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# ANANTARATNAPRABHAVA

## STUDI IN ONORE DI GIULIANO BOCCALI

*a cura di Alice Crisanti, Cinzia Pieruccini, Chiara Policardi, Paola M. Rossi*

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## Studi in onore di Giuliano Boccali

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# Cultural Elaborations of Eternal Polarities: Travels of Heroes, Ascetics and Lovers in Early Modern Hindi Narratives

*Giorgio Milanetti*

## 1. *Introduction: Searching for Embedded Continuities Through the Lenses of the Polarity Principle*

In this essay I argue that the use of the polarity principle as a heuristic tool can reveal embedded or structural continuities throughout the history of Indian civilization. To substantiate this hypothesis, I analyse how the polarity constituted by elements such as movement, nomadism, mobility, and homelessness, on the one hand, and immobility, settlement, domesticity, and stationariness, on the other, has been culturally elaborated and, more specifically, variously translated in narrative terms. More than in the details of the specific narrations, however, I am interested in a semiotic analysis of the texts on the basis of the above-described methodological approach. While the focus is primarily on early modern literatures in North Indian languages, a few references are also made to Vedic, Epic and Buddhist contexts, which can offer evidence for the persistence of the mentioned polarity in a diachronic perspective.

The first scholar who systematically applied the polarity principle to human sciences was the American philosopher Morris R. Cohen.[1] Observing that «the empirical facts are generally resultants of opposing and yet inseparable tendencies like the north and south poles», he warned against

> the universal tendency to simplify situations and to analyze them in terms of only one of such contrary tendencies. This principle of polarity is a maxim of intellectual search, like the principle of causality, against the abuse of which it may serve as a help. If the principle of causality makes us search for operating causes, the principle of polarity makes us search for that which prevents them from producing greater effects than they do. [...] Philosophically it may be generalized as the principle, not of the identity, but of the necessary copresence and mutual dependence of opposite determinations.[2]

1. Cohen 1982; Cohen 1977.
2. Cohen 1977, 74-75.

On the basis of the authority of Cohen, who decisively contributed to the development of a modern philosophy of law, the principle of polarity continued to inspire scholarly works for several decades. In a volume that focused, among other political issues, on the nature of American federalism, H. Eulau, for instance, remarked that

> by calling attention to the basic interdependence of opposites and their mutual entailment, the polarity principle sensitizes the observer to the complexity of seemingly paradoxical facts as well as to the possibility of alternative hypotheses. In contrast to dualistic thinking, the polarity principle aids the analyst in avoiding one-sided and easily false formulations.[3]

Interestingly enough, Eulau noted how the principle of polarity works in an conspicuously different way from the principles of the «Hegelian-Marxist» dialectic, since the latter «is uncomfortable with the contradictions immanent in a phenomenon and seeks to absorb or transcend them in their unity», while the polarity principle «stresses the interdependence of the poles in what is a continuous phenomenon; and it does not deny the existence of the poles but *calls for their measurement*».[4]

Arguably, the specialists of Indian philosophy are likely to be at ease with the workings of the principle of polarity. They will not only appreciate its general warning – as Cohen calls it – against «the greatest bane of philosophizing», i.e. «the easy artificial dilemma between unity and plurality, rest and motion, substance and function, actual and ideal, etc.»;[5] but also, more specifically, they might share the vision of a «fundamental polar aspect of Hindu thought» – as it was outlined by Betty Heimann[6] just a few years after the publication of Cohen's landmark work. In her essay, Heimann sees the polarity principle as pervading almost every aspect of Indian philosophy, from «eschatological problems»[7] to «cosmological concepts»:[8] «[e]pistemologically, too, India adheres to her at least double aspect of everything».[9]

Several scholars have subsequently defined perspectives and processes of the polarity principle as a powerfully inspiring heuristic tool. In a speech focused on the theme of word and silence, the Indian-Catalan philosopher Raimon (Raimundo) Panikkar, for instance, has observed that «only a holistic point of view will do

3. Eulau 1986, 234.
4. *Ibid.*, italics added.
5. Cohen 1977, 75.
6. Heimann 1939, 1018.
7. *Ibid.*, 1017.
8. *Ibid.*, 1018.
9. *Ibid.*, 1019.

justice to reality and that any analysis is methodologically inadequate for this kind of apprehension of reality, since the whole is more than just the sum of its parts (so that the integral of the analyzed parts would never yield the real)».[10]

