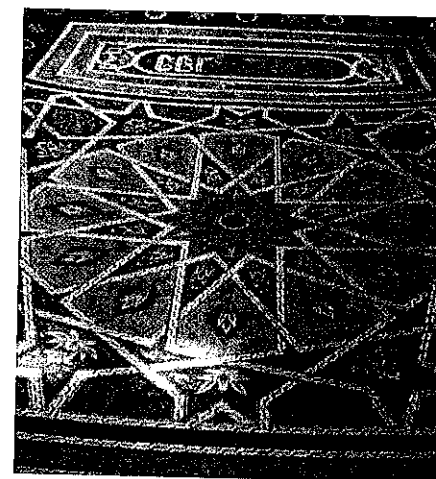


Middle East, Asian, Colonial & Postcolonial Studies
The Department of Oriental Studies, University of Turin, Italy
DOST Critical Studies

9

General Editor: *Alessandro Monti*



A ceiling in the Gorresio building (DOST)

This book was printed with financial support from the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Turin, the Dean of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Turin, the Department of Oriental Studies of the University of Turin, and the Regione Piemonte.

Tīrthayātrā

Essays in Honour
of Stefano Piano

Editorial Board
Pinuccia Caracchi
Antonella Serena Comba
Alessandra Consolaro
Alberto Pelissero



Edizioni dell'Orso
Alessandria

© 2010

Copyright by Edizioni dell'Orso s.r.l.
via Rattazzi, 47 15121 Alessandria
tel. 0131.252349 fax 0131.257567
e-mail: edizioniellorso@libero.it
<http://www.ediorso.it>

Realizzazione editoriale ed informatica di Arun Maltese (bear.am@savonaonline.it)

È vietata la riproduzione, anche parziale, non autorizzata, con qualsiasi mezzo effettuata, compresa la fotocopia, anche a uso interno e didattico. L'illecito sarà penalmente perseguibile a norma dell'art. 171 della Legge n. 633 del 22.04.41

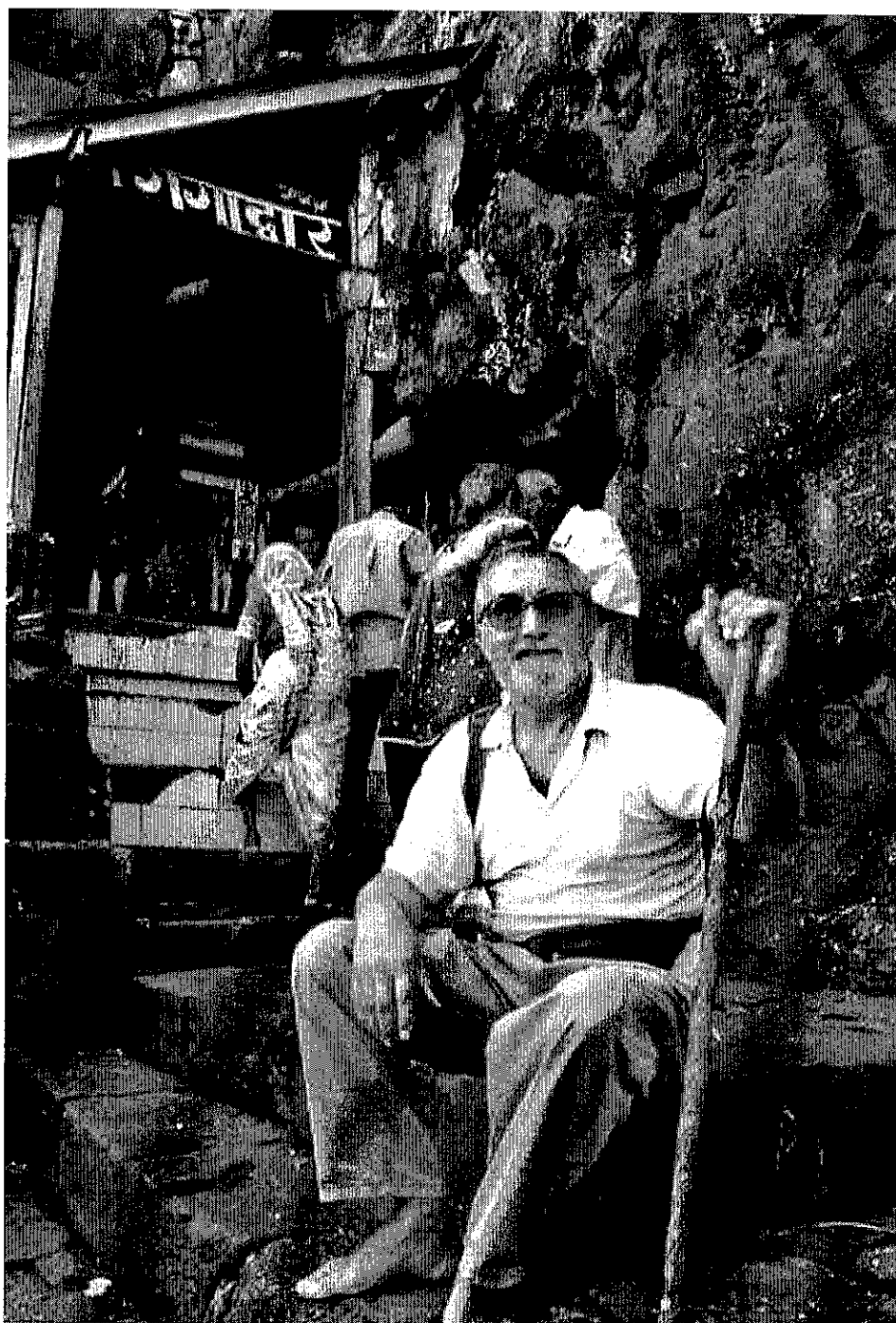
ISBN 978-88-6274-204-7

तीर्थसेवासु सत्सङ्गस्सत्सङ्गे निर्मला मतिः ।
निर्मलायां मतौ ज्ञानं ज्ञाने मुक्तिश्च जायते ॥

*tīrthasevāsu satsaṅgas satsaṅge nirmalā matiḥ
nirmalāyāṃ matau jñānaṃ jñāne muktiś ca jāyate*

Dalla permanenza presso i guadi sacri, si ha la compagnia dei buoni; essendovi la compagnia dei buoni, la mente si fa immacolata; divenuta immacolata la mente, vi è la conoscenza; quando vi sia la conoscenza, viene in essere la liberazione.

