

Article

Wonderland: The Image of Kāmarūpa in the Kālikāpurāṇa

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Abstract: In the Kālikāpurāṇa, the mountainous region of Kāmarūpa (roughly present Assam) is described as a ‘Wonderland’ where Hindu gods and goddesses are present in the form of mountains, wells, stones and rivers, and where people become immortal and reach a divine status. Death had no access there. The text, however, reports that after some time, all the sacred places in this region had been completely washed away by a flood of the Brahmaputra river. The gods disappeared. Wonderland became an ordinary land again, where people live and die. The way Kāmarūpa is described in this Purāṇa betrays the hand of a Brāhmin who accepted ‘correct’ Tantrism to some extent but preferred Vaiṣṇava standards. The relevant passages are translated anew and briefly discussed. The text itself is given the floor.

Keywords: Kālikā Purāṇa; Kāmākhyā; Kāmarūpa; Mahāmāyā; *mleccha*; Nīlakūṭa; *pīṭha*; *yoni*

1. Some Preliminary Remarks about the Source

The Kālikāpurāṇa (KP) is often mentioned in connection with the indigenous religions of Assam, the influence of which would be particularly noticeable in the ‘Blood-Chapter’, and in the ways the local goddess Kāmākhyā is worshipped.¹ Obviously, customs and rites of the indigenous people did persist, in Kāmarūpa and elsewhere, existing side by side, and sometimes interfering with the established or newly introduced Tantric forms of worship.²

As far as the region of Kāmarūpa is concerned, Sanskrit and Hindu culture had spread from the fifth century CE onwards, and must have been familiar, particularly to the upper classes (Bronkhorst 2010). The KP continues this longstanding tradition, at the same time introducing the new Tantric forms of worship, but from a Brahmanical perspective. Animal and human sacrifice are handled as an almost Vedic institution, to be performed very rarely—as far as human sacrifice is concerned—to satisfy Durgā, the war-goddess of the *kṣatriyas*. Kāmākhyā is indeed hailed as the leading, tutelary goddess of Kāmarūpa, but identified as a form of the supreme goddess Mahāmāyā Yoganidrā, Viṣṇu’s cosmic energy. In the KP, she is never the ‘bloody’, menstruating goddess known from some Tantric sources and practices.

Kālikā as a terrifying deity only plays a minor part in the KP, suddenly appearing at the end of the Naraka legend as a true goddess of the battlefield, and again in the section about Durgā Mahiṣāsura-mardini, where she comes forth out of Durgā’s body in order to slay two powerful demons. The long opening story about Satī abandoning her body at Dakṣa’s sacrifice and being reborn as the beautiful girl Kālikā—‘the Black one’—to finally marry Śiva again, is called *kālikācarita*, ‘the lifecycle of Kālikā’.³ This naming may even have determined the final title of the whole Purāṇa (Van Kooij 2022, 13ff.). But in this context, Kālikā is just another name of Pārvatī, Śiva’s consort.

The KP as we know it was possibly written by a *brāhmin* composer hailing from Mithilā, who was affiliated to the court of Kāmarūpa at the time the Pālas of Kāmarūpa were in power.⁴ If so, the composition of the text may be dated to the tenth or eleventh century CE (Van Kooij 2022, p. 4.). Considering its explicit preference for Vaiṣṇavism, a later date of the final text might be more plausible. The whole text is spoken by a famous Purāṇic authority, Mārkaṇḍeya, who acts as the chief speaker and is answering questions



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of an audience of seers (*ṛṣi*). An important part of the text, however, is narrated by the sage Aurva, who is framed as the second speaker. He is speaking to a mythical king named Sagara about royal leadership (*rājanīti*) and the ‘conduct of the good’ (*sadācaram*).

Being a Purāṇa, the text deals with ‘old stories’ but the myths told by Aurva are often presented as models to be followed. The story of Śiva becoming half male and half female (*ardhanārīśvara*), for example, is rendered as a love story culminating in the ultimate union of man and woman at the moment that Śiva and Kālikā are merging into one body: “In the same way, your excellency, you should provide your beloved and her servants with the means of good actions. Then, you will be happy”.⁵ That is what the composer seems to transmit to its listeners.

