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# Īśvara As He Is: Devotional Theism in the Pātañjala Yogaśāstra

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*IŚVARA AS HE IS:*  
DEVOTIONAL THEISM IN THE *PĀTAÑJALA YOGAŚĀSTRA*

Written by  
JONATHAN DICKSTEIN  
B.A., University of Pennsylvania, 2001

A thesis submitted to the  
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*Iśvara As He Is: Devotional Theism in the Pātañjala Yogaśāstra*  
written by Jonathan Dickstein  
has been approved for the Department of Religious Studies

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline

Dickstein, Jonathan (M.A. Religious Studies)

*Īśvara As He Is: Devotional Theism in the Pātañjala Yogaśāstra*

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Loriliai Biernacki

Abstract: Patañjali's *Yogasūtra* forms the textual basis for what is commonly called "Classical Yoga Philosophy". This seminal first millennium text repeatedly employs the Sanskrit word "*īśvara*" to refer to a presiding divinity, the nature of which has been contested for centuries. In contrast to the abundance of modern interpretations that depreciate the status of "God" in Classical Yoga, I argue that the *īśvara* of the *Pātañjala Yogaśāstra* (*sūtras* and *bhāṣya*) carries an eminence comparable to that of Lord Kṛṣṇa of the *Bhagavad Gītā*. In short, "God" means "Supreme God" for Patañjali, regardless of the philosophical complications that may result from the admission of a totalizing divinity. This argument is evidenced through a historical analysis of the word "*īśvara*", a close reading of its role in the *Pātañjala Yogaśāstra*, and a juxtaposition with relevant verses from the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

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## Introductory Remarks

This is not a theological treatise. I do not deliberate the question of divinity nor the persuasiveness of varying conceptions of God. Rather this thesis probes the history and function of a word—*īśvara*—that carries serious theological implications in Indian Philosophy.<sup>1</sup> The persistent tendency to distort or shroud the meaning of this word is the precise target of my critique. Although the subject matter may seem narrow in scope, revolving around a single word, several overarching issues concerning textual interpretation and the popular reception of religious texts are directly implicated.

Patañjali's *Yogasūtra* (YS) forms the textual basis for what is commonly called "Classical Yoga Philosophy". This first millennium text repeatedly employs the word "*īśvara*" to refer to some divine entity, the nature of which has stirred heated debate in both traditional and modern commentaries. In contrast to the wealth of modern interpretations that minimize both the nature and function of this *īśvara* in Classical Yoga, I argue that the "God" of the YS sustains the same grandeur as found in staunchly theistic texts such as the *Bhagavad Gītā*. In short, "God" means "Supreme God" for Patañjali, regardless of the damage it inflicts on the scholarly wish for a robust and rational 'philosophy' of Classical Yoga. This conclusion derives not from a personal affection for theism and/or devotionism, but rather a comprehensive archaeology of the term with a focus on textual depiction and historical context.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the thesis "*īśvara*" and "God" are used interchangeably. "God" is capitalized owing to the main argument of the thesis, which is that *īśvara* in the PYŚ is a precisely the type of totalizing divinity (e.g. "*parameśvara*") to be distinguished by capitalization. I also opt for the capitalized pronouns "He", "Him", and His, as "*īśvara*" is a masculine noun in Sanskrit. There is a feminine form of the word—*īśvarinī*—and if this word has been used in the PYŚ I would have employed feminine pronouns.

Section One introduces the *Pātañjala Yogasūtra/Yogaśāstra* itself. The YS has commonly been received as a stand-alone text with the main commentary (*bhāṣya*) considered the contribution of an altogether different author. Recognizing the recent contributions of Philipp Maas, I problematize this assumption and encourage the reception of the *Pātañjala Yogaśāstra* (PYŚ) as a whole, that is, *sūtras and bhāṣya* together. Reinforcing the authority of the *bhāṣya* as the proper expositor of the *sūtras*, better conclusions can be made regarding the God-concept present in the work. Section One also claims that the metaphysical scaffolding behind the PYŚ cannot justifiably be identified with any specific ‘school’ of sāmkhya. The conflation of Classical Sāmkhya with PYŚ sāmkhya may hold on superficial levels, but beyond that it often confuses the content of the text itself. Hence while PYŚ sāmkhya may closely resemble some form of Epic sāmkhya, it is best received as its own strain, simply Pātañjala Sāmkhya.

Section Two gives an overview of the research of M.D. Shastri and Lloyd Pflueger, two scholars who have scrutinized the term “*īśvara*” from etymological and historical perspectives. This part sketches the proper historical textual context for approaching the term “*īśvara*” in the PYŚ. The end of this section also explains why the most common religio-philosophical understanding of “*īśvara*” during this period could pose a problem for the metaphysics of Pātañjala Yoga.

Section Three represents the core of the thesis, dissecting the *sūtras* on *īśvara* in the PYŚ with a consistent eye on the elaboration of the *bhāṣya*. Not only does this section provide the most plausible (though not necessarily popular) explanations for these oft-quoted *sūtras*, but also introduces key *bhāṣya* sections and interpretations heretofore absent or trivialized in most Yoga scholarship. The section ends with a couple

“alternative *īśvaras*”—innovative yet textually insensitive reconfigurations of *īśvara*—elevated in modern readings of the YS/PYŚ.

The final section, Section Four, posits that Patañjali’s conception of God is consistent with God-as-Kṛṣṇa as found in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Comparing uses of the terms “*īśvara*” and “*puruṣa*” in the *Gītā* with their mention in the PYŚ, I argue that even though Patañjali is markedly modest in his description of God, a modesty owing to the central theme of his text, his presentation of *īśvara* does not conflict with depictions of Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā*. While not altogether equating Patañjali’s God with the *Gītā*’s God, I posit that the *type* of God promoted in each text is unmistakably similar.

## 1. Texts and Traditions

### *YOGASŪTRA AND YOGAŚĀSTRA*

The strength or weakness of a text can often be linked to plasticity. From the perspective of longevity, an enduring work permits diverse interpretations and succeeds in adapting to various times, places, and surrounding doctrines. The corresponding weakness, if it may be called so, is that authorial intention becomes highly contentious and the impetus to speculate upon it is problematic from the outset. An obvious example involves the divergent schools of Vedānta, all of which invoke identical Upaniṣadic passages to elevate their own systems of thought above their competitors. Sharing the same malleable quality as Upaniṣadic passages, Sūtra texts are also cryptic and laborious to unpack, a facet that facilitates high interpretability and often extends scholastic shelf-life.

The YS, when read without its principal commentary, the *Vyāśabhāṣya*, may not be as impenetrable as the *Brahmasūtra* but still leaves much to be desired. For hundreds of years scholars have worked to unravel the *sūtras* with the aid of the *bhāṣya*, though rarely adhering strictly to its conclusions. In fact, modern YS scholars are notably candid in their disputation of the main commentary. Alternatively, within the pre-modern, native tradition, commentators have typically offered their own innovative interpretations while claiming at least superficial alliance with the *bhāṣya*. An intriguing facet of some modern YS scholarship is that it challenges the *bhāṣyakāra* while simultaneously excusing and praising Patañjali, as if criticism of the *bhāṣya* incriminates the *bhāṣya* alone with no impact on the supposedly impregnable *sūtras*.

*PHILIPP MAAS' CONTRIBUTIONS AND COMPLICATIONS*

The isolation of the *sūtras* from the *bhāṣya* has allowed for a great level of creative interpretation, hence ‘strengthening’ the YS from the perspective of accessibility and durability. However, is there much precedent for reading the *sūtras* independent of the *bhāṣya*? The recent work of Philipp Maas has critiqued this trend through a resurrection and emboldening of the argument that the PYŚ—*sūtras* and *bhāṣya*—were originally recognized and received as a single unified text, and there is scarce evidence, if any, that they were not compiled and commented on at the same time.<sup>2</sup> To cite just a few relevant conclusions of Maas,

The assessment that the PYŚ is a single work with a single author is corroborated by the wording of the critically edited version of all four chapter colophons of the PYŚ in the twenty-five manuscripts that I used for my critical edition of the first chapter of the PYŚ.

References to the title *yogabhāṣya* and to the author’s name Vyāsa or Vedavyāsa are only transmitted in a few manuscripts of limited stemmatic relevance. Originally the work had neither the title *yogabhāṣya* nor did it contain the personal name Vyāsa (see Maas 2006: xvf. and xxf.).

And perhaps most importantly,

The Yoga Sūtra appears to have *no manuscript transmission independent of that of the PYŚ*, because the manuscripts of the Yoga Sūtra I have seen so far exist of extracts from the PYŚ only.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Philipp A. Maas, “A Concise Historiography of Classical Yoga Philosophy” in *Periodization and Historiography in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Eli Franco (Vienna: Nobile, 2013), 57-68. Philipp A. Maas, *Samādhipāda. Das erste Kapitel des Pātañjalayogaśāstra zum ersten Mal kritisch ediert, = The First Chapter of the Pātañjalayogaśāstra for the First Time Critically Edited* (Aachen: Shaker, 2006), xii-xix.

<sup>3</sup> Philipp Maas, “A Concise Historiography,” 58. Italics added.

To date no one has completed more manuscript research than Maas, and if his findings are accurate, we must come to one of two possible conclusions:

(1) Patañjali and Vyāsa, the *sūtrakāra* and *bhāṣyakāra*, are one and the same person, and thus the *bhāṣya* is an auto-commentary on the *sūtras*.

(2) The *sūtrakāra* and *bhāṣyakāra* are not necessarily the same person, but the latter (as Patañjali or Vyāsa) gathered pre-existent *sūtras* (most likely with some original additions) and composed his own *bhāṣya* on them.

Whichever position one prefers, the outcomes are not terribly dissimilar. Even with conclusion (2), if the *bhāṣyakāra* simply collected (“Vyāsa”, *vi* + *√as* = divide, arrange) existing *sūtras* for his commentary, then as the curator for this multi-layered, composite work, he is also their proper exegete.<sup>4</sup> If these two positions solidify as the only legitimate viewpoints, what will no longer be acceptable is the claim that the *sūtras* were written or compiled by one figure at one time and the *bhāṣya* was written by another

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<sup>4</sup> Tola expresses this dilemma well: “Contradictions are found among different parts, and often the union of several sections seems contrived so that one may be inclined to think either that the *Yogasūtras* are not an original work and are actually composed in their entirety of texts derived from a plurality of sources, texts juxtaposed and unified, in some by the compiler of the work, in the form in which we have them today, or that the original work was more or less of extensive interpolations, more or less in contradiction with the doctrine of the original.” Fernando Tola and Carmen Dragonetti, *The Yogasūtras of Patañjali: On Concentration of Mind* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), x.

figure at a non-contemporaneous time. Nor will the “text-immanent” approach emerge as the most plausible. To quote Maas at length,

Irrespective of the question of whether the PYŚ has a single author – and irrespective of how to define “authorship” for a work consisting of different textual layers – *it is advisable from a philological and historical point of view to accept, at least hypothetically, that this work is the result of a single, roughly datable authorial intention.* The *sūtra* part taken for itself consists of 195 (or, in other versions, of 196) brief statements that in some cases are not even full sentences. Because of the brevity of these statements and because of the shortness of the *sūtra* part as a whole, the Yoga Sūtra cannot be interpreted convincingly without taking recourse to its cultural and historical contexts. As we shall see below, *the text-immanent approach to the Yoga Sūtras was indeed used frequently to project anachronistic ideas upon this text.*<sup>5</sup>

Space does not permit a recapitulation of Maas’ argumentation, which is gaining traction in academic circles.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, I contend that even if one doubts the ‘hard’ position of Maas, the argument for a fully unified PYŚ, it is still prudent to recognize that our entire understanding of the content of the otherwise impenetrable *sūtras* derives from the language of the *bhāṣya*. Hence the comparably ‘soft’ position of scholars such as Edwin Bryant will only lead into the same territory. Bryant has emphasized that the history of Patañjala Yoga scholarship is a history of analyzing the *sūtras* as they are understood by the *bhāṣyakāra*.<sup>7</sup> Even scholars who critique the *bhāṣyakāra*’s unpacking of particular *sūtras* have depended almost singularly on the *bhāṣya* for their own fundamental

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<sup>5</sup> Philipp Maas, “A Concise Historiography”, 68. Italics added.

<sup>6</sup> Maas does admit tensions between the *sūtras* and the *bhāṣya*, but concludes that they do not outweigh the arguments for assimilation. Philipp A. Maas, “Once More on Postures in the Patañjala Yogaśāstra” (presentation, Thinking with the Yoga Sutra: Translation, Interpretation, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA, April 11-12, 2015), 44:05-45:55.

<sup>7</sup> Edwin Bryant, *The Yoga Sutras of Patañjali: A New Edition, Translation, and Commentary* (New York: North Point Press, 2009), xl.

understanding of the context and content of the *sūtras*. Thus, at the very minimum this paper accepts this ‘soft’ position and admittedly leans towards Maas’ claim that the PYŚ is most likely guided by “single, roughly datable authorial intention”, regardless of what that intention actually is. In sum, from the standpoint of plausibility, the accuracy of the *bhāṣyakāra*’s interpretation trumps any other, and a disagreement with the *bhāṣya* on any *sūtra* amounts to a disagreement with the content of the *sūtra* itself.

I also concur with Maas that a “text-immanent” approach to the YS has allowed for many questionable ideas, some anachronistic, to be foisted upon the text. Relatively late commentators (traditional and modern), typically with specific religious or theoretical proclivities, have waged the strongest critiques of the *bhāṣya* and offered in its stead less philologically and historically sensitive alternatives. During the course of this thesis some of these problematic projections will be scrutinized, specifically concerning definition of the term “*īśvara*” or “God”.<sup>8</sup> This word and its corresponding idea have often been translated and positioned to dovetail with some larger theoretical project, such as ensuring coherence to the notion of a “Classical Yoga Philosophy”. For the purposes of this paper, the tight, internal coherence of Pātañjala Yoga philosophy, as well as its distinction as a system of “Classical Indian Philosophy”, are not central issues.<sup>9</sup> This study interrogates the PYŚ’ understanding of the term “*īśvara*” with the full

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<sup>8</sup> In this paper “*īśvara*”, “God”, and “God-concept” are used synonymously. I refrain from using “God-principle” due to the terminological overlap with the translation of *tattva* as “principle”. However, in some formulations of *sāṃkhya*, *īśvara* in fact may operate as a *tattva*.

<sup>9</sup> To cite, if not outright accept, Daya Krishna’s bold assessment, “As for Yoga, it is perhaps counted among the traditional schools of Indian Philosophy only as a matter of *courtesy*.” Daya Krishna, “Three Myths about Indian Philosophy” in *Indian Philosophy: a counter perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 5. Italics added.

acknowledgement of the resulting metaphysical problems. It seeks an answer to the *īśvara* question “come philosophical hell or high water”.

### *SĀṂKHYA, PĀTAÑJALA SĀṂKHYA, CLASSICAL SĀṂKHYA*

Any discussion of Pātañjala Yoga (or yoga in general) inevitably involves the closely related tradition of sāmkhya.<sup>10</sup> Sāmkhya can broadly be defined as a tradition of philosophical speculation centering on metaphysical enumeration, frequently providing the psycho-physical map for a corresponding means of practice. The metaphysical emphasis of sāmkhya lends its characterization as mere intellectual contemplation isolated from a “corresponding means of practice”. The latter, such as meditation on an object or principle, is oftentimes identified as “yoga”. However, it is crucial not to separate these two ideas, sāmkhya and yoga, for it is not until the classical period that they are framed as two different “schools”. In fact, as early as Aśvaghōṣa’s *Buddhacarita* (1<sup>st</sup> cent. CE) there is clear evidence that practiced-sāmkhya exists (and is identical to “yoga”), hence it is inaccurate to refer to these two as completely independent paths.<sup>11</sup> In any event, as a tradition of enumeration, sāmkhya divides the entirety of the knowable world into *tattvas*, literally “that-nesses” or principles. The ‘Classical’ form of Sāmkhya

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<sup>10</sup> Uppercase “S” “Sāmkhya” refers to *Sāmkhya-kārikā*/Classical Sāmkhya. Lowercase “s” “sāmkhya” is used in the general sense of some philosophical tradition of metaphysical enumeration. Uppercase “Y” “Yoga” refers to Pātañjala/Classical Yoga. Lowercase “y” is used in the general sense of any tradition that calls itself “yoga”.

<sup>11</sup> *Buddhacarita* 12.45-1.68. Here the sāmkhya sage Arāḍa instructs the to-be Buddha on how to “do” sāmkhya: “Becoming supremely content with whatever he gets from anyone at all, He lives in a secluded place, free from the pairs of opposites, skillful, learned in sacred texts. Then, seeing that from passion comes danger, from detachment likewise, the highest bliss, He restrains all his sense organs and strives to quiet his mind.” Patrick Olivelle, *The Life of the Buddha By Aśvaghōṣa* (New York: NY University Press/JJC Foundation, 2008), 343. For the full discussion, see p. 342-351.

(*Sāṃkhyakārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa, 4-5<sup>th</sup> cent. CE) enumerates twenty-five *tattvas*, with the twenty-fifth principle of *puruṣa* or “Self” residing absolutely and eternally distinct from the remaining twenty-four, collectively labeled *prakṛti* or “material reality”.<sup>12</sup> Pātañjala Yoga irrefutably operates within *some* realm of sāṃkhya metaphysics, and oftentimes the classical cosmography is conveniently supplied. But while the PYŚ invokes a sāṃkhya inclusive of God, as evident in at least two of its four chapters,<sup>13</sup> the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* (SK) is curiously and completely silent on *īśvara*. *Īśvara* has no explicit location or relevance in the classical formulation of sāṃkhya. Due to the SK’s reticence on the issue—an unusual omission among works of the genre—Classical Sāṃkhya has routinely been labeled as atheistic or non-theistic. One reason why *īśvara* in the PYŚ is sometimes considered a “problem of God” is its dissonance with SK Sāṃkhya; it also begs the question of what type of sāṃkhya is appropriated by the PYŚ.

### THE SO-CALLED “PROBLEM” OF GOD

Irrespective of the physical presence and prominence of the term “*īśvara*” in the printed texts, the looming question involves the actual function of God in Sāṃkhya or Yoga metaphysics. In short, God seems to lack soteriological necessity. A ‘God’ of any type is inessential for the achievement of *moṅsa* or *kaivalya*, the aspirant’s final liberation from the cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*). YS 3.56 indicates that *kaivalya* is effected

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<sup>12</sup> For this paper the translation of “*prakṛti*” as “material reality” is acceptable given a consistency with the traditional understanding. In critical contexts I prefer to translate the term as “phenomenality”, akin to Mikel Burley’s description—“*prakṛti* that which shows itself as the conditioning factors of experience”. Mikel Burley, *Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga: an Indian metaphysics of experience* (London: Routledge, 2007), 149.

<sup>13</sup> The first two chapters employ “*īśvara*” in actual *sūtras*. YBh (*bhāṣya*) 3.6 and YBh 3.45 also include references to *īśvara*.

when, through the practice of *samādhi* (meditative absorption), the individual purifies his/her intellect to match the purity of the *puruṣa*.<sup>14</sup> Liberation does not appear to be dependent on any notion or action of God. Classical Sāṃkhya lacks an inclusion of God altogether, hence it is a moot point, but the text still affirms at SK 68 that *kaivalya* simply refers to the individual's disjunction from *prakṛti*.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, as one can sufficiently achieve liberation through self-effort, it is fair to conclude that both Sāṃkhya and Yoga are *mechanically* self-sufficient. "Non-theistic" in this context (as opposed to "atheistic" which would reject God's existence) only denotes the expendability of *īśvara* from the mechanics of liberation. However, the self-sufficiency of these methods does not nullify *īśvara*'s potential ability to influence an aspirant's ultimate release, even if the same achievement could be reached eventually without divine assistance. In short, God may be expendable but is not irrelevant. In either case, given the rather awkward optionality of God, one may conclude that the entire controversy surrounding *īśvara* is altogether foolish. If this *īśvara* is superfluous to the central project of ultimate liberation, then is this *īśvara* even worthy of the title "God"? The lack of mechanical centrality is perhaps the strongest philosophical argument against a reconciliation of theism with the Sāṃkhya or Yoga traditions. However, I counter with the basic argument that since Pātañjala Sāṃkhya/Yoga is not governed by the structure of Classical Sāṃkhya, as a *body of thought* (rather than some solidified metaphysical artifice) it has no responsibility to prove that its *īśvara* is a structural necessity for an individual's ultimate release.

