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Biography as Geography

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The Līḷācaritra*, the first literary text in Marathi, is a prose biography of Cakradhar compiled by his followers in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. The close attention to place in the* Līḷācaritra *is key to understanding not only this text from long ago and far away but also the attachment to particular places in other highly mobile worlds, including our own. The* Līḷācaritra *follows Cakradhar's ascetic peregrinations, as well as journeys made by the many people who came to see him or attempted to return to his presence (his* sannidhān*). The text's attention to the details of Cakradhar's daily life, including the places he visited, is motivated by* bhakti *(devotional love). In order to soothe the pain they felt at his absence, the community of Cakradhar's followers practiced remembrance of the things he had said and done, and made pilgrimages to the places where he had stayed.*

Keywords: bhakti, biography, geography, hagiography, Mahānubhāv tradition, Marathi literature, memory, mobility, pilgrimage, relics

Let me begin with a map of a kind that I first saw on television (see figure 1). Early in 2019, while the US government was shut down for thirty-five days, one of the anchors on MSNBC used a map like this to highlight one very precarious aspect of the situation: the air traffic controllers who keep those thousands of planes in the air were doing so without pay. What the image reminds me of, though, is thirteenth-century India. It is a great way to picture the world portrayed in the text that this essay will discuss. The text, entitled *Līḷācaritra*, is a biography of Cakradhar compiled by his followers in the last quarter of the thirteenth century.[1] The close attention to place in the *Līḷācaritra* is key to understanding not only this text from long ago and far away, I believe, but also the attachment to particular places in other highly mobile worlds, including our own.

The *Līḷācaritra* is the first literary text that was written in Marathi, the language of the modern state and historical region named Maharashtra. Composed before 1287 CE, it predates all other extant literature in Marathi, including the more widely known *Jñāneśvarī* (1290 CE; Tuḷpuḷe 1979, 330), Jñāneśvar's Marathi commentary on the

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[1]The *Līḷācaritra* passages in this essay are extracts from a translation that I am preparing for publication in the Murty Classical Library of India series (Harvard University Press). The edition to be published on the pages facing the English translation is a slightly revised version of Nene's (1936–37, 1950). Other editions I have consulted include V. B. Kolte's ([1978] 1982), Puruṣottam Nāgpure's (2004), Mādhavrāj Panjābī's (n.d.), and S. G. Tuḷpuḷe's (1964–67), which is based on Nene's edition. The divisions of the text are "Ekāṅka," "Pūrvārdha," and "Uttarārdha," abbreviated here as "E," "P," and "U," respectively. In some editions and manuscripts of the *Līḷācaritra*, "Ekāṅka" is included within "Pūrvārdha."

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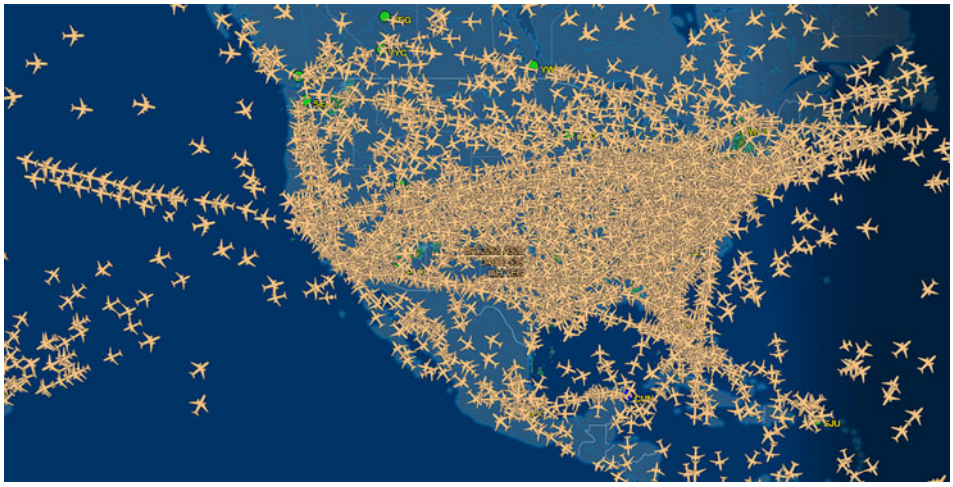


Figure 1. Planes in the air over the United States (FlightAware 2019). Printed with the permission of FlightAware.

Bhagavadgītā.[2] Like a great deal of the earliest Marathi literature, the *Līḷācaritra* originated within a community of people who produced and preserved their literature out of *bhakti*, religious devotion.[3] One principal strand of Old Marathi *bhakti* literature, that of the Vārkarīs, features the works of poets devoted to the god Viṭṭhal or Viṭhobā of Paṇḍharpūr, whom they see as a form of Kṛṣṇa (Dhere 2011). The *Līḷācaritra* stands at the beginning of the other principal strand of Old Marathi literature, that of the Mahānubhāvs. The Mahānubhāvs consider Kṛṣṇa, the teacher in the *Bhagavadgītā*, to be a "walking, talking" incarnation of the one supreme Lord, Parameśvar; Cakradhar, the subject of the *Līḷācaritra*, is another.[4]

Unlike most Vārkarī literature and a good deal of Mahānubhāv literature—indeed, unlike much premodern literature in most Indian languages—the *Līḷācaritra* is written in prose, not verse. Moreover, the prose style of the *Līḷācaritra* is quite simple and direct—"telegraphic," in Raeside's (1976, 597) term. Many *bhakti* biographies composed in the early forms of the modern languages of South Asia are more properly described as

[2]See Novetzke (2016) for a recent study that brings together these two monumental works as sources for social history. See Tuḷpuḷe (1979, 315–16) for arguments against an earlier view that the Vedāntin Mukuṇḍarāj's *Vivekasindhu* was the first literary work in Marathi.

[3]The earliest Marathi literature is thus an important exception to Pollock's understanding of literature in the Indian "vernacular" languages as arising more importantly in courts than in religious movements. The "inaugural literary texts in Marathi" are, he says, "*anomalously* … works by members of two religious communities" (Pollock 2007, 382; emphasis added). This perceived anomaly may account in part for the absence of a Marathi chapter in Pollock's (2004) groundbreaking edited volume on the history of premodern literature in South Asian languages.

[4]For more on the Mahānubhāvs, see Raeside (1960, 1976); Feldhaus (1983, 1984); and Feldhaus and Tuḷpuḷe (1992). Mahānubhāvs recognize five "walking, talking" incarnations of Parameśvar: the gods Kṛṣṇa and Dattātreya; Cakradhar; his guru, Guṇḍam Rāüḷ (also called Śrīprabhu); and his guru's guru, who was also Cakradhar's previous incarnation, Cāṅgdev Rāüḷ.

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hagiographies.[5] Unlike these, the *Līḷācaritra* lies toward the biographical pole of what Richard Eaton has suggested is a "continuum" between biography and hagiography.[6] The *Līḷācaritra*'s tone is matter-of-fact; it pays a great deal of attention to the details of everyday life; what few miracles it tells about are, for the most part, relatively unremarkable;[7] its subject is not presented as a model of exemplary human behavior. In these ways, it is unlike many hagiographies. Moreover, for the compilers of the *Līḷācaritra*, its subject is not a saint, a "holy person" (Greek, *hagios*): he is God, a divine incarnation.

Because of its attention to daily life, its matter-of-fact tone, and its simple prose style, the *Līḷācaritra* is an excellent source for social and economic history, as well as for the history of material culture. For its compilers, though, and for its many reverent Mahānubhāv readers over the centuries, it is most importantly a detailed record of everything anyone could remember about what its subject did and said as he wandered around Maharashtra at the end of the thirteenth century. Why did the community that produced and preserved this remarkable text care about the many details it records?

