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Debating Religion

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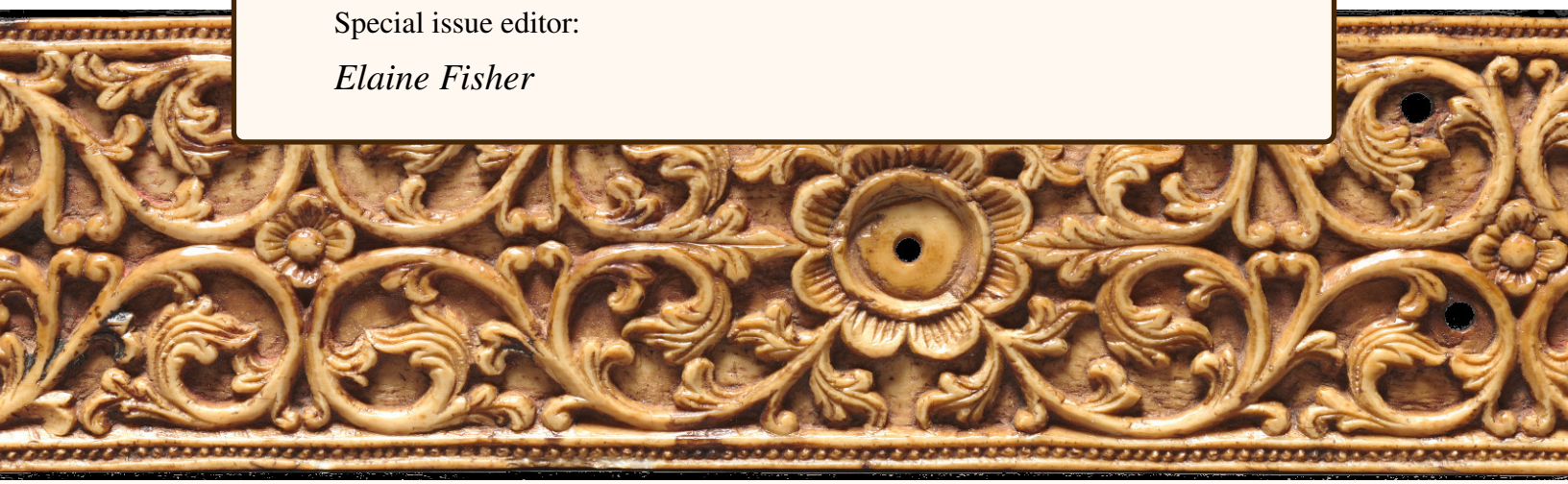

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Meat Matters:

Kolaimaṟuttal and the Genealogy of Tamil Śaiva Vegetarianism

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Abstract

In this article, I explore the processes through which Tamil-based Śaivism came to be conceptually equated with the maintenance of a vegetarian diet, a development reflected in the modern Tamil word *caivam* (Skt. *śaiva*), which in colloquial speech primarily signifies lacto-vegetarian cuisine. I contend that although Tamil Śaiva literary sources have long articulated the normativity of vegetarianism, the conflation of Śaiva praxis with plant-based dietary habits likely dates to the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Such, at least, is the picture that emerges from a consideration of the *Kolaimaṟuttal* (*Rejecting Killing*), a brief polemic against animal slaughter likely composed in the then-frontier region of what is now the suburbs of Coimbatore, which emphasizes dietary nonviolence as the quintessential Śaiva virtue and the principal basis for demarcating Śaivism from other religions. A close reading of this hitherto unstudied text suggests that early modern Tamil Śaiva food discourse transformed, at least in part, in response to the emergence of new notions of "self" and "other" in this period, which prompted a corresponding need to rethink the contour and configuration of community boundaries.

Keywords: vegetarianism, śaivism, tamil, polemics

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1 Introduction

In 2014, a film about a rooster named Baby became a surprise hit among Tamil-speaking audiences. The film, directed by A. L. Vijay and starring M. Nassar and Sara Arjun, tells the story of a wealthy Ceṭṭi family who have gathered in their ancestral home in Kāraikkuṭi to make an offering to a local deity. Baby (Tm. Pāppā) is both the intended sacrificial victim whose ritual killing promises to eliminate the family's troubles and an object of affection for the young Tamiḻcelvi (Arjun), granddaughter of the family's patriarch (Nassar). Through her endearing devotion to the bird, Tamiḻcelvi manages by the final scene not only to save Baby's life but also to convince her relatives to stop eating meat altogether. Despite its pro-vegetarian message, which in contemporary Tamil society can, in certain contexts, be perceived as an endorsement of Brahminical elitism, the film was a critical and commercial success: at least one leading filmmaker reportedly gave up meat after watching it, and a Telugu remake came out the following year.[1]

No less striking, at least from the perspective of the history of religions, is the film's title, *Caivam*, which derives from a calque on the Sanskrit *śaiva*, literally, "relating to the deity Śiva." In colloquial Tamil, however, this term does not first and foremost signify any explicitly religious belief, sentiment, social practice, or institution; its primary referent is lacto-vegetarian food. Countless restaurant signboards across Tamil Nadu, for instance, advertise their establishments' expertise in preparing *caiva* ("vegetarian") or *acaiva* ("non-vegetarian") cuisine. Hence an adequate translation of the film's title is simply *Vegetarianism*. The film's moral is consistent with this secularized sense of *caivam*, as the family

1. Sudha G. Tilak, "Tamil Film on the Explosive Subject of Vegetarianism is a Surprise Hit," *Scroll.in*, July 12, 2014, https://scroll.in/article/670125/tamil-film-on-the-explosive-subject-of-vegetarianism-is-surprise-hit.

abandons their entrenched dietary habits not as a result of having received religious teachings, but rather because of the sheer magnetism of Tamiḻcelvi's childlike ability to love without drawing distinctions between species.

Yet when and how did Tamil Śaiva religion come to be identified with vegetarianism in this manner? Put differently, when and how did the consumption of non-human animals come to be perceived as anathema to established Tamil Śaiva values? And what is the connection between such an understanding and the predominantly nonreligious meaning conveyed by the word *caivam* today?

Indologists have long realized that vegetarianism in India has a history (e.g., Alsdorf 2010 [1962]). At least partly in response to the recent political weaponization of diet by Hindu nationalists and related instances of anti-Muslim violence (Ghassem-Fachandi 2012), both textual scholars and anthropologists have stressed the context-sensitivity and historical contingency of South Asian vegetarian discourse, from ancient Brahminical hand-wringing over Vedic animal sacrifice to modern controversies surrounding cow slaughter (e.g., Bryant 2006; Doniger 2009; Staples 2020). It is now widely supposed that the identification of "Hindu" dietary practice with the avoidance of meat is in no small measure a product of the gendered ideologies of the colonial encounter, according to which vegetarian Hindus were often stereotyped as weak and effeminate (Nandy 1983). As one scholar has aptly put it, "[t]hough it is commonplace to regard Hindus as vegetarian and India as the land of vegetarianism from time immemorial, historical scholarship and social fact call these axioms into question; the very meaning of vegetarianism has been, and continues to be, a matter of contestation and of historical and regional variation" (Roy 2015: 272).

Nevertheless, much remains unknown about what vegetarianism actually meant to specific religious communities that flourished on the subcontinent during the roughly two-millennia interval between Manu and Gandhi.[2] This is especially so for Śaiva traditions, which are less commonly associated with dietary nonviolence than their Vaiṣṇava cousins. In order to adequately resist hegemonic and exclusivist representations of Indian food culture as vegetarian, it is essential to address the historical, regional, and sectarian specificity of South Asian attitudes toward the eating of animal flesh.[3] The present article endeavors to contribute toward this goal by developing a historically nuanced perspective on repre-

2. For a recent and fascinating discussion of vegetarianism among eighteenth-century Marwari merchants, see Cherian 2023.

3. This idea draws inspiration from Olivelle's (1995: 374) review of R. S. Khare's pathbreaking studies of Indian food culture: "The problem I raise is rather simple: is there a single food ideology which can be termed 'Hindu' and which remains constant across time, regions, and sects…? The answer is clearly no."

sentations of vegetarianism in Tamil Śaiva literature through a hermeneutically responsible interrogation of available textual materials.[4]

In what follows, I argue that while Tamil Śaiva literature has long articulated the normativity of vegetarianism, it would have been, if not impossible, at least relatively rare to find the fact of being a Śaiva conceptually equated with the maintenance of an exclusively plant-based diet prior to the second half of the sixteenth century. In fact, the earliest explicit attempt to differentiate between Śaiva and non-Śaiva diets in the manner of the modern Tamil antonyms *caivam/acaivam* likely dates to roughly a century later. I further suggest that at least one factor that contributed to the drawing of this distinction was the emergence of new notions of "self" and "other" in this period and a corresponding need to rethink the contour and configuration of community boundaries. Facing new social contexts marked by considerable status mobility and intense religious competition, seventeenth-century Tamil Śaiva intellectuals consciously adapted existing forms of vegetarian rhetoric in ways that anticipated discourse about food in modern Tamil.

An important piece of evidence for this transformation is a brief polemic against animal slaughter entitled *Kolaimaṟuttal* (hereafter, *Rejecting Killing*). Probably composed during the late seventeenth century in the vicinity of present-day Coimbatore, in the traditional Tamil region known as Koṅkunāṭu, the text appears to be, with perhaps a single exception, the first independent composition in the Tamil language dedicated to promoting vegetarianism. While admittedly not widely known today, there are reasons to believe that the text played a significant role in making vegetarianism a central feature of Tamil Śaiva identity. It received a lengthy commentary, probably during its author's lifetime, and thereafter seems to have circulated widely, particularly in the Koṅkunāṭu region.[5] The influential colonial-era Śaiva reformer Āṟumuka Nāvalar (1822–1879) published the text in 1860 (Hudson 1992: 42), and it is likely that the text also served as a key inspiration for the Śaiva mystical poet Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ's (1823–1874) concept of "compassion for living beings" (*cīvakāruṇyam*).[6]

4. It must be said here that it is emphatically *not* this paper's intention to imply that Tamil-speaking Śaivas may have been nonvegetarian before a certain point in time. What people actually ate, or eat, is of comparatively little concern to the arguments elaborated here.
5. The text is explicitly mentioned, for instance, in the *Tiṭṭamalaiyāṇṭavarkommi*, an eighteenth-century folk ballad (*kummi*) dedicated to Murukaṉ that would have been sung by dancing women at Tiṭṭamalai, a hill about seventy-five kilometers northeast of Coimbatore (Ñāṉaciṅkāram 1986: 90, v. 97). I would like to thank Cu. Viknēcu, a Ph.D. student at Thavathiru Santhalinga Adigalar Arts, Science and Tamil College, for bringing this reference to my attention.
6. See Raman 2022: 84 and the ensuing discussion.

A consideration of the manner in which *Rejecting Killing* creatively responds to a series of established and more recent religious rivals reveals it to be an innovative attempt to navigate conditions then prevalent in the Tamil-speaking dry-zone interior. In particular, it will be demonstrated that the text articulates a novel alimentary ideology, referred to in this article as "Caiva *ahiṁsā*," according to which nonviolence, conceived primarily in terms of vegetarian dietary practices, is represented as the quintessential Śaiva virtue and the principal basis for demarcating the path of Śiva from other, inferior ways of being in the world.[7] The next section contextualizes the discussion by surveying Tamil Śaiva perspectives on meat eating prior to the seventeenth century. Then follows a section on *Rejecting Killing*'s form and content and another on its engagement with Christian, Śākta, and lay interlocutors. The conclusion offers some brief remarks on the wider significance of food for the early modern consolidation of South Indian Śaivism.

2 Situating Caiva *ahiṁsā*

In her study of medieval South Indian Buddhist, Śaiva, and Jaina "dietary polemics," Ulrich (2007: 245) has shown that the *Tēvāram* poets (circa 6th–8th century) tend to concentrate on the manner in which religious others eat, rather than the kinds of food eaten per se. She convincingly proposes that the rare instances in which the poet Campantar rebukes his adversaries for craving meat target not the well-known nonvegetarianism of Buddhist monastics but rather the sanctimony of Jain ascetics:

> At issue, I suspect, was the perceived hypocrisy of renouncers renowned for an austere vegetarian diet who (allegedly) longed for meat. Most Buddhist monks, in other words, did not insist on vegetarianism, and thus their consumption of meat was perfectly acceptable. Jains, on the other hand, did prohibit meat eating, and therefore desire for it on the part of renouncers might have been viewed as symptomatic of an insufficiency of renunciation.
>
> Ulrich 2007: 248

7. This expression intentionally combines Tamil and Sanskrit transliteration schemes to underscore the text's indebtedness to both literary traditions. I thank Srilata Raman for first suggesting the phrase to me during a conversation whose date I no longer recall.

Accounting for Campantar's relative silence on the subject, Ulrich (249) points to the poet's "support for Vedic sacrifice" and "valorization of meat eating in a devotional context." The latter refers to celebrated instances in the lives of certain Tamil Śaiva saints, such as the hunter Kaṇṇappar, whose hagiography is elaborated in the twelfth-century *Periyapurāṇam*. While Kaṇṇappar's life story assumes the transgressiveness of meat (the saint famously offered Śiva a freshly slaughtered boar, to the horror of a Brahmin onlooker), it subordinates dietary norms to devotional intensity (*ibid.*; Cox 2005: 235–236) and the power of austerities performed in previous lives (Monius 2004: 156). One might, therefore, summarize the position of the early tradition by saying, as Ulrich (2007: 250) does of Campantar, that "absolute nonviolence and vegetarianism were secondary to other values," of which devotion to Śiva was paramount.

A less flexible position is found in the *Tirumantiram*, an assemblage of teachings from the Śaiva Āgamas unlikely to predate the thirteenth century.[8] This text's initial volume, which celebrates Śiva's divine instruction and outlines qualifications for entering the path to liberation (Martin 1983: 120), contains two adjacent pairs of quatrains under the headings "Not killing" (*kollāmai*, vv. 197–198) and "Rejecting meat" (*pulāṉmaṟuttal*, vv. 199–200).[9] It should be noted that these same topical headings also occur as the titles for two decads in the much earlier *Tirukkuṟaḷ* (circa 500 CE), a renowned collection of 1,330 aphorisms on the moral life. These very decads have, in fact, been cited as evidence for the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*'s likely Jaina authorship (Zvelebil 1973: 157), though every Tamil-speaking religious community has claimed the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* as its own. Whatever relationship, if any, the *Tirumantiram*'s first volume may bear to the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, it is important to recognize that the former interprets abstention from violence and meat within a decidedly Śaiva theological framework.[10] Thus, v. 197 associates the practice of nonkilling with the worship of one's guru, and v. 200 suggests that those who have attained Śiva's feet do not kill or commit other sins. Sandwiched between these are two conceptually similar stanzas, the second of which is possibly the earliest explicit condemnation of nonvegetarianism in Tamil Śaiva literature:

> *pollāp pulālai nukarum pulaiyarai*
> *ellāruṁ kāṇa iyamaṉ ṟaṉ tūtuvar*

8. On the problems involved in dating this text too early see Goodall 1998: xxxvii–xxxix.
9. Natarajan 1991: 30–31.
10. The suggestion that Tamil Śaivas adopted vegetarianism from the Jains, or even that they are themselves converted Jains, is a frequently encountered trope in modern Tamil literary histories (Emmrich 2011: 629).

> *cellākap paṟṟit tī vāy narakattil*
> *mallākkat taḷḷi maṟittu vaippārē*

> When outcastes who consume foul flesh die,
> Yama's messengers seize them while everyone looks on,
> push them on their backs into the fiery maw of hell,
> and keep them there.[11]
>
> *Tirumantiram* v. 199

Later Śaiva authors repeatedly returned to the themes iterated in this quatrain, which links meat eaters with lowly birth and vividly depicts the terrible fate awaiting them after death. In context, v. 199 can be interpreted to suggest that maintaining a vegetarian diet is necessary in order to be eligible for receiving Śiva's liberating grace and avoiding an unpleasant rebirth. While this is clearly distinct from the stance adopted in the *Tēvāram*, dietary nonviolence is hardly portrayed as the archetypal Śaiva virtue in the *Tirumantiram*. Rather, it is accorded roughly the same importance as a host of other good qualities mentioned in the first volume, including equanimity, devotion, generosity, sexual continence, and abstention from alcohol.

Expressions of the evils of eating meat become noticeably more common during the late sixteenth century. Two Tamil texts from this period are particularly rich sources for such statements. The first is the *Kācikaṇṭam*, an adaptation of the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* on Benares, which became widely distributed in South India shortly after its circa mid-fourteenth-century composition (Minkowski 2002: 331–332). The second is the *Civatarumōttaram*, an influential translation of the circa sixth–seventh-century *Śivadharmottara* on lay Śaiva praxis.[12] Both texts denounce killing and consuming animals in the context of delineating forms of behavior (in)appropriate for uninitiated Śaiva householders. While the precise relationship between these works and their respective Sanskrit source materials awaits further study, for now it can be said that the *Kācikaṇṭam* and *Civatarumōttaram* supported, as proof texts,

11. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are mine.
12. Ganesan 2009: 36–38 summarizes the Tamil text, the *opus magnum* of Citamparam-based scholar Nigamajñāna I.

the development of a ritual-prescriptive framework for theorizing and policing the dietary practices of lay Śaivas in South India.[13]

An intriguing treatment of vegetarianism from this period is also found in the *Civañāṉatīpam* (*Lamp on Śiva-Gnosis*), a philosophical text incorporating elements of Śaiva Siddhānta, Advaita Vedānta and Vīraśaivism.[14] After discussing how Śiva dispenses his grace to different types of enfettered souls, the text's "General" (*potu*) section praises the abandonment of killing and other vices before addressing the issue of food:

> *evvuyirum parāparaṉ cannitiyat' ākum*
> *ilaṅkum uyir uṭal aṉaittum īcaṉ kōyil*
> *evvuyirum emmuyir pōl eṉṟu nōkkiy*
> *iraṅkātu koṉṟ' aruntum iḻiviṉōrai*
> *vavvi yamaṉ tūtar arun taṇṭañ ceytu*
> *vall irumpaiy urukkiy avar vāyil vārttu*
> *vevviya tīy eḻu narakil vīḻtti māṟā*
> *vētaṉai ceyt' iṭuvar eṉav ōtu nūlē*

> Every living being is the sacred presence of the Supreme.
> All bodies of manifest living beings are the temple of the Lord.
> As for the base ones who kill and eat,
> not thinking with compassion upon living beings as they do their own lives,
> The messengers of Yama will take hold of and punish them severely,
> melting hard iron and pouring it in their mouths,

13. A research project underway at L'Orientale University of Naples is studying the transmission and reception of the vast *Śivadharma* corpus across premodern South Asia and promises to transform our understanding of the *Civatarumōttaram* and its Sanskrit prototype. In September 2022, I had the opportunity to read portions of *Rejecting Killing* and its commentary with members of this group, for which I wish to thank Florinda De Simini and Margherita Trento. I have since begun examining the *Civatarumōttaram*'s negative appraisal of nonvegetarianism, which appears to depart significantly from the position of the *Śivadharmottara*. These findings will be published along with a translation of the *Civatarumōttaram*'s sixth chapter that I am currently preparing.

14. Aruṇācalam 2005 [1975]: 269–275 provides information on this text. He is skeptical of the claim that the text's reputed author, Rēvaṇa Cittar, was a Vīraśaiva Brahmin, suggesting he followed the Śaiva Siddhānta (95–98), though by his own admission (271) the *Civañāṉatīpam* includes references to distinctively Vīraśaiva practices such as *liṅgadhāraṇa*. The verse translated below seems to support a claim for the work's Vīraśaiva provenance, though a thorough textual study remains a desideratum.

> making them fall into the seven hells of searing fire
> and causing them ceaseless pain.
> Thus declares the treatise.
>
> *Civañāṉatīpam* v. 11 (Aṭikaḷāciriyar 1970: 10)

Lines 3–8 adapt the fire and brimstone message of *Tirumantiram* v. 199 (presumably the cited "treatise"), dilating graphically upon the tortures awaiting nonvegetarians in hell. The initial two lines, however, are reminiscent of the Kannada Vīraśaiva *vacana* corpus — notionally dating to the twelfth century but in any case available to intellectuals in the sixteenth (see Chandra Shobhi 2005 and Ben-Herut this issue) — a central theme of which is the notion that the body constitutes the true Śiva temple.[15] Striking for their uncompromising universalism, these two lines have entered the proverbial repertoire of learned Tamil speakers, though their origins are largely forgotten (Aruṇācalam 2005 [1975]: 273–274). Taken as a whole, this verse expands the theological significance of vegetarianism by associating the condemnation of meat eaters with a reflection on the very nature of living beings and their embodied forms. If all bodies are Śiva temples, then to be vegetarian is to actively care for the deity's sacred abode and the divine presence that dwells within it, while to be otherwise is to desecrate the same. Moreover, by foregrounding this idea at the beginning of its exposition of Śiva-gnosis, the text implies that vegetarianism is not simply one of the virtues a Śaiva must cultivate but rather the very sine qua non of liberation.

If this admittedly brief survey demonstrates anything, it is that vegetarianism became a more conspicuous and theologically weighty topic in Tamil Śaiva sources in the century immediately preceding the composition of *Rejecting Killing*. It is to the latter's explicit theorization of the difference between Śaiva and non-Śaiva diets in terms of the renunciation of meat to which this article now turns.

3 The Vegetarian's Apotheosis

Rejecting Killing is a tour de force of concision, consisting of just twenty-two stanzas composed, with the exception of an initial benedictory verse (not counted toward the total), in

15. Ramanujan 1973: 19–22. For a recent critical assessment of Ramanujan's reading of the *vacana*s see Ben-Herut 2018: 5–10.

āciriya viruttam meter. Tradition identifies its author, unmentioned in the text itself, as Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ, a Vīraśaiva intellectual active in the latter half of the seventeenth century (Steinschneider 2016: 301; Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ 2009: 55–64). Cāntaliṅka is credited with establishing a monastic institution at Pērūr, a temple town located on the western edge of present-day Coimbatore, and text-internal evidence supports the hypothesis that *Rejecting Killing* is a product of the early modern Tamil hinterlands.[16] The text received a single, lengthy commentary, also anonymous, which is traditionally attributed to Cāntaliṅka's grand-disciple, Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ of Tiruppōrūr.

The text's title, given in a densely packed first verse along with virtually all the information traditionally provided at the beginning of a Tamil scholastic treatise, hints at the work's hybrid form while still managing to appear entirely conventional. *Kolaimaṟuttal* is a kind of portmanteau of "Not killing" (*kollāmai*) and "Rejecting meat" (*pulāṉmaṟuttal*), recalling, of course, the aforementioned passages of the *Tirumantiram* and *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. However, the verb *maṟuttal*, according to the University of Madras *Tamil Lexicon* (s.v.), can also mean "to confute, refute the opinion or argument of another," suggesting the text's concern to counter other religious traditions' justifications for animal slaughter. This innovative blending of dietary didacticism with formal religious polemics in the guise of a profound traditionalism is crucial to the text's social agenda, to be examined in further detail below.[17]

Another important feature of the text is its narrative frame, introduced in the second verse, around which the discourse is carefully organized. Enhancing the coherence of this frame is the employment, also initiated in v. 2, of a form of versification called *antāti*, in which the last word of each stanza supplies the first word for the following one:

16. The allusion in v. 6 to Jesuit criticisms of the doctrine of rebirth and a Śaiva response to the same suggests that the text could not have been composed prior to the mid-seventeenth century. The *terminus ante quem* is less certain. However, in the absence of contradicting evidence, it seems reasonable to accept the traditionally posited late-seventeenth-century date. Taken together, the text's allusion to Christianity, preoccupation with Śākta blood sacrifice, and agrarian slant strongly suggest an early modern dry-zone context, and accord quite well with what is known of Koṅkunāṭu society at that time. For a detailed anthropological study of this region see Beck 1972.
17. It should be noted that, as an independent text dedicated to denouncing nonvegetarianism, *Rejecting Killing* has virtually no precedent in Tamil literary history. The commentary occasionally cites from another text entitled *Pulāṉmaṟuttal* (*Rejecting Meat*, not to be confused with the identically named chapter of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*), about which I have unfortunately failed to uncover any relevant information.

> *eṭutt' uḷav eccamayikaḷum ulakaruñ cār ōr avaiyiṉ iṭaiyiṛ ṛōṉṛum*
> *uṭut taṉaic cūḻ tara viḷaṅku matiyiṉ uyar caivarai vant' oruvaṉ ṛāḻnt' īṇṭ'*
> *aṭutta palav uyirt tōṛṛatt' uyarvu tāḻv' aruḷuk' eṉav avaṉait tēṛṛit*
> *taṭutta puṛac camayikaṭk' uttaram uṛutti niṛuttukiṉṛār tampāl ūṛṛam*

> A man approached an eminent Śaiva who, like the moon shining in the midst of stars, appeared in the center of an assembly where gathered adherents of all the established religions as well as common folk.
>
> Bowing, he said, "Please explain the relative status of the many forms living beings assume in this world."
>
> Clarifying the matter for him, [the Śaiva] furnished replies to the adherents of the heteroprax religions who opposed him and established the certitude of his position.[18]
>
> *Rejecting Killing* v. 2 (Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ 1927: 3)

Among those assembled at this seventeenth-century South Indian World's Parliament of Religions are representatives from the "outer religions" or *puṛa-c camayaṅkaḷ*. This is a technical term used in Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta polemics to differentiate between traditions that do not acknowledge the authoritativeness of Vedic and Śaiva Āgamic revelation and the "inner religions" (*aka-c camayaṅkaḷ*) that do. The *locus classicus* for this distinction is the circa thirteenth-century philosophical treatise *Civañāṉacittiyār*, a text that is partially structured as a systematic refutation of fourteen rival schools (*parapakkam*), and partially as an elaboration of the established doctrine (*cupakkam*). Of note here is the way in which *Rejecting Killing* subtly begins to refocus the meaning of heteropraxy around a rejection of what is perceived to be the settled position of divine revelation on matters of dietary practice. Following, for the most part, the twofold pattern established in the *Civañāṉacittiyār*, the Śaiva will illuminate the nature of alimentary orthopraxy by rebutting the claims of his opponents and expounding the conclusion accepted by the tradition.[19]

18. I have translated this verse in the past tense, though it uses the grammatical present.
19. *Rejecting Killing*'s polemical form is likely inspired by a brief reference to Buddhist nonvegetarianism in the *Civañāṉacittiyār*. In the latter's rebuttal of Sautrāntika Buddhism, the text makes the opponent claim that while killing is unacceptable (it had been celebrated by the previous opponent, the Materialist, at *parapakkam* v. 36, Balasubramanian 2013: 130–131), eating creatures killed by another is not, since what is dead

Also present are common folk (*ulakar*, lit. "worldly people") whose religious identity is unmarked. Presumably the anonymous man (*oruvaṉ*) in v. 2, who serves as the text-internal witness to the imminent public exchange, also belongs to this group. Indeed, the conceit of the assembly (*avai*, Skt. *sabhā*) appears designed to draw attention to this questioner. One could conceive of a hypothetical scenario in which the text omitted v. 2 and proceeded directly to elaborating and defending its core position; what would be lost is precisely this spectator, whose implied conversion to vegetarianism toward the end of the text constitutes a kind of narrative climax. This suggests that the common folk are closely linked to the text's intended audience. The latter are identified in v. 1, which proclaims that *Rejecting Killing* was composed "so that those who fear the fire [of hell] will reject killing and attain virtue" (*añciṉar tīkk' aṟaṅ kolaimai taḷḷi-c cārtaṟk'*). Thus, the text can be said to imagine an audience of nonvegetarians, unaffiliated to any specific religious tradition, who nevertheless are at least potentially receptive to the authority of revealed Śaiva scriptures on the matter of correct dietary discipline.

Verse 3 gives the Śaiva's reply to the man's question and is the pivot of the text:

> *ūṟṟa mikuñ carācarattuḷ uyarcci carañ carattu ṇarar narar tamm uḷḷum*
> *ēṟṟamun tāḻcciyum uḷa pall uyir cekutt' uṇṭ' uṭalai vaḷartt' iṭuṅ kīḻ ammēl*
> *cāṟṟum uyirk kolai purita ṟuyar neṭu nāḷ eṉṟum uṭa ṟāṉ poyy eṉṟun*
> *tēṟṟa mikk' ēṉṟ' uyir tamai vīṭṭiṉum avaṟṟiṉ uyir purakkun tīt' ilōrē*

> Among immobile and mobile beings that possess [comparatively] greater intelligence, mobile beings are superior. Among mobile beings, men.
> There is superiority and inferiority among men as well.
> Lowly men (*kīḻ*) nourish their bodies, killing and eating many living beings.

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is insentient and since the demerit of killing accrues only to the killer, not the eater (v. 92, 178). The text responds, from the perspective of the accepted position, by placing responsibility for the sin that accrues to the butcher squarely on the Buddhist, since it is for the latter's sake that animals are killed. The opponent is then portrayed as a hypocrite thrice over: accumulating sins for one who feeds him, he lacks austerity; he eats meat but does not offer the same to his deity; and he is disgusted by his own bodily impurity but not that of the creatures he eats (v. 131, 220–221). As in Campantar's dietary polemics, it is not meat-eating per se, but rather the Buddhist's purported deficiency of austerity, as well as his ritual inconsistency, that is singled out for ridicule. Nonetheless, the explicit reference to another tradition's support for nonvegetarianism in a formal *pūrvapakṣa/siddhānta* context can be understood to have anticipated the approach adopted in *Rejecting Killing*.

> Above them are the faultless ones who, accepting with complete certainty that killing the aforementioned living beings yields sorrow for a long time, and that the body itself is false, protect those beings' lives even if it costs them their own.
>
> *Rejecting Killing* v. 3 (Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ 1927: 4)

This verse elaborates a chain of being whose structure can be represented in tabular form:

Table 1: The chain of being according to *Rejecting Killing*, v. 3

1. Vegetarian humans
2. Nonvegetarian humans
3. Mobile beings (non-human animals)
4. Immobile beings (plants)

The significance of this classificatory scheme hinges on the fact that it constitutes a response to a question concerning the relative rank of "the many forms living beings assume in this world" (*īṇṭ' aṭutta pala-v uyir-t tōṟṟatt'*). In its primary sense, the phrase *uyir-t tōṟṟam*, literally "appearance of living beings," refers to a common taxonomy according to which creatures are grouped on the basis of their mode of generation, namely, egg-born (Skt. *aṇḍaja*), moisture-born (*svedaja*), sprout-born (*udbhijja*), and womb-born (*jarāyuja*). Both this fourfold system (Skt. *bhūtagrāma*) and the twofold division of beings into "immobile" and "mobile" categories are found at the beginning of the ancient Ayurvedic treatise *Suśrutasaṁhitā*, though they also appear in other contexts, notably the epics and *dharmaśāstra*, where they are often linked to the process of the Self's transmigration through different forms of embodied being (Zimmerman 1987: 199). The concept was appropriated within specific soteriological traditions, and frequently recurs in contexts emphasizing the rarity of human birth and the need to use one's time to pursue liberation. For instance, the *Civañāṉacittiyār* (*cupakkam*, vv. 179–181) refers to the *uyir-t tōṟṟam* while explicating the process by which Śiva causes the soul to pass through an elaborate series of embodiments across hundreds of thousands of lifetimes, culminating in one's birth as a man in a middle-class Śaiva family in India. The distinction between vegetarian and nonvegetarian humans also came to be folded into such accounts of the transmigratory process, likely not much prior to *Rejecting Killing*'s composition. Thus, the circa fifteenth-century religious

anthology *Peruntiraṭṭu* (1912, *arumaiyuraittal*, v. 6, 30), charting the path of the Self to the highest form of embodiment (namely, a Brahmin male in the Cōḻa country who understands the Vedānta), stresses the rare good fortune of not being born among meat eaters in the hill country.

Rejecting Killing synthesizes this tradition of reflection on the soteriological significance of the *uyir-t tōṟṟam* with teachings adapted from the *Tirumantiram* and especially the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. These include the ideas (1) that meat eaters are low-born or base and selfishly seek to sustain their bodies with those of other beings (*Tirukkuṟaḷ* v. 329, v. 251); and (2) that the wise realize that killing leads to unfortunate rebirths and are aware of the impermanence of the body, which is not worthy of nourishing at the cost of others' lives, and who therefore would rather forfeit their life than take another's (*Tirukkuṟaḷ* v. 255, v. 325, v. 330, v. 338, v. 340, v. 327). Fusing taxonomy with ethical insight, the Śaiva thus presents vegetarians as the pinnacle of embodied existence.

Crucially, the absence of explicit sectarian content and repeated paraphrasing of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, which is viewed as authoritative by all Tamil-based religious traditions, suggests the Śaiva has carefully formulated his response to be comprehensible to his relatively untutored audience, that is, the layman of v. 2 who does not yet understand this hierarchy and who is therefore still unsure about how he should live.[20] In apparent anticipation, then, of the modern sense of *caivam* in colloquial speech, which as mentioned above has largely been shorn of its earlier religious connotations, v. 3 establishes a nonsectarian theory of vegetarian supremacy that is nevertheless presented as originating from a Śaiva source. This framing of Caiva *ahiṁsā* as a universal value constitutes, I would suggest, a new understanding of vegetarianism in Tamil Śaiva thought, one that views it as pertinent not only to brahmins, monastics, ascetics, or even lay Śaiva householders, but rather, like A. L. Vijay's *Caivam*, to all people. In the conclusion, I will link this formulation to what I see as the text's attempt at establishing a meatless public in the frontier region of late seventeenth-century Koṅkunāṭu.

