

I.24 *kleśa karma vipākāśayair aparāmṛṣṭaḥ puruṣa viśeṣa Īśvaraḥ.*
kleśa, obstacles to the practice of *yoga*; *karma*, action; *vipāka*, fruition,
maturing; *āśayair*, by the receptacle, storage or deposit of *saṁskāras*;
aparāmṛṣṭaḥ, untouched; *puruṣa*, soul; *viśeṣa*, special; *Īśvaraḥ*, the Lord.

The Lord is a special soul. He is untouched by: the obstacles [to the practice of yoga], karma, the fructification [of karma], and subconscious predispositions.

Vyāsa, Vācaspati Mīśra and other commentators dedicate their longest commentaries to this *sūtra*. Patañjali notes here that *Īśvara*, too, is a *puruṣa*, but he is *viśeṣa*, ‘special,’ that is, different and distinct from other *puruṣas*. He briefly lists four conditions of *saṁsāra* from which *Īśvara* is free, and these are elaborated upon by Vyāsa and the commentators. The root cause of *saṁsāra* is the *kleśas*, ‘obstacles’ – ignorance, ego, attachment, aversion and the will to live – which are discussed in II.3. Under the influence of these, the individual engages in the second item on the list given here, *karma*, which consists of one’s actions, whether good or bad. As discussed previously, actions produce a corollary, their fructification, listed here as *vipāka*, which is the effect they produce – every action has a corresponding reaction. Vācaspati Mīśra alludes to chapter II which will discuss in detail how these reactions manifest as the situation into which one is born, one’s life expectancy, and one’s life experience (II.13–14). Vyāsa glosses the final term in the list, *āśaya* (that which lies stored) with *vāsanās*, habits, or clusters of *saṁskāras*; while the terms are often used interchangeably, *vāsanās* tend to refer to latent *saṁskāras* of past lives, which lie dormant, albeit subconsciously molding personality habit and choice, and *saṁskāra* to the more active imprints of this life generated at every moment. *Saṁskāras* have to be contained somewhere, and the *āśaya* is their bed or container in the *citta*. Vācaspati Mīśra adds that these *vāsanās* and *saṁskāras*, subliminal imprints or subconscious impressions which eventually fructify, lie stored as potencies in the field of the mind. *Īśvara* is free from all of these conditions of *saṁsāra*; hence he is a ‘special’ type of *puruṣa*.

Since *yogīs* who have broken the ‘three bonds’¹ and attained

¹ Vijñānabhikṣu states that these three bonds are: attachment to the sense of ‘I’ – ego; attachment to the objects of the senses; and attachment of householders to sacrifice, sacrificial fee, gifts and Vedic study, etc. (in other words, ritualism for the sake of its fruits).

liberation, too, are free from these influences, Vyāsa makes a point of noting that *Īśvara* is distinct from liberated *puruṣas*, since he never had nor ever will have any relation to these bonds. Unlike all other *yogīs*, then, he never was bound, nor ever will be. He is eternally the transcendent God, not some sort of a liberated *yogī*. As Śaṅkara points out, in this *sūtra*, *akliṣṭa*, untouched, means *never* touched by the four conditions for *samsāra* noted above, whether in time past, present or future. A liberated *yogī* was once touched by all these in the past but is no longer in the present. *Īśvara* was never touched to begin with. He is therefore in a different category to liberated *yogīs*.

The recent notion in some modern commentaries that *Īśvara* is some sort of ‘archetypal’ *yogī* (e.g., Eliade, 1907) is nowhere to be found in the traditional commentarial tradition of the Yoga school, nor, for that matter, in the usage of the term *Īśvara* in the history of Indic philosophical discourse. In later classical Indic philosophical circles there were *Īśvara-vādins*, those believing in *Īśvara*, and *nir-īśvara-vādins*, those who rejected the notion of an *Īśvara*, a supreme God, but whether *īśvaravādin* or *nirīśvaravādins*, there was no debate at least as to the basic and general referent of the term, *Īśvara*. The arguments were philosophical revolving around whether the existence of a personal God was philosophically defensible, not semantic, in terms of what *Īśvara* meant.² While the term can, on occasion, refer by extension to a being with extraordinary power,³ texts such as the *Mahābhārata*, the *Gītā* and later Upaniṣads indicate that the term *Īśvara* was associated with a personal God, a supreme being, by Patañjali’s time, as will be discussed below, and one would need compelling grounds to renegotiate the meaning of the term as it is used and understood not only by the Yoga tradition, but by the entire later Indic philosophical tradition in general in the premodern period. The term cannot be extricated from in its traditional context.

On a related note, it is generally held, including in traditional

² Of course, different theistic schools had different notions as to the specific role played by *Īśvara*: for example was *Īśvara* the material and efficient cause of the universe or simply the efficient cause (e.g., commentaries to *Vedānta Sūtra* II.2.37, *contra* Nyāya, etc.; and II.2.3 *contra* Yoga).

³ *Vide* the description of the mystical powers of the *yogīs* which cause them to be referred to as *Īśvaras* in *Mahābhārata* XII.289.24 ff (my thanks to David White for this reference), or the deluded demoniacal character type who considers himself *Īśvara* in the *Gītā* (XVI.14). In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, the term is used to refer to *ātman/brahman* as ‘Lord’ (IV.4.22). But such usages are figurative and derivative, and their connotative force implies the normative referent of the term to a Supreme Being.

philosophical discourse, that Patañjali's *Īśvara*, is not a creator sort of God. Sāṅkhya is criticized in Vedānta for considering creation to evolve from inanimate *prakṛti* (*pradhāna*),⁴ rather than the conscious *Brahman* of the Upaniṣads, and the only criticism levied against Yoga by this school is that it is viewed to hold the same position (*eteṇa yogaḥ prayuktah*⁵), so Patañjali's *Īśvara* seems to have been seen in this light, and this is, of course, significant. Now, there are two types of 'creatorship': God as material cause (i.e., that the material stuff of the world emanates from God) and God as 'efficient' cause (i.e., that God does not create the actual material substance of the world, which is eternal as is He, but it is He who manipulates this stuff to create the world). But in point of fact there is nothing in Patañjali himself to indicate how he envisioned the relationship of *Īśvara* with the creation of the world. *Argumentum ex silentio* is not the strongest type of evidence, especially since Patañjali is not talking about creation in the sections of the text where he mentions *Īśvara*. He introduces *Īśvara* in the context of meditation, since that is his project in this text. While he does briefly mention a few attributes of *Īśvara*, these are attributes relevant to the ongoing discussion on meditation and liberation from *samsāra*. Creation is an entirely different topic not connected with the subject matter of the *Sūtras* and thus one has no explicit grounds from the text itself to determine how Patañjali envisioned the relationship of *Īśvara* with creation. He does correlate *Īśvara* with *om*, in I.27, and would have been well aware that *om* is the designation for *Brahman* in the Upaniṣads, and that *Brahman* is depicted there and consequently in the Vedānta tradition as the source of creation.⁶ And certainly all the commentators do accept the creatorship of *Īśvara*, that is, *Īśvara* as efficient cause.⁷

This seems a fairly important point. Patañjali's project is a very specific one, and his compact *Sūtras* provide succinct information germane

⁴ *Vedānta Sūtras* I, 1 1.ff & II.2.1ff.

⁵ *Vedānta Sūtras* I, 1. 3, *vide* also Śaṅkara's commentary to II.2.37.

⁶ *Vedānta Sūtras* I.1.2 and throughout.

⁷ *Vide*, e.g., Vyāsa I.25 for implicit acceptance of *Īśvara*'s role which seems to be taken for granted in this context. *Vide* also Vācaspati Miśra IV.3; however, in his characteristically eclectic and non-partisan manner, Vācaspati Miśra, when writing his commentary on the *Sāṅkhya Kārikās* (LVI-II), is quite comfortable representing the Sāṅkhya view that *prakṛti* is the source of creation, and presenting all the standard atheistic arguments against accepting *Īśvara* as cause of creation without refuting them. Interestingly, the commentator Gauḍapāda considers *prakṛti* and *brahman* to be synonyms (*bhāṣya* to XXII), another interesting twist in blending Vedāntic and Sāṅkhyian categories.

to his specific and immediate project, namely, *citta vṛtti nirodhaḥ (samādhi)*. He thus provides whatever information related to *Īśvara* is immediately relevant to this project – that *samādhi* can be attained by *Īśvara*; that this is possible because *Īśvara* is omniscient and beyond the *kleśas* and other sources of ignorance dealt with in the text that impede *samādhi*; that this can be attained by reciting *om*, etc., etc. There was no need to extrapolate further since, apart from this commitment to a very delimited focus, there was anyway no paucity of other theistic texts dealing with all manner of additional theological specificities in circulation at the time. (Certainly Vijñānabhikṣu, although much later and clearly a Vedāntin, explicitly states this: “Now what is *Īśvara*? What is devotion to Him? ...He has been very thoroughly analyzed in the *Vedānta Sūtras*...Consequently, it is only touched upon in passing here.”)⁸

To make this point, one could wonder why Patañjali has nothing to say about, say, disease, which he mentions in I.30 below. Again, this solitary reference is in the context of disease being an obstacle to *samādhi*, and in this regard only is it relevant to and therefore introduced in Patañjali’s project. There was an extensive body of knowledge in *āyurveda* on other aspects of disease available in other sources at the time. That greater body of knowledge is not relevant to Patañjali’s project, but this does not mean Patañjali did not consider other texts which do focus on *āyurveda* essential to human existence, or accept their jurisdiction. Likewise, Patañjali’s text focuses on *puruṣa*, not *Īśvara*. But this does not mean he minimizes or rejects the jurisdiction and contours of those texts which do focus on other aspects of *Īśvara* such as creation, or, for that matter, the varieties of *praṇidhāna*.