## 2. *Nomadism and Settlement in Early Narratives*

The polarity constituted by nomadism (mobility, homelessness, etc.) on the one hand, and settlement (domesticity, stationariness, etc.) on the other, has been rooted in Indian civilization since its earliest cultural elaborations. In fact, as their narratives show, the Vedic tribes[11] developed their identity by resorting largely to the dynamics that characterize this polarity and the processes that arise therefrom. Their texts regularly describe the local or original inhabitants – with whom they clashed while advancing southward and eastward into the Indian subcontinent – with negative or even derogatory expressions such as «treacherous», «black-skinned», «snub-nosed», «performers of black-magic», etc.[12] Even more importantly, the local inhabitants (and their divine counterparts, the Asuras) are represented as particularly despicable since they «live in *fortified habitations*»,[13] while the Vedic tribes (and their divine counterparts, the Devas) are strictly associated with the values of movement, dynamicity, and open space. Vocabulary adds to the evidence as well: the main Vedic god, Indra, is invoked with the name of 'destroyer of cities' (*purandara*, *purbhid*) – which also points to the fact that cities are not occupied by the conquerors, but destroyed and returned to open space;[14] the name for 'place', 'region' (*deśa*) is a derivative of the word for 'direction' (*diś*). Thus the picture seems quite clear: mainstream values are those related to movement and nomadism;[15] demons (and local people) build walls that hinder free advance and consequently are to be destroyed; lengthy stays, settlements, stations, circumscribed spaces – all belong to a dimension which is perceived as unavoidable, but is confined to the sphere of the dead, the ancestors, and Yama, the god of Death.[16]

10. Panikkar 1974, 163.

11. I.e. those tribes who «spoke an Indo-European language, which developed into Vedic», and who were «small groups of semi-nomadic peoples» (Staal 1996, 65).

12. Thapar 1971, 410.

13. *Ibid.*, italics added.

14. Angot 2009, 46.

15. In later texts of the Vedic corpus, movement and wandering will be given a moral and spiritual value as well: «Evil is he who stayeth among men / Indra is the comrade of the wanderer / [...] Flower-like the heels of the wanderer, / His body growth and is fruitful; / All his sins disappear, / Slain by the toil of his journeying» (Keith 1998, 302).

16. See e.g. *Ṛgveda Saṃhitā*, X.14.9d (Griffith 1897, 399).

Nonetheless, there are other indications that an ever-evolving dynamic between the two poles was clearly manifest in (and had a great influence on) the Vedic corpus. It is noteworthy, for instance, that the above-mentioned *Ṛgveda Saṃhitā*, while celebrating open space and unhindered movement, also contains clear references to values that are typical of settled communities and an economy based on agriculture.[17] Indeed, several major elements of Vedic civilization may be seen as the tools of a transition to settlement. In this regard, the central role that Vedic religion and philosophy assign to fire should be mentioned; it is not only worshipped as the god Agni, but also placed at the centre of the sacrificial ritual. At the same time, in historical perspective, fire represents a decisive tool in the process of clearing the jungle and turning it into arable land. As Heesterman puts it: «The sacrificial fire cult is tantamount to settling the wild».[18]

## 3. *Trajectories of the Movement-Settlement Polarity in the* Ādi-kāvya

Similar contradictions characterize the narrative contents of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the 'first poem' (*ādi-kāvya*) in Sanskrit literature,[19] whose oldest parts date back to 500 BCE or slightly earlier.[20] Over the last few years I have often written and lectured about the possibility of extracting data of historical value from this text, which appears to be an invaluable document concerning the institution of a "new" urban-agricultural civilization,[21] based on the triple hegemony of plough (or settled) agriculture in economy, monarchy in the political domain, and the *brāhmaṇa* caste in the religio-sacrificial sphere. Again, the movement-settlement polarity represents one of the main drivers of the narrative, as its very title[22] indicates. The dynamic nature of the story is further emphasized by its being presented against the background of a severe dynastic crisis, which tradition places at the turning point between two cosmic eras, *tretā* and *dvāpara yuga*, thus highlighting the element of change and "modernity" that the text introduces. On this basis, the interplay between movement and settlement is mainly expressed through the exile of Rāma and his companions and their advancing amidst densely forested areas of the Indian subcontinent, within the scenario of a «continuum of social and economic forms, moving from hunting and gathering peoples to chiefdoms and [...] the

17. Angot 2009, 76-77.

18. Heesterman 1993, 124.

19. Bhatt–Shah 1960-1975 (quotations from the text refer to this critical edition); Goldman 1984-2017.

20. Brockington 1985, 309-310.

21. Milanetti 2007; 2012a; 2015.

22. It can be translated as 'Rāma's advancing', or 'Rāma's journey' (*Rāma-ayaṇa*).

monarchical state».[23] The long journey takes a dramatic turn when the "devilish" Rāvaṇa abducts Rāma's spouse Sītā;[24] in order to rescue her, Rāma and his brother Lakṣmaṇa, with a following of local tribal warriors, march towards the southern island of Laṅkā, thus «striking out on an unbeaten path».[25]

As is well known, the story ends with the establishment of Rāma's prosperous reign (*Rāma-rājya*) in the city of Ayodhyā, yet many elements suggest that the narrative is more complex than the celebration of a hero's deeds, in that it describes not only the difficulties which Rāma has to overcome before accomplishing his feats, but also the elements of loss that are implicitly contained in the institution of the new civilization. In fact, the poem presents a clear picture of what can be termed as the "dark side" of the prosperity brought about by "modern" agriculture – although the use of the plough was well known to, and already celebrated in, the Vedic scriptures –[26] and, as far as our discussion is concerned, the aftermath of settlement in an urban context.

