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*An Alternative World History from India?  
Ramavatar Sharma's puzzling  
Hindi narration Mudgarānand'caritāvalī  
of 1912-13*

von

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# An Alternative World History from India? Ramavatar Sharma's puzzling Hindi narration *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī* of 1912-13<sup>1</sup>

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1

The text that is the subject of this article is in many ways a misfit and a failure. It is not a successful narration with any decent structure and ending, and cannot be called reader-friendly in any sense; it has copious repetitions due to the inattention serial publications sometimes receive, and of course it has never been properly edited and arguably not even been finished. It not only refuses to be assorted to one specific literary genre, but cannot even be said to mock any particular literary form. What we are going to deal with in the following appears as a partly inconsistent piece of overburdened literary imagination that seems thoroughly out of place by so many standards. It may seem odd to open the discussion of a text with such a disclaimer, but in this case it is a necessity – not so much to prepare for an altogether unsavoury and painstaking exercise in textual analysis, but more as a rhetorical device to create an horizon of expectation appropriate to the task. The choice to deal with a textual failure is not born from the lack of more successful and palatable texts in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Hindi literature, but rather due to the fact that the text at hand is quite an *interesting* and possibly significant failure.

In general, failures and misfits can be fascinating objects of study. Failures are not in order: they criss-cross our ideas about how things, or here narrations, should be, and thus prompt us to reflect on what norms we apply to them. Misfits do not smoothly enter our frames of perception, genre, discourse etc. One can try various frames on them and nevertheless always get to see only a very partial aspect. The whole thing just won't fit in: either because it has the wrong kind of substance, or because it has too much substance, too many twists, folds, turns. In this lingers the temptation to write a history of literary failures, a collection of awkward texts or the like – a relevant task for a time like the colonial era in South Asia, in which a multiplication of norms made all kinds of experiments possible and consequently all kinds of failures likely. Far from attempting anything of the sort, however, we will in the following deal with only one such case, Ramavatar Sharma's *Mud-garānand'-caritāvalī* or "The biographies of Saint Macejoy".<sup>2</sup> The present interpretation of this text will try to unravel a narration that simultaneously speaks out of and into the highly asymmetrical scenario of British colonial rule in India.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context" on *Flows of Images and Media*, 7-9 October 2009, University of Heidelberg. Transliteration of Hindi terms and passages is according to the ZIS (*Zeitschrift für Indologie und Südasiastudien*) system which is based on Rahul Peter Das's suggestions. Cf. Rahul Peter Das (1984): Review of Dušan Zbavitel, *Bengali Literature* (Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1976), *Indo-Iranian Journal* 27 (1984): 51-69; p. 66, n. 2. I thank Prabhat Kumar, PhD student in the project B1 "Gauging Cultural Asymmetries" of the above-mentioned Cluster of Excellence, for bringing this fascinating text to my attention and for many illuminating discussions of the same. An analysis of Sharma's text is also part of his dissertation, but since our readings are sufficiently different and complementary, we felt that this article should also be published.

<sup>2</sup> Śarmā, Rāmāvatār (1954): *Śrīrāmāvatāraśarmānibandhāvalī* (RŚN). Paṭ'nā: Bihār-Rāṣṭrabhāṣā-Pariṣad. Darin: *Mud-garānand'caritāv'li* (pp. 147-99), divided into 19 *adhyāyas* and containing occasional footnotes. *Mud-garānand'caritāv'li* first appeared in the *Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Patrikā*, 1912-13.

2

Ramavatar Sharma (1876-1929) was a renowned brahmin pundit and Sanskritist of Patna, a contemporary and colleague of Ganganath Jha, the prolific Sanskrit scholar and translator, and George Thibaut, contributor to the "Sacred Books of the East" series started by Friedrich Max Müller. The *Vāṇmaya mahārṇava*, an encyclopedia in Sanskrit verse composed between 1911 and 1925, is considered his most significant work.<sup>3</sup> Ramavatar Sharma is also celebrated for his service to the developing national language Hindi. He was in close touch with the movement for the propagation of Hindi, actively participated in meetings of the "All-Indian Hindi Literature Conference" (*Akhil bhār'tīya hindī sāhitya sammelan*), and besides his Sanskrit works left a volume of articles in Hindi on topics such as astrology, geography, the state and progress of Hindi, the development of civilisation, perennial religious issues, Hindi grammar, education in India etc. Most of these articles and tracts betray an encyclopedic breadth of knowledge, an experienced mastery of brahminical traditions, both scientific and mythological, and simultaneously a reformist mind, well-informed about current scientific and philosophical trends in Europe and open to converse with and eventually appropriate them. His peculiar kind of interposition between Indian and European traditions of learning was also apparent from his outer appearance, a feature the present portrait (illus. 1) does not betray: He used to be seen on the campus of his university in *dhotī*, *kurtā* and a western-style hat (a combination that made contemporaries think of him as a wandering satire).<sup>4</sup>



Illus. 1: Photograph of Ramavatar Sharma (RŚN: [8])

<sup>3</sup> Cf. RŚN: [11] (in the introduction entitled *Paricay*, pp. [9]-[12], by Umānāth).

<sup>4</sup> I owe this information to Prabhat Kumar, who refers to personal communication with Patna University staff. The English version of the Wikipedia article on Sharma also mentions various clothing peculiarities and his unease with standard dress at the office: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/-Ram\\_Avatar\\_Sharma](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ram_Avatar_Sharma) (accessed December 18, 2014).

Two of the texts in his collected essays, however, stand out as of a different nature. Both are, in a way, fictional, and both feature saint Mudgaranand (literally meaning “macejoy”), a personality who also appears shortly at the end of the essay *Purāṇ'tattva*<sup>5</sup> and who shall be described in some detail further below. The first, entitled *Atha Śrīsatyadevakathā* or “The narration of the true god”, is a versified Sanskrit didactic tract with an interlineary Hindi translation, apparently written around 1910. The narration is triggered by Mudgaranand’s friends who ask him to explain how (colonial, early 20<sup>th</sup> century) India should free itself from the stupidity and sin it is presently suffering from.<sup>6</sup> In answer to this question, Mudgarānand does nothing less than to explain the genesis of the world and present a sketch of global history. He applies the scheme of the four *yugas* or declining ages of Hindu mythology to his account of history<sup>7</sup> and deals at length with the negative impact of Buddhism that has reduced Indian civilisation to laziness and illusionism<sup>8</sup> and, together with *māyāvād* (illusionism) stands in the way of India’s progress:

As long as illusionism (the whole world is an illusion) and the doctrine of the void (all things are void) remain in this country, as long as demons [*piśāc ādī*] will be revered and true science will not, so long no progress [*unnati*] of any kind will be possible, because the main attribute of progress is not to revere stupidity.<sup>9</sup>