Nevertheless, the bulk of *Rejecting Killing* defends the vegetarian's superiority on decidedly religious grounds, above all by countering objections raised by representatives of the "outer religions." A stylistic peculiarity of the text, however, is that the identity of these interlocutors and their counterarguments are not, for the most part, made explicit. More

20. The commentary to v. 2 suggests as much, claiming the Śaiva speaks "so that all the people gathered in the assembly, from child to pandit, can agree" (*accapaiyiṉ irunt' uḷḷa āpālapaṇṭitar ākiya carva caṉaṅkaḷukkuñ cammatam varumpaṭiyē*, p. 4).

specifically, although the text maintains the situation of oral interreligious debate through periodic usage of the grammatical second person (e.g., "your words are mistaken," *uṉ coṟ piḻai-y ām*, v. 6), it tends to relate only the established conclusion (*uttarapakṣa*/*siddhānta*), omitting most of the various opponents' prima facie positions (*pūrvapakṣa*). While the basic gist of the text is often clear enough, an adequate understanding is frequently impossible without the aid of a commentary, which must supply the unstated "questions" to which the Śaiva responds.[21]

In this sense, *Rejecting Killing* mimics the conventions of scholastic Sanskrit, specifically the ancient *sūtra*/*bhāṣya* model that facilitates the memorization of the main points of a particular system of thought (Tubb and Boose 2007: 2). It thus seems likely that the text was designed to be memorized by a predominantly nonvegetarian audience, such as literate members of a rural peasantry. It is possible that Cāntaliṅka himself would have provided the original, oral exegesis of the text. However, his hagiography suggests that he commissioned the learned scholar Tiruppōrūr Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ, his disciple's student, to compose commentaries for *Rejecting Killing* and other works, implying that he intended the text to be read in conjunction with Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ's written commentary. The ensuing discussion inevitably makes use of this gloss to elucidate the text's polemics.

Whatever the case may be, the Śaiva defends his position in a highly systematic manner. The commentary clarifies the overall pattern of the arguments by identifying the interlocutors and their prima facie claims. Table 2 summarizes the relevant information.

The polemic thus advances in a logical sequence, its target moving (sometimes midverse) from the extreme claim that killing is intrinsically permissible to a series of progressively more qualified stances that accept killing in specific contexts, or that reject killing as such but permit the consumption of animal flesh under certain conditions. The text thus reveals the truth gradually, which makes sense given its didactic aims.[22] Conspicuously absent from the list of interlocutors are the Jains. Presumably this is because they are known to reject nonvegetarianism in all circumstances, unlike Tamil Śaivas, who, as noted, traditionally recognize its legitimacy within certain Vedic sacrificial and devotional contexts. The Jains,

21. The commentary observes its own necessity in its introduction to v. 4, noting that the meaning of the base text is dependent upon a "syntactical expectancy" (*avāynilai*, p. 7).

22. This progressive organizational structure is typical of many South Asian doxographical texts, including the final sections of the Tamil *Maṇimēkalai* and the Sanskrit *Sarvadarśanasaṅgraha*, as Nicholson (2010: 150–151) points out, though he would probably categorize *Rejecting Killing* as a form of religious polemic rather than doxography. An alternative way of arranging philosophical difference can be found in the Jain scholar Haribhadrasūri's "argumentatively neutral" *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya*, recently discussed by Mundra 2022.

Table 2: Interlocutors and prima facie claims refuted in *Rejecting Killing*, as specified by the commentary

Interlocutor	**Passage**	**Synopsis**
1. a Materialist (*ulōkāyataṉ*)	vv. 4–5	Killing is acceptable.
2. a Christian (*ēcumatavāti*)	v. 6	Killing non-human animals is acceptable.
3. a "left-handed" tantric practitioner (*vāmi*)	vv. 7–16	Killing animals in tantric ritual contexts is acceptable.
4. three Buddhists (*pauttar*)	vv. 16–17	Eating the meat of animals one has not personally killed is acceptable.
5. six common folk (*laukikar*)	vv. 17–19	Eating meat for reasons of emergency, health, or custom is acceptable.
6. the man from v. 2, who has become spiritually mature (*pakkuviyāṉavaṉ*)	vv. 20–22	It is acceptable if one's kin eat meat.

therefore, would according to the text's internal logic have to be positioned "higher" in the hierarchy than the Śaiva, which is clearly unacceptable. Of the interlocutors who *are* listed in Table 2, numbers 2, 3, and 5 constitute relatively new quarries for Tamil Śaiva polemicists. The next section analyzes the Śaiva's arguments against these implied opponents and explores their relevance for the formation of Caiva *ahiṁsā*.

4 Christians, Sorcerers, and Other Killers

In response to an implicit defense of killing, vv. 4–5 claim that causing the death of living beings leads to rebirth in hell and supply arguments for the existence of an immaterial soul capable of experiencing the fruits of action after death.[23] The verse that follows, according

23. Cf. the link between Materialism and killing established in the *Civañāṉacittiyār* (*parapakkam* v. 36) and the latter's refutation of the Materialist denial of the soul (*parapakkam* vv. 38–55).

to the commentary, answers a Christian's counter that although murder leads to hell, killing non-human animals is permissible because in the Bible (*cattiya vētattil*, 16) it is said that God made animals for the benefit of mankind. For the sake of clarity, the following translation numbers sentences by subscript (S_1, S_2, etc.) and the ensuing exegesis uses conditional clauses to mark information supplied in the commentary.

> *tēc' iṟai māṉuṭarkk' evaiyum aruḷiṉ uṇṭ' īk kīṭam aiy eṉ ceyvāy māntarkk'*
> *āc' aruḷvat' eṉai vēṅkaiy ātiy accātikaḷ avar coṟk' aṭaṅkum āṟ' eṉ*
> *kāc' aṭaint' immuṟaiyum ōr ōr kāṟ ṟirivat' eṉai muṉañ cey karuman taṉṉāṟ*
> *pēcum acarātiy uruv uyirkaḷ uṟal uṇmaiy uṉ coṟ piḻaiy ām aṉṟē*

> $_1$If the radiant Lord granted all [animals] to men, what do you do with the worm that is [spawned by] a fly [on excrement, or other] minute [creatures]?
>
> $_2$Why does He trouble men with tigers, etc.?
>
> $_3$How is it that certain species obey men's command?
>
> $_4$Why does even this system become flawed and inconsistent in particular instances?
>
> $_5$It is true that souls assume the form of the aforementioned immobile beings, etc., according to actions performed in previous [births].
>
> $_6$Your words are mistaken, are they not?
>
> *Rejecting Killing* v. 6 (Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ 1927: 17)

S_1–S_4, which rebuts the Christian's contention, constitutes a highly elliptical paraphrase of three stanzas, cited in the gloss, from an otherwise lost anti-Christian polemic entitled *Ēcumatanirākaraṇam* (*Refutation of the Jesus-Doctrine*).[24] Tradition attributes this text — perhaps the first of its kind in the Tamil language — to the seventeenth-century Vīraśaiva poet Tuṟaimaṅkalam Civappirakācar, who is remembered to have been Cāntaliṅka's brother-in-law. While the polemic's composition has been linked to a supposed meeting between Civappirakācar and the Italian Jesuit Constanzo Gioseffo Beschi (1680–1747), Nilakanta Sastri (1958: 379) rejects this possibility, and as discussed below the paraphrased

24. For a translation and discussion of these verses see Trento 2022: 291–294.

verses are better understood as a reply to ideas found in earlier texts attributed to Roberto de Nobili.

S_1 is clear: tiny creatures serve no obvious human purpose. If one claims that they supply food for larger animals that do, S_2 asks why some of the latter harm mankind. If it is answered that animals do not submit to human will because God cursed the first man (i.e., Adam) for his disobedience, S_3 replies by pointing out that some species, such as cows, do obey men. If one retorts that God ordained it such that certain species would submit to men's will while others would not, S_4 responds by alluding to the fact that humans are sometimes obeyed by proverbially dangerous creatures such as snakes and sometimes killed by proverbially submissive animals such as cows. Finally, S_5 (not part of the paraphrase) affirms the established conclusion, namely that human relations with other forms of life are governed not by the curse of a divine creator but rather the doctrine of transmigration.

Arguments against rebirth are a recurring theme in the writings of the Madurai-based Jesuit Roberto de Nobili (1577–1656).[25] Departing from earlier missionary tactics, which prioritized the conversion of low-caste communities, de Nobili (in)famously fashioned himself after the manner of a Brahmin ascetic and wrote Tamil in a style calibrated to engage learned audiences, especially Śaivas.[26] Although his criticisms of rebirth are, like those of other contemporary Jesuits, framed in strictly philosophical terms (Clooney 2014), in certain of his writings they occur in the context of discussions that allude to biblical accounts of humanity's God-given dominion over the animals and the latter's rebellion that was precipitated by the Fall. This is the case, for instance, in de Nobili's *Ñāṉōpatēcam*, a summation of his great Catechism:

> This smaller *Ñāṉōpatēcam*'s seventh chapter is about the creation of the "first mother" and "first father" — Eve and Adam, we might say — and their sin and the resultant original sin. The ninth chapter indicates the disposition of humans to sin, the rise, after the flood (itself caused by human sin), of all kinds of erroneous religions, but finally the possibility of forgiveness of sins and the value of instruction in the Ten Commandments. The intervening eight [*sic*] chapter, which critiques rebirth, therefore presents an alternative viewpoint that must be

25. Rajamanickam 1972 gives an overview of de Nobili's life and writings.
26. Clooney 1988: 32. A letter discussed by Županov (1999: 153–157) demonstrates that as early as 1607 de Nobili had attempted to disabuse an upper-caste Śaiva Siddhāntin of his faith in rebirth.

> ruled out if the creation and sin narrative familiar from the Bible is to make sense and move forward to its logical (Christian) conclusion.
>
> Clooney 2014: 38

The paraphrased verses of the *Ēcumatanirākaraṇam* can thus be understood as an attempt to undermine Jesuit arguments against rebirth by demonstrating the incoherence of this larger "creation and sin narrative" within which they are sometimes set. Strictly speaking, they are not focused on meat eating, but rather on the problems certain animals and animal behaviors pose for the theory of humankind's dominion over the animal world. However, by situating these arguments within a text dedicated to refuting nonvegetarianism, Cāntaliṅka implicitly draws a link between perceived inconsistencies in Christian doctrine and impure Christian dietary practices. S_5 makes this connection clear, cleverly tying its affirmation of rebirth to *Rejecting Killing*'s central thesis, namely, the supremacy of vegetarian humans in the transmigratory schema.[27]

The Śaiva's primary heteroprax interlocutor is not a Christian, however, but rather a left-handed tantric ritualist or "Vāmi," whose refutation occupies a plurality of the text (vv. 7–16).[28] Verses 7–10 set up the discussion, claiming that although killing plants generates karmic demerit, the latter is relatively small and can be removed, along with the demerit produced by accidentally killing animals in the act of ploughing and so on, by making vegetarian offerings to the guru and others before one eats.[29] This raises the question of whether one can remove demerit accrued through killing by making nonvegetarian offerings. After

27. The notion that Christianity lacks a vegetarian ethic would become a standard feature of later Tamil Śaiva anti-Christian polemics (Young and Jebanesan 1995: 86–87, 107, 153). Interestingly, there is little evidence for early modern missionary critiques of Hindu vegetarianism (Richard Fox Young, personal communication, Jan. 5, 2020). It is well known that De Nobili renounced meat to more effectively proselytize the higher castes. However, the existence of anti-vegetarian propaganda in the seventeenth century cannot be ruled out. A prominent class of missionaries, the *paṇṭāracuvāmi*s, were not strictly vegetarian. Historical precedent also existed in the medieval Church's condemnation of Cathar vegetarianism. I thank Gérard Colas for bringing this last point to my attention.
28. The Vāmi's presence is made clear at v. 15, in which the Śaiva hails his opponent with the expression "O great one who delights the Materialist!" (*ulōkitaṉ makiḻum periyōy*). This phrase unambiguously alludes to *Civañāṉacittiyārparapakkam* v. 26, in which a Materialist is made to praise a "Vāmi" for, not coincidentally, accepting the permissibility of killing and other sinful deeds shunned by others.
29. The assumption that killing plants has negative karmic consequences may suggest an implicit Jain influence on the text. I thank Katherine Ulrich for this suggestion. References to the sin generated by ploughing and other activities can be found in the *Civatarumōttaram*. The fact that *Rejecting Killing* explicitly vindicates the use of the plough and twice proclaims (v. 9 and v. 20) the possibility of cancelling demerit generated through

dismissing the possibility of offering meat to Śiva,[30] the Śaiva rejects the implicit suggestion that one can offer it to the deity's consort:

> *ūṉ ṟaṉaiy imayavaraimātukk'*
> *innilan taṉiṟ pattirai mutal āñ cattikaṭkum varaiv' eṉi ṉī nikaḻtta ṟītē*

> …Since [meat] is unsuitable even for the goddesses beginning with Pattirai (Skt. Bhadrā, i.e., Kālī) in this land, your making of flesh [offerings] to the daughter of the Himalaya Mountain (Pārvatī) is definitely evil.
>
> *Rejecting Killing* v. 10 (Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ 1927: 28)

This passage also elliptically paraphrases a verse, which is cited without attribution in the commentary. The implication appears to be that, since even those who worship fierce local goddesses in order to master the eight magical rites (a variant of the *ṣaṭkarma*) offer vegetarian food to those deities, reserving flesh for the goddesses' ghoulish attendants, it is *a fortiori* inappropriate to offer meat to the benevolent Umā.

Next the Śaiva establishes his position, which may be summarized as follows: (1) Gods do not desire flesh, ghouls and other such beings do (v. 11). (2) Killing animals in the restricted context of Vedic sacrifice is theoretically acceptable because it enjoined by the Vedas, which are the utterances of the lord. (3) Nevertheless, no similar authoritative scripture exists for the performance of extra-Vedic animal sacrifice, which is consequently to be shunned (vv. 12–14). (4) Left-handed tantric rituals may temporarily yield supernormal powers (*citti*, Skt. *siddhi*); however, these pale in comparison to the attainment of the supreme Being (*piramacitti*, Skt. *brahmasiddhi*), which gives eternal mastery over the entire cosmos and is enjoyed by those who follow the path of the Vedas and the Āgamas (vv. 14–15). (5) The wise burn up their karma by refusing to kill and as a result eat the ambrosia that is liberation (v. 16).

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accidental killing suggests the text intends an agrarian audience, such as the Kavuṇṭars who control most of the land in Koṅkunāṭu (see Beck 1972: 9).

30. The text denies that the example of Kaṇṇappar, who offered meat to Śiva and attained liberation, can be emulated; the strength of this saint's world-transcending devotion (*ulakaṅ kaṭanta patti valan*) does not constitute an injunction to similar behavior (v. 10). Already the circa twelfth-century Śaiva Siddhānta treatise *Tirukkaḷiṟṟuppaṭiyār* had declared the spectacular and sometimes violent deeds performed by Śiva's saints in days of yore to be inimitable (Monius 2018: 32–33).

The most striking aspect of this lengthy section of the text is the attention given to clarifying the theoretical, scriptural, and moral underpinnings of ritual praxis. The Śaiva feels the need to carefully distinguish between divine and demonic sacrificial recipients, rites that are rooted in divine revelation and those that are not, the superior and inferior results of different kinds of rituals and, finally, the nature of those whose lives are organized around alternately nonviolent and violent forms of ritual behavior. The anxiety evident in this discussion is likely indicative of the fact that the Vāmi, among all the text's implied interlocutors, is arguably the one whose established ritual regimen most closely resembles that of *Rejecting Killing*'s protagonist. His presence, therefore, threatens to dissolve the boundary between the Śaiva community the text wishes to imagine into being and those whom it seeks to place outside of it.

Yet who is Vāmi? This figure, who looms so large in the text, was hardly an established target of earlier Tamil Śaiva polemics.[31] It seems reasonable, therefore, to ask whom *Rejecting Killing*'s author might have in mind. Though admittedly speculative, a plausible answer can be found in the wealth of roughly contemporaneous Tamil *cittar* literature, a regional development of the pan-Indic *siddha* traditions of the second millennium. Among the vast and heterogeneous *cittar* corpus is a prolific genre attributed by Venkatraman (1990: 7) to a group of authors known as "Kāyasiddhas." According to Weiss (2009: 48), these Kāyasiddha texts deal with "Tamil traditions of knowledge such as alchemy, medicine, astrology, yoga, and tantric ritual," and "detail ways in which ordinary people can obtain [supernatural powers and eternal youth] through yoga, mantras, or mineral compounds." Though generally Śaiva in orientation, this literature concentrates on the worship of Bālā/Tripurasundarī and a host of other local goddesses, often endorsing the use of transgressive substances associated with left-handed tantric praxis (Venkatraman 1990: 9, 94–96). One author, Koṅkaṇar, is particularly intriguing. In addition to the fact that he apparently lived in Koṅkunāṭu (as his name suggests) during the late seventeenth century, he explicitly identifies himself as a Vāmi in at least one of the texts bearing his name (*ibid*., 54, 95 n. 50). So great was his reputation in this region, moreover, that he is mentioned in non-*cittar* texts from the fol-

31. The Vāmi is virtually absent, for instance, from the circa 13th-century *Civañāṉacittiyār*. South Indian Śaivas appear to have paid increasing attention to *Vāmatantra* in the century preceding *Rejecting Killing*. Thus Sanderson (2012–2013: 87–88) notes that southern Saiddhāntika literature tended to stress its "congruence with brahmanical orthopraxy" by censuring various forms of non-Saiddhāntika Śaivism, citing a passage from the sixteenth-century *Śivajñānabodhasaṅgrahabhāṣya* critical of the Vāma (*ibid*., 88 n. 358). Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta doxographies would eventually come to include the Vāma among a group of "inner-outer religions" (*aka-p puṟa-c camayaṅkaḷ*) that are understood to accept the authority of the Vedas and Āgamas yet are seen as inferior to the "inner religions" (*aka-c camayaṅkaḷ*) of orthoprax Śaivism (Sivaraman 2001: 20).

lowing century, including the *Koṅkumaṇṭalacatakam* as well as two narrative compositions that seek to subordinate his considerable power to that of Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva saints, respectively (*ibid.*, 55–56, nn. 45–46). While dating the Kāyasiddha literature remains a problem (Weiss 2009: 49), there is little reason to doubt that Koṅkunāṭu was a hotbed of Kāyasiddha activity at the time of *Rejecting Killing*'s composition.[32]

Having dealt with the Vāmi, the text moves on to quickly reject the classic Buddhist argument that one can eat animals so long as one does not participate in their killing (vv. 16–17), and then proceeds to refute claims associated in the commentary with several different "common folk" (*laukikar*). Some of the Śaiva's points here are standard *dharmaśāstra* fare, for example his suggestion that eating flesh in medicinal contexts, to save someone's life, or during *śrāddha* rites is not permissible in the current degenerate age (v. 17). Others appeal to a kind of common sense, particularly appropriate for these lay interlocutors. For instance, to the implicit objection that flesh is needed to nourish a body made of flesh, the Śaiva's response is that, on the same logic, one should be prepared to consume excrement (v. 18). The discussion culminates in the remarkable nineteenth verse, which the commentary suggests counters a series of claims, the first of which is that persons belonging to nonvegetarian castes must continue to eat meat:

> *ūṉ uṇuñ cātikaṇ mirukātikaḷ aṟam pūṇṭ' avaiy uḻu muṉp' oḻukiṟṟā ṉī*
> *tāṉ eṉav ūṉ ṟiṉal paḻut' ōr iḻivu pitāp puriyiṉ maintar tāmuñ ceyyār*
> *māṉilattiṟ pālar pittar teḻintum iḻukk' iyaṟṟiṉ uṇṭōr maṟukk' oṇāt' ūṉ*
> *āṉmav iccai karuti muṟaiyallārait tōynt' uṟiṉ ūṉ aruntal ceyyē*

> [1]The species (*cātikaḷ*) that eat meat are quadrupeds, etc.
>
> [2]If some among *them* previously acted in accordance with virtue, then it is wrong for *you* to call yourself [one of them] and eat meat.
>
> [3]If a father does something disgraceful, his sons do not do it too.
>
> [4]If, on earth, children and madmen continue to disgrace themselves even after they, respectively, have matured and regained their sanity, then one cannot refute the meat eater [for continuing to consume flesh despite knowing better].

32. See the map (n. pag.) at the beginning of Venkatraman's book and his discussion (*ibid.*, 186–191) of several places in this region associated with the *cittar*s. Another prominent Kāyasiddha, Karuvūrār, also appears to have been active in the area at this time.

> 5If, having considered the inclination of your inmost Self (*āṉma-v iccai*), you would embrace inappropriate sexual partners, then eat flesh.
>
> *Rejecting Killing* v. 19 (Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ 1927: 56)

Playing on the word *cāti* (Skt. *jāti*), which can mean both "caste" and "species," the Śaiva first claims that non-human animals are the only natural meat eaters and alludes to several Purāṇic narratives of carnivorous animals who, despite their nature, found it in themselves to forgo flesh (S_1–S_2). S_3–S_5 then address several implied counterarguments: that one must do as one parents did; that even if it is advisable to renounce meat from birth, there is no point in doing so later in life; and that if trying to renounce meat necessitates repressing the will of one's inmost being, one should abandon the project. The text thus advocates rejecting both family and caste nonvegetarianism to construct a reformed community of vegetarians. In a sense, this is the position that the text was building to throughout the entire polemical exchange, the entire point of which, as we have seen, was to clarify the superiority of vegetarians within the transmigratory schema for the edification of the layman mentioned in v. 2. Having dispensed with all religious and worldly objections, the text culminates in the claim that those who understand the truth must fearlessly abandon the meat-eating practices of their parents and community and lead a pure vegetarian lifestyle.[33]

The radical implications of this position are fleshed out in the final three verses, which, according to the commentary, constitute the Śaiva's replies to the remaining doubts of the man from v. 2, who has now decided to henceforth renounce killing animals and eating their meat. Stanzas 20–21 stress that even if one has adopted the vow of nonkilling (*kollā noṉpu*), one will still go to hell if one's wife, children, and kinfolk eat meat because one is liable (*atikārattāl*) for their actions. Thus, one must ensure that they too change their dietary habits. Verse 22 adds a final qualification that one should also avoid certain flesh-like plants and warns against backsliding into nonvegetarianism and a life dedicated to the body. It closes by emphasizing the need to join a community possessed of true austerity (*mey-t tavar kuḻu-v uṟṟ'*) from whom one may learn virtuous conduct, the practice of which will enable one to obtain mental purity, supreme knowledge, and, ultimately, liberation.

33. The commentator acknowledges the climactic nature of this verse within the context of the interreligious debate by suggesting that after the Śaiva had made his point, his interlocutors "became motionless, like painted pictures or a lamp in a windless place" (*eḻutiṉa cittiraṅkaḷ pōlavum kāṟṟ' illātav iṭattil irukkiṟa viḷakkup pōlavum acaiv' aṟav iruntārkaḷ*). At that point the assembly fell completely silent, "like a waveless ocean" (*alaiy oḻinta camuttiram pōla*, p. 61).

The foregoing account reveals that Caiva *ahiṁsā* is formulated with respect to a novel understanding of "self" and "other." Significantly, dietary heteropraxy no longer explicitly signifies the Jains, ostensibly vegetarian themselves, who for centuries prior had been crucial foils for Tamil Śaiva self-understanding (Peterson 1998). Instead, *Rejecting Killing*'s effort to differentiate between Śaiva and non-Śaiva diets is primarily connected to its engagement with new kinds of religious and lay communities. The final section of this article speculates on the social context of this engagement to ask why meat might have mattered to *Rejecting Killing*'s author.

5 Conclusion

Caiva *ahiṁsā* may be profitably interpreted as a form of "frontier Śaivism." In proposing this phrase, I have in mind recent studies of Jews and Mormons in the late nineteenth-century United States (Rabin 2017; Smith Hansen 2019) and goddess cults in southwestern China (Bryson 2017) that call attention to the ways in which religious traditions evolve on the real and imagined boundaries of established socio-moral orders. It has already been mentioned that *Rejecting Killing* was probably composed in the Tamil uphill region, perhaps in Pērūr. This area was hardly central to the traditional Tamil Śaiva geographic imagination if we take as our guide temples celebrated by the poets of the *Tēvāram*. During the late seventeenth century, Pērūr would likely have been a small town (as it is today) focused around its main temple, dedicated to Śiva Paṭṭīcuvarar. The status of different local caste groups, such as the Kavuṇṭars or Koṅku Vēḷḷāḷar, were still relatively fluid, with the coming division between so-called "right" and "left" castes only beginning to crystallize (Beck 1972: 32). On the other hand, Susan Bayly (1989) demonstrates that the late precolonial Tamil hinterland was undergoing rapid change due to increased interaction with the settled peoples of the major rice-producing river valleys and the intensification of dry-zone agriculture. The local religious landscape, at the time centered on the worship of blood-drinking goddesses and other fierce male deities, was also in a state of flux, with the construction of new temples to Śiva and Viṣṇu and the gradual expansion of Christian missionary influence in the region.

An underexplored aspect of this dramatic transformation is the role played by Śaiva monastic institutions. Cāntaliṅka is supposed to have founded a Vīraśaiva monastery in Pērūr, which still stands today. This monastery maintains ties to Tiruvāvaṭutuṟai, a preeminent Śaiva Siddhānta–affiliated monastery, through Cāntaliṅka's guru, Tuṟaiyūr Civappirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ, who is remembered to have adopted Vīraśaiva orthopraxy in a bid to

restore Śaiva worship at Citamparam (Koppedrayer 1990: 206 n. 381). It may have been the case that *Rejecting Killing* was intended to reform a recently constituted group of semi-literate Koṅkunāṭu landowners into a community united in its shared commitment to vegetarianism and unswerving allegiance to enlightened Śaiva ritual-moral leadership based at the newly established Pērūr *ātīṉam*. This would suggest that the development of Caiva *ahiṁsā* is at least partly connected to the expansion of Śaiva monastic networks from their base in the Kaveri Delta to the increasingly economically important uphill regions during the seventeenth century. Likely also relevant is Pērūr's geographical proximity to modern-day Karnataka, a region with longstanding ties to vegetarian Vīraśaiva and Digambara Jain communities.

As a literary artifact from the early modern Tamil Śaiva frontier, *Rejecting Killing* can be regarded an innovative attempt at constructing a meatless, and thus implicitly Śaivicized, public through persuasive argumentation. Line-drawings accompanying the first edition of the text, published in 1844, capture this public dimension, depicting the Śaiva, his supplicant, and the now-enlightened assembled host, gathered before seated images of Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ and Citampara Cuvāmi, with several figures holding what would appear to be manuscripts of *Rejecting Killing* and Cāntaliṅka's three other compositions in their hands (see Figure 1).[34] It is possible that the text's effort to persuade lay audiences to alter the way they live was at least partly inspired by contact with contemporary Christian writings in Tamil.[35] However, spaces for certain kinds of public religious instruction in Tamil predated the arrival of European Christianity, as Ambalavanar (2006) demonstrates with respect to Jaffna. Moreover, *Rejecting Killing*'s formal models are decidedly indigenous, with clear debts to texts such as the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* and the *Civañāṉacittiyār*.

Stepping back momentarily from the immediate context, it is worth briefly considering the significance of Caiva *ahiṁsā* with respect to scholarship on religious foodways in other traditions. In a relatively recent study, Freidenreich (2011) examines the ways Jewish, Christian, and Muslim legal traditions imagine community boundaries through norms governing food prepared by and shared with religious others. Through a careful comparison of these "foreign food restrictions," Freidenreich shows how ancient and medieval intellectuals associated with each tradition go about classifying religious insiders and outsiders in

34. The image identifies Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ not with Pērūr but rather with Tuṟaiyūr, a town near Tiruccirāppaḷḷi, presumably because that is where his guru Civappirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ is from.

35. Theorizing Tamil literature as a means of persuasion was a major concern of Constanzo Gioseffo Beschi (1680–1747), of whom Tiruppōrūr Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ was likely a near contemporary, as Trento (2022: 173*ff*.) observes in her careful study of the Italian Jesuit's Tamil grammar, the *Toṉṉūlviḷakkam*.

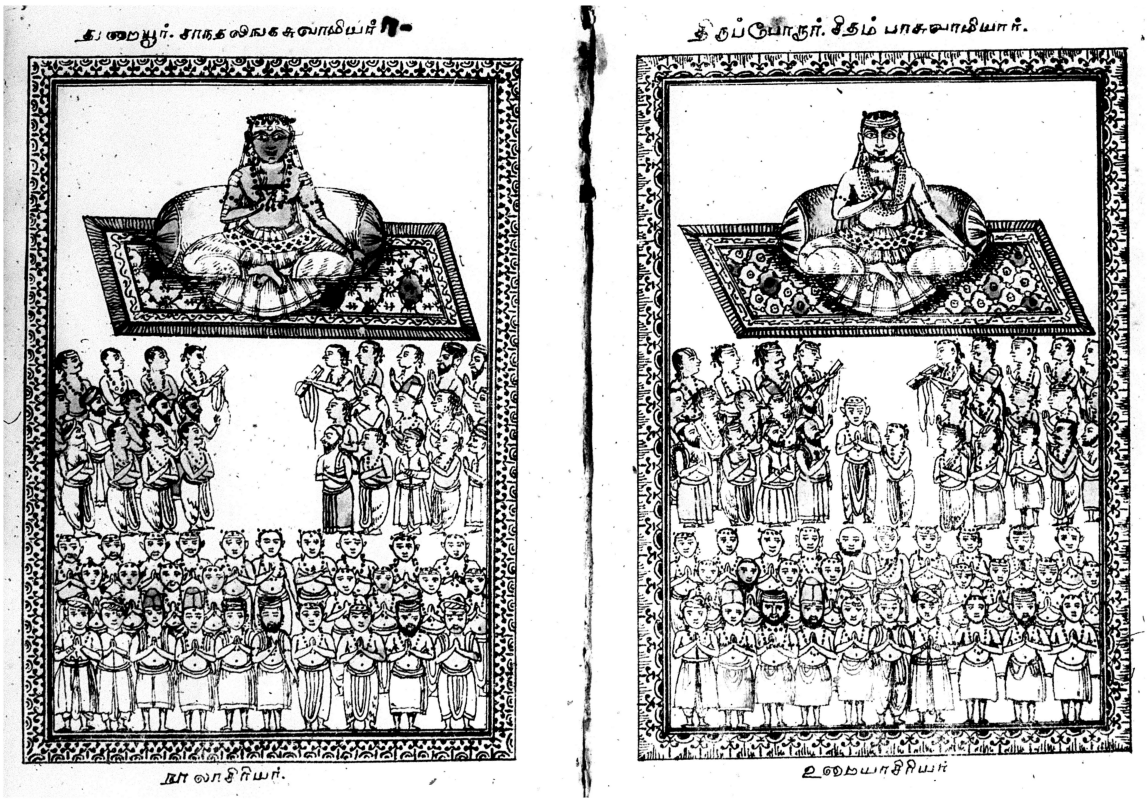

Figure 1: Line drawings accompanying the 1844 *editio princeps* of *Rejecting Killing* (photo by the author)

qualitatively different ways. He writes, "They draw incongruent border lines around their respective communities and establish different kinds of barriers along these borders because they imagine the proper social order in fundamentally different ways" (24). Thus, while Jews tended to *mark the otherness* of non-Jews without distinguishing among them, Christians *defined the otherness* of non-Christians as either "not Us" or "anti-Us," and Muslims *relativized the otherness* of non-Muslims as either "like-Us" or "unlike Us" (30).

Although he is uninterested in what he calls "ingredient-based religious food restrictions" (21), Freidenreich is helpful for thinking about how *Rejecting Killing* might constitute a new style of "imagining otherness" within the Tamil Śaiva tradition. Clearly, the idea that food, or even meat specifically, would demarcate a religious boundary in South Asia is not particularly new. However, the text's use of diet to organize and comparatively evaluate religious difference constitutes a noticeable departure from the concerns of earlier Tamil

Śaiva Siddhānta polemics. It is well known that polemical literature became a site of intense productivity and innovation in the final precolonial centuries. One noteworthy development, discussed by Fisher (2017: 128), is the heightened concern exhibited by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century South Indian intellectuals with respect to issues of "public sectarian comportment," for example the propriety of bearing Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava insignia on the body. Such outward signs of sectarian affiliation, she suggests, were coming to assume a new role "in defining the boundaries of public space" (134) in South Indian society at this time. What this article has called Caiva *ahiṁsā* seems to constitute a further ramification of the polemical genre in this general direction. Here, it is not what one's tribe puts *on* their bodies as much as what they put *in* them, and *in* those of their deities, that primarily serves to "mark the difference" in one's public religious identity. Among the factors one might point to in accounting for this enhanced semantic significance of food, and meat in particular, one thinks of the centrality of food-giving for expressions of Nāyaka-era kingship (Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam 1992: 67–68), a general post-Vijayanagara Brahminization of South Indian *maṭha* culture (Stoker 2016: 8), and a widespread tendency in early modern India to critique tantric transgressiveness in the name of devotion (Burchett 2019).

Ultimately, *Rejecting Killing* is the type of text one assigns for a class entitled "Śaivism 101." This interest in schooling others in the "basics" of Śaivism foreshadows later developments in Tamil Śaiva discourse. The attention to vegetarianism, Christians, the impropriety of animal sacrifice, and the reformation of a Tamil public through careful scripture-based moral instruction are all hallmarks, for instance, of the titan of nineteenth-century Tamil Śaivism, Āṟumuka Nāvalar, who as mentioned above published the text in the mid-nineteenth century. Attempts to transform local populations into pious, Āgama-compliant Śaiva vegetarians and to deny the legitimacy of meat-eating "others" by no means began with the advent of European colonialism. Thus, our text, despite having fallen into relative obscurity, anticipated a major strand of colonial-era religious rhetoric, while putting its finger, as it were, on an issue that, as A. L. Vijay's *Caivam* indicates, continues to be hotly debated among Tamil-speakers to this day.

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Desecrating the Divine:

Vyāsa's Body between Polemic and Procession

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Abstract

This paper examines the textual and juridical history of Vyāsantōḷ, a once-popular Vīraśaiva procession in which the severed arm of Vyāsa — the storied author of the *Mahābhārata* — was paraded through villages and cities throughout the Deccan. As a sacred figure for some, Vyāsa's desecration provoked ire and occasional violence until 1945, when the Bombay High Court outlawed the practice. This paper examines Vyāsantōḷ across three turning points. The first is a polemical praise-poem (*stōtra*) titled *Praising Vyāsa, Condemning the Apostates* (*Pāṣaṇḍakhaṇḍanavyāsastōtra*) written by Vādirāja Tīrtha (ca. 1550–1610), a popular intellectual and proselyte of Madhva's realist Vedānta and the first known writer to weigh in on the question of Vyāsa's arm. The second is a genealogy of Vyāsantōḷ in the Mahābhārata, Purāṇas, and Śaiva didactic writings. And the third is the circuitous course that Vyāsantōḷ cut through courts in British India. Collectively, these turning points provide not only a provisional genealogy of a religious controversy; they also remind us that figures like Vyāsa belong not to epic antiquity, but to a present in which gods and epic heroes are refigured (or disfigured) according to the interests of historical communities.

