

The Story of King Yaśōdhara – Processes of Transformation

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“The Story of King Yaśōdhara” is one of the narratives exclusively told by Jains,¹ and it is told in numerous versions (and different languages), the earliest dating from the eighth century, the most recent from 1980. It is not at all surprising that the story is taken up again and again – King Yaśōdhara, who as a result of a symbolic act of violence has to suffer the most terrible rebirths and cruel ways of death, is an ideal example for the propagation of the concept of ahimsa, non-violence in deeds, words and thoughts, which is central to Jainism.

As the material is very extensive, I will focus in this article especially on two versions written in Kannada and their direct sources. Central for my investigation is the first version in Kannada, composed by Janna (or Janārdanaḍēva), court poet, minister and army commander under the Hoysaḷa kings Ballāḷa II (r. 1173-1220) and Narasiṃha II (r. 1220-1235). Janna chose exactly this tale in 1209 as the subject of his first major poem,² and certainly for a good reason, as he created it during a time of transition in Karnāṭaka. While until the end of the first millennium the members of the ruling dynasties were predominantly close to Jainism,³ towards the middle of the twelfth century the Vīraśaivas gained more and more power.⁴ The strengthening of the Vīraśaivas demanded

¹ The only exception being the drama *Hiṭṭina huṃja* by Girish Karnad, written in 1980, see below.

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² As far as we know, besides the *Yaśōdharacarite* Janna composed the *Anantanāthapurāṇaṃ*, “The Legend of Tirthaṅkara Anantanātha”, the *Anubhavamukura*, a treatise on sexology that is no longer extant, and most probably two inscriptions.

³ Thus, until the middle of the twelfth century, almost all literary works that have survived to the present day were written by Jains (see Rice 1921: 17f.).

⁴ In contrast to the earlier largely peaceful coexistence of the various religious movements, polemics and sometimes violent confrontations – similar to those in Tamil Nadu from the sixth/seventh century onwards – now occurred, culminating in the takeover or destruction of numerous Jain shrines, cf. Geen 2020, esp. chapter “Jains and Śaivas in Karnataka”. As Dibbad (2011: 67) was able to show on the basis of epigraphic evidence, about half of all Jain shrines in Karnataka were destroyed or

a counter-reaction from the Jains, a confrontation with and clear dissociation from the values and rituals of their rivals. To show the importance of “The Story of King Yaśōdhara” in this context, I will first of all give a brief summary of the plot, following Janna’s *Yaśōdharacarite*.⁵ I will then address issues of transformation and transcreation and demonstrate how “The Story of King Yaśōdhara” is still relevant today.

Summary of Janna’s version of “The Story of King Yaśōdhara”

Māridatta, king of Rājapura, celebrated the spring festival for the blood-thirsty goddess Caṇḍamāri. He sent his men to fetch a human pair for the main sacrifice. They caught a boy and his sister, who had come with a group of ascetics to the city and were seeking for alms. They were brought into the temple, a hell full of blood, skulls and crying animals, where the king awaited them, his sword drawn. To the king’s amazement the children showed no fear at all. Admiring their courage, he asked about their family. The boy realised that the king was ready to embrace the true faith and agreed to tell him the story of their lives:

Yaśōdhara, king of Ujjaini, was happily married with beautiful Amṛtamati. One night the queen was awakened by a voice, singing sweet and alluring in the dark silence of the small hours. She lost her heart to the possessor of that divine voice, whoever it might be. It turned out that the singer was the mahout, a bald, ugly, crippled, mean, bad-smelling fellow, in every inch the opposite of Amṛtamati’s royal husband. What follows now is an old story, which we already find in the commentaries to the *Āvaśyaka-Sūtras*.⁶ Spurning her brave and handsome husband, the queen got involved with this unworthy guy, who also treated her badly. Yaśōdhara, aware of the diminishing passion of his wife, followed her one night and found out the truth. His first impulse was to kill them both, but the baseness of his wife’s paramour kept him from doing so. Disgusted, he left the scene.

The next day he visited his mother Candramati in her chambers. Of course, she noticed that something was bothering her son. Yaśōdhara told her about a bad dream in which he symbolically hid the adultery of

converted into Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava temples. On the violence of the Vīraśaivas against the Jains, see also Leslie 1998, Ben-Herut 2012 and Hegewald 2014.

⁵ The spelling of the names of the protagonists in this essay has been taken from Janna’s Kannada version for consistency.

⁶ See, for example, the story of the elephant-driver, *Āvaśyakacūrṇī* I 461,13-465,6, translated by Nalini Balbir in Granoff 1990: 21-24.

his wife. Terrified, she asked him to sacrifice an animal to the goddess to avert the evil effects of the dream, but he refused, pointing to the compassion for living beings, the very essence of Jainism. Finally, Candramati was able to convince her son to offer a cock made of dough instead of a “real” animal. With a heavy heart, Yaśōdhara agreed.