To my knowledge, all unambiguous theistic traditions taking roots in Patañjali’s day – Epic, Purāṇic, Vedānta, Nyāya – accepted *Brahman/Īśvara* at least as efficient creator (if not, with the Vedāntins, material creator) – understandably because the Upaniṣadic and Epic usages of the term cast *Īśvara* (or the more common Upaniṣadic term, *Īśa*) in this role.⁹ What grounds do we have from this period to insist Patañjali’s notion of *Īśvara* was an exception other than the *Vedānta Sūtra* reference? And even here

⁸ *Atha ka Īśvaraḥ kiṃ vā tat praṇidhānam ucyate.....sa ca...vedānta-sūtrair aśeṣa-viśeṣato mīmāṃsitaḥ. Ato ‘tra dīn-mātreṇocyat (Yogasara).*

⁹ *Vide*, for example, *Śvetāśvatara* VI.6ff; *Gītā* IX.4 and throughout, *Mahābhārata* e.g., XII.290.110; 333.16; 335.11 (*Īśvaro hi jagat-sraṣṭā*); 336.55, and elsewhere. For Nyāya, *vide Nyāya Sūtras* IV.1.19. The *Nyāya Sūtras* were composed by Gautama, the reputed founder of another of the six classical schools of thought, that of Nyāya (which specialized in analyzing categories of logic).

the evidence simply points to some form of Yoga being associated with some form of Sāṅkhya as denying material creatorship to *Brahman*. Even prior to the Vedānta Sūtras, the Mahābhārata states that he whom both Sāṅkhya and Yoga call the Supreme Soul, Nārāyaṇa, is the source of *prakṛti*, so prior to the Vedānta Sūtras and after their composition, there were strains of Sāṅkhya and Yoga that accepted the creatorship of *Īśvara*. We have no grounds to consider the author of the *Vedānta Sūtras* to be referring to Patañjali’s version of Yoga, since the *Yoga Sūtras* post-dated him.¹⁰ Rather, the very fact Patañjali makes no reference to the creatorship aspect of *Īśvara* suggests he accepted the status quo. We must, I suggest, accept that Patañjali considered *Īśvara* as efficient cause, at least, of creation.

Moreover, the fact that this *sūtra* indicates that *Īśvara* is not touched by the *kleśas* and *karma*, etc., does not indicate that *Īśvara* could not be a personal God, for Patañjali. If he is the ‘teacher of the ancients’ (I.26), the bestower of liberation (II.45), and omniscient (I.25) etc., then he must have some sort of personality (even to accept a form of pure *sattva* as held by the commentators), and clearly Patañjali does not consider his involvement with *prakṛti* in this capacity to compromise him, or subject him to the laws of *prakṛti* – the *kleśas* and *karma*, etc. There is a difference between our commentators on how to make sense of this important point, which we will take up, below, but practically any theistic tradition of the world envisions God as a personal Being involved in some way with the world, and yet simultaneously absolute and temporally untouched, and the notions of *Īśvara* prevalent in Patañjali’s time are no exception. One need only consider the *Gītā*, where Kṛṣṇa as *Īśvara* unambiguously claims to be the creator and source of everything (VII.4 ff; IX.8; X.8; and throughout), the *Īśvara* who enters into the world of *prakṛti* and supports it (XV 16–18)¹¹

¹⁰ Śaṅkara recognizes Yoga as accepting *Īśvara* as efficient cause in II.2.37 (although in II.1.3, Śaṅkara seems to state that *prakṛti* is the sole cause of creation in Yoga; *vide* Rukmani, 1993, for discussion).

Article I. ¹¹ The term *Īśvara* is first used in the *Gītā* in IV.6, which is also the first instance where the text unambiguously announces Kṛṣṇa supreme and divine nature. The opportunity is ostensibly framed by Arjuna’s question after Kṛṣṇa had informed him that he had come to reestablish the eternal science of *yoga*, which he had originally imparted to the sun god Vivasvān in primordial time. Given that Kṛṣṇa, his cousin and contemporary, is standing in front of him, how, wonders Arjuna, could he possibly have instructed Vivasvān many eons ago. Kṛṣṇa replies that he is the *Īśvara* of all living entities, birthless, imperishable, and the controller of *prakṛti*, and that his appearances in the world are through his own power (*ātmamāyā*). This is then followed by the well-

and yet remains untouched and unchanged by all such things (IV.13–14; IX.8–9). The point here is not to project the theology of the *Gītā* onto Patañjali, but to stress that Patañjali's *Īśvara* cannot be extracted from the context of *Īśvara*-related theologies of the time. The entire *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, too, presents Śiva as *Īśvara*, who actively creates, rules and engages with the world, and yet remains distinct and transcendent to it.¹² Moreover the largest body of Sanskrit written material, the Purāṇic genre, while yet to attain its final form, was absorbing oral traditions that predated Patañjali's time, and these are pervaded with Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa and Śiva theologies of this sort.¹³ We have no grounds to insist that Patañjali's *Īśvara* be distinct from such theistic expressions, and thus stress that in our view Patañjali's reference to *Īśvara* cannot be excised from this context of his time.

Fewer than twenty-five words have been utilized in the *Sūtras* descriptive of *Īśvara*. Far too much has been made, in our view, by extracting from the greater theistic landscape of his day these terse statements Patañjali has made towards a description of *Īśvara*, and focusing on them as if they exist in some sort of isolation specific to Patañjali and immune from the mainstream *Īśvara* theologies that were enveloping the Indian landscape. We have noted how earlier scholars opted to consider the entire *Īśvara* element as a later interpolation, in the hope, we suspect, of preserving a 'rational' core to Patañjali, stemming, possibly, from discomfort with this vivid background of Hindu *Īśvara* theologies. Even

known verses in which Kṛṣṇa states that he comes whenever there is a decline in *dharma* and increase in *adharma* in order to protect the pious and destroy the impious.

In V.29, Kṛṣṇa claims that he is *maheśvara* (the great Lord) of all the worlds, enjoyer of sacrifices and austerities and friend of all creatures, and that one knowing him attains peace. Similar language is used in X.3, where Kṛṣṇa repeats that he is the *maheśvara*, 'great' *Īśvara*, of the world, birthless, and beginningless, and that the undeluded amongst men who know him as such are freed from all evils. A few verses further, Arjuna calls Kṛṣṇa the supreme *Brahman*; supreme abode, *dhāma*; supreme purifier; birthless, all-pervading primal God; and, of relevance here, the eternal divine *puruṣa* (*Īśvara*, for Patañjali, as noted above is a 'special' *puruṣa*). In XVIII.61, Kṛṣṇa as *Īśvara* is said to reside in the hearts of all beings, causing them to revolve by the power of illusion, as if fixed on a machine. Although the term *Īśvara* is used elsewhere in the text with different nuances, the *Gītā* unquestioningly (and, indeed, quite assertively) identifies this supreme being with Kṛṣṇa.

¹² Of the three occurrences of the term *Īśvara* in the Upaniṣads – other derivatives of the root *īś* such as *īśa* and *īśan* are used more frequently – two (supplemented by the adjective *mahā*, great, i.e., *maheśvara*, great '*Īśvara*') occur in the SU (IV.10 & VI.7), in reference to Śiva (that is, to Hara and Rudra).

¹³ For a discussion of the *Īśvara* theology of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, vide Bryant (2003, *prev cit*, xix ff).

with the more careful attention of later scholars who recognize that the *Īśvara* element is inherent to the text, one senses an aversion to pursuing the implications of this. In Patañjali's day and age (and subsequently, for that matter), what other options would there have been for any type of *Īśvara* theism other than the Nārāyaṇa/Viṣṇu and Śiva-derived traditions? Viṣṇu and Śiva had long risen to prominence centuries before Patañjali, and their worship was widespread across the subcontinent by the beginning of the common era. The *Īśvara* theological options of the time are amply preserved in the Epic and much neglected Purāṇic traditions, and thus we have gone so far as to speculate whether, given the theistic options of the Indian subcontinent in the 2nd-3rd century C.E., one can legitimately reject the probability that Patañjali would have envisioned *Īśvara* as either Viṣṇu or Śiva as I have considered (only somewhat gratuitously) elsewhere.¹⁴

Already many centuries prior to Patañjali, there were Sāṃkhya/Yoga traditions preserved in the *Mahābhārata* which were theistic, all with Vaiṣṇava flavorings. Rao (1966) has extensively sieved through the Sāṃkhya and Yoga (*Mokṣadharmā*) sections of the great Epic and determined that there were several variant schools subscribing to Sāṃkhyan metaphysics, all of which were theistic in some form or fashion.¹⁵ These theistic expressions were Vaiṣṇava¹⁶ in orientation, that is, used the language of Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa when referring to *Īśvara* (even in those variants who conceived of the Supreme Truth in less personal terms).¹⁷ And, of course, the Epic's *Bhagavad Gītā* (generally dated between 4th B.C.E.- 2nd C.E.) has Viṣṇu in his form as Kṛṣṇa emphatically stating throughout that he is *Īśvara* (see footnote above) and that *prakṛti* and her

¹⁴ Bryant (2005).

