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The Murder of a Buddhist Monk : A Perspective on Religious Diversity from Thirteenth-century India

Elaine Fisher

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The Murder of a Buddhist Monk :

A Perspective on Religious Diversity from Thirteenth-century India

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1 Introduction

In the twelfth-century Andhra country, in the village of Māruḍiga, there lived a Śaiva saint by the name of Hiriya Nācayya.[1] A lone Śaiva within a predominantly Jain village — in fact, his village boasted a grand total of seventeen hundred Jain temples — Nācayya was unflinching in his devotion to Śiva. And yet, this unflinching devotion inspired Nācayya to act in a fashion that aligns rather poorly with "saintly" behavior, as we typically conceive it. According to our earliest hagiography, Nācayya decided one day to take radical action against the religious others in his backyard. Assembling an army of twelve thousand Śaiva warriors, he launched a surprise incursion on his home village. In a fit of rage, the Śaiva devotees decapitated their Jain neighbors. With deliberate calculation, they desecrated each of the seventeen hundred temples in turn, smashing the head of every single Jina statue they found and installing a *śivaliṅga* in its place. This account comes to us

1. For the story of Hiriya Nācayya, see Narayana Rao and Roghair (1990): 212–213.

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from a thirteenth-century Telugu work, from Pālkuriki Sōmanātha's *Ancient Tale of Basava* (*Basavapurāṇamu*), which narrates the exploits of a number of early Vīraśaiva devotees. Counterintuitive as it may seem, however, Sōmanātha did not present the sack of Māruḍiga as a blemish on an otherwise-illustrious religious career. Rather, it was for these violent acts alone that Sōmanātha preserved the memory of Nācayya for posterity, praising the ferocity of his devotion to Śiva and celebrating him as the epitome of what it meant to be a Vīraśaiva.

Aside from how abhorrent these actions will appear to the modern reader, the story of Nācayya's cleansing of the religious others may at first glance appear equally at odds with its own historical moment. As a Vīraśaiva, Nācayya belonged to a community that scholarship has traditionally represented as a social movement of inclusion, a sort of progressive humanistic movement toward egalitarianism and tolerance.[2] What sort of historical circumstances might have given rise to a tradition whose classic texts, while rejecting inequality based on caste, seemingly endorse, and even aestheticize, interreligious violence? Given the frequency of such narrative incidents across Sōmanātha's oeuvre, we cannot simply dismiss such elements as unsavory marginalia, tangential to his larger interpretive project. Rather, the story of Hiriya Nācayya is by no means the only episode in the *Ancient Tale of Basava* to celebrate a flagrant xenophobia that veers at times toward eliminationism. Take, for instance, a certain Bibba Bhāskara, who according to Sōmanātha torched an entire brahmin enclave after its residents had insulted the purity of Śiva's *prasāda*. Or consider the tale of Vīra Śaṅkara, who flagellated his own body for merely dreaming that he had touched a Buddhist.[3] In this light, how should stories about "saintly figures" like Hiriya Nācayya inform our readings of devotional hagiography as a south Indian narrative genre? How do they

2. By early Vīraśaivism, I mean to refer to the elements of transregional religious culture shared by the Vīramāhēśvaras of Srisailam in the thirteenth century as well as the contiguous twelfth- and thirteenth-century communities of Karnataka and Maharashtra that likewise lie at the juncture between Lākula/Kālamukha Śaivism and the emerging Vīraśaiva tradition. For further discussion of the hostility toward religious others in early Vīraśaivism, see also Fisher (forthcoming), chapter 2; Ben-Herut (2018), especially chapter 6; and Ben-Herut (2012). On the representation of Vīraśaivism in Western scholarship, see footnote 13 below, and the introduction to Fisher (forthcoming). Concerning the language of caste inclusivity in early Vīraśaiva texts, while many of our conventional narratives about the origin of Vīraśaivism originate in hagiographies from within the community, in turn informed by Orientalist scholarship, early Vīraśaiva texts did advocate inclusivity across the boundaries of caste, rejecting caste distinctions among initiates on the basis of earlier Śaiva proof-texts in Sanskrit, particularly the *Śivadharmaśāstra*. See for instance Fisher (forthcoming, chapter 1).
3. For the story of Bibba Bhāskara, see Narayana Rao and Roghair (1990): 236, and see *ibid.*: 222 for the story of Vīra Śaṅkara.

speak to our emplotment of the history of *bhakti* or devotional religion in South Asia? How might Sōmanātha have envisioned the relationship between such violent narrative extracts, the people who consumed them, and the worlds into which they were disseminated?

In the search for answers to these questions, it seems eminently reasonable to turn beyond the confines of Sōmanātha's narratives to situate their thematic concerns within a broader discursive and historical context. And yet, existing disciplinary approaches to the study of devotional narrative render the task a bit more complex. For instance, recent research has directed our attention to the similar intertwining of devotion and the aestheticization of violence in a twelfth-century Tamil Śaiva hagiography, *The Great Story* (*Periyapurāṇam*), composed at the height of the Cōḻa imperium just a century before the earliest efflorescence of Vīraśaiva textuality in the thirteenth century. As Vīraśaiva narrative literature in Telugu and Kannada drew substantially upon *The Great Story* and its hagiographical corpus, it is perhaps scarcely a surprise, on strictly narratological grounds, that these contiguous devotional cultures share a pervasive fascination with the "harsh devotee"—the saint who never hesitates to inflict violence on himself or others in the service of Śiva.[4] Intriguingly enough, in a landmark article on such violent tropology in Tamil literary cultures, Anne Monius (2004) contends that references to violent acts of devotion had earlier been few and far between, but rose to an unprecedented fever pitch in Cēkkiḻār's work in the twelfth century. One might not be unwarranted, then, in situating this upsurge of violent rhetoric within the particular contextual circumstances of twelfth- and thirteenth-century south India. After all, repulsive as such violent acts may be, the meanings ascribed to violence as a category are historically bounded, much like those ascribed to religion.

We find, albeit rather briefly, just this sort of appeal to the historical context of harsh devotion in Monius's article, "Love, Violence, and the Aesthetics of Disgust: Śaivas and Jains in Medieval South India" (2004). To problematize past assumptions that violent devotion captured some endemic, ahistorical ethos in Tamil culture, Monius proposes the following:

4. It should be noted that Anne Monius's (2004) use of the analytic term "harsh devotee" (*vaṉ toṇṭar*) obscures the fact that the phrase was originally exclusively employed in Tamil literature as an epithet for Cuntaramūrti Nāyaṉār, and in its original usage was not intended to connote violence. Indeed, none of the other saints who commit such fierce acts in the *Periyapurāṇam* are identified by the term *vaṉ toṇṭar*. Nevertheless, my use of the term references Monius's argument, which deploys the adjective "harsh" as an index of the recurrent violent tropology of the *Periyapurāṇam* and its contiguous literary cultures. On the broader theme of violence in Śaiva devotional literature, see also Mahalakshmi (2019), Vose (2006), Vamadeva (1995), Hudson (1989), Hardy (1995), and Shulman (2001).

> If the violent deeds of the Nāyaṉmār represent the resurrection of ancient Tamil poetic ideals that wed the themes of love and violence, then the question must be raised as to why this sudden resurgence of heroic blood sacrifice should take place at the height of Cōḻa power, in an era of temple-building, of the consolidation of Agamic forms of worship, and of burgeoning authority of Śaiva maṭam or monastic establishments.
>
> Monius 2004: 123

The questions Monius raises in this passage are apt indeed. Reading these words alone, one might have expected the remainder of the article to proceed in a similar vein. And yet, Monius's argument veers in the opposite direction, focusing our attention on the textual content of comparative Jain and Śaiva corpora in the service of explicating harsh devotion as a strictly literary device. Tracing its iteration in hagiographical narrative through an aesthetic, or tropological, lens, Monius argues that "given these literary qualities of the text, the violence in *The Great Story* cannot be understood apart from the literary culture in which it was composed." The problem of harsh devotion can thus be solved, Monius suggests, by reading Cēkkiḻār's invocation of narrative violence as an intramural literary affair, a purely aesthetic response to the Tamil Jain epic, the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*. Previous invocations of the Cōḻa imperium, Śaiva *maṭam*s, and Āgamic literature notwithstanding, for Monius "context" ultimately is nothing but intertextual literary context, with extratextual reality remaining a black box unassailable by contemporary scholarship.[5]

To be clear, tracing the literary continuities between the *Periyapurāṇam* and the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* is by no means inherently problematic. The rich intersection between Śaiva and Jain conceptual universes remains a scarcely charted horizon for future research.[6] Nev-

5. Largely incidental to the conceptual point at hand is the question of whether or not the Cōḻa imperium should truly be characterized as a period of institutional orthodoxy governed by an established Saiddhāntika Āgamic canon, which has been called into question by recent research on the south Indian Śaiva Siddhānta (e.g., Goodall 2015 and Gollner 2021).
6. Despite the close contiguity of early Vīraśaiva communities with the Digambara and Yāpanīya texts and traditions in circulation within the Deccan, little work has yet examined their intellectual or religious points of interchange outside of the literary sphere. Particularly relevant to the present context is how Jain narratives might inculcate values resembling what Vīraśaivas later referred to as *gaṇācāra*, the vehement exclusion of contact with religious others, which finds minimal precedent in other transregional Śaiva traditions. One such example is the *Ratnakaraṇḍaka Śrāvakācāra*, ascribed to Samantabhadra, who according to some scholarship was a resident of Bijapur district in Karnataka sometime between the seventh and eighth centuries. In this work, we meet with demands to avoid contact (*asampṛkti*) with religious others, praising religious others, assisting

ertheless, more is at stake in this conversation than may be apparent at first glance for broader questions about how, and why, we study the religious or literary past. In Monius's references to tropology and aesthetics, we find adumbrated not merely the concerns of a literary theory that seeks to understand how language produces a richly affective aesthetic response, but rather, more specifically, a particular methodological approach to hermeneutics and history. Indeed, Monius's views on literary culture bear a striking resemblance to the conceptual project of Hayden White, who is best known for drawing attention to the tropological undercurrents concealed within the craft of historiography. For White, the historical past as such is intrinsically inaccessible to empirical analysis. Rather, what we encounter from our contemporary vantage point is strictly narrative in nature, dependent upon the structures of emplotment that allow us to make sense out of the unfolding of past events.[7] For instance, to adopt an example closer to home for South Asian religions, a good-versus-evil romantic emplotment constrains not only literary works such as Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* but also the historiographical just-so story of the Protestant Reformation, the displacement of the elitist, hidebound Catholic church through the populist turn to individual experience accessible to all in the vernacular. It is hardly an accident, perhaps, that an identical emplotment has been deployed to explain the origins of Buddhism, for instance, or the devotional communities of the *Bhakti* "Movement."[8] By our very nature, we structure our thinking through stories, especially those we find familiar.

Thus, by calling attention to the narratives that implicitly constrain our thinking about the past, humanistic inquiry across disciplines, and the field of Religious Studies in particular, have benefited substantially from White's interventions. And yet, an argument such as

religious others, and all interactions with their gods and practices. As with the murder of the Buddhist monk, these principles are narrativized in episodes such as "the story of how Rēvatī exemplifies non-deluded belief" (*amūḍhadr̥ṣṭitvē rēvatīdr̥ṣṭāntō 'sya kathā*). When the gods Brahmā, Vāsudēva, and Śaṅkara along with his *gaṇa*s manifest in the flesh in her city, the protagonist, a pious Jain lay woman, refuses to even look at them, let alone seek their blessings, as they are not recognized by the Jain scriptures (Bollée 2010: 17–29). In short, while beyond the scope of this essay, the available sources provide abundant potential for further contextualizing the interaction between Jains and Śaivas in south India, and their mutual influence, within the lived space of their historical context.

7. For instance: "Thus, for example, what Michelet in his great history of the French Revolution construed as a drama of Romantic transcendence, his contemporary Tocqueville emplotted as an ironic Tragedy. Neither can be said to have had more knowledge of the 'facts' contained in the record; they simply had different notions of the kind of story that best fitted the facts they knew" (White 1978: 85).
8. On the historiographical constitution of the category of the Bhakti Movement, and its premodern antecedents, see Hawley (2015). For further discussion of the impact of Protestant metanarratives on scholarly conceptions of the origins of Buddhism, see for instance Obeyesekere (1972) and Schopen (1992).

we find in Monius's work and subsequent scholarship indebted to her approach translates White's central insight about narrativity into a more radical epistemological claim: given that what we can access of the past is nothing but narrative, we as scholars can meaningfully speak only of what "the text thinks" as a world unto itself, and never of its place within past social imaginaries that cannot be adequately reconstructed.[9] Such a methodological approach essentially posits textual cultures as hermetically sealed entities, nowhere informed by authors' experiences of and responses to their lived extra-textual realities. Epigraphical and documentary evidence are fundamentally incommensurable with literary works and are to be approached with a thoroughgoing hermeneutics of suspicion. Indeed, as Monius asserts regarding *The Great Story*, "virtually no extra-textual evidence exists to support such an analysis of literary versus real-world events in the Tamil case" (2001: 9). In the case of violence and devotion in Śaiva narrative literature, then, to adopt such a mode of scholarship would preclude any and all questions about interreligious violence in the extra-textual world of twelfth- and thirteenth-century south India.