Through this symbolic act of violence alone, Yaśōdhara and Candramati had to suffer the worst rebirths imaginable: After they had been poisoned by Yaśōdhara’s unfaithful wife, they had to endure various cruel rebirths as animals, killing and devouring each other, being sacrificed and being tortured to death. Finally, they were born as a pair of chickens, listened by chance to the sermon of a saint named Sudatta and gained insight into their former lives. After their violent death — they were pierced by an arrow — they were reborn as children of Yaśōdhara’s son Yaśōmati by the name of Abhayaruci and Abhayamati. Even as children, they remembered their past lives. When their father was converted to the true faith by the saint Sudatta and renounced the world, they also joined the ascetic and his group of monks, wandering with them from place to place, until they were caught in Rājapura by King Māridatta’s men.

Abhayaruci concluded his narrative with the admonition: “I have seen and experienced the suffering of births through one symbolical act of violence; you kill without hesitation this much living beings – you will undergo attoning in hell!” (JY 4.70).⁷ After these words, the goddess Caṇḍamāri appeared in bodily form and asked her devotees not to kill any animals for her now or in the future. King Māridatta, horrified by this tale, renounced the world.

Janna and his predecessors

As mentioned before, this narrative of King Yaśōdhara is by no means new in Jain literature. The oldest known source is the now-lost work of the poet Prabhañjana, which may have been written before the eighth century CE in northwestern India in Jaina Maharashtra.⁸ In the mid-eighth century, Haribhadra, also in Jaina Maharashtra, takes up the story in the fourth *bhava* of his *Samarāiccakahā* (p. 237.17-285.16,

⁷ *saṃkalpa-hiṃsey-omdaṛoḷ āṃ kaṃdeṃ bhavada duḥkham uṃdeṃ nīṃ niḥśaṃkateyin initu dēhigaḷaṃ koṃdape narakadoḷ nivāraṇe-vaḍevai* (JY 4.70).

⁸ A *Jasaharacaria* (Skr. *Yaśōdharacarita*) of Prabhañjana is mentioned in Uddyotanasūri’s *Kuvalayamālā* (778 CE) 3.31 (ed. Upadhye), cf. Handiqui 1968: 42. Since Uddyotanasūri is from Jāvālipura (present-day Jalore in Rajasthan), it is likely that Prabhañjana can also be located in northwestern India.

ed. Jacobi). Subsequently, the narrative material was rendered into Sanskrit by several poets; the oldest known version is that from Hariṣeṇa's *Bṛhatkathākośa* (931 CE, tale no. 73, ed. Upadhye), followed by Somadeva's *Yaśastilakacampu* (959) and Vādirāja's *Yaśodharacarita* (11th century). These three works were composed in the Kannada-speaking area, as was the only version extant from this period in Apabhramsha, Puṣpadanta's *Jasaharacariu* (975).⁹ By comparing Janna's *Yaśodharacarite* (JY) with these chronologically preceding versions written in a supra-regional language (Sanskrit, Jaina Maharashtra and Apabhramsha), I hope to get interesting insights into the processes of vernacularisation, regionalisation and transcreation of pan-Indian narratives.¹⁰ This, however, would exceed the scope of this article, which is why I will limit myself here to a brief comparison with Janna's main source, Vādirāja's *Yaśodharacarita* (VY).

Vādirāja, the author of the *Yaśodharacarita*

Since there are several poets with the name Vādirāja, one must be careful to distinguish between them. A confusion of two authors of this name first appears in the introduction by Gopinatha Rao to Vādirāja's *Yaśodharacarita* (Tanjore 1912, p. 5), who attributed the work to Kanakasena Vādirāja, who lived in the tenth century. This was for a long time uncritically adopted in the scholarly literature, e.g. by Hertel (1917: 6), Keith (1928: 142) and Vaidya (1972: 25, cf. Krishnamoorthy 1963: 5-8), although it has already been proven by Hultzsich (1914: 696, 698) on the basis of inscriptions that there were two Vādirājas, one Kanakasena Vādirāja, who lived in the tenth century, and another Vādirāja, who lived in the eleventh century (cf. also Venkatasubbiah 1929).¹¹ The *Yaśodharacarita* was written after 27 October 1025¹² and before the death of the Western Cālukya king Jayasiṃha II (1042), which

⁹ Two more texts predate most probably Janna's time, the anonymous *Yacōtarakāvīyam* in Tamil, according to Zvelebil (1974: 140) 975-1050 CE, and Māṇikyāsūri's *Yaśodharacaritra* in Sanskrit, originating from Gujarat, that Hertel (1917: 146) dates before the eleventh century (which is considered too early by Granoff 1989: 126 f., fn. 19).

