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Introduction

Myth creates an often paradoxical world of meaning through its unique use of language, through a combination of familiar themes yoked to inventive metaphor, of uncommon fantasy clothed in ordinary words; it is the junction of the familiar and strange, the “cosmic map of the intersecting territories of reality and fantasy.”¹ Yet as much as it reveals to us, even more is eclipsed by what myth suggests but conceals; the diverse and innumerable ideas and issues it gives rise to attest to myth’s wellspring nature as well as its ultimate value.

Our study of Vāmana and Narasimha is foremost an exploration into the world of myth; into the ways in which it uses language, into its interconnection with other forms of conceptualization and expression, into the questions it raises as it unravels a vision of life.

Long ago, in the Kṛta Yuga, the mighty demon Hiraṇyakaśipu performed severe austerities. After 11,000 years of fasting head down and observing a vow of silence, he became tranquil. Brahmā, pleased with the demon’s tapas, arrived at his side and granted Hiraṇyakaśipu a boon. “Whatever you desire, that you shall have.” Hiraṇyakaśipu replied, “Inviolability from all beings, and immortality. Neither gods nor men nor beasts may kill me. Neither by arrows nor missiles, nor by wet nor dry, neither

by night nor by day may I be slain. I will become the sun and moon, wind, fire, and rain, the god of all." Brahmā said, "So be it," and returned to Vairāja, his own abode.

Having heard the granting of that boon, all the gods, celestials, and sages approached Grandfather Brahmā. "Because of that boon the demon will kill us! Please find a way to bring about his death." Brahmā replied, "The fruit of tapas must be obtained. At the end of the demon's tapas, Viṣṇu shall become his conqueror."

Meanwhile Hiranyakaśipu, arrogant from the granting of the boon, oppressed the triple world. He harassed illustrious sages in their hermitages, he vanquished the gods in heaven and made the demons recipients of the sacrificial shares. The gods sought shelter with Lord Viṣṇu, and he promised them a swift end to Hiranyakaśipu's reign.

Having given his word, the Blessed One went to the abode of the demon Hiranyakaśipu at dusk. Having made his form half man and half lion, he shone like a golden mountain adorned by a mass of flames. His powerful body looked like burning coals, and his tongue quivered like the lightning of the cloud at the destruction of the world.

Shattering the assembly hall and slaying the demon army, Viṣṇu himself, raging man-lion, seized Hiranyakaśipu and, swiftly placing him upon his lap, tore open the demon's chest with his claws, leaving him lifeless.

Having worshiped Viṣṇu Narasimha, the gods together with Indra returned to heaven, and that man-lion form of the god vanished.

The son of Hiranyakaśipu was Prahlāda, and his son, Virocana. Mighty Bali, son of Virocana, endowed with great strength, conquered all the earth and set his sights on heaven. That righteous ruler, having vanquished Indra, gained sovereignty over the triple world. Under his reign, the earth produced crops without cultivation. People, following their caste duties, were happy and long-lived, and there was no war between the gods and demons.

However, ousted from heaven and deprived of the shares of the sacrifice, Indra and the gods sought refuge in Viṣṇu. Out of concern for their welfare, the Blessed One told the gods this. "After some time, I shall be born from Aditi, mother of the gods, to deceive Bali and win back the triple world. Now calm yourselves."

In time, and after performing severe austerities, Aditi gave birth to Viṣṇu in the form of Vāmana, the dwarf. The gods conferred on him all the accoutrements of a brahmin; staff, water jar, sacred thread, and so on. All these were given to Vāmana in his upanāyana ceremony.

At this time, Bali was preparing for the great horse sacrifice, to ensure his universal sovereignty. Vāmana, arriving at that sacrifice, was duly greeted and honored. Despite the warnings of his priest, Śukra, who suspected foul play, Bali offered this brahmin dwarf a gift. "I am fortunate! This lord of sacrifice visits my sacrifice. Pray, choose a gift. Whatever you desire, I will grant it to you." To this generous offer the dwarf modestly replied, "I have no need of wealth. Please give me three steps of land for my own sacrificial ground."

Bali readily consented, and as he poured the water into Vāmana's hands, the dwarf grew to cosmic proportions, like Puruṣa himself. Striding thrice, he covered earth, atmosphere, and heaven with his steps, reclaiming the triple world on behalf of the gods. Thus vanquished, Bali was sent back to the netherworlds, and Viṣṇu placed Indra on the throne of heaven once again.

