Allies or Rivals?

Vyāsatīrtha’s Material, Social, and Ritual Interactions with the Śrīvaiṣṇavas

In his polemical works, Vyāsatīrtha also identifies the Śrīvaiṣṇavas as intellectual rivals. This movement had affiliated with religious institutions in the Tamil country as early as the tenth century and, from the fourteenth century on, enjoyed a growing institutional presence in southern Andhra. Doctrinally, Śrīvaiṣṇavism encompasses both a popular vernacular piety and a more rarified Sanskrit tradition of Vedānta intellectualism. It flourished at the sixteenth-century Vijayanagara court, and this presented both opportunities and challenges to Vyāsatīrtha and the Mādhvas.

Compared with the documentation of Vyāsatīrtha’s relations with the Advaitin Smārtas, which consists primarily of his polemics against them, the documentation of his relations with the Śrīvaiṣṇavas is more multifaceted. This is due to the fact that Mādhvas and Śrīvaiṣṇavas have a lot in common and, therefore, a more complicated relationship. Doctrinally, both Mādhvas and Śrīvaiṣṇavas identify Brahman with Viṣṇu and conceptualize the ultimate reality as possessing attributes. Both communities believe that liberation from the cycle of rebirth (saṃsāra) requires some acknowledgment of Viṣṇu’s supremacy over the individual human soul. Both sects assert the actual existence of the physical world and the reality of saṃsāra. Finally, both argue that souls retain some distinct identity in the state of mokṣa rather than losing all individuality as in Śaṅkara’s Advaita.

These doctrinal similarities had practical implications in that both Mādhvas and Śrīvaiṣṇavas worshipped in temples dedicated to Viṣṇu’s various forms. Moreover, they worshipped these forms according to Pāñcarātra ritual practices, albeit with important sectarian inflections. While it seems that during the sixteenth century, these two groups shared several prominent, royally patronized religious spaces
and collaborated on the general format of the ritual proceedings there, evidence suggests the eventual dominance of Śrīvaishnavas in temple life at the sixteenth-century Vijayanagara court.¹ There is also evidence that Vyāsatīrtha worked to gain a firmer foothold for Mādhva Brahmins in these shrines. Thus, much like his relationship with the Advaitin Smārtas, Vyāsatīrtha was in competition with the Śrīvaishnavas for royal attention. This competition manifested itself most clearly in a detailed doctrinal critique of the Śrīvaishnavas’ form of Vedānta, Viśiṣṭādvaita, to be examined in the next chapter.

However, when we study the full range of Vyāsatīrtha’s interactions with the Śrīvaishnavas, there are many indications that Vyāsatīrtha sought to improve his sect’s standing at court precisely by forming an effective functional alliance with this alternative Vaiṣṇava group. He facilitated this alliance, which was rooted in their shared Vaiṣṇavism and which greatly benefited each sect, largely through material exchanges that had both practical and honorific implications. Vyāsatīrtha donated land, cash, and other provisions to Śrīvaishnava-dominated temples in ways that increased this sect’s ritual largesse and, by extension, its social and religious prestige. But such gifts, which typically involved perpetual reenactment of specific rituals, also promoted Mādhva Brahminism’s long-term visibility in certain regions. Publicly displayed inscriptions documenting these arrangements increased Vyāsatīrtha’s fame while the arrangements themselves often created long-standing economic relationships between Mādhva Brahmins and various local constituencies. Because these constituencies included agriculturalists, suppliers, and craftspeople, Vyāsatīrtha’s gifts to Śrīvaishnava-dominated institutions implicated a broad swath of South Indian society.

The alliance Vyāsatīrtha forged with the Śrīvaishnavas through gifts to Śrīvaishnava-dominated temples also spread the institutional network of Mādhva Brahminism into Tamil- and Telugu-speaking regions. As we saw in chapter 2, these regions were increasingly the focus of Vijayanagara statecraft owing to a variety of economic and military factors. Rebelliousness in these areas among local chieftains and even, occasionally, on the part of the empire’s own heavily militarized nāyakas, or overlords, restricted the empire’s access to valuable overseas trade routes and productive weaving communities along the Coromandel coast. In the wake of military reconquests of these rebellious areas, Kṛṣṇadevarāya often lavishly patronized prominent local temples in an effort to integrate these regions more effectively into the empire (see map 4 and its discussion in chapter 2). It seems that Śrīvaishnava institutions in particular benefited from this system. This may have had to do, in part, with the initiative of Śrīvaishnava leaders who, as A. Rao’s recent work has demonstrated, sought to establish fruitful connections with the Vijayanagara court through their theologization of the Rāmāyaṇa and their related identification of the Vijayanagara king with the Hindu epic’s divine protagonist, Rāma.² Furthermore, Śrīvaishnava emphasis on vernacular traditions
and extensive proselytization efforts throughout the Tamil country also may have improved this group’s courtly standing. Thus, by participating in Śrīvaishnava religious projects, Vyāsatīrtha secured his sect’s place in the orbit of the court’s attention and consolidated his relationship with Vijayanagara royals.

For its part, Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s court actively supported this alliance between Mādhvas and Śrīvaishnavas, even as it occasionally fostered competition between these two sects. An alliance between these two Vaishnava groups was good for the court because it brought together different regional and linguistic traditions of Viṣṇu worship under the auspices of large temple complexes that attracted diverse pilgrims. Insofar as royal donations to temples were a means of forging connections with various constituents of the empire, the more variegated and inclusive the temple, the better for royal outreach.

At the same time, Vyāsatīrtha’s material exchanges with the Śrīvaishnavas were also motivated by competition, and the court’s role in this intersectarian relationship was sometimes that of arbiter. It was always the case that large South Indian temples dedicated to Viṣṇu catered to a variety of Vaishnava publics. In this sense, they were pluralistic spaces that were united in a shared, somewhat open-ended Vaishnava identity that predated Vyāsatīrtha’s initiatives to forge a Mādhva-Śrīvaishnava alliance. This shared Vaishnava identity transcended sectarian divisions in many ways, but in other ways, it reinforced them. Indeed, some of the temples that I call “Śrīvaishnava-dominated” got that way only through a concerted effort on the Śrīvaishnavas’ part. Often, they “held” these spaces through arrangements that, of necessity, satisfied the requirements of other groups, who had equal, and often older, claims to the temple’s management. Issues of control would sometimes arise and there is evidence that the Vijayanagara court occasionally mediated intersectarian or intrasectarian disputes.

Yet while the Vijayanagara court may have used its patronage to negotiate tensions between factions at temples, it also seems on occasion to have stirred them up in an effort to rein in the local power of particular sectarian organizations and leaders. Inscriptions of the šīlaśāsana variety, wherein sectarian leaders make donations to temples on their own initiative, indicate that these leaders commanded considerable resources and could use them in ways that promoted their own local authority. As we saw in chapter 2, this authority may have competed with that of the state. In some instances, it seems that Kṛṣṇadevarāya used intersectarian or intrasectarian rivalries to quash this competition. Some of the court’s gifts to Vyāsatīrtha at Śrīvaishnava-dominated institutions may have served this purpose.

Thus, even if royal patronage in general conformed to certain patterns, each gift had its own implications that reflected a variety of local, regional, and imperial interests. Vyāsatīrtha’s efforts to forge an intersectarian alliance with the Śrīvaishnavas, through material exchanges that carried ritual, social, and honorific implications, are historically significant precisely for this reason. They simultaneously illuminate
what constituted a shared Vaiṣṇavism between Mādhvas and Śrīvaiṣṇavas and what boundaries persisted between them. Moreover, they shed light on the context within which these processes of defining relative sectarian identity took place. Yet while Vyāsatīrtha’s interactions with Śrīvaiṣṇavas reveal certain patterns, the understanding of which enhances our general sense of this period, they also reflect the dynamic responses of individual agents to historic contingencies. Such responses also played their part in the shaping of sectarian identities.

MĀDHVAS AND ŚRĪVAIṢṆAVAŚ AT THE IMPERIAL CAPITAL

Recent scholarship on religion in sixteenth-century Vijayanagara argues that, as Śmārta Advaita influence and Śaivism were on the wane, beginning with the reign of Sāluva Narasimha and continuing through the subsequent rulers of the Tuluva dynasty, Śrīvaiṣṇavism rose to a position of prominence in almost direct correspondence. It is true that, beginning during the reign of Kṛṣṇadevarāya, Virūpākṣa’s status as the royal court’s favored deity was gradually compromised—first by the addition of Viṭṭhala (a form of Viṣṇu) as a witness to the arrangements recorded in various inscriptions and ultimately by the elimination of Virūpākṣa from these records during the reign of Rāmarāya, Sadāśiva’s regent. Correspondingly, the main temple to Viṭṭhala in the capital city of Vijayanagara became the hub of religious activity in the early sixteenth century. Many new pavilions (maṇḍapas), towered gateways (gopurams), colonnades, and subsidiary shrines were built within the temple grounds while monasteries, related temples, feeding houses, and streets for conducting processional festivals were constructed around it (see map 5).