Keywords: vīraśaiva, madhva, vādirāja tīrtha, vyāsa, desecration, procession, vēdānta, deccan, vyāsantōḷ

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Contents

1 Introduction

Early in May 1911, the residents of Kolhapur braced for a riot. The city's Vīraśaivas planned to celebrate the arrival of a prominent monastic leader with a procession. Anticipating backlash, organizers asked Kolhapur's nominal ruler, Chhatrapati Rajarshi Shahu (descendent of the Maratha leader Shivaji Bhonsle), to personally approve the event. Shahu later recalled in his memoirs that Brahmans in the city "threatened a breach of the peace" were the procession to take place.[1] They objected not to the arrival of a prominent religious figure, or even to using city streets as a stage for Vīraśaiva piety. Kolhapur's Brahmans objected to a specific processional object — the severed arm of Vyāsa, fabled author of the *Mahābhārata*. Made of bundled rags or gnarled wood, an effigy of Vyāsa's severed arm — known in Kannada simply as *Vyāsantōḷ* (Vyāsa's arm) — would dangle atop a tall pole alongside cymbals, streamers, and a flag decorated with the image of Śiva's bull, Nandin. During the procession, devotees would hoist the pole aloft while dancing and singing. Some might even swing at Vyāsa's arm with sticks or swords, reenacting an event from Purāṇic lore when Nandin lopped off Vyāsa's arm in a fit of pious rage.

Vyāsa's severed arm had sparked violence elsewhere in the Deccan. There were riots in Bellubbi in 1882, and the *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* reported in 1884 that "many lives were lost" during a conflict in Dharwad a few decades earlier.[2] "Formerly riots were of constant occurrence," the *Gazetteer* reads. "The parading of Vyāsa's hand was forbidden, but in outlying villages the practice is still kept up."[3] Vyāsa's arm may have put parade-goers and passersby at risk, but it seems to have been especially dangerous for organizers. In 1830,

1. Latthe (1924: vol. 2, 345).
2. *Gazetteer* (1884), pp. 229–230.
3. *Gazetteer* (1884), p. 229.

at the request of Brahmans in the western reaches of the Mysore state, Krishnaraja Wodeyar III ordered the execution of two Vīraśaiva leaders for organizing a Vyāsa procession.[4] Despite the potential for bloodshed, Shahu approved the parade in Kolhapur and promised his royal marching band as a token of support.

The controversy about Vyāsa's body in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was, of course, a product of a particular place and time. The establishment of British common law in the subcontinent, for instance, required that both defenders and challengers of *Vyāsantōḷ* adopt new conceptual and legal categories. But *Vyāsantōḷ* was not an iatrogenic product of colonial law, which is to say that it was not produced by the advent of colonial law itself.[5] Though British courts had a hand in refiguring *Vyāsantōḷ* along new conceptual lines, the rhetoric and perhaps even the practice of Vyāsa desecration is evident as early as the late sixteenth century.

This article examines the first known anti-*Vyāsantōḷ* writing, a short Sanskrit poem titled *Praising Vyāsa, Condemning the Apostates* (*Pāṣaṇḍakhaṇḍanavyāsastōtra*).[6] Written by Vādirāja Tīrtha (ca. 1550–1610), an influential poet, scholar, and proselyte of Madhva's dualist Vedānta, *Praising Vyāsa* provides a starting point for not only plotting the murky history of a particular controversy, but also for rethinking prehistories of religious conflict to include textual polemics and philological disputes.

By invoking the language of religious conflict, I am, of course, thinking of Christopher Bayly and his work on riots in late precolonial and early colonial north India.[7] Bayly was working against at least two accounts of conflict in the subcontinent. The first was only "dimly aware" of religious violence prior to the rise of colonial commercial power, and the second, while acknowledging the fact of precolonial religious violence, nevertheless maintained that its "quality and incidence" changed dramatically after 1860. Bayly advanced a position of continuity, in which moments of religious conflict in the late nineteenth cen-

4. Wodeyar's dispensation was found in the library of the Sringeri Śāṅkara *maṭha* at Koodli (near Channagiri) in 1945. Collectors deduced that Wodeyar sent a copy of the decree to Brahmans at the *maṭha* because they petitioned the court to intervene in the procession. Doing so may have endeared Wodeyar to the region's Mādhva and Smārta Brahmans at a moment when their support was vital to securing Mysore's power over western Karnataka. It is unclear whether a copy of the document was also sent to the Akṣobhyatīrtha Mādhva *maṭha* in Koodli. See sannad no. 3 in the "Sannads of the Mysore King Mummadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar," in *Annual Report* (1946).
5. On iatrogenesis and law see Pinney (2009: 29–62).
6. Elsewhere, Vādirāja writes that Buddhists, Jains, and Vīraśaivas — the *pāṣaṇḍas* — once accepted, but ultimately rejected, the authority of the Vedas. "Apostate" is closer to this understanding than the more commonly translated "heretic." See Peterson (2023).
7. Bayly 1985.

tury are thought to have analogues in the early colonial period. These earlier moments were linked not to religious revivalism or civilizational clashes, Bayly suggested, but to localized shifts of resources and power. Bayly's work has invited nuancing and criticism since it was written in 1985, but few have challenged the way Bayly consigned texts and their interpretation to little more than symbolic outgrowths or second-order effects of politics and economy.[8]

This article examines the textual prehistories of what became, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a site of violent agitation and acrimonious litigation. Through a close reading of *Praising Vyāsa* and related texts, I argue several things. First, no *Vyāsantōḷ* text was itself the pretext for conflict. Nor were *Vyāsantōḷ* texts the mere sublimation of strife on the ground. The desecration of Vyāsa's body and its ceremonial display in city streets in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries emerged from an interplay of text and practice — a kind of mimetic loop — in which forms of interpretation informed paradigms of performance and vice versa.

The movement between reading, performance, and public spectacle was accelerated in part by Vyāsa's migration from a fictive figure of epic antiquity to a centerpiece of devotion among Vaiṣṇavas of various orders, and especially among a community of Viṣṇu devotion and Vedānta organized around the figure of Madhva (ca. 1238–1317 CE). Styled as both an emanation of Viṣṇu as well as Madhva's guru, Vyāsa imparted to Madhva's writings, and by extension to his dualist Vedānta philosophy, both soteriological and scholastic legitimacy. It is unsurprising, then, that followers of Madhva wrote numerous Vyāsa praise poems and that even the notional desecration of Vyāsa's body would be interpreted as an affront to the very affective and soteriological core of Madhva's devotional community.

Whether Vyāsa's arm was a processional object before the early nineteenth century is unclear. Even its presence in writing before the nineteenth century is fleeting. The second part of this article puts forward a provisional genealogy of *Vyāsantōḷ*. Episodes of divine dismemberment are not uncommon in Sanskrit literature, and the case of Vyāsa's arm appears to adapt and amplify earlier motifs of "aggressive bodily intervention" seen in Sanskrit epics, Śaiva Purāṇas, and Vīraśaiva didactic texts.[9] The closest parallel to the amputation of Vyāsa's arm is its paralysis. I look at several examples of Vyāsa's monoplegia. The first is from the *Skanda Purāṇa*, where Vyāsa confronts Śiva with a sermon about Viṣṇu's superiority and is paralyzed in turn. Similar moments of paralysis are found in earlier texts,

8. For instance, see Pandey (1990).
9. See Jesse Pruitt's forthcoming work on the *Śivadharmōttara*.

including the *Mahābhārata* and the *Śivadharmōttara*. Yet these cases of paralysis are usually reversed and are thus symbolically distinct from the permanent dismemberment of *Vyāsantōḷ*. Earlier motifs of paralysis appear to have undergone a consequential intensification in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This is apparent, for instance, in Vīraśaiva didactic texts like Śivayogin's (ca. fourteenth century CE) *Siddhāntaśikhāmaṇi* and its early-modern commentaries, where Śiva's slanderers are met with more egregious forms of bodily harm.

Here I must emphasize that these were textual dictates, and that the gap between text and life on the ground — at least where they concern violence against those who challenge Vīraśaivas and their institutions — appears to have been vast indeed. When Vādirāja wrote *Praising Vyāsa* in the late sixteenth century, swaths of his home in western Karnataka were controlled by a powerful Vīraśaiva ruling family. Rather than curse or kill critics of Vīraśaivas, the Nāyakas of western Karnataka lavished them, including Vādirāja, with royal largesse.

The sources I present here show Vyāsa's arm as a surrogate for several things simultaneously. By the end of the sixteenth century, it had become a token of sectarian triumph, where Śiva could win over the most ardent devotee of Viṣṇu, even if only by force. For Vādirāja, the desecration of Vyāsa was both an egregious textual misinterpretation and an unforgivable attack on the legitimacy of Madhva and his Vedānta. What I do not touch on here, but which hangs over the entire *Vyāsantōḷ* controversy, is caste. Vyāsa's venerated position among Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva Brahmans alike would have rendered his desecration a potent symbol of anti-caste agitation. And with the rise of the Vīraśaiva ruling family of western Karnataka, the flagrant desecration of an exemplar of caste elitism may have marked a turn in subaltern political power and its symbolic expression.

I conclude with a perfunctory examination of *Vyāsantōḷ*'s juridical life, which allows me to highlight at least two avenues of further research. The first might be a new direction in the study of the *Mahābhārata*. While anthropologists and historians have noted the *Mahābhārata*'s various localizations and retellings, Sanskrit epics as points of sectarian, caste, and legal conflict are largely unstudied. Second are the legal afterlives of premodern Sanskrit polemics in colonial India. I have in mind both the direct and indirect ways that precolonial Sanskrit disputes, especially over issues of inheritance, property, marriage, temple access, procession, and so on, shaped legal discussions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But early modern Sanskrit polemics about *Vyāsantōḷ* are interesting not because of their influence on later legal debates, but because they appear to have had no influence at all. Though Vyāsa's body remained a source of outrage, modes of what we might call "philo-

logical containment" — erudite (if still vitriolic) Sanskrit polemics as a strategy of conflict management — seem to have given way to political violence and courtly machinations.

2 Conjuring the Image of Vyāsa

Vyāsa was probably never a real person, though some of the deeds ascribed to him may have been the work of many people over many centuries.[10] Yet when Vādirāja wrote *Praising Vyāsa, Condemning the Apostates* in the late-sixteenth century, Vyāsa had long been transformed into a god. To do justice to his divinization alone would warrant a separate study.[11] My starting point here, however, is Vyāsa after apotheosis.

Vyāsa's identity as Viṣṇu had not only been a given for Madhva and his early followers; it was vital for establishing Madhva's legitimacy as a Vedānta commentator. Vyāsa plays an especially prominent role in Madhva's *Determining the Ultimate Aim of the Mahābhārata* (*Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya*), which emplots the tenets of Madhva's Vedānta within the narrative arcs of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In addition to peppering the commentary with his own Vyāsa encomia, Madhva dutifully reiterates the few existing *Mahābhārata* verses that equate Vyāsa with God. "You should know Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa as the Lord Nārāyaṇa," Madhva repeats.[12]

One of the "ultimate aims" Madhva wanted his readers to take from his *Mahābhārata* commentary was that Viṣṇu-as-Vyāsa sanctioned both Madhva's divine nature and his dualist Vedānta project. In the commentary's second chapter, for instance, Vyāsa announces Madhva as an incarnation of the god Vāyu. Citing a verse from the Bhaviṣyatparvan, but which is not found in any recension of the text, Vyāsa proclaims:

10. Later Purāṇas speak of as many as eighteen Vyāsas. See *Viṣṇupurāṇa* 3.3.9 (ed. Sampatkumārācārya 1972: 191).
11. The figure of Vyāsa has accumulated a considerable scholarship. A study of his divinization alone would include Shembavnekar (1947), who showed that "Vyāsa had nothing to do with the four Vedas." It would include volumes written about Vyāsa in the field of *Mahābhārata* studies, such as Sullivan (1999) and also studies on specific chapters and sections of the *Mahābhārata*. Grünendahl (1989 and 2002, and Grünendahl and Schreiner 1997) for instance, describes how Vyāsa became an "emanation of Nārāyaṇa," and the scholarship of Biardeau (2002), Hiltebeitel (2005), and others has convincingly shown the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* to be a later feature of the epic and to reflect the interests of new cults of Viṣṇu worship in the first centuries CE. Such a study would also include work on Vyāsa in the Purāṇas, like Saindon (2004–2005) and Bisschop (2021).
12. See Madhva's *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya* (ed. Gōvindācārya), v. 2.41, and *Mahābhārata* 12.334.9 (ed. Sukthankar and Belvalkar):

    kṛṣṇadvaipāyanaṁ vyāsaṁ viddhi nārāyaṇaṁ prabhum

> *tasyāṅgaṁ prathamaṁ vāyuḥ prādurbhāvatrayānvitaḥ*
> *prathamō hanumān nāma dvitīyō bhīma ēva ca*
> *pūrṇaprajñas tṛtīyas tu bhagavatkāryasādhakaḥ*
> *trētādyēṣu yugēṣv ēṣa saṁbhūtaḥ kēśavājñayā*

> The first subsidiary of Viṣṇu is Vāyu,
> who has three worldly manifestations.
> The first is called Hanumān, the second, Bhīma.
> But the third is Madhva, fulfiller of God's deeds.
> At Viṣṇu's decree, Vāyu has appeared in the first three epochs.[13]
>
> Madhva, *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya* (ed. Gōvindācārya, vv. 2.124–125, pp. 88–89)

The clamor that Madhva's messianic self-styling caused in the centuries after his death obscured the messenger himself. Strictly speaking, Madhva did not announce his own divine nature, Vyāsa did. As an emanation of Viṣṇu, Vyāsa transformed Madhva's unprecedented claim of his own divinity into a scriptural dictate. To deny Vyāsa's declaration of Madhva's divine nature, in other words, would be tantamount to denying the authority of the *Mahābhārata* itself.

Elsewhere, Madhva invokes Vyāsa as his guru, which allowed for elaborate narratives about Madhva's connection to Vyāsa in early hagiographies. Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍita (ca. fourteenth century CE), for instance, devotes the seventh chapter of his *Śrīmadhvavijaya* to narrating Madhva's visit to Vyāsa's Himalayan hermitage. Daniel Sheridan has shown how this episode connects Madhva and his writings to Vyāsa by asserting a direct student-teacher relation.[14] But this didactic connection is, by measure of verse, an utterly minor feature of Madhva's life story. Far more significant, both as a narrative fact and for their influence on devotional practice, are the dozens of verses Nārāyaṇa devotes to Madhva's inner monologue upon seeing Vyāsa in the flesh.[15] "Even though Madhva had always seen Vyāsa in his pure, lotus heart," Nārāyaṇa writes, "upon seeing Vyāsa again anew, Madhva became

13. Madhva says the verse is from the Bhaviṣyatparvan of the *Harivaṁśa*, but it is probably one of his own compositions. For more on Madhva's untraceable sources, see Mesquita (2000, 2008).
14. Sheridan (1992).
15. Concealed from ordinary people during the Kali Age, Vyāsa nevertheless welcomes Madhva's mind and eyes (*cetōnayanābhinandana*). Nārāyaṇa likens Vyāsa's disappearance from the vision of ordinary people in the

wonderstruck and thought the following to himself."[16] The next thirty verses describe Madhva's cascade of observations about Vyāsa's body, from the dust on Vyāsa's feet to the matted hair on his head. Madhva's life story, in other words, takes a sharp detour into Vyāsa encomia. About Vyāsa's feet, for instance, Madhva thinks to himself:

> *kamalākamalāsanānilair vihagāhīndraśivēndrapūrvakaiḥ*
> *padapadmarajō 'sya dhāritaṁ śirasā hanta vahāmy ahaṁ muhuḥ*
> *praṇamāmi padadvayaṁ vibhōr dhvajavajrāṅkuśapadmacihnavat*
> *nijamānasarāgapīḍanād aruṇībhūtam ivāruṇaṁ svayam*
> *nanu kēvalam ēva vaiṣṇavaṁ śritavantaḥ padam ātmarōciṣā*
> *tamasō 'py ubhayasya nāśakā vijayantē nakharā navaṁ ravim*
> *sukumāratarāṅgulīmatōḥ padayōr asya nigūḍhagulphayōḥ*
> *upamānam ahō na dṛśyatē kavivaryair itarētaraṁ vinā*

> Wow! I have the dust of Vyāsa's lotus feet on my head, the same dust that Lakṣmī, Brahmā, Vāyu, Garuḍa, Śeṣa, Śiva, and Indra once had on theirs. I bow to the lord's two feet, which are marked with Viṣṇu's banner, lightning bolt, goad, and lotus. Though naturally ruddy, his two feet appear to have become even more so after beating back the mental passions of his followers. His toenails, which have taken refuge at Viṣṇu's feet, destroy two kinds of darkness (internal and external) with their luster, and thus surpass even the sun at daybreak. Except for one or the other foot, the best poets fail to find an adequate analogy for Vyāsa's two feet, which have the most delicate toes and concealed ankles.[17]
>
> Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍita, *Śrīmadhvavijaya* (ed. Gōvindācārya v. 7.25–28)

Kali Age to the disappearance of the sun at night (Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍita, *Śrīmadhvavijaya* [ed. Gōvindācārya] v. 7.22).:

> *adhunā kalikālavṛttayē savitēva kṣaṇadānuvṛttayē*
> *janadṛgviṣayatvam atyajad bhagavān āśramam āvasann imam*

16. Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍita, *Śrīmadhvavijaya* (ed. Gōvindācārya v. 7.17):

> *nijahṛtkamalē 'tinirmalē satataṁ sādhu niśāmayann api*
> *avalōkya punaḥ punar navaṁ tam asau vismita ity acintayat*

17. The verb *śritavantaḥ* in verse 27 conveys that the toenails are both connected to and have taken refuge at Viṣṇu's feet, much as a disciple might. The suggestion seems to be that just as the toenails remove darkness and surpass the sunrise in their splendor, so too the disciple — in this case, Madhva — can do the same.

Madhva's encounter with Vyāsa allowed Nārāyaṇa to conjure an intimate portrait of Vyāsa's body in the minds of his readers. It is worth dwelling on this image for a moment. Vyāsa's legs are "fittingly burly from bottom to top," and "cause the person who worships him to become the same."[18] Sitting on a deerskin that shines with the "lovely sheen of sunlight," Vyāsa possesses a miraculous hue.[19] His "slender, soft, beautiful lotus belly" contains the whole universe.[20] Nārāyaṇa exploits the ambiguous word division in the phrase *brahma-su-sūtram* to simultaneously tell us that Vyāsa's chest appears white because of the *upanayana* thread (*brahmasu sūtram*) and that his heart is captivating because it holds the glorious aphorisms about *brahman*, that is, the *Brahmasūtra*s (*brahmasusūtra*).[21] His arms

18. *ibid.*, v. 7.29:

ucitāṁ gurutāṁ dadhat kramāc chuci tējasvi suvṛttam uttamam
bhajatō 'tra ca bhājayaty adō vibhujaṅghayugalaṁ sarūpatām

"The Lord's two legs, appearing fittingly burly from bottom to top, are pure, brilliant, well-made, and excellent. They cause the person who worships him to become the same/to attain *mōkṣa*." The pun here is on *sarūpatā* being a stage of *mōkṣa*, on which reading the legs confer the appropriate *gurutā* according to one's stage of enlightenment (cf. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 5.13.1–4 [ed. Limaye and Vadekar 1958: 262–263], which is echoed later in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and elsewhere).

19. *ibid.*, vv. 7.30–31:

acalāsanayōgapaṭṭikā varakakṣyā sakṛdāptam iṣṭadam
paritō 'pi hariṁ sphuranty ahō aniśaṁ dhanyatamēti mē matiḥ

rucirēṇa varēṇa carmaṇā rucirājadyuticārurōciṣā
paramōrunitambasaṅginā paramāścaryatayā virājyatē

"A meditation cloth for steady sitting posture, which has the finest hems, shines from all sides upon Hari as Vyāsa, who gives whatever is desired even when approached once — that cloth, in my opinion, is the most praiseworthy thing. The resplendent deer skin upon which he sits, which has the lovely sheen of sunlight, makes him appear most miraculous." Bāṇa used the term *yōgapaṭṭaka* several times in the *Harṣacarita*. It means both a meditation cloth and a forged royal document. In his edition of the text, P. V. Kane (1918: notes, 26) gives the following explanatory verse. From where it comes, I am not sure.

pṛṣṭhajānvōḥ samāyoge vastraṁ valayavad dṛḍham
parivēṣṭya yad ūrdhvajñus tiṣṭhēt tad yōgapaṭṭakam

20. *ibid.*, v. 7.32:

tanunimnasunābhiśōbhitē valibhē vārijanābha ādadhē
pratanāv atisundarē mṛdāv udarē 'smin jagadaṇḍamaṇḍalam

"He has kept the sphere of the universe in this slender, soft, beautiful lotus belly, which has delicate folds, and which is adorned with a soft, deep navel."

21. *ibid.*, vv. 7.33–34:

hṛdayē kṛtasajjanōdayē suviśālē vimalē manōharē
ubhayaṁ vahati trayīmayaṁ bhagavān brahmasusūtram uttamam

asamē 'nadhikē susādhitē nijatātē ravirāśidīdhiti
pradadau trijagajjayadhvajaṁ vidhir ētad galasaṅgibhūṣaṇam

possess soft, ruddy hands that have the marks of Viṣṇu's discus and conch.[22] His neck has three auspicious lines, one for each of the Vedas he composed.[23] Vyāsa's face outshines the light of a thousand beams from a spotless moon, and the appearance of his teeth against his red lips "put to shame a string of new pearls glimmering on ruby facets."[24] His speech, likened to a infinite spring of freshwater, fills the "wells which are the questions posed by thousands of Brahmans."[25] The Tulasi leaf that sits upon Vyāsa's ear whispers, "O Lord,

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"The lord holds the two best Vedic *sūtra*s: One he wears on his broad chest, the other he holds in his expansive heart, which uplifts the righteous. In the case of the [*upanayana*] thread on Brahmans [*brahmasu sūtra*], his chest is white and beautiful, whereas in the case of the glorious aphorisms about *brahman* [i.e., the *Brahmasūtra*], his heart is pure and captivating. When Vyāsa proved [through his various compositions] that Viṣṇu is unequaled and unsurpassed, Brahmā gave him this ornament, the *kaustubha* gem, which hangs around his throat as a symbol of his conquest over the three worlds and which shines like a cluster of suns." The word *susūtra* can be glossed as *śōbhanam sūtram iti susūtram*.

22. *ibid.*, vv. 7.35–36:

arivārijalakṣaṇōllasatsukumārārūṇapāṇipadmayōḥ
pṛthupīvaravṛttahastayōr upamāṁ naiva labhāmahē 'nayōḥ

bhavatāṁ varatarkamudrayā dyati hastāgram abōdham īśituḥ
adhijānusamarpitaṁ paraṁ kṛtabhūyōbhayabhaṅgamaṅgalam

"I cannot find a comparison for these two arms, which have large, brawny, and round forearms, which have lotus-like hands that are soft, ruddy, and resplendent with the marks of Viṣṇu's discus and conch. Through *jñānamudrā*, the fingers of one hand destroy the ignorance of devotees. The fingers of the other sit atop the knee, auspicious for their part in vanquishing tremendous fear."

23. *ibid.*, v. 7.37:

satataṁ galatā svataḥ śrutitritayēnēva nikāmam aṅkitaḥ
suviḍambitakambur īkṣyatē varārēkhātrayavān guror galaḥ

"I see Vyāsa's neck, which, perfectly resembling a conch shell, has three auspicious lines; the neck, which is clearly marked [or numbered] by the three Vedas that issue forth [from his throat] eternally."

24. *ibid.*, vv. 7.38–39:

sakalāstakalaṅkakālimasphuradinduprakarōruvibhramam
adharīkurutē svaśōbhayā vadanaṁ dēvaśikhāmaṇēr idam

aruṇāśmadalāntarōllasannavamuktāvalim asya lañjayēt
hasataḥ sitadantasantatiḥ paramaśrīr aruṇōṣṭharōciṣaḥ

"By its own splendor, the face of Vyāsa — the crown jewel of the gods — outshines even the beautiful light from a thousand moon rays blazing brightly after the moon's spots have been completely removed. Smiling and effulgent with red lips, Vyāsa has a row of the most beautiful white teeth that would put to shame a string of new pearls glimmering on ruby facets."

25. *ibid.*, v. 7.40:

dvijavṛndakṛtaṁ kutūhalād anuyōgāndhusahasram uttamam
iyam ēkapadē sarasvatī śrutibhartuḥ paripūrayaty ahō

"Amazing! With a single word, the Lord of Scripture's riverine speech miraculously fills up thousands of well-like questions posed by scores of Brahmans."

please do not let the lotus and other flowers steal my position out of jealousy."[26] And after describing his eyebrows and forehead, Madhva thinks about Vyāsa's miraculous body and its innumerable qualities:[27]

> *navam ambudharaṁ viḍambayad varavidyudvalayaṁ jagadgurōḥ*
> *avalōkya kṛtārthatām agāṁ sajaṭāmaṇḍalamaṇḍanaṁ vapuḥ*
> *na ramāpi padāṅgulīlasannakhadhūrājadanantasadguṇān*
> *gaṇayēd gaṇayanty anāratam paramān kō 'sya parō guṇān vadēt*
> *na kutūhalitā kutūhalaṁ tanum ēnām avalōkya sadgurōḥ*
> *sanavāvaraṇāṇḍadarśinō gṛhabuddhyā mama niṣkutūhalam*

> I became completely satisfied upon seeing the Lord of the Worlds' body, which, with its most precious, lightning-bright arm band, resembles a new raincloud, and is festooned with a matted knot of hair. Not even Lakṣmī, despite continuously counting, could keep track of the innumerable, sanctified qualities emanating from just the movement of the toenails of Vyāsa's feet. Who could possibly describe his virtues?
>
> Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍita, *Śrīmadhvavijaya* (ed. Gōvindācārya vv. 7.45–48)

26. *ibid.*, vv. 7.41–42:

jalajāyatalōcanasya mām avalōkō 'yam upētya lālayan
kurutē parirabhya pūritaṁ bhuvanānandakarasmitānvitaḥ

upakarṇam amuṣya bhāsitā tulasī mantrayatīva lālitā
mama nātha padaṁ na matsarāj jalajādyāni hareyur ity alam

"I became fulfilled after this sportive gaze of Vyāsa — whose eyes are wide like lotus petals — fell to me and embraced me, the gaze accompanied by a smile that makes all sentient beings happy. It is as if the beloved Tulasi leaf that sits just above his ear mutters silently to itself — 'O Lord! Let not the lotus and other flowers steal my position out of jealousy.'"

27. *ibid.*, vv. 7.43–44:

vibhavābhibhavōdbhavādikaṁ bhuvanānāṁ bhuvanaprabhōr bhruvōḥ
anayōr api dabhravibhramāt sabhavāmbhōjabhavātmanāṁ bhavēt

trijagattilakālikāntarē tilakō 'yaṁ parabhāgam āptavān
harinīlagirīndramastakasphuṭaśōṇōpalapaṅktisannibhaḥ

"From the slightest quiver of the Lord of Creation's eyebrows would result the destruction, maintenance, and birth of all existing things, which have as their nature Śiva and Brahmā. This *tilaka* — which is indistinguishable from a row of rubies shining resplendent atop a sapphire mountain — has attained eminence in the middle of the Ornament of the Three Worlds' forehead."

Simile, metaphor, alliteration, pun, and other poetic devices are key to conjuring Vyāsa's image in the minds of Nārāyaṇa's readers. So, too, is the failure of poetic language. Twice Nārāyaṇa stresses that words fail to express Vyāsa's true glory. Even Lakṣmī cannot fully enumerate the qualities of Vyāsa's toenails, let alone the totality of his body. How could a poet? Yet later Mādhva poets nevertheless tried. Nārāyaṇa's *Vyāsastōtra* is a precursor for later Vyāsa praise poems. In addition to *Praising Vyāsa, Condemning the Apostates*, several other *Vyāsastōtra*s are attributed to Vādirāja, including *Eight Verses to Vyāsa* (*Vyāsāṣṭaka*) and *Describing Vyāsa* (*Vyāsavarṇana*). Simple but rich compositions, *Eight Verses* and *Describing Vyāsa* appear to have been written for popular consumption. Vādirāja says as much — "For those devotees who recite *Eight Verses* every day, there is no defeat for them anywhere."[28]

Reciting Vādirāja's *stōtra*s in the sixteenth century would have entailed repeating banal tropes. Vyāsa is Viṣṇu. He is the infallible author of the *Mahābhārata*, Purāṇas, and the *Brahmasūtra*s. He is dear to the gods, and he shares a special connection to Madhva. But these tropes provided a frame for deft poetic flourishes:

> *indrādidaivatahṛdākhyacakōracandrāmandāṁśukalpaśubhajalpitapuṣpavṛndaḥ*
> *vṛndārakāṅghryupalatōguṇaratnasāndrō mandāya mē phalatu kṛṣṇataruḥ*
> *phalaṁ drāk*

> May the black tree (*kṛṣṇataru*) that is Vyāsa
> quickly yield its fruits to me, Vādirāja, unintelligent as I am —
> that black tree whose dazzling, flower bunch–like arguments
> are like moon rays that sate the Cakōra birds
> we call the hearts of gods like Indra and others;
> that black tree, which has small creepers at its feet that are the other gods,
> and which is encrusted with gem-like qualities.
>
> Vādirāja, *Vyāsāṣṭaka* (1953, v. 4, p. 39)

28. Vādirāja, *Vyāsāṣṭaka*, v. 9, p. 40:

    vāsiṣṭhavaṁśatilakasya harēr manōjñaṁ dōṣaughakhaṇḍanaviśāradam aṣṭakaṁ yē
    dāsāḥ paṭhanty anudinaṁ bhuvi vādirājadhīsambhavaṁ paribhavō na diśāsu tēṣām

    "For those devotees who recite *Eight Verses* every day, which pleases Hari (Vyāsa), the ornament of the Vāsiṣṭha Dynasty, which is famous for destroying a deluge of faults, and which is born from the intellect of Vādirāja himself — for those devotees, there is no defeat anywhere."

Like Nārāyaṇa, Vādirāja uses a handful of images to describe Vyāsa's dark skin. His skin resembles the hue of emeralds.[29] It resembles the roiling, saturnine waters of the Yamuna river.[30] And, following the image of the verse above, it is like a dark tree in the night sky.

Vādirāja seems to reserve his most creative flourishes for verses that connect Vyāsa's body to his literary creations. In the image of the dark tree above, Vyāsa's skin is likened to the night sky; his textual creations — the *Mahābhārata*, the *Brahmasūtra*s, and the Purāṇas — are like the cool rays of the moon; and the hearts of the gods are like Cakora birds, who slake their thirst on Vyāsa's textual moonbeams. Vādirāja indulges in a similar strategy of stacking body and text when bowing to Vyāsa's feet:

> *vēdāntasūtrapavanōddhṛtapañcavēdāmōdāṁśatōṣitasurarṣinarādibhēdām*
> *bōdhāmbujātalasitāṁ sarasīm agāḍhāṁ śrīdāṁ śritō 'smi śukatātapadām*
> *akhēdām*

> I have taken refuge at the deep lake that is the feet of Vyāsa, father of Śuka;
> the lake-like feet that give wealth,
> are tireless,
> are adorned with lotuses of knowledge,
> and by which the various gods, sages, and men are satisfied
> by just a whiff of the fragrance of the five Vedas,
> which has been lifted aloft
> by the breeze of the *Vēdāntasūtra*s.
>
> Vādirāja, *Vyāsavarṇana*, v. 2, p. 39.

Both Nārāyaṇa and Vādirāja used poetry to produce an image of Vyāsa in the minds of readers and listeners. Perhaps this sort of poetic image production was tantamount to a "corpothetics" before the age of print. Like the modern mass-produced images of Hindu gods that Christopher Pinney has suggested entail a "desire to fuse image and beholder," the poetic reproduction and appreciation of Vyāsa's image in the sixteenth century was made

29. Vādirāja's *Vyāsāṣṭaka*, v. 1, p. 39.
30. Vādirāja's *Vyāsavarṇana*, p. 42.

possible through the listener's or reader's faculties of linguistic understanding and literary imagination, all of which, of course, belong to the "beholder" of the image.[31]

3 Violating Vyāsa, Slandering Śiva

By the turn of the seventeenth century, a new form of incendiary ritual involving Vyāsa's amputated arm appears to have emerged among some Vīraśaivas in northwestern Karnataka. Vādirāja's *Praising Vyāsa, Condemning the Apostates* is the first writing that I know of to critique the practice of cutting Vyāsa's arm. Most of the essay is concerned with clearing up confusions about who, precisely, Vyāsa speaks for as a raconteur of epic events. But the last verses suggest that Vādirāja directed the essay toward a generic Śaiva devotee — an "idiot" — who wants to cut Vyāsa's arm not just notionally, it would seem, but in practice.

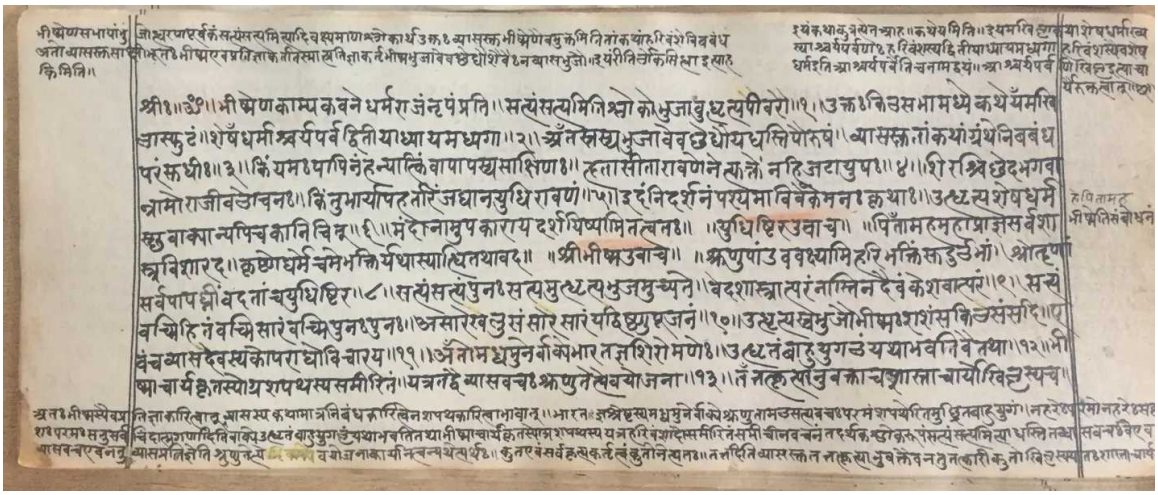

Figure 1: Leaf from the *Pāṣaṇḍakhaṇḍanavyāsastōtra* with marginal commentary by an unknown author. Mysore Oriental Research Institute, ms. 4347C.

