SP 70.16c), and Śiva instantly makes him “corporeal” (*mūrtimān*, SP 70.17d). Then Śaśāṅka wishes to become “free from consumption” (*yakṣmahīnaḥ*, SP 70.18e), and Śiva promises that he will become free from consumption, as soon as Śaśāṅka has done *tapas* (SP 70.19).

specific problem and its solution is discussed below in section 4.1.1. The second problem is the very fact that Viṣṇu does not give up his manifested form. From a theological perspective, this is a problem because it means that if Viṣṇu does not give up his form, he is unable to manifest himself again in other times of crisis in another form. Already in the first occurrences of Viṣṇu's ability to manifest himself, like in the *Bhagavadgītā* of the *Mahābhārata* (the oft-quoted "definition" of Viṣṇu's manifestations)³²⁵, Viṣṇu's manifestations are presented as a continuous process. This implies that Viṣṇu gives up his manifested form before he takes on another one. This is also a few times suggested in the *Skandapurāṇa* itself. First of all, the very fact that Indra makes explicit that Viṣṇu became Narasimha to combat Hiranyakaśipu, but did not give up his form after his success, suggests that he considers this a problem (SP 70.12). Second, the connection between Viṣṇu's completed task and the fact that he should return to his own form again is reiterated later by Śiva twice; first, in the form of a simple statement (SP 71.70)³²⁶ and then, in the form of a boon, which suggests that the problem *and* its solution were present all along. This brings us to the second constant, namely that it has long been destined that Śiva will rescue Viṣṇu from his manifestation if he clings to it.

Just before Śiva releases Viṣṇu from his Man-Lion form, he addresses Viṣṇu as follows.

³²⁵ BhG 4.7—8:

*yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānir bhavati bhārata |
 abhyutthānam adharmasya tadātmānam sṛjāmy aham || 7 ||
 paritrāṇāya sādḥūnām vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām |
 dharmasaṁsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge || 8 ||*

"For whenever the Law languishes, Bhārata, and lawlessness flourishes, I create myself. I take on existence from eon to eon, for the rescue of the good and the destruction of the evil, in order to reestablish the Law" (translation by Van Buitenen 1981, 87).

³²⁶ SP 71.70:

*kṛtaṁ kāryaṁ tvayā sarvaṁ hiranyakaśipur hataḥ |
 ehi gaccha śubhāṁ yonim ātmanaḥ paramādbhutām || 70 ||*

"The entire task has been accomplished by you: Hiranyakaśipu is slain. Come on, go to your own glorious and perfectly wonderful base."

SP 71.68—69:

tubhyaṃ viṣṇo mayā dattaḥ puṇyo hy eṣa varaḥ śubhaḥ |

ayonau sajjamānasya svayonau pratipādanam || 68 ||

sa tvaṃ viṣṇur mahātejā matto labdhavarah sadā |

velāyāṃ tvam samudrasya tiryagyonim asūta yah || 69 ||

“Oh Viṣṇu, I have given you this auspicious and glorious boon: the return to your own birth, when you cling to an unnatural birth. You, who brought an animal form into being at the shore of the ocean [viz. that of a Man-Lion]³²⁷, are the glorious Viṣṇu who has always received boons from me.”

It had always been Śiva’s intention to help Viṣṇu whenever he would be stuck to a manifested form because this promise was given as a boon sometime in the past (note the usage of the past participle *dattaḥ*). Since Viṣṇu is now clinging to his Man-Lion form, Śiva is there to help him return to his own body again.

Besides Śiva’s role in the form of this promise, Śiva also turns out to be the one who actually solves this new additional problem himself by making Viṣṇu return to his own form again—the third constant. In fact, in the Narasiṃha myth, Śiva is most prominently and most actively responsible for this, so that, one may add, there is no doubt about his involvement in the other two manifestation myths either. This has already been articulated in the preamble to the Narasiṃha myth, when, after Indra’s request for help, Śiva promises that he will take care of it (SP 70.15c—f)³²⁸. In this way, Śiva’s role as ultimate saviour is immediately clear. The way in which he saves Viṣṇu is, however, different for each manifestation.

³²⁷ The idea that Narasiṃha is born at the ocean shore also appears in the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*: *sāgarasya ca velāyāṃ ucchritas tapaso vibhuḥ*, “at the shore of the ocean, the lord had arisen through *tapas*” (BdP 2.5.27cd). According to the *Harivaṃśa* (HV App. 1 No. 42A), on the other hand, Viṣṇu left his Narasiṃha form at the Northern shore of the Kṣīroda ocean (HV App. 1 No. 42A ll. 579—81).

³²⁸ SP 70.15c—f:

siṃharūpaṃ yathā śakra viṣṇus tyakṣyati bhīṣaṇam |

kariṣyāmi tathā śakra vyetu te mānaso jvaraḥ || 15 ||

“Oh Śakra [i.e. Indra], I will do that thing so that Viṣṇu will abandon his frightful lion-form. Oh Śakra [i.e. Indra], your mind’s distress should go.”

4.1.1 Narasiṃha vs. Śarabha

The Narasiṃha story as we know it from other sources ends in SP 71.46—47. These verses report that when Hiranyakaśipu has been killed, the remaining Asuras flee to Rasātala, Indra regains his kingdom in heaven, and the gods get their homes back. However, Viṣṇu does not give up his Narasiṃha form. The text does not give a reason for this, nor what trouble he causes exactly. Instead, when the main story has ended, the scene directly moves to Śiva's intervention (SP 71.48—50, see below). There are nevertheless two hints that Narasiṃha forms a threat to the universe because he is a cruel being. First, as mentioned above, the gods are afraid of this “cruel and meat loving” (*krūreṇāpi piśitepsunā*, SP 70.13b) Man-Lion. There seems to be nothing harmless about Narasiṃha. Second, Narasiṃha's cruelty is also observable in the way in which he kills Hiranyakaśipu. The killing is more brutal than necessary, as can be read from the following death scene.

SP 71.44—45:

*grhītvā sa tadā siṃho hiraṇyakaśipuṃ sakṛt |
talenāhatya taṃ prāṇair vyayojayata satvaram || 44 ||
siṃhanādaṃ mahat kṛtvā nakhair vajramayair vibhuḥ |
uro bibheda daityasya mahāśailopamaṃ hariḥ || 45 ||*

“Then the Lion, having grabbed Hiranyakaśipu, having struck [him] with the palm [of his claw only] once, immediately took away his life. Having made a loud lion-sound, lord Hari [i.e. Viṣṇu] tore open the Daitya's chest, which was like a big mountain, with his nails, hard as diamond.”

The actual kill is done by just one slap of his claw, so Narasiṃha could have left it by that, but he tears Hiranyakaśipu's chest open. This suggests that the Man-Lion shows no mercy and one wonders what other harm he could do to other creatures. There is no doubt about it: Viṣṇu must leave his Narasiṃha form³²⁹.

³²⁹ With this conclusion, I hold a different position than Phyllis Granoff in her article on the afterlives of Narasiṃha and Varāha, ‘Saving the Saviour: Śiva and the Vaiṣṇava Avatāras in the

Śiva's solution to this problem is to become a Śarabha (SP 71.48—50)³³⁰: “a very strong [creature] with four feet on its back and sharp teeth” (*caturbhiḥ prṣṭhajaiḥ pādaiḥ tīkṣṇadaṁṣtro mahābalaḥ*, SP 71.50ab). With this description, the *Skandapurāṇa* follows the popular image of a Śarabha as a ferocious, mythical beast that particularly kills lions. According to Walter Slaje, in an article on the Śarabha, this characterization starts in the *Mahābhārata* (Slaje 2017, 342—43). For example, in a conversation between Bandin and Aṣṭāvakra, a list of entities that are known for a specific number is given. The Śarabha is, among other creatures, characterized by the number eight: *tathāṣṭapādaḥ śarabhaḥ siṁhaghātī*, “and the eight-legged, lion-slaying Śarabha” (MBh 3.134.14b). According to Slaje, this is the only occurrence of the adjective *siṁhaghātī* in the entire Sanskrit corpus (leaving Sanskrit commentaries aside), and he argues that it may be built on another verse on Śarabhas, viz. MBh 12.117.34³³¹ (ibid, 343). In “The Story of the Ungrateful Dog” (Fitzgerald 2004, 457), various animal duos that are known to combat each other are

Early Skandapurāṇa'. According to Granoff, “[t]he Man-lion, as awesome as it may be, is described here as a playful lion cub. [...] Śiva's purpose in becoming the Śarabha is made explicit: it is not to put a stop to an *avatāra* that has gone wild, but to help Viṣṇu return to his own divine birth (the term *yonī* is used), from an undesirable, animal birth and to give him a special boon” (Granoff 2004, 123). In other words, “the objection to the Man-lion in the early *Skandapurāṇa* is more to his form than to anything that he does” (ibid, 124). I would like to argue, however, that both problems are the case.

³³⁰ SP 71.48—50:

athāgatya tato devaḥ śūlapāṇir vṛṣadhvajah |
surair vijñāpito vyāsa yat te kathitavān aham || 48 ||
viṣṇos tyājayitum rūpaṁ siṁham adbhutakarmanah |
śarabhaḥ sa tadā bhūtvā himavacchikharopamah || 49 ||
caturbhiḥ prṣṭhajaiḥ pādaiḥ tīkṣṇadaṁṣtro mahābalaḥ |
narasiṁhasamīpaṁ tu gatvāgarjat samāhitaḥ || 50 ||

“Next, having arrived then, Deva [“God”, i.e. Śiva], the one whose hand [holds] a trident, Vṛṣadhvaja [“Bull-Bannered one”], being informed by the gods about what I had told you, oh Vyāsa, having then become a Śarabha, equal to the top of the Himavat, very strong, with four feet on its back and sharp teeth, in order to make Viṣṇu, whose deeds are miraculous, leave his lion-form, having come near Narasiṁha, he roared in a composed manner*.”

* For this translation and a note on *samāhitaḥ*, see SP Vol. IV, 44 note 89.

³³¹ MBh 12.117.34:

aṣṭapād urdhvacaraṇaḥ śarabho vanagocaraḥ |
taṁ siṁhaṁ hantum āgacchan munes tasya niveśanam || 34 ||

“[D]enizen of the forest, an eight-legged *śarabha* (with some of its feet directed upwards) [...] came to the seer's dwelling to kill the lion” (translation by Fitzgerald 2004, 461).

For Slaje's discussion of this passage, see Slaje 2017, 343—44.

enumerated. One of the duos is the Śarabha and the lion, of whom the Śarabha approaches the lion to kill him.

The choice to make Śiva a Śarabha as the opponent of the Lion is thus intertextually supported. It is also in line with the rest of the text, for there are various comparisons in which Śarabhas fight against lions and win. For example, in the *devāsura* war in the Varāha myth, the Asuras say that they are not afraid of the gods, just like Śarabhas are not afraid of lions (SP 77.35cd)³³², and elsewhere in the same battle, Hiranyākṣa is said to grasp the earth, just like a tiger catches a female deer, the king of Śarabhas catches a lioness, etcetera (SP 95.10—11)³³³. This standard combination of Śarabha versus lion (both in the *Skandapurāṇa* and outside) may well have contributed to the idea that Śiva becomes a Śarabha to fight Narasiṃha³³⁴.

