

साहबकौलविरचितः कल्पवृक्षः

Sāhib Kaula's Tree of Languages

A multilingual carmen cancellatum
from 17th century Kashmir

By

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Indica et Tibetica Verlag
Marburg 2021

Pages from leT60

Preface

AT THE WORLD SANSKRIT CONFERENCE held 2012 in New Delhi the *Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts* presented a small exhibition. One item was the reproduction of a large cloth,¹ onto which a grid was painted that resembled an oversized chess-board. Each square contained one, sometimes more syllables in small Śāradā script so that the whole—to be read roughly 150 squares from left to right and 150 lines down—constituted one large continuous text. Some syllables were written in red ink and form patterns, so that diagonal, zigzag, square, rhombic and other red shapes were covering the whole cloth. These red texts, the so-called intexts,² could be read in various ways by following the red paths in different directions, and turned out to be mostly in Sanskrit, but some others seemed to be in Indian vernaculars, others could not be read at all.

My colleague Advaitavadini Kaul, since she knew that I was editing works of the Kashmirian author Sāhib Kaula, asked me whether I could make sense of the object, which was supposed to be a text by the same author, but I could not. In the following years, whenever I got access to manuscripts of the *Kalṅavṛkṣa*, which was the name associated with this cloth, I had another look, but since these manuscripts were puzzling in many ways, the idea of editing the text was postponed more and more. There were too many questions surrounding this enigmatic object.

In the meantime Alessandro Battistini, who had worked on *citrakāvya*, had found out that three of these cloths existed, and very kindly forwarded scans and his photographs to me. So I pursued the matter further, found and collated more

¹ One accession card of the *National Mission for Manuscripts*, New Delhi, gives 155cm width. ² The term is adopted from the elaborate vocabulary for visual poetry used in Ernst, *Carmen figuratum: Geschichte des Figurengedichts von den antiken Ursprüngen bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters*. For details see below, p. 54.

sources, but too many unsolved questions surrounded the cloth so that I did not dare to publish any of the meagre results. It was only at the end of 2018 that I perused a manuscript—a huge codex of more than a thousand folios with materials on the Kaulas—which on a few pages turned out to contain the missing link. Suddenly Sāhib Kaula’s “wish-fulfilling tree” started to make more sense. The new findings are spectacular enough to be relevant not only to a larger community of Indologists, but also to interdisciplinary research on *carmina figurata*, for, as will become clear in the following, the *Kalpavr̥kṣa* seems to be the largest *carmen cancellatum* in world literature. It also most likely holds at least one other record, namely the one for the number of languages for the intexts. Nevertheless the text is keeping, as it were, quite a few secrets that are clearly beyond my expertise, to itself, and thus I consider my foundational work done and leave the remaining riddles to others.

Over the years many colleagues contributed in one or the other way to this work. I am very grateful to Advaitavadini Kaul for asking the question that I am now trying to answer, and of course for the set of scans, for Alessandro Battistini for providing further scans and pictures, to Oliver Kahl for identifying the Arabic text, and to Anna Martin for identifying the Persian text. Monika Horstmann, Hans Harder and Lata Deokar kindly shared their observations on the non-Sanskritic texts with me. Dragomir Dimitrov very kindly put the partial scans together to form the complete picture, so that I could regularly stand in front of and ponder the object in a reproduction in original size. Thanks are also due to Stanislav Jager and Roland Steiner for proof-reading and to the editors of the *Mokṣopāya*, Susanne Stinner and Anett Krause, for access to the collation of the unpublished section of the *Nirvāṇaprakaraṇa*. Martin Gansten has kindly helped in the discussion and calculation of Indian dates, and with Hamsa Stainton, who has been working on Sāhib Kaul and his pupils, I had the pleasure of discussing some finer details around the literary history of the Kauls. And finally, the *Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung* and the *Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen* have kindly given their permission to reproduce the relevant manuscripts.

The work is dedicated to the memory of my *kāvya*guru Michael Hahn, who would have been thrilled by the *Kalpavr̥kṣa*.

Jürgen Hanneder

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Overview

There are quite a few works of the seventeenth-century Śaiva author Sāhib Kaula available in manuscript libraries,¹ but whereas his *Devīnāmavilāsa* has been published long ago in a reliable edition,² the rest of his oeuvre has remained mostly unknown.³ With the recent availability of larger numbers of Kashmirian manuscripts⁴ a much clearer picture of the author and his works started to emerge.