Praising Vyāsa consists of thirty-one verses in *śloka* meter. It has been published at least twice. There are no known commentaries, but a manuscript in Mysore has extensive

31. Pinney (2004: 194). Sanskrit literary aesthetics never presumed the mind-body dichotomy that defined western aesthetic theory since at least Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, and so Pinney's effort to coin a neologism to describe a long-standing fact of aesthetic theory in South Asia is somewhat misplaced.

marginal notes that function as a kind of commentary.[32] Both the printed text and the Mysore manuscript end with a short colophon: "Vādirāja Yati has composed this praise poem to Vyāsa (*vyāsastōtra*) in the form of a critique of the apostates."[33] Vādirāja may have called the essay a *vyāsastōtra*. Or perhaps a later copyist or cataloguer supplied the title. In either case, it is worth thinking about what, exactly, makes *Praising Vyāsa* a *stōtra*.

Some have suggested that *stōtra*s are stylistically distinct. Yigal Bronner, for instance, understands *stōtra*s as "relatively short works in verse, whose stanzas directly and repeatedly address a divinity in the vocative case."[34] Others have suggested that a *stōtra*'s profusion of vocatives are the linguistic outgrowth of far more profound orientation toward a subject of praise. Hamsa Stainton, for instance, suggests that *stōtra*s possess a certain "vectorial" or directional quality that foregrounds the act of praise itself.[35] Yet *Praising Vyāsa* requires that we tweak either definition. Vādirāja's addressees are not gods or divinities, but "idiots" and "scoundrels." Insults replace sweet vocatives. And the very title of the essay betrays a multi-vectoral devotionality in which opprobrium is not inimical to the act of supplication but is in fact vital to it.

The text has a simple structure. The first third argues against *Vyāsantōḷ* on the basis of narrative-criticism. Vādirāja argues that Vyāsa is a victim of wrongful punishment. As a reporter of epic events, the thinking goes, Vyāsa was simply conveying a statement Bhīṣma had made about Viṣṇu being the ultimate lord instead of Śiva. Vīraśaivas have mutilated the messenger. The second third of the text poses a set of hypotheticals about wrongful punishment, which is followed by an argument about the *liṅga* being a symbol of Śiva's dismemberment. The first two sections give way to a description of the painted image of Vyāsa and a set of concluding verses that say any Śaiva who wants to cut Vyāsa's arm ends up harming Śiva instead.

Vādirāja begins by describing a declaration Bhīṣma made in front of an assembly of learned men:

32. The marginalia are anonymous, but they appear to have been copied by the same scribe who copied the main text. It is not impossible that the marginal notes belong to Surōttama, who many believe to be Vādirāja's brother. Surōttama commented on several of Vādirāja's writings, including the *Pāṣaṇḍakhaṇḍanavyāsastōtra*'s companion text, the *Pāṣaṇḍakhaṇḍana*.
33. Vādirāja's *Pāṣaṇḍakhaṇḍanavyāsastōtra* (Rāmācārya 1911): *iti śrīvādirājayatikṛtaṁ pāṣaṇḍakhaṇḍanaṁ vyāsastōtraṁ*.
34. Bronner (2007).
35. Stainton (2019).

bhīṣmēṇa kāmyakavanē dharmarāja(ṁ) nṛpaṁ prati
satyaṁ satyam iti ślōkō bhujāv uddhṛtya pīvarau
uktaḥ kila sabhāmadhyē kathēyam akhilā sphuṭā
śēṣadharmāścaryaparvadvitīyādhyāyamadhyagā
atas tasya bhujāv ēva chēdyau yady asti pauruṣaṁ
vyāsas tu tāṁ kathāṁ granthē nibabandha paraṁ sudhīḥ
kiṁ yamaḥ pāpinaṁ hanyāt kiṁ vā pāpasya sākṣiṇaḥ
hṛtā sītā rāvaṇēnēty uktē nahi jaṭāyuṣaḥ
śiraś cicchēda bhagavān rāmō rājīvalōcanaḥ
kiṁ tu bhāryāpahartāraṁ jaghāna yudhi rāvaṇaṁ
idaṁ nidarśanaṁ paśya māvivekē manaḥ kṛthāḥ
uddhṛtya śēṣadharmasthavākyāny api ca kānicit
mandānām upakārāya darśayiṣyāmi tattvataḥ

Among the assemblymen in the Kāmyaka forest, Bhīṣma proclaimed the verse "this is the truth, this is the truth" to king Dharmarāja (Yudhiṣṭhira), brawny arms lifted high. This well-known tale is found in the second chapter of the Āścaryaparvan on *śeṣadharma*. Therefore, the heroic thing to do would have been to cut off Bhīṣma's arm. Vyāsa, who is exceedingly learned, simply recorded that event in the *Mahābhārata*. Should Yama, the god of death, kill the sinner? Or should he kill the one who witnessed the sin? The lotus-eyed Rāma didn't cut off Jaṭāyus's head after he reported that Rāvaṇa abducted Sītā Rather, Rāma killed the kidnapper of his wife, Rāvaṇa, in battle. Take a look at the evidence! Don't fix your mind on this stupidity. After quoting a few statements from the *śeṣadharma* section of the *Mahābhārata* to help the idiots, I will make you understand the verses as they really are.

Vādirāja, *Pāṣaṇḍakhaṇḍanavyāsastōtra* (Rāmācārya 1911, vv. 1–7a)

Vādirāja poses a peculiar genealogy of *Vyāsantōḷ*. By his account, cutting off Vyāsa's arm is born from a misreading of the *Harivaṁśa* (the Āścaryaparvan of the *Mahābhārata*). Yet the verses he cites are not found in the Bhandarkar edition of the text or in its critical apparatus, and only one can be found in Madhva's commentary on the *Mahābhārata*, which Vādirāja invokes approvingly in the next passage. According to Vādirāja, it was Bhīṣma

who lifted his arm and declared, “this is the truth, this is the truth, again, this is the truth.” Vādirāja continues:

> *yudhiṣṭhiraḥ —*
> *pitāmaha mahāprajña sarvaśāstraviśārada*
> *kṛṣṇē dharmē ca mē bhaktir yathā syād dhi tathā vada*
> *bhīṣmaḥ —*
> *śṛṇu pāṇḍava vakṣyāmi haribhaktiṁ sudurlabhāṁ*
> *śrōtṛṇām sarvapāpāghnīṁ vadatāṁ ca yudhiṣṭhira*
> *satyaṁ satyaṁ punaḥ satyam uddhṛtya bhujam ucyatē*
> *vēdaśāstrāt paraṁ nāsti na daivaṁ kēśavāt paraṁ*
> *satyaṁ vacmi hitaṁ vacmi sāraṁ vacmi punaḥ punaḥ*
> *asārē khalu saṁsārē sāraṁ yad viṣṇupūjanaṁ*
> *uddhṛtya svabhujau bhīṣmaḥ śaśaṁsa kila saṁsadi*
> *ēvaṁ cēd vyāsadēvasya kō ’parādhō vicāraya*
> *atō madhvamunēr vākyē bhāratajñaśikhāmaṇēḥ*
> *uddhṛtaṁ bāhuyugulaṁ yathā bhavati vai tathā*
> *bhīṣmācāryakṛtasyōgraśapathasyānuvāditaṁ*
> *yatra tad vai vyāsavacaḥ śṛṇu cēt tava yōjanā*
> *tattatkṛtyānuvaktā ca śāstrācāryō ’khilasya ca*
> *aśēṣanigamōddhartā hartā duḥsamayasya ca*
> *manaḥsaṁkalpamātrēṇa kurupāṇḍavasēnayōḥ*
> *kartā satyavatīputrō vihartā munimaṇḍalē*
> *rājasūyasya cārcāyaḥ sarpayāgasya ca prabhuḥ*
> *kas tasya bhujayōś chēttā kiṁ vā tac chēdakāraṇam*
> *bhramamūlā tataḥ sarvā kathāsīd vyāsavairiṇām*
> *rajakadrōhatō bhikṣōḥ śūlārōpaṇavākyavat*
> *bhrāmakaṁ tasya śāstraṁ ca yatrētthaṁ samudīritam*

> Yudhiṣṭhira said: “O grandfather, great intellect, expert in all the sciences, teach me in such a way that I should be devoted to Kṛṣṇa and *dharma*.”
>
> Bhīṣma replied: “Listen up, Yudhiṣṭhira. I’ll tell you about devotion to Viṣṇu, which is very difficult to get in this world, a devotion that destroys the sins of both

> listeners and speakers alike. This is the truth! This is the truth! Again, this is the truth! I proclaim this lifting my arm. There is no scripture superior to the Vedas. There is no god superior to Viṣṇu. I am telling you the truth. I am describing what is beneficial for you. I am telling you again and again the essence of everything. The one essential thing in this essence-less existence is worshiping Viṣṇu."
>
> Lifting his arms in the air, Bhīṣma proclaimed this in the assembly of kings. If this is the way it was, why fault Vyāsa? Think about it! This is why Madhva — the crest-jewel among those who know the *Mahābhārata* — wrote in his commentary on the *Mahābhārata* that just as Bhīṣma said this while raising his arms, Vyāsa recounted it in the same way (i.e., arms raised). If only you would pay attention to Vyāsa's speech, then your sense of the passage would be that it is a retelling of the great vow taken by Bhīṣma. Vyāsa is the narrator of this or that person's deeds in the epic and is the teacher of the whole *Mahābhārata*. He is the rescuer of the Vedas and destroyer of incorrect codes of conduct. By simply setting his mind to it, Vyāsa — the son of Satyavatī and who relishes being in the assembly of sages — creates the Kurus and Pāṇḍavas (in the minds of the reader) and presides over the Rājasūya, Arcā, and Sarpayāga rites. Who could cut off Vyāsa's arms, and what is the purpose of doing so? Thus, the whole story about severing Vyāsa's hand is, at its root, erroneous and belongs to those who hate him. This is like calling for a sage to be impaled on a spike for the crimes of a washman. And where a text prescribes cutting off Vyāsa's arm, it does so to deceive whoever reads it.
>
> *ibid.*, vv. 7b–19.

After arguing that Vyāsa was simply relaying Bhīṣma's sermon when he repeated the phrase, "this is the truth," Vādirāja turns his attention to Śiva. If any god has been dismembered, Vādirāja claims, it is Śiva not Vyāsa. He cites a story from the *Padma Purāṇa* in which Śiva, who had been distracted while having sex with Pārvatī, snubs Bhṛgu who then chops Śiva to pieces out of anger. All that remains is Śiva's penis mid-coitus, which is symbolized by the *liṅga* that Vīraśaivas wear and worship. He writes:

> *nārīsaṁgamamattō 'sau yasmān mām avamanyatē*
> *yōniliṅgasvarūpaṁ hi tasmād asya bhaviṣyati*
> *iti padmapurāṇōktaṁ bhṛguśāpasya sāhasaṁ*
> *paśyantu pañcaśīrṣāṇi bhujānām ca catuṣṭayaṁ*
> *dvau pādāv adaraṁ vakṣaḥ kaṭī cōrū ca dhūrjaṭēḥ*
> *vichidya tatkṣaṇād ēva petuḥ kila mahītalē*
> *śiśnamātraṁ tūrvaritaṁ tac ca yōnyām nivēśitaṁ*
> *atra pramāṇaṁ śaivānāṁ kaṇṭhē kaṇṭhē vilaṁbinī*
> *liṅgamālaiva yā nityaṁ karē vāmē prapūjyatē*
> *ataḥ pādmōditakathā śaivānām api saṁmatā*

> In the *Padma Purāṇa*, the punishment of the curse of Bhṛgu is relayed in the following way:
>
> "Śiva, who was out of his mind because he was having sex with his wife, disrespected me (Bhṛgu). Because of this, Śiva's body will be reduced to his penis in Pārvatī's vagina. Let everyone see that after Śiva's five heads, his four arms, his two feet, stomach, chest, hips, and thighs are chopped off, they fall to the ground in an instant. Only his penis, which had entered the vagina, remained."
>
> The proof for this is that around Śaivas' throats dangle a necklace of Śiva's penis, which they worship with the left hand. Thus, the Śaivas, too, agree with me on this story from the *Padma Purāṇa*.
>
> *ibid.*, vv. 20–24.

The salacious provocation gives way to reverential praise, where Vādirāja invokes the "knowledge-giving image of Vyāsa" as painted on walls by artists and described in *mantra* texts:

> *hastadvayavatī ramyajaṭāmaṇḍalamaṇḍitā*
> *padmapādā śyāmavarṇā lasatkṛṣṇājinōjjvalā*
> *mandasmitā candramukhī bimbōṣṭhī paṅkajēkṣaṇā*
> *kundakuḍmaladantābhā sāndrakuntalasaṅkulā*
> *kandarpakōṭisadṛśī saundaryāṁbudhimandirā*

> *vandārūṇām abhayadā vandyamānāsurair naraiḥ*
> *adyāpi pūjyatē vyāsapratimā jñānadāyinī*
> *citrakair likhyate bhittau mantraśāstreṣu varṇyate*

> Even today, the knowledge-giving image of Vyāsa is painted on walls by artists
> and is described in various *mantra* texts —
> the image, which shows Vyāsa as having two hands;
> as being lustrous with beautiful hair;
> as having dark, lotus-like feet;
> as luminous from the radiant antelope skin he sits on;
> as smiling with happiness;
> as having a moon-like face with lips like the bimba fruit;
> as having lotus-like eyes and teeth like budding jasmine flowers;
> as having thick hair;
> the image of Vyāsa is like a crore of gods of love;
> is the object of devotion for those who worship beauty;
> it gives fearlessness to all those who prostrate;
> and it is worshiped by both gods and humans alike.
>
> Vādirāja, *Pāṣaṇḍakhaṇḍanavyāsastōtra* (Rāmācārya 1911, vv. 25–28)

Vādirāja concludes by writing:

> *atō vyāsabhujacchēdam āśāsānasya durmatēḥ*
> *svadairvasarvagātrāṇāṁ chēdaḥ khēdakarō 'bhavat*
> *tadvṛddhim icchatō mūlachēdō 'bhūt tava durjana*
> *yadvyāsāya druhyatas te śivadrōhō 'bhavad dhruvaḥ*
> *vivādaparihārāya kathēyaṁ grathitā kila*
> *yatinā vādirājēna vyāsakaiṅkaryakāminā*
> *iti śrīvādirājayatikṛtaṁ pāṣaṇḍakhaṇḍanaṁ vyāsastōtraṁ*

> It follows, then, that the idiot who is longing to amputate Vyāsa's arm is tormented instead by cutting off all of your own god's limbs. Hey, loser! You wanted interest on your capital, but you ended up losing your capital instead. By violating Vyāsa, you ended up slandering Śiva. Desiring servitude to Vyāsa, I have composed this story to solve the controversy of his arm.
>
> Vādirāja, *Pāṣaṇḍakhaṇḍanavyāsastōtra* (Rāmācārya 1911, vv. 29–31)

Unlike other Vyāsa *stōtra*s, *Praising Vyāsa* combines perfunctory textual arguments with declarations about Vyāsa's painted image not to construct a new image of Vyāsa in the minds of readers, but to restore an image under threat. The textual and visual arguments about Vyāsa's body amount to two intersecting axes for managing the volatility of Vyāsa's representation. The close connection between image and text suggests that the problem of cutting Vyāsa's arm was not simply an act of iconoclasm, but also a form of textoclasm in which the *Mahābhārata* and its interpretive methods were wounded alongside Vyāsa's body.

4 Piety and Paralysis at Śiva's Doorstep

I want to begin a provisional genealogy of *Vyāsantōḷ* by looking at an episode in the *Skanda Purāṇa*, in which Vyāsa, who is depicted as a zealous devotee of Viṣṇu, was paralyzed and convinced of Śiva's supremacy. That Vyāsa was the target of a type of forced conversion is unsurprising. Peter Bisschop has recently argued that the *Skanda Purāṇa* emerged in part as a Śaiva rejoinder to the Vaiṣṇavization of the *Mahābhārata*, and so any reappropriation of the epic would inevitably involve Vyāsa.[36] In an episode in the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa*, Vyāsa is depicted as a haughty Vaiṣṇava who wandered around haranguing sages about the glories of Hari. Once in the Naimiṣa Forest, Vyāsa found himself standing before thousands of ash-smeared Śaivas. He lifted a finger and indulged in a sanctimonious sermon:

> *parinirmathya vāgjālaṁ suniścityāsakṛd bahu*
> *idam ēkaṁ parijñātaṁ sēvyaḥ sarvēśvarō hariḥ*
> *vēdē rāmāyaṇē caiva purāṇēṣu ca bhāratē*

36. In Bisschop's words, the *Skanda Purāṇa* is where Vyāsa became "a dedicated Pāśupata adept" (Bisschop 2021: 49).

ādimadhyāvasānēṣu harir ēkō 'tra nāparaḥ
satyaṁ satyaṁ trisatyaṁ punaḥ satyaṁ na mṛṣā punaḥ
na vēdād aparaṁ śāstraṁ na dēvō 'cyutataḥ paraḥ
lakṣmīśaḥ sarvadō 'nānyo lakṣṁīśō 'py apavargadaḥ
ēka ēva hi lakṣṁīśas tatō 'dhyēyō na cāparaḥ
bhuktēr muktēr ihānyatra nānyō dātā janārdanāt
tasmāc caturbhujō nityaṁ sēvanīyaḥ sukhēpsubhiḥ
vihāya kēśavād anyaṁ yē sēvantē 'lpamēdhasaḥ
saṁsāracakrē gahane tē viśanti punaḥ punaḥ
ēka ēva hi sarvēśō hṛṣīkēśaḥ parāt paraḥ
taṁ sēvamānaḥ satataṁ sēvyas trijagatāṁ bhavēt
ēkō dharmapradō viṣṇus tv ēkō bahvarthadō hariḥ
ēkaḥ kāmapradaś cakrī tv ēkō mōkṣapradō 'cyutaḥ
śārṅgiṇaṁ yē parityajya dēvam anyam upāsatē
tē sadbhiś ca bahiṣkāryā vēdahīnā yathā dvijāḥ

After churning a vast ocean of words, and after becoming perfectly sure of their meaning time and again, I've come to know this one thing — Hari is the one who should be worshiped. Hari is the lord of all. From beginning to end, the Vedas, *Rāmāyaṇa*, Purāṇas, and *Mahābhārata* convey only Hari and no one else. This is the truth! This is the truth! Again, this is the truth! A triple oath. It's not wrong to say that there is no scripture greater than the Vedas, no god greater than Hari. No one but the Lord of Lakṣmī is the giver of all, and no one but Lakṣmī is the giver of heaven. Because the Lord of Lakṣmī is the one and only, it follows that he should be worshiped and no one else. No one but Janārdana gives enjoyment in this world and liberation hereafter. Thus, those who want happiness should always serve Viṣṇu. Having abandoned him, the stupid people who worship another god consign themselves again and again to the mysterious cycle of *saṁsāra*. Indeed, there is only one lord of all. Hṛṣīkēśa is the best of the best. Whoever attends to him would themselves be the object of constant worship of the three worlds. Only Viṣṇu is the giver of *dharma*. Only Hari is the giver of riches. Only the Discus-Bearer is the giver of pleasure. And only Acyuta is

> the giver of liberation. Those who forsake the Archer and worship another god should be abandoned by the virtuous, like a Dvija who has lost the Vedas.
>
> *Skāṇḍapurāṇīyakāśīkhaṇḍa* (Śrēṣṭhin 1908, vv. 95.11–19, fol. 351v)

The Śaiva sages of the Naimiṣa Forest revered Vyāsa for arranging the Vedas and authoring the *Mahābhārata*, but his homily made them agitated. The sages spoke up: "The people here don't trust what you have just argued with your finger raised confidently. But we would trust you if you proclaim it in front of Śiva in Benares."[37] Annoyed, Vyāsa set off for Śiva's city with his entourage. Their time in Benares began wondrously: Vyāsa bathed at the city's ghats and performed rites for Viṣṇu. Conch-calls announced his presence. Devotees adorned him with fresh garlands of Tulasi. And he sang the lord's many names in the streets. It was in the buoyant din of devotion that Vyāsa and his followers danced their way to Śiva's doorstep at the Viśveśa Temple. They sang some more, and when the music stopped, Vyāsa stood there among his students. "He lifted his right arm," the passage reads, "and he loudly recited the Naimiṣa sermon again, this time as if it were song — 'After churning a vast ocean of words, and after becoming perfectly sure of their meaning time and again, I've come to know this one thing — Hari is the one who should be worshiped, Hari is the lord of all.'"[38]

Vyāsa the pious provocateur became a chapter frontispiece for a Marathi translation of the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* published in 1881. The lithograph shows Vyāsa standing in front of Śiva and Pārvatī, right arm lifted as he pronounces Viṣṇu the lord of all. In the Marathi edition, Gayāsura is the one who points his finger and curses Vyāsa. The more popular telling has Śiva's attendee Nandin doing the cursing. In both, Vyāsa's arm became stiff and his voice faltered mid-sermon. For all the dancing and singing, Vyāsa could never quite summon Viṣṇu. But in the silent paralysis of Nandin's curse, Viṣṇu finally appeared. Rather than praise Vyāsa

37. *Skāṇḍapurāṇīyakāśīkhaṇḍa* (Śrēṣṭhin 1908, vv. 95.23–25, foll. 351v–352r):
bhavatā yat pratijñātaṁ niścityōtkṣipya tarjanīm
asmin māṇavakās tatra pariśraddadhatē na hi
pratijñātasya vacasas tava śraddhā bhavēt tadā
yadānandavanē śaṁbhōḥ pratijānāsi vai vacaḥ

38. *Skāṇḍapurāṇīyakāśīkhaṇḍa* (Śrēṣṭhin 1908 v. 95.44, fol. 352r):
punar ūrdhvaṁ bhujaṁ kṛtvā dakṣiṇaṁ śiṣyamadhyagaḥ
punaḥ papāṭha tān ēva ślōkān gāyann ivōccakaiḥ
parinirmathya vāgjalāṁ suniścityāsakṛd bahu
idam ēkaṁ parijñātaṁ sēvyaḥ sarvēśvarō hariḥ

Figure 2: Lithograph of Vyāsa lifting his right arm while proclaiming to Śiva that Viṣṇu is the supreme lord. Frontispiece of the 74th chapter of a Marathi translation of the Kāśīkhaṇḍa (1881).

for his devotion, however, Viṣṇu admonished him. "O Vyāsa! You've committed a serious sin. Even I'm terrified by your offense."[39] Viṣṇu explains:

> *ēka ēva hi viśvēśō dvitīyō nāsti kaścana*
> *tatprasādād ahaṁ cakrī lakṣmīśas tatprabhāvataḥ*
> *trailōkyarakṣāsāmārthyaṁ dattaṁ tēnaiva śambhunā*
> *tadbhaktyā paramaiśvaryaṁ mayā labdhaṁ varāt tataḥ*
> *idānīm stuhi śaṁbhuṁ yadi mē śubham icchasi*

39. *Skāṇḍapurāṇīyakāśīkhaṇḍa* (1908), vss. 95.48b–49a, fol. 352v:
aparādhaṁ mahac cātra bhavatā vyāsa niścitam
tavaitad aparādhēna bhītir mē 'pi mahattarā

> Śiva is the one true lord of the universe. There's no second. His grace makes me the discus bearer, his power makes me Lakṣmī's husband. It's Śambhu who gives me the ability to protect the three worlds. It's only by devotion to Śiva that he granted me divine status as a boon. If you desire my welfare, praise Śambhu.
>
> *Skāṇḍapurāṇīyakāśīkhaṇḍa* (Śrēṣṭhin 1908, vv. 95.49b–51, fol. 352v)

Still speechless, Vyāsa gestured for Viṣṇu to restore his speech. Viṣṇu obliged, and Vyāsa (arm still paralyzed) praised Śiva as the ultimate lord with eight verses (a *Vyāsāṣṭaka* of a different kind).

Paralysis was only the beginning of Vyāsa's difficulties in Kāśī. Hunger, desperation, and, in some tellings, exile would await him after Nandin lifted the curse.[40] Yet of all Vyāsa's travails, his paralyzed arm proved an especially potent subject of poetic focus. The Telugu poet Śrīnātha elaborated on this episode in his *Kāśīkhaṇḍamu*, and it appears to have migrated out of the Purāṇas altogether and circulated as a standalone work.[41] For instance, a short manuscript at the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute in Jodhpur titled *Praising the Paralysis of Vyāsa's Arm* (*Vyāsabhujastambhanastōtra*) recounts Vyāsa's paralysis in Kāśī in the form of praise poem.[42]

In both the *Skanda Purāṇa* and *Praising Vyāsa*, Vyāsa lifts his arm and proclaims his triple oath about Viṣṇu's supremacy — "This is the truth! This is the truth! Again, this is the truth!" In the *Skanda Purāṇa*, Vyāsa's declaration is his own, whereas in *Praising Vyāsa* it is Bhīṣma's. Vādirāja does not mention what happens to Vyāsa's voice, but the *Skanda Purāṇa* positions aphonia alongside monoplegia as connected afflictions. Vyāsa's arm is simply an extension of a pious speech act, and its uplifted position a gesture of steadfast devotion. It is the arm's connection to Vyāsa's Viṣṇu worship that transformed it into a location for, and an eventual symbol of, the rejection of the belief of Viṣṇu's supremacy over Śiva.

The arm as a site of divine intervention is a well-worn trope. Vyāsa's paralysis in Kāśī mirrors an episode in the Drōṇaparvan of the *Mahābhārata*, where the infant Śiva paralyzed Indra's uplifted arm just as Indra was about to kill him with a lightning bolt.[43] The *Śivadhar-*

40. Skanda goes on to narrate the famous episode of Vyāsa's hunger in Kāśī. The fourteenth-century Vīraśaiva and Telugu poet Śrīkaṇṭha used this episode in his *Bhīmēśvarakhaṇḍamu* to foreground Vyāsa's exile from Kāśī and his arrival at Dakṣarāma. See Narayana Rao and Shulman (2012: 76–81).
41. Śrīnātha, *Kāśīkhaṇḍamu* 7.103–110 in Narayana Rao and Roghair (1990: 281, n. 29).
42. *Vyāsabhujastambhastōtra* (1984), p. 266.
43. *Mahābhārata*, *Drōṇaparvan*, v. 7.173.60.

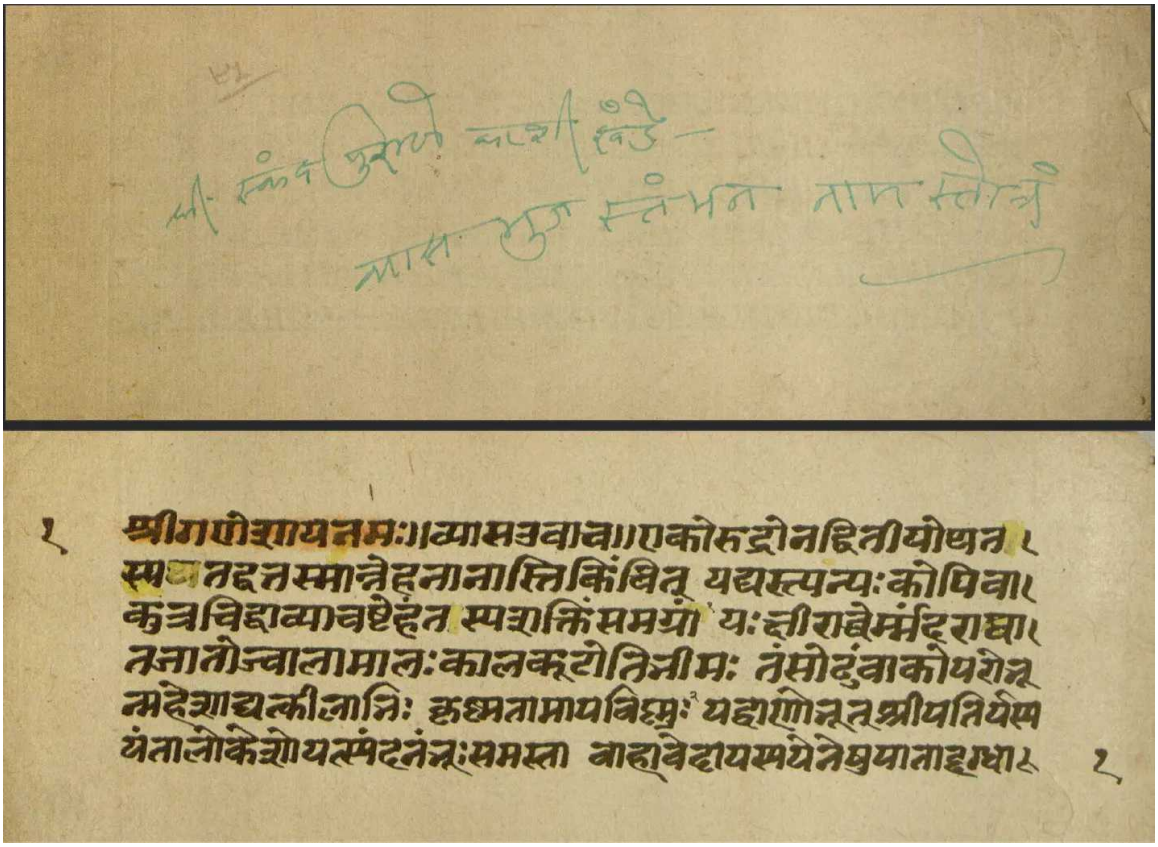

Figure 3: Leaf from the *Vyāsabhujastambhanastōtra*. Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, ms. no. 2392. The inscription in green ink reads *śrīskandapurāṇē kāśīkhaṇḍē vyāsabhujastaṁbhana(ṁ) nāma stōtram*.

mōttara (ca. seventh century CE), for instance, describes a variety of divine afflictions: the Sun has leprosy, Varuṇa has dropsy, Pūṣan is missing teeth, Soma has consumption, Dakṣa Prajāpati has a fever, and Indra has a paralyzed arm (*bhujastambha*). The *Śivadharmōttara* and the later Tamil *Civatarumōttaram* (ca. sixteenth century CE) do not specify Śiva's role in Indra's paralysis, but the *Taṇikaipurāṇam* (ca. eighteenth century CE) clarifies that it was indeed Śiva who brought on these afflictions.[44]

The paralysis of Indra's arm in the *Mahābhārata* and *Śivadharmōttara* may have provided a template for the story of Vyāsa's paralysis in Kāśī. Amputation is medically distinct from paralysis, but their narrative forms are distinguished only by degrees of permanence.

44. See *Śivadharmōttara* (2019), vv. 8.224-25. Thanks are due to Jesse Pruitt for bringing these verses to my attention.

The severing of Vyāsa's arm is different from the paralysis of Vyāsa's arm because it is a permanent intervention in a pious gesture instead of a temporary one. Amputation is perhaps best understood as an inevitable amplification of the kind of bodily interventions Śiva had long been depicted as exercising over other gods. The drift from paralysis to amputation is difficult to track, but it is evident in faint traces in Vīraśaiva writings from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, where Purāṇic accounts of Vyāsa's paralysis became a reference point for prescribed interventions against Śiva's naysayers and critics.

The ninth chapter of the *Siddhāntaśikhāmaṇi* of Śivayōgin (ca. mid-thirteenth century CE), for instance, enumerates a pious Śaiva's ideal conduct and their salvific rewards.[45] Many dictates concern matters of conduct, almsgiving, and ritual purity. But a handful of others promote a punitive strategy against Śiva's enemy's — "one should be ready to martyr themselves to protect a *liṅga* and its devotees from destruction," reads one verse.[46] Another reads:

> If you see someone criticizing Śiva, then you should hurt them (*ghātayēt*), or (in the least) you should curse them (*śapēt*). If you can't do either, then you should turn from that place and go away.[47]

For Maritōṇṭadārya, a commentator who lived between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, "to hurt" Śiva's enemies was an insufficiently harsh reading of the verb *ghātayēt*.[48] Śiva's enemies should be cursed or killed, and to support this, Maritōṇṭadārya classifies the verse under the heading "The Conduct of Vīrabhadra and Nandin" (*vīrabhadrācāranandikēśvarācāra*).[49] The reference is clear: In the eighty-ninth chapter of the *Skanda Purāṇa*, just a few chapters before Vyāsa's paralysis, Dakṣa hosted an enormous sacrifice but did not invite Śiva. Worried that Dakṣa's irreverence will spread to others,

45. Here I take M. R. Sakhare's dates. See Sakhare (1942: 370).
46. Śivayōgin, *Siddhāntaśikhāmaṇi* (Śivakumāra 2015, v. 9.34–35).
47. Śivayōgin, *Siddhāntaśikhāmaṇi* (Śivakumāra 2015, v. 9.36). The causative imperative verb *ghātayēt*, from the root *han* in the sense of violence (*hiṁsā*) or going (*gati*), is perhaps intentionally underdefined.
48. *Tōṇṭada* in old Kannada means "garden." Tiziana Ripepi (1997) has argued that as a name or title, Tōṇṭada only came into circulation after the Vijayanagara ruler Virūpākṣa, whose guru was given the title *Tōṇṭada Siddhaliṅgēśvara*. Ripepi disagrees with Jan Gonda, who dates Maritōṇṭadārya to the fifteenth century. She suggests instead that he lived in the eighteenth century.
49. In some recensions the heading reads, "The Conduct of Vīrabhadra and Basavēśvara" (*vīrabhadrācārabasavēśvarācāra*), which pairs with the mandate to turn away and leave if one is not able to curse or beat, which is an homage to a story of Basava leaving Kalyāṇa after the city was overrun and looted by marauding anti-Śaivas.

Śiva commanded Vīrabhadra to destroy the sacrificial grounds. The result was a bloodbath. Vīrabhadra and his gang destroyed the sacrificial pavilion. They dug up the altars, drank the oblations, crushed the utensils, and devoured the sacrificial animals. Drunk on power, they massacred those who attempted to flee — they castrated Vāyu and cut off Sarasvatī's nose. Aditi lost his lips, Aryaman his arms, Agni his tongue. Viṣṇu — the source of Dakṣa's strength and the recipient of the sacrifice — was nearly killed, but a voice from the heavens intervened just as Vīrabhadra was about to sink a trident into his chest. Vīrabhadra redirected his rage to Dakṣa, whom he swiftly bludgeoned to death with bare knuckles. Dakṣa's demise was hardly the end of the butchery. Those who had not yet fled were methodically dismembered and hung from the sacrificial post.