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<sup>14</sup> YS 3.56 *sattvapuruṣayoḥ śuddhisāmye kaivalyamiti*

<sup>15</sup> SK 68 *prāpte śarīrabhede caritārthavāt pradhānavinivṛttau | aikāntikam ātyantikam ubhayam kaivalyam āpnoti ||*

*HOW “CLASSICAL” IS THE SUPPOSED ATHEISM OF CLASSICAL SĀṂKHYA?*

It is generally agreed that up until the 4-5th century CE (the time of the PYŚ and the SK) “pre,” “early”, or “proto” Sāṁkhya cannot be cast as atheistic.<sup>16</sup> Franklin Edgerton famously remarked, “Where do we find that ‘original’ atheistic view expressed? I believe: *nowhere*.”<sup>17</sup> K.B.R. Rao’s exhaustive *Theism of Pre-Classical Sāṁkhya* all but ends the debate on this issue, and actually argues that the eventual decline of sām̐khya’s stature owes to its later, less-convincing, *atheistic* formulation.<sup>18</sup> Johannes Bronkhorst follows suit in acknowledging an originally theistic sām̐khya, though with a qualification regarding this theistic element—“Important is, however, that no Sāṁkhya texts of the first millennium deny God’s existence. Rather, more often than not they give us the impression that they accept God’s existence as a matter of course, but do not accept his causal agency with respect to the world.”<sup>19</sup> This notion of “causal agency” will be covered in greater detail in Section Three. Bronkhorst describes how the popular atheistic understanding of Sāṁkhya gained traction through the Jain author Haribhadra’s doxography, the *Śaḍḍarśanansamuccaya* (8<sup>th</sup> cent. CE), which differentiates a sām̐khya

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<sup>16</sup> Franklin Edgerton, “The Meaning of Sāṁkhya and Yoga,” in *The American Journal of Philology* (1924); Pulinbihari Chakravarti, *Origin and Development of the Sāṁkhya School of Thought* (1951; repr. Delhi: Munishiram Monoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1975); K.B. Ramakrishna Rao, *Theism of Pre-Classical Sāṁkhya* (Prasaranga: University of Mysore, 1966); Gerald James Larson, *Classical Samkhya* (1969; repr., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2011); Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian philosophy Volume I* (1975; repr., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2010); Johannes Bronkhorst, “Yoga and seśvara Sāṁkhya,” in *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 9 (1981).

<sup>17</sup> Franklin Edgerton, “The Meaning of Sāṁkhya and Yoga,” 8.

<sup>18</sup> K.B.R. Rao, *Theism of Pre-Classical Sāṁkhya*, 78-94.

<sup>19</sup> Johannes Bronkhorst, “God in Sāṁkhya,” in *Wiener Zeitschrift die Kunde Südasiens* 27 (1983): 6.

with God (*śeśvara*) from a sāmkhya without God (*nirīśvara*). Yet Bronkhorst argues that there is no reason to believe that even Haribhadra’s “īśvara” is anything but a reference to a creator God, and not any and all other formulations of God. In Mādhava’s *Sarvadarśanasamgraha* (14th cent. CE), once again the atheistic component of Sāmkhya is emphasized, yet it is only in the manner of denying the causal agency of God. Mādhava astoundingly sees this as proof enough to deny to possibility of *any* type of God in the Sāmkhya system, forecasting later, erroneous Indological claims in the process.<sup>20</sup>

Armed with only this superficial discord on the God-concept between the PYS and the SK, it is already justifiable to question Patañjali’s alliance or affiliation with Īśvarakṛṣṇa’s metaphysics. While Classical Sāmkhya and Classical Yoga are conveniently aligned for the sake of select discussions,<sup>21</sup> and may draw from a bank of like terminology, it is faulty to assume that Patañjali utilized or knew anything about the exact branch of sāmkhya depicted in the SK.<sup>22</sup> Surendranath Dasgupta was very prudent in isolating “Pātañjala Sāmkhya” from “Kārikā Sāmkhya” and even the earlier “Kapila Sāmkhya”. Larson follows by distinguishing in a similar way. Dasgupta, Larson, and other renowned sāmkhya scholars such as Charkravarti, Modi, and Rao, have all admitted

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<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Dickstein, “Richard Garbe, German Indology and the Messiness of (A)theistic Sāmkhya,” in *SAGAR: a South Asia Research Journal* xxiii (2015).

<sup>21</sup> I note Burely’s book even though he clearly understands the issue. Still I find that the phrasing of his title, “*Classical Sāmkhya and Yoga: an Indian metaphysics of experience*”, encourages a faulty alignment of these two traditions.

<sup>22</sup> Most scholars date the SK after the PYS, if only slightly. Larson seems to be the only one whose dating allows for the possible antecedence of the SK. See Gerald Larson and Ram Shankar Bhattacharya, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies Volume XII - Yoga: India’s Philosophy of Meditation* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2008), 53; Gerald Larson and Ram Shankar Bhattacharya *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies Volume IV - Sāmkhya: A Dualist Tradition in Indian Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 15; Gerald Larson, *Classical Sāmkhya*, 252.

the resemblance of Pātañjala Sāṃkhya to some form of Epic sāṃkhya, even if they do not agree on exactly which one. In the *Mokṣadharmā* section of the *Śāntiparva* of the *Mahābhārata* (Mbh), yoga and sāṃkhya are discussed extensively and at times contradictorily so, but there is repeated mention of sāṃkhyān ideas that clearly clash with the architecture of the SK. Particular Mbh formulations include a twenty-sixth principle, occasionally marked as the *puruṣa* in the liberated state but more commonly designated as some ultimate state or being. Note Dasgupta, Chakravarti, and Modi, with differing thought not completely opposed takes on this topic. Dasgupta claims,

In *Mahābhārata* XII. 318 three schools of Sāṃkhya are mentioned... This last school admitted a *supreme being* in addition to *puruṣa* and this was the twenty-sixth principle. This agrees with the orthodox Yoga system and the form of Sāṃkhya advocated in the *Mahābhārata*. The schools of Sāṃkhya of twenty-four and twenty-five categories are here denounced as unsatisfactory.<sup>23</sup>

And Chakravarti,

In our opinion, the twenty-sixth principle cannot be regarded as the doctrine of pure Sāṃkhya; but it is the Sāṃkhya-Yoga School of the Epic which is found to advocate the said doctrine.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> S. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 1, 217. Italics added.

<sup>24</sup> P. Chakravarti, *Origin and Development*, 50-51. For a full discussion, see pages 42-73. Assuming that “Sāṃkhya-Yoga” (Pātañjala Yoga) admits this twenty-sixth principle, the question of how it is understood (as a liberated *puruṣa* or an ultimate principle) is still debatable. Chakravarti emphasizes that this does not represent “pure” Sāṃkhya, but even still, it is not entirely clear how Sāṃkhya-Yoga conceives of this additional principle. It appears on p.48 that Chakravarti regards it as the *puruṣa* in the liberated state, but on p. 50, citing Jacobi, he juxtaposes it with the “universal spirit”. In either situation, Chakravarti labels the additional admission as “impure” sāṃkhya. As will become clear later, as far as Pātañjala Sāṃkhya is concerned, such a principle (if admissible) could only be considered a supreme principle or “supreme being”(as Dasgupta claims).

And Modi on this “Twenty-sixth”,

The other statements which mention the Twenty-sixth always refer either to the two Yoga Schools or to the Aupanīṣada School of the later Mahābhārata... Even XII. 308. 14-17 which refers to the Twenty-sixth of the Yoga is wonderfully accurate when it says that the Sāṃkhya mention “twenty-five principles” (XII. 308 14). The Sāṃkhyas believed that the *budhyamāna* becomes the buddha, but they never said that the Twenty-fifth becomes the Twenty-sixth, because in their School the *budhyamāna* is always numerically identical with the buddha.”<sup>25</sup>

For the present study, the salient point is that the Mbh includes *some* type of sāmkhya that influences or is adopted by Pātāñjala Yoga, and this sāmkhya differs from Īśvarakṛṣṇa’s Classical Sāṃkhya. Contradictions and ambiguities permeate the *Mokṣadharmā* portion of the Epic, yet they do not diminish the conclusion that Epic sāmkhya are dominantly theistic in nature, with “theistic” *provisionally* meaning that they adopt some additional concept or state, regardless if it raises questions about overall metaphysical coherence.<sup>26</sup> It is tempting to delve into the Mbh with the hope of locating the exact sāmkhya or yoga that forms the backdrop Pātāñjala Yoga. The “Hiraṇyagarbha Yoga” of Mbh. XII 308 is an obvious candidate and the one that Rao specifically isolates.<sup>27</sup> Much could also be gathered from the later *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, which highlights the theistic core of its synthesis of Epic Vedānta, sāmkhya, and yoga elements.

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<sup>25</sup> P.M. Modi, *Akṣara: A Forgotten Chapter in the History of Indian Philosophy* (Baroda: Baroda State Press, 1932), 58.

<sup>26</sup> Rao refers to these as “Epic Yogas” and not “Epic Sāṃkhyas” based on dissimilarities on certain positions. As I am not convinced, following Daya Krishna, that these can be separated convincingly given the strong similarities, I am not encumbered by such distinctions. However, whichever system of metaphysical enumeration (i.e. a “sāmkhya”) the Epic yogas follow, they include an additional feature or principle. See Rao, *Theism of Pre-Classical Sāṃkhya*, 289-293.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 292. For Rao’s full discussion, see p. 221-296.

Yet in this Upaniṣad the favored designation for “God” is not “*īśvara*”, thus forcing considerable speculation on the employed terminology. Any bold conclusions from these texts on the topic of “*īśvara*” are far from indubitable, and more importantly, draw the focus away from our internal understanding of Patañjali’s *īśvara*. This is worth repeating. The present project attempts to understand *īśvara* in the PYŚ based on the content of the PYŚ itself alongside contemporaneous understandings of the term. The sām̐khya of the PYŚ arguably evolved from some Epic conception, but as the PYŚ fails to profess allegiance to any singular conception and additionally takes pains to describe its own conception of *īśvara*, any heavy reliance on an individual Epic sām̐khya is flawed. Therefore, it is not altogether necessary to engage copious verses from the *Mokṣadharmā* to make a *general point* that is relatively uncontroversial among Mbh scholars. This general point is that formulations of sām̐khya in the Mbh include an additional *feature*, often tinged with theistic implications, and this feature is conspicuously absent in Classical Sām̐khya. As it resurfaces in the PYŚ as “*īśvara*”, it is reasonable to conclude that Pātañjala Sām̐khya resembles or draw from some form of Epic sām̐khya. For the time being, all that is necessary is the recognition that this feature, based on Mbh readings, could potentially refer to (1) the “awakened” individual *puruṣa*, (2) *īśvara* or a personal God of some sort, or (3) the “Universal Self” (which may or may not overlap with *īśvara*). The truly critical question now emerges, echoing Bronkhorst: In the case of the PYŚ, where an additional feature surfaces as “*īśvara*”, what *type* of *īśvara* is it? This question requires close primary source evaluation, as will be provided in the remaining sections.

### *WHO IS THIS IŚVARA?*

Before investigating the term itself, it is helpful to zoom out and ask—What is the actual dilemma? What’s all the fuss about? My overall suspicion is that owing to the secularization of Yoga following its transnational explosion in the modern period and the desire of scholars to present the YS as a fully rational and internally cohesive work, the status of *īśvara* has been ignored, trivialized, de-legitimized, or otherwise creatively rendered in order to harmonize with extrinsic sensibilities. There is no shortage of literature exploring Patañjali’s God from both Indian and non-Indian scholars, with some ridiculing the notion entirely and others revering it as the highest value in all of Yogic thought and practice. What is outstanding is how little philological work has been done on the actual word denoting God in the PYŚ especially with respect to other Sanskrit texts of the time period. To date I am only aware of the English works of M.D. Shastri and Lloyd Pflueger, both of whom target the term “*īśvara*” independent of the vast topic of theism in all Indic thought. Their work will be presented in the following section to help recreate the linguistic climate in which Patañjali invoked the term “*īśvara*”. While the trouble involved in dating early Indian texts is notorious, by casting a large enough temporal net around the PYŚ I believe that the most plausible depiction of Patañjali’s God can be determined.

## 2. A History of “īśvara”

With Sanskrit words, which have a huge range of meanings...you can only understand Sanskrit texts, especially this brief and condensed Sūtra text, if you position them somewhere in history.<sup>28</sup>

Phillip Maas

### THE TIMELINE

As the objective is to extract the meaning of the term “īśvara” in the YS,<sup>29</sup> it is essential to discover how the same word functioned in other texts of the epoch, especially works of the same genre (*mokṣaśāstra*, liberation scriptures). While it is impossible to date or geographically peg Patañjali with absolute precision, the most diplomatic option is to consult as many hypotheses as possible, even the less plausible ones. Fortunately, and quite ironically, the temporal extremes for this section derive from the viewpoints of teacher and student, Ram Shankar Bhattacharya and Gerald James Larson.

To my knowledge Bhattacharya argues for the earliest date of the YS, some time in the pre-Buddhist period before 500 BC.<sup>30</sup> His reasons are outlined in *An Introduction to the Yogasūtra*, though they have been highly doubted if not outright rejected by most modern scholars. Therefore, 500 BC stands as the most generous starting point, as I know of no other scholar who posits such an early date. One critic of Bhattacharya’s dating is his own student and eventual collaborator, Gerald Larson, who places the YS in a more

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<sup>28</sup> Philipp Maas, “Once More on Postures in the Pātañjala Yogaśāstra,” 45:20.

<sup>29</sup> In this section I generally use “YS” and not “PYŚ” as these scholars take the *sūtras* to be composed separately and earlier than the *bhāṣya*.

<sup>30</sup> R.S. Bhattacharya, *An Introduction to the Yogasūtra* (Delhi: Bharatiya Vidya Prakasana, 1985), 112.

generally accepted period of 350-400 CE. This date has been pushed forward by others into the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, presenting a daunting timeline for the YS of about a millennium! For the present project, this huge range of 500 BC- 500 CE is more than sufficient.

In the following paragraphs I summarize the studies of M.D. Shastri and Lloyd Pflueger, two scholars who have concentrated specifically on the history of the term “*īśvara*”. Of the two, Pflueger has contributed a more comprehensive study and one expressly directed at the YS. Naturally the present project would benefit an inclusion of all of the primary sources cited in these studies (and those not cited), but for reasons provided in Section One, the conclusions of these scholars are generally, though not absolutely, accepted by the present author. Both studies support the thesis argued in this paper, although Pflueger, curiously disregarding his own findings, subsequently injects a definition for *īśvara* in the YS that exhibits the modern tendency for creative re-interpretation.

#### *M.D. SHASTRI*

Shastri’s short 1935 publication, “A History of the Word ‘*Īśvara*’ And Its Idea”, ironically provides “an almost exhaustive survey of the Sanskrit literature” pertaining to the topic.<sup>31</sup> In this article Shastri presents a condensed history of the word leading up to the modern period without critically discussing incongruities between the term and the textual-philosophical context. In this sense his work leaves much to be desired, but much is to be gained as well.

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<sup>31</sup> M.D. Shastri, “The History of the Word ‘*Īśvara*’ and its Idea” in *Proceedings and Transactions of the All-India Conference* 7, (1935), 488.

The word “*īśvara*” derives from the Sanskrit verbal root “*īś*”, which means to “own”, “master”, “be master of”, “possess”, “rule” or “govern”. In early Sanskrit literature, other forms of the root appear in addition to verbally conjugated forms, such as the “*īśa*”, “*īśana*”, and “*aiśvarya*”. Shastri notes that “*aiśvarya*” undoubtedly stems from “*īśvara*”, and while carrying some sense of “lordship”, it is typically used in the sense of one’s worldly prosperity, visible through the ownership or mastery of other human beings and material possessions. Another noun, “*īśana*”, is understood as a synonym for “*īśvara*”, a word that broadly refers to some sort of master or ruler. I resist giving much weight to alleged synonyms for “*īśvara*” (other than compounds of the word such as *maheśvara*, *yogeśvara*, and *parameśvara*) as the YS exclusively uses the word “*īśvara*” to denote its God, though the *bhāṣya* exceptionally utilizes the word “*siddha*” at times as well. It is tempting and periodically justifiable to view all these terms basically equivalent, or at least indicative of particular aspects of a singular supreme divinity (as exists in Kaunḍinya’s commentary on the *Pāśupata Sūtra*<sup>32</sup>). Yet such an assumption goes well beyond the language of the YS/PYŚ itself, which deviates very little in its word choice. Hence, while these related terms are far from irrelevant to this study, they are not crucial either. The central question is how the word selected by Patañjali was commonly understood during this time period.

Shastri delineates three time segments in “*īśvara*” history: (1) Vedic period until the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC (though the word itself is only present in the *Atharvaveda Saṃhitā*)

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<sup>32</sup> “Here the word ‘*Patih*’ means the category of cause, in the concise form. But it is also given in detail as Vāma, Deva, Jyeṣṭha, Rudra, Kāmī (one who assumes forms at one’s sweet will), Śaṅkara, Kala, Kala-Vikaraṇa, Vala-vikaraṇa, Aghora, Ghoratara, Darva, Śarva, Tatpuruṣa, Mahādeva, Oṃkara, Ṛṣi, Vipra, Mahān, Īśa, Īśāna, Īśvara, Adhipati, Brahmā, and Śiva.” *Bhāṣya* on *Pāśupata Sūtra* 5.47, Haripada Chakraborti (trans.), *Pāśupata Sūtram: with Pañchārtha-Bhāṣya of Kaunḍinya* (Calcutta: Academic Publishers, 1970), 189.

(2) The “transitional” period, including the *Bhagavad Gītā* and *Manusmṛti* (not dated by Shastri, but given accepted dates for these two texts I provide an endpoint of 200 CE) (3) The third and final period, including certain Upaniṣads and later Sūtra literature, such as the YS itself.

During the first period up until the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century B.C, Shastri claims that “*īśvara*” was only understood in the sense of a “lord” or “master”, and that in the *Artharvaveda Saṃhitā* (the earliest known source for the term) it is used in the plural to refer to specific deities as lords or masters. These deities are limited or localized and not afforded universal supremacy. This period also includes the great grammatical works of Pāṇinī and Patañjali (a different Patañjali), in which “*īśvara*” is understood as an administrative head, such as a king or terrestrial ruler. In both cases the term was obviously reserved for masters of defined regions or things, designating a capacity for some form of high management. In Shastri’s terms, however, the term “*īśvara*” had not yet risen to the notion of a supreme Godhead (*paramēśvara*), some totalizing monotheistic or panentheistic “lord” of the world. Citing Shastri, this eventual conception of a totalizing God is to be understood as an “omnific, omnipresent, eternal supreme God, who is the Lord of all, above all gods and at the same time is an object of worship.”<sup>33</sup>

The second period of 200 BC to 200 CE is called the “transitional period” because “*īśvara*” takes on a sense other than a localized administrative head; now the term occasionally takes on the meaning of this “eternal supreme God”. Concerning the two works of this period that Shastri highlights, the *Manusmṛti* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the former predominantly exercises the prior meaning of “lord” with only two exceptions,

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<sup>33</sup> M.D. Shastri, “The History of the Word ‘Īśvara’ and its Idea,” 496

and in the *Gītā*, “*īśvara*” is *almost* uniformly used in this new sense of *īśvara* as *parameśvara*, or a supreme God.

Before introducing the final period, the question about the presence of the exact word “*īśvara*” in the early Upaniṣads is an interesting one. As Shastri notes, the word itself is absent in all ten of these famous works, except in the oldest, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. Yet in this text “*īśvara*” is “unambiguously used in the sense of ‘capable of’”,<sup>34</sup> which lends itself to the earlier usage referring to the aptitude of a ruler or administrative head. At *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* 4.4.22, one finds “*sarveśvaraḥ*”/ “lord of all”, but it indicates a type of ruling ability and is not indicative of some larger Godhead.<sup>35</sup> As Plueger concurs on this verse, “Though *īśvara* is mentioned, the emphasis here is on ātman...though there is some *ruling* going on, little attention is really going to anything like a theistic ruler.”<sup>36</sup> “*īśvara*” also shows up in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, but according to Shastri’s dating the *Śvetāśvatara* is a later *Upaniṣad* that, despite its youth, has still not fully adopted (also according to Shastri) the fully-fructified definition of *īśvara* as *parameśvara* as provided in the *Gītā*.

The third and final period captures the more sectarian Upaniṣads and the Sūtra literature of Yoga, Nyāya, and Sāṃkhya. Shastri maintains that these works completely adopt the burgeoning meaning of *īśvara* as *parameśvara/maheśvara*. Even though this conclusion about Patañjali’s *īśvara* is by no means incorrect, Shastri is overly

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 494.

<sup>35</sup> See *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.22 in Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upaniṣads* (1953; repr., New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2008), 278.

<sup>36</sup> Lloyd W. Plueger, “God, consciousness, and meditation: The concept of God in the ‘Yogasūtra’,” Unpublished Phd dissertation (University of California, Santa Barbara, 1990), 43.

presumptuous in attributing this meaning to the YS without detailed investigation. While the present study ultimately agrees with his final assessment, Shastri treats the issue with a brevity that ignores the intricacies evidenced by later exegetical, metaphysical, and theological debates.

