*Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā*:
**An Imperial Tantric Manual from Vijayanagara**

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**Abstract**

This thesis examines the *Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā*, a tantric manual for kingship created during the rule of the Vijayanagara Empire of early sixteenth-century South India. After establishing the plural, inclusive nature of religion at Vijayanagara in this period, this study identifies two crucial ways in which the text's titular goddess Sāmrājyalakṣmī rewards kings who correctly propitiate her: firstly, by helping them to actualize god-like status on earth, and secondly, by allowing them to absolve themselves of sin (*pāpa*) without curbing their ability to perform the violence necessitated by their caste affiliation. In this way, *Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā* articulates a solution to the classical Indian quandary of kingly dependence upon (and inferiority to) Brahmins, in the process offering kings unprecedented ritual power which translates directly into political power and, ultimately, universal overlordship (*sāmrājya*). The text provides another example of how tantric practices can be and were central to Indian society, aiding in statecraft and kingship.

# Résumé

Cette thèse s'intéresse au *Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā*, manuel tantrique destiné à la royauté sous l'Empire Vijayanagara du début du XVIe siècle en Inde du Sud. Après avoir défini la nature plurielle et inclusive de la religion sous les Vijayanagara, cette étude identifie deux types d'intervention utilisées par la déesse Sāmrājyalakṣmī pour récompenser les rois qui apaisent sa colère: d'abord en les aidant à atteindre un statut divin, ensuite en leur permettant de s'absoudre de leurs fautes (*pāpa*) sans limiter leur capacité à poser les gestes violents inhérents à leurs fonctions. Le *Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā* propose une solution au dilemme de la dépendance du roi et de son infériorité aux Brahmans. Il offre un pouvoir rituel innovateur se traduisant par une puissance politique menant potentiellement au pouvoir impérial (*sāmrājya*). Voilà un nouvel exemple des modalités à partir desquelles le pouvoir tantrique fut, et demeure central dans la société indienne, contribuant aux affaires étatiques et royales.

**Note on Transliteration**

For the most part, this thesis employs standard transliteration for Sanskrit and Tamil words. I have used diacritical marks for the personal names of pre-Colonial figures, as well as for places of mythological significance.

## Acknowledgements

**Introduction**

*Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā* (literally "seat of the goddess Sāmrājyalakṣmī") is a

kingship manual that emerged out of the South Indian empire of Vijayanagara during the

sixteenth century CE. Written in Sanskrit, the text focuses in large part upon the worship

of its titular goddess Sāmrājyalakṣmī, a form of Lakṣmī who grants power and well-being

to kingship lineages (or "*sāmrājyas*"). Encyclopaedic in scope, *Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā*

synthesizes the rather disparate traditions of Sanskrit courtly culture, goddess worship,

and, perhaps most incongruously, tantric elements such as mantra (formulaic prayer) and

*yantra* (auspicious patterns and symbols). Much of the text is dedicated to the description

of tantric rituals and practices, suggesting over and over again that such rites can allow

kings to acquire magical powers, destroy enemies more efficiently, and absolve

themselves of accumulated sin. Ultimately, the text promises the king who correctly

follows its rituals emperorship over vast territories. Surprisingly, even though the

*Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā* provides a virtual blueprint for tantric kingship, the work has

inspired only three scholarly studies to date (Sarangi 1993; Thite 1978-1979; Gode 1954).

While these studies have been helpful in providing us with ideas as to the dating and

location of the text (as well will see in subsequent sections), they have remained almost

entirely in the realm of the descriptive, failing to address critical issues such as whom the

*SLP* was intended for, and how the text operated alongside established traditions of

kingship.

 That scholars have hesitated to look at *Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā* critically, if they have

even acknowledged the text's existence at all, speaks to some overarching difficulties with

tantric studies. Most obviously, the use of a phrase like "tantric kingship" to describe such a text or tradition is bound to raise the eyebrows of more than a few students of Indian religion, especially those of Indian kingship. Based on the present scholarly opinion regarding both tantra and Indian kingship, the pairing of the two categories might seem to border upon a contradiction in terms. Kingship is, after all, a proud and indispensible aspect of Indian history that has allowed us to understand temple rituals, conceptualizations of dharma, and other topics that have been of great interest to scholars. Tantra, on the other hand, has proven to be a misunderstood, under-studied, and sometimes even embarrassing facet of Indian religion for both scholars and Indians alike. Furthermore, kingship is and always has been a public concern, while tantra is typically thought of as secretive and subversive. More specifically, kingship is inextricably linked with higher-caste status and membership in the Kṣatriya *varṇa*, while tantra, often noted for its pointed rejection of Vedic notions of what is pure and impure, is stereotypically thought to be removed from Brahminical hegemony altogether, subsisting in bizarre midnight rituals at cremation grounds. The prevailing popular (and sometimes even scholarly) definition of tantra is fixated on that tradition's insistence upon transgressing prudish norms, whether they be those of Vedas or of the West, often associating tantric ritual with the erotic and the macabre (Urban 1999). Kingship, on the other hand, enacts dharma in the public sphere, enforcing proper behaviour and respect for universal moral tenets by way of force.[1] In sum, kingship has long been considered fundamentally central to Indian society and religion, while tantra has been thought of as peripheral. How then,

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[1] Tantric literature itself appears to separate these incongruent traditions of tantra and kingship, as in the *Niruttara Tantra*, which draws sharp contrast between Vaidika and *tāntrika* consecration: while the royal consecration is based upon Vedic injunctions, esoteric consecration is hidden in tantras (Urban 2003a, 32).

could these two worlds coexist – how could kingship ever be tantric?

This present study concerns itself with answering these sorts of questions. Firstly, how is it that a text like the *Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā* (hereafter abbreviated as *SLP*), concerned with the supposedly marginal activities of tantra, became useful for the most central aspect of statecraft – that is, kingship – especially in the kingdom of Vijayanagara, which had frequently been thought of as a "bulwark" of Hindu conservatism (as per Sewell 1900)? Further, what kind of power, both political and metaphysical, did the *SLP* afford the king and his retinue? Finally, is there indeed such a phenomenon as "tantric kingship" and, if so, what can it tell us about prevailing scholarly conceptualizations of tantra itself? We will find that tantrism can and did exist alongside kingship, at least in the vision of the authors of the *SLP*. The program of tantric goddess worship the text prescribes served as a political and metaphysical expedient for the king, making it possible for him to become the most powerful being in the kingdom, if not the universe. The rites described in the text enabled a king to obtain superhuman status via magical powers (or *aṣṭaiśvaryas*), allowing him to destroy his enemies more efficiently. All the while, the king was able to forgive those sins that were borne out of the violence he committed, making him independent of the Brahmins and thereby mitigating perennial tensions between kings and priests in South Asia. Thus, via partnership with the goddess Sāmrājyalakṣmī, this god-like king ideally became the most powerful entity in Indian society, and perhaps even in the universe. This line of argument suggests that Vijayanagara was not as conservative as is sometimes thought. That said, *SLP* by no means sought to completely overhaul the social order of the kingdom – after all, the

existence of the text was by all indications kept secret – though it worked to covertly give the ruler of Vijayanagara not only supreme political power but also supreme spiritual power, presumably for the betterment of the state. This suggests that tantra is not inherently peripheral to Indian society, at the very least not at Vijayanagara.

## Difficulties of Scholarship on Tantra

Few categories in the study of South Asian religion have proven more problematic than that of tantra. This section seeks to work through two of these difficulties by 1) delineating a working definition of tantra, and 2) re-evaluating the scholarly tendency to characterize tantra as a transgressive and/or subversive phenomenon that exists on the periphery of Indian society.

*Defining Tantra*

A ubiquitous definition of tantra has evaded scholarly grasp throughout the history of studies into "Tantrism", and the typically vague understanding of what tantra is as a whole has allowed the category to inherit a willy-nilly mix of meanings, many of them seemingly paradoxical. This has even lead some scholars, such as Andre Padoux, to question the very existence of tantra as a category of religion, in the process reminding the academic audience that tantrism was *not* a religious category acknowledged by Indian people, but rather an etic construction – a perspective of those on the outside (Padoux 2002, 17).

When we consider tantra as an emic term – that is, a term arising out of Indian religion independent of scholarly analysis – we realize almost immediately that tantra

does not lend itself to singular, parsimonious definition. Like any other word or morpheme that has persisted over centuries, tantra has accumulated an incredible range of definitions. The Sanskrit uses of the term are too numerous to detail here in full,[2] but generally they are based on Pāṇini's injunction that tantra derives from the root *tan*, "to stretch," "to spread," or "to weave," with cloth providing the central referent or metaphor, usually in the context of rhetoric. From the ninth century onward, vast bodies of texts referred to as "tantras" began to appear all over India. While the authors of texts such as *Svacchanda Tantra* use the term tantra to refer variously to Truth, mantra and the actualization of liberation, none of these authors align themselves with a specific school of thought called "tantra" (Urban 2003a, 32). Accordingly, Mādhava does not list tantra among the fifteen schools of worship he identifies in his *Sarvadarśanasaṃgraha*, a text that emerged during the purported height of tantric religious activity in the 14th century (Padoux 2002, 17-18). If nothing else, tantra sometimes represented a broad, generic category of extra-Vedic writings and activities, as the term "*tāntrika*" has also been used from time to time in commentaries upon the *Laws of Manu* and various *Purāṇas* as a contrast to what is *vaidika*, or "pertaining to the Vedas" (Urban 2003a, 27). While these tantric endeavours are differentiated from the Vedic norm, often on account of association with members of lower-castes,[3] these sects are not described, however, as expressly deviant or scandalous (Ibid). Even Abhinavagupta, an eleventh century Kashmiri thinker who helped systematize Śaiva tantra, did not provide a clear, consistent definition of the

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2 For a detailed history of the linguistic as well as historical development of the term tantra, see Urban (2003a), 25-41.
3 The *Padma Purāṇa*, for instance, claims that Vaidika forms of worship are for Brahmans, while *tāntrika* worship is best suited for the Śūdra (Deshpande 1990, 2087) – that is, all well within the traditional Brahmanic societal organization.

term, and so tantra remained a vaguely defined category in the commentarial tradition that followed (Urban 2003a, 34-35).

When we add to these meanings and trajectories the etic formulations of the term put forward by both Orientalists and modern scholars from the West (not to mention Colonial and modern Indian interpreters), the situation becomes even more complex. It was under the label "Tantrism" that early Christian missionaries culled together all those aspects of Indian religious practices they considered darkest and seemingly most irrational, illustrative of the incorrigibly corrupt Indian mind (Urban 2003a, 71-72). By the late nineteenth century, tantra had become a singular category of religious expression as per the definition of Sir Monier-Williams, and by early twentieth century, it had gained widespread infamy in scholarly and popular understandings as the most scandalous and perverted form of Indian religion (Urban 1999, 133). By proffering symbolic interpretations for the potentially offensive aspects of tantra such as the infamous *pañcamakāras* (meat, fish, wine, parched grain and sexual intercourse), Orientalist Sir John Woodroffe[4] succeeded to some degree in shifting the definition of tantra to more speculative, philosophical concerns (Taylor 1996, 150). The formulations of tantra put forward by scholars in the twentieth century have largely arisen out of a synthesis between the sensationalist Orientalist conceptions of tantra and the sanitized version produced by Woodroffe. That is, while scholars have continued to be fascinated with the scandalous aspects of tantrism described by the earliest Christian missionaries, they have also come to defend tantra not only for its philosophical value but also for its affirmations

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4 For more on Sir John Woodruffe, see Urban (1999), 135-137.

of the human body and sexuality as valid means to spiritual realization (Urban 1999, 138).[5]

So what are we left with? Tantra has taken on a vast variety of meanings, representing all at once a tradition that is perverse, orthodox, speculative, embodied, and socially subversive, among other things. Considering this range of definition conceptually and linguistically in both Sanskrit and English, alongside the fact that tantra only emerged as a fixed category of religion in its own right post-colonially, we may be tempted to ask if tantra really is a category of religion at all, and subsequently, whether it is worth studying? Padoux, as we have already seen, has claimed that tantra is entirely a Western creation (2002). To say tantra is not a valid category of religion, however, and to accept thereby the complete deconstruction of the term, would be to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Beneath all of the academic, religious, and New Age formulations of the term both East and West, there does appear to be a number of components of religious activity in India that are more easily managed conceptually if they are thought of as "tantric." There has, after all, existed a tradition in India dedicated to worship of the female principle that began in the early centuries of the Common Era, if not earlier. This tradition became a flourishing cult of the goddess by the sixth and seventh centuries and from there seems to have evolved into the tantric literary traditions that began to crystallize around 1000 CE (Bhattacharyya 1982, 161). In addition, tantric traditions persist today that have identifiable pre-colonial roots. For instance, the South Indian Śrīvidyā lineage, which

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5 Mircea Eliade, for instance, connects the spirit of tantra back to pre-Aryan worship of the Mother Goddess, working against patriarchy and repression put in place by the Vedic tradition (Eliade 1958, 200-207). It was precisely this idea that modern New Age interpreters seized upon as they appropriated tantra as a means of liberating Western sexuality from its supposedly repressed puritan roots.

venerates the goddess Tripurasundarī via mantra and the Śrīcakra, utilizes tantric texts dating back to the twelfth century, which has lead some scholars to conclude that the sect cannot be classified as simply a colonial construction (Ti Nijenhuis, Gupta & Gupta 1987, 10). Thus, the term "Tantra" can serve as a heuristic device to organize and interpret these various kinds of related phenomena. And, to most fully appreciate the multifarious and often contradictory nature of these phenomena traditionally classified as "tantric," it is necessary for us to employ a "polythetic classification" for tantra, as Jonathan Z. Smith refers to it – a definition in which a "large number of characteristics are possessed by a large number of class members" (1986, 8).

With this in mind, this study of the *SLP* will utilize Douglas Renfrew Brooks' own polythetic definition of tantra, which attempts to cull together the many disparate elements thought to characterize that category of Indian religion. Brooks' ten "tantric" properties are as follows: (1) tantric texts are extra-Vedic and thus outside the conventional Hindu canon, (2) tantric traditions involve special forms of spiritual discipline, especially techniques such as *kuṇḍalinī* yoga, (3) they are theistic yet non-dualistic, (4) they utilize mantras on account of the auspicious nature they attribute to sound, (5) they involve the worship of symbolic diagrams such as *yantras* or *maṇḍalas*, (6) they place special importance on the guru, (7) they utilize the symbolism of the god and goddess and the inextricable link between them, (8) they are secretive in the sense that teachings are restricted to a select and qualified few, often by a guru, (9) they often use prohibited substances such as the infamous *pañcamakāras* in a ritual context and (10) they require special initiation in which the criteria of caste and gender are not the primary

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prerequisites for qualification (1990, 55-72).

Complete though it may seem, even this model is not without its shortcomings. For instance, as Hugh Urban points out, Brooks does not account for traditions that have many of these aforementioned traits yet would deny being tantric (2003a, 7). That said, the foremost strength of Brooks' polythetic definition is the fact that a given tradition does not have to possess all of these traits to be tantric; rather, tantra is an adequate label for any tradition having a "significant number" of these above-mentioned characteristics (Brooks 1990, 53). Given these criteria, any particular text or tradition need not explicitly refer to itself as tantric to be considered tantric so long as it possesses a sufficient number of these traits in the view of a particular scholar. We should also add to Brooks' definition a more general aspect of tantrism that touched upon by several prominent authors in the field, and that is tantra's concern with "power," often rendered by the Sanskrit term *śakti*. In tantra, as Biardeau has phrased it: "the quest for liberation is fundamentally nothing but a tapping, a using, or even manipulating of power" (as quoted in Padoux 1981, 351).[6] Anything worldly can be used towards the attainment of power, for the goal of the tantric is "not to sacrifice this world to deliverance, but to integrate it in one way or another within the perspective of salvation." While this is not so much a specific feature of tantra, it provides an acceptable (if not complete) attempt to summarize the overall purview of the category. This concern with power will again become very crucial as we discuss *SLP*.

*Tantra on the Periphery*

Perhaps the most persistent misconception or oversimplification about tantra in Hinduism,

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6  For the original source see Biardeau (1972), page 209.

Buddhism and even Jainism is the notion that it is inherently peripheral to society – that is, transgressive, subversive, liberating, and altogether opposed to the established order. The idea has grains of truth: for instance, we have seen that the category of texts called "tantras" were often extra-Vedic; indeed, the very first literary reference to tantric texts (in the *Kādambarī*, circa the seventh century CE) associates said writings with the highly peripheral figure of an insane holy man (Urban 2010, 18). The notion that tantra is intrinsically peripheral on account of its transgressive and subversive nature was carried to extremes by colonial scholars, who concluded that such debased and thereby marginal practices were not even worthy of study.[7] It was only after Sir John Woodroffe provided his sanitized interpretation of tantric rites that other serious studies began to emerge on the topic. That said, most academics have distanced themselves from tantric traditions and texts, seemingly convinced that tantra is so outside the established context of Indian society – so peripheral – that it is not crucial for study.[8] The notion that tantra is trangressive endures in modern scholarly treatments of the topic. For instance, McDaniel has observed the importance of socially marginal spaces such as graveyards and cremation grounds in tantric rituals, as it is these sites that are considered by Bengali *tāntrikas* to be replete with the spirits essential to tantric ritual (McDaniel 2000). Others have continued to lavish in the more disturbing visions of tantra as per the earliest Orientalist writers. Banikanta Kakakti, in the process of relating the political downfall of

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7 The tantras are identified specifically as a body of texts by Orientalists like William Jones and H.T. Colebrooke, both of whom dismiss this literature as inherently contrary to the Vedas and not worthy of any further study (Urban 2003a, 48-49). Later on, H.H. Wilson would describe the tantras as not just perverse but "basically all the same" (as cited in Urban 2003a, 51).

8 While contemporary writers on tantra such as Hugh Urban might disagree with this statement, arguing instead that scholars have exhibited a "Victorian obsession" with tantric imagery, the fact still remains that innumerable tantric texts and traditions remain unstudied.

medieval Assam to the presence of tantric practitioners, seems to channel antiquated Victorian visions when he explains that "the land was infested with teachers of Vāmacāra Tantra with their philosophy of sex and plate. Among the most spectacular were bloody sacrifices (...) night vigils in virgin worship and lewd dances of temple women" (Kakati 1989, 79). Even Hugh Urban, one of the more prolific and even-handed contemporary scholars of tantra, has centred numerous articles upon the "transgressive" aspect of that tradition such as blood sacrifice, sex, and scatological offerings.[9] And as we have seen, Brooks not only lists contradistinction to the Vedic tradition first among his list of tantric traits, but he also goes on to enumerate "prohibited substances" as one of the definitive elements of tantric practice.

Closely related to these persistent notions that tantra is "transgressive" and sexually liberal is the idea that it is also socially subversive. The assumption by an overwhelming number of popular interpreters, and even by some scholarly commentators, is that tantra's apparently liberal use of various societal taboos has made it a vehicle for social upheaval. On the scholarly side, Miranda Shaw has argued based upon her studies of tantric Buddhism that tantra both liberates and empowers its female practitioners on account of its rejection of the patriarchal norms of mainstream religion (1994, 4). Similarly, with Hindu tantra, some have been tempted to argue that since tantric rites have been and are often open to all castes and genders, and since they so readily break taboos closely tied to supposedly oppressive Brahmanical norms of purity, they must reflect some sort of egalitarian, anti-caste sentiment (Saran 1998, 4; Brooks 1990, 25).

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9 See for example Urban's 1995 comparison between the tantric Kāpālikā sect (discussed in chapter 1) and the writings of Georges Bataille.

Historically speaking, however, tantra has not always operated in these marginal positions of transgression and subversion. Hardly transgressive, tantric ritual, conceptual and spiritual ideas often permeated Vedic texts (Padoux 2002, 18). One such example of this tantric-Vedic synthesis is the *Bahvṛcopaniṣad* (c. 18th cent), a tantric text that in its style and sphere of allusion actively attempts to resemble the Vedas.[10] The very fact that the title contains the word "*Ṛc*" ("Vedic verse" or "praise") illustrates the fact that tantric materials were in some cases actively amenable to the Vedic worldview. Moreover, the apparently subversive undertakings that occurred in tantric rites were not necessarily extrapolated outside of the ritual settings, if they can even be said to exist within it. Consider the *Bṛhat Tantrasāra*, or the "Great Essence of the Tantras", one of the foremost compendiums of tantric practice. Although the text calls for use of the *pañcamakāras* during tantric practice, the meat and wine can only be consumed by members of the twice-born castes; further, the author insists that when it comes to the rite of *maithuna*, sexual intercourse, Brahmins should only pair with other Brahmins (Urban 2003b, 278-279). This suggests that while some notions of purity are overturned in the course of a tantric rite, others remain rigidly fixed. Consider also that tantric texts like the *Bṛhat Tantrasāra* and the *Bahvṛcopaniṣad* were invariably composed in Sanskrit by men, without even so much as a tradition of female commentary upon them, and so they hardly overturn societal – in this case patriarchal – norms. On the contrary, as we will see in the literature review dedicated to tantric kingship below, and eventually in our analysis of the *SLP*, tantra often upheld the most central institutions of Indian society.

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10 For a translation of the *Bahvṛcopaniṣad,* see Warrier (1967), 73-76.

Similar ambiguities with tantra's relationship to mainstream Indian society persist in contemporary practice. Hindus that fancy themselves as Westernized urban middle class elite generally do not wish to be associated with tantra or "tantric" aspects of religion due to its supposed connections with transgressive practices (Brooks 1997, 405). For many of these elites, tantra is the religion of intrepid, perverse New Agers like Bhagawan Shri Rajneesh[11] who are, in their eyes, "not Hindu at all" (1997, 407). Nonetheless, many of these same Hindus participate in contemporary tantric traditions. Consider for example Śrīvidyā practicioners in modern day Chennai, their numbers largely consisting of Smārta Brahmans, who employ the *pañcamakāras* in their rituals while at the same time enforcing caste rules rigorously (1997, 411-415). Although they practice tantra, these elite Hindus would by no means relish the label of "*tāntrika*."[12] Thus, Douglas Renfrew Brooks suggests that *tāntrikas* are not simply the "other" from Vedic Hinduism but rather the "other-within" representing for Hindus "the other-living-among-us or the other-who-is-in-part-us" (1997, 409). Even though these Smārta Brahmans were not willing to acknowledge the tantric nature of their rites publicly, suggesting tantra's peripheral nature, the rites ultimately served to uphold the status quo, which intimates that tantra is more importantly a conservative force.

Citing similar tensions between the tantric and the Vedic in Bengal, June McDaniel has actually discerned between "classical" tantra, which seeks knowledge of what is very

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11 Bhagawan Shri Rajneesh, known popularly as Osho, was a popular guru best known for bringing his sexually liberal vision of tantra westward to America. See Feuerstein (2006).

12 As Brooks describes it, these Śrīvidyā practicioners simply "renamed" what was tantric as Vedic (1997, 428). Thus, Śrīvidyā's tantric ritual "was not a means of breaking through or breaking down caste boundaries. Rather, Śrīvidyā was a tradition around which the community could reaffirm its position of religious leadership and gain access to divine power" (1997, 423).

much a Vedantic ultimate, and "folk" tantra, which is more focused upon obtaining immediate powers, such as the magical *siddhis*. The folk branch is also opposed to Brahminical learning and accepting of women as well as members of low castes (McDaniel 2004, 74-76). While these categories nuance differences between peripheral and mainstream tantras, McDaniel also notes that they are not absolutely separate, with both traditions often employing the very same texts and practices (2004, 97-98).

These examples suggest that tantric traditions, both pre- and post-colonial, cannot be said to consistently cut through caste and gender barriers erected by the Brahminical worldview, at least not in the Hindu context. As David Gordon White has pointed out, when tantra has played this role of the peripheral, anarchical, or subversive presence, it has most often done so in attempts to establish an *alternative centre* or ruler that is properly religiously sanctioned – that is to say, by the proper tantric king (2000, 26; my emphasis). Regardless of whether or not tantra is peripheral and thereby liberative in relation to modern prudery both east and west, this is not a *de facto* role it has necessarily played through history, and is not one it necessarily plays today. Thus, we must be careful not to project this idea backwards in time. Indeed, this idea that tantra must exist on the fringes of society will certainly come into question when we examine the *SLP*.

**Introducing *Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā***

*Sāmrājyalakṣmipīṭhikā* consists of approximately four thousand verses composed in Anuṣṭubh meter, presenting an extended dialogue between Śiva and Pārvatī. These verses are divided into 136 chapters or *paṭalas*, the content of which provides the reader with

detailed information on a variety of topics ranging from the proper worship of the titular

goddess to the most effective means for fortifying a kingdom. The text has been

conservatively dated between 1500 to 1735 CE, probably falling at the earlier end of that

spectrum, most likely during the reign of Kṛṣṇadevarāya, who ruled the Vijayanagara

empire from 1509-1529.  This would suggest that the *SLP* emerged from the Karnataka

region, a debate we will take up alongside issues of dating in the following sub-sections.

The text may form a section of the larger *Ākāśabhairavakalpa*,[13] another tantric text that

was procured by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute of Poona from the Sarasvati

Mahal library of Tanjore in 1926 (Gode 1954, 122).[14] Because of its connection with this

larger tantric text, Vide Burnell classified *SLP* as a tantra in his 1879 catalogue of Tanjore

manuscripts (Sarangi 1993, 7). Whether these connections to the *Ākāśabhairavakalpa* are

tenable or not, the *SLP* focuses so specifically on goddess worship and kingship that it

appears to have been treated and distributed as an independent literary work in and of

itself. As such, the *SLP* has been published as a standalone entity, as per the 1990 edition

of the text produced by the Tanjore Sarasvati Mahal library. The *SLP* as we know it ends

abruptly at *paṭala* 136, suggesting that it is incomplete (Sastri & Sastri 1990, 4). However,

Sarangi has accepted that the manuscript as it stands is "more or less" complete,

concluding that those excluded sections probably amount to no more than minor

supplements to the overall purview of the text – that is, the worship of Sāmrājyalakṣmi

(Sarangi 1993, 12-13). In the introduction to the printed text of the 1990 edition, the

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13 For Sanskrit and Tamil renderings of the *Ākāśabhairavakalpa's* mantras (with a very brief English
introduction), see Krishnamurthi Sastri (1985).
14 This text was the modern copy prepared for the Institute from MS 6707 of the Tanjore library, and this is
the standard *Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā* text upon which this present study is based. For a review of the various
*SLP* manuscripts, see Sarangi (1993), pages 7-9.

*paṇḍits* of the Sarasvati Mahal library note that some of the *SLP* manuscripts in their possession are personal copies, as is evidenced from the names of the Marāṭhā kings of Tanjore inscribed within many of them (Sastri & Sastri 1990, 4). This suggests that at least a few kings and princes regularly studied this text and perhaps even enacted its contents. Despite the window into South Indian royal culture that the *SLP* potentially provides, the text has been almost wholly ignored by scholars. To date, Artatrana Sarangi's single volume is all that exists in the way of a lengthy scholarly work on the text, and while Sarangi's English summary of the text is undeniably helpful, the author offers little in the way of ideas as to why the text emerged. Earlier on, Thite (1978-1979) and Gode (1954) offered smaller articles on *SLP*, each of which dealt mostly with issues of dating and location. We turn now to a discussion of these very issues with reference to these works.

*Dating*

Our previously stated range for the emergence of the *SLP*, 1500-1735, has been determined by weighing the efforts of Gode and Sarangi. Gode dates the *Ākāśabhairavakalpa* (with the *SLP* included therein) to 1500-1565, basing this on the assumption that the *SLP* embodies the tradition of Vijayanagara kings such as Kṛṣṇadevarāya (1509-1529). Sarangi, meanwhile, has determined the earlier limit by examining references to pyrotechnics made in the text, such as those in verses 107.29-32. Verse 107.32, in describing 25 types of entertainment witnessed in the celebration of Navarātra, includes pyrotechnic displays among these. Because the first use of gunpowder in Indian warfare has been dated to 1528 by scholars of Indian chemistry, Sarangi has

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chosen this year as the earliest possible date for the text (1993, 20-21). Sarangi has

determined the later limit of 1735 on account of the fact that the latest name inscribed on

the various *SLP* manuscripts in the T.M.S.S.M. library is that of the Marāṭhā king Tuḷajā I

(also known as Tukkojī), who ruled Tanjore from 1729-1735 (1993, 21).