The same sage Aurva narrates the story of Vetāla and Bhairava. One should learn from these two cursed, monkey-faced, sons of Śiva how to free oneself from a curse, how to become powerful on earth and how to obtain a divine status. In order to achieve this, the two sons are advised to approach Śiva, who tells them they should worship Pārvatī.

At this point, the composer—through Mārkaṇḍeya and Aurva—adds a whole Tantric section, explaining that the sage Aurva adapted and abridged a long Tantric text, called Bhairava Tantra, making its contents manageable to his audience, namely king Sagara and his court. What the composer actually did is transforming this Bhairava Tantra into a Vaiṣṇavī Tantra, also called Mahāmāyākalpa.⁶ But this Vaiṣṇavī Tantra is still expounded by Śiva, who is staged as the third speaker of the KP. He is teaching his two sons, Vetāla and Bhairava, who are often addressed as *sādhakas* (Cf. 52, 4–8, Van Kooij 2022, pp. 31–33). Śaiva Tantra, particularly its *mantramārga* form, was apparently accepted by the Brahmins, in this Purāṇa under the aegis of the supreme goddess Mahāmāyā Yoganidrā. After the Tantric session is completed Śiva reveals (*darśayet*) the sacred geography of Kāmarūpa. It is again the sage Aurva who passes on Śiva’s talk to his royal listener, king Sagara, as did the composer to his listeners.

2. Kāmarūpa

Within this context, and within these limitations, I would like to focus upon the surprisingly elaborate picture of sacred Kāmarūpa sketched by Śiva to his sons Vetāla and Bhairava. He points out where all the sacred places are to be found, what deities are present there, and what kind of Tantric rituals should be performed. Most important is Mt. Nīlakūṭa, his own seat, Śiva says, which is also the place where Satī’s female part (*yoni*) had fallen down (see below). At the end of his teachings, Śiva recommends his sons to make the pilgrimage (*pīṭhayātrā*).⁷

Kāmarūpa, the KP explains, was a kind of divine sanctuary. Mountains, ponds and rivers were ‘seats’ of gods and goddesses. Temples or images did not exist. Deities were ‘seen’ at their respective ‘seats’ during the ritual procedure. A pilgrimage through Kāmarūpa, the text says, results into immortality and a divine life. At that time, Yama had no access.

But this divine landscape did not last forever. The KP tells us, as we will see below, that afterwards, all the holy places were completely washed away by a heavy flooding of the Brahmaputra river, caused by Brahmā with the explicit aim to turn Kāmarūpa again into a ‘normal’ land where people live and die. Finally, Viṣṇu had restored the Brahmanical order.

The reason why Kāmarūpa, in the KP at least, was bereaved of all its sacred places, so elaborately pictured by Śiva, may be due to the composer’s perspective. He accepted Śiva’s vision of Kāmarūpa but apparently it did not fit in with his own—or his royal patron’s—Vaiṣṇava preferences. He, therefore, referred all these events to a mythical past.

Śiva’s elaborate picture of Kāmarūpa covers chapters 77–80. Before briefly going into a translation of a few relevant stories, I would like to show how Kāmarūpa is characterized in the preceding parts of the KP. The first time Kāmarūpa is mentioned is at the very end of the myth about Satī, Śiva’s spouse, who took her own life at Dakṣa’s sacrifice. Parts of her dead body, carried on the shoulders of the grieving Śiva, were cut off one by one by the gods and fell down upon earth creating sacred ‘seats’ (*pīṭha*) everywhere. The six sacred

places mentioned in the following passage partly coincide with the four traditional Tantric 'seats' (*pīṭha*). Two others are added.

18, 41–43⁸

Upon Devīkūṭa the pair of feet first fell on earth,
then, in Uḍḍiyāna, the pair of thighs, for the good of the worlds, (41)
in Kāmarūpa, on Kāmagiri, fell the vulva-ring (*yonimaṇḍala*), on the same place,
on the mountain, fell the navel-ring (*nābhimaṇḍala*) on earth, (42)
upon Jālandhara the pair of breasts, adorned with golden chains,
shoulders and neck upon Pūrṇagiri, her head at the edge of Kāmarūpa
(*kāmarūpāntataḥ*). (43)

Other Tantric traditions, Śaiva, as well as Buddhist, mention four of the six sacred places enumerated here. Adherents of different religious beliefs were no doubt visiting these places, standing next to each other, sharing common Tantric rituals and exchanging ideas. Our text adds a fifth place, viz. a mountain called Devīkūṭa, 'mountaintop of Devī', which is mentioned first, and a sixth place situated 'at the edge of Kāmarūpa', which is mentioned last. Thereafter, these six places are each linked to a goddess. Each goddess is considered a manifestation of Yoganidrā, Viṣṇu's *māyā*. Kāmarūpa's goddess is Kāmākhya, as expected.

