Circulating Scholarship: A Note on a Sanskrit Letter from Bengal circa 1535 CE*

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Abstract

This note examines a Sanskrit letter from Bengal dating to approximately 1535 CE. *The letter was assumed to be lost. Addressed to a scholar in the discipline of nyāyaśāstra, the letter is the only available example of a personal letter between Sanskrit scholars from Bengal in the premodern period. First located in 1907 and then subsequently assumed lost, the letter has never been the subject of sustained analysis. This has resulted in a number of disagreements among modern scholars about the identities of the individuals named in the letter. This note provides a translation of the letter and presents arguments for identifying the individuals named in the letter. It then concludes by briefly reflecting upon the importance of the letter and its use in scholarly communication.*

At the monthly general meeting of the Asiatic Society of Bengal on 3 April 1907 in Calcutta, Haraprasad Shastri (1853-1931) exhibited a Sanskrit letter to those in attendance. The brief minutes of the meeting record that Shastri read a short paper on this letter in which he identified its author as a Maheśa Candra and its recipient as the well-known *nyāya* scholar from Bengal, Raghunātha Śiromaṇi.[1] Shastri's remarks, however, were never published by the Society; and he never devoted a longer essay to an analysis of the letter. Instead, five years later in 1912, he only very briefly referred to the letter in an article published in *Indian Antiquary*—again, without longer analysis. In the article, he posits that the letter's author is the founder of the Darbhanga Raj in Mithila, namely, Maheśa Ṭhakkura. In addition, he informs his reader that the recipient of the letter—whom he identified as Raghunātha Śiromaṇi in the Society's meeting—is actually referred to in the letter as "Cūḍāmaṇi Bhaṭṭācārya". Shastri conjectures that this is another name for Raghunātha Śiromaṇi. He also further informs his reader that the letter was found attached to the end of a Sanskrit text on astral sciences entitled the *Vaivasvatasiddhānta*.[2]

After Shastri's discussion of the letter in 1907 and 1912, however, the letter was assumed to be lost. In fact, the letter was not discussed again for forty years until Dineshchandra Bhattacharya addressed its existence in his classic, but sorely neglected, study of *nyāyaśāstra* in

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[1]Asiatic Society of Bengal, 'April 1907', *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, New Series, Vol. 3, 1907, pp. lxxv (appendix).

[2]H. Shastri, 'Dakshini Pandits at Benaras', *Indian Antiquary* 1912 (January), p. 9.

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Bengal published in 1952 entitled *Bāṅgālīr Sārasvata Abadān: Baṅge Nabyanyāẏacarcā* (Learned Accomplishments of Bengalis: The Practice of Navya Nyaya in Bengal). In his work, Bhattacharya bemoans the fact that this historically important letter can no longer be found.[3] Bhattacharya was likely expressing the general consensus about the letter in the early 1950s: writing at the same time, Daniel Ingalls, in his *Materials for the Study of Navya-Nyāya Logic* (1951), states that to his knowledge the letter had not been published.[4] But despite not being able to examine the letter, both Bhattacharya and Ingalls question one of Shastri's main conclusions. Each argues that the individual to whom the letter is addressed, namely, "Cūḍāmaṇi Bhaṭṭācārya", cannot be Raghunātha Śiromaṇi but rather is more likely Jānakīnātha Cūḍāmaṇi Bhaṭṭācārya, a *nyāya* scholar from the early sixteenth century who lived in western Bengal (Navadvip, Nadia District).[5]

Yet Bhattacharya and Ingalls' regret over the putative loss of the letter occurred in spite of the fact that it had already been published posthumously in 1945 by Haraprasad Shastri under the aegis of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.[6] Reproduced together with lengthy passages of the text to which it was attached, the publication of the letter went unnoticed until 1958 when Dineshchandra Bhattacharya discussed the letter in his monograph entitled *The History of Navya-Nyaya in Mithila*.[7] Bhattacharya is the first and only person after Shastri to examine the letter. Upon his examination of the letter, however, Bhattacharya expresses disappointment. Arguing with his usual candour, he says that

> Dr. Śastri's conjecture about the identity of the person (Maheśa Śarman[8]) who wrote this letter is entirely wrong. The letter was written in the Bengali script, and though not dated is somewhat later than the manuscript of the work (named *Jyotiḥsārasāgara* composed in 1450 [*sic*] Śaka, *Vaivasvatasiddhāntasāra* [*sic*] being only a part). The author of the work (Gaurīnātha of the Mukherji family) and all the persons referred to in the letter including Maheśa undoubtedly belong to Bengal.[9]