Sarangi favors the earlier end of this range, believing, like Gode, that the text

emerged out of an environment resembling that of Kṛṣṇadevarāya's era. He even cites as

evidence for this Gode's crucial comparison between the descriptions of forts in the *SLP*

and the *Daivajñavilāsa* of Lolla Lakṣmīdhara*,* a great scholar during the time of

Kṛṣṇadevarāya. Lakṣmīdhara mentions eight classes of forts in his work, which marks it

as idiosyncratic when compared to most other texts in historical proximity, such as the

Telugu *Rāyavācakamu*, which enumerates only four such classes. In the 21st *paṭala* of the

*SLP* a verse also describes eight kinds of forts, using language so close to that of Lolla

Lakṣmīdhara that the verse could almost have been plagiarized (Gode 1954, 134). Either

*Daivajñavilāsa* influenced *SLP* or vice-versa – the two works may even share the same

author. Leaving that debate aside, we can conclude at the very least that the author(s) of

the *SLP* and the *Daivajñavilāsa,* if not the same person, were each in close historical and

geographical proximity to the Vijayanagara Empire.

*Location*

Despite these connections that would seem to suggest the *SLP* emerged during the

time of Vijayanagara, at no point does the author explicitly refer to any of the kings of

Vijayanagara by name, nor does he specifically locate the text within the empire (Gode

1954, 127). This may have been the case for purposes of maintaining secrecy.

Nonetheless, Gode has provided several lines of argument suggesting that *SLP* arose out of the Vijayanagara Empire, and we will review the most convincing among them here. Most importantly, Gode counts three references to a city known as "Vijayapura" within the *SLP*, specifically verses 2.5, 3.11, and 139.8. *Paṭala* 3.11 provides the most salient example, proclaiming that Sāmrājyalakṣmī should be installed in a location bearing this name. While acknowledging that "Vijayapura" could be an allusion to the modern city of Bijapur, Gode takes these specific references in the *SLP* to denote Vijayanagara, as the term was occasionally used to refer to assorted domains in the Vijayanagara Empire (1954, 128-130).

Furthermore, drawing upon the earlier references to gun powder and pyrotechnics in the *SLP*, Gode suggests that the use of such technology would not be out of place in the Vijayanagara kingdom. In verse 105.10-23 of the *SLP*, within which are referenced the various weapons a king should worship, the 23rd weapon mentioned is the *nālikāstra*, which Gode interprets to be a gun (1954, 132).[15] Kṛṣṇadevarāya's troops were said to be equipped with "baggage and guns" in a battle in 1520 during the battle of Raichur,[16] as mentioned by Sewell (1900, 133). This suggests that the *SLP*, cognizant of the use of firearms in warfare, could very well have come from Vijayanagara Empire. Furthermore, the *SLP* provides in *paṭala* 62 a description of several structures to be used in pyrotechnic

15 The *Śukranīti* (see chapter 2) confirms that the term *nālikāstra* refers to a type of primitive firearm: "The *nalikastra* [sic] is the cylindrical or tubular instrument to be used by infantry and cavalry, having a horizontal and straight hole at the origin, the length of two cubits and a half...which has fire produced by the pressure of a machine on flint...holds gunpowder in the interior..." (as cited in Kokatnur 1948, 269).
16 The battle of Raichur began on May 19, 1520 between forces of Vijayanagara, led by Kṛṣṇadevarāya, and those of the Muslim kings of Bijapur and Gulbarga. The Vijayanagara forces captured the city of Raichur and obtained victory, seriously mitigating the power and prestige of the Adil Shah, king of Bijapur. For more on this conflict, see Sewell (1900), pages 133-134.

displays that the king was to witness every day. Such displays would not be out of place within the kingdom of Vijayanagara, which, according to travelers, often employed fireworks during festivals like Mahānavamī. The Portugese traveler Fernao Nuniz, for instance, claims to have witnessed pyrotechnic celebrations during the course of his stay in Vijayanagara from 1529-1542 (Gode 1954, 133-134).

Moreover, connections between the setting of the *SLP* and Persian culture can also be taken to suggest that the text is indeed set in Vijayanagara. For instance, Gode notes that Persian horses are considered by the *SLP* to be among the best of breeds (94.4), a sentiment which would be consistent with that of Kṛṣṇadevarāya, who made numerous attempts to monopolize the import of horses from Persia.

Sarangi provides further evidence for Gode's notion that *SLP* took origin in Karnataka, specifically in Vijayanagara. He notes that the author of the *SLP* favors geographical locales and religious places of south India, as in the obvious preference for the Narmadā, as opposed to the Yamunā, as the definitive Indian river (130.10). The author also dwells upon Gokarṇa (120.19) and Mount Śrīśailam (130.18), among other natural South Indian landmarks (1993, 31). As for more cosmetic aspects, Sarangi notes that *SLP*, in *paṭalas* 112 and 113, uses *amānta*, or the new-moon day, to compute months, as is typical in the region south of the Narmadā river (1993, 30). Further, he adds that there are some decidedly South-Indian linguistic idiosyncrasies throughout the text: for instance, voiced consonants which are nasalized often become devoiced within a word, as is exemplified by verse 117.21, where *aṅgaṇa* becomes *aṅkaṇa* (1993, 30). This and other linguistic drift in *SLP* bespeaks a South Indian origin, according to Sarangi. Further, in

verse 80.11 when listing numerous countries that attend the king upon his evening diversions, the *SLP* makes only a veiled reference to Karnataka among them, which, in Sarangi's estimation, serves "to qualify the native kingdom of the patron-king" (1993, 33).

Moving past these and other generally South Indian characteristics of the text, Sarangi, like Gode, specifically places *SLP* in Vijayanagara. He argues that the city described in the *SLP*, which stands within a fort as per the custom of the 16-17th century, is reminiscent of a prosperous city like Vijayanagara as it was described by Nuniz (Sarangi 1993, 344-345). Even more tellingly, Sarangi focuses upon passage 91.15, which instructs the king to undertake in practice duels with "*tulavas*". This could refer to either men from Tulu or, alternatively, princes of the Tuḷuva dynasty (1500-1565).[17] Taking into consideration verse 77.21, which earlier on mentions the king is to duel with princes, Sarangi favors the latter of these interpretations (1993, 32-33). If the king for whom this text was written was indeed engaging in sporting duels with Tuḷuva princes, this not only places *SLP* in the early 16th century, but virtually confirms that the text emerged in Vijayanagara, for it was kings of Vijayanagara, most notably Kṛṣṇadevarāya, who placed themselves in the Tuḷuva dynasty.

Considering all this evidence, Sarangi and Gode alike conclude that the *SLP* emerges in Vijaynagara, most likely during the reign of Kṛṣṇadevarāya (1509-1529), and that the author, although unknown, was probably a learned *paṇḍit* or minister who belonged to that ruler's retinue (Gode 1954, 136; Sarangi, 1993, 35).

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17 The history of Vijayanagara is divided into three dynastic periods. The empire was founded by the Saṅgamas (1336-1485), who were followed by the Sāḷuvas (1485-1505) and then the Tuḷuvas (1505-1570) under whom the kingdom flourished. For a brief political history of the Vijayanagara rulers, see Stein (1989).

*Sāmrājyalakṣmipīṭhikā as a Tantric Manual*

Those scholars who do acknowledge the significance of the *SLP* typically classify it as tantric. As we have seen, Burnell concluded the *SLP* was a tantra simply on the basis of its connection with the *Ākāśabhairavakalpa*, leading Goudriann and Gupta to include *SLP* within their catalogue of tantric works in Sanskrit (1981, 114). However, neither party provides any further discussion so as to establish *SLP*'s tantric nature. Due to the lack of thorough arguments that this is indeed the case, some have expressed doubt that the *SLP* is actually a tantric text. Gode, for instance, hastily offers that "the work has no connection with Tantrik literature proper" and that it "can hardly be called Tantrik," citing as evidence for this the seemingly un-tantric topics of the *paṭalas*, most of them concerning ethics, politics and regal life (1954, 123-126).

Sarangi, on the other hand, has taken a more involved approach to answering this question, delineating quite convincingly the various reasons why the text should be considered tantric. He begins with the focus upon mantra found in the *SLP*, the use of which figures prominently in the worship of the goddess Sāmrājyalakṣmī. Verses 3.6-7, for instance, provide the reader with the following sixteen-syllable formula: *"Om namaḥ bhagavatyai sāmrājyadāyai lakṣmyai svāhā."* When directed to Sāmrājyalakṣmī, this formula bestows a variety of aptitudes upon kings, including the magical powers known as *aṣṭaiśvaryas* or *siddhis* (Sarangi 1993, 46-47). The auspiciousness afforded to the sound of this formula and its repetition corresponds to Brooks' fourth property of tantra. There are also numerous references made in the text to other tantric formulae useful in the context of rituals such as *nyāsa* and *pratiṣṭha*. Chapter 30.8-10, for instance, suggests that

the practitioner seeking longevity should use *japa* (mantric repetition) and *homa* (the fire sacrifice) along with related three-letter tantric formulae of Sūrya, the sun-god, among others (1993, 17). These kinds of tantric formulae are prescribed throughout the text as being useful in a wide variety of endeavours, whether they be daily routines or religious festivals (1993, 18).

Further, the *SLP* holds *yantra* as being very important in worship, corresponding with Brooks' fifth property. Any person who recites the mantra, according to the author of the *SLP*, must also be conversant with the *yantra* of Sāmrājyalakṣmī – together mantra and *yantra* become super-effective. Described in verses 4.5-11 are the instructions for creating such a *yantra*, including the necessary materials as well as the procedure for actually drawing the six angles circumscribed by an eight-pedalled lotus. Like the mantra, the *yantra* when properly utilized affords the king a number of benefits, including, once again, the attainment of the *siddhis* (4.15-16). The author of the *SLP* also suggests that *yantras* can prove helpful in mounting defence strategies, and should be cast upon fortress walls so that their auspicious powers can repel invading forces (37.17; Sarangi 1993, 18).

In consonance with Brooks' sixth property of tantra, Sarangi notes the fact that the overall purview of the *SLP* is dedicated mainly to the figure of the goddess, who in this case takes the form of Sāmrājyalakṣmī (1993, 16). Featured in the text are numerous verses that describe the proper worship of this deity. The presence of the goddess in the form of Pārvatī (synonymous with *Śakti*), as well as her husband Śiva, another tantric motif, also persists through the text in prominent fashion. Most obviously, the contents of the *SLP* are presented in the form of dialogue between Śiva and Pārvatī, and so the god

and goddess form the entire narrative frame of the text. Not only does this further speak to the importance of the god and goddess in the *SLP*, but in using such a dialogical frame the *SLP* borrows a trope customarily employed by tantric literature for presenting just such a treatise (Sarangi 1993, 16). In addition, the *SLP* prescribes the worship of virgins or *kumārī pūjā* during Navarātra festivities, a ritual that figures prominently in many other Śākta-tantra traditions (110.3).[18]

To these aspects of tantra we can also note a none-to-obvious but not altogether absent correspondence with Brooks' ninth property of tantra, the use of prohibited substances in rituals. While *SLP* is certainly not fixated upon the *pañcamakāras*, which are so often associated with tantra *de facto*, there is one mention of the use of such substances. Verses 110.31-33 describe the various methods of worship at *kumārī pūjā* and suggest modifying them depending upon the caste to which the girl being worshipped belongs. While girls from the twice-born castes should be worshipped with perfume, flowers and rice, it is advised that girls from the Śūdra class should be worshipped with liquor, meat and other forbidden substances, presumably the rest of the *pañcamakāras*. And while the *SLP* does not call for the performance of bloody sacrifices nor any of the subversive sexual practices that have so often fascinated scholarly and popular commentators on tantra, we must not rule out the possibility that *SLP* held some additional transgressive value. The author or authors of the *SLP* were, after all, well aware of the martial dirty work the king had to inevitably perform as leader, which is made evident by the fact that some of the contents of the *SLP* are given with the purpose of

18 For more on *kumārī pūjā* and other forms of *śakti pūjā*, see Khanna (2000), page 119.

assisting the king in precisely these tasks.[19] But even more significantly, as we will see in the third chapter, the *SLP* afforded kings a measure of power over their own karmic destiny, a capacity that had previously been the monopoly of the Brahmins. As such, with help of the *SLP* kings would have been able to swing the balance of soteriological power as it stood in the mainstream Brahminical world-view from the Brahmins towards themselves. On account of the potentially subversive power it afforded to kings, the *SLP* by all indications had to be kept under wraps, which may have increased the "prohibited" nature of the text, for secrecy, according to Hugh Urban, can be an expedient vehicle for intensifying and optimizing transgression (2003b, 302).

This element of secrecy related to the *SLP* is another indicator of the *SLP*'s tantric nature that we can add to those already provided by Sarangi. The text appears to have been created and disseminated in a highly secretive fashion, a fact that is evident not just from its absence in scholarship but also from the relative lack of references to it in texts of its time. The earliest reference we have to the *SLP* was made by the famous South Indian tantric commentator Bhāskararāya Makhin in the eighteenth century, which seems to significantly antedate the most likely emergence of the text (1993, 4). As we have already seen, many of the manuscript copies of the *SLP* in existence today are personal copies, which may suggest the contents of the text were "zealously guarded" and certainly not widely disseminated in the public realm. Sarangi suggests that, based upon the rivalries and suspicions that drive the ruling class, "it sounds quite probable that this text continued to devolve as a personal heritage of kings of a particularly dynasty only for whose

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19 The Sāmrājyalakṣmī mantra, for instance, when encased in *Ṛg Veda* 10.84.7, is said to aid in the routing of an enemy on the battlefield (Sarangi 1993, 54). See chapter 3.

reference it was originally written (...) thus all scope for its spread and popularity remained impeded till of late" (1993, 4). This coheres with Brooks' eighth characteristic trait of tantra: that its teachings were often promulgated and practiced secretly, restricted to select individuals.

Finally, as we will see in the chapters to follow, the *SLP* is concerned with affording kings unlimited power in the way of universal emperorship, a vivid example of Biardeau's notion that tantra is fundamentally concerned with power in all forms. This and the above mentioned lines of evidence converge to lead us to the conclusion that the *SLP* is indeed a tantric text, or, in the words of Sarangi, that it "at least highly approximates a text having Tantra, Kalpa or Āgama as its basis" (1993, 19).

**Literature Reviews**

*The Imperial Śrī-Lakṣmī*

It is first necessary to undertake a review of the literature concerning the goddess Lakṣmī and her closely-related prototype, Śrī. Looking at the Sanskrit word *śrī* in its earliest appearances as a substantive noun rather than as a goddess proper, Jan Gonda associates the term primarily with "material prosperity" based on its connections to growth, glory and superiority in the Vedic Saṃhitās (1954, 176-188).  He further relates the term to similar words such as *śrīmat* (possessed of fortune), *śreman* (superiority), and *śreyas* (excellent), all of which deal with political preeminence, an important aspect of Śrī-Lakṣmī's character in Indian literature at large, as well as in the *SLP*. At one point, Gonda notes that *śrī* was even identified with the cushion of the throne upon which a king sat, as

if the seat itself bore the power that was temporarily possessed by the individual sitting in it (1954, 188). Gonda also stresses the diametric opposition between *śrī* and sin, referred to in Sanskrit as *pāpa* or *pāpmān*. Those who correctly perform ritual and sacrificial acts will prosper while those who do not will suffer evil, having alienated themselves from *śrī*. Although *śrī* here is taken as a noun rather than as a goddess, some of these associations would carry on with later Hinduism and the development of the goddess Śrī-Lakṣmī, such as her opposition to sin. In contrast to Gonda, Alf Hiltebeitel has, by looking at epic sources such as the *Mahābhārata*, interpreted Śrī to refer more specifically to "sovereignty." Focusing on the goddess rather than the substantive noun, Hiltebeitel has concluded that Śrī is 1) associated with royalty, 2) concerned with royal virtue, 3) responsible for the transference of royal virtue to kings on account of the fact that 4) it is she who comes to the king with royal virtues (1976, 149).

More recent studies have focused upon the complementary nature of these aspects of "prosperity" and "sovereignty" as they coexist in the figure of Śrī-Lakṣmī (Kinsley 1986; Kumar 1997; Rhodes Bailly 2000). Kinsley puts particular focus on these aspects of prosperity as they relate to kingship in later Vedic literature, suggesting that Śrī's power is "associated more with the office of the king than with the king himself" (1986, 19). Śrī, in both abstract and personified forms, is the embodiment of royal qualities (1986, 20).[20] Appropriately, she is also associated with elephants, a symbol of royal authority, which often flank her in so-called "Gajalakṣmī" images, popular in later Hindu iconography

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20 The word *lakṣmī* bears a remarkably similar etymological history as *śrī*, as it too began as an abstract noun referring to auspiciousness. Later, it took on a personal identity as the goddess Lakṣmī auspiciousness personified (Rhodes Bailly 2000, 135). The figure of Śrī-Lakṣmī, then, is an anthropomorphic manifestation of auspiciousness and prosperity.

(Kinsley 1986, 22). The elephants spray her with water, likely a representation of the act of royal consecration. On account of her associations with prosperity, during the Vedic period Śrī-Lakṣmī comes to be related to fecundity, both agricultural and reproductive. She is able to bring an abundance of riches, and can be invoked in later works like the *Śrī-Sūkta*,[21] an appendix to the *Ṛg Veda,* to bring not only material things like gold, livestock and bountiful harvests, but also intangibles such as fame (1986, 20). Like Gonda before him, Kinsley intimates Śrī-Lakṣmī's persistent association with forgiveness, noting textual examples in which Lakṣmī defends sinners from the wrath of her husband, the preserver god Viṣṇu. Here Lakṣmī often takes it upon herself to insist that Viṣṇu bestow his grace upon these sinners so as to maintain his reputation as merciful (1986, 32). Kinsley dedicates much of his analysis to Śrī-Lakṣmī's pairing with Viṣṇu, which becomes firmly established during the medieval period. Kinsley considers this pairing to be most fitting on account of both deities' regal associations. Viṣṇu is the "divine king par excellence," dwelling in the heavenly court of Vaikuṇṭha, and is commonly depicted as a mighty ruler who maintains dharmic order by way of his avatars; Śrī-Lakṣmī is his queen (1986, 27).[22]  Viṣṇu is also considered to be present wherever righteous kings rule on earth, and thus Śrī-Lakṣmī is present alongside any given earthly king: "she follows [Viṣṇu] when he becomes part of his human agents – the righteous kings – and she bestows on these kings her royal power, prosperity and fertility" (1986, 28).

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21 The *Śrī-Sūkta*, found in *Ṛg* Veda appendix (*khila*) 5.87.1, is a famous devotional hymn dedicated to the goddess Śrī in hopes of winning her blessings. S.K. Ramachandra Rao (1985) has provided a translation of the text. For a brief analysis of the *Śrī-Sūkta* as it relates to Lakṣmī in her queenly function, see Rhodes Bailly (2000).
22 Many of Viṣṇu's incarnations, such as Rāma, are considered to be kings during their tenures on earth (see chapter 2). As could be expected, the wives of these avatars are themselves often considered incarnations of Lakṣmī, as was Rāma's wife Sītā.

This pairing of Śrī-Lakṣmī with Viṣṇu is also examined by Kumar, who claims the notion of that this particular god and goddess are inseparable and one developed mainly in the Purāṇic and Pāñcarātra traditions (1997, 20). Kumar also notes the frequency with which Śrī-Lakṣmī turns up alongside eminent and in many cases kingly male deities from the time of Vedas right through to modern Hinduism. Indeed, before Viṣṇu, Śrī-Lakṣmī was paired with Puruṣa/Prajāpati (the primordial man as identified by several Vedas), Agni (the fire-god so important to the sacrifice), Kubera (the wealthy king of the Yakṣas), and Indra (king of the Vedic pantheon), among others (1997, 18). Rhodes Bailly also reviews Śrī-Lakṣmī's kingly associations, characterizing the goddess as a personification of kingly wealth and splendor who is mercurial in temperament, coming and going from ruler to ruler and conferring royal qualities upon them as she pleases (2000, 138-139). Hence, Lakṣmī is known by the epithets *Aiśvaryalakṣmī* (Lakṣmī of sovereignty) and Rājyalakṣmī (Lakṣmī of royalty), each of which connotes her connection with kingly attributes (2000, 135). Thus, Śrī-Lakṣmī's associations with preeminence, power, and kingly rule were well-established before they became so prominent in medieval Hinduism.

*Kingship*

Copious amounts have been written about kingship in India over the past century, to the extent that it is not feasible to review here all the literature pertaining to the topic. The writings about kingship most germane to this study will be those of J.C. Heesterman (1982) and David Shulman (1985). Both authors have focussed on a central conundrum that has marked kingship since the time of the Vedas: that a king's ability to accumulate

spiritual merit will always be limited because of the violent behaviour he must undertake in the process of fulfilling his duties – namely, the military conquest by which he defends and maintains dharma (Shulman 1985; Heesterman 1982). On account of this violence, the Indian king has found himself since the time of the Vedas reliant upon Brahmins to remove the ill effects of sin, as Brahmins are the only party with the ritual qualifications to do away with his accumulated *pāpa*. So long as the king is dependent upon the Brahmin, his power is restricted (Shulman 1985).

 *South Indian Kingship.* There exists almost as much literature concerning South Indian kingship in specific as there is dealing with Indian kingship in general. Shulman's *King and the Clown* (1985) extends his discussion of this aforementioned conundrum of kingship by locating it specifically in the South Indian context. Because of the sin they committed, kings became ambivalent, tragicomic figures in South Indian literature. On account of their paradoxical nature, South Indian kings took up programs of *dāna* or gift-giving to Brahmins, who would then relieve them of the sins they had undertaken in protecting dharma, as it was these Brahmins who possessed the balance of ritual power (1985, 10). This provides some crucial nuance to the works of theorists like Gonda (1956) and Ronald M. Davidson (2002), who have insinuated or argued outright that Indian kings, both Pan-Indic and southern, respectively, were so incomparably powerful that they were at various junctures in history actually conceptualized as divine. Shulman's formulations stand in even more pronounced contrast to the writings of scholars like Ronald Inden, who insisted earlier on that a king does indeed possess ritual sovereignty alongside his political sovereignty, mostly on account of his reception and transmission of

the powers of the gods (1978). Offering something of a middle ground between these positions, Burton Stein (1983) has claimed that throughout the history of South India, it was never so much the king that was sacred, but rather kingship itself – that is, kingship represented a sanctified office transferred from one king to the next.

South Indian kingship requires even further nuance when we observe the empire of Vijayanagara, wherein scholarship has often identified the trans-historical, universalistic trajectories that kingship came to assume. Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam (2004) claim that alongside the ongoing expansion of the Vijayanagara kingdom that ensued following the enthronement of Kṛṣṇadevarāya, literature from that time and place (most obviously Kṛṣṇadevarāya's own *Āmuktamālyada*) became steeped in a decidedly trans-local idiom – specifically that of Śrīvaiṣṇavism. Apparently, this ideal of universal, ever-expanding rule established by Vijayanagara kings, the apotheosis of whom was Kṛṣṇadevarāya, had lasting effects upon later South Indian conceptualizations of kingship. Wagoner, for example, has recorded how the Nāyaka kingdoms, which flourished after the demise of Vijayanagara as a centralized capital in 1565, made extensive efforts to relive the glories of Vijayanagara kings. The best example of this is the *Rāyavācakamu*, a text which glorifies the reign of Kṛṣṇadevarāya, all the while professing continued subordination to and dependence upon his Vijayanagara throne even though the Empire had fallen almost a century before (1993, 10). Apparently, Kṛṣṇadevarāya and his kingdom embodied the quintessential example of kingship, an example these smaller Nāyaka kingdoms felt it necessary to follow in order to reflect some of Vijayanagara's former glory and thereby garner authority for themselves.

*Tantric Kingship.* Unlike kingship in the Pan-Indian and South Indian contexts, little

has been written about what we might refer to as "tantric kingship." Some scholars have

been reticent to even flirt with the idea that these two aspects of Indian culture might

intersect; nonetheless, some studies do exist that propose such a connection. Based on

works in the context of North Indian Assam, Hugh Urban has posited that tantric texts

such as the *Kālikā Purāṇa* were very attractive to Assamese rulers, as they enabled kings

to harness the *śakti* generated by the violence of sacrificial rituals and then apply this

power in social and political contexts (2001, 792-811). Similarly, the king of Puri in

Orissa is said to have utilized the *pañcamakāras* in rituals performed in the recent past

(Marglin 1985). Moving southward to 8th century Kanchipuram, D. Dennis Hudson has

charted the significance of Pāñcarātra Āgama texts, with their combination of both Vedic

and tantric rites, in the ritual process of creating an "equality" between Kṛṣṇa and the

Pallava emperor Nandivarman at the Vaikuṇṭha Perumal temple (2008, 17).[23] Much later

on, it is popularly understood by South Indians that the famous Marāṭhā ruler Serfoji (r.

1712-1728) offered large grants of land to Bhāskararāya, the famous tantric commentator

(Brooks 1992, 41). Although firm historical evidence has not appeared to support this

idea, the belief at the very least suggests that South Indians afford tantra some degree of

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23 Not surprisingly, tantric motifs abound at this royal temple. Hudson has argued that panels along the
north side of this temple depict stages of enlightenment, from first awakening the subtle body and thereafter
doing the same for the consciousness of the gross body, a very tantric trope (2010, 79). Similarly, the panels
of the southern side of the temple telling the story of Mohinī allude to the use of the *pañcamakāras* (Hudson
2008, 458). See both of Hudson's works cited in the bibliography for further details.

acquaintance with kingship. Similarly, Pamela Price (1996) has recorded how Setupati

kings of colonial Tamil Nadu were affiliated with temples that employed tantric elements

such as *cakras* towards the worship of ferocious goddesses like Rājarājeśvarī ("goddess of

the king of kings"). In the North Indian Buddhist context, Davidson has identified how

medieval esoteric texts were preoccupied with the metaphor of a practitioner becoming an

"overlord" (or *rājādhirāja*), with spiritual attainment and ritual practice respectively

analogous to assuming kingship and exercising dominion (2002, 121).[24] Based on his

summary of various tantric studies, White has characterized tantra as central to kingdoms,

labeling the king as the "Tantric actor par excellence" (2000, 24).  In doing so, he

identifies the supposedly peripheral aspects of tantra – "the potentially subversive and

antinomian" – as forms of these practices which develop specifically "when there is no

temporal ruler to be identified with the godhead at the center" so as to render the *tāntrika*

the "true" ruler (2000, 32). While White's insights will prove very helpful later on in the

present work, much of his visioning of the tantric king is based in Tibetan

conceptualizations of the Dalai Lama. Despite these connections, such intersections

between tantra and kingship have been overlooked in attempts to categorize Indian

strands of tantra. June McDaniel (2004), for example, when formulating a typology of

tantric goddess traditions, has neglected to include a category for "imperial tantra."

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24 Davidson cites examples wherein rites of coronation became an essential motif in transferring spirituality
between esoteric masters and disciples. Further, tantric technical language was often conceptualized in
terms of politics and kingship. One such example is the pun made in the Mānasollāsa on the term "mantra",
which could mean "spells of a priest" as well as "internal decisions of a court" (2002, 144).  Another myth
tells of Śiva's defeat by a Buddha in magical combat, after which the loser's maṇḍalas are subsumed into
that of the winner, effectively recreating the monarch's victory on the battlefield (2002, 151-152). Esoteric
Buddhism, it appears, had internalized the political models of medieval India.

**Materials and Method**

The method employed for determining how *SLP* was used and what powers it offered its users will be based in social history and textual analysis, which converge in service of an ethnohistorical methodology. Ethnohistory attempts to reconstruct indigenous discourses about the past, providing insight into the ideological uses of these local forms of knowledge (Wagoner 1993; Dirks 1993). Ethnohistory does not attempt to discern historical fact from mythical fiction, but instead tries to delineate the meaning of particular historical records in their own cultural terms (Cohn 1981, 247). Thus, by establishing the socio-cultural context of the *SLP*, we will then be able to analyze the text as it functioned under the particular cultural forms and contents of Vijayanagara. Such a method works against histories produced by various colonial and nationalist groups who have for centuries read Indian history through their own worldviews (Thapar 1999). This is particularly crucial when dealing with the history of Vijayanagara, which has been recurrently framed in terms of Hindu-Muslim conflict on account of nationalist interests, thereby divesting the region of religious plurality and effectively ignoring elements such as tantra that do not fit the "conservative" Hindu mould.

While no substantial accounts detailing the origin of the *SLP* exist, the opening chapter of this study will first attempt to compose an ethnohistorical background of the context out of which the text arose, drawing upon existing studies of temple patronage, festivals, iconography and architecture of early sixteenth century Vijayanagara. The chapter begins with a necessary discussion of the major religious sects of Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism, with a particular focus upon the former, often accepted by scholars as the "state

religion" of Vijayanagara during this time. From here, the chapter charts the history of the goddess at Vijayanagara, focusing upon not only Lakṣmī but also Durgā, paying particular attention to the presence of these deities in the processions at major festivals such as Mahānavamī. Also provided is a brief history of tantra at Vijayanagara. Together, these later sections suggest that Vijayanagara was not as conservative and religiously monochromatic as scholars sometimes conceive it; rather, it seems to have provided a pluralistic environment conducive for the employment of a variety of practices, including tantra.