18, 48–50

Upon Devīkūṭa the great goddess is praised as Mahābhāgā, merged in
the pair of feet. She is Yoganidrā, the source of the worlds. (48)
And she is Kātyāyanī in Uḍḍiyāna, Kāmākhya in Kāmarūpa,
Pūrṇeśvarī in Pūrṇagiri, Caṇḍī on the mountain Jālandhara. (49)
On the eastern edge of Kāmarūpa is the goddess Dikkaravāsini,
also called Lalitakāntā. Such is Yoganidrā praised. (50)

Kāmarūpa appears again in the story of Naraka, an epic hero, son of Viṣṇu and the goddess Earth, who is the mythical founder of several Kāmarūpa dynasties. Kāmākhya is the 'leading' goddess in this story. In the following verses Viṣṇu is taking Naraka together with the goddess Earth to Kāmarūpa, his future kingdom.

38, 99–100

After having said this, the Lord Viṣṇu, Master of the Worlds, took the one
called Naraka together with the goddess Earth, and plunged into the
Ganges. (99) After plunging he went in no time to the city of Prāgjyotiṣa, sit-
uated in the middle of Kāmarūpa, where Kāmākhya is the leading goddess
(*nāyikā*). (100)

After conquering the whole of Kāmarūpa single-handedly and driving its inhabitants, called *kirāṭas*, towards the sea, Naraka is installed as the first king of Kāmarūpa. What then follows are a brief geographical outline of his new kingdom and a picture of Kāmarūpa as a land of the gods. Viṣṇu is speaking to his son Naraka.

38, 118–24

The Lord said:

The Karatoyā, Gaṅgā forever, situated in the eastern part, as far as
Lalitakāntā, so far is your city. (118)
Here, the goddess Mahāmāyā, Yoganidrā, Creatress of the worlds,
assuming the form of the beautiful Kāmākhya, stays forever. (119)
Here is the king of rivers, Lauhitya, son of Brahmā. Precisely here
are the Ten Regents of the Quarters, each with his own seat (*pīṭha*).

(120) Here reside Mahādeva, Brahmā and I myself. The moon and the sun stay here forever, my son. (121) All of them came secretly to this most excellent land for amorous sport (*krīḍārtham*). Here the auspicious Śrī is staying, here is great enjoyment (*bhogyam*). (122)

While standing in its centre, Brahmā created the Eastern Constellation (*prāñnakṣatra*), then called Prāgjyotiṣa, a city equal to the city of Śakra.

(123) You, stay here, prosperity is all yours, being anointed by me myself, married, becoming a mighty king, with your ministers. (124)

In this myth, the kingdom of Kāmarūpa is pictured as the ideal country, where Mahāmāyā in the form of Kāmākhyā is worshipped as the supreme deity. The land is the amorous playground of the gods, and Hindu *dharma* is followed throughout. Well guided by Viṣṇu, his own father, and duly worshipping Kāmākhyā on Mt. Nīlakūṭa (38, 158) and in the shrine on the citadel of Prāgjyotiṣapura as well (39, 9–10), Naraka rules his kingdom perfectly until his demonic side comes to the surface due to his friendship with the Asura Bāṇa. This relation will ultimately lead to his fall. Kāmākhyā is not duly worshipped anymore and leaves the country, the gods no longer visit Kāmarūpa. Finally, Naraka is slain by Kṛṣṇa, who is Viṣṇu himself, on the battlefield. The brahmin composer seems to use this story as a warning to the kings of Kāmarūpa. Any deviation from the brahmanical ‘order’, and any neglect of the goddess Kāmākhyā, will lead to their fall, as in the case of Naraka. Mythology presented as a warning.⁹

In the Tantric section (chapters 52–76), Kāmarūpa is again praised as the region where the result of worshipping Mahāmāyā Yoganidrā is the most promising of all. Worshipping Mahāmāyā, in our text, means worshipping Kāmākhyā. In the following passage, an ascending range of sacred places and areas is enumerated, from Vārāṇasī, Dvārāvātī, Prayāga, Jalpiṣa to Siddheśvarī-yoni, culminating in Kāmarūpa as the region with the best results.