Overall for Shastri, the dominance of *īśvara-as-parameśvara* extends well through the modern period, for excluding some sectarian uses of *parameśvara*, the term overwhelmingly took on an all-embracing sense as a supreme Godhead. Therefore, only two chief meanings for *īśvara* existed during this period, with the former gradually giving way to the latter; either a lord with regional dominion or a supreme God most commonly recognized in verses of the *Gītā* and later devotional literature.<sup>37</sup>

#### LLOYD W. PFLUEGER

Pflueger's 1990 unpublished dissertation "God, consciousness, and meditation: The concept of God in the 'Yogasūtra'" provides an expanded version of Shastri's inquiry. Pflueger is well aware of Shastri's article and builds off of it with only minor disagreement on the historical usage of "*īśvara*". Regarding the first two periods in the history of the term, Pflueger agrees Shastri on the major points. He then argues that it is not until the arrival of the *īśvara* of the *Gītā* and a contemporaneous *Upaniṣad* that the supposed problem of God reveals itself. Shastri offered very direct treatment of this *Upaniṣad*, the *Śvetāśvatara*, tersely stating that within this work the fulfillment of the evolution of *īśvara* into *parameśvara* had not yet taken place. The *Śvetāśvatara* is clearly

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<sup>37</sup> Space does not permit a discussion of the distinctions between monotheism, pantheism, and panentheism. It is enough to assert that the God-concept here never loses its transcendent and personal quality, and hence cannot be encapsulated by the strict pantheistic equation of God=Material Reality.

a Śiva-centric text, synonymizing *īśvara* with that “*maheśvara*”<sup>38</sup> (“great God”) who is none other than Śiva himself. Although Shastri is hesitant to concede the point, this depiction of God is basically equivalent to the one he defined above, carrying all the typical attributes one assumes with totalizing monotheistic-like deity. As Pflueger asserts more forcefully, “Rudra-Śiva’s distinct elevation to *parameśvara*, supreme Lord, maintainer, and Destroyer of the world, is accomplished in the *Śvetāśvatara*.”<sup>39</sup> He adds, gesturing forwards, “The of *īśvara* as *parameśvara* in particular gives expression to the coalescence of impersonal and personal conceptions of divinity, an Upaniṣadic half-way house to devotional theism”. If the *Śvetāśvatara* is a stepping stone to devotional theism, then akin to Shastri, Pflueger chronologically places the *Śvetāśvatara* before the *Gītā*, if only slightly. Interestingly enough, K.B.R. Rao asserts that the *Gītā* precedes the *Śvetāśvatara*, though he does recognize existent arguments to the contrary.<sup>40</sup> This mere suggestion calls into question Shastri’s argument that the *Śvetāśvatara* marks a formative period in which *īśvara* is still becoming the supreme Godhead offered full form in the *Gītā*. Without tackling this chronological debate in depth, I merely intend to illustrate that both the *Śvetāśvatara* and the *Gītā* are sām̐khya- and yoga-infused texts, and both understand *īśvara* in an all-embracing sense.

Pflueger’s most significant contribution to the discussion involves his isolation of the *Gītā* as source of something profoundly different in this history of both the word and idea of *īśvara*. The unique feature of the text lies in Kṛṣṇa’s admission of his debatably

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<sup>38</sup> See for example, *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 4.10 and 6.7, in Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upaniṣads*, 734.

<sup>39</sup> Lloyd Pflueger, “God, consciousness, and meditation”, 83.

<sup>40</sup> Rao recognizes that even Modi places the *Gītā* after the *Śvetāśvatara*. K.B.R. Rao, *Theism of Pre-Classical Sām̐khya*, 306.

panentheistic nature, with a corresponding ability to “cross-over” into the world in innumerable forms or avatars.<sup>41</sup> The first ‘new’ quality that distinguishes Kṛṣṇa from earlier conceptions of *īśvara* as God is that in addition to being the foundation *for* the universe (i.e. responsible for its existence, maintenance, and destruction) the *Gītā*’s God is now also immanent *in* the universe.<sup>42</sup> The second ‘new’ quality, that of being able to manifest through avatars, asserts *īśvara*’s direct activity in the world and in a very personal way, as these avatars descend precisely to *physically* interact in the lives of sentient beings. On this topic, my own magnification of the *Gītā* in Section Four highlights the kinship of these “new” qualities with the PYŚ’ descriptions of *īśvara*, and also how the God-talk of the *Gītā* closely resembles that of the PYŚ. The objective both here and in Section Four is not to dissect Kṛṣṇa’s status from a theological perspective, but rather illustrate how both texts are claiming a similar, if not identical, *type* of divinity.

The nuances of God’s supremacy and intimacy are fascinating for theological discussion (such as how He manifests in the world yet remains disinterested and untainted) but they are tangential to unearthing the fundamental meaning of “*īśvara*” in the PYŚ. I acknowledge this because typically the God of the PYŚ is denied association with any of the totalizing conceptions provided in the *Śvetāśvatara* or the *Gītā*, for reasons that will become apparent. Yet up to this point both Shastri and Pflueger are in agreement that, in a *mokṣasāstra* context, the word “*īśvara*” had taken on the meaning of

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<sup>41</sup> “*Avatāra*” literally refers to one who “crosses down” or “crosses over”.

<sup>42</sup> Pflueger issues a pantheistic quality to Kṛṣṇa, where if anything “panentheistic” is more appropriate. “Kṛṣṇa however, is not only the foundation of *brahman*, and the person beyond the universe who rules it, he is also the pantheistic divinity immanent through it.” Lloyd Pflueger, “God, consciousness, and meditation”, 56.

a supreme monotheistic/panentheistic ‘X’ and this is the religio-metaphysical ground out of which the PYŚ and the literature of the last period arose.

Pflueger admirably appraises the late period, especially with respect to Viṣṇu- and Śiva-centered conceptions of God as offered in the *Viṣṇu Purāna* and the *Pāśupata Sūtra*. Some works of this period, such as the *Pāśupata Sūtra*, denigrate the renunciation-oriented tenets of Sāṃkhya and Yoga, which encourage a type of ‘un-yoking’ from the world.<sup>43</sup> S.R. Goyal, who Pflueger consistently cites, demarcates the two by stating, “Patañjali defines yoga as the suppression of mental modes (*chittavṛttinirodha* [sic]), withdrawing the mind from all objects. But, according to the Pāśupatas, yoga is the union of a soul with God through trance or complete absorption of the mind in Him.”<sup>44</sup> This division is a bit crude for although Patañjali does define yoga as mental cessation, he also states that its attainment may be reached by “trance or complete absorption of the mind in Him” (YS 1.23). There is no doubt that the emphasis on *īśvara* is extremely strong in the *Pāśupata Sūtra*, not only because the God contained therein is ultimately totalizing in almost every sense, but also because liberation is said to ensue particularly from the grace (*prasāda*) of Śiva, and not from alternative techniques such as knowledge or dispassion.<sup>45</sup>

However, the intention here is not to gauge the philosophical consistency of Classical Yoga within some form of sāmkhya nor evaluate the efficacy of its

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<sup>43</sup> “Yoga” is linked to the Sanskrit root “yuj”, which means to join or yoke.

<sup>44</sup> S.R. Goyal, *A Religious History of Ancient India (up to c. 1200 A.D.) Volume Two: Smārta, epic-Paurāṇika and Tāntrika Hinduism, Christianity and Islam* (Meerut: Kusumanjali Prakashan, 1986), 263.

<sup>45</sup> Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy Volume V: Southern Schools of Śaivism* (1922 reprint Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2012), 132. See Footnote 1 for Kaṇḍinya’s comment.

soteriological techniques. The fundamental conception of *īśvara* is actually not drastically malformed by sectarian opinions concerning the hierarchy of means to, and of, *īśvara*. In view of the studies considered above, one can confidently surmise that shortly before the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, the word “*īśvara*” carried no other conceivable meanings than a basic “master” or “lord” of some thing, or, and much more appropriately to the texts of the genre, a supreme God worthy of devotion, even if this God’s powers or characteristics differed at times according to sectarian positions. Respecting the textual history of the term and in the absence of a provable alternative, one can tentatively assume that Patañjali’s work employed the most prevalent and apt definition of the period. If any argument is to be made to the contrary, it must substantively demonstrate how another time-sensitive definition exists and is clearly being applied, or make the bold assertion that Patañjali advanced an entirely original interpretation for the meaning of the word “*īśvara*” (as Gerald Larson has done<sup>46</sup>). While scholars such as Eliade, Feuerstein, Whicher, and Pflueger himself appear to take the latter position for granted, as if Pātañjali’s description of *īśvara* obviously marks an innovation in fundamental meaning, this is simply not supported in the pre-modern, traditional commentaries.

#### *RETURNING TO THE SO-CALLED PROBLEM OF GOD*

Prior to launching into the main task of determining how the word “*īśvara*” operates in the *Yogaśāstra*, it is sensible to ask why a reconsideration of the word is necessary at all. Why is there a lack on consensus? Why is the standard *mokṣaśāstra*

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<sup>46</sup> Gerald James Larson, “Yoga’s Atheistic Theism: A New Way of Thinking About God” in *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 25 (2012).

definition of “*īśvara*” as “*paramēśvara*” distressing to PYŚ scholarship? I see two main reasons, the second of which is fit to be handled at length here.

The first objective to the standard meaning has little to do with the etymology or historical use of the word “*īśvara*”, and nor does it summon overlooked or neglected meanings of the word. Rather it derives from the widespread secularization of religion in the modern period, specifically within Western thought and academic scholarship of South Asia. As a consequence, the admittance of God in an otherwise fascinating exploration of the mind-complex and its ongoing suffering (which exists in the PYŚ), is quite frankly inconvenient and bothersome. As *īśvara* does not assume an exclusive role in eliminating the root suffering of the individual aspirant, disregarding Him in the PYŚ does not suffer the fate of tossing the baby out with the bath water. A prominent feature is unmistakably neglected, but not the assumed ‘essence’ of the text. Hence this first motivation for problematizing the inclusion or definition of “*īśvara*” in the PYŚ, or casually labeling it a sectarian accretion or commentarial corruption, has little to do with the text itself but rather an extrinsic motivation to eliminate ‘religious’ or God-oriented aspects from the ‘core’ doctrine.<sup>47</sup>

This second dilemma relates to the first insofar as they share a desire for logical consistency. The obstacle involves the internal paradox in both Sāṃkhya and Yoga in which the enumerated metaphysical categories have little need for the action of God. Although early sāmkhya (pre-*Sāṃkhyakārikā*,) assumed theistic elements in various manifestations, its soteriology was never wholly dependent on the grace or work of a

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<sup>47</sup> This is not the central claim of this paper, but it is nevertheless an important one. Although their recent book does not deal with the PYŚ specifically, this secularizing tendency is explored in Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, *The Nay Science: A History of German Indology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

God-like entity; the embodied Self could apparently achieve liberation through individual effort alone. The base sāmkhya worldview, which is adopted by the PYŚ in one fashion or another,<sup>48</sup> is grounded in a fundamental dualism. The individual Self (*puruṣa*) marks one pole and material reality (*prakṛti*, including the mind-complex or *citta*) marks the other.<sup>49</sup> In both Sāmkhya and Yoga, the individual Selves are isolated from one another and also (in an absolute sense) from the shared material reality to which they are illusorily bound. Suffering stems from the false belief that one's true identity resides in some aspect of *prakṛti* (such as the *citta*) when in fact one's true nature is only *puruṣa* or the Self. Therefore, for both of these traditions, Sāmkhya and Yoga, the removal of this ignorance (*avidyā*) is what catalyzes liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

If this metaphysical architecture is accurate and ultimate liberation is to be sought, there remain theoretical and practical hurdles for both classical traditions. While neither depends, in a soteriological sense, on the principle of *īśvara*, Classical Sāmkhya more successfully evades the theistic conundrum on a superficial level by simply ignoring the issue. There is simply no mention of God in the *Sāmkhya-kārikā*. Furthermore, the existence of God is actually rejected in a medieval work (though it unconvincingly claims ancient origins) on sāmkhya, the *Sāmkhya-sūtra*. Classical Yoga includes “*īśvara*” in its worldview and a convincing defense for its admittance is no easy endeavor. Gaspar

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<sup>48</sup> Sometimes the overly simplistic claim is made that Yoga is practical Sāmkhya and Sāmkhya is theoretical Yoga. The problem lies in determining what one means by “Yoga” and *which form* of sāmkhya this Yoga is tied to.

<sup>49</sup> Daya Krishna concludes that the foundational dualistic maxim of sāmkhya, the segregation of the Self from material reality, is what really makes Sāmkhya “sāmkhyan”. It is not so simple as that as, but historically this is what has established sāmkhya as its own area of philosophical speculation. Daya Krishna, Chapter 7 “Is Īśvarakṛṣṇa’s Sāmkhya-Kārikā Really Sāmkhyan?” in *Indian Philosophy*.

Koelman does not deny the theistic bent of the PYŚ, but nevertheless concludes that “a doctrine of God could not consistently be expressed in *Sāṅkhyan* [sic] terminology, could not be logically compossible with Sāṅkhyan categories.”<sup>50</sup> In spite of this great and perhaps insurmountable philosophical difficulty, modern interpreters of the text have conjured alternative definitions of “*īśvara*” to force a reconciliation and lend credence to the notion of a sound and watertight philosophy of Classical Yoga. My contention is that these amount to purely corrective measures, exercised in order to ‘fix’ the arguably ‘bad philosophy’ of Patañjali. This is a poor tactic for Yoga scholarship and therefore I agree with Maas that “future studies in Yoga philosophy will be particularly promising when they give up the doxographical approach completely.”<sup>51</sup> In the following section, after a presentation of “*īśvara*” in the PYŚ, I will provide a few examples of alternative *īśvaras*, such as proposed by Gerald Larson and his former pupil Lloyd Pflueger.

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<sup>50</sup> Gaspar M. Koelman, *Patañjala Yoga* (Poona: Papal Athanaeum, 1970), 64.

<sup>51</sup> Philipp Maas, “A Concise Historiography”, 79.

### 3. *Īśvara* in the *Yogasūtra/Yogaśāstra*

#### CHOOSING A PĀTAÑJALA YOGAŚĀSTRA

In Section One I offered a rationale for heeding Maas’ advice to receive the PYŚ as a text of unified authorial intention. What was not mentioned is how Maas and Kengo Harimoto position Śaṅkara’s *Pātañjalayogśāstravivarāṇa* (8<sup>th</sup> cent. CE?) as the oldest and, perhaps most importantly, most authoritative commentary on the PYŚ. Without dissecting the authorship question of the *Pātañjalayogśāstravivarāṇa*,<sup>52</sup> suffice it to say that Maas generally agrees with Albrecht Wezler that, “to anyone experienced in dealing with problems of textual criticism it becomes plain that the author of the *Vivarāṇa* knew or had before him a text of the Y[ogasūtra]Bhāṣya that is definitely older than that known to Vācaspatimiśra and hence comes closer to the original.”<sup>53</sup> While the original publication of this commentary in 1952 certainly added to our understanding of the PYŚ, questions of authorship and dating kept it marginalized compared to other commentaries, specifically Vācaspati Miśra’s well-known *Tattvavaiśāradi* (10<sup>th</sup> cent. CE). As this latter text is the bedrock upon which modern most modern PYŚ scholarship has articulated, any move to base the present essay on the *Vivarāṇa* tempts an immediate objection from

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<sup>52</sup> Kengo Harimoto, *God, Reason, and Yoga: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Commentary Ascribed to Śaṅkara on Pātañjalayogaśāstra 1.23-28* (Hamburg: Universitat Hamburg, 2014), 5-11, 225-251. Philipp Maas, “A Concise Historiography,” 72-80. Philipp Maas, *Samadhipada*, 165-170. Trevor Leggett, *Śaṅkara on the Yoga Sūtras: A Full Translation of the Newly Discovered Text* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006), 4-6, 17-33. Wilhelm Halbfass, “Śaṅkara, the Yoga of Patañjali, and the so-called Yogasūtrabhāṣyavivarāṇa,” in *Tradition and Reflection* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 205-245. Albrecht Wezler, “Philological Observations on the so-called Pātañjalayogśāstrabhāṣyavivarāṇa (Studies in the Pātañjalayogśāstrabhāṣyavivarāṇa I,” in *Indo-Iranian Journal* 25 (1983):17-40. T.S. Rukmani, *Yogavarttika of Vijñānabhikṣu* 4 Vols. (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1981-1989) ix-xxxii.

<sup>53</sup> Albrecht Wezler, from “Philological Observations” cited in Philipp Maas, *Samadhipada*, 166. See Maas’ Note 6.

those who reject its dating, accuracy, and authority. For this reason, until the *Vivarāṇa* is widely accepted in mainstream scholarship as carrying equal if not greater authority than the *Tattvavaiśāradi*, I will conform to the *sūtras* and *bhāṣya* as offered in Vācaspati Miśra’s work. This dares an accusation of incongruence, one that Maas himself would probably venture,<sup>54</sup> for it weds the *sūtras* and *bhāṣya* of a manuscript that the commentator himself viewed as distinct. However, as the *bhāṣya* in the *Tattvavaiśāradi* does not diverge drastically from that in the *Vivarāṇa*, my approach is not unreasonable given the singular focus of this study. While I am personally convinced that my overall conclusion — “*īśvara* means *parameśvara* in word and idea”<sup>55</sup> — can be gathered from the *sūtras* alone, when considered alongside the *bhāṣya* the point becomes overwhelmingly persuasive. In the years to come, if the *Vivarāṇa* eventually emerges as the most authoritative text of the PYŚ, I sense that this conclusion would only be strengthened further.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Maas critiques Filliozat’s on this point, and the same critique could feasibly apply here. “Filliozat’s translation of the Pātañjala Yogaśāstra (2005), although a useful work of scholarship, does not fulfill scholarly requirements. It is based on the vulgate version of the Pātañjala Yogaśāstra, its annotations are mainly intended for a more general readership, and it does not use the explanations of the *Vivarāṇa*.” Phillip Maas, “A Concise Historiography”, Note 41, 78-79.

<sup>55</sup> Meaning that *īśvara* is, to use Shastri’s words once again, an “omnific, omnipresent, eternal supreme God, who is the Lord of all, above all gods and at the same time is an object of worship.”

<sup>56</sup> Not to mention the commentator’s strong emphasis on the “*īśvara sūtras*”. Regarding the *sūtras* of the first chapter alone, Harimoto notes, “In length, the section of the six *sūtras* out of 190+ *sūtras* of the entire YS occupies about 9% of the whole text. The commentary on *sūtra* 1.25 alone occupies about 6% of the whole text. In number of syllables, the whole section is equivalent of about 500 *ślokas*, about the size of a small work.” Kengo Harimoto, *God, Reason, and Yoga*, 9-10.

### GOD IN THE SAMĀDHI PĀDA

The word “*īśvara*” appears in select *sūtras* of the first two *pādas* (chapters) of the four-chapter YS. The first chapter contains the most controversial material, in particular the definitive statements on the nature of *īśvara*. The second chapter adds little new definitional information but rather emphasizes God’s importance in light of certain types of yoga practice. The third chapter does not include the word “*īśvara*” in its *sūtras* but two key references occur in the *bhāṣya*. Before engaging the text, I would be remiss not to mention that Edwin Bryant has broached this topic in detail in his work on the YS.<sup>57</sup> My goal is to fortify much of the argument contained therein and penetrate deeper into the *bhāṣya* to highlight several new components to complete the proposed understanding of *īśvara*. Contrary to the not infrequent non-dual biases of the main traditional commentators (specifically Śaṅkara, Vācaspati Miśra, and Vijñānabhikṣu), the present analysis adheres to a type of dualistic theism in the PYŚ that aligns with some pre-SK conception of sāmṅhya. It is possible that the author of the PYŚ ultimately favored a form of monism, hidden for reasons I allude to in Section Four, but this is nowhere *substantively* revealed in the PYŚ. For the time being, I resist any dependence on additional sub-commentaries that lean towards non-dual interpretations and proceed along the narrower lines of illustrating the PYŚ’ God “as He is”. Not only do I think the text is descriptive enough to provide this definition, but that its murky dualistic theism is not necessarily irreconcilable with some overarching (albeit speculative) non-dual superstructure.

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<sup>57</sup> Edwin Bryant, *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, 81-118, 471-474.

The first chapter of the YS, the *Samādhi Pāda* (Chapter on Meditative Absorption), includes fifty-one *sūtras*. The God-concept is either named or inferred in YS 1.23-1.29. The word “*īśvara*” itself surfaces in two of these seven *sūtras*, though through pronouns and substitute nouns the same *īśvara* is uncontestedly implied in the remaining five. Leading up to this section of the YS, Patañjali has described the meaning of “*yoga*” (1-2), the two potential paths of awareness for the mind-complex (3-4), the various fluctuations of the mind-complex (5-11), the need for tenacity and dispassion in controlling the mind (12-16), the four levels of ‘meditative absorption’ (17-20), and the different fitness levels of aspirants (21-22). The following seven *sūtras* are directed specifically at *īśvara*, with the first one introducing Him as vehicle for the goal of absolute meditative absorption.