According to Mahānubhāv theology, the key to liberation from the cycle of rebirth and suffering is to experience the presence, the *sannidhān*, of a human incarnation of Parameśvar.[8] For Mahānubhāvs, *sannidhān* is not merely a formal, theological requirement but an emotionally powerful attachment. Since the late thirteenth century, however, the *sannidhān* of such an incarnation has been elusive. Cakradhar disappeared in 1273 CE, walking north from Pratiṣṭhān, on the Godāvarī River (see figure 2). After he was gone, Cakradhar's principal disciples went to stay with his guru, Śrīprabhu, in Ṛddhipur (*Smṛtisthaḷ* 3–4; Feldhaus and Tuḷpuḷe 1992, 70–71). Fourteen years later, in 1287, Śrīprabhu died. Cakradhar's leading disciples returned to the Godāvarī valley and bowed to a series of places where Cakradhar had stayed (*Smṛtisthaḷ* 5; Feldhaus and Tuḷpuḷe 1992, 71). They thus inaugurated a tradition of pilgrimage that flourishes to this day. In addition, they began a tradition of venerating relics: they removed, for example, the wooden threshold of a temple where Cakradhar had stayed, and made the threshold into bowls and beads.[9] During the fourteen years after Cakradhar

[5]See, for example, Callewaert and Snell (1994) and Smith (2000, 91–95).

[6]Eaton (2005, 5) suggests that texts at the hagiographical end of the continuum are "socially constructed" and live "in the collective memory of communities," whereas biographies are generally thought of as more "objective," created using nineteenth-century European "positivist methodologies" in "an attempt to reconstruct a factual narrative of a person's life from birth to death." As will be seen throughout this essay, the *Līḷācaritra* displays a profound interest in factual precision and accuracy, and at the same time it is also a product of the community of Cakradhar's followers. The text thus combines characteristics of both ends of the continuum Eaton identifies.

[7]Except, of course, for those ascribable to yogic powers, such as the ability of Cakradhar's previous incarnation, Cāṅgdev Rāüḷ, to leave his body and enter that of a young man who had just died and who awoke from the dead as Cakradhar (E4–5).

[8]See, for example, the opening verse in some manuscripts and editions of the *Sūtrapāṭh*, the collection of Cakradhar's aphorisms edited by Kesobās (Feldhaus 1983, 246): "There is in the world only one means of liberation: Parameśvar. That Parameśvar is limbless and formless, but by his mercy he takes on limbs and takes on a form. He descends. He gives his presence [*sannidhān*]. Serving him brings about liberation."

[9]*Smṛtisthaḷ* 8 (Feldhaus and Tuḷpuḷe 1992, 71–72): "Then one day Bhaṭobās sent for a carpenter. He had him make another threshold. The temple was made entirely of wood, and the threshold was also wooden. Bhaṭobās took it out. He put another one in its place. Out of the middle part,

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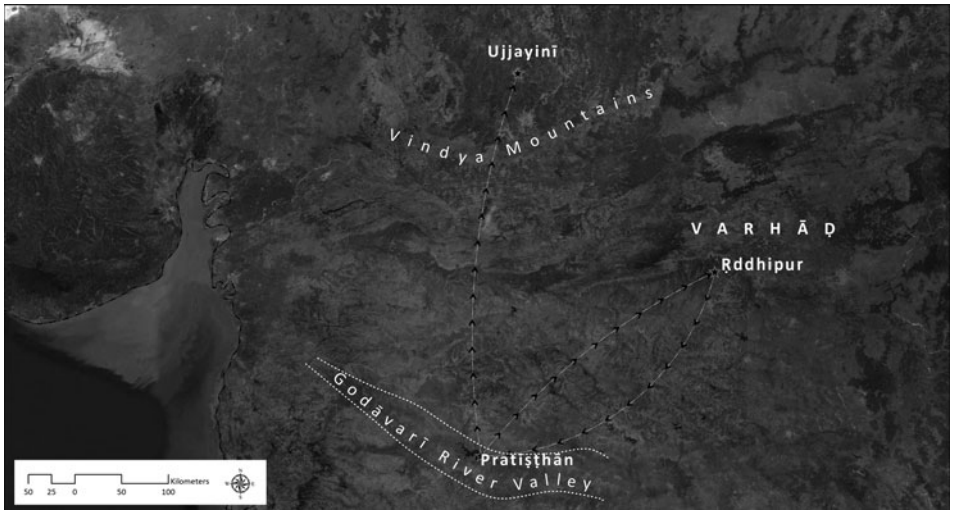


Figure 2. Cakradhar's departure and the first Mahānubhāv pilgrimage. Map by Nikhil Shejwalkar. Sources: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community.

disappeared and before Śrīprabhu died, Cakradhar's followers also created a literary tool for remembering him: the *Līḷācaritra*.

The *Līḷācaritra* consists of a series of approximately 1,000 episodic chapters called *līḷā*s (divine deeds). It was compiled by a disciple named Mhāïṃbhaṭ, sometime between Cakradhar's departure and Śrīprabhu's death, on the basis of Mhāïṃbhaṭ's own recollections and those of others who had spent more time than he had with Cakradhar.[10] A few of the *Līḷācaritra*'s chapters do have a tendentious theological message, demonstrating Cakradhar's divinity, for example, or portraying him imparting the teachings preserved in the *Sūtrapāṭh*, the collection of his aphorisms (Feldhaus 1983).[11] For the most part, though, the *Līḷācaritra* simply recounts, in a matter-of-fact way, the many small events and routines of Cakradhar's day-to-day life: where he went,

where the holy feet used to step, he made a large bowl. The two ends he made into two smaller bowls. The rest he made into beads and gave them to everyone to reverence…." For a discussion of connections between relics and biography in a closely related tradition, see Strong (2004).

[10]According to a Mahānubhāv text entitled "Itihās" (Deśpāṇḍe 1932), after noting down the recollections of Nāgdev and Bāïse, the two disciples who had spent the most time in Cakradhar's company, Mhāïṃbhaṭ went to the places where the various *līḷā*s had occurred and collected the recollections of those who had witnessed those episodes. He then subjected the whole text to Nāgdev's editorial supervision (Feldhaus 1983, 12–16). For a vivid account of Mhāïṃbhaṭ's research methods, see *Smṛtisthaḷ* 139–42 (Feldhaus and Tuḷpuḷe 1992, 115–16).

[11]Kolte's ([1978] 1982) edition of the *Līḷācaritra* adheres to the editorial principle that each aphorism (*sūtra*) of the *Sūtrapāṭh*, as well as each parable (*dṛṣṭānta*) in the compendium of Cakradhar's parables (*Dṛṣṭāntapāṭh*), must have originally been included in the *Līḷācaritra*; as a result, Kolte's *Līḷācaritra* draws material from manuscripts of these other texts as well as from manuscripts of the *Līḷācaritra* itself in a narrower sense.

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where he sat, what he did, who came to see him, what they asked, what he said, and—surprisingly often—what he ate. Sometimes even the recipes are included.

One aspect of everyday life that seems to have been extremely important to the authors of the *Līḷācaritra* is what we would call geography.[12] In the rest of this essay, I will try to explain what I mean by this and why I think it is important.

Geography

Geography is central to the *Līḷācaritra* in several ways. First, the text identifies precisely numerous places where Cakradhar sat, ate, slept, and stayed. It names villages and towns he visited, as well as temples and other public or private buildings that became his temporary homes.[13] In many cases, the chapters are *framed* geographically as well. Often they begin by stating where the episode narrated in them happened, even if that was "along the road" (*mārgīṃ*; for example, E73, P110, and P111); "in a certain village" (*gāṃvīṃ ekīṃ*);[14] "at the foot of a tree between two villages" (E36); "in a thicket in the wilderness" (E43); or in either of two named places, for example, "either Rāyer or Nāndeḍ" (E46). Sometimes a chapter ends by revealing disagreements about where its *līḷā* took place,[15] or else by remarking, "It is not known what place that was" (for example, E75 and P198). In many cases, an entire chapter consists simply of its title, a brief statement that Cakradhar spent the night in a particular village: "He stays overnight in place X," or "He stays overnight in such-and-such a temple in place Y."[16] In these cases, the *only* information the chapter gives is where its *līḷā* took place.

Besides the frequency and precision of the mention of place-names in the text, and besides the geographical framing of its chapters, geography is important to the *Līḷācaritra* in another way as well: it is basic to the structure and chronology of the text as a whole (see figure 3). Cakradhar came from Gujarat to Maharashtra as a pilgrim. He received

[12]As the next section of this essay should make clear, I use the term "geography" to indicate attention to particular places and to the itineraries that connect the places by means of remembered or imagined travel between them. I do not mean to imply that Cakradhar's early followers would have made or used maps like those that accompany this article, nor do I intend to refer here to questions of "spatiality" or territory.