58, 40–45

Just as Viṣṇu is the best of all, Lakṣmī the highest of all, (40)

in the same way worship of the Goddess in Kāmarūpa, the abode of the

Gods, is recommended. Kāmarūpa is the ‘field’ of the Goddess. No other

(land) is equal to this. (41) Elsewhere the Goddess is rare, in Kāmarūpa she is in

every house. (Worship) on top of Nīlakūṭa is called a hundredfold of that. (42)

It is said even twice of that on the *śivaliṅga* Heruka, twice of that on the *yoni*'s

of Śailaputrī, etc. (43) It is called a hundredfold of that on the *yonimaṇḍala* of

Kāmākhyā. Who performed worship of Mahāmāyā or Kāmākhyā only once (44)

obtains all his wishes here on earth and Śiva's form after his life. No other is

equal to him, nothing is to be done by him. (45)

In another passage, Kāmarūpa, in particular Mt. Nīlakūṭa, is mentioned as the center of the cosmos. The context is the myth about the sleeping Viṣṇu at the verge of creating a new world period. His first act consists of slaying two demons, named Madhu and Kaiṭabha, after putting them on a stone, which has been formed by Brahmā's energy (*brahmāsaktiśīla*). This very stone will serve as the foundation of Mt. Nīlakūṭa. The whole passage (62, 1–128) foreshadows Śiva's vision of Kāmarūpa as the most divine land. For the present purpose, I only quote the passages concerning Mt. Nīlakūṭa.¹⁰

62, 1–4

As Mahāgaurī has come together with me (Śiva) for the sake of love

(*kāma*), the goddess who came in secret in Nīlakūṭa is called Kāmākhyā. (1) As

she is love-giving, full of love, love itself, beloved, giving her lovebody and

destroying her lovebody, therefore she is called Kāmākhyā. (2) Listen to the

greatness of this Kāmākhyā in particular, who

in the form of primary matter ‘steers’ (*niyojayet*) the whole world. (3)

After summarizing how the earth emerged from the primary waters the text continues with Mt. Nīlakūṭa, Śiva’s mountain, which is referred to as being ‘once Kubjikā’s seat’.

62, 56–57

Upon this ‘seat’ of Kubjikā the female part (*yonimaṇḍala*) of Satī fell. There, the goddess Mahāmāyā concealed herself. (56) After Yoganidrā had concealed herself in me having the form of a mountain, that mountain became dark-blue, because the female part had fallen. (57)

The text explains that Brahmā, Varāha, Kūrma and Ananta assumed the shape of mountains in order to support the new earth, in particular Śiva’s mountain in the middle, and continues:

62, 73–77

In this way, on the most meritorious seat called Kubjikā’s seat, (73)

on Mt. Nīlakūṭa, the goddess stays in secret together with me. However, after it had fallen there Satī’s *yonimaṇḍala* was shattered. (74) It went to stone-ness inside the mountain. Kāmākhya is staying there. After touching this stone, a mortal being will reach immortality. (75) Being immortal, staying in the abode of Brahmā, he will reach final liberation. The greatness of this stone, in which Kāmeśvarī is staying, (76) is wonderful, the secret of which being that iron becomes ashes.

(.)

After I had reached ‘liṅga-ness’ (*liṅgatvam*) on the *yonimaṇḍala* stone, (82) all immortals (*nirjarāḥ*) reached ‘stone-ness’ (*śilātvam*), assuming the form of mountains (*śailarūpās*). Just as I have sexual intercourse with Kāmā in my own form, (83) in the same way all the gods are covered by stone-forms. While covered by stone-forms, staying each in his own mountain, (84) they always have sexual intercourse in their own form, coming together in secret. Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Hara, the Regents of the quarters, (85), as well as the other gods staying there, they all follow me in paying homage to the goddess Kāmākhya, who assumes any form at will (*kāmarūpiṇī*). (86) Nīlaśaila is triangular, low in the middle, Sadāśiva. In the middle of it is a lovely *maṇḍala*, provided with thirty Śaktis. (87) The cave Manobhavā is there, created by Manobhava. The *yoni* is upon this stone, in the form of a stone, lovely, measuring 12 *aṅgulas* in width and 21 *aṅgulas* long, (88) gradually sloping in a minute way along with Bhasmaśaila, . . . (89) reddish like vermilion or saffron, fulfilling all wishes. In this *yoni* the fivefold Kāminī always sports. (90)¹¹