There are obvious pitfalls, naturally, in adopting a naïvely literal reading of how narrative interfaces with the broader social world. In this article, however, I aim to illustrate, through the case of early Vīraśaivism and literary violence, that a strictly text-internalist approach to devotional narrative inadvertently traduces the conceptual innovations of White and other theorists of his day upon which it was founded. Thus far, both monotextual and intertextual approaches have failed to arrive at a satisfactory sense of what such texts might have "intended" on their own terms — for instance, why Pālkuriki Sōmanātha may have chosen to employ narrative violence against religious others in the way he did. As a result, I argue that we simply cannot afford to restrict our gaze to an artificially narrow literary sphere should we desire to extricate our hermeneutic lens on the past from Western and presentist preconceptions about text and genre. But even more fundamentally, by seeking to understand how we might instead fuse the horizons of text and context, broadly defined, I aim ultimately to consider how texts interfaced both conceptually and programmatically

9. As Anne Monius was unfortunately unable to complete her intended monograph on the *Periyapurāṇam*, which might have rendered more explicit her position on these issues, I would draw attention in connection with our present concerns to a contiguous work in the field inspired by her approach. For instance, Monius's student Kristin Scheible (2016: 45) glosses White's position on the narrative textures of history as amounting to the claim that any empirical study of the extra-textual past is epistemically infeasible: "Any recounting of things past, especially those things far past, that are beyond the empirical knowledge of the agent responsible for their retelling, is a story." Once again, in citing Scheible on the issue here, I hope to underscore that my aim is not primarily to critique the work of Monius or Scheible or any other scholar in particular, but rather to reflect on a broader disciplinary trend within the study of south Indian religions.

with lived religious reality, including, in this case, the reality of interreligious conflict and violence. In pragmatic terms, this implies, among other things, thinking across linguistic boundaries, rather than segregating devotional *bhakti* narrative from scriptural, legal, and ritual texts in Sanskrit, and across the boundaries of genre, bringing the language of narrative in dialogue with epigraphy.

In presenting a fresh perspective on violent devotion in thirteenth-century Vīraśaivism, this article makes no specific claims about *The Great Story*, although I do highlight the intimate connection between the discursive and social worlds of the twelfth-century Cōḻa court and the Śaiva lineages of thirteenth-century Srisailam.[10] I focus on one almost universally overlooked but telling episode in a thirteenth-century Telugu work of Pālkuriki Sōmanātha, the *Exploits of Paṇḍitārādhya* (*Paṇḍitārādhyacaritramu*), a minimally studied text that has yet to be translated into any modern language. The story in question narrates the murder of a Buddhist monk at the hands of two Vīramāhēśvaras, the early Vīraśaivas of Pālkuriki Sōmanātha's circle at Srisailam. There is much in this episode that is contiguous with other accounts of harsh devotion treated in scholarship to date. Nevertheless, as I argue, when situated within its own historical and discursive context, the episode in question reveals some rather surprising extra-textual undercurrents to such literary acts of violent devotion. In turn, by doing so, I explore how the Vīraśaiva evidence can contribute new insights about why the epoch in question, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, proved such a pivotal moment for transregional south India, not only for radical shifts in royal polities, law, and land tenure, but also the very pressing questions at hand about religious identity and interreligious toleration.

10. For more on the connections between the Śaivism of the Tamil country and early Vīraśaivism beyond the strictly narrative literary episodes of *The Great Story*, see Fisher (forthcoming). Such evidence includes Sanskrit works of transregional Śaiva traditions almost certainly imported to Srisailam most immediately from the Tamil country, including the *Sōmaśambhupaddhati* and other Saiddhāntika works (via the Gōlagī Maṭha network), cited in Vīramāhēśvara works, and non-Saiddhāntika textual fragments from the Tamil region that parallel early Vīramāhēśvara practice, such as the bearing of a personal *liṅga* and worship of the *jaṅgama*. Beyond the scope of the present study, but most certainly relevant to the historical questions in this article, are the political alliances that Whitney Cox (2016) has excavated at the intersection of the Tamil and Andhra regions, by way of the relations between the Cōḻas and Vēṅgī Cālukyas.

2 A Question of Genre: Narrative and Prescription in Early Vīraśaiva Hagiography

Inevitably, not far from the question of tropology is that of genre, as genres of religious texts, in the study of South Asian religions, are often segregated in tandem with the methodologies through which we approach them. And yet, our assumptions about historical influence within the realm of Śaiva devotion remain significantly more constrained. Within Hindu Studies, Vīraśaivism, like the early centuries of Tamil Śaiva literature, is generally classified within the *Bhakti* or devotional Movement of Hinduism, which emerged over the course of the late medieval and early modern centuries.[11] From the perspective of our traditional emplotment of Hindu history, *bhakti* devotional poets sang to God in the language of the people, replacing the elite, retrogressive idiom of classical Sanskrit with the accessible, mellifluous register of vernacular lyric.[12] Scholarship on Śaiva *bhakti* literature, as a result, tends to draw a straight and singular line from one vernacular to another, linking Vīraśaiva narrative in Kannada to its Telugu and its Tamil antecedents. Presumed to have arisen as a grassroots, autochthonous form of south Indian Śaivism, Vīraśaivism has thus been viewed as an intrinsically local, populist phenomenon, discursively connected only to the Tamil Śaiva literature of its Dravidian neighbors.

11. As A. K. Ramanujan famously wrote, for instance, in *Speaking of Śiva* (1973: 21): "The Vīraśaiva movement was a social upheaval by and for the poor, the low-caste and the outcaste against the rich and the privileged; it was a rising of the unlettered against the literate pundit, flesh and blood against stone… Bhakti religions like Vīraśaivism are *Indian analogues to European protestant movements* [emphasis added]. Here we suggest a few parallels: protest against mediators like priests, ritual, temple, social hierarchy… producing often the first authentic regional expressions and translations of inaccessible Sanskritic texts (like the translations of the Bible in Europe)." In Fisher (forthcoming, introduction), I contextualize Ramanujan's claims within the surrounding discourse on Vīraśaivism from devotional and academic circles in Karnataka in the mid-twentieth century. In short, Ramanujan was far from the first to constitute a historiography of Vīraśaivism based on European Protestant narratives.
12. Literature attributing such a globalizing ethos to *bhakti* communities and their poetic traditions is too voluminous to cite here exhaustively. Take, for instance, the words of John Stratton Hawley, with which he opens his revisionary monograph (2015: 2–3) on the subject: "Bhakti is heart religion… the religion of participation, community, enthusiasm, song, and often of personal challenge, the sort of thing that coursed through the Protestant Great Awakenings in the history of the United States. It evokes the idea of a widely shared religiosity for which institutional superstructures weren't all that relevant, and which, once activated, could be historically contagious — a glorious disease of the collective heart. It implies direct divine encounter, experienced in the lives of individual people… Sanskrit too could be understood all over India — it was India's refined supralocal language, like Latin or Greek, but you had to be educated to take in its meaning. These bhakti poets fashioned a different kind of translocal movement, one that spoke the mother tongue — or rather, the mother tongues."

That these parallels may also be based on transregional shifts in Śaiva institutions, textual canons, or religious cultures, however, has remained an avenue as yet closed to exploration. Despite the sea change in our knowledge of premodern Śaivism over the course of the past two decades, this knowledge has yet to be integrated with previous scholarly narratives of our earliest centuries of vernacular Śaiva textuality. In other words, we need to ask ourselves how changes in the contents of Śaiva texts, whether literary, prescriptive, or otherwise, might be contextualized within the vicissitudes of the remarkable success — and the abrupt conclusion — of the Śaiva Age, ca. 600–1300 CE (Sanderson 2009). As I have argued elsewhere, and will argue in greater detail in future venues, the earliest generation of Vīraśaivas, across regions, crafted the identity of their community in deep continuity with their own scriptural past, and they drew actively on substantial bodies of Śaiva scripture composed in Sanskrit.[13] The question of the roots of Vīraśaivism is far too complex to treat in the present article; moreover, local variation naturally existed across the spectrum of regional Vīraśaivisms even by the thirteenth century. Nevertheless, I take it as a hermeneutic maxim we have much to gain in shifting the focus of our lenses by viewing thirteenth-century Vīraśaivism not as an unprecedented social, devotional, or regional movement but as a religious community embedded within a diachronic multilingual context.[14]

In fact, this historical context, I would argue, is particularly crucial to understanding the Vīraśaiva texts composed by Pālkuriki Sōmanātha, the author of the narrative of the murder of the Buddhist monk and thirteenth-century resident of Srisailam, the mountain pilgrimage site in the wilderness of the present-day state of Andhra Pradesh. Pālkuriki Sōmanātha can claim the honor of being the only Vīraśaiva author working outside of the Kannada language tradition to have received substantial attention in the Western academy to date, thanks

13. See also Fisher (2019, 2021, and forthcoming). This of course is not to say that Vīraśaivas did not continue to circulate knowledge across the boundaries of distinct vernacular languages throughout the early modern period. Such exchange continued, and in a manner that defies any unilateral model of vernacularization. While it is crucial in the present context to foreground Vīraśaivism's conceptual and institutional links to the transregional Sanskritic Śaivism of the Śaiva Age, my larger project equally explores questions of translation and multilingualism across multiple vernacular languages.

14. Particularly relevant to this point is Gil Ben-Herut's contribution to the present volume, which excavates the sparse but recoverable traces of *vacana* literature in the corpus of Harihara's *ragaḷegaḷu*. By contrasting these resonances with later ideas of the *vacana*s as a canonized corpus, Ben-Herut makes a compelling case that we cannot read the emergence of the *vacana* in the twelfth century as a sudden metrical rupture in the literary sphere, in the sense of what Pollock (2006: 433) has called a literary anti-form. Further evidence complicating these assumptions is to be found in the earliest generation of "anthologies" of *vacana* citations, composed under the auspices of Vijayanagara courtly patronage in the fifteenth century (see Fisher [forthcoming], chapter 3 for further details).

in particular to the translation of the *Ancient Tale of Basava* by Velcheru Narayana Rao and Gene Roghair. The Sōmanātha of scholarship to date, however, very much in keeping with the Protestant reading of Vīraśaivism's history, remains strictly a *bhakti* devotional poet— a poet of the *vernacular Telugu*, writing in opposition to a hegemonic Sanskrit past.[15] Nevertheless, a careful reading of Sōmanātha's linguistic textures reveals a markedly different scenario. All of Pālkuriki Sōmanātha's texts make use of heavy Sanskrit compounding and incorporate untranslated quotations, sometimes even lengthy untranslated passages, from Sanskrit source texts. Most of these verses are extracted from Śaiva scripture and prescriptive legal and ritual texts that delineate Śaiva *ācāra*, or proper Śaiva conduct. Moreover, intratextual evidence compellingly suggests that Sōmanātha wrote not only in Telugu but also authored a Sanskrit language work of his own, synthesizing those very same elements of Śaiva conduct that he embeds in his Telugu narrative.[16] This Sanskrit treatise, popularly known as the *Sōmanāthabhāṣya*, or "Sōmanātha's commentary," set the stage for much of Vīraśaiva Sanskrit textuality in later centuries.