[13]Another Mahānubhāv text, *Sthānpothī* (Kolte [n.d.] 1976), goes even further, using the terms for the cardinal and intermediate directions to describe the buildings where Cakradhar stayed and their directional relationships to one another, their location within (or outside) their village or town, the placement of their doors and gateways, and what corner or wall of a building was the all-important one where Cakradhar sat or slept (see Feldhaus 2003, 196–99; 2019, 153–57).

[14]This phrase (in a number of different spellings) occurs primarily in "Ekāṅka." This part of the text covers the period of Cakradhar's life before his principal disciples joined him. They therefore, in compiling the text, had only relatively vague, secondhand knowledge about the "Ekāṅka" period. See, for example, E12–14, E16, E18–19, E23, E33–35, E38–40, E42, and E48–53.

[15]And therefore, by implication, disagreements about where in the text the chapter should be placed. See, for example, P187, P225, P292, P297, P304, P441, P444, and P447.

[16]Three of many examples of this usage occur early in "Pūrvārdha":

> 26. He stays overnight in Rāhāṭgāv.
> 27. He stays overnight in the Mahālakṣmī temple in Kaḍeṭhāṇ.
> 28. He stays overnight in Bhīvāṇḍāüva's Rājaur.

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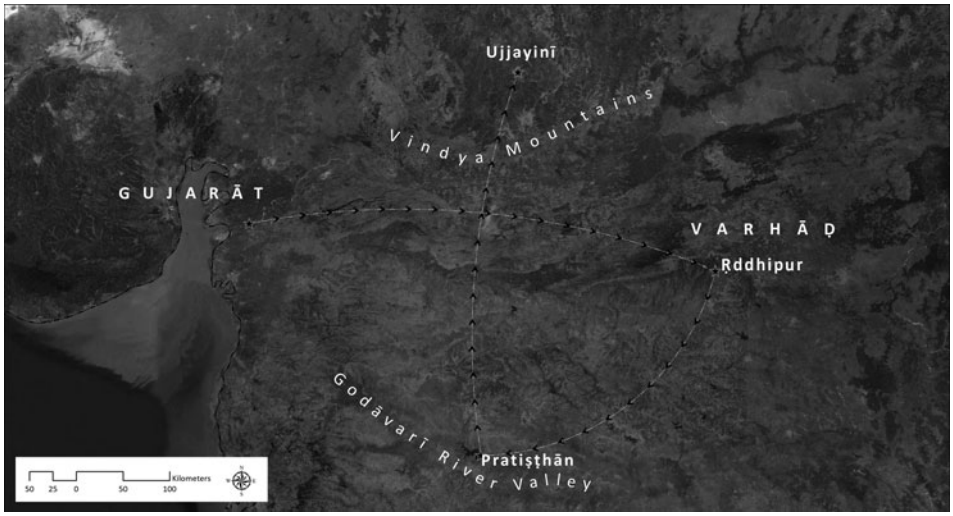


Figure 3. The geographical framework of the *Līḷācaritra*. Map by Nikhil Shejwalkar. Sources: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community.

a kind of initiation from Śrīprabhu in Ṛddhipur and then moved around, mostly in the Godāvarī valley, for an unspecified number of years.[17] Eventually Cakradhar settled down, more or less, in Pratiṣṭhān (modern Paiṭhaṇ), staying in a number of different temples in the city, until he left on "the road to the North." Itinerant cloth merchants traveling between Gujarat and the Godāvarī valley saw him in the Vindhya Mountains; his last known address was Ujjain (Ujjayinī). The end of the *Līḷācaritra* is thus symmetrical with the beginning: Cakradhar comes south (and east) into Maharashtra from Gujarat, and he leaves Maharashtra by going back north, this time toward—and beyond—Ujjain.

Within this overall framework, which is both geographical and chronological, the *Līḷācaritra* is structured in three parts that are differentiated according to the presence or absence of permanent disciples in Cakradhar's company and according to the degree of commitment of his principal disciple, Nāgdev (whom the text often calls Bhaṭobās).[18] Although this tripartite structure is chronological, within each part the order of the episodes follows the itinerary of Cakradhar's wanderings rather than the months of the calendar or the years of his life.[19] In general, then, the biography expresses chronology

[17]For speculation in some Mahānubhāv manuscripts about the number of years covered in the "Pūrvārdha" and "Uttarārdha" sections of the *Līḷācaritra*, see Kolte ([1952] 1977, 58–65).

[18]See note 1. Cakradhar begins to have permanent disciples at the transition between "Ekāṅka" and "Pūrvārdha"; toward the end of "Pūrvārdha," Nāgdev undergoes a conversion experience, and, at the beginning of "Uttarārdha," he decides to become a full-fledged disciple of Cakradhar.

[19]The few exceptions to this rule I have noted occur when several episodes about the same disciple cluster together (for example, those about Bhāṇḍārekār are found in E27–32 and those about Viṣṇusvāmī in E46–47), or when chapters are grouped by theme (for example, E48 and E49 both tell about weddings, and E51 and E52 are both about ascetics and monasteries). This kind of nongeographical ordering is found primarily in "Ekāṅka," the part of the text that narrates episodes from the period during which Cakradhar wandered alone, not yet accompanied by the

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in terms of geography. This is the significance of the cases in which the text takes the trouble to record a disagreement about where a particular episode took place: knowing where it happened is key to knowing when it happened.[20]

Mobility

One reason that geography is so important to the *Līḷācaritra* is that Cakradhar traveled around a great deal. In fact, not only he but also many other people in the text travel to a large number of places for a wide variety of reasons, and in some cases for no reason at all. As a result, the *Līḷācaritra* portrays Cakradhar's world as one of nearly constant motion, with people, objects, and messages traveling back and forth and around and around in a complex network of connected places.

For his followers, Cakradhar prescribed a life of constant, solitary, ascetic wandering. "Renounce your attachment to your own land," he said, in the first *sūtra* of the section of his collected aphorisms that records his teachings about proper conduct. "Renounce your attachment to your own village. Renounce especially your attachment to your relatives" (*Sūtrapāṭh*, "Ācār" 1; Feldhaus 1983, 199). "Practice constant peregrination," he commands elsewhere (*Sūtrapāṭh*, "Ācār Mālikā" 132; Feldhaus 1983, 214). Or again, "Throw away your life at the foot of a tree at the end of the land" (*Sūtrapāṭh*, "Ācār" 26; Feldhaus 1983, 200)—closely followed by the caution, "Do not get used to any one tree; do not get used to any one place" (*Sūtrapāṭh*, "Ācār" 37; Feldhaus 1983, 200). Cakradhar himself practiced this kind of itinerancy during the early part of his career as a holy man, the part of his life sketched in the "Ekāṅka" section of the *Līḷācaritra.* Chapter 8 of that section describes the extreme indifference with which he set out on his career as a wandering ascetic:

> Ekāṅka 8. He accepts a state of extreme detachment.
>
> The Gosāvī accepted a state of dispassion. He was not inclined to walk along the road. His matted hair got caught in thorns. The wind would unravel it, or someone would come along and unravel it, and then the Gosāvī would move on. Thorns would pierce his body and scratch it. Drops of blood would appear. They would look naturally beautiful, like rubies on pure gold.

In the two longer and later sections of the *Līḷācaritra* ("Pūrvārdha" and "Uttarārdha"), Cakradhar continues to wander, but he no longer wanders alone.

disciples who later created the *Līḷācaritra* (and who knew from direct experience only the itineraries that structure "Pūrvārdha" and "Uttarārdha").

[20]See note 15 and the associated text in the discussion. In addition, knowing where Cakradhar told his disciples about earlier events in his life is key to knowing when he told them about the events. In E4, the mention of the place where Cakradhar told a disciple about an episode that had occurred earlier indicates when the narration occurred, even if the episode itself is placed in "Ekāṅka." The chapter begins, "In Hīvaralī, Mahādāïse asked…," and then goes on to narrate an important episode from the "Ekāṅka" period. The mention of Hīvaralī tells us that Cakradhar told Mahādāïse about this episode much later, toward the end of the "Pūrvārdha" period of his life.