In this passage, all the mountains of Kāmarūpa are places of gods and goddesses, who had come to this area in secret to make love with Kāmākhya, who assumes any form at will (*kāmarūpiṇī*). The latter qualification may also sound as “the One of Kāmarūpa”. Hereafter a complete *maṇḍala* is drawn around the *yoni*-stone, which becomes a real *yonimaṇḍala* indeed.

3. Śiva’s Vision of Kāmarūpa

“Go to the *pīṭha* in the area of Kāmarūpa called Mount Nīla”, Śiva says to his sons, “the secret abode of Kāmākhya, named Kubjikā’s seat, where the heavenly Gaṅges is, and besprinkle yourselves with its waters” (76, 73–74). The two brothers performed it and praise Mahāmāyā who is then coming forth out of the *liṅga* and appears to them in her own anthropomorphic form. A long hymn of praise follows and the boons asked for are granted in a miraculous way. By pressing her two nipples, the goddess produces two streams of milk. Bhairava and Vetāla drink the milk (76, 112). It is the drink of immortality making them divine again. Mahāmāyā, now called Vaiṣṇavī, says: “You both will become leaders of the Gaṅgas, of the gods, and staying at (my) door you will be forever close (to me), like Nandin, my sons” (76, 115), and then she disappears on the spot. But Śiva returns and

starts narrating a complete sacred geography of Kāmarūpa with their deities, and with their mythical background. (76, 118–21)

One significant passage from this rather long section may be selected, by way of example. ¹² The passage is about Jalpīśa, where Śiva is present in the form of a *liṅga*.

4. Jalpīśa

The Karatoyā river is mentioned first and straight away at the very end of chapter 76. In the following chapter, Śiva proceeds with Jalpīśa and Nandin's well situated in the north-west of Kāmarūpa, but he starts with mentioning six grand rivers springing from this area, where one should take a bath with spectacular results (7–22). He concludes with a story about a group of *kṣatriyas* who being afraid of the son of Jāmadagni were hiding at Jalpīśa, and disguised themselves as *mlecchas* guarding Śiva's *liṅga*.

77, 1–33

Then, in the northwest of Kāmarūpa, Tripurāntaka (Śiva) showed the unequalled *liṅga* of himself, called Jalpīśa, (1) where Nandin after propitiating Mahādeva, father of the world, obtained leadership of the Gaṇas with an unaltered body; (2) where in former times Nandin made the great well Nandikuṇḍa. Sprinkling after drinking the most excellent water one's boon is obtained. (3) After bathing in it and drinking it the excellent man who has done what he had to do goes to the abode of Hara, his wellbeing as great as even Nandin's. (4)

5. Siddheśvarīyoni

In its neighbourhood, situated not too far away, Tryambaka showed the noble Bhairava the great goddess Siddheśvarī in the form of a *yoni*—being Mahāmāyā containing the worlds—where Nandin after worshipping Mahāmāyā with hymns of praise and bows, as ordered by Śiva, obtained the leadership of the Gaṇas. (5–7)

6. Suvarṇamānasa River

Suvarṇamānasa is there, the best of rivers, charming (*manohara*), (7) in order to quickly do a favour for Nandin. That lake called Mānasa came there by order of Śambhu who was formerly practicing asceticism (*tapasyataḥ*). (8)

There is the beautiful river, springing from his ascetic locks, coming from the Himālaya. After bathing in it, a man will obtain a merit equal to (that of bathing in) the daughter of Jahnu (Ganges). (9)

7. Jaṭodā

Formerly, at the time of Gaurī's wedding, water was sprinkled by the groups of all Mothers (*mātrikās*) on Śiva's ascetic locks. (10) That is why due to these waters a river came forth, then called "the water from his locks" (*jaṭodā*). When a man takes a bath in its waters on the bright, eighth day in the month Caitra, he will go, (11) after a full lifetime, O best of men, to Śiva's abode.