Among Sōmanātha's works, perhaps the most vivid example of his fusion of Sanskritic and vernacular Śaiva textual cultures is the *Exploits of Paṇḍitārādhya.* Centered on the narration of the life of the twelfth-century proto-Vīramāhēśvara saint Mallikārjuna Paṇḍitārādhya, author of the Telugu *Essence of the Principle of Śiva* (*Śivatattvasāramu*), the *Exploits of Paṇḍitārādhya* is also the same text in which the story of the murder of the Buddhist monk is preserved.[17] Although deeply contiguous with Sōmanātha's own *Ancient Tale of Basava* and his predecessor's *Essence of the Principle of Śiva*, the *Exploits of Paṇḍitārādhya* exceeds both works in its densely woven multilingual texture and its intertextuality with Śaiva prescriptive literature in Sanskrit. Throughout the work, Sōmanātha embellishes his Telugu with such lengthy citations of Sanskrit scriptural passages that large swaths of the text would have proved utterly incomprehensible for an audience unversed in the Sanskrit

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15. For instance: "Sōmanātha's rejection of Sanskritic, brahminic, literary conventions was complete. He based his book on the stories of great bhaktas that were popular in oral traditions among Vīraśaivas. He sought instruction regarding such stories from the local assemblies of bhaktas, rather than from a Sanskrit poet-sage" (Narayana Rao and Roghair 1990: 6).
16. See for instance Fisher 2021 on the Sanskrit passages in the Telugu *Exploits of Paṇḍitārādhya*, and their correspondence with his Sanskrit work, *Extracting the Essence of Vīramāhēśvara Conduct* (*Vīramāheśvarācārasāroddhāra*), often referred to within the tradition as *Sōmanātha's Commentary* (*Sōmanāthabhāṣya*).
17. By "proto-Vīramāhēśvara," I indicate that Paṇḍitārādhya nowhere employs the appellations Vīramāhēśvara or Vīraśaiva as do Sōmanātha and his successors beginning in the thirteenth century. Nevertheless, substantial textual parallels exist to underpin the discursive continuity of the *Śivatattvasāramu* and the thirteenth-century Vīramāhēśvaras. See Fisher (2021, forthcoming) for further details.

language — and, more specifically, in the Śaiva scriptural canons Sōmanātha was citing. But even beyond the sheer quantity of his Sanskrit citations, when we turn to the content of Sōmanātha's Telugu narrative episodes, time and again, we find that Sanskrit prescriptive injunction, even when alluded to briefly, prefigures or reinforces the message of the stories in which they are embedded.

To take a very simple example, one of the last stories in the *Ancient Tale of Basava* depicts a dispute between the Vīramāhēśvaras, led by Basava, and a "low-caste" Śaiva community called the Bōyas, at the end of which Basava drinks poison to prove the veracity of his position and miraculously does not die — a literary trope if there ever was one.[18] Upon closer look, there is much more to the story than meets the eye. While ostensibly capturing a moment in Basava's public life in Kalachuri courtly circles, narrated through expected literary tropology, the episode also carries deep resonances of its wider discursive and historical context. Specifically, Sōmanātha embeds under the surface of the narrative a pedagogical lesson for devotees about the most iconic marker of Vīramāhēśvara identity, the personal *iṣṭaliṅga*, or emblem of Śiva, which Vīramāhēśvaras wore on their bodies at all times on pain of death. As the episode commences, the Bōyas approach King Bijjala with a grievance: Basava, the king's minister, has just confiscated all of the temple food offerings in the city of Kalyana on behalf of his followers. The Bōyas, however, held a long-standing relationship with the god Caṇḍēśvara, to whom all leftover food at a Śaiva temple was traditionally offered.[19] The Bōyas relied on a steady stream of these leftover offerings, called

18. The term Bōya is no longer in use today as a designator of caste or community identity, and epigraphical evidence leaves many ambiguities in how we might understand the social composition of the Bōyas during Sōmanātha's day and how their position may have shifted historically. Cynthia Talbot (2001) suggests that we might understand the caste-based affix *-bōya* in donative inscriptions, which we encounter appearing in the manner of *-reḍḍi* or *-seṭṭi*, as commonly referring to a caste cluster of pastoralists, as the term *bōya* is elsewhere synonymous with *golla*. Thus, the term would be taken as referring to the occupation of herding rather than as the proper name of a specific caste. As R. N. Nandi (1968) documents, however, other cases exist in which Bōya communities received land grants with invocation of *gōtra* affiliation. In such cases, the terms *kōyila-bōya* or *kōvil-bōya* ("temple Bōya") appear to indicate that such Bōya communities served in the capacity of temple priests. This evidence would coincide with Sōmanātha's narrative description, suggesting that some Bōya communities were antecedents to the groups more commonly referred to in the Tamil country in later centuries as Śaivabrāhmaṇas or Ādiśaivas.

19. Caṇḍēśvara/Caṇḍēśa/Caṇḍa is best known within the context of the Śaiva Saiddhāntika as the deity responsible for the purification of all *nirmālya* offerings. Recent evidence, however, confirms that Caṇḍēśvara had previous non-Saiddhāntika, Atimārga origins, with references in the *Śivadharmaśāstra* and Nepalese Skanda Purāṇa that coincide with material culture in the Deccan. These findings are quite relevant to the affiliation Sōmanātha describes between Caṇḍeśvara and the Bōya community he depicts. For further details, see Goodall (2009), Acharya (2005), Bisschop (2010), and Schwartz (2023, chapters 6 and 10).

prasāda — literally grace or favor — for their very subsistence. Invoking the canon of Sanskrit Śaiva scriptures, the Bōyas claim that Basava has violated normative ritual procedure as enshrined in Sanskrit scripture: only Caṇḍēśvara, the canon tells us, is capable of purifying temple *prasāda*, making it fit for human consumption. By extension, only Caṇḍēśvara's favored followers, the Bōyas, may consume it. As Sōmanātha recounts:

> *dharuṇīśvarunitōṁ dān' iṭul' aniyen*
> *"iccuṭa galadu saṇḍēśunak' abhavuṁḍ'*
> *iccina teṟaṁgu mīr' eṟuṁgarē? vinuṁḍu:*
> *bāṇaliṅgamulandu baṭikambulanduṁ*
> *brāṇaliṅgamulanduṁ pauṣyarāgādi-*
> *liṅgambulandunu lēdu prasādam'*
> *aṅgajaharuniki n' āgamōktamuga"*

> [Basava] replied to them, along with the king: "Indeed, there exists a tradition of giving [the *prasāda*] to Caṇḍeśa that had been offered to Śiva, don't you know? But listen: according to what is stated in the scriptures (*āgamōktamuga*), no [such tradition exists of giving] the *prasāda* of Śiva that was offered to a *bāṇaliṅga*, crystal *liṅga*, a life-breath (portable) *liṅga*, or a topaz *liṅga*, and so forth."[20]
>
> Pālkuriki Sōmanātha, *Basavapurāṇamu*, p. 229

Although speaking entirely in the vernacular Telugu, Basava responds here by invoking the authority of Śaiva Āgamic scripture, ostensibly written in Sanskrit. But did Sōmanātha intend this reference to scripture as a purely rhetorical device, designed to underpin the authority of Basava's message, or was he truly alluding to a passage in a Sanskrit Śaiva text? Subsequent generations of interpreters within the tradition, it turns out, came to a clear and unambiguous conclusion. When a certain Śaṅkarārādhya transposed the *Ancient Tale of Basava* into the form of a Sanskrit *mahākāvya* perhaps two centuries later, he took the liberty of inserting into Basava's discourse a single Sanskrit *ślōka*, attributing it to a certain "Śaiva Āgama" (*śivāgamē*): "Caṇḍeśvara is not authorized [to consume *prasāda* offered to] a *bāṇaliṅga*, a portable *liṅga*, an iron *liṅga*, a crystal *liṅga*, a self-arising *liṅga*, and to all images."[21] Beyond all possible coincidence, we find precisely the same verse cited in

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20. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
21. *Basavapurāṇam* 42.41:

Sōmanātha's own Sanskrit *Vīramāheśvarācārasārōddhāra* or *Sōmanāthabhāṣya*, as well as in the *Śaivaratnākara*, a Vīramāhēśvara text heavily indebted to the *Sōmanāthabhāṣya*.[22] Thus, even in this seemingly purely vernacular narrative passage, Sōmanātha is quite deliberately paraphrasing a Sanskrit scriptural verse, which asserts that one may freely consume food offered to a personal *liṅga*. As with many categories of portable *liṅga*s, the personal *iṣṭaliṅga* is not subject to the conventional rules of purity associated with large-scale temple worship, and thus no intervention from Caṇḍēśvara is needed. On the grounds of this technicality, Basava claims that by wearing a personal *liṅga*, the Vīramāhēśvaras themselves become the proper recipients of *prasāda* as food as well as the grace it conveys, and owe the Bōyas nothing.

Outside of the tropological frame of the narrative, then, Sōmanātha's rendering of this episode inculcates for his intended audience one of the foundational elements of early Vīraśaiva subjectivity: they must always, without exception, eat nothing but *prasāda*, food they have first ritually offered to their personal *iṣṭaliṅga*s. [23] In others words, Sōmanātha offers his intended readers an exemplary narrative model to follow along with the ritual and moral strictures that should govern their existence. It follows that Sōmanātha did not simply embed these allusions in his Telugu narrative to showcase the magnitude of his own learning. He deployed these references, rather, as a pedagogical tool: his Telugu narratives conveyed a message about proper Vīraśaiva religious conduct that harmonized precisely with the Sanskrit textual context to which he alluded. It is the citation Basava implicitly invokes, then, that conceals the pedagogical drift of the narrative in question. For its intended

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bāṇaliṅgē carē lōhē ratnaliṅgē svayambhuvi
pratimāsu ca sarvāsu na caṇḍō 'dhikr̥tō bhavēt

22. See *Śaivaratnākara* 16.111–112. The *Śaivaratnākara* attributes his verse to the *Śivarahasya*, a popular and seemingly newly crafted work of Vīramāhēśvara scripture (which differs substantively from later recensions of a text by the same name). The nearly verbatim reference to this verse is not mentioned in the apparatus of Narayana Rao and Roghair's translation of the text, which is unsurprising, as the original recension of the *Śivarahasya* does not survive, and thus I have found this verse to appear nowhere outside of Vīramāhēśvara Sanskrit textuality prior to the sixteenth century. Intriguingly, Goodall (2009: 362) calls attention to a ca. twelfth-century Saiddhāntika passage from the *Garland of the Gems of Gnosis* (*Jñānaratnāvali*) of Jñānaśambhu in which an inverted version of this verse appears, underscoring the opposite point — namely, that Caṇḍēśvara remains absolutely essential for these seemingly exceptional types of *liṅga*s:

sthirē calē tathā ratnē mr̥ddāruśailakalpitē
lōhē citramayē bāṇē sthitaś caṇḍō niyāmakaḥ

For more on the Sanskrit translations of Sōmanātha's works, including Śaṅkarārādhya's *Ancient Tale of Basava* (*Basavapurāṇa*), see Fisher (forthcoming, chapter 4).

23. See Fisher (forthcoming) for a more detailed discussion of how the bearing of a personal *liṅga* and the exclusive consumption of *prasāda* were central pillars of Vīramāhēśvara religiosity.

audience, the story is not merely an occasion for the miraculous trope of Basava's ordeal by drinking poison. Rather, it inculcates what time and time again Vīramāhēśvara texts assert is one of *the* most foundational modes of ritual propriety for initiates in the community, and one that an ideal reader would have been expected to correlate with a Sanskrit scriptural source text.

What the story of Basava and the Bōyas makes evident, then, is how much we stand to gain by digging deeper under the surface of the vernacular narrative that we encounter, in an English translation or in a monolingual modern edition, as a world onto itself. Even when writing apparently in purely Telugu verse, Sōmanātha is embedding direct references to Sanskrit canons and verses that would have been immediately apparent to much of his intended audience in the thirteenth century. Early Vīraśaiva narrative is at once unmistakably literary and irreducibly prescriptive, and the two are by no means diametrically opposed in genre or in their reception by an ideal reader. In other words, in the midst of a vernacular narrative episode, structured with predictable generic constraints and conventional literary tropes, Sōmanātha clearly intended his text to act on the extratextual world, promulgating a particular religious habitus to be inculcated among initiates of the Vīramāhēśvara community.

What, then, of harsh devotion? The fact that Sōmanātha clearly seems to have incorporated a prescriptive element to his narrative literature requires that we reevaluate the assumption we have inherited from Monius's iconic argument — specifically, that harsh devotion was intended purely as an intermural literary trope, with no bearing on the conduct of devotees in the extratextual world. And yet, when we think back to the acts of interreligious violence we surveyed earlier across Sōmanātha's Telugu oeuvre, the commingling of the literary and prescriptive becomes quite a bit more troubling. Could it be, inconceivable as it may seem, that Sōmanātha was actually advocating that his readers imitate Hiriya Nācayya by engaging in deliberate acts of interreligious violence? The answer, as we will see, is a bit more complex. As we turn to the story of the murder of the Buddhist monk, the fierce devotee emerges not as a flagrant outlier but as an integral *and* thoroughly unexpected fragment of early Vīraśaiva identity.