For example, in 1513, Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s two queens arranged for large towered gateways, visible from a distance, to be constructed in the outer walls of the Viṭṭhala temple. In 1516–17, Kṛṣṇadevarāya celebrated the recapture of territories lost to the Gajapati kingdom in the northeast by constructing a hundred-pillared hall on the Viṭṭhala temple grounds. According to Verghese, the pillars in this hall are significant because they attest to the Viṭṭhala temple’s affiliation with the Śrīvaiṣṇavas; many of them are inscribed with nāmams or sectarian marks associated with the northern and southern factions of this sect, later known as Vaṭṭakalai and Teṅkalai, respectively. From the period after Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s reign but during the lifetime of Vyāsatīrtha, another inscription documents the installment of images of the Āḻvārs or Śrīvaiṣṇava saints inside the Viṭṭhala temple. Later in the sixteenth century, under the successive reigns of Acyutarāya and Rāmarāya (Sadāśiva’s regent), new freestanding temples to Rāmānuja and the Āḻvārs were built around the Viṭṭhala temple, attesting to the expansion of Śrīvaiṣṇava dominance in this region of the city.
Possible Mādhva matha

MAP 5. Viṭṭhalapura.
Not all of these developments were royally funded nor were all explicitly Śrīvaishṇava. A variety of Vaiṣṇava constituents representing various labor and linguistic communities made contributions to the temple, a fact that is suggested by the languages of the inscriptions. While the majority of the royal grants are in Kannada, one by Kṛṣṇadevarāya is recorded in the empire’s three main languages, Kannada, Telugu, and Tamil. In addition to the Tamil-speaking Śrīvaishṇava elites, such as merchants who installed various Āḻvār statues and made donations to support their worship, local boatmen, who ran the ferry service across the Tungabhadra river, which was vital to the capital’s functioning, also donated shares of their earnings to support temple worship. These diverse nonroyal donors were motivated in part by their personal devotion but also, perhaps, by a desire either to acknowledge or pursue close ties to the court. This is not surprising, given the variety of social, economic, and political networks that were forged through donations to these royally funded temples. Indeed, sectarian leaders themselves made donations to such temples precisely to implicate their communities in such developments.

Strong evidence exists that in the early sixteenth century the Mādhvas had a matha in Viṭṭhalapura (see map 5), and in 1513, a royal edict from Kṛṣṇadevarāya granted Vyāsatīrtha three shares of the temple’s food offerings. Images of Viṭṭhala are found on the tombs of two Mādhva leaders, including that of Vyāsatīrtha (see fig. 2), located in the capital city; one of these is not far from the Viṭṭhala temple. Furthermore, there is evidence linking important members of the Haridāsakūṭa, or Mādhva-affiliated devotees of Viṣṇu famous for their devotional songs in Kannada, to the Viṭṭhala temple in the imperial capital. Both Purandaradāsa and Kanakadāsa, who are believed to have been Vyāsatīrtha’s disciples, are supposed to have lived and worshipped there, while other members of the community made pilgrimages to the temple. This implies a broad Mādhva-associated constituency was at the temple. Finally, in 1532, during Acyutarāya’s reign, Vyāsatīrtha donated an icon of Y ogavarada-Narasiṅha to the Viṭṭhala temple, indicating that he sustained his interactions with this temple for a lengthy period (see Viṭṭhala temple floor plan). His donation of this particular icon may have been his way of underscoring his close ties to the court, which placed images of Narasiṅha at the capital’s gateways to serve a protective function. The yogic component of the icon that Vyāsatīrtha donated to the Viṭṭhala temple links the more martial nature of this avatāra of Viṣṇu to his ascetic side, a side that Vyāsatīrtha, a samnyāsin, would want to play up. Indeed, sectarian leaders’ installation of icons of Viṣṇu’s various forms at large, royally funded temples served both to integrate different Vaiṣṇava communities into a single devotional body and gave prominence—by implying a royal seal of approval—to a particular sect’s conception of the deity. Thus, Mādhvas and Śrīvaishṇavas were clearly in the habit of sharing sacred spaces. Yet because of the presence of both Mādhva and Śrīvaishṇava imagery in the
Viṭṭhala temple, there is some debate in the scholarly literature over which sect controlled it. This debate reflects the ambiguity in this period of Mādhva-Śrīvaishnav relations, which were simultaneously competitive and collaborative. There is strong epigraphic and monumental evidence that ultimately the Śrīvaishnavas came to control the Viṭṭhala temple, as they did many of the other Vaiṣṇava shrines in the capital city. According to Verghese’s review of the temple’s inscriptions, the Śrīvaishnavas seem to have dominated at the Viṭṭhala temple. However, the dating of these inscriptions indicates that this dominance of Śrīvaishnava festivals and ceremonies did not occur explicitly until after Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s reign and that it proliferated after the death of Vyāsatirtha. Thus, Śrīvaishnava dominance cannot be definitively asserted for the period of Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s rule. For this period, all that can be said is that both sects used the temple and made contributions to it.

Vergheke also theorizes that the Śrīvaishnavas dominated the new Bālakṛṣṇa temple, built by Kṛṣṇadevarāya in the capital’s “sacred quarter” in 1515, to celebrate his conquest of Udayagiri and his triumphant return to Vijayanagara with an icon of the infant Kṛṣṇa taken from that fort (see map 6 for location of Kṛṣṇa temple). Mādhvas have long claimed a special role in that now defunct temple by virtue of the fact that Kṛṣṇa in his infant form is commonly worshipped by Mādhvas.
Furthermore, Vyāsatīrtha is well known to have composed a devotional song in Kannada to this deity upon its arrival in the capital city. Finally, in two lengthy inscriptions, which together document the single most lavish donation to any temple made by Kṛṣṇadevarāya, thirty-seven Brahmins, mentioned by name, are appointed to conduct various temple tasks. The Mādhvas have traditionally held that two of these are Mādhva names, Rāmaṇṇācārya and Mulbagal Timmaṇṇācārya, which indicates that Mādhva Brahmins played an active role in the temple’s ritual program. Verghese, however, disputes this and argues that the iconography in the temple, in the form of inscribed Śrīvaīṣṇavā nāmams and Āḻvār statues, attests to its association with Śrīvaīṣṇavism. In her estimation, while Mādhvas certainly used the temple, they did not control it and a Śrīvaīṣṇava ritual program would have prevailed there. However, while it does seem that Śrīvaīṣṇavas dominated the temple after the reign of Kṛṣṇadevarāya, there is no clear evidence of this during Vyāsatīrtha’s lifetime. In fact, it may be that Kṛṣṇadevarāya mentions the Brahmins individually for the precise reason that they were handpicked from the two different sects, Mādhva and Śrīvaīṣṇava, to manage the temple. Indeed, Mulbagal was a major Mādhva institutional center at that time; it is where Vyāsatīrtha himself spent several years studying under the Mādhva guru Śrīpādarāja.

In contrast to both the Viṭṭhala and the Kṛṣṇa temples, another significant Vaiṣṇava temple, the Rāmacandra temple, was located in the royal center amid the living quarters of the king and other nobles. According to Verghese, this temple, which accommodated only the priests and the royal family, was likely designed exclusively for royal use. Yet even though this was a private temple, it was definitely linked to the public religiosity of the empire. In fact, Fritz, Michell,
and M. S. Nagaraja Rao have mapped axial systems and circumambulatory routes to demonstrate that the entire capital city was oriented around this temple at the royal center. Citing this evidence, A. Rao argues that this orientation had the effect of “transforming the geography of the city itself into an emblem of the identification between king and god.”

The Rāmacandra cult was particularly important because of the role it played in the Mahānavamī festival. During this festival, the Vijayanagara king and the deity Rāma, in his triumphant return to Ayodhya as described at the end of the Rāmāyaṇa, were identified ritually: “On a central platform in front of the Rāmacandra temple the king identified himself with Rāma, granted honours and reviewed the army in an ostentatious exercise of military and political power.” A. Rao maintains that the Śrīvaiṣṇavas played an active role in promoting the Rāma cult, in ways that enhanced their status at court. As he puts it, “The connection between Śrīvaiṣṇavas and Rāma worship was not an insignificant one but rather the result of a strategic partnership between Vijayanagara kings and members of the Śrīvaiṣṇava order.”
While there is no similar evidence to support any Mādhva affiliation with this temple, it seems significant that, as discussed in chapter 2, Vyāsatīrtha took Rāmacandra as the tutelary deity of his mathas. This would suggest, that, much like the Śrīvaiṣṇava leaders, Vyāsatīrtha sought to emphasize his sect’s affiliations with the epic in a manner that was beneficial to his sect. Indeed, there is evidence that Vyāsatīrtha and his Mādhva contemporaries at Vijayanagara participated in this Śrīvaisnava project of developing a cult at Hampi of Rāmāyaṇa figures, particularly the deity Hanumān. Reverence for Hanumān as an incarnation of the wind god Vāyu had been a significant feature of Mādhva Brahminism since the sect’s beginning, when Madhva proclaimed himself the third avatāra of Vāyu, after Hanumān and Bhima. That the region of the Vijayanagara capital had long been associated with Hanumān’s residence in the monkey kingdom of Kishkinda was a significant advantage to Vyāsatīrtha for establishing a connection between Dvaita Vedānta and local religious associations. While Vyāsatīrtha may not have installed the 732 icons of Hanumān in the capital city as the Vyāsa Vijaya credits him with doing,28 he is firmly associated with establishing a Mādhva Hanumān shrine, wherein the icon bears distinctive Mādhva imagery (see fig. 3).

