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Lexical Debates: Unravelling the term 'Nārāyaṇa' in Early Modern Polemical Works of Vedānta

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Abstract The present paper examines early modern Vedāntic polemics over the referent of the term 'Nārāyaṇa', foregrounding debates between Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva theologians regarding the identity of the supreme deity. The present study focuses on Paravastu Vedāntācārya's Vedāntakaustubhā, a significant yet understudied Viśiṣṭādvaita rejoinder to Appayya Dīkṣita's Śaiva reinterpretations. The study explores how etymology, scriptural citation, and semantic strategies were employed to assert sectarian claims over divine nomenclature. A thorough examination of lexical derivations and intertextual references from Upaniṣadic and Purāṇic sources is presented in this article, shedding light on the evolution of the name Nārāyaṇa as a contested signifier. The analysis unveils that Vaiṣṇava authors exclusively assert the name for Viṣṇu, while Śaiva thinkers reinterpret it to signify Śiva or all the Trimūrtis. The article highlights the intersection of philology and theology in shaping sectarian boundaries, thus offering new insights into the intellectual history of Vedānta and the strategic role of language in religious identity formation.

Introduction

As a foremost school of Indian philosophy, Vedānta investigates the nature of Brahman—the essence of being and supreme reality hailed in Upaniṣads—and its relation to the world and sentient beings. The Dvaita (dualism), Advaita (non-dualism), and Viśiṣṭādvaita (pan-organismal monism)[1] systems are the most popular forms of Vedānta. The Upaniṣads, the *Bhagavadgītā* (hereafter Gītā), and the *Brahmasūtras*

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(hereafter BS), collectively known as the *prasthānatraya* (three foundational texts), form the cornerstone upon which every Vedānta establishes its final philosophical stance (*siddhānta*). While the Upaniṣads delve into metaphysical and philosophical concepts, the Gītā and the BS further elucidate the supreme reality (*parabrahman*) referred to in them. It is noteworthy that much of Vedānta's philosophical literature emerged through commentaries on the BS, underscoring their central role in the systematic exposition and progression of Vedantic thought.

While commentaries on the BS written in the first millennium[2] focused on key metaphysical, epistemological, and soteriological issues, commentarial literature in the second millennium shifted towards an emphasis on devotional and wider religious issues as philosophers increasingly wrote in agreement with the principles of their own religious traditions (*sampradāya*), principally either Śaivism or Vaiṣṇavism. Among such commentaries are those written by Rāmānuja (1017–1137 CE), Madhva (1238–1317 CE), Śrīkaṇṭha,[3] Vallabhācārya (1479–1531 CE), and others. In these commentaries, especially those written in the early modern period, two central concerns emerge: (i) the nature of the supreme reality, in terms of whether it is with qualities (*saguṇa*) or without qualities (*nirguṇa*), and (ii) the identification of this supreme reality with the supreme deity of their tradition, notably Śiva or Viṣṇu. Since Upaniṣads address the supreme reality both as endowed with and without qualities, commentators made use of selected passages[4] of their choice in support of their views, thus generating debates on the true nature of the supreme.

In particular, this led to further debates about the supremacy of personal deities, specifically regarding whether Śiva or Viṣṇu is considered the primary deity, and their mutual superiority. Such interpretive debates were particularly prominent among early modern Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava theologians of Vedānta. Starting with Rāmānuja and Sudarśanasūri (late 13th century CE), this Śaiva-Vaiṣṇava debate was fueled by the Śaiva Vedānta work of Appayya Dīkṣita (1520–1593 CE), which for the most part engaged the Vaiṣṇava school of Viśiṣṭādvaita.[5] The challenge posed to this school led later Viśiṣṭādvaitins to defend their views. Among them was Paravastu Vedāntācārya (18th century CE), whom my study reveals as a major opponent of Appayya Dīkṣita.

Paravastu's *Vedāntakaustubhā* a monumental yet understudied work of Vaiṣṇava polemics from which the arguments discussed in this article are taken, vehemently condemns Dīkṣita's view that Śiva is the supreme reality and that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' can also refer to Śiva. In this article, I focus on a central topic: the referent of the term 'Nārāyaṇa'. This debate, with its long history, persists in the early modern polemical works of Vedānta.

By the 16th century, the names of deities became critical points of contention among sectarian scholars over successive generations. While these names are found throughout Vedic and Purāṇic texts, many of them had come to be conventionally linked with either Viṣṇu or Śiva, the two principal sectarian deities. Etymological ingenuity became a hallmark of leading theologians, who sought to affirm the absolute supremacy of their chosen deity. Among these contested names, Nārāyaṇa

emerged as a focal point. Vaiṣṇava authors sought to claim this name solely for Viṣṇu, while Śaiva scholars devised explanations to either align the name with Paramaśiva or interpret it as encompassing the three deities (i.e., *trimūrti*) namely, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva. These debates, as Elaine Fisher observes, highlight the strategic use of language and interpretation in sectarian polemics.[6]

Background of the debate

The canonical texts unanimously proclaim that the supreme reality is the ultimate cause of the universe without mentioning any particular name of a deity. The Upaniṣads refer to the supreme reality or the ultimate cause of the universe by the words *sat*,[7] *brahman*,[8] and *ātman*.[9] The words *īśvara* and *maheśvara*[10] are frequently used in the Gītā to address the supreme. Likewise, Bādarāyaṇa (between 400 and 200 BCE),[11] the author of the BS, does not refer to any particular deity and refers to the ultimate cause of creation with the word *brahman*.[12] However, over time, while commenting on the Upaniṣads and the BS, the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava theologians of Vedānta quoted various Vedic passages in an attempt to associate these general terms (*sat, brahman*, etc.) with the deity of their respective religious tradition, namely, Śiva or Viṣṇu. Beyond arguing about the nature of the supreme reality in terms of its being endowed with qualities or not, the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava theologians, particularly in the early modern period, debated about the superiority of Śiva over Viṣṇu, and vice versa, as the ultimate cause of creation. Although most of the passages quoted to support their arguments differed from each other—some centred on Śiva and others centred on Viṣṇu—some passages were quoted by both parties. Importantly, most of these common passages were taken from theistic Upaniṣads such as the *Mahānārāyaṇopaniṣad* and the *Subālopaniṣad* (hereafter SU), wherein the supreme reality is referred to with the term 'Nārāyaṇa'.[13] Additionally, to support their arguments, these theologians extensively utilised theistically oriented sources such as the Purāṇas, wherein the name[14] Nārāyaṇa is employed to denote the supreme reality. In this context, they made use of grammatical derivation and etymology-based arguments to demonstrate that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' actually refers to their supreme reality, whether it be Śiva or Viṣṇu.

Let us take a step back in history. Śaṅkarācārya (8th century CE), in his monumental commentary on the BS, the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*, says, ad BS 2.2.42:

> *tatra yat tāvad ucyate - yo 'sau nārāyaṇaḥ paro 'vyaktāt prasiddhaḥ paramātmā sarvātmā, sa ātmanā ātmānam anekadhā vyūhya avasthita iti - tan na nirākriyate.*
> That which has been said, namely, that this Nārāyaṇa, who is well known to transcend the unmanifest, the supreme soul, the soul of all, emanated himself into many forms—it is not refuted.[15]

Although Śaṅkara discusses in this context the emanations (*vyūha*)[16] of the supreme soul, which are characteristics of Pāñcarātra/Vaiṣṇava theology, he does not

explicitly identify the term 'Nārāyaṇa' with any particular deity, namely, Śiva or Viṣṇu. However, in the preface of his commentary on the Gītā, he does identify the term with Viṣṇu, when stating that the first creator Viṣṇu is Nārāyaṇa (*ādikartā nārāyaṇākhyo viṣṇuḥ*). After Śaṅkara, while commenting in their respective commentaries on the BS, Rāmānuja and Madhva also saw no need to emphasise this identity because the term 'Nārāyaṇa' is commonly associated with Viṣṇu—the deity they hold as the supreme one and the ultimate cause of creation. However, a different perspective emerged with Śrīkaṇṭha's Śaiva-commentary on the BS, *Brahmamīmāṃsābhāṣya*. He says, ad BS 1.2.3:

> *nārāyaṇa eva mūrtyātmā viśvapatitvādinā liṅgena pratipādyate iti pūrvapakṣaḥ. siddhāntas tu nārāyaṇātmā maheśvara iti.*
> The prima facie position is that Nārāyaṇa alone is explained as the embodied entity due to characteristic marks such as the fact of being the lord of the universe, etc. However, [our] final position is that Maheśvara [i.e., Śiva] is the soul of Nārāyaṇa [himself].[17]

According to Śrīkaṇṭha, the deity Nārāyaṇa is the cause of the universe, but his inner soul is none other than Maheśvara/Śiva, thus implying that Śiva is superior to Nārāyaṇa.

