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REPLACING THE ABBOT: RITUALS OF MONASTIC ORDINATION AND INVESTITURE IN MODERN HINDUISM*

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Abstract

The transfer of monastic responsibilities is a moment that demands a definition of the power over men and resources at stake, and an assessment of the means put at the disposal of those who exercise that power. The paper looks at the rules and rituals of investiture of Hindu abbots in contemporary India in order to investigate the conception of religious authority prevailing in their community. Its examples are drawn from two representative Hindu monastic traditions, the Daśanāmī founded by the monist (*advaita-vedāntin*) theologian Śaṅkara (VIIIth c.), and the Nimbārkī founded by the theist (*vaiṣṇava vedāntin*) theologian Nimbārka (XIIth c.). It shows that in both traditions replacing the abbot is a process that comprises three distinct phases: (1) selecting the heir apparent; (2) ordaining him; and (3) installing him as abbot, and implies four successive transformations of the initiate: (1) into an ascetic (2) into a disciple; (3) into a guru; and (4) into the abbot. It also shows how the rituals of ordination and investiture participate in the legitimization of Hindu monastic authority.

Like wealth, power is best seen when it changes hands. The transfer of monastic responsibilities is a moment that demands a definition of the power over men and the resources at stake, as well as an assessment of the means put at the disposal of those who exercise that power. In this paper I look at the rules and rituals of investiture of contemporary Hindu abbots¹ in order to investigate from this limited perspective the conception of religious authority in their community. After some introductory remarks about Hindu monasticism, its development and its main characteristics, I will examine and compare the procedures of selection and of installation of two abbots. My

* I have incorporated in this paper some reflections born from remarks that Véronique Bouillier, Phyllis Granoff, Monika Horstmann and Axel Michaels made on an earlier version of my study. The polishing of the English is due to the kindness of Phyllis Granoff. I thank them all heartily.

1 The head of a Hindu monastery is designated by two main sanskrit words, *mathādhiśa* and *mahanta*, both of which I translate by abbot here.

examples will be drawn from institutions belonging to two representative Hindu monastic traditions, the Daśanāmī founded by the monist (*advaitavedāntin*) Śaṅkara (VIIIth c.), the Nimbārkī by the theist (*vaiṣṇava vedāntin*) Nimbārka (XIIth c.). For the latter I will rely on the extensive anthropological and historical research I have been doing on the Nimbārkī monastery of Sallemabad; for the first one, on different studies on the monastery of Sringeri.² The two monasteries belong to groups whose theological and soteriological assumptions are very different and who have been arch rivals on the Hindu religious scene throughout history, but they have enough in common to justify a comparison. In fact, the issue examined here is not unique to them and points to a more general pattern. The paper will conclude with some remarks on the way rituals of ordination and investiture participate in the legitimization of Hindu monastic authority.

The Hindu monastery as a sectarian institution

Hinduism admits ascetics, but unlike Buddhism it is not first and foremost a monastic religion. Though the Buddha repeatedly gave advice to laymen, his main teachings were addressed to those who had left society and social norms behind them. In principle, if one is to achieve the aim of his teaching, the monastic way of life is the mode of conduct to adopt. It is not that an assertion in favor of world withdrawal is absent from Hinduism. As is well-known, the *upaniṣads* express the conviction that release (*mokṣa*) from transmigration (*samsāra*) can be attained directly through ultimate knowledge (*jñāna*), and that to acquire this emancipating knowledge one should give up all activities incumbent on those who live in the world. But this teaching is counterbalanced by an equally legitimate stance upholding the importance of activity, particularly ritual activity. This explains that, in principle at least, religious life comes to be organized around two opposite poles and in two corresponding models of conduct, that of the married house-

2 See GNAMBAL, 1973; KULKE, 1985:120–143; SHAstry, 1982; CENKNER, 1983; CENKNER, 1996:52–67; SAWAI, 1992; YOCUM, 1996:68–91; MALINAR, 2001:93–112. Besides, the ceremony of installation of the incumbent abbot of Sringeri has been filmed: *Avicchinna paramparā – The Unbroken Chain*, directed by S. Sampath Kumar, produced by S. Viswanathan: Sringeri Seva Trust (no date).

holder (*grhastha*) on the one side, that of the celibate renouncer (*saṃnyāśī*) on the other. In Brahmanical Hinduism, then, the philosophical foundation of world renunciation (*saṃnyāsa*) is only one point of view.

In reality, world withdrawal and the assumption of the ascetic life-style are radical steps, only taken by a few. During the course of history they have led to the development of specific modes of social organizations, generally called “sects”, for want of a better term. It is within the context of these sects that Hindu ascetics have organized some forms of monasticism, implying a shared living space, a common set of regulations, and a more or less sedentary existence. The word “sect” refers to a federation of lineages, which claim pupillary succession from the same founder, usually an ascetic, and comprise ascetics as well as lay followers. Each lineage has established and maintains a monastic center for the philosophical training of its ascetic disciples and the religious and moral instructions of its lay followers. Modern Hinduism, then, does not possess a single unified monastic organization, as asceticism and its monastic manifestations are found embedded in independent sectarian traditions.

The relationship between Hinduism and Hindu sects is a rather difficult question to summarize, because it takes place simultaneously on several levels. A crucial element can be apprehended at the theological level. While Hinduism largely defined accepts a plurality of cults, sectarian Hinduism tends to be more exclusivist and even to hold that the grace of God is the direct means of salvation. The importance of this conception is reflected in the endogenous classification of Hindu sects as Śaiva, for whom Śiva is the main deity, and as Vaiṣṇava, for whom it is Viṣṇu. The two examples examined in this paper represent both classes: the Daśanāmis are Śaivas, the Nimbārkīs Vaiṣṇavas. As Vaiṣṇavas, the Nimbārkīs are more “sectarian” than the Daśanāmis: though they worship other gods, they teach that salvation can be obtained through Kṛṣṇa (a form of Viṣṇu) and through him alone; they also hold that everybody qualifies for salvation, and for this reason they tend to be socially more open (they admit low castes). In their theology the Daśanāmis are not so exclusivist; they put Viṣṇu on par with Śiva, but they are much more conscious of caste distinctions, because for them salvation is conditioned by the acquisition of knowledge (*jñāna*) which is reserved to those who have received the Brahmanical initiation (*upanayana*). The majority of their lay followers belong to high castes who claim to follow orthodox (*smārta*) Hinduism in that they observe the socioreligious norms of the smṛti and integrate the Brahmanical domestic ritual with the cult of all the

deities of the pantheon.³ In addition, the Daśanāmīs are classified and also consider themselves as Śaiva.

Hindu sects have inherited the ancient ideal opposition between “householder” and “renouncer”. Their ascetic members are the latter’s counterparts. This is probably the reason why there is often confusion between the words “renouncer” and “ascetic”, though they are not interchangeable. They should be distinguished on two accounts. First, not all ascetics are renouncers, and second, the word “renouncer” itself covers two groups. In effect, “renouncer” refers (1) to the twice-born who has entered the fourth *āśrama* and (2) to the member of an ascetic lineage whose rules of conduct, though modeled on the former’s pattern, have integrated later sectarian developments. In other words, it is only the context which tells whether “renouncer” refers to the Brahmanical *saṃnyāsī* – with its strong normative or idealized dimension –, or to an historically attested monastic type of life. The distinction is important, because in modern Hinduism there is no institution corresponding to the Brahmanical fourth *āśrama* (*saṃnyāsa*) – if the latter ever had any historical reality it is now defunct –, and all renouncers (*saṃnyāsī*) belong to a sectarian lineage. It is equally important to keep in mind that not all Hindu ascetics are renouncers. The rules of ordination into renunciation proper (*saṃnyāsa*) with their symbolism of death are not followed by all ascetics. “Ascetic” is therefore to be preferred to “renouncer” as a generic term and it is this usage that I follow in these pages.

The two examples examined in this paper illustrate the variety of Hindu asceticism. The Daśanāmīs are renouncers in the strict sense of the word; their ochre or safran colored dress is a clear sign of this quality. They follow a code of conduct that evolved out of the fourth *āśrama* and abide by the philosophical tenets of *advaita-vedānta* as taught by Śaṅkara. They are also distinguished from the rest of the population by their necklace of *rudrākṣa* beads and the three horizontal stripes (*tripuṇḍra*) on their forehead (and other parts of their body) made with the sacred ashes of cow-dung, all symbols associated with Śiva. The Nimbārkī ascetics are called *vairāgīs* or *virakta*s (dispassionate) – names exclusively born by Vaiṣṇavas –, and they wear a white dress; their necklace of *tulasi* beads and their vertical bodily marks

3 They are ideally represented by five divine emblems worshipped on the same level (*pāñcāyatana-pūjā*).

(*ūrdhvapuṇḍra*) looking like a U painted with holy clay – all symbols of Viṣṇu –, are other markers of their sectarian identity.

A sect not only teaches a set of theological propositions but also practical means or spiritual disciplines (*sādhana*) to be followed in order to obtain salvation. The teachings of any given sect appear as a more or less unified whole when one considers the dogmas and religious practices, especially if one looks at them through the canonical literature of the sect, which affords a synthetic view of the group's teachings. But from an institutional point of view, a sect is a loosely coordinated structure. Its lineages enjoy a real autonomy in financial, religious, and disciplinary matters, and there does not exist an overall coordination vested in a permanent or institutionalized body recognized by all. Neither the Daśanāmī renouncers nor the Nimbārkī *vairāgis* form a monolithic monastic organization, obeying a single and uncontested authority, vested in a central monastic seat. Rather, they comprise several autonomous lineages, represented by their respective guru, each ruling over a particular monastery.⁴

Ascetics do not usually spend their whole life in the same monastery, but they do belong to a given lineage and tend to remain attached to the same guru. Despite the development of monastic organizations, solitary asceticism and wandering have remained important features of Hindu asceticism to this day. The ideal ascetic is still very much a peregrinating individual who goes from one monastery to another but never sojourns for long in any. This goes back to the old regulation found in Brahmanical Hinduism (also attested in early Buddhism) that renouncers should go on wandering (it is the concept of *parivrājya*), except during the time of monsoon rains. So if in practice most Hindu ascetics do in fact reside in a monastery, they cannot be said to belong to a monastery. The important point to stress is that they do not owe their allegiance to a monastery, but to a guru and through him to a lineage of spiritual succession.