The deity in this temple, which is located on the banks of the Tungabhadra (see map 6), is called the Yantroddhāraka Hanumān and sits in meditation inside
two intersecting triangles. This temple remains an active one, wherein Mādhva Brahmins conduct the rites.

Furthermore, on Vyāsatīrtha’s tomb, located on Navabṛndāvana Island in the Tungabhadra River, an image of Rāma-Sītā-Lakṣmaṇa and Hanumān faces outward into the remains of the maṇḍapa that is in front of the tomb (figs. 4 and 5). Across
from this *mandapa* is a small Hanumān temple, which is tended today by Mādhva priests. The Hanumān image is distinctly Mādhva—the deity is seated in a lotus pose and holding a book on his lap—although it does not seem that this temple dates to the sixteenth century. Finally, there is a sixteenth-century image of Caturbhujā Hanumān, or “Four-Armed Hanumān”—facing the tomb of Vyāsatīrtha’s sectarian colleague and contemporary, Raghunandana, and located along the banks of the Tungabhadra River—between the Virūpākṣa and the Viṭṭhala temple complexes. This image depicts Hanumān holding, respectively, a conch shell, a discus, a mace, and finally a book in each one of his four hands. Again, it is primarily the book that identifies this icon as distinctly Mādhva. Thus, Mādhvas in the Vijayanagara capital at the time of Vyāsatīrtha participated actively in the theologization of the Rāmāyaṇa project initiated (and, it would seem, dominated) by the Śrīvaishṇavas. By linking traditional Mādhva motifs with courtly emblems and associations and by working with their Śrīvaishṇava rivals in pursuits that were of clear benefit to the court, Vyāsatīrtha and the Mādhvas promoted their own sect’s visibility.

Therefore, while I would agree with Verghese and A. Rao that Tuḷuva Vaiṣṇavism seems to have been largely synonymous with Śrīvaishṇavism, (particularly post-Kṛṣṇadevarāya), I would also argue that Vyāsatīrtha actually deserves
some of the credit for this. Vyāsatīrtha’s interactions with this group likely abetted Śrīvaiṣṇavism’s distinctive success, even as these interactions also extended Mādhva Brahminism’s influence both at court and in society at large. By involving his sect in various ways with Śrīvaiṣṇava projects in the empire’s capital, Vyāsatīrtha helped to articulate a generic, multifaceted, transsectarian, and transregional Vaiṣṇavism that simultaneously made Mādhva gurus, devotional songs, iconography, and institutions better known. Because this generic Vaiṣṇavism had great potential to bring together different Vaiṣṇava linguistic, devotional, ritual, and labor communities under the auspices of large temple complexes, it was particularly attractive to the court, which used temple patronage partly as a form of outreach to different constituents of Vijayanagara society. Insofar as temples with both Mādhva and Śrīvaiṣṇava icons and activities broadened their appeal among different Vaiṣṇava publics, an alliance between these sects attracted royal favor. Because royal gifts were often intended expressly for redistribution among other sectors of society, those sects that enjoyed royal support thereby increased their popular following.

BEYOND THE IMPERIAL CAPITAL: VYĀSATĪRTHA’S RELATIONS WITH ŚRĪVAIṢṆAVAS AT KANCHIPURAM AND TIRUPATI

Kanchipuram

That Vyāsatīrtha’s cultivated alliance with the Śrīvaiṣṇavas was important to his stature at Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s court is evident in the fact that the first inscriptive reference to Vyāsatīrtha involves the Śrīvaiṣṇava-dominated Varadarāja temple in Kanchi. A Tamil inscription of the rāyaśāsana or “royal edict” genre, dated August 13, 1511, and carved onto the base of the east wall of the Aruḷāḷa-Perumāḷ temple (also known as the Varadarāja temple), documents Vyāsatīrtha’s gift of the produce from the village of Pulompakkam in Vadapanadu to this temple. The inscription states that Vyāsatīrtha had received this village as a gift from Kṛṣṇadevarāya and stipulates that the produce from the village be used to conduct worship to the deity on the occasion of Āvaṇi or the annual event in which Brahmins change their sacred thread. The inscription also records the fact that Vyāsatīrtha augmented rituals associated with the commencement of major festivals by arranging for a vehicle throne to be supplied “for the god to relax in during the midday on the occasion of the flag-hoisting ceremony.” Flag-hoisting ceremonies typically initiated lengthier festival periods that were associated with royal patronage, as it was often a royal right to raise and lower the temple flag. Thus, the arrangements recorded in this 1511 inscription suggest that the connections of Vyāsatīrtha and the Mādhva sect to Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s court were now to be displayed rather prominently at the Varadarāja temple.
As mentioned in chapter 2, Somanātha’s biography claims that Vyāsatīrtha spent his early years as a samnyāsin studying in Kanchi, after his guru, Brahmmanyatīrtha, had died. According to Somanātha’s portrait, Vyāsatīrtha’s studies at Kanchi were broad based; he only procured a second Mādhva guru when he left Kanchi for Mulbagal and began studying under Śrīpādarāja. Vyāsatīrtha’s first recorded donation to the temple in Kanchi may attest to his personal affinity for that deity, as well as the ties to the temple’s authorities that he established during his early career. While this gift was clearly facilitated by the royal court and while the format and rhetoric of the royal edict type of inscription can convey the impression that the arrangements made in a given inscription were being imposed by the king on the various agents involved, Vyāsatīrtha’s own preferences may be evident in some of the gift’s specifics. For instance, Ávani was a particularly important holiday for South Indian Brahmins. Moreover, as Appadurai has argued, the court’s role in such arrangements was often more arbitrative, with the court giving its seal of approval to arrangements that had already been made between the parties in question. Thus, royal edicts in which Kṛṣṇadevarāya gave Vyāsatīrtha valuable resources to regift to others may tell us more about Vyāsatīrtha’s preferences or initiative than the king’s.

However, it is also true that Kanchi was a significant location for Kṛṣṇadevarāya, who likely had his own multifaceted reasons for having Vyāsatīrtha bestow this wealth on the temple at this particular time. Inscriptional records at Kanchi and elsewhere attest to Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s frequent visits to this temple and his patronage of it. Kanchi is one of the places typically listed in the praśasti portion of royal inscriptions as evidence of Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s lavish support of various Hindu institutions. While Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s devotional motivations played a role in Kanchi’s importance, the long-standing resistance to Vijayanagara rule on the part of the region’s chieftains was also significant. Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s August 1511 gift to the Varadarāja temple by way of the Mādhva sectarian leader Vyāsatīrtha seems to have been linked to Kanchi’s rebellious history.

This is substantiated by an inscription at another important Vaiṣṇava shrine, the Śrī Venkaṭeśvara temple at Tirupati. This inscription, carved into the western section of the temple’s second prakāra (outer wall) and dated April 7, 1511, records the fact that Appa Pillāi, Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s general in the region around Kanchi and in Kongunadu, made a grant of the village of Virakampanallur to the Śrī Venkaṭeśvara temple in Tirumala. The inscription specifies that Appa Pillai’s gift was intended for the merit of Kṛṣṇadevarāya. Tirupati historian Viraraghavacharya points out that Kṛṣṇadevarāya had recently succeeded, after years of failure on the part of his predecessor Vīra Narasimharāya (Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s older brother), in bringing the rebellious Sambuvarāya chieftains to submission in the region around Kanchi. Thus, Appa Pillai’s donations to the Tirupati temple for his ruler’s merit seem to have been intended to commemorate this significant military victory.
When, four months later, Kṛṣṇadevarāya authorized Vyāsatīrtha to regift the produce of a village to the Kanchi temple for the purposes of expanding the temple’s ritual largesse, he was seemingly implementing his typical economic plan for recently conquered (or reconquered) areas. By funneling donations through sectarian leaders to prominent temples in such areas, Kṛṣṇadevarāya appeared to develop the local economy and to link that apparent development symbolically to the state. In this manner, he hoped to procure a certain measure of political stability and loyalty to Vijayanagara rule.

While this clarifies the general rationale behind Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s 1511 donation to the Kanchi temple, it does not explain why Kṛṣṇadevarāya chose a Mādhva sectarian leader as the intermediary. Why not simply make the donation directly to the temple itself or rely on a local Śrīvaṇava leader to implement it? Certainly, Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s use of Vyāsatīrtha as the intermediary in part attests to Vyāsatīrtha’s early prominence at Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s court and substantiates Mādhva claims regarding their leader’s importance. While the resources benefited the temple, the Śrīvaṇava community who controlled it, and members of the local population, the honor that the king bestowed on the Mādhvas by having Vyāsatīrtha enact the gift helped to spread Mādhvaism into Tamil-speaking regions. Indeed, Mādhvas did eventually establish mathas near this temple in Kanchi that continue to function today. The connections that Vyāsatīrtha forged between Mādhva sectarian institutions and historically Śrīvaṇava ones—connections that were facilitated in large part by Vijayanagara patronage—are a critical component of Vyāsatīrtha’s historical legacy for the Mādhva sect. It may be that this royal edict reflected the court’s approval of Vyāsatīrtha’s initiative in pursuing a Mādhva-Śrīvaṇava alliance.