The remedy he suggests is to concentrate on science, industry and truth, and to shield off superstitious judgments and develop proper knowledge ; and in the end, apparently as a mock version of traditional didactic texts in Sanskrit, he attaches a *Pūjāvidhiḥ* or “rules for adoration”, in which he ordains, for instance, that the poor student or the teacher with a distressed family should be venerated by garlands, clothes and books.<sup>10</sup> While the form of this sermon and the occasional mockery may here and there disrupt a facile reading, “The narration of the true god” is nevertheless not too hard to decipher as a somewhat strangely old-fashioned and weird brahmin reformer’s attempt to make an argument for the social and intellectual renewal of Hindu society. The old register of a guru’s teaching is applied to convey very contemporary exigencies, and although the form may strike one as particularly anachronistic, Sharma is in good company here, since similar registers had been in use with other authors for a number of decades.<sup>11</sup>

Things get more complicated as we proceed to the second “fictional” text, the one this lecture focusses on, namely *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī* or “The biographies of Macejoy”. The title could also have been “The autobiographies of Mudgaranand”, since the I-narrator of the piece is saint Mudgaranand himself. Saint Mudgaranand is,

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<sup>5</sup> In *RŚN*: 114-19; 119. This mention will be dealt with below. There is apparently also another Sanskrit work by him that bears Mudgar in its title, *Mudgaradūtam*, a parody of the *Meghadūtam* (cf. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ram\\_Avatar\\_Sharma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ram_Avatar_Sharma), accessed 19.1. 2015). Unfortunately I have not been able to trace this text.

<sup>6</sup> *Atha śrīsatyadeva kathā* in *RŚN* , 120-146; 120.

<sup>7</sup> Verses 3.8ff., *RŚN*: 128.

<sup>8</sup> Verses 4.1ff., *RŚN*: 130ff.

<sup>9</sup> 6.26-27; *RŚN*: 140.

<sup>10</sup> *RŚN*: 145f.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. most prominently Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay’s *Dharmmatattva* (1884-85) and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj* (1909).

of course, a short-hand for quite a complex personality that I will deal with in some detail now.

3

Who, then, is Mudgaranand, the narrator of the alternative world history or satire we are going to examine now? While in the *Śrīsatyadevakathā* he remains in the dark, in the *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī* he introduces himself extensively, and the trip into what was labelled overburdened literary imagination above starts.

Mudgar is a 11,832-year old native of planet Varuṇa or Neptune, who has spent the last 8,000 years or so on earth and left again only very recently. He was born asexually by Lord Indra's wish and always looks like a twenty year-old man. If this may appear miraculous on earth, it is completely normal on Neptune, we are told, for there, human capacities are found in animals, whereas humans have all kinds of supernatural faculties. All things are available at all times, ghosts may be ordered to come, and if one fails to come to office, Ram, Krishna or Bhishma do the work in one's stead. Neptunians, moreover, are able to take *samādhi* for long periods anytime; they possess divine power and divine vision (*divya śakti* and *divya dṛṣṭi*) to witness whatever they want. There are no marriages among Neptunians since differences between men and women are small anyway, and one can use Tantra and make love invisibly. The power of *mantras* is extremely strong, and they serve the purpose of teleportation, so no means of transportation are required.<sup>12</sup> If they ever are, *prāṇāyāma* is used for locomotion, and the *trikāl'darśī ānā* or "mirror that looks into past, present and future" is enough to keep track of developments and makes things like letters, telegraphs and planchettes entirely superfluous. The capital is called *Nirvāṇ'pur* or Nirvana City, and it has various dwelling places of great souls, monasteries and temples, among them one with a *liṅga* that has extreme magnetic powers and transforms anything touching it into gold. Moreover, the city has lots of wish-fulfilling trees (*kalpavṛkṣas*), touchstones (*cintāmaṇis*) and wish-fulfilling cows (*kāmadhenus*).<sup>13</sup> Mudgar experienced the "three times and fourteen worlds" while playing with his personal deity called *vandhyāputra*, the son of a barren woman – apparently a common philosophical term for something improbable or impossible.<sup>14</sup> So on Neptune there are basically different laws of nature at work than on earth:

For the planet Neptune, the laws of space and time imagined [*kalpit*] by philosophers such as Kānt (Kant [Lat.]) and those of gravity etc. imagined by Navatanu (Newton [Lat.]) and others are not existent. All these humble [*kṣudra*] laws are only for the beings on that humble planet [earth].<sup>15</sup>

Some readers might wish to detect here intertextual links with the emerging genres of phantasy and science fiction literature. Indeed, the *Neptunians* make an appearance in the 1930s in the works of the English phantasy writer H.P. Lovecraft and his

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<sup>12</sup> *RSN*: 147-48.

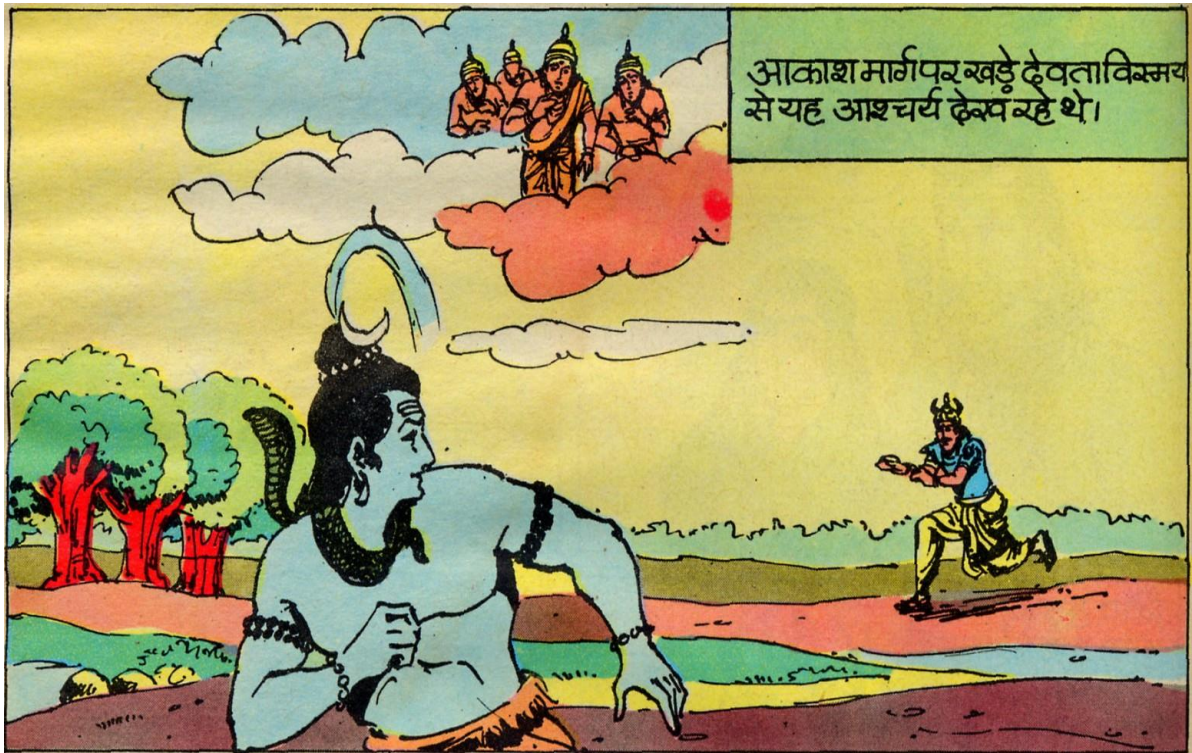
<sup>13</sup> *RSN*: 149.