4 On the loose monastic structure of the Daśanāmīs, see SAWYER, 1998:159–180.

The monasteries of Sringeri and of Salemabad

Śaṅkara, the founding father of the Daśanāmīs, is credited with having established four traditional lineages (*āmnāya*) and four monasteries in the four main directions of the peninsula, each having jurisdiction over one of the cardinal points. But these monastic foundations and their correlative ecclesiastical divisions are likely to have occurred several centuries after his death; they correspond more to an idealized vision than to reality. The establishment of the great monastic center of Sringeri in the South-Western ghats, on which I will focus here, is not prior to the XIVth century (this makes it nonetheless one of the oldest living monastic institutions in Hindu India).⁵ However, from this period onward it played a leading role in the religious and political history of South India due to its close association with the empire of Vijayanagar and subsequently with other secular powers.⁶ The neat four-center pattern of the Daśanāmī monastic organization is moreover blurred by the existence of other lineages and monasteries which lay claim on their own to some territory and contest the jurisdiction of others within its boundaries. In the South alone, there are two such competing monastic centers, each one associated with distinct linguistic, cultural, and political regions, Sringeri is in Karnataka (Chikmagalur District) and Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu; each one claims to be the only legitimate representative of the southern tradition (*dakṣināmnāya*) founded by Śaṅkara. Until 1959 the monastery of Sringeri was a very prosperous landed property yielding tax free revenues (*inām*). Its abbots supervised a complex administrative machinery with a hierarchy of managers, treasurers, accountants and tax collectors. Since the adoption of the Inam Abolition Act in 1959, the monastery has been under the management of an administrator who works in association with the abbot and the government of the State of Karnataka (then Mysore State).⁷

Though the spatial expansion of the Nimbārkīs on the Indian peninsula is far more limited than that of the disciples of Śaṅkara, no greater institutional unity is to be found among them. They are mostly found in North-West India. The cradle of the sect seems to have been the area around

5 Its first abbot was the great *advaita-vedāntin* theologian Vidyāranya.

6 See SHASTRY, 1982.

7 See GNANAMBAL, 1973:3, 8; SHASTRY, 1982:chapter VII.

Mathura, a place holy for all Vaiṣṇavas due to its association with the early life of Kṛṣṇa. Then, due to different historical factors, the sectarian seat was shifted to the monastery of Salemabad in Eastern Rajasthan. From the time of its foundation in the 17th century, the fortress-looking monastery enjoyed the patronage and protection of several Rajput dynasties. It was in particular richly endowed by the kingdom of Jaipur and some of its abbots were spiritual advisers of the Kachvaha ruler. The monastery was also the centre of a force of fighting ascetics (*nāgā*) and wielded military power. For the last two centuries, it has claimed control over the whole sect of Nimbārka and jurisdiction over all its lineages, monasteries and temples. The claim is, however, rejected by some Nimbārki lineages, especially by one of them which is still settled in the original cradle of the sect (around Mathura).

In modern Hinduism a monastery is not first and foremost an abode for ascetics; it is a social institution owning properties that also caters to the religious and other needs of the laity. It is often part of a larger unit comprising one or several temples, a traditional Sanskrit school, a library and some kind of hostel for the lay visitors. It is thus a dwelling-place for both ascetics and lay followers and a center where they can pursue philosophical studies and ritual activities. The monastery of Sringeri has a greater intellectual tradition than Salemabad; it has been a seat of learning (*vidyāpūṭha*) since its origin and its present abbot is a recognized sanskrit scholar and exponent of *advaita-vedānta*.⁸ Big and successful monasteries, such as Sringeri and Salemabad, are also regional centers of religious activities. They are places of pilgrimage, they arrange for special worship, feed Brahmans, etc. and organize the collective religious life on festive occasions; in brief, they take the initiative in marking events of importance for the cohesion of the Hindu population. A steady flow of pilgrims visits the shrine of their tutelary deity and the cenotaphs of their former gurus and abbots;⁹ pilgrims also seek the sanctifying vision (*darśana*) of the incumbent guru and abbot. In all these activities the role of the latter is naturally crucial. My experience in Salemabad allows me to say that nothing can be done there without having first asked the permission of the guru or his representative when he is not on residence. For it has also to be stressed that in Salemabad as well as in Sringeri

8 YOCUM, 1996:70.

9 In Salemabad as in Sringeri, the incumbent abbot solemnly celebrates every year the death anniversary of the preceding gurus (for Sringeri, see SAWAI, 1992:169).

the abbot is frequently on the move, a clear reminder that the typical Hindu ascetic is an itinerant figure.

The monasteries of Salemabad and of Sringeri are each placed under the protection of two deities, one of which is more especially associated with the lineage; I draw this conclusion from the fact that it is under the exclusive care of the guru and abbot. At Sringeri, the two deities are the goddess of learning Sarasvatī, locally known as Śaradā, and a form of Śiva called Candramaulīśvara. Their cult is said to have been established by Śaṅkara himself, at the time of the foundation of the monastery. While the worship of the enlivened image of the goddess is celebrated by the temple priest, that of the crystal emblem (*linga*) of Śiva-Candramaulīśvara falls under the personal responsibility of the abbot. The *linga* is believed to have been brought by Śaṅkara from the Himalaya¹⁰ and its cult to have been performed without any interruption by all the gurus who succeeded him as the head of the lineage and monastery.¹¹ It is therefore an important symbol of monastic continuity and its worship is a crucial element in the construction of the legitimacy of the incumbent spiritual and monastic authority.

The cultic activities in the Vaiṣṇava center of Salemabad are strikingly similar to those of Sringeri despite the fact that they rest on very different theological assumptions. There too the monastery is placed under the protection of two presiding deities; there too one observes a distribution of ritual responsibilities between a professional priest, operating in the temple, and the abbot, worshipping a portable aniconic symbol. Daily, the image of the couple of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa (the main deity of the Nimbārkīs), said to have been installed at the time of the foundation of the monastery, is worshipped by the temple priest. Daily, too, the abbot worships privately a *śālagrāma* or stone-emblem of Viṣṇu (and of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa). This is a very lengthy process that implies several coordinated ritual activities from drawing fresh water from a well, grinding some wheat flour with a hand-mill and making some type of unleavened bread, cooking pulses and vegetables, and then

10 SHAstry, 1982:79; SAWAI, 1992:166. Its cult is performed twice a day, morning and evening; a *śālagrāma*, symbol of Viṣṇu, is placed close to the crystal *linga* at the time of worship, a reminder that the Daśanāmīs are *smārtas* and put Śiva on par with Viṣṇu. For the most learned followers of Sringeri the crystal symbol represents the formless absolute (*parabrahman*) (SAWAI, 1992:69).

11 SAWAI, 1992:28.

offering all these items along with other ingredients during the worship. The sacred stone-emblem (a tiny ammonite stone) is said to have belonged to Nimbārka himself and to have been originally worshipped by him in this very way. It never leaves the abbot's side; it is kept inside the temple of the monastery when he is in residence; it hangs in a locket tied around his neck when he is on the move.¹² Its possession and the fact that he is the only person entitled to worship it play an important legitimating role and support the Salemabad monastic lineage's claim of having supremacy over all the other lineages of the sect. To own the sacred stone is seen as a proof that the guru and abbot of Salemabad is the direct successor of Nimbārka himself, and that the monastery is the central seat of the sect. This claim is challenged by another monastery which puts forward another direct line of spiritual descent from the original founder of the sect and another equally sacred stone-emblem to consolidate its claim. Thus the protective deity of the monastic lineage becomes an instrument of power and the war between rival monasteries is also fought in the realm of divine symbols.

Monasteries also try to outdo each other in the realm of words while referring to their chief and lineage. They try to best one another by using titles and expressions that mark a higher degree of responsibility as well as a more encompassing level of monastic organisation. These tactics are part of intra- as well as inter-sectarian rivalries. Today the lineage of Salemabad calls itself the "Tradition of the Preceptors (*ācārya-paramparā*)", and refers to all the other Nimbārkī lineages as "Traditions of the Disciples (*śisya-paramparā*)". It designates its chief by the title "Teacher of the World – Preceptor Nimbārka (Jagadguru-Nimbārkācārya)" and addresses him with the regal title of Śrījī Mahārāja (since the XVIIIth century). The repeated use of these formal titles, often without mention of the name of the incumbent abbot, expresses power. By contrast, the integration of the personal name of the founder (Nimbārka) in the title serves to underscore the continuity of the successoral process which he started. It asserts that the incumbent guru and abbot is the sole representative of the fountain-head of the tradition. In the

12 True to the traditional principle of peregrination, the abbot of Salemabad is often on tours. He has taken part in all pilgrimages of note, using them as occasions to draw attention to his monastery. But even then he does not discontinue the ritual routine of worshipping the main deity of his lineage. The abbot of Sringeri who also travels frequently (see SAWAI, 1992:153, 167; CENKNER, 1996), always keeps the crystal emblem of Śiva with him so as to worship it wherever he goes (SAWAI, 1992:69, 166).

same vein, the monastery of Salemabad is said to be an elevated seat or pedestal (*pīṭha*)¹³ and not just an ordinary throne (*gaddi* or cushion; *śimhāsana* or lion-like seat). A monastery that is called a *pīṭha* must be seen as having jurisdiction not only over its own but also over other monastic lineages. The abbot of Salemabad is sometimes referred to as “Lord of the seat (*pīṭhādiśvara*)”. But its main rival lineage also makes use of similar expressions.