At the same time, however, the gift seems to highlight that the Śrīvaṇava Tamils were of greater use to Vijayanagara statecraft than the primarily Kannadiga Mādhvas, who, by virtue of their historical location in territory more firmly under Vijayanagara control, could not assist as directly in shoring up the empire’s territorial holdings. As mentioned above, weaver communities and overseas trade routes situated along the Coromandel coast were increasingly important to the Vijayanagara economy; the rebellious local chieftains and heavily militarized—but sometimes rogue—imperial nāyakas in Tamil country could restrict Vijayanagara access to these valuable entities. These regions therefore demanded constant Vijayanagara attention. By bestowing resources on Vyāsatīrtha and having him donate them to the Śrīvaṇava-dominated temple at Kanchi, the court at once expanded its general support of Vaishānavism while still privileging the form of Vaishānavism that had greater, and more multifaceted, value to the court. Vyāsatīrtha’s awareness of the increased importance of the Tamil region and Śrīvaṇavism is what likely prompted his pursuit of an alliance with this community.
From the court’s perspective, giving the gift this way implicated two sects in the royal agenda for the price of one. In keeping with conventional understandings of the court’s reputed “ecumenism,” two-stage gifts of this type enabled the court to maximize its interaction with religious groups who could help to implement its economic and sociopolitical policies in the broadest way possible. The Vaishnava alliance that Vyāsatīrtha sought to establish between Mādhvas and Śrīvaishnavas was appealing to the Vijayanagara court for this very reason; it enabled them to publicize their support of historically Śrīvaishnava-dominated institutions in the Tamil regions that were increasingly important to the empire’s stability. At the same time, the alliance encompassed other linguistic, devotional, and doctrinal communities over whom the Mādhva mathas held greater sway. In this way, the court’s two-stage gift to the temple at Kanchi helped to articulate a big tent Vaishnavism that encompassed a variety of regional, linguistic, and devotional publics.

Thus, by collaborating with the Śrīvaishnavas and implementing royal gifts to Śrīvaishnava-dominated institutions, Vyāsatīrtha successfully implicated his sect in the Śrīvaishnava’s rise. In doing so, he did not seek to merge Mādhvaism with Śrīvaishnavism. Indeed, the distinction between the two sects was Vyāsatīrtha’s motivation for collaborating with the Śrīvaishnavas: he sought to spread Mādhva Brahminism into new Tamil and, as we shall soon see, Telugu, regions precisely by establishing Mādhva footholds at important Śrīvaishnava shrines. In fact, when we follow the historical arc of this alliance, we see that the court sometimes favored Vyāsatīrtha and the Mādhvas over the Śrīvaishnavas and played the two groups off each other, even as it supported their collaboration.

**Tirupati-Tirumala**

Vyāsatīrtha’s efforts to spread Mādhvaism into new areas through an alliance with the Śrīvaishnavas that would appeal to the Vijayanagara court are most vividly displayed at the Śrī Venkaṭekṣvara religious complex in Tirupati-Tirumala in modern-day Andhra Pradesh. The importance of this temple complex to Vijayanagara rule seems to have begun just prior to the short-lived Sāluva dynasty, which originated in Chandragiri, about sixteen kilometers south of Tirupati-Tirumala (see map 1). That Sāluva Narasimha, a general in Emperor Virūpākṣarāya’s army, who had been made governor of this region, was able to usurp the authority of the last king of the Saṅgama dynasty and establish the short-lived “Sāluva” one attests to how much military power had been placed in his hands. This, in turn, attests to the strategic significance of the Tirupati region to the empire.

As mentioned in chapter 2, the establishment of strong relationships with the local community in southern Andhra enabled Vijayanagara kings to monitor the empire’s rebellious northern Tamil holdings and remain within striking distance of Kalinga, a contested area for the empire’s duration. Sāluva Narasimha built alliances in this region by funneling the means for economic developments
through the Tirupati temples, the facilitation of which was left largely in the hands of Śrīvaishnava officials, particularly Śrīvaishnavas of the emerging southern/Tamil-oriented faction. Sāluva Narasiṁha coordinated the worship programs at the Śrī Veṅkaṭeśvara mandir and Śrī Govindarāajasvāmi temple, located, respectively, at the top and bottom of the hill, by making simultaneous donations to both; these were then often recorded in the same inscription. Together with his Śrīvaishnava representative at the temple, Kantātai Rāmānuja Aiyankār, Sāluva Narasiṁha established a Rāmānujakūta, or a place for feeding non-Brahmin pilgrims, named for a famous Śrīvaishnava saint. Attendance at the recitation of the Tamil Prabhāṇḍham, or devotional hymns dedicated to Viṣṇu, on the birth star days of the Śrīvaishnava Ālavārs at ancillary shrines dedicated to them became open to non-Brahmins during Sāluva Narasiṁha’s reign. Thus, Sāluva Narasiṁha’s patronage of these temples at Tirupati simultaneously increased the temples’ importance and consolidated certain forms of Śrīvaishnava control over them.

Like his predecessor Sāluva Narasiṁha, Kṛṣṇadevarāya also generously patronized the Śrī Venkaṭeśvara temple complex at Tirupati. Kṛṣṇadevarāya, who explicitly linked his successful rule to his devotion to Lord Veṅkaṭeśvara, made seven separate visits to the temple—more than he made to any other outside the empire’s capital—to celebrate important events. His ultimately triumphant 1513–1514 campaign to recapture the fort of Udayagiri, in the region of Kalinga, from the Gajapati Empire, was celebrated by a lavish set of donations to the Veṅkaṭeśvara mandir during that time. Like Sāluva Narasiṁha, he also seems to have implemented some important changes at the temple.

For example, three inscriptions from the Tirupati-Tirumala temple complex attest to the fact that on January 12, 1524, Kṛṣṇadevarāya gave Vyāsatīrtha three house sites on which to construct two mathas. As mentioned in chapter 2, two of these sites are located on top of the hill in Tirumala, near the Śrī Venakaṭeśvara mandir. The third site is at the hill’s bottom, in the town of Tirupati, near the ritually related Govindarājasvāmi temple. Two of the three inscriptions attesting to Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s gift were placed on plaques outside the monasteries that Vyāsatīrtha built, while the third was inscribed on a wall surrounding the Śrī Veṅkaṭeśvara mandir itself. All three inscriptions state that the house sites had been confiscated by Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s predecessor, Sāluva Narasiṁha, from the temple’s arcakas because they had stolen temple jewels.

That this same event was recorded in Tamil, on the same day in three separate locations, attests to its significance, as does the prominence given to it in the Mādhva biographical tradition surrounding Vyāsatīrtha. By giving Vyāsatīrtha this land, Kṛṣṇadevarāya inserted Mādhva Brahmins, who had no previous official role at Tirupati, into the affairs of one of the most important redistributive centers of wealth and honors in the Vijayanagara Empire. The fact that the arcakas’ thievery is mentioned each time implies that Kṛṣṇadevarāya felt the need
to justify his gift to Vyāsatīrtha. This is likely because it upset the temples’ established power structure.

It is not entirely clear, however, whom Kṛṣṇadevarāya was punishing by giving these confiscated house sites to Vyāsatīrtha. The arcakas arguably represented an older pre-Śrīvaṅgnavas association of the temple with the Vaikhānasa tradition. The Vaikhānasa priests’ standing at the temple by this period is somewhat ambiguous.42 The rituals performed on the mūlamūrti, or central image in the main shrine, continued to be observed according to Vaikhānasa practices, thereby attesting to their entrenched significance for the management of the temple. The dominance of Śrīvaṅgnavas at this temple complex began during the fourteenth century, after the invasion of Madurai by the breakaway sultanate from Delhi, when there was a large influx of Tamils into this Telugu-speaking region.43 Over time, this Śrīvaṅgnav presence at the temples amplified; it was manifested in several construction projects, including shrines to Rāmaṇuja and the Āḻvārs and a Rāmānujakūṭa, or resting house, for Śrīvaṅgnav pilgrims. Liturgical additions, such as the recitation of the Tamil Prabandham on specified occasions at ancillary shrines and the celebration of various lavish public festivals involving processional icons of the temple deities, at the temple complex also promoted Śrīvaṅgnavism. These festivals followed the Pāñcarātra ritual rules favored by the Śrīvaṅgnavas and often involved large offerings of cooked food.

Yet despite this increasing Śrīvaṅgnav presence, the temples at Tirupati and Tirumala remained pluralistic Vaiṣṇava spaces. As stated above, the mūlamūrti in the Śri Venkaṭeśvara mandir continued to be worshipped according to Vaikhānasa traditions rather than Pāñcarātra ones and, according to Viraraghavacharya, cooked food was never allowed into the temple’s main shrine.44 Furthermore, while the Śrīvaṅgnav overlay on the temple was quite pronounced by the time of Kṛṣṇadevarāya, with the emerging “southern” or “Teṅkalai” faction’s sensibility dominating the proceedings, the temple’s abiding pluralism was formally recognized in the composition of the sthānattār. This administrative body acted as the trustee of gifts donated to the temple, oversaw what was to be offered, and made certain that the donor’s share of the offerings was distributed according to his or her stipulations. These trustees did not exercise absolute control over the temple nor did they impose unilateral decisions upon it, but by overseeing the donations they played a leading role in the temple’s management. Since these donations came from various sources, the sthānattār were responsible for maintaining the temple’s pluralism, even though the board itself seems to have consisted largely of Śrīvaṅgnavas. According to inscriptions, this body emerged toward the end of the fourteenth century and, in Viraraghavacharya’s view, became formalized in 1390, in an inscription referring to proportionally allocated stipends (nirvāha) that the sthānattār were to receive according to the following stipulations:45
Allies or Rivals?