Śrīśaṅkarācāryacarita III, 44 (traduzione di Mario Piantelli)



Contents

Editorial Note	p. XI
List of Contributors	XIII
Tabula gratulatoria	XV
Bibliografia di Stefano Piano 1965-2009	XVII
Esterino Adami <i>Text-construction, register-shifting and social pragmatics in Indian English</i>	1
Hans T. Bakker <i>Rohitāgiri</i>	15
Giuliano Boccali <i>Mare e cielo stellato nel kāvya piū antico</i>	27
Maria Piera Candotti/Tiziana Pontillo <i>The autonomous process of denotation: Kātyāyana and Patañjali on the limits of analysis</i>	41
Pinuccia Caracchi <i>La kathā nel tempo e nell'eternità: note in margine a Rāmcāritmānas I, 33.2-34</i>	63
Claudio Cicuzza <i>Luang Pu Thuat: culto e adorazione di un santo buddhista thailandese</i>	85
Antonella Serena Comba <i>The Śivagītā and a manuscript of the Laghuśivapurāṇa</i>	101

VIII	Contents	
Alessandra Consolaro <i>The power of kathā in a secular world: Alka Saraogi's Koī bāt nahīn</i>	117	
Elena De Rossi Filibeck <i>La guida di Trugò recentemente ritrovata</i>	127	
Wendy Doniger <i>The control of addiction in ancient India</i>	137	
Svevo D'Onofrio <i>Il capitolo sui luoghi santi dello spirito (mānasatīrtha) nella versione persiana del Mahābhārata</i>	149	
Andrea Drocco <i>La concordanza verbale nelle costruzioni transitive al passato della braja-bhāṣā</i>	161	
Marco Franceschini <i>Guadi e demoni: il lato oscuro dei Tīrtha</i>	187	
Giorgio Renato Franci <i>Di fronte agli Yogasūtra. Interpretazioni e ideologie del terzo millennio</i>	199	
Laura Liberale <i>Teste indiane fra le nuvole</i>	213	
Bruno Lo Turco <i>Note sulla funzione cosmopoietica della Parola divina</i>	227	
David N. Lorenzen <i>Kabir and the secular state</i>	243	
Alessandro Monti <i>Storie junglee di donne birmane</i>	255	
Emanuela Panattoni <i>Apporti italiani nel tamil</i>	265	

Contents	IX
Shyam Manohar Pandey <i>Dei re e dei guru. Prime forme poetiche sūfi in hindī</i>	273
Alessandro Passi <i>The dunce, the pig, and the goddess's mantra</i>	289
Alberto Pelissero <i>Fenomeni di fondamentalismo all'interno di una religione considerata come sistema complesso: il revisionismo militante contro l'accademia ragionante</i>	305
Agata Pellegrini <i>Un tīrtha insolito a Palermo: il santuario di Santa Rosalia</i>	321
Mario Piantelli <i>On mahāvākya-s and Jesus' sayings. A few notes</i>	337
Antonio Rigopoulos <i>The sanctity of the audumbar in Mahārāṣṭra</i>	349
Tiziana Ripepi <i>A proposito di Kalyāṇa come avimuktakṣētra</i>	367
Daniela Rossella <i>Lo Śṛṅgārarasāṣṭaka attribuito a Kālidāsa (e qualche riflessione sul kāvya)</i>	377
Saverio Sani <i>Dhāman e svadhā: alcuni esempi rigvedici</i>	393
Marta Sernesi <i>To establish the qualities of the Master. Considerations on early bKa' brgyud hagiographical writings</i>	401
Francesco Sferra <i>La Anuttarāṣṭikā. Testo e traduzione</i>	425
Jagadamba Prasad Sinha <i>Professor Stefano Piano: a friend, philosopher and guide</i>	435
Abstracts	439

Editorial Note

Con questa raccolta di saggi si vuole rendere omaggio a Stefano Piano, indologo eminente, maestro della scuola indologica torinese, già Direttore del Dipartimento di Orientalistica dell'Università degli Studi di Torino, Presidente del Centro di Scienze religiose "Erik Peterson" dell'Università degli Studi di Torino, fondatore e coordinatore del dottorato di ricerca in Studi indologici e tibetologici, confluito come indirizzo nella Scuola di Studi euro-asiatici: indologia, linguistica, onomastica dell'Università degli Studi di Torino. L'opera testimonia la stima, l'affetto e la gratitudine di quanti, colleghi, discepoli e amici, hanno benevolmente accolto la nostra iniziativa.

Il nostro sentito ringraziamento va a quanti hanno contribuito con l'attivo interessamento e il concreto sostegno non solo finanziario alla realizzazione della Miscellanea, in primo luogo al Magnifico Rettore dell'Università degli Studi di Torino, Prof. Ezio Pelizzetti, al Preside della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università degli Studi di Torino, Prof. Lorenzo Massobrio, e al Direttore del Dipartimento di Orientalistica dell'Università degli Studi di Torino, Prof. Alessandro Monti. Un ringraziamento va anche alla Regione Piemonte.

Il Comitato Promotore

I.8 makes the Divine Teacher, at last come back to reign over all, proclaim, "I am the Alpha and the Omega". *Mutatis mutandis*, this is the very approach of *Vedāntasūtra* I.1.2.

It is hoped that there be some food for thought in all this.

The sanctity of the *audumbar* in Mahārāṣṭra

Antonio Rigopoulos

Botanical and Therapeutic Characteristics of the udumbara.

The cluster fig, Skt. *udumbara*, is a tree native to all of India. Identified as *Ficus glomerata* Roxb. it was subsumed under the larger group of *Ficus racemosa* Linn. in 1946¹. In Hindī it is known as *gūlar* or *ūmar*, in Bengālī as *jagya dumbar* (*jagya* = Skt. *yajña*, reminiscent of its sacrificial import), in Tamil as *atti*. In Gujarātī and Marāṭhī the tree's name is *umbar* or, more commonly, *audumbar*². An almost entirely glabrous tree, with ovate leaf-blades three to eight inches long shining on both surfaces, the *udumbara* is a large fig without aerial roots. Its wood is greyish-white or reddish-grey, soft and light, not durable. By comparison with other woods it is a wet, sappy wood, and its sap is said to be milky³. For this reason, the *udumbara* is called *kṣīrī* or *kṣīra-vṛkṣa* ("milky tree").

The tree produces an abundance of edible fruits two or three times a year⁴. The way in which it bears its fruit is noteworthy: the downy, reddish figs are mostly borne in clusters from the trunk and larger branches, and they are not found on the twigs as is usual⁵. The fruit does not hang from the tips of the leafy branches but is found in leafless clusters right against the main trunk of the tree itself. Typically, the fruit is full of crawling insects and is even said to be dangerous to eat⁶. The medicinal use of these insects

¹ M. F. Barrett, *The Case of the Vanishing Ficus racemosa*, in "Bulletin of the Torrey Botanical Club", vol. 73, no. 3, 1946, pp. 312-325.

² Whenever referring to the tree in the specific Marāṭhī milieu I will thus call it *audumbar* rather than *udumbara*.

³ See A. P. Benthall, *The Trees of Calcutta and Its Neighbourhood*, Thacker, Spink, Calcutta 1946, p. 420.

⁴ M. F. Barrett, *The Case of the Vanishing Ficus racemosa*, cit., p. 313. *Aitāreya Brāhmaṇa* 5.24.4 states that the *udumbara* ripens three times a year.

⁵ A. P. Benthall, *The Trees of Calcutta*, cit., p. 419.

⁶ See D. V. Cowen, *Flowering Trees and Shrubs in India*, Thacker & Co., Bombay 1970 (1st ed. 1950), p. 70; A. P. Benthall, *The Trees of Calcutta*, cit., p. 420.

sticking to the *udumbara* has been documented in recent fieldwork: traditional healers of Chhattisgarh use the dried insect powder in their herbal remedies and even use the insects feeding on the *udumbara* fruits as an alternative to the fruits themselves⁷. Due to its "milky nature", a common belief is that beneath any *udumbara* runs a hidden stream⁸.