Despite the Śarabha's violent characterization³³⁵, Śiva in the form of this mythical creature does not fight with Narasiṃha. As soon as Narasiṃha notices that the Śarabha is not the least hurt by the slap of his claw, and he himself is hurt instead (SP 71.51—52, see section 3.3), he realizes that the creature is Śiva and starts praising him (SP 71.55—66). There is no need for Śiva to fight.

³³² SP 77.35cd: *katham bibhema teṣāṃ vai siṃhānāṃ śarabhā iva*, “why should we be afraid of them [i.e. the gods], similarly [why should] Śarabhas [be afraid] of lions?”

³³³ SP 95.10—11:

tām mṛgīm iva śārdūlo bhujaṃgīm iva pakṣirāt |
śārdūlīm siṃha iva ca siṃhīm śarabharād iva || 10 ||
haṃsīm kāka iva kṣudro mayūṛīm madgurād iva |
tathā tām sa diteḥ putro jagrāha ruṣitānanah || 11 ||

“Just like a tiger [catches] a female deer, the king of birds [catches] a female snake, a lion [catches] a tigress, the king of Śarabhas [catches] a lioness, a vile crow [catches] a female goose, [and] the king of diver-birds [catches] a female peacock, just like that the angry-faced son of Diti [i.e. Hiranyākṣa] caught her [i.e. the earth].”

Other comparisons with a Śarabha and a lion are found in SP 89.48cd, SP 98.24b, SP 104.6b and SP_{Bh} 148.42b. There are also a few comparisons that include Śarabhas fighting with elephants (e.g. SP 90.24b and SP_{Bh} 135.4d).

³³⁴ Granoff has furthermore shown that it is not uncommon for Śiva to take the form of an animal (Granoff 2004, 125). For example, in a eulogy on Śiva, he is referred to as *sṛgālarūpa*, “having the form of a jackal” (MBh 13.17.44c), *mṛgarūpa*, “having the form of a deer” (MBh 13.17.45c) and *siṃhaśārdūlarūpa*, “having the form of a lion and a tiger” (MBh 13.17.47c). In the *Skandapurāṇa*, Śiva also occasionally takes on the form of an animal. For instance, in SP 29.48, he takes on the form a jackal (*jambuka*) in order to kill those Asuras that thanks to a boon can only be killed by jackals; and in SP 60.57—58, Śiva appears before Pārvatī as a deer (*mṛga*).

³³⁵ Śarabha is also the name of an Asura. In the *Mahābhārata*, for example, Śarabha is born in the lineage of Danu, (MBh 1.59.26a), and both in the *Harivaṃśa* (e.g. HV 31.72c) and in the *Skandapurāṇa* (e.g. SP 76.26d), Śarabha is listed among the Asuras.

The actual return to Viṣṇu's own body also runs peacefully. The Śarabha merely steps on Narasiṃha with his feet.

SP 71.71:

tatas tam ākramat pādaiḥ siṃhaṃ śarabhasattamaḥ |

ayojayac ca dehena punar divyena keśavam || 71 ||

“Then the best of Śarabhas stepped with his feet on the Lion and united Keśava [i.e. Viṣṇu] with his divine body again.”

The brevity of the description of the actual return shows that the method is of little concern here. What is more important is who solves the problem that Viṣṇu was still a Narasiṃha. Śiva's role in solving this problem comes to the fore with the causative *ayojayat*, “he caused to unite”. The verb form shows both Śiva's active role in solving the problem and Viṣṇu's dependency on Śiva to be saved.

4.1.2 Varāha vs. Skanda

The same problem arises in the Varāha myth when Viṣṇu does not want to give up his boar-form. The difference with the Narasiṃha myth is that the text provides a reason why Viṣṇu does not want to leave his Varāha manifestation. In answer to the gods' request to return to his own form (SP 108.19)³³⁶, Varāha says:

SP 108.20—21:

iyaṃ mūrtir mayā devāḥ prāptā paramavarcasā |

na cānayā ratih kācit prāptā me sadṛśī bhuvi || 20 ||

so 'haṃ kaṃcid vihr̥tyeha kālaṃ mūrtyānayā sukham |

bhaviṣyāmi punar devaḥ satyam etad bravīmi vaḥ || 21 ||

³³⁶ SP 108.19:

tatas tam ṛṣayaḥ sarve devatāś ca savāsavāḥ |

ūcuḥ svāṃ mūrtim āsthāya yathā pūrvaṃ tathā bhava || 19 ||

“Then all the sages and gods, including Vāsava [i.e. Indra] said: ‘having resorted to your own body, please become just like before.’”

“Oh gods, I, of ultimate energy, have obtained this body, but I have not [yet] received any proper form of pleasure with it on earth. Having roamed around happily for some time with this body, I will become a god again; I tell you the truth.”

Viṣṇu does not want to give up his form because he has not been able to fully enjoy it yet³³⁷. The gods seem to accept this because “they all went to their abodes” (*jagmuḥ sthānāni sarvaśaḥ*, SP 109.22b), and Varāha enjoys being a boar to the fullest, entertaining himself with Apsarases in the form of female boars³³⁸ and celebrating his victory with a festival (SP 108.23—end). Citralekhā was probably one of the Apsarases, for she becomes his wife, and the two of them beget a son called Vṛka (SP 109.1)³³⁹. It is Vṛka who eventually leads to Varāha’s destruction. When Vṛka arrives at Skanda’s palace after a walk, he wrecks the garden and is punished for this by Skanda, by keeping him hostage. Varāha hears about this from Nārada and goes to Skanda. Varāha starts a fight with Skanda to save Vṛka, but, in fact, this very battle leads to Viṣṇu’s liberation from his boar-form.

³³⁷ A similar idea is found in the *Kālikāpurāṇa* version of Varāha’s afterlife (see note 320).

³³⁸ SP 108.24:

tasya tatropatiṣṭhanta mṛgyo bhūtvā sahasraśaḥ |
vaidikyo 'psarasasḥ śubhrās tābhiḥ saha rarāma saḥ || 24 ||

“Thousands of beautiful Vedic Apsarases, having become female boars, served him there, and he enjoyed himself with them.”

³³⁹ SP 109.1:

tasya kālena mahatā ramataḥ śaktinandana |
bhāryāyāṃ citralekhāyāṃ vṛko nāmābhavat sutaḥ || 1 ||

“When he had enjoyed [his Varāha form] for a long time, oh son of Śakti [i.e. Vyāsa], a son called Vṛka was born from [his] wife Citralekhā.”

Both Citralekhā and Vṛka are known from other sources, but neither of them is related to the Varāha myth. Citralekhā is known, for example, from the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* and *Brahmapurāṇa* (ViP 5.32 and BrP 205), but she is not Varāha’s wife. Vṛka, on the other hand, is occasionally mentioned as Viṣṇu’s son (e.g. ViP 5.32.4a and BrP 205.4a), but not as Varāha’s son specifically. Instead, according to these texts, Varāha’s wife is the earth, and the two get a son called Naraka (ViP 5.29 and BrP 202, see Gonda 1954/1969, 141—43 for a study on Naraka).

SP 110.13—16:

tām āpatantīm vegena bhagavān nandivardhanaḥ |
jaghānāstrair bahuvidhair nādayan siṃharād iva || 13 ||
tāni sā bhasmasāt kṛtvā śaktiḥ saṃvartikā śubhā |
viveśa hṛdayaṃ tasya kāmīnīva dṛḍhaṃ priyā || 14 ||
sa tayā bhinnahṛdayo yogena parameṣa ha |
yogīva dehaṃ saṃtyajya dehenānyena tasthivān || 15 ||
so 'nyad dehaṃ samāsthāya paurāṇaṃ surasattamaḥ |
devaiḥ sarvaiḥ parivṛto jagāma bhavamandiram || 16 ||

“13. The lord, Nandivardhana [Varāha]³⁴⁰, attacked [the spear (SP 110.12d)] that was quickly approaching, with many different arrows, roaring like the king of the lions. 14. Having reduced them [i.e. the arrows] to ashes, the beautiful Saṃvartikā spear entered his heart, like a beloved female lover resolutely [enters the heart]. 15. He, whose heart was broken by it, having abandoned his body through supreme *yoga* like a Yogin, stood there with another body. 16. Having assumed another body, [his] old one, the best of gods [i.e. Viṣṇu], surrounded by all the gods, went to Bhava’s [i.e. Śiva’s] abode.”

³⁴⁰ The epithet *nandivardhana*, “increasing joy”, occurs 22 times in the *Skandapurāṇa*, which all except for one appear in the Varāha myth. It is applied twenty times to Varāha himself (from SP 97.37 until SP 110.13b) and once to Varāha’s victory festival that is celebrated after Hiraṇyākṣa’s defeat (SP 108.33). The only other occurrence of the epithet outside the Varāha myth is in SP 112.80, where it refers to the Aśoka tree that is adopted by Pārvatī. The distribution of the word is thus very limited and may point to the hand of a particular group of composers. The epithet’s application to Varāha is unique for the *Skandapurāṇa* and its grammatical usage is uncommon as well. It generally goes with a genitive, indicating for whom someone increases joy, or *nandivardhana* is compounded with the one for whom joy is increased. For example, *gopānām nandivardhana*, “oh [Kṛṣṇa], increasing joy for the cowherds” (HV 56.27b), and *kaikeyīnandivardhanaḥ [...] bharato*, “Bharata, increasing joy for Kaikeyī”, i.e. “Bharata, the son of Kaikeyī” (Rām 6.116.1b—c). In the *Skandapurāṇa*, on the other hand, the epithet stands on its own. The editors of SP Vol. V, forth., therefore, understand Nandivardhana as a personal name of Varāha, which I follow in the case of *nandivardhana* qualifying Varāha himself. For a possible historical understanding of the name, see SP Vol. V, forth.

Whereas in the afterlife episode of the Narasiṃha myth, Śiva released Viṣṇu from his Man-Lion form, in the present episode, Śiva's son Skanda releases Viṣṇu. The choice for Skanda fits, however, the context of the myth. First of all, the initial conflict in the afterlife episode was between the sons of the two main gods: Skanda being the son of Śiva and Vṛka being the son of Varāha³⁴¹. The “son” theme moreover fits how the Andhaka myth cycle in which the Varāha myth is embedded originally started, viz. with the story of Andhaka, the son of Śiva and Pārvatī, who was handed over to Hiraṇyākṣa as his son³⁴².

Choosing Skanda—or to be more precise, *not* choosing Śiva—also matches the rest of the *Skandapurāṇa*. Śiva usually stays behind the curtains and only designs the plans that are executed by the other gods thereafter³⁴³. This is also the position allotted to Śiva in the afterlife episode of the Varāha myth because Skanda's spear is in fact given by Śiva, as reported earlier in the same episode. When Vṛka arrived at Skanda's palace, Skanda was not present because he had gone to Mount Mandara (*kumāro mandaraṃ yātah*, “Kumāra [i.e. Skanda] has gone to [Mount] Mandara, SP 109.12a), where he visited his father. Skanda reports the following back to Kokavaktra.