<sup>14</sup> Also, of course, employed to denote miraculous or superhuman descent, well-known in Hindu and also Christian mythology (e.g. in the case of the biblical prophet Samson).

<sup>15</sup> *RSN*: 153.

circle.<sup>16</sup> But Sharma's text is prior to them, and there seems to be no occurrence of Neptunians in world literature earlier than this; moreover, the respective locations of these writers are so remote from each other that such intertextuality seems highly unlikely. A more probable point of reference for this Neptunian wonderland is the contemporary, late-nineteenth century projection of the Vedic period as the golden age of Hindu civilisation by such Hindu reform movements as the *Ārya samāj* – in which case Sharma could be credited with the audacity of shifting the dear utopia of quite a few of his contemporaries to a different planet. We will come back to this interpretative option towards the end of this article.

One more capacity Mudgarānand brings to earth is the almost independent existence within himself of two bodies and two *ātmas*, "souls", as well as the capacity to enter *samādhi*, "deep meditation", whenever desired.<sup>17</sup> Throughout the narration to come, Mudgar deposes one of his *ātmas* in such deep meditation first on Hemakuta (*hemakūṭa*) mountain<sup>18</sup> and then at the holy site of Prayag, i.e. the confluence of the rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Sarasvati at today's Allahabad. All the while, his second *ātma* takes various positions in lofty heights above the ground so as to be able to watch the progress of human history. The satellite would be the appropriate image for our times to describe this second Mudgar's location, but the picture more in tune with the narration is that of the gods sitting on clouds to observe the human sphere, a scene recurring in recent comic books on Indian mythology (illus. 2):



Illus. 2: Shiva running away from Brkāsura while the Devas are watching from above. *Śiv mahimā* (n.d.). Nai Dillī: Ḍāy'maṇḍ Kāmiks; n.p. (in the story *Bhasmāsura kā bhasm*).

<sup>16</sup> Lovecraft uses Neptunians in his horror story *The Whisperer in Darkness*, first published in 1931. Cf. H.P. Lovecraft (2007): *Collected Stories. 1. The Whisperer in Darkness*. London: Wordsworth.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. especially the chapter *Do śarīr aur do ātmā* in *RŚN*: 150-52.

<sup>18</sup> I.e. mount Kailasa in the Himalaya, the traditional dwelling place in Hindu mythology of god Shiva and his consort Parvati.

From this results a double quality of Mudgaranand for the purpose of the narration at hand: he is both the ideal historian and the prototype of a satirical narrator. The ability to travel freely across space and time (as apparent from what Mudgar calls his *trikāl'yātrā*), to witness events directly by the power of divine sight, yogic vision etc., together with the mastery of all human languages and the provenance from a different planet would, one may suppose, make for a perfect historian. Mudgar does not have to rely on sources when referring to historical events but accesses them directly; he also evades the risk of partiality by virtue of being completely out of the system. He is independent of the methodology of historians and, by virtue of his direct access, can dispense with the critical evaluation of documents; he is not bound by the hermeneutics of historiography. The question of standpoint will have to be asked differently in his case, for his personal perspective is external in an ideal sense.

Simultaneously, Mudgar (as his name, which literally means "macejoy", strongly suggests) is a typical narrator of satire. He does not speak from within any given society or, for that matter, from within humankind, but observes it from its margins; in this he stands in a line with various other narrators and protagonists of colonial satire in South Asia, who are frequently human drop-outs, animals or gods. The Bengali author Kaliprasanna Sinha in his famous *Hutom pyācār nak'sā* (1862) employs the owl as the narrator for his sketches of Calcutta city life;<sup>19</sup> his contemporary Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay uses the "revered master tiger longtail" for commenting upon the progress of the human race, or the opium-addict Kamalākānta to upset the logic of colonial society.<sup>20</sup> Gods appear in Tamil author Putumaippittan's short stories in all their traditional attire to create anachronistic effects,<sup>21</sup> and the Hindi pioneer Bharatendu Harishchandra has a pseudo-Islamic mock-prophet utter the rules of the present rotten age.<sup>22</sup> Closest to Mudgar comes the narrator Vīrbhadra of the Hindi satirical journal *Mat'vālā* or "Intoxicated", a godling heavily on dope who is sent down to earth by Shiva to report all terrestrial events and to check how much longer it will take until *pralaya* or the destruction of the world.<sup>23</sup> All these narrators are not bound by established rationalities but are allowed by way of dislocation to speak from a particular off-stage, and to employ off-stage rules and standards of evaluation. It is by no means obvious which of these two qualities of Mudgaranand, the ideal historian or the satirical narrator, is the dominant and decisive one, and we will have to keep both of them in suspension as we move on further into a very condensed synopsis of the text.

#### 4

As mentioned above, Mudgarānand first introduces himself and then starts off with his account of earth history. Or rather he chats along, dropping a note on Britons

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Kālīprasanna Siṃha (1991): *Saṭīk hutom pyācār nak'sā*. Hg. Aruṅ Nāg. Kal'kātā: Subarṇarekhā.

<sup>20</sup> Baṅkim'candra Caṭṭopādhyāy (1990): *Baṅkim racanābalī*, Vol. 1. Kalikātā: Sāhitya Saṃsad. Reference is to the piece *Byāghrācāryya bṛhallāṅgul* (pp. 1-9) and to the famous collection of satirical essays *Kamalākānta* (pp. 49-112).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. e.g. the story *Kaṭavuḷum kantacāmip piḷḷaiyum*. Putumaippittan (2000): *Putumaippittan kataikal*. Nākarkōvil: Kālaccuvaṭu Patippakam; pp. 559-577.

<sup>22</sup> *Pāc'vē (cūsā) paiḡambar*. Bhār'tendu Hariścandra (1989): *Bhār'tendu samagra*. Vārāṇasi: Hindī Pracārak Saṃsthān; pp. 1000-1002.