Coupled with Bhattacharya's earlier remarks and Ingalls' reservations, the argument in this passage by Bhattacharya overturns nearly all of Shastri's conclusions about the letter. First, an individual named Maheśa Śarman is the author of the letter, not Maheśa Ṭhakkura; second, Jānakīnātha Cūḍāmaṇi Bhaṭṭācārya is the recipient and addressee of the letter, not Raghunātha Śiromaṇi; and third, the manuscript to which the letter is attached is entitled the *Jyotiḥsārasāgara*, written by Gaurīnātha Śarman in 1453 Śaka (1530/31CE), not the *Vivasvatsiddhāntasāra*[10]—the latter being only a section of the former.

Strangely, however, even after Bhattacharya's discussion of the letter, it again falls out of scholarly memory. Currently the letter is incorrectly assumed to be lost again. Jonardon Ganeri, for example, while discussing Jānakīnātha Cūḍāmaṇi Bhaṭṭācārya, speaks sceptically

[3]D. Bhattacharya, *Bāṅgālīr Sārasvata Abadān: Baṅge Nabyanyāẏacarcā* (Kalikata, 1952), p. 101.

[4]D. Ingalls, *Materials for the Study of Navya-Nyāya Logic* (Cambridge, 1951), p. 22.

[5]Bhattacharya, *Bāṅgālīr Sārasvata Abadān*, p. 101; Ingalls, *Materials*, p. 22.

[6]H. Shastri, *A Descriptive Catalogue in the Collections of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Volume X, part I (Astronomy Manuscripts), (rev.) and (ed.) P. C. Sen Gupta (Calcutta, 1945), pp. 235–236.

[7]The delay in locating the letter in the Society's catalogue was most likely due to the Second World War.

[8]Note yet another name for the letter writer—this is the actual name used in the letter.

[9]D. Bhattacharya, *History of Navya Nyāya in Mithala* (Darbhanga, 1958), p. 176.

[10]This is the name of the section as given in the manuscript (Shastri, *A Descriptive Catalogue*, p. 233).

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of the letter's existence; and while Ganeri is equally sceptical that Raghunātha Śiromaṇi is the individual addressed in the letter, preferring Jānakīnātha, he does not question the identity of the letter's author.[11]

Much of the reason for the confused historiography on the letter is a result of the fact that it has never been the subject of a detailed analysis. This note constitutes the first detailed examination of the letter since Shastri located it in 1907 and offers the first translation of the letter. As will be appreciated, the letter reveals very little about the social life of Bengal during the early sixteenth century, but it does include the names of four individuals, the identities of whom remain undetermined. Despite this limitation, the letter is important for the simple fact that it is the only example of a personal letter between Sanskrit scholars from Bengal in the premodern period. Before addressing the letter in more detail, however, I begin by quoting it in full (a number of lacunas plague the reading):

> May there be prosperity. Thousands upon thousands of prostrations [are made] by Śrī Maheśa Śarman at that pair of lotuses, the two feet of the logician Śrī Cūḍāmaṇi Bhaṭṭācārya—by whom the arrogance of an array of adversarial scholars is undercut by his amassed fame acquired as a result of his constant teaching of flawless logic and celebrated in song by virtuous people.
>
> May you have tranquility. This [letter] is about another matter. The news sent by you has been received. But, having decided that there is some need of us here, we have still not yet now departed for your residence (*tatra*). However, I continue to have a strong desire to see you [lit., of beholding your feet]—a desire that has remained with me for the last two monsoons and is still not yet realized even today. Therefore, I am unfortunate [—]; immediately after my attending to [—], I must come to see you. On this point, you should know that I have no reservations. But, you do have Rāmakṛṣṇa Cakravartin [with you]. Just as things stand, I have written it. May many auspicious and wonderful blessings be upon [—] on this day, 21 Bhadra. This is the purpose [of the letter]. We are [humbly] yours. Here, as well, may there be wonderful [—] upon Śrī Rāmadeva[12] Cakravartin. This is also a purpose [of this letter]. Homage to Śrī Kṛṣṇa; to Śrī Rāma; to Śrī Hara; and to Śrī Govinda.
>
> [In a different handwriting[13]]
>
> Here also are one hundred salutations to Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Cakravartin, who resembles the essence of life, by Śrī Paraśurāma Śarman, a guardian (*pālya*[14]). O, Brother, for the purpose of meeting [—].
>
> svasti sadgīyamānaniravadhisattarkādhyāpanopārjitayaśorāśikharvīkṛtavividhavipakṣavidvatkuga-rvaśrīmattārkikacūḍāmaṇibhaṭṭācāryacaraṇāravindadvandveṣu śrīmaheśaśarmaṇaḥ praṇāmāḥ sahasraśaḥ | śamastu bhava[tāṃ] kāryam idam anyac ca | bhavatprahitā vārttā samadhigatā kintv asmākam atra kiñcit prayojanaṃ varttate iti kṛtvā tatra na gatim idānīm | parantu mamāpi varṣadvayaṃ vyāpya bhavaccaraṇasandarśanecchāsantatir jā[tā] sā nādyāpi pūrṇā bhavati ata eva bhāgyarahito + + + + sevānantaraṃ bhavaccaraṇasandarśane gantavyam | atra sandeho nāstīti niveditam | kintu bhavatāṃ rāmakṛṣṇacakravarttī yādṛśaḥ tādṛ[śaḥ] dik bhādrasyaikaviṃśe 'hni | + + + + + varttiṣu śrīśubhāśīrāśayaḥ santu | prajoyanañ caitat | vayaṃ tvadīyā eva iti dik | ihaiva

