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**Performing Satyabhāmā:
Text, Context, Memory and Mimesis in Telugu-Speaking South India**

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स्त्रिय ऊचुः ।

कस्मादीशेनसंयोगंप्राप्यवेश्यात्वमागताः...ब्रूहि तपोधन ।

striya ūcuḥ:

kasmādīśenasamyogamprāpyaveśyātvamāgatāḥ...brūhi tapodhana

The women spoke:

How did we, having attained union with God, obtain the status of "prostitute"? Tell us, accomplished one.

-Matsyamahāpurāṇam, 70. 17

for

*those members of the hereditary dance and music communities of South India
who passed away while this thesis was under preparation*

and

my family

Abstract

Hindu religious culture has a rich and long-standing performance tradition containing many genres and regional types that contribute significantly to an understanding of the living vitality of the religion. Because the field of religious studies has focused on texts, the assumption exists that these are primary, and performances based on them are mere enactments and therefore derivative. This thesis will challenge this common assumption by arguing that performances themselves can be *constitutive* events in which religious worldviews, social histories, and group and personal identities are created or re-negotiated. In this work, I examine the history of performance cultures (understood both as genres and the groups that develop and perform them) in the Telugu-speaking regions of South India from the sixteenth century to the present in order to elucidate the cross-fertilization among various performance spheres over time.

My specific focus is on the figure of Satyabhāmā (lit. True Woman or Woman of Truth), the favourite wife of the god Kṛṣṇa. Satyabhāmā represents a range of emotions, which makes her character popular with dramatists and other artists in the Telugu-speaking regions of South India where poets composed hundreds of performance-texts about her, and several caste groups have enacted her character through narrative drama.

The dissertation is composed of four substantive parts – text, context, memory, and mimesis. The first part explores the figure of Satyabhāmā in the *Mahābhārata* and in three Sanskrit Purāṇic texts. The second examines the courtly traditions of poetry and village performances in the Telugu language, where Satyabhāmā is innovatively portrayed through aesthetic categories. The third is based on ethnographic work with women of the contemporary *kalāvantula* (*devadāsī*) community and looks at the ways in which they identify with Satyabhāmā and other female aesthetic archetypes (*nāyikās*). The final section is based on fieldwork with the *smārta* Brahmin male community in Kuchipudi village, where men continue to perform mimetic representations of Satyabhāmā through a performative modality known as *strī-veṣam* (“guise of a woman”).

Abstract

La culture religieuse hindoue renferme de longue date une tradition de performance dont les nombreux genres et types régionaux contribuent de façon importante à notre compréhension de la vitalité de cette religion. Dû au fait que les études religieuses se sont à ce jour concentrées surtout sur l'étude de textes, on présuppose généralement que ces derniers sont de première importance et que les performances qui y sont reliées ne sont que des représentations et, en conséquence, ne sont que dérivatives. La présente thèse remet en cause cette présupposition en suggérant plutôt que les performances peuvent constituer des événements *constitutifs* au cours desquels des visions religieuses du monde, des histoires sociales et des identités personnelles et collectives sont créées ou renégociées. J'examine dans le présent ouvrage l'histoire des cultures de la performance (aussi bien en tant que genres qu'en tant que groupes développant et pratiquant ces derniers) dans les régions de langue Telugu de l'Inde du Sud du seizième siècle à aujourd'hui, dans le but de clarifier l'inter-fertilisation avec le temps de diverses sphères de performance.

Plus particulièrement, je me concentre sur la figure de Satyabhāmā (littéralement Vraie Femme ou Femme de Vérité), la femme préférée du dieu Kṛṣṇa. Etant donné que Satyabhāmā représente tout un éventail d'émotions, son personnage est très populaire auprès des dramaturges et autres artistes du monde de langue Telugu de l'Inde du Sud, où des poètes ont composé des centaines de textes de performance à son sujet, et où un certain nombre de castes ont personnifié son personnage au moyen de scènes narratives.

La présente dissertation comprend quatre parties principales: texte, contexte, mémoire et mimesis. La première partie examine la figure de Satyabhāmā dans le *Mahābhārata* et dans trois textes Purāṇiques sanskrits. La seconde partie se penche sur les traditions de poésie de cour et de performances de village en langue Telugu, dans lesquelles Satyabhāmā est représentée de façon innovatrice au moyen de catégories esthétiques. La troisième partie, fondée sur des recherches ethnographiques effectuées auprès de femmes de la communauté contemporaine des *kalāvantulu* (*devadāsī*), traite des manières dont ces femmes s'identifient à Satyabhāmā et à d'autres archétypes esthétiques féminins (*nāyikās*). La dernière partie résulte d'études de terrain menées auprès de la communauté de brahmines masculins des *smārta* dans le village de Kuchipudi, où les hommes perpétuent la représentation mimétique de Satyabhāmā au moyen d'un mode de performance appelé *strī-veṣam* ("allure d'une femme").

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Abstract (Français).....	ii
Maps.....	v
List of Figures.....	ix
Note on Transliteration.....	xi
Acknowledgements.....	xii

INTRODUCTION.....	1
-------------------	---

PART I: TEXTS

Locating Satyabhāmā in Sanskrit Textual Tradition

CHAPTER ONE

Satyabhāmā as Female Archetype in Epic and Purāṇic Texts.....	18
---	----

PART II: CONTEXTS

Literary and Performative Representations of Satyabhāmā in Andhra Pradesh

CHAPTER TWO

The Popularization of Satyabhāmā in South Indian Poetry and Performance-Texts.....	41
---	----

CHAPTER THREE

Performance Genres of Andhra Pradesh: Representing Caste and Gender Identities.....	73
--	----

PART III: MEMORY

Everyday Lives and Identities of Kalāvantula Women in Coastal Andhra

CHAPTER FOUR

Situating <i>Devadāsī</i> Culture in Andhra Pradesh.....	92
--	----

CHAPTER FIVE

Defiance, Memory, Identity: <i>Devadāsīs</i> Invoke the Image of Satyabhāmā and Other Female Archetypes.....	131
---	-----

PART IV: MIMESIS

Men Articulate Womanhood: Satyabhāmā in the Kuchipudi Tradition

CHAPTER SIX:

Men Perform Satyabhāmā: Gynemimetic Representation Among Smārta Brahmins in Kuchipudi Village.....	163
---	------------

CONCLUSION.....	198
------------------------	------------

Appendices

1. Kṛṣṇa as Rājamannār.....	203
2. Satyabhāmā in Mithila, Assam and Bengal.....	209
3. The Tañjāvūr Brothers, the Jāvaḷi and Colonial Modernity in the Tanjavur Court.....	216
4. Translated Examples of Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Jāvaḷis Performed by Kalāvantula Women.....	231
5. Ethical Approval Certificate.....	237

Figures.....	238
---------------------	------------

Bibliography.....	269
--------------------------	------------



Map 1: Districts of Modern Andhra Pradesh (South-Eastern India)



Map 2: East Godavari District (Andhra Pradesh)



Map 3: West Godavari District (Andhra Pradesh)



Map 4: Krishna District (Andhra Pradesh)

List of Figures

1.	P.S. Ratna Bai as Satyabhāmā holding a sword in the Tamil film <i>Bhama Vijayam</i> (1934)	238
2.	VCD jacket for the Telegu film "Dipavali" (1960), showing the popular actress Savithri as Satyabhāmā, holding a bow	239
3.	Bontalakoti Jagannadam, one of the last Tūrupu Bhāgavatam artists from the Godavari delta as Satyabhāmā in <i>Bhāmākalāpam</i>	240
4.	Chindula Yellamma with her troupe, c.1988	241
5.	Saride Manikyam at her present home in Kapileswarapuram, East Godavari, January 2002	242
6.	Madanagopālasvāmi Temple, Ballipadu (view from South side)	243
7.	Śrī Rukmiṇī-Satyabhāmā Sameta Śrī Madanagopālasvāmi, Ballipadu, West Godavari	244
8.	Marampalli Induvadana and Chittajallu Vaidehi, Hyderabad, 1958.....	245
9.	The late Annabhatttula Buli Venkataratnam in a <i>meḷam</i> performance of <i>Gollakalāpam</i> (c.1950?)	246
10.	Kuntīmādhavasvāmi, Pithapuram, East Godavari.....	247
11.	The <i>mahāmaṇḍapam</i> of the Kuntīmādhavasvāmi Temple, Pithapuram	248
12.	Saride Seshachalam performing a <i>jāvali</i> during a <i>meḷam</i> performance at her home in Duvva, West Godavari, March 2002	249
13.	Maddula Janakamma depicts one of the <i>rati-hastas</i> depicting sexual union while singing a <i>padam</i>	250
14.	Maddula Venkataratnam performs a <i>jāvali</i>	251
15.	A "red-light" street on the town of Peddapuram, where descendents of the <i>kalāvantulu</i> live and work.....	252
16.	Devulapalli Vīrarāghavamūrti Śāstri, author of <i>Abhinaya Svayambodhini</i>	253

17.	Saride Anusuya accompanies her sisters by singing and playing the <i>tālam</i> during a <i>meḷam</i> performance at her home in Duvva, West Godavari, March 2002	254
18.	Saride Maithili performing the <i>jāvaḷi</i> “ <i>cēragu māse</i> ” during a <i>meḷam</i> performance at her home in Duvva, West Godavari, March 2002	255
19.	Saride Varahalu sings a <i>padyam</i> from her notebook during <i>meḷam</i> performance at her home in Duvva, West Godavari, March 2002	256
20.	Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma outside his home in Kuchipudi, June 1995.....	257
21.	Vedantam Parvatisam reciting <i>Bhāmākalāpam</i> in front of the Rāmaliṅgeśvarasvāmi temple, Kuchipudi, June 1995.....	258
22.	Chintavari Meḷam, Kuchipudi, c. 1952	259
23.	A performance of <i>Bhāmākalāpam</i> outside the shrine to the Goddess Bālatripurasundarī in Kuchipudi village, artist unknown, ca. 1940s (?).....	260
24.	Contemporary portrait of Siddhendrayogi (with Kṛṣṇa and Satyabhāmā in upper left corner)	261
25.	Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma as Satyabhāmā in front of the Bālatripurasundarī shrine.....	262
26.	Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma in <i>Bhāmākalāpam</i> , ca. 1960	263
27.	Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma in <i>Bhāmākalāpam</i> , with Chinta Krishnamurti in <i>sūtradhāri-veṣam</i> , ca. 1960	264
28.	Kṛṣṇa as Rājamannār, with Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā, Cōla period, 12 th Century	265
29.	Kṛṣṇa with Devī (Satyabhāmā?), Cōla period, 11 th -12 th Century	266
30.	The <i>utsava-mūrti</i> of Śrī Rājagopālasvāmi, Mannargudi	267
31.	Śrī Rājagopālasvāmi, Mannargudi, flanked by Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā (Popular calendar print)	268

Note on Language, Transliteration, and Names

Short Dravidian vowels (ə and ɐ) occurring in Telugu words are marked as ě and ǝ. The more common Sanskrit vowels e and o are left unmarked. Generally, Sanskrit names ending in a long vowel are marked as short in Telugu literary practice (Satyabhāma and not Satyabhāmā as in Sanskrit). However, for the sake of consistency, I have avoided this convention, and all Sanskrit-derived names ending in long vowels appear as they would in standard Sanskrit transliteration. The exception is when transliterated passages from Telugu texts or their titles are cited.

Words occurring in Tamil contexts (*ālvār*, *tēvaraṭṭiyāl*, *naṭṭuvaṇār*) are transliterated according to the Tamil Lexicon of the University of Madras (MTL).

Place-names are indicated in standardized or simplified form without diacritical marks. The common (sometimes Anglicized) spellings are used for most major towns and even commonly cited villages (Kuchipudi, Ballipadu, Vijayawada). Names of persons from premodern South India are spelled with diacritical marks (Kṛṣṇadevarāya, Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha), while standard English spellings (without diacritical marks) are used for the names of persons who flourished from the nineteenth century onward (Yamini Purnatilakam instead of Yāminī Pūrṇatilakam).

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Introduction

Hindu religious culture has a rich and long-standing performance tradition containing many genres and regional types that contribute significantly to an understanding of the living vitality of Hinduism. Hinduism foregrounds the idea of performance and ritual, and it is this corporeal, emotional and sense-oriented aspect that informs and engenders religious praxis. Because the field of religious studies has focused on texts, the assumption exists that they are primary, and that performances based on them are mere enactments, and therefore derivative. This thesis will challenge this common assumption by arguing that performances themselves can be *constitutive* events in which religious worldviews, social histories, and group and personal identities are created or re-negotiated.

In this work, I will examine the history of performance cultures (understood both as genres and the groups that develop and perform them) in the Telugu-speaking regions of South India from the sixteenth century to the present in order to elucidate the cross-fertilization among various performance spheres over time. These include performances within the temple and its adjacent pavilions, the streets on which processions of the deity take place, the royal courts and private homes. The performances themselves range from ritual dance to the enactment of epic narratives to acts of blessing and entertainment of guests during rites-of-passage such as marriages. Because of the cross-fertilization between religious and courtly performance domains, these need to be studied together.

This historical analysis foregrounds the changing role that performance plays in four larger cultural transformations with reference to: (1) the development of poetic and performance-based genres in the temple and the court; (2) the relation of these to public and private spheres; (3) the relation of performance culture to caste, community and gender identities; and (4) the relation of the region (Telugu-speaking South India)¹ to dynastic patronage, colonialism and nationalism.

My specific focus will be on the figure of Satyabhāmā (lit. True Woman or Woman of Truth), the favourite wife of Kṛṣṇa. Satyabhāmā is important in Sanskrit religious literature, specifically in the epics and Purāṇas. These Brahmanic texts typically present us with a bifurcated typology of womanhood. At one end of the continuum is the model

of the *pativratā*, the wife who is modest, loyal, self-sacrificing, morally sound, incorruptible and above all chaste. At the other end is the *veśyā* (courtesan, prostitute or other “public woman”), who is aggressive, without verbal reticence, and has a ravenous sexual appetite. The *pativratā* is revered and culturally approbated; the *veśyā* is vilified, distanced, and sometimes demonized. Between these two extremes, there are instances of their reversal,² as well as various kinds of mediating figures.

One of the most important mediating figures is Satyabhāmā. As an archetype, she simultaneously embodies aspects of both the ideal wife, the *pativratā*, and the strong, willful woman, the *veśyā*, but without the latter’s sexual independence. As such, she represents a range of emotions, which makes her character interesting to explore. A beautiful woman, she attracts Kṛṣṇa and becomes his favourite wife, but because of her pride and ego, she can be extremely jealous if she perceives her co-wives as competitors for his affections. Because of this emotional complexity, Satyabhāmā became very popular with poets and dramatists in religious and courtly circles in the medieval period. They imaged her as the eight types of heroine (*nāyikā*) and aestheticized her relationship with Kṛṣṇa according to the classifications emotional states (*bhāvas*) found in classical literary theory. This was particularly true in the Telugu-speaking regions, where poets composed hundreds of performance-texts about her and several caste groups have enacted her character through narrative drama traditions. Men as well as women have identified with her character. All this contributes significantly to the idea of performance as a constitutive event both for the performer and audience. These three paradigms of womanhood – the *pativratā* especially as a Brahmanical cultural ideal but also the *nāyikā* and the *veśyā* – are archetypes for real women. These performance traditions had pedagogical functions and moulded social reality, even as they drew from society. Sandra Robinson argues, for instance, that although mythic images “provide models for social values, they also reflect models of society.” (Robinson 1985, 182)

Besides mediating the categories of *pativratā* and *veśyā*, Satyabhāmā is a mediating figure in other senses as well. Representations of her character provide fertile ground for socio-cultural and religious mediations between texts and performances and upper-caste male and female artists.

This study will focus on the religious, social and performative contexts of two such groups: a community of women called *kalāvantulu* (also known by the more generic term *devadāsī*) from coastal Andhra; and *smārta*³ Brahmin men from the village of Kuchipudi in the Krishna district. By looking both to the general history of performance culture in South India and to the specific traditions associated with Satyabhāmā, I hope to contribute to the understanding of performance at the intersection of religious and courtly traditions.

Boundaries of this Project

In this thesis, I have examined only religious narrative performance traditions about the figure of Satyabhāmā. I recognize that there are many other kinds of religious performance traditions in central and coastal Andhra, but they are beyond the scope of this study. Although I have used a selected number of texts in my analysis of genres, I have not studied all the possible candidates for inclusion under the various typologies I have developed, nor have I done an exhaustive translation and study of the individual works in this enormous corpus. This type of work awaits future research.

My ethnography includes interviews with representatives from all the relevant performing communities, with the exception of the Dalit *māḍiga* community that performs Cindu Bhāgavatam. I have not conducted ethnographic work with this community because they do not include performances about Satyabhāmā in their theatre repertoire. Nevertheless, I still discuss them in Chapter Three because of their connections to the overall culture of performance in central and coastal Andhra Pradesh. I feel that *māḍiga* insights on these and related topics might prove informative, and this is something I will explore in the near future.

Finally, in my work on *kalāvantulu* (*devadāsīs*) of coastal Andhra, I examine a regional history and therefore do not revisit the pan-Indian history of *devadāsī* reform that is characteristic of most works on the subject. In any case the “pan-Indian” approach to *devadāsī* studies has some methodological problems that are discussed below.

Literature Review

Studies on Satyabhāmā in Telugu literature have been rare, a fact that is surprising given her popularity in regional representations of religious, literary and performative culture. P.N. Parvati Devi is, to my knowledge, the only person to have critically examined literary motifs related to Satyabhāmā narratives in classical Telugu literature in her recent book in Telugu, *Āndhra Sāhityamulo Satyabhāma Pātra Citraṇamu* (1999)⁴. Her work highlights some of the intricacies of the early Telugu Purāṇic and *kāvya*-oriented descriptions of Satyabhāmā. However, Parvati Devi does not work on the content of the later genres that I am calling *kalāpam*, nor does she examine the aesthetic and cultural contexts of the Tanjavur court and its role in the aestheticization of the character of Satyabhāmā so central to later *kalāpam* texts meant for performance. With the exception of a brief discussion of the Kuchipudi tradition, her work also does not examine the relation between text and performance in Andhra, nor does it address later *kalāpam* texts composed for *devadāsī* women by Brahmin poets in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I do not wish to reiterate Parvati Devi's excellent work. Instead, I provide a history of Satyabhāmā-oriented texts in the Telugu literary context in order to set up the religio-cultural framework that provides a background to the organization and practice of Brahmin and *devadāsī* traditions of performance that I will examine in subsequent chapters. My history of genres takes into account the textual development of specific genres, supplemented by a discussion of literary genres such as Tanjavur *yakṣagāna* and *kalāpam* that travel from the literary into the performative realm.

The only other major work to deal with genres and stratifications of Telugu literature from the pre-Vijayanagara period to the twentieth century is the encyclopedic work, *Samāgra Āndhra Sāhityam* (1991) by Bhagavatula Sankara Sastri (known by his pen-name Arudra). Particularly noteworthy is volume twelve, where he analyzes several works produced in the *zamīndāri samasthānas* (feudal courts) in Andhra. Other works deal with specific genres of Telugu literature such as *yakṣagāna*. In 1956, Ganti Jogisomayaji edited a compilation of several Telugu *yakṣagānas* from the Nāyaka period in a two-volume compendium entitled *Yakṣagānamulu (Taṇjāvūru)*. This remains one of the few sources for printed editions of texts in this genre. Another work that discusses *yakṣagāna* texts is S.V. Joga Rao's *Andhra Yakṣagāna Vāṅmaya Caritra* (1961), which

also focuses on the Nāyaka period texts in this genre. In English, N. Venkata Rao's *The Southern School in Telugu Literature* (1978)⁵ also discusses *yakṣagāna* and the Telugu literary output of the Tanjavur court. Over the years, Velcheru Narayana Rao (more recently in collaboration with David Shulman) has produced a significant amount of work on a variety of Telugu genres. Together with Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Narayana Rao and Shulman have written an authoritative cultural history of Nāyaka rule in Tanjavur entitled *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nāyaka Period Tamil Nadu* (1992). Many of my comments about the aesthetic shifts represented by this period come from their pioneering study. In his more recent work, Narayana Rao has made extensive comments on the interplay between temple and court poets in medieval Andhra (Narayana Rao 1992; 1995; 2003), which have been extremely helpful for this project. In addition, the recent anthology entitled *Classical Telugu Poetry: An Anthology* (2002), prepared with Shulman is another benchmark piece that contains some of the best translations of many of the literary genres I will be examining in Chapter Two. Narayana Rao's translation of the sixteenth-century poems of Kṣetrayya that were performed by *kalāvantulu*, produced in collaboration with Shulman and Ramanujan (Ramanujan, Narayana Rao and Shulman 1994), is the finest English translation of this genre.

Perhaps the only work to examine the full range of Andhra performance traditions is Nagabhushana Sarma's *Folk Performing Arts of Andhra Pradesh* (1995). Although it is unique for the range of traditions it covers, the *kalāvantulu* are not given a space in the work but are only mentioned in passing. By contrast, Kuchipudi and even Tūrupu Bhāgavatam (the goldsmith caste's performance tradition) are dealt with in independent sections of the work.

Unlike many others who have written on "*devadāsīs*," I do not conflate the Dalit *jogati* and *basavi* traditions with the relatively upper-caste *kalāvantulu* in my work on women's performance. In addition, I do not reiterate the entire history of early travellers' reports, missionary writings and other outside perspectives on "dancing girls" in various parts of India. Most historical studies of the anti-*devadāsī* movement tend to conflate reform-oriented descriptions of the women of "nautch parties" (*nacni*) in Calcutta with the early bills put forth in the Bombay Presidency against Marathi-speaking *kalāvants* and *jogatis*⁶ with the Madras Legislative Assembly debates. At the very least they address these as part of an unbroken history of shifting attitudes towards hereditary female

artists (Jordan 1989; 1993; Sundara Raj 1993; Parker 1998; Epp 2000). In this sense, I have found Leslie Orr's critiques of the scholarly construction of the "trans-historical" *devadāsī* extremely useful (Orr 2000, 9). My study instead focuses squarely on the *kalāvantulu* communities of coastal Andhra. For this reason, my section on social reform does not address some of these large historical and cultural patterns of disenfranchisement that have been dealt with in detail by others.

The only major ethnographic accounts of the upper-caste *devadāsī* traditions continue to be the well-known works of anthropologists Amrit Srinivasan (1984) and Saskia Kersenboom (1987), dealing with the Tamilnadu region, and Frederique Marglin (1985a) dealing with Puri, Orissa. These pioneering ethnographies will remain valuable, because they document the culture of a marginal and aging group that had been ignored by scholars until recently.

Ethnographic work on the Andhra *kalāvantulu* is virtually non-existent. Only the work of K.V.L.N. Suvarchala Devi entitled *Āndhranāṭyam: The Lāsya Dance Tradition of Āndhras* [sic] (2001) contains a brief account of some aspects of Saride Manikyam's duties at the temple of Kṛṣṇa in Ballipadu. Earlier, Nataraja Ramakrishna had produced several small monographs in Telugu on the early history of female dance traditions in Andhra, but his most significant contribution in this respect is a monograph entitled *Nava Janārdanam* (1984a), which contains songs from the *navajanārdana pārijātam* performance tradition from Pithapuram preceded by an introduction to the contexts of its performance. The work of Swapnasundari (1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 1996, 1999) is certainly very sympathetic to the community but too narrowly focuses on the artistic aspects of their lives and thus effaces the other socio-cultural and historical aspects of *devadāsī* culture in coastal Andhra. In terms of the social history of Telugu-speaking *devadāsīs* during the social reform period, two somewhat biased accounts have been produced in the more general works on social reform by Kesavanarayana (1976) and V. Ramakrishna (1983). More recently, Priyadarshini Vijaisri has worked on the historical documents from the reform period that are linked to various kinds of socially ambiguous women (*bhogam*, *kalāvantulu* and *mātāṅgis*) in the Telugu-speaking regions. However, for the most part, she relies on secondary sources, and her work does not include any ethnographic data whatsoever (Vijaisri 2003).

The Kuchipudi tradition has received relatively more attention from scholars in India. Nationalist philanthropists and dancers began to write on Kuchipudi in English in the 1960s (Devi 1963; Sastry 1966; Kanakalingeswara Rao 1966, 1968). These explorations established a problematic history for Kuchipudi (which I will discuss further in chapter six). Over the next three decades, most scholars who wrote monographs or essays on the subject simply replicated these histories and assumptions about Kuchipudi's past (Naidu 1975; Dakshina Murthy 1976; and Rama Rao 1992 for example), while others focused on specific aspects of its technique in current practice (Vasanthalakshmi and Narasimhachari 1987; Venugopala Rao 1987, 1995). Notable exceptions to these dominant histories were the works of Acharyalu (1969) and Acharyalu and Sarabhai (1992), which added sections on the influence of *devadāsīs* and "temple dance" on the contemporary Kuchipudi repertoire. The work of Nataraja Ramakrishna (1968) also attempted to locate Kuchipudi in a broader performance ecology that included the *devadāsī* traditions of coastal Andhra. In 1994, Arudra wrote one of the first critical histories of the Kuchipudi tradition in which he questioned the quasi-historical status of the figure of Siddhendrayogi, the supposed "founder" of the performance tradition in Kuchipudi village. He also claimed that many of the key performance elements found in contemporary Kuchipudi might, in fact, have been borrowed from the *devadāsī* tradition (Arudra 1994). However, by far the best work on Kuchipudi to date is an unpublished dissertation from the University of Hyderabad by Anuradha Jonnalagadda entitled *Traditions and Innovations in Kuchipudi Dance* (1996a). It meticulously documents the nineteenth and twentieth century history of the form. This was followed by other shorter publications on various aspects of Kuchipudi history by the same author (Jonnalagadda 1996b, 1997, 1998). A recent work by Sunil Kothari (2001) builds upon Jonnalagadda's work and also attempts to locate some aspects of Kuchipudi in a larger performative context.

Scholarly Contributions

The scholarly contribution of this dissertation relates to three major areas of study: (1) epic and Purāṇic studies; (2) the contextualization and classification of vernacular texts and practices; and (3) ethnographic studies of performance cultures in South India. With regard to epic and Purāṇic studies, I contribute my own translations from Sanskrit of

three Purāṇic texts, as well as the first study of the character of Satyabhāmā using these sources. In terms of the study of Telugu vernacular texts and practices, I offer translations of some Telugu passages and a genre-based analysis of the relations and interactions among court poetry, images of womanhood and performance cultures that represent the figure of Satyabhāmā. This dissertation is also the first scholarly study of the various contexts in which the performance genre known as *Bhāmākalāpam* is found in central and coastal Andhra. My major scholarly contribution relates to my ethnographic work in South India. This project represents the first ethnography of the *kalāvantulu* (*devadāsī*) community of coastal Andhra, a community that is on the brink of extinction. It is one of the first academic studies that foregrounds indigenous voices and emic categories that emerge out of fieldwork with the *devadāsī* community in South India. To this end, it also contributes to an understanding of the pre-colonial and colonial performance repertoires of the community, translates for the first time a selection of songs called *jāvaḷis*, and builds a history of the anti-*devadāsī* movement led and propagated by Telugu men and women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Methodology

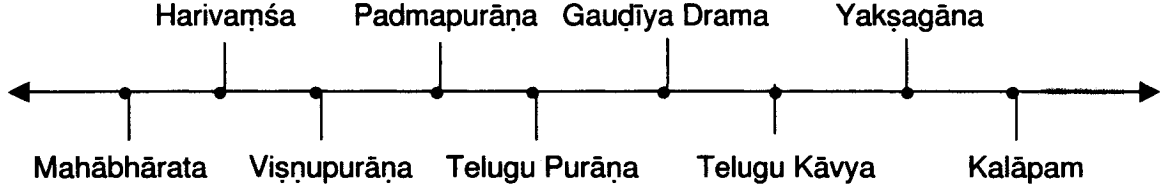
This dissertation employs two methodological apparatuses, textual analysis and ethnography. I explore the former with regard to the relation between Sanskrit and vernacular texts; the nature of the relation of text and performance in South India; epic and Purāṇic textual study; and the mapping of genres in the vernacular. With reference to the latter, I examine the challenges of data collection and the value of the anthropology of memory. I turn now to a detailed discussion of the two distinct methods involved in my work.

a) Textual Hermeneutics

The Analysis of Sanskrit and Vernacular Texts: The texts that I use for this study include background Sanskrit epics and Purāṇas that contain passages on Satyabhāmā, as well as classical Telugu literary genres and performance texts. In addition, I examine one genre (Gauḍīya drama) from another region (Mithila-Bengal-Assam) which is introduced

for comparative purposes, but discussed mainly in appendix 2. Table 1 locates some of the major texts and genres I will be using along a diachronic axis:

Table 1: *Satyabhāmā-Oriented Texts*



I do not wish to impose a hierarchy on the textual materials, with Sanskrit texts seen as the sources of all subsequent tellings of a given narrative. Working with “classical” Sanskrit texts such as epics and Purāṇas as prior to or sources of vernacular texts such as South Indian court *kāvyas*, for example, is potentially problematic. David Shulman takes note of the “all too prevalent misunderstanding of the interrelations of texts such as these, that is, a classical Sanskrit model and a “translation” or adaptation into one of the regional languages” (Shulman 1993, 123). As Shulman notes, this type of unidirectional model eschews difference – it attempts to create an understanding of these textual cultures based on the principle of derivation and posits a clear distinction between Sanskrit texts that are almost always perceived as “*Ur*-texts” and non-Sanskrit ones that are simply translated or, at best, re-worked versions of these. Wendy Doniger also comments that this paradigm is “used to draw too sharp a line between these presumably high and low cultures, ignoring the fact that a Brahmin who wrote a Sanskrit text with one hand (his right, one assumed) was also quite likely to be the author of a Tamil oral tale with the other hand (presumably the left)” (Doniger 1993, viii). I prefer to envision these texts as located along a cultural continuum, a continuum that acts as a cultural “reservoir” (deBruin 1999, 164-65), from which poets are able to recall, reuse, and transform textual images at will. As we shall see later, this is also a principle at work in most performance traditions of South India. However, before proceeding with specific methodological approaches, I offer my theoretical understanding of the relation of texts and performance in South India.

The Relation of Text and Performance in South India: Studies of performance in South India⁷ have, to a large extent, examined the dichotomies between the conceptual or

textual background of the narrative and its performance. Richard Frasca, in his recent study of *Mahābhārata*-based *terukūttu* performances in Tamilnadu, labels these dichotomous elements as “non-performance modes” and “performance.” He links these to the indigenous Tamil terms *katai* (story, narrative) and *kūttu* (dance, theatre) (Frasca 1990, 4-5). However, I propose here to understand the performance-text itself as identical to the conceptual or narrative text. That is, I wish to collapse the dichotomy between “non-performed” and “performed” text and see text as having a multiplicity of dimensions including oral-aural-visual. I proceed based on the pioneering study of Tamil texts by linguistic anthropologist Saskia Kersenboom. Kersenboom analyzes the Tamil performance text called *bhairavī varṇam* using the tripartite Tamil hermeneutical categories *iyal* (nature, order, word), *icai* (sound, orality, music) and *nāṭakam* (drama, mimesis, performance). She points out that “as early as the sixth century, the Tamils defined their language as being threefold: *muttamīl* (literally ‘three Tamil’), comprising word, music and mimetic dance. The natural consequences of this definition imply that the Tamil language assumes its full scope only in expressions cast in three medial *forms* and in the dimension of *time*” (Kersenboom 1995, xvi).

This Tamil notion of *muttamīl* (three-fold text as word-sound-image) is found in the earliest Tamil grammatical treatise, the *Tolkāppiyam* (Kersenboom 1995; Zvelebil 1990). There is still debate over the date of the various chronological layers of this text, but we can safely assume that the portions dealing with the idea of *muttamīl* date back to the third century CE. The articulation of the concept of *muttamīl* surfaces most clearly in later *bhakti* contexts (sixth to ninth centuries CE). For example, in a Tamil *bhakti* (devotional) hymn from the sixth century, the poet Appar describes Śiva using the phrase *muttamīlum nāṇ-maṇaiyum āṇāṇ* (“the One who has become *muttamīl* and the four Vedas”)⁸. Put differently, for the *bhakti* poet, the deity incarnates into the threefold Tamil language. The very invocation of language in its three medial forms generates the condition for “the divine presence.” The interpreter, as embodiment of word-sound-image, is able to convey experience in a process called *rasānubhāva* (experience of taste) in Sanskrit and *meypṇāṭu* (experience affecting the body) or *cuvai* (taste) in Tamil. The interpreter’s body is, in the end, the experiential site of God’s reality. That reality is expressed and understood in terms of “taste” (*rasa*), as if the devotee is tasting God’s presence, collapsing all experience into the most interior of corporeal senses. Later, this

theory permeates almost all spheres of poetic culture in Tamilnadu and, I would argue, becomes (albeit in a subtle, perhaps unconscious way), *the* paradigmatic model for understanding and expressing the relation between text and performance throughout South India.

The text, which appears to be a document, is in effect a “cue for action,” an event. In the context of South Indian epic theatre traditions, I would like to offer a further explication of “event”. In effect, there are two events that occur simultaneously, as Mikhail Bakhtin observes:

...the event that is narrated in the work and the event of narration itself (we ourselves participate in the latter, as listeners or readers); these events take place in different times...and in different places, but at the same time these two events are indissolubly united in a single but complex event we might call the work in the totality of all its events...thus we perceive the fullness of the work in all its wholeness and indivisibility, but at the same time we understand the diversity of the elements that constitute it. (Bakhtin cited in Bauman 1986, 112)

The “work” or text comprised of the narrative (the “content” being enacted) and the narration (the “act” of the performance) are characteristic of most epic-centred dance-theatre traditions of South India. This dualistic split reminds one of Frasca’s “non-performance” and “performance” modes. However, it differs from such a dichotomy, because the elements are “indissolubly united in a single but complex event” – that is, they are both cues for action and constitute the world of the text.

This theory can be illustrated by performances of *Bhāmākalāpam* (“The Ballad of Bhāmā,” Satyabhāmā, the focus of this thesis). The term *kalāpam* in Sanskrit and Telugu means “bundle, collection” but is also the name of a genre. These texts are effectively bundles of signals that are tied together by the interpretive categories of *iyaḷ*, *icai* and *nāṭakam*. The process of tying together the signals of the performance-texts evoke both time and space. The South Indian dance-theatre traditions, then, in their visions of text bring together not only narratives framed by time and space but shape the tradition in word, sound and image.

Bhāmākalāpam exists not as a tactile object like a palmleaf manuscript or hand-written notebook but as a living entity. In this way, *Bhāmākalāpam* performance-texts are akin to the oral epic traditions of the past. In approaching the formation, fluidity and embodiment of the *Bhāmākalāpam* text, I use Hanne de Bruin’s idea of the “oral

reservoir” as a starting point. In her pathfinding work on the Kaṭṭaikkūttu theatre of Tamilnadu, de Bruin identifies the “oral reservoir” as a repository of organically linked ideas, narratives and memories that exist in latent or dormant as well as active states. The distinctive elements of the oral reservoir can be selected, combined, and improvised upon in both literary and performing arts. I conceptualize the formation of the *Bhāmākalāpam* texts as rooted in the larger oral reservoir that I have called the *Epic-Purāṇic-Folk* continuum. Purāṇic texts focusing on the character of Satyabhāmā, such as parts of the *Harivaṃśapurāṇa* (c. sixth century CE) and the *Padmapurāṇa* (c. thirteenth century CE), affect the creation of Telugu court poetry during the Vijayanagara period beginning in the 16th century. These crystallizations of narrative then affect the formation of a second “oral reservoir,” this time a pool of information that exists in the form of vernacular, performance-specific texts. Here we find that the narratives of Satyabhāmā develop into the *Bhāmākalāpam*, a solo performance, narrated almost entirely from Satyabhāmā’s perspective and performed by both upper-caste men and *devadāsī* women.

Bhāmākalāpam is not a fixed text but rather a fluid poetic narrative that is capable of many transformations in its representation. In performance, the actor-dancer may add spontaneous interpolations to the text of a *vacanam* (dialogue), or sing a *padyam* (song-text) in a new *rāga* (tonal scale), or perhaps improvise some additional *abhinaya* (mimesis). Each of these transmutations of the given text adds to the “life” of the text, that is to say each embellishes the previous interpretation or even constitutes, through sheer improvised creativity, a new event. In this way, the phenomenon of rendering the narrative of Satyabhāmā through performance is truly an “oral-aural-visual exegesis”, and its performer the virtuosic interpreter.

Epic and Purāṇic Textual Study: Key texts informing the Satyabhāmā performance traditions are the Sanskrit epics and Purāṇas. These belong to a category of Hindu religious texts called *smṛti* (“remembered” texts, composed in specific times and places) as distinct from Vedic texts, which are *śruti* (“heard” texts, which have no author). The content of these texts drew from an immense pool of cultural data that was rooted in oral narratives, folk motifs and bardic traditions. Although ostensibly the products of Brahmanic culture, they also contain information about beliefs and practices that are

non-Brahmanic in orientation. Julius Lipner explains that “Such material needed Brahminic ratification...it received Brahminic approval ‘by the back door’ and subsequently became a part of the authoritative tradition” through the epics and Purāṇas (Lipner 1994, 149). These are thus catchall texts that simultaneously replicate Brahmanic cultural patterns, while absorbing and legitimizing non-Brahmanic views. We could effectively conceptualize them as storehouses of “folkloric wisdom.” In a discussion of the Puranic context, A.K. Ramanujan aptly refers to the “Purāṇic pool” (Ramanujan 1993, 120), but this concept could easily be applied to the epics as well. The functionality of this cultural pool of data, lay in its flexibility and its ability to incorporate (despite the rhetoric of homogeneity) diverse kinds of data. But the epic and Puranic texts themselves have been fluid over the centuries. There have been regional translations and transcreations. In addition, storytellers, poets, *ācāryas* and others have drawn from these storehouses of wisdom and improvised, in turn, on them.

I examine passages in these texts on Satyabhāmā, who is the focus of my study of performance traditions. To this end, I have translated and examined in detail passages from the *Mahābhārata*, *Harivaṃśapurāṇa*, *Viṣṇupurāṇa* and *Padmapurāṇa* in order to itemize the major and minor motifs related to her. By culling this data out from the Sanskrit texts, I establish the importance of some key symbols and motifs related to womanhood that also occupy a significant place in the later vernacular and performative interpretations of the figure of Satyabhāmā. In particular, I focus on the ways that Satyabhāmā is constructed as a *pativrata* (loyal, chaste wife) in these passages with special reference to visual markers of her auspicious status (such as ornaments and bound hair) and her performance of *vrata* (votive observances) and *dāna* (donative activities). I also focus on Satyabhāmā’s other qualities, namely those of stubbornness, vanity and pride. And I show how she mediates the categories of *pativrata* and *veśyā*.

Genre Mapping: Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation consist of surveys of the literary and performative contexts in which we encounter Satyabhāmā in the Telugu-speaking regions of South India. Chapter Two examines the chaotic abundance of Telugu-language works dedicated to the figure of Satyabhāmā. To date, classifications of these texts into genres have been messy and the criteria have not been made explicit or systematic. My classifications of Vijayanagara, Nāyaka, Marāṭhā and Modern period

texts dealing with Satyabhāmā are based largely on scrutinizations of the structural elements of the texts. By detecting characteristics such as the presence of poetic or prose passages, the uses of particular metres, narrative or episodic-oriented plots, etc., I locate repetitive characteristics that form distinctive patterns, which allows me to define them as belonging to specific genres.

The crystallization of these genres, in turn, enables me to see both the continuity and transformations that characterize the development of Telugu texts related to Satyabhāmā. Through genre analysis, I detect the variety of aesthetic explorations of Satyabhāmā that occur as we move through historical periods and various courtly contexts. In order to establish the placement of key Telugu texts within four primary genres, I examine their historical contexts. I look for specific social and political conditions that might have influenced the transformation of these genres, the creation of sub-genres or the creation of new genres altogether. This historicization of genres illustrates how new cultural data is integrated and helps constitute the performative event.

b) Ethnography

Most of the ethnography for this study was carried out in selected villages in the East and West Godavari and Krishna districts in coastal and central Andhra Pradesh. The Godavari delta region is home to large numbers of *kalāvantulu*. The village of Kuchipudi, home to the *smārta* Brahmin community I have worked with, is located in the Krishna district. The majority of the data was collected during ten months of fieldwork, from 2001 to 2002, following one year of informal fieldwork in 1995-1996.

A variety of formal techniques were used in the field, including situational and contextual analyses, participant observation and interviews. Primary ethnographic research in the *kalāvantulu* community was carried out using a network approach in which one woman, Kotipalli Haimavati, was the centre. Her personal network of *kalāvantulu* in the Godavari delta region allowed me access into the deepest recesses of the community. I also interviewed several young women from the community in towns such as Rajahmundry, Tanuku and Peddapuram.

Formal interviews were conducted in Telugu and often videotaped. They were then transcribed into English with the help of my research assistant, Voleti Rangamani,

who also translated some of the interviews. Some research was conducted without the use of formal interviews, and these informal conversations were also recorded. In total, I interacted with over twenty-five *kalāvantulu*, two temple priests, and five hereditary artists from the Kuchipudi and Tūrupu Bhagavatam traditions.

My work with the *kalāvantulu* was based less on participant observation (because they no longer perform publicly) than it was on the collection and classification of memories and nostalgia. In anthropological circles, a focus on memory as a central heuristic lens has, in some ways, contributed to a new understanding of the nature of the ethnographic enterprise (Bal 1999; Brison 1999). Ann Gold and Bhoju Ram Gujar explain,

Speaking memories, the voices from whose testimonies ethnographers have ever woven synthetic fabrics of meaning and knowledge, cannot sound frozen in time. An anthropological turn to memory allowed ethnographers to accommodate history while retaining the essence of their disciplinary identity. One facet of this identity lies in the fragile, vulnerable heart of anthropological practice: fieldwork experience generating intimacies, dependent on human interactions. Another fact of our discipline remains bound to a quest for patterns. From divergent, even clashing, memories within a single community there may emerge not only vividly positioned views of reality, but some of those designs with which anthropologists remain concerned, in spite of dissolution, fragmentation and globalization. (Gold and Gujar 2002, 22)

As I point out in Chapter Five, ethnographic work in the *kalāvantula* community was difficult, given the extreme social stigma attached to the women.⁹ Although the majority of interviews were conducted in the women's homes, often these would be disrupted by angry male family members or neighbours who were uncomfortable with an upper-caste male "outsider" interacting with the elderly women of the house. At these points, it was nearly always the close personal relationships I had developed with the women that made them rebuke such suspicions. Occasionally, *devadāsī meḷams* or performances were arranged for me in the homes of the women. Musicians (usually a drummer and a violinist or harmonium player) would be called in from nearby villages to accompany the women's performances. These would begin around 8.00 p.m. and continue into the early hours of the following morning. On these occasions, we would carry electric generators and video equipment with us. This type of activity attracted a lot of attention in the villages, particularly in Duvva and Muramanda, where the majority of these *meḷams* were held. These events and the other ethnography-related anecdotes I

discuss in Chapter Five made clear to me the fragile and complex relationships that *kalāvantulu* have with outsiders.

If I may be permitted a final personal note, I would like to point out that my own training in Karnāṭak (South Indian) vocal music from the age of fifteen initiated me into the technicalities of South Indian musical traditions. This has made it possible for me to understand much about these performance texts and their contexts. My long collaboration with Hari Krishnan of the Dance Department at Wesleyan University -- who as a dancer has been learning repertoire from the descendants of the Nāyaka and Marāṭhā-period dance masters of the Tanjavur court – has attuned my eye to the complex interpretive dimensions of performance culture in South India.

¹ I use the phrase “Telugu-speaking regions” instead of Andhra Pradesh because it also encompasses regions such as the cities of Tanjavur and Tiruttani in present-day Tamilnadu, both of which have had (and continue to have) large Telugu-speaking populations. In Tanjavur, for example, through the Nāyaka and Marāṭhā periods, Telugu was a prominent language in the courtly landscape. From the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, both Andhra and Tamilnadu were subsumed under the larger colonial territory known as the “Madras Presidency.”

² The myth of an unnamed Brahmin’s wife, Sevyā, as narrated in the *Padmapurāṇa* (1.51) provides an example of how these categories mutually enforce each other. In this narrative, the *pativrata* Sevyā, sexually despised by her ill husband, carries him on her shoulders to the home of a *veśyā* whom he lusts over. The *veśyā*, seeing the compassion and piety of Sevyā, becomes of a changed nature – she becomes a pious woman. Similarly, in the *Matsyapurāṇa* (70), the sixteen thousand *pativrata* wives of Kṛṣṇa are cursed to be born on the earth as *veśyās*. After performing the votive rite called *anaṅgadau vrata* dedicated to Kāmadeva (the God of Desire), they are restored to their original status as Kṛṣṇa’s women. In this second narrative, we see the fluidity of the categories of wife and *veśyā*. That is, though the categories function as the anchors for a binary, there is room for oscillation between the two, where wives become *veśyās*, or vice versa.

³ The term *smārta* refers to a Brahmin group also known as *aiyyar*. Unlike the other major Brahmin group in South India known as *aiyyaṅkār* who are staunchly Vaiṣṇava in sectarian outlook, the *smārtas* have traditionally worshipped many deities including a cluster known as the *pañca-devatās* (Gaṇeśa, Śiva, Viṣṇu, Devī and Sūrya). They also have close affiliations with the *mathas* or institutions that are said to have been established by the philosopher Śaṅkara. Though South Indian *smārtas* are found in the Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam-speaking regions today, historically the Kaveri delta region in contemporary Tamilnadu has been one of the principal sites where the *smārta* cultural influence has been dominant. Under royal patronage in this region, both

Tamil and Telugu-speaking *smārtas* held privilege over housing and temple service while the land-owning caste called *vellāḷa* generally controlled political and economic power. For details on *smārta* culture in the Kaveri delta, see Jackson (1991). For information on change in the *smārta* community and perspectives on contemporary urban *smārtas* cultural brokers for the nation see Hancock (1999).

⁴ This book is a revised version of her Telugu doctoral dissertation from the Department of Telugu, University of Madras.

⁵ This is a condensed English version of his Telugu work entitled *Dakṣiṇadeśīyāndhra Vāṅmayamu* published by the University of Madras in 1976.

⁶ For discussions of various aspects of temple women and professional female performers in Maharashtra, see Cabral e Sa (1990); Datar (1992); Kadam (1998); and Rege (1996).

⁷ Excellent theoretical insights on performance in South India are found in Blackburn (1988; 1996; 1998); deBruin (1998; 1999); Goldberg-Belle (1984); Kersenboom (1995; 2001a; 2001b). For more general discussions of the relationship between text and performance in South Asia, see Flueckiger and Sears (1991); Hildebeitel (1988); Lutgendorgf (1991).

⁸ Appar *Tēvāram*, 6.23.9.1 cited in Kersenboom (1995, 6).

⁹ For an excellent account of the problems in working with stigmatized communities in South India, see Seizer (1997).

Chapter 1

Satyabhāmā as Female Archetype in Epic & Purāṇic Narrative

रूपेण गर्विता सा तु भर्ता का स्त्री न गर्विता ॥

She is proud on account of her beautiful form [*rūpa*] and her husband [*bhartā*],
but which woman is not?

- Satyabhāmā speaks of Śacī, wife of Indra, *Viṣṇupurāṇa* 5.30.76b

Introduction

This chapter, is, in effect, a “background” chapter. It provides the Sanskritic textual perspective on Satyabhāmā as presented in the *Mahābhārata* and some Purāṇic texts¹. My intention here is simply to take note of a particular kind of construction of womanhood found in a specific textual canon. This chapter unlocks some of the deeper cultural logic that allows us to explore the ways in which womanhood, even in Brahmanic texts such as the epics and Purāṇas, can be understood as a complex phenomenon, operating at and drawing from a variety of religio-cultural strata.

Having its origins in the *Mahābhārata*, mythology concerning Satyabhāmā is fully developed in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* and is expanded in the *Harivaṃśa*- and *Padmapurāṇas*. Generally Satyabhāmā is identified as the daughter of King Satrājīt,² whom Kṛṣṇa marries after securing the Symantaka gem. The main narrative of the Purāṇic tradition, however, centres around an episode concerning Satyabhāmā’s desire for the flowers of the celestial *pārijāta* tree, which is planted in the garden of Śacī [Indrāṇī], the wife of Indra. At the request of Satyabhāmā, Kṛṣṇa “steals” the tree by conquering Indra and replants the tree in the garden of Satyabhāmā’s palace.

I consider the dual concepts of *vrata* (votive rites) and *dāna* (alms-giving, donation) as markers of Satyabhāmā’s identity as a *pativratā* (ideal, chaste wife). These analyses are based on the *Harivaṃśa*- and *Padmapurāṇa*, texts in which the *pārijāta* myth is “amplified.” Unless otherwise referenced, all translations from the Purāṇas are my own.

Early History of Satyabhāmā in the *Mahābhārata*

The first major references to Satyabhāmā in Sanskrit literature come from the *Mahābhārata*, in the *Vana*- and *Mausalaparvas*. While the *Mausalaparva* (75) describes her retreat to a *tapovanam* (forest where penance is undertaken) following the death of her husband Kṛṣṇa, the *Vanaparva* reference provides the conceptual framework for her later growth as the “True Woman.” It is important to realize that Satyabhāmā does not exist independently of Kṛṣṇa. In the *Mahābhārata*, she is rarely referred to as an autonomous character, but is almost always mentioned in reference to Kṛṣṇa (i.e. accompanying him in the forest, etc.). The *Vanaparva* (222-24) reference is in the context of a discussion between Satyabhāmā and Draupadī (wife of the Pāṇḍavas). Satyabhāmā, identified as Kṛṣṇa’s wife, asks Draupadī how she is able to keep the five Pāṇḍavas content, and how she acts while attending upon them (*kena draupadi vṛttena pāṇḍavānadhitiṣṭhasi*, 222.5). She asks,

Have you followed a votive ritual [*vratācārya*], done austerities [*tapas*]?
Is there a special ablution [*snāna*], spells [*mantra*], herbs [*auśadhāni*] ? A
powerful knowledge of roots [*vidyāvīryam mūlavīryam*] ? Some prayer or
fire oblation, or drug? Tell me the glorious secret of your sexual power,
Kṛṣṇā [Draupadī], so that Kṛṣṇa will always be amenable to me too.³

Having assured Satyabhāmā that she is not among the “wanton women” (*asatstrīṇām*, literally “unreal” or “false” women) who resort to such measures to please their husbands, Draupadī proceeds to describe the virtues of a good wife (222.18-35), and summarizes her knowledge of Yudhiṣṭhira’s wealth and her present plight (222.40-55). The discussion ends with Draupadī’s poetic exposition of advice to Satyabhāmā (223.1-15):

No bliss [*sukham*] is easily found on earth,
A good woman finds happiness through hardship;
So worship Kṛṣṇa with happy heart [*sauhṛdena*]
With love [*premnā*] and always the acts of devotion [*pratikarmaṇā*]

This is the glorious secret of sex
That leads to heaven and uproots the foes;
Worship your husband [*bhartāramārādhaya*] while wearing your costly
Flowers and jewels [*ābharāṇa*] and make-up [*aṅgarāga*] and scents
[*punya-gandhaiḥ*].

Satyabhāmā's spouse-centred orientation becomes apparent in the later Purāṇic myths, wherein she becomes "possessive" over Kṛṣṇa, and does not wish to share him with her co-wives, especially Rukmiṇī. The instruction given to her by Draupadī might have been influential in shaping her as a "good wife." Particularly significant here is the importance attached to ornamentation of the physical body by the wife who wishes to please her husband. This importance is one that the character of Satyabhāmā retains throughout the Purāṇic narratives. Beauty is significant because it is around her obsession with physical beauty and vanity that the Purāṇic episodes and subsequent traditions weave their didactic narratives.

The Pārijāta Episode in the Purāṇas

The earliest Purāṇic reference to Satyabhāmā as the consort of Kṛṣṇa is in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, which establishes the narrative episode central to her mythology, namely the *pārijātāpaharaṇa* ("stealing away of the *pārijāta* tree [by Kṛṣṇa]"). Taking the accepted date of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* as circa fourth century CE⁴, I will study the expansion of the *pārijāta* episode. The narrative presented in this text provides the "root myth" for the amplification of the narrative in later Purāṇas, and perhaps even for the *Harivaṃśapurāṇa*. R.C. Hazra cites the amplification of the *pārijāta* narrative as one of the reasons for the antiquity of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* over the *Harivaṃśapurāṇa*:

We may now compare the Viṣṇu-p. with the Harivaṃśa to see if the date of the former can be pushed further up. In the Harivaṃśa the biography of Kṛṣṇa is given at greater length and in greater detail...The stories have been developed and expanded in the Harivaṃśa. The story of Jarāsandha and that of the carrying away of the Pārijāta tree by Kṛṣṇa may be cited as examples. Besides these, there are many new additions found in the Harivaṃśa. For instance, there are the Āryastava (Hv II,3) and the Puṇyaka-vrata observed by Satyabhāmā (Hv II, 77-81). From all this it can be concluded that the Viṣṇu-p. is of earlier origin than at least this portion [i.e. the *Viṣṇuparvan*] of the Harivaṃśa. (Hazra 1975, 23)

In the tradition of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* also posits Satyabhāmā as a good wife. She is among the sixteen-thousand "beloved

women” of Kṛṣṇa yet occupies a unique place as his principal wife⁵. Just prior to the *pārijāta* episode, Satyabhāmā is given a boon by Aditi, the mother of the *devas*. The tyrannical demon, Naraka, the progeny of the Earth’s sexual contact with Viṣṇu during his incarnation as Varāha (and therefore Viṣṇu’s own son) possessed the two earrings of Aditi. Having slain Naraka, Kṛṣṇa is given back the earrings by the Earth (to protect them - *grhāṇa kuṇḍale ceme pālayāsyā ca santatim*).⁶ Kṛṣṇa then proceeds to the palace of Aditi, the rightful owner of the earrings, and gives the earrings to her while narrating the story of the death of Naraka. Aditi praises Kṛṣṇa (5.30.6-23) and grants him a boon:

O Tiger Among Men [*puruṣavyāghra*], let your wishes be fulfilled. May you be invincible [*ajeyah*] over divine and demonic beings on Earth.⁷

Thereafter, Satyabhāmā, accompanied by Indra’s wife Śacī, approaches Aditi to secure her blessings. Aditi blesses Satyabhāmā with the boon of ever-lasting physical beauty and youth:

Then Satyabhāmā, the consort of Kṛṣṇa, along with the wife of Śakra [Indra] paid obeisance again and again to Aditi, by saying “Be pleased [Mother]”.

[Aditi said:]

By my blessing, O One with Beautiful Eyebrows, old age and physical deformity [*vairūpyam*] will not affect you. Oh Faultless Woman, your ever-fresh youth [*navayauvanam*] will remain eternal [*susthiram*].⁸

Armed with this blessing, Satyabhāmā develops her characteristic attributes of vanity and pride. There is a continuity with the *Mahābhārata* in the depiction of Satyabhāmā as the classic *sumāṅgalī* or *saubhāgyavatī* (“auspicious married woman”).⁹ As in the discussion with Draupadī in the *Mahābhārata*, here also, Satyabhāmā receives a “doctrine” of *strīdharma* (women’s *dharma*) from an established “role model.” The maintenance of physical beauty is an integral emblem of the “good wife”, whose *sumāṅgalyam* (auspiciousness) is reflected in her clothing, make-up and jewellery.

Turning to the *pārijāta* episode itself, it is stretched across three chapters in the fifth book (5.30-32) and begins just after Satyabhāmā secures the blessing from Aditi. At the request of Aditi, Indra worships Kṛṣṇa with all of the *pūjā* honours, including the offering of flowers. However, Śacī, the wife of Indra,

adorned with the flowers of the *pārijāta* tree, thinking Satyabhāmā to be a mortal woman [*mānuṣī*], does not offer those flowers to her¹⁰. Thereafter, Kṛṣṇa and Satyabhāmā are given a tour of Nandana and the other pleasure-gardens of the gods:

There, the Lord of the Universe [*jagannātha*], Slayer of Keśi [*keśisūdana*], Keśava, saw the *pārijāta* tree which was rich in fragrance [*sugandhadhyam*], wielded a number of sprouts [*mañjarīpuñjadhāriṇam*], always brought about joy [*nityahlādakaram*], decorated with copper-coloured lotus buds [*tāmrabālapallavaśobhitam*], which had arisen at the time of the churning of the [Milk] ocean, with bark [*tvacam*] of gold.