¹⁰ This will be part of my aforementioned project "The Story of King Yaśōdhara in the Religious and Cultural Environment of Karnāṭaka".

¹¹ The confusion is all the more understandable since both Vādirājas not only bear the same name but were also both pontiffs of the Aruṅgaḷa-*anvaya*, a subdivision of the Nandi-*saṅgha* belonging to the Draviḷa-*saṅgha* (cf. Hultzsich 1914).

¹² At this date Vādirāja completed his *Pārśvanāthacarita*, as is stated in the *praśasti* at the end of this work. The *Yaśodharacarita* was written afterwards, as can be seen in

is almost certainly referred to in verses 3.83 and 4.73.¹³ Therefore, the author of this work cannot be Kanakasena Vādirāja, but his namesake who lived in the eleventh century.¹⁴

Vādirāja's Yaśodharacarita and Janna's *Yaśodharacarite*

Like his predecessor Vādirāja, Janna divided the narrative into four cantos with approximately the same number of verses; in total, Janna has 310 verses, Vādirāja 295. Quite often single verses (or a group of verses) correspond to each other. But the *Yaśodharacarite* is by no means a mere Kannada version of Vādirāja's Sanskrit-poem, it is an ingenious transformation that takes up images and comparisons and creatively and skillfully transfigures them into entirely new metaphors, which I will show in a few concise examples:¹⁵

The introductory verses

Although both authors dedicate the first verse of their *opus* to Suvrata, the twentieth *tīrthaṅkara*, the content is totally different. While Vādirāja associates Suvrata with the image of rumbling clouds, pregnant with rain, Janna plays on Suvrata as “he who was indifferent to the women of others” (*para-vanitā-nirapēkṣakan*), though he had “seduced the lady Liberation” (*parama-śrī-vadhuvan olisiy-uṃ*), as had done before him the other Jinās, starting with Ṛṣabha. By alluding to the (dis)interest in women, Janna is already anticipating the main trigger of all subsequent events. The second verse is dedicated to the teachers in general. While

VY 1.6, where the *Pārśvanāthacarita* is mentioned as former work of the author (cf. also Venkatasubbiah 1929: 180).

¹³ *vyātanvan jayasimhatāṃ raṇa-mukhe dīrghaṃ dadhau dhāriṇīm* (VY 3.83, 3rd *pāda*) / *raṇa-mukha-jayasimho rājya-lakṣmīm bābhāra* (VY 4.73, 4th *pāda*). Vādirāja, who wrote the *Yaśodharacarita*, was a guru of King Jayasimha II alias Jagadekamalla I (1018-1042) – although Jayasimha II was by no means a Jain, as many gifts of land made over to Śaivas and Brahmins show, cf. Krishnamoorthy 1963: 38.

¹⁴ Besides the *Yaśodharacarita*, two works are attributed to Vādirāja with certainty: The *Pārśvanāthacarita*, completed in 1025, a *mahākāvya* in twelve cantos describing the life of the twenty-third jina Pārśvanātha, and the *Nyāyaviniścayavivaraṇa* (according to Krishnamoorthy 1963: 41 the *magnum opus* of Vādirāja), a very comprehensive commentary on Akalaṅka's *Nyāyaviniścaya*, in which Vādirāja successfully refutes many rival doctrines and defends the *syādvāda* against Śaṅkarācārya's criticisms in his *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*.

¹⁵ A detailed study with a comparison of the individual verses is part of the project mentioned above.

the list – jinas, siddhas, *sūris*, preceptors (VY *upādhyāya* / JY *dēśika*) and monks (VY *sadhu* / JY *muni*) – is the same in both works, the rest of the verse differs significantly. Vādirāja quite simply prays for their help in attaining *nirvāṇa*; Janna, however, prays that the mind, compared with a bumblebee (*tum̃bi*), may be attracted by the fresh fragrance, viz. devotion (*bhakti*), to the grove of lotuses, portrayed by the feet of the teachers.¹⁶ Here Janna creates a fascinating image of the mind, unsteady and buzzing around like a bumblebee, but finally led by fragrance / devotion to the flowers / words of the teachers.¹⁷

Interestingly enough, while Vādirāja gives some details about his person in one mere verse (VY 1.6) and does not mention his patron at all, Janna dedicates twelve verses to his patron Ballāḷa II and his lineage (JY 1.6-1.17) and six verses (JY 1.18-1.23) with exuberant praise to himself — possibly an indication of more difficult times for poets, when patronage had to be fought for more strongly?

