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**Replacing the Abbot:  
Rituals of Monastic ordination and Investiture in Modern Hinduism**

Catherine Clémentin-Ojha (2006)

(CEIAS- EHESS, Paris)\*

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 resources at stake, and 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 Hindu abbots [1] in contemporary India in order to investigate, from this limited perspective, the conception of religious authority prevailing in their community. After some introductory remarks about Hindu monasticism, its development and main characteristics, I examine and compare the procedures of selection and installation of two abbots. My examples are drawn from institutions belonging to two representative Hindu monastic traditions, the Daśanāmī founded by the monist (*advaita-vedāntin*) theologian Śāṅkara (VIIIth c.), the Nimbārki by the theist (*vaiṣṇava vedāntin*) theologian Nimbārka (XIIth c.). For the latter, I rely on the extensive anthropological and historical research I have been doing since 1988 on the Nimbārki monastery of Salemabad (Rajasthan, North India); for the first one, on different published studies on the South Indian monastery of Sringeri [2] as well as on interviews I conducted there myself in November 2003. The two monasteries belong to Hindu groups whose theological and soteriological assumptions and ritual practices are very different and who have been arch rivals on the Hindu religious scene throughout history ; nonetheless, they have enough in common to justify a comparison. In fact, the issue examined here is not unique to them and shows in a more general way how rituals of ordination and investiture participate in the legitimation of Hindu monastic authority in modern Hinduism.

**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 the Buddhist teaching, he or she must adopt the monastic way of life. 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 (*saṃsāra*) 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 why, 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 householder (*gṛhastha*) on the one hand, and that of the celibate renouncer (*saṃnyāsī*), on the other.

In Brahmanical Hinduism, then, the necessity for world renunciation (*saṃnyāsa*) is only one point of view. This helps to explain why, in reality, the radical steps of world withdrawal and assumption of the ascetic life-style are only taken by a few.

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\* Clémentin-Ojha, Catherine, “Replacing the Abbot: Rituals of Monastic ordination and Investiture in Modern Hinduism”, *Asiatische Studien. Etudes Asiatiques*, LX, 3 (2006), pp. 535-573 (the passages in grey have not been published, they have been added in August 2006)

During the course of history the practice of renunciation has 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 forms of monasticism, implying a life apart from the rest of society in a shared living space and the cultivation of detachment through the observance of a common set of regulations. The word « sect » refers to a federation of lineages, which claim pupillary succession from the same founder, usually an ascetic. The lineage includes both ascetics and 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 does not possess a single unified monastic organization; rather, asceticism (and its monastic manifestations) is found embedded in independent sectarian traditions.

The relationship between Hinduism and the various Hindu sects is rather difficult to define in a succinct way, because it takes place simultaneously at several levels. A crucial feature 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 revealed teachings and the grace of (one) God are 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 categories: the Dāśanāmīs are Śaivas, the Nimbārkīs Vaiṣṇavas. But the Nimbārkīs are more “sectarian” than the Daśanāmīs: 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 open (they admit members of “low castes”). The Daśanāmīs are not so exclusivist in their theology, as they put Viṣṇu on par with Śiva, but given their insistence that salvation requires the acquisition of knowledge (*jñāna*, reserved to those who have received the Brahmanical initiation, *upanayana*), they are much more conscious of caste distinctions than the theist Nimbārkīs. The majority of their lay followers belong to high castes, claiming to follow orthodox (*smārta*) Hinduism (they observe the socioreligious norms of the *smṛti*), and they 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 of Brahmanism between “householder” and “renouncer”. Their ascetic members are the latter’s counterparts. This is probably the reason why the words “renouncer” and “ascetic” are often used as if they were interchangeable, whereas in fact they should be distinguished on two accounts. First, not all ascetics are renouncers, and second, the word « renouncer » itself has two meanings. 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—all renouncers (*saṃnyāsī*) belong in fact to a sectarian lineage. It is equally important to keep in mind that not all Hindu ascetics are renouncers because 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 this essay.

The two examples examined in this essay illustrate the variability of Hindu asceticism. The Daśanāmīs are *saṃnyāsīs* in the strict sense of the word ; their ochre or saffron- colored

dress is a clear sign of this. They are also distinguished from the rest of the population by their necklace of *rudrākṣa* beads and the three horizontal white stripes (*tripuṇḍra*) on their forehead (and other parts of their body) made with the sacred ashes of cow-dung, all symbols associated with Śiva. They follow a code of conduct that evolved out of the rules of the ancient institution of the fourth *āśrama* and accept the philosophical tenets of *advaita-vedānta* as taught by Śaṅkara. The Nimbārī ascetics are called *vairāgīs* or *viraktas* (dispassionate)—names exclusively borne by Vaiṣṇavas—and they wear a white dress ; their necklace of *tulasī* beads and their vertical bodily marks (*ūrdhvaṇḍra*) looking like a U painted with holy clay—all symbols of Viṣṇu—are other clear markers of their sectarian identity.

Hindu sects not only teach a set of theological propositions; they also teach practical means or spiritual disciplines (*sādhana*) to be followed in order to obtain salvation. They appear as more or less unified entities, when one considers together their dogmas and religious practices, especially if one looks at them through their canonical literature which affords a synthetic view of their teachings. But from an institutional point of view, any given 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. Thus neither the Daśanāmī renouncers nor the Nimbārī *vairāgīs* form a monolithic monastic organization, obeying a single and unconstested authority, vested in a central monastic seat. Rather, they comprise several autonomous lineages, represented by their respective gurus, each ruling over a particular monastery [4].

Ascetics do not usually spend their whole life in the same monastery, but they do see themselves as attached to a particular lineage of gurus. 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 and by Jainism throughout its history) 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 lineage of spiritual succession.

### **The monasteries of Sringeri and of Salemabad**

Śaṅkara, the founding father of the Daśanāmīs, is usually credited with having established four traditional lineages (*āmnāya*) and four monasteries (*maṭha*) in the four main directions of the Indian peninsula, each having jurisdiction over one of the cardinal points. But the neat four-center pattern of the Daśanāmī monastic organization is 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 particular boundaries. In the South of India alone there are two such competing monastic centers, each one associated with distinct linguistic, cultural, and political regions. These are Sringeri in Karnataka (Chikmagalur District), and Kanchipuram in the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu. Sringeri's claim to have jurisdiction over the whole south (as the legitimate representative of the "Southern tradition", *dakṣiṇāmnāya*) is challenged by Kanchipuram's claim of standing above (or in the center of) the four other monasteries because unlike them it was not established by Śaṅkara's main disciples, but by Śaṅkara himself. In reality, all these monastic foundations and their related ecclesiastical divisions are likely to have occurred several centuries after Sankara's 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 focus here, did not occur before the 14th

century. This makes it nonetheless one of the oldest living monastic institutions in Hindu India [5]. From its foundation it has 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]. 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 close association with the abbot and the government of the State of Karnataka (former Mysore State) [7].

Though the spatial expansion of the Nimbārkaīs on the Indian peninsula is far more limited than that of the disciples of Śaṅkara, their institutional unity is no greater. They are mostly found in North-West India. The cradle of the sect seems to have been the area around Mathura, a place holy for all Vaiṣṇavas because of 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 17<sup>th</sup> century, the fortress-like 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 Kachvaha rulers. 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. This claim is, however, rejected by some Nimbārkaī lineages, especially by one of them which is still settled in the original cradle of the sect (Mathura).

