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Viṣṇu's Children

Prenatal life-cycle rituals in South India

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with a DVD by Ute Hüsken and Manfred Krüger

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Contents

Preface	7
Introduction	13
1 The <i>Daśavidhahetunirūpaṇa</i>	23
1.1 On Vaikhānasa literature	24
1.2 The author Śrīnivāsa Dīkṣita	29
1.3 Pārthasārathi Bhaṭṭācārya, editor of the <i>Daśavidhahetunirūpaṇa</i>	34
1.4 The <i>Daśavidhahetunirūpaṇa</i> in its literary context	37
2 Rituals in the <i>Daśavidhahetunirūpaṇa</i>	53
2.1 Domestic ritual and temple ritual in the <i>Daśavidhahetunirūpaṇa</i>	53
2.1.1 The Vaikhānasas' entitlement to perform temple ritual	53
2.1.2 Temple priests as devalakas	54
2.2 Vaikhānasa life-cycle rituals (saṃskāra)	64
2.2.1 Prenatal life-cycle rituals (garbhasaṃskāra)	71
2.2.2 Viṣṇubali	78
2.2.3 Garbhavaṣṇavatva and viṣṇubali in the <i>Tātparyacintāmaṇi</i>	102
2.2.4 Viṣṇubali and pañcasamskāra	105
2.2.5 Viṣṇubali as the Vaikhānasas' "taking refuge in Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa"	124
2.2.6 Summary	140
3 Branding for Vaikhānasas in the 19 th and 20 th centuries	143
3.1 Conflicts: enforced branding	143
3.1.1 Evidence in the texts	143
3.1.2 Śrīperumbudūr and Vānamāmalai	146
3.1.3 Going to court: the Singhaperumāl Kōyil case	151
3.1.4 Sons and slaves	158
4 Saṃskāra performance in the early 21 st century	161
4.1 Ritual handbooks (prayoga, paddhati)	162
4.2 Rites not specific to saṃskāras	162
4.3 The two ritual handbooks used during the performances	167
4.3.1 <i>Sūtrānukramaṇikā</i>	168
4.3.2 <i>Pūrvaprayoga</i>	170
4.3.3 Tabular comparison of the viṣṇubali sections	171
4.3.4 Comparison of the two ritual handbooks	185
4.4 Actual performance: three examples	189
4.4.1 Comparison of the scene of the three performances	191
4.4.2 Table: a comparison of the structure of the three performances	205

4.4.3 A comparative description of the three performances	206
4.5 Factors behind ritual variance.....	222
4.5.1 Text and performance	222
4.5.2 Mistakes in ritual	225
4.5.3 The role of the ṛhaspati	227
4.5.4 Saṅkalpa as transfer of agency	228
4.5.5 Power and status	231
4.5.6 Ritual practice and the meaning attributed to the ritual	232
4.6 On ritual competence: the ṛhaspati	233
4.6.1 Traditional Brahmanic training	235
4.6.2 A classical expert.....	237
4.6.3 From small town to big city.....	239
4.6.4 A modern scholar priest.....	242
4.6.5 Vaikhānasa training institutions	245
4.6.6 Ritual knowledge	251
5 Variation in life-cycle rituals and the stability of tradition	257
5.1 The historical context of the <i>Daśavidhahetunirūpaṇa</i>	257
5.2 Ritual and power struggles	260
5.3 Strategies of integration and demarcation	264
5.4 The role of the saṃskāras—from śākhā to jāti.....	266
5.5 On the rigidity of rituals	269
Sanskrit texts	273
Secondary literature.....	279
Appendix 1: Tabular view of six Guruparamparās	295
Appendix 2: Text of the DVD booklet.....	301
Appendix 3: Text of the “Introduction” to the DVD.....	309
Abbreviations	313
Index.....	315

Preface

Looking back at the beginnings of the research that was to become this book with DVD I see that circumstances and material that turned up unexpectedly guided me as much as the research plan I designed originally. In spite of the clear research proposal necessitated by the literary genre of applications to a research funds granting institution, the actual outcome of my work was not predicted therein. First the book and then the DVD took shape in very dynamic processes. They became what they are now because I decided where to go while I was on my way.