The description of Rājapura

After the introductory verses, Vādirāja and Janna both portray the place, where the tale starts — the city of Rājapura in Yaudheya. Its tremendous wealth is illustrated in both works by many metaphors of light and splendour. In verse 1.8, Vādirāja claims that the fortress wall, made of gold, appears like the halo of the midday sun; the next verse “Wherein the light of the mid-day sun, mingled with the glow of rubies set in the turrets of the mansions, appears like the light of dawn” (VY 1.9, transl. Krishnamoorthy) reminds of Kālidāsa’s wonderful metaphor of *akāla-saṃdhyā* in *Kumārasaṃbhava* 1.4.¹⁸ Janna responds to these verses in two similes, playing first with the midday sun: “In that [city], at the eaves of the palaces inlaid with glittering gems, the lustre of the mass of wonderful pearls that were strung gave the mark of sandalwood

¹⁶ A similar metaphor can be found in the colophon of Vādirāja’s *Pārśvanāthacarita*, where Vādirāja is described as a bumblebee at the lotus-feet of his teacher Matisāgara: *tat-[= Matisāgara]pāda-padma-bhramarena... śrī-vādirājena kathā nibaddhā...* (verse 4, cf. ed. Sāstrī 1915: 8).

¹⁷ *jina-siddha-sūri-dēśika-munigaḷa caraṇaṃgaḷ emba sarasi-ja-vanam ī manam emba tum̃biy-erakaman anukarisuge bhaktiy-emba nava-parimaḷadiṃ* (JY 1.2).

¹⁸ Compare *prāsāda-śikhara-protā-padma-rāga-marīcibhiḥ | madhyāhnārkā-tapo yatra miśro bālātāpāyate ||* (VY 1.9) and *yaś cāpsaro-vibhrama-maṇḍanānām saṃpādayitrīm śikhair bibharti | balāhaka-ccheda-vibhaktā-rāgām akāla-saṃdhyām iva dhātumattām* (Kālidāsa, *Kumārasaṃbhava* 1.4, ed. Kale).

ointment to the sun that was moving about on midday” (JY 1.29).¹⁹ The image is multi-layered and, as so often with Janna, evokes various associations: sandalwood paste is said to have a cooling effect; the strong rays of the midday sun are softened, as it were, by the lustre of the pearls. As the fragrant sandalwood paste is also associated with auspiciousness, a welcome is expressed by applying a line or dot on the forehead of the guest. In this way, the city welcomes the midday sun with the lustre of its pearls. In addition, a sandalwood mark is often part of religious acts or ceremonies, e.g. by applying a thin line of sandalwood paste to the forehead of people to be honoured or images of gods. The interaction between the city and the sun thus takes on an almost religious character. In the second verse, Janna puts his emphasis on the “untimely light”: “The palaces with their filigree work of pure gold, coloured by flowers made of gems, flood with their own lustre the street with a mild sunshine even in the black night” (JY 1.30).²⁰

Particularly imaginative is Janna’s response to Vādirāja’s verse 1.10, where the connecting link is the word *ketu*.²¹ Skt. *ketu* has, among others, the meaning “sign, mark, ensign, flag, banner” as well as “bright appearance, clearness, brightness (often pl., ‘rays of light’)” (see MW). Vādirāja builds his verse on the first meaning of the word: “Which, with its banners (*ketubhir*) fluttering in the wind on the mansions of the wealthy, seems to invite, from above, the needy from every direction” (VY 1.10, transl. Krishnamoorthy). Janna adopts the word, but not the meaning of his predecessor: “The domes with red gems of the Jain temples, in which the night exceeds the day with its own lustre, unite the rays [of the sun] (*kētugaḷam*) with their [own] rays (*kētugaḷim*) [of the gems], and thus mock the globe of the sun that seems to stand still” (JY 1.32).²²

Of course, a description of the beautiful ladies of the city should not be missing: “Wherein, fawn-eyed women, though with limbs of unequal (or: unequalled) charm, appear to the gallants sweet in ever limb” (VY 1.11, transl. Krishnamoorthy). Vādirāja’s beautiful, but not particularly

¹⁹ *adaṛoḷage mereva maṇi-māḍada lōvegaḷalli kōda posa muttina mottada beḷagu caṃdan-ālēpada padanaṃ kuḍuvud-aleva ravig-eḍe-vagalo!* (JY 1.29).

²⁰ *kār-iruḷoḷ-am-eḷe-visilaṃ pūraṃ-bariyipuvu bīdiyoḷ nija-ruciyiṃ hīreya pūvina baṃṇada nērāṇiya kusuri-vesada nele-māḍaṃga!* (JY 1.30).

²¹ Literal correspondences, as it is the case here, are rare, which is certainly due to the difference between the two languages – even though classical Kannada, especially in poetry, has adopted many Sanskrit words.

