

WHERE AM I ?

THREE SPACES IN THE METAPHYSICS OF THE *MOKṢOPĀYA*

Key note Address to the Seminar on the Philosophy of 'Yoga Vāsiṣṭha'

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" *saṃsāra - nāṭya nirmāṇe yā - 'vakāśavidhānataḥ /
pūrvaraṅgāyate vyomamūrtiṃ tāṃ sāmkaṛiṃ numah //*"

We bow down to that luminous sky-body of Lord Śiva which assumes the role of a dramatic prelude in the construction of the theatre we call "the world" by providing for an opening space.

Abhinava gupta on NŚ V.1

A problem is haunting contemporary Western science and philosophy of mind and brain. It is called "the mind-body problem". There are many alternative ways of stating that problem. One of those ways is this:

We cannot deny the existence of inner mental directly felt phenomena, like a felt strong wish (*icchā*), a twinge of jealousy or a rush of anger (*dveṣa*), or a warm sense of pleasure (*sukha*). And yet, these are not things or events in space. I cannot ask anybody who is angry with one person and also in love with another, "Is your anger to the left of your love, is it six milimeters longer than your love?" even if I believe that anger and love are things happening in the brain or the Thalamus or the endocrine glands. Spatial properties simply cannot be attached to these inner states felt by one person alone at a time, *icchā*, *dveṣa*, *sukha*, *duḥkha*, etc. Yet, if I am somewhere in space and these are my wish, my hatred, my joy and my suffering then they must be here in my body and thus very much in space. Now, if consciousness is not constitutionally spatial, then how could it have its origin and felt location in bodies very much located in the spatial world?

In his celebrated book *The Conscious Mind* (1996) David Chalmers calls this "the hard problem" and observes : "The hardest part of the mind-body problem is the question: how could a physical system give rise to conscious experience ?" (p25)

According to the received cosmology of present day science, there was a time at which the universe contained no consciousness but only matter in space, obeying the laws of physics. Then life began to evolve as matter started suddenly clumping together in new ways and through somewhat blind trial and error, driven by the mechanism of natural selection, finally self-preserving self-nourishing forms of life came into being and so on. But then consciousness came suddenly in this big cooking pot of the cosmos--- to use the metaphor of the *Yakṣaprasāna* of the *Mahābhārata* (III.App.32.69) "*asmin mahā moha maye kaṭāhe*",

where the seasons and months are like ladles and individual sentient beings are being cooked. Now initially there was no consciousness according to science. But science has a problem. The only ingredients in the pot when consciousness was cooking were particles and fields laid out in space. Yet, something radically non-spatial got produced. On that fine spring morning when consciousness was first laid on nature's table, there was nothing around but extended matter in space. Yet, now suddenly, non-spatial stuff simmered and bubbled. How could this happen? Simply put, in inert matter, could consciousness have evolved? And yet, people can doubt the existence of inert matter but people cannot doubt the existence of consciousness and that everybody accepts. If some hardcore materialist tells us that he believes that we all suffer from an illusion that pleasure, pain, hatred, desire and such nonmaterial properties exist then, even as he says so, he is himself assuming the existence of his believing and our illusions- which are nothing but states of consciousness.

Very recently, in the last decade of the twentieth century, some Western philosophers of mind and brain have started to explore an alternative cosmology. In order to solve the mind-body problem, they say, and I'm quoting Colin Mc Ginn an Oxford Philosopher: "In order to solve the mind-body problem we need, at a minimum, a new conception of space."

Previously the moves were that we had to change the conception of mind to fit our materialist conception of the fundamental matrix. What we call *caitanya*, (consciousness) had to be given a more *jaḍa* (matter)-oriented analysis. It had to be analyzed in a Physicalist way. So, previously the effort was to reduce the mind into the brain and then the brain into the cells, the cells into the chemicals and the chemicals into physical particles and thereby everything into the physical.

That didn't work. So the effort now is to try the reverse move, to see whether we could rethink of extension or matter itself as an evolute of consciousness. Well, in the physical world, the most basic thing is space, where things are arranged side by side or on top of one another— which is an *adhiṣṭhāna /ādhāra*. Now, maybe things in space are eventually able to manifest the undeniably felt features of consciousness only because those things are at heart not as solid and inert as we thought. Perhaps they are not, at some level, as dead as we have conceived them to be. Perhaps they contain in them some concealed aspect or principle. So, the suspicion is that space itself is saturated with, shimmering with consciousness from the very beginning. The ontologically primary matrix, according to this radically opposite conception of reality, is the "space" of pure impersonal objectless undifferentiated consciousness which contains both the possibilities of congealing like solid material bodies and the physical extension they inhabit as well as the potentiality to proliferate into eddies of consciousness that imagine themselves to be individuals looking at those material bodies.