On a contrasting note, in his magnum opus, the *Śrutaprakāśikā*, a seminal commentary on Rāmānuja's *Śrībhāṣya*, Sudarśanasūri meticulously examines the term 'Nārāyaṇa', particularly emphasising its relevance in the first chapter. He staunchly argues that 'Nārāyaṇa' denotes Viṣṇu alone. His contention rests on the premise that generic terms like *sat*, *brahman*, etc., are ultimately resolved in their meaning to specific entities like *puruṣa*, Nārāyaṇa, etc., indicating that Nārāyaṇa alone is the ultimate point of reference in all Vedic statements.[18] In addition, in the *Samanvayādhikaraṇa*, he establishes that it is appropriate for terms like 'Nārāyaṇa', etc., which denote causes, to be understood as referring to Viṣṇu.[19]

Around the same period, Veṅkaṭanātha (1268–1364 CE), one of the most important preceptors of the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition and a notable theologian of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, discusses the referent of the term 'Nārāyaṇa' in his *Tattvamuktākalāpa* (hereafter TMK). He says:

> *nissādhāraṇyanārāyaṇapadaviṣaye niścayaṃ yānty abādhe*
> *sadbrahmādyāḥ samānaprakaraṇapaṭhitāḥ śaṅkitānyārthaśabdāḥ* ।[...][20]
> Words such as *sat*, *brahman*, etc., which are encountered in generic contexts (i.e., Vedic passages discussing creation), and whose alternative meanings are questioned, are linguistically directed towards the subject of the name Nārāyaṇa. This subject is distinct (i.e., having Viṣṇu as its sole referent) and unequivocal.

It is thus evident that Veṅkaṭanātha's adherence to Sudarśanasūri's perspective reflects a deep-seated agreement with Sudarśanasūri's comprehensive analysis and nuanced interpretation of the subject matter.

Two centuries later, this controversy intensified with the influential contributions of Appayya Dīkṣita. A 16th-century erudite and staunch devotee of Śiva, Dīkṣita was a prolific scholar who extensively wrote on poetics, Śaivism, and Vedānta. Notably, his oeuvre includes many polemical works defending the supremacy of Śiva.[21] Dīkṣita is widely recognised as one of the scholars who, following Śrīkaṇṭha, reinforced the Śivādvaita tradition through his writings.[22] One of the major strategies he uses in these polemical works centres around the interpretation of the term 'Nārāyaṇa' found in scriptures and other texts. Dīkṣita claims that it refers not *only* to Viṣṇu but also to other deities, notably Śiva. He deals with this topic in a portion of his sub-commentary on Śrīkaṇṭha's *Brahmamīmāṃsābhāṣya*, the *Śivārkamaṇidīpikā* (hereafter ŚMD). Dīkṣita discusses this topic also in his *Śivatattvaviveka,* a self-authored commentary on the *Śikhariṇīmāla*, a work containing sixty verses that defends the supremacy of Śiva.[23] In the following, I focus only on the ŚMD.

Dīkṣita's argument

In his commentary on BS 1.1.2, Śrīkaṇṭha says that the *śivatattva* (i.e., nature of Śiva) is the substratum of all auspicious things, devoid of all worldly stains, and also that Śiva is the ultimate cause of creation and an entity possessed of incomparable qualities, such as omniscience, etc.[24]

While annotating Śrīkaṇṭha's commentary on BS 1.1.2 in his ŚMD, Dīkṣita lays the groundwork by establishing Lord Śiva as the ultimate cause of creation. In coherence with this premise, he contends that all terms found in Vedic passages that are associated with creation either directly or indirectly refer to Śiva alone. Building upon this assertion, he posits that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' can *also* refer to Śiva. To substantiate his claim, he refers to the following hymn (4.18) from the *Śvetāśvataropaniṣad* (hereafter ŚVU):

> *yadātamas tan na divā na rātrir*।
> *na san na cāsac chiva eva kevalaḥ*।
> When ignorance was dispelled, there was neither day nor night, neither being nor non-being, there was only Śiva.

In Sanskrit, the word *śiva* is commonly used as an attribute to signify something good or auspicious. For instance, '*pāvako 'smabhyam śivo bhava*' means 'May fire be auspicious for us',[25] and '*panthānaḥ santu te śivāḥ*' means 'May your paths be [filled with] auspiciousness'.[26] This linguistic background introduces the possibility of a tendentious interpretation of *śiva* in the hymn. Dīkṣita asserts that the word *śiva* in the hymn specifically refers to Lord Śiva and not merely to a characteristic like the auspiciousness of the supreme reality. More importantly for us, he holds that this hymn seeks to establish that only Śiva is referred to by all Vedic hymns about the creation of the world,[27] and also that only Śiva is designated by all the names of deities mentioned in those hymns, most notably 'Nārāyaṇa'. While Dīkṣita argues that

the term 'Nārāyaṇa' mentioned only in the SU refers to Śiva,[28] his argument stands out due to the historical association of this term with Viṣṇu, the supreme deity of Vaiṣṇavas. Additionally, Dīkṣita insists that it does not *exclusively* denote Viṣṇu[29] but is also identified with Brahmā in certain texts.

In this context, Dīkṣita deals with the lexical aspects and the referent of the term 'Nārāyaṇa' from two different standpoints:

A. The term 'Nārāyaṇa' can *also* refer to Śiva
B. The term 'Nārāyaṇa' does not *exclusively* refer to Viṣṇu

Standpoint A—The term 'Nārāyaṇa' can also refer to Śiva

In light of the Sanskrit usage of the term *śiva* to signify auspiciousness, as said above, Dīkṣita raises the pertinent question: if the term *śiva*, when interpreted as an attribute, can be associated with the deity Nārāyaṇa (understood to mean Viṣṇu) insofar as Nārāyaṇa is the bestower of good and auspiciousness, then why is it not possible to interpret the term 'Nārāyaṇa' as an attribute and associate it with Lord Śiva?

To further support his view that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' can *also* refer to Lord Śiva, he makes use of the theory of the expressive power of a word (*śabdaśakti*). Sanskrit linguistic traditions present differing views on the expressive power of words, but they are commonly categorised into three types: (i) denotation (*abhidhā*), (ii) indication (*lakṣaṇā*), and (iii) suggestion (*vyañjanā*).[30] While *abhidhā* conveys the primary meaning and *vyañjanā* brings out implied nuances, *lakṣaṇā* extends meaning beyond the literal when the direct sense is either impossible or contextually inappropriate. For instance, in the phrase 'the herd-station on the Ganges' (*gaṅgāyāṃ ghoṣaḥ*), *lakṣaṇā* enables us to understand that the herd station is on the riverbank, not in the water.[31]

While all three senses are accepted by poets, Vedantins prefer only the first two types: denotation and indication. This is because they (i.e., *abhidhā* and *lakṣaṇā*) are directly understood from the word, whereas the suggested meaning does not directly emanate from the word but from its meaning and other factors. The lexical sense (*śābdika*) is more widely accepted than the semantic sense (*ārthika*) in the Vedāntic tradition.

Dīkṣita employs the indicative method (*lakṣaṇā*) to illustrate that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' can also denote Śiva. He cites the hymn from the ŚVU, as mentioned above, to assert that Śiva is the sole entity existing before creation. Thus, assuming that the entity Nārāyaṇa originates from Lord Śiva, the term 'Nārāyaṇa' can also refer to Śiva through its indicative power (*lakṣaṇā*). This is similar to the function of the word 'pot' (*ghaṭa*) with respect to the lump of clay (*mṛtpiṇḍa*) in the sentence 'he makes a pot' (*ghaṭaṃ karoti*) during the making of a pot from clay. In the said example, the lump of clay, existing before the pot's creation, is denoted by the word 'pot' through its indicative power. Similarly, Śiva, existing prior to the entire creation as an unmanifest and from whom the deity Nārāyaṇa is to be manifested, can be referred to by the term 'Nārāyaṇa'.[32]

To further support his argument, Dīkṣita makes use of other lexical aspects, such as grammatical features, semantic references, and etymology, related to the term 'Nārāyaṇa'. Therefore, understanding the word's formation and its grammatical features is essential. The term 'Nārāyaṇa' is a compound word (*samāsa*) consisting of two stems, *nāra* and *ayana*. Usually, a gloss in the form of a sentence is required, called *vigrahavākya*, to comprehend the formation of a compound. And a common gloss of the term is: *nāram ayanam yasya*, meaning 'whose abode is [celestial] water'. According to Vaiṣṇavas, this gloss entails that the deity referred to by the term 'Nārāyaṇa', can only be Viṣṇu,[33] and not Śiva for no reference is found in scriptures to the effect that Śiva has waters as his abode.