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In these sections of the text, the sections whose episodes were witnessed directly by his disciples, Cakradhar moves with them from place to place, mostly in the Godāvarī valley. His stays are never very long, and they are set in a large number of different places. Figure 4 indicates the principal places where Cakradhar stayed in just the "Pūrvārdha" section of the *Līḷācaritra*. It distinguishes, as the text does, between places where he stayed overnight (*vasatī* places); those where he stayed for a longer period, a few days or weeks or even a couple of months (*avasthān* places); and those where he stopped but did not stay overnight (*sthāns*).[21] Figure 5 is meant to provide a sense of the complexity of Cakradhar's travels during the "Pūrvārdha" period: it indicates the order in which he went to the major, *avasthān*, places mentioned in the text.[22] In the last half of "Uttarārdha," Cakradhar stays primarily in Pratiṣṭhān (a place now called Paiṭhaṇ), but still he keeps moving around, living in turn in more than a dozen different temples in that town. Figure 6 is a scholar's reconstruction of the geography of Pratiṣṭhān in Cakradhar's time.

Wherever Cakradhar was staying, he seems to have followed the daily practice of going out for a walk. The text uses a term for this, *viharaṇ*, that I think can best be translated as "wandering around aimlessly." Much of Cakradhar's moving from one place where he stayed overnight or longer to another appears also to have been aimless, on a larger scale. In at least some episodes, he seems to have had an itinerary in mind, as he is able to tell a disciple where they can meet again (for example, E61, U235). More often, though, Cakradhar's decisions about where to go appear to have been spontaneous. A good example is found in P352, when he accepts an invitation from a man who happens to come by while Cakradhar is sitting under a tree:

> Pūrvārdha 352. He meets Vāyanāyak along the road.
>
> Then, along the road, he sat for a while at the foot of a certain pipal tree. Bāïse washed his feet. The Gosāvī had rinsed his mouth and was chewing pan when Vāyanāyak came along. He was on his way to Rāvasgāv along with his family, for the eighth-month-of-pregnancy rite for [his daughter] Kāmāïse. They were traveling there in a large cart. He was checking on his fields as they went along.
>
> He saw the Gosāvī sitting at the foot of the pipal tree. They greeted each other. Vāyanāyak prostrated himself. He touched the holy feet. Then he said,

[21]The tradition (and to some extent the *Līḷācaritra* itself) distinguishes, further, among places where Cakradhar sat (*āsan sthāns*), places where he defecated (*pariśray sthāns*), places where he urinated (*laghu pariśray sthāns*), and places where he simply stood (*caraṇcārī sthāns*). Some Mahānubhāv traditions make even finer distinctions. In July 2019, a Mahānubhāv Mahant in Jalna District told me of a distinction between *vasatī* (a stay of one night and one day) and *kuḍ vasatī* (a stay of two nights and one day), as well as of a distinction between *avasthān* places (where a divine incarnation stayed from one to nine days) and *mahāsthāns* (where he stayed for more than nine days).

[22]My colleague Nikhil Shejwalkar and I plan to create an interactive version of this map to post on the Internet. The map will have clickable links to the relevant chapters of the *Līḷācaritra* and the relevant passages from *Sthānpothī* (Kolte [n.d.] 1976; see note 13, above). It will also feature photographs of what is to be seen in the places now and interviews with their caretakers, as well as a recording of Mahānubhāv monastics singing a litany (*Tīrthamālikā*) of the places where Cakradhar went, in the order in which he visited them.

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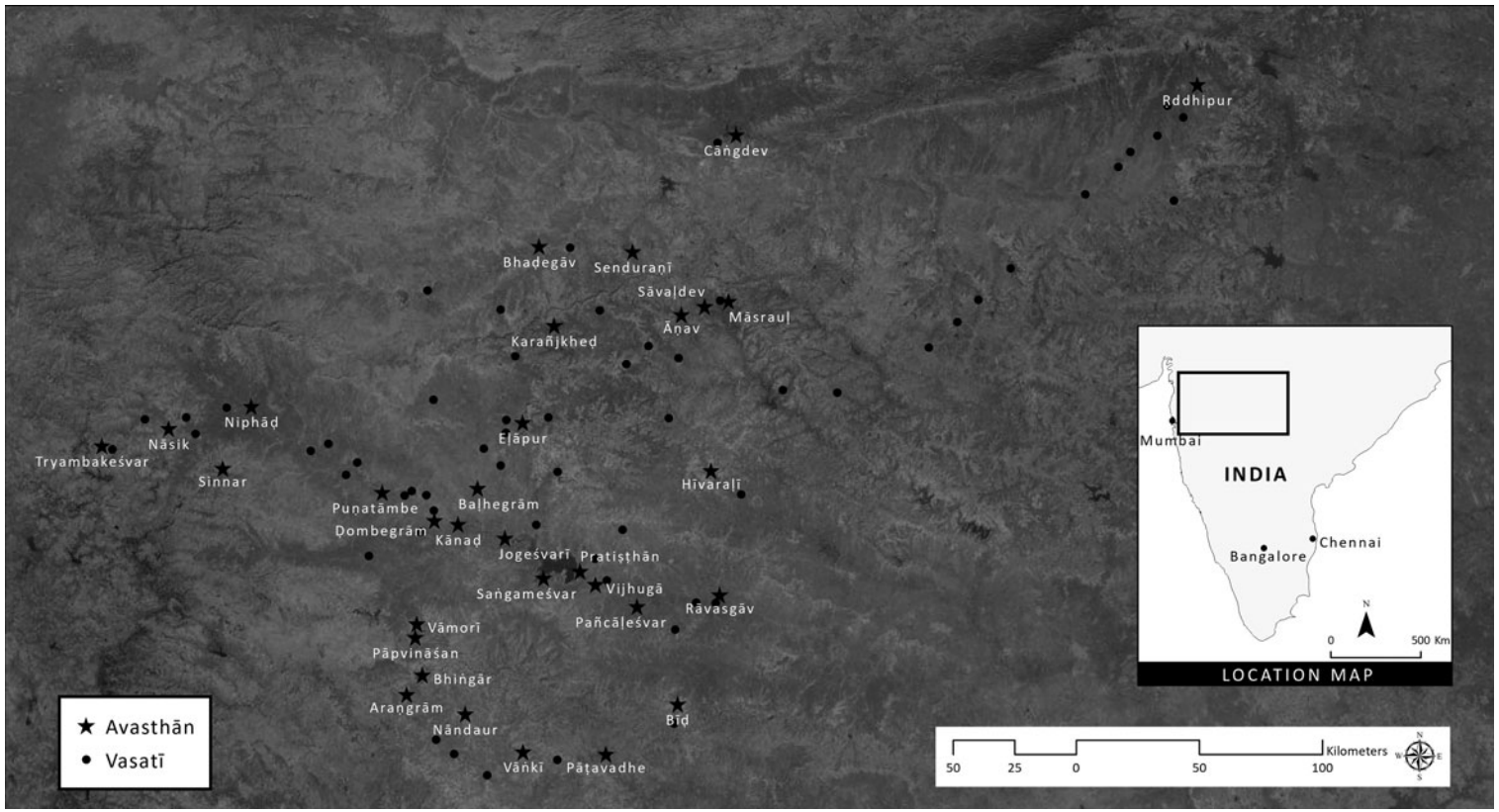


Figure 4. Places visited by Cakradhar in "Pūrvārdha." Map by Nikhil Shejwalkar. Sources: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community.