Maritōṇṭadārya seems to have had Vīrabhadra's murderous rage in mind when glossing the verb *ghātayēt* as "the conduct of Vīrabhadra," that is, "mutilating and murdering Śiva's enemies." Perhaps Maritōṇṭadārya found the end of the chapter, where Śiva, dismayed by Vīrabhadra's savagery, brought his victims back to life, an unsatisfactory coda to apostasy, for he never recommends taking pity on those who speak ill against Śiva or his followers. Or perhaps Śiva's mercy for those who were righteously slain was precisely what made violence palatable, even if only notionally. Regardless, Maritōṇṭadārya linked the second verbal action — "should curse" (*śapēt*) — to the story of Nandin and Vyāsa's arm just a few chapters later, thus presenting butchery and bodily maiming as a logical concatenation of cursing.[50]

Like most scriptural dictates, Maritōṇṭadārya's prescriptions mapped unevenly onto life on the ground. Critics of Vīraśaivism like Vādirāja Tīrtha — who was historically and regionally proximate to Maritōṇṭadārya — were, so far as we know, never cursed, beaten, or tortured for their dissenting views, despite having brushed shoulders with south India's most powerful Vīraśaiva warlords. In fact, the opposite was true. The Vīraśaiva kings at Keḷadi and Ikkeri, erstwhile vassals of Vijayanagara who controlled what is now western Karnataka, Goa, and the Kanara coasts, lavished Vādirāja and other putative critics of Vīraśaivism, including Jains and Muslims, with royal largesse.[51] Perhaps, then, cutting Vyāsa's arm was realpolitik, a calculated displacement of a perilous, even impossible, command onto a symbolically potent figure. Why waste energy on an ordinary slanderer when

50. For Śivayōgin, cursing and beating are complimentary responses to critics, but there's no reason to suspect that he had the *Skanda Purāṇa* in mind when writing the verse.

51. See my essay (2023) on Vādirāja's *Pāṣaṇḍakhaṇḍana* — an anti-Jain essay — for more on these patronage connections.

Vyāsa, "the paragon of Vedic Brahmanical *ṛṣi*-hood," to borrow Christopher Minkowski's words, is available instead?[52]

5 Conclusion: Contesting *Vyāsantōḷ* in Colonial Courts

Vādirāja, Śivayōgin, and Maritōṇṭadārya (to say nothing of Purāṇas and epics) leave a crucial question unanswered: how was *Vyāsantōḷ* practiced in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries? Vādirāja argues against the practice on textual grounds. Its proponents have confused or exploited the labyrinthine dialogues and frame stories of the *Mahābhārata* and pilloried Vyāsa for a declaration that was not his. By the early nineteenth century, however, when the Vīraśaivas of Kolhapur were preparing Vyāsa's arm for display in the city's streets, *Vyāsantōḷ* had spilled well beyond the written page. What follows is hardly an exhaustive account of this transition, but I want to conclude by way of a provisional sketch of *Vyāsantōḷ*'s juridical life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Vādirāja does not treat *Vyāsantōḷ* as a processional practice, but epigraphic evidence suggests that Vīraśaivas may have incorporated Vyāsa's arm into a fixed pillar or mobile pole adorned with a flag of Nandin and other decorations (aptly called the *Nandikamba*) sometime before the nineteenth century. In the early 1870s, Colonel John Mackenzie made a sketch of a stone tablet in Mysore that depicts a man and woman at the base of a fixed pillar mounted with a large arm. The woman touches the pillar while the man next to her brandishes a scythe or sword. Mackenzie labeled the image *Vyāsana tōḷu-kattu* — "cutting off Vyāsa's arm."

The pillar on the tablet appears to be fixed, perhaps even made of stone, but it nevertheless resembles the kind of objects that were vigorously litigated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Processional *Nandikamba*s were made of bamboo and festooned with streamers, bells, brass globes, and, before it was outlawed, an effigy of Vyāsa's arm and Nandin's horn (*nandikōḍu*). Even today, Vīraśaivas parade an armless *Nandikamba* through the streets of villages and towns in northern Karnataka and southern Maharashtra.

A comprehensive study of *Vyāsantōḷ*'s path through District and High Courts warrants a separate study and is beyond the scope of this article. What I present here is selective and sketchy, consisting mostly of cases presented before the Bombay High Court in the early and mid-twentieth century. A richer story will surely emerge from a close study of court

52. Minkowski (1989: 420).

Figure 4: Col. J. S. F. Mackenzie's sketch of a stone tablet depicting the Nandikamba, Vyāsantōḷ, and a pious Vīraśaiva couple. After much searching, I was never able to locate the tablet or an estampage. See Mackenzie (1873: 49).

archives, judge's notes, case records, private collections, and local newspapers. But even a cursory examination of the available legal material shows how the story of *Vyāsantōḷ* in colonial India is really a story about the definition of religion and its place in public life.

It is unclear precisely when, and through what legal pathways, *Vyāsantōḷ* became a subject of litigation, but records attest to district-level courts in the Deccan hearing civil cases in 1881 and probably earlier.[53] Gazetteers and other records suggest that *Vyāsantōḷ* was unevenly practiced throughout the Deccan and that no discernible consensus had emerged about its legal standing before the first decades of the twentieth century, after which a series of high-profile cases wound their way to the Bombay High Court and tested settled decisions about religious processions and more technical matters of procedure.

In July of 1910, Lingayats in Athani, a small town in the Bijapur District of the erstwhile Bombay Presidency, petitioned the Collector of Belgaum to approve a *Vyāsantōḷ* procession planned for September 20. Like the Kolhapur procession a year later, they hoped to commemorate the arrival of a prominent monastic leader. Similar events on the Kanara coast had been approved despite resistance from local Brahmans. The Vīraśaivas of Athani informed Collector B. A. Brenson of these earlier processions. After a month or so of deliberation, Brenson approved the Lingayats' request, albeit with clear instructions for where and how the procession should take place. Brenson wrote:

> I therefore allow the Lingayats of Athani to hold a *Vyāsantōḷ* procession after the termination of the Ganesh festival. The procession will be allowed to take place in Athani town on the 20th September 1910, between the hours of 8 and 10 AM. It will enter the town at the Siddheshwar Gate, pass through the Aditwar Peth, the road connecting the latter with the Buddhwar Peth, and then down the Buddhwar Peth to the Gachin Math, where it will terminate at 10 AM. In this quarter of the town the residents are nearly all Lingayats. The Police Sub-Inspector will conduct the procession with a sufficient force to prevent any possible disturbance.
>
> *Pandurang Shidrao v. Revapa Rudrapa Mohajan* (1910).

Pandurang Shidrao Gumaste Patil and other "Brahmans and non-Lingayats" appealed Brenson's decision to M. C. Gibbs, Commissioner of the Southern Division. In a fragile victory for the Lingayats, Gibb's declared on the 15th of September — four days before they were due to take to the streets — that Brenson's decision was sound and that *Vyāsantōḷ* could

53. See Oppert (1893: 58 n. 57), where Oppert mentions a decision at the Cittur Jilla court in 1881.

take place. In a bid to halt the procession, Patil and the others filed an ex-parte application to the Bombay High Court. The *Times of India* reported that the justices, aware of scheduled police presence and the potential for unrest, were "reluctant to grant an order at the eleventh hour on an ex-parte application." Yet the court succumbed to the situation and halted the procession until the "matter could be decided on merits."[54] The Lingayats of Athani would never march.

While reporting on the case, the *Times of India* explained *Vyāsantōḷ* to its educated, Anglophone readership:

> The word "Vyasantol" literally meant the "arm of Vyas." It was carried in procession on the top of a long pole in pursuance of a legend that Vyas, the composer of the Mahabharat epic and the other Hindu Puranic Shastras, was a great devotee of Vishnu in preference to Shiva. The arm which he had raised in devotion to Vishnu was therefore lopped off by a devotee of Shiva. In commemoration of this episode the arm was carried in public procession by the Lingayats who proposed themselves to be the ardent devotees of Shiva. The Brahman applicants on the other hand averred that this processional conveyance of the lopped limb of a sage man and sacred person like the muni Vyas, whom they held in considerable veneration was insulting, offensive, and revolting to their religious sentiments.
>
> Times of India (October 1910)

Despite being "revolting" to the "religious sentiments" of some, *Vyāsantōḷ* was never litigated on the basis of blasphemy law. The case before the Court concerned the right of religious procession and the authority of a District Magistrate to approve and oversee it. On October 14, the Bombay High Court ruled against Patil and the Brahman applicants, citing earlier cases that protected religious procession in public streets, including a judgment the court had issued just months earlier about a Lingayat parade in Deshnur (a controversy involving an automobile).[55]

Newspapers played an important role both in bringing *Vyāsantōḷ* to a wider readership and in amplifying misinformation.[56] A year after the Athani court case, the *Times of In-*

54. *Times of India* (October 1910).
55. The cases are *Sadagopachariar v. A. Rama Rao* (1902), which was followed in *Baslingappa Parappa Chedachal v. Dharmappa Basappa Chedachal* (1910).
56. See for instance a piece titled "Behind the Indian Veil: Faiths and Feuds" (*Times of India*, November 1910). The anonymous author named "an Indian" suggests that it was Virabhadra who cut off Vyāsa's arm.

dia reported from so-called "vernacular sources" about a marauding band of Lingayats in Bagalkot, a small town in the Bijapur District. In addition to parading Vyāsa's arm through the town's streets, the *Times* reported, the Lingayats "defiled" the town's Viṭṭhala temple, carried their guru's palanquin "cross-wise" through the streets (an honor evidently restricted to Brahmans), and "committed on the Brahman residents numerous and unprovoked assaults." The story was not true. The *Times* ran a brief press report on November 9 titled "Disturbance at Bagalkot" clarifying that Vyāsa's arm had in fact not been paraded, that Lingayats had every right to parade their guru "cross-wise," and that "the few individuals who did receive injuries seem to have provoked them (the Lingayats) by wantonly meddling with a lawful procession."[57]

After the Bombay High Court dismissed the Athani Brahman's ex parte application in October 1910 and sent *Vyāsantōḷ* back to lower civil courts, an atmosphere of legal ambiguity seems to have provided an opening for Vīraśaivas elsewhere in the Deccan to hold their own *Vyāsantōḷ* processions. Rajarshi Shahu — the Maharaj of Kolhapur who approved the parade in May 1911 and promised his marching band to boot — cited the Athani case as a reason for allowing the procession to proceed. But this favorable ambiguity would be short lived. On May 6, 191, just a week before the procession was due to take place in Kolhapur, Government Resolution no. 2658 was passed, which not only banned *Vyāsantōḷ* in Athani, but in the District of Belgaum "for all time."[58] The Lingayats of Athani swiftly sued.

A lengthy appeals process in lower courts meant that the Bombay High Court would not decide another case on *Vyāsantōḷ* until 1916. *Dundappa Mallappa Sigandhi and Others v. Secretary of State for India and Others* would prove a more complex and consequential case than the ex parte application of 1910. Having done considerable research, the judges (one of whom presided over the 1910 case) wrote that *Vyāsantōḷ* had been the subject of acrimonious litigation and civil conflict for more than a century and that a dispute about the right to parade Vyāsa's arm had "always existed."[59] They specified that it was "Vaishnavite Brahmans" who were "most directly aggrieved," but that Śaiva Brahmans and "non-Lingayat Hindus" sympathize with an "agitation against the procession."[60]

Despite *Vyāsantōḷ* being an "obnoxious" and "unbecoming ceremony," according to the defendants' council, *Vyāsantōḷ* appeared to be on firm legal footing for two reasons: First, the way in which the Government Resolution had been upheld in lower courts was

57. Times of India (1911).
58. Times of India (1916).
59. *Dundappa Mallappa Sigandhi and Others v. Secretary of State for India and Others* (1916).
60. *Sigandhi v. Secretary of State* (1916).

illegal (the details of which need not be dealt with here).[61] Second, religious procession was a right that had been secured some years earlier by the Bombay High Court itself. The judges ruled in favor of the Lingayats once again.

Two cases decided by the Bombay High Court secured the right to religious procession. The first, *Sadagopachariar v. A. Rama Rao* (1907), concerned a century-long dispute between Vadakalai and Tenkalai Vaiṣṇavas over the use of streets around the Devanatha Swamy Temple in Thiruvanthipuram and its adjoining shrine dedicated to Vedānta Deśika, an important Vadakalai guru. After a century of legal wrangling, the Court ruled in 1907 that the public have a right to use city streets, even those adjoining prominent temples.[62] The second case, which involved the use of automobiles in Lingayat processions, pushed the Court to clarify its position further: "every member of the public and every sect has a right to use the public streets in a lawful manner and it lies on those who would restrain him or it to show some law or custom having the force of law abrogating the privilege."[63]

Despite these safeguards, the courts never distinguished a "religious" procession from a non-religious one, nor had it specified whether laws protecting religious processions extended to others. This ambiguity laid the groundwork for a strategy that would be *Vyāsantōḷ*'s undoing — prove that Vyāsa's arm is not a "religious" feature of the *Nandikamba* procession and that non-religious processions are not protected under the law. A series of cases in the 1930s and 1940s did precisely this.

In the early 1930s, the Sub-Divisional Magistrate of Bijapur prohibited Lingayats in the small village of Mangoli from conducting a *Vyāsantōḷ* procession. In the process of hearing

61. It had been upheld on the basis of the District Police Act (Bom. Act IV of 1890), which, the defendants argued, allowed the Government not to "prohibit" *Vyāsantōḷ* per se, but to deny future applications for its procession in perpetuity across the whole district.

62. In 1807, Tenkalais in Thiruvanthipuram sued Vadakalais for having been prevented from installing an image of a Tenkalai guru in the Devanatha Swamy Temple. The Tenkalais lost the suit but installed the image in a nearby house and began parading it in the streets around the temple. The Vadakalais sued in response, alleging that the streets around the temple were originally the property of Vadakalais who permitted the construction of houses on the condition that no "alien deity" be worshiped in them or processed on nearby streets. The court consulted a handful of sympathetic pandits who, the 1907 judges remark, based their decision "not so much on legal grounds as on precepts relating to ritual and ceremonial observances to be found in the ancient treatises on such subjects." The Vadakalais won their case but there were numerous suits and countersuits until 1886, when the Magistrate of the Southern Arcot District refused to prohibit the public procession of Tenkalai images. Vadakalais lost on appeal and then brought the case to the Bombay High Court. The Court determined that there was no evidence attesting to the streets surrounding the temple belonging to Vadakalais. To the contrary, the streets belonged to the public under Madras Act No. V of 1884. See *Baslingappa Parappa Chedachal v. Dharmappa Basappa Chedachal* (1910).

63. *Baslingappa Parappa Chedachal v. Dharmappa Basappa Chedachal* (1910).

the Lingayats' lawsuit against the magistrate's decision, a lower appellate court determined that *Vyāsantōḷ* was not a "religious" rite on the grounds that it had not been "enjoined or even recommended by any shastra or work containing the tenets of the Lingayats or the Veershaiva faith."[64] In other words, *Vyāsantōḷ* lacked the kind of scriptural and scholastic edifice that propped up many Brahmanical rituals. This extraordinarily narrow definition of a "religious procession" was upheld by the Bombay High Court in 1945, after the Mangoli case had bounced around in lower courts for more than a decade.

The 1945 case is significant not only because it determined that *Vyāsantōḷ* was not properly religious and was thus not protected under the law; it also appears to have been the first time a plaintiff argued for a general non-religious right to procession. Drawing on a series of rulings concerning the Shi'i Matam procession, the lawyer arguing the Lingayats' case in 1945 claimed that the law protects a general right to procession.[65] The Bombay High Court disagreed, but three years later, while hearing a lawsuit that sought to prevent a procession during the Dasara festival from passing by a mosque in Sakur, Maharashtra, the Bombay High Court reversed their position and determined that the law protects a general right to procession. In their decision the judges wryly asked, "can it be said that conducting a non-religious procession along a thoroughfare is a less lawful and reasonable use of a highway than conducting a religious procession?"[66] Too late. By 1948, the litigious zeal of Lingayats in the Deccan appears to have dissipated, or at least the practice seems to have no longer been litigated.

In deciding that texts make a rite or ritual "religious," the courts tilted the tables toward Brahman religiosity and away from oral and non-textual forms of devotion. This is not an unfamiliar story: historians have long pointed to the outsized power of Brahman pandits in colonial jurisprudence. But *Vyāsantōḷ* is not simply a story of Brahman triumph over lay religiosity. The circuitous path the practice took through colonial courts highlights decisions on the part of the judiciary to protect (at least for a time) certain practices that Brahman communities vigorously opposed. *Vyāsantōḷ*'s public life many have ended when the judge's gavel dropped in Bombay in 1945, but the practice has much to tell us about religious conflict in the subcontinent and their textual pre-histories.

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64. *Sangabasavaswami Mahantaswami v. Baburao Ganesh* (1945).
65. *Saiyid Manzur Hasan v. Saiyid Muhammad Zaman* (1924) and *Martin and Co. v. Syed Faiyaz Husain* (1943).
66. *Chandu Sajan Patil and Others v. Nyahalchand Panamchand and Others* (1948).

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(1) Law Times, (2) Lower Burma Rulings, (3) Upper Burma Rulings; Calcutta (1) Indian Law Reports, (2) Law Journal, (3) Weekly Notes; Madras (1) Indian Law Reports, (2) Law Journal, (3) Law Times, (4) Weekly Notes; Nagpur Law Reports; Oudh Cases; Punjab (1) Law Reporter, (2) Record, (3) Weekly Reporter; Sind Law Reporter, With a Large Number of Extra Rulings of High Courts Not Reported Elsewhere. 1910. Lahore: Manager at the Law Pub. Press.

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Early Traces of *Vacana*s in Kannada Literature

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Abstract

The *vacanas*, short devotional poems in the Kannada language that started to be composed in the twelfth century, are central for the modern identity of the "Vīraśaiva" or "Liṅgāyat" religious tradition and are also popular among the Kannada-speaking public and, through translations, global audience. But there is an ongoing interpretive controversy of what the *vacana*s are "really" about, and this partly rests on the "authenticity" of the poems themselves. While most uncritically attribute the *vacana*s we have at hand today to the twelfth century, some reject this attribution by pointing to the *vacana*s' complex history of transmission and dissemination over roughly eight centuries, and specifically to the fact that written collections of *vacana*s only started to appear during the fifteenth century, three hundred years after their purported composition. This article adds nuance to the above controversy by tracing quotations of *vacana*s in a written hagiographical text that was created around the turn of the twelfth century. While disproving the claim that no written evidence for *vacana*s exists before the fifteenth century, the article also complicates assumptions about their content and other textual features in the early period by pointing to the relative marginality of the *vacana*s in the early hagiographical material, the absence of the term "vacana" and a concomitant appreciation of their outstanding poetic features in it. Lastly, the article suggests several options for explaining the difference in how the *vacana*s were understood in the early period and today.

Keywords: vacanas, śaivism, basava, akka mahādēvi, allama, ragaḷe, harihara, vīraśaiva, liṅgāyata

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1 Introduction

Many people see the *vacana*s, short devotional poems in the Kannada language that started to be composed in the twelfth century, as *the* major vehicle of the attitudes, values, and practices of one of the region's most prominent religious traditions, known as "Vīraśaiva" or "Liṅgāyat" (the relationship between the two terms being historically complicated). The *vacana*s are central to the identity of this tradition, and as such they play a major role in the ongoing controversy about whether the tradition is a part of "Hinduism" more broadly or stands apart from it.[1] But even outside of this religious tradition the *vacana*s are enormously popular among the Kannada-speaking public.[2] The translations of selected *vacana*s into English by A.K. Ramanujan in 1973 presented them to a global audience as evidence of spiritual and social rebellion against oppression by the religious mainstream in a way that anticipates modern and Western values.[3] Ramanujan did not invent this reception of the *vacana*s, however; since the late colonial period they had been mobilized for various social and political movements. Today, people quote them in support of a range of positions: for individual devotion and against blind ritualism and superstition; for personal spirituality unfettered by religious orthodoxy; for social upliftment and against the oppression of marginalized groups; for women's rights, and more.

Examples of invoking *vacana*s as a premodern precursor to modern and progressive values abound.[4] But there are also those who read *vacana*s differently. Against the move-

1. See articles in this volume.
2. See an example in Boratti (2013).
3. Ramanujan (1973).
4. Rajghatta (2018: 18–19, 28–29).

ment to separate the Liṅgāyat tradition from Hinduism, some scholars quote *vacana*s to emphasize the tradition's continuity with other Hindu traditions; some claim, too, that the *vacana*s quoted in support of progressive values are inauthentic.[5]

A handful of scholars have pointed out the open-endedness with which *vacana*s are read and the interests that have shaped the multiple interpretations mentioned above.[6] But some part of the *interpretive* controversy of what the *vacana*s are "really" about — although clearly not the entire controversy — rests on the philological question of the "authenticity" of the texts themselves. When we experience a *vacana*, either in Kannada or in translation, either printed in a book, or performed to Hindustani or Carnatic music, how, if at all, do we account for the history of the text that we are experiencing? The uncritical attribution of the entire corpus to poet-saints of the twelfth century has led to a certain complacency, even on the part of scholars, as if the texts have come to us (or our eyes) directly from the twelfth century. Yet it is readily acknowledged that they have come to us through a long and winding journey across time and media. We are still learning about the *vacana*s' textual history, and already it is clear that this body of songs has undergone heavy editing and reformulation at different points.[7]

To read *vacana*s critically means to consider their complex history of transmission and dissemination over roughly eight centuries or so. This history is punctuated by dramatic shifts in how *vacana*s were handled. For example, they were collected, edited, and written down as texts for the first time only in the fifteenth century. Until that important moment, the *vacana*s were transmitted from one generation to the next in oral recitations and performances, perhaps with the aid of written notes — a practice that inherently implies textual malleability and that apparently went on for a period of about three hundred years.[8] Another important moment in the history of the *vacana*s started from 1870, with their early print publications: these publications involved the heavy-handed work of culling, reframing, and even rewriting that was guided by contemporary political, social, and cultural agents in the colonial and, later, the post-colonial, periods.[9] Paradoxically, such historical interventions in the textuality of the *vacana*s — starting with recording them in manuscripts, then

5. *ibid.*, 28.
6. Ben-Herut (2018: 9–12).
7. I am spending some portions of research time between 2023 and 2025 to study the literary history of the *vacana*s with the support of the Fulbright-Nehru Academic and Professional Excellence Award and the Senior Short Term Research Grant, funded by the American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).
8. Chandra Shobhi (2005).
9. Boratti (2012); Boratti and Ben-Herut (forthcoming).

fixing them in printed books, and now making them available in digital media — have contributed to the widespread presumption that *vacana*s are and have always been an integral and natural part of what we think of as "premodern Kannada literature," independently of cultural and religious practices, of performances, and of the various interpretations of and responses (or lack thereof) to the *vacana*s throughout this circuitous history.

Whether intentionally or not, *vacana*s are almost always presented to their readers and audiences without the apparatus of textual criticism and as the *ipsissima verba* of twelfth-century poet-saints. This is true not only with regard to translations of *vacana*s but also to publications in Kannada.[10] In many of these publications, issues such as textual sources and manuscript variation are briefly dealt with in the introduction, if at all, while the *vacana*s in the body of the publication are rendered without the apparatus of alternative readings. This practice speaks of the exceptional popularity of the *vacana*s and their unique appeal to large audiences, but it also contributes to the general obfuscation of complexities in the history and textuality of the *vacana*s. A good case in point for this is the extensive edition of the *vacana*s edited by Eṁ. Eṁ. Kalaburgi, called *Samagra Vacanasāhityada Janapriya Āvṛtti* (The Popular Edition of the Complete *Vacana* Literature), which contains fifteen volumes. This popular edition was reprinted several times and is commonly used for accessing *vacana*s. In the introduction to the first volume, Kalaburgi lists the sources he used for this publication and provides examples of text variations in fourteen *vacana*s, adding an explanation for why a specific variation is, to the editorial board, the "correct one."[11] But the 1,414 *vacana*s in the body of this publication have no indication of these editorial choices. Furthermore, the historical possibilities embedded in the existence of the variations are never considered, and questions about the textuality of the *vacana*s before they were collected in manuscripts are absent altogether.

*vacana*s are thought of by many today as an outstanding form of Kannada literature. But this appreciation appears to be a late one. In the first centuries after the appearance of *vacana*s, very few Śaiva authors minimally refer to them and the literati outside the circle

10. As exception to this rule, some of R. C. Hiremath's publications of *vacana* collections from the second part of the twentieth century have a critical apparatus. An example of the disregard for textual criticism issues in translations of *vacana*s can be found in Ramanujan's short and general statement about the study of the *vacana*s' textuality in a footnote to the "Translator's Note" section of his translations (1973: 11 n. 2).
11. Kalaburgi (2001a [1993]: xxvii–xxxiii). Complete list of sources is provided in pp. 428–436. See also Basavarāju (2001 [1960]: 29–38).

of Śaiva devotees never make any mention of them.[12] The idea that the *vacana*s were not considered a literary event in their own time was articulated in 2005 in an unpublished dissertation by Prithvi Datta Chandra Shobhi that locates the textualization of *vacana*s in the rise of the Viraktas of the fifteenth century, during the Vijayanagara period. Chandra Shobhi writes:

> Even in the pre-*virakta* narratives on the lives of the *vacanakāra*s [*vacana*-composers], nowhere are *vacana*s mentioned or quoted. It appears as if until the fifteenth century, neither Śaiva authors nor for that matter others recognized and valued *vacanakāra*s as the authors of *vacana*s.
>
> Chandra Shobhi (2005: 126)

Chandra Shobhi argues that we do not have access to the *vacana*s before the fifteenth century — supposedly the first time they appeared in writing — and that the silence by earlier Śaiva authors is indicative of their lack of recognition or appreciation of the *vacana*s and of the *vacanakāra*s, their composers, as such. Chandra Shobhi presents a radical alternative to the popular reading of the *vacana*s as authentic testimonies of the twelfth century, arguing that the absence of any textual source before the fifteenth century means there is no direct access to *vacana*s of the twelfth century. Accordingly, Chandra Shobhi goes on the analyze in his dissertation the massive textualization of the *vacana*s in the fifteenth century as the earliest moment for making a cultural sense of these poems, one which reflected communal anxieties of Vīraśaiva communities of that period.

In this article I probe a portion of the early Śaiva narratives that Chandra Shobhi refers to in the above quotation, specifically life stories of *vacanakāra*s and their associates. I show that, contrary to Candra Shobhi's claim, these texts *do* contain descriptions and quotations of what we recognize today as *vacana*s. Significantly, however, these references are infrequent in the examined set of stories and are sometimes incomplete, inconclusive, or obscure. These findings do not sit well with the popular wholesale embrace of the *vacana*s as products of the twelfth century nor with the categorical doubt that Chandra Shobhi casts regarding the possibility of having a "direct access" to the *vacana*s before the intervention of the Viraktas. Instead, the findings presented in this article lead to a more fine-grained understanding of

12. D. R. Nagaraj comments on the absence of *vacana*s from a thirteenth-century anthology of Kannada literature that "professional intellectuals did not consider the *vacana*s literature" (2003: 364), but he does not consider this observation in his overall treatment of the *vacana*s as a watershed mark in the history of Kannada literature.

the *vacana*s' textual reception before the fifteenth century, according to which the *vacana*s, though certainly present in the early hagiographies, remained very much in the narratives' margins, and were associated with only few of the saintly figures. Put differently, while the *vacana*s certainly reverberated in the early written texts about the local devotional culture, they did not receive a significant amount of attention from the early Śaiva authors who recorded in their works the emerging devotional (*bhakti*) tradition in the Kannada-speaking region.

A recognition of the liminal status of the *vacana*s in the earliest devotional texts opens up a new set of historical questions. Above all, it raises questions about the *vacana*s' presence and role in the early history of Śaiva devotion in the Kannada-speaking region. If the *vacana*s were indeed the harbinger of a new local devotional culture, as commonly thought of today, why did the authors who wrote about it in the proceeding decades and centuries dedicate so little space to them in their writings?[13] Given the fact that the saints of the twelfth century are today thought of primarily as *vacanakāra*s, "composers of *vacana*s," how do we account for the fact that the first authors who wrote about these saints did not think of them in this way? And what might this apparent lacuna indicate about the reception of the *vacana*s and the historical circumstances of the devotional community in its earliest stages?

The body of the earliest Kannada and Telugu narratives referring to the twelfth-century model devotees this article focuses on dates to the early thirteenth century. It contains a variety of authors and styles, but at its core we can clearly identify three poetic mavericks among the group of early hagiographers. Each of these authors introduces in his works radical departures from contemporaneous works in terms of literary practices and religious visions, departures that would have a lingering effect in succeeding centuries. The first two of the three — Hampeya Harihara and his nephew Rāghavāṅka — wrote in Kannada, and the third, Pālkuriki Sōmanātha, wrote mostly in Telugu (but also in Sanskrit, Kannada, and other languages). Considered together, these three poets represent a major shift in regional

13. There is a need for a separate study on the presence of *vacana*s in contemporaneous epigraphy. I was only able to locate a few inscriptions from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries that quote *vacana*s by Siddharāma, a saintly figure who operated at the northern borders of the local tradition, in the Marathi-speaking region (Upadhyaya 2005: cviii–cx). I wish to thank Tony Evensen for his help in locating these materials and thinking about them. Siddharāma was credited with *vacana*s by Harihara's nephew Rāghavāṅka (Devadevan 2016: 14 n. 50), and there is room to speculate about the relation of this particular saint and the later use of the word *vacana*. Harihara mentions Siddharāma several times in his *Ragaḷe*s about other saints, but he apparently never dedicated a *Ragaḷe* to this figure.

literature that undoubtedly echoed a larger historical process: the introduction of devotional religion as a major cultural and social force.[14]

In general, the *vacana*s were not what Harihara, Rāghavāṅka, Sōmanātha, and their immediate followers wanted to highlight about these saints. In their writings, the saints' devotional sentiment was communicated not via lyrical utterances or public discourses but through religious *action* that included public and private worship, miracle making, and care for the devotional community. This article will focus on the work of Harihara. Judging by a casual examination of the other extant works, his treatment of *vacana*s is similar to that of all his near contemporaries.[15]

2 Hampeya Harihara's *Ragaḷe* Stories

Harihara was a prolific author who composed his poetic works in Hampi in the early thirteenth century (close to two hundred years before the establishment of the Vijayanagara Empire in the same place).[16] In terms of its content, his poetic oeuvre is devotional, and for this reason he can be considered an innovator against the prevailing trend of courtly narrative poetry. Stylistically, the genres and styles that he used involved both traditional practices and new ones. Harihara composed several *śataka*s (hundred-verse poems), one *aṣṭaka* (eight-verse poem), and one acclaimed *mahāprabandham* (court epic).[17] Although these compositions were written in familiar pan-Indian styles, they nevertheless present stylistic and thematic innovations in a clearly articulated and self-confident devotional voice. They do not, however, directly address the historical appearance of the twelfth-century saints in the Kannada-speaking region, their remarkable exploits, or the poetry associated with them. It is another work by Harihara — a collection of stories written in the *ragaḷe* meter and conventionally referred to as the *Śivaśaraṇara Ragaḷegaḷu* (*Ragaḷe Stories of Śiva's Saints*, eponymous of the meter) that presents for the first time in writing the early Śaiva co-

14. In the opening to his most appreciated work the *Hariścandra Cāritra*, the author Rāghavāṅka offers homage to major Śaiva poets (who composed in Sanskrit) as well as to his uncle Harihara, but he does not mention any local devotee who is recognized today as a *vacana* composer. See *Hariścandra Cāritra* 1.12–13 (Viswanatha 2017: 12–15). In his *Siddharāma Cāritra*, there are sporadic references to utterances by Siddharāma that might be considered as *vacana*s. See Devadevan (2020: 307 n. 5).
15. See comparison of *vacana*s and *ṣaṭpadi*s verses in Bhīmakavi's Kannada version of the *Basava Purāṇaṁ* (Vidyāśaṅkara 2008: 104–109).
16. This dating is conservative. It is possible that Harihara was writing a few decades earlier, in the second half of the twelfth century (Devadevan 2020: 307 n. 4).
17. Ben-Herut (2018: 45).

hort of devotees from the Kannada regions, including major figures such as Basava, Allama Prabhu, and Akka Mahādēvi.[18]

The fact that the *Ragaḷe* stories were the first written account of the Kannada saints contributes to this collection's high ranking in the list of extant textual sources about these figures. Harihara composed these stories shortly — perhaps as little as a few decades — after the times of these saints, and in the same region of today's north Karnataka.[19] The lives of the saints are presented in a linear and straightforward manner, from before the figure's birth to after his or her passing away, with obvious highlighting of significant moments in the saint's religious career. The portrayal of the saints in the *Ragaḷe* stories is remarkably lucid, and it conveys the poet's deep familiarity with the local, recently formed devotional culture.[20]

Considering Harihara's careful narrative crafting of these stories, one might expect to find a profusion of detail about the *vacana*s and the contexts in which they were created. However, the *Ragaḷe* stories have little to say about the *vacana*s, and what they do say is uneven and does not fully cohere with later configurations of the *vacana*s' history. In this sense, Harihara's treatment of the *vacana*s further problematizes our historical understanding of them. His view regarding the marginality of the *vacana*s is made evident in the generally minute space they occupy in the saints' lives; the majority of the saintly figures in Harihara's text, including those whose *vacana*s became their main claim to fame, are mostly appreciated for devotional exploits and not for composing poetry.

Above all other aspects of their lives, the *Ragaḷe* stories celebrate the saints' unwavering determination to remain exclusively devoted to the god Śiva. This determination is expressed in myriad forms, of which the most apparent is their impassioned worship of the god. In addition, they are remembered for exceptional acts and miracles, and these occur mostly in the context of public competition against agents of other religions or in situations of social crisis. Another recurring feature of these life stories is the saints' support of the local community of devotees by, for example, providing them with money, jewelry, clothes, and food, and organizing collective worship events.