Here we have a description of the *pārijāta* tree, which is later to become the object of Satyabhāmā's desire. In chapter 31, we are given a further description of the excellence of the tree:

Having come in proximity to it, humans of all classes remember their former lives. The fragrance that is emitted from its flowers remains fragrant for three *yojanas*¹¹ [measure of distance].¹²

Satyabhāmā also sees that “king among trees” [*tarurāja*] and asks Kṛṣṇa:

“Oh Kṛṣṇa, Why should this tree-root not be in Dvārakā?”¹³ She rebukes him saying, “If your words ‘you are my most beloved’ [*tvamatyārtham priye*] are true, then bring this tree to my pleasure garden [*madgrhaniskuta*]. On many occasions you have said to me ‘Satyā, neither Jāmbavatī nor Rukmiṇī is as beloved to me as you are.’¹⁴ If you have spoken the truth and are not merely patronizing me [*na upacāraḥ mama*], then let the *pārijāta* tree be the ornament of my house [*mama geḥbhūṣaṇam*]. I desire to flaunt [*śobheyam*] amidst your co-wives, with the flowers of the *pārijāta* tree in the braids of my hair [*keśapakṣena*].”¹⁵

At this, Kṛṣṇa smiles, uproots the tree, places it on the back of Garuḍa and is about to leave when the keepers of the garden protest. To them, Satyabhāmā says:

“Who is Śacī, who is the King of Gods, Śakra to [possess] the *pārijāta* tree? If this tree has arisen at the time of the churning [the ocean] for *amṛta* (nectar of immortality), then it is the common property of all [*sāmānyassarvalokasya*]. How can Indra alone possess it?”¹⁶

She threatens Śacī with a challenge:

“If Śacī, on the strength of her husband's arm (i.e. prowess), has become filled with pride [*garva*], and wishes to keep [the tree] for herself, tell her that ‘Satya is taking away [the tree]’...Quickly, go tell this to Paulomī [Śacī], that Satyabhāmā, in haughty words [*garvoddhataksaram*] has said that ‘If you are truly the beloved of your husband, then he should stop my husband from carrying away the *parijata* [tree].”¹⁷

The attendants duly convey the message to Śacī, a battle ensues between the army of Indra and Kṛṣṇa (30.53-67), and finally Indra is rendered helpless and disarmed. Satyabhāmā, seeing his plight, says,

“Because of her pride in her husband's strength, Śacī did not see me into her home with the appropriate customs. On account of being a woman, my heart is also haughty, and I am anxious to praise my husband, and for this reason, Oh Śakra, this war [*vigraha*] was launched with (against) you. What need do I have to steal the property of another? [Śacī] is full of pride due to her appearance (beauty). Which woman is not proud of her husband [*bhartrā kā strī na garvitā*]?”¹⁸

Indra, hearing these words, surrenders to Kṛṣṇa, whom he eulogizes in three stanzas (30.78-80). The next chapter (31) begins with Kṛṣṇa apologizing to Indra, saying that he and Satyabhāmā are “mere mortals” [*martya*], and that he has committed an offensive act [*aparādham kṛtam mama*]. To this, Indra replies:

“You are deluding me [*vimohayasī*], Oh Lord. Why have you said “I am a mortal”? I only know you, Oh Lord, not your subtle self...Oh Kṛṣṇa, take this *pārijāta* tree to Dvārakā. When you leave the mortal world [*martyāloke tvayā tyakte*], so shall it disappear from the world.”¹⁹

Kṛṣṇa returns to Dvārakā with the *pārijāta* tree. Accompanied by Satyabhāmā, he plants it in her garden:

Thereafter, having descended from Garuḍa, Kṛṣṇa, accompanied by Satyabhāmā, established [*sthāpayāmāsa*] the great tree, the *pārijāta* in [her] garden [*niṣkuṭe*].²⁰

The *Viṣṇupurāṇa* version of the *pārijāta* incident provides the narrative base for determining the character of Satyabhāmā: (1) she is a “devoted wife”; (2) she prides herself on physical beauty and on being Kṛṣṇa's wife; and (3) she is jealous of Śacī's sense of propriety over the *pārijāta*. It is important that even at this early stage, Satyabhāmā is identified with characteristics such as vanity,

pride, jealousy and haughty temperament yet does not lose her place as Kṛṣṇa's most beloved consort. She herself admits to possessing these characteristics toward the end of the narrative, enforcing her earlier thoughts on women and pride (30.76b):

[Śacī is] proud on account of her beautiful form [*rūpa*] and her husband [*bhartā*], but which woman is not?²¹

The *pārijāta* incident also surfaces in two later Purāṇas but is only summarized in one stanza in each. The two texts seem to be more or less contemporaneous, the *Agnipurāṇa* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. The *Agnipurāṇa*, in its twelfth *adhyāya* (chapter), provides us with a summary of the incident and simply says:

Seated on his vehicle Garuḍa with Satyabhāmā, Hari, the Slayer of Naraka, after defeating Indra, brought the mountain of gems and all the jewels and the *pārijāta* tree, and planted it in Satyabhāmā's palace. (12.32-33)²²

Similarly, in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, we have a single verse in the tenth canto describing the replanting of the tree:

Thus implored by his wife [*bhāryā*], he uprooted the *pārijāta* tree and placed it on Garuḍa, his vehicle. After defeating the *devas*, he brought the tree to Dvārakā. (10.59.39)²³

Satyabhāmā as the Embodiment of Womanhood: The Performance of *Vrata* and *Dāna* in the *Harivaṃśa* and *Padmapurāṇas*

Over and above the intricacies of the *pārijāta* narrative itself, a central concern of ours is the view of womanhood in the Purāṇic texts. Later ones such as the *Harivaṃśapurāṇa* and *Padmapurāṇa* engage Satyabhāmā in the performance of the dual acts of *vrata* (votive observance) and *dāna* (donation). A similar “performative” dimension to women's roles in the religious realm as been noted in other Indic religious cultures as well.²⁴ Both *vrata* and *dāna* are essential forms of *tapas* (austerity) for women – they are both ritual actions rooted in self-deprivation. The *vrata* in the Purāṇic context often involves ritual fasts, while *dāna* implies the sacrifice of material culture. Both *vrata* and *dāna* (excepting

large-scale “royal donations” mentioned in the Purāṇas) are also usually entrusted to the women’s sphere (McGee 1989; 1991; 1996; Pearson 1996; McDaniel 2003). Mary McGee describes women’s *vratas* in Marathi narratives as follows:

Vratas, periodic votive days and fasts which punctuate the Hindu religious year, are observed primarily by women, and indeed constitute a significant part of the religious activity of many Hindu women. Women observe these votive rituals largely to benefit the good health and prosperity of their husbands and children... I have formed the conclusion that most women perform *vratas* more out of a sense of duty than desire; that is, most women perceive the observance of *vratas* as a contributing, if not necessary, factor in the fulfilment of their *strīdharma*, their duties as wives and mothers. (McGee 1996, 147-48)

In the Purāṇic context, the same could be said about *dāna* as well. Kala Acharya, in her study of *dāna* in various Purāṇic texts, notes that the performance of *dāna* by women is frequent:

It is clearly stated in the [Bhaviṣya Purāṇa] (Uttaraparva 156.24ab) that the woman who makes the gift of the golden cow goes to heaven by an aerial car and she is worshipped by the gods. It is further stated that a woman gets all her wishes fulfilled by making the said gift (ibid., 26). The gift of a jagged mountain is recommended especially for women (ibid., 197.25ab). The legend of the queen Sulabhā who enjoyed the love of her husband because of making this gift is quoted. The gift of a cooking pan (*sthalidānam*) is also to be made to a woman by a woman. Draupadī offered the gift in one of her births (ibid., 170). (Acharya 1993, 251)

As McGee points out, the purpose of such rites is twofold: first, the rites function as a portal to achieving *mokṣa* and second, they also promise lesser yet more immediately enjoyable fruits, both “seen” (*dṛṣṭa*; that is, obvious in this world) and “unseen” (*adrṣṭa*; that is, other-worldly ones) (1991, 73). McGee notes that the second of these two functions (usually related to marital felicity) is clearly more important in women’s self-perception, although the Sanskrit textual canon tends to give prominence, as we would expect, to the soteriological intention of the *vrata* (ibid., 73).

Satyabhāmā, the “True Woman,” is linked to the concept of *strīdharma* through her observance of *vrata* and performance of *dāna*. These actions bring her into the realm of real women; they are markers of her identity as “wife of

Kṛṣṇa". As we have already seen, the concept of *saubhāgya* or *sumāṅgalyam* has played a central role in the development of Satyabhāmā's persona in the early texts. Satyabhāmā's "quest for *saubhāgya* [good fortune]" (McGee 1996 147ff.) involves the acts of *vrata* and *dāna*, and it is on these narratives, found in the *Harivaṃśa*- and *Padmapurāṇas* respectively, that I will now focus.

The *Harivaṃśapurāṇa*: Satyabhāmā performs the *Puṇyaka Vrata*

If we are to take the *Harivaṃśapurāṇa* as a *khila* (supplement) to the *Mahābhārata*²⁵ and accept its proposed date as c. 500 CE²⁶, it is the next Sanskrit text that examines the *pārijāta* episode and more importantly, introduces Satyabhāmā as the *pativratā*, one who performs votive rites for the welfare of her husband. The *Harivaṃśapurāṇa* is divided into three *parvans* (parts or books): the *Harivaṃśaparva* (Book of the Lineage of Hari [Viṣṇu]), from which it derives its name; the *Viṣṇuparva* (Book of Viṣṇu), which describes the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa; and the *Bhaviṣyaparva* (Book of the Future), which contains several unrelated Purāṇic narratives of both Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva orientation.

This text is the first to deal with the *pārijāta* episode at length, in nineteen chapters. Several new narrative elements emerge in the *Harivaṃśapurāṇa*. Most importantly, we are introduced to Rukmiṇī, the other principal wife of Kṛṣṇa, to whom he first gives the flower of the *pārijāta* tree, thereby rousing Satyabhāmā's anger. Satyabhāmā's attendants inform her of Kṛṣṇa's "favouritism", and Satyabhāmā, dejected and angry dons the appearance of a widow. Dressed completely in white with no ornaments, she rebukes Kṛṣṇa. As Freda Matchett notes, Satyabhāmā "does not make...a profession of humble devotion to Kṛṣṇa" (Matchett 2001, 230, n. 28). She freely expresses her jealousy and sense of betrayal by Kṛṣṇa (72.49-51, 53-55a):

But the very proud Satyabhāmā, eternally beloved of Viṣṇu, could not bear the good fortune bestowed upon the other wife. She, full of beauty and youth, had pride in her usual good fortune, and was susceptible to jealousy. Hearing of the good fortune of the other, she was consumed by jealousy. Angry like the flame of a fire, the woman of a smiling face threw off her cloth painted with vermilion power and put on a white one...

...Applying sandal and red mud on the forehead, and wearing two garments white as snow, these are the markers of anger towards one's husband. The *devī* Satyabhāmā too, did not forget [to don] this appearance. She ripped off her ornaments [while seated on] a bed with a large pillow. Then, with her hair tied in one braid, and remembering the fortune of her co-wife [Rukmiṇī], she sat and bitterly shook her head.

Kṛṣṇa enters her chamber of anger (*krodha grha*) and sees Satyabhāmā in her resentful mood – scratching lotus flowers, smearing sandal paste onto her breast then throwing it aside, rising from her bed and falling into it again (73.6-11). He approaches her and seeks to console her. When he asks her why she is angry and feels dejected, she replies (74.6-7, 13, 15, 22):

I held my head high with pride thinking that I am the most beloved of your wives, Lord. My maids and others inform me that today I have been made into a laughing stock by my co-wife... Oh Lord, I could never even have dreamed that you would honour another woman over me, but this has really happened, and that too, in the presence of others... You have told me that people's lives are defined by their sense of self-respect; today I feel as if I have no respect for myself and I do not wish to live any longer... You used to say to me "Oh Daughter of Satrājit, there is none more beloved to me than you." Who will remember this [after what has occurred today]?

Kṛṣṇa tries to explain that he did not give the flower to Rukmiṇī, but rather that Nārada gave it to her on his own accord. He offers to bring not only one flower, but the entire *pārijāta* tree itself to Satyabhāmā. She readily agrees (74.33-34):

Thus addressed by Hari, the beloved woman said: "Oh righteous one, if you bring the tree to me, I shall abandon my anger, and I will be immensely satisfied. [For then] Oh Adhokṣaja, I will reign as the primary among all of your wives."

Nārada then arrives, and after receiving the customary welcome and meal, he briefly narrates the origin of the *pārijāta* tree and links its origins to a votive rite (*vrata*) known as *puṇyaka* (lit. "merit awarding"), which, as we shall later see, is important for various mythic *pativratās* who frame its narrative (74.57-64):

Pleased by the devoted service of his wife Aditi, sage Kaśyapa created the celebrated *pārijāta* tree, so that she could perform the *puṇyaka vrata*. Kaśyapa, who possessed incredible powers due to his *tapas*, pleased with Aditi, asked her for a boon. She replied: "Oh greatest of sages, grant me a boon which will enable me to adorn myself with various ornaments whenever I want, and will grant me the knowledge of song and dance.

Oh Lord rich in ascetic power, I want to remain ever-youthful, purged of inauspiciousness and afflictions, and devoted to my husband and religious acts. To please his wife, [Kaśyapa] created the *pārijāta* tree, with eternally fragrant, desire-fulfilling blossoms. The tree, which delighted all who looked upon it, had three ever-blossoming branches. Many types of blossoms grew on its branches. Beautiful women often adorn themselves with these blossoms, and some women also adorn themselves with radiant jewels that also grow here.

The unique element of the *puṇyaka vrata*, the ritual of “buying back the husband from Nārada” is thereafter described by him (74.67-69):

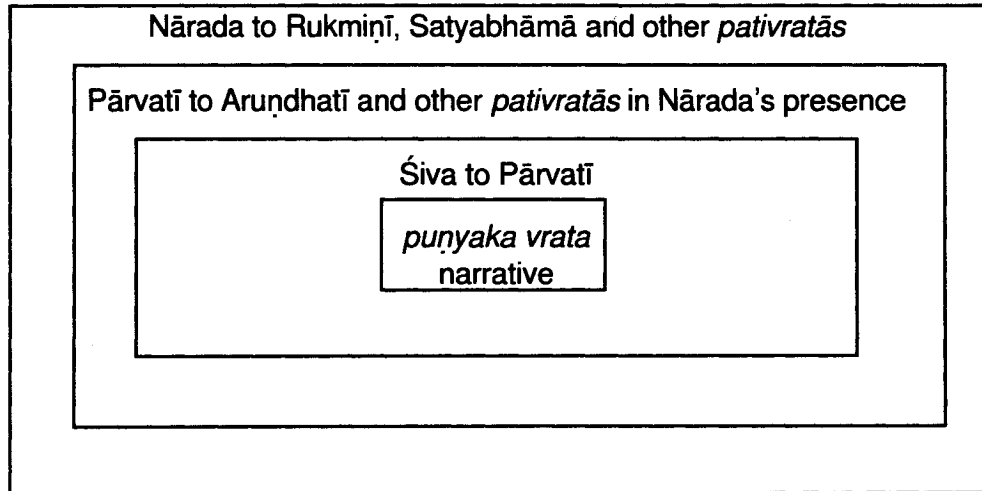
The divine Aditi then tied Kaśyapa to the tree and “handed him over” to me so that she could reap the benefits of the *puṇyaka vrata*. Aditi gave me Kaśyapa, with his neck tied with a flower garland to the *pārijāta* tree, so that she could complete her votive offering. That sage rich in ascetic power was later released when the proper bail was paid [by him] to me. Indra was given to me in this way by his wife, Soma by Rohiṇī and Kubera by Ṛddhi to secure the continuance of their good-fortune.

Thereafter, Satyabhāmā resolves to perform the *puṇyaka vrata*, and Kṛṣṇa leaves to capture the *pārijāta* tree from Indra’s heaven. At this point, the narrative of the theft of the *pārijāta* is more or less the same as the *Viṣṇupurana*. Kṛṣṇa successfully transplants the tree in Dvārakā, and Satyabhāmā performs the “payment of bail” ritual (83.2-7, 11):

Having worshipped [Nārada] in the customary manner, Śrīpati [Kṛṣṇa] invited him to accept the *puṇyaka* offering. At the appropriately auspicious time, Vāsudeva [Kṛṣṇa], the Lord of Beings, annointed the ritually pure Nārada with incense and flowers, and offered him a meal. The woman of good fortune then placed a garland around Kṛṣṇa and tied him to the *pārijāta* tree. With his permission, she “sold” Kṛṣṇa to Nārada. She gifted sesamum seeds shining with jewels, rice and other cereals combined with gold, and mounds of gold. In a playful manner, Nārada said “I’m leaving now, you wait here”. That most jesting of sages took the garland off of Kṛṣṇa’s neck and said [to him]: “You must give me a Kapila cow and its calf, and sesamum seeds and gold offered in the skin of a black deer.”

Kṛṣṇa fulfils his portion of the ritual by giving Nārada what he requests. Satyabhāmā’s votive rite is complete. In celebration of her “breaking the fast”, she invites the sixteen thousand wives of Kṛṣṇa and offers gifts of cloth and ornaments to all of them (83.19-20).

The “payment of bail” ritual is only a minor outward manifestation of the rite and its meaning. At another gathering of Jāmbavatī, Satyabhāmā and other *pativratās* in the following chapter, Rukmiṇī asks Nārada to narrate the origins of the *pūṇyaka vrata*. Nārada tells Rukmiṇī that the essential meaning of the *pūṇyaka vrata* and its special significance to the married woman was described by the exemplary married woman, Pārvatī. Pārvatī revealed the knowledge of the importance of the *vrata* to a gathering of the foremost *pativratās* of Hindu tradition – Aditi, Śaci (spouse of Indra), Satī, Rohinī (spouse of Soma), Lopāmudrā (spouse of Agastya), Sāvitṛī, Śrī, Medhā, Gaṅgā and Sarasvatī (84.11-21). These *pativratās* had gathered for the concluding ceremony of Pārvatī’s own *pūṇyaka vrata*, wherein she is to give gifts to other married women. The *vrata* “narrative genealogy,” to use Philip Lutgendorf’s term, is “framed” by the three layers of its oral transmission (1991, 23-25):



Oral retelling is the way that *vrata* narratives were, and continue to be, transmitted in women’s religious cultures in various parts of South Asia. As McGee notes, “popular lore and knowledge of *vratas* has largely been preserved and passed on through generations by way of storytelling, still a vital and popular pastime in India” (1996, 150-51). The transmission of the *pūṇyaka vrata* narrative from Pārvatī to Aruṇḍhatī as told by Nārada to Rukmiṇī in our text, provides greater detail into the ritual sequence, the time-place and, most importantly, the reasons for the exaltation of this votive rite. Indeed, the

alternate names of the *pūnyaka vrata* given in the text (*umā vrata*, *aditi vrata*) suggest the map of its transmission.

The *pūnyaka vrata*, we are told, is to be practised only by chaste, single-mindedly devoted wives. The following passage lays out the moral criteria for the potential performers of the *pūnyaka vrata* (85.4-7a, 9-10):

The votive rites of the *purāṇas* are directed toward those who practise chastity and religious observance. Oh pure Aruṇḍhatī, gift-giving, fasts and other righteous behaviour is futile for unchaste women. Religious observances are defiled by illicit sexual relations. Therefore, those women who lie to their husbands or practice illicit intercourse do not earn the merit of such rituals; rather, they go to hell. Those mild-natured, chaste women who see their husbands as god, hold the universe together...A wife should never, under any circumstance, abandon her husband, even if he becomes a beggar, commits unjust actions, or loses his caste. A wife is capable of saving herself and her husband [through *vratas*] even if he is a "good-for-nothing", commits unjust actions, or loses his caste.

The ritual sequence and temporal context is also central to the observance of *vratas*. As we have noted earlier, the "payment of the bail" ritual seems to have been the climax of the *pūnyaka vrata*, after which the woman breaks her fast and the final gift-giving occurs. The *vrata* itself consists of a lengthy, complex series of ritual actions and non-actions or abstentions. As Mary McGee points out, "a *vrata* demands modification of behavior, and most often this takes the form of restrictions on diet (*upavāsa*) and some times on dress. In addition to a disciplined regimen, *vratas* consist of a series of prescribed rites that vary from *vrata* to *vrata*" (McGee 1996, 150).

The temporal duration of the *pūnyaka* is to be either one year, six months or one month (86.1). It should be undertaken in the months of *jyaiṣṭha* (June-July) or *aṣāḍha* (July-August), and it is particularly auspicious to have the concluding ceremonies in *kārttika* (November-December). Five major ritual injunctions to be followed during the observance of the *pūnyaka vrata* appear in the *Harivaṃśapurāṇa*:

- i) Ritual Salutation and Ablution of the Husband: Every morning the woman undertaking the *vrata* must salute the feet of her husband. She must also obtain the permission of her in-laws and husband before undertaking the

vrata (that is, she must declare her *saṅkalpa* or intent). She then must take a pot full of water and using *kuśa* grass, sprinkle the right horn of a cow, then sprinkle the same on her husband (85.21).

- ii) Ritual Bath: The woman finally pours the remaining water over her own head, and for her this is the equivalent of “bathing in all of the holy *tīrthas*” (85.22).
- iii) Emotional and Physical Austerity: During the course of the *vrata*, the woman should not shed tears, argue, or become angry. She must also not sleep or sit [excessively] (85.24-25). She must also avoid comfortable transport such as vehicles drawn by animals (85.30), and wear shoes made of reeds (85.26). She must only have one meal a day (86.55).
- iv) Ascetic Appearance: The woman performing a *vrata* must avoid adorning herself. She must not wear kohl, flowers, perfume or jewels (85.28). She cannot wear colourful clothes and should wear only white. She cannot brush her teeth nor wash her hair regularly. When she does clean herself, she must use only mud to do so (85.28-29).
- v) Donations: At the conclusion of her *vrata*, the woman must donate cloth to other married women, cotton and gold sacred threads to Brahmins (86.52), and feed several Brahmins (86.55). We shall discuss the importance of donation (*dāna*) later.

The end of the *vrata* calls for a celebration, in which the woman clips the nails and hair of her husband and herself (86.6), bathes and adorns herself with jewels and garlands as if she were a bride (86.7). She is to recite the following verses (86.11-14 paraphrased):

May I serve my husband as a devoted wife... May I be the best among my husband's wives, gifted with beauty and charm, auspicious, the mother of sons... May my husband be dependent upon me, and be steadfast in his single-mindedness toward me. May I go to the abode of chaste women who hold together the universe by their devotion to their father-in-law and husband....

The rewards for such an observance exemplify the very nature of women's religious orientation (*strīdharmā*) prescribed in Purāṇic texts. Among the rewards mentioned in our text are “never becoming a widow” (85.56), “having immortal sons” (86.62), “having a beautiful daughter in her own image” (86.33),

“prosperity” (86.34) and, most importantly for Satyabhāmā, “ruling over the other wives of her husband” (85.63).

***Vrata* Observance as Prehistory: Satyabhāmā’s Former Lives**

The vast number of references to Satyabhāma in the Purāṇas are either in the context of Satyabhāmā performing *vratas* herself²⁷, or are located in very close proximity to *vrata-māhātmya* sections. As David Shulman has pointed out, the temporal settings for Purāṇic narratives are rarely limited to a single lifetime. Rather, the Purāṇas often locate the motivation behind their narratives in the past lives of a given character (Shulman 1993, 133).

In terms of the Purāṇic descriptions of Satyabhāmā’s previous life, we find two variations, each linking Satyabhāmā to the performance of *vrata*. The first of these is found in *Skandapurāṇa*, 2.4.13.4-23:

There was once a Brahmin named Devaśarmā who lived in Māyāpurī. In the later part of his life, he gave his only child Guṇavatī in marriage to his own disciple Candra. One day, when they went into the forest to gather *kuśa* grass and other offerings for their fire sacrifices, they were both killed by a heinous demon. Both of them immediately went to Vaikuṇṭha, on account of their pious lives and karmic merit. Guṇavatī was traumatized by the loss of both her father and husband. She sold all of the household goods and furniture to make arrangements for their final rites and *śrāddha*. As a pious woman, Guṇavatī continued to observe the two *vratas* that she had observed throughout her life: the *ekādaśī vrata* and the *kārttika vrata*. One year, while performing the *kārttika vrata*, she fell ill, and though burning with fever, she went to the Gaṅgā for her ritual bath. All of a sudden, she saw a chariot [*vimāna*] in the sky. The chariot descended, she mounted it, and was taken to Vaikuṇṭha, on accord of her faithful observance of the *kārttika vrata*. Kṛṣṇa then goes on to explain how, when he descended to the earth in his present form, Devaśarmā was reborn as Satrājit [father of Satyabhāmā], and Guṇavatī was reborn as Satyabhāmā. He also explains that during her birth as Guṇavatī, she had cared for *tulasī* plants, and thus the *pārijāta* tree has been replanted in her courtyard (2.4.13.20).

This same narrative is reiterated almost verbatim in the *Padmapurāṇa*. The second narrative concerning Satyabhāmā’s previous lives comes from a chapter of the *Matsyapurāṇa* called Bhīmadvādaśīvratakathanam (“The Story of the Vrata of Bhīma Dvādaśī”). It narrates how, due to the performance of

the *bhīma dvādaśī vrata*, a woman from a Vaiśya clan was reborn as Indrāṇī (Śacī), and how the servant-girl of that woman was similarly reborn as Satyabhāmā by the merit accrued from the observance of this vow:

[Kṛṣṇa said:]

A woman born into a *vaiśya-kula* became daughter of King Puloma (Śacī), and wife of Puruhūta (Indra). Thus, in a similar way (through the performance of this *vrata*), her servant-girl has become my most beloved Satyabhāmā (*Matsyapurāṇa*, 69.60).²⁸

In both versions, Satyabhāmā is born as the chief wife of Kṛṣṇa due to the karmic merit (*puṇya*) accrued from the observance of *vrata* rites.

The *Padmapurāṇa*: Satyabhāmā Performs the *Tulāpuruṣadāna*

The *Padmapurāṇa* is a lengthy Purāṇic text of “loose composition”, meaning that its contents were likely composed by different authors at various points in history. It is a hybrid text of both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava orientation, containing six *khaṇḍas* [books], usually called *Sṛṣṭi*, *Bhūmi*, *Svarga*, *Brahmā*, *Pātāla* and *Uttara*. Our narrative is in the last book, the *Uttarakhaṇḍa*, chapters 90-91. The *Uttarakhaṇḍa* is Vaiṣṇava in orientation, and on account of its several references to the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, we can assume that it is a fairly recent portion of the text.

The *Padmapurāṇa* attaches great importance to gift-giving. In fact, in a narrative from the *Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*, Kṛṣṇa’s sixteen thousand wives were cursed to become *veśyās* or courtesans and redeemed themselves by making gifts to Brahmins (23.74-142). There are various types of *dānas* mentioned in the text, and the sixteen types of “great gifts” are termed *mahādāna* in the *Uttarakhaṇḍa* (86.26)²⁹. The first of these, *tulāpuruṣa* (“weight of man”) is called the foremost (*tulāpuruṣadānādyaiḥ* - 72.94). The earliest and most detailed description of this type of gift occurs in the *Matsyapurāṇa* (274.6b), where it is said to be “the giver of virtue, long life, dispeller of all ills, venerated by Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva and other Devas”³⁰.

The *Matsyapurāṇa* provides a lengthy description of this type of ritual, including the dimensions of the scale to be constructed, and the types of Vedic

sacrifices to accompany the gifting ceremony. The text lists the benefits of such a gift as follows (274.75-77):

Those who observe this Mahā Dāna in such a way reign over a Loka for one manvantara. He becomes illustrious like the Sun and then goes to the realm of Viṣṇu seated in a Vimāna decorated with beautiful perforated work, bells, garlands and adorned by the nymphs where he remains for crores of kalpas. On the completion of his store of virtues he is born as an illustrious emperor on this land and conquers thousands of kings after performing sacrifices.³¹

In addition, the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* provides a description in which Kṛṣṇa himself explains the *tulāpuruṣadāna*. According to this text, the ritual must be performed in the months of *kārttika* (November-December) or *māgha* (February-March) (Acharya 1993, 179). It should also be performed in a time of extreme calamity.³²

The *pārijāta* narrative in the *Padmapurāṇa* is the same as the *Harivaṃśapurāṇa* excepting two details. First, when Nārada brings the *pārijāta* flowers to Kṛṣṇa, he distributes them among all of his wives, forgetting Satyabhāmā (88.3).³³ Second, once Kṛṣṇa has replanted the *pārijāta* in Satyabhāmā's garden, she becomes proud (88.15a) and asks Nārada what she should do to secure Kṛṣṇa and the *pārijāta* in all of her future births (88.15b).³⁴

Nārada instructs her to perform a *tulāpuruṣadāna* ("to give away an amount of material goods equivalent to the weight of a man") (88.16-17). She places Kṛṣṇa and the *pārijāta* tree on one end of a scale and gives Nārada the equivalent weight in material goods (88.21-45).

In the chapter that follows, Kṛṣṇa describes to Satyabhāmā her previous birth as Guṇavatī, a *pativratā* who, after observing the *vrata* of *kṛttikā* and *ekādaśī*, received the grace of Viṣṇu and was reborn as Kṛṣṇa's wife, Satyabhāmā (91).

Again, as in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, we come across the two concepts of 'womanhood' expressed by Satyabhāmā who wishes to secure the 'balance' of married life, and 'vanity' in that she is possessive of Kṛṣṇa, and will go to any measure to keep him as her own. Here, Satyabhāmā is born as Kṛṣṇa's wife as a result of the *vratas* she observed in her past life. Her acts of merit transcend

the here-and-now, and for Satyabhāmā, the performance of such acts is simply a continuation of her single-minded love for Kṛṣṇa and concern for the well being of all around him. *Dāna*, which is certainly related to *vrata*, enforces Satyabhāmā's *pativratā dharma* and transforms her into an ever-auspicious female, placing her firmly in the same realm of the spouse goddess. As such, she is reminiscent of the goddess Lakṣmī.³⁵

Conclusions

This chapter has examined epic and Purāṇic constructions of Satyabhāmā that later are manipulated in medieval South Indian (specifically Telugu) poetic and performance traditions. The *Mahābhārata* and most Purāṇic texts depict the figure of Satyabhāmā as an exemplary *pativratā*. Through the performance of specific acts such as *vrata* (votive observance) and *dāna* (donation), Satyabhāmā is brought into the realm of "ideal wifehood." The *dharma* of women, as our texts have shown, deals with the everyday world. Soteriological aims are of minor, if any concern. When "other-worldly" concepts are mentioned, they are usually an expression of a desire for continuity into the next life. Women's power, as McGee describes it, "is a strong force, a life-force, which maintains and feeds the well-being of others" (1996, 164). Satyabhāmā's role as the observant wife in Sanskrit textual tradition establishes her along the continuum of canonical *pativratās*, as we saw in the narrative genealogies of the *puṇyaka vrata*. She becomes a cogent exemplar of the feminine ideal. Indeed, she must live up to her name.

The importance of ornamentation cannot be understated when we examine a figure such as Satyabhāmā. Ornamentation also clearly links Satyabhāmā to real *pativratās* because it symbolizes prosperity and auspiciousness even today. In her work on adornment in Nepal, Bronwen Bledsoe has rightly observed that personal adornment "is honour and propitiation, a mark of domestication, a *lakṣhan* [characteristic or attribute] of woman in her proper and auspicious role" (Bledsoe 1984, 88). For the auspicious married woman (the *sumāṅgalī* or *saubhāgyavatī*), the body must remain

“marked” by gendered symbols. In her study of contemporary Tamil *smārta* women in Madras city, Mary Hancock notes that “...women whose bearing was modest, whose hair was neatly plaited, who were attired in silk, gold bangles, and wedding necklace (*tālī*), as well as ornamented with a *poṭṭu* (the dot applied between the eyebrows) and daubs of *kuṅkumam*, were ‘Lakshmi-like’ (*laṭcumikaramāka*). As married women with living husbands, they embodied auspiciousness (*maṅkalam*) and with their actions enhanced this quality” (Hancock 1999, 103). Apposite images of womanhood are thus constituted, to some degree by physical markers, especially ornaments, which symbolize women’s powers to generate, preserve and disseminate auspiciousness. For Satyabhāmā too, as we shall see later in our discussions of South Indian performance traditions, jewels (particularly her nose-ornament) signify both her auspicious femininity and her status as wife of Kṛṣṇa. Bledsoe also notes that “Adornment is aesthetically delightful, but excessive use of beautification implies vanity and is subject to strong disapproval” (Bledsoe 1984, 93).

A significant rupture is represented by the depiction of Satyabhāmā in the *Harivaṃśapurāṇa* where Satyabhāmā’s character is more fully developed. Here we encounter a slightly different woman, one who is proud, jealous, and haughty. She is only satisfied when Kṛṣṇa concedes to her desire for the *pārijāta* tree. The *pativratā* ideal is thus juxtaposed with representations of her assertive, jealous, desirous and vain nature. This two-fold Purāṇic representation is parallel to the images of Satyabhāmā encountered in the Telugu-speaking regions of South India. In terms of Brahmanic cultural models of womanhood, then, Satyabhāmā incorporates qualities of the two categories of *pativratā* and *veśyā* (again without the latter’s sexual independence). As such, she emerges as a mediating figure. The Sanskrit texts are striking because they focus on the complex character of Satyabhāmā in a nuanced manner that does not limit her representation to the normative *pātivratya* ideal. At the same time, however, this representation does not diminish her claim to *pativratā* status. Her identity is not absorbed into her husband’s, nor is it meshed together with those of the other heroines who are known to us solely on the basis of their *ekāgratā* (single-

mindedness) toward their husbands. Satyabhāmā does not lose herself in the model of the ideal woman but rather expresses her “real” qualities. The creation of the mediating category generalizes the figure of the *pativratā* and introduces an element of emotional complexity to the depiction of female characters.

In the *Harivaṃśapurāṇa*, Satyabhāmā’s womanhood is intrinsically linked to performing or “acting out” particular “states of being,” or *bhāvas* as the aesthetic tradition would say. In the next chapter, I look at how Purāṇic images of Satyabhāmā are complemented by the roughly contemporaneous emergence of vernacular literature that brings Satyabhāmā fully into the realm of aesthetics. The “aestheticized” Satyabhāmā re-negotiates concepts of idealized womanhood in new ways as her popularity grows in South India.

¹ Similar studies on figures such as Sītā, Draupadī and Rādhā in Sanskrit and vernacular traditions have been carried out by many scholars including Sutherland (1989) and Wulff (1984; 1985; 1996; 1997; 2000).

² Sometimes Satyabhāmā is described as having two sisters, Vratinī and Padmāvatī, whom Kṛṣṇa also marries (*Harivaṃśapurāṇa*, 28.34). The *Harivaṃśapurāṇa* itself does not refer to these women again, although other Purāṇas (such as the *Matsyapurāṇa*) mention their names among lists of Kṛṣṇa’s wives.

³ All translations of the *Mahābhārata*, unless otherwise referenced, are from J.A.B. van Buitenei, *The Mahābhārata* (1975). I have included Sanskrit terms in parentheses where relevant. These are from the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata*, ed. V.S. Suthankar et al. (1933-66).

⁴ According to R.C. Hazra, the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* is “one of the most important of the extant puranas” (1975, 19). Although Hazra does not attempt to solve the problem of the date of the text, Ludo Rocher provides a list of the proposed dates of the text, ranging from 700 BCE to 1045 CE (1986, 249). The commonly accepted date of the text lies between 200-500 CE (Klostermaier 1989, 419), making it among the earliest Purāṇic writings. In its present form, it consists of six *aṃśas* (‘parts’ or books) and a total of one hundred and twenty-six chapters. The fifth *aṃśa* deals entirely with the Kṛṣṇa cycle, and clearly posits Kṛṣṇa as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. According to Rocher,

The Kṛṣṇa story of the Viṣṇu[*purāṇa*] has repeatedly been compared with other Kṛṣṇa stories, in the *Harivaṃśa* and in several *purāṇas*, the *Bhāgavata* in particular. Wilson already held out two possibilities: either the *Bhāgavata*[*purāṇa*] amplified and “improved upon” the Viṣṇu[*purāṇa*],

or the latter's greater conciseness resulted from its being an abridgement of the former...Both the amplification and, to a lesser extent, the abridgement theories have found favor with later scholars. (1986, 251)

⁵ After vanquishing the demon Naraka, Kṛṣṇa marries the 16,000 maidens whom Naraka had kidnapped and held hostage (*Viṣṇupurāṇa*, 5.31.14-20). All references to the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* are from *Viṣṇupurāṇa* published by the Gita Press (1943).

⁶ *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, 5.29.24b.

⁷ *ibid.*, 5.30.25:
evamastu tathecchā te tvamaśeṣaissurāsuraiḥ |
ajeyah puruṣavyāghra martyaloke bhaviṣyasi ||

⁸ *ibid.*, 5.30.26-27:
tataḥ kṛṣṇasya patnī ca śakrapatnyā sahāditim |
satyabhāmā praṇamyāha prasīdeti punaḥ punaḥ ||
matprasādānna te śubhru jarā vairūpyameva vā |
bhaviṣyatyanavadyāṅgi susthiraṃ navayauvanam ||

⁹ For discussions and analyses of the concept of *sumāṅgalyam*, see Marglin (1985); Kersenboom (1987); and Narayanan (1985).

¹⁰ *Visnupurāṇa*, 5.30.29:
śacī ca satyabhāmāyai pārijātasya puṣpakam |
na dadau mānuṣīm matvā svayaṃ puṣpairalaṅkṛtā ||

¹¹ A *yojana* is equal to four *krosas*, roughly eight or nine miles.

¹² *Visnupurāṇa*, 5.31.12:
yamabhyetya janassarvo jātīm smarati paurvikīm |
vāsyate yasya puṣpotthagandhenorvī triyojanam ||

¹³ *ibid.*, 5.30.33b:
kasmānna dvārakāmeṣa nīyate kṛṣṇa pādapaḥ ||

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 5.30.35:
na me jāmbavatī tādr̥gabhīṣṭā na ca rukmiṇī |
satye yathā tvamityuktaṃ tvayā kṛṣṇāsakṛtpriyam ||

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 5.30.37:
bibhratī pārijātasya keśapakṣeṇa mañjarīm |
sapatnīnāmahaṃ madhye śobheyamiti kāmaye ||

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 5.30.45b, 46:
kā śacī pārijātasya ko vā śakrassurādhipaḥ ||

Mahābhārata”, *Journal of Vaisnava Studies*, Vol. 4, No.3, Summer 1996, 127-138.

²⁶ This is the commonly accepted date of the text (vide. Kinsley 1986, 83). Couture maintains that it is not possible to agree on a fixed date for the emergence of the work (1996, 135-36).

²⁷ For example, *Skandapurāṇa* (2.4.13.4-23); *Matsyapurāṇa* (69.60); *Harivaṃśapurāṇa* (74-86). Most of these will be discussed in detail below.

²⁸ *Matsyapurāṇa* (69.60):

jātāthavā vaiśyakulodbhavāpi pulomakanyā puruhūtapatnī |
tatrāpi tasyāḥ paricārikeyaṃ mama priyā samprati satyabhāmā ||

²⁹ These sixteen are *tulāpuruṣa*, *hiranyagarbha*, *brahmāṇḍa*, *kalpavṛkṣa*, *gosahasra*, *kāmadhenu*, *hiranyāśva*, *hiranyāśvaratha*, *hemahastiratha*, *pañcalāṅgala*, *dharādāna*, *viśvacakra*, *kalpalatā*, *saptasāgara*, *ratnadhenu* and *mahābhūtaghaṭa*. This list is actually from the *Matsyapurāṇa* (274.6-10).

³⁰ *Matsya Purāṇam* (Part 2). Trans. A Taluqdar of Oudh. Allahbad: Sudhindra Natha Vasu, 1917, 347.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 351.

³² *ibid.*, p. 179.

³³ *Padmapurāṇa*, *Uttarakhaṇḍa*, 88.3:
nāradaśtānīpūṣpāṇīkṛṣṇāyopājahāraca |
kṛṣṇaḥ śoḍaśasāhasrastrībhyastānīvyabhajyata ||

³⁴ *ibid.*, 90.15:
bhavebhava katham prāpyastadākhyātubhavān mama ||

³⁵ I have often been told by lay Vaiṣṇavas in Tamilnadu that Satyabhāmā is “Lakṣmī-like” (*laṭcumikaramāka*).

Chapter 2

The Popularization of Satyabhāmā in South Indian Poetry and Performance-Texts

*mānaṃbē tōḍavu satulaku
mānamē prāṇādhikaṃbu mānamakhila sa-
mmānamulaku mūlaṃbagu
māna rahitamaina bratuku māninikelā ||*

A woman's jewel is her pride,
more precious than life.
Pride is the basis of all honour.
How can a woman live
if she loses pride?

- *Pārijātāpaharaṇamu* of Nandi Timmana (1.127)

Introduction

This chapter will focus on the popularization of Satyabhāmā in South India, more specifically in the Telugu-speaking regions. From the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries, the image of Satyabhāmā was popularized in the various regions and vernacular languages of the subcontinent. The process that I refer to as “popularization” was facilitated not only by the use of vernaculars, which brought the image of Satyabhāmā closer to the masses but also through the incorporation of Satyabhāmā into literary genres meant for performance. One major development of this popularization occurred in the North-East (Mithila, Assam and Bengal) in dramas and devotional *rasa*-oriented texts. By the time we reach Rūpa Gosvāmi's Prakrit and Sanskrit drama *Lalita-mādhava* written in the year 1537, the image of Satyabhāmā has entered the realm of aestheticized and eroticized devotion or *madhura bhaktirasa*, through her identification with the figure of Rādhā in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava context. Appendix 2 provides details on the major texts dealing with Satyabhāmā from the Mithila-Assam-Bengal region. Most of these texts are also contemporary with some of the early Telugu court *kāvyas* (poems) from the Vijayanagara period, where Satyabhāmā becomes the sole focus of several texts composed in the *prabandha* mega-genre.

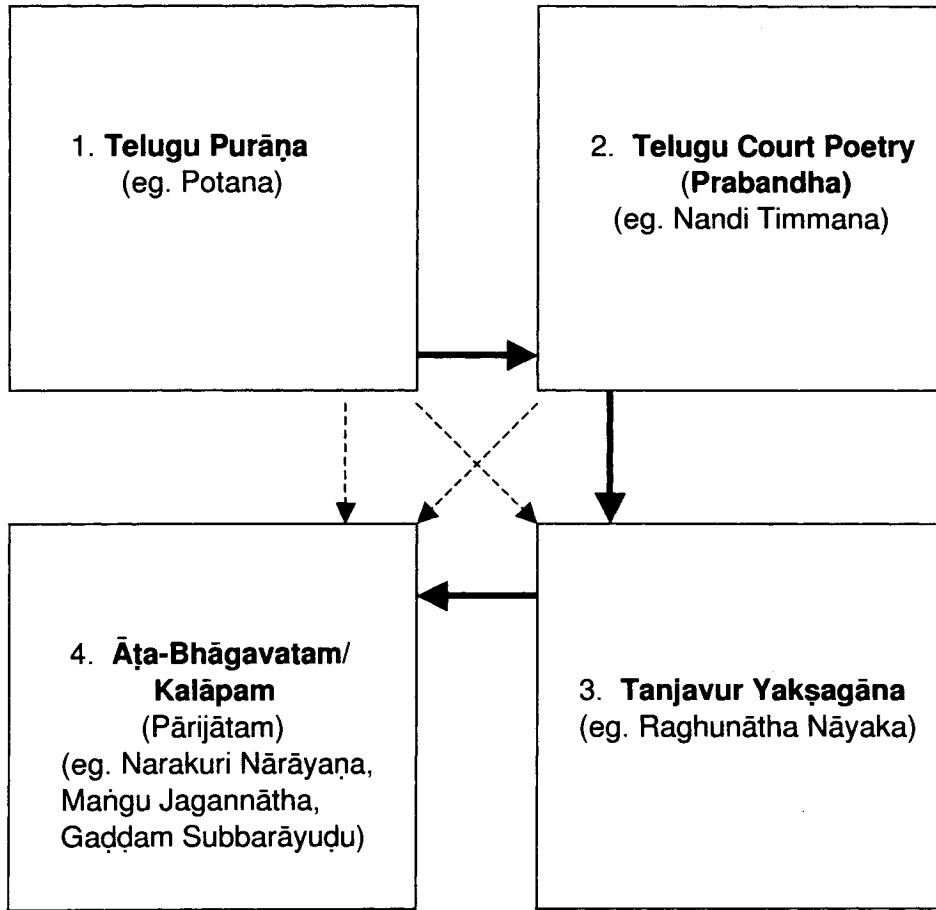
In late-medieval Andhra and Tamilnadu, Telugu writers and performers invoke and use the image of Satyabhāmā in a variety of modes and contexts. One of the major developments as we move from Sanskrit Purāṇic images of Satyabhāmā to elite court and popular literary contexts, is the evolution of an aestheticized Satyabhāmā. Satyabhāmā is identified not so much as a *pativrātā* but as an ideal “character” in the dramatic or aesthetic sense. She is seen as well-suited for representation through aesthetic modes of expression such as poetry and drama. However, this process of “aestheticization” cannot be understood without examining basic shifts in cultural context and ethos. Therefore, unlike the previous chapter, my purpose in this chapter is not so much textual analysis as it is a kind of textual “genre mapping”. In mapping the figure of Satyabhāmā in Telugu literature, I have classified literary texts into four genres: (1) Telugu Purāṇa; (2) Telugu Kāvya or Court Poetry; (3) Yakṣagāna (“musical dramas”) from the Tanjavur court; and (4) Kalāpam (“solo dance theatre” texts commissioned by feudal kings or *devadāsī* women). These four genres can roughly be aligned with four historical stages of popularization. The mapping of genres signals the significant changes in cultural context and ethos that manifest through poetic elaborations such as those we find in the material related to Satyabhama. This survey, however, is limited to examining a select number of representative texts from among those found in Telugu-speaking South India. It does not claim to be comprehensive.

Locating Satyabhāmā in the Telugu Literary Context

From the early fifteenth century onward, the figure of Satyabhāmā becomes the focus of a large corpus of texts written by Telugu poets in various parts of Andhra and Tamilnadu. The origins of the Telugu texts on Satyabhāmā, or rather the origins of the cultural “selection” of Satyabhāmā as a female cultural archetype by Telugus, are somewhat uncertain. However, as Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam point out, “thematic selectivity is itself a major indicator of cultural change” (1992, 163). An increasing preoccupation with the representation of Satyabhāmā runs parallel to the development of a court culture rooted in the ethos of aesthetics. Here I follow the work of Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam on Nāyaka imperial culture (1992). By the end of the seventeenth century, Satyabhāmā is fully transformed into a *nāyikā*, or

heroine in the culture of Sanskrit aesthetic theory, and the bulk of the texts written about her are *meant for performance* through drama and dance. Following some of the early textual stratifications suggested to me by Arudra, I posit four distinct yet interactive genres in the development of pre-modern Telugu literature related to imagings of Satyabhāmā. The four genres are represented below with the names of exemplary authors from each genre given in parentheses:

Table 1: *Four Genres of Telugu Satyabhāmā-Oriented Literature*



In Table 1, I have arranged these genres in a developmental model, which I understand as a process of cumulative stratification represented by the solid lines. But I have also tried to show the secondary directions of influence, represented by the dotted lines. I suggest that this process of cumulative stratification and secondary influences creates a poetic culture of intertextuality. In addition, when it comes to the latter two genres, titles

such as “*yakṣagāna*” and “*kalāpam*” (also known as *pārijātam* or *pārujātam*¹) are easily interchanged. Gaddam Subbrayudu Sastri’s fourteen *Bhāmākalāpam* texts, for example, are referred to as “*pārijātam*” or *pārujātam* by the *kalāvantulu* (*devadāsīs*) of the Godavari delta, but are also called *Āṭabhāgavatam* and *Bhāmākalāpam*. In the sections that follow, I will outline the historical and stylistic contexts of each of these genres, and discuss the figure of Satyabhāmā in a representative text from each genre. Again, my intention is to signal to the reader some of the differing genres in which Satyabhāmā appears through the vast corpus of Telugu literature.

Telugu Purāṇa

The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries constituted a seminal period in the development of Telugu Vaiṣṇava culture, with a tremendous amount of religious and intellectual activity concentrated at centres such as the Narasiṃhasvāmi temple at Simhachalam (Vizag district).² Bammēra Potana (early fifteenth century) was born in the town of Bammēra (Warangal district) near Simhachalam. His literary magnum opus is the *Mahābhāgavatamu*, the “Great Bhāgavatapurāṇa.”³ This work is almost universally recognized as one of the gems of medieval Telugu literature, and verses from certain episodes in the text are memorized and recited by many contemporary Telugu Vaiṣṇavas. Velcheru Narayana Rao notes the important distinction in medieval Andhra between what he calls “court poets” and “temple poets”. The former are those who liberally accept royal patronage, whereas the latter are those who reject imperial patronage and the power-based political privileges that come with it (Narayana Rao 1987, 143-54). Potana is said to have refused the patronage of the local king Sarvajña Siṅghabhūpāla. Instead, he dedicated his *Mahābhāgavatamu* to his “divine patron,” Rāma, and thus can be called a “temple poet” unlike all of the later Telugu poets who have written about Satyabhāmā.

Shulman describes Potana’s *Mahābhāgavatamu* as “a Brahminic, regional adaptation of a classical Sanskrit text” (Shulman 1993, 152 n. 7). Like the Sanskrit *Bhāgavatam* which reads more like *kāvya* than an epic narrative, Potana’s *Mahābhāgavatamu* is replete with literary and aesthetic nuances. Shulman notes that Potana does not make many major narrative departures from the Sanskrit text of the

Bhāgavatam, and, in fact, he very cleverly borrows entire clusters of compounds from it and adds these to his own Telugu verses. However, for our purpose, the *Mahābhāgavatamu* of Potana makes one very important narrative innovation in its depiction of Satyabhāmā.

Our discussion here will focus not on the *pārijāta* incident (which has little narrative innovation in Potana's work), but the section that immediately precedes it, namely the slaying of Narakāśura. In the Sanskrit *Bhāgavatam*, this episode also occurs in the same chapter as the *pārijāta* incident (10.59).⁴ Naraka is the son of the earth, Pṛthvī or Bhūmi, and thus is also known as Bhaumāsura. He kidnaps sixteen thousand young women (*ṣaṭ-sahasra kanyāḥ*) and steals the earrings of Indra's mother Aditi, the umbrella of Varuṇa and the *maṇiparvata*, a pleasure-zone located atop the Mandara mountain. Indra appeals for help to Kṛṣṇa in Dvārakā, and Kṛṣṇa and Satyabhāmā set off to Prāgjyotiṣapura, the abode of Naraka. At Prāgjyotiṣapura, they encounter the five-headed demon Mura, whom Kṛṣṇa decapitates with his *cakra* (discus). Eventually, Kṛṣṇa locates Naraka and slays him:

Bhauma [Naraka], whose attempts [to slay Kṛṣṇa] left him frustrated, lifted his trident to slay Acyuta.

But even before the trident could be discharged, Hari [Kṛṣṇa] severed the head of the demon who was seated upon an elephant with his sharp-edged discus.⁵

In the *daśama-skandhamu* of Potana's *Mahābhāgavatamu*, we find Satyabhāmā aiding Kṛṣṇa in his battle against Narakāśura. Satyabhāmā enters the battlefield, full of rage, and engages in battle with Naraka's armies. This is a significant departure from the Sanskrit *Bhāgavatam*, and in terms of the development of the character of Satyabhāmā, it represents a major shift in representation. In Potana's work, Satyabhāmā emerges as a *vīra vanitā*, or valourous woman, cast as a *vīrāṅganā* (heroic woman) of late-medieval India (Hansen 1992b), as in the following verse about Satyabhāmā battling the armies of Naraka. Naraka says to Kṛṣṇa:

maguva magavāri muṁdara
magatanamulu sūpa raṇamu mānuṭa nīkun
magatanamu gādu danujulu
maguvala desa janaru magalamaga laguta hari

A woman [Satyabhāmā] is showing off her “manliness” by fighting in a fierce battlefield. And Hari [Kṛṣṇa], you have stopped fighting! Don’t you have any virility (lit. “manhood”) [left]? We demons don’t step foot into battlefields where women [fight].

A few verses later, Kṛṣṇa decapitates Naraka by hurling his discus at him. Although ultimately Naraka is slain by Kṛṣṇa, Satyabhāmā is not a passive observer of the event. She is actively involved in the fight and later oral re-tellings in Telugu tradition eventually depict Satyabhāmā as slaying her own son, in an extreme violation of Hindu conceptions of motherhood. The slaying of Naraka (*narakāsura-vadham*) is perhaps the best-known mythic explanation for the origins of the festival of *dīpāvalī* in South India. The night before *dīpāvalī* is also known as Naraka Caturdaśī, because Naraka’s death took place on the *caturdaśī* (fourteenth day) of the fortnight that ends with *amāvasya* (new moon day), which is *dīpāvalī* proper. Even today, in many parts of Andhra, *dīpāvalī* is celebrated as the day after Kṛṣṇa (or Satyabhāmā) killed Narakāsura. The image of Satyabhāmā presented by Potana continues to fascinate the South Indian imagination, and some of the earliest South Indian films depict Satyabhāmā as per this text – as a warrior (*vīra vanitā*), with weapons in hand. Examples of this range from the Tamil *Bhāmā Vijayam* (“The Victory of Satyabhāmā”), produced in 1934, with P.S. Ratna Bai in the role of Satyabhāmā (Fig. 1), to the extremely popular Telugu film *Dīpāvalī*, produced in 1960 with the actress Savithri as Satyabhāmā (Fig. 2)⁶.

Telugu Court Poetry: A New Poetic Universe

The Vijayanagara dynasty ruled over the southern peninsula of India for more than three centuries. From the mid-fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries, the Vijayanagara (lit. “City of Victory”) kingdom exerted a tremendous amount of cultural influence in the region. Not only was Vijayanagara imaged as a powerful and militarily resilient culture (Stein 1993), but its leaders were also imaged as paradigmatic rulers who were great aesthetes and patrons of the arts. In particular, the cultural apogee of the dynasty was the rule of the King Kṛṣṇadevarāya (r. 1509-29)⁷. Perhaps one of the greatest acknowledgements of the sophisticated forms of cultural negotiation that occurred at the hands of the Vijayanagara kings comes from Phillip Wagoner’s recent essay on the “Islamicization” of Hindu courtly culture (1996). Wagoner suggests that the

transformations that occurred at the Vijayanagara court as a result of Islamic influence could best be characterized as a politicized strategy that altered cultural practice, but did not replace established cultural forms (ibid., 1996, 854). It is against the backdrop of this hybrid religio-political milieu that I begin a discussion of the literary output of this period. My focus in this section is specifically on the court poets who were patronized by Kṛṣṇadevarāya, since the earliest reference to Satyabhāmā comes from this period.

As Narayana Rao and Shulman note, in the first half of the sixteenth century, the earlier style of Telugu Purāṇic poetry “gave way to full-fledged *kāvya* or *prabandha* texts – elevated and sustained courtly compositions” (2002, 11). It is in this period that we see a new perception of the importance of vernacular poetic (*kāvya*) and aesthetic (*alaṅkāra*) writings in various parts of South India⁸.

Kṛṣṇadevarāya's only surviving composition is the *Āmukta-mālyada*, about the Tamil female saint Āṇṭāl. However, his court patronized some of the finest Telugu poets. Later historiographic tradition calls these celebrated court-poets the *aṣṭadiggajālu*,⁹ or “Eight Elephants of the Directions,” namely Allasāni Pēddanna, Nandi Timmana, Mādayyagāri Mallanna, Dhūrjaṭi, Piṅgaḷi Sūranna, Rāmarājabhūṣaṇa, Ayyalarāju Rāmabhadruḍu and Tēnāli Rāmakṛṣṇa.

The poets of Kṛṣṇadevarāya's court are thought to have ushered in a “golden age” of a poetic genre called *prabandham*. Traditionally, Allasāni Pēddanna (early sixteenth century) is thought to have written the definitive *prabandha-kāvya*, *Svārociṣa Manu Saṁbhavamū*. As early as 1600, Pēdapāṭi Jagganna wrote an anthology of *prabandha* texts called *Prabandha-ratnākaramū*, clearly indicating that the form had attained a significant status. Nandi Timmana's *Pārijātāpaharaṇamū*, which will be the focus of our discussion, likewise is a *prabandha* text. Narayana Rao notes the distinguishing characteristics of *prabandha* texts as thick description and attention to ornamental detail:

A *prabandha* is defined by the number of descriptions it contains, generally listed as eighteen (an auspicious number) but almost always more. These are supposed to include descriptions of such subjects as a city, seasons, sunrise, moonrise, marriage, lovemaking, the birth of a son, hunting, battle, and so on. The focus of the *prabandha* is on the aesthetic quality of the descriptions and not on narrative or character development. The grandeur of the *prabandha* consists in the ornamental beauty of the language, in luxurious description and intricate detail. It is a text to savor, to relish, and the notion of sanctity acquired through listening to the story is far less important than in the case of *itihāsas* and *purāṇas*. (1987, 137-38)

That fact that one of the most important Telugu Satyabhāmā-oriented texts is specifically composed in the *prabandham* genre is significant. We are now in the realm of pure aesthetics, where the demonstration of literary prowess becomes the focus of the poet's creative enterprise. Within the genre of *prabandha*, Telugu literary historians designate certain texts as belonging to a sub-genre called *śṛṅgāra-prabandha*. *Śṛṅgāra-prabandhas* consist largely of female-oriented love-poetry, and it is in this context that images and roles of women clearly take on new forms and meanings.

In the sixteenth century, one of the court-poets of King Kṛṣṇadevarāya, Nandi ('Mukku')¹⁰ Timmana, composed a landmark *śṛṅgāra-prabandha* text called *Pārijātāpaharaṇamu* ("Theft of the Pārijāta Tree"). This is one of the earliest Telugu texts specifically centred around the character of Satyabhāmā. It is considered one of the finest pieces of Telugu poetry and has become a literary benchmark. In this text, Satyabhāmā is presented at the height of her arrogance. She is identified with the Vijayanagara queen Tirumaladevi. According to traditional accounts of Nandi Timmana's life, there was a particular incident that sparked the composition of *Pārijātāpaharaṇamu*. Kṛṣṇadevarāya awoke one day to find that his queen Tirumaladevi was sleeping with her feet touching his head. Kṛṣṇadevarāya was exceedingly angry by this sign of disrespect on her part. Timmana is said to have composed the *Pārijātāpaharaṇamu* in order that Tirumaladevi be able to win back the affection of Kṛṣṇadevarāya. They hoped that the king would perceive the text as a didactic poem on the basics of love relationships. In the first canto of the *Pārijātāpaharaṇamu*, Kṛṣṇa bows at Satyabhāmā's feet so that she may forgive him for giving the *pārijāta* flower to Rukmiṇī. Perhaps this was the image that Tirumaladevi was hoping for – that Kṛṣṇadevarāya would realize his folly and come back to her.

The conflation of the images of the king and the deity is complete at Kṛṣṇadevarāya's court. Timmana is clear that he not writing about just any king. At the beginning of the *Pārijātāpaharaṇamu* (1.17), he clearly identifies the King Kṛṣṇadevarāya with Kṛṣṇa:

Because as a cowherd he could not sit on a throne,
he was to take his place, radiant, on a throne.
Because he made love to the wives of other cowherds,
he was to act as a brother toward all women not his own.
Because he lost Mathura to the demon Jarāsandha,
he was to take by force the fortresses of his enemies.
Because he had greedily stolen Indra's Pārijāta tree,

he was to wipe out that blemish with his charity.
Because all these faults had to be his when born
before as Krishna, he has returned so as to remove them.
He is Krishna descended again, who has taken on a form
that receives utmost honor from everyone in the world:
the son of Narasarāya, Krishnarāya, lord of the earth.
(Narayana Rao 1987, 148)

It is this pattern of complete identification between the king in his court and the deity in the temple that continues as the paradigmatic model of kingship later in the Nāyaka period. Indeed, a famous standing bronze image of Kṛṣṇadevarāya inside the Tirupati Veṅkaṭeśvara temple depicts him flanked by his two queens, Tirumaladevi and Cinnadevi (c. 1514-18) and is reminiscent of the images of Viṣṇu flanked by Śrī and Bhū, and Kṛṣṇa flanked by Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā, discussed in Appendix 1.