[11] In his remarks, J. Ganeri, *The Lost Age of Reason: Philosophy in Early Modern India, 1450-1700* (Oxford, 2011), p. 81, refers only to Bhattacharya, *Bāṅgālīr Sārasvata Abadān*; Shastri, 'Dakshini Pandits at Benaras', *Indian Antiquary* 1912 (January); and Ingalls, *Materials*.

[12] This is most certainly a scribal error and should read 'Rāmakṛṣṇa'.

[13] This is noted by Shastri in his reproduction of the letter (Shastri, *A Descriptive Catalogue*, p. 236).

[14] I read this as an abstract form of *pāla* (i.e., 'being a guardian/protector') rather than a gerundive (*kṛtya*) form of √*pāl*.

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śrīrāmadevacakravarttiṣu śubha + + + + + + prayojanañ caitat | śrīkṛṣṇāya namaḥ | śrīrāmāya namaḥ | śrīharāya namaḥ | śrīgovindāya namaḥ | ihaiva prāṇapratimaśrīrāmakṛṣṇacakravarttiṣu pālyaśrīparaśurāmaśarmaṇaḥ śataṃ namaskārāḥ kāryañ caitat bhrātaḥ sandarśanā{r}the + + + + + | [15]

As mentioned, the historical significance of the letter is tempered by the fact that it does not refer to contemporary circumstances in Bengal nor is the earlier "news" to which Maheśa refers available for consideration. Given these limitations, the main concern is the identity of the four individuals named in the letter: Maheśa Śarman, Cūḍāmaṇi Bhaṭṭācārya, Rāmakṛṣṇa Cakravartin, and Paraśurāma Śarman. Below I present arguments for identifying only three of these individuals. The exception is Paraśurāma Śarman: I am not able to locate any reliable information about his identity.[16] After presenting my arguments, I then briefly reflect upon why knowing the identities of these individuals is important and upon what the letter may suggest about modes of scholarly communication in early modern Bengal.

The letter is addressed to a logician (*tārkika*) referred to as Cūḍāmaṇi Bhaṭṭācārya. As mentioned, Shastri initially identified this logician as Raghunātha Śiromaṇi but Bhattacharya, Ingalls, and Ganeri have subsequently rejected this conclusion. A better identification they have suggested, with which I also agree, is Jānakīnātha Cūḍāmaṇi Bhaṭṭācārya, an author who wrote extensively in the discipline of *nyāya* in the early sixteenth century in western Bengal (Navadvip, Nadia District). As can be immediately appreciated, his name matches the name in the letter—although the letter does not include his given name, Jānakīnātha. Any concern about this omission, however, is alleviated by an examination of his textual colophons.