¹⁵ Specifically, Rao determines that there were four traditions accepting the basic Sāṃkhya categories, proto-Sāṃkhya, Vedānta, Yoga and Pāñcarātra. These differed primarily in their understanding of whether there were 25 or 26 categories, and whether the 25th or 26th category was *Īśvara* or a more impersonal notion of an absolute. Yoga and *Pāñcarātra* accepted the 26th category of *Īśvara* which they accepted as Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa. Even proto-Sāṃkhya, interestingly, which accepted 25 categories, albeit associating this with a universal rather than individual self, nonetheless referred to this category as Viṣṇu (1966, chapter V). Thus the theism of the proto-Sāṃkhya Yoga section of the Epic is Vaiṣṇava in orientation. Incidentally, Rao finds evidence of Sāṃkhya and Yoga being independent but overlapping strains in this early period, rather than the one system argued by the other scholars noted earlier.

¹⁶ Vaiṣṇava refers to a devotee of Viṣṇu, Śaivite to a follower of Śiva.

¹⁷ *Vide e.g.*, XII.289.62; 290.109-110; 291.37; 306.76 and, of course, the entire Nārāyaṇiya section where, for example, 334.17 specifically states that the followers of Sāṃkhya and Yoga meditate on Nārāyaṇa (*tat-sāṃkhyoyogibhir-udāra-dhṛtaṃ buddhyā yatātṃ mabhir-viditaṃ satatam*).

Sāṅkhyan evolutes are his “lower nature” (VII.4). As discussed in the introduction, the only extant description of the supposed original Sāṅkhyan text, the *Ṣaṣṭi-tantra-sāstra*, in the (admittedly later and sectarian) Vaiṣṇava *Ahīrbudhnya Saṁhitā*, also accepts a Sāṅkhyan *Īśvara* and considers him to be Viṣṇu, and these Vaiṣṇava Sāṅkhyan traditions were preserved in the Purāṇas, as in the later Vedānta traditions (including that of Śaṅkara who clearly conceived of *Īśvara* as Viṣṇu¹⁸). There was thus a widespread variety of Vaiṣṇava-flavored traditions preserved in a variety of genres.

Indeed, every characteristic Patañjali will make about *Īśvara* in this section (I.23–31, II.) – being transcendent to *karma*, of unsurpassed omniscience, teacher of the ancients, untouched by Time, represented by *om*, and awarding enlightenment – seem extracted from the *Gītā*. In the *Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa claims to be: a distinct (but supreme) sort of *puruṣa*, the *uttamam puruṣas anyam*, specifying that this *puruṣa* is distinct not only from non-liberated *puruṣas*, but also liberated ones (XVI.16–18)¹⁹; beyond *karma* and the *kleśas*, etc. (IV.14; IX.9); of unsurpassed omniscience (VII.26; X.20 & 32; XI.43); the teacher of the ancients (IV.1 here specified as Vivasvān the sun god, who in turn imparted knowledge to Manu, the progenitor of mankind); transcendent to time (10.30); the sound *om* (IX.17); the remover of obstacles impeding the progress of his devotees, and the bestower of liberation (VIII.58; IX.30–32; X.10–11). There is thus perfect compatibility in quality between Patañjali’s unnamed *Īśvara* and Kṛṣṇa as depicted in the *Gītā*. Similarly with the attributes assigned to Nārāyaṇa/Viṣṇu throughout the *Nārāyaṇīya* portion of the *mokṣadharmā* section in the XIIth book of the *Mahābhārata* Epic, which unambiguously

¹⁸ For Śaṅkara’s understanding of *Īśvara* vide Nelson (2007).

¹⁹ In XV.16-18, Kṛṣṇa states that there are two types of *puruṣas*, *kṣara puruṣas*, perishable beings and *akṣara puruṣas*, imperishable ones. The *kṣara puruṣa* are all living entities, *sarvāṇi bhūtāni*, and the *akṣara puruṣas* are *kuṭaṣṭho*, literally, ‘situated on the top.’ This latter term is used twice elsewhere in the *Gītā*, VI.8 & XII.3; the former in reference to the enlightened sage, and the latter as a quality of the highest truth realized by the enlightened sage. On both scores, we can take the *kṣara puruṣa* to refer to the unenlightened being (or, with Minor, 1982, the being phenomenally considered), and the *akṣara puruṣa* as the enlightened being (or, with Minor, the true realized self). XV.17 then, goes on to describe another, highest *puruṣa*, the *paramātmā*, supreme self who pervades the three worlds and supports them, and the term *Īśvara* is used for this highest *puruṣa*. XV.18 emphasizes again that this supreme self is higher than both *kṣara* and *akṣara puruṣas*, and XV.19 that one who knows this supreme self to be Kṛṣṇa knows all that there is to know. X.20 goes further and asserts that knowledge of this is the most confidential scriptural teaching. Thus, while more assertive and elaborative than Patañjali, the *Gītā* also articulates a theology of *Īśvara* as a special *puruṣa* of a different order than other *puruṣas*, except that the *Gītā* puts a name to the position – Kṛṣṇa.

presents Viṣṇu as the Supreme deity possessing all these characteristics throughout.²⁰

Of course, the *Mahābhārata* with its *Gītā* was not the only well-known philosophical text on the religious landscape at the beginning of the Common Era promoting theism to an identified *Īśvara*; a definite theism had also long emerged in the late Upaniṣads, particularly the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (generally dated 4th-2nd B.C.E.) which vigorously identifies Śiva (named Rudra and Hara in this text) as *Īśvara*. Indeed, the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* assigns to Śiva several of the same generic characteristics associated with *Īśvara* that Patañjali uses: he is distinct from other souls²¹; he is the awarder of liberation (or, more precisely, by meditating on him all illusion disappears, I.10); he is omniscient and the maker of Time (VI.2 & 16); and he ‘supported’ (taught) the ancient sage Kapila, significantly, the founder of the Sāṅkhya system, which, as we have discussed was not considered distinct from Yoga at this period. In fact, this text is very relevant to our line of argument as it promotes *yogic* practice; the *sūtras* in chapter II give the most extensive (and almost sole) description of *yoga* in the earlier Upaniṣads (along with the later Maitrī).²² Moreover, the *sūtra* is situated in the context of Sāṅkhyan metaphysics²³ which is the metaphysical infrastructure within which Patañjali situates his yoga system.²⁴

²⁰ E.g. XII.chapters 199, 200, 202, 271, 321, 323, 326, 336)

²¹ While not directly related to a discussion of Patañjali, who does not use these terms, it is interesting to note, as an aside, that the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* also parallels the *Gītā* by stating that *Īśvara* is beyond the *kṣara* and the *akṣara*, except of course stating that *Īśvara* is Rudra. In I.8, the whole world is described as a combination of the *kṣara* and the *akṣara*, and, as with Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā*, is born by Hara (here referred to as *īśa*). Two verses further, the immortal Hara is described as imperishable *akṣara*, and ruling over both the *kṣara*, perishable (here, importantly, a reference to *pradhāna*, or matter) and the *ātman*. The implication is that the *ātman* is also *akṣara*, but that *akṣara* Hara is distinct and supreme. That there are two types of *ātma*, the liberated and non-liberated, as promoted in the *Gītā*’s parallel rendition, is substantiated in I.9-10 and IV.5.

²¹ Moreover, VI.8 specifies that the *ātman* is not *īśa*, and remains bound (because of having an enjoying disposition), until he comes to know God. In short, we have the soul in bondage, the liberated soul, and Śiva, an almost exact Śaivite equivalent of the *Gītā*’s XIV.16-18, with parallels to Patañjali’s theistic rhetoric.

²² III.8-11 speaks of the *yogī* sitting in a cave or sheltered place in an appropriate setting, where he should keep the body straight and erect, draw the senses and mind into the heart, and compress the breath and exhaling through one nostril; the benefits of this practice are described in III.11-15.

²³ Proto-Sāṅkhyan metaphysics are clearly referred to in I.9, and, later, in IV.5.

²⁴ Additionally, the text also refers to Rudra as *puruṣa* (III.9 -17); however, the reference is more archaic, making a clear association between Rudra and the famous thousand-limbed *puruṣa* of the Ṛg Vedic *puruṣa* hymn.