The *Pārijātāpaharaṇamu* consists of 507 stanzas spread across five cantos (called *āśvāsam*). The text bases its narrative structure completely on the *Harivaṃśa* (2.65-67, 77-80), and includes the mention of the *puṇyaka vrata* (the votive observance performed by Satyabhāmā). The first canto, which is the most popular, describes Kṛṣṇa's gifting the *pārijāta* to Rukmiṇī, Satyabhāmā's attendants conveying the news to Satyabhāmā, Satyabhāmā's subsequent anger and dishevelled appearance, and Kṛṣṇa's promise to replant the *pārijāta* tree in Satyabhāmā's garden. The second canto of the work deals with Nārada blessing Satyabhāmā and the forays of Kṛṣṇa and Satyabhāmā into the abode of Indra. The third canto describes the reception hosted for Kṛṣṇa by Indra and the couple's stay in the Vaijayantī palace, where the *pārijāta* tree is located. Canto four describes their overnight stay at the palace, and how in the morning, Kṛṣṇa uproots the tree. The attendants of the garden protest, and a dialogue very similar to the one in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* (5.30.45-50) ensues between the guards and Satyabhāmā. The battle between the *devas* and Kṛṣṇa begins toward the end of canto four and continues into canto five. After Kṛṣṇa successfully planted the tree in Satyabhāmā's garden, Nārada informs Satyabhāmā of the *puṇyaka vrata*, which requires that Satyabhāmā give away her most precious possession to Nārada. Satyabhāmā gives away Kṛṣṇa to Nārada, and later "buys" Kṛṣṇa back. Kṛṣṇa, "bought back" by Satyabhāmā, lives as her eternal slave, unable to be released from his mistress' clutch.

Timmana's narrative innovations acted as a conceptual "template," upon which several versions of the *Bhāmākalāpam* were drafted, composed and recomposed. Let us examine one significant narrative innovation made by him that is recounted or replicated by several later authors who compose *pārijāta* texts in Telugu. In the first canto or *āśvāsam*, when Kṛṣṇa finds Satyabhāmā in her "sulking room," tired and dejected, he approaches her, and bows at her feet, asking for her forgiveness. This is perhaps a scene inspired by a similar incident involving Rādhā in Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda* (10.8)¹¹. However, unlike Rādhā in the *Gītagovinda*, Satyabhāmā's anger is not so easily quelled. Instead of considering Kṛṣṇa's plea, she kicks his head, much as Tirumaladevi had touched her feet to Kṛṣṇadevarāya's head. The following verses clearly outline the incident in Timmana's elegant poetry. The equally eloquent translations are by Narayana Rao and Shulman (2002, 277-78):

She kicked him with her left foot,
Right on the head – the head of God, honoured
by all other gods.¹² That's how it is.
When the husband errs, the wife is usually too furious
to be sensible.¹³

I am deeply honoured to have been kicked
by Your Highness, in loving anger. My only worry
is that my bristling hairs might have hurt
your ever-so-tender foot. Please don't be angry any more.¹⁴

Tricks and lies were born along with you.
You sucked them in with your mother's milk.
I know that, but still, like a fool, I loved you.
Now I've lost all self-respect. What am I to do?¹⁵

A woman's jewel is her pride,
more precious than life. Pride
is the basis of all honour. How can a woman live
if she loses pride?¹⁶

Eventually, Kṛṣṇa promises to bring Satyabhāmā the entire *pārijāta* tree, and this promise finally quells her anger. This incident brings to the forefront a number of important issues related to our study of Satyabhāmā. First, Satyabhāmā's audacity to kick Kṛṣṇa is surprising on two grounds – on the one hand Kṛṣṇa is her husband, and on the other, he is God. Wulff (1997) has discussed a similar imaging of Rādhā in Bengal as *mānini* (the "woman offended"), and she notes that in *kīrtan* performances, the figure

of Rādhā ridicules and humiliates Kṛṣṇa. She says that it can be traced back to Bengali literary conventions of *pati-nindā* (lit. “husband abuse”) found in medieval *maṅgal-kāvya*s (ibid., 75). Wulff attributes the use of this rhetoric to *bhakti* theology, in which women are considered to be natural devotees. This implies that men must become women to fully experience God (ibid., 67). Such understandings are also prevalent in South India (as we shall see in chapter six) and certainly underlie our example from the *Pārijātāpaharaṇamu*, but we must remember that the court is also a site where reconfigurations of womanhood occur. Second, Satyabhāmā’s pride (*mānam*) is explicitly mentioned here. This is an uncommon trait for *pativrātās*, especially in Sanskrit religious contexts. Early Sanskrit dramatic literature mentions characters possessing *garva* (“pride”), but even this is rarely used with respect to female characters. More than likely, the depiction of Satyabhāmā’s *mānam* is a result of a courtly context where the presence of real women, perhaps role models such as Tirumaladevi, might have allowed for the expression of such ideas in written form.¹⁷

Telugu Yakṣagāna and the Origins of ‘Kalāpam’: Courtly Conventions and *Pārijāta* Texts from Nāyaka and Marāṭhā-Period Tanjavur

The Nāyakas were essentially captains/regents of the Vijayanagar state who had broken away to form autonomous kingdoms in four South Indian locales: Tanjavur, Gingee, and Madurai (in Tamilnadu) and Ikkeri (in Karnataka). Following the breakdown of the Vijayanagara state in 1565, several court poets migrated South to the new capital of Telugu aesthetic patronage, the city of Tanjavur in Tamilnadu. The Nāyaka penetration of the Tamil country is a complex historical process, which has been thoroughly discussed by several scholars, including Karashima (1984), Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam (1992) and Subrahmanyam (1995). For our purposes, we need only concern ourselves with the Nāyaka rule at Tanjavur, which begins with Cevappa Nāyaka, whose occupation of Tanjavur supposedly began through a marriage alliance. Cevappa’s wife, Mūrtimāmba, was the sister-in-law of the Vijayanagara king Acyutadevarāya (Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s brother), who is said to have gifted Tanjavur to Cevappa¹⁸.

Table 2: *The Nāyaka Kings of Tanjavur*

	Cevappa Nāyaka (r. 1532-1560)
	Acyutappa Nāyaka (r. 1560-1600)
	Raghunātha Nāyaka (r. 1600-1634)
	Vijayarāghava Nāyaka (r. 1634-1673)
	Alagiri Nāyaka (r. 1674)
↓	Ceṅgamaladāsa Nāyaka (r. 1675-1676)

At this point, there is a radical shift in the way that culture is perceived. Nāyaka dynastic rule speaks the language of courtly decadence, centred around a new kind of eroticism. Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam call this a “telos with existential features, that is, ‘enjoyment’ (*bhoga*)” (1992, 57). This culture of *bhoga*, of erotic longing and fulfilment, is one in which the court and temple have merged in a single universe.

Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam further note that:

An ideology of *bhoga*, such as that which emerges in the Nāyaka courts, almost inevitably implies an interest in... violation. One begins with the human body regarded now – from the mid-sixteenth century on – with a new and far less qualified seriousness... If *bhoga* presupposes violation, then a society oriented toward it must incorporate antinomian drives... Normative hierarchies may be challenged and... re-ordered or reversed... More generally, the imagined social universe takes shape, it seems, by imaginatively breaking down the existing, external one. (1992, 163-64)

In the Nāyaka period we also begin to see very clearly a rich culture of drama and more specifically dance being performed at the royal court. The Tanjavur Nāyakas were great patrons of music as well and had the magnificent structure now known as ‘Saṅgīta Mahal’ (a proscenium-style theatre) built on the grounds of their palace.

The Tanjavur Nāyakas made the Mannargudi Rājagopālasvāmi temple their primary ritual centre, and Kṛṣṇa as Rājagopāla was established as the tutelary clan deity (Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam 1992, 172). The Nāyaka palace at Tanjavur, in fact, houses a miniature replica of the Mannargudi shrine, where the

Nāyaka kings and their families performed daily worship of Rājagopāla (for details on Rājagopāla see appendix 1). It is thus not surprising that there is a spate of literature connected with the Mannargudi temple (and with Kṛṣṇa more generally) composed during this time.

In addition to the culture of the court dramas, Nāyaka rule served to conflate the roles and identities of the temple woman (*devadāsī*) and the royal courtesan (*bhoga-strī*, *veśyā*). Their new role as artists who performed both in temple and court in fact allowed these women to be imaged as mistresses, wives or even queens (Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam 1992, 187). In addition, the Nāyaka court supported creative writing by these women – works by Rāmabhadraṁba and Raṅgājamma, for example, are considered among the crowning literary pieces from this period. Rāmabhadraṁba, a highly learned courtesan and wife of King Raghunātha Nāyaka, composed a Sanskrit literary masterpiece called *Raghunāthābhyudaya*,¹⁹ valorizing the deeds of the king, and linking him explicitly to Rāma-Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa by positing his royal career as a re-enactment of Rāma's life (Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam 1992, 195-97). Raṅgājamma was the authoress of two *yakṣagānas* (dramatic compositions discussed below): *Uṣāpariṇayamu*, describing the love and eventual marriage of the demon Bāṇāsura's daughter Uṣā and Kṛṣṇa's grandson Aniruddha; and *Mannārudāsa Vilāsam*, celebrating the marriage of King Vijayarāghava and the courtesan Kāntimatī. In addition, she wrote several *cāṭu* verses²⁰, and erotic songs (*padams*) that have unfortunately been lost. This is the period when the *padams* of Kṣetrayya were composed, partly under the patronage of Vijayarāghava Nāyaka. The *padams* of Kṣetrayya, which still survive in the repertoire of the *kalāvantulu* community today, reflect new images of womanhood and a unique image of fully eroticized devotion. Many of these songs express female desire and are completely unabashed in their representations of the corporeality of sexual experience. These *padams* were exclusively sung by the *kalāvantulu* in various parts of Telugu-speaking South India, and as we will see in Chapter Four, served to crystallize their identities as ambivalent women.

The Nāyaka period is considered the high-point of a particular genre called *yakṣagāna* (lit. "Song of the Yakṣa"). While erotic *bhakti* poetry, local *shtalapurāṇas* and many other literary forms thrive under Nāyaka imperial patronage, the *yakṣagāna*

dramas are unique in terms of form and content. Technically the genre of *yakṣagāna* begins at the Vijayanagara court of Kṛṣṇadevarāya with the composition of two texts – the *Saubhari-caritramu* of Prolugaṇṭi Cēnnaya and the *Sugrīva-vijayamu* of Kandukūri Rudrakavi – but the genre is recognized as only reaching its maturity in the hands of the Nāyaka-period Telugu poets. *Yakṣagāna* becomes an enduring genre – it survives well into the Marāṭhā period, when hundreds of new texts in this genre are created, and presumably enacted, in the royal precincts.

Along with the evolution of the *yakṣagāna* comes the evolution of one of its most important components, the literary and musical form *daruvu* (also called *daru*). Indeed *yakṣagāna* texts can be distinguished by the presence of the *daruvu* – it is the primary marker of the *yakṣagāna* text. Many scholars have remarked that the *daruvu* is a direct descendant of kind of song called *dhruvā* in Sanskrit, mentioned in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Kothari 2001, 49; 80, n. 8)²¹, although in reality, Telugu *yakṣagāna* authors who were familiar with Sanskrit poetics, likely borrowed the principle of the Sanskrit *dhruvā*, altered it, and applied it in the form of the *daruvu*, to their works. Essentially, a *yakṣagāna* text may be defined as a text consisting of several compositions that are linked to a particular subject or more commonly, a particular narrative. The compositional genres that make up the *yakṣagāna* are generally *daruvu* (song), *vacanam* (prose, dialogue) and *padyam* (verse). The "link" might seem obvious in the *daruvu*-compositions themselves, or might be provided by monologue (*vacanam*, *padyam*) or dialogue (*saṁvādam*) that "fill in the gaps" between the compositions.

An important text based on the *pārijāta* episode was supposedly composed by Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha (c. 1675-1745 CE).²² A palm-leaf manuscript of this text was discovered by Dr. V. Raghavan in the village of Nallur (Tanjavur district, Tamil Nadu) in 1942. The text, consisting of 27 leaves, contains *daruvus* indicating the *rāgas* (melodic structures) in which they are to be sung.²³ Entitled *Pārijāta-haraṇa Nāṭaka* ("The Drama of the Stealing of the Pārijāta"), the narrative centres around the gifting of the *pārijāta* flower to Rukmiṇī (although it is erroneously written on leaf 7 as Satyabhāmā), Satyabhāmā's *dūti* (attendant) describing the event to her, Satyabhāmā's subsequent anger, a dialogue between Satyabhāmā and Rukmiṇī, Kṛṣṇa's consoling Satyabhāmā, Kṛṣṇa journeying to Indra's palace to steal the *pārijāta* and his replanting of the tree in Satyabhāmā's garden. At the moment when Kṛṣṇa enters Indraloka, the demon Naraka is introduced, and Kṛṣṇa slays

him before uprooting the *pārijāta* tree. The final two leaves describe Indra's arrival in Dvārakā and his prayers to Kṛṣṇa.

The text of the *Pārijātaharaṇa Nāṭaka* is important to this study for several reasons. First, it is an example of a highly Sanskritized Telugu composition based on the theme of the *pārijāta* narrative. Like a paper manuscript entitled *Śrī Pārijātaharaṇam* (G.O.M.L. R2961) by one Kīrti Nārāyaṇa Kavi Rājapaṇḍita (unknown date),²⁴ the text provides us with evidence of the many linguistic tongues in which the *pārijāta* episode was represented; in this case it is a hybrid-language (*maṇipravāḷa*) of Sanskrit and Telugu. It is also written in the style of the *yakṣagāna-prabandha* as are the later Telugu renditions. Structurally, being a performance-specific text, it contains the elements of *pātra-praveśa daruvu* (entrance song of characters), *saṁvāda daruvu* (dialogue song), etc. which are central to the Telugu performances. From the perspective of narrative, too, its contents match many of the eleven characteristic elements of the *pārijāta* narrative in vernacular tradition mentioned by Arudra that we shall examine below.

The text is important from the perspective of the chronology of *pārijāta*-centred texts. If we place the beginning of Telugu ones at the earliest around 1634 CE, then Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha's text is contemporaneous with the earliest writings on the subject. This is important as it too may have acted as a "source-text" *yakṣagāna* from which the later Telugu performance traditions have arisen. It is also significant that the *Śrī Kṛṣṇalīlātarāṅginī*, Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha's most popular Sanskrit devotional composition, is a popular text among the communities that preserve traditions of *pārijāta*-centred performance. Excerpts from the *Śrī Kṛṣṇalīlātarāṅginī* figure prominently in the repertoire of the *mejuvāṇi* (entertainment dance) traditions of the coastal Andhra *kalāvantulu* (*devadāsīs*), and at the beginning of this century these were incorporated into the neo-classical dance tradition known as Kuchipudi by Vedantam Lakshminarayana Shastri (1875-1957). Many authors have referred to Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha as a native of Andhra Pradesh (Naidu 1975, 22). Because his Sanskrit compositions remain popular in Andhra in spite of his long stay in Tamil Nadu and because the manuscript was discovered in Nallur, it is quite possible that this text contributed to the formulation of Telugu texts in the *kalāpam* genre, in terms of narrative content and structure.

One of the key shifts in this period is the marked aestheticization of Satyabhāmā. The image of Satyabhāmā is re-worked through a series of (largely Sanskritic) aesthetic

signposts. The most prominent of these is the explicit identification of Satyabhāmā with the female aesthetic category of *nāyikā* (heroine)²⁵. Appendix 2 demonstrates the identification of Satyabhāmā with the *nāyikās* in Rūpa Gosvāmi's *Lalita-mādhava*, but the Nāyaka court is where we first encounter this identification in the Telugu literary context. As we shall see later, these aesthetic imagings of Satyabhāmā become extremely important in various genres of performance throughout Andhra. Indeed, as one moves through the corpus of performance-specific texts about Satyabhāmā (called *yakṣagāna* and *kalāpam*), one notices that the image of Satyabhāmā as *nāyikā* becomes the central heuristic tool used by men and women to unpack the meanings of womanhood.

One of the earliest surviving Telugu references to Satyabhāmā as a *nāyikā* in Telugu literature is from Ceṅgalva Kāḷakavi's *Rājagopālavilāsamu*.²⁶ Ceṅgalva Kāḷakavi was a court poet in the Nāyaka court of Vijayarāghava Nāyaka of Tanjavur (1633-73). Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam note that the *Rājagopālavilāsamu* incorporated "the local purāṇa materials of Mannarkuti as well as...[reworked]...Krishna materials in terms of the Sanskrit *alaṅkāra* typologies" (1992, 335). The *Rājagopālavilāsamu* is in effect a poetic Telugu rendering of the Sanskrit Mannargudi *sthalapurāṇa*, called *Campakāraṇyamāhātmya*. In this work, Ceṅgalva Kāḷakavi identifies the eight principal wives of Kṛṣṇa (*aṣṭabhāryās*) with the eight principal *nāyikās* (*aṣṭanāyikās*) of Sanskrit *nāṭya*- and *alaṅkāraśāstra*. The chart below maps these identifications:

Table 3: *Kṛṣṇa's Bhāryās and the Aṣṭanāyikās in the Rājagopālavilāsamu*

Bhāryā	Nāyikā
Rukmiṇī	Sviyā
Bhadṛā	Kalahāntāritā
Lakṣaṇā	Vāsakasajjikā
Jāmbavatī	Vipralabdā
Mitravindā	Khaṇḍita
Sudantā	Virahotkaṇṭhita
Kalindī	Proṣita
Satyabhāmā	Svādhīnapatikā

Ceṅgalva Kāḷakavi images Satyabhāmā as *svādhīnapatikā* or *svādhīnabhartṛkā*, the *nāyikā* whose husband is forever by her side because he is fully captivated by her. The *svādhīnabhartṛkā* is fully in control of her husband.

From the mid-1670s, Tanjavur was ruled by the Marāṭhā *Bhosala* clan (Table 4), until it came fully under British control in 1856. Vijayarāghava Nāyaka, the last Nāyaka ruler of Tanjavur fell to his enemy, the king Veṅkaṭakṛṣṇappa Nāyaka of Madurai in 1673. In a highly poetic description of this fall, provided in the eighteenth-century Telugu text *Taṇḍāvūri-āndhra-rājula-caritram*, the Nāyakas of Madurai storm Vijayarāghava's fort as he is offering his daily prayers to his clan deity, Rājagopālasvami of Mannargudi. He dies at the hands of the Madurai Nāyakas crying "Raṅganātha! Rājagopāla!" and at that very moment, the priests of the Śrīraṅgam temple, some sixty miles away, report seeing Vijayarāghava and his imperial retinue enter the sanctum and merge with the image of Raṅganātha there (Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam 1992, 307-8). Veṅkaṭakṛṣṇappa appointed Alagiri Nāyaka as governor of Tanjavur during a brief interregnum from 1673-76. It was at the end of this interregnum that Tanjavur was passed into the hands of the Marāṭhā ruler Ekojī I (r. 1676-1683), aided by the Sultan of Bijapur.

Table 4: *The Marāṭhā Kings of Tanjavur*

	Ekojī (c. 1630-1686/87)
	Śāhajī (r. 1683-1711)
	Pratāpsimha (r. 1740-63)
	Tuḷajājī II (r. 1764-89)
	Amarasimha (r. 1787-98) → Temporary Shift to Tiruvidaimarudur
	Sarabhojī [Serfojī] II (r. 1798-1832)
	Śivājī II (r. 1832-1855)
↓	Tanjavur annexed to the British in 1856

The Marāṭhā kings, though not remembered for their military prowess, continued the aesthetic expansions of the landscape of Tanjavur culture. The Marathi speaking rulers legitimated their rule over the Tamil populus by simultaneously enforcing and supporting indigenous cultural idioms (such as the patronage of Telugu literature and endowments to Tamil temples) and by ushering in new, often hybrid cultural forms (such as Marathi

*lāvaṇis*²⁷, *harikathā* traditions²⁸, and multilingual dramas²⁹). Although Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam comment that royal rhetoric seems somewhat depleted in this period, they also note that the fascination with the culture of eroticism continues in “even more extreme expressions” (1992, 316). The rule of the Tanjavur Marāṭhā kings can be best characterized by what Indira Peterson terms “accelerated social change...that accompanied the increasing power of European colonial interests” and a unique form of multilingual, hybrid cultural creativity (Peterson 1995, 3). Peterson goes on to note three distinguishing features of the literary and performative output of this period:

Firstly, under Maratha patronage, the boundary between literature and the performing arts was nearly completely eliminated. Secondly...most literary texts appear to have been written for performance, especially for enactment in the form of dance, before larger public audiences (eg. at temples, during festivals) as well as in the Tanjore court. Most works also acquired a decidedly “popular” cast, at the same time unobtrusively incorporating key elements of scholarly theory and classical form...Lastly – and this is the most striking feature of the three – not content with nurturing Telugu and Sanskrit, with making Marathi, their mother-tongue, a major participant in literary and cultural transactions, and with patronizing new genres in Tamil, the Maratha kings experimented with all these languages, in a plethora of genres. (Peterson 1995, 4)

In the year 1799, King Sarabhoji [Serfoji] II was forced to sign a treaty with the East India Company. From that point onward, Tanjavur was a British province, although the king and his family were guaranteed certain privileges, including an annual income of twelve lakh rupees, and the right to collect revenue in a few towns (Bhosale 1995, 56).

The cultural prominence of *devadāsī* women continued in the Marāṭhā court as well. Like the literary figures of Rāmabhadraṁba and Raṅgājamma from the Nāyaka period, the Marāṭhā court encouraged writing by such women. The most notable example is that of Muddupaḷani, a woman from Prātapasiṁha's court, who wrote a masterpiece of Telugu literature called *Rādhika Sāntvanamu* (“Appeasing Rādhikā”). This highly erotic work, modelling itself after the kinds of thick description found in the *padams* of Kṣetrayya, describes Kṛṣṇa's love for his new young wife Iḷa, and Rādhā's feelings of jealousy that follow (Narayana Rao and Shulman 2002, 396-99; Tharu and Lalita 1993). Scholars often classify this poem as belonging to the genre of *śṛṅgāra-kāvya* or *śṛṅgāra-prabandham*, and like the *padams* of Kṣetrayya, often analyze it according to Sanskrit *alaṅkāra* typologies. Its authorship by a *devadāsī* and much of its erotic contents are still the source of much debate in contemporary South India. As we

shall see later, a call for a ban on the *Rādhika Sāntvanamu* in the public sphere is one of the earliest historical moments that propels the anti-*devadāsī* movement in coastal Andhra in the late nineteenth century.

At the Marāṭhā court, Telugu *yakṣagāna* texts are known by a variety of names, and although technically retaining their identities as *yakṣagānas*, they also (quite confusingly) represent themselves by the title *prabandha*. In rare cases, we come across a hyphenated title, *yakṣagāna-prabandha*³⁰, alongside the Śāhajī and post-Śāhajī *yakṣagānas* that call themselves *prabandha* or simply *nāṭakamu* (“drama”), such as the *Pallaki Seva Prabandhamu* and the *Śivakāmasundari Pariṇaya Nāṭakamu*³¹.

An early text dealing with Satyabhāmā composed at the Tanjavur Marāṭhā court is Pratāpasimha’s *Pārijātaḥaraṇa-nāṭaka* in Marathi. This text calls itself a “*nāṭaka*,” and Mayabai Sardesai who edited the work for publication calls it a *yakṣagāna*. In her introduction, she discusses the fact that it was meant for performance as a *nṛtyanāṭaka* “dance-drama” (1969, 38). The work, however, does not contain the structural elements of *yakṣagāna* texts *per se* – most strikingly, it does not make use of *daruvus*. The major part of the drama involves the *sūtradhāra* (director/narrator) speaking in verse. Although portions of the text contain *rāga* and *tāla* indicators, their structure is unclear. These sections are not divided using the standard terminology such as *pallavī*, *anupallavī*, etc. that one finds in earlier works such as Śāhajī’s *Pallaki Seva Prabandhamu*. In terms of narrative, there are few innovations, and the work essentially follows the standard narrative structure of earlier works like Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha’s *Pārijātaḥaraṇa Nāṭaka* manuscript.

The other major work on Satyabhāmā from this period is written by the court poet Mātrbhūṭayya, a *velanāḍu* Telugu Brahmin, who likely lived during the reign of King Amarasiṃha (1787-98). Although popular hagiographies of the composer revolve around his encounter with King Pratāpasimha (r. 1740-63), internal evidence from his compositions suggests that most of his creative output was commissioned during the rule of Amarasiṃha (Seetha 1981, 163).

His major work, a Telugu *yakṣagāna* entitled *Pārijātāpaharaṇa Nāṭakamu* only survives in the form of one manuscript in the Tanjavur Sarasvati Mahal Library³². Apart from this piece, a Telugu text called *Abhinaya Darpaṇa*³³ is attributed to him, as are four Telugu musical compositions (*kīrtanas*)³⁴. The *kīrtanas* bear the *mudrā* (signature)

“*tr̥śiragiri*,” a reference to Śiva as Tr̥śiragiriśvara or Matr̥bhūteśvara, the presiding deity of the town of Tiruchirapalli (Trichy)³⁵. The *Pārijātāpaharaṇa Nāṭakamu* was apparently commissioned by a minister in Amarasiṃha’s court named Śivarāyamantri. Upon the completion of the *yakṣagāna*, the King is said to have presented Matr̥bhūtayya with two *veḷis* (measures) of surface-irrigated land (*nanjai*) near Tiruvaiyaru, and a house (Seetha 1981, 164).

Matr̥bhūtayya’s *yakṣagāna* is central to our study because the language, form and *rāga* assignments found in the text are very similar to those used in the living traditions. Although there are no innovations in the narrative (it basically follows earlier works), stylistic aspects of the text are noteworthy. It consists of song-genres including *daruvus*, verses called *cūrṇikā* and *dvipada*, as well as propitiatory compositions called *toḍayam*, *śobhaṇam* and *maṅgalam*. It also contains a *maṇipravāḷa daruvu* bringing together Kannada, Marathi, Hindi and Tamil in one song³⁶. Most of the *daruvus* are highly descriptive and lend themselves well to *abhinaya* (histrionic representation). For example, in expressing her *viraha* (longing) to her friend, Satyabhāmā sings the following *daruvu* in the *rāga ghaṇṭārava*:

What can I say, girl? What shall I do now, girl?
Girl! He’s the one with the dark hue of an emerald, wearing a golden cloth,
He’s full of compassion, adorned with the most excellent wreathes from the
forest, with a feather crowning his head, that cowherd Kṛṣṇa!
*What can I say, girl? What shall I do now, girl?*³⁷

This *daruvu* is similar in style and imagery to a *daruvu* in the contemporary Brahmin *Bhāmākalāpam* performances of Kuchipudi village, wherein Satyabhāmā, unable to utter her husband’s name in front of the audience out of modesty, sings to her friend:

I am shy, O friend, to utter his name!
Born on the earth as the son of Vasudeva,
He is the grazer of cows, the son of milkmaids.
I am shy, O friend.

By the time we reach the end of the Marāṭhā period, we have all the elements of the *kalāpam* present at the Tanjavur court. The creation of *kalāpam* texts, however, had already begun in the eighteenth century in the *zamīndāri samasthānams* (principalities, “little kingdoms”) of Andhra. The presence of Satyabhāmā enters the realm of performance largely through the emergent genre of *kalāpam*. *Kalāpam* performances

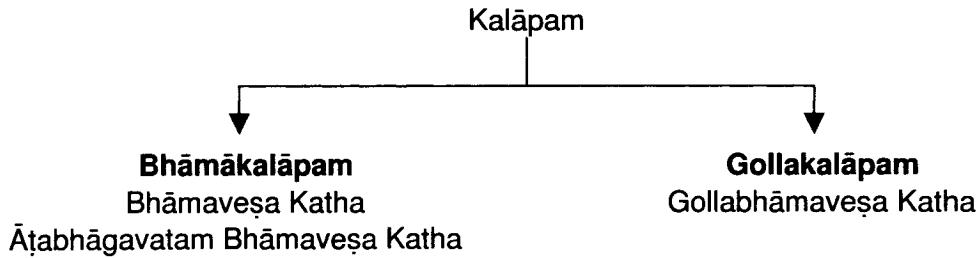
are found in various communities, and in Chapters Five and Six we will examine two specific examples of how *kalāpam* performances about Satyabhāmā affect ideas about womanhood among *devadāsī* and *smārta* Brahmin communities in Eastern and central Andhra.

Charting the Emergence of *Kalāpam*

The word *kalāpam* has several meanings. First, it can simply mean “bundle” or “assemblage,” a meaning that is reflected in the structure of the genre as a collection of literary forms such as *daruvu*, *cūrṇika*, *padyam*, etc. all linked by a single narrative framework. Another meaning of the word *kalāpam* that elaborates upon this idea is “a peacock’s tail,” where again, each of the forms that constitute the *kalāpam* are seen as comprising various hues and shades, yet all held together by conceptual or narrative uniformity.

From the literary historian’s perspective, by the time we enter the late eighteenth century, two primary streams of literature called *kalāpam* have come into being. These are the texts called *Bhāmākalāpam*, connected with the narratives of Satyabhāmā, and those called *Gollakalāpam* (“*Kalāpam* of the Milkmaid”), connected with a narrative involving an unnamed Brahmin and a Gollabhāma (milkmaid)³⁸.

Table 5: *Kalāpams Focused on Satyabhāmā and Gollabhāma*



It is very difficult to ascertain exactly when the *kalāpam* tradition crystallizes. One of the earliest texts to focus on Satyabhāmā as a central character without many references to others is a seventeenth century work called *Satyabhāma Sāntvanamu* (“Appeasing Satyabhāmā”)³⁹ by Liṅganamakhi Śrīkāmeśvara Kavi.

As we noted earlier, Mātrbhūṭayya’s *Pārijātāpaharaṇa Nāṭakamu* from the Marāṭhā court of Amarasimha presents us with one of the earliest specimens of texts

with Satyabhāmā as central character that employs forms such as *daruvu*, *cūrṇika* and *dvipada*, as well as propitiatory compositions such as *toḍayam*, *śobhaṇam* and *maṅgalam*.

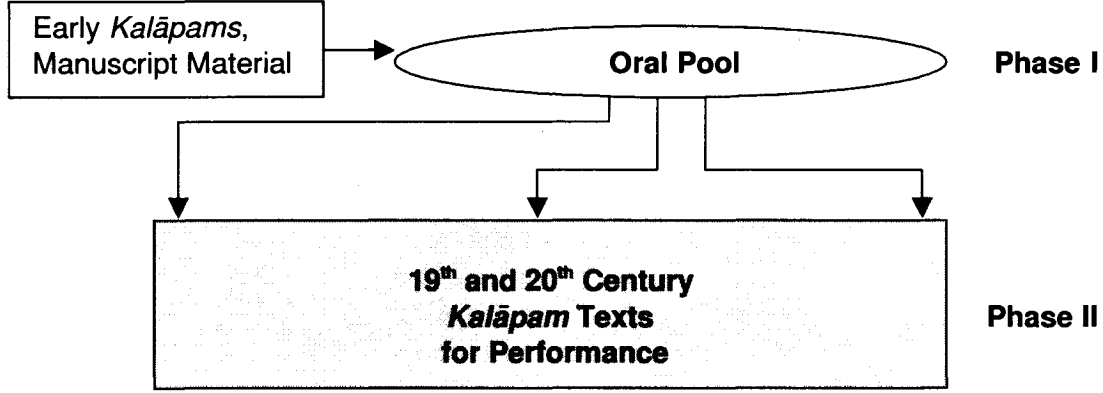
Palmleaf manuscripts of several types of texts that we could classify as *kalāpam* are found throughout South India. The Oriental Research Institute (Tirupati), the Sarasvati Mahal Library (Tanjavur) and the Madras Government Oriental Manuscripts Library (Chennai), for example, all house manuscripts with titles such as *Bhāmaveṣa Katha*, *Āṭabhāgavatam* and *Bhāmakalāpam*⁴⁰, but most of these texts are fragmented, and also do not usually contain the names of the authors, proprietors or performers of the text. These manuscripts are in need of much linguistic analysis in order to establish their chronology. At this point, then, we can only proceed based on the data available to us thus far. In terms of linguistic style, one of the earliest of such texts that survives in a nearly complete form is the *Āṭabhāgavatam Bhāmaveṣakatha*, written by the poet Narakuri Nārāyaṇa, under the patronage of Vēlugoṭi Kumārayacam Nayani (r. 1777-1804), the *zamīndār* of Venkatagiri (present Nellore district). This is to be found in the The Oriental Research Institute (Tirupati)⁴¹.

I posit two phases in the development of *kalāpam*. Both phases were nourished by smaller *zamīndāri samasthānams* governed by Reddi, Kamma and Vellama castes. Noted among these for their patronage of the arts were the *samasthānams* of Bobbili, Pithapuram, Peddapuram, Kalahasti, Karvetinagaram, Nuzvidu and Venkatagiri, to name but a few. The first phase begins in the early eighteenth century, while the second begins in the late nineteenth and continues into the early twentieth. The first is represented by early works that have not been performed for the past hundred and fifty years. These are the versions of *Bhāmākālāpam* that survive largely in written form today, usually as palmleaf manuscripts in libraries or private collections. The tunes (*meṭṭu*) for rendering the *daruvus* have been lost.

The second phase begins in the late nineteenth century, when *kalāpam* texts appear to be more and more visible through performances by *devadāsīs*, Brahmin and goldsmith communities in central and coastal Andhra. These texts, such as the ones composed by Gaddam Subbarayudu Sastri for *devadāsīs* in coastal Andhra or Mangu Jagannatha Panditulu's text for Kuchipudi Brahmins, do not seem explicitly connected to the texts of the earlier phase. They seem to be drawing on the genre of *kalāpam* at a

conceptual level, selecting structural and sometimes descriptive features from the oral pool that the earlier texts constitute. Table 6 visualizes this relationship between the first and second phases of *Bhāmākalāpam* development:

Table 6: *Two Phases of the Development of Kalāpam Texts*



In terms of narrative, all texts that we can identify as *Bhāmākalāpam* begin their tellings after the *pārijāta* tree has been planted by Kṛṣṇa in Satyabhāmā's garden. The *pārijāta* episode thus does not figure prominently in the *kalāpam* traditions. In most *kalāpams*, the narrative begins with Satyabhāmā and Kṛṣṇa being distanced from each other due to a quarrel, in which Satyabhāmā tells Kṛṣṇa that she is more beautiful than he is. In a huff, Kṛṣṇa leaves Satyabhāmā, and the rest of the narrative focuses on the inner feelings of Satyabhāmā as she passes through various stages of longing (*viraha*). Her confidante (*sakhī*) Mādhavi intervenes and requests Kṛṣṇa to come back to Satyabhāmā. In certain texts and in the list of *kalāpam* elements provided by Arudra (see below), a final episode depicting a quarrel between Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā is also featured, but this element, often called *savatula kayyam* (or *sapatni vivādam* in Sanskrit), is present only in the *devadāsī* and Tūrupu Bhāgavatam presentations of *kalāpam*⁴².

The texts that emerge in this context are notable for their retention of the classical descriptive aspects of earlier *yakṣagāna* texts, but these texts are clearly meant for performance. Thus certain other aspects of the earlier texts such as the prominence of the *sūtradhāra* (director) or other "narrator" have been minimized or deleted altogether. Structurally, the *kalāpam* is not distinct from the earlier Nāyaka *yakṣagānas*. Like the *yakṣagāna*, the *kalāpam* also consists of *daruvus* strung together using speech

(*vacanam*) or dialogue (*saṁvādam*). It may also contain verse passages (*cūrṇikā* and *dvipada*, for example) and may be framed by propitiatory opening verses (*stuti* or *maṅgalam*) and concluding songs (also called *maṅgalam*).

Arudra (1994) developed the following typology of eleven distinct narrative elements found in the *Bhāmakalāpam* texts he observed in written or performed versions. Most *kalāpams* will selectively borrow from this pool and will not incorporate all eleven situations.

1. *prastāvana* - introduction/preliminaries
2. *viraham* - suffering the pangs of separation
3. *dūtika saṁvādam* - conversation with the maid
4. *svapna-avastha* - state of dreaming
5. *avadhi* - conclusion
6. *bhāma saṁvādam* – dialogue between Satyabhāmā and Mādhavi
7. *manmatha-upalambhana* - rebuking the God of Desire (Manmantha)
8. *candra-upalambhana* - admonishing the moon
9. *vāyu-upalambhana* - reprimanding the breeze
10. *mūrccha-avastha* - state of fainting or swooning
11. *sapatni vivādam* - quarrel among the co-wives

(Arudra 1994, 242)

Clearly, the emphasis in the *kalāpam* works is on the different states of *viraha* (suffering or longing) that Satyabhāmā passes through in the course of her separation from Kṛṣṇa. These texts were created for interpretation by a solo dancer-actor, and thus narrative situations requiring multiple characters were eliminated, and those in which the image of the main character (Satyabhāmā) could be thoroughly examined, were elaborated upon.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the literary history of Satyabhāmā in non-Sanskrit textual materials. Unlike the figure of Rādhā, which undergoes a process of “theologizing” in the Gauḍīya and Sahajīya Vaiṣṇava traditions of North India, the Telugu image of Satyabhāmā is only aestheticized – it is not taken any further. She is morphed into the *vīra vanitā* or virile woman, on the one hand, and the archetypal *nāyikā* (heroine), on the other. Yet even as archetypal heroine, she is identified largely with the confident, bold varieties of *nāyikās* such as *svādhīnabharṭṛkā* (the woman who is confident of her love). This “aestheticization,” then, is marked not only by the incorporation of Satyabhāmā into aesthetic paradigms (such as those of the *nāyikā* classifications) but also by a selective

focus on the *rasa* or aesthetic sentiment called *śṛṅgāra* in classical Sanskrit poetics. The use of paradigms from Sanskrit aesthetic theory influences much of the literary output of the South India court milieu. Representations of Satyabhāmā as both the valiant *vīrāṅganā* and the *nāyikā* emerge in the courtly context. The royal heroic culture of Vijayanagara and Nāyaka-period South India provides the cultural framework for these new developments. Finally, it is in the new cultural ethos of the Tanjavur court from the nineteenth century onwards (and in Andhra's little kingdoms that replicate many of its cultural patterns) that we are able to see the development of the *Bhāmākalāpam* texts in the form that we presently encounter them.

The four major genres of Telugu Purāṇa, Telugu *kāvya* or court poetry (which begins at the Vijayanagara court), *yakṣagāna* (from the Tanjavur court) and *kalāpam* (which likely begins under the patronage of feudal kings), each possess several key features that are rooted in historical and structural patterns. Potana's *Mahābhāgavatamu*, represents a vernacular transcreation of the Sanskrit *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. Telugu Purāṇas such as Potana's are characterized by the innovative integration of new cultural data into known Purāṇic narratives. Telugu court poetry, especially in the *śṛṅgāra-prabandha* genre, is marked by an emphasis on lengthy poetic passages of thick description and, much like the later *kalāpam*, contains little narrative development. *Yakṣagāna* refers to a particular genre of musical court drama that crystallizes in Nāyaka-period Tanjavur, in which specific songs (*daruvus*) are linked by prose passages (*vacana*, *padyam*, *cūrṇikā*). They usually contain a linear narrative and are characterized by lyrical passages that dwell on character development. By the eighteenth century, an offshoot of *yakṣagāna* emerges that retains all of its characteristic structural components but focuses on the two figures of Satyabhāmā and Gollabhāmā (a milkmaid). These *kalāpams* appear to be written specifically for mimetic interpretation (*abhinaya*) by one or two performers. They focus squarely on the heroine (Satyabhāmā in the case of *Bhāmākalāpam*) and her movement through a vast landscape of emotions.

The purpose of this chapter has thus been twofold: to trace the growth of texts and literary genres centred on the figure of Satyabhāmā and to examine the ways in which these texts and genres depict Satyabhāmā, largely vis-à-vis representations of *śṛṅgāra* (love-oriented or erotic sentiments). In this process, we have seen how

representations of womanhood that tend to move away from images of *pātivratya* into the more fluid spaces of courtly culture where multiple roles for women – ranging from queen and wife to courtesan – are represented and valued on their own terms. In the next chapter, I will examine cultures of performance in which the hermeneutic, didactic and aesthetic ethos of these textual traditions continues to survive.

¹ I have been unable to find a specific reason as to why “*pārijātam*” becomes “*pārujātam*” in common parlance within the *devadāsī* community. I think that it may simply reflect a change in pronunciation. Often the Sanskrit vowel *ṛ* is pronounced “ru” by Telugus (for example, the word *vr̥kṣamu*, “tree”, is usually pronounced “*vr̥kṣamu*”), and perhaps a similar occurrence has taken place here with the conjunct sound *ri*. However, it is also interesting that words like *pāruḍu* (“Brahmin”) and *pāruṭakka* (“Brahmin woman”) are used frequently in Telugu, and since most *devadāsī kalāpams* were composed by Brahmins, this may be a possible derivation of the term “*pārujātam*” (*pāruḍu* “Brahmin” + *jāta* “born of”).

² For details on the expansion of Simhachalam and Ahobilam as cultic centres and the early history of Narasiṃha worship in Andhra, see Narasimhacharya (1989).

³ Potana did not complete the entire work himself. As Narayana Rao and Shulman (2002, 200) note, several books or *skandhamulu* of the *Mahābhāgavatamu* were completed by later authors: book five by Bōpparāju Gaṅgayya, book six by Ercūri Siṅṅanna, and books eleven and twelve by Vēligandala Nārāya.

⁴ The Naraka episode is also given a detailed treatment in the *Kālikāpurāṇa*, 36-41.

⁵ *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, 10.59.21:

śūlaṃ bhaumo 'cyutaṃ hantumādade vitathodyamaḥ |
tadvisargātpūrvameva narakasya śiro hariḥ |
apāharad gajasthasya cakreṇa kṣura neminā ||

⁶ The representation and uses of the image of Satyabhāmā in Telugu cinema is complex but consistent. Early films interpret and re-interpret the Purāṇic episodes, such as *Sri Krishna Tulabharam* (1935 and re-makes in 1955 and 1966), *Satyabhama* (1942), *Satyabhama Parinayam* (1962), and *Sri Krishna Satya* (1971). Modern films use the name Satyabhāmā to invoke the idea of a strong female character. For example, *Srimati Satyabhama* (2002) is a modern Telugu action film in which the heroine is a strong-willed female police officer named Satyabhāmā, who wreaks vengeance upon her uncle for killing her father.

⁷ For a detailed discussion of Kṛṣṇadevarāya and a full translation of the Nāyaka-period “biography” *Rāyavācakamu* (“Tidings of the King”), see Wagoner (1993).

⁸ The Vijayanagara poetic culture gives rise to a tradition of vernacular, yet heavily Sanskrit-oriented *śṛṅgāra*-texts produced in the courts of Andhra. For example, a Telugu text known as *Śṛṅgāra Mañjarī* written c. 1660 supposedly by Akbar Shah in Golkonda is a case in point. Although it borrows its classifications of the *nāyikās* and erotic experience from Sanskrit texts on aesthetics (such as the tenth century *Daśarūpaka* of Dhanañjaya), it also borrows from the works of Brajbhāṣā poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such as Keśavdās and Sundardās. In the opening of the *Śṛṅgāra Mañjarī*, the author clearly acknowledges both the Sanskrit and Brajbhāṣā sources as equally legitimate texts (*pramukhagrantha*). It is translated first into Sanskrit (possibly by the author himself), and then eventually into Brajbhāṣā by Cintāmaṇi Tripāṭhi in the year 1670. For details see the first printed edition of the *Śṛṅgāra Mañjarī* edited by V. Raghavan.

⁹ The use of this analogy of the eight cosmic elephants that hold up the earth is found in other literary contexts as well. For example, in the later Śrīvaiṣṇava literary tradition, the eight primary disciples of Maṇavāḷa Māmuni are called *aṣṭadiggajas* as well.

¹⁰ The word “*mukku*” is a kind of nickname traditionally associated with Timmana. *Mukku* means “nose,” and there is a popular legend about Timmana that explains that he once composed a beautiful verse comparing a woman’s nose to the *campaka* flower. The verse was subsequently incorporated into the *Vasu-caritramu* written by the poet Bhaṭṭumūrti:

In agony the *campaka* blossom wondered
Why bees enjoy the honey of so many flowers
But never come to her.
She fled to the forest to do penance.
As a reward, she achieved the shape of a woman’s nose.
Now she takes in the perfumes
Of all the flowers, and on both sides
She is honoured by eyes
Black as bees
(Narayana Rao and Shulman 2002, 266-67)

¹¹ In the twelfth-century Sanskrit text *Gītagovinda*, Rādhā rebukes Kṛṣṇa for his infidelity. Kṛṣṇa’s song of apology contains the following verse:

smara garala khaṇḍanam mama śirasi maṇḍanam
dehi pada pallavam udāram
jvalati mayi dāruṇo madana kadanāruṇo
haratu tad upāhita vikūram ||

Place your foot upon my head –
A sublime flower destroying poison of love!
Let your foot quell the harsh sun
Burning its fiery form in me to torment love.
(*Gītagovinda* 10.8, trans. Barabara Stoller Miller 1977, 113)

Donna Marie Wulff notes a similar tradition among the *kīrtanīyās* of contemporary Bengal. In a performance episode highlighting Rādhā's power over Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa bows at Rādhā's feet. Rādhā, in turn, does not even look at him but only notices him *because* the anklets she is wearing jingle when his head touches them (Wulff 1985, 233).

¹² The exact translation here would be "...honoured by the lotus-born One [Brahmā], Indra [Vāsava] and others."

¹³ *jalajātāsana vāsavādi sura pūjā bhājanambai tana-
rcu latāmtāyudhu kannā taṁḍri śīramacco vāma pādambunan
tōlagan drocē latāṁgi yaṭṭa yagu nādhul neramul seya pe-
ralukan jēṁdina yaṭṭi kāmṭalucita vyāpāramul nerture* (1.119)

¹⁴ *nanu bhavadīya dāsuni manambuna nēyyapu kinka būni tā-
cina yadi nāku mannanaya cēlvagu nī pada pallavambu ma-
ttanu pulakāgra kaṁṭaka vitānamu tākina noccunamcu ne
nani yēda nalka mānavu gadā yikanaina narāḷa kuṁṭalā* (1.121)

¹⁵ *gaṭṭiva cetaluṁ pasalu kalla tanāmbulu nīvu puṭṭagā
puṭṭinavēṁḍu leni palu pokala māyalu nīku vēnnato
peṭṭinavau ṭēriṁgiyunu bela tanāmbuna ninnu nammi nā
guṭṭunu tejamun migula kolpaḍi poyitinemi jeyudun* (1.125)

¹⁶ *mānambē tōḍavu satulaku
mānamē prāṇādhikāmbu mānamakhila sa-
mmānamulaku mūlāmbagu
māna rahitamaina bratuku māninikēlā* II (1.127)

¹⁷ As literary motifs, jealousy and pride are also characteristic of Caṅkam and *bhakti* literature in Tamil, but in this context, I would argue that this motif is squarely located in the politics of courtly culture in South India.

¹⁸ The information on the origins of Nāyaka rule at Tanjavur are found in an anonymous eighteenth-century Telugu work called *Taṁjāvūri-āndhra-rājula-caritra*. See Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam for a critique of some of the claims made by this text vis-à-vis the problem of the origins of Nāyaka rule (1992, 40).

¹⁹ This is not to be confused with the Telugu works called *Raghunāthanāyakabhyudayamu* and *Raghunāthābhyudayamu*, both attributed to Raghunātha's son Vijayarāghava Nāyaka. These works have been edited by N.

Venkataramanayya and M. Somasekhara Sarma and published in the Tanjore Saraswathi Mahal Series (No. 32), in 1951.

²⁰ The *cāṭu* is a kind of “remembered verse,” usually attributed to a single poet, usually written in Sanskrit, Telugu or occasionally Tamil. See Narayana Rao and Shulman’s work on *cāṭus* (1998) for details.

²¹ *Nāṭyaśāstra* 32.9-48 mentions five types of dhruvā songs, *prāveśikī* (“entrance”), *ākṣepikī* (“indicative”), *prāsādikī* (“soothing”), *antarā* (“transitional”) and *naiṣkrāmikī* (“departing”). Although many *yakṣagāna* texts and even the later *kalāpams* do appear to employ some of these types of songs (eg. *pātra-praveśa daruvu* to indicate the entrance of a character), today the South Indian *daruvu* as a musical genre used in narrative theatre is often treated as a *kīrtana* or *kṛti*, containing the tripartite divisions of *pallavī*, *anupallavī* and multiple *caraṇams*.

²² On the contested dates of Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha, see the introduction to B. Natarajan’s translation of the *Śrī Kṛṣṇalīlā Taraṅginī* (1988, 62-84).

²³ A summary of the contents of each of the leaves of the manuscript is provided by V. Raghavan (1942).

²⁴ This is a paper manuscript (R2961) transcribed from the palm-leaf manuscript in 1919-20 in the town of Kunnankulam in Kerala. It was given to me by the curator of the Government Oriental Manuscript Library in Madras. The author’s date is unknown. It consists of ten *sargas* (chapters) and is a lengthy Sanskrit *kāvya* of 84 paper pages. It is not a *yakṣagāna-prabandha* and therefore does not follow the style of the Telugu texts known as *Bhāmakalāpam/Pārijātam*, nor that of Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha’s *Pārijātaḥaraṇa*.

²⁵ The word *nāyikā* comes from the verbal root *√nī*, “to lead”. It is used in early texts such as the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and *Kāmasūtra*, and eventually comes to represent one of the central categories of human experience in aesthetic and religious literature in Sanskrit and vernacular languages. For details on the evolution of *nāyikā*-types in Sanskrit literature, see Rākeśagupta (1967). For an interesting study of the *nāyikā* representing the “transformation of patriarchal power” in medieval South India see Ali (2000).

²⁶ It is interesting that like the texts called “Pārijātaḥaraṇa,” the title “Rājagopālavilāsa” becomes extremely common in Telugu, Sanskrit and even Marathi literature produced in Marāṭhā-period Tanjavur. One of the other well-known “Rājagopālavilāsa” texts is in Marathi, by Śyāma Kavi, who was likely a court poet during the reign of Śāhajī (r. 1683-1711). What survives of this text is an incomplete manuscript of only two *ullāsas* (chapters) that has been edited by S. Ganapathi Rao, and published in the *Journal of the Tanjore Maharaja Serfoji’s Sarasvati Mahal Library* (1966). The word *campakāranya* appears in the text in several places, indicating that it was in praise of Rājagopāla of Mannargudi, as *Campakāranya* (“Forest of Campaka Trees”) was one of the Sanskrit names of the site (Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam 1992, 172, n. 6). Other

than sharing its title, Śyāma Kavi's *Rājagopālavilāsa* bears absolutely no resemblance to Ceṅgalva Kāḷakavi's text.

²⁷ The *lāvaṇī* is a particular Marathi literary form that is meant for performance. The term *lāvaṇī* therefore can signify both the song-texts as well as the performance itself. Women *lāvaṇī* performers in Maharashtra were generally called *kalāvantīn* and formed a distinct community much as the *kalāvantulu* of Andhra. *Lāvaṇīs* performed by *kalāvantīns* were generally of two types: *phadāvarcī lāvaṇī* (those sung at public gatherings) and *baithakīcī lāvaṇī* (those sung at chamber or private salon performances). For details on the historical contexts of *kalāvantīn* performance see Kadam (1998). On the transformations and reconfigurations of *lāvaṇī* performances in colonial and postcolonial contexts, see Rege (1996). *Lāvaṇī* performance culture eventually gave rise to a particular kind of verse form, which was quite prominent at the Tanjavur Marāṭhā court. For example, Sarabhoji II's pilgrimage to various parts of Northern and Southern India is documented in a text attributed to the king himself (but more likely a composition of his court poet Śrī Dhunḍisuta Śiva) called *Tristhaḷi Yātrecyā Lāvaṇyā* written as a series of *lāvaṇī* songs, consisting of various sections such as *chanda* and *dhruvā*. The text was edited by A. Krishnaswami Mahadick Rao Sahib and published in the Tanjore Saraswathi Mahal Series (No. 37) in 1951. For a detailed treatment of the *Tristhaḷi Yātrecyā Lāvaṇyā*, and discussions of Sarabhoji's pilgrimage to Varanasi in 1820-22 as a location for strategic negotiations with colonial administrators, see Peterson (2002).

²⁸ For details on the development of the culturally hybrid, multilingual *harikathā* or *kathākālakṣepa* traditions of Tanjavur see Gurumurthy (1994).

²⁹ See below (n. 46).

³⁰ This term is mentioned by Dr. S.A.K. Durga in her discussion of the *Basavakalyāṇa Yakṣagāna Prabandham*. See Durga (1979, 36; 58 n. 47).

³¹ The *Pallaki Seva Prabandhamu* by King Śāhajī (r. 1683-1711) is a ritual Śaiva *prabandham* set in the temple of Tyāgarāja (Śiva) at Tiruvarur, Tamil Nadu. Until recently, it was enacted by the *koṇṭi paramparā devadāsīs* as part of the "palanquin-ceremony" (*pallaki seva*) during the *brahmotsava* of the Tiruvarur temple. It has been edited and printed in two editions, one by P. Sambamoorthy (Madras, 1955) and the other by Gowri Kuppuswami (Mysore, 1976). I have learned many of the songs of the *Pallaki Seva Prabandhamu* from P.R. Thilagam, the last woman in the artistic lineage of the *koṇṭi paramparā devadāsīs* of Tiruvarur. The *Śivakāmasundari Parinaya Nāṭakamu* is a composition attributed to King Tuḷajājī (Śāhajī's successor). It revolves around the myth of the wedding of the Goddess Śivakāmasundarī to Śiva in his form of Naṭarāja (both deities are enshrined in the Naṭarāja temple at Chidambaram). It has been edited by Dr. S. Seetha (1971).

³² Manuscript No. 543 (Telugu Collection). See also Seetha (1981, 161).

³³ This work has been edited by T.V. Subba Rao, and published by the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Madras in 1951.

³⁴ The musical notation for Mātrbhūṭayya's four surviving *kīrtanas* (in the *rāgas toḍi, sārāṅga, kalyāṇī* and *kedāragaula*) are to be found in the *Saṅgīta Saṃpradāya Pradarśinī* of Subbarāma Dīkṣitar (Vol. 5), pp. 1404, 1406, 1412, and 1415.

³⁵ Mātrbhūṭayya was conceived after his parents visited the temple of the goddess Sugandhī Kuntalāmbā at Tiruchirapalli. Hence he was named after her consort, Śiva-Mātrbhūṭayya (Seetha 1981, 162).

³⁶ This was of course reflective of the multilingual court culture of Tanjavur in the eighteenth century. Perhaps the earliest creation of such a multilingual work at the Tanjavur court is a text by King Śāhajī called *Pañcabhāṣāvilāsam* (see Peterson 1995). The following is the *daruvu* by Mātrbhūṭayya, with a line-by-line translation. My translations are based on Seetha's original text (1981, 165-66), which I have transliterated using the appropriate methods for each language.

1. Kannada

bāro kṛṣṇa bāro ondu muddu tāro
melāyitu śrī tṛśiragirisvaraṇa mitranāda sucarita
karuṇe iṭṭu bāro kṛṣṇa bāro
Come, Kṛṣṇa, come to give me just one kiss.
Friend of the Lord of Tṛśiragiri (Śiva), Virtuous One!
Show some compassion, come Kṛṣṇa!

2. Marathi

yā ho gopāla karuṇena yātā
Come, O Gopāla, with Compassion

3. Hindi

gale gale miliye re gopāl
Come, embrace (me), Gopāla

4. Tamil

eṇaiyā kōpālā umakku ittaṇai mōṭi
yāṇummai varittum vērum viṇāccutō
ivvaḷavum tōṇatō naṇṇāccutu
āṇaittu piriyaḷāmō
ācaikoṇṭu mōkaveṣamtīrakkūṭi
pēca veṇṭa eṇṇai ēcukirīr
tāca camrakṣaṇollācarē vaikuṇṭa vācarē
tiricirakiricarkum nēcarē
What's this, Gopāla? You have so much anger (towards me)?
Still upset? Any other concerns?
All this [drama] will not even be remembered, very good!
Can you be separated from me with all this?

You scold me saying “don’t say anymore”,
yet you create love and infatuation in my heart.
Lord who resides in Vaikuṇṭha, one who sports in the protection of his servants,
Friend of the Lord of Tṛśiragiri (Śiva)

³⁷ The original text is cited in Seetha (1981, 164):

*ela telavārenamma nenindukemisetunamma
bāla! indranīlavarṇuḍu kanakaceluḍu
karuṇālavāluḍu varavanamālikābharaṇuḍu
mauli piñchamu gala gopālakṛṣṇuḍu*

³⁸ In terms of texts connected with living performance traditions of *kalāpam*, the Tūrupu Bhāgavatam tradition (that we will examine in Chapter Three) also uses a *kalāpam* called Choḍigānikalāpam, which is wholly a satire on husband-wife relations. This was among the more popular *kalāpams* performed by Tūrupu Bhāgavatam artists (Nagabhushana Sarma 1995, 103).

³⁹ Muddupaḷani’s *Rādhika Sāntvanamu* from the eighteenth-century Tanjavur court may have been inspired from Kāmeśvara Kavi’s text.

⁴⁰ For example, in Tirupati, *Bhāmakalāpam* (R429); *Bhāmaveṣa Katha* (D1917); *Bhāmaveṣa Katha* (D1916); *Bhāmaveṣa Katha* (D1919). For details see Jonnalagadda (1996a, 43, n.80).

⁴¹ *Ātabhāgavatam Bhāmaveṣakatha* (D1899). Anuradha Jonnalagadda (Hyderabad) and Swapnasundari (Delhi) have both indicated to me that they are interested in pursuing the date question further with this and other Mss. materials from Tirupati and Tanjavur.