The roots and figs of the *udumbara* are credited with therapeutic value. Especially its "golden juice" (*hema-dugdha*) is said to have healing properties⁹. Actually all parts of the tree are revered in one way or other as curative and are employed in native medicine: its leaves are used in the treatment of bilious affections; its bark is given to cattle in case of rinderpest (an infectious viral disease); its roots are used to cure diarrhoea and diabetes; its fruits are said to tone the stomach; its latex is utilised in case of piles and also applied on infected wounds and edemas to alleviate pain¹⁰. The stem bark extract of the *udumbara* is valued as a potent antioxidant and anti-inflammatory¹¹. Healers often use the decoction of the *udumbara*'s bark in cases of dysmenorrhoea, so as to cleanse the uterus¹². Noticeable is that the fruit of the *udumbara* is said to be astringent to bowels, styptic, tonic, and effective in the treatment of burning sensation¹³. Being a combination of earth and fire, the *udumbara* is mentioned as an astringent savour in Vāgbhaṭa's *Aṣṭāṅga-hṛdaya*: it is predominantly cold and stultifying, said to remove cholera and phlegm, and, being heavy, it is a blood purifier. It is also

⁷ See P. Oudhia, "Doomar or Gular (*Ficus glomerata*) as Medicinal Herb in Chhattisgarh, India. Research Note", in http://www.botanical.com/site/column_poudhia/127_doomar.html (2001, 2002, 2003).

⁸ See A. P. Benthall, *The Trees of Calcutta*, cit., p. 420. Rivers are often understood to come from trees, especially from their roots; see A. Feldhaus, *Water and Womanhood. Religious Meanings of Rivers in Maharashtra*, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford 1995, p. 112, note 23.

⁹ See K. D. Upadhyaya, "Indian Botanical Folklore", in S. S. Gupta (ed.), *Tree Symbol Worship in India. A New Survey of a Pattern of Folk-Religion*, Indian Publications, Calcutta 1965, p. 31.

¹⁰ See B. L. Malla, *Trees in Indian Art Mythology and Folklore*, Aryan Books International, New Delhi 2000, p. 86.

¹¹ V. P. Veerapur et al., "Ficus racemosa Stem Bark Extract: A Potent Antioxidant and a Probable Natural Radioprotector", in <http://ecam.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/nem119> (2007).

¹² It is also believed to cure hysteria and prevent abortion; see K. D. Upadhyaya, *Indian Botanical Folklore*, cit., p. 15.

¹³ P. Oudhia, "Doomar or Gular (*Ficus glomerata*) as Medicinal Herb in Chhattisgarh, India", cit.

reported to paralyse the crude matter and to be absorbent, lean, and extremely cleansing for the skin¹⁴.

With regard to the etymology of the term *udumbara*, the *Śata-patha Brāhmaṇa*, in connection with the preparation for the *agni-cayana* ritual, suggests the following: "Indra took his [Prajāpati's] vigour away and went away to the north: it became the *udumbara* tree" (7.4.1.39); "He said: 'Verily this one has lifted me from out of all evil'; and because he said 'he has lifted me out (*udabhārṣī*)', hence (the name) «*udumbhara*»; «*udumbhara*» doubtless being what is mystically called *udumbara*, for the gods love the mystic" (7.5.1.22)¹⁵. According to M. Mayrhofer, *udumbara* or *uḍumbara*¹⁶ is to be derived from an Austro-Asiatic root *ḍub* meaning "to swell up" and, according to Ch. H. Werba, from **ṛdū-bara-* "feuchte (d. i. saftige) Kraft habend/verleihend"¹⁷.

The udumbara in Vedic Literature.

Already in *Atharva Veda* 19.31 we find a *sūkta* to be used while fastening an *audumbara maṇi*, an amulet which was worn to force away poverty and hunger and to confer offspring and riches¹⁸. The ritual importance of the *udumbara* wood has been masterfully scrutinised by Ch. Minkowski, in an article which appeared in 1989¹⁹. As he has shown, in Vedic literature the

¹⁴ See D. Wujastyk, *The Roots of Āyurveda. Selections from Sanskrit Medical Writings*, Penguin, New Delhi 1998, pp. 272-277.

¹⁵ J. Eggeling (trans.), *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* ("The Sacred Books of the East"), 5 vols., Oxford 1882-1900, vol. 3, pp. 374, 395 (Reprint; Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1963, 1966, 1972, 1978).

¹⁶ Regarding the cerebralisation of the "d", see T. Burrow, *Spontaneous Cerebrals in Sanskrit*, in "Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies", vol. 34, no. 3, 1971, pp. 538-559.

¹⁷ M. Mayrhofer, *Kurzgefaßtes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen*, 4 vols., Heidelberg 1953-80, vol. 1, p. 104; C. H. Werba in M. Mayrhofer, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen*, vol. 1/3, Heidelberg 1988, p. 217.

¹⁸ See K. G. Zysk, *Medicine in the Veda. Religious Healing in the Veda. With Translations and Annotations of Medical Hymns from the Ṛgveda and the Atharvaveda and Renderings from the Corresponding Ritual Texts*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1998, p. 51. For a discussion of *maṇi* and *audumbara* as being metal or wood, see S. Einoo, *Studien zum Śrautaritual I*, in "Indo Iranian Journal", vol. 25, 1983, pp. 3-16; M. Witzel, *Ṛgvedisch udumbalā-*, in "Indo Iranian Journal", vol. 25, 1983, pp. 239-240.

¹⁹ C. Minkowski, *The udumbara and Its Ritual Significance*, in "Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasien", vol. 33, 1989, pp. 5-23.

udumbara is consistently identified as a source of abundance and nourishing strength/sap, that is, as *ūrj*. Among all trees, such identification is specific to the *udumbara*. Of the 107 different passages in the *Vedas* and *Brāhmaṇas* in which the term *udumbara* appears, 93 of these make an association between *udumbara* and *ūrj*. The exact phrase *ūrj vā udumbara* occurs 25 times in Vedic texts²⁰. The *udumbara* is even said to have been born from *ūrj* and, indeed, *ūrj* refers to a nourishment of a liquid, vegetal kind. In the *Brāhmaṇas*, *udumbara* is also equated with *anna/annādyā* or *rasa* i.e. food, sustenance.

The *udumbara* wood was always considered suitable for ritual purposes. It was especially utilised to make thrones (*āsandī*), unction cups and seasonal implements (to be used once and then burned) in sacrifices of regal import, such as the *rāja-sūya*, the *vāja-peya*, and the *agni-cayana*. The *udumbara* appears as the royal wood par excellence due to its attribute of providing wealth and abundance: even its fruit is said to be a food suitable for a king (*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 7.32). In solemn sacrifices (*śrauta yajñas*) the *udumbara* was used in association with the regal patron, the *yajamāna*, rather than with any of the *brāhmaṇa* priests. Given its association with fecundity, the *udumbara* played a central role in the anointing of a new king.