However, the word *nāra* in 'Nārāyaṇa' can also be interpreted in the senses of liberation[34] and human beings,[35] and the word *ayana* in the sense of obtaining.[36] Taking the clue from this, Dīkṣita argues that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' means that 'from whom liberation is obtained' or 'whose abode is human beings'.[37] If we contend with these different glosses, the term 'Nārāyaṇa' can now *also* refer to Śiva as he is known to bestow liberation and as the inner soul (i.e., *antaryāmin*) of all human beings.

Dīkṣita assumes that Vaiṣṇavas may still not agree with this interpretation and may raise an objection based on a grammatical rule applied to the formation of the term. The rule, *pūrvapadāt saṃjñāyām agaḥ*,[38] from Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, states that dental *n* is substituted with cerebral *ṇ*, if the cause for the change (i.e., either the letter *r* or *ṣ*) is in the first member of a compound which does not end in *ga*, and if, with the substitution, a proper name (*saṃjñā*) is understood. The two examples illustrating this rule are the compounds *druṇasaḥ* and *śūrpaṇakhā*. The *vigrahavākya*s are, respectively: *ḍrur iva nāsikā yasya*, meaning 'one who has the nose like a tree', and *śūrpāni iva nakhāni yasyāḥ*, meaning 'whose nails are like winnowing fans'. In both cases, the letter *r* in the first members *dru* and *śūrpa*, respectively, serves as the cause for the substitution of the letter *n* with *ṇ* in the further members *nāsika* and *nakha*, as they are proper names of male and female demons.

Likewise, this grammatical rule applies to replace the dental letter *n* with the cerebral letter *ṇ* in the word *ayana* (i.e., the latter component) of the compound 'Nārāyaṇa'. However, this rule is deemed applicable only when the compounded words (in this case, *nāra* and *ayana*) together denote a proper name (*saṃjñā*).

From Dīkṣita's standpoint, the objection from Vaiṣṇavas is significant and is rooted in their understanding and interpretation of the term. According to their perspective, 'Nārāyaṇa' is a proper name *specifically* of Viṣṇu and not of any other deity, including Śiva. As a result, they argue that no scriptural references establish the term 'Nārāyaṇa' as a proper name of Śiva. Consequently, the Pāṇinian rule *pūrvapadāt*, which enables the substitution necessary to form the correct word 'Nārāyaṇa', would not apply. Without this substitution, compounding the words *nāra* and *ayana* directly would result in the incorrect form *nārāyana*, considered an *apaśabda* (faulty word) and thus prohibited by scholars. Based on this reasoning, Vaiṣṇavas reject Dīkṣita's interpretation of the term 'Nārāyaṇa' referring to Śiva.

In response to this, Dīkṣita quotes the following verses from the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Kūrmapurāṇa* (hereafter KP), which demonstrate that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' is also a proper name of Śiva:

> *nāmāni tava govinda yāni loke mahānti ca ।*
> *tāny eva mama nāmāni nātra kāryā vicāraṇā ॥*[39]
> Govinda! Your great names [known] in the world are also mine, and no investigation should be done into this.
> *vaśitvād apy avaśyatvād īśvaraḥ paribhāṣitaḥ ॥* [...]
> *narāṇām ayanaṃ yasmāt tena **nārāyaṇas** smṛtaḥ ।*
> *haras saṃsāraharaṇād vibhutvād viṣṇur ucyate ॥*[40]
> He is conventionally named Īśvara because he is full of self-control and not liable to be subjected to anyone else's control. [...]
> Since he is the goal of men, he is termed Nārāyaṇa. He is called Hara because he removes the [bondage of] worldly existence. He is called Viṣṇu because He is omnipresent.[41]

Dīkṣita asserts that the verse from the *Harivaṃśa*, wherein Maheśvara praises Lord Kṛṣṇa within the context of his *kailāsayātra*, serves as evidence not only to link the term 'Nārāyaṇa' but also to associate all other names signifying Viṣṇu with Śiva. Furthermore, verses from the KP, where this term appears alongside other names of Lord Śiva such as Īśvara, Hara, etc., confirm that Śiva is also addressed as Nārāyaṇa. Therefore, the aforementioned grammatical rule that facilitates the substitution of *ṇ* causes no difficulty, as the term is now recognised as a proper name of Śiva.[42]

Standpoint B—The term 'Nārāyaṇa' does not exclusively refer to Viṣṇu

After ascertaining that the term 'Nārāyaṇa', due to its indicative power and the formation of words, can *also* denote Śiva, Dīkṣita presents his second standpoint: it does not *exclusively* refer to (i.e., it is not reserved for) Viṣṇu, as it is also associated with Brahmā. This second argument of Dīkṣita is based on his anticipation of objections from the Vaiṣṇavas. They may argue that despite references such as those in the KP and *Harivaṃśa*, the specific characteristic 'having water as his abode', inferred from the etymology of the term 'Nārāyaṇa', applies *exclusively* to Viṣṇu and not to Śiva. Viṣnu is commonly described as lying on the ocean (*samudraśāyin* or *jalaśāyin*), while no such reference is found in the scriptures regarding Śiva.[43]

In response to this possible objection, Dīkṣita argues that Brahmā is also referred to by the term 'Nārāyaṇa'. To support his view, he quotes the following verses from the KP where the specific characteristic of lying on the ocean is associated with Brahmā as well:

> ***brahmā nārāyaṇākhyas tu** suṣvāpa salile tadā ॥*
> *imaṃ ca udāharanty atra ślokaṃ nārāyaṇaṃ prati ।* [...]

> *āpo nāra iti proktā āpo vai narasūnavaḥ ।*
> *ayanaṃ tasya tā yasmāt tena **nārāyaṇas** smṛtaḥ ॥* (KP 1.6.3, 1.6.5)
> Brahmā, named Nārāyaṇa, fell asleep on the [celestial] water at that time. [The sages] cite this verse in this context with reference to Nārāyaṇa. [...]
> The waters are called '*nārāḥ*' since they are the offspring of '*nara*' [the man, here meaning the very first person to counter existence]. Since they (waters) became his [i.e., the first man's] abode, He is termed Nārāyaṇa.

Based on these verses, Dīkṣita states that the first quarter of the verse—*brahmā nārāyaṇākhyaḥ*—shows the identity of the term 'Nārāyaṇa' with Brahmā. Furthermore, the specific characteristic of having water as his abode, as indicated by the etymology *nārāḥ ayanam asya* is also applicable to him, as evident from the second quarter—*suṣvāpa salile tadā*. Thus, according to Dīkṣita, even if Vaiṣṇavas do not accept the first argument that the term refers to Śiva through its indicative power, they must nevertheless acknowledge, based on the verses of the KP, that Brahmā can also be referred to as 'Nārāyaṇa'. This challenges the Vaiṣṇavas' argument that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' *exclusively* denotes Viṣṇu.

One may wonder what is the need here for Dīkṣita to discuss this term 'Nārāyaṇa' in detail and to associate it with Śiva while there are other terms, like *śambhu*, *rudra*, *nīlakaṇṭha*, etc., that *exclusively* denote him? This is because, unlike other terms, the term 'Nārāyaṇa' is frequently used in the Upaniṣads to refer to the ultimate cause of creation. Hence, if it is admitted that the term indeed denotes Śiva, then it can be established that he is the ultimate cause of creation, and thus the supremacy of Śiva can be easily defended. Furthermore, the *Subālopaniṣad*, which Dīkṣita quotes very often in his polemical works to defend the supremacy of Śiva, mentions and often repeats the term 'Nārāyaṇa' in reference to the ultimate cause of creation.

Paravastu's response to Dīkṣita's arguments

It is a known fact that Dīkṣita's polemical arguments in support of Śiva's supremacy were very much criticised by the other Vaiṣṇava schools of Vedānta, particularly by Dvaitins and Viśiṣṭādvaitins, during and after his time. Two centuries after Dīkṣita, Surapuram Veṇkaṭācārya (18th century CE)[44] wrote the *Siddhāntaratnāvalī,* a polemical work consisting of four chapters in which he aggressively criticises the views of Dīkṣita. Around the same time, another Vaiṣṇava from the Surapuram family named Śrīnivāsācārya[45] composed a work called *Ṇatvadarpaṇa*, in which he strongly argues that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' *solely* denotes Viṣṇu. After him, the great Vaiṣṇava scholar Paravastu Śrī Vedāntācārya (18th century CE) wrote the *Vedāntakaustubha*, a voluminous work in which, similarly to Veṅkaṭācārya, he refutes Dīkṣita's views.

Paravastu Vedāntācārya was the son of Koneṭyambā and Ādivarahācārya.[46] While the exact timeline of his activity is unknown, Vedāntācārya's prominence within the intellectual milieu of his time is evident through his significant contributions.

