

**Alastair Gornall (ed.)**

# Jñānapraśaṃsā

In Praise of Knowledge:  
Essays in Honour of E. G. Kahrs





Jñānaprasāṃsā

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E. G. Kahrs

(Photograph courtesy of Sudeshna Guha)





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## Contents

Frontispiece .....	5
Tabula Gratulatoria .....	7
Contributors .....	9
1. E. G. Kahrs: A Bibliography Alastair GORNALL .....	13
2. Uses of monosyllables in the <i>Vidaddhamukhamaṇḍana</i> Nalini BALBIR and Javier SCHNAKE .....	21
3. Pāṇini and Pāṇinīyas on Anubandhas Saroja BHATE .....	51
4. Does Pāṇinian grammar have (a) history? Johannes BRONKHORST .....	83
5. On the transmission of Tamil poetical vocabularies, with a special focus on the <i>Tivākaram</i> and the <i>Cūṭāmaṇi Nikanṭu</i> Jean-Luc CHEVILLARD .....	95
6. The Origin and Development of the <i>Subanta</i> Genre: Some Reflections With Special Reference to the <i>Cāndra</i> Grammatical School Lata Mahesh DEOKAR .....	115
7. Sectarian Confrontation as Theatrical Diversion: Observations on Yaśaś-candra's <i>Mudritakumudacandraprakaraṇa</i> and the Jain Debate at Aṇahillapaṭṭana Paul DUNDAS .....	127
8. What Upasīva asked and how the Buddha answered: On the <i>Upasīva-māṇavaṇapucchā</i> ( <i>Suttanipāta</i> vv. 1069–1076) and its commentaries Rupert GETHIN .....	161

9. A note on the emendation of the text of the <i>Mahābhāṣyadīpikā</i> in light of a quotation found in the <i>Sūktiratnākara</i> Malhar KULKARNI .....	183
10. Towards a Mādhyamika Error Theory of Causation Antoine PANAIOTI .....	189
11. From Ancient India to Medieval Spain. Unexpected reincarnations of <i>karāṭakadamanakanāmānau dvau srgālau mantriputrau</i> Wendy J. PHILLIPS RODRÍGUEZ .....	217
12. The Letters from R. C. Childers to T. W. Rhys Davids: Edited with Notes William PRUITT .....	235
13. The Pali Version of Caṅgadāsa's <i>Sambandhopadeśa</i> . A Preliminary Study of Yasa's <i>Kaccāyanasāra</i> and Its Major Commentaries Aleix RUIZ-FALQUÉS .....	299
14. 'This is not!' — a <i>Mahābhārata</i> Idiom John D. SMITH .....	339
15. On the expression “ <i>pañcavidhaṃ niruktaṃ/niruttiṃ</i> ” Paolo VISIGALLI .....	351
Index .....	363

# 1. E. G. Kahrs: A Bibliography

Alastair Gornall

sthāṇur ayaṃ bhārahārah kilābhūd  
adhītya vedaṃ na vijānāti yo 'rthaṃ |  
yo 'rthajña it sakalaṃ bhadram aśnute  
nākam eti jñānavidhūtapāpmā ||  
*Nirukta*, i.18

“MUST a name mean something?” Alice asked doubtfully. “Of course it must,” Humpty Dumpty said with a short laugh: “MY name means the shape I am – and a good handsome shape it is, too. With a name like yours, you might be any shape, almost.”  
LEWIS CARROLL, *Through the Looking Glass*

This edited volume brings together fourteen essays on Sanskrit, Pali, and Tamil literature from South and Southeast Asia in honour of Eivind Georg Kahrs, former Reader in Sanskrit at the University of Cambridge and a lifelong fellow of Queens' College. Throughout a research career spanning more than forty years (and counting), Eivind Kahrs changed the direction of the study of South Asia's traditional language sciences, particularly in the field of *nirvacana* or “semantic analysis.” His monograph, *Indian Semantic Analysis* (CUP, 1998), remains a monumental work of scholarship and erudition more than twenty years on. It continues to be a touchstone for anyone who studies Yāska's *Nirukta* (c. 7<sup>th</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> BCE) and the exegetical practice of semantic analysis that was so important for all pre-modern South Asian writing.