### YS 1.23

*īśvarapraṇidhānād vā* | Or, [mental cessation may be achieved] by devotion to God (*īśvara*).<sup>58</sup>

The first word in the translation—“or”—refers to the particle “*vā*” at the end of the original *sūtra*.<sup>59</sup> It announces that devotion (*praṇidhāna*) to God is a viable alternative to that which has been described before, namely YS 1.12’s designated means for mental

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<sup>58</sup> All translations are original unless otherwise noted. I admit similarities to translations composed by Bryant, Leggett, and Rukmani, but this is only natural given the brevity of the *sūtras* and the admiration I have for their work.

<sup>59</sup> “*Vā*” is occasionally used in the sense of “*ca*”/“and”, but the meaning here as “or” is adopted in all traditional sub-commentaries. It also makes the most sense contextually.

cessation, *abhyāsa* (tenacity) and *vairāgya* (dispassion).<sup>60</sup> The *sūtras* leading up to YS 1.23 describe *abhāsyā* and *vairāgya* in detail and at this point the alternative route of *īśvarapraṇidhāna* is given. I find this understanding of “*vā*” to be the most accurate yet two additional interpretations should be noted. First, the “*vā*” in the *sūtra* could arguably point a different aspect of the preceding *sūtras*, namely the *intensity* of the *abhāsyā* and *vairāgyam* of YS 1.21 and YS 1.22.<sup>61</sup> The meaning here would be that the accomplishment of yoga is near for one who adopts these practices intensely or by one who executes them *with* devotion to God. I find this reading less credible as it is unclear exactly how one practices *abhāsyā* and *vairāgya* without intensity yet combined with *īśvarapraṇidhāna*. What would that mean and entail? A persuasive argument for this interpretation is not altogether impossible, yet even if adopted our basic understanding of *īśvara* would still not be significantly altered. Second, another reading of YS 1.23’s “*vā*” would maintain that *īśvarapraṇidhāna* is but one of the many feasible objects for meditation listed in YS 1.33-1.39, since these are also marked by the particle “*vā*”. This hypothesis is even more suspicious given that this list of meditative options begins at YS1.33 and not YS 1.23. This starting point at YS 1.33 is not only the more plausible conclusion from a grammatical standpoint given that this *sūtra* immediately precedes the one with the “*vā*”, but more significantly, the *abhāsyā* expresses this *sūtra*’s relationship to the succeeding *sūtras*, which YS 1.23 does not.<sup>62</sup> Thus, the most convincing assessment

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<sup>60</sup> YS 1.11 *abhyāsavairāgyābhyāṃ tannirodhaḥ*

<sup>61</sup> YS 1.21 *tivrasaṃvegānāmāsannaḥ*  
YS1.22 *mṛdumadhyādhimātratvāt tato’pi viśeṣaḥ*

<sup>62</sup> YBh 1.33 concludes with: *prasannamekāgraṃ sthitipadaṃ labhate* | [Then the mind] Is clear and attains stability and one-pointedness.

links YS 1.23 to YS 1.12 and distinguishes the two options for YS 1.2's *cittavṛttinirodhaḥ* as YS 1.12's *abhyāsavairāgya* and YS 1.23's *īśvarapraṇidhāna*. As Bryant states regarding the viability of both, and perhaps Patañjali's proclivity for the latter, "Patañjali, like the Gītā, is not denying that the *ātman* can be attained by self-effort, but he is clearly favoring a theistic approach."<sup>63</sup>

While we have yet to encounter a description of *īśvara* Himself, *praṇidhāna* to/of Him is glossed in the *bhāṣya* as a distinct type of devotion, a "*bhaktiviśeṣa*". Monier-Williams provides definitions for "*praṇidhāna*" as "laying on", "fixing", and "applying", as found in *Caraka Saṃhitā* (1<sup>st</sup> cent. CE) and *Suśruta Saṃhitā* (6<sup>th</sup> cent. CE). The term used in the *bhāṣya*—"bhakti"—is pivotal in texts such as the *Bhagavad Gītā* where a totalizing God is fully accepted. Furthermore, in the *Gītā*, *īśvara* as Kṛṣṇa refers to *bhakti* towards Him as a type of fixation or application. In verse 12.6, denoting his devotees, Kṛṣṇa describes them as "meditating on me" ("*mām dhyāyanta*"). If we correctly take "meditating" in the sense of the PYŚ' "*dhyāna*", which is but the continuation of concentration on a single point, then we invoke the same notion of "fixing" or "applying".<sup>64</sup> The important distinction here is that the point of fixation is none other than God himself, and hence "*īśvarapraṇidhāna*" or even "*praṇidhāna*" alone conjures this idea of devotion with or without the term "*bhakti*". However, as the *bhāṣya* is vague on the meaning of *bhaktiviśeṣa* at this point, it is premature to hastily equate the meaning of the compound with another, extra-textual definition of *bhakti*. It is also somewhat

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<sup>63</sup> Edwin Bryant, *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, 86.

<sup>64</sup> YS 3.1 *deśabandhacittasya dhāraṇā*  
 YS 3.2 *tatraprayayaikatānatā dhyānam*

unnecessary as the present goal is merely to establish the status and role of the object of this *bhaktiviśeṣa*, that is, *īśvara*.

As a result of this distinct form of devotion, the yogin receives the “favor” (*anugraha*) of *īśvara*. Trevor Leggett translates the *bhāṣya* to read that as a result of this special devotion, *īśvara* “bends down to him and rewards him”.<sup>65</sup> I hesitate to fully sanction an anthropomorphic translation for “*anugraha*” as a “bending down”, even though it is not too far-fetched. As will become evident in the discussion of YS 1.26, what is much more objectionable than Leggett’s translation is Georg Feuerstein’s definition of *īśvara* as “the archetypal yogin who ‘instructs’ by his sheer being.” Feuerstein repeats Eliade’s construal of this interaction, of this “favoring”, as one of “meta-physical sympathy”.<sup>66</sup> While the present paper disagrees with Feuerstein’s general depiction of *īśvara* as an idea or archetype, for the moment I underscore this peculiar and unconvincing notion of an inactive favoring that operates through “sheer being”. This idea is dubious in light of the *bhāṣya* of YS 1.23 and highly inappropriate when coupled with that of YS 1.26, both of which speak to the active assistance of *īśvara*. It seems that because of the supposed metaphysical problems involved in admitting an “active” *īśvara*, Feuerstein, Eliade, and others resort to creative discussions of favoring, obliging, or assisting, without any real, *prakṛtic* infusion or involvement. The *bhāṣya* however has no problem alluding to a *prakṛtically*-active God-concept.

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<sup>65</sup> Trevor Leggett, *Śaṅkara on the Yoga Sūtras*, 106.

<sup>66</sup> Georg Feuerstein, *The Philosophy of Classical Yoga* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1980), 12.

### YS 1.24

*kleśakarmavipākāśayair aparāmr̥ṣṭah puruṣaviśeṣa īśvaraḥ* | God is a distinct Self, He is untouched by afflictions, *karma*, the fruition of *karma*, and predispositions.

YS I.24 carries the trickiest clause, the one that has perplexed Yoga scholars for centuries. *Īśvara* is defined as a “*puruṣaviśeṣa*”, a “distinct Self”, who is untouched by afflictions, *karma*, the fruition of *karma*, and predispositions. It is conspicuous that this description of *īśvara* is intended to play off of the tragic predicament of all other sentient beings, who constantly being *touched* by afflictions, *karma*, the fruition of *karma*, and predispositions, are born time and time again into the world of suffering. *Īśvara*, on the other hand, unlike all of the other *puruṣas* has never been subject to these factors. It is owing to this particular attribute or His absolute otherness (it is not stated in the *bhāṣya*), that *īśvara* is called a distinct Self and is in fact the only distinct Self.

Regardless of how substantial the “*viśeṣa*” or distinctiveness of *īśvara* is, the term “*puruṣaviśeṣa*” still appears to place *īśvara* into the category (*tattva*) of “*puruṣa*”. Both the PYŚ and the SK agree that even though *puruṣas* are qualitatively identical, they are quantitatively distinct and multiple, if not infinite in number. The only quantitative oneness is the *prakṛti*, which is the ultimately singular (as *pradhāna* or *mūla-prakṛti*) shared realm of them all.<sup>67</sup> So even if God is distinct because of his lack of contact with afflictions, *karma*, etc., He is still fundamentally (i.e. qualitatively) no different than the other Selves. However, this conclusion hinges on the assumption that “*puruṣa*” carries

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<sup>67</sup> See SK18 and YS II.22 for the recognition of this *puruṣabahutva*, or plurality of Selves. Gerald Larson questions this entire idea, and is mentioned near the end of this section. Lloyd Pflueger also doubts that Sāṃkhya and Yoga accept this idea, though it is quite explicit in my view.

only one invariable meaning in sāmkhya or Yoga, that is, the twenty-fifth *tattva*, the individual *puruṣa* itself. But as section one has argued, Pātañjala Sāmkhya need not align perfectly with SK Sāmkhya. “*Puruṣa*” is a common and flexible Sanskrit word and has seemingly been appropriated by Patañjali specifically for its flexibility. Moreover, YBh 1.24 takes pains to describe how this *puruṣaviśeṣa*’s lordship (*aiśvarya*) cannot be surpassed or even matched, hence establishing an unmistakable demarcation between God and the other Selves. After describing how this ultimate lordship cannot be possessed by more than one Self, the *bhāṣya* states, “Thus He is only *īśvara* who is free from any equal or superior lordship.”<sup>68</sup> In other words, there can only be one *īśvara*, only one unique *puruṣaviśeṣa*, and thus it is problematic to describe *īśvara* (as some have) as any individual *puruṣa* in the liberated state. If this were the case, many *puruṣas* would wield equal lordship, a situation that the *bhāṣya* firmly rejects. The PYŚ has no problem using the term “*puruṣa*” for its God and thus seemed unconcerned with a potential confusion with the individual Self. This idea will be further addressed in Section Four where we see how even the highly theistic and devotional *Bhagavad Gītā* employs the term “*puruṣa*” to refer to its totalizing God, Kṛṣṇa.

Lexical matters aside, one key metaphysical objection argues that all of the qualities listed in YS 1.24 are not exclusive to *īśvara*. While *puruṣas* are said to be pained or afflicted or bound, in fact is only *as if* they are pained, afflicted, or bound. YBh 1.24 describes *īśvara* as a military general, who while not physically engaging in the actual battle, is nevertheless credited with victory or defeat. *īśvara* is but a witness

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<sup>68</sup> YBh 1.24 *tasmādyasya sāmīyātiśayairvinirmuktamāiśvaryaṃ sa eveśvaraḥ*

(*draṣṭr*), an experiencer (*bhoktr*<sup>69</sup>), yet certainly not a doer (*kartr*) in the conventional sense. However, this definition conceivably applies to all *puruṣas* and not only *īśvara*. It may appear like the *puruṣa* has been afflicted and bound, but in fact this has never been the case, is not the case, or nor ever will it be the case. Like the SK, the PYŚ adheres to the idea that, “No one, then, is bound, nor released, nor wanders; it is *prakṛti*, in its various abodes, that wanders, and is bound and released (SK 62).”<sup>70</sup> Thus our understanding of the distinctiveness of *īśvara* requires a qualification. He is not the only *puruṣa* who has never been bound, but rather He is the only *puruṣa* who has never been *as-if* bound! Though this determination may seem improbable or purely semantic at first, the problem dissolves when one remembers that the cycle of *saṃsara* is fueled by false knowledge, *avidyā*,<sup>71</sup> where the “as-if” is taken to be the “as”. The *puruṣa* affiliated with a *prakṛtic* body is fundamentally free, but the strength of the *citta*’s false knowledge obscures this fundamental freedom and creates an as-if bondage. In fact, the *puruṣa* only continues to affiliate with bodies, to be ‘reborn’ so long as this as-if-ness persists. The *puruṣa* is released from *saṃsara* once false knowledge is removed and the ever-existent freedom of *puruṣa* is unveiled and dwelled within.<sup>72</sup> At this point *īśvara* can feasibly be

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<sup>69</sup> I admit that the term “*bhoktr*” is more troublesome than “*draṣṭr*” when characterizing the *puruṣa*. An “experiencer”, “enjoyer”, or “eater” seems strongly tied to the idea of a mind-body that can experience, enjoy, or eat. However, using the idea of the military general, while he does not fight in the actual battle, he both *sees* the event and, in a sense, *enjoys* it. He also *experiences* the credit or blame resulting from victory or defeat.

<sup>70</sup> Translation in Mikel Burley, *Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga*, 177. Also see YS 4.34 for the idea of a double liberation, meaning *prakṛti*’s liberation from service to the *puruṣa* and *puruṣa*’s as-if liberation from *prakṛti*.

<sup>71</sup> YS 2.16 *tasya heturavidyā* | The cause [of connection] is ignorance/false knowledge.

<sup>72</sup> YS 2.25 *tadabhāvāt saṃyogābhāvo hānaṃ tadṛśeḥ kaivalyam* | With the absence of ignorance/false knowledge, connection is also absent; this removal is the ultimate freedom of the Seer.

distinguished from the other Selves but not in any remarkable manner. He is an aloof, untainted, special Self who has never been afflicted by false knowledge nor tormented by *saṃsara*, who abides eternally in a state sought by all yogins. This is perhaps where the conjecture of the archetypal yogin emerges, as Ian Whicher adds, echoing Feuerstein, “It is possible to see *īśvara*’s role as guru in purely metaphorical terms,” [who can be seen as] “the utter formless transcendent teacher” and the “archetypal yogin.”<sup>73</sup>

Reflecting on the previous *sūtra*, serious, pressing questions begin to emerge. If this *īśvara* has never and will never be thrust into *saṃsara*, how can He possibly interact with other Selves? How can he “favor” or “bend down” to them? Does not taking on a mind-complex and a body assume wishes, desires, and the production of some *karma*, no matter how minimal? How can this God favor without transgressing his status as being eternally untouched by action? Conversely, if this God cannot practically interact with the *puruṣas*, how does devotion to Him actually accelerate the aspirant’s achievement of *cittavṛttinirodhaḥ*? At this juncture one can understand why Feuerstein, Eliade, and arguably Whicher come to this notion of instruction by “sheer being”. The God-concept seems mechanically impotent at this point, castrated His own defined attributes.

### YS 1.25

*tatra niratiśāyaṃ sarvajñabījam* | In Him resides the unsurpassable capacity for omniscience.

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<sup>73</sup> Ian Whicher, *The Integrity of the Yoga Darśana: A Reconsideration of Classical Yoga* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 85.

This *sūtra* and *bhāṣya* further establish *īśvara*'s uniqueness from other *puruṣas*. In contrast to them, *īśvara* is all-knowing, or has reached the uppermost limit of all-knowing-ness. Later commentaries go into protracted discussions about this type of omniscience, what “*bīja*” actually refers to, and how does a *puruṣa*, no matter how unique, have omniscience if knowledge itself resides not in the *puruṣa* but with its affiliated *saṃsara*-bound mind-complex. These are issues that deserve due philosophical and theological attention, but the PYŚ is clear on this point that *īśvara* is understood as the *only* fully omniscient Self (*sa sarvajñah*<sup>74</sup>), a trait not present in other *puruṣas*. Hence any claim that this *īśvara* is simply just another *puruṣa* is once again denied. Even when fully liberated, the other *puruṣas* have still been bound in the past and still do not reach this uppermost limit of omniscience.

The *bhāṣya* also includes another clue into how or why *īśvara* actually acts in the world. Towards then end of the commentary on YS 1.25, the *bhāṣya* states, “Favor (*anugraha*) does not exist for Him, His purpose is the bestow favor upon sentient beings. [Thinking thus] ‘During the periods of dissolution and great dissolution, I will extricate those *puruṣas* bound in *saṃsara* by teaching knowledge and *dharma*’”.<sup>75</sup> It is altogether bizarre to imagine this *īśvara* being able to teach knowledge and *dharma* inactively by a mere “meta-physical-sympathy”. Returning to Legget’s questionable translation of *īśvara* “bending down” to assist the bound Selves, the use of the phrase “*uddhariṣyāmi*” or “I will lift up” gives ample validity to his interpretation. *īśvara* is actually doing something Himself, by whatever mysterious, karmically-evasive means, to favor the worthy *puruṣas*.

<sup>74</sup> YBh 1.25 *yatra kāṣṭhāprāptirjñānasya sa sarvajñah*

<sup>75</sup> YBh 1.25 *tasyāmānugrahābhāve’pi bhūtānugrahaḥ prayojanam jñānadharmopadeśena kalpapralayamahāpralayeṣu saṃsarinaḥ puruṣānuddhariṣyāmīti*

The bound Selves receive the favor of *īśvara* and do not self-generate favor by the mere contemplation of His existence and characteristics.

### YS 1.26

*sa eṣa pūrveṣāmapī guruḥ kālenānavacchedāt* | He is the teacher of all preceding teachers, for the reason that He is not limited by time.

This *sūtra* is strikingly explicit and conveys almost its full meaning in isolation from the commentary. The previous *sūtras* and *bhāṣya* have established that *īśvara* is omniscient, transcendent (untouched by *saṃsara*), and is able to personally interact with and favor the other *puruṣas* for their benefit. YS 1.26 adds two more characteristics: eternality and the role of the original guru. According to the *sūtra*, *īśvara* is not limited or conditioned by time while all prior gurus have been subject to time; in such a manner, *īśvara* is without beginning and without end.<sup>76</sup> Not only is *īśvara* eternal but also deemed to be “*siddha*” or “perfected” before the beginning of this world cycle, and he is also perfected in advance of all previous world cycles. Alongside or owing to this eternal perfection, *īśvara* is understood as the teacher of all previous teachers, assumedly instructing knowledge and dharma, to even the world-architect, Brahmā himself.

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<sup>76</sup> Yet this resurrects the two philosophical conundrums given above. First, the other *puruṣas* are also unconditioned by time in an absolute sense, for regardless of the appearance of bondage they are in essence free. Second, even if one were to accept that at the very minimum the other *puruṣas* are as-if conditioned and this can never apply to *īśvara* (YS 1.24), then what are the karmic consequences of *īśvara*’s personal interaction with the other *puruṣas*? Do he not have to limit himself into *prakṛti* (i.e. take on a *sattva*-body) and condition Himself by time? I agree that these are key philosophical questions, yet they do not erase the author’s clear intention to concretely distinguish *īśvara* from the other *puruṣas*.

It is important to note the use of the words “*pūrva*” and “*siddha*” in this *bhāṣya* because they will resurface in a crucial commentary on YS 3.45. While “*siddha*” is used here to denote *īśvara*, this does not imply that “*siddha*” has only been used in Sanskrit texts to refer to this type of totalizing God. In various other texts such as the *Mahābhārata*, the term applies to those of “accomplishment”, those who succeed in acquiring certain supernatural powers. Moreover, in a Jain context, the word refers to the *jiva* who has “accomplished” or “perfected” his purpose, that is, cleansed himself of *karma* and is thus free from the cycle of birth and death.<sup>77</sup> If the *bhāṣya*’s use of “*siddha*” were to be understood in these other manners, then the definition would equally apply to the individual embodied *puruṣas*. However, the *bhāṣya* does not apply this term to the other *puruṣas*. It is used specifically for the one perfected from all time and at all times, *īśvara*. In YBh 3.45, where the word “*siddha*” (as “*pūrvasiddha*”) is used without explicit mention of its referent, the commentary and especially all of the traditional sub-commentaries understand the word to undoubtedly mean *īśvara*.

### YS 1.27

*tasya vācakaḥ praṇavaḥ* | The speech form designating God is the syllable *om*.

*īśvara* is now linked to a speech form, the *praṇava*, also known as the syllable *om*.

This syllable had historically denoted the appearance of ultimate reality (Brahman) in sound form, as *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 1.8.1 succinctly exclaims, “Brahman is *om*. The

<sup>77</sup> See *Tattvārtha Sūtra* 2.6 and 10.4. In 2.6 the term “*asiddhatva*” refers to the non-liberated or unaccomplished state. In 10.4 “*siddhatva*” refers to the liberated or accomplished state. In either case, as the *asiddha* or *siddha*, it is the individual Self (*jiva*) being described and certainly not some type of God-concept.

whole world is *om*”. What this equation *actually* means, or how the syllable *is* Brahman or *is* “the whole world” is unclear, contestable, and perhaps altogether incomprehensible. However, barring speculations on that topic here, this type of understanding pervades textual material beyond the Upaniṣads. As Bryant aptly summarizes,

Even though he never refers to *Brahman* in the *sūtras*, here again we must allow for the possibility that, along with texts such as the *Gītā*, the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, the epic, and the theologies of the Purāṇas— indeed, along with all the *Īśvara* theologies of his time, to my knowledge—he is conspicuously equating the Upaniṣadic *Brahman* with the person *Īśvara*, by means of a common denominator of *om*.<sup>78</sup>

As YS 1.28 will illustrate, the *omkāra* is not only to be contemplated, but to be recited repeatedly. The *praṇava* is not actually God on earth, but the handle by which bound *puruṣas* connect to *īśvara*. To put it differently, the syllable is a conduit between prakṛtic reality and *īśvara* from the position of the *puruṣa*. There is certainly a channel(s?) between the two, as *īśvara* must execute his favor for deserving aspirants through some form of pathway. The *bhāṣya*, while not very detailed on the metaphysical mechanics behind the functionality of *om*, does reinforce that the relationship between *īśvara* and the *praṇava* is fixed, that is, ever-present in successive world-cycles. Hence, the channel is always hard-wired into the fabric of *prakṛti*, no matter how many times *prakṛti* unfolds, refolds, and unfolds again.