Jānakīnātha wrote four known works, although only two have been located. In the two works that are available, he refers to himself by this name. In his *Nyāyasiddhāntamañjarī*, he ends by saying: "The *Nyāyasiddhāntamañjarī* written by Śrī Jānakīnātha Cūḍāmaṇi Bhaṭṭācārya is completed".[17] Similarly, in his *Ānvīkṣikītattvavivaraṇa*, the colophon reads: "You learned people should consider this treatise by Śrī Cūḍāmaṇi Bhaṭṭācārya".[18] This last colophon, of course, exactly matches the style of address in the letter.[19]

Additional evidence is found in a text written by one of Jānakīnātha's sons, Rāghava Pañcānana. At the end of his work entitled the *Ātmatattvaprabodha*, Rāghava refers to his father by concluding: "After refuting those arguments not found in the Veda, the *Ātmatattvaprabodha*, composed by Śrī Śrī Rāghava Pañcānana Bhaṭṭācārya, son of Māhamahopādhyāya Śrīmat Bhaṭṭācārya Cūḍāmaṇi, is completed".[20] Again matching the

[15]Shastri, *A Descriptive Catalogue*, pp. 235-236. In transliterating the text, any emendations made by this author are inserted with curly brackets to distinguish them from emendations made by Shastri in square brackets.

[16]Reading the letter literally, he may have been the brother of Rāmakṛṣṇa.

[17]R. Mitra, *Notices of Sanskrit MSS*, Vol. 5, Part I (Calcutta, 1879), p. 175: iti śrījānakīnāthabhaṭṭācāryacūḍāmaṇikṛtā nyāyasiddhāntamañjarī samāptā | In addition, J. Eggeling, *Catalogue of the Sanskrit manuscripts in the library of the India Office*, Vol. 1, Parts 1-4 (London, 1887), p. 638 (MSS No. 1038b), when describing the *Nyāyasiddhāntamañjarī* states that "*Nyāyasiddhāntamañjarī* is an elementary treatise on the *pramāṇa*s, in four *paricchedas*, by Jānakīnātha Śarman, in the colophons always called Bhaṭṭācārya Cūḍāmaṇi".

[18]Quoted in Bhattacharya, *Bāṅgālīr Sārasvata Abadān*, p. 106: śrībhaṭṭācāryacūḍāmaṇibhaṇitam idaṃ sūriṇo bhāvayadhvam |

[19]His other two works are the *Maṇimarīci* and the *Tātparyadīpikā* (Bhattacharya, *Bāṅgālīr Sārasvata Abadān*, p. 106).

[20]Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 108: iti mahāmahopādhyāyaśrīmadbhaṭṭācāryacūḍāmaṇitanayaśrīśrīrāghavapañcānanabhaṭṭācāryaviracita[ṃ] vedabāhyanirāse ātmatattvaprabodhaṃ saṃpūrṇam |

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language of the letter, Rāghava's style of referring to his father indicates that scholars may have referred to Jānakīnātha in this manner in more formal settings with the assumption that readers would immediately know the individual being named.

Jānakīnātha's dates are not mentioned in his available colophons, but his date can be estimated by comparing a passage found in his *Nyāyasiddhāntamañjarī* with a passage in Raghunātha Śiromaṇi's *Padārthatattvanirūpaṇa*. As discussed by Dineshchandra Bhattacharya, this passage is essentially a direct quote from Raghunātha's *Padārthatattvanirūpaṇa*.[21] This indicates that Jānakīnātha was later than Raghunātha Śiromaṇi, who dates to approximately 1510, and corresponds well with the date of the *Jyotiḥsārasāgara*, 1530/31 CE (1453 Śaka)—the work in which the letter is preserved. Taken together, we can posit that Jānakīnātha flourished in approximately 1535, if this letter was composed slightly later than the *Jyotiḥsārasāgara*.

To conclude, then, it can be argued with near certainty that this letter was addressed to the *nyāya* scholar Jānakīnātha Cūḍāmaṇi Bhaṭṭācārya.

The identity of Maheśa Śarman is more difficult to determine and has been a greater source of contention between scholars. As mentioned, Shastri identifies him as Maheśa Ṭhākkura, but Dineshchandra Bhattacharya is in complete disagreement. I concur with Bhattacharya that the identification of Maheśa Śarman as Maheśa Ṭhākkura is incorrect. I also support Bhattacharya's conclusion that this Maheśa is from Bengal or a Bengali community (such as in Banaras) given that the letter is in Bangla script. One additional consideration is that the text to which the letter is attached is a work on astral sciences. This may provide some clue as to the disciplinary location of Maheśa. This is important to register since the affix, Śarman, is simply a term of respect that is added to the names of Brahmins and does not identify him by any title.[22] Taken together, then, I posit that Maheśa Śarman is a Brahmin from Bengal (or a Bengali community outside of Bengal) who writes on astral sciences (*jyotiḥśāstra*).