He composed four notable works: *Nyāyaratnāvalī*,[47] *Mahābhāratatātparyarakṣā*, *Vedāntakaustubha* (hereafter VK), and *Siddhāntacandrikā*.[48]

Among these, the *Mahābhāratatātparyarakṣā* and the VK directly criticise Dīkṣita's work. In the *Mahābhāratatātparyarakṣā*, Paravastu criticises the views of the Śaivites regarding the *Mahābhārata* and counters Dīkṣita's interpretations found in his *Mahābhāratatātparyasaṃgraha*. The VK argues for the supremacy of God Viṣṇu, directly addressing and criticising Dīkṣita's views. The author has therein taken principally the *ŚTV* and ŚMD as the prima facie views (*pūrvapakṣa*) for his position and responds to them. Although Dīkṣita's argument about the term 'Nārāyaṇa' had already been partly discussed and refuted by many Viśiṣṭādvaitins before, Paravastu addresses Dīkṣita's etymological arguments in greater detail. It therefore deserves our scrutiny here.

Paravastu discusses this topic in the VK in the form of four different thematic sections:

(1) the correct etymological interpretation of the term 'Nārāyaṇa'
(2) the semantic referent of the term through its derivation
(3) the irrelevance of the term as applied to other deities
(4) the conclusion that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' *solely* denotes Bhagavān (i.e., Viṣṇu).

While Paravastu meticulously addresses Dīkṣita's arguments in the third section, he initially lays the groundwork for his argumentation by discussing the etymological nuances of the term 'Nārāyaṇa' and its semantic referent in the opening two sections. These preliminary discussions establish a foundation for comprehending the rest of his critical discussion. Furthermore, the fourth section serves to reaffirm his stance conclusively. Let us analyse his systematic approach throughout these sections, in sequence.

Section 1—The correct etymological interpretation of the term 'Nārāyaṇa'

Paravastu quotes the following verses from the *Mahābhārata* (hereafter MB) and the *Padmapurāṇa* (hereafter PP) as evidence for the etymology of the term 'Nārāyaṇa':

> *narāj jātāni tattvāni nārāṇīti tato viduḥ ।*
> *tāny eva cāyanaṃ tasya tena* ***nārāyaṇas*** *smṛtaḥ ॥*[49]
> The core principles originated from the '*nara*' (i.e., the very first person), and hence they are known as '*nārāṇi*'. Since they become the abode (*ayanam*) for him (the *nara*), He is termed Nārāyaṇa.
> *nāro narāṇāṃ saṅghātaḥ tasyāsāv ayanam gatiḥ ।*
> *tenāsau munibhir nityaṃ* ***nārāyaṇa*** *itīritaḥ ॥*[50]
> The totality of human beings is '*nāra*', and He (i.e., Viṣṇu) is their refuge (*ayana*). Hence, sages always call him Nārāyaṇa.

According to Paravastu, both verses, taken from the MB and PP, respectively, provide an etymological interpretation of the term 'Nārāyaṇa', along with unique

characteristics applicable to the deity this term denotes. These characteristics, both of which involve different renderings of the Sanskrit word *ayana*, include: (i) the fact that the deity originates the components and makes them its abode (*ayana*), and (ii) the fact of being the refuge (*ayana*) of souls and the means to attain it. Paravastu suggests that these characteristics apply exclusively to the supreme reality (*parabrahman*). However, he contends that considering Dīkṣita's perspective, these attributes could potentially extend to Śiva, as both verses lack explicit references to water as his abode,[51] and the first characteristic could refer to the inner soul of all beings, also applicable to Śiva. Consequently, in the following section, he further examines the appropriateness of the term 'Nārāyaṇa' specifically for Viṣṇu, whom Paravastu asserts embodies all the characteristics expressed by its derivation.

Section 2—The semantic referent of the term through its derivation

Paravastu begins this section with the following verse from the *Manusmṛti* (hereafter MS):

> *āpo nārā iti proktā āpo vai narasūnavaḥ ।*
> *tā yad asyāyanam pūrvam tena nārāyaṇaḥ smṛtaḥ ॥* (1.10)
> The [celestial] waters are called *nāra* since they are the offspring of *nara*. He is termed Nārāyaṇa because they [i.e., the waters] are His first abode.

Paravastu invokes this verse to emphasise that the aforementioned verse from the MB implies that the elements mentioned therein are indeed the celestial waters mentioned in the MS verse. Furthermore, he asserts that this particular verse from the MS elaborates more on the characteristics denoted by the term 'Nārāyaṇa'. According to Paravastu, the first two-quarters of the verse collectively indicate two characteristics of the deity conveyed by the term 'Nārāyaṇa' while the third one indicates the third characteristic. He explains each characteristic along with the meaning and derivation of the term 'Nārāyaṇa':

1. *naraḥ*—He says that the word *naraḥ* is derived from the root *ri* (*ri kṣaye*—'to perish') by adding the suffix *Ḍa* and the negative particle *na* as a prefix to it. The meaning of the word *naraḥ* is 'imperishable', indicating the first characteristic of 'unchangeability'.[52]
2. *nārāḥ*—The secondary affix *aṆ* is employed after the word *nara* in the sense of *tasmāj jātam,* meaning 'born from Him' (i.e., *nara* the 'imperishable'). The word *nārāḥ* indicates that the waters originated from Him, which in turn proves that He is the 'creator' of all beings encompassing both living and non-living entities. Thus His second characteristic is justified.
3. Finally, the etymology of the term 'Nārāyaṇa'—*nārāḥ ayanam asya,* meaning that water is his abode—proves His third characteristic.[53]

Accordingly, Paravastu argues that the verse from the MS, which includes the words *nara* and *nārāḥ* in the first half and *ayanam* in the second half, conveys that the deity denoted by the term 'Nārāyaṇa' should possess all these three characteristics *together*. Thus, if we accept Dīkṣita's etymological interpretation, we face the problem that Śiva lacks the characteristic of having water as his abode and that Brahmā lacks two characteristics—namely, being imperishable and the cause of whole creation. In contrast, the three characteristics are undoubtedly together applicable to Viṣṇu.[54]

Paravastu also highlights that even the SU, which Dīkṣita quotes repeatedly, explicitly claims that only Nārāyaṇa is the supreme soul due to His imperishable nature.[55] In his view, this supreme soul is none other than Viṣṇu, the supreme deity of Śrīvaiṣṇavas. Consequently, he concludes the second section by affirming that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' can denote *only* Viṣṇu and not any other deity, as evident from the analysis of its word-by-word exegesis (*avayavārtha*).[56] While initially addressing Dīkṣita's assertions, Paravastu ultimately refutes their validity in the following section.

Section 3—The irrelevance of the term as applied to other deities

Paravastu discusses the inappropriateness of the term 'Nārāyaṇa' to denote both Śiva and Brahmā as argued by Dīkṣita. He cites the following verse which has been anonymously referenced by scholars to establish the right referent of a word:

> *ucyate -*
> *prayogo yasya śabdasya yasminn arthe vyavasthitaḥ ।*
> *sa eva tasya śabdasya hy abhidheya iti sthitiḥ ॥*[57]
> It is said:
> The referent (*abhidheya*) of a specific word is that specific meaning in which the usage of that word is well established [in the world].

The purpose of quoting this verse is to emphasise that the usage of a word in its commonly accepted sense is considered its right referent. Since, according to Paravastu, the term 'Nārāyaṇa', as mentioned earlier, is commonly employed in world usage to refer to Viṣṇu, and not to any other deity (notably Śiva), the real referent is indeed Viṣṇu. He further affirms that everywhere—in Vedas, *smṛti* texts, Epics, Purāṇas, Āgamas, and throughout the world, even among the ignorant—the name Nārāyaṇa is established to refer exclusively to 'Bhagavān' (i.e., Viṣṇu).[58]

In this manner, Paravastu prepares the ground to refute Dīkṣita's claims and then proceeds to address his arguments based on the lexical aspects of the term 'Nārāyaṇa'. He renders the whole passage from the ŚMD as the prima facie view and then establishes the final position (*siddhānta*) by quoting numerous verses from different scriptures (KP, MB, PP, etc.) to counter Dīkṣita's arguments. This section is larger than other sections in the VK that discuss the term 'Nārāyaṇa'. I

will, therefore, present below just the counter-arguments and conclusions put forth by Paravastu paying special attention to the lexical aspects to affirm that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' *exclusively* refers to Viṣṇu.

Paravastu's response to Dīkṣita's standpoint A

Before delving into his detailed response to Dīkṣita's arguments, Paravastu initially encapsulates his perspective in a single verse:

> *nārāyaṇapadaṃ loke puruṣaiḥ prākṛtair api ।*
> *prayujyate ramākānte na tu brahmaśivādiṣu ॥*[59]
> In common parlance, the name Nārāyaṇa is used even by ordinary people in [the sense of] the husband of Ramā (i.e., husband of the goddess Lakṣmī that is Viṣṇu) and not in [the sense of] Brahmā, Śiva, etc.