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<sup>78</sup> Edwin Bryant, *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, 106. See p. 105-116 and the notes therein for several Upaniṣadic references.

### YS 1.28

*tajjapastadarthabhāvanam* | Repetition of it (i.e. *om*) coupled with contemplation of its signification (i.e. *īśvara*) [is to be undertaken].

Having stated that *om* is the speech designation for *īśvara*, Patañjali now describes what one does with it. The yogin should practice repetition (*japa*) of the syllable and also contemplate (*bhāvana*, lit. “being with”) its meaning (*artha*). As has been indicated in the previous *sūtra*, the meaning of *om* is *īśvara* Himself, hence the yogin is urged to recite *om* while/and contemplating *īśvara*. It is initially tempting to conclude that these two components, *japa* and *arthabhāvana*, constitute the *praṇidhāna* of YS 1.23. Ybh 1.23 does not state with any precision *how* this *praṇidhāna* is to be exercised, and both Śankara on YS 1.27-1.28 and Vācaspati Miśra on YS 1.28 assume that this *praṇidhāna* is composed of both recitation and contemplation. The *bhāṣya* notably includes a verse from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, as Bryant highlights, “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.”<sup>79</sup> I cite the verse to emphasize the fact that the *bhāṣya* is associating, perhaps even identifying, *japa* with *svādhyāya* and *arthabhāvana* with *yoga*. This is critical because *svādhyāya* (own-study) plays a key role in the second chapter when *īśvara* is again invoked. If *japa* is supposedly the first ‘half’ of *īśvarapraṇidhāna*, then why does the *bhāṣya* equate *svādhyāya* with *japa* when the second *pāda* intentionally separates the two (*svādhyāya* and *praṇidhāna*) during its discussions of *kriyāyoga* and *aṣṭāṅgayoga*? It is either redundant or

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 110.

contradictory to define *svādhyāya* as *japa* and then also define *praṇidhāna* as substantially composed of *japa*.

At this point in the text it seems prudent to postpone the determination that *praṇidhāna* is incontrovertibly defined (at least equally) by both of these aspects. At YS 1.28, all that is said is that the yogin ought to repeat *om* and contemplate its meaning. Turning back to the verse from the *Viṣṇu Purāna*, with *japa* connected to *svādhyāya*, *arthabhāvana* thus corresponds to the word “*yoga*”. “*Yoga*” in this context carries the sense of “joining” or “uniting”, which is proper for one is trying to contemplate or “yoke” his/her mind to *īśvara*. It also make sense considering that apart from the PYŚ’ technical definition of *yoga* as *cittavṛttinirodhaḥ*, the word is commonly employed to refer the technique or state of one-pointed concentration. The *bhāṣya* on YS 1.1 carries this meaning by stating “*yogaḥ samādhiḥ*” or “*yoga* is *samādhi*”. As the bulk of the first chapter describes *sabīja samādhi* or “*samādhi* with a referent”, the term “*yoga*” describes this practical and progressive technique as well its ultimate accomplishment, *nirbīja samādhi* or “*samādhi* without a referent”. Likewise, the connection of *yoga* to *arthabhāvana* signifies the consistent effort to contemplate or “be with” (*bhāvana*) the meaning of the *praṇava*, *īśvara*. My point here is that according to the *bhāṣya* it seems that *praṇidhāna* is much more strongly associated with contemplation of *īśvara* rather than the repetition of *om* (which is tied to *svādhyāya*).

### YS 1.29

*tataḥ pratyakcetanādhigamo’pyantarāyābhāvaśca* | When this has been accomplished, the disturbances are eliminated and an understanding of the inner-self arises.

This final *sūtra* on the topic of *īśvara* offers little additional information for this inquiry. The thrust is that by repeating *om* and contemplating its meaning, certain disturbances (to be described in successive *sūtras*) are removed and the “inner-Self” (the *puruṣa*) arises or comes into view. This statement aligns well with the aforementioned verse from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* that claims that from these two practices “the supreme *ātman* shines forth” (*paramātmā prakāśate*). However, nowhere in the *bhāṣya* is it stated that the disturbances are only removed by this orientation towards *īśvara*. “*Tataḥ*” (“Then”) can also refer to practices preceding *īśvarapraṇidhāna*, particularly YS 1.12’s *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*. The removal of the disturbances and the revealing of the inner-Self can be effected through *īśvara* or independently through self-effort.

Several determinations can now be drawn, if only tentatively, before discussing *pādas* two and three:

**YS 1.23:** The yoga of mental cessation (and thus *kaivalya*) can be assisted and ultimately achieved through devotion (*bhaktiviśeṣa*, *praṇidhāna*) to *īśvara*. This is realized by receiving the favor (*anugraha*) of God. Hence, God is *personal* and *immanent*, He can actively effect liberation for bound *puruṣas* according to their devotion to Him. Though not conclusive, this *īśvara* also appears to be omnipotent as he can facilitate the highest objective of mankind (*puruṣārtha*) through his favor alone. **YS 1.24:** *īśvara* is *transcendent*, being not only a distinct Self but also untouched by all prakṛtic elements. He is also unambiguously (from a textual perspective) distinct from all other *puruṣas*, yet

whether His status connotes a separate principle (*tattva*) is indecipherable. Nevertheless, there can still be only one “distinct Self” according to the *bhāṣya*, as only one can have ultimate lordship. This makes *īśvara* *singular* and seemingly *omnipotent*. If one is not convinced by this argument for omnipotence, more support will be presented in the third chapter. **YS 1.25:** *Īśvara* is *omniscient*. He is also responsible for the teaching of knowledge and *dharma*. **YS 1.26:** *Īśvara* is *eternal*, with no beginning and no end. He is also an *active teacher*, the guru of all gurus. **YS 1.27:** *Īśvara* is denoted in speech form by *om*. *Om* has historically been tied (in one manner or another) to *ultimate reality/Brahman* during this period of thought. **YS 1.28:** The yogin is encouraged to recite *om* and contemplate its meaning, which is *īśvara*. This *sūtra* provides minimal information about *īśvara* Himself, but does reinforce the personal relationship one can have with *īśvara* in order to induce liberation. **YS 1.29:** The two practices stated in YS 1.28 remove hindrances and ‘reveal’ the *puruṣa*.

In summary, this *īśvara* is personal, immanent, transcendent, singular, possibly omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, active, and related to Brahman-as-*om*. At this juncture, even without the other chapters, this *īśvara* looks very much like the *parameśvara* discussed by Shastri and Pflueger. At the very least it would be difficult if not impossible to locate any alternative conception of *īśvara* during this time period that satisfied all of these requirements yet did not admit of constituting a *parameśvara*, *maheśvara*, or another totalizing God.<sup>80</sup> At this point all that is lacking to complete a normative conception of a totalizing God (for whatever that’s ultimately worth) is the characteristic

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<sup>80</sup>Bryant claims that the choices were limited for a religious understanding of *īśvara* during this period. “In Patañjali’s day and age (and subsequently, for that matter), what options would there have been for any type of *Īśvara* theism other Nārāyaṇa/ Viṣṇu - and Śiva-derived traditions?” Ibid., 92.

of creatorship. Nowhere in the PYŚ is *īśvara* denied the role of creatorship, and while this lack of denial does not validate a positive assertion, it also does not eliminate it. More importantly, I contend that this quality can be sufficiently if not completely satisfied by portions of the *bhāṣya* in the third chapter.

While Patañjali's *īśvara* mirrors the generic understanding of *īśvara* during this time period, it is impossible to ignore the resulting thorns of apparent philosophical incoherence. One such thorn is the looming, aforementioned problem of inserting God into a sāmkhya system that appears to have no room available; a second is subjecting God to the category of "*puruṣa*" with a qualifying adjective ("*viśeṣa*") that leaves much to be desired; and a third thorn involves some determination of *how* this God can interact with the world and the world with God. As a result of these sticky points, the interpretation of *īśvara* as *parameśvara* has been contested and more often than not been marginalized completely.

#### *GOD AND INCONGRUITY IN THE SĀDHANA PĀDA*

The classification of Pātañjala Yoga as some form of cohesive and fully-accountable school of philosophical thought has swayed interpreters from the totalizing conception of *īśvara* and also the possibility that the PYŚ is occasionally irreconcilable. The fact that the PYŚ does not always indicate, explain, or prove how its features operate, nor why they should be persuasive, is a worthy target of critique. But the continual desire for watertight coherence in this "orthodox philosophy" is problematic. I side with Daya Krishna, who exclaims, "We have revered the past too long. Let new questions be asked, and maybe the oracle will give a different answer, more relevant to the times we live

in.”<sup>81</sup> Let this relevance include an ability to irreverently posit the fallibility of the PYS or presume that the work was significantly less concerned with logical solidity than we have demanded. Regarding this second possibility, I now point to the highly unsatisfying architecture of the second *pāda* and conclude that Patañjali/Vyāsa may not have succeeded or even aspired to present a text devoid of any internal inconsistency or paradox. That is to say, the inclusion of the God-concept may not satisfy the archaeological aspirations of scholars to isolate a definable school of Yoga, but this may not have been a central concern for the compiler himself. In sum, the odds of Patañjali being a poor systematic philosopher and/or organizer are greater than him being a type of closet-atheist.<sup>82</sup>

The second chapter, the *Sādhana Pāda* (Chapter On Practice), includes the term “*īśvara*” in three *sūtras*. These *sūtras* fail to provide explicit information about the essential characteristics of *īśvara* Himself, but rather describe how “devotion to God” (*īśvarapraṇidhāna*) is situated within specific frameworks of yoga practice and how devotion can accelerate the process of liberation. My objective here is not to continue debating the attributes of *īśvara*, and nor is it to overemphasize the admittedly peculiar fact that devotion in the *Sādhana Pāda* is mandatory in contrast to its optionality of the first chapter. Instead I follow the work of Feuerstein and Bryant who have acknowledged a basic compositional problem of the second chapter that supports the conclusion that the text is a syncretic work. This problem, namely the questionable relationship between the chapter’s two yogas, can only be responsibly investigated through an examination of each

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<sup>81</sup> Daya Krishna, *Indian Philosophy*, 154.

<sup>82</sup> Gerald James Larson, “Yoga’s Atheistic Theism: A New Way of Thinking About God”, 23.

relevant *sūtra* in detail. Fortunately, the inclusion of God via *īśvarapraṇidhāna* in both of these two yogas, apparently isolated from one another and from the conception promoted the first chapter, warrants a suspicion of syncretism on its own.

In the opening verse of the second chapter, Patañjali announces a three-pronged “yoga of action” (*kriyāyoga*, YS 2.1) that mandates “austerity”, “own-study”, and the previously-mentioned “devotion to God”. The *bhāṣya*’s introduction to this verse clarifies that the *Samādhi Pāda* divulged yoga for the collected mind (*samāhitacitta*) while the present chapter provides yoga for the restless mind (*vyutthitacitta*); thus there is a separate, ostensibly preparatory yoga now being introduced. Notably this new yoga requires “devotion to God” while it was optional for the yogin in the first chapter. In the middle of the chapter (YS 2.28-2.29), Patañjali curiously admits an additional set of eight *yogāṅgas* (“yoga limbs” or “yoga aids”). The second of these limbs consists of five personal observances (*niyamas*, YS 2.32), one of which is this exact same devotion to God (*īśvarapraṇidhāna*). In this context, similar to *kriyāyoga*, devotion is not considered optional but rather constitutes the final mandatory component of the observances. It is not at all clear whether the eight yoga limbs constitute another (third) paradigm for the practice of yoga or if they are collectively subsumed under the “yoga of action” declared at the start. The second interpretation is momentarily persuasive given the lack of any elaborate explication of *kriyāyoga* itself. *Kriyāyoga* is referenced directly in only two *sūtras* (YS 2.1-2.2), while the *aṣṭāṅgayoga* or eight-limbed yoga is discussed in thirty-six *sūtras* (YS 2.28-3.8). It is reasonable to assume that the three pillars of *kriyāyoga*—austerity, own-study, and devotion to God—were either self-evident to the audience and

required minimal elucidation,<sup>83</sup> or the yoga of action is the superstructure under which eight-limbed yoga articulates. Yet in spite of these two options, ample confusion still remains along with the potential impossibility of an easy reconciliation. Perhaps the most outstanding source of consternation in this chapter is the fact that the three aforementioned pillars of *kriyāyoga* are repeated *verbatim* as three of the five observances (*niyama*) of the eight-limbed yoga. If the limbs of this *aṣṭāṅgayoga* are generally progressive, as the grammar and content of the *sūtras* signify, then surely the entirety of *kriyāyoga* cannot be condensed and contained within just one of the early limbs of *aṣṭāṅgayoga*. If so, the whole now serves as a part, the superstructure (*kriyāyoga*) operating as a mere preliminary technique. This construction is also strange considering the fact that the five observances are collectively considered one of the five “external” limbs in comparison to the final three components of the system.<sup>84</sup>

Confronted with these troublesome textual juxtapositions, I will not attempt to decipher the placement of the *sūtras* within some hypothetical superstructure. But this roadblock does not eliminate the possibility of mining some useful information on *īśvara* from the relevant *sūtras* and *bhāṣya*. One important point to recall is that the *Samādhi Pāda* did not provide a straightforward and precise definition for “*īśvarapraṇidhāna*”. Most commentators understandably assume it to include both *japa* and *arthabhāvana*, but I have already argued the potential problem with this reflex characterization. The

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<sup>83</sup> I generally doubt any conclusion that rests on an assumed base-knowledge of the intended audience. In this case however, the three words used in the definition of *kriyāyoga* are common enough to have been generally understood. Furthermore, *īśvarapraṇidhāna* was already described in the first chapter, along with a connection of *svādhyāya* to *japa*.

<sup>84</sup> YS 3.7 *trayamantaraṅgaṃ pūrvebhyaḥ* | These three [*dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, *saṃādhi*] are internal limbs compared to the previous ones [*yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyāhāra*].

characterization is far from patently false, but it does struggle when considered among the descriptions of *svādhyāya* and *praṇidhāna* in the *Sādhana Pāda*.

### YS 2.1

*tapahsvādhyāyeśvarapraṇidhānāni kriyāyogaḥ* | The yoga of action involves austerity, own-study, and devotion to God.

### YS 2.32

*śaucasantoṣatapaḥsvādhyāyeśvarapraṇidhānāni niyamāḥ* | The observances are purity, contentment, own-study, and devotion to God.

The term “*īśvarapraṇidhāna*” is found in YS 2.1, YS 2.32, and YS 2.24. YBh 2.1 and YBh 2.32 provide almost identical definitions for the term, even though the first functions under the yoga of action and the section functions under the eight-limbed yoga. In both situations, *īśvarapraṇidhāna* is not described as *japa* and/or *arthabhāvana*, but rather the consigning of all actions over to *īśvara*, who is the supreme guru.<sup>85</sup> As a preliminary remark, the consignment of all actions to God is yet another way that *bhakti* is described in the *Gītā* (For example, see BG 12.6, BG 12.10-11). So regardless of the momentary disparity in the definitions for *īśvarapraṇidhāna*, both meanings find a home in the *Gītā* under the umbrella notion of *bhakti*. It is clear that the PYŚ is towing the same meaning of “*īśvara*” from the first *pāda*, not only because the same exact word and

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<sup>85</sup> YBh 2.1 *īśvaraspraṇidhānaṃ sarvakriyāṇāṃ paramagurāvarpaṇaṃ tatphalasaṃyāso vā* | Devotion to God is the consigning of all actions to the supreme guru and/or the renunciation of the fruits of actions.  
YBh 2.32 *īśvaraspraṇidhānaṃ tasmin paramagurau sarvakarmārpaṇaṃ* | Devotion to God is the consigning of all actions to the supreme guru.

compound is employed in these *sūtras*, but also because as in YS 1.26, *īśvara* is again referred to as the foremost teacher, here called the “*paramaguru*”. One could feasibly halt at this point, resting on the conclusion that no matter what these yogas have to say about *praṇidhāna*, the term “*īśvara*” itself refers to the exact same concept as before. How *praṇidhāna* is actually practiced is a relevant though ultimately secondary matter. However, it is puzzling that this chapter’s special devotion is tied to the consignment of all actions to God, and there is no mention of *om* or contemplating its meaning. Or is there?

Revisiting the *bhāṣya*’s understanding of the word “*svādhyāya*” in YS 2.1, it is there described as the repetition of mantras like “*om*, etc” and/or the study of *mokṣaśāstras*. In YBh 2.32 “*svādhyāya*” is defined specifically as the recitation of *om*.<sup>86</sup> I highlight these descriptions because in the second chapter *japa* is not directly linked to *īśvarapraṇidhāna*, rather it is more intimately associated with, if not the essence of, *svādhyāya*. This seems to mesh well with the *bhāṣya*’s previous invocation of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* at YS 1.28. In that verse *svādhyāya* was to be performed side-by-side with *yoga*, with “*yoga*” denoting a unification of the mind with the referent of the *praṇava*, that is, *īśvara*. As a result of this intimacy between *svādhyāya* with *japa*, I argue once again that *praṇidhāna* is predominantly defined not by *japa*, but by the corresponding mental contemplation of and orientation to *īśvara*.

While this may settle a relatively minor issue, what it does not clarify is the larger question of why the *bhāṣya* redefines *praṇidhāna* as the “consignment of actions” and

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<sup>86</sup> YBh 2.1 *svādhyāyaḥ pranavādipavitṛāṇāṃ japo mokṣaśāstrādyāyanam vā* | Own-study is the recitation of purifying [mantras] such as *om* and/or the study of liberation-scriptures.  
YBh 2.32 *svādhyāyo mokṣaśāstrāṇāmadyayanam pranavajapo vā* | Own-study is the study of liberation-scriptures and/or the recitation of *om*.

not the contemplation of meaning (*arthabhāvana*), as in YS 1.28. If my argument is accepted, albeit tentatively, and the recitation of *om* is not *praṇidhāna* ‘proper’ but more so *svādhyāya*, then *praṇidhāna* ought be described as a “contemplation/being with [its] meaning”, as in YS 1.28. Why is it not? The immediate and more superficial response is that being a compilation of at least three different yogas, the PYŚ aspires to combine the terminology and ideas of separate methodologies with minimal tension and contradiction. Some of these complications are unavoidable, such as the repetition of the three facets of *kriyāyoga* in the *niyamas* of *aṣṭāṅgayoga* and another is the diverging definition(s) of *praṇidhāna*. The second (and admittedly speculative) response is that the first chapter is designed for those fit for concentration and are thus uninvolved with actions, while the second chapter is specifically structured for those who require an action-based ladder of practice.

From a broad perspective, there is no conflict between the different definitions given for *praṇidhāna*, as both require some type of reflection upon the idea of God. The yogin of mental cessation is unconcerned with actions and hence the consignment of fruits is incongruent with the disposition of an adept practitioner. *Praṇidhāna* for him/her is mere contemplation of *īśvara*. On the other hand, both *kriyāyoga* and *aṣṭāṅgayoga* practitioners are entangled in actions (yoga-prescribed or otherwise) and hence due to the performance of actions the contemplation of *īśvara* must be linked to their performance. It would make little sense to assume that an ‘action-yogin’ could consign actions to *īśvara* without any curiosity and reflection on the *īśvara* to whom s/he was encouraged to consign these actions. In other words, it is a preliminary method to direct the action-yogin’s mind to the idea of God. The action-yogin does not carry a mind as steadied the

yogin of the first chapter, so his/her contemplation of *īśvara* understandably abides at a less mature level. Still, it is the continual consignment of actions to *īśvara* that keeps this yogin's mind focused on Him, which can only lead to the good results attested to in the first *pādā*. The third and final response is that since all of these definitions of *praṇidhāna* can find a home somewhere in highly devotional texts such as (and specifically) the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the PYS is supporting the type of malleable, all-welcoming *bhakti* propounded therein. This last argument will be readdressed in Section Four.

#### YS 2.44

*svādhyāyādiṣṭadevatāsamprayogaḥ* | From own-study comes connection with the desired deity.

#### YS 2.45

*samādhisiddhir īśvarapraṇidhānāt* | The perfection of absorption derives from devotion to God.