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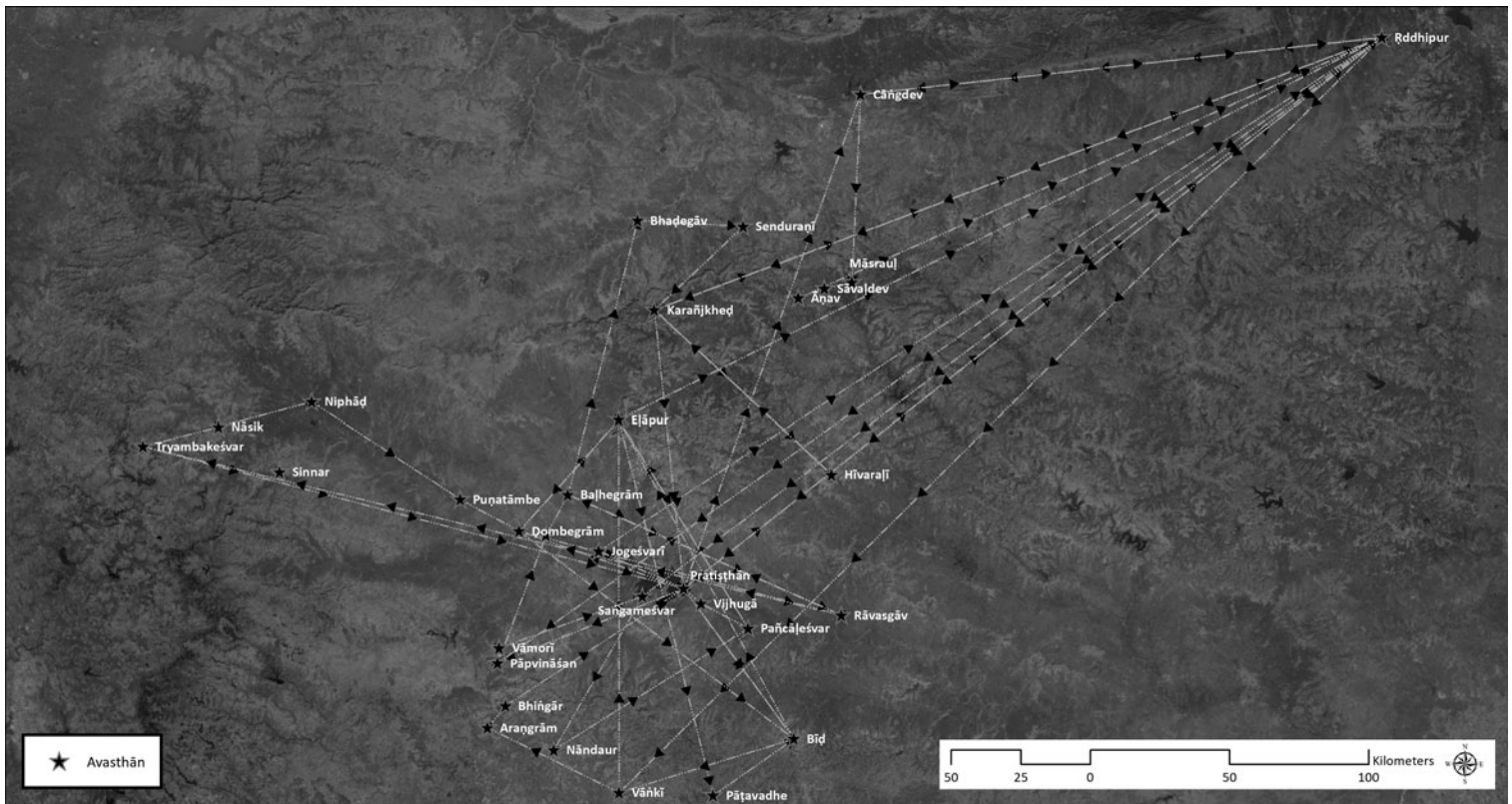


Figure 5. Route taken by Cakradhar in "Pūrvārdha." Map by Nikhil Shejwalkar. Sources: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community.



Figure 6. Map of Pratiṣṭhān in the time of Cakradhar, on display in the Bāïsā Gumphā temple in Paiṭhaṇ. Much of the area on this map is now under the water behind the Jayakwadi Dam. Map by Dr. Arunchandra Pathak, photograph by Anne Feldhaus. Printed with the permission of Dr. Pathak.

> "What is going on, Lord? Where is the Gosāvī going?"
>
> The Omniscient one said, "I am going to the ascetic grove … at Nimbgāv."
>
> Then Vāyanāyak made a request: "Rāvasgāv is nice, Lord. There are two temple courtyards there. There is a fine temple of Siddhanāth. There is a temple of Rāmnāth."
>
> The Omniscient one said …, "I have seen that [place] before."
>
> Then Vāyanāyak invited him again: "Lord, please come to Rāvasgāv. Please give *darśan* to my family."[23]
>
> Then the Gosāvī accepted the invitation.…

In some episodes, Cakradhar and his disciples disagree about when to leave a place (for example, P344), where to go next (for example, P204, P227, U275), or what route to take (for example, U258). Usually Cakradhar wins these arguments. On some occasions, though, he is willing to adjust his plans in order to give a devotee a chance to spend time with him. A good example of this is narrated in U210:[24]

[23]That is, please grant the sight of yourself to my family, allowing them to gaze at you.
[24]See also P344 and U235. In each of these two episodes, Cakradhar accedes to a female disciple's request that he stay on to celebrate a festival at a place that he was about to leave.

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Uttarārdha 210. When he is about to leave, he asks Dādos about giving him days to be with him.

After the Gosāvī's morning worship service was over, he put on a cloak and a cap. Then the Gosāvī said to Dādos, "O Mahātmā, I am inclined now to move to another village. But you have just arrived here, so where should I give you your days to spend with me?"

"Lord, if the Gosāvī is leaving, I will come along with him. Then the Gosāvī can give me time with him wherever he is inclined to be."

Then the Gosāvī went to Rāñjangāv.

Moreover, at least once when Cakradhar changes his mind about where to go, he leaves a message for a disciple he has promised to meet in one place, telling her that he will be in another:

Uttarārdha 228. He sends Maṇḍaḷīk to invite Sādhe.

Then, on the third day [of his stay in a certain place], after the Gosāvī's morning worship service was over, the Omniscient one said, "Maṇḍaḷīk, go to invite Sādhe.... I will go to Bhiṅgār. Bring her there."

"All right, Lord."

Then Maṇḍaḷīk set out to invite her.

229. When he reaches Araṇyagrām, he leaves a message for Sādhe.

Then he left for Bhiṅgār. At a certain village, there was one road that went to Bhiṅgār and another that went to Ciñcoḍī [and Araṇyagrām]. The Gosāvī stood at the fork in the road.

Then the Omniscient one said, "Why should a person taking this road not stay on this same road?" The Gosāvī decided to go by the road to Araṇyagrām. The Gosāvī said to Bhaṭobās [also called Nāgdev or "Monkey"], "Monkey, leave a message for Sādhe here in this village."

"All right, Lord." Bhaṭobās went up to a man who was seated on a platform at the foot of a tree. Then Bhaṭobās said, "Excuse me. Five women of ours and one Mahātmā are coming along this road. Please tell them, 'Your Gosāvī is not going to Bhiṅgār after all. He went to Araṇyagrām.'"

When Sādhe came up to that place, the man said, "Mother, your Gosāvī is not going to Bhiṅgār after all. He went to Araṇyagrām. He has invited you to come to Araṇyagrām."

Sādhe said, "My friend, did Pāṭhā come to tell you the message, or was it Nāgdev?"

At that, the man laughed.

"What are you laughing at, my friend? Nāgdev has two eyes. Pāṭhā has one eye. When he was little, he fell out of his cradle. The seat poked him. His eye got put out."

At that the man laughed even more.

"Why are you laughing, my friend? Don't you have a mother or sisters?"

"Mother, do I know Pāṭhā? And do I know who Nāgdev is? I gave you the message...."