<sup>23</sup> See the *Ātm'paricay* in which the narrator of *Mat'vālā* introduces himself, in Karmendu Śīśir (ed.) (1994): *Mat'vāle kā mat*. Hāpur: Saṃbhāv'nā Prakāśan; pp. 14-16.

(James Prinsep) deciphering the Ashoka inscriptions here and the limited reliability of modern editions of mythological Indian texts there,<sup>24</sup> another on the German misinterpretations of the Ramayana,<sup>25</sup> on various excavations by Westerners and so on. The chronology of Mudgar's narration is sometimes obscure and actually a proper historian's task – on top of which he switches between his two souls and their respective experiences with a good amount of liberty. Thus, Mudgaranand's is a highly digressive and utterly meandering style. And, as we will immediately notice and discuss further below, like Kant's and Newton's laws, one more thing that does not count here is the distinction between history and mythology.

Mudgar's first engagement with terrestrial history seems to be with India at the time of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. His *paramātmā*, residing on mount Kailasa, witnesses the raids of demon king Ravana, the antihero and abductor of Sita in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and these raids each time reduce the size of the mountain. While staying there, Mudgar's moustaches keep growing down the slopes of the mountain and into the surrounding mythological landscape, eventually getting twisted with monkey-god Hanuman's tail. And when finally the whole mountain is dislocated by Ravana, his moustaches get eradicated and never grow again.<sup>26</sup>

Scolding himself, Mudgar then proclaims that he will avoid digressions and carry on with his account without getting lost in the great epics – all directly witnessed by him, as we are to understand – of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*. He sums up his experiences with Rama and Sita and then moves on to Krishna and the *Mahābhārata*, finding its ending so depressing that he decides to turn his gaze away from India and westwards.<sup>27</sup> Heading towards the *Ajaputras* or Egyptians, he passes the *Asuras* or Assyrians and mentions the great cities of Niniveh (*Ninhav'pur*) and Babylon (*Bhavyalūn'pur*), surpassing in size even modern *Nandan*, i.e. London.<sup>28</sup> Mudgar describes the Egyptian script “in the form of animals, birds and men”; he mentions the pyramids and the Egyptian belief that the dead go to heaven, and then mocks their cult of the dead. Mudgar states that the Egyptians had a system of three *varṇas* or castes, namely brahmins, kshatriyas and vaishyas, and were excellent in crafts and mathematics. Short descriptions of other peoples of the Near East like the Phoenicians, the Jews and the Persians follow. Admiration for these civilizations and the efforts to find out about them through excavations lead to scolding remarks

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<sup>24</sup> *RSN*: 156 (both). Many pundits say, according to the text, that the newly printed *purāṇas* are not reliable; the originals are in Tibet, and “Bhaṭṭ Mokṣamūlar” (Friedrich Max Müller) and others have not worked with the proper manuscripts.

<sup>25</sup> The comment is on some people from *śarmanya* (i.e. Germany) and India who interpret Ram as peasant, Sita as plow and the monkeys as uncivilised men. Mudgar prefers to rely on his *adhodṛṣṭi* or “downsight” with which he has witnessed all these events directly (*RSN*: 160).

<sup>26</sup> *RSN*: 157.

<sup>27</sup> *RSN*: 164. Noteworthy and quite typical for his idiosyncratic diction are his comments on Krishna (163f.) who, for some “*paurāṇik*” *bhaktas* like Shukadeva and modern ones like Malaviya (referring to the educationist Madan Mohan Malaviya, 1861-1946) was a miracle and his demon killings as an infant were natural. “For Jayadeva and other devotees who did not know English (*jay'dev ādi āgrezī na jān'ne vale*) he was a young man (*javān*) and did all the things that young men do; but for those who know English and are afraid of the contemptuous judgment of English education, he was just a naïve child in his dealings with women” (p. 163). Some today have yet different ideas about Krishna's character and life and think, narrator Mudgar continues, that he was an astonishing man all his life, a critic of the Vedas and a modern reformer like Luther. Mudgar concludes by stating that it is better not to argue with these last-mentioned (*aise logom se hār mān'ne mēṇi hī kalyāṇ hai*) (p. 164).

<sup>28</sup> *MC*: 165.



about the attitude of the Indians, who according to Mudgar do not have anything but their ancient glory (*prācīn gaurav*) anyway:

With the exception of some uneducated Sanskrit pundits and those who know English, the bearer of divine intellect (*dev'buddhivādī*<sup>29</sup>), the people definitely possess the virtue of taking the trouble of clapping their hands when some English has discovered some ancient glory through digging and searching, and the joy spreads in the whole country that the Westerners may be able to invent wondrous things such as swimming bridges [*pīpā ke pul*], bridges with stairs, bridges under water, forty-storeyed buildings, railways, telegraphs, airplanes, x-rays etc. for their pecuniary profit; but they are unable to take the possessions of millions and the life of thousands in order to construct pillars, pyramids and so on, ideal examples of undesirous [*niṣkāṃ*] and unnecessary industry, for the dead's dwelling or the curiosity of the leisurly living.<sup>30</sup>

After thus strolling through a number of ancient civilizations, Mudgar visits antique Greece with its prominent cities of *Arthanā* and *Suvratā* (Athens and Sparta), its great hero *Harikul* (Hercules) who reminds him of monkey-god Hanuman and *Mahābhārata* hero Bhima, its *Rāmāyaṇa* as composed by *Sumer* (Homer), and the philosophers *Aristu*, *Pratanu* and *Ariṣṭāttar*.<sup>31</sup> His survey eventually features the heroic king alternately called Alakṣendra or Alīk'candra (Alexander) who conquered all of Greece and took his army up to Sindh; Mudgar travels with them and witnesses a meeting between Alexander and the famous Indian king Chandragupta Maurya. Alexander wanted to conquer India, but India's wondrous doing was such that all arrivals, even the most heroic, were overcome by the slumber of laziness (*ālasya-nidrā*)<sup>32</sup> and the non-violence wrought by Buddhists and Jainas. In consequence, Alex did not get to visit the Patna municipality (the author Ramavatar Sharma's hometown), and Mudgar, at this point, decides not even to stay for Priyadarśī (Aśoka) and move to Rome and Carthage.<sup>33</sup>

So, Mudgar places himself like a balloon above the Mediterranean in order to be able to observe India, Greece, Rome and Spain simultaneously. He witnesses the advent of Rām and Raumil (Romulus and Remus) and the development of early Roman democracy (*prajā-rājya*), which was however hindered by the great difference between *dvijas* and *śūdras*, i.e. "twice-born" higher castes and lower ones. Next comes

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<sup>29</sup> The original phrase (*dev'buddhivādī aṃgrezīdā*) is unclear: the attribute *dev'buddhivādī* could relate to the first part of the following compound (*aṃgrezī*) which underlies my translation, but it could also refer to the whole compound (*aṃgrezīdā*). Further, its meaning is rather opaque. While *dev'buddhi* may be rendered as divine intelligence, *vādī* usually relates to someone subscribing to an "ism". So if *dev'buddhi* means something like "spirit intelligence", one could conjecture that *dev'buddhivādī* represents "spiritistic" – but such a reading seems to contradict the usual connotations of English. So the somewhat loose translation "bearer of divine intellect" has been kept for lack of more convincing solutions.