With this verse, Paravastu starts refuting Dīkṣita's first argument that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' refers to Śiva through its indicative power (*lakṣaṇā*).

He says that hypothesising that the term, by any means, refers to Śiva is improper, as it is well-established in the sense of Viṣṇu. He adds that assuming multiple meanings for a term, specifically for the term 'Nārāyaṇa', may lead to the complexity of understanding it in different contexts. Paravastu is aware that the following question may be raised concerning the polysemy of a term: if a word has the power (*śakti*) to express multiple meanings, and there is uncertainty among the alternatives, then it can have different meanings according to different contexts. There will be no difficulty in understanding that word in any given context. The same applies here to the term 'Nārāyaṇa', which has the power to refer to other deities in different contexts. Hence, as Dīkṣita argued, why can it not denote Śiva using its indicative power and Brahmā in their respective contexts?

Paravastu rejects this view affirming that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' is neither used in Vedas nor in worldly usage in the sense of Śiva or Brahmā, and this in any context. He quotes the following verse from the *Vāmanapurāṇa* to support this argument:

> *na tu nārāyaṇādīnāṃ nāmnām anyatra sambhavaḥ।*
> *anyanāmnāṃ gatir viṣṇu eka eva prakīrtitaḥ ॥*[60]
> There is no concordance of names such as Nārāyaṇa, etc., elsewhere [i.e., with other deities]; instead it is only Viṣṇu who is the ultimate referent of the other names.

By citing this verse, Paravastu asserts that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' *exclusively* refers to Viṣṇu, with the names of all other deities ultimately leading back to Viṣṇu. Interestingly, his assertion bears a resemblance to Dīkṣita's argument that Śiva is the supreme reality, the ultimate cause of creation, and that all names directly or indirectly refer to Śiva. However, Paravastu argues that Viṣṇu is the supreme reality,

the ultimate cause of creation and that all names find their referent only in Viṣṇu. It is also fascinating to note that Paravastu underscores the conventional usage of a word's denotation. While Dīkṣita used the indicative method, Paravastu highlights the precedence of denotation over indication, resulting in the affirmation that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' can denote only Viṣṇu in all contexts and by all means.

He then responds to Dīkṣita's assertion that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' is also a proper name of Śiva with reference to the KP. Paravastu applies a method used by Mīmāṃsakas and Vedāntins in this context to determine the purport of the chapter of the KP from which Dīkṣita quoted the verses (1.4.59–63 mentioned above) to establish the word 'Nārāyaṇa' as Śiva's proper name. The method involves the so-called *ṣaḍvidhatātparyaliṅgāni*, that is 'the six indicators of purport'. According to this method, the purport of a text or textual section is determined by six indicators (*liṅga*): (i) the opening (*upakrama*) and the concluding (*upasaṃhāra*) statements, (ii) recurrence (*abhyāsa*), (iii) novelty of the subject (*apūrvatā*), (iv) alleged results (*phala*), (v) corroborative statement (*arthavāda*), and (vi) plausibility (*upapatti*). An interesting fact is that this technique of using '*upakrama*' and '*upasaṃhara*', either together or separately, is also discussed by many theologians, notably Dīkṣita,[61] in their polemical works.

Paravastu uses the first indicator to respond to Dīkṣita's claim. He pays attention to the opening statement (*upakrama*) from the fourth chapter of the KP, from which Dīkṣita quoted the verses. In this statement, it is mentioned that the deity Nārāyaṇa, in the form of a tortoise, spoke about the origin and destruction of beings.[62] Furthermore, the concluding statement (*upasaṃhāra*) should also be observed, where the Supreme Being states that He thus briefly explained the primary creation (*prākṛtasarga*).[63] Thus, Paravastu states that both the opening and concluding statements together determine that this chapter purports to explain, *particularly*, the creation and destruction of the beings and *not* the names of any deity, as Dīkṣita argued (i.e., Śiva in this context).[64]

Paravastu's response to Dīkṣita's standpoint B

In what follows, Paravastu responds to the second of Dīkṣita's arguments, namely, that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' does not *exclusively* denote Viṣṇu but also denotes Brahmā in the KP. Paravastu argues that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' mentioned in the verse from the sixth chapter of the KP, quoted by Dīkṣita, and its repetition in the tenth chapter,[65] makes it clear that the deity it refers to is none other than the ultimate cause of creation and not Brahmā. Moreover, the deity's characteristics that are mentioned in this context, such as possessing a thousand heads and eyes, etc., can only apply to the ultimate cause, the supreme reality (*parabrahman*) and in this context, it is none other than Viṣṇu. He further states that in the sixth chapter, there is a verse that comes shortly after the verses quoted by Dīkṣita, and this verse clearly pertains to Hari alone (Hari being an *exclusive* name of Viṣṇu).[66]

According to Paravastu, this verse is major evidence that *only* Hari is referred to by the term 'Nārayaṇa' everywhere in the KP, notably in the chapters quoted by Dīkṣita. Therefore, he contends that it is impossible to equate the term 'Nārāyaṇa' with either Śiva or Brahmā as the evidence presented unequivocally establishes its *sole* denotation as Viṣṇu.

Section 4—The affirmation that the term *solely* denotes Bhagavān (i.e., Viṣṇu)

In the last section, Paravastu summarises his earlier explanations and strongly affirms that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' *solely* denotes Bhagavān (i.e., Viṣṇu). He concludes the section with reference to the TMK of Veṅkaṭanātha by underscoring that 'Nārāyaṇa' is not a general term like *sat*, *brahman*, etc., capable of denoting any deity. Since it possesses a unique referent determined by the characteristics understood through its derivation, the term 'Nārāyaṇa' can denote *only* Viṣṇu. He thus concludes his final stance with the following verse:

> *tan nārāyaṇasaṃjñāyāḥ pātivratyaṃ ramāpatau ।*
> *vyavasthitaṃ nirātaṅkaṃ iti paśyata sūrayaḥ ॥*[67]
> O wise men! Observe the conjugal fidelity of the term 'Nārāyaṇa' in the husband of Ramā (i.e., Viṣṇu) which is well established without doubt.

Through this verse, Paravastu asserts that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' is unequivocally associated with the husband of Ramā (i.e., Viṣṇu), not only through Vedic and worldly usage but also through a comprehensive analysis of its lexical and etymological aspects, as detailed above. An interesting aspect is Paravastu's use of a metaphor (*pātivratya*) to explain that the term is linked *exclusively* to Viṣṇu, just as a wife is traditionally associated with her husband. This metaphor highlights the unique and singular relationship between the term 'Nārāyaṇa' and Viṣṇu, emphasising that no other deity shares this association. He emphatically declares that 'Nārāyaṇa' is none other than Viṣṇu, who is the supreme reality and the ultimate cause of creation as proclaimed by the scriptures.

Conclusion

Although the VK has attracted little scholarly attention so far, it is undoubtedly one of the most important polemical works criticising Dīkṣita's arguments from a Viśiṣṭādvaita standpoint. This is evident from the extent with which Paravastu refutes at length Dīkṣita's views about the denotation of the term 'Nārāyaṇa' and in the way he rejects some of his key theses, notably the concept of *turīyaśiva* (Śiva in the fourth or transcendental state).

This debate showcases contrasting argumentative styles and underscores the two scholars' nuanced interpretations of scriptural passages, particularly with

reference to the lexical aspects of the term 'Nārāyaṇa', in the context of Vedānta. On the one hand, Dīkṣita adopts a broad and inclusive methodology, drawing from diverse scriptures to substantiate his claims. On the other hand, Paravastu employs a more selective and focused strategy, emphasising the exclusivity of Viṣṇu's identity as 'Nārāyaṇa'. The interplay of these methodological choices reflects not only their philosophical commitments but also their engagement with a shared intellectual tradition that valued linguistic precision as a means of advancing theological arguments.

This debate exerted a profound influence on later Vedānta polemics. A survey of the available literature reveals that Vedāntins, particularly those aligned with the Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita schools during the early modern period, actively pursued the discussion on the interpretation and identification of the term 'Nārāyaṇa', offering grammatical arguments and formulating their ideas in the form of numerous treatises and concise tracts.[68] These efforts reflect a culture of reading that prioritised textual authority and etymological ingenuity, reflecting broader shifts in intellectual practices.

As Fisher observes, philology became a 'pillar of the unspoken rules of polemical discourse', particularly from the sixteenth century, providing theologians with the tools to assert doctrinal superiority and engage in intersectarian debates.[69] The Nārāyaṇa controversy exemplifies how early modern sectarian theologians employed philological methods to articulate sectarian identities and reshape theological discourse. Moving beyond textual exegesis, these debates engaged broader audiences, influencing the religious and intellectual ecology of South India.