8. Gaṅgā

The river Gaṅgā of the second world-age (*dvāparasya*), called 'Three Streams', best of rivers, (12) springing from the Himālaya, having come forth from the disk of the pure moon—after bathing in it on the day of the full moon in the month Māgha, one will not be born in a mother's womb. (13) After bathing, on sun, moon and planets, a man will reach Oneness (*kaivalyam*).

9. Sitaprabhā

The river called Sitaprabhā, descending from Śiva, (14) springing from the Himālaya too, white, going to the south ocean. After bathing in it during Daśaharā on the tenth day in the bright half of the month, (15) a man goes in the house of Viṣṇu, freed from his sins.

10. Navatoyā

Then, the river called Navatoyā, situated in the East. (16) Always making new (*nava*), new (*nava*), new (*nava*), it purifies. Therefore, it has formerly been called ‘New-water’ (Navatoyā). It springs from the Himālaya too. (17) Bathing in it on the day of full moon in the month Māgha, a man becomes a god (*devatā*). Bathing during the full month of Māgha, he will proceed to the house of Viṣṇu. (18)

11. Agadā

The river called Agada is the father of these rivers, situated in the East of the ‘seat’ (*pīṭha*), meritorious, springing from Brahmā’s feet. (19). It springs from the Himālaya too, it is honoured by gods and Gandharvas. After bathing there and drinking, a man will go to Brahmā’s house. (20) Listen to the fruit of merit of a human being who the whole month of Kārttika takes a bath in the great river named Agadā: (21) Without disease (*aroga*) here in this world, and reaching the very ultimate happiness. After reaching Brahmā’s house for the rest of his time, he will then obtain final liberation. (22)

12. Jalpīśa

When a man takes a bath in Nandin’s well, he should perform it at night. Then in the night, and on the following day, he should go to the shrine of Jalpīśa. (23) There, after bathing in the great river and after worshipping Jalpīśa again, eating the food offering in that night, he should spend the night in control of himself. (24) Then, when the following day has dawned, he should go to Śivā Siddheśvarī. Here he should worship, and he should practice fasting on the eighth. (25) The goddess has four arms, full and uplifted breasts, glowing like a heap of vermilion, she carries a knife and a skull (26) in the right (arms) and in both left arms the fearless and a boon-giving gesture, her head adorned with matted hair, standing upon a red lotus. (27) Her mantra consisting of praying five syllables starting with the last is well-known, Kāmākhya’s *tantra* is recommended as the *tantra* for her worship. (28) After doing this, this courageous man will not be born again in a womb.

13. Mlecchas

Formerly, some Kṣatriyas being afraid of the fearlessness of the son of Jāmadagni (29) sought refuge at Jalpīśa, disguising themselves as ‘barbarians’ (*mlecchas*). Speaking *mleccha* all the time, but always speaking Aryan (30) when serving Jalpīśa, they guarded him, Hara. Charming like great kings they were, still, his Gaṇas. (31) So, after satisfying them all, a man should worship (Śiva) Jalpīśa: he has two arms, hands in the fearless and boon-giving gestures, a colour such as jasmine. (32) One should worship the supreme god with the mantra of Tatpuruṣa. In this way the *pīṭha* of the noble Jalpīśa brings merit. A man who knows this goes to the city of Śaṅkara. (33)

After the account of Jalpīśa lying in the northwest, the sage Aurva continues with Śiva’s description of the south-western, northern and middle ‘rock’. Then the first speaker, Mārkaṇḍeya, takes the floor for a brief moment, establishing that he is actually telling the account.

78, 1–6

Mārkaṇḍeya said:

After listening to this excellent conversation of Śaṅkara (Śiva) and Bhairava together with the noble Vetāla, (1) king Sagara asked the very wise seer Aurva for more, being delighted with joy about this excellent speech. (2)

Sagara said:

Colourful is this story, my lord and excellent seer, about the location of the *pīṭha* of Kāmarūpa, and its exposition. (3) Now, I wish to hear more in detail, great wise man, the exposition of the northwestern, middle and eastern part. (4) How, and on which place Mahādeva and Ambikā were staying. Tell all this, tiger of the seers, I am eager to listen. (5)

Aurva said:

The exposition of the northwestern part has been spoken about, most excellent king. Listen now to the detailed exposition of the southwestern, northern and middle rock.¹³

Now, an elaborate description follows of mountains, stones, ponds and rivers, where a whole pantheon of Hindu deities is present, some of them in the form of *lingas* and *yonis*. Pilgrims should take a bath in all these rivers and ponds, climb mountains and hills, and worship the respective deities who will make themselves visible to the worshipper during the ritual procedure. In all these cases, the Vaiṣṇavī Tantra, also called Uttaratantra, is to be followed. The result will be immortality and a divine status.

