

# A new imperial idiom in the sixteenth century: Krishnadevaraya and his political theory of Vijayanagara

Velcheru Narayana Rao  
David Shulman  
Sanjay Subrahmanyam

## Introduction

The 1510s were a busy time – though perhaps not unusually so -- in the military life of the Vijayanagara emperor Krishnadevaraya (r. 1509-1529).<sup>1</sup> The early years of his reign had seen this ruler, son of the great Tuluva warlord Narasa Nayaka, and his younger wife Nagaladevi, preoccupied first with wars to the north, and then in campaigns to the south-east against the Sambuvarayars. But from about 1514, a series of campaigns took him to the distant north-east, where he managed to extend his domains considerably, as far as the Godavari river and its delta. Inscriptions such as an entire series on the second *prākāra* of the Tirumalai temple inform us that this ruler, described by an elaborate title which includes the interesting epithet *Yavananārya-sthāpanācārya* – ‘the lord who established the kingdom of the Muslims’ – set out in about 1514 from his capital of Vijayanagara on ‘an eastern expedition’, and went on to capture not only Udayagiri, but such centres as Addanki, Vinukonda and Nagarjunakonda, to say nothing of the great fort of Kondavidu, where we learn that he ‘laid siege to it, erected square sheds around the fort, demolished the rampart walls, occupied the citadel [and] captured alive Virabhadraraya, son of Prataparudra Gajapatideva’.<sup>2</sup> He then made further substantial inroads into the kingdom of the Gajapati rulers of Orissa, captured a number of members of the Gajapati family as well as subordinate rulers (*pātra-sāmantas* and *manneyars*), but released them and having given them ‘an assurance of safety for their lives’, eventually returned to the city of Vijayanagara. A second expedition against Kalingadesa, the core Gajapati domain, is reported soon afterwards, with the ruler making his way on this occasion through Bezwada (Vijayavada) to Kondapalli, which he occupied; after another series of extensive campaigns that took him as far as Simhadri-potnuru and Rajamahendravara, he eventually returned to his capital city by late 1516. The first days of January 1517 then saw the ruler make a triumphal visit to Tirupati, where he made extensive gifts and grants of gold and jewellery to the god. He would continue to visit this great Vaishnava temple periodically, with his last recorded visit being in February 1521.

At some point in the busy years of these north-eastern campaigns, perhaps during the second of the expeditions described above, Krishnadevaraya began to compose his great Telugu work, the *Āmukta-mālyada*, ‘the woman who gives

---

<sup>1</sup> A vast, and largely repetitive, body of work exists on this monarch, to which we shall not refer in detail here. For significant exceptions, see Oruganti Ramachandraiya, *Studies on Kṛṣṇadevaraya of Vijayanagara*, Waltair, 1953, and N. Venkataramanayya, *Kṛṣṇadevarāyalu*, Hyderabad, 1972.

<sup>2</sup> V. Vijayaraghavacharya, *Inscriptions of Krishnaraya's Time, from 1509 AD to 1531 AD*, reprint, Delhi, 1984, Inscription No. 76, pp. 172-75.

a garland already worn', meant to recount the story of the Vaishnava goddess Goda or Antal from the southern town of Villiputtur.<sup>3</sup> Here is how the king himself recounts the circumstances of the text's composition.

'Some time ago, I was determined to conquer the Kalinga territory. On the way, I camped for a few days with my army in Vijayavada. Then I went to visit Andhra Vishnu, who lives in Srikakula. Observing the fast of Vishnu's day, in the fourth and final watch of that god's night, Andhra Vishnu came to me in my dream. His body was a radiant black, blacker than a rain cloud. His eyes, wise and sparkling, put the lotus to shame. He was clothed in the best golden silk, finer still than the down on his eagle's wings. The red of sunrise is pale compared to the ruby on his breast'.

The god, it turns out, was familiar with the earlier literary works that the king had set down (but which are lost to us today) – the story of Madalasa, that of Satyabhama, and works called the *Jñāna-cintāmani* ('The Gem of Wisdom'), and *Rasa-mañjari* ('The Pleasures of Poetry'). But he still expressed disappointment that the king had composed nothing in Telugu, asking:

Is Telugu beyond you ? Make a book in Telugu  
now, for my delight.

In the dream, the god even specified the story to be told, namely that of 'the girl who had given me a garland she wore first'. The king could hardly refuse such an imperious command, despite the fact that he was almost certainly more confident in his usage of Tulu, Kannada and Sanskrit than of Telugu. He writes that on awakening: 'I held court in the presence of my army men and subordinate kings, but dismissed them early to their homes. Then I called the scholars learned in many old texts, of various traditions, honoured them, and related my good dream. They were thrilled and astonished (...)' . The scholars urged him then to compose the work, describing him as 'sole sovereign in the fields of letters and wars'.<sup>4</sup>

The work opens then with a stylised literary device redolent of 'objective' pretensions, in which the Vijayanagara ruler is described together with his family not by himself in an autobiographical mode, but in the words employed by his courtiers; this part of the work includes a section from Allasani Peddana's description of Krishnadevaraya in his *Manucaritra*, and has at times misled commentators into attributing the *Āmukta-mālyada* to the court-poet instead of the ruler. Elements of similar descriptions can be found in inscriptions too, as we see from one of the great Sanskrit epigraphs (in Telugu script) on the east wall of the third *prākāra* of the Tirumalai temple. Here, the

<sup>3</sup> A recent scholar of European travel-accounts has concluded from a handful of such facts that the text could not have been composed by Krishnadevaraya, but is instead a 'fabrication' from the Madurai region, by a 'brahmin of Tirumalai-Tirupati'; cf. Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European Eyes, 1250-1625*, Cambridge, 2000, pp. 238-39. His view would inspire more confidence if Rubiés had read the entire text, and not merely a summary and antiquated English translation of the *nīti* section.

<sup>4</sup> V. Narayana Rao and David Shulman, *Classical Telugu Poetry: An Anthology*, Delhi, 2002, pp. 252-65. Here, and elsewhere in the text, we have used the critical edition by Vedamu Venkataraya Sastri, *Āmukta-mālyada nāmāntaramu Viṣṇucittiyamu*, Madras, 1927 (reprint 1964).

genealogy of Krishnadevaraya is traced back to the moon, then to Budha, Pururavas, Ayu and Nahusha. The first of the 'Tuluva lineage' who finds mention is Timmabhupati (and his wife Devaki), followed by his son Isvara and spouse Bukkamma, and then a certain Narasabhupala – to whom is attributed the conquest of the Ceras, Colas and Pandyas, as well as of the Gajapatis and of certain Muslim rulers.<sup>5</sup> This is none other than Krishnadevaraya's own father Narasa Nayaka (d. 1503), kingmaker and warlord in the late fifteenth century, and the inscription assures us that he had 'established his fame firmly over the country extending from the Ganges to Lanka and between the western and eastern ghats'. We are now almost to the present time of the inscription, as we see from the following passage (lines 13-14), in which we learn that 'by his queens Tippaji and Nagaladevi, like Dasaratha by Kausalya and Sumitra, the great king [Narasa] had two sons called Vira Narasimha and Krishnaraya, like unto Sri Rama and Lakshmana'.<sup>6</sup> This is a rather modest introduction to Krishnadevaraya, one that seems to afford a far greater degree of glory to his older brother – who actually reigned a mere six-odd years. And indeed, the verses that follow confirm this impression, detailing as they do the rule of Vira Narasimha, his conquests, his pilgrimages, and his sixteen *mahādānas*. To be sure, Krishnadevaraya too is the object of extensive praise in the following verses, now that he bears the earth on his shoulders. Here then is how the king appears to those who composed the inscription in his honour.

'Filling the whole world with the camphor of his glory, and the renown acquired by his generosity, heroism and prowess, which have been praised by all the poets, terrible on the field of battle, putting in the shade the acts of Nriga, Nala, Nahusha, Nabhaga, Dundhumara, Mandhatru, Bharata, Bhagiratha, Dasaratha, Rama and others, protectors of the Brahmins and vanquisher of the Sultans, the fever of the Gajapati elephants, well-versed in all the arts and sciences, with a face that overshadows the lotus, a second Bhoja, with deep insight into poetry, drama and rhetoric, and the true knowledge of righteous action (...).'<sup>7</sup>

Here is a king then who is not merely warrior and protector, patron to Brahmins and to the great spring-festival, but a ruler who – unlike the descriptions of his father and brother -- prides himself on being a connoisseur of poetry and theatre, both Bhoja and Kalidasa rolled into one.