The *Gītā* (by most dating estimates²⁵) and the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* had preceded Patañjali by centuries, as had many of the Purāṇic stories, even if they were still being organized into their final literary forms, and there is no evidence that Patañjali's rendition of *Īśvara* is a departure from such specific theistic orientations. Indeed, the question must be raised as to what alternatives to Viṣṇu or Śiva would there anyway be in that period? We thus suggest that the evidence points to the conclusion that the theism in Patañjali's system can only be stemming from these preexisting Vaiṣṇava or Śaivite strains.

One might add one final note here, that Patañjali not only stipulates the practice of *svādhyāya*, self study, understood in all the commentaries as referring to the study of scripture and recitation of *japa* (II.I & 44) but also states that from such study and recitation one connects with an *iṣṭa devatā*, one's 'divinity of preference,' a term used in the Upaniṣads and earlier Vedic texts to refer to the Vedic gods. That Patañjali was well-versed in the *śāstras* (sacred texts) – and thus hardly immune to the theistic currents of the day – is already obvious; this *sūtra* suggests he was himself oriented towards a specific divinity 'of preference.' It is hard to conceive that this divinity would have been one of the (by this time) minor Vedic deities for reasons outlined in the commentary to II.44 (where I again take up the matter of Patañjali's own personal theistic orientations), but which can be summarized by pointing out that the minor deities are approached for worldly boons (see introduction). Obviously the *yogī* has no interest in worldly boons as Patañjali has already specified in I.15. The *yogī* is only interested in *samādhi*, and the only divine being who can bestow this is *Īśvara*. Thus, *iṣṭha devatā* might better be read as a reference to a form of *Īśvara* to which the *yogī* is partial, as it is taken in the theistic traditions.²⁶ This is further underscored by the fact that *svādhyāya* is also taken by all the commentators as referring to the recitation of *mantra*, *japa*, which Vyāsa,

²⁵ Even if, for argument's sake, one accepts Minor's (2005) very late dating of 150 C.E. for the composition of the *Gītā* (in contrast to his earlier 1982 assignment of 150 B.C.E.), which is more-or-less coterminous with the common date assigned to Patañjali, it nonetheless at the very least reflects a major theistic expression current at the time that had long been developing its roots, all the more so given that it was deemed worthy of insertion into the great Epic. *Vide* introduction to Minor (1982), for the range of dates assigned to this text.

²⁶ *Vide* e.g., *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* IV.11 & 17 for the use of the term *deva* for Rudra (Śiva), which the text presents as the supreme *Īśvara* and, likewise, the *Gītā* (XI.38) for Kṛṣṇa. The term is used extensively in the *Mahābhārata* as a reference to Nārāyaṇa/Viṣṇu (e.g., three times in XII.331.47-51), and throughout the Purāṇic corpus (e.g. Bhāgavata III.28.18).

following Patañjali (I.27–28) takes as reciting *om*. *Om*, we will see, specifically refers to *Īśvara*. So whether *svādhyāya* is taken to be study or *mantra*, *iṣṭha devatā* can only conceivably refer to a preferred form of *Īśvara*. The preferred forms of *Īśvara* in the 2nd century C.E. had long been associated with Śiva or Viṣṇu or one of his incarnations such as Kṛṣṇa. There were no other candidates.

If one felt inclined to push the matter further, the scanty inferential evidence that can be brought to bear on the case for Viṣṇu as Patañjali's *iṣṭha devatā* might include the facts that, apart from the evidence of the earlier Vaiṣṇava flavored Yoga streams preserved in the *Mahābhārata* noted above, the later tradition considered Patañjali to be an incarnation of Śeṣa, Viṣṇu's serpent carrier in the Ocean of Milk (rather than, say, Nandi, Śiva's bull carrier) and assigns the primary commentary on Patañjali to the famous Vyāsa, who is embedded in Vaiṣṇava narrative traditions. Indeed, the *Mahābhārata* considers Vyāsa a manifestation (*aṃsa*) of Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa, and the son of the latter.²⁷ This might suggest the preservation of a tradition that was partial to *Īśvara* as Viṣṇu. For this and other reasons,²⁸ a case can thus be made that Patañjali personally subscribed to the Vaiṣṇava (Viṣṇu) flavored theism of the older Epic and Purāṇic Sāṃkhya and Yoga traditions. But one can also make a case for Śiva. Perhaps any such reading of the sparse evidence reflects pre-existing predispositions, but one can certainly argue that *Īśvara* in Patañjali's time had long been associated with Viṣṇu and Śiva, and thus Patañjali would in all likelihood have been either a Vaiṣṇavite or a Śaivite.

Having said all this, one cannot ignore the fact that Patañjali has chosen not to disclose his understanding of *Īśvara* other than in the most general categories of relevance to the specific focus of the *Sūtras*, *citta vṛtti nirodhah*. As I note in II.33, I like to imagine that Patañjali is too sophisticated and broadminded a thinker to risk sectarianizing the otherwise universalistic tenor of the *Sūtras* and thereby alienating the sensitivities of aspiring *yogīs* with theistic (or nontheistic) orientations different from his own. That millions of people worldwide continue to find his text personally relevant today speaks to his foresight in this regard.

One might add, on a related note, that the Yoga tradition in America today primarily stems from the Vaiṣṇava (Viṣṇu-centered) traditions. Krishnamacarya, his son Desikachar and his son-in-law Iyengar,

²⁷ *Mahābhārata* XII.337.4-5.

²⁸ See footnote 110², and Bryant (2005).

are all devoted members of the Śrī lineage of Vaiṣṇavism, best associated with the 12th century Vedāntin Rāmānuja. This is a devotional lineage, prioritizing *bhakti*, which accepts Viṣṇu as the Supreme *Īśvara*.²⁹ This aspect of their heritage is unknown to most of their followers, since it was not stressed by these *ācāryas* upon coming to Western shores (although it can be perceived more readily in the *vinīyoga* writings of Desikachar than in those of Iyengar).³⁰ The transplantation of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* to the West in modern times as a *yogic* path unto itself is to be credited to the efforts of A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami, founder of ISKCON (the Hare Krishna Movement), whose devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa inspired him to spread Kṛṣṇa-centered *bhakti yoga* ('Kṛṣṇa Consciousness') around the world. Noteworthy, too, in the same time period, is the transplantation of the Kashmeri form of Śaivism featuring *bhakti* to Lord Śiva popularized by Swami Mukṭānanda, founder of Siddha Yoga. While both these traditions have had their growing pains, there is good reason to hope and suppose that both have established permanent roots in the western landscape (in many cases outside the parameters of their respective founding institutions).³¹

Returning to our commentators, *Īśvara* is unsurpassed by any other power, continues Vyāsa; he has no competitor. Nor does he have an equal. As Vyāsa puts it rhetorically, if, amongst two equals, one says of a desired object: "let it be old," and the other says: "let it be new," the wishes of one of the two will be thwarted since they cannot both have their way. And if, on the other hand, their wishes never contradict, adds Vācaspati Miśra, then what is the point of having more than one *Īśvara* in the first place? Thus, *Īśvara* has no equal but is the one sole Being who is unexcelled and unequalled. Therefore Patañjali states that he is a special *puruṣa*. His existence is substantiated by the scriptures, add the commentators – Vijñānabhikṣu lists a variety of passages in this regard, such as the

²⁹ Older photos of Krishnamacharya as well as Iyengar show them with the *tilak*, sacred clay, of the Śrī lineage – two broad white vertical lines on the forehead, with a red vertical streak in between.

³⁰ *Vide* Stern (2005) and Nevrin (2005).

³¹ See Bryant (2007), for a range of the post-charismatic problems and challenges faced by the Hare Krishna Movement. A simple websearch on either tradition will produce a significant amount of material from both adherents and critics of both institutions (expectedly, given the trauma inherent in such dramatic transplantation attempts to the radically different socio-cultural landscape of the West). These notwithstanding, the traditions themselves are authentic classical Indian spiritual traditions and rich in centuries of philosophical and literary developments.

occurrence of the term *Īśvara* in the *Gītā* (e.g., XV.17). The scriptures are themselves the product of *Īśvara* when he associates with pure *sattva* (to which we will return, below). Thus there is circularity between *Īśvara*, pure *sattva* and scripture; *Īśvara* produces scripture from his adoption of pure *sattva*, and scripture directs one to *Īśvara*.³² Obviously this means that, since *Īśvara* is omniscient, and it goes without saying that he is beyond any cheating propensity due to his nature of pure *sattva*, the scriptures emanating from him are absolute and free from error.

Vācaspati Mīśra raises an issue here concerning *Īśvara*'s 'personality' to which we referred above. If *Īśvara* has knowledge and the power to act, as the previous *sūtras* indicate that he does (since he has the power to bestow liberation on the devoted *yogī* and thus must be aware of his devotion, and I.27 informs us that he 'taught the ancients,' etc) does this not mean he has a *citta* mind? Pure consciousness, Vācaspati Mīśra reminds us, is unchanging and without object according to the Yoga school (and an axiom of Hindu thought in general), and therefore removed from all knowledge and the desire to act. Knowledge and desire are thus functions of *citta*, in other words *citta vṛttis*. Did not the opening *sūtras* of the text inform us that it is these very *citta vṛttis* which are responsible for bondage in *saṃsāra*? The very *citta* itself is the product of *prakṛti*, and thus has its origin in ignorance, *avidyā*. How can *Īśvara*, who is forever free, be bound by *prakṛti* and its products and subject to ignorance in the form of *citta vṛttis*?