These myths of Viṣṇu as Narasiṃha and Vāmana present two strikingly different visions of one deity. Narasiṃha, half man and half lion, storms the palace of the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu and, surrounded by images and omens of cataclysmic destruction, rips the demon apart with his claws. Vāmana, the dwarf priest, respectfully approaches the demon Bali at his sacrifice, modestly requests three steps of land so that he, too, may have sacrificial ground, and strides over the universe instead, displaying his all-encompassing, beneficent form.

As dissimilar as these figures appear, at the same time we sense something similar about them and their myths. Both descend to confront similar crises—a demon threatening the welfare and stability of the world—and both resolve the crisis through means that are not exactly straightforward. Although Narasiṃha *acts* directly, his nature is circumventive; he slips through the loopholes in the conditions of Hiraṇyakaśipu's boon by creating a form, coming at a time, and employing a "weapon"—all of which do not violate the conditions of the pact. Vāmana is cunning and deceptive, concealing his pervasive, cosmic size within a diminutive form while he begs a boon from the unsuspecting demon. How are we to understand these forms of one deity, markedly dissimilar but somehow alike? And how do multiple

forms relate to the unity of the god as Viṣṇu, one of Hinduism's most popular deities, as evidenced in mythology, iconography, and temple and festival worship for over a millennium?

Let us draw this circle of inquiry wider. The man-lion and dwarf are but two of Viṣṇu's manifestations. The myths tell of his appearances in the theriomorphic forms of a fish, tortoise, and boar. He appears on earth as the cowering lord Kṛṣṇa and the genocidal Paraśurāma, annihilator of the kṣatriya caste. He becomes noble Rāma, beloved hero of the Indian epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, he descends as the Buddha, and as Kalkin, herald of the apocalypse, he will usher in the eschaton atop a white steed.

These ten manifestations of Viṣṇu, known primarily (but not exclusively) through their myths, are the avatāras of the deity. This term (from the Sanskrit root *ṭṛ*, "cross over," and prefix *ava*, "downward"), meaning to cross downward or descend, refers both to the literal descent of Viṣṇu from the highest celestial abode to the earthly domain and to the metaphysical descent from Viṣṇu's complete and transcendent form to a partial, material manifestation.

The corpus of myths of Viṣṇu's avatāras raises many questions. Why, out of the limitless range of possibilities, are the ten figures just enumerated accepted by tradition as the "classical list?" Why does Viṣṇu appear as a tortoise, but not an elephant? What is the intentionality of choice behind a man-lion avatāra? Is there a significance to the *order* in which the avatāras appear? As a deity with multiple forms, is Viṣṇu in his avatāric forms a mythological expression of a unity-in-diversity theology, or is this just another example of what one Indologist wryly called "Vaiṣṇava imperialism"²; that is, the taking over of any religious expression or mythological manifestation to view it as derivative of or related to Viṣṇu?

These issues, among others, claimed the attention of scholars who have examined the avatāras from a variety of perspectives. The quasi-evolutionary progression of the avatāras from fish to anthropomorphic deity has been noted³ and understood as an allegory for the "psychophysical evolution"⁴ of moral and spiritual growth.⁵ The use of the loaded term *incarnation* as the English equivalent of *avatāra* prompted several scholars to look comparatively at the two forms in Hindu and Western religious traditions.⁶ Such an approach demonstrates the danger of translating Hindu (or any non-Eurocentric) concepts into Christian terminology and highlights the differences and incomparability of the two traditions on this point, rather than uphold any valid similarities.

By default, studies such as Parrinder's *Avatar and Incarnation* indicate that the avatāra is most deeply rooted in mythology and

exhibits little significance as a theological construct. This has been substantiated by those who have linked the avatāra with the propensity toward ideas of divine multiplicity or cosmic repetition within Indian traditions of thought,⁷ and more particularly by the work of Jan Gonda⁸ as well as those who have contributed valuable studies of single avatāras or avatāra myths.⁹

Although the relationship between a theology of multiple forms and the stories of Viṣṇu's avatāras appears to have been of little concern to the mythographers themselves, questions of why, for example, a boar avatāra but not a horse avatāra, of intentionality of choice, are in some sense answered by the myths themselves, by the resonances these ten figures have with the whole of Hindu culture, with the "world" these figures evoke, both on universally symbolic and culturally specific levels. The relationship *between* avatāras has been examined only summarily on a general level¹⁰ but not specifically, as we will do in looking at Narasimha and Vāmana as a pair as well as individually.