Four shares for Tirupati Śrīvaiṣṇavas;
Three shares for Tiruchanur Sabhaiyār, who were members of Brahmin assemblies in villages of the surrounding area;
One share for the Nampimār, who were the temple’s ritual officiants or priests;
Two shares for the Kōyil Kēḻkum Jīyars or Śrīvaiṣṇava sectarian ascetic leaders responsible for inspecting the articles to be offered to the deity; and
Two shares for the Kōyil Kaṇakku or temple accountant.

The sthānattār’s inclusion of both Tirupati residents and leaders from surrounding villages suggests that the temple was of vital importance to the whole region, which both explains and is explained by royal patronage. Furthermore, the board’s composition demonstrates the dominance of Śrīvaiṣṇavas in the running of the temple and perhaps the continued authority of the pre-Śrīvaiṣṇava Vaikhānasa tradition in the inclusion of the temple arcakas/nampimār on the board. Thus, the formalization of the sthānattār attests at once to the temple’s abiding diversity and to the prominent role played by those with a Śrīvaiṣṇava orientation. It also implies the necessity of having a system in place, precisely to manage this diversity and avoid conflict between different interest groups.

When Kṛṣṇadevarāya took away house sites belonging to the temple’s arcakas to give to Vyāsatīrtha for the construction of Mādhva mathas, he was perhaps trying to avoid alienating the Śrīvaiṣṇava component of the temples’ management too directly while still making a significant change in the temple’s power structure. Of course, Vyāsatīrtha and the Mādhvas did not obtain a place on the temple board and all of the arrangements brokered in these inscriptions were done explicitly at the Śrīvaiṣṇavas’ approval and protection. However, it does seem that Kṛṣṇadevarāya felt compelled to justify this addition to temple affairs by referencing an earlier crime committed against the temple by less prominent—but still important—members of the temple community.

Some Mādhva scholars have argued that Vyāsatīrtha received this gift from Kṛṣṇadevarāya as a reward for the twelve-year period during Sāluva rule, when Vyāsatīrtha was placed in charge of conducting the temple rituals to the mūlamūrti. According to Venkoba Rao (1926), the Vyāsa Vijaya maintains that Vyāsatīrtha first went to Tirupati during the reign of Sāluva Narasimha, who had just punished these priests for their theft; since there were no sons of appropriate age to perform the daily pūjās, Vyāsatīrtha filled in for a period of several years. According to the Vyāsa Vijaya, Vyāsatīrtha did so by conducting rituals according to Madhva’s Tantrasārastaiṅgraha, a ritual manual written by Madhva at the community’s founding in the thirteenth century. In this view, by giving Vyāsatīrtha
these house sites roughly thirty years later, Kṛṣṇadevarāya was rewarding him for his earlier service to the temple during a period of crisis.

There are no inscriptions that locate Vyāsatīrtha in Tirupati-Tirumala prior to the period of Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s rule, however, so the notion that Vyāsatīrtha served as the temple arccaka during Sāluva Narasimha’s reign is uncorroborated. Furthermore, the inscriptions from Sāluva Narasimha’s time do not mention this theft at all. What the biographies may be reflecting in their portrayal of events at Tirupati is Vyāsatīrtha’s lengthy collaboration with the Śrīvaisṇavas at many of their most prominent shrines, such as those in Kanchi and in the imperial capital. The Vyāsa Vijaya’s claim that Vyāsatīrtha conducted rituals at Tirupati according to Madhva’s manual could also be a reference to the tension present at Tirupati between the Śrīvaisṇavas’ more lavish Pāñcarātra traditions and the sparer ritual traditions of their Vaikhānasa predecessors.

That Vyāsatīrtha himself was more in line with the Śrīvaisṇavas’ ritual style, but with distinctive Mādhva inflections, could signify that Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s insertion of the Mādhvas into the ritual program at Tirupati actually promoted Śrīvaisṇava ritual practices over Vaikhānasa ones. Kṛṣṇadevarāya may also have just been extending some of his apparent efforts at Vaishnava temples in the capital city, such as the Viṭṭhala mandir, to address different constituencies within his empire simultaneously. The temple complex at Tirupati-Tirumala now had Telugu, Tamil, and Kannada publics, and the inscriptional records come to reflect this. By fusing such groups into a shared temple culture, Kṛṣṇadevarāya likely sought to articulate a cosmopolitan and yet distinctly Vijayanagara Vaiṣṇavism.

However, there is also evidence that Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s gesture here was one of control over sectarian entities and a response, not only to Śrīvaisṇava dominance in the region, but also to infighting between different factions of that sect. Indeed, Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s gift of these confiscated house sites to Vyāsatīrtha may be read as an attempt to stir up conflict between emerging factions within the Śrīvaisṇava community. What later came to be known as the “Vāṭakalai,” or “northern,” and more Sanskritic branch and the Tenkalai, or southern, and more Tamil-oriented branch seem to have coexisted at Tirupati during Sāluva Narasimha’s reign. Appadurai and Viraraghavacharya, however, both maintain that a hardening of divisions between these two groups took place precisely during the period under discussion. The central issues were the recitation of the Tamil Prabandham and the associated inclusion of non-Brahmins in the proceedings versus the recitation of the Veda by Brahmins only. Both Appadurai and Viraraghavacharya cite Tirupati temple inscriptions, between 1520 and 1528, that document gifts to the temple from the northern faction that explicitly excluded Prabandham reciters from any share.

By inserting the Mādhvas into the mix at Tirupati, Kṛṣṇadevarāya, in contrast to his predecessor Sāluva Narasimha, may have been expressing a preference
for Vedic recitation over Tamil Prabandham. It is certainly possible to infer that Vyāsatīrtha had a preference for the northern, Sanskritic branch of Śrīvaiṣṇavism. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, Vyāsatīrtha assumed this group’s preferred approach to obtaining mokṣa was superior to that of the southern faction. His partiality is also evident in Vyāsatīrtha’s independent gifts to the temple, documented in inscriptions of the śīlaśāsana variety, to be discussed below. However, when it comes to Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s motivations, I think it is more likely that he saw an opportunity in the Śrīvaisṇavas’ infighting to destabilize their increasing power in the region. Adding an additional sectarian entity, the Mādhvas, into the mix at Tirupati reminded the Śrīvaisṇavas that their control over this prominent shrine was not absolute.

Whatever the (likely, multifaceted) motivations behind Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s gift to Vyāsatīrtha of these confiscated sites, the gesture amounted to direct and significant royal patronage of Mādhvaism within the context of a historically Śrīvaisṇava-dominated shrine. It resulted in the permanent installation at the temples of an additional sectarian presence. As such, this royal gift was quite different from the one that Kṛṣṇadevarāya bestowed upon Vyāsatīrtha at Kanchi thirteen years earlier, wherein he empowered Vyāsatīrtha to donate land and ritual paraphernalia to the temple in ways that affiliated the Mādhva sect with the temple’s ritual activities but which did not explicitly establish any Mādhva institutions there. Furthermore, in the royal edict carved into the second outer wall of the Śrī Veṅkaṭeśvara mandir, the longest and most detailed, Kṛṣṇadevarāya also granted the Śrī Veṅkaṭeśvara temple the tax proceeds collected during the Purattasi Brahmotsava at Tirumala, along with the proceeds of several villages in the “inner” and “outer” divisions of Tirupati. These grants were for the purpose of making offerings to the deity. It is significant that Kṛṣṇadevarāya then arranged for the donor’s share of this prasād, which would normally have been returned to himself, to be conducted to Vyāsatīrtha’s matha for the matha’s use in perpetuity (i.e., “as long as the moon and the sun shine”). According to Viraraghavacharya’s calculations, this prasād amounted to enough food to feed two hundred people, who, he presumes, were the residents of Vyāsatīrtha’s matha.

Subsequent to receiving the gift of house sites from Kṛṣṇadevarāya and constructing his two monasteries, Vyāsatīrtha took steps to promote an active role for Mādhvas in temple affairs. An inscription in the Śrī Veṅkaṭeśvara temple says that on November 8, 1524, Vyāsatīrtha constructed mandapas in front of the mathas at both the top and bottom of the hill. He also arranged that, for 96 days of the eight Brahmotsava festivals that were taking place each year, the processional icon of the deity from the Śrī Veṅkaṭeśvara temple at the hilltop would be brought to the mandapa in front of his matha and worshipped there, with the prasād being distributed there as well. Vyāsatīrtha also arranged for other offerings to be made on other festival days so that, for the annual festival cycle in Tirumala, prasād
would be distributed in front of Vyāsatīrtha’s matha on 222 festival days. Meanwhile the same inscription indicates that Vyāsatīrtha made a similar set of donations to the Govinda rājāsvāmi temple down the hill in Tirupati, with the prasād being distributed on the festival calendar at the mandapa in front of his second matha located there.