In conclusion, the identification of the deity Nārāyaṇa as a sectarian marker underscores the enduring relevance of language in shaping Vedāntic thought. This study highlights the complex interplay between language, philosophy, and sectarian identity, illustrating how philology transformed into a public and intersectarian discourse. These debates exemplify how language served not only as a theological tool but also as a medium for negotiating sectarian identity within South India's intellectual traditions.

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Notes

1 'Pan-organismal', as used by P. N. Srinivasacarya, reflects the Viśiṣṭādvaita view of Brahman as *śarīrin* (the possessor of a body), with the universe as its *śarīra* (body). Unlike other translations such as 'qualified non-dualism', which primarily denotes a modified unity, this translation captures the inseparable, organic unity between Brahman and the universe, where all entities function as integral parts of the divine whole. Therefore, I prefer this translation over others. See—Srinivasachari (1943, p.614).

2 Although only a few commentaries, written in the first millennium are available, such as those of Śaṅkara and Bhāskara, the references to both authors and titles found in later *bhāṣyagrantha*s provide evidence of other commentaries written in the first millennium, such as the *Bodhāyanavṛtti*, etc.

3 The date of Śrīkaṇṭha is still in dispute, but it could be assumed to be between Rāmānuja's period (ca. 11th century) and the 14th–15th centuries. For more details about the date of Śrīkaṇṭha, see Duquette (2021, chapter 1).

4 To give a single example: Advaitins who hold the view that the supreme reality is without qualities (*nirguṇa*) quote in support of their view the hymn from the *Śvetāśvataropaniṣad* (6.11): *eko devaḥ [...] sākṣī cetā kevalo nirguṇaś ca*—'One God who alone is [...] the mighty witness, consciousness, the absolute and without attributes'. Viśiṣṭādvaitins who hold the view that it is with qualities (*saguṇa*) quote another hymn from the *Śvetāśvataropaniṣad* (6.8): *parāsya śaktir vividhaiva śrūyate svābhāvikī jñānabalakriyā ca*—'His power is Supreme, He is heard differently, and His knowledge, strength and actions are intrinsic'.

5 'I would suggest that the first blow against the Śrīvaiṣṇava theology of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta is to be found in Appayya's Śivādvaita work. [...], as well as the fact that the hagiographical tradition remembers Appayya as a major opponent of Śrīvaiṣṇavas'—Duquette (2021, p.118).

6 Fisher examines the central role of philology in early modern South Indian sectarian debates, focusing on the contested identity of Nārāyaṇa and its significance in shaping intersectarian theological exchanges. See Fisher (2017, pp.120–28).

7 ***sad*** *eva somya idam agre āsīt, ekam eva advitīyam*—'Oh Somya! before the creation there was only existence (*sat*), that one alone without a second' (*Chāndogyopaniṣad* 6.2.1).

8 *yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante, yena jātāni jīvanti, yat prayanti abhisaṃviśanti, tad vijijñāsasva, tad* ***brahma*** *iti*—'That from which all these beings are born, that by which the born-beings live, that which they go to and into which they merge at the end, know that to be Brahman' (*Taittirīyopaniṣad*, 3 *Bhṛguvallī*, 1).

9 ***ātmā*** *vā idam eka eva agre āsīt*—'Ātman (the Supreme soul) alone was there at the beginning [i.e., before the creation]' (*Aitareyopaniṣad* 1.1.1).

10 *bhūtāṇam* ***īśvaro****'pi san* (Bhagavadgītā 4.60); ***īśvara****s sarvabhūtānāṃ* (Bhagavadgītā 18.61); *vetti loka****maheśvara****m* (Bhagavadgītā 10.3).

11 Adams (1993, pp.7–9).

12 *athāto* ***brahma****jijñāsā*—'Then, therefore the enquiry into the Brahman [should be taken up]'; *janmādy asya yataḥ*—'from which (Brahman) the origin, etc., of this [world proceed]' (BS. 1.1.1–2).

13 For instance: *sa eṣa sarvabhūtāntarātmā apahatapāpmā divyo deva eko* ***nārāyaṇaḥ***—'He is this Nārāyaṇa, the soul inside all creatures, freed from sins, one divine deity' (*Subālopaniṣad* 7.1); ***nārāyaṇa*** *paraṃ brahma tattvaṃ nārāyaṇaḥ paraḥ*—'Nārāyaṇa is the supreme reality and Brahman, Nārāyaṇa is the supreme' (*Nārāyaṇopaniṣad* of the *Taittirīyāraṇyakam*—4th hymn).

14 Throughout the article, I interchangeably use 'term' and 'name' in reference to 'Nārāyaṇa', emphasising its grammatical and linguistic aspects when treated as a 'term' and presenting it simply as a name when referred to as a 'name'.

15 Śaṅkarācārya (1938), pp.572–73.

16 The concept of four forms viz. Paravāsudeva, Saṅkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha, referred to by the Vaiṣṇavas is dealt with in this context.

17 Śrīkaṇṭhācārya (1986), pp.318–19.

18 *sadbrahmādiśabdānāṃ puruṣanārāyaṇādiviśeṣaparyavasāyitvāt sarvaśrutīnāṃ nārāyaṇa eva paryavasānabhūmir iti - Śrutaprakāśikā*, *Śrībhāṣyam* 1.1.2, Vol.I, Part-II, p.105 (Rāmānuja, 1989).

19 *kāraṇaviṣayāṇāṃ nārāyaṇādiśabdānāṃ prasiddhaviṣṇuparatvam tu yuktam—ibid*. 1.1.4., p.138.

20 *Tattvamuktākalāpa* 3.5, p.343 (Vedāntadeśika, 1973).

21 To know more about the Śaiva oeuvre of Appaya Dīkṣita, see Duquette (2021).

22 To know more about Śrīkaṇṭha's role as the founder of a new school of Vedānta, see McCrea (2016, pp.81–94).

23 Dīkṣita deals with the supremacy of Śiva over the deity Nārāyaṇa in the ŚTV, specifically in verses 31–35, while discussing the purport of the *Nārāyaṇānuvāka*, a section of the *Taittirīyāraṇyaka* of the *Kṛṣṇayajurveda*. However, in the ŚMD, he discusses the identification of the term 'Nārāyaṇa' based on its linguistic aspects.

24 The qualities stated in the commentary by Śrīkaṇṭha are: Omniscience *(sarvajñatva)*, Omnipotence (*sarvaśaktimattva*), Omnipresence (*sarvavyāpitva*), Greatness (*mahattva*), etc.

25 *Śuklayajurveda* 17.4.

26 *Yogavāsiṣṭha* 6.92.30.

27 *[...] sarveṣāṃ kāraṇavākyānaṃ śive paryavasānam āhatya pratipādayitum eva pravṛtto yadātamo mantra iti sūcitaṃ bhavati*—'it is thus suggested that the '*yadā atamo*' hymn proceeded only to explain that all [Vedic] sentences about the cause [of the creation] end up in Śiva' (*Śivārkamaṇidīpikā* 1.1.2, vol.1, p.129) (Appayya Dīkṣita, 1895).

28 [...] *saubālaśrutyāmnātasya nārāyaṇanāmna eva śive paryavasānāṃ syāt, na tu vaiparītyam*—'the name 'Nārāyana', mentioned in the *Saubālaśruti*, should be understood in relation to [i.e., fundamentally means] Śiva, not the opposite' (*Śivārkamaṇidīpikā* 1.1.2, vol.1, p.130) (Appayya Dīkṣita, 1895).

29 *na ca nārāyaṇaśabdasya viṣṇvaikāntikatvam asti*—'And, there is no exclusivity of Viṣṇu to the word Nārāyaṇa' (*ibid.*) (Appayya Dīkṣita, 1895).

30 The following verses from the *Sāhityadarpaṇa* shed light on these distinctions:
artho vācyaś ca lakṣyaś ca vyaṅgyaś ceti tridhā mataḥ‖
vācyo 'rtho 'bhidhayā bodhyo lakṣyo lakṣaṇayā mataḥ|
vyaṅgyo vyañjanayā tāḥ syus tisraḥ śabdasya śaktayaḥ‖ (*pariccheda* 2, verses 2–3)
'The meaning of a word is held to be three-fold: expressed, indicated, and suggested. The expressed meaning is that which is conveyed by the word's power of direct signification (i.e., denotation); the indicated meaning is that conveyed by the word's indication; the suggested meaning is that conveyed by the word's suggestion. These three are the powers of a word'.

31 Denotation conveys the primary meaning of a word without requiring any additional interpretive power. For example, in the sentence 'bring a cow' (*gām ānaya*), the Sanskrit word *go* directly denotes a cow. However, when the primary meaning conflicts with the context, indication comes into play. In the phrase 'herd-station on the Ganges' (*gaṅgāyāṃ ghoṣaḥ*), the word Ganges denotes a river, but since a herd station cannot exist on water, we infer it refers to the riverbank. Suggestion, on the other hand, operates when both denotation and indication have completed their function, conveying a further implied meaning. In the sentence 'Hari with his conch and discus' (*saśaṅkhacakro hariḥ*), the word Hari could denote multiple referents, but the contextual mention of conch and discus specifies the intended meaning as Viṣṇu. This interpretive process exemplifies the power of suggestion.