Vācaspati Mīśra resolves this dichotomy by supposing that the Lord, even though untouched by nescience, 'appears' to assume the nature of ignorance out of his freedom, just as an actor imitating Rāma, freely assumes the character of Rāma. But the actor does not forget his real self. In the same way, *Īśvara* associates with pure *sattva*, free from the influence of *rajas* and *tamas*, out of his own free will, says Vācaspati Mīśra.³³ A parallel

³² Vācaspati Mīśra (and Vijñānabhikṣu) offer the argument that the scriptures must be absolute, because the *mantras* and knowledge of herbs, etc., contained in them are seen to work, and no one person, even in a thousand lives, could have figured out such things independently.

³³ In his commentary to the next *sūtra*, Hariharānanda states that any *yogī* can potentially arrest the fluctuations of the mind and extinguish the latent *saṃskāras*, or subconscious impressions. Consequently, such a *yogī* can close down the working mind for a specified period and enter into a state of meditative absorption after which he or she can then reactivate the mind if desired. This mind will not be the uncontrolled one of ordinary beings, but endowed with knowledge appropriate for the benefit of such a *yogī*. Thus, voluntarily adopting such a mind, liberated *yogīs*

notion of *Īśvara* is expressed in the *Gītā*:

Although I am unborn and my nature is imperishable
And although I am the *Īśvara* of all beings
Yet I come into being by my own power
By controlling *prakṛti*, which is mine (IV.6).

Nonetheless, even if *Īśvara* associates with *prakṛti* out of freedom, rather than bondage, his inclination to do so still indicates desire on his part, and desire, for Vācaspati Mīśra, is also a symptom of ignorance (it will be described as a *kleśa*, obstacle to ultimate knowledge, in II.2ff). To address this philosophical objection, Vācaspati Mīśra patches together a rather complicated argument (that will not meet the approval of Vijñānabhikṣu). He argues that *Īśvara* is transcendent to Time. Before the dissolution of the universe,³⁴ *Īśvara* determines, or wills, that he will again associate with *sattva* when the next universal manifestation occurs. This wish or *saṁskāra* is deposited into *sattva* along with the collective *saṁskāras* of all embodied beings. When dissolution occurs, all *saṁsāric puruṣas* remain in a latent state until the next manifestation. The *saṁskāras* each *puruṣa* had accumulated in past lives, also remain latent, but are again regrouped around the appropriate *puruṣa* when the next cosmic manifestation takes place. This, for Vācaspati Mīśra, applies to *Īśvara*: after dissolution, *Īśvara* disconnects from *sattva*, and all acts of volition, etc. (i.e., from the *citta*), as do all other *puruṣas*. But when the universe manifests again, *Īśvara*'s determination from the previous cycle is activated, like a cosmic alarm clock, and *Īśvara* again associates with *prakṛti* (just as, says Vācaspati Mīśra, Chaitra who contemplates “tomorrow I must get up at daybreak” and then, after sleeping, gets up at that very time because of the *saṁskāra* he had deposited into the *citta* the previous day to this effect). This cumbersome explanation is construed to explain how desire, knowledge and the will to act, which in conventional Yoga understanding are *citta vṛttis* indicative of unliberated *puruṣas* in *saṁsāra*, can exist in

can work in the world for the benefit of other beings. Hariharānanda understands *Īśvara*'s adoption of a mind at the time of creation and dissolution to be along the same lines: to address a need such as the upliftment of creatures from the world of *saṁsāra*.

³⁴ Creation in all Hindu systems (except the Mīmāṃsā school) is cyclical: for the Sāṁkhya School tradition, the universe periodically ‘dissolves’ into its Sāṁkhya *tattva* constituents and ultimately into primordial *prakṛti*, and remains in a state of dissolution until the next cosmic ‘manifestation,’ when it evolves forth again.

Īśvara, whom Patañjali says in this *sūtra* has always been pure and liberated and free from ignorance.

Vācaspati Mīśra does not explain how, in the new cycle of creation, the pure and independent *Īśvara* can become influenced by the reactivated *sattva* containing his deposited wish from the previous cosmic cycle. Vijñānabhikṣu draws attention to this problem, pointing out that it is ignorance which causes *puruṣa* to associate (or, after cosmic dissolution, re-associate) with *prakṛti* – but how can ignorance be applicable to *Īśvara*? For Vijñānabhikṣu, desire, knowledge and the power to act, exist in *Īśvara* eternally. Here, he again reflects the position held by certain Vedānta schools, who also hold that *Īśvara*'s mind and, for that matter, body, are not *prakṛtic* productions, even in its pure *sāttvic* potential, but made of pure *Brahman* and thus part of the essential nature of *Īśvara* rather than an external *prakṛtic* covering as is the case with the mind and bodies covering the *puruṣas* in *saṃsāra*.³⁵

Vijñānabhikṣu uses this *sūtra* as an opportunity to argue on behalf of another matter, namely, the view of the Sāṅkhya and Yoga schools that there is an eternal plurality of *puruṣas*, in opposition to the position of the *advaita*, nondualistic, school of Vedānta, which posits one ultimate, single all-pervading *puruṣa* (*ātman*). The Yoga view holds that, both in the liberated state as well as in the world of *saṃsāra*, there is a plurality of individual souls, while the *advaita* school holds that the apparent plurality of *puruṣas*, including the *puruṣa* known as *Īśvara*, is a product of ignorance occurring only in the world of *saṃsāra*. In *advaita Vedānta*, from a liberated perspective, there is only one undivided *ātman* (see discussion in Introduction, footnote 59?). Other Vedānta schools, however, such as Rāmānuja's *viśiṣṭhādvaita*, oppose this view, and Vijñānabhikṣu presents various arguments against the *advaita* position that can be found in the writing of Rāmānuja and other post-Śaṅkara Vedāntins. For example, if there were only one ultimate undivided *ātman*, then if any one *jīva*³⁶ becomes liberated, it attains to this undivided state. How, then, can other *jīvas* continue to exist in *saṃsāra*? In other words, if there is only one undivided *ātman* in reality, how can it exist in both liberated as well as *saṃsāric* states? This contradicts the supposed undividedness of *ātman*. For this reason alone, there must therefore be a plurality of *puruṣas*, some

³⁵ This is the view of the theistic Vedāntins (e.g., Rāmānuja's commentary to *Vedānta Sūtras* I.1.21; Baladeva's commentary to *Vedānta Sūtras* III.2.14ff).

³⁶ *Jīva* is the term usually used to refer to the *ātman* in *saṃsāric* bondage.

liberated and some in *samsāra*, as held by the *Sāṃkhya Kārikās* (XVIII).³⁷ The argument has a history in the polemics of Vedāntins opposed to Śaṅkara's extreme *advaita* form of monism. Thus, *Īśvara* is distinct from the *puruṣas*, and the individual *puruṣas* from each other.

And, importantly, clearly in response to the Vedānta criticism of Sāṃkhya (and, by extension Yoga³⁸), Bhoja notes that it is by the will (*icchā*) of *Īśvara* that the union between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* takes place. The Vedāntins point out that since *prakṛti* is inert and unconscious, and *puruṣa* in its pure form is free of all desire or any content of consciousness, how could the union between the two ever occur? For Bhoja, as for the Vedānta and all other theistic traditions, it is by the desire of *Īśvara* (in conjunction with the previous activities of each *puruṣa*), which brings about the union between the two in each cycle of creation (the issue of 'first time' primordial beginnings is avoided in Indian Philosophy in general by positing that this cycle is beginningless). Thus, with Bhoja, Vijñānabhikṣu and, of course, Śaṅkara and other commentators, Vedāntic concerns are blended into the commentaries on the *Yoga Sūtras* (which, as I have argued in the introduction, is an organic and quintessentially 'orthodox' exegetical thing to do).

³⁷ Vijñānabhikṣu quotes the *Sāṃkhya Sūtras* (I.154) as stating that the supposed *advaita* passages of the Upaniṣads (upon which the *advaita* school is predicated) do not in actuality contradict the existence of a plurality of eternal *puruṣas*, because, properly understood, they do not point to one ultimate monistic *ātman*, but refer to the oneness of the *category* of *ātman*. In other words, all *ātman* are the same in so far as they belong to the same category of existence, '*ātmanneś;*' they are not ontologically one.

³⁸ *Vedānta Sūtra* II.1.3

I.27 *tasya vācakaḥ praṇavaḥ.*

tasya, his; *vācakaḥ*, designation; *praṇavaḥ*, the mystical syllable *om*.

The name designating him is the mystical syllable ‘om.’