SP 109.29—30:

ukto gataś cāham adya sthāṇunā paramātmanā |
mā kṣamethā varāhasya tanuṃ tvāṃ so hvayed yudhi || 29 ||
iyaṃ ca mama tenādya śaktir dattātibhāsvarā |
saṃvartiketi vikhyātā sarvāstrabalanāśanī || 30 ||

³⁴¹ It may be furthermore relevant that there is at least one short *Mahābhārata* episode that tells about a contest of power between Skanda and Viṣṇu. In the *Śāntiparvan* (MBh 12.314.7cd—17), Skanda plants his spear in a mountain and challenges the gods to pull it out or to shake it (9—10ab). The gods are troubled by this, and Viṣṇu thinks about “the right thing to do” (*sukṛtaṃ kāryaṃ*, 11e). He shakes the spear with one hand, and as a result, the earth starts to tremble (12—13). Then Prahlāda, Hiraṇyakaśipu's son, tries to pull it out, but the spear does not move at all, and Prahlāda falls on the ground (16—17). Although this is not a clash of arms, the story does represent a contest of power. According to Richard D. Mann, in his study on Skanda, “[t]his short narrative from the Śāntiparvan may allude to an early sectarian rivalry” (Mann 2012, 15 note 1).

³⁴² The Varāha myth is part of a larger myth cycle, the Andhaka cycle. The Andhaka cycle runs from SP 73 until SP_{Bh} 157. Its main narrative concerns the Andhaka myth, but it includes several other myths and myth cycles, such as the Narasiṃha and Varāha myth. For an integration of the different myths and myth cycles within the Andhaka cycle, see SP Vol. V, forth.

³⁴³ Śiva's active role in the Narasiṃha myth is therefore rather the exception than the rule.

“I, who had gone today, was spoken to by Sthāṇu [i.e. Śiva], the highest soul: ‘Do not show mercy with the body of Varāha, should he challenge you in battle’. And this spear, exceedingly shining, called Saṃvartikā [“Destroying”], demolishing the power of all weapons, was given to me by him.”

Skanda received the Saṃvartikā spear³⁴⁴, which ultimately causes Viṣṇu to return to his own body again, from Śiva. In light of Viṣṇu’s *cakra* in the *Skandapurāṇa*, I have argued in section 3.2 that when a weapon is given by Śiva to someone else, Śiva becomes its agent. Even though the *cakra* is intrinsically linked to Viṣṇu and the spear to Skanda³⁴⁵, Śiva takes control over the weapons by distributing them to the respective gods. In the case of the afterlife episode of the Varāha myth, the Saṃvartikā spear is the only weapon in the battle with Varāha that is truly successful and it is the only weapon that Skanda has to employ against Varāha³⁴⁶. Since this weapon is given by Śiva, Śiva once again becomes the mastermind behind the plan and ultimately saves Viṣṇu from holding on to his manifestation.

4.1.3 Vāmana on a pilgrimage

In the Narasiṃha and Varāha myth, Viṣṇu continues to live in his manifested form. However, this narrative layout is not possible for the Vāmana myth because it is a fixed part of the main story that Viṣṇu leaves his dwarfish body. In order to nevertheless create an afterlife for Viṣṇu in this myth that moreover has the same parameters as the other manifestation myths, the *Skandapurāṇa* composers had to design a different storyline.

³⁴⁴ The name Saṃvartikā comes from the adjective *saṃvartaka*. It often appears in combination with words meaning “fire” (*anala*, *agni*, *vahni*, etcetera), in which case it denotes the all-destroying fire at the end of an era. The connotation with final destruction fits the situation in the *Skandapurāṇa*, for Skanda’s spear puts an end to Viṣṇu’s Boar manifestation.

³⁴⁵ Already in the *Mahābhārata*, Skanda’s primary weapon is the spear; for example, in MBh 3.214.22d: *śaktiṃ cānyena pāṇinā*, “and with [his] other hand a spear”.

³⁴⁶ The spear is the final weapon that is used in the battle. Varāha starts with a rock (SP 110.4—5) and then uses his *cakra* (SP 110.6—9). Whereas his *cakra* killed Hiraṇyākṣa immediately, it is now easily averted by Kokavakra. As a last resort, Varāha hits Skanda with a tree (SP 110.10—11ab). Infuriated by this, Skanda takes his Saṃvartikā spear that enters Varāha’s heart (SP 110.11cd—14). Skanda thus only needs one weapon and one attempt to defeat Varāha.

When the main story has finished in SP_{Bh} 117.20 with Bali returning to Pātāla and the gods having their kingdom back, Vyāsa asks Sanatkumāra: “what was lord Viṣṇu like, after he had given up his own mighty *dharma*?” (*kīḍṛk sa bhagavān viṣṇus tyaktvā svaṃ dharmam ūrjitam*, SP_{Bh} 117.21ab). Sanatkumāra replies that when Viṣṇu became big enough to conquer the triple world back, the gods were happy and praised Viṣṇu (SP_{Bh} 117.22cd—27). As a result of that praise, Viṣṇu becomes excessively proud of himself.

SP_{Bh} 117.28—118.1:

tasyaivaṃ stūyamānasya tridaśaiḥ śārṅgadhanvanāḥ |
abhūt tuṣṭis tadātyartham bahumānas tathātmani || 28 ||
tato 'bhimānatas tasya sa yogaḥ paramo mune |
abhraśyata yathā vahniḥ salilena samukṣitaḥ || 29 ||
tatas tadantaram labdhvā pāpmā sā hy āsurī mune |
prahr̥ṣṭā saṃprahasyaiva-m³⁴⁷ āviveśa janārdanam || 30 ||
sa tayā pāpmayā vyāsa āviṣṭo viṣṇur avyayaḥ |
na babhau dīptimāṃs tatra santaḥ prāpyeva dāruṇam || 31 ||
sanatkumāra uvāca |
tathā sa pāpmayā vyāsa āsuryā saṃgatas tadā |
tad eva rūpaṃ saṃprāpto vāmanam devasattamaḥ || 118.1 ||
“28. When he, who has the Śārṅga bow [i.e. Viṣṇu], was praised like that by the gods, satisfaction as well as great pride of himself arose exceedingly. 29. Because he was [so] proud, [his] highest power (*yoga*) disappeared, oh sage, just like fire [vanishes] when it is sprinkled by water. 30. Having found his weak spot (*tadantaram*), oh sage, having broken into laughter, the delighted Asuric³⁴⁸ Pāpmā [“Sin”] entered Janārdana [i.e.

³⁴⁷ I diverge from the emendation done by Bhaṭṭarāi in his edition, *saṃprahr̥ṣyainam*, “being delighted with him”, because it is redundant together with *prahr̥ṣṭā*, both referring to Pāpmā. Instead, I follow the majority of the manuscripts here (S₁ reads *saṃprahasyevam*; S₂, S₃, and R read *saṃprahasyaivam*; the A manuscripts omitted this verse) and take *-m* as a hiatus breaking *-m* between final *-a* of *eva* and initial *ā-* of *āviveśa*.

³⁴⁸ “Asuric” here means that Pāpmā comes from the Asuras. This is made explicit in SP_{Bh} 118.11cd: *sāsurān saṃparityajya keśavaṃ saṃviveśa ha*, “having left the Asuras, she entered Keśava [i.e.

Viṣṇu]. 31. The imperishable Viṣṇu, being entered by this Pāpmā, did not shine brightly [anymore] there, just like good people, when they suffered a harsh fate. 118.1. Sanatkumāra said: Being entered by the Asuric Pāpmā like that, oh Vyāsa, the best of gods [i.e. Viṣṇu] then attained that same Vāmana body [again].”

As a result of the gods’ praise, Viṣṇu becomes so excessively proud of himself that a personification of sin (Pāpmā) enters him, who turns him into Vāmana again³⁴⁹. The notion that pride is a sinful act is known from numerous other sources. According to the *Arthaśāstra*, for example, there are six sins that should be avoided: “lust, anger, greed, pride, madness and overjoy” (*kāmakrodhalobhamānamadaharṣa*, AŚ 1.6.1). In an article on sins and vices in Sanskrit sources, H.W. Bodewitz remarked that these sins “are not purely ethical, but are bad qualities which have to be avoided by a king [...] who wants to be successful” (Bodewitz 2007, 322). The relationship between the six sins and kings, the highest ranking among the class of *kṣatriyas*, “warriors”, may have been intended in the Vāmana myth of the *Skandapurāṇa*, since in this narrative, Viṣṇu pretends to be a Brahmin, but in fact he is a *kṣatriya*³⁵⁰.

Viṣṇu]”. A similar idea can be found in the *Bhagavadgītā* below, where it is stated that sins, including pride (Sanskrit *darpa* and *atimāna*; cf. *bahumāna* and *abhimāna* in the *Skandapurāṇa*), belong to the Asuras.

BhG 16.4:

*dambho darpo ’timānaś ca krodhaḥ pārūṣyam eva ca |
ajñānaṃ cābhijātasya pārtha sampadam āsurīm || 4 ||*

“Deceit, pride, too much self-esteem, irascibility, harshness, and ignorance are of him who is born to the demonic complement, Pārtha” (translation by Van Buitenen 1981, 133).

On evil created by Asuras, including *āśura pāpman*, see O’Flaherty 1976/1988, 70ff.

³⁴⁹ Concepts are often personified as (female) entities. For example, in Rām 7.77.10, brahminicide is personified as Brahmahatyā.

³⁵⁰ There are some additional indications elsewhere in the three manifestation myths that Viṣṇu is more than just any *kṣatriya*, but a king. In the current section and in section 4.2.3, it is noted that Viṣṇu performs a horse sacrifice, which is a royal ritual and as such the preserve of kings. In section 4.2.1, I will demonstrate that Viṣṇu’s official task as Asura-slayer fits Viṣṇu’s characterization as protector of the universe and king. In section 4.2.2, I will argue that the *pāśupatavrata* performed by Viṣṇu in the afterlife episode of the Varāha myth is specifically targeted at kings who wished to be initiated in Śaivism.

The text repeatedly emphasizes that Viṣṇu has abandoned his own *dharma* of the *kṣatriyas* and adopted the *dharma* of the Brahmins instead in order to be allowed to come begging at Bali's horse sacrifice and to accept gifts from him. For example, during a dialogue between Vāmana and Bali (see *Appendix I: Summaries* for more details), Bali becomes aware that Viṣṇu is disguised as a dwarfish Brahmin, having abandoned the *dharma* of the *kṣatriyas* (SP_{Bh} 116.57)³⁵¹.

In the afterlife episode of the Vāmana myth, the theme is once again referred to, when the sages report what Brahmā has advised them on how Viṣṇu can be released from Pāpmā. They first recapitulate what happened.

SP_{Bh} 118.9—11:

yad anena parityajya svadharmam devabandhunā |
pratigrahaḥ kṛto rājyaṃ vaikuṇṭhena mahātmanā || 10 ||
tataḥ pāpmāsurañāṃ yā sarvaprāṇibhayamkarī |
sāsurān saṃparityajya keśavam saṃviveśa ha || 11 ||

“Since, after abandoning his own *dharma*, the kingdom was accepted as a gift by that friend of the gods, the great Vaikuṇṭha [i.e. Viṣṇu], consequently, the Pāpmā of the Asuras, who frightens every living being, having left the Asuras, entered Keśava [i.e. Viṣṇu].”