### The frame text

And this is what largely defines the tone of the *Āmukta-mālyada* itself. When we enter into main body of the text, we are transported directly to the Tamil country, beginning with a detailed and realistic description of the small town of Villiputtur, followed by a description of the principal personage in the story, a certain Brahmin by the name of Vishnucitta. Throughout these sections, the

<sup>5</sup> For various versions of this genealogy, see Polavarapu Hymavathi, *Vijayanagara: The life and times of Tuluva Vira Narasimha Raya*, Madras, 1994, pp. 17-21.

<sup>6</sup> Narasa Nayaka also had a third wife, Obambika, the mother of Acyutaraya and Rangaraya, but she is not mentioned here.

<sup>7</sup> Inscription No. 65 from Tirumalai-Tirupati, in Vijayaraghavacharya, *Inscriptions of Krishnaraya's Time*, pp. 148-57.

work shows a considerable preoccupation with a form of realism, as well as with providing detailed evidence that its royal author has a familiarity with life outside the palace, perhaps a sign of his days as the son of an up-and-coming warlord. A remarkable feature of this early part is thus a detailed version of the menu that Vishnucitta has available to feed guests in different seasons, and which takes us to the end of the first section (*aśvāsa*).

Yet, we should not imagine that the whole text is simply dominated by the realistic mode. Instead, the second *aśvāsa* opens with an elaborate and rather fantastic description of the city of Madhura (Madurai), far less effective however in poetical terms than that of Villiputtur, in the course of which a certain Pandya king (referred to as the Matsyadhvaja ruler) is introduced. He is described as a successful king, yet one day he decides to renounce his kingdom when he hears a Brahmin singing a verse on the subject; this makes him the first of a whole series of renouncing kings in the text. At the moment when he has decided to retire from the affairs of state, a debate is announced to resolve the vexed question of which of the various gods is best. In his heaven, Vishnu is anxious to defend his own claim, and so instructs Vishnucitta to go there and defend his position as a Vaishnava, and also to convert the king. The text now shifts modes, as the *aśvāsa* ends with another meticulous and realistic description, this time of Vishnucitta's travel to the contest.

The third *aśvāsa* is a chapter focused on textual learning, with the assembled scholars in the courtly debate arguing in favour of one or the other position. The texts cited by them are once more very accurately quoted, in what is effectively an authorial *tour de force*. As might have been expected, Vishnucitta handily defeats the other Pandits in the contest, and having won, then tells them a story of two rival kings, who are cousins. One is a great expert in rituals, and the other in the path of knowledge. The two fight a battle, and the specialist in rituals is defeated and deprived of his kingdom. The winner, King Keshidhvaja, uses the occasion of his victory to start a royal ritual, but the sacrificial cow is snatched off and eaten by a tiger. The king is humiliated; he knows of no appropriate form of atonement, and so has to go to his defeated rival Khandikya and submit to his superior expertise in matters of ritual. Khandikya has an occasion now to kill him in his moment of weakness, but decides not to. He instead gives him good advice; Keshidhvaja performs the ritual successfully, and returns to give his rival his *guru-dakṣiṇa*. He offers to restore his cousin to his kingdom, but Khandikya decides he does not really want it back. Keshidhvaja also decides at this stage to retire, and gives his own kingdom over to his son. These actions of renunciation are presented here as the ideal acts for a ruler, and Khandikya himself (perhaps the nobler of the two) is presented as the champion of Srivaishnavism. The ideal devotee Vishnucitta, having recounted this story, returns to his hometown of Villiputtur, and the chapter closes.

In the fourth *aśvāsa*, we return to Vishnu, who is seen now engrossed in conversation with his spouse Lakshmi, to whom he singles out for praise two human beings -- Vishnucitta and Yamunacarya. The first of the two is well-known to us (and to the goddess) by now, but Lakshmi is curious to know more about the other character, Yamunacarya. In response to her questions, Vishnu himself now tells the story of Yamunacarya. This involves still another Pandya

king who becomes a fervent Virasaiva and takes it upon himself to humiliate Brahmins and Vaishnavas. But his wife is a Vaishnava, who while loving and devoted to her husband, still keeps her own religious ways. Vishnu encourages a young Brahmin bachelor called Yamuna to go to the king and tell him he wants a debate in his court on the superiority of Vishnu. Instead of directly asking the king, Yamuna approaches the queen to this end. Through her intervention, the king agrees, but warns the young Brahmin that if he is defeated he will himself have to become a Saiva. Again the debate is described with accuracy and detail. Yamuna naturally wins the debate, and the Pandya king offers him his sister in marriage. This is a chance for Yamuna's children to become the heirs to the throne, since succession in the kingdom is matrilineal, from uncle to nephew. Yamuna accepts the tempting offer, marries, and soon becomes lost in the pleasures of courtly life – a far cry from his earlier life as a Brahmin bachelor.

In the autumn of a certain year, Yamuna sets out on a *digvijaya* tour of world conquest. On the face of it, it would seem that his life is now an ideal one, but other true Vaishnava devotees are worried by now about him, and the fact that he has partly lost his bearings. So, one of these true devotees, a certain Brahmin called Srirama Mishra, offers a vegetable called *alarkashakam* to the palace cooks to be used in the king's food. His act is based on the theory that the food one eats influences the thoughts one thinks; this particular vegetable will presumably clear up the clouds in Yamuna's mind. The king inevitably likes the vegetable and asks to see its supplier, Srirama Mishra. In the course of the audience, the Brahmin recites an intriguing verse to describe a treasure that the king, Yamuna, potentially has available to him. The poem in fact functions at two levels, for the treasure could be literal, or it could be god himself, Ranganatha-Vishnu. At this point, the king has a vision in which he directly sees Ranganatha and decides that he must henceforth look to his own salvation rather than pursue royal power. He hence renounces his kingdom, and decides he must teach his own son political ethics (*rājanīti*) as he is leaving. This central – and deeply political -- section of the work thus comes inserted inside two frames: Vishnu is recounting the story to Lakshmi, and inside his account, Yamunacarya is speaking to his own son.

It is to this section that we shall return presently in greater detail, but the constant preoccupation in the work with the desire of the king to renounce certainly calls for some immediate comment. At least one source, the account of the Portuguese trader Fernão Nunes (from the 1530s), offers us some insight into this question by recounting a story drawn from the Kannada oral tradition. In this retrospective view, in the summer months of 1509, as Vira Narasimha Raya lay dying, he ordered his minister Saluva Timma to blind Krishnadevaraya, in order to ensure the clear succession of his own son. Nunes continues:

'Salvatina [Saluva Timma] said that he would do so and departed, and sent to call for Crisnarao [Krishnaraya], and took him aside to a stable, and told him how his brother had bade him put out his eyes and make his son king. When he heard this, Crisnarao said that he did not seek to be king, nor to be anything

in the kingdom, even though it should come to him by right; that his desire was to pass through this world as a *jogi* (...).<sup>8</sup>

The theme of the king-as-*jogi* is of course a widespread one in the period, and we also encounter it with another contemporary monarch, Sultan Bahadur of Gujarat (r. 1526-37). But in the case of Vijayanagara, we note that it is for some reason particularly associated with Krishnadevaraya rather than with either of his brothers, who were equally ruling monarchs. In a certain version, it is even refracted to us in the later text, the *Rāyavācakamu*, of the early seventeenth century, where the king is so frustrated by the power wielded by his ministers that he threatens to renounce.<sup>9</sup>

To return to the *Āmukta-mālyada* itself, the text now goes on to a fifth chapter, in which we come at last to the story of Goda Devi, the tale that Krishnadevaraya was expressly commanded by Vishnu to tell. This story takes us back to Vishnucitta, who finds an abandoned baby-girl in a mango grove, under a *tulasi* plant, and brings her up as his own adopted daughter, as he has no children of his own. The girl — who is Antal or Goda — grows up and falls in love with the god Vishnu. It would seem that this chapter draws on some earlier version from Villiputtur (perhaps the *Dīvyasūricaritra*, or some other *purānic* text), but the circumstantial material is substantially truncated in this later Telugu version. The key part of the plot, which concerns the god's garland, and the girl's wearing the garland before it is offered to Vishnu, is also much reduced. Instead, there is a very long *viraha* section concerning the girl and the god, which largely takes place in the springtime. This incidentally allows the seasons — as is standard in all *mahākāvya* — to play a central role in the text as a running line of development, for the earlier section on Yamunacarya has largely centred on the autumn. Of particular interest though is the fact that Yamuna is associated with the colder and darker season and Goda with the spring, as if the text were moving towards the more emotional and sensual pole of life. Vishnucitta eventually comes to discover what love is through his daughter, a feature of the story which is presented as somewhat comical. On his complaining to the god in Villiputtur, Vishnu eventually instructs him to take Goda to his temple in Srirangam.