Patañjali states here that *Īśvara* is represented by the mystical syllable *om*. *Om* has been understood as a sonal incarnation of *Brahman* (which is the most common term used for the Absolute Truth in the *Upaniṣads*), since the late Vedic period.³⁹ The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, for example, states: “*Brahman* is *om*, this whole world is *om*” (I.8.1), as does the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (II.16), the *Praśna Upaniṣad* (V.2-5), and the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, which concerns itself entirely with the relation of manifest reality with this syllable. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* describes *om* as the bow, the self as the arrow, and *Brahman* as the target that must be struck, paralleling Patañjali’s statement in the next *sūtra*. The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* states that through the practice (*abhyāsa*) of meditating on *om*, one “can see God”⁴⁰ (I.14). A scholastic such as Patañjali would most certainly have been well schooled in the *Upaniṣads* (especially given his own mandate of the prerequisite of study for success in *yoga*, II.1 & 44), which, as an orthodox thinker, he would have accepted as *śruti*, divine revelation. Even though he never refers to *Brahman* in the *Sūtras*, here again we must wonder whether, along with texts such as the *Gītā*,⁴¹ the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*,⁴² the Epic and the theologies of the Purāṇas – indeed, along with *all* the *Īśvara* theologies of his time, to my knowledge – he is quite consciously equating the Upaniṣadic *Brahman* with this personal *Īśvara*, by means of this common denominator of *om*.

Vyāsa raises the question, which touches upon various Indian theories of language, as to whether the relationship between the person *Īśvara* and the designation (*vācaka*) *om* is conventional – a socially agreed upon usage – or inherent and eternal. The relationship of word and meaning (signifier and object signified)⁴³ has an extensive history in Indian intellectual thought which need not detain us here except as it relates to the Yoga school’s understanding of the syllable *om*. Briefly, from conventional perspectives, the word ‘elephant,’ refers to a particular type of creature, but the word ‘camel’ (or any other term such as abracadabra)

³⁹ Vide Bedekar (1964) for a discussion of *om* in the *Mahābhārata* Epic.

⁴⁰ *Devam paśyet.*

⁴¹ E.g., XV.17-8, XIII.13 & XIV.27.

⁴² E.g., III.7, V.6, VI.18.

⁴³ This relationship between ‘designator’ and ‘designatum,’ *vācaka* and *vācya*, is called *abhidhā*.

would do just as well provided it became a designation for this creature agreed upon by the speakers of the language. Different languages of the world hold different terms for the same object. The term ‘elephant’ is thus conventional; it does not have an eternal or absolutely binding relationship with its referent. The same obviously holds true for personal names given to people, as Vijñānabhikṣu notes: the name ‘Devadutta’⁴⁴ is given adventitiously to a son by his father – he could just as well have called him Viṣṇupriya.

An inherent relationship, on the other hand, is eternal and not dependent upon social usage – Vyāsa gives the example of the relationship between a lamp and light; wherever there is a lamp there must always and necessarily be light. Such is the relationship between *Īśvara* and *om*; it is not a culturally agreed upon designation. *Īśvara* was known by the syllable *om* in previous creations, and will be for all eternity; it is an eternal designation not assigned by human convention or socially agreed upon usage.

How can this be, wonders Vācaspati Miśra? After all, *om* is just a sound and merges back into *prakṛti* along with all other sounds and all material objects at the dissolution of the universe, and its powers must thereby disappear. At a new creation, how can this particular phoneme regain its power from the previous creation? It remanifests with all its previous power, he continues, just like life forms which disappear into the earth during the dry season burst back into the same life forms after the rains. This particular and specific phoneme is eternally invested by *Īśvara* with his power.⁴⁵ One can conclude then, that, not being subject to time, *Īśvara* is not subject to cyclical creation, and therefore can invest his potency eternally into the sacred syllable *om*.

Hariharānanda believes that this empowered syllable *om* along with its designation, *Īśvara*, is reintroduced to humanity in each new cycle of creation by omniscient beings, or sages with recollection of their past lives. He feels that no other word can bring about comparable calmness of mind. Moreover, it is easy to pronounce, since, unlike consonants, vowels can be pronounced in prolonged continuity. The sound, he holds, moves from the throat to the brain where it aids contemplation. Certainly, the repetition of the sound *om* has been performed by mystics and meditators

⁴⁴ The name Devadutta is used ubiquitously in the commentarial tradition to refer to an everyday individual – a Joe Bloggs, or a John Doe.

⁴⁵ The denotative power of all words are eternal, according to Yoga (and other schools).

in India for many centuries, and is one of the most common forms of Hindu meditation.

Śaṅkara gives a popular etymology for the term *praṇava*, the term used here by Patañjali to refer to *om*. Popular etymologies are common in exegetical literature, and usually break a word down into its components, assigning extended theological meaning to each segment. While they would not always be accepted by modern-day historical linguists as etymologically accurate, such derivations are a good example of how many of the important Vedic terms are reconfigured to conform to specific theological principles of later times. The prefix *pra*, of *praṇava*, he says, stands for *prakarṣeṇa*, perfectly; and *nava* is a derivative of the root *nu*, in its third person passive form of *nūyate*, ‘he is praised.’ Thus, through the recitation (*jaṇa*) of *om*, *Īśvara* is praised. Alternatively, he continues, substituting the *va* of *praṇava* with *dhā*, one can construe *praṇidhā*, which we know from I.23 means to surrender to the Lord; *praṇava* is thus a sound representation of the Lord through which one can meditate on him in a devotional mode as the next *sūtra* will indicate.

One further more general comment seems useful here. *Īśvara*, as discussed in I.23, is the generic name for God in the Hindu theistic traditions, that is, when used alone it tends to refer to a philosophical category in these contexts – that of a supreme personal Creator - rather than with specific divine manifestations of this Supreme Being in the forms of Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Kṛṣṇa, who all lay claim to the title *Īśvara* in Purāṇic and Epic texts. Factually, however, most *yogis* over the last two millennia have been associated with these devotional sects, and hence tend to add the specific name of their *iṣṭha devatā*, their ‘preferred personal form of divinity’ (viz, the object of their personal devotion, a notion discussed in detail in II.44) onto the *om mantra*. Thus, for the Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa traditions, that is those who conceive of *Īśvara* as Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa, the favored *mantra* is *om namo nārāyaṇāya*; for the Śiva traditions, *om namo Śivāya*; and for the classical Kṛṣṇa traditions, *om namo bhāgavate vāsudevāya*. Even in the by now far more popular and universalized Kṛṣṇa *mantra* - Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare, Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare - introduced to the Western world by the great Vaiṣṇava teacher A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swāmi, the medieval Kṛṣṇa theologians from which his lineage stems proposed that this *mantra* both inherently contains

and also supercedes *om*.⁴⁶ The point is, that even in the more developed *bhakti* traditions, *om* retains its primordial status as encapsulating the Absolute Truth, but is incorporated into more sophisticated understandings of *Īśvara* and, consequently, more personalized and elaborate variants of the *om mantra*.

τ:φφ:π:στ:δΤ:|Β:αω:ν:μ:ε .. 28..

I.28 *taj-jāpas-tad-artha-bhāvanam*.

taj, its [of the syllable *om*]; *jāpas*, repetition; *tad*, its [of the syllable *om*]; *artha*, meaning; *bhāvanam*, dwelling upon.

Its repetition and the contemplation of its meaning [should be performed].

Continuing this discussion of *om*, Patañjali here gives a specific indication as to how to fix the mind on *Īśvara*. After all, since *Īśvara*, as a type of *puruṣa*, is beyond *prakṛti*, and therefore beyond conceptualization or any type of *vytti*, how is one to fix one's mind upon him - we have discussed that the *prakṛtic* mind cannot perceive that which is finer than itself? Patañjali here provides the means: through the recitation of the syllable in which *Īśvara* manifests. Such recitation is called *japa*. *Japa* is an old Vedic term common in the old Brāhmaṇa texts, where it referred to the soft recitation of Vedic *mantras* by the priest.⁴⁷

Vyāsa states that by constantly repeating *om* and contemplating its meaning, *artha*, namely *Īśvara*, the mind of the *yogī* becomes one-pointed – the goal of all *yoga* practice. Vyāsa quotes a verse from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*: “From *svādhyāya* (reciting *mantras*), let *yoga* be practiced, and from *yoga* let reciting *mantras* be performed; by perfection in both, the supreme *ātman* shines forth”⁴⁸ Elaborating on this, Vācaspati Mīśra takes this *sūtra* as specifying how to engage in meditation on *Īśvara*, that is, the dedication to *Īśvara* referred to in *sūtra* I.23. He understands the *bhāvana*, ‘dwelling

⁴⁶ For the Chaitanya Gauḍīya tradition, since Kṛṣṇa is the fullest possible manifestation of Godhead who contains and supercedes all other divine manifestations (Bhāgavata Purāṇa I.3.28), the name of Kṛṣṇ, as his sonic manifestation, includes and supercedes all other *mantras*.