<sup>30</sup> *RŚN*: 167. This sentence, it should be said, is far above the average size and syntactical complexity of the text.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, referring, of course, to Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

<sup>32</sup> The laziness of Indians is of course a trope in colonial discourse which was time and again taken up by reformist-minded Indian writers. Cf. Bharatendu Harishchandra's satire 'Īśvar baṛā vilakṣaṇ hai'. Bhār'tendu Hariścandra, *Bhār'tendu samagra*, pp. 994-5, where the Indian north-west is described as place where all the laziness in the world is assembled (p. 995).

<sup>33</sup> *RŚN*: 169-170.

Hanuman's *avatāra* Hanubal (Hannibal), his conquests and finally the fall of Carthage; Rome taking control over the territory beyond the Alps and also Śvetadvīpa (England), Egypt etc.; Caesar, Brutus, Augustus, and the ensuing moral decline and revolts.<sup>34</sup> This affects Mudgar's otherwise hardly sensitive *ātmā*, and also that of the earth (*bhagavatī vasundharā*) so much that she spits fire, and the cities of Harikul and Pampiya (Herculaneum and Pompeji) get drowned in smoke and dust. Mudgar then swallows the fire of the Vesuvio, puts the earth to deep meditation and keeps on watching the misdeeds of the Romans until the fall of Rome into the hands of Huns, Tartars, Karmuks and other horrible savages (*bībhats vanya*), resulting in the division of the empire into Rome and Kaṃsatantupurī (Constantinople).<sup>35</sup>

After this short overview, Mudgarānand goes again back in much more detail to classical Greece, Rome and India;<sup>36</sup> touches upon the origin of Christianity and Islam;<sup>37</sup> dwells in the European middle ages (he mentions the crusades and his general fondness of religious extremists, and also Charlemagne and Canossa), the empire of Muhammad's followers (Harun al-Rashid) and Mahmud of Ghazna attacking India;<sup>38</sup> he even proves the unworthiness of medieval European knights by retelling the story of Don Quijote and Sancho Panza. Mudgar realizes that if he went on narrating the progress of the new peoples following upon the decline of the old at this pace, his account would become lengthy like many *Mahābhāratas*<sup>39</sup>, and so he limits himself to name-dropping those other experiences on his travels that he cannot deal with in detail: namely, Cromwell, Columbus, Vasco da Gama; the Japanese attacking Russia, the 1911 Xinhai revolution in China; the bad state of the Muslims; the Hagia Sofia – Supriyā in Kaṃs'tantupurī and so on.<sup>40</sup>

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Here, right in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter, ends the "historical" portion of *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī*, and it appears convenient to interrupt this synopsis as well before coming to the final part of the text, and pause for some preliminary observations. Some of the reasons why *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī* was announced above as a failed text may have become apparent by now.

First and foremost, the economy of narration of *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī* is highly uneven. The presentation is unsystematic, and the chronology moves in loops rather than steadily. Chronology, of course, is not a universal exigency for a successful narration, but *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī* does not enforce any alternative temporal organisation, and it seems rather that a chronological set-up was at some point intended but then sacrificed in favour of other dynamics of the presentation. As hinted above, the text appeared in instalments in the *Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Patrikā* from 1912 to 1913, and even when taking into account Sharma's high status and renown we might very well imagine an editor behind the scene urging the author to draw a close to his never-ending story, which would also explain the mere name-dropping of Cromwell, Columbus and da Gama (*RŚN*: 190) towards the end of this part.

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<sup>34</sup> *RŚN*: 170-71.

<sup>35</sup> *RŚN*: 172.

<sup>36</sup> *RŚN*, Chapters 11-14, pp. 173-84.

<sup>37</sup> *RŚN*: 181 and 186 respectively.

<sup>38</sup> *RŚN*: 186f.

<sup>39</sup> *in jātiyōṃ kī unnati kā varṇan yadi kiyā jāy to das-pāc mahābhārat ban jāeṃ. RŚN*: 190.

<sup>40</sup> *RŚN*: *ibid*, in a concise summary.

Secondly, Mudgar, as he piles up evaluations and verdicts on human societies, runs into inconsistencies more than once when his narratorial voice blends with that of the author, making Mudgar pose as the scientifically inclined modernist that Ramavatar Sharma purportedly was rather than the utter spiritualist as which Mudgar is introduced here and also in the other two texts.<sup>41</sup>

Lastly, and in extension of the afore-mentioned point, Mudgar's external standpoint is also severely shaken, for his perspective is not so much Neptunian, no matter what we might understand this to be, but quite discernibly Indian, because it is the implications for India and the author's location that are again and again highlighted and not those of any other of the many peoples that feature in the narration.

All of these points, of course, if used as conscious artistic devices, may be completely fine aesthetically if they achieve to generate a meaningful presentation and give the reader a clue as to why they are being employed; and it is the perceived lack of such clues and the concurrent impression that these devices have not been used intentionally that leads to the notion of a failed text. However, despite such narrative deficiencies, a look at the blue-print of the text thus far reveals quite a fascinating intellectual operation by the author. As we have seen, Ramavatar Sharma's *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī* is an attempt to narrate a kind of world history in traditional, non-colonial terms, or in a mythological narrative frame. Now, if we place the text in the context of the emerging discipline of modern Indian historiography, this attempt to tell world history in a modern Indian language and in an alternative epistemic framework is quite unique. There have, on the one hand, been some efforts in the nineteenth century to write history on the basis of material furnished by Indian mythology, but these never extended to anything larger than India.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, there was a trend of positivist nationalist historiography, soon asserting itself as the dominant current and becoming the order of the day, in which – both in English and in vernacular Indian languages – the overarching epistemic frame was almost invariably of European origin. So in relation to this latter dominant current, Mudgar – and it is the narrator we have to concentrate upon to isolate this manoeuvre, not yet the author – reverses the new order of the day. He does so, I think, on three separate levels:

- On the level of scriptural notation and phonetics, what strikes us is his almost penetrant use of Indianised forms of non-Indian proper names (Ajaputra for Egypt, Alakṣendra/Alīk'andra for Alexander, Abrahma for Abraham, to list only examples beginning in A) (cf. illus. 3 for a sample page). If we compare the usual constellations, it is obvious that this is a conscious and somewhat unruly move. Mudgar reverses the usual hierarchy of scriptural/phonetic

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<sup>41</sup> Compare, e.g., his praise of European researchers on the Ashokan edicts (which Indians, he remarks derisively, would have passed off as the secret script of the Pandavas) (*RŚN*: 156) on the one hand, and his explicit denial to watch Jesus leave his grave, stating that he did not want to defile such events with his divine eye since he believed such sacred things only from the stories (*keval kissoṃ se hī aīsī bātoṃ meṃ biśvās kar letā hū*; *RŚN*: 181). In the *Purāṇ'tattva*, Mudgar is quite unequivocally the spiritualist, blaming those who do not believe in miraculous means of transportation for being atheists (*RŚN*: 119).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Partha Chatterjee (1993): *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton, Princeton University Press; particularly p.77ff. on Mrityunjay Vidyalkar.

representation: he counters the phonological corruptions at work in so many English renderings of Indian proper names by equally distorting and “Sanskritizing” names of English and world history (the latter in their English forms).

- On the level of semantic representation, we can easily notice that Mudgar explains non-Indian phenomena by comparisons and analogies to Indian ones: there are *varṇa* distinctions in Roman society;<sup>43</sup> Hercules and Hannibal remind him of Hanuman or are even his *avatāras*; Homer has written a second *Rāmāyaṇa*, etc. So also on this level, India provides the grid of reference for classifying phenomena.
- On the level of narrative policy, furthermore, we find that Mudgar radically refuses to police out myth from his account of world history. He erases the epistemic bifurcation, fortified in the colonial period, between history as the “factual” and history as the “commonly concocted”, and fuses the two into one.<sup>44</sup>

Mudgar, then, may be the opposite of a typical 19<sup>th</sup> century rationalist reformer in his avowed spiritualism, but he certainly is a “reframer” through his location within a Hindu mythological scheme that is broadened in such a way as to provide a Hindu or brahmanical perspective on the world experienced by him at large. This kind of reframing of world history through the vision of this Hindu-Neptunian figure of Mudgaranand, however sketchily it may have been executed, is quite a pun already. But *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī* does not stop here, since in the remaining part it is Mudgar himself who is reframed. This greatly complicates the interpretation of the text as we shall see.

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<sup>43</sup> This particular feature may be based on earlier efforts to „sociologize“ the *varṇa* system e.g. by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay; cf. Hans Harder (2001): *Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's Śrīmad-bhagavadgītā: Translation and Analysis*. New Delhi: Manohar; 186-89.

<sup>44</sup> In doing this Mudgar opposes quite radically the widespread notion of Indians as a people without a proper sense of history.

का वर्णन पाश्चात्य भाषाओं में बहुतांश ने किया है। संस्कृत भाषा में भी 'वाङ्मय-महाणव' में इसका वर्णन पाया जाता है।

प्रायः दो हजार वर्ष के स्वातंत्र्य के बाद पहले पारसियों के, फिर अलक्षेन्द्र (Alexander) उसके पीछे रोम के हाथ अजपुत्र, असुर, फणीश (Phenicians) जाखूष (यहूदी) आदि सभी जातियों ने दास्य के मूल्य पर स्वाधीनता बेंच खाई। इन जातियों में फणीश बड़े उद्योगी और साक्षर थे। श्वेतद्वीप से लेकर मलयभूमि तक इनका वाणिज्य चलता था। इन्हीं के अक्षरों से पाश्चात्य यवन-यूनानी और रोमन आदि अक्षर उत्पन्न हुए हैं। अंगरेजी रोमन अक्षरों ही का रूपान्तर है, यह सब लोगों को विदित ही है। जाखूष लोग ऐसे उद्योगी तो नहीं थे पर धर्म-कल्पना में वे पहले से ही ऐसे निपुण थे जैसे आजकल सूद बढ़ाने में। मूसा आदि महात्मा इन्हीं के वंश में हुए थे, जिन्हें ब्रह्म की ज्योति दीख पड़ी थी और जिनकी साक्षात् निराकार ईश्वर से बातचीत होती थी। मैंने एक बार देखा कि अब्राहम (अब्राहम) नामक जाखूष अपने कुटुंब के साथ धूमते-धूमते अजपुत्रों में आ पहुँचा। अजपुत्रों ने उसके कुटुंब को अपने यहाँ से निकाल दिया। जाखूष महात्माओं की कृपा से पार होते समय लाल समुद्र घुटने भर हो गया और जाखूष लोग उत्तर की ओर चले गये। उस दृश्य को देखकर मुझे भगवान् कृष्णचंद्र को लिये हुए वसुदेव जी का जमुना पार करना याद आया जिसका वर्णन विष्णु भागवत में किया गया है।

जाखूषी (यहूदी) लोगों ने अपनी धार्मिकता के बड़े-बड़े तमाशे दिखाये। कुछ रोज तक तो इनके मंदिरों में पुरोहितों को आवेश आ जाता था और उसी आवेश में वे जिस किसी को नियामक का पद दे देते थे, उसी का राज्य रहता था। फिर इसके बाद राजाओं का समय आया। द्विविद (दाऊद) और शूलमणि (सुलेमान) आदि अनेक दिव्य-शक्ति-संपन्न राजा हुए। एक-एक की धर्म-पत्नियों की संख्या देखकर श्रीकृष्णचंद्र की द्वारका के रनिवास का स्मरण आता है। इसी जाति के बीच रोम साम्राज्य के काल में महात्मा ख्रिस्त का जन्म हुआ, जिनका वृत्तांत जब मैं रोम पहुँचूँगा तब लिखूँगा।

फणीशों ने पश्चिम में कई उपनिवेश बनाये थे। उत्तर अफ्रिका में करध्वजपुर (Carthage), श्रीशल्य (Cicily) में श्रीकुश (Syracuse) और सुफेन (स्पेन) में गाधिज (Cadiz) नगर इन्हीं के उपनिवेश थे। अजपुत्रों की सभ्यता जब कुछ मंद पड़ रही थी उसी समय यवन देश के समीप क्रीत द्वीप (Crete) में एक बड़ी सभ्यता फेली। भूमि खोद-खोद कर इस सभ्यता के चिह्न और वर्णन पाकर पुरातत्त्ववेत्ता लोग लोट-पोट हो रहे हैं। क्यों न हों? अमेरिका के कवियों ने कहा है कि 'अतीत काल अपने मुर्दों को गड़ा ही रखे, (Let the dead past bury its dead), पर जिन्हें वर्तमान काल में कोई विशेष कार्य नहीं है वे इन मुर्दों को न उखाड़ें तो और करें ही क्या ?