Moreover, in the passages in which Harihara refers to the saints' devotional poetry, he does not focus on their exceptional messages, their unique mode of expression, or their con-

18. See Ben-Herut (2018) for an in-depth analysis of the early Kannada Śiva-devotion culture based on this work.
19. Many *Ragaḷe* stories mention Hampi as the place where the author lived, while the twelfth-century saints are associated with different towns, including Kalyāṇa.
20. A separate project of *Ragaḷe* translations by R. V. S. Sundaram and the author of this article was recently completed. See Ben-Herut and Sundaram (forthcoming).

versational contexts — all the distinguishing characteristics of *vacana* literature that came to be most recognized and appreciated and continue to be so today.[21] Rather, Harihara usually mentions devotional poetry as a stock ingredient in a fixed grammar of ritual that takes place either in private worship or in public communal worship, but even this reveals very little about the performance of *vacana*s. Despite Harihara's sensibility for composing devotional poetry in Kannada, attested to in the *Ragaḷe* stories and in his other works,[22] his mentioning of devotional songs, with a few exceptions discussed below, is short and general, even offhand. Thus, for example, when Harihara describes the devotional gatherings in which Kōvūra Bommatande participates, songs are mentioned nominally to explain the saint's excitement with no reference to their content or to their performative or dramatic context:

> *sukhadiṁ purātanara gītadoḷu bāḷutuṁ*
> *mukhav' alardu bhaktirasa sindhuvinoḷ āḷutaṁ*
> *gītakke mecci meccugaḷan olid' īvutaṁ*
> *ōtu nūtanavastrakanakadiṁ taṇiputaṁ*
> *śaraṇara padaṅgaḷaṁ bigiy appi taṇivutaṁ*

> He lived happily by the joyful songs of the elders,
> and with a beaming face he was immersed in the nectar of devotion.
> Inspired by the songs, he praised them,
> affectionately appeasing the devotees with gold and new clothes,
> and himself by tightly embracing their feet.
>
> *Kōvūra Bommatandeya Ragaḷe* 3.3–7 (Suṅkāpura 1976: 371)

It is difficult to know from this passage whether the songs Bommatande heard were what later became known as *vacana*s, since Harihara refers to them as *gīta*, which means simply "song," and attributes them to the *purātanaru*, or "elders," a label that might refer to earlier devotees from other regions.[23]

21. Definitive testimony to the appreciation of *vacana*s for their exceptional messages, their unique mode of expression, their conversational contexts, and other features is provided by A. K. Ramanujan in the introduction to his translations of *vacana*s (1973: 19–55).
22. Ben-Herut (2018: 25–27).
23. Ben-Herut (2015: 278).

Harihara does occasionally use the word "*vacana*" in the eighteen *Ragaḷe* stories about saints from the Kannada-speaking region but never in relation to any recognizable *vacana*.[24] Read in context, the word "*vacana*" in the *Ragaḷe* stories most likely means an "utterance" and not "*vacana*" in the sense that we know the term today.[25] Another set of related terms Harihara uses are *gadya* ("prose") and *padya* ("verse"), which he sometimes invokes as a pair when relating to verbal expression. In Kannada poetics, the former term overlaps with *vacana* in the general sense of "prose," while the latter signifies a versified text.[26] The poems we call today *vacana*s are, with few exceptions, not metrically arranged, and therefore correspond to the general meaning of *vacana* and of *padya* in the sense of "prose," although many are rhythmically patterned.

With these general observations in mind, we now approach specific *Ragaḷe* stories in Harihara's collection that bear upon the question of the presence and significance of the *vacana*s in the early period of the tradition.

3 Not *Vacana*s: Kēśirāja's Devotional Songs

As noted, in specific cases in which Harihara mentions saints' poems, he usually describes them in a conventional manner. Missing is any reference to the *vacana*s' style and themes as well as any definite sense of how they came to be known with time. A case in point is found in the story about Koṇḍaguḷi Kēśirāja, a Śaiva poet who is described as a prominent leader

24. I was able to locate a total of thirteen mentions of the word *vacana* in this group of *Ragaḷe* stories. They include: *Rēvaṇasiddhēśvarana Ragaḷe* ch. 2, prose (Suṅkāpura 1976: 163); *Kēśirājadaṇṇāyakara Ragaḷe* ch. 2, prose (Suṅkāpura 1976: 193); *Vaijakavveya Ragaḷe* v. 104; twice in *Ādayyana Ragaḷe* (ch. 2, prose page 324, and v. 3.221); *Ēkāntarāmitandeya Ragaḷe* v. 39, and *Jommayyana Ragaḷe* ch. 2 (prose page 389). Five mentions merit special attention: *Kōvūra Bommatandeya Ragaḷe* 3.44; *Mahādēviyakkana Ragaḷe* v. 3.197; and thrice in *Basavēśvara Dēvara Ragaḷe* ch. 6 (prose pages 50–51). In the first occurrence of these five, Bommatande instructs his son on devotional conduct that includes performing rituals, protecting the Śiva settlement, and heeding the *vacana*s of Śiva devotees (without further detail). In the second occurrence, Akka Mahādēvi quotes the truthful *vacana*s of the elders to always take care of other devotees. The latter three occurrences appear with regard to Basava's words addressed to King Bijjaḷa and to devotees, but these words do not match any known *vacana* and lack a signature line at the end. In addition, two manuscripts of the *Mahādēviyakkana Ragaḷe* have the expression "words of the saintly devotees" (*śaraṇavacana*) in v. 5.133, while the other manuscripts have "[words from the] mouths of the saintly devotees" (*śaranavadana*). The above list is based on searches in an uncritical digital version of the relevant *Ragaḷe* stories that was created with the help of Poorvi Acharya (June 2022).
25. See also Devadevan 2016: 14 n. 50.
26. Cidānandamūrti (1966).

of the Śaiva devotional community and an important political figure in Kalyāṇa, presumably several decades prior to Basava's tenure at Bijjaḷa's court. Kēśirāja's poetry is not a central theme in the *Ragaḷe* about him. It is referred to in only eight verses in the opening section of the text. There, Harihara writes:

> *niccal eṇṭuṁ padyamaṁ sōmanāthaṅge*
> *accari migalke pēḷvaṁ śivānāthaṅge*
> *pañcākṣarānubandhaṁ chandav' anuv' āge*
> *pañcamukhanāmad' abhidhāna buddhiy ad' āge*
> *śivavākya śabdaśuddhi vyākaraṇam āge*
> *śivabhakti vṛttakk' alaṅkāradant' āge*
> *padyaṅgaḷaṁ śivaṅg' anudinaṁ pēḷutaṁ*
> *cōdyav ene śaṅkarastōtradoḷe bāḷutaṁ*

> Every day he astonishingly composed eight verses to Śiva Sōmanātha,
> the moon-bearer and Pārvati's husband:
> his meters were all made up of the five-syllable *mantra*;
> his inspiration came from the name of the five-faced god;
> his grammar was the purity of speech in the Śiva mantra;
> devotion to Śiva served as the ornaments of his verses.
>
> Composing every day, creating verses for Śiva,
> he lived a most wondrous life of praise of Śaṅkara, the peace-making god.
>
> *Kēśirājadaṇṇāyakara Ragaḷe* 1.23–30 (Suṅkāpura 1976 184)

This passage is remarkable in the context of early sources about devotional poetry in Kannada in terms of the details it provides. Astonishingly, the rare passage is markedly *not* about the *vacana*s. The terms Harihara uses, such as "verse (*padya*)," "meter (*chanda*)," "grammar (*vyākaraṇa*)," and "ornaments of his verses (*vṛttakk' alaṅkāra[ṁ]*)," are all conventional technical terms in Sanskrit that associate Kēśirāja's songs, even if only generally, with conventional composition in traditional styles, which is very different from the way in which the style of *vacana*s has come to be considered.[27] None of Harihara's descriptions

27. Compare Harihara's description of poetic elements with Ramanujan's discussion about the *vacana*s' style in the introduction to his translations of *vacana*s (1973: 37–47). A famous *vacana* by Basava, which emphatically

in these verses is associated with what distinguishes the *vacana*s, such as the absence of meter and other poetic conventions, the poet's signature line (*aṅkita*) at the end, the poem's lyrical content, biting social critique, and so on.

Further evidence of the disconnect between Kēśirāja's poetry and the *vacana*s is found at the beginning of the above passage with the phrase: "his meters were all made up of five syllables (*pañcākṣarānubandhaṁ chandav' anuv' āge*)." The five syllables are of course *namaḥ śivāya*, the most important mantra of Śaivism. In its six-syllable form (*ōṁ namaḥ śivāya*), it corresponds with the title of Kēśirāja's most famous composition, the *Ṣaḍakṣara Kanda* ("Treatise of the Six-Syllable Mantra").[28] The treatise, dated to the early twelfth century, is among the earliest Śaiva devotional works in Kannada, but unlike the *vacana*s it is lengthy and composed in a traditional style and meter, and therefore cannot be regarded a *vacana*. It should also be noted that no *vacana*s are attributed to Kēśirāja by the later tradition.

The only additional mention of Kēśirāja's songs in this *Ragaḷe* can be found a few dozen lines further, in a passage that describes a devotional assembly led by Kēśirāja. Harihara writes:

> *kuḍigoṇḍu korbut' iral iral ondu devasadoḷu*
> *eḍegoṇḍu śivagōṣṭhiv urbut' ire candadoḷu*
> *hāḍuva purātanara gītadoḷ karagutaṁ*
> *kūḍe jaṅgamada caraṇakk' eṛagi neṛevutaṁ*
> *śivana padyavan ōdi mige bīgi birivutaṁ*

> Thus did Kēśirāja grow and develop when one day, a Śaiva gathering was in full swing: he felt he was melting in the songs of elder devotees being sung. He immediately bent low at the feet of the Jaṅgamas who gathered there. He broke out into reciting verses for Śiva, with great jubilation.
>
> *Kēśirājadaṇṇāyakara Ragaḷe* 1.81–85 (Suṅkāpura 1976: 186)

presents itself as nonpoetic, begins with the following line: "I don't know anything like timebeats and metre" (ibid.).

28. The *Treatise of the Six-Syllable Mantra* is composed in the *kanda* meter, traditionally used for discursive texts. For more details about this text, see Ben-Herut (2018: 166 n. 28) and further references there.

It is difficult to determine whether Harihara refers in this passage to two different bodies of poetry — songs of the elders and Kēśirāja's own verses — or whether the two belong to the same collection. The first reference is to songs of elder devotees (*hāḍuva purātanara gīta[ṁ]*), while the second reference is to verses to Śiva that Kēśirāja recites (*śivana padyavan ōdi*). But the use of "recites" in the second reference is noteworthy, because it implies that these verses were pre-composed — not extemporaneous, which is how the tradition usually understands the composition of *vacana*s. In addition, in both passages quoted here from the *Kēśirājadaṇṇāyakara Ragaḷe*, Harihara refers to "verses" (*padya*s), and this formally distinguishes them from *vacana*s, which, with the exception of a small subset composed in triplets (*tripadi*), are written without meter. Finally — and this is characteristic of Harihara's reports of the saints' songs or verses — we learn next to nothing about their outstanding content or message beyond devotional conventions that are ubiquitous in the text.

Thus, although the passages about Kēśirāja's poetry are among the most pronounced sections of Harihara's writing about devotional singing by the saints in the Kannada-speaking region, these are by any measure brief and do not shed light on the early reception of *vacana*s. They simply describe devotional poetry that was composed in traditional forms and was not recognized for groundbreaking messages or exceptional discursive quality, nor for the poetic features that distinguish the *vacana*s. Based on these passages, it is reasonable to assume that, in the devotional culture of the Kannada-speaking region of the period under discussion here, devotional poetry and its performance did not narrowly imply *vacana*s as they are imagined today: at the very least, devotional songs in more traditional forms were being composed and appreciated. The remaining sections of this article discuss the three most celebrated saint-poets of this tradition: Allama Prabhu, Basava, and Akka Mahādēvi. We will see that Harihara's treatment of the poetic oeuvre of each of these saints complicates the historical understanding of *vacana*s in a different way.

4 A Eulogy (and not *Vacana*) by Allama Prabhu

As I argue elsewhere, Allama Prabhu, who is today considered among the most prolific and prized composers of *vacana*s, is not recognized as such in Harihara's version of his life story.[29] Furthermore, in contrast to the later tradition, in which Allama is portrayed as a staunch and polemical spiritual leader of the nascent devotional community, Harihara's portrayal of Allama as a saint focuses on his wandering as a reclusive mendicant who shuns

29. Ben-Herut (2018: 70–71).

the company of other. Harihara's approach to Allama's solitary sanctity leaves limited scope for presenting his celebrated lyricism or for describing at length his dramatic encounters with other spiritual figures, both of which are hallmarks of his later biographies.[30]

In the *Ragaḷe* story about Allama there is only one passage that quotes a poetic utterance by this saint. This utterance, consisting of words of praise for Allama's guru, is extemporaneous, just as *vacana*s are supposed to be, but in terms of form it is organically woven into the text using the *ragaḷe* meter and hardly resembles a *vacana,* which should be in rhythmic prose and include a "signature":

> *siddhaśivayōgiyaṁ*
> *mige mōkṣalakṣmiy oḍagūḍirda bhōgiyaṁ*
> *dēva nirmaḷa nitya nirupama mahāyōgi*
> *dēva nirmaḷa nijānandakara śivayōgi*
> *śivanan occatav' āgi kaikoṇḍa dṛḍhayōgi*
> *bhavana mūrtige sōltu kaṇṇiṭṭ' acalayōgi*
> *nōṭadoḷu liṅgavaṁ seṛegeyda śivayōgi*
> *kūṭadoḷu kaṇṇe tanuv' āda beḷagina yōgi*
> *madananaṁ mardisiye sandird' abhavayōgi*
> *hṛdayadoḷu bhaktiyaṁ taḷedirda śivayōgi*

> The accomplished yogi of Śiva,
> who enjoys Lakṣmi in the form of liberation,
> Lord! Great yogi, pure, eternal, and unparalleled,
> Lord! A yogi of Śiva who generates pure, innate bliss,
> the firm yogi dedicated to holding Śiva in his hand,
> the unmoving yogi watching closely the image of the root of existence,
> the yogi of Śiva who captured the *liṅga* in his glance,
> the illuminating yogi who, with eyes only,
> has attained integration of his entire self,
> becoming a yogi of the unborn god only by crushing lust.

30. Those considered today as the most authoritative biographies of Allama are the fourth version of the *Śūnyasampādane* and the *Prabhuliṅgalīle*.

> The yogi of Śiva, fastened to devotion in his heart.
>
> *Prabhudēvara Ragaḷe* 265–74 (Suṅkāpura 1976: 13)

Allama's other direct speeches in this *Ragaḷe* are not lyrical and in general are terse and descriptive.[31]

In contrast to Allama himself, other figures in the *Ragaḷe* are quoted expressing their wonderment at the sight of him, but their appreciation focuses on Allama's renunciation, his practice of carrying of the *liṅga* in the palm of his hand, and his spiritual merits, without making any mention of his poetic acumen or verbal skills.[32] Although in this text Allama is claimed to have met with two other important devotees, Basava and Siddharāma, Harihara's report of these important encounters is minimal, consisting in total of just six short lines, and he does not quote any direct conversation.[33] This can be put in sharp relief against the elaborate drama in the much later *Śūnyasampādane* ("Reaching Nothingness") works about Allama's stay in Kalyāṇa during his tenure there next to Basava, which is replete with *vacana*s.

5 Two *Vacana*s (and a Fragment) by Basava

The *Ragaḷe* story about Basava stands out in the collection as the longest and most developed piece, even in its extant form, which is about half the length of the original. The sheer length of Harihara's version of Basava's life offers a profusion of details about his remembered story. Fortuitously, this also includes references to Basava's poetic compositions, although the space allotted by Harihara to this aspect of Basava's life is quite limited:[34] Of the thirteen chapters, containing together about 1,200 lines, direct quotations of *vacana*s consist of only two short lines in chapter 12, and perhaps another short fragment in chapter 13.[35]

To complicate things further, the actual task of identifying what might be considered a *vacana* quotation in the text is not an easy one. A few verses scattered throughout this

31. See, for example, *Prabhudēvara Ragaḷe* 389–90 (Suṅkāpura 1976: 18).
32. See *Prabhudēvara Ragaḷe* 291–324 (Suṅkāpura 1976: 14–15).
33. *Prabhudēvara Ragaḷe* 373–78 (Suṅkāpura 1976: 17).
34. Compare with Mahādēvayya (1999: 122–25).
35. The count is approximate, since about half of this story is in prose. The count is taken from Saudattimath (1988: 133).

long work quote Basava addressing his god or a fellow Śaiva with a devotional appeal, but these verses are difficult to identify as recognized *vacana*s. To illustrate: a passage in chapter 3 with a quotation of Basava praising Śiva reads more like traditional devotional poetry with stock descriptions of the god and a refrain at the end of every line; it does not meet the expectations of a *vacana* in terms of either structure or content.[36] Five other short quotations addressed to the god could be read like *vacana*s, but I was not able to find any similar statements in the published corpus of *vacana*s.[37] Three words of praise to Allama appear to correspond with the concluding line of a known *vacana*, although the verb is different.[38]

Harihara's own description of Basava's songs in the end of chapter 9 and beginning of chapter 10 is telling in terms of Harihara's appreciation of them. The passage comes immediately after a miraculous feat: Basava's resuscitation after his life breath has left his body in his sleep to follow roaming devotees. The following passage celebrates Basava's recovery:

> *nenenenedu puḷakisute gītamaṁ pāḍutaṁ*
> *munidu saṅgaṅge posagītamaṁ pāḍutaṁ*
> *mūdalisi pāḍutaṁ muddisute pāḍutaṁ*
> *ādarisi pāḍutaṁ mēregeḍe pāḍutaṁ*
> *gītaṅgaḷoḷag' ēkaniṣṭhe hoḷehuḷevut' ire*
> *gītaṅgaḷoḷag' abhavabhakti beḷebeḷevut' ire*
> *gītadoḷu saṅgan' ādhikyav opputtam ire*
> *gītadoḷu śaraṇara samagravē jigilut' ire*
> *gītadoḷu paradaivaśōṣaṇaṁ tōṟut' ire*
> *gītadoḷu parasamayabhīṣaṇaṁ poṇmut' ire*
> *gītaṁ śivaṅge karṇābharaṇav' āgut' ire*
> *gītav' īśana dayākaruṣaṇav' ad' āgut' ire*
> *hāḍutaṁ śaraṇaroḷu basavaṇṇan oppidaṁ*
> *āḍutaṁ bhaktinidhi basavaṇṇan oppidaṁ*

36. *Basavēśvara Dēvara Ragaḷe* 3.85–98 (Suṅkāpura 1976: 35).
37. The five quotations in the *Basavēśvara Dēvara Ragaḷe* appear in the prose of chapter 6 (one in p. 50 and one in p. 51), in the prose of chapter 10 (p. 76), at the end of chapter 12 (p. 91), and in chapter 13 vv. 53–55 (p. 94). The former two include the word *vacana*, probably in the general sense of "saying" or "uttering."
38. See the discussion of the section on Allama below.

> *amama daṇḍādhipakirīṭapadan oppidaṁ*
> *amama chalināyakara dēvan int' oppidaṁ*

> Reflecting on all this, the hair on his body bristled, and he began to sing songs.
> Emboldened, he sang new songs for Saṅga [Śiva].
> Chiding, he sang; caressing, he sang.
> Caring, he sang, and going beyond all limits, he sang.
>
> In song, as his single-minded dedication blazed forth.
> In song, as his devotion to the unborn god grew.
> In song, as the greatness of Saṅga spread.
> In song, as the bond of the Śaraṇas took over him.
> In song, with the downfall of other divinities.
> In song, as the horrid nature of other religious traditions was exposed.
>
> The songs became ear ornaments for Śiva!
> The songs attracted the Lord's compassion!
>
> Revered Basava sang together with the Śaraṇas and shone.
> Revered Basava, the wealth of devotees, danced and shone.
> Oh wonder! The one at the top of the chain of command shone.
> Oh wonder! The lord of devoted heroes in this way shone.
>
> *Basavēśvara Dēvara Ragaḷe* 9.195–210 (Suṅkāpura 1976: 73)

Chapter 10 continues this theme in three opening verses that quote the devotees' reciprocal eulogy:

> *basavana gītav' ambudhiparītadharātaḷadalli sandav' end'*
> *usirvud' id' āvud' ond' aridu pannagalōkada dāravaṭṭadoḷ*
> *desegaḷa bhittiyoḷ digibhad' aṅgadoḷ indrana jihveyoḷ śivā-*
> *vasathada bāgilalli bared' ippud' enalk' idum oppad' ippudē*
> *gītaṁ saṅgastuti saṁ-*
> *gītaṁ gītaṁ viśālavasudhāpūtaṁ*
> *gītaṁ gaṇavikhyātaṁ*
> *gītaṁ samprīti nīti gītaṁ nūtaṁ*

> *gītaṁ vēdāntārtha-*
> *vrātaṁ gītaṁ samastaśāstrōpētaṁ*
> *gītaṁ sakaḷāgamakula-*
> *jātaṁ gītaṁ parāparaikasamētaṁ*

> "Basava's songs spread across the ocean-encircled earth!" —
> By saying this, one confines them to a single place.
> Wouldn't it be better to say they are inscribed
> on the round entrance of the serpentine world,
> on the outer walls of the eight directions,
> on the bodies of the elephants that guard the universe,
> on Indra's tongue, on the doors of Śiva's abode?
> The songs were the music of Saṅga's praise.
> The songs were the purity of the broad earth.
> The songs were famous among Śiva's attendants.
> The songs were filled with laudable morals, and they were praised.
> The songs, encompassing all philosophical scriptures,
> the songs, replete with all authoritative knowledge,
> the songs, arising from the collection of all worship manuals,
> the songs, merging the worldly with the beyond.
>
> *Basavēśvara Dēvara Ragaḷe*, opening verses 1 to 3 of chapter 10 (Suṅkāpura 1976: 74)

In terms of understanding the reception of *vacana*s in the early period, this passage both reveals and obscures. We learn from it that Basava composed original songs of his own when inspired by the collective worship of the god and the company of fellow Śaivas. We also learn that the songs he composed were devotional in nature and focused on Śiva in his specific manifestation called "Saṅga," which is a variant of "Kūḍalasaṅgamadēva," Śiva's name in many of the *vacana*s attributed to Basava. These descriptions can be easily read as direct testimony to the fact of Basava's composing *vacana*s. Furthermore, according to this passage, the songs he composed affirmed the community of devotees, expressed hostility toward other religious traditions, and had a strong ecstatic quality to them. Such descriptions are corroborated by some of the *vacana*s attributed to Basava.

And there is more: the opening verses of chapter 10 tell us that Basava's songs were disseminated widely, were possibly accompanied by musical tunes,[39] were sung in praise of Śiva, and purported to summarize all mainstream and traditional religious knowledge.[40] This passage therefore appears to confirm that already in Harihara's time Basava was thought to have composed devotional poetry. Nevertheless, much remains unknown: What was the nature of this poetry and what was its flavor? In what style was it composed and how long was it? And what messages did it convey — were the messages radical and, if so, in what way? As much as the above passage extols Basava's compositional craft in dramatic ways, it does not reveal much about the form and content of the poetry itself, and it leaves questions such as these unanswered.

There is one additional episode in Basava's life story in which his songs appear, and it is here that the most pronounced reference to what we recognize today as Basava's *vacana*s is found in the whole collection. The incident itself, located in chapter 12 of the work, revolves around a Śiva devotee who lives in Kaliṅga, in today's Odisha. The devotee regularly attends assemblies of worship and recitations.[41] In one of these, while listening to someone publicly singing devotional songs, the devotee hears the following song attributed to Basava:

> *bēḍi bēḍida śaraṇarge nīḍad' irdaḍe taledaṇḍa kūḍalasaṅga avadhār'*

> If I fail to provide Śaraṇas with whatever they ask for,
> I will offer my head to you!
> O Kūḍalasaṅga, pray hear me!
>
> *Basavēśvara Dēvara Ragaḷe* 12, prose (Suṅkāpura 1976: 87)

39. The phrase Harihara uses here, *gītaṁ saṅgastuti saṅgītaṁ* ("song | praise of Saṅga | musical singing"), is minimal and obscure. One possible meaning is "The songs were the music of Saṅga's praise."
40. This last claim is commonly shared among many forms of verbal expression that are rhetorically linked to authoritative traditional knowledge, but it gains importance when contrasted with contemporary readings of *vacana*s by some as antinomian. Gauri Lankesh, for examples, writes: "In several vachanas, the sharanas [i.e., Basava and his fellow *vacana* composers] have rejected the Vedas, shastras, smritis and the Upanishads." From "Making Sense of the Lingayat Vs Veerashaiva Debate," *The Wire*, September 5, 2017, https://thewire.in/history/karnataka-lingayat-veerashaive-debate.
41. I have written at length about Śiva assemblies in the *Ragaḷegaḷu* in Ben-Herut (2018 and 2015).

Hearing this, the devotee, whose name suggests he is a merchant, concocts a ruse to extract gold from Basava based on the "blank check" the latter has rhetorically offered in his song.[42]

The line in Harihara's *Ragaḷe* might accord with what we think of in terms of a *vacana*, both syntactically and semantically. In terms of syntax, the quotation, which addresses the god as many *vacana*s do, culminates with the familiar signature line of Basava, which is the name of his chosen deity Kūḍalasaṅga. Semantically, this quotation presents a dramatic, indeed life-threatening, promise by the devotee to give up his life if he fails in his devotional commitment. Even Basava's vow in this line, of cutting off his own head (*taledaṇḍa*), corresponds well with the local idiom of this devotional milieu, as a token that is repeatedly woven around the life of Basava and his fellowship.[43]

The passage in which this verse appears identifies the poetic quotation as a song (*gīte*) by Basava that the devotee hears during a performance of "prose and verse composed by the elders."[44] In the Kannada discourse of poetics, the term "prose and verse" (*gadyapadya*) describes two distinct forms of poetic expression. Indeed, *gadya* and *vacana* both mean "prose" (though the former term is usually associated with longer prose compositions). And, most significantly, even though the term *vacana* is nowhere to be found in the passage, the verse quoted above is a part of a published *vacana* attributed to Basava. The *vacana* is numbered 1053 in Kalaburgi's publication of *vacana*s.[45] The full *vacana* in this edition reads:

> *āne bhaṇḍāra lāyada kudureya bēḍuvar illade baḍav' āden ayyā*
> *bēḍuvud' ēnu dēvā*
> *munna bēḍide sindhuballāḷana vadhuvanu*
> *innu bēḍidaḍe nigaḷavan ikkuve*
> *bēḍida śaraṇarige nīḍad' irdaḍe taledaṇḍa*

42. The suffix of his name is *seṭṭi*, which denotes a merchant or trader.
43. Ben-Herut (2012: 136–41).
44. *Basavēśvara Dēvara Ragaḷe* 12, prose (Suṅkāpura 1976: 87): *purātana viracita gadyapadyaṅgaḷaṁ kēḷisuttaṁ*.
45. See Kalaburgi (2001b [1993]). This is a popular collection of *vacana*s and not a critical one, and it is voluminous, a fact that makes the series very useful for locating *vacana*s. I have consulted it for all the vacana references in this article by using the *Vacana Sañcaya* (*Vacana Collection*) and the *Śivaśaraṇara Vacana Samputa* (*Collection of Vacanas by Śiva's Saints*), two online search engines based on this printed series. Each online project contains close to 21,000 digitized *vacana*s (Mahāsvāmigaḷu 2023; Vasudhēndra and Nāgabhūṣaṇa Svāmi 2014–2019).

> *kūḍalasaṅgamadēvā*

> Without those who supplicate for an elephant, for coffers,
> or for a stable horse, I have gone bankrupt, O Lord!
> What more is there to ask, dear God?
> Earlier, you asked for the wife of Sindhuballāḷa,
> and if you ask again, I will give my own ornament![46]
> If I fail to provide the devotees with whatever they ask for,
> I will offer my head to you, O Lord Kūḍalasaṅgama!
>
> Vacana no. 1053 in Kalaburgi (2001a [1993]: 284)

Another quotation of a *vacana* soon follows. As the greedy devotee arrives at Basava's place to test him, Śiva appears in disguise before Basava and worriedly admonishes him about the morass his song has generated. Basava, however, smiles, tells the god not to be afraid, and then declares unperturbedly:

> *añjadir dēva parīkṣege teṛah' illaṁ kaṭṭiden oṛeya biṭṭe jannigey ēṛan ōḍad' ir' ōḍad' iru śaraṇara maneya biridin' aṅkakke himmeṭṭad' ir' el' ele dēva ele tande el' ele hande kūḍalasaṅga.*

> Do not cower, my lord, for there is no room for doubt:
> I have fastened my sheath and removed the sacred thread.
> Do not flee, do not flee from the battlefield!
> Do not retreat from the house of a Sharana, an emblem of courage.
> O Lord, O benefactor, you coward. O Kūḍalasaṅgama!
>
> *Basavēśvara Dēvara Ragaḷe* 12, prose (Suṅkāpura 1976: 88)

Basava's address to his god is striking in its boldness. We can note the saint's proud refusal to wear the sacred thread, which is a Brahmanical sign of Vedic initiation and social privilege. We can also note Basava's challenging of the god by calling him a coward. (At the

46. Later in the chapter, Basava will indeed offer his wife to the god, disguised as a devotee.

end, Basava's sharp words prod Śiva to arrange for the delivery of gold and precious stones to untangle the financial mess prompted by Basava's earlier *vacana*). As in the case of the previous quotation, Basava's speech here is almost identical to what is today recognized as *vacana* no. 701, with a slight variation in spelling and word choice.[47]

The core message in the two *vacana*s discussed here is Basava's unbounded commitment to provide for the material needs of any Śaiva devotee, and it corresponds well with Harihara's understanding of Basava's life goal as the author presents it in the framing story at the beginning of this *Ragaḷe*. The *Ragaḷe* about Basava opens with his prenatal life in Kailāsa, Śiva's heavenly abode, where the divine attendant Basava, while passing out food graced by Śiva to all those present in the hall, mistakenly skips Śiva's son Skanda. Śiva's punishment for Basava's failure to distribute the grace of the god to one and all is to spend a lifetime as a human on earth, where he will provide for all the devotees of Śiva, without exception. In Śiva's own words:

> *koḍade ennaya kumāraṅge*
> *eseva nijabhaktibhūṣaṇan enipa vīraṅge*
> *emage koḍad' irdaḍaṁ sairisuvev' āv 'ayya*
> *vimalaśiśuviṅge husi nuḍiye sairisev' ayya*
> *idaṟindav' ondu jananaṁ ninage dorakittu*
> *mudadinde hōg' ayya jananava nī hottu*
> *dharaṇiyoḷu vr̥ṣabhamukha huṭṭu*

> How could you deprive my own son — a hero and ornament of true devotion — of the offering, thus slighting this congregation and my presence? Dear man, I would have turned a blind eye had it been me that you skipped, but how can I when it was an innocent child? Because of this, you shall undertake a human

47. See *vacana* no. 701 in Kalaburgi (2001a [1993]: 175):

> *kaṭṭiden oreya biṭṭe jannigey ara*
> *muṭṭi band' iridaḍe ōsarisuvan alla*
> *ōḍad' iru ōḍad' iru*
> *nimma śaraṇara maneya biridina aṅkakāra*
> *ōḍad' iru ōḍad' iru ele ele dēvā*
> *ele ele svāmi*
> *ele ele hande*
> *kūḍalasaṅgamadēvā*

> birth. Go now, and endure this rebirth with a smile. Be born on earth, Vṛṣabhamukha!
>
> *Basavēśvara Dēvara Ragaḷe* 1.59–65 (Suṅkāpura 1976: 25)

Indeed, the story Harihara weaves around the life of Basava stresses the saint's commitment to caring and providing for the community of devotees, and Harihara explicitly states this several times in the text. The *vacana*s quoted in Harihara's story pertain to precisely this theme. By contrast, we encounter no *vacana*s on the themes for which Basava, as a composer of *vacana*s, was famous in later periods: his lyrical self-inquiry into the nature of devotional sentiments and his adamantine resistance to external and social constraints. These elements can be found in the fabric of Harihara's literary version of Basava's life but are not expressed in *vacana*s.

In chapter 13 there is yet another quotation that perhaps can be linked to a *vacana*. This chapter is the last in the *Ragaḷe* as we have it today, and it appears to be an amalgamation of disparate passages cobbled together. In the beginning of the chapter, Allama pays a quick visit to Kalyāṇa and teaches Basava about the *śivaliṅga*. Basava expresses his admiration to Allama by singing a song, from which Harihara quotes only a few words:

> *anuvan allamadēvan aṟupidaṁ tān endu*
> *manavāre gītamaṁ pāḍuttal iral andu*

> "Lord Allama himself has made known the way!"
>
> Wholeheartedly he sang this song.
>
> *Basavēśvara Dēvara Ragaḷe* 13.7–8 (Suṅkāpura 1976: 92)

This short line is similar in meaning to the end of the four-line *vacana* numbered 1303, although the words are different.[48]

The fact Harihara quotes only two, or perhaps three if we count a fragmented phrase in chapter 13, of what later will be recognized as Basava's *vacana*s, and that these quotations narrowly focus on Basava's care for the material welfare of Śaivas, speaks volumes regarding Harihara's understanding of what is at the core of Basava's historical importance, which is

48. *Vacana* no. 1303 in Kalaburgi (2001a [1993]: 359): *īy anuva allama tōridanu*.

his exceptional sponsorship of devotees, and what is not, which is his criticism of social practices or religious rites.

6 Three *Vacana*s by Akka Mahādēvi

Of Harihara's portrayals of saints, that of Akka Mahādēvi (also known as Mahādēviyakka) has the most elaborate treatment of the subject's original poetic compositions.[49] This exceptional attention makes sense in the broader context of Mahādēvi's saintly persona, since the poetry attributed to her clearly played a central role in the spread of her fame well beyond the Kannada-speaking region.[50] In general, Mahādēvi's *vacana*s express a woman's rejection of worldly familial ties and longing for physical unity with the god, and the defiant voice in her *vacana*s corresponds with her traditional story — including in its earliest rendition by Harihara.[51]

The first mention by Harihara of Mahādēvi's songs appears in chapter 5 of the *Ragaḷe* story about her, amid a long lyrical section describing Mahādēvi's emotionally laden worship of the *liṅga*. Here, Harihara writes:

> *gītadoḷage nūtna*[52] *bhakti jātav' āgal ōtu pāḍi*
> *gītadoḷage śarvan' aṛivu teṛah' uguḍade tīvi pāḍi*
> *bhaktirasada nadiya naḍuve gītaratnav uṇmi pāḍi*
> *bhaktiyoḷu virakti nelasi mukti mundudōṛi pāḍi*
> *olidu pāḍi ulidu pāḍi maledu pāḍi balidu pāḍi*
> *salugeyinde gelidu pāḍi puḷakav' aḍare nōḍi pāḍi*
> *dēva śivane bhaviya saṅgav' endu māṇbud' enna tande*
> *dēva berakey' illad' acca bhaktisukhav' ad' endu tande*
> *pūjeyoḷage macci beccamanavan entu tegeven ayya*
> *pūjeyoḷage naṭṭa diṭṭigaḷan ad' entu kīḷven ayya*

49. Basavarāju (2007 [1966]: 29).
50. See Hawley (2015: 335), Ramaswamy (2007: 1996), and Ramanujan (1973: 111–42).
51. Ramanujan (1989).
52. Sic.