The *udumbara* staff (*daṇḍa*) is the *devas*' might and also represents the *kṣatriya*'s prowess in war: by touching his chariot and praising it as *udumbara*, he guarantees the conquest of the regions (*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 37.6)²¹. The staff was of varying lengths and different woods according to one's hierarchical ranking. It was generally made of *palāśa* (*Butea frondosa*) or *bilva* (*Aegle marmelos*) for the *brāhmaṇa*, *nyagrodha* (*Ficus indica*) for the *kṣatriya*, and *badara* (*Zizyphus jujuba*) or *udumbara* for the *vaiśya*²². The *udumbara* was invoked by the *vaiśya* as "life sap" (*ūrj*), so that he may "put life sap in himself" (*Baudhāyana Gṛhya-sūtra* 2.5.22-23). The *udumbara* staff was also reputed to be fit for *kṣatriyas* (*Āśvalāyana Gṛhya-sūtra* 1.19.13). In order to acquire longevity and descent, at the end of his studentship the *brahma-cārin* used to hide his girdle at the root of an *udumbara*, where also the cuttings of his hair and nails were placed (*Āpastamba Gṛhya-sūtra* 12.5).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²¹ See A. Glucklich, *The Royal Scepter (Daṇḍa) as Legal Punishment and Sacred Symbol*, in "History of Religions", vol. 28, no. 2, 1988, pp. 99, 102-103, 106-107, 110-111.

²² See B. K. Smith, *Ritual, Knowledge, and Being. Initiation and Veda Study in Ancient India*, in "Numen", vol. 33, no. 1, 1986, pp. 65-89.

The *udumbara*, the most prolific of trees, is said to belong to Prajāpati and to have sprung from the spot where Agni was created. Agni issued from Prajāpati's head and the latter then wiped off whatever of his blood (*lohita*) was left there: he wiped it off onto the earth and precisely there the *udumbara* was born. Therefore, the fruit of the *udumbara* turns red when ripe (*Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* 1.8.1; *Kāthaka Saṃhitā* 6.1; *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 5.24.4). Even later *Brāhmaṇas* such as the *Pañca-viṃśa* and the *Jaiminīya* relate the *udumbara* to Prajāpati: "Prajāpati distributed *ūrj* to the gods. Thence was born the *udumbara*. The *udumbara* is Prajāpati's" (*Pañca-viṃśa Brāhmaṇa* 6.4.1); "When Prajāpati distributed *ūrj* and sustenance to creatures, then whatever remnant remained became this tree" (*Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* 2.183). Indra replaces Prajāpati in *Śata-patha Brāhmaṇa* 12.7.1.9: Indra's *ūrj* is said to flow out from his flesh and to become the *udumbara* tree. The most elaborate story concerning the *udumbara* is the one told in *Śata-patha Brāhmaṇa* 6.6.3.2-3, from which we learn that the *udumbara* has the *ūrj* of all trees concentrated in it and thus it is always moist, the most fruitful of all:

The gods and the *asuras*, both of them sprung from Prajāpati, strove together. Now all the trees sided with the *asuras*; but the *udumbara* tree alone did not forsake the gods. The gods, having conquered the *asuras*, took possession of their trees. They said: 'Come, let us lay into the *udumbara* tree whatever pith, whatever vital sap there is in these trees...'. Accordingly, they laid into the *udumbara* tree what pith and essence there was in those trees; and on account of that pith it matures (fruit) equal to all the (other) trees: hence that (tree) is always moist, always full of milky sap, – that *udumbara* tree, indeed, (being) all the trees, is all food: he thus gratifies him (Agni) by every kind of food, and kindles him by all trees (kinds of wood)²³.

The identification of the *udumbara* with Soma is especially noteworthy: the deity/plant Soma, just like the *udumbara* fruits tied to a woman to promote fecundity, represents the life-giving power manifesting itself in the cyclical processes of fertility²⁴. Various texts identify Soma with the essence of waters, sap in trees, and seed in men and animals. The throne of King Soma is carved out of *udumbara* wood and the seat of Vivasvan, worshipped

²³ J. Eggeling, *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*, cit., vol. 3, pp. 256 ff. On Prajāpati, see J. Gonda, *Prajāpati's Rise to Higher Rank*, Brill, Leiden 1986.

²⁴ See J. C. Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration. The Rājasūya Described According to the Yajus Texts and Annotated*, Mouton & Co., The Hague 1957, p. 75.

at the end of the Soma sacrifice, is made of it. Moreover, the *udumbara* is also linked to Yama as the prototype of the immortal. One of the god's names as found in late Brāhmaṇical literature is: "Coming from the *udumbara* tree". Yama's connection with the *udumbara* is intended to highlight his royal virility, he being extolled as the first human and the first king²⁵.

In domestic rites the *udumbara* is consistently linked to fertility, as in the *śimantonayana* or "parting of the hair" ceremony: a ritual performed by the husband during the first pregnancy of his wife, in the third or fourth month²⁶. The husband is to put the branch of an *udumbara* tree with an even number of unripe fruits (corresponding to the male children hoped for) round the neck of his spouse, and this is believed to transmit generative power and to protect the to-be mother ensuring an easy delivery (*Sāṅkhāyana Gr̥hya-sūtra* 1.22.10). Leaves of the *udumbara* were used in wedding ceremonies. During the three nights of chastity after marriage, an *udumbara* rod smeared with a fragrant substance and wrapped round with a cloth or thread was placed between the sleeping spouses. In the fourth night the husband gave it to his wife who accepted it by saying: "May I have offspring" (*Baudhāyana Gr̥hya-sūtra* 1.5.17 ff.). According to various sources the rod would represent the Gandharva Viśvāvasu thought to possess the bride before marriage²⁷.

Another rite which a newly married couple was expected to perform was on the fifth day after wedding: having cut their hair and nails they were to go out of the village to pay honour to an isolated *udumbara* and pray for good fortune on their marriage (*Baudhāyana Gr̥hya-sūtra* 1.8). Even in *Mahābhārata* 3.115 the *udumbara* is eulogized as generating the birth of sons. Just before the *pum-savana* rite, the mother of Paraśurāma is to embrace an *udumbara* and the mother of Viśvāmitra an *aśvattha*. But then the trees are mixed up and the touching of the *aśvattha* produces a *brāhmaṇa* child who acts like a *kṣatriya* (= Paraśurāma), while touching the *udumbara* produces a *kṣatriya* child who acts like a *brāhmaṇa* (= Viśvāmitra)²⁸.

The *udumbara*, being suitable for religious rites, should never be cut

²⁵ See A. Wayman, "Studies in Yama and Mara", in *Id.*, *Untying the Knots in Buddhism: Selected Essays*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1997, pp. 468-470.

²⁶ See J. Gonda, *The Śimantonayana as Described in the Gr̥hyasūtras*, in "East and West", vol. 7, 1956, pp. 12-31.

²⁷ See J. Gonda, *Vedic Ritual: The Non-solemn Rites*, Brill, Leiden, Köln 1980, p. 394; A. Glucklich, *The Royal Scepter (Daṇḍa) as Legal Punishment and Sacred Symbol*, cit., pp. 106-107.

²⁸ See C. Minkowski, *The udumbara and Its Ritual Significance*, cit., p. 23.

down²⁹. The consumption of the fruits of the *udumbara*, on the other hand, is approved of. Interestingly, from Vedic times the presence of certain trees in the vicinity of the chosen place for building a house is forbidden: in the *Gr̥hya-sūtras*, the *udumbara* associated with Prajāpati is thought to cause bad eyes if placed on the north side of one's house³⁰. Rather, various authorities stress that the *udumbara* should be planted in the south (perhaps because this is recognised as Yama's direction).

The audumbar in the Guru-caritra and the Dattātreya Cult.