The emphasis on *īśvara* and *praṇidhāna* in the *Sādhana Pāda* are further reinforced in the descriptions of the results of *svādhyāya* and *īśvarapraṇidhāna*. Both of these *sūtras* are extremely curious when read in light of the sections we have already encountered. YS 2.22 propounds that *svādhyāya*, which involves the recitation of *oṃ* and the study of liberation scriptures, leads the practitioner to union or contact with his/her preferred deity (*iṣṭadevatā*). The *bhāṣya* states that the yogin gains vision of and assistance from gods, sages, and perfected ones (*siddhas*) through *svādhyāya*. If one recalls how this practice centers on the recitation of the *praṇava* and also the study of scriptures, *and* how the

*praṇava* is precisely *īśvara*'s eternal designation, then one may wonder why *svādhyāya* leads one to subjectively desired deities and not *īśvara* Himself. After all, the repetition of *om* should connect the yogin to that which it signifies and not some other deity or figure. Alongside Bryant,<sup>87</sup> I find that it is reasonable to suppose that since *īśvara* is understood as a totalizing, all-encompassing God, then even these desired deities can only represent manifestations or aspects of that supreme God. The recitation of *om* directs one to *īśvara* through these more conceivable and accessible forms. Categorizing these desired deities as manifestations of the totalizing *īśvara* helps make sense of a *sūtra* that almost paradoxically links the recitation of *om* to deities other than *īśvara*. Such a conclusion is awkward given the eternal connection between the sound and meaning explained in the previous chapter.

Even more perplexing is the purported fruit of the *niyama* of *īśvarapraṇidhāna*, the “perfection of *samādhi*”. As Bryant notes, several of the sub-commentaries on the PYS attempt to explain how and why the full accomplishment of *samādhi* is stated to derive from only the fifth component of the second limb of the *aṣṭāṅgayoga*. The *bhāṣya* gives very little insight into this matter and the *Vivaraṇa* is completely silent on the topic. It is bewildering that perfected *samādhi* (which is the goal of yoga as a whole) is claimed as the fruit of such a preliminary stage of *aṣṭāṅgayoga*. The sub-commentaries scramble to defend the subsequent six limbs even though they have been rendered superfluous by this single *sūtra*. As these commentators do not root any of their reconciliations in the text itself, the present study will not explicitly side with nor reject their interpretations. Faced with this perplexing issue, I modestly suggest that instead of trying to force the issue

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<sup>87</sup> Edwin Bryant, *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, 273-279.

through creative speculation, we simply recognize the penchant for *īśvara* that the PYŚ repeatedly exudes. One cannot ignore the enduring proclivity that Patañjali has for including his idea of *īśvara*. The promise of the perfection of *samādhi* harkens back to YS 1.23 where this is exactly what is guaranteed by the identical (terminologically speaking) practice of *īśvarapraṇidhāna*. Perhaps it can be claimed that “devotion to God” and the “perfection of *samādhi*” mean something entirely different in this new context of eight-limbed yoga, but that conclusion is based on the assumption that the PYŚ as a treatise must make full logical sense. Given the contents of the first chapter, the only plausible argument would have to show that the words of the *Sādhana Pāda* bear entirely new meanings. This is surely possible, but as Patañjali did not take the commonsense route of choosing different words, the more credible conclusion is that these words carry their expected meanings. If not, the onus is on an interpreter to substantively prove otherwise. The philosophical integrity of the text may fray under an adherence to these conventional meanings, but what does not suffer is the PYŚ’ consistent understanding of God. I argue that it is completely reasonable to imagine a theistically-inclined Patañjali who, while compiling material from various sources with various degrees of theistic emphasis, was unwilling to significantly downplay his (and the standard) conception of *īśvara*. This may have been a poor choice from the perspective of philosophical coherence, but it does not alter the text’s unwavering understanding of the term. The *Sādhana Pāda*’s messiness makes it the least reliable chapter to base an argument for a totalizing *īśvara*, but it ultimately does support this judgment.

### CREATORSHIP IN THE VIBHŪTI PĀDA

An often-overlooked component of this discussion involves key references to *īśvara* in the third chapter (*Vibhūti Pāda*). First, YS 3.6 states that that *saṃyama* (the technical term for the progression of *dhāranā-dhyāna-samādhi*) ought be applied to the various grounds or stages of *samādhi*.<sup>88</sup> These grounds, as described in the *Samādhi Pāda*, are progressive, moving from gross to subtle objects. Rekindling the personal and active function of *īśvara*, the *bhāṣya* states that a yogin may accelerate his/her this practice of *samādhi* through the grace of God (*īśvaraprasāda*<sup>89</sup>). If God intervenes to catapult one’s practice, s/he need not bother with the more rudimentary grounds that the grace of God has propelled him/her beyond. This point is nothing new, as God’s ability to favor the yogin is explicitly described in the first chapter where God’s nature is directly discussed. What is much more illuminating is the second reference to *īśvara* in the *bhāṣya*, found at YS 3.45.<sup>90</sup> YBh 3.45 gives a response to the question of creatorship left unanswered by the first chapter. The context of the *sūtra* involves the supernatural abilities that a yogin acquires through the practice of a particular type of *saṃyama*. The *bhāṣya* comments on what the yogin should or should not do with such supernatural power. I include the *sūtra* and the most relevant section of the *bhāṣya*.

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<sup>88</sup> YS 3.6 *tasya bhūmiṣu viniyogaḥ*

For the grounds of *samprajñāta/sabīja samādhi*, see YS 1.17, YS 1.42-46.

<sup>89</sup> David White questions the definition of *prasāda* as “grace” and seems to favor “serenity” or “trans-luminous peace”. I do not know how he is convinced that the term does not carry this meaning of “grace” or “favor”, not only because (as was mentioned in Section Two), *prasāda* is used in very active sense by Kauṇḍinya in his contemporaneous *Paśupata Sūtra* commentary, but especially since the active favor of *īśvara* was already established in the *Samādhi Pāda*. David Gordon White, *The Yoga Sutra of Patañjali: A Biography*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Kindle Edition, 2014), 176-180.

<sup>90</sup> There is third and brief mention of *īśvara* at Ybh 3.53, but it provides no new information.

### YS 3.45

*tato'ṇimādiprādurbhāvaḥ kāyasaṃpattaddharmānabhighātaśca* | As a result comes abilities such as atomization, etc., perfection of the body, and non-limitation by the nature of the elements.

### YBh 3.45

*na ca śakto'pi padārthaviparyāsaṃ karoti | kasmāt | anyasya yatrakāmāvasāyinaḥ pūrvasiddhasya tathābhūteṣu saṅkalpāditi* | Though having the power, [the yogin] does not overthrow the order of things. Why not? Owing to the will of another, the one who orders things according to desire, the previously perfected one (*pūrvasiddha*), whose will has ordered things as such.<sup>91</sup>

The *bhāṣya* asks why the yogin refrains from using his/her supernatural powers over the natural elements to change the order of the material world. The *bhāṣya* unobjectionably accepts that both *īśvara* and the accomplished yogin wield the power to alter physical reality (*prakṛti*) according to mere will. These powers are very much real,

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<sup>91</sup> It is interesting to note how Prasāda and Woods (as but two examples) translate this section of the *bhāṣya*. Prasāda reads “*saṅkalpāt*” (“owing to the will”) as referring to the powerful yogin while Woods takes it as the will of the *pūrvasiddha*. In either situation, what remains static is that assumption that world has been formerly ordered by the will of this *pūrvasiddha*, who almost all commentators identify as *īśvara*. “Although he possesses the power, he does not interfere to set the objects of the world topsy-turvy. Why not? Because his desire with reference to them is the same always which another Siddha of the same power has formerly willed.” Rāma Prasāda, *Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras*, 249. “And although having power, he does not cause reversal of things. Why not? Because at the will of another [the *īśvara*], who determines things according to desire, and who from the beginning is perfected, the elements have been so willed.” James Houghton Woods, *The Yoga-System of Patañjali; Or the Ancient Hindu Doctrine of Concentration of Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), 279.

as Bryant emphasizes, for “however uncomfortable to our modern sensibilities, we have no grounds to suppose that Patañjali or the commentators considered the *siddhis* to be anything other than literally factual”.<sup>92</sup> Vācaspati Miśra agrees, describing this powerful yogin as one who “may transform the moon into the sun; or he may make the day from which the moon is totally absent, one from which she is not at all absent.”<sup>93</sup> It must be admitted that while the adept yogin does not create the *prakṛti ex nihilo*, s/he holds the supernatural power to manipulate its nature, its function, and its processes. The moon can be literally changed into sun through his/her mere desire. Nevertheless, the *bhāṣya* states that the yogin resists this temptation to manipulate the order of the world because the present order has been set in motion by another, a “*pūrvasiddha*”. Who is this *pūrvasiddha*? Returning to YBh 1.26, both terms—“*pūrva*” and “*siddha*”—are used in reference to *īśvara*. These words are not uncommon in Sanskrit literature by any means, and “*siddha*” in particular can sometimes refer to the accomplished yogin him/herself. However, the compound word at YBh 3.45 does not refer not to just any *siddha*, but specifically the prior one, the ancient one, the foremost one, *īśvara*. If this identification of “*pūrvasiddha*” with *īśvara* seems doubtful, then it is germane to consider that all three main sub-commentators—Śaṅkara, Vācaspati Miśra, and Vijñānabhikṣu—identify the *pūrvasiddha* as *īśvara*. In fact, all three commentators amplify this identification by using the term “*parameśvara*” or “Supreme God” as the synonym for “*pūrvasiddha*”, leaving little doubt as to how the word was understood.

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<sup>92</sup> Edwin Bryant, *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, 334.

<sup>93</sup> Rāma Prasāda, *Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras: with the commentary of Vyāsa and the gloss of Vācaspati Miśra* (1912; repr., Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2005), 250.

Both *īśvara* and the accomplished yogin brandish the power to modify the order of the universe. The difference between the two according to the *bhāṣya* is that *īśvara* has already willed the order of the present universe and the yogin, presumably, has no wish to contradict the will of God. In light of the *bhāṣya*, we are confronted with three possibilities: (1) *īśvara* has actually created the world *ex nihilo*, including the *prakṛti* and the individual *puruṣas*; (2) *īśvara* has created the world, including the *prakṛti*, but the *puruṣas* are not ‘created’ by *īśvara*, though they clearly relate to Him ‘historically’ in a manner unspecified by the PYŚ; (3) *īśvara* has not created the world from nothing, but has only imbued the beginningless *prakṛti* with an order suitable to this world cycle (and has also done so in all previous world cycles). I find that an acceptance of any of these three positions (as it is impossible to reject them all based on the *bhāṣya*) satisfactorily substantiates the PYŚ’ *īśvara* as a totalizing God or *parameśvara*. The first two positions plainly assign creatorship to Him, even if position (2) does not solve the question of the origin of the individual Selves and their relation to *īśvara*. Position (3) is the only one that qualifies creatorship substantially, as *īśvara* is not claimed to be, include, or have birthed the *prakṛti*, but is merely its original controller or governor. If, eschewing all of the claims of the sub-commentaries on the matter, one characterizes “*pūrvasiddha*” not as *īśvara* but as *any* “previously perfected One”, the prakṛtic dilemma only multiplies. This perspective is forced to concede that the while there may be no Supreme God who has ordered the world, there is another perfected being, a former accomplished yogin, who has fashioned the *prakṛti* according to his will at the beginning of this world cycle. Any accomplished yogin can feasibly become a world-fashioner, and “*pūrvā*” only refers to the fact that there is one singular yogin who set this particular world in motion. In another

world cycle, another powerful yogin will reign as the new world sculptor. I know of no commentator on the PYŚ who adopts this position other than Hariharānanda, and as such it is to be considered an idiosyncratic reading of the text.<sup>94</sup>

Returning to these three positions, if only the final, modest understanding is accepted, and *īśvara* is simply a modeler of the forms and dynamics of the *prakṛti*, is He really that much different from the common conception of a creator God? The root-*prakṛti* is unknowable in itself and has no discernible features. It is simply not a “world” as encountered in any type in perception, gross or subtle. The phenomenal world as we know it, the one with forms and dynamics, with the sun and the moon as they are, is the world that we think of being created or destroyed, not the principle (*tattva*) of a root-phenomenality. The world as we know it is exactly what has been engineered by *īśvara* according to the PYŚ.<sup>95</sup> It is a world in which the sun is the sun and the moon is the moon and not otherwise. This is perhaps an overly simplistic conclusion, but governance and creatorship are not so dissimilar when it comes to actual *experience* in a *prakṛtic* reality.

Whichever position one takes, the *īśvara* of the PYŚ carries the role of the Supreme God,

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<sup>94</sup> *Bhāsvatī* on YS 3.45 “It is because another Yogin, having mastered Yatra-kāmasāitva (and gaining thereby the power to ordain the disposition of Bhutas and their cause, the Tanmātras) *i.e.* Hiraṇyagarbha as the previously perfected one and as Lord of the universe has willed that the material worlds should run as scheduled.” Swāmī Hariharānanda Āraṇya, trans. P.N. Mukerji, *Yoga Philosophy of Patañjali With Bhāsvatī* (1963; repr., Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 2000), 590-51. “Those who have attained *kaivalya*, *i.e.* the state of Self-in-Itself, are liberated for ever. At one stage lower are the Hiraṇyagarbhas, who are the Creators, Protectors, and Overseers of the universes. Other sentient beings may vary from celestial to human to lower down. Through the practice of Yoga and pursuit of true knowledge, sentient beings gain successively higher stages of existence and ultimately attain liberation.” Swāmī Hariharānanda Āraṇya, trans. Adinath Chatterjee, *Progressive and Practical Sāṃkhya-yoga* (Madhupur: Kapil Math, 2003), 96.

<sup>95</sup> I thank Andrew Nicholson for alerting me to *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.35-37, where he suggests one sees a type of “organizer” God as opposed to a “creator” God. I find either label acceptable insofar as it is only the undifferentiated *prakṛti* and/or the individual *puruṣas* that the PYŚ’ *īśvara* does not “create”. This would be position (3) given above.

the *parameśvara*, whether or not there needs to be an asterisk next to His faculty of creatorship.

### *ALTERNATIVE IŚVARAS*

The only thing we mean to say is that the whole Yoga philosophy and the psychological technique it stands for are atheistic in nature. If some one yogi, even if all yogis, did admit *Iśvara* as somehow God, this would be due not to Yoga doctrine, but to the yogis' individual religious dispositions.<sup>96</sup>

Gaspar Koelman

Gaspar Koelman is one of the few scholars who instead of trying to rework the definition of “*īśvara*”, credits the term’s appearance in the PYŚ to extrinsic factors. These factors include the “existential experience of God by the yogis”<sup>97</sup> and the (expectedly resultant) “individual religious dispositions”. It is not “Yoga doctrine” that is responsible for the repeated mention of *īśvara* in the PYŚ, but mystical experience and sectarian reliance. Patañjali himself is thus assumed to have composed the YS under the influence of some combination of these two factors. I actually commend Koelman’s assessment, not because it tacks the inclusion of God up to subjective mystical experience, nor because it assumes the existence of a fixed “Yoga doctrine”, and nor because it paints *īśvara* as absolutely superfluous to this supposed doctrine; rather because Koelman candidly accepts the religious (i.e. theistic) emphasis of the PYŚ, no matter the origin. Koelman is contradictory at times in his discussion of this “Supreme Lord”, but this is

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<sup>96</sup> Gaspar M. Koelman, *Patañjala Yoga*, 64.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

only expected given his allegiance to problematic juxtaposition of Yoga theism vis-à-vis Sāṃkhya atheism. Nevertheless, I agree that Patañjali is of a “religious disposition”, for no matter how diplomatic and non-sectarian the phrasing of the PYŚ, the text still contains the common “religious” understanding of *īśvara* of the time period.

The glaring problem with Koelman’s judgment is that it is extraordinarily speculative regarding the construction and configuration of the PYŚ. Earlier I expressed the extreme difficulty in locating authorial intention even when one has the actual text in hand. Further speculation that not only hinges on the assumed socio-religious climate of the hypothesized region and time period, but also guesses how that climate directly instigated complications in the text, is simply unsubstantiable. Alternative approaches to the PYŚ sidestep this rabbit hole by creatively tinkering with the words of the text and its supposed metaphysical backdrop. These interpretations, while laudable for their ambitiousness, are ultimately unconvincing and frequently force the language of the PYŚ for their confirmation. The most obvious point, often overlooked during these bouts of theological wrangling, is the casual and repeated disregard for the credibility of the conventional definition of “*īśvara*”. In the wake of the modern tendency to trivialize *īśvara* in the PYŚ (such as with Eliade), even more inventive interpretations have sprung up to tackle the issue. Gerald Larson and Lloyd Pflueger, as but two examples, have both developed textually-nuanced conceptions of the term and its *raison d’être*.

In a recent article Gerald Larson argues that the notion of God presented in the PYŚ is “absolutely unique in the general history of religions”,<sup>98</sup> including South Asia in this history. Larson is the foremost Western scholar of sāmkhya in the past half century

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<sup>98</sup> Gerald James Larson, “Yoga’s Atheistic Theism: A New Way of Thinking About God”, 7.

and has grappled intensely with some of the core philosophical problems of both Classical Sāṃkhya and Classical Yoga. Larson's outstanding contributions to the field are undeniable, but at times it appears that instead of letting certain textual problems endure as flaws or shortcomings, he chooses to reconfigure the problems to better reconcile them. As a momentary detour, let us consider his assessment on the topic of the plurality of *puruṣas*. Larson concludes that the admission of this doctrine as such is an “insuperable difficulty”,<sup>99</sup> whether in Sāṃkhya or Yoga, and that “it is hardly likely that the Sāṃkhya teachers were thinking of the plurality of consciousnesses as a set of knowable entities to be counted. They were thinking, rather, of a plurality of intellects through which the disclosure of contentless consciousness occurs.”<sup>100</sup> As Larson finds no way to justify the *puruṣa*-plurality doctrine in a coherent fashion, he boldly moves towards reworking the idea to fill in the gaps of the Sāṃkhya system. This is similar to his treatment of Yoga's *īśvara*, which nudges readers to embrace the “absolutely unique” definition Patañjali is supposedly introducing,

God for Yoga, then, serves both as a regulative idea and as an interesting ontological argument... He is the “eternal excellence” in which pure consciousness and “perfect *sattva*” are present to one another.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Gerald James Larson and Ram Shankar Bhattacharya, *The Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, Volume 4 – Sāṃkhya: a Dualist Tradition in Indian Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 636, Note 50.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 80. Larson fully admits (though only in an endnote) that this is his own determination and the traditional commentators defend the plurality of consciousnesses despite its “insuperable difficulty”. Mikel Burley criticizes Larson for his creative interpolation (Mikel Burley, *Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga*, 148) but perhaps too harshly as Larson admits his lack of textual support and his “suspicion...that the ‘plurality of *puruṣas*’ (*puruṣabahutva*) has not yet been properly understood by interpreters of Sāṃkhya in the extant native textual tradition and in modern scholarship.” See Gerald Larson, *Sāṃkhya: a Dualist Tradition*, 636, Note 50.

<sup>101</sup> Gerald Larson, “Yoga's Atheistic Theism: A New Way of Thinking About God,” 23.

I lack the space to satisfactorily flesh out Larson’s contention, but suffice it to say that Larson is only willing to support the tenability of *īśvara* in Classical Yoga only if the common, time-sensitive idea of *parameśvara* is rejected.

Lloyd Pflueger, who acquiesces to the idea of God-as-guru (imagined or living<sup>102</sup>), simultaneously equates the identity of this “*puruṣaviséṣa*” with the other ‘ordinary’ *puruṣas*. He states, “The sublime purity known as ‘The Lord’ is nothing other than the non-dual purity of pure consciousness, which is present at the core of every conscious creature, and essentially untouched and free.”<sup>103</sup> Thus, if *īśvara* is claimed to represent anything other than an ideal or archetype, then it must be *non-dually* identified with, or infused within, each and every individual *puruṣa*. God may be immanent but cannot be transcendent in the sense of “other” in relation to the individual *puruṣas*. The equation of this “distinct Self” with the other Selves is not absolutely antithetical to descriptions found in texts such as the *Bhagavad Gītā*, but the one-to-one ratio, as if the use of the term “*īśvara*” is only cunningly utilized by Patañjali to steer the aspirant back to a sophisticated and elusive understanding of his/her own Self, is not consistent with any commonplace definitions of “*īśvara*” of that time period. If anything, I would argue that Patañjali cleverly uses “*īśvara*” to lure one *away* from the individual Self, a notion I discuss in Section Four.