In the inimitable words of Yogavāsiṣṭha or Mokṣopāya: "Just as inherent in the tree in the forest lie all the yet-unsculpted figurines of dancing women, this visible objective world-essence lies in the hollow of sheer sentience (*cin-mātra-koṭare*)." (M/YV VI b/168/40)

In this lecture I shall try to explicate Yogavāsiṣṭha's concept or concepts of such ontologically basic all pervasive *ākāśa* - best translated as the blissful blank of pure consciousness. I shall try to go through twelve features of *ākāśa* that I have been able to isolate on the basis of my study of this concept in the Vedas, Upaniṣads (mostly Chāndogya) Kashmir Saivism and crucially in the Yogavāsiṣṭha or Mokṣopāya.

Ākāśa is the concept that I was building towards with all this talk about consciousness and space. A good and accurate translation of this term is nearly impossible. "Ether", which was B.L. Atreya's translation wouldn't work now because as an element in physics, it has become outdated. Nobody believes in it. And yet it has become pretty standard. To say "space" is a little bit of a problem, especially in Vaiśeṣika because Vaiśeṣika categories also have another thing called *dik* gets translated as "space". So, we are very tempted to call *ākāśa* "the void".

But then the Yoga Vāsiṣṭha *ākāśa* is not empty or *śūnya*. It is full. It is thick with being and light and with the potency for all the future creations in the forms of sound or speech that is ready to name those creations. So it is not void, after all. The Upaniṣads have said, and the Yoga Vāsiṣṭha appeals to that, that none of us, not even a snake or a snail, would have been able to breathe or move, if the sky, this *ākāśa*, were not brimming over with bliss. "*ko hy eva anyāt kaḥ prāṇyāt yadeṣa ākāśa ānando na sīyat*" (Taitt.II.7). Madhva alias Ānandatīrtha, of all persons, with his genius, interprets the the "*ā*" of "*ākāśa*" as *samantāt*, all around, the "*ka*" as *sukham*, bliss *ānanda* and the "*āś ā*" after that as *aśnāti* meaning "enjoys": that which all around enjoys bliss. Now this could be Madhvācārya's own imagination. But there is a lot of truth to this. In the Yogavāsiṣṭha notion of "*ākāśa*" as well there definitely is a sense of bright, blissful space where a playful imagination creates illusory objects and persons and their life-stories. So, for the moment I would suggest the translation "blissful blank". A blank is what we need in order to put things in, *ākāśa* is like those dot-dots in the application forms without which we cannot fill up the forms but which allow different things to be put in the forms. So when you fill up an application form, the structure of the form is determined by where the blanks are. Now *ākāśa* is somewhat like the blanks.

Right there in that encyclopedic chapter of the Mahābhārata called the "Book of Peace" (Śāntiparva) a verse lists the main characteristics of *ākāśa*:

"*ākāśasya guṇaḥ śabda vyāpitvaṃ chidratā'pi ca /
anāśrayam anālabham avyaktam avikāritā.*" // (MBh .XII. 247.9)

Chidratā = the property of being a hole is the most important feature. Just as a flute makes sounds because of its hole or hollow inside, the second feature listed here follows from the first feature: *ākāśa* the big hole in the heart of things is sonorous, its quality is sound. It is also *vyāpi*--pervasive, ubiquitous. It is itself without any further support or site, because it is the ultimate site of all things.

It is not manifest as one object to be seen as clearly marked out from others. So it is unmanifest. And while all changes happen or seem to happen in it, it itself does not change, hence *avikāritā*.

Three varieties of *ākāśa* are enunciated in the text, Yoga Vāsiṣṭha, viz. *cidākāśa*, *cittākāśa* and *bhūtākāśa*. Roughly the space of consciousness, the space of the active mind and the space of physical matter.