²² *yann itthaṃ dhanadāvāsa-ketubhir vāta-kampitaiḥ | dūrād āhvayatīvoccair arthinah sarva-dīn-mukhaiḥ* (VY 1.10); *pagalan iruḷ nija-ruciyiṃ miḡisuva jina-bhavanad-aruṇa-maṇi-kalaśaṃgaḷ naguvuvu kētugaḷim kētugaḷam keḷe-gomḍu nimḍu ravi-maṃḍalamam* (JY 1.32).

original verse is countered by Janna with the ingenious comparison “Not being able to become equal to the round faces of the coquettish women, moving like idle swans on the terraces, the moon makes thus constantly the *cāndrāyaṇa*-fast” (JY 1.31).²³ Central to this verse is the pun on the moon and the *cāndrāyaṇa-vrata* named after him²⁴, a fasting vow in which food is reduced by one morsel a day during the waning moon and increased again in the same way during the waxing moon (see also MW). Janna depicts the constant waning and waxing of the moon as the regular keeping of this vow by the moon himself. Since the goal of a *vrata* is often the fulfilment of a wish, the question arises as to what this wish might be? Janna gives the answer by pointing out the faces of the women of Ujjaini, which surpass the beauty and splendor of the moon — a situation he obviously hopes to reverse through the vow!

Yaśōdhara's feigned dream

Janna's brilliant way of creatively transforming the text of his predecessor is particularly evident in the scene of Yaśōdhara's alleged dream: Yaśōdhara's mother notices that something is wrong with her son and worries about him. Yaśōdhara is not ready to confess the truth to his mother. In both texts, he first assures her that he does not lack anything (VY 3.8 / JY 3.9). Then he tries to symbolically hide his wife's adultery. While in Vādirāja's version Yaśōdhara does not explicitly say that it is a dream (*adya tu mayā niśi dṛṣṭā* – I saw today in the night...), but his mother understands it as such (cf. VY 3.11), in Janna's text he directly refers to his symbolic narration as a dream (*pōd-irulo!*... *kanasam kaṇḍem* – last night I saw a dream). Vādirāja conceals Amṛtamati's infidelity as follows: “But today in the night, o mother, I saw distinctly the moonlight that liberated herself from the moon bearing the excellent splendour of the blue water lilies, and making union with the darkness” (VY 3.9).²⁵ Janna transforms Vādirāja's metaphor in the following way:

²³ *yasminn asama-lāvanya-nirmitāvayavā api | sarvāṅga-madhur āyante bhogināṃ mṛga-locanāḥ* (VY 1.11); *nele-māḍado! eḍey-āḍuva kalahaṃsālasa-ṣiṣavatiyara mukha-maṃḍalake sariy-āgal-ārade sale mālpam caṃdran imtu caṃdrāyaṇamaṃ* (JY 1.31).

²⁴ Since the moon is grammatically masculine in both Sanskrit and Kannada, I will use the masculine pronoun here.

²⁵ *kiṃ tu kāntir avamucya mṛgāṅkaṃ bibhrataṃ kuvalayorjita-lakṣmīm | vyaktam adya tu mayā niśi dṛṣṭā devi saṅgama-karī timireṇa ||* (VY 3.9). The moonlight (*kānti*) is grammatically feminine in Sanskrit and symbolises Amṛtamati, while the moon (*mṛgāṅka*), grammatically masculine in Sanskrit, represents Yaśōdhara.

“Last night I saw a dream, in which a female swan from a pond of golden lotuses is enjoying itself in a miserable pond with red water lilies” (JY 3.9).²⁶ At first glance, Janna’s version of the dream seems to have not much in common with that of Vādirāja; but again, he presents an artful transformation of his predecessor’s text: The bright moonlight is replaced by a spotless (female) swan, both despising their former consort that is connected with light and brilliance: the moon, characterised by the splendour of blue water lilies, and the pond, characterised by shining golden lotuses. In clear contrast to this image of purity and splendour is the new target of desire: the darkness, or rather a miserable, dirty pond with red water lilies²⁷. Even the allusion to a sexual background, indicated by Vādirāja through the word *saṅgama*, was taken up by Janna through the red colour of the water lilies, being connected in Indian culture, among others, with love, passion and danger.²⁸ Yaśōdhara’s ensuing affirmation that he had never seen such a thing in his life, not even in a dream, and that it caused him unbearable agony (VY 3.10), is transformed into vivid comparisons by Janna: “By the sight of this bad omen my mind became like a peacock that has seen a lizard, like a goose that has seen rain, like someone separated from his beloved that has seen a blossoming creeper” (JY 3.10).²⁹

Janna’s portrayal of the main characters – the example of Amṛtamati

These few examples (which could be continued at will) show the way in which Janna enters into a creative dialogue with Vādirāja, taking up central motifs from his predecessor’s verses but incorporating them into more imaginative and ingenious images, thus transforming his Sanskrit source into a Kannada poem in its own right. But not enough with that, Janna’s transformation goes even deeper: He gives his characters more human depth, he draws them more lifelike and alludes to possible motivations of their actions. This is especially clear in the way he portrays Amṛtamati, Yaśōdhara’s adulterous wife. One of the most significant

Saṅgama, “union”, can also have the more specific (and here very appropriate) meaning “sexual union”, see MW.