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<sup>102</sup> “Ultimately the real deity of the YS (*Yogasūtra*), standing in the background of the experiential system, is the yogic *guru*, potent and immanent, protecting, guiding, assuring, and inspiring the aspirant.” Lloyd W. Pflueger, “Person, Purity, and Power in the *Yogasūtra*” in *Theory and Practice of Yoga: Essays in Honor of Gerald James Larson*, ed. Knut Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 29.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

The inclination to creatively rethink “*īśvara*” has still not subsided. A 2014 article by Marzenna Jakubczak carries the torch of Gerald Larson’s approach. The title alone, “The purpose of non-theistic devotion in the classical Indian tradition of Sāṃkhya-Yoga”, announces that the PYŚ’ *bhaktiviśeṣa* is apparently non-theistic. This claim rests upon the idea that “*īśvara*” ought not be understood in the conventional manner of a supreme God-concept or even a limited deity. Disappointingly, Jakubczak never discusses the historical understanding of the term “*īśvara*” nor her assumption that Patañjali unambiguously rejects and reinvents that meaning in the PYŚ. She follows the trend of reconfiguring the meaning of the term and states with a similar tone as Larson, “We should rather identify yogic God with the impersonal ‘eternal excellence’ or exemplum of the presence of *puruṣa* and *cittasattva* in any and all realms of becoming.”<sup>104</sup>

There are other proponents of alternative *īśvaras* and these figures exhibit varying degrees of concern for historical and textual accuracy. In their short treatment of *īśvarapraṇidhāna* as one of the *niyamas*, Sarbacker and Kimple admirably distinguish the literal or technical understandings of the term from the more liberal or customized ones.<sup>105</sup> I do not object to the mere inclusion of more flexible and practical interpretations, as there is substantial value (following Daya Krishna) in making concepts relevant to an ever-evolving audience. However, by opening the door to almost any conceivable interpretation, we run the risk of allowing it to overshadow the literal meaning while furtively snatching the latter’s credentials in the process. In sum, the endless search for a

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<sup>104</sup> Marzenna Jakubczak, “The purpose of non-theistic devotion in the classical Indian tradition of Sāṃkhya-Yoga,” *Argument* 4 (2014): 62.

<sup>105</sup> Stuart Ray Sarbacker and Kevin Kimple, *The Eight Limbs of Yoga: A Handbook for Living Yoga Philosophy* (New York: North Point Press, 2015), 24.

solution to this ‘problem of God’ problematically assumes that the compiler of the PYŚ absolutely must have been adhering to some rigid philosophical system. Some scholars continue to be disappointed if not outright offended by Patañjali’s inclusion of God in the PYŚ, either due to their own secular sensibilities or the illogical injustice it commits to an otherwise cogent work.

#### 4. Turning Towards the *Gītā*

It is unknown if or how the *Bhagavad Gītā* impacted the PYS, or if the author of the latter knew anything of the former.<sup>106</sup> While the second claim is unlikely, the *Gītā*'s chronological antecedence and prominence do not substantiate the assertion that the texts interacted in a concrete way. However, it is safe to assume that the *Gītā* knows nothing of the PYS even if the improbable conjecture is made that the PYS precedes the *Gītā* in time. Regardless of any hypothetical interaction, there remain explicit and implicit conceptual similarities between the PYS and the *Gītā* that cannot be casually dismissed as speculative or coincidental. A few of these will be referred to in passing, but given the largely lexical focus of this study I will not probe them in detail. This section rekindles the emphases of Section Two and also Section Three, which zeroed in on the actual use of the word “*īśvara*” and also “*puruṣa*” to some degree. Recalling how the “*puruṣaviśeṣa*” (“distinct Self”) operates as an clear reference to *īśvara* in YS 1.24 and the subsequent problem of positing *īśvara* as one *puruṣa* among other *puruṣas*, I now turn to a work that unhesitatingly employs the words “*īśvara*” and “*puruṣa*” to refer to its totalizing God-concept—Lord Kṛṣṇa.

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<sup>106</sup> “We cannot know whether or to what extent Patanjali or Vyasa were aware of the Bhagavad Gita and its doctrines. While our best evidence indicates that the Yoga Sutra was compiled at about the same time as the Bhagavad Gita, neither work makes any explicit reference to the other. Of course, both likely drew on oral traditions that circulated, perhaps in the same circle, for some time (decades? centuries?) before they were committed to writing, and it was precisely in the first centuries of the Common Era that oral traditions began to be committed to writing in South Asia.” David Gordon White, *The Yoga Sutra of Patañjali: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 179-80.

The objective of this section is to demonstrate how the PYŚ<sup>107</sup> description of *īśvara* accords with descriptions, epithets, and other statements regarding Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā*. These kinships demonstrate that it is most plausible, given the findings of the previous two sections, that Patañjali did not birth any new definition for “*īśvara*” but predictably used the terminology and ideas common to highly theistic and devotional texts of the milieu. It is crucial that I indicate two major points I am *not* arguing: (1) The PYŚ is lifting ideas from the *Gītā* and reusing them (2) Patañjali’s *īśvara* is none other than the *īśvara* of the *Gītā*, hence the PYŚ’ *īśvara* is Kṛṣṇa. Concerning (1), I have already revealed my unwillingness to posit any definitive overlap or exchange between these two texts, hence the consonance between the two texts only points to a common religio-philosophical climate. Regarding point (2), simply because the *Gītā* and the PYŚ may understand the concept “*īśvara*” evenly, this does not mean that the PYŚ adopts any form of Kṛṣṇa/Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa. The other predictable theistic option of the time period, a Śaivite notion of God, would exhibit similar, if not identical, contours as Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā*. The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* is a Śiva-oriented text fit for comparison, yet I find that the *Gītā* is even more demonstrative of the parallels with the terminology of the PYŚ.<sup>108</sup> Overall the aim is not to place Patañjali in some sectarian camp but simply make the case that whatever sectarian bias he may have held, it included an understanding of God as

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<sup>107</sup> I focus on the *sūtras* and not the *bhāṣya* in this section for both the sake of space and because I find that the *sūtras* demonstrate so much similarity with the language of the *Gītā* that they can stand on their own (which would be even more persuasive for those who reject the unity or authority of the *bhāṣya*).

<sup>108</sup> As Yardi states concerning the theistic similarities of the *Gītā* and the *Śvetāśvatara*, “From this it was a short step to the monotheism of the *Śv. Up.* And the *Gītā*, which respectively identify Brahman with Lord Śiva and Lord Kṛṣṇa with Brahman and praise each of them as the Lord of the world.” M.R. Yardi, *The Bhagavadgītā, as a synthesis*, (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1991), 28.

found in a text *such as* the *Gītā*. The PYŚ accepts the general conception of the God as given in the *Gītā*, with no outright conflict with its uses of “*īśvara*” and “*puruṣa*”.

There are many opportunities to align the attributes of *īśvara* in the PYŚ with Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā*, even where the terms “*īśvara*” and/or “*puruṣa*” are not visible in the verses. The PYŚ’ *īśvara* is typically critiqued for its modesty rather than grandeur, whereas the description of God in the *Gītā* does not lack for a range of power or a well of traits. Yet as the present focus is not to illustrate Kṛṣṇa’s godliness but rather see how the *Gītā* uses similar language as the PYŚ, the verses and comments below do not include all the locations where the attributes of the two *īśvaras* converge. Nevertheless, I do cite a few examples where the descriptive overlap is so evident that it matches if not surpasses the bare linguistic connection. Still, as the theistic debate around the PYŚ often centers on Patañjali’s word choices of “*īśvara*” and “*puruṣa*”, I emphasize the verses where the *Gītā* applies the terms “*īśvara*” and/or “*puruṣa*” to denote its totalizing divinity. There are some cases where these terms do not refer to Kṛṣṇa but rather the individual Self, and hence some due caution must be exercised, but these relatively few usages do not outweigh the abundance of referents that favor a flexibility in the use of the terms that mirrors Patañjali’s own understanding.

*ON “ĪŚVARA”*

### YS 1.23

*īśvarapraṇidhānād vā* | Or, [mental cessation may be achieved] by devotion to God (*īśvara*).

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**BG 4.6**

*ajo'pi sann avyayātma bhūtānām īśvaro'pi san | prakṛim svām adhiṣṭāya*

*saṁbhavāmyātmāyayā ||*<sup>109</sup> Though I am birthless and imperishable, and though I am the lord of all beings, by presiding over my Nature (prakṛti) I come into material being by my own power.

“*Īśvara*” in the modest sense of a “master” or “lord”. Yet the term “*bhūtānām*” (“of all beings”) marks this *īśvara* as the lord of all creatures.<sup>110</sup>

**BG 5.29**

*bhoktāraṁ yajñatapasāṁ sarvalokamaheśvaram | suhṛdaṁ sarvabhūtānāṁ jñātvā māṁ*

*śāntimṛccati ||* Having known me, the receiver of sacrifices and austerities, the **great lord of the entire world**, the friend of all beings, he attains tranquility.

**BG 10.3**

*yo māṁ ajam anādiṁ ca vetti lokamaheśvaram | asaṁmūḍhaḥ sa martyeṣu sarvapāpaiḥ*

*pramucyate ||* He who knows me, me without birth or beginning, the **great lord of the world**, he is undeluded among mortals and freed from all evils.

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<sup>109</sup> All *Gītā* translations are original though informed by those of Winthrop Sargeant and J.A.B van Buitenen. See Winthrop Sargeant. *The Bhagavad Gītā* (1984; repr., Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010) and J.A.B van Buitenen, *The Bhagavadgita in the Mahabharata* (University of Chicago Press, 1981).

<sup>110</sup> While not a rare phrase denoting God in the literature of the period, one significant example of congruence is in *Pāśupata Sūtra* 5.43, where the totalizing Śiva is also described as “*īśvaraḥ sarvabhūtānam*”.

Kṛṣṇa as “*maheśvara*” (“Great Lord”). “*Īśvara*” could still be interpreted in the modest sense as a “lord” to construct the phrase “great lord of the world”. However, not only is the term “*maheśvara*” used in isolation at other times to refer to Kṛṣṇa, but “great lord of the world” clearly implies a totalizing, Supreme Lord/God.

### BG 11.3

*evam etad yathāttha tvam ātmānaṃ **parameśvara** | draṣṭum icchāmi te rūpam aiśvaram puruṣottama* // As such you have described yourself, **O Supreme Lord**, I want to see [that] lordly form, O Ultimate Self.

“*Parameśvara*” (“Supreme Lord”) is used in the vocative, which means that “*īśvara*” itself designates God even without the addition of possessive referent such as “of all beings” or “of the world”. Arjuna is using the term “*parameśvara*” as an epithet for Kṛṣṇa himself. Hence “*īśvara*” was clearly used at this time in a grand sense as well as the modest one, with the former succeeding with the use of “*īśvara*” without a possessive referent such as “*sarva*” or “*sarvaloka*”. Also remember how *īśvara* (as the *pūrvasiddha*) was also identified as *parameśvara* in the sub-commentaries on YS 3.45 of Śaṅkara, Vācaspati Miśra, and Vijñānabhikṣu.

### BG 11.9

*evam uktvā tato rājan **mahāyogeśvaro** hariḥ | darśayam āsa pārthāya paramaṃ rūpam aiśvaram* // Having spoken thus, O King, Hari, the **great lord of yoga**, revealed his supreme lordly form to the son of Pṛthā.

Here Kṛṣṇa is called the “great lord of yoga” or the “lord of the great yoga”. In either case, this summons a similar understanding as in BG 5.29 and BG 10.3, where although Kṛṣṇa remains the Supreme God, he is here described as the “lord of x”.

### **BG 13.22**

*upadraṣṭānumantā ca bhartā bhoktā **maheśvaraḥ** | paramātmēti cāpy ukto dehe'smin puruṣaḥ paraḥ* // In this body the supreme Self is the **great lord**, the seer, the consentor, the supporter, and the enjoyer, who is also called the supreme Self.

One instance in which it appears that the individual Self is considered the “*maheśvaraḥ*”/ “great lord” (and also the “Supreme Self”, which will be handled below with YS 1.24). Admittedly this causes a bit of tension but such use is in the minority.

### **BG 15.17**

*uttamaḥ puruṣas tv anyāḥ paramātmety udāhṛtaḥ | yo lokatrayam āviśya bibharty **avyaya** īśvaraḥ* // But the Supreme Self is yet another, called the Supreme *Ātman*, who having entered the three worlds, supports [them], this **eternal lord**.

Now “*īśvara*” is not used in compound, though the adjective “*avyaya*” / “eternal” is used descriptively. The term now refers to that “Supreme Self” who is Kṛṣṇa.

**BG 18.61**

*īśvaraḥ sarvabhūtānāṃ hr̥ddeśe'rjuna tiṣṭhati | bhrāmayan sarvabhūtāni yantrārūdhāni māyayā ||* The **lord of all beings** dwells in the heart, Arjuna, and by his power of illusion causes all beings to wander in his wheel.”

Similar to 4.6 where this “īśvara” is the “lord of all beings”.

**BG 18.75**

*vyāsaprasādāc chrutavān etad guhyam ahaṃ param | yogam yogeśvarāt kṛṣṇāt sākṣāt kathayataḥ svayam ||* By the grace of Vyāsa I have heard this secret, this supreme yoga, from Kṛṣṇa, **the lord of yoga**, who conveyed it himself.

**BG 18.78**

*yatra yogeśvaraḥ kṛṣṇo yatra pārtho dhanurdharaḥ | tatra śrīr vijayo bhūtir dhruvā n̄tir matir mama ||* Wherever are Kṛṣṇa, **lord of yoga**, and the son of Parthā, the archer, my mind is certain that there are also fortune, victory, wealth, and right conduct

Similar to 11.9 where Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme God is described as the “lord of yoga”.

*ON “PURUṢA”*

**YS 1.24**

*kleśakarmavipākāśayair aparāmr̥ṣṭaḥ puruṣaviśeṣa īśvaraḥ |* God is a distinct Self, He is untouched by afflictions, *karma*, the fruition of *karma*, and predispositions.

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**BG 4.14**

*na mām karmaṇi limpanti na me karmaphale sprhā | iti mām yo’bhijānāti karmabhir na sa badhyate* // Actions do not defile me, nor do I have desire for their fruits, he who knows me thus is himself not bound by actions.

This verse does not include the word “*puruṣa*” but the description of Kṛṣṇa is extremely similar to *īśvara* at YS 1.24. Here Kṛṣṇa states that he is untouched by all actions and the corresponding mental desires concerning fruits, etc.

**BG 8.1**

*kiṃ tad brahma kim adhyātmaṃ kiṃ karma **Puruṣottama** | abhibhūtaṃ ca kiṃ proktam adhidaivaṃ kim ucyate* // **O Ultimate Self** (v), what is *brahman*? What is *adhyātman*? What is called “*adhibūta*” and what is called “*adhidaiva*”?

Here “*puruṣa*” is used for Kṛṣṇa in the form of “*puruṣottama*” or “Ultimate Self”. The optional translation of the compound as “best of men” is not incorrect, but given the content of BG 10.15 and BG 15.16-15.19 (see below), the term reaches beyond the realm of mortal men. In this verse, two things are quite noteworthy: (1) It is irrefutable that “*puruṣottama*” in this verse referring to the same entity (Kṛṣṇa) who was called the “*paramēśvara*” above. After all, Arjuna is asking direct questions to Kṛṣṇa (2) The *Gītā* has no problem using the term “*puruṣa*” to denote its God-concept, its “Ultimate Self”, hence the argument that all uses of “*puruṣa*” must refer to the twenty-fifth *tattva* of

Classical Sāṃkhya is refuted. The additional argument that the word “*uttama*” fundamentally changes the sense of the term is perhaps accurate, but one could make the same case for the PYS’ use of “*viśeṣa*” in “*puruṣaviśeṣa*”. “*Viśeṣa*” is decidedly more modest than “*uttama*” in describing a totalizing God, but that modesty does not make it impossible that the same meaning was intended. I advance a possible motive behind the understated language of the PYS’ at the end of this section.

### BG 8.8

*abhyāsayogayuktena cetasā nānyagāminā | paramam puruṣam divyam yāti*  
*pārthānucintayan* // Thinking of the **divine Supreme Self** with a mind joined to the discipline of yoga, not moving elsewhere, to him he goes, son of Pṛthā.

“*Puruṣa*” is not put into compound yet still refers to Kṛṣṇa. Through adjectives He is called the “divine Supreme Self”. The *Gītā* once again uses the word “*puruṣa*” for its totalizing God. (The same sense is found two verses later in 8.10)

### BG 8.22

*puruṣaḥ sa paraḥ pārtha bhaktyā labhyas tv ananyayā | yasyāntaḥsthāni bhūtāni yena*  
*sarvam idaṃ tatam* // It is the **supreme Self**, attainable only through devotion, in whom all beings exist and the whole world is woven.

Similar to 8.8 and 8.10. Yet here not only is “*puruṣa*” employed, but this *puruṣa* is only reachable through devotion and clearly has some type of creator role with respect to the

world. Beings both inhere in Him and the world is woven upon/through Him. If the former phrase (“*yasyāntaḥsthāni bhūtāni*”) is taken to mean that all individual *puruṣas* reside in Kṛṣṇa, then we return to position (1) of the prior section where *īśvara* not only interacts with the other *puruṣas* but is composed of them or has created them. This conception of God goes beyond what the PYŚ actually divulges, but it is not outright refuted. Also, the PYŚ shares this verse’s idea of reaching God through devotion, for that is exactly how His favor is secured according to YS 1.23.

### BG 10.15

*svayam evātmanātmānaṃ vettha tvam puruṣottama | bhūtabhāvana bhūteśa devadeva jagatpate* // **O Ultimate Self**, you know yourself by yourself,<sup>111</sup> who grants being to beings, O Lord of Beings, God of Gods, Master of the World!

### BG 11.3

*evam etad yathāttha tvam ātmānaṃ parameśvara | draṣṭum icchāmi te rūpam aiśvaram puruṣottama* // As such you have described yourself, O Supreme Lord, I want to see [that] lordly form, **O Ultimate Self**.

Both verses, akin to 8.1, use “*puruṣottama*” in the vocative as a name for Kṛṣṇa. This is nothing new, yet recognize how in 10.15 this “*puruṣa*” is called the “Lord of Beings”, “God of Gods”, and “Master of the World”. There is no reason to deny these qualities to the PYŚ’ *īśvara* purely based on its use of “*puruṣa*” in YS 1.24.

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<sup>111</sup> I opt for “by” in a *trītiya tatpuruṣa* construction but am not opposed to other translations using “through” (“know yourself through yourself”) or “as” (know yourself as yourself”).

**BG 11.18**

*tvam akṣaram paramaṃ veditavyaṃ tvam asya viśvasya paraṃ nidhānam | tvam anvayaḥ śāsvatadharmagoptā sanāntanas tvaṃ puruṣo mato me ||* You are *akṣara*, the ultimate object to be known, the ultimate foundation of the world, you are the unchanging, eternal protector of *dharma*, you are the **ever-existent Self**, so I believe.

“*Puruṣa*” is again used in isolation, but here this eternal *puruṣa* is also said to be “the ultimate object to be known”, “the unchanging”, and the “eternal protector of *dharma*”. This aligns with the PYŚ’ teachings that *īśvara* is the most soteriologically-powerful object of contemplation/devotion (*praṇidhāna*), is unconditioned by time, and also the teacher of knowledge and *dharma*.

**BG 11.38**

*tvam ādidevaḥ puruṣaḥ purāṇas tvam asya viśvasya nidhānam | vettāsi vedyam ca paraṃ ca dhāma tvayā tataṃ viśvam anantarūpa ||* You are the original god, **the ancient Self**, the ultimate support of the world, the knower, that to-be-known, and the ultimate state; O You of Infinite Forms, this world exists upon you.

Even more than 11.18, Kṛṣṇa’s description here as the “ancient Self” resonates with the PYŚ understanding of *īśvara* as the teacher of the ancients, unconditioned by time, and the previously perfected One (*pūrvasiddha*).

**BG 13.22**

*upadraṣṭānumantā ca bhartā bhoktā maheśvaraḥ | paramātmety cāpy ukto dehe'smin*

***puruṣaḥ paraḥ*** // BG In this body the Supreme “Person” is the great lord, the seer, the consentor, the supporter, and the enjoyer, who is also called the **Supreme Self**

As has been remarked in previous sections, “*puruṣa*” not only can be used in the basic sense of “man”, but also as the referent for the individual Self. Chapter 13 provides many such usages. Here is one such case in which “*puruṣa*” is used in reference to the “Supreme [individual] Self”. I do not deny these uses in the text and admit that it makes the translation and interpretation of words in isolation extremely challenging. It is for this very reason that I contend that “*īśvara*” must be viewed in textual and historical context. Like “*puruṣa*” the word on its own can exhibit moments of both flexibility and rigidity.

**BG 15.16**

*dvāv imau puruṣau loke kṣaraścākṣara eva ca | kṣaraḥ sarvāṇi bhūtāni kūṭastho'kṣara*

*ucyate* // In the world there are **two “Self”s**, the *kṣara* and the *akṣara*, the *kṣara* refers to all beings, and *akṣara* to the unchangeable.

**BG 15.17**

*uttamaḥ puruṣas tv anyāḥ paramātmety udāhṛtaḥ | yo lokatrayam āviśya bibharty*

*avyaya īśvaraḥ* // But the **Ultimate Self** is yet another, called the Supreme *Ātman*, who having entered the three world, supports [them], this eternal lord.

**BG 15.18**

*yasmāt kṣaram atīto’ham akṣarād api cottamaḥ | ato’smi loke veda ca prathitaḥ*

***puruṣottamaḥ*** // As I transcend both the *kṣara* and the *akṣara*, thus in both the world and the Veda I am known as the **Ultimate Self**.