But if Vyāsatīrtha’s gifts were intended to promote Mādhva Brahminism at Tirupati-Tirumala, they also reflect his ongoing efforts to build an alliance with the Śrīvaishnavas. For example, many of his more lavish donations coincided with the period of the Adhyayanotsava or “Festival of Recitation,” a prominent Śrīvaishnava festival during which not only Vedic hymns but the Tamil Prabandham were recited. Viraraghavacharya notes that Vyāsatīrtha clearly wanted to respect established practice at the temple by coordinating one of his gifts to coincide with this important Śrīvaishnava festival. Yet he also notes that Vyāsatīrtha did not give any part of the donor’s share of the prasād to the Prabandham reciters as was typical of many other donors who contributed to the Adhyayanotsava. Again, this may have reflected Vyāsatīrtha’s preference for the northern, more Sanskritic and Vedic-oriented form of Śrīvaishnavism, even as he was careful not to alienate members of the other faction.

The same inscription also documents the fact that Vyāsatīrtha made a sizeable donation in the form of fourteen thousand coins to the temple treasury, with the stipulation that the money “be spent for the excavation of tanks and channels in the temple villages” and that the produce derived therefrom be used to supply a long list of articles to be offered on various days to the deity. At the two mandapas in front of his mathas, Vyāsatīrtha arranged for a lavish amount of additional produce and prepared foods to be distributed on a daily basis. Yet while such gestures undoubtedly increased the Mādhvas’ prominence in the region, they did so in large part by benefiting other local groups. Vyāsatīrtha’s arrangements to irrigate land and to supply produce and other items, such as lamps and oil, to the temples created long-standing economic links between the temple, Vyāsatīrtha’s mathas, and various local artisans and labor groups such as basket weavers, torch bearers, and fuel suppliers. Simultaneously, Vyāsatīrtha’s largesse forged new relations with the Śrīvaishnavas.

Indeed, the November 1524 inscription notes that Vyāsatīrtha donated a village and several hamlets to the temple, again for the purposes of procuring various food and other elements to be offered to the deity eight times daily. It also states that temple servants and temple cooks were to be given their due portions. The sthānattār also received a share of these offerings: “After deducting the portion for these servants the remaining portion shall be distributed among the 12 nirvāham of the sthānattār and the 4½ vagai equally. The remaining appam shall be set apart for distribution at the early distribution hour.” Thus, Vyāsatīrtha’s gifts to the temple
in part went to the temple servants and suppliers involved in rendering them as well as to the temple management, whose stipends (“nirvāḥa”) were enlarged by these gifts. Finally, shares of Vyāsatīrtha’s donations were also distributed as prasād to the general population while some were returned to Vyāsatīrtha’s maṭha.\textsuperscript{63}

A separate inscription dated April 2, 1528,\textsuperscript{64} indicates that Vyāsatīrtha made an additional set of donations to the Govindarājasvāmi temple down the hill in Tirupati, where his second monastery and mandapa were located. Here, Vyāsatīrtha’s donation to the temple of a village authorizes the sthānattar to collect sixty gold coins, the annual income of the village (and the first to be recorded in a Tirupati inscription),\textsuperscript{65} to cover the cost of various items from the temple store to be given to the deity on Vyāsatīrtha’s behalf. The sixty coins also will cover the cost of the labor of various temple servants. Monetary gifts of this type, which were bestowed upon a variety of laborers and suppliers, broadened the web of Vijayangara’s increasingly cash-based economy and enabled new modes of status acquisition, social mobility, and the exercise of power among recipients. Other offerings included noncomestibles as well as ten meals to be supplied daily. In this case, Vyāsatīrtha received the typical quarter share of the offering, but the inscription notes that the “remaining prasādam we shall set apart for distribution at the time of early sandhi.” This arrangement implies that Vyāsatīrtha’s gift here actually increased Śrīvaiṣṇava ritual largesse because the distribution of the prasād does not seem to have been officially linked to Vyāsatīrtha’s maṭha; rather, it was folded into the general distribution and thereby linked more clearly to the temple’s Śrīvaiṣṇava leadership. Furthermore, the gift involved the purchase of goods from the temple stores, in addition to goods that Vyāsatīrtha had donated. By enriching the temple’s cash coffers, Vyāsatīrtha increased the temple leadership’s discretionary power in the region.

Thus, Vyāsatīrtha’s gifts to the Śrīvaiṣṇavas at Tirupati acknowledged their established dominance there while simultaneously promoting Mādhvaism in this new and politically significant region. His efforts to reshape the local economy through lavish donations to the temples reflected the court’s agenda. Indeed, his patronage, which emphasized cash infusions into the temple’s coffers as well as food redistribution that was a direct result of irrigation schemes, bore a distinctive Vijayanagara imprimatur. But Vyāsatīrtha’s patronage also attests to just how wealthy and powerful maṭhādhipatis in sixteenth-century Vijayanagara could become. Vyāsatīrtha seems to have commanded a variety of considerable resources and was able to distribute them in ways that increased his sect’s prominence. He even seems to have been able to initiate and fund large-scale public works projects, such as irrigation schemes, independent of Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s authority. Clearly, Vyāsatīrtha had his own power to exercise, power that, in some instances, may have competed with that of the state.
While Kṛṣṇadevaraya's gift to Vyāsatīrtha of these house sites likely disrupted established power structures at the temple and forced Śrīvaiṣṇavas to cede some of their dominance at these temples to the Mādhvas, the manner in which Vyāsatīrtha redistributed his wealth paved the way for mutually beneficial intersectarian relations. Such dynamics are also evident in a land endowment near the modern-day Andhra-Karnataka border that was given by Kṛṣṇadevaraya to Vyāsatīrtha in 1526 (see Vyāsasamudra on map 3). This gift is recorded on a Sanskrit copper plate inscription, referred to in Epigraphia Indica vol. 31 as the Kamalapur Plates of Krishnadevaraya. As noted in chapter 2, this inscription documents Kṛṣṇadevaraya’s gift to Vyāsatīrtha of the village of Bettakonda, together with several lesser hamlets, located today in the district of Chittoor, in which Tirupati is also located. The inscription indicates that the village was popularly known as “Vyāsasamudra,” in reference to a large tank that Vyāsatīrtha had earlier constructed in the area. It may be that the November 1524 Tirupati inscription cited above, in which Vyāsatīrtha arranged for the excavation of tanks and channels in the temple villages for the purpose of producing more goods to be donated to the deity, refers to what was to become “Vyāsasamudra.” The 1526 Kamalapur copper plates indicate that Kṛṣṇadevarāya gave this land to Vyāsatīrtha as a reward for his having developed it. However, as was discussed in chapter 2, the inscription also documents the fact that the village will now be called Kṛṣṇarāyapura, after the king. This suggests that, although Kṛṣṇadevarāya was rewarding Vyāsatīrtha for his work to irrigate the area, thereby promoting a specific version of economic well-being that linked the region culturally to the state, he was also reminding Vyāsatīrtha that the latter’s wealth was largely dependent on the king’s generosity. This inscription thereby attests to the court’s anxiety about investing too much wealth in maṭhādhipati, whose local influence could eclipse that of the king.

The endowment documented in the Kamalapur Plates is also significant for what it reveals about Vyāsatīrtha’s work to forge mutually beneficial relations with the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, by establishing an agraḥāra or Brahmin settlement “to be enjoyed in succession by students and their students as long as there are the moon and the stars.” According to the inscription, Vyāsatīrtha subdivided the land grant among 308 individual Brahmins, each of whom is identified by name, father’s name, gotra, and the portion of the Veda that he can recite. The number of vṛttis or “shares” allocated to each recipient varied, presumably based upon the recipient’s intellectual accomplishments or other status markers.

The use of land to establish a Brahmin settlement is arguably an anachronism. Appadurai has argued that “starting from about AD 1350, and during the next three centuries of Vijayanagara rule, there was a serious decline in the status of brahmadēyas [land gifts to Brahmmins for settlement purposes] and a concomitant
growth and expansion of temples in South India. It does seem that, relative to earlier periods in South Indian history, the Vijayanagara Empire was notable for the fact that most gifts to Brahmins were through their association with temples and *mathas*. The latter institution had eclipsed the *agrahāra* as the center for Brahminical learning. However, it was also the case that some of the land grants, discussed in chapter 2, that Vyāsatīrtha received from the court were likely intended as Brahmin settlements; several make no explicit reference to *mathas* being built. But even these *agrahāras* were often linked in one way or another to *mathas* and temples. Indeed, a close reading of the Kamalapur plates indicates that Vyāsatīrtha’s redistribution of this land was intimately related to events at the Tirupati-Tirumala temple complex.