Notice that in the first of these concepts, the two ideas which Descartes takes as a contradictory pair are brought together. Not space, as against consciousness, but the space of consciousness. Consciousness instead of being an evolute, a late evolute, a late-comer in the scene of creation, out of inert matter in space, consciousness is the space which is provided for in which even the so-called material objects have evolved, even *paramāṇus* have evolved. Now this *ākāśa*, of course, is not Vaiśeṣika *ākāśa*. You have to be careful about that because the Vaiśeṣika *ākāśa* is not conscious. So this *ākāśa*, *cidākāśa*, is the space of consciousness. Second, *cittākāśa* is the space of individual or collective minds. Now there is a wrinkle there, individual or collective. The collective mind is ultimately the mind of the creator, Brahmā's mind, which is still *citta*. It is not pure *cit*. It is *citta* because it has *saṅkalpa* to make a world, except that it seems that Brahmā cannot be a completely imaginative fully creative creator because he has a blue print which has gone before. The Yoga Vāsiṣṭha tries very hard to combine a certain kind of *ajāti-vāda*, a certain kind of non-causal account of the world with the Vedic doctrine which is opposed to that which is *nahī kadācit anīdṛśaṃ jagat* that there has been a world like this always. Those elements have come together. Many, sort of *kaṭṭarpanthīs* think, both in the West and the East that the Yoga Vāsiṣṭha is a hopeless text because it tries to combine elements which are totally uncombinable and they think it is patchwork. Whatever it might be it has its own attraction and historically it has been so important to the spiritual teachers. Even if the philosophers have ignored it, but the spiritual teachers have actually taken it as their *kaṇṭaka*, like Ramanamaharshi, like Sri Ramakrishna, like many others including my own teacher.

The twelve characteristics of *ākāśa*. As I said, after I did this, I found a summary in the Mahābhārata. The first characteristic of *ākāśa* is a gap, a hole, a slit, and that is the meaning of the term '*kha*'. Now all of you know that the standard seven or eight items for *ākāśa* in Sanskrit. Let us see what are they: *ākāśa*, *vihāyasa*, *gagana*, *kha*, *nabhas*, *vyoma*, *ambara*,

viyat, div, anatarikṣa.

Now *kha* especially is a gap or a hole or a slit. And this is very important to understand the most fundamental notions of the Indian tradition. Because it is a slit or a window or a hole, the *indriyas*, the sense organs are compared, especially the *jñānendriyas*, are compared to windows. Explicitly in the *Praśastapādabhāṣya* (on *Vai Sū*) it says, "*aneka gabākṣāntaravarti prekṣakavadantarātmā kaścideka..*" This is in line with "*darśanasparśābhyām*" Now because *indriyas* are *kha*, and famous lines are there, that it is a construction defect in the windows, that the windows open only outside, they don't open inside." *Parāñci khāni vyatṛṇat svayambhū tasmāt parāṇ paśyati nāntarātmān*" (Kath. II.1.1). But some like Natciketas are *āvṛttacakṣu* and they become *vivṛttasādhana*. So there is *kha* as an *indriya* where it becomes actually a *klīvaliṅga* - *parāñcikhāni* because *indriya* is *kha*, a slit. If somebody's *indriyas* are not functioning well, including *karmendriyas*, the *indriyas* are like also the axle holes of a *cakra*, *rathacakra*, *dehacakra*. And if the axle is not properly going there and its like a bad wheel in a car, then it is a *śarīra* which is suffering from a bad *kha*, a bad *indriya*. A bad is *dur*. So we call that *duḥ-kha*. So suffering is a badly adjusted hole in the body. And this I'm not making up. This is actually the standard interpretation. Similarly, if you have a smoothly oiled, properly functioning *indriya* which is adjusted in the world and in the body, it is *su-kha*. So *sukha*, *duḥkha* comes from the notion of *kha*, which is *indriya*, which at heart is a whole and which goes back to the notion of *ākāśa*. See the fundamentality of this notion? That's only the first element.

Second, the locus of all, especially all sounds, *vyāpitvam sarvādhāratvam*, is the physical space. Now as I said, this the third notion, first is *cidākāśa*, then *cittākāśa*, the third is *bhūtākāśa*, material space. This material space is supposed to be the locus of sound even according to *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* and its just one because it is *vyāpi* and because it is indivisible. The first cosmic mutant, the first effect of *ātman*, "*tasmadvā etasmāt ātmanaḥ ākāśaḥ sambhūtaḥ*" (*Taitt. II.1*) So although *ākāśa* is so important, and now we are talking about *bhūtākāśa* - remember physical *ākāśa* - that is not the *Vaiśeṣika ākāśa*, according to *Vedānta* and *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*. It is not eternal and it is not uncreated and it is not unevolved. It has a current, namely *ātman*, i.e. *cidākāśa* is the cause of *bhūtākāśa* and there is a great debate in the *Ākāśa Adhikaraṇa* of *Advaita Vedānta Brahmasūtras*. Also *Śaṅkarācārya*'s interpretation and the others, with the *Vaiśeṣikas*, about this that unless you believe that *ākāśa* came from *ātman* you would have *śrutivirodha*. And this is under the *Sūtras*, *ākāśastallīṅgāt* (BS I. 1. 22) locus of all, first especially of sound, *śabdāśraya*. Then it is supposed to be limitless. Then because it is limitless it is supposed to be *avikārī*. Once it is evolved it is not *vikārī*. It is a very strange concept. Then it is supposed to be *niravayava*, without parts, although we imagine parts. This is also another special property of *ākāśa* that although it itself does not