The title of “Teacher of the World” is also used by the guru and abbot of Sringeri and it reflects his assertion that he is an all-India authority as the direct successor of Śaṅkara, the first Jagadguru.¹⁴ He is also called Śaṅkarācārya as he is believed to represent the founder of his lineage.¹⁵ There are other titles which were bestowed in the past by political authorities.¹⁶ They are a reminder that traditionally, I mean when the social and political order was still defined exclusively in terms of *dharma*, the abbot of Sringeri was recognized by the secular power as a point of reference in socioreligious conduct. For many castes in the area around his monastery his judgements and decisions superseded those of their own caste councils (*pāñcāyat*)¹⁷. Today he is still considered a leading religious figure, However, the abbots of the four other main centers of the Daśanāmīs are also called “Teacher of the World” and so are other leading Daśanāmīs as well, who claim equal status with these four.

To recapitulate. Hindu monasticism has an essentially fragmentary nature; it is embedded in different sects and is represented by different ascetic lineages. The two monasteries of Sringeri (Daśanāmīs) and of Salemabad (Nimbārkīs) are associated with a single lineage at the head of which rules a guru who is an ordained celibate ascetic. In both cases, the abbot is the spiritual as well as the administrative head of the monastery and its main guiding force. In both cases, his religious life revolves around the observance of daily rites meant to propitiate the tutelary deities. The authority of the guru is based on his privileged access to these deities. The centrality of

13 In medieval India, *pīṭha* referred to the pedestal of a throne, see INDEN, 1982:105.

14 He is also referred to as *mahāsaṁnidhānam* (sanskrit) and as *dodda gurugalu* (kannada) or senior teacher, SAWAI, 1992:31. On the process of canonization of Śaṅkara and on his establishment as a Jagadguru in his hagiographies, see MALINAR, 2001.

15 SAWAI, 1992:35; see also 180–181.

16 As indicated by numerous inscriptions, see SHAstry, 1982:58.

17 GNANAMBAL, 1973; SHAstry, 1982:67–68, 114–116.

either Śiva (and the Goddess) or Viṣṇu (in one or the other of his forms) in the construction of the lineage and the fact that the abbot is a recognized guru are clear reminders of the sectarian dimension of the Hindu ascetic institution. In what follows, I discuss how the rituals that transform a given individual into the abbot of the monastery reflect all these concerns. I will begin with a description of the ceremonies of investiture which were performed at Salemabad (1944) and at Sringeri (1982) when the rule of their respective incumbent abbot was inaugurated.

The ceremony of investiture (*paṭṭābhīṣeka*) of the abbot at Salemabad and at Sringeri

Śrījī Mahārāja was invested abbot of Salemabad in 1944. He offers an example of a life entirely spent at the head of a monastic institution, for not only did he take charge of the highest monastic office right from the start of his ascetic career, he also entered the monastery when he was a mere child of 11. He had just turned 14 when he became the new abbot. Three years earlier he had been designated heir apparent and named Sarveśvaraśarāṇa by his guru, the incumbent abbot; from then on he spent his time in the monastery seminary, getting trained for his future vocation. The ceremony of his investiture (*paṭṭābhīṣeka*) took place soon after the death of his guru and predecessor. It was performed in the temple of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, in the presence of the deities and several witnesses. Among them were leading celibate ascetics of the lineage and sub-lineages of Salemabad, of other Nimbārkī lineages of Rajasthan and neighbouring areas and also of monasteries belonging to other sects. The witnesses included official envoys of several Rajput kingdoms, whose rulers, all longstanding patrons of the monastery, were at the helms of affairs in those last years of British colonial rule. The ceremony provided the occasion for the coming together of leading religious and political authorities at a time when the notion that monarchy was necessary to the maintenance of the traditional social order was still very much alive.

Unfortunately there is no detailed description of the investiture. Only sketchy outlines of its enactment are available in the different biographical accounts of the incumbent abbot found in the publications of Salemabad and

in the biography of a prominent Nimbārkī ascetic of Vrindaban who played a leading role in it.¹⁸ From these reports I extract the following information. The investiture comprised two distinct parts: (1) an aspersion and (2) the conferring of a shawl (*cāddar satkār*). The first part was performed for Sarveśvaraśaraṇa by the domestic priest (*purohita*) of the monastery: the boy sitting on the monastic seat (*ācārya-pīṭha*) was sprinkled with consecrated water while the appropriate mantra was recited. Then the priest ceremoniously placed on his head the sacred stone-emblem (handed down in the lineage since Nimbārka) and made him take the following pledge:

We shall not have any more relation with our former family and we shall treat our co-disciples and the members of the other Vaiṣṇava sects as our own family. We shall respect during our entire life the vow of perpetual celibacy and we shall never omit to celebrate, either out of laziness or of neglect, the obligatory or occasional rites, nor to worship the Lord. We shall not become addicted to drugs, etc., in accordance with the principle laid down by our former gurus. We shall strive to spread the doctrine of our tradition and to increase its fame. We shall treat with due respect the Vaiṣṇavas of the other sectarian traditions.

After this declaration, the priest withdrew and the second part of the investiture ceremony commenced. It was performed by Svāmī Dhanañjayadāsa, the prominent Nimbārkī ascetic of Vrindaban referred to above. Standing close to the teenager who was still sitting on the monastic seat, he first applied the sectarian mark (*tilaka*) on his forehead with some sandal paste, then tied a rosary (*mālā*) of sacred basilic (*tulasī*) beads around his neck and finally wrapped him up into the ceremonial shawl. Sarveśvaraśaraṇa, being solemnly addressed for the first time as Śrījī Mahārāja, was officially declared the 13th abbot of Salemabad and the 48th Universal Master (*jagadguru*) of the sect of Nimbārka. Afterwards, other ascetics of note came

18 Svāmī Dhanañjayadāsa of the Kāthiyābābā lineage of Vrindaban; see RĀSABIHĀRĪDĀSA, 2001:115. Among the numerous Salemabad publications, see Ācāryapīṭhābhīṣeka-ardhaśatābdī pāṭotsava svarṇa jayantī mahotsava smārikā (commemoration volume issued on the silver jubilee marking the fiftieth anniversary of the investiture of the abbot), (Salemābad: Akhila Bhāratīya Jagadguru Śrī Nimbārkācārya, VS 2051 [1994]); *Sanātanadharma sammelana smārikā* (commemoration volume of the Eternal dharma fair), (Salemābad: Akhila Bhāratīya Sanātana Dharma Sammelana Svāgata Samiti, VS 2034 [1977]).

to pay their respects and garlanded him with flowers as he sat in public for the first time, giving his blessed vision or *darśana*.

Before making any comments, I will describe the ceremony of investiture that was celebrated in 1989 in the Daśanāmī monastery of Sringeri when the present abbot took charge. I am relying on Yocum's observations and on the relevant section of *Avicchinna paramparā – The Unbroken Chain*, a documentary film made on the monastic tradition of Sringeri by S. Sampath Kumar and circulated commercially by the monastery. Though the technical execution of the film is not perfect and it does not show all the rites in their entirety, it nevertheless affords a close view of their performance. In 1989 Śrī Bhāratī Tīrtha had already lived in the monastery for more than 15 years. He had become heir apparent in 1974 when he was 23 years after having been selected for the highest office some years earlier. In Sringeri as in Sallemabad the responsibility for the selection of the heir apparent had rested entirely with the latter's guru and predecessor on the abbatial seat. On the 19th October 1989, almost a month after his guru's death, Śrī Bhāratī Tīrtha was officially invested as the new abbot.¹⁹ The ceremony of investiture (*paṭṭābhiseka*) took place in the temple of the goddess Śaradā where, on the previous day, a decorated throne had been ceremoniously installed on a tiger skin.²⁰ The film shows Śrī Bhāratī Tīrtha arriving there after having paid hommage to the founder of the lineage (amidst crowds of cheering lay followers) and being welcomed near the throne by a group of *purohitas* and "Vedic scholars", all clad in white. He was then wearing a red conic cap in silk and was wrapped up in a reddish shawl (looking like silk too), which the film commentator calls "his initiation dress" (*dīkṣāvastra*). Before he sat on the throne it was worshipped (behind a white cloth). Then the ceremony unfolded in two parts. First Śrī Bhāratī Tīrtha ascended the throne while the group of priests entonned what the film commentator calls "Vedic chants" and the main priest (wearing a blue shawl atop his white dress) performed

19 The film commentary says he was installed as the "Karnāṭaka-simhāsana-pratiṣṭhāpanācārya" (established ācārya on the throne of Karnataka).