When I set out in 1996 for my encounter with the South Indian Brahmin group called Vaikhānasa, not much had been published about their present-day communities and ritual practices. Until then this group had been treated mainly as a textual tradition of a relatively recent Vedic school. I became aware of the Vaikhānasas' living tradition first through Pārthasārathi Bhaṭṭācārya's letter to Willem Caland, which Caland published in his preface to his edition of the *Vai-khānasaśrautasūtra* ("A short note on the Vaikhānasasūtra"; Caland/Vīra 1941: xxviii-xxx). In his letter Pārthasārathi Bhaṭṭācārya emphasised that the present day Vaikhānasas are temple priests with a rich ritual literature, and that they are in several respects distinct from other vaiṣṇava groups.

Then Gérard Colas' erudite book *Viṣṇu, ses images et ses feux. Les métamorphoses du dieu chez les Vaikhānasa* was published in 1996. This enlightening and exhaustive study of the Vaikhānasas' texts on temple rituals pulled me further into investigating this group's textual heritage along with their contemporary ritual practice. However, trained mainly as a philologist, texts were my first points of reference. In order to collect hitherto unknown texts of this tradition, I applied for a travel grant which was generously granted by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). So I spent eight busy weeks in early 1998 in South India, visited many centres of Vaikhānasa activities in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, and collected two big trunks full of Vaikhānasa publications. Back in Germany I applied for a Habilitandenstipendium, which was granted by the DFG in 2000. This stipend enabled me to visit those scholars who had already done work on the Vaikhānasa tradition, namely Professor Gérard Colas in Paris and Professor Guy R. Welbon in Philadelphia. Both contacts were invaluable for my further research, not only because these scholars generously shared their

knowledge with me, but also because they helped me immensely in refining my research questions.

I then set out for another research trip to South India, this time for eight months. The “heart” of this book is based on the Sanskrit text *Daśavidhahetuni-rūpaṇa*, which I read in Chennai with the Sanskrit Paṇḍit Professor Śatakopan at the Kuppusvami Shastri Research Institute (KSRI).¹ He not only helped me understand difficult passages of the text, but also gave me a first introduction into South Indian Vaiṣṇavism,

In South India I spent my time not only in libraries and in diverse Indological research institutes, but also in following several invitations to witness, document, and participate in domestic Vaikhānasa life-cycle rituals. A. Rangacharyulu and Dr S. Muttubhaṭṭar are two people who call for special thanks. They established valuable contacts for me with several families and with Vaikhānasa communities in South India. Rangacharyulu in Vijayawada, president of the “Sri Vaikhanasa Samajam,” helped me in many ways. He introduced me to his uncle, the late Anantacarya Padmanabha, a kind person and rich source of knowledge, and he also arranged for me to witness and document two viṣṇubali performances in Vijayawada. Parts of the video coverage of these two events are presented on the accompanying DVD. S. Muttubhaṭṭar, Sanskrit lecturer at the Vivekananda Sanskrit College in Chennai, kindly put me into contact with the Vaikhānasa association “Sri Vaikhanasa Divya Vivardhini Sabha” in Tirumalai (Andhra Pradesh) and its secretary, the late D.V. Chari. He also established contact for me to the Vaikhānasa family in Cidambaram, where I took still pictures of a performance of the prenatal life-cycle ritual known as viṣṇubali. The viṣṇubali ritual is central to this book. Some of these pictures are also presented on the DVD. Moreover, S. Muttubhaṭṭar patiently discussed with me all of my questions, large and small, regarding the Vaikhānasa tradition.

During my stay in India, when the opportunities arose, I set out for diverse domestic rituals, equipped first with a borrowed, then with my own video and still cameras, as well as with an audio tape recorder. Although in the beginning I had nothing but a vague plan for “using” my documentation, I recorded whatever I could. And in fact, the repeated listening to and viewing of my documentation helped me immensely in understanding and analysing the performances.