Eivind Kahrs' engagement with traditional Indian hermeneutics began remarkably early during his formative years at the University of Oslo. His undergraduate degree was in Indian Studies with a specialisation in Sanskrit. There, he had the good fortune to be mentored by Nils Simonsson (1920–1994), whose work fo-

cused on the traditional translation methods between Sanskrit and Tibetan.<sup>1</sup> After graduating in 1975, Eivind pursued a Magistergrad in Indian Philology (1980, equivalent to a Ph.D.) at the University of Oslo and wrote his dissertation on the methods of word analysis in Yāska's *Nirukta*. For his subsequent Doctor philosophiae (Oslo, 1996, equivalent to the German Habilitation), Eivind expanded his interests to explore the fundamental concepts of 'substitution' and 'change' within traditional Indian philology, paying particular attention to Sanskrit grammar or *vyākaraṇa*.

After finishing his Magistergrad at the University of Oslo, Eivind took up the position of University Lecturer in the History of Religion in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Bergen from 1980–1981. He returned to Oslo in 1981 and was awarded a NAVF (Norwegian Research Council) research fellowship back at the Indo-Iranian Institute, his *alma mater* in the University. In 1982 he was awarded a Michael Coulson Visiting Research Fellowship in Indology at Wolfson College, University of Oxford. He met James W. Benson and Alexis Sanderson in the year he spent there, two scholars who remained important interlocutors throughout Eivind's career. In 1983, Eivind took up the position of Vitenskapelig assistent (Assistant Professor) in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Oslo. During the six years he spent in this role, Eivind was elected to the General Board of the University of Oslo (1986), was appointed Vice President of the Norsk orientalsk selskap (Norwegian Oriental Society) (1985–1986), and served as editor of *Chaos*, the Danish-Norwegian Journal for the History of Religion (1986–1990).

Eivind left Oslo in 1989 when he took up the position of Lecturer in Indian Studies (Sanskrit) in the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the University of Cambridge. This vacancy had arisen due to the retirement of K. R. Norman, Professor of Indian Studies and one of the world's foremost scholars of Pali and Middle Indic languages. At that time in Cambridge, retiring faculty could overlap with their replacements for three years to foster continuity. Eivind benefited greatly from K. R. Norman's learned guidance. In those years, they read all of Aśoka's inscriptions together (twice!), and they remained close until Prof. Norman's death in 2020. Eivind was also fortunate to work in Cambridge with fellow Sanskritist John D. Smith, who remained an important source of support and friendship throughout his career. It was under the influence of K. R. Norman that Eivind turned his attention to traditional Pali grammar, specifically the *Saddanīti*, a twelfth/thirteenth-century Burmese work. Eivind lectured to and led a reading group on the *Saddanīti* at Cambridge, and these sessions resulted in his monograph on the work (1992).

1 SIMONSSON 1957.



Eivind continued teaching Sanskrit at Cambridge for twenty years until his retirement in 2019. He was promoted to Senior Lecturer in Sanskrit in 2000 and then to Reader in Sanskrit in 2003. Throughout his time in Cambridge, Eivind continued to play a leading role in Pali studies in Britain. He was elected as a Member of Council of the Pali Text Society and its Honorary Librarian in 1994. In 1995 he became a Director of the Pali Text Society and from 2003 held the role of Honorary Secretary until his retirement. He remains a lifelong fellow of Queens' College, University of Cambridge.

The essays in this volume focus on the interpretation of classical South Asian texts, both from a modern, philological perspective and from the emic standpoint of traditional South Asian forms of textual interpretation, such as commentarial exegesis, grammar, and etymology. This dual focus encompasses Eivind Kahrs' own pioneering approach to South Asian philology. When we consider Eivind's scholarship, it is apparent even in his earliest works from the 1980s that his philological interests were somewhat different from those of many of his contemporary Indologists. Indological philology (in Britain especially) when Eivind arrived in Cambridge was still largely subsumed within the general field of historical and comparative linguistics. Despite specialising in South Asia's traditional language sciences, Eivind's interests lay less in the linguistic side of philology and more in the cultural history of ideas about language. This meant that Eivind set to one side linguistic problems about what things meant and turned to what he saw as the more compelling cultural question of how things were ascribed meaning.

Eivind's cultural, philological approach focused on primarily understanding indigenous modes of interpretation to explain a textual culture rather than using concepts and ideas imposed from the outside. He endeavored in his early works to derive general models that underpin traditional South Asian philology and to use those models as a basis for understanding broader patterns in South Asian intellectual culture. This approach deeply impacted the field and represented a shift in the study of South Asian philology. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the field of modern linguistics was particularly influential, and its ideas regularly framed how scholars were interpreting traditional Sanskrit grammar and other language sciences. Eivind's call to study these indigenous sciences on their own terms to recover cultural meaning gave new relevance to studying these works beyond the narrow lens of contemporary linguistics. As a result, Eivind demonstrated the value and importance of studying subjects that scholars had previously disregarded as unscientific, such as *nirvacana* and non-Pāṇinian *vyākaraṇa*.