In modern Hinduism a monastery (*maṭha*) 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 (*vidyāpīṭha*) 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 incumbent guru is naturally crucial. My experience in Salemabad and in Sringeri allows me to say that the whole life of the monastery revolves around the presence and activities of the abbot and that nothing can be done without having first asked his permission or the permission of his representative when he is not on residence. For it has also to be stressed that in Salemabad as well as in Sringeri 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 seems to be 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 (*līṅga*) of Śiva-Candramaulīśvara falls under the personal responsibility of the abbot. The *līṅga* is believed to

have been brought by Śaṅkara from the Himalaya [10]. It is also said that worship of this *liṅga* has been performed without any interruption by all the gurus who succeeded Sankara 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 head.

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 and ritual rules. 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 Nimbārka), 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 a type of unleavened bread, cooking pulses and vegetables, and then 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 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 possess the sacred stone is seen as a proof that the 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 the Mathura 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. Similarly, the Daśanāmī monastery of Kanchipuram possesses a crystal emblem of Śiva-Candramaulīśvara, also said to have been brought back from the Himalaya by Śaṅkara, and therefore as sacred as that owned and worshipped by the rival monastery of Sringeri. 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 Nimbārka lineages as “Traditions of the Disciples (*śiṣya-paramparā*)”. It designates its chief by the title “Teacher of the World—Preceptor Nimbārka (Jagadguru-Nimbārkaācārya)” and since the 18th century has addressed him with the regal title of “Śrījī Mahārāja”. 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 successional process which he started. It asserts that the incumbent abbot is the sole representative of the original founder of the tradition. In the 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; *simhāsana* 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 (*pīṭhādīśvara*)”. But its main rival lineage also makes use of similar expressions.

The title of “Teacher of the World” is also used by the abbot of Sringeri and it reflects his assertion that he is an all-India authority as the direct successor of Śāṅkara, the first Jagadguru [14]. He is also called Śāṅkarācārya 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 (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 (*pañcāyat*) [17]. Today he is still considered a leading religious figure. However, the abbots of the other main centers of the Daśanāmīs are also called “Teacher of the World” and so are other leading Daśanāmīs renouncers in a claim to equal status with their rivals.

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 an abbot 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 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 of the lineage 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 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 abbots was inaugurated.

### **The ceremony of investiture (*paṭṭābhiṣeka*) 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 (*uttarādhikārī, yuvarāja*) and named Sarveśvaraśaraṇa 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 (*paṭṭābhiṣeka*) 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 as well as representatives 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 helm 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 (Hindu) 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 the ceremony [18]. From these reports I extract the following information. The investiture comprised two distinct parts: (1) an aspersion (*abhiṣeka*) and (2) the conferring of a shawl (*cāddar satkār*). The first part was performed for

the young ascetic Sarveśvaraśaraṇa by the domestic priest (*purohita*) of the monastery: the boy sitting on the abbatial seat (*ācārya-pīṭha*) was sprinkled with consecrated water while the appropriate mantras were 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 Nimbārki ascetic of Vrindaban referred to above. Standing close to the teenager who was still sitting on the abbatial seat, he first applied the sectarian mark (*tilaka*) on his forehead with some sandal paste, then tied a rosary (*mālā*) of sacred basil (*tulasī*) seeds around his neck and finally wrapped him up into the ceremonial shawl. Sarveśvaraśaraṇa, being solemnly addressed for the first time by the abbot’s title of “Śrī Mahārāja”, was officially declared the 13<sup>th</sup> abbot of Salemabad and the 48<sup>th</sup> Universal Master (*jagadguru*) of the sect of Nimbārka. Afterwards, other ascetics of note came 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 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 three sources: G. Yocum’s published observations, the interviews I conducted in Sringeri and the relevant section of *Avicchinnā 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 (*saṃnidhānam*, to contrast him with the abbot, who is *mahāsaṃnidhānam*) in 1974 when he was twenty-three years old, after having been selected for the highest office some years earlier. In Sringeri as in Salemabad 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 (*paṭṭābhiṣeka*) was celebrated in the temple of the goddess Śaradā, in the place where sits the throne. There, on the previous day, the throne had been decorated and ceremoniously installed on a tiger skin [20]. The film shows Śrī Bhāratī Tīrtha entering the temple after having paid homage to the cenotaph of 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 intoned what the film commentator calls “Vedic chants”, and the main priest (wearing a blue shawl atop his white dress) performed 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 G. Yocum, the film giving no indication of the duration of any of the ritual sequences it shows in part), he appeared dressed in full regalia, standing near the throne and wearing a “gold-thread and silk shawl”, 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 Vidyāraṇya 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”, important lay followers and some journalists (a testimony to the prestige enjoyed by the monastery of Sringeri). Later Śrī Bhāratī Tīrtha personally worshipped the goddess Śaradā. Finally, he again sat on the abbatial 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 aspersion of the Hindu king (*rājyābhiṣeka*) as it is known to us through textual descriptions [23]. In the royal ceremony the main rites are, in the order of their performance, a series of aspersions (of baths in fact), a coronation, an enthronement, and finally, holding an assembly. The two monastic investitures include an aspersion [24], the solemn giving of some emblem of monastic authority, and holding of 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 aspersion has been performed. It is this rite with its royal symbolism which signals that the ascetic sitting on the abbatial seat has achieved overlordship and can receive the emblem of his new office. There are two features present in Sringeri and lacking in Salemabad, which seem to stress the connection to the ceremony of royal investiture. One is the rite of coronation and the other is the rite of enthronement. The symbolism of the throne is also present in Salemabad; there, too, the replacement of the abbot requires the formal installation of his successor on his seat of authority. In Salemabad the power of the guru is similarly 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 throne after receiving his crown. One can observe this important detail 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 in the full view of all the onlookers.

According to G. Yocum, the coronation found in Sringeri is attributable to the monastery’s close connections with secular power [25]. The comparison with Salemabad makes it possible to nuance this interpretation slightly. 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 its monastery, which was of great religious, political, and economic significance [26]. But the bond of Salemabad with secular rulers was no less close than Sringeri’s and its abbot no less entitled to regal paraphernalia, 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. Besides, crowning the abbot during his investiture is found among other Daśanāmīs and is not unique to Sringeri [28]. We must also ask if the word *paṭṭa* necessarily refers to a crown. A major difficulty in

interpreting the ceremony of *paṭṭābhīṣeka* arises from the fact that *paṭṭa* has several meanings [29]. It refers to anything that is flat, such as a length of cloth (as one used to make a turban), a slab in stone or metal (bearing inscriptions or deeds) and a seat. So given the polysemy of the term what precisely does the expression *paṭṭābhīṣeka* mean? In so far as Sringeri is concerned, G. Yocum translates it as “coronation”, but does he imply thereby that *paṭṭa* refers to a headdress associated with regal status? In support of such an interpretation is the fact that in ancient India the principal wife of the king was called *paṭṭa-devī* or “turbaned queen” [30]. But today in Sringeri itself *paṭṭābhīṣeka* is associated with the notion of deed (confering a right) or with that of seat (confering a position), and not with a crown. Locally knowledgeable people will tell you that the ceremony confers the highest right (*adhikāra*) inside the monastery. In other words, they do not take *paṭṭa* to refer to a crown (etc.) but to a status, whether they arrive at this conclusion through the notion of deed or through the notion of seat. To make things more confusing, there is no coronation in the investiture of the abbot of Salemabad, though it is also called a *paṭṭābhīṣeka*. Let me elaborate on this statement by making two comments. Firstly, it is only recently that the monastery of Salemabad has started referring to the investiture of its abbot as a “*paṭṭābhīṣeka*”. In the biographical accounts of the previous abbots the ceremony is designated as *cāddar satkār* or receiving the homage of the shawl [31]. The new terminology could be part of the efforts mentioned above designed to raise the prestige of the lineage of Salemabad to new heights. It also reflects a fairly common usage of the term in contemporary India in the vague 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 18th 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 (*pagḍī*) [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 associated rights of raising revenues [34]. In Salemabad, as in other monasteries, the heir apparent who had been officially recognized as the successor was called *yuvārāja* 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.