I here focus on the significance of the *audumbar* in the Marāṭhī cultural area, in which it figures as the favourite tree of the god Datta/Dattātreya³¹. In modern iconography, he is often depicted as standing or sitting cross-legged in front of it, surrounded by three or four dogs said to represent the *Vedas* and by a cow i.e. Kāmadhenu³² said to represent Mother Earth. To be sure, this tree is revered as his abode and is found at all Datta temples and pilgrimage places. Many *bhaktas* even plant an *audumbar* in front of their houses in order to worship it daily³³. The tree is said to symbolise renunciation and higher wisdom. Believed to be the repository of nectar, Dattātreya is thought to always reside in its shade, albeit invisibly. In Mahārāṣṭra the

²⁹ See J. Abbott, *The Keys of Power. A Study of Indian Ritual and Belief*, University Books, Seacaucus (N.J.) 1974, p. 331.

³⁰ See J. Gonda, *Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1993 (1st ed. Leiden 1954), p. 13.

³¹ Dattātreya is a Purāṇic deity, in origin a Tantric antinomian *yogin* later sanitized and adapted to the devotional *milieu* of the *Purāṇas*. For an overview, see A. Rigopoulos, *Dattātreya: The Immortal Guru, Yogin, and Avatāra. A Study of the Transformative and Inclusive Character of a Multi-Faceted Hindu Deity*, State University of New York Press, Albany (N.Y.) 1998.

³² As trees and the *udumbara* in particular are linked with rivers, so are cows. In the Marāṭhī area the Godāvarī is revered as Kāmadhenu; see A. Feldhaus, *Water and Womanhood*, cit., pp. 46-47.

³³ The planting of any tree is viewed as a meritorious act. The planting of eight *udumbaras* is said to lead to a sojourn in Soma's realm (*Vṛkṣāyurveda* 12-18); see A. Nugteren, *Belief, Bounty, and Beauty. Rituals around Sacred Trees in India*, Brill, Leiden 2005, p. 81. Nonetheless the *udumbara* especially in North India is also believed to be an uncanny tree, possibly because it is regarded as the dwelling place of Yama; see W. Crooke, *Religion & Folklore of Northern India*, Oxford University Press, London 1926, p. 408.

advent of the *Datta-sampradāya* ("the tradition of Datta [followers]") dates to the middle of the sixteenth century when the Marāṭhī *Guru-caritra* ("Life of the Master"), the sacred text of the movement, was written by Sarasvatī Gaṅgādhara³⁴. Divided into fifty-one chapters (*adhyāyas*) containing more than seven thousand verses (*ovīs*), this hagiography presents the miraculous lives of Śrīpād Śrīvallabh (c. 1323-1353) and Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī (c. 1378-1458), the two seminal figures venerated as the first 'historical' *avatāras* of Dattātreya. The *Guru-caritra* emphasizes brāhmaṇical ritual orthodoxy, in an effort to counter Islāmic dominance as well as Tantric excesses. Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī, the actual founder of the *Datta-sampradāya*, was apparently a *brāhmaṇa* ascetic who had been ordained in the Sarasvatī order of the Śāṅkaran *daśa-nāmin* renunciants. Constantly on the move, he finally settled down in the village of Gāṇagāpūr about fifty miles south-east of Solāpur (presently in northern Karnāṭaka), the major pilgrimage centre of the tradition along with other sites such as Narsobāvāḍī and Audumbar.

It is from the time of the *Guru-caritra* that Dattātreya's popular iconography incorporating the triad of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva emerges. He is represented with three heads (*tri-mukha*) – the central one being that of Viṣṇu, his focal identity – and six arms holding the emblems of the *tri-mūrti*: the water-pot and rosary of Brahmā, the mace and conch of Viṣṇu, the drum and trident of Śiva. The icon captures and recapitulates Dattātreya's integrative force, embracing all functions as the manifestation of the fullness of the Godhead. In Gāṇagāpūr and other holy spots his presence is attested to also in the non-iconic form of the *pādukās*, the sandals worn by Datta or one of his incarnations, emblem of the wandering ascetic and of the deity's unfathomable omnipresence. Indeed, Dattātreya is believed to be eternal and to manifest himself under a variety of forms. Attaining his vision is thought to be extremely difficult, a rare grace: Datta is unforeseeable in his transcendence and a rule unto himself.

The identification of the *udumbara* tree with Viṣṇu is the fundamental datum which should be kept in mind. In *Mahā-bhārata* 13.149.14-120, where the thousand names of Viṣṇu are extolled, he is praised as *udumbara* in the 823th (*om udumbarāya namaḥ*; concomitantly, he is also identified with the *aśvattha* and the *nyagrodha*)³⁵. Given the basic association of the *udumbara* with Viṣṇu, the peculiar sanctity of the *udumbara/audumbar* tree

³⁴ R. K. Kāmat (ed.), *Śrī-guru-caritra*, Saṃdīp Press, Mumbāi 1990 (1937).

³⁵ See I. Panduranga Rao, *The Universe that is God. An Insight into the Thousand Names of Lord Viṣṇu*. With a Foreword by K. Singh, D. K. Printworld, New Delhi 1999, pp. 300-303.

in the Dattātreya cult is explained in chapter 19 of the *Guru-caritra* (verses 7-32), the "Bible" for all devotees set in the form of a dialogue between Siddhamuni and the disciple "Nāmdhārak". Chapters 17 through 20 in various ways highlight the *audumbar*'s central place in the tradition: herein, 19.7-32 is the core textual source giving the reason for the tree's "greatness" (*mahiman*). The story runs as follows. Right at the beginning of chapter 19, Nāmdhārak questions Siddhamuni as to why Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī was always more fond of the *audumbar* tree, whereas there are other holy trees such as the *aśvattha*, etc. He wishes to know what is the special significance of the *audumbar* and why Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī chose to always sit under it. At his request, Siddhamuni explains that when Viṣṇu manifested as the Man-Lion Narasiṃha in order to protect his devotee Prahlāda and annihilate his arrogant father, the Daitya demon-king Hiranyakaśipu, he had to tore open the latter's stomach (*poṭ*) with his sharp claws/nails (*nakh*). Consequently, his nails got drenched with the *kāla-kūṭa* poison of which the Daitya's stomach was replete and, as a result, Narasiṃha found himself in excruciating pain. Seeing the suffering of her lord, the goddess Mahālakṣmī intervened and plucked a fruit (*phal*) of an *audumbar* tree which was nearby. She offered it to the fierce (*ugra*) Narasiṃha who could then stuck his nails deep into the fruit's pulp. In this way his pain was instantly assuaged. The fiery poison abated and Narasiṃha, relieved, regained his peaceful composure (*saumya*). Mightily pleased, the Man-Lion – now extolled with the epithet of Hṛṣīkeśa – blessed the *audumbar* saying that from then onwards it would be as powerful on earth as the *kalpa-vṛkṣa* in heaven. In the *kali-yuga*, he added, the *audumbar* will be the *kalpa-taru*: whoever will worship the tree will get his desires fulfilled, both worldly (sons, riches, cure from ailments) as well as spiritual³⁶. 'I myself', announced Narasiṃha, 'will take my abode in the *audumbar* together with Mahālakṣmī, as all deities abide in it'. Therefore, concluded Siddhamuni, this is the reason why Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī chose to always sit under the *audumbar* tree.

Chapters 18-19 of the *Guru-caritra* tell us that Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī stayed under an *audumbar* tree at the *pañca-gaṅgā-kṣetra*, the *saṅgama* of the Kṛṣṇa and Pañcagaṅgā, for a period of twelve years. The place was known as Amarpur from the local Amareśvara temple, but due to Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī's prolonged stay it came to be known, as it is today, as Narsobāvāḍī³⁷.