have parts but it allows us to superimpose parts on other things and other things are known to be bigger and smaller only thanks to the big expanse of *ākāśa*. It is supposed to be subtle, imperceptible. We don't see it. We see other things in it but we don't see it, *avyakta sūkṣma*. It is not individuated like other substances. As a result, it is, and here I'm using little bit of a western philosophical notion because I'm writing in English and saying in English, it is that which makes room for or permits or makes possible a range of possible combinations and recombinations. This has been called by a philosopher called Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his early phase, the concept of logical space. In the name 'logical space' is that if you allow all sorts of possibilities out of them, some have actualised, the others haven't, then the entire logical space can be called a kind of *ākāśa*. Now whether it will be *cidākāśa*, *cittākāśa* or *bhūtākāśa* has to be seen. It seems that because it is the logical space of recombining, imaginatively, objects, which are actually combining only one way, it should be the middle *ākāśa*, the creative mental sky or the mental space of Brahmā. That which is mistaken for the world, the host of illusions.

Every illusion has a guest and a host, a *viśaya* and an *ādhāra*. A very simple example given by all the Advaita text - if you are mistaking a mother-of-pearl for a silver, then the mother-of pearl is the host of the illusion. Without it you would not have the mistake but what has newly been superimposed which is not there but the mother of pearl, as it were through our ignorance has hosted it, as a guest, invited it in it only for the duration of our illusion, ie the silver or the snake, that is the guest. Now the whole world is a guest in the host of *ākāśa*. This is the idea. *Ākāśa* is the *adhiṣṭhāna*, and *āropa* is the world. But the *ādhāra* of this *jagadbhrama* is supposed to be *ākāśa*. And also *cidākāśa* is *ākāśa svarūpa* because unlike *saviśayaka* consciousness, unlike the Naiyāyika kind of *jñānam*, *cidākāśa* is objectless, *nirviśaya*. It has no *viśaya*. It is not about an object. It does not have *viśayatva*. It does not have *viśayitā* either. It is completely *nirviśaya*. And it is also the cause of all other things, manifestations and illuminations, and hence the presence of the verb 'kaśyatīti kāśaḥ'. All of these are related. So *ākāśa* is circum illuminator, illuminates all around. These are basically the notions which constitute the most important concept of *ākāśa*.

Now to stories. There are 52 stories, at least, in the Yoga Vāśiṣṭha and some of them are told with great flair, great love for story-telling. It is almost comparable to Kathāsaritsāgara in its beauty of the stories and its *kāvya*, of which I'm sure there are better judges here, really moves you. And the text proudly claims that 'I'm a text which is called *mokṣopāya*.' It is not called Yoga Vāśiṣṭha but called *mokṣopāya*, which has 32000 verses and, as a text, *mokṣopāya* is like a father and a wife at the same time. It says it charms you and loves you and entertains you like a beloved woman and at the same time through the entertainment, it also teaches you and disciplines you like a father. While saying this, there is a beautiful analogy, given in

the text, immediately after its self-description. It says and it uses the words '*nirvāṇa*' and '*anirvāṇa*' at the same time in a beautiful way. It says, 'just as a lamp, once it is lit, it keeps on giving light even if a sleepless person who wants to sleep. A sleepless person, a *vinidraḥ*, is somebody who does not like the lighting at night but since the light is on, it will keep on awakening you like a person. Even if the listeners don't want to eliminate their ignorance and darkness, it will keep, in spite of themselves, giving them the light of wisdom, and out of this *anirvāṇa* light will come *nirvāṇa*. This is what this text says. And it is full of these stories of which I don't have time to go into too many but I would share with you the most famous of these to which even Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita makes some references and I will touch upon some of the other stories, just to show you the complexity of the structure.