I think we are now in a position to develop G. Yocum’s argument about Sringeri having an especially close association with political power. In the large and well-endowed monasteries of both Salemabad and Sringeri the responsibilities of the abbot integrated two distinct but complementary functions: the abbot was both the administrator of the landed property of the institution and a spiritual leader. 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 why the investiture ceremony either incorporated or imitated the celebration of rites marking access to administrative and juridical responsibilities. In Salemabad this involved the offering of a full attire (including turban-tying), and this was celebrated apart from the investiture ceremony proper. In Sringeri, however, whatever might be the meaning of the word *paṭṭa*, the investiture (*paṭṭābhīṣeka*) included not only a type of coronation ceremony, but also an enthronement, both rituals found in the traditional aspersion of the Hindu king. I am tempted to conclude that what the monastery of Sringeri adopted into its investiture ceremony through its association with the empire of Vijayanagar was these specifically Hindu (royal) elements. Vijayanagar was known for its patronage of Hindu rituals and the investiture

of the abbot of Sringeri could well have been deliberately patterned on the rites of installation of the Hindu king as part of the Vijayanagar empire's policy of Hinduization. The *paṭṭābhiṣeka* of Sringeri is not only reminiscent of the *rājyābhiṣeka*, it displays its binary structure—aspersion in the first part, coronation 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. It displays royal features, too, but in place of a coronation and of an enthronement it has the ritual of giving a 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 18th century) also left its imprint on it as shown by the use of the 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 be required to substantiate my interpretation; this would necessitate a much more complete documentation of their respective enactment than the one available to me.

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

The designation of a new abbot is a long process that starts much earlier than the actual performance of the ceremony of investiture. 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 Ratanalāla Śarmā, 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 in singling out the child during the process of selection was his “unusually sincere nature”. Next was the fact 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 a counterindication of his ascetic vocation, concluded that Ratanlāla was an exceptional subject, “able to withstand the appeal of wordly influences” and to 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 unless his Brahmanical initiation (*upanayana*) has been celebrated, that is not before the age of 8. What made Ratanalāla eligible then, was his being an unmarried yet initiated (or twice-born) Brahmin. Nimbārka, the sect founder, had himself been a Brahmin “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 continuity in the succession of abbots. It was thought that once an heir had been duly selected, the monastery ran less of a risk of being engulfed in a crisis of succession upon 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, 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 celibacy throughout his life, and the rule is stricter for those who are destined to the highest monastic office. The knowledgeable Nimbārki, both ascetic and lay, whom I interviewed in Salemabad and in Jaipur on this subject thought that the selection of a child was best suited to insure this goal. They said that if a pubescent child has good *saṃskāras*, 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, would 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 Brahmans 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 Nimbārki sect has made its own), according to which guruship and abbotship are only accessible to Brahmans. 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 who dedicates himself to Him (regardless of his caste).

The biographies of the important ascetics of the sect show that the Gauḍa sub-caste of Brahmans played an important role in the expansion of the Nimbārki in North India. Not much is known about the sect prior to the 16th century, but from that time onward it is found settled in the town of Mathura with leaders belonging to the locally important Gauḍa Brahman sub-caste. This last fact is at odds with the earlier pattern of having Telugu Brahmans at the head of the lineage, apparently in keeping with Nimbārka's own caste affiliation (nothing certain can be said about Nimbārka, but it is usually held that he came from South India). The close association of the Nimbārki with Mathura seems therefore to have transformed their leaders' recruitment policy. But this was not the only way in which it shaped the Nimbarka sect. Association with Mathura can also be seen to have influenced their canonical literature: whereas earlier they had expressed themselves in Sanskrit, they started composing in the vernacular language of the Mathura region (*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 Brahmans for the highest monastic office, of using the local vernacular as a canonical language, and of adopting the new devotional sensibility probably testify to an attempt by the Nimbārki 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 17th century as the result of the subsequent growth of the sect's ascetic and lay membership.

When Ratanalāla was selected in 1940, some Gauḍa Brahmans had been closely linked to the Nimbārki ascetics through a system of patronage in which the gift of a son to the monastery played a significant part. In fact, in modern times the monastic succession has been organized in a limited number of families of Gauḍa Brahmans, possibly even in the same extended family. The present heir apparent is the nephew (father's younger brother's son) of the abbot [35] who was himself the nephew (same relation as above) of his predecessor [36], who was himself the nephew of an important ascetic of the monastery [37]. Though these elements are an index of the degree to which family-based connections obtain 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]. Nevertheless, it appears certain that the continuity of the lineage of Salemabad is assured by the recruitment of a boy selected from 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 whom I mentioned above as playing a leading role in the abbot's investiture in 1944. Chief of the Kāṭhiyābābā monastery, he belonged to the main rival lineage of Salemabad, but had chosen to give his support to the latter for reasons of his own. His successor and biographer reveals some hitherto unpublished details about 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 passed away [39]. There were talks of black magic (*śaḍyantra*) 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 (in which he directly participated) could take place. 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]. It seems that 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 apparent has aroused any such tension. Whatever the case, it remains that in Salemabad the succession to the monastic property rights and material assets follows lines of kinship, despite the fact that the person in charge is a celibate ascetic. These fragments of information illustrate the thesis that 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 succeeded to the Daśanāmī abbatial seat of Sringeri under the name of Śrī Bhāratī Tīrtha. He was chosen by his predecessor (the 35<sup>th</sup> 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 Sanskrit seminary of 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 33<sup>rd</sup> abbot selected in 1866, was 8 years old; his own predecessor in 1931 was 14 [42]). Subsequently, he was seen by the side the abbot in all 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. The abbots also must be Brahmans. Śaṅkara is well-known to have stressed Brahmanical