The sages' speech contains two messages. First, the sages confirm that Viṣṇu had abandoned his own *dharma*, i.e. the *dharma* of the *kṣatriyas*, and had accepted the kingdom as a gift. So far, this is in accordance with Brahmā's announcement at the beginning of the narrative (*taṃ gatvā viprarūpeṇa viṣṇur eṣa prayācatu*, “having gone to him [i.e. Bali], this Viṣṇu should beg [from him]”, SP_{Bh} 116.21cd) and it corresponds to the fixed general storyline. However, the second element appears to be the sages'

³⁵¹ SP_{Bh} 116.57:

bhavān viṣṇur viprarūpī chadmanā mām prayācase |
kṣatradharmaṃ samutsrjya kārpaṇyaṃ ca prabhāṣase || 57 ||

“You are Viṣṇu in the form of a Brahmin. You are begging me [for something] under a disguise. Having abandoned the *dharma* of the warriors, you speak of poverty.”

interpretation of what happened next: Pāpmā has entered Viṣṇu, since (*yad*, SP_{Bh} 118.9a) Viṣṇu left his *dharma* and accepted the kingdom is a gift. *Pratigraha* “acceptance of gifts”, is a privilege of Brahmins and it is not allowed for *kṣatriyas*, as is, for instance, made clear in the *Arthaśāstra* (AŚ 1.3.5—6)³⁵² and the *Manusmṛti* (MaS 1.88—89)³⁵³. This did not seem to have been an issue for the gods. After all, the acceptance of the kingdom as a gift was done through the disguise of a dwarfish Brahmin; in other words, as long as Viṣṇu was in his Vāmana manifestation, *pratigraha* must have been allowed. The sages, on the other hand, seem to hold a stricter position: the disguise should not be a reason to transgress the prohibition of *pratigraha*, for Viṣṇu was still was a *kṣatriya* at that moment. According to the sages at least, this violation of *dharma* is a sin, and Viṣṇu is therefore entered by Pāpmā.

The result of Pāpmā’s entry into Viṣṇu is that he becomes a Dwarf again and hence, the same problem arises as in the other two manifestation myths: Viṣṇu remains stuck to his manifestation³⁵⁴. However, the sages know a way out after consulting Brahmā.

³⁵² AŚ 1.3.5—6:

svadharṃ brāhmaṇasya adhyayanam adhyāpanam yajanam yājanam dānam pratigrahaś ca || 5 ||

kṣatriyasyādhyayanam yajanam dānam śāstrājīvo bhūtarakṣaṇam ca || 6 ||

“The specific Law of a Brāhmaṇa consists of studying, teaching, offering sacrifices, officiating at sacrifices, giving gifts, and receiving gifts. That of a Kṣatriya consists of studying, offering sacrifices, giving gifts, obtaining a livelihood through the use of weapons, and protecting creatures” (translation by Olivelle 2013, 67).

³⁵³ MaS 1.88—89:

adhyāpanam adhyayanam yajanam yājanam tathā |

dānam pratigrahaṃ caiva brāhmaṇānām akalpayat || 88 ||

prajānām rakṣaṇam dānam ijjādhyayanam eva ca |

viśayeṣv aprasaktim ca kṣatriyasya samādiśat || 89 ||

“To Brahmins, he assigned reciting and teaching the Veda, offering and officiating at sacrifices, and receiving and giving gifts. To the Kṣatriya, he allotted protecting the subjects, giving gifts, offering sacrifices, reciting the Veda, and avoiding attachment to sensory objects” (translation by Olivelle 2004, 91).

See also MaS 10.74—80ab, which is an elaboration of the duties of the Brahmins and *kṣatriyas*.

³⁵⁴ When Viṣṇu in the *Kūrmapurāṇa* (KūP 1.16.59) and the *Skandapurāṇa Māheśvarakhaṇḍa* (SkP *Māheśvarakhaṇḍa* 1.19.18ef and 36ef) has stridden the entire universe, he also becomes a dwarf or a boy again (*baṭu* in the *Skandapurāṇa Māheśvarakhaṇḍa*). Although it remains unclear why this happens, there is no doubt that it is Viṣṇu’s own choice to become small again, and it is not a punishment for a sin, nor is it a preamble to an afterlife episode. The situation is therefore different from the one in the *Skandapurāṇa* studied here.

SP_{Bh} 118.13—14:

sa eṣa yadi manyadhvaṃ tīrtheṣu susamāhitaḥ |
snātvāśvamedhena punar yajatām daivataiḥ saha || 13 ||
tataḥ pinākinam dṛṣṭvā tena pūtaś ca sarvaśaḥ |
bhavitā pāpmayā mukta evam āha pitāmahaḥ || 14 ||

“If you agree, he [i.e. Viṣṇu] should perform a horse sacrifice together with the gods, after having bathed in holy bathing places with great attention. Then, after having seen Pinākin [“the one with the Pināka bow”, i.e. Śiva], being entirely purified by him [i.e. Śiva], he will be released from Pāpmā. This is what Brahmā said.”

The gods take the advice at heart and start their expedition. The gods’ contribution appears to be essential, for they make sure that Viṣṇu completes all prerequisite steps. They take Viṣṇu on a pilgrimage along various holy bathing places, *tīrthas*, and make him bathe in each of them (from SP_{Bh} 118.15). Some places are specified by name (Suṣumnā, Kṛmilā and Kṛtyā), and a story is told about each of them. The final bathing place is remarkably enough not mentioned by name (*tām āgamyā tato*, “having arrived at that [place]”, SP_{Bh} 119.105a)³⁵⁵.

³⁵⁵ Each story is summarized in *Appendix I: Summaries*. I have discussed the stories in a paper at the Eighth Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas (Dokter-Mersch 2017). In this paper, I argue that these stories stand out from the rest of the *Skandapurāṇa* in general and the Vāmana myth in particular because they have various specific features in common that deviate from the rest of the text. 1) The narrative frame structure is different. In addition to the common dialogue structure between Vyāsa and Sanatkumāra which primarily contains narratives told in the third person, the stories also show a more colloquial conversational style, in which the first person is used. This is, for example, found in the story that I refer to as the Conversation between Indra and the Parrot (SP_{Bh} 118.31—end). 2) The main characters and the content of the stories are not inherent to the primarily Śaiva framework of the *Skandapurāṇa*. The stories do not deal with Śiva, nor with Śaiva topics, such as *pāśupatayoga*. Instead, they deal with the gods and the sages in general and Indra in particular and with the more general subjects of *dharma* and *karman*, often infused with a moral teaching. 3) Each story has a parallel in the *Mahābhārata* and at least one additional text, mainly Buddhist Pāli Jātakas. I found a parallel of the Story of the Stealing of the Lotus (SP_{Bh} 118.21—30) in MBh 13.96, Jātaka 488 “*Bisajātaka*” and Jātakamālā 19 “*Bisajātaka*”. The Conversation between Indra and the Parrot (SP_{Bh} 118.31—end) is found in MBh 13.5 and in two Jātakas telling the same story: number 429 “*Mahāsuvaṇṇajātaka*” and 430 “*Cūlasuvaṇṇajātaka*”. The Story of the Hunter and the Snake (SP_{Bh} 119.2—48) has a parallel with MBh 13.1 and Jātaka 354 “*Uragajātaka*”. The Story of the Seven Brahmins and Yātudhānī (SP_{Bh}

It is a classical pilgrimage, *tīrthayātrā*, involving bathing as a means for expiating sin, just as it is known from other sources and actual practices³⁵⁶. Viṣṇu is dependent on the gods to help him³⁵⁷ because he is possessed by evil and possibly also because of his size. This matches his dependency in the other manifestation myths in the *Skandapurāṇa* as demonstrated in section 3.1. The description of the gods taking Viṣṇu on a pilgrimage may be understood as to represent the way in which priests would have taken kings on a pilgrimage. The possibility that Viṣṇu represents a king here is furthermore supported by Viṣṇu's next task. He is instructed to perform a horse sacrifice (SP_{Bh} 119.106)³⁵⁸, which

119.51—104) is found in MBh 13.94—95, the *Padmapurāṇa Śṛṣṭikhaṇḍa* (PdP *Śṛṣṭikhaṇḍa* 19.225—end) and the *Skandapurāṇa Nāgarakhaṇḍa* (SkP *Nāgarakhaṇḍa* 32). 4) The transitions between the stories display some inconsistencies. Whereas the *Skandapurāṇa* is generally well-composed with little ungrammatical discrepancies, the *tīrthayātrā* is conspicuous on this point. Based on these shared features, I have argued that these individual stories form a coherent whole and have been written by a different (group of) composer(s), and may even have been added later to the Vāmana myth. The composers tried to blend the stories with the outer frame, but were only partly successful. If we would leave out the stories between the problematic transitions, the text is smooth, but the pilgrimage would consist of only one *tīrtha*, viz. Suṣumnā. This is therefore the bathing place where Viṣṇu took his final (and only) bath (*tām* in SP_{Bh} 119.105a). Earlier in the myth, Suṣumnā is richly described (SP_{Bh} 118.16—19). For example, it is “resounding with delighted birds” (*prahr̥ṣṭāṇḍajanāditām*, SP_{Bh} 118.16d), its surroundings have “sand [resembling] fine gold” (*sūkṣmakāñcanavālukām*, SP_{Bh} 118.17d), and it even has a Viṣṇu temple (*śrīniketanāniketanām*, “a temple for him whose temple is Śrī [i.e. Lakṣmī, Viṣṇu's wife]”, SP_{Bh} 118.19d). It makes it the perfect place for Viṣṇu to take his final (and only) bath.

³⁵⁶ In *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition*, Knut A. Jacobsen notes that “[m]any pilgrimage places are associated with water and taking sacred baths is a key ritual. The purification of *pāpa* [“sin”] by using water combines the physical experience of the cleansing property of water with the salvific property of sacred water” (Jacobsen 2013, 82). This notion appears at various occasions in the *Mahābhārata* (see for example, Vassilkov 2002 and Jacobsen 2013, 51) and continues in the *Purāṇas*.

³⁵⁷ Viṣṇu's passiveness and the gods' active role in deciding in what Viṣṇu should do during the pilgrimage are expressed at different occasions. At the start of the pilgrimage, for example, it is stated that the gods “did a pilgrimage after having taken the imperishable Viṣṇu [with them]” (*tīrthayātrām akurvan taṃ grhītvā viṣṇum avyayam*, SP_{Bh} 118.15cd); and later during the pilgrimage, the gods “made Viṣṇu bathe in the *tīrtha* that is honoured by groups of sages” (*viṣṇum taṃ snāpayām* cakrus tīrthe ṛṣigaṇārcite*, SP_{Bh} 119.105cd).

* Bhaṭṭarāi reads *snāpayām*, but all manuscripts read *snāpayām*.

³⁵⁸ SP_{Bh} 119.106:

tatas te himavacchailaṃ samāgamya mudānvitāḥ |
ayājayan tadā viṣṇum aśvamedhena suvratāḥ || 106 ||

“Having gone to the top of the Himavat then, those virtuous ones [i.e. the gods and sages], filled with joy, made Viṣṇu perform a horse sacrifice.”

Later in the same narrative, Viṣṇu performs another horse sacrifice (SP_{Bh} 121.14a: *aśvamedham tadā yaśtvā*, “having then performed a horse sacrifice”).

is a ritual that, like the *rājasūya* sacrifice, is reserved for kings (see e.g. Steiner 2010, 370).

Since the gods fulfilled all requirements—take Viṣṇu on a pilgrimage and make him perform a horse sacrifice—Śiva arrives.