20 On that day, several rites of hommage and propitiation had been celebrated in the temple of goddess Śaradā (YOCUM, 1996:72–73; *Avicchinna paramparā – The Unbroken Chain*, op. cit.).

three *abhiṣeka*²¹ to the accompaniment of mantras. Afterwards Śrī Bhāratī Tīrtha was hidden from the eyes of the onlookers by a large silk cloth and the second part of the ceremony started, unseen by the onlookers (and the cameraman). When the cloth was lifted (after 20 minutes according to Yocum, the film giving no indication of the duration of any of the ritual sequences it shows), he appeared dressed in full regalia, standing near the throne and wearing a “gold-thread and silk shawl” and a “gold and gem-encrusted crown”²² and a heavy pendant in silver. Then, in view of all present he climbed on the throne or as the film commentator put it: “the Jagadguru ascended the *vākhyānasimhāsana* with the *darbār* dress and crown (see further). The *ācāryas* since Vidyāranya have to go through this ritual of great splendor in order to please the devotees.” At this juncture, the film shows several people paying their respects to the new abbot. They had been allowed to attend the ceremony (while others watched it on closed-circuit television) and included leading ascetics representatives of different monasteries, “nationally prominent political leaders”, outstanding lay followers and some journalists (a testimony to the notoriety enjoyed by the monastery of Sringeri). Later Śrī Bhāratī Tīrtha personally worshipped the goddess Śaradā. Finally he again sat on the monastic seat and offered his blessed vision (*darśana*) to the crowd which was then allowed inside the temple.

I now comment on the rituals. The two investitures present some similarities but also some important differences. To start with the similarities, both are performed in the temple, that is inside the main ritual centre of each monastery, a place no doubt associated with power. Both are called *paṭṭābhiṣeka* and include operations reminiscent (at least at first sight) of those found in the inauguration by unction of the Hindu king (*rājyābhiṣeka*) as known to us through textual descriptions.²³ In the royal ceremony the main rites are in the order of their performance: a series of unctions (of baths in fact), a coronation, an enthronement, and finally, holding an assembly.

21 1. Sprinkling with gold (*svarnābhiṣeka*); 2. with golden flowers (*svarnapuṣpābhiṣeka*); 3. with nine jewels (*navaratnābhiṣeka*). The film shows the priest depositing with great care on the top of the abbot's silk cap what appears to be tiny flakes.

22 YOCUM, 1996:76.

23 The traditional mode of installation of a Hindu king (*rājyābhiṣeka*) was performed for each new king in medieval India; for a description of the ceremony as given in the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, see INDEN, 1978:28–73.

The two monastic investitures include an unction,²⁴ the solemn giving of some emblem of monastic authority, and holding an assembly. In Salemabad the emblem of authority is a ceremonial shawl; in Sringeri it is a ceremonial shawl and a crown. In both cases monastic authority is acquired once the royal unction has been performed. It is this rite which signals that the ascetic sitting on the highest seat has achieved overlordship and can receive the emblem of his new office, whether it is a ceremonial shawl alone or a ceremonial shawl and a crown as in Sringeri. Coronation is thus found in Sringeri alone and it marks a major difference with Salemabad. Enthronement is another noteworthy feature that is lacking in Salemabad. It is not that the symbolism of the throne is missing in Salemabad. There, too, the replacement of the abbot requires the formal installation of his successor on his seat of authority. There, too, the power of the guru is thought to reside in his throne, which is treated with extraordinary respect. But in Sringeri the abbot takes possession of his throne after his coronation just as the Hindu king takes possession of his after having received his crown. One can observe this very clearly on the film: when the silk cloth (behind which he has been dressed and crowned) is removed, the abbot is seen standing, not sitting; then he climbs on his throne.

According to Yocum, the coronation found in Sringeri is attributable to the monastery's connections with secular power.²⁵ Sringeri has indeed received the patronage of different dynasties since the time of its foundation, and secular authority has taken a keen interest in the administration of the monastery, which was seen to be of great religious, political, and economic significance.²⁶ But the bond of the monastery of Salemabad with rulers was no less close than Sringeri's and its abbot no less entitled to regal parapher-

24 It is considerably reduced in time and simplified as no bath is performed but a mere sprinkling.

25 YOCUM, 1996:88. The fact that the ceremony is celebrated in the temple of the goddess is seen by the same author as a sign that the monastery of Sringeri has "one foot firmly planted in the world" and that its abbot rules over the material as well as over the transcendental realm. Not only is the goddess concerned with the affairs of this world, her temple is also located in the "world-affirmative" part of the compound (YOCUM, 1996:79–80, 89). The whole study of SAWAI, 1992, shows indeed that the monastic tradition of Sringeri caters to the religious needs of householders as well as of renouncers.

26 SHASTRY, 1982:17–55.

nalia, economic patronage, and honours.²⁷ Throughout history the chief of Salemabad was dependent upon different Rajput states (Jaipur, Kishangarh, Jodhpur) to obtain and maintain control over lands and other material means required to build and exercise his legitimacy. Moreover, coronating the abbot during his investiture is not unique to Sringeri.²⁸ Another difficulty in interpreting the coronation is raised by the word *patta*, a polysemous term²⁹ which refers to anything that is flat, such as a length of cloth or a slab. It seems that it stands for a headband (or a turban) in the expression *paṭṭābhiṣeka*. Yocom translates the latter as “coronation”. In ancient India the principal wife of the king was called *patta-devī* or “turbaned queen”³⁰. But today in Sringeri, *paṭṭābhiṣeka* is associated with the notion of deed (confering a right) or with that of seat (confering a position), and *not with a crown*. To make things more confusing there is no headband or crown in the investiture of the abbot of Salemabad and one wonders why the ritual is called *paṭṭābhiṣeka* at all. Two comments can be made in this respect. Firstly, it is only recently that the monastery of Salemabad has started referring to the investiture of its abbot as a “*paṭṭābhiṣeka*”. In the biographical accounts of the previous abbots the ceremony is designated as *cāddar satkār* or receiving the hommage of the shawl.³¹ The new terminology could be part of the efforts mentioned above designed to raise the prestige of the lineage of

27 CLEMENTIN-OJHA, 1999.

28 For example, it is also found in Chitrapur, another Daśanāmī monastery in North-Western Karnataka. The investiture of the incumbent abbot of Chitrapur was done recently under the supervision of Śrī Bhāratī Tīrtha of Sringeri, see http://www.chitrapurmath.org/iphart_1.htm, which also gives a photographic report of the different phases of the ceremony.

29 The dictionary gives the following translations: “slab, tablet (for painting or writing upon) – Mbh; a copper plate for inscribing royal grants or orders (*tāmra-patta*); the flat or level surface of anything; a bandage, ligature, strip, fillet (of cloth, leather, etc.); a frontlet, turban (5 kinds, viz. Those of kings, queens, princes, generals, and the *prasāda-pattas* or turbans of honour); tiara, diademe; coloured or fine cloth, woven silk; an upper or outer garment; a place where four roads meet”. *Paṭṭābhiṣeka* is rendered as “consecration of a tiara”; *patta-bandha* means “binding or crowning the head with a turban”; see MONIER-WILLIAMS, 1976 (1899).

30 MONIER-WILLIAMS, 1976 (1899).

31 In modern Northern India “to wrap up in a shawl” (*cādar oḍhanā*) generally means installing an ascetic on the monastic seat, see SINHA & SARASVATI, 1978:75. *Cādar* or *cāddar* is of persian origin.

Salemabad to new heights. It also reflects a usage of the term in the sense of solemn consecration, a sense in which the actual meaning of *paṭṭa* appears to be overlooked.³² Secondly, the idea of coronating or rather of tying a turban on the abbot is not altogether absent from the sectarian tradition of Salemabad. From at least the end of the XVIIIth century, the heir of the abbot had to be duly recognized by the state of Jaipur to function as the successor. In Jaipur as well as in other neighbouring kingdoms, after the death of a member of the landed nobility (*jāgīrdār*) the ruler officially named his successor by offering him a complete robe of honour (*siropāv*) during the public ceremony of condolence. That attire included a turban (*pagdī*)³³. The same protocol was observed for chiefs of religious lineages, whether they were celibate ascetics or householders, for the obvious reason that they too inherited landed property and the rights of raising revenus, etc. that pertained to it.³⁴ In Salemabad as in other monasteries the heir apparent who had been officially recognized as the successor was called *yuvarāja* or “young king”. It is not known whether in 1944 too the heir apparent of Salemabad was recognized by any state (and probably had a turban tied) in order to succeed his predecessor and qualify for investiture. The corresponding information is wanting in the biographical accounts I have consulted.

In the large and well-endowed monasteries of Salemabad and Sringeri the responsibilities of the abbot integrated traditionally two distinct but complementary functions: he was both the administrator of the landed property of the institution and a spiritual instructor. These responsibilities could not be exercised independently of local political power, which meant that local political authorities became involved in the process of selection and appointment of the abbot. These circumstances also explain that the investiture ceremony integrated rites marking access to administrative and juridical responsibilities. In Sringeri it was a coronation. In Salemabad it was the offering of a full attire (which included turban-tying), which was celebrated

32 For a brief and sketchy description of the *paṭṭābhiṣeka* in a śrī-vaiṣṇava monastery, which does not mention any crown, see LESTER, 1992:79 n. 10. *Paṭṭābhiṣeka* is also the name given to ceremonies of consecration of some deities.

33 *Siropāv* (“from head to feet”) refers to a robe of honour which includes several pieces. In modern Rajasthan tying a turban (*pagdī*) is still a symbol of succession. In Hindi *paṭṭa* is a synonym of *pagdī*, see VARMĀ, 1964.