First about the structure of the text itself, of the entire text of Yoga Vāsiṣṭha. There is a little bit of a difference in spelling. The Bengali scholars always spell Vāsiṣṭha with 'ś', whereas in the Sanskrit text it is always with 's'. As a result, the Yoga Vāsiṣṭha is called the Yoga Vāśiṣṭha. The *ṭīkā* printed, in 1903 or something, just the Utpatti Prakaraṇa has been printed and there is always Yoga Vāśiṣṭha and this could be something that you could solve.

The structure of the entire text is like this. Sūtikṣṇa is a sage who asks a question to another sage called Agasti. In answer, Agasti tells a story. So you have Sūtikṣṇa asking Agasti and Agasti tells a story- and so you have one frame - the story is of Kāruṇya and Āgniveśya. In that story Āgniveśya tells the story of Suruci the *apsarā* and Indra's messenger, *devadūta*. To this *apsarā* Suruci, this *devadūta* tells the story of another king who refuses to go to heaven and asks Vālmīki the way to liberation while alive. And Vālmīki, in response, narrates the story of Rāma's depression in early youth and Vasiṣṭha's counselling him and Vasiṣṭha tells Rāma, among 54 other stories, the story of Līlā.

So you have Agasti telling a story of Āgniveśya, Āgniveśya telling the story of *devadūta* who tells the story of Vālmīki. Then Vālmīki telling the story of Rāma and Vasiṣṭha, and Vasiṣṭha telling the story of Līlā. It becomes more complicated because in this story there is another character, not Rāma's Vasiṣṭha who is also called Vasiṣṭha. And the book is full of these namesakes. There is a story of an ordinary woman called Ahalyā, who falls in love illegitimately with another man called Indra. And it is very specifically mentioned that just because that man was called Indra and this Queen, Ahalyā, and she was a nobleman's wife, and once it was found out, both the woman, Ahalyā, and Indra together were put into death but they didn't care because they said even after death we will create our own mental universes. So these are pretty dangerous stories and not necessarily good for keeping society in order but they have some other purposes.

Just to the Līlā story. Līlā is in total love and there is wonderful, sensual description of her love. So the story begins in the middle. Some of these like the modern novel, it begins in

the middle, there is a flashback, then it goes back. And I have tried to give the structure here, I don't know how many of you can see it. So Līlā is the queen of Padma the king and Līlā is already afraid, as they are growing older, that one day he will die and how can she live without him. So she worshipped Sarasvatī and takes the boon that when he dies his body will never lose its lustre and this shows Līlā as the original, Līlā as yet unenlightened. Then there is another character called Prabuddhalīlā, when she is enlightened later on in the text. So she, interestingly, like all of us, is not only in love with Padma but is also in love with Padma's body. Otherwise why does she want the body not to wither away? 'I don't care about the *ātman* or anything. I want this body to be alive in this bedroom, fresh, and I want to live with it.' A strange kind of wish. I wouldn't easily ask for that boon because I'll be terribly spooked out by that.

In any case, Padma dies and in the royal bedchamber the dead body is decorated with flowers and Līlā keeps watch on that. But then Līlā talks to Sarasvatī and is interested to know what is happening to Padma the person because obviously something is happening to him not just to the body. And Sarasvatī says I can show you but I can't show you in this space because in this space Padma is dead. So they together, Līlā meditates and they go into *cidākāśa*. Now here there is clear hint in the text that what she's doing is a yogic practice, or if you want a tantric practice which is literally mentioned as *khecarantī*. So she is in *khecarī* state, very definitely. And in that *khecarantī avasthā*, accompanied by Sarasvatī *jñapti*, who later on says, 'I'm not an independent entity, I'm just your knowledge.' So she takes her to this new incarnation, Viduratha, another king in another country, where Līlā's mental state is somewhat like the mental state of Brahmā, after stealing the cows of Kṛṣṇa. Remember Brahmā was totally bamboozled because he saw all the cows with him as well as down there. You know, its like xerox copies of everything were there. So Līlā saw that the king was there and, lo and behold, he had a queen just looking like her. And not only was a metaphysical wonder there but also womanly jealousy. She thought, 'how did it come?' And all the ministers, all the kings, all the king's men and all the king's soldiers. They were all there. So Līlā said, 'Who is this? Is this my husband? Then what happened to our ministers because ministers didn't die.' So she comes back again, to the bedroom, and wakes up, in the middle of the night all the ministers and says, 'Look, I saw you in a different land which is totally not in this space, in a different galaxy as it were. And have you all died here?' They said, 'No, no, we are carrying on.'