²⁶ *pōd-iruḷoḷ poṃ-dāvare-goḷad-aṃce kaḷald-āval-goḷad-oḷage naliva kanasaṃ kaṃḍeṃ* (JY 3.9).

²⁷ The red water lily (*āval*) can be clearly considered inferior to the golden lotus.

²⁸ See e.g. Hanchett 1988, esp. chapter 6 “Red offerings to Death’s blackness: myths and rituals for some restless spirits”.

²⁹ *gōdāme-gaṃḍa navil-aṃt-ādudu kār-gaṃḍa haṃsana-vol-ādud-alarvōda late-gaṃḍa virahi-vol-ādudu durnayada kāṅkeg-ennaya cittam* (JY 3.10).

differences between the two texts is the fateful scene in which Amṛtamati listens to the song of the mahout. According to Vādirāja, Yaśōdhara, “fatigued by amorous delights”³⁰, fell asleep, still embracing Amṛtamati (VY 2.33). Meanwhile, the elephant-keeper, having tied the royal elephant to its post close by the royal bed-chamber, started to sing in a melodious and sweet way (VY 2.34). Vādirāja describes the song of the mahout in very general terms (VY 2.35) and states that the queen, lying on her bed with half-closed eyes, “at once took a fancy for the gifted singer” (VY 2.36).³¹ No deeper reasons are given for the queen’s sudden interest in the singer; Vādirāja’s very terse portrayal underlines the usual topos of the unfaithful and fickle woman. This is quite different from Janna, who shows throughout his work a deep interest to understand and — in a certain way — explain Amṛtamati’s sudden affection for the unknown singer. His emphasis on the strong bond between Yaśōdhara and Amṛtamati is already evident in the verse that introduces this scene: Unlike in Vādirāja’s work, Amṛtamati is not still awake while Yaśōdhara has fallen asleep — the two lovers are connected and, tired from their intensive lovemaking, they delve *together* into the realm of dreams, tightly embraced (JY 2.25-27). In a beautiful comparison, Janna describes how the soft voice of the elephant keeper “became, so to say, a seed of the clearing nut tree³² for the sleep”³³ of Amṛtamati, i.e. something that cleared the queen’s drowsiness completely away and made her mind lucid at once. She became fully awake and listened attentively; then she “gave at once as a ritual present her whole mind that was [deeply] touched” (JY 2.28).³⁴ Amṛtamati does not follow here a mere whim, as it seems to be the case in Vādirāja’s version; she follows a deeper urge in her heart — or perhaps her fate. Janna repeatedly brings into play the concept of fate, *vidhi*,³⁵ a concept that cannot exist in Jainism, whose cornerstone is the immutable law of *karman*. Consequently, there is an underlying conflict in Janna’s work between two discourses, one

³⁰ *ratotsavārambha-parīśrameṇa* (VY 2.33).

³¹ *cakāra tṛṣṇam api rakta-kaṅṭhe*, lit. she developed a longing for the one with the sweet voice.

³² The seeds of the *Strychnos potatorum* Linn. or clearing nut tree (Sanskrit and Kannada *kataka*, Hindi *nirmali*), often mentioned in āyurvedic texts, are used for purifying water even today. For a detailed study of this fruit and its ability to clarify water, incorporating Sanskrit, Pāli and Prakrit sources as well as results from modern research, see Roṣu 2000: 80-89, 98f. et passim.

³³ *nuṅ-dani nidrege kataka-bijam āyt-ene* (JY 2.28).

³⁴ *muṭṭida manamane toṭṭane pasāya-dānam-goṭṭa!* (JY 2.28).

³⁵ Janna mentions *bidi* / *vidhi* “fate” in the verses JY 2.34, 2.60, 2.61, 3.27, 3.52, *daiva* “destiny, fate” in JY 2.69.

religious and one humanistic (cf. Ramachandran & Rai 2015: 255 f.), which is neither addressed nor resolved in the text.

“The Story of King Yaśōdhara” after Janna

Janna’s *Yaśōdharacarite* is by no means the last work dealing with “The Story of King Yaśōdhara”: There are many versions from the twelfth century onwards, written in Sanskrit, Gujarati and Marathi, also one more Apabhramsha — and one Hindi-version; most of them are only available as manuscripts.³⁶ Based on Janna’s text, several works were created in Kannada.³⁷ Out of them I will discuss briefly the most recent “transcreation” from 1980, Girish Karnad’s³⁸ *Hiṭṭina huṃja*, “The cock of dough” – the English translation by the author from 2004 bears the title “Bali: The sacrifice”.³⁹

Janna’s *Yaśōdharacarite* and Girish Karnad’s *Hiṭṭina huṃja* / “Bali: The sacrifice”

While Janna followed Vādirāja’s text quite closely so that comparisons between single verses are possible, Girish Karnad created a completely new work from the narrative material. He transformed the poem into a stage play in one act and limited the number of characters to four: The Mahout (*māvuta*), the Queen (*rāṇi*), the King (*rāja*) and The Queen Mother (*rājamāte*). The setting of the plot is an old temple, in the middle of the night. The queen has been irresistibly drawn by a sweet song to

³⁶ See e.g. the different texts listed by Vaidya (1972: 57-60) in his introduction to the edition of *Jasaharacariu*. Not mentioned by him is Raidhū’s version in Apabhramsha from the fifteenth century (see Jaina 1974: 348–361; 608–611).