32 *yadi tasya śivanāmatvaṃ nāsti tadā viṣṇunāmnaḥ eva tasya bhāvitadavasthopalakṣite sargādyasamayavartini śive lakṣaṇayā vṛttiḥ syāt, ghaṭam karotīti vākya iva ghaṭaśabdasya bhāvighaṭāvasthopalakṣite mṛtpiṇḍe‖* (*Śivārkamaṇidīpikā* 1.1.2, vol.1, p.130).

33 *jalaśāyī janārdanaḥ* (*Brahmavaivartapurāṇa* 4.19.158); *jalaśāyī jagadyoniḥ prīyataṃ mama keśavaḥ* (*Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* 4.153.9); the word *jalaśāyī*, meaning 'one who is lying on waters', is listed as one of the names of Viṣṇu in the *Amarakośa*: *viṣṇur nārāyaṇaḥ kṛṣno vaikuṇṭho viṣṭharaśravāḥ* [...] *jalaśāyī viśvarūpo mukundo muramardanaḥ* (1.1.18 and 23).

34 *sārūpyamuktivacano nāreti ca vidur budhāḥ*—'The intellectuals know that the word *nāra* denotes the liberation consisting in the similarity with the supreme soul' (*Brahmavaivartapurāṇa* 4.111.22).

35 The word *nāra* is a secondary derivative form (*taddhitānta*). The comprehensive statement is *narasamūho nāra* which means the group of humans is called *nāra*.

36 The word '*ayana*' is derived from the root '*aya gatau*' which means 'to go'. According to a common maxim in grammar—*ye gatyarthās te jñānārthaḥ prāptyarthāś ca*, which means that the roots that are used in the sense 'to go' are also used in the sense 'to know' and 'to obtain'—Dīkṣita interprets the word *ayana* here as 'obtaining'.

37 The *vigrahavākya*s differ in each context. If the context is liberation, then the gloss is '*nārasya prāptiḥ yasmāt*', and if the context is human beings, then the gloss is'*nāram ayanam yasya*'.
38 *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 8.4.3.
39 *Harivaṃśa* 3.88.61.
40 *Kūrmapurāṇa* 1.4.59–60.
41 I used this English translation from the book [KP] published by the Motilal Banarsidass publishers, New Delhi (Kūrmapurāṇa 1998).
42 In this context it is fascinating to read about an incident (in tradition) mentioned by Govindācārya in the preface of his English translation of the Sanskrit text *Yatīndramatadīpikā*. This work was composed by Śrīnivāsacārya, a philosopher of Viśiṣṭādvaita from Tirupati, in the early 17th century. It offers a comprehensive exploration of Viśiṣṭādvaita's doctrines, covering aspects such as metaphysics, epistemology, and religion. In the incident mentioned by Govindācārya, Appayya Dīkṣita and his contemporary Viśiṣṭādvaitin Mahācārya, also known as Caṇḍamārutācārya, were good friends. The latter waited for an opportunity to test the truth of his friend's argument regarding the term 'Nārāyaṇa'. Once they were ascending the Alagarmalai mountain to visit the Sundarabāhū or Alagar temple. The eighteenth step from the bottom is believed to be presided over by a deity named Karuppan in the Tamil tradition, and the belief held that whoever speaks untruth while on this step would suffer. Mahācārya, taking hold of his friend's hand and making him stand there, questioned him: Tell me, my dear friend, are you genuinely convinced that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' can be construed as a name of Śiva? Then Dīkṣita is said to have spoken out his own conviction: 'The letter *ṇ* in the term "Nārāyaṇa" is in the way of such construction. This is my conviction'. Govindācārya completes the story here. He then speaks about Dīkṣita and his works. See Govindācārya (1912, Preface, p.v).
43 See above, n. 28.
44 For the date of the activity of this scholar, see Raghavan (1979, p.60) and Philips and Potter (2017, p.452).
45 See *ibid*. p.61 and p.452.
46 Raghavan (1979, p.61). The same date is mentioned in the NCC (Vol.31, p.348). Paravastu is also known as Vātsya Vedāntācārya, see Potter (2017, p.468).
47 In the *Nyāyaratnāvalī*, Vedāntācārya refutes the doctrine of *Ānandatāratamya*—the difference in the degree of eternal bliss, enjoyed by the liberated souls—of the Dvaita system, emphasising the supremacy of God Viṣṇu.
48 The *Siddhāntacandrikā* upholds the practice of branding arms with Śaṅkha and Cakra as authoritative, offering a rebuttal to Bhāskara Dīkṣita's *Taptamudravidrāvaṇa*, which advocates a different perspective on this particular religious practice. To know more about the concept of *taptamudrā* and the debate around it, see Peterson (2022).
49 *Mahābhārata* 13.186.7 (Vedavyāsa, 1933).
50 *Padmapurāṇa* 6.226.56.
51 See n. 28 and its context for additional explanation on this point.
52 The *uṇādi* affix *ḍa* can be employed after all roots by virtue of the Pāṇinian formula *uṇādayo bahulam* (*Aṣṭādhyāyī* 3.3.1), which says that all *uṇādi*-affixes are variously used after (all) roots to express present tense and also a designation. '*ḍa*' is employed here after the root *ri* to form the word *raḥ* meaning 'that which perishes'. Then, the negative particle *na* is added before it to mean 'imperishable'.

53 *ri kṣaya ityasmād dhātor ḍapratyaye ṭilope ca kṛte ra iti bhavati, naraḥ akṣayaḥ nirvikāra ityarthaḥ, jahnur nārāyaṇo nara iti vacanāt, nara iti bhagavannāma tasmāj jātam ityaṇpratyaye kṛte nārā iti bhavati । nārākhyā āpo ayanam asyeti nārāyaṇaḥ । evaṃ naraśabdena nirvikāratvaṃ, nāraśabdena jagatkāraṇatvam, ayanaśabdena jagadantarātmatvaṃ cetyarthatrayamuktaṃ bhavati ॥* Paravastu Vedāntacārya (1964–65) p.26.

54 [...] *nārāyaṇanāmanirvacanasya bhagavadviṣayatāyā vajralepāyitatvāt ॥ ibid.* p.27.

55 *aja eko nityaḥ* [...] *sa eṣa sarvabhūtāntarātma apahatapāpmā divyo deva eko nārāyaṇaḥ*—'(He) is unborn, [only] one, eternal [...] He is this Nārāyaṇa, the soul inside all creatures, freed from sins, one divine deity' (*Subālopaniṣad* 7.1).

56 *subālopaniṣadi aja eko nitya iti nirvikāratvaṃ, jagatkāraṇatvaṃ, jagadantarātmatvañcoktvā nārāyaṇaśabdo 'sakṛdāvartitaḥ । ato jagatkāraṇatvādikaṃ tritayamapi nārāyaṇaśa bdasyāvayavārtha iti śruterabhiprāya iti matvā jagatkāraṇatvādipravṛttinimittakaṃ nārāyaṇaśabdaṃ paramakāraṇasya vācakatvena* [...] ॥ Paravastu Vedāntacārya (1964–65), p.26.

57 ibid. p.28.

58 *sarvatra ca śrutismṛtītihāsapurāṇāgameṣu loke ca sarveṣu deśeṣu āpāmaraṃ nārāyaṇaśabdaḥ bhagavaty eva prasiddhaḥ ॥* ibid. p.28.

59 Paravastu Vedāntacārya (1964–65), p.30.

60 Paravastu states that this verse is from the *Vāmanapurāṇa* in his *Vedāntakaustubha* (p.28). Interestingly, Bhaṭṭoji Dīkṣita (17 CE) quotes the same verse in his *Tattvakaustubha* (under 1.3.3), also mentioning that it is from the *Vāmanapurāṇa*. However, it is not found in printed editions.

61 However, Dīkṣita, in his work *Upakramaparākrama,* contends that the *upakrama* (initial statement) holds precedence over the *upasamhāra* (concluding statement), when there is a contradiction between them. On Dīkṣita's engagement with this topic, see Duquette (2016–17).

62 *śrutvā nārāyaṇo vākyam ṛṣīṇāṃ kūrmarūpadhṛk । prāha gaṃbhīrayā vāca bhūtānāṃ prabhavāpyayau ॥* (*Kūrmapurāṇa* 1.4.4).

63 *ity eṣa prākṛtas sargaḥ saṃkṣepāt kathito mayā ।* (*ibid.* 1.4.65).

