

TEXTUAL SUPPORT FOR EARLY INTEGRITY OF THE *MAHĀBHĀRATA* FROM ITS SOUTHERN  
RECENSION

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In my part of the presentation, I will discuss indications of the early integrity of the *Mahābhārata* that emerge from examining the relation between early Brahmin migrations to South India and the manuscript evidence behind the Pune Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata*. In brief, I have unfolded a theory of the early history of the text that takes note of the coincidence between the early migrations to the South of one identifiable group of Vedic Brahmans (Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans) in the centuries around the beginning of the Common Era, and the likelihood that similarities between the shortest northern (Śārada/Kashmiri) manuscripts and shortest version of the Southern Recension (Malayālam) texts allow one to explore the new proposition that the correspondence affords a glimpse of an early version of the *Mahābhārata* that the Pūrvaśikhā Brahmans would have brought South with them, along with their Vedic praxis, as the textual foundation for creating the Southern Recension of the epic. Having worked out this new proposition, providing further evidence for it from the history of Brāhmī paleography, in a recent lengthy article in the Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies, I follow it up here with a closer study of the idiosyncrasies of the Southern Recension. I am particularly interested in exploring a long devotional passage, uttered in the *Mahābhārata*'s second book by the Patriarch Bhīṣma to describe Kṛṣṇa that occurs only in Southern Recension texts; my current hypothesis is that this passage will afford a glimpse of how the Pūrvaśikhā redactors interpreted the text as a whole, while also offering a new passage by which to advance their view of the whole.