While it is impossible to state definitively the sectarian affiliation of the 308 donees, a high proportion of recipients seem to have had an established association with either Tirupati-Tirumala or Ahobilam, two major centers of Śrīvaishnava religious activity. Ahobilam was and is the location of an important Śrīvaishnava *matha* that was situated in the region of Andhra along the Vijayanagara Empire’s perennially contested northern border (see maps 3 and 4). Of the 308 donees mentioned, 37 are named “Tirumala” or some variant thereof, while 23 are identified as sons of a Tirumala; 3 individuals fall into both categories, that is, are named Tirumala and are sons of a Tirumala. Indeed Tirumala is the most common name in the inscription, with roughly 20 percent of the total number of recipients either having that name or having a father with that name. In addition, of the 308 mentioned, 10 are named “Ahobala” while 6 are sons of an Ahobala. Three of the recipients are named “Veṅkaṭa,” after the deity at Tirupati, while 4 are “Perumal,” a common Tamil epithet for the deity. Adding these names to the 57 who are either Tirumala or sons of a Tirumala brings the total percentage of recipients who seem to have had an established affiliation with a major Śrīvaishnava religious center to 26.

While we must be cautious about presuming that place or deity names indicate sectarian affiliation, the numbers are striking. It is possible that these were Mādhva Brahmins, who took the name Tirumala in deference to the deity installed there. While there is not much evidence of an alliance between Mādhvas and Śrīvaishnavas prior to Vyāsatīrtha, who seems to have been responsible for establishing it, Mādhvas may have worshipped in Śrīvaishnava shrines prior to this period. Indeed, if Somanātha’s biography is accurate, Vyāsatīrtha himself went to Kanchi to study after his first guru died and before he left for the established Mādhva *matha* at Mulbagal. His Mulbagal guru, Śripādarāja, then urged him to take up residence at Chandragiri, sixteen kilometers south of the Tirupati-Tirumala temple complex. Perhaps this was a well-worn path, despite the lack of evidence of any Mādhva presence at Tirupati prior to Vyāsatīrtha’s receipt of the house sites in 1524.

A second possible way of reading these names is that these were Śrīvaishnava converts to Mādhvavism. As discussed in previous chapters, conversion from one
school of Brahminical Vedānta thought (and related ritual practices) to another did not necessarily require the radical rejection of one’s former identity and affiliations. However, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, significant doctrinal and ritual differences did persist between Mādhvas and Śrīvaiṣṇavas, despite their collaboration at large temples; Vyāsatīrtha was not only conscious of these differences, he emphasized them in his polemical writings. Vyāsatīrtha likely addressed these polemical writings not only to his own followers but also to the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, in an effort to convince them of the unique correctness of Mādhva Vedānta. It is therefore possible that Vyāsatīrtha established this agrahāra to welcome new Śrīvaiṣṇava, and perhaps even Śmārtas, members who had been so convinced to his community.

But given what we know about Mādhva-Śrīvaiṣṇava relations in this period, that is, that they were both collaborative and competitive, it is also plausible that Vyāsatīrtha was establishing a different kind of Brahminical space, in which sectarian divisions would be less significant. In this scenario, Vyāsatīrtha was giving land shares to Brahmins who would remain Śrīvaiṣṇava in orientation. However, the purpose of Vyāsatīrtha’s gift was to encourage the two sectarian communities to develop their working relationship. Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s 1524 gift of confiscated house sites enabled Vyāsatīrtha to make a significant inroad into the Śrīvaiṣṇava-controlled temples at Tirupati. This may have required him to smooth things over by giving some land back to important community members in order to inaugurate a new era of religious collaboration with this locally prominent group. Indeed, the emphasis the inscription places on the Vedic recitation skills of the recipients may indicate that Vyāsatīrtha was privileging Vedic religiosity precisely to override those sectarian divisions among the recipients that were based on Vedānta ideology and guru-śiṣya lineages.

The Vedic orientation of Vyāsatīrtha’s gift also may have consolidated a special relationship between Mādhvas and the more Sanskritic, Vedic branch of Śrīvaiṣṇavism, later called the Vaṭakalais or “Northernners.” In establishing a multisectarian agrahāra in nearby territory that emphasized traditional Vedic learning, Vyāsatīrtha may have been advocating for Vedic recitation at the Tirupati temples and consolidating an alliance with the emerging Vaṭakalai branch of the Śrīvaiṣṇava school. As mentioned above, the place name “Ahobila,” featured in the names of many of the recipients of shares in the agrahāra, was a center for the more Sanskritic/Veda-oriented form of Śrīvaiṣṇavism.

A final interesting feature of the 1526 Kamalapur copper plate inscriptions is that Vyāsatīrtha gave land shares in the agrahāra to the three sons of the prominent Viṭṭhala worshipper and Kannada devotional singer Purandaradāsa. While Vyāsatīrtha may have been trying to highlight the vernacular side of Mādhvaism in this gift and, thereby, cultivate popular awareness of the tradition’s teachings, it is important to note that Purandaradāsa was a Brahmin, as many members of the Haridāsakūṭa seem to have been. This inscription makes that status very clear by
describing Purandaradāsa’s sons’ Vedic education and by mentioning the fact that
they were “twice-born.” Thus, Vṛṣṭāṭīrtha’s inclusion of Purandaradāsa’s sons in
the agrahāra may have been an attempt to highlight the Mādhva sect’s inclusion
of vernacular, popular, and accessible forms of devotion but still link those forms
very clearly to the Vedic Brahminical power structure. Such a gesture may have
simultaneously aligned Vṛṣṭāṭīrtha with the Veda-oriented Vatakalai Śrīvaiṣṇavas
and showcased to the court the Mādhva sect’s lack of factionalism between its own
Sanskrit and vernacular traditions.74
Even if Vṛṣṭāṭīrtha’s inclusion of Purandaradāsa’s sons in the allocation of shares
in the agrahāra was not a way of taking sides in the Śrīvaiṣṇavas’ intrasectarian
rivalry, it is of historical significance. By installing the sons of one of the most
prominent Viṭṭhala worshippers of that time in the region of Andhra, Vṛṣṭāṭīrtha
imported a new Vaiṣṇava cult. Not only did the Viṭṭhala cult have a distinctively
Mādhva heritage but Viṭṭhala was also one of Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s favored deities. The
worship of Viṭṭhala at the capital became increasingly important for the Tuluvas,
with Viṭṭhala eventually replacing the Śaiva deity, Virūpākṣa, as the divine signatory
of all royal inscriptions. Because Viṭṭhala was significant at home and Venkatesvara
abroad, synchronizing the worship of these two Vaiṣṇava deities made sense.75
Vṛṣṭāṭīrtha’s gift to Purandaradāsa’s sons likely helped to bring this about.
Thus, we should read Vṛṣṭāṭīrtha’s founding of the agrahāra in light of both
his activities at Tirupati and his relations with the Vijayanagara court. Vṛṣṭāṭīrtha
played a pivotal role in the implementation of several features of the king’s agenda
in southern Andhra. By investing in regions associated with the Tirupati temple
complex and by infusing the temple coffers there with significant amounts of cash,
he helped to forge new economic and social relations between different labor com-
munities in the region. These new relations reflected the values, aspirations, and
functional apparatus of Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s rule and thereby linked this region to the
state in a variety of symbolic and practical ways. Furthermore, by helping to im-
port the cult of Viṭṭhala into southern Andhra, Vṛṣṭāṭīrtha established a cultural
link between religious practices at the capital and in Tirupati. Finally, by sharing
his wealth with the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, he demonstrated his willingness to work with his
sectarian rivals when the king required it. But all of these benefits to the king were
also beneficial to Vṛṣṭāṭīrtha and Mādhvaism, which now spread into new regions
and had obtained a firm foothold in the most important Vaiṣṇava shrine in South
India. Thus, by reallocating material wealth to forge a working relationship with
the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, Vṛṣṭāṭīrtha gained greater prominence for his sect.

CONCLUSION
An overview of Vṛṣṭāṭīrtha’s material exchanges with the Śrīvaiṣṇavas indicates
that he collaborated with this group to mutual benefit. The Tuluva dynasty’s
favoring of the Śrīvaishṇavas was due to several factors, some of which were beyond Vyāsatīrtha’s control and others of which he could use to implicate Mādhva Brahmins. The southern Śrīvaishṇava faction’s support of various forms of non-Brahmin participation in religious festivals, its use of Tamil in temple liturgy, and its proselytization efforts across caste lines were distinct features of this Śrīvaishṇava community that enjoyed a broad appeal. It was partly this appeal that seems to have initially attracted Vijayanagara patronage. While some of these Śrīvaishṇava activities were sect specific, others could be augmented by Mādhva collaboration. These included the Śrīvaishṇava theologization of the Rāmāyaṇa, which established an isomorphic relationship between Rāma and the Vijayanagara king and cultivated the popular worship of various Rāmāyaṇa deities associated with the region around the imperial capital. Still other, more incidental factors for lavish Vijayanagara support of Śrīvaishṇavism included the serendipitous location of these Śrīvaishṇava shrines in a region that was becoming of increasing strategic significance for the Vijayanagara Empire. Here, Vyāsatīrtha could offer little by way of competition, but he could use his collaboration with the Śrīvaishṇavas and with the court to spread awareness of Mādhvaism into Tamil- and Telugu-speaking regions through donations to historically Śrīvaishṇava-dominated temples there.