> In a song, she recited and sang the birth of new devotion.
> In a song, she sang the knowledge of Śarva,
> wholeheartedly and continuously.
> She sang and produced a gem of a song
> from the river of the sentiment of devotion.
> She sang, growing into liberation while grounding her renunciation in devotion.
> She sang pleasingly, loudly, elatedly, wholeheartedly, and unsparingly.
>
> Overflowing with happiness, she sang tenderly as she gazed at the god.
> With the hair of her body standing on end, she sang:
>
> "Lord, O Śiva! End my marriage with this worldly person,
> you who are my benefactor!
> Lord, the joy springing from pure devotion cannot be adulterated, O benefactor!
> Subsumed in worship as I am, how can I distract my enthralled mind, O Lord?
> Caught up thus in worship, how can I turn away my gaze, O Lord?"
>
> *Mahādēviyakkana Ragaḷe* 5.147–56 (Suṅkāpura 1976: 133)

As in the case of other saints, here too Harihara describes his appreciation of the saint's poetic oeuvre while divulging little about the nature of the songs beyond their devotional intensity. The four-line quotation at the end of the passage can be read poetically, although it is difficult to determine if this lyrical outpouring is a *vacana*: while it does carry the pleading and lyrical voice recognizable in many of Mahādēvi's *vacana*s, it is in the *ragaḷe* meter (and not in prose as most *vacana*s are), lacks a concise message, and does not bear a signature line. Furthermore, a few verses earlier we were told about "auspicious songs sung with love by the supreme devotees"[53] to the sounds of conch, drum, cymbal, which is the conventional style of devotional singing to which Mahādēvi's songs might have belonged.

In chapter 6, Harihara again quotes Mahādēvi singing:

> *ayō śivane uḷiva kareva nēhav' uṇṭe saṁsārakkaṁ nimmallig' eḍeyāḍuva*
> *bhaktiy uṇṭe, ēnayya śivane, ēnaṁ pēḷven ī lajjeya mātan*

53. *Mahādēviyakkana Ragaḷe* 5.134 (Suṅkāpura 1976: 132): *bhaktar olidu pāḍut' irpa maṅgaḷaṅgaḷoḷage.*

> Alas, O Śiva! Is there any love left out there to receive me?
> And is there any room for devotion that leads to you in marital life?
> O Śiva, what shall my fate be?
> What more can I say beyond these humiliating words?
>
> *Mahādēviyakkana Ragaḷe* 6, prose (Suṅkāpura 1976: 135)

In contrast to the previous quotation, this one is almost identical to and clearly identifiable as *vacana* no. 88 in the published version.[54] A few minor changes in that version stand out: (1) the pronouns appear in a different order, (2) the language register is slightly updated (e.g., from *pēḷven* to *hēḷuven*), and (3) the name of the deity whom Mahādēvi addresses has changed from "Śiva" to "Mallikārjuna." This latter change is telling in the sense that it might point to an editorial need in modern times to fix the signature phrase of a *vacana* composer in more hermetic ways than in Harihara's time (although in other parts of the text Harihara does identify Mahādēvi with the specific manifestation of Śiva as Mallikārjuna).

A bit further along in the same chapter Harihara again quotes Mahādēvi's words:

> *śivalāñchanavan ēṛisikoṇḍu manege bandavaraṁ kaḍegaṇisi entu nōḍut' ippeṁ avarge satkāravaṁ māḍal illad' irdaḍ' ennan ī dhareya mēl' irisuva kāraṇav' ēn' abhavā ninn' avaḷ' end' enna muddutanavaṁ salisuvaḍ' irisuvud' allā kailāsakke koṇḍoyvud' endu cannamallikārjunaṅge gītamaṁ pāḍut'…*

> How can I remain idle, having seen
> those who came to my home carrying Śiva's emblem being treated with contempt?
> If I cannot show these people hospitality,
> what reason is there for me to remain on this earth?
> O you who are beyond existence,

54. See *vacana* no. 88 in Rājūra (2001 [1993]: 31):
uḷuhuva karava nēhav' uṇṭe nimmalli
saṁsārakk' eḍeyā[ḍada] ā bhaktiyoḷave
enna dēva cennamallikārjun' ayyā
ēna hēḷuven ayya lajjeya mātanu

> keep me alive if you intend to indulge me,
> considering me as your own,
> or otherwise take to me Kailāsa!
>
> *Mahādēviyakkana Ragaḷe* 6, prose (Suṅkāpura 1976: 137)

Vacana no. 350 in the printed corpus is shorter than what we find here, and there are certain differences between the two renditions, but the two texts generally correspond in letter and in spirit.[55] One major difference is that in the version transmitted as a *vacana*, Mahādēvi asks the god to lead her to Srisailam, the famous Śaiva temple complex in Andhra Pradesh, while in the *Ragaḷe* version she asks to be taken to Kailāsa. As noted earlier, such a variation could be explained by a need in the later tradition to align more strongly Mahādēvi's *vacana*s with her life story, in which she travels to Srisailam to unite with her god.

Another relevant passage appears toward the end of the same chapter, at the climactic moment of Mahādēvi's desertion of the palace and her married life. Forced to remain disrobed in front of her husband, parents, guru, and fellow devotees, Mahādēvi formally announces the termination of her marriage agreement. She places her personal *liṅga* in the palm of her hand, bids farewell to her parents and guru, hands over her jewelry to the Śaiva devotees who stand there, and walks away naked. At this point, Harihara quotes Mahādēvi saying:

> *aśanad' āseyaṁ tṛṣeya tṛṣṇeyaṁ besanada bēgeyaṁ viṣayada vihvaḷateyaṁ*
> *tāpatrayada kalpanegaḷaṁ geliden inn' ēn inn' icchey ādudu*
> *cannamallikārjunā ninag' añjen añjen*

55. See *vacana* no. 350 in Rājūra (2001 [1993]: 104):
lāñchana sahita manege bandaḍe
tatkālavan aridu prēmava māḍad' irdadaḍe
nīn irisida maneya tott' alla
tatkāla prēmava māḍuvante enna mudda salis' ayyā
alladoḍe oyy' ayya siriśaila cennamallikārjunā

> I have overcome hunger and thirst,
> the fire of craving and the delusion of sexual desire,
> as well as the three defiling and unreal torments.
> What is there left for me to desire?
> O beautiful Mallikārjuna,
> because of you I have no fear,
> no fear at all.
>
> *Mahādēviyakkana Ragaḷe* 6, prose (Suṅkāpura 1976: 139)

This passage can easily be read as *vacana*, among other reasons because of the concluding line in this utterance ("O beautiful Mallikārjuna…"), which is identical to the format of signature line found at the end of many *vacana*s. The signature line usually presents a reflection that brings home the preceding statements in the body of the *vacana* and is addressed to the devotee's chosen manifestation of the god. In this passage the concluding line indeed captures the message that pervades in the body of the passage with the proclamation addressed to Śiva Mallikārjuna: "I have no fear." In spite of this and other indications that what we have here is a *vacana*, I was not able to locate a *vacana* that resembles this passage in Kalaburgi's publication.

In chapter 7, Mahādēvi is confronted by Kauśika, her non-Śaiva husband, who pretends to have had a change of heart and become a Śaiva devotee. Harihara quotes Mahādēvi's response in the form of a reflecting song:

> *biṭṭappen endaḍaṁ biḍadu ninnaya māye*
> *oṭṭayisi bandaḍ' oḍuvand' appud' ī māye*
> *jōgigaṁ jōgiṇiy ad' āytu ninnaya māye*
> *rāgadiṁ savaṇaṅge kantiy āyitu māye*
> …
> *karuṇākarā ninna māyeg' añjuven ayya*
> *paramēśvarā mallinātha karuṇipud' ayya*

> Illusion: you say you abandoned her, but she never left you.
> Illusion: as she has accompanied you here, so she will remain with you.
> Illusion: she has become the wandering partner of a wandering ascetic.
> Illusion: she has become the panhandler lovingly accompanying you, a mendicant.
> …
> Pray, O ocean of mercy! I fear your illusion!
> O Supreme Lord, Mallinātha! Please have mercy on me!
>
> *Mahādēviyakkana Ragaḷe* 7.89–92, 99–100 (Suṅkāpura 1976: 143)

Here, Mahādēvi expresses her deep frustration and the difficulty she experiences in facing the lingering shadow of her previous married life. Her words conform to the *vacana* traits we mentioned earlier, and indeed *vacana* no. 303 in the popular edition is similar to what is quoted above.[56] There are also marked differences: after the first four lines, the two versions diverge, until they converge again with the concluding two lines (right after "Pray, O ocean of mercy!"). However, in Harihara's version, Mahādēvi asserts "I fear your illusion!" (*añjuven*) while in the published version she states the opposite: "I am not afraid of your illusion!" (*nān añjuvaḷ' alla*). Also, in the last line of the *vacana* in Harihara's version, Mahādēvi beseeches the god for mercy (*karuṇipud'*), but in the published version she exclaims that this is the command of the god (in second person, *nimm' āṇe*). Although the degree of variation between Harihara's text and the published version is considerable, the two versions share enough of the *vacana* content and form to recognize them as the same *vacana*.

Finally, very close to the end of the chapter and of the *Ragaḷe* as a whole, Harihara mentions in two verses a meeting between Mahādēvi and another famous devotee named

56. See *vacana* no. 303 in Rājūra (2001 [1993]: 90):

> *biṭṭen endadē biḍad' ī māye*
> *biḍad' iddaḍe bembattittu māye*
> *yōgige yōgiṇiy āyittu māye*
> *savaṇaṅge savaṇiy' āyittu māye*
> *yatige parākiy āyittu māye*
> *ninna māyege nān añjuvaḷ' alla*
> *cennamallikārjunadēvā nimm' aṇe*

Kinnara Bommatande. Mahādēvi sings a song for the occasion, but the author does not provide any further details.[57]

Unlike the *Ragaḷe*s about Kēśirāja and Allama, but with some similarity to that about Basava, the *Ragaḷe* about Mahādēvi conveys Harihara's genuine appreciation of her original songs and their inherent role in her life story. And yet, these *vacana*s appear in only a few, very specific moments. This limited appearance is nothing like the voluminous body of *vacana*s attributed to Mahādēvi in later texts. Considered together, Harihara's sparse treatment of the *vacana*s in the lives of Allama, Basava, and Mahādēvi, as compared to what we might expect given their later reputation as "authors of *vacana*s," compels us to reconsider our understanding of *vacana*s in their early history.

7 Conclusion

In concluding this article I would like to reflect on the *vacana*s as they were received during the first centuries of their appearance based on the evidence I have presented above.

The songs quoted in this article might appear substantial when read in sequence, but they are in fact a minute portion of Harihara's voluminous *Ragaḷe Stories*. When examined against the full breadth of the work, which is a collection consisting of more than ten thousand lines in its current form, the references to what can be ascertained as *vacana*s are astonishingly brief, few, and casual.[58] Moreover, the only two figures to whom Harihara clearly attributes what can safely be considered *vacana*s — Basava and Mahādēvi — also have the longest stories in the collection (with 26 and 7 chapters, respectively). The fact songs by these two figures are not major in the respective texts again highlights the limited importance of *vacana*s in Harihara's rendering of the saints of that period. Notably, we find in Harihara's text nothing like the celebration of *vacana*s in the much later *Śūnyasampādane*, where long conversations between devotees (Mahādēvi included) are uttered in *vacana*s, and the story is itself a dramatization of the *vacana*s.

It is meaningful that Basava and Mahādēvi are the only model devotees in Harihara's work who are directly linked to *vacana*s as we have them today, especially when considered against the absence of *vacana*s associated with Allama Prabhu, who since the fifteenth

57. *Mahādēviyakkana Ragaḷe* 7.193–96 (Suṅkāpura 1976: 147).
58. A minimal count of only *Ragaḷe* stories that involve Kannada-speaking figures and whose authorship is not contested amounts to eighteen texts and a total line count of close to twelve thousand. See Ben-Herut 2018: 59 n. 41 for the list of the eighteen stories and Saudattimath 1988: 133 for respective line counts.

century has been regarded as a leading *vacana* composer and an important figure in the tradition but receives only limited attention from Harihara.[59] It is no less than astonishing that Harihara mentions nothing of this saint's prolific *vacana* composition, the subject of much attention in later periods, including today.[60]

When we look closer into the few instances of *vacana* quotations in the *Ragaḷe* stories, several additional features emerge. One is the fact that because Harihara does not label the quoted lines as *vacana*s and refers to them only as "songs" (*gītegaḷu*), it is difficult for the *Ragaḷe* listener/reader to tell them apart from traditional styles of devotional poetry that are referred to in the text, such as in the case of Kēśirāja or in descriptions of public singing by crowds of devotees. Harihara seems to acknowledge some newness in the songs of Akka Mahādēvi (*nūtana*), but he reveals little about their qualities beyond devotional merit, which he describes in very general terms. This point is significant, I believe, because it suggests a lack of appreciation of the *vacana*s' uniqueness by Harihara or more broadly during this period, and even a lack of distinction between *vacana*s and other popular forms of devotional expression. The widely accepted understanding of *vacana*s as an ingenious and indigenous style in Kannada, unique in both its form and content, an understanding that has been so essential since the fifteenth century and is so even more strongly today, and which is captured by the label *vacana*, highlights the absence of such an appreciation in the early period.

A more technical aspect of *vacana*s as they appear in the *Ragaḷe* stories is that *vacana*s quoted in this text are not easily distinguishable from Harihara's own prose. With the exception of one *vacana* by Mahādēvi, the *vacana* quotations appear in the prose chapters and not in those written in the *ragaḷe* meter.[61] Harihara's literary prose is often styled with repetitions, syntactical patterns, metaphors, and so on, and it is possible that Harihara felt that *vacana*s fitted better in his prose. In any case, this highlights the meter-less structure of *vacana*s and the fact that, as utterances, they were closer to "prose" than to "verse," very much in accordance with one meaning of the word *vacana* as "prose." Further, this coheres with the fact that until the nineteenth century and the advent of print, *vacana*s were written as continuous prose text without line breaks.[62] Harihara's referring to *vacana*s as "songs"

59. The *Ragaḷe* to Allama, with only one chapter, is considerably shorter than those of Basava and Mahādēvi.
60. See, for example, Nāgarāj (1999).
61. The outlier *vacana* appears in *Mahādēviyakkana Ragaḷe* 7.88–103 and is discussed in the previous section of this article.
62. Ramanujan writes: "Medieval Kannada manuscripts use no punctuation, no paragraph-, word-, or phrase-divisions, though modern editions print the *vacana*s with all the modern conventions" (1973: 13). Halkatti

complicates their labeling as "prose" (or even as "*vacana*s"), since the word "songs" traditionally connotes singing to music while the word "prose" does not.[63]

A matter related to the absence of meter is the malleability of the language used in the *vacana*s, which becomes evident in a word-to-word comparison between Harihara's quotations of *vacana*s and how they appear in current publications. The amount of language change found in these comparisons is, in my view, greater than that which would be expected in routine manuscript variation. It not only testifies to the importance of oral performance and of the performer in the transmission of *vacana*s but also foregrounds the textual malleability of these poems in terms of spoken registers through the ages. Above all, it reminds us that *vacana* literature, like any devotional poetry in India, is a lived genre that is experienced in performative and other live settings, which is very remote from the Western notion of premodern literature as frozen in its time. Put differently, we must change our expectations of "literature," as a fixed form of text, when we deal with *vacana*s.

Returning to the starting point of this article and the larger question regarding the status of the *vacana*s in the early centuries of the Kannada tradition, it is possible to say that the authors trained in Kannada literature who first began writing about the devotional culture promulgated by the twelfth-century saints did not see the *vacana*s as something that required "textualization," that is, their being written down and collected for posterity. In order to communicate devotional attitudes and behaviors to their audiences in *written* form in their own compositions, the authors chose not to record *vacana*s by saintly figures but to tell their life stories.[64] In light of this remarkable but quite apparent conclusion, we might ask: What was the status of the *vacana*s during this period?

(1922) translates *vacana*s in prose form as they appeared in manuscripts. Verse was also rendered without line breaks in the manuscripts, but the verses themselves were separated by punctuation marks, and the metrical form itself would have been recognized by most readers.

63. There is a subgroup of *vacana*s called *svaravacana*s, written in local meters. They are meant to be sung according to a particular rhythm, but it is difficult to determine if these evolved out of meter-less *vacana*s or out of meters such as *tripadi*.

64. A case in point for comparison in this regard is devotional literature in Tamil, for example in the case of the poems and life story of Cuntarar (aka Sundarar) in the early Tamil Śaiva canon. David Shulman (1980: xxxv–xlii) addresses questions that are related in nature to those raised in this article, and from his analysis it appears that: (1) the earliest Tamil hagiography of this saint-poet (written in the twelfth century) was thematically more closely aligned with the poems attributed to him than what we find in Harihara's text, and (2) in contrast with the *vacana*s, the Tamil devotional poems were highly formulaic and apparently underwent textualization*before* the writing down of the saints' life stories. These features perhaps contribute to the relative cohesiveness of the Tamil canon, in comparison with the Kannada Śivabhakti materials. Richard Davis current project of the solidification of the Tevaram canon will surely shed more light on this subject.

The most radical possibility, both historically and politically, is that the *vacana*s were marginal for the emerging tradition during the early period and/or that the corpus of *vacana* literature was dramatically expanded after its moments of origins in the twelfth century. Although such a claim has been suggested by some historians, I find it farfetched, as it rests on the idea of a wholesale "fabrication of tradition" starting from the fifteenth century, an idea that seems improbable in light of the vastness of the *vacana* corpus, its originality, and its spectacular success and influence, even on the early authors, albeit indirectly.

Another unlikely possibility is that *vacana*s were performed, transmitted, and appreciated largely by a different audience than that of literary works. We do not know much about the public context in which literary works were composed nor about the *vacana*s' performative context. The Kannada authors Harihara and Rāghavāṅka are only tenuously associated with political centers, and even less with religious ones, and we are ignorant about how their written texts, too, were performed.[65] Notwithstanding this lacuna, one could argue that the *vacana*s in this period won appreciation elsewhere, perhaps in less literate circles where oral performance of *vacana*s was distinct from that of written literature. But making such claims on the basis of the canon of devotional literature as we have it today, or even as we inherited it in writing since the fifteenth century, seems precarious. In addition, the style with which Harihara composed his *Ragaḷe*s betrays his fascination with oral and popular forms, and from the analysis in this article it is evident that he was not averse nor ignorant of (at least a few) *vacana*s.

Another explanation, and one that is most compelling in my view, is that the *vacana*s were circulated orally in the same communities for which the devotional authors composed their written texts, but that these authors did not feel compelled to write them down or to elaborate on them. The early authors saw the *vacana*s as part of conventional songs performed by devotional communities; they could not, and did not, recognize or acknowledge the *vacana*s' unique significance *as written literature*. Such a hypothesis should not be read as radical in any way, because devotional poetry in a larger sense was circulating and available, and the poems we recognize today as *vacana*s were to some extent indistinguishable within a larger body of oral devotional poems, sung or recited in performative contexts in

65. That is, beyond what is described in later hagiographies. The most direct testimony we have is the opening section of the *Basava Purāṇamu* in the Telugu language, which clearly associated itself with the institutional form of Śaivism in Srisailam, but this setting is not directly connected with the Kannada authors. See Fisher (2019).

different parts of South India, perhaps as early as the sixth century in the Tamil region.[66] What was missing in this period was not the *vacana*s themselves but a literary recognition of their uniqueness and a public appreciation of their messages, vision, literary form, and performative context — all the elements that are signified by the much later label *vacana*. This possibility opens up new ways of imagining the development of an original literary form over time, in this case originating as an organic part of a pre-existing oral culture of devotional songs and evolving into a clearly identifiable and distinct textual corpus that is celebrated and argued over by different religious traditions, literati, and social agents in later periods.

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66. The basic incongruence between the meters used in devotional songs and the non-metrical style of the *vacana*s requires further consideration.

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The Murder of a Buddhist Monk:

A Perspective on Religious Diversity from Thirteenth-century India

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Abstract

One of the earliest authors of Vīraśaiva vernacular literature, Pālkuriki Somanātha, author of the thirteenth-century *Basavapurāṇamu*, crafts a hagiographical vision for his emerging community that relies heavily on narrative accounts of violence against religious others, particularly Buddhists and Jains. This article revisits the question of narrative violence in Śaiva and Vīraśaiva literature by way of an unstudied episode of the Telugu *Exploits of Paṇḍitārādhya* (*Paṇḍitārādhyacaritramu*). Through a close reading of Somanātha's account of the murder of a Buddhist monk, I argue that the upsurge of narrative violence attested in Somanātha's works and adjacent Śaiva vernacular literature must be read in the context of contemporary epigraphical and multilingual prescriptive literature. I suggest that discursive commonalities between these genres—in particular, the use of the term *śivadrōha(mbu)*, "treachery against Śiva"—shed new light on the relationship between religion, law, and violence at the end of the Śaiva Age in south India.

Keywords: Śaiva, Buddhist, Sanskrit, Telugu, Violence

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Contents

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 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

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

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 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 litera-

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.

ture 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:

> 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

4. It should be noted that Anne Monius's (2004) use of the analytic term "harsh devotee" (*vaṉroṇṭar*) 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 *vaṉroṇṭar*. 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).

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] Nevertheless, 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

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 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" (*amūḍhadṛṣṭitvē rēvatīdṛṣṭāntō '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.

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 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

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).
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.

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 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 Cōḷa court and the Śaiva lineages of thirteenth-century Srisailam.[10] I focus on one almost universally

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

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.

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

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 Cōḷas and Vēṅgī Cālukyas.

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

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.

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 re-

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."

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 tran-

gional 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 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

sregional 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).

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).

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 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

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.
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

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 *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:

> *dhāraṇīśvaranitōñ dān iṭṭul aniyen*
> *iccuṭa galadu saṇḍēśunakabhavuñḍ'*
> *iccina teṛañgu mīr' eṛuñgarē? vinuñḍu:*
> *bāṇaliṅgamulanduñ baṭikambulandu*
> *brāṇaliṅgamulanduñ bauṣyarāgādi*
> *liṅgambulandunu lēdu prasādam*
> *aṅgajaharunikin āgamōktamuga*

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).

> [Basava] spoke to the king: "Indeed, there exists a tradition of giving to Caṇḍeśa [the *prasāda*] that had been given by 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, destroyer of Kāma, 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 Sōmanātha's own Sanskrit *Vīramāheśvarācārasārōddhāra* or *Sōmanāthabhāṣya*, as well as in the *Śaivaratnākara*, a Vīramāhēśvara text heavily indebted to the *Sōmanāthabhāṣya*.[22]

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

    bāṇaliṅgē carē lōhē ratnaliṅgē svayambhuvi
    pratimāsu ca sarvāsu na caṇḍō 'dhikṛtō 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 mṛddāruśailakalpitē
    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).

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 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

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.

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

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

maintained their densest presence in the erstwhile domains of the Pāla Empire in the northeast 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

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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 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

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 relevant 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

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 Cōḷa 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).

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).

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 Smṛtis 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 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

28. This episode begins right at the outset of the *Mahimaprakaraṇamu* (*Paṇḍitārādhyacaritramu*, 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
khaṇḍanaśāstratarkaprauḍhi pērmin'
atulapurāṇētihāsāgamānu-
gatanijōdāsīnakalitavākyamula
sakalavēdānantaśākhōpaniṣada-
vikalatarkasmṛtivihitasūktulanu-
śiṣṭānumatahētudṛṣṭāntasupra-
hṛṣṭapramāṇasamīhitōktulanu

in question, however, a certain Gaulabhaṭṭāraka, failed to provide the scathing review the Buddhist had anticipated:

> *vāraṇāsiki sākṣigōriy ā ślōkam*
> *āraṅga gauḷabhaṭṭāraku kaḍakuň*
> *banupa "yatsaṁvittiy" anina ślōkādiň*
> *bonaru nālg' akṣarambulaku bhāṣyamuga*
> *veravuna nālugu vēlu granthambu*
> *viraciñci kartagā haruň bratiṣṭhiñci*
> *śēṣākṣarārtham ā śēṣuňḍainanu vi-*
> *śēṣiñciy aṭl' ani ceppa lēňḍ' anucu*

> Wishing to have it examined in Varanasi, he sent the poem with that verse to Gauḷabhaṭṭāraka. Having composed a skillful text of four thousand *granthas* in commentarial style on those four pleasant syllables in the verse beginning with *yatsamvitti*, he [Gaulabhaṭṭāraka] installed Hara [in it] as Lord, saying "even the serpent Śēṣa himself could not adequately (*viśēṣiñci*) explain the meaning of the rest (*śēṣa*) of the syllables."
>
> 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 returned 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

30. *Paṇḍitārādhyacaritramu*: 164:

[gonni] dinamulu
sana munna mallikārjunu dhikkariñci
palikeň dān aṭe bauddhapāpi darkamuna
geluvaṅgaňjālakay ilan aṭluňgāka
malayucuň datsabhāmaṇṭapambunaku
balimi vaṭrillaňgā kolani śrī cenna-

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:

> *dōṣamb' anaka śivadrōhamb' anaka vi-*
> *śēṣiñci lōkulu sēkonar anaka*
> *vracci teppiñcinavāṅḍ' aṭe vīniṅ*
> *cecceraṅ jampaka cikkitimēniy*
> *ūhimpan ātaṅḍu drōhiyē? manama*
> *drōhālamunu sabhaktulamuṅgāk' anucu*

> Not seeing it as an error, not thinking of it as *treachery against Śiva* (*śivadrōhambu*), nor, even, thinking that people won't accept it, he ripped it out and carried it away. Thus, if we are caught without having killed him, he wouldn't be considered the traitor. We *two* will be traitors (*drōhulu*) and not 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 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

malikārjuna dīpamāle gambambun
ellavārunu jūḍa ...

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.

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 (*asaṁkhyātalay ānatilēkha*, 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 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

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.

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*.

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 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

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).

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, 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

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.)

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 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

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 pitṛdrōhī ca sa smṛtaḥ
    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.

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,

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 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

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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).

41. *Basavapurāṇamu*, p. 243:

> *śivagaṇadrōhambu sēviñbaḍḍay apuḍay*
> *avicāramuna vāri hariyimpavalayuň*
> *jālarēň dārēni samayaṅgavalayuň*
> *gālakāluni bhaktagaṇamārgam idiyu*

Trans. Narayana Rao and Roghair (1990).

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 Cōḷa-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.

Within the inscriptional record both in the Cōḷa 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

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 **dreuǵ^{h}* 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 Ṛgveda, 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, ṚV 10.066.08cd places the semantics of *druh* in direct opposition to *ṛta* (truth) and cannot be coherently construed should we understand the term as strictly signifying "malice":

> *agníhōtāra ṛtasā́pō adrúhō*
> *apō̃ asṛjann ánu vṛtratū́riyē*

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 *ṛta* and *anṛta*. 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 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).

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 court-room proceedings. Taking matters a step further, then, I would argue that through these 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

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 maṛintom

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.

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; his Sanskrit work is appended, chapter by chapter, with the habitual refrain: "Based on this statement and the following, those who do not worship Parameśvara 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 unprece-

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.

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

dented 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 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*,

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.
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).

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 pravṛttaṁ 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*

> 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)

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

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 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 mo-

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śivālayē śivārāmē śivagrāmābhirakṣaṇē
tātparyam aniśaṁ kuryād dhanyāt tadapahāriṇam

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

tivated 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

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).

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:

> *prakaṭitakrōdhāgniparitāpadagdha-*
> *sukr̥tuṇḍu velanāṅṭicōḍaḍ' an pāpi*
> *dhara 'brāhmaṇō na hantavyay' anaṅgaṅ*
> *garam algi tapp' enta galginanainan*
> *adhamajātulaṅ barcunaṭṭi brāhmaṇala*
> *vadhiyimparādu bhūpatik' aṭluṅgāka*
> *śikṣimpaṅ dalaṅtur ēṅ jēyudur olin*
> *akṣidaṇḍamb' arham aṭlunuṅgūḍad'*
> *adhikāparādhakuṅḍaina dvijanmun*
> *adhamāntyajuṇḍ' evvaṅḍainanu śaivuṅḍ'*
> *adhikuṅḍainaṭṭi brāhmaṇu vadhiyimpa*
> *vadhakun anarhuṇḍa vaidikanyāya*
> *gati śivasannidhi gāraṇambunanu*
> *rati vēdaśāstrapurāṇasiddhānta-*
> *matamunaṅ janu vēdamārgambu viḍici*

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.

> *gatabuddhi bauddhēndraghātakuṅḍ' itaṅḍay*
> *aniy akṣadaṇḍanamb' ācarimpaṅgaṅ ...*

> 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 *brāhmaṇa* is not to be killed," no matter how great a transgression has taken place, a *brāhmaṇa* may not be killed in the manner of the lower castes (*adhamajātulu*). How, then, might a king punish him? Gouging out his eyes would be suitable. But this, also, shouldn't be done: a Śaiva, whoever he might be, whether he be a twice-born or of the very lowest birth, even if he has committed a great trangression, being of higher status, should not be killed in accordance with the [aforementioned] Vedic maxim, even if he has killed a *brāhmaṇa*, on account of his proximity to Śiva. [But] having departed from the Vedic path as accords with the Vedas, *śāstra*s, Purāṇas, and Siddhānta, this dimwit has slain this best among Buddhists, so the gouging out of his eyes should be implemented according to proper conduct (*ācarimpaṅgaṅ*).[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

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 Viṇñāneśvara'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).

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 (*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.

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*.

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.

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 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

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."

60. Ganeri (2008: 553).

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 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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Positioning Liṅgāyatism:

Rebellions and the Boundaries of Religion in the History of Royal Mysore

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Abstract

This paper investigates the historical construction and political positioning of Liṅgāyat identity within the context of the Mysore court, emphasizing the influence of political expediency in shaping religious boundaries. Through an analysis of two key narratives about rebellion—one set in the seventeenth century and the other in the nineteenth—the paper explores how Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyats navigated the shifting allegiances and socio-political structures of colonial Mysore. This study argues that Liṅgāyat identity was not solely a product of theological differentiation but was significantly shaped by external political forces. This analysis highlights the intricate relationship between religious identity, state power, and historical memory, offering insights into the broader mechanisms by which religious communities are situated within political frameworks.

Keywords: liṅgāyatism, cikkadēvarāja, vīraśaiva, hinduism, identity, religion, colonialism, kingshop, politics, wodeyars, mysore

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Contents

1 Introduction

Recently, Liṅgāyatism, and more precisely its place in broader classifications of religion in India, has once again become the subject of controversy in Indian legal and public discourse: are Liṅgāyats Hindus? At stake in this controversy are both the Indian Constitution's definition of religion(s) and an individual's and/or community's agency in determining their own religious identity. Some Liṅgāyats had been claiming for decades that they were not Hindus, but it was up to the government to recognize those claims. The conversation over Liṅgāyat religious identity came to a flash point on March 19, 2018, when in a landmark decision, the Congress-led Karnataka Government and its Chief Minister Siddaramaiah decided to grant Liṅgāyatism, whose followers make up 17% of the state's population, the designation of "minority religion" (*Times of India*, March 20, 2018). With this declaration, the state officially marked a distinction between the broader Hindu traditions and the Kannadiga tradition that self-identifies as a separate, non-Hindu religion and traces its philosophy to the *bhakti* poet Basava of the twelfth century. Many aspects of the political intention and potential impact of the state government's decision, including its implications for Indian constitutional hermeneutics and Indian jurisprudence and legislation, lie outside the scope of this essay. In this article, I wish, instead, to use this monumental decision as an opportunity to think about religious identity and the agency through which a group or tradition has the power to demarcate its own boundaries within the broader landscape of religions and religious traditions, particularly those in India. I am interested in the inherently political process of deciding who is "in" and who is "out," who is part of the group and who is, for whatever reason, pushed outside its confines, and, finally, how the decision-making process inevitably resides beyond the agency of the group whose (religious) identity is in question. Indeed, in the days following the Karnataka government's decision, many implied, suggested, or outright accused the reigning Congress government's decision of pandering

to the Liṅgāyat community in an attempt to mobilize its members, approximately 10 million people, in the upcoming statewide elections, and Congress has, likewise, accused the BJP of turning a matter of social and religious identity into an opportunity to sow political discord.

I begin this article with the recent debate described above as a starting point to highlight the ongoing importance of Liṅgāyat community within Kannadiga politics and to highlight how the negotiation of Liṅgāyat identity is subject to political intervention. In this article, I examine two narratives of rebellions, set in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries and written in the nineteenth century, that demonstrate how political positionality became mapped onto the modern religious identity of Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyats — two terms that have their own histories but are interchanged in the Kannada sources that I discussed below and I, therefore, use both terms simultaneously to describe the group/tradition. I argue that histories of the Mysore court, particularly stories of these two revolts written in the nineteenth century, were vehicles for political positioning of Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyatism through negotiation of its acceptability as courtly religious tradition of the Mysore. The political inclusion or exclusion has continued to be a political touch point in the Kannada-speaking south. More broadly, I am interested the ways that different agents mobilize religious identity for political expediency, and, particularly, the pragmatism that determined Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyats' ritual participation in the Mysore court. That is to say, the place of Liṅgāyatism within the broader religious landscape was determined by political concerns relative to where the Liṅgāyat community fit into a political agenda, long before contemporary contentions over the place of religion and religious groups within democratic Indian politics.