3 The Murder of a Buddhist Monk

From the vantage point of the thirteenth-century Deccan Plateau, although the social history of south Indian Buddhism is deeply in need of further research, rumors of Buddhism's

demise across the entire Indian subcontinent could rightly be viewed as highly exaggerated.[24] By this point in history, Indian Buddhist scholasticism and monastic institutions maintained their densest presence in the erstwhile domains of the Pāla Empire in the north-

24. The turn of the thirteenth century is also precisely the moment at which scholarship traditionally situates the precipitous decline of Buddhism within the Indian subcontinent, an ongoing subject of concern that is unfortunately beyond the scope of this article to treat systematically. Abundant evidence attests that Buddhism did not, in fact, abruptly and completely disappear from the South Asian subcontinent in the thirteenth century. As Arthur McKeown (2018: 3) asserts, for instance, in his study of Śāriputra (1335–1426 CE, a date that should speak for itself), the last abbot of Bodhgayā: "In order to tell Śāriputra's story, we will first need to dispense with another story. This is an oft-told tale about the demise of Buddhism in India, and it is quite misleading despite its popularity. From the very beginning of western Buddhist studies, most scholars have assumed that Buddhism died out in India between the ninth and thirteenth centuries. The few dissenters from this assumption failed to have the impact their dissent warranted. This book is the most substantial (and verifiable) case-study of a late Indian Buddhist, and therefore aims to significantly reshape the received version of Indian Buddhist history." McKeown further surveys the evidence for Buddhist activity in northeastern Indian during this pivotal period.

Nevertheless, scholars remain troubled by precisely how to emplot shifts in Buddhist institutional culture during this pivotal period. Earlier models have come under fire for their often-problematic essentialization of the iconoclastic violence of Islamic polities in South Asia. For a recent survey and intervention into this literature, see Truschke (2018). The continued reminder of the impact of Islamophobia on our scholarly narratives is timely and relevant. And yet, the scholarly conversation on the factors involved in Buddhism's decline remains ongoing. For instance, Péter Szántó (forthcoming) raises important factual corrections to the discussion in Truschke (2018). For instance, Truschke's argument about the institutional continuity of Nālandā up through the late thirteenth century hinges on a misreading already present in one of Truschke's sources (McKeown 2010) of the date of a key inscription. More immediately relevant to the present context is Szántó's crucial reminder that Buddhism clearly did not "disappear" completely in South Asia after 1200, as the continued efflorescence of Newari Buddhism demonstrates, and of course, Buddhism in Sri Lanka is equally deserving of mention.

Likewise, more should be said the historical relationship between Śaivism and Buddhism, especially where questions of violence are concerned, but this subject will have to be treated in future venues. As concerns the present conversation, readers may be interested in the recent work of Dániel Balogh (2022), who has undertaken a preliminary quantitative mapping of violent rhetoric in epigraphy across region, dynasty, and religion, and concludes counter to Davidson (2002) that the correlation of martial epigraphical imagery with Śaivism is vexed at best, suggesting closer correlation of violent rhetoric with dynasty than with religion. In the process, Balogh provides a critique of Davidson's rhetorical analysis of key epigraphs. Moreover, rhetorical violence as deployed in Buddhist literature warrants continued exploration. As an example of one recent study, David Gray (2015) rightly points out (as many others have as well) the dangers of essentializing Buddhism as a quintessentially "peaceful" religion.

The persistence of south Indian Buddhism up through the early modern period remains in great need of further study. Concerning the Tamil country, see, for instance, Monius (2001): 6 on the material culture evidence for a continuing Buddhist presence, which in fact "seems to expand exponentially" during Cōḻa rule up through the thirteenth century. Dehejia (1988) further documents substantial evidence for the persistence of the major Buddhist monastic settlement in Nakapattinam; the latest inscriptional reference to Nakapattinam dates to the fifteenth century, and the production of Buddhist bronze sculpture continued through the sixteenth century. Outside of Nakapattinam, Dehejia (1988: 58) also notes a Korean inscriptional mention of

east of the subcontinent, but south and central India retained an active if highly understudied Buddhist cultural presence. Perhaps most noteworthy is the recent discovery by James Mallinson that the emergence of *haṭhayoga* in the Deccan was a phenomenon catalyzed by south Indian Buddhism by way of a pivotal and neglected text, the *Amṛtasiddhi*. Through the lasting impact of this work on Śaiva, and later Vaiṣṇava and transsectarian yogic practice, Vajrayāna Buddhist practices succeeded remarkably in "cheating Buddhism's death" in India.[25] Within the Andhra region of south India, moreover, where the narrative in question takes place, understudied archaeological and art historical evidence shows that Buddhism persisted in smaller pockets well into the fourteenth century.[26] As a result, this historical context, and its implications for the broader scholarship conversation, remains quite rele-

continuing Buddhist presence in Kanchipuram in 1378. On the maritime context of the production of south Indian Buddhist bronze sculpture, see also Ray (2018).

25. Research continues to develop concerning the precise location within the Deccan of the *Amṛtasiddhi*. Mallinson (2019) had previously suggested that the *Amṛtasiddhi*, a key vector for the dissemination of *haṭhayoga* from Buddhist to Śaiva yogic circles, was likely composed at the Kadri monastery in Mangalore on the west coast of India in the Konkan. In James Mallinson and Péter Szántó's 2022 edition and translation of the *Amṛtasiddhi* and *Amṛtasiddhimūla*, however, the authors argue that the text most likely originated in present-day eastern Maharashtra. Equally importantly, however, as Mallinson (2019) has clarified, the broader interpretive context for the exchanges between Śaiva and Buddhist yogic traditions should ultimately include the vernacular literatures of the Deccan, especially in Telugu and Marathi. On such works, see for instance Jamal Jones's (2018) study of the *Navanāthacaritramu*, and Seth Powell's (2023) analysis of the *Śivayogapradīpikā* as a Sanskrit rendering of the Telugu *Śivayogasāramu*. It is worth recalling, moreover, that as an established center of the Buddhist Siddha tradition, Srisailam was home to the famed Tantric exegete Advayavajra in the late eleventh century, and his student Rāmapāla remained in the region in the early twelfth century (see Isaacson and Sferra 2014).

26. Concerning the purported decline of Buddhism in Andhra during the late medieval period, much has been made of an epigraph near Kandy in Sri Lanka from 1344, which documents repairs made to a two-story image house in the vicinity of the famous Amarāvatī *stupa* by a certain Sinhalese monk Dharmakīrti (Ray 2014: 164; Knox 1992: plates 123–128). Reflecting on this epigraph and contiguous inscriptional and documentary evidence, Walters (2008) contextualizes this visit within a multi-century political alliance between the Andhra region and Sri Lanka, initially intended to counterbalance Cōḻa hegemony in the Tamil south, thus speculating that Andhra Buddhism may have been artificially resuscitated by their Sri Lankan allies for either political or sentimental ends. Walters further suggests that Buddhism was functionally absent by the twelfth century in Dhānyakaṭaka on the grounds that surviving epigraphs document maintenance of Buddhist institutions of worship by a Śaiva-affiliated ruler. While documentary evidence that centers royal polities and their patronage with religious institutions is most certainly quite relevant, further archaeological and interdisciplinary research would be needed to make a more conclusive case for this reading of the Kandy epigraph as pivotal for our understanding of Buddhism in late medieval Andhra. For present purposes, I would simply like to suggest that sufficient material cultural and epigraphical evidence exists to attest that a twelfth-century encounter between proto-Vīramāhēśvaras such as Mallikārjuna Paṇḍitārādhya and a neighboring Buddhist community could indeed have plausibly occurred. For more on the history and archaeological remains of Buddhism in coastal Andhra, see for instance Fogelin (2003), Subrahmanyam (1964), Shimada (2012), and Ray (2018).

vant to the story Pālkuriki Sōmanātha recounts in his *Exploits of Paṇḍitārādhya* about how two Vīramāhēśvara devotees undertake — successfully — the premeditated murder of one of their Buddhist monastic neighbors.

The narrative in question, despite the interdisciplinary significance of its thematic concerns, has unfortunately yet to be treated systematically in scholarship to date. We find, at best, brief elliptical references, but no in-depth analyses — whether literary or historical — of the episode's contents. For example, in referring to the *Paṇḍitārādhyacaritramu*, the archeologist Giovanni Verardi informs us: "we read that at the end of the debate between Paṇḍitārādhya and a Buddhist dialectician, the disciples of the former killed the monk."[27] On the surface level, the episode does proceed as Verardi claims: in Sōmanātha's *Exploits of Paṇḍitārādhya*, two Vīramāhēśvaras do indeed murder a Buddhist monk, a narrative act that cries out for contextualization. But, what motive might the Vīramāhēśvaras in question have held for committing such an atrocity — as it would certainly be classified by modern sensibilities? In particular, Verardi's abbreviated version, I would argue, buries the lede, eliding the very interpretive contexts that render explicable, though not condonable, the interreligious violence we encounter within Vīraśaiva literature. The tale is much longer than other vignettes on the acts of fierce Vīraśaiva devotees, and its added detail provides both a theological and sociological context for beginning to make sense of how precisely narratives of interreligious violence came to be bound up with Vīramāhēśvara religious identity.

As our story begins, Paṇḍitārādhya is seated in the assembly hall (*sabhā*) of the renowned Mallikārjuna Temple of Srisailam,[28] surrounded by his students. At this moment, Paṇḍitārādhya had just emerged victorious from an intermural philosophical debate, "having had conquered his disputants through his eminent greatness in logic (*tarka*) and the systematic treatises on disputation, with citations ordained by the Smr̥tis and formal logic (*tarka*) without defect, and all the Vedas and lineage-specific Upaniṣads, and select statements, neutral to himself, that accord with the incomparable Purāṇas, Itihāsas, and Āgamas."[29] A certain

27. Verardi (2011: 345). Verardi has not read the episode in question: "Cf. Hiremath (1994: 89), who mentions (without giving any reference) a Kannada version of this Telugu work" (Verardi 2011: 385).

28. This episode begins right at the outset of the *Mahimaprakaraṇamu* (*Paṇḍitārādhaycaritramu*, p. 163). A Sanskrit translation of the text was composed by Gururājārya (ca. fifteenth century), and the corresponding episode begins on p. 82. See Fisher (forthcoming, chapter 4) for more on Gururājārya's Sanskrit *Exploits of Paṇḍitārādhya* (*Paṇḍitārādhyacaritra*).

29. *Paṇḍitārādhyacaritramu*, p. 163

> *paṇḍitārādhyuṇḍu daṇḍitavādi*
> *khaṇḍanaśāstra tarkapprauḍhipērmin'*
> *atulapurāṇētihāsāgamānu-*

Buddhist teacher, however, was incensed at the results of the debate, unable to accept his apparently ignominious defeat. The assembled Vīramāhēśvaras expressed their consternation that the Buddhist was behaving with such impropriety, to the extent that he would deign to disrespect the Ārādhya, the incarnation of Śiva in his form as Dakṣiṇāmūrti on earth. Trembling, his eyes blazing with fury, the Buddhist gathered his followers and stormed out of the assembly. In petty retaliation, he decided to consult an expert on poetics in faraway Varanasi in northern India to garner proof of poetic flaws in a hymn written by Paṇḍitārādhya, the *Bhīmēśagadya*, that began with the syllables *yatsamvitti*. The expert in question, however, a certain Gaulabhaṭṭāraka, failed to provide the scathing review the Buddhist had anticipated:

> *vāraṇāsiki sākṣigōri yāślōkam'*
> *āraṅga gauḷabhaṭṭāraku kaḍakuṁ*
> *banupa "yatsaṁvitti" yanina ślōkādiṁ*
> *bonaru nālg' akṣarambulaku bhāṣyamuga-*
> *veravuna nāluguvēlugranthambu*
> *viraciñci kartagā haruṁ bratiṣṭhiñci*
> *śēṣākṣarārtham ā śēṣuṁḍainanu vi-*
> *śēṣiṁci y' aṭlani ceppa lēṁḍ' anucu*

> To have that verse examined in Varanasi, he sent it to Gaulabhaṭṭāraka with the verse beginning *yatsamvitti*. Having composed a text of four thousand *grantha*s in commentarial style on those agreeable four syllables, he [Gaulabhaṭṭāraka] installed it in front of Hara for the author, saying "even the serpent Śēṣa himself could not adequately (*viśēṣiṁci*) explain the meaning of the rest (*śēṣa*) of the syllables."
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> Pālkuriki Sōmanātha, *Paṇḍitārādhyacaritramu*, p. 164

The fires of his anger only stoked further, the Buddhist embarked on another course of action against the community that had offended his dignity. Raging with fury, he re-