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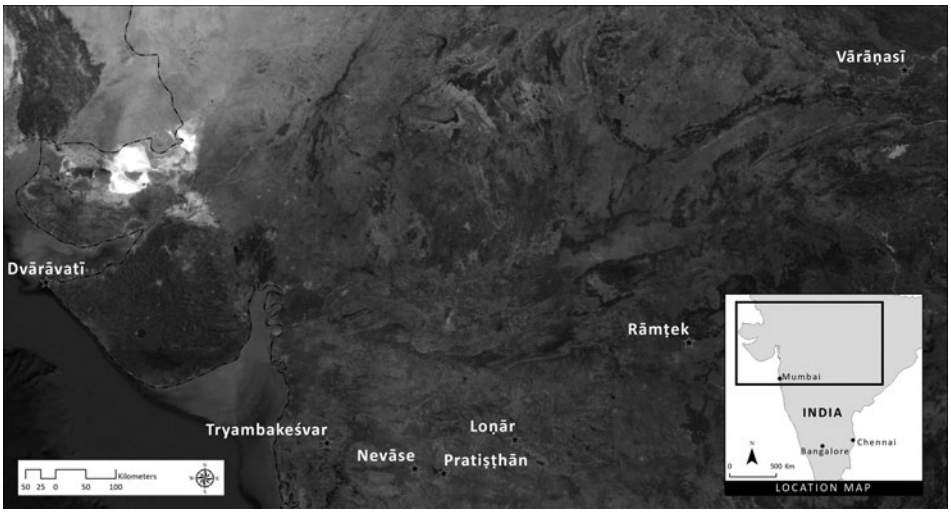


Figure 7. Places of pilgrimage in the *Līḷācaritra*. Map by Nikhil Shejwalkar. Sources: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community.

Although Cakradhar's travel is central to the *Līḷācaritra*, he is by no means the only person in the text who travels. Many others also move around, and they do so for a wide variety of reasons. Several people in the *Līḷācaritra* go on pilgrimages, generally traveling in largish groups (see figure 7): to Dvārkā;[25] to Vārāṇasī (U130, U362, U465); to Pratiṣṭhān;[26] to Loṇār (E71, P274); to Nevāse (U190–91); and to Tryambakeśvar (E72ff., U19, U145). Cakradhar's own travels begin as he sets out from his home in Gujarat to go on pilgrimage to Rāmṭek (E7); "Ekāṅka" ends and "Pūrvārdha" begins with him setting out for the Siṃhastha (Kumbha Melā) festival at Tryambakeśvar (E72–76, P1). The fact that both of his pilgrimages are aborted (P1, E7) does not matter to my point here. They are part of the *Līḷācaritra*'s evidence of a lively world of travel to holy places.

Besides going on pilgrimage, people travel for all kinds of other reasons as well. Cakradhar's disciples make trips to nearby villages or market towns for shopping or begging (for example, in U111), and people travel long distances to deliver invitations and other messages. Soldiers set out on military expeditions (E54, P114); cloth merchants travel back and forth between the Godāvarī valley and Gujarat (as we have seen); and horse traders move from village to village selling horses (E16). Women travel from their marital home to their parental home to give birth, and we learned earlier about a father who went to his daughter's marital home for her pregnancy rite (P352). People go to the capital, Devgirī, to deal with government officials, and government officials—sometimes even the king—leave the capital on official or personal business.

[25]Generally called Dvārāvatī in the *Līḷācaritra*. See P88, P263–66, P322, U133, and U184.
[26]U357 describes a crowd of people who had come to Pratiṣṭhān for the No-moon Monday (Somvaṭī) festival.

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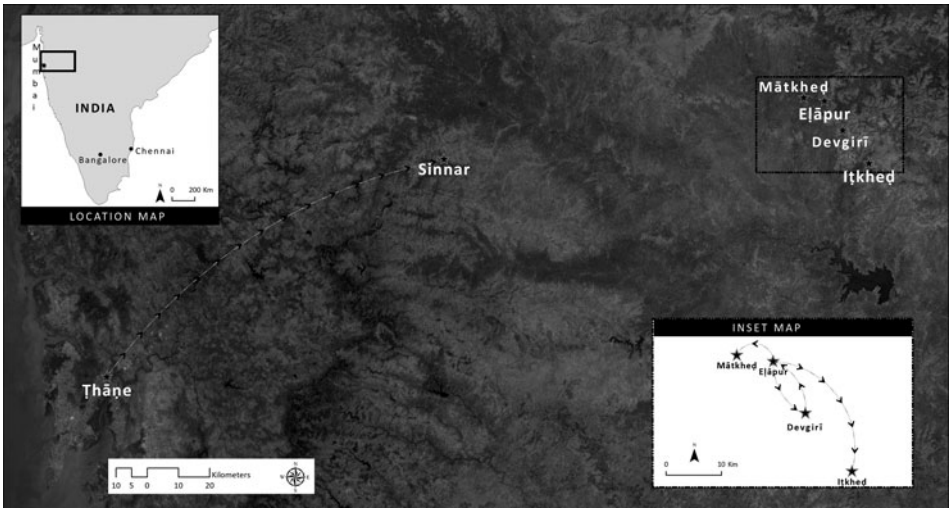


Figure 8. King Mahādev pursues Cakradhar. Map by Nikhil Shejwalkar. Sources: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community.

In a fascinating series of chapters, the *Līḷācaritra* tells of futile attempts by Mahādev, the Yādava king who ruled from 1260 to 1270 (Altekar [1960] 1982, 2:545), to meet Cakradhar. Noticing an epidemic of absenteeism among his courtiers, the king asks where they are all going. Informed that they are going to see Cakradhar, who is staying in the nearby caves at Eḷāpur (Verūḷ, Ellora), the king decides to go there and see for himself. When Cakradhar hears that the king is on his way from Devgirī to find him, he has his disciples pack up and move on swiftly to another place (see figure 8):[27]

> Pūrvārdha 104. He agrees to let the king come for *darśan*.
>
> All the royal servants were coming from the capital for *darśan* of the Gosāvī. When King Mahādev reached the assembly hall, not a single member of the assembly was there. Then King Mahādev became angry and asked, "Hey! No one seems to have reported for duty. Where do all of you go?"
>
> They said, "If you promise us immunity, we will tell you."
>
> "Tell me."
>
> "We go for *darśan* of the holy man who is at Eḷāpur."
>
> "What is his name?"
>
> "His name is Śrī Cāṅgdev Rāüḷ Gosāvī."[28]
>
> With that, the king felt a powerful attraction. "So will you arrange for me to have his *darśan*?"

[27]The motif of the holy man evading the king is a common one in Indian hagiographical literature (Smith 2000, 159–76). For an account of a near-contemporary Sufi shaykh's attempts to avoid several successive sultans of Delhi, see Digby (1990).

[28]This name is used quite often in the text for Cakradhar. I am not sure exactly how this usage is related to the account of Cakradhar being a re-embodiment of a previous divine incarnation named Cāṅgdev Rāüḷ (see note 7).

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"All right."

Pālhā Ḍāṅgiyā came to say, "Lord, the king is coming for *darśan* of the Gosāvī."

The Gosāvī agreed to it.

105. And the king comes.

One day the king got ready. He set out to have *darśan* of the Gosāvī. And the royal elephant fell down (Or: died).[29] Because that bad omen occurred, the king turned back.…

Pālhā Ḍāṅgiyā came. He said, "Lord, the king was on his way here when the elephant fell down. So the king turned back."

Another day the king set out again. That time it rained, so he turned back.

The third time, the king set out with determination. The Omniscient one said, "My woman, Mahādev is an honorable person. He will come for my *darśan*. He will hand over the kingdom to me. He himself will become my servant."

Bāïse said, "Is that so, Bābā?"

The Omniscient one said, "Then, my children, you will have nowhere to go." (Or, Hirāïsā: "Then, my children, you will be set aside.")[30]

Bāïse said, "Oh, no, Bābā!"

The Omniscient one said, "I will prevent that day from coming. You make the preparations for us to leave."

Bāïse made all the preparations. The Gosāvī set out.

106. And the news reaches them.

(Paraśarāmbās: He stayed overnight in Mātkheḍ.) (Rāmeśvarbās: He stayed overnight in Itkheḍ.) The Gosāvī was seated there. Bāïse went to fill a water pot. The women who sold dairy products had come back early from selling their yoghurt and milk and ghee. The women at the place for getting water began to ask, "Why have you come back so early today? Most days you come back late from your daily trip to the capital."

They said, "The king came to Eḷāpur for *darśan* of a holy man. We sold our yoghurt and milk right there, so we came back early."