This interest in understanding South Asia's traditional language sciences from an emic perspective led Eivind to offer some of the first critical analyses of nineteenth-century European philology and its lasting impact on how South Asia's

cultural history has been studied. Beginning with his early article, “Yāska’s *Nirukta*: the quest for a new interpretation” (1984), in several works, Eivind has traced the nineteenth-century Orientalist origins of the dominant approaches to the *nirvacana* tradition and their legacy in modern scholarship. In describing the method and logic of the *nirvacana* tradition, Eivind revealed the inadequacy of earlier interpretations of the discipline as a primitive ancestor to modern, historical linguistics. Despite disagreeing with some of his predecessors’ approaches, Eivind has always expressed his debt to and deep respect for pioneering Indian scholars of the *Nirukta*, such as, Lakshman Sarup, Vajjanatha Kasinatha Rajavade, and Madhukar Anant Mehendale (to whom he dedicated his 2003 K. V. Abhyankar Memorial Lectures).

This brief overview of Eivind Kahrs’ career and intellectual approach would not be complete without mentioning his character. When I began studying under Eivind, I was struck by how sincerely he cared about his students and our ideas. I soon realised, however, that this was not simply because of a sense of pastoral duty but rather was the way Eivind went about everything, especially his scholarship. Reading the *Nirukta* with Eivind was to enter Yāska’s world, care sincerely about what Yāska was thinking, and know deeply that it mattered. This approach to South Asian intellectual history left a lasting impression on all of us and continues to guide our work. In recognition of how much we have all benefited from Eivind’s care, as students, friends, and colleagues, we offer this volume in gratitude. May we continue to enjoy the fruits of Eivind’s journey as a *nairukta* for many years to come.

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## 2. Uses of monosyllables in the *Vidaddhamukhamaṇḍana*

Nalini Balbir and Javier Schnake

### I. Introduction

While scholars have overlooked learned riddles as a linguistic genre, riddles were popular among learned monks and literati in premodern Southern Asia. The only known Pali text dealing exclusively with this topic is the *Vidaddhamukhamaṇḍana* (Vid), accompanied by a *ṭīkā* called the *Vidaddhamukhamaṇḍana-dīpanī* (Vid-d).<sup>1</sup> It is a Pali translation-cum-adaptation of the famous Sanskrit handbook on learned riddles, the *Vidaḍḍhamukhamaṇḍana* (Vid-s), composed by Dharmadāsa at an unknown date (perhaps around the 7<sup>th</sup> century; KRAATZ 1968, I: xviii) and widely disseminated in India. This sophisticated Sanskrit work calls for knowledge of grammar and vocabulary (especially monosyllables or rare words) in all their niceties (STERNBACH 1974: 74; 1975: 92–96). Far from being purely for the entertainment of the mind, the purpose of the Pali counterpart, the Vid, is to show the multiple potentialities of the Pali language through a sophisticated handling of it, and at the same time to convey the core of Buddhist teachings through a large-scale praise of the Buddha’s qualities. While the Vid is assigned to Vipulabuddhi in Pagan (Burma) at an unknown date, the question of its origin and diffusion has not yet been solved. The only existing preliminary review of the Vid and the Vid-d’s contents and diffusion in Southeast Asia has been provided by Nalini Balbir in “Three Pali Works Revisited” (BALBIR 2007: 346–360).

The Vid and its *ṭīkā* have never been edited so far.<sup>2</sup> They exist only in the form of manuscript copies in various scripts kept in different monastic library collections. They are not mentioned in works of reference dealing with Pali literature, very rarely mentioned in catalogues of Pali manuscripts, and secondary sources barely speak of them. Nonetheless, a review of primary and secondary sources shows that this work on learned riddles found interest among erudite circles and circulated in the Pali traditions of South and Southeast Asia.

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1 The colophon says *Vidaḍḍhamukhamaṇḍana-dīpanī-nāmāyaṃ ṭīkā*.