34 But only after having paid the fees of succession to the state, see CLEMENTIN-OJHA, 1999:61–62; HORSTMANN, 2001:147–148.

apart from the investiture proper. In Sringeri, however, the investiture not only included a coronation but also an enthronement. I think we are now in a position to develop Yocom's argument about Sringeri's close association with power. The fact that Sringeri was founded in the empire of Vijayanagar and under its protection does not account so much for the royal features than for the Hindu features of its investiture ceremony. Vijayanagar was known for its patronage of Hindu rituals and the investiture of the abbot of Sringeri could have been deliberately patterned on the installation of the Hindu king as part of the Vijayanagar empire's policy of Hinduization. For the ceremony is not only reminiscent of the *rājyābhiṣeka*, it displays its binary structure – unction in the first part, crowning and enthronement in the second part – albeit in a much more simplified form. The monastery of Salemabad on the other hand grew in a cultural and political environment which was influenced by a blending of Rajput and Moghul courtly protocol. In place of a coronation and an enthronement, it has the ritual of giving the shawl. It is also not the case that the ritual of investiture of Sringeri is purely "Sanskritic"; Persian (the pan-Indian language of power since at least the XVIIIth century) also left its imprint on it as shown by the use of word "*darbār*" (royal assembly) next to the sanskrit "*vākhyānasimhāsana*" (lion-like throne of speech) to refer to the first public appearance and oral address of the abbot in the commentary of the film. A closer study of both rituals of investiture would now be required to substantiate my interpretation; this would necessitate a much more complete documentation on their enactment than the one that was available to me.

Who qualifies to succeed the abbot? Or what goes on before the investiture.

The investiture ceremony is a long process which starts much earlier than its actual performance. I am now going to illustrate this statement, starting with the case of Salemabad, as it is better documented.

The present abbot of Salemabad, then called Ratanalālā Šarmā, was 11 years old when he was selected as next-in-charge (*uttarādhikārī*) by the incumbent chief. According to those I interviewed and to the biographical accounts already mentioned, the justifications for this decision were the following. The first element taken into consideration to single the child out

during the process of selection was his unusually sincere nature. Next were the facts that his parents were lay disciples of the monastery and were willing to offer him to the institution. Then the astrologer of the monastery, who had been called to examine his horoscope for any sign that could be opposite to the ascetic career, concluded that Ratanalāla was an exceptional subject, able to withstand the appeal of worldly influences and maintain in every way the dignity of the highest office in the monastery.

Some comments on these arguments are required to understand the assumptions of the entourage of the abbot at the time of his selection. The Brahmanical *varṇāśrama* system ascribes rights and duties to members of the society according to their hereditary class (*varṇa*) and to their stage of life (*āśrama*). A first rule of the system is that only Brahmins qualify for world-renunciation. A second rule is that an individual can become an ascetic at two different stages of his life: either before his marriage (during *brahmacārya*) or after. Thus the Brahmanical four-*āśrama* theory provides the context in which to understand the practice of recruiting children and teenagers to ascetic lineages. It also explains that no one can become an ascetic until his Brahmanical initiation (*upanayana*) has been celebrated, that is before the age of 8. What then made Ratanalāla eligible was the fact of being an unmarried yet initiated (or twice-born) Brahman. Nimbārka, the sect founder, had himself been a Brahman “perpetual celibate student” (*naiṣṭhika-brahmacārī*) at the time of his Vaiṣṇava initiation; Ratanalāla’s selection was considered authoritative because it was patterned on the original model of Nimbārka.

The mode of selection of Ratanalāla reflected three other concerns. The first concern was for successoral continuity. It was thought that once an heir had been duly selected, the monastery ran less of a risk of being engulfed into a crisis of succession at the sudden death of the abbot. There is little doubt that this system has been partly influenced by local political usages, according to which there could be no vacancy in power. The monastery of Salemabad grew under Rajput protection, and among the Rajput nobility the son (or adopted son) had to be officially declared and recognized as his father’s successor before the latter’s death, so as to be installed on the throne without delay. In the monastery as in the kingdom many years could pass between the nomination of the heir apparent and his actual accession to power, but as a symbol of dynastic continuity he was a great stabilizing force. This is also the reason why from the time of his selection, the heir apparent of Salemabad was seen at the side of the abbot in all functions. One observes this situation today as the present Śrījī Mahārāja, whose selection I

am discussing here, has appointed his own successor in 1993. One can also note that he has started transferring some responsibilities to this teenager (aged 16 in 2003).

The second underlying concern behind the selection of as young an heir apparent as possible is pedagogical. It is held that through education conducted from an early stage the future abbot will acquire the right type of habits. The third concern comes as a correlate of the other two. It has to do with sexual continence. As we have seen, it is said that the 11 year old boy was not selected until his horoscope had been scrutinized to ascertain that his birth chart contained no sign of debauchery. Every Hindu ascetic is expected to maintain absolute chastety throughout his life, and the rule is stricter for those who are destined to the highest monastic office. The persons I interviewed in Salemabad and in Jaipur on this subject thought that the selection of a child was best suited to the goal pursued. They said that if a pubescent child has good *samskāras*, or good mental and moral dispositions inherited from his past life, his strict training within the precincts of the monastery, in the sole company and under the surveillance of older ascetics, will ensure that he remains celibate.

A closer look at the Brahmanic caste of the heir apparent is now called for in order to understand some of the social realities behind his selection. The young Ratanalāla was born in a sub-caste of Brahmins called Gauḍa. His predecessor had a similar background. The young man, who since 1993 is training in the monastery to succeed him, is from the same caste. As I said earlier, the selection of a Brahman is in keeping with Brahmanical ideas (that the Nimbārkī sect had made its own), according to which guruship and abbotship are only accessible to Brahmins. Here one sees that world withdrawal does not entail abandoning all orthodox socio-religious norms. Caste is a feature of Hindu sectarian monastic organizations, even when, as in the present case, they hold that God saves each and everyone (regardless of his caste) who dedicates himself to him.

The biographies of the important ascetics of the sect show that the Gauḍa sub-caste of Brahmins played an important role in the expansion of the Nimbārkīs in North India. Not much is known about the sect prior to the XVIth century, but from that time onward it is found settled in the town of Mathura with leaders belonging to the Gauḍa Brahman sub-caste. This last fact was at odds with the earlier pattern of having Telugu Brahmins at the head of the lineage, apparently in keeping with Nimbārka's own caste affiliation (nothing certain can be said about Nimbārka). The close association

of the Nimbārkīs with Mathura not only transformed their leaders' recruitment policy, but also their canonical literature: whereas they had expressed themselves in Sanskrit, they started composing in the vernacular language (*braja-bhāṣā*) as well, thereby adding to their old repertoire of stern vedantic commentaries a mystical type of poetry. These innovations took place at a time when Mathura and its region were undergoing notable religious transformations under the influence of new devotional (*bhakti*) sects. These three moves of selecting local Brahmins for the highest monastic office, of transforming the local vernacular into a canonical language, and of adopting the new devotional sensibility probably testify to an attempt by the Nimbārkīs to consolidate their presence in the region. In any case, their sect was refounded on a new basis at this time and developed in Braj and culturally close areas, such as Eastern Rajputana. The monastery of Salemabad was founded there in the XVIIth century as the result of the subsequent growth of its ascetic and lay sectarian membership.

When Ratanalāla was selected in 1940, some Gauda Brahmins had been closely linked to the Nimbārkī ascetics through a system of patronage in which the gift of a son to the monastery played a significant part. In modern times the monastic succession has been organized in a limited number of families of Gauda Brahmins, possibly even in the same extended family. The present apparent heir is the nephew (father's younger brother's son) of the abbot³⁵ who was himself the nephew (same relation as above) of his predecessor³⁶, who was himself the nephew of an important ascetic of the monastery.³⁷ Though these elements are indexes to family-based connections within the leadership of the monastery of Salemabad, they are not sufficient to reconstruct the whole web of kinship relationship between the ascetics and lay disciples of Salemabad. The matter requires further documentation.³⁸ But

35 This information is not found in any document published in Salemabad; it is only available in RĀSABIHĀRĪDĀSA, 2001:112; the author is the incumbent abbot of a lineage independent from Salemabad.

36 I learnt this while talking with an ascetic living in the monastery of Salemabad in October 2001.

37 This information is printed in several booklets sold at the monastery.

38 Most lay followers of Salemabad belong to families which have a traditional link with the monastery; this is especially the case for those who live in its vicinity; but there is no hereditary allegiance to the monastery as in the situation described by CONLON, 1977.

it nevertheless appears certain that the continuity of the lineage of Salemabad is assured by the recruitment of a boy selected within a certain group of Brahman lay followers.

The recent release from Vrindaban of the biography of Svāmī Dhanañjayadāsa (1901–1983) sheds some further light on the social realities behind the selection of the young Ratanalāla. Svāmī Dhanañjayadāsa is the ascetic of note who took a leading role in his investiture as abbot in 1944. Chief of the Kaṭhiyābābā monastery, he belonged to the main rival lineage of Salemabad, but had chosen quite early in his rule to give his support to the latter for reasons of his own. His successor and biographer reveals some hitherto unpublished details on the circumstances of the selection of Ratanalāla. He shows that it was contested right from the start within the lineage and sub-lineages of Salemabad and that tensions mounted as soon as the old abbot had passed away.³⁹ There were talks of black magic (*sadyantra*) being done and the child was (naturally) worried. It was only due to Svāmī Dhanañjayadāsa's intervention that the late abbot's decision was finally respected and that the investiture ceremony could take place with his direct participation. The reasons for this opposition are not given in detail, but from what the biographer quotes Svāmī Dhanañjayadāsa as saying they had to do with the young age of the boy and his total lack of preparation for his future task.⁴⁰ In other words, the entourage of the old abbot had resented his having based the selection of his successor on mere kinship ties. I am not aware that the recent appointment of the abbot's own nephew as heir appar-

39 RĀSABIHĀRĪDĀSA, 2001:112–115.

40 “Since Śrījī Mahārāja designated this child as his successor and made a written document to this effect, then it is he who will have to be installed on the throne (*gaddi*) of the *ācārya*. If somebody does black magic (*sadyantra*), he should be stopped. The child's education and upbringing (*śikṣā-dīksā*), the energy to carry on the heavy responsibility of the office of *ācārya*, etc., all this is not favorable (*pratikūla*) in his case, this is true; but he is very young. From now onwards, we shall make the correct arrangement for his education and upbringing and shall try to make him a worthy (*yogya*) *ācārya* for the throne of the *ācārya*, so that in the future he will most certainly be suitable (*supātra*, i.e. a worthy vessel). If a practiser (*sādhaka*) can have the *darśana* of the luminous form of the absolute (*parātman*) in a wooden toy once the vital breath has been installed (*prāṇa pratiṣṭhā kara*) in it, then this embodied soul (*dehadhārī jīva*), in whom the *parātman* resides in person, will certainly be competent to be made worthy (*yogya*) of the office of *ācārya* if everybody puts his effort in it”, RĀSABIHĀRĪDĀSA, 2001:114.

ent has aroused any such tension. In Salemabad, then, the succession to the monastic property rights and material assets still follows lines of kinship, despite the fact that the person in charge is a celibate ascetic. These fragments of information highlight the sociological thesis according to which religious power is dependent upon the power of the social group who supports it.

