## ABSTRACT

## Of Mangalas and Methodologies: Benedictory Verses and Rhetorical Strategies in Alamkāraśāstra Treatises

## David Mellins

Benedictory verses (mangalācāranas) are a staple feature of Sanskrit treatises, statements of reverence for a principle deity (*istadevatā*) or revered teacher placed at the forefront of texts. While they are ostensibly composed in order to remove obstacles to the full composition of texts, they are encompassed in texts as auspicious introductions and for pedagogical purposes. This paper specifically examines the form and function of mangalācāranas in several important works on alamkāraśāstra to determine whether these are strictly benedictive or if they additionally provide a template for rhetorical methodologies and aesthetic strategies of their authors. This investigation is contextualized by a more general examination of benedictory verses and their analysis in classical commentaries and modern scholarship. Mangalācāraņas in alamkārašāstra works are contrasted with those in other *sastras* and examined stylistically, historically and geographically, when possible. Particular attention is directed towards the relationship between theistic content in benedictory verses and foci of rhetorical inquiry. As is to be expected, many of the benedictory verses in *alamkāraśāstra* are directed to Sarasvatī, the patron Goddess of speech and learning, and hence examine the relationship between language and divinity. In benedictory verses composed by Kashmiri *ālamkārikas* at the turn of the first millennium (e.g., Abhinavagupta and Mammata), Sarasvatī is frequently equated with the supreme Goddess Parā, acquiring a more complex agency that integrates the aesthetic potency of poetry, the creative and purgative power of divinity, and the soteriological freedom of ultimate truth. The study lastly considers benedictory verses composed by non-theistic authors of *alamkāraśāstras* (Hemacandra) and those by later authors (Jayadeva, Appaya, Jagannātha) of syncretic and revisionist works