So Padma had to die in order to be reincarnated as Viduratha but as he was reincarnated, he created his own assembly without those ministers dying here. So, you have to notice that it is not reincarnation which is being talked about. It is many universes which are parallel, which is something the conception of which our physicists would talk a little bit

about because one of the interpretations of the quantum superposition is in terms of many worlds, which is developed by this great scientist called David Böhme.

In any case, so Līlā watches, gradually she comes to live with this idea of another wife, Līlā2, and then there is a huge war. In between, Līlā asks Sarasvatī 'OK, I understand that there are these parallel universes but in my bedroom his dead body is still there.' So she asks, 'Which one of these worlds is real and which one is fake? Which *sr̥ṣṭi* ? *kā kṛtrimā*, *kā vā akṛtrimā*?' Sarasvatī in answer asks her a question, 'You first explain to me Līlā what do you mean by *kṛtrimā* and *akṛtrimā*?' Līlā, like the common sense answer to Berkeley by Thomas Reed and realist philosophers, pounds the table - this is what we call table-pounding realism. 'This is real' she says, 'I am real. My body is real. This bedroom is real. That is what I call *akṛtrimā* and that place where this man, the copy of my husband and the copy of the ministers and copy of me, that is unreal. Then Sarasvatī laughs and says, 'Oh you think you are real. Let me tell you who you are and let me tell you who Padma is'. Then she goes back and she says, 'There was a man called Vasiṣṭha, who was a simple sage, a brahmin, not a *kṣatriya*, but he saw lots of kings, so in his heart there was a *vāsanā* that he would like to be a king sometime. And his wife was called Arundhatī and just eight days ago, Vasiṣṭha had died and Arundhatī is still watching his dead body in that little hut. In that hut, Vasiṣṭha and Arundhatī, after Vasiṣṭha's death, have created this dream, that Vasiṣṭha has become Padma and for fifty years, you and Padma and Līlā have lived. And after that fifty years, Padma had died and had been re-materialized here as Viduratha and Viduratha is now ruling for fifty more years and a war is about to happen and all of these two fifty years, one inside the other, are happening in eight days, in the little cottage of sage Vasiṣṭha.' 'Now, Līlā', Sarasvatī says, 'You are a character in the dream of Vasiṣṭha and Arundhatī jointly. So you think you are real'. Līlā doesn't want to mess with this. So she wants to know what will happen in the future.

Very quickly there is a war with Sindhurāja. There is a horrible description of a war and Viduratha dies, killed by the enemy. As soon as he dies, with the second Līlā this time in the royal chamber, the dead body of Padma comes alive and Līlā lives the rest of her life, happily, with the King Padma, with one difference that Padma now has two wives, Līlā1 and Līlā2. And Līlā1, for the rest of her life, while she is in perfectly in love with the king is changed, she is a transformed person, she is *prabuddha*. She doesn't think she is any more real than dreams and she doesn't want after Padma's death that his body should be alive because she doesn't see much difference between life and death.

This is just one story. Now there are other stories, and what is the point of this rather long keynote address? Just to give one example of the other stories, there is a man called Jīvata and the point of these stories are somewhat explained in the hand-out. Is this the only

world. Are there many worlds? Can we create according to our minds? Who is Brahmā? etc etc. I mean each of these is very controversial. By the way, this whole thing is happening in *cidākāśa* and there are many spaces here. There is the space of the hut of the holy man in which there is the *cittākāśa* of Vasiṣṭha in which there is another *bhūtākāśa* created within the *cittākāśa* of this. Then there is a parallel *bhūtākāśa* here and this whole thing is within the big *cittākāśa* of Brahmā and this whole *cittākāśa* is within the *cidākāśa*. This roughly is the ākāśa structure. There are more complications here because at one point Sarasvatī says, because Līlā asks, 'So now I've got it straightened, they dream of us and we dream of them'. Sarasvatī says, 'No, no no not so fast. Actually, you can say that this Līlā and you, you dream each other.' Now this, *anyonya svapna* is really a doctrine which is not met with elsewhere in this because there you cannot have this *sattātraividhyavāda* because in *sattā-traividhyavāda* there is a clear hierarchy. *Pāramārthika* is there, then *vyavāharika*, then *prātibhāsika*. You would not say that the *prātibhāsika* has dreamed up the *vyavahārika*. But here there is a reversal. The closest in the most traditional Scriptures we can find if we don't go into Yogācāra and we don't go into Kashmir Śaivism the closest is Gauḍapāda Māṇḍūkya Kārikā. That's the closest you can find in the traditional core. Otherwise it is its own system and it calls itself Sarvasiddhāntasiddhānta, and it says wherever our *yukti* takes us, we go there. And the famous verse I have heard quoted from my childhood by the rationalists who wanted to defend the Indian tradition *yukti yuktam vacogrāhyam*, reasonable words must be honored even if spoken by a child and unreasonable words even if spoken by Brahmā the creator must be rejected.