Comparatively little is known about the selection process of Sitarama Anjaneyulu, the young man who was later to succeed to the Daśanāmī monastic seat of Sringeri under the name of Śrī Bhāratī Tīrtha. He was chosen by his predecessor (the 35th abbot) in 1974 after the latter had consulted goddess Śaradā and received her divine permission during the festival of Navarātri.⁴¹ Śrī Bhāratī Tīrtha, then 23 years old, had been a celibate student (*brahmacārī*) in the monastery for 9 years. At the time of their selection, his four predecessors were also members of the first *āśrama*, some of them being quite young (the 33rd abbot selected in 1866, was 8 years old; his own predecessor in 1931 was 14⁴²). Subsequently, he was seen by the side the abbot in all the important ceremonies.⁴³

The tradition is that all the abbots of Sringeri are celibate ascetics. The reason given is that Śaṅkara was himself a “perpetual religious student” when he became a renouncer. Just as in Salemabad, then, the rule of celibacy is set by the example of the founder of the lineage. Śaṅkara is also well known to have stressed Brahmanical principles, and among Daśanāmīs, therefore, Brahmins alone qualify for the higher stages of renunciation. Needless to say, in Sringeri, too, the aspiring abbot must belong to the Brahman caste. It appears that all recent abbots of Sringeri have been Telugu Smārta Brahmins.⁴⁴ But the sociological implications of their recruitment from a specific social group have not yet been investigated. For the purposes of comparison with Salemabad we can consider the case of the related Daśanāmī monastery of Chitrapur (see note 28), whose abbots have been traditionally selected

41 YOCUM, 1996:72. In the Daśanāmī monastery of Chitrapur (see note 28) the local deity was traditionally consulted through an oracle to select the future abbot; the practice was discontinued in the 19th century (CONLON, 1977:142).

42 SAWAI, 1992:160–161. Śaṅkara is not known to have appointed his own successors according to these rules; his hagiographies do not show him selecting young disciples as heirs but rather outstanding ascetics who had already achieved a great intellectual reputation (SAWAI, 1992:161–162).

43 This is well documented in the film *Avicchinna paramparā – The Unbroken Tradition*.

44 YOCUM, 1996:69.

since the XVIIIth century in a small number of families of Brahman lay disciples. Both ascetics and lay followers of the monastery belong to the same sub-caste of a group of Brahman called Gauḍa Sārasvata, a situation not found in Sringeri, whose disciples belong to castes representing the whole social hierarchy. In any case, it is worth noting that in Chitrapur in exchange for the gift of their son, the concerned families have received a share of the revenus of the monastery and have taken a significant part in its administration.⁴⁵ It is very likely that Sringeri, too, has been controlled at least partly by locally influential lay Brahmins.

The rituals of monastic ordination and their intended meaning

Having shed some light on the circumstances in which the abbots of Salemabad and of Sringeri selected their heir apparent, I will now describe the rituals of their monastic ordination through which their selection was made official and then attempt some observations on their meaning.

In July 1940, Ratanañala Śarmā became the heir apparent of the incumbent abbot of Salemabad after having received from him the *virakta-dīkṣā* or the initiation required to become an ascetic (*virakta*) in the Nimbārkī sect. The ritual was celebrated in the temple of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in the presence of a group of prominent Nimbārkī ascetics. Unfortunately, there is no description of this ceremony or of the ceremony that took place in 1974 when Sitarama Anjaneyulu (the future abbot of Sringeri) “was initiated into sannyasa and named the pontiff’s heir apparent”⁴⁶. Both ritual procedures are only known through the relevant ritual handbooks, and so it is their procedural guidelines that I will compare here, starting again with Salemabad.

According to pāṇḍita Rāmagopāla Śāstrī, Ratanañala Śarmā’s initiation followed the instructions of the *Dīkṣātattvaprakāśa* (Light on the principle of initiation) and I have reasons to believe him. Pāṇḍita Rāmagopāla Śāstrī lived in the city of Jaipur until his death in 1991. When I first met him in 1988, he had been a long-time disciple of the abbot of Salemabad and was considered a reliable authority on the philosophical and ritual tenets of the Nimbārkī sect. I looked for the *Dīkṣātattvaprakāśa*, found it in Vrindaban and discov-

45 CONLON, 1977:41–42, 66–69.

46 YOCUM, 1996:72, also 70.

ered that it had been compiled from older sectarian sources in the 1920s. As could be expected, its content was not immediately clear. The performance of initiations is a well-guarded secret and it depends on orally transmitted knowledge as much as on written instructions. The *Dīksātattvaprakāśa* was no exception to the genre, though its author's intention in writing it seems to have been to render the teachings of the sect more readily available to the average Nimbārkīs (he included in it a Hindi translation of the Sanskrit instructions). I am unable to say whether he gave there a faithful description of a ritual procedure current in his day or whether he compiled his manual in order to introduce some sort of ideal systematization or standardization where before there had been a wide variety of practices.

The *Dīksātattvaprakāśa* does not call its ritual “*virakta-dīksā*” (initiation into asceticism) but *dīksā*. Further research has shown that it does not describe the average initiation into the sect of Nimbārka (see further) but the ritual of introduction to the practice of *gurūpasatti* or dedication to the guru. This is a method of spiritual realization (*sādhana*) which the Nimbārkīs have followed since the beginning of their sect. First described by Nimbārka in a short poem, it was really explained in the elaborate commentary that Sundarabhaṭṭa, his thirteenth successor composed on it.⁴⁷ It implies a complete surrender to the guru; by dedicating himself body and soul to the guru, by obeying and serving him, the disciple frees himself from the fetters of the world and is able to have a direct contact with Kṛṣṇa. It has to be recalled that we have here a theological system that considers the grace of Kṛṣṇa an essential prerequisite of salvation. In *gurūpasatti*, the guru is the intermediary between the disciple and God. The whole ritual of initiation described by the *Dīksātattvaprakāśa* is informed by the method's ideas of giving up one's own sense of self and mine. It begins with Sanskrit formulas expressing mutual acceptance between the guru and the disciple; using pre-determined expressions, the latter asks the protection of the former, who replies that he is going to make him his own. Then the guru paints the sectarian vertical marks on twelve parts of the disciple's body, prints the symbols of the conch and disc of Viṣṇu on his shoulders, gives him a new monastic name and ties a rosary (*mālā*) of *tulasī* beads around his neck. Afterwards he draws him close to him with his left arm and recites in his right ear the names of all the former gurus making up the ascetic lineage. Then the guru celebrates the rite

47 BOSE, 1943:55–57, 116–122.

of “anointing in sovereignty” (*svarājyābhiseka*), makes the disciple recite a formula of dedication of himself to the sacred stone-emblem, and teaches him how to worship it. And finally, he whispers the two mantras⁴⁸ of the sect in his right ear.

The ritual integrates the five sacraments (*pāñca-saṃskāra*) of the average Nimbārkī initiation⁴⁹ or the sacraments required to worship Viṣṇu in the *Pāñcarātrāgama* – the ancient Vaiṣṇava tradition on which the Nimbārkīs have built much of their own ritual. It also comprises the remarkable “anointing in sovereignty”⁵⁰. The name is revealing and sheds light on the intended meaning of the rite. The enactment is even more explicit. It consists in a series of Sanskrit formulas recited aloud by the guru (as the disciple is sitting on his lap?): “He becomes a king (*sasvarād bhavati tasya*), he moves freely in all the [three] worlds (*sarvesu lokeṣu kāmacāro bhavati*)”; “by this mantra [one obtains] sovereignty (*iti mantreṇa svārājyam*)”; the lap of the guru (*guror aṅkam eva*) is your throne (*siṃhāsanam*), the right hand of the guru is your [royal] umbrella (*tava cchatram*), his left hand is your [royal] fan (*cāmaram*), the knowledge that you gain through worshipping him (*tad-dattā saparikarāvidyaiva*) is your army (*tava senā*), association with the Lord (*śrībhagavatsambandha*) is your royal capital (*tava rājadhāni*), attaining the Lord (*śrībhagavadbhāvapattir*) your victory (*jayaśrī*), the destruction of desires, etc. and connection with matter (*kāmādinivṛttipūrvap-rakṛtisambandhadhvamsa*) is your universal conquest (*digvijayah*)”. Having uttered these words, the guru sprinkles the disciple and assures him that he will attain the sovereignty of Brahman (*brahmasvārājya*)⁵¹. With its regal name and formulas of enthronement, the rite of “anointing in sovereignty” serves two purposes: (1) it enacts the symbolical identification of the guru’s body with the royal regalia, (2) it ordains the disciple as a king. The disciple achieves overlordship as he acquires from his guru the insignias of power.