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gata nijōdāsīna kalitavākyamula
sakalavēdānantaśākhōpaniṣada
vikalatarka smr̥tivihitasūktulanu-
śiṣṭānumatahētudr̥ṣṭānta supra-
hr̥ṣṭapramāṇasamīhitōktulanu

turned to the Mallikārjuna Temple and proceeded to uproot and carry away the pillar of lights from the temple pavilion (*maṇḍapa*): “After some days had gone by, cursing and reviling Mallikārjuna, unable to defeat him by means of logic (*tarkamuna*), that degenerate Buddhist, traversing a great distance on foot to that *sabhāmaṇṭapa*, forcefully extracted the immeasurable lamp pillar (*dīpamāle*) of Śrī Cennamallikārjuna while everyone was watching.”[30] The devout Śaivas who witnessed this act of vandalism were incensed at what they viewed as an unspeakable atrocity. Two among them, however, decided to take the matter into their own hands. Reflecting on what had transpired, they declared the Buddhist teacher to be guilty of *śivadrōha* (Telugu *śivadrōhambu*), or *treachery against Śiva*. As Sōmanātha writes:

> *dōṣaṁb’ anaka śivadrōhamb’ anaka vi-*
> *śēṣiñci lōkulu sēkonar’ anaka*
> *vracci teppiñcinavāṁḍ’ aṭe vīniñ-*
> *cecceraṁ jaṁpaka cikkitimēni*
> *yūhimpan’ ātaṁḍu drōhiye manama*
> *drōhāl’amunu sabhaktulamuṁ gā kanucu*

> Not seeing it as an error, not thinking of it especially as *treachery against Śiva* (*śivadrōhambu*), he was impelled by his faulty intellect. Thus, if we do not kill him, how is he the traitor? *We two* will be known as *traitors* (*drohālu*) and will no longer be considered devotees.
>
> Pālkuriki Sōmanātha, *Paṇḍitārādhyacaritramu*, p. 164

Thus, having considered the repercussions of failing to act, the pair of devotees set out with the intention of killing the offending Buddhist. Having traveled some distance to the

30. *Paṇḍitārādhyacaritramu*: 164:

dinamulu-
sana munna mallikārjunu dhikkariñci
palikeṁ dān’ aṭe bauddhapāpi darkamuna-
geluvaṅgaṁ jālaka y’ ila maṭluṁgāka
malayucuṁ datsabhāmaṇṭapambunaku
balimi vaṭrillaṁgā kolani śrī cenna-
malikārjuna dīpa māle gambambun’
ellavārunu jūḍa

eastern coast of India, the two Vīramāhēśvaras took shelter for some days in a nearby Jain temple.[31] Waiting until they confirmed that the Buddhist had returned home, they declared that he had been marked for death. The next morning, having awoken and performed their daily ritual worship of Śiva, they disguised themselves in Buddhist robes, built a boat, and traversed the ocean shore, remembering in their heart the great devotees who had performed similar deeds. Upon arriving on the shore near the Buddhist enclave, they caught sight of their quarry. Tracking the monk until he entered the temple alone, they followed him in. As he was bowing, they set upon him. Here we meet with a graphic description of how they trampled his throat with their feet and rent apart his stomach, just as he had uprooted the *dīpāmāle*. The fierce devotees cut out the tongue that had spoken words of defamation against Paṇḍitārādhya, and cut off the Buddhist's head, impaling it on a stake. On the chest of the Buddhist's corpse, they left a letter, announcing to those who would find the corpse that this was the handiwork of the innumerable (*asaṁkhyāta*) devotees of Śiva.

The next day, when the Buddhist teacher had not returned, his students went to the temple to search for him. Breaking down the door, they discovered his body, mangled and covered with blood and maggots. The students immediately set off to alert the king, who was himself a Buddhist. Enraged, the king declared that whoever was found guilty of the murder would be punished by having his eyes gouged out. Upon learning of the letter the two devotees had left behind — which, the text tells us, constitutes a document issued by the Vīramāhēśvara community, investing legal authority to execute a course of action (*asaṁkhyātala y'ānatilekhaṁ*, cf. Skt. *ājñāpatra*) — the king demanded that their leader Paṇḍitārādhya be summoned to stand trial and receive his punishment.[32] When brought before the king, Paṇḍitārādhya claimed, truthfully, to have been ignorant of what had transpired prior to that point, but fully endorsed the authority of the Vīramāhēśvara corporate body, the *asaṁkhyātagaṇa*s, as specified in the *ānatilekha*. He then testified that if the king deigned to punish him by gouging his eyes out, Śiva would miraculously restore his eyesight

31. In his Sanskrit rendering, Gururājārya identifies the site of the ostensible Buddhist community as Srikakula, although the original Telugu specifies a location near the ocean, thus presumably ruling out the Buddhist communities at Amāravatī, which may have been under contestation in the twelfth century. Given the geography, it is not unreasonable that the *Paṇḍitārādhyacaritramu* could have been speaking of the Buddhist sites at Salihundam and Kalingapatnam, which would have been accessible by boat from Srikakula. Intriguingly, as Akira Shimada (2012: 234) notes, surviving Vajrayāna sculptures at Salihundam date only up through the tenth to twelfth centuries.

32. On the use of the term *ānati*, derived from the Sanskrit *ājñapti*, in contemporary inscriptional literature from the Andhra region, see for instance Sastry (1978: 186), Rao (1988: 19), and Radhakrishna (1971: 225). Sastry (1978: 182–182) further discusses the Asaṁkhyāta Māhēśvaras as a corporate body operating out of Srisailam.

to prove his innocence. And indeed, in a classic trope of devotional hagiographical literature, this is exactly what happens: Paṇḍitārādhya's eyes are gouged out, and his vision is once again restored. This series of events, in Sōmanātha's larger textual project, served as a dramatic prologue for a larger plot arc in the Mahimaprakaraṇamu, the sudden decline of the Velanāṭi Cōḷa dynasty, which the misguided king officiating at our trial had the misfortune to represent.[33]

As the final moment in this narrative episode testifies, there is much in this account that is highly tropological. Most noteworthy, perhaps, is the final ordeal, in which the defendant's eyesight is miraculously restored by divine intervention. Here we are very clearly in the realm of the literary. An identical turn of events, for instance, is attributed to the life of the seventeenth-century south Indian intellectual Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita. About to be chastised for his alleged familiarity with the king's wife, Nīlakaṇṭha preemptively gouged out his own eyes, crying out for the goddess Mīnākṣī's mercy with a spontaneous Sanskrit *stōtra*.[34] And, predictably, Mīnākṣī promptly restored the vision of her innocent devotee. Given the pervasiveness of this trope within south Indian literature, then, Paṇḍitārādhya's unjust punishment and miraculous restoration call for a hermeneutics that places the trope within a strictly literary context. In the denouement of this deeply unsettling episode, Sōmanātha restores to his readers a sense of stability by invoking a predictable trope, conveying an experience of catharsis through the vindication of our innocent hero. And in doing so, Sōmanātha reveals a seasoned awareness of the *literary* context of his work. Following this line of reasoning, one might speculate that the untimely demise of the Buddhist monk was intended to be received by readers within the genre constraints of devotional narrative as a strictly intertextual reference to prior works of literature. And thus, one might argue that the centerpiece of the episode, the execution of the monk itself, is likewise a strictly tropological affair. After all, as narrative hagiography, the episode provides us with no evidence that events actually transpired in the manner that Sōmanātha describes.

The question remains, however, of whether we should presume that changes in tropology were conceptually divorced from the social reality in which they circulated. Did authors

33. On the Velanāṭi Cōḷa (also transliterated as Cōḍa) dynasty, see for instance Devi (1993: 15–74) and Mohan (1996). The kings of the Velanāṭi Cōḷas are also featured in a number of episodes in the *Ancient Tale of Basava*.

34. Fisher (2017). A similar motif also appears in Śrīvaiṣṇava hagiographical literature, where Rāmānuja's disciple Kūrattāḻvāṉ is blinded by the Cōḻa king Kulōttuṅga, but in this instance, does not regain his sight. I thank Srilata Raman for this reference. As it would have been known to Sōmanātha, also of relevance is the *Periyapurāṇam*'s narration of the self-blinding of Kaṇṇappar, himself a "harsh devotee" although engaging in self-harm rather than the interreligious violence depicted in Sōmanātha's Telugu works (see Cox 2005).

never reflect on lived experience, whether outlandish and traumatic events or the banal reality of quotidian life? Do texts never have an impact on the extra-textual world, shaping the experiences and decisions of readers acculturated in their idiom? It is crucial, in this regard, that we move beyond tropology to reflect on whether the murder of a Buddhist monk, although itself a hagiographical account that cannot be confirmed to mirror empirical reality, illuminates deeper patterns at work in south Indian religious institutions and society. What can we reconstruct about the social place of religious violence in Pālkuriki Sōmanātha's world? As we will see, the *śivadrōhin*, or traitor against Śiva, was not just a narrative trope, but a concept that had risen to prominence quite recently in contemporary epigraphical and prescriptive texts. Thus, how we interpret this episode has the potential to speak to much broader historiographical and methodological questions concerning of the hermeneutics of South Asian textual genres, and the project of historiography as a reconstruction of South Asian extra-textual pasts.

4 "Treachery Against Śiva": Situating Text in Historical Context

Reflecting upon how the murder of the Buddhist monk and its aftermath unfolded in the *Exploits of Paṇḍitārādhya*, some striking elements stand out that had failed to emerge in Verardi's one-line summary. Most obvious, perhaps, is that the key explanatory points of the plot were absent: the Vīramāhēśvaras do not simply dispose of the Buddhist "after" the debate, if we take the term "after" in its implied sense of "because of" the debate. Rather, the Buddhist is killed in retribution for stealing and defacing Śaiva property at one of the subcontinent's most famous pilgrimage sites. Our first reaction, from a modern Western perspective, might be to insist that such a vindictive murder was somewhat of an overreaction, to say the least, and that the case ought to have been subjected to some established legal procedure besides the "vigilante" justice carried out by two private devotees.[35] And indeed,

35. A number of intriguing issues might be pursued here, which unfortunately fall beyond the scope of what may be feasibly covered in the present article. Among these is the pressing question, which has yet to be adequately addressed systematically, of the extent and function of extra-state violence in premodern South Asia. For now, simply put, we have no reason to presume that the premodern South Asian "state," should we use this term, was ever qualified by Weber's notion of a monopoly on legitimate violence, which is itself explicitly Eurocentric in its historical inspirations. Even when interreligious violence in particular is not thematized, epigraphical records from the medieval Deccan contain blatant endorsement of retributive murder as justice (see, for instance, Schwartz 2023, chapter 4.)

as we will see, just what legal standards may have applied to such a scenario is precisely what is at stake in this narrative. Second, and equally crucial, the crime with which the assembly of Vīramāhēśvaras indict the Buddhist teacher is *śivadrōha*, or "treachery against Śiva." But although the term *drōha* is often translated as treachery, and the related noun *drōhin* as traitor, something is lost here in English translation. In terms of contemporary notions of religious identity, the Buddhist might be understood to bear no allegiance to Śiva in the first place; thus, how might he betray him? Before hazarding any explanation for this violent episode, we will need to resolve these seeming aporia by situating them within their discursive context in thirteenth-century south India.

Indeed, perhaps the most striking thing about the retributive murder in this episode is that it is not an isolated incident: retaliation for perceived wrongdoing is a recurrent, if not almost omnipresent, motif in how narrative violence against the religious other is emplotted in Vīramāhēśvara literature.[36] Wherever we find Jain *basadi*s being demolished or heterodox heads impaled on stakes, more often than not, the Vīraśaiva perpetrators perceived the victims to have been guilty of some prior crime. Recall the case of Ēkānta Rāmayya, whose self-beheading, an ordeal designed to cleanse the town of Abbalūru of Jain *basadi*s and to force the conversion of its Jain population to Śaivism, was precipitated by a Jain who happened to speak ill of Śiva.[37] And in fact, such was the case for the narrative with which we began our explorations today, the story of Hiriya Nācayya. Why, according to the *Ancient Tale of Basava*, did Nācayya decide to launch a homicidal incursion into the Jain village of Māruḍiga? Quite simply, we are told, the Jain inhabitants of Māruḍiga had murdered the priest of the village's only Śaiva temple. This prior act of violence against Śiva and his dominion, however delimited, for Sōmanātha justified the demolition of seventeen hundred Jain temples and the beheading of all Jina images in the village. And by and large, incidents of intercommunal conflict, many resulting in violence, are rhetorically demarcated

36. Importantly, the term *drōha* is not developed as a major socio-religious concept in the *Śivadharmaśāstra*, one of the key source texts and legal charters of the Vīramāhēśvara community, and the Vīramāhēśvara fixation on the concept is a marked departure from earlier literature. The term appears only briefly, e.g., v. 3.52:

> *ātmadrōhī sa vijñēyaḥ pitr̥drōhī ca sa smr̥taḥ*
> *yasmāt sarvēṣu bhūtēṣu gatir dēvō mahēśvaraḥ*

The compounds *śivadrōha* and *śivadrōhin* do not appear. A related concept, *śivanindā*, "defamation of Śiva," which continues to appear in Vīramāhēśvara texts, is thematized in the *Śivadharmōttara*, chapter 7. See De Simini (2022) for further detail. For a comparative perspective outside of Śaiva communities, it is worth considering that defamation or slander is also covered by a particular title of Brahminical Dharmaśāstra law, *vākpāruṣya*, from the time of the *Mānavadharmaśāstra* onward. See for instance Rocher (2012).