At this point (we have by now spilt over into Chapter 6), the plot takes on another twist, involving still another tale within a tale. For in the course of their conversation, Vishnu himself tells Vishnucitta the story of the untouchable Maladasari and a certain Brahmarakshasa who wants to eat him up. Eventually, the Brahmarakshasa comes to realise that he has gone down the wrong path, and reforms his ways. The seventh chapter then tells us how the Brahmarakshasa came to have the fate he did, on account of his own greed and acquisitive nature and also describes how he eventually becomes a normal human being through Vishnu's grace. At first, Vishnucitta does not understand

<sup>8</sup> Robert Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire – Vijayanagar: A Contribution to the History of India*, reprint, Delhi, 1962, pp. 300-301.

<sup>9</sup> This faintly ridiculous early seventeenth-century story about Krishnadevaraya, and his tantrums at his own lack of power, may be found in Phillip B. Wagoner, *Tidings of the King: A Translation and Ethnohistorical Analysis of the 'Rāyavācakamu'*, Honolulu, 1993, pp. 100-109.

why he is being told this story, and does not realise that by it the god is delicately hinting at his own acquisitive nature, and reluctance to give up his daughter. Yet, eventually, he returns home and then takes his daughter to the great temple at Srirangam. Here the god promptly falls in love with her, takes her into his palace, and also substitutes a magical image for the girl, which he returns to the devotee. But Vishnucitta, who is after all no fool, soon finds out he has been tricked, and denounces the god for having stolen his daughter. Vishnu then tells him to return home, where he miraculously finds his daughter. The devotee now realises that he too has fallen short in his devotion, and that all his knowledge was really not enough for him to pass this test. At this point, Vishnu sends Brahma, Rudra, Sarasvati and Parvati to ask a contrite Vishnucitta for his daughter in marriage. He naturally agrees, and a wedding is performed in Srirangam, with which the text closes.

We may note that underneath its layered complexity, the structure of the *Āmukta-mālyada* text presents us with certain clear patterns. We can see it as a sort of proto-novel – and the stories consistently are concerned with images of kings who renounce or are taught yogic dispassion. Despite its twists and turns, the text remains well-integrated, discursive, philosophical, and astonishingly personal in tone. A distinction is drawn -- perhaps for the first time in South India -- between the king as individual, with his individual inclinations and exigencies, and kingship as institution (which has to go on at all costs). A basis for stable kingship is elaborated around Srivaishnava, trans-local values, with a yogic colouring, an aesthetic component (expressed through music), and strong themes of personal, non-ascriptive loyalty. All this is expressed in a striking register of Telugu, one that is constantly creative, yet at times harsh, and reflective of the fact that its author is after all a non-native speaker, a royal transplant as it were from the fertile plains of the Tulu-speaking west coast to the Telugu cultural domain.

The complexity of the framing is also worth remarking upon, beginning with the external super-frame, for Krishnadevaraya himself tells these stories in the first instance to the god Venkatesvara. At two points, a double frame emerges within the super-frame: the first of these is the *rāja-nīti* section, where Yamuna speaks to his son, and Vishnu reports this to Lakshmi; and second, when Vishnu tells Vishnucitta the story of Maladasari, within which Goda herself is said to have heard the story from Varaha at an earlier moment when he lifted her up, as Bhudevi, from the ocean. In this second case, to render matters still more complex, there is also the explicit memory of the double frame. The recourse to this elaborate poet-listener (author-patron) frame allows for wide variation in metre, mood, theme -- in a manner that is arguably foreign to Sanskrit *kāvya*s.

### **On royal advice**

It is notoriously easier to give advice than to take it. But what if you are giving advice to yourself? We can see the *rāja-nīti* section of the *Āmukta-mālyada* as standing at the confluence of two traditions, a fact that is also rendered all the more complex by its remarkably intricate framing. On the one hand, a long

Sanskrit and vernacular tradition exists of texts of *nīti*, of political wisdom, that can be traced back to the *Arthaśāstra* of Kautilya, a text that was certainly known to Krishnadevaraya and those around him. In a Tamil context, a work such as Tiruvalluvar's *Kural* – on which François Gros has written extensively -- while embracing a variety of subjects and materials, also functions in an 'advice' mode, even if its principal object is not to form the behaviour of rulers.<sup>10</sup> Besides, closer to hand, we find medieval texts from the Deccan, such as the *Mānasollāsa* of the twelfth-century Calukya king, Someshvara III, which like the *Āmukta-mālyada* has the specific feature of possessing a royal author.<sup>11</sup> Again, the medieval Deccan produces a number of vernacular *nīti* texts, of which the best-known is probably the Telugu text by Baddena, but of which examples could be multiplied.<sup>12</sup> Such works as these can certainly be seen to participate in a culture of political realism, and thus give the lie to those who have argued that pre-colonial politics in India was conceived along purely idealist lines. Yet, the 'realism' of these texts often dissolves into a series of clichés, rather than demonstrating a capacity to react or adapt to the particular circumstances of one or the other polity in its historical context. At the same time, the genre of the 'Mirror for Princes' is well-known in the Indo-Islamic context, where a number of such texts exist both from the time of the Sultanate of Delhi, under the later Mughals, and from the regional Sultanates such as those of the Deccan.<sup>13</sup> Such texts, often written in Persian, are themselves at times influenced by Indic models such as the *Pañcatantra*, known in the Islamic world through its translation as the *Kalila wa Dimna*. Yet, they also bear the clear imprint of the non-theological perspective on kingship that had emerged in the Islamic lands in the aftermath of the Mongol conquests, when Muslim advisers and *wazīrs* struggled with the problem of how to advise *kāfir* rulers and princes on the matter of government, without taking them into murky and controversial theological waters. The 'Mirror for Princes' genre ranges wide, and attempts to do everything from forming the prince's musical tastes, to refining his table manners, but the core of the matter is usually politics, both in the sense of diplomatic relations between states, and relations between a prince and his companions, or between different elements in a courtly setting.

The *nīti* section of the *Āmukta-mālyada* appears to be aware of these different traditions, and even draws upon them quite explicitly.<sup>14</sup> Yet, in contrast to the typical 'Mirrors for Princes', Krishnadevaraya offers a top-down,

<sup>10</sup> Tiruvalluvar, *Le Livre de l'Amour*, translation and introduction by François Gros, Paris, 1992.

<sup>11</sup> See Somesvara, *Mānasollāsa*, 3 Vols., ed. Gajanan K. Shrigondekar, Baroda, 1925-61.

<sup>12</sup> See Baddena, *Nītiśāstramuktāvali*, ed. M. Ramakrishna Kavi, Tanuku, 1962. Baddena is at times incorrectly termed the author of the *Sumati-śatakamu*. For a brief discussion of such texts, see Wagoner, *Tidings of the King*, pp. 182, 197.

<sup>13</sup> Linda T. Darling, "'Do Justice, Do Justice, for That is Paradise": Middle Eastern Advice for Indian Muslim Rulers', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, Vol. XXIII, Nos. 1-2, 2002, pp. 3-19.

<sup>14</sup> For an earlier translation, see A. Rangasvami Sarasvati, 'Political Maxims of the emperor-poet Krishnadeva Raya', *Journal of Indian History*, Vol. IV, No. 3, 1926, pp. 61-88; also the later rendition (with the Telugu text of the *rāja-nīti* section) in K.A. Nilakantha Sastri and N. Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, 3 Vols., Madras, 1946.



hands-on vision, partly rooted in pragmatic experience, partly creatively adapting the existing literature of *nīti*-statecraft. This is no arm-chair pontificating but a largely practical synthesis reflecting the political, economic and institutional changes of the early sixteenth century. Still, highly individualized statements that can be attributed directly to the book's author do alternate with verses that seem to be lifted from standard *nīti*-texts about politics and kingship. Nonetheless, we are left with a total impression of a unique concoction of pragmatic wisdom, specific constraints, an inherited normative politics, and a meditative sensibility capable of formulating something entirely new. It may be useful in this context to recall, even if briefly, the political context in which the Vijayanagara ruler found himself.