Illus. 3: *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī*, p. 166.

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Confused of all this, Mudgar's travelling soul decides to rejoin his immersed soul, which in the meantime was transferred to the holy site of Prayag because after the cutting of the moustache, smoke came out of it, and a famous ṛṣi removed it. At Prayag it awakes during the Kumbh Mela (possibly the one of 1906<sup>45</sup>). Dizzy after such a long meditation and dumb-struck by the hazzle all around, naked Mudgar finds himself the object of devotion of a mixed group of pilgrims, who start performing all kinds of devotional acts on him. After having been offered alcohol by one of his devotees, Mudgar starts singing (in a mixture of Sanskrit, Persian, English

<sup>45</sup> RSN: 190f. The year is not clear, since the narrator Mudgar states „some 12-13 years ago“, but while it is obvious that he writes for a colonial public in the early 20th century, it is unlikely that that is supposed to coincide with the author's present (1911-12) – because there was no Kumbh Mela in 1898-99.

and Hindi)<sup>46</sup> and dancing in exaltation, and the group joins him. In this process, the devotive lamps lit by one lady fall down and eventually set fire to a hut nearby, killing two children and a cow. As soon as the police appears, the crowd around Mudgar disperses in fear. A police constable takes Mudgar and the lady into custody; the lady denies her action, and in due course Mudgar is taken to court under the accusation of having caused an incendiary leading to both *gohatyā* (cow murder) and *ād'mī hatyā* (homicide), as the court representative mentions in this order.<sup>47</sup>

Here starts the ultimate Mudgar dilemma: what is at stake in court, and what the policeman firmly believes, is whether Mudgar, in the manner of certain yogis, Hanuman etc., has the capability to emit fire, i.e. his supernatural powers. The court, in the shape of the magistrate, a foreign-returned Babu, denies Mudgar's supernatural faculties and wants to set him free. The constable, however, insists on these faculties and wants to put him into jail – the additional irony being that Mudgar presumably *is* able to emit fire, but that he has equally presumably *not* caused the incendiary.<sup>48</sup> So Mudgar's story ends in delirium and absurdity: Barristers come in and adduce prove in the form of the four accepted means of knowledge according to *Nyāya* philosophy, *śābda*, *anumāna*, *upamāna* and *pratyakṣa*, that it is possible for humans to emit fire.<sup>49</sup> In the meanwhile, Mudgar is offered alcohol by the magistrate; he gets drunk and dances and sings again.<sup>50</sup> The police officer is enthralled by that and joins, upon which both are thrown out of the office. Now the police officer asks Mudgarānand to stand by the side of the road and do his "morning rites" (*prātaḥkriyā*), or, in plain language, go for a loo break while the Babu goes home by bike, so that the latter may witness the fire coming out of Mudgar's body.<sup>51</sup>

And here, the text breaks off. It is unclear if the author Ramavatar Sharma actually wanted it to end here, and the not altogether unlikely version would be that this text started to be too much of a burden on the publishers of the Nagari Pracharini Sabha's journal, and they closed it down. But no matter how perplexed this ending leaves the reader, it does make for an interesting *finale*, and we will now attempt to spell this out with reference to asymmetrical frames in the concluding part of this paper.

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<sup>46</sup> RŚN: 195. Especially the English part of the song is worth quoting: "We are Neptunians all, / we are Oh, seven and small, / Six are under railway lines, / I am in the black coal mines. / 'Tis the latest fashion in dress / straw-hat on the stark nakedness. / The Jogin East and ladies West, / in me you see all that's best."

<sup>47</sup> RŚN: 195-96.

<sup>48</sup> RŚN: 197-98. The wording the constable uses (p. 198) is *huzūr ne ise kuch khilāyā aur is'ne kahīṃ pākhānā kiyā to sāre daftar meṃ abhī āg lag jāegī* (If His Higness gives him something to eat and he defecates somewhere, fire will at once break out in the whole office).

<sup>49</sup> The proofs run thus: 1. *śabda*: In the *Mahābhārata*, Uttanka Muni set the underworld to fire, and the horse called Hayavāna emitted fire. 2. *anumāna*: Hindus fear that fire may come out of the arse when defaecating and therefore use water, not paper. 3. *upamāna*: two well-known personalities have died in the washroom recently from fire. 4. *pratyakṣa*: a practical demonstration can be done if a purgative is given to Mudgar. RŚN: 199.

<sup>50</sup> "I am Neptunian and come to see poor earth, / How she is hypnotised in gay occult myth, / Clairvoyance, and planchets and telepathy, / Why telepathy, why allopathy, why homeopathy." RŚN: 198.

<sup>51</sup> RŚN: 199.

7

*Mudgarānand'caritāvalī* has a multi-layered and unstable structure, and is wrought by manifold tensions. Thus it seems not too far-fetched to look at this text as a discursive battlefield – an arena in which various discursive templates, hardly controllable by the author, try to gain supremacy over and *frame* their adversaries. We can describe this as instances of “context wrapping”: ascending levels of context wrap and thereby subordinate each other. And in the process of these contexts swallowing one another each at its turn, multiple inversions of meaning are produced. It is by isolating the various levels internal to the text and then setting them against established frames of Orientalist and colonial organization of knowledge that we can realise the text's potential to speak about the fate of the Hindu mythological universe in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century India, and eventually see what colonialism does to a Neptunian, but actually Hindu/Indian semi-god.

In simplified terms,<sup>52</sup> and in continuation of the arguments made above, such an unravelling might result in the following: On the very basic *first level* of scriptural representation, as we have seen already, a Sanskritic frame rules the transcriptions of names and designations, upsetting thereby the usual colonial (and partly Orientalist) order. On the *second level*, pertaining to the narration proper already, we find Mudgar's transcultural journey through history and myth in one single frame, without any kind of consistent subordinating of the latter by the former. Mudgar's narrative personality with various kinds of self-references would come on top of this as a *third level*, including his belief in everything supernatural and stern contempt for atheists, etc. These three levels support most of the 60 pages of the text and would, as remarked above, lend themselves to interpreting *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī* as an attempt at Indocentric historiography. This interpretation, however, is swallowed by yet another frame on a *fourth level*, on which the semi-divine narrator Mudgarānand is dismantled of his aura and touches earthly ground hard when he is taken to court and forced to demonstrate his supernatural capacities (which eventually makes him leave the earth in a fury). On the *fifth level*, then, lies the main riddle of *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī*: the relationship between the narrator and the author, or, in brief, the author's intention. What does Ramavatar Sharma want to communicate by this account of world history, and especially by delegitimizing or deconstructing his narrator Mudgarānand in this way? This is the question that the remaining part of the article will attempt to address now.