2 A critical edition of these texts is ongoing.

The Burmese tradition gives testimonies of the presence of the Vid and a commentary, although it is difficult to be sure that they are Pali versions. The oldest mention of a *ṭikā* is found in Aggavaṃsa's *Saddanīti* (12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century), in a passage devoted to the discussion of monosyllables (*ekakkharas*) as has long been noticed (KRAATZ 1968, I: XVI; BALBIR 2007: 346–348): *mā vuccati sirī. tathā hi Vidaddhamukhamāṇḍanaṭikāyaṃ “mālinī” ti padassatthaṃ vadatā “mā vuccati lakkhī, alinī bhamarī” ti vuttam* (Sadd 244, 19ff.). *Mālinī* is an answer to a type of riddle where the solution to be found is the name of a metre (Skt. *vṛttanāmajāti*, Pa. *vuttanāmajāti*), as it is recorded in Vid-s 2.36.<sup>3</sup> However, the examination of the corresponding section in our Vid-d shows that *mālinī* is not among the expected answers and, in addition, is not found elsewhere in chapters 1 to 3 of the Pali work. On the other hand, the passage quoted by Aggavaṃsa also occurs in the commentary on the *Ekakkharakosa* (16<sup>th</sup> century),<sup>4</sup> which is the reference lexicon for monosyllables (SCHNAKE forthcoming), alongside other examples that are not traced in our Vid-d. Nevertheless, all of them are traced in Vid-s or its commentary, which is perhaps the *Vidaddhamāṇḍanaṭikā* mentioned in Sadd and in the *Ekakkharakosa* commentary. Besides that, a *Viragḍha* and a *Viragḍha-ṭikā* are listed in the Pagan inscription dated 1442 CE (BODE 1909: 108, §§ 265 and 266) as titles mentioned among non-canonical works. Given the fact that no indication accompanies these mentions and taking into account what has been said previously, it is difficult to determine the language and origins of these two works. In addition to the identification of texts, stray references to the Vid and Vid-d in historical documents or lists of books highlight some points of confusion regarding their authorship. While the colophon of Vid is clear and attributes it to Vipulabuddhi, M. Bode assigned to Vepullabuddhi “a *ṭikā* on Vidadhimukhamāṇḍana” (BODE 1909: 28). The late *Gandhavaṃsa* supports this assertion, mentioning the *Vidadhimukhamāṇḍana-ṭikā* in a discussion related to Vepullabuddhi's works (Gv 64 and 74–75). Finally, the *Piṭakat samuiṇḥi* also mentions the *Vidag* and *Vidag-ṭikā* and states that the first is composed by Dhammadāsa (Pali form of “Dharmadāsa”) and the second by Vimalabuddhi from Ceylon, without other detailed information (Piṭ-sm §§ 1065 and 1066).

The Northern Thai and Lao contexts also provide evidence of a presence of Vid and Vid-d in the area until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The *Vajirasāratthasaṅgaha* (Northern Thailand, 16<sup>th</sup> century), which focuses on the in-depth study of multiple linguistic mechanisms, expounds different kinds of learned riddles showing that the Vid was a very probable source for knowledge in this field (SCHNAKE 2021b:

3 Vid and Vid-s each propose two examples for this variety of riddle. Answers in Vid-s are *sikhariṇī* and *mālinī*, while Vid selects *rucirā* and *ketumatī* (BALBIR 2007: 355).

4 Ekakkh-ṭ s.v. *mā*.



liv–lvi). The well-known monastic centre Wat Sung Men (Northern Thailand), academically very active in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, holds three codices of the Vid-d very probably copied in Laos. These manuscripts could be linked with one manuscript still preserved in the Royal Library in Luang Prabang (Laos) and referenced by Louis Finot at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (FINOT 1917: 214, § 1088). The visibility of the Vid in the Thai monastic community is also attested on murals dated to the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Wat Thong Nopphakhun (วัดทองนพคุณ) in Thonburi. These paintings expound on the ordered set of texts of the Tipiṭaka as conceived by the monks during the Ayutthaya period until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (SKILLING 2017: 277). The Thai collections not only preserve the root text but also several ancillary texts to the Vid in the form of vernacular commentaries or adaptations (*upadesa*, *ṭīkā*, *atthayojanā*, *nissaya*). Most of them are not rare: multiple copies exist in the National Library<sup>5</sup> and temple collections (SKILLING 2014: 361), as well as in the royal monastery Wat Pho.