Bāïse heard that. She told the Gosāvī, "Bābā, the women at the place for getting water were talking." She told him what had happened. "What Bābā said came true."

The Omniscient one said, "My woman, I told you that I would prevent that day from coming."

Later, as the king is returning from a military campaign on the west coast, he sends a scout to find Cakradhar, who is now staying in yet another place, one that lies close to the king's route from the coast back to the capital. This time Cakradhar eludes

[29]See note 30.

[30]The text of the *Līḷācaritra* includes variant readings, based on different disciples' recollection of the wording of a text whose only manuscript was lost soon after the text was composed (Feldhaus 1983, 15–16). What I have translated in parentheses here is an example of such a variant, based on the version memorized by the disciple Hirāïsā or Hirāïse. Often such variants are introduced only by words meaning "or" (*tathā*) or "another version" (*vāsanā* or *ekī vāsanā*).

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detection by disguising himself as a Gujarati pastoralist and speaking to the king's scout in Gujarati:

> 114. He conceals his own name.
>
> King Mahādev had gone to Ṭhāṇe on a military campaign. He came to Sinnar. He said, "This is a beautiful town. Maybe the Gosāvī is here." So he sent Pālhā Ḍāṅgiyā to look. He looked at all the other temples, and then came to the Bhīlmaḍh. Saying, "How could he be here? This is a small temple," he stayed outside. He sent a man in to take a look.
>
> After the afternoon worship service was over, the Gosāvī ate his meal. He rinsed his mouth, he chewed pan, he went to sleep, and he woke up. The Gosāvī was standing next to the sculpted central part of a pillar, wrapped in a blanket from Saurāṣṭra.
>
> The man asked, "Is Śrī Cāṅgdev Rāüḷ Gosāvī here?"
>
> The Omniscient one said, "Mother, he isn't here. And he isn't there.…[31] (Hirāïsā: "I don't know about Cāṅgdev Rāül. I don't know about Bāgdev Rāül. There was an old woman here. She has gone into the village to beg for alms.") (Or: There aren't any Mahātmās or Bahātmās. I am right here.")[32]
>
> Then the man left.

In fact, much of the travel in the *Līḷācaritra* consists of people coming to meet Cakradhar, either for the first time or on repeat visits. Usually they have more success than the king did in finding him. In several episodes, disciples who have been moving around with Cakradhar go away and come back to whatever place he has reached by the time they return. Some disciples, even some who have taken initiation as ascetic renouncers, return to their home villages to visit their families and provide for their welfare (for example, P90, P348). Other disciples go away on pilgrimage for a while. Still others travel wherever Cakradhar sends them, whether to deliver a message; to find a place to stay in the next village (for example, P138, P276, P282, and U214); to pick up belongings that have been left behind (for example, P437); to dispose of the body of a dead fellow ascetic (U260–61); or to serve Cakradhar's guru, Śrīprabhu, in Ṛddhipur (P274, P343, U2, U292, U322; cf. P339). Indeed, much of the coming and going in the text is of disciples whom Cakradhar has sent to Ṛddhipur or summoned back from there. These trips provide some of the biggest oscillations in the text, as most of the places where Cakradhar stayed with his disciples were in the Godāvarī valley, while Ṛddhipur lies far to the northeast, in Varhāḍ, a different subregion of the Marathi-language world (see Māṭe 1975).[33]

[31]Cakradhar speaks to the man in Gujarati, with some Marathi words mixed in. I am grateful to Samira Sheikh and Sachin Ketkar for helping me make whatever progress I have managed to in deciphering the conversation.

[32]See note 30.

[33]An episode recounted in the *Ṛddhipurcaritra*, the biography of Cakradhar's guru Guṇḍam Rāüḷ (or Śrīprabhu) that serves as a much briefer companion volume to the *Līḷācaritra*, tells with gentle humor of confusion arising from linguistic differences between the Marathi of the Godāvarī valley and that of Varhāḍ (Feldhaus 1984, 74–75; the *Līḷācaritra* also narrates the episode, in P440).

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The Bonds of Love

If the intention behind the ascetic peregrination that Cakradhar practiced, and that he enjoined for his disciples as well, was to avoid attachment—to one's land, to one's village, even to one particular tree at the "end of the land"—much of the other mobility in the *Līḷācaritra* is based on people's attraction and eventual attachment to Cakradhar himself. Like the Yādava king, many others who are not, or not yet, Cakradhar's disciples come to see him (that is, they come for his *darśan*). And a common theme in the episodes in which Cakradhar sends his disciples off somewhere is their strong desire to return and be with him. Early in the *Līḷācaritra* (E14), a fervent disciple whom Cakradhar has sent to stay in the next village comes to the edge of that village every day to inquire about Cakradhar's welfare. When someone mischievously tells the man that Cakradhar has died, the disciple himself drops dead from grief. Much later in the *Līḷācaritra*, when Cakradhar sends away all the disciples who are with him, he finds himself wondering why they are not as devoted as the dog, Ḍāṅgarā or Ḍāṅgareś, who similarly dies from the agony of separation:

> Uttarārdha 310. Ḍāṅgarā dies.
>
> One day the Gosāvī … said to his devotees, "Hey, why are you all here? You have no idea how to please me. When you are here, everything that happens is bad. All of you, get out of here."
>
> "All right, Lord." Then they all left.
>
> Ḍāṅgareś was sitting there. The Omniscient one said, "Ḍāṅgarā, you go away too." He got up, he circumambulated the holy feet, and he set out. There was a stream that flowed into the river south of the Kedār temple. He laid down his body there.
>
> Then, when it was time for the afternoon worship service, all the devotees came back. They prostrated themselves to the Gosāvī. They touched his holy feet. Then the Omniscient one said, "Hey, you have all come back. Why has Ḍāṅgareś not come back?"
>
> "He must have gone somewhere to fill his stomach, Lord."
>
> The Omniscient one said, "That's not so. Go. Look for him."
>
> So all the devotees, with Bhaṭobās in the lead, went to search for the dog. Bhaṭobās saw him from a distance. Then everyone came to tell [the Gosāvī], "Lord, Ḍāṅgareś has laid down his body."
>
> The Gosāvī went there. He sat down near him. The Gosāvī said, "Ḍāṅgarā" and touched him with his holy hand. Then he had Bhaṭobās dig a grave. He had them bury him.
>
> The Omniscient one said, "This dog is better than you. Being separated from me made him completely unable to stay alive."

Some of the most intricate travel stories in the text are those in which a disciple who has been separated from Cakradhar searches for him, going to place after place in an effort to catch up with him as he moves around. The following episode provides a sense of the lengths to which some people went to find their constantly moving

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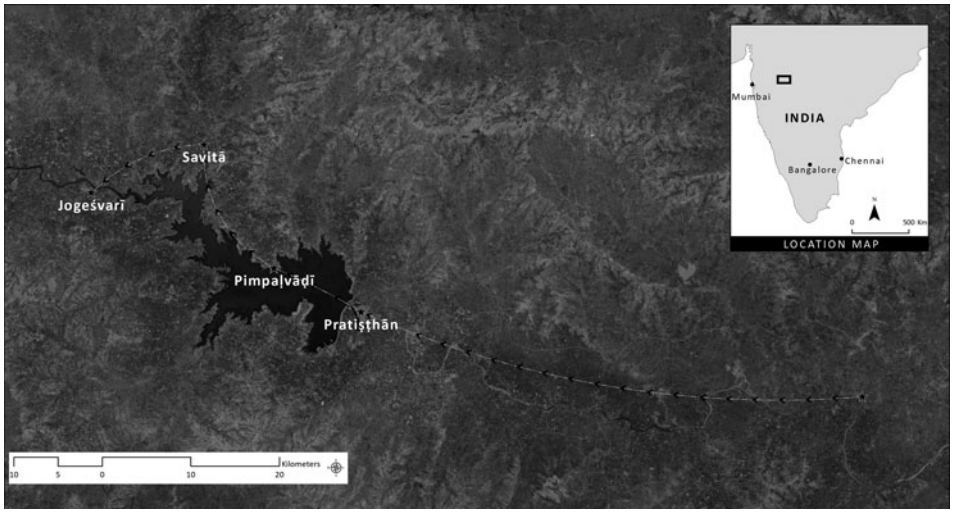