37. See Ben-Herut 2012 for more on the narratives of Ēkānta Rāmayya and his self-beheading.

in Sōmanātha's writings by his frequent mentions of traitors and treachery, *drōhālu* and *drōhambu*.[38]

From a broader discursive perspective, Sōmanātha was not the only early author in the early Vīraśaiva imaginary for whom *drōha* and *śivadrōha* had crystalized as socioreligious concepts.[39] And yet, it is Sōmanātha himself who places the concept of *śivadrōha* at the heart of the most famous murder of early Vīraśaiva history, the murder of Basava's royal patron, the Kalachuri king Bijjala, in the city of Kalyana.[40] One day, as Sōmanātha tells the story, Basava was admonishing a devotee by the name of Jagadeva for his laxity in adhering to Śaiva conduct. But Basava assured Jagadeva that he might yet atone for his transgression: at that very moment, someone in the city of Kalyana was undertaking a grievous act of treachery against Śiva. Jagadeva had only to step up and murder the traitor, whoever he might be, to prove the steadfastness of his devotion. Meanwhile, King Bijjala had just arrested a pair of Vīraśaiva devotees without valid cause, gouging out their eyes as punishment for some unspecified crime. Basava, incensed, miraculously restored their vision. Jagadeva, distressed at the enormity of the task before him, consulted his mother for advice. She replied: "As soon as someone as served up treachery against *gaṇa*s" — that is, the human incarnations of Śiva's celestial bodyguards — "you must kill him without reflection. If you cannot kill him, you must kill yourself. This is the only path for a devotee of the killer of

38. Mentions of treachery and treachery against Śiva in Sōmanātha's works are far too numerous to catalogue exhaustively in the present context. Numerous episodes in the *Basavapurāṇamu* deal with similar themes. The devotee Kakkayya, for instance, chanced to listen a Purāṇic reciter who failed to adequately affirm Viṣṇu's subordination to Śiva. In recompense, Kakkayya beheaded and disemboweled the Paurāṇika, in much the same fashion as the two devotees disposed of the Buddhist monk.

39. Shanthamurthy (2019 mentions the use of the term *śivadrōhi* in Harihara's *Ragaḷegaḷu*, in the narration of Appar's trial at the hands of the Jains (p. 91), and the use of a term *gurudrōha* in a newly added narrative in Bhīmakavi's *Basavapurāṇa* (p. 247). Likewise, see Ben-Herut (2018: 173–176) for the *śaraṇa* Jōmmayya, who stands trial for murdering a Vaiṣṇava who "offended Śiva," a translation intended to capture the term *drōha*.

40. For the discussion and use of the term "*śivadrōha*" in Sōmanātha's narration of the murder of Bijjala, see Shanthamurthy (2019: 244–255). The murder of Bijjala is attributed by the *Paṇḍitārādhaycaritramu* to two Vīramāhēśvaras by the name of Jagadēva and Mollebommayya. Although a similar mention concerning Bijjala's murder appears in one of Harihara's *Ragaḷegaḷu* as well, some doubts have been raised about the possible interpolation of the passage (see for instance Shanthamurthy 2019: 238).

the god of death."[41] True to his word, Jagadēva assassinated the treacherous king. With that act, the Kalachuri dynasty fell, Śiva's devotees rose up in rebellion, and the city of Kalyana crumbled.

Like the murder of the Buddhist monk, then, many such episodes in Sōmanātha's narrative frame violent retribution as the inevitable response to wrongs inflicted upon Śiva himself, Śiva's devotees, or property owned by Śaiva institutions. That is, all these cases are subsumed within the category of treachery against Śiva. Sōmanātha himself, however, does not deserve the credit for coining this term of art. In short, the term had come to occupy a particular niche in the south Indian social imaginary. When we turn to the broader discursive currents of the thirteenth century, even well beyond Vīraśaiva circles, we discover that the term *śivadrōha* is frequently foregrounded both in doctrinal and theological writings as well as in multilingual inscriptions. In fact, the very sense of *drōha* we can recover from Vīraśaiva narrative literature across linguistic boundaries maps on closely to a pattern Daud Ali has reconstructed from Cōḻa-period epigraphical evidence in the Tamil country. Ali suggests that we construe "*drōha* or disloyalty" (2020: 38) as the violation of the terms of a given social compact.[42] These compacts appear and rise to prominence rather suddenly in the twelfth century, as such language does not figure into traditional imprecatory formulas.

41. *Basavapurāṇamu*, p. 252:

> *śivagaṇadrōhimbuṁ seviṁ baḍḍayapuḍuy'*
> *avicāramuna vāri hariyimpavalayuṁ jūlarēṁ dārēni samayaṅgavalayuṁ*
> *gālakāluni bhaktagaṇamārga midhiyu*

Trans. Narayana Rao and Roghair (1990).

42. Monier-Williams defines *drōha* as "injury, mischief, harm, perfidy, treachery, wrong, offence." In terms of historical linguistics, however, that the sense of *drōha* as "treachery" or "disloyalty" stems from valences of the proto-Indo European verbal root **dreuǵʰ* signifying deceit, untruth, or falsity makes clear the notion of deceit was not a subsequent accretion to an original sense of "malice" or "injuriousness." In fact, Mayrhofer (1992: 760) asserts quite plainly that in the R̥gveda, the root *druh*, with present conjugation *druhyati*, already carries the meaning "to deceive," with the meaning "to harm" appearing subsequently in younger literature. As a case in point, R̥V 10.066.08cd places the semantics of *druh* in direct opposition to *r̥ta* (truth) and cannot be coherently construed should we understand the term as strictly signifying "malice":

> *agníhōtāra r̥tasā́pō adrúhō*
> *apō̃ asr̥jann ánu vr̥tratū́riyē*

I thank Caley Smith for this observation. The parallels in Avestan are also telling (Kellens 1996), with the cognate feminine noun *druj* signifying "lie," "error," or "deceit," in opposition to *aša*, the true or real order, similar to the Vedic binary of *r̥ta* and *anr̥ta*. In Old Avestan, the term appears frequently in compounds that specifically suggest treachery or betrayal, such as *miθrō.druj-* one who "betrays the contract." For relevant parallels of MIA loan words in Southeast Asia, see Hoogervorst (2017: 416), who notes that the Malay *dəhaga*, which he argues is cognate with Sanskrit *drōhaka* and Ardhamāgadhī *dōha*, is attested in the sense of "disobedience to lawful authority, disloyalty, treason." In short, the epigraphical sense of *drōha* as signifying

Within the inscriptional record both in the Cōḻa country and across south India more broadly, then, at this very moment in time, the terms *drōha* and *drōhin* in general, and the term *śivadrōha* in particular, irrupt dramatically in frequency, warning others against violating temple property, sometimes invoked in reference to local legal proceedings. We find, for instance, a copper plate from the Kākatīya dynasty of the Andhra region, in which a merchant collective granted trade privileges to one Puliyama Seṭṭi as a reward for his killing a certain "*samayadrōhi*" or "betrayer of the *samaya*," the legal norms of a specific religious or corporate community.[43] In a similar vein, as recorded by a twelfth-century inscription, a group of *śivadrōhin*s (in Tamil, Grantha script, *śivadrōhikaḷ*) looted the storehouses of the Rāmeśvaram Temple when an army from Sri Lanka had invaded the Tamil region in the far south of India. In response, one of the officiants at a temple near Kanchipuram performed ritual magic, or *abhicāra*, with the intent of killing or harming the traitors, or *durjanar*, "bad people," as they are also described.[44] In a further inscription from the Cōḻa country dating to 1194 CE, temple officiants level the dual accusation of treachery against Śiva and treachery against the king, or *rājadrōha,* against a pair of Śaiva priests who had pilfered temple property in a town by the name of Civapuram, absconding with a necklace that the king himself had bestowed upon the god.[45]

What can we learn, then, from these rising anxieties about treachery, and treachery against Śiva specifically, in twelfth- and thirteenth-century inscriptions? Much depends, naturally, on how we view the act of inscribing an epigraph itself: Daud Ali (2020) rightly cautions against viewing these supposedly "documentary" inscriptions purely as faithful records of financial transactions or legal settlements. Rather, he argues, the choice to write permanently on stone constitutes a "technology of power." Such inscriptions were imbued with an aura of authority, creating a sense of presence beyond the delimited space of courtroom proceedings. Taking matters a step further, then, I would argue that through these

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the violation of a compact, i.e., treachery, is by no means foreign to the etymology of the verbal root or its historical usage.

43. *South Indian Inscriptions* vol. 2, 4:935. Also recorded as ARE (Annual Report on Epigraphy) copper plate 10 of 1919, Cited in Davis 2005: 107 and Talbot (2001: 75). It is worth noting that this dual sense of the term *samaya* is far from coincidental, as legal literature often understands both mercantile collectives and religious communities as analogously self-governing corporate bodies. See Schwartz (2018 and 2023, chapter 3).

44. *South Indian Inscriptions* vol. 6, no. 456, pp. 188–190, ll. 25–27:

> *tiruvirāmiśvarattil devarkoyilait tirukkāppuka koṇṭu pūjai muṭṭappaṇṇi aṅkuḷḷa śrīpaṇṭāram ellām kaikkoṇṭu śivadrohikaḷ ennumiṭam maṟintom*

45. *South Indian Inscriptions* vol. 2, 4:356. Also recorded as ARE (Annual Report on Epigraphy) 189 of 1929. Cited in Sastri 1937: 264–265 and Sanderson 2009: p. 260.

technologies of power, this inscriptional discourse allows the term "treachery," or *drōha*, to become established as a religious concept. Specifically, treachery as a legal term did not come to exclusively signify the betrayal of one's personal allegiances. On this point, our last inscriptional example is especially telling: if even Śaiva priests can be considered traitors against Śiva, the religious othering of the heterodox Buddhists and Jains is not all that was at stake. Rather, treachery against Śiva constituted quite simply the violation of the normative, legal prescriptions that governed the Śaiva domain. Thus, when these epigraphs enshrine the new sense of *śivadrōha* in stone on temple property, they construct a fixed and legally actionable category — the traitor against Śiva. And simultaneously, they actively promote a new culture of suspicion, urging Śaiva devotees on temple premises to keep a constant lookout for treacherous action and respond accordingly, with violence when necessary. In other words, "if you see something, *slay* something."

