



**Prabhavati C. Reddy, *Hindu Pilgrimage: Shifting Patterns of Worldview of Shri Shailam in South India***

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IN THIS STUDY of Shri Shailam, located in Andhra Pradesh, Prabhavati Reddy brings together a variety of historical and ethnographic sources to present a comprehensive account of the evolution of a prominent Shaiva pilgrimage center in South India. The wide arc of materials is crucial to the methodology of the book, which aims to place “texts in an interactive discourse” (15) with each other. The result is an erudite study of several kinds of medieval and contemporary texts (*paurāṇik*, epigraphic, topographic, and popular stories), although this interactive discourse does not characterize the ethnographic process of the book. The book’s authoritative account comes from the author’s skillful interweaving of written, sculptural, and archaeological texts rather than from a transparent interweaving of voices of living individuals whose devotions and livelihoods tie them to Shri Shailam. Pilgrimage, for instance, is interpreted as a phenomenon of “experience and consciousness” as imaged through texts rather than constructed through the subjective experiences of pilgrims. In another example (chapter 13), we learn that the major festival of Mahashivaratri at Shri Shailam includes a ritual event in which the outside tower of the main temple is draped in white cloth that is woven by the Devanga (weaver) community. At the time that Reddy witnessed it, the head of a Devanga family performed the draping, climbing the tower in the nude. Reddy interprets the ritual in the light of a wonderful story in the Devanga Purāṇa about the competing devotions of a spider, elephant, and snake for Shiva—a story that may have gained credence during Virashaiva patronage of the temple in the fifteenth century. But it is puzzling that save for a few allusions, voices from Devanga families remain indistinct in this interpretation.

The book is organized into four parts. The first part (chapters 1–3) lays out the map of the book itself. A well-grounded description of Shri Shailam, with its older name of Shri Parvata, tells readers that here Shiva goes as Mallikarjuna (“Lord of White Jasmine”) and his consort Durga is known as Bhramarambha (“Mother Bee”). Mallikar-

juna and Bhramarambha are worshipped with ritual grandeur and sectarian specificity that are part of local traditions, but this localization intertwines with Shri Shailam's location in pan-Hindu, Sanskritic mythology. Thus Shri Shailam is named and praised in the *jyotirlinga* tradition elaborated in the Skanda Puraṇa, a text that identifies the twelve sites of Shiva's manifestation across India in the form of a *jyotirlinga*, an unscalable brilliant column of light that for Shaiva devotees demonstrates Shiva's supremacy over Vishnu and other deities. The other pan-Hindu framework into which Shri Shailam has been absorbed is that of the Devi or Goddess tradition. Two particular aspects are embodied in Shri Shailam: one, Durga's manifestation as a formidable giant bee (*bhramara*), and two, Shri Shailam as a site in the *śāktā* network of primary Sati temples. The book provides a table with timelines (80) that helps the reader visualize the development of Shaivite and Shakta traditions at Shri Shailam.