Vijayanagara expansion over the peninsula begins in the latter decades of the fourteenth century, and one of the significant moments is undoubtedly Kumara Kampana's southward campaign that takes him as far as the conquest of the Sultanate of Ma'bar based at Madurai. However, it seems likely that Vijayanagara rule in the fifteenth century was a relatively fragile affair once one moved away from the northern core of the kingdom, and we are aware that local rebellions and other forms of resistance occurred periodically, as for instance in the 1420s.<sup>15</sup> Our impression of Vijayanagara in the mid-fifteenth century, at the time of the rule of Deva Raya, is still of a largely westerly kingdom, with contested frontiers and boundaries, as well as internal spaces that had been rather imperfectly integrated into the polity.

When Krishnadevaraya ascended the throne in 1509 (the earliest inscription bearing his name as ruler is dated to 26 July, and his coronation probably took place on 8 August 1509), it is clear that a number of crucial problems regarding political management remained to be resolved.<sup>16</sup> The first decade of the sixteenth century is generally thought to have been marked by internal rebellions because of the contested succession of his brother Vira Narasimha Raya, who had initially ruled as regent when the last king of the Saluva dynasty still held the throne. At the death of Saluva Narasimha Raya (r. 1456-1491), his son Immadi Narasimha, or Dharmaraya, had ascended the throne, but real power had increasingly fallen into the hands of a powerful warlord from the westerly Tulu region, Narasa Nayaka, and after the latter's death in 1503 into the hands of his son. It was this son, Narasimha Nayaka, who had arranged the assassination in 1505 of Immadi Narasimha and then himself seized the throne as Vira Narasimha Raya. A contemporary Portuguese source dated 1506 informs us succinctly of these events as follows: 'The old king [Saluva Narasimha] had died quite some time ago, and after him, his son became king, but he was then killed too, and so there have been wars ever since'.<sup>17</sup> These problems – both with regard to the neighbouring kingdoms, and

<sup>15</sup> Some authors claim however that the fifteenth century represented a high point of centralized rule; for this view, and more generally for Vijayanagara rule in the Tamil country, see Noboru Karashima, *A Concordance of Nayakas: The Vijayanagar Inscriptions in South India*, Delhi, 2002.

<sup>16</sup> For the succession dates of Krishnadevaraya and his coronation, see P. Sree Rama Sarma, *A History of Vijayanagar Empire*, Hyderabad, 1992, p. 133.

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of these Portuguese materials, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Sobre uma carta de Vira Narasimha Raya, rei de Vijayanagara (1505-1509), a Dom Manuel I de Portugal (1495-1521)', in

to other sources of autonomous power within the bounds of the Vijayanagara state – seem to be central to the preoccupations of the *rāja-nīti* section. On what institutional basis could a lasting form of power be based for a fledgling dynasty, when the scale of kingship extended far beyond the confines of a compact region? Whom could one trust, and who had to be controlled?

Another way to formulate the dilemma that this king confronted is in terms of an enduring tension between local and trans-local forces, a near-universal problem in India in this period. There is a consistent effort to conceptualise some basis for a trans-local polity that could extricate the state from its constant re-submergence in diffuse local contexts. A striking element in this conceptual effort lies in the king's own dynastic origins in one of the most marginal, and recently conquered localities -- the western coastal plain of Tulunad. A kind of upstart, whose own family inheritance dictated that he prove himself outside the family context, finds himself articulating, somewhat inchoately, a vision of trans-regional, highly personalized loyalties. Krishna-devaraya eschews the standard solution, namely the resort to *purāṇic* and *dharmaśāstric* normative language regarding an alliance between Brahmins and Kshatriyas. Instead, his preference is markedly for yogic and renunciatory themes that are at the same time strongly and paradoxically allied to a Srivaishnava idiom rooted in the idea of *bhoga* (enjoyment) – a theme to which we shall return below. We are incidentally aware that the Vijayanagara dynasty had switched its primary allegiance shortly earlier from Saivism to Vaishnavism, and here we see a bold attempt to imagine a royal order glued together with Vaishnava *bhakti* in both its renunciatory and sensual aspects.

Once a trans-regional state-system is conceivable, its ruler runs up against its external boundaries. The *manyam* forest-regions (especially the northern and north-eastern frontiers but also implicitly to the south-west in Coorg and the Western Ghats) thus figure prominently in the *rāja-nīti* and require special treatment. External boundaries, however, coexist with the internal wilderness, as we see in a verse about the farmer marking off his field and then slowly making it free of stones and other impediments. But the text is also marked by a consistent suspicion, at times bordering on hostility or even contempt, for peoples like the Boyas and the Bhils, who could be found both at the border regions of the empire (in the north-east) and at the internal frontier. A prose passage within the *nīti* section thus advises the listener: 'Allay the fears of the hill-folk, and bring them into your army. Since they are a small people, their loyalty or faithlessness, their enmity or friendship, their favour or disfavour, can all easily be managed'. Another passage, this one in verse, runs as follows:

Trying to clean up the forest folk  
is like trying to wash a mud wall.  
There's no end to it. No point in getting angry.  
Make promises that you can keep and win them over.  
They'll be useful for invasions, or plundering an enemy land.  
It's irrational for a ruler to punish a thousand  
when a hundred are at fault (257).

This then is *rāja-nīti* for building an empire, composed by a rather introspective, yet by now quite experienced king, who has been on the throne for perhaps a decade. In certain key respects, the author departs quite some distance from conventional wisdom. For example, he recommends posting Brahmins as commanders of forts, *durga*, and the fact that this was practical advice is shown by studies of the prosopography of the notables of the empire in that time.<sup>18</sup>

Make trustworthy Brahmins  
the commanders of your forts  
and give them just enough troops,  
to protect these strongholds,  
lest they become too threatening. (207)

Brahmins, in this view, have certain clear advantages over non-Brahmins, even though this caste is theoretically at least not to be associated with warrior functions (though numerous exceptions, both in the epics and earlier historical instances could be found):

The king will often benefit by putting a Brahmin in charge,  
for he knows both the laws of Manu and his own dharma.  
and from fear of being mocked  
by Kshatriyas and Sudras,  
he will stand up to all difficulties. (217)

Beyond this, however, lies the Brahmin's relative freedom from local attachments. At the same time, these Brahmins are clearly trained by now in military ways and engaged in worldly activities. This seems a clear precursor to the early eighteenth-century Maratha state, and its so-called 'Brahmin Raj', under the Peshwas. In this latter case, we see the rise to dominance of a secular Brahmin elite, Persianised in its culture, and largely made up of members of the Citpavan and Konkanastha sub-castes. Between these two moments, one can also cite the late seventeenth century political conjuncture in the Sultanate of Golkonda, when the Brahmin brothers Akkanna and Madanna had come to dominate the land-revenue administration and to appropriate a series of military functions.<sup>19</sup> Arguably, these later developments should be seen as variations on a theme that already had been set out by Krishnadevaraya.

But the king's leanings toward Brahmins do not extend as far as those learned men established in institutional settings, that can become autonomous foci of power:

If you are partial to learning  
and give lands and money away to the learned,  
mendicants, monks and men with matted hair  
will become swollen-headed.  
Famines, sickness and infant deaths will increase.  
Just show devotion to the learned,

---

<sup>18</sup> Cynthia Talbot, 'The Nayakas of Vijayanagara Andhra: A Preliminary Prosopography', in Kenneth Hall, ed., *Structure and Society in Early South India: Essays in Honour of Noboru Karashima*, Delhi, 2001.

<sup>19</sup> On these figures, see, most recently, Gijs Kruijtzter, 'Madanna, Akkanna and the Brahmin Revolution: A study of mentality, group behaviour and personality in seventeenth-century India', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 45, No. 2, 2002, pp. 231-67.

and if they resent their poverty – don't be concerned. (242)

This verse seems to be directed against *mathādhipatis*, the heads of sectarian mutts, and seems to reflect real tensions that existed in this context in fifteenth-century Vijayanagara.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, the text clearly reflects a state that is in movement -- expanding outwardly. There is a strong sense of movement, incorporation, and the attempt to stabilize new areas and their peoples. With this comes a groundswell of economic expansion through external trade. Foreign traders are to be treated with respect, ports and harbours to be cared for. There is thus a feeling -- which the Portuguese observers of the early sixteenth century confirm -- that the kingdom was eager to foster external relations, quite distinct from the thalassophobia that could be found elsewhere in some parts of Asia in the same period.