Many of the performers and Vaikhānasa Paṇḍits I met had a great interest in making information available to me, and were open with me even with regard to legal cases over who could perform the rituals (see esp. 3.1). Some of the priests

¹ I also want to thank the always friendly and cheerful staff of the KSRI, especially Dr Kameshvari, Dr Balasubramaniam, Dr Vasudevan, and Mrs Lalita.

even took me along with them, so that I became familiar with their actual working conditions, and with South Indian vaiṣṇava rituals in general, which was at that time an entirely new field to me. It was certainly not always an easy task for all those who helped me: as a single woman and foreign scholar, I am sure that I often behaved improperly, even if it was just out of ignorance. Moreover, I was not in command of the local languages Tamil or Telugu. Therefore my direct communication was often restricted to those among the actors who spoke English, who then also acted as interpreters. And if all else failed, I had to manage with Sanskrit. I was and still am amazed by the great hospitality and generosity of many people who, although we never met before, invited me to stay in their house, and to share their water and food.

Back in Germany I submitted my thesis in German, but decided to publish a reworked version in English, in order to make it accessible to the many people who so generously shared their thoughts and time with me.

In 2006 I had the chance to re-visit some of the places and people, and could collect some more information especially on the legal cases pertaining to ritual performance in southern Tamil Nadu (see 3.1.2). At that time I also got the consent of the concerned participants to publishing the audio-visual material and was able to clarify some more aspects of the performances I had witnessed and documented. And, to my great joy, I met Govinda, son of Balaji and Shrividya in Cidambaram, a “child of Viṣṇu,” whose prenatal life-cycle ritual viṣṇubali I had witnessed five years earlier.

Will Sweetman (New Zealand) kindly agreed to do a draft translation into English and to go through the work again, after I had made some changes. The collaborative research program on “The Dynamics of Ritual” provided the stimulating intellectual background for many revisions of the work and the funds for the draft translation. The discussions there encouraged me even more to publish the edited audio-visual material along with the book. Anand Mishra and Bao Do (both Heidelberg) helped me at various stages of the production of this book. Finally, the DFG granted the funds for producing and publishing the book with DVD, and the experienced cameraman and cinematographer Manfred Krüger produced the DVD with me.

The materials on which this work is based are diverse, and so are the methods applied. In this book, being part of the series “Ethno-Indology,” a combination of textual and contextual approaches are employed (see Michaels 2005a). First the texts are taken as witness of the tradition. Most of the works dealt with here are Vaikhānasa texts and thus self-representations, which in part are oriented inwardly, but in part also towards others. Here, especially the *Daśavidhahetunirūpaṇa*, and the Vaikhānasas’ ritual literature in Sanskrit occupy the central

place (for this study only printed texts, not manuscripts, have been drawn on). In dealing with these texts I follow Colas who says (2005: 32):

Ritual handbooks make no claim to be perfect works either from a linguistic or literary point of view. ... Therefore, a philological approach focussing exclusively on classical grammatical and linguistic criteria is less appropriate to their study.

As the Sanskrit texts dealt with here are mainly written to communicate subject matter which should be comprehensive to ritual practitioners, and as they are to be read and understood in close connection with practice (see Colas 2005b: 32), I decided not to correct the occasional “irregularities” of the language,² especially as these “irregularities” are no obstacles to understanding the content. The evident “irregularities” of the Sanskrit used in the Vaikhānasa ritual texts that I look at are the result of the dynamics of the non-classical, living priestly Sanskrit (see Deshpande 1996). Unfortunately, only in very few cases can the texts dealt with here be chronologically classified. The order in which they are presented is therefore determined by their content. Moreover, as many of these texts are preserved only as short citations, they cannot be reconstructed as they were structured as complete texts (see esp. 2.2.3–6).

