VELCHERU NARAYANA RAO
GENE H. ROGHAIR

Siva's Warriors

The Basava Purana of Palkuriki Somanatha

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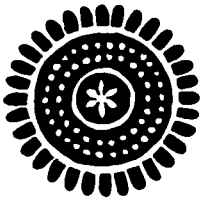
The *Basava Purāṇa* of Pālkuriki Somanātha

Translated from the Telugu by
Velcheru Narayana Rao

Assisted by Gene H. Roghair



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FOR DAVID SHULMAN

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Translation

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This translation has taken a long time to complete. When I did the first draft with the assistance of Gene Roghair, supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1979, I knew it was not nearly ready for publication. There were far too many unclear passages and unknown words and references.

Somanātha was not easy to understand. We benefited immensely from the pioneering research in Śaiva works by Veturi Prabhakara Sastri and Cilukuri Narayana Rao, and especially from the prefaces written by Prabhakara Sastri to his edition of the *Basava Purāṇa* and by Narayana Rao to his edition of the *Paṇḍitārādhya Caritra*. But the text of the *Basava Purāṇa* itself had no commentary and there was little help available for the many words and references not listed in dictionaries and glossaries.

In Hyderabad I read three chapters of the book with Nidadavolu Venkata Rao, a renowned scholar of Śaivite literature. Although he was ailing at that time, he kindly read the text with me. He was very helpful, but still questions persisted.

I visited India on other trips, consulted scholars, read Śaivite works not available in the United States, and tried to make sense of difficult passages. Years went by and progress was slow.

Then Cekuri Ramarao gave me a rare copy of the *Padya Basava Purāṇamu* of Piḍuparti Somanātha. This was a verse retelling of Pālkuriki Somanātha's *Basava Purāṇa*, for which I had been looking for years. This book helped me immensely in understanding many unclear passages in the *Basava Purāṇa*.

Soon after that I met with Mallampalli Sarabhesvara Sarma, a practicing Śaivite and probably the best-informed scholar of Śaiva texts in Andhra today. I read with him all seven chapters of the *Basava Purāṇa* during two of my visits to India, in 1986 and 1987. At that point I was reasonably comfortable with my understanding of the text and made my last revision of the translation.

I acknowledge the help I received from both Nidadavolu Venkata Rao and Mallampalli Sarabhesvara Sarma with gratitude. Responsibility for the translation, however, is entirely mine.

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The final version of the translation was completed in Jerusalem, at the Institute for Advanced Studies, Hebrew University. I am deeply thankful to its director, Professor Menahem Yaari and its deputy director, Schabtai Gairon, for the facilities provided me.

The translation would not have been completed without the support, encouragement, and expertise of David Shulman, who has stood by me and helped me finish it. He has been my guide and friend. To him I dedicate this book.

ABBREVIATIONS

AITM	J. L. Sastri, ed., *Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology*. 6 vols. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970
BP	Pālkuriki Somanātha, *Basava Purāṇa*
LP	*Liṅga Purāṇa*
PBP	Piḍuparti Somanātha, *Basava Purānamu: Padyakāvyamu*, popularly known as *Padya Basava Purāṇamu*
PC	Pālkuriki Somanātha, *Paṇḍitārādhya Caritra*
PP	*Pĕriya Purāṇam*
SP	*Śiva Purāṇa*

GUIDE TO PRONUNCIATION

Telugu is a South Indian Dravidian language very different in phonetic structure and vocabulary from Sanskrit, an Indo-European language. But literary Telugu has assimilated a vast number of words from Sanskrit. We have used standard, modern transliteration for Indian languages. All Sanskrit words and names are spelled as they are in Telugu. (Feminine nouns and names ending in long *ī* or long *ā* are given with their Telugu short endings.) The following guide is meant to provide approximate sound values for those unfamiliar with Telugu.

Vowels

a like the *u* in but
ā like the *a* in father
i like the *i* in pill
ī like the *i* in machine
u like the *u* in put
ū like the *u* in rule
ṛ is a short vocalic *r* pronounced like the *ri* in rig.

ĕ like the *e* in bet
e like the *a* in gate
ai like the *ai* in aisle
ŏ like the *o* in no
o like the *o* in rote
au like the *ow* in now

Consonants

Consonants may be pronounced like their English equivalents, with the following exceptions.

Aspriated consonants (*kh, gh, ch, jh, th, dh, ph, bh*) should be pronounced with a strong explosion of breath after the initial consonant. For instance, *ph* is to be pronounced like the *ph* in uphill (though as a single sound), and, similarly, *th* should be pronounced like the *th* in anthill.

C is like the *ch* in child. In words of Telugu origin, *c* is pronounced somewhat like the English *ts* before a front vowel (*a, ā, u, ū, ŏ, o, au*). Similarly, in words originally Telugu, *j* is pronounced somewhat like the English *dz* before the same front vowels.

Ṭ, ṭh, ḍ, ḍh, the nasal *ṇ* and *ḷ* are retroflex cerebral sounds, pronounced with the tongue folded back against the roof of the mouth.

ṇ like the *n* in -ing
y like the *y* in yellow
r like the *r* in drama
ś like the English *sh* but with the tongue closer to the teeth
ṣ like the English *sh*
jñ is approximately *gnya*

(Adapted from Heifetz and Narayana Rao, 1987, pp. 175–178.)

Śiva's Warriors

Image of Kannappa in Kāḷahastīśvara Temple at Kāḷahasti, in Andhra Pradesh, state of

INTRODUCTION

The *Basava Purāṇa* (BP), an important religious text of the Vīraśaivas (heroic Śaivas) of South India, was composed in Telugu, probably in the thirteenth century, by Pālkuriki Somanātha. It is an anthology of legends of Vīraśaiva saints known as *bhaktas* (devotees) and a hagiography of Basaveśvara, the twelfth-century leader of the Vīraśaiva movement. Vīraśaivism, also known as Liṅgayatism, is a militantly antibrahmin sectarian religion.

Legends about Somanātha's Life and Death

Although there is little reliable information about Somanātha's life (more about this later), and although Somanātha himself showed great reluctance to speak about his life—he describes himself only as a bhakta and a strict follower of the Vīraśaiva code of conduct—Somanātha has grown into a cult figure in Andhra and Karnataka. There are so many legends about the miracles and powers he demonstrated that an entire hagiographic tradition has grown around his name.

An incident involving the BP and Somanātha was related by Piḍuparti Somanātha, the poet who, some three hundred years later, rewrote the *Basava Purāṇa* in the meters of the Sanskrit *mārga* tradition: one day some Vīraśaivas were listening to a reading of the BP in a Śiva temple in Orugallu (present-day Warangal) when King Pratāpa Rudra happened to visit the temple. He asked, "What's going on here?" Brahmins who were accompanying the king told him that the Śaiva devotees were listening to a reading of the *Basava Purāṇa*. When the king asked to know more about it, an evil brahmin told the king that it was a new work composed by the sinner Pālkuriki Somanātha, who had made the couplets in *dvipada* (a popular meter) with poor caesura. This was not standard, and indeed had never been done before. Having heard this, the king left without paying any more attention to the reading.

Angered by this event, the Vīraśaivas went to Somanātha and asked his permission to kill the brahmin who had so insulted their text. Somanātha listened to their complaint and decided that if he did not take

action, the honor of his devotees would not be protected. He vowed that he would have the brahmins defeated in a dispute with an ordinary human being.

Somanātha headed for the city of Warangal in a bullock cart marked with *liṅga* imprints. A group of his opponents gathered together some hooligans, dressed them up as Śaiva devotees with spurious liṅgas, and sent them to receive Somanātha at the city gate. But when the disguised hooligans bowed to Somanātha, their liṅgas became real and they turned into genuine Śaiva devotees.

Somanātha then arrived at the king's fort. At the entrance was the image of the goddess Lakṣmi. His bulls came to a halt because they, as Śiva's servants, could not respect the goddess, who was the consort of Viṣṇu. At Somanātha's command, the image fell to pieces. Hearing of this incident, the king reportedly ran to Somanātha, seeking his forgiveness and protection.

Somanātha then remained in the city for some time. When he decided to leave, he warned his devotees that shortly afterward Muslims would overrun the area. He spent his old age in the village of Kalikemu in Karnataka. At the time of his death, he sat on a heap of ashes and commanded his disciples to protect his body after he died. At the time of his death Śiva appeared before him and invited him to his abode on Kailāsa. Somanātha responded: "If you opened my grave and took me away without anybody knowing about it, people would say that I had run away. And if you did so without opening my grave, people would say that my body had rotted. So take me to Kailāsa in such a way that everyone will see that I entered your body and also that my vow not to look at a *bhavi* [non-Vīraśaiva] is not broken." Śiva took the form of a crystal bull, drew Somanātha inside the bull, and remained on the grave for a while, in full view of all the devotees.[1]

Another Telugu text, the *Pālkuriki Someśvara Purāṇamu*, narrates in addition to the above story an incident of religious dispute Somanātha had with a Vaiṣṇava scholar Cakrapāṇi Raṅganātha. Somanātha, who had vowed not to look at a non-Śaivite, consented to participate in the argument from behind a curtain. Somanātha did not even have to argue; his son Caturmukhabasaveśvara defeated Raṅganātha. The humiliated Vaiṣṇava left the city, and on his way he approached the great Śaivite religious center, Śrīśailam; there he refused to see the god Mallikārjuna inside the temple. As a result of this failure, he lost his eyesight. He then went to the Vaiṣṇavite deity Narasiṁhasvāmi at Ahobilam, who appeared in his dream and exhorted him on the superiority of Śiva. Raṅganātha returned to Śrīśailam and regained sight in one of his eyes. He came to Somanātha to ask for forgiveness, and was

granted the sight in his other eye. He became a devotee of Somanātha and composed a hymn on Śiva.[2]

Somanātha's scholarly talents were eulogized by a number of Śaivite poets; among them the most articulate was Piḍuparti Somanātha, who wrote:

> Infinite power of meaning flows from his tongue
> even before he writes anything down.
> He did not have to learn the methods of meter and grammar;
> he has the skill of making poems in his mind.
> Earlier than learning the great commentary on grammar he has
> perfected his learning in Rudra commentary.
> He knew how to destroy the opponent's arguments
> without having to learn the texts on logic.
>
> Can I adequately praise Somanātha?
> He is renowned with titles such as
> the sharp spear on the skulls of Jainas
> and the hero who beheaded the evil Bijjala.[3]

The *Basava Purāṇa* in Its Literary and Social Context

The profoundly tendentious antibrahminism reflected in these legends about Somanātha is apparent in the BP itself, in the very style Somanātha chose to write in. Literary historians recognize two distinct traditions in Telugu literature, *mārga* (Sanskritic) and *deśi* (indigenous). The mārga tradition begins with Nannayya, the eleventh-century poet who retold the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* in Telugu, under the patronage of King Rājanarendra, the Eastern Cāḷukya king of Veṅgi. Nannayya, called the first poet in Telugu literature, borrowed meters from Sanskrit. The genre that he introduced, called *campū*, combines verse and prose in one common narration. In adopting this genre, Nannayya was influenced by the Kannada poet Pampa, who in the tenth century had first rendered the *Mahābhārata* into Kannada. Through his writing, Nannayya continued to popularize brahminic religion. In contrast, Pālkuriki Somanātha adopted the deśi style and composed his works in dvipada. This was a meter popular in oral tradition and was closely related to the meters of folk songs. In the prefatory remarks to the BP, Somanātha states his preference for deśi meters:

> Since beautiful, idiomatic Telugu is more commonly understood
> than heavy compositions of mixed prose and verse, I have chosen

> to compose this entirely in the dvipada meter. Let it not be said that these words are nothing but Telugu. Rather, look at them as equal to the Vedas. If you wonder how that can be, remember, "If a *tūmu* is a standard for measure, so is a *sola*." Is it not generally agreed that the stature of a poet derives from his ability to compose great poetry in simple language? (p. 44 below)

Somanātha was clearly aware of the dominant position that Sanskrit and the Sanskritic campū style enjoyed in Telugu poetry during his time. His apologetic tone in recommending his dvipada work to his listeners and readers is indicative of the beginnings of a new tradition in the face of strong opposition. In his later work, the *Paṇḍitārādhya Caritra* (PC), which was also composed in dvipada meter, the poet spoke much more confidently. In a long passage at the beginning of the PC, Somanātha describes the poetic excellence of dvipada and its worth in comparison with "noble works composed in prose and verse." He declares, punning on the name *dvi-pada* (two feet, two honors): "It is called a *dvipada* because it leads to the two honors, of this world and the other world."[4] Somanātha also refused even to mention the names of any other poets in his work. Nannayya had paid homage at the beginning of his work to the Sanskrit epic poet Vyāsa, and later poets paid respect to Nannayya, along with the other major Sanskrit and Telugu poets. Somanātha, in contrast, failed to mention any other poet, Sanskrit or Telugu. He said, instead, that he had learned his poetic art from his religious guru.

In the mārga tradition, poets borrowed their themes from a well-known source—almost always from Sanskrit—and rendered them into Telugu, which effectively discouraged the use of local themes. Not only the stories but also the authority of the mārga poets was derived from the great poets of Sanskrit such as Vyāsa and Vālmīki, who possessed the status of sages, and from those venerated Telugu poets who had begun the mārga tradition. Furthermore, the poets enjoyed the patronage of kings or other persons of royal status; it was conventional for any poet to designate the patron who had requested a poem as the chief listener of his work.

Somanātha's rejection of Sanskritic, brahminic, literary conventions was complete. He based his book on the stories of great bhaktas that were popular in oral traditions among the Vīraśaivas. He sought instruction regarding such stories from the local assembly of bhaktas rather than from a Sanskrit poet-sage. Finally, he made his friend, rather than a king, the audience for his poem. Somanātha's dissociation

from previous literary tradition, therefore, marks the commencement of a new school of poetry, usually called the Śaiva school.

Somanātha emphasized his opposition to the brahminic tradition by explicitly stating that he never associated with bhavis, non-Vīraśaivas. In BP he declared: "I avoid showing respect, holding conversation, or any other kind of association with bhavis. My name is Pālkuriki Somanātha. I am a man of pure character" (p. 43). Later, in the PC, he grew even more severe:

> I reject rice produced by bhavis, food seen by them, fruit, vegetables, and leaves handled by them; I avoid their houses, lands, trees, and money; I do not see them, touch them, talk to them, or deal with them in any way in either giving or taking from them. I am known as Pālkuriki Somanātha; I am a scholar of the four Vedas.[5]

Even though Somanātha vehemently rejected brahminism and brahminic literary styles, he accepted the Vedas, the *purāṇas*, and the *śāstras*. He repeatedly stated that he was a scholar of the "four Vedas," and also asserted that Vīraśaivism was in complete conformity with the Vedas and śāstras. Throughout the BP, the PC, and his other works, there are scores of Sanskrit quotations that Somanātha says are from *śruti*, from the revealed texts, that is, the Vedas. In fact, Somanātha's quotations from Sanskrit increase in number in his later works; some chapters of the PC have a Sanskrit quote in every line of the text, so that on the whole there is more Sanskrit than Telugu. There is, indeed, no other poet in Telugu literature who has quoted so many lines from Sanskrit texts, with the result that parts of his works are more difficult to understand than the works of the mārga poets of his time.

The abundance of Sanskrit quotations and the repeated references to the Vedas, śāstras, and purāṇas would seem to indicate that Somanātha employed them more for the authority of the Sanskrit words than to document his sources. To label a religious movement antivedic was a powerful strategy adopted by brahmins to undermine the social acceptability of anything they did not like. Understandably, the Telugu Vīraśaivites attempted to avoid such attacks. Although in every detail the BP was antibrahminic, Somanātha insisted that the religious practices advocated therein closely adhere to the vedic texts. He took care, however, not to extend the respect given the texts to their chanters, the brahmins. In the seventh chapter, Kallidevayya confronts Veda-chanting brahmin scholars and tells them that his dog could chant the Vedas better than they. In an attempt to degrade the brahmins, he commands his dog to perform a chant, which the dog does (p. 235).

Vīraśaivism and the *Basava Purāṇa*

As Somanātha describes them in the BP, the three important aspects of Vīraśaivism are *guru*, *liṅga*, and *jaṅgama*. Each person in the Vīraśaiva religion is initiated by a guru. The *guru-śiṣya* relationship, that between teacher and disciple, is the most powerful of any type of relationship between people. The guru initiates a devotee into the cult by putting his palm on the head of the devotee. *Hastamastakasaṁyoga*, the union of head and hand, instills the energy of Śiva (*citkalā*) in the body of the devotee, who is believed thereby to have taken birth from the palm of his guru. From this point onward, the devotee considers the guru as his father; he is a new person, and his past, his parentage, and all other relationships are annulled.

The guru also invests the devotee with a liṅga, a stone symbol of Śiva. The devotee must carry the liṅga around his neck at all times. Five times a day the devotee takes the liṅga off his neck, sets it in his palm, worships it, and puts it back around his neck. Any separation, even accidental, between the liṅga and the body of the devotee is considered extremely undesirable. According to Śaiva lore, devotees may kill themselves because of such accidental separation.

The liṅga worn by the devotee, called *iṣṭa liṅga*, is his or her personal deity and is superior to the liṅga in the temple. The latter is *sthāvara* (stable), whereas the liṅga on the body is *jaṅgama* (mobile). The opposition between sthāvara and jaṅgama is central to Vīraśaivism. A poem by Basavanna, in A. K. Ramanujan's exquisite translation, captures the theme:

> The rich
> will make temples for Siva.
> What shall I,
> a poor man,
> do?
>
> My legs are pillars,
> the body the shrine,
> the head a cupola of gold.
>
> Listen, O lord of the meeting rivers,
> things standing shall fall,
> but the moving ever shall stay.[6]

As Ramanujan says, the poem "dramatizes several of the themes and oppositions characteristic" of Vīraśaivism, one of which is its opposi-

tion to the temples. The iṣṭa liṅga represents the god who is in the body of the devotee as opposed to the one in the temple. To quote Ramanujan again:

> Medieval South Indian temples looked remarkably like palaces with battlements; they were richly endowed and patronized by the wealthy and the powerful, without whom the massive structures housing the bejewelled gods and sculptured pillars would not have been possible. The Vīraśaiva movement was a social upheaval by and for the poor, the low caste against the rich and the privileged; it was a rising of the unlettered against the literate pundit, flesh and blood against stone.[7]

In medieval Andhra, the "rich and privileged" meant the brahmins and the landowning castes such as *reḍḍis*, *kāpus*, and *vĕlamas*, who enjoyed a higher social status than did the traders, artisans, and other service castes. Even the brahmins, who were religiously superior, depended on the patronage of the landowner. Members of the landowning castes who did not themselves own land were entitled to share social dominance in the village because of their kinship ties to the landowners.

In a traditional village controlled by a local variant of the system of *jajmāni* (customary exchange of services), craftsmen and members of the service castes such as washers, barbers, potters, weavers, carpenters, tanners, and watchmen of cremation grounds were relegated to a socially low position and to a ritually unclean status. Also included in this group were people with socially unrespectable professions such as burglars, prostitutes, and pimps. Among the craftsmen, *kamsālis* (goldsmiths), *kammaris* (blacksmiths), *vaḍraṅgis* (carpenters)—castes that are usually included among the *pāñcālas* (five artisan castes)—and *sāles* (weavers) in particular felt themselves in conflict with brahmin claims to superiority, for they themselves had aspirations to priestly status. The goldsmiths even called themselves *viśvabrāhmaṇas*, the universal brahmins. The artisan castes have historically competed with brahmins in that jealously guarded skill, literacy. Many poets and scholars from the artisan castes have composed poetry and have claimed knowledge of religious texts. Because they were competing with brahmins, these poets and scholars imitated brahminic styles, but were in conflict with the brahmin ideology, often adapting antibrahminic religious doctrines. A large number of Vīraśaiva poets emerged from this group, and as evidence of the importance of the artisan castes in medieval Andhra, BP includes a number of stories of bhaktas from these castes.

One of the characteristics of artisan and trading castes is their mobility. Their skills are always with them; as a part of the body, skills can be carried wherever there are better opportunities to make a living. These people are not like the land-oriented castes, tied to one place by their need to earn a livelihood on the land, which is entirely external to them and totally immobile. The two groups of castes—those that live from the land and those that live by trade—have developed different styles of life, beliefs, aspirations, and world views. Whether or not they have always been in conflict with each other, these two groups of castes were separated throughout the medieval period and even into modern times. In the Tamil country they are identified as right-hand castes and left-hand castes: the landholding castes are right and the trading castes are left. Although Telugu does not have exactly equivalent labels, the ideological separation between the caste groups follows the same lines as in Tamilnadu. The bhaktas associated with the stories and legends of BP come predominantly from the left-hand castes—artisans, merchants, washermen, potters, tanners, and the like; or they come from such socially marginal groups as burglars, hunters, prostitutes, and pimps. There is not one story related to landed peasants or their low-caste *māla* (untouchable) farmhands. As a religious text of the left-handed castes, then, the BP carries a good bit of ideological baggage.

It would be interesting to relate structurally the religious symbolism of sthāvara and jaṅgama to the land and trade orientations of the right-hand and left-hand castes, respectively. Medieval Andhra and Karnataka temples were built by landowning caste leaders who sought to establish the legitimacy of their rulership as kings over their own areas. The deity in the temple was also viewed as a divine king ruling over the area, and it was from such a deity that each king derived his legitimacy. The temple itself symbolized the stability, the sovereignty, and the palatial glory of the king's house. Myths about temple deities relate the events by which the land where the temple was built came to belong to the deity. The place (*sthala*, or *kṣetra*) was seen to be as sacred as the deity who resides there. Supporting this sacred center was the brahmin, who served the god-king as his priest, minister, and adviser.

In contrast, the traders and the artisans, who had no interest in land as such, would take their god with them. Like their skills, which were part of their bodies, their god was internal to them. A religion that endowed them with a jaṅgama liṅga, a mobile god, could perfectly symbolize their aspirations.

The BP establishes the absolute superiority of the order of bhaktas, also known as jaṅgamas, as distinct from the lay community. Bhaktas are considered to be superior even to Śiva. They are never wrong and

they are above any law. Among the vows Basava takes, according to the BP, are "a vow not to punish the wrongs of the devotees . . . a vow never to let Śiva win, not even in a dream; a vow always to give victory to the devotees . . . a vow never to disagree with Hara's devotees" (p. 68).

In contrast with this, the brahminic religious system does not provide the *sannyāsin* (ascetic) with superior status, either religious or social. Strictly speaking, people who renounce and become sannyāsins do not constitute a religious order. They become isolated, in a way, from the social group and operate as lone individuals. The jaṅgamas in Vīraśaivism, however, are a strong, close-knit group, a community that shares a disciplined order, with the power to control the lay section of their religion. The BP shows that the jaṅgamas have more power than the king of the land. They are involved in violent activities in total disregard for the lay ruler. Even Basava, who was himself a devotee, did not always understand the rationale for the behavior of the jaṅgamas. He could only assert the infallibility of the jaṅgamas as an act of faith.

A significant feature of *bhakti* cults is that they create their own mythology. If the cult deviates from the existing religious traditions, then the hagiography of a saint becomes the basis for a new mythology. Thus, whereas the emergence of new gods, such as Kṛṣṇa and Rāma in Hinduism, led to new hagiographic works depicting their miracles, it was only in the bhakti cults of Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism that hagiographies of saints acquired the authority of scripture.

In the BP the lives of the devotees are depicted for their efficacy and power. Basava, who is the focal point of the anthology of stories about the devotees, is depicted both as a god and as a human devotee, with all the attendant weaknesses. His descent to the earth is associated with Śiva's interest in propagating the Śaiva religion in the world. Basava is the vehicle of Śiva, the bull, who assumed human form. Toward the end of the BP, we are reminded of the divine stature of Basava when he reenters the Śiva image in the temple of Kappaḍisaṅgameśvara.

The period between these two divine incidents—his descent into the world of human beings and his final merging with Śiva—encompasses a number of events on the human level. Every one of the stories serves to privilege the visible, the here and now, rather than events of far away and long ago. During the period of his time on earth, Basava acts only as a lay devotee of Śiva who has taken a vow to protect and obey the infallible jaṅgamas. As a minister of state, Basava periodically controls and corrects the behavior of King Bijjala toward jaṅgamas. A number of stories narrate incidents involving jaṅgamas who have violated social conventions and have broken civil and criminal laws. In

each instance, Bijjala wants to punish the jaṅgamas; and in each case Basava prevents the king from doing so, in recognition of the divine superiority of the jaṅgama.

Yet, on occasion, Basava himself is found to be at fault by jaṅgamas. For example, when Basava grows too proud of his own strength of devotion, and when he takes pride in himself for having composed 464,000 songs in praise of Śiva, his pride is severely censured by the jaṅgamas (see p. 139).

A strong proclivity toward violence is characteristic of many of the stories of jaṅgamas in BP. By killing, hurting, abusing, and destroying, the jaṅgamas express a steadfast allegiance to their religion. Violence is directed not only against nonbelievers but also against other devotees as punishment for accidental offenses against Śiva or his devotees. Moreover, it is also a way of exhibiting one's faith in Śiva. Devotees commit acts of self-mutilation or suicide with the same ease as they hurt others. They demonstrate their faith by decapitating themselves and then regaining life by getting their heads back onto their bodies.

The prevalence of violence in Somanātha's narrative conforms to prescriptions given by Paṇḍitārādhya. In his *Śivatattvasāramu*, Paṇḍitārādhya enjoins devotees of Śiva to adopt a set of strict principles. He states:

> One should not commit violence against any living being, but yet the sinners who abuse Śiva must be killed without hesitation. (v. 275)
>
> Books that include words accusing Śiva should immediately be burned without hesitation, and their authors should be killed. (v. 277)

Whether or not violence has characterized the actual social behavior of Vīraśaivas, the symbols of violence and hatred toward outsiders that BP generates and legitimizes can be seen as an attempt to organize a closed cult.

In brahminic religion, women are placed in the same category as the low castes. Even women of high caste are not allowed to undergo the *upanayana* (initiation) ritual considered to be the second birth, which elevates men of high castes to the status of *dvijas*, twice-born. In contrast, Vīraśaiva texts elevate women to the same status as men by including them in the initiation ceremony. In Vīraśaivism, every person, without regard to caste or sex, receives a liṅga. Paṇḍitārādhya even sanctions a woman to disobey her husband if he does not share her Vīraśaiva devotion. The BP repeats Paṇḍitārādhya's instruction, and illustrates it by the story of Vaijakavva in the sixth chapter.

Not only does the BP repeatedly insist that caste origins of a jaṅgama are irrelevant and that all jaṅgamas are, by definition, forms of Śiva, there is also a suggestion that the teaching advocates a casteless society. Even though there are no stories in the BP involving marriage between castes, there is reference to a marriage from the Vīraśaiva tradition. According to the tradition, Haraḷayya, an untouchable, marries his daughter to the brahmin Madhupayya's son. The marriage causes a major uproar and ultimately leads to the assassination of King Bijjala. Somanātha narrates the story of Bijjala's assassination in the seventh chapter, but he omits the legend about the intercaste marriage. Nor are there stories of nonhereditary occupations in the BP. The washermen, barbers, weavers, tanners, and others of low caste who are elevated to the level of devotees continue their traditional occupations and conform to the conventions prescribed for them within their castes.

Contrary to the brahminic valuesystem that regards manual work as degrading, the BP makes physical labor respectable. In many instances there are statements that emphasize and extol physical labor. An aphorism often quoted in the BP says *kāyakame kailāsamu*, "work is equal to [living with Śiva in] Kailāsa." It does not make any difference whether the profession is tanning or thieving, so long as what one does is the traditional occupation of the family and so long as the income so acquired is used in the service of jaṅgamas.

What the BP does reject is any attitude that might view service occupations as low and polluting. Maḍivālu Mācayya, a washerman, is eulogized as the purest of the pure, as Śiva incarnate. Rules of pollution related to saliva, cooked foods, and physical touch are consistently broken in the BP. Food cooked by a low-caste devotee is pure, whereas food cooked by the highest brahmin is impure. The story of Kannappa dramatically demonstrates that saliva-polluted meat, liquor, leather sandals, and other items that are normally disdained by brahmins are all acceptable to Śiva because Kannappa is his devotee.

In all these conventions of purity and impurity, the BP ridicules brahmin practices. Somanātha perceives brahmins as the authors and guardians of social ideology and directs all the opposition against the brahmin practices.

The *Basava Purāṇa* and the *Pĕriya Purāṇam*

Any study of the BP inevitably invites comparison with the Tamil *Pĕriya Purāṇam* (PP), "the great *purāṇa*." The author of PP was Cekkiḻār, a *veḷāḷa* from the Tŏṇṭai region in Tamilnadu. Historians say that he

was a minister in the court of the Cola king Kulottuṅga II (A.D. 1133–1150). Both Prabhakara Sastri and C. Narayana Rao think that Somanātha did not know the PP; they appear to read Somanātha's statements about the source of his text rather literally. As mentioned earlier, Somanātha said that he had received instructions to write from the assembly of bhaktas in Śrīśailam. He says in the first chapter, "And I submitted to the assembly saying, 'I want to narrate the incomparable *Basava Purāṇa*. Kindly tell me how to handle the thread of that story and make me fulfilled' " (p. 142). Again in the seventh chapter, "I have devotedly, and to the best of my ability, told the praiseworthy story of Basava just as I heard it from the devotees. But who am I to narrate the marvelous story of the great Basava, whose story even the lord of this world is not capable of knowing?" (pp. 265–266).

The above statements indicate Somanātha's devotion and respect toward his superiors, but do not identify them as sources of his text. It was common among bhakti poets to admit inferiority on their part and to claim that everything they knew came by the grace of god or the other devotees. The earliest date that one may suggest for Somanātha's work is still several decades later than that of Cekkiḻār. There is also ample evidence to show that Somanātha knew Tamil well enough to compose poetry in that language. Somanātha used several languages—Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada, Tamil, Marathi—in the same text, as is evidenced by his *Vṛṣādhipaśatakamu* and the PC. The language boundaries of medieval South India were far less rigid than they are now. In view of this, it is improbable that Somanātha did not know about the PP. One should also recognize, however, that stories of bhaktas were part of the oral tradition and an author did not need to consult a written text in order to write a story.

The basic narratives of the PP and the BP are very similar. The PP is a collection of hagiographies of the sixty-three Nāyaṉārs, whose stories had been popular in medieval Śaiva tradition from long before the twelfth century. The number sixty-three is a symbolic number that had been borrowed from the Jaina tradition of the sixty-three *Śalākā Puruṣas*. Śaivism, which was fiercely competing against Jainism, borrowed the style of the *Mahāpurāṇa*, also known as the *Śrī Purāṇa*, in which the sixty-three Jaina heroes were extolled. There are several Nāyaṉār stories common to the PP and the BP, although the original Tamil names of the PP may have been altered in the BP.

Although there is a considerable similarity of themes and stories between the PP and the BP, there is also one important difference between them. We noted earlier that the BP is oriented toward the left-hand castes and is antibrahmin. In contrast, the PP is oriented toward

the right-hand castes and is probrahmin. The author, Cekkiḻār, comes from a landowner caste, and the PP includes a number of stories about devotees from agrarian castes, whereas, as was noted earlier, the BP does not have one story related to an agrarian-caste devotee. What is more important than that is the tone and nature of the two texts: the BP is aggressively antibrahmin, the PP is respectful to Brahmins.

The Brahminization of Vīraśaivism

Even though Vīraśaiva doctrine militated against caste hierarchy and was violently opposed to brahmin superiority, over time hierarchical social structure gradually asserted itself. The twelfth-century militancy of the movement waned, giving way to a validation of caste identities and of brahminic superiority.

Brahmin Vīraśaivas of Andhra called themselves *ārādhyas* and maintained their own caste identity. With their literary superiority and their Sanskrit skills, brahmin Śaivas came to dominate Śaiva scholarly circles. In their hands, the Vīraśaiva texts composed by Somanātha underwent a process of significant brahminization, and the original compositions of Somanātha became less popular than the later brahminized versions.

Veturi Prabhakara Sastri has hypothesized that two distinct Vīraśaiva traditions developed—that of the *Basavasampradāya* following Basaveśvara, and that of the *Ārādhyasampradāya*, following Paṇḍitārādhya. According to this hypothesis, the *Ārādhyasampradāya* is not antibrahmin. Prabhakara Sastri quotes part of a verse attributed to Paṇḍitārādhya that states:

> bhakti toḍi valapu, brāhmyambuto pŏttu pāyalenu nenu basavaliṅga
>
> I cannot give up my love for bhakti, O Basava, nor my association with brahminhood.[8]

This statement, according to the legend, is Paṇḍitārādhya's response to Basaveśvara's call to him to renounce brahminhood and join the Vīraśaivas. The statement, however, is not to be found in any written Śaiva texts. Prabhakara Sastri apparently quotes it from oral tradition.

Yet Paṇḍitārādhya's *Śivatattvasāramu* does not provide support for the claim that he has respect for brahmin rituals or brahmin superiority. Verse 134 of this book states: "If a person from a high caste and a person from a low caste accept devotion to Śiva, they are equal to one another. One should not call them high caste or low caste anymore."