Manage your ports well,  
and let commerce increase  
in horses, elephants, and gems,  
pearls, and sandal-paste.  
When drought, sickness and calamity  
make foreigners seek refuge in your lands,  
shelter them in keeping with their station.  
Give out gardens, yards, and mines  
to those whom you wish to favour (245).

None of this is innocent, of course, in view of the close links between external trade and the import of strategic war-animals. Fernão Nunes was to claim in the 1530s, that already in the late fifteenth century, Saluva Narasimha had a monopolistic policy in this regard: 'he caused horses to be brought from Hormuz and Aden into his kingdom, and thereby gave profit to the merchants, paying them for the horses just as they asked'. Nunes also adds in a later passage, devoted to the reign of Krishnadevaraya, that 'the king buys thirteen thousand horses of Ormuz, and country-breds, of which he chooses the best for his own stables, and he gives the rest to his captains, and gains much money by them'.<sup>21</sup> A relatively simple verse in the *nīti* text confirms the claim of Nunes in an absolutely explicit manner.

Merchants who bring elephants and good horses  
all the way from distant islands,  
should be given villages and good houses and a favourable price  
and be honoured with audiences,  
so that they come to you in the normal course,  
and the war-animals don't go to the enemy (258).

<sup>20</sup> This may be an oblique reference to the complex relations between the Sringeri establishment and Vijayanagara, for which see Hermann Kulke, 'Maharajas, Mahants and Historians: Reflections on the Historiography of Early Vijayanagara and Sringeri', in A.L. Dallapiccola and S. Zingel-Avé Lallemand, eds., *Vijayanagara – City and Empire: New Currents of Research*, 2 Vols., Stuttgart, 1985, Vol. I, pp. 120-143. But also see the more general view in K. Sarojini Devi, *Religion in Vijayanagara Empire*, New Delhi, 1990.

<sup>21</sup> Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire*, pp. 294, 362.

At the same time, the king must have an eye for investment in infrastructure, husbanding the resources (and especially the agrarian resources) at his disposal:

The extent of a country is the source of its wealth.  
 Make small ponds and channels,  
 so that even poor people can pay taxes in cash and kind.  
 Give them concessions,  
 and if you let them improve,  
 both your treasure and virtue will increase. (236)

Yet, this is clearly a Srivaishnava-flavoured form of legitimation, unafraid of enjoyment (*bhoga*), centrist, stable, and to an extent a precursor of the unabashedly hedonist view of the polity put forward in later Nayaka times, by the smaller successor states spawned by Vijayanagara.<sup>22</sup>

The money you spend on elephants, horses, and their fodder,  
 and on salaries for your soldiers,  
 and for Brahmins, and temples,  
 and your own luxuries too,  
 this is money well-spent (262).

Asceticism has its rightful place, of course, but only in a sequential sense – after kingship has been done with. There is no sense in denying oneself the pleasures of kingship while one is on the throne. This too is a form of ‘realism’, and perhaps linked to the idea of kingship as display. For what is a king whose subjects do not see him as the First Consumer, and leading precisely such a life of pleasure in the palace !

A king should enjoy life, each pleasure  
 in its season—massages, baths, good food,  
 ointments, rich clothes, and flowers.  
 The merit that comes from severe control of the body  
 he can attain by charity (280).

There is at times even a blurring in this view between the king’s own body, and the body-politic, as in a witty ‘split-meaning’ verse, which can be read in two ways, as we have translated it using two columns (Verse 270). We see in this verse a preoccupation with how the king treats his own body, a feature that even finds a reflection in the Portuguese accounts of the epoch, and reminiscent too of the preoccupation with the daily routine of the gods themselves in Vaishnava temples such as Tirupati. Thus we have the description of Domingos Paes from the late 1510s:

‘The king is accustomed to drinking a quantity (*quartilho*) of sesame oil every day before daylight, and he anoints himself all over with the said oil; he covers his loins with a small cloth, and takes in his arms great weights made of earthenware, and then, taking a sword, he exercises himself with it till he has sweated out all the oil, and he then wrestles with one of his wrestlers. After this labour, he mounts a horse and gallops about the plain in one direction and another till dawn, for he does all this before daybreak. Then he goes to wash

<sup>22</sup> We have discussed these later polities at length in Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nayaka-Period Tamilnadu*, Delhi, 1992.

himself, and a Brahmin washes him whom he holds sacred, and who is a great favourite of his and is a man of great wealth (...).<sup>23</sup>

We have already learnt from an earlier passage in Paes's text that despite this rather rigorous fitness regime, 'the king is of medium height, and of fair complexion and good figure, rather fat than thin; he has on his face signs of smallpox'. Besides, he is generally 'cheerful of disposition and very merry' and though seen even by the Portuguese as a 'most perfect', and just ruler, is still regarded by those in his court as subject to fits of melancholy and changes of humour (*grandes súbitos*). These are characteristics that a later historiography in the same century would also attribute to another ruler, the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605).

Yet, whatever the symbolic import of the king's body, the reader of Paes is left in no doubt that this is an eminently practical and pragmatic kingship, one in which the king must play a constant and somewhat interventionist role rather than leaving all routine business to his subordinates. The king may exercise, and attend to his body; he is certainly much given to pleasure; but he is equally a manager. We can see this from his idealised daily routine as described by Paes.

'Thence he goes to a building made in the shape of a porch without walls, which has many pillars hung with cloths right up to the top, and with the walls handsomely painted (...). In such a building, he despatches his work with those men who bear office in his kingdom, and govern his cities, and his favourites talk with them. The greatest favourite is a man called Temersea [Timmarasu]; he commands the whole household, and to him all the great lords act as to the king. After the king has talked with these men on subjects pleasing to him he bids enter the lords and captains who wait at the gate, and these at once enter to make their salaam to him'.<sup>24</sup>

Pragmatic management, with a set of record-keepers is a feature of Vijayanagara that had been remarked even a century earlier by the Timurid ambassador 'Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi in the 1440s. 'Abd al-Razzaq had in particular focused on the office of the so-called *dannāyak*, who is associated by him with the revenue-administration (*dīwān-khāna*), the place where he works being described as a pillared hall that is compared to the classic *chihil sutūn* (the forty-pillared hall) of Sasanid times. Here, one finds a number of scribes (*navisindagān*) who keep records, either on Indian coconut-palm leaf (*ba barg-i jauz-i hindī*), or when the record is meant to be permanent and reliable (*daftar-i mu'tabar*) with white colour on black stock.<sup>25</sup> But some things have changed too between the 1440s and the 1510s. The rather compact if impressive kingdom of 'Abd al-Razzaq's times has become a sprawling empire. The Vijayanagara military-machine, with its emphasis on an effective cavalry has begun by the early sixteenth century to pay heavy dividends, and it is possible to conceive of campaigns not only against the Bijapur Sultans, but the far less accessible

<sup>23</sup> Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire*, p. 241.

<sup>24</sup> Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire*, pp. 241-42.

<sup>25</sup> 'Kamaluddin Abdul-Razzaq Samarqandi: Mission to Calicut and Vijayanagar', in Wheeler M. Thackston, *A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid History and Art*, Cambridge [Mass.], 1989, pp. 299-321.

Gajapatis in Orissa. At the same time, excessive and unrealistic ambition is to be spurned: do your best, you don't have to achieve the impossible, seems to be the underlying message of *rāja-nīti*. Besides, even if the king keeps himself fit for warfare, there is really no point in exposing oneself to unnecessary risk.

A king should never go himself on campaign.  
 For his own comfort, he should find someone who is competent.  
 A weak commander won't do. Even a good one needs full support --  
 cash, elephants, and horses. Moreover, if you send a non-Brahmin  
 he'll turn against you. Give him -- the Brahmin commander --  
 land equipped with forts and armies (255).