Finally, the Sinhalese tradition also has known of at least the Vid-d and the *atthayojanā*. Written respectively in modern Thai script and in Khom script, manuscripts of these works have been recently recorded on the island (BHIKKHU ÑĀṆATUSITA 2010: 16 and 25), where they probably came in the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the formation of the Siyam Nikāya (IDEM: 12). The root text was probably present at some point, as the use of the commentary is limited without its *mūla* text. In addition, an interest in this corpus on the island is shown by the fact that one of the first editions of the Vid-s was published in 1902 by Seelakkhandha Thera in Ceylon.

In short, the presence of the Vid and the Vid-d is attested in almost all the Pali traditions of Southeast Asia, illustrating their circulation through time. Riddles are meant as a large-scale praise of the Buddha and his achievements, and this Buddhist tone, which characterises almost all the answers to the proposed riddles, gives the Pali Vid its specificity, distinguishing it from the rather heterogeneous atmosphere of the Sanskrit Vid, the religious affiliation of which has been a vivid subject of discussion among scholars until today.<sup>6</sup> The use and importance of the Vid (and its commentary) in Pali philology should be appreciated in the light of the Burmese and Lanna monastic contexts at the turn of the second millennium (RUIZ-FALQUÉS 2015: ii–iv; SCHNAKE 2021b: xvi–xvii). These traditions focused on the in-depth study of the Pali language, notably via contact with Sanskrit works, and produced various texts that highlighted the linguistic structures

5 Consultation *in situ*.

6 Examples of questions and answers with a Buddhist tone are rare. Vid-s 2.66d (below II.2 Riddle 1) is one of them. See further KRAATZ 1968, I: XIII.

of the Pali language. Although the playfulness of these learned riddles is obvious, their entanglement with scholarly works testifies to the unique status granted to the genre. It concentrates the resources of grammar and lexicon (*sandhi*-rules, synonyms, root names, etc.) that only the virtuosos of the language can handle. These resources were later used in other Pali works for the explanation of word-formations and etymologies.

The purpose of our joint work here is to add knowledge on the Vid by centring on one specific procedure of frequent use in riddles: the manipulation of monosyllables (*ekakkharas*). We think the topic of this article might be an adequate offering to Prof. Eivind Kahrs, whose contributions on the Indian analysis of language through etymology (*nirukta*, 1994, 1998a, 1998b, etc.) and Pali grammar in particular (*Saddanīti*) have been so inspiring.

In fact, there are various kinds of monosyllables. The commentary on Vid 1.8, which states that certain varieties of riddles are meant to show “skilfulness in the meanings of monosyllables” (*ekakkharakosallatthamī*), provides a rather broad understanding of the notion. Unique letters can stand for abbreviations like in *ta-u-bha-paṭhamā-saṃ* where *ta* stands for *taṅhā* “desire”, *u* is *upādāna* “basis”, *bha* is *bhava* “re-birth”, *pa* is *paccaya* “cause”, and *saṃ* is *saṃkhārā* “formations”; or in *jājarāsaṃ* where *jā* is *jāti* and *saṃ* again *saṃkhārā*, all terms connected with the *pañiccasamuppāda* formula.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the half-verse *abhumme katham bhaṇasi* (“What you say is false/unfounded (*a-bhumme*)!”) illustrates the analysis of words through the interpretation of two monosyllables, the privative *a* and *bhūm*.<sup>8</sup> The Vid and *Ekakkh* also deal with and manipulate letters of the alphabet as such.<sup>9</sup>

7 Vid-d 1.8 *tattha ta iti taṅhā. u iti upādānaṃ. bha iti bhavo. jā iti jāti. jarā iti jarāmarāṇaṃ. saṃ iti saṃkhārā. paṭhamā* is not glossed, but as a part of the *pañiccasamuppāda* formula we guess *pa* is for *paccaya*. However, we do not know whether *ṭha* and *mā* refer to any term and which one.

8 Vid-d 1.8 = Ja VI 495,<sup>23</sup>; Sadd 207,<sup>2-3</sup>; also quoted in Vss-ṭ 232. Comm. *a iti paṭisedho, bhūm iti vuḍḍhyattho*.