Thus, Vyāsatīrtha deserves credit for the deft manner in which he responded to historical realities in ways that benefited his sect. By consolidating relations with the Śrīvaishṇavas through donations to their temples and by possibly including them in Brahmin settlements he formed, Vyāsatīrtha at once increased Śrīvaishṇavism’s prestige and publicized various features of his own community. He also helped to fuse various regional forms of Vaiṣṇava worship at large temple complexes into a big tent Vaiṣṇavism that was attractive to Vijayanagara patrons for its ability to reach out to a variety of publics. In these ways, Vyāsatīrtha’s donative acts—both those that were by royal decree and those that he undertook independently—consolidated Vyāsatīrtha’s relations with the Vijayanagara court.

Perhaps because of his cultivation of stronger ties between the two sectarian communities, Vyāsatīrtha is typically praised in inscriptions of both the rāyasāsana and šilaśāsana type as “Vaiṣṇava-āgama-siddhānta-sthāpana” or “the establisher of the correct philosophical position among traditions of Viṣṇu worship.”76 This title, on the one hand, could be emphasizing Vyāsatīrtha’s sectarian identity by implying that Mādhva siddhānta in particular is the correct philosophical form of Vaiṣṇavism. On the other hand, it could also be praising Vyāsatīrtha for establishing a more generic Vaiṣṇava position, rooted in philosophy (siddhānta) and tradition (āgama) but common to all Vaiṣṇavas.77 In this sense, he was the establisher of Vaiṣṇavism, both philosophically, through his polemical texts, and practically, through his multifaceted religious collaboration with other Vaiṣṇava groups. Read in this way, this moniker may highlight the role that Vyāsatīrtha’s alliance with the
Śrīvaiśṇavas played in the eventual exclusion of Śaiva Śmārtas from royal patronage over the course of the Tuḷuva dynasty.

In fact, carvings on Vyāsatīrtha’s tomb, located on an island in the Tungabhadra River, approximately three kilometers downriver from the Viṭṭhala temple and approximately half a kilometer to the northeast of the royal village of Anegondi,7 seem to attest to Vyāsatīrtha’s role as a Vaishṇava synthesizer of various forms of Viṣṇu worship (see map 6). This island is known locally as “Navabṛndāvana,” for the nine Mādhva saints whose tombs, including Vyāsatīrtha’s, are located there (see fig. 6). These shrines, called either “bṛndāvanas” or “samādhis” by Mādhvas, are understood to house the mortal remains of these saints, who are thought to have entered into samādhi or a sustained meditative state. Although these saints are understood to have transcended this world, their advanced spiritual aptitude enables their abiding presence in the shrines, making the shrines a focus of pilgrimage and veneration. Vyāsatīrtha’s bṛndāvana, which is situated in the middle of the eight other tombs of prominent Mādhva saints, is the most elaborately decorated. It is distinctive today for the partial remains of the mandapa still in front of it and is encircled at its base by a ring of linked elephants and at its top by carved tulasi leaves that also resemble a crown (see fig. 4 for the clearest depiction of this;
actual tulasi plants grow out of the top of all nine of the shrines). Vyāsatīrtha’s brndāvana is also directly across from a small Hanumān shrine, still in worship.

On the four faces of Vyāsatīrtha’s brndāvana are different depictions of Viṣṇu’s forms. The front of the shrine depicts Rāma, seated with Sītā and flanked by Lakṣmaṇa on the right side and a small, kneeling Hanumān next to a standing figure on the left.

That standing figure, whose hands are folded in the aṅjali mudrā indicating devotion, is an elite male devotee but not an ascetic. His headdress suggests that he is a nobleman, possibly the king, underscoring again the entombed maṭhādhipati’s royal connections (see figs. 4 and 5 above).

The next side, if one proceeds clockwise around the square-shaped tomb, has an image of Viṭṭhala (see fig. 2 above), followed by an image of Narasiṃha and, finally, by an image of Kṛṣṇa in his infant form (see figs. 7–9).

As we have seen, Mādhvas under Vyāsatīrtha’s direction were associated with shrines dedicated to all of these forms of Viṣṇu. Their appearance together on Vyāsatīrtha’s brndāvana is distinct, as such extensive imagery is not found on the other samādhi shrines on the island. In addition to highlighting Vyāsatīrtha’s historical prominence among Mādhva leaders, this imagery also suggests that one of

FIGURE 7. Vyāsatīrtha’s brndāvana, side with Narasiṃha image and side with Bāla-Kṛṣṇa image.
Vyāsatīrtha’s main legacies for the Mādhva sect was his role in unifying different forms of Vaiṣṇavism, even as he also advocated for his system’s supremacy.81

Vyāsatīrtha’s reputation as both the architect of a trans-sectarian Vaiṣṇava alliance and as the arbiter of correct Vaiṣṇava Vedānta thought is also evident in how Vyāsatīrtha is remembered by subsequent generations of Vaiṣṇava groups. Hawley’s research on the concept of the four sampradāyas in the Vallabhite community indicates that Vyāsatīrtha plays an important role in how this North Indian Vaiṣṇava sect understands both its own lineage and the relationship between different Vaiṣṇava groups. While the composition date and authorship are uncertain, a text called the Sampradāyapradīpa or The Lamp of the [Vaiṣṇava] Tradition, written by a Vallabhite community member, “represents itself as having been composed in Brindāvan in . . . 1553 or possibly 1554 C.E.” and forges a connection between the Vallabha or Puṣṭimārga Sampradāya and that of Vyāsatīrtha/Madhva.82 At one point in the narrative, Vallabha travels south to Vijayanagara or, as the text calls it, “Vidyānagar.”83 When Vallabha arrives, a debate between the Māyāvādis and the Tattvavādis is taking place before King Kṛṣṇadevarāya.84 The Māyāvādis are just about to win when Vallabha reverses the course of the debate by throwing out a challenge and establishing Vallabha’s form of Vedānta, Śuddhādvaita, as supreme. Not only is Vallabha subsequently
honored by Kṛṣṇadevarāya with a *kanakābhiṣeka*, or a showering with gold, and with the offering of the king’s throne but Vyāsatīrtha, who had been presiding over the debate “beseeches the younger man [Vallabha] to replace him on the sāmpradāyik throne, and thereby effectively to accept a spiritual coronation that will parallel the physical one the monarch has just promised.”

Vallabha ultimately refuses to take up Vyāsatīrtha’s mantle because the form of Vaiṣṇavism that Vyāsatīrtha espouses is distinct from the true lineage that Vallabha is meant to inherit. As Hawley puts it, the text presents the formulations of Vaiṣṇavism offered by Madhva, Rāmānuja, and Nimbāditya (Nimbārka) as “ineffective against Śaṅkara and the Māyāvādīs.” Thus, while the text establishes a connection between the different *sampradāyas* of Vaiṣṇavism, it does so in a hierarchical way that privileges Vallabha’s system. But the roles played by Vijayanagara, Kṛṣṇadevarāya, and Vyāsatīrtha in the story are intriguing. Even though Vyāsatīrtha is portrayed as deferring to Vallabha’s authority, his entitlement to choose a successor implies that Vyāsatīrtha was, until the advent of Vallabha, the arbiter of Vaiṣṇavism. His is not the most correct or truest Vaiṣṇavism but it is, in some way, connected to Vaiṣṇavism’s other forms.
This text of course reflects the concerns of a somewhat later time, place, and sect. Vyāsatīrtha may have been selected to play such a crucial role in this story because he made Mādhvaism famous in the north. Moreover, he did this in large part through his royal associations. Yet Vyāsatīrtha could also have been selected in this narrative, which at once unifies and hierarchically orders the four different sampradāyas, because he was one of the original and most prominent unifiers, the establisher of a shared tradition of Vaiṣṇava philosophy and practice, the “Vaiṣṇava-āgama-siddhānta-sthāpana.” He brought together Mādhvas and Śrīvaiṣṇavas in what seems to have been a newly close and intricate way and highlighted the potential benefits of intersectarian Vaiṣṇava collaboration. At the same time, he also used some of the Vaiṣṇava sects’ inherent similarities and shared features so as to establish his own particular sect’s system more widely and firmly.

Vyāsatīrtha’s collaboration with the Śrīvaiṣṇavas also indicates that the sectarian leader’s role in sixteenth-century South Indian society was not set in stone. An effective maṭhādhipati had to respond creatively to situations as they unfolded and be willing to collaborate with his rivals if the circumstances, such as increasing royal attention, warranted it. Vyāsatīrtha’s material exchanges with the Śrīvaiṣṇavas show his ingenious responsiveness to historic contingencies even as they also reveal what was less malleable and more constrictive about his context. For example, as we have seen, Vyāsatīrtha sometimes took advantage of the open-ended pluralism of Vaiṣṇava temples to establish sectarian institutions and practices on temple grounds. That this enabled a clearer affiliation between specific and bounded sectarian religious institutions and the more pluralistic temple’s ritual affairs is somewhat ironic. Furthermore, there were aspects of Vyāsatīrtha’s doctrinal positions that were nonnegotiable, precisely because they distinguished his tradition from that of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas. Thus, to understand better the role of doctrinal differences in Mādhva-Śrīvaiṣṇava relations in this period, we now turn to Vyāsatīrtha’s polemics against the Śrīvaiṣṇava’s form of Vedānta, Viśiṣṭādvaita or “qualified nondualism.”