However, since this work relies on the study of the relevant texts and on fieldwork, the frame of mind that guides this work is based not only on the (seemingly) stable textual representations, but also on my interaction with those people who “own” and perform these rituals today, and to whom these rituals are meaningful constituents of their identity. My research confirmed that ethnography and ethnology can help gain a better understanding of what is not obvious in the texts. However, being aware that ethnography can also be misleading because we might be tempted to read ancient texts in the light of present day practices (see Colas 2005b: 28f.), I present the diverse material and its analysis separately and only combine the findings in the final section of the book. John Strong calls this method “exegetical exploration” (Strong 1992: xii): not a single text or other material, but a particular issue is focused on for presenting and discussing the problematics of a given tradition. The effort to understand these issues is further developed “by the perspectives of different contexts and co-texts” (Strong 2004: xv). Nevertheless, what I present, in the book as well as on the DVD, is my perspective and interpretation of situations and texts, adding just another point of view to the perspectives of the members of the Vaikhānasa tra-

2 Sanskrit terms and texts are transcribed according to the standard conventions. Tamil terms and textual passages are transcribed according to the conventions used by the Madras Tamil Lexicon. In transcribing these texts, which are printed in Telugu, in Grantha and in Devanāgarī script, I follow the texts as printed, and make no corrections to the spelling.

dition.³ I decided to change the names of those persons mentioned in the section 3.1 dealing with past and ongoing controversial issues. In contrast to that, in the section 4.3 on the ritual events I attended the names of the actors are given: they invited me, they agreed to being filmed, they received a copy of the unedited film after the event, and they act. So we should learn their names.

The DVD that goes with this book presents the video coverage and still pictures of three viṣṇubali performances. I perceive this visual representation also as a “way of knowing” (see Grimes 2006: 40), which at the same time grants access to data. Apart from the introduction to the DVD, I chose to use subtitles instead of voice-over, in order to retain as much of the sensorial experience of the ritual as possible. The DVD thus adds sound, colour, and motion to the textual descriptions and interpretations of the events. I wish to convey that the rituals talked about and analysed are not performed in a remote past, but that they are integral part of the everyday religious life of those who perform them.⁴ However, when I shot the rites, I was a novice in the field of videoing, and in the beginning I planned to use the coverage mainly as a visual notebook. The DVD is not a documentary of the events, although one of the performances is given in full. Instead, I decided to arrange the material in a way that reflects my analysis, guided by a comparative perspective.⁵ The material presented, edited and already pre-interpreted as it may be, gives the reader/viewer the possibility “second level participation.”

I wish to thank all the performers and participants in the rituals, who not only so generously invited me to take part at these important events, but who also patiently bore with my ignorance and shared their knowledge, opinions and experience with me: K. Balaji Bhattachar and his wife Shrividya, their families, and the priest Katukallur S. Manivanna Bhattacharya with assistants, Jvala Narasimhacaryulu and his wife Kalyani with their families, and the priest Parankusha

3 However, it is important to note that the views and perspectives represented in the book as well as on the DVD are for the most part male ritual specialists’ perspectives: men authored and transmitted the ritual texts, men are the main agents in the performances (as priest and as officiator), and men offered their interpretations of the rituals to me. The women’s voices and their understanding of the rituals were not within the scope of my investigation, but are certainly not less important than male perspectives.

4 The attitude I aimed at is perhaps best described by what Peter Köpping calls ‘surrender’: “Surrender implies the attentiveness with which we listen to musical performances, or that is characteristic of lovers’ relationships, this relationship which leads not to a losing of self but to finding of it” (Köpping 2002: 259; quoted in Rao 2003: 20).

5 A detailed description and suggestions on how to view the DVD is given as Appendix 2 in this book.

Rangacaryasvami and assistants, Shrinivasa Cakravartin, his wife Vasudhara and their families, and the priest Parankusha Vasudevacharyulu and his assistants.