Figure 9. Umāïse and Avaḍaḷbhaṭ search for Cakradhar. Map by Nikhil Shejwalkar. Sources: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community.

guru. Figure 9 traces the route along which the disciples in this chapter pursued Cakradhar:[34]

> Pūrvārdha 433. He meets Umāï and Avaḍaḷ.
>
> Umāïse and Avaḍaḷbhaṭ set out for *darśan* of the Gosāvī.… They were traveling one stop behind him. They reached Pratiṣṭhān. There they met Lakhubāïse. They asked her, "Where is the Gosāvī living?"
>
> She said, "Pimpaḷvāḍī. The Gosāvī left here yesterday. I went to see him off."
>
> Immediately they came to Pimpaḷvāḍī. They asked Mahādev Pāṭhak. He said, "The Gosāvī ate his meal in the babul grove. He slept in the Brahmanāth temple. Then the Gosāvī went to Savitā. I just got back from seeing him off."
>
> They had spent that whole day traveling, and they could not catch up with him. So they stayed in Pimpaḷvāḍī. Early the next morning they came to Savitā. They asked the priest of the Nāgnāth temple there.… The priest said, "The Gosāvī spent the night here. He left early in the morning for Jogeśvarī. He rinsed his mouth here.…"
>
> Umāïse looked down. She saw pan that had been spat out. Umāïse picked up the bits of betel nut and took them as *prasād*.[35] … They smelled good and were extremely fragrant.…
>
> Then immediately they came to Jogeśvarī. The devotees were cleaning the cell. The Gosāvī was seated on the verandah of the temple, facing north. Umāïse and Avaḍaḷbhaṭ had *darśan* there. They prostrated themselves. They

[34]Besides this most dramatic example, there are several other such episodes, including P321–22, P331, P437, U11, U221, and U257.

[35]That is, she ingested them reverently, taking them to be a divine being's leftovers.

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touched the holy feet. They sat down.

Then Umāïse told the Gosāvī everything that had happened. "Lord, I saw bits of betel nut that were very beautiful and extremely fragrant. I said, 'If these bits of betel nut are like this, they must be our Gosāvī's.'"

The Gosāvī agreed.

Umāïse's reverence for the bits of betel nut that had emerged from Cakradhar's mouth adumbrates the veneration for relics that his Mahānubhāv followers developed in the years after his departure. Her intense desire to be with Cakradhar, to be in his *sannidhān*, his presence, was partially assuaged by holding, and even ingesting, something that had been inside his mouth. Similarly, the inspiration to compose the *Līḷācaritra* appears to have emerged from a desire to hold onto Cakradhar by recording in detail everything he had said and done. The pilgrimage tradition that grew up concurrently with the veneration of relics and the composition of the *Līḷācaritra* is another powerful way to remain close to Cakradhar, by going to the places where he had gone and remembering the things that he had said and done at the places.

Cakradhar himself enjoined his followers to "remember" him—that is, to practice *smaraṇ*, recollection, of him—during periods of separation while he was still alive. In *Līḷācaritra* P90, when Cakradhar's disciple Cāṅgdevbhaṭ is summoned to his home village to visit his mother, Cakradhar tells him, "Baṭikā, think of me ten or twenty times a day. If not ten or twenty times, then think of me five or seven times. If not five or seven times, then think of me two or four times. If not two or four times, then at least think of me once or twice. If not once or twice, then think of me at least once. But do not let a day go to waste." In another episode, Cakradhar also explicitly commands his disciples to visit places where he himself has stayed. He chides Nāgdev (Bhaṭobās) for having passed near but not gone into one such place:

Uttarārdha 52. He sends Bhat to Rākṣasbhuvan.

One day the Gosāvī sent Bhaṭobās to Rākṣasbhuvan on an errand. It is not known what the errand was. He completed the task and came back by way of Pañcāḷeśvar.

He prostrated himself. He touched the holy feet.

The Gosāvī asked, "Did you come back by way of Pañcāḷeśvar?"

"Yes, Lord."

The Omniscient one said, "Did you go into Pañcāḷeśvar?"

"No, Lord."

The Omniscient one said, "You should go to the places where I have been!"

It was after Cakradhar had left, when his disciples' separation from him became extremely prolonged (for centuries, as it has turned out), that his "deputy," Nāgdev (Bhaṭobās), made explicit the connection between *smaraṇ* of Cakradhar and visits to places where he had been. Nāgdev advised his fellow disciples, "Go to holy places (*tīrthas*) and recollect the deeds (*līḷās*) that were done at them. That is the way one practices recollection (*smaraṇ*) there" (*Smṛtisthaḷ* 39; Feldhaus and Tuḷpuḷe 1992, 79).

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Conclusion

In the centuries since the *Līḷācaritra* was written, the tradition of Mahānubhāv pilgrimage has spawned a number of additional premodern texts and modern guidebooks,[36] as well as architectural embellishments, websites,[37] YouTube videos,[38] and mobile phone apps.[39] It is in this pilgrimage tradition, I believe, that we find a deeper explanation of the importance of geography to the *Līḷācaritra*. Besides the fact that Cakradhar was extremely mobile, the *Līḷācaritra* was created and preserved by and for a community of people who were themselves pilgrims. They needed to know exactly *where* Cakradhar had done the things he did so that they could visit those places themselves—and thereby soothe the pain they felt at his absence. In other words, geography is central to the *Līḷācaritra* because visiting places where Cakradhar went is a way of being as nearly as possible in his presence, his *sannidhān,* given the harsh fact of his *asannidhān*, his absence.

Sannidhān, then, is a (socio-)geographical value that provides the motivation for a pilgrimage tradition that thrives today. The assumption of that tradition is that places are capable of embodying their own pasts and of bringing one closer to people who once lived in or visited the places. This assumption is one that I believe is widely shared around the world; it has significant religious-ritual consequences in a number of traditions. Moreover, as geographers like Doreen Massey (1995) have shown—or as anyone who visits Jerusalem, for example, will realize—the assumption that places can embody their own pasts has powerful political and social consequences as well.

The connection of places with their pasts also tells us, I think, something important about biography in general. When I think back on my own life, it falls into periods that I identify by the places where I have lived, studied, and worked. Many academics' CVs are characterized by a similar periodization. On a personal level, whereas some people remember what year something happened by what age they were or what age their children were at the time, I tend to remember my life and the history of my times in terms of which years I have spent in India or other countries. Those readers whose work similarly takes them back and forth across the globe may think of their own lives in these sorts of terms as well. Among historians who write biographies, I would be interested to learn how many end up periodizing or framing the biographies in terms of geography. Could it be that not just Cakradhar's, but most biographies are geographies?

What, then, do we learn from the thirteenth-century Mahānubhāvs who compiled Cakradhar's highly geographical biography? We learn the importance of *sannidhān*, of being in the physical presence of someone who matters greatly to us. We learn the importance of place to the remembrance of those who have gone away, and, conversely, we learn the importance of history and biography to a sense of place. As scholars, we learn the significance of geography for biography, while, at the same time, as people

[36]The most important of the premodern texts is *Sthānpothī* (Kolte [n.d.] 1976; see note 13, above). The modern guidebooks include Śevalīkar (1970) and Khāmanīkar (2003).
[37]See, for example, Anuruddha Bhave (2015).
[38]There is a burgeoning number of these; see, for example, Aditya Bhave (2017).
[39]See, for example, Palve (2017).

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reflecting on our own lives, we learn to attend to the central role that geography plays in the ways we think about our development and formation.

Finally, the *Līḷācaritra* reminds us that presence is something that we all long for. This is the case even in an age of technologies meant to mitigate our geographical separation. Mobile phones, landlines, Skype, FaceTime, WhatsApp, WeChat, LINE, Zoom, and online learning are all fine as substitutes, twenty-first-century equivalents of relics, pilgrimages, and detailed biographies. But what belies the view that substitutes can be as effectual as the real *sannidhān* is the number of airplanes that we scholars take to get to a conference, spending time and money and creating large amounts of carbon dioxide in order to be together on a particular day, in a particular place, in one another's presence.

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