In Part II (chapters 4–6), Reddy proposes that the historical development of Shri Shailam into a sacred site can be understood through a threefold process, which she identifies as idealization, materialization, and sanctification. As an idealized place, Shri Shailam is a product of various Sanskrit and Telugu *sthala-purāṇas* (place lore texts) that conceptualize it as a site of Shiva and Durga's hierophanies and human encounters with these. A key text is the twelfth- to thirteenth-century *Shrishaila Khandā*, a Sanskrit text available as an unpublished written Telugu manuscript, which maps out the sacred geography of Shri Shailam both as the cosmic mountain of Meru, as well as a *maṇḍala* (geometric diagram) with eight mountains—symbolizing the eight forms of Shiva (the five elements, the sun, the moon, and the human mind—with the Shri Parvata at the center). Reddy shows how several other texts, such as various Shaiva *purāṇas* and the thirteenth-century *Panditaradhya Caritra*, map narratives and cosmologies onto Shri Shailam's topography and demonstrates how “place becomes a mediating agency” (29) that expresses, over time, layered world views. As a place that undergoes sacred materialization, changing over time (Reddy's observations span fifteen years), Shri Shailam's boundaries of a *kṣetra* (sacred land) expand, making three regions visible. The innermost region is the *axis mundi* (the mountain of Sri Shailam, the temple complex, and immediate township); the middle region contains other local sacred sites and intersections of an important pilgrimage network—the Nallamalla hills that boast of two other famous sacred centers, Ahobilam and Tirupati. Apart from the mountain, Reddy discusses two other topographical features that “materialize” Shri Shailam's sacrality. The river Krishna whose flow around the region's plateau is checked by a triad of hills forms an inland body of water called the *pātāla gaṅgā* (the underworld Ganga). However, when Reddy discusses the subterranean confluence of rivers, it would have helped if she had clearly distinguished between actual geography and ones imagined by *paurāṇik* texts, and further, if she had critically addressed the question of visibility and invisibility in Hindu sacred geography that underlies her findings. Similarly, a reader wishes for ethnographic conversation on the fascinating account of the *sthala vrkṣa* (place tree) that Reddy provides. Here it is a banyan tree, declared dead in 1985, and “replaced by a new one” (48) by the temple management. (The Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department has since instructed temple managements “to adopt cloning to preserve the *Sthala Vriksham* or tree unique to each temple”; see <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/sthala-vriksham-to-be-preserved-through-cloning/article6656463>. ece.) Reddy's description of the middle and outer spatiality of Shri Shailam is equally

vivid. The sixth and final chapter of Part II illustrates how different sectarian Shaivisms engage this sacred geography through ritual and pilgrimage.

Part III (chapters 7–10) studies the history of Shri Shailam through diverse Shaiva orders over fifteen hundred years, a history that mirrors the development of Shaivism itself. It begins with references to Shri Shailam in the Mahabharata, and takes us through the seventh century, when Kapalikas (esoteric Shaivite traditions) were prominent. Through a visual analysis of the temple enclosure, Reddy shows how Shri Shailam became important for the Kalamukhas and their monastic establishments during the tenth century. Between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, under the patronage of the Kakatiya kings, Shri Shailam began to crystallize its identity as a Smarta Shaivite center. (Reddy attributes this crystallization to the aforementioned Shrishaila Khandā, which she discusses in detail.) One of the singularities of this text and concomitant phase in the emergence of Shri Shailam is that it established the manifestation of the great Devi of the Durga Mahatmya as Bhramarambha of Shri Shailam. The diversity in Shaiva “ownerships” of Shri Shailam continued through the thirteenth century through Shaiva Siddhanta lineages, which brought a distinct *āgamik* identity to Shri Shailam through temple building and the establishment of ritual procedures for *lingam* worship. Reddy provides complex portraits of the distinctive and influential phase of the Virashaivas after the thirteenth century.

Part IV (chapters 11–13) concludes with a modern history of Shri Shailam, which Reddy traces against key political developments of the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. After discussing Shri Shailam’s dilapidated fate in the twilight of the Vijayanagara dynasty and during the British colonial regime, Reddy brings us to the most modern era of Shri Shailam’s history when the Endowment Department of Andhra Pradesh (EDAP) took over the temple’s management. The temple complex and township have since been systematically transformed through architectural rearrangements and new annual festival regimens, creating in effect a Shri Shailam that continues to consecrate a divine realm of timeless myths but also to cater to a civic realm of state-directed imperatives for reaping a tourist economy. The major festival tradition of Mahashivaratri displays the intermeshing of the divine and civic agenda.

This magisterial study of Shri Shailam, even with its ethnographic limitations, adds a wealth of information to the archive of Hindu pilgrimage studies—where studies of Shri Shailam are scant. It persuasively demonstrates that a diachronic, layered, and intertextual reading can widen our understanding of the enmeshed theologies and politics of ancient sacred sites.

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