⁴² In a contemporary re-working of Kuchipudi *Bhāmakalāpam* created by Vempati Chinna Satyam in Madras entitled “Sri Krishna Parijatam”, the script-writer, S.V. Bhujangaraya Sarma has included this episode of *sapatni-vivādam* or *savatula kayyam*. For details see Satyanarayana and Surya Rao (1994).

Chapter 3

Performance Genres of Andhra Pradesh: Representing Caste and Gender Identities

“Satyabhāmā is an egotistical woman (*ahaṅkāri*), who still has a good (*mañci*) name”.

- Kottuvada Anjali, a woman from the goldsmith community, the first woman to perform in the male-oriented Tūrupu Bhāgavatam tradition.

Satyabhāmā figured prominently in the literary texts surveyed in the last chapter and had entered the realm of performance with the development of the *yakṣagāna* and *kalāpam*. In this chapter, I investigate the cultural ecology in which narrative theatre traditions of Andhra Pradesh are located. In a few of these narrative theatre forms, we find the performance of *Bhāmākalāpam* (“Kalāpam about Satyabhāmā”) occupying a central place. A striking feature of these developments in genre is their connection with caste and gender identities.

I propose a tripartite model of narrative theatre traditions in Andhra, loosely configured using the names *yakṣagāna*, *kalāpam* and *veṣam*. Each of these traditions yields several performance genres that represent a diverse spectrum of gender and caste identities and performance techniques. After discussing some of the general features of each, I focus on two genres, Tūrupu Bhāgavatam and Cindu Bhāgavatam, to look at the ways in which caste and gender are implicated in performance culture in South India. Tūrupu Bhāgavatam, performed by a goldsmith community, is a genre with a focus on Satyabhāmā, derived from the Kuchipudi Bhāgavatam of the upper class *smārta* Brahmins in Krishna district. Tūrupu Bhāgavatam serves to simultaneously enforce and subvert caste ideologies, the subversion being accomplished largely through the rhetoric of parody. Cindu Bhāgavatam performances, on the other hand, do not involve the representation of Satyabhāmā, but, as a gender-inclusive form of Dalit theatre, Cindu Bhāgavatam demonstrates the principle of flexibility when it comes to representations of gender in the living theatre forms of Andhra. Here, women can play male parts, in an inversion of the normative performance model found throughout South India, where men play female roles. Furthermore, the *cindu* women are usually *jogins*, village prostitutes, and their identities are often erroneously confused with the *devadāsī* or *kalāvantulu* we shall examine later.

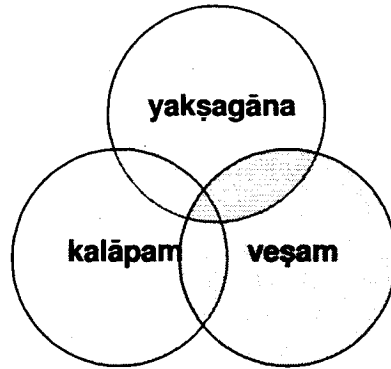
Finally, I end this section with a brief introduction to the Kuchipudi (Brahmin) Bhāgavatam and the *devadāsī* Bhāgavatam, both of which are upper class *kalāpam* traditions, in an attempt to articulate the indigenous distinction between the performance “bands” referred to by the gendered categories *naṭṭuva meḷam* (dance band) and *nāṭya meḷam* (drama band). This final section demarcates the basic features of Brahmin and *devadāsī* performance cultures, which are the focus of chapters four, five and six. I focus on the Brahmin and *devadāsī* traditions because these are closely linked to classical Telugu literature and courtly culture. As opposed to the other traditions, it is in these traditions that Satyabhāmā occupies a central place, and it is perhaps because of these communities’ connections to elite literary culture that we find Satyabhāmā figuring so prominently, although the clear establishment of this link awaits further investigation. The next three chapters of this dissertation will focus on two communities of performers, both of which can be classified as performers of *kalāpam*. The discourses on caste and gender put forth in our discussions of Tūrupu Bhāgavatam and Cindu Bhāgavatam in this chapter form a backdrop for understanding Kuchipudi and *devadāsī* traditions. In both the Tūrupu and Cindu Bhāgavatam traditions, we shall encounter issues of caste and gender at play in various ways.

Caste, Gender, and Performance Culture in Andhra: Towards a Mapping of Genres

Scholars of Andhra performance traditions have long grappled with the production of typologies for the various forms of performance culture in the region (for example, Nagabhushana Sarma 1995, 85ff.). Narrative theatre traditions in Andhra present a taxonomical problem because of the fluid way in which performance genres are referred to in everyday speech. For example, the terms “*yakṣagāna*” and “*bhāgavatam*” are generic terms that can refer to a wide range of performance practices, some of which employ radically different performance grammars, and others which are performed by varying caste groups. The term “*bhāgavatam*” can refer to a range of performance genres, from Brahmin group performances to solo *devadāsī* performances, or even Dalit mixed-gender performances. In addition, as we have already seen in the case of Telugu literary texts, terms such as “*pārijātam*” or “*kalāpam*” are also used interchangeably in the realm of performance. *Devadāsīs* in coastal Andhra thus refer to their performances of

Bhāmākalāpam as “*pārijātam*” (or “*pārujātam*”) as well as “*kalāpam*” and “*bhāgavatam*”. To cite another example of this confusion over performance typologies, most audiences refer to narrative performance traditions simply by the term *bhāgavatam* or *bhāgotam*, presumably after the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. The term, however, is indiscriminately used to refer to any of the performance traditions we have referred to in the previous section, regardless of their gender or caste associations.

Table 1: *Narrative Theatre Traditions in Andhra*



Yakṣagāna

Full-length dramas that tell a story from beginning to end (usually linear narratives). Many actors playing different parts.

Sub-genres:

- Vīdhi-nāṭakam (also called Bayalāṭa)
- Cindu-bhāgavatam

Kalāpam

One, or at most two characters, little narrative content, non-linear, sometimes episodic, explores a particular state of being or *bhāva*.

Sub-genres:

- Kuchipudi-bhāgavatam (pre-modern)
- Tūrupu-bhāgavatam
- Devadāsī-bhāgavatam

Veṣam/Veṣālu (lit. “guises”)

One character performs a monologue or a scene from a known drama.

Sub-genres:

- Paṅgaṭi Veṣālu
 - a) Bahurūpulu (some related to Kuchipudi)
 - b) Jātra Veṣālu (Gaṅgamma Jātras, Tirupati)

I propose to delineate three major “strata” of narrative theatre traditions in Andhra, taking into account both the textual genres and performance conventions employed in each (Table 1). I have chosen to demarcate these using the terms *yakṣagāna*, *kalāpam* and *veṣālu*. Each of these terms are traditionally loaded ones – their boundaries are permeable and fluid. My purpose here is not to attempt to fix these categories, but rather to explore their fluid nature through an examination of the composite performance genres that comprise them. I also recognize that this paradigm does not consider forms such as *tolubommālāṭa* (puppet theatre) or any of the “*katha* traditions” (recitation theatre, such as *burrakatha*, *vīrula katha*, *āsādi katha* etc.) found in various parts of Andhra. These forms have been discussed at length by other scholars¹. I am dealing specifically with what scholars such as Nagabhushana Sarma have termed Telugu “folk theatre forms” (1995), that is, forms of dance-theatre that employ stylized modes of somatic mimesis (*abhinaya*), as opposed to the narration-oriented presentation of epics or ballads that we find in the *katha* traditions. The three strata of performance culture span a range of caste groups and cover all of the three major geo-cultural zones of Andhra: Telangana, Rayalaseema and Coastal Andhra.

The first stratum is what I have called *yakṣagāna*. By *yakṣagāna*, I am referring to those theatre forms that narrate full-length dramas, with many actors taking on the various roles. These usually involve relatively more elaborate costumes and staging techniques. Perhaps the most clear example of this would be the genre known as *vīdhi bhāgavatam* or *vīdhi nāṭakam* (lit. “street theatre”). The *vīdhi nāṭakam* traditions found in Andhra are largely forms of epic theatre, and are almost exactly the same as the Terukkūttu or Kaṭṭaikkūttu traditions found in Tamilnadu². In the Rayalaseema region, *vīdhi nāṭakam* is also referred to as *bayalāṭa* (lit. “open-air theatre”) ³. Dramas with titles such as *Sīta Kalyāṇamu* (The Marriage of Sītā) are fairly common⁴. Also included in this stratum would be the form known as Cindu Bhāgavatam, which has a structure similar to the *vīdhi nāṭakam* but is performed exclusively by Dalits (untouchables) from the *cindu* community. We shall examine Cindu Bhāgavatam in more detail below.

The second stratum is what I call *kalāpam*, again, after the literary genre of the same name. We have already dealt with the literary characteristics of *kalāpam* in the previous chapter. Here, it is important for us to note that of all the forms of narrative theatre in Andhra, the *kalāpam* is perhaps the most “Sanskrit-oriented”. In terms of

literary development, it provided a space for Brahmin males to compose forms of what has been characterized as *ādhyātmika-alaṅkāraśāstra* (“the art of religious poetics”). Its texts are almost always composed by Brahmin males, and yet it often contains satirical or socially subversive subtext. In terms of the visual dynamics of *kalāpam* performances, they are usually centred around one, or at most two figures. In the case of *Bhāmākalāpam* these are the characters of Satyabhāmā and her confidante, Mādhavī. The characters are occasionally assisted by minor characters such as Kṛṣṇa or the *Sūtradhāri-veṣam* (“narrator” or “director”, usually played by the same individual playing Mādhavī) who appear briefly, and quickly disappear.

The third stratum of performance culture is what I call *veṣam* or *veṣālu* in plural. The representative genre here is what is generally called *pagaṭi veṣam* (lit. “guise during the daytime [*pagalu*]”), performed in two contexts by different sets of performers, known as *bahurūpālu* or *bairūpulu* (“[taking on] many forms”) and *jātra veṣālu* (“guises of the *jātras* [fairs]”). The major difference between the *bahurūpālu* and the *jātra veṣālu* is that the former come from a variety of caste and class backgrounds (including *smārta* Brahmins), whereas the latter usually come from the weaver (*kaikola*) community. *Pagaṭi veṣam* performances differ from *yakṣagāna* and *kalāpam* in that each performance actually consists of a series of smaller performances or “guises” (hence the use of the plural term *veṣālu* to describe the performances). A typical *pagaṭi veṣam* performance may thus consist of a serious mythological *veṣam* followed by a comedic *veṣam*, followed by yet another mythological *veṣam*. The sequence and content of the *veṣālu* are determined by the actors, and usually do not follow any particular order.

The *jātra veṣālu* derive their name from the location of performances during *jātras*, usually held in honour of local goddesses, especially the goddess Gaṅgamma of Tirupati⁵. In a remarkable essay on the Gaṅgamma *jātra* of Tirupati, Don Handelman has examined the various *veṣālu* performed as part of the *jātra* rituals (such as *toṭi* [untouchable sweeper], *dōra* [prince] and *viśvarūpa* [“true form” of the goddess Gaṅgamma as the essence of the universe]). The *bahurūpālu* performers by contrast are largely concentrated in the Coastal Andhra and Telangana regions. In Telangana, they belong to a caste group called *budige jaṅgam*, but in the Coastal Andhra region, they usually come from Kuchipudi village. It is not known exactly when Kuchipudi *smārtas* began to perform *veṣālu*, although Arudra notes that he has counted more than thirty-three different *veṣālu* being performed by

Kuchipudi Brahmins (Arudra 1994, 241). These types of *pagaṭi-veṣams* were likely performed by the Kuchipudi men who did not usually dance, or by others who had retired from performing the regular repertoire (Jonnalagadda 1996a, 42). These artists usually perform *veṣams* that can be classified into three broad categories: social parodies, mythologicals and comedies. Under the first category of social parody come *veṣams* such as *somayājulu-somidevamma-veṣam*, parodying the orthodox Brahmin man and his annoying wife, and *komaṭi-veṣam*, parodying the cunning North Indian (*baniyā*) merchants. Mythological *veṣams* include the very popular *ardhanārīśvara-veṣam*, depicting the actor in the half-male, half-female form of Śiva, or *śakti-veṣam*, depicting the warrior goddess Durgā. Finally, there are the “comedic” *veṣams* such as *siṅgi-siṅgaḍu*, the bird-catcher and his wife (likely adapted from Tamil *kuṛavañci* performances⁶).

Tūrupu Bhāgavatam: A Goldsmith Community Performs Satyabhāmā

Tūrupu bhāgavatam (Eastern Bhāgavatam) is a type of performance found in and around the northeastern parts of Andhra, especially in the Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, and Visakhapatnam districts. The majority of performers identify their caste as *viśva-brāhmaṇa*⁷, equivalent to the *kammari* or goldsmith caste. Strictly speaking, the Tūrupu Bhāgavatam is actually a *kalāpam* tradition – there are only two characters, and the narrative content is minimal, yet it is very rich in terms of descriptive content. It is most definitely derivative of the *Bhāmākalāpam* tradition at Kuchipudi, which will be the focus of Chapter Six, although it appears to have a high operatic content when compared to the more dramatic and kinaesthetically developed dance-dramas of Kuchipudi. Visually as well, Tūrupu Bhāgavatam is particularly striking. Satyabhāmā wears large wooden ornaments, including an imposing headdress, and her face is bright yellow (*pasupu*), smeared with auspicious turmeric⁸ (Fig. 3).

Kottuvada Anjali, my primary informant for this tradition, herself represents an anomaly in the Tūrupu Bhāgavatam tradition. She is one of four daughters born to the eminent Bhāgavatam artist, the late Kocherla Brahmananda Bhagavata from the Vizianagaram district. Women traditionally have not participated in this Bhāgavatam tradition. Initially, Brahmananda Bhagavata was extremely hesitant to teach her, but eventually gave in when urged by other theatre artists in the region. Anjali’s first lessons involved learning the entire *Bhāmākalāpam*, with her father playing the role of Mādhavī,

Satyabhāmā's confidante. Eventually, she went on to perform *Gollakalāpam* and two other dramas *Nala Damayanti* and *Sāraṅgadhara* with her father. She, together with her father and other sisters (who would act in minor roles or as musicians), used to give performances in temples, particularly during the *jātras* (fairs) of the local goddess Poleramma. Today Anjali is married and has a son. She works at her husband's shoe store in the town of Nidadavolu and has not performed publicly for close to twenty years.

In January 2002, Anjali performed excerpts of *Bhāmākalāpam* for me. The songs that she sang were in fact the same as many of those heard in contemporary Kuchipudi performances, although, as Nagabhushana Sarma has pointed out, the texts used by contemporary Tūrupu performers are composite texts that consist of contributions made by several poets over a span of at least one hundred and fifty years⁹. Anjali told me that she thinks that Satyabhāmā is "an *ahāṅkāri* [egotistical woman], who still has a good [*mañci*] name". However, she was careful to note major departures in the Tūrupu performances from those of the Kuchipudi tradition. Nagabhushana Sarma observes that many narrative performance traditions evolved as reactions to, or even as subtle parodies of the dominant upper-caste Brahmin forms such as the one from Kuchipudi village (1995, 94). The most prominent departure from the Kuchipudi tradition according to Anjali was the imaging of Satyabhāmā's confidante Mādhavī as a buffoon-like character whom she referred to as a "*hāsyam*" (lit. comedic) artist. To show the nature of this character, she sang a song in which the buffoon mocks Satyabhāmā's entrance song (called *pātra praveśa daruvu*). This is sung in the same melody (*mettu*) as Satyabhāmā's entrance-song. The first line of Satyabhāmā's song is *bhāmane satyabhāmane*, or "I am Bhāmā, Satyabhāmā." The Tūrupu Bhāgavatam buffoon sings instead, *boṭlane nene vīram boṭlane*, or "I am a *boṭlu* [another name for *smārta* Brahmins, such as those who perform the Kuchipudi Bhāgavatam]¹⁰, I am a mighty *boṭlu*." A translation of the excerpts that she sang is given below:

praveśa daruvu (*mukhāri rāga*)

I am a *boṭlu*, a mighty *boṭlu*.

I am a *boṭlu* who can fill my stomach with 160 *dosa* (rice pancakes), *vaḍa* (fried lentil doughnut), sweets and snake-gourd curry!

I am a boṭlu, a mighty boṭlu.

Oh, Madanagopāla [Kṛṣṇa] might come, but I still need five *cāmaras* (yak-tail fans) to cool me off (after all that eating)!

“*ghabel ghabel ghabel ghabel ghabel*” sounds the roar (of my stomach)

“*tapāl tapāl tapāl tapāl tapāl*” stealthily [Kṛṣṇa] comes.

I am a boṭṭu, a mighty boṭṭu.

As a performance culture that mimicks the upper-caste Kuchipudi tradition, Tūrupu Bhāgavatam uses *Bhāmākalāpam* (and *Gollakalāpam*) performances as a way of expressing a critique of caste difference. In the above song, for example, the Brahmin is parodied – he consumes an over-abundant amount of food, and although ostensibly serving Kṛṣṇa, seems more concerned about his own well-being. Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam’s comments on parody characterize what is going on in Tūrupu Bhāgavatam performances:

The folktale is, precisely, a parody of, not a foil to, high-caste Sanskritic models, a parody which is in some sense mortgaged to its object, which it partly assimilates into its own radical, folk perspective. Indeed, mimesis infuses parody with its most penetrating power...Parody...pivots on a hinge that swings in two directions – both toward, and away from, the parodied subject (which the parody partially constructs). By its very nature, it is simultaneously mimetic and subversive. Its mode is ambivalence, never simple, overt hostility. (1992, 21)

Like the eighteenth and nineteenth century South Indian Sanskrit *bhāṇa* dramas described by Indira Peterson (1997), these performances largely consist of “gentle ribbing, perhaps, but certainly not savage satire” of Brahmanic culture (1997, 5). Tūrupu Bhāgavatam performances are definitely “mortgaged” to the Kuchipudi tradition, but there is room for some freeplay. In a similar way, as we shall see later, performative depictions of Satyabhāmā in general are bound to the reiteration of gendered Brahmanic values, yet they are flexible enough to allow for subtle subversions and re-interpretations.

Men and Women Interchange Gender: Cindu Bhāgavatam (Dalit Performance Tradition)

Narrative theatre forms in Andhra are not limited to the upper or even middle castes. A form of Bhāgavatam known as Cindu Bhāgavatam, for example, is performed by a Dalit community called *cindu-mādiga* in the northern districts of Telangana. The performers in the community are called *cindus* (lit. “step”), and their patrons, who belong to the same

caste, are called *mādigas*. The *cindu* community is one among approximately six subdivisions of the *mādiga* (dalit) community that practices performing arts.¹¹ Each of these communities is expected to travel and perform in various *mādiga* villages (mostly in the Nizamabad district) during the annual performance season (roughly corresponding to winter). Ideally, a *cindu* performance troupe is supposed to live off the collections of material and food donated by families who watch the performances during the performance season for the rest of the year. In reality, however, many members of the *mādiga* community are leather tanners for the rest of the year. In his recent work, Pulikonda Subbachary cites the *cindus* as an example of what he terms “dependent performing castes” (Subbachary 1998, 2003a, 2003b). Subbachary’s work clearly outlines the intricate ritual functions and social privileges accorded to *cindus* who are performing artists.

Cindu Bhāgavatam artists, to my knowledge, do not perform narratives about Satyabhāmā. However, in spite of this, my reasons for briefly discussing this tradition are twofold. First, a discussion of Cindu Bhāgavatam aids us a great deal in locating the flexibility of gender roles in Andhra performance traditions. Cindu Bhāgavatam traditions are perhaps unique since they not only allow for the active inclusion of women in the realm of public performance but in fact also allow for women to take on male roles during performance. Second, the women who do act in Cindu Bhāgavatam usually are known as *jogin* or *jogati*, and often are confused with the *devadāsīs* or *kalāvantulu* women whom we will encounter in Chapter Four. A discussion of Cindu Bhagavatam will therefore also help bring attention to the fundamental differences between Dalit *jogins* and upper-caste *devadāsīs*.

Unlike the Tūrupu Bhāgavatam, which is essentially a *kalāpam* form, Cindu Bhāgavatam is technically a *yakṣagāna* tradition, with many actors taking on the roles of different characters in a largely action-oriented drama. Even though *cindu-mādiga* performances are generally grouped under the generic category “Bhāgavatam,” in essence the primary oral epic in the community is known as *Jāmbapurāṇamu*¹². This is a caste-specific oral narrative (*kula-purāṇamu*)¹³ about the supremacy of the *mādiga* caste over all others. It is the story of the Bear-King Jāmbavan^{tuḍu} (Skt. Jāmbavan) of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, who marries a woman named Nīlādrikanyaka and, after overcoming his

enemies, rules the world along with his descendents, the *mādigas*, having secured the blessings of Goddess Yellamma.

In the performance of *Jāmbapurāṇamu*, Yellamma appears on stage to give her blessings ostensibly to Jāmbavantuḍu but in reality to the audience. The role of the goddess Yellamma, called *Yellamma veṣam* (which ends every performance of Cindu Bhāgavatam), must be played only by a woman. The prominence of Yellamma in Cindu Bhāgavatam is explained by Chindula Yellamma of Armoor village in Nizamabad (Fig. 4), one of the senior-most Cindu Bhāgavatam artists and herself a *jogin*, as follows:

In the past when a fierce battle was going on between Lord Śiva and Tripurāsura, then seven crore supporters of Jāmbava origin supported Lord Śiva. [As the demons of Tripurāsura's army are being killed, each drop of their blood that falls to ground gives rise to a thousand demons]... To stop this multiplication, Ādiśakti or Yellamma was invoked... She drank the blood pouring out from the bodies of these demons. Then she became unconscious and fell asleep. So, to regain her consciousness, 33 crore gods and goddess tried [to wake her]... but their attempt was without result. Then crores of Harijans [*mādigas*] took the *kanaka-ḍappu* [a golden drum] and... [played it. To the accompaniment of the drum, Jāmbavan's daughter performed a dance and worshipped Yellamma]. Her dance was just like the waves of the ocean... Yellamma was very happy and pleased with the dance. Then began the 'cindu' dance.¹⁴

The mandatory *Yellamma-veṣam* at the end of each Cindu Bhāgavatam performance, therefore signifies the "presencing" of the clan-goddess and serves to intimately connect the goddess' worship with the performance genre of Cindu Bhāgavatam. Indeed, M. Nagabhushana Sarma describes the *Yellamma-veṣam* as the point when the "whole performance situation immediately changes into a ritual" (Nagabhushana Sarma 1995, 106).

Most of the women of the *mādiga* community who perform Cindu Bhāgavatam are not married. Instead, the female performers are called *jogin* or *jogati*. They have been dedicated to the Goddess Yellamma and have ritually married her bodyguard, Poṭṭurāju. The worship of Yellamma and the tradition of "dedicating" young girls to her, which is found through areas in Andhra, Karnataka and Maharashtra, has been discussed at great length by Bradford (1983), Assayag (1990), Epp (1995, 1998), Bruckner (1996) and Evans (1998). The majority of these scholars in fact refer to Yellamma's devotees by the generic term "*devadāsī*" and invariably link them to a degenerate form of the "Hindu temple dancer." In reality, however, there is very little that

connects these two figures other than a dedication ceremony to a deity that employs the rhetoric of marriage. The *jogins* of contemporary Andhra have been extensively documented by V. Chandra Mowli, and even he notes that they have too often been confused with the local traditions of *kalāvantulu* (Chandra Mowli 1992, 5). As we shall see in Chapter Four, the *kalāvantulu* are of relatively high-caste background, and until recently were independently wealthy women who lived in matrifocal households, were supported by feudal land grants, and were skilled in music and dance traditions that today would be called “classical”. There is a fundamental difference between the *jogin* and the *devadāsī* that most scholars do not realize – the *jogin* (from the Sanskrit *yoginī*, “renunciant”) has always been imaged as an ascetic, but the South Indian *devadāsī* proper has never been imaged this way. Contemporary *jogins* are, for example, supposed to earn their livelihood through begging (*jogvā* or *bhikṣā*), whereas the *devadāsīs* affiliated with the court and temple were perceived, as we have seen in our discussions of Nāyaka and Marāṭhā culture (and will continue to see in Chapters Four and Five), as courtesans, who were nonetheless embodiments of “power, piety, magnanimity, and even of the wifely virtue of faithfulness” (Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam 1992, 316).

The practice of dedicating young girls to local goddesses, particularly Yellamma and Pocamma, is concentrated in the Telangana region today, especially in and around the Nizamabad district¹⁵. Many girls in this region are dedicated to the goddess for largely financial reasons (a girl child is usually seen as a financial liability), or in some cases to fulfil a vow (*mokku*) made to the goddess. Dedication ceremonies usually take place before puberty. The girl is ritually “married” to the Goddess’ guardian, Poṭṭurāju, and after reaching puberty, has another ceremony performed called *mila paṭṭa*, in which the highest bidder (usually an influential man in the village) has the right to “buy” her so that he may be the first to have sexual relations with her. After that she usually ends up as the village prostitute and is visited by any number of men. These young women are also called upon to sing songs and dance a kind of a circular step-dance at the time of funeral processions, while the corpse is carried to the cremation ground. The majority of these girls are forced into prostitution at a very young age and exploited in various ways (including sometimes being sold to brothels in larger cities), making them the focus of several women’s Non-Governmental Organizations and even scholarly studies. The

large numbers of dedication-ceremonies of *jogins* in the Telangana region has instigated the government of Andhra Pradesh to pass the “Andhra Pradesh Devadasis (Prevention of Dedication) Act of 1988”¹⁶, modelled after the famous 1947 Anti-Devadasi Act of the Madras Presidency. In a sense, it is easy to see how at first glance these women might be confused with the *kalāvantulu*, but it is imperative that we maintain this very important distinction for the purposes of our study. As we shall hear from *kalāvantulu* informants in Chapter Five, it is in fact this conflation of identities that has further marginalized *kalāvantulu* women in contemporary Andhra.

Most *jogin* performers of Cindu Bhāgavatam have managed to escape forced prostitution on account of their inclusion into the performance *meḷams*. As we have noted, today’s leading *cindu* artist, Chindula Yellamma, is a *jogin* who has not engaged with the lifestyle of most modern *jogins*. Instead, she and her troupe members are known for their performances of *Jāmbapurāṇamu* and other narratives. Cindu Bhāgavatam provides us with a gender-inclusive performance model, which unlike most other performance traditions in Andhra, allows women to play male roles and even become troupe leaders (*nāyakurālu*) as in the case of Chindula Yellamma.

The Cindu Bhāgavatam tradition thus provides us with an example of the complexity of gender and caste representations found in the narrative dance theatre traditions of Andhra. We shall now move on to look at the performance traditions of the *devadāsīs* or *kalāvantulu* and the *smārta* Brahmin men of Kuchipudi village. These two traditions will form the major foci of our analyses of representation of womanhood through performance. The primary reasons why I have chosen these traditions are their links to Satyabhāmā-oriented narratives, on the one hand, and their proximity to Sanskrit-oriented courtly and poetic cultures, on the other. In other words, these are both somewhat elite performance traditions.

***Meḷam*: Indigenous Gendered Divisions of Performance in Andhra**

The word *meḷam* (“band”) is used to refer to troupes of performers throughout much of South India. From approximately the early eighteenth century to the early part of the twentieth century, the Tamil terms *cinnamēḷam* and *periyamēḷam* were used, for example, to delineate two broad divisions of communities of temple performers in the Tamil country. The term *cinnamēḷam* (“small band”) referred to the collective made up of the *devadāsīs*, her

dance master (*naṭṭuvanār*), the drummer and *mukhavīṇā* player, and the term *periyamēlam* (“big band”) referred to the ritual music troupe consisting of a *nāgasvaram* (oboe) player and his drummer.¹⁷

In the Telugu-speaking regions, the word *meḷam* or its plural form *meḷālu* was used to delineate broad performance categories but was also used to refer to specific troupes led and directed by famous troupe leaders (called *nāyakurālu*). Many of the *nāṭya meḷa* troupes, for example, would call their troupe by the name of their *nāyakuḍu*, such as *Chintavāri Meḷam*, *Vedāntamvāri Meḷam*, etc., where “Chinta” and “Vedantam” were the family names of the troupe leaders. In the case of the Kuchipudi *meḷams*, they usually toured for six months when they took time off from their agricultural activities. The various *meḷams* of the village would agree to perform only in particular areas so as to afford enough performance opportunities for each *meḷam* (Jonnalagadda 1996a, 43). As we shall see later, *devadāsī* communities in Coastal Andhra also used the terms *meḷālu* and *nāyakurālu*, but here the “leader” is usually the senior-most woman in the troupe, and the word *meḷam* is in fact used to refer to the performances themselves. For example, most *devadāsī* women told me that they “performed *meḷams*,” meaning that they participated in public performances, referring to dancing as a part of a troupe in the homes of patrons or during the processions (*ūregimpu*) of the temple deity on festival occasions.

The term *meḷam* is also used today to describe the gendered division of performance genres in Andhra. The two terms *naṭṭuva meḷam* and *nāṭya meḷam* have been used since the beginning of the twentieth century to refer to female and male genres of performance respectively. Whereas the term *nāṭya meḷam*¹⁸ is used quite loosely to refer to any narrative theatre troupe consisting of male performers (Kuchipudi Brahmins, Tūrupu Bhagavatam artists, etc.), the term *naṭṭuva meḷam* is specifically used only to refer to the performances of the *devadāsī* women of Andhra, also known as *kalāvantulu*, *sānivāru*, and *bhogamvāru*.

Brahmins and Devadāsīs: Towards a Model of Interclass Co-dependency

The caste issue has plagued the arts community throughout South India where problems of cultural property rights, ownership and representation have come to the forefront. Critical scholarship has created what seems like a clear-cut distinction and even tension between “Brahmin” and “Non-Brahmin” (read “*devadāsī*”) identities in history, particularly

following the rise of Non-Brahmin political assertion (Ramaswamy 1997; 1998; Srinivasan 1983; 1984; 1985; 1988; O'Shea 1998; 2001). Although the tension between the two communities is a very real one today, there appears to be enough evidence (in both the Tamil and Telugu-speaking regions) of co-dependent relationships among Brahmins and the *devadāsī* community in the period from ca. 1750-1930. The pre-“dance-revival period” (ca. 1800-1920) is marked by a conscious interaction among Brahmins and the *devadāsī* community¹⁹. Indeed, in the Tamil region, this interclass collaboration was not limited to Brahmin men and *devadāsī* women. As an example, one can cite the figure of K. Papammāl (1854-1921), recently discussed by B.M. Sundaram (2003). Papammāl was a Brahmin woman who performed the *devadāsī* dance in public in the late nineteenth century, long before Rukmini Devi Arundale (1904-1986) claimed to have been the first woman from outside the traditional community to perform the dance in 1935.

In late nineteenth and early twentieth century coastal Andhra, the *devadāsī* community interacted with Brahmins regularly in order to expand and create repertoire. For example, the famous poet of the Godavari delta, Gaddam Subbarayudu Sastri (d. 1940) composed individual *Bhāmākalāpam* librettos for fourteen *devadāsī* women in the East Godavari region, including the famed Maddula Lakshminarayana and Maddula Venkataratnam. Atkuri Subbaravu, a contemporary of Sastri, composed similar librettos for the *devadāsīs* of the famous Annabhatula family of Mummidivaram. *Devadāsī* performances in this region did not, for the most part, include male *naṭṭuvanārs* (dance-masters, orchestra leaders) as we see further south. Therefore, in many instances, upper-class men provided accompaniment for certain kinds of dance. For example, the *sūtradhāri-veṣam* (who played the role of Mādhavī in the *devadāsī Bhāmākalāpam* librettos) was most often an upper-class male, who was a specialist in music and Telugu poetics.

Turning to the development of the repertoire of Kuchipudi as we understand it today, it is important to note that it was the result of the intermingling of *smārta* Brahmin and *devadāsī* dance traditions. Two *devadāsīs*, Duggirala Jagadamba (c. 1911-1979) and Pandiri Venkataratnam (c. 1905-1971), are known to have been students of Vedantam Lakshminarayana Sastri of Kuchipudi village. They might have been

responsible for the expansion of his own repertoire of *padams*, *javalis* and *padavarnams*. We shall discuss this further in Chapter Six.

Finally, we cannot forget that aspect of the *devadāsī* tradition that most artists and scholars in contemporary India are hesitant to talk about. In Tamilnadu and Andhra, the majority of relationships that *devadāsī* women had were with upper-class men. The “mixed” caste identities of *devadāsī* households are arguably difficult to define. Most *devadāsī* lineages are of “mixed” caste background precisely because they contain Brahmin elements. Many *devadāsī* women, in Andhra especially, also adopted the Brahmin dialect and visual markers of Brahmin women (such as wearing *maḍikaṭṭu* – the ritually pure *sārī* tied in the orthodox Brahmin manner – on a regular basis), and in some cases, it was difficult to distinguish who was Brahmin and who was not.

Today’s politically-charged and divisive discourse around Brahmins and *devadāsīs* needs to be understood as a contemporary construct. Pre-modern relations between the communities in Andhra were fluid. From the standpoint of music and dance traditions, the relations between the two communities could well be represented as a model of complementarity instead of the tactful and fractured dyad we have inherited today.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the ecology of performance culture in which narrative theatre traditions of Andhra are embedded. The three genres of *yakṣagāna*, *kalāpam* and *veṣam* each have rich and nuanced histories, sub-genres and performance conventions: *yakṣagāna* performances, such as the Cindu Bhāgavatam involve multiple actors playing various roles in a linear narrative performance; *kalāpams* are performed usually by one or two actors and elaborate on the varying states-of-being (*bhāvas*) experienced by one character in a given narrative episode; and *veṣams* are also performed by one actor who “becomes” a character from a particular drama.

The Tūrupu Bhāgavatam and Cindu Bhāgavatam traditions demonstrate how images of caste and gender are played out in various ways through performance. In the Tūrupu Bhāgavatam tradition, caste differences between the Tūrupu (*kammari* or goldsmith caste) artists and the Kuchipudi (Brahmin) artists are highlighted using the mode of satire. In the Dalit Cindu Bhāgavatam, a major structure of South Indian

performance traditions, namely the impersonation of female characters by men, is reversed. In Cindu Bhāgavatam, women not only play women's roles such as that of the goddess Yellamma but sometimes also play men's roles.

Finally, in this chapter, I have considered the form and function of the *meḷam* (troupe). It is important to note that one of the key features of the *meḷam* was its itinerancy. *Meḷams* would travel from one village to another at the invitation of temple authorities, kings, *zamīndārs* and other patrons. As such, they traversed the thresholds of the court, temple, and home. The performance *meḷam* was, in fact, a key modality that linked these various domains. This explains, for example, how the courtly rhetoric and conventions of texts such as *yakṣagānas* or *kalāpams* enter the repertoire of theatre-forms that are enjoyed by the masses in villages. Although often the courtly tradition represents itself (or is represented in scholarship) as "elitist," its influence on popular culture in Telugu-speaking South India is undeniable. The dialectical relationship between court and village-level performances again speaks to the dynamism of, and cultural necessity for, the narrative theatre traditions in this region. In the next chapter, we will begin our discussion of the *devadāsī* dance traditions of coastal Andhra. As we have already noted, from the Nāyaka period onward, these women simultaneously served in both the temple and the court.

¹ For *tolubommalāṭa*, see Goldberg-Belle (1984), for *vīrula katha* see Roghair (1982). For *burrakatha* see Negens (1996). Other *katha* forms of Andhra such as *āsādi katha* have been discussed by Nagabhushana Sarma (1995, 13-45).

² For details on Terukkūttu in Tamilnadu, see Ramasamy (1987), Frasca (1990) and DeBruin (1998, 1999). Among these, the most clear and comprehensive study is DeBruin (1999), whose troupe, the "Tamil Nadu Kattaikkuttu Kalai Valarchi Munnetra Sangam" prefers to represent the artform by the name Kaṭṭaikkūttu, after the ornaments (*kaṭṭai*) worn by the actors. Based on my experience, modern *vīdhi nāṭakam* actually resembles a mix between Kaṭṭaikkūttu and the "Special Nāṭakam" genre also found in Tamilnadu (see Seizer 1997). For details on the *vīdhi nāṭakam* tradition of Andhra, see Raghavan (1969), Pandu Ranga Rao (1981) and Nagabhushana Sarma (1995, 99-105).

³ The Kannada *yakṣagāna* tradition of Karnataka is also known by the name *yakṣagāna-bayalāṭa*.

⁴ The majority of contemporary *vīdhi nāṭakam* texts were written by Chervirala Bhagayya, and his Muslim student Mohammad Abdullah in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In an innovative twist, the leftist theatre group Andhra Praja Natya

Mandali has used *vīdhi nāṭakam* technique to present plays such as *Hitler Paṭanam* ("The Fall of Hitler") written by Koganti Gopalakrishnayya in 1946 (Jonnalagadda 1996a, 47; Nagabhushana Sarma 1995, 105).

⁵ One of Tirupati Gaṅgamma's "peripheral forms" is *Veṣāḷamma*, the "Mother of Guises (*veṣam*).⁵ For details see Handelman (1995).

⁶ *Kuṛavañci* (lit. "Drama of the Kuṛa Woman") is a post-eighteenth century literary and performance genre from Tamilnadu. The second half of the typical plot of the *kuṛavañci* texts revolves around the fortune-telling Kuṛa woman from the hills (also called Kuratti or Ciṅki) and her lover, a hunter or bird-catcher, known as Ciṅkan. See Muilwijk (1996) for a literary study of the *Kumāraliṅkar Kuṛavañci*, and Peterson (1998) for an excellent critical study of the *kuṛavañci* genre in transition.

⁷ Personal communication, Kottuvada Anjali, daughter of the late Kocherla Brahmananda Bhagavata, Nidadavolu, January 2002.

⁸ In South India, turmeric is considered cooling and is thought to have a healing or medicinal property. It is used in almost all female lifecycle events. Puberty ceremonies in South India involve an obligatory bath in turmeric-water, many *boṭṭus* or *tālis* (wedding necklaces) are made of string dipped in turmeric and have a piece of turmeric root as a pendant, and finally, turmeric is also used in fertility rituals for pregnant women known as *garbhadānam*, *pūṃsavana* and *sīmāntam*. On the meanings and uses of turmeric, see Chellaperumal (2003, 619-20).

⁹ The following place-names occur in most *daruvus* in this tradition: Narasinghapalli, Kesavapuri, Bobbili, Duvva and Nellimarla. This is almost exactly the same case with the *navajanārdana pārijātam* texts that used to be performed by Pendyela Satyabhama in the Kuntīmādhavasvāmi temple, Pithapuram. Nagabhushana Sarma believes that the majority of the *daruvus* in Tūrupu Bhāgavatam were written in the nineteenth century by one Vankayala Balarama Bhukta (Nagabhushana Sarma 1995, 97).

¹⁰ A nineteenth-century mystic (and perhaps Tantric practitioner) named Potuluri Vira Brahmendra Svami was also known affectionately as *vīram botlayya*. Here the term is used as one of endearment and respect, as Brahmendra Svami was reportedly an extraordinarily bright child.

¹¹ The six major subdivisions of the *māḍiga* community include: *cindu-māḍiga*, *ḍakkali*, *kommula*, *baiṇḍla*, *āsādi* and *nulaka-candrayya*. There is great variety among the types of arts these communities specialize in. For example, the *ḍakkali* community plays a peculiar lute called *kinnara* and in the off-season writes Telugu manuscripts on palmleaves. The *ḍakkali* community is thus, today at least, a literate Dalit community of musicians and scribes. The *nulaka-candrayya* community, by contrast, performs a type of *bhāgavatam* called *dāsari bhāgavatam*, and in the off-season specializes in making cots out of date-plant leaves (personal communication, Dr. K. Muthyam, Department of Telugu, Koti Women's College, Osmania University, Hyderabad, January 2002).

¹² The Janapada Kala Parisodhana Vedika of Hyderabad has recently published a version of the *Jāmbapurāṇamu*, under the title *Jāmba Purāṇam: Māḍiga Samskr̥tika Citram, Cindu Bhāgotam* (1997). In addition to the *Jāmbapurāṇamu*, according to Venkateswara Rao (1999, 13-14), the *cindu* community also performs the following dramas: Alli Rāṇi, Bhakta Rāmadāsu, Bhakta Kurcela, Bālanāgama, Bāṇāsura, Bhīmārjuna, Bhakta Prahlāda, Bhabruvāhana, Ceṇcu Lakṣmi, Candrahāsa, Dharmāṅgada Carita, Gaṅgagauri Vilāsam, Kanaka Tāra, Kāliṅga Mardana, Kāntimati, Kīcaka Vadha, Lakṣmi Parinayam, Mārkaṇḍeya, Mairāvaṇa, Prabhāvatī Vilāsam, Rukmāṅgada, Satyatulasi, Satisāvitri, Satyahariścandra, Sugrīva Vijayam, Vipranārāyaṇa, Vīrābhimaṇyu. The plethora of Brahmanic themes explored in the *cindu* community through the enactment of these narratives is very interesting and could potentially be a topic for future research.

¹³ The performance of *kula-purāṇamu* or caste-myths by various communities in Andhra is fairly common. The *cindu-māḍiga*'s performances, however, are perhaps best representative of Subbachary's idea of dependent performing castes. For an excellent analysis of the structure and strategic functions of *kula-purāṇas* in South India, see Subbachary's "*Kulapurāṇas: A Counter Narrative System*" (1998).

¹⁴ I was unfortunately not able to meet Chindula Yellamma in person. This account was told to Mudapaka Venkateswara Rao and subsequently incorporated into his monograph published in 1999.

¹⁵ Within the Nizamabad district, the taluks of Bodan, Banswada, Yellareddy and Madnur are all known for the *jogi paṭṭa* ceremonies in which the girls are dedicated to the goddess.

¹⁶ The act has been published at least twice to my knowledge, first in the *Andhra Pradesh Gazette*, March 31, 1988, then again as Appendix 2 in Chandra Mowli (1992, 75-80).

¹⁷ The distinguishing features of *mēlams* and the *mēlakkāraṇ* community in nineteenth and twentieth century Tamilnadu have been discussed at length by Kersenboom (1987, 1988) and to a lesser extent by Amrit Srinivasan (1983, 1985, 1988).

¹⁸ The *nāṭya mēlam* ("drama band") comprises the rendering of Purāṇic narratives by upper-caste males, known as *bhāgavatulu*. Although the most famous *bhāgavata* tradition comes from the Kuchipudi village in the Krishna District, several other such traditions (such as the Tūrupu Bhāgavatam discussed earlier) also exist.

¹⁹ In Tamilnadu, perhaps the best-known example of such a model of co-dependency is the relationship of Rāmasvāmi Dīkṣitar and his son Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar with the *koṇṭi paramparā* women of the Tiruvarur temple. Rāmasvāmi Dīkṣitar (1735-1817) is popularly known to have studied music with the musicians and female dancers of the temple, whereas his son, Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar (1775-1835), was the guru of Tiruvarur Kamalamuttu (c. early nineteenth century, daughter of Tiruvarur Kuṭṭiyammāl).

Kamalam may also have been among the first women to dance the compositions of Dīkṣitar's student Ponnaiyā (1804-1863) of the Tanjavur Quartet, the others being the *devadāsīs* Mīnākṣī (of Mannargudi), and Sarasammāl of Tanjavur (for details see Sundaram 1997, 32).

Chapter 4

Situating *Devadāsī* Culture in Andhra Pradesh

Andhradesh, I think, is the heart of this evil. Hindu society here engages dancing girls – especially during marriages and festivals of the deity – to sing obscene songs accompanied by obscene gestures before the pious deity, and sets a bad example before the newly-wed couple. The misery of a whole community consigned to a life of prostitution is great. Young men here are trying to do their best to root out this evil.

- A young man's letter to Gandhi, 1934

Introduction

In this chapter, I shift our focus from the figure of Satyabhāmā to the figure of the *devadāsī* of coastal Andhra Pradesh. A large portion of this chapter focuses on contemporary ethnographic work with over thirty *devadāsīs* in coastal Andhra Pradesh, in order to listen to their voices, and hear their own articulations of the form and functions of the *devadāsī* tradition in Andhra, as well as the enormous changes brought about by the social reform and social purity movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The figure of Satyabhāmā was prominent in *devadāsī* traditions linked to temple culture in pre-reform coastal Andhra. However, today the contexts for these types of performance have been dismantled, and *devadāsī* performances of ritual repertoire in temples and *Bhāmākalāpam* performances in temple courtyards and pavilions have disappeared altogether.

In this chapter, I chart the various pre-reform contexts for *devadāsī* performance in coastal Andhra, in order to situate the functions of the *devadāsī* community and their relationship to the figure of Satyabhāmā. Next, I trace the disappearance of *devadāsī* performance culture in the Telugu-speaking regions, with a particular focus on the early attempts at reform that were ushered in by Telugu men, and the unique focus on Andhra *devadāsīs* by Gandhi in the 1920s. I discuss the figure of Yamini Purnatilakam, a *devadāsī* from coastal Andhra who became a devout Gandhian and established a set of rehabilitation centers to “rescue” women from her own community, in spite of the tremendous amounts of internal resistance to such activities. I end this chapter with a history of the events that led to the *Madras Devadasis (Prevention of Dedication) Act* of

1947, which is where we will begin the next chapter that deals with contemporary *devadāsī* identity and the mobilization of female archetypes in coastal Andhra.

However, before we begin our discussions of the contexts of *devadāsī* performances, I would like to briefly address the issue of “naming” in the *devadāsī* traditions of contemporary Andhra. The women I have worked with belong to a class of persons who call themselves *kalāvantulu* (“receptacles of the arts” or *kalāvati* in the singular), i.e. women trained in the performance of music and dance. As such, they were a sub-set of the larger category of women called *bhogam* (“embodiments of enjoyment”)¹, a reference to their non-normative sexuality. Not all *bhogam* women are *kalāvantulu*. In one family of family of *bhogam* women, some will be trained in the performing arts, whereas their sisters might not be. I point this out only to move away from both homogenized and to some extent, romanticized understandings of *devadāsī* cultures in South India. The use of the Sanskrit word “*devadāsī*” as an umbrella term referring to women with temple associations throughout various parts of South India, Maharashtra and Orissa, is rooted in colonial attempts to classify data on such communities (Orr 2001; Vijaisri 2003). However, throughout this dissertation, I will be using the terms *devadāsī* and *kalāvantulu* (or its singular form, *kalāvati*), largely because this is how contemporary women in the community wish to refer to themselves². At the same time, I recognize the problems with the use of the term *devadāsī* in particular: (1) it connotes a pan-Indian tradition, evoking Sanskritic traditions over vernacular ones; (2) in doing so, it loses the specificity of Telugu *bhogam* culture by homogenizing all South Indian *devadāsī* cultures; and (3) in the Andhra context, it collapses the distinction I have made between *bhogam* and *kalāvantulu*.

Contexts of Devadāsī Performance in Andhra Pradesh

In Precolonial South India, *devadāsīs* in coastal Andhra performed in three basic contexts – the temple, the court, and the private home of a patron. The temple performances could be further sub-divided according to the sites where performance took place: the temple sanctum, the temple *maṇḍapa* (pavilion) and the temple procession. One of these, namely the performance of *Kalāpam* in the public space of temple *maṇḍapas* or *pandals*, drew upon the textual performance genres and Satyabhāmā material discussed in Chapter Three.

Table 1: *Contexts of Devadāsī Performance in Nineteenth-Century Andhra*

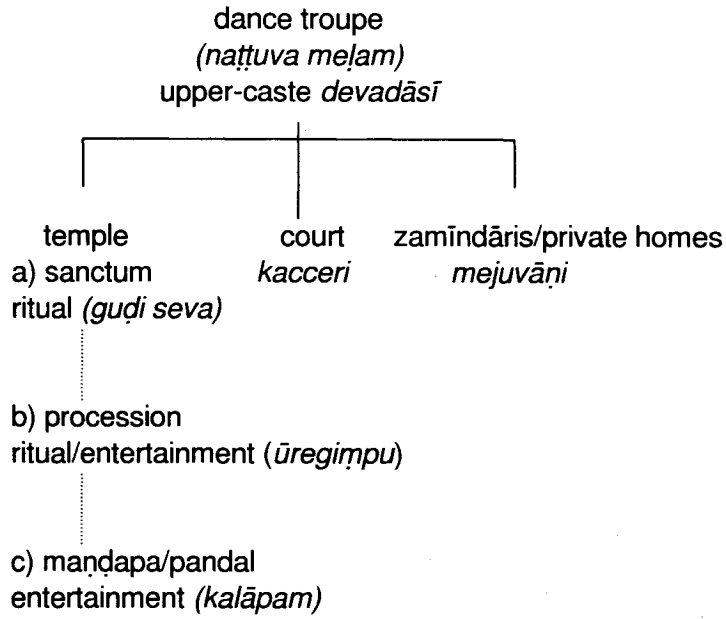


Table 1 represents the nature of *devadāsī* and Brahmin performance cultures in eastern Andhra Pradesh. Although I shall examine the *devadāsī* performance context in great detail in this chapter and the Kuchipudi Brahmin context in Chapter Six, at this point it is necessary only that we understand the basic settings and variations in repertoire that are characteristic of each group. The term *naṭṭuva meḷam* (dance band) refers to the tradition of dancing confined to a particular community of female dance-professionals (*kalāvantulu*). As of the nineteenth century, *devadāsī* performances took place in three sites: (1) the temple, where performance was referred to as *guḍi seva* (temple service); (2) the royal court, where the performance was called “concert” (*kacceri*) and (3) the homes of feudal landlords or other wealthy patrons, where the performance was called “*mejuvāṇi*” or “*mezuvāṇi*,” from the Urdu word *mezbān*, meaning “host” or “landlord”. As we shall see, the actual repertoire performed in many of these sites however, was fluid.

In the temple context, ritual dance that complemented or mirrored the ritual sequence of events inside the temple sanctum (*garbha-gr̥ha*) was perhaps the least widespread of all the traditions. By early twentieth century, *devadāsī* participation in daily temple ritual had been severely curtailed on account of colonial critiques and the reform movement. However, the *ūregimpu meḷam* or dancing with the deity as it was taken on procession, was common, even among women in the community who had not been

dedicated to deities. The *ūregimpu meḷam* consisted of a random selection of songs and dances from the *kacceri* or concert repertoire that would be performed for the enjoyment of both the deity and devotees, when the deity would periodically stop for “breaks” enroute the procession. The *devadāsī bhāgavatam* or *kalāpam* consisted of the rendering of night-long performances about the archetypal female characters Satyabhāmā, a wife of the god Kṛṣṇa (called *Bhāmakalāpam*) and Gollabhāmā, an intellectual milkmaid (called *Gollakalāpam*). The *devadāsī bhāgavatam* was essentially thought of as a dramatic idiom (*nāṭakamu*)³.

The Temple Context

The early history of temple women in South India is somewhat problematic. Although there is certainly early evidence of women performing ritual tasks (including the performance of music and dance) in medieval Andhra temples and there is also evidence of an active community of female performers at this time, as Leslie Orr points out in her work on medieval Tamilnadu, there is no reason to assume that these groups together represent what is popularly understood as “the *devadāsī* institution” in South India (Orr 2000, 5, 177). Beginning in the Kakatiya period (twelfth to fourteenth centuries), there are numerous references to women employees, servants, and donors in Andhra temple inscriptions. However, these women are not married to the temple deity, nor do they have specific ritual tasks to fulfill in the temple. Cynthia Talbot, in her recent work on medieval Kakatiya-period inscriptions notes that

The temple institution was the primary public arena for women in Kakatiya Andhra. There they could hold honoured positions as officials in charge of the treasury, as well as serving as temple dancers. In several temples of coastal Andhra, endowments were administered by the collective body of temple women known as Sani 300 [*munṇūru sāni*]. Most of these temple women, or *guḍisāni*, were daughters of respectable men like *nāyakas* and *seṭṭis*. In at least one instance, a temple woman had been married as well. These tantalizing hints demonstrate the vast differences between the temple women of medieval Andhra and the *devadāsī* of the nineteenth century... (Talbot 2001, 84)

Part of the confusion around the activities of women in medieval Andhra concerns terminology. Historians have often collapsed the Telugu terms for women in medieval evidence. Thus, the terms found in the inscriptional record – *sāni*, *guḍisāni*, *guḍipātra*, *mānikkalu*, *bhogam*, and *birudu-pātra* to list a few – are all read by scholars as referring

to the direct ancestors of the *devadāsīs* or *kalāvantulu* of nineteenth and twentieth century Andhra (Arudra 1990, 1995; Swapnasundari 1995c). It is more likely that each of these terms denoted a specific kind of woman, who functioned either in the temple (as evidenced for example, by the term *guḍīsāni*, lit. “temple-lady”), or in the court (as in the term *birudu-pātra*⁴, lit. “honoured actress”). In the Vijayanagara period, we do hear of at least one example of a woman moving from one context into the other. Muddukuppāyi, who was a dancer in the court of King Acyutarāya (r. 1530-1542), left her official position to serve Lord Viṣṇu in Tirupati through the daily performance of dance in that temple (Arudra 1990, 52). However, such instances were extremely rare. For our purposes, it is important that these scattered and fragmentary references to temple women, court dancers, and other “public women” only coalesce in the Nāyaka period (c. sixteenth to seventeenth centuries), when the roles of the court dancer and temple woman are fully collapsed, and the identity of the *devadāsī* as we understand her today (characterized by a marriage to the temple deity, the right to ritual and economic honours within both temple and court structures, a complex dance repertoire and matrifocal social structure) emerges (Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam 1992, 187).

Certainly, from the Nāyaka period onward, there is an increased level of these women’s participation in the public aspects of temple worship and in the culture of the royal court, where she was imaged as an embodiment of enjoyment (marked by the Telugu terms *bhogini*, *bhogam* or *bhoga-stri*) in keeping with the imperial ethos of late-medieval South India. Saskia Kersenboom (1987) has shown that a reconstruction of the exact duties of these women in the temple is an extremely challenging task. There are only a few hereditary manuscripts that provide the song-texts that were sung by the women in the temples⁵, and there are the somewhat fragmented oral accounts of the tasks performed by the last women who had served in the temples immediately prior to the implementation of the Anti-Devadasi Act of 1947. In light of the problem of sources, and to focus some of our discussion specifically on Satyabhāmā, I draw on the memory of one *devadāsī*, Saride Manikyamma (Fig. 5), who recounted to me her ritual duties. There is no reason to believe that these were very different from what *devadāsīs* did in temples in previous centuries, but we do need to remember that even by her time, *devadāsī* participation in temple ritual had been severely curtailed on account of colonial critiques and the reform movement (to be discussed in due course). In the early

twentieth century, there were only a handful of temples where dance was still performed as part of daily temple ritual (*nityapūjā*).

This section deals with a religious dance-culture from the town of Ballipadu (West Godavari district). Using the women dedicated to the Madanagopālasvāmi temple in Ballipadu as paradigmatic examples, I provide an image of the form and function of the *devadāsī* temple tradition as it existed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries⁶. The marriage festival (*kalyāṇotsavam*) of the deity and the temple procession (*ūregimpu*) were the primary temple events in which *devadāsī* women of coastal Andhra were active participants. Saride Manikyam's descriptions of her duties in the temple probably represent the residual substance of the *devadāsīs'* links to the temple. The discussion ends with a short description of the *ekānta seva* or bedtime service for Kṛṣṇa, in which *devadāsīs* would perform the roles of Kṛṣṇa's multiple consorts. Satyabhāmā figures in this ritual context only briefly alongside figures such as Sītā and Rādhā.

a) The Ritual Repertoire of Kṛṣṇa's Women at the Madanagopālasvāmi Temple, Ballipadu

Saride Manikyamma was a performer in, and supported by the Madanagopālasvāmi temple in Ballipadu, a small village in the Attili Mandalam of the West Godavari district. The temple was constructed by Pemmaraju Konayamatya (exact dates unknown) sometime in the late eighteenth century (Fig. 6). The central image in the temple is that of Kṛṣṇa as Madanagopālasvāmi, "The Cowherd Beautiful as the God of Desire" (Fig. 7)⁷. The two other primary shrines in the temple are those of the Goddess Lakṣmī and Viṣṇu as Veṅkaṭeśvara (popularly called Yenṅanna-bābu)⁸. The temple also houses images of the *ālvārs*. Excerpts from the *Tiruvāymoli* of Nammālvār are recited daily in the temple, preceding the morning *bālābhoga nivedana* around 6.00 a.m. and preceding the evening *dhūpa sevā* at 8.00 p.m.⁹

The earliest surviving records of the temple exist in the form of written documents called *paḍitaram* or *paḍikaṭṭu*, which outline the administrative and ritual processes of the temple. Another major textual source for understanding the culture of this temple comes from the *Madanagopāla Vilāsam*. This Telugu text was written by Poduri Mṛityunjaya Kavi and Pemmaraju Sumitramba (the wife of Pemmaraju

Lakshminarasimha, who was in charge of the temple when its *dhvajastambha* [flag staff] was erected in 1901). It was given to me in the form of a handwritten transcript by Saride Varahalu when I visited the home of the Saride family of *devadāsīs* in Duvva, West Godavari district, in February 2002. The text consists of a series of musical compositions, apparently written by the authors, that delineate the religio-artistic contours of “ritual performance” in the temple. The text contains compositions in the *daruvu* genre, poetic verses in various Telugu meters, as well as other compositions including *maṅgalahārati pāṭulu* (auspicious songs to accompany the ritual waving of lamps), *lāli-pāṭulu* and *jola-pāṭulu* (lullabies), and *heccarikalu* (“warning” songs meant to be performed as part of the *baliharaṇa* rituals to propitiate the *aṣṭadikpālas*, guardian deities of the eight directions).

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Madanagopālasvāmi temple consistently supported two major artistic ensembles (*meḷams*) which would perform for the daily and periodic rituals: *cinna meḷam* (small troupe) and *pedda meḷam* (large troupe), also known as *sannāyi meḷam*.¹⁰ The *cinna meḷam* consisted of the female dancer and male musicians who played the *mukhavīṇā* (a small reed instrument), *śrutipeṭi* (a small harmonium-like box used to maintain the pitch), *mṛdaṅgam* (double-headed drum) and *tālam* (small hand cymbals). The *pedda meḷam* or *sannāyi meḷam* consisted of men who played the *ḍolu* (known in Tamilnadu as the *tavil*, a double-headed drum), *sannāyi* (known in Tamilnadu as *nāgasvaram*, an oboe-like double-reed instrument), *śrutipeṭi* and *tālam*.

