

Vaishnavism as Fine Literature

Yale University (New Haven, CT)

May 27-29, 2022

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Śrīvaiṣṇavism as Poetic Framework: Perspectives from Kṛṣṇadevarāya's Āmuktamālyada

The Āmuktamālyada, a Telugu poem composed by King Kṛṣṇadevarāya (r.1509-1529), is often considered an innovative text in its being the first text to bring the Tamil devotional world of the Ālvārs into Telugu. Kṛṣṇadevarāya's innovation is often explained as stemming from his personal devotion and desire to elucidate the tenets of his own Vaiṣṇava faith. The Āmuktamālyada, however, is not considered a religious text, and the connection between the text's poetic form and religious content is seldom examined. In this talk, I will focus on the Āmuktamālyada's most doctrinal section, its retelling of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa's story of Khāṇḍikya and Keśidhvaja. Analyzing the context, content, and form of this story, I argue that Śrīvaiṣṇava discourse deeply influenced Kṛṣṇadevarāya's retelling, shaping everything from narrative content and structure through poetics and vocabulary. I argue that in the Āmuktamālyada Śrīvaiṣṇavism is an all-encompassing ideological and poetic framework which subordinates, at time displaces, many of the pre-existing literary conventions, primarily those associated with the domain of the Sanskrit court poem (mahākāvya).