³⁷ The *Jivadayāṣṭami-nōmpi* of Padmanābha (15th / 16th cent.), the *Yaśōdharacarite* of Piriya Nemaṇṇa (16th / 17th cent.), the *Yaśōdharacarite* of Candravarṇī (17th cent.), the *Jivadayāṣṭami-nōmpi* of Candrasāgaravarṇī (date uncertain), the anonymous *Jivadayāṣṭamiya nōmpiya kathe* (date uncertain) and *Hiṭṭina huṃja* of Girish Karnad (Giriśa Kārṇāḍa, 1980).

³⁸ Girish Karnad (in Kannada: Giriśa Kārṇāḍa, 1938-2019), was an Indian actor, film director and Kannada writer. He is best known as a playwright who drew his material from Indian epic and narrative literature.

³⁹ As with all translations of his own works, whether into Hindi or English, Girish Karnad handles his text very freely, so that the result could be called a transcreation rather than a translation. Thus, “Bali: The sacrifice” differs in quite a few elements from his Kannada-version *Hiṭṭina huṃja*. Since the English text is accessible to a wider audience, it will be taken as the basis here; a more detailed comparison of the Kannada text with the English version will be published elsewhere.

the owner of this heavenly voice, an ugly mahout who spends this night in the old temple. The king, who followed her, is devastated to discover that his wife got involved with another man. In order to avert the evil consequences of her infidelity, his mother convinces him to sacrifice a cock to the goddess. As he has taken on the Jain faith from his wife and adheres to the principle of non-violence, she proposes to sacrifice as a substitution a bird made of dough – on condition that his wife, an ardent devotee of Jain faith, joins him in giving the rooster the “death blow”.

Girish Karnad took the central motif of Janna’s poem — ahimsa — and created a work around it that raises timeless questions. Besides the fact, already addressed in the earliest Jain writings, that non-violence must be performed not only on a physical but also on a spiritual level, he touches on problems of faith, of freedom, of acceptance. Yaśōdhara, who according to Karnad’s imagination comes from a Hindu family but converted to the Jain faith for the sake of his wife, is in a constant state of tension between accepting his mother’s belief in bloody sacrifice and the Jains’ central precept of non-violence. Questions of tolerance and the free practice of religion, but also tensions between the individual characters, gradual alienation and injuries accumulated over the years are dealt with in *Hiṭṭina huṃja* – aspects which are alien to Janna’s work.

Jivadayāṣṭami

It was not only for literary reasons that Janna’s *Yaśōdharacarite* exerted and continues to exert a great influence on the Jain community of Karnāṭaka; this work still plays a central role in a kind of counter-ritual to one of the most important Hindu festivals in this region (if not in all of India) — Navarātri,⁴⁰ which lasts nine days or nine nights and culminates in the celebrations of the tenth day, Vijayadaśamī (cf. Verghese 2004: 428f.). This festival is dedicated to the goddess Durgā or one of her local forms. Its origins can be clearly traced back to the first millennium AD, as is evident from the descriptions in the various versions of “The Story of King Yaśōdhara”. This festival played later a major role especially in the empire of Vijayanagara (1336/1346-1565),⁴¹

⁴⁰ Also called Navarātra, Mahānavamī, Durgā Pūjā, Dasarā or Dassain. This festival is celebrated during the time of the waxing moon of the month of Aśvin (September-October), but there are also traditions that deviate from this, cf. Simmons & Sen 2018: 1.