48 The *Mukundaśarāṇa-mantra* and the *Gopāla-mantra* of eighteen syllables.

49 Namely: branding or stamping the body of the disciple (*tāpa*), painting the marks of Viṣṇu on his body (*puṇḍra*), giving him a new name (*nāman*), transmitting the secret mantra (*mantra*) and ritual instructions (*yāga*), see RAMACHANDRA RAO, 1991:140.

50 *Svarājya* means independent kingdom or sovereignty and probably refers also to the kind of authority wielded by an autonomous king, just as *rājya* refers both to kingdom and to kingship, see INDEN, 1978:30.

51 See also BOSE, 1943:120–121.

Before I say more about this conception, let us consider the ceremony performed at Sringeri in 1974 when Sitarama Anjaneyulu “was initiated into sannyasa and named the pontiff’s heir apparent”. *Samnyāsa* is probably the best known mode of entry into asceticism and it is likely that Śrī Bhāratī Tīrtha’s ordination conformed to its classical procedure.⁵² My purpose is not to give yet another detailed description of the ritual, but to make use of the available data in order to understand its underlying assumptions and intended meaning.

Samnyāsa is a lengthy process which comprises several operations organized in three distinct sections: 1) *samnyāsa* or renunciation proper; 2) *dīksā* or initiation; 3) *yogapatta* or conferring the meditation shawl. The three sections are celebrated successively, the second immediately after the first, the third after a certain lapse of time which is left to the decision of the guru.

The first section includes a set of rites symbolising abandonment of one’s former life style and ritual activities. They comprise a last sacrifice (this implies that the renouncer is qualified to celebrate Vedic rituals), the deposition of the sacrificial fires within oneself, the declaration of one’s intention to renounce the world, the removal of one’s sacrificial thread and sacred tuft of hair, the recitation of the formula of renunciation (*praiṣa*), the vow of safety (*abhaya*) to all creatures. Then the renouncer removes all his clothes and walks five steps in the direction of the North. At this point, his guru salutes him and gives him a loin-cloth, an upper garment of ochre colour, a bamboo staff, and a water pot. Afterwards the renouncer sits down and asks his guru to instruct him. This marks the beginning of the second section or initiation (*dīksā*). The guru sprinkles water on (*abhiṣeka*) the renouncer while reciting a formula of propitiation, then transmits to him the sacred syllabe “*om*” and teaches him the main theological tenets of the Daśanāmīs (*advaita-vedānta*). Afterward he gives him a monastic name, consisting of two parts, a personal name and the name of one of the ten monastic sub-orders.⁵³ The third and

52 See OLIVELLE, 1976–1977; OLIVELLE, 1997 (1st ed. 1995). See also the *Dharmasindhu* (*the Ocean of Dharma*), Kaśināthopadhyāya viracita (Bombay: Khemarāja Śrīkṛṣṇadāsa prakāśana, 1998). This law digest written in the 18th century is a pan-Indian reference for lay and ascetic *smārtas*. For an English summary of its guidelines for the procedure of *samnyāsa*, see KANE, 1974 (1st ed. 1941):958–962.

53 The Daśanāmīs form (as the name indicates) a group of ten “names” or sub-orders (several have become extinct). In principle, a renouncer gets initiated into the same sub-order as his guru and has the same title. In Sringeri however, a Jagadguru need not bear

last rite of conferring the meditation shawl or *yogapatta* is performed once the guru has ascertained that the disciple is qualified to receive it (it requires a sort of probationary philosophical training). It begins with a public theological examination of the renoucer, who has to deliver a learned address to an assembly of ascetics and lay followers. Then the guru sprinkles water on him (*abhiṣeka*) and invests him with the meditation shawl⁵⁴, while those present (ascetics and lay followers) recite some verses from the *Bhagavad-gītā*. After that the guru calls him by his monastic name and tells him that now he is authorized (*adhikārin*) to give the full ordination (with its three sections) to one who is eligible for it.⁵⁵ Finally, every person in the assembly bows to the new *saṃnyāsī* saying “Nārāyaṇa”.

In summary, the ordination of a Daśanāmī ascetic has three functions: (1) it serves as a rupture, symbolising death (*saṃnyāsa* stricto sensu); (2) it marks the entry into a relationship with a guru (*dīkṣā*), under whose guidance the renoucer places himself; (3) it acts as an investiture (*yogapatta*) entitling the new renoucer to teach and to ordain disciples. The purpose of each of the successive sections is therefore to turn the person first into a renoucer, secondly into a disciple and thirdly into a guru in his own right.

the same title as his guru. I was told there that the name of the present one associates in fact two titles, Bhārati and Tīrtha. For a thorough explanation of the system of monastic naming followed at Sringeri, see DAZEY, 1990:316 n. 10.

54 “*Yogapatta*” means also a long and narrow piece of cloth used (by a *yogī* for example) to maintain a sitting position, but here, judging from the description of the procedural guidelines, it refers to a shawl (it is also called *vastra*) that is held above the disciple or put on him. KANE, 1974 (1st ed. 1941): calls it: “the cloth of yoga, union with Spirit”; OLIVELLE, 1997:186–187: “meditation shawl”.

55 In the Śrīvaiṣnava (*tenkalai*) monastic tradition of Vanamamalai (Nanguneri, Tirunelveli District, Tamil Nadu), I have encountered an usage of the term which illustrates a direct connection between investiture, *patta* and naming. There, in effect, *patta* refers to a one meter long narrow strip of brocade cloth which is first tied around the head of the abbot when, moments after his investiture (during which there is no coronation as such, see also note 32), he receives the temple honours for the first time. At the time of tying the strip, the priest utters the abbot monastic name loudly. Afterwards, this ceremony is repeated each time the abbot receives honours in a temple. The strip is untied the moment he has taken the *prasāda*. As the abbot of Vanamamalai himself put it (in November 2003): “when the *patta* is tied, the name is given according to the custom (*maryadā*) of the spiritual dynasty and as a sign that we are keeping the *maryadā* of the temple. Each time I go to a temple (of the *tenkalai* sub-sect), they tie the *patta* while pronouncing my name. The *patta* comes from the deity and is always kept with the deity.”

What then does the comparison between the monastic ordinations of the would-be abbots of Salemabad and Sringeri teach us about their significance? First of all, there is this major difference: unlike *saṃnyāsa* (at Sringeri), the *virakta-dīkṣā* (at Salemabad) does not sever the disciple's link with the world. Its essential purpose in effect is to qualify him to worship Kṛṣṇa and to consecrate his entire life to this goal. In fact all Nimbārkīs, regardless of their station in life, receive the same basic initiation (i.e. the five sacraments, see above). They are all given on the occasion a religious name that expresses their relationship of slavery (*dāsyā*) to Kṛṣṇa and transforms them into new men. Those Nimbārkīs who opt for a total and definitive surrender of themselves to Kṛṣṇa adopt the ascetic life-style after receiving the corresponding insignias at the end of their initiation. In other words, the average Nimbārkī monastic ordination is the sectarian *dīkṣā* celebrated with the firm intention of living a life of celibacy in order to serve Kṛṣṇa without any distraction throughout one's life. In addition to that, the heir apparent of Salemabad, who is not an ordinary Nimbārkī, achieves overlordship at the time of his ordination, but there too one does not find any element that symbolises death to the world in contrast to the rituals of *saṃnyāsa*.

Another important purpose of the Nimbārkī *dīkṣā* is to establish a privileged link with the guru who celebrates it. This feature is even more developed in the heir apparent's ordination. As we have just seen, the Daśanāmīs too enter in a relationship with their guru at the time of their *saṃnyāsa* (and become a member of his lineage), but this is governed by entirely different reasons. It should be stressed that looking for an eligible guru (who should be a *saṃnyāsī*) is the first step to take for anyone who wants to become a Daśanāmī renouncer; the tradition goes back to Śaṅkara himself.⁵⁶ Equally noteworthy is the fact that the presence of the guru is mandatory right from the beginning of the process of ordination, even if his participation starts only in the second section. But for the Daśanāmīs, the guru is first and foremost a teacher and he is not the sole dispenser of instruction. Among the Nimbārkīs, by contrast, there is no salvation without the guru's help, as it is through him and through him alone that the disciple acquires the ritual and psychological aptitude to worship Kṛṣṇa. This conception that stresses the relationship with the guru is characteristic of their

56 SAWAI, 1992:131. The *Dharmasindhu* (op. cit.) is very clear on this point; see also KANE, 1974 (1st ed. 1941):958–961.

theology: salvation is obtained through a close and continuous connection with a personal God and with a guru. Therefore among the Nimbārkīs, no ascetic can ever contemplate loosening his link with his guru. It is different among the Daśanāmīs. Their monist theology revolves around the notion of an impersonal and single principle (*brahman*) and they lay stress on the acquisition of knowledge (*jñāna*) rather than on devotion (*bhakti*) as a means of liberation. This explains the fact that the ordinary Daśanāmī may seek enlightenment from several gurus in his life time and live apart from the *saṃnyāsī* who ordained him. However the abbot of Sringeri can never do that: after his ordination he is as closely associated with his guru as his counterpart is in the theist tradition of Salemabad. I will now try to understand the nature of the link with the guru which gets constructed during both ordinations.