It will be our purpose, in the ensuing chapters, to address some of the questions raised here, by way of observing these two avatāras within their mythic milieu; not just the avatāras in their own stories, but their relationship to the cosmos as it is understood and delineated within the mythological corpus; the universe that Viṣṇu, as avatāra, descends through and, as supreme deity, that he pervades.

The Literary Context

Although we have presented summaries of both myths by way of introduction, in actuality the myths examined here are found in many versions, scattered chronologically and geographically throughout India. The myths under consideration are found in the two Sanskrit epics, *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, and in the eighteen Purāṇas; in total, eighteen versions of the Narasimha myth, and thirty of the Vāmana.

To understand the differences between the versions of each myth, the unique and problematic nature of the Purāṇas as a genre should be briefly noted. As the written retellings of fluid oral traditions, the Purāṇas are stratified by interpolations that reflect sectarian allegiances, temple and pilgrimage site-related data, as well as caste-specific concerns. These interpolations further complicate an already difficult situation for attempting to delineate a chronology for these texts. As our approach to the myths is thematic and motific rather

than historical, it can suffice to outline broadly the chronological boundaries of our texts.¹¹ The dates for the composition of the *Mahābhārata*, also a highly interpolated text, are commonly accepted as 400 BC–400 AD, and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, 200 BC–200 AD. The earliest Purāṇas¹² can be dated at approximately 300–500 AD, and the latest¹³ at roughly 500–1300 AD.

More than any historical, geographical, or sociological factor, the development of bhakti, the ideology of sacred love between deity and devotee, seems to account for much of the variation in the versions of the two myths. Thus the myth versions reflect a progression that appears to have a *loose* relationship to chronological progression from a myth free from the theme of bhakti to one where saving grace bestowed by the avatāra on the demon devotee becomes a leitmotif. We find this line of development more meaningful to our study than a strictly historical one.

The Religious Context

Understanding the myths of Narasimha and Vāmana as sacred stories about descents of a deity puts them squarely in a religious context. And although we might pursue their study further along the lines of the avatāras as deities (how they are like or unlike other Hindu gods; if they fit or challenge concepts of deity formulated by scholars of religion) or their relationship to structures of soteriology (if their mission is to confer salvation, as earthly manifestations of deities in other religious traditions often do), our most productive approach has been to follow the direction pointed to by the avatāras themselves, in what might be seen as their own “statement of purpose,” Kṛṣṇa’s words to his friend Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gītā*: “Whenever the dharma withers away and adharma¹⁴ arises, then do I send myself forth. For the protection of good, for the destruction of evil-doers, for the establishment of the dharma do I come into being age after age”¹⁵ (*Bhagavad Gītā* 4.7–8). Kṛṣṇa, the eighth avatāra, relates the periodic descent of Viṣṇu to the nature of dharma, the cosmic “glue,” to its deterioration and the complementary rise of its inverse, adharma or disorder.

As the predictable fall and rise of dharma are inextricably related to the cosmological structures of time in Hinduism, specifically the yuga system, Kṛṣṇa’s words beckon us to examine this relationship more carefully. Further, if we adopt Courtwright’s understanding of religion as “a world of its own,”¹⁶ taking this definition in a literal sense, we can seek to understand this world in its sense as a cosmos,

constructed in the Purāṇic myths with intricate conceptions of time and space, creation and destruction, and the movement of all beings through this universe.

The relationship of the avatāras and dharma to the cosmology is made explicit through the system of the yugas, four successive ages in which dharma and all that it governs deteriorate progressively from a golden age of perfection to a world of chaos in need of annihilation and renewal. The pursuit of Narasimha and Vāmana along these lines of explicit interrelation leads into a web of subtle and intricate associations in which these avatāra myths find, to our mind, their most significant context of meaning.