³⁶ The fourth *avatāra* Narasiṃha, just like the preceding three *avatāras* of Matsya, Kūrma and Varāha, appeared in the first age of the world (*satya, kṛta*). The Narasiṃha *avatāra* is placed at the very end of the *satya-yuga*.

³⁷ On Narsobāvāḍī, see P. Rāmsāstī Jere, *Śrī Kṣetra Nṛsiṃhavāḍī Darśan*, Gokhale

After the twelve year period, the saint decided to leave the locale and to settle in Gāṇagāpūr³⁸. Before leaving, he blessed the site saying that he would always be present in an invisible form at that *audumbar* tree, and left there his wooden sandals for worship. To this day, the *audumbar* and the *guru-pādukās* enshrined therein are believed to shower Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī's power and grace. Previously, in chapter 17, the *Guru-caritra* narrates of Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī's stay in another nearby locale, significantly known as Audumbar due to the presence of many *audumbar* trees³⁹. Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī is reported to have resided here under an *audumbar* for the period of a *catur-māsya*, that is, the four months of the rainy season, after which he departed for Amarapur. Audumbar lies on the western bank of the Kṛṣṇa river, in the vicinity of Bhillavāḍī, and is to date a most important pilgrimage centre for all Datta devotees.

The greatness of the *audumbar-sthān* at the *saṅgama* of the Kṛṣṇa and Pañcagaṅgā is highlighted in chapter 20 of the *Guru-caritra*: after Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī's departure, the worship of his *pādukās* coupled with the circumambulation (*pradakṣiṇā*) and *abhiṣeka* of the holy tree as summoned in a dream to a poor woman, is so powerful as to free her from a terrible ghost and grant her the blessing of giving birth to two children⁴⁰. References to the *audumbar* are found in two other chapters of the *Guru-caritra*: in *adhyāya* 32, where a woman ready to burn herself on the funeral pyre of her husband approaches Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī seated under an *audumbar*, asking for his blessings; and most notably in *adhyāya* 40, where the dry wood of an *audumbar* puts forth twigs and grows into a tree thanks to Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī's sprinkling water upon it from his water-jar.

As regards the famous episode of Narasiṃha killing the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu⁴¹, the Purāṇic sources I have examined do not contemplate the story

Granth Prakāśan, Sāṅglī n.d. See also R. C. Dhere, *Datta Sampradāyācā Itihās*, Nīlkaṅṭh Prakāśan, Puṇe 1964, pp. 215-217.

³⁸ On Gāṇagāpūr, see *Śrī Kṣetra Gāṇagāpūrātīl*. Dattāī, Śrī Gajānan Printing Press, Gāṇagāpūr 1991; M. S. Mate, *Temples and Legends of Maharashtra*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay 1988 (1st ed. 1962), pp. 79-101; R. C. Dhere, *Datta Sampradāyācā Itihās*, cit., p. 217-218.

³⁹ On Audumbar, see *Śrī Kṣetra Audumbar Darśan (paricay āṇi nityakram)*, Gokhale Granth Prakāśan, Sāṅglī n.d.; R. C. Dhere, *Datta Sampradāyācā Itihās*, cit., pp. 214-215.

⁴⁰ Even nowadays women worship the *udumbara* in the hope of getting pregnant; see J. Abbott, *The Keys of Power*, cit., p. 322.

⁴¹ For an overview of the main Purāṇic myths relative to Narasiṃha, see D. A. Soifer, *The Myths of Narasiṃha and Vāmana. Two Avatars in Cosmological Perspective*, State University of New York Press, Albany (N.Y.) 1991. See also A. C. Swain, A

of Narasiṃha's claws being drenched by the *kāla-kūṭa* poison contained in the demon's belly, nor do they mention the soothing/healing power of the *audumbar* fruit⁴². This narrative is probably the original "creation" of the *Guru-caritra*'s author, spelled out in order to emphasise the *audumbar*'s sanctity. The story is indeed very popular in the Marāṭhī area. R. E. Enthoven in his *Folklore of the Konkan* reports a variant of it as told by a school master informant of Ratnagiri: with no aid from Mahālakṣmī, the burning sensation caused by the poison would have been assuaged by Narasiṃha himself, who thrust his 'hands'/nails directly into the trunk of an *audumbar*⁴³. In this regard, it should be noted that the practice of driving actual nails into trees is common throughout the Deccan. Such practice is believed to cure fever and various kinds of diseases by coercing the *śakti* of the tree, 'extracting' its bountiful essence/sap⁴⁴. According to another variant, it would have been Anasūyā i.e. Dattātreya's mother to advise Mahālakṣmī to use the juice of the *audumbar* leaves in order to relieve her lord from the pain caused by the poison: as a consequence, Narasiṃha would have had Dattātreya's *darśana*.

Some Purāṇic accounts elaborate on the fact that Narasiṃha's claws are tainted with the demon's blood. In various *māhātmyas* when a deity kills a demon the former is considered to have committed *brahma-hatyā*, the murder of a *brāhmaṇa*. When Narasiṃha rips out the intestines of the *brāhmaṇa* demon Hiraṇyakaśipu, Narasiṃha's claws remain stained with his blood, the tangible representation of his violent deed. Narasiṃha then searches long and hard for a place where he can purify himself and wash off the blood, and finally finds such a place (for instance the Pūrṇā river; see *Payoṣṇī Māhātmya* 16.15-18.31). In our story, however, there is no issue of expiation from having killed the demon. In lieu of the blood, of which there is no mention, Narasiṃha's claws are stained with the terrible, burning poison which lied in Hiraṇyakaśipu's intestines and the whole issue is how to relieve himself from it.

Study of the Man-Lion Myth in the Epics and Purāṇa-Texts, in "Indian Antiquary", vol. 5, 1971, pp. 38-54; M. Biarreau, *Narasiṃha, mythe et culte*, in "Puruṣārtha: Recherches de Sciences sociales sur l'Asie du Sud", Centre d'Études de l'Inde et de l'Asie du Sud, Paris 1975.

⁴² Even in the extant *Narasiṃha Purāṇa* one finds no trace of such story. On this text, see preliminarily L. Rocher, *The Purāṇas*, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 1986, pp. 205-206.

⁴³ See R. E. Enthoven, *Folklore of the Konkan*. Compiled from Materials Collected by the Late A. M. T. Jackson, Indian Civil Service, Cosmo Publications, Delhi 1976 (1915), p. 72.

⁴⁴ See J. Abbott, *The Keys of Power*, cit., pp. 328-329.

An Analysis of the Guru-caritra's Story.