⁴¹ On the foundation of Vijayanagara (today’s Hampi) and the transition from the Hoysaḷa to the Saṅgama dynasty, cf. Kulke 1985, Stein 1989 and Filliozat 1999: 5-42.

where it was performed with great pomp, as we can understand from the accounts of various travellers and merchants who attended the festivities as eyewitnesses.⁴² On the eighth day of Navarātri, animal sacrifices took place in honour of the goddess in many temples – predominantly of chickens and goats, but also of buffaloes and other animals.⁴³ These sacrifices, which violate the fundamental rule of non-violence, ahimsa, met with little approval from the Jain population. Therefore, on this eighth day of the Navarātri cycle, a kind of counter-ritual to the animal sacrifices that were customary among Hindus was (and is) celebrated by the Jains in Karnāṭaka. This festival called *Jīvadayaṣṭami* or “the eighth [day] of compassion with [all] living beings”⁴⁴ existed already before Janna’s time (as we can understand from JY 1.24, where Janna states he had written his *Yaśōdharacarite* explicitly for this day),⁴⁵ but it became closely connected with “The Story of King Yaśōdhara”. On the day of *Jīvadayaṣṭami*, special care is taken to avoid harming any living being. Shrines are decorated with flowers, fruits are sacrificed instead of animals, and fasting takes place. Verses from Janna’s *Yaśōdharacarite* are recited in the temples and at public celebrations, as well as stories based on Janna’s version.⁴⁶ Thus, Janna’s intention to transcreate this pan-Indian narrative into a Kannada poem for the Jain lay devotees fasting on “the eighth day of compassion with all living beings” has borne fruit for over 800 years.

⁴² Cf. the account of the Persian ‘Abd-ar-Razzāq as-Samarqandī (Major [1857] 2010: 35-38) or those of the Portuguese Domingo Paes (Sewell [1900] 1995: 263-275) and Fernao Nuniz (Sewell [1900] 1995: 376-378) who were in Vijayanagara in 1443, around 1520 and 1535-1537.

⁴³ See e.g. the accounts of Domingo Paes and Fernao Nuniz, Sewell [1900] 1995: 266f., 274f.; 377. The description of the festival in honour of the goddess Caṇḍamāri in JY 1.54-57 is also likely to have originated not exclusively in Janna’s poetic imagination.

⁴⁴ The *Jīvadayaṣṭamī-nōmpu* or “vow of the eighth [day] concerning compassion for [all] living beings” is extremely rarely mentioned in academic literature – the most extensive representation I have found is six lines in Joseph 1997: 137. A more detailed examination of this festival – especially with regard to its Hindu “counterpart” – has not yet taken place, either in relation to historical sources or in relation to contemporary practices. More detailed insights into the performance of the rites, the texts used, the significance of the text as well as the relationship between text and performance will emerge during a stay in India as part of the project.

⁴⁵ *śrāvaka-janad-upavāsaṃ jīva-dayāṣṭamiyo! āge pāraṇe kivigalg-ī vastu-kathanadiṃḍudbhāṣe kavi-bhāḷalōcanaṃ viracisidaṃ*, “When there was the fast of the lay people at “the eighth day of compassion with all living beings (*jīvadayaṣṭami*)”, the poet Bhāḷalōcana (= Janna) composed a tale of this object, in order to show with it the breaking of the fast for the ears” (JY 1.24).

⁴⁶ There exist several short prose renderings of Janna’s text that are recited at the celebrations, called *Jīvadayaṣṭamī-nōmpu* or *Jīvadayaṣṭamiya nōmpiya kathe*. For these versions see fn. 39.

Conclusion

“The Story of King Yaśōdhara” can be considered a paradigmatical and stimulating case for diachronic as well as synchronic research in the field of transcreation: Since numerous versions of “The Story of King Yaśōdhara” are attested from the eighth until the twentieth century, it is possible to compare texts that originate from the same time and also works that were composed in different periods, works that are written in the same or in different languages, versions that originate from the same area or from distant regions. In this article, only a few representative examples could be given: Janna’s version of “The Story of King Yaśōdhara” shows that the adoption of a text from a supra-regional to a local language need by no means lead to slavish adherence to the original text. In his *Yaśōdharacarite*, Janna takes up Vādirāja’s central motifs and transforms them into more imaginative and sophisticated images; he enters into a creative dialogue with his predecessor at many points and is not afraid to shape the protagonists according to his own imagination, giving the characters more human depth and alluding to possible motivations of their actions.

Despite these changes, Janna follows his source — at least formally — very closely. The situation is quite different, however, with the most recent adoption of “The Story of King Yaśōdhara” by Girish Karnad: He transformed the poem of four cantos in a one-act play, giving the central motif of ahimsa a prominent, but not exclusive place. In addition, Girish Karnad addresses issues that are more (but not exclusively) central to modern society. General topics such as the questions of tolerance and the free practice of religion are discussed alongside interpersonal problems that, despite all individuality, touch the roots of human relationships.

The continuous recourse to this narrative by various authors from different times, the many transformations it has undergone over the centuries up to the present day, and the central position this story has occupied in the ritual context of *Jīvadayāṣṭami*, “the eighth day of compassion with all living beings” for more than 800 years, make it clear that “The Story of King Yaśōdhara” deals at its core with a timeless theme that has not lost its relevance to this day.

Abbreviations

JY = Janna, *Yaśōdharacarite*

MW = Monier-Williams' *A Sanskrit – English Dictionary*

VY = Vādirāja, *Yaśōdharacarita*

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