SP_{Bh} 119.107:

tasmin yajati deveśas tryambakaḥ saṅgaśvaraḥ |
yajñam prati mudā yukta ājagāma viḥāyasā || 107 ||

“As he [i.e. Viṣṇu] was sacrificing, the lord of the gods, Tryambaka [“Three-Eyed One”, i.e. Śiva], together with the Gaṇeśvaras [“Lords of Gaṇas”], filled with joy, went to the sacrifice through the sky.”

The gods ask Śiva to complete the sacrifice, release Viṣṇu from sin and give all the gods their strength back (SP_{Bh} 121.4)³⁵⁹. Śiva consents to the gods’ wishes.

SP_{Bh} 121.5—8:

teṣāṃ tad vacanaṃ śrutvā bhagavān hr̥ṣītānanaḥ |
samāpya yajñam śūlena giriṃ taṃ samadārayat || 5 ||
tasmād bhedāt tato hy āpaḥ sudhāśaṅkhendupāṇḍarāḥ |
niḥśr̥tās tatra te viṣṇuṃ snāpayām³⁶⁰ cakrire tadā || 6 ||
tasyātha snātamātrasya śarīrād abhiniḥśr̥tā |
pāpmāsurī mahāghorā vikṛtā vikṛtānana || 7 ||
devān abhidrutā hantum niruddhā devabandhunā |
— — — — —³⁶¹ || 8 ||

³⁵⁹ SP_{Bh} 121.4:

samāpyatām ayaṃ yajñāḥ pāpmanā mucyatām hariḥ |
svām ūrjāṃ pratipadyantām devāḥ sarve savāsavāḥ || 4 ||

“This sacrifice should be completed, Hari [i.e. Viṣṇu] should be released from [his] sin, [and] all the gods, including Vāsava [i.e. Indra], should get [their] own strength back.”

³⁶⁰ Bhaṭṭarāi reads *snāpayām*, but all manuscripts read *snāpayām*.

³⁶¹ Bhaṭṭarāi suggests the loss of two *pādas*. Perhaps even more *pādas* have gone lost during the transmission, because not only a main verb is missing, Viṣṇu leaving his dwarfish body is not made explicit either. The latter is, however, at least implied by Pāpmā leaving Viṣṇu’s body.

“Having heard that speech of theirs, the lord with the smiling face [i.e. Śiva], having completed the sacrifice, split the mountain with his trident. From that breaking then, streams of water emerged that were white as plaster, conch-shells and the moon. Thereupon, they [i.e. the gods] made Viṣṇu bathe there. As soon as he bathed, the Asuric, very terrifying, disfigured Pāpmā with her disfigured face, who had come out of his body, who was about to attack the gods to kill [them, but] was stopped by the friend of the gods [i.e. Śiva]...”

The pilgrimage and the horse sacrifice have led to the climactic moment where Śiva purifies Viṣṇu with water from the Himavat. Even though it is not made explicit, we expect that with Pāpmā leaving Viṣṇu’s body, Viṣṇu left his Vāmana form and reunited with his former body (see note 361). Śiva’s role in this process has once more proven vital. As the highest god of all, he finalized the pilgrimage and the horse sacrifice, and thereby effectuated Viṣṇu’s purification, causing Viṣṇu to return to his divine self. Only through the intervention of Śiva, the cosmic order is truly restored. Śiva has once again accommodated with his age-old promise of “the return to your own birth, when you cling to an unnatural birth” (*ayonau sajjamānasya svayonau pratipādanam*, SP 71.68cd).

4.1.4 Viṣṇu’s problem or Śiva’s solution?

The shared structure in the first part of Viṣṇu’s afterlife episodes is the additional problem-solution structure. Although each problem is implemented differently and has different consequences, the general problem is that Viṣṇu holds on to his manifested form. This is a radical innovation in the *Skandapurāṇa* and has been noticed and made a central topic by Phyllis Granoff in her article on the afterlives of Narasiṃha and Varāha, ‘Saving the Saviour: Śiva and the Vaiṣṇava Avatāras in the Early Skandapurāṇa’ (2004). As already mentioned in section 1.3, Granoff argues that the afterlife episodes of these two manifestations show that the *Skandapurāṇa* composers felt uncomfortable with animal

manifestations, and possibly even with the concept of manifestations in general³⁶². From the perspective of the content of the narratives, I agree with the first statement, *viz.* that the text shows a discomfort towards Narasiṃha and Varāha, because they form a danger to the universe. They are wild, and at times even brutal, and need to be annihilated. However, I would like to challenge the second statement for two reasons.

To start, the central problem in the afterlife episodes is not that Viṣṇu manifests himself in the first place, but rather that he remains in his manifested form, either wanted or unwanted. The fact that Viṣṇu manifests himself is, from the perspective of the storyline, the only way to conquer Hiranyakaśipu, Hiranyākṣa and Bali, and the *Skandapurāṇa* composers knew that very well. Viṣṇu manifesting himself is not only a fixed part of the general storyline that cannot be changed, it is also intrinsically connected to Viṣṇu's character. If the composers would tamper with the basic storyline or with some of Viṣṇu's core features, the chance that the audience would accept the retellings would decrease, as shown in chapter 3. Since the *Skandapurāṇa* composers seem to be aware which elements could be changed and which not, it seems implausible that they would want to challenge Viṣṇu's ability to manifest himself.

In addition to that, elsewhere in the *Skandapurāṇa*, Śiva also manifests himself on earth. In a narrative about the holy place of Kārohaṇa (SPs 167.110—38)³⁶³, Śiva descends to earth four times in the form of a human manifestation, each in a different era³⁶⁴. If the *Skandapurāṇa* composers had a problem with the very concept of manifestations, they would not project it on Śiva.

The central message of the afterlife episodes, I argue instead, is not the problem but the solution, *viz.* Śiva saves Viṣṇu from being stuck to his manifested form. Already

³⁶² “[F]or the story-teller, these animal incarnations are somehow not entirely divine; they border on the demonic and need to be ‘saved’ from themselves. It seems possible to go even further and see in the stories of the early *Skandapurāṇa* a discomfort with the very idea of incarnations, that is, of the birth of a god on earth, whether in an animal or in a human form” (Granoff 2004, 128).

³⁶³ The siglum SPs refers to the Nepalese manuscripts and is used here, because the S recension differs greatly from the RA recension, see Bisschop 2006, 5ff.

³⁶⁴ In the Kṛta *yuga*, having become Bhārabhūti, Śiva took away the burden of Brahmins and threw it into the Narmadā river (SPs 167.115a—d). In the Tretā *yuga*, having become Diṇḍimuṇḍa, Śiva cut off heads (SPs 167.116ab). In the Dvāpara *yuga*, having become Āśāḍhi, Śiva favoured through dancing (SP 167.116cd). In the Kali *yuga*, having made a body with white limbs, Śiva favoured the world through various deeds. For example, he teaches the Pāśupata doctrine to four disciples (SPs 167.124—30).

in the Narasiṃha myth, the *Skandapurāṇa* composers make clear that it has always been Śiva's intention to help Viṣṇu when he clings to an unnatural birth. In this and the following two manifestation myths, this is indeed what he does. He sometimes actively makes Viṣṇu return to his own body, and he sometimes remains more at the background, rather facilitating the return. Whether active or passive, Śiva becomes the ultimate saviour. Since each manifestation myth conveys this same message, which is much more important than Viṣṇu's own problem from the perspective of the ideology of the *Skandapurāṇa* as a whole, I conclude that this is the key message that the *Skandapurāṇa* composers wanted to convey with this part of the afterlife episodes.

4.2 Śiva's boons to Viṣṇu

Śiva continues to play an important role in the last scenes of the afterlife episodes. In the second shared part, Viṣṇu realizes that it was Śiva who released him from his manifested form, starts praising Śiva and receives a boon from the benevolent god. Although the boon is different in each manifestation myth, the element unites the three manifestation myths. Not only because each narrative finishes with this component, but also because, as will become clear, the boons become more religious, and hence grander from the ideological perspective of the *Skandapurāṇa*.

4.2.1 Slayer of Daityas

Immediately after Śiva has re-joined Viṣṇu with his own body after his Narasiṃha manifestation (SP 71.71), he grants him the following boon.

SP 71.72:

*viṣṇave 'tha varam dattvā daityaghaṇam sa vṛṣadhvajah |
prakṛtistho bhavety uktvā tatraivāntaradhīyata || 72 ||*

“Then, Vṛṣadhvaja [“Bull-Bannered One”, i.e. Śiva], having given Viṣṇu the boon of slaying Daityas, [and] having said, ‘you should stay in your natural form’, disappeared from that place.”

By granting Viṣṇu “the boon of slaying Daityas”, Śiva gives Viṣṇu a specific task in the Śaiva cosmos. The *Skandapurāṇa* presents a Śaiva universe in which the gods generally maintain the tasks which they are known for. The same holds true for Viṣṇu’s task as the destroyer of the enemy of the gods, for this is in line with texts as old as the Vedas, in which Viṣṇu already functions as protector and king of the universe. Viṣṇu’s primary tasks have been explored by Jan Gonda, for example, in *Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism*.

“There is a striking parallelism between the special emphasis laid already in Vedic texts upon Visnu’s protecting activities and his intimate relations with kingship, the first function of which is to protect the world and its inhabitants and to defend the dharma, to punish the wicked. Viṣṇu indeed is a protector”³⁶⁵ (Gonda 1954/1969, 164)³⁶⁶

Viṣṇu’s role in the *Skandapurāṇa* to slay the Daityas, the enemies of the gods, conforms with this notion that Viṣṇu, as a king, should protect the world and its inhabitants. The most important difference with other texts is, however, just as in the case of Brahmā, that Śiva assigns the task to Viṣṇu. This makes Śiva once again the ultimate decision-maker and makes Śiva in control of and accountable (and thus laudable) for all actions in the universe.

³⁶⁵ Gonda gives several Vedic examples, such as TS 3.1.10.3, ŚB 1.3.4.16, and several examples from the *Mahābhārata*: “Mbh. 2,24,34; 3,249,26 where he is stated to look after the celestials; 8,45,34 where he protects all creatures; 12,48,70 etc.” (Gonda 1954/1969, 164).

³⁶⁶ In the chapter called ‘Mythology’ in *Hinduism in India*, Greg Bailey connects Viṣṇu’s task as king and protector to Viṣṇu’s manifestations specifically. “A Viṣṇu cycle of myths is more difficult to locate than a Śiva cycle, in part because Viṣṇu as a deity is often reflected in the activities of his avatāras and there has always been a tendency to see his role in mythology as a palimpsest of their activities. One principal theme in his mythological persona, emerging even from the early Vedas, is his primary association with kingship and the protection of the Earth, especially through the preservation of *dharma* understood as cosmic and class “law.” Such activities become very highly profiled in the two Sanskrit epics and the Purāṇas, especially where Viṣṇu and his wife Lakṣmī are seen as models of a functioning king and queen” (Bailey 2017, 96).

4.2.2 Pāśupata initiation

When Viṣṇu has left his Varāha form, he goes to Śiva's abode and starts praising Śiva (SP 110.16—24). Śiva is pleased with Viṣṇu's "devotion and the effort [he made] for the task of the gods" (*bhaktyā [...] devakāryodyamena*, SP 110.26ab), so he tells Viṣṇu that he can choose a boon (SP 110.25—26). Viṣṇu asks the following.