64 *[...] tad adhyāyopakramavacanena [...] tad upasaṃhāragatavacanena tasya adhyāyasya sṛṣṭinirūpaṇārthaṃ pravṛttatvāvagamena śivanāmanirvacanaidaṃparyeṇa pravṛttatvābhāvāt* (Paravastu Vedāntacārya 1964–65, p.31).

65 *sahasraśīrṣanayanaḥ śaṅkhacakragadādharaḥ । brahmā nārāyaṇākhyo 'sau suṣvāpa salile tadā ॥*—'Having thousand heads and eyes, the bearer of conch, discus and mace, this Brahmā named Nārāyana slept in [celestial] water' (*Kūrmapurāṇa* 1.10.9–10).

66 The verse reads: *dṛṣṭvā daṃṣṭrāgravinyastāṃ pṛthivīṃ prathitapauruṣam । astuvan janalokasthāḥ siddhāḥ brahmarṣayo harim ॥*—After seeing the earth held upon the tips of his tusk, the Siddhas, [and] the Brāhmaṇa sages, situated in the *janaloka* eulogised Hari, whose manliness is well-known (*Kūrmapurāṇa* 1.6.10).

67 Paravastu Vedāntacārya (1964–65), p.41.

68 I provide a list of some of these key works, most of which remain unstudied, in the appendix.

69 Fisher uses this phrase to highlight how philology functioned both as a theological tool and as a medium for negotiating sectarian identity, shaping Vedāntic polemics. For further discussion, see Fisher (2017, Chapter 3).

70 Oppert (1880) p.24—s.no.236; p.114—s.no.1242; and p.488—s.no. 6342.

71 See NCC Vol-VIII, p.13.

72 See Mysore (1922, p.467).
73 See p.2628) (Sanskrit C).
74 Rangacarya (1911, pp. 3860–61).
75 Malledevaru (1987, p.17) (Śaiva section).
76 Ravishankar (2018, pp.253-54).
77 NCC Vol-VIII, p.13.
78 Rangacarya (1911, p.3676).
79 Krishnamachariar (1941, p.162).
80
81 Krishnamacharya (1966, p.264).
82 Malledevaru (1985, pp.393 and 395).
83 Krishnamcacharya (1966, p.500).
84 *ibid*. (p.509).
85 *Viṣṇutattvarahasya*, p.42 (Rāmasubrahmaṇyaśāstrī, 2015).

Appendix

This appendix provides information on works that contributed to the debate over the term 'Nārāyaṇa' from the Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita schools during the early modern period.

1. The *Ṇatvasamarthanam*

There are some conflicts in identifying the author of this work. Gustav Oppert, in his catalogue, mentions one Vedāntācārya as the author,[70] and one Śrīnivāsācārya is mentioned in the New Catalogus Catalogorum (hereafter NCC)[71] and Mysore catalogues.[72] The subject matter is identified as Viśiṣṭādvaita in all three catalogues. However, the following verses found, under the same title, in the triennial catalogue of manuscripts raise doubt about the subject matter:

> *nārāyaṇapade ṇatvam na sidhyati śive tv iti*।
> *iha kecid dākṣiṇātyā ruvaṇty ajñānamohitāḥ*॥
> *teṣāmjñānanāśāya sadāśivakṛpābalāt*।
> *vivṛṇmahe śive ṇatvasiddhiṃ nārāyaṇa pade*॥[73]
> Here, some Southern people [i.e., scholars], confused by ignorance, roar that the [cerebral] *ṇa* in the word 'Nārāyaṇa' does not occur [when it refers] to Śiva. To dispel their ignorance with the powerful grace of Sadāśiva [we] explain the occurrence of *ṇa* in the word 'Nārāyaṇa' [when it refers] to Śiva.

The contradiction between the subject matter mentioned in the catalogues and the meaning of the verse raises questions about how a Viśiṣṭādvaita scholar composed a work to criticise the views expressed by other scholars within the same while asserting that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' also denotes Śiva. Hence, I opine two possibilities: (i) either the author or the subject matter may belong to a different school,

notably Advaita, and (ii) even if the author belongs to the Viśiṣṭādvaita school, then he must possess a broader vision extending beyond the sectarian debates. Despite these conflicts, it is evident that the debate on the term continued after Paravastu.

2. The *Navakoṭi*

The revered scholar Kuṇigala Rāmaśāstrī (1807–1860) from Mysore authored this work. It has not been published, and manuscript copies are available in the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library (hereafter GOML),[74] Chennai and the Oriental Research Institute (hereafter ORI), Mysore.[75] An interesting event is mentioned regarding this work in his biography. It is said that he debated with some Śrīvaiṣṇavas in a symposium in Kāñcīpuram, defending the word 'Nārāyaṇa' to refer to Lord Śiva using arguments from a certain Smārta grammarian. In this context, I would like to provide a passage from the translation of Rāmaśāstrī's biography by Chinya V. Ravishankar:

> At the same time, the Śāstrī composed a work called Navakoṭi. Finally, the issue still unresolved, some 600-700 Vaiṣṇavas, deciding that matters were to be taken into their own hands when all else has failed, arrived, bent upon a physical confrontation. The Śāstrī replied to them thus: "Gentlemen, this fact has been established more recently than Appayya Dīkṣita, by a great grammarian called Śaṅkara Bhaṭṭācārya. This is not a new determination. Besides, this is not a dispute involving sectarian tenets, but a scholarly debate. The arguments we have presented are based purely on statements from the Śāstras; there is no disparagement of religion.[76]

Thus, from the above passage, we can understand that the mention of Dīkṣita by Rāmaśāstrī emphasises that the signification of the term 'Nārāyaṇa' was a major dispute between the Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas from that time onward. Additionally, the reference to Śaṅkarabhaṭṭa reinforces the notion that this dispute persisted, involving grammatical arguments for centuries.

3. The *Ṇatvacandrikā*

Tiruputkuzhi Kṛṣṇatātācārya (19th century CE) is the author of this unpublished work, with the manuscripts available in the GOML, Chennai.[77] In this work, the author initially presents the interpretations of Śaivas as the prima facie view. Then he responds by establishing that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' can only denote Viṣṇu and not Śiva, regardless of any interpretation indicating the power of a word. A sentence from the work found in the descriptive catalogue is as follows:

> *tasmāt sarvathā uktanirvacanāt nārāyaṇaśabdasya śive rūḍhīr na sambhavati iti.*[78]
> Thus, from the said explanation, the conventional meaning of the term 'Nārāyaṇa' does not apply to Śiva in any way.

It should also be noted that Kṛṣṇatātācārya responded to Kuṇigala Rāmaśāstrī's *Navakoṭi* through his other work on this topic called the *Navakoṭibhañjanavāda*, which is not published. The manuscript copy of this work is said to be available at Sri Venkateswara Oriental Research Institute, Tirupati.[79] Additionally, another work called the *Daśakoṭiratnamālā* from a Viśiṣṭādvaitin, Aṇṇaṅgarārya (19th century CE) of the Śeṣārya family, also refutes the views expressed by Rāmaśāstrī and establishes that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' really denotes Viṣṇu.[80]

4. Other works

The NCC provides information about other works on this topic. There is one *Ṇatvavādārtha* available in the Adyar Library (Raja 1974). It contains a debate on the term 'Nārāyaṇa' between an anonymous scholar of Viśiṣṭādvaita and one Śaṅkarabhaṭṭa that took place in the court of King Kṛṣṇarāja Woḍayar of Mysore.[81] This Śaṅkarabhaṭṭa could be the same person quoted by Kuṇigala Rāmaśāstrī. Additionally, the king referred to should be Kṛṣṇarāja III, who reigned over the Mysore kingdom for 70 years, from 1799 to 1868.

The *Ṇatvatattvaparitrāṇam* and the *Ṇatvaikāntaśīromaṇi* are two more works available at the ORI, Mysore, by Viśiṣṭādvaita scholars, establishing the term 'Nārāyaṇa' for Viṣṇu.[82]

One Nṛsiṃhaśāstrin, a resident of Śrīśaila, composed the *Ṇatvadarpaṇa* (other than the one mentioned earlier) to argue that the syllable *ṇa* in the word 'Nārāyaṇa' is justifiable in the sense of Śiva.[83] The *Ṇārāyaṇapadabhūṣaṇam* with a self-authored commentary, namely, the *Ṇatvabhādāvidhūnanam* by some Śeṣādrisūri, is a metrical work in which he attempts to prove that the term 'Nārāyaṇa' means Lord Śiva.[84]

The discussion on this term continued until the 20th century. The revered scholar Rāmasubrahmaṇya Śāstrī (familiar as Rāmasubbā Śāstrī [1840–1922]) of Tiruviśanallur discussed this topic in his *Viṣṇutattvarahasya* in a separate section called *nārāyaṇaśabde ṇatvavicāra* meaning 'the discussion of the syllable *ṇa* in the word 'Nārāyaṇa'.[85]