It is true that Krishnadevaraya did not always follow this advice, as we see in the campaigns against Bijapur, but there is little evidence that he exposed himself in a constant and foolhardy fashion – as his son-in-law Aravidu Ramaraya did in the 1550s and 1560s, with notably disastrous consequences in 1565. The vision and the language in which it is expressed here is rather dispassionate, and all this is posed moreover in the form of a self-ironic, meditative vision:

The king is non-violent, though he kills.  
 Chaste, though he has women.  
 Truthful, though he lies.  
 Ever fasting, though he eats well.  
 A hero, though he uses trickery.  
 Rich, though he gives away.  
 Kingship is rather strange. (278)

As noted above, other sections of the text are far more conventional, dealing with the usual means with which one should treat neighbouring kings (both the weak and the strong), the administration of justice, the treatment of spies and soldiers, and the delicate matter of rewards to subordinates. The potential for conflict between kings and ministers, that would be a staple of the histories and treatises produced by the *karaṇams*, the class from which the ministers themselves came, is already present as a theme here, though its resolution is rather more to the king's advantage. The following extended passage makes this clear enough.

Employ Brahmins who are learned in statecraft,  
 who fear the unethical and accept the king's authority,  
 who are between fifty and seventy,  
 from healthy families,  
 not too proud, willing to be ministers,  
 capable of discharging their duties well.  
 A king with such Brahmins for just a day  
 can strengthen the kingdom in all its departments.  
 If such ministers are not available,  
 a king must act on his own,  
 and do whatever he can.  
 If not, a bad minister can become  
 like a pearl as large as a pumpkin –  
 an ornament impossible to wear.  
 The minister will be out of control,  
 and the king will live under his thumb (211-13).

The penultimate verse of this section of the text sums up this grounded, pragmatic, vision of kingship.

Don't assume that kingship  
inevitably leads to wrong,  
or that you can't escape it.  
Texts don't ask the impossible.  
They just tell you: do your best (284).

## Conclusion

It may be argued that the *rājanīti* section of the *Āmukta-mālyada* embodies a paradox, since it gives pragmatic advice on rulership while at the same time being framed in a text where the ideal that is insisted upon is one of renunciation. The paradox is however easily resolved. For the central thrust of the Srivaishnava political theology in which this advice comes embedded is that it is necessary to separate rulership as a social function – which is not merely desirable but essential for the world to cohere -- from the personal salvation of the ruler. It is understood that at some moment or other in his life, the king will wish to escape the bonds of his royal life and become a renouncer. The text does not suggest otherwise, and quite on the contrary, expresses its unbounded admiration for such rulers. But the view is clearly that renunciation is not a solution to the problems of kingship, only to the problems of the king as individual. We are not quite in the realm of the 'two bodies' of the king developed by Kantorowicz, but what is obviously being proposed here is a view where Srivaishnava this-worldliness plays a central role in protecting the king from renunciatory excess.

What is of particular interest for us is that such a vision does not die out with Krishnadevaraya or even the Tuluva dynasty. We find echoes of it in later works, whether normative or not, concerning both kingship and the actions of kings. Three-quarters of a century later, the great Mughal poet Abu'l Faiz 'Faizi' was to pen a version of another exemplary story of kingship, by transposing the tale of Nala and Damayanti (or Nal and Daman) into an Indo-Persian context.<sup>26</sup> Faizi's Nal is a great king, but one who loses his sense of balance, drawn as he is into the whirlwind of his passion (*junūn*) for Daman. Wisdom on political matters comes hard, and in Nal's case only at the price of extended exile and enormous personal suffering and transformation. Yet, in Faizi's great didactic poem, Nal ends his royal life after having ruled wisely for many years, and hands his kingdom over to his son with suitable words of advice (*nasīhat*). Curiously, these words of advice echo other words that have been uttered in the same work, these by a renouncer-king to Daman's father early in the text. The parallels between the *Āmukta-mālyada* and Faizi's *Nal-Daman* are striking, but by no means conclusive evidence that the Mughal poet-laureate had any knowledge of a South Indian precursor. They certainly do suggest however that the

---

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of this text, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Love, Passion and Reason in Faizi's *Nal-Daman*', in Susan S. Wadley, et al., *The Story of Nala and Damayanti in South Asian Traditions*, forthcoming; as also Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'The afterlife of a Mughal *masnawi*: *Nal-Daman* in Urdu and Persian', in Kathryn Hansen and David Lelyveld, eds., *New Frontiers in Urdu Scholarship: A Tribute to Professor C.M. Naim*, Delhi, forthcoming.



problems of kingship that were posed in Krishnadevaraya's great work had a significance that extended both beyond his own lifetime and even that of his empire.<sup>27</sup> They offer us a glimpse into a political world in which the aesthetic and the pragmatic could be combined in ways that are as effective as they are surprising.

## Appendix: A fresh translation of the *Rājanīti* section

### *Rāja-nīti* 4. 204-285.

204.

Never tire of protecting people.  
When people in distress cry out to you,  
listen to them, remove their suffering.  
Don't give any responsibility to bad people.

205.

The people (*rāṣṭramu*) seek the welfare of a king  
who holds their wellbeing in his heart.  
Don't discount this truth.  
If all the people, from the Brahmins down,  
want the same thing,  
God, who moves inside them,  
will surely give it.

206.

A king should be obeyed.  
Abhira pastoralists and Bhilla tribals obey a leader  
who sends his order together with a string tied to an arrow.  
So the command of a great king  
should strike terror into everyone.

207.

Make trustworthy Brahmins  
the commanders of your forts  
and give them just enough troops,  
to protect these strongholds,  
lest they become too threatening.

208.

Don't give someone a high position  
and then degrade him.  
Nobody remembers that he began with nothing.  
Instead he'll become resentful.  
In keeping with his character, raise him up by steps,  
and get work out of him in the ripeness of time.

209.

These are the untrustworthy:

---

<sup>27</sup> For the afterlife of such texts, also see such important late seventeenth-century formulations on statecraft from the Maratha domains as Ramacandra Pant Amatya, *Ajñapatra*, ed. Vilas Khole, Pune, 1988.

Those of low birth, or who live in a Boya village,  
 the uneducated, those who lie fearlessly,  
 the violent, those too-clever by half,  
 the foreigners, the unethical.  
 If you want to be king, reject all of these, even if they're Brahmins.

210.

Avoid those raised in isolated villages.  
 Remember the story of the fallen Brahmin  
 from one such place,  
 who killed the crane that had saved him,  
 just to eat for a day.

211.

Employ Brahmins who are learned in statecraft,  
 who fear the unethical and accept the king's authority,  
 who are between fifty and seventy,  
 from healthy families,  
 not too proud, willing to be ministers,  
 capable of discharging their duties well.  
 A king with such Brahmins for just a day  
 can strengthen the kingdom in all its departments.

212-13.

If such ministers are not available,  
 a king must act on his own,  
 and do whatever he can.  
 If not, a bad minister can become  
 like a pearl as large as a pumpkin –  
 an ornament impossible to wear.  
 The minister will be out of control,  
 and the king will live under his thumb.

214.

For each task, appoint more than one person.  
 Then the work will be finished quickly.  
 If the numbers are reduced, it creates trouble,  
 but if they are increased, problems will be solved.

215.

No job is done with money alone.  
 Many people should work at it with commitment.  
 If the king is generous, truthful and fair,  
 such qualities may attract the best to the job.

216.

Though you have money in your treasury and horses,  
 without the right sort of men  
 those assets will be ruined  
 and the kingdom will fall into enemy hands.  
 Haven't we heard of such kingdoms?

217.

The king will often benefit by putting a Brahmin in charge,  
 for he knows both the laws of Manu and his own dharma,  
 and from fear of being mocked

by Kshatriyas and Sudras,  
he will stand up to all difficulties.

218.  
Don't place important temples  
in the hands of a tax-collector (*āyatikāḍu*).  
Being greedy for money, he'll make up his shortfalls  
by drawing on the temples.  
He'll bring that income to the king's treasury.  
That isn't right.  
Appoint someone exclusively to that job,  
and if he's a little corrupt  
God will see to him.

219.  
Just as a farmer occupies new lands,  
fences them in, and digs out rocks and roots  
to prepare them for cultivation,  
a king can occupy a country,  
by giving battle to the enemy  
or by taking over forts by bribes,  
then seek out and uproot the enemies inside  
one by one.

220.  
If you find a liar in your ranks,  
don't condemn or expel him at once.  
And if he lies all the time,  
rather than discharge him,  
move him to a minor post.

221.  
Farm out those villages  
which lie by impenetrable hills and forests,  
and are harassed by the nearby hunters  
to discharged soldiers from elsewhere.  
Let them fight it out,  
and whatever happens will be to the good.

