

THE FEET OF THE JAṄGAMA IDENTITY AND RITUAL ISSUES AMONG THE VĪRĀŚAIVAS OF KARNATAKA *

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The Vīrāśaivas, known also as Liṅgāyatās, are a large community counting today more than ten million people and living in the South Indian state of Karnataka and southern Maharashtra.¹ For practical purposes and clarity sake, they will be described in this paper by the term Vīrāśaivas, the first reason being that the association representing the community is called Vīrāśaiva Mahāśabhā, and the second being that the term Liṅgāyatās has been used to describe one part, though large, of this group of people and, of recent, has become the label for a political agenda by one faction internal to the group itself.

A brief introduction

Though for centuries the Vīrāśaivas have played an important role in the social, religious, economic and cultural life of Karnataka, where they constitute today roughly 22 percent of the population, acting as a vital force in the modernization process, engaging in a dynamic competition with the Brāhmanas to gain access to education, jobs, power and prestige,² and also working as agents of sanskritization, in the process so defined by M. N. Srinivas,³ we gather from the available social studies on the community that they are not a homogeneous group.⁴

The Vīrāśaivas have a complex social organisation in endogamic groups (*jāti*), show regional cultural differences, do not acknowledge a single religious authority, and do not vote for the same

* Most of the contents of pages 1 to 11 have already appeared in, *The feet of the Jaṅgama: caste divisions and ritual among the Vīrāśaivas of Karnataka*, in *Feeding the self, feeling the way*, edited by A. Monti, L'Harmattan Italia, Torino 2005. Unfortunately, during the editing of that paper many unwonted changes and mistakes have crept in the text without me seeing the proofs, making it hard reading. So here I'm including those contents as well by way of introduction to the last part of the paper. The Kannāḍa words are given in italics. The Sanskrit terms may appear in the Kannāḍa form with a different ending: *karma* for *karman*, *pūje* for *pūjā*. Jaṅgama in capital letters refers to a caste, the same word in italics refers to a religious function.

¹ As a minority their presence is recorded in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh as well and, of course, in the Hindū diaspora, in the Unites States, in the United Kingdom and in Australia, where they are represented by their local associations, such as the the Veerashaiva Samaja of North America, or VSNA (www.vsna.org).

² Chekki, Danesh, *Religion and Social System of the Virasaiva Community*, Greenwood Press, London 1997, p. 58.

³ Srinivas, M. N., *A Note on Sanskritization and Westernization*, in *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. xv, n. 4 August 1956, pp. 481-496 (reprinted in *Understanding Indian Society, Festschrift in Honour of Professor S. C. Dube*, New Delhi 1993, pp. 45-64).

⁴ See for instance Assayag, Jackie, *Modernisation de la caste et indianisation de la démocratie: le cas des Lingayat*, in *Archives Européenne de Sociologie*, Tome xxvii 1986, n. 2, pp. 319-352.

party.⁵ However, in spite of such differences, they have been sharing a common identity on the base of a common religion.⁶

Though the peculiar nature of the group attracted, in the first half of the twentieth century, the interest of outsiders who described it as a caste-sect,⁷ with a few exceptions in the past two decades, the Vīraśaivas have been studied throughout mainly by insiders, as Danesh Chekki - a scholar belonging to the community - aptly remarks in his review of the studies on the subject.⁸ The scholars belonging to the community have shown great concern about the origins of their religion and, in some cases, it is clear to the external observer that the nature and the scope of such concern goes somehow beyond academics. Of the two versions handed over by tradition of the origin of the faith, such scholars seemed either to choose one excluding the other, or to combine both of them in a sort of compromise, or even to avoid the issue altogether, by stating that the origins are indeed obscure for lack of evidence and that further research is needed.⁹ Such variety in the approach by the insider makes more sense in the light of the few studies on the community by non Indian scholars of anthropology and religious studies.¹⁰ For what concerns the idea of religious leadership, a main split has been observed between two religious denominations, known as Virakta and Pañcācārya Svāmīs. To these two models of leadership are related two different foundation myths of the religion, with normative value, and the allegiance of the faithful would go to either of these two poles. From the beginning of the twentieth century, as far as we know, the relations between these two groups of institutions (*maṭhas*) have been far from cordial, creating a clear cut split in the community. After a war of almost a century, only in very recent days, the most prominent and popular religious leaders of the two orders have met and decided to cooperate in the interest of all Vīraśaivas, an event saluted by most devotees as a welcome turning point in the history of the community.¹¹ But, as a closer observation shows, the situation is far more complex.¹² Apart from the Hirēmaṭhas or Gurumaṭhas and the Viraktamaṭhas, there are a number of *maṭhas* that have become *de facto* independent from the above mentioned main orders, and since Vīraśaiva Svāmīs entertain among themselves visiting relationships, through which they strengthen customary bonds or create new ones, one can observe that many a time the nature of such relations rests on the

⁵ See Assayag, Jackie, *op. cit.*, and Parvathamma, C., *Politics and religion: a study of historical interaction between sociopolitical relationships in a Mysore village*, Sterling Publishers, Delhi 1971. See also *Which way now for the Lingayats?* By Naheed Ataula in *The Times of India*, Monday March 8, 2004.

⁶ One may quote M. N. Srinivas: The concept of the unity of India is essentially a religious one. See Srinivas, M. N., *Caste in modern India and other essays*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay 1962, p. 105.

⁷ Hutton, G. H., *Caste in India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1946; McCormack, William, *Lingayats as a sect*, in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 93, 1963, pp. 59-71.

⁸ Chekki, Danesh, *op. cit.*, p. 126; see also pp. 107-126.

⁹ The study of Nandimath, *A Handbook of Vīraśaivism*, first published in 1942 and till now the best introduction in English on the subject, doesn't tackle the issue of the origins. Others, for instance Vijayaśrī Hirēmaṭha, say that though the origin of the Vīraśaiva *dharma*, which is well known in Karnataka for its historical development and geographical distribution, is the object of a controversy, there is no doubt that in the twelfth century, this religion assumed a clear form. The quote is from Hirēmaṭha, Vijayaśrī *Sampādana samaya*, Liṅgāyata adhyayana samsthe, Śrī Viraktamaṭha Dēśanūru 1999, p. 1. For a more biased presentation, see the quotations from Sakhare further in this paper.

¹⁰ See Michael, R. Blake, *Foundation Myth of the Two Denominations of Vīraśaivism: Virakta and Gurusthalins*, in "Journal of Asian Studies" XLII.2, feb 1983, pp. 309-321, and Bradford, N.J., *The Indian Renouncer: structure and transformation in a Lingayat community*, in *Indian Religion*, ed. by Richard Burghart and Audrey Cantlie, "Collected Papers on South Asia no. 7", Curzon Press/St. Martin's Press, London/New York 1985, pp.79-104.

¹¹ See *Veerashaiva seers vow to work together* in *The Hindu* Monday, Jun 02, 2003 Karnataka.

¹² I've been visiting various *maṭhas* of the Vīraśaivas, in Karnataka and outside Karnataka, several times since 1993. The *maṭha*, a sectarian religious institution, headed by a *svāmi*, is a regular feature of rural and urban life in Karnataka, especially for the Vīraśaivas, but also for the Jains and the main Brahmanical sects. In common parlance the word *maṭha* forms a compound with *mane* (home, family), *manemaṭha*, as a sort of label for all the social obligations of an individual. According to a recent compilation by Candraśekhara Nāraṅpura, a sort of directory with informations about the history and the activities of each institution, the total number of *maṭhas* is 1089. See the preface in Nāraṅpura, Candraśekhara, *Karnāṭaka vīraśaiva maṭhagaḷu*, Geḷeya prakāśana, Cikkamagaḷūru 2002.

personal bent of the Svāmīs, and not on the traditional allegiance of the institution of which they are the heads.¹³

To the issue of the origins are linked other issues like "are Liṅgāyatas Hindūs?" and "are Liṅgāyatas and Vīraśaivas one and the same thing?", which have been subject matter of a hot debate for quite sometime among the educated, urban élites, especially, but not exclusively, in relation to the identity of the community vis-à-vis the government.¹⁴

I will try to shed some light on the picture sketched above, availing myself of the contributions of Indian scholars writing in Kannāḍa,¹⁵ and of my personal observations. By going through the recent history of the Vīraśaivas and a few specimens of religious pamphlets, I will try to point out at the ways ritual issues both in the past and in the present, can hide more complex and deep social tensions related to the community's identity. I will also try to show, in the last part of the paper, how ritual can become, in the hands of religious heads, a powerful instrument to operate changes which are meant to affect the social and political spheres, as an attempt to reshape the community's identity. Religious identity is still very strong in Karnataka nowadays and this helps us understand why sectarian religious institutions (*maṭhas*) have been growing in number, keep wielding power and are able to mobilize their devotees, specially but not exclusively in the case of Vīraśaivas. Therefore the appeal to the sense of religious belonging or affiliation, seems to still work better than a straight forward secular appeal in order to mobilize people on social and political issues, and the *maṭhas* of Karnataka keep functioning as a parallel network to that of the democratic institutions.¹⁶

¹³ Some non Indian scholars fail to notice such complexity and simply understand all the "progressive" or "modernized" *maṭhas* to belong to the Viraktas. See for instance Schouten, J. P., *Revolution of the mystics: On the Social Aspects of Vīraśaivism*, Kampen, KOK Pharos 1991, pp.271-279.

¹⁴ One can see such debates reflected in the newspapers, for instance in titles like *Mahasabha heading for a split?* in *The Hindu Sunday*, Jan 09, 2005 Karnataka, and *Veerashaiva seers warn Khandre on change of name* in *The Hindu Friday*, Jan 07, 2005 Karnataka, that deal with the storm generated by the recent attempt by the president of the Vīraśaiva Mahāsabhā, Bheemanna Khandre, to change of name of the institution into Liṅgāyata Mahāsabhā.

¹⁵ There is valuable research published in Kannāḍa, which deserves being brought to the attention of the non Indian scholars.

¹⁶ The recent controversy on the introduction of eggs in the midday meal of Karnataka's school children is a good exemplification of what I mean. The decision was taken this year by the Sate Government and has been opposed by the Deputy Chief Minister, a Liṅgāyata, while Māte Mahādēvi, a religious leader of the same Liṅgāyata community has created a Federation of Vegetarian Communities and Organisations threatening a statewide agitation if the government implements the scheme. Liṅgāyatas, are supposed to follow, for religious reasons, a strict vegetarian diet without eggs, and so do the Jains and most of the Brahmanical sects who follow even a stricter diet, abstaining from eggs as well as from some kind of vegetables. But the other communities of Karnataka, such as the Vokkaligas, the Dalitas and other groups, accounting for the majority of the population, do eat eggs and did welcome the new step. While the Chief Minister has tackled the problem by attempting a third way, though less practical - give children milk instead of eggs, a political move - one can observe that in the Indian Army, where the diet is not vegetarian, the minority vegetarian personnel is given strictly vegetarian dishes. One can easily observe here that diet is something pertaining more to identity, which is religious and sectarian, than to individual choice. This last may be at variance with the religious affiliation but it's rare to find someone born in a vegetarian caste willing to disown his group identity by stating openly to be a non vegetarian. I say his and not her as it is extremely unlikely that women cook non vegetarian food in a vegetarian household, specially if it is a joint family. While men, who often eat outside, may easily have a chance to eat a non vegetarian meal. I can think of the Liṅgāyata males of a village I know who, on the occasion of the village festival for the meat eater Karyamma, the goddess of the Beḍara Nāyakas of the same village, eat together with them a ceremonial non vegetarian meal. None of these Liṅgāyata villagers cooks meats or eggs at home, and if asked they will state to be vegetarians. But their weakness is known and they are teased by the Beḍara Nāyakas of the closeby villages. I once remember having heard, in a conversation between school children in Mysore, a girl say in a proud and defiant tone "We don't eat eggs. We are Liṅgāyats". For more information on the eggs' debate see *The Ande Ka Funda Debate Eggs or bananas or milk? The Janata Dal (Secular) and the BJP are at loggerheads over what to include in the mid-day meal scheme*, by M. Radhika in *Tehelka The People's paper*, 28 September 2007.

The religious beliefs and main rituals of the Vīraśaivas

In spite of the differences mentioned above, among the Vīraśaivas there is almost no room for variance regarding the religious tenets and the moral conduct, expressed in the synthetic labels of *aṣṭāvaraṇa* (the eight coverings) and *pañcācāra* (the five conducts).¹⁷

The eight fundamental elements for a Vīraśaiva are invariably listed in the following order: *guru, liṅga, jaṅgama, pādōdaka, prasāda, mantra, vibhūti, rudrākṣa*.

Vīraśaivas are first of all *bhaktas* of Śiva, whom they worship in a threefold form: the *guru*, the *liṅga*, the *jaṅgama*. They believe that Śiva is the only god, and that by earning His grace one can be rescued from the natural world dominated by *karman*, and join Him forever. To the Vīraśaiva God is equally present in the small symbol inherited by the *śaiva* tradition (*liṅga*), as well as in the spiritual preceptor who grants the *liṅga* (*guru*), and in the spiritually realized man who has attained oneness with God (*jaṅgama*). When the *guru* initiates him, the *bhakta*, reborn as a son of Śiva, receives the sacred formula (*oṃ namaḥ śivāya*) and the miniature *liṅga*, wears the sacred ashes (*vibhūti*) on the forehead and a rosary of *rudrākṣa* seeds around the neck. Through the initiation, the *guru* awakens the presence of God in the three bodies of the devotee: thus Śiva is present in the physical or gross body as the *iṣṭaliṅga*, through which He receives material acts of worship, in the subtle body as the *prāṇaliṅga*, and in the causal body as the *bhāvaliṅga*. These more intimate forms of the divine presence are to be experienced in advanced stages of the salvation path. From the material worship, which is a form of exchange between the worshipper and the worshipped, the *bhakta* receives holy water (*pādōdaka*) and holy food (*prasāda*).

If we compare this brief description with the general *hindū* view, we notice new elements. First of all, we may notice the shift from the fixed context of the ordinary *hindū* temple where the devotee approaches Śiva in the fixed (*sthāvara*) *liṅga* often through the mediation of professional priests, to the mobile context in which the *liṅga* is housed in the body itself of the devotee: a bearer of the *liṅga* (*liṅgadhāri*) can virtually stop visiting temples of Śiva. As a consequence of the initiation as a *liṅgadhāri*, the impurity of birth is destroyed and the ritual impurity caused by contact with death, menstrual blood and childbirth, doesn't affect the body, which is ritually speaking a Śiva temple: this makes all the initiated ritually equal. Moreover, each act of the *liṅgadhāri* becomes a ritual act and, apart from offering, according to the *śaiva āgamic* ritual, adoration (*pūjā*) to the miniature *liṅga* kept in the left palm, every meal is first offered to the *liṅga*, and thus it becomes *prasāda*, sacred food bringing to the devotee God's grace. But there are more innovative elements that are not so immediately apparent. The first one is that in ritual matters the *jaṅgama*, who is the living *liṅga*, has precedence on the *iṣṭaliṅga*. The *iṣṭaliṅga* is the aid to the daily ritual and meditation; once received from the *guru*, it has to be used by the devotee as a focus for the emotional and mental attention. However if the devotee, while engaged in the *pūjā* of the *iṣṭaliṅga*, is approached by a *jaṅgama* he has to drop the *pūjā* and attend to the holy man.

Though the ritual procedure (*pūjākrama*) is the current one, as one can find it in *śaiva purāṇic* and *āgamic* literature, the *pūjā* of the *jaṅgama*'s feet is the most important act of cult, and the water that has ritually washed the feet of the *jaṅgama* is not only sprinkled over the heads of the devotees and all around the house, but it is poured three times on the *liṅga* and then drunk. If the *jaṅgama* is not available one can resort to a surrogate ritual procedure, but the best *pūjā* for a *liṅgadhāri* is that done in the presence of a *jaṅgama* by first ritually washing his feet and then worshipping the *iṣṭaliṅga* together with him. After the worship, a carefully cooked meal must be offered to the *jaṅgama* and, once he has eaten, all the devotees must partake of the meal that, having been consecrated, has become *prasāda*.

¹⁷ Such "labels", along with that of *ṣaṣṭhala*, referring to the mystical path towards salvation, appear consistently in the vast and rich religious literature created by the Vīraśaivas in a span of several centuries and in different languages and genres.

The idea behind this is that the feet of the *jaṅgama* are the feet of Śiva, and the mouth of the *jaṅgama* is the mouth of Śiva. The *jaṅgama* is a living *liṅga* who can eat, whereas the *liṅga* of stone inside the temple cannot eat.

The worship of the *jaṅgama*'s feet, known as *pādapūjā*, and the feeding of the *jaṅgama* seem to be the main customary rituals in the Vīraśaivas' faith. The *jaṅgama* must be invited home by the *bhaktas* for such ritual purposes on the days sacred to Śiva, and for the life cycle ceremonies, like the tying of the *liṅga* to a new born baby, weddings, funerals, entering in a new house, etc. The ritual presence of the *jaṅgama* or at least the water that has washed his feet is also beseeched by many *jātis* who are not initiated but resort to the Vīraśaivas for religious guidance, especially to purify their homes after a funeral has taken place.¹⁸

So, we may say that the *jaṅgama* is not only ritually pure, but also an agent of purification and that the living *liṅga* is more powerful than the stone one.

The Jaṅgama's identity

I introduced the *jaṅgama* above by describing him as a, "spiritually realized man who has attained oneness with God". But we find that the Jaṅgamas today are the traditional priestly class of the Vīraśaivas. Indeed, from a still not ascertained stage of the history of the Vīraśaivas up to our days, we find a closed group of hereditary priests called Jaṅgamas, forming a caste (*jāti*) divided in subcastes (*upajātis*), enjoying the highest status among the Vīraśaivas, and whose feet are still today worshipped by the *bhaktas* as the very feet of Śiva. No need to say that the mere birth in a Jaṅgama family doesn't make one a, "spiritually realized man who has attained oneness with God". This definition was meant to name the wandering religious ascetic wearing the marks of the Śaiva cult, who could transfer by his grace the knowledge of God to the devotee. And by washing his feet and drinking a few drops of that holy water of knowledge, the seeker would speed up in his/her spiritual path. Such conceptions of the *jaṅgama* were central in the *bhakti* movement that flourished in the northern parts of Karnataka during the twelfth century. We have a literary monument of that period, a large corpus of short compositions in the Kannaḍa language called *vacanas*, in which the leaders of the sect, men and women belonging to all castes, expressed their religious beliefs and their spiritual experiences.¹⁹ From such literature we can gather a description of the sect as a group of equals, who treated each other with great respect, humility, and a willingness to learn from each other. They called themselves *śaraṇas* - those who surrender to Śiva, taking refuge in Him who rescues from death - and *bhaktas*, in opposition to those who did not believe in Śiva, who were called *bhavis* or wordly beings, meaning bound to existence (*bhava*) and prey to *saṃsāra* and *karman*. The passage from the world of the *bhavis* to that of the *bhaktas* happened through the *guru*'s compassion. The *guru* would grace the *bhakta* with the *liṅgadīkṣe* and the teaching of the *mantra*, remove the impurity and clear the way for a life of discipline and spiritual efforts. The *jaṅgama* would then act upon the *bhakta* like a surgeon, removing the *karman*, till both of them would shine, united in the glory of supreme spiritual knowledge. So, in this context, the ritual of the washing of the feet and of the feeding of the *jaṅgama*, was intimately associated with deeply meaningful spiritual practice. M. Cidānandamūrti, one of the most prominent scholars of Kannaḍa, remarks that the authors of the *vacanas* used the word *jaṅgama* in

¹⁸ McCormack, William, *The Forms of Communication in Vīraśaiva Religion*, in *Traditional India: Structure and Change*, edited by M. Singer, Philadelphia 1958, pp.119-129. There are Śaivas non Liṅgāyatas who have the funeral rites performed by a low caste priest called *gwārappa*, then the water that washed the *jaṅgama*'s feet is requested by them to purify their homes after the funerals. See Gurusurthy, K.G., *Kallapura. A South Indian Village*, Karnatak University, Dharwar 1976, pp. 122-123.

¹⁹ In Kannaḍa, *vacana*, literally means "uttered word, speech", but also "promise, given word". In the context of the Śaraṇas it has the function of verbal testimony (*śabda*) as the communication to us of the knowledge of the two higher ideals of *dharma* and *mokṣa* and of the proper means to their realisation. This is evident from the importance given to the word of the Ancients (Ādyara *vacana*) which, like the philosophical stone, has the power to transform and like the neem tree leaf, bitter to the lips but sweet to the stomach, has the power to heal. See the *vacanas* given in the *Pīṭhike* in *Basavaṅṅanavara vacanagaḷu*, sampādaka Ḍā. El. Basavarāju, Gītā Buk Haus, Maisūru 1952.

the neuter gender, like the word *liṅga*, as if they wanted to convey that both referred to the same reality.²⁰ He further adds that in the writings of the most popular author, the promoter of the Śaraṇa's movement, Basavaṅṇa, the word *jaṅgama* appears 135 times and the word *guru* only 50. In the *vacanas*, we have hundreds of quotes on the *jaṅgamas*: they have no caste (*kula*) and it is wrong to treat them as if they had one; Cannabasavaṅṇa, Basavaṅṇa's nephew, says that even if a *bhavi*, initiated by a *guru* becomes a *bhakta*, and after that becomes a *jaṅgama* and leaves for a tour of the country, when he comes back to visit his *guru*, they both commit a great sin if they still think of their relationship in terms of *guru* and disciple; the *jaṅgamas* used to study the Veda and Vedānta, quit family life, shave their heads or wear matted locks. Others say that the *bhakta* must offer whatever he enjoys, including his wife, to the *jaṅgama* first, and spend his money to feed the *jaṅgamas*, instead of burying his money in the ground.²¹ With all of the benefits afforded to the *jaṅgamas* due to their important social position, certain authors of the time established a set of warning signs that would signal a fraudulent *jaṅgama*. Cannabasava and other authors warn to beware of the *jaṅgamas* who eat meat, drink alcohol and go with the prostitutes, and the later hagiographic literature tells about frauds trying to take advantage of the gullible Basava or merely trying to eke a living by wearing the *jaṅgama*'s garb without having any spiritual knowledge.²²

As far as other sources of information are concerned, the epithet *jaṅgama* or *jaṅgamaliṅga* appears, along with the terms *rājāguru* and *paṇḍita*, in inscriptions of the twelfth and thirteenth century referring to the Kālāmukha *ācāryas*, who were residing, as heads, in *maṭhas* and Śiva temples in the area of today's North Karnataka.²³ In such places the itinerant ascetics (*jaṅgamas*) would find shelter and food as stated in the epigraphic sources.²⁴ A more comprehensive study of

²⁰ See Cidānandamūrti, Em., *Jaṅgamajātiyalli anuśrēṇi*, Beṅgalūru Viśvavidyālaya, Beṅgalūru, 1984, pp. 20-23. In Kannaḍa, the grammatical gender for human beings is according to their sex, only infants can be referred to by the neuter gender.

²¹ Giving one's wife to the Śaiva ascetic is a *topos* of the literature narrating the lives of the Śaiva saints, both before and after the *vacanas*. In the Tamiḷ Peryapurāṇam, written by Cēkḷilār in the twelfth century but telling older stories, Śiva tests his devotee Iyarpakai Nāyanār by appearing at his door disguised as a lecherous *brāhmaṇa* smeared in ashes and asking for his wife, to which both Iyarpakai and his wife comply. See Dennis Hudson, D., "Violent and Fanatical Devotion Among the Nāyanārs: A Study in the *Periya Purāṇam* of Cēkḷilār", in *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees: Essays on the Guardians of Popular Hinduism*, edited by Alf Hiltebeitel, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1989, p. 378. A similar story is narrated about Basava, who gives his wife to a *jaṅgama* (Śiva in disguise), by Harihara (1230), the first to write about the lives of the Śaraṇas.

²² Cannabasava says "Are those who merely have a shaven head all Jaṅgamas? Are those who wear the proper garb all Jaṅgamas? Are those who go about with earthy souls all Jaṅgamas? He who is without motion is Jaṅgama; he who is without limit is Jaṅgama; he who is one with Reality is Jaṅgama...Because he did not see the stirring of such Jaṅgama, Lord Kūḍala Cennasaṅgama Himself took on the form of a Jaṅgama, Prabhu by name.", in Gūlūra Siddhavīraṅṇāryaru, *Śūnyasampādane*, 5 voll., edited by S.C. Nandimath, L.M.A. Menezes, R.C. Hiremath, S.S. Bhoosnurmath and M.S. Sunkapur, Dharwar, 1965-1972, vol.V, p.97.

²³ A record from Gadag (AD 1192) describes the Kālāmukha Candrabhūṣaṇa-paṇḍita-deva as the fourth *jaṅgamaliṅga* of the god Trikūṭeśvara. The donor of the AD 1189 grant from Hombaḷ, the Kālāmukha priest Rudraśakti, is called a *jaṅgama*, and Sarveśvara-deva, the Kālāmukha ascetic who headed the Jagadīśvara temple at Munavalli in AD 1252 is called a *jaṅgamaliṅgāvatāra*. The inscription adds that Sarveśvara-deva was a *rāyarājaguru*, master of the discipline of yoga and well versed in the Vedas, Vedānta, six systems of philosophy, grammar, lexicography. He preserved the Lākūlāgama and had obtained the status of *sāmyarūpa* with Śaṅkara. He used to wear ashes on the body, a *kaupinya*, an antelope skin and a rosary of *rudrākṣa*. From the end of fourteenth century onwards we have Vīraśaiva inscriptions in the temples formerly occupied by the Kālāmukhas. See Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas, Two Lost Śaivite Sects*, 1st ed. Thompson Press, 1972, 2nd revised ed, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1991, p. 121, 153, 171, 239. See also later records, such as the Śrīśaīla Kaifiyat where a certain Kumāra Liṅgayya, who built a *maṭha* at Śrīśaīla, is called a *jaṅgama*. In *Epigraphia Andhrīca*, p. 46 ff., quoted in Lalitamba, K., *Vīraśaivism in Āndhra*, Guntur 1981, p.66. In the Śaṅkaradigvijaya by Ānandagiri, the Jaṅgamas are mentioned as one among other Śaiva sects.

²⁴ The records from the Kodiya maṭha, at Balligave, state that the heads of the same were *jaṅgamakalpabhūjas*, magic plants that could fulfil any wish of the *jaṅgamas*. Quoted in Heggade, Rajarama, *The Dynamics of Devotional Cults: Saivism in Medieval Karnataka*, in *Journal of Karnataka Studies* 1 November 2003-April 2004, p. 95. On the basis of such and other records Rajarama Heggade (*op. cit.*, p.

Śaivism in the Deccan area from eleventh century to the pre-colonial era would possibly give us a clearer picture and help us understand how, in the course of time, the word *jaṅgama* has come to designate a status inherited by birth, and sanctioned by ritual initiation.²⁵

Social and ritual hierarchy among the Vīraśaivas: Jaṅgamas and Bhaktas

As stated before, the Vīraśaivas of the modern period belong to social subgroups, which are not the same as those of the Hindūs, and for this reason they have been called a caste-sect. The main division is between Jaṅgamas and *bhaktas* (or *Liṅgāyatās*). The Jaṅgamas are the highest *jāti*, they are to the Vīraśaivas more or less what the Brāhmaṇas are to the non Vīraśaiva Hindūs: a closed, partially endogamous group²⁶ to which one belongs by birth, acting as the priestly class of the community and enjoying a special ritual status. The *bhaktas* are a larger group depending on the Jaṅgamas for religious and ritual guidance. Their *jātis* are organized in a loose hierarchy, in the sense that among them there is a competition for status and there are regional differences, the highest rank being occupied either by the Pañcamasālis (landed agriculturists), or by the Baṇajigas (traders), and the base being formed by many other occupational groups of farmers and artisans, while at the lowest border line we find the *dalitas* who have been influenced by the Vīraśaivas but are not fully part of the community.²⁷

The Jaṅgamas are organized in occupational subgroups and are subject to an internal ritual hierarchy. The highest among them are called Hirēmaṭhas, a Kannaḍa word meaning the great *maṭha*, because they are entitled not only to receive worship, but also to become *gurus* and head of religious institutions (*maṭhādhyakṣa*). They may marry and act as religious officiants for the *bhaktas* or can be chosen as representatives of a higher level of religious authority and become *paṭṭādhyakṣas* or *upācāryas*, heads of *maṭhas*, who remain celibate and wear orange (*kāvi*) colored robes.²⁸ So they become part of a hierarchically organized network, spreading all over the territory populated by the Vīraśaivas from five pontifical seats called Pañcāpīṭhas. These seats are believed to have been established in the cosmic age in which we live, that is the Kaliyuga, by five teachers, or Pañcācāryas, who had preached and revived, with different *avatāras* in the four different cosmic ages, the eternal religion of Śiva. Today each seat (*pīṭha*) is occupied by a representative of the

107) concludes that “the term *jaṅgama* in the Śaiva tradition cannot be said to simply indicate a strict renunciation of a wanderer who rejected the temple rituals altogether” and that “the Kālāmukha temples, mystic and militant Śaivism were the three contextual expressions of Śaivism, the latter two belonging to the *jaṅgama* tradition legacies (...)”.

²⁵ It might be fruitful to compare the evolution of the Buddhist *newari* priestly class of Nepal, whose case may show many similarities.

²⁶ They may marry women belonging to the Pañcamasāli and Baṇajiga groups.

²⁷ See, Assayag, Jackie, *op. cit.*, pp. 340-345. Also the table in Chekki, Dan, *op.cit.*, p.60. In Kannaḍa, Cidānandamūrti, Em., *Jaṅgamajāṭiyalli anuśrēṇi*, Beṅgaḷūru Viśvavidyālaya, Beṅgaḷūru, 1984, pp. 4-5 and Mūrti, Cidānanda, Em., *Vīraśaiva dharma: bhāratīya saṃskṛti (hindū : liṅgāyata)*, Miñcu prakāśana, Beṅgaḷūru 2000, p. 156. The most recent descriptions are based on material gathered between the 60s and the early 70s of the 20th century. Unfortunately village studies on caste went out of fashion after the 70s as noted in Karant, G. K., *Caste in contemporary rural India*, in *Caste Its Twentieth Century Avatar*, edited and introduced by M. N. Srinivas, Viking, New Delhi 1995, pp. 87. The acceptance into the fold of the *dalitas* by means of conversion is still a controversial issue as it was in the first half of 20th century: “The third group or sub-division is non-Panchamasālis without ashtavarna rites. It contains washermen, tanners, shoemakers, fishermen, etc., which would rank as unclean castes among Brāhmanic Hindus. It is practice among the Liṅgāyats of the present day to deny that the members of this third group are entitled to be classed as Liṅgāyats at all. They maintain that, since the possession of the full ashtavarna rites is the mark of a Liṅgāyat, these lower divisions, who at the most can claim three or four of the eight sacraments, are only the followers or servants of Liṅgāyats. The contention is not unreasonable; yet it seems that these lower orders would be styled Liṅgāyats by other Hindus of the neighbourhood, and would describe themselves as such. A classification of the Liṅgāyat community would not therefore be completed unless they were included”. In Enthoven, R. E., *The Castes and Tribes of Bombay*, Vol. II, reprint Asian Educational services, New Delhi 1990 (1st ed. 1922), p. 354.

²⁸ Though rarely, there are accepted instances of married Paṭṭādhyakṣas too. I came across two cases and I was told that if there are no males in *svāmi*'s the family, he is allowed to marry in order to beget a successor.

original founder, who bears the title of teacher of the world (*jagadguru*), sits on the imperial throne (*siṃhāsana*), and wears both the symbols of the royal authority, a crown (*mukuta*) and a signet ring, and those of the religious function, a wooden staff with a coloured flag and a metal basket (*kamaṇḍalu*). The five Jagadgurus are the ultimate religious authority; they ascend their royal thrones like kings, through the ritual of the royal consecration (*paṭṭābhiṣeka*), and when they appoint the heads of their branch institutions, they do it through the same kingly ritual and by handing over to them a copy of their golden signet ring. They derive their religious authority from Śiva himself and refer to the Sanskrit Śaiva Āgamas along with the whole tradition accepted by the Āgamas for textual support (*pramāṇa*). The five teachers, according to the Āgamas, sprung either from the five faces of Sadāśiva or from five of the twelve *jyotirlingas*, believed by all Hindūs to be natural and powerful manifestation of this god.²⁹ Two of the five seats are in Karnataka (Rambhāpuri and Ujjayini) and three are in pan-Indian pilgrimage centres sacred to Śiva: Kedāra, on the Himālayas, Kāśī, on the river Ganges, and Śrīśaila, the sacred mountain in Andhra Pradesh. Each of these five seats has a main lineage, divided into twelve branches, and to such affiliations belong all the Jaṅgamas and all the devotees, who are formally initiated by them into the fold by the tying of the *liṅga*. The presence of the Pañcācāryas is ritually evoked in five pots of water (*pañcakalaśa*) during the initiation ceremony to the young Jaṅgamas and during the wedding ceremony.³⁰

The Paṭṭādhyaṅga, called in spoken Kannada Paṭṭāddēvaru, lives in a *maṭha* with the families of his elder and younger brothers. He is in charge of a certain number of villages where Vīraśaivas live.³¹ In each of such villages there might be a married Hirēmaṭha who takes care of a number of rituals but, for many purposes, the Paṭṭāddēvaru is required. He has the right to arbitrate disputes and exact fines from the devotees, in his presence marriage alliances are fixed, he must perform the initiation ceremony to the young Jaṅgamas and his presence is also necessary in other rituals, like the funeral rites. He is also invited home by the devotees for the ritual of the washing of the feet, followed by a ritual banquet (*prasāda*) and an offering in cash (*kāṇike*).³² The mode of succession to the Hirēmaṭha and to the Upācāryamaṭha is patrilinear, and the capacity of *guru* is transferred, in the first case, to the son and, in the second case being the *guru* a celibate, to the brother's son (*putravarga*).³³

Besides enjoying the rights to the properties of which the institution is endowed, he has the right to get from his *bhaktas* the first part of any new crop and also to demand from them the *bhikṣa*, which he may do, once a year, by visiting them wearing a set of bells, called *jaṅgu* on his leg and the bag for alms called *jōlige*.³⁴ This can be done by the married Hirēmaṭha as well, as both of them have received at the time of their initiation as Jaṅgamas the female bag (*heṅṅu jōlige*), while the

²⁹ This traditional account in Sanskrit circulated, in Kannada script, at the end of 19th century in printed form. See *Pañcācāryavaṃśāvali suprabhedāgamāntargatam*, Cannavīra Phakīrappa Karnāṭaka buk dīpo, Dhāravāḍa 1888. It was printed in Devanāgarī script, with Marāṭhi rendition, in 1903, see *Pañcācāryotpattiprakaraṇam suprabodhāgamāntargatam*, ed. by Vedamūrti Maṇūramathādhyaṅga Mallikārjuna śāstrī, Vīraśaivaliṅgibrāhmaṇa-dharmagranthamālā, Rāvasaheba Mallappā Basappā Vārada, Bombay 1903. The *Pañcārādhyasamudbhavam* is also subject matter of a manuscript preserved in the Oriental Research Institute of Mysore and claiming to belong to the Uttarabhāga of the Vātulāgama (C.2608), and two of the five preceptors are mentioned in another manuscript classified as *Vīraśaivaguruparamparā* and preserved in the GOML, Madras (5490). For more details, see Ripepi, Tiziana, *Una bibliografia ragionata di testi vīraśaiva in sanscrito*, Tesi di Dottorato, Università di Roma La Sapienza, 2000, pp. 110, 123.

³⁰ The Pañcācārya Jagadgurus and the Jagadguru of the Rambhāpuripīṭha can be viewed in the following webpages: RAMBHAPURI PEETHA.htm SHRI MADJAGADGURU PANCHACHARYA PRASANNA.htm

³¹ *Paṭṭada dēva-ru* means literally “the god-s of the *paṭṭa*” (the plural is honorific), as his initiation into the office is performed like the coronation of the king, *paṭṭābhiṣeka*, by pouring water on the head of the candidate, and by tying a cloth containing a piece of gold, called *paṭṭa*, to his forehead.

³² If the area under the Paṭṭāddēvaru is too large, he can appoint a Carasvāmi, who can tour the villages on his behalf.

³³ In certain circumstances the choice of the candidate has to be approved by the five Jagadgurus.

³⁴ In many cases the *bhaktas* themselves bring to the *maṭha* provisions in plenty, for instance in occasion of the annual *jātre*.

Jaṅgamas belonging to subordinates *upajātis* receive the male bag (*gaṇḍu jōḷige*) and have no right to ask for alms.³⁵ Such people used to work as ritual helpers of the Paṭṭāddēvaru and Hirēmaṭha but they are disappearing as such either because they are quitting the traditional occupation or because they tend to change their name to, let's say, upgrade their status.³⁶ These have no matrimonial alliances with the Hirēmaṭhas.

The Viraktas

So, we can notice that in the triad of *guru*, *liṅga* and *jaṅgama* the *guru* and the *jaṅgama* have come together in the person of the *born jaṅgama*, more precisely speaking, the Hirēmaṭha/Paṭṭādhyaḱṣa. He is a ritualist by right of birth and by further initiation and he caters to the needs of devotees who are already born in Vīraśaiva families, and to be more explicit, he does not try to convert people to the faith. The organization formed by the Hirēmaṭha/Paṭṭādhyaḱṣas and presided by the five Jagadgurus is known as the Pañcācāryas or Gurus.

But as hinted above, there is another powerful organization of Svāmīs among the Vīraśaivas, the Viraktas. The Sanskrit word *virakta*, meaning literally “discoloured, disaffected, indifferent to”, taken in the sense of indifferent to the mundane values, comes to designate the renouncer. In Kannāḍa, it acquired the clear meaning of “ascetic”. According to the *Kannāḍa Kannāḍa English Dictionary* by the Kannāḍa Sāhitya Pariṣattu the term is a synonym of *virāgi and sanyāsi*.³⁷ We find the word *virakta* in the twelfth century Śaraṇas' literature, in association with the *jaṅgama*, the wandering ascetic as moving *liṅga*, to say Śiva himself. In this case it is a lady mystic, Amugerayamma, who describes the *viraktas*: unlike the *jaṅgamas* who grow their hair in matted locks and hair knots, the *viraktas* have shaven heads, and wear saffron robes; they travel constantly and read to the people the *vacanas* of the elders; they know the truth, they have gone beyond the three reaches – gold, woman, land – and it doesn't befit them to fall at the feet of the *guru* who's still within the three; they must wear the *iṣṭaliṅga* on their body, remain solitary and be content.³⁷

Here we see a clear awareness of the distinction between the *guru*, who initiates into the fold but is not a renouncer, and the *jaṅgama/virakta*, who is clearly a renouncer. This distinction is further glossed as superiority of the second on the first and, what is of wider consequence, anyone can become a renouncer, one need not be born in a specific caste.³⁸

In the sixteenth century, the ideal of the *jaṅgama/virakta* finds an institutional *avatāra*, in the work of Tōṅṭada Siddhaliṅgayati, mystic, writer, organizer and founder of the tradition of the Viraktas. According to the many hagiographies written by his disciples, Siddhaliṅgayati had with him seven hundred *viraktas*. Even if this figure is an exaggeration, the tradition founded by him has grown to be the largest and the most successful among the Vīraśaivas. The hagiographers called Siddhaliṅgayati a *jaṅgama* and described the acquisition of his ascetic power, his miracles, and his constant engagement in travelling and propagation of the religion. At a given point of time his rich devotees built for him a monastery, called Kallumaṭha, in Eḍeyūru where devotees flock even today to visit his *samādhi* and obtain his blessings. Like the mystics of the twelfth century, Siddhaliṅgayati wrote *vacanas* describing the path to the ultimate spiritual union and was depicted,

³⁵ According to Cidānandamūrti, Em. *op. cit.*, p. 13.

³⁶ Immediately below the Hirēmaṭha we find the Gaṇācāri. He acts as a messenger, inviting all the Jaṅgamas to the auspicious ceremonies taking place in the homes of the devotees, informing the Hirēmaṭha and the whole village about any wedding, death or birth, but he has no right to celebrate at weddings. Below the Gaṇācāri is the Maṭhapatti (lit. servant of the *maṭha*). He executes all the preparations for the ritual and large part of the ritual itself, instructed by the Hirēmaṭha who supervises, sits on the *gadduge* and gives the blessings (*āśīrvāda*). He performs alone at the marriage of widows (*uḍike/uḍukī lagna*), a very simple ceremony. Among the lower *upajātis* are the Bhasmadayyas or Būdi aigaḷu, who prepare the sacred ashes from cowdung, the Kante aigaḷu, who make the small *iṣṭaliṅga* and its cover (*kante*), and the Vastrada aigaḷu, who prepare the cloth and the thread used for ritual purposes. For more detail see Cidānandamūrti, Em., *op. cit.*, pp.15-19. Cidānandamūrti doesn't mention the Pūjeri (Pūjāri) subcaste, whose male members officiate in the temples of Vīrabhadra in North Karnataka.

³⁷ Quoted in Cidānandamūrti, Em., *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.

³⁸ See the *vacana* of Cannabasava quoted before in this paper.

a short time after his death, as the reviver of that tradition. His successors dedicated their energies and knowledge to write the history of the Śaraṇas and to edit the corpus of the *vacanas*, the most important work in this field being the *Śūnyasampādane*. The importance of this work is in that it combines both the editing of the texts and the narration of the religious history: the editor connects through a prose narrative frame the *vacanas* of the Śaraṇas, structuring them in a dialogue between the different characters. So, in twenty-one chapters, we are introduced to the twelfth century kingdom of Kalyāṇa and to the events that took place in the span of about fifteen years under the rule of king Bijjala, and also to the main issues of the theology, spirituality, and ritual of the Viraśaivas.

The main character of the narration is Allama who is depicted as the ideal *jaṅgama*. In the beginning, he states that his true nature is supra-mundane and that he has come on the earth now, as in ages past, to protect and promote *bhakti*; then his initiation by the *guru* Animaṣa is described as a mystic experience that transforms him into the *guru*. From the second chapter onward Allama travels meeting various devotees of Śiva and teaching or debating on various religious issues. Thus, in Sonnalige, he persuades the famous *yogin* Siddharāma to stop building temples and tanks in order to earn religious merit and to convert to the path of knowledge, and then takes him to Kalyāṇa, in North Karnataka, where Basava, the minister to the king was a great patron of the *bhaktas* of Śiva. Though Basava's nephew, Cannabasava, had predicted the arrival of the great mystic Allama, when this finally happens Basava is not spiritually ready. At his home Allama and Siddharāma are attended by a servant as Basava is busy in the religious service to his *iṣṭaliṅga*. This becomes the occasion to stress the superiority of the *jaṅgama* over the *liṅga*. After other chapters dedicated to the instruction of Basava, Cannabasava, and to the initiation of Siddharāma, comes the praise of Allama by the assembly of the Śaraṇas and Cannabasava extols the spiritual transformation power of the ritual washing of the the *jaṅgama*'s feet (*pādapūje*). The following three chapters stress the importance of dedicated work as both means of subsistence and selfless service to the community of *bhaktas* and *jaṅgamas* and its superiority over ritual routine, and other three chapters describe people who have a non conventional way to live their devotion and are looked at with some fear by the Śaraṇas. Allama shows that Maḍivāla Mācayya's quick anger towards the non devotees of Śiva, Maruḷuśaṅkara's dirty appearance and mad behaviour, Ghaṭṭivālayya's stern disapproval of the life style of the well to do devotees, Mahādēviyakka's rejection of marriage, resulting in her later becoming a naked wanderer, all hide a profound and accomplished spirituality. Then Allama sets for a tour of the subcontinent and, in a span of twelve years, spreads the devotion for Śiva, which causes him to be praised by converts wherever he goes, and takes him to end his journey on the Himālayas, where he spends some years meditating in a cave. His spiritual perfection shows in the transformation of his physical body as well: it doesn't cast any shadow, walks a few inches above the earth and, in the last chapter, when Allama is challenged by the famous *siddha*, Gorakṣa, he defeats him by a miracle: Gorakṣa's sword passes through his body as if through empty space. Allama in fact, has reached the ultimate experience, that of the void (*śūnya*). By the time he comes back to Kalyāṇa, the Śaraṇas are prepared for his return. They have organized at Basava's residence a formal space for religious debates, called Anubhava Maṅṭapa, the Hall of Experience, and built a throne to be occupied by Allama, called by them Prabhu, as the leader of their society. But when Prabhu enters Basava's palace disguised as a beggar, and sits on the Śūnyasiṃhāsana, the throne of the void, only Basava and a few of his companions recognise him and rejoice, with the consequence that many thousands of *jaṅgamas* who are being fed in the palace, as customary routine of Basava's devotion, feel insulted and leave the place in rage. This depresses Basava who regrets what happened but Prabhu and the others explain to him that he has to choose between the true and the fake *jaṅgama* and asks him if there is difference between God as one or God as many, for by feeding him he shall satisfy all the *jaṅgamas*. Then Prabhu asks for food and starts his *liṅga* worship. After the ritual Basava brings the meal and it is soon clear that Prabhu is testing his disciple. Basava serves him, course after course, the food prepared to feed hundred and ninety-six thousand *jaṅgamas* and, to everyone's bewilderment, Prabhu is never full. Not knowing what to do, Basava empties storerooms and granaries, recurs to the alchemic stone to multiply food but there is no way he can satiate his lord. Finally Cannabasava gives the answer: the *jaṅgamaliṅga* sitting on the throne of the Void, is God.

How can you think to satisfy the infinity of God? The only offer that can please Him is infinite love. He says to Basava: “You should be the main dish, the side dish I.”

So, after this brief sketch, the fact that Tōṅṭada Siddhaliṅgayati was referred to by his younger contemporaries as Tōṅṭada Allama and *jaṅgama* gives us an idea of how deeply the ties with the older tradition still resonated at the time. One more remark is needed: apart from Basava and Cannabasava, who were *brāhmaṇas* by birth but had discarded the sacred thread and all affiliation to their caste, all the other characters were of lower castes. The *vacanas* say that looking for caste among the *bhaktas* and *jaṅgamas* is wrong, because the initiation destroys caste along with other impurities, therefore all the devotees must be considered as equal. Allama, in particular, is sometimes depicted as born in a low caste and when he returns to Kalyāṇa he's disguised as a beggar but his social status is not even taken into account nor perceived as a hindrance to the acquisition of spiritual perfection. And the second Allama too, in the 16th century, belonged, according to some, to the merchant caste (*baṇajiga*). Thus the Virakta order is self styled as the heir of Allama's Śūnyasiṃhāsana, which is a seat of spiritual authority, its members being renouncers with the duty to study and preach the religion by touring and reaching to the people. The Viraktas were bound by the rule that they should not stop in one place for more than one night but, as we hinted to before, their devotees, often chieftains and kings, insisted that they settle in their proximity and build monasteries for them. So, in the course of time the Viraktas became more and more stable. Under the fourth successor of Siddhaliṅgayati, Kaṭṭigehalli Siddhaliṅga, there was the first schism in the tradition and the so called Sampādana-samaya was born. Sampādaneya Siddhavīra moved to Hāgalavāḍi, gained the support of the local chieftain and had a *maṭha* built. This branch of the tradition had a rich scholarly production that is a treasure for the Vīraśaivas. One of the disciples of Kaṭṭigehalli Siddhaliṅga, Murigā Rājendra spent some time in Citradurga, where he took with him an orphaned cowherd boy. Before leaving for a long tour, he trusted the boy to the local chieftain who had no sons. On a second visit of the Virakta to Citradurga, the boy, now a local ruler, insisted upon building a *maṭha* for Murigā Rājendra. Among the disciples of Murigā Rājendra, other *caramūrtis*, un-happy with the choice of the successor by the guru, left the place: thus the five *samayas* or traditions of the Viraktas were born: Sampādana, Murughā, Cīlāḷa, Kumāra, Kempina.³⁹ In the course of time, the Viraktas attracted more and more disciples because they were not bound, like the Gurus, to the *bhaktas* sharing the same patrilinear affiliation or to those living in the neighbourhood. As alluded to above, though they started to live in monasteries, they kept travelling. For instance, if we consider a case belonging to 18th century, we can see that Sarpabhūṣaṇa Śivayōgi born in 1795, a *baṇajiga* by caste, became a Virakta at the age of 21 and, from 1815, for 13 years he toured India visiting sacred places like Sonnalige, Hampi, Śrīśaila, Kūḍalasaṅgama, Kāśī.⁴⁰ The Viraktas attracted the support of entire castes and, in the beginning of the modern age, we find that they took up even the traditional functions of the Gurus, first and foremost the conversion to the Vīraśaiva fold. Their scholarly tradition and their attention to the needs of the devotees made them sensitive to the issues of modernization and soon they transformed their *maṭhas* in centres of modern education and solidarity for the community of the Vīraśaivas.⁴¹ The most prominent Viraktamaṭhas at the beginning of the modern period were the Citradurga Bṛhanmaṭha, the Hubli Mūrusāviraṃmaṭha, and the Gadag Tōṅṭadāryamaṭha.

The conflicts of modern times

The period starting from the last years of the nineteenth century up to our times, is dominated by conflict. On the external front the Vīraśaivas, guided by their educated élites, started challenging the pre-eminence of the Brāhmaṇas, anticipating the issues of the Non Brahmana Movement, but

³⁹ Sadasivaiah, H. M., *A Comparative Study of Two Vīraśaiva Monasteries*, Prasaranga Manasa Gangotri, Mysore 1967, p. 93. Hirēmaṭha, Vijayaśrī, *Sampādana samaya*, Liṅgāyata adhyayana samsthe, Śrī Viraktamaṭha Dēśanūru 1999.

⁴⁰ Mūrti, Cidānanda, Em., *Vīraśaiva dharma: bhāratīya saṃskṛti (hindū : liṅgāyata)*, Miñcu prakāśana, Beṅgalūru 2000, p. 146.

⁴¹ See Assayag, J., *op.cit.*, pp. 334-336; also Bradford, N. J., *op.cit.*, pp. 93-99.

on the internal front they were and still are divided by a war of factions, between Gurus and Viraktas, and between the Jaṅgamas and the non Jaṅgama castes.

It's important to specify here that the claims of the Vīraśaivas to the same rights enjoyed by the Brāhmaṇas were not an example of the sanskritization process, at least as it was described by Srinivas: a slow process of emulation of the customs and rituals of the upper castes that could take one or two generations and that the leaders of the dominant castes had the power to prevent. Rather, the Vīraśaivas set the model for a new type of emulation, through defiance and appeal to the courts of justice. And this model seems to have become current in modern India.⁴²

Vīraśaivas versus Brāhmaṇas⁴³

In the State of Mysore, the Vīraśaivas were well represented in the Mahārāja's court till the Oḍeyars shifted their patronage to the Śrīvaiṣṇava Brāhmaṇas, choosing their religious head as royal *guru*. In 1800, around two hundred people belonging to their community were still employed in the royal palace, but short after their fortunes declined and, in the censuses of 1871 and 1881, the community was listed among the Śūdras. Their educated élite, outraged by such an open disregard, attempted by all means to prove to the government and to society at large that they were not Śūdras but Liṅgi Brāhmaṇas, Śaiva Brāhmaṇas wearing the *liṅga*. Such an élite was formed by Jaṅgamas and Baṅajigas who had had access to Sanskrit education and Ārādhyā Brahmāṇas who had joined the Jaṅgamas. There were intellectuals among them, who had been honoured by the Mahārāja with the title of *āsthāna vidvān* (court scholar), and one of such men P. R. Karibasavaśāstri, stood as the champion of the Vīraśaivas in public debates with the Brāhmaṇas.⁴⁴ In 1881 Yajamān Vīrasaṅgappa (1843-1899), the leader of such a circle, started a newspaper, the Maisūru Śtār so to have a forum for debate and circulate ideas about the issues dear to him. He also started a printing press where he published the Vīraśaiva Sanskrit treatises in a series, called Vīraśaivagrathaprakāśikā, edited by P. R. Karibasavaśāstri and other scholars.⁴⁵ One of the first issues tackled was that non *brāhmaṇas* could not be admitted to the traditional Sanskrit schools (*pāṭhaśālas*), because they were banned from the recitation and learning of the Vedas. The Vīraśaivas claimed that they had the right to recite those parts of the Veda related to Śiva, and that their philosophy called Śaktiviśiṣṭādvaita was based on the Vedānta. But the doors of the Mahārāja Saṃskṛta Pāṭhaśāla, in Mysore, remained closed to them till independence.⁴⁶ P.R. Karibasavaśāstri though, financially backed by the Jagadguru of Citradurga, found a way to organize private classes of vedic recitation in order to form a class of qualified teachers among the Vīraśaivas.⁴⁷ In 1904, at the religious gathering of the annual *jātre* for Mallikārjuna, at Muḍukutore, known as the second Śrīśaila and for being sacred to the Vīraśaivas, an association was started for the promotion of the Vīraśaiva religion: the Vīraśaivamatasaṃvardhinī Sabhā, presided by P. R. Karibasavaśāstri. The aim of the institution was to revive this ancient religion that had lost importance, though its followers were in great number in the State of Mysore. This would be brought about by organizing religious speeches by learned scholars, by editing and publishing the ancient Sanskrit books, and by

⁴² Such change is noted by Karant, G. K., *op. cit.*, p. 94.

⁴³ In this section I'm drawing upon Mūrti, Cidānanda, Em., *op. cit.* and Naṅjuṅḍārādhyā, N. J., *Śirasi Guruśāntaśāstrigaḷu*, in *Vīraśaiva puṅyapurūṣaru*, saṃpuṭa 1, ed. by Basavarāja Malaśeṭṭi, Vīraśaiva adhyayana saṃsthe Śrī Jagadguru Tōṅṭadārya saṃsthānamāṭha, Daṃbala/Gadaga 1983, pp. 37-48.

⁴⁴ Other prominent intellectuals were Abhinava Kālidāsa Basavappaśāstri, Vyākaraṇa B. Mallappa, Mallārādhyā, Gurikāra Marimallappa.

⁴⁵ These were N. R. Karibasavaśāstri and Guruśāntaśāstri. Vīrasaṅgappa himself used to collect from the people old manuscripts of Sanskrit treats to get them edited and published.

⁴⁶ In 1948, thanks to the efforts of Chief Justice P. Mahādevappa, then supervisor of the managing committee of the Cāmarājendra Sanskrit College of Bangalore, a course on Śaktiviśiṣṭādvaita was introduced and Guruśāntaśāstri was appointed to teach it. He served there till 1958, and when the same course was started at the Mahārāja College, in Mysore, he moved there and taught till his retirement in 1960.

⁴⁷ According to Naṅjuṅḍārādhyā, the course in Vedic recitation, went on for about ten years. A *pāṭhaśāla*, the Bhāṣōjjivini, with free boarding for the students was started by Vīrasaṅgappa and closed soon after his death.

starting a *pāṭhaśāla* and a library.⁴⁸ The Śaṅkaravilāsa Veda Pāṭhaśāla was indeed started in 1909 and in 1911, the Sabhā could felicitate the Government of Mysore for considering in the census the Vīraśaivas as a religious community and not as a caste of Śūdras. Then in 1917 they felt confident enough to request the Government to consider the fact that compared to the Brāhmaṇas, the non *brāhmaṇas* were very low in number in Government jobs.

But though the public debates with the Brāhmaṇas could yield to sporadic successes, these didn't prove as effective as the appeal to the courts. If the Government of the Mahārāja was partial to the Brāhmaṇas, the British Government was not and, from 1900 onwards, the appeal to the courts with the support of modern lawyers became the most successful weapon in the hands of the Vīraśaivas in the northern areas of today's Karnataka. During this war, from 1910 to 1930, the Viraktamaṭha of Citradurga, though in the then State of Mysore, housed the headquarters of such strategic operations and the Jagadguru Jayadēva Murughārājēndra became the symbol of the self confidence of the Vīraśaivas in challenging the Brāhmaṇas. The Citradurga Jagadguru was a learned Sanskrit scholar who soon understood the advantages of modern education.⁴⁹ Since he was often invited by his devotees both to the Kannaḍa speaking and Marāṭhi speaking areas, being fluent in both the languages, he had the chance to illustrate to large audiences the concordance of the Vīraśaiva religious tenets with the principles of the Vedānta and Āgamas.⁵⁰ On the other hand he started the first free hostels in order to help poor Vīraśaivas students in getting access to modern education.

The most popular issue between the Vīraśaivas and the Brāhmaṇas concerned the right to perform a religious procession called *aḍḍapallakki utsava* or celebration of the palanquin, in which the devotees carried the Jagadguru on a palanquin in a procession with a certain number of insignia and symbols of honour, often offered by the royal patrons as a token of respect. In 1883 the Jagadguru of the Smārta Brāhmaṇas residing in Śrīgeri had filed a case in the Dharwar court against the Virakta Jagadguru of Hubli, claiming that he had no right to the *aḍḍapallakki*. In 1886 the case was won by the Hubli Jagadguru, and in 1843 the High Court of Bombay confirmed to him the right to the *aḍḍapallakki*. On the basis of such pronouncement, the Vīraśaivas obtained each time the permission to hold such procession. In this connection a great impact was had by the visit of the Citradurga Jagadguru, held in 1911 in Kolhapur, on invitation of the local Mahārāja, who sent to the Jagadguru the royal elephant, the royal horse, the royal band and several constables. During the procession vedic laudations were recited and the press reported that the Jagadguru had blessed the Mahārāja with vedic formulas (*mantras*). Among the traditional symbols that were paraded in such processions, one in particular became the focus of the defiance strategy of the Vīraśaivas: the arm of Vyāsa (*vyāsana tōlu*).⁵¹ This is to the Vīraśaivas a symbol of the superiority of Śiva and refers to a story told in the Purāṇas: Vyāsa, the sage who wrote the Mahābhāratha and the Purāṇas, dared proclaim in the city holy to Śiva, Kāśī, that Viṣṇu was the supreme deity; hearing that, the angry Nandīśvara paralyzed Vyāsa's risen arm. To see the *vyāsana tōlu* pass in front of their homes was considered an insult by the Brāhmaṇas, who sued the

⁴⁸ The speeches delivered every year in occasion of the annual *jātre* were collected by Guruśāntaśāstri in *Upanyāsasaṅgraha* (1925). Of the thirty-six, nine are by the editor and some of the titles give us a hint about the debate going on at the time. For instance *Gurutvakke vidyeya āvaśyakate* (on the necessity of learning for the capacity of guru); *Pañcasūtakavicāra* (on the five types of impurity); *Līngadhāranavu vēdōktavādaddu* (the wearing of the *līnga* being mentioned in the Veda); *Brahmādvaita mattu Śivādvaita* (the philosophy of non dualism of the Absolute and the philosophy of non dualism of god Śiva); *Pādōdakavicāra* (on the [sacred] water that has washed the feet [of the *jaṅgama*]).

⁴⁹ It's interesting to know that in 1910 he reintegrated in the community, through a proper ritual (*prāyaścitta*) a devotee from Bangalore who had gone to England for education. By crossing the sea, an action believed to cause the lost of the caste for a Hindū, he had put himself in a very difficult position as his caste fellows would not eat with him anymore. Gandhi had to face the same criticism before leaving to England

⁵⁰ His visit to Poone in 1912 was a great success. In this occasion the Jagadguru met Bhandarkar.

⁵¹ This was an arm like thing made of cloth, tied to the Nandīhvaja, or Nandīkōlu a bamboo pole eighteen to twentyfive feet long interspersed with hollow brass pots or bells, carrying at the lower extremity a small brass temple with Nandī, Śiva's bull. The pole is held by one single man who dances balancing it and shaking it so as to produce sound from the brass ornaments.

Vīraśaivas. In no time the photographs of the Kolhapur procession of the Citradurga Jagadguru became very popular among the Vīraśaivas – a copy of which was available at the cost of one rupee- as in the picture, the *vyāsana tōḷu* appeared. Processions were held in spite of their prohibition by the authorities, until in 1922 the Brāhmaṇas had to give in and in Athni a compromise was reached: the procession would avoid the streets where the Brāhmaṇas lived.

Another right restated by the Vīraśaivas through the courts of law was that of performing as temple priests in certain Śiva temples. In the past, such rights had been safeguarded by local chieftains, but in the twentieth century it was questioned by the Brāhmaṇas. The Vīraśaivas enjoyed special rights to perform worship in the Mallikārjuna temple of Śrīśaila, in Andhra Pradesh, and in the Viśvanātha temple of Kāśī, and the Jaṅgamas had a particular subset of temple priests called Pūjāris, but there were also temple priests belonging to other *jātis* like the Guruvas, the Tammaḍis, the Oḍeyars. Famous was the case of Paraḷi, today in Maharashtra, then under the Nizam's rule, where the Guruvas were the traditional temple priests for the Vaidyanātheśvara *liṅga*, one of the twelve *jyotirlingas*. In 1925, the local Brāhmaṇas, on the ground that in 1901 the Bombay Court had decided that the Liṅgāyatas were Śūdras, complained to the Nizam Government that the Guruvas, being Śūdras, could not perform the vedic ritual of the Rudrābhiṣeka to the *liṅga*. After many scholars pronounced in favour of the Vīraśaivas, in 1929 the Government allowed them to stay. Another noteworthy case is that of the Madhukeśvara temple of Banavāsi, whose priests had been in the past the local Oḍeyars but which, in 1923, was in the hands of the Brāhmaṇas. The then Deputy Commissioner of Cauḍadānapura on a visit to the temple, since his caste, the Oḍeyars, had enjoyed some rights on the temple in the past, entered inside the sanctum. The reaction of the Brāhmaṇas was very clever: they started circulating a story saying that after the Deputy Commissioner had defiled the sanctum, a black cobra had been seen inside the temple, and in order to pacify the anger of the god, they asked the guilty to pay a fine of three hundred and fifty rupees. The matter was taken up by Haḷakatti, the well known lawyer and scholar of *vacana* literature, and reached the High Court of Bombay that, in 1935, established that the Vīraśaivas were not Śūdras but Liṅgi Brāhmaṇas.

The term Liṅgi Brāhmaṇas was soon set aside in the political arena, and though the Vīraśaiva Sanskrit texts series published by Vārada Mallappa in Solapur continued to be called Vīraśaiva-liṅgibrāhmaṇa-dharmagranthamālā, in the beginning of the twentieth century, a group of prominent Vīraśaivas who gathered under the supervision of the Virakta Hānagal Kumārasvāmi, decided that the "Liṅgāyatas are indeed Vīraśaivas and there is no need to use the word Brāhmaṇas to describe them". They also requested Enthoven, who was then preparing an official list of castes for the Government of Bombay, to consider the Liṅgāyatas/Vīraśaivas a group of high status but beyond castes (*varṇātīta*), part of the Hindū society.⁵² Enthoven, on his side, a few years later could remark that "Among the educated members of the community there is a strong spirit of rivalry with the Brahmans, whose intellect and capacity have secured them a preponderating share of Government appointments and often a preponderating influence in municipal affairs. This rivalry between the two sects may be said to dominate the whole social and political life of the Bombay Karnatak".⁵³ So Vīraśaivas was the name chosen to represent the whole community, and in 1904 the Akhila Bhārata Vīraśaiva Mahāsabhā was created in Dharwar. In 1908 the Okkaligas started the Okkaligara Saṅgha and soon every caste had its own association in order to promote internal solidarity and the interests of the whole group, in the climate of the so called Non Brahmana Movement. The peculiarity of the Vīraśaiva Mahāsabhā is that since it is not strictly speaking a caste association, it reflects the tensions between the different factions and castes among the Vīraśaivas.

The Gurus, the Viraktas and the New Jaṅgamas

⁵² The word *varṇātīta* referred to the Vīraśaivas appears in their Sanskrit literature. It's interesting to note that the heads of the Bhikṣāvṛttimaṭha of Śrīśaila (14th to 16th century) are called in the inscriptions Ajāti Vīraśaivas. See Konduri Sarojini Devi, *Religion in Vijayanagara Empire*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi 1990, p. 244.

⁵³ In Enthoven, R. E., *The Castes and Tribes of Bombay*, cit., p. 347.

The role played by the Citradurga Jagadguru as a guide for the Vīraśaivas in their fight for prestige was a matter of pride for many Vīraśaivas but, at the same time, was felt as an injustice by the Gurus. At that time the Viraktas were indeed exercising a series of rights pertaining to the Gurus.⁵⁴ Instead of living a life of asceticism and study, they had taken up ritual and disciplinary activities and had started celebrating with royal pomp festivals like Dasara. But this had happened also because the Gurus' network was somehow ossified and not able to react to the changing society. Many Gurumaṭhas were deserted as they were sustained by a survival economy and could not count on cash donations from a large clientele like the Viraktamaṭhas, and some of them had been brought back to life by the Viraktas, as a further insult to the Gurus. So between 1910 and 1920, the Gurus declared war on the Viraktas. Their champion was Kāśīnātha Śāstri, who in 1918 had brought together the five Jagadgurus, started the Paṭṭacārādhikāri Sammelana, a yearly conference of all the heads of the Gurumaṭhas and, in 1920, the Guruvargottejaka Saṅgha, an association to promote the interest of the Jaṅgamas. He was a Sanskrit scholar and a good orator and made all efforts to settle quickly the disputes related to the succession to the Pañcācāryapīṭhas. His faction sued the Citradurga Jagadguru on the grounds that he had no right to excommunicate or reintegrate into the caste the devotees, and argued that only the born Jaṅgamas should become heads of any *maṭha*, Guru or Virakta. This last point was openly in contrast with the Viraktas' tradition though, in North Karnataka, most heads of the Viraktamaṭhas of the time belonged to the Jaṅgamas' caste.

Even the Śivayōgamandira, an institution started in 1909 by the Virakta Hānagal Kumārasvāmi, with the aim to train the future heads of *maṭhas* was soon controlled by the Jaṅgamas.⁵⁵

On the other side, the power of the Jaṅgamas, backed by the Baṇajigas, was challenged by the lower castes, who were looking for opportunities to emerge but were kept back. The defiance took again the form of an assertion of autonomy and thus different *jātis*, such as the Sādas and the Nonabas created their own Jaṅgamas. These were called Hosa Ayyas,⁵⁶ the New Jaṅgamas. For instance, in the area of Shimoga and Davangere, the people belonging to the Sāda caste of agriculturists, were looked down on by the Jaṅgamas. Their children were not admitted to the student hostel of the Citradurga Murughāmaṭha, controlled by the higher castes. The Sādas were prosperous and in good number but their status was low. Then they started inviting home for ritual purposes only the Sāda Jaṅgamas and were backed in their bold move by Śāntirājadēśikēndrasvāmi, the Paṭṭādhyakṣa of the *maṭha* of Sirigere, who in 1925-26 presided over the Sadar General Meeting.⁵⁷ This Svāmi, claimed the right to the succession of the Ujjayanipīṭha (one of the five seats of the Gurus, near Bellary), but eventually settled down in Sirigere, content with the title of Jagadguru. Something similar happened to some of the branch *maṭhas* of the Rambhāpuripīṭha. In the case of Gōḍekere (Tumkur dist.), where the Nonabas were particularly powerful, a claim to the succession to the Rambhāpuripīṭha was staged and soon after a Nonaba became the head of the local *maṭha*. Another such case was the *maṭha* of Suttūru, near Mysore, where independence has resulted in an immense growth of the institution.⁵⁸ It's interesting to note

⁵⁴ Even the ethnographic literature of those years maintains the view that "Viraktaswamis do not live in towns and villages, but are more of the nature of recluses. They are not allowed to become gurus or spiritual guides, or to exercise any religious authority over the Lingayats." in Nanjundayya, H.V. and Iyer, L.M. Ananthakrishna, *The Mysore tribes and castes*, vol IV, Mysore University, Mysore 1931, pp. 88-89.

⁵⁵ Pāvate even before 1930 had opposed the refusal to admit non Jaṅgamas to the Śivayōgamandira.

⁵⁶ Ayyagaḷu, Aigaḷu (-gaḷu is a suffix for the plural in Kannada) are popular ways to call the Jaṅgamas.

⁵⁷ An instance of such conflicts at village level is given by Gurusurthy: in the village of his study, "For the first time in 1932, the immigrant Sādar group claimed a share in the ritual roles and remuneration for their Shivana Math's Jangamas. Since this was considered uncustomary by the Jangamas of the Five Maths and their supporters, the claim was refused. The Sādar Lingāyats, who form a dominant caste in Kallapura, objected to the celebration of the festival itself [the village festival]", in Gurusurthy, K.G., *Kallapura. A South Indian Village*, Karnatak University, Dharwar 1976, p. 134.

⁵⁸ The heads of the Suttūrumaṭha are Jaṅgama by birth and bear the title of Jagadguru of the Śrī vīrasimhāsana mahāsamsthāna maṭha located in Suttūru, a town near Mysore, whereas the original *vīrasimhāsana*, one of the five *pīṭhas*, is in Bālehoṇṇūru, in Chikmagalur district. Today the Jagadguru Sri Shivaratreeshwara Mahavidyapeetha of Mysore, the educational institution of the Suttūrumaṭha, known as J.S.S., guides more than 250 institutions in and out of the country.

that these independent *maṭhas* chose to forget their previous affiliation to the Gurus and took the appearance of Virakta institutions. They started giving importance to modern education, and to the message of the *vacanas*, with its openings on modern issues, and their Svāmis, though Jagadgurus, adopted the simplicity of the Viraktas. Even among the Viraktas new *maṭhas* came up in that period, the most important being that of Siddhagaṅgā, near Tumkur. It was built in the last years of the nineteenth century by a certain Aḍavīsvāmi coming from the North. He died in 1902 leaving the institution to Uddana Śivayōgi who, in 1917 started a Sanskrit Veda Pāṭhaśāla open to students of all castes, providing them with free boarding. This was recognized as a Sanskrit College by the Government of Mysore in 1938. The present head, Śivakumārasvāmi, who was installed in 1942, is not a Jaṅgama by birth. He too has developed the institution though in keeping with a certain austerity and, when I visited in 1998, the free hostel used to feed 4286 students everyday, of which only half were Vīraśaivas.⁵⁹ The two factions of the Gurus and the Viraktas carried on with their different activities, ritual the first and educational the second, and the divide grew wider in the course of time. In 1927 Kāśīnātha Śāstri started a printing press in Mysore, the Panchacharya Electric Press, to publish both the Sanskrit religious literature of the Vīraśaivas as well as propaganda pamphlets, and kept organizing gatherings of devotees on ritual occasion and delivering public speeches.⁶⁰ In 1934 he organized the first official visit of the Rambhāpuri Jagadguru to the Mahārāja of Mysore, after more than one century and, before that, the visit of the Mahārāja to Rambhāpuri in 1931. Even after independence, the Pañcācāryas in keeping with their traditionalist nature, went on with activities of ritualistic and sanskritic nature, and though they started educational institutions and scholarship schemes for the devotees as well, their main effort was directed to train a proper class of *jaṅgamas* in order to keep alive their wide network of *maṭhas*. The Viraktas and the independent *maṭhas*, on the other hand chose to modernise taking active part in the education boom, interacting with society at the political and economic level, promoting social service, without forsaking their traditional mission of study and dissemination of the religious literature of the Vīraśaivas. This was pursued both in traditional and modern ways of communication, and directed both to the community of devotees and to the world at large as a few progressive Svāmis, who had studied English, started taking part to conferences on religion, even outside India.

Vīraśaivas and Liṅgāyatās

If before independence sanskritization seemed to be the trend of social mobility, after independence a new trend has prevailed: the competition among castes for the status of “backward class,” that ensures the benefits of protective discrimination. In the sixties in the North of the recently re-organized State of Karnataka, now comprising the Kannaḍa speaking areas of Maharashtra, the Vīraśaivas concentrated in their hands landed property and political power. They held the key posts in the Congress Party and, from 1956 to 1972, they had four Chief Ministers, without break, and the majority of seats in the Legislative Assembly of the State. In that period, the different factions of the Vīraśaivas came together in the common interest and when a report of 1961 classed them as a “forward community”, they got back the “backward” status by means of

⁵⁹ I’ve been told by ex alumni that today the number of boarding students is over eight thousand.

⁶⁰ Actually according to Nañjuṅḍārādhyā, N. J., *op. cit.*, in 1927 the Pañcācāryaprabhā was started in a private house of Mysore by Umacagi Śankaraśāstri, Sunakallibidare Basavalingaśāstri, Hariśvaraśāstri and Guruśāntaśāstri with the help of Kāśīnāthaśāstri. The aim of the newsletter was to circulate the principles followed by the Vīraśaivas as they were explained in the Sanskrit tracts belonging to the Pañcācārya tradition and Guruśāntaśāstri was chosen as its director. In 1930 it was shifted to the Panchacharya Electric Press in Sayyaji Rao Road. Very soon Kāśīnāthaśāstri took over and started publishing virulent propaganda against the Viraktas. Though Guruśāntaśāstri resigned in 1935 the Pañcācāryaprabhā kept being published under his name till 1938. Two apologetic religious speeches delivered in Mysore in 1928 and 1929 and a presentation of the vedantic philosophy of the Vīraśaivas to the Mysore Philosophical Congress in 1935 were published in English. See Kashinatha Shastri Pandit Sri, *Speeches on Veerashaiva Religion*, 2 ed., Mysore, Panchacharya Electric Press, 1969; Chakravarti, R., *Shakti-Vishistadvaita or the Philosophical Aspects of Virasaivism*, Panchacharya Electric Press, Mysore 1957.

political pressure. In this new climate, a new religious propaganda came into existence which could serve also a political purpose.

As we have seen, in 1904 the word *Vīraśaiva* was chosen to represent all the community on the basis of a shared religious identity claimed by many social segments. Thus both *Jaṅgamas* and non-*Jaṅgamas* were involved in the *Vīraśaiva Mahāsabhā*. Now, since the non-*Jaṅgama* castes were known as *Liṅgāyatas*, the label “*Vīraśaiva*” was preferred so as to include the *Jaṅgamas*, who would never accept to be called *Liṅgāyatas*. On the other hand the label “*Liṅgāyata*”, had been used as early as in 1883 for a non religious institution, started in Dharwar by educated *Liṅgāyatas* in order to promote modern education: this was the *Liṅgāyata Vidyāvardhaka Saṅgha*. A similar association, the Karnataka Lingayat Education Society (K.L.E.) was started in 1916 in Belgaum⁶¹ and the word appeared also in 1905 in the Mysore Lingayat Education Fund Association (M. L. F. A.). Since the spreading of modern education was a mission undertaken by the *Viraktas*, the modern élite of educated professionals, lawyers, judges, university professors, doctors, engineers and indeed politicians, was closer to the more progressive *maṭhas*, and they started a fruitful collaboration that resulted in an impressive growth of educational institutions associated with the *Virakta* and *Virakta* looking “independent” *maṭhas* of Karnataka.⁶² At the same time, in the political arena the run for special benefits as a minority started manifesting in the form of the request for a specific column in the census, like in the case of Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Buddhists. This implied that the community had to prove to be a separate religion. The issue of being counted separately in the census was an old one, restated from census to census by several Presidents of the *Mahāsabhā*, who invited the community members to write in the census “*Vīraśaiva* or *Liṅgāyata*” instead of “*Hindū*”, in the religion column, but in 1940 Sakhare, one of the founders of the K. L. E. Society, had said loudly what many people wanted to hear: that the *Liṅgāyatas* were not *Hindūs* but a separate, independent religion. A professor of Sanskrit educated abroad, Sakhare had published in 1942 a study by the title *History and Philosophy of Liṅgāyat Religion*, in which he critically discussed the historical sources of the *Vīraśaiva* faith with a view to assess who was its founder. His conclusion is that since the *Pañcācāryas*’ account of the five teachers preaching the religion from *yuga* to *yuga* is mythical in nature and cannot be proved by history, while the historicity of Basava and the *Śaraṇas* is a fact, Basava must be considered the founder of the *Liṅgāyat* religion and the five pontifical seats of the Gurus a further historical development claiming greater antiquity. In the last chapter of the book, he eventually advocates that the status of independent religion would be more convenient to the *Liṅgāyat* religion.⁶³ The importance of Basava, a family man and administrator, though a mere *bhakta* compared to Allama, more spiritually accomplished but too detached from the world, started growing so to become an icon of the political success of the community.

In 1967 when Nijalingappa was the Chief Minister of Karnataka and the power of the community was in full sway, it was decided to hold the Eighth Centenary Celebrations of Śrī Basavēśvara, and a State Level Committee was created for the task.⁶⁴ The Committee availed itself

⁶¹ The founder members were S. S. Basavanal, M. R. Sakhare, V. V. Patil, H. F. Kattimani, B. B. Mamadapur, B. S. Hanchinal and P. R. Chikodi. The K.L.E. Society has since then established over hundred institutions.

⁶² For instance, besides the J.S.S. mentioned above, owning the largest number of institutions and planning to start a university in the U.S.A., we may mention the *Siddhagaṅgā Maṭha* controlling, in 1997, ninety-six educational institutions, both of them in the Southern part of the country. Among the *Viraktas*, we may mention the *Murugharājendra Brhanmaṭha* of Citradurga and the *Śrī Jagadguru Tōṇṭadārya Saṁsthānamāṭha* of Gadag, which are running around hundred and fifty educational institutions each, the *Śrī Basavēśvara Vidyāvardhaka Saṅgha*, started by Gurubasava Mahāsvāmi of Bilur in 1906, which has a network of ninety, and the the *Rudrākṣimaṭha* of Nāganūr that in 1932 started in Belgaum a free hostel along with the famous *Liṅgarāja College*, a *College of Law*, a *College of Education* and an *Ayurvedic College*.

⁶³ See Sakhare, M. R., *History and Philosophy of Liṅgāyat Religion*, Karnataka University, Dharwar 1978, p. 274. The book was reprinted in 1978 by the Karnataka University Press with a foreword by the then Vice Chancellor R. C. Hiremath, a scholar of the *Kannaḍa vacanas*.

⁶⁴ Here were involved all the prominent *Liṅgāyata* politicians who became Chief Ministers: S. Nijalingappa (1956 and 1962-68), B. D. Jatti (1958), S. R.Kanthi (1962), Veerendra Patil (1969-71). In the committee there were also other Congress Party men like Devaraj Urs, the candidate from the Arasu community, chosen

of the help of the Basava Samiti, recently started in Bangalore by B. D. Jatti, while Professors from the Universities of Bangalore, Mysore, Madras and Dharwar, were appointed to a Sub-editorial Committee, presided by the Svāmi of Tumkur Siddhagaṅgāmaṭha, in order to bring out a Commemoration Volume. The book, published by the Government of Mysore, introduced to the world Basava, in five hundred pages of scholarly essays, as one of the most outstanding personalities in the religious history of India, stressing his role as a social reformer and the universality of his message, that anticipated many modern ideas like socialism, free thinking, equality of women, and the Gandhian non-violence and respect for the Harijans.⁶⁵ The interplay of the political ideals of the Congress, treated as quasi-religious beliefs and the religious beliefs treated as social ideals and virtual points for a political agenda is here quite clear.⁶⁶ In this spirit, the Veerashaiva Samaja of North America was founded in 1978 by the members of the community who has migrated abroad in order to “preserve and foster Veerashaivism (Lingayatism) in North America; and to impart the Lingayata spiritual heritage, its universalistic, democratic values to posterity through the teachings of Basavaṅṅa and his contemporaries”.⁶⁷

Viraśaivas and Liṅgāyatas according to Jagadguru Mātē Mahādēvi

In such a liberal climate, the view that the function and role of Jaṅgama, as a spiritual and religious guide, should be assigned to a worthy individual and that any member of the community, male or female, could be chosen for such purpose was slowly gaining favour in some sections of the community.⁶⁸ Then a young lady was given the Jaṅgamadīkṣā and, in 1970, installed as Jagadguru of the Akkamahādēvi Anubhavapīṭha. This was, as far as I know, the first case of a lady attaining the office of Jagadguru, or better Jaganmāte. Mātē Mahādēvi, who held a Master in Philosophy, had been initiated by Liṅgānandasvāmi in 1966, and she had as a model the famous lady mystic Akka Mahādēvi about whom she wrote a novel. In 1976 the Jaganmāte attended the Symposium on Indian Religions organized in London by the School of Oriental and African Studies where she gave a speech on the faith she was representing, calling it Lingayatism and presenting her views as the result of her study of the same.

In her speech, published as a pamphlet in India, we may find some noteworthy statements which I'll sum up as follows:

the follower of the religion called Lingayatism is a *liṅgāyata*, one who is not only wearing the *liṅga* but that has obtained it through an initiation ceremony (*dīkṣe*); synonyms of Lingayatism are Basava Dharma, the faith founded by Lord Basava, a great prophet of the

by Indira Gandhi in 1972 to weaken the Liṅgāyatas, and Ramakrishna Heggade, a Brāhmaṇa, who became C. M. in the eighties.

⁶⁵ See the *Introduction* in *Śrī Basavēśvara Commemoration Volume*, Government of Mysore, Bangalore 1967. The iconography of Basava was fixed at that time: he is represented in the attire of a royal minister, sitting on a throne-like chair and wearing a crown along with the *iṣṭaliṅga* and the rosary of *rudrākṣa* beads. An equestrian monument depicting Basava was erected as well in Bangalore, near to the building housing the Basava Samiti.

⁶⁶ Such trend is still a part of public life in Karnataka. See for instance a newspaper report appeared in *The Deccan Herald* Friday, April 23, 2004 about the Basava Jayanti celebration function organised in Gulbarga last year by the District Administration, Kannada and Culture Department, Gulbarga Mahanagara Palike, and the Zilla Veerashaiva Mahasabha. The title reads *Scores celebrate Basava Jayanthi*. I quote a few lines: “Senior journalist Ramzan Darga has stated that the basic principles in the 'vachanas' of Lord Basaveshwara could be found in the Indian Constitution, and the World Human Rights Charter. (...) He said, according to Lord Basaveshwara, the administration should be responsible only to the law, and not to the lawmakers, as even the lawmakers come under the purview of the law they have enacted. And the administration should see that these laws are implemented in the interest of the people, and not the lawmakers. The administration has to be pro-people, he added. Stating that Lord Basaveshwara was a thinker, philosopher, economist, administrator, sociologist, anthropologist, and others rolled into one, Mr Darga said, all the faculties in the universities should take in the 'vachanas' of Lord Basaveshwara, as they dwelt with all the subjects.”

⁶⁷ See www.vсна.org.

⁶⁸ Among those who published their views is Hirēmallūra Īśvaran, a scholar of social studies belonging to the community. See Īśvaran, Hiremallūra, *Jaṅgama*, Kannaḍa Viśvavidyālaya, Hampi 1996.

twelfth century, and Vacana Dharma, the faith preached in the Vacana literature, the original and authentic scriptural source for this religion; another popular word, Vīraśaivism, which carries the meaning that it is the faith of staunch followers of Śiva. Liṅgāyatism is the term to be preferred, as wearing the *iṣṭaliṅga* is the cardinal principle of this religion. Coming to the status of Liṅgāyatism in the Hindū fold, if we consider Hindūism as a community of many religions, Liṅgāyatism can exist within it without losing its individuality but if we identify Hinduism with the Vedic tradition, it steps out of it, like other non-Vedic faiths. The origin and development of Liṅgāyatism is inseparably connected with the birth and life of Lord Basava (1116-1168), who as we learn from inscriptions and literary sources, was the finance minister, commander in chief of the army and the prime minister of a king named Bijjala, who usurped the Chalukyan throne and ruled from 1157 to 1167 A. D. Still we cannot ignore the controversy, though the defenders are quite small in number, that the religion existed before Basava and that it is even pre-Vedic, being founded by five Ācāryas who sprang directly from the five faces of Paraśiva and from the five Śivaliṅgas installed in the temples of Kedāra, Kāśī, Kollipaki, Śrīśaila and Ujjayani. This belief is treated as a mythological legend and it is discarded by almost all epigraphists, historians, and literary scholars of Karnataka. The controversy persists as many religious leaders are afraid of lowering the greatness of religion by tracing its antiquity back only eight centuries; it exists even among a few scholars, maybe due to the confused identification of Liṅgāyatism with Vīraśaivism.

Then the Jaganmāte proceeds to explain the difference between the Vīraśaivas, whom she considers a community of people settled in some districts of Tamil Nadu, where they have monasteries, and the Liṅgāyats of Karnataka. According to the Jaganmāte

the Vīraśaivas are staunch followers of Śiva, they wear *liṅgas* that are different in concept and form from those worn by the Liṅgāyats; they worship the Śivaliṅga [the *liṅga* in the temple], as the symbol of Śiva, a deity among the Hindū trinity, while the Liṅgāyat literature supports the monotheistic worship of *iṣṭaliṅga* as the symbol of Absolute Reality, denominated in the metaphysics of Liṅgāyatism as Para Śiva; the Gurus of the Vīraśaivas don't like to eat with the new converts coming from other communities, while the Liṅgāyata Gurus are expected to treat the followers equally.

Another feature stressed in the speech is that:

Liṅgāyatism, a reformative and prophetic religion was first systematized and then conveyed to the masses. An Academy called Anubhava Maṅṭapa, Hall of Experience or Mahāmane, the Great House, was established in 1140 in the city of Kalyāṇa, by Basava and contributed a vast quantity of mystic literature and a galaxy of seven hundred and seventy saints, together with thousands of followers in a short span of time. Among this constellation, three hundred were writers, and sixty ladies were great saints, thirty of these producing a vast quantity of literature. Many problems concerning the individual and society were discussed in the assembly; it is the first idea of a parliament germinating in the history of mankind.⁶⁹

From the summary given above it appears quite clear the will to project the image of a religion of the Liṅgāyats, distinct from Hinduism to which the Vīraśaivas belong, which is historical - with history working mainly as chronology – rational, and systematic.⁷⁰ Elsewhere, like Sakhare did earlier, she would resort to science to prove the goodness of a given religious ritual or the need to reform it. The appeal to history or science as a claim for legitimacy in the attempt to present the religious message as consistent, systematic and fit for an urban mind, superficially acquainted with disciplines such as history and science, combines with the recourse to direct communication with

⁶⁹ Mate Mahadevi, Jagadguru, *Lingayatism*, Jagadguru Akkamahadevi Ashrama, Dharwar 1977, pp. 2-9. No need to mention that such statements met with the stern opposition of the Pañcācāryas and to counter her statements pamphlets were published such as Kubasada Śāntappa Vīrabhadrapa, *Basavādi nijatavadarpana*, Panchacharya Electric Press, Mysore 1969.

⁷⁰ In other writings the author shows a quasi-maniacal concern for determining the exact dates of every single event in the life of Basava.

the founder of the religion, who instructs his representative on earth about the changes to introduce in his message in order to make it more suitable for the changing times. In 1996, Māte Mahādēvi created a scandal in the community by changing the signature (*an̄kitanāma*) in the *vacanas* of Basava from Kūḍalasaṅgamadēva to Liṅgadēva, in a book by the title of *Vacanaḍīpti*. She stated she had done so guided by Basavaṅṅa in a dream but cases were filed against her by her correlativeionaries and she had to appear in a court. Then, according to a press report, she said that even though the *vacanas* were correct during the twelfth century, by the fifteenth century, they gradually changed and some even had foul language. Therefore she corrected them. Of the 1.456 available *vacanas* of lord Basaveshwara, she had changed the pen-name in 1.342 *vacanas*, and the remaining had not been changed. Moreover -she said- Liṅgadēva is not her creation, but a word brought by Basavēśvara himself, which means the ultimate.⁷¹

We may see here a clear instance of re-interpretation of the tradition in order to free it from all associations with the god Śiva, his worship in the temple and the śaiva legacy which is, in the Jaganmāte's understanding, the domain of the Vīraśaivas, who are Hindūs and different from the Liṅgāyatas. If we go to the *vacanas*, we can clearly see that to Basava and to all the other Śaraṅas, Śiva is the only god to refer to whom the word *liṅga* is also used. For instance in a famous *vacana* by Basava, we find the following expression *nuḍidare liṅga mecci ahudenabēku, nuḍiyolaḡāgi naḍeyadiḍdare Kūḍalasaṅgamadēvanentolivanayya?* The literary translation is "when you speak, the *liṅga* has to approve and say yes; if you don't behave according to what you say, how can the god of *Kūḍalasaṅgama* like you?"⁷² In this sentence the *liṅga* and the god of *Kūḍalasaṅgama* are apparently one and the same entity, who can feel and speak like human beings.⁷³ Though god is understood to be the fundament of reality, neuter in gender, as both the *brahman* of the Upaniṣads, and the *liṅga* are, he can also show himself to the seeker through the ways of *bhakti*. And since *bhakti* employs the language of *bhāva*, of emotion and intuition, each Śaraṅa gives a name to god according to his or her personal mystical experience. Basava for instance had in the temple of Saṅgamēśvara a meaningful vision of Śiva and therefore refers to Kūḍalasaṅgama, whereas Allama had his encounter with god in a cave and calls him Guhēśvara, the lord of the cave. This is why the *liṅga* is imagined to speak and interact with the devotees in terms of human behaviour. This shifting of perspective on the same reality is well depicted in another *vacana* by Basava where the *liṅga* which is *apratima*, is described like the *brahman* of the vedāntic tradition as *agamyā*, *apramāṅa*, *agōcara*, and like the *puruṣa*⁷⁴ of the vedic tradition, filling the whole world and beyond, the feet piercing deep in the underworlds and the crown trespassing the Brahmāṅḍa, the cosmic egg which contains the worlds. And then that very same *liṅga*, that is Kūḍalasaṅgamadēva, becomes so small as to fit in Basava's hand.⁷⁵

It shall be clear from this quick look at the *vacana* literature that Basava does not reject indiscriminately the previous religious tradition, be it Vedic or Śaiva, but he rather selects from the contents and language of tradition what suits his own experience, weaving new meaning with old threads. His conception of God is surely different from that of a Hindū who may resort to different Gods in different circumstances, but he makes it clear enough without feeling the need to erase from his experience the link with the Śaiva tradition. He is no doubt a revolutionary but his

⁷¹ See *I am in court for wrong reasons: Mate Mahadevi*, Deccan Herald Saturday, July 10, 2004. The book has been banned by the Karnataka High Court. The controversial issue has come into the news also because materials from the book are still being circulated. See *Books, pamphlets seized from Basava Mahamane* in *The Hindu*, May 4, 2004 and *Mate Gangadevi defends sale, use of Basava Vachana Deepthi* in *The Times of India*, Sunday, April 16, 2000.

⁷² Vacana 440 in *Basavaṅṅanavara vacanagaḡu*, sampāḍaka Ḍā. El. Basavarāju, Gītā Buk Haus, Maisūru 1952, p.143.

⁷³ See also Michael, R. Blake, *Liṅga as Lord Supreme in the Vacanas of Basava*, in *Numen* 29.2, dec 1982, pp. 202-219.

⁷⁴ *Apratima* can be translated as aniconic, *agamyā* as inaccessible, *apramāṅa* as incommensurable and *agōcara* as beyond the comprehension of the mind. The idea of god as filling the universe and expanding beyond it as a giant is found in the Rḡveda, in the hymns to Vāc, the goddess of speech, and to Puruṣa, the cosmic giant. The same image appears then in the Bhagavadgītā to depict Viṣṅu's cosmic form.

⁷⁵ Vacana 409 in *Basavaṅṅanavara vacanagaḡu*, cit., p.134.

revolution has deep roots in the Vedānta philosophy, in the Śaiva āgamic tradition and in the practice of *bhakti*, and he tries to negotiate a free space for his new community, facing both the criticism possibly coming from his critics as well as the problems posed by the relapse of the new converts into the old way of life.

While the view that Liṅgāyatas and Vīraśaivas are two different entities was restated by Māte Mahādēvi in a pamphlet published in 1996, bearing the title *Liṅgāyataru Vīraśaivaralla (The Liṅgāyatas are not Vīraśaivas)*,⁷⁶ the next step in her strategy was the organisation of the All India Fifth Basava Dharma Conference in New Delhi, in October 1997, an occasion for again recommending to the participants that in the coming census they should write Liṅgāyata in the column reserved to the religion and reminding the Central Government of India about the request of a separate minority status for the Liṅgāyatas, like the case of the Sikhs. The idea of reshaping the Liṅgāyatas, taking as a model the Sikhs, is elaborated upon in a more recent piece of writing by the title *Sikh dharmīyarinda liṅgāyataru kaliya bēkāda pāṭha* (the lesson that Liṅgāyatas ought to learn from the Sikhs), published in 2005. According to Mātājī, the virtues Liṅgāyatas should learn from the Sikhs are: firm commitment to the *guru* of their religion, to whom they show appropriate respect by referring to him as Śrī Guru Nānakdev; firm commitment to the holy book Ādigranth Sāhib, which is the focus of devotion for their temples, where it is read showing great deference; gratitude towards the Gurus, such as Tej Bahaddūr, who sacrificed their lives to protect their religion and, last but not least, unmatched spirit of service. The Liṅgāyatas should indeed feel inspired by such example and start opposing all who do not show due respect to the founder of their religion, for instance politicians and scholars, who call him Basavaṅṅa (*aṅṅa* means elder brother) without using the honorific plural. They should instead call him *guru*, *viśvaguru* (universal teacher) or *dharmapita* (father of the religion) and use the plural. For what concerns the holy scriptures, the *vacanas* should be read in a spirit of devotion and sitting in a proper posture. Indeed in the religious programs organised by Māte Mahādēvi the group reading of the *vacanas* is a part of the ritual activities and the *vacanas* are taken in a procession along with the portrait of the *dharmapita*. She also adds that the Liṅgāyatas show lack of self-respect by not remembering their own martyrs, such as Haraḷayya and Madhuvarasa (the two *śaraṅas* who, according to the tradition, were killed by the king for breaking the caste rules by celebrating the inter-caste marriage of their children), for nothing has been done to preserve their memory on the spot of their sacrifice, in Basavakalyāṅa.

Taking a step back to 1988, in that year the Jaganmāte assembled her followers for the first time at Kūḍalasaṅgama, the confluence between the rivers Krishna and Malaprabha and the place where Basava had merged into the *liṅga* of Saṅgamēśvara, ending his mortal days, and becoming one with God (*liṅgaikya*). In that occasion she decided to hold a general meeting of all the followers of Basava, called Śaraṅasammēḷana, in the sacred place every year and fixed the following six points of the new religion: the *guru* (*dharmā*) is Basava, the sacred literature is the *corpus* of the *vacanas*, the sign (*lāñchana*) of the religion is the *iṣṭaliṅga* which is a symbol of the universal soul (*viśvātma*) and has the form of the universe, the sacred place is Kūḍalasaṅgama, the flag is the Basava flag (*dhvaja*) with the six pointed triangle, and the aim of the religion is the edification of the kingdom of Kalyāṅa,⁷⁷ which is religious and free from class and caste.⁷⁸ The new formulation

⁷⁶ To sum up, she writes that the Liṅgāyata *dharmā* is different from the Vīraśaiva *pantha*, where we can understand *dharmā* as religion and *pantha* as sect; the Vīraśaivas being in the eternal Vedic fold, observe the tradition of caste; they are a sect previous to Basava, and though they also wear the *iṣṭaliṅga* they have nothing in common with the Liṅgāyatas. See Mātājī [Māte Mahādēvi], *Liṅgāyataru Vīraśaivaralla*, Viśvakalyāṅa Miṣan, Beṅgaḷūru 1996, p. 24. Same is the content of the brief speech *Liṅgāyatism-Vīraśaivism. Which is correct?*, in *Basava Sourabha. A Souvenir. 5th Basava Dharma Conference. New Delhi October 1997*, p. 35.

⁷⁷ Kalyāṅa was the place where the Śaraṅas created the ideal spiritual society. The edification of the Kingdom of Kalyāṅa, a society founded on justice, reminds of the Christian appeal to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

⁷⁸ See Basavātmaje [Māte Mahādēvi], *Śaraṅa mēḷa*, Basavadharmada Mahājadgurupīṭha, Kūḍalasaṅgama 1996, pp. 1, 14-16. In more recent times she writes that January fourteenth is the holiest day being the date in which the Liṅgāyatadharmā was established. On January fourteenth 1155 the Father of the religion had the vision of god, that is the *liṅga*, (Liṅgadēva), and took the *iṣṭaliṅga* as a symbol (*kuruhu*) of Liṅgadēva, the

of the religion seems to be structured on a model such as could be that provided, for instance, by Islam, with one historical founder, one sacred pilgrimage place, one single holy book, one era named after the founder, etc.⁷⁹ To the traditional five rules of behaviour towards God and the community of *bhaktas*, a sixth is added which is Basavācāra, the duty to be loyal to and to offer cult, prayer and meditation to the founder of the religion (*dharmakarta*); and Kūḍalasaṅgama is elected as sacred place (*dharmakṣētra*) of Liṅgāyatism. Such theoretic construction was soon followed by an act of appropriation of the sacred place of Kūḍalasaṅgama, as on January 13 1992, “by divine inspiration of Basava, Liṅgānandasvāmi ascended the Basavadharmapīṭha in Kūḍalasaṅgama with the title of Śrīman Nirañjana Mahājagadguru, in order to protect the rights of men irrespective of difference of caste, class and gender, and to help develop the love for the religion and for the country, wishing well to all living beings”.⁸⁰

So it is the founder of the new religion, Basavaṅṅa, who guides Liṅgānandasvāmi’s ascent to the Basavadharmapīṭha, appropriating a meaningful centre of religious authority, and inspires Māte Mahādēvi’s redefinition of his own concept of god.

The feet of the Jaṅgama: ritual as weapon

If the attempt to have Basava’s *vacanas* serving Māte Mahādēvi’s reform of the Liṅgāyata faith appears as an instance of fundamentalist trends surfacing in the Virakta area of the New Jaṅgamas, the use she makes of ritual reveals clearly her ideas on how the Liṅgāyata society should be reformed.⁸¹

Māte Mahādēvi can be seen as an extreme and polemic champion of the view that the traditional priestly caste among the Vīraśaivas, the Jaṅgamas, is somehow undeserving of the privileges it has been enjoying for centuries, and that *jaṅgamatva*, the state of *jaṅgama*, should be conferred through initiation to deserving individuals without concern for their birth in another caste. While other religious authorities such as the Citradurga Jagadguru, confer the initiation to *jaṅgamatva* to

Creator. Therefore all the *śaraṇas* must participate in all the programs that she organises on such day. That day program is as follows: in the morning after taking bath one has to perform the cult of one’s own *iṣṭaliṅga*, then have breakfast, salute the guru, have the *darśana* of the *gaṇaliṅga*, and take part in the collective prayers. After that one must read the *vacanas*. Then follows a swearing-in ceremony for those who have come for the first time and a membership ceremony for those who are participating for the second or third time. After *prasāda* (a blessed common meal), there are religious speeches by the leaders. The program closes with a march by the participants who carry in a procession the *vacanas* and a portrait of the Dharmaguru and with a mass-whorship (*iṣṭaliṅgārcaṇe*) in the evening. See Māte Mahādēvi, *Sikh dharmīyarinda...cit.*, p.8.

⁷⁹ Even a Basava Era has been started.

⁸⁰ Liṅgānandasvāmi, who is no more, was Māte Mahādēvi’s guru. The quotation is from Basavātmaje [Māte Mahādēvi], *Śaraṇa mēla, cit.*, pp. 25.

⁸¹ By fundamentalist trends I mean selective re-interpretation of the tradition in the light of the contemporary context; criticism of the contemporary state of affairs, advocating the return to fundamental values; reference to scriptural evidence as a source of ultimate authority; totalitarian attitude; acquisition of power. See Madan, Trilokī, N., *Religione e politica in India. Cultura politica, revivalismo, fondamentalismo e secolarismo*, in *L’India contemporanea*, Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, Torino 1998, pp. 53-54. The virulent bias and fundamentalist nature of the movement headed by Jaganmāte Māte Mahādēvi have been noticed also by Birgit Heller, a scholar of religious studies, in her communication to the 17th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, Heidelberg September 9-14 2002 by the title *Claiming equal rights: Women’s Emancipation in Modern Lingayatism*. There are other two papers on Māte Mahādēvi by European scholars which I ought to mention though they are not available to me for reading: Heller, Birgit, *Her Holiness Mahajagadguru Mate Mahadevi. Weibliche Leitung als Ausdruck der Gleichberechtigung bei den Lingayats*, in *Frau und Göttin. Die Rolle des Weiblichen in der indischen und buddhistischen Religionsgeschichte*, Hutter, M., Graz 1998, pp. 75-85, and Charpentier, Marie-Thérèse, *Mate Mahadevi. En progressiv kvinnlig mystiker i dagens Indien*, in *Svensk religionshistorisk årskrift*, Swedish Science Press, Uppsala 2001. Other scholars, such as Michael and Schouten, have failed to notice the controversial nature of this religious movement and the latter has even shown a sort of appreciation by saying that in such movement lies the future of the Liṅgāyata religion. See R. Blake Michael, *The Origins of Vīraśaiva Sects*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1992, p. 22 n. 33 and Schouten, J. P., *op. cit.*, pp.271-279.

individuals belonging to the scheduled castes, a revolutionary stand to the eyes of many people, she rather wants to do away with the *jaṅgamas*. Besides openly accusing the Pañcācārya Jagadgurus of protecting the interest of the Jaṅgamas at the expense of the Liṅgāyatas, she has been reinterpreting the ritual in order to minimise and eventually erase from it the function of the *jaṅgama*.⁸²

We shall see what her view is like after a brief presentation of the traditional understanding of the ritual.

The identity of the *jaṅgama* with the *liṅga*, and the necessity of integrating these two manifestations of god with one another at all level of the spiritual life is stressed again and again in the *vacanas* of Basava.⁸³ If we browse through the edition of Basava's *vacanas* edited by Haḷakaṭṭi, who arranged them by theme, we may notice a full section devoted to the *jaṅgama*.⁸⁴ It is worth mentioning the headings under which we find *vacanas* of similar meaning, as each of them is related to a key concept.

One of the *vacanas* under the first heading, "relation between *liṅga* and *jaṅgama*", describes the relation between the two through a simile: as the roots of a tree are its mouth, and by watering the foot of the tree we have tiny leaves sprouting on it, likewise the *jaṅgama* is the mouth of the *liṅga*, and by offering him a full meal one gets the full meaning. If one, though aware of the fact that the *jaṅgama* is Hara (Śiva), considers him as a man, he cannot escape hell.⁸⁵ The other headings read as "the relation between *bhakta* and *jaṅgama*", "the rituals to the *liṅga* in the presence of the *jaṅgama*", "the merging of *bhakta* and *jaṅgama*", "the offering to the *jaṅgama*", "the faith in the *jaṅgama*".

Another *vacana* by Basava suggests what is the proper ritual interaction between *jaṅgama* and *bhakta*: when a *jaṅgama* walks up to the home of a *bhakta*, as soon as the *bhakta* sees him, he stands up, comes out of the house and politely welcomes him in. Then he makes him sit, washes his feet, drinks the water, and offers him sacred ashes and betel leaves. He enjoys his company by gazing at him, praising him, talking to him till he's satisfied, and then asks him how he can serve him. Doing so with the mind and the body melting away is the *bhaktasthala*, while the *jaṅgamasthala* is to accept all this, be the devotee rich or poor. When the two become one, the glory is beyond description. Accepting actions other than these doesn't benefit the *jaṅgamasthala*, as it becomes a means of survival and for both existence won't dissolve.⁸⁶

In the *vacana* quoted above we find the expression *pādārcaneyaṃ māḍi pādōdakaṃ koṇḍu*.

In the wider Hindū context, the *pādārcane*, more commonly known as *pādapūjā* in Sanskrit, is the ritual washing and adoration of the feet performed to one's guru. Such ritual must be understood in the context of the intense and meaningful relationship between teacher and disciple that we find in Indian culture, which is not restricted to the religious or spiritual field but pertains to other spheres of learning as well, such as music and dance. It can be performed by Hindūs to their gurus on special occasions, such as Gurupūrṇimā, and it is part of the ritual duties of kings towards their religious preceptors.⁸⁷ In the South Indian tradition of Śivabhakti, this ritual is connected with the religious act of feeding the devotees of Śiva, often carried out as a vow, as it appears from the

⁸² For a report on the anti-Pañcācāryas' public statements and the reactions to them see for instance *Mate Mahadevi stirs hornet's nest again* in the *Kannada Prabha*, Monday October 11 2004, available in the internet.

⁸³ I'm choosing to quote from Basava as he is the only authority accepted by Māte Mahādēvi.

⁸⁴ *Hosapaddhatiya Basavaṇṇavara vacanagaḷu*, sampādakarū Pha. Gu. Haḷakaṭṭi, Vīraśaiva adhyayana samsthe, Sri Jagadguru Tōṇṭadārya samsthāna maṭha. Ḍambaḷa-Gadaga 1999, pp. 205-220.

⁸⁵ No. 845 in *Hosapaddhatiya*..., cit., p. 206.

⁸⁶ The sentence 'existence won't dissolve' means that they shall be reborn and will not attain liberation. Vacana 864 in Tippērudrasvāmi, Ec., *Basavēśvara vacana dīpikē*, Jagadguru Śrī Śivarātrīśvara granthamāle, Maisūru 1995.

⁸⁷ The Mahārāja of Mysore, for instance, on occasions such as the festivity of Dasara, or his birthday, performs this ritual to the Parakala Svāmi, his Śrīvaiṣṇava guru. The inscriptions recording donations done by chieftains and kings to religious authorities often mention the act of washing the feet of the recipient by the donor.

narratives of the lives of the Tamil Nāyanārs, considered by the Kannaḍa Śaraṇas as ancient authorities, and, in today's Tamil Nadu, the washing of the feet is performed in a ritual known as *māhēśvara pūjā*.⁸⁸

In the Vīraśaiva context, however, the ritual washing of the feet is closely associated with the concept of *pādōdaka*, very often coupled with *prasāda*. To quote again from Basava: *guru liṅga jaṅgamadinda pādōdaka prasādavāyitu: ā bhāvavē mahānubhāvavāgi enage matte bēre prasādavembudilla, Kūḍalasaṅgamadēvā*.⁸⁹ He says that the feeling experienced while obtaining *pādōdaka* and *prasāda* from *guru*, *liṅga* and *jaṅgama* is the great experience and that to him no other *prasāda* exists.

If we look at *pādōdaka* and *prasāda* from a plain materialist point of view, they are water and food, what feeds our body, becoming part of it and providing us with the vital energies. *Guru*, *liṅga* and *jaṅgama* have the power to transform the water and the food, infusing into them a particular quality that can bring about changes in our physical body and in our other bodies as well, those pertaining to *karman* and *knowledge*.

The *pādōdaka* has a central role in a complex ritual procedure which is proper only to the Vīraśaivas and that combines the *pūjā* of the personal *iṣṭaliṅga* and that of the *jaṅgama*.

The importance of the two is stressed over and over again in the *vacanas*, both in positive and negative terms.

We may quote a *vacana* by Cannabasavanna: “the *gaṇḍabērūṇḍa* bird has two heads and one body. If one pours milk to one head and poison to the other, will the bird die or thrive? If worshipping the *liṅga* they forget the *jaṅgama*, watch out! They won't escape the Kumbhīnī hell, o lord Kūḍalacennasaṅgamadēva”.⁹⁰

Basava says “it's good for a *bhakta* to worship the *liṅga* along with the *jaṅgama*. For a *jaṅgama* it's good to worship the *liṅga* along with the *bhakta*. The *bhakta*'s humility is service to the *jaṅgama*. The *jaṅgama*'s leadership is service to the *bhakta*. The *jaṅgama* hidden in the *bhakta*, the *bhakta* hidden in the *jaṅgama*, how shall I describe the greatness of the two who have become one? How shall I measure that compact greatness without any space left? O Lord of Kūḍalasaṅgama, since your word said that there is no rebirth for these two, I had your compassion on me.”

Now we may go through the standard ritual procedure to obtain the *pādōdaka* according to a traditional manual in Kannaḍa compiled by Mallikārjunaśāstri.⁹¹

First the *jaṅgama/guru* does the *pūjā* of his *iṣṭaliṅga* keeping it on the palm of the left hand. Then the feet are washed and wiped with a clean cloth and the house and people are purified by sprinkling the water. After that the devotee, that may be helped by his wife, stands, recites a laudatory formula of the *guru* and prostrates at his feet. He does the *pūjā* of his own *iṣṭaliṅga* and then sits in front of the *guru*, puts a metal tray beneath his feet and holds the feet in his left hand. With the right hand he wets the tips of his fingers in a small vessel full of clean water and pronouncing the six syllable *mantra*, he draws a line for three times along the inside of the foot, and once from the little finger to the second finger. He does this for

⁸⁸ Ciruttoṅṭar and his wife make a vow to feed the devotees of Śiva everyday and when Śiva himself, in order to test their devotion, comes to their house disguised as a Bhairava ascetic, they wash his feet and sprinkle the water on their heads and all over the house. Then they bow to him and perform his *pūjā* with flowers, sandal paste, incense and lamp. See Hart, George L, III, *The Little Devotee: Cēkkilār's Story of Ciruttoṅṭar*, in ed. by M. Nagatomi, B. K. Matilal, J. M. Masson, and E. Dimock, *Sanskrit and Indian Studies*, D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979, pp. 231. The *māhēśvara pūjā* is mentioned in Hudson, Dennis D., *op. cit.*, p. 368.

⁸⁹ Vacana 461 in Tippērudrasvāmi, Ec., *op. cit.*

⁹⁰ Vacana 143 in *Cennabasavarājadēvara vacanagaḷu, Vacanāvāhini 3*, ed. by Ṭi. Ār. Candraśēkhara, Vīraśaiva adhyayana samsthe, Śrī jagadguru Tōṅṭadārya samsthāna maṭha, Ḍambaḷa Gadaga 1999.

⁹¹ Mallikārjunaśāstri, Vēdamūrṭi, Maṅūrumaṭhādhyakṣa, *Pādōdakavicāravu*, Rōṇa 1921. The author is the editor of the Vīraśaiva-liṅgibrāhmaṇa-gramthamālā, in which from 1888 to 1910 more forty titles of Vīraśaiva Sanskrit works were published.

both the feet in such a way that he doesn't waste a single drop of water. This is the procedure to prepare the *gurupādōdaka*. Then the *guru*'s *iṣṭaliṅga* resting in his left palm must be revered by the devotee, but often this part is skipped. Next follows the *pūjā* of the feet: the devotee has to present the water to the feet, apply the sacred ash, write a mantra on the feet, offer *bilva* leaves, flower, incense, lamp, and with a special gesture of the hand (*mudrā*), perform circumambulation. With the offer of burning camphor the auspicious laude is sung (*maṅgala*), a coconut is broken and offered (*naivedya*) and then the flowers and leaves are removed. While keeping the left hand below the feet with the middle finger bent, for three times a little water has to be poured on the toes by the right hand and collected in a vessel. Then sacred ash is smeared on the feet and a *bilva* leaf is offered. This water is the *kriyāpādōdaka*. This is poured by the Guru on his *iṣṭaliṅga* three times, while saying first *gurupādōdaka*, then *liṅgapādōdaka*, and at last *jaṅgama pādōdaka*. After this, the Guru drinks it and then he gives it to the devotees, who first pour it on their *iṣṭaliṅgas* and then drink it. This ritual varies in length and complexity depending on the spiritual advancement of the devotees, on the occasion, and on the number of people taking part in it.⁹² At the end of the manual, the compiler expresses a "humble request": after explaining the merits of drinking the three varieties of *pādōdaka*, (*gurupādōdaka* that purifies the body and makes devotion rise, *kriyāpādōdaka* that purifies the *prāṇa* and makes detachment rise, and *jñānapādōdaka* that purifies the mind and makes knowledge rise), he invites the reader to drink the sacred water of knowledge (*jñānapādōdaka*) that grants *mukti* and frees from *saṃsāra*. Then he adds that one should approach a Guru or a Jaṅgama, or a Virakta so to have explained all the hidden meaning, for very few people know that *karman* and *jñāna* are the same thing. Here we may notice that such water has the power to free us from the weight of our past actions (*karma*), by which we are born again and again (*saṃsāra*), has the power to grant us the final emancipation (*mukti*) infusing us with a special kind of knowledge, that is the Vedāntic knowledge of the *ātma*, of the Self. The spiritually advanced devotee, as well as the Svāmi, Guru or Virakta, feeds only on *pādōdaka* and *prasāda*.

Now a logical question may arise, which I happened to hear in the Virakta and New-Jaṅgamas circles: if the *jaṅgama/guru* doesn't possess that knowledge, like Allama and all the real *jaṅgamas* do, how can he transfuse it in the devotee?⁹³ The answer given by the radical Svāmis is that if one doesn't find a "real" *jaṅgama*, a *jñāni*, one should be content to use the surrogate system advised by the texts when there is no Guru in sight. One should take a cake of *vibhūti*, a very fine ash obtained by burning cow dung and filtrating it in water, smear it on the finger tips of the right reciting the *pañcākṣara mantra*, and then dip the fingers in the water. That water becomes *mantrōdaka* and can be poured on the *iṣṭaliṅga*. According to the Jaṅgamas, the *vibhūti* cake to be used for such purpose must have previously received a few drops of *pādōdaka*. However this procedure, which is consistent with the ritual as we have sketched it before, is omitted in the reformed ritual introduced by Māte Mahādēvi and followed by other Svāmis too.⁹⁴

⁹² In the case of the Jagadgurus of the Pañcācāryapīṭhas it can become a lengthy business, because all the devotees go in a queue to get the *kriyāpādōdaka*, normally called *tīrtha*. Specially elaborated is the *pūje* of the Rambhāpuri Jagadguru and, according to some of his devotees, the other Jagadgurus are not equally proficient in the rituals. I have observed this ritual several times in two Pañcācārya pīṭhas and once in a Hirēmaṭha. I have never had the chance to witness to the *pādapūje* of a Virakta Svāmi though I've been told that the procedure is basically the same. The Nāganūrumaṭha for instance, the biggest Virakta institution of the Belgaum district, has the tradition to invite the Svāmis of other *maṭhas* for the *pādapūje* during the whole month of Śrāvaṇa. The ritual takes place daily for the whole month and is attended by the devotees of both the *maṭhas*. See Jalaraḍḍi, Ji. Ef., *Nāganūru Śrī Rudrākṣimaṭha ondu adhyayana*, Liṅgāyata adhyayana samsthe Śrī Viraktamaṭha, Dēsanūru 1997, p. 28-29.

⁹³ A Virakta Svāmi once told me that he had stopped accepting the devotees' invitation to visit their homes for the *pādapūje* as he felt that the significance of the ritual had been lost. We must remember that at each visit the devotees offer the *kāṇike*, that according to the importance of the Svāmi can amount up to several thousand rupees.

⁹⁴ See for instance Cannabasavapaṭṭaddēvaru, *Iṣṭaliṅgapūjāvīdhāna*, Basavadharma granthamāleya nālkaneya puṣpa, Hirēmaṭha Saṃsthāna, Bālki 1984, p. 30. Instead of the *pañcākṣara mantra namasśivāya* here the

The opinion of Māte Mahādēvi was published in 1996 with the title of *Pāda namaskāra niṣēdha* (*The prohibition of prostrating to the feet*). Here is a résumé:

the feet of the *śaraṇas*, *gurus*, and *mahātmas* are like the touchstone, they transform those who touch them. Though Basavaṅṅa understood the importance of the yogic power and the scientific value of *pādōdaka* - a ritual that since ever had existed in Indian culture- and adopted it, the time has come for a critical review of this practice. Talking of *liṅgapādōdaka* is wrong as God has no parts, so the use of *liṅgadēvakaruṅōdaka* (the water of compassion of Liṅga that is God) is far more appropriate from a philosophical point of view. In the *gurupādōdaka* word, the *guru* is understood to be the *dharmaguru* Basavaṅṅa and not the *dīkṣāguru* who is a Jaṅgama, therefore one has to say *gurubasavakaruṅōdaka*. The Gurus follow a bizarre traditional custom: they pour the water from their own feet on their *iṣṭaliṅga*. This is an insult to the creator who is the *liṅga*. The proper procedure is the *hastakaruṅōdaka*. The *śaraṇa* has to smear the *vibhūti* on the finger tips reciting *om basavaliṅgāya namaḥ*, believing that his *saṅkalpa* has come down in form of energy to the water bringing Liṅgadeva's compassion and the favour of the Śaraṇas and of the Dharmaguru Basavaṅṅa. Then he has to distribute the water with a spoon along with the *prasāda*. He has to lift the spoon three times saying *liṅgadēvakaruṅōdaka*, *gurubasavakaruṅōdaka*, *śaraṇakaruṅōdaka*. Everything must be perfectly clean. This method is more suitable for the young generations, who are keeping away from religious people. Before preparing the *karuṅōdaka*, the *pūje* of the portrait of Basavaṅṅa must be performed. The *karuṅōdaka* must be accepted joining the palms and saying “*śaraṇu*”. When we prostrate on the ground to someone's feet the *iṣṭaliṅga* on our body, that is God, also prostrates and sometimes hits the ground. This is a lack of respect for the *paramātman*. Moreover when there is more than one *svāmi* there are always problems of precedence and the custom generates animosity and increases personal importance. Moreover, modern educated people don't like to bow, therefore the ancient greeting “*śaraṇu*” is the best form of respect.⁹⁵

In the reformist formulation of the ritual by Māte Mahādēvi the feet disappear along with the *jaṅgama*. Of the holy triad of worship, *guru/liṅga/jaṅgama*, only the *liṅga* and the *guru* remain, under the condition that the Guru is Basavaṅṅa and not the person who initiates the devotee by the *dīkṣe* ritual. Even the *pañcākṣaramantra* “*om namaḥ śivāya*”, so important in Basava's preaching, is substituted by the Basava *mantra* so that Śiva too is ousted from the scene. In the new terminology a new triad appears: *liṅgadēva/gurubasava/śaraṇa*. The *śaraṇa* is someone who has taken refuge in Basava, and anyone can become such by ways of initiation. The ritual function of the *śaraṇa* is that of bringing by the powers of the *mantra* and through the medium of water, the compassion of God, of Basava and of the Śaraṇas who lived in his time, to the faithful. The notion of the *jaṅgama* as a sacred source of knowledge is lost, and the notion of knowledge itself has disappeared to the advantage of *karuṇa*, a concept close to that of divine grace.

At the same time the personal relationship between the *jaṅgama* and the *bhakta* is somehow lost, and mass or group worship and group reading of the *vacanas* is encouraged.⁹⁶

Is this new conception of the ritual going to succeed at wiping off the ritual function of the *jaṅgama*? We'll have to wait and see. But behind the “modern” and “scientific” reformist attitude

mantra prescribed is *om basavaliṅgāya namaḥ*. The author though head of a Gurumaṭha has clearly sided with Māte Mahādēvi.

⁹⁵ Māte Mahādēvi, Jagadguru, *Pāda namaskāra niṣēdha*, Basava Dharmada Mahājagadguru Pīṭha, Kūḍalasaṅgama 1996. The greeting can be translated as “I take refuge in you”.

⁹⁶ Functions are held on Sundays at the Bangalore headquarters, and mass-worship is organised during the annual gathering.

of Māte Mahādēvi appealing to universal values we can still perceive the old war between caste factions taking place.⁹⁷

Competing identities

The Vīraśaiva community as history has brought it before us today can be imagined in many ways and defies a strict label. It may be thought of as a large social container, a sort of *super-jāti*, where people from different sub-castes were accommodated along with their *gurus*, mainly but not exclusively *jaṅgama* by birth, belonging to traditions at different points of time, in different areas of present day Karnataka and even outside its boundaries.⁹⁸ The new challenges of the colonial period, brought the need to construct a group identity, based mainly on the effort and vision of the upper caste religious élite and by the educated laymen. This identity, sanskritic in the beginning, served its purpose in the competition with the Brāhmaṇas and in the acquisition of power and prestige. In the years immediately before independence the chasm between the two broad religious orders of the community, Pañcācāryas and Viraktas, both recruited in the Jaṅgama priestly caste, and the debate on the right for an individual born in a different caste to become a *jaṅgama* by initiation and then be appointed as a *svāmi* are among the reasons for the emergence of a different identity, styled as Liṅgāyata, in which the sanskritic element loses importance in favour of the Kannāḍa *vacana* literature. After independence, such identity is fostered by the political success of the community and Basavaṅṅa is chosen as a religious model, and eventually, a political icon for the community: a religious leader who is a politician and a social reformer, and politician who is a mystic and a revolutionary.⁹⁹ Under the umbrella of the Liṅgāyata identity, the New Jaṅgamas and the Independent Svāmis flourish and the status of *jaṅgama* is acquired by Liṅgāyata belonging to various sub-castes. Besides challenging caste privilege, gender is also challenged and room is made for a lady Jagadguru. In contrast to these advancements for the community, the new construct of a Liṅgāyata religion without the Jaṅgamas created by Māte Mahādēvi, promises to weaken a community which is already divided. Liṅgāyatas, though still a majority in the Legislative Assembly of Karnataka, are not politically united. Unlike in the past, when all Liṅgāyata political representatives were within the Congress Party, today Liṅgāyata candidates are seen contesting against each other in different parties.¹⁰⁰ While the President of the Vīraśaiva Mahāsabhā keeps appealing to the Census Commissioner, requesting, as in the past, that a separate column may be allotted to the Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyata religion in order to assess the minority status of the community,¹⁰¹ the former enemies Pañcācārya and Virakta Svāmis have come together in an appeal for unity so that the community may regain its past glory without begging from the Government. Both the appeals have as a target the empowerment of the so called weak sections of the community, to be achieved either by getting access to the facilities offered by the reservation policy, or by a stronger

⁹⁷ As M. N. Srinivas, a man from Karnataka, had predicted in 1956, "A warning must be however be uttered against the facile assumption that caste is going to melt like butter before westernization" Srinivas, M. N., *op.cit.*, p. 62.

⁹⁸ For the Vīraśaivas as a *super-jāti* see by Zydenbos in "Vīraśaivism, Caste, Revolution, etc.", in JAOS 117 (1997), pp. 529-530.

⁹⁹ This dual role is a synthesis of the two attitudes to life, according to the Brahmanical tradition: *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*, engagement and disengagement or withdrawal from the involvement in the mundane activities. It is also apparent in the iconography of Basavaṅṅa. The statue erected to him in Bangalore, depicts him in his official attire, wearing a court robe and a crown-like headgear and riding a horse. The portrait of Basavaṅṅa popularised for instance by Māte Mahādēvi is quite different: he has the appearance of a Virakta, with shaven head, personal *liṅga* tied to the neck in a ochre cloth indicating renounce, though his dress is white, to point that he is a family man, and a palm leaf book in the hand, to remind that he taught the *vacanas*.

¹⁰⁰ To give a few instances, in 1999 the late ex. Chief Minister J. H. Patel, a Baṅajiga, was defeated in his home turf, Channagiri, by a Sāda, Vadnal Rajanna; the same year, M. P. Prakash, a Jaṅgama, was defeated by a Pañcamasāli, in the Hadanagalli constituency (Bellary district). See *Which way now for the Lingayats?* in The Times of India, Monday March 8, 2004.

¹⁰¹ This happened in February 2000, with a view to the 2001 census. Street processions and rallies were organised in Bangalore in support of the request. The content of the letter to the Census Commissioner is reproduced in Mūrtil, Cidānanda, Em., *Vīraśaiva dharma: bhāratīya saṃskṛti (hindū : liṅgāyata)*, Miñcu prakāśana, Bengalūru 2000, p. 338.

political representation,¹⁰² but they are at odds with each other. The President of the Vīraśaiva Mahāśabhā is working to section off the community while the Pañcācārya and Virakta Svamis would like to integrate it by maintaining the traditional status quo. In 2003, a Convention at State level of the Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyata religious Gurus (Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyata Dharmagurugaḷa Rāṣṭrīya Samāvēśa) was held in Kūḍalasaṅgama and, for the first time, the Gurus and the Viraktas blessed the devotees together. Their resolve, according to the press reports, was, “to work together to safeguard the social, cultural, economic, and political interest of Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyata dharma, whose values of equality and brotherhood are universally accepted, and at the same time, to be committed to carry the community along with the mainstream of society”. We gather from the press reports that one of the official statements concerned the change of signature in the *vacanas* of Basava by Māte Mahādēvi, deplored as an offence for which legal action was called for, and that the meet lauded the efforts of the former Chief Minister, late J.H. Patel, and S.M. Jamdar, Commissioner for the Rehabilitation and Resettlement Wing of the Upper Krishna Project, in developing Kūḍalasaṅgama as an international pilgrim centre.¹⁰³ This last statement may be possibly read as hinting to a re-appropriation by the whole of the Vīraśaivas, of the holy site of Kūḍalasaṅgama, elected by Māte Mahādēvi as sacred place of the Liṅgāyata religion. And when in 2005 the President of the Vīraśaiva Mahāśabhā, Bheemanna Khandre, stated that in order to obtain a separate column in the Census report, he intended to change the name of the association into Liṅgāyata Mahāśabhā, a hot debate was raised in the Mahāśabhā and in the community at large, and he was warned by the religious authorities.¹⁰⁴ As illustrated above, though the present situation seems one of reconciliation and acceptance of history, as the use of the double label of Vīraśaiva-Liṅgāyata suggests, the community is now challenged from the inside to redefine its identity. The central issue seems to be the identity of the *jaṅgama*.¹⁰⁵ Of the trinity of the faith, *guru-liṅga-jaṅgama*, the *jaṅgama* is beyond any doubt the most important for the life of the community. From the *jaṅgama* of Basava’s times, of whom the devotee should not ask to which caste he previously belonged, to the caste of today’s Jaṅgamas, this élite has guided the devotees over the centuries.

Though the status of *jaṅgama* in the course of time has become hereditary resulting in a caste the *jaṅgama*’s identity has been revisited in times of crisis by resorting to the old principle that by becoming *jaṅgama*, that is by becoming an ascetic, the caste is lost: therefore anyone could become a *jaṅgama*. This happened when the Virakta order was created and when the New Swamis came into being by the support of the dominant caste to which they belonged. Now the *jaṅgama*’s identity is again being revisited by a few religious leaders as a status that any convert can achieve by means of initiation, and in this case, the right to the *jaṅgamadīkṣe* could be extended to individuals who are not born Jaṅgamas and not even born Liṅgāyatas. In particular, the Maṭha of Citradurga advocates the extension of such rights to the *dalitas*. A step further is taken by Māte

¹⁰² See an excerpt from a public speech as reported by the press “The Rambapuri Jagadguru emphasised the need for unity among sub-sects of the community, which was on the decline both politically and socially due to the gap that existed among the community leaders. Despite being the largest community in the State, the Lingayats were exploited both socially and politically, he claimed and called upon the community to rise as one to regain its lost glory. There was a need for bigger representation in the power corridor, he added. He sought to allay the fear that the coming together of Veerashaivas would spell doom for others in politics by saying that there was no ulterior motive in the effort, and it was for the betterment of the poor and oppressed people within the community.” In *Veerashaiva seers vow to work together* in The Hindu Online edition Monday, Jun 02, 2003.

¹⁰³ See *Veerashaiva seers vow to work together* in The Hindu Online edition Monday, Jun 02, 2003.

¹⁰⁴ Also see *Mahasabha heading for a split?* in The Hindu Online edition Sunday, Jan 09, 2005 and *Veerashaiva seers warn Khandre on change of name* in The Hindu Online edition Friday, Jan 07, 2005. We may note that even Māte Mahādēvi contested for the general elections in 2004, as a candidate of the Kannaḍa Nāḍu from the Dharwad North Constituency and she was defeated with a 3.41% of votes.

¹⁰⁵ Another excerpt from the same press report quoted above: “Religious conversion also figured but the meet could not arrive at a consensus on the issue. The Rambapuri Jagadguru said steps had to be taken to arrest this trend. The Chitradurga swamiji wanted the seers to welcome the oppressed Hindus, especially dalits, into the Veerashaiva-Lingayat dharma. However, the seer of Srishaila Math disapproved the idea by saying that anomalies and disparity that existed within the community should be set right first.” in *Veerashaiva seers vow to work together* in The Hindu Online edition Monday, Jun 02, 2003.

Mahādēvi who by modifying, the ritual of the *pādapūje* which has also worked for centuries as a binding force between the Jaṅgamas and the *bhaktas*, aims to erase from it the function of the *jaṅgama* altogether. However marginal in their fundamentalist nature, Māte Mahādēvi's dramatic changes, ment to weaken the power and social status of Jaṅgama caste, show us once again how in India religion and society are closely related.

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