principles, and, accordingly, among Daśanāmīs only Brahmans qualify for the higher stages of renunciation. Moreover, all their Jagadgurus are *daṇḍī samnyāsīs* (staff-carrying renunciators), a class of renunciators only open to Brahmans. There are other general rules. Thus each of the four monastic centers founded by Śāṅkara is connected with a Veda and Sringeri's Veda being the Yajur Veda, its abbot has to be recruited from a family of Yajurvedī Brahmans. It is known that the last six abbots of Sringeri have been Telugu speaking Yajurvedī Smārta Brahmans [44]. Sringeri is located in a Kannadā speaking region, but it was for a crucial period of its history associated with the empire of Vijayanagara, where Telugu was the dominant language, and it might have retained some link with this area upto this day. But the full sociological implications of the recruitment of the abbots from this specific sub-caste of Telugu-speaking Brahmans have yet to be investigated. For the purpose of comparison, we may consider the case of the monasteries of Hariharapura, Shakatapura and Chitrapur, also located in Karnataka, the first two being within 20 kms of Sringeri, the third in the north-western part of the state. In each of these three Daśanāmī monasteries, the abbot and his lay disciples always belong to the same sub-caste of Brahmans, the Śivahallī in Hariharapura, the Kotā in Shakatapura (or Bhandigadi) and the Gauḍa Sārasvata in Chitrapur. There, too, as in Salemabad, kinship ties play an important role in the selection of the abbot. For example, it has been shown that in Chitrapur in exchange for the gift of their son, two or three families of Gauḍa Sārasvata Brahmans were entitled to receive a share of the revenues of the monastery and to take a significant part in its administration [45]. Though the situation prevailing in Sringeri is different (its disciples, though mainly Brahmans—but not exclusively—do not belong to a single sub-caste of Brahmans), it is very likely that there as well the Brahman groups who have repeatedly given their sons to the highest office of the monastery have had a say in its management. In fact, the present *peškāra* or (lay) administrator of the temples controlled by the monastery of Sringeri is none other than the younger brother of the abbot.

### **The rituals of monastic ordination and their intended meaning**

Now that some light has been shed on the circumstances in which the abbots of Salemabad and of Sringeri select their heir apparent, let me describe the rituals through which their selection is made official, and then attempt some observations on their meaning.

In July 1940, Ratanalāla 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, no witness has left a description of this ceremony nor 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]. It is only through the relevant ritual handbooks that both rituals can be reconstructed. Therefore I compare their procedural guidelines, starting again with Salemabad.

According to paṇḍita Rāmagopāla Śāstrī, Ratanalāla Śarmā's initiation into asceticism was performed in accordance with the instructions of the *Dīkṣātattvaprakāśa* (Light on the principle of initiation). There is no reason to doubt this. Paṇḍita 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. So I looked for the *Dīkṣātattvaprakāśa* and when I found it, I discovered that it had been compiled in the 1920s in Vrindaban from older sectarian sources. As could be expected, its contents were not immediately clear. The performance of initiations is generally a well-guarded secret; it depends on orally transmitted knowledge as much as on written instructions, making ritual handbooks often very obscure.

The *Dīkṣātattvaprakāśa* 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 Nimbārki (he included in it a Hindi translation of the Sanskrit instructions). I am, however, unable to say whether he gave a faithful description of the ritual procedure followed to initiate disciples 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 question arises from the fact that the *Dīkṣātattvaprakāśa* does not describe the standard initiation into the sect of Nimbārka (see further) but the ritual of *gurūpasatti* or dedication of oneself to the guru.

*Gurūpasatti* is one of the methods of spiritual realization (*sādhana*) of the Nimbārki. It was first described by Nimbārka in a short poem, but was really explained in the elaborate commentary that Sundarabhāṭṭa, his thirteenth successor composed on it [47]. The method 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 are dealing with 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. Accordingly the whole ritual of initiation described by the *Dīkṣātattvaprakāśa* is informed by the method's central theme of giving up one's own sense of self and mine. It comprises several ritual sequences. 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. At this point, the guru celebrates the rite of "anointing in sovereignty" (*svarājyābhīṣeka*). Later still he 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 mantras of the sect in his right ear [48].

The ritual of *gurūpasatti* integrates the five sacraments (*pāñca-saṃskāra*) of the standard Nimbārki initiation [49]. These are the minimum sacraments required to worship Viṣṇu according to the *Pāñcarātrāgama*, the ancient Vaiṣṇava school on which the Nimbārki have built much of their own ritual tradition. It also comprises the « anointing in sovereignty » [50]. If the name alone expresses the intended meaning of this rather remarkable ritual sequence, its 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 (*śasvarāḍ bhavati tasya*), he moves freely in all the [three] worlds (*sarveṣu lokeṣu kāmācāro 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 cchatraṃ*), his left hand is your [royal] fan (*cāmaram*), the knowledge that you gain through worshipping him (*taddattā saparikarāvidyaiva*) is your army (*tava senā*), association with the Lord (*śrībhagavatsambandha*) is your royal capital (*tava rājadhānī*), attaining the Lord (*śrībhagavadbhāvapattir*) your victory (*jayaśrī*), the destruction of desires, etc. and the severing of any connection with matter (*kāmādinivṛttipūrvaprakṛtisambandhadhvamsa*) 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 the insignias of power from his guru.

Before I say anything more about this ritual operation, let me consider the ceremony of *saṃnyāsa* celebrated in 1974 at Sringeri for Sitarama Anjaneyulu. My purpose is not to give yet another detailed description of *saṃnyāsa* (probably the best known mode of entry into Hindu asceticism), but to understand its underlying assumptions and intended meaning. I do that first by referring to textual descriptions [52] and then by looking at a particular detail of the procedure as it was explained to me in Sringeri (and in the monastery of Kanchipuram).

*Samnyāsa* is a lengthy process which comprises several ritual operations organized in three distinct sections: 1) *saṃnyāsa* or renunciation proper; 2) *dīkṣā* or initiation; 3) *yogapaṭṭa* (an expression whose rendering is problematic, as we shall see). The three sections are celebrated successively, the second immediately after the first, and the third after a certain lapse of time, the duration of which is left to the discretion of the guru.

The first section includes a set of rites symbolising abandonment of one's former lifestyle and ritual activities. They comprise a last sacrifice (this implies that the would-be renouncer is necessarily 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 (*praīṣa*), 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 (*dīkṣā*). The guru sprinkles (*abhiṣeka*) water on the renouncer while reciting a formula of propitiation, then transmits to him the sacred syllable “*oṃ*” and teaches him the main theological tenets of the Daśanāmīs (*advaita-vedānta*). Afterward, he gives him a new name. The third and last rite of conferring the *yogapaṭṭa* is performed some time later, only after the guru has ascertained that the disciple is qualified for it (it requires a sort of probationary philosophical training). It begins with a public theological examination of the renouncer, who has to deliver a learned address to an assembly of ascetics and lay followers. Then the guru sprinkles water on him and invests him with the *yogapaṭṭa*, that is to say, if one follows the ritual handbooks, with a shawl like cloth [53], while those present (ascetics and lay followers) recite some verses from the *Bhagavad-gītā*. After that the guru gives the disciple a monastic title [54], calls him by his full monastic name (personal name and title) and tells him that he is authorized (*adhikārin*) to give the full ordination (with its three sections) to one who is eligible for it. Finally, every person in the assembly bows to the new *saṃnyāsī* saying “Nārāyaṇa”.