An examination of existing catalogues of astral sciences reveals that a scholar by the name Maheśa Śarman Pañcānana did write on *jyotiḥśāstra*.[23] This Maheśa wrote two texts, one of which is entitled the *Smṛtisaṃgrahasāra* that is, according to Rajendralal Mitra, based upon Raghunandana's works or digests (*tattva*s).[24] Setting aside for the moment the debate about Raghunandana's date, a consideration of the two works is an imperative in order to determine if this identification for the Maheśa Śarman of the letter is even feasible.

The beginning verses and colophon of the *Smṛtisaṃgrahasāra* are important for the discussion here. These read:

> Having bowed at the ocean—the two feet of Gopāla—and having examined the *śāstra*s composed by Manu and others, the learned Maheśa Śarman now writes about the reasons for performing required actions. All scholars have written about this collection of settled legal opinion, which informs us about actions that are prescribed and those that are proscribed. . . . The *Smṛtisaṃgrahasāra* composed by Śrī Maheśa Pañcānana is completed.[25]

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 107.

[22] As noted by Ingalls, *Materials*, p. 22, Jānakīnātha also uses this affix in his *Nyāyasiddhāntamañjarī*.

[23] I am unable to find this name among scholars writing on *nyāya*, for example.

[24] Mitra states this in the meta-data he records about the manuscript (R. Mitra, *Notices of Sanskrit MSS*, Vol. 6 (Calcutta, 1882), p. 235).

[25] *Ibid.*, pp. 235–236: praṇamya gopālapadāravindaṃ vilokya manvādikṛtañ ca śāstram | avaśyakartavyavidhānahetuṃ maheśaśarmā vitanoti dhīraḥ || vihitasya niṣiddhasya karmaṇo jñānakārakaḥ |

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These opening verses and colophon are of considerable importance: Maheśa does refer to himself in this text simply as Maheśa Śarman, which matches the style in the letter; and he also includes his title Pañcānana in the colophon. This allows a tentative identification between the Maheśa Śarman of the letter and the Maheśa Śarman Pañcānana of the *Smṛtisaṃgrahasāra*. Adding further evidence for this identification is another text written by Maheśa entitled the *Jyotiḥsāra*. In this text, he refers to himself simply as Śrī Maheśa in the opening verses and again as Maheśa Pañcānana in the colophon.[26]

Other considerations support identifying Maheśa Śarman Pañcānana as the Maheśa in the letter. One of the requirements noted above by Bhattacharya was that Maheśa ought to be from Bengal. This requirement is met in this instance: both of Maheśa's manuscripts referred to above are (or were) located in western Bengal and preserved in Bangla script. As noted by Mitra, the *Smṛtisaṃgrahasāra* was located in the town of Ula (Nadia District) and, as Shastri notes, the *Jyotiḥsāra* was located in the town of Kajoda (Barddhaman District).[27] No known manuscripts belonging to Maheśa Śarman Pañcānana are located outside of Bengal.[28]

The only issue remaining is the date of Raghunandana. This is a consideration because, according to Mitra, Maheśa's *Smṛtisaṃgrahasāra* is based upon Raghunandana's writings. Of course, to reach a definitive conclusion on the date and period of activity of Raghunandana is outside the scope of this note and would be a contentious undertaking. However, at the very least it is important to date Maheśa later than Raghunananda. Ludo Rocher, surveying existing arguments about Raghunananda's dates, presents the following date ranges in which he is thought to have flourished: 1520–1570, 1520–1575, or 1510–1580; this literature also posits that Raghunananda was likely to have been born in 1490 or 1500.[29] If we posit a *terminus post quem* of 1535 for the letter, this would place Maheśa Śarman Pañcānana just after Raghunandana finished some of his early writing and so would support Mitra's assertion that Maheśa was engaging with Raghunananda.

While none of these considerations is definitive in isolation, taken together they present a compelling case for identifying the author of the letter, Maheśa Śarman, as the *jyotiḥśāstra* scholar Maheśa Śarman Pañcānana.