So far the comparison conducted between the two ordinations has left out one section of each, the *svarājyābhiṣeka* of the Nimbārkīs and the *yogapatti* of the Daśanāmīs. We have seen that the declared objective of the latter is to mark the attainment of guruhood. It is my contention that in Salemabad the rite of “anointing in sovereignty” serves a similar purpose, namely transforming the disciple into a guru. A parallel can in effect be drawn between the symbolism of the formulas accompanying the two procedures. In *saṃnyāsa* the words are borrowed from the *Bhagavad-gītā*. As the guru covers his disciple with the meditation shawl (*yogapatti*) the assembly recites the chapter Viśvarūpa which concludes with the verse: “therefore arise and attain fame, and conquering your enemies, enjoy a flourishing kingdom”⁵⁷. In the ritual of the Nimbārkīs, the guru transfers his power to the disciple and invests him with the insignias of his sovereignty, that is of his own guruhood. Both rituals therefore mark access to an independent authority that is not subversive to any other authority. But they do more than that.

In Salemabad the ritual also effects a profound transformation of the initiate that evokes the installation of the divine image (*pratiṣṭhā*) according to the rituals of the *Pāñcarātra* tradition.⁵⁸ It should be recalled that on this occasion the deity is made to reside in a man-made image through several

57 *Tasmāttvamuttiṣṭha yaśo labhasva / jitvā śatrūn bhūrīkva rājyam samṛddham //* (BhG, XI, 33 a). In that section (BhG, XI. 15–33a), Kṛṣṇa reveals to Arjuna his universal form, a total divine figure containing within himself all deities.

58 See DE, 1986 (1st ed. 1942):511–515; JOSHI, 1959:chapter V.

operations, of which the main ones are ritual baths (with water imbued with divine power) and the ritual opening of the eyes of the image. Just as an image is bereft of power before its installation, so is the disciple bereft of power before being anointed in sovereignty. But after the rituals the power of the guru is inside the disciple in the same way that the divine power is inside the image. Those who worship image or guru address their homage to the power that has been infused in them.⁵⁹ The comparison can be carried a step further also to take into account the fact that both the image and the disciple are considered worthy recipients to receive the power.⁶⁰

In Sringeri, the ritual of *samnyāsa* does not include a symbolic transfer of the guru's power into the disciple's body as in Salemabad, but the incumbent abbot designates his successor in a such a way as to make it clear that he is his own substitute:⁶¹ the ordination of the heir apparent can only be celebrated by him and by him alone. Moreover, the abbot can only ordain one person in his life time, that is, his own successor.⁶² This goes back to the origin of the lineage. Indeed it is held that the abbot is Śaṅkara himself or an incarnation of Śaṅkara.⁶³ In the two monastic traditions studied in here, then, there is an implication that the heir apparent becomes the next recipient of the power which had been handed down from the beginning of the lineage in a uninterrupted manner. The clearest manifestation of that transformation

59 The royal symbolism is also at work during the cult of the divine image. It gets honoured like a king, sits on a throne, etc.

60 The comparison is found among the Nimbārkis themselves (see note 40). There is the idea that *mutatis mutandis* the whole process of the heir apparent's formation bears comparison with the careful fabrication of the image according to a prescribed model.

61 A propos the Daśanāmī monastery of Kanchipuram, CENKNER, 1996:64) observed: "When an acarya turns a matha over to his successor, as was the case when the senior acarya of Kanchi relinquished the matha to Sri Jayendra Saraswati, the implication is that equality, spiritual and ontological, had been achieved". A similar implication is found among the Śaiva sect of the Vīraśaivas. After the succession ceremony has been performed by the incumbent abbot, he and his heir take some food in the same plate: "It is done to signify the complete identity between the two", see SADASIVAIAH, 1967:99.

62 According to CENKNER, 1983, the same tradition prevails in the Daśanāmī monasteries (and Jagadguru seats) of Badrinath and Kanchipuram (SAWAI, 1992:157; n. 7).

63 SAWAI, 1992:157, 162. The abbot is referred to as the *avatāra* of Śaṅkara in the film *Avicchinna paramparā – The Unbroken Tradition*.

is that from his ordination onward he is considered as a guru himself.⁶⁴ The new ascetic disciple becomes therefore the official successor of the abbot once he has been made ritually ready to replace him in every way.⁶⁵ It this way one goes back to the fountain-head of the lineage itself. The intention is clearly to reproduce the first guru, the very epitome of the perfect ascetic. The story repeats itself constantly, following the pattern put in place at the origin.

Conclusion

In this paper I have concentrated on the rituals marking access to the highest office in two Hindu monastic institutions in order to understand their underlying assumptions about authority. I have shown that replacing the abbot is a process that comprises three distinct phases: (1) selecting the heir apparent; (2) ordaining him; and (3) installing him as abbot. It also implies four successive transformations of the initiand: (1) into an ascetic (2) into a disciple; (3) into a guru; and (4) into the abbot. But replacing the abbot involves more than the transfer of titles and position of power to him, it also guarantees his legitimacy. The investigation shows that the ordination and investiture do that in two ways. First they do so by being public acts of affirmation.⁶⁶ These rites are socially valid because they are celebrated ac-

64 The archives of the state of Jaipur show that the ruler and his mother could get initiated by the heir apparent of a monastic tradition during the life time of the incumbent abbot. Pratapsingh (1778–1803) was initiated in 1780 by Govindānanda, then heir apparent of the abbot of the Bālānandī monastery; he succeeded him in 1794 (HORSTMANN, 2001:148–150); the mother of Jaisingh III (1819–1835) was initiated by Nimbārkaśaraṇa, then heir apparent to the monastery of Salemabad (whose abbot he became in 1822) (CLEMENTIN-OJHA, 1999:88–89).

65 There is something in the whole process that reminds one of the old upanisadic ritual of *sampratti*, during which the dying father transmitted his own essence to his son (KauU 2.15). I am not aware that in any of the two monastic traditions presented here there is any implication that the guru-abbot dies ritually after having empowered his heir. But this eventuality was discussed in the Śaiva-siddhānta tradition. On the ritual measures that were taken to reestablish the power in the guru, see BRUNNER-LACHAUX, 1977:488–491.

66 BOURDIEU, 1982:58–63.

cording to rules recognized by the group and by persons whose function has been universally (or collectively) acknowledged. The highest monastic authority can only be transferred to unmarried individuals who belong to recognized social and sectarian structures. The abbot's religious identity is constructed within the world of caste and kinship relationships. He is selected among certain families of Brahman lay disciples. This is not always a smooth process, as tensions are bound to manifest themselves when a group is confronted with the necessity to make choices affecting its perpetuation. The abbot's religious identity is also constructed through his relationship with his guru and predecessor. The guru-disciple bond in Hinduism has often been stressed and with good reason. Its importance is even greater in monastic Hinduism and highlights its sectarian dimension. It is within the lineage of the guru, in reference to his own predecessors and to his own inherited understanding of the sectarian theological and ritual patrimony, that the disciple's religious identity gets shaped. Here it is fictive kinship that matters and not real kinship. But the close similarity between the structure of ascetic organizations, divided in lineages all claiming the same ancestor, and kinship organization has also been noted by all students of Hindu monasticism.⁶⁷ Whether fictive or real, therefore, kinship plays an essential role in the ritual construction of the abbot's authority and legitimacy.

Secondly, rituals legitimize because they are "effective" acts, endowed with a transformative power. But there is more than this in that, here we also have an effect of accumulation. Replacing the abbot is a process that takes place over a long stretch of time and supposes the enactment of successive actions, each building on the preceding one. In both monastic traditions investiture is the end of a composite ritual whose earlier stages culminate in the initiand being made into a guru. It requires that the status of guru has been obtained; it does not fabricate guruship. Thus it sanctions a distinction that has been already established and gains thereby in legitimacy. Similarly the transformation of the disciple into a guru unfolds in a series of successive operations and they are themselves operative because they rest on an earlier

67 CENKNER, 1996:53, see also 63) is therefore right in observing about the Daśanāmī tradition of Kanchipuram that "the religious centers attributed to Sankara, are not in imitation of the Buddhist monastic sangha but are a transformation of the Brahmanic gotra and household sampradayas and as such are dominated by the Sankara lineage". (*Gotra* refers to all those who descend from a common male ancestor; *sampradāya* means tradition, line of succession). See also DAZEY, 1990:288–292.

stage, which is the careful selection of a worthy recipient. This in turn presupposes the existence of a reservoir of qualified candidates whose superiority has already been established. Legitimacy results from this accumulation. We are reminded of the way Hindu *samskāras* operate. It is through the succession of the ritual qualification which they confer that an individual acquires the ability and competence (*adhikāra*) to act in a particular domain. In such a logic there is no absolute beginning either.

Other features show that the reference to the past enhances authority. The imitation or repetition of the founder's example is also a key element in the legitimization of the man in charge of the highest monastic office. The disciple becomes the abbot's successor once he has been made ritually ready to function in his place as his alter-ego. The ability to command obedience is transferable because its holder is perceived as endlessly replicable. This absence of change is considered a guarantee of both authenticity and validity.

But the reputation and prestige of the abbots of Sringeri and Salemabad and of their counterparts in other Hindu monastic traditions are not simply the result of the rituals through which they acquire their position. They depend very much on what each one of them is able to make of the position through his own achievements. Therefore, their legitimacy rests also on their individual ability to command effectively and exercise their leadership. But this is another story.⁶⁸ In the successful Hindu abbot, then one observes the creative tension between two opposing attitudes. On the one hand, he is supposed to do away with his own individuality. On the other hand, he has to assert his personal uniqueness, as defined by his social determinants and as demonstrated by the manner with which he fulfills his obligations.

68 For a study of the manner in which the abbot of Kanchipuram expresses his individuality through his leadership, see MINES & VIJAYALAKSHMI, 1990:761–786.

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