Bhāmākalāpam was not performed by the women of the Saride house themselves because Manikyam’s aunts Saride Mutyam and Saride Madhuram died prematurely following their first public performance of *Bhāmākalāpam*, and this was considered an inauspicious omen. However, because *Bhāmākalāpam* was so important, the temple turned to outside performers. Marampalli Induvadana and Chittajallu Vaidehi (Fig. 8), two *kalāvatis* known for their expertise in *Bhāmākalāpam* and *Gollakalāpam*, used to perform both *kalāpams* for the annual *kalyāṇotsavam* of the Ballipadu temple, to celebrate Kṛṣṇa’s wedding to Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā, and thus the performance of *Bhāmākalāpam* was a regular feature of the *kalyāṇotsavam*.

The Daily Ritual (*nityapūjā*)

P. Purushottamacharyalu, one of the principal priests (*arcaka*) of the temple, described the daily ritual sequence of the temple to me as follows:

6.00 a.m.	<i>tīrthabinde abhiṣekam</i> (bath for Kṛṣṇa using the waters of the temple tank) <i>dhūpa sevā</i> (offering of <i>dhūpa</i> or incense) <i>drāviḍa prabandha sevā</i> (recitation of the Tamil hymns of the <i>ālvārs</i>)
7.00 a.m.	<i>āragimpu</i> , also called <i>bālabhogam</i> (a <i>naivedya</i> offering consisting of curd-rice)
11.00 a.m.	<i>mahānivedana</i> , also called <i>madhyāṅgana</i> (a <i>naivedya</i> offering of a full meal)
3:00 p.m.	<i>naivedya</i> offering (consisting of <i>nuvva pappu</i> [sesame seeds] and <i>bellamu</i> [jaggery])
5.30 p.m.	<i>mahānivedana</i> , <i>abhiṣekam</i> and <i>arcanā</i>
8.00 p.m.	<i>dhūpa sevā</i> <i>drāviḍa prabandha sevā</i> <i>āragimpu</i> (<i>naivedya</i> offering consisting of <i>ciṭṭigārelu</i> [fried rice flour cakes], <i>canagalu</i> [chick peas] and <i>kṣīrāṇnam</i> [sweet rice pudding])
9.00 p.m.	<i>pavvaḷimpu sevā</i> (putting the deities to sleep) <i>prahari</i> (offering to the <i>aṣṭadīkṣpālas</i> [gods of the eight directions])

Devadāsī participation in the daily ritual was rather minimal. From a quantitative perspective, as Saskia Kersenboom has shown, *devadāsī* participation in *nityapūjā* has been primarily oriented towards the morning and evening rituals (Kersenboom 1987, 111)¹¹. My main informant for the ritual repertoire, Saride Manikyamma, was quick to point out that in her time, the night-time worship called *pavaḷimpu sevā* or *ekānta sevā* was the primary occasion for the performance of the *devadāsī* ritual repertoire.

Saride Manikyamma, now eighty-one years of age, was the last woman who performed during the daily ritual offerings (*nityapūjā*) of the Madanagopālasvāmi temple. Born in 1921 in the village of Kaldari (Undrajavaram Mandal, West Godavari district), Manikyamma was dedicated to Kṛṣṇa in the Ballipāḍu temple at the age of nine. She remembers her initiation as follows:

There are four of us who were married to Madanagopālasvāmi. My sister Seshachalam and I were brought to Ballipadu together with my cousins Mutyam and Anusuya. I was trained in vocal music by Rudrabhatla Ramamurti, and in dance by my grandmother, Dasari Mahalakshmi for a period of four years, from age five to nine. I was nine years old when I performed my *gajjapūja* (ceremony of worshipping the ankle-bells, a kind of debut performance). Subsequently, I was married to Madanagopālasvāmi. The *maṅgalasūtram* (marriage cord) was

tied by a priest from the temple. Everyday, after the *alaṅkāra* and *bālabhogam*, I would perform the ritual of the *pañca-hārati* (waving five lamps in front of the deity), while singing the song “*jaya maṅgalam, mahotsava maṅgalam*”.

On Fridays, at the time of the evening *abhiṣeka* (around 5:30 pm), Manikyamma would perform excerpts from the court repertoire to entertain the deity:

After Madanagopālasvāmi was seated in the Mahāmaṇḍapa, I would perform *kumbha-hārati* (waving of the pot-lamp)¹² for him. Then I would perform a selection of *alarimpu*, *pallavi*, *svarajati*, *varṇam*, *padam*, *jāvali* and *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa kīrtanas*.¹³

Wearing her *maḍikaṭṭu* (ritually pure nine-yard sari, tied in the orthodox Brahmin manner), she used to stand in front of the *dhvajastambha* (flag-staff) and sing *padams* and *jāvalis* to Kṛṣṇa. She also became known throughout the region for her interpretations of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa kīrtanas*, songs composed in the nineteenth century by the poet Munipale Subrahmanya Kavi.¹⁴

In addition to her regular ritual duties in Ballipadu, for a period of five years she gave public performances of *jāvalis* during the annual marriage festival (*kalyāṇotsavam*) of the Satyanārāyaṇasvāmi temple in Annavaram.

Ekānta Seva: Inside the Bedchamber of the Lord

The figure of Satyabhāmā appears in the daily ritual called *ekanta-seva* that took place in the bedchamber of God. Among the rituals of the *devadāsīs* of Ballipadu remembered by the women themselves was that of the *ekānta-seva* (solitary, private service) which took place in the bedchamber of Madanagopālasvāmi. This service, which usually took place around 9:00 p.m., was also known as *pavvalimpu seva* (service in the bedchamber).¹⁵ In February of 2002, Saride Varahalu read the text of the *ekānta-seva* to me from a handwritten copy of the *Madanagopāla Vilāsam* and described the details of the ritual. Although she had never performed the ritual herself, her elder cousin, Saride Manikyamma had, and Varahalu had observed it on several occasions. According to her account and the song-text for the occasion found in the *Madanagopāla Vilāsam*, *ekānta-seva* was structured as a dialogue (*saṁvāda daruvu*) between Kṛṣṇa and his beloved women, in which Kṛṣṇa would individually request each one of them to come and sleep with him. The ritual enactment of this dialogue was done by a male musician who would sing the lines of Kṛṣṇa, and a *devadāsī* who would sing the lines of

Kṛṣṇa's women. Following the evening procession, the deity was made to halt outside the *garbhagr̥ha*, and the *saṃvāda daruvu* was recited by the *devadāsī* while standing at the threshold of the *garbhagr̥ha*, as though she were barring Kṛṣṇa from entering. The *daruvu* began with Kṛṣṇa calling Sītā, then Satyabhāmā, Jāmbavatī, Mitravindā, Bhadrā, Sudantā, Kālindi and finally Rādhā.¹⁶ The parts for Kṛṣṇa were in the *kandārtham* metre, and the female parts in *adhacandrika* metre. I have translated below the section on Satyabhāmā and the final section on Rādhā:

ardhacandrikalu kandārthamu ekānta sevalu

puruṣuḍu [male]: Your father (Satrājī) gave you to me to make up for the mistake he made¹⁷. Now, Satyabhāmā, don't you recognize *your* mistake (of not coming to bed)? Why don't you just come here and play Kāma's games [*māruni keḷi*]?

stri [female]: Listen, here's why I'm not coming. You were secretly sweet-talking that woman with teeth like jasmine buds! What is this?

puruṣuḍu [male]: I will listen to your orders from now on. Tell me your thoughts, Oh Rādhā with intoxicating eyes [*madirākṣi rādhikāmaṇi*]. How will we have union, Sweet Rādhā?

stri [female]: Madanagopāla of Ballipāḍu! From the beginning, it was / who taught you the arts of love. Kṛṣṇa, come!

This passage provides us with an interesting example of the fluid exchange between the temple and court aesthetics so characteristic of South Indian *devadāsī* performance traditions in the nineteenth century. Here, Kṛṣṇa is overcome with desire, and wishes to engage in love-play ("Kāma's games"). But the reference to Satyabhāmā places her within the framework of the jealous wife. In this composition, Rādhā is illicitly connected to Kṛṣṇa. Satyabhāmā is the only woman who expresses jealousy towards her (the "woman with teeth like jasmine buds" is Rādhā). None of Kṛṣṇa's other wives rebuke Kṛṣṇa in such a way. Here we can clearly see the crossover between temple ritual and the poetic universe of the Telugu court.

b) Devadāsī Kalāpam or Bhāgavatam Performances

The *devadāsīs'* public performances in the temple context were in the form of *kalāpams*, or narrative-oriented, night-long performances based on the characters of Satyabhāmā and

Gollabhāmā. These types of open, public performances helped generate income for the temple. *Devadāsī kalāpams*, which could be classified as “popular entertainment,” attracted pilgrims from around the Godavari delta region, who would come to temples such as the Madanagopālasvāmi temple in Ballipadu and the Satyanārāyaṇasvāmi temple in Annavaram specifically to watch them. Figure 9 shows the *meḷam* of Annabhatula Buli Venkataratnam (from Mummidivaram, East Godavari district) just prior to a performance of Gollakalāpam, c. 1950. These *kalāpam* performances are similar in structure and form to many of those found in the other male-oriented narrative-theatre traditions such as the Tūrupu Bhāgavatam and Kuchipudi Bhāgavatam. Most *devadāsī kalāpam* texts divide the *kalāpam* into smaller sections or episodes called *paṭṭu* (“acts”). So, for example, the entire first act in most versions of *devadāsī kalāpam* is called *viniki-paṭṭu* (audience [or hearing?])¹⁸ act), because this is when Satyabhāmā speaks from behind a curtain and introduces herself to the audience for the first time.

The Kalāpam Tradition of the Kuntīmādhavasvāmi Temple, Pithapuram

Pithapuram is a town situated eighteen kilometres from Kakinada in the East Godavari district of coastal Andhra. The ancient capital of the Kāliṅgas was known as Piṣṭapuram or Paiṣṭapuraka, and Pithapuram is its present name. The primary deity in the temple here is Śrī Kuntīmādhavasvāmi (Fig. 10), a standing form of Viṣṇu as Mādhava, depicted holding his *śaṅkha* (conch), *cakra* (discus) and *gadā* (mace), and flanked by small images of Lakṣmī (to his right) and Bhūmi (to his left)¹⁹.

According to the temple priest, the following narrative accounts for the name of the temple, and also links it to a larger circuit of five Vaiṣṇava temples in various parts of the subcontinent:

In order to expiate the sin of killing the Brahmin demon Vṛtrāsura, Indra established five images of Viṣṇu in different places throughout India. These are called the *pañca-mādhava-kṣetras*. They are Bindu-mādhava (in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh); Veṇu-mādhava (Prayaga, Uttar Pradesh); Kuntī-mādhava (Pithapuram, Andhra Pradesh); Sundara-mādhava (Anantapadmanābhasvāmi, Tiruchirapalli, Tamilnadu); and Setu-mādhava (Rameswaram, Tamilnadu).

In Dvāparayuga, Kuntīdevī, the mother of the Pañca-Pāṇḍavas, worshipped Viṣṇu in his form as Mādhava in the area that is now Pithapuram. So, our Lord now has the name Kuntī Mādhavasvāmi.

The annual celebration of *śuddha-ekādaśī* in the month of Mārgaśīrṣa (December-January) attracts a large number of pilgrims to the Kuntīmādhvasvāmi temple.

Devadāsīs belonging to the Pendela [or Pendyela] clan had served at the Pithapuram temple for several generations²⁰. In the late nineteenth-century, when Gangadhara Rama Rao ruled Pithapuram (r. 1877 onward), a woman named Pendela Satyabhama²¹ was the primary temple performer at the Kuntīmādhava Temple²². The *Bhāmākalāpam* she used to perform was in the context of a larger religious ceremony simply called *navajanārdanam* ("nine Janārdanas" [Janārdana is a name of Viṣṇu]), performed in the *mahāmaṇḍapa* (main pavilion) of the temple (Fig. 11). The name *navajanārdanam* is derived from the name attributed to a circuit of nine Vaiṣṇava temples in the Godavari river delta. The sage Nārada is thought to have consecrated nine temples to Viṣṇu in his form as Janārdanasvāmi in the following nine villages: (1) Mandapeta; (2) Dowlaiswaram; (3) Midiki; (4) Jonnada; (5) Alammur; (6) Kapilesapuram; (7) Korumilli; (8) Kotipalli; (9) Machara. The nine temples to Viṣṇu as Janārdanasvāmi are all located in the coastal belt, spanning the present-day East and West Godavari districts.

In the *navajanārdana* ritual, usually hosted by the *zamīndār* of Pithapuram, nine *devadāsī melams* would perform *Bhāmākalāpam* for nine consecutive nights. This was done in a kind of relay fashion, when one *devadāsī* would resume the narrative where the previous performer had ended. On the evening of the tenth night, the tenth canto of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*²³ would be recited in Sanskrit, and the local ruler, the Maharaja of Pithapuram [the *zamīndār*] as the commissioner (*yajamāna*) of the ritual, along with the *devadāsīs*, would receive ritual honours and gifts from the temple. Although the Kuntīmādhava temple in Pithapuram is not one of the *navajanārdana* temples, it appears to have been the site where such performances, in honour of the nine localized forms of Janārdanasvāmi, were held. In addition, some of the songs from the text performed during this ritual by the Pendela family, were dedicated to Viṣṇu as the "Lord of Pīṭhikāpura"²⁴.

Several accomplished women artists were called upon to perform in the *navajanārdana pārijātam*. For example, according to Saride Manikyam, her aunt, Saride Chandramma, was brought to Pithapuram by the Maharaja to take part in the

navarajanārdanam in the early part of the 1920s. The *meḷams* were carefully chosen by the Maharaja on the basis of the skills and accomplishments of the *devadāsī*.

Today what is left of the *navajanārdanam* survives in the form of a few songs that were learned by dance-teacher Nataraja Ramakrishna (Hyderabad) from Pendela Satyabhama. These songs obviously represent only a very small portion of the whole gamut of the texts meant for *navajanārdanam* performance. In these songs, no single author's "*makuṭam*" or signature is to be found. One song mentions a certain "Venkaṭakavi," but the identity of this author is ambiguous. The following is the *praveśa daruvu* or entrance song of Satyabhāmā:

daruvu (Bhāmā)

bhāmayani pilucure, rāga: mukhāri, tāla: miśracāpu

He [Kṛṣṇa] calls me Bhāmā, they think I am Vayyāri Satyabhāmā

He calls me Bhāmā

Among all women, I am the first, my beloved calls me "Bhāmā" with such love.

He calls me Bhāmā

My father is the great king of seven islands, and I am his beloved daughter, so the people of the world say.

He calls me Bhāmā

Śiva, Brahmā, Indra and others all worship the Lord who Resides in Nellimarla, but I am far greater than even the *varapuruṣas* (gifted persons) and *dikpatis* (guardians of the eight cardinal directions).

He calls me Bhāmā

The *devadāsī kalāpam* was also very closely connected to the culture of the literati. The *kalāpam* texts were composed by or commissioned from upper-caste poets by the *devadāsīs*. In many cases, these men would analyze the meaning of the poetry with the *devadāsī* and makes suggestions as to how it should be interpreted through *abhinaya*. For example, a small section of the *viniki-paṭṭu* I collected from the *Bhāmākalāpam* composed by Subbarayudu Sastri for Maddula Venkataratnam in the early part of the twentieth century, makes the Telugu courtly aesthetic influence apparent. The following section is an imitation of the verses from Timmana's sixteenth-century *Pārijātāpaharaṇamu*, wherein Satyabhāmā kicks Kṛṣṇa's head:

sigasina puṣpamvalla nī mṛduvaina pādālu

kathinamaina nā śirasunu tagilina nī pādālu nōppipetṭenemo ||

Your foot is as delicate as the flower meant to ornament one's hair [*sigasina puṣpam*].

My head is strong. Was your foot injured?

For at least the past hundred and fifty years, if not more, *devadāsīs* have been performing *Bhāmākalāpam* in public settings, usually at temple festivals in makeshift spaces. Though clearly meant as entertainment, these performances take us away from the popular idea that *devadāsī* performance was limited to short, erotic compositions such as *jāvaḷis* that we will encounter in the court repertoire. The *kalāpam* was one of the genres that afforded the individual *devadāsī* an opportunity to insert her own identity into her performances. Like the Brahmin men from Kuchipudi village I will discuss in Chapter Six, *devadāsīs* also identify with Satyabhāmā, but specifically with the fact that Satyabhāmā represents a female anomaly, much like the *devadāsīs* themselves²⁵. We shall return to this discussion in Chapter Five, when we discuss the ways in which contemporary *devadāsīs* in coastal Andhra represent themselves.

c) Devadāsī Performances in Temple Processions (*ūregimpu*)

As we have noted, the performance of ritual dance in the temple, particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, had already become extremely rare in most parts of South India. However, the *ūregimpu meḷam* or dancing with the deity as it was taken on procession, was common, even among women in the *devadāsī* community who had not been dedicated or married to deities. The *ūregimpu meḷam* consisted of a selection of songs and dance from the *kacceri* or concert repertoire that would be performed for the enjoyment of both the deity and devotees, when the deity would periodically stop for “breaks” on the procession route.

On February 16, 2002, I visited the Madanagopālasvāmi temple with Saride Anusuya and Saride Varahalu. Anusuya recounted to me that every Saturday evening there was a procession around the streets of the village (*tiruvīdhi grāmotsavam*). She also told me that in the month of March, the temple would celebrate one of its greatest annual festivals, which she called “The Ponna Vehicle Village Festival of the Lord and His Consort” (*śrī svāmivāriki amnavārulaku ponnavāhana grāmotsavam*). This is the festival in which Kṛṣṇa is taken on procession riding the *ponnavāhana* vehicle, a chariot

fashioned in the shape of the *ponna* tree that Kṛṣṇa is said to have climbed when he stole the clothing of the milkmaids (*gopikās*) who were bathing in the river. As a prank, Kṛṣṇa secretly stole the clothing that the women had removed and placed at the riverbank. He climbed a *ponna* tree, tied their clothing in its branches, and played his flute. When the women had figured out that their clothing was tied high up in the tree, Kṛṣṇa agreed to give back their clothes only if they came out of the water and appeared before him naked. This episode, called *gopikāvastraharaṇamu* (the stealing of the clothes of the *gopikās*) is celebrated in this annual festival in Ballipadu. In connection with it, the *devadāsīs* must perform during the *ūregimpu*, according to Anusuya. As the women closest to Kṛṣṇa, they donned the image of the *gopikās*, and sang songs to Kṛṣṇa, while he was mounted on the *ponnavāhana* chariot. Although there is no specific repertoire for this type of performance, it is notable because here the *devadāsīs* were free to sing whatever they desired. According to Anusuya, they most often chose songs from the court and home repertoire, they also could sing other popular folk songs or devotional songs (*bhajanās*).

Devadāsī Court Performance

The most common feature of *devadāsī* performance culture was the concert repertoire called *kacceri* (concert). This would take place in the courts of feudal kings (*zamīndārs*) or at the homes of influential members of society (often poets, politicians, business people, etc.). The *devadāsī* and her troupe (*meḷam*) would receive an obligatory fee or “gifts” (*ōsalgulu*) for their performances in this context. These performances were sometimes known as “*mejuvāṇi*” or “*mezuvāṇi*,” from the Urdu word *mezbān*, “host” or “landlord”.

The Andhra *devadāsī* court repertoire as we encounter it in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century builds largely upon the Tanjavur court repertoire as it developed under Marāṭhā patronage in the nineteenth century. By the late nineteenth century, the Andhra *kalāvantulu* were performing some of the genres that had been systematized by the Tanjavur Quartet (see appendix 3), such as the *śabdām*, *varṇam*²⁶, *padam*, *jāvaḷi* and *tillānā*. In addition, they performed genres such as the *pallav*²⁷ and *daruvu* that were specific to their communities. The *padams* of Kṣetrayya were also an integral part of *devadāsī* public performances, especially in the court and home contexts.

It is striking that there are no dances based on Satyabhāmā in the court repertoire, even though literary and poetic genres such as *yakṣagāna* develop in this context. In our present state of research, it seems that the Satyabhāmā poetic texts did not become part of courtly performance in either Tanjavur or Andhra. It is difficult to know why, but one could postulate that as in the *padams* of Kṣetrayya, the *nāyikās* (heroines) presented in the *devadāsī* court repertoire were unnamed. Therefore, just as one does not find mention of Satyabhāmā, so also Rādhā, Rukmiṇī, and other consorts and spouses of deities are similarly absent. Thus, even though there is no explicit Satyabhāmā repertoire in the court, it is important for us to look at the Andhra court context because one of its main genres was the *jāvaḷi*, which becomes a hallmark of *devadāsī* performance culture in the Godavari delta in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Composers such as Vidyala Narayanasvami Nayudu of Tirupati (1875-1942) and Neti Subbaraya Shastri (c. 1880-1940?) composed *jāvaḷis* that became tremendously popular in the coastal Andhra region (Arudra 1986b). The poets themselves had close interactions with the *kalāvantula* women of their times. Vidyala Narayanasvami Nayudu sang for the dance performances of Nayudupeta Rajamma, a famous *devadāsī* artist from Sri Kalahasti (Chittoor district). I have had the opportunity to see Neti Subbaraya Shastri's compositions, marked by the *makuṭa* "*naupurīśa*" performed by *devadāsīs* in coastal Andhra. The beautiful *jāvaḷi*, *cēragu māse* ("It's that time of the month...") in the *rāga* Kalyāṇī discussed in the following chapter, is a composition by Subbaraya Shastri. I begin this discussion with a typical example of a *jāvaḷi* from the repertoire of the Saride family of women in Duvva. This *jāvaḷi* was performed for me by Saride Seshachalam (Fig. 12) in February 2002. Dedicated to the *zamīndār* of Vizianagaram, Sri Ananda Gajapati Maharaju (1850-1897), this composition was likely written by one of the hundreds of poets he patronized (Rama Rao, 1985). In it, the married *nāyikā* asks her lover, the King, to be patient. He has approached her at her in-law's home, and she is afraid of getting caught with him. (Full translations of some of the *jāvaḷis* I have collected during my fieldwork have been translated as Appendix 4):

A Woman to Her Lover

Why are you in such a hurry, beautiful one?
I will have union with you, just wait...

You should know that in the evening, my in-laws are around.
We can't make love *here!*

I'll come [out of my house and meet you] at our special love-nest,
and we will be able to make love on a large wooden bed fit for a king!

Don't follow me around!
I'm telling you, I'll come to meet you!
Alas, it seems as though you don't believe me!

You place your hand on my breast (*caṇṭi*) and body (*vaṇṭi*),
and speak such sweet words to me.
But, if my husband's eye falls on us, we're in big trouble!

I've told you not to do it in my house,
and my heart aches because of that.
I will be yours in one hour. But for now, please go –
look, there's the road to your house.

It's been so long since I've been with you –
I can't leave you!
My heart trembles with fear.
But, what will my "agent" (*yejaṇṭu*, husband) think?

You are so intelligent, such a connoisseur, an expert in the arts of love
just like the God of Love, and full of desire –
I will certainly come and make love to you!
Oh King Ānanda Gajapati, salutations to you (*bhaḷire*)!

ēnduki tondara
rāga: ānandabhairavī, tāla: miśracāpu
Sung by Saride Seshachalam, February 20, 2002, Duvva village

The *kalāvantulu* of Andhra Pradesh preserve highly developed and complex systems of performative hermeneutics or *abhinaya*²⁸. For at least the past two centuries, they have been experts in mimetic elaboration or *sañcāri*. The *kalāvantulu* of the Godavari delta in particular have been famed for their unparalleled technique of *sandhi-viccheda-sañcāri*, where lines of songs are split up (*viccheda*) and particular words are repeated over and over again, adding emphasis to specific ideas.

The strongest accusations made by colonial administrations and social reformers against *devadāsīs* in Andhra in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was that their songs and dances were lewd and somehow represented a morally degraded

approach to aesthetics. In my work with the community, I found several aspects of the *devadāsī* dance that have been consciously erased from the re-worked, modern versions of these dances practiced under the name “Bharatanāṭyam” in various centers across South India. Among these was the usage of *ratī-mudrās* (Fig. 13), that is, hand-gestures that depict the various positions of sexual union (*ratī-bandhas*) described in medieval works on erotics (*kāmaśāstra*) such as *Anaṅga Raṅga* and *Ratirahasyam*.

Most *devadāsīs* invoked the taxonomies of *Kāmaśāstra* when performing *padams* and sometimes *jāvaḷis*. Terms such as *samarati* [man on top], *uparati* [woman on top, also *viparati*], and *nāgabandhamu* [bodies coiled in the serpent position] were common parlance among the women. I witnessed one of the most elaborate of such performances by the late Maddula Venkataratnam (Fig. 14) in January of 2002. In the midst of the rich repertoire that Venkataratnam possessed was a beautiful *Kṣetrayya padam*, in the *rāga* Mohana. In this unique *padam*, the *nāyikā* mocks her lover Kṛṣṇa for not being able to satisfy her sexually. It is a rare example of the explicit expression of a woman's own sexual desire. The *pallavī* (refrain) of the *padam* reads:

okkasārikē yīlāgainanoho yideṭi ratirā
makkuva dīrcarā mā muvvagopāla

If only one round of love-making makes you so tired,
what [kind of love] is this?
Come, fulfill my desires,
my Kṛṣṇa-Muvvagopāla!

In her performance, Venkataratnam sang the words *makkuva dīrcarā* (come fulfill my desires) over fifty times, and provided a new hand gesture to depict sexual union each time.

Devadāsī Home and Salon Performances

Kalāvāntula women performed largely in the salons of *zamīndārs* and other influential individuals. Here, the singing and dancing of compositions called *padams* and more importantly *jāvaḷis* created the public persona of the *devadāsī*. *Devadāsī meḷams* could be called upon to perform inside the homes of patrons on two occasions: (1) as part of a life-cycle (*saṃskāra*) celebration such as a birth or wedding; and (2) as part of the “*mejuvāṇi*” (entertainment for guests) in a salon setting. Salon performances in the

homes of wealthy *zamīndārs* are significant – the salon is last context in which the *kalavāntula* women claim to have had a public identity. With the collapse of the *zamīndāri* patronage in South India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this type of salon performance shifted to the homes of other wealthy persons.

‘Kaṁṭa’ Ritual

Until recently, the presence of *devadāsīs* at weddings was extremely important and was a clear visual marker of high-society weddings in the Godavari delta. Most of the women I worked with referred to this as *kaṁṭa*, after the *kaṁṭa* (or *kaṁca*), “metal platters” given to them by the hosts at this time. This was the time when the *devadāsīs*’ status as *nityapuṇistri* (ever-auspicious woman) was most evident. The *devadāsīs* not only would dance *padams*, *jāvaḷis* and other erotic compositions at weddings but would also be involved in providing blessings to the bride in a process of symbolically transferring her powers of auspiciousness. By tying the beads (*nallapūsam*) of the bride’s *maṅgalasūtra* or wedding necklace, the *devadāsī* would ensure the longevity of the woman’s husband. This was a transaction that was at once economic, social and religious. The following, in Kotipalli Rajahamsa’s words, is a brief description of a typical *kaṁṭa* ritual:

After the wedding ritual, large amounts of *kumkum*, fruits, sweets and a silk shawl (*paṭṭu śālva*) would be placed on large platters (*kaṁṭa*). People carry the *kaṁṭas*, and we follow them, doing *meḷam* [ie. singing and dancing] in procession to the bride’s new home. When we finally reach the house, the bride and groom are seated on a cot. The hosts will ask the *nāyakurālu* [troupe leader] to take one of the *kaṁṭas*, and will also give her a large sum of money and several sets of new clothes. Then the *mejuvāṇi* [performance of dance and music as entertainment for the guests] begins.

Only we can tie the *nallapūsam* [black beads on the marriage necklace] because we are *nityapuṇistris*. We never [experience] widowhood. So, we tie the beads on whoever calls us, and bestow blessings so that they will also remain *puṇistris* like us.

The home repertoire may be seen as a “cross-over category.” Although much of the repertoire performed here is taken from the court repertoire (for example, *javalis* figure prominently), there are certain types of compositions that are unique to such performances. A parallel tradition was present in the Tamilnadu-Andhra border regions. Saskia Kersenboom’s primary informant P. Ranganayaki from Tiruttani (Tel. Cirutanni) mentions

distinct compositions that Kersenboom calls *saṃskāra saṃbandham* (related to rites-of-passage). These include compositions such as swing-songs (*ūñjal-pāṭu*), lullabies (*lālī-pāṭu*) and marriage songs (Kersenboom 1991, 145-46). On such occasions, the *devadāsīs* would also perform the *kumbha-hāraṭi* (waving of the pot-lamp) to protect the family of the patron from any ill-fortune or potential negativity (*dr̥ṣṭi-doṣa*). All of these activities have also been described by my informants. However, my informants often used the word *mejuvāṇi* (entertainment of guests) in the context of salon performances, implying that after these types of “ritual” activities were over, a formal concert of dance would follow. Many women, for example, remember performing elaborate court compositions such as *varṇams* and *padams* at these private soirees.

The Disappearance of Devadāsī Culture in Colonial South India

Colonial rule in South India, particularly in the town of Tanjavur (Tanjore, annexed to the British in 1856), and in the coastal Telugu-speaking parts of the Madras Presidency (modern Andhra Pradesh), occasioned the creation of new configurations of *devadāsīs* as morally inferior, diseased, fallen women (Whitehead 1995; 1998; 2001). These new images were ushered in largely by colonial critiques of the *devadāsī* lifestyle as associated with lewd dancing traditions on the one hand, and temple “prostitution” on the other. Colonial power also undercut the traditional sources of patronage for *devadāsī* performance, in particular the support provided by the royal courts and *zamīndāri samasthānams*. The *zamīndāri samasthānams* of South India in particular were implicated in radical processes of cultural negotiation with colonial rulers (Price 1994, 1996; Waghorne 1994). In the nineteenth century, reform activity related to women in colonial India was widespread. Issues such as *satī*, widow remarriage, and the age of consent were prominent in public debate, judicial process, and eventually, in the twentieth century, nation-making. As Kunal Parker has argued, “Anglo-Indian courts [from 1800-1914] neither discussed what specific activities might constitute ‘prostitution’ nor required evidence of specific instances of ‘prostitution’”. In addition to being taken as a given, the ‘prostitution’ of temple dancing girls was seen as a *condition*” (Parker 1998, 613-14). As early as 1876, however, *devadāsīs* in the Madras Presidency were approaching courts in order to urge them not to conflate their identities with those of prostitutes who belonged to the emergent sex trade in urban colonial centres²⁹.

Nevertheless, colonial re-evaluations of *devadāsīs* were rapidly internalized by the emergent educated urban elite. The presence of missionaries in the Telugu-speaking regions dates back at least to 1805 (Oddie 1977), and Protestant education shaped the early generation of English-speaking Indians in the late nineteenth century. In the Telugu-speaking regions of what was then the Madras Presidency, the Arya Samaj, founded in 1875 by Dayananda Saraswati, had also become a visible part of the landscape of the new religio-cultural modernity ushered in by colonization.

Social reform movements, such as those led by Kandukuri Viresalingam (beginning in 1881) and Yamini Purnatilakam (from 1922 onward) in coastal Andhra, dislodged the *devadāsīs* from their matrifocal homes, “domesticated” them in rehabilitation centres, and generally questioned their legitimacy. I trace this history, and the significant role played by Gandhi in the attempted “reform” of Andhra *kalāvantulu*, and juxtapose this with written and performed resistance to reform on the part of Telugu-speaking *devadāsīs*. I then proceed to examine the impact of anti-*devadāsī* legislation on women today and look at rhetoric that allows them to retain and express some sense of their fractured identities. In the words of Susan Seizer, “reform movements deployed modernity in an oppositional endeavour: they overtly opposed ‘traditions’ thought to be barbaric, unjust, and oppressive with the egalitarian, just, and compassionate practices they attempted to mandate through governmental legislation” (Seizer 1997, 157). In this section, I investigate the ways in which the anti-*devadāsī* (also called the “anti-natuch”³⁰) movement begins in South India as a struggle for the middle-class male to re-orient the idea of womanhood around British standards of ideal womanly conduct (Chatterjee 1993, 116-159). The restriction of women’s lifestyle choices to Victorian sexual norms also resonated deeply with indigenous patriarchy³¹. Kathryn Hansen explains Partha Chatterjee’s well-known ideas of “home” and “world” in terms of indigenous constructions of the domestic woman and the public woman, the artist:

Gender roles...are defined in spatial terms, with women occupying private inside spaces and men public outer ones. Women are valued for their domestic labour and for their reproductivity, which must be controlled for the perpetuation of pure family and caste lines. Enclosure, whether effected by *pardā* (the curtain or screen or a segregated household), by the canopy of a bullock cart, or by a veil or sari-end drawn over a woman’s face, is conceived as necessary to preserve a woman’s chastity, and, by extension, her menfolk’s honor. Since the social construction of gender places “good women” in seclusion, women who appear in

public spaces (such as on stage) are defined as “bad,” that is, prostitutes. Subjected to the gaze of many men, they belong not to one, but to all. (Hansen 1992, 22-23)

British missionaries, liberals and progressive Indians became involved in a movement that questioned the legitimacy of *devadāsī* womanhood. At the epicentre of the debate was the extra-domestic sexual life of the *devadāsī*, and much legal and cultural debate investigated the acts of temple dedication and dance practice to ascertain the exact source or locus of the *devadāsī*'s sexuality. This is the reason why, when independent India outlawed *devadāsī* lifestyles with the well-known Anti-Devadasi Act of 1947, sexual relations are nowhere mentioned – only the rituals of dedication and dance performance are criminalized. In the end, the anti-*devadāsī* movement and its resolutions served not only to rebuke extra-domestic *female* sexual activity but in fact served to further enforce indigenous patriarchies and further polarize gender roles. This will be discussed further in due course.

Social Reform and Social Purity Movements in Telugu-Speaking South India

Social reform in the Telugu-speaking regions is generally thought to have begun with Kandukuri Viresalingam (1848-1919), a Brahmin from Rajahmundry, who lived much of his early life in the Godavari delta. In 1874, Viresalingam began his post as the headmaster of the Anglo-Vernacular School³² and also started publishing his first Telugu journal, *Viveka Vardhani*. In 1875, the journal carried an article called *Vesyalu* (“prostitutes”). In it, he posits his town of Rajahmundry, a stronghold of *kalāvantula* culture, as infested with “whorehouses”:

In this day and age, contact with prostitutes is praised as meritorious. Individuals who leave their wives and consort with prostitutes are not ridiculed today. People who do not patronize prostitutes are not regarded as important. Individuals with one wife are considered eunuchs, not men. While rich people are honoured as great men, they themselves patronize procurers and houses of prostitution... These women do not acknowledge respectable people by standing. [Instead] they spread their legs fearlessly because of their patron's protection. It is the fault of the devils who patronize them, not the women alone. Although there are many whorehouses elsewhere, there are an excessive number in Rajahmundry. (*Viveka Vardhani* VV, June 1875, cited in Leonard 1991, 60-61)

Viresalingam also wrote a Telugu satire called *Vesypriya Prahasanamu* ridiculing men who had relations with *bhogam* women in general and *kalāvantulu* in particular, which he staged to educate people in Dowlaiswaram and the Rajahmundry region (Ramakrishna 1983, 139). In 1893, he encouraged public opinion in the Godavari delta in support of a memo sent to the Governor of Madras, from the newly-formed Madras Hindu Social Reform Association, an organization headed by Subramaniya Aiyer, editor of *The Hindu* newspaper. The Madras Association's memo requested that the government discourage the *devadāsī* system, for that would "strengthen the hands of those who are trying to purify the social life of their community" (Vijaisri 2003, 182). The Governor of Madras, Mr. Wenlock, responded that he had himself witnessed many such dance performances (*me/lams*, "nautches") and had not seen anything that "in the remotest degree, be considered improper" (ibid., 182).

In 1895, another figure took charge of the anti-*devadāsī* movement in the Telugu-speaking regions. Raghupati Venkataratnam Naidu (1862-1939) was born in Machilipatnam and converted to the Brahmo Samaj in Madras³³. He was president of the Metropolitan Temperance and Purity Association in Madras (Ramakrishna 1983, 137), and it was in this capacity that he formally moved an "anti-nautch" resolution at the eighth annual Indian Social Conference in 1895. Writing in 1901, Naidu says:

Among all the countries with which India would wish to compete in morals and civilisation there is not one that accords to open, flagrant impurity such recognition as this country gives to the nautch-girl. Secret vice and veneered in chastity [sic] are to be found all the world over; but immorality as a hereditary and acknowledged profession, living in peace and amity with and amidst other avocations, fortified against the attacks of time and change, and endowed with the privileges of social sanction, is peculiar to this land (Venkataratnam Naidu 1901, 271-72)... In the temple, she has not only the free and ready admission of any lay person, but, in innumerable cases, a position next only to that of the priest or the manager (ibid., 272)... "How is it," asks that eminent temperance-preacher and great friend of India, the Revd. T. Evans, "that the temple Priests and sacred Brahmins do not step to the front to reform such a degrading abuse as this?" But the question is really an appeal to the heart and the conscience of all educated India. (ibid., 274-75) ... As to the particular community concerned, when deprived of the prestige of music, its hope will be chiefly in two healthy changes: - (1) the allotment of temple-service (of course, wholly for sacred purposes) as the reward for chastity – married life being no disqualification, and (2) the education and improvement of the male members of the community – now, mostly drones or parasites... But if the present wealth and influence of the community be wisely utilised, the meed of immorality may be happily changed

into the price of salvation. A caste, chartered to a vicious life, will cease to be; and though some poor sheep may deplorably go astray, not a few of the daughters now deliberately prodigal will be restored to the longing bosom of the Divine Mother (ibid., 279)... The crowning feature of our national hero was that he never sent but one arrow and never loved but one woman – the Kohinoor of her kind. Our national type of truthfulness preferred gifting away an empire to plucking the rose from a maiden brow. Our national model of devotion made purity the basis of piety by finding a “mother” in every “stranger woman.” The greatest of our epics tells man “to look upon his neighbour’s wife as on her that gave him life.” (ibid., 280)

Clearly, the sexual freedom and ritual status of the *devadāsī* was a core issue. Her elevated social position (“next only to that of the priest or manager”) was acknowledged and problematized. Venkataratnam Naidu was well aware that once the “nautches” came to a stop, the economic infrastructure of the community would be dismantled. As an alternative, he suggested that women be allowed to perform ritual service in temples as a “reward for chastity”. He ended with a eulogy on the glories of motherhood, a strategy that connected the nation with the self-sacrificing image of the mother, a familiar trope in South Indian regional politics (Ramaswamy 1997; 1998; O’Shea 2001).

At the end of his paper, Venkataratnam Naidu proposed what he called a “Specimen Pledge” for the upholding of social purity. The “Social Purity Movement,” started by Naidu in the early 1880s, effortlessly melded together the meta-discourses of elite, gendered nationalism and religious “reform”. Naidu felt that if such pledges, modelled after the purity pledges of Christian organizations such as the White Cross Societies of America, were adhered to by men and young boys in South India, their attendance at “nautch-parties” (*melams*) would decrease, and by extension, the “social purity” of the nation would be augmented. Table 2 below shows Venkataratnam Naidu’s “Specimen Pledges” (1901) and the pledges of the American White Cross Society (for men) and the “Knights of the Silver Crown” (for boys) dated 1886 (after Willard 1887, 12).

Table 2: Specimen Pledges by Venkataratnam Naidu (1901) and the American White Cross Society (1886)

1.]

SOCIAL PURITY.

281

APPENDIX.

[SPECIMEN PLEDGES.]

A. For Adults.

With the help of God, I pledge myself to keep the following covenant :—

1. I will not attend any gatherings where nautes are present, or invite them myself, or do anything else that tends to encourage them.
2. I will not use impure language, or tell coarse jests, or sing indecent songs, or indulge in listening to such language. songs or jests.
3. I will not indulge in witnessing indecent pictures, paintings, or scenes.
4. I will not converse or read, for the sake of impure pleasure, about subjects that are calculated to suggest impure thoughts, and will try my best not to entertain any such thoughts.
5. I will be chaste in body and will endeavour my best to be chaste in mind, as well as to promote the cause of purity in general.

B. For boys.

In order to preserve my own personal purity and to encourage it in others, as being one important feature of a sound character, I promise, with trust in God's help and guidance, to try my very best—

- (1) To cultivate such habits as will help purity in thought, speech and action;
- (2) To abstain, while showing obedience to the wishes of my father (or guardian), from such engagements as are likely to be harmful to personal purity; and
- (3) To persuade my friends and school-mates to do likewise.

THE WHITE CROSS SOCIETY

is formed on men alone. No woman or girl has ever, in any land been made a member. It is not a secret society, but it very simply organized, and has no admission fee. Each member takes the following fivefold obligation:

I.....

PROMISE BY THE HELP OF GOD

- 1.- *To treat all women with respect, and endeavor to protect them from wrong and degradation.*
- 2.- *To endeavor to put down all indecent language and coarse jests.*
- 3.- *To maintain the law of purity as equally binding upon men and women.*
- 4.- *To endeavor to spread these principles among my companions, and to try and help my younger brothers.*
- 5.- *To use every possible means to fulfil the command, "Keep THYSELF pure."*

"THE SILVER CROWN" was organized last year (1886), and the following pledge, prepared by Dr. De Costa, has been adopted as the pledge of this new society, whose members are known as "Knights of the Silver Crown."

THE SILVER CROWN

*Take Silver and make Crowns. Zech. 6:11.
I will refine them as silver. Zech. 13:9.*

I.....

PROMISE BY THE HELP OF GOD

- 1.- *To treat all women with courtesy and respect, and to be especially kind to all persons who are poorer or weaker or younger than myself.*
- 2.- *To be modest in word and deed, and to discourage profane and impure language; never doing or saying anything I should be unwilling to have known by my father or mother.*
- 3.- *To avoid all conversation, reading, pictures and amusements which may put impure thoughts into my mind.*
- 4.- *To guard the purity of others, especially of companions and friends, and avoid speaking or thinking evil.*
- 5.- *To keep my body in temperance, soberness and chastity.*

This is for boys, and like the White Cross, is not a secret society.

Gandhian Womanhood, Nationalism and the Rehabilitation of Telugu-Speaking Devadāsīs

As we have seen, the roots for the anti-*devadāsī* movement in Andhra were planted long before the arrival of Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi's initial anti-*devadāsī* resolution in the Madras Legislature in 1927. Elite philanthropy, reform and anti-colonial nationalism went hand-in-hand in the re-imaging of a variety of cultural and religious dimensions of the emergent national consciousness.

In this section, I focus specifically on the *devadāsī* social reform movement as it affected Telugu-speaking *devadāsīs* in the Andhra region. Although excellent studies such as those by Jordan (1989), Meduri (1996) and Natarajan (1999) have already

traced such histories in Tamilnadu, no systematic attempt has been made to delineate the process of marginalization of the *kalāvantulu* of Andhra.

Most of the studies I have mentioned focus, perhaps rightly so, on the “action” occurring in Madras city, where legal decisions and moral pronouncements were being made. I suggest shifting the focus to the rural areas, where the majority of *devadāsīs* lived. These were the places where the “Madras decisions” had profound effects. Major displacements of the community resulted when reformers moved into the rural areas, empowered by the politics of Madras, and attempted to affect change. In this final section on reform, I would like to address another forgotten chapter in *devadāsī* history, namely the formation of rehabilitation centres for *devadāsīs* in the Madras Presidency. While these institutions have not received much attention from scholars, it is the memories of these institutions that are most poignantly remembered by many contemporary *devadāsīs*, particularly those from the Telugu-speaking regions. In addition, the formation of these rehabilitation centres for *devadāsīs* is implicated in larger discursive fields, namely those of Gandhian nationalism and emergent Indian feminism.

In 1921, Gandhi made his first visit to Andhra. He met several members of the *devadāsī* community in Kakinada, a stronghold of *kalāvantula* culture. Whereas Coomaraswamy, Tagore and other cultural commentators who were not involved with the aggressive nationalism of the 1920s and 30s sympathized with a romantic image of the *devadāsī*, Gandhi spoke vehemently against it (Whitehead 1998, 97; Vijaisri 2003, 184). Combing through all of the writings of Gandhi from 1921 to 1940, I have traced Gandhi’s references to his encounters with these “fallen sisters,” his responses to letters from the men of the *kalāvantula* community of Andhra, and his visions of reform for the *devadāsī* communities of South India. In addition to feeling like “sinking into the bowels of the earth” (Gandhi 1942, 173; 174) every time he was faced with the *devadāsī* issue, Gandhi used the familiar trope of “false consciousness” when it came time to listen to *devadāsī* resistance to reform. He refused to listen to *devadāsī* voices, or in his words, “The opinion of the parties concerned in the immoral traffic cannot count, just as the opinion of keepers of opium dens will not count in favour of their retention, if public opinion is otherwise against them.” (Gandhi 1942, 203) The rhetoric employed by Gandhi became the inspiration for Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi’s well-known legislative proposals that culminate in the *Madras Devadasis (Prevention of Dedication) Act* of

1947. Recent studies such as those by Alter (1994; 1996; 2000), Caplan (1987), Katrak (1992), Lal (2000) and Patel (2000) have analyzed Gandhi's attitudes towards sexuality in general and female sexuality in particular. Although it is certainly important to acknowledge the success of Gandhian idealism in mobilizing women in the public sphere, his attitudes towards women who did not "fit" into his vision of the new woman of the nation are worth reconsidering. As Ketu Katrak has remarked,

...Gandhi's involvement of women in his "satyagraha" ...movement – part of his political strategy for national liberation – did not intend to confuse men's and women's roles; in particular, Gandhi did not challenge patriarchal traditions that opposed women within the home. Furthermore, his specific representations of women and female sexuality...promoted...a "traditional" ideology wherein female sexuality was legitimately embodied only in marriage, wifehood, motherhood, domesticity... (Katrak, 1992, 395-96).

Here is what Gandhi had to say about the *devadāsīs* of coastal Andhra after they had welcomed him to Kakinada (Cocanada) during his first visit in 1921:

I had my full say at Rajahmundry on an important matter, and I hope that some Telugu friend will reproduce that speech, translate it, and spread it broadcast among hundreds of our countrymen. It was about ten o'clock last night in Cocanada that dancing girls paid me a visit when I understood the full significance of what they were. I felt like sinking in the earth below...I ask you, brothers and sisters, to send me assurance, as early as possible, that there is not a single dancing girl in this part of the land. I charge these sisters who are sitting behind me to go about from place to place, find out every dancing girl, and shame men into shunning the wrong they are doing. (*Young India* 11-05-1921 cited in Gandhi 1942, 174)

As is well-known from studies of *devadāsī* reform in Tamilnadu, men from the community were among the most staunch supporters of the reform movement (Srinivasan 1984; Vijaisri 2003, 185-86)³⁴. In Andhra, as early as 1906, young men from the community took vows not to accompany the women on violin and *mṛdaṅgam* for their performances, in addition to pledging to get the women educated at the new schools and to get them married (*Krishnapatrika* April 15, 1906, cited in Ramakrishna 1983, 143).³⁵ Here, in a letter written in 1934, a young man from the *kalāvantula* community writes to Gandhi about the *devadāsī* situation in Andhra. He notes that "Andhradesh" is the "heartland of this evil," and links *devadāsīs* to Dalits, arguing that both are in urgent need of "moral elevation":

I wanted to write to you long ago. But I was awfully shy. Thank God, I am at last confiding my burden to you.

I come from the devadasi community. My life was socially a torture. Mahatmaji, do you think that there is any other profession worse than that of the dancing girls in the universe? Is it not a blot on India that prostitution should personify in a community?

Andhradesh, I think, is the heart of this evil. Hindu society here engages dancing girls – especially during marriages and festivals of the deity – to sing obscene songs accompanied by obscene gestures before the pious deity, and sets a bad example before the newly-wed couple.

The misery of a whole community consigned to a life of prostitution is great. Young men here are trying to do their best to root out this evil. But they badly need guidance. Won't you kindly take up this matter as equally important and emergent as the Harijan movement? Please have this affair always in a corner of your heart and give it publicity. You have not only the Congress but the whole public opinion at your back. What the Brothels Bill and the I.P.C. could not do, I am confident a word from your mouth would do.

I am legally and religiously married to a girl of my own community, and I am a father of two daughters. My wife is pious in my eyes as any other Hindu wife. Still society looks down upon us. The sins of our ancestors are wreaking vengeance on us. The stigma of prostitution is attached to us, though both of us are free from the vice.

Harijans and devadasis are the only two communities which are almost in the same degree of depravity. Of course, they will have to help themselves to moral elevation. Still a teacher like you would educate them and the society more quickly than they can do it for themselves. These are two sister movements. Please don't forget the sister community in your enthusiasm for the Harijans. (*Harijan*, 14-09-1934 cited in Gandhi 1942, 205-06)

In an address to a gathering at the Gandhi Ashram in Pudupalayam, Tamilnadu, on March 21, 1925, Gandhi supported the institutionalization of *devadāsī* reform, suggesting that “domesticating” the women by teaching them handicrafts would somehow solve the issue of prostitution:

...we must take up the case of these unfortunate women and find them suitable employment... The income of these women is large; we cannot promise them the same income in their alternative professions as they are getting from their sinful practice; nor would they require such an income if they lead a reformed life. Spinning may not secure a living for them. They could take to it only as a recreation, as a sacrificial practice. I place it before them only as purification. But other occupations can be found for them which they can easily learn and follow. There is weaving, tailoring, or fancy-work on khaddar. Some Parsi women have taken to fancy weaving. There is also lace-work, embroidery and other handicrafts which can easily yield them an income of three quarters of a rupee to one and a half rupees per day. The Devadasi class being small, it must not be a difficult matter to find five or six handicrafts for them. We require men

and women – preferably women who been trained in these handicrafts and lead a pure life – to take up this cause of reformation of their fallen sisters. You may also study and copy the institutions with similar objects working in other places. There should be a specialist to devote his life to the noble work of reclamation. (*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* XXXIV 351-52)

Yamini Purnatilakam, a middle-aged woman from the *kalāvantula* community³⁶, inspired by Gandhi's visit to Kakinada and his stance on the *devadāsī* issue, became a spokesperson for the anti-*devadāsī* movement in Andhra. With the backing of the important nationalist figure D. Chenchayya, Yamini Purnatilakam made herself visible by lecturing on Gandhian philosophy and Telugu literature. She was patronized by the Theosophical Society, and was a key figure in the founding of the Kalavati Reform Association in 1922 (Kesavanarayana 1976, 221). In the same year, she also founded a fortnightly newspaper, *Hindu Yuvati*, and an institution in Madras called Hindu Yuvati Saranalayam. As a "rehabilitation centre" set up for *devadāsīs*, the Hindu Yuvati Saranalayam saw to the "moral, vocational and literary instruction of the inmates to wean them away from their traditional lives...the vocational part of the instruction consisted of spinning, weaving, basket-making and gardening" (ibid., 222). Although these institutions have not received much attention from scholars, it is the memories of these institutions that are still recounted by many contemporary *devadāsīs*, particularly those from the coastal Andhra region. Purnatilakam's Hindu Yuvati Saranalayam inspired men in Andhra to set up similar institutions in Guntur and Narasapur, many of which began as "associations" or "educational institutions for poor girls and destitute women."

In 1924, Purnatilakam was instrumental in organizing the first Andhra Provincial Kalavantula Social Reform Conference in Guntur. The conference president, C. Anjaneyulu in his introductory address echoed the voices of Gandhi and Purnatilakam. He advocated a return to "a wholesome atmosphere for healthy progress", referring to the *kalāvantula* tradition as a "moral depravity", and to the fact that it was "unmeaning [sic] that Hindu civilization should have given recognition to it" (ibid., 223). The conference resulted in several "resolutions", including the organization of an annual meeting to implement the changes necessary to rehabilitate the *kalāvantula* community, the official proposal of an amendment to section of the Penal Code dealing with prostitution, and the creation of a "marriage board" to initiate *kalāvantula* women into

“decent ways of life”. In 1925, the board secured marriages for three *kalāvantulu*, K. Sitaramamma, Annapurnamma, and D. Venkatamahalakshamma (ibid., 225). In May of 1926, a new group, called the Kalavantula Social Reform Propaganda Committee, began to visit the homes of *kalāvantulu* women in their villages with a view to dissuade them from teaching music and dance to their female children. In Rajahmundry, where there were close to 120 *kalāvantulu* households, the reformers could only persuade 25 to give up their hereditary profession (*Krishnapatrika* June 5, 1926 cited in Kesavanarayana 1976, 225). Many families in Rajahmundry refused to let the reformers into their homes, in spite of warnings that they would be violating the newly amended section of the Penal Code in doing so. The following year, Muthulakshmi Reddi introduced her well-known resolution of 1927 in the Madras Legislative Council. Reddi herself spoke at the 1932 Andhradesa Kalavantulu Conference in Rajahmundry and represented *kalāvantulu* women as eagerly awaiting the reforms she had in mind:

I have had the joy of knowing some of the Kalavanthulu women who, having given up their traditional mode of easy and luxurious living have of their own choice taken up to a very simple yet honourable mode of life... I have found... that they are as good and pure as any woman could be but only custom – wicked custom, has made them otherwise. I found them clean-hearted, earnest and anxious that their children should lead a different life from theirs and be made good, pure and respectable women (1932 *Andhradesa Kalavantulu Conference Proceedings*, 609, cited in Natarajan 1997, 127).

Muthulakshmi Reddi’s 1927 resolution,³⁷ which urged the government to legislate against *devadāsī* temple dedications, provided a major impetus for the concerted legal effort to criminalize the *devadāsī* lifestyle. This nearly three decade-long legal and bureaucratic struggle, well-documented by other scholars (Jordan 1989; Meduri 1996; Natarajan 1997; Whitehead 1998; 2001), resulted in the *Madras Devadasis (Prevention of Dedication) Act*, passed into law by the Madras Legislative Assembly in 1947, based on a document entitled “A Bill to Prevent the Dedication of Women to Hindu Temples” that Reddi had proposed to the Legislative Council in 1930. “The Act,” as contemporary *devadāsīs* refer to it, irrevocably displaced the social, economic and religious aspects of their lives. In the next chapter, we will examine the ways in which contemporary *devadāsīs* in coastal Andhra represent themselves in light of the criminalization of their traditional ways of life in the twentieth century.

Conclusion

Prior to the reform movements that began in the late nineteenth century, *devadāsī meḷams* (also called *bhoga meḷams*) formed an integral, visible part of public culture in coastal Andhra Pradesh. The three primary contexts for their performances – the temple, court and home – reflected the diversity of religious, aesthetic and social practices of these women. Temple performances, specifically those that took place as part of the daily worship in the inner parts of the temple and in the more public spaces of *maṇḍapas* or *pandals*, often included references to Satyabhāmā. The contexts for *devadāsī* performances sometimes overlapped – for example, the temple processions included court repertoire, and the *devadāsī Bhāmākalāpam* performance was “ritualized” in the nine-night long *navajanārdana* performances at Pithapuram. Court performance and *mejuvāṇi* (performances for guests in homes) included the representation of various kinds of *nāyikās*. In the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, compositions from the Tanjavur court had made their way into the Andhra *kalāvantulu* repertoire. The *jāvaḷi*, in particular, becomes a hallmark of *devadāsī meḷams* in the Godavari delta.

The vociferous social purity and anti-nautch movements of South India were led by Telugu-speaking men and followed by the Gandhian-inspired activities of women such as Yamini Purtilakam and Muthulakshmi Reddi. These movements not only contributed to the disappearance of *devadāsī* performance from the public sphere but also severely stigmatized women in this community. Often forced or coerced into the Saranalayams (rehabilitation centres), *kalāvantulu* women’s familial structures and sources of income were dismantled. In the following chapter, we turn to strategies of resistance to social reform employed by Telugu-speaking *devadāsīs*. We will hear of the loss that contemporary *kalāvantulu* feel because of the reforms. And we will see how they use memory to reconstitute their identities in contemporary South India.

¹ Arudra insists that this word comes from the Sanskrit *bhoginī*, meaning “lady of enjoyment” (Arudra 1990; 1995). The Sanskrit word *bhoginī* is also found in classical Telugu literary contexts. For example, the poet Bammēra Potana (1450-1510) who wrote the Telugu *Bhāgavatam*, is also attributed with the composition of a poem called *Bhoginī Daṇḍakam*, which he is to have composed in praise of the concubine a local king, Sarvajña Singama Nāyudu.

² Most contemporary women recognize the social value of the terms *devadāsī* and *kalāvati*. *Devadāsī* links them to spirituality and temple traditions, while *kalāvati* marks them as artists, women with special skill. Most women I have worked with did not appreciate the use of the words *bhogam* or *sāni*, with a few exceptions. These terms appear to have acquired a more severely pejorative connotation in the early part of the twentieth century.

³ *Devadāsī* involvement in “dramas” was fairly common in Tamil Nadu in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For example, other than the *kuṛavañci* performances discussed in Appendix 3, many disenfranchised *devadāsīs* in Tamil Nadu founded or joined drama companies who performed either Kaṭṭaikkūttu or “Special Nāṭakam.” DeBruin cites *devadāsī* troupes who performed dramas such as Pavaḷakkoṭi, Vaḷḷi Tirumaṇam, Allī Arjunaṇ, Cūṛpaṇakai Paṇkam, Cītā Kalyāṇam, Nālāyaṇi Carittiram, Naḷa Tamayanti, Cattiyaṇ Cavittiri, Pātukai Paṭṭāpicēkam and Vellāḷarājaṇ Carittiram in the Kaṭṭaikkūttu idiom (deBruin 1999, 101).

⁴ The word *pātra* (Skt. *pātrā*) is used to refer to female dancers in literary and inscriptional materials from various parts of South India. An interesting inscriptional analysis of temple women and the use of the term *pātrā* in Karnataka is found in Parashar and Naik (1986). Sathyanarayana (1990, 38-39) also deals briefly with Vijayanagara materials related to Karnataka.