⁴⁷ *Vide*, in the Upaniṣads, Bṛhad I.3.28; VI.3.6; Chāndogya, V.2.6; Kauṣītaki, II.2.8 & II.2.11

⁴⁸ *Svādhyāyād-yogam-āsita yogāt-svādhyāyam-āsate; svādhyāya-yoga-saṃpattiyā param-ātmā prakāśate*. Citation untraced.

upon’ of this *sūtra*, as ‘permeating the mind again and again,’⁴⁹ and Bhoja as “the entrance into the mind of an object again and again to the exclusion of all other objects”⁵⁰ (the term occurs also in II.2, 33 & 34). Repeating the sound *om* and ‘contemplating its meaning,’ namely, that it is the sound representation of *Īśvara*, the object of the *yogī*’s surrender, when coupled with Patañjali’s usage of the word *praṇidhāna*, surrender, in I.23, points to chanting the *mantra* in a devotional mood. According to the *bhakti* traditions— and we will recall that Vyāsa consider *Īśvara praṇidhāna* a special sort of *bhakti*, by doing this, thoughts of the Lord become the very substance of the *citta* – a sort of ‘*Īśvarizing*’ parallel to the ‘*sattvicizing*’ activities of the *yogic* lifestyle.⁵¹ Just as an image and associations of, say, a cow, arise upon hearing the word ‘cow,’ so, thoughts of the Lord arise in the *citta* upon reciting and hearing his name, *japa*. Śaṅkara notes that such *japa* can be mental or softly audible. By such recitation, *japa*, the *citta* becomes saturated with *saṁskāras* connected to God (of course, in meditation proper, the mind has to remain fixed on one such *saṁskāra*, specifically, the *mantra* encapsulating *Īśvara*). By such recitation, *japa*, the *citta* becomes saturated with *saṁskāras* connected to God. This results in a feeling of bliss. More importantly, continues Vācaspati Miśra, the Lord then becomes gracious to such a devotee, and awards him or her *samādhi*.

Śaṅkara’s analysis of this *sūtra* reflects the widely-held view in Hindu traditions that, in addition to perception of *puruṣa*, the *yogī* whose practice is imbued with devotion can also directly perceive God as a distinct but supreme *puruṣa*. Since *om* has an inherent relationship with *Īśvara* says Śaṅkara by reciting *om* the *yogī* can meet *Īśvara* face to face, that is, by the recitation of *om* with intense concentration not only brings *Īśvara* to mind, but takes one to a supersensory face-to-face encounter with *Īśvara*: “by perfecting the repetition of *om* and meditation on the supreme *Īśvara*, the supreme *ātman* (*paramātman*) situated in the highest place (*parameṣṭhin*) shines forth for the *yogī*.”⁵² Vijñānabhikṣu articulates the same view:

His name is the *praṇava* (*om*). And *praṇidhāna*, devotion, consists in contemplating Him, preceded by chanting *om* and culminating in

⁴⁹ *Bhāvanam punaś-citte niveśanam* (in I.28).

⁵⁰ *Bhāvanā tavad bhāvyaśya viśayāntara-parihāreṇa cetasi punaḥ-punar-niveśanam* (in I.17)

⁵¹ This is to say that, in addition to manifesting the *sattvic* potential of the *citta*, the *bhakti* traditions aspire to fill the *citta* with *saṁskāras* centered exclusively on *Īśvara* (e.g. Gītā IX.34, XII.8; IX.27 and throughout).

⁵² *Tathā ca praṇava-japa-parameśvara-dhyāna-sampattiyā para ātmā parameṣṭhī prakāśate yogina iti.*

direct perception of Him. This absorption (*saṁyama*⁵³) with regard to the supreme *Īśvara* is the primary practice in *asamprajñāta samādhi* and [the attainment of] liberation....absorption on the personal *ātman*, on the other hand, is secondary.”⁵⁴

Here we find the Vaiṣṇava view articulated that the realization and perception of *puruṣa* is a secondary, less important goal of *yoga*. The higher goal is the realization and perception of *Īśvara*, the Supreme form of whom both Śaṅkara and Vijñānabhikṣu consider to be Viṣṇu. Be that as it may, as Coward (1985) recognizes: “according to the Yoga tradition, it was this route to *Īśvara* that was chosen by the majority of *yogīs* as their path to release.”

Coward gives a fascinating correlation of Śaṅkara’s comments here with the various stages of *samādhi* outlined in I.17 – that is, he attempts a hermeneutic of the mechanics underpinning this ‘perception of *Īśvara*’ through the recitation of chanting om. Coward’s representation of the various stages involved in this process involves the subdivision of the *vitarka* and *vicāra* states of *samādhi* from I.17 into *sa-* and *nir-* forms (the Sanskrit prefix *sa* means ‘with,’ and *nir* ‘without’) which we refer to briefly here but which will be explained fully in I.42–44, so the reader is referred to the discussion there for a clearer technical understanding of the following section.

In the *savitarka* stage of chanting, the syllable *om* is mixed up with the conventional meanings and ideas associated with the word. For example, one may have a mental image of *Īśvara* derived from some picture, or from some description in a Purāṇic scripture, or one’s ideas on *Īśvara* will be molded by some sectarian theological notions, or even from pure imagination. In other words, one’s mind will be conditioned by convention in some form or fashion. Therefore, at this stage, even though one is fully absorbed in chanting the *mantra* without external distraction, which is the prerequisite of any of the levels of *samādhi*, nonetheless, this stage of *samādhi* is obscured by these habitual ways of conceiving *Īśvara*. At the *nirvitarka* stage, these conventional ways of thinking are weakened, and the object of meditation, in this case *Īśvara*, appears in its own pure nature, unobstructed by mental clutter and imposition. Coward states:

⁵³ See III.4 ff for *saṁyama*.

⁵⁴ *Tasya praṇāvo nāma praṇava-pūrvakaṁ ca tad-anucintaṁ sākṣātkāraparyavasāyi praṇidhānam-iti. Atah paramēṣvare saṁyamo ‘samprajñāta-paryanta-yoge mokṣe ca mukhyakalpaḥ...jīvātma-saṁyamas-tu tatrānukalpa iti*

From the reports of *yogīs* like Patañjali and Vyāsa, in this experience, one comes to know *Īśvara* as the original speaker of the Vedas to the *Rṣis*, although, of course, to put this into conventional words, as we have just done, already reduces us back to the level of *savitarka*. To know it in its *nirvitarka* purity, one must experience it for oneself.” (354)

At the third stage of *savicāra*, as the mental concentration on the recitation of the *mantra* deepens, one penetrates into the essence of the sound and begins to perceive *Īśvara* body as consisting of pure *sattva*. The *yogī*'s mind is now so completely identified with *Īśvara* that it is no longer aware of its own separate existence; one is so absorbed in this vision that one has lost all self-awareness. One has 'merged' into *Īśvara*, although one must always bear in mind that this is not the merging of *advaita vedānta* where the soul is held to actually ontologically lose its separate identity. *Puruṣa* never loses its separate identity in Yoga. The merging here is a psychological one – one forgets one own self in the rapture of the divine vision of *Īśvara*, but one nonetheless remains a distinct individual. In the final stage, one's absorption in this vision of *Īśvara* is purged of all notions of Time and Space: “*Īśvara*'s relationship with the *praṇava* and all the Vedas (of which it is the seed) is seen to have existed in all previous cycles [world ages] (beginninglessly), to be manifest in the preset cycle, and to be potential in all future cycles” (*ibid*, 355). Since the late Vedic period, as Coward points out: “*Īśvara-praṇidhāna* and *svādhyāya* (in the form of chanting *AUM*) has been the core practice of most *yogīs*.” (357).

It is unfortunate that adequate attention has yet to be directed to the Purāṇic traditions, which were being compiled and organized into the Purāṇic corpus in Patañjali's time, where the 'bare bones' directives of the *Yoga Sūtras*, are brought to life. It is in the colorful narratives and stories of the great and manifold manifestations of *Īśvara* in the form of Viṣṇu, Śiva and the Goddess, and in the stories of the great devoted paradigmatic *yogīs* who undertook *Īśvara-praṇidhāna* and *svādhyāya* in unique and incredible ways, that one finds the inspirational exemplars of Hindu *yoga*. Much as these stories have been dismissed by most western scholars as too mythological to merit serious philosophical attention, it is from these stories and renditions that the living Yoga traditions of Hinduism have found their inspiration and the spiritual practices of hundreds of millions of Hindus over the centuries have taken shape.

The Dhruva story is a well-known Purāṇic story. Dhruva was a young boy of five who was offended by his father the king (see II.12 & 51 for this part of the narrative). Desiring revenge due to his *kṣatriya*, warrior, spirit, the boy took to the forest, where he performed *japa* on the *mantra* given to him by his *guru* Nārada – *om namo bhagavate Vāsudevāya* - with undeviating concentration. (As noted previously, the devotional traditions typically retain the ancient syllable *om*, given its correlation with *Īśvara* and with *brahman*, but adjoin to it the specific name of *Īśvara* they revere, in this case Kṛṣṇa). As a result of his undeviating focus, and incredible austerities (See II.51) Viṣṇu appeared to the boy despite his *tāmasic* motive in undertaking this meditation. Connecting this story with the *vitarka* stage of *samādhi* described in this *sūtra*, Vijñānabhikṣu remarks that [in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and Vaiṣṇava tradition in general], there are two ways of gaining a vision of God through meditative practice, that is, two types of Divine epiphany. God can either appear in an external physical form and be perceived externally by the physical eyes of the dedicated devotee, as in the Dhruva story, or God can appear internally to the meditating devotee, or put more precisely, the *yogī*'s awareness can be transported to another non-*prakṛtic* plane of consciousness (*saguṇa brahman*⁵⁵), even as the devoted *yogī* is still embodied in the physical body his physical body which Vijñānabhikṣu correlates with *vitarka* meditation:

The direct perception of *vitarka samādhi* is different in character from the perception of the form of four-armed Viṣṇu by Dhruva and others attained by the practice of *japa* and penance, &c. The Supreme *Īśvara*, being satisfied with the penance and meditation of such [devotees]...created a body for Himself and manifested before them and interacted with them by talking to them and so forth. *Yogīs*, on the other hand, by the power of their *yoga* practice, directly perceive the four-armed body of the Lord situated in the eternal Divine realm, even though they themselves are somewhere else.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *Saguṇa brahman* in the Vedānta traditions points to realms within *brahman* which are made of pure consciousness, *brahman*, but which nonetheless contain forms, individuals, and personalities. It is important to note that these are non-*prakṛtic* forms and personalities, and not to be confused with the evolutes of *prakṛti*.