Obviously, this work would not have come into existence without the help of many individuals—only some of them can be mentioned here by name. I am especially indebted to Dr S. Muttubhattar (Chennai) and A. Rangacharyulu (Vijayawada), who helped me in many ways. Thanks are also due to Dr S. Sudarshan, the late D.V. Chari, P. Jagganatha Charyulu and his family, Dr Lakshmi Narasimha Bhatta, P. Bhatta Brahmacharyulu, Dr M. Narasimhachari, Dr K.K.A. Venkatachari, Dr M.A. Venkatakrishnan, Venkatakrishnan Parthasarathy Bhattacar, Ch.B.R.K. Charyulu, A.G. Krishnamacharyulu, Dr Kameshwari, N.S. Parthasarathy Bhattachar, Dr Dominic Goodall, Parthasarathi Bhattacharya and Gopalakrishna Bhattacharya, Gopalakrishnabhattacharya, Anjana und Michael Das-Hasper, G. Prabhakara Charyulu, S. Raghuvirabhattacharya, P.V. Ramanacharyulu, the late Vedantam Ananta Padmanabhacharyulu Garu, Sylvia und Raghu Stark-Raghunathan, P.K. Varadha Bhattachar and his family, Nalluru Vikhanasa Bhattacharyulu, N.S. Dikshitalu, Sthapathy A.B.L. Guhanathan and Mrs Lalita.

Especially Reinhold Grünendahl, Gérard Colas, Guy R. Welbon, Siglinde Dietz and Thomas Oberlies helped me with fruitful discussions, Alexis Sander-son kindly commented on some of my translations, and towards the final stage of the making of the DVD I profited a lot from valuable suggestions by Srilata Raman, Ronald L. Grimes, Donna L. Seamone, Darrell Grimes, Anne Peters, and Erik de Maaker. Moreover, I am grateful to Will Sweetman who prepared the draft translation of the book into English, to Manfred Krüger who produced the DVD with me, and to Malcolm Green who checked the language of the DVD's subtitles. Among the many friends and good colleagues I wish to especially thank Jörg Gengangel and Axel Michaels who brought me to Heidelberg where I found very stimulating working conditions in the Collaborative Research Centre on "The Dynamics of Ritual" (SFB 619) while I worked on this book.

This book with DVD has been made possible through the generous funding of the DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft), first with a travel grant in 1998, then with a Habilitandenstipendium from 2000 to 2002, and finally by funding the publication of the book along with the DVD. I would also like to thank the University of Oslo for a generous contribution to the funding to this book with DVD.

Introduction

शङ्खचक्राङ्कितभुजान्वृणीयादन्यसूत्रिणः ।
गर्भे मास्यष्टमे विष्णुबलिं कुर्याद्यथाविधि ॥
नारायणः स्वयं गर्भे मुद्रां धारयते निजाम् ।
तत्करस्थेन चक्रेण शङ्खेन प्रथितौजसा ॥
करोति चक्रशङ्खाङ्कं शिशोर्वे ब्राह्मूलयोः ।
वैखानसेन सूत्रेण स्यादयं गर्भवैष्णवः ॥
वैष्णवं सूत्रमेतद्धि सर्वसिद्धिकरं परम् ।
वैखानसाश्च मत्पुत्रा दत्तपुत्राश्च दीक्षिताः ॥

क्रियाधिकार ३६.४२-४५

The present work examines and analyses the ritual tradition of the Vaikhānasas, a Brahmanic community in South India.⁶ The members of this group serve as hereditary priests in Viṣṇu temples, large and small, in the Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.⁷ The repeated reformulations of the Vaikhānasas' identity as a group of ritual specialists dealt with in this book illuminate the development of this Indian religious tradition from the premodern period to the present in adaptation to and encounter with changes in the socio-religious environment. I concentrate on what makes a person eligible to perform the rituals in Viṣṇu temples: does birth, or initiation, create the ideal intermediary between humans and the god? This controversy has been ongoing for centuries among South Indian devotees of the god Viṣṇu (Vaiṣṇavas). For several centuries the discussion centered around the question of whether the Vaikhānasa priests must undergo an initiation including a branding on the upper arms, or whether their life-cycle rituals, and in particular the prenatal life-cycle ritual viṣṇubali, make them eligible to perform temple rituals. As hereditary temple priests the Vaikhānasas' stance is explicit: *only they* are Viṣṇu's children, preor-

6 The Vaikhānasas refer to themselves in English as the "Vaikhānasa community." This community shows several features of a Brahmanic subcaste, such as transregional endogamy, commensality, and the hereditary profession as temple priests or as āyurvedic doctors.