This is actually from the Yoga Vāsiṣṭha and immediately the analogy given is of an unreasonable person, and some of you will not like this but it says that the society is full of readers and believers who are so unreasonable that they will drink from a dirty polluted well, *kūpa*, because it is their grandfather's well whereas if clear water is offered they will not take it. But Yoga Vāsiṣṭha is suggesting wherever clear water is available, take it. It doesn't have to be your grandfather's well. So basically it is a text on behalf of reason and imaginative logical thinking. It is hard and disciplines the mind like a father *piteva śāsti* but then it also charms like a beautiful beloved lady "*kāntā iva ramayati*" with entrancing stories and poetry! .

Now there is this man called Jīvaṭa who was an ordinary person, who wanted to be a learned priest. So he becomes a learned priest but as a priest he is frustrated. So quickly he has a different ambition, he says 'I want to be re-born as a local chieftain, as a tribal lord or a powerful man.' So he becomes a local chieftain, a *niṣādādhipa*, but as a local chieftain he is always tortured by the country's king, so he becomes the country's king. As the country's king he is constantly thinking about a celestial *apsarā* because kings are always thinking of

apsarās as we know, from the American President. So he becomes in this particular case, instead of getting involved, he actually becomes a celestial female but the celestial female is jealous of a pet doe, a female deer. He will tell her, 'You are beautiful but the doe's eyes are more beautiful.' So, she is constantly obsessed with the doe. She becomes the doe. As a *mṛgī*, of course, we think of does as beautiful, romantic creatures, but what are they always thinking about? They are thinking about food. So they are thinking about some vegetables and *latā*, some creepers they have to chew. So constantly thinking about the creeper, now the doe becomes the creeper. And the creeper is in love with a bee. So the creeper quickly dries out and becomes a bee and the bee is of course, so much fond of the honey of the lotus, that it becomes a lotus. The lotus one day is nervous of a huge elephant which always moves around and the lotus is afraid that this elephant will stamp on it. And thinking of the elephant as an attacker and aggressor, as you know, there is a danger that in this country we think too much obsessively of some of our foreign invaders, then our behaviour will become like them. Similarly the lotus becomes the elephant, because it is envious of it and jealous of it and afraid of it and the elephant somehow, through another change, manages to become a bee and the bee this time makes friends with the swan, which happens to be the swan of Brahmā and then he becomes the swan of Brahmā. And as the swan of Brahmā he accompanies him on some of his social visits. Brahmā always visits Rudra and now Jīvaṭa who is this swan, says 'This is my chance of life. I should meditate contemplate, obsessively think in an *ekāgrah* way about this and I'll become a Rudra' and he becomes a Rudra. Once he becomes a Rudra, he thinks of his previous hundred incarnations as a bee, as an everything, and he makes himself all these hundred things, he makes all of them a Rudra. Now this is a pun and a joke on the concept of *Satruj*. And this is called the Śātrudrīyakathā.

Now I'll submit to you what is this text doing with these kinds of stories? Then some of you know the story of Cūḍālā. Again a favourite of many people. Cūḍālā gets enlightened like many of our great mothers and sisters and women, way long before her husband is enlightened. Her husband is busy in making money. Cūḍālā is religious and Cūḍālā does some *tapas*. Cūḍālā becomes enlightened. After becoming enlightened, Cūḍālā becomes very beautiful and as the king is getting older and older, Cūḍālā is looking younger and younger. The king gets envious and says, 'What have you done? Have you got some new drugs or something? How are you getting more beautiful?' Cūḍālā says 'I'm getting beautiful because I am not afraid of death and I know my *svarūpa*.' The king says, 'Look you are hiding something. This is called woman's foolishness. No one gets more beautiful physically just by knowledge.' So he ignores her. Cūḍālā says, 'Listen to me, let me talk to you about wisdom and about the nature of myself and you and the body and the relationship.' Cūḍālā is deeply in love with this king who snubs her and spurns her. So his pride is so much

hurt. The king says, 'You are talking about knowledge. Do you know what one needs to do for knowledge? One has to forsake one's *gr̥hastha* life and become a monk.' So the king leaves the kingdom and becomes a monk in order to teach a lesson to Cūḍālā who was ready actually to teach the lesson.