⁵ For example, Kersenboom is in possession of what she has called the “Subburatnamma Manuscript,” a Telugu text written by her primary informant P. Ranganayaki’s grandmother, Subburatnamma (1871-1950). It outlines the song-texts and contexts of the ritual dance and music compositions of the *devadāsīs* of Tiruttani (Kersenboom 1987, 151-164; 1991). I have similarly acquired a hand-written copy of the *Madanagopāla Vilāsam*, a nineteenth-century text that documents the song-texts composed for the annual festivals of the Madanagopālasvāmi temple in Ballipadu.

⁶ I have not witnessed either of these types of performance, yet there is no reason to assume that ritual dance as described by my informants did not occur, given the details of the oral accounts.

⁷ The name “Madanagopāla” is also encountered in South Indian Vaiṣṇava iconographic literature, where it refers to a specific multi-armed image of Kṛṣṇa, holding among other things, the sugar-cane bow (*ikṣukodaṇḍa*) and flowery arrows, like the Gōd of Desire, Madana or Kāma (Champakalakshmi 1981, 146-7; Gopinatha Rao 1914, 210, Appendix [Pratimālakṣaṇāni], p. 48). Another source is a verse from the Pāñcarātra text, where he is referred to as *madanagopavilāsaveṣam*, “Guise of the Play of the Cowherd, Beautiful as Madana,” *Parāśarasamhitā*, 15.256:

*kodaṇḍamaikṣavamanekaśaraṃ ca pauṣpaṃ cakrabjapāśasṛṇikāñcanavaṃśanālam |
bibhrānamaṣṭavidhabāhubhirarkavarṇaṃ dhyāyet harim madanagopavilāsaveṣam ||*

⁸ The presence of a separate image of Veṅkaṭeśvara in this temple complex is likely indicative of the popularity of the Tirumala-Tirupati shrine at the turn of the century when the Ballipadu temple was built.

⁹ The rendering of the *Tiruvāymoḷi* is called *drāviḍa prabandha sevā* by the priests of the Madanagopālasvāmi temple. This service is not rendered by a community of *araiyars* (reciters) as it is in some temples in Tamilnadu. To the best of my knowledge, it is largely hymns from the *Tiruvāymoḷi* that are recited here, with the exception of the rendering of Āṇṭāl's *Tiruppāvai* during the celebration of Āṇṭāl Kalyāṇam on the *day of bhogi-poṅgal* (the first of the three-day long *poṅgal* festival in January). For details on celebrations of *poṅgal* in South India see Good (1983) and for a discussion of *poṅgal* in the South Indian Vaiṣṇava context, Narayanan (1999). The *adhyāyanotsavam* (festival of reciting the hymns of the *Tiruvāymoḷi*) is celebrated at Ballipadu for five days beginning on *mukkoṭi* or *vaikuṇṭha ekādaśī* (mid-December) as it is in Śrīvaiṣṇava temples elsewhere in Andhra and Tamilnadu. For detailed discussions of the *adhyāyanotsava* and the place of the *Tiruvāymoḷi* in Tamil temple ritual, see Narayanan (1994), Cutler (1987), and Younger (1982). For details on the *adhyāyanotsava* in the Tirupati temple, see Ramesh (2000, 171-96).

¹⁰ The terms *ḍolu* and *sannāyi*, I believe, are adapted from the Hindustani words *ḍhol* and *śehnāi*, but in reality these instruments resemble the South Indian *tavil* and *nāgasvaram*. The *tavil* is a double-headed drum played by using a short stick, on the one hand, and wearing hardened rice-flour bandages on the fingers of the other hand. The *nāgasvaram* is a double-reed, oboe-like instrument, seen in South India as the *maṅgala vādyam* (auspicious instrument) *par excellence*. The Hindustani equivalents, *ḍhol* (technically known as *naghāra*) and *śehnāi*, were prominent in the Mughal courts where they belonged to an ensemble called *naubat*. Today the *naghāra* and *śehnāi* are played as part of Hindu festivals and at Hindu weddings. For details on the technique and function of the *nāgasvaram* in South India, see Skelton (1971) and Terada (1992).

¹¹ In Tamilnadu, *devadāsī* participation in *nityapūjā* appears to have centred around the *cāyaraṭcai* ("dusk" *pūjā*) in Śaiva temples. According to Tamil Śaiva temple traditions, the *cāyaraṭcai* is the both the most auspicious and most dangerous time of the day. It is a power-charged moment, and thus its power must be properly controlled and channelled. The *cāyaraṭcai pūjā* is also usually the most well-attended *pūjā* of the day. Kersenboom's primary informant, Smt. P. Ranganayaki, remembers the performance of *kumbha-hāraṭi* at this time, as well as the performance of *svāmi-puṣpāñjalī* (a dance of "offering flowers"). See Kersenboom (1987, 112-13), and for the text of the *svāmi-puṣpāñjalī* of the Tiruttani Murukan temple, see 154-59. On the Andhra side, Vaiṣṇava *devadāsī* participation in *nityapūjā* centred around the *pavvalimpu-seva*, equivalent to the very last daily ritual of the Tamil Śaiva tradition known as *paḷḷiyārai cēvai* ("service in the bed-chamber").

¹² The *kumbha-hāraṭi* or *kumbhāraṭi* seems to have been one of the primary markers of *devadāsī* identity in both Tamilnadu and Andhra. The use of the pot-lamp (*kumbha-dīpa*) is prescribed primarily in late Śaivāgamic textual sources, such as

Sadyojātaśivācārya's Tamil commentary on the *Kāmikāgama*. Kersenboom links the performance of the *kumbha-hāratī* to the image of the *devadāsī* as an embodiment of Śakti:

Her special qualification of being ever-auspicious (*nityasumaṅgalī*) made her more suited to this task than any of the ritual personnel... No one but a female so close to the auspiciousness of the goddess was considered fit to perform this task (Kersenboom 1987, 119-120).

¹³ This idea of the “randomness” of temple performance in the early twentieth century was also brought to my attention during an interview with Kotipalli Sitaramalakshmi of Muramanda. According to her, at the time of the *abhiṣekam* (ritual ablution) of the *śivaliṅga* at the Someśvarasvāmi temple, the *devadāsī* would perform one line from the *khamās rāga varṇam* by the Tanjavur Brothers (*sāmi nī rammanave*), for which she would perform a *sañcārī* (mimetic elaboration) depicting some general ritual activities (pouring ablutions, lighting lamps, offering flowers, etc.) through gesture. This clearly demonstrates the idea that “temple dance” in the early twentieth century had been cut off from its ritual context. The *devadāsī*'s actions were not related directly to ritual tasks or specific ritual injunctions (such as offering *puṣpāñjali*, *ūñjal*, *bhoga*, etc.). Rather, her presence represented a kind of token. As Saride Varahalu of Duvva told me, they would just be called upon at certain points of the ritual, and told to “do something...”

¹⁴ These songs are *kīrtanas*, similar to the compositions of the saint Tyāgarāja. They follow the same tripartite structure, consisting of *pallavī*, *anupallavī* and *caraṇam*. His composition called *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇamu* consists of 104 such *kīrtanas*, spread across six sections or *kaṇḍas* (Bāla, Ayodhyā, Āraṇya, Kiśkindha, Sundara, and Yuddha). A printed edition of selections from the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇamu* was brought out by Manchala Jagannatha Rao in 1962 (*Adhyatma Ramayana Kirtanams of Munipalle Subrahmanya Kavi in Notation*. Rajahamundry: Andhra Ganakala Parishat).

¹⁵ The phrase *pavvalimpu seva*, used commonly throughout Andhra temples to refer to the bedtime rituals of the deities, is derived from the Telugu *pavvaliṅcu* (“to lie down, to recline”).

¹⁶ This list has excluded some of the traditional *aṣṭa-bhāryās* (eight wives) of Kṛṣṇa, such as Rukmiṇī, Nagnajitī and Lakṣmaṇā and has added the more popular figures of Sītā and Rādhā.

¹⁷ The mythic reference to Satrājī, Satyabhāmā's father, comes from the Purāṇic context, where Satrājī gifts his daughter Satyabhāmā to Kṛṣṇa as a form of gratitude for returning to him the prized *syamantaka* gem. Satrājī's mistake was giving the gem to his younger brother Prasena. This narrative is found in several Purāṇic sources, but one of the more elaborate versions is from *Padmapurāṇa* (6. 249).

¹⁸ Brown lists several meanings for *viniki* that could be relevant here, including “audience, hearing, listening” (Brown 1903, 1185).

¹⁹ This is a perfect Mādhava image. By this I mean that the traditional lists of the twenty-four permutations of Viṣṇu images describe the image known as 'Mādhava' in a manner that is reflected in the image at Pithapuram. These lists are found in the iconographic text *Rūpamaṇḍana* and in the *pātāla-khaṇḍa* of the *Padmapurāṇa* (Gopinatha Rao 1914, 227-244).

²⁰ There were women from several families serving at the Kuntīmādhava temple. Nataraja Ramakrishna told me that he had learned the ritual repertoire from Chinna Parankusam and Pedda Parankusam, the older ritual specialists of the temple. The temple priest Sri Narasimhacharyulu informed me that the last woman to have performed dance in the temple was Puvvulu Tayaru, who passed away in 2001.

²¹ According to Nataraja Ramakrishna, a disciple of Pendela Satyabhama, she received special honours at the Vīraveṅkaṭa Satyanārāyaṇasvāmi temple in Annavaram.

²² At the temple, the performances apparently took place either in temporary *pandals* or in the *mahāmaṇḍapam* of the temple (Fig. 11). This *maṇḍapam* was an open space until 1961 when a permanent wall and roof were added.

²³ The tenth canto (*daśama skandha*) of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is considered by most contemporary Vaiṣṇavas as the most sacred part of the text, because it contains all of the major portions of the work that deal with the life of Kṛṣṇa.

²⁴ Nataraja Ramakrishna and some of his students perform some of these songs today. The name "Pīṭhikāpura" appears in a song that Satyabhāmā addresses to her "uncle-moon", Candramāma, wherein the childhood of Kṛṣṇa is recounted. Other than the Pithapuram temple, the text contains songs dedicated to a variety of localized forms of Viṣṇu from all around the Godavari delta region, including Mohinī Keśavasvāmi (Ryali) and Sāttvika Lakṣmī-Narasimhasvāmi (Korukonda).

²⁵ Apart from the instances of *devadāsīs* identifying with Satyabhāmā in their interviews with me, I am convinced that popular culture in Andhra has established a larger cultural link between the image of the *devadāsī* and Satyabhāmā as *nāyikā*. A case in point is *Maidānam*, a 1927 Telugu novel written by Gudipati Venkata Calam. Known for developing "female narrators with complex subjectivities" (Pal 2003, iii), Calam's heroine in *Maidānam*, Rājeśvari, describes the various shades of her experience with her lover, using analogies to both Satyabhāmā and *bhogamvālu* (*devadāsīs*):

Sometimes we were too close! At other times for no reason, there was a shyness, though there was no newness, there was an intense shyness, lover's games. Mad kindness. Acting angry and hurt. A mother's coaxing. A pleasure woman's teasing temper [*bogamdānibettū*]. Satyabhāmā's anger [*satyabhāma dhūrtatvamū*], quarrels, I used to show him all different kinds of change (Pal 2003, 176).

²⁶ For a translated example of a *varṇam* by the Tanjavur Quartet that survives in practice in Muramanda village, see Appendix 3, n. 31.

²⁷ The *pallavi* (lit. “sprout”) is a *nṛtta* or abstract dance composition that usually does not contain text (*sāhitya*). In the *pallavi* one line of music is repeated over and over again, and the *devadāsī* performs specific sets of “choreographed” movement. There are three types of *pallavi* found in the living performance traditions: (1) *svara-pallavi*; (2) *śabda pallavi*; and (3) *sāhitya pallavi*. The first of these is the most common, and consists of a line of *svaras* (solfa syllables or notes). In the *śabda pallavi*, the *svaras* are replaced by a line of *colkaṭṭu* or *śabda* (rhythmic syllables), and in the rare *sāhitya pallavi*, there is one line of text (*sāhitya*). I have also heard from some informants that *pallavis* used to be performed doing the *bālabhogā* or morning meal offering to the deity in the temple context in the early part of the twentieth century.

²⁸ *Abhinaya*, which I translate as “mimesis,” is the primary interpretive tool employed in *devadāsī* performances of poetry. It encompasses not only gestural action, but also rhythmic and melodic expression, and transformations of the performer’s outer appearance (dress, make-up, etc.). Technically, the word *abhinaya* consists of the prefix *abhi* (toward) added to the verbal root *√nī* (to lead, guide or carry) and thus signifies any kind of action that *carries meaning toward* the audience. However, *abhinaya* is always more than “mimesis”, for it is almost wholly improvised. The process of “traveling” through the oral reservoir in order to grasp the signs and symbols of meaning is referred to as *sañcāribhāva* (wandering emotions). The word *sañcāri* comes from the root *car* (to walk, move, travel, roam about), and here we have the key modality of *devadāsī* textual exegesis. The performance of a composition by an artist in this system is marked by the conscious allusion to ideas and situations that serve to augment the emotional and descriptive content of the composition. Lines of texts are repeated over and over again, each repetition being the place for a new interpretation, a new “wandering” into varied terrains of meaning, a new opportunity for the interpreter to reach deep into the reservoir of oral memory. With each repetition of the line, the interpreter demonstrates a new understanding of each word or phrase. The meaning of the given text is thus stretched with each repetition. The rendering of a *padam* or *jāvaḷi* text is therefore never just a direct translation of the text into mimesis. Instead, it is a process of free improvisation based on the oral reservoir of inherited symbols and meanings, and thus each performance captures interpretations from the pool of possible renderings. *Devadāsī* exegeses of text are thus necessarily *polysemous* (open to many meanings).

²⁹ For example, the cases of Regina vs. Arunachalam (1876) and Public Prosecutor vs. Kannammal (1913) cited in Parker (1998, 614). Anglo-Indian courts however, preferred to sometimes use the term “concubinage” to refer to *devadāsīs*’ sexual lifestyles. Even then, they did not wish to draw a distinction between the terms “concubine” and “*devadāsī*” (ibid.).

³⁰ The word “nautch” is an Anglicized form of the Hindi *nāc* “dance”. *Devadāsī* dance was sometimes referred to as “Tanjore Nautch,” and the term “nautch” eventually came to stand for any genre of public dancing by a female.

³¹ Other works that address social reform activities related to female sexuality in colonial India include Banerjee (1987; 1993; 1998; 2000), Gupta (2001; 2002); Hardgrave (1979); Levine (1996); Mani (1998); Nair (1996); Oldenburg (1990); and Whitehead (1995).

³² Ironically, Viresalingam, a great proponent of women's education, does not comment on the fact that the *devadāsī* community in the Godavari delta consisted largely of educated women. *Devadāsī* women were among the first women in South India to attend colonial schools (Anantha Raman 1996) and, as always, continued to legally adopt and "purchase" orphaned or abandoned children (Parker 1998).

³³ Venkataratnam Naidu grew up in Northern India, where he learned Urdu and Persian. During his stay in Banda, Uttar Pradesh, his Bengali teacher Babu Gangadhara Mukherjee introduced him to the reformist ideas of Lord Bentick and Rammohun Roy. Later, he moved to Hyderabad, where he met Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya at the Nizam's College. Chattopadhyaya introduced him to the principles of the Brahmo Samaj founded in 1828 by Rammohun Roy. After graduation, Venkataratnam moved to Madras, where he studied at the Madras Christian College, and officially converted to the Brahmo Samaj under the guidance of Pandit Sivanath Sastri and Mannava Buchaiah Pantulu in the year 1881. Although his "anti-nautch" work began in Madras, where he served as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Madras, he later moved to Andhra, where he taught in cities such as Machilipatnam, Eluru, Rajahmundry and Secunderabad before finally settling down as the principal of the Pithapuram Maharaja College at Kakinada in 1905. For details on Venkataratnam Naidu's life, see Ramakrishna (1983, 136-37).

³⁴ During my fieldwork, I have come across extreme resentment towards elderly *devadāsī* women from their sons and grandsons. The case of Saride Anusuya from Duvva is a good example of this:

We did what we did with sincerity. But after us, these younger ones do business [*vṛtti*]. Our children get angry with us and say "Hey, get in the house!" My son doesn't let me go out of the house. If I do, he threatens to beat me. "Hey you!" he says, "We don't want to get a name like you. We are *sūryabaliḥa*, not *devadāsī*."

Sūryabaliḥa (lit. "born of the sun sacrifice") is a caste identity that contemporary *kalāvantula* families have taken upon themselves, to conceal their stigmatized backgrounds. A similar phenomenon took place in twentieth-century Tamilnadu, where the *devadāsī* and *naṭṭuvaṇṇār* families took on the caste identity of *icai vellala* (lit. "cultivators of music") in the year 1948 to lend a ring of respectability to their profession (Irschick 1986, 215).

³⁵ Moreover, in the early twentieth century, the men of the *kalāvantula* community formed associations on behalf of their women such as the Kalavanthulu Vidhya Sangham ("Kalavanthulu Educational Association") and the Kalavanthulu Samskarana Sangham

("Association for the Amelioration of Kalavantulu"). Similar associations still exist. For example, in Duvva village (West Godavari district), I came to know of Saride Seshagiri Rao and Saride Narasimha Rao who head the Kalavanthulu Sangham (Reg. 308/88) that seeks to regulate outsiders' representation of and accessibility to *kalāvantula* women in the region.

³⁶ Yamini Purnatilakam and Muthulakshmi Reddi represented a fraction of the Tamil and Telugu-speaking *devadāsī* communities who supported the abolition of the system. For alternate perspectives and details on figures such as Muvalur Ramamirthammal (a Tamil-speaking *devadāsī* who wrote a novel that supported reform) see Anandhi (1991); Kannabiran (1995); Kannabiran and Kannabiran (2003).

³⁷ The resolution to the Madras Legislative Council reads as follows:

This Council recommends to the government to undertake legislation or if that is for any reason impracticable, to recommend to the Government of India to undertake legislation at a very early date to put a stop to the practice of dedication of young girls and young women to Hindu temples for immoral purposes under the pretext of caste, custom or religion (*Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council Vol. XXXVIII*, cited in Jordan 1989, 243)

Chapter 5

Defiance, Memory, Identity: *Devadāsīs* Invoke the Image of Satyabhāmā and Other Female Archetypes

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize “the way it really was.” It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.

- Walter Benjamin (1955, 255)

Now we have our memories left, isn't it? Who knows about the future. Wait, let me tell you a story about a performance in Ballipadu...”

-Saride Varahalu (Duvva, West Godavari District)

Encountering *Devadāsī* Women In Coastal Andhra

రేవల్లె వాడ చందము

Like a row of houses in Repallē

This old Telugu proverb comes to mind when I think about my first attempts to locate *devadāsī* women in coastal Andhra. Repallē is the Telugu name for Vraja, the town where Lord Kṛṣṇa passed his childhood and youth in the company of the local women (*gopīs*). For devotees, Repallē is a paradise where Kṛṣṇa sports with the *gopīs*, although for others, it is just a place known for its loose women.

Peddapuram is a town located in the East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, about twenty kilometres from the city of Kakinada. It is famous for its celebration of the annual festival (*jātra*) of the local goddess Mariḍamma¹ in the month of Jyaiṣṭha, and infamous for its rows of brothels (Fig. 15). Today, the town of Peddapuram is known for the exceptionally high numbers of prostitutes who inhabit its streets. Many of them are *kalāvantulu*. These women have ended up in the brothels of towns like Peddapuram as the result of a complex political, religious and cultural restructuring that began in the nineteenth century.

One of the first women I encountered in Peddapuram was Jakkula Radha, one of the senior-most *kalāvantulu* living in that town. Today Radha sells *bīḍis* (tendu-leaf cigarettes), candy and other confectionary at a small stall outside her home. For about an hour after I met her, Radha refused to discuss her *kalāvantula* identity. Instead, she

talked about the fact that she has converted to Christianity, because the local mission pays her Rs. 60 (about \$2) per month for maintaining a Christian lifestyle². When she finally began to speak openly about her past, she insisted on continuing our conversation elsewhere. We helped her into our Ambassador car and started to back out of the lane on which her house was located. Sure enough, four young men rushed out from nearby houses, and started yelling “*muṇḍālu muṇḍālu*” (“Whores! Whores!”) at us, while throwing small stones at our car.

This chapter focuses on the ways in which memory and performance can act as modes of resistance. Beginning with historical resistance demonstrated by *kalāvantulu* during the social reform period, I move back into my ethnographic work, where I observe how *kalāvantulu* lapse into the realm of nostalgic longing and see figures such as Satyabhāmā as archetypes.

Ethnographic Location and Memory Theory

My ethnographic field research with the *devadāsī* community of coastal Andhra (1998-2003) concentrates on issues of identity, oral history, memory and performance. I conducted much of my research in the “red light” areas of villages, explicitly marked as off limits to persons outside the village. One of my research assistants, Kotipalli Haimavati, herself a *devadāsī* living in Muramanda village (East Godavari district), functioned as a primary interlocutor during the final and most intense phase of my fieldwork conducted from January to May of 2003.

Although it is not necessary to provide details here, it is important to point out the significant shifts in South Asian anthropological studies that have taken place since the mid-eighties. As with anthropology as a discipline, ethnographic studies on South Asia have moved away from the pretenses of objectivity and linearity which until recently characterized most studies of this type. Recent studies by Kirin Narayan (1993) and Kamala Visweswaran (1994), for example, have questioned the status quo when it comes to issues of positionality in the field. Their works have demonstrated, in a highly nuanced manner, the necessity for re-organizing the relationship between the ethnographer and the subject. Visweswaran has pointed out that “Lies, secrets and silence are frequently strategies of resistance” (Visweswaran 1994, 60). This certainly is

true in the case of the *devadāsīs* of coastal Andhra. As we noted with the example of Jakkula Radha, the majority of *devadāsīs* choose to hide their *devadāsī* identity in public. This conscious “strategy of lies” is one among many ways in which contemporary *devadāsīs* choose to interact with the world outside their community. It affected the data gathered by anthropologists and others and thus challenged the factual basis on which their claims of objectivity were built. Much of my own work rests upon the relationships that I have built with my “subjects” over a span of several years. In an atmosphere of trust, they revealed to me their “lies and secrets,” or broke their public silence on several delicate topics. Chapter Five attests to the physical and emotional conditions under which most *kalāvantulu* live today – these are same circumstances under which my interviews in 2002 were conducted. In my work I have tried to bring out some of the emotional tenor of my experiences working with physically, economically and emotionally broken women.

In the words of Pierre Nora, *memory*, as opposed to *history*, is “a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present.” (Nora 1989, 8) It is affective, only accommodates those facts that suit it, and nourishes recollections. Memories are collective yet individual. They take root in the concrete – in spaces, gestures, images and objects. Whereas in today’s public culture, *devadāsīs* oscillate in and out of sets of historical and moral discourses in which they embody a highly contested subject position, in their homes, contemporary *devadāsīs* embrace fragments of the past by remembering (and in some cases re-enacting) precisely those aspects of their identity that they can no longer express or display in public. The memories of the ritual and artistic aspects of temple service, and more potently, the memories of their painful severance from the socio-economic infrastructure provided by temples and feudal kings (*zamīndārs*) serve as anchors for their identities as *devadāsīs*. Thick description and emotional intensity characterize these movements through the remembered landscape, and provide new perspectives on the study of *devadāsī* culture in South India. Using historical evidence and ethnographic data, this chapter demonstrates that memory is the central heuristic lens through which *devadāsīs* are able to personally reconcile, re-constitute and represent their identities in contemporary South India.

For many *devadāsī* women today, and certainly through their recent history as colonial subjects, Satyabhāmā, Rādhā, the *gopīs*, and the hundreds of unnamed *nāyikās* (heroines) of the *padams* and *jāvaḷis* they dance, are the principal expressions of identity. These archetypes live in the minds of *devadāsīs* who invoke and re-activate them from the depths of their memory, consciously manipulate them, and to an extent, re-image them.

***Devadāsī* Resistance and Defiance in Colonial and Early Independent South India**

To counter the colonial construction of themselves as prostitutes, *devadāsī* women relied on the expression of themselves as semi-divine beings, using the rhetoric of *śakti* (goddess-derived power) and the *nityasumangali* (eternally auspicious woman). This can be clearly evidenced from the proceedings of the Madras Legislative Assembly debates. Many representations of *devadāsī* women in fact, stem from this historical moment, as ideas about the supposed victimization of these women, their social and ritual powerlessness and the value of their artistic heritage are being discussed and re-interpreted in the discursive spaces of colonialism and social reform. Recent scholarship on *devadāsīs* has questioned the legitimacy of social reform vis-à-vis *devadāsī* lifestyles (Srinivasan 1984; Marglin 1985a; Kersenboom 1987; Meduri 1996; Natarajan 1997; and Orr 2001).

Excellent studies on the legal history of *devadāsī* reform have been produced by Jordan (1989), Natarajan (1997) and Parker (1998). Jordan and Natarajan in particular, have documented the written forms of resistance that were presented during the Madras Legislative Assembly debates in the 1920s. Written resistance centred on the *devadāsīs'* own articulation of their identity in terms of its *dissimilarity* to that of the prostitute, while their performances invoked the image of Satyabhāmā, as well as of the various unnamed *nāyikās* of the *jāvaḷi* tradition. In the *Bhāmākalāpam* performances and in the *jāvaḷis*, women are depicted as haughty, assertive and often rebuke their male partners. These images of womanhood were at complete odds with Gandhian femininity (represented by the self-sacrificing, nurturing, chaste wife) and instead were clearly of an alternative nature – they lacked sobriety and austerity. Using these images, *devadāsīs* attempted to destabilize the rhetoric of femininity espoused by social reformers and the emergent national consciousness they claimed to speak for.

To make some of these contexts clear, I will briefly cite some examples from two government documents I have examined, in which prominent *devadāsī* women spoke against the early legislations proposed by Muthulakshmi Reddi. Many *devadāsīs* were adamant about expressing the fundamental difference between themselves and “prostitutes.” In a letter that T. Dorai Kannammal, (Secretary of the Madras Devadāsī Association) sent to the government in 1927, *devadāsī* women articulate their identity in the following terms:

The community which dedicates their women to temple service are known as devadasis. It is a compound of two words God and Devotee and means the devotee of God. Dasi is the feminine of the word Dasa occurring in such words as Ramadasa. Popularly our caste is styled by the name of dancing girls probably due to the reason that most of our caste women are experts in dancing and music. Such a hoary name is now unfortunately mingled up and associated with an immoral life. It would, we submit, be easily conceded by everyone that the institution of dedicating one’s life to a temple has nothing to do with prostitution (G.O. 4079, 2)...Hence we make bold to question the implied identification of Devadasis with prostitutes (ibid., 3).

We are only most anxious that true public opinion ought to be ascertained on this point and that the principles underlying this subject be seriously and calmly considered in all its aspects and bearings. The principle of dedicating one’s life to religion and service and the sanction of law and religion in support of it, the pledge of religious neutrality by the Government and the attempted deviation from the same, the avowed object of suppressing the institution of Devadasis and how far the means employed will secure that end without detriment to public interests, these and similar questions should be considered by the public in a calm atmosphere (G.O. 4079, 4).

In the same document, quoting the late Śaiva text *Kāmikāgama*, they write:

...Siva said:

...Therefore to please me during my puja, arrangements should be made daily for Shudda [sic] Nritta (dance). This should be danced by females born of such families and the five Acharyas should form the accompaniments...

Again, Lord Siva says,

‘Therefore, let (everyday) the dance be arranged only be those *born of the dancing girl caste*.’ (ibid.)

Devadāsī women were also well aware of the detrimental effects of colonial writings such as Katherine Mayo’s *Mother India*³ on their community and on the general status of women in the emergent nation. In response, they continue, “The violent and untrue

description given by a wandering globe-trotter ought not to dim our eyes with respect to real facts of the situation...such legislation is unparalleled in the civilized world" (ibid.)

Similar protests are recorded in a Home Department Government Order dated 1939:

The present state is so terrible that if we...[had] a separate place...one would adopt the course [to move out]. But we do not want to leave the *Punya-bhumi* or *Bharata-bhumi* of which we hope we still are the shining ornaments (G.O. 3210, 8)...We beg to submit – could it be the intention of anyone to crush us – to wipe us completely out of existence? (G.O. 3210, 12)

Although these accounts come from organizations such as the Madras Devadasi Association, it must be noted that a large number of the members of such groups were Telugu-speaking *devadāsīs* from as far north as the Godavari delta. Also, at this time, men from the Andhra *devadāsī* community founded associations such as the Provincial Kalavanthula Reform Association, which were active in siding with reformers (Kesavanarayana 1976, 230-33). Even in light of these associations, the women of the East Godavari region in particular exhibited a tremendous amount of resistance to any kind of reform. In addition to supporting the resistance activities in Madras, they also continued to give *meḷam* performances at weddings and soirees after the 1947 act was passed, pointing out that the act did not prohibit such non-temple related performances (ibid., 232).

It is also important to note that Yamini Purnatilakam's efforts (discussed in the previous chapter) were not appreciated by the majority of *devadāsīs*. Like the relatively unnoticed protests from the *devadāsī* community against Muthulakshmi Reddi, Telugu-speaking *devadāsīs* began a slow protest against Yamini Purnatilakam and her Saranalayams. The imposition of a domestic lifestyle on most of these women was traumatic, as was the forced disintegration of the matrifocal structure of their households. A 71 year-old woman from Tanuku, West Godavari district, remembers:

My mother's sister was taken to the Narasapur *śaraṇālayam*. They told her what she should wear, how she should speak, everything. By that time, nobody in our family wanted to give their daughters as *devadāsīs*. We were scared. My mother had to sell the land she got as *mānyam* so that we could live.

At the same time that social reformers were attempting to disrupt the socio-religious-economic bases of the *devadāsī* system, *devadāsī* women in various parts of South

India began a rather short-lived resistance movement questioning the de-legitimization of their lifestyles. I posit that this resistance movement serves as the ground for the creation and deployment of various new discussions about the meaning and significance of the *devadāsī* tradition. The active resistance on the part of the *devadāsīs* of the Madras Presidency not only takes the form of written petitions (recorded in the Government Orders of the Home and Law Departments of the Government of Madras), but also of performance.

The performative resistance on the part of the *devadāsīs* of coastal Andhra consists of the development and increased public performance of a ritualized *Bhāmākalāpam*, called *navajanārdana pārijātam*, under the auspices of the Kuntimādhavasvāmi temple in the town of Pithapuram (discussed in the previous chapter), as well as defiant and outspoken *meḷam* (processional) performances of erotic compositions such as *padams* and *jāvaḷis* (also called *mejuvāṇi*), in spite of the threat of prosecution. Immediately following the introduction of the Devadasi Bill in the Madras Presidency in 1947, there was a strong resistance to the reform by *kalāvantula* women in the Godavari District. On June 17, 1948, fourteen *kalāvantulu* of Relangi and adjoining villages took part in a *meḷam* procession celebrating the marriage of a man named Saride Narayana in the village of Mukkamala in an act of public protest (Kesavanarayana 1976, 231). The defiant women were willing to get arrested to display their protest of the new act. However, when news of the “violation” reached the Madras High Court, it was decided that their street procession in fact did not violate the act, because it did not in any way revolve around an actual “dedication”, and therefore, ten of the women were fined Rs. 25 each, and the case was dismissed (High Court Criminal Petition No. 142, 23-02-1950). In some regions, the *mejuvāṇi* tradition of entertaining guests was still carried on by the *kalāvantulu*, for this did not seem to interfere with the prohibition on “temple dancing” as described by the act. On August 14, 1956, however, the Andhra government carried out a final amendment to the act, which outlawed dancing at marriages and other private social events as well.⁴

Although I feel it is necessary to rewrite the history of the anti-Devadāsī movement by demonstrating that *devadāsīs* were not wholly subdued by their situation, I must also not be over optimistic about the efficacy of such resistance. Individual women certainly were attempting to better their own situations through challenges such as the

legal and performative resistance that sought to articulate and assert *devadāsī* identity. But the systemic biases against the community were so strong that, in fact, as collective subjects, *devadāsīs* could not reclaim their former professional status. The experiences of contemporary *devadāsīs* reflect one possibility in the large range of the results that agency can yield. As Ann Gold has recently observed, "...we could think of South Asian women's tactical subversions and radical voiced imaginings as sometimes contesting, sometimes threatening, sometimes squelched should their threat be perceived to empower, sometimes empowering to the point of overpowering" (Gold 2002, 180).

Effects on Repertoire/Performance: Loss of the Classical Genres

As social reform movements gained momentum under the leadership of Raghupati Naidu, Yamini Purnatilakam and Muthulakshmi Reddi in the early part of the twentieth century, the public visibility of *devadāsī* performances in the Telugu-speaking regions declined. In 1915, out of fear that this tradition was slowly disappearing because of the social reform movement, Devulapalli Vīrarāghava Śāstri (Fig. 16), a Brahmin poet from the Kakinada region, attempted to preserve this tradition in the form of a book, which he called *Abhinaya Svayambodhini* (Teach Yourself *Abhinaya*)⁵. In his preface, he notes that the *kalāvantula* technique of textual interpretation (*abhinaya*) is fast disappearing, and that his primary aim in collecting and publishing these compositions is to document them for the benefit of future generations. The *Abhinaya Svayambodhini* provides the song-texts; underneath each word is a list of possible ways to interpret it through mimesis.

In the somewhat disparate performances that continued in the twentieth century, usually in salon settings, repertoire was becoming more and more limited. *Jāvaḷis* acquired a special status in this period, because they were more accessible to lay audiences in comparison to other longer, more technical compositions in the court repertoire such as the *varṇam*. Indeed, by the 1930s, the *jāvaḷi* had become the mainstay of *devadāsī* performances throughout Andhra. Other than the performance of *jāvaḷis*, *Bhāmākalāpam* performances by *devadāsīs* were also popular in this period. As with the *jāvaḷi*, *Bhāmākalāpam* performances were "accessible," because they presented a more narrative-oriented exploration of a single character. Perhaps the defiant nature of the character of Satyabhāmā was consciously being invoked to assert the *devadāsīs'*

public presence despite the activities of the social reform movement. This seems probable given the fact that the *devadāsī Bhāmākalāpam* often incorporated the identity of the *devadāsī* into the text, and that even today, Satyabhāmā serves a mythopoeic function for *devadāsī* identity.⁶

Effects on Lifestyle: Impoverishment, Disenfranchisement, and Prostitution

Saride Manikyamma (the woman whose memories we drew upon for our discussions of temple ritual in the previous chapter), and her family were formally expelled from temple service in the late 1940s. Manikyamma owned twenty acres of land and several residential properties as well as over one hundred *kāsulu* of gold (one *kāsu* roughly equals eight to ten grams). After 1948, this *devadāsī* family was no longer entitled to *patram* (land ownership) from the temple. The women attempted to win back their rights through litigation but were unsuccessful. With no money, they moved to the nearby village of Duvva (about six kilometres away), and formed a small *meḷam* (dance troupe). They continued to tour rural Andhra, performing *mejuvāṇi* (concert repertoire as entertainment) at births, marriages and other festive occasions. They would occasionally perform the court repertoire (mainly *padams* and *jāvaḷis*) at the Ballipadu temple in the context of the *ūregimpu* (temple processions) but only after the temple had obtained permission from the district authorities.

As we have seen in the case of the women of the Ballipadu temple, the reform movement in general and the *Madras Devadasis (Prevention of Dedication) Act* of 1947 in particular, not only dislodged *devadāsīs* from public culture (by outlawing their art) but also drove them into dire poverty. Saride Anusuya (Fig. 17), now eighty-two years old, remembers:

We became beggars (*muṣṭivāḷḷu*). The *dharmakartālu* (temple trustees) took all our land. We were born for the temple, for God. We danced for God. But they took our land and made us beggars. Whatever was there is gone. Even Kṛṣṇa has forsaken us! I don't want to go back into that temple.

Saride Manikyam, Anusuya's cousin, also remembers:

I remember, it was about 50 years ago. Suddenly the temple staff was dismantled. I had nowhere to go. I felt miserable. We fought a losing battle in the courts. The case even reached the high court. Finally, I moved to Duvva, another nearby village after selling my 136 acres of property.

Saride Varahalu, seventy-six years old and another cousin of Manikyam, who took to performing Harikathā after the ban, told me: “We are the sisters of Lakṣmī, and have been made into outcastes by society...We have been treated worse than animals!”

Saride Seshachalam, now seventy, who was on the brink of beginning her performing career at the time of the reforms remembers: “All we did was sign a bond promising to stop even our public performances after the closure of the temple services. I have nothing but one room in this small house to my name, and no means to sustain myself.”

What did the social reform movement mean for *devadāsīs* in rural areas? If they managed to escape being forcibly institutionalized in the Saranalayams, the dismantling of the economic support of the temple *devasthānas* and the *zamīndāri samasthānas* left the *devadāsīs* in a liminal, vulnerable position. Many younger *devadāsīs* began to dance to popular songs at public events, and, as in Tamilnadu, many entered the film industry (Srinivasan 1984, 16). Nayudu Chilakamma of Mandapeta village remembers:

The land my elder sisters owned was given by the *devasthāna* [both her sisters were dedicated *devadāsīs*]. During *tōli-ekādaśi* they performed *bhāgavatam* [Bhāmākalāpam] at the Gudivada temple. They also did *meḷam*. When the older people used to do *meḷam*, it was good. But then younger ones started to dance for money, and did “record” dance (dancing to film music). The older women such as my sisters wouldn’t allow these women to dance in the *meḷam* with them, so they didn’t. They went into “business” (*vṛtti*, prostitution) instead.

Kola Somasundaram, from Muramanda, who used to have her own *meḷam* (she was a *nāyakurālu*), remembers the threat of prosecution, and how she would pray for the success and protection of her *meḷam* in light of efforts by the police to monitor and raid *meḷam* performances:

When the Act came, I secretly took bookings for *meḷam*. If I was caught, I was arrested by the police. This happened a few times. I didn’t know what to do – should I leave behind *meḷam* or not?

I remember, in those days, Vināyaka Caturthi was very important. The *gajja* (ankle bells), *tāḷa* (hand cymbals), *maddala* (*mṛdaṅgam*, double headed barrel drum), harmonium and *pīṭha-karra* (wooden board and stick used to keep rhythm) were all placed in front of Lord Gaṇapati. All the *sānis* (*devadāsīs*) from one neighbourhood (*basti*) would gather at one woman’s home. We broke coconuts, performed *pūjā* and danced for Gaṇapati, to ensure that we had success in the future, and more importantly, to ensure that there would be no breaks or halts in our performances [because of the reform movement].

Kotipalli Haimavati described the ways in which the *mānyam* (rent and tax collection from the lands she owned) were slow to come, or sometimes never came at all because of the reform movement. Eventually her mother sold all her *mānyam* land, and today Haimavati and her sister, Sitaramalakshmi, live in a small home in Muramanda, with no property of their own:

My mother is Kotipalli Manikyam. She told me that sometimes the *mānyam* money would come in once a year. Until that time, they would live by borrowing money throughout the year, and clear the debt when they received the *mānyam*. With the money they received on loan, they would sometimes have jewelry made for the performances. They danced when and where the *nāyakurālu* told them. The *nāyakurālu* would fetch an advance for the performance. She would divide the money as follows:

Fifteen rupees for the orchestra, ten rupees (one share or *vāṭa*) for the *meḷam* artists, five rupees (half a share) for child-artists, and thirty rupees for the *nāyakurālu*, who was a “class artist” [English term used].

My mother sold the temple *mānyam* she received so that we could eat. It was a very difficult time for us. We simply could not perform in public. My mother also had many students [Haimavati looks around the room, at Rajahamsa, Somasundaram and Krishnaveni, all of whom were students of her mother, Kotipalli Manikyam]

Haimavati also remembers that often men would come to the *meḷam* performances led by her sister after having seen the performances of *jogins* (Dalit women we had discussed in the Cindu Bhagavatam section of chapter three) at funerals and expect the same from them. In her younger days, she had herself performed snake-dances, somersaults, and other forms of lewd entertainment for money. She told me how the requests for songs that subtly implicated the identities of *devadāsīs* as prostitutes became frequent. As an example, she sang the following song for me:

You’ve done so much, you’ve ruined my house, you whore
I’m shocked by all this, here and there, there and here, you whore⁷

The context for the song is actually a quarrel between two women who are fighting for the love of the same man. However, the invocation of the crude language (the words *laṁja*, *daṁga* and *muṇḍa* – all synonyms for “whore”) serve a reflexive function when the *devadāsīs* are made to perform the composition. The song continues,

You've caught [the Brahmin] by his tuft of hair and you're swinging on it, playing on it, swinging on it, playing on it...⁸

The sexual overtones of the song are clear. As Haimavati explained, "They enjoyed seeing us talk about each other in that way". Most of these men were businessmen from the city, tax collectors and ministers. Undoubtedly, there was an almost indisputable publicization of the *kalāvantula* woman's new identity as "whore" in the post-social reform period.

Unlike in Tamilnadu, in Andhra, opportunities for *devadāsīs* to teach their art to non-*devadāsī* women for money were rare. In the 1930s, there was a movement to create a "regional" dance form for Andhra, much like the newly created "Bharatanāṭyam," which had become a national symbol of Tamil culture (O'Shea 2001). Nationalists and elite philanthropists accorded this status to a re-worked version of the *smārta* dance tradition at Kuchipudi, and not to the indigenous *devadāsī* dance of Andhra. From 1940 onward, girls came in large numbers to study from the traditional gurus from Kuchipudi village, but the *devadāsī* art of Andhra remained marginalized and was not re-fashioned or re-constituted by the upper classes as the *catir* dance of the Tamilnadu *devadāsīs* was in Madras⁹. According to Maddula Venkataratnam, the few women (such as Maddula Lakshminarayana) who tried to start dance schools in their villages had to obtain a certificate from the police and hang the certificate in a visible spot outside their homes. The certificate legitimated the fact that they were *bona fide* dance teachers and were not bringing young girls into their homes for other purposes.

In the early twentieth century, when traditional systems of patronage such as *mānyam* were dismantled, in a self-fulfilling prophecy, some younger *devadāsīs* indeed turned to prostitution. As a result, *devadāsīs* in general were seen as prostitutes and their art, once a central aspect of cultural experience in South India, was seen as unfit for consumption by respectable people. This was also a time when the *kalāvantulu* community in particular was targeted by various North American Christian missionary groups who sought to "rescue" the "fallen" *devadāsīs* of coastal Andhra. By the middle of the twentieth century, a large number of women in the *kalāvantulu* community had converted to Christianity, because this promised them a stable monthly income as members of the new rehabilitation programs of the missions.

Colonial and Indigenous Categories Around Womanhood

“If every woman is a *pativratā*, then Sītā will lose her position.”

-Maddula Venkataratnam, Tatipaka Village, West Godavari District

The socially and morally ambiguous status of *devadāsīs* in pre-colonial and colonial South India has been commented upon by nearly all scholars who have discussed the subject (for example, Srinivasan 1984; Kersenboom 1987; Seizer 1997; O’Shea 2001). In attempting to locate the anti-*devadāsī* movement in a larger historical and cultural framework, I will briefly draw the reader’s attention to the basic paradigms of female sexuality suggested by some of these scholars, and then examine these vis-à-vis some of the categories I have culled from my ethnographic data in Andhra. As Srinivasan notes, Victorian images of womanhood revolved largely around the three categories of wife, nun and whore.

wife	nun	whore
married, controlled sexuality	celibacy	public, uncontrolled sexuality

Although the parallel is at many levels problematic, these categories roughly align with the categories of wife (*patnī*), female ascetic (*saṃnyāsini*)¹⁰ and whore or courtesan (*veśyā*). These types of cultural parallels might explain how, as many authors have argued, a new Brahmanic ideology ushered in by anti-colonial nationalism and Victorian morality went hand-in-hand in dislodging *devadāsīs* from the public sphere (Kersenboom 1987; Natarajan 1997; O’Shea 2001).

patnī	saṃnyāsini	veśyā
married, controlled sexuality	celibacy	public, uncontrolled sexuality

Throughout my fieldwork, I was unable to hear *devadāsīs* referring to these types of “roles” for women. Instead, however, it was quite common to hear of the ways in which they conceptualized the relationships (*saṃbandhamu*) they had with men. In the diagram below, I have recovered the Telugu terms for various types of relationships for heuristic purposes, even though I have not heard *devadāsīs* use the last category (*raṃkāḍu*):

pēḷḷi
marriage
(multiple lives)

saṃbandhamu
long-term relationship
(mediating category)

raṃkāḍu¹¹
short-term relationship
(one-night)

When we examine *devadāsī* culture through this kind of a typology, we can clearly see that the *devadāsīs* belong to a mediating category that does not fit into the wife-*veśyā* binary that we examined in chapter one. As Srinivasan has noted,

Quite unlike the ‘prostitute’ in the modern-day sense of the term...the *devadāsī* stood at the root of a rather unique and specialized temple ‘caste’ tradition... The only other cultural examples of obligatory or institutionalized female celibacy available from India – the widow of conservative, domestic society and the nun of the heretical [Jaina/Buddhist] monastic organization – were also committed to the unmarried state and to a specifically religious life... All three demonstrated that the chance for attaining some kind of ‘education’ or proficiency in a vocation could only occur in the case of women outside the married state... These underlying resemblances however disappear when we consider that out of the three, it was only the *devadāsī* who was permitted to have sex and bear children despite her being ‘without a husband.’ (Srinivasan 1984, 286-88)

***Sānis* and *Saṃsāris*: *Devadāsīs* Articulate Ideas About Womanhood**

In this section, I will examine the ways that contemporary *kalāvantulu* in coastal Andhra represent the ambivalent womanhood of the *devadāsī* lifestyle. In other words, what is the emic perspective on this type of lifestyle, and how do *devadāsīs* articulate their identities as women? This section addresses two features around *devadāsī* womanhood that were both described to me during my fieldwork: (1) the relationships that *devadāsīs* had with (usually) upper-caste men; and (2) the lack of menstrual pollution in their community. In both cases, *devadāsīs* spoke about themselves as being *distinct* from other women. I would argue that even if insufficient to reverse or overthrow popular constructions of themselves as “prostitutes,” such features could nevertheless be effective as positive expressions of identity for individual women. These statements serve the dual functions of conferring positive self-worth and allowing *devadāsīs* to retain and express some sense of their past identities.

A couple of generations ago, it was not at all uncommon for upper-caste married men in South India to have relationships with *devadāsīs*. Maintaining a *devadāsī* as a lover, or having a second family with her, was not considered anything out of the ordinary. Contributing to the economic functioning of the household of a well-known *devadāsī* artist was thought to be a rare privilege. The sexuality of the *devadāsī* was the

nodal issue throughout the social reform movement led by Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi in the early part of the twentieth century. As Srividya Natarajan notes, Reddi's use of the rhetoric of victimization of *devadāsīs* was dependent upon her imaging of the *devadāsī*'s sexuality as a mark of her oppressed status:

Both the medical discourse of the time and the ideology of the Victorian middle class held that sexual agency was incompatible with femininity. The fact that the *devadasis* as a community customarily invited sexual relationships (rather than acquiesced in them, as the far more abject upper-class girl-bride was bound to do) had to be interpreted as sexual exploitation by men of the *devadasis*; once this was established, the *devadasis* could be saved by right-thinking people. Throughout the anti-nautch campaign, and especially in the speeches of Muthulakshmi Reddi, we have the recurrent motif of 'rescue': upper-caste, enlightened people saving the *devadasis* from priests, from patrons, from older women in their community, from disease, from sin, from themselves (Natarajan 1997, 116-17)

Perhaps the most important difference to clarify here is that contemporary *devadāsīs* very clearly distinguish their lifestyles from those of householders. Throughout coastal Andhra, they use the term *saṃsāri* (from the word *saṃsāra*, world) to refer to householders (*gr̥hasthins*, that is ordinary married couples and their extended families) and the term *sāni* (from the word *svāminī*, female leader, wife of the Lord) to refer to themselves.

$\frac{\text{kannērikam}}{\text{pēlli}} = \frac{\text{sāni}}{\text{saṃsāri}}$

The clear distinction between householder and *sāni* is maintained in nearly all *devadāsī* households. *Devadāsīs* do not use the word *pēlli* (marriage), and householders do not use the word *kannērikam* (initiation of a virgin). The two spheres are consciously kept apart.

Kannērikam: Devadāsī Dedication and Relationships

As opposed to girls in the *jogin* traditions which we have already discussed in Chapter Three, *devadāsī* women in coastal Andhra were not forced to have sexual relations with

multiple men after being dedicated to the temple deity. Kotipalli Rajahamsa provided the following description of the dedication ceremony called *kannërikam* (>*kanya*, virgin):

Days after the girl becomes mature, she is bathed, and old women [from the community] tie a *tāli* on her, sprinkle turmeric rice on her head, and place a yellow thread [*kañkaṇam*] around her wrist. This is how they do the *kannerikam* [ritual].

See, nobody shows us the Aruṇḍhati *nakṣatra*!¹² We call a *brāhmaḍu* [Brahmin priest], and he recites some *mantras*. Then all the women [from the community] come and we give them *tāmbūlam* [betel nut].

A *rājā* or *zamīndār* would be called, and the girl has to receive rice from his fields for the next one year. She should also have sexual relations with him. For that one year, she should not have relations with anyone else. He looks after her for that period. After one year, they are free to sever the relationship. He can leave if he wants, so can she.

We women look after ourselves (*anta aḍavāḷḷe jūcukovalī*). We don't want to wait for someone to come and help us. It isn't that we are dependent on men, like most other people think.

Dedication ceremonies were almost always accompanied by the simultaneous commencement of training in music and dance. Maddula Ramatulasi from Tatipaka describes this process:

First the elders of the village were called. Permission had to be obtained from them. The girl goes to the temple with her guru [usually an elder woman from the community]. The *pūja* materials are kept in front of the deity; *pūja* is performed, and the girl begins to learn dance. Then *dakṣinā* is given to the *guru*.

In our community, *mōkku* [votive offering of a daughter to God] was common. Sometimes, if one has asked a *mōkku* from God, then one girl in the family is dedicated. That girl stays in the temple for three days and nights. Her first husband is God (*mōḍaṭi bharta devuḍe*). She can be dedicated to Kṛṣṇa or Yeṅkanna-bābu [Veṅkaṭeśvara]. Some people think that we give all the children. This is not true. Only one daughter can become a *devadāsī* from one family.

Unlike the *devadāsīs* of Puri, for example, *devadāsīs* in coastal Andhra were less restricted in their sexual relations. Frederique Marglin mentions, for instance, the officer called *dosandhi paricchā*, whose responsibility it was to ensure that the *devadāsīs* of Puri did not have relations with males from non-water-giving castes¹³ (Marglin 1985, 91). Because of the lack of influence of the King/*zamīndār* in the social organization of *devadāsī* households in Andhra, this type of highly structured, hierarchical system was

absent. Restrictions on sexual relations were rare, and if at all present, were dictated by the parents of the girl. Often the *devadāsī* mother and her male partner (usually the biological father of the girl) would chose the first man the girl would have relations with, in a process much like an arranged wedding. This was usually the case in coastal Andhra by the early 1920s, when the imaging of *devadāsīs* as prostitutes had already crystallized, and social reform movements had made a significant impact in the region. Saride Varahalu, for example, mentioned that her father had chosen appropriate partners for her and her sisters, and that each of these men came from different class backgrounds:

Let me give you the example of my own family. We all had relations with men, but all of our men were from different communities [although we should note that these are all from elite class backgrounds]. My man was a *śaukār*, a *komaṭi* (a *vaiśya*, businessman). Anusuya had a Brahmin, Seshachalam had a *kamma* (also known as *caudhari*, influential agricultural community) man, and Maithili had a *velama dōralu* (a very wealthy landlord).

Most of the women I have encountered have had only one partner in their lives. In most cases, the male partners die long before the *devadāsī* women themselves. The partner will usually leave some percentage of his wealth and/or lands for the *devadāsī* and her children. If this is not the case, the *devadāsī* will move back into the home of her *akka* (elder sister). Many *devadāsīs* did not want children, especially those who were actively involved in performing dance and music in public. They employed indigenous forms of contraception. The standard way of expressing this was *pillalni puttānivva ledu*, ("I did not let children be born") and usually involved the insertion of homemade pessaries into the vagina near the cervix.

In post-social reform Andhra, *kannērikam* ceremonies became conflated with the *pedda-manuṣi* rite-of-passage for the onset of menarche. The obvious reasons for the domestication of this public ritual relate to the legal sanctions imposed on the dedication of girls to temple premises. The majority of my informants below the age of seventy were thus not married to temple deities, but instead, their ritual "marriage" and their embodiment of eternal auspiciousness were symbolically conferred upon them during their *pedda-manuṣi* ceremony, now conflated with the *kannērikam*.

Purity and Impurity: The Lack of Menstrual Restrictions Among the Devadāsīs of Andhra

Brahmanic constructions of female sexuality generally view menstruation as auspicious yet polluting¹⁴. Women are considered to be untouchable (*aspr̥ṣṭā*) for four (or sometimes three) days every month. At this time, in orthodox homes, they are barred from eating with other family members, from cooking and bathing, from worshipping at the family altar and at public shrines and from adorning their bodies. The very zones in the home such as the kitchen (*vaṇṭillu* in Telugu) that define much of female identity are closed-off to women during this time. In most orthodox Telugu *smārta* Brahmin households, separate meals are cooked for menstruating women, and the utensils that they have touched are washed only by servants and not by other members of the household.

During a casual conversation with Kotipalli Haimavati after her mother's funeral in March 2002, I noticed that Haimavati and her half-sister Sitaramalakshmi were not observing any kind of mourning rituals or post-mortem pollution. I asked Haimavati about *maila* ("pollution") in general. She told me that her family does not observe *maila* of any sort, like many of the untouchable communities in Andhra. I later decided to ask other members of the *devadāsī* community in Andhra about pollution. I began with one of the senior-most women I had been working with, Maddula Venkataratnam. When I asked her about menstruation, she said:

We have no restrictions to go into the temple during our periods (*māku aḍḍu ledu*). If we have a five night-long performance and we get our period in between, we bathe and continue with our performance. We always are in possession of turmeric and *kum̐kum*. We do not remove it when our man dies.

Surprised, I continued to ask women from other *devadāsī* families the same questions about pollution and menstruation. Saride Anusuya, the eldest of the Saride women living in their Duvva home, confirmed Venkataratnam's answers:

We can dance during our monthly periods (*nela nela*). There is nothing wrong for us [to do this] (*māku yemi tappu ledu*).

Later, my research assistant asked Kotipalli Rajahamsa, aged 64, dedicated at the Someśvarasvāmi temple, Muramanda, the same questions and received similar answers:

Rangamani: Do you dance when you are having your monthly periods (*nela nela*)?

Rajahamsa: There is nothing wrong in this for us (*tappu ledu*).

Rangamani: How about when someone dies, there is pollution (*maila*) from that, do you observe that?

Rajahamsa: We have no such *maila*.

It quickly became apparent to me that *devadāsīs* in Andhra did not observe menstrual pollution. For Maddula Venkataratnam, there is a direct link between the lack of menstrual taboo and the concept of the *devadāsī* as *nityapuṇistri*. Because she is an ever-auspicious woman, she need not bother with mundane and temporary forms of pollution such as those caused by menstruation and death. Months later, all of the women of the Saride family in Duvva village would tell me that this was one of the primary differences between *sānis* and *saṃsāris*. Saride Anusuya, in particular, was vehement about the fact that this was a unique marker of *devadāsī* identity.

In the early twentieth century, when the social reform movement was reaching its apex, *kalāvantulu* in coastal Andhra popularized a *jāvaḷi* composed by Neti Subbaraya Shastri that dealt with the issue of menstrual pollution. The performance of these compositions by *devadāsīs* attests to the fact that the stigmatized issue of menstruation was publicly discussed by *devadāsī* women. In February of 2002, Saride Maithili (Fig. 18) sang the composition for me:

It's that time of the month, what can I do?
I can't even come close to you!

You useless God! You create obstacles to intercourse
For three straight days!
It's that time of month

Even on our first night, we did not make love.
Even though I was reveling in thoughts of union.
It's that time of month

Lord of Naupuri with a gentle-heart,
Don't have these worries in your heart,
In another two days I'll be able to give you satisfaction!
*It's that time of month*¹⁵

cēragu māse yemi seturā
Rāga: Kalyāṇī, Tāla: Rūpakam
Sung by Saride Maithili, Duvva village

In this *jāvaḷi*, Kṛṣṇa has come to a woman asking her to make love to him. The woman is menstruating and exposes the hypocrisy of the situation – the very god who has made the rules of purity and pollution now wishes to break them at will. The woman resists and teasingly tells him that he will have to wait until after her period of impurity is over. This *jāvaḷi* bears a striking semblance to a Kṣetrayya *padam*, likely composed nearly three centuries earlier. In Kṣetrayya's *padam*, however, it is the heroine who has come to Kṛṣṇa for sex. Kṛṣṇa is apprehensive about touching her in her polluted state, and she implores him to let go of the "false taboos" (*tappu*) that society places on menstruation:

It's true, I have my period,
but don't let that stop you.
No rules apply
to another man's wife.

I beg you to come close,
but you always have second thoughts.
All those codes were written
by men who don't know how to love.
When I come at you, wanting you,
why do you back off?
You don't have to touch my whole body.
just bend over and kiss.
No rules apply.

What if I take off my sari
and crush your chest with my breasts?
I'll be careful, except with my lips.
Here is some betel, take it
With your teeth. No one's here.
I'm watching.
No rules apply.

You don't seem to know yourself.
Why follow these false taboos?
Haven't you heard that women like it now?
It's not like every day.
You'll never forget today's joy.
*No rules apply.*¹⁶

(trans. Narayana Rao and Shulman 2002, 336-37)

cēragu māsiyunnānu
rāga: begaḍā, tāla: cāpu

After she sang the *jāvaḷi* “*ceragu māse*” by Subbaraya Sastri, Maithili was quick to add, however, that the meaning encoded in this song only applies to *saṃsāris* (householders) and not women such as herself. “But who among the *saṃsāris* will talk about such things?” she said. Although it is not possible to go into an elaborate analysis of the performance conventions deployed in the representation of this *jāvaḷi*, I will note one very obvious point. In the depiction of the *pallavī* or refrain of the song (“*ceragu māse yemi setura*”), Maithili holds the *pallu* or end of her *sari*, as if to confront the *fact* of menstruation, represented by the soiled clothing. This is not some kind of a stylized, abstract or displaced representation. It is a way of *marking difference* – the *sāni* or *devadāsī* *can* and *will* confront this fact and elaborate upon it, whereas according to Maithili, the *saṃsāri* will not. “They can’t talk about it, but we can” she noted.