7 There are also temples in Kerala and Orissa which follow the Vaikhānasa ritual system.

dained for temple service already before birth. Others, who receive an initiation, are only Viṣṇu's adopted children—or even his slaves.

In this book several perspectives on viṣṇubali, the central Vaikhānasa ritual in question, will be examined. First, I will deal with the changes in the interpretation and—along with it—in the description of the “proper performance” of this ritual in Vaikhānasa Sanskrit texts from the the mid-14th century to the 20th century CE. Second, three concrete examples of local conflicts about the question of whether the Vaikhānasas require initiation will be presented and analysed. Third, three examples of present day performances of viṣṇubali will be presented, documented on the accompanying DVD and interpreted in the light of the relation between text and performance, highlighting the importance of the acting priest's ritual competence.

In all parts of this book, an understanding of the rituals in their socio-religious contexts is aimed at. It is presupposed here that there always exists an interdependence and close interaction of ritual and context, and that (when need arises) ritual performances and the meaning attributed to these rituals are readily adapted to changing circumstances. One main reason for this, I argue, is that the rituals dealt with here are “lived religion”⁸ and as such are practices that would become extinct if they lost contact with and relevance for the living world.⁹ This detectable flexibility of ritual stands, however, in stark contrast to the Vaikhānasas' own traditional view. Their texts assume a continuity from time immemorial: the god Viṣṇu incarnated in the form of the school's founder, Vikhanas, and taught the authoritative texts of this tradition, the Vaikhānasasūtras and the content of the Vaikhānasasamhitās to four sages, the Ṛṣis. They then wrote down the content of these texts in abbreviated form. The traditional view is that since the time of the Ṛṣis the Vaikhānasas' ritual texts have been passed down in this

8 I do not, however, subscribe to the view that all ritual is necessarily religious ritual.

9 On the extinction of ritual systems, see Hüsken 2007b. I use the term “ritual” in this work in a rather narrow sense, because the concrete actions I deal with *are* rituals in a narrow sense: they are actions characterized by repetition and a verbal as well as cognitive framing, they are formally stylized, they refer to scripts and models, they are perceived and enacted as different from everyday behaviour, they are invested with (diverse) meaning(s), they consist of building-blocks (rites), they are culturally constructed and traditionally sanctioned, they take place at a specific place and/or time, they are structured, ordered, sequenced, and rule-governed (see Snoek 2006). Moreover, unlike Grimes (for example, in 2006b: 13), I use the term “ritual” for the idea as well as for the specific action. “Rite” here denotes an element, a building block within a ritual. However, “ritual” is not a term usually used in the Vaikhānasas' discourse. There, rather the type of ritual is named. One example is saṃskāra, which I refer to as a “life-cycle ritual.” On the term and concept “ritual” in South Asian languages, see Michaels 2006.

form and the rituals have been performed in accordance with these texts ever since.¹⁰