As suggested in the beginning of this paper, *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī* might be read as an alternative world history or as a satire, either in the form of a mock mythological account or as an independent piece relating to multiple genres. The synopsis and analysis so far have shown that it is none of these in its totality but contains ingredients of all three. In terms of a history – which is the dominant mode in the middling part – the text privileges an Indian perspective alright, but does not challenge most of the basic narratives of contemporary positivist nationalist historiography. *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī* apparently takes the data about Egyptians, Romans etc. from mainstream English-medium historiography and restricts itself to correlating this and Hindu mythological narratives and erasing the divide, well-established in his context, between history and story. This mode governs a

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<sup>52</sup> Simplified because this distinction of levels does not take into account the inconsistencies of the text, but is rather an attempt to reconstruct a blueprint.

considerable part of the text. But if the mytho-historical account were to be seen as the central point of gravitation, there would have been no need for Sharma to ban his narrator from earth and his narration in the end. *Ergo* this gravitational centre must lie elsewhere.

Some features of the narration, such as the episode with Mudgar's moustache, exceed the range of material that even the most broadly conceived mytho-history could possibly cover and rather signal towards an interpretation as a mock mythological account, something no too uncommon in India in Sharma's days or after.<sup>53</sup> But quite obviously *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī* is not simply a mock *purāṇa* either. For had it been intended as such, one would have expected more attention towards formal features of paurāṇic literature. Especially in the narrative set-up one would have counted on the typical model of a Muni reporting events and telling stories, rather than the autobiographical first-person narration which seems completely alien to paurāṇic narrative techniques. So as far as genre is concerned, *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī* indeed defies categorization and, if read as a piece of mockery, targets more than one without exclusively belonging to any.

However, irrespective of its problematic genre affiliation, it appears that *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī* will primarily have to be understood as a satire. As argued above, Mudgar is a suitable narrator of satire who instills satirical qualities to the historical account also by his aloofness and supernatural powers. What remains to be made sense of, then, is the final unmaking of Mudgar by his author, because here Mudgar ceases to be a spectator and becomes himself an object of representation. Mudgar, however – and that is one of the great difficulties of the present text – does not really qualify as a target of satire if we buy into the notion that satire, however obliquely, always targets some commonality and puts some moral standard to something<sup>54</sup> – unless, of course, we can decipher him as something already well-known to the readers. \*

So here, in a somewhat bold interpretative move, is a hypothesis: arguably, the only way to read sense into this text as a whole is to suppose that Mudgar stands for the whole complex of brahmanical tradition, the mythological universe of Hinduism, and, not in the least, for the traditional brahmanical intellectual that Ramavatar Sharma himself to some extent was. *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī* would then be a hazy, meandering effort at *annihilation* of a part of the traditional brahmin's persona; not a very conscious and planned undertaking, but something that enunciates itself almost *despite* the author.<sup>55</sup> The last part of *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī* dismisses Mudgar as a figure not really tenable on earth, someone out of place in a colonial set-up. And

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<sup>53</sup> The mocking of classical forms (*stotras, purāṇas, epics, etc.*) can be found in the works of a wide range of authors such as the above-quoted Bharatendu Harishchandra and Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, as well as later authors like Dvijendralal Ray (Bengali), Amritlal Nagar (Hindi), Putumaippittan (Tamil) and others.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. e.g. Northrop Frye (1971[1957]): *Anatomy of Criticism: four essays*. Princeton, Princeton University Press; p. 224: "Satire demands at least a token fantasy, a content which the reader recognizes as grotesque, and at least an implicit moral standard, the latter being essential in a militant attitude to experience. Some phenomena, such as the ravages of disease, may be called grotesque, but to make fun of them would not be very effective satire. The satirist has to select his absurdities, and the act of selection is a moral act."

<sup>55</sup> An instance, maybe, of Keats's "negative capability", in the sense that the text tells us more than the author ever would.



consequently, along with Mudgar goes also – and again somewhat despite Sharma's intention – his narration of world history from a position aloof of the human sphere.

Taking Mudgar to court, in such a reading, becomes judging the whole of Hindu mythology on criteria that deny its specific properties and validity, and from which it can emerge only either as ineffective and irrelevant or as effective and illegal. The judicial court, by the way, features frequently in colonial satires, its methods of truth finding being led *ad absurdum* and its procedures being ridiculed.<sup>56</sup> In Mudgar's case, the court does not so much threaten Mudgarānand. It rather shows that he may get away if he complies with the common (colonial) notion of a human but will be liable to punishment if he chooses to deviate from that notion. All that happens without any guilt of his own, and neither of the court or the policemen. It is rather a tragical coincidence that creates this dilemma and makes Mudgar look so utterly displaced that he soon after leaves the earth again.<sup>57</sup> Mudgar's trajectory, in short, leads from the clouds into the ditch and then off to Neptune; and this is exactly what, according to this satirical piece, happens to traditional brahmanical systems of knowledge.

So far for an interpretation of *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī* and its failure as a text in the light of colonial asymmetries. The text construes an "Indian" frame for trans-cultural history, whose feasibility is thereupon ruled out by the authoritative frame of a colonial court of justice: the narrative succumbs to, and is rendered irrelevant by, a novel paradigm of *fact and fiction*, mediated and empowered by both Orientalist and colonialist paradigms. But this remains guesswork – and it is part of the failure (rather than the artistry, because the text fails artistically as well) of the text that it does. Nonetheless, *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī* makes fascinating reading as a text symptomatic of the colonial cultural encounter and as a unique Indian gloss on disenchantment. Ramavatar Sharma describes the colonial withdrawal of a Neptunian semi-god, whom we have read as an embodiment of traditional brahmanical genius. In colonial modern times, this genius and its semi-divine world becomes anachronistic and goes into retreat. It is no longer at the disposal of contemporary Hindu revivalist movements like the *Ārya Samāj*, and their efforts of finding up-to-date electronics, weaponry and aircraft in ancient Vedic scriptures are utterly disqualified by this divine retreat. Mudgar is back to Neptune, his heavenly body is back to heaven, and humans are left to themselves, prompted to sort out whatever asymmetries among themselves and with the help of down-to-earth zeal and rationality. Along with Mudgar, however, the Sanskritist pundit Ramavatar Sharma, prompted by the deeply humorous perception of the anachronism of his own profession, sends much of himself, and the scholarship he stands for, into an exile of absurdity and irrelevance.

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<sup>56</sup> E.g. Bankim's *Kamalākānta* (as referred to above), Sukumar Ray's famous *Ha-ya-ba-ra-la*, the mock lexica by Pratapnarayan Mishra and Radhacharan Gosvami, etc.

<sup>57</sup> As we learn in a footnote signed by the *lekhak*, author, long before (*RŚN*: 173).



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