Methodology

As myths reveal their multivalent nature to us, so they demand a multifaceted approach to understanding them; as O'Flaherty aptly puts it, "the toolbox approach of pluralism."¹⁷ O'Flaherty sees the pluralistic approach as the necessary complement to the multiple levels of meaning simultaneously present in myth.¹⁸ Our use of the toolbox approach is based to some degree on a concurrence with her notion of levels, which we have termed *contexts*, but also is a serial use of methods, as will be seen.

Our approach evolved from the simple observation, made from reading a sampling of avatāra myths, that several points seemed to present themselves in the myths over and over again, appearing as threads that might hold together the mythological fabric. This observation had to be turned into a "methodology" to become a valuable tool, enabling us to systematically check the material for these traits, as well as guard against turning our observations into assumptions, mangling the material.

One technique used most successfully on material like our myths, the bulk of which often makes it unwieldy, is that of motif-checking or motific analysis. Our familiarity with this method comes first from folklorists. However, there is considerable lack of clarity as to what exactly is meant by motif on their part. Stith Thompson defines motif initially as "any one of the parts into which an item of folklore can be analyzed,"¹⁹ but goes on to specify that motifs exist independent of or without regard for context. Vladimir Propp²⁰ defines motif as a function of the character, having a fixed place in an order of motifs, but independent of the character performing it. Problematic explanations. We have modified our understanding of motif

to be less structurally and more contextually oriented, taking a cue from the extremely successful and sophisticated use of the method on Purāṇic myth by Wendy O'Flaherty in her exhaustive work, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva*. However, we perceived the motif as a tool to uncover basic elements in the myth, not to discern the structure of each one. In other words, the group of motifs used in our analysis were thought to be central but by no means exhaustive of those that could be found in each myth, representing a group of traits which were thought at the outset to be present in most of the avatāra myths. Thus, motif checking became a *preliminary* methodology to guard against pursuing and maintaining a thesis not borne out by the data.

Those characteristics appearing over and over in the sample readings of the avatāra myths (which extended beyond Narasiṃha and Vāmana myths) became the five motifs used in the preliminary analysis, and represent a diverse group of statements of relationship, context, action, and position. They were these:

1. *A special relationship with Indra*: The avatāra continues an alliance with Indra that began as early as the Vedic literature, which often united the two gods in battle against demons, portraying Indra as a kṣatriya par excellence, possessor of physical strength, and Viṣṇu as his aid, his subordinate, who nevertheless possessed a higher, superior power.
2. *Invocation of a cosmogonic scenario*: The avatāra invokes the quality of the interstitial period of pralaya (destruction) and recreation through the use of cosmological language describing his appearance and the events surrounding it.

Motifs 3, 4, and 5 are basically variations on the theme of liminality and should be understood as a cluster:

3. *Mediating power and activity*: The avatāra amasses power by positioning himself "betwixt and between" two opposing groups, gaining the role of mediator.
4. *Action through trickery*: The avatāra often employs deceit, guile, or trickery to win a victory for the gods (or protagonists) over the demons (or antagonists).
5. *The loophole in the law*: Faced with what appears to be an airtight situation that threatens to imperil the gods (or protagonists), the avatāra finds a chink, a loophole that provides

a solution to the conflict without direct violation of the pact or law.²¹

These motifs were seen not as independent entities, but in relation to each other.

The overriding emphasis in the development of these motifs was the concept of liminality. Through an understanding of such a highly pregnant concept, enriched foremost by the works of Victor Turner,²² what appeared to be at the heart of the avatāras at the outset, generating four out of five motifs (excluding motif 1), was what Turner might have called a *liminal* character. That is, the avatāra brought with him, clothed himself in, an “interstructural” period, via the pralaya imagery, appearing as a figure of pure potency, oftentimes an unlikely hero, the “underling made uppermost,” an amoral trickster, the very principle of ambivalence. It seemed, at the outset, that the avatāra, through his liminal properties, caused the collapse of a temporal structure and created a “betwixt and between” through his own power to do so; he even transgressed the cosmology: “He is believed to break through the progressive decay, arrest its course, and even reverse it.”²³ So it appeared going into the motif checking.