Sāhib Kaula⁵ was active during the second half of the seventeenth century and was a prolific writer, according to Sanderson “the Kauls’ most outstanding and influential author”.⁶ While his sometimes elaborate colophons provide some information about his family and his teachers, his works show that he subscribed to a mixture of Advaita Vedānta and Kashmirian non-dual Śaivism.

The author has mentioned a number of his works in the colophons of his *Devīnāmavilāsa*, not all of which are available in manuscript. At present we know of twenty works from the pen of Sāhib Kaula. Three are ritual handbooks written, compiled or merely associated with the author.⁷ The above-mentioned *Devīnāmavilāsa* is a large *stutikāvya*, the *Citsphārasārādvaya* is a soteriological dialogue between teacher and student,⁸ many other works are Stotras or something in between Stotras and religious poems. Among these the *Saccidānandakandalī* stands

¹ For details on sources and more background information see my forthcoming edition: Hanneder, *Sahib Kaula's Works*. ² *The Devīnāmavilāsa*. By Sāhib Kaul. Ed. by MADHUSŪDAN KAUL SHĀSTRĪ Lahore 1942 (Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies LXIII). ³ The print of some of his smaller works by JANARDAN PANDEY in a collection of Śaiva works (Pāṇḍeya, *Śaivādvayavimśatikā*) cannot be counted, for it is so faulty as to give an unfavourable impression of the author. ⁴ For instance the eGangotri collection on archive.org. ⁵ The “Sāhib”, by the way, is invariable part of his name and is spelt, reflecting the Kashmirian variation in spelling foreign words, as Sāhib, Sāhiba, even Sāhibha. Within his Stotras he calls himself *sāhibkaula*. ⁶ Sanderson, “Kashmir,” p. 124. ⁷ *Śrīvidyānityapūjāpaddhati*, *Śyāmāpaddhati* and *Hṛllekhāpaddhati*. See Hanneder, *To edit or not to edit*, p. 221ff., for a discussion of this type of authorship. ⁸ See Hanneder, *To edit or not to edit*, p. 215–220.

out as being transmitted in Sanskrit and in a Bhāṣā version. Then we have the *Śivaśaktivilāsa*, *Sahajārcanāṣṭikā*, *Nijātmabodha*, *Śivajīvadaśaka* and the *Śārikāstava*, which contains a *mantroddhāra* of the Kaula's lineage goddess (*vaṃśadevatā*).¹

But the most unusual and enigmatic of Sāhib Kaula's works is clearly the *Kalpavṛkṣa*, written according to the colophon on the 12th August, 1676. The text is transmitted in a few manuscripts, to be briefly described below, but there are also three versions of the text written onto a large cloth. There the text of the *Kalpavṛkṣa*—identical with the text we know from the “normal” manuscripts—is filled into a grid from left to right and top to bottom. Some letters are written in red ink to form a net of red lines in all directions, containing apparently further layers of text, which we call intexts. The cloths are of considerable size² with a numbered chess-board grid of ca. 150 × 150 painted onto them. Lines and rows are numbered, and minute digits are running from the left top to the right and downwards.

The *mūla*-text of the *Kalpavṛkṣa* as known from the manuscripts,³ the “linear” or “base” text—in contradistinction to the intexts, the paratexts in red ink—is filled into this grid. As far as the base text is concerned, the cloth is just like a giant one-page manuscript.

Strangely the editor of the *Devīnāmavilāsa*, who prides himself with being from the family of the author, and who has mentioned the *Kalpavṛkṣa* in his short description of Sāhib Kaula, has not given any hint about the content or nature of this work. Perhaps he had only seen the manuscripts of the text, but not the cloths. Admittedly there is not much in the manuscripts to alert the reader to the fact that this is but the base text of a piece of visual art, which can only be properly understood and appreciated when viewing the cloth.

¹ See Hanneder, “Śārikā's Mantra.” ² One accession card of the *National Mission for Manuscripts*, New Delhi, gives 155cm width. ³ The sources are given in some detail below, and part of the edition is reproduced at the end of this work.