After this long passage, the KP adds a remarkable story about the loss of all the sacred places of Kāmarūpa. Śiva is not speaking any longer. What is happening now is told by the sage Aurva who is speaking to king Sagara.

81, 1–38

Aurva said:

In Kāmarūpa, the great *pīṭha*, after taking a bath, drinking and worshipping the deities, a great many people formerly went to heaven. (1) Some reached liberation (*nirvāṇa*), others went to Śambhu-hood. Yama was not able to stop them and to lead them to his own abode, O tiger of men, out fear for Śivā. (2–3) The messenger(s) of Yama, when going there, the Gaṇas of Śaṅkara drove them away. Being afraid of them, Yama's messengers did not go there, when ordered. (3–4) Having seen it, being deprived of his own duties, Śamana (Yama) approached the Creator (Brahmā) and spoke the following words. (4–5) O Creator, after bathing and drinking in this Kāmarūpa, mankind reaches the status of Gaṇa of Kāmākhyā and Lordship of Śambhu's Gaṇas. (5–6) I have no authority there, nor am I able to stop them. Settle a proper ruling for this, if this fits within

Brahmā goes to Viṣṇu, and both of them approach Śiva with the request to do something about it.

The Lord said:

This Kāmarūpa is pervaded (*vyāptam*) with all gods, all sacred places (*tirtha*), and also all sacred fields (*kṣetra*). There is no other greater than this. (10) After approaching this *pīṭha* human beings attain divinity, immortality, and the status of Gaṇa. Yama cannot do anything about it. (11) Great god, make it so that Yama is capable there. Where Yama is thrown out, no limits are seen. (12)

Aurva said:

After hearing this word of Viṣṇu, together with Vidhi (Brahmā), Śiva took his word to heart to achieve what had to be achieved. (13) After leaving Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Yama, the Bull-Rider (Śiva) taking all his own Gaṇas went to the area of Kāmarūpa. (14) Then Śaṅkara (Śiva) said to the goddess Ugratārā and the Gaṇa(s): "The Gaṇas must all these people drive away quickly. Great goddess Ugratārā, you too drive them quickly away". (15–16) Then, the Gaṇas and also the goddess Aparājitā drove the people out of Kāmarūpa in order to make the *pīṭha* into a secret area.¹⁴ (16–17) However, when the people of the four castes and the twice-born were being driven out, the sage Vasiṣṭha, angry, had gone to Mt. Sandhyācala. (17–18) He too was seized by the goddess Ugratārā together with the Gaṇas, at the command of the Lord (Śiva), to drive him out. He pronounced a curse, making it very horrible: (18–19)

14. Vasiṣṭha's Curse

"Because, O Vāmā, I, a sage, am seized by you to drive me out, therefore, you, be worshipped with the 'Left method' (*vāmyabhāvena*) with its *mantras*. (19–20) Because, O slow-witted ones of the Gaṇas, you roam about like *mlecchas*, therefore you must become