Indeed, the *Rāmāyaṇa* – inasmuch as it represents a civilizational narrative – could have never had a happy ending. In it, elements of a major crisis become evident immediately after Rāma's victory over Rāvaṇa, when the triumphant hero repudiates Sītā accusing her of being «a woman who lived in another's abode»[27] and declaring that he fought Rāvaṇa only for the sake of his family's honour. Out of despair, and in order to demonstrate her pureness, Sītā throws herself into the fire, which, however, leaves her untouched.[28] In the last book of the poem – which describes 'further' (*uttara*) episodes that occurred after Rāma's enthronement, and is considered a later addition to the central plot – rumours once again arise as to Sītā's faithfulness. This time Rāma is urged to exile her to Vālmīki's hermitage, notwithstanding the fact that she is pregnant, and he reluctantly does so. Sītā will return to the king's court only many years later, when Rāma acknowledges his twin sons' identity during the celebration of a royal sacrifice. She then «publicly affirms her purity by calling upon the Earth to swallow her in testimony; the Earth embraces Sītā and disappears with her (87-88), while Rāma is left to mourn her loss, using a *golden statue* of hers as a substitute at sacrifices (89)».[29] It is precisely through this

23. Thapar 1989, 10.
24. *Rāmāyaṇa*, III.64.10.
25. *Rāmāyaṇa*, III.65.2, trans. in Pollock 2006, 381.
26. The *Kauśikasūtra* of the *Atharvaveda* explicitly identifies *sītā* (the 'furrow') with agriculture (*kṛṣi*), personifying it as a goddess and praising the overabundant gifts it bestows (*Kauśikasūtra*, 106, 6-7, in Bloomfield 1890, 259).
27. *Rāmāyaṇa*, VI.103,19.
28. *Ibid*., VI.104.
29. Brockington 1985, 8, italics added.

loss, a true human sacrifice, that the deeper meaning of the story – containing a touch of an "a posteriori" consciousness – can finally surface.

On the other hand, the hierarchy of values set forth by the author(s) of the *Rāmāyaṇa* – whom we may identify as the agent(s) or the codifier(s) of "modernity" – does not leave any room for doubt, since it communicates (in a narratological sense)[30] not only the key elements of the new society that was then being created, but also, and more specifically, information about the critical re-evaluation of the old identity-related features, regarding movement, nomadism, etc. In Indian epic, description is tantamount to prescription: the de-legitimization of values pertaining to different (and competing) forms of social organization is narratively achieved by bringing an end to the long and painful "advance" of Rāma and his companions through the wilderness of the Indian subcontinent. From this perspective, the establishment of the divine kingdom of Rāma in the city of Ayodhyā represents a seemingly total reorientation compared to the Vedic celebration of movement, nomadism and wandering. That notwithstanding, from the heuristic perspective of the polarity principle, the dramatic loss of Sītā testifies to the resilience of the opposite force, since it points exactly to the «the interdependence of the poles in what is a continuous phenomenon»,[31] i.e. to the interplay of the forces of movement and settlement in the making of Indian civilization, which – as per the above-quoted conceptualisation – necessarily brings about the *measurement*,[32] or the intrinsic counterbalancing, of the (temporarily) prevailing pole.

## 4. *Ritualizing the Pole of Movement: Wandering Asceticism and Early Buddhism*

In fact, it is the same principle of the interdependence of the poles – with its related dynamics of measurement and counterbalance – that explains why key-elements of a given culture (seemingly) discarded due to civilizational crises and changes, easily find other ways to surface. Starting from the mid-first millennium BCE, when the oldest nucleus of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was composed, at least two important processes, which are particularly relevant with regard to movement, nomadism and the associated values, were set in motion: on the one hand, wandering, journeying and homelessness underwent a process of spiritualization, becoming a central element of spiritual quest;[33] on the second, the same themes began to be elaborated and cir-

30. See Rigney 1992, 267.

31. Eulau 1986, 234.

32. *Ibid.*

33. See note 15 for verses from the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* which attribute a moral and spiritual value to wandering and journeying. The date of composition of the *Aitareya* may well correspond to the period under examination.

culated in literary compositions, both in classical languages and in the vernaculars, sometimes in texts which were only orally transmitted. To summarize, a civilization that has chosen to settle, and to enjoy the prosperity of urban-agricultural institutions, confines the pole of movement (nomadism, homelessness etc.) to restricted and culturally ritualized contexts in order to "metabolize" – within the described dynamic of "measurement" – the values it expresses.