From a textual scholar's point of view, however, it is evident that a major change has in fact taken place in this tradition: a vedic "branch" (*sākhā*) with its own sūtra turned into a community of temple priests with an extensive literature on temple ritual. The oldest extant works of the Vaikhānasas do not even mention their profession as vaiṣṇava temple priests: the Vaikhānasasūtras are ritual texts which describe the solemn sacrifices and the domestic rituals for this vedic branch. In these works the cult of Viṣṇu as Nārāyaṇa is not yet prominent, although a sectarian tendency towards vaiṣṇavism is discernible (see Krick 1977). Only in inscriptions from the 9th century CE onwards are the Vaikhānasas described as ritual specialists who also serve god on behalf of others.¹¹ It appears that it was also in this period that the Vaikhānasas began to compose texts for temple rituals, the so-called Vaikhānasasamhitās. The history of the Vaikhānasas during the centuries which elapsed after the formulation of the sūtras (3rd /4th cent. CE) and before the formulation of these inscriptions and the early samhitās is unknown.¹² However, as temple priests they produced many texts on temple ritual, but also on the domestic rituals of their tradition. For it is above all with their specific domestic rituals, which they derive from the *Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra*, that the Vaikhānasas identify themselves, and distinguish themselves from other (ritual) traditions. This emphasis on the specific domestic ritual tradition is inextricably bound up with a shift in the balance of religious power in South Indian vaiṣṇavism, which made itself felt after the 12th century: the so-called Śrīvaiṣṇavas established themselves as the dominant power among the Vaiṣṇavas; at the same time this tradition opened itself also to non-Brahmanic groups. As a consequence of this development the Vaikhānasas appear to have been increasingly marginalized as temple priests. The prenatal life-cycle rituals (*garbhasamskāra*) of the Vaikhānasas then played a key role in their efforts to assert their position as ritual specialists in temples through a reformulation of their religious and ritual identity. This change, manifest in the change in the interpretation and performance of the prenatal life-cycle ritual viṣṇubali ("the offering to Viṣṇu"), is presented and analysed here.

Some of the questions guiding this investigation are the following: How ought we to understand the notion of "unchanging rituals" in the Vaikhānasas?

10 On the legendary origin of the Vaikhānasas see the detailed account in Colas 1996: 16ff.

11 See Colas 1996: 58ff.; see also Pathak 1959.

12 It is even uncertain, whether we in fact can speak of an uninterrupted Vaikhānasa tradition (see Colas 1996: 42–44).

case? Why is this notion of the rituals' stability so important for the self-perception and representation of this group? What this group perceives as an attack on the "core" of their identity is of most interest here. It is evident that in the context at hand, rituals—and especially rituals of initiation—are an important marker of identity.¹³ These rituals serve to determine the boundaries of the group.¹⁴ However, as rituals not only reflect, represent and alter identity, but also are subject to changes themselves, the present work addresses both the question of the function of rituals in the formation, maintenance, and alteration of identity, as well as the question of how rituals are transformed as a consequence of a changing self-perception of a group in a specific historical and local setting.

Printed Sanskrit texts of the Vaikhānasa tradition form the starting point of the investigation. Here, this work breaks new ground with respect to the texts on which it is based. Since the mid-twentieth century Indian and Western indological research has engaged with the Vaikhānasas mainly as a vedic tradition, based solely on their sūtras (see 1.1). An exchange of letters between the Sanskritist Willem Caland and the Vaikhānasa scholar Pārthasārathi Bhaṭṭācārya (see 1.3) in the late 1930s brought the extensive literature and the living ritual traditions of the Vaikhānasas to attention in the West.¹⁵ Between 1944 and 1959 Pārthasārathi Bhaṭṭācārya published several articles, and later Rāghavaprāsada Caudharī and Lakṣmīnārasimha Bhaṭṭa likewise published several shorter works on the Vaikhānasa tradition.¹⁶ Prompted by Willem Caland, some scholars of the Utrecht school also worked on this tradition's texts on temple ritual, the Vaikhānasasamhitās. Thus, Jan Gonda gave attention to the change in the use of the mantras prescribed in the sūtras in some of the samhitās,¹⁷ and in 1965 Tennis Goudriaan published what remains so far the only complete translation of a Vaikhāna-

13 The Vaikhānasas' specific identity as a group of ritual specialists is here understood as one of many social identifications, which together constitute the Vaikhānasas' social identity. "Vaikhānasa identity" thus refers to their orientation to, and interaction with others, as well as to their recognition and acknowledgement by others. As the demarcation line between both self and other is here always defined through ritual, the Vaikhānasas will in what follows be treated as first and foremost representatives of a ritual tradition, even though other factors (theology, soteriology, etc.) also constitute important components of their religious identity.