The identity of Rāmakṛṣṇa Cakravartin is also problematic and has never been considered in the limited secondary literature on the letter. Part of the reason for the difficultly in determining Rāmakṛṣṇa's identity is that two authors by this name are known: one author from the discipline of *jyotiḥśāstra* and another from *nyāyaśāstra*. Adding to the difficulty, the letter makes an extremely brief reference to Rāmakṛṣṇa, which seems to suggest that he is with Jānakīnātha. Admittedly, this is not a very clear statement in the letter. Could this

vyavasthāsaṃgrahaḥ sarvaiḥ paṇḍitaiḥ parilikhyate ‖ ... iti śrīmaheśapañcānanaviracitaṃ smṛtisaṃgrahasāraṃ samāptaṃ | I know of Mitra from D. Pingree, *Census of the Exact Sciences in Sanskrit*, Series A, Vol. 4 (Philadelphia, 1981), p. 396.

[26]H. Shastri, *Notices of Sanskrit MSS.*, Second Series, Vol. II (Calcutta, 1904), p. 60. I know of Shastri from Pingree, *Census of the Exact Sciences in Sanskrit*, p. 395. Also of note is that both of Maheśa's texts begin with the same, though common, trope as the letter: bowing at the feet of a revered individual.

[27]Mitra, *Notices of Sanskrit MSS*, Vol. 6, p. 235 and Shastri, *Notices of Sanskrit MSS*, p. 60, respectively.

[28]For a comprehensive listing of the locations of Maheśa Śarman Pañcānana's manuscripts, see entries under 'Maheśa Pañcānana' and 'Maheśa Śarman Pañcānana' in Pingree, *Census of the Exact Sciences in Sanskrit*, pp. 395-396.

[29]L. Rocher, *Jīmūtāvahana's Dāyabhāga: The Hindu Law of Inheritance in Bengal* (Oxford, 2002), p. 16.

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mean that Rāmakṛṣṇa is part of the community of *nyāya* scholars? Or, is he a student of Jānakīnātha? No answer is forthcoming in the letter.

The first author from the discipline of *jyotiḥśāstra* wrote a text entitled the *Udbodhacandrikā*. This text is preserved only in Banaras on a palm leaf manuscript written in Bangla script. The opening verses do refer to other scholars, but I cannot identify them in any meaningful manner with the context of the letter. The colophon and opening verses do not provide any dates nor is there any mention of Rāmakṛṣṇa's teacher, although this Rāmakṛṣṇa does refers to himself as Rāmakṛṣṇa Cakravartin, which matches the language of the letter.[30]

Due to these difficulties and as a result of a number of reasons discussed below, I submit that the Rāmakṛṣṇa Cakravartin named in the letter ought to be identified as the *nyāya* scholar Rāmakṛṣṇa Cakravartin Bhaṭṭācārya. This Rāmakṛṣṇa wrote six known works in the discipline of *nyāya*. In four of these works, he refers to himself simply as Rāmakṛṣṇa; and, in two works he refers to himself as Rāmakṛṣṇa Cakravartin Bhaṭṭācārya.[31]

Other considerations are more convincing, however. Unlike the Rāmakṛṣṇa who wrote the *Udbodhacandrikā*, this Rāmakṛṣṇa can be dated very closely to the estimated date of the letter as a result of two pieces of information. First, all of his works are commentaries on texts written by Raghunātha Śiromaṇi. This places him after Raghunātha (c. 1510). In fact, Rāmakṛṣṇa even speaks of Raghunātha in the opening verses of one of his works as a guru.[32] Although it is not clear if he means that Raghunātha is his guru, Dineshchandra Bhattacharya reads this verse to argue that Rāmakṛṣṇa was a direct student of Raghunātha.[33]

Second, this Rāmakṛṣṇa is mentioned in the *Ā'īn-i Akbarī* of Shaikh Abu'l Faẓl ibn Mubārak (1551–1602). As is well known, Abu'l Faẓl lists four groupings of learned individuals. This listing includes an individual named "Rām Kishn", who falls at number sixty in the fourth grouping.[34] Dineshchandra Bhattacharya posits that Abu'l Faẓl is referring to Rāmakṛṣṇa Cakravartin Bhaṭṭācārya.[35] Abu'l Faẓl does not specify where this Rāmakṛṣṇa was based, but I submit that Rāmakṛṣṇa Cakravartin Bhaṭṭācārya lived in Banaras since nearly all of his manuscripts are found in Banaras (none in Bengal) and nearly all are preserved only in *devanāgarī*. In addition, as discussed below, one of his students, Yādavācārya, lived in Banaras.[36]

Taken together, these references enable a dating of this Rāmakṛṣṇa to before the completion of the *Ā'īn-i Akbarī* and after the date of Raghunātha, which would conform to the letter's estimated date of 1535. Given that Rāmakṛṣṇa lived in Banaras, the passage in the letter referring to him perhaps means that he is in Bengal at the time of the letter and is visiting or recently visited Jānakīnātha. Parenthetically, this may be the reason that

[30]R. Cakravartin, *Udbodhacandrikā*, MSS No. 36291, Sarasvati Bhavan Library (Banaras). I accessed a copy of this manuscript at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi. I know of this manuscript from D. Pingree, *Census of the Exact Science in Sanskrit*, Series A, Vol. 5 (Philadelphia, 1994), p. 453.