The ascetic codification of the values of movement (etc.) is particularly pertinent to the present discussion, because a central feature of the narrations analyzed below, is that of a king who turns into a wandering ascetic. Such codification represents a key element of Indian spiritual tradition since its earliest days, as is shown by the Śramaṇa tradition, which stands as a paradigm for several later forms of Indian asceticism. Śramaṇas were wandering ascetics, who basically challenged the Brahmanical tradition founded on ritual and sacrifice. Many scholars consider their views as a fundamental, albeit underestimated, contribution to the development of later currents of philosophical thought, both Hindu and non-Hindu, from Buddhism and (especially) Jainism[34] to the *Upaniṣad*s.[35] The Buddha himself is sometimes considered both a representative and a reformer of this tradition, whose adepts used to practice a life of toil and effort (√*śram*) in order to achieve enlightenment and freedom from the fetters of human condition.

The life of the Buddha – which was largely described and commented upon by Buddhist authors –[36] is particularly instructive in terms of the values it explicitly describes (and prescribes) with regard to the settled life/wandering life polarity, all the more so since the Buddha, just like Rāma, belonged to a royal lineage. His rejection of household life, as we learn from the *Majjhima Nikāya*[37] and other sources, is radical and unambiguous:

> Before my enlightenment, while I was still only an unenlightened Bodhisattva, I thought: «Household life is crowded and dusty; life gone forth is wide open. It is not easy, while living in a home, to lead the holy life utterly perfect and pure as a polished shell [...]».
> Later, when still young, a black-haired young man endowed with the blessing of youth, in the prime of life, though my mother and father wished otherwise and wept with tearful faces, I shaved off my hair and beard, put on the yellow robe, and went forth from the home life into homelessness.[38]

34. See e.g. Lalwani 1975.
35. See e.g. Pande 1978.
36. See e.g. Cowell 1894.
37. Bhikku Ñanamoli, Bhikku Bodhi 1995.
38. *Ibid*., 36, 12-13, 335.

This and other similar passages indicate not only that the opposition between the first and the later stages of the Buddha's life can be interpreted as a metaphor for the contrast between a settled and a nomadic existence, but also that, in the perspective of early Buddhism, there is a causal relationship between the condition of homelessness and the very possibility of spiritual quest, since the wandering life is conceived and presented as a prerequisite for spiritual growth. On the other hand, this equation is also evidenced by a number of key elements of the early Buddhist enquiry into human nature.[39]

It can be suggested that *Rāmāyaṇa* and early Buddhism (which are roughly coeval) might well represent two different answers to the same epochal crisis. On the one hand, in fact, the poem – a new identity-related narrative – metabolizes and institutionalizes the shift from old to new values (and hierarchies), describing in political terms, as it does, the constitution of an affluent society in which individuals have a fixed place and an established duty; on the other, the Buddha's teachings emphasize the necessity of a "private" (as opposed to "political") response to the same critical changes, recommending the repudiation of an individual's former social identity and the integration of external behaviour and inner dynamics. This integration is achieved through what is described as an "itinerary" – from "right view" and "right speech" to "right concentration" – the fullest expression of which can be found in the celebrated Noble Eightfold Path (*āryāṣṭāṅgamārga*).[40] Indeed, Buddhist spirituality is largely built not only on the actual condition of homelessness, but also on metaphors emphasizing its necessity: progressing towards enlightenment means following a path, a road (*mārga*). Once again, we are on the move. The ideal of an orderly domesticity in a settled society is explicitly discarded in favour of the institution of a congregation of wandering monks and nuns who convert and instruct lay disciples, regardless of the social position of the latter (which contributes to explain why Buddhism, and not Hinduism, can be considered a universal religion).

## 5. *Ritualizing the Pole of Movement: Inner Itineraries in Yoga-Tantra Practices*

A further spiritual elaboration of the movement (etc.)/stationariness (etc.) polarity with a specific bearing on our discussion was produced within the Yoga-Tantra tradition. With its emphasis on male and female energies, Tantra provided Yoga – or Aṣṭāṅga Yoga, as it is termed in the *Yogasūtras*,[41] attributed to the grammari-

39. See e.g. Johansson 1979.
40. Thich Nhat Hahn 1999.
41. *yama-niyamāsana-prāṇāyāma-pratyāhāra-dhāraṇā-dhyāna-samādhayo 'ṣṭāv aṅgāni*

an Patañjali –[42] with a formidable framework for the development of its more dynamic aspects. The systematization of this complex set of concepts and practices is conventionally attributed to Gorakh'nāth, a semi-legendary figure who lived perhaps around the 12th century and is credited with the authorship of many major Haṭha-Yoga texts.[43] He and his *guru* Matsyendranāth are traditionally considered the founders of the Nāth Yogī or Kān'phaṭa ('split ears') Yogī order,[44] whose adepts still embody the prototype of Indian ascetics, with regard to the practices and the accessories by which they are characterized.

Several Yoga-Tantra elements may be classified as manifestly related to the pole of movement, advance, etc., among them a series of channels (*nāṛī*) where energies flow, a set of *cakra*s, where channels meet or cross each other, and the process of awakening a sleeping energy called *kuṇḍalinī*, portrayed as a coiled snake lying at the base of the spinal cord.[45] On these foundations, the Haṭha-Yoga tradition proceeded to produce detailed descriptions of spiritual paths and the techniques that stimulate this inner journeying. During its ascent, *kuṇḍalinī*, which is sometimes represented as a female goddess, or Śakti, crosses all the energy centers which are positioned along the central channel one after the other, from the lowest (*mūlādhāra* or *ādhāra*)[46] to the highest one (*sahasrāra*). It is precisely in this sense that this process of progressive exploration and purification of the human psycho-physical complex can be considered a path that ultimately leads to the dissolution of any separation between individual and universal energies – or, in tantric terms, to the mystical union of Śiva and Śakti. This journey and the consequent merging of the two have been variously described in texts of different kinds, but given their non-dialectical nature, their representation has mainly been carried out through symbols or metaphors. In several early modern narratives that circulated in North Indian languages, this process typically took the form of a romance, or, more precisely, of a love story (*premākhyān*), the narrative content of which – coming full circle – was almost invariably expressed via the dramatic description of a journey.

(*Yogasūtra*, 2.29).

42. Woods 1914 for a translation of the text and hypotheses on its dates and authorship.

43. See Banerjea 1962; Muñoz suggests dates as early as the ninth to eleventh century for Gorakh and his *guru* Matsyendra (Muñoz 2011, 113).

44. See Briggs 1989.

45. A list of «Nāth-related texts that deal with haṭha yoga» is in Muñoz 2011, 111-112.

46. *Gorakṣaśataka*, 17, from the text as edited by Briggs 1989, 284-304.

## 6. *Journeys Through Early Modern Narrations: Dāūd's* Candāyan

Taking into account the literary *avatār*s of the pole of movement, homelessness, journeying, etc., what is particularly noteworthy is that many of the major elements of "mobility" that were later developed and reflected in both oral and written literatures were already present in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The themes of the king who had turned into a wandering ascetic, his adventurous journey(s), his encounters and battles with fierce enemies, the loss of his spouse during the journey and his desolate wandering in search of her, the voyage(s) of a love messenger, the arrival in breathtaking foreign cities, are all "mobility" motifs that have been adopted and adapted, modified and replicated, echoed and alluded to endless times over the centuries and down to the present day. That notwithstanding, it must be observed that many of the major early modern Hindi narratives – particularly Sūfī *premākhyān*s – took the form of *mahākāvya*s, i.e. of classical courtly compositions that are typical of urban (and highly institutionalized) cultures. From a political point of view, this may be due to the fact that classical *kāvya*, with its «common heritage of themes, elements, images, situations, and characters»,[47] and its emphasis on cities as centres of monarchical power,[48] was also particularly suited to conveying Sūfīs' support for local Islamic dynasties. On the other hand, this apparent contradiction can also be seen as another illustration of the polarity principle, which «(b)y calling attention to the basic interdependence of opposites and their mutual entailment, [...] sensitizes the observer to the complexity of seemingly paradoxical facts as well as to the possibility of alternative hypotheses».[49] In fact, «(t)he polarities we speak about [...] are not mutually exclusive so that they must be *aufgehoben*, but mutually inclusive. They need one another and they cannot be without each other».[50]

In any case, fictional compositions benefit from lingering on dilemmas, all the more so when they are related to civilizational-turned-existential quandaries. Within the context of early modern Hindi narratives, the tensions and the contradictions between the poles of settlement, domesticity (etc.), on the one hand, and movement, homelessness (etc.) on the other, have often represented one of the main elements that underpin the evolution of the story. In this regard, a brief analysis of some of the dynamics related to the two poles follows, with reference to a few selected narratives, two of which represent formal elaborations by Avadhī Sūfī poets of popular folk tales: *Candāyan*, composed by Maulānā Dāūd towards

47. Boccali 2000, 460.
48. *Ibid*., 460-461. Eulau 1986, 233.
49. Eulau 1986, 233.
50. Panikkar 1974, 163.

the end of the 14th century[51] and based on the traditional love story of Lorik and Candā,[52] which was especially popular in the eastern part of northern India and in Chhattisgarh; and Jāyasī's *Padmāvat*,[53] perhaps the greatest of all Sūfī *premākhyān*s, composed between 1520 and 1540[54] and based on both legendary and historical narrative materials. The third narrative is a set of folk stories variously interpreted and handed down throughout Northern India, from Panjab to Bengal; they deal with the adventurous life of the king-turned-ascetic Gopī Cand.[55]

A few interesting features are common to these narratives, the most prominent of them being the journey that leads the principal characters of the stories towards the eastern borders of the subcontinent, thus replicating the progression described in the Vedic texts and its ritual elaborations.[56] Strong identity-related features characterize the narrative framework of the journey as told in *Candāyan*, a poem that can be considered – like other Sūfī *premākhyān*s – a tool furthering the establishment of an alliance «of the settler-Muslim poets with groups displaying similar sensibilities, usually of a socially disruptive and "anti-Brahmanical" kind».[57] The context within which these poems were composed is distinguished by processes that are comparable to those which I have described with reference to the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In fact, from the middle of the fourteenth century onwards, Muslim immigrants were settling in formerly wild areas of Eastern Doab and Avadh, gradually introducing agriculture[58] and producing a new culture and a new, integrated society. There is an explicit celebration of cultivation, as a few verses from *Tuḥfa i naṣā'iḥ*, a coeval moral treatise by Yūsuf Gadā,[59] attest:

> Eat from your own labor, and from the toil of your hand [...]
> If you sow a field and it provides a living,
> Cultivate and you will bear away plentiful fruit.
> The benefit of this toil is counted in the world,
> Cultivation benefits a whole world, its profit is not limited.[60]

Through literary works that focused on Indian characters and were based on local folk narratives, Sūfī poets aimed at creating a climate that could facilitate the im-

51. Gupta 1967.
52. Pandey 1979; Pandey 1982.
53. Agravāl 1955; Gupta 1963; Milanetti 1995.
54. Milanetti 1995, 46-47.
55. Grodzins Gold 1993.
56. Angot 2009, 78.
57. Digby 2004, 341.
58. Ludden 1999, 94ff.; see also Milanetti 2006, 22-25.
59. Digby 1984, 91-123.
60. *Ibid*., 115-116.

migrants' integration in Indian society. *Candāyan*'s hero, Lorik, is a chieftain from the Ahīr (Abhīra) *jāti* – a tribal or ethnic semi-nomadic group mainly involved in cattle raising, which was considered to be living on the margins of mainstream Hindu society and was thus particularly suited to an alliance with the Muslim settlers. (Incidentally, traces of this relationship have even survived in contemporary politics, as shown by the electoral agreement between Yādavs and Muslims that has represented a major feature of the Northern Indian political scene for many years now). Yet what seems to be of particular interest to our discussion is the fact that, once again, a community that has chosen to settle down and to embark on agricultural activities, entrusts the transmission of its new identity-related values to a narrative based on a painful and demanding journey – which, once more, highlights the dynamics of the polarity under discussion.

The two lovers, Lorik and Candā, elope and attempt to reach the region of Kaliṅga (in modern Orissa), where Lorik intends to meet some of his kinsmen. During the journey across the Ganges and through the wilderness of the jungles of northern and eastern India, events take a dramatic turn: Candā dies of a snake-bite, and is revived by a healer's *mantra*s, who, however, takes away all Lorik's arms and ornaments as a reward.[61] The next day, Candā once more succumbs to a snake-bite.[62] In utter despair, blaming himself for the fatal accident, Lorik resolves to die on his lover's pyre, until

> a Gunī [another sorcerer-healer] comes along and Lorik implores him to revive Cāndā [*sic*]. In return, he pledges all his belongings and promises to serve the Gunī for as long as he lives and also for the next life. Once again Cāndā is brought back to life, and they continue on their journey.[63]

These dramatic events completely change the direction of the story, which thenceforward «embarks upon the spiritual journey within Lorik's physical journey».[64] The experiences that the Ahīr hero is forced to undergo during the two fateful nights, in fact, represent the different stages (*maqāmat*) of the Sūfī path that leads to the union with the Absolute: from poverty (*faqr*) and repentance (*tawba*) to self-surrender and trust in God (*tawakkul*). Yet Avadhī Sūfī poetry goes even beyond that, as this and other literary works show, since the ultimate goal it envisages for human beings is to live one's life *in* and *for this* world,[65] which also explains why no journey can ever be conclusive. When the couple arrives at their destination,

61. Gupta 1967, stanzas 308-312.
62. *Ibid*., stanzas 313ff.
63. Hines 1999, 168.
64. *Ibid*.
65. Milanetti 2012b, esp. 234-239.

they look for Lorik's relatives in vain: travels cannot be meant for reaching what you long for, yet you cannot refrain from travelling. Dāūd's text being incomplete, the conclusion of the story is offered by the different popular versions that have been handed down. Most of them relate that after returning home, Lorik resumes his daily life as a chieftain, a husband and a herdsman, soon meeting his death on the battlefield.[66]

### 7. *The Journeys of Kings-Turned-Ascetics: Gopī Cand and Ratan'sen*

The epic legend of Gopī Cand has travelled through India more extensively than Gopī Cand himself. Colonial registries list several communities of Yogīs who used to sing the tale of his deeds, from which they sometimes earned their livelihood, from Bengal to the Bombay Presidency.[67] Many versions of the story have been recorded and translated, from Panjab[68] and Rajasthan[69] to Bihar[70] and Bengal.[71] Yet it is the Rajasthani version that is particularly pertinent to the present discussion, since in it Gopī Cand's journey to Bengal is described in great detail.

Gopī Cand is a king who is obliged by his mother, Queen Manāvatī, to abandon his palace, his riches and his women in order to become a yogi and save his own life. His renunciation is thus imposed on him, which causes him a great deal of sorrow and anguish:

> Most of all he weeps at parting from the world and his loved ones in it. Gopi Chand's sorrow arises because he remains internally attached to the glories and pleasures he once enjoyed as a king, even after he has taken on the external signs of a renouncer. Renunciation is not his choice, only his destiny; fate and his mother conspire to make him a yogi against his inclinations and better judgment. Gopi Chand's sorrowful partings are reminiscent of the ones that come to every human being.[72]

As a yogi, Gopī Cand is homeless and bound to wander. Despite his *guru* Jalindar'nāth's harsh disapproval, he resolves to go to Bengal where his sister, Queen Campā De, lives. His arrival there is immediately marred by a dramatic encounter with seven female magicians, who challenge him and transform him into various

66. Gupta, *Bhūmikā*, in Gupta 1967, 32-33.
67. Briggs 1989, 51-56.
68. Temple 1884.
69. Grodzins Gold 1993.
70. Grierson 1878.
71. Grierson 1885.
72. Grodzins Gold 1989, 773.

animal forms. Finally rescued by Jalindar's personal intervention, Gopī can finally meet with his sister; however,

> [a]s soon as she saw Gopi Chand's countenance, she wept and weeping she went and at once she threw her arms around Gopi Chand. «O my brother, [...] how did you come to take on yoga, and what caused you to put yogis' earrings in your ears? What is this you have done?». She threw her arms around him and embraced him, and she began to wail. Then she really breathed her last. Really, clinging to his shoulders, Champa De died.[73]

Stories of journeys and the narratives that are composed thereof abound with tales of death. Such is the case with Ratan'sen's hazardous voyage by land and by sea, as told in Jāyasī's magnificent poem *Padmāvat*. Ratan'sen – the Rāj'pūt sovereign of Cittor – blends the different, yet mutually linked characters of a king, a lover, a renouncer, and a warrior in a single persona. He abandons his palace and his wife, Queen Nāg'matī, assuming the guise of a Nāth ascetic, and sets off to reach the faraway island of Siṃhal, where the beautiful princess Padmāvatī lives (stanza 126). Significantly, while bidding farewell to his mother, he mentions Gopī Cand's asceticism: «When he [Gopī] realized that the world did not belong to him, he gave up his kingdom and took refuge in the Kajarī jungle» (130.7). Ratan'sen explicitly describes himself as being already dead: when he finally arrives at the sea coast south of Orissa, he is warned by king Gaj'pati of the danger of crossing the seven oceans. Yet his reply is straightforward: «Death can do nothing to him who is already dead. [...] I have drowned in this ocean [of love]» (143-144). A few verses later, Jāyasī adds: «Only those who die while still living, can be considered true ascetics» (146.9).

When Ratan'sen and his retinue finally reach the island of Siṃhal, he realizes that he won't be able to enter the imposing citadel – «higher than the sky» (161.1) – where the princess resides. He is stuck at the foot of the steep hill, incapable of moving on, his entire journey being in vain. This condition of forced immobility is unbearable to him: overwhelmed with grief and despair, he resolves to die on a pyre – which strongly recalls Lorik's decision. In this regard, it must be observed that although in terms of narrative development Ratan'sen's immobility may logically result in his death, in semiotic terms it testifies instead to the urgency of restoring a dynamic relation between the two poles of movement (etc.) and stationariness (etc.) – which Jāyasī significantly achieves by resorting to Yoga-Tantra. Accordingly, while Ratan'sen is about to light his own pyre, Maheśa, god of the Nāth ascetics, manifests himself and teaches him the way to enter the impenetrable fortress:

73. Grodzins Gold 1993, 262.

> It may be conquered only by those who know themselves. Nine gates are inside, and five guards keep watch over it. The tenth gate is a secret access, which is reached by an obscure path through a steep climb. [...] The itinerary starts from the shining and unfathomable lake at the bottom of the stronghold. [...] The tenth gate may be attained only by those who control their minds and their breath. [...] Subdue your breath, be the master of your mind, and if you have to die, kill rather your "ego" (215-216).

The deadly impasse is completely reversed: what has to be annihilated, in fact, is the "ego", or the *man-ahaṃbhāv* complex,[74] which constitutes the basis of illusion and self-identification. Śiva's teachings, plainly based on yogic psychic and physical techniques, allow Ratan'sen to put an end to his immobilization and to move into the fortress, which is a yogic metaphor for the human body. Once more, Yoga-Tantra proves to be the experiential dimension within which the dynamics of the movement/stationariness polarity can ideally develop. Indeed, a Nāth-yogī alternates practices of perfect immobility – mind, breath, postures – with «jet-age motion».[75] The «passive, withdrawn, and ascetic position [...] is only one facet of yogic identity. [...] [I]t is repeated innumerable times whenever any yogi, including Gopi Chand, goes anywhere: "[...] A seated yogi's a stake in the ground, but a yogi once up is a fistful of wind"».[76]

However, as soon as Ratan'sen gets inside the fortress, he is met by the soldiers of King Gandharvasen, Padmāvatī's father, who bring him to the sacrificial pole to put him to death, while he openly declares his love for the beautiful princess and his indifference for his own life. Once more, immobilization – aptly symbolized by the stake – is depicted as conducive to death. This condition is finally overcome by the disclosure of an existential dimension higher than Yoga-Tantra itself – though based on it – and a synthesis is achieved between the different aspects of Ratan'sen's character. In fact, it is Padmāvatī's love that saves his life, as the sage parrot Hīrāman points out: «Now you are in his body, and he is in yours. Death cannot steal anything from him, not even his shadow, because entering in someone else's bodily form, that *jogī* has become immortal» (258.7-8). Realizing that love has truly turned Ratan'sen into a Perfect (*siddha*) – thus fulfilling, and bringing an end to, his Yoga-Tantra practice – she sends him a straightforward message: «Give up asceticism, be once again a sovereign. In my heart I set up a throne for you; now you are my king both in this world and in the other one. While living, we'll enjoy together the pleasures of love; when we shall die, the two of us will be one» (259.4-8).

74. I agree with M. P. Gupta's interpretation of *āpuhi karu nāṃsā* as *to ap'ne ko (ahāṃbhāv) hī naṣṭ kar (mār)* (Gupta 1963, 254).

75. Grodzins Gold 1989, 779.

76. *Ibid.*

A lavish, gleeful wedding is soon celebrated with pomp and joy, and the two spouses, after a vivid dialogue characterized by elaborate tantric references, devote themselves to love and passion (316-321), experiencing fusion in the highest forms of pleasure. Ratan'sen's journey, however, does not end up there: as mentioned above, according to the specific teachings of Avadhī Sūfīs,[77] even when the supreme union is reached, a return to the incumbencies of daily life is unavoidable. The second part of the poem – which, significantly, is partly based on historical accounts – deals with the long-standing conflict between the Rāj'pūt sovereign and Alāuddīn (Ala-ud-din Khalgi), the Islamic emperor of Delhi. When Ratan'sen is finally killed by the poisoned spear of one of his Hindu opponents, Padmāvatī and the first wife Nāg'matī join him on the funeral pyre. Carnage ensues, since all the women throw themselves into the fire, and all the men die in the last battle against the emperor's army (651.8-9). Death is evoked once more in the very last verses of the poem, where Jāyasī, quite unexpectedly, adds some strikingly human words about his own old age and the pitiable condition it brings forth:

> For Muhammad, youth has ended, old age has come. His strength and his sight have gone away, weakening his body and wetting his eyes. Teeth have fallen out, emptying his cheeks; voice has disappeared, his words aren't seductive anymore. [...] When youth finishes, you go on living like a dead man. Life is life only when it's united with youth. Later on, when you are in others' hands, it is the end (653.1-7).

In conclusion, all these stories – in keeping with their civilizational-turned-existential character – explicitly teach (and deeply elaborate on the fact) that life, indeed, is made of many deaths, such as those inherent in the acts of parting, ceasing, losing, missing, loving, leaving. Yet if placed in the framework of the movement (etc.)/immobility (etc.) polarity, these stories also show (and perhaps even mainly show) that the many "deaths" experienced in the course of one's life, as well as the last and final departure, are intrinsically part of that polarity. This, in turn, would seem to suggest that the two poles of life and death are not, and cannot be, «mutually exclusive»: instead, «[t]hey need one another and they cannot be without each other».[78] Being part of a polarity, death is in fact intrinsically "measured", or counterbalanced, by life-giving (or life-restoring) movement. Thus, it is precisely movement that evokes and provides the possibility of an "after-death" – be it one of the deaths experienced while living, or one's actual demise. Life is inherently rooted in movement, which is perhaps what the emphasis on movement, wandering, etc. contained in the above narratives, is ultimately aiming to convey.

77. See note 65.
78. Panikkar 1974, 163.

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