But while these inscriptions actively condone retributive murder as a social norm and legally sanctioned practice, another genre of textuality further instills suspicion against outsiders as integral to the very personhood of Śaiva devotees. Recall that Sōmanātha himself also composed a commentarial essay in Sanskrit, and like much of the earlier Śaiva scripture he synthesized, this work was concerned with how one had to act as a Vīramāhēśvara — in other words, with what they would call proper conduct, or *ācāra*. For instance, according to Sōmanātha, Vīraśaivas must always adorn their bodies with ash and *rudrākṣa* rosary beads. A Vīraśaiva must maintain constant physical contact with their personal *iṣṭaliṅga*, which constituted their very life's breath; should they ever become separated from it, they were to sever their own head as if it were a lotus.[46] Such matters were pillars of early Vīraśaiva conduct, or *ācāra* — that is, matters of ritual propriety and legal normativity, instilling a shared sense of religious belonging. And such codes of propriety would have been propagated in the pedagogical contexts of Vīraśaiva monasteries through instruction in such Sanskrit anthologies of conduct, and circulated to a wider public when key verses were embedded verbatim in vernacular Telugu narrative. But according to Sōmanātha, the conduct or *ācāra* of his community equally comprised the obligation to exclude the religious other. Even untouchability, for Sōmanātha, was quite literally a matter not of caste but of religion;

46. As with the case of *śivadrōha*, narratives of severing one's head make numerous appearances in Vīraśaiva narrative literature (see for instance Ben-Herut 2012) but are closely echoed in prescriptive texts. *Śaivaratnākara* 17.207:

prāṇaliṅgavratē luptē hastakhaḍgād avañcayan
mukhaṁ paṅkajavat chindyād vīrabhṛtyārcanakramaḥ

See Fisher (forthcoming, chapter 2) for further details.

his Sanskrit work is appended, chapter by chapter, with the habitual refrain: "Based on this statement and the following, those who do not worship Paramēśvara must not be looked upon and must not be spoken to" (*na darśanīyā na sambhāṣyāḥ*); or, "Those who fail to bear *rudrākṣa* beads and three stripes of ash as prescribed by these and other statements of Śruti, Smṛti, and Āgama must not be looked upon and must not be spoken to."[47]

But this obligation to exclude did not operate by dehumanizing the religious other per se, if by that we mean to refer to what we today experience as being human. Rather, Sōmanātha's community of early Vīraśaivas perceived themselves and their fellow devotees not as ordinary human beings, subject solely to human norms, but as the living incarnations of Śiva's *gaṇa*s — his celestial bodyguards, so to speak. To become a *gaṇa* after death had been a soteriological ideal of Śaiva communities for centuries, due to the legacy of the *Śivadharmaśāstra* and adjacent textual canons, but the early Vīraśaivas made the unprecedented move of framing the role of *gaṇa* as the very foundation of their everyday religious subjectivity.[48] In Śaiva narrative literature, Śiva's *gaṇa*s had long been remembered as the legendary disruptors of Dakṣa's sacrifice, the violent defenders of Śiva's norms, Śiva's rights, and Śiva's orders. In myth and legend, Śiva's *gaṇa*s often took incarnation as a punishment for a momentary transgression of Śaiva conduct.[49] Thus, the proper conduct (*ācāra*) of the early Vīraśaivas extended beyond the personal disciplining of the body — by always wearing ash or *rudrākṣa* beads — or of the mind — for instance, cultivating a personal experience of devotion to Śiva. Rather, to be a Vīraśaiva subject was, in essence, to experience oneself as being one of Śiva's *gaṇa*s on earth. Indeed, the religious institution with which Sōmanātha's Vīramāhēśvara followers appear to have affiliated is legally identified in inscriptions as the Gaṇa Maṭha of the Asaṁkhyāta Māhēśvaras, the monastery of Śiva's innumerable *gaṇa* devotees.[50]

Thus, as earthly incarnations of Śiva's *gaṇa*s, perhaps atoning for their own past misdeeds in prior incarnations, early Vīraśaivas bore a latent contractual obligation to defend

47. *Sōmanāthabhāṣya* p. 19: *ityādivākyēna yē nārcayanti paramēśvaraṁ tē na darśanīyā na sambhāṣyāḥ*. *Sōmanāthabhāṣya* pg. 15: *ityādiśrutismṛtyāgamavacanōdīritabhasitatripuṇḍrarudrākṣadhāraṇahīnāś ca yē santi te na darśanīyā na saṃbhāṣyāḥ*. Page numbers are cited from the Bhairavamurtyaradhya printing. Citations include my emendations.

48. The goal of becoming a *gaṇa* in the Nepalese recension of the *Skanda Purāṇa* was discussed by Yokochi (2018). On the divinization of the Śaiva devotee as *gaṇa* within the *Śivadharmaśāstra*, see also Mirnig (2019).

49. While many such cases exist, the most obvious is Basava, who was widely regarded as an incarnation of Śiva's bull *gaṇa*, Vṛṣabha.

50. See for instance *South Indian Inscriptions*, vol. 10, no. 504. See also Fisher (forthcoming, chapter 1) for a more detailed discussion of contiguous epigraphical evidence.

Śiva's honor and property by any means necessary, even by violent force. From their perspective, this was part and parcel of being a Śaiva, and thus of the very social contract that placed them outside the jurisdiction of Brahminical Hindu law. The obligation — quite literally — to be a fierce devotee, then, fell under the purview of Śaiva *ācāra*. After all, while the term *ācāra* denotes community-specific religious obligations, "religion" here is no abstract reference to an internal, subjective moral compass. Rather, following earlier Dharmaśāstra conventions, *ācāra* was just as fundamentally a legal category with real-world juridical significance.[51] In such a light, if Vīramāhēśvara theologians did indeed find themselves in a position in which their community precepts were being subjected to intersectarian legal scrutiny, we might expect that Sanskrit Vīramāhēśvara anthologies would have incorporated language that would provide a precedent for any devotees attempting to inflict violence upon others as a response to *śivadrōha*. And indeed, this is precisely what we find in the primary Vīramāhēśvara anthologies, the *Śaivaratnākara* and *Vīramāhēśvarācārasaṅgraha*, which preserve a passage attributed to the Vātula Tantra explicitly authorizing Vīramāhēśvara devotees to enact retributive violence upon those guilty of appropriating or damaging Śaiva property:[52]

> *śivanindāparaṁ vākyaṁ śrutvā tadvaktraśikṣaṇam*
> *kuryād anyatra vā gacchēd aśaktaḥ pihitaśrutiḥ*
> *śivālayaśivārāmaśivagrāmābhirakṣaṇē*
> *tātparyam aniśaṁ kuryād anyās tadapahāriṇaḥ*
> *śivadravyāpahārāya pravr̥ttaṁ manujādhamam*
> *jñātvā tanmāraṇaṁ kuryāt sa yāti paramāṁ gatim*
> *śivacihnāṅkitaṁ vatsaṁ hanti yō durjanō janaḥ*
> *hanyāt taṁ svēna hastēna vīramāhēśvarō vratī*
> *śivabhaktajanadrōhavidhāyini durātmani*
> *na kadācid dayāṁ kuryāt tanmardanaparō bhavēt*

51. For instance, as Donald Davis encapsulates the matter: "The concept of *ācāra* is both the conceptual and practical link between scholastic norms, ideas, and presuppositions and the rules and institutions of law in practice" (Davis 2010: 144).
52. The Vātula Tantra, a newly redacted scripture with earlier Atimārgic roots, was a principal textual authority for the early Vīramāhēśvaras. See Fisher (forthcoming) for further details.

> Having heard a statement aimed at reviling Śiva, one should punish the speaker's mouth, or, he should go elsewhere if he is unable to do so, having covered his ears.
>
> He must always make it essential to protect Śiva's temples, Śiva's retreats, and Śiva's villages. Any who [do] otherwise are guilty of theft against him.
>
> Having known that one lowest among men has undertaken the theft of Śaiva property, he must carry out his execution. Thus, he goes to the highest path [after death].
>
> One who has undertaken the Vīramāhēśvara vow must kill with his own hand any base person who kills a calf marked with Śiva's insignia.
>
> One should never grant clemency to a bad-souled person who engages in treachery (*drōha*) against Śaiva devotees. [Rather], he must be intent on crushing him.[53]
>
> *Vīramāhēśvarācārasaṅgraha* 6.77–81 (attributed to the Vātula Tantra)

The parallels with our Vīraśaiva vernacular narratives, including the episode of the murder of the Buddhist monk, are unmistakable; the two texts were clearly cut from the same cloth. Their similarity, moreover, is no accident: although Sōmanātha never cited these Sanskrit verses verbatim in this particular Telugu narrative, the intertextuality would have been immediately apparent to the more classically educated among his readers. As in the story of Basava and the Bōyas, where we found a hidden allusion to a Sanskrit scriptural verse, I would find it highly implausible to suggest that Sōmanātha was not envisioning these very verses attributed to the Vātula Tantra, or others much like them, when crafting his narrative. The passages exemplified here, of course, are a minority occurrence within a substantial scriptural corpus largely preoccupied with other matters. Violence, interreligious or otherwise, was by no means the central organizing thematic concern of Śaiva religiosity in centuries past, nor in the following centuries when Vīraśaiva identities flourished across south India. Rather, Sōmanātha was participating in an active project to curate past religious

53. I have emended the reading of the second verse based on this parallel citation in the *Śaivaratnākara* (10.43):

śivālayē śivārāmē śivagrāmābhirakṣaṇē
tātparyam aniśaṁ kuryād dhanyāt tadapahāriṇam

I thank Whitney Cox for his suggestion on the emendation of verse 6.77.

canons to speak to the changing needs of a new social world, selecting fragments of his religious heritage to disseminate to a wider population in the form of vernacular narrative.

5 Violence, Law, and Religion in the Thirteenth-Century Deccan

How, then, can we account for this novel impulse to frame violence, of all things, as foundational to being a Vīramāhēśvara religious subject in the thirteenth century? If a strictly literary critical hermeneutics is insufficient to explain the discourse-wide trends that Pālkuriki Sōmanātha participated in when he invoked the tropes of harsh devotion, should we turn instead to general theories of religion and violence? Theorists disagree substantially, however, about whether we can even distinguish something called "religious violence" from violence originating from any other sphere of human activity. In his monograph *The Myth of Religious Violence* (2009), William Cavanaugh argues that by delineating certain acts of violence as "religious" in nature, scholars underpin the imperialist project of Western nations to exoticize and stigmatize the colonized global South. Likewise, in his "Theses on Violence and Religion," Bruce Lincoln (2005) maintains that violence, religiously motivated or otherwise, is principally driven by the scarcity of material resources, and the competition such scarcity engenders. Taking a page from Lincoln's book, an approach that sees discourse as acting agentively upon the extratextual world would do well to begin by asking what sociohistorical shifts might have engendered such a scarcity at this pivotal moment in the history of the subcontinent. It is worth recalling that the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were a time of remarkable social instability, well before Islam had made a substantial appearance in south India. This was the end of what Indologist Alexis Sanderson has called the Śaiva Age (2009), when Śaivism and its institutions dominated the religious landscape of medieval India. It was the era of the gradual collapse of the Cōḻa Empire, the decline of the Kalyāṇi Cāḷukyas in Karnataka, and the short-lived reign of Bijjala's dynasty, the Kalachuris. Even Sōmanātha's home country, Srisailam, was subject to incursion by the Seuna Yādavas of Maharashtra. Although the field as a whole has yet to fully reckon with the significance of these events for large-scale transformations in religious and cultural history in peninsular India, we would be naïve to discount the potential relationship between these turbulent political conditions and the remarkable upsurge in violent rhetoric contained within the early Vīraśaiva narrative and prescriptive textual corpus.

In such an unstable political climate, then, perhaps thirteenth-century Śaivas began to see treachery against Śiva around every corner because acts of temple theft and vandalism, and challenges to Śiva's sovereignty, were genuinely increasing in frequency in contrast to the relative stability of the Śaiva Age. Indeed, throughout much of the medieval period in South Asia, especially across the Deccan Plateau where Sōmanātha made his home, religious institutions and their norms would simply have been defended as a matter of course by the ruling powers of the day, regardless of their personal sectarian affiliation. As Jason Schwartz (2023) has recently demonstrated, in the early medieval Deccan, Śaiva institutions not only owned their land in perpetuity but held incontrovertible legal jurisdiction over the affairs conducted within those domains. By Sōmanātha's day, Brahminical Dharmaśāstra literature had maintained a centuries-long precedent of carving out legal exceptions for caste, occupational, and religious collectives to govern their communities according to their own principles of conduct (*ācāra*).[54] Thus, Śaiva institutions with land granted in perpetuity retained the right to dictate what precisely constituted law within their domains, according to their religious precepts.[55] It is open to question to what extent the Vīramāhēśvaras of the thirteenth century retained such legal authority to dictate the scope of law within their territory, in contrast with the preceding centuries of the Śaiva Age. Nevertheless, as narrative and prescriptive literature clearly attests, such a model of legal pluralism remained not only an ideal to which Vīramāhēśvara communities aspired, but also a social reality that initiates were striving — and indeed, were obligated — to protect at all costs.

In this light, it is worth returning briefly to Sōmanātha's narrative to scrutinize more closely some of the legal language embedded in his depiction of Paṇḍitārādhya's encounter with the king — which constituted, after all, a formal trial. Recall that the murder of the Buddhist monk had been instigated by a legal document (*ānatilēkha*), apparently issued under the presumption that the Vīramāhēśvara community retained the right to govern their domains according to their own legal norms. After Paṇḍitārādhya has made the case for his defense, the king replies as follows:

54. On legal pluralism and the self-governance of communities according to *ācāra* as central to the social dynamics of the early medieval Deccan, see Schwartz (2018 and 2023). See also Davis (2005) and Lubin (2015). On the concept of *dharma* as Śaiva law in the *Śivadharmaśāstra* and its surrounding corpus, see Bisschop (2018) and Bisschop, Kafle, and Lubin (2021).