mlecchas in Kāmarūpa. (20–21) Even Mahādeva, because he tried to drive me out, me, a great ascetic, a sage, restrained, perfect in the Vedas, like a *mleccha*, therefore Śaṅkara will be the beloved of the *mlecchas*, wearing bones and ashes. (21–22) This is what is called Kāmarūpa, guarded by *mlecchas*, quick with intoxication (*madatvaram*), until Viṣṇu himself will go to this place again. (23) The Āgamas will be rare, and those who teach them as well, as well as the wise man who knows the rare Kāmarūpa Āgama. (24) Only he will obtain the full result, after his time has come." After he had said so, Vasiṣṭha disappeared on the very spot. (25) The Gaṇas became *mlecchas* in Kāmarūpa, the abode of the gods. Ugratārā too was 'Left', Śambhu became the beloved of the *mlecchas*. (26) The Āgamas were rare, as well as the ones who teach them. Without the Vedamantras, however, deprived of the four classes, Kāmarūpa was pursued by Yama in no time. (27) When Hari (Viṣṇu) had come back, however, and the 'seat' (*pīṭha*) was freed from the curse and giving results, (28) Brahmā made a plan to hide all the wells so that gods and men would not stay forever on this 'seat'. (29) In order to hide both the Apunarbhava well and the Soma well, the Brahmā and Urvaśī wells, also numerous rivers, (30) the rivers mentioned before and not mentioned, in the knowledge that 'one takes all', Brahmā made the plan thus: (31) After begetting a son of his own at Amoghā, wife of Śāntanu, in the form of water, letting it descend deliberately by the wise son of Jamadagni, flooding entire Kāmarūpa, this firm son of Brahmā flooding the multitude of wells, covering all sacred places (*tīrtha*), made them hidden on earth. (32–34) Men who only know the Lauhitya will obtain the fruit of a bath in the Lauhitya, most certainly. (34–35) They do not know the wells nor the sacred places elsewhere. Because of the curse of Vasiṣṭha, this hiding of the sacred places (*tīrtha*) came about. (35–36) Whoever knows the diversity of the sacred places, this excellent man will obtain the complete fruit of taking a bath in it. (36–37) After all the rivers, all the sacred places were completely submerged, everywhere, the Lauhitya, son of Brahmā, went to the south-ocean. (37) Such is the song of Kāmarūpa that has been told to you, O king.

15. 'The Invention of Myth'

Like 'traditions'¹⁵, myths are 'invented' mainly to create or to restore the cosmic order. In the myth just quoted, Kāmarūpa became a 'normal' land again, after a flood had washed everything sacred away. Floods like this must have been fairly common in this area, like nowadays. A natural phenomenon was turned into a myth with the aim to view the region as an ordinary land where people live and die.

In Śiva's story, Kāmarūpa is a wondrous land, where stones, wells, ponds and rivers are visited by the gods, where everybody may reach immortality and where the powerful goddess Kāmākhyā became the leading deity, taking over Kubjikā's 'seat', which already had the triangular form before Satī's *yoni* fell down (Dyczkowski 2004, pp. 93–108). In the KP, Śiva's Kāmarūpa is—in the words of the text itself—a *darśana*, a revelation of the presence of the divine, not a practical guide through a real landscape.

It seems to me that the composer—throughout the whole text by the way—created and adapted myths in order to establish a new, preferably Śākta-Vaiṣṇava, cosmic and social order. Myths—like traditions—are invented indeed, for a purpose.

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Notes

¹ See for example: Rosati (2017), pp. 4–6, and Urban (2001) and the extensive bibliography there.

² I am not fond of the terms 'cross-cultural' or 'negotiation' in this context. In my opinion indigenous customs and rituals just stayed on along with the official Hindu religious institutions, without harming or influencing each other, apart from some Tantric developments.

³ KP 44, 57–59.

⁴ As suggested already by R. C. Hazra (1963).

⁵ Cf. 45, 185: *evam sadā tvayā yojyāḥ sānugā nṛpasattama/vanītā satkriyopāyais tato bhadram avāpsyasi//*

- 6 About the feminine focus of most Bhairava Tantras, see [Dyczkowski \(2004\)](#), 93, note 1.
- 7 In Śiva's vision the whole of Kāmarūpa is a divine landscape, where gods and goddesses assume the form of mountains, rivers, ponds and stones.
- 8 All translations are my own, and are based on the text in [Śāstrī \(1972\)](#), and [Shastri \(1991, 1992\)](#).
- 9 KP 38, 146–50.
- 10 For a full translation of the whole passage, see [Van Kooij \(1972\)](#), pp. 130–41, and [Shastri \(1991\)](#), pp. 905–23.
- 11 There is never mention of a temple in the KP. The shrine is just a cave with a stone formation, which formerly was the seat of Kubjikā and is now associated with Satī's *yoni*, and with Kāmākhyā.
- 12 For the text and translation of the whole section, the reader is referred to [Shastri \(1992, part III\)](#), pp. 1179–261.
- 13 Shastri's translation is not correct here
- 14 The reading *rahasyakam* is followed.
- 15 See the well-known 'The Invention of Tradition' by [Hobsbawm and Ranger \(1983\)](#).

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