I ground my discussion in narratives surrounding two rebellions recorded in nineteenth-century Karnataka, particularly in the kingdom of Mysore that lies in the southern portion of the modern Indian state of Karnataka. By this time, Liṅgāyatism was well established and had matured as both a religious tradition (including established temples, unique rituals, powerful *maṭha*s, and institutional hierarchies) and as a caste identity. To draw out the precarious history of Liṅgāyatism in the context of burgeoning modernity, I focus on two cases of rebellion against the Mysore court by communities of Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyats in which the tradition and its leaders were the focus of political contention. One of these cases was set in the late seventeenth century, one in the early nineteenth century, but both were written about in the nineteenth century. Through these case studies, I hope to show how the Liṅgāyat religious beliefs and practices had little bearing upon their acceptance into the fold of religious traditions of the Mysore court or its political favor. Instead, their status

as insiders or outsiders was prescribed and enacted upon them as a measure of political expediency.

The case of Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyatism in nineteenth-century histories allows us the opportunity to examine the negotiations of identities and how blurry lines of identity, practice, and belief come to form rigid boundaries that separate one group from the next, a process that seems to be as inherent to the category of religion/religions as any other practice, belief, or spiritual pursuit. I suggest, much like Orsi (2006), Chidester (1996), and Boyarin (2004), that rigid distinctions between religious traditions are not natural but imposed from the outside as a means to control, isolate, and/or demean the other. Likewise, in the case of early modern and early colonial Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyatism, the inclusion and exclusion of the tradition from positions within the Mysore court was imposed by the politically strong upon the politically vulnerable, and whether they were "in" or "out" was not simply a theological parting of ways. Instead, minority religious identity was decided by the political elite as they worked to consolidate their own political identities.

2 Cikkadēvarāj and Religion in the Mysore Court in Seventeenth-Century Sources

In the vacuum of political power in the Deccan created by the decline of the Adil Shahi Sultanate, Cikkadēvarāja ascended the throne of Mysore in 1673 CE, unthreatened by the Mysore kingdom's rivals in Bijapur. Cikkadēvarāja strengthened diplomatic relations with the Mughal emperor Alamgir (Aurangzeb) and his general Qasim Khān. Simultaneously, Cikkadēvarāja defended his kingdom against repeated incursions by the Maratha rulers, including Śivajī and his son Śambhājī. Cikkadēvarāja not only repelled the Marathas but expanded the Mysore territories (*Cikkadēvarāya Binnapam* vv. 4–5; Wadayar 1949: 1–5; *REC* My. 99). For his efforts, Cikkadēvarāja's royal chronicler and court poet Tirumalārya bestowed upon him the epithet of "Unequalled Hero" (*apratima-vīra*). Cikkadēvarāja ruled for thirty-two years, longer than any other Mysore king, enjoying a period of imperial control like no other Woḍeyar ruler before or after. While his rule is generally described as one of great peace and stability, the territory of Mysore was under continual onslaught from the south by the newly established Maratha Nāyakas of Madurai and from the north by the Keḷadi rājas of Ikkēri, to whom I will return.

Though the royal histories of the time and his many royal eulogies focused on his military exploits, Cikkadēvarāja was also lauded for the cementing Śrī Vaiṣṇavism as the official tradition of the Mysore rulers during his reign. Indeed, his first major act of patronage in 1674 was the construction of a temple at Trikadamba Nagarī in which he established an image of the principal deity Paravāsudēva, his consort Kamalavallī, and two courtesans (*nācayār*) (*REC* My. 99). The temple was also given implements for conducting Rāmānuja *pūjā* in honor of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava saint in order to secure Cikkadēvarāja's father Doḍḍadēvarāja's perpetual state of bliss in heaven. The foundation inscription that commemorates the establishment of this temple was written by the court poet Tirumalārya, who would eventually become the king's prime minister, and refers to Cikkadēvarāja as the "Stabilizer of Śrī Vaiṣṇava doctrine" (*śrīvaiṣṇava mata pratiṣṭhāpaka*; *REC* My. 99, line 432–433). In addition to this first donative record, the king from early in his reign showed interest in and patronized works by Śrī Vaiṣṇava poets and philosophers. Prominent among them was Cikkōpādhyāya, author of the *Divya Sūri Caritrē* (a Kannada translation of the Tamil poetry of the twelve Āḻvārs and a collection of *māhātmya*s or "glorifications" of popular Śrī Vaiṣṇava pilgrimage sites). These work stress the importance of Śrī Vaiṣṇava tenets in the Woḍeyar political administration and affirm the influence of the tradition in the governance of the region under Cikkadēvarāja. It was not until 1678, however, that Cikkadēvarāja was formally initiated into the religion. After this point he became a staunch and vocal proponent of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition in Mysore and regularly received the epithet of the "Stabilizer of Śrī Vaiṣṇava doctrine" in the region.

3 Cikkadēvarāj and Religion in the Mysore Court in Nineteenth-Century Sources

One hundred and fifty years later, however, a different vision of Cikkadēvarāja's court emerged in colonial-era scholarship. These sources maintain that early in his reign, Cikkadēvarāja's court had space for a plurality of religious and sectarian traditions. In the early 1800s, in his *Rājāvaḷi Kathāsāra*, the Jain poet and historian Dēvacandra writes in great detail about Cikkadēvarāja's training with three gurus from three different religious traditions: Tirumalārya (Śrī Vaiṣṇava), Ṣaḍakṣariya (Vīraśaiva), and Viśālākṣa (Jain, Saṇṇayya 1988: 341, 347). Dēvacandra writes that they each had a profound impact on his religious practice and in the administration of his kingdom. Dēvacandra worked with the Mysore Survey un-

der the leadership of Colin Mackenzie, and it was for the Survey that he wrote his account, receiving a commission of 25 rupees from the surveyor in 1804 (Sastri 1941). According to Dēvacandra, at Cikkadēvarāja's coronation, he selected the Jain Viśālākṣa (also called Yaḷandūra Paṇḍita and Yelandur Pundit) as his prime minister. According to Wilks (1869 [1810]: 124), this led many to believe that the king intended to be initiated as a Jain. Several scholars have also maintained that Cikkadēvarāja was a practicing *jaṅgama*, a wandering Vīraśaiva priest (Śastri 1920: 47; Rice 1897: 2461). C. Hayavadana Rao, a colonial historian of the Mysore court, followed Wilks in arguing that Cikkadēvarāja remained a devout "jangam" (1943: 482) from the time of his coronation through the early years as king. Of note in each of these colonial-era sources is that Śrī Vaiṣṇava, Vīraśaiva, and Jain are all treated as distinct traditions. There is no implication that Śrī Vaiṣṇavism and Vīraśaivism are any closer to one another as "Hindu" traditions than they are to Jainism, but they are all shown as equally competing for recognition and supremacy in Cikkadēvarāja's court. Moreover, it appears that while they jockeyed for position and patronage — and contrary to broader theological and ideological positioning — these traditions were not portrayed to be mutually exclusive with the king simultaneously participating in rituals associated with all three traditions.

These same sources point to the civil strife of 1686 as an important turning point for the sectarian affiliation of the Woḍeyar court. After losing the city of Madurai and paying a handsome ransom for peace earlier in the same year, the Mysore kingdom was weakened and its coffers dwindling. Cikkadēvarāja therefore worked to reconcile the state's financial burden by increasing tax revenues in his domains, especially some of his newly acquired domains in the north. The exact amount that was levied on the yield is not known for certain. While many sources claim that the king raised the taxes on the land up to one-third of the produce, twice as much as the one-sixth prescribed in most traditional legal texts (e.g., *Manu Smṛti*, Wilks 1869 [1810]: 124–128), others claim that Cikkadēvarāja simply started enforcing tax collection (Rice 1897: 2462). Regardless of the amount, provincial cultivators resented the increased economic burden. These cultivators included residents of the erstwhile Keḷadi kingdom of Ikkēri when Cikkadēvarāja's army defeated Basappa Nāyaka in 1682. The Mysore and Keḷadi kingdoms had been involved in ongoing conflicts throughout the seventeenth century, and the Mysore armies had regularly attacked these lands for decades. The kingdom was annexed by Cikkadēvarāja in 1682, but after the tax reforms were put into place in 1686, a large part of the territory reportedly revolted against Cikkadēvarāja. The ruler and many of the subjects of the Ikkēri kingdom had been Vīraśaiva-Līngāyatas,

and the network of *jaṅgama*s and their vast system of *maṭhas* throughout the region was allegedly instrumental in organizing the revolt. It was accordingly the Vīraśaiva-Līngāyata religion against which the state retaliated. Ironically, if we take Wilks's account at its word, it was the effective organization of the Vīraśaiva-Līngāyatas that led them to become peripheral in the royal networks of religious practice and patronage.

Due to a dearth of sources, it is difficult to accurately reconstruct how the events of this rebellion unfolded. The only contemporaneous source that attests to the rebellion of 1686 is a letter sent from the Jesuit missionary P. Louis de Mello to R. P. de Noyelle, the leader of the Jesuits ("general de la compagnie de Jésus"), that is also dated 1686 (Bétrand 1850, 376–404). His account of the events is as follows:

> To provide for the expenses of war, the king of Mysore exerted on the eastern provinces of its states exactions and cruelties so revolting that his subjects rose *en masse* against him and against all his ministers. Driven by their weakening losses and current agony and without reflection on the future, as all the enslaved peoples who are deprived of patriotic sentiments, they formed two great armies and chose for their generals two brahmins, leaders of the sects of Viṣṇu and Śiva...
>
> The king of Mysore, outraged at their insolence, dispatched against them an army charged with setting everything to fire and blood, and to pass the rebels at the edge of the sword, regardless of age and sex. These cruel orders were carried out; the pagodas of Viṣṇu and Śiva were destroyed, and their immense revenues were confiscated for the benefit of the royal treasury. Those idolaters who escaped the carnage fled to the mountains and in the forests, where they lead a miserable life.
>
> Bétrand 1850: 377, 380–381, my translation

The letter continues describing how the revolt specifically targeted Christians in the region and the heroes that arose from their ranks to fight for the cause of Christ. While this partisan emphasis in the letter contains obvious exaggeration, the letter blames the king for the insurrection against Mysore in 1686 and identifies religious leaders as its instigators.

The later and more detailed accounts of the colonial-era historians claim to be based on oral histories from the region. These oral histories were recorded in English (Wilks 1869 [1810]) and Kannada (Dēvacandra's *Rājāvaḷi Kathāsāra*, Saṇṇayya 1988) and appear alongside the details of Cikkadēvarāja's pluralistic court from the early nineteenth century de-

scribed above. Not only do these sources give a more thorough accounting of the rebellion but they relate gruesome tales of treachery, religious persecution, and mass murder.

The first such account of the rebellion was recorded and printed by Mark Wilks, the acting Resident of the British East India Company in the Mysore court of Krishnaraja Woḍeyar III from 1803–1808 (Carlyle 1900: 279–280). Wilks bases his version of the events on a "traditionary account …[that] has been traced through several channels to sources of the most respectable information" (Wilks 1869 [1810]: 129). Like Jesuit missionary P. Louis de Mello, Wilks's account is replete with allusions of mismanagement that certainly served his role as an agent of the British East India Company, and it seems likely that his version of the story was shaped by Liṅgāyat informers and his personal predilection for their "rational reform" (Wilks 1869 [1810]: 514). The first recorded Kannada version of the events is in the *Rājāvaḷi Kathāsāra* (1838) that was written by the Jain poet Dēvacandra. Dēvacandra's account of the story, like the Liṅgāyat version related by Wilks, is told from sectarian perspective, highlighting the ills that were perpetrated on the Mysore Jain community. It also must be noted that Wilks acknowledges in his preface that he worked closely with Mackenzie, who gave Wilks "unlimited access to the study of [his] collection … and to his establishment of learned native assistants" (Wilks 1869 [1810]: xii); therefore, it is extremely likely that Dēvacandra was familiar with Wilks's account and that they might have even had the opportunity to discuss one another's version of the events.

Both Wilks and Dēvacandra point to the adoption of royal titles as the very first tension that later erupts into the full-blown rebellion. For Wilks, the problems began when Cikkadēvarāja forced the local, smaller rulers to renounce their royal titles, like *woḍeyar*, *palegāra*, and *rāja* and to join his court in official, albeit diminished, capacities and to cede administration over legal and financial decisions within their realms to the Mysore king. According to Wilks, this angered the "Jungum priests" (i.e., Liṅgāyats) because they had formerly held enormous sway over the courts in these outlying feudatory territories. When the new financial reforms were enforced, the Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyats used this as an opportunity to push their followers into revolt.

In Dēvacandra's account, the controversy focused on the title *woḍeyar*. During the Vijayanagara Empire, *oḍeyar* (also spelled *voḍeyar*, *vaḍiyar*, etc.) had been an administrative title for a petty chieftain. After the fall of the empire, many of the successor states transformed their titles to family names, such as the title *nāyaka*. The title *woḍeyar* would become a point of contention with emerging kings and religious leaders adopting the sovereign title. The Mysore Woḍeyars adopted *woḍeyar* as their family name while changing their title

to *rāja* and *mahārāja*. Simultaneously, however, *woḍeyar* had been adopted as the title for Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat swamis, particularly those who oversaw their religio-political institutions or *maṭha*s. Dēvacandra suggests that the Vīraśaiva *maṭha*s had become so powerful that the Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat *woḍeyars* wanted the title to themselves and desired to overthrow the Mysore state (Saṇṇayya 1988: 347).

While both sources agree that the Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat leaders stoked the insurrection and cut off Mysore's revenue stream by encouraging the cultivators to cease agricultural work, Dēvacandra adds that the *jaṅgama*s and their followers took up arms and forced the king's representatives out of the region. On the council of his Jain prime minister Viśālākṣa, Cikkadēvarāja sent Firdullā Khān, a junior officer (*jamādāra*) from his cavalry. After the Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat *oḍeyar*s demanded that the Mysore kings cede their authority to the Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyats leaders, Firdullā Khān cut down the rebel leaders with a spray of arrows. While this effectively ended the revolt, the demands of the *jaṅgama*s incensed Cikkadēvarāja, and the king ordered his *gurikāra* (headman) Nanjē Gauḍa to hunt down the remaining *jaṅgama*s, destroy their *maṭha*s, and confiscate their rent-free lands. Gauḍa was efficient in his efforts, rounding up over 1,000 *jaṅgama*s who were promptly brought before the king and executed. As further punishment, the king ordered the region's taxes to be raised yet again. For Dēvacandra, however, the events do not end with the victory of the king, but with the assassination of the Jain prime minister Viśālākṣa, whom the Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat community held responsible for the slaughter of their leaders and their exorbitant taxes. On his death bed, Viśālākṣa recommends the staunch Śrī Vaiṣṇava minister Tirumalārya, who goes on to effectively consolidate religious authority within his own tradition.

According to Wilks's rendering of the events, Cikkadēvarāja did not wait for the rebellion to organize. Instead, once the news that labor in the fields had ceased and revenues were no longer being collected arrived, Cikkadēvarāja "adopted a plan of perfidy and horror, yielding in infamy to nothing which we find recorded in the annals of the most sanguinary people" (Wilks 1868 [1810]: 128). The king, then, invited the Vīraśaiva-Līngāyata priests and *maṭha* leaders to the Śrīkaṇṭhēśvara (a.k.a. Nañjuṇḍēśvarasvāmī) temple in Nañjaṅgūḍu under the pretense of brokering a peace treaty. Four hundred *jangama*s came for the meeting, and one by one they were led through a labyrinthian walled corridor. At its end they were received by the king to whom they would bow in obeisance. After this formal recognition of the king's overlordship, the individual leader would be ushered into the next room. Instead of receiving gifts for their participation, which was the custom, they were met by an executioner who beheaded each priest and threw the body into a mass grave. On the very

same day, orders were carried out for the destruction of seven hundred Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat *maṭha*s throughout the kingdom. In the subsequent days and weeks, the king's men roamed the countryside assassinating anyone wearing an ochre robe and any followers that were with them. After eradicating the leadership, Cikkadēvarāja canceled all of the tax-free land grants given to the Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyats and continued with his tax reforms (Wilks 1868 [1810]: 128).

After the revolt was subdued, Wilks's account continues, Cikkadēvarāja eliminated the Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyats from the Woḍeyar court and installed a new Śrī Vaiṣṇava prime minister, Tirumalārya. Though Vīraśaiva-Līngāyatas were not formally forbidden from his court, a royal decree issued by Cikkadēvarāja in 1693 forbade non–Śrī Vaiṣṇava sectarian marks in the Mysore court, effectively ostracizing anyone who wore the Liṅgāyat *liṅga* (Rao 1948: 365). Instead, the primary criterion for full participation in the court was affiliation with the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition, which was signified by initiation through the five rites (*pañca-saṁskāra*) and the correct continued performance of Śrī Vaiṣṇava rituals (Rao 1948: 365).

For both Wilks and Dēvacandra, Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyats were systematically excluded from participation in the court, not as a result of their beliefs or practices, but as a consequence of their role in the rebellion. According to these sources, after 1686, Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat ritual and practice had no place in the Woḍeyar religious worldview; they were effectively outsiders. Whenever we consider the context during which these new details for the rebellions emerged, there is an additional layer of complexity to understanding the role Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat identity in the politics of southern Karnataka. Published in 1810 (Wilks) and 1838 (Dēvacandra), both accounts of the Revolt of 1686 appeared during the reign of Kṛṣṇarāja Woḍeyar III, and on either side of the rebellion of 1830–1831, as a result of which he would eventually lose his power. As with the colonial-era details of the Revolt of 1686, historians claim that the Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat community were catalysts for the insurgency. Through this context, we can better understand the role of Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat identity as a political concern in Mysore in the early nineteenth century and how this might have shaped the colonial-era histories of the seventeenth-century revolt.

4 The Rebellion of 1830–1831

We now turn to the rebellion that was just mentioned, namely, the Nagara Rebellion of 1830–1831 CE, or the "Peasant Insurgency," as Burton Stein has called it. This rebellion took place in the Mysore kingdom during the reign of Kṛṣṇarāja Woḍeyar III (r. 1799–

1868 CE) and was one of the reasons adduced by the British East India Company to strip the king of his administrative sovereignty. Similar to the rebellion during Cikkadēvarāja's reign, the Nagara Rebellion arose in reaction to land-tax reforms, and the Mysore court held the Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat community responsible. Though the rebellion was quickly subdued, the the rebellion of 1830–1831 led to the weakening of Mysore kingship and the strengthening of Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyatism into the center of Mysore royal practice.

Like the Revolt of 1686, the Nagara Rebellion started in the northeastern portion of the kingdom in the Śimōga district (*tālūk*) of the Nagara governorship (*fauzdāri*). The chieftains of this area claimed descent from the Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat Keḷadi Ikkēri kings and contested Kṛṣṇarāja III's rule during the early years of his reign (he was installed by the British at four years old after the defeat of Ṭipū Sultān in 1799). However, the Britishf orces quickly quelled this descent in order to solidify Kṛṣṇarāja III's shaky claims to the throne.[1] The hesitation of the Nagara chieftains to support the newly "restored" king earned them steeper taxes under the cash tax system instituted during the famous administrator Pūrṇayya's time as Kṛṣṇarāja's *divan* (Stein 1985: 15–16). The tension subsided for a while, but the chieftains of this peripheral zone soon challenged the authority of the Woḍeyar king once again. Buḍi Basappa, a wealthy chieftain of Nagara, proclaimed himself to be the king (*rājā*) of Nagara, descendant of the Keḷadi-Ikkēri kings. The new "king" immediately called upon agriculturalists of the region to stop paying taxes to Mysore and join his cause to revoke the king's claim to sovereignty in the territory. The rebellion spread to other regions of the Mysore kingdom as agriculturalists from the *fauzdāris* of Madhugiri, Aṣṭagrāma, and Bangalore ceased paying taxes and joined in violent revolt.

While most subsequent scholarship (Gopal 1960; Stein 1985; Gopal and Prasad 2010), has followed the British colonial-era account in presenting the rebellion as essentially a tax revolt, the role of Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyatism in the spread of the 1830–1831 rebellion should not be understated, especially in its claims of sovereign authority by the new king of Nagara, Buḍi Basavappa. Before he was Buḍi Basavappa, the new king was a petty criminal named Śāradāmalla (lit., "Saraswati's hero"). Śāradāmalla met a Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat *jaṅgama* who claimed to be the former *purōhita* of the final Keḷadi Nāyaka Channabas(av)appa (r. 1754–1757), who ruled prior to Nagara's fall to Ṭipū Sultān's father Haidar Ali and the Keḷadi kingdom's incorporation as territory of Mysore. The former Keḷadi *purōhita* had in his possession the insignia of the erstwhile royal family and vested the authority of the Keḷadi

1. For more regarding the precarity of Kṛṣṇarāja's claim to the throne *vis-à-vis* Ṭipū Sultān's sons, see Simmons 2020: 113, 129 n. 34.

kingdom on Śārādamalla by bestowing him with the royal insignia and claiming that he was actually the son of the final ruler of the Keḷadi kingdom in Nagara. Endowed with the outward signs of royalty and the genealogy of the Keḷadi rulers, Śāradāmalla adopted the name Buḍi Basavappa (lit. "Basavappa's Descendant") and began raising an army.

The Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat elites served as the mouthpieces of the rebellion, who read the dissenters' propaganda to the "peasants" (Stein 1985: 15). The Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat population — 30% of the region — was quickly mobilized by the networks of *jaṅgama*s and their call to action. Hesitant members of the community were further prodded to join the revolt through threats of excommunication from the sect via pronouncement of pollution or, even worse, having "horns and bones of animals thrown into their houses" if they did not fall in line with the insurgency (Stein 1985: 18).

By the beginning of 1831, the Mysore administrators and their forces had been effectively ousted from Nagara, causing the British East India Company troops to step in and take the region back for the Mysore kingdom. In the wake of the rebellion and a lengthy study of its causes, British administrators decided that rebellion was a result of Kṛṣṇarāja III's mismanagement of finances and his appointment of administrators ill-suited to perform their duties for the benefit of the state (Hawker *et al.* 1833). Therefore, Kṛṣṇarāja III's direct rule of the Mysore kingdom ended, and the administration of the kingdom was bequeathed to a series of British Commissioners. In the deliberations that led to this decision, British correspondence makes the case that Kṛṣṇarāja III had no dynastic sovereign claims over the region of Nagara, which had formerly been part of the kingdom of Keḷadi. It had been incorporated into the kingdom of Mysore through the rights of conquest during the period of the usurpers Haidar Ali and Ṭipū Sultān, who had conquered the region in 1763 and 1782, respectively, and established themselves as the kings of Nagara.[2] Nagara had only become the possession of the Wodeyar kings through the Subsidiary Treaty of 1799 after the death of Ṭipū Sultān.

As I have argued elsewhere (Simmons 2020), in the subsequent years of his reign, Kṛṣṇarāja III and his court emphasized his "Hindu" identity — even using the term — as he attempted to situate himself into the British historiography of India. This was done in an attempt to justify his claims to kingship, not on the grounds of the "rights of conquest" but through religious identity as the rightful "ancient Hindu rajah" of Mysore (Simmons 2020: 107–132). Kṛṣṇarāja III argued for his sovereignty over the region through both explicit and

2. The city at the time was called "Bidanūru" but was renamed Haidarnagara ("City of Haidar") by Ṭipū Sultān. After the fall of Ṭipū Sultān, the name was shortened to Nagara.

implicit claims of Hindu identity and kingship, framing himself as a king for all Hindus. In addition to theoretical framing of his sovereign authority, a consolidated Hindu identity served as a means to unite the various religious traditions of southern Karnataka under one larger unified political banner. Therefore, Kṛṣṇarāja III thoroughly incorporated Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyatism into his ritual and devotional life in an attempt to consolidate support through appeals to a Hindu identity (see Stoker 2016). Kṛṣṇarāja III went to such great lengths to demonstrate his acceptance of Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyatism that he was initiated into the tradition and incorporated it into the Woḍeyars' origin narrative.

The most thorough account that connects Kṛṣṇarāja III to the Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat tradition is detailed in the *Śrīmanmahārājavara Vaṁśāvaḷi* (or *Lineage of the Kings of Mysore*, ca. 1867), a lengthy history of the Mysore kings that is attributed to the king himself. The text traces the lineage of the Woḍeyars from the creation of the cosmos to Kṛṣṇarāja III, particularly focusing on the period following the migration of the Wodeyar progenitor Yadurāya to Mysore in 1399 CE. It is in this narrative of the establishment of the Wodeyar kingdom in Mysore that Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyatism is embedded into Wodeyar sovereignty through the authority of a *jaṅgama*. The text tells us that Yadurāya and his brother Kṛṣṇarāya traveled to Mysore and immediately made a pilgrimage to Chamundi Hill to see the goddess Cāmuṇḍēśvari, who was supposed to give them a kingdom over which they would rule. After worshiping the goddess, she appeared before the brothers and told them to go to the goddess Uttanahalli's temple and then "to go the Kōḍibhairava temple beside the pond, which is behind the temple of Īśvara who was worshiped by the Ṛṣi Tṛnabindu that is on the East side of Mysore city, and stay there. At that time, a man wearing a *liṅga* and the robes of a *jaṅgama* will come. When he sees you, he will say a few words" (Wodeyar 1916: 4–7, my translation; see also Simmons 2020). The brothers did as they were told and the next morning they met a *jaṅgama*. After a brief conversation about the brothers' background and their journey to Mysore, the *jaṅgama* told them of the evils that had beset Mysore and its former rulers and that another *jaṅgama* would come give them instructions on how to take the city. At this point, the mendicant vanished, and the brothers realized that the Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat mendicant had been none other than Śiva in his manifestation as Śrīkaṇṭhēśvara, the deity who lives at nearby Nañjaṅgūḍu. They vowed right then and there that, just as Cāmuṇḍi is their family goddess, Śrīkaṇṭhēśvara will be their family god, in marked contrast to the slaughter of Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyats in the Śrīkaṇṭhēśvara of Nañjaṅgūḍu during the revolt of 1686 as described in Wilks's history. The centrality of the Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat tradition in the foundation of the Mysore Wodeyar kingdom is further reiterated later in the

narrative at Yadurāya's coronoation in the *Śrīmanmahārājavara Vaṁśāvaḷi*: "Having made [Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyatism] their family tradition as requested by the *jaṅgama*, who had been pleased by their actions, the brothers commanded that all subsequent rulers would be called by the name Woḍeyar, and that saffron cloth, the symbol and vestment of the *jaṅgama*s, be included in their flag (Wodeyar 1916: 7, my translation).

This small reference is easy to overlook but is crucial for the refashioning of the Woḍeyar kings as sovereigns authorized by Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyatism as a result of their piety and devotion. As mentioned earlier, the term *oḍeyar* was a medieval term employed within imperial administration that denoted a small local vassal. This title was given to Bōḷu Cāmarāja IV by the Vijayanagara viceroy in 1573. The Woḍeyar clan certainly developed their family name from this petty administrative and political position within Vijayanagara polity as a way to maintain royal authority as the empire crumbled. The term *oḍeyar* had also developed into a title for a leader within the Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat network of priests. By providing an alternate origin of the Woḍeyar family name, instead of tracing their name from the Vijayanagara imperium, the *Śrīmanmahārājavara Vaṁśāvaḷi* connects the entire lineage to Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat leaders, resolving the tension over the title that Dēvacandra claimed had been the source of the 1686 rebellion.

The origin story of the *Śrīmanmahārājavara Vaṁśāvaḷi*, which was written approximately thirty-five years after the rebellion of 1830–1831 and the subsequent British takeover, is the first extant record of Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat influence in the Wodeyar origin story. It, therefore, can only be understood in the context of the previous revolt as a *post hoc* attempt to make a place of prominence for the Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat community within the devotional worldview of Kṛṣṇarāja III's kingdom. Just as in the case of Buḍi Basavappa, this devotional alliance with Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat priests and their religious institutions worked to retroactively bestow spiritual and sovereign power to the Wodeyar king whose authority was questioned and sovereignty challenged.

The bonds between Kṛṣṇarāja III and Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat community were further strengthened through the production and circulation of portraits of the king, a common practice of the Mysore kings to display devotional preferences and alliances in early modern and colonial period (Simmons 2020). Kṛṣṇarāja III's devotional imagery was far more extensive than his predecessors, including paintings and prints, ranging from large murals to frontispieces of mass-produced books, of the king conducting rituals that were circulated throughout his kingdom and abroad. While most of the devotional images of Kṛṣṇarāja III focused on the goddess Cāmuṇḍēśvari or Śrī Vaiṣṇava practice, several extant portraits portray the

Figure 1: Kṛṣṇarāja III wearing an *iṣṭaliṅga*. Government Museum, Bangalore. Photo by author with permission.

king wearing the outward signs of Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat devotion, a personal *iṣṭaliṅga* (figure 1), and conducting Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat ritual to his personal *liṅga* (figure 3). Through this display of his pious practice Kṛṣṇarāja III incorporated the Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat practice within the royal ritual repertoire, projecting his new persona as the Hindu king and the king for all Hindus for both his subjects and his British overlords, regardless of whether or

Figure 2: Detail of *iṣṭaliṅga* from figure 1.

not Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyats considered themselves to be part of his Hindu fold (see Simmons 2020).

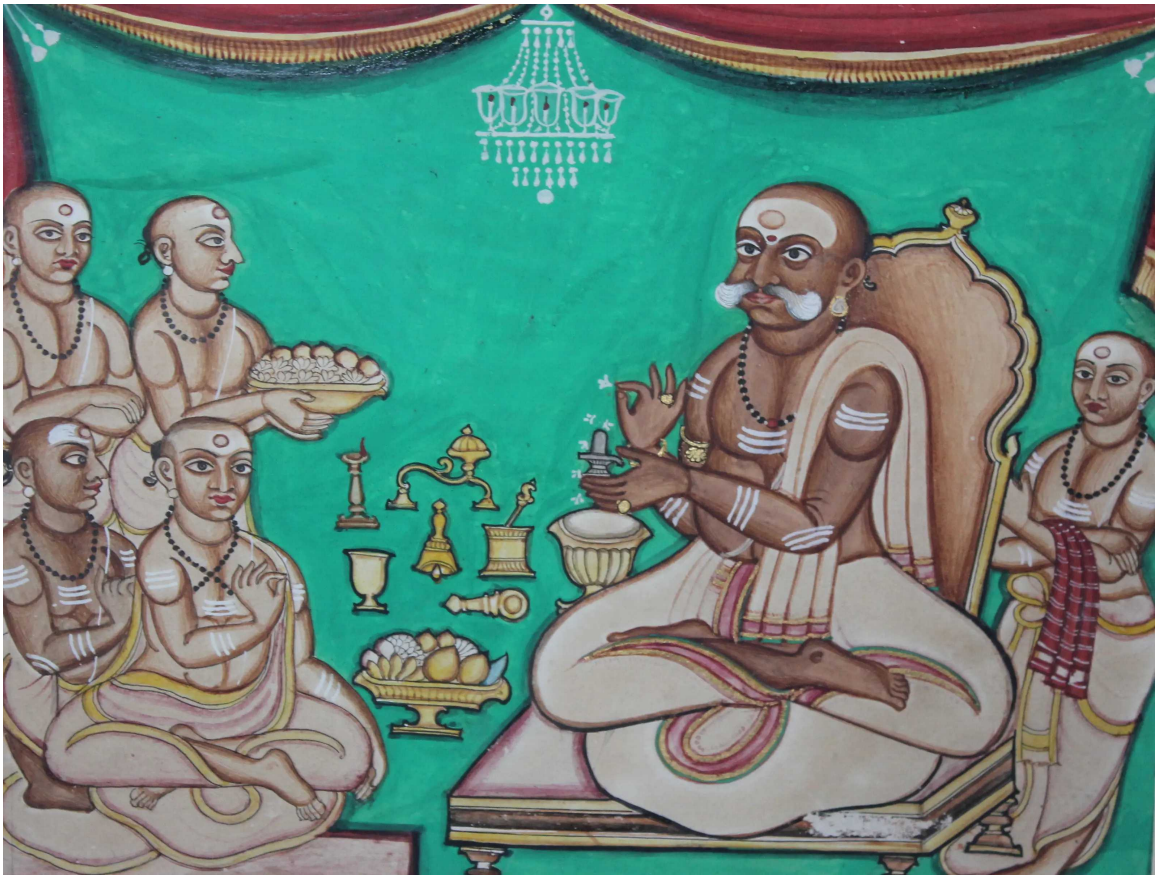

Figure 3: Kṛṣṇarāja performing *iṣṭaliṅga puje*. Government Museum, Bangalore. Photo by author with permission.

5 Conclusion

Through these two case studies, I have attempted to shed light on the construction of Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat identity *vis-à-vis* political authority and structures within early modern and colonial Mysore to provide us with an opportunity to think about external factors that shape religious identities. The inclusion or exclusion of a religious tradition — in our case the exclusion of the Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat tradition from the allegedly pluralistic court of Cikkadēvarāja and its inclusion within the "Hindu" court of Kṛṣṇarāja III — and, therefore, the determination of one's religious identity has a history of being a contentious topic in the political arena. Exclusion and inclusion, othering and appropriation, are not simply unidi-

rectional or macro-level processes; instead, they are dynamic and fluid positions that change in response to a variety of stimuli. Additionally, the construction of religious identity is often beyond the purview of the tradition itself, but it is shaped, and often mandated, from the outside.

Returning to the framing mechanism of contemporary Liṅgāyatism, this history allows us to see continuity and fracture with the past. As alluded to above, Liṅgāyats began their movement to be considered a separate religion in the 1920s. This movement too was not without external factors. If Liṅgāyatism were recognized as a religion distinct from Hinduism, its practitioners would be afforded the rights of minority religions. This movement, however, has never been entirely representative of the Liṅgāyat community as a whole, which like most religious traditions is not monolithic or heterogeneous. Over the decades since Independence, the majority Liṅgāyat political alliance has shifted between different political parties, often gravitating toward Hindu nationalist positions. Indeed, in the aftermath of Siddaramaiah's decision, prominent leaders and heads of Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat *maṭha*s came together to pass a resolution against the government's decision. Even the decision about Liṅgāyat identity led to accusations from prominent Liṅgāyats that the Congress Party was attempting to divide the Hindu community (Shivasundar 2023). Congress eventually lost the election, including in Liṅgāyat-dominated regions, and Siddaramaiah lost as chief minister of Karnataka. This conclusion is not intended to tread into the territory of analyzing contemporary politics. Certainly, as the postscript to Siddaramaiah's 2018 decision about Liṅgāyatism demonstrates, the identity of Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyat's and its inclusion and exclusion is still an ongoing discussion. The history of Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyatism's role in the court of Mysore, however, can help us to understand the complex historical and cultural context that shape contemporary politics and debates and help us to better understand the role political expediency play in the shaping of religions and religious identity.

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