SP 110.27—28:

yadi tuṣṭo 'si no deva yadi deyo varaś ca naḥ |
tataḥ pāśupataṃ divyaṃ vratam ādeṣṭum arhasi || 27 ||
yad āśritya vyaṃ sarve saśakrāḥ sārvaśāntikāṃ |
yuddhe jeṣyāma daiteyān duḥkhaśokavivarjitāḥ || 28 ||

"If you are pleased with us, oh Deva ["God", i.e. Śiva], and a boon should be given to us, then please teach the divine *pāśupatavrata*, so that, after having taken refuge to [that vow], which fulfils all desires, we all, together with Śakra [i.e. Indra], will be victorious in battle against the Daityas, being free from suffering and pain."

In other words, Viṣṇu wants Śiva to teach him and the gods the *pāśupatavrata*, so that they will conquer the Daityas in battle. Śiva promises to teach them the *vrata*.

SP 110.29:

ahaṃ vaḥ kathayiṣyāmi guhyam etat sanātanam |
vratam pāśupataṃ divyaṃ yena kāmān avāpsyatha || 29 ||

"I will tell you this secret, eternal, divine *pāśupatavrata*, through which you will obtain [all] desires."

Śiva goes to Mount Sumeru to teach the *vrata* (SP 110.30—end), but the reader does not get to hear the actual teaching.

Despite the limited information provided about the *vrata*, it is clear that the *vrata* is the Pāśupata observance and is requested by Viṣṇu with a particular goal in mind, viz.

to conquer the Asuras. This goal is different from what is known about the observance from other instances of the *pāśupatavrata* in other parts of the *Skandapurāṇa* and from one of the foundational texts for Pāśupata Śaivas, the *Pāśupatasūtra*, and its fourth-century commentary by Kauṇḍinya called *Pañcārthabhāṣya*. There, we learn that one of the key customs is to bathe in ashes in order to reach union with Śiva, as proclaimed in the *Skandapurāṇa* (SP_{Bh} 180.17b—d)³⁶⁷ and the *Pāśupatasūtra* (PS 1.2 and PS 5.32)³⁶⁸. For Pāśupatas, reaching union with Śiva is the highest goal in life and essentially means to reach liberation (*mokṣa*), to escape from the continuous cycle of rebirth. The observance was, in other words, directed to Pāśupata *ascetics*, because liberation is the goal in life of ascetics in particular³⁶⁹.

This goal is very different from the worldly goal expressed by Viṣṇu. He wants to take the Pāśupata observance in order to conquer the Asuras instead. The goal is not only different, it also fits a different class of people, *viz.* the *kṣatriyas*—i.e. kings, warriors, etcetera—, precisely the class to which Viṣṇu belongs in the Varāha myth and other *devāsura* war myths. The *kṣatriya*-related goal of this *pāśupatavrata* therefore suits Viṣṇu’s cosmic role as “slayer of the Daityas” granted after his Narasiṃha manifestation. In fact, if Viṣṇu would have intended the ascetics’ goal of *mokṣa*, then this would not only mismatch Viṣṇu’s warriorhood and kingship, it would also cause a problem with the *devāsura* wars that are still to come in which Viṣṇu plays an important, fighting role (these wars include the battle in the Vāmana myth). If Viṣṇu would observe the *vrata* of the Pāśupata ascetics, as, for instance, prescribed in the *Pāśupatasūtra*, then Viṣṇu would have to give up his life as a *kṣatriya* and become an ascetic. Consequently, he would not be able to fulfil his task as Asura-slayer³⁷⁰.

³⁶⁷ SP_{Bh} 174—81 is a theological section of the *Skandapurāṇa* that includes the practice and goal of the Pāśupata observance. For example, SP_{Bh} 180.17b—d reads: *yaḥ snānam bhasmanā caret | bhasmanā śivayogena mucyate pāśabandhanāt*, “he who performs [the practice of] bathing with ashes, he will be liberated from the binding of fetters, through ash and union with Śiva”.

³⁶⁸ PS 1.2: *bhasmanā triṣavaṇam snāyīta*, “at dawn, noon and sunset, one should bathe using ashes”.

PS 5.32: *labhate rudrasāyujyam*, “one obtains union with Rudra [i.e. Śiva]”.

³⁶⁹ See, for example, Acharya 2011, 459: “[i]n the *pañcārtha* system, all initiates were ascetics, and all practice was aimed ultimately at liberation”.

³⁷⁰ I would like to thank Prof. Yuko Yokochi for this observation. She remarked that, taking the Vāmana myth into account, it is not possible that Viṣṇu takes on the life of a Pāśupata ascetic.

Based on these differences in task and goal in life, I suggest that we may be dealing with a different kind of vow; one to officially become a Pāśupata devotee through initiation, while remaining a *kṣatriya* and observing the rules of the warriors³⁷¹. This may reflect the medieval practice of initiation of kings into Śaivism. In ‘The Śaiva Age’, Alexis Sanderson shows that from the seventh century, there is epigraphical evidence for granting the king “Śaiva initiation (*śivamaṇḍaladīkṣā*)” (Sanderson 2009, 254). Whereas the initiated Śaiva usually has to adhere to severe rules, “early in the development of the Mantramārga, the Śaivas, no doubt in order to extend their recruitment and hence their influence, admitted a category of initiates who in consideration of the fact that they were incapable of taking on these onerous duties were exonerated from doing so” (ibid.). Initiated kings generally adopted an initiation name, and names ending in *-gaṇa* were reserved for *kṣatriyas* (ibid, 291 note 695). At the time of the *Skandapurāṇa*, Śaiva initiation was thus not exclusively for ascetics, but kings from the *kṣatriya* class were also able to be officially initiated as Śaivas³⁷². The *pāśupatavrata* performed by Viṣṇu, with the *kṣatriya*-related goal, could be an allusion to this royal practice. In that case, Viṣṇu, being a king, becomes a Pāśupata Śaiva and at the same time, obeys his obligations as *kṣatriya* in general and as protector and Asura-slayer in particular³⁷³.

³⁷¹ Instead of becoming a Pāśupata ascetic, who has to follow the rules of an ascetic.

³⁷² I should stress that Sanderson’s examples come from a different strand of Śaivism than the one followed in the *Skandapurāṇa*. At the time of the *Skandapurāṇa*, Śaivism was divided into two main branches: the Atimārga and the Mantramārga. The Pāśupatas belonged to the former and focussed primarily on the attainment of liberation. The Mantramārga type of Śaivism was the tantric branch, which “promised not only liberation but also, for those initiates consecrated to office, the ability to accomplish supernatural effects (*siddhiḥ*)” (Sanderson 2014, 4). Sanderson furthermore gives several examples, starting from the tenth century, of kings seeking initiation for the sake of victory over one’s enemies (ibid, 258—59). The *Skandapurāṇa*, with its focus on Pāśupata Śaivism, belonged to the Atimārga branch, whereas the examples provided by Sanderson 2009 belonged to the Mantramārga branch. To project practices of the Mantramārga onto those of the Atimārga may be problematic, but the correspondences with Viṣṇu’s *kṣatriya*-related goal of the *pāśupatavrata* are nevertheless remarkable. In addition, Hans Bakker noted similar initiatory names ending in *-gaṇa* for kings associated with Pāśupata Śaivism. In *The World of the Skandapurāṇa*, Bakker mentions a sixth century Pāśupata king from Ujjain, whose name “Śaṃkaragaṇa may itself have been a Śaiva initiation name ending in *gaṇa*” (Bakker 2014, 205). This may point to a practice of the initiation of kings into Pāśupata Śaivism.

³⁷³ It should be noted that Viṣṇu performs the *pāśupatavrata* together with the gods. It is unlikely that this particular royal type of observance also applies to them, since they have no special relationship with kingship. From the perspective of the storyline, this does not present a problem though, because the *Skandapurāṇa* composers were not so much concerned with the other gods, but rather with Viṣṇu, and to him, the parallel with Śaiva kings applies. Cf. Sanderson 2009 gives

4.2.3 Final liberation

The *pāśupatavrata* appears once more in the afterlife episode of the Vāmana myth. When Viṣṇu is freed from Pāpmā, he realizes that this was brought about by Śiva and he goes to Śivakūṭa to perform a horse sacrifice and worship Śiva for 1,006 years and six months (SP_{Bh} 121.13cd—14). From his performance of the horse sacrifice, we can tell that Viṣṇu is still a king. However, after Śiva offers Viṣṇu a boon because of his devotion to him (SP_{Bh} 121.15), Viṣṇu's wish and religious activities indicate his ambition to become a Pāśupata ascetic and to renounce his worldly life. Each step in the process of becoming an ascetic shows close parallels with the teaching in the Pāśupata section of the *Skandapurāṇa* and the *Pāśupatasūtra*, both of which target Pāśupata ascetics, as shown above. Each step is discussed below, starting with the boon that Viṣṇu asks for.

SP_{Bh} 121.16³⁷⁴:

*bhagavan pāpmanā*³⁷⁵ *vāpi tapasā vāpi lokapa |*
*lepo*³⁷⁶ *na me yathā syād vai tan mamācakṣva kālāhan || 16 ||*

an example from the *Brhatkālottara* in which the Śaiva teacher also initiated “the horses, elephants, chariots, and soldiers of the army [...] “in order to remove all obstacles and to ensure victory in battle”” (Sanderson 2009, 259). Although it is tempting to consider the gods as similar participants in the battle and thus suitable for initiation, the *Brhatkālottara* is not only several centuries later than the *Skandapurāṇa* (“some time after the 9th century and before the 12th” (Sanderson 2018, “Śaivism” section, para. 19)), it belongs to the Mantramārga type of Śaivism (*viz.* the Saiddhāntika Śaiva tradition (*ibid.*), hence posing the same problems as indicated in note 372.

³⁷⁴ The manuscripts show some variation for verses SP_{Bh} 121.16 until SP_{Bh} 121.19 (quoted below), and Bhaṭṭarāi has introduced several emendations. The most significant variants are given in the notes below.

³⁷⁵ *Pāpmanā* is the reading of S₁, R and the A manuscripts and is thus well-supported. Since the afterlife is about sin, *pāpmanā* suits the context of the myth. The combination of *pāpman-/ pāpa-* and *lepa-/ lip-* (see *pāda c*) is furthermore well-attested in the *Mahābhārata* (e.g. MBh 1.7.4 and MBh 12.185.16), so it is a common phrase. On the other hand, S₂ and S₃ read *karmanā*, “by action”. I do not follow this reading, not only because its manuscript support is limited, its combination with *lepa-/ lip-* is less common as well (cf. MBh 5.43.1). Furthermore, *karmanā* matches *tapasā* better because both are actions, so I consider *karmanā* to be the *lectio faciliior*, and hence as secondary. Even though *tapasā* is found in all the manuscripts, I have not found it combined with *lepa-/ lip-* elsewhere. It may have been included here because it fits Viṣṇu's ambition to become a Pāśupata ascetic, as I argue in the current section.

³⁷⁶ I follow the reading of the S manuscripts for *lepo*; cf. the R manuscript reads *niya-* (i.e. *niyamena* with the following two syllables), while the A manuscripts have *lopo*, which is also Bhaṭṭarāi's reading. The parallels with the Pāśupata section of the *Skandapurāṇa* and the *Pāśupatasūtra* discussed in the main text, which have the verb *lip-*, furthermore support the reading *lepo*.

“Oh lord, oh protector of the world, oh slayer of time, tell me
how there may be no contamination by sin or *tapas* for me.”