Chapters two and three will utilize the *SLP* as their primary source, culling together passages from the text that endow the king with magico-religious ascendancy. The second chapter resurrects the debate concerning divinity as it relates to kings and kingship throughout the history of India, particularly in the South. Can kings be called gods in South India? While thinkers like Gonda, Inden and Davidson might argue that they can be called so in a pan-Indic context, I pay particular attention to Stein's (1983) claim that in South India, the notion of the sacred king gradually gave way to the notion of sacred kingship. Using examples from the *SLP* wherein kings are granted *aiśvaryas* – tantric powers synonymous with the *siddhis* – I argue that the line between sacred kings and sacred kingship becomes blurred at Vijayanagara. Thus, the person of the king as envisioned in the *SLP* becomes virtually divine, as does his throne, acquiring immense supernatural power and actualizing the brand of universal, trans-local kingship for which Vijayanagara rulers strived.

The third chapter connects the *SLP* to the fundamental quandary of South Indian

kingship: that a king must perpetrate violence against his enemies, as a result becoming dependent upon Brahmins for the absolution of his accrued transgressions. After establishing the persistence of this difficulty at Vijayanagara, the chapter examines passages of the *SLP* that enable the king to "destroy enemies" with greater efficacy via mantras, votive offerings, and the worship of weapons, thereby better fulfilling his dharmic responsibilities. The chapter then deals with the subsequent measures the *SLP* provides so that a king may destroy his own sins more efficiently than (if not completely independent of) the Brahmin. This, I argue, allowed the king to carry out his violent duties more effectively and without dependence upon Brahmins for forgiveness, thereby giving him further potential to become not only the most powerful political entity in the kingdom, but the most powerful spiritual entity in the universe as well.

The conclusion synthesizes the findings of the three chapters, speculating as to how the tantric elements of the *SLP* afforded a king the opportunity to attain unconditional, universal power. The conclusion also uses this further example of imperial tantra to re-evaluate scholarly conceptualizations of both tantra and Indian kingship.

Chapter 1

**The Socioreligious Milieu of Early Sixteenth Century Vijayanagara:**
**A Reevaluation of the "Hindu Bulwark"**

When Robert Sewell referred to the Vijayanagara empire as a "Hindu bulwark against

Muhammadan conquest" he effectively set the trajectory for a century's worth of

historiography concerning this region (1900, 1). Many South Indian historians to follow

have taken this concept of "Hindu bulwark" as a given, recurrently framing Vijayanagara

as a united front against the southward expansion of Islam. Alongside this have arisen

characterizations of the empire as a savior of Hindu religion – a military state that

protected Hinduism from "molestation" at the hands of outside forces (Aiyangar 1936,

16). This notion of Vijayanagara as a frontier of conflict between Hinduism and other

religions has been invaluable for anti-Muslim nationalist Indian historians, who have

taken the empire to be an historical example of "pure" Hinduism, where Hindu forces

engaged in a heroic struggle to protect dharma from Islamic invaders (Stein 1989, 9).

These historians would have us believe that for Vijayanagara "in matters spiritual the

policy was the protection of Dharma understood in its widest sense" and "in matters

social it was the protection of the various *varṇāśrama* dharmas (...) the peaceful

observation of the rules of conduct as enjoined by the castes to which one belonged"

(Heras and Bhandarker 1936, 35). For these historians, Vijayanagara has come to be read

as a last bastion of unpolluted Hinduism – a model for the ideal conservative, religiously

monochromatic Hindu state.[25]

    This depiction of Vijayanagara as staunchly conservative and purely Hindu,

however, has its critics. Stein has noted the "modern nationalist sentiment" that such

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25 For a more detailed critique of this kind of historiography as it relates to Vijayanagara, see Wagoner
(1996).

theories project back onto Vijayanagara (1985, 73). Terms like "protection of dharma," which were applied so literally by nationalist historians to Vijayanagara kings, are more accurately Sanskrit tropes that do not have such specific, exclusively conservative meanings (Verghese 1995, 2). And while some may cite the numerous conflicts between the Vijayanagara empire and Muslim forces such as the Bahmani sultanate[26] as evidence for the anti-Islamic spirit of the Empire, "their cause was more political and economic than religious," representing "a revival of the ancient feud that had existed between the Deccan and south India under the earlier Hindu sovereigns" (1995, 3). Indeed, the Vijayanagara Empire was just as (if not more) likely to orchestrate military expeditions against less powerful Hindu rulers as they were to attack Muslims, with the campaigns against the Gajapatis[27] serving as just one example to this effect (Ibid). By most indications, the Vijayanagara Empire itself was in fact characterized by remarkable religious tolerance. Even nationalist historians, in the process of propounding the glories of the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva majority in Vijayanagara, will acknowledge this spirit of tolerance on the grounds that the empire gave protection to the Hindu religion "irrespective of different sects" (Heras and Bhandarker 1936, 33). However, it is rare that much is said about the Jain, Muslim and even tantric folds that operated in the Empire, even though there is considerable evidence for the presence of each. The nationalist model, as it were, seems to ignore elements that do not fit the "conservative" Hindu mould, and thusly divests the region of the religious plurality and inclusivism that it appears to have promoted.

Thus, the most recent commentators on religion in Vijayanagara have concluded that

26 The Bahmani sultanate was a powerful Muslim kingdom located across the Deccan Plateau from 1347-1527. Bahmani sultans engaged in numerous conflicts with the Vijayanagara Empire for control of the Deccan. See Sherwani (1985).
27 The Gajapatis were a Hindu dynasty that controlled the ancient kingdom of Kalinga (present day Orissa, as well as portions of Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal) from 1434-1541. See Ramachandra Rao (1988).

while the Vijayanagara Empire "did create conditions for the defense of Hindu culture and institutions" it was ultimately pluralistic, in that it attempted to "integrate people of varied beliefs" (Verghese 1995, 3; 133). Nonetheless, the debate continues. William J. Jackson has recently written that "[i]t would be logical or natural to assume that reestablishing Hindu dharma to counter the chaos caused by Muslim invaders was a main motive of the founders of Vijayanagara" (2005, 47). While this may have been the case at the dawn of the empire, little evidence exists to support the presumption that this fiercely anti-Muslim prerogative extends throughout the history of the empire.

The present chapter utilizes this pre-existing debate as a vehicle for discussing various types of religiosity that existed in Vijayanagara, particularly during the early sixteenth century, in hopes of gaining an understanding of the religious milieu out of which the *SLP* arose. In accordance with the dating established for the *SLP* in the introduction, we will pay closest attention to the religions and sub-sects of the sixteenth century, during which Kṛṣṇadevarāya reigned. Kṛṣṇadevarāya, as the greatest of the Vijayanagara kings, often has the title of "Hindu defender" foisted upon him, and this chapter wishes to establish that this was just one aspect of his character. While I hope to acknowledge the primacy of Vaiṣṇavism and to a lesser degree Śaivism as "state religions" during Kṛṣṇadevarāya's time, I more importantly hope to elucidate the plurality of religious life at Vijayanagara, suggesting that the Empire was not, in fact, a "religious bulwark." By the time we have proceeded from "conservative" traditions like Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism to the less-noted goddess traditions (the festivals of which played so important a role in Vijayanagara public life), as well as the presence of religions like Jainism and even Islam, we see that Vijayanagara was not as conservative as it is still sometimes thought to be. By coming to terms with the multifarious forms of religious life

of this time period, it is my hope that we will come to see Vijayanagara of the early

sixteenth century as inclusivistic, if not pluralistic, and readily amenable to what are

typically thought of as peripheral (that is, less immediately conservative) traditions such

as tantra. Tantra, as we will see, had already taken root much earlier in the history

Vijayanagara, and so the emergence of secretive tantric circles – those out of which the

*SLP* appears to have been composed – is far from inconceivable during the time of

Kṛṣṇadevarāya.


### Vaiṣṇavism

While Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism were generally the dominant religious traditions

throughout the Vijayanagara Empire historically and geographically, the former was

particularly powerful during late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This had much to do

with the preeminence of Śrīvaiṣṇava traditions, figures and deities in the city during this

time, as well as the cults dedicated to Vaiṣṇava deities such as Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Narasiṃha,

Viṭṭhala and others. At his coronation, Kṛṣṇadevarāya identified himself as an incarnation

of Viṣṇu, and as we might expect given this declaration, the kingdom during and after his

reign is decidedly Vaiṣṇava (Elgood 2004, 102).

Śrīvaiṣṇavism refers to a unique brand of South Indian Viṣṇu-worship notable not

only for its recognition of the preserver god as the supreme divinity but also for the

reverence it grants his consort Lakṣmī, also known as Śrī (from whom the sect takes the

first part of its name). In this tradition, Śrī represents divine grace, mediating between

human beings and god.[28] This belief system developed largely out of the devotional

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28 For a comprehensive history of Śrīvaiṣṇavism explicated via an analysis of the goddess Śrī-Lakṣmī, see
Kumar (1997).

writings of the twelve South Indian poet-saints known as the Āḻvārs,[29] and were

subsequently given philosophical structure by the twelfth-century philosopher Rāmānuja,

founder of the Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta school of thought.[30] Rāmānuja was active in the

Karnataka area, and so Śrīvaiṣṇavism established roots in this region long before the

emergence of the Vijayanagara Empire. With the establishment of the Saṅgama dynasty in

the early fourteenth century, Śrīvaiṣṇavism became prominent in the northern reaches of

the budding Empire, its popularity only increasing during the Sāḷuva and Tuḷuva periods.

By the sixteenth century, Śrīvaiṣṇavism had become the leading religious movement in

the city of Vijayanagara, with almost all of the prominent sixteenth century temples

bearing markings that suggest their affiliation with the sect (Verghese 1995, 69). These

Śrīvaiṣṇava temples received extensive royal patronage from Vijayanagara kings, with

periodic displays of gifting performed in honor of the deities housed within them.

Arrangements were also made at these complexes for the regular feeding of Śrīvaiṣṇava

Brahmins and pilgrims alike (Verghese 1995, 81). No Vijayanagara king provided more

support than Kṛṣṇadevarāya, whose dedication to Śrīvaiṣṇava temples, deities and

*ācāryas* both past and present confirms his firm alignment with the sect.

    Among the best supported religious complexes in Vijayanagara during the reign of

Kṛṣṇadevarāya were the three great Śrīvaiṣṇava pilgrimage sites: the Raṅganātha temple

at Śrīraṅgam, the Varadarāja temple at Kanchipuram, and the Veṅkaṭēśa temple at

Tirupati. The temple to Raṅganātha (the reclining form of Viṣṇu) located at Śrīraṅgam in

Tiruchirapalli,[31] one of the most sacred of the Śrīvaiṣṇava temples at Vijayanagara due to

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29 For a general introduction to the Āḻvārs, who produced a large corpus of works between the fifth and ninth centuries, see Varadachari (1966). For a more specific study of the Āḻvārs works as they relate to kingship, see Hudson (2010).

30 For more on the history of Rāmānuja and his impact on temple worship see Gopal (1983) and Jagannathan (1994), respectively; for more on the philosophical school of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta (or qualified non-dualism) see Srinivasachari (1988).

31 For a translation of the *Kōyil Oḻugu*, an indigenous history of the Śrīraṅgam temple, see Hari Rao (1961).

its association with the Āḻvārs and *ācāryas*, received lavish gifts of jewels, villages and coins from Kṛṣṇadevarāya. The king's third visit to the temple was particularly noteworthy, as he had the doors of the *mukha-maṇḍapa* gold-plated (Verghese 1995, 75).[32] King Acyutarāya (r. 1529-1542) followed Kṛṣṇadevarāya's example, gifting his weight in gold – a practice known as *tulāpuruṣadāna* – to the Raṅganātha temple in 1539. Kṛṣṇadevarāya was also one of (if not the) foremost patrons of the temple to Varadarāja (Viṣṇu as as "king of boon-granting") at Kanchipuram, a site famous for its associations with Rāmānuja. In 1514 Kṛṣṇadevarāya had the temple *vimāna* covered with gold (Raman, 1975, 149). After conquests in 1516 he gave five villages to the temple, which altogether yielded an annual income of 1,500 gold coins for the site (1975, 143). In 1517 he fixed the processional route for the car festival of Lord Varadarāja here, and also presented the temple with a vehicle for the event (1975, 122; 179). To the Veṅkaṭēśa temple atop Tirupati hill in what is modern day Andhra Pradesh,[33] a principal pilgrimage center in the poems of the Āḻvārs, Kṛṣṇadevarāya paid a disproportionately large number of visits, providing the usual gifts of jewels, villages and coins each time (Verghese 1995, 70-71). Veṅkaṭēśa was considered to be Kṛṣṇadevarāya's patron deity, and the king's loyalty to the god was unquestionable: not only would he dedicate (and narrate) his literary masterwork *Āmuktamālyada*[34] to this god (who inspired the text in the king's dreams), but he also named his heir, Tirumala (born 1518) after him (1995, 71).

32 Kṛṣṇadevarāya also provided support to a number of other temples dedicated to Raṅganātha, such as the Anantaśayana-guḍi temple near Hampi. The construction of this temple, the largest of those to Raṅganātha, is credited in a 1524 inscription to Kṛṣṇadevarāya, who also provided several villages to the temple along with the appointment of three priests (Verghese 1995, 77). The temple seems to commemorate the coronation of prince Tirumala at age six, which, when taken together with the donation made to the Tirupati temple at Tirumala's birth (see below), further suggests the importance of Śrīvaiṣṇava deities to the Tuḷuva lineage.
33 For details on concerning the Tirupati temple, see Stein (1960) and Subrahmanyam (1995). For translations of the works of fifteenth century Telugu poet Annamayya from Tirupati dedicated to Veṅkaṭēśa, (the most prized possessions of the temple), see Narayana Rao and Shulman (2005).
34 For a brief introduction to the *Āmuktamālyada*, including translated passages from the text, see Narayana Rao and Shulman (2002, 166-177). See also footnote 49.

Evidently, Kṛṣṇadevarāya's support for Śrīvaiṣṇavism went beyond material patronage of temples. The king's *Āmuktamālyada* is actually based upon the story of Āṇṭāl, the female Āḻvār whose Telugu name serves as the title of the text, and so the work provides extensive tribute not only to the female poet saint but also to the other Āḻvārs and *ācāryas*. Additionally, Narayana Rao, Shulman & Subrahmanyam have argued that the text, in its fixation upon the dialectical relationship of enjoyment (*bhoga*) and renunciation, betrays an unequivocally Śrīvaiṣṇava aesthetic, suggesting that the author was concerned with conveying Śrīvaiṣṇava ideals (2004, 606). No doubt Kṛṣṇadevarāya was well informed of these precepts, for his personal *guru* was Veṅkaṭa Tātācārya, a member of the important Tātācārya family of royal chaplains. The Tātācāryas were supposedly descendants of Rāmānuja's maternal uncle, and served as prominent figures in the dissemination of Śrīvaiṣṇava theology throughout the empire (Rao 2006, 55). Considering Kṛṣṇadevarāya's choice of *guru* alongside his Śrīvaiṣṇava literary contribution and the support he gave to that sect's pilgrimage sites, it is clear that the king was Śrīvaiṣṇava, and consequently that Śrīvaiṣṇavism was no doubt popular at Vijayanagara during his reign.

A note should also be made here concerning the Mādhava sect, Śrīvaiṣṇavism's leading competitor in the Vijayanagara Vaiṣṇava circle. Mādhavas, named for the dualist philosopher Madhvācārya, propagated  bhakti worship of Kṛṣṇa in this region between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries.[35] Eleven memorials to the Mādhava saints, known as Haridāsas,[36] exist at the site, and fittingly so, for it was these saints who greatly

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35 For more on Madhvācārya and the roots of Mādhava philosophy and practice, see Sarma (2003 and 2005).

36 The Haridāsas are a group of devotional poet-saints whose literature spans over 500 years between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries. Their compositions had significant impact upon Kannada literary circles as well as the Karnataka bhakti culture. For a general introduction to the Haridāsas, see Jackson (1998, 10). For an an in-depth look at Kanaka Dāsa, a sixteenth century Haridāsa, see Basrur Rao (2001). For an earlier study of the Haridāsas, see Karmarkar and Kalamdani (1939).

propagated the cult of Viṭṭhala in Vijayanagara during the sixteenth century (1995, 60). Epigraphs suggest that Kṛṣṇadevarāya enjoyed a reciprocally beneficial relationship with the Mādhava sage Vyāsarāya, who was said to be another of his personal gurus. An epigraph from 1511 records that Vyāsarāya actually instituted a festival in honor of Kṛṣṇadevarāya while presenting a village and a serpent vehicle to the Varadarāja temple (Raman 1975, 137). No doubt seeking to return the favor, Kṛṣṇadevarāya decreed in an inscription of 1513 that a generous three shares of food offerings be made for Vyāsarāya at the Viṭṭhala temple (Verghese 1995, 114). Another story tells of how the king even gave Vyāsarāya his throne during an inauspicious conjunction of the planets, for the sage was seen as the only person who could overturn the malignity of the stars (Filliozat 1981, 134). Clearly, the sage held considerable influence on the religious life of the king and the city itself. It was only after Vyāsarāya's death that Śrīvaiṣṇavism took over in Vijayanagara, and by the time of the co-rule of Sadāśiva and Rāmarāya (1542-1565), the Śrīvaiṣṇavas had undisputed ascendancy (Verghese 1995, 9). So while Kṛṣṇadevarāya appears to have been Śrīvaiṣṇava on account of his identification of Śrīvaiṣṇava ascetics like Veṅkaṭa Tātācārya as well Govindarāja as his *gurus*, this did not preclude his similar veneration of Mādhava *gurus*. Thus, it is evident that both Mādhavaism and Śrīvaiṣṇavism were major sects during the reign of Kṛṣṇadevarāya, illustrating just how much of a stronghold Vaiṣṇavism had in the empire at the time.

A number of other Vaiṣṇava deities were very popular in Vijayanagara of the early sixteenth century, including Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Narasiṃha and Viṭṭhala, among others. The cult of Rāma was prominent in Vijayanagara on account of the widespread Śrīvaiṣṇava support for the deity as well as earlier associations made between the Rāma story and the region that was to become the Empire. From the pre-Vijayanagara era onward, natural

features in and around Hampi had been identified as places in which events from the *Rāmāyaṇa* took place (Fritz, Michell and Rao 1984, 149).[37] This *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition proliferated between the thirteenth and sixteenth century, as Śrīvaiṣṇavism fully assimilated the Rāma story into temples, first into those dedicated to Viṣṇu in general and later on to Rāma-specific temples (Rao 2006, 17). This precipitated the rather sudden emergence of a royal Rāma cult at the dawn of the Vijayanagara Empire, which only increased in popularity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, especially during the reign of the Tuḷuvas, who were decidedly Śrīvaiṣṇava. As a token of its high esteem, the Rāmacandra temple, itself a bearer of Śrīvaiṣṇava markings, was situated at the very nucleus of Vijayanagara's royal center, the convergence point of a complex road system (Dallapiccola et al. 1992, 4; Fritz, Michell and Rao 1984, 149). Although this temple was probably constructed by Devarāya in the fifteenth century, it was during the Tuḷuva period that many of the Rāmacandra temple's major constructions were added. No Vijayanagara ruler was more crucial in the development of this temple than Kṛṣṇadevarāya. In 1513, for instance, he gifted six villages to the Rāmacandra temple (Dallapiccola et al. 1992, 30). Kṛṣṇadevarāya also ensured that daily quantities of food and supplies were transferred from the massive Kṛṣṇa temple so that they could be used as offerings for Rāma (1995, 49). All this gifting is fitting, for the Rāma shrine appears to have been the private place of worship for Kṛṣṇadevarāya and the rest of the Tuḷuva kings (Longhurst 1917, 69-71). It was also during the Tuḷuva period that numerous other Rāma temples were built in their entirety throughout the Empire, indicating not only the dedication of kings like Kṛṣṇadevarāya to the god but also Rāma's popularity throughout the kingdom (Rao 2006,

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37 For instance, Kishkindha, where Rāma killed the monkey king Vāli, is said to be located in the hills surrounding Anegondi. Similarly, legends claim that Sītā's garments left streaks on rocks adjacent to the Tungabhadra River.

47).[38]

While Rāma temples were also widely patronized by wealthy dignitaries, subordinate chiefs, and mercantile groups, it was Vijayanagara kings who enjoyed a special homological relationship with the god, which will be treated at length in chapter two. It bears mentioning here that it was something of an earthly Rāma the king became at the popular Mahānavamī festival (to be discussed below), where he hoped to acquire military valor and economic prosperity through communion with the martial goddess Durgā. The festival, one of the most prominent on the Vijayanagara calendar and a favorite of Kṛṣṇadevarāya, even appended as its tenth day the Kṣatriya festival Vijayādaśamī, which celebrated Rāma's triumph over evil in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Rao 2006, 50). Here, upon the central platform of the Rāmacandra temple, the king publicly identified himself with Rāma as per the description of the hero's return at the end of Vālmīki's narrative. We also read in the *SLP* that the king should during Vijayādaśamī pay private worship to Lakṣmī-Narayana in proximity to a *śamī* tree (Sarangi 1993, 219). Such ritual action is fitting, considering that it was the *śamī* tree that Rāma worshipped in order to imbue his own weapons with power. In the context of the Mahānavamī proceedings, the title of the festival took on additional trajectories, as *Vijayā* is also an epithet of Durgā. Victory and the goddess become literally equivalent, then, and so the king, identified with Rāma, seems to have renewed a partnership (if not identification) with the goddess so as to further ensure military success. Naturally, this all took place in

38 Additionally, Rāma's monkey-helper Hanumān is among the most popular of Vijayanagara's minor deities, which is quite fitting considering the site is believed to be his place of birth (Verghese 1995, 90). After Mādhavas like Vyāsarāya greatly popularized Hanumān worship in the Vijayanagara Empire, the cult grew to such an extent that many shrines, reliefs and sculptures to the deity could be found in the sacred centre and in the urban core of the city (1995, 91-92). The sixteenth-century Portuguese traveler Nuniz refers to pagodas bearing images of monkeys, many of which are still extant today. In addition, there were many Hanumān temples in the metropolitan area of the city, with at least seven that can be identified in Anegondi alone. Epigraphs suggest that the cult of Hanumān also received extensive patronage from the court (1995, 91).

the city and empire bearing victory in its very name.

Kṛṣṇa, the famous incarnation of Viṣṇu beloved among both the Mādhavas and the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, was perhaps the most popular Vaiṣṇava deity in sixteenth century Vijayanagara. As we have seen, Kṛṣṇadevarāya had identified himself as an incarnation of Viṣṇu, and he quite fittingly had the name of Kṛṣṇa affixed to his own to support that notion. For not only was Kṛṣṇadevarāya an incarnation of Viṣṇu, but he was also, according to courtly poet Nandi Timmana,[39] specifically an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa (Shulman 1985, 367). Kṛṣṇadevarāya almost single-handedly established this Kṛṣṇa cult at Vijayanagara due in large part to his support for the capacious Kṛṣṇa temple, the construction of which he funded in 1515 (Verghese 1995, 55). Here the king installed an icon of Kṛṣṇa he collected as a war-trophy after obtaining victory in Udayagiri (1995, 56). Considering Kṛṣṇadevarāya's additional contributions to this complex – including jewelery, ornaments as well as thirty-seven Brahmins to staff the temple – alongside the elaborate arrangements he made for the performance of rituals and festivals there, it is obvious that the Kṛṣṇa temple was a royal temple (Verghese 1995, 58). This idea is also communicated in temple iconography, most notably the carvings on a pillar on one of the porches projecting out of the temple *maṇḍapa* that depicts a regal devotee, whom local traditions claim to be Kṛṣṇadevarāya, paying homage to Kṛṣṇa (Dallapiccola & Verghese 1998, 91).

There are also numerous reliefs of the *Kṛṣṇa-līlā*, scenes from Kṛṣṇa's boyhood, found in both Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva temples alike throughout Vijayanagara (Verghese 1995, 55). For instance, a number of such scenes are depicted on the pillars of the *mahā-raṅga-*

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39 Nandi Timmana has been historically confirmed as a key presence in Kṛṣṇadevarāya's court. For an introduction to the poet and translations of some of his work, see Narayana Rao and Shulman (2002, 178-190).

*maṇḍapa* of the Virūpākṣa temple built by Kṛṣṇadevarāya in 1509-1510 (Ibid). Thus, even when Kṛṣṇadevarāya built for Śaivite deities, he made efforts to honor Kṛṣṇa as well. As could be expected, similar scenes appear in the aforementioned Kṛṣṇa temple that he constructed several years later.

The cult of Narasiṃha, the half-man, half-lion avatar of Viṣṇu, was among the earliest of the Vaiṣṇava cults to develop in Vijayanagara and enjoyed particular flourish during the reign of Kṛṣṇadevarāya (Narasimhacharya 1989, 84). In 1515, Kṛṣṇadevarāya visited Ahobala, near Kurnool in present-day Andhra Pradesh, en route to his conquest of Kalinga. He presented the Narasiṃha temple here with precious jewels, a gold plate, and a thousand gold coins as well as a village. His queen also gifted a precious pendant (1989, 85). The following year he visited the Lakṣmī-Narasiṃha temple at Simhachalam, another important site for the Narasiṃha cult, where he and his queens gave similar gifts. In 1519, the king instituted daily food offerings to the deity at Simhachalam, and in doing so also gifted five villages. In 1527, Kṛṣṇadevarāya gave the village of Madavara in Gundlursima to a Narasiṃha temple (Ibid). In 1529, he provided an endowment of land to the Narasiṃha temple at Ahobilam for the provision of daily rituals in honor of the god (1989, 236). Numerous temples to Narasiṃha also exist within the city of Vijayanagara, some dated as late as the sixteenth century (Verghese 1995, 35). Nearby a medium-sized Narasiṃha temple in proximity to the Kṛṣṇa temple is a Lakṣmī-Narasiṃha monolith standing almost seven meters high that was erected by Kṛṣṇadevarāya in 1528 (1995, 36-37). This shrine, which depicts Narasiṃha with the goddess Lakṣmī sitting on his lap, marks one of only three temples built entirely by Kṛṣṇadevarāya, commemorating his special affiliation with Narasiṃha (1995, 37). Worship of this deity was so popular it even spread across sectarian lines, with Narasiṃha appearing in the temples of other Vaiṣṇava

deities as well as in Śaiva temples. One such example of Narasiṃha appearing in Śaiva temple can be found upon the *mahā-raṅga-maṇḍapa* that appears in the Virūpākṣa temple built in 1509-1510 (1995, 40). In addition, Kṛṣṇadevarāya's feudatories also made numerous gifts to this deity.[40] Thus, the cult of Narasiṃha was well-supported throughout the empire during the time of Kṛṣṇadevarāya, and this extensive royal support would carry through to the reign of Sadāśiva (Narasimhacharya 1989, 412).

Another Vaiṣṇava cult popular in Vijayanagara during the sixteenth century, especially during the Tuḷuva period, is that of Viṭṭhala, another form of Kṛṣṇa. The Viṭṭhala cult originated during the thirteenth century at Pāṇḍharpūr where the central god, known as Pāṇḍuraṅga, received extensive royal patronage (Vaudeville 1999, 202). The cult was established at Vijayanagara by the fifteenth century, when the Viṭṭhala temple appears to have been built in the heart of the city, quickly becoming the most prominent Vaiṣṇava temple (Verghese 1995, 59-62). Haridāsas spread the Viṭṭhala cult throughout the city and the Empire at large, particularly during the sixteenth century, and Kṛṣṇadevarāya was well-attuned to this trend, providing numerous gifts for Viṭṭhala-affiliated temples (Karmarkar and Kalamdani 1939, 24). In 1513, on the occasion of a solar eclipse, Kṛṣṇadevarāya granted three villages and land to the temple, while his queens gave funds for the construction of the *gōpura* as well as 200 cows so that lamps could perpetually be burnt within the temple (V. Filliozat 1981a, 126). In this grant he also ensured that the Viṭṭhala temple, a haven for festivals, would be the central route for two prominent cart festivals, Phālguṇa and Vaiśākha (Verghese 1995, 103). Various other gifts of villages and lands were given by Kṛṣṇadevarāya from 1513 to 1526, the most architecturally magnificent coming in 1516, when he had a one-hundred-pillared hall built

40 One such gift was that made by one Gaurada Nāyaka to the village of Bayarapura, which afterwards came to be known as Narasimhapura. See Narasimhacharya (1989), pages 85-86.

for music and dance (1995, 63-64). Viṭṭhala's popularity was such that his cult also spread from the city to the distant reaches of the empire during the reign of Kṛṣṇadevarāya and beyond.[41]

Viṭṭhala's name itself also had preeminence in Vijayangara, taking on immense titular and bureaucratic significance throughout the empire. Eleven of the eighteen foremost Haridāsas have the name Viṭṭhala appended to their own titles, and epigraphs suggest that during the sixteenth century, many other civilians followed suit by also taking this deity's name as an indication of their devotion to him (Verghese 1995, 65). Moreover, while the majority of grants made by Vijayanagara kings were rendered in the name of the Śaivite deity Virūpākṣa, even during the time of Kṛṣṇadevarāya, a significant amount also came to be registered in Viṭṭhala's presence. This shift was initiated by Kṛṣṇadevarāya, and carried on by rulers and ministers that followed. Some ministers like Sāḷuva Govindarāja even registered grants in the presence of both Virūpākṣa and Viṭṭhala, presumably to reconcile both cults. By the time of the latter rulers of Vijayanagara, almost all grants were made in the name of Viṭṭhala, illustrating just how influential Kṛṣṇadevarāya's support of Vaiṣṇava deities was in directing the religious life of the later Empire toward Viṣṇu (Ibid).

Thus, it is more than evident that Vaiṣṇavism was strongly installed in the Vijayanagara Empire, particularly during the early sixteenth century when Kṛṣṇadevarāya ruled. During Kṛṣṇadevarāya's rule, all things Vaiṣṇava flourished in the region. Śrīvaiṣṇava practices thrived on account of Kṛṣṇadevarāya's support for temples and

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41 For instance, in 1519, a Viṭṭhala temple was set up in the Chingleput district, setting the stage for the consecration of temples and/or images of the deity in the districts of Chittoor (in 1535), South Kanara and Śrīraṅgam (both in 1546; Verghese 1995, 64). The Viṭṭhala cult flourished even more markedly after the reign of Kṛṣṇadevarāya. Extensive building activities such as the construction of shrines, temples, tanks, and *maṇḍapas* continued around the Vitthalapura region with the reign of Acyutarāya, and lasted until the fall of the empire (Ibid).

deities affiliated with the tradition. This did not occur to the detriment of competing sects such as the Mādhavas, who also wielded influence upon the king and presumably upon the kingdom as well. Further, Kṛṣṇadevarāya provided support for an abundance of other Vaiṣṇava deities and their cults, building the immense Kṛṣṇa temple and funding important additions to the Viṭṭhala and Rāmacandra temples, while consistently making donations to most all of these institutions. The importance of these Vaiṣṇava deities and traditions suggests the prominence of Vaiṣṇavism during the early sixteenth century in Vijayanagara. Clearly, Kṛṣṇadevarāya not only carried on but also bolstered a program of support for Vaiṣṇava establishments that continued among his successors.

## Śaivism

Although not as pronounced as Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism was also a prominent religious tradition throughout the Vijayanagara Empire during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Virūpākṣa, a localized variation of Śiva, was an early patron deity of kings and remained a perennial favorite even in the court of Kṛṣṇadevarāya. He played a particularly critical role in the yearly Vasantotsava festival. In addition to Virūpākṣa, various other Śaiva deities such as Bhairava and Vīrabhadra appeared in Vijayanagara iconography and practice. With Śaivism we observe not only another branch of the mainstream religion at Vijayanagara, but also the first intimations that the religious landscape therein may not have been so conservative.

Virūpākṣa, an iteration of Śiva with "malformed eyes," was the foremost deity of the Hampi region in pre-Vijayanagara times, due in large part to his mythological wedding with the local river goddess Paṃpā, whom we meet in the following section. Virūpākṣa maintained a position of preeminence throughout most of the Empire period, which only

tapered off during the Tuḷuva period when Viṭṭhala and a number of other Śaiva became so popular (Verghese 1995, 17). Virūpākṣa was accepted as a patron deity by founders of the Vijayanagara Empire such as Harihara and Bukka, responsible for the protection of the empire, and so the capital was built in close proximity to the pre-Vijayanagara temple to the deity located in Hampi (Filliozat 1981, 133). This temple has perennially been the most important pilgrimage spot in the region, except for the period of time between Kṛṣṇadevarāya's rule and the fall of the empire when it was eclipsed in popularity by the Viṭṭhala temple (Verghese 2000, 110). Early kings lavished gifts upon Virūpākṣa, and he continued to serve as patron deity under later rulers such as the Tuḷuvas, whose personal deities were decidedly Vaiṣṇava (Verghese 1995, 19-21). Even though Viṣṇu was the dominant deity in this time, Tuḷuvas still ended their inscriptions with the name of Śrī Virūpākṣa, which stood in as the signature of the king, a practice which continued even after the demise of the empire (1995, 19). Thus, it is clear that the rulers of the Vijayanagara Empire regarded themselves as representatives of Virūpākṣa (Anderson 1993, 174). Also, grants made in the capital, as we have already seen, were made in the presence of Virūpākṣa until Kṛṣṇadevarāya began to register them in the presence of Viṭṭhala as well.

There appears to have been a direct link between the rising importance of the Viṭṭhala cult and the decline in patronage of Virūpākṣa, a process which began during Kṛṣṇadevarāya's rule (Verghese 1995, 21).[42] In spite of this shift that was instigated on his part, Kṛṣṇadevarāya still showed support for Virūpākṣa and the temple named for the god. An inscription made on the occasion of Kṛṣṇadevarāya's coronation in 1509 mentions a number of major additions to aspects of the Virūpākṣa temple complex, including the

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42 From 1516 onward, the majority of Vijayanagara grants were made in the name of Vaiṣṇava deities.

*mahā-raṅga-maṇḍapa* and the inner *gōpura*, as well as the repair of the outer *gōpura* (Verghese 1995, 19). Kṛṣṇadevarāya also gifted a village to the deity at this time, as well as a number of gold and silver objects (1995, 20). In 1513, Kṛṣṇadevarāya provided another gift of villages and precious ornaments on the occasion of the solar eclipse. An additional prominent Śaivite location was the Prasanna Virūpākṣa temple, which was constructed within the royal center. To this temple Kṛṣṇadevarāya granted villages and gardens in 1513 (1995, 22). Thus, while the period of Kṛṣṇadevarāya's rule saw the rise of Vaiṣṇava cults such as that of Viṭṭhala, the presiding ruler still continued patronage to the popular Śaiva god. Evidently, Kṛṣṇadevarāya held Virūpākṣa in high regard, as the aforementioned pillar-carving on the porch of the great Kṛṣṇa temple depicts a noble person, which we have already suggested may be the king himself, worshiping not only Kṛṣṇa but also a Śiva-liṅga representing Virūpākṣa (Dallapiccola & Verghese 1998, 91).

Virūpākṣa and his main temple also figures prominently in Vasantotsava, what was (and continues to be) one of the most important festivals on the Hampi/Vijayanagara religious calendar. A festival of the spring, Vasantotsava celebrates Virūpākṣa as Paṃpāpati, "the husband of Paṃpā." Paṃpā, the local river goddess, represents an iteration of Pārvatī, and so marital imagery abounds throughout this festival, with images of both god and goddess installed in front of temples and in chariots (Anderson 1993, 177).[43] Vijayanagara's variation of Vasantotsava is also particularly notable on account of the relation it affirms between Virūpākṣa and the ruler. Again, homology is acknowledged between god and king, for Virūpākṣa is acknowledged as possessing and bestowing the attributes of ideal kings – these are, among others, sovereignty and prowess in the hunt

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43 The most prominent celebrations at the Virūpākṣa temple were those involving the betrothal and the marriage of Virūpākṣa and Paṃpā. Chariot festivals still take place at Hampi today to commemorate these events (Anderson 1993, 174).

(1993, 172). As far as sovereignty goes, the king is relied upon to set the vehicle

containing Śiva and Pārvatī into motion, even after Śaiva Brahmins have ritualistically

feigned the inability to perform the very same task (1993, 177-178). Here it is more than

intimated that the king upholds a unique relationship as a driving force *vis-a-vis* the god

Virūpākṣa; further, he is fully independent in his sovereignty, like the god. The

relationship between the two borders on complete equivalence. Anderson explicates this

link between Virūpākṣa and the king and their shared power as it is displayed during

Vasantotsava:

> The centre of this kingdom, the temple, is clearly the locus of power from
> which the eminence of the deity as well as the eminence of the king
> radiates. It is this centre from which the deity emerges, surveys his
> kingdom and to which he returns. The temple is where lord Virūpākṣa
> customarily receives visitors but, on the occasion of *Rathotsava* [the
> chariot portion of Vasantotsava], he ventures outside the temple
> compound, into the public sphere. This territory, this city is his kingdom
> and on this journey Virūpākṣa reinforces his claim to it as well as to the
> loyalty of his subjects (1993, 180).

The very same goes for the king on account of his relation to Virūpākṣa. After all, the king

and the deity are "virtually indistinguishable" in appearance, as the deity dons many of

the accouterments of the king, including his retinue (1993, 180). Further homology is

drawn in the Mṛgayāmahotsava (or Deer Hunt Festival) aspect of Vasantotsava, which

follows Virūpākṣa's mythological forays beyond the banks of the Tungabhadra river to the

untamed wilds on the other side of it, all set alongside his separation from (and

subsequent reunion with) Pārvatī on account of a *ménage-et-trois* with two damsels from

the forest (1993, 189). This part of the festival draws upon obvious motifs of sporting

conquest and sexuality in order to further illustrate the king's virility, aggressiveness, and

masculinity; moreover, it establishes his status as one who expands his kingdom towards

the land beyond the Tungabhadra river – like Śiva, he inevitably becomes ruler of both

society and the wilderness (1993, 189-190). At the very end of the festival, after the

Mṛgayāmahotsava celebration is completed, the king places a crown studded with gems

on the head of a Śiva-liṅga (considered the original image of Virūpākṣa), making more

explicit this hyper-masculine, imperialistic link between king and god (1993, 188). While

more will be said about this relationship of Vijayanagara kings and deity in chapter two, it

is sufficient here to note the connection between royal and religious power displayed at

Vasantotsava. This festival was prominent in the Vijayanagara Empire from start to finish,

and has persisted through to modern times. Kṛṣṇadevarāya was a great admirer of the

celebration, instituting the performance of his drama, the *Jāmbavatīkalyāṇam*,[44] in front

of the people assembled to witness the festival (Aiyangar 1919, 142). Thus, by

patronizing Vasantotsava, rulers like Kṛṣṇadevarāya no doubt acknowledged this

homology between Virūpākṣa and the presiding king that Vasantotsava demonstrated.

Other Śaivite deities also enjoyed currency in Vijayanagara. Bhairava, the

horrifying aspect of Śiva, enjoyed a considerable following, particularly among the tantric

Kālāmukhas that were active in early Vijayanagara, as we will see in the final section of

this chapter (Verghese 1995, 22). While no temples were erected for the deity, a number

of still-extant shrines are devoted to Bhairava, and inscriptions suggest that worship of the

god was prevalent from the Saṅgama through to the Tuḷuva periods (Ibid).[45] Vīrabhadra,

another destructive aspect of Śiva, was also popular. A number of temples exist to the

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44 *Jāmbavatīkalyāṇam* ("the marriage of Jāmbavatī") is a five-act Sanskrit drama that has been attributed to Kṛṣṇadevarāya. Little scholarly material has been produced concerning the text, though Ilanit Loewy Shacham (2010) has quite recently treated its contents as they may relate to the actual marriage of Kṛṣṇadevarāya.

45 Mailāra, a localized Śaiva deity who is actually a mixture of Bhairava, Śiva and Sūrya, also enjoyed some folk popularity in Vijayanagara. The deity shows great iconographic overlap with Bhairava, to the extent that the two are almost indistinguishable in depictions. Mailāra's somewhat "violent" cult was Sanskritized in the *Mallāri Māhātmya*, and eventually came to bear insignias of royalty in the Saṅgama age. At least two temples exist to this deity in the region, along with several sculptures (See Verghese 2000, 141-154).

deity, such as that in the city at the summit of Matanga hill, as well as another at Lepakshi (1995, 24). There are more extant shrines to Vīrabhadra than those to Bhairava throughout the empire, suggesting the former's widespread popularity (1995, 23). Near the Kṛṣṇa temple is located a large standing Vīrabhadra statue, 3.6 meters in height and wearing an ornate diadem (V. Filliozat 1981b, 127). Other popular Śaivite traditions included worship of deities like Candramauli (Śiva wearing the moon), who had numerous shrines, as well as the Mallikārjuna-liṅga, a *jyoti-liṅga* which was enshrined at the Śrīśailam temple. The Śrīśailam temple is one of the greatest Śaivite temples in the Empire and enjoyed benefactions from many rulers, including Kṛṣṇadevarāya (Verghese 1995, 26-27). In 1515, for instance, Kṛṣṇadevarāya built *maṇḍapas* in the chariot street of the Mallikārjuna temple in this location (Verghese 2000, 209). Kalahasti was another celebrated Śaivite centre in proximity to a *liṅga* that received numerous donations from Kṛṣṇadevarāya and his successor Acyutarāya (Verghese 1995, 28). The *liṅga* was on the whole a popular symbol in Vijayanagara, often cut into basal rock; this technique is especially notable along the south bank of the Tungabhadra river (1995, 29). In the year 1522 a temple was built to Rāmaliṅga (Śiva as he was worshiped by Rāma), once again pointing to the widespread support given to Śaivite deities during Kṛṣṇadevarāya's reign.

Thus, Śaivism remained a prominent aspect of religious life in Vijayanagara, even during the more Viṣṇu-oriented times of Kṛṣṇadevarāya. The deity enjoyed a special relationship with kings, not unlike that of a more traditionally regal god like Viṣṇu, a motif which was made very evident at Vasantotsava. And while concerted attempts were made to include or synthesize Śaiva deities within the Vaiṣṇava fold, Vaiṣṇavism clearly dominated the Vijayanagara religious sphere during the first half of the sixteenth century. This conclusion is quite consonant with the persistent postulation that Vijayanagara

upheld "conservative" Hindu values. Be that as it may, the popularity of Śiva at Vijayanagara might also be said to have had some loosely tantric undercurrents, considering the focus upon his close connection with Pārvatī, as well the worship of fierce deities such as Bhairava, who was connected with the Kālāmukhas.

## The Goddess at Vijayanagara

Little attention has been paid to the goddess traditions at Vijayanagara, even though their presence in the Empire is more ubiquitous than commonly acknowledged. While goddess worship may not always fit the mold that conservative historians have set for Indian history, the evidence of its flourishing in Vijayanagara is undeniable. Not only was the local river goddess Paṃpā one of the earliest foundations of religiosity in the empire, but other minor goddesses such as Lajjā-Gauri feature persistently (if not prominently) in iconography through to the reign of Kṛṣṇadevarāya. Lakṣmī and Durgā also appear frequently in iconography and each played a prominent role in celebrations. The very fact that Mahānavamī, the foremost festival undertaken in Vijayanagara every year, happened to be a goddess festival, cannot be underestimated. That the goddess enjoyed a persistent presence in Vijayanagara is only corroborated by the *SLP*.

*Pampa and Other Early Vijayanagara Goddesses*

The goddess tradition in the Hampi region dates back centuries before Vijayanagara times with the figure of Paṃpā. Paṃpā is associated with both the river and the lake in the region, which are named after her; the name Hampi itself is derived from her name (Verghese 1995, 16). It is on the northern banks of the Tungabhadra river that she, analogous to Pārvatī, is said to have done penance to Virūpākṣa (Michell 1981, 41). And, as we have already seen, just as Pārvatī was wed to Śiva, Paṃpā came to be accepted as

the wife of Virūpākṣa (Verghese 1995, 16). The divine marriage of Paṃpā and Virūpākṣa

is depicted on the ceiling frescoes at the Virūpākṣa temple, and two festivals of betrothal

and marriage, known as *Phalapūjā* and *Kalyāṇōtsava* respectively, are to this day the

most important festivals at this complex (1995, 17). Paṃpā had a decidedly royal

connection, and is referred to in one Devarāya-era inscription found at the Rāmacandra

temple as the protector of the king (Dallapiccola et al. 1992, 19). While Paṃpā was

gradually reduced to the status of a minor deity at Vijayanagara, with only one small sub-

shrine (dated to pre-Vijyanagara times) in the Virūpākṣa temple dedicated to her alongside

a few scattered inscriptions throughout the city,[46] she has served as something of a

precursor for the later Sanskritic and village-based goddess traditions that would develop

in the region (Verghese 2000, 95).

Another local goddess who is implicated in the primordial mythology of the empire

is Bhuvaneśvarī, identified with Pārvatī and one of the tantric Mahāvidyās.[47]

Bhuvaneśvarī is believed to have been the patron deity of Vidyāraṇya, the Smārta

Brahmin sage who is credited with the founding of Vijayanagara. Living in the region of

pre-Vijayanagara Hampi, Vidyāraṇya is said to have undertaken severe penances out of

dedication to this goddess (Michell 1981, 41-42). Legend has it that the early founders of

the city lacked the riches needed to run the budding Empire, and so Bhuvaneśvarī

rewarded Vidyāraṇya's penances by showering Hampi with gold, providing the wealth

necessary to sustain the kingdom (Verghese 2000, 98). While this goddess was not widely

worshiped, there is among the Vijyanagara ruins a Bhuvaneśvarī temple within the

Virūpākṣa complex (2000, 60).

46 One inscription in the Rāmacandra temple asks for the bestowal of Paṃpā's blessing upon king Devarāya I. This may suggest that there was some need to integrate the older Śaiva or Śākta traditions into the rising Vaiṣnava tradition (Dallipicolla et al. 1991, 20).
47 For a discussion of Bhuvaneśvarī as one of these ten tantric Mahāvidyā goddesses, see Kinsley (1997), pages 129-143.

A minor goddess who appears frequently at Vijayanagara is a nude female figure referred to by Verghese, for lack of a better epithet, as Lajjā-Gauri ("shameless woman").[48] This goddess, notable for her pronounced child-bearing features, is often depicted squatting as if giving birth, commonly without a head or with a lotus flower where her head should be (Radcliffe Bolon 1992, 1). She appears on a number of pillar-reliefs, plinth moldings, and wall-surfaces in locations such as the Rāmacandra and Kṛṣṇa temples, as well as the Viṭṭhala complex (Verghese 2000, 156-158). Her images are more common in the sixteenth century, with one notable example being that which appears on the outer wall of the second *prākāra* of the North side of the Kṛṣṇa temple *gōpura* constructed in 1513 (2000, 159). Moreover, three pillar reliefs of Lajjā-Gauri appear in the hundred-pillared hall of the Viṭṭhala temple constructed in 1516-1517 (Verghese 2000, 160). While there is no evidence of a formal cult to this goddess, these images were conceivably used as objects of worship, as many bear the marks of continued veneration – that is, daubs of vermilion, turmeric and white powder on the breasts and pudenda – during the present day (2000, 166). Since these images appear on monuments dedicated by Kṛṣṇadevarāya, we have the first subtle suggestions that there was religious interest in goddess figures in Vijayanagara during his reign.[49]

*Lakṣmī*

Moving on to goddesses with well-established Sanskritic backgrounds, we find that

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48 The name Lajjā Gauri refers to a constellation of images of a female figure about which little is known. She is referred to by at least twenty-five names, including "nude squatting goddess" or "the mother goddess" in addition to the epithet given above. Her depictions appear throughout India, though she is most commonly found in the south, with images particularly concentrated in the Karnataka, Andhra, and Maharastra regions. See Carol Radcliffe Bolon's 1992 study for further details.

49 Another minor goddess-figure who seems to have been in currency in Vijayanagara, at least in literary circles, is Āṇṭāl, commonly held to be an incarnation of the earth goddess Bhūmī. As we have seen, Kṛṣṇadevarāya's *Āmuktamālyada* is based on Āṇṭāl's story, telling of how the girl Āṇṭāl becomes the goddess Goda Devi by way of marriage (and subsequent merger) with Kṛṣṇa. That said, the text is focussed mostly upon the worship of Viṣṇu rather than upon worship of the goddess Āṇṭāl herself (see Nandakumar 1989a).

Lakṣmī was one of if not the most commonly portrayed divinities at Vijayanagara. Lakṣmī is often depicted on door-frames of Vaiṣṇava and even Śaiva temples throughout the empire, as is exemplified by the Mūla Virūpākṣa temple (Dallapiccola & Verghese 1998, 63). An icon of Gajalakṣmī is present on the lintel blocks in the *garbha-gṛha* – the innermost sanctum – of virtually every temple, whether Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava (Fritz, Michell and Rao 1984, 81). The elephants speak to Lakṣmī's royal associations, while her consistent presence in the *garbha-gṛha* illustrates virtual inseparability from the highest divine, regardless of sect affiliation. Lakṣmī is also often found on column carvings with lotuses in hand and, once again, with elephants above her, as is the case in the Tirupati temple (1984, 95). Epigraphic evidence confirms that provision was made for her worship at a number of these sites in Vijayanagara, most notably at the Kṛṣṇa temple (Verghese 1995, 57).

Lakṣmī's popularity is fitting, as she would have been a natural favorite in a predominantly Vaiṣṇava community, considering that she is the companion of Viṣṇu. This is particularly true in a heavily Śrīvaiṣṇava context where, as we have seen, Lakṣmī represents divine grace. Furthermore, so many associations are made between Lakṣmī, kingship and kingly splendor, and Vijayanagara was an empire that put great stock in the glory and the ritual life of its kings. She is the ultimate consort, and her accompaniment itself brings auspiciousness, an idea that the denizens of Vijayanagara seem to have utilized to the fullest. As we have seen, she appears alongside the statue of Narasiṃha, one of Kṛṣṇadevarāya's favorite deities, no doubt a testament to the power she bestows upon the man-lion god. That Lakṣmī's auspiciousness was crucial to the kingly rule of Kṛṣṇadevarāya is indubitable when we consider our text in question. *SLP* not only showers encomiums on this special variation of Lakṣmī known as Sāmrājyalakṣmī, but

also implicates her in the continued prosperity of the state (Sarangi 1993, 41). At the very beginning of the text, the narrating Śiva explains that Sāmrājyalakṣmī's blessing enables righteous kings to build empires (1.11-12). With her help, these kings may also possess prosperous cities, fill their kingdoms with bumper crops and wealth, and ensure that the military will be well-stocked and brave (1.13-23). All these rewards that Sāmrājyalakṣmī bestows constitute the trademarks of the classical divine king, as we will see in chapter two. Interestingly enough, it is tantric means through which Lakṣmī and the auspiciousness she grants is contacted in this text.

*Durgā and Related Goddesses*

Another prominent goddess at Vijayanagara was Durgā, the warrior iteration of Pārvatī. As consort of Śiva, Pārvatī was popular at Vijayanagara, appearing on a number of rock carvings and pillar reliefs, and as such Durgā enjoyed comparable popularity (Dallapiccola & Verghese 1998, 62). A small Durgā temple built prior to the Empire (circa 1199 CE) is located north of the Virūpākṣa temple complex (V. Filliozat 1981b, 129). A number of rock carvings of Durgā proper, as well as her form as Mahiṣāsuramardinī (Durgā killing the buffalo demon), and other Durgā-related goddesses can be found throughout the city (Verghese 1995, 89). Mahiṣāsuramardinī, for instance, appears beside Śaiva mainstays like Nandi in another panel near the Kṛṣṇa temple complex, betraying her non-sectarian affiliation. Similarly, one of the most aesthetically pleasing reliefs to Mahiṣāsuramardinī appears on a pillar on the east gateway of the Rāmacandra temple (Ibid).

Also associated with Durgā, and enjoying similar levels of popularity in Vijayanagara, were goddesses like Kālī (capricious goddess of annihilation), Bhadrakālī (a more benign form of Kālī) and Bhairavī (the wife of the terrifying Bhairava), all of

whom feature in both myth and iconography. One legend has Kālī coming to Hampi, where Paṁpā blesses her with fair complexion and invites her to remain in the region (V. Filliozat 1981b, 128-129). Although he was Vaiṣṇava, Kṛṣṇadevarāya's faith in Kālī was pronounced. In 1510, Kṛṣṇadevarāya began commissioning messages and images all over religious sites in Vijayanagara wherein *śakti* – the power of the goddess(es) – was employed as a symbol of the Empire's military power (Elgood 2004, 75). In one such depiction, the king himself is pictured holding a blade decorated with vermilion, representative of blood and emblematic of Kālī (2004, 74). Verghese suggests that the prominence given to these violent, transgressive deities like Kālī may be due to the influence of the Kālāmukha sect, and this is a suggestion that appears to hold ground considering what we will bring forth about the *SLP* and the tantric motifs that underlie strands of Vijayanagara practice (1995, 88-89). Kālī, Bhadrakālī and Bhairavī are all tantric goddesses. Rarely is tantra very far from goddess traditions, and based on the often-neglected popularity of goddesses in the Vijayanagara religious circles, we should not be surprised to find tantra in the Empire as well. The violent and powerful tantric goddesses seem to have provided inspiration for Vijayanagara's imagery of military might.

*Mahānavamī*

Mahānavamī/Navarātra, the most popular festival in the Vijayanagara city and court, just happens to have been dedicated to goddesses, most obviously Durgā. Mahānavamī (part of the Navarātra celebration occurring between September 15 and October 15) celebrates Durgā's victory over the buffalo demon Mahiṣāsura, while also illustrating how all components of society were incorporated into the king's realm on account of his partnership with the goddess (Stein 1980, 384). The festival accomplished this by

bringing all viceroys and subordinate rulers together each year so that the king could reaffirm their sovereignty while testing their loyalty (Sivapriyananda 1995, 73). Over the course of the celebration, the king accepted homage and gifts from throngs of such votaries while also providing gifts and redistributing wealth, illustrating his prosperity while also reaffirming his subject's dependence upon him (Stein 1980, 386). These offerings to the king also serve to recapitulate the worship given by the king to Durgā throughout the event, implying a homology between the king and the goddess (Elgood 2004, 119). All the while, the king remained seated on his cushion, no doubt showing his affinity to the power-bestowing *pīṭhikā,* or seat (Sivapriyananda 1995, 79). The king sometimes shared his throne with a richly decorated, unidentified deity, or sat at its foot while the deity occupied the throne. Because the Rāmacandra temple is in the closest proximity of all the temples to the festival route, and because it was so important to the Tuḷuvas, Stein suggests that this deity may have been the consort goddess of Rāma – that is, Sītā, incarnation of Lakṣmī (Stein 1983, 83).[50]

Other public proceedings during Mahanavami involved processions, entertainment, sacrifices and assemblies. *Darśana* and *pūjā* were undertaken to the goddess Durgā, as well as animal sacrifices in which hundreds and sometimes even thousands of animals were slaughtered for the benefit of the goddess (Stein 1980, 386). There was also a sacrificial reconsecration of the king's weapons, which were worshiped in order to perpetuate the ruler's martial prowess. As a martial goddess, Durgā was the natural choice to bestow such power upon weapons, her *śakti* transmuted here into military strength. Along with the freshly consecrated royal sword and scepter, replete with the renewed powers of Durgā, the Vijayanagara emperor also received at the conclusion of the

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50 Interestingly, in the later Ramnad variation of this ritual, this tutelary idol was the tantric goddess Rājarājeśvarī (Stein 1983, 85). See footnote 66.

ceremony further affirmation of his authority to rule (Davis 1997, 69). As further homage

to Durgā, there were also a variety of displays undertaken on Mahānavamī featuring

dancing and singing processions of the king's caparisoned women, who were

representative of the goddess as per the description of the festival in the *Devī Bhāgavata*

*Purāṇa* (Stein 1980, 390).[51] The king watched all of these proceedings from the top of the

great Mahānavamī Dibba, a massive platform structure located in the northeast part of the

royal centre. Twelve metres in height, 35 metres square at the base and 25 metres at the

top, it is the highest platform in the metropolis and dominates the royal center to this day

(Sivapriyananda 1995, 97-98) Its grandeur alone confirms its status as a royal monument

(Verghese 1995, 106). The platform was built by Kṛṣṇadevarāya in 1513 after his

victorious campaign versus the Gajapati kings in Orissa (Sivapriyananda 1995, 98); thus,

the famous king appears to have taken a vested interest in the public Mahānavamī

festival, the goddess, and the power that she offered.

The private aspect of Mahānavamī involved rituals in a sacred enclosure where the

icon of the goddess was installed. At several points during the proceedings, the king

retired to this chamber in order to worship the deity here (Stein 1980, 385). What

presumably took place in this space were sacred rites based upon, in Sivapriyananda's

opinion, the *Mārkaṇḍeya* and *Kālikā Purāṇas* (Sivapriyananda 1995, 98). That the secret

rites would be based in a tantric text like the *Kālikā Purāṇa* is an interesting possibility,

but is merely speculation without evidence. The fact that the *SLP* closely resembles the

*Kālikā Purāṇa* in its contents, particularly in the texts' shared concern for state polity and

kingly rule as it relates to tantric ritual,[52] makes this line of speculation more plausible.

51 The *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, one of the most prominent Śākta works in Sanskrit, describes females in
the procession before the goddess as an essential part of the Mahānavamī festival. For more on the text, see
Brown (1990).
52 Chapter 84 of the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, for instance, is dedicated to state polity, offering the king advice on a
number of topics such as training horses, maintaining forts, and dealing with enemies. Furthermore, the text

Was the *SLP* utilized in the sacred enclosure? Given the text's evident connection to the Vijayanagara Empire, it seems likely. The *SLP* itself treats Mahānavamī/Navarātra at length, claiming that the festival begins on the morning of *pratipāda* with the invocation of Sāmrājyalakṣmī within the king, a task performed by a Brahmin who speaks a specific formula to the goddess (100.5-7). The vitality of the goddess allows the Brahmin to further enhance the luster, strength, prosperity and boldness of the king with further benedictions (100.8-14; 101.4-8). Later, in conjunction with the ritual consecration of the king, the ruler is to invoke Durgā, Lakṣmī and Vāgdevī (the goddess of speech) into jars of gold, silver, copper and earth while Vedic, tantric and Purāṇic formulae are chanted (Sarangi 1993, 210-211; 105.3-9). Later on in the consecration, the ruler is to chant the names of hymns for the satisfaction of Durgā and Lakṣmī (1993, 206-207). If what is prescribed in the *SLP* was truly practiced in the Vijayanagara Empire by kings like Kṛṣṇadevarāya, we can conclude that the goddess Sāmrājyalakṣmī also played a crucial role in Mahānavamī.

What becomes quite clear with the components of the Mahānavamī celebration, such as the manifestation of wealth and the consecration of the king's arms (not to mention the identifications made between the king and the deity presiding over the festival), is the ritual power the king possesses alongside his kingly power (Stein 1980, 390). On account of his connection with the goddess, Mahānavamī renders the king a potent spiritual entity in and of himself, since his ritual authority relative to that of the Brahmins is increased. In fact, Brahmins are consigned to the background during Mahānavamī, while the king enacts dominance in the ritual space (1980, 388). Seemingly, it is the power of the goddess Durgā (as well as the power of the goddess Lakṣmī inherent

is much like the *SLP* in its offering of riches, supernormal powers and success in battle as rewards for properly conducting its rituals (see chapter 2). For a translation, see Shastri (1992).

in the throne upon which he sits), that aids the king in actualizing his spiritual power. In this way, Mahānavamī illustrates the connection between kingly and ritual power, with the presiding goddess serving as the ultimate supplier of both kinds of power. Much like Paṃpā before her, Durgā assumes this role as protector goddess who directs the ruling king. Thus, Mahānavamī makes evident the immense importance of the goddess in Vijayanagara, specifically as she relates to the king: if we were not already convinced of her ability (as Durgā) to bestow military and political power when considering the public aspect of the ritual, we must surely be persuaded after observing the invocation of the goddess (Sāmrājyalakṣmī) in the private aspect.

It is more than evident that goddess traditions, especially those of Lakṣmī, Durgā and closely related deities, were strongly installed in the Vijayanagara Empire. While not particularly salient during the early sixteenth century considering the sources we have, Kṛṣṇadevarāya was no doubt influenced by the goddess traditions as well, as they so often intersected with the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva practices and sites. Not only can we deduce this influence of goddess worship upon Kṛṣṇadevarāya on account of historical continuity, but also on account of his open support of the traditions – for example, his funding of the Mahānavamī Dibba. Furthermore, Kṛṣṇadevarāya showed some obvious support for the fertility goddess Lajjā-Gauri. That some of these goddesses present in Vijayanagara like Durgā, Kālī and Bhairavī were tantric deities further speaks to the diversity that existed in the Vijayanagara religious sphere.

**A Note on Muslim and Jain Influences**

It is worth noting that the Vijayanagara Empire was also accepting of non-Hindu religious communities. The presence of Muslims in the Empire is perhaps the most

compelling argument against the conceptualization of Vijayanagara as a Hindu bulwark, ever-poised to counter the threat of Islamic invaders. Vijayanagara greatly depended on Arab horse traders from the middle of the fourteenth century to the close of the fifteenth, when the Muslim world had a monopoly on that industry (Verghese 1995, 125). The *SLP* itself suggests that Persian horses are of superior stock, reporting that this preference continued on into the times of Kṛṣṇadevarāya (Sarangi 1993, 26). Indeed, foreign-looking men can be seen on the reliefs on the Mahānavamī Dibba presenting horses or riding camels (Verghese 1995, 125). By the fifteenth century, large numbers of Muslims were recruited by the Vijayanagara army. Devarāya I is said to have had as many as 10 000 Muslims in his army serving as bowmen and horsemen, the latter being used to train his Hindu cavalry (Hutt 1981, 105; Elgood 2004, 45). By the time of Kṛṣṇadevarāya, Muslims were of immense value to the military force, contributing to numerous successful military operations, such as the conquest of Raichur in 1520 (Verghese 1995, 126). This preference for Muslim warriors necessitated large areas in the city wherein Muslims were allowed to build mosques and observe their religious rites (Hutt 1981, 105). Such a Muslim quarter exists at the east end of the north ridge extending across the valley to the base of the Malyavanta hill, with another located south of the urban core (Verghese 1995, 126). Based on extant ruins, we can conclude that there were at least two mosques in the city (Ibid). Evidently, Kṛṣṇadevarāya had a hand in developing this Muslim infrastructure, for an inscription at the Tirupati temple bestows the title *Yavanarājya-sthāpanācārya* ("the lord who established the kingdom of the Muslims") upon him (Narayana Rao, Shulman & Subrahmanyam 2004, 597). This support for Islam was evident not only in urban planning, but also through the commitment made by the Hindu majority to acknowledge Muslim symbolisms. For instance, kings like Devarāya II

and Rāmarāya are said to have had Korans placed near their throne so that Muslims within the Vijayanagara kingdom could avoid the sin of bowing to an infidel overlord (Verghese 1995, 125-126). Thus, it appears Muslims enjoyed considerable religious freedom, and even state protection, within the Vijayanagara Empire.

There is also evidence to suggest that Vijayanagara was not only accepting of Muslim religion, but also influenced by Persian culture. Architecturally speaking, courtly monuments in Vijayanagara were borne out of a synthesis of Hindu and Islamic forms (Michell 1992, 169). As for the matter of fashion, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the traditional south Indian mode of dress was replaced by Islamic-styled garments (Wagoner 1996, 853). Persian-style vestments were worn by kings like Devarāya II, who is recorded as having donned the pullover tunic, and Kṛṣṇadevarāya, who wore the conical cap (1996, 858-859). The adoption of these garments, according to Wagoner, was "a deliberately calculated act on the part of Vijayanagara's courtly elite" as it paralleled the appropriation of Islamic modes of political language (1996, 853). The main example for such appropriation that Wagoner provides is the adoption of the title "*Hindu-rāya-suratrāṇa*", literally the "Sultan among Hindu Kings," by Vijayanagara rulers (Ibid). This blend of Islamic vestments and titles suggests that some Vijayanagara kings were willing to frame themselves as sultans – rulers in the Islamic idiom – in order to communicate the universality of their kingship beyond the boundaries of Hindu or Muslim religious categories (1996, 863). This phenomenon substantiates the possibility that Islam was an influential presence in the Vijayanagara Empire. Even though there is little evidence of formal religious conversions to or syncretic movements with Islam in the context of Vijayanagara Hinduism, Muslim culture had such a degree of influence upon the empire that it calls into doubt the assertions that Vijayanagara was bent on

repressing non-Hindu religion (1996, 854). Rather, it appears Vijayanagara elites were attempting to appeal in mode of dress and title to the standards of the Islamic world, which was the political lingua-franca of the Indian Ocean region at the time (1996, 864).

Jainism was also firmly installed in the Vijayanagara religious sphere. Seven Jain temples are still extant at the Vijayanagara site, with their locations in and around the royal center indicating the Jains were something of a privileged community (Verghese 1995, 122-124). Through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Vijayanagara kings provided extensive grants to the Jains and their temples. Although Jainism did not receive much royal patronage after the Saṅgama period, one notable exception was the grant made by Kṛṣṇadevarāya to the Trailokyanātha Jaina temple at Tirupparutikkundram (1995, 121). Thus, Jainism, even if not as prominent as Islam, was still well-accepted within the Vijayanagara Empire during the early sixteenth century.

## Tantra at Vijayanagara

We jump back now into the Hindu fold to finish with a discussion of the small but undeniable presence of tantra in Vijayanagara. Given the prevalence of so many diverse traditions in the region, perhaps it is not surprising that tantra would also have a place in the empire's religious milieu. Long before it was incorporated in the Vijayanagara Empire, the *maṇḍala*-like Vaikuṇṭha Perumal temple at Kanchipuram housed a tantric-flavored Pāñcarātra tradition that rendered the king as equal of Kṛṣṇa (Hudson 2008, 17). The Pāñcarātras were also influential upon the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition throughout its development, with their *Lakṣmī Tantra*[53] figuring prominently in the theologies of twelfth

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53 The *Lakṣmī Tantra,* an important Pāñcarātra text composed between the 9th and 12th centuries CE, identifies Lakṣmī as the supreme divine principle. For an introduction to and translation of the text, see Gupta (2000).

and thirteenth century Śrīvaiṣṇava thinkers (Kumar 1997, 5-6). Considering the popularity

of Śrīvaiṣṇavism in the Vijayanagara Empire throughout the centuries that followed, it is

perhaps not surprising that another text should arise venerating Lakṣmī in a tantric mode.

In addition, we have already noted the iconographic popularity of fierce deities such as

Bhairava in the city, not to mention typically tantric goddesses like Bhairavī, Kālī and

even Bhuvaneśvarī. Kālī, as we have seen, is given symbolic homage by Kṛṣṇadevarāya

with the blood-red sword blade. Here we also trace the roots of earlier tantric sects and

motifs in the empire.

*Gurus* belonging to the Kālāmukhas, a Śaiva sect with tantric origins, notably their

connection to the Kāpālikās,[54] were present in Vijayanagara during its earliest stages. A

priesthood whose leaders bore the name Kriyāśakti played an important part in the

religious life of the early Vijayanagara Empire. Because many Kālāmukhas and Pāśupata

priests took this title, there is little doubt that the Kriyāśaktis of Vijayanagara belonged to

these sects (Lorenzen 1972, 161). Kālāmukha Kriyāśakti *gurus* were very influential in

the Vijayanagara court from the mid-fourteenth to the early fifteenth century during the

rule of the ancient Saṅgamas (Verghese 1995, 112). One Kriyāśakti was characterized as a

great disciple of Vidyāraṇya, founding guru of Vijayanagara, and is said to have been

revered by the first thirteen kings of Vijayanagara who worshiped Virūpākṣa (Lorenzen

1972, 162). During the reign of Harihara II, another priest under the title Kriyāśakti is

given the title *rājaguru* ("preceptor of the king") or *kulaguru* ("family preceptor"). This

suggests that Kālāmukha priests were held in high regard by the early Vijayanagara rulers.

Epigraphs concerning priests going by the title of Kriyāśakti extend from 1347 to 1431

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54 The Kāpālikās (or "skull-bearers") themselves may have had some influence at Vijayanagara, as they are mentioned among the Śaivite sects in the *Paṁpāmāhātmya,* Hampi's indigenous mythical text. Also described in this text are the extreme penances of Śaiva ascetics, such as standing on one leg for long periods of time and sitting naked in fire. This reflects many of the Kāpālikās austere practices, and also fits the sculptural representations of Śaiva ascetics in Vijayanagara (Verghese 1995, 113).

until they were eventually assimilated into the Vīraśaiva sect (1972, 163). Thus, a lineage with tantric connections had some significance in the early stages of the Vijayanagara Empire.

Another loosely tantric connection can be identified when observing the modes of symbolism present in Vijayanagara, in this case that of the *cakra*. In tantric circles under Cola and Pāṇḍya rule, a cult developed around Sudarśana, a personification of Viṣṇu's *cakra* (Elgood 2004, 111). The Sudarśana cult worshipped the *cakra*, which had long before been established as a seminal tantric symbol. This symbol was evidently important to the Vijayanagara kings as well, as the *cakra* commonly appears on Vijayanagara swords. Presumably the *cakra* in his position symbolized a king's right to rule (Ibid). Hence, a tantric motif seems to have given Vijayanagara kings reassurance of their kingship.

Considering the presence of sects and temples with tantric connections earlier on in the history of the empire, as well as the sustained prevalence of fierce tantric deities and related motifs in iconography, it is not inconceivable that a tantric text like *SLP* could gain ground later on in the empire. The favorable relationship the early Kriyāśaktis enjoyed with kings, the prevalence of *cakra* symbolism on swords, and the connection of fierce deities with military power also makes it reasonable to believe that such tantric traditions would be highly amenable to Vijayanagara rulers. For when we look at *SLP,* which utilizes tantric elements such as mantra, *yantra* and goddess worship, it becomes quite clear that tantra was indeed installed firmly in Vijayanagara, effecting both religion and kingship.

**Conclusions**

This survey of the religions of the Vijayanagara Empire has sought to accomplish two tasks. First, it has hopefully established that the religious milieu of the empire during sixteenth century Vijayanagara was pluralistic and inclusivistic rather than monochromatic – that is to say, strictly Hindu or Vaiṣṇava. With the prevalence of so many of Viṣṇu-related deities, Vaiṣṇavism seems to have been the foremost religious group during the time with which we are concerned, but its pre-eminence was neither monolithic nor imperious. Clearly, from the examples we have observed of Śaiva iconography appearing at Vaiṣṇava sites and vice-versa (not to mention royal support of both Śrīvaiṣṇava and Mādhava sects), there was a high degree of tolerance between and within both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava camps during the time of Kṛṣṇadevarāya. This spirit of tolerance, or perhaps more accurately inclusivism, extended beyond these purportedly conservative iterations of Hinduism. Throughout its history and no less so during the early sixteenth century, Vijayanagara sustained local and Sankritized goddesses, who were included in most every existing sect, and, as we observe with the Mahānavamī celebrations, also subject to worship in their own right. Vijayanagara was also home to supposedly antagonistic religions, namely Islam and Jainism. Muslim culture and religion was not only accepted in Vijayanagara, but also had a great deal of influence upon the court, effecting the very idiom by which universal kingship was framed. Considering the coexistence of all these Hindu and non-Hindu traditions, it is difficult to argue, as many have and still do, that Vijayanagara was a bulwark of conservative Hinduism. Add to these considerations the evidence for tantra in the city, and the argument for Vijayanagara as "bulwark" looks that much less plausible.

To make way for this discussion of tantra has been the second task of the chapter.

When we consider the plurality of religion in Vijayanagara, the presence of tantra is hardly anomalous. Strands of tantric organizations and symbolisms can be identified in the early prevalence of the Kriyāśaktis, as well as in the recurrent motif of the *cakra*. In addition, we have also noted the popularity of fierce, tantric deities in Vijayanagara iconography, most notably the connection of the tantric goddesses to weaponry, particularly in the ability of the martial goddess Durgā to imbue the king's weapons with power. While we have just recently noted the presence of tantra as a possible argument against the antiquated nationalist conceptualization of Vijayanagara as "conservative" in the most typical sense of the word, the examples themselves present what might at first seem paradoxical: in each of these examples from Vijayanagara, tantric motifs are not peripheral to society, but rather closely related to the royal court and kingly power. Indeed, while Vijayanagara seems not to have been concerned with conserving a "pure" form of Hinduism that some historians have projected back onto the past, the empire does appear to have utilized tantric practices to conserve the institution of kingship and to empower kings. Perhaps it is the preconceived notion of tantra as peripheral and inherently radical (precisely the conceptualization that prevents nationalist historians from writing about it) that needs to be reevaluated. Taking all these disparate strands of tantra at Vijayanagara into consideration, the emergence of a secretive text like the *SLP*, with its synthesis of goddess worship and tantric mechanisms like *cakra*, mantra and *yantra* for the benefit of kingly power, hardly seems out of place in Vijayanagara, even during the time of Kṛṣṇadevarāya. Indeed, when we consider the undercurrents of tantra – specifically that Pāñcarātra strand which afforded Lakṣmī immense ritual importance – in the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition dominant during this period of multifarious religious expression, the reemergence of Lakṣmī-based tantra seems most fitting.

Chapter 2

**Sacred Kings and Sacred Kingship:**
**The Magical Sovereign of *Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā***

The divinity of kings has been a recurrent, if not particularly crucial, topic of interest in the historical study of South Asia. The motif of kings as gods and gods as kings is readily identifiable within a variety of Indian texts, both mythological and historical, as well as in public festivals (one need only recall descriptions of Mahānavamī from the previous chapter). These lines of evidence have led a significant number of scholars to argue that Indian kings were (and in some cases, still are) divine. Others, most notably Stein (1983), have suggested that throughout history it was not so much the idea of the sacred king that held sway in India as it was the notion of sacred *kingship*. Stein interprets the Mahānavamī ritual of Vijayanagara as solid evidence that it is the office of kingship and not the king himself that is sacred, a trend that he identifies throughout many parts of South India and subsequently claims to be applicable to this region as a whole. However, it is very easy to be sceptical of assertions such as this, which extend claims as to the sacred status (or lack thereof) of kings and/or kingship beyond specific localities. As Mayer (1991) has pointed out, the sacred status of Indian royals was often malleable, with divinity present or absent based upon specific contexts and junctures in time. As such, it is perhaps best to nuance understandings of divinity, kings, and kingship not only in their situational contexts, but also in their particular geographical and historical contexts as well.

This chapter attempts to re-evaluate the sanctity of kings and kingship at Vijayanagara of the early sixteenth century according to the contents of the *SLP*. By correctly following the various rites and ceremonies – most often those involving the

goddess – described in the text, kings purportedly benefit in a number of ways. Among the most frequent benefits listed for the various rites and observances is the actualization of *aṣṭaiśvaryas* – tantric powers such as levitation and invincibility, among others. Needless to say, these powers render the king a veritable magico-religious entity, and so the line between sacred kings and sacred kingship we may have been able to read into the Vijayanagara Mahānavamī festival becomes blurred. This is not to do away with Stein's analysis, for when we consider the public display of Mahānavamī alongside the benefits of these relatively private tantric rites of the *SLP*, it seems that both kingship *and* kings were made sacred at Vijayanagara on account of their repeated contact with goddesses, particularly Sāmrājyalakṣmī. Indeed, the *SLP* labels the king who correctly follows its precepts for kingship as a "ruler perceived as god-like" (*pratyakṣya-daivatam*) – a being in whom the divine could be made immanent. It is more than conceivable that ideas of this sort of god-like power would develop and circulate in Vijayanagara, for the king-*cum*-god actualizes the age-old tantric ideal of the *siddha* as universal overlord, all the while conforming to notions of trans-local kingship that rose to prominence during the rule of Kṛṣṇadevarāya (Narayana Rao, Shulman & Subrahmanyam, 2004).

## Divine Kings and Divine Kingship

One does not have to look far in the Indian literary tradition to find archetypes of divine kings and/or kingship. The Vedas describe the storm god Indra as being a universal monarch on account of his martial power and greatness, as well as his ability to bring the fertilizing rains. The ideal human king, an earthly Indra, was to watch over and protect his subjects, all the while ensuring their continued agricultural prosperity through his own powers of vitalization (Gonda 1956a, 64). The Vedic horse sacrifice (or *aśvamedha*), in

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currency until the age of the Guptas (4th to 6th centuries CE),[55] ensured that these sacred powers of the king were recurrently regenerated so that he could continue to protect and nourish his kingdom (Stein 1983, 68-69). According to the *Śantiparva*, twelfth book of the epic *Mahābhārata*, the king "is great divinity existing in the form of a man" (68.40).[56] With the development of the Purāṇas, Viṣṇu was also conceived as a king, sustaining and protecting the world. Fittingly, he dons royal regalia in depictions and his heavenly abode is a grand palace called Vaikuṇṭha. It was also by at least this Purāṇic era that Rāma, already the ideal king of the epic age, came to be described as fully divine, an incarnation of Viṣṇu on earth.[57] The theocratic rule of Rāma, called Rāmarājya, remains for many Indians the cornerstone of a utopian society, with Rāma monumentalized as a paragon of both kingliness and godliness.[58] Throughout history, living kings used these god-king archetypes to their advantage. Kauṭilya, for instance, advised in typical Machiavellian fashion that the king should appear alongside persons dressed up as gods in order to affirm his connection with divinities (Basham 1968, 84). Many kings identified themselves with these kingly gods, as did Kṛṣṇadevarāya when he declared himself an incarnation of Viṣṇu. References to king as god are innumerable, even in *dharmaśāstra* texts, as in a famous pericope proffered by Manu to the effect that the king was in the beginning created from particles of Indra as well as the seven other great *devas* responsible for guarding the world (Gonda 1956b, 130). The association of kingliness and

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55 The Gupta Empire, which spanned much of the Indian Subcontinent over the course of its existence from (approximately) 320 to 550 CE, was one of the most influential Indian empires. The Guptas made significant contributions to Indian culture in the realms of architecture, art, literature and religion. For a detailed history of the Gupta era, see Sharma (1989); for more information on the empire's cultural contributions, see the volume edited by Bardwell L. Smith (1983).

56 The translation here is that provided by Pollock (1984), page 523. For a full translation of the *Śantiparva*, see Wynne's 2009 three-volume translation for the Clay Sanskrit Library.

57 The idea of Rāma as Viṣṇu may have been established in the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition even earlier on, perhaps even in Vālmīki's early telling, for as Pollock has suggested, Rāma's divinity is absolutely "constitutive of the tale" (1984, 508).

58 For a detailed discussion of Rāmarājya as it relates to modern Indian politics, see Pollock (2004).

godliness even reflected itself in Indic languages, as in Tamil, where, depending on context, the word used for "king" is the same as that for "god." Yet these scattered facts alone give us little systematic understanding of the relationship between kings and gods. While earlier studies tend to confirm that Indian kings are indeed sacred, ranging from devas to demi-gods and sometimes even supreme deities, some scholars eventually arrived at the notion it was actually the office of kingship that was sacred, paving the way for Stein's Mahānavamī study.

*Divine Kings*

A.M. Hocart (1927), in his cross-cultural study concerning the divinity of kings, was the first to identify Indian kings as divine. Like many scholars to follow, he concluded based on texts like *Manusmṛti*, the Vedas, and the Epics, that the king is a ritual performer as well as the primary agent for the prosperity and well-being of the realm, much like a god. Thus, for Hocart the notion of kings as divinities was just as relevant in India as it was in Egypt and Sumeria, among other regions. Similarly, E.W. Hopkins (1931) posited that an Indian king becomes divine by virtue of his ritual consecration (*abhiṣeka)*, and that this idea of king-as-god remains fixed in India even in contemporary times. He cites as evidence for this latter point an incident in colonial Bombay, wherein an outbreak of plague which occurred just after the defacing of a Queen Victoria statue was interpreted as revenge inflicted by the Queen for having had her divinity insulted (1931, 314). Auboyer (1949) sees the king as being infused with divinity by contact with the royal throne, which is intimately connected with the consecratory altar. The king occupies both altar and throne, according to Auboyer, as a substitute for the divinity.

Based on literary evidence, Jan Gonda claims that the divinity of kings, "has always been accepted by the masses" in India (1956a, 36). Gonda sees the ancient Indian king as

undergoing a rebirth at the *abhiṣeka* ceremony, which transforms him from human being to deity. On account of this physical transformation at consecration, the king "is called and considered a *deva*, that is to say, not God, the sole Eternal Lord and Creator of all things [...] but one of a class of powerful beings, regarded as possessing supernormal faculties and as controlling a department of nature or activity in the human sphere" (1956a, 59). That said, Gonda later on pronounces more strongly on the divinity of kings, claiming that the king was a full embodiment or personification of transcendent powers upon which the community depended (1956b, 133). As such, he claims that the king represents the earthly forms of various gods in his various functions, such as Yama when he is judging, as well as Indra when he is ensuring revitalization and growth (1956a, 64).

Heesterman was also aware of the divinity of ancient Indian kings, just as, in his mind, "every student of Indian culture perforce must be" (1957, 5ff). Looking even closer at the various phases of the Vedic *rājasūya* consecration ritual, he observes that here kings are implicated in the perpetual regeneration of the universe (1957, 222). The king's primordial cosmological function in the *rājasūya* makes him comparable to supreme Vedic deities like Indra, Varuṇa and Agni, though the king, in Heesterman's mind, actually comes to overshadow these other gods in the context of the ritual. In the *rājasūya*, it is the king himself who is the deity presiding over the ritual, and he even integrates the aforementioned gods into himself during the rite, thus realizing "his inherent identity with the cosmos and its processes" (1957, 225-226).

More recently, Inden has lent support to these earlier arguments for the divinity of Indian kings. Citing evidence across textual and inscriptional data, he argues that both the consecration (*rājyābhiṣeka*) and enthronement rituals are linked parts of a single ceremony transforming the king into a god. Firstly, these rituals help the king actualize his

transcendence, for they bring him "into direct touch with the gods" by giving him the powers and functions of deities (1978, 47). Secondly, the king is given ritual and political sovereignty within the immanent realm by way of these rituals, becoming "the active source of authority, honour, and wealth" (1978, 52). The king is now a partial descent of Viṣṇu, transmitted from the transcendent plane to become the *axis mundi* of the immanent domain, enjoying the status of divine mediator between humanity and nature (Ibid). Continued participation in these cyclical rituals renews and refreshes the king's divine status. Based on the historical and geographical breadth of his data, Inden posits the divinity of kings as a pan-Indian category from the early medieval period onward (Inden 1978, 40-41).[59]

With the suggestion that kings were gods came the corollary identification among scholars that gods were also kings. Kulke and Rottermund (1998) have argued that divinities in early medieval India underwent a "feudalization" of sorts: like the king, who was thought to embody the power and function of any given god in his administrative role, the gods themselves were arranged in a hierarchical bureaucracy, with gods of various rank reflected in the levels of government (1998, 136-137). This proceeded first from village gods, who were worshipped by headmen within village boundaries, then to sub-regional and regional gods, worshipped by princes and their families as tutelary deities, and finally to universal gods of the realm *(rāṣṭradevatā)*, who represented the royal dynasty and were worshipped by the overlord (1998, 137). In general, the more regal the cult of the territorial god, the more legitimate was the king's rule over the territory on behalf of the god, for he was seen as the deity's temporal embodiment.

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59 That said, Inden qualifies this idea by admitting that the divinity of Indian kings cannot be conflated with the notion of divine kingship as it exists in cultures like Egypt or Japan, wherein kings enjoyed transcendent divinity apart from the physical kingdom and received worship in their own right (1978, 29). Rather, Indian kingship entails aspects of both immanence and transcendence.

Davidson expands this notion of "feudalization" of the gods, observing that great and local deities of the early medieval period began to assume the position of feudal lords (*sāmantas*), occupying positions in metaphysical and mythological space analogous to the positions controlled by their devotees in terrestrial, political space (Davidson 2002, 72). Hence, we see figures like king Rāma labelled as an incarnations of Viṣṇu in this historical period. Further, Davidson suggests that the Purāṇas put deities like Śiva, Viṣṇu, Durgā and Kālī in competition for hegemony over cosmological and ritual landscapes. In this way, a divine military culture had begun to develop, with gods undertaking all the activities of real-life kings, fighting those who challenged their authority and attempting to commandeer their neighbour's domains. Myth and iconography depicted their abodes as royal palaces and fortresses, from which they held court. In the meantime, earthly kings began to erect temples and patronize these regal divinities, rendering sacred zones "the palaces of the gods and the temples of kings" (2002, 73-74). As a corollary, the king became explicitly divine, if he was not already seen as such: "the gods became kings even as the kings became gods" (2002, 74). Like Gonda and Inden before him, Davidson identifies the moment of a ruler's apotheosis as his coronation ceremony held by a priest, and cites as evidence for a king's divinity numerous textual references spanning several centuries comparing kings to gods (2002, 129-130).

Some authors have been less convinced of the divinity of Indian kings. Though he came to later propose the feudalization of kings as gods, Kulke (1978) claimed earlier on, based on epigraphical evidence from both Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva sects in Orissa as well as the *devarāja* cult of Cambodia,[60] to have "disproved" the notion that there ever existed

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60 The epithet *Devarāja* was also used to refer to Viṣṇu at the Varadarāja temple at Kanchipuram around the eleventh century, suggesting a similar proto-tantric understanding of kingship existed at this site (Kulke 1978, xvii).

anything like a genuine deification of living kings in these parts of the Hindu world (Kulke 1978, xv).[61] He goes on to claim that epigraphical sources show this finding to be representative of all of medieval India, and suggests the idea that kings were gods seems to be based in idealistic descriptions of kings as they exist in texts, as opposed to in actual religious practice. That said, Kulke still admits that Hindu kings were *partially* divine.  He cites as an example of this the Angkor region in Cambodia, where rulers claimed in their inscriptions to be part (*aṃśa*) of Śiva, with the divine essence of kings representing a portion of the great god that existed as the king's "subtle inner self" or *sūkṣmāntarātman* (1978, xvi).[62]

Having surveyed much of this vast body of literature on the divinity of kings and kingship, Mayer (1991) suggests that it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions about kings and kingship, noting that "what is said of one historical period may not be true of another," with "no single theory" emerging as to the divinity of kings and/or kingship (Mayer 1991, 767). Mayer's own study of more modern, pre-Independence rituals for the installation of princes shows that the initial consecration and enthronement rites, as well as their regular repetition, allows royalty to enjoy partial, permeable divinity in certain contexts, a divinity which sometimes spills over into daily life (Mayer 1991, 775). We are well served for our present purposes to pay close attention to Mayer's conclusions that the divinity of kings in India is often 1) situational and context-bound within the life of the king and 2) highly variable across historical and geographical contexts.

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61 Another author who downplayed the divinity of Indian kings was Dumont (1970a). He argues that early on in Indian history, kings enjoyed a magico-religious function alongside their political one. However, once religious and political functions became dissociated, the king became subordinate to the priest, possessing only mere vestiges of this magico-religious capability.

62 In the case of Angkor, this inner self was located in the *liṅgas* which were consecrated on temple mountains (Kulke 1993, 365). The Cambodian king Jayavarman IV, for instance, ruled as part or participant in Śiva, and derived the legitimacy of his rule from this homology, with an attack on the king equivalent to an attack on the rule of Śiva.

What preliminary statements can we make about the divinity and kings in the specific historical and geographical context that is early sixteenth century Vijayanagara? Iconography at Vijayanagara traditionally focused upon the homology between Rāma, the ideal king, and the earthly monarch. Accordingly, an inscription of 1379 compares Vijayanagara to Ayodhyā, the capital in which Rāma dwelt (Saletore 1934, 221). It has been suggested elsewhere that Rāmacandra was thought of as being "within" the Vijyanagara ruler, empowering or generating his activities, an idea communicated architecturally by the overlapping regions in which both acted (Fritz 1985, 266). The arrangement of the reliefs on the enclosure walls of the Rāmacandra temple complex are perhaps the best illustration of this notion. On the inner faces of the enclosure walls are the various *Rāmāyaṇa* reliefs, while on the outer face are corresponding reliefs that depict royal pageantry, as in the celebration of Mahānavamī or Vasantotsava. Verghese suggests that this quite literally draws homology between the exterior king, powerful and wealthy, and the interior deity (Verghese 1995, 51). Furthermore, the reliefs of Rāma found within his main temple often differ from accepted iconographic depictions of the god. Pictured on a throne, leaning against a cushion with one hand raised in the *tarjanī-mudrā* with a shawl draped around one arm, Rāma adheres more to the dress and comportment of Vijayanagara kings as they appear in public depictions such as the Mahānavamī platforms than he does to the standard image of Rāma (Ibid). Thus, there is a kinship between the person of Rāma and that of the reigning Vijayanagara king, whereby their identities seem to become co-dependent, ambiguous and permeable. Considering this, it is probably not coincidental that it was crucial Vijayanagara Śrīvaiṣṇava ascetics such as Govindarāja, one of Kṛṣṇadevarāya's personal *gurus*, who helped explicate king Rāma's status as incarnation of Viṣṇu (Rao 2006, 24-31).

As for the layout of the city itself, we see another homology drawn, this time between the realm of the king and the god (Fritz, Michell & Rao 1984, 151). For instance, the placement of the Rāma temple at the nucleus of the city's royal centre, from whence the king's authority emanated outwards, intimates a partnership between Rāma and the king (Dallapiccola et al.1992, 5). Both the ruling monarch and Rāma were the shared foci of the royal center, and so the king is established as the foremost earthly counterpart of the god. Further, Fritz, Michell and Rao have noted that the seat of the god in the Rāmacandra temple serves as the dividing line between royal performance and royal residence (1984, 151). Not only does this signify the god's central role in the king's public and private life, but it also suggests that the king transcends human dualities on account of his intimate relationship with the god, dissolving opposites like private and public, activity and rest, taking and giving, and so on (Ibid). Thus, circumambulation of the temple enclosure would represent not just worship Rāma but also that of the king, further expressing the homology between the two figures (Dallapiccola et al.1992, 6).

As we have seen in the previous chapter, each of the major Vijayanagara festivals also displays publicly something of a homology between gods and kings. At Vasantotsava, the relationship between the king and Śiva borders on complete equivalence, as the king recapitulates the hyper-masculine mythological feats of the god. All the while, both the king and Śiva share the same appurtenances, and so, most fittingly, the festival culminates in the king crowning a Śiva-linga. At Mahānavamī, the king communes with the goddess to actualize her power, becoming something of an earthly Rāma when he uses this power to enact just rule and military valour. During the Vijayādaśamī portion of this event, he even recapitulates Rāma's acts of worship by venerating the *śamī* tree. Again, the homology between king and divinity is pronounced. It seems that we have compiled here

enough evidence to argue for king-as-god at Vijayanagara, without even delving into our primary text. However, we may not be seeing the whole gestalt when interpreting these materials as indicative of a direct equivalence between king and god, for Stein has interpreted the spectacle of Mahānavamī and the homology it articulates quite differently.

*Divine Kingship*

Before Stein, the idea that in India it is kingship that is sacred rather than kings began to take germ among Western scholars with the work of Lingat, who writes that "[t]he dominant idea of the *dharmaśāstra* writers seems to have been that it was not the king who had a divine nature, but the royal function itself" (1973, 208).[63] Drekmaier continues this line of argument, stating that it is "the functions of the king, and not the king himself, [which] are usually equated with the gods. The claim to godlike qualities comes from kingship -- rather than kingship from divinity" (1962, 251). He finds evidence for this starting in late Vedic texts like the Brāhmaṇas, and traces it through to classical compositions like the aforementioned *Śantiparva*[64] and also the *Śukranīti*;[65] prior to this he claims no such notion of divine kings or kingship existed (1962, 34). Drekmaier sees this conception of divine kingship as holding up at the very least to the period before the decline of Mauryan rule (1962, 252). When faced with the possible counter-example of the cosmological kingships dealt with in the Purāṇas, Drekmaier claims that the king's

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63 This very dichotomy of kings and kingship has also been subject to challenge. While a critique of the hermeneutic that would seek to divide kings from kingship in India is beyond the scope of this thesis, Pollock (1984) has provided just such a re-evaluation. He suggests that such a dichotomy takes root from a "juristic concept belonging primarily to the European medieval period" that has been projected with little warrant upon South Asia by Western scholars (1984, 524).

64 The *Śantiparva*, twelfth book of the *Mahābhārata* (see also footnote 56) which concerns itself with the dharma of rulers "locates divinity in the office rather than in the personality of the king" (Drekmaier 1962, 142). That said, Drekmaier admits the *Mahābhārata* as a whole goes farther toward a theory of the king's divinity than other texts (1962, 231).

65 Further, the medieval *Śukranīti*, which deals with monarchy and political administration, also "makes clear that it is the institution and not the person of the king that is divine" (Drekmaier 1962, 223). For more on the *Śukranīti*, see Sharma and Sharma's *Indian Political Thought* (1996, 49-51). For a translation of the text, see Basu (2005).

apparent divinity in these traditions is actually a "metaphorical expression of the majesty of his office" (1962, 243). As for the king himself "at best he is 'god-like'" Drekmaier writes (1962, 34). Similarly, Derrett also anticipates Stein's theory, stating that "there is not the least doubt but that the king, as actual ruler, was a surrogate for various deities, and needed to function, periodically, as a ritual agent of the people in relation to nature," meaning that "the king was a minor deity in himself, because he was *acting* as king" (1976, 605; author's emphasis). Derrett also notes that the king, quite unlike a god, was prone to insurrections, assassinations, and various other worldly forms of strife, thus it had to be the office and not the king himself that was divine (1976, 605).

Stein observes public kingly ritual at Vijayanagara through this lens of divine kingship. While he admits that kings themselves were initially altered via rituals like the horse sacrifice and the *rājasūya* so as to become composed of divine substance, he identifies a trend toward desacralization of kings by the early medieval period of Indian history (1983, 68-69). Kings were actively *divested* of their divinity, and Stein cites as evidence for this the prohibition of sacrifices that attempted to infuse kings with divine power, both during and after the Gupta period; in fact, *dharmaśāstra* texts from this point in history actively forbade the horse sacrifice and *rājasūya* sacrifices (1983, 70-71). It was these same texts produced during the Gupta era that rendered kingship sacred in lieu of the divine king (1983, 71). The king, flawed and temporally bound, now served as but a manifestation of the "infinite and perfect" deity. In this way, gods and men came together to establish and maintain the sacred condition of which kingship was one crucial manifestation (1983, 72).

Thus, kingship gained the divine qualities lost to kings as individuals, and while Stein makes this blanket statement in what appears to be a pan-Indian context, he does

identify sacralization of kingship specifically at Vijayanagara in the observance as Mahānavamī, as well as at other locations that observe the festival, such as Ramnad.[66] While the public festival can be understood as equating kings with gods (an idea we have entertained above), it can, in Stein's view, be more accurately taken to suggest that it is kingship that is divine. Stein focuses upon the comparison drawn between king and Rāma that is so prevalent at the festival, which aims to recapitulate the celebration marking Rāma's victory in the final verses of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*, all in service of the idea that righteous kingship delivers people from the threat of evil (1983, 83). This establishes a homology between Rāma and the presiding Vijayanagara king. Later variations of the Mahānavamī festival, such as that which occured at Ramnad until the late nineteenth century, confirm this motif. Here the linkage between the given Setupati Rāja's lineage and the lineage of Rāma was heavily emphasized during the *abhiṣeka* portion of the event (1983, 84-85).[67]

The office of the king is further sacralised on account of its capacity to integrate the entirety of the kingdom, another idea which is made decidedly evident at Mahānavamī. In an earthly parallel of Kulke and Rottermund's idea of divine feudalization, Stein notes that the Mahānavamī celebration culled together gods from all over the king's realm – Udayagiri Kṛṣṇa and Viṭṭhala from Maharashtra among them – and brings them together in the central capital of Vijayanagara (1983, 87). Meanwhile, servants of these various deities, from priests and dancing women, also came to pay homage to the king, further displaying the considerable scope of the kingdom. Thus, during Mahānavamī, the city of Vijayanagara came to represent the "total moral order over which the Vijayanagara kings

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66 For more on the history of Ramnad kingdom and the Setupati kings see Howes (2003) and Price (1996). The latter contains detailed analysis of the Ramnad Mahānavamī (pages 132-160).

67 Furthermore, "Setupati" or "protector of the bridge" – bridge here referring to the causeway between Lanka and the Indian subcontinent that Rāma was said to protect – reveals another aspect of the homology between Rāma and the Ramnad kings (Stein 1983, 84).

exercised sway" (1983, 87). In its almost wholly royal and symbolically incorporative

character, the festival confirms the ritual power of kingship in itself, a power that is

expressed in the manifestation of wealth, the consecratory actions with weapons, and the

king's frequent, independent acts of worship, around all of which Mahānavamī is based

(1983, 85-86). If I am reading Stein correctly, the allusions made at Mahānavamī to past

ceremonies like *aśvamedha* (for example, the fact that both festivals feature anointing of

royal arms by priests, the crucial presence of women, and animal sacrifices, as well as the

significance of decorated horses) only further compound kingship's sacredness, as they

suggest that kingship is trans-historical in addition to being incorporative. Because Durgā

and other goddesses – and we may very well include Sāmrājyalakṣmī among them – are

persistently linked to the city of Vijayanagara and the Mahānavamī festival, Stein seems

to insinuate that the office of the king becomes homologized with not only gods like

Rāma, but also with the goddess herself (1983, 87-88).[68] This inherently close proximity

to divinity that the king enjoys on the grounds of his position, as displayed by the

Mahānavamī festival, affords Stein further grounds to conclude that public rituals

manifest sacred kingship as it is formulated in the Gupta-era *dharmaśāstras* (1983, 88).

Thus, it would appear from Stein's work that it is kingship, and not the king, that is

sacred at Vijayanagara. Taking this into consideration, we may be able to interpret the

aforementioned public artistic and architectural homologies between Rāma and the king

as illustrative of sacred kingship as well. And while I do not in the sections that follow

wish to challenge Stein's assertion that kingship is sacred at Vijayanagara, I also do not

intend to preclude the possibility that kings themselves may have also been sacred at

68 Similarly, through the choice of Rājarājeśvarī as tutelary Mahānavamī goddess, Stein argues that
Ramnad Raja is paying homage to both Cholas and Pandyas, once again showing how greater kingships of
the past are also included in the "system of transitive meanings of royal incorporation" that the festival
serves to display (1983, 85). Interestingly enough, Rājarājeśvarī, also known as Tripurasundarī, is a tantric
goddess.

certain junctures in the city's history as well. Indeed, when we observe the *SLP*, we find that it purports to grant kings magico-religious powers, seemingly rendering them sacred or perhaps even divine.

## The Sacred King of the *Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā*

Listed following the instructions for virtually every ritual act in the *SLP* – be it festival, *pūjā*, *vrata*, or repetition of mantras – are the positive results of said activity, often at length. These may include general forms of prosperity such as good health or wealth, agricultural plenitude, political advantages such as widespread fame and the destruction of enemies, and soteriological benefits such as the destruction of sins (we discuss these latter two benefits at length in the next chapter). Along with these, the king can also gain magical powers by properly following the *SLP*'s rites, powers the text refers to as *aṣṭaiśvaryas* (the "eight powers" or "sovereignties"). This term *aṣṭaiśvaryas* appears to be synonymous with the *siddhis*, the "miraculous powers" which are also typically eight in number; fittingly, the two terms are throughout the text frequently joined together in a compound (*aṣṭaiśvaryasiddhyartham)*, and descriptions of a super-human king often follow mention of these two terms. While sources vary as to what each of these powers entails, the *siddhis* or *aṣṭaiśvaryas* were first enumerated in the Yogasutra as: *aṇimā* (atomization), *laghimā* (levitation), *mahimā* (magnification), *garimā* (greatness), *prāpti* (power of getting anything), *prākāmya* (non-obstruction of desire), *vaśītva* (power of charming) and *īśitva* (sovereignty over all things; Bhattacaryya 2002, 152).[69] As one can imagine, the master of these supernatural abilities clearly possesses considerable magico-religious power, if not some degree of actual transcendence, considering that what

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69 Grimes' *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy* confirms that the terms *siddhi* and *aṣṭaiśvaryas* are used interchangeably in the Yogic tradition, providing the same listing for a *aṣṭaiśvaryas* as is given here for the *siddhis* and even cross-referencing the two terms (1996, 63).

amounts to overlord-ship is the last of these benefits mentioned here. One who possesses these clearly has a power that approaches or even actualizes divinity on earth. Fittingly, the *siddhis* and the magical capacity that comes with them are a common goal of tantric practice, with the tantric adept gaining the title *siddha* once he has perfected *sādhana* and mastered these abilities.[70] The *siddhis* have sometimes been passed off by scholars as secondary goals of tantric practice, though not all agree with this notion. Hugh Urban, also writing on tantric models of kingship in the context of the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, suggests "these sorts of occult powers cannot be dismissed so easily. Rather than mere accretions, they are an integral part of Śākta Tantra and a critical element in Tantra's very *this-worldly* notion of power" (author's emphasis). Further, they infuse the practitioner, in this case the king, "with a mastery over the temporal world and the categories of the social order" (Urban 2001, 804). This is precisely how the *siddhis* are used in the *SLP* which, much like the *Kālikā Purāṇa,* conceptualizes the ideal king as something of a royal *siddha* – and even a god on earth – by actualizing these powers.

The *SLP* first mentions the *aṣṭaiśvaryas* in its description of the Grand Pacificatory Rite (*Mahāśānti*) of Sāmrājyalakṣmī, which spans *paṭalas* 15 through 21. Unlike the *mahāpūjā* to Sāmrājyalakṣmī described immediately previous, the king undertakes the Grand Pacificatory Rite on occasions of great catastrophes or unnatural phenomenon, such as the absence of rainfall, or on the verge of an enemy attack (Sarangi 1993, 72). After several elaborate rituals, with priests speaking mantras and making homa offerings to idols of various deities positioned around a *vāstucakra*, the king himself enters the place of worship (1993, 73-85). Upon completing preliminary circumambulations and gaining control of the vital airs (*prāṇāyāma*), the king precedes with the *mahāpūjā* rite.

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70 One South Indian example of a tantric text focused upon mastery of *siddhis* and the casting of a variety of spells therewith is the *Ḍāmara Tantra.* For a translation, see Kumar Rai (1988).

First he offers an enormous quantity of food to the goddess (21.1-18). He then requests as reward for performing the Pacificatory rite various benefits such as long life, absence of aversive phenomena, and the *aṣṭaiśvaryas,* as well as the favour of Sāmrājyalakṣmī (21.22-23). This rite then proceeds with the gifting of the Sāmrājyalakṣmī idol, along with gold coins, to the main Brahmin preceptor, with similar donations of idols given to other priests in attendance. Verses 21.34-39 suggest that proper performance of this rite earns the king all he has asked for and then some: "universal acclaim," the assurance that there is no fear in his kingdom, as well as wealth and a bounty of crops throughout his kingdom, among other benefits. Evidently, the king successfully attains the *aṣṭaiśvaryas* as well, for the text lists various miraculous powers that a king attains by successfully performing the ritual: "[He] throws water from land, turns the sea into a pool, [and] makes poison into nectar by performing this rite" (21.37).[71] While these sorts of feats may at first seem hyperbolic, they reflect poetically the power of the *siddhis*. That is, shrinking the ocean to a puddle utilizes the *siddha*'s ability to manipulate the properties of objects, such as their size, while the transformation of water to nectar suggests a combination of *prāpti, prākāmya,* and *vaśītva*, in this case working together as magical power in order to transubstantiate nefarious materials into more precious ones. These bespeak the powers of a *siddha*, if not a deity.

It is also significant that the Pacificatory rite affords the king these god-like powers in times of catastrophe, when the transcendent gods have evidently failed in their roles as provider and protector. During these times, the *SLP*'s ideal king is to assume these magico-religious capabilities in order to take over from the gods the classical role – so crucial for Indra and Viṣṇu – of sustainer, fructifier, and protector. Accordingly, with the

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71  All translations provided are mine unless explicitly noted.

pacificatory rite to Sāmrājyalakṣmī properly performed, the crops are bountiful and fear

exits the kingdom, and so the king finds himself in full service of this protective,

fructifying role.[72] Considering this revivification of his life-sustaining powers alongside

the accumulation of the *aṣṭaiśvaryas,* proper pacification of Sāmrājyalakṣmī appears to

reward the king with some degree of sacredness.

Fittingly, during the rites prescribed in the *SLP* for the *abhiṣeka* that are held at

various occasions over the course of a king's rule – such as auspicious events like his

birthday, and inauspicious occurrences such as epidemics or unfavourable asterisms – the

king is once again implored to ask for divine powers. In this case, after preparatory

worship by preceptors, the king worships Viṣṇu with offerings of flowers and addresses

him with a number of other deities representing the directions, asking for various benefits

all the while. At two junctures during this worship, he requests divine powers. Firstly, in

verse 61.8-9, of the god Vaiśvānara he asks: "O Vaiśvānara, the venerable one, the

bestower of divine powers (*aiśvarya*), I now offer this handful of flowers to you so that

my *aiśvaryas* may be increased." In verse 61.13-14, he asks similarly of Soma: "I now

offer this handful of flowers to bless me with *aṣṭaiśvaryas*" (as translated by Sarangi

1993, 147). Evidently, a key element of undergoing the ritual consecration and

reconsecration – and therefore a key element of being king – is for the *SLP* the

obtainment and reaffirmation of these powers. These magico-religious capabilities are

seemingly a key element to the sacred or divine aspect of the king and his kingship, for

after these aforementioned requests comes the coronation on the *pīṭhikā*, and it is here that

Viṣṇu and the eight gods of the directions are invoked in the person of the king, rendering

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72 Earlier on, when enumerating the functions of the Sāmrājyalakṣmī mantra, the *SLP* claims that
recitations of *Ṛg Veda Khila* (appendix) 5.84.1 alongside the Sāmrājyalakṣmī mantra can ensure rains on the
completion the ritual (Sarangi 1993, 55-56). Hence, this formula allows a king to quite literally step into the
role of the ever-fructifying divine monarch by precipitating rainfall.

him and/or his kingship divine.

The *aṣṭaiśvaryas* are mentioned once again in *paṭala* 30, which advises the king as to the employment of *japa*, *homa* and mantra of both Vedic and tantric varieties. Verse 30.11-12 indicates that by encasing ritual *japa* and *homa* within the Sāmrājyalakṣmī mantra, as well as the imperially charged *Śrī-Sūkta* hymn, the king can become potent and prosperous, expanding his kingdom as a result (30.11-12). Moreover, by worshipping Śiva, Durgā and Pārvatī with these formulas, the king is said to easily obtain the *aṣṭaiśvaryas* (30.13-15). Hence, through propitiation via tantric and Vedic mantras, the *SLP* once again allows the king to actualize supernatural powers by way of contact with goddesses.

The king can also gain *aṣṭaiśvaryas* by performing *vratas*, or votive offerings. *Paṭala* 90 describes the *vrata* of Varalakṣmī, "the boon-giving goddess of wealth", which is, according to the *SLP*, the "best of the *vratas*" (*uttamottama*). This observance takes place on the Friday preceding the full-moon day in the month of *Śrāvana*. On this day, a pitcher filled with ritual accouterments is placed upon the auspicious seat in the northeast section of the palace. The king invokes the goddess Varalakṣmī into the pitcher and performs the *pūjā* for the typical list of benefits, including among them the attainment of the *aṣṭaiśvaryas* (90.5-10). Worship then proceeds with the recitation of the *Śrī-Sūkta*, and the king makes an offering of flowers to the goddess (90.11-16). If properly performed, the *SLP* states that the king will attain all he has asked for and more: "He gains life, health, attainment of siddhis, and destroys the enemy side by performing the Varalakṣmīvrata with good intention" (100.10). Hence, the Varalakṣmīvrata allows the king to subjugate the earth, no doubt based on his attainment of such god-like powers, most obviously *īśitva*. The Mahālakṣmīvrata, another *vrata* to another form of Lakṣmī, is

both similar in the worship it entails (with chanting of the *Śrī-Sūkta* following by food offerings) and the effects it bestows. Beginning on the eighth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Bhādrapada and lasting fifteen days, this fast also blesses the king not only with the ability to defeat all enemies, but also the eight forms of supernatural powers (94.9). Here again, we observe two more examples of ritual observance where worship of the goddess figure gives the king opportunity to actualize supernatural powers.

Not surprisingly, the *SLP* identifies the obligatory Navarātra/Mahānavamī festival as yet another occasion for the king to accumulate supernatural powers, and goes on to implicate these powers in the task of ruling the world. This festival and its observance is considered one of the most important, for the *SLP* describes it as generating significantly more merit than other festivals – for instance, one passage (97.1-4) claims that the Navarātra rites generate the equivalent merit of the performance of a thousand rites during eclipses of the sun and moon. The rites the *SLP* prescribes for observance during the festival are numerous, and involve fasting, reading of scriptures and the repetition of mantras. The last listed among the various mantras prescribed for repetition is the formula of Durgā, Mahānavamī goddess *par excellence*, which is to be repeated alongside her glories at some point over the course of the festival (97.5-19). The result of this ritual action is not only the passage into *mokṣa* after death, but also, yet again, the attainment of the *aṣṭaiśvaryas* in this world, once again on account of a goddess.

But this is not the only opportunity for obtaining such powers during Navarātra, nor is Durgā the only goddess who bestows them. We have already observed in the previous chapter that the king's Navarātra worship begins with the invocation of Sāmrājyalakṣmī within the king by a Brahmin speaking a formula, which reads as follows:

O Omniscient king, the master of your subjects, in you do reside all the

divinities. O he-whose-self-embodies-all-gods [*sarvadevātman*], in you do
I invoke now goddess Sāmrājyalakṣmī to enable you to rule the sea-
girdled-earth. O king of kings, I now invoke goddess Sāmrājyalakṣmī in
you to enable you to protect the good and punish the wicked...(100.5-7).[73]

The content and the eventual result of this formula appear to identify the king explicitly

with god, embodying all divinities as *sarvadevātman*, literally, "he whose self is made of

all gods." The king becomes not just sacred or god-like but *all* gods on account of the

invocation of Sāmrājyalakṣmī within him, a process reminiscent of the Vedic notion that

the king integrates various deities into himself at the *rājasūya*.[74] So while the divinity of

kingship is being illustrated in the public spectacle of the ongoing Mahānavamī festival, it

would appear that the divinity of the king is being simultaneously actualized in the ruler's

private program of worship. And fittingly, just a few verses later, the *SLP* states that such

an invocation of the goddess imbues the king not only with strength and luster, but also

with the eight supernatural powers (100.8-14). Thus, these powers are closely tied to the

king's status as *sarvadevātman,* all gods in one person and overlord of the world. That

this festival is obligatory every year solidifies the *aṣṭaiśvaryas*, divinity and the goddess

as indispensable elements of being king at Vijayanagara, at least according to the *SLP*.

The idea that the presiding king should indeed be god-like appears elsewhere in the

*SLP*. In a discussion of the ideal royal qualities, verse 70.68-69 claims that Lakṣmī will

always remain in close proximity to the king if he properly undertakes the duties

necessary for good kingship, and she will consistently bestow wealth upon him in the

way of parasols, horses, and elephants, among other royal symbols. The *SLP* refers to this

sort of king as *pratyakṣya-daivatam*, "a king who is perceived as god-like" (70.70). Thus,

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73 This is the translation provided by Sarangi (1993, 197), though I have retranslated *sarvadevātman*.
Sarangi originally translated this compound as "all-god-souled-one."
74 Fittingly, it is Śrī-Lakṣmī who is asked to reside with the king and imbue him with sovereignty in Vedic
descriptions of the *rājasūya* ceremony, such as that in the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (Rhodes Bailly 2000, 140-
142). Clearly that ceremony influences *SLP's* figuring of this power-bestowing ritual on Mahānavamī.

we see again that the *SLP*'s ideal king, ever-flanked by Lakṣmī, will appear nothing less than a god ruling the immanent realm due largely, perhaps even entirely, to his reliance upon the goddess.

Altogether, these examples suggest that a king following the precepts of the *SLP* can become an immanent divine being with help from the goddess. At the very least he was rendered sacred – becoming a virtual *siddha* charged with magico-religious potential on account of his mastery of the eight supernatural powers. It is fitting that Lakṣmī is sought after for bestowing these *aiśvaryas*, given that she acquired the epithet *Aiśvaryalaksmī* earlier on in history because of her ability to grant the powers of sovereignty. We have limited our focus here to examples wherein these powers are obtained through worship of Sāmrājyalakṣmī and other goddesses, though there are several other instances in the text in which these powers are granted in the context of other deities or duties.[75] Clearly, it was a great concern of the text that kings should attain these powers, and fittingly so, for it appears that divinity, as envisioned by the *SLP*, was not necessarily an inherent quality of the king but rather one that had to be invoked. The divine or sacred qualities of the king can also be established firmly in the king on account of his attainment of kingly accouterments from the goddess, as well as his recurrent participation in rituals like *abhiṣeka*, *vratas*, and Mahānavamī, in all of which *aṣṭaiśvaryas* are received from the goddess. In this way, *SLP* provides in a tantric context a further example of Inden's idea that the divinity of the king is to be cyclically renewed. During times of crisis, it is also of the utmost importance for the *SLP* that these *aṣṭaiśvaryas* are taken on by (or renewed within) the king so that he can step into the role of Indra or Viṣṇu on earth as protector and fructifier. So while the king is seemingly not a god by default, he can actualize god-

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75 Verse 82.5, for instance, states that the king can gain the eight forms of power by celebrating New Years, warding off bad luck in the process (*alakṣmī-parihara*).

like powers on earth when need is greatest by meticulously adhering to the ritual schedule

laid out by the *SLP*. The *SLP*'s claim to the divinity of kings is strongest during

Mahānavamī, where the king is not just a *siddha* but *sarvadevātman,* consisting of all

gods and ruling over all other kings. Here again we observe a divinity that is invoked in

the king for the occasion, at the very least, and once again it is contingent upon the

fortune-bestowing presence of the goddess – in this case Sāmrājyalakṣmī herself –

alongside and within the king. In this sense, the king's divinity is to some degree bound

by situational contexts, though these do not necessarily limit it. After all, by keeping

Sāmrājyalakṣmī close by his side, a king can become the *pratyakṣya-daivatam*, the god

on earth, by no means precluding the possibility that his divinity, like his kingdom, is

without limit.


**Conclusions**

If we extend Mayer's observations, both the divinity of kings and the divinity of kingship

in India rely on geographic and historical factors. In some places and times and textual

formulations, one or none are divine; in some instances, as it appears was the case in

early sixteenth century Vijayanagara, both are sacred. Stein's argument that the public

ritual of Mahānavamī specifically displayed the sacred nature of kingship need not stand

in counterpoint to this evidence of the sanctity of kings at Vijayanagara. Clearly,

Mahānavamī was a spectacle illustrating the divinity of kingship. In light of Stein, we can

safely interpret the public artistic and architectural homologies between Rāma and the

king as illustrative of sacred kingship as well, with the given Vijayanagara ruler assuming

– via centralized location of his palace in addition to mode of dress – the office of Rāma's

earthly representative. At the same time, in light of the *SLP,* we can clearly see that

individual kings could invoke sacred attributes through their own private program of worship. One may even wish to draw a public-private distinction between the divinity of kingship and kings at Vijayanagara: while Mahānavamī served to glorify the office of the king to observers from within and around the kingdom, a good number of the *SLP*'s prescribed rites may have allowed individual kings to commandeer supernatural powers in the relative privacy of their palace among their most trusted preceptors, subsequently bringing their actualized *sarvadevātman* or *pratyakṣya-daivatam* status into the public sphere. Admittedly, we have little evidence to concretely establish this public-private dichotomy, though the *SLP* does appear to have been a highly secretive text, its contents open only to the king and a limited number of other individuals, suggesting its program for divine kingship was not explicitly disseminated in the public sphere.

In drawing upon these related notions of *sarvadevātman* or *pratyakṣya-daivatam,* the *SLP* consciously or unconsciously recapitulates a much older tantric trope from the early medieval period; that is, the notion of the ideal practitioner as *rājādhirāja* or "overlord". This motif, which took shape in esoteric Buddhist and Hindu circles between the seventh and eight centuries CE, involved an esoteric practitioner – a *siddha* – metaphorically becoming a *cakravartin* (Davidson 2002, 114-115). Through the mastery of mantras, meditation, and *maṇḍalas*, the esoteric practitioner assumes kingship and exercises dominion through ritual and metaphysical means (2002, 117). For instance, in a vivid parallel of the feudalization of both Indian society and its divinities that was taking place at the same time, potential adepts were consecrated like kings receiving coronation, taking on divinity and taking power over lesser divinities in a *maṇḍala* in the process (2002, 122). While in the context of esoteric religion becoming a *siddha* allowed a practitioner to gain access and assert control over a metaphorical spiritual "state", in the

*SLP*, the accumulation of *siddhis* is used to better rule an *actual* state. We see these same connections made in the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, the dating of which spans everywhere from the eighth to fourteenth centuries CE, where the *siddhis* are also implicated in augmenting royal power. This at the very least suggests some continuity either in Indian conceptions of kingship, or perhaps more likely in the sphere of esoteric, tantric practice, if not in both. Evidently, tantra and kingship are well-met in both esoteric Buddhism, the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, and in the *SLP*, as kingship can apparently serve as a trajectory for tantric attainment, while tantric attainment can likewise serve as a trajectory for better kingship.

All political leaders are by nature interested in power, so why would this notion of king as god, *siddha*, and tantric overlord have been so particularly important in Vijayanagara? Vijayanagara was, of course, one of the greatest kingdoms in Indian history, standing as an immense imperial power for three tumultuous centuries. The kingdom itself was not satisfied with simply maintaining its given territory, as is evident with its frequent forays into nearby lands – Udayagiri and Addanki, to name two – which it sought to annex. Hence, the kingdom was ever-expanding to new localities, and so consistent efforts were made during this time to create "trans-local polity that could extricate the state from its constant re-submergence in diffuse local contexts" (Narayana Rao, Shulman & Subrahmanyam 2004, 606). These efforts are evident in texts of the period, the best example of which is Kṛṣṇadevarāya's *Āmuktamālyada* (particularly the *rājanīti* section), which attempted to develop programs for building a new empire that could incorporate and stabilize a variety of new areas and peoples (2004, 607-608).[76] A kingdom such as Vijayanagara during the reign of Kṛṣṇadevarāya, rapidly expanding, was

76 In this way the *SLP* can be said to resurrect the early medieval notion of feudalization of the gods. Only in this case, instead of there being just a parallel between universal gods of the realm (*rāṣṭradevatā*) and kings or their office, the king himself was now the god of the immanent realm, providing for the localities within and their gods while persistently making efforts to incorporate more and more localities and gods.

in need of a king who was also not to be limited to a particular locality. Thus, the *SLP* develops the notion of the king-as-divine-overlord, *pratyakṣya-daivatam,* whose domain is the world itself, as much a brilliant political move as a metaphysical one. After all, who better to rule over an ever-expanding base of subjects and territories than a god on earth?

Indeed, the *SLP* often draws upon this notion of the king as overlord with expansive domain, using phrases like "king of kings," as we have seen in verses like 100.5-7 mentioned above. Such is evident most obviously in the very name of the text's titular goddess herself, *sāmrājya* referring to emperorship.[77] When listing the benefits of various rites, we have limited our focus here to the verses dealing with *siddhis*, though there are many other positive outcomes of these undertakings, many of which are in direct service of the king's overlord-ship. Recall verses 21.34-39, which claims that a king gains not only fearlessness and bountiful crops from the Great Pacificatory rite, but also "universal acclaim." Various other verses in the *SLP* list benefits including but not limited to destruction of enemies and the forgiveness of sins, both of which we will observe in depth in the next chapter. Evidently, the king who follows the *SLP* to the letter obtains no shortage of power, befitting of a universal god on earth.

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77 Accordingly, the text propounds this very notion. Early on in the text, immediately preceding the introduction of the Sāmrājyalakṣmī mantra, worship of Sāmrājyalakṣmī is recommended specifically for kings who want empires and large domains (2.28-29).

Chapter 3

**Removal of Sins, Destruction of Enemies:**
**Transgression and Forgiveness in *Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā***

Although the *SLP* is a text for would-be overlords, a king's ability to render himself

sacred is not sufficient for the attainment of universal overlord-ship. Even in the late

medieval period, there were still structures foundational to Indian society – and certainly

no less important at Vijayanagara – that provided checks and balances against the king

ever having complete power over the kingdom, the earth, or whatever realm he sought to

conquer. The foremost of these checks and balances was caste hierarchy and the

ascendancy of the Brahmins within it. No matter how much political power the king could

obtain in his political pursuits, he was, as a Kṣatriya, ultimately subordinate to the

Brahmins, who held the balance of spiritual authority. Firmly established spiritual power

was always just out of the reach of the king. Even though he was to some degree divine,

he was at the same time replete with sin borne out of the violent business of defending

and expanding the kingdom. These sins compromised the king's spiritual purity and also

rendered him dependent upon the Brahmin to remove this impurity. Brahmins performed

this service in exchange for lavish gifts from the king, a practice known as *dāna*, in the

South Indian idiom. This process continued during the Vijayanagara period, accounting in

part for the luxuriant displays of public gifting we have discussed in previous chapters.

The inversion of the prescribed roles of kings and Brahmins during Vijayanagara's

festivals also seems to suggest that there was a certain degree of conscientiousness within

the empire concerning this perennial tension between Brahminical and kingly power.

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Fittingly, the *SLP* also seems to understand the contours of this ancient quandary between kings and Brahmins. As might be expected of a manual for kingship, the text frequently allows the king the capacity for the effective use of violence, with numerous rituals boasting as their reward the "destruction of all enemies." At other junctures, the text provides instructions for the worship of weapons so that they might better serve the king and his troops on the battlefield. Alongside these means of giving rulers martial advantages, the text also offers the king as a reward for rituals – many of the same ones resulting in the destruction of enemies – the destruction of his sins *(pāpa)*. In numerous instances throughout the text, it is either implied or quite obviously demonstrated that the king can obliterate his sins without need of Brahminical supervision. In some cases, the ritual action of the king is even more effective than that of a Brahmin in this task of absolution.  Thus, the *SLP* seems to have proposed a means by which the king could carry out his violent duties more effectively, while at the same time emancipating him from his traditional dependence upon Brahmins for the elimination of his sins. This newfound soteriological independence gained from Sāmrājyalakṣmī, I argue, offered a ruler further ritual authority, leaving the king alone as the most powerful entity in the kingdom both politically and spiritually, effectively charting a clear course for emperorship.

**Of Kings and Brahmins**

This opening section will look deeper into the complexities of the relationship between kings in Brahmins in the Indian tradition at large, as well as in South India

specifically. Kings found themselves ultimately subordinate to Brahmins because of their transgressive nature, as they were tied up in a system of giving (or *dāna*) in order that the Brahmins forgive their accumulated sins. This section also identifies how these classical conundrums of kingship were of lasting important at sixteenth century Vijayanagara, where *dāna* went on all the while kings attempted to publicly display their own ritual sovereignty.

*Caste and Transgression*

At the core of Indian kingship is a crucial dilemma. On one hand, the king is the embodiment of dharma – dharma in this sense referring to the morality of the world – and must make efforts to uphold it in all aspects of his role (Heesterman 1998, 21). As such, he resembles a god on earth, the representation of all things righteous. On the other hand, in the process of upholding dharma, he will also have to mete out punishments to those criminals who violate the established order, a task that will necessarily involve violence. It is for this reason that some classical Indian texts likened the king to Yama, the god of death, in his capacity as witness and judge (Gonda 1956a, 64). Moreover, it is also the king's duty to protect the people of his kingdom. In the process of defending and promulgating the dharmic kingdom, he will have to resort to programs of violence on a much larger scale, undertaking war and conquest, which will cause considerable suffering and death. The king's order, then, is unavoidably that of conflict and violence. As such, he becomes the apotheosis of danger and fear, variously described in early Sanskrit texts like the *Manusmṛti* and the *Mahābhārata* as the "eater" of people who devours everything

around him, equal to "a hundred thousand slaughterhouses" on the grounds of the death

he causes (Heesterman 1985, 109). Not only does the king necessarily create sin by way

of his societal function, but he also absorbs the sins of others. Because the king is the

representation of the kingdom as a whole, he additionally acquires by association the

violence done by each and every one of his subjects, a reality which only exacerbates his

already transgressive nature (Shulman 1985, 84-85).

Similar tropes concerning kingship can be found specifically in the South Indian

context in which we are most interested, where kingly figures commonly embody this

duality of beneficence and danger. Consider Āputtiraṉ of the Tamil epic *Maṇimēkalai*,[78]

for instance. Based on his charity, Āputtiraṉ is capable of nourishment and protection, but

also potentially violent and cruel (Shulman 1985, 70-71). Shulman suggests that the

duality of Āputtiraṉ's character speaks to a more general South Indian motif where the

king takes on a decidedly feminine role (1985, 71). That is, the king is not unlike Kālī or

Durgā, goddesses who are both maternal as well as martial, both capable of sustaining and

destroying their worshippers. Shulman's figuring of king-as-Kālī/Durgā is not only

reasonable on account of similar associations that are drawn during Mahānavamī, but also

quite helpful, as it shows that this conflicted nature of kingship is as applicable in South

India as it is to the larger Sanskritic tradition. The South Indian king, while indispensible

in his function, is ultimately violent and transgressive by nature.

The king's inherently violent character has two somewhat damning socio-political

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78 For a translation of the *Maṇimēkalai*, one of the five key Tamil epics, see Nandakumar (1989b).

consequences. Firstly, the violence necessitated by these responsibilities for expanding and defending the realm, punishing criminals, and so forth, creates impurities in the person of the king. These impurities allow the Brahmins to secure the top of the social hierarchy for themselves (Dumont 1970b, 33). By bringing the ancient Vedic sacrifice to the realm of the metaphorical and thereby distancing themselves from the demerits of violence, the Brahmins stand unmatched in their purity. Thus, no matter how much power the king might accumulate doing his very practical political duties, he will always remain subordinate to the priest or *purohita*, as the non-violent religious element is always put in front of the political (Dumont 1970a, 68).

Secondly, violent transgression renders kings dependent upon the Brahmins for absolution. Mired in bloodshed, the ruler needs a means to purge himself of his own *pāpa*, or sin, as well as the *pāpa* of the rest of the kingdom, for *pāpa*, as we recall, is the opposite of (and therefore a threat to) *śrī*, the king's splendor and prosperity (Shulman 1985, 88). If the king wishes to perfect himself, he must renounce the secular world and its temporal dharma in favour of the transcendent, atemporal dharma, which remains resistant to the change (Heesterman 1985, 2-6). However, the king cannot withdraw from the world, for to do so would be to divest himself of all his worldly powers – he can, after all, only maintain his sacred quality while he is in this sphere (Shulman 1985, 94). The king is inherently conflicted on account of his violent nature, for he cannot simply leave the arena in which his sins accumulate in order to dwell in the realm of the transcendent, atemporal dharma. It is the transcendent dharma alone that provides ultimate authority –

and hence the ability to obliterate sin – and only the Brahmin has access to this realm based on his ritual capacity and renunciate status. The king, then, must look to the Brahmins to perform the duty of ridding him of his accumulated sin. While the Brahmins' monopoly over the transcendent swings the balance of spiritual power and purity (and hence caste rank) to them, it also limits their own political power. That is, the Brahmin cannot involve himself with the business of the king lest he compromise the very renunciate status that gives him his transcendent authority, and so he cannot rise above the king on the political scale (Heesterman 1985, 7). Thus, the king and the Brahmin exist in a complex and symbiotic relationship, based in large part on the king's reliance upon the Brahmin to deal with his accumulated transgressions.

In practice, the transfer of karmic demerit from king to priest happened by way of sacrifice, then later on by the use of ritualized gifting, or *dāna*. In early Vedic times, the priest enacted positive violence during the sacrifice in order to eliminate the negative violence of war and conquest undertaken by the king (Urban 2001, 810). This ancient Brahminical sacrifice sought to exchange *śrī*, the sacrificer's goal, for *pāpa*, the sacrificial evil (Shulman 1985, 87). In time, however, the Brahmins, moving towards a more Upaniṣadic ethic of non-violence, excised the aspects of death and catastrophe from the ritual, and, in the process, came to exclude the impure king from the sacrifice altogether (Heesterman 1985, 91). The king's required offerings were now to be made directly to the Brahmin. From that point, the king was to patronize the Brahmins with grants of money, jewellery and land so that they would purify him from his accumulated sins. The

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Brahmins, while accepting the king's gifts, also accepted and disposed of the sacrificial residues came with them. This would also, by effect, bestow status and legitimacy on the king's rule (Thapar 1994, 312). Despite the benefits that gifting offered to the king, it also provided further assurance that the balance of authority in the kingdom remained with the Brahmins while taking some degree of authority away from rulers, who now lacked the capacity to act independently of the priestly caste (Shulman 1985, 88).

Because of his dependence upon the Brahmins for dealing with his accumulated sins, the king becomes comparatively weak: a tragic figure whose power is ultimately impotent when removed from the network of ritual that supports it. As Shulman has described it, the position of the king in South India is "brittle, fragile, ludicrously dangerous; at any moment the whole madly whirling machine, with its powerful, antithetical currents racing through intersecting channels, may collapse and crush him" (1985, 94). Faced with these difficulties on account of the residues of his violence, the king is presented with a limited amount of options, at least as they are enumerated by Shulman: he can go on hoping for the best, pass on the burden to someone else (preferably the Brahmin), renounce the kingdom, or dissolve the entire edifice of kingship. Many of these options are impractical, some unfeasible. Shulman includes in his list another option, however, which may or may not be equal in its impracticality with those previously listed, and that is for the king to make attempts at "arrogat[ing] greater power," even when doing so might seem beyond his capacity (Ibid). However, means for gaining additional power were often difficult to realize in the highly circumscribed life of

the South Indian king, so he most often remained fixed in his ambiguous, comic-tragic and ultimately Brahmin-dependent role.

*Gifting and Forgiveness at Vijayanagara*

These ideas are helpful for understanding the classical struggles between kings and Brahmins and the conflicts of kingship that arose as a result, but did they persist beyond the pages of the classical texts in which they were presented? Do these speculations based in Vedic and medieval Indian materials have any pertinence across history – that is to ask, did they apply to sixteenth century Vijayanagara? There is evidence to suggest that they did. We know already that Vijayanagara kings gave copious amounts to Brahmins and sectarian leaders to encourage the building of temples, though there is little in the inscriptions themselves suggesting that these were specifically for the absolution of sin. Still, it is very conceivable that this notion that sin could be destroyed by way of gifts was in currency at Vijayanagara. No matter how pluralistic Vijayanagara may have been, the empire was also quite concerned with classical Hindu structures, and it displayed a definite conscientiousness as to the implicit power struggle between kings and Brahmins, all the while continuing the tradition of gifting from the former to the latter.

As we have seen earlier, Vijayanagara festivals played upon established Brahmin-Kṣatriya caste disparity, often subverting established roles so that the king could display his superiority while the Brahmins looked spiritually and politically incapable by comparison. We may recall the Vasantotsava festival, where it was the king who successfully set the vehicle containing idols of Virūpākṣa and Pārvatī into motion after

Śaiva Brahmins failed at the same task (Anderson 1993, 177-178). Here the king is quite

literally the driving force that moves the divine couple, pulling them along fully

independent of the Brahmins. Mahānavamī similarly renders the king a veritable spiritual

entity in his own right, for here his own ritual power relative to the Brahmins is

augmented on account of his contact with the various goddesses both public and private.

The king dominates the ritual arena during the public portion of Mahānavamī, while the

Brahmins are actually relegated to the background (Stein 1980, 388). This was often

expressed quite explicitly, as in a record of 1421 which suggests men of religion were on

this occasion pelted with oranges and lemons during the celebration, as if to illustrate

their stark inferiority to the king (Sivapriyananda 1995, 75). Other reports tell of how

Brahmins threw roses at the king after he bore witnessed to the Mahānavamī sacrifice,

further illustrating their subordination to him at this juncture in time (1995, 86). Clearly,

the organizing parties of these festivals were conscious of the tensions between Brahmins

and Kṣatriyas, and even attempted to work through these traditional paradoxes to the

benefit of the king, allowing him to temporarily arrogate more power in the process. Now

the possessor of political power was also the possessor of religious power, as well; he

who is supposedly dependent on the Brahmins is now fiercely independent of them. The

festivals made it clear that here in the person of the Vijayanagara king – one of the most

powerful that India had ever seen – was the truly supreme entity that no Brahmin or group

thereof could actually hope to match, let alone supersede, no matter what tradition

dictated.

Despite these ceremonial inversions, which would entertain the idea of having the king as the most powerful figure in the kingdom, there was still an understanding in the Vijayanagara court that the king is easily corrupted. For instance, a Telugu poem attributed to Nandi Timmana, in the process of identifying Kṛṣṇadevarāya as an avatar of Kṛṣṇa, traces quite a telling path of the god from antinomian cowherd to the king incarnate (Shulman 1985, 367). The audience, according to Shulman, is tempted to question whether this transition from bandit to king is ever fully complete, and whether Kṛṣṇadevarāya's apparent propriety is just a "volitional guise" of his kingship (367-369). Apart from symbolic displays of kingship, Kṛṣṇadevarāya maintains throughout this narrative a core alliance with the violent, cow-pilfering, and lascivious god of whom he is the embodiment, and must now in his earthly personality and function atone for these intrinsic antinomian proclivities (1985, 368-371). Hardly paradoxical alongside the ceremonial inversions, these affirmations of the king's corruptibility most likely informed the displays of kingly supremacy at festivals, which served as a kind of conscious compensation in the public sphere. And of course, Shulman ties the bandit-like nature of Kṛṣṇadevarāya and others back to "conspicuous renunciation" such as gifts to the Brahmins, suggesting that the notion of the king's sinful nature was still a motivating factor behind the extensive patronage given by kings to temples and sectarian leaders at Vijayanagara (1985, 369).

The *SLP* itself documents in a number of passages the process of giving gifts for the removal of sins, suggesting that such a system existed in the cultural context out of which

that text emerged. *Paṭala* 124 deals with *dāna* in detail, specifying not only preferred gifts but also the most auspicious days upon which these gifts should be given. The most important of these dates are times of astronomical anomalies such as eclipses of the sun and the moon, as well as *vyatipātas* (any astronomical event causing unnatural phenomena or calamities), among others. Also auspicious are the days in proximity to frightening dreams, sacrifices and marriages. On these occasions, the king is advised to give various gifts, the foremost benefit being the forgiveness of a variety of sins:

> In all previous births and in all multiple births, in infancy and childhood, youth and old age, known and unknown, life after life, sins both small and great arising from one's own actions [are forgiven]. (124.9-10).

The next series of verses goes on to recount the various types of *dāna* that the king is supposed to perform. These include the *tulāpuruṣadāna*, a gift of the donor's weight in gold, which as we have already seen in chapter one was a trademark of the Tuḷuvas (124.13).[79]

Although the beneficiaries of these gifts are not listed explicitly in the above passages, I think it is quite clear based on what we already know about donations at Vijayanagara that the recipients of these gifts were intended to be the Brahmins in control of temples. We can firmly establish this hypothesis by observing an earlier passage in the *SLP* that deals specifically with the event of the *vyatipātas*. *Paṭala* 116 advises the reader that if a *vyatipātas* or some other astronomical anomaly occurs during the relatively holy

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79 In its extended discussion of hunting, the *SLP* additionally suggests that a king coming home from mandatory hunts is to perform brief ritual expiations in order to remove sins generated by the killing of animals he has undertaken. The expiation includes gifts of cows, land and gold, presumably to Brahmins (130.42; Sarangi 1993, 296).

month of Mārgaśīrṣa, various donations must be made to the "best of Brahmins." Also, one thousand other Brahmins must be fed with sweet-rice (116.22-24). With these donations properly given, the text lists the various benefits the king reaps, including not only victory in war but also the forgiveness of sins (116.25-26). If we extrapolate upon this verse, it confirms our presumption that the recipients of these kinds of gifts were indeed, first and foremost, Brahmins.

Such passages, though not widespread throughout the text, suggest that *dāna* performed by kings for Brahmins in exchange for the removal of sins was still prevalent in Vijayanagara during the time of the *SLP*. Thus, the extensive patronage given by kings to temples and sectarian leaders throughout the empire was motivated at least in part by this classical urge to continually rectify the king's sinful nature. Such a desire is fitting, considering the court poetry that subtly acknowledges the bandit-like nature at the core of kings like Kṛṣṇadevarāya, as well as the public festivals that playfully attempt to subvert the subordinate role of the king to the Brahmin. This ritual inversion of established social hierarchies observed at the festivals also betrays a desire to arrogate more power for kings and thereby unshackle them from their dependence upon and subordination to the Brahmins. Perhaps it is for want of an independent, all-powerful king that the passages dealing with *dāna* are not widespread throughout the *SLP*, limited to these few examples. This is less a function of the prevalence of these exchanges in the actual society, I think, as it is a function of the alternatives the *SLP* provides the king for absolution, independent of the Brahmin. That is, the *SLP* not only acknowledges this perpetual reliance of kings

upon Brahmins, but it also seems to propose a solution of its own to this classical

predicament. As we will see in the next section, portions of the *SLP* suggest that there are

other avenues for a king to rid himself of his sins – ways that do not immediately involve

Brahmins – while still upholding his inevitably violent dharma to the fullest extent.


### Destruction of Enemies, Forgiveness of Sins

We have already seen in the previous chapter how the *SLP* follows virtually every ritual

act and celebration it describes with the positive results of fulfilling these instructions.

Two of the most common positive results given in the text, often listed in immediate

proximity to one another, are "the destruction of enemies and the forgiveness of sins." For

instance, the verse describing the benefits of the Sāmrājyalakṣmī mantra alongside the

Veda mantra (which we will look at in detail below), suggests that the combination of the

two can both "destroy sins" (6.4-6) and also "ruin an adversary" (6.8-9). Similarly, when

the king worships virgins, he is said to be able to better destroy enemies while at the same

time having his sins destroyed (110.11-19).The two benefits often appear by themselves

as well. That the text is so fixated upon bestowing the king with the capacity for both

violence and self-absolution is not only interesting for its immediate benefits for the

person of the king and the kingship in which he partakes, but also on account of the fact

that the two benefits embody in themselves – and at the same time work to solve – the

classical conundrum of Indian kingship. By granting a ruler the power to easily destroy

his enemies, the *SLP* and Sāmrājyalakṣmī allow the king to better fulfill his messy duty of

protecting dharma. And this is not problematic: by at the same time granting the king the ability to forgive his own sins, the ruler is able to absolve himself of any demerit such violence may cause him to accrue. Moreover, the destruction of these sins takes place with relative ritual distance between the king and the Brahmins upon whom he usually relied to forgive his transgressions with public gifting. Thus, the *SLP* seems to offer the king a degree of ritual independence from the Brahmins in this regard.

*Destruction of Enemies*

Much like other kingship manuals of Indian origin such as the *Arthaśāstra* or the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, the *SLP* permits and even encourages violence on the part of the king, considering it to be an inevitable component of the duties of a ruler. In fact, correct performance of the rituals in the *SLP* enables the king to do his violent duties more effectively. The examples are almost too numerous to list in detail. As we have just seen, the combination of the Sāmrājyalakṣmī and Vedic mantras, when followed by food offerings to the Brahmins, destroys enemies (6.4-9). In addition to granting the *aṣṭaiśvaryas*, the vrata for Varalakṣmī also enables the destruction of enemies (90.5-10). The Mahālakṣmīvrata does the same. In fact, the text identifies this as the most proficient ritual for allowing a king to defeat the enemy, no matter how strong that adversary may be (94.1-10). Similarly, worship of both Śiva and Pārvatī during the auspicious month of Mārgaśīrṣa is said to remove sins, destroy enemies and even to help earn victory in war (116.9-15). Hence, contact with the goddess allows the king to neutralize his enemies efficiently, a skill that is no doubt immensely useful on the battlefield. A number of other

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rituals that do not immediately involve the goddess also offer similar benefits. For instance, the king who wants to obtain victory in war is advised to carry out the Siddhivināyaka vrata (a *vrata* for the god Gaṇeśa) during the month of Bhādrapada (93.1-5). The *Anantavrata*, also undertaken during Bhādrapada, has much the same effect (96.1-4; 189). Similarly, the king who ties flags in honor of Viṣṇu asks for destruction of his enemies and the forgiveness of his sins, among other requests (114.37-43).

   In addition to these passing references, the *SLP* also provides more involved means of destroying enemies. This is perhaps most obvious in the context of Navarātra. We have heard in the accounts of Portuguese travelers such as Domingo Paes and Fernao Nuniz that weapons were worshiped during this time, and the *SLP* confirms this, providing detailed descriptions of the various rites. As analyses such as Stein's would have it, it was indeed the power of the goddess that was invoked in the weapons during these rites so as to make them more effective in combat. After the king completes the task of invoking the goddesses Durgā, Lakṣmī and Vāgdevī into jars of precious metals with tantric and Purāṇic formulas (105.3-9), he then worships his 32 personal weapons, starting with the bow and finishing with the javelin (105.10-23). The king does this by offering flowers and articles of food to each weapon while priests continue the tantric and Purāṇic chants. The reverence given to the weapons in such close chronological and physical proximity to that given to the goddesses suggests that both goddesses and weapons share comparable auspiciousness, the former imbuing the latter with their destructive powers. Indeed, this relationship between weapon and goddess is reminiscent of the decorative schemes of

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weapons of the Vijayanagara Empire. As we may recall, it was vermilion, representative of blood as well as Kālī – herself a symbol the Empire's military might – that was placed on blades of daggers such as that held by Kṛṣṇadevarāya in certain depictions (Elgood 2004, 74-75). Goddess and weapon, then, seem to enjoy an indelible relationship at Vijayanagara.

During the Vijayādaśamī celebration so closely linked with the Navarātra festival, the sword, bow and arrows, in particular, are worshiped once again. To the sword the priest offers the following prayer: "O sword, the sharp-edged-one, thou are dreadful in war, the killer of the heroes of the enemy. Do you cause death to deadly enemies and protect my master" (108.25; as translated by Sarangi 1993, 217). The bow and arrows are addressed in the same way (108.26-28). These prayers are fascinating not only for their celebration of violence but also for the decidedly anthropomorphic character they attribute to the weapons. In the context of worship, this personalization suggests a certain degree of deification, in which the weapon is praised for both its protective and destructive abilities in the same way that a goddess like Kālī often is. Afterward, the weapons, recharged with newfound deadliness, are handed back to the king "causing his vitality to be increased" (Sarangi 1993, 218). The king then pays his respect to the weapons and they are placed under a *śamī* tree, where they are once again worshipped by the Brahmin alongside Lakṣmī and Nārāyana (109.1-6). At this point the Brahmin makes requests along the following lines on behalf of the king: "Whatever benediction had accrued to Mahādeva, the bearer of the trident at the time of killing of the ferocious

monster, Tripura, let that be mine" (109.9; as translated by Sarangi 1993, 218). Similar

requests are made concerning the powers wielded by other heroes and deities on specific

mythological occasions, their intent seemingly to render the weapons something of an

intermediary between these mythical figures and deities, transferring supernatural, martial

power into the person of the king. In this way, both weapon and king are reinvigorated

with the lethal force of the gods and other propitious figures. Here again the *SLP* provides

a means by which enemies are readily destroyed. Accordingly, *paṭalas* 128.6-14, in

dealing with the protocols to be undertaken before leaving on expeditions into foreign

territory, refer back to these verses, reminding the king that the worship of weapons can

be highly beneficial at this point in time (1993, 377).

Similarly, the vow of Bhāratapaurṇamāsī, a solitary observance undertaken during

the month of Māgha in which the king ritually bathes and worships his weapons with

formulas, increases the vitality of his arms (122.5-10). Thus, there is considerable

evidence that programmatic, involved means of strengthening weapons and thereby

crushing adversaries could be obtained by the king who followed the *SLP*, in addition to

the numerous references to the destruction of enemies that occur almost in passing.

Clearly it was a goal of the text to help the king do the violent parts of his job more

effectively, thereby upholding his dharmic responsibilities as per the classical injunctions.

In some cases, these means to destroying enemies, such as the worship of weapons at

Vijayādaśamī, appear to be presented with some degree of zest and alacrity: like the

*Kālikā Purāṇa*, the *SLP* is not afraid to luxuriate in the necessary violence of kingship.

And why should the *SLP* have held back? After all, it seems to have at the same time proposed a means by which a king could deal with violence without worrying about the transgression it embodied.

*The Self-Absolving King*

What is even more interesting than this enhanced ability to do violence is the capacity the *SLP* affords a king to forgive his own sins. Rather than have the king suffer for the violence he perpetrates, the text repeatedly boasts that as a benefit of its rituals a king will have "all his sins forgiven" or "destroyed" or some variation on this theme. For many of these rituals and mantra repetitions, a Brahmin is not involved. In some cases, the presence of a Brahmin necessitates an even more involved ritual procedure. Ultimately, these rituals render the king the paramount ritual performer when it comes to the destruction of his accumulated sin, a status that seems to offer a solution to the king's dilemma concerning the violence he accumulates. In the process of solving this problem of soteriology, the text also provides an opportunity for the king to commandeer additional social power and effectively transcend the limitations of the established caste hierarchy.

The first means by which the *SLP* allows the king to cleanse himself of sin we will observe here is that of the Sāmrājyalakṣmī *yantra*, detailed in the *SLP*'s fourth chapter. The *yantra* is virtually inseparable from the Sāmrājyalakṣmī mantra, and each one is only ritually effective based on its use alongside the other, for a deity cannot be pleased unless worshipped by mantra (4.5). The text provides extensive details for the construction of

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*yantras*, which consist of intersecting triangles forming a *cakra* that contains the *bīja* of Śrī at its centre, and various deities placed around this at the corners. When the Sāmrājyalakṣmī *yantra* is properly constructed, the king is to give worship first to Śrī, then each of the other deities. By doing this, the king attains *siddhi*, or perfection. Further, all dangers and evil spirits distance themselves from the king, with enemies becoming his friends and all malevolent planets becoming subservient to him (4.15-16). And, most importantly for our purposes, the effects of demerit disintegrate for the practitioner, as we are informed by verse 4.15 that "his sins are destroyed" ("*tasya pāpāni naśyanti*"). Brahmin priests are not explicitly connected to this ritual, suggesting that the king can encounter the *yantra* independent of the priests and still reap the benefit of having his sins forgiven. It is the goddess alone, seemingly, who can absolve the king who performs these tantric rites.

Another crucial ritual described in the *SLP* is the *kumārī pūjā*, a trademark Śākta-tantra ritual involving the worship of young girls as the embodiments of *śakti*. The text considers the performance of this ritual mandatory during Navarātra, though it also recommends that the king perform *kumārī pūjā* during other celebrations, as well as on the ninth of every month. The king must also undertake the ritual in crises, such as when an enemy is about to attack, or when the kingdom is disintegrating (110.36-37). The ritual as described in the *SLP* involves nine premenstrual girls ranging in age from two to ten years and carefully selected on account of their caste affiliation as well as a number of physical features (110.3; 24). Each girl is given a specific name of a goddess, and each

provides different forms of blessing to the king. By worshipping varying numbers of the girls, one can expect different rewards: worshipping eight, fittingly, results in the eight supernatural powers, while worshipping nine guarantees overlord-ship (110.19-23). During Navarātra, the king ideally worships one more virgin than he did the previous day as the festival proceeds, hence maximizing his payoffs (110.27-30).

Interestingly, the worship itself blends both Vedic and tantric elements, with specific ritual actions varying depending upon the caste to which any given girl belongs. Twice born girls receive traditional worship, with offerings of perfume, flowers, rice, and garments, while low-caste Śūdra girls receive more transgressive offerings such as liquor and meat (110.31-33). This marks one of the few junctures in which the *SLP* propounds use of any of the *pañcamakāras*. No matter the caste of the girl, worship proceeds with the participant praising each girl for the specific blessing she bestows. The blessings conferred by these girls range from wealth to fame, and as we may have come to expect, both the destruction of enemies and the forgiveness of sins. It is Śāṃbhavī, the eight-year-old girl worshipped on the second day, who possesses the latter capacity. Verse 110.17 states that her worship not only relieves suffering and penury, but also nullifies the effects of the king's *mahāpāpā*, or "great sins" ("*mahāpāpapraṇāśāya śāṃbhavī pūjayennṛpaḥ*"). Here again we have another means by which worship of goddess-figures enables the king to forgive his sins in a context in which he is the primary ritual actor.

Our last major example takes us back towards the start of the text to look at the all-important formula of Sāmrājyalakṣmī, detailed in the early stages of the third *paṭala*. This

mantra reads as follows: "*Om namaḥ bhagavatyai sāmrājyadāyai lakṣmyai svāhā*" (3.6-7). When properly spoken, the *SLP* claims that this formula grants the *siddhis*, or magical powers, to kings. In addition, it also bestows empires upon deserving kings (citing ancient kings Nābhāga[80] and Nahuṣa[81] as examples of previous users of the mantra who gained exceptional powers), and provides them with wealth, enjoyment, fame and salvation. Most importantly for our purposes, verse 3.4 describes the formula in as "destroyer of all sins" *("sāmrājyalakṣmyā mantrastu sarvapāpaharaḥ paraḥ").* The king is to recite the formula as he meditates on the form of the goddess, and while the *pūjā* ritual is to conclude with the king entertaining Brahmins at a feast, at no point is the presence of the Brahmin necessary during the recitation of Sāmrājyalakṣmi's formula itself in order for it to take effect. Thus, with the Sāmrājyalakṣmī formula, the *SLP* renders the king as capable of the task of obliterating his accumulated demerits as anyone else, a notion that, if only latent in this and the other ritual practices we have observed, becomes explicit three *paṭalas* later.

The sixth *paṭala* deals with a number of occasions during which the repetition of the Sāmrājyalakṣmī formula can be most efficacious (Sarangi 1993, 53). The very first of these occasions concerns instances in which the king wants to destroy his sins. If the practitioner wants to rid himself of accumulated transgressions, then he is advised to encase the formula from *Ṛg Veda Khila* (appendix) 9.67.7 within the Sāmrājyalakṣmī formula, then, while touching with his hand the yantras already described, he must repeat

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80  Nābhāga was one of the ten sons of Manu.
81  Nahuṣa was a prominent king of the ancient Indian Aila dynasty mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*.

the encased formula one thousand times. All of his sins will then disappear, a result that

occurs, once again, without the immediate presence of the Brahmin during the ritual.

Truth be told, the Brahmin is not altogether absent from the process, as the completion of

the round of *japa* is to be concluded with, among other activities, the traditional donations

to a suitable Brahmin (Sarangi 1993, 54). However, it is the king who is most efficacious

at this ritual, and so we can perhaps infer the primacy given to the riddance of sins on this

list is indeed meaningful, as the ritual in itself strengthens the king's ability to forgive his

own sins while greatly reducing the Brahminical involvement in the task. This inference

is virtually confirmed when we read the helpful note attached to these instructions in

verses 6.6: "If one is not able to do the mantra oneself, it can be done by employing a

Vipra [Brahmin] who recites the mantra two times in order to make the aforementioned

results happen." This verse provides alternatives to a king who does not feel competent to

perform this *japa* all by himself, for he can also employ a Brahmin to perform the

repetition. However, to get the optimum results in such cases, the number of repetitions of

the formula spoken by the Brahmin has to be *doubled* ("*dviguṇam kārayet*"). Therefore,

while the king must repeat the formula 1000 times to have his sins forgiven, the Brahmin

must say it 2000 times to accomplish the same task on behalf of the king. This appears to

be a direct blow against the Brahmins as per their ability to forgive the sins of the ruler, a

task which the *SLP* evidently finds better suited for the ruler himself. Thus, while a

Brahmin can be involved in the ritual, the king remains the ideal performer of the ritual

for ridding himself of sin. It seems, then, that the *SLP* puts forward a very strong

endorsement of the king's own ritual efficacy, with verses such as 6.4-6 suggesting that it is on par with or, on certain occasions, even greater than that of the Brahmin.

Thus, while helping kings to destroy enemies, the *SLP* also provides many opportunities for the king to forgive his own sin via contact with the goddess via tantric rituals like mantra, *yantra* and *kumārī pūjā*. This is fitting of a text named for Lakṣmī, for in a number of the aforementioned verses the goddess fully lives up to her classical role, as ancient as *Śrī*, as the granter of forgiveness par excellence – the diametrical opposite to *pāpa*. We have limited our focus here to examples wherein the forgiveness of sins is obtained via specific intervention of the goddess or her related surrogates, though there are numerous other instances in the text in which forgiveness is granted as a result of ritual performance on the part of a king, to the extent that the text seems obsessed with the notion.[82] And this obsession is most fitting of a text concerning kingship, for the absolution of sin, as well as the party who has the power to absolve it, is crucial for the Indian king. Violence is an unavoidable aspect of kingship, and the *SLP* is aware of this reality, for it even makes great efforts to enable this violence. However, the text has put a

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82 For instance, verse 116.2-6 suggests that the worship of Śiva and Pārvatī during Mārgaśīrṣa helps to remove sins as well as destroy enemies (Sarangi 1993, 235). Worshipping Rāma on Rāmanavamīvrata is said to do the very same (84.4-8; Sarangi 1993, 168-169). The observance of Śivarātrī is considered among the most effective festivals for destroying sins, even the most egregious ones (118.1-2; Sarangi 1993, 238). Repetitions of syllables to Viṣṇu, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa on Navarātra also rid one of all types of sin (97.5-19; Sarangi 1991, 192). *Paṭala* 89 describes the "sacred ablution of Viṣṇu with 1000 water-filled pitchers," which involves the consecration of an idol of Viṣṇu with various sacred substances, and then finally with one thousand pitchers of sacred water. The king is to perform this ritual on his own so as to receive long-life, physical strength, and the pleasure of Lord Viṣṇu, as well as the destruction of sins (89.5-8). Another such ritual takes place among the festivities involved in the birthday celebrations of Kṛṣṇa. The *SLP* reminds the reader that when this day is in conjunction with the asterisms Prājāpatya or Rohiṇī, it is known as Jayantī – "the remover of great sins" (92.4). On such a day, after the king has performed a number of preparatory pūjas, he is to worship and make offerings to Kṛṣṇa. By doing this successfully, the *SLP* claims the king will gain a number of benefits, most importantly the removal of all sins (92.17-23).

mechanism in place so that kings will not really suffer the traditional disadvantages of violence, that is, dependence on Brahmins, for now they are just as (if not more) capable of destroying the residue of their mandated force. Considering the latter example dealing with the repetition of the Sāmrājyalakṣmī formula, it appears the authors of the *SLP* had a definite agenda to expand forgiveness of the king's sins out of the jurisdiction of the Brahmin alone and place it directly into that of the king himself. Now in possession of this ability to absolve so much more efficiently by himself, the king's power was effectively without limitation.

## Conclusions

While the *SLP* is encyclopaedic and therefore opaque in regards to its overall intentions, the allowances it makes for the king to destroy his enemies while at the same time forgiving his own sins suggests that the text was well aware of the classical conundrums of Indian kingship identified by Heesterman and Shulman, among others. Further, by transferring the locus of forgiveness from Brahmins to the king himself, the *SLP* moves towards a solution to this ancient difficulty. Now the king has access to the transcendent world without an interlocutor. As such, the king possessing and employing the *SLP* becomes freed of the shackles that kept his authority rooted in the Brahmins; theoretically, he is now fully independent, the Brahmins no longer compromising his power. By that token, only the king is left as the most powerful figure in the kingdom, wielding both political and spiritual power. *SLP*, then, can be identified as one mechanism

that developed within a particular time and place in Indian history to afford a king the opportunity to "arrogate greater power" (to borrow Shulman's phrasing). Now the king has a hand in two powerful religious systems at once – the Vedic and the tantric, the transcendent and the worldly – and so he has circumvented the perpetual difficulty of Indian kingship, thereby attaining to powers beyond the reach of the conventional Indian king or Brahmin.

This power gained from Sāmrājyalakṣmī was not overtly displayed in the public sphere, for, as we have seen throughout the *SLP* and with Vijayanagara, the Brahmins still played an important role in the public ritual life of the king. While this ability to forgive his own sins evidently did not affect the frequency or intensity of gifting to Brahmins – which as we have seen only flourished at Vijayanagara, particularly during the time of Kṛṣṇadevarāya – it was conceivably a significant achievement for the king and those members of the private circles with whom he developed and conducted these tantric rites. In his private, and apparently secretive (given the nature of the *SLP*) ritual life, surrounded by only a few of his most intimate preceptors, the king was validated as a much more powerful entity in two important ways. Firstly, the king's enhanced ability to both destroy and forgive allowed him to uphold his dharma more effectively, for now he could commit violence without worry of the sinful residue and the dependence upon Brahmins that it perpetuates. Secondly, the king's ability to forgive his own sins provided him with a vote of confidence that he was just as spiritually capable as a Brahmin, if not more so. As with the magico-religious powers he could accumulate via the *siddhis*, the

ability to absolve himself of sin once again reassured the king that he and he alone was truly the supreme sovereign entity in the kingdom, if not of the world at large and in the universe itself. Moving past his violent, fragile, conflicted, and dependent nature, the king could rule self-assuredly knowing it is he who truly holds the balance of power. The *SLP* seeks to realize within the king's private ritual life the vision of the king that was portrayed publicly during Vasantotsava and Mahānavamī: the truly supreme political and spiritual entity that no Brahmin or group thereof could hope to supersede or even match, no matter what tradition dictated. This king is the *siddha*, divinity on earth, and, like a god, he destroys his enemies and expands his kingdom without suffering for it. The categories of spiritual and political power collapse into one another, as both are proven to be limitless, and in this way the *SLP* encourages the king to proceed unimpeded towards overlord-ship.

**Conclusions**

*Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā* realized that it was not just political power but also spiritual power that was necessary to build empires, the latter nourishing the former. Through a program of tantric rituals and practices, the *Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā* offered kings ritual power in two very crucial ways. Firstly, the text sacralises the person of the king by affording him magico-religious powers, or *aṣṭaiśvaryas*. These powers, along with the assurance of the vivifying and protective contributions of royal divinities such as bountiful crops and the ability to destroy enemies, allowed the king to step into the role of royal divinity on earth. Indeed, with the goddess Sāmrājyalakṣmī invoked within him, the king became *sarvadevātman (*"the king whose self is made of all the gods"*)* and *pratyakṣya-daivatam (*"he who is seen as a god"). Secondly, the text provides the king a means to not only destroy his enemies more effectively, but in the same ritual space also allows him to do away with the demerit accumulated by these compulsory acts of violence. This gives the king a relative degree of independence from the Brahmins, whom traditionally took responsibility for destroying the sin accumulated by kings upholding their dharma. Thus, the ideal king who followed the *SLP* and created for himself an independent ritual life therewith was destined to become both god on earth and soteriological free agent. Deigning to no one, the king was free to expand his kingdom in all directions, his newfound ritual capability transmuted directly into political power.

Considering the *SLP*'s orientation towards large kingdoms and overlord-ship, the fact that the text likely developed at Vijayanagara – the supposed "Hindu bulwark" – is not such a surprise after all. Most obviously, Vijayanagara kings were intent upon just this type of universal, trans-local kingship, with Kṛṣṇadevarāya perhaps best exemplifying this

spirit of empire-building.[83] This thirst for arrogating power and land also fed into more ancient Brahmin-Kṣatriya caste tensions, which were evidently still applicable at sixteenth century Vijayanagara. Kings still made large offerings to Brahmins as not only a display of wealth but also for the absolutions of sins made inevitable by their violent dharma, and the *SLP* is one source that confirms just as much. And this is to be expected, for the numerous campaigns to foreign lands, particularly during the Tuḷuva dynasty, assure us that there was no shortage of kingly violence at Vijayanagara. That this reliance upon Brahmins and the inferiority of political to religious power it entailed was problematic to Vijayanagara kings is also made evident during the public festivals, which often sought to playfully overturn existing hierarchies. Faced with these difficulties, the author or authors of the *SLP* sifted through the Vijayanagara milieu – inclusivistic, pluralistic and replete with a variety of religious traditions – and brought forth tantric practices as a means by which the king could become more self-sufficient ritually.

Evidently, the self-absolving *siddha*-kings of the *SLP* did not render the established tradition of *dāna* obsolete, and the strong possibility that the *SLP* circulated in secrecy suggests that its author or authors did not seek to render such overt change in the social sphere. Rather, as I think is evident on account of its secretive nature, the *SLP* sought to create a covert, ritual world where the king could enhance his spiritual power in the private sphere to match the image of divine, wholly sovereign kingship which was displayed time and again during festivals.[84] The god-like powers and the ability to absolve

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83 While Kṛṣṇadevarāya's urge to expand his kingdom was undeniable, Narayana Rao, Shulman & Subrahmanyam (2004) have also identified what they refer to as a "renunciatory" aesthetic in the king's literary work *Āmuktamālyada*. Given what we have seen in the *SLP*, I think it will be the role of future biographers of Kṛṣṇadevarāya to answer this question of whether the king was a renunciate or a *siddha*, or if he managed to synthesize the two perspectives.

84 It is not much of a stretch to believe that Vijayanagara kings sought to develop this kind of secretive ritual setting. The ritual space at the principal shrine at the Rāmacandra temple – quite possibly the main sanctum of the Tuḷuva kings – is notably limited, which suggests that its use was restricted for an elite circle consisting of only the king, his priests, and possibly the royal ministers (Fritz, Michell & Rao 1984, 149).

himself independently of the Brahmins was all part of what seems to be a private vote of confidence assuring the king that his unique combination of religious and political power made him the supreme entity on the earth. White has suggested that the religious power created by tantra, when operating on this kind of clandestine level, "controls the invisible forces of the universe from the hidden 'center' of the *tāntrika's* 'peripheral' shrine, monastery or lodge" (2000, 26). Evidently, with the *SLP* it is the king who is *tāntrika*, and it is the palace that becomes the shrine – the hidden center at the *very* center of society, as it were. The king-as-*tāntrika* is not the "other-within" but rather the apotheosis-at-the-very-core. The king's newfound tantric power could now project outwards from this private ritual centre at the palace, spreading throughout the kingdom and the world beyond, which was now well established as being his for the taking.

While this kind of centralized tantric power in the hands of kings put the ruler above and beyond the established caste hierarchy, the *SLP* does not necessarily run in counterpoint to Brahminical society, but in fact serves to its benefit. While the king actualizes immense spiritual power of his own via the relatively private world of the *SLP*, he maintains the public theatre of Brahmin-Kṣatriya interdependence by keeping up the tradition of public gift-giving, which thrived at Vijayanagara, particularly during the time of Kṛṣṇadevarāya. Thus, the Brahmins' apparent monopoly over the transcendent goes on unimpeded in the public sphere, and society is undisturbed. In fact, the king's rituals are to the solid advantage of the entire kingdom, as they provide the people with a king in control of his soteriological and existential situation – a king who can dwell in the transcendent realm without having to leave the immanent social sphere. Free to destroy enemies without worry of sinful residues, the king can protect his people and expand their territory even more readily. Thus, the *SLP* critiques Brahminical society in the most

effective way: covertly, providing a re-evaluation and re-invigoration of the traditional social order without disrupting it. This echoes Brooks' assertion based on his work with the Śrīvidyā tradition that "the Tantric way of life does not intend to overturn the established social order but rather offer[s] a more soteriologically efficacious alternative to the qualified few" (Brooks 1990, 24). In this sense, the *SLP* is truly tantric, and once again would have us call into question the persistent trend in scholarly and popular understandings to describe tantra as "antinomian."

Taking all this into consideration, the notion of "tantric kingship" no longer seems so paradoxical. In fact, it seems perfectly obvious why a king would want to engage a tantric text like the *SLP* that could prove so empowering. That tantra was so well suited to have positive effects on kingship is not unprecedented – in fact, the two traditions have been interwoven at numerous nodes across the history of India and beyond, with emperorship variously serving as the metaphorical goal of the tantric, and tantric attainment serving as an aspect of actual emperorship (Davidson 2002). The *SLP*, then, provides what is just one among several examples of tantric kingship in the Indian, Tibetan and Southeast Asian traditions, both Buddhist and Hindu. The resemblance between the *Kālikā Purāṇa* and *SLP* is particularly pronounced, as both offer support to White's observation that tantra is often essential to the formation of royal authority and power, with the king being the "Tantric actor par excellence" (2000, 24). Both texts offer the king religious power via *siddhis*, all the while making allowances for the undertaking of violence, ultimately serving to tip the balance of power in the caste hierarchy from the Brahmin to the king.[85] There are, however, also some notable differences between these

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85 *SLP* and *Kālikā Purāṇa* may share an additional feature when it comes to the issue of authorship. On the topic Urban has suggested that the *Kālikā Purāṇa* probably arose out "a negotiation between Assam's kings ... and the Brahman priests whom they patronized" (2001, 790). Considering the importance of patronage, I think that the *SLP* was composed out of a similar collaborative dialogue – that is, the king's closest Brahmin preceptors probably developed the *SLP* with shared intentions of massaging the presiding

texts, one of the foremost being the *Kālikā Purāṇa*'s employment, in Urban's estimation, of transgression for the purpose of blatantly inverting societal norms to commandeer power, a process which is not present in the *SLP* (Urban 2001). In fact, aside from a few references to the *pañcamakāras* and *kumārī pūjā*, the *SLP* contains little in the way of transgressive inversions. While the *Kālikā Purāṇa* would apparently have kingly violence sublimated into the power of impurity, the *SLP* enables this violence and allows the king to absolve himself of its deleterious effects. Moreover, while Urban's Assamese example emerges from what is a tantric hotbed where such crossovers of the kingly and tantric spheres could be expected,[86] the *SLP* arises out of what is by comparison a relatively conservative Hindu context both geographically and historically, wherein tantra has been found to have only a minimal presence, at best. And as we have seen, the *SLP* serves as a very centralized if not conservative force in its own right. Indeed, this is not a peripheral tantra set to overturn societal norms but rather one based in the central figure of the ruler himself, determined to expand the established order of the "true" king (to borrow White's phrasing). Evidently, the *SLP*'s ideas appealed to future Indian kings. That Marāṭhā kings such as Tuḷajā owned personal copies of the *SLP* suggests the text may have played a role similar to that of the *Rāyavācakamu*, preserving the distinctly Vijayanagara-era ideals of universal (and in this case tantric) kingship for later kingdoms.

Thus, with the *SLP* as just one example, it seems that tantric kingship may have been a more widespread phenomenon in India than we might initially imagine, though it has evidently existed in highly diverse and regionally-bound forms. These examples give

king's ego by making him into such a ritually and politically eminent figure. As a reward for their service, these Brahmins potentially reaped the benefits of the king's generosity. Future studies on the *SLP* will need to take a closer look at the question of authorship.

86 Indian and Western scholars, Urban among them, have often agreed that Assam is one of the birthplaces of tantra, for it is the location in which many key tantric texts are said to have been revealed (see Urban 2010, 8-10).

us pause to reevaluate our conceptualizations of both tantra and kingship. Prevailing typologies of Śākta-tantric practice, such as that provided by McDaniel (2004), do not provide a category for intersections of the royal and tantric. Considering the *SLP* alongside these other examples, it becomes clear that a category for "imperial tantra" needs to be added to these existing Śākta-tantra typologies or any to follow.[87] Similarly, I propose that "tantric kingship" should no longer be absent from typologies of South Indian kingship. Stein (1978) held the "ritual" mode of South Indian kingship to have been based mostly upon the śāstric and Purāṇic textual traditions, and to these we might add on the basis of the *SLP* "tantric" texts as a valid source. Further, Stein's conception of ritual kingship was also tied up mostly in *dāna* as well as other public ceremonies (1978, 134-146). Having observed the *SLP*, we can now augment our understanding of ritual kingship by adding that some kings also had a relatively private ritual life wherein many of the benefits that would have appeared exclusive to the public giftings were additionally (if not alternatively) attained.

If the true king is the tantric king, as is suggested in texts like the *SLP* and the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, as well as traditions such as the Setupatis' worship of Rājarājeśvarī, then notions of tantra as an inherently peripheral category of religion are again called into question. Readily amenable to the business of kingship, tantric materials are in these cases not an antinomian presence, but rather, in their ability to influence statecraft, they are a decidedly conservative one. That is, mantra, *yantra* and other tantric ritual mechanisms work at the very core of the kingdom to preserve and expand society rather than to subvert it. Therefore, tantra is not essentially peripheral or even exclusively a process that

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87 That said, imperial tantra may be difficult to tease apart from other aspects McDaniel's existing categories. For instance, she proposes that the category of "folk tantra," unlike classical tantra, is very much concerned with attaining the *siddhis*. Interestingly, the tantra of the *SLP* is as we have seen also fixated upon the accumulation of these kinds of powers, suggesting that tantric kingship is as much tied up in the folk tantric system as the classical.

proceeds from the periphery towards the centre, but it can also work *at* the center *for* the

center, its benefits presumably proceeding outward from there.

With boundaries collapsing between periphery and centre, king and *tāntrika*,

mainstream and esoteric, not to mention Vedic and tantric, among others, one may wonder

what we can say definitively about the category of religion labeled as tantra. Because of

these ambiguities, it will be helpful to continue thinking about tantra as a polythetic

category as per Jonathan Z. Smith's assertions, as well as Douglas Brooks' convenient list

of ten properties. It may also be helpful to conceptualize tantra not as strictly a discrete

phenomenon, category, counter-movement or branch of South Asian religion, but rather as

particular mode or ritual syntax that forms a pervasive, if not immediately obvious, aspect

of Hindu ritual. For instance, it is almost impossible to think of South Indian temple ritual

without tantra working alongside the Vedic systems.[88] By conceptualizing tantra as a ritual

syntax or modality, we might better understand why tantric elements so frequently turn up

not just in kingship but also in various other elements of "mainstream" Hindu ritual.

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88 Since the early medieval period, much of South Indian temple liturgy has been deeply rooted in the Śaiva Āgamas and the closely related Śākta-tantras (Davis 1991, 9-10). See Davis (1991) for a detailed survey of tantric ideas as they relate to South Indian temple rituals.

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