**BG 15.19**

*yo mām evam asaṁmūḍho jānāti puruṣottamam | sa sarvavid bhajati mām sarvabhāvena*

*bhārata* // He who, without delusion, knows me as the **Ultimate Self**, he knows all, and honors me with his entire being, O Bhārata.

These verses offer more examples of Kṛṣṇa being called a “*puruṣa*” or the “*puruṣottama*”/“Ultimate Self”. The verses harken back to 8.1 where the translation of “*puruṣottama*” as Ultimate Self” was mildly questioned. But these verses, especially the last three, clearly demonstrate that this *puruṣottama* does not view Himself as a mere “best of men”. Kṛṣṇa exclaims how He supports the three world, transcends both manifest and unmanifest, and is the source of ultimate knowledge for those who know and honor Him.

*ON OMNISCIENCE*

**YS 1.25**

*tatra niratiśāyaṁ sarvajñabījam | In Him resides the unsurpassable capacity for omniscience.*

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**BG 7.26**

*vedāhaṃ samatītāni vartamānāni cārjuna | bhaviṣyāṇi ca bhūtāni mām tu veda na  
kaścana* // I know the dead and the living, Arjuna, and future beings as well, yet no one  
knows me.

This verse uses neither term under examination, but point to the feature of omniscience present in both the PYS and *Gītā*. Note that omniscience in the *Gītā* is reserved for Kṛṣṇa alone, as he adds, “yet no one knows me”. This is but one verse pointing to the all-knowing capacity of God.

*ON BEING THE TEACHER OF PRECEDING TEACHERS***YS 1.26**

*sa eṣa pūrveṣāmapī guruḥ kālenānavacchedāt* | He is the teacher of all preceding teachers,  
for the reason that He is not limited by time.

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**BG 4.1**

*imaṃ vivasvate yogaṃ proktavān aham avyayam | vivasvān manave prāha manur  
ikṣvākave'bravit* // I declared this imperishable yoga to Vivasvat, who conveyed it to  
Manu, who then told it to Ikṣvaku.

**BG 4.2**

*evaṃ paramparāprāptam imaṃ rājarṣayo viduḥ | sa kāleneha mahatā yogo naṣṭaḥ  
paraṃtapa ||* Thus, obtained through lineage, the royal sages knew this. After a long  
time here, this yoga has been lost, O Scorcher of Enemies.

**BG 10.6**

*maharṣayaḥ sapta pūrve catvaro manavas tathā | madbhāvā mānasā jātā yeṣāṃ loka  
imāḥ prajāḥ ||* The seven ancient sages and the four Manus, from whom the world's  
beings originate, originate from me, birthed from my mind.

These verses establish that the teaching lineage of yoga begins with God, in this case  
Kṛṣṇa and in YS 1.126, *īśvara*. “*Īśvara*” is not employed in these verses, but the  
following verse plainly identifies Kṛṣṇa as the “original god” and “ancient Self”. Thus  
both texts state that the teacher of all previous teachers is this *īśvara*.

**BG 11.38**

*tvam ādidevaḥ puruṣaḥ purāṇas tvam asya viśvasya nidhānam | vettāsi vedyam ca  
paraṃ ca dhāma tvayā tataṃ viśvam anantarūpa ||* You are the **original god, the ancient  
Self**, the ultimate support of the world, the knower, that to-be-known, and the ultimate  
state.

Similar to the portrayal in the PYŚ, here Kṛṣṇa is described as the “*ādidevaḥ puruṣaḥ  
purāṇas*”/ “original ancient Self”, hence establishing his seat at the origin of the teaching

lineage and perhaps also the world. The latter quality is more debatable in the PYŚ, but the former is not given the import of YS 1.26.

### BG 11.43

*pitāsi lokasya carācarasya tvam asya pūjyaśca gurur garīyān | na tvatsamo'sty  
abhyadhikah kuto'nyo lokatraye'py apratimaprabhāva ||* You are the father of the world, of the moving and unmoving, you are to be honored by the world as the most worthy guru, in the three worlds there is none like you nor how could there be one greater, O Incomparable Being.

This verse epitomizes the notion of Kṛṣṇa as this totalizing God, for he is the unique (*na tvatsamas*), creating/governing (*pitāsi lokasya*), unsurpassable (*na...abhyadhikah*), incomparable (*apratimaprabhāva*), God. Of particular importance is that alongside these qualities He is also called the “most worthy guru”/ “*gurur garīyān*”, similar to the PYŚ’ conception of *īśvara* as the guru of all former gurus.

ON“PRAṆAVA”

### YS 1.27

*tasya vācakah praṇavaḥ |* The speech form designating God is the syllable *om*.

### YS 1.28

*tajjapastadarthabhāvanam |* Repetition of it (i.e. *om*) coupled with contemplation of its signification (i.e. *īśvara*) [is to be undertaken].

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**BG 7.8**

*raso'ham apsu kaunteya prabhāsmi śaśisūryayaoh | praṇavaḥ sarvavedeṣu śabdaḥ khe  
pauruṣaṃ nṛṣu ||* I am the taste in the waters, O Son of Kuntī, the light in the sun and the  
moon, the *praṇavaḥ* (*om*) in all the Vedas, the sound in space, and the manliness in men.

**BG 9.17**

*pitāham asya jagato mātā dhātā pitamahāḥ | vedyam pavitram omkāra ṛk sāma yajur  
eva ca ||* I am the father of the world, the mother, the organizer, the grandfather; [I am]  
that which is to be known, the purifier, the syllable “*om*”, the Ṛg, Sāma, and Yajur.

As discussed in the previous section, *om* is the designation for Brahman/ultimate reality in the Upaniṣads and elsewhere, and in the PYŚ it named as the designation for *īśvara*. Likewise, in these verses, Kṛṣṇa is identified as “the *praṇavaḥ* (*om*) in all the Vedas” and the “*omkāra*”. It is very clear and precise.<sup>112</sup>

*ON YS 1.29*

**YS 1.29**

*tataḥ pratyakcetanādhigamo'pyantarāyābhāvaśca |* When this has been accomplished,  
the disturbances are eliminated and an understanding of the inner-self arises.

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<sup>112</sup> See BG 10.25 for a similar reference, though here called the “*ekam akṣaram*”.

In the previous section I mentioned how this *sūtra* is less significant as it may not in fact only refer to the capacity of *īśvara*. However, as Kṛṣṇa is also capable of removing impediments, this *sūtra* could be supported by verses from the *Gītā*.

### *DRAWING CONCLUSIONS*

*evaṃ satatayuktā ye bhaktās tvāṃ paryupāsate | ye cāpy akṣaram avyaktaṃ  
teṣāṃ ke yogavittamāḥ ||*

Who are the most adept at yoga, those devotees who are constantly fixed in their worship of you, or those who worship the imperishable and unmanifest?

*Bhagavad Gītā 12.1*

If the preceding analysis is accepted, and the PYŚ adheres to a *Gītā*-esque understanding of *īśvara* regardless of resultant internal philosophical problems (which may or may not have been cognized by the author), there remains one unresolved issue, an elephant in the room. Why is *īśvara* depicted so modestly and mysteriously in the PYŚ? Why didn't the author use more direct and overt language, such as found in the *Gītā*, to describe this totalizing *īśvara*? While such questions are both relevant and intriguing, they inappropriately take us well beyond the bounds of superficial authorial intention and into the unknown internal dialogue of the author himself. It is arduous enough to uncover what an author means by what s/he actually writes, so asking questions about what s/he *didn't* compose is even more precarious. With this disclaimer I offer a potential and reasonable response that unfortunately cannot rely on solid textual footing.

At the outset of Chapter 12 of the *Gītā*, Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa about the path of the most adept yogin. He asks which path is more conducive to the accomplishment of yoga,

devotion to God or devotion to the “imperishable and unmanifest” (“*akṣaram avyaktam*”). Most if not all commentators read the “imperishable and unmanifest” as a reference to the individual Self, the individual *puruṣa*.<sup>113</sup> The additional attributes listed for this “imperishable and unmanifest” at BG 12.3, such as being omnipresent (*sarvatragam*), inconceivable (*acintyam*), and unwavering (*kūṭhastham*), affirm the supposition that the referent is the individual Self. Kṛṣṇa predictably responds that yogins who worship Him are the “most yoked” or “most fixed” (*yuktatamā*), but that those who worship the individual Self “also attain me” (BG 12.4 “*te prāpnuvanti mām eva*”). BG 12.5 does not deny that both types of yogin eventually reach the ultimate goal, but for those who pursue the individual Self alone, the path is much more laborious (*kleśo’dhikataras, duḥkham*). Hence the path of devotion to God is not only preferred by Kṛṣṇa but is also preferable for the yogin from the viewpoint of rigor and hardship.

My contention is that even though it includes an obvious affection for devotional theism, the PYŚ was compiled specifically for yogins who do not pursue God but instead opt for the “imperishable and unmanifest”, that is, the individual Self. The PYŚ is a manual designed precisely for the second category of aspirants of whom Arjuna inquires, those who seek the goal of yoga without any reliance on God. At BG 12.4, Kṛṣṇa describes such a seeker in a manner resembling the yogin of the PYŚ, for s/he is “completely controlling of all the senses” (“*saṁniyamendriyagrāmam*”) and “with even-mindedness on all sides” (“*sarvatra samabuddhayaḥ*”). The PYŚ serves this type of

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<sup>113</sup> While “*avyaktam*” can refer to the *pradhāna* or unmanifest *prakṛti* in a sāmkhya context, here it is dominantly understood as a reference to the individual Self. Rāmānuja takes it as such in his *Gītābhāṣya*, as do modern translators such as vanBuitenen and Yardi. As vanBuitenen adds in an endnote to BG 12.1 to clarify this “*akṣaram avyaktam*”, “I.e. those who pursue knowledge and attainment of the *ātman* alone.” J.A.B. van Buitenen, *The Bhagavadgītā in the Mahābhārata*, 168.

yogin and plainly admits, similarly to Kṛṣṇa, that liberation can be achieved through an autonomous journey to the individual Self.

This hypothesis can be supported by the language and structure of the PYŚ in a few ways, two of which I will address here. First, as has been established, the *Samādhi Pāda* offers two roads to the yoga of mental cessation (YS 1.2), one being tenacity and dispassion (YS 1.12) and the other being devotion to God (YS 1.23). The majority of the PYŚ details the various steps that an aspirant seeking the individual *puruṣa* must take to effect liberation. Whether included in the stages of *sabīja samādhi* in the first chapter or in the *kriyāyoga* or *aṣṭāṅgayoga* of the second, a gamut of practices and stages are delineated. On the contrary, devotion to God (*īśvarapraṇidhāna*) leads to the exact same end but is conspicuously straightforward by comparison. By no means is *praṇidhāna* easy, but it is certainly less technical, complex, and progressive than all of the other paths of yoga. I advance the idea that this relative simplicity of *praṇidhāna* potentially functions as a lure away from the formality and difficulty of the other options. It is an enticement that mirrors Kṛṣṇa's response at the beginning of Chapter 12, in which the pursuit of the individual Self is deemed both inferior to the path of devotion and significantly more difficult to accomplish. To put this idea in some perspective, it is helpful to consider the target audiences of the two works. The intended recipient of the *Gītā*, at least regarding soteriological accomplishment, is the borderline *bhakta*, the aspirant already welcoming the practice of devotion to God. It is for this reason that the *Gītā*'s predilection for devotion is not only visible but plainly advertised. The PYŚ on the other hand (and for whatever reason), functions *primarily* for the yogin seeking the *puruṣa* alone and not a relationship with *īśvara*. Although Patañjali inserts the path of

devotional theism into his text, he does not exhibit *excessive* favoritism out of faithfulness to this main theme. That being said, given that the PYŚ has no real mechanical necessity for including *īśvara*, Patañjali does a suspiciously poor job of disguising his own theistic proclivity.

Secondly, as the PYŚ is geared for those disregarding the idea or relevance of *īśvara*, or following the path of self-effort for some other reason, Patañjali couches the wording of the PYŚ accordingly. This discretionary choice has led many scholars to conclude that it is not simply the language denoting *īśvara* that is modest, but that the status of God itself is modest in constitution. One admittedly facile response to this conclusion is that since the theme of the PYŚ is not *īśvara* but rather *yoga*,<sup>114</sup> the author has no responsibility to flesh out his full philosophy of God. Moreover, silence on a tangential topic actually bespeaks of the maturity of an author who can remain dedicated to the subject at hand. This type of logic could similarly be applied to the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, in which the absence of *īśvara* may also indicate the author's strict dedication to the central theme of the work (i.e. *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*). However, silence on a key though orbiting topic does not provide any conclusive evidence about how the author understood said topic, in this case the potential existence and/or nature of God. The problem with any blanket argument for selective authorial reticence is that many philosophical texts and commentaries *do* delve into areas digressive of the main theme. Arbitrarily choosing where and when we apply this principle of conscientious abstention only weakens its moments of application due to a lack of any consistent standard. Therefore, opting for a more direct approach, I contend that the PYŚ' mysterious "*puruṣa*"-oriented language

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<sup>114</sup> YS 1.1 *athayogānuśāsanam*

surrounding *īśvara* indicates the author's simultaneous recognition of the thrust of the text, his expected audience, and his personal affection for devotional theism.

As a text for those seeking the individual *puruṣa*, the terms employed therein ought have some if not total relevance for the mentalities of those yogins. It is thus reasonable to venture that Patañjali described his *īśvara* in the exact manner that would resonate with the language and concepts of the *puruṣa*-centric yoga of the PYŚ. Aspirants would have been familiar with common ideas such as *karma*, *kleśa*, the *praṇava*, a lineage of gurus, and the removal of hindrances, all of which are mentioned in the *sūtras* related to *īśvara*. Thus *īśvara* Himself is strategically depicted *like* a liberated individual *puruṣa* in order to mesh with the soteriological orientation of the intended audience and the dominant motif of the work. It is this dangerous choice for kindred terminology that has led some to cast Patañjali's *īśvara* as nothing but the liberated individual *puruṣa*, or the ideal or archetype of one (but I have countered these perspectives in preceding sections). My judgment, though admittedly experimental, is that *īśvara* is described in this curious fashion in order to integrate successfully into the text and the psychology of its readers. It would have made little sense for Patañjali to describe *īśvara* in a bombastically *bhakti*-infused manner, thus grating against the dominant focus on self-effort towards the individual Self. The PYŚ as whole is only able to survive its syncretic and compilational 'flaws' by employing a consistent lexicon that lends a sense of uniformity to the text as a whole. This tactic is clearly at work in the troublesome depiction of *īśvara*. Patañjali is able to simultaneously express his preference for the theistic approach to yoga while wooing the *puruṣa*-seeking yogins through amenable language and concepts. After all, both paths reach the same goal, and

as Patañjali arguably prefers devotion to *īśvara* over self-effort, a bit of terminological subterfuge isn't altogether unfathomable.

I offer these final points as reasonable reconciliations to a few incongruities encountered up to this point. It is certainly possible that Patañjali, drawing from a common spiritual landscape, had the same question as Arjuna in mind when he introduced his two main paths to yoga—the self-sufficient and the devotional. As has been illustrated, Patañjali conspicuously reveals his affection for the latter even though the former would constitute the main subject of his treatise.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

Philology ought to set for itself a goal higher than finding Vyāsa's dictionary.<sup>115</sup>

The preceding examination has hopefully accomplished the following objectives: (1) demonstrated the impossibility of ignoring the PYŚ' affection for devotional theism (2) shown that this devotional theism is organized around a totalizing conception of *īśvara* (3) *īśvara* in the PYŚ is consistent with the general depiction of *īśvara*-as-*parameśvara*/Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* (4) Patañjali arguably selected language for his *īśvara* that, while appearing ambiguous and unflattering when analyzed out of context, makes sense when viewed alongside the trajectory and anticipated audience of the work.

These points may not be equally convincing, but the most significant and credible is (2), which denies that the PYŚ creatively invents or reconfigures a definition for its *īśvara*. This is perhaps a small victory given the apparent superfluity of *īśvara* in the soteriology of Pātañjala Yoga, but a small drop produces large ripples. For almost two hundred years the *Pātañjala Yogaśāstra* has been studied in the Western academy and its scholarship is still wanting for the expulsion of outdated and prejudiced means of interpretation and their problematic conclusions. The many volumes of work on the PYŚ have still yet to resolve a number of its weighty topics. Any significant improvements in this arena will have effects stretching beyond mere intellectual debates, as Maas notes, “due to the large public attention that yoga receives in globalized societies, the consequences of this unsatisfactory state of research in yoga studies may not only be of

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<sup>115</sup> Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, *The Nay Science*, 437.

academic but also of social and political relevance.”<sup>116</sup> Societal relevance confers considerable value on the exhortation to pursue more reliable historical and philological work on the PYŚ. Hopefully with a more mature understanding of the text’s presence in the surrounding religio-philosophical environment, authorial intention will also become significantly more palpable.

The epigraph to this section is purposefully unnamed. I have lifted the sentence out of context from Adluri and Bagchee’s *The Nay Science*. The “Vyāsa” in this comment is not the Vyāsa of the PYŚ, but rather the Vyāsa traditionally accepted as the author of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Nevertheless, the critique of philology evident in the comment could legitimately be pointed at my own historical and text-critical analysis of “*īśvara*” in the PYŚ’. The final section of *The Nay Science*, entitled “Conclusion: Gandhi On The Gītā”, builds off of the preceding 350-page reproof of the supposedly “historical” and “critical” methods of German Indology, elevating Gandhi’s fluid approach to textual interpretation as a valid foil. For Gandhi, authorial intention deserves due recognition, but the meanings of printed words are never static. Words continually and *correctly* take on different meanings, shifting, transforming, and extending well beyond the imagination of the author him/herself. Therefore, the desire to “find Vyāsa’s dictionary” is a misguided, futile, and ultimately inconsequential ambition. As Adluri and Bagchee claim, “For Gandhi, reading a text never occurs in a vacuum and is never divorced from politics, and the *correctness* of reading is possible from the intellectual, existential, and—most important—ethical struggles of the reader.”<sup>117</sup> This

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<sup>116</sup> Philipp Maas, “A Concise Historiography,” 80.

<sup>117</sup> Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, *The Nay Science*, 436. Italics added.

resonates with Sarbacker and Kimple's aforementioned characterization of *īśvara*, wherein there is a literal conception of the term as well as a practical one. Honoring the original authorial intention leans more towards the literal interpretation while the Gandhian recognition that an author can never control the meanings imbued to his/her words leans more towards the practical approach.

Gandhi was cognizant of the pitfall of his perspective, the eventuality feared most deeply by Indology. This is the allowance for any and all interpretations to be imposed on a text, perhaps without any knowledge of, or regard for, original meaning. Adluri and Bagchee remark that Gandhi did not altogether ignore this issue, for he “allows that there be continuous inflation in the use of words *and yet their essential meaning is preserved.*”<sup>118</sup> But here we encounter the all-too-common problem of deciphering what in fact is “essential meaning” and in what way it is substantially “preserved”. A consequence of the inflation in the use of words is the usurpation of the role, status, and authority of the original “essential meaning” of the words. Oftentimes when one permits extreme interpretive flexibility, owing to surrounding “intellectual, existential, and—most important—ethical struggles”, there is minimal care for the protection and preservation of “essential meaning”. Who is the judge and who is the guardian of this “essential meaning”? For this study there is no need to pledge strict allegiance to Maas' underlying respect for authorial intention and his insistence on a critical method, or to Adluri and Bagchee's critique of said method and resultant embrace of Gandhi's more liberal and fluid perspective. Both of these viewpoints demonstrate an acknowledgement

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 437. Original italics.

and genuine concern for the “essential meaning” of words, even if that meaning ought be safeguarded or compromised due to surrounding practical factors.

The preceding analysis centered on an “essential meaning”, the conceptual excavation of a word employed during a particular period and in a particular genre of literature. The inquiry was supplemented by a few tangential speculations as to how and why the term was used as such, and which explanations for its usage are the most credible given the current state of scholarship. In sum I find that that the authorial intention behind the term “*īśvara*” has not been appreciated, preserved, or protected in most modern discussions on Pātañjala Yoga. The intellectual, existential, and ethical “struggles” of the reader (scholar or lay practitioner) have consistently imposed creative definitions under the banner of “essential meaning”. The degree to which we ought to honor and operate according to the “essential meaning” is surely up for debate, but neither European Indology nor Gandhi were willing to discard its importance altogether. Voluntary amnesia regarding the most plausible understanding of the term is bound to have consequences for our constantly developing understanding of Classical Yoga and its interaction with contemporaneous textual traditions. The question of “*īśvara*” may seem like a minor scholarly squabble on the surface, but it has attracted an extraordinary amount of attention in both traditional commentaries and modern scholarship. My guess is that a sincere and serious appreciation of the “essential meaning” of “*īśvara*” as “*parameśvara*” will have repercussions that penetrate much deeper than ever expected.

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