222. (Prose)  
Allay the fears of the hill-folk, and bring them into your army. Since they are a small people,  
their loyalty or faithlessness, their enmity or friendship, their favour or disfavour, can all  
easily be managed. Here is an illustration.

223.  
A certain Bhil had gone with his bow and arrow  
to eat in the house of another.  
He was given milk and rice;  
but seeing fibre on the boil in a pot,  
and believing it was meat, grew enraged.  
By the time his host walked him back,  
the guest was ready to kill him.  
Suspecting this, the host said:  
"Let me go, for that fibre will become too soft".  
Then the other understood his error and let him go.

224.

Give them a little rice and milk,  
and they'll never go back on their word.  
But when they suspect the smallest deviation,  
their imperfect minds cannot forgive it,  
and they become your worst enemies.

225.

Make friends with the forest-folk through honesty.  
Honour the ambassador to make a friend  
even of an enemy king.  
Pay the foot-soldier punctually to earn his love,  
and win over the horseman with gifts.

226.

Give a good horse and a good elephant  
only to a loyal warrior.  
Take care of the stables yourself.  
Don't delegate that task to someone else.

227.

If one person gives good advice,  
and another condemns it from jealousy,  
don't contradict either.  
When the court has concluded, go home;  
and do what the first adviser said.  
That is to the good.

228.

They ally with outside enemies,  
and foster trouble inside the kingdom,  
they create problems for the king,  
through neglect and bad policy  
just to make the king dependent on them.  
Such are bad ministers !

229.

They make you give gifts to their friends.  
They exclude others.  
They make you promise and make you break your promise.  
And when people say you're untrustworthy,  
everyone believes it.

230.

When the fire in your belly  
grows weak because of phlegm  
or other problems, medicine from outside  
may heal it. Like this, a competent outsider  
may counteract the machinations in your court.

231.

If you ask me how:

232.

The king—who is both knowledgeable and able—  
must retain control of the treasury, the cavalry,

and the elephant stables. In this case,  
impediments will fall away of their own.

233.

If even a single morsel of food  
falls short, the king's servants  
become rebellious. A king has no real friends.  
So don't cast such people off.  
Try to manage them, without trusting them,  
as best you can.

234.

If a certain person doesn't shrink from doing a certain thing,  
you can imagine all the rest. For example, Drupada in the *Mahābhārata*  
wanted to perform a killing ritual. He asked a certain sage  
to preside. The sage refused but said that his brother  
would surely do it. Once he had seen this brother  
pick up a fruit from an unclean place  
when no-one else would touch it.  
You can infer people's character by such means.  
You'll never know everything.

235.

If a certain man bears enmity to you,  
and if you defeat him in battle,  
don't be merciless.  
Just take his wealth, and leave him alone.  
What can a snake do  
when its fangs have been drawn ?  
Besides your enemy will trust you,  
for the kindness you have shown.

236.

The extent of a country is the source of its wealth.  
Make small ponds and channels,  
so that even poor people can pay taxes in cash and kind.  
Give them concessions,  
and if you let them improve,  
both your treasure and virtue will increase.

237.

The people have fled the country in distress,  
but the officials don't call them back.  
Instead they think, "Why not sell their cattle and grain,  
and tear down their houses for firewood ?"  
A king supported by such jackals of the battlefield --  
even if he conquers all seven parts of the world --  
will gain nothing.

238.

From his revenues a king  
should spend one quarter for charity and enjoyment  
and two parts for his army,  
and save one part in the treasury.

His spies should watch his enemies,  
his ministers, and the other pillars of the state.  
As for thieves, kill them all.

239.

Treat your watchmen well  
and use them to discover thieves.  
If the real robbers escape prison  
and the innocent are punished instead,  
your reputation will suffer.  
It's like the king who impaled a fat merchant  
because the real thief was too thin for the stake.

240.

A king should understand three-fourths of a problem  
by his own intelligence.  
The remaining quarter he can think through  
with the help of his good friends.  
He should always be free from anger  
and moderate in his punishments.  
Such a king's rule will last long.

241.

Like a bear asleep on a tree,  
who still has one eye open,  
a king should be ever watchful  
of enemies within and without,  
even in moments of enjoyment.

242.

If you are partial to learning  
and give lands and money away to the learned,  
mendicants, monks and men with matted hair  
will become swollen-headed.  
Famines, sickness and infant deaths will increase.  
Just show devotion to the learned  
and if they resent their poverty – don't be concerned.

243.

Before you punish a condemned man,  
let him appeal for mercy thrice.  
But if someone is a real threat to you,  
use your weapon without delay.

244.

Though a king might be a great warrior,  
it's good to allow his soldiers to boast.  
That may swell them up with pride,  
and make them better fighters.

245.

Manage your ports well,  
and let commerce increase  
in horses, elephants, and gems,  
pearls, and sandal-paste.  
When drought, sickness and calamity

make foreigners seek refuge in your lands,  
shelter them in keeping with their station.  
Give out gardens, yards, and mines  
to those whom you wish to favour.

246.

Await the right moment  
to punish the evil-doer  
like the waiting bowman who releases his arrow,  
when the target comes into view.

247.

Gradually advance into enemy territory,  
building up your armies,  
just as waters must build up  
before they flow into a river.  
If the enemy is too strong,  
accept his honours and retreat.  
But if your spies tell you of his weakness  
advance and engulf him.

248.

If a king takes money through torture,  
takes counsel from the low,  
cedes a part of his land to his enemies,  
and suspects the loyalty of his friends--  
give him secret gifts of gems and ornaments,  
reassure him, and create divisions amongst your enemies.  
But take care you don't become like him yourself.

249.

If an enemy asks, give him half your kingdom.  
Make a strong bond with him. Remove his enmity.  
Fear of an enemy is worse than the fear of snakes.

250.

Why waste words?  
A king should uncover hidden enemies  
in his kingdom and destroy them, so he can move  
freely through his own country like a man among  
beautiful women. Otherwise, what use is a kingdom?  
Is it only to give you grief?

251.

If a strong enemy is running from you,  
don't reel him in right away.  
Follow him and take him at the right moment,  
as a fisherman who has a big fish on the line  
plays him out until he turns back.

252.

Harshness in punishment,  
acting on slander,  
refusing an offer of peace,  
turning on a stranger who offers strategic information,  
failure to conceal your actions from an enemy,

working with a known traitor,  
 alienating a faithful ally,  
 going along with bad advice out of politeness,  
 failure to punish indiscretion,  
 shying away from unpleasant events,  
 denying minimal respect to those who deserve it,  
 keeping bad company,  
 addictions,  
 and obstinacy—  
 all these a king must avoid.

253.

If the three kinds<sup>28</sup> of portent occur,  
 the king should spend much money  
 on feeding Brahmins, rituals for the gods,  
 and fire rituals.

254.

The king should encourage competition  
 among subordinates and soldiers.  
 That's how their qualities, good and bad,  
 will come out. They will be so obsessed  
 with winning the king's attention and honour  
 that they'll have no time for treacherous plots.

255.

A king should never go himself on campaign.  
 For his own comfort, he should find someone who is competent.  
 A weak commander won't do. Even a good one needs full support—  
 cash, elephants, and horses. Moreover, if you send a non-Brahmin  
 he'll turn against you. Give him—the Brahmin commander—  
 land equipped with forts and armies.<sup>29</sup>

256.

Make dense forests at the borders.  
 Thin out the forests in the middle of the kingdom  
 so that you won't have problems with bandits.

257.

Trying to clean up the forest folk  
 is like trying to wash a mud wall.  
 There's no end to it. No point in getting angry.  
 Make promises that you can keep and win them over.  
 They'll be useful for invasions, or plundering an enemy land.  
 It's irrational for a ruler to punish a thousand  
 when a hundred are at fault.

258.

Merchants who bring elephants and good horses

---

<sup>28</sup> *Divyam*, divine -- unfavorable planetary conjunctions; *antarikṣam*, celestial -- comets; *bhauma*, terrestrial -- strange creatures.

<sup>29</sup> The Telugu is somewhat ambiguous, and the editor Vedamu Venkatarayasastri reads: 'You need the non-Brahmin, too.'



all the way from distant islands,  
should be given villages and good houses and a favourable price  
and be honoured with audiences,  
so that they come to you in the normal course,  
and the war-animals don't go to the enemy.

259.