Remembering: *Devadāsīs*, Satyabhāmā and *Devadāsī* Identity Today

In 1948, at the end of a long struggle with the discursive contours of “social reform”, the five women attached to the Ballipadu Madanagopālasvāmi temple – Manikyam, Anusuya, Varahalu, Seshachalam and Maithili – were expelled from temple service. They subsequently moved to the small town of Duvva, where they still maintain a small matrifocal home, adhering to their traditional patterns of kinship as *devadāsīs*. The five women from Ballipadu do not ostensibly retain any markers of *devadāsī* identity: they no longer sing or dance in public, they no longer have any ritual duties in temples, they no longer receive tax-free land (*mānyalu*) from temples or *zamīndāri samasthānas* and they no longer are called upon to bless homes during auspicious occasions. Yet, they insist on referring to themselves as *devadāsīs*, despite the extreme social stigma attached to this identity. What is it, then, about *devadāsī* culture that persists?

Unlike in many parts of Tamilnadu, after the Anti-Devadasi Act of 1947 was passed, salon performances of *bhogam meḷams* continued in coastal Andhra, because these did not interfere with the prohibition on “temple dancing” as described by the act. However, on August 14th, 1956, the Andhra government carried out a final amendment to the act, which outlawed dancing at marriages and other private social events as well.

What then happened to the *bhogam meḷam*? Did it simply disappear after 1956 and is *devadāsī* performance culture in Andhra really dead? I would argue that today *bhogam*

meḷams still take place, but secretly, behind closed doors. They have gone “underground” – that is to say, they have found a safe haven inside the homes of the *devadāsīs* themselves. Today there is no audience, but this is not a criterion for performance. The *meḷams* have become part of the *devadāsīs*’ interior world – they have moved from the realm of public spectacle into the realm of nostalgia and memory.

Whereas in public culture *devadāsīs* are perceived as women of ill repute, in their homes, contemporary *devadāsīs* embrace fragments of the past by remembering (and in some cases re-enacting) precisely those aspects of their identity that they can no longer express or display in public. Their music and dance repertoire, their extra-domestic sexuality, their devotional lives, their lack of menstrual taboo, and their own experiences during the anti-*devadāsī* movement in the early part of the twentieth century figure prominently in these private journeys of recollection. During my fieldwork with *devadāsī* communities in coastal Andhra, I have had the good fortune of being able to observe and document some of these private journeys of recollection and nostalgic longing that take place spontaneously, often at late hours of the night. These plunges into the nourishing reservoirs of memory are not “fleeting” nor are they simply retrospective narrations.

These journeys are embodied memories of clear performative contexts. They nurture identity and help the *devadāsī* not to forget who she is and from where she came. Citing three examples – two related to Satyabhāmā and another to Lakṣmī – I show that these journeys of memory also highlight the disjunctures between past and present. They resist attempts to erase or deny the past. In this final section, I would like to make the argument that identity can be produced through acts of memory, and that *devadāsīs* in coastal Andhra wistfully and nostalgically elaborate upon identity to affirm their subjectivity in the present.

Venkataratnam’s *Bulākī*

“I won’t dance without my *bulākī* (nose ornament)!” Maddula Venkataratnam, an eighty-two year old *devadāsī* said to me one day. When I looked at her with a perplexed face, not knowing what she really meant, she started singing the entrance song of Satyabhāmā from *Bhāmākalāpam*. After she had finished singing the *anupallavī* section, she sat down next to me and said, “So, you want to know about Satyabhāmā?”

I nodded my head. I then realized the connection between the nose-jewel and Venkataratnam's articulations of female identity. The nose ornament immediately brought to her mind the image of Satyabhāmā, and by extension, an image of herself. She continued,

Kṛṣṇa loves Bhāmā. He has 16, 000 *gopikā-strīs*, and of these, eight are his *paṭṭa-mahiṣilu* [main queens]. They are all *rāja-kanyalu* [royal maidens]. Satyabhāmā is Kṛṣṇa's most beloved wife [*mahā-prīti bhārya*]. She is eroticism [*āvaḍe śṛṅgāram*]. She has a lot of pride. She is the most beautiful of all. She is an artist [*kalākāru rālu*]. She is a singer [*pāṭaku rālu*]. *She is like us, no?* She has pride [*garvam*] because she comes from a great family. *She is not like others*. For this reason, in spite of her abuses and beatings, Kṛṣṇa still loved her [*aṃduke tiṭṭina koṭṭina āviḍa aṃṭe kṛṣṇuḍiki prema*].

Venkataratnam, who passed away in 2003, was among the last *devadāsīs* to have performed *Bhāmākalāpam* in public. She passed away just prior to the date we had set to record her performance of *Bhāmākalāpam*. In the early part of the twentieth century, along with several other *devadāsīs* from the East and West Godavari districts, she commissioned an individual *Bhāmākalāpam* "libretto" of her own from one of the greatest Brahmin poets of the time, Gaddam Subbarayudu Shastri (d.1940). In total, Subbarayudu Shastri composed fourteen such *Bhāmākalāpam* texts specifically for individual *devadāsīs* in the coastal Andhra region. In addition, he provided them with lessons on how to interpret highly sophisticated poetic passages from the text through *abhinaya* (gestural and other expressive forms of mimetic interpretation).

Today, none of Subbarayudu Sastri's *Bhāmākalāpam* texts survive in the *devadāsī* community. I have not been able to see or record any performances of *devadāsī kalāpams*. However, the powerful image Satyabhāmā continues to linger in the minds of Andhra *devadāsīs*, many of whom had never performed *Bhāmākalāpam*. The popularity of Satyabhāmā among women from *devadāsī* families in the Godavari delta region is astonishing. Daughters and granddaughters of women who used to perform *Bhāmākalāpam* had memorized key passages and could talk about the aesthetics of such performances in detail, even though they were so far removed in time and space from them.

Satyabhāmā as a *Devadāsī*: Varahalu's Story of Candrasenā

One of the key links between real women and the image of Satyabhāmā is provided by Saride Varahalu (Fig. 19), now eighty-four years old, who lives in Duvva village, West Godavari district. In the late-1940s, Varahalu and her sisters became dispossessed of the land that they owned due to the implementation of the Anti-Devadasi Act of 1947. They eventually moved from their home in Ballipadu to the village of Duvva where they continue to live together, in a matrifocal household, even today. Varahalu, a gifted vocalist, stands apart from many other *kalāvantula* women because she has taught herself the art of *harikathā* (also known by the term *kathākālāṣepa* in parts of South India); that is, she is a modern-day Paurāṇikā (oral commentator on the Purāṇas). Varahalu's primary income comes from discourses on the Purāṇas that she gives in various villages in the West Godavari District. Varahalu's Purāṇic stories, however, are loosely structured, fluid, Telugu oral narratives, and many of them centre around the figure of the *devadāsī*. Varahalu does not hide or shy away from her *devadāsī* identity in public. In fact, she negotiates the implications of being a *devadāsī* in modern South India by creating and deploying legendary paradigms that validate her *devadāsī* heritage. One of Varahalu's favourite stories links *kalāvantula* women to Satyabhāmā. During my fieldwork in 2002, she told me this story of Candrasenā, a *kalāvatī*, who loved and worshipped Rāma. However, as Rāma was an *eka-patni-vrata* [chaste husband, with loyalty only to one woman], and was already married to Sītā, he promised Candrasenā that in her next life she would be reborn as Satyabhāmā, he would be Kṛṣṇa, and that her love and desire would be thus fulfilled. So, said Varahalu, "Didn't you know? Satyabhāmā was a *devadāsī*!" The following is the story of Candrasenā/Satyabhāmā, as narrated by Varahalu:

In Tretāyuga, Mairāvaṇa kidnapped Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. He imprisoned them in a Kālī temple. Āñjaneya Svāmi (Hanumān) went to look for them in Pātālalaṅkā (Mairāvaṇa's home). There, he met a girl who was born in Ayodhyā, and was a great Rāma-*bhakta*. Now, those women who worked in the Ayodhyā palace were our people; they were *devadāsīs*. One of the women whose job it was to wave the fly-whisk (*viñcāmara*) for the king had twin girls. One of these girls was given away in adoption in the city of Ayodhyā itself. The other was given to the mother's sister in Pātālalaṅkā. All these women were *kalāvantulu*. That girl (who grew up) in Pātālalaṅkā was known as Candrasenā. Before she was given in adoption, she used to play with Rāma, back in Ayodhyā. When she went to Pātālalaṅkā, she couldn't forget Rāma. She kept him in her

heart and loved him. She and her mother used to dance in the *āsthāna* (court) of Mairāvaṇa. Mairāvaṇa desired Candrasenā; he loved her. He took great care of her, but even then, she couldn't forget Rāma and continued loving him.

Now, Āñjaneya Svāmi took great difficulties to penetrate into Mairāvaṇa's Laṅkā. He went to Candrasenā's house. He said to her, "Mairāvaṇa has taken Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. I've come to kill him. Please tell me where Mairavaṇa's *prāṇa* (life-breath) is located." She said, "I will certainly tell you, but on one condition. I want to marry Rāma. You must promise me that if I tell you about Mairāvaṇa's *prāṇa*, I will get to marry Rāma". "I will fulfill your desire," said Āñjaneya Svāmi.

That night, Candrasenā indulged Mairāvaṇa, pleased him with her dance, and found out the secret location of his *prāṇa*. Mairāvaṇa's *prāṇa* was located in five butterflies. Āñjaneya Svāmi promptly found the five butterflies, and killed them, and thus Mairāvaṇa was also killed. He rescued Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. Then he told Rāma about the promise he had given Candrasenā. Rāma said "How can this be? I am *eka-patni-vrata*. I can't do this. What will I do now?" Āñjaneya Svāmi said "But she saved you, you must do something, Lord!" So they made a plan.

Āñjaneya Svāmi took on a *sūkṣma-svarūpa* (subtle form) and went under the cot on which Rāma and Candrasenā were to sit. Candrasenā arrived, and Rāma was about to sit on the cot. At that moment, Āñjaneya Svāmi broke the cot into pieces, and Rāma fell to the ground. Rāma blamed Candrasenā, "You called me here, and now you've insulted me by making me fall!" Candrasenā started weeping. "I haven't done this, Lord. I only love you. You are God. You should know what's in my heart."

Rāma looked at Candrasenā and smiled. "Yes, I know what's in your heart. You *truly* are a devotee (*nīvu nijamaina bhaktu rālivī*). You shouldn't keep your mind fixated on *kāma* (desire). I will absorb you into my being (*līnam cesukomṭānu*). I can fulfill your desire only in your next birth."

She is Satyabhāmā (*āvaḍe satyabhāma*). It is because he had granted her the boon of fulfilling *her* desire that Kṛṣṇa *became* Satyabhāmā's slave (*satyabhāmaki dāsuḍu āyipoyāḍu*).¹⁷

Varahalu Sings About *Devadāsīs*

In addition to the story of Candrasenā, Varahalu, knowledgeable in classical Telugu, recited verses from Allasāni Pēddanna's sixteenth century classic *Svārociṣa Manu Saṁbhavamū*. Pēddanna was mentioned in chapter two, where we noted that his *Svārociṣa Manu Saṁbhavamū*, written at the court of King Kṛṣṇadevarāya, was seen as the definitive work in the Telugu *prabandha* genre of court poetry. In one of the most

popular parts of the text called *varūthinī pravara vṛttāntam*, the *apsaras* named Varūthinī has a dialogue with a handsome, orthodox man. Varūthinī validates her identity as an *apsaras* by telling the man that she is the sister of the goddess Lakṣmī, that the arts of music and *kāmaśāstra* are like child's play for her, and that dancing in the assemblies of Brahmāloka, Vaikuṇṭha and Kailāsa comes as easily to her as the *gariḍī* (a kind of acrobatic fencing):

*cinni vēnnēla kaṁdu vēnnudanni sudhābdim-boḍamina cēluva tombuṭṭu māku
rahipuṭṭa jamtra gātramula rālgaramgiṁcu-vimala gāṁdharvaṁbu vidya māku
nanaviltu śāstrāmpu minuku lāvartimcu-pani vennatoḍām bēṭṭinadi māku
hayamedha rājasūyamulanam berpaḍḍa-savana taṁtrāmbulumkuvalu māku
ganakanagasīmam kalpavṛkṣamula nīḍam baccarācaṭṭugami raccapaṭṭu māku
badmasaṁbhava, vaikuṁṭha, bhargasabhalu sāmu gariḍīlu māku
gotrāmareṁdra !*

The goddess born from the ocean of milk
in the wake of the crescent moon
is our sister. Our gift is in making
music to fan desire, with voice and lute,
pure enough to melt a stone.
The arts and sciences of making love
are our birthright: smooth
as butter. Men go through huge sacrifices –
offering up horses (*aśvamedha*), crowning kings (*rājasūya*) –
just to win our hand. We perform
on stages set with emeralds,
in the shade of wishing-trees
on the Golden Mountain,
and the courts of the gods
are where we get our exercise.

(trans. Narayana Rao and Shulman, 2002, 247-8)

Varahalu extends the relevance of this identity to herself and to the *kalāvantula* community. “We are the sisters of Lakṣmī,” she interpolates. In this way, the invocation of archetypes (here the *apsarases* and Lakṣmī) has tremendous significance in locating and expressing contemporary (albeit individual) *devadāsī* identity in Andhra.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the last phase of the social reform movement and its effects on the community. In addition, we have examined some of the ways in which contemporary *devadāsīs* understand and express womanhood. Their articulations of

difference from *saṃsāris* (householder women) represented by their long-term relationships (*saṃbandhamu*) and lack of menstrual taboo place them, like Satyabhāmā, in a mediating category. They, too, are neither *pativratās* nor *veśyās*. Like Satyabhāmā, they, too, are married to God. As artists they publicly display emotions and represent (through performance) transgressive behaviours. But perhaps the most interesting point here is that the identifications between them and the figure of Satyabhāmā are made by the women themselves. Venkataratnam's *bulākī* incident and Varahalu's Candrasenā story point to the ways in which Satyabhāmā remains a model for them, despite the fact that their *Bhāmākalāpam* performances have disappeared.

The incorporation of the *devadāsī* into myth represents one way of negotiating identity and status for contemporary *devadāsīs*. The mythopoeic articulations of *devadāsī* identity allow for the expression of loss and nostalgia. The fact that these expressions arise in the context of *meḷam* performances is significant. The act of performance ignites a larger process of recollection and reflection. Figures such as the *nāyikās* of the *jāvaḷis* and Satyabhāmā become the foci of comments on topics such as sexuality, society and personal loss. What do such private journeys of recollection tell us about *devadāsī* identity in contemporary South India? In a recent essay, Margaret Meibohm (2002, 61) suggests that the core questions of identity formation, "Who am I?" and "What do I do?" can be partially addressed through the additional queries of "Where have I come from?" and "Who have I been?" For *devadāsīs* in Andhra today, the answers to these questions can only come from behind closed doors, from what we might call "deep memory" – a process that "remakes the self" and reconstructs identity from scattered fragments of remembrance, knowledge and experience. In the following chapter I shift our focus from the *kalāvantulu* to a community of Brahmin men that continues to perform *Bhāmākalāpam*.

¹ Mariḍamma is generally thought to be a goddess of the lowest castes, and is worshipped primarily in the Visakhapatnam region. Her festival (*jātra*) at Peddapuram attracts thousands of worshippers, including members of the upper castes. For details on Mariḍamma, see Padma (2001, 135-6). One of the primary ritual activities at the Peddapuram Mariḍamma *jātra* is the performance of the *garagālu* dance (>Tam. *karakam*, *karakāṭṭam*), wherein male and female performers dance while balancing a full pot (*garaga*, pl. *garagālu*), a symbol of the goddess, on their heads. The *garaga* is the only representation of the goddess worshipped at this time. *Garagālu* dance often induces trance, and after the performance, water from the *garaga* is sprinkled on the

threshold of each house in the village using margosa leaves, as an act of protection and purification. A similar tradition exists in the Māriyamman *jāttirai* of the Cheyyar taluk (Tiruvannamalai district) in northern Tamilnadu, where the dance is called *karakāṭṭam* and is performed by professional artists from the *kūttu* community. For details see de Bruin (1999, 64-71; 96-7). Sarah Diamond's doctoral dissertation on *karakāṭṭam* links *karakāṭṭam* with *devadāsī* culture in Tamilnadu, specifically suggesting that many disenfranchised *devadāsīs* might have opted to join *karakāṭṭam* performances after the anti-*devadāsī* movement in the early twentieth century (1999, 37-40). To the best of my knowledge, *kalāvantulu* do not take part in such performances in Andhra. However, at my request, on March 11, 2002, my research assistant Haimavati brought a Dalit female *garaga* performer to Duvva, where we were about to videotape the Saride family's *meḷam*. This woman was an ardent devotee of Mariḍamma, and performed *garaga* dance to popular film songs. For details on the *garagālu* of Andhra, see Nagabhushana Sarma (1995, 60-62).

² Christian missions are still extremely active in coastal Andhra and have historically had a strong base in this region (for details see Oddie 1977). *Devadāsī* women have been the focus of many of their activities. The mission that appears to be the most prominent in the region is called "World Missions Far Corners Inc.," an organization headquartered in Long Beach, California. Their special ministry directed toward *devadāsī* women called "Operation Rescue" is headed by evangelical leader S. John David, the All-Asian Field Director of the organization. When I interviewed Mr. John David in Kakinada in January 2002, I observed that he referred to the women as *muṇḍālu* ("whores"), and he eventually told me that the kind of sympathy that I am showing these women will "trap them into the same evil." But he was glad that I would "show the world who they really are."

Upon arriving back in North America, I discovered their website, which has the following to say about "Operation Rescue":

This "sight seeing" tour was God's appointment -- the beginning of a powerful, exciting ministry we call OPERATION RESCUE. The rescue of these women and girls was hectic and dangerous with monumental problems. Organized syndicated prostitution on this scale had muscle and power to withstand intruders as we soon learned. Operation Rescue, the first of its kind, sprang forward. A ministry of compassion with its center in Christ and the Gospel. Its design is simple -- rescue fallen women and their children. By God's leading we discovered thousands more called Devadasis trapped in religious rituals such as temple prostitution, a system passed down for generations. These women are taught from birth that they are born to serve the gods for the pleasure of the temple priests and the wealthy; to serve the gods of lust for personal pleasure. These facts make harsh judgement of these women difficult. God gave answers to thorny problems. We found it amazingly simple to lead these girls to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Programs of rehabilitation and training were set up. Many New Life Centers are now in operation today, practical work shops where the needs of the whole man are met body, soul and spirit and venereal disease

stamped out with full emphasis on the spiritual. Thousands of Devadasi women have accepted Jesus Christ, fled slavery of prostitution and are now in one of the many New Life Centers having their dreams fulfilled. More than five hundred have married and moved to other villages with their children, new creatures in Christ, trained and equipped to take their place in society. No longer are they outcasts of society. They have regained their dignity and respect!
(<http://www.worldmissionsfarcorners.com/or.htm>)

The ministry works with both *jogins* (from the Telangana region) and *kalāvantulu* and does not recognize differences between the two groups. In terms of maintaining a Christian “lifestyle,” most *kalāvantulu* who have joined the “Operation Rescue” program clearly have done so for the economic stability it offers them by providing Rs. 60 per month. Most households, for example, keep an image of Christ in their domestic *pūjā* (worship) spaces, next to images of Venkateśvara, Śiva and Durgā. As Kotipalli Haimavati told me using the English word “duty”, worshipping the image of Christ is “our duty.” The use of the English word here is indicative of Haimavati’s perception of “acting Christian”: it is a formality, an outer act. Only in the home of Kola Subrahmanyam in Bommur, a suburb of Rajahmundry, did I observe Subrahmanyam, a senior *kalāvati*, dressed in white, with only images of Christ on her household altar. Interestingly, her own daughters have not adopted a Christian lifestyle, even though their home is one of the principle “headquarters” for the distribution of the Rs. 60 monthly allowances for *kalāvantulu* in the East Godavari district. Her daughters practice prostitution and regularly perform “record” dance, a kind of titillating dance to the accompaniment of Telugu and Hindi film songs, for the enjoyment of their customers.

³ Katherine Mayo’s book *Mother India* was a controversial colonial depiction of India published in 1927. See Mayo (1927). For detailed critiques of Katherine Mayo and *Mother India*, see Sinha (2000a, 2000b) and Wilson (1997).

⁴ In the East Godavari district in particular, *meḷam* performances at homes were particularly strong, even after the act was in place. Kesavanaryana (1979, 261, n. 76) cites a letter from M. Ayyanna, Treasurer of the Provincial Kalavanthula Reform Association dated February 13, 1949 to this effect. This region is still the stronghold of the *kalāvantulu* community in Andhra even today.

⁵ *Abhinaya Svayambodhini* by Devulapalli Vīrarāghava Śāstri. Kākināḍā: Sarasvatī Mudrākṣara Śālā, 1915.

⁶ More research is required to establish the quantitative shift from court repertoire into *Bhāmākalāpam* performances that took place in the coastal Andhra region at this time. As we shall see later in this chapter, performances such as the *navajanārdana pārijatam* of Pithapuram might have indeed been related in some way to a new religio-cultural expression of *devadāsī* culture in light of the social reform movement.

⁷ The *pallavī* and *anupallavī* of the song run as follows:

*eṃto jesināve elamaḍi kōmpamāpitivi, o laṃjamuṇḍa
aṃtaku vintāye viramari eṃtaku eṃtauno, o daṃgamuṇḍa*

⁸ *vāḍi pilaka paṭṭukoni uyālalo, mari jhampālalo, mari uyālalo...*

⁹ In 1972, Nataraja Ramakrishna held an *abhinaya sadas* (gathering) and brought many *kalāvantulu* together in Hyderabad for the first time after the Anti-Devadasi Act had been passed. He urged the women to come forth to teach his own students. He aided many of them financially, including Saride Manikyam. Together with many *kalāvantulu*, he coined a syllabus for teaching the art of the coastal Andhra *devadāsī* tradition, which he christened “Āndhra Nāṭyam,” modeled after the new name given to the re-worked form of the *devadāsī* art from further south, “Bharatanāṭyam”. In 1993-94, Swapnasundari, an upper-caste woman who was one of the nation’s most famous dancers, embarked on a project that contested Nataraja Ramakrishna’s codification of the Andhra *devadāsī* art. She studied dance and music repertoire under several *kalāvantulu*, including the Saride women of Ballipadu, and named her version of the Andhra *devadāsī* art “Vilāsini Nāṭyam.”

¹⁰ It is important to remember that the category of *saṃnyāsini* was never a formal one in Brahmanic culture. Although Buddhist and Jaina traditions developed orders of nuns, such institutionalized celibacy for women was never fully endorsed in Hindu textual tradition. For an excellent study of *saṃnyāsini*s as “anomalous women,” see Khandelwal (2004).

¹¹ The word *raṃku* refers to illicit intercourse and is most often used to refer to adultery. Compounds such as *raṃku-botu* (adulterer) or *raṃkutālu* (whore, adultress) are also common.

¹² The *Aruṇḍhati nakṣatra* is the constellation named after the *pativratā* Aruṇḍhatī. In most orthodox Telugu weddings, the bride is shown the *Aruṇḍhati nakṣatra*.

¹³ In Oriya, this term is *pāṇisprusya* (water-touching) and refers to all the castes that can give water to Brahmins. It refers to the fact that the *devadāsīs* of Puri must come from families of these castes only. Untouchables and other non-water giving castes cannot become *devadāsīs* (Marglin 1985, 68).

¹⁴ On Brahmanic images of menstruation and menstrual taboo, see Leslie (1989; 1994; 1996), Marglin (1995).

¹⁵ *cēragu māse yemi seturā
dariceranaina vīlu kadurā*

*kōramālina daivamakaṭa
nelaku sariga mudunallu
marukeliki vedalu cesi
muriyucu musurusu konenu*

*muripemugala modatiratirilo
mucataina diraledu
kūḍudamani muriyucuṇḍa
intalone cēragu mase*

*mṛdula hṛdaya naupurīśa
madini cinta cemḍaboku
mariyoka renā laku nī
mudamu tīra kalayūḍamu*

To my knowledge, this composition, like most of the *jāvaḷis* of coastal Andhra, has never been published. Therefore, the above text is technically corrupt and has been pieced together by Saride Maithili. Her memory of the composition is vague but nonetheless conveys much of the spirit of the text.

¹⁶ The Telugu text of the *padam* is as follows:

*cēragu māsiyunnānu yocanaseya vaddura sāmī dōrayau nā muvvagopāla
para satulaku dosamennaḍu ledura*

*sarasaku rammani cāla ne veḍiti śanka padevemirā
arasikula tappu śāstramulu nijamanucunammavaddura
durusuga nenī vaddiki vaccina dūramarigevemirā
valapu mīra āvāranuṇḍi okamuddaina yivvarā
nannanṭaka sāmī*

*sadaya nāpayyeda tōlagiñci nī
yēḍacanu mōnala gummēda
ōdigimēnanṭaka nīdu tīyanimovi
yōnaraga nānēdanu
madana janaka anduṇḍe nī mōna paṇṭiki
maḍupu landīyudunā
madi ne vaganaina munduvenuka mari jūtura sāmī*

*tannu tānērugaka tōlaguṭa yīvaṭṭi
tappu nemamu lelarā
vane lāḍulakidi saha jaguṇambani
vārtayu vinavemirā
innāllavale gādurā neṭi sukha
mērigite maruvavurā nāsāmī*

¹⁷ This oral narrative is based on the popular folktale known in various parts of Tamilnadu as *Mayilrāvaṇaṇ Katai* (The Story of the Peacock Rāvaṇa), a reworking of various South Indian Rāmāyaṇa sources. In his translation of one Tamil version of the *Mayilrāvaṇaṇ Katai*, Kamil Zvelebil notes that the text is a “folklore version of a high

literary theme, derived, in regional oral traditions, from the great pan-Indian epic tradition of the *Rāmāyaṇa*" (Zvelebil 1987, xxxv). A character similar to Mayilrāvaṇaṇ (Peacock Rāvaṇa) is also found in the Sanskrit *Śivapurāṇa* (3.20.34), where he is called Mahīrāvaṇa (Rāvaṇa of the Earth). The *Mayilrāvaṇaṇ Katai* also seems to have been popular in Telugu literary and performative contexts. This is known in the shadow puppet traditions (*tolubommālāṭa*) of rural Andhra (Shulman 1979, 20). David Shulman, in his analysis of the Tamil text *Catakaṇṭarāvaṇaṇ Katai*, notes that there is close proximity between this text and the *Mayilrāvaṇaṇ Katai*, and that the Tamil *Catakaṇṭarāvaṇaṇ Katai* might in fact be based on earlier Telugu versions (Shulman 1979, 2).

Chapter 6

Men Perform Satyabhāmā: Gynemimetic Representation Among Smārta Brahmins in Kuchipudi Village

I am Bhāmā, the lovely and charming Satyabhāmā

Among the sixteen thousand women,
O friend, sister, girl, confidante,
I am the woman who has stolen the heart of Kṛṣṇa

I am Bhāmā, the lovely and charming Satyabhāmā

- Entrance Song (*praveśa daruvu*) from Kuchipudi *Bhāmākalāpam*

Kuchipudi [Kūcipūḍi] is a village about 80 kilometres from Vijayawada in the Muvva Mandalam of Krishna district. On a hot day in early June of 1995, I travelled to Kuchipudi village accompanied by my videographer, Y. Ganesh Babu. We spent the next week interviewing the residents of the village, mostly *smārta* Brahmins who until recently have practiced agriculture and theatrical performance as their hereditary occupation.¹ I had decided to make a trip to Kuchipudi in order to interview Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma (b. 1934, Fig. 20), the last hereditary artist who performs the role of Satyabhāmā through female impersonation, and the seventy-five year old Vedantam Parvatisam (b. 1920, Fig. 21), the senior-most of the living Kuchipudi artists, who had earlier edited and published a version of *Bhāmākalāpam*. On our way to Sarma's home, we stopped by the village temple, home of the patron goddess of the Kuchipudi artists. The temple is popularly known as *ammavāru guḍi* after the image of the goddess housed inside, though its "official" name is Rāmaliṅgeśvarasvāmi Guḍi. Flanking Bālatripurasundarī are images of her consort, Śiva-Rāmaliṅgeśvara, and Vīrabhadra. Also housed in the temple is an image of Āñjaneya Svāmi (Hanumān). The temple used to have an image of Kṛṣṇa-Veṇugopāla, which was damaged and now is located on the premises of the Siddhendra Kala Kshetra, a Government-operated school established for the preservation of the Kuchipudi performance tradition in the early 1960s. Sarma was born in Kuchipudi village in 1934. His training in the dance-drama technique began under the guidance of Chinta Krishnamurti (1912-1969) at the age of seven. His debut performance was held in Laṣkmīpatisvāmi temple in the village of Pedda Muktidivi. He

later continued his training with Vedantam Prahlada Sarma (1929-1991). At a young age, Vedantam Satyam (as he is also known) won accolades for his representation of the female roles of Satyabhāmā and Uṣā. At the age of thirty-six, he was awarded the “Padmashri” award by the Government of India for his unique contribution to keeping the female impersonation traditions of Kuchipudi village alive, and for his unrivalled artistry. Vedantam Satyam represents one of the last living links to a unique tradition of upper-caste men who once gave night-long *Bhāmākalāpam* performances in the villages around the Krishna river in central Andhra.

This chapter examines the ways in which hereditary *smārta* Brahmin practitioners of *Bhāmākalāpam* articulate ideas about womanhood through their performances. The chapter begins with a brief critical history of performance at Kuchipudi village, followed by a section dealing with an oral genesis myth describing the origins of Kuchipudi. Following some general remarks on Brahmin male involvement in the performing arts, it moves on to address issues around gender mimesis and transformation. This is followed by a synopsis of a typical Kuchipudi *Bhāmākalāpam* performance, and finally some analysis of its contents. The analysis focuses on the ways in which these performances simultaneously enforce and question upper-caste ideologies about womanhood, through the figure of Satyabhāmā. Her pride, longing, devotion, intelligence and *svabhāva* (innate nature) are all brought into the discursive realm through performance.

Towards a Documented History of the Performance Tradition at Kuchipudi

The earliest surviving documents pertaining to the practice of dramatic performance in Kuchipudi village come from the reign of Nizam Ali Khan, also known as Asaf Jah II (r. 1762-1803).² With the decline of Mughal power in the eighteenth century, Nizam Ul-Mulk (1724-1748) also known as Asaf Jah I, established his supremacy over the Deccan and declared independence from the Mughals. The Nizam ruled a vast region, consisting of six provinces that covered much of peninsular India, south of the river Tapti with the exception of a narrow strip of the western coast that belonged to the Mārāṭhās. Nizam Ali Khan, also known as Asaf Jah II was Nizam Ul-Mulk’s successor. Among other things, he is remembered for shifting his family’s capital from Aurangabad to Hyderabad on June 12th, 1770. The central location of the city of Hyderabad was

conducive to the economic and political expansion of the East India Company, which eventually lead to the city's heightened prosperity. Anuradha Jonnalagadda (1996a) has painstakingly examined the documents relating to this period, which she had secured from Pasumarti Subrahmanya Sastri and P.S.R. Appa Rao.

In the year 1763 a property rights dispute arose among several families living in Kuchipudi village. Members of these families (recorded as having the surnames Vedantam, Vempati, Hari, Bhagavatulu, and others) appealed to Nizam Asaf Jah II. The Nizam appointed two persons, Mosalikanti Kamoji Pantulu and Kandregula Jogipantulu to resolve the case. As a result, the village of Kuchipudi was divided, and land was apportioned to fifteen families having the following surnames: Bhagavatulu, Pasumarti, Vedantam, Yellesvarapu, Hari, Mahankali, Josyula, Vallabha Josyula, Bokka, Darbha, Peddibhatla, Polepeddi, Vemu, Venukunti and Vempati recorded in a document dated August 24, 1763. In addition, the document refers to the land as an *agrahāram* or Brahmin settlement (Jonnalagadda 1996a, 40; Arudra 1994, 236).

Later, in 1897, British administrators issued a Revenue Order to the residents of Kuchipudi village. As proof of their continuing rights to farm on the land, the Revenue Order document mentions that the village was originally granted to four persons, Bhagavatula Lingayya, Vedantam Ramesam, Gopal and Peddibhotla Gurulingam, as a *stotriya dharmasāsana* (religious endowment) in the year 1744 by the Zamindar of Bezawada, Kalvakolanu Bucanna Caudari. This document also mentions that the primary occupations of the residents of the village were agriculture and dance (Jonnalagadda 1996a, 41).

It is around this time that we hear of one the earliest traceable ancestors of the present cluster of Brahmin families settled at Kuchipudi, Hari Madhavayya, who likely lived in the late eighteenth century. Not much is known about him other than the fact that he is said to have trained with his father, who was named Śrīrāmulu, and that he is credited with having visited Tañjāvūr and therefore is thought to have introduced the traditionally female-oriented *śabdham*³ genre into the realm of *kalāpam* performances (Jonnalagadda 1996a; Kothari 2001, 155).

In the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, professional theatre companies from Dharwad and Bombay became extremely popular in various parts of Andhra. The Parsi theatre in particular, seems to have had a great effect on the

transformation of dramatic performances at Kuchipudi. The Parsi theatre usually employed European stage technologies including electrical lighting and sets adapted to plays written in Gujarati, Hindi and Urdu, thereby creating a new genre of theatrical performance which attracted large audiences throughout India. Shakespearean-style drama houses and stages were set up in various parts of India as a result of the popularity of the emergent Parsi theatre.⁴ Parsi theatre companies such as the New Alfred Theatre Company, Parsi Natak Mandali, the Empress Victoria Theatrical Company and many others had extensive India-wide tour schedules especially in the period ca. 1850-1930 (Hansen 1999, 142-3). Parsi theatre troupes influenced almost all regional forms of theatre around the country. K. Narasimha Rao notes that:

In 1881, a Maharashtra drama troupe named the Dharvada Company toured all over Andhra extensively. On seeing the interest of the people in drama, Kandukuri Viresalingam produced *Sakuntalam* in Telugu with his students on the stage of the Dharvada Company. (Narasimha Rao 1995, 200)

Similarly, in 1884, Dharmavaram Ramakrishnamacharyalu (1858-1912)⁵, hailed as the “father of Telugu theatre”, set up the Sarasavinodini Sabha in Rayalaseema, modelled after the Maharashtra Jinkhandi Company (Narasimha Rao 1995, 200; Arudra 1986a, 45). Many hereditary Kuchipudi artists also participated in the Parsi theatre, and learned the rather peculiar hybrid music used in these performances. The term *pārsi meṭṭu*⁶ (Parsi tunes) was used to refer to this “new music” by the traditional Kuchipudi artists, who speak about it as a denigrated form of music (Jonnalagadda 1996a, 125).

It was at this time that Chinta Venkataramayya (1860-1949), founder of the *Veṅkaṭarāma Nāṭya Maṇḍali* (also called *Chintavāri Meḷam*, Fig. 22) – perhaps one of the most famous Kuchipudi *meḷams* in recent memory – began to reach beyond the traditional *kalāpam* repertoire and decided to present longer, narrative-oriented *yakṣagānas* in response to the popularity of the Parsi theatre. The first non-*kalāpam* text to be staged in Kuchipudi village appears to be *Bhakta Prahlāda* (known today as *Prahlāda Caritramu*)⁷, written by Vedala Tirunarayanacharyulu and Tiruvalikkeli Ramanujacharyalu (S.V. Joga Rao, cited in Jonnalagadda 1996a, 46), and Chinta Venkataramayya was responsible for its debut performance. His *Veṅkaṭarāma Nāṭya Maṇḍali* staged the performance in the year 1875, and the music for this was apparently tuned by Hari Mādhavayya himself (ibid., 115). In addition, he is also said to have

adapted various other texts including *Aniruddha Nāṭakamu* (known today as *Uṣā Pariṇayamu*) by Renducintala Cidambarakavi and *Rukmaṅgaḍa Nāṭakamu* (known today as *Mohinī Rukmaṅgaḍa*) by Betapudi Bhagavanta Rao for performance. Another *yakṣagāna* text, *Śaśirekha Pariṇaya Nāṭakam* by Vallabhaneni Chaudhari mentions in its last few lines that it was written in the year 1911 specifically for a troupe of performers from Kuchipudi village (ibid., 46 f. 93). These *yakṣagāna* performances, unlike *kalāpams* that focused on elaborate and sophisticated *abhinaya*, were able to accommodate the new European theatrical technologies more easily, and popular Kuchipudi performers such as Vempati Venkatanarayana (1871-1932) and Vedantam Ramakrishnayya (1919-1971) continued to adapt and evolve many of these new techniques into Kuchipudi village productions well into the mid-twentieth century.

In the early twentieth century, nationalist patrons and scholars attempted to demonstrate the hegemony of the Sanskritic male Brahmin tradition at Kuchipudi village over other traditions of performance in Andhra. Kuchipudi village, once hardly known outside the Krishna district, became a “cultural symbol of national importance” while *devadāsī* culture receded to background. However, some of the most characteristic elements of modern Kuchipudi in fact do not stem from Kuchipudi village nor from the male performance traditions. They were consciously borrowed from the *devadāsī* traditions in the early part of the twentieth century. Vedantam Lakshminarayana Sastri (1875-1957) was born into a hereditary family of farmers and performers in the village of Kuchipudi. Though trained in the hereditary dance-drama technique of Kuchipudi by his male relatives, Sastri sought out female *kalāvantulu* teachers as well. He eventually gathered a sizable repertoire of *kalāvantulu* compositions including the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa kīrtanas* composed by Munipālle Subrahmanya Kavi, that were the specialty of the Saride house of *kalāvantulu* in the village of Ballipadu.

With the visibility of the *catir* dance (the term used to refer to the court dance of the *devadāsīs* of Tamilnadu) in the Madras Presidency in the 1930s, Sastri was inspired to create a form of dance for a female solo dancer modeled after the *catir* of Tamilnadu, but rooted in the aesthetic traditions of Andhra. He began to re-construct the form, technique and repertoire of the dance tradition at Kuchipudi almost single-handedly⁸. With his two students, Vempati Chinna Satyam, C.R. Acharyalu and his son Jagannadha Sarma, he took his new form outside of Kuchipudi village for the first time in the mid

1930s. He also taught dancers in Madras such as Balasaraswati, Ramaiyya Pillai and Uday Shankar. His re-imaging of tradition, largely a response to the prominence of the *catir* dance in the emerging cultural life of Madras, consisted of changes to the repertoire of Kuchipudi tradition. By re-casting the group theatre of males impersonating females onto female solo dancers, Sastri essentially blurred the boundaries between *naṭṭuva meḷam* (dance band) and *nāṭya meḷam* (drama band) traditions.

Banda Kanakalingeswara Rao, a nationalist patron of the arts and advocate by profession, has been described by historians as “the inspiring force behind the revival and development of Kuchipudi dance” (Rama Rao 1992, 70). At the highpoint in his career as evangelist for the new “Kuchipudi tradition,” Rao went to great lengths to insist on the legitimacy of this form using the Sanskrit textual canon⁹. Founder of Prabhat Theatre in Eluru (West Godavari district) in 1942, Rao was clearly a fond admirer of Sanskrit textual traditions. In 1956, Rao was working with the All India Radio in Vijayawada, and came to meet Chinta Krishnamurti, son of the late Kuchipudi master Chinta Venkataramayya. A few years later, after raising funds with the aid of the Andhra Pradesh Sangeeta Nataka Akademi, the Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthānam Trust, and the State Government, Rao helped establish the *Sri Siddhendra Kala Kshetra*, a training institute in Kuchipudi village. Rao’s re-writing of the history of the dance traditions of Andhra represented essentialist and unhistorical notions of “tradition”. His revised histories, commissioned by the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi, Marg Publications, the Madras Music Academy and other organizations, not only demonstrate a privileging of the dance tradition at Kuchipudi over the other *nāṭyameḷa* traditions, but also a clear disdain for the *kalāvantula* women and their art:

Devadasis as well as *rajanartakis* were very popular. Sensuous dances crept in gradually. The *devadasis* danced to please their patrons and lost respect for the deity. *But the gurus of these devadasis were still orthodox and maintained their purity.* (Kanakalingeswara Rao 1966, 32)

His writings depict the Kuchipudi brahmins as the legitimate representatives of the *ôpureô* culture of the Indian nation by virtue of their ownership of the key elements which define such purity:

Siddhendra thought that they [the *devadasis*] would still more demoralise [sic] society if they presented Bhama Kalapam dances. So he induced good-looking young Brahmin boys to learn Bhama Kalapam. Till then then the Brahmins never

danced, though they were Gurus... Every dancer [in Kuchipudi village] had to learn Vedas and Sastras, *Natyasastra* and music, and had to perform Trikala Sandhya-vandanams (ritual salutations to the dawn). (Kanaklingeswara Rao 1966, 33)

Rao envisaged the dance of Kuchipudi village as the perfect site for implicitly and explicitly producing and reworking tradition. The *devadāsī* for Rao and others after him, was “corrupt and impure” and thus could not participate in the new culture of the nation-space. Lakshminarayana Sastri’s restructuring of the repertoire and technique allowed for non-*devadāsī* women, however, to revel in that same space. Kuchipudi dance, in its new, urban form, is thus very much removed from the *meḷam* ethos that once governed its practice. It has been removed from the cultural ecology of the religious narrative-theatre milieu.

The traditional performances at Kuchipudi village (Fig. 23) lasted for several hours and usually began late in the evening. Although these night-long performances were presented with greater frequency prior to the development of the “neo-classical” modern dance style called *Kuchipudi*, today, these types of full-length performances can only be seen once a year at the annual Siddhendra Jayantī (birth anniversary of Siddhendra) celebrations in the village. However, even here, all the aspects of the new Kuchipudi (new movements, costumes, styles of singing and texts) are now employed during this annual celebration. Prior to the development of the new Kuchipudi dance, the transmission of the artform was based on heredity with only the male offspring of the fifteen traditional families of the village being allowed to present the performances.

The *Bhāmākalāpam* of the Kuchipudi tradition has been edited and rewritten several times. In recent memory, Maṅgu Jagannātha Paṇḍitulu of Ākivīḍu village in West Godavari district significantly altered the texts of many of the traditional *daruvus*. There are three significant printed editions of the full text of the Kuchipudi *Bhāmākalāpam*: (1) an edition published in 1913, edited by Maṅgu Jagannātha Rāvu; (2) an edition published in 1964, edited by Vedantam Parvatisam Sarma; and (3) an edition published by the Andhra Pradesh Sangeet Natak Akademi in 1967, edited with the aid of Banda Kanakalingeswara Rao. In the late 1980s, the late Arudra had found a palm-leaf manuscript in Telugu characters entitled *Bhāmākalāpam*, which contained a few *daruvus* similar to those found in both the Brahmin and *devadāsī* communities. The manuscript, which consists of 62 leaves,

is, however, in very poor condition. It will be necessary to study this manuscript in detail in order to enhance our knowledge about the *Bhāmākalāpam* texts of both the male and female traditions.

Oral Histories at Kuchipudi:

Siddhendrayogi and the Genesis of Kuchipudi *Bhāmākalāpam*

There are no references to Kuchipudi in any medieval Telugu *kāvyas*. The origin of the dance tradition at Kuchipudi is attributed to a quasi-mythic figure Siddhendrayogi, who is said to have composed the first version of *Bhāmākalāpam*. The figure of Siddhendrayogi occupies a prominent place in the minds of the Brahmins of Kuchipudi and until recently, the very existence of a “historical” Siddhendra has not been questioned. None of the *daruvus* (songs) in the modern *Bhāmākalāpam* performances in Kuchipudi village contain any references to Siddhendrayogi. Until his death, Bhagavatula Sankara Sastri, also known by his pen-name Arudra (1925-1998), had been one of the few scholars to have pursued this line of inquiry, and just prior to his death narrated the following incident to me. In 1990, he had finally discovered a *daruvu* containing the *mudrā* or *makuṭam* (“signature”) “*siddhendra svāmi*” in a manuscript of *Bhāmākalāpam* originally thought to have been in the possession of Vedantam Chalamayya (early nineteenth century), great-grandfather of Vedantam Prahlada Sarma (1929-1991). However, later he found the same *daruvu* popular in the repertoire of the *devadāsīs* (*kalāvantulu*) of the East Godavari district, with the *mudrā* “*śrī basava svāmi*”. This incident reveals several aspects of the nature of transmission of *Bhāmākalāpam*:

- (1) There was a free exchange between the Brahmin texts and those of the *devadāsī* tradition. Either the *daruvu* was originally in the repertoire of the *devadāsīs*, and the *mudrā* changed to “*siddhendra*” as a way of legitimising its performance in the Kuchipudi repertoire, or it was a composition of the Kuchipudi Brahmins, and later built into the repertoire of the *devadāsīs* of Konasima (Coastal Andhra) where its *mudrā* changed to “*basava svāmi*” so that it could be identified with the local deity of the temple.
- (2) There may have been a “layering” of compositions from various sources in Vedantam Chalamayya’s text. Perhaps the Kuchipudi artists collected several *daruvus* from the surrounding areas and collated them into a single text that could be performed by the Brahmins with the *mudrā* “*siddhendra*”.
- (3) The fact that *mudrās* were themselves fluid entities might indicate that there could have been multiple authors who used “*siddhendra*” as a pen-name, or that the

compilers of the *daruvus* (if indeed the text is a compilation) freely interchanged various *mudrās* according to the local performance contexts in which they were to be performed.

Historical evidence for the existence of a Siddhendrayogi who composed a *Bhāmākalāpam* is thus virtually non-existent. As mentioned earlier, however, images of the legendary figure of Siddhendra and his “sacred text” are still key images in the self-perceptions of the people of Kuchipudi village. Today, lithographs of a bearded poet, pen in hand, seated amidst various musical instruments, adorn many homes in Kuchipudi village (Fig. 24).¹⁰ The training centre funded by government grants in Kuchipudi is known as the Sri Siddhendra Kala Kshetram (The Art Centre of Sri Siddhendra). The narrative of the “genesis” of *Bhāmākalāpam* at the hands of Siddhendrayogi is a very important aspect of the identity of the Brahmin families in Kuchipudi. Nearly every person I spoke to in the village made reference to Siddhendra, and more importantly to Siddhendra *as originator of Bhāmākalāpam*. I have compiled the following version of the oral narrative of Siddhendra from interviews with several persons in Kuchipudi village and with C.R. Acharyulu and Mallika Sarabhai:

A young orphaned boy came Srikakulam (Krishna district in Andhra Pradesh) named Siddhappa. Nothing was known about him except that since childhood he had followed dance troupes wherever they went...Often, at sunrise, entranced but totally exhausted by watching an all-night performance, the sleepy boy would curl up in a corner of the *maṭha* built by the svāmi Narahari Tīrtha...The principal of the math was a wise and farsighted man...realizing he was no ordinary boy, [the principal] sent him to the main *maṭha* at Udupi for religious instruction.

Two decades went by. Siddhappa became a scholar of the Vedas and *śāstras*, an avid reader of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata, a composer of music and a trained artist. At last, receiving the blessings of his guru, and now renamed Siddhendra, he returned home to Srikakulam.

When the elders of his hometown realized who the young man was, they were delighted and urged him to fulfil his marriage vows and bring home his wife to whom he had been married when he was a mere infant. Following their advice Siddhendra sent word to his in-laws who lived on the other bank of the Krishna river. Selecting an auspicious day he set out to cross the river to bring back his bride, filled with anticipation and joy.

Suddenly the sky clouded over. The dark clouds split asunder creating a violent storm. The boat overturned and the young man found himself helplessly tossed into the mighty river, dragged and battered by the huge angry waves. In anguish, devoid of all hope of being saved, Siddhendra prayed to Lord Kṛṣṇa promising to

sever all ties with the world if he could reach the other bank alive. As he prayed he saw a vision of Kṛṣṇa who appeared to bless him. Suddenly the storm subsided and the waves calmed. Siddhendra, as though in a revelation, realised his vocation. He threw away his sacred thread as a gesture of severance from the world, and swore to serve only God...

On reaching his bride's home, he was received with great joy and respect and led to his wife whose beauty stirred him deeply. Siddhendra forgot his vow to Kṛṣṇa, that of becoming a *saṁnyāsi*, rejecting the life of a householder and dedicating himself to God. His wife shyly got up and came towards him. As she raised her eyes to him, she suddenly screamed "*saṁnyāsi*" and fell to the floor unconscious. In a flash, Siddhendra saw a vision of Kṛṣṇa and his consort Satyabhāmā. He was filled with bliss. In the face of his wife, he saw the beloved of Krishna, Satyabhāmā. In an instant he understood that all human love, lust and sensual desire had to be sublimated to the desire for oneness with God. He realised that he too was like Satyabhāmā, craving eternal oneness with Kṛṣṇa.

Revelation had come to Siddhendra. His whole being was filled with his love for Kṛṣṇa. He composed song after joyous song of exalted love. He sang and danced these songs and above all he felt that he was Satyabhāmā, the devotee and beloved of Kṛṣṇa.

Soon Siddhendra's songs, all of which were dedicated to Satyabhāmā, came to be known as *Bhāmākalāpam*. He decided to teach [the compositions] only to Brahmin boys who were devout students of the sacred scriptures.

The training of the first group soon began in earnest...The young students had to study the Vedas and *śāstras*, music and the canons of the performing arts as prescribed in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata Muni.¹¹

I cite this narrative at length since it represents the transformation of the *parijāta* narrative into sacred scripture, revelation. The incident of the *pārijāta* tree is now invoked by Kṛṣṇa and Satyabhāmā as a way of conferring their grace (*anugraha*) upon their devotee Siddhendra. They decree that representing it through the medium of performance is a sacred act. The oral hagiography of Siddhendrayogi also bears an uncanny semblance to several narratives from the Vijayanagara period. For example, in a sixteenth century work attributed to King Kṛṣṇadevarāya (r. 1509-29), the *Āmukta-mālyada* (The Woman Who Gives a Garland Already Worn), the King visits the Āndhraviṣṇusvāmi temple at Śrīkākulam on Ekādaśī, and has a dream wherein the Lord commands him to write a work in Telugu commemorating his wedding to Āṇṭāl in Śrīraṅgam.¹²

The story of Siddhendra frames the *pārijāta* narrative in the context of a "divine eroticism" and casts Satyabhāmā into a mortal coil. Siddhendra is a *bhakta*, and identifies

himself directly with Satyabhāmā, the devotee *par excellence*. An emotional dimension is brought to the tradition with the image of Siddhendra in ecstatic rapture while performing the texts of his songs. Similarly, the Brahmin male who plays Satyabhāmā is imaged in a state of “divine bliss” where he transcends the gender difference between himself and Satyabhāmā and completely identifies with her and her Lord Kṛṣṇa. Siddhendra’s “teaching”, the *Bhāmākalāpam*, is seen as “revelation” – it is the product of divine vision (the Sanskrit words *pratyakṣā* and *darśana* were employed by Vedantam Satyanarayana to describe Siddhendra’s experience).

Introducing the Brahmin Male Performance Tradition at Kuchipudi

Brahmin male involvement with the performing arts is fairly common throughout South India. Many scholars link the performance tradition at Kuchipudi to Nāyaka culture. During the Nāyaka period in Tanjavur, we see a definite crystallization and patronage of Brahmin male artistic production. For example, the King Acyutappa Nāyaka is said to have granted an *agrahāram* (Brahmin village) called Melattur in the Kaveri delta to a group of Telugu Brahmin performers, and this is thought to have been the origin of a performance genre called Bhāgavata Meḷa Nāṭakam¹³. *Smārta* men in the Kaveri delta region were also actively involved in the presentation of *harikathā* or *kathākālakṣepa* recitals (Gurumurthy 1994) and *bhāṇa* dramas (Peterson 1997), in addition to the production and codification of vocal and instrumental devotional and concert music (Jackson 1991, 1994). In other words, South Indian Brahmins have always been experimental with new forms of religious and cultural expression. Most performance traditions, including ritual performance traditions (such as Vedic fire sacrifice, see Knipe 1997) are the media through which new ideas are expressed. And indeed, the medium is often the message. When it comes to narrative theatre traditions, this is the certainly the case. As the carriers of technical expertise, South Indian Brahmins have received imperial or state support for their endeavours.

The *Bhāmākalāpam* performances, which are linked to South Indian *bhakti* traditions on the one hand, and to the courtly culture of *bhoga* (enjoyment) on the other, are the traditions where *smārta* Brahmins in the Krishna river valley have carried out a vast number of cultural experiments from at least the eighteenth century onward.

Like many other traditions of narrative religious/devotional performance throughout the Indian subcontinent, the one at Kuchipudi traditionally barred females from performance. Female impersonation in South Asia is often seen as what Kathryn Hansen calls a “theatrical compulsion resulting from the social taboo of women performing” (Hansen 1999, 130). The “taboo” on women’s public performances is imbricated in larger discourses surrounding the relegation of upper class women to the private sphere, and the concurrent creation of the image of the “public woman,” whose very identity was fixed in and represented through song and dance. I acknowledge, as does Min Tian in a recent study of female impersonation in China, that underlying male performances of *Bhāmākalāpam* is an understanding that male artists are superior in their understanding of the true essence of womanhood (Tian 2000, 86-87). In the Brahmanic social order, men are generally considered capable of representing women in a more idealized, generalized manner, and thus, to some extent, regulating their representation.

This approach to understanding female impersonation in South India, though recognizing some of the larger issues around Brahmanical patriarchy and women’s representation, illustrates *one* aspect of what is going on at Kuchipudi. As Hansen notes in a recent essay, traditions of female impersonation in South Asia are often too quickly dismissed as “surrogates for missing women,” given the social taboo on upper-class women participating in the public domain. In the Andhra context, a vital tradition of women performers (*devadāsīs* and also Dalit women in the case of *cindu bhāgavatam*) had existed long before the advent of the Brahmin *bhāgavata* traditions. Why then, the need for men to perform the same repertoire? As Hansen explains, gynemimetic performers “were desired in their own right, as men who embodied the feminine” (Hansen 2002, 164). Hansen goes on to note that:

In the South Asian context, where women of status had long been secluded within private domestic spaces, masquerades of gender were productive new ways of imagining and viewing the female form. Through the transvestite performer, the external look of the “woman” was regulated by minute attention to details of...feminine accoutrements. This reworking of the surface was conjoined to a new focus on the interiority of character (ibid., 169).

In the case of the Brahmin *bhāgavatas* of Kuchipudi, gynemimetic performances serve largely to reproduce and reinterpret dominant gender ideologies. As Purnima Shah

notes in a recent work on gender transcendence in Kathak dance, the gynemimetic performer is “concerned with conveying not a personal code of gender but a set of signals that are natural and stylized, abstract and graphic, compared to those transmitted in everyday social interaction; his portrayal of ‘male’ and ‘female’ is absolutely culture-specific” (Shah 1998, 9). The situation becomes increasingly complex and nuanced because male performers in this tradition identify as ‘Kṛṣṇa’s women-devotees.’ That is, they play with the epistemological and symbolic structures of South Indian *Vaiṣṇava bhakti*.

Performance as Religious Experience: Kuchipudi *Bhāmākalāpam* as *Ādhyātmika-alāṅkāraśāstra*

In ‘performing’ Satyabhāmā, the basic experience emphasized by Kuchipudi Brahmins over and over again, is that of the longing and pain of separation (*viraha*). Metaphysical allegory is a seminal image in the contemporary representation of the act of female impersonation in Kuchipudi theatre.¹⁴ According to Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma,

Bhāmākalāpam is not merely a story of the love between Kṛṣṇa and Satyabhāmā. It has a deeper significance. Kṛṣṇa is the *paramātmuḍu*, and Satyabhāmā the *jīvātmuḍu*, and Mādhavī represents the *māyā* that interferes with their union. At every stage, one can see that this is a text that is spiritual (*ādhyātmika*) and at the same time overflows with the beauty of the art of poetics (*alāṅkāraśāstra*)... For example, after Satya seemingly abandons her ego (*ahamkāra*) and writes Kṛṣṇa the letter [asking his forgiveness], she waits for Kṛṣṇa to come. Now, here all the intricacies of a *khaṇḍita nāyikā* are shown. When the Lord doesn’t come, the devotee rebukes him (*nindā-stuti*) no? So here, *Bhāmākalāpam* is *ādhyātmika-alāṅkāraśāstra* (a philosophically-oriented aesthetic expression).¹⁵

From both structural and epistemic perspectives, Kuchipudi *Bhāmākalāpam* bears a striking resemblance to the *rāgānugā bhakti sādhana* as developed by Jīva Gosvāmī. *Bhāmākalāpam* projects Satyabhāmā as the ideal devotee, just as the character of Rādhā is developed in Jīva’s works, and the character of the *sakhī* (here Mādhavī) plays an extremely important role.¹⁶ Satyabhāmā emerges as the quintessential heroine in the dramatic traditions of the all-male Brahmin performances in villages such as Kuchipudi. It is in these presentations that Satyabhāmā metaphorically transforms into the “archetypical *bhakta*”. The performers are all *bhaktas* themselves, and perform the text as if it were “sacred narrative”. In this sense, these performances are similar to other Vaiṣṇava ritual-

performance traditions that are linked to *bhakti* theology, such as the *Rāmlīlā* of Ramnagar, the *Pāṇḍavalīlā* of Garhwal, the *Kṛṣṇalīlā* of Brindavan and to some extent, the *araiyar cēvai* of Srirangam, Srivilliputtur and Alvar Tirunagari¹⁷.

Mimesis and Transformation: Vedantam Satyam on “Being” Satyabhāmā

In this dissertation, I have chosen to refer to the tradition of female impersonation as *gynemimesis*. Although generally glossed as “the imitation of women” in a very wide sense, I use this term because of its links to the idea of *action* or *performance*, represented, in our context, by *abhinaya* (which I translate as “mimesis”). Technically, the word *abhinaya* consists of the prefix *abhi* (toward) added to the verbal root √*nī* (to lead, guide or carry) and thus signifies action that carries meaning toward the audience. In the Kuchipudi performance tradition, ideas and images of womanhood are communicated through the gynemimetic modalities of *abhinaya* called *strī-veṣam* (the assumed appearance of a woman). Often *strī-veṣam* is misrepresented as referring only to the outer appearance (dress, ornamentation, makeup) of male performers who perform female roles on stage. The word *veṣam* comes from the verbal root √*viṣ*, “to be active, to act, do, perform”. I locate *strī-veṣam* very much within the realm of *abhinaya*, and posit it as a form of total (albeit temporary) gender mimesis, which includes a transformation of the inner, emotional landscape as well as outer appearance. My use of the term gynemimesis is in many ways similar to William Beeman’s definition of mimesis as he encounters it in the female impersonation traditions of Iranian *ru-hozi* theatre. According to Beeman, “mimetic representation depicts women through imitation of overt gender markings with great skill, intending that the audience cannot easily determine whether the actor is a woman or not” (Beeman 1992, 18).