1. The first thing which one cannot fail to observe is that Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī, whose name at birth was Narahari (an equivalent of Narasiṃha), bears the same name of the *avatāra* of Viṣṇu who is the protagonist of the narrative. Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī clearly comes to identify himself with Narasiṃha. His characterization as a Datta *avatāra* in the present *kali* age encompasses the Narasiṃha *avatāra*, who appears to be at the same time subsumed within the former and identified with it. The lion-headed Narasiṃha is the deity of many *brāhmaṇa* families of southern Mahārāṣṭra whose main *kṣetra* is precisely Narsobāvāḍī near Kolhāpur, that is, the place sanctified by the twelve-year presence of Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī. Thus in Mahārāṣṭra the spread of Narasiṃha's cult is largely due to the saintly impact of Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī's life. Of the two historical *avatāras* of Datta which the *Guru-caritra* extols, Śrīpād Śrīvallabh was born in Pīthapur in present day Āndhra Pradeś, East Godāvarī District, whereas Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī was born in Karañjā, in the Akolā District of Mahārāṣṭra. Nonetheless, in the *Guru-caritra* Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī is regarded as none other than Śrīpād Śrīvallabh reincarnated. As is well-known, the cult of Narasiṃha is diffused in South India and particularly in Āndhra Pradeś, where there are more than one hundred and sixty shrines dedicated to him⁴⁵. Narasiṃha's cult is thought to have played a significant role in the "hinduization" of Āndhra⁴⁶. It might be hypothesized that a way through which Narasiṃha's cult was brought to southern Mahārāṣṭra was precisely from Āndhra, via the mediating link of the first seminal *avatāras* of Dattātreyā.

Dattātreyā, though *strictu sensu* an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, is glorified in the *Datta-sampradāya* as the veritable Godhead. He is worshipped as the paradigmatic *guru*, *yogin*, and *avatāra* and is believed to be an eternal, omnipresent "incarnation". It is important to highlight the similarities between Narasiṃha and Dattātreyā. If in its *vaiṣṇava-śaiva* combination Dattātreyā appears as the synthetic icon par excellence, Narasiṃha is also an integrative figure since his terrifying, *ugra* nature in annihilating Hiraṇyakaśipu clearly evidences *śaiva* traits, most fitting in sanctioning the end of the *satya* age (akin to a *pralaya* and thus performing Śiva's function). Narasiṃha corre-

⁴⁵ See S. Jaiswal, *The Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism. Vaiṣṇavism from 200 BC to AD 500*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi 1981, p. 136.

⁴⁶ See A. Eschmann, "The Vaiṣṇava Typology of Hinduization and the Origin of Jagannātha", in A. Eschmann, H. Kulke, G. C. Tripathi (eds.), *The Cult of Jagannāth and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, Manohar, New Delhi 1978, pp. 99-117.

sponds to Śiva's shape of terror, and is the main *avatāric* exception to the preponderance of the bounteous traits of Viṣṇu. As in Dattātreyā's case, even in Narasiṃha's portrait the inclusion of *śaiva* motifs points at the representation of the totality of the Godhead. Narasiṃha, who is popular among the esoteric Pāñcarātras, resembles Śiva Bhairava in character, to the point of emerging like Bhairava from the (sacrificial) pillar⁴⁷. Last but not least, I should mention the fact that Narasiṃha, just like Datta, is extolled as a supreme *yogin*⁴⁸.

2. The *kāla-kūṭa*, also known as *halā-hala*, the black poison contained in Hiraṇyakaśipu's stomach, is one of the substances which emerged from the churning of the ocean of milk (*samudra-manthana*) performed by *devas* and *asuras* in their effort to extract the nectar of immortality (*amṛta*). There are Purāṇic accounts in which the deadly poison is said to be the first substance to have emerged from the churning of the milky ocean, *in lieu* of the cow of plenty Kāmadhenu⁴⁹. Typically, it is Śiva who saves the world from destruction by swallowing the poison and stopping it at the level of his throat, thus becoming known as Nīlakaṇṭha. In another account, however, it is Prahlāda, the pious devotee of Viṣṇu and son of Hiraṇyakaśipu, who drinks the poison given to him by his own father wishing to kill him: Prahlāda digests it with no problem, having rendered it powerless through his invocation of the snake Ananta⁵⁰. In our story we clearly witness an opposition between the black and burning mortal substance, quintessence of evil with its pestilential vapours, and the bright red fruit of the *audumbar* with its refreshing, healing milky juice. As noted, the cooling effect of the *audumbar*'s sap, often utilised in cases of swelling, is one among the medicinal properties attributed to the plant. Even the juice of the *audumbar*'s root is believed to have a cooling effect and is used in cases of measles and itches⁵¹. Indeed, the *audumbar* is believed to contain the essence of all trees: as the one antidote, the *audum-*

⁴⁷ See D. A. Soifer, *The Myths of Narasiṃha and Vāmana*, cit., p. 102.

⁴⁸ See S. K. Ramachandra Rao, *Vishṇu-Kośha*, Kalpatharu Research Academy, Bangalore 1998, pp. 162-164.

⁴⁹ See *Agni Purāṇa* 3.1-22. In the epics, the myth of the churning of the ocean is told in *Mahā-bhārata* 5.102.12 ff. and *Rāmāyaṇa* 4.58.13. For other Purāṇic accounts, see *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 1.9.105; *Padma Purāṇa* 5.4.1 ff.; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 8.8.7-28.

⁵⁰ For an English summary of this narrative which is found in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, see C. Dimmitt & J. A. B. van Buitenen (eds., trans.), *Classical Hindu Mythology. A Reader in the Sanskrit Purāṇas*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 1978, pp. 312-320.

⁵¹ See R. E. Enthoven, *Folklore of the Konkan*, cit., p. 72.

bar fruit is here identified with the *amṛta* and with Soma, which is also one of the substances said to emerge from the churning of the milky ocean⁵². Viṣṇu is directly linked to the Soma plant/sap and explicitly identified with it (*Śata-patha Brāhmaṇa* 3.2.4.12, 3.6.3.19). Moreover, Soma is also comprised among the thousand names of Viṣṇu (*Mahā-bhārata* 13.149.67). We must recall that in Dattātreya's Purāṇic mythology Soma/Candra figures as Dattātreya's brother, being an *avatāra* of Brahmā as he is of Viṣṇu (the third brother, Durvāsas, is revered as an *avatāra* of Śiva)⁵³. By the time of the *Guru-caritra*, when Dattātreya comes to incorporate the *tri-mūrti*, Soma/Brahmā is understood to be part and parcel of his supreme nature.

Mahālakṣmī's role in plucking the *audumbar* fruit and offering it to Narasiṃha should not be overlooked. Her function as prompt helpmate of her spouse is a characteristic feature. Mahālakṣmī or Śrī-Lakṣmī is especially linked with fertility and the sap of life. The vegetative, procreative symbolism is dominant in the goddess's portrayal. Her association with Viṣṇu comes about precisely in the context of the churning of the milky ocean albeit in later versions of the myth, since she also figures as one of the "products" emerging from it⁵⁴.

Besides fertility, another theme in Lakṣmī's imagery is her connection with royal authority, which is intimately linked to the function of the *audumbar*, and, of course, to Viṣṇu. From around the 5th century CE Viṣṇu is viewed as the divine king par excellence and his primary role is to institute and maintain *dharma* through his *avatāras*. As ruler and protector of the universe, Viṣṇu is represented on a royal throne and the very name Narasiṃha, "lion among men", is a royal epithet. Where Lakṣmī is present royalty waxes strong. Finally, Lakṣmī is associated and even identified with Soma⁵⁵.

We have thus come a full circle in establishing a series of identities or homologies. Besides the constitutive one of the *audumbar* with fertility and royalty and thus with Viṣṇu, we can appreciate its identification with *amṛta*, Soma, and Mahālakṣmī. In our story the latter acts as a veritable *trait d'union* between the *audumbar* and Narasiṃha, who solemnly vows to abide in the holy fig tree along with his spouse and the host of the gods. Ultimately,

⁵² *Udumbara* is one of the 108 names of Soma/Candra and *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.5.3 even mentions a *soma-savana* ("Soma yielding") fig-tree in the *Brahma-loka*.