The motif analysis was applied to all versions of the Narasimha and Vāmana myths found in the epics and Purāṇas. We have insisted on the use of the word *version* rather than *variant*, as the latter seems to imply variation from something—an ur myth, a favorite, one that fits the methodology best, and so on—and we were looking at the totality of the myths, ideally as equal texts. O’Flaherty concurs with such an approach: “There is no way to begin with any ‘basic’ myth or any ‘basic’ theme, for the entire corpus interlocks and feeds back so that the total fabric resembles a piece of chain-mail rather than the brachiated, family-tree structure sought by the text-historical analysis and some structuralists.”²⁴

At the conclusion of the motific analysis it was evident that, although motifs had headed us down the right track, the cart was before the horse. A poverty of check marks in the triad of liminal motifs (3, 4, and 5) and an overwhelming number in the cosmogonic scenario column brought the realization that the avatāra was not the *creator* of this liminality, but relied on that quality inherent in the cosmological structures to *appear* liminal. The cosmology contained within it that liminal, unstructured period of chaos and potency, a time in which the *sacra* is communicated (via the avatāra), a period whose gnosis brings a change in being (furthermore, the liminality of the cosmology during the avatāra’s appearance reinforces on a mythical level the *communitas* characteristic of the bhakti movement). This

is not to imply that the avatāra is a mere instrument of cosmological structure; he becomes not the creator, but the manipulator, of liminal "structures" already existent in the Purāṇic cosmology.

This perception brings us back to the importance of language, especially cosmological language; and basically an awareness of this vocabulary and its conceptual ramifications, as well as the multi-leveled nature of all mythical language, governs our efforts beyond the preliminary motif checking. This approach is couched in an awareness that the Purāṇas stand at the end of a long Sanskrit tradition of mythology, and in many ways are the culmination and storehouse of that tradition. A living dialogue is carried to it and the entire mythological milieu in which it exists. This dialogue is often expressed in subtleties of phrase or image or even in a single word, and the meaning of the myth is multiplied by how well versed the reader is in its heritage.

Thus, to study these myths, it would be unwise to employ a method that searches only for the structure of the myth, and sees the words of the myth as meaningful only by way of their arrangement in a larger structure. As Mary Douglas has stated: "The best words are ambiguous, and the more richly ambiguous the more suitable for the poet's or the mythmaker's job. Hence there is no end to the number of meanings which can be read into a good myth."²⁵ Therefore, dealing with the myths that stand near the end of a long mythological corpus, one must constantly be aware of the multivalency of a word or phrase, which may evoke images from several strata of myth. One must seek to understand the unspoken "givens" or multiple entendres in the language of myth. Through this process of understanding all the "reference points" of the myth, we hope to uncover the wider intent and significance of these avatāra myths.

Thus we are brought back, as we will be over and over in this study, to the significance of language, especially cosmological language, and the need to understand it as context for theophany and soteriology, indeed for every mythic drama played out on its stage. Our work on the avatāras attempts to show the need to understand deity in an ongoing cosmological context; not simply as one who begins the cosmos or one who arrives to obliterate it.

In the following chapters, we will examine the development of Viṣṇu in pre-Purāṇic literature, highlighting antecedents to his avatāric form in general and with specific reference to Narasimha and Vāmana. After acquainting the reader with the Purāṇic cosmology, we turn to the specific analysis of the myths of the two avatāras. In concluding, we hope that Viṣṇu's epithet of *Pervader* of the cosmos will be revalued in light of an understanding of these two avatāras,

and that the tangle of Narasimha's and Vāmana's myths, which weaves itself through the Purāṇas and in and out of Hindu life, will unfold as a tapestry of meaning.

Notes

1. Wendy D. O'Flaherty, "Inside and Outside the Mouth of God: The Boundary between Myth and Reality," *Daedalus* 109, no. 2 (1980):93–125.

2. The late J. A. B. van Buitenen, in private conversation.

3. Ronald Huntington, "A Study of Purāṇic Myth from the Viewpoint of Depth Psychology," (unpublished dissertation, University of Southern California, 1960).

4. Bhagavan Das, *Krishna: A Study in the Theory of Avatāras* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1962), p. 9.

5. Jean Herbert, *Narada: précédé d'une étude sur Les Avatars de Vishnou* (Lyon: Author, 1949).

6. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970) and G. Parrinder and H. Jacobi, "Incarnation (Indian)," *ERE* 7:193ff.

7. R. G. Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems* (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1965), p. 2; Sukumari Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 308.