Viṣṇu asks Śiva to instruct him in a teaching (implied by *tat*), thanks to which he will not be contaminated by sin or by *tapas*. The verse has a close parallel with both the Pāśupata section of the *Skandapurāṇa* and the *Pāśupatasūtra*. In the former, it is first stated that the Yogin “may not be contaminated by actions that are bound by ignorance” (*na lipyeta karmabhir mohabandhanais*, SP_{Bh} 179.17ab), and then that “the Yogin is not contaminated by sins either” (*yogī tathā pāpair na lipyate*, SP_{Bh} 179.19ab). In the latter, it is reported that “the accomplished Yogin is not contaminated by action, nor by sin” (*siddhayogī na lipyate karmaṇā pātakena vā*, PS 5.20)³⁷⁷. Viṣṇu’s request not to be contaminated thus shows close parallels to the teaching of these doctrinal passages.

Similar parallels show up in the means to realize non-contamination as ordered by Śiva in the next verse: “perform the *mahāvratā*” (*cara mahāvratam*, SP_{Bh} 121.17d). This observance is further explained in the following verses, where we learn that Viṣṇu indeed performs the *vrata*.

SP_{Bh} 121.18—19:

*pañcārtham kṛtarakṣaṃ taṃ*³⁷⁸ *sarvadharmāvaham śubham |*
yogaṃ yantraṃ vrataṃ caiva paramaiśvaryasādhanaṃ || 18 ||
yat tat pāśupataṃ divyaṃ vidhānaṃ sārvaśāntikam |
tac cīrtvā dvādaśa samāḥ paramaiśvaryam āptavān || 19 ||

³⁷⁷ The concept of Siddhas, “Accomplished Ones”, will be taken up again below.

³⁷⁸ This *pāda* has been conjectured by Bhaṭṭarāī into *sa cārtha kṛtarakṣas taṃ*, “and then he [i.e. Viṣṇu], by whom a *raṁṣa* [i.e. protection ritual] was done, [having performed (*cīrtvā*, SP_{Bh} 121.19c)] it [i.e. the *vrata*]”. Even though this is a good verse, it is possible to stay closer to the readings in the manuscripts. S₁ reads *pañcārtha kṛtarakṣantaṃ* (underscored syllables are uncertain), S₂ reads *pañcārtham kṛtarakṣantaṃ*, and S₃ reads *pañcārtham kṛtarakṣantaṃ*. R reads *yat pāpam harate nityam*, and the A manuscripts read *yaṃ{A4: paṃ}cānukṛta pūrvam vai*. The readings of R and A are corrupt, but nevertheless support a reading *pañcā*° because *pa* and *ya* look very similar and can be easily misread.

I have furthermore decided to divide *kṛtarakṣantaṃ* into *kṛtarakṣaṃ taṃ*. The change from *-n-* to *-ṃ* is merely orthographical and does not influence the case. The reading *taṃ* could refer to *vrataṃ*. The correct case would be *tat* (neutral, instead of masculine), which under the influence of the endings in *-aṃ* might have become *taṃ*. Confusion of *tat* and *taṃ* is common in the *Skandapurāṇa* (see SP Vol. IV, 26).

“Having performed for twelve years that divine, wish-fulfilling Pāśupata practice (*vidhāna*, 19b), which is [known as] *pañcārtha*³⁷⁹, which protects, which is the vehicle of all *dharmas*, glorious, which is the [ultimate] *yoga* [“practice”], [ultimate] *yantra* [“instrument”] and [ultimate] *vrata* [“observance”]³⁸⁰ and leads to supremacy, he [i.e. Viṣṇu] obtained supremacy.”

In light of the Varāha myth earlier, it is most striking that the *mahāvrata* is also qualified as “*pāśupata*”. Having already performed a *pāśupatavrata* together with the gods in order to be victorious against the Asuras, Viṣṇu now performs another *pāśupatavrata*. This time, he performs it alone and with the ascetic goal of non-contamination. The qualifications of the *vrata* as well as its results again have parallels with the Pāśupata section of the *Skandapurāṇa* and the *Pāśupatasūtra*.

To start with the *mahāvrata* itself, elsewhere in the *Skandapurāṇa* (SP_{Bh} 180.10—11), it is qualified as “the totality of practices [related to] ashes”³⁸¹ (*bhasmasādhanamātram*, SP_{Bh} 180.10c), and “by abiding to it, [its practitioners] are released” (*sevanād yasya mucyante*, SP_{Bh} 180.11c). This is reminiscent of the *Pāśupatasūtra*’s description of the *pāśupatavrata*. The *Pāśupatasūtra* prescribes practices involving ashes, including bathing (PS 1.2, see note 368), sleeping (PS 1.3, *bhasmani śayīta*, “one should sleep in ashes”), and bathing again (PS 1.4, *anusnānam*). These are

³⁷⁹ This refers to the five categories in the Pāśupata teaching as defined by Kaunḍinya in the *Pañcārthabhāṣya*: “(1) Kārya: effect (= worldly existence); (2) Kāraṇa: cause (= God); (3) Yoga: union (with God); (4) Vidhi: prescribed regimen (= ritual praxis); (5) Duḥkhānta: end of suffering (= the goal)” (Bisschop 2014, 28). The Pāśupata practice described here thus belongs to the *pañcārtha* system.

³⁸⁰ I understand the three nouns to refer to the main object of the sentence, in the sense that the Pāśupata practice is “the best of all *yogas*, the best of all *yantras* and the best of all *vratas*”.

³⁸¹ Hans Bakker has translated this *pāda* differently in *The World of the Skandapurāṇa*, viz. that it “merely consists of taking baths in ashes” (Bakker 2014, 153). However, in the following verses, various practices with ashes, including their beneficial results, are enumerated. For example, “by just grasping ashes, there is the release of all bondages” (*bhasmagrahaṇamātrāt tu sarvabandhapramocanam*, SP_{Bh} 180.14ab). Additionally, the *Pāśupatavrata* also mentions more practices than just bathing, as shown below.

all done for the sake of liberation, which is understood as complete union with Śiva (PS 5.32, see note 368)³⁸².

The result of Viṣṇu's performance of the *mahāvratā* has a further parallel with the two discussed text portions, viz. he attains *paramaiśvarya* (SP_{Bh} 121.19d). This state is often described as involving “the eight qualities”³⁸³, such as being very small or very big³⁸⁴, and is obtained by the Siddhas, “Accomplished Ones”. The *Pāñcārthabhāṣya*, Kauṇḍinya's commentary on the *Pāśupatasūtra*, glosses the word *siddha* in *siddhayogī* in PS 5.20 quoted above as someone who has reached supremacy³⁸⁵. And the *Pāśupata* section of the *Skandapurāṇa* refers several times to *paramaiśvarya*, of which SP_{Bh} 180.8 is a suitable example here, for it places the attainment of supremacy between the practice of the *pāśupatavratā* and final liberation³⁸⁶, exactly corresponding to the moment of Viṣṇu's attainment of *paramaiśvarya* in the Vāmana myth. After having reached *paramaiśvarya*, Viṣṇu namely reaches final liberation, as can be deduced from the following verse.

SP_{Bh} 121.20:

tasya devaḥ svayaṃ śūlī tuṣṭaḥ prekṣya tathāvidham |
śarīrārdham dadau tasmai tad abhūd viṣṇuśaṃkaram || 20 ||

“Deva [“God”, i.e. Śiva] himself, Śūlin [“the one with the trident”], being pleased with him [i.e. Viṣṇu], having watched [him] in that state [i.e. having obtained *paramaiśvarya*], gave

³⁸² For a possible connection between the *mahāvratā* and the Kāpālikas, another Śaiva group, see Bakker 2014, 153.

³⁸³ For example, the *Skandapurāṇa* speaks of *aṣṭagunam aiśvaryaṃ*, “eightfold supremacy” (SP 29.116c and SP_{Bh} 114.67c).

³⁸⁴ The complete list is: *aṇiman* (“minuteness”), *mahiman* (“bigness”), *laghiman* (“lightness”), *gariman* (“heaviness”), *prāpti* (“obtaining [everything one wants]”), *prākāmya* (“irresistible will”), *īśitva* (“superiority”) and *vaśitva* (“subduing to one's own will”). For references to the “eightfold supremacy” in other sources, see SP Vol IIA, 198—99.

³⁸⁵ For example, PBh 5.20:6 reads *siddho nāma darśanādyaiśvaryaṃ prāptaḥ*, “he who has reached supremacy, such as clairvoyance, is called Siddha”.

³⁸⁶ SP_{Bh} 180.8:

vrataṃ pāśupataṃ prāpya ṣaḍmāsāj jñānam āpnute |
yogaiśvaryaṃ mahad vyāsa yad avāpya vimucyate || 8 ||

“Having received the *pāśupatavratā*, one obtains knowledge after six months [and] having obtained great supremacy in *yoga*, one is released.”

half of his body to him. [As a result] that (*tad*) [body of Viṣṇu]
became Viṣṇuśaṃkara [i.e. Viṣṇu-Śiva]³⁸⁷.”

As stated above, according to Pāśupata Śaivism, final liberation has the form of union with Śiva (see PS 5.32). The penultimate verse of the Vāmana myth represents this highest goal of the Pāśupata ascetics through Śiva giving half of his body to Viṣṇu³⁸⁸. The result is that Viṣṇu’s body becomes a combination of Śiva and Viṣṇu, a merged entity that should be worshipped, according to the *phalaśruti*, “reward for listening [to the narrative]”, in SP_{Bh} 121.21³⁸⁹. Viṣṇu’s final liberation is, in other words, the climactic

³⁸⁷ *Pāda* d is elliptical because it is not clear what *tad* refers to. The most straightforward answer would be Viṣṇu, referred to earlier with *tasya* and *tasmai*, but this does not agree with the neuter form *tad*. One option, therefore, is to supply a neuter word, among which a word like *rūpa* or *śarīra*, “body”, fits the context best. From a theological perspective, it cannot refer to Śiva’s body because Śiva is not subject to change: he will always remain the ultimate lord Śiva. Instead, I understand it as Viṣṇu’s body that becomes a combination of himself and Śiva. Alternatively—or perhaps additionally—a separate form arose, viz. a merged entity that consists of both gods, representing the concept of Harihara (see note 388), which should be worshipped as stated in SP_{Bh} 121.21c (see main text below and note 389).

³⁸⁸ The image sketched here also suggests the concept of Harihara. Harihara is a combination of Viṣṇu (Hari) and Śiva (Hara), each forming one half of the body (see Figure 3 in *Appendix II: Figures*). The composite icon becomes popular in material art from the Gupta period (Agrawala 1970, 348). From the viewer’s point of view, Śiva is usually on the left, recognizable by his trident (*triśūla*), his matted hair (*jāṭamakuṭa*) and the *abhaya mudrā* (the hand gesture not to fear) and Viṣṇu on the right, recognizable by his *cakra*, crown (*kirīṭamūkuṭa*) and conch. Harihara is often seen as the primary example of syncretism, where the gods are worshipped on an equal level and are considered to solve sectarian rivalry and complement each other. For example, according to the *Skandapurāṇa Nāgarakhaṇḍa* 247.8—13, Brahmā tells the gods that once upon a time, Śiva put a halt to a sectarian battle between Śaiva devotees and Vaiṣṇava devotees by making a form that is half Śiva and half Viṣṇu and was called Harihara (Adiceam 1966, 84). It should be noted, however, that it is Śiva who creates the form, so there is still a hierarchy between the two gods. The idea that the two gods complement each other is found in various Sanskrit sources on art, which describe Śiva as *ugra*, the “terrible” aspect of the god, and Viṣṇu as *śīṭala*, the “gentle” aspect of the god (ibid, 84—85). However, not all instances of Harihara are an example of non-sectarian syncretism. For example, in Cambodia, as studied by Paul A. Lavy, Śaiva kings used Harihara images to expand their political control, where Viṣṇu was the deity of the royals. “These northern [Śaiva] rulers consequently employed an icon that represented the union of both deities and the concurrent conceptions of authority represented by each, in order to symbolise and legitimise their own territorial and political aspirations” (Lavy 2003, 23). According to Lavy, this mechanism was used more often by Śaivas than by Vaiṣṇavas, both in Cambodia and in India (ibid, 39).