Ambassadors from countries on the border  
should be treated with familiarity.  
A subordinate should make hard talk  
in businesslike or warlike tones,  
while the king affects a light air.

260.

When you raise someone up in a post  
don't share state secrets at once.  
To show that he's in the corridors of power,  
he may boast of what he's heard,  
and both he and the secret will be ruined.

261.

The Brahmins who are fortress commanders  
should be your well-wishers, learned,  
devoted to virtue, heroic, and known over generations.  
These are the sort who should be given forts.  
Stock the forts up with a lifetime's provisions,  
even cheese from tiger's milk.  
Grant lands to your subordinates,  
even if it's just an ant's portion,  
and never give them too much.  
Let your incomes exceed your expenditures,  
but never make the people suffer.  
Watch over the weak kings around with spies,  
like a meditating crane that suddenly snatches a fish.  
Protect the common people,  
but attack the pillars of the enemy's state.  
Such a king can sleep with his hand on his heart.

262.

The money you spend on elephants, horses, and their fodder,  
and on salaries for your soldiers,  
and for Brahmins, and temples,  
and your own luxuries too,  
this is money well-spent.

263.

Never boast in the face of an enemy.  
You may win in battle, or lose,  
or you may win only through attrition.  
A king should mean business, not battle.

264.

If you drive an enemy force into a corner  
and it turns on you, you may win  
or you may die.  
Provoke the local population

to face those forts  
where there are various dangerous devices.<sup>30</sup>

265.  
If someone advises a king well once or twice,  
he becomes a trusted adviser.  
Access to the king makes the man  
the target of bribes.  
Now he starts to give bad advice.  
Spies should keep an eye on ministers  
to know how they lead their lives.

266.  
If a neighbouring king is headed for ruin,  
help him along.  
If he manages to recover, become his friend.  
If he's your enemy, it's the king beyond  
who can help against him.  
When they fight, your borders will be safe.

267.  
Cause problems in neighbouring lands.  
Take their forts, but if you seize their women,  
treat them like your own sisters.  
Say no harsh words to ambassadors,  
you may yet have to make peace with them.

268.  
If your neighbouring land has sorcerers,  
their water is poisoned, illness is rampant,  
and there are dense forests and hills,  
full of barbarians,  
don't enter there even for a pile of gold  
as large as Mount Meru.  
Just send in a force to seize it.

269.  
There are those who talk smoothly,  
just to get what they want.  
They are fair-weather friends  
who leave you in troubled times.  
Such people are bad, and the king should be like a goldsmith  
who can assay their real worth.

270.	Assemble knowledgeable people.	Collect good doctors.
	Find out where there are precious metals.	Learn the elements of your body.
	Mine gold from the land.	Ingest gold.
	For the good of the people,	Eat moderately in keeping
	tax them as little as possible.	with your needs.
	If there is a rebellion somewhere	If you have an excess of wind,

---

<sup>30</sup> With the implication: 'And keep your own army in reserve'.

pound it into submission.	manage it by massage.
Have a soft heart	Bathe in oil.
and take care of everyone.	Adopt a holistic approach.
Keep people from violating	Find remedies for greying hair
caste conventions	and skin blemishes.
And take special care of Brahmins.	Take special care of your teeth.
Settle areas that need population	Be plump where you should be plump
and thin out overpopulated ones.	and thin where you should be thin.
Clear the land of enemies.	Cleanse the system to enhance your glow.
Take scrupulous care of your body and the body politic	
and both will endure.	

271.

In the early morning, after being woken up by courtiers who inquire about his sleep,  
the king meets with physicians and Brahmin astrologers.  
In the next watch, he meets his ministers, subordinate kings, and accountants.  
At midday, after wrestling and being massaged, he checks with his cooks and hunters.  
In the afternoon, he worships the deities and meets temple managers and ascetics.  
After dinner come the clowns, *purāṇic* scholars, and poets.  
At dusk, after meeting his spies, he listens to musicians.  
At night, after a good sleep, he plays with women.

272.

Companions come in three kinds: those who always wish you well,  
those who wish you well sometimes, and those who never wish you well.  
Let me elaborate.

273.

Those who always wish you well are your physicians, astrologers, pandits, poets, and priests.  
Those who collect money for you sometimes wish you well.  
Those who never wish you well are the ones whose property you have confiscated  
and who are eager to recover it.  
A king should manage all of them skilfully, according to context.

274.

A king should identify a deserving person  
before he asks and before anyone recommends him.  
He should surprise him with a sumptuous reward, the way the jack-fruit tree  
yields plentiful fruit, like a dream coming true.

275.

Between rituals for the gods  
and ceremonies for dead ancestors,  
the ceremonies are more important.  
Send your ancestors to higher worlds  
by giving to learned, upright, gentle devotees of Vishnu.

276.

Charity is for protecting Brahmins.  
Learning is for protecting yourself.  
Surrender to Lord Narayana.  
They say, *rajyante narakam dhruvam*,  
“Hell is certain after being king.”  
There is no other hope.

277.

Wives obey their husbands,  
 men and women avoid incest,  
 yogis control their passions,  
 the lower castes emulate the higher,  
 servants willingly serve their masters—  
 all because they fear punishment by the king.

278.

The king is non-violent, though he kills.  
 Chaste, though he has women.  
 Truthful, though he lies.  
 Ever fasting, though he eats well.  
 A hero, though he uses trickery.  
 Rich, though he gives away.  
 Kingship is rather strange.

279.

These are the qualities of a spy:  
 He should live in the same city as the king.  
 He must know many languages.  
 He should know no other spies  
 and have no unusual external marks.  
 The king should reward him beyond his hopes.  
 Otherwise, no one will take the job.

280.

A king should enjoy life, each pleasure  
 in its season—massages, baths, good food,  
 ointments, rich clothes, and flowers.  
 The merit that comes from severe control of the body  
 he can attain by charity.

281.

A king's food has many flavours.  
 He should eat only in the afternoon  
 and on an empty stomach.  
 This is a healthy regimen.

282.

If a king pays equal attention  
 to all the three goals in life,  
 but has a preference for *dharma* above all,  
 he'll be as happy as the farmer  
 whose rice fields are watered when  
 the dam with other fields is accidentally breached.

283.

Wear a precious stone  
 to stand out in the crowd.  
 And, when you are dressed up,  
 above all wear the stone  
 that is appropriate to that day.

284.

Don't assume that kingship

inevitably leads to wrong,  
 or that you can't escape it.  
 Texts don't ask the impossible.  
 They just tell you: do your best.

285.

Manu, the first king, and Yama, lord of justice, are considered just because they strictly punish wrong-doers. An anointed king who takes his rule seriously and bears with the necessary pain is known in the Veda by various names: Virat, Samrat, and others. He is like a god. Until he resolves his people's problems, his life is unfulfilled. If sensual pleasure is the only goal, even bandits who seize other men's wives and rob wayfarers achieve it. Nor is it good to say that kingship is mostly a bother, so why get involved in protecting the earth? In the Kṛta Yuga, Kartavirya held up the earth with his thousand arms; he would turn up with the appropriate weapon—sword, club, or bow and arrow—wherever, whenever, however anyone was contemplating a foul act. Such absolute authority is no longer possible for us, in this final age, with our limited energies. Things have come to a point where not only kings but even Brahmins are not what they used to be. In those days, a single Brahmin<sup>31</sup> drank up the entire ocean. Another Brahmin<sup>32</sup> created a counter-world to God's creation. Another one<sup>33</sup> used his Brahmin staff to hold back God's own weapon. So can today's Brahmins give up their Brahmin duties, to the extent they can perform them, just because they're not up to what these earlier Brahmins could do? Do we cease to respect them for this same reason? So stay alert and do your best, without ignoring what you see and hear. Protect and punish, and leave what is beyond your own power to lotus-eyed Vishnu, the ultimate protector of those who surrender to him. Put the burden on him. If you behave without self-importance, all power will be within your grasp. A crowned king should act with *dharma* as his only goal. Even the gods stationed in the corners of the cosmos -- Varuna, Kubera, the Wind, Fire, Indra and the others -- were elevated to those posts because of *dharma*. So, my son, follow *dharma*, pay the three debts<sup>34</sup> and, honoured by your equals, rule the kingdom.

---

<sup>31</sup> Agastya.

<sup>32</sup> Visvamitra.

<sup>33</sup> Vasistha.

<sup>34</sup> To the gods, the sages, and your ancestors.