9 In what follows we do not take into account these extreme cases where simple letters are used for manipulations in riddles. Thus, we distinguish between *i* as designating the corresponding letter and phoneme, and *i* as a monosyllable *stricto sensu* meaning “Kāma”. Examples of these extreme cases would be Vid 3.35cd: *majjhe vaṇṇa-ttayaṃ datvā, kīdiso pabhavo jino?* “After having put three syllables in the middle [of *saddho*, answer to question 1], how is the powerful Jina? – Perfectly Awakened (*sammāsambuddho*)”; Vid 3.36cd: *ante vaṇṇadvayaṃ datvā kīdiso bhāgyava jino?* “After having put two syllables at the end [of *paragu*, answer to question 1] (say) how is the Venerable Jina? – He has a lot of excellent qualities (*paraguṇogho*).” These were examples of the *vaḍḍhamānakharajāti*, but the same applies to the *hīyamānakharajāti* (3.39ff.). See also Vid 3.41 (below IV s.v. *ka* “Brahmā”). Letters of the alphabet without specific meaning are also made use of in figurative riddles (e.g., Vid 3.13–14 *cakkajāti*; 3.15ff. heart of the lotus in

Monosyllables endowed with one or several meanings, the *ekakkharas stricto sensu* found their origin in the Sanskrit context: *ekākṣaras* were mainly used in Tantric practices and literary works dealing with games on linguistic matters – riddles and learned poems – and recorded in many lexicons dedicated to their referencing (the *ekākṣarakośas*; VOGEL 2015: 102–104). The emblematic *śāstra* that handles word plays, Dharmadāsa’s *Vid-s*, gives an important role to these monosyllables in various kinds of riddles (see below, pp. 26–27). The basic procedure consists of segmenting words in smaller units to produce a sequence of answers which combine in order to result in one larger ensemble (French *charade*). In the same way, *Vid* is concerned with this method, based on a stock of monosyllables, the origin of which is still difficult to determine.<sup>10</sup>

*Vid* and *Vid-s* each have four chapters and follow a similar outline. Certain varieties of riddles are more suitable than others to the use of monosyllables. These are found in chapters 1 to 3 of both works, and our examples will be taken from them. As chapter 4 resorts to other techniques, it will not be considered here. The professed purpose of the author of the Pali version is to provide a counterpart in Pali to the Sanskrit treatise. He lists the same varieties in the initial *mātikā*, uses the same technical terms, and provides definitions which are most frequently Pali quasi-translations of the Sanskrit. To underline parallels and differences, we give correspondences and further details if necessary. The commentary (*Vid-d*) is an indispensable tool for understanding the questions and solving the riddles. It occasionally includes indications on the methods to be followed, on the metre (e.g., on 3.5), or on the procedure for building figures in the case of figurative poetry (*citrakāvya*; see comm. on *Vid* 3.12ff., 3.44) as well as older readings (*porāṇapāṭha*, e.g., on 1.51, 2.53, 3.5).

In this paper, we successively deal with examples of riddles that exclusively place monosyllables at the heart of the resolution and use monosyllables as elements in the formatting of the word plays and their answers. We will then draw attention to the *Vid-d*’s gloss, which uses etymological explanations to dissect the elements of its *mūla* text. Finally, we list all the *ekakkharas* used in *Vid*.

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the *padmajāti*, 3.44). The illustration of the variety *visamajāti* in *Vid* 2.34 is the most elaborate in this trend: *nātho ti pi bhavē saddo, no-vāci kīḍiso vada*. “Tell, how would the word ‘protector’ designate a boat? – Having *tha* removed, *ā* removed and *o* coming in *sa+(ava-tha)+(a-ā-no) = sāvathāno*,” following the same line as *Vid-s* 2.34cd: *dhānā iti bhavēc chabdo nauvācī vada kīḍṛśaḥ?* “Say, how should the word *dhānāḥ* be in order to designate a boat? – Having *au* coming in, *dhā* removed and *ā* removed.” Knowing the alphabet and playing with its letters in many ways is seen in many riddles, also in Jain works in Sanskrit and Prakrit (BALBIR 2004: 277–282).

10 For an overview of the *ekakkharas* in the Pali tradition, see SCHNAKE 2021a.

This edited volume brings together fourteen essays on classical Sanskrit, Pali, and Tamil literature from South and Southeast Asia in honour of Eivind Georg Kahrs, who was Reader in Sanskrit at the University of Cambridge from 1989 to 2019. E. G. Kahrs's contributions to the scholarship on Southern Asia's traditional language sciences, particularly vyākaraṇa 'grammar' and nirvacana 'semantic analysis', brought new attention to these fields within the cultural and

intellectual history of the region and redefined their study. The essays in this volume reflect E. G. Kahrs's main research and teaching interests, especially traditional Southern Asian grammar and lexicography, Sanskrit and Pali literature, Buddhist philosophy, and the history of Orientalist and colonial philology. The volume is also prefaced with a concise overview of E. G. Kahrs's academic career and a bibliography of his work to date.

