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THE ŚAIVA AGE:
AN EXPLANATION OF THE RISE AND DOMINANCE OF ŚAIVISM
DURING THE EARLY MEDIEVAL PERIOD, c. AD 500–1200

Alexis Sanderson

Handout

PART I: EVIDENCE OF THE DOMINANCE OF ŚAIVISM

1. Surviving temples and epigraphical records of foundations
2. Epigraphical records of the religious allegiances of kings
3. Evidence of the influence of Śaivism on the other religions of the period, introducing *inter alia* the hypothesis that the Pañcarātra that survives in the earliest Saṃhitās is the result of a reformation along Śaiva lines

PART II: THE CAUSES OF THIS DOMINANCE

The Early Medieval Process

The key elements of the social, political and economic process that characterized the working of the state in the early medieval period:

1. the spread of the monarchical model of government through the emergence of numerous new dynasties at subregional, regional, and supraregional levels;
2. the multiplication of land-owning temples, both royal temples in nuclear areas and lesser temples in peripheral zones, often established by subordinate local lords, thus promoting the rural economy and the progressive penetration of the authority of the centre into new territories;
3. the proliferation of new urban centres, both commercial centres that grew from below through a process of agglomeration and planned settlements, growths from above, founded by rulers;
4. the expansion of the agrarian base through the creation of villages, land reclamation, and the construction of water-reservoirs, wells, and other means of irrigation, with the steady growth in population that these developments imply; and

5. the cultural and religious assimilation of the growing population of communities caught up in this expansion.

The Hypothesis

On the basis of the epigraphical record of acts of patronage, and considering evidence of changes over time within the Śaivas' prescriptive literature, I propose the hypothesis that the fundamental reason for the religion's success, underlying and structuring the mass of particulars now lost to view, was that it greatly increased its appeal to a growing body of potential royal patrons by extending and adapting its repertoire to contain a body of rituals and normative prescriptions that legitimated, empowered, or promoted all these key elements of the early medieval process. In this way, I propose, it became an integral and indispensable part of that process, achieving as it progressed a transregional organization and a consequent standardization of its rituals and doctrines. This transregional uniformity, I propose, further heightened its appeal to kings by enabling it more easily to be perceived as a transcendent means of legitimation, empowerment, and the integration of regional traditions, as an essential part of a pan-Indian socio-religious order that each regional kingdom sought to exemplify. It was by virtue of this success that it could construct the impressive edifice of a literature that is almost entirely silent about these vital but less elevated aspects of its life, with the consequence that scholars who have attempted to read this literature have mostly neglected to look in and beyond it for evidence of the factors that enabled and sustained this high-cultural efflorescence.

I propose that the principal factors of Śaivism's engagement in the early medieval process are the following

1. It granted kings Śaiva initiation followed by a Śaiva modification of the brahmanical ritual of royal consecration (*rājyābhiṣekah*), reconceptualizing initiation as a means of increasing their power and presenting the subsequent consecration as qualifying them to preside over a socio-religious order in which the validity of brahmanical norms was to be preserved but made subordinate to that of Śaivism.
2. It extended its ritual of post-initiatory consecration (*abhiṣekah*) by also performing it for the king on the eve of battle as a means of empowering him to attain victory (*jayābhiṣekah*).
3. It developed a range of apotropaic, invigorative and hostile Mantra-rites to promote the success of royal patrons and the frustrating of their enemies.

4. It provided specialized officiants and rituals to establish the Śiva temples whose foundation marked the rule of all but the most ephemeral sovereigns, developing a secondary body of scriptural authorities, the Pratiṣṭhātantras, devoted exclusively to this domain, setting out the rituals and defining the norms for the iconography of images and the construction of temples.
5. It propagated the principle that the Sthāpaka, the Śaiva specialist who performs these rituals, is competent not only in the Śaiva domain but also on all the levels that the Śaivas ranked below it. The king's Śaiva Sthāpaka was thus *sarvādhikārī* and could therefore officiate in the construction and consecration of non-Śaiva deities such as Viṣṇu.
6. It provided for the construction by royal patrons of residences for their Śaiva preceptors, these leading in time to the creation of a pan-Indian network of interconnected seats of Śaiva learning for the training of candidates for this office as the demand for Śaiva Rājagurus increased with the spread of the tradition.
7. It was customary for patrons to reward Gurus for initiations and other ceremonies with lavish gifts, especially with grants of land. The wealth thus acquired enabled them to behave like royal patrons themselves: they made land-grants to brahmins and they founded and endowed temples and Maṭhas, thus facilitating the expansion of their institutions into new areas. Figures at the summit of this pan-Indian clerical hierarchy are claimed to have officiated as the Dīkṣāgurus of several kings, a clear indication that the Śaiva Guru had become a far grander figure than the brahmanical Rājapurohita, who was tied to the service of a single king and was unambiguously his subordinate.
8. The early Śaiva Pratiṣṭhātantras show that the activities of the Śaiva Sthāpaka were extended to encompass the rituals attendant on the foundation of the palaces of their royal patrons. The *Piṅgalāmata*, which is the latest of the early texts of this genre, distinguishes between ordinary royal palaces and those of Mahārājādhirājas, prescribing in detail the layout to be followed in both cases. This includes in the latter case accommodation within a section of the palace for *mantramārgopadeśinah* 'teachers of the Śaiva Mantramārga'.
9. The layout of the palace taught in these texts is only part of the layout for an urban settlement to be established by the king around the palace, complete with markets and segregated areas for the dwellings of the

various castes and artisans, with detailed instructions for the size and plan of these dwellings determined by caste status.

10. One of the early Pratiṣṭhāntras, the *Devyāmata*, devotes a chapter to the layout to be followed not only in new towns but also in new villages, with an emphasis on the positioning of the various deities within the plan and the directions in which they should face. The regulations imposed show us Śaiva officiants on a purely civic level. There is nothing specifically Śaiva in the layout. The *Devyāmata*'s chapter on iconography shows further evidence of the involvement of the Śaivas in both urban and rural planning. Differentiating various forms of Śiva in accordance with mood and number of arms it tells the Sthāpaka which are appropriate where. The same concern can be seen in the Pratiṣṭhā sections of the South-Indian Yāmalatantras with regard to the positioning and iconography of the images of Bhadrakālī whose installation and cult are their concern.
11. Śaiva officiants also designed new rituals to enable them to officiate in the consecration of the works of irrigation that were a key element of the royal promotion of agrarian expansion that marks this period.
12. The *Netratantra* shows the existence of a further class of Śaiva officiants who functioned in almost all the areas traditionally reserved for the king's brahmanical chaplain, the Atharvavedin Rājapurohita: the performance of the king's recurrent duties to worship the various deities on the tithis assigned to them, to celebrate the major annual royal festivals of the Indrotsava and Mahānavamī, to protect the royal family through rites to ward off ills (*śāntih*), to restore them to health after illness, to ward off or counter the assaults of dangerous supernaturals of every kind, to empower through lustration (*nīrājanam*) the king's elephants, horses and weapons of war, and to protect the king with apotropaic rites before he eats, sleeps, and engages in his regular practice of martial skills.
13. Though there is almost no trace of this practice in the earliest Śaiva sources, there was also a numerous class of officiants who functioned as the priests that performed the regular rituals in the Śaiva temples. This spawned a new wave of Śaiva scriptures in the South from the twelfth century onwards in which, as in the South-Indian Pāñcarātrika Saṃhitās, the ceremonial life of the temple and the duties of its priests are for the first time the subject-matter.

14. The Śaivas reserved the office of the king's Guru to brahmins, but they opened initiation to candidates from all four caste-classes, thus enabling the integration of powerful agriculturalist castes classed as Śūdra that were dominant in the countryside, and providing a means of articulating a social unity that encompassed and transcended the disjunctions and oppositions of the brahmanical social order.
15. The non-Saiddhāntika traditions of the worship of Bhairavas and goddesses in Śaivism served to encompass and incorporate the local cults of territories being assimilated into Śaiva-brahmanical culture through the expansion of state-formation at the subregional level.
16. Śaivism mirrored and validated the incorporative structure of the state's power by elaborating an inclusivist model that ranked other religious systems as stages of an ascent to liberation in Śaivism, the religion of the king manifest in his initiation, his Śaiva consecration, and his royal temples.

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