The men of the Kuchipudi theatre, particularly in referring to their mimetic representations of characters such as Satyabhāmā, often tell stories of the very real effects of their performances on men and women in audience. Throughout Vedantam Satyanarayana’s career (Fig. 25, 26, 27), he has been mistaken for a woman following his sophisticated *abhinaya* performances. He recalls two such instances:

Once in Nagpur Andhra Mahasabha, I was performing the role of Usha in Usha Parinayam [*Uṣā Parinayamu*, one of the other popular Kuchipudi dramas, depicting the love between Bāṇāsura’s daughter Uṣā and Kṛṣṇa’s grandson Aniruddha].¹⁸ After the performance of the *Pravesa Daruvu* and finally *Krishna*

Sabdam, there was a standing ovation from the audience. I went to the green room and started changing... One of the spectators, a wealthy landlord, sneaked into the green room, glanced at my long braid, sari, etc., and started making amorous advances. I did not pay any attention to him and when I was about to return to the stage, he stood in my way making some mad demands. I had to reveal my identity and plead with him to allow me to proceed to the stage for the next part ...[of the performance]. He felt embarrassed and returned to his seat after saying that had I really been a lady, he would have bequeathed his entire property to me, but unfortunately I happened to be a male.

On another occasion, we went to Duvva village in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. We were staying in the house of a rich landlord. Members of the landlord's family were talking to us during the day. By nine o'clock in the evening, we commenced the performance of *Bhama Kalapam* in one of the temples in the village, and I was playing the role of *Satyabhama*. The landlord and his wife were among the audience. While the performance was still on, he went to the market, purchased a huge garland and came directly onto the stage and garlanded me. His wife started crying believing that her husband had garlanded a strange lady in her presence and went home in a huff. When the performance was over and we reached the house, the landlord had to face the torrent of abuses from his wife. He was amused and started play-acting as though he had really committed the crime he was accused of by his wife. Meanwhile, I removed my make-up and went to see them. The fight was almost reaching the climax when I explained to her that it was none other than I who played the role of *Satyabhama* and showed her the garland. She was shocked and went inside the house with an embarrassed look. (Sarma, 1999b, 41)

Sarma's way of explaining his transformation, which he reiterated several times to me, was rather matter-of-fact. He feels he has clearly *become* *Satyabhāmā*, and for the time that he is engaging with this performance, he feels like *Satyabhāmā*. Once the performance is over, he feels like "himself":

Look, when I put on *Bhāmā's jadā* (braid), I feel like I am *Satyabhāmā*. When I take it off and wear my *dhoti* again, I feel like the old *Satyam* has come back.¹⁹

On other occasions, however, he has expressed a rather nuanced expression of his transformation. Sarma explains how *abhinaya* can cause an actor to get "carried away" in the mood of the moment, and how he sometimes felt as if he was in a "trance" while he performed *Bhāmākalāpam*:

When I have chosen a particular character, I have always made it a point to study its several *bhavas* or moods, with reference to the background and context, through the epics and the *kavyas*...so [as] to evoke such a clear picture of the character in my mind. This may not seem very difficult, because even the most sensitive and subtle of characters, whatever its [sic] divinity, has been modelled

mostly from experience in real life. Still, [even] this is insufficient to bring out the full power and impact of the character, in the absence of sincerity and one's complete integration into the personality [of the character]. Often, carried away by such moods, I have imagined myself to be Satyabhama, spontaneously improvising the nuances as they might occur, impelled by the mood of the moment. Then I am very much irritated at the approach of men and occasionally feel as if I am in a trance, too. (Sastry 1964, 35)

Before we turn to examining some of the key features of the Kuchipudi *Bhāmākalāpam*, we will briefly survey the narrative elements of a typical performance. It is important to realize that such performances for the most part do not take place anymore in their entirety. I have observed elements of these performances (some of which were specially staged so that I would document them), and the synopsis that follows has been put together in consultation with Vedantam Satyam and Vedantam Parvatisam.

A Synopsis of the Performance of *Bhāmākalāpam* by the Kuchipudi Brahmins

The performance of the Kuchipudi Brahmins begins with a short hymn to Gaṇeśa, followed by the recitation of a hymn of thirteen verses to the Goddess Tripurasundarī²⁰. The first character to enter the stage is the sage Nārada, followed by Kṛṣṇa. These characters set the scene – that is, they enact the narrative of the gifting of the *pārijāta* flower by Nārada to Kṛṣṇa. The performance proper begins with the act known as *vinikipattu*, wherein Satyabhāmā enters behind a curtain with the *tērabaildara* (entering from the curtain) *daruvu*. From behind the curtain, Satyabhāmā throws her *pedda jaḍa* (large ornament-laden braid) over it. The *sūtradhāra* (story-teller/production director) enquires about the *jaḍa*, and Satyabhāmā provides its history²¹. Next, Satyabhāmā relates to the *sūtradhāra* (who now represents her maid, Madhavī) how she has been looking for her Lord Kṛṣṇa, and the curtain is removed²². At this point, she performs her *praveśa daruvu* (entrance song), “*bhāmane satyabhāmane*” (I am Bhāmā, Satyabhāmā) which introduces her character, and concludes by stating that she is pining for her Lord. Mādhavī, her confidante, asks who her Lord is, and in a gesture of feminine shame (*lajjā*) she replies “*siggayano amma*” (I am embarrassed, O friend), since the *pativratā* is not to mention her husband's given name in the company of others. Helpless, Satyabhāmā finds herself tormented by Manmatha (the God of Love), the moon and the cool breeze. She calls out to Manmatha, “Beautiful Kṛṣṇa has forgotten me! I cannot bear these arrows any longer!” In

despair she turns to her friend and requests her to speak to Kṛṣṇa, and bring him back. In return, she promises to give Mādhavī her nose-ring.

Mādhavī offers sympathy to Satyabhāmā and asks her to write a letter to Kṛṣṇa, asking his forgiveness, and inviting him back to her palace. This scene, known as *patra-lekha*, is one of the longest and most emotional passages in the performance. At this point, Satyabhāmā sees auspicious signs (*sakunālu*) around her such as lightning in the sky and women carrying full water-pots (*puṇa kumbhālu*). Madhavī leaves and returns with the news that Kṛṣṇa was immersed in love-making with Rukmiṇī and that under Rukmiṇī's influence, he would not leave her side. When Kṛṣṇa finally arrives, Satyabhāmā rebukes him, until he promises to present her with the *pārijāta*. Satyabhāmā is humbled and realizes her folly. The pair is united, and Satyabhāmā worships at Kṛṣṇa's feet.

The Kuchipudi performances thus employ many of the same characteristics found in the literary *kalāpam* texts, including some of the eleven stages typical of *kalāpam* texts mentioned by Arudra in chapter two. In this next section, I will examine in detail at some of the key motifs around the figure of Satyabhāmā in the Kuchipudi tradition.

Satyabhāmā in the Performance Tradition at Kuchipudi

In the following section, we comb through Kuchipudi *Bhāmākalāpam* texts to examine how idealized womanhood is signified through references to various markers of womanhood. By invoking the rhetoric of the powers of feminine modesty, ornamentation and restraint, Kuchipudi performances of *Bhāmākalāpam* obviously serve to uphold upper-caste gender roles for women. We shall look here at three signifiers of *pātivratya* (the power of the chaste and virtuous woman) and how they are represented in *Bhāmākalāpam* performances in Kuchipudi village: (1) modesty or feminine shame (*lajjā*); (2) *saubhāgya* or auspiciousness, symbolized by ornamentation, specifically the nose-ring; and (3) restraint and chastity, represented by bound hair.

Feminine Modesty and Shame (*lajjā*) in Kuchipudi *Bhāmākalāpam*

The concept of feminine modesty often encompasses restraint in action and speech. Normative *strīdharmic* injunctions strongly encourage verbal reticence (Leslie 1989, 170-6). Indeed the *pativratā* should not only avoid talking to any man who is not related to her (*parapuruṣa*), but ideally should also not utter her husband's name in public (Leslie

1989, 161) as a sign of *lajjā* (from the root √*laj*, to be ashamed). Julia Leslie notes that according to *Tarkatīrtha* Lakshmanshastri Joshi of the *Prajñapāṭhśālāmaṇḍala* in Vai, Maharashtra,

Even today in Maharashtra, the traditional wife will say “My husband is out,” without mentioning his name. A generation ago, that too would have been contrary to strict tradition: she would have said, “The coat is not here” or “I see no turban,” thereby implying her husband’s absence (Leslie 1989, 161).

Orthodox women in Andhra follow the same principle. The Telugu noun used in this context in place of the Sanskrit *lajjā* is *siggū*, meaning “shame, shyness, modesty, timidity” (Brown 1903, 1338). In the Kuchipudi *Bhāmākalāpam*, we see Satyabhāmā unable to utter Kṛṣṇa’s name. Traditionally, the following *daruvu*, “Siggāyanoyamma” was performed with Satyabhāmā covering her face with a veil, out of modesty.

vacana (Mādhavī)

Seeing that jewel among women (*vanitājana maṇi*), who could not bear the awful suffering and “fire of agony” due to being separated from the Rider of Garuḍa, the companion said to her:

“Tell me his name, Lady.”

saṃvāda (Bhāmā/Mādhavī)

Bhāmā: I will tell you, listen. My Lord holds a *cakra* (wheel), friend.
Mādhavī: Oh, a *cakra*? He isn’t a *kommari* (potter) is he?
Bhāmā: My Lord holds a *śaṅkha* in his other hand.
Mādhavī: Hmm...then the Lord of the *jaṅgamas*²³ must be your husband!
Bhāmā: No! My Lord is crowned with a peacock feather.
Mādhavī: Oh, a peacock feather! That means your lord must be a *ceṅcu*²⁴ boy!
Bhāmā: *Abba!*²⁵ He wears earrings shaped like the *makara*, do you know who he is *now*?
Mādhavī: Ok, now I know. Your husband is a *yajña*-performing *brāhmaṇa*!
Bhāmā: What more can I say?
Mādhavī: Come on, describe your Lord to me.
Bhāmā: Friend, how can I speak of my Lord?

padyam (Bhāmā)

His neck is marked with three lovely lines
His eyes are large and dazzling
His long arms reach down to his knees
His body is a beautiful blue shade

He wears a large *nūpura-hāra* on his chest
His feet appear tender like young sprouts.
His glorious body is blue in colour
His face is marked by the nectar of his tender smiling lips
He is distinguishable by the quality (*guṇa*) of beauty
His glory is equivalent to the beauty of millions of gods of love
He is the child of Devaki, He is Lord Viṣṇu²⁶.
He is a feast for the eyes of women to behold.

vacana (Mādhavī)

Come on, how can I know who he is unless you tell me his name?

vacana (Bhāmā)

“*Abba!* I feel ashamed to utter His name! How can Satyabhāmā utter her Lord’s name in front of all these men and all these women? *Abba!* I’m ashamed!”

Daruvu (Bhāmā)

siggāyenyamma, rāga: madhyamāvatī, tāla: ādi

I am ashamed, O friend, to utter his name!

Since childhood, I have been accustomed to not uttering his name [in the presence of others].

I am ashamed, O friend.

Born on the earth as the son of Vasudeva,
He is the grazer of cows, the son of milkmaids.

I am ashamed, O friend.

**“A Woman’s Most Important Ornament is Her Nose-Ring”:
Representing Female Chastity and Fidelity in Kuchipudi *Bhāmākalāpam***

Of the various types of auspicious accoutrements worn (and removed as we saw in the narrative from the *Harivaṃśa*) by Satyabhāmā, the nose-ornament (Tel. *mukkara*) and the plait of tied hair (Tel. *jaḍa*) are pre-eminent signifiers of her identity as a married woman (*sumāṅgalī* or *saubhāgyavatī*) and ideal *bhakta*.

The history of the nose-ornament is rather problematic. According to Altekar (1956, 303), it appears to be of Arab origin, and he suggests that it may have acquired a Hindu re-imagining sometime in eighth-century Malabar, where marine contact with Arabs was common. Altekar also notes that it is conspicuously absent from pre-Muslim sculpture and painting, and is only to be seen in images from Puri, Rajputana and Tiruvananthapuram from

the thirteenth century onwards (ibid., 303). There is no indigenous Sanskrit-derived word for the nose-ornament, and, indeed, how it has come to be such a prominent visual marker of the auspicious married woman in contemporary Hindu culture is somewhat unclear. Altekar's ideas about the Muslim origins of the nose-ornament are corroborated from a study of terms. For example, the Tamil word used to refer to the distinctive nose-ornament worn at the columella (the ridge between the two nostrils) is *pullāṅku* or *pulāṅku*, from the Urdu *bulāṅ* (Tamil Lexicon 2781, 2787). In Telugu the same word is rendered *bulāṅī*, and Brown traces it to Boulak, a suburb of Cairo (Brown 1903, 898).

The common Telugu word used to denote the ornament worn on the nostril is *mukkara* or *muṅgara*, from the word *mukku* (>Tam. *mūṅku*) meaning "nose." Orthodox Telugu women usually wear the ornament on their right nostril, and like the South Indian *tāli* (Skt. *maṅgalasūtra*, *māṅgalyābharaṇam* or *kaṇṭhasūtram*), the nose-ring "confirms...marriage, legitimates sexual relations, binds the procreative capabilities of the wife to the husband, and makes the woman auspicious" (Reynolds 1980, 38).

Orthodox Brahmins in Andhra place great emphasis on the importance of the nose-ring for married women. In 1997, after recording one of the *daruvu*s from the Kuchipudi *Bhāmākalāpam*, C.R. Acharyalu commented, "You know, a married woman's most important ornament is her nose-ring. Without it, she cannot have [sexual] relations with her husband. Look at this song. See what Satyabhāmā is doing?" The *daruvu* we had just finished recording was the following, where Satyabhāmā, tired of her friend Mādhavī's silly games and her lack of sympathy, requests her to go and bring Kṛṣṇa back.

vacanam (Mādhavī)

I desire only this nose-ornament of yours, Bhāmā.

vacanam (Bhāmā)

Mādhavī, for a woman, the nose-ornament is the most important of all her ornaments.²⁷

daruvu (Bhāmā)

vādamela pove, āhiri rāga, tiśrajāti ādi tāla

Why are you arguing? Go bring my Lord!
You are my only comfort,
my only support.

Excellent girl of golden complexion,
don't deceive me now, my friend!
If you heed this one request,
I will give you my nose-ornament.

Why are you arguing

All of my hopes will be dashed,
every breath, will be unbearable.
That love, like a transient dream,
will be fruitless, lost.

Why are you arguing

Here, Satyabhāmā chooses to part with that most cherished possession, the nose-ornament. However, there is a *caveat*. She instructs Mādhavī to understand that she has not taken the place of Satyabhāmā by wearing her nose-ornament. In other words, Mādhavī can have the nose-ring, but cannot be afforded the privilege of having union with Kṛṣṇa that the ornament represents. Satyabhāmā is a chaste wife, and in a way, her chastity, symbolized by the nose-ornament, is given to Mādhavī for safekeeping during her period of separation from Kṛṣṇa. In C.R. Acharyalu's spontaneous oral commentary on these lines, he adds, "During [sexual] union [when the couple is kissing], the nose-ornament blocks the bad winds from entering the nose of the man. If a man has union with a woman who is not wearing a nose-ring [ie. with a woman other than his wife], his *prāṇa* [vital life-breath] will be affected." This is a common belief among Telugu men in central and coastal Andhra. Here the nose-ornament, like the *tāli*, serves a protective function. It is an amulet, warding off the dangerous instability of inauspiciousness (*doṣam*) and other inimical forces. Satyabhāmā's *pātivratya*, which encompasses not only her own chastity and fidelity, but also Kṛṣṇa's well-being, is thus brought to the forefront in Acharyalu's interpretation of this *daruvu*. By urging Mādhavī not to "deceive" her, she is protecting both herself and Kṛṣṇa.

The Whole World in Her Hair: Satyabhāmā's Hair Ornament and the *Jaḍa-Vṛttāntam*

From the early Purāṇic texts, Satyabhāmā's ornamented braid of hair (Tel. *jaḍa*, or Skt. *jaṭā*, *jaṭā-kalāpa*, or *keśa-pakṣa*) is an important symbol of her desire. It is in her hair that she wishes to place the flowers of the *pārijāta* tree (*bibhrati pārijātasya keśapakṣeṇa mañjarīm*, vide. *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, 5.30.37). Indeed, as we have noted earlier, bound hair is

also a symbol of female propriety, control and restraint. Bound hair symbolizes chastity and order, while unbound hair represents unbridled sexuality and chaos.

Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma is in the possession of the hereditary wooden *jaḍa* that has been in his family for several generations. For him, the *jaḍa* represents a microcosm. To use the epistemology of the *Mahābhārata*, the *jaḍa* thus simultaneously locates Satyabhāmā in the realms of both *pravṛtti* (involvement in the world) and *nivṛtti* (renunciation of the world) *dharma*. Satyabhāmā as ideal inheritor of the *pāṭivrātya* tradition is concerned with the here and now, while at the same time, as an ideal *bhakta*, a liberated being, she also engages with the transcendent or other-worldly realm. In the words of Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma,

On one side of the line of partition of the hair is fixed a silver ornament denoting the Sun, and on the other side is one denoting the Moon. On the parting itself is a line of pearls descending to an ornament over the forehead, and over this is fixed a parrot representing Nature. At the back, on top of the braid, is the hood of a serpent and to the plait itself are fixed 27 stars corresponding to the celestial *nakshatras*, Asvini, Bharani and so forth. At the end are three pendent tassels, denoting the *tribhuvana*, or three worlds, and below these, again are nine smaller ones in triple bunches denoting the *navagraha*, or nine planets. Thus it is seen that Satyabhama symbolises the very universe and hence is regarded as the very soul of the Kuchipudi tradition (Sastri 1964, 35).

Why does Satyabhāmā “symbolize the universe”? Vedantam Satyanarayana explains that Satyabhāmā, as an exemplary devotee has taken on the aspects of the Lord. She is identified with the cosmos as both consort and devotee of Kṛṣṇa. As divine consort she certainly has the cosmos as part of her own body, and as devotee, she has merged completely with Kṛṣṇa, and therefore shares his *divya-maṅgala* (divine, auspicious) nature.²⁸

Until about eighty or ninety years ago, performances of Bhāmākalāpam by Kuchipudi Brahmins would start with a long prelude in which Satyabhāmā would stand behind a curtain for hours, with only her *jaḍa* flung over the top of the curtain, and here she would perform what was called *jaḍa vṛttāntam* or *jaḍa bharatam*. In this prelude, she would relate the narrative of the *jaḍa* to the audience, locating herself in the long lineage of *pāṭivrātās* fortunate enough to possess it. In the *devadāsī* traditions, women would take this opportunity to introduce themselves through the character of Satyabhāmā in the form of personalized librettos composed for them by Brahmin scholars²⁹. In Kuchipudi village,

the actor playing Satyabhāmā would use the prelude to dwell on the symbolic meaning of the *jaḍa* and by extension, Satyabhāmā as the ideal woman.

Although today the *jaḍa vṛttāntam* is not part of performances in Kuchipudi village, the narrative of the origin of Satyabhāmā's *jaḍa*, embedded in the performance of the *jaḍa vṛttāntam*, was told to me by Vedantam Satyanarayana:

A *śilpi* (sculptor or architect, sometimes identified as Viśvakarma) once performed penance and secured a boon from Śiva enabling him to create anything he desired. Viṣṇu suggested that he create a celestial braid. The *śilpi*'s braid was given first to Śiva's consort, Pārvatī, who gave it to Brahmā's consort Sarasvatī, who in turn gave it to the *pativratās* Damayantī and Aruṇḍhatī for their blessings, who then gave it to Vāyu (the 'wind-god'). Eventually it was given to Kṛṣṇa who presented it to Satyabhāmā, in whose possession it was to eternally remain.³⁰

Clearly, the plait had passed through the hands of the celebrated *pativratās*, just as the *puṇyaka vrata* tradition survived through a lineage of illustrious *pativratās* in the Purāṇic texts we had examined in chapter one. This makes it one of the distinguished markers of the ideal woman, and it is only natural that Satyabhāmā, the "true woman," be its rightful heir. *Pativratā* values are thus endorsed by a host of role models, and through the symbol of the *jaḍa* and its inheritance, Satyabhāmā is to consciously emulate these righteous women of old.

The *pativratā*, represented by the *jaḍa* and its lineage, is also linked to *bhakti*. *Pativratya* is an ideal state of union (*sambhoga śṛṅgāra*, or love in union), and the worst fate a *pativratā* can suffer is to be distanced or separated from her husband (*vipralambha śṛṅgāra* or love in separation). Hence, the *jaḍa* plays an extremely important role in the Kuchipudi *Bhāmākalāpam*. It signifies Satyabhāma's eternal attachment to Kṛṣṇa, and during the time of her lament at being separated from him, it serves as a reminder for the potential of reunion.

So far, we have examined the ways in which Kuchipudi *Bhāmākalāpam* serves to reiterate and reinforce dominant constructions of gender as they are found in Brahmanical textual culture. However, it is significant that the rhetoric and aesthetics of *bhakti* allow for the projection of a slightly altered ideal of womanhood. While the primary leitmotifs of Kuchipudi *Bhāmākalāpam* certainly appear to revolve around ideal of women's chastity and modesty, spaces do exist in the performances where *bhakti* images are dominant.

The clearest example of the merging of the aesthetic, erotic and devotional in Kuchipudi performance is to be seen in a passage called *patra-lekha*, or “writing of the letter”. This passage has been reworked by many, many authors, and is found in all performative variants of *Bhāmākalāpam*. Here, Mādhavī suggests that Satyabhāmā write a letter requesting Kṛṣṇa to come back to her. Satyabhāmā dictates a letter to Mādhavī, while the actor playing Satyabhāmā performs the *abhinaya*. Below is a paraphrased translation from the *patra-lekha* sung for me by Vedantam Parvatisam in Kuchipudi village:

patra-lekha (Bhāmā)
śrīmad ratnākara putrika, ārabhi rāga

Kṛṣṇa, you blissfully sip the sweet honey flowing from the lotus-like face (*mukhāravindamu*) of the daughter of the ocean. You gifted boons to the King Mucukunda. You are the son of Nanda. Since the day I was given to you in marriage by my father, we have spent so many days making love in the *samarati* (man on top) and *uparati* (woman on top) positions, reviving my soul by touching me with his hands, on this swan’s-down mattress. Even though I am your truly beloved, Rukmiṇī has captured your heart. You have left me. Māra is being cruel -- he pierces by heart with his sharp arrows. The sounds of the cuckoo birds are intolerable, the buzz of honeybees makes my head spin. The moon affects me with his cooling rays, the southern wind burns my skin like the flames of a *pralaya*...O Lord, I am always immersed in thoughts of you, and your lotus-like feet are forever in my heart, and I eternally worship you...
 A [written] reply will not do. You must answer my prayers and come to me [in person] so that we can speak to each other. I need you.
iṭlu bhavat caraṇadāsi satyabhāmā [the Servant at your lotus-feet, Satyabhāmā].

Here we see very clearly the ways in which the *bhakti* of *Bhāmākalāpam* is aestheticized and eroticised. The common leitmotifs of the painful mating calls of birds, the buzzing of bees, the rays of the moon, and the southern wind, are reminiscent of the somatic symptoms of *viraha* in classical and medieval *kāvya*. The explicit references to desire and the *rati-bandhas* (sexual positions) are in keeping in line with much of Kṣetrayya’s *bhakti padams*, and as we have noted earlier, these form an integral part of *devadāsī* court and salon performance traditions.

viraha-vedana (Bhāmā)
rāga: ṣaṇmukhapriyā, tāla: eka
 madana, madana, madana

daruvu (Bhāmā)

madanagopāluḍu, rāga: ṣaṇmukhapriyā, tāla: ādi

*madanagopāluḍu nannu maruvakurā svāmi
mārūni śaramula bāri korvagajāla
cukkalarāyūḍu mukkuna velese
ravva seyutameḷa rājagopāla
neramulēṃcaku nera nammitira svāmi*

The arousing arrows of Kāma disturb me.

The moon mocks me.

Rājagopāla! Don't fight with me!

Pardon my faults, come now to protect me, Lord!

In this part of the performance, the lines between agony and ecstasy, *śṛṅgāra* and *bhakti* are clearly blurred. There is a deliberate play on the word “*madana*”. The piece begins with Satyabhāmā simply calling out “*madana! madana!*” as if pleading with Kāma (also known as Madana) to stop piercing her heart with his relentless arrows of passion. However, when the *daruvu* begins, the first word is “*madanagopāluḍu*”, an epithet of Kṛṣṇa, and it appears as if, like the archetypal *bhakti* mystic, Satyabhāmā is calling upon the Lord. Rukmiṇī has captured Kṛṣṇa's heart, he has left Satyabhāmā, and she longs for him (*viraha*). She is jealous, yet overcome with *viraha-tāpa* (the heat of separation). But, as we shall see below, unlike the ideal *bhakta*, Satyabhāmā's ego is not burnt away by the fires of longing.

On Vanity, Intelligence and the Nature (*svabhāva*) of Women

A Telugu construction used to describe Satyabhāmā that occurs frequently in the performance traditions of both the Brahmins and *devadāsīs* of Andhra is *vayyāri satyabhāmā*. The term refers directly to Satyabhāmā's attributes of vanity, femininity and charm. Brown translates the Telugu word *vayyamu* as “vain, useless” (Brown 1903, 1137). As we have already seen in Purāṇic tradition, vanity and desire characterize Satyabhāmā and play an important role the mythological incident of the *pārijāta* flower in which her personality is fully developed. Similarly, the situational contexts and specific *daruvus* of the Kuchipudi tradition reveal that this aspect of Satyabhāmā's nature is integral to the texts of the vernacular performance traditions as well. The entrance-song (*praveśa daruvu*) in the Kuchipudi tradition perhaps best exemplifies the concept of *vayyamu* (vanity):

praveśa-daruvu (Bhāmā)³¹

bhāmane satyabhāmane, bhairavī or mukhāri rāga, miśracāpu tāla

I am Bhāmā, the lovely and charming Satyabhāmā

Among the sixteen thousand women,
O friend, sister, girl, confidante,
I am the woman who has stolen the heart of Kṛṣṇa

I am Bhāmā

By threatening the *devas*, [Kṛṣṇa] immediately won the *pārijāta*
I made him bring the tree to my garden, and firmly plant it there.

I am Bhāmā

Threatening Narakāśura, I released arrows upon him.

I am Bhāmā

My beauty is comparable to that of a chrysanthemum, a flowery arrow, or a full-blown marigold.

Endearing mannerisms? Among all women, I am endowed with the most!

I am Bhāmā

I am the dearest among all of the daughters of King Satrājit
I cannot bear the suffering of being estranged from my Lord Madana[gopāla].

I am Bhāmā

[I desire] the embrace of the lotus-eyed one who dwells in Dvārakā
[I desire] to be engaged in play-fighting and love-play

I am Bhāmā

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* (7.67) mentions several forms of *garva* (pride, arrogance), many of which feature prominently in performative representations of Satyabhāmā. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* delineates the types of *garva* based on their root causes. The five forms of *garva* mentioned in *Nāṭyaśāstra* 7.67 are those that arise due to *vidyā* (knowledge), *yauvana* (youth), *rūpa* (form, beauty), *aiśvarya* (fame) and *dhanāgamat* (acquisition of wealth).³² Satyabhāmā is, as Vasanthalakshmi and Narasimhachari point out,

...a *saundarya garvita* [sic] (one who is proud of her beauty), a *prema garvita* (one who is proud of her Lord's love for her), a *vidya garvita* (one who is proud of her knowledge), a *yauvana garvita* (one who is proud of her youthful charms) and a *kula garvita* (one who is proud of her lineage). (Vasanthalakshmi and Narasimhachari 1987, 28)

According to Vedantam Satyam, the *praveśa daruvu* illustrates all of these forms of *garva*. The word *muddula*, "kiss, charm" in the first line³³, refers to her pride in her physical beauty (*saundarya garva*), the reference to Kṛṣṇa replanting the *pārijāta* tree in her garden³⁴

indicates *prema garva*. The *vidyā garva* can be seen in her “knowledge of warfare” in asserting that she defeated the demon Naraka with arrows³⁵, while the *yauvana garva* is exemplified in her assertion that she is “foremost among the sixteen thousand women of Kṛṣṇa”.³⁶ The reference to her father, King Satrājīt is an obvious example of Satyabhāmā’s pride in her lineage, *kula garva*³⁷. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* in addition mentions *aiśvarya garva* (pride due to fame) as well as *dhanāgamat garva* (pride due to the acquisition of wealth), both of which are to be seen in the line where Satyabhāmā asserts that the *pārijāta* has been planted in her garden.

Satyabhāmā’s *garva* signifies not only her own disposition, but could also be read as signifying the *svabhāva* or inherent nature of women in general. Kuchipudi *Bhāmākalāpam* performances seem to offer a commentary on *strī-svabhāva* in various places. For example, later in the performance, Mādhavī asks Satyabhāmā how she came to be estranged from Kṛṣṇa:

Bhāmā: O friend, one day when I was sleeping alone on my mattress of swan’s-down, the Lord came into my chamber. He sat me on his lap, dressed me in jewels, and dressed himself in jewels too. He held up a mirror. Then, looking at our reflection in the mirror, he asked me: “Satyabhāmā, are you more beautiful, or am I?”

Mādhavī: Then? What did you reply?

Bhāmā: Oh! With my female intelligence (*āḍabuddhi*), I answered “I am more beautiful! [*nene cakkani dānananṭine*]”

Mādhavī: Well, that’s fair, isn’t it?

Bhāmā: Then the Lord got very angry with me, and went away!

Here, *strī-svabhāva* is depicted as it is in Brahmanical *dharmaśāstra* and in our initial textual encounters with Satyabhāmā and Draupadī in the *Mahābhārata*. Woman, even the “True Woman” Satyabhāmā, possesses a distinctly lower level of intelligence. Satyanarayana Sarma glosses this episode by saying “the Lord has forsaken the devotee out of the devotee’s ignorance”. It is here that we see the complex ideological intersections of *svabhāva* and *bhakti*. This passage and many others like it throughout the Kuchipudi *Bhāmākalāpam* performances illustrate the extent to which gynemimetic performance is capable of replicating ideological definitions of womanhood.

Theories of Gender and Gendered Performance: Gynemimesis in South India

Gender *is* performance. As a cultural construct, made up of learned values and beliefs, gender identity (if one can posit such an absolute) has no ontological status...Like a Berkeleian universe, gender exists only insofar as it is perceived; and the very components of perceived gender – gait, stance, gesture, deportment, vocal pitch and intonation, costume, accessories, coiffure – indicate the performative nature of the construct. Even when the performance becomes second nature, it can, like any other performance, vary in plausibility, verisimilitude, and persuasive power (Senelick, 1992, ix).

Laurence Senelick, in his Introduction to *Gender in Performance* offers support for a theory of social constructionism, arguing that gender roles and identities are not natural, universal or essential, but rather are constructed by socio-performative discourses and processes. As Judith Butler puts it, “such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (Butler 1990b, 173). The performance of the gendered body serves to represent, reconstitute, and reconfirm epistemological structures found in culture at large. Moreover, Butler emphasizes the fact that “the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts” (Butler 1990a, 272). In many parts of South India, theatrical performances function as sites that both support and subvert dominant constructions of gender roles. As we will see with the *Bhāmākalāpam* as it is performed in Kuchipudi, these performances are capable of delineating (and subtly pushing) the boundaries of sexual propriety, modesty, *dharma*, and *svabhāva* as they relate to women.

Bhakti*, Performance and *Svabhāva

Do male devotees appropriate *strī-svabhāva* when they image themselves as women? That is, to what degree is the gendered idea of *svabhāva* flexible and fluid, or, put another way, does gendered *svabhāva* really become altered when a male *bhakta* approaches God as a *nāyikā* (heroine)? In an insightful essay called “Real Men and Ideal Women: The Construction of Gender in the *Aṣṭayāmalilā*,” A. Whitney Sanford demonstrates the ways in which

bhaktas use the constructions of femininity depicted in the *padas* and *līlās* as models for arousing *bhāva* for Kṛṣṇa. They depict paradigmatic visions of the feminine, and *bhaktas* can refine their approach using these stylized modes of girls and women. These feisty *gopīs* provide a variety of models for the *bhaktas*. (Sanford 1997, 178)

A similar approach to the conscious *uses* of female models is what I see going on at Kuchipudi. However, in this case, Sanford's later claim that such models are "clearly presumed to be left in the realm of the ideal and are not to be enacted in the so-called real world" does not hold true (ibid., 180). Unlike the clandestine *gopīs* who leave their husbands and families and "violate almost every conceivable social norm to meet with Kṛṣṇa" (ibid., 180), Satyabhāmā is a proper wife, and therefore, I argue that *Bhāmākalāpam* performances articulate *dharmic* models of womanhood that clearly *are* meant for the "real world." Kuchipudi performances of womanhood belong to the realm of what Peggy Phelan calls "representational visibility" – spectacles where "the real is read through the representational and the representational through the real" (Phelan 1993, 2). I believe that in these performances, the image of Satyabhāmā is to be likened to that of a real woman, and that real women are interpreted as having some kind of relationship to Satyabhāmā. Once, during our detailed discussions of the *devadāsī* heritage of the East Godavari district, Nataraja Ramakrishna, a historian and teacher of dance said, "Satyabhāmā is the typical dominant Telugu wife. Her image is taken from the real ways in which Telugu households are often run [sic]."

Conclusions

Gynemimetic performance in South India represented by the Brahmin artists at Kuchipudi serves a pedagogical or didactic function. The modality of *strī-veṣam* ("guise of a woman") creates and disseminates images of archetypal femininity. Many upper-caste Telugu women have told me that they would be inspired by the performances of men who played female roles in the performances of the early Telugu theatre companies. As with the performances of the Marathi actor Bal Gandharva in the early 1900s (Hansen 1999, 135), upper-class Telugu women would often impersonate the feminine mannerisms, attire and speech of leading male performers.

What then distinguishes the Kuchipudi *Bhāmākalāpam* from other Satyabhāmā performance traditions? The primary differences relate to the enforcement of upper-

caste ideology towards women, on the one hand, and the articulation and exploration of *bhakti* theology, on the other. Satyabhāmā here is framed mainly as a *pativratā* who practices modesty (*lajjā, siggu*), and she usually repents for her “transgressions” by pining for Kṛṣṇa (as seen in the letter-writing sequence)³⁸. In the Kuchipudi tradition, as in the epics and Purāṇic texts examined in chapter one, several of the same motifs of vanity, pride, and jealousy are juxtaposed with Satyabhāmā’s *pativratā* qualities. The gifting of the *jaḍa* (braid ornament) by Kṛṣṇa, Satyabhāmā’s inability to utter her husband’s name, and the importance attached to the symbolism of the *jaḍa* and nose-ornament offer ample evidence of Satyabhāmā’s role as an epitome of auspicious yet sexually-controlled wifehood, but her vanity and pride in the *praveśa daruvu* and her jealousy toward Rukmiṇī as seen in the letter-writing scene present a contradiction in identity. However, for the Kuchipudi artists, this is resolved by the injection of *bhakti* into the narrative. As the archetypal devotee, Satyabhāmā is allowed to rebuke her lover-God (*nindā-stuti*), even though she knows that he is omnipotent. The entire situation becomes transformed into a *līlā* (divine play). Kṛṣṇa is merely “playing” with Satyabhāmā. In the words of Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma, Satyabhāmā’s ultimate union with her lover-God will only take place “when she abandons her vices, her *ahaṃkāra*.”

¹ It is likely that most of the Brahmin families in this *agrahāram* (Brahmin settlement) were *vaidiki* Brahmins. *Smārtas* in Andhra fall under two distinct groups, *vaidiki* and *niyogi*. *Vaidiki* branches of this community were traditionally associated with temples, while *niyogi smārtas* were bureaucratic Brahmins, employed by the king. The clan names of the Kuchipudi Brahmins such as Śāstri, Vedāntam, etc. indicate that they are *vaidiki smārtas*. For details on the rituals of *vaidiki* Brahmins in the Godavari delta, see Knipe (1997).

² Most scholars mention a document called the “Machupalli Kaifiat,” an eighteenth century land-grant document. This document contains a reference to a village called Kuchipudi, traces its antiquity back to the year 1145 CE, and notes that its residents are descended from the Kāśyapa *gotra*. However, Arudra opines that the document actually refers to another Kuchipudi village in the Tenali Taluk, Guntur district (Arudra 1994, 238).

³ *Śabdams* are dance compositions that probably date back to the Nāyaka period. According to Sunil Kothari, Mādhavayya took the compositions of Meḷaṭṭūr Kāśināthayya (1684-1712) to Kuchipudi village from Tañjāvūr (Kothari 2001, 155). The compositions of Kāśināthayya were popular in the *devadāsī* repertoire of the Tañjāvūr court dancers until the early part of the twentieth century. Kothari makes specific reference to Kāśināthayya’s composition called *maṇḍūka śabdam* travelling from Tañjāvūr to

Kuchipudi. This same *śabdam* is reproduced (or rather “documented”) in Kaṅkaimuttupillai’s Tamil work *Naṭanāṭi Vāṭṭiya Rañcaṇam*, a record of the dances that survived in the repertoire of the dance-masters (*naṭṭuvaṇārs*) of Tirunelveli in the year 1898. The *śabdam* is to be found on page 39 of this text, under the heading “*telin̄ku maṇṭūkacaptam*.” For details on the compositions of see Kāśināthayya, see Visvanathan (1985).

⁴ For example, Parsi theatre companies also influenced indigenous forms of Tamil theatre in Tamilnadu. Two major Tamil theatre companies were established in Tamilnadu, one by Campanta Mutaliyār in 1891, and another by Caṅkaratās Cuvāmikaḷ in 1910, and these gave rise to the hybrid Tamil theatre genre known as “Special Nāṭakam.” For details see Seizer (1997, 162-63).

⁵ Dharmavaram Ramakrishnamacharyalu and other educated and affluent Brahmin men actively involved in acts of cultural production around this time (Ramakrishnamacharyalu was a lawyer by profession), were also intimately connected with the *kalāvantulu* (*devadāsīs*) of coastal Andhra. In fact, Ramakrishnamacharyalu himself also became famous as a composer of *jāvaḷis* (a *jāvaḷikarta*). See Arudra (1986a, 45).

⁶ For details on *meṭṭu* or “tunes” in classical Karṇāṭak concert music, and the contested “identities” of popular *meṭṭus* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Allen (2000).

⁷ *Prahlāda Caritram* is the story of the child-devotee Prahlāda and his demonic father Hiranyaśipu, who is slain by Viṣṇu-Narasimha. The text by Vedala Tirunārāyaṇācāryalu and Tiruvalikkeli Rāmānujācāryulu as it is performed in Kuchipudi also contains some verses from Bammēra Potana’s fifteenth century *Mahābhāgavatamu* as well as prose passages from another text called *Prahlāda Nāṭaka* written by Dharmavaram Ramakrishnamacharyalu [1858-1912] (Jonnalagadda 1996a, 115-16).

⁸ Lakshminarayana Sastri created a Sanskritized solo invocatory dance called *pūrvaraṅgam* (“preliminaries”, a name taken from the fifth chapter of the *Naṭyaśāstra*), which brought together the introductory verses from the Sanskrit text *Abhinayadarpaṇa*, and the “*gurur brahmā...*” *śloka* from the *gurustotram* found in the Viśvasāra Tantra. This *pūrvaraṅgam* replaced the *meḷaviṃpu* or *sabhākaṭṭu* to the goddess Bālātripurasundarī containing Tantric *bījamantras* (beginning with the words *ambām bhajāmi, hrīm hrīm mahākālī*), which was sung before the night-long dramas in Kuchipudi village until ca. 1940.

Most important, however, was Lakshminarayana Sastri’s adaptation of the *nṛtta* technique of the *kalāvantulu* solo dancers for the creation of the new “Kuchipudi” dance. The technique of pure movement or *nṛtta* in the repertoire of the dance-dramas at Kuchipudi was limited, because the narrative aspects were considered paramount. Sastri developed a system of basic movements (*aḍavusāmu*), which he culled from the *devadāsī* traditions in the Krishna district. He modified the various groups of *aḍavusāmu* prevalent in the repertoire of the Krishna district *kalāvantulus* such as *vāḷaḍavu* and *gupaḍavu* and included these in his choreographies for solo female dancers.

The most characteristic feature of modern Kuchipudi, dancing on the edge of a brass plate while balancing a pot of water on one's head, also has its roots in *devadāsī* performance. Dr. K. Uma Rama Rao, Head of the Dance Department at Telugu University in Hyderabad, considered a historian and *guru* of modern Kuchipudi, has this to say about the dance:

Some of the modernists, who believe in classicism look at this item as mere acrobatics...The special and attractive feature...of this dance was the artist exhibiting the intricate footwork and body movements with a pail of water on the head and feet balanced on the sharp edges of the brass plate. In the spiritual aspect of Kuchipudi dance, this is 'yoga' and meditation. We could conclude that whatever Kuchipudi artists performed, it was with a devotional fervor, leading to the union of *jivatma* and *paramatma* (Rama Rao 1992, 50-51).

Until the 1930s, the dance on the brass plate while balancing water on one's head was extremely popular during the wedding performances of the *kalāvantula* women. It was an integral part of the *mejuvāṇi* repertoire, which had no other purpose than to entertain, much like the vegetable, chicken and kite dances found in the rites-of-passage (*saṃskāra*) repertoire of the *devadāsīs* of Tamilnadu (Kersenboom 1987; Meduri 1996). Sastri took *gītams* (short musical compositions) from the Third Book of the Sanskrit text *Śrī Kṛṣṇalīlātaraṅginī* and choreographed the "plate dance" with this religious text as a conceptual frame. The secular, popular traditions of the *devadāsī* were thus re-invented in the subtle language of spiritual idealism.

⁹ Rao introduced the recitation of four *nāṇḍi śloka*s (invocatory verses) from chapter five of the *Naṭyaśāstra* in the presentation of Kuchipudi dance-dramas. According to Vedantam Parvatisam, the senior-most living artist from Kuchipudi, the *nāṇḍi* of the pre-modern Kuchipudi dramas consisted of a *saṃvāda-daruvu* (dialogue-song) between the *naṭi* and *sūtradhārī*.

¹⁰ These images, I was told, were recently commissioned, and the portraits of Siddhendra were modelled after those of Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha and Kṣetrayya.

¹¹ Acharyalu and Sarabhai 1992, 7-10.

¹² A brilliant translation of this portion of the *Āmukta-mālyada* has recently been done by Narayana Rao and Shulman (2002, 252-65).

¹³ For discussions of Bhāgavata Meḷa Nāṭakam, see Jones (1963); Iyer (1969) and Ranganathan (1982).

¹⁴ I am well aware that much of this emphasis could simply be symptomatic of the "post-revival" Neo-Vedāntic discourses about the nexus between religion and the arts that have affected all the performing arts in post-Independence India. However, many *Bhāmākalāpam* texts and performative exegeses of such texts in the *tūrupu* tradition make clear references to *bhakti*, and so I treat this as a somewhat indigenous part of the

premodern tradition at Kuchipudi village. See Meduri (1996), Allen (1997) and O'Shea (2001) for details on the strategic uses of the *bhakti* allegory in the representation and transmogrification of South Indian performing arts, c. 1920-1950.

¹⁵ Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma, Kuchipudi Village, July 21, 1995.

¹⁶ For details on the interpretation of Rādhā and her *sakhī* in the Gauḍīya tradition see Haberman (1988, 81-86).

¹⁷For analyses of the *Rāmlīlā* see Lutgendorf (1994) and Sax (1990), for the *Pāṇḍavalīlā* see Sax (1991), for *Kṛṣṇalīlā* see Hawley (1981) and for *araiyar cēvai* see Narayanan (1994).

¹⁸ Until recently, Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma was known for his masterful representations of Uṣā in this drama, which were considered only second to his portrayal of Satyabhāmā. Representations of the Uṣā-Aniruddha narrative also find prominent representation in the literary canon of *prabandha* literature in Telugu, continuing well into the time of the Maratha kings of Tanjavur. N. Visvanathan, former Telugu Pandit at Sarasvati Mahal Library, Tanjavur, has recently produced a critical edition of a Marathi *Uṣā Parinayamu*, attributed to King Pratāpasimha himself, preserved in a Telugu character manuscript, which he calls a Marathi "*bhāgavata meḷa*" script. See *Uṣā Parinaya Nāṭaka*, ed. N. Visvanathan (2000). The version performed at Kuchipudi village is one attributed to one Renduchintala Chidambara Kavi (early nineteenth century?) who is said to have lived most of his life in Palnadu (Guntur district).

¹⁹ Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma, Kuchipudi Village, July 21, 1995.

²⁰The *amba stuti* ["Hymn to the Mother"] begins with the words *amba parāku devi parāku mammelu mā sārādāmba parāku* || It contains the name of the village in the eleventh stanza: *mūḍu mutrulaku mūlamaina kūcipūḍilo vēlasina bāla parāku* || See *Kūcipūḍi Bhāmā Kalāpamu*, ed. Vedantam Parvatisam Sarma, pp. 8-9.

²¹This is largely an improvised monologue. I have not come across a printed edition of the Kuchipudi *Bhāmākalāpam* that contains the *jaḍa vṛttāntam* as it is known. See below for details on the *jaḍa vṛttāntam*.

²² According to C.R. Acharyalu, the *vacanam* "*anuvamḍaga satyabhāma naṁdure nannun*" is repeated several times and eventually sung in *miśracāpu tāla* (a rhythm cycle of seven beats), at which point the curtain is removed and Satyabhāmā dances the *daruvu* "*bhāmane satyabhāmane*".

²³ The term used here is *jaṅgama-devara* and actually alludes to Śiva. The *jaṅgamas* are the Vīraśaiva followers of Basava. The word *jaṅgama* literally means "mobile" and is the term that technically refers to the *liṅga* worn by Vīraśaiva devotees around their necks. Initially, the term was applied to individual ascetics and later came to refer to communal identity (Narayana Rao 1990, 8, 25, *passim*).

²⁴ The word *ceñcu* refers to a group of tribal persons found mainly in Andhra but also in the areas bordering on Karnataka and Orissa. They are a patrilineal, exogamous hunting and gathering tribe. They are Hindu and are recognized as being part of the *varṇa* system. Their language is also known as *ceñcu* and has a close affinity to other Dravidian languages, although many *ceñcu* people speak Telugu today.

²⁵ The Telugu expression “*abba!*” is similar in usage to the Tamil “*ayyo!*”. It is an interjection expressing grief, astonishment or admiration. Literally, the word *abba* means father (Brown 1903, 67), so an English colloquial equivalent might be something like “Oh Brother!”.

²⁶ Though Satyabhāmā tells Mādhavī that he is Viṣṇu, she does not say “Kṛṣṇa.”

²⁷ *oyamma, strilaku samastābharaṇamulunanu muṅgaralenicu avanniyu vṛdhāguni |*

²⁸ Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma, Kuchipudi Village, July 21, 1995. The expression *divya-maṅgala vighraha*, used commonly in the Śrīvaiṣṇava theological context to refer to Viṣṇu’s nature, is also used by Satyabhāmā in the Kuchipudi Bhāmākalāpam in the *patra-lekha*, or letter writing sequence.

²⁹ An example of this type of libretto was sung for me by Maddula Venkataratnam in Manepalli village on February 16, 2002. The text outlined Venkataratnam’s lineage and also contained a condensed *sthala-māhātmya* (local Purāṇa) of the Kṛṣṇa-Veṅugopāla temple in Tatipaka (West Godavari district) to which she was dedicated. This libretto was composed for her by the late Gaddam Subbarayudu Sastri in the early part of the twentieth century. It was used to identify her (Venkataratnam) with Satyabhāmā (... *veṅkataratnamanuperu velayucuṇḍi satyabhāmākalāpambu saravitoḍa...*) for the duration of the performance.

³⁰ Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma, Kuchipudi Village, July 21, 1995. The same story was also narrated to me by Vedantam Parvatisam, Kuchipudi Village, July 22, 1995. See also Rama Rao (1992, 36).

³¹ All references to the text of *Bhāmākalāpam* have been taken from recording of the oral performances by Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma in 1995, and C.R. Acharyalu in 1997. References to variant versions of the text as per Vedantam Parvatisam’s printed edition are indicated with page numbers.

³² *vidyāyauvanarūpādaiśvaryādatha dhanāgamādvāpi |*
garvaḥ khalu nīcanām dṛṣṭyaṅgavicāraṇaiḥ kāryaḥ || (7.67)
Nāṭyaśāstram, ed. Batuka Natha Sharma and Baladeva Upadhyaya. Varanasi: Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan, 1980, p. 90.

³³ *bhāmane satyabhāmane vayyāri muddula satyabhāme ||*

³⁴ *attahasamu jesi surula natte gelaci parijatapu |*
cettu decci nadu veratanu gattiga natimcukunna ||
From *Kūcipūdi Bhāmā Kalāpamu* ed. Vedantam Parvatisam Sarma, p. 18.

³⁵ *aṭṭahāsamu jesi narakāsuruni baṭṭi śaramu drumci ||*
ibid., p. 18.

³⁶ *bhāmane padiyāru veḷa komalulaṁdarilona |*

³⁷ *kūrimi satrājittu kūturaiyiṁdarilona |*

³⁸ The letter-writing sequence, and many other such features I have discussed in this chapter are common to all the *kalāpam* performance traditions, including the *devadāsī Bhāmākalāpam*. However, the degree to which Satyabhāmā longs for Kṛṣṇa and the particular imaging of this as an apology or repentance is unique to Kuchipudi.

Conclusions

Making, Unmaking, Remaking: Performance as a Key Modality of Hindu Religious Culture

In its most general sense, performance can be characterized as serving hermeneutical, pedagogical, and aesthetic functions. In this way, performance can be seen as a constitutive event. Hermeneutics, from the Greek verb meaning “to interpret,” refers to a process of making, unmaking and remaking meaning. As developed by Wilhelm Dilthey, the concept of the “hermeneutic circle” implies that one cannot understand the whole without understanding its parts, but the parts rely on the structural context of the whole for their meaning in what appears like a circle. From the perspective of performance culture, particularly in its distinctive South Indian expressions, we can see more clearly what might be signified by the term “hermeneutic circle.” In performance, understanding develops through the reciprocal interplay of word, sound and image. Repetitions, oral and corporeal expression, and improvisation intensify, augment and clarify meaning. In this sense, South Indian performance can itself be seen as a hermeneutic process. In our discussions of the *devadāsī* performative exegesis called *sandhi-viccheda sañcāri* (lit. creative wandering based on the splicing of phrases) in Chapter Four, we observed how a single line of text can be opened up to reveal a multiplicity of varied meanings through improvisation.

Expertise is often hereditary, and it is this “system of human experts” (Kersenboom 1995) that provides for the transmission and refinement of skill that is central to performance. Oral transmission (usually from teacher to student) provides the core framework for a given performance, for example, the basic melody for a song, the key gestures for the literal interpretation of a text through *abhinaya* (mimesis), or the central monologue for a theatrical performance. In performance, this fixed yet extremely flexible core is manipulated, transformed or “remade” using various forms of improvisation. Fixity and improvisation, training and performance are thus correlatives. A reciprocity of ideas exists between sender and receiver, teacher and student, text and its interpreter.

Performance also has a pedagogical function. As we have seen clearly in Chapter Six, performance culture around the figure of Satyabhāmā promotes cultural values (as in the case of Brahmanical norms) but also integrates the values of other castes because it addresses the need of society as a whole to integrate diverse communities. But various castes utilize the fundamental flexibility of the cultural pool for their own performance hermeneutics, which in the case of the lower castes such as the *kammari* (goldsmith caste) artists who perform Tūrupu Bhāgavatam might even satirize the values of the upper-castes altogether. This commentary, too, is part of the hermeneutic circle.

As we saw in Chapter Three, performing communities in Andhra that have been discussed in this study have included Brahmins, *devadāsīs*, goldsmiths and Dalits. Accordingly, a range of caste groups participate in the creative processes of making and remaking culture. In the case of the Cindu Bhāgavatam (*māḍiga*) and *kalāvantulu* communities, caste and performing expertise contribute significantly to the creation and representation of identity.

Another dimension of performance relates to its aesthetic value. The pedagogical component of performance is purposeful; it serves as a cultural conduit. But, pleasure and sheer enjoyment are also important – play is something that is central to human nature. As Richard Schechner observes, “A coherent theory of play would assert that play and ritual are complementary, ethologically based behaviors which in humans continued undiminished throughout life...play creates its own permeable boundaries and realms...” (Schechner 1993, 26). Because of the strong component of play in *Bhāmākalāpam* or *devadāsī* court repertoire, which involves the interaction of artist and audience, such performances become constitutive events.

In my discussions of Satyabhāmā in Sanskrit texts, vernacular texts and performance traditions, I have established her figure as representing a mediating category between the *pativrata* and the *veśyā*. Although *pāṭivratya* is the ostensibly preferred ideal (as a Brahmanical norm), Satyabhāmā is loved because she represents the human face of the norm. Her foibles and turbulent emotions are at the centre of her character. This makes her an archetype for the ordinary woman. Given her enormous popularity, I surmise that women could more easily see themselves in her than in the dutiful perfection of a Sītā and yet still be inspired by the concept of the good wife. If that

was a bit beyond the pale for some groups of women, such as the *kalāvantulu* who were not formally wives (although their long term relationship with one male partner was certainly analogous and suggests they too valued “wifely” loyalty), they could also be inspired by the preeminently strong and willful character of Satyabhāmā. She served as an archetype for their own position in society as public figures, artistic experts at the heart of expressive culture.

Men are also drawn to the figure of Satyabhāmā. As one informant noted, “She represents the typical dominant Telugu wife.” In addition, upper-caste men’s relationships with *devadāsīs*, who in many ways represented characteristics that Satyabhāmā embodies, might have something to do with this. On the other side, male artists can virtually *become* Satyabhāmā.

Performances help define the historical moment through its reworking of cultural data. They represent dynamic living processes that contribute to cultural vitality in general and religious experience in particular. The Kuchipudi tradition provides a concrete illustration of this principle. The Kuchipudi performers are *smārta* Brahmins with clear Vaiṣṇava leanings. Much of the imagery embedded in their performance culture is akin to Śrīvaiṣṇava religious ideology. Though no concrete historical links to this effect can be established given the present state of research, it might be useful to think about some of these. As I noted in my discussion of the Kuchipudi *Bhāmākalāpam*, Satyabhāmā can also be read as a *bhakta* or devotee of God. The myth of Siddhendrayogi’s identification with Satyabhāmā is reminiscent of the uses of the feminine psychology as a central *modus vivendi* in early Tamil *bhakti* and Śrīvaiṣṇava exegetical contexts (Young 1995, 185). Brahmin performers in Kuchipudi see the performance as *adhyātmika-alāṅkāra śāstra* (philosophically-oriented aesthetic expression). As such, it can be understood as analogous to the Śrīvaiṣṇava poet’s expositions of *anubhava* (descriptive “enjoyments” of the forms and qualities of God) (Hopkins 2002). Indeed, other key Śrīvaiṣṇava ideas find place in the Kuchipudi *Bhāmākalāpam* including those of *prapatti* (surrender) and, of course, the modality of *nāyaka-nāyakī bhāva* (the emotionalism of the lover-beloved relationship). However, in-depth explorations of these links await further investigation.

On the female side, the women of the Madanagopālasvāmi temple in Ballipadu whom I examined in Chapter Four see themselves as wives of Kṛṣṇa. Aside from the ritual duties of these women, their role as artist was also deeply influenced by the devotional ethos. Many of the *nāyakas* (heroes) of *jāvalis* and other compositions of the court and public repertoire were male deities, most often Kṛṣṇa. Having said this, we must also note how performance can serve to demarcate boundaries or mediate between spheres of experience. *Devadāsī* involvement in temple processions at Ballipadu, for instance, was limited to performing while the deity halts or breaks the procession. This time is set aside for “entertainment.” It is distinct from the imperial act of the god surveying his domain, which is symbolized by the procession. Yet it is precisely this oscillation from one domain to another, this fluidity mediated by structure, so characteristic of performance in South India, that allows it to speak for religion, culture and history.

Performance culture focused on Satyabhāmā is a window on the massive changes in Indian society from the late medieval period through the twentieth century. This thesis has been able to trace the history of performance cultures through three major dynasties into the modern period, and the resultant classification of genres has helped bring some order to the plethora of Satyabhāmā-oriented vernacular texts. This, in turn, serves as a heuristic tool for identifying cultural continuity and change.

In my delineation of the four major genres of Telugu Purāṇa, court poetry (*prabandha*), *yakṣagāna* and *kalāpam*, Satyabhāmā has morphed into the *vīra vanitā* or virile woman, on the one hand, and the archetypal *nāyikā* (heroine), on the other. During the Nāyaka period, Satyabhāmā enters a new cultural domain marked by the signs of sensual enjoyment (*bhoga*), and it is in this culture that we see the development of texts similar to the *Bhāmākalāpam* texts in the form that we presently encounter them. Representations of *śṛṅgāra* (love-oriented or erotic sentiments) are key markers of courtly and religious culture. There is a distinct cultural shift here in terms of a focus on the actualization of the eros of Vaiṣṇava devotion. The court serves as a testing ground for cultural experiments – the clearest example being the conflation of the role of the temple-woman with that of the courtesan. In the South Indian context, we have traced some of the shifts in the perceptions of womanhood in literary and performative contexts, where multiple roles for women are represented.

Another clear porthole through which to examine how historical processes are informed by aesthetics is the transformation of the *kalāvantulu*. In colonial South India, the performative visibility of *devadāsī meḷams* