EPISTEMOLOGIES AND THE LIMITATIONS OF PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

Doctrine in Mādhva Vedānta

Deepak Sarma
EPISTEMOLOGIES AND THE LIMITATIONS OF PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

“This book breaks new ground in at least two ways, both of them important. The first is that it treats the epistemology of the Mādhva school of Vedānta, and in doing so explains the essential philosophical commitments of that tradition. The second is that it wittily and pointedly develops the insider/outsider questions: Can a tradition that forbids study of its classical texts to the uninitiated be the subject of scholarly interpretation by western scholars who lack such initiation? How is such a tradition’s self-understanding changed by new technologies of communication and by increasing pressure from western scholars with money and resources who would like to study it? Mādhva Vedānta, in Sarma’s expert hands, is shown both to question the western scholarly establishment, and to be questioned by it.”

Paul J. Griffiths, Schmitt Professor of Catholic Studies, University of Illinois at Chicago

“Sarma’s book is an accessible and highly readable discussion of the ‘insider-outsider’ debate. His own personal experience in exploring the issue of membership in this context is insightful and engaging.”

Richard King, Lecturer in Religious Studies, University of Stirling

Do you have to be one to know one? Madhvācārya, the founder of the thirteenth century school of Vedānta, answered this question with a resounding ‘yes!’ Madhvācārya’s insistence that one must be a Mādhva to study Mādhva Vedānta led him to employ various strategies to exclude outsiders and unauthorized readers from accessing the root texts of his tradition and from obtaining oral commentary from living virtuosos. In this book Deepak Sarma explores the degree to which outsiders can understand and interpret the doctrine of the Mādhva school of Vedānta. The school is based on insider epistemology, which is so restrictive that few can learn its intricate doctrines. Revealing the complexity of studying traditions based on insider epistemologies, this book encourages its audience to ponder both the value and the hazards of granting any outsider the authority and opportunity to derive important insights into a tradition as an insider. This work contributes to the ongoing controversies regarding epistemic authority and voice in religious studies.

Deepak Sarma is an Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Case Western Reserve University.
The RoutledgeCurzon Hindu Studies Series, in association with the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, intends primarily the publication of constructive Hindu theological, philosophical and ethical projects aimed at bringing Hindu traditions into dialogue with contemporary trends in scholarship and contemporary society, and with the particular concerns of Hindus living in India and abroad today. The series also invites proposals for annotated translations on important primary sources and studies in the history of the Hindu religious traditions.

**EPISTEMOLOGIES AND THE LIMITATIONS OF PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY**

Doctrine in Mādhva Vedānta

*Deepak Sarma*

**A HINDU CRITIQUE OF BUDDHIST EPISTEMOLOGY**

Kumarila on Perception
The “Determination of Perception” Chapter of Kumarilabhatta’s *Slokarvarttika*

Translation and Commentary

*John Taber*
EPISTEMOLOGIES AND THE LIMITATIONS OF PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

Doctrine in Mādhva Vedānta

Deepak Sarma
Oṁ
nārāyaṇo ’gaṇyagunāṇityaikaniyākṛtiḥ |
āseṣaḍoṣaratah priyatāṁ kamalālayaḥ |
Madhvācārya, Upādhikhaṇḍana, 1

namo ’mandanijānandasāndrasundaramūrtaye |
indirāpataye nityānandabhojanadāyine |
Madhvācārya, Upādhikhaṇḍana, 19

In service of Lord Kṛṣṇa and the Mādhva Sampradāya.

Oṁ
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The RoutledgeCurzon Hindu Series, published in collaboration with the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, primarily intends to focus on the publication of constructive Hindu theological, philosophical, and ethical projects. The focus is on issues and concerns of relevance to readers interested in Hindu traditions and a wider range of related religious concerns that matter in today’s world. The series seeks to promote excellent scholarship and, in relation to it, an open and critical conversation among scholars and the wider audience of interested readers. Though contemporary in focus, however, the series also recognizes the importance of a contemporary retrieval of the classic texts and ideas, beliefs and practices, of Hindu traditions. One of its goals, then, is the promotion of fresh conversations about what mattered traditionally.

We are therefore delighted to publish as our first book Deepak Sarma’s *Epistemologies and the Limitations of Philosophical Inquiry*, a book that addresses conceptual issues of broad contemporary importance, yet in light of specific traditional materials and with deep respect for a traditional religious community largely outside the world of Western academe. *Epistemologies* focuses on the rich and fascinating Mādhva Vedānta tradition, an old, long-established, yet still vital religious tradition that unfortunately has often lay in the shadows, seemingly last and least in a trio of Sankara, Ramanuja, and Mādhva Vedānta.

Sarma skillfully provides a needed introduction to this religious and theological tradition of devotion to Visnu in its medieval south Indian context. He then brings this information into recognized and urgent contemporary debates about the requirements for reliable insider knowledge and the array of factors that make true understanding of the other difficult or even impossible. On many issues this community stands in continuity with other and earlier Vedānta schools, but it offers a particularly strong case for exclusive communal identity, with habits
and reasons to the effect that outsiders – born elsewhere, educated in the wrong way, belonging to other religious traditions – cannot grasp the truths of Vedānta accurately and to good effect.

The possibilities and limits of religious knowing, particularly related to the challenging questions as to who can understand, speak for, and teach Hinduism, have of course captured much attention in academic circles today. But Sarma moves beyond the general features of the problem and debate, and embeds the issues in the details of the Mādhva tradition. Poised at a delicate balancing point as an American-trained scholar and an initiated insider to the tradition, he ably and accessibly presents the Mādhva tradition in a fashion that sheds a clear light on the problem of insider–outsider identities, and allows the voice of this tradition to be heard and taken seriously in the contemporary conversation.

In the book’s intriguing final pages, Sarma highlights the contemporary scene in several ways. After sketching the Mādhva tradition’s encounter with the West, he very interestingly discusses the implications of Mādhva publishing – the primary texts, translations, for scholarly initiates, for wider audiences, and finally on the Web – and how this practice of publication is, to a degree, transforming the community’s understanding of and relationship to various kinds of outsiders. Here Sarma offers an autobiographical anecdote of his own experience in struggling for acceptance as a (rehabilitated) insider to the tradition. This account aptly leaves unsettled the problem of the book since, although he is not purely a product of the tradition, he is an insider who was challenged to re-learn how to become an insider more deeply and formally. His success offers only very modest prospects for those born outside the Mādhva tradition, outside Hinduism, and outside India. Conversely, though, Sarma unsettles the tradition’s claims to privacy about itself, locating its self-understanding in the context of alternative Vedānta versions of such claims, in the wider epistemological conversation evoked in Chapter 1, and most widely, among the readers of this volume. The categories of insiders and outsiders are clarified, complexified, and made a bit more indistinct by the end of Epistemologies and the Limitations of Philosophical Inquiry.

Looking to the future, we can thus also notice the role played by the series itself, not only in studying Hindu traditions from the outside, but also in providing insights and access that cross the boundary between insider and outsider, thus contesting merely habitual limits on religious learning and knowing. With its balance of scholarship and personal concern, contemporary issues and questions of great antiquity, lucid exposition and a respect for stubborn, unresolved problems, Epistemologies and the Limitations of Philosophical Inquiry marks
some of the style and tone we expect to mark subsequent volumes in
this series.

An editor’s note on terms we use in the series as a whole: in both the
series title and in forewords such as this, we use the words “Hindu” and
“Hinduism” with a mixture of confidence and caution; individual
authors may write similarly. We do not presume that such words have a
single, fixed meaning or indicate a fixed essence for Indian religiosity.
Yet, too, we do not dismiss their value in successfully indicating spe-
cific forms of Indian religiosity and thought that are recognizable to
insiders and outsiders, distinguished from forms that can be called non-
Hindu, and not contradicted nor rendered useful by more specific and
valid references to Vaisnavism, Saivism, and other (and more particu-
lar) traditions of religious thinking and acting. We hope that terms such
as “Hinduism” and “Hindu” will be further specified and given con-
crete meanings by Epistemologies and the volumes to follow.

Francis X. Clooney, S.J.
Series Editor
Academic Director
Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies
The intellectual traditions of India, both Hindu and non-Hindu, now place and have placed a great deal of importance on paraµpara (lineage), a practice which dates back to the transmission of the Vedas themselves from a group of ṛṣīs (seers) to generations of Hindus. Thinkers ever since have assumed a position within a trajectory of intellectual inquiry and inheritance, leading to the frequent writing of commentaries, which automatically situated them in an unbroken line of teachers. By so doing, they sought legitimacy and honored their predecessors while positioning themselves in the center of current controversies and debates. Because this book concerns the mechanics and perpetuation of intellectual lineages in Mādhva Vedānta, it is especially appropriate to begin by explaining the lineages in which I imagine myself and this book to assume a place.

I consider this book to emerge from a course of intellectual concerns pursued by Francis X. Clooney and Paul J. Griffiths in their focus on the institutions of the scholastic traditions of India. Both investigate the activities pursued by the intellectuals of religious traditions. Clooney’s Theology After Vedānta explores many of the same themes concerning pedagogical institutions that I examine here, although his topic is the Advaita School of Vedānta rather than the Mādhva School. Griffiths’ Religious Reading examines the religious practice of reading, including manuscript production and dissemination, and the mechanics of reading a religious text. My study of the insider epistemology of Mādhva Vedānta likewise concentrates on the activities of religious readers and the institutions that foster their studies, centering on the transmission of knowledge in Mādhva Vedānta, elucidating the institution of paraµpara in Mādhva Vedānta.

Although my book may not satisfy all of the criteria that characterize a commentary as stipulated by Griffiths in his Religious Reading, it certainly satisfies the first one. My inquiry does comprise “a metawork
in which there are overt signs of the presence of another work, by quo-
tation, summary, or paraphrase.” The vast majority of this book is a
glossing of the term “atha” (afterwards) which is found in the first
śūtra (aphorism) of the Brahma Śūtras of Badarāyaṇa. My interpreta-
tion of this term is based entirely on Madhvācārya’s Brahma Śūtra
Bhāṣya, a commentary that meets all of Griffiths’ requirements, as well
as its subcommentaries. According to Griffiths’ definition, my book is
a subcommentary on Madhvācārya’s commentary as well as on the
Brahma Śūtras. I am a Mādhva and I humbly consider this book to con-
tribute to the commentarial lineage that began with Madhvācārya in the
thirteenth century CE. This book, then, constitutes a work of Hindu
theology, specifically Mādhva theology, in addition to being a study in
the comparative philosophy of religion by a scholar trained in the
Western academy.

This claim that my book qualifies as a commentary may appear
unusual, since traditional Mādhva commentaries are written in Sanskrit.
Nonetheless, I believe that English commentaries like this one will help
to propagate Mādhva Vedānta to the non-Sanskrit-reading Hindu (and
non-Hindu) public. Such expositions, which can reach broader audi-
cences than Mādhva theologians alone, may very well be the only way
for Mādhva teachers and Mādhva Vedānta to prevent the disappearance
of this 700-year-old tradition. So I pursue this work in the hope of per-
petuating Mādhva Vedānta and its pedagogical practices, with the aim
of revealing its value and its vitality.
This book has its origins in the dissertation that I submitted to the University of Chicago in 1998. Without a doubt I owe a great deal to the same group of people whom I thanked in the acknowledgments of my dissertation but it seems silly to repeat their names here, though I will a few. As always, Francis X. Clooney, Boston College, Andy O. Fort, Texas Christian University, and Paul J. Griffiths, University of Illinois at Chicago, have been indispensable colleagues and friends and I thank them for their editorial suggestions, encouragement, and wisdom. My thanks to Professor D. Prahlādācarya with whom I studied at the Pūrnaprajñā Vidyāpitham of the Pejāvara matha (monastery) on a Fulbright–Hays dissertation fellowship in 1996–1997. I did the bulk of work for this book with him at that time. Professor Sītā Nambiar provided invaluable assistance throughout this project. Thanks to K. Ames who edited earlier versions of the manuscript.

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I wholeheartedly wish to thank my parents whose unconditional love sustains me through this long and strange trip.
INSIDER EPISTEMOLOGIES

The issue

In a well-known skit on Saturday Night Live, African-American actor–comedian Eddie Murphy disguised himself as Mr. White, a Caucasian businessman, in order to understand what it is like to be white, an understanding that remained unavailable to him by any other means because of his race. While buying a newspaper, riding a bus, and meeting a loan officer in a bank, Murphy discovers that Caucasians treat one another very differently from the way they treat African-Americans. Most of the hilarity arises from the fact that Caucasians are governed by an entirely different standard of behavior when no one of another race is present. For example, a newspaper was given to him for free by a Caucasian clerk, a bus became a festive party when the only African-American rider (other than the disguised Murphy) exited, and Murphy was offered a “no strings attached” loan for thousands of dollars by a Caucasian official at the bank. Murphy’s spoof provokes questions that are central to certain kinds of social scientific inquiry: is it possible to know, to understand completely, or to study a community without joining it? Does being an insider give access to data and/or experiences that are not available to outsiders? Do insiders have a higher degree of understanding of that data or experience than outsiders? Such a privileging may limit the degree to which an outsider can understand a doctrine or set of practices. Are their difficulties in deciding who is an insider and who is not? Does the voice of the insider have more epistemic authority than an outsider’s voice, or vice versa? Lastly, are there epistemologies that restrict or limit the kinds of inquiries that social scientists can make?
Social sciences and objectivity

The social sciences were founded on the assumption that it was possible to study a community without, in the jargon of anthropologists, “going native” and offering highly subjective, rather than dryly objective, analyses. In imitation of their counterparts in the “hard” sciences, social scientists considered objective scholarship to be the center of their methodology. Although, in recent times, scholars have reconsidered this drive to achieve objectivity and admitted that it is impossible to eliminate biases, objectivity was and still is held to be a worthwhile, if unattainable, aspiration. In spite of these cracks in the foundations of the social sciences, scholars continue to doubt the value of work done by insiders. If one ignores the deception involved in his fieldwork, and corresponding ethical problems, Murphy’s covert ethnography as Mr. White would be acceptable to social scientists because he maintained his status as an outsider even though he did conceal it temporarily. Still, Murphy’s skit is troubling, as it suggests that there is some data that would not be available to the social scientist unless s/he managed to “go native.”

Do you have to be one to know one?

Philosophers and social scientists are sometimes confronted by communities whose members believe that insiders have greater epistemic authority than outsiders. Arguing, “You have to be one to know one,” they believe that only insiders can know and understand what it is like to be an insider. This privileging of the insider, known as an “insider epistemology,” is deeply problematic for the social sciences. After all, according to an insider epistemology, the only qualified social scientist is one belonging to the community being studied!

To start with, it may not always be easy to determine who is an insider and who is not. In the Eddie Murphy skit, it is obvious to everyone who belongs to which category, but in other cases it may not be. Although communities often have criteria that must be met for someone to be designated an insider, the categories are not always exhaustive, and there may be individuals who fit in more than one, or none at all. Take, for example, the problems that arise when one makes seating arrangements for one’s wedding. Some guests are clearly part of the groom’s family and others from the bride’s side. There are, however, guests that do not fit in either category. Are they insiders or outsiders? Do they get invited to the rehearsal dinner or not? Where should they be seated during the ceremony? Such ambiguities become
even more complicated when there is a link made between insider status and epistemic authority and the community in question is a traditional one. For this reason, one must determine who is qualified and who dictates who is qualified.

Consider the following: I am an Indian-American and could claim that only other Indian-Americans can know and understand what it is like to be one. According to my insider epistemology, any study of the Indian-American experience by a social scientist that was not an Indian-American her/himself would be necessarily and unavoidably defective. I could further stipulate that insiders are only those Indian-Americans who grew up in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s and, consequently, an even smaller number of people would qualify as credible social scientists of Indian-Americans. I could increase the criteria even further and limit the community to be studied to those who grew up in Stony Brook, New York, and have graduate training in South Asian studies from the University of Chicago. As far as I know, membership in this group includes only me and, for that reason, only I could study myself! Following this trajectory, I could claim that only I can understand myself and lapse into complete solipsism, the belief that one can only be aware of one’s own experiences and no one else’s. Some would contend, however, that the possibility of self-knowledge is itself flawed, given that a person changes over time. Depending on how quickly and substantially one believes that a person changes, it could be argued that the person who began reading this sentence is so fundamentally different from the one who finishes reading it that s/he could not know her/his earlier self!

If solipsism described human experience accurately, then not only would social scientific inquiry be pointless, but so would any meaningful conversation. Readers, for example, would not even be able to understand this sentence; only I would (if, of course, I believe that I could know myself over time)! Thankfully, solipsism is an intellectual dead end. It is only useful for the amusement of philosophers, for those under the influence of psychotropic drugs, or for students in late-night conversations.

Fortunately, there are less radical forms of the insider epistemology that do not lead to solipsism and cannot be ignored as trifling or useless banter, or as impossible and frivolous positions. Such esoteric communities withhold data from social scientists, thereby limiting the kinds of inquiries that social scientists are able to pursue. These communities are a different sort from those that claim that experiential data is available to insiders alone. Rather, they monopolize their texts and simply do not allow outsiders to read and examine them. How do
such esoteric communities construct insider epistemologies that restrict or impede outside investigation? Are these strategies found in the doctrines of a given community, or are they afterthoughts or unofficial ones created later? Do these communities also have ways to exclude outsiders from joining and thus are able to maintain an even higher level of exclusivity? Social scientific and philosophical inquiry may be limited by these strategies, doctrines, and epistemologies and such limitations are the topic of this study.5

Access to the text

The social sciences are based not only on objectivity but also on an assumption that data is readily available to be analyzed. Some philosophers, like those thinking about the nature of philosophy itself, are not restricted by insider epistemologies because they are not reliant upon data from living traditions. But what about a philosopher who merely wishes to evaluate a particular school of philosophy or a thinker? For example, a scholar studying Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* requires the text in the original Greek itself, as well as commentaries written by subsequent thinkers. In such cases, texts, which include oral, printed, and electronically generated materials produced by the adherents of a particular school of thought or a thinker, are essential. Any scholar, a philosopher or otherwise, who wishes to investigate the history of a tradition or thinker cannot proceed without careful study of the critical texts. But what happens when the community being studied has “monopolistic access” and prohibits the outsider/philosopher from accessing the required texts?6 Could a scholar, for example, study the content of the conversations between a Roman Catholic priest and his parishioner that occur during confession, which, according to my stipulative definition, would qualify as a text? The answer to this question can be found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

Given the delicacy and greatness of this ministry and the respect due to persons, the Church declares that every priest who hears confessions is bound under very severe penalties to keep absolute secrecy regarding the sins that his penitents have confessed to him. He can make no use of knowledge that confession gives him about penitents’ lives. This secret, which admits of no exceptions, is called the “sacramental seal,” because what the penitent has made known to the priest remains “sealed” by the sacrament.?
The work of a social scientist who was also a Catholic priest surely would be hampered severely by this restriction!

Insider epistemologies are not limited to religious traditions and can also be found in secular communities. A prosecutor, for example, is denied access to conversations between the accused and her/his lawyers. Such a restriction is the result of an insider epistemology established by a privileging of lawyer–client information. In fact, lawyer–client confidentiality, that “A lawyer shall not reveal a confidence or secret relating to representation of a client unless the client consents after consultation,” is an essential component of the rules of professional conduct of the American Bar Association. Similarly structured insider epistemologies and privileging are thus found among schools of philosophy, religious traditions, and secular communities. The activities of an outsider are greatly limited in such cases, unless, of course, s/he decides to infiltrate or to join the community or school sincerely and thus obtain the desired insider information. On the one hand, covert fieldwork and deception is ethically problematic. On the other hand, a sincere commitment to join the cause could mean a loss in objectivity or a choice to maintain the insider epistemology. In the case of the prosecutor, it might even mean switching sides and assisting the defense!

The restriction might be partial and there may be only a lower degree of understanding that was available to outsiders rather than complete understanding. Consider the following: a philosopher has access to the vast majority of texts of a given school but, being an outsider, is not permitted to read those texts that concern its logical presuppositions and methods. The tradition, called “The Muddled,” allows a philosopher to examine only the following text: “the Supreme Being (brahman) is the Individual Self (ätman).” Our philosopher knows that there are Muddled texts on Muddled logic composed by its founder, Most Muddled. By the decree of Most Muddled, these texts, however, are only available to insiders and no one else. The activities that the philosopher can pursue are severely limited. Our philosopher may wish to evaluate the truth of the available claim but then will be confronted with a choice of which system of logic to use as the benchmark. Leaving aside the prickly issue of whether or not there are multiple forms of logic, s/he can apply the logical rules of one tradition, the Aristotelian for example, to the Muddled text. S/he cannot know, however, whether or not the Muddled text is based on a different form of logic! S/he also cannot find internal flaws (that is, analyze via a reductio ad absurdum) since s/he has no access to the text on Muddled logic! S/he cannot even claim that the statement “the Supreme Being
(brahman) is the Individual Self (ātman)” makes sense in Muddled terms. Clearly our philosopher is in an inescapable quandary because the scholarly activities s/he wishes to pursue are limited significantly by the Muddled insider epistemology. Her/his degree of understanding is thus significantly lower than an insider’s. In this way, Muddled truth itself is protected. Philosophers cannot properly evaluate the truth of the doctrine of a system that has a restrictive insider epistemology.

Some readers will imagine that it is possible for our philosopher to consult with an insider who is willing to provide the gist of Muddled logic and therefore bypass the restriction and obtain a higher degree of understanding. Although I have already stipulated that this would not be possible, let us imagine that it is. Secondhand insider-information is not without its problems. Our philosopher, not having seen the Muddled logic text, cannot be certain that the insider is telling the truth or merely being intentionally misleading. Besides, like the exposed adulterer who can no longer be trusted by a spouse, why would our philosopher grant epistemic authority to someone so willing to reveal what was supposed to be a secret? Our philosopher is doubly damned!

One may wonder if it were possible to join. Even if it was anathema to objectivity, it might be possible to become a temporary member of Muddled for a short time. One could “go undercover” and become a covert ethnographer of the Muddled, just as Eddie Murphy became temporarily white. Setting aside the ethical problems, if one were to become too “Muddled,” one could not objectively evaluate Muddled doctrine. In any case, one assumes a great deal when one thinks that joining is a possibility. One may not even be allowed to join, making matters far more muddled! Membership could be denied if the Muddled community were open only to specific genders, ages, or races. As already mentioned, our philosopher could fit the criteria and could join but will also lose any claim to objectivity in the process.

A more devious scholar may wonder if it were possible to spy on the insiders and, like a detective, obtain data unbeknownst to the observed. Although one certainly could make use of surveillance equipment, doing so would mean fragrantly breaking a number of codes of conduct. Of course, one would hope that our philosopher would not choose such an unethical option!

Given the complex questions that arise from these brief thought experiments, it should be clear that the most important hurdle for a philosopher to overcome concerns access to texts. If the texts are not accessible, then the activities that the philosopher can pursue are severely restricted. S/he can only have a minimal understanding of the
The pedagogical context

Some living traditions of thought have educational institutions which require that followers learn their root texts from virtuosos who are themselves the products of such training. The root texts are oral, printed, and electronically generated materials, which are held to be canonical by members of the tradition. In a tradition that follows an insider epistemology, a portion or all of these root texts may not be available to outsiders. Many of these may not even be made available to insiders unless or until they have met certain criteria, such as age, stage of intellectual or psychological development, or gender. Jayatirtha’s *Nyāya Sudhā (The Nectar of Logic)*, for example, is a text that is taught only to the most advanced students at the Pūrṇaprajña Vidyāpitham, a monastic institution devoted to the training of virtuoso readers of canonical texts in Mādhva Vedānta. Another example can be found in Aristotle’s *Ethics*. Aristotle states that:

A young man is not equipped to be a student of politics; for he has no experience in the actions which life demands of him, and these actions form the basis and subject matter of the discussion.

Such internal restrictions are not unusual when training is specialized, and similar ones can be found in Western educational institutions today, though they are less formalized. A philosophy professor, for example, is likely to advise a novice to begin with Quine’s *Methods of Logic* before plunging into Frege. A biology professor is likely to recommend that new students begin with Helena Curtis’ *Biology* rather than Lubert Stryer’s *Biochemistry*.

Novices are often required to fulfill admission requirements in order to study root texts with experts. But why must the novice study with an expert? What about studying by oneself? Why is it essential to study
some root texts in an educational institution and according to the prescribed fashion?

The need to study with experts derives from the way that the root texts are to be used and read. Often the root texts of living traditions of philosophy are no more than mnemonic devices used by teachers and students to memorize and recall doctrine.13 The scholastic traditions of South Asian Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism, for example, have texts in their canons that are filled with short, pithy, aphorisms (śūtras). These are rarely read without the assistance of oral or textual commentaries. The first aphorism of the first chapter (pāda) of the first book (adhyāya) of the Bhārma Śūtras is: “Then, afterwards, the inquiry into the Supreme Being (brahman) is to be undertaken.”14 This does not convey much without a word for word commentary explaining each component (“then,” “afterwards,” “inquiry,” “After what?,” “What kind of inquiry?” and so on) and their grammatical relationships with one another. Only after taking Madhvacārya’s commentary into consideration does the passage become intelligible. The expanded passage reads: “Therefore, after having met the requirements for eligibility, the inquiry into the Supreme Being (brahman) is to be undertaken.”15 Shorthand and coded texts like the aphorisms in the Bhārma Śūtras are often vague and ambiguous, or easily misunderstood without the assistance and commentary of an expert who is a virtuoso reader of the text and its commentaries. Armed with the commentaries, novices are expected to become experts themselves and to teach the next generation of students how to read the root texts. When removed from their pedagogical context, namely the educational institution, root texts can easily become unintelligible or too vague to be meaningful.

These kinds of problems are found in any number of educational contexts that involve the training of specialized readers by virtuosos. For example, instructors teaching in Western institutions are often asked by students if they can have the class notes from a missed class. Such notes are sometimes indecipherable to students outside of the class who are not privy to the coded language that has been developed in that class. They are sometimes even inaccessible to enrolled students who miss specific classes. Unless assisted by another enrolled student who attended all classes or, ideally, by the instructor who composed the notes, students are unable to decode the root text, namely the class notes. In this case, as well as those involving living traditions of thought, a commentary offered by an authoritative insider is required for a proper understanding of the root text. Novices, moreover, have no other choice but to study with experts and obtain their oral comment-
ary, because it can neither be purchased nor obtained outside of the proper pedagogical environment.

It may be argued that the philosopher can offer her/his own interpretation of the root text and need not defer to the epistemic authority of insiders. Similar themes concerning hermeneutics are confronted by scholars of literature when it concerns their attempt to discern the meaning or significance of a passage or work. Is it essential to know the motivations or intentions of the author in order to be able to read the text accurately? Is there a correct reading? Can one offer an accurate interpretation without knowing either the motivation or intention of the author? The hermeneutic issues are, however, only superficially similar. For, in the case of the living tradition of thought, there are unquestionable official interpretations and correct readings which are passed on from teacher to student in an unbroken lineage. The root texts, moreover, are not intended to be self-explanatory, nor are they intended to be read independently of the prescribed pedagogical context. Although it is certainly possible to generate an interpretation on her/his own, our adventurous philosopher will have merely added to the commentarial literature surrounding the root text and, that too, from an uninformed and unofficial perspective. The activities that s/he could then pursue, evaluation and the like, are of her/his own interpretation of the root text rather than the official one. Insiders are likely to discount summarily the validity of her/his work and outsiders will be perplexed by her/his suspect (but creative) scholarship.

As already mentioned, s/he could also find someone who has been through the training for her/his assistance. If such aid is permitted outside of the confines of the educational institution, then it may be one way that the outsider can gain some access to the oral commentary. If giving aid is forbidden, then one cannot help but question the authority of the informant.

In sum, there are two kinds of communities that uphold insider epistemologies. One is centered around experiential data and claims that outsiders can neither know nor understand what it is like to be an insider. The other simply does not permit outsiders to access root texts. Though actual communities are likely to lie somewhere between these two, or combine elements from each, this bivalent taxonomy is useful as a heuristic device. The second community, which is the topic of this study, manifests its restrictions in two ways. It may have doctrines about the ways that root texts are viewed and treated. It may also have doctrines about who can and cannot become an insider and why. The first are doctrines about doctrines, while the second are doctrines about the qualifications of the members of the community itself. These
strategies by which the texts are kept hidden are no more than the admission policies of an esoteric community. They are also topics that the philosopher is not entirely restricted from studying! Hence, philosophers do not have to compromise their ethics, as Eddie Murphy did when infiltrating the white world, in order to study communities from which they have been restricted.

Mādhva Vedānta

Skeptical readers may wonder if such cases are only hypothetical and if there are any actual instances of such restrictions. Indeed there are. The Mādhva school of Vedānta is based on an insider epistemology. Its founder, Madhvācārya, employed strategies to exclude outsiders and unauthorized readers from accessing the root texts and from obtaining oral commentary from living virtuosos. Madhvācārya’s regulations are so thorough that the truth of his doctrine cannot be questioned nor refuted by outsiders. Madhvācārya thus successfully insulated his position from criticism and evaluation. Philosophical inquiry of his restricted doctrine by outsiders is limited to the most superficial level of summary and analysis and is judged irrelevant by insiders. The present project comprises my analysis of the insider epistemology found in the doctrine of Mādhva Vedānta and the limitations that it places on philosophical inquiry.

Readers may wonder how I was able to study these doctrines of Mādhva Vedānta, given its strict insider epistemology. Did I covertly infiltrate the community and am I now exposing their secrets to the world like Eddie Murphy? Or have I enlisted the assistance of a loose-lipped insider? Although I was born and raised as a Mādhva and have status as an insider, the study of the exclusivist strategies of Mādhva Vedānta does not require one to be a Mādhva. Study of other aspects of Mādhva Vedānta, such as ontology and soteriology, is prohibited to outsiders and they are restricted from oral and written commentaries. As an insider, I am privy to these commentaries. Nevertheless, the issue at hand only concerns these prohibitions. For this reason, I am not exposing Mādhva doctrine that is not already available to outsiders. But I am exposing the centrality of the insider epistemology and the boundaries that are erected around philosophers by such strategies.

What was the background within which Mādhva Vedānta developed? Did the context lend itself towards the construction of an insider epistemology?

10
MĀDHVA VEDĀNTA IN MEDIEVAL KARṆĀṬAKA

The Mādhva School of Vedānta is founded upon such an unusually strict insider epistemology that it prohibits outsiders from accessing its texts altogether. Although this epistemology dramatically diminishes the kinds of inquiries in which outsiders can engage, such as the evaluation of the truth of Madhvācārya’s doctrine, it nevertheless permits an analysis of the strategies and components of the restrictions. Madhvācārya, the founder of this school, did not derive these strategies on his own but, in fact, was deeply affected by his predecessors and contemporaries. Madhvācārya (1238–1317 CE) was born of Śivallī Brahmin parents in the village of Pājakakṣetra near modern day Uḍupi in the Tuluṇāḍu area of southern Karnāṭaka. Southern Karnāṭaka is a coastal region, and in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was the home for a wide variety of theologies and people, each with its own views about how best to act in the world, how to obtain liberation (mokṣa) and how to encourage or restrict access to their texts and teachings.1 With which communities and intellectual traditions did Madhvācārya interact? Did any have insider epistemologies limiting access to their root texts to an elite or chosen few? Did any try to spread their texts and teachings as far and as wide as possible to anyone willing to listen?

In order to answer these and other related questions, it is essential to take into account the context within which Madhvācārya lived and developed his school of Vedānta. Because others have engaged in detailed studies of the religious, economic, and political worlds of medieval Tuluṇāḍu, the history presented here is not intended to be comprehensive. Instead, I intend to provide a broad overview of the intellectual context, the theologies and religious communities of the time when Madhvācārya lived for the sake of recognizing the extent of the interactions between Mādhva Vedānta and his contemporaries. But first, what were the religious questions that these communities tried to resolve? From what were they seeking liberation (mokṣa)?
The theological context

The fundamental theological issues of medieval India concerned methods by which one could obtain liberation (mokṣa in Hinduism and nirvāṇa in the schools of Buddhism and Jainism) from the cycle of birth and rebirth (samsāra). It was assumed that time was circular and that the universe was perpetually born anew and destroyed. Not only were sentient beings part of this larger cycle of the universe, but they also underwent their own cycles of birth and rebirth. Each sentient being had an enduring self (ātman or jīva), which was reborn after every death. Although not all of the speculative traditions shared the belief that the enduring self ultimately existed, they all agreed that it did exist temporarily. Birth and rebirth were dependent upon the mechanism of karma, the doctrine that one’s actions in earlier lives affected the rebirth and events in the present and those yet to occur in one’s future lives. Karma accumulated and could be meritorious (puṇya) or demeritorious (pāpa). The events of an individual’s life were no more than the actualization of latent (prārabdha) karma. Hindus believed that one’s birth as a member of one of the four classes (varṇas), namely brahmins (priests), kṣatriyas (warriors/rulers), vaiśyas (merchants), or sūdras (laborers) was dependent upon one’s karma. The origins and precise function of these mechanisms of karma and rebirth were matters of debate, but their existence was not challenged. Although my readers might assume that rebirth is wonderful, the thinkers of medieval India believed that it was a trap from which all should seek to escape. Each tradition offered a method to end this seemingly endless cycle of birth and rebirth. In fact, finding and offering a method (and defending that method against those prescribed by others) was their raison d’être. The root texts of these schools, directly or indirectly, included teachings which assisted practitioners in their efforts to obtain release from the cycle of birth and rebirth. The root texts and the teachings about how to achieve liberation, and their dissemination as well as their concealment, were the focus of these speculative traditions, and Mādhva Vedānta was no exception.

The schools of Vedānta all followed insider epistemologies forbidding outsiders from studying root texts and Madhvācārya’s restrictions were identical with his counterparts. Other schools, such as the Jains and Vīrāsaivas, did not control access to their root texts so tightly and were more receptive to teaching the masses. Still other communities were even less systematic and did not establish structured and formal educational institutions and hierarchies to disseminate teachings. The diverse religious environment of medieval Karnātaka, with its varying
epistemologies and pedagogical theories, made the stakes of intra-religious and inter-religious dialogue very high indeed!

Which schools of Vedānta were Madhvācārya’s contemporaries? How did the Jain and Vīraśaiva tactics differ from those of their Vedānta counterparts? How did the pedagogical strategies of these commentarial traditions differ from those that were not commentarial at all?

Vedānta

Madhvācārya’s school of philosophy is self-avowedly a school of Vedānta. Its predecessors include the Advaita (non-dualism) School, founded by Śaṅkarācārya, in the eighth century CE, and the Viśiṣṭādvaita (qualified non-dualism) School, founded by Rāmānu-jācārya in the eleventh century CE. Although these two traditions were (and are) the chief rivals for the Mādhva tradition, they also had the greatest impact on the development of his school of thought, including his insider epistemology. In fact, Madhvācārya’s school of Vedānta is part of an intellectual trajectory that began with Śaṅkarācārya.

Leaving aside their widely differing epistemologies and ontologies, the schools share similar core canonical/root texts. In fact, the term vedānta, a determinative compound (tatpuruṣa) comprised of the two terms, veda and anta, means “the culminating sections of the Vedas.” That Vedānta is named after this body of texts marks their importance. These texts are the Vedas, of which there are four: the Rg, Yajur, Sāma, and Atharva Vedas. Each Veda can be further subdivided into the Brāhmaṇas, the Āraṇyakas, and the Upaniṣads. The Vedas are believed to be revealed root texts (śruti), without human origin (apauruṣeya) and are self-valid (svataḥ-prāmaṇa). For this reason they are held to be eternal (nitya) and free from defects (nirdoṣa). By no means were the schools of Vedānta the only ones to hold the Vedas in such high esteem and grant them unquestioned epistemic authority. Their most important predecessor was the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā (Earlier Investigation) School (founded by Jaimini in the second century BCE), which devoted the entirety of its intellectual efforts to interpret the ritual injunctions prescribed in the Vedas. Much of the hermeneutic foundations of Vedānta, in fact, can be found in Mīmāṃsā texts. The insider epistemology that is shared by all of the schools of Vedānta also relied heavily on the writings of Mīmāṃsā thinkers like Śabara and his commentators. For these reasons, Vedānta is sometimes known as Uttara Mīmāṃsā (Later Investigation). The restrictions in the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā tradition pertained to the right to perform a
sacrifice while those of the schools of Vedānta, as I will show, concerned the right to study the sacred texts.

Although the schools of Vedānta include the Vedas in their canon, each expanded its boundaries to include additional texts. Leaving aside these supplements to the canon, the Vedas are the primary root texts for the schools of Vedānta and are the critical objects of commentary. Above and beyond the Vedas, all of the schools also presume that the Brahma Sūtras is a key root text. The Brahma Sūtras, composed by Bādarāyana (also known as Vyāsa) in the fifth century CE, is a summary of the teachings of the Vedas, specifically the Upaniṣads, and, indirectly, an explanation of how to obtain liberation (mokṣa). In the introduction to his commentary (bhāṣya) on it, Madhvācārya explains, “He, namely Vyāsa, composed the Brahma Sūtras for the sake of ascertaining the meaning of the Vedas.” Furthermore, Madhvācārya documented that Vyāsa did so at the request of other gods:

Hari, manifested as Vyāsa, requested by the attendants Bhava and Virifiña, composed that which is declared to be the highest knowledge and preeminent treatise (sāstra).

The text is four chapters long and is comprised of 564 pithy aphorisms (sūtras). Its brevity makes it difficult to read without the commentaries produced by the founders of each of the schools of Vedānta and the multiple subcommentaries produced by subsequent thinkers. It is likely that the aphorisms were merely mnemonic devices used for pedagogical purposes. Whatever the reasons, the elusive nature of the Brahma Sūtras lends itself to concealment.

The Vedas and Brahma Sūtras were interpreted in conflicting ways by each school, and each has different theories about the nature of the liberated state and how it can be achieved. Training in Vedānta centered on close studies of these root texts, the production of new commentaries, and the careful study of old ones, where all of these activities were conducted in the confines of monasteries (mathas) and in other traditional teaching environments such as the residences of teachers (gurukulas). The importance that the schools of Vedānta gave (and give) to commentary and commentarial activities are reminiscent of their counterparts among the scholastics in medieval Christianity.

Both the Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita Schools of Vedānta had many followers in medieval southern Karnātaka, making the region an ideal setting for philosophical dispute. According to the Saṃkaradigvijaya (The Victories of Saṃkarācārya), a hagiography of Saṃkarācārya, the founder of Advaita Vedānta, Saṃkarācārya visited southern Karnātaka
in the ninth century CE and disputed with scholars of local traditions. One of the four monasteries established by Śaṅkaracārya himself was located in Śrīneri, only about 50km, from Udupi, the center of the Mādhva community and the city where Madhvācārya built his first monastery. The heart of Viśistādvaita activity and its chief monastery lay in Melkōte, which was 250km from Pājakakṣetra. These two cities, Śrīneri and Melkōte, were (and continue to be) centers for Vedānta studies in Karnātaka.

The Advaita and Viśistādvaita schools of Vedānta were well established in medieval times in southern Karnātaka and competed with one another and eventually Mādhva Vedānta for adherents. Although the competition was fierce and their interpretations of the Vedas were in conflict, the schools had insider epistemologies that were almost identical. All three thus shared an interest in restricting access to their root texts, namely the Vedas and Brahma Sūtras, and their commentaries, thereby excluding unauthorized readers from reading them. Their pedagogical theories stood in direct contrast with those offered by the Vīraśaiva and Jain schools of thought and those offered by local and indigenous traditions. How did Vīraśaiva and Jain theories about the dispersal of root texts differ from those of Vedānta? How did their positions and communities threaten Vedānta?

Two non-Vedānta traditions: Vīraśaivism and Jainism

The Vīraśaiva and Jain communities thrived in medieval Tuḷunādu. Buddhism also had some historical significance in Tuḷunādu but by medieval times Jainism and the Advaita and Viśistādvaita Schools had displaced it, leaving only vestiges of Buddhism in the form of images and monuments without any community of adherents. Although Buddhism no longer posed a threat to Vedānta, Jainism and Vīraśaivism conflicted significantly with the Veda-based Vedānta traditions. How did the Vīraśaivas and Jains differ from the schools of Vedānta? The Vīraśaivas and Jains rejected the authority of the Vedas. Their complete elimination of the Vedas provoked their denial of the legitimacy of the class (varṇa) and caste (jāti) system, structures which were an integral part of the social, religious, and pedagogical world of Vedānta. Vīraśaivas and Jains made their doctrines accessible to the masses and did not base their systems on insider epistemologies. This was most unlike the way in which Vedānta linked accessibility to class and imposed strict restrictions on that basis. Vīraśaivism, a medieval reform movement begun by Basava in the twelfth century CE, even granted
equal status to women, a social transformation that would be deemed
an abomination in Vedānta.9 Sūdras, who occupied the lowest position
in the Hindu social system, for example, were permitted to worship and
were allowed access to the Vīraśaiva root texts. This clashed with the
insider epistemologies of Vedānta.10 Jains went even further than
Vīraśaivas because their sixth century BCE founder Mahāvīra com-
pletely rejected the class system and any other ties with Hinduism.
Anyone could become a Jain monk or nun and receive training to
become a virtuoso reader of Jain root texts and commentaries. The
most important Jain monastery in South India was also located in
southern Karnātaka at Śrāvana Belgola, only 250km from Udupi.
Given that the majority of feudal states in Tuḷunāḍu were Jain, their
opposition to the social and religious world of Vedānta was not
insignificant.11
Neither tradition thus gave any epistemic authority to the root texts
or commentaries of the Vedānta schools. Although both Vīraśaivism
and Jainism were commentarial and scholastic traditions and shared
these intellectual practices with their Vedānta counterparts, their canon
was completely different from those of the schools of Vedānta. Their
social program, as well as their interest in philosophical and religious
speculation outside of the Vedānta canon, and their less restrictive ped-
agogical practices, made them considerable adversaries to the Vedānta
traditions and social system.

Local and other indigenous traditions
The exegetical traditions, Vedānta, Vīraśaivism, and Jainism, were jux-
taposed with local and other indigenous traditions, which did not place
any value on commentarial activity, did not systematize their theologi-
cal positions, and did not prevent anyone from accessing texts and
learning doctrines. These Hindu traditions were often localized and
became more popular among the lower two classes such as the vaisyas
and sūdras. Many fostered methods to liberation via devotion (bhakti)
and did not encourage the study of esoteric texts or rituals.
Worship of Śiva stands foremost among these traditions and was the
prevalent religion in Tuḷunāḍu. Most temples in pre-Mādhva Tuḷunāḍu
were Saiva. Śiva temples were often found in the vicinity of those
devoted to Sakti (female power).12 The Sakti traditions were also
dominant in Tulunāḍu. More broadly, the goddess was worshipped as
Devi, Durgā, Kālī, and, more often, as a local female deity. The local
and indigenous traditions cannot be discounted, especially since the
Śaiva and Sakti traditions may have been the most dominant traditions
in Tulunāḍu. Hence, Madhvācārya’s theology, which centered on the god Viśnū, emerged as a stark contrast to the prevailing and principal traditions.

The Śakti traditions were also affiliated with tantric rituals and worship regimens. The tantric texts and practices were very different from those of the prevailing Vedic tradition. Further, though tantric worship often entailed initiation rites, these rites were not always restricted to literati or other elite groups. In spite of being based on insider epistemologies, these groups did not place such restrictions on membership based on class, as did the schools of Vedānta.13 They also allowed all devotees to engage in and lead worship practices. Consequently, such traditions were widespread among the lower social classes. It is likely that such tantric traditions were intellectual and social challenges for the virtuosos of Vedānta, who attempted to defend and uphold the class restrictions and orthodoxy of the Vedas.

To sum up, the traditions that existed at the time when Madhvācārya lived ranged from the esoteric schools of Vedānta to popular forms of worship that did not have elaborate educational institutions or systematized doctrines. These communities can be placed on a continuum that varies from the restrictive to the highly accessible. The esoteric schools of Vedānta, which were founded on highly restrictive, insider epistemology, lie at one end of the continuum. The indigenous and local traditions, which place no restrictions on their teachings (and do not have organized doctrines), lie at the other. Vīraśaivism and Jainism are located somewhere in the middle. Although they are open to anyone, both are pedagogically oriented and commentarial traditions that required aspirants to enroll in educational institutions to receive training. It is important to acknowledge how Madhvācārya’s insider epistemology was established in this context.

This diversity persisted because the Hoysala kings, who considered themselves supporters and protectors of the various traditions that existed in Tulunāḍu, permitted such religious pluralism.14 The rulers may not have had much of a choice but to allow pluralism, given that coastal Karnāṭaka was a center for trade with both South Asian and non-South Asian communities.15 Quite possibly, such diversity encouraged the rise of a cosmopolitan society wherein religious heterogeneity prevailed. It is thus likely that this variegated setting had a dramatic effect upon the development of Madhvācārya’s school of Vedānta and the modes, or lack thereof, for disseminating his doctrine. Given the geographical and historical context, Madhvācārya adopted and further developed the insider epistemologies of his Pūrva Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta predecessors.
Madhvācārya’s life and education

Very little information has survived about Madhvācārya’s life. Aside from relevant colophons found in Madhvācārya’s own works, his biographical data derives from the Madhvavijaya (The Triumph of Madhvācārya), a hagiography composed by his devotee and follower, Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍitācārya, and from inscriptive evidence and records found in Udupi monasteries. These and other sources provide information about the prevailing theological environment as well as Madhvācārya’s intellectual and religious growth and development.

Education

Madhvācārya was familiar with the literature of the schools of Vedānta, proven by the 292 texts he mentioned by name in his works. According to the Madhvavijaya, Madhvācārya studied the Vedas and other relevant root texts of the Advaita School of Vedānta with a teacher who was of the Pūgavana family. An inquisitive student, Madhvācārya was still not satisfied with what he had learned, so he next sought a new teacher in order to be granted ascetic (saṃnyāsa) status. Madhvācārya met Acyutapreksa, an ascetic who was also dissatisfied with the tenets of Advaita Vedānta, and underwent the prescribed rites to become a renunciant (saṃnyāsin). Acyutapreksa then changed Madhvācārya’s name to Pūnaprajña, “The One Whose Knowledge is Complete.” Unfortunately, Madhvācārya did not have much luck with his new teacher due to their vehement disagreements. Even the name given to Madhvācārya did not last, as Madhvācārya began referring to himself as Ānandatṛtha, “The Teacher of Bliss,” in colophons. Although Madhvācārya has several names, including Pūnaprajña and Pūnabodha, “The One Whose Realization is Complete,” among others, I hereafter refer to him only as Madhvācārya. The word “Madhvācārya” is actually comprised of “Madhva,” and “ācārya.” The suffix “ācārya” means “teacher” and is used both descriptively and as an honorific among the scholastic traditions of Hinduism illustrating the magnitude of pedagogy for these traditions.

After becoming a renunciant, he studied Vimuktātman’s Iṣṭasiddhi (The Accomplishment of the Desired), a ninth century CE Advaita text. This is the only mention of an Advaita text in the Madhvavijaya, which is somewhat surprising since Madhvācārya devoted much of his life to refuting their doctrines. It is likely that Madhvācārya also studied aspects of the Pūrva Mimāṃsā and Visiṣṭādvaīta traditions, although this is not mentioned in any of his hagiographies. Madhvācārya’s edu-
cation ended when Acyutapreksa installed him as the leader of the monastery. Madhvacarya thus rose from the ranks of students to become the head of an educational institution and was able to teach his own methods for obtaining liberation.

It was a standard practice among the intellectual elite in medieval Tulunadu to travel and to participate in public debates (sambvadas). After completing his studies, Madhvacarya traveled throughout South Asia in order to argue his new Vedanta position with other scholars. Madhvacarya came into contact with Vidyasamkara, the religious leader (svami) of the Sringeri matha, the Advaita monastery founded by Samkaracarya himself. His exposure to, and interaction with, other schools of philosophy, both Vedanta and non-Vedanta, is evident in his hagiographies, his works, and the broader issues that he addresses. For example, Panditacarya mentions that Madhvacarya refuted six systems of thought, indicating that he must have been familiar with them. It is unclear as to which six systems of thought he is supposed to have refuted, though it is likely to have been some combination of the Buddhism, Carvaka, Jaina, Nyaya, Purva Mimamsa, Samkhya, Vaishesika, Utrara Mimamsa (Vedanta) and Yoga traditions. Madhvacarya displays his knowledge of these traditions in his examination and refutation of their doctrines in a section of his commentary on the Brahma Sutras. This section is known as Samayavirodha (The Contradictions in Other Doctrines). Again, though such an exposure is not unusual, it helps to establish the range of interlocutors that Madhvacarya may have confronted.

Mdhva’s travels took him to Mahabardarikasrama, the home of Vyasa, and author of the Brahma Sutras. Vyasa is believed to be an incarnation (avatara) of Lord Visnu, the deity around which Madhva Vedanta is centered. Under the guidance of Vyasa, Madhvacarya composed his Brahma Sutra Bhasya, a commentary on Vyasa’s Brahma Sutras. Madhvacarya not only claims to have been trained by Vyasa, but he proclaims himself to be the third incarnation of Vayu, the wind God, who is also the son of Visnu. He is preceded by the first and second incarnations who are found in the two epics of Hinduism, namely Hanuman, the monkey deity in the Ramayana of Valmiki, and Bhima, one of the Pandavas in Vyasa/Vaisampayana’s Mahabhara. Vayu, namely Madhvacarya, is a guide for devotees (bhaktas) on their journey toward Visnu and occupies a dynamic position as a mediator between devotees and Visnu. This self-identification is unusual in the history of South Asian hagiographies.

Data taken from colophons, along with genealogical and chronological data found in the monasteries, have led non-Madhva scholars to
conclude that Madhvācārya died in 1317 CE.30 Pañditācārya records that Madhvācārya disappeared and was immediately honored with a shower of flowers from the deities.31 According to the Mādhva tradition, then, he did not actually die and is considered to be alive and residing in Mahābadarikāśrama in the Himalayas with his teacher and father Vyāsa-Viṣṇu.

The Mādhva sampradāya (community) and institutions

In addition to composing treatises on Vedānta matters, Madhvācārya founded the Mādhva community (sampradāya) in Uḍupi. According to traditional accounts, Madhvācārya discovered an idol of the god Kṛṣṇa, an incarnation of Viṣṇu, encased in mud in the ocean and installed it at a temple in Udupi. The idol is still worshipped in Udupi today.

After ordaining eight monks, Madhvācārya established each of them as religious leader of a monastery, thereby establishing the “Eight monasteries” (aṣṭamaṭhas) as an institutional tradition.32 These are the Palimār, Adamār, Kṛṣṇapūr, Putige, Sirūr, Sōde, Kanūr, and Pejāvar monasteries. The “Eight monasteries” still exist today and are the sites for studying both doctrines and rituals and for the training of virtuosos.33 They are the chief places where the restrictions sanctioned by Madhvācārya’s insider epistemology are imposed and maintained.

Madhvācārya’s works: the Sarvamūlagramāntah (Compendium of All the Fundamentals)

Madhvācārya wrote a total of 37 treatises, together known as the Sarvamūlagramāntah (Compendium of All the Fundamentals).34 First, there are commentaries on the three-fold systems (prasthānatraya). The Bhagavad Gītā (The Song of the Lord), the Brahma Sūtras and ten Upaniṣads (the Aitareya, Brhadāranyaka, Chāṇḍogya, Īsāvāsyas, Kena, Kaṭha, Māṇḍūkya, Muṇḍaka, Śaṭprasaṇa, Tatātīrīya), comprise the three-fold systems and each has a commentary written by Madhvācārya. The Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya, a commentary on Vyāsa’s Brahma Sūtras, is, perhaps, Madhvācārya’s most important work and is, indirectly, a summary of the essence of the Mādhva position. Madhvācārya wrote three other commentaries on the Brahma Sūtras, including the Anubhāṣya (The Brief Commentary), (also known as the Sarvasaṅkrātahasamgrah, Compendium of the Meaning of all the Śastra), the Anuvyākhyāna (An Explanation of the Śūtras), and, finally, the Nyāyavivarāna (An Exposition on Logic). This large
number of commentaries on the *Brahma Sūtras* is unusual in comparison to founders and followers of rival schools of Vedānta. Samkarācārya, for example, composed only one commentary on the *Brahma Sūtras*.

The second category consists of the ten-fold treatises on specific topics (*daśaprakaraṇa*). In these short treatises, Madhvācārya presents arguments concerning epistemology and ontology. His most well-known works in the area of ratiocination are his *Viṣṇutattva(vi)nirṇaya* (*The Complete Ascertainment of the Nature of Viṣṇu*) and his *Khaṇḍanatraya* (*A Trio of Refutations*). The *Khaṇḍanatraya* is composed of the *Upādhiḥkhaṇḍana* (*The Refutation of the Upādhi Position*), the *Māyāvādakhaṇḍana* (*The Refutation of the Māyā Position*), and the *Prapañcamithyātvānumānakhaṇḍana* (*The Refutation of the Inference of the Illusoriness of Phenomenal Reality*).

The third set, the systems of *Purāṇas* (*Stories of the Past*) (*purāṇaprasthāna*), addresses philosophical matters exemplified in commentaries on mythological, epic and historical–literary works. Included in it are the commentaries he composed on the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The fourth set of Madhvācārya’s works is comprised of minor treatises on practical doctrines. These works still play a role in the contemporary practice of Mādhva Vedānta. The *Tantrasārasaṃgraha* (*The Compendium of the Essential Parts of the Practical Doctrines*) and *Sadācārasmṛti* (*Tradition of Correct Practices*) concern Vaiṣṇava rituals and worship frameworks. This fourth set also includes poetic texts such as the *Dvādaśa Stotra* (*The Twelve Hymns*), which can be set to music and may have helped to give rise to musical traditions in South Karnātaka.35

Mādhva Vedānta was not developed in a vacuum. The context within which it was conceived had a substantial effect on Madhvācārya’s insider epistemology which severely limited access to root texts. Who had access to Mādhva texts? How were the restrictions justified? To answer these and other questions, I will next address the components and mechanisms of the Mādhva insider epistemology.
THE MĀDHVA INSIDER
EPISTEMOLOGY

Introduction

According to Madhvācārya, “Not everyone possess the eligibility (adhikāra)” for acquiring knowledge of the Supreme Being (brahman) and for obtaining release (mokṣa) from the cycle of birth and rebirth. Not every enduring self (jīva) has full access to Mādhva root texts, the source of the knowledge that is efficacious for learning about the nature of the Supreme Being, for obtaining release, and for learning the intricacies of Mādhva dialectics. The Mādhva insider epistemology hinged on this restriction of access to the root texts. One may wonder, though, if philosophical speculation could occur independently of the textual tradition? How important were the root texts for Mādhva Vedānta? How seriously should the restrictions be taken?

In order to answer these and related questions, it is essential to show the centrality of the text and commentarial activity in Mādhva Vedānta. It is also necessary to distinguish between the kinds of knowledge from which outsiders were restricted. If it were merely mystical knowledge of the Supreme Being, then the restrictions may be irrelevant for the excluded investigator. If, on the other hand, it were textual knowledge, then the investigator would be affected. It is also vital to know which were the root texts that Madhvācārya guarded. But first, couldn’t one take the philosophical issues out of their context and analyze them using pure logic? If it were possible then the texts were merely a means to a greater philosophical and religious end and could otherwise be jetisoned.

Reasoning (anumāna) alone

Madhvācārya held that reasoning (anumāna) itself was dependent (upajīvaka) on the root texts and that it was not to be used for purposes
other than interpreting them. In his Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya, he emphasized the supremacy and centrality of the root texts: “Without the assistance of the revealed root texts (sruti), reasoning (anumāna) would certainly not accomplish its goal . . . Empty logic should be avoided.” According to Madhvacārya, philosophical debate could not occur outside of the confines of the canon. In fact, knowledge of the contents of the root texts was a necessary requirement for participation in the Vedānta dialogue and Madhvacārya’s school was no exception.

Madhvacārya, however, was exposed to, and interacted with, non-Vedānta schools. Although Madhvacārya still addressed the positions of non-Vedānta schools, he treated them as impotent and innocuous given that they did not uphold the epistemic validity of his root texts. For example, Madhvacārya dismissed those who maintained the authorship of a text called the Pāsupatāgamas. He argued: “Their position is unreasonable due to its opposition to all the revealed root texts (sruti) and so on.” In such cases, reasonability was not determined by revealing inner flaws but instead was based on a disagreement about the foundations of epistemology. One must argue within the boundaries of Vedānta to be taken seriously by Madhvacārya.

Another place in the Mādhva corpus where Madhvacārya addressed these issues was his Kathālakṣaṇa, a primer on the strategies of debate (saṃvāda). In this text, Madhvacārya was almost exclusively concerned with instructions on proper debate and strategies of hermeneutics. The debates that he described were not about abstract philosophical issues. Instead, debate was founded entirely in the root texts and concerned interpretations of particular passages. Debate meant criticizing the interpretation or the evidence offered by one’s opponent and then offering one’s own interpretation or even better, or more appropriate, evidence. Debate meant resolving what appeared initially to be contradictions in the canon. This demonstrates the utter centrality of the root texts for Mādhva Vedānta. All of the schools of Vedānta, in fact, upheld the epistemic authority of the root texts.

Mādhva epistemological reflection was never an end in itself. Instead, it was always in the service of soteriology, of attaining release. A proper understanding of the mechanisms of the universe, including epistemological ones, and, most importantly, complete and correct knowledge of the Supreme Being via the root texts, was essential for liberation. An incorrect understanding of the Supreme Being was the reason why sentient beings were reborn. Such knowledge, combined with devotion (bhakti) and other practices, could eventually break the cycle of birth and rebirth. It is vital for readers to keep this in mind in order to avoid artificially separating the theoretical from the practical.
In part, it is for this reason that Madhvacarya stated in his Kathalakṣana that the arbitrator (prāśnika) of a debate “should always be engaged in the devotion of Viṣṇu. For the chief characteristic of all people whose qualities are good is devotion to Viṣṇu.” Not only must one know and uphold the root texts, but also one must be a devotee of Viṣṇu to be a qualified dialogue partner!

Knowledge of the text versus unmediated knowledge

Next, the investigator may wonder if the Mādhva restriction concerned knowledge that was merely a result of a mystical experience. After all, an investigator may not be bothered if s/he was restricted from knowledge that was connected with a mystical experience. Madhvacarya was aware of this distinction between textual and non-textual knowledge and separated mediated textual knowledge (parokṣa-jñāna) of the Supreme Being from unmediated knowledge (aparokṣa-jñāna) of the Supreme Being. The former was a result of a close study of the root texts with the assistance of commentaries and qualified teachers. The latter was obtained only after a study of the texts and by the grace of Lord Viṣṇu (viṣṇuprasādā). Madhvacarya explained: “He, the Lord, is attainable to whom He chooses. Only by that grace, He, the Self, reveals His nature.” Madhvacarya downplayed the power of the individual: “Direct realization (aparokṣya) of the highest Lord comes only from grace and not from the efforts of the enduring self.” Although there are stipulations for how to obtain the grace of Lord Viṣṇu, they are not of concern here. In fact, the restrictions and insider epistemology in question solely concern mediated textual knowledge (parokṣa-jñāna) of the Supreme Being.

Restricting access to the text clearly limited the types of philosophical inquiry available to investigators. How was this restriction justified? Which types of enduring selves (jīvas) were permitted and which were not? Which types of humans? But, first, which were the root texts that were restricted? Were there some texts that were more accessible than others? If so, why?

The Mādhva canon

Madhvacarya was a scholar of Vedānta and thus shared many of the same root texts, such as the Vedas and the Brahma Sūtras, with his Advaita and Visisṭādvaitsa counterparts. Although these texts were held to be canonical by all of the schools of Vedānta, each school made its own additions and emendations to the agreed upon list. Given that the
Mādhva insider epistemology centrally concerned access to texts, it is essential to learn which texts have been added and which have been eliminated, how Madhvācārya defined the canon, which texts were the foundations of his philosophy and which were decidedly and explicitly eliminated from the list of root texts, the *index librorum prohibitorum*.

Madhvācārya used several terms in his corpus to refer to the canon, principally “āgama,” “sāstra,” and “veda.” The terms were interchangeable insofar as, *prima facie*, they seemed to refer to the same body of texts. It may be that different terms were employed based on their use. For example, the term “āgama” was used as a way of describing the canon as a whole or a compendium of practical doctrines. The term “sāstra” was used in reference to the instructiveness of the texts. Finally, the term “veda” was used in the context of epistemology for the set of root texts were a means of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*). Madhvācārya used the term “veda” in two different ways. Sometimes he used it to refer to the four Vedas, namely the Rg Veda and so on. At other times, it was used merely to refer to the set of root texts among which included the Rg Veda. I designate the former as “Veda” and the latter as “veda.”

Not surprisingly, he listed the relevant texts in his descriptions of the three terms. According to Madhvācārya:

In the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* it is written: “The right texts are composed of: the Rg Veda and so on, the Mahābhārata, all of the Pañcarātrāgamas, the Mūlarāmāyaṇa, and also the Purāṇas. Those texts that conform to these are good āgamas. Other texts are bad āgamas. Janārdana, that is, Viṣṇu, cannot be understood by those bad texts.”

In his commentary on the aphorism found in the *Brahma Sūtras* regarding the origin of the sāstras, he explained:

The term “sāstra” denotes the Rg, Yajur, Sāma, and Atharva Vedas, the Mahābhārata, the Pañcarātra, and the Mūlarāmāyaṇa. And whatever agrees with these texts is also declared to be “sāstra” . . .

Finally, he also defined the term “veda” as “denoting the Rg, Yajur, Sāma, and Atharva Vedas, the Mūlarāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata, and the Pañcarātra.”

According to these passages, five texts were held to be canonical. It is no surprise that the Vedas were included in this list since
Madhvācārya was a scholar of Vedānta. Despite their importance, he composed only one commentary on the Rg Veda and it was only partial. In contrast, he wrote commentaries on all ten of the Upaniṣads, which clearly indicated their significance as root texts. What about the other four texts? What kinds of texts were they? Did they also inspire many commentaries?

Vyāsa/Vaiśampāyana’s Mūlarāmāyaṇa and Vālmiki’s Mahābhārata are Itihāsas (Narrative Histories), each with accounts of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, both incarnations of Viṣṇu. The Mūlarāmāyaṇa is about Rāma while the Mahābhārata has Kṛṣṇa as one of its central characters. These are epic poems not unlike Homer’s Odyssey and Iliad. Madhvācārya considered them to be Vedas but this was neither extraordinary nor controversial. Several passages can be found in the Mahābhārata where its purported author himself classified it as a fifth Veda (pañcaveda). For example, “He, great lord, most eminent granter of boons, taught the Vedas, and the Mahābhārata as the fifth Veda …”¹³ All of the schools of Vedānta held the Mūlarāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata to be root texts and Mādhva Vedānta was no exception. Madhvācārya wrote a partial commentary on the Mahābhārata, within which was included a partial commentary on the Mūlarāmāyaṇa. He did not, however, write an independent commentary on the Mūlarāmāyaṇa. Incidentally, the Bhagavad Gītā (The Song of the Lord), which consists of a conversation between Lord Kṛṣṇa and a warrior named Arjuna, is no more than a chapter of the Mahābhārata, despite its being treated often as an independent treatise by many. It too was held to be a root text and Madhvācārya wrote two commentaries on it.

The Purāṇas (Stories of the Past) are another set of texts that shared many of the same themes as these two epics, and Madhvācārya included them in his list. In addition to being characterized as āgamas, they were also given the same epistemic status as the Vedas. Madhvācārya reclassified both the Itihāsas as well as Purāṇas as a fifth Veda in his Viṣṇutattvaviniṇṇaya: “The Itihāsas and the Purāṇas are the fifth Veda because the two, along with the other four Vedas, comprise that, the fifth.”¹⁴ There were a large number of Purāṇas and Madhvācārya cited many of them in his commentaries. He wrote, however, a commentary on only one, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, which contained stories about Kṛṣṇa. Many of the Purāṇas that Madhvācārya cited in his corpus are not extant and some have argued that they never existed and were mere fabrications.¹⁵ If they did not exist, then this may indicate that Madhvācārya had relied on other ways to conceal and protect his doctrines, namely to refer to texts that could never be discovered.
These two types of texts, the *Itihāsa* and *Purāṇas*, were (and are) accepted by all of the schools of Vedānta. Their inclusion was neither a matter of concern nor debate. Which text or texts were included by Madhvācārya as root texts but were not included by other schools of Vedānta? Which were added to the set of restricted texts?

The *Pañcarātrāgamas*

The *Pañcarātrāgamas* were a set of texts that only two of the schools of Vedānta hold to be canonical, namely the Viśiṣṭādvaita and Mādhva Schools. The focus of these sectarian texts was prescriptions for ritual behavior, construction of temples, and the like. The texts, which were predominantly monotheistic, were affiliated with the god Nārāyana. Nārāyana was identified with Viṣṇu by Viṣṇavas and was the object of pietistic devotion. This reliance upon the *Pañcarātrāgamas* was (and is) found only among the Vaiṣṇava schools of Vedānta, namely Viśiṣṭādvaita and Mādhva Vedānta. Madhvācārya’s predecessor Rāmānujacārya first incorporated them in the Vedānta canon in the eleventh century CE. They were not held to be a root text by the Advaita School, and Īśkaraṇya argued that the *Pañcarātrāgamas* conflicted with the Vedas in his commentary on *Brahma Sûtra* 2.2.44.16 For these reasons, Madhvācārya and other Vaiṣṇava thinkers took pains to justify the inclusion of this text in their canons. For example, Yāmunācārya, the tenth century CE precursor to Rāmānujacārya, wrote the *Āgama-prāmaṇya* (*The Epistemic Authority of the Āgamas*) in defense of their validity.17 It is likely that Madhvācārya was familiar with Yāmunācārya’s text or, at the very least, with the arguments contained therein. To defend the authority of this marginal text Madhvācārya declared:

Nārāyana himself, namely Viṣṇu, is the speaker of the entire *Pañcarātrāgama*. Oh Rājendra! In connection with the knowledge located in all of these texts, such as the *Sāṃkhya*, *Pāśupata*, and the like, the knowledge of the *Pañcarātrāgama* is superior.18

Madhvācārya also held that the *Vedas* and the *Pañcarātrāgamas* were on equal epistemic footing: “... The *Pañcarātrāgma* is a means of knowledge (pramāṇa) for its intended meaning and the meaning of the *Vedas* is identical.”19 Although the *Pañcarātrāgamas* were considered to be root texts and *Pañcarātrāgama* ontology was incorporated by Madhvācārya into his own, neither Madhvācārya nor his subsequent
commentators focused on them. Madhvācārya wrote his Tantrasārasamgraha and Sadācārasamṛtti as digests of ritual life of Mādhvas, and they were correlated with Pañcarātrāgamasya. Neither, however, were the subject of many commentaries of his disciples, nor were the Pañcarātrāgamasya.

The Tantras

One more set of texts that were mentioned by Madhvācārya to belong in the canon, while not being included in the five given above, are the Tantras. These are referenced in three places in the Mādhva corpus. First, in his commentary on Brahma Sūtra 1.2.26, Madhvācārya stated, “all of the Vedas, the Tantras, and Purāṇas and so on, indicate the supremacy of Viṣṇu.”20 The text was also mentioned in two passages that concerned the Mādhva insider epistemology and strategies for concealment: “Those who are eligible (adhikāri) are spoken of in the Bhāgavata Tantra.”21 Here the term is qualified by the word Bhāgavata, often used in reference to Viṣṇu or auspiciousness. B.N.K Sharma suggests that the Bhāgavata Tantra was a Pañcarātra text that is no longer extant.22 Madhvācārya also refers to it in the Brahma Sūtra without the qualifier: “For women, sūdras and unworthy brahmins, there is eligibility (adhikāra) with regard to the knowledge that is found in the Tantras.”23 Madhvācārya did not discuss the character of the Tantras. Were they new texts, a sixth set to be added to the already existing body of texts? Jayatīrtha answers this question in his Tattvaprakāśika (The Elucidation of the True Nature of the Supreme Being), a commentary on Madhvācārya’s Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya, and explained that “The term ‘tantra’ refers to the Pañcarātras and so on.”24 There is no reason to doubt Jayatīrtha’s interpretation. Additionally, other Vaiṣṇava scholars, such as Yāmunācārya, who predated both Madhvācārya and Jayatīrtha, employed the term “Tantra” to refer to the texts of the Pañcarātrāgamasya.25 Although the exact nature of these Tantras has not been clearly stated by Madhvācārya, it was very likely that they were another name for the Pañcarātrāgamasya.

These were not the only texts that were part of the Mādhva canon and there were others that were included in this list. Madhvācārya even accounted for ones that conflicted with his position.

The confusing treatises (mohaśāstras)

In his commentary on the Mahābhārata, Madhvācārya mentioned that there was a category of texts, known as the confusing treatises
(mohaśāstras), which were not restricted and were thus made available to the masses. They were, however, inaccurate, and were intended to mislead. They were, in some sense, an index librorum prohibitorum, a body of texts that were to be avoided by adherents or, at least, read with the knowledge that they were intended to lead astray. Madhvācārya proposed that texts that seemed to conflict with his perspective did not, in fact, conflict with Viṣṇu’s plans:

Those who are ignorant of Hari make the treatises whose meaning is confusing. Because these texts have been described as unacceptable they guide the demons (asuras) to Hell.²⁶

In a subsequent passage, he pointed out that Viṣṇu was responsible for them:

“I emit this confusion which will confuse people. You, Oh Rudra, Oh Strong Armed One, cause the confusing treatises to be composed. Show those false treatises, Oh Powerful One. Make your Self renowned and conceal me.” This is stated in the words of the Vārāha Purāṇa and, similarly, in the Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa.²⁷

Such texts were intended to befuddle people, thus playing a crucial role in Madhvācārya’s esotericism and insider epistemology. They existed to conceal the true nature of the Supreme Being from those who were ineligible, functioning as decoys that would mislead the unauthorized reader to believe that s/he has gained access to Mādhva doctrine. The inclusion of such texts as a component of Madhvācārya’s insider epistemology marked the significance of limiting access and the importance of concealing Mādhva doctrine.

To summarize, there were five root texts (or types of texts), namely the Vedas (Ṛg, Yajur, Sāma, and Atharva), the Mahābhārata, the Mūlarāmāyana, the Purāṇas, and the Pañcarātras/Tantras, that made up the Mādhva canon. The confusing treatises (mohaśāstras) are only tangentially part of the canon, are not restricted, and are of no concern here. The five root texts, though, were the ones that Madhvācārya held to be at the center of Mādhva pedagogy. These and their commentaries must be memorized, recited, and learned by aspiring adherents. Only virtuoso readers of these root texts and their commentaries could claim comprehensive knowledge of Mādhva doctrine. Only virtuoso readers, moreover, could evaluate, synthesize, and summarize Mādhva philosophy.
Who could become an authorized reader? How could one become an authorized reader?

The qualifications (adhikāra) of the reader: eligibility and competence

In several places in his commentary on Vyāsa’s Brahmasūtras, Madhvācārya directly and indirectly alluded to his insider epistemology. Madhvācārya explicitly warned his disciples against spreading Mādhva doctrine indiscriminately:

“Having learned it, the knowledge, he understands the Supreme Being. He may speak about this knowledge to men. As he speaks about it, he indeed becomes greater.” The instructions for teaching are spoken of in the Māṭhara Sruti. One should not think: “It is the aim to distribute this knowledge to many men.” There is a reason for not distributing this knowledge. When it is distributed, the result is the granting of knowledge of the vedas to those not qualified. This is prohibited.²⁸

There were rules about who could and could not have access to the knowledge found in the Vedas, and these were found in the root texts themselves. These rules concerned the qualifications (adhikāra) of potential students and they pertained to both inherent disability as well as stipulated exclusion; some were ineligible due to the particularities of their birth, while others who were unable to study were simply intellectual incompetent.²⁹ For this reason I will use the terms “qualification,” “eligibility,” and “competence” interchangeably.

All three founders of the schools of Vedānta addressed the qualifications of aspirants in their commentaries on the first aphorism of the Brahmasūtras of Bādarāyana: “Then, afterwards, the inquiry into the Supreme Being (brahman) is to be undertaken.”³⁰ In fact, such qualifications were frequently addressed at the beginning of Vedānta treatises. Before one embarked on a study or analysis, the practice was that one must first show to one’s audience that there were devotees who were eligible and competent to study the subject. So it is no surprise that the Brahmasūtras, arguably the most important root text of Vedānta, began in this way. Madhvācārya’s characterizations of the qualifications, moreover, were identical to those offered by Śaṅkarācārya and Rāmānujācārya.

Vyāsa, the author of the Brahmasūtras, did not invent this pattern
of addressing the qualifications in the first aphorism and he was imitating the Mimāṃsa thinker Jaimini, who began his *Mimāṃsā Sūtras* in exactly the same way. Jaimini’s concern about the qualifications (*adhihāra*), however, centered upon the right to learn and to practice sacrifices (*yajñās*) that were enjoined in the *Vedas* and not Vedic study itself. The first aphorism of his *Mimāṃsā Sūtras* was: “Then, afterwards, the inquiry into *dharma* (dutiful behavior).”\(^{31}\) Mimāṃsā scholars such as Śabara (second century CE), and Kumārila (seventh century CE), wrote detailed commentaries on this and related passages.\(^{32}\) The sixth *adhyāya* (chapter) of Sabara’s commentary on Jaimini’s *Mimāṃsā Sūtras*, for example is devoted to these issues of the entitlement, eligibility, and competence of insiders. Madhvācārya’s insider epistemology thus has its origins in its Pūrva Mimāṃsā and Vedānta predecessors.

Nearly every major school of Indian philosophy discussed the topic of eligibility and thereby established either insider epistemologies or open ones in commentaries on at least one (usually the first) aphorism found in their central texts. This practice points toward the importance of regulation of reading and other pedagogical habits and, therefore, for the training of virtuoso religious readers.

By itself, this first aphorism of Vyāsa’s *Brahma Sūtras*, “Then, afterwards, the inquiry into the Supreme Being (*brahma*) is to be undertaken,” is vague and inspires several questions: “After what?” “What is the significance of ‘then’?” and “By whom is the inquiry to be undertaken?” To answer these and other questions, Madhvācārya commented on the word “then”:

> The word “then” is used as an auspicious expression and to indicate that there are preconditions for eligibility."\(^{33}\)

Next, he confirmed the accuracy of his interpretation by citing a conversation between the god Brahmā and the legendary messenger Nārada found in the *Garuḍa Purāṇa* which agreed with his:

> “All aphorisms begin with the word ‘then’ and ‘afterwards.’ What is the reason for this? What do they mean? How are they better than other words? Oh Supreme Being, tell me so that I will know the true nature of things.” Thus spoken to by Nārada, Brahmā, the most excellent one, said: “The word ‘then’ is used as an auspicious expression (*maṅgalārtha*) and to indicate that there are preconditions for eligibility. . . “\(^{34}\)
Jayatīrtha’s commentary further clarified Madhvācārya’s. He wrote:

He, namely Madhvācārya, states the literal meaning of the word “then” to be “after obtaining eligibility.” It is mentioned for the sake of denying the commencement of the inquiry into the Supreme Being for the person who merely desires liberation. In this way, he explains the term “eligible.”

Taking Madhvācārya’s and Jayatīrtha’s commentary into consideration, the expanded passage reads: “Then, after having met the requirements for eligibility, the inquiry into the Supreme Being is to be undertaken.” What were these requirements? What did one need to do to become an authorized student of Mādhva Vedānta?

Requisite dispositions

Many of the schools of thought in South Asia required that students ought to have satisfied psychological precursors, such as appropriate disposition and temperament, in order to qualify as a proper student of textual knowledge. For example, Madhvācārya held that knowledge of the Supreme Being (brahma-jñāna) must be accompanied “with the condition of tranquility and the restraint of the senses.” When one has satisfied these requirements, one must then seek a teacher (guru), since the root texts cannot be studied without one. Madhvācārya enjoined:

He, whose goal is knowledge of Him, who holds a sacrificial stick for the sacred fire, approaches a teacher (guru) who is both versed in the Vedas and devoted to the Supreme Being.

At first glance, it would appear that anyone whose goal was knowledge of the Supreme Being could become a student. The above passage is taken from the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 1.2.12. The passage in its entirety is informative of the required disposition and temperament that rendered mere desire inadequate:

Let the brahmin whose goal is knowledge of Him, who holds a sacrificial stick for the sacred fire, after having examined the worlds which are known through ritual action, who is indifferent to worldly objects, realizing that that which is not created, namely liberation, is not obtained by ritual action, for the sake of understanding the Supreme Being, approach a teacher.
(guru) who is both versed in the Vedas and devoted to the Supreme Being. 

A proper student would possess the required dispositions and have realized that ritual methods to obtain liberation were insufficient. Who determines if these dispositions have been attained? How about the sincerity of the aspiring students? Such an evaluation was left to the discretion of the teachers who were approached. As far as I know, there were no standardized tests described anywhere in the Mādhva corpus. Nevertheless, dispositional requirements were merely the first hurdle that one must leap over in order to gain access to the Mādhva root texts. This restriction, though, was different from others, since it seems that it could be overcome. One could learn that ritual action was insufficient, become indifferent to worldly objects and therefore obtain the desired and prescribed dispositions. I show below other kinds of restrictions which could not be overcome and were immutable.

Gradation (tāratamya) and qualifications (adhikāra)

Madhvācārya characterized the varieties of men and the types of education to which they are entitled in his commentary on Brahma Sūtra. His taxonomy and the categories of eligibility paralleled his ontology which was structured around hierarchy and gradations (tāratamya). Each and every component and sentient being in the universe could be located in a pyramidical configuration with Viṣṇu at the zenith. Given the centrality of difference to Mādhva Vedānta, it comes as no surprise that the varying grades of devotees (bhaktas) and enduring selves (jīvas) also have varying degrees of access. Madhvācārya thus addressed the extent to which human males, intelligent oviparous animals, women, sūdras, gods, and those excluded from the class system (antyajas) could access the root texts. He and his followers believed this list to be a comprehensive taxonomy that accounted for any potential student.

The twice-born (dvijas)

His analysis of access as it pertained to the twice-born sentients can be broken down into several categories: types of men, prescribed and prohibited activities of these men, intellectual capabilities, and other non-human twice-born creatures.

First, Madhvācārya distinguished men from other kinds of sentient beings:
Those who are eligible (adhipari) are spoken of in the Bhagavata Tantra: “There are three types of eligible devotes: the lowest, middling, and highest. The lowest class is comprised of the best among men. The middling class is comprised of sages and demi-gods (gandharvas). The highest class is comprised of gods.”

Men were at the lowest end of this hierarchy of sentient beings who were qualified to study the root texts. But not all men were granted access, for the set of men was further limited to encompass only the best among men. Though Madhvacarya did not clarify which men were held to be the best in this passage, he did in subsequent ones.

Additionally, Madhvacarya, himself a member of the brahmin class, indexed the qualifications to class (varsha) status. These restrictions were not derived independently but were the same ones that his Vedanta and Paurva Mimamsa predecessors upheld. These, in part, had their origins in the duties and obligations of the four classes first mentioned in Purushasukta (the Sacrifice of Primal Man), hymn 10.90, found in the Rg Veda.

Madhvacarya wrote: “Those of the first three classes who are particularly devoted to Hari are qualified to study the Vedas” and “All of the Vedas along with the secret doctrine are to be studied by the twice-born.” Who were these “twice-born” sentient? Was there a difference between them and those of the first three classes? The designation “twice-born” (dvijas) was in reference to the Upanayana, an initiation practice followed by male members of the first three classes in the Hindu social system, namely the brahmins, kshatriyas, and vaisyas. Madhvacarya prescribed:

“At the age of 8, let the brahmin be initiated and let him be taught them, the Vedas.” The reference is to the sacred initiation rites as the condition for studying the Vedas.

According to Manava-dharmasstra (Manu’s Treatise on the Law) 2.36, kshatriyas were to undergo the rites when they were 11 and vaisyas at 12. The sacred initiation rite was the most important prerequisite for humans who wished to study the Vedas. The ceremony consisted of the memorization of esoteric religious chants (mantras) such as Gayatri as well as investiture with a sacred thread. The initiated became a brahma-cari (celibate student), the first of the four stages in the asramas (stage of life) system. Brahma-carya (celibate studentship) was followed by the gṛhaustha (householder), vānaprastha (forest dweller), and samnyāsa
(ascetic) stages. The initiation as a celibate student was believed to be a second birth. Hence those who underwent the ceremony were called “twice-born.” Only those who had this ceremony or were naturally twice-born were granted access to the Vedas and other root texts.

Incidentally, in his commentary on Brahma Sūtra 3.4.12, “Eligibility is only for those who have studied the Vedas,” Madhvācārya also linked eligibility with the desired dispositions described earlier:

This is stated in the Brahma Tarka: “The person who is not a follower of Viṣṇu, who does not have devotion to the teacher (guru), who is devoid of peace and so on, who is not of the favorable classes, namely the twice-born, such a person is not qualified.”

This restriction of the study of the Vedas to the twice-born was the most important component in the Mādhva insider epistemology. It was virtually impossible to gain access to the root texts if one was not born a male member of a twice-born class. But how permanent was one’s class if one was born a man? Could it be changed? Mādhva Vedānta, like all of the Hindu systems of thought, allowed for mobility between the classes in future lives. Hence, it would be possible for a sūdra to be reborn eventually as a brahmin, to have an Upanayana, and to study the Vedas with Mādhva teachers in the prescribed pedagogical setting. Although this restriction may apply in the current lifetime, it need not in future ones. In light of the mechanisms of rebirth and the possibility for mobility, the Mādhva insider epistemology appears less severe and restrictive. Still, planning that far ahead for future lifetimes of study is not an option for most investigators!

Birth as a male in a twice-born class did not guarantee that one had access to esoteric Mādhva teachings. Besides the need for one’s father or a male relative to be willing to perform the initiation, it was also possible to lose one’s privileged position of eligibility. Madhvācārya did not spend much effort listing the rules that one must follow to maintain eligibility but it was likely that he assumed the validity of those listed in Mānava-dharmaśāstra and others treatises on law (dharmaśāstras). These include hygiene rules, dietary restrictions, and other prescriptions for dutiful behavior (dharma).

Although there are many regulations other than sexual ones that were mentioned in the available codebooks, Madhvācārya emphasized the rules prescribing chastity. In his commentary on Brahma Sūtra 3.4.17, “And, as is mentioned in the root texts (śabda), an eligible one is properly chaste,” Madhvācārya warned:
Even if there is a little bit of wantonness, there is no eligibility with regard to knowledge of the Vedas. He, the chaste one, tells the highest mystery to that one who is also chaste.\textsuperscript{48}

Chastity was required for the student as well as for the teacher. It was likely that Madhvācārya intended this requirement to be followed in full, thus making slight infractions, peccadillos, or degrees of sexual activity irrelevant.

Could one be redeemed if one broke a rule? Or were infractions inexcusable? According to the Mānava-dharmaśāstra, in some cases it was possible perform a ritual and the error would be absolved. For example:

A twice-born chaste student of the Veda who has spilled his semen in his sleep, not out of lust, should bathe, worship the sun, and chant, three times, the Vedic verse that begins, “Let my sensory power return to me again.”\textsuperscript{49}

Exclusion was sometimes temporary and there were ways that one could be reinstated as an insider and regain access to the root texts. Madhvācārya anticipated that there would be transgressors, and in one passage referred to brahmins who have fallen from their exalted status and relinquished their access to all of the root texts. To this end, Madhvācārya stated that:

For women, śūdras, and unworthy brahmins (brahmabandhus), there is eligibility with regard to the knowledge of the Tantras but only when a portion is spoken and not with regard to study from a text.\textsuperscript{50}

Though there are no glosses of the term “brahmabandhu” in any Mādhva commentaries, the term usually refers to an unworthy brahmin or to one who is only nominally a brahmin. It is also unclear whether brahmabandhus could be reinstated or if the excommunication was permanent and could not be rescinded. According to contemporary Mādhva scholars, it is possible to perform a ritual and be reinstated as an eligible brahmin.\textsuperscript{51}

The proverbial fall from grace resulted in a complete loss of access to root texts and to oral commentaries. What little access was available was no more than partial and secondhand summaries of concepts and general principles offered by insiders. Close study of the text with virtuoso readers would become impossible, as would debate and any other
philosophical activity. The *brahmabandhu* had a very low degree of access indeed!

To summarize: one must have been a twice-born male who has undergone the prescribed initiation rite, namely the *Upanayana*, and adhered to the rules befitting someone of his status in order to become a student of Mādhva Vedānta and to have access to the root texts. But were there other, non-human, sentient beings that could be classified as twice-born? Were they also authorized to read the root texts?

Oviparous creatures such as birds and snakes were held to be twice-born. After all, both are literally born twice, first from mothers and then from eggs, and are therefore twice-born! So, if all twice-born creatures were eligible, then this would include all birds and snakes. Only a very small number of birds and snakes, however, had the capacity to read the root texts. The rest were deemed incompetent. There would then be an overextension (*ativyāpti*) of the rule as it would include the vast majority of birds and snakes that were unable to read them. To avoid including too many in the set of eligible twice-born sentients, Madhvācārya further stipulated that:

> It was said, “Only humans are eligible for knowledge found in the *Vedas*.“ The distinction, “only humans” (*manuṣyāṇāṁ eva*), is said to exclude lower sentient beings and the like, but not to exclude gods and others.\(^52\)

This characterization, however, was not sufficient. While the previous characterization was too broad, this one was too narrow. There would be an under-extension (*avyāpti*) of the definition as it excluded some lower sentient beings that were recorded in root texts, such as the *Mahābhārata*, to have read the root texts. But not all lower beings were so gifted. These lower sentient beings, Madhvācārya stipulated, must also have a distinctive intellect if they were to be competent:

> Of those lower sentient beings and the like previously mentioned, competence is not possible for them for they are lacking a distinctive intellect and so on. Even for those lower beings, competence is possible if there is a distinctive intellect and the like. There is no objection here to their eligibility. And eligibility is also evident because there is no restriction. For example, cases like the bird Jaritāri and others are seen.\(^53\)

The reference to birds like Jaritāri concerned myths found in root texts such as the *Mahābhārata*, the *Ramāyaṇa*, and the *Purāṇas*.\(^54\) In the
myth about Jaritāri, which is found in the Mahābhārata, Maṇḍapāla, a seer (ṛṣi) became a Śārgaṇaka bird and had intercourse with Jaritā, a bird. The offspring of their union, Jaritāri, Sāriṣrikva, Stambamitra, and Drona, were each characterized as eligible and competent interpreters of the Vedas. In the same section of the Mahābhārata, Jaritāri spoke in Sanskrit and offered a prayer to fire. Madhvācārya had to account for this myths and others that were in the root texts. For this reason, although birds occupy a lower position on the hierarchy of intelligence and do not typically have distinctive intellects, Madhvācārya believed that Jaritāri and his siblings were examples of lower sentient beings that nevertheless possessed the required distinctive intellects. Therefore they did (and others like them could) study the Vedas.

To sum up, there was access for human males who were twice-born and who abided by the rules and regulations appropriate to class, caste, and stage of life (āśrama). Non-human sentient beings that were twice-born were also granted access if they possessed distinctive intellects. All other humans and sentient beings that were not twice-born were excluded from this elite and privileged group. This small set of sentient beings who qualified for a Mādhva education and, therefore, were literate (or could become literate) and approved readers and interpreters of Mādhva root texts. The Mādhva rules were identical with those of the Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita schools. As virtuoso religious readers, these twice-born men could effectively argue both for and against the Mādhva tradition. The kinds of philosophical inquiries that were available to them were certainly not limited as they were for outsiders for they had complete access to the root texts.

Women

Madhvācārya was unable to posit a universal rule that restricted all women from accessing the root texts because there were references in root texts themselves to women who had eligibility. Madhvācārya thus faced a problem that was very similar to the ones he faced with unusually intelligent birds mentioned in the Mahābhārata and other root texts. The rules and requirements for males, however, meant decisively that women were excluded. It was vital for Madhvācārya to accommodate the exceptions. Madhvācārya identified the first set of women in his commentary on Brahma Śūtra 1.1.1. He explained:

And, they also say that the best women are eligible for Vedic study; and those best women are Urvaśī, Yamī, Sacī, and the rest.55
Madhvācārya had already stipulated that only the “best among men” were eligible, and it is no surprise that he perceived a natural gradation (tāratamya) among women as well. Who was included among this highly exclusive set of women? Each of the women to which Madhvācārya referred was a heavenly nymph (apsara) who was mentioned in the context of a conversational hymn (ākhyāna) found in the Rg Veda.56 The Rg Veda was composed in Sanskrit and the conversations that these heavenly nymphs (apsaras) had were also in Sanskrit. It is possible that Madhvācārya thus inferred that the women mentioned in the Rg Veda were capable of Vedic study given their knowledge of Sanskrit.

The choice of these three women is made more complicated by the sexual content and concerns of the conversations that they had in each of their hymns. Urvasī, for example, was the lover of the demi-god (gandharva) Purūravas. According to the myth, Urvasī made Purūravas promise never to let her see him naked. If she saw him, she threatened, she would disappear. Yami’s conversation was with her brother Yama and in it she tried, and failed, to convince him to commit incest with her. Finally, Śacī, the wife of Indra, also known in the Rg Veda as Indrāni, had spoken to her husband about a sexual relationship that she had with Vṛṣākapī, his favorite monkey. She even compared their sexual abilities! It is not clear why Madhvācārya chose these three sexually charged hymns and women for his ideal set except, of course, from their being mentioned in the Rg Veda. Did this mean that all women mentioned in the Rg Veda had eligibility and were competent? Or did it mean only those in the Rg Veda who had risqué conversations? Did the conversations have to be in Sanskrit? Or are all women, even those outside of the confines of the Rg Veda, who have sexually explicit conversations, qualified?

The difficulty in answering these questions is heightened because Madhvācārya used the phrase “and the rest” (ādi) in “and those best women are Urvasī, Yami, Śacī, and the rest.”57 The phrase was open-ended and did not appear to fix clearly the limits of the set of eligible women. To mitigate this openness, two Mādhva scholars, Jayatīrtha (fourteenth century CE) and Rāghavendraśīrtha (seventeenth century CE), offered commentaries on this passage. In his gloss of term “best,” Jayatīrtha stated, “The best, then, are those who are well born and those who are the wives of the sages (munis).”58 Rāghavendraśīrtha added further clarification and he cited a passage from a root text to buttress his interpretation:

This is an explanation of the phrase “those who are well born.” As is stated in the twenty-ninth chapter (adhyāya) of
the Tātparyanirṇaya, those who are well born are the wives of sages and goddesses.59

Rāghavendratīrtha differs from Jayatīrtha slightly because he added goddesses to the list. In light of their commentaries, the expanded passage reads:

And, they also say that women who are well born, namely goddesses and those who are the wives of the sages, are eligible for Vedic study; and those best women are Urvaśī, Yamī, Śacī, and the rest.

Madhvācārya also compared the best women with śūdras, yet the best women are distinguished from śūdras because they have an initiation rite that is analogous to the Upanayana. Madhvācārya noted:

But the best women are not like the śūdras. This is because of observing their eligibility to study in passages from the Mantrapraśna like “along with my wife, the best.” This is also because of the general rule; “There is no eligibility for the śūdra for they lack an initiation rite.” There is, however, an initiation rite for women. This passage is found in Mānava- dharmasāstra 2.67, a traditional text (smṛti); “For women, being given away in marriage is like the initiation practice of a twice-born (Upanayana).”60

Jayatīrtha commented on this passage and, in particular, on the passage from the Mantrapraśna:

This is an explanation of the passage beginning “The best...”: It is not fit to say that the best women are like śūdras, that they lack of an initiation rite, and that they are not eligible for the knowledge of the Vedas. It is evident that the best women are not like śūdras in light of passages like “along with my wife, the highest.” With regard to Śacī and others, that they are not like śūdras is evident from seeing their eligibility, and by being seers of that knowledge themselves. This is the meaning of the passage.61

Presumably, the enigmatic passage from the Mantrapraśna concerned women like Śacī, who were the consorts of gods, seers, or were themselves seers. Here the Upanayana, required in order to obtain status as
a twice-born, is compared to a marriage ceremony which, of course, women were permitted to undergo. It may be that, in addition to being seers themselves, Urväsī, Sacī, and Yamī each had been married and, therefore, were initiated.

These women were one type that was allowed access to the root texts and could become literate in Mādhva doctrine. There are, though, other women who were neither goddesses, nor heavenly nymphs, nor married, and they were given the same status as unworthy brahmins who were permitted only a lower degree of access. Madhvācārya wrote:

For women, sūdras, and unworthy brahmins (brahmabandhus), there is eligibility with regard to the knowledge of the Tantras but only when a portion is spoken and not with regard to study from a text.62

All women, human and non-human, were, like the unworthy brahmin, eligible to be taught only a portion of the Tantras. They were not allowed to learn, however, directly from the text. Women required twice-born teachers for limited instruction of sections of the Mādhva canon. Those who had power over the knowledge thus restricted knowledge and the degree of understanding that could be attained by listeners. Though it was not clearly stated, it was likely that the portions of these texts that were available did not educate listeners sufficiently so that they could partake in inter- or intra-Vedānta philosophical dialogue. In spite of being partially excluded, the degree to which they had access to the root texts greatly limited the scope and depth of their inquiries.

It is not clear why there is a specific stipulation on how the texts are to be used. According to this passage, teaching could only be transmitted orally to women and others and the written text was available only to the eligible adherents. This explicit distinction may point at the importance of the written over the oral in the Mādhva Vedānta. It may also indicate that women and others were literate in medieval Karnāṭaka.63

One may wonder if it was possible for a woman to “marry into” eligibility regardless of her original class or her status as an outsider. For men, class was immutable and mobility could only occur in future lives. For women, on the other hand, it was possible to obtain eligibility as long as one married a sage. It would thus appear, prima facie, that there was upward mobility for women, but not for men.64

To summarize, three heavenly nymphs (apsaras) mentioned in the Rg Veda, and others like them, were eligible for Vedic study. The best
women, namely goddesses and wives of sages, were also eligible for Vedic study and to become virtuoso religious readers. Lastly, all women were eligible to be taught sections from the Tantras, though orally and not directly from these texts.

Madhvācārya contrasted the best women with sūdras who did not have an initiation rite. Was this the only reason? Were all sūdras ineligible? How and why were the sūdras restricted?

The Śūdra

In his Añubhāṣya, a short commentary on the Brahma Sūtras, Madhvācārya asserted that “Viṣṇu is not to be investigated by sūdras and the like by means of the Vedas.” At first glance, this restriction appears unambiguous. The phrase “and the like,” however, suggested that others were also included in the restriction. Chalāri Sēṣācārya, a seventeenth-century Mādhva, clarified this ambiguity in his Tattvaprakāśikavyākhyāna (Commentary on an Explanation of Reality), a commentary on the Añubhāṣya:

The phrase “and the like” is to be understood to mean ordinary women and those excluded from the class system (antyajas).

It comes as no surprise that ordinary women, who were not the best women, were part of this set. I will address those excluded from the class system below.

Śūdras, the social group that occupied the lowest position in the four-fold class system, were the category of humans who were the most rigorously restricted from accessing unabridged portions of the Mādhva canon. Madhvācārya’s theories of gradation (tāratamya) were patterned after the four-fold hierarchy of the Hindu social system. According to Madhvācārya, the reason for such a strong prohibition was that the sūdra did not undergo any sacred initiation rites. In an interesting rhetorical move, Madhvācārya contrasts the reasons why brahmins are eligible with the reasons why sūdras are not:

“At the age of 8, let the brahmin be initiated and let him be taught them the Vedas.” The reference is to the sacred initiation rites as the condition for studying the Vedas. And the absence of this initiation ceremony in the case of the sūdra is declared in the Paingiśṛuti: “The sūdra has no sacred fire, no sacrifice, no initiation ceremonies, and no ritual observances.”
Even the best women were granted accessibility to all of the root texts because their marriage ceremony was an initiation ceremony. But sūdras had no initiation rites and were thus excluded. Like ordinary women and unworthy brahmins, however, they were still eligible for the knowledge of the Tantras, though only when portions were summarized for them by insiders who were, of course, members of the first three classes or highly intelligent oviparous animals, namely the twice-born.

Possible exceptions in the Chāndogya Upaniṣads

Like the restrictions applying to women, birds, and snakes, those that were applied to sūdras were problematized by exceptions that were found in the root texts themselves. Madhvācārya needed either to modify or mitigate his restrictions or to account for them. These tasks were essential activities for scholars of Vedānta who were no more than commentators on root texts who devoted their lives to resolving apparent contradictions in them. The points of controversy are found in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad and are cited in a sequence of aphorisms in the Brahma Sūtras. In his commentary on each of these aphorisms, Madhvācārya resolved the supposed ambiguities. Samkarācārya also addressed these points in his commentary written in the eighth century CE, and it is more than likely that Madhvācārya was familiar with his predecessor.

Madhvācārya first posited a universal claim and then pointed out its undesirable implications.

When it is said “there is eligibility for male humans,” then, because of a lack of specificity, there would also be eligibility for sūdras! There would be eligibility because of this conversation from the Chāndogya Upaniṣad “Hey you! Drive them back to your palace, sūdra! Keep your goods and cows!” which was spoken to Pautrāyana. Therefore they say “the sūdra is eligible.”68

Here Madhvācārya presented an example of an ambiguous myth found in Chāndogya Upaniṣad (4.1–2). This concerned the myth of Jānasruti Pautrāyana, the grandson of Janaśruti. In this myth Pautrāyana was called a sūdra yet was still eligible to be initiated and to study the Vedas. The myth is as follows: Jānasruti, after hearing from birds passing overhead that sage Raikva was greater than he, was plunged into despair and grief. Seeking the guidance of Raikva, he went to
Raikva and offered him wealth, namely cows, jewelry, and a mule-driven chariot:

> Taking with him six hundred cows, a gold necklace, and a carriage drawn by a she-mule, Jānaśruti Paurāyaṇa went back to Raikva and said to him: “Raikva, here are six hundred cows, a gold necklace, and a carriage drawn by a she-mule. Please, sir, teach me the deity that you venerate.” But Raikva replied: “Hey, you! Drive them back to your place, Śūdra! Keep your goods and your cows!”

Paurāyaṇa went back to his castle, gathered together more gifts, and returned to Raikva:

> Jānaśruti Paurāyaṇa went back to him once again and said: “Raikva, here are a thousand cows, a gold necklace, and a carriage driven by a she-mule, here is a wife, and here is the village where you live. Sir, please teach me.”

> Lifting up his face, Raikva said: “Hey you! Drive them to my place, Śūdra!…”

With this, Jānaśruti Paurāyaṇa received Vedic instruction. Nothing else was mentioned about him in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad.

The issue that concerned Madhvācārya was that Jānaśruti Paurāyaṇa was referred to as a śūdra, but was nevertheless invited to begin Vedic study. At first glance, this appears to be a transgression of the rules of eligibility and Madhvācārya needed to account for what seemed to be a contradiction in the root texts. How could one root text restrict śūdras and another concern a śūdra who had been granted access?

Instead of modifying the rule restricting śūdras, Madhvācārya, like his predecessor Śaṃkarācārya, offered a different interpretation of the event based on Sanskrit word derivation (nirukta). According to Madhvācārya, if one analyzed the etymology of the term “śūdra” then one would more accurately understand the conversation that Paurāyaṇa had with his steward about what he had overheard:

> That Paurāyaṇa is not a śūdra. The status of being a śūdra is the crying due to distress (sucādravaṇam) when he heard the disdain “Why do you speak of him as if he were Raikva, the gatherer? That man – how is he Raikva, the gatherer?” This sadness was indicated from hearing the disdain and from the
passage in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 4.1.5 “as soon as he got up in the morning, he said to his steward.”

Madhvācārya rationalized that this problematic appellation was simply an appropriate description of Pautṛāyaṇa; he was tearful and was sad. By word derivation rules, Madhvācārya thus traced the term *sūdra* to the compound *sucādravaṃ*, “crying that is due to distress”:

> Of him there is distress, at that time his status as a *sūdra* is indicated from the oozing of tears.

Madhvācārya was consistent in his etymology as he glossed the term *sūdra* in the same way in his commentary on the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*:

> “The grandson of the king, a *sūdra* from crying due to distress, is called a “distressed *sūdra*.”

To further buttress his interpretation, Madhvācārya referred to other characteristics of Pautṛāyaṇa. He argued that Pautṛāyaṇa was the possessor of a chariot that was led by a mule and that those outside of the first three classes did not possess such vehicles:

> And, that Pautṛāyaṇa is not a *sūdra*. There is an understanding of his status as a *kṣatriya* by reason of the mark of the chariot subsequently mentioned.

Finally, chariot possession was linked to the study of the *Vedas*:

> “Wherever there is Vedic study, there is a chariot. Wherever there is no Vedic study, there is no chariot.” So it is said in the *Brahmavaivarta*.

Madhvācārya thus proved that the root texts did not contradict one another. Pautṛāyaṇa, though distressed and crying (*sucādravaṃ*), was not a member of the *sūdra* class and there was no reason why he could not study the root texts.

In this same section in the *Brahma Sūtras*, Madhvācārya addressed another possible disparity that arose from one more story from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣads*. In fact, it follows directly after the myth of Jānaśruti Pautṛāyaṇa and it concerned Satyakāma Jābāla, a character whose status as a *sūdra* was also ambiguous. The myth is about a boy named Satyakāma Jābāla who found out from his mother that he was a bastard and that the identity of his father was unknown. Desiring *Vedic* knowledge, he approached a teacher, Hāridrumata.
Gautama, who, following Vedic protocol, asked him about his parentage:

“Sir, I want to live under you as a vedic student. I come to you, sir, as your student.”

Hāridrumata asked him: “Son, what is your lineage?”

Satyakāmō stated that he did not know and related his mother’s explanation. Pleased and surprised, Gautama replied:

“Who but a brahmin could speak like that! Fetch some firewood, son. I will perform your initiation. You have not strayed from the truth.”

Satyakāmō was therefore regarded as eligible for the knowledge of the vedas, despite his ignorance about his lineage. In his commentary on Brahma Sūtra 1.3.37 Madhvācārya explained:

By reason of the true statement of Satyakāma, “Oh, I do not know what my lineage (gotra) is . . .” Hāridrumata is certain that he is not a īdāra. Hāridrumata says “Who but a brahmin could speak like that?” And then, after ascertaining this he performs the initiation.

After telling the truth to Hāridrumata, Satyakāma proved that he was not a īdāra and that he was a twice-born, in this case a brahmin. The presupposition is that īdāras lie and Satyakāma did not, proving that he could not be one. Hence, there was no contradiction in the root texts and no doubt that īdāras were not permitted to access the root texts.

The two examples taken from the Chāndogya Upāniṣad and mentioned in the Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya confirmed, rather than refuted, Madhvācārya’s restrictions. These two myths from the Chāndogya Upāniṣad were thus used as arguments in support of Madhvācārya’s insider epistemology. Interestingly, they occur together in the fourth section of the first chapter of the Chāndogya Upāniṣad. Were these the only points of ambiguity or were there other exceptions to the rule?

An exception from the Mahābhārata

There was one place in the Mādhva corpus where an exception was made and that is in his commentary on Brahma Sūtra 1.3.38, in the
context of punishments prescribed for sūdras who broke the rules of access. The aphorism is vague without Madhvācārya commentary:

And from the prohibition in traditional texts (smṛti) from knowing the meaning, studying and hearing.79

Citing from Gautama-dharmasāstra (Gautama’s Treatise on the Law80) 12.4–6, Madhvācārya suggested that several forms of discipline and punishment would guarantee adherence to the rules:

For the sūdra is prohibited from studying the Vedas: If a sūdra hears the Vedas his ears are to be filled with lead and lac. If he speaks the Vedas his tongue is to be slit. If he understands the Vedas his heart is to be ripped open.” According to the traditional texts; “There is no fire, nor sacrifice for the sūdra, certainly no study of the Vedas. But only the service81 of the first three classes is enjoined.” For Vidura and the rest, from being knowers of what is to be known, of those special cases, there is an exception.82

Although the punishments are rather startling, the mention of Vidura is far more startling. Who was Vidura and why was he exceptional? Vidura was a character from the Mahābhārata (1.100.22–28), which, of course, was a root text. The story of his birth explained why he was permitted to transgress the textual boundaries. Vyāsa, a sage, was asked by Satyavatī to have sex with her daughters-in-law in order to produce needed children. Vyāsa agreed but required that the daughters-in-law did not break a vow, namely a promise not to react in any way to his ugliness during sexual intimacy. The first two women failed to comply with the vow, reacted, and, for that reason, their children were physically incapacitated. Pañcu was born pale and sickly because his mother paled with fright when she made love to Vyāsa. Dhṛtarāṣṭra was born blind because his mother closed her eyes during intercourse. The elder daughter-in-law sent a lower-class slave dressed as herself to have sex with Vyāsa. The slave woman, unlike the other daughters-in-law, did not react in a negative way. In fact, she acted appropriately and gave Vyāsa great pleasure. Vyāsa awarded her for her behavior and the result was Vidura, an incarnation (āvatāra) of the god Dharma (Law) himself who was born as a human as a result of a curse by a brahmin.83

The Pāṇḍavas, a royal family from the Mahābhārata, loved Vidura for his great knowledge and impartiality. His knowledge, however, far outreached his birthright as the son of a slave. It was for this reason that
Madhvācārya held Vidura to be an exception to his rules that restricted śūdras.

There was still a slight ambiguity here given the use of the term “and the rest” (ādi). Jayatīrtha expanded on Madhvācārya’s commentary:

Here is an explanation of the passage beginning “For Vidura and the rest”: There is an exception for them, for those other śūdras like Vidura and the rest, because they possess unmediated knowledge (apurva-jñāna) of the Supreme Being (brahman), acquired in a former birth. For them, the ascertainment of the meaning of the Vedas is not restricted. This is the meaning of the passage beginning “Of Vidura and the rest.” Thus Hari is not to be known by śūdras and others by means of Vedic knowledge. This is the case.Śūdras like Vidura were exceptional because they already had unmediated knowledge (apurva-jñāna) of the Supreme Being. The path to unmediated knowledge, and subsequently to release (mokṣa), required that the enduring self (jīva) study the root texts. If Vidura had unmediated knowledge then it follows that he must have studied the root texts. Madhvācārya also believed they could only be granted unmediated knowledge by Viṣṇu. Vidura and others were granted this knowledge, yet were born again in the cycle of birth and rebirth. For this reason, they were competent and granted complete access to the root texts despite being śūdras.

To summarize: śūdras were restricted from directly accessing the root texts. Śūdras could be taught only abridged portions of the Pañcarātrāgamas/Tantras. There was, however, a subset of śūdras who qualified for a comprehensive Mādhva education, such as Vidura, a figure from the Mahābhārata. Finally, Jayatīrtha explained that these exceptions to the rule had been graced with unmediated knowledge (apurva-jñāna) of the Supreme Being in previous births and, therefore, were eligible and competent.

What about gods? Were they allowed complete access to the root texts? Why or why not?

The eligibility of the gods

Vyāsa himself addressed the eligibility of the gods in his Brahma Śūtras. Vyāsa posed the issue in the context of a debate that existed among the scholars of the forefathers of Vedānta, namely the Pūrva...
Mimāṃsā tradition. These Mimāṃsā thinkers reflected almost exclusively on the proper performance of sacrifices (yaññīs) to the gods. Their concern was with the eligibility of gods who wished to perform rituals and sacrifices to themselves. For the schools of Vedānta, knowledge took precedence over sacrifice. Hence they were concerned with whether the gods, who were already omniscient, were eligible to study the root texts and not their eligibility to sacrifice. The assumption here was that eligibility required a certain degree of ignorance. Otherwise studying the root texts would be purposeless and without an objective. It is not clear, though, why omniscient gods would study in the first place.

The discussion in the Brahma Sūtras began with a reference to Jaimini, the author of the Mimāṃsā Sūtras, and, indirectly, the issue in Mimāṃsā. Vyāsa first presented Jaimini’s argument that gods were ineligible: “Because there is an impossibility for the gods to worship according to the honey (madhu) metaphor and the like, Jaimini thinks that there is no eligibility.” 85 The focus, once again, was a myth from the Chāndogya Upaniṣad. In this myth, a metaphor was developed that likened the sun to honey: “The honey of the gods, clearly, is the sun up there.”86 This was known as the honey metaphor (madhuvidyā). The components of the metaphor, namely the honey, the comb, the bees, and the flower, were identified with the sun, the rays of the sun, the verse of the Rg Veda, and the Rg Veda itself. Devotees could learn this esoteric metaphor and then worship the sun as honey and so on. Jaimini held that the gods, who were to be worshipped in the honey metaphor, were ineligible to employ it when they worshipped because they could not worship themselves. The sun, for example, could not worship according to the honey metaphor.

In order to explain Jaimini’s contention further, Madhvācārya offered an example of a type of deity known as a Vasu taken from the same section of Chāndogya Upaniṣad where one finds the honey metaphor. He then further clarified the objection:

Jaimini thinks that there is no eligibility for these gods to worship according to the honey metaphor and the like. There is no eligibility for the possessors of the fruits, namely the gods, for they have already obtained the state of being a Vasu. This is seen in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad 3.5.6 like “On the first nectar among these Vasus subsist with fire as their mouth” and other assertions about gods already having the fruit which is to be obtained.”87
Here is the passage *in toto* that he cited from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*:

> On the first nectar among these the Vasus subsist with fire as their mouth. The gods, of course, neither eat or drink. They become sated by simply looking at this nectar . . . When someone knows the nectar in this way – he becomes one with those very Vasus, and with fire as his mouth, becomes sated by just looking at this nectar."^98

If one aspired to become a Vasu, then one could worship according to the Madhuvidyā. A god who was already a Vasu, however, did not need to worship in this way since he had achieved the desired goal, namely to become a Vasu! He was not eligible, then, for this worship via the honey metaphor.

From this, it would follow that omniscient gods would not benefit from a study of the root texts and, therefore, were not eligible. In *Brahma Sūtra* 1.3.32, Vyāsa further emphasized that if one possessed omniscience, then one may be restricted access to the root texts: “And the gods are not eligible from being in the light.”^89 Madhvācārya compared their omniscience to rays of light, which are part of the light of the sun. This was, in turn, a metaphor for the knowledge of the Supreme Being.

> “And from being in the light” means “being all knowing.” Just as all rays of light are included in the light of the sun, so too all things are in the knowledge of the gods. Moreover, the knowledge of the gods is eternally established.^90

This was the objection to granting eligibility to the gods.

In the next aphorism, Vyāsa, referring to himself as Bādarāyana, replied to Jaimini’s objection: “But Bādarāyana maintains that gods are eligible for there is a distinctive light (*prakāśaviśeṣaḥ*) to be obtained.”^91 Although the gods do not need to study the Vedas, if they did there would still be a growth in their knowledge. Therefore, despite being omniscient, the gods were still eligible. Madhvācārya explained:

> Bādarāyana thinks that for the gods who have already obtained knowledge there exists a distinctive fruit. Thus there is eligibility for the gods to worship according to the honey metaphor and the like. This is because there is a distinctive light (*prakāśaviśeṣaḥ*) to be obtained.^92
This possibility of obtaining a distinctive light meant they would still benefit from study of the root texts. Since their study was useful, gods were eligible.

Madhvācārya tied the discussion to the issue of the eligibility of the gods to perform sacrifices in the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā debate and to elements in his own ontology. Madhvācārya thus cited from the Skānda Purāṇa:

However much devotion (bhakti) there is for the Supreme Being, that much is distinctive bliss in heaven. Because of the possibility of increased enlightenment for the gods, except for Hari, the Great One, and because of their possession of a capacity, all practices and all activities such as sacrifices and the like are also eternally enjoined for the gods.93

Since Jaimini refers to the eligibility for fruits that have already been attained, there was no contradiction between his and Bādarāyaṇa’s position.94 Madhvācārya’s explanation, that the gods were eligible and could increase their devotion, coincides with his theory of gradation (tārataṁya). Madhvācārya believed that there was gradation in the released state (mokṣa) that was indexed to the gradation in the devotion towards Viṣṇu, the Supreme Being.95 This is known as Madhvācārya’s theory of a gradation in bliss (ānanda-tārataṁya-vāda).96 According to this theory, gods could increase their knowledge of Viṣṇu, their devotion, and their status in the released state. In this way, gods were judged to be eligible first to enhance their literacy of the root texts and then to enhance their status in release (mokṣa).

**Those excluded from the class system (antyajas)**

If Madhvācārya was so comprehensive, then did he incorporate those who were excluded from the class system in his analyses? Madhvācārya mentioned them in only one place in his corpus. He wrote:

Even for them, devotees who are excluded from the class system (antyajas), there is eligibility with regard to knowledge of the name of God.97

Antyajas were included in the set of sentient beings that can have “knowledge of the name of God.” What was the knowledge of the name? It is likely that “knowledge of the name” referred to one of the many names of Viṣṇu (Nārayana and the like) and to esoteric religious
chants (mantras), that were efficacious for obtaining release. There is a set of verses in the Anusānika section of the Mahābhārata (13.149), moreover, called the Viṣṇusahasranāma-stotra (Hymn of the 1,000 names of Viṣṇu) and it is also possible that “knowledge of the name” referred to these 1,000 names.

Although Madhvācārya did not address the differences between the two, those excluded from the class system were distinguished from foreigners or barbarians (mlecchas). The former were considered to be part of the community of sentient beings found in the approved or the immediate areas. The latter were those sentient beings who were neither born nor living in the approved or immediate areas.98 The geographic boundaries that determine the classification of such sentients was not clear and may indicate an important ambiguity. Madhvācārya does not mention these foreigners in any of his works.

The Mādhva insider epistemology

Is it possible to bypass these restrictions in order to obtain access to the root texts of the Mādhva tradition? To what degree does Madhvācārya’s insider epistemology limit philosophical inquiry? What can a philosopher do with the available data? To answer these and other questions, I will next address the implications that the Mādhva insider epistemology has for the philosopher of religions.

THE MĀDHVA INSIDER EPISTEMOLOGY
4

MADHVĀCĀRYA’S
EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE
LIMITATIONS OF
PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

The claim and its implications

In Chapter 1, I made a strong claim that Madhvācārya had successfully excluded outsiders and unauthorized readers from accessing the root texts and from obtaining oral commentaries from living experts. In Chapter 2 I examined the context within which Madhvācārya developed his school of thought and in Chapter 3 I documented the extent to which his insider epistemology was restrictive. When the restrictions dictated by Madhvācārya’s insider epistemology were implemented, the truth of his doctrine could neither be questioned nor refuted by outsiders. One may wonder if this claim is defensible and may think that there are ways to circumvent the restrictions, despite their severity. If so, then how should an outsider proceed if s/he wished to study Mādhva Vedānta in depth or to surmount the restrictions? Or, if the claim is warranted and the restrictions cannot be overcome, what were (and are) the limitations placed on philosophical inquiries (or any other kind of study) that could have been (or can be) conducted by outsiders? Finally, do these rules still apply to the contemporary Mādhva community or are they hopelessly outdated remnants of medieval Mādhva Vedānta? Is this question of access still relevant to the contemporary Mādhva community or is it one which is superannuated and extraneous?

The answers to these and other questions will and should have a significant impact on the ways that philosophers and other social scientists study secretive traditions with insider epistemologies such as Mādhva Vedānta. If social scientists who are outsiders are unable to access the texts required for their studies, then they may be forced to acknowledge or bow to the indigenous structures and the traditional methods for transmitting knowledge rather than importing their own. Such an acknowledgment conflicts with the ideals upon which the social sciences themselves are founded, in which data is assumed to be open to
all who seek it. Scholars in the West have often been accused of disregarding such rules and regulations in their zeal to study a particular text or tradition. Post-colonial scholarship, currently in vogue, documents the objectification and commodification of non-Western concepts and beliefs by Westerners and the ways that indigenous groups have endeavored to increase their voice and authority and to limit the extent to which outsiders can exploit them as objects of study. Although it would be an anachronism to suggest that Madhvācārya was anticipating the social sciences and the colonization of South Asia, his strategies for exclusion can surely be perceived as a method that is in harmony with the ones proposed by many post-colonial scholars. After all, the Mādhva restrictions were ways to prevent a kind of “colonization” by unauthorized outsiders!

**In principal versus de facto and descriptive versus prescriptive**

Before evaluating the integrity of the defensive shield that surrounded the Mādhva root texts and searching for flaws or for a proverbial Achilles’ heel, it is essential to distinguish between in principal and de facto restrictions, as well as prescriptive and descriptive ones. After all, one may wonder if the conventions were (and are) followed or if the practicing community differed (and differs) widely from the hypothetical one. One may think that I merely documented an ideal community rather than an actual one in my presentation of the Mādhva insider epistemology and that the restrictions are irrelevant for the modern social scientist. The two, in principal and de facto, must be distinguished from one another, lest one confuse the hypothetical with the historical community.

Typically, when one examines any rules or laws, such as codes for behavior found in the Buddhist vināya (monastic discipline) literature, the Hindu dharmasāstras (law treatises), in the monastic rules of the Catholic theologian Saint Benedict, or even in traffic laws, one must acknowledge that the mere existence of a rule does not mean that the rule was followed. For example, though it is a well-known rule that drivers must obey the speed limit on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago (a ridiculously low 45mph), it is certainly not the case that they do so. Such rules (and the signs on the Drive) are prescriptions rather than characterizations of what usually occurs. They are suggestions for how people ought to behave rather than descriptions of how they actually do. Similarly, the restrictions in the Mādhva tradition may have been merely suggested guidelines to which devotees should adhere rather than accurate descriptions of pedagogical institutions and society in medieval Karnātaka.

Given the paucity of data about the community of practicing Mādhvas
in medieval India, it is virtually impossible to know whether or not the rules were enforced. Still, as a thought experiment, one can examine the ideal community that Madhvācārya envisioned and evaluate the coherence of its rules. It thus behooves the outsider to take these rules seriously whether or not they were put into practice, much in the same way that a philosopher might examine the nuances of Socrates’ vision of a hypothetical city-state in the *Republic*. Both are ideal communities toward which many aspired and continue to aspire. Only after my evaluation of the coherence of the insider epistemology of the hypothetical Mādhva community will I turn to the contemporary Mādhva community, which, unlike its medieval predecessor, can be observed in its execution of such rules. But first, it must be determined if there any ambiguities or gaps in the insider epistemology of Madhvācārya’s ideal community that could be exploited by outsiders who sought access to the root texts.

**Impenetrability and group membership**

When the Mādhva insider epistemology was implemented, almost all sentient beings were excluded from accessing the root texts other than those of the twice-born classes (*dvijas*) who had received the requisite initiation. The exceptions included a select few *śūdras*, the best women, and extraordinarily intelligent oviparous creatures. All of the schools of Vedānta upheld these restrictions and Mādhva Vedānta was no exception. In this way, accessibility to the root texts was linked to membership in highly exclusive groups. It is essential to know the degree to which these groups were exclusive and if anyone could join or earn the right to become a member. Could someone who was completely outside of the class system eventually become part of this privileged set?

Some of the methods for obtaining membership are absurd or frivolous and can be discounted immediately. For example, if the outside investigator was a male human, it was clearly impossible for him to become a bird, snake, or a woman (leaving aside sex changes, transsexuals, transvestites, and others). Women cannot become men, cats cannot become birds, and so on. There are myths and hagiographical accounts about seers such as Śamkarācārya, however, who were able to leave their bodies and enter the bodies of another such as females, animals, and so forth.¹ I will set these aside as well, for if the outsider were able to leave her/his body, s/he probably would not be constrained like other outsiders. But how about becoming a twice-born? Was it possible for a man to convert to Hinduism,² receive initiation, become a twice-born, and study the root texts?

Although in recent times conversion has been possible (many
Westerners have joined the Hare Krishna and Ramakrishna orders, for example), it is likely that it was impossible in the thirteenth century CE. Questions about conversion are inextricably linked to those concerning the origins of the class (varṇa) system itself. In its earliest forms, the class system may not have been nearly as rigid as previously believed. It may have been possible to move “upwards” and, more importantly, class may not have been hereditary. There are historical accounts of groups which changed their behavior or moved and then claimed to be members of an entirely different caste and/or class once they reached their destination. To facilitate this upward movement, they may have changed their surnames (which often bore class or caste indicators) appropriated dress styles, languages, and the like from classes that were higher up in the social hierarchy (“Sanskritized” themselves), or suddenly accumulated wealth (like the Clampett’s in the American sitcom “The Beverly Hillbillies” or some other nouveau riche family). This mobility indicated that the boundaries of the class system were porous and not as strict as many imagined (or wished) them to be. According to this theory, an outsider, who wished to modify his/her class or obtain one, could “go native” like Eddie Murphy and pursue a deceptive and covert ethnography. Madhvācārya, however, never mentioned this mobility as a possibility or as a threat.

According to another theory, in its earliest forms class was not an indicator of patrilineal pedigree. For example, the son of a brahmin need not necessarily become a brahmin. Such “rags-to-riches” or “Horatio Alger” theories are based on the belief that class was a vocational designation rather than one that specified pedigree. Males could become proficient in jobs other than the ones held by their fathers and would be identified by the appropriate class designation even if it differed from their fathers’. It would have been possible, then, for the son of a kṣatriya to undergo an Upanayana, study the Vedas, and become a brahma or, in the opposite case, for the son of a brahma to become a vaiśya! The following passages that are found in the Māṇava-dharmasāstra 2.168 and 10.91 support this theory, though they are couched in terms of losing status rather than gaining it:

A twice-born man who does not study the Veda but exerts himself doing something else quickly turns into a servant, even while he is alive, and his descendants too.

And:

By (selling) mean, lac, or salt, a priest immediately falls; by selling milk, he becomes a servant in three days. But by will-
ingly selling other (forbidden) merchandise, a priest assumes the nature of a commoner here on earth in seven nights.8

Although this controversial theory is also possible, there are no characterizations of class as vocational designation in the Mādhva corpus. It is unlikely that Madhvācārya believed that one could improve, invent, or earn one’s class (though it was possible to lose one’s class), or that it was merely a vocational designation. Still, it might be possible that an outsider who was a scholar of Sanskrit and displayed the prescribed psychological precursors, such as disposition and temperament, could be regarded as competent and bestowed with the designation “brahmin”!

Clearly a great deal hinged (and hinges) on whether or not it was (is) possible to change one’s class surreptitiously, to be awarded one like a degree, or to apply for one like a union card. Still there is no data that indicated that Madhvācārya thought that it was possible and he never mentioned it. Although one could digress and speculate about the evidence for and against conversion itself and to challenge or to confirm either of these theories, one must first ask if conversion was (and is) desirable. It is not. Why? As mentioned in Chapter 1 in the context of the hypothetical group called the “Muddled,” if one were to become too Muddled, one could not objectively evaluate Muddled doctrine. Similarly, one who became a Mādhva would then be an insider, would give up the ideal of objectivity, and may even choose to enforce the restrictions that one had initially sought to overcome. Ironically, if one became a Mādhva then one would not want to expose the root texts to outsiders. Moreover, one who did reveal the concealed texts to those who were ineligible demonstrated some misunderstandings of Mādhva doctrine in the first place!

With neither the ability nor the desire to convert and become a twice-born, the male outsider would not have access to the root texts other than the few passages that concerned the restrictions themselves. He could study these strategies for restriction adequately and conclusively (as I have in the previous chapter). If the restrictions were upheld, and there is no reason to think that they were not (that is, there were no external pressures such as military action or economic sanctions to prevent such a state of affairs), then male outsiders were simply unable to gain authorized access to the root texts whether or not they were able to read Sanskrit.

**Women: a loophole in the rules?**

Although the vast majority of men were unable to obtain accessibility, all women may not have been governed by the same restrictions.
Women, according to Madhvåcårya, could move up in the class system by getting married to the right man. It certainly seems as if they could marry their way into access. After all, Madhvåcårya stated: “they also say that the best women are eligible for Vedic study.”9 His commentators, namely Jayatîrtha and Råghavendraîrtha, explained that the “best women” were “well born” and were “the wives of the sages (munis).”10 This would seem to imply that a woman of any class could obtain eligibility as long as she had the right husband. It would thus appear that outsider investigators who were women could become legitimately trained readers in the root texts merely by marrying sages.

Although this marital maneuvering seems possible, it too was unlikely. One can assume that sages were well versed in the treatises on law (dharmaśåstras) and that they would follow the instructions contained in them for finding a suitable bride. Some of these instructions would likely exclude the possibility of marrying a woman who was outside of the class system. For example, among the lists of the women to avoid found in the Månava-dharmaśåstras include those who were from families that did not chant the Vedas!11 Besides, if the outsider were from a family that was authorized to chant the Vedas, then she probably would not have been an outsider in the first place!

But surely there must have been cases of brahmins and other twice-born men who succumbed to temptation and lust and married women who were sùdras or antyajas. Manu anticipated such inter-class and inter-cultural marriages that “went against the grain” (pratiloma) of the social system. This passage in the Månava-dharmaśåstras was meant to dissuade those who may be led astray by their carnal desires:

Not a single story mentions a servant woman as the wife of a priest or a ruler, even in extremity. Twice-born men who are so infatuated as to marry women of low caste quickly reduce their families, including their descendants, to the status of servants.12

In light of these marital regulations, it is not likely that a sage would marry a woman who was a sùdra, much less someone who was outside of the class system. It still might be possible, though, to succumb to an extramarital affair. To discourage such naughty behavior, Manu warned that:

A priest who climbs into bed with a servant women goes to hell; if he begets a son in her, he loses the status of priest.13
In such a case the priest jeopardized his next birth or his eligibility to study the root texts! One might even surmise that a priest who was willing to risk either showed little or no understanding of the root texts themselves and was unmistakably incompetent. Hence, whatever information about the Mādhva root texts that he was able to convey ought to be suspect. Hence it only appears as if there was a weakness in the Mādhva defenses and that it was possible for an outsider to marry into eligibility. Deeper study, however, indicates otherwise. Neither “god diggers” nor “gold diggers” could have any chance of success!

Membership in the exclusive set of eligible readers is (and was) nearly impossible to obtain. Madhvācārya’s insider epistemology is (and was) based on social structures that were the essential component of the Vedas. Someone who was outside of the set could not manage to become part of it. But did Mādhvas only converse with other Mādhvas or scholars of Vedānta?

If a school of thought prepared its adherents to debate with members of other religious traditions then it would seem that conversion of outsiders was a possibility. Mādhvas are well known for the polemics against those outside of the fold of Vedānta. How are their polemics to be understood?

Debate with heretical traditions

There are several places in Madhvācārya’s corpus where he addressed issues of debate and argued against doctrines of non-Vedānta traditions that did not uphold the legitimacy of the Vedas and other root texts. This interest in debate, and also with non-Vedic traditions, seems to conflict with the need and desire to uphold an insider epistemology. Debate with those outside of the Purva Mimamsā and Vedānta worldview would seem to be irrelevant. Nevertheless, Madhvācārya examined Buddhist doctrine and offered arguments against their positions. What was the purpose of a critical examination of the doctrines of traditions outside of the Vedic fold? After all, such traditions had nothing to do with the root texts of Vedānta.

Madhvācārya discussed these matters in his Kathālakṣaṇa, a text devoted to the rules and regulations surrounding debate, and in his Anuvyākhyāna, which includes commentaries on BS 2.1, a section known as Samayavirodha (The Contradictions in Other Doctrines). Neither of these, however, reveal that Madhvācārya had allowed the ineligible to access the root texts.
The Kathālakṣaṇa and Samayavirodha (The Contradictions in Other Doctrines)

The Kathālakṣaṇa (The Characterization of Dispute), also known as the Vādalakṣaṇa (The Characterization of Argument), is a short text of 35 anustubhs (a class of meter consisting of thirty-two syllables) in which Madhvaṅcārya defined the types of debates and the context within which they ought to take place. Although this text does not contain lists or summaries of arguments against the positions held by other schools, it offers suggestions for the way debates were to be conducted. According to Madhvaṅcārya, debates did not concern topics that were relevant to scholars outside of the Vedānta schools. The debates that he illustrated were not about abstract philosophical issues that could appeal to anyone. Instead, debate was rooted entirely in the āgamas and only concerned interpretations of particular passages. Reasoning (anumāna) was dependent (upajivaka) on the root texts and it was not to be used for purposes other than interpreting them. Debating meant criticizing an opponent’s interpretation of a passage from the root text and then offering one’s own. Debate exclusively concerned the proper interpretation of the root texts and there was an assumption that suitable interlocutors were traditionally trained and were well-versed in them. Debate was neither for, nor with, scholars outside of the Vedānta fold. The fact that Madhvaṅcārya composed a handbook for rhetoric therefore does not prove that he was not committed to his insider epistemology. In fact, it proves the opposite. One may wonder, though, about his polemics against other traditions.

As already mentioned, Madhvaṅcārya wrote commentaries on the section of the Brahma Sūtras known as Samayavirodha (The Contradictions in Other Doctrines). This section was comprised of refutations of the positions of non-Vedānta schools. Why did Vyāsa, the author of the Brahma Sūtras, include such materials in his Brahma Sūtras in the first place? If debate with other schools was not prescribed, then why should one bother to learn the errors in their positions? Madhvaṅcārya anticipated these questions and answered them in his Anuvyākhyāna:

Then, Vyāsa, who is the Lord of knowledge, composed refutations of rival doctrines for his own devotees in order to sharpen their intellect.

A sharpened intellect helped devotees not only to learn the intricacies of their own tradition, but also to defend it. Debate with others, moreover, did not require that one disclose one’s position. In his
Kathālaksana, for example, Madhvācārya encouraged the use of vitandā, a reductio ad absurdum style of debate in which one participant sought only to destroy the position of the other, yet did not reveal any position whatsoever. Victory was achieved only by showing the incoherence of the position of one’s opponent and neither presenting, nor exposing, one’s own position for judgment. Although Madhvācārya prescribed this style to be used against other scholars of Vedānta, there was no reason that it could not also be used outside of the Vedānta schools. The fact that Mādhvas have debated with those who did not share their root texts therefore did not mean that they granted accessibility to those who were otherwise ineligible.

Limiting philosophical inquiry

To sum up, in light of the restrictions that stem from the Mādhva insider epistemology, the outsider did not, and could not, have direct access to root texts. S/he may only receive secondary knowledge of the Pañcarātrāgamās/Tantras or of the names of God, but such knowledge, though from the root texts, was (and is) not an integral part of Mādhva epistemology and ontology. The Pañcarātrāgamās were an essential component of Mādhva rituals and ecclesia and our philosopher would have limited access to such materials. S/he might research Mādhva rituals but could write neither a comprehensive nor authoritative account, since all his/her data were merely from secondary sources. Like a poorly researched undergraduate paper that relied solely on an encyclopedia or some other diluted secondary source, such a project would hardly receive a passing grade. S/he certainly could not make any arguments or claims about the validity (or lack thereof) of the Mādhva interpretations of the root texts and the like. S/he could not even try to argue via reductio since s/he knew next to nothing about Mādhva Vedānta. Evaluation of the truth claims of Mādhva Vedānta would thus be nearly impossible because one has little access to them. In this way, the Mādhva epistemology severely circumscribed the extent to which s/he could make any inquiries, philosophical or otherwise.

Historical Mādhva Vedānta

When the rules propounded by Madhvācārya are followed, as I have shown, it is impossible for outsiders to obtain access to the Mādhva root texts. Although this ideal community may never have existed, a historical community certainly did and it continues to exist in the present. Was the actual community as strict as Madhvācārya envisioned
it to be? Are there (or were there) any changes in the contemporary situation that forced Mådhvas to allow outsiders to access their doctrines? If so, then do scholars of the contemporary community simply choose not to maintain the insider epistemology, or do they offer reasonable explanations that permit them to disseminate the root texts? Have the traditional rules been bent in the modern context?

These and other questions are significantly different from the ones that have been asked thus far, for they involve a living community rather than a hypothetical one. Although it is possible to offer a detailed study of the religious, economic, and political worlds of the contemporary Mådhva tradition (sampradåya), the history presented here is not intended to be comprehensive. Instead, I aim to provide an overview of the historical context in order to contrast the hypothetical community with the actual one and to gesture toward some of the ways that the contemporary community has acted and the theologies it has developed. But first, before examining the tradition as it has changed over the past 200 years, one must account for the interactions or debates with outsiders that show that they were granted access to the root texts found in the hagiographic literature such as the Madhvavijaya.

**Accounts in the Madhvavijaya**

Although Nåråyaˆa Paˆ∂itåcårya’s Madhvavijaya is a hagiographic text and often contains hyperbolic anecdotes, the descriptions of debates against outsiders found in it nevertheless need to be explained. As already mentioned, the debate may have been in the vitaŋḍā form, but this was not made explicit in the accounts in the Madhvavijaya. Paˆ∂itåcårya, for example, held that Madhvåcårya debated with Buddhists but he does not mention the topics of the debate or if they concerned the root texts of Mådhva Vedånta. If they did, then either the Buddhist was privy to the root texts or he was formerly a twice-born and recent convert to Buddhism. One cannot assume that the debaters were not granted access to the restricted texts, although it is unlikely that they were.

An account that is found in both the Madhvavijaya as well as in Paˆ∂itåcårya’s Bhåvaprakåßika, which was a commentary on the Madhvavijaya, illustrates these ambiguities. Paˆ∂itåcårya stated:

Buddhisågara, who the best among the haters of the Vedas, who is the defeater of all the elephants who are the best disputants, who is wandering along with Vådisimha, came here with the desire of meeting opponents.17
In his *Bhāvaprakāśika*, Panditācārya further clarified:

He whose name is Vādisimha, the twice-born, is a knower of the essence of the Vaiśeṣika system. Having conquered the earth, Buddhisāgara fell in with the incomprehensible followers of Buddha.\(^1\)

Panditācārya emphasized that Vādisimha was a twice-born and scholar of the Vaiśeṣika school of thought. Given Vādisimha’s status as a twice-born, he had to have been familiar with at least a portion of the root texts of Mādhva Vedānta. As for Buddhisāgara, he may have formerly been a twice-born but it is impossible to know. Although Madhvācārya may have debated with scholars outside of Vedānta, there are no recorded debates between Madhvācārya and either Christians or Muslims.

These debates, though deriving from a hagiographical text, may indicate that the actual Mādhva community was significantly more open than the one envisioned by Madhvācārya. They do not prove that Madhvācārya made concealed texts available to outsiders but they do indicate that he was arguing with scholars who were outside of the Vedānta fold, some of whom may have been like Vādasiṃha. One must give Madhvācārya the benefit of the doubt and presume that he was arguing via *vitaṇḍā*. For, if he were not, then he would be willingly revealing restricted doctrines to those who were ineligible. Either way, the ambiguity of accounts such as the one offered above leaves open a variety of possibilities that may or may not conflict with the restrictions established by Madhvācārya’s insider epistemology. The contemporary community surely has come into contact with outsiders. Are there similar ambiguities in their interactions with outsiders?

**The contemporary Mādhva tradition and the dissemination of the root texts**

A great deal has changed in the South Asian subcontinent since the thirteenth century CE and it should come as no surprise that the contemporary Mādhva tradition reflects these new innovations and has risen to the challenge of modernization. In the simplest terms, these challenges were the result of the colonization of South Asia, the resultant increase in diversity, and the inevitable change in the technology of duplicating and disseminating texts. In reaction to these, the Mādhva tradition was forced to reduce the severity of its restrictions. After all, neither Mādhva Vedānta nor Tulunāḍu were isolated from the changes in the rest of the subcontinent. How and when did these changes occur? What were their
precursors? How does the contemporary tradition make sense of these modifications to their traditionally upheld beliefs and practices?

Colonization meant that Karnātaka was to become even more diverse than it already was in medieval times. Similar challenges to those faced by the Mādhva tradition in the thirteenth century CE again arose for the colonial tradition. The response, however, as I will show, differed greatly, as Mādhvas have been willing to publish root texts rather than to conceal them from outsiders. Although it is not known to what extent Europeans interacted with Mādhvas and denizens of the Udupi region, Major Mackenzie published the first account of the Mādhvas, “Accounts of the Marda Gooroos,” in 1804. Mackenzie may not have been the first to interact with Mādhvas, but he was certainly the first to write an ethnography.

One of the most important milestones for the traditions of South Asia that upheld insider epistemologies was the publication of the Vedas and their translations by Western scholars, such as F. Max Müller (among others), throughout the nineteenth century CE. Although Müller had many antecedents, including the Asiatic Society, he had a significant impact on the widespread distribution of formerly concealed texts. This began with his publication of the Rg Veda under the patronage of the East-India Company between 1849 and 1874 and its subsequent translation into English in 1869. When Müller and others made this hidden text available for public consumption, the traditions of Vedānta such as Madhvācārya’s were simply unable to maintain such strong restrictions as they had in the past. Gautama’s commandment that śūdras would be punished severely if they were to hear or even speak the Vedas was no longer pertinent.

One may wonder if insiders allowed this to occur or if they could have stopped it, but speculating about the intentions of insiders is fraught with difficulties. It is likely, however, that this massive change in their social world was inextricably linked to the effects of colonization on the psychology of the oppressed. Their colonizers, namely the British, were interested in the materials and the colonized simply made them available. Was there a parallel effort by Mādhvas themselves to publish their root texts? Or was this a situation where Mādhva texts were plundered like pieces of art to be put on display in the museums (in this case, libraries) of Europe, where knowledge was made into a commodity, and where insiders were forced to divulge secrets like a tortured prisoner of war? Did Mādhvas participate in this process of exposure or did they struggle to defy and resist it?

The first recorded publication of a Mādhva text was in 1867 of Madhvācārya’s Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya (The Complete Ascen-
tainment of the Meaning of the Mahābhārata).\(^{22}\) In the years that followed, a number of Mādhvas themselves published root texts. Although these were predominantly from the ten-fold treatises on specific topics (dasaprakaraṇa), Jibānanda Vidyāśāgara edited and published Madhva-cārya’s Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya in 1873.\(^{23}\) T.R. Kṛṣṇācārya drastically altered the history of Mādhva Vedānta when, in 1892, he published the entire Sarvamūlagranthāḥ (Compendium of All the Fundamentals), the so-called “Kumbhakonam edition.”\(^{24}\) Since then, several editions of the Sarvamūlagranthāḥ have been released and insiders have published nearly all of the relevant sub-commentaries in hard copy.\(^{25}\) The text, which, at one time, was only available as a palm leaf form, has clearly since been extricated from the institutional settings within which it was to be read religiously.

But, even if these formerly restricted texts were published, this did not mean that they were readily available to the masses, like pulp fiction books available in local bookstores and in the checkout lines in grocery stores. Although there is no evidence to indicate they were, in my own experience I can attest to the difficulty of obtaining root texts and the unwillingness of insiders to sell them to outsiders. One could not purchase them with the ease of buying a bestseller. In fact, one may argue that Mādhvas may have taken advantage of the technological changes in order to make their books available for other insiders and sold only a limited number to outsiders. In any case, there may not have been many print runs of the texts, so the few that were available may have been distributed to a select few and could not have been intended for the masses.\(^{26}\) Besides, the schools of Vedānta are commentarial ones and the move to publish root texts may also have the underlying pedagogical purposes of making texts available to students in the monasteries. Contemporary scholars with whom I spoke also emphasized that their intention is not, in fact, to make restricted texts accessible to those who were not eligible. They are only making texts available to those who are eligible or potentially eligibility. Hence they are publishing texts and distributing them in the only ways possible to make them available to those with eligibility. The logistics of selling books meant that they no longer have control over who could purchase them. Nevertheless, their intention is pure. For these reasons, one cannot infer that the publication of Mādhva texts proved that there was a complete and utter breakdown in the Mādhva insider epistemology.

In addition to publishing the root texts that were all in Sanskrit, scholars of the Mādhva tradition have also published translations of them in English, Kannada, and other languages. S. Subbha Rao’s creative translation of Madhvācārya’s Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya in 1904 was the first. It was
soon followed in 1906 by a creative translation of Madhvācārya’s Bhagavad Gitā Bhāṣya. Since that time translations of portions of the Mādhva corpus have been published by Mādhvas and by non-Mādhva scholars. Most of these translations were and are in English, and some, such as Siauve’s were in French, others such as Glasenapp’s and Mesquita’s were and are in German. There are many more translations of Mādhva texts in Kannada and other Indian languages, such as Govindaścārya’s translations of portions of the Sarvamūlagranthāḥ.

The pressures of colonial India and the adoption of new technologies resulted in the publication and dissemination of Mādhva materials to those who were uninitiated and ineligible. But what about post-colonial India? Are Mādhvas more or less restrictive now that they are no longer under the dominion of Great Britain? Have they sought to recover their past and to emulate the ideal community envisioned by Madhvācārya?

**Surfing the Mādhva Web**

The largest number of publications of Mādhva root texts has occurred since India became independent in 1947. In the mid-1990s up to the present time, Mādhvas have also made use of the newest form of publication, namely the World Wide Web. There are a number of sites devoted to Mādhva materials constructed by Mādhva practitioners in India and in the Indian Diaspora. Some were even developed by the scholars of the monasteries (maṭhas) themselves under the auspices of their respective religious leaders (svāmijis). These sites contain introductions in both English and Kannada to Mādhva doctrines, translations and summaries of root texts, downloadable recordings of discourses of Mādhva teachers and religious leaders, and even downloadable copies of Mādhva root texts. These are available to the masses and are not restricted in any way; they do not require passwords and there are no charges for accessing the sites. Unlike hard copies, there are neither limitations on the number of books published nor any ways to control their distribution. Anyone, and this, of course, includes outsiders, can learn basic Mādhva doctrine, and can download the root texts. Scholars who developed the first site in 1995 were not unaware of the potential problems of making the texts available to the masses. The following was found on the site in 1999:

> It is recommended that you not recite either the *Brahma-Suutra*, or the *Balitthā Suukta* [sic], unless instructed in the proper procedure by a Guru [teacher]. It is of course the rule that no *stotra* [hymn], including these and others on this page,
be recited whimsically, disrespectfully, or uninterestedly. [brackets are mine] 29

Although no reason has been given, the reference to the Mādhva restrictions has since been removed. This may indicate that the tradition has given up on the restrictions.

Has the Mādhva insider epistemology broken down? Are the boundaries now permeable or merely nominal? Is the ideal community a mere fiction in the mind of nostalgic Mādhvas or a thought experiment imagined by scholars such as myself? Or, are there still restrictions despite the apparent openness? Do Mādhvas respect the rules restricting eligibility or do they scoff at their outdated and irrelevant past?

**Justifications and explanations**

Mādhva scholars have neither ignored the restrictions nor laughed at them. Instead, they have sought to justify their new activities and claim to follow the rules of eligibility that were propounded by Madhvācārya in medieval India. There are three kinds of justifications and explanations that are typically offered: untranslatability, awaiting the apocalypse, and pedagogical context. While the first two are based on religious beliefs, the third is based on logistical impediments. Are they defensible? Or are they hasty attempts to patch up a quickly leaking ship?

**Untranslatability**

“Sanskrit can never be fully translated into any other language” is a fairly common answer given by many traditional teachers (paṇḍīts) when asked if they were breaking eligibility rules when they taught or published translations of Sanskrit texts to those who were ineligible. The belief is that translations can never fully communicate the essence of the texts as they are found in the Sanskrit. The impossibility of a full translation of Sanskrit thus protects the meaning of the texts from improper transmission. Although readers will gain a higher degree of understanding of basic Mādhva principles, they, like women, sūdras, and unworthy brahmins (brahmabandhus) who are entitled to only select portions of summaries of the Pañcarātārāgamas, will be limited only to the abbreviated information that is given to them by insiders. The integrity of the root texts is partly maintained, given that Sanskrit is posited to be untranslatable.

The view that there are languages that are untranslatable is not a widely accepted one. 30 Such arguments are based on theories about the
nature of language itself and the uniqueness of particular languages. They are also linked with theories that a language can be independent of the community that employs it. This belief is an underlying epistemic premise held by all of the schools of Vedānta, namely that Sanskrit is a divine language that is an intrinsic component in the very framework of the universe. Madhvācārya, for example, held that the Vedas and, conjointly, the Sanskrit language, are eternal and that they were still not even created by Lord Viśṇu. The phonemes (varṇas) of the Vedas themselves, he reasoned, are eternal and without a creator. For Madhvācārya, Sanskrit was neither constructed by humans nor even by god(s). Such a position conflicts with ones that hold that there are linguistic universals such as syntactic and semantic categories that are found in all cultures, contexts, and so on, which are the basis for effective communication between otherwise disparate groups of people. The belief that Sanskrit is untranslatable is thus based on controversial beliefs and premises. Clearly it is not patently obvious that it is true. Are there other arguments that are dependent upon leaps of faith? Are there other justifications that make sense only to insiders?

Awaiting the apocalypse

Another explanation that is sometimes offered by traditional teachers to explain why they can no longer enforce the restrictions is based on a belief that the current era is kali-yuga, a period of time when dharma (dutiful behavior) has collapsed. That the root texts can no longer be kept concealed exemplifies this destruction of ethics and the social order. This concept of time, also shared by Madhvācārya, is based on the Purāṇas. In them, the universe is characterized as proceeding through a cycle of four ages (yugas). These ages, namely kṛta, the first, tretā, second, dvāpara, third, and kali, fourth age, are distinguished by the degree to which the sentient beings of the universe adhere to dutiful behavior (dharma). In kṛta-yuga, dutiful behavior is upheld, while in kali-yuga, it is ignored. In the introduction to his Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya, Madhvācārya cites a passage from the Skanda Purāṇa that describes the degeneration of dharma. According to this text, the Brahma Sūtras themselves were composed when Brahmā, Rudra and other deities requested Viśṇu’s assistance during dvāpara-yuga. At the end of each kali-yuga, when the universe is chaotic and filled with adharma, unlawful activities, Viśṇu will return in his incarnation (avatāra) as Kalki who will destroy the universe and begin the cycle anew with the kṛta-yuga.
epistemology. They explain that they are merely breaking the rules because of the looming crisis of modernity and the complexity of a situation that is beyond their control, in which all traditional rules have disintegrated. They are merely following dutiful behavior in the time of extremity (āpad-dharma), preeminently exemplified in kali-yuga.

Although this loophole is mentioned in Māṇava-dharmaśāstra and other treatises on law, it is still not altogether clear whether a loosening of the rules governing access to the root texts is permissible, no matter the extremity of the circumstances. The appeal to the apocalypse may not be defensible. For example, Manu warns:

A priest should never, even in extremity, forge Vedic or sexual bonds with those people who have not been purified.36

On the other hand, he also offers a method to restore purity if one were to teach the ineligible:

The error of sacrificing or teaching (despicable men) is dispelled by chanting (the Veda) and making offerings into the fire …37

Resorting to the kali-yuga hermeneutic may not be a convincing explanation after all, given the ambiguities in Māṇava-dharmaśāstra. Either way, traditional teachers rely upon it when seeking to give good reason for their activities.

These two explanations, the sacrality of Sanskrit and the kali-yuga qualification, serve to justify why teaching the root texts in translations and publishing them for mass consumption does not conflict with the restrictions. They also function to justify why, when the restrictions are broken, it is legitimate given the mitigating circumstances. Such an account, for example, permits insiders to teach outsiders to read Sanskrit. In addition to these, there are other kinds of defenses that allow insiders to maintain the insider epistemology, yet make formerly restricted texts easily accessible and do not require such leaps of faith. Such justifications are based simply on the mechanics of transmission.

**The Mādhva pedagogical context**

The importance of the oral commentarial tradition and its use as a method for enforcing restrictions cannot be underestimated. Although the root texts may be available and outsiders may have learned to read Sanskrit, as mentioned in Chapter 1, they may be sufficiently vague such that
they cannot be fully understood without the assistance of traditionally trained experts. Many of the root texts are no more than mnemonic devices for teachers whose oral commentaries are essential to decode them. It is true that the Mådhva tradition has made all of the root texts somewhat available to the masses. It is also true that some people who obtain the root texts may not be eligible to access them, yet have sufficient abilities in Sanskrit to be able to read them. But, in light of the importance of the oral commentary, reading alone does not automatically imply accurate understanding. Consider the following hypothetical situation: the proposition “You are not that” has been kept concealed since it was first conceived but has now been published on the front page of the New York Times and is available to all. Although the proposition certainly is readable, its content is ambiguous without a commentary that explains each of its components and their relationships with one another; who is “you”? What is “that”? and so on. Similarly, the Mådhva root texts require oral commentary in order to be fully comprehensible.

One may argue that many of the oral commentaries of the Mådhva tradition have already been published and that a “live” commentary is unnecessary. The commentaries, however, often require sub-commentaries themselves. Without the assistance of an expert in the Mådhva tradition, complete understanding of the texts simply becomes impossible. One may wonder about who determines “completeness.” Surely the evaluation can only be made by an insider, and one cannot know if the insider is telling the truth. The question of degrees becomes similarly problematic, for an outsider can only know that one’s knowledge has increased but cannot know how near or far s/he is from complete knowledge of the Mådhva root texts.

For these reasons, the mere publication of the root texts is insufficient for outsiders to become experts. This justification is not based on theological commitments to the ontology of Sanskrit or the inevitability of the apocalypse, but is based on simple logistics: “We have complete knowledge and you cannot gain that simply by studying our root texts.” Are these restrictions put into practice or are they mere hearsay? Are traditional teachers known to withhold their knowledge from the uninitiated or from those twice-born who have transgressed the boundaries for proper and dutiful behavior (dharma)?

**When is a brahmin and brahmabandhu?**

From personal experience I can attest to the fact that the teachers of Mådhva Vedânta still enforce these restrictions. As mentioned in Chapter 1, I was born and raised a Mådhva. But, I am also a so-called
“ABCD”, American Born Confused desi (person having Indian origin) and have not undergone traditional training in a Mādhva monastery, though I have studied for short periods of time with some traditional teachers. My liminal status challenged the eligibility rules of Mādhva Vedānta the most when I pursued research for my dissertation in 1996 and 1997. Could I be categorized as an insider or an outsider? As both? Or as neither? The Mādhva teachers with whom I studied were often confused by my ambiguous status and it was difficult for them to classify me as either a “foreign” scholar, an outsider, or as an insider who was eligible to study esoteric Mādhva texts. I did put myself in a position, though, where I learned about what happens when an insider is temporarily made an outsider.

Broadly stated, my chief teacher, to whom I will refer as Śrī Dronācārya, usually treated me as one who was eligible to learn esoteric doctrine. On other occasions he treated me as a brahmabandhu and, if I was fortunate, merely gave me summaries of concepts. The issues regarding my eligibility were made complicated when my column in the Indian Express (Karnātaka state’s second-largest English newspaper) was discovered by students and teachers at the Vidyāpītham. I wrote the column knowing full well that my dual identity, thus far kept concealed, as insider and as outsider, as eligible one and as ineligible one, might very well be discovered by scholars and residents of the Vidyāpītham. The focus of this auto-ethnographic column, moreover, was the identity problems that ABCD’s such as myself faced in Bangalore who also walked the boundary line between insider and outsider. I thus decided to write several of my columns on amusing situations in which ABCDs find themselves. Were we treated as Indians or as foreigners? Were we insiders or outsiders? After a particularly racy column was published (racy by Vidyāpītham standards), I gained instant notoriety in the Vidyāpītham. The column was on dating and mating in Bangalore, the trials and tribulations that a single man like me confronted, and my far-too-many failed attempts to meet the Bangalore girl of my (and my parents’) dreams. I intentionally alluded to activities anathema to celibate student (brahmacāri) lifestyles and did not leave much to the imagination of my readers. Clearly I violated the Mādhva rule that:

Even if there is a little bit of wantonness, there is no eligibility with regard to knowledge of the Vedas.

Alas! The end result was that, for all intents and purposes, I was excommunicated. I was declared to be incompetent (anadhikārin).
The context for such a declaration was Śrī Dronācārya’s office. I asked him if he had seen my column (knowing full well that he had). He grunted an affirmative and then proceeded to give me a stern look throughout the ill-fated class, ironically one in which we looked at texts and commentaries addressing the eligibility of those who were excluded from the class system (antityajas). I arrogantly asked him at the end of class about my own eligibility and he curtly replied that I was not eligible. He said “good-bye” and then told me that he would not be able to see me for at least one month. Punished! No more was I privy to his helpful oral commentaries on root texts!

At the end of the month, I returned to his office in the hope that my transgressions would be forgiven and that I would be allowed back into the Mādhva fold. Not so. He was again quite terse and declined to assist me in obtaining root texts and commentaries that I needed for my research, despite the fact that the texts were on the bookshelves in his office itself and in the Vidyāpīṭham library next door. I left with the insight that the question of eligibility was still a live one for Mādhva practitioners today. The restrictions really did apply, and they applied to me too. Alas!

I managed to get an appointment with Śrī Dronācārya in late July, one month later. In the meantime, I dropped in as frequently as possible in order to show to him that I was a true devotee (bhakta) of Mādhva Vedānta and therefore eligible to study esoteric doctrine. Such displays included innumerable prostrations where eight parts of the body are made to touch the floor (aṣṭaṅgapraṇāma), as well as proclamations of the validity of Madhvācārya’s positions.

Eventually my devotion paid off. I proved myself worthy and he relented. After the meeting at the end of July, Śrī Dronācārya smiled and asked me if I was going to attend the branding (tapta-mudrā) ritual that was going to occur in early August at the Vidyāpīṭham. I told him that I was indeed going to observe and participate in the marking (mudrā) ceremony. In this ceremony the religious leader of the monastery stamps or marks the skin of devotees with up to five heated silver brands of a conch (śaṅkha) and the discus (cakra), both symbols of Kṛṣṇa. The brand is meant to distinguish the Vaiṣṇava from other members of society and to mark adherence to Vaiṣṇava and Mādhva philosophy, the mark of an insider. Hearing that I was going to be marked in this way, Śrī Dronācārya scheduled an appointment within a week.

Was this the ritual that I needed to undergo in order to be reinstated as an eligible brahmin? To no longer be considered a brahmabandhu, a wicked brahmin? To make me an insider again?

I attended the ritual. When I went to class a few days later, Śrī
Dronācārya mentioned that he had heard that I had the ceremony performed. He smiled and casually stated that I was now “adhikāri” (eligible) and then plunged into discussion of esoteric doctrine more vigorously than ever before.

This anecdote about the implementation of the Mādhva restrictions proved that there was far more to accessibility than merely having the text in hand and the ability to read Sanskrit. Without the assistance of a virtuoso, one was still restricted! By losing my permission to learn within the prescribed pedagogical context, the degree to which I could study Mādhva Vedānta was greatly reduced indeed!

Although I was able to redeem myself, redeemability presupposed that I was once an insider and could have my status reinstated. An outsider who was not qualified could not be granted access no matter the extent to which s/he was devoted. Other brahmins such as those from the Viśiṣṭādvaita tradition, however, could obtain access and could be converted.

The future of Mādhva Vedānta

Traditions like Mādhva Vedānta that hold to restrictive insider epistemologies risk dying or becoming irrelevant. The numbers of students in the Mādhva monasteries is reducing, as is the number of traditionally trained experts in the tradition. The logical outcome of this trajectory inclines one to envision a time when the last expert is no more and no one remains who can claim complete understanding of the Mādhva root texts. Like the dodo bird, the virtuoso reader of Mādhva texts could become extinct. The insider epistemology, which has been a unique characteristic of Mādhva Vedānta, may be the cause of its demise.

The Mādhva tradition is not alone, for its Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita counterparts have faced the same challenges. They, however, have loosened their restrictions. There has been a calculated effort to educate the masses throughout the world, for example, to promote Advaita Vedānta by so-called neo-Vedāntins. This includes Vivekānanda, who traveled across the United States and spoke in Chicago in 1893, and President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, who used Advaita Vedānta to unify and pacify India. The effect is that many Westerners, Hindus in India, and diasporic Hindus are now familiar with Advaita tenets and that it is more than unlikely that the tradition will die. Viśiṣṭādvaita thinkers have sought to increase their numbers by expanding their canon to include texts written in Tamil, a vernacular language that is available to the masses.

In contrast, many Mādhva pandits (teachers) have upheld the restrictive insider epistemology and have not embraced the inevitability of,
and need for, a universal, global, and urban tradition. As I have pointed out, until recently, they have neither published many books on Mādhva Vedānta nor made the Sarvamāla and subsequent commentaries available to the masses. This exclusivity is changing thanks to Sri Viśveṣa Tīrtha Svāmijī, the scholars that he supports at the Pūñaprajñā Samśodhana Mandiram (PPSM), and the members of the Akhila Bhārata Mādhva Mahāmanḍala (ABMM). These scholars are making the texts and teachings more widely available. Their effort has led to many ABMM, Pūrnaprajñā Vidyāpitham, and Dvaita Vedānta Research Foundation publications. Additionally, the PPSM has developed a website where devotees can download Mādhva texts freely and easily, as well as read clear and concise introductions to Mādhva teachings. Mādhva teachers must continue to publish and digitize texts.

But is this enough? Will it help to spread the teachings of Mādhva Vedānta and avert the dissolution of this thirteenth-century CE tradition? The Sanskrit medium is far from inviting and many Mādhvas and non-Mādhvas have neither the resources nor the patience to read the Sanskrit originals. For this reason, I believe that Mādhva teachers must also strive to publish readable translations of Mādhva texts and continue to publish lucid English summaries of doctrine online and in print. Most Mādhva teachers, despite being superb Sanskritists and scholars, lack the skills to convey their knowledge using the English language. The older generation of teachers may not be able to satisfy this need, so it is up to younger Mādhvas to learn scholarly English and to publish in English. Not only will this help to propagate Mādhva Vedānta to the non-Sanskrit-reading Hindu public, but it will also provide a way, perhaps the only one, for Mādhva teachers and Mādhva Vedānta to prevent its disappearance.

With its reliance on the rapid developing web technology, the Mādhva tradition is surely making every effort to preserve its root texts and teachings. The impact of the technology on the transmission of knowledge is now being reflected in the theology and pedagogy of Mādhva Vedānta. It is possible that, in the next decade the issue of eligibility will become obsolete and outsiders will be made privy to root texts and concealed teachings. Hence, there may be no limitations on the kinds and extent of the philosophical inquiries made by outsiders.

This possibility, though, is bittersweet; will the changes be so massive that the new version of the tradition barely resembles its antecedent? Or, alternatively, are these changes indicators that dharma continues to dissolve and that Viṣṇu will soon return as Kalki, to destroy the universe, only to begin the cycle anew?
APPENDIX A

Text index

This index is for advanced scholars wishing to locate my citations of Mādhva materials. Scholars of Mādhva Vedānta have been confronted with difficulties when older scholarship refers to pagination, etc. from even older manuscripts that are either hard to find or no longer extant. The result is a great deal of painstaking searching for citations. I have composed this text index to avoid those problems of the past. I have thus included a passage number, if one exists, a portion of the passage that I have cited or to which I have referred, and pagination from Govindācārya’s edition of the Sarvamūla (hereafter BG) and then Prabhanjanacharya’s (hereafter VP). If I have used a different edition from either of these two then it has been indicated in the header. I have also added the location of the citation in this book (DS).

Madhvācārya’s texts have been grouped according to the category system of the Sarvamūla.

Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya
Anubhāṣya
Anuvyākhyāna

Chāndogya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya

Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya

Kathālakṣaṇa
Viṣṇutattva(vi)nirṇaya

Jayatīrtha’s texts:
Tāttvapraṇāsika

75
## Madhvācārya’s texts:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya</th>
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<th>VP</th>
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<tr>
<td>0 nārāyanam</td>
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<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 dvāpare sarvatra</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 tadarthaniṅṇāyāya</td>
<td>1–2</td>
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<td>0 evaṃvidhāni</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>1.1.1 athasabdo</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>8, 31</td>
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<td>1.1.1 uktaṃ ca gāruḍe</td>
<td>2–3</td>
<td>4–5</td>
<td>31</td>
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<td>1.1.1 adhikārās cokta</td>
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### Bhāgavatatantra

| 1.1.1 tadvijñānārthāṃ | (missing) | 6 | 32 |
| 1.1.1 antyajā api ye | 4–5 | 6 | 51 |
| 1.1.1 strīśuddrabrahmabandhūnāṃ | 5 | 6–7 | 28, 36, 41 |
| 1.1.1 traivarṇikānāṃ | 5 | 7 | 34 |
| 1.1.1 āhur apy uttamastraṇāṃ | 5 | 7 | 38, 39, 58 |
| 1.1.1 yam evaiṣa | 5 | 8 | 24 |
| 1.1.1 eṣa mohāṃ | 7 | 10 | 29 |
| 1.1.3 nāvedadinmanute | 9 | 11 | 23 |
| 1.1.3 na ca anumānasya | 9 | 12 | 23 |
| 1.1.3 rgyajuḥ | 10 | 12 | 25 |
| 1.1.3 ity āraḥhyā | 10 | 13 | 27 |

### Vedapañcarātrayor

<p>| 1.2.26 casabdena | 32 | 44 | 28 |
| 1.3.26 manuṣyānām eva | 41 | 60 | 37 |
| 1.3.26 tiryagādīnā | 41 | 60 | 37 |
| 1.3.31 vasūnām evaiṣa | 42 | 62 | 49 |
| 1.3.31 madhvaḍīśv | 42 | 62 | 49 |
| 1.3.32 jyotiṣi bhāvāc ca | 42 | 62 | 50 |
| 1.3.32 jyotiṣi sarvañjñātve | 42 | 62 | 50 |
| 1.3.33 bhāvaṃ tu bādaraṇyaṇo ‘sti hi | 42 | 62 | 50 |
| 1.3.33 phalaviśeṣabhāvāt | 42 | 62 | 50 |
| 1.3.33 yāvat sevā | 42 | 62 | 51 |
| 1.3.33 uktaḥpahādikārāmātra | 42 | 62 | 51 |
| 1.3.33 manuṣyādikārataśvādity | 42 | 63 | 43 |
| 1.3.34 sugasya tad | 42 | 63 | 45 |
| 1.3.34 nāsau | 42 | 63 | 44–45 |
| 1.3.35 kṣatriyaṭvāvagateś | 43 | 63 | 45 |
| 1.3.36 āṣṭavaṃṣaṃ | 43 | 64 | 34, 42 |
| 1.3.36 uttamastraṇāṃ tu | 43 | 64 | 40 |</p>
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<td>sravanaadhyyayanārthapratiśedhāt</td>
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<td>sravaṇe trapujatubhyām</td>
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<td>60</td>
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<td>2.2</td>
<td>Samayavirodha</td>
<td>71–88</td>
<td>100–111</td>
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<td>sakalāsrutyādiviruddhatvāc</td>
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<td>111</td>
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<td>3.2.22</td>
<td>paramātmāparokṣyaṃ</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>181</td>
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<td>3.3.3</td>
<td>hiśabdāt vedāḥ kṛ</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>189</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.3.33</td>
<td>yathā yathā</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>201</td>
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<td>3.4.10</td>
<td>na sarvesām</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>223</td>
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<td>adhyayanamātravataḥ</td>
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<td>avaiśnavasya</td>
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<td>tṛdhvaretassu ca sabde hi</td>
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<td>na tāvatā</td>
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<td>yady api</td>
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<td>228</td>
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<td>3.4.49</td>
<td>etāṃ vidyāṃ</td>
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<td>238–239</td>
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**Aṇubhāṣya**

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**Anuvyākhyaṇa**

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<td>2.2.9</td>
<td>iti vidyāpatih</td>
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**Chāndogya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya**

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<td>vāyuḥ hareḥ sutam</td>
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**Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya**

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<td>eṣa mohāṃ</td>
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<td>paṇcarātrasya</td>
<td>22 (2.107–108)</td>
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**Kathālakṣaṇa**

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<td>vītaṇḍā</td>
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<td>eko vā bahavo</td>
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**Viṣṇutattva(vi)nirṇaya**

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<td>itihāsapurāṇah paṇcamo</td>
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<td>na coccāraṇakāla</td>
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<td>72</td>
<td>68</td>
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APPENDIX A

77
I used Panchamukhi’s (hereafter RSP) and Panḍurangi’s edition of the BSB for Jayatirtha’s *Tattvaprkāśīka* and Rāghavendratirtha’s *Bhāvadīpa*.

<table>
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<tr>
<th><em>Tattvaprkāśīka</em></th>
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<th><em>KTP</em></th>
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<td>117</td>
<td>51, 87</td>
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<td>117</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>1.1.1 *āhur iti</td>
<td>tathā*</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>117</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.3.36 *uttameti</td>
<td>nottamastrīṇāṁ*</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>286</td>
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<td>1.3.38 *vidurādīnāṁ iti</td>
<td>teśām*</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>293</td>
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</table>

*Bhāvadīpa*

*narādikulājas ceti | taduktaṁ* | 33 | 125 | 39–40, 58 |

I used Malagi’s edition of Madhvācārya’s *Āṅubhāṣya* for Chalarī Śeṣācārya’s *Tattvaprkāśikavyākhyāna*.

*Tattvaprkāśikavyākhyāna*

1.3.1 *ādyāṣabdena* on page 43.

This citation appears on page 42 of this book.
ABBREVIATIONS USED IN NOTES

All texts are by Madhvācārya unless otherwise indicated. The abbreviations are used in the notes to each chapter but not in the body of the text.

AB  Anūbhāṣya
AV  Anuvyākhya
BS  Vyāsa’s Brahma Sūtras
BSB  Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya
KL  Kathālakṣaṇa
MBhTN  Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya
MDS  Manu’s Mānava-Dharmaśāstra
MV  Paṇḍitācārya’s Madhvavijaya
VTV  Viṣṇutattva(vi)nirṇaya
NOTES

PREFACE


1 INSIDER EPISTEMOLOGIES

1 Saturday Night Live, 15 December 1984.
3 Merton refers to this as “a doctrine of group methodological solipsism” (1972: 14).
4 Merton deems this kind of solipsism “individual methodological solipsism” (ibid.: 15).
6 I am reliant upon Merton for the phrase “monopolistic access” (Merton 1972: 11).
7 Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part Two, The Celebration of the Christian Mystery, Section Two, the Seven Sacraments of the Church, Chapter Two, the Sacraments of Healing, Article Four, the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, VII, the Minister of This Sacrament, 1467.
8 See American Bar Association, Ethics 2000 Recommendations, rule 1.6, Confidentiality of Information.
NOTES

10 See Paul J. Griffiths, Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999 for more on the training of what he calls “virtuoso religious readers.”

11 Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, 1, 3, 1095a.


13 See Griffiths (1999).

14 athâto brahmajijñåsa | Brahma Sûtra 1.1.1.

15 athaßabdo mangalartho ’dhikärānantaryārthaś ca | athaßabdo hetvarthaḥ | Madhvaçārya, BSB, 1.1.1.


2 MĀDHVA VEDĀNTA IN MEDIEVAL KARNĀṬAKA

1 I am reliant upon G. Bhatt, Studies in Tuluva History and Culture. Manipal: Manipal Power Press, 1975, for many of the details with regard to Tuluṇādu religion, culture, etc.

2 See Bhatt (1975).


4 ... tadarthanirñayāya brahmasutrāni cakāra | BSB, 1.1.1.

5 prādurbhūto harir vyāso viriṇcabhavapūrvakaḥ | arthitaḥ paravidyākhyāṃ cakre sāstram anuttamam | AV, 3. Hari is another name for Viṣṇu.


7 Mādhava. Śamkaradigvijaya. See the Padmapādaṭṭhajayatrāvarṇam and related chapters of Mādhava’s Śamkaradigvijaya. These chapters are descriptions of religious pilgrimages and travels undertaken by Śamkarācārya.


10 Bhatt (1975: 448).

11 Ibid.: 441.

12 Ibid.: 283.


NOTES


17 For a detailed list of these texts, see R. Mesquita, Mādhva Und Seine Unbekannten Literarischen Quellen: Eine Beobachtungen. Vol. XXIV. Vienna: De Nobili, 1997.


19 MV, 4.4–30, MV, 4.49–54.


22 MV, 5.1.

23 C.R. Krishna Rao, Srimadhwa, His Life and Doctrine, Udupi: Prabhakara Press, 1929, pp. 6–8, 23–27. This meeting is not mentioned in the MV.

24 saha tatra samayānakhanda ya MV, 9.15.

25 See Dasgupta’s History for detailed introductions to each of these traditions.

26 BSB, 2.2.

27 evanvīdhāni sûtran kṛtvā vyāso mahāyasāh | brahmārūdrādideveśu manusyayātprakṣīṣu | jnānam samsthāpya bhagavānkiṇḍante puruṣottamaḥ | BSB, 0.


29 vāyuḥ hareḥ sutam . . . | Chāndogyopaniṣadbhāsyam, 3.15.1.


31 MV, 16.58.

32 MV, 15.128–129.


34 For analyses of the contents of each of these texts, see Sharma (1981) and Naga Raja Sarma, Reign of Realism in Indian Philosophy, Chennai: The National Press, 1937.

3 THE MÅDHVA INSIDER EPISTEMOLOGY

1 na sarvesām adhikāraḥ | BSB, 3.4.10.
2 na ca anumānasya niyatapramāṇam | suritisāhāyyarahitam anumānaṁ na
kutra cit nisūlayāt sādhyey arthām pramānāntaram eva ca | ... ity ādyam
iñhanām tarkāḥ suñskatāram tu varjayet ity āddī kaurmer | BSB, 1.1.3.
3 I return to this question in Chapter 4.
4 sakalaśrutīyādiviruddhatvāc cāsamañjasam | BSB, 2.2.45.
5 A complete translation of the Kathālakṣaṇa can be found in chapter 5 of D.
Sarma, An Introduction to Mådhva Vedānta, Great Britain: Ashgate Publishing
Ltd., 2003.
6 nāvedadīnmanute tām bhṛhantam sarvānubhūmātmānam sāmparāye | BSB,
1.1.3.
7 eko vā bahavo vā syur viṣṇubhaktiparāsādā | viṣṇubhaktir hi sarvesāṁ
sadbhūtānam svalakṣaṇam | KL, 7.
8 yam evaṁ vṛṇute tena labhyaḥ tasyaisāmāva viṣṇute tanaṁ svām | BSB,
1.1.1. Cited from the Kathopaniṣad, 2.23.
9 paramātmaśarvasyam ca tatprasadādā eva na jīvasakṣety | ... | BSB, 3.2.22.
10 rṣāgāya bhrātratām caiva pañcarātratām atāhābhilām mālārāmaṁyaṁ caiva
purāṇam caitad ātmakam | ye cāmukyāvinus tv eṣām sarve te ca sadāgāmāḥ |
durāgamās tadyate te tair na jñeyo janārdanāḥ | ... iti brahmānde | VTV.
11 rgaḍāḥsāṁśāṭhavāṣ ca bhrātratām pañcarātratākam | mālārāmaṁyaṁ caiva
sāstram ity abhidhiyate | yac cāṅkūlum etasya tac ca sāstram prakṛtītām |
atō 'nyo granthavistāro naiva sāstram kuvartma tat | iti śākde | BSB, 1.1.3.
12 rgaḍāḥsāṁśāṭhavāṣ ca mālārāmaṁyaṁ tathā | bhrātratām pañcarātratām ca
vedā ity eva sābditāḥ | BSB, 2.1.5.
13 vedān adhyāpayām āsa mahābhūratapañcamān | ... | MBh 1.57.74. This
translation is taken from J.A.B. van Buijtenen, The Mahābhārata: 1. The
14 itihāsapurāṇāḥ pañcamo vedānāṁ vedāḥ iti tad grhitatvāc ca | VTV.
15 See Mesquita (1997).
16 See Śaṅkarabhāṣya, 2.2.44, 574–575.
17 See J.A.B. van Buijtenen, Yāmuna’s Āgama Prāmāṇya or Treatise on the
Validity of Pañcarātra; Sanskrit Text and English Translation. Madras:
18 pañcarātrasya kṛtsnasya vaktā nārāyaṇa svayam | sarvesy eteṣu rājendra
jiñāṇesv etad viśisyaṭe | jiñāṇesv eteṣu rājendra sāṁkhya-paśu-paitādiṣu |
MBhTN, 2.101–102.
19 ity ārābhya vedapañcarātrayor aikyābhīpāryeṣa pañcarātrasyaiva
prāmāṇyam uktam itareṣam bhinnam atatvam pradarsya mokṣadharmaṁ
api | BSB, 1.1.3.
20 casabdena sakalavedatrantrapurañādiṣu viṣṇuparataṃ puruṣaśākṣtaṃ
darsayati | BSB, 1.2.26.
21 adhikārās cokta bhāgavatatantre | BSB, 1.1.1.
22 B.N.K. Sharma, The Brahmastītras and their Principal Commentaries: A
23 strīśudrabrahmabandhūnāṁ tantrajñāne āhākāritā | ekadeśe parokte tu na
tu granthapurassare | BSB, 1.1.1.
24 tantram pañcarātrādī | TP, 1.1.1.

mohaṁ tyāṁ anyaśāstraṁ kṛtaṁ evājñāya hareḥ | atateṣaṁktaṁ agrāhyam asūrāṇāṁ tamogataḥ | yasmāt kṛtaṁ tāṁśa viṣṇunoktaṁ śivādiḥ | eṣāṁ yan na virodhi syāt tatraṅktaṁ tan na vāryate | MBhTN, 1.34.

eṣa moham srjāmyāṣya yo janāṁ mohyāṣyanti | tvam ca rudra mahābāho mohasāstraṁ kāraya | atathāṁni vītathāṁni darsāyasva mahābhūvaḥ | prakāsaṁ kutaṁ cātmāṁ samprakāsaṁ ca māṁ kuru | iti vārahavacanaṁ brahmāṇḍotktaṁ tathāḥ param | MBhTN, 1.48–50. This same passage is found also in BSB, 1.1.1. Siva and Rūdra are identical. Sudarsana Sūri (twelfth century CE), a theologian of the Viśistādvaita school of Vedānta, cited the same passage in his subcommentary on Rāmānuja's commentary on the *Brahma Sūtras*. Such interpretations were part of the debates between the Saiva and Vaisnava schools. See Francis X. Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, chapter 3 for more. I am reliant upon Clooney for this reference to Sūri.

etāṁ vidyāṁ adhiṁya brahmadarśaṁ vāva bhavati | sa etāṁ manusyeṣu vibhīṣyat | yathā yathā ha vai britāṁ tathā tathā adhiko ‘bhavatīti māṭharasrutau vidyādānāṁ śrūyate | tac ca bahūnāṁ svikaraṇartham āvikāśere ‘ti na mantavayan | anvāyad yuktēḥ | āvikāśere ‘yogyānāṁ api svikāraṇaprātipiḥ | tac ca niściddham | BSB, 3.4.49, 342.

My thanks to Francis Clooney for reminding me of this distinction and for some of this wording.

bhrāmaṁjñānaṁ | BS, 1.1.1.


See Kumārila, *Slokāvārtika* and Sabara, *Sabarabhāṣya*.

athasabdād maṅgalārtho ‘dhikārāntaryārthas ca | BSB, 1.1.1.

uktaṁ ca gāruḍe | athātaḥ sabdāśāyaṁvikalpanaḥ api prārabhante nītyaṁvīdeyaṁvīdyyādaṁ kāscarthas ca tayaṁ vidvam katham uttamat tayoḥ | etad ākhyāṁ me brahmaṁ yathā jñāsyāṁ tattvātah | evam uktō nāradena brahmaṁ proviṣa sattamaḥ | ānantartye ‘dhikārasya maṅgalārthe tathaṁvīdeyaṁvīdeyaṁvīdyyādaṁ ca | BSB, 1.1.1.

granthādaṁ maṅgalācaraṇasyāśāyakartvyatvāt tatparatayāhasabdaṁ vyācaṣṭe | atheti | muktyarthinātreyasva brahmajñājñāsāyāṁ pravṛttinirasana-paratayē api tvaṁ vyākarṣaṁ tasyābhidheyaṁ arthām āha | adhikāreṇu | TP, 1.1.1.

yādy api jñānenaiva mokṣo niyastathāpi jñāṇāḥ samadāṇādyutapaṁ syāt | BSB, 3.4.27.

tadviṣṇārthaṁ sa gurum evābhigacchet samitpāṇīḥ srotṛiṣyaṁ bhrāmaṁśaḥ | BSB, 1.1.1.

parīkṣya lokāṁ karmacitāṁ bhrāhmaṁ nirvedam āyāṁ nāṣy akṣṛaṁ ṭṛṣṭaṁ | tadaṁ viṣṇuṁ bhrāmaṁśaḥ sa gurum evābhigacchet samitpāṇīḥ srotṛiṣyaṁ bhrāmaṁśaḥ | Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, 1.2.12.

adhikārās cokta bhāgavatatantre | mandamadhyottamavena trividhāh | adhikārīṇāḥ | tatra mandāḥ manusyeṣu ya uttamaṁ gacchati maṁ | madhyamāṁ ṛṣīgandharvā devās tatttomaṁ maṁ | BSB, 1.1.1.
40 traivarnikānāṁ vedokte samyag bhaktimatāṁ harau | āhur āpy uttamastrināṁ adhikāraṁ tu vaidike | BSB, 1.1.1.
41 hisabdāt vedha kṛtsno 'dhigatavyaḥ sarahasyo dvijanmane ti śrvente | BSB, 3.3.3.
42 aṣṭavaṃaḥ brāhmaṇam upanayita tam adhyāpayītey adhyayanārtham saṁskāraṇapāṃśarāt | BSB, 1.3.36.
43 The Gāyatrī mantra can be found in Rg Veda, 3.62.
45 adhyayanamāṭravatāḥ | BSB, 3.4.12.
46 aviśnāvasya vede 'pi hy adhikāra na vidyate | gurubhaktiviṁśasya samādīrahitasya ca | na ca varṇavarasyāpi tasmād adhyayanāṅvitaḥ | brahmajñāne tu vedoke 'py adhikāri sātāṁ mata iti brahmatarke | BSB, 3.4.12.
47 They are found in chapter 2 of Māṇava-dharmaśāstra.
48 īṛdhvaretassu ca sabde hi | BSB, 3.4.17. na tāvata kāmacārānāṁ jñāne 'dhikāraḥ | ya idam paramaṁ guhyam īṛdhvaretassu bhāsayet | BSB, 3.4.17.
50 strīśudrabrahmaṁbandhūnāṁ tantrajñāne 'dhikāritā ekadesā pe rakte tu na tu granthapuraśare | BSB, 1.1.1.
52 manuśyānāṁ eva vedavīyādhikāra ity uktam | tiryagādyapekṣayaiva manuṣyatavaviśeṣanam uktam na tu devādyapekṣayety āha | BSB, 1.3.26.
53 tiryagādānāṁ tadabhāvād abhāvāḥ | teśāṁ api yatra viśiṣṭabuddhyādibhāvas tatrāvirodhaḥ | nisedhābhāvāt | ṛṣyante hi jariṝtyādayaḥ | BSB, 1.3.26.
54 MBh, 1.220.15–17.
55 āhur āpy uttamastrināṁ adhikāraṁ tu vaidike | yathorvāyam yam caiva śacyādyās ca tathāparā | BSB, 1.1.1.
56 Yami’s conversation is found in Rg Veda 10.10, Urvasi’s in 10.95, and Śacī’s in 10.86.
57 āhur āpy uttamastrināṁ adhikāraṁ tu vaidike | yathorvāyam yam caiva śacyādyās ca tathāparā | BSB, 1.1.1.
58 āhur iti | tatha parā munistiyo narādikulajās ca | TP, 1.1.1.
59 narādikulajās ceti | taduktaṁ tāṭparyanirṇaye ekonatriṁśedhāye | devyo munistiyaṁ caiva narādikulajāpi | Rāghavendratīrtha, Bhāvadīpa, 1.1.1.
60 uttamastrināṁ tu na sudravat | sapatniṁ me parādhame 'tyādiṣy adhikāradosanāt | saṃskārābhavenābhavas tu sāmānyena | asti ca tāsāṁ saṃskāraḥ | strināṁ pradānākarmaiva yathopanayanam tathe 'ti śrvente | BSB, 1.3.36.

According to the notes in Panchamukhi’s edition of the *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* (Delhi: Indological Research Centre, 1994), the passage “along with my wife, the highest” was taken from the *Mantraprasna*, 1–16.
According to Granoff such cases may indicate more widespread literacy in medieval India. Granoff, personal communication, May 9, 1998. See P. Granoff, “The Role of Written Texts in Medieval Jain Sectarian Conflicts,” in Jain Studies in Honour of Jozef Deleu, R. Smet and K. Wantanabe (eds), Tokyo: Hon-No-Tomosha, 1993, pp. 315–338, for related issues. The emphasis on the written word here is peculiar given the importance placed on oral commentary.

I return to this possibility of martial maneuvering in Chapter 4.
NOTES

80 Gautama, the author of the Gautama-dharmaśāstra, is not the person mentioned in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad.
81 literally “desire to hear,” in this case “desire to hear the order of . . .”
82 śravaṇe trapujatubhyām srotaparipūraṇam | adhyayane jihvācchedah | arthāvadhārane hṛdayavidāram iti pratiṣedhāt | nāgūr na yajñās śudrasya tathaivaḥdhyayanaṃ kutaḥ | kevalāva tu suśūśa trivāraṇāṇāṃ vidhiyatetāt smṛtes ca | vidurādānaṁ tu utpamajñānaṁvat kāscecid viṣeṣaḥ | BSB, 1.3.38. Śaṅkarācārya cites the same passage in his commentary on this aphorism.
83 Earlier I translated dharma as “dutiful behavior.” The term has a wide semantic range and here I think that “law” is more appropriate.
84 vidurādānaṁ iti | teṣām pūrvajanmany uppannāparokṣajñānaṁ niṣvenetara-sūdrādvibho viṣiṣṭatvāt vedaṛthāvadhāranaṁ | na niṣiddham iti bhāvah | ato hariḥ śudrādvīdaḥ vedāvidyā vijñeyo na bhavatītī siddham | TP, 1.3.38.
85 madhvādiṣy asaṁbhavād anadhikāraṇa jaiminiḥ | BSB, 1.3.31.
87 vasūnām evaiko bhāvtē 'tyādināprāpyapalatvat | prāptapadaṇāṃ devāṇāṁ madhvāvidvidyāśv anadhikāraṇa jaiminīr manyate | BSB, 1.3.31. Olivelle (1996) 120.
89 jyotiṣi bhāvaḥ ca | BSB, 1.3.32.
90 jyotiṣi sarvajñātve bhāvaḥ ca | ādityapraśāye ntarbhāvavat tajñāna sar-vavastūnām antarbhāvāt | nityasiddhatvaḥ ca vidyānām | BSB, 1.3.32.
91 bhāvaḥ tu bādarāyaṇo ’sti hi | BSB, 1.3.33.
92 phalaviśeṣabhaḥvai prāptapadaṇāṁ apī devānaḥ madhvādiṣy apy adhiśčaṁ bādarāyaṇo manyate | asti hi prakāśavisēṣaḥ | BSB, 1.3.33.
93 yāvat sevā pare tatva tāvat sukhaviśeṣatā | saṁbhavāc ca prakāśaṣya param ekamṛte harim | teṣām sāmarthya-yogāc ca devānaḥ apy upāsanāṁ | sarvam vidihiyate nityam sarvayajñādikarma ca ’ti skandā | BSB, 1.3.33.
94 uktaphalānaḥdhisthāramātraṁ jaiminimatam | ato na tanmatavīrodeḥ | BSB, 1.3.33
95 . . . tāratamyaṁ visuktīgam | AB, 3.3.
96 yathā yathā ’dhiśkarī viśiyate evaṃ mukti-vānanda viśiyate | BSB, 3.3.33.
97 antyajā api ye bhaktā nāmājñānaḥdhiśkarīnaḥ | BSB, 1.1.1. antyajā varṇābhāyāḥ | TP, 1.1.1. Jayatirtha explained that antyaja meant “excluded from the class system.”

4 MADHVĀCĀRYA’S EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE LIMITATIONS OF PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

1 For a summary of this account about Śaṅkarācārya, see B.J. Malkovsky, The Role of Divine Grace in the Soteriology of, Śaṅkarācārya (2001): p. 12, footnote 60. Although Śaṅkarācārya did not become a female, he became a king and had sex, an experience that was unavailable to him as a celibate monk.
There has been much debate about the reification of “Hinduism” and the difficulty in ascertaining its purported basic beliefs. By using the term I do not mean to suggest that such lists or basic doctrines can be made easily. Instead, I am using it as a broad category within which one would find Mādhva Vedānta. See H. von Stietencron, “Hinduism: On the Proper Use of a Deceptive Term,” in G. Sontheimer and H. Kulke (eds), Hinduism Reconsidered. Manohar: Delhi, 2001, p. 32–53, for a comprehensive analysis of this controversy.

For a number of instances of this kind of social mobility, see W. L. Rowe, “The New Cauhāns: a Caste Mobility Movement in North India.” In J. Silverberg (ed.), Social Mobility in the Caste System in India. The Hague: Mouton, 1968.


I am reliant upon A. Sharma, Hinduism for Our Times. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 43 for these citations from the Māṇava-dharmaśāstras.


āhur apy uttamastrīnāṃ adhikārāṃ tu vaidike | yathorvasī yamī caiva sacyādyāś ca tathāparā | BSB, 1.1.1.

āhur iti | tathā parā munistrīyo narādikulājās ca | TP, 1.1.1. narādikulājās ceti | taduktaṃ tātparyanirṇaye ekonatrimśedhyaye | devyo munistrīyas caiva narādikulājāpi | Rāghavendratīrtha, Bhāvadīpa, 1.1.1.


BSB, 2.2.

iti vidyāpatiḥ samyaksamayānāṃ nirākṛtāṃ | cakāra nijabhaktānāṃ buddhisānatasiddhayā | AV, 2.2.9.

vitaṇḍā tu satām anyais tatvam eṣu nigūhitam… | KL, 4 Vitaṇḍā (captious objection) is with good people and others who are not good. When the debate is among these others who are not good, then one’s own truth is hidden.

samastāvāndinādragajaprabhadgadaḥ caranavanyāṃ pratipakṣakānśayā | vedadvisāṁ yāḥ prathamāh samāyayau savādīsinho ‘tra sa buddhisāgara | MV, 5.8.

vaiśeṣikavīṣeṣajñō vādīsmābhidhidho dvijaḥ | mahīṁ vijitya samprāpto buddhāgamyam buddhisāgara | Panditācārya, Bhāvaprakāṣika, 5.8.


See Chapter 3.

NOTES


25 The most well known editions are Govindācārya’s (Bangalore: Akhila Bharata Madhwa Mahamandala, 1969–1974) and Prabhanjanachārya’s (Bangalore: Sri Vyasa Madhwa Seva Pratisthana, 1999).

26 Work remains to be done about the print runs of these texts.


29 This was found on the Dvaita Home Page (http://www.dvaita.org/stotra/index.html) but has since been removed.


31 vijñeyaḥ paraṁ brahma jñāpikā paramā ānādianityā sā tac ca vinā tāṁ sa gamyate iti kātyāyanaśruti | VTV.

32 na coccāraṇakāla eva varṇānāṁ upatīrī itī vācyam | VTV. The term “varṇa” has a broad semantic range that includes both “class” and “phoneme.”

33 Descriptions of Purānic time can be found in any introduction to Hinduism such as K. Klostermaier (1994).

34 nārāyaṇādīvinispanṇam jñānam kṛtyuge sthitam | kincittadanyathā jātaṁ tretāyāṁ dvapare ‘khilam | BSB, 0.

35 dvāpare sarvatra jñāna ākūlibhūte tannirṇayāya brahmarudrendrādhibharrhito bhagavanānārāyana . . . | BSB, 0.


38 A lengthier account of this event can be found in my article, “When is a Brahmin a brahmabandhu, an unworthy or wicked Brahmin? Or When is the adhikārin, Eligible One, anadhikārin, Ineligible?” Method and Theory in the Study of Religion, 13 (2001): 82–90.


40 na tāvatā kāmacārāṇāṁ jñāne ’dhikāraḥ | BSB, 3.4.17.

41 A portion of this paragraph has been published in Tattvavāda.
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