³⁸⁹ SP_{Bh} 121.21:

*ya imaṃ śṛṇuyān martyaḥ sadā parvasu parvasu |
arcayec chivaviṣṇuṃ ca sa gacchet paramām gatim || 21 ||*

“The man who always listens to this [story], chapter by chapter, and worships Śivaviṣṇu, he would go to the highest state.”

state of his adherence to the ideal path of the Pāsupata ascetic, which starts with complete devotion to Śiva (SP_{Bh} 121.14), continues with the attainment of *aiśvarya* (SP_{Bh} 121.19d) and concludes with union with Śiva, which is granted by Śiva himself (SP_{Bh} 121.20).

4.2.4 From *kṣatriya* to Viṣṇuśaṃkara

We can observe that the boons gain a more religious character as the text progresses. In the Narasimha myth, Viṣṇu receives the boon to be the slayer of Daityas. This boon does not have a religious character, but rather gives Viṣṇu a specific, active task in the Śaiva universe. The boon fits Viṣṇu's characterization both in the *Skandapurāṇa* and in other sources as protector of the universe and king. Since Śiva grants him this task, Śiva remains in control.

Viṣṇu fulfils his task with success in the Varāha myth. At the end of this narrative, Viṣṇu receives another boon, this time with a religious character: the teaching of the *pāśupatavrata*. Being one of the most important teachings in Pāsupata Śaivism, the *pāśupatavrata* is usually directed to those who wish to become Pāsupata ascetics. However, Viṣṇu does not want to become an ascetic, but specifies the goal he envisions with his initiation, *viz.* he wants to be victorious in battle against the Daityas together with the gods. This matches his character as active *kṣatriya* in general and Asura-slayer in particular, but it does not, at first glance, match the goal of the *pāśupatavrata*. I have argued that the *pāśupatavrata* with Viṣṇu's *kṣatriya*-related goal might have a parallel with Śaiva initiations of kings. At the time of the *Skandapurāṇa*, it was possible for kings to become official Pāsupata initiates, while at the same time adhering to the rules of a king. In this way, kings could both participate in religious (non-violent) activities and participate in worldly (violent) activities. In the same way, king Viṣṇu could both become an official devotee of Śiva and continue his task as Asura-slayer.

This task is once again fulfilled in the Vāmana myth, and his devotion to Śiva reaches its zenith. After performing another *pāśupatavrata*, *viz.* the *mahāvratav* with the sole intention on becoming a Pāsupata ascetic, Viṣṇu attains supremacy. After worshipping Śiva for another 1,006 years and six months, he is granted the highest reward according to Pāsupata Śaivas: union with Śiva. In various Pāsupata texts, including its foundational *Pāśupatasūtra*, union with Śiva means final liberation, *mokṣa*, the goal of

every Pāśupata ascetic. While in the Varāha myth, Viṣṇu was still a *kṣatriya*, performing a royal type of *pāśupatavrata* with the *kṣatriya*-related goal of victory over the Asuras, in the Vāmana myth, he becomes a Pāśupata ascetic, by performing the *pāśupatavrata* with the ascetic goal of union with Śiva. Viṣṇu even reaches this state of final liberation³⁹⁰.

To summarize, just as each manifestation myth in this set of three narratives demanded a different interpretation of the new additional problem-solution structure in which Viṣṇu did not give up his manifested form, each manifestation myth also speaks of a different boon from Śiva to Viṣṇu. The boons get more religious with the absolute climax in the Vāmana myth. There is, however, one consistent factor to which all boons can be led back: devotion to Śiva. Śiva and devotion to him are once again at the centre of Viṣṇu's afterlife episodes. In the final part of this chapter, I will explore which objectives the afterlife episodes might serve and return to the principle of end weight.

4.3 Conclusions

As demonstrated in chapters 2 and 3, the composers made several changes to the core myths of Viṣṇu's manifestation myths. Some of these can be explained from the perspective of Śaivization, where typical Vaiṣṇava elements gain a Śaiva character. This is often done in a subtle manner. I have argued that this combination of known Vaiṣṇava features and new Śaiva additions increases the chance that the retold myths will be accepted by the audience. If the story would differ too much from the one the audience knew from other sources, they could find it difficult to believe the new version. This explains, for example, why the general storyline is kept intact, with the original problem-

³⁹⁰ It should be noted that Viṣṇu's liberation forms a potential problem for the narratives that follow, in which Viṣṇu is again one of the (main) participants in a *devāsura* war. In fact, immediately after the Vāmana myth, the Tārakāmaya war is told, in which Viṣṇu kills Kālanemi. There is no doubt that Viṣṇu is back in his Asura-slayer role, which does not agree with his state as liberated soul. This forms precisely the problem that we were able to solve in the Varāha myth by assuming a Śaiva initiation of king Viṣṇu, but it is impossible to circumvent the problem here from the perspective of the narratives. Perhaps it is possible to explain this from the perspective of the composition instead. Even though the three manifestation myths are not told immediately after one another, there are several characteristics that make them appear as one set of narratives, a trinity. They show the same structure and similar adjustments like a new portrayal of Viṣṇu, Viṣṇu living an afterlife and receiving increasingly religious boons. The three manifestation myths build up to the climax of liberation in the Vāmana myth, and this section is therefore, in a way, concluded. What follows might still be connected on other thematic levels (as I will demonstrate in chapter 5), but Viṣṇu's manifestations end here.

solution structure of a Daitya king who has become too powerful and taken over control (problem) and Viṣṇu who manifests himself and conquers the king of the Daityas (solution). Each main story is well-balanced, with Viṣṇu as the saviour of the universe, and—one may add—with Śiva remaining absent from the narrative.

However, the *Skandapurāṇa* composers introduced entirely new endings for each manifestation, leaving any balance between Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva elements aside. This results in three rich afterlife episodes that follow the same structure, yet aligned with the demands and specifics of the manifestation myth in question, and introducing the god who was absent in the manifestation myths so far: Śiva.

As demonstrated in this chapter, the afterlife episodes can be divided into two parts. The first is the introduction of an additional problem and solution. A new problem arises when Viṣṇu does not or cannot free himself from his manifested form. As Narasiṃha, he forms a threat to living creatures; as Varāha, he gets a troublesome son; and as Vāmana, he is unable to protect the universe from evil. The cosmic order is, in other words, still not entirely restored. This critical situation is solved by Śiva, who makes Viṣṇu return to his former body. Even when Śiva is not actively involved in releasing Viṣṇu from his manifested form, as is the case in the Varāha myth where Skanda puts an end to Varāha with a spear that he had received from Śiva, it is clear that Śiva is the mastermind behind every solution.

From that moment, Śiva does not leave the stage, which brings me to the second part. As soon as Viṣṇu realizes that Śiva has released him from his manifestation, he starts praising Śiva. As a reward for Viṣṇu's devotion, Śiva grants Viṣṇu a boon. He first officially becomes the slayer of Daityas, then he is taught a royal type of *pāśupatavrata* and finally, he is taught the *mahāvrata* of the Pāśupatas. I have argued that the boons gain a more religious character as the text progresses. The reward for devotion to Śiva becomes bigger and bigger, resulting in the highest goal in the life of the Pāśupata ascetic: liberation in the form of union with Śiva.

Both parts shift the focus from Viṣṇu to Śiva. I would like to argue that it is a deliberate choice of the *Skandapurāṇa* composers to introduce this major change specifically at the end of the manifestation myths because it is the most defining part of a narrative, following the principle of end weight. Besides the what Miller called “intuitive

but rarely theoretically-articulated sense that the ending stands as the primary site of control in narrative” (Miller 2014, 9), the importance of the concluding afterlife episodes can also be observed from the structure of the Narasimha myth. This narrative starts with an announcement of the afterlife, which functions as a foreshadowing to this important future event; an event in which Śiva is presented as the ultimate saviour and sole devotion to him as the right means to liberation. This is the message that will linger in the minds of the audience and will be remembered most vividly.

To conclude, what effect does this strong Śaiva message have on the endings and on the manifestation myths as a whole? Can we speak of a Śaiva appropriation of the myths³⁹¹? The endings with the new Śaiva message can be seen first of all as reflecting a Śaivization of the endings. The myth turns from a narrative ending with the heroic deed of Viṣṇu into a narrative ending with Śiva saving Viṣṇu and granting him fabulous (Śaiva) boons. This effectuates a Śaivization of the entire myth, precisely because the endings are such a defining part of a narrative. By making the right changes at the right places in the myths, the *Skandapurāṇa* composers took control of Viṣṇu’s manifestation myths.

Whether the composers wanted to appropriate the myths is difficult to say because it is a fine line between integration and accommodation on the one hand, and appropriation on the other. On the one hand, the first two processes aim at incorporating Viṣṇu and his myths in such a way that they establish a connection with the audience, by reaching agreement with their theological and mythological expectations of the *Skandapurāṇa*. This, as I have argued in section 3.6, was probably attempted by the *Skandapurāṇa* composers. Appropriation, on the other hand, has a different goal. It aims at making Viṣṇu and his myths Śaiva property, claiming them and disjoining them from the predominantly Vaiṣṇava culture where they came from. It is hard to believe that the *Skandapurāṇa* composers would have thought that after the composition of their text, Viṣṇu and his manifestation myths exclusively belonged to the Śaiva community, being disjoined from the Vaiṣṇava tradition. Rather, the composers would have wanted to tell *their* version of the story, which is characterized by a Śaiva ideology but does not ignore its underlying

³⁹¹ Comparable to how Miller has shown that Chaucer’s works became Scottish property through Scotticization of the endings (see the introduction to the current chapter).

roots; and this is, in fact, what I have argued with the help of integration and accommodation in section 3.6.

At the same time, it is important to note that Viṣṇu holds a different position from the other gods in the *Skandapurāṇa*. Brahmā, for example, although his task as creator god underwent a similar Śaivization—viz. Śiva granted it to him—and although he is also presented as Śiva’s devotee just like almost all figures in the *Skandapurāṇa*, as shown in section 3.4, he remains relatively independent. Viṣṇu, on the other hand, does not only undergo a Śaivization of his task as protector of the universe and he is not just presented as a devotee of Śiva, but his dependency on Śiva to fulfil his tasks in the Śaiva cosmos is continuously emphasized in various narratives, and he is even presented as the ideal Pāśupata Śaiva, who attains liberation through sole devotion to Śiva. It is the most effective means to incorporate Viṣṇu into the Śaiva universe and Śaivism at large.