According to the ritual guidelines, as we have just seen, *yogapaṭṭa* means holding a cloth above the renouncer. But it is understood differently by those who have seen or undergone a ceremony of *saṃnyāsa* among Daśanāmīs, whether in Sringeri itself or in Kanchipuram. Thus according to a well-informed renouncer who lives in Sringeri (and has witnessed the *saṃnyāsa* of the present abbot), *yogapaṭṭa* does not refer to a shawl or cloth but to the *naming* ceremony that is performed by the guru. Confering the *yogapaṭṭa* on a *saṃnyāsī* means giving him his full monastic name, the implication being that from this time onward he is entitled to give *saṃnyāsa* to another person. The same explanation was given to me by another *saṃnyāsī* (who lives in Kanchipuram), with the following enlightening commentary: “a *saṃnyāsī* needs to have a monastic name in order to initiate someone else into *saṃnyāsa*; in Kanchipuram as well as in Sringeri, the abbot gives the *yogapaṭṭa* only to his successor”. There is obviously not much more agreement on the meaning of *paṭṭa* in the expression *yogapaṭṭa* than there was for the expression *paṭṭābhiṣeka*, and one can not help marvelling at

the strange faculty of this word to create problems of interpretation wherever it is found! But what is especially fascinating and extremely instructive is the peculiar relation that seems to exist between the mysterious *paṭṭa* and the act of appointing someone to a high position of responsibility (as in the investiture) or of giving him his official name (as in *saṃnyāsa*), for, symbolically, both acts come to the same [55].

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 renouncer places himself; (3) it acts as an investiture entitling the new renouncer to teach and to ordain disciples (*yogapaṭṭa*). The purpose of each of the successive sections is therefore to turn the person firstly into a renouncer, secondly into a disciple, and thirdly into a guru in his own right.

What then does the comparison between the two monastic ordinations teach us about their deep signification and about the way they guarantee the legitimacy of the would-be abbots of Salemabad and Sringeri? First of all, there is this major difference: unlike *saṃnyāsa* (at Sringeri), *virakta-dīkṣā* (at Salemabad) does not sever the disciple's link with the world. Its essential purpose 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 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, what distinguishes the Nimbārkī monastic ordination from the standard sectarian *dīkṣā* is that it is celebrated with the firm intention of remaining a celibate throughout one's life in order to serve Kṛṣṇa without any distraction. But it remains that none of the Nimbārkī rites integrate any element symbolising death to the world in contrast to the rituals of *saṃnyāsa*.

Another 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 ordination of Salemabad's heir apparent. It is also found among Daśanāmīs. As we have just seen, they too enter in a relationship with their guru at the time of their *saṃnyāsa* (and become a member of his lineage). But, there too, one finds an important difference between them and the Nimbārkīs. In order to appreciate this difference, it should first be stressed that for anyone who wants to become a Daśanāmī renouncer, looking for an eligible guru (who should be a *saṃnyāsī*) is indeed the first step to take (the tradition is said to go 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 though his participation starts only in its second section. But for the Daśanāmīs, the guru is first and foremost a teacher and he is not the sole dispenser of salvation. By contrast, among the Nimbārkīs there is no salvation without the guru's help, as it is through him and through him alone that they acquire the ritual and psychological aptitude to worship Kṛṣṇa. This conception is characteristic of their theology: salvation is obtained through a close and continuous connection with a personal God and with a guru. Therefore no Nimbārkī ascetic can ever contemplate loosening his link with his guru. This is not the case 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 the cultivation of devotion (*bhakti*) as a means of liberation. This explains why an 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 is no ordinary renouncer and he can never do that: after his ordination, he is as closely associated with his guru as his counterpart in the theist tradition of Salemabad is. It is therefore necessary to look into the nature of the link with the guru which gets constructed during both ordinations.

So far while comparing the two ordinations, I have left out one section of each, namely, the *svarājyābhiṣeka* of the Nimbārki and the *yogapaṭṭa* of the Daśanāmīs. I have shown 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 this purpose too, namely it transforms the disciple into a guru. A parallel can in effect be drawn between the symbolism of the formulas accompanying the two procedures. In the *yogapaṭṭa* section of *saṃnyāsa*, the words are borrowed from the *Bhagavad-gītā*: 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 Nimbārki ritual, the guru transfers his power to the disciple and invests him with the insignias of his sovereignty, that is, of his own guruhood. The resulting transformation of the initiate has elements that evoke the rituals of the installation of the divine image (*pratiṣṭhā*) according to 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 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, the disciple is bereft of power before he is anointed in sovereignty. But once the rituals have been celebrated, the power of the guru resides inside the disciple just as the divine power resides inside the image. Those who worship them, image or guru, address their homage to the power that has been infused in them [59]. The comparison is actually found among the Nimbārki themselves [60]. It can be carried a step further to take into account the fact that both the image and the disciple have to be considered worthy recipients in order to receive the power.

In Sringeri, the ritual of *saṃnyāsa* 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: in effect, the ordination of the heir apparent can be celebrated only by him and by him alone. The same situation is found in Kanchipuram [61]. Moreover, the abbot can fully ordain only one person in his life time, that is, his own successor [62]. This goes back to the origin of the lineage. Finally, the heir apparent is called *saṃnidhānam* or receptacle (his guru being for his part the great receptacle, a title that suggests that he is seen as a worthy place of deposit of divine power just like a divine image) [63]. Besides, it is held that the abbot is Śaṅkara himself or an incarnation of Śaṅkara [64].

In the two monastic traditions studied in here, then, the ritual of ordination constructs a very specific link between the abbot and his heir apparent. It implies that the latter becomes the next recipient of the power which has been handed down in an uninterrupted manner from the beginning of the lineage. The clearest manifestation of the transformation that takes place is that from his ordination onward, the new appointed heir is considered as a guru himself, that is to say, during the life-time of his own guru [65]. In other words, he becomes the official successor of the abbot once he has been made ritually ready to replace him in every way [66]. In this way, one goes back to the founding figure of the lineage itself. The intention is clearly to reproduce the first guru, the very epitome of the perfect ascetic. The imitation or repetition of the lineage founder’s example is a key element in the legitimation of the man in charge of the highest monastic office. 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 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. 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 a transfer of titles and position of power; it also guarantees legitimacy. The ordination and investiture do that in two ways. First, they do so by being public acts of affirmation [67]. These rites are socially valid because they are celebrated according to rules recognized by the group and by persons whose function has been universally (or collectively) acknowledged. In more concrete terms, 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. His selection is not always a smooth process, because 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. This highlights the latter's 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 that all claim the same ancestor, and the structure of real kinship organization has also been noted by all students of Hindu monasticism [68]. 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. I want to underline in particular that the rituals we have been looking at in this essay transform through a process of accumulation. Replacing the abbot is an operation that takes place over a long stretch of time and demands the enactment of successive actions, each building on the previous one, as it were. In both monastic traditions the investiture of the abbot comes at the end of a composite ritual, whose earlier stages culminate in the initiand being made into a guru. Celebrating the investiture requires that the status of guru has already been obtained; *it does not fabricate guruship*. Thus it sanctions a distinction that has been previously established, and it gains thereby in legitimacy. Similarly, the transformation of the disciple into a guru unfolds in a series of successive operations that are themselves effective because they rest collectively on an earlier stage, which is the careful selection of a worthy recipient. And the latter's mode of selection itself presupposes the existence of a reservoir of qualified candidates, whose superiority has already been established according to recognized criteria. Legitimacy results from this repeated accumulation. There is a scale of status and one has to climb every rung one after the other. We are reminded of the way Hindu *saṃskāras* tend to operate in a series in order to confer on a given individual the ability (*adhikāra*) to act (thus, among twice-born, *upanayana* is required to get married, marriage is required to celebrate a sacrifice, the ability to celebrate sacrifice is required to take *saṃnyāsa*). In such a logic, there is no absolute beginning.

The context and circumstances in which the rites are performed also increase their import and their transformative power. This is especially the case with the ordination of the heir apparent into monasticism. It is at the time of their *saṃnyāsa* or *virakta-dīkṣā* that the abbots of Sringeri and Salemabad really achieve overlordship (not at the time of their investiture) But the ability of the ritual to confer overlordship is not due to any unique intrinsic quality that they possess. Neither the *saṃnyāsa* performed in Sringeri, nor the initiation into asceticism celebrated in Salemabad is unusual. If they open the way to abbotship it is because they are performed by an abbot and because it is held that in these conditions they make the selected disciple ritually ready to function in the abbot's 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, these abbots' legitimacy rests also on their individual ability to command effectively and to exercise leadership. This is another story [69]. It implies that in the successful Hindu abbot one is bound to observe a creative tension between two opposing requirements. On the one hand, the abbot is supposed to do away with his own individuality, so as to be nothing but the vehicle of the highest monastic office. On the other hand, he must assert his personal uniqueness, as defined by his social determinants and as demonstrated by the manner in which he fulfills his obligations.

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### Notes

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 patience and kindness of Phyllis Granoff, who was a great source of encouragement for me throughout the writing process. I thank them all heartily.

- 1 The head of a Hindu monastery is designated by different sanskrit words, *maṭhādhiśa*, *maṭhādhipati*, *mahanta*, I translate them all by “abbot” here.
- 2 See K. Gnanambal, K. *Religious Institutions and Caste Pancayats in South India* (Calcutta : Anthropological Survey of India - Memoir n° 18 -, 1973) ; Hermann Kulke, “Mahārājas, mahants and historians. Reflections on historiography of early Vijayanagara and Sringeri”, *Vijayanagara –City and Empire. New Currents of research* (ed. Alla Libera Dellapiccola and al., Stuttgart : Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH. 1985), 120-143 ; A.K. Shastry, A.K., *A History of Sringeri* (Dharwad, Karnatak University, 1982); William Cenkner, *A Tradition of teachers: Sankara and the Jagadgurus Today* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983) ; William Cenkner, “The Sankaracarya of Kanci and the Kamaksi Temple as Ritual Center”, *A Sacred Thread. Modern Transmission of Hindu Traditions in India and Abroad* (ed. Williams, R.B, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) 52-67; Yoshitsugu Sawai, *The Faith of Ascetics and Lay Smārtas. A Study of the Śāṅkaran tradition of Śṛṅgeri* (Vienna: Publications of the De Nobili Research Library, 1992); Glenn Yocum, “The Coronation of a Guru: Charisma, Politics and Philosophy in Contemporary India”, *A Sacred Thread. Modern Transmission of Hindu Traditions in India and Abroad* (ed. Williams, R.B, New York: Columbia University Press 1996), 68-91; Angelika Malinar, “Śāṅkara as Jagadguru according to Śāṅkara-Digvijaya”, *Charisma and Canon. Essays on the religious History of the Indian Subcontinent* (ed. Dalmia V., Malinar A. and Christof M., Delhi: Oxford University Press. 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).

- 3 In their system, the deities, ideally represented by five divine emblems, are worshipped together on the same level (*pāñcāyatana-pūjā*).
- 4 On the loose monastic structure of the Daśanāmīs, see Dana W. Sawyer, “The monastic structure of Banarsi Dandi Sadhus”, *Living Banaras. Hindu Religion in Cultural Context* (ed. Hertel Bradley R., Humes Cynthia Ann, Delhi: Manohar. 1998), 159-180.
- 5 Its first abbot was the great *advaita-vedāntin* theologian Vidyāraṇya.
- 6 See Shastry, op. cit.
- 7 See Gnanambal, op. cit., 3, 8, Shastry, op. cit., chapter VII.
- 8 Yocum, op. cit., 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, op. cit, 169).
- 10 Shastry, op. cit., 79; Sawai, op. cit., 166. For the most learned followers of Sringeri, the crystal symbol represents the formless absolute (*parabrahman*) (Sawai, op. cit., 69). In Sringeri today (November 2003), the cult of the *liṅga* is performed thrice a day, morning, midday and evening, the first two rituals being celebrated by a priest (*arcaka*), the evening one by the abbot himself. The evening performance is public and, along with the morning *darśana* of the abbot, is one of the important events of the monastery that no lay devotee would like to miss. Like the daily *darśana*, it takes place on the raised platform of a large hall where the heavy (but portable) silver shrine of the deities is kept. The abbot performs the different ritual gestures and operations while seating cross-legged in front of the temple-shaped shrine. His relative immobility contrasts with the rapid movements of his white-clad two or three assistants, who keep moving on the platform as they bring him the ingredients and utensils needed for the cult. It is to be noted that the same material arrangement and performance are to be found at Kanchipuram, but there the abbot celebrates the three daily cults himself. This mode of worship in public is not confined to the Daśanāmī of South India. I have also observed it in the Chennai—Tambaram—branch of the Śrīvaiṣṇava monastery of Ahobilam (vaṭagalai sub-sect), where the abbot worships an image of Narasiṃha in a portable silver shrine installed on the raised platform of a hall. This system is probably found elsewhere too. To return to the Sringeri evening cult: a *śālagrāma*, symbol of Viṣṇu, and a *śrīcakra* (also called *sumeru*), symbol of the goddess, are placed close to the crystal *liṅga* at the time of worship. It is a reminder that the Daśanāmīs are *smārtas* and put Śiva (and the goddess) on par with Viṣṇu. Besides, the three symbols are worshipped in the ritual framework of the “five-seats”» (*pāñcāyatana*) of the *smārta* tradition (see note 3).
- 11 Sawai, op. cit., 28.
- 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, always keeps the crystal emblem of Śiva with him so as to be able to worship it wherever he goes (Sawai, op. cit., 69, 166). In Kanchipuram now-a-days, the cult always takes place inside the monastery for when the Jagadguru is on tour, it is celebrated by his appointed successor, the junior Jagadguru.
- 13 In medieval India, *pīṭha* referred to the pedestal of a throne, see Ronald Inden, “Hierarchies of kings in early medieval India”, *Way of Life. King, Householder, Renouncer. Essays in Honour of Louis Dumont* (ed. Madan, T.N., Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd. 1982), 105.
- 14 He is also referred to as *mahāsaṃnidhānam* (sanskrit) or great receptacle (see note 63) and as *dodda gurugalu* (kannada) or senior teacher, Sawai, op. cit., 31. On the process of canonization of Śaṅkara and on his establishment as a Jagadguru in his hagiographies, see Malinar, op. cit.
- 15 Sawai, op. cit., 35; see also 180-181.

- 16 As indicated by numerous inscriptions, see Shastry, op. cit., 58.
- 17 Gnanambal, op. cit.; Shastry, op. cit., 67-68 et 114-116.
- 18 Svāmī Dhanañjayadāsa of the Kāṭhiyābābā lineage of Vrindaban ; see Rāsabihārīdāsa (Śrīmat Svāmī Rāsabihārīdāsa Kāṭhiyābābājī Mahārāja), *Brajavidehī tathā catuḥ sampradāya ke Śrīmahanta Śrī Śrī 108 Svāmī Dhanañjayadāsa Bābājī Majhārāja kā jīvana caritra* (biography of Svāmī Dhanañjayadāsa, abbot of the Four sects for the Braj region), (Vrindavan : Shrikatiyababa Charitable Trust, 2001), 115. Among the numerous Salemabad publications, see *Ācāryapīṭhābhīṣeka-arddhaśatābdī pāṭotsava svarṇa jayantī mahotsava smārikā* (commemoration volume issued on the silver jubilee marking the fiftieth anniversary of the investiture of the abbot), (Salembad: Akhila Bhāratiya Jagadguru Śrī Nimbārkācārya, VS 2051 [1994]) ; *Sanātānadharmā sammelana smārikā* (commemoration volume of the Eternal dharma fair), (Salembad: Akhila Bhāratiya Sanātana Dharma Sammelana Svāgata Samiti, VS 2034 [1977]).
- 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 homage had been celebrated in the temple of goddess Śaradā (Yocum, op. cit., 72-73; *Avicchinna paramparā-The Unbroken Chain*, op. cit. ).
- 21 1. Sprinkling with gold (*svarnābhīṣeka*); 2. with golden flowers (*svarnapūṣpābhīṣeka*); 3. with nine jewels (*navaratnābhīṣeka*). 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, op. cit. 76.
- 23 The installation of a Hindu king (*rājyābhīṣeka*) was performed for each new king in medieval India; for a description of the ceremony as given in the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, see Ronald Inden, “Authority and Cyclic Time in Hindu Kingship”, *Kingship and Authority in South Asia* (ed. Richards, J.F., Madison: University of Wisconsin. 1978), 28-73.
- 24 It is considerably reduced in time and simplified as no bath is performed but a mere sprinkling.
- 25 Yocum, op. cit., 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, op. cit., 79-80, 89). The whole study of Sawai (op. cit.) shows indeed that the monastic tradition of Sringeri caters to the religious needs of householders as well as of renunciators.
- 26 Shastry, op. cit., 17-55.
- 27 Catherine Clementin-Ojha, *Le Trident sur le Palais. Une cabale anti-vishnouite dans un royaume hindou à l’époque coloniale* (Paris: Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient, 1999), 86-94.
- 28 Thus, *paṭṭābhīṣekas* are celebrated at Chitrapur, a Daśanāmī monastery in North-Western Karnataka. The investiture of the incumbent abbot of Chitrapur was done recently under the supervision of Śrī Bhārati Tīrtha of Sringeri, see [http://www.chitrapurmath.org/iphart\\_1.htm](http://www.chitrapurmath.org/iphart_1.htm), which also gives a photographic report of the different phases of the ceremony. The close connection of Chitrapur with Sringeri might explain the celebration of a *paṭṭābhīṣeka* there. No such ritual is found at the Daśanāmī monastery of Kanchipuram. There, as soon as the Jagadguru dies, the person he has appointed as his heir (by giving him *saṁnyāsa*) performs his funeral rites and succeeds him at the head of the monastery. Once the prescribed mourning period is over, he ascends the throne (*pīṭhārohana*) officially in the presence of the monastery’s administrator (addressed as “Śrī Kārya”); on the same day, he is also duly recognized (through an act of registration) by the Commissioner of the Hindu Religious Endowment Board, a governmental body. See also note 65.

- 29 A Sanskrit-English dictionary gives the following translations: “slab, tablet (for painting or writing upon) – Mbh ; a copper plate for inscribing royal grants or orders (*tāmra-paṭṭa*); 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-paṭṭas* 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” ; *paṭṭa-bandha* means “binding or crowning the head with a turban” ; see Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1976 [1899]). For an interesting usage of *paṭṭa*, see note 55 and the corresponding discussion.
- 30 Monier-Williams, op. cit.
- 31 In Northern India, “to wrap up in a shawl” (*cādar oḍhanā*) generally means installing an ascetic on the abbatial seat, see Surajit Sinha et Baidyanath Sarasvati, *Ascetics of Kashi. An anthropological exploration* (Varanasi: N.K. Bose Memorial Foundation, 1978), 75. *Cādar* or *cāddar* is of Persian origin.
32. For a brief and sketchy description of a *paṭṭābhiṣeka* in Śrī-vaiṣṇava monasteries (which does not mention any crown), see R.C. Lester, “The practice of renunciation in śrīvaiṣṇavism”, *The Journal of Oriental Research* - Dr S.S. Janaki Felicitation volume-, 56-62 (1992), 79 n. 10. *Paṭṭābhiṣeka* is also the name given to ceremonies of consecration of some deities (especially in South India?).
- 33 *Siropāv* (“from head to feet”) refers to a robe of honour which includes several pieces. In modern Rajasthan tying a turban (*pagḍī*) is still a symbol of succession. In Hindi, *paṭṭa* is a synonym of *pagḍī*, see Rāmacandra Varmā, *Mānaka hindī kośa*, (standard hindi dictionary), (Prayāga: Hindī sāhitya sammelana, 1964).
- 34 But before they had to pay the fees of succession to the state, see Clementin-Ojha, op. cit., 61-62 ; Monika Horstmann, “Religious Dignitaries in the Court Protocol of Jaipur (Mid-Eighteenth to Early Nineteenth Century)”, *Explorations in the History of South Asia. Essays in Honour of Dietmar Rothermund* (ed. G. Berkemer, T. Frasc, H. Kulke and J. Lütt, Delhi: Manohar. 2001), 147-148.
- 35 This information is not found in any document published in Salemabad; it is only available in Rāsabihārīdāsa, op. cit., 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 Frank Conlon, *A Caste in a Changing World. The Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmins 1700-1935* (New Delhi: Thomson Press (Indian) Limited, 1977).
- 39 Rāsabihārīdāsa, op. cit., 112-115.
- 40 “Śrījī Mahārāja designated this child as his successor and made a written document to this effect, therefore it is he who will have to be installed on the throne (*gaddi*) of the *ācārya*. If somebody does black magic (*śadyantra*), he should be stopped. The child’s education and upbringing (*śikṣā-dīkṣā*), 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 today onward, we shall make the correct arrangement for his education and upbringing and shall try to make him a worthy (*yogyā*) *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 have 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 (*yogyā*) of the office of *ācārya* if everybody puts his effort in it”, Rāsabihārīdāsa, op. cit., 114.
- 41 Yocum, op. cit., 72. In the Daśanāmī monastery of Chitrapur in north-western Karnataka (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, op. cit., 142).
- 42 Sawai, op. cit., 160-161. Śāṅkara 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, op. cit., 161-162).
- 43 This is well-documented in the film *Avicchinna paramparā—The Unbroken Tradition*.
- 44 Veda: Yajurveda; sūtra: Āpastamba (information provided by the *peškāra* of Sringeri).
- 45 Conlon, op. cit., 41-42, 66-69. See also note 38.
- 46 Yocum, op. cit., 72, also 70.
- 47 Roma Bose, *Vedānta-pārijāta-saurabha of Nimbārka and Vedānta-kaustubha of Śrīnivāsa* (Commentaries on the Brahma-sūtras), Vol. III. *Doctrines of Nimbārka and his Followers*, Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1943), 55-57, 116-122.
- 48 The *Mukundaśaraṇa-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 S.K. Ramachandra Rao, *Āgama-Koṣa* (Āgama Encyclopaedia), Vol. IV. Pāñcarātrāgama, Bangalore: Kalpataru Research Academy, 1991), 140.
- 50 *Svarājya* means independent kingdom or sovereignty. It probably refers 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, op. cit., 120-121.
- 52 See Patrick Olivelle, *Renunciation in Hinduism. A Medieval Debate*. Vol. One. The Debate and the Advaita Argument; Vol. Two, The Viśiṣṭādvaita Argument (Vienna: Publications of the De Nobili Research Library, 1976-1977); *Rules and Regulations of Brahmanical Asceticism. Yatidharmasamucaya of Yādava Prakāśa*, edited and translated by Patrick Olivelle (Delhi: Sri Satguru publications, 1997 [1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1995]). See also the *Dharmasindhu (the Ocean of Dharma)*, Kaśīnāthopadhyāya 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 *saṃnyāsa*, see Pandurang Vaman Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra* (Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law), (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Vol. II, part 2, 1974 [1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1941]), 958-962.
- 53 “*Yogapaṭṭa*” 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 (op.cit., 961) calls it : “the cloth of yoga, union with Spirit”; Olivelle (op.cit. 1997, 186-187) : “meditation shawl”.
- 54 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 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 Wade H. Dazey, “Tradition and Modernization on the Organization of the Daśanāmī Saṃnyāsins”, *Monastic Life in the Christian and Hindu Traditions. A Comparative Study* (ed.

- A. Creel and V. Narayanan, Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press. 1990), 316 n. 10.
- 55 In the Śrīvaiṣṇava (teṅkalai) monastic tradition of Vanamamalai (Nanguneri, Tirunelvely District, Tamil Nadu), I have encountered an usage of the term which illustrates a direct connection between investiture, *paṭṭa* and naming. There, in effect, *paṭṭā* 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 *paṭṭa* 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 teṅkalai sub-sect), they tie the *paṭṭa* while pronouncing my name. The *paṭṭā* comes from the deity and is always kept with the deity.”
- 56 Sawai, op. cit. 131. The *Dharmasindhu* (op. cit.) is very clear on this point; see also Kane, op. cit., 958-961.
- 57 *tasmāttvamuttiṣṭha yaśo labhasva / jītvā śatrūn bhuṅkvā rājyaṃ 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 S.K. De, *Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal*, (Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Limited, 1986 [1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1942]), 511-515; Rasik Vihari Joshi, *Le Rituel de la Dévotion krishnaïte*, Pondichéry: Institut Français d’Indologie, 1959), chapter V.
- 59 The royal symbolism is also at work during the cult of the divine image, which 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. A propos the tamil word *cannitānam*, the title of the guru of Śaiva-siddhānta monastery of Thiruvavaduthurai (Tamil Nadu), G. Yocum (“A Non-Brahmaṇ Tamil Śaiva Mutt: A Field Study of the Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam” - *Monastic Life in the Christian and Hindu Traditions. A Comparative Study* - ed. Creel A.B and Narayanan V. -, Lewiston/Queenstown/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press. 1990, 250) makes a similar observation: “the head of the mutt is in fact treated like an embodiment of the divine. Indeed, in certain respects the parallels with the divine embodiments found in temple mūrtis (‘image’) are quite striking.”
- 61 A propos the Daśanāmī monastery of Kanchipuram, Cenknar (op. cit., 1996, 64) writes: “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”. It can be noted that a similar implication is found in other monastic traditions as well. Among the Śaiva sect of the Vīraśaivas, for example, 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 H.M. Sadasivaiah, *A Comparative Study of Two Vīraśaiva Monasteries. A Study in Sociology of Religion*, Mysore: Prasaranga, Manasa Gangotri, 1967), 99.
- 62 According to Cenknar, op. cit., 1983, the same tradition prevails in the Daśanāmī monasteries (and Jagadguru abbatial seats) of Badrinath and Kancipuram. I was told in Sringeri that since the Jagadguru can only initiate his own successor, he gives “indirect *saṃnyāsa*” to all others. It means in concrete terms that the rites are celebrated in his presence and with his blessings by a *saṃnyāsī* of his choice; he also chooses the monastic name of the initiand. See also

Sawai, op. cit., 156-157. The implication is that the new *saṃnyāsī* does not belong to his lineage. A similar practice is found at Kanchipuram.

- 63 The abbot of the monasteries of the Śaiva-siddhānta tradition bear the same title (*cannitānam* in tamil), see Yocum, op.cit., 1990, 250; see also note 60.
- 64 Sawai, op. cit., 157, 162. The abbot is referred to as the *avatāra* of Śaṅkara in the film *Avicchinna paramparā—The Unbroken Tradition*.
- 65 The monastery of Kanchipuram affords a perfect illustration of this point: Vijayendra Sarasvatī, the appointed heir of the 69<sup>th</sup> abbot (Jayendra Sarasvatī), is not only a guru in his own right but is also considered as the 70<sup>th</sup> abbot (since his *saṃnyāsa* 20 years ago). As already seen (see note 28), there are no ceremony of investiture at Kanchipuram, rather, as he explained it to me himself (October 2003): “the entire power is transmitted to the successor at the time of *saṃnyāsa*”.. As such, he fully participates in the administration of the monastery with his guru (however the official monastic seal is in the sole name of the latter). The archives of the state of Jaipur show that in that part of India too, in earlier times at least, the heir apparent to an abbatial seat was considered as a guru in his own right *during the life time of the incumbent abbot*. Pratapsingh (1778-1803) was initiated in 1780 by Govindānanda, the heir apparent of the abbot of the Bālānandī monastery; he succeeded him in 1794 (Horstmann, op. cit., 148-150); the mother of Jaisingh III (1819-1835) was initiated by Nimbārkaśaraṇa, heir apparent to the monastery of Salemabad (whose abbot he became in 1822) (Clementin-Ojha, op. cit., 88-89).
- 66 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). But 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. Interestingly, this eventuality has been discussed in the Śaiva-siddhānta tradition. See the ritual measures that were taken in order to reestablish the power in the guru once the latter had ritually designated his disciple in Hélène Brunner-Lachaux, 1977, *Somaśambhupaddhati*. Troisième partie. Rituels occasionnels dans la tradition śivaïte de l’Inde du Sud selon Somaśambhu. II: dīkṣā, abhiṣeka, vratoddhāra, antyeṣṭi, śraddhā, Pondichéry: Institut français d’Indologie, 1977), 488-491.
- 67 See Pierre Bourdieu, « Les rites comme actes d’institution », *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 43 (1982), 58-63.
- 68 Cenker (op. cit., 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 sampradāyas 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). On the role of *gotra* inside the Daśanāmī tradition, see Wade H. Dazey, op. cit., 288-292.
- 69 For a study of the manner in which the abbot of Kanchipuram expresses his individuality through his leadership and for a renewed vision of Dumont’s famous statement on the renouncer as the individual-outside-the-world, see Mattison Mines & Vijayalakshmi Gourishankar, “Leadership and Individuality in South Asia: The Case of the South Indian Big-man”, *The Journal of Asia Studies*, 49, 4 (1990), 761-786.