⁵³ See *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* 16.88-90; *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* 3.8.82.

⁵⁴ See D. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses. Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*. With a New Preface, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1988, p. 27.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

Narasiṃha the *avatāra* is linked/identified with Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī. All these figures are understood as facets of the triadic Dattātreya, the supreme, inclusive Godhead.

3. As we know from Purāṇic accounts, Hiraṇyakaśipu, contending with his son Prahlāda as to Viṣṇu's omnipotence and omnipresence, demanded to know if the god was present in a stone pillar of the royal hall, and struck it violently. Consequently, in order to avenge Prahlāda and confirm his sovereignty, Viṣṇu came forth from the pillar as Narasiṃha and tore the arrogant Daitya king to pieces. What is interesting is the fact that many Datta devotees believe that the pillar from which Viṣṇu's *avatāra* manifested himself was made of *audumbar* wood⁵⁶, which leads to an identification of the pillar with the tree and allows the recognition that the pillar/tree is the same as the cosmic, sacrificial pillar. After all, even the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* narrative of the Narasiṃha-Hiraṇyakaśipu story uses the term *skambha*, "stake," for referring to the pillar, which clearly links us to a sacrificial context. I'm here reminded of an article of H. W. Bodewitz relative to the raising of the central pillar of the hut of the sacrificial assembly (*sadas*) – a pillar made of *udumbara* wood – by the *udgātṛ*⁵⁷. We thus come back to our Vedic sources. The *udumbara* is identified with Prajāpati and the *udumbara* tree/pillar is life-sap. Prajāpati is understood to be the same as Viṣṇu and therefore the same as Dattātreya, who is equated with the essence of all the gods (who are said to reside in the tree). We witness a series of equivalences: *udumbara* = sacrificial pillar = Prajāpati = Viṣṇu and his *avatāra* Narasiṃha = Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī = Dattātreya who is extolled as the *tri-mūrti* and equivalent to *Brahman*. It can also be argued that the *udumbara/audumbar* as Dattātreya is first and foremost Viṣṇu's essence (*viṣṇutva*), which amounts to the Absolute, subsuming in itself all deities.

The series of identifications of Viṣṇu with sacrifice and Puruṣa/Prajāpati are well-known. Already by the time of the *Brāhmaṇas*, Viṣṇu came to be associated with the sacrifice and the sacrificial post (*yūpa*)⁵⁸. As the personi-

⁵⁶ See for instance the English translation of chapter 19 of the *Guru-caritra* in the website of the contemporary *guru* Śrī Gaṇapati Saccidānanda Svāmin, head of the *Śrī Avadhūta Datta Pīṭham* in Mysore: <http://guru-charitra.shreeswami.org/sri-guru-charitra-chapter-19.htm>.

⁵⁷ H. W. Bodewitz, "The Raising of the Central Pillar (Made of *Udumbara* Wood) of the *Sadas* Hut by the *Udgātṛ* According to *Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa* 1.70-72", in J. P. Sinha (ed.), *Ludwik Sternbach Felicitation Volume*, Akhila Bharatiya Sanskrit Parishad, Lucknow 1979, Part 1, pp. 77-82.

⁵⁸ See J. Gonda, *Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism*, cit., pp. 81-84.

fication of sacrifice he maintains order in the universe, *dharma*, upholding the primacy of the *brāhmaṇas* and the proper royal government of the earth. As the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* account hints at, the Narasiṃha-Hiraṇyakaśipu story can be read as the performance and consummation of a sacrifice sanctioning the end of the *satya-yuga*: the murder performed by the Man-Lion who disembowelled Hiraṇyakaśipu wearing his entrails as a garland assumes a redemptive value, in which the violence exercised upon the victim is justified as *necessary*, inherent to the performance of a sacrifice (*yajña*). In the association of Narasiṃha with the *udumbara* which is a sacrificial implement from Vedic times, we witness the strength of the brahmanical component, intertwined to Narasiṃha's (and Viṣṇu's) kṣatric portrayal. In the *Datta-sampradāya* the brāhmaṇical nature of Dattātreya and his *avatāras* is especially underlined. One of the *Guru-caritra*'s concerns is *varṇāśrama-dharma* and the execution of the prescribed *yajñas*. The identification of Datta's icon with the *audumbar* reinforces his priestly character, elevating him to the role of bulwark of "Vedic" orthodoxy.

Furthermore, Dattātreya's association with the *audumbar* highlights his ascetic nature: *ab origine* he is the prototype of the *yogin*, of the *paramahansa* and *avadhūta* renunciant. *Āśrama Upaniṣad* 98-99 even mentions the existence of a class of forest-hermits called Audumbaras⁵⁹. G. Feuerstein thinks that these Audumbaras are a class of renunciants "who sustain themselves by eating wild grain and fruit, especially figs (*udumbara*)"⁶⁰. In Dattātreya's case what is sure is that his connection with the *audumbar* is aimed at stressing his ascetic character. When not naked (*digambara*) – and Śrīpād Śrīvallabh is typically eulogised as Digambara – the ascetics' "clothes" are often said to be made of the bark of trees. The very name of one among the oldest Datta followers, Dalādanamuni, literally means "the silent one who subsists on leaves" (*dala*)⁶¹. In popular folklore the *audumbar* is assimilated to Dattātreya's triadic nature: its roots are said to be Brahmā, its bark Viṣṇu, and its branches Śiva⁶². The tree is also believed to

⁵⁹ See P. Olivelle (ed., trans.), *Samnyāsa Upaniṣads. Hindu Scriptures on Asceticism and Renunciation*, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford 1992, pp. 155-156. For other references to the Audumbaras as a class of ascetics, see *Hari-vaṃśa* 7988; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 3.12.43.

⁶⁰ G. Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition: Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*, Bhavana, New Delhi 2001, p. 94.

⁶¹ Dalādanamuni is revered as the author of the *Datta-laharī*, a poem in Datta's praise; see Dalādanamuni, *Dattalaharī. L'onda di Datta*. A cura di A. Rigopoulos, Cafoscarina, Venezia 1999.

⁶² See S. M. Gupta, *Plant Myths and Traditions in India*. With a Foreword by Late Dr. C. Sivaramamurti, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi 1991, p. 50.

be visited by Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva on occasions⁶³. As lord of ascetics (*ādi-nāth*) and embodiment of the *tri-mūrti*, Datta is worshipped as an immortal. By the same token, the *audumbar* is itself viewed as an immortal tree being the abode of all the gods and the receptacle of the highest sap of *soma/amṛta*. As Dattātreya is extolled as the giver of both *bhukti* and *mukti*, mundane enjoyments and liberation from rebirth, in the same way the *audumbar* is worshipped as the celestial wish-yielding tree (*kalpa-taru*). Datta devotees preferably observe their penances under it, and the practice of the so-called *audumbar-dīkṣā* is thought to grant both the eight supernormal *siddhis* as well as *mukti*⁶⁴. It may be concluded that in the Marāṭhī area Dattātreya and the *audumbar*, from at least the XVIth century, have come to be thought of as one and the same.

⁶³ See J. Abbott, *The Keys of Power*, cit., p. 337.

⁶⁴ On the *audumbar-dīkṣā*, see the website of Śrī Gaṇapati Saccidānanda Svāmin, <http://www.dattapeetham.com>.