14 Rituals can establish a group's boundary as forms of social practice (see Mol 1978a: 7) or even, as in the present case, as manipulation of the body through branding and wearing of a visible sign on the forehead.

15 See especially Caland 1928, also the foreword in Caland/Vīra 1941.

16 See Caudharī 1967, 1972, 1986 and 1995; Bhaṭṭa 1972a and b; see also Gode 1961; Nārasimha Reddy 1983; Rāmānuja Tātācārya 1990.

17 See Gonda 1954 (234–262), 1972, 1977b, 1979 and 1981a.

sasamhitā into a western language.¹⁸ Almost two decades later V. Varadachari, in his seminal work *Āgamas and South Indian Vaiṣṇavism* (Madras, 1982) offered a precise and insightful summary of the contents of many edited and unedited Vaikhānasa texts on temple ritual.¹⁹ Since the late 1970s, the French scholar Gérard Colas has worked continuously on these texts in particular. He studied the connection of the Vaikhānasasūtras to other texts of the same genre and probably of the same period,²⁰ discussed individual questions of rituals and the specific tradition of the Vaikhānasa school on the basis of their samhitās and other texts,²¹ and published a partial edition and translation of the *Vimānārcanakalpa*, the ritual text of this school most widely used in contemporary practice.²² The results of his dissertation on the Vaikhānasasamhitās²³ informed his seminal work, *Viṣṇu, ses images et ses feux. Les métamorphoses du dieu chez les Vaikhānasa* (1996). Therein he deals in detail with the ritual texts ascribed to the four mythical Ṛṣis.²⁴ The further extensive literature of the Vaikhānasas has nevertheless until now scarcely been studied;²⁵ still less has the contemporary situation of this vaiṣṇava group and its rich tradition been granted scholarly attention.²⁶

18 In addition Goudriaan dealt with the Vaikhānasa tradition in two articles in 1970 and 1973. For a review of Goudriaan's translation, see Brunner 1969.

19 In India in the 1990s two works were published, entitled *Vaikhānasāgama* (Ramachandra Rao 1990) and *Vaikhānasa Āgama Kośa* (1991; the series was continued 10 years later). These contain extracts from the samhitās, arranged according to content.

20 See Colas 1992 and 1994.

21 See Colas 1986a, 1986b, 1988, 1989 and 1992.

22 See Colas 1984b and 1986b.

23 See Colas 1995b.

24 On pp. 94–97 Colas presents a relative chronology of the Vaikhānasasamhitās and shows that the oldest group of samhitās was probably composed after the ninth century and before Vedāntadeśika (14th century). The newer samhitā texts are considerably more diverse, which makes even a preliminary dating virtually impossible.

25 Even though Caland had already been made aware of the *Daśavidhahetunirūpaṇa* by Pārthasārathi Bhaṭṭācārya (see Caland 1928: 235f.), this text was not subsequently dealt with (see also Ramachandra Rao 1990: 24–26). Of the extracanonical works, until now only the *Sūtrabhāṣya* of Nṛsiṃha Vājapeyin (Muttu 1996) and the *Mokṣopāyapradīpikā* (Colas 1985) have been studied.

26 At present, apart from Gérard Colas (see bibliography, s.v. Colas), only Guy R. Welbon (Philadelphia, U.S.A.) studies this tradition. From the 1960s he collected material on his many research visits to South India. He also photographed and filmed some rituals in Vijayawada and Machilipatnam (see Welbon 1984). Welbon's fieldwork in Andhra Pradesh was acknowledged in detail in an issue of the monthly journal *Vaikhānasapatrika* in the 1980s. He informed me in 1998 that he is writing a monograph on two great Vaikhānasa scholars of the 20th century, namely Pārthasārathi Bhaṭṭācārya (see 1.3) and Anantapadmanābhācāryulu Gāru (see 4.6.2).