[31]Bhattacharya, *Bāṅgālīr Sārasvata Abadān*, pp. 270–271. That his title 'Bhaṭṭācārya' is not used in the letter would parallel the way in which Maheśa refers to himself by dropping his title 'Pañcānana'.

[32]*Ibid*., p. 103. This text is his *Guṇadīdhitiprakāśa*.

[33]*Ibid*., p. 270.

[34]H. Blochmann and H. S. Jarrett, *Ain i Akbari by Abū al-Faẓl ibn Mubārak* (Calcutta, 1873), p. 542.

[35]D. Bhattacharya, 'Sanskrit Scholars of Akbar's Time', *Indian Historical Quarterly* XIII (1937), p. 34. Bhattacharya also notes here that this person could less likely be the *mīmāṃsā* scholar, Rāmakṛṣṇa Bhaṭṭa (c. 1543).

[36]Bhattacharya, *Bāṅgālīr Sārasvata Abadān*, pp. 104 and 270–271, also argues that Rāmakṛṣṇa lived in Banaras.

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Jānakīnātha originally wrote to Maheśa (the earlier "news" mentioned by Maheśa) and part of the reason that Maheśa expresses regret in his letter that he is unable to visit.

These last few conjectures are supported by the fact that Rāmakṛṣṇa Cakravartin Bhaṭṭācārya does engage with the work of Jānakīnātha via one of his students, Yādavācārya. Yādavācārya, who was also based in Banaras, wrote a commentary on Jānakīnātha's *Nyāyasiddhāntamañjarī* entitled the *Mañjarīkautuka* or the *Mañjarīsāra*. In one of the opening verses of this work, Yādavācārya refers to Rāmakṛṣṇa as his guru. He says:

> With a lowered head, I honour my guru, the guru of the world, Rāmakṛṣṇa Cakravartin Bhaṭṭācārya and [my father] Śrīmat Nṛsiṃha of the Vyāsa *goṣṭhī*.[37]

That Rāmakṛṣṇa's student, Yādavācārya, commentated upon Jānakīnātha's *Nyāyasiddhāntamañjarī* should not be taken as mere coincidence but rather indicative of an already existing scholarly relationship between Rāmakṛṣṇa and Jānakīnātha upon which Yādavācārya's commentary is predicated. Indeed, we might speculate that the procurement of Jānakīnātha's *Nyāyasiddhāntamañjarī* was a major outcome of Rāmakṛṣṇa's visit to Bengal. Rāmakṛṣṇa did not comment upon this text, but his student Yādavācārya may have benefited from the presence of this work in Rāmakṛṣṇa's collection after his visit to Navadvip.

These considerations taken together, though not definitive individually (and at times speculative), suggest that the Rāmakṛṣṇa Cakravartin referred to in the letter is the Banaras-based *nyāya* scholar Rāmakṛṣṇa Cakravartin Bhaṭṭācārya.

Before concluding this note, it is necessary to reflect upon why identifying these individuals is important.[38] Of course, these three individuals do not hold equal significance in their respective disciplines. Both Rāmakṛṣṇa and Maheśa, despite writing important treatises, are minor authors: neither of them trained influential students and their works were not assiduously copied and/or commentated upon by subsequent generations of scholars.[39]

The exception in this regard, however, is Jānakīnātha Cūḍāmaṇi Bhaṭṭācārya. Jānakīnātha is an extremely important author for the discipline of *nyāya* in early sixteenth-century Navadvip. Aside from the importance of his works, especially his *Nyāyasiddhāntamañjarī*, he was the teacher of Rāmabhadra Sārvabhauma, his son and author of a number of important *nyāya* treatises.[40] Rāmabhadra, in turn, was the teacher of the very well-known *nyāya* scholar Jagadīśa Tarkālaṅkāra.[41] The fact that the letter definitively places Jānakīnātha in circa 1535, allows for a better dating of these later authors, whose dates have remained tentative in the

[37] Quoted in Bhattacharya, *Bāṅgālīr Sārasvata Abadān*, p. 104: bhaṭṭācāryacakravartirāmakṛṣṇaṃ jagadguruṃ | śrīmadvyāsanṛsimhaṃ ca natagrīvo namāmy aham ‖ On the Vyāsa *goṣṭhī* in Banaras, see *Ibid*. The only complete manuscript of Yādavācārya's work is in Banaras (K. Kunjunni Raja and C.S. Sundaram, *New Catalogus Catalogorum: an Alphabetical Register of Sanskrit and Allied Works and Authors*, Vol. 10 (Madras, 1978), p. 273).

[38] As mentioned, I do not address the identity of Paraśurāma Śarman.

[39] This is not to deny the importance of minor scholars, nor is it an attempt to forge a canon, but simply to mark some parameters of analysis for this note.

[40] Jānakīnātha's *Nyāyasiddhāntamañjarī* became a standard treatise upon which later authors commentated from across all of India. These commentators include (up to the end of the seventeenth century): Yādavācārya (1550), Rāmabhadra Sārvabhauma (1550), Rājacūḍāmaṇi Dīkṣita (1630), Janārdana Vyāsa (1650), Śrīkaṇṭha Dīkṣita (1660), Laugākṣī Bhāskara (1660), Nṛsiṃha Pañcānana (1675), and Appayya Dīkṣita (1700). Aside from the dates of Yādavācārya and Rāmabhadra, this information taken is from K. Potter, *Bibliography of Indian Philosophies*, http://faculty.washington.edu/kpotter/ckeyt/txt4.htm (accessed 28 May 2016).

[41] For the evidence of these relations, see Ingalls, *Materials*, pp. 21–22.

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extreme. In other words, on the basis of this letter, Rāmabhadra can be dated to approximately 1550 and Jagadīśa can be dated to approximately 1570–1590. These dates are slightly earlier than current estimates.[42] This, in turn, helps to better date authors in the seventeenth century who may have associated with Jagadīśa but whose dates remain uncertain.

The letter is also important because it demonstrates that scholars in Bengal did correspond with each other in Sanskrit; and that letters did circulate as attachments to manuscripts. Although much more research is required on this latter point, this letter suggests one manner in which scholarly communication operated in premodern India or at least in premodern Bengal: when circulating a manuscript, scholars may have also included personal letters addressed to those to whom the manuscript was being sent. This means that Maheśa Śarman Pañcānana may have sent the *Jyotiḥsārasāgara* to Jānakīnātha Cūḍāmaṇi Bhaṭṭācārya together with a personal letter addressed to Jānakīnātha as part of the manuscript bundle.[43] That an author in the discipline of *jyotiḥśāstra* was writing to an author in the discipline of *nyāyaśāstra* should not be viewed as an unusual occurrence in this case. Jānakīnātha is known to have been interested in issues outside of *nyāyaśāstra*: in his *Ānvīkṣikītattvavivaraṇa*, for example, he quotes multiple times from the works of the Bengal-based *smārta* scholar Śūlapāṇi (1365-1445).[44] Jānakīnātha's apparent interest in multi-disciplinarity may well have been an impetus for his communication with Maheśa. Of course, the above claims about scholarly communication remain tentative in the extreme but are nonetheless suggested by the existence of this letter. Given that similar, additional letters may be difficult to locate, however, this Sanskrit letter from circa 1535 stands as the sole representative of the vestiges of a mode of scholarly communication in early modern Bengal—a mode that ought to be remembered even though now nearly completely absent in the historical record and forgotten by modern scholarship.

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[42]For current estimates of their dates, see the standard reference of Potter, *Bibliography of Indian Philosophies*, in which 1580 is suggested for Rāmabhadra and 1620 for Jagadīśa.

[43]Of course, it is entirely possible that the letter was later randomly incorporated into the manuscript bundle. However, this seems less likely as the manuscript dates very closely to the time of Jānakīnātha and the letter would likely have been lost if separated from the folia of the *Jyotiḥsārasāgara*. Shastri does not provide the provenance of this work when describing it in Shastri, *A Descriptive Catalogue*, pp. 231–234. Importantly, however, the folia of the letter also include the first, original leaf of the manuscript (Ibid. p. 236).

[44]For the quotation references, see Bhattacharya, *Bāṅgālīr Sārasvata Abadān*, p. 107. The dates of Śūlapāṇi are from Rocher, *Jīmūtāvahana's Dāyabhāga*, p. 19.

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