Cūḍālā is sad, conducts the kingdom affairs all by herself and discovers, by her great wisdom, that the king, in a far away country in a forest, is unnecessarily pursuing austerities where he is actually suffering from anger and a sense of insecurity. So Cūḍālā says, 'I have to rescue him.' Cūḍālā uses all her energies and becomes a man and calls himself Kumbha during the day time. And in off times comes back to her kingdom and manages her kingdom and as Kumbha, he goes and makes friends with the king. The king becomes deeply friendly with Kumbha and there is almost a description that the king is so friendly with Kumbha, that it is almost like a same-sex friendship. And the king, at one point, unconsciously giving rise to some Freudian motives says, 'You know, I'm so fond of you because you kind of resemble my wife whom I have left.' Kumbha says, 'Well I'm just a man.' So the king asks, 'Who are your parents, father and mother?' Kumbha gives some peculiar story about how Nārada was predictably seduced by some girls who were bathing and Nārada dropped his semen, in a kumbha, in a pot. So he is a pot-born, a motherless son. But when Kumbha is advising, what Cūḍālā cannot do as a woman she can do as a man. Rājā called Śikhidhvaja, who gets gradually sobered up and enlightened. When he is getting enlightened, one day Cūḍālā plays a trick because Cūḍālā wants to love the king as Cūḍālā and although she is enlightened, she is getting happy. She wants to gradually come back to her female self and let the king know who she is. So one evening, right in front of the king, while the king is in a very friendly way, and the king believes that he has now become a *sannyasī* and his *jñāna* is based on the fact that he has avoided the company of women, Cūḍālā, that is Kumbha the man, starts developing breasts along with all the womanly saris and everything which appear on his male body. And Kumbha is very embarrassed. Kumbha says, 'You know there was a curse on me, One day Durvāsā was going very hurriedly, to meet somebody and I told Durvāsā, "What is happening? Why are you in such a rush? You look like a woman who is going to meet her illegitimate lover." Durvāsā says, "You call me a woman, you will become a woman. Everyday. Once in the evening." So I'm becoming a woman.' The king says, 'I don't care, I'm so much in love with you Kumbha. Even if you turn a woman in the evening, I know you are Kumbha.' So Kumbha, every evening turns into a woman called Madanikā. Cūḍālā is Kumbha, Kumbha is Madanikā. Woman turned into man, that man turned into woman again. The king says so but gradually he gets more attracted to Madanikā than to Kumbha. So one evening he says to Madanikā, 'Look if you don't mind, although I like you as Kumbha, I'm really attracted to you as Madanikā. Can we marry?' So rājā marries Madanikā, forgetting about Cūḍālā and Cūḍālā is of course watching as Kumbha and he

says, 'Well fine, that's OK.'

But then Cūḍālā creates another illusion. This is the last temptation and the last test. One day when the king is away, the king comes back to their secret garden when Madanikā and king were supposed to have their love together. And Madanika creates out of her own *cittākāśa* a young boy who is much more handsome and younger than the king Śikhidhvaja, and the king Śikhidhvaja sees that Madanikā is in embrace with that young boy. But the king is by this time is completely free of all jealousy. The king says, 'Fine. I love Madanikā and if Madanikā is happy doing this, that's fine.' So no fuss is raised. The king says 'This is O.K.' Then Madanikā turns back into Kumbha and says, 'Oh I'm so sorry, as Madanikā I did something so wrong, after getting married to you, I did this.' The king says, 'I don't mind.' At this point, Madanikā and Kumbha all march back into Cūḍālā and Cūḍālā says, 'This is me' and the end of the story is that they hop back into the bed and spend the rest of their nights in a love-making which is full of wisdom and through *śṛṅgāra* they also taste *Brahmāsvāda*

And the imagery there is so modern, so sensuous, how do they embrace each other? *Nakulaḥ nakulinīva*. Like a mongoose with each other. You can see the intertwining of two mongooses. With all the *roma sattvā* which is hinted as a *dhvani*. So this is a very worldly text in a sense. On the other hand, it is a text which gives the highest of the philosophies. There are textual problems about this, there are aesthetic problems about this, there are philosophical problems about this and there is a lot of insight we derive. I have tried to give you some foretaste.