8. Jan Gonda, *Viṣṇuism and Śivaism* (London: Athlone Press, 1970), pp. 49–50; B. Badshah, *Aryan Theory of Divine Incarnations* (Lisbon: Geographical Society of Lisbon, 1892); Oswald Joseph Grainger, "The Rise of the Incarnation Idea in Indian Religion," (dissertation, University of Chicago, 1927); Paul Hacker, "Zur Entwicklung der Avatāralehre," *Weiner-Zeitschrift für die Kunde Sud-und Ostasiens* 4 (1960):47–70.

9. K. S. S. Janaki, "Paraśurāma," *Purāṇa* 8, no. 1 (1966); V. M. Bedekar, "The Legend of the Churning of the Ocean in the Epics and Purāṇas: A Comparative Study," *Purāṇa* 9, no. 1 (1967); A. P. Karmarkar, "The Matsyāvātāra of Viṣṇu," *A Volume of Studies in Indology* (Poona: Oriental Book Agency, 1941); J. B. Long, "Life Out of Death: A Structural Analysis of the Myth of the 'Churning of the Ocean of Milk,'" *Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976); Adam Hohenberger, *Die Indische Flutsage und das Matsya Purāṇa* (Leipzig, 1930); M. Biardeau, "Narasimha: mythe et culte," *Puruṣārtha: Recherches de Sciences Sociales sur l'Asie du Sud* (Paris: Centre d'Études de L'Inde et de l'Asie du Sud, 1975); A. C. Swain, *A Study of the Man-Lion Myth in the Epics and Purāṇa-Texts*, Publications of the

Centre of Advanced Study in Sanskrit, Class A, No. 3 (Poona: University of Poona, 1970); G. C. Tripathi, *Die Ursprung und Entwicklung der Vāmanalegende in der Indischeliteratur* (Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1968). Interestingly, two excellent studies focus not on the avatāra but on demon figures in the two avatāra myths under discussion: Paul Hacker, *Prahlāda: Werden und Wandlungen einer Idealgestalt* (Weisbaden: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur No. 9, 1959) and Clifford Hospital, *The Righteous Demon* (Vancouver: University of Columbia Press, 1984).

10. David C. Pocock, "The Anthropology of Time-Reckoning," in *Myth and Cosmos* (Garden City: Natural History Press, 1967); M. Biarreau, "Études de mythologie hindoue IV: Bhakti et Avatāra," *BEFEO* 63 (1976).

11. See Paul Courtright, *Gaṇeśa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 17–18 for corroboration on this view.

12. That is, the *Harivamśa*, *Brahmāṇḍa*, *Matsya*, and *Sṛṣṭikhandā* of the *Padma Purāṇa*. It would be interesting to pursue a comparative and historical study of these texts, as there is a marked similarity and identity between some of their versions of the Narasimha and Vāmana myths.

13. That is, the *Bhāgavata*, *Liṅga*, *Śiva*, *Skanda*, *Vāmana*, and *Varāha Purāṇas*.

14. Adharma, literally "not dharma" (Sanskrit utilizes the alpha privative, like English), might be translated as disorder, chaos, unrighteousness, lawlessness. Its opposition to dharma is seen most clearly in its untranslated form.

15. yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānir hi bhārata
 abhyutthānam adharmasya tadā 'tmānam sṛjāmyaham
 paritrāṇāya sādḥūnām vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām
 dharmasamsthāpan 'ārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge

16. P. Courtright, *Gaṇeśa*, p. 14; he provides a "provisional definition of religion as a world of its own."

17. Wendy D. O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and other Mythical Beasts* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 5.

18. That is, the narrative, divine, cosmic, and human. See Wendy D. O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 2. Courtright adopts this schema but adds a fifth level, the etiological; see *Gaṇeśa*, pp. 18–19.

19. Stith Thompson, "Motif," *ESS* 2:711.

20. Valdimir Propp, *The Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), pp. 20ff.

21. I am indebted to A. K. Ramanujan for highlighting this trait and coining the term, *loophole in the law* with reference to it.

22. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (England: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969); *The Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967); "Liminal to Liminoid in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology," *Rice University Studies* 60, no. 3.

23. Pocock, "The Anthropology of Time Reckoning," p. 313.

24. O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva*, p. 21.

25. Mary Douglas, "The Meaning of Myth, with Special Reference to 'La Geste d'Asdiwal,'" in *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism*, A.S.A. Monographs 5 (England: Tavistock Publications, 1957), p. 63.