⁵⁶ *Tapo-japādi-sādhanair-Dhruvādīnām catur-bhūjādi-sākṣātkārādayām sākṣātkāro vilakṣaṇaḥ. Teṣām hi tapo-dhyānam ādinā tuṣṭhaḥ paramēśvaraḥ svayaṁ śarīraṁ nirmāya puraḥ prakāṣibhūya vāgādi-vyavahāraṁ cakre. Yogīnas-tu-yoga-balena-vaikuṇṭha-śvetadvīpādi-stham-eva catur-bhūjādiśarīraṁ-anyaatra sthitāḥ. (Yogasāra).*

We noted in the introduction that, realistically speaking, it was (and remains) primarily scholastics or dedicated practitioners who would have actually seriously studied or engaged intellectually with Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras (which actually remains true for most *yoga* practitioners in the West today). For everyday Hindus, the teachings of the classical knowledge systems are translated into and transmitted through popular stories. We include here a translation of the episode from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (IV.8.43-IV.9.2) referred to here by Vijñānabhikṣu, which describes part of Dhruva's *mantra* meditation and the resulting manifestation of *Īśvara* (Viṣṇu) before him, as an example of how the technical and esoteric stages of classical *yoga* are made accessible and come to life in the popular and colourful narratives that form the core of real-life Hindu religious identity. (In III.3 we provide for another description of *yoga* practice from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa using the same form of *Īśvara* as the *ālambana*). Here, we take up the narrative where Dhruva's *guru*, the great sage Nārada, instructs the child:

.....Seated on a prepared seat (*āsana*).

One should cast off the impurities of the senses, breath and mind by the three practices of *prāṇāyāma*,⁵⁷ one should contemplate (*dhyāna*⁵⁸) with a steady mind the [Supreme] Teacher (*guru*).⁵⁹

He has pleasing face and eyes and is always inclined to bestow his grace. He has beautiful nose and eyebrows, charming cheeks and is the most attractive of the divine forms.

Youthful, with charming limbs, and reddish eyes and lips, he is the refuge of his devotees, the shelter of humankind and an ocean of compassion.

He is a *puruṣa*, his colour is that of a dark cloud, and he bears on his chest the mark of *śrīvatsa*. He wears a forest garland, and his four

⁵⁷ See commentaries to II.50 for: *recaka*, where breath is suspended after *praśvāsa*, exhalation; *pūraka*, where breath is suspended after *śvāsa*, inhalation; and *kumbhaka*, the simultaneous suspension of both.

⁵⁸ *Dhyāna* is the seventh limb of *yoga* in Patañjali's system (III.2; the verbal form *abhi-dhyāyet* is used here).

⁵⁹ *Īśvara* is being referred to as the *guru*, here, in the same sense as Patañjali is using the term in I.26.

arms bear the conch, discus, club and lotus flower.⁶⁰

He wears a helmet, earrings, and is adorned with bracelets and armlets. His neck is adorned with the *kaustubha* gem, and his garment is of yellow silk.

He sports a belt with dangling bells, and shining golden anklets. He is the most attractive person in existence, serene, and delightful for the mind and eyes to behold.

He is endowed with two feet shining with a row of gem-like nails. He is to be found within, having taken up his seat in the lotus of the heart of his worshippers.⁶¹

He is the supreme boon-giver, and one should meditate (*dhyāna*) on his smiling countenance and loving glances with a steady and concentrated mind.

The mind of one meditating on the most auspicious form of God, *Bhagavān*, becomes perfected due to this highest form of mind control, and never refrains from meditating.

Now hear the supreme secret *mantra* which should be chanted (*japa*). A person reciting this *mantra* for seven days and nights attains a vision of the *siddhas*.⁶²

It is: *om namo bhagavate Vāsudevāya*.

With this *mantra*, a wise person should perform the Lord's worship with devotional offerings, understanding the appropriate articles to use in worship according to place and time.

The Lord manifests in the form of the *mantra*. One should perform worship in the same manner as he has been worshipped by the ancients, while reciting this intimate *mantra*....

Dhruva withdrew his mind, which is the support of the senses and their objects, from all other objects. Meditating on the form of God in his heart, he ceased to be aware of anything else....

Then, he observed that form, which was as brilliant as a flash of lightning, [that he had been perceiving internally] in the lotus of his heart on account of his insight honed by dedicated *yoga* practice,

⁶⁰ *Śrivatsa* is a curl of hair on Viṣṇu's chest. All the details here are standardized descriptions of Viṣṇu's form (as will be encountered again in III.3).

⁶¹ The Bhāgavata School holds that a manifestation of *Īśvara*, the *antaryāmi* or *paramātman*, resides in the heart along with the individual *ātman*.

⁶² *Siddhas* are perfected beings who have developed mystic powers, discussed in chapter III, such as flying through the air (which is the term used here, *khecara*).

suddenly disappear, and [opening his eyes] he beheld that same form standing externally.

As elsewhere, Vijñānabhikṣu again introduces a Vedāntic element to the discussion. As noted previously, his philosophy is one of *bhedābheda*, ‘oneness in difference,’ and he quotes a variety of scriptural passages emphasizing the oneness of the *puruṣa* with *Brahman*, or *Īśvara* – that is, between the soul and God – and a selection of different passages focusing on the difference between the two (Vijñānabhikṣu is correlating *brahman* with *Īśvara* here since, in theistic Vedānta, where *brahman* is conceived of as a personal being, they are essentially one and the same). In Vijñānabhikṣu’s view, such apparently conflicting statements can be reconciled by holding that *puruṣa* and *brahman* are simultaneously both one and different. As he has attempted to illustrate in previous passages, the oneness of the equation holds good in so far as both are pure consciousness and thus belong to the same class, or category of existence. However, both *Īśvara* and *puruṣa* retain their identities eternally, hence the difference, as Vyāsa will specify in the next verse.⁶³ While this is a Vedāntic concern, it actually holds good for the Yoga tradition (at least with regards to *puruṣa* and *Īśvara*).

Vijñānabhikṣu also adds that the oneness of *puruṣa* with *brahman* results from the absorption of the consciousness of the former into the latter, in other words it is a psychological not an ontological or metaphysical oneness. Put differently, the pure *puruṣa* forgets its own separate existence by being absorbed in thoughts of *Īśvara*, but this does not mean such a *puruṣa* actually loses its distinct individuality as certain nondualist schools hold (hence the ‘difference’ indicated in *bhedābheda* philosophy). Vijñānabhikṣu quotes the well-known verse from the *Mahābhārata*⁶⁴ stating that those who are wise worship the 26th category of existence, *Īśvara*, not *puruṣa* the 25th. Thus, *Īśvara*, like *puruṣa*, is an eternally separate category of reality, and, while the two are alike in nature, they are nonetheless eternally separate and distinct individuals. Through repetition of *om*, and meditation on *Īśvara*, one can realize the latter as

⁶³ This paradoxical relationship of individuality in oneness, *bhedābheda*, is called by such terms as: *viśiṣṭādvaita*, ‘differentiated non-duality;’ *dvaitādvaita*, ‘duality in non-duality’ *śuddhādvaita*, ‘pure non-duality’ and *acintābheda*, ‘inconceivable difference and non-difference’ by different post-Śāṅkara schools of Vedānta, all with nuances of difference as to how this relationship is conceived of metaphysically.

⁶⁴ *Mahābhārata*, XII. 306.76.

paramātmā, the supreme soul.

Additionally, in Vijñānabhikṣu's view, one cannot chant *om* and meditate on *Īśvara* at the same time. Therefore, he suggests that *om* be repeated as a prelude and postlude to devotional meditation.

Hariharānanda, on the other hand, holds that the *om mantra* be recited while thoughts of *Īśvara* are simultaneously cultivated because if *om* is chanted correctly, its designation, *Īśvara*, automatically comes to mind anyway. In his perspective (which is representative of most *bhakti* theologies), eventually the *mantra* and its referent, *Īśvara*, both come naturally to mind, at which time the devotee is established in *Īśvara praṇidhāna*, the submission to God mentioned in *sūtra* I.23.