55. As Schwartz demonstrates, our documentary records show that in the middle of thirteenth century, the Seuṇa Yādavas begin to systematically confiscate the Śaiva and Śākta-Śaiva estates in the western Deccan, placing the management of these institutions under the purview of the Yādava state with onsite oversight provided by Smārta brahmins (Schwartz 2023, chapter 10). Indeed, perhaps it is no coincidence at all that at the time our text was written the Seuṇa Yādavas had recently launched exploratory incursions into the vicinity of Srisailam.

> *prakaṭita krōdhāgni paritāpadagdha-*
> *sukr̥tuṇḍu vōlanāṁṭicōḍ'aḍan pāpi-*
> *dhara "brāhmaṇō na hantavya" yanaṅgaṁ*
> *gara malgi tappenta galgin'anainan'*
> *adhamajātula barcu n' aṭṭi brāhmaṇalu*
> *vadhiyimpa rādu bhūpati k' aṭluṁgāka-*
> *śiṣṭimpaṁ dalaṁtu rēṁ jēyudu rolin'*
> *akṣidaṇḍamb' arham' aṭlunuṁ gūḍad'*
> *adhikāparādhakuṁḍ' aina*
> *dvijanman' adhamāntyajuṇḍ' eppuṁḍ' ainanu śaivuṁḍ'*
> *adhikuṁḍ' ainaṭṭi brāhmaṇu vadhiyimpa-*
> *vadhaku n'anarhuṇḍu vaidikanyāya-*
> *gati śiva sannidhi gāraṇaṁbunanu-*
> *rati vēdaśāstrapurāṇa siddhānta-*
> *matamunaṁ janu vēdamārgambu viḍici*
> *gatabuddhi bauddhēndra ghātakuṁ ḍ' itaṁḍay'*
> *ani y'akṣadaṇḍanamb' ācarimpaṅgaṁ*

> The sinful Vēlnāḍa Cōḍa king spoke, his good deeds incinerated by the blazing of the fire that was his manifest anger:
>
> "According to the maxim, 'a brahmin is not to be killed,' no matter how great a transgression has taken place, a brahmin may not be killed by those of lower castes (*adhamajātulu*). For a lord of the earth, it is permissible to punish in such a way, by gouging out the eyes if the crime warrants it. [Some have argued that] one may never punish a Śaiva in such a way due to his proximity (*sannidhi*) to Śiva, whether low caste or a brahmin, regardless of how great the crime. [But, such a position] stands in contradiction with the Vedic maxim that he is not suited for the standard of punishment accorded to a brahmin, as has been ascertained by the established doctrine of the Vedas, *śāstra*s, and Purāṇas.
>
> Thus, this dimwit who has departed from the proper Vedic path is indeed the slayer of this best among Buddhists. The gouging out of his eyes should be implemented according to proper conduct (*ācarimpaṅgaṁ*)."[56]

Pālkuriki Sōmanātha, *Paṇḍitārādhyacaritramu*, p. 166

Perhaps the most immediately startling aspect of this remarkable passage is the vision of legal orthodoxy Sōmanātha attributes to the Buddhist king. In this account, the Velanāṭi Cōḷa regent, despite his professed allegiance to Buddhist doctrine, speaks with the full-throated voice of Brahminical orthodoxy, advocating that legal decisions be carried out with strict adherence to caste normativity. Note, in particular, the maxim the king invokes to name the crime in question, "a brahmin is not to be killed,"[57] as the relevance of this maxim to the proceedings presumes that the slain Buddhist monk should be accorded the status of a brahmin. In other words, in the sociality depicted by Sōmanātha, it is the Buddhist king and monastic community who speak for the legally conservative position sanctioned by what we typically call "Hindu law." To make the case for the orthodoxy of his own perspective, in fact, the king must explicitly delegitimize legal maxims originating from Śaiva communities. According to the view he attempts to refute, to be a Śaiva is not merely to adopt a confessional religious identity, but to be constituted as a particular type of juridical agent, who ought to be tried as befits his status. The Buddhist king, in contrast, aims to denude Śaiva initiation of any juridical significance, especially insofar as it claims to override caste-based qualifiers of legal personhood. Thus, Śaivas, such as Paṇḍitārādhya, the Buddhist king asserts, are no better than *nāstika*s, standing in violation of the norms of *varṇāśramadharma*, whose legal autonomy should be rescinded.

In this light, it was no politically neutral or private community affair that the Vīramāhēśvaras composed lengthy Sanskrit anthologies on *ācāra* (e.g., *Vīramāhēśvarācārasaṅgraha*), including within these anthologies language authorizing retaliation against the *śivadrōhin*, during such a period of heightened turmoil. These compendia were in a very real sense legal and programmatic documents, intended to speak directly to the tumultuous social realities of their day. On one hand, it is true that based on the structure of the Dharmaśāstra anthology

56. In light of some syntactic ambiguities in the Telugu original, my translation here also takes inspiration from Gururājārya's Sanskrit rendering. Nevertheless, some uncertainties remain, such as the legal referent of the term *bhūpati* in this passage. While one might naturally understand this as endorsing the king's own role in the proceedings, Gururājārya appears to interpret the term as referring to brahmins in this context: Gururājārya, *Paṇḍitārādhaycaritra*, *Mahimaprakaraṇa* 2.27: *śikṣayanti tathā viprō na śikṣyō dharaṇītalē*.

57. While the phrase *brāhmaṇō na hantavyaḥ*, to my knowledge, is not attributed to a canonical legal source in Sanskrit literature, its circulation history as a maxim is quite lengthy, dating back at least to Śabara's *Mīmāṁsāsūtrabhāṣya*, and invoked, for instance, in Medhātithi's commentary on Manu, and Vijñāneśvara's *Mitākṣarā*. On the use of legal maxims as foundational to the administration of law in precolonial South Asia, see Rocher (1993: 263) and Davis (2012: 24–25).

(*nibandha*), these Vīramāhēśvara digests compiled numerous ritual and theological passages whose authority was rooted in their status as scripture — Āgama, Tantra, Veda, etc. On the other hand, is almost certainly no accident that these architects of the Vīramāhēśvara tradition sought to anthologize their legal conduct in the very same authoritative medium, the *dharmanibandha*, that had rapidly risen to prominence in the domains of the polity by which Srisailam was under incursion, the Seuna Yādavas of Maharashtra.[58] Passages from anthologies of Vīramāhēśvara conduct could well have been used to defend the autonomy of religious institutions whose Śaiva practices might have been maligned as contrary to increasingly normative standards of Brahminical law, and to safeguard the community should radical action prove necessary to defend Śiva's property against their religious others. In a world where the rules and the institutions that uphold them are breaking down, Sōmanātha seems to be saying, it is only by putting into action the embodied normativity of Śiva's innumerable *gaṇa* devotees that the community's interests will be defended.

In Sōmanātha's narrative, indeed, we meet with just such a multilayered portrait of a world in which the relationships between religion, law, and violence were rapidly shifting. One striking feature about Sōmanātha's emplotment of the murder of the Buddhist monk is that he is repeatedly preoccupied with shared social norms originating outside the Vīraśaiva community — the languages of philosophical debate, literary excellence, and ultimately law — shared norms of adjudication that should apply any kind of social or religious other. And yet, all of these ultimately fail. Recall, once again, how the murder of the Buddhist monk was framed within the larger narrative structure of the *Exploits of Paṇḍitārādhya*: the debate, and ultimately the murder, serve as an entrée to a longer narrative sequence concerning the fall of the local Velanāṭi Cōḷa dynasty. According to Sōmanātha, as a result of the aftermath of the murder, the Vīramāhēśvara community quite literally found that their continued existence was under threat, as their leader, Paṇḍitārādhya, was summoned to stand trial and incur punishment at the hands of a Buddhist king. That is, Sōmanātha implicitly frames this murder within the broader context of a social world, at the twilight of the Śaiva Age, in which Śaiva religious domains were no longer reliably protected by the kings who had acknowledged their institutional autonomy for centuries.

58. For more on the role of the *dharmanibandha*, especially the *Caturvargacintāmaṇi* of Hēmādri, in connection to the Sēuṇa Yādava polity, see Schwartz (2023, chapters 9 and 10). See also Fisher (forthcoming, chapter 1) on specific textual parallels between the Vīramāhēśvara Sanskrit *nibandha*s and Hēmādri's *Caturvargacintāmaṇi*.

6 Toward a Conclusion: Text, Context, and Interreligious Violence

We are now in a position, then, to reflect once again on the methodological questions that arose from calling into question a strictly literary approach to the study of religion, in South Asia and beyond. Although deeply relevant for literary aesthetics and comparative questions of religion and violence, our narrative was clearly cut from the fabric of its times. A discursive and historical contextualization of Pālkuriki Sōmanātha's works renders it inconceivable that such episodes were intended for purely aesthetic effect, simply negotiating the semiotic valence of heroism through literary excess. I hope to have demonstrated conclusively, rather, that the story of the murder of the Buddhist monk, and the trope of harsh devotion in early Vīraśaivism more broadly, cannot be properly understood divorced from its historical and multilingual discursive context. In the case of Pālkuriki Sōmanātha's narrative works, especially where rhetoric of interreligious violence is concerned, I would suggest that scholarship and translations to date have failed to recover key elements of the texts' connotation for want of adequate context.

So far, at least, this gesture toward a conclusion would seem to align with the emerging trend in South Asian intellectual history to adapt the pathbreaking work of Quentin Skinner to the vagaries of the fragmentary contextual archive with which we are confronted. Indeed, Skinner's avowed intention in articulating his methodology for intellectual history is to facilitate the *understanding* of the illocutionary intention of key statements within a given text.[59] To the extent that we adopt such an understanding as the goal of our own intellectual labors, Skinner's intervention aligns quite well with the fruits of the present study. In other words, if our aim is to understand the signifying power of texts and words on their own terms — along the lines of the classical hermeneutic sense of *Verstehen* — there can be no doubt that it is crucial to integrate with literary tropology a contextually situated approach to discourse. Clearly, we have to date *misunderstood*, or misattributed intentionality to narrative depictions of violence, a state of affairs that warrants remedy. In support of such a pursuit, we need only emphasize that Jonardon Ganeri's often cited dictum — that India is "all text and no context" — may, in some cases, unfortuitously underestimate the materials

59. Take, for instance, Skinner (1969: 48–49): "The understanding of texts, I have sought to insist, presupposes the grasp both of what they were intended to mean, and how this meaning was intended to be taken… The essential question which we therefore confront, in studying any given text, is what its author in writing at the time he did write for the audience he intended to address, could in practice have been intending to communicate by the utterance of this given utterance."

at our disposal.[60] Context may exist where we have yet to acknowledge it, if we undertake the labor necessary to recover it.

And yet, understanding need not be all we strive for in situating texts as discursive acts within a dynamic sociohistorical landscape. This article began with a question of intentionality, in response to the framing that scholarship to date has provided: why did south Indian Śaiva authors choose to compose narrative depictions of interreligious violence? Nevertheless, I would suggest, it is the context itself we have excavated that illuminates the limited and perhaps even misleading nature of the question of authorial intentionality for making sense of Sōmanātha's work as but one concrete intervention within a larger discursive and material landscape. That is, our evidence answers more than the questions: "By narrating the murder of a Buddhist monk, did Sōmanātha *intend* to endorse interreligious violence? Might the perlocutionary effect of his *prabandha* have been that more Buddhists and Jains were murdered in the medieval Deccan?" The latter question, empirically, we cannot answer. But in response to the first question, the historically embedded semantics of the concept *drōha* point toward systems of signification, personhood, and spatial and material practices that far overflow the potential boundaries of Sōmanātha's volitional intentionality. Such systems of signification may well fall under the rubric of what Quentin Skinner himself once described — invoking Ricoeur — as "surplus meaning," textual meaning that escapes the confines of the author's intention.[61] And yet, it is often this "surplus meaning," above and beyond intention, that calls attention to — and actively contributes to — fundamental transformations in the wider social and religious landscape, contributing to the refashioning of human religious subjectivity and reshaping the limits of interreligious toleration in the thirteenth-century Deccan.

If, in this way, we decenter intentional meaning of individual statements as the touchstone for the making-sense work we do with texts, what we call "context" is perhaps not so fundamentally distinct from text-internal content as we might have imagined. As a result, to deliberately cut off analysis at the bounds of a literary text, following Monius's interpretation of White, is not simply to excise valuable information from our purview but rather to create an artificially constrained "work" that never existed at its time of composition. By studying such works in isolation, when context permits otherwise, as epistemic worlds onto themselves, we are not merely rewriting history at whim. Rather, we run the risk of losing sight of the real-world consequences that choices in emplotment — in Hayden White's

60. Ganeri (2008: 553).
61. Skinner and Li (2016: 124).

terms — can have for the travails of history and those who endure them. And when it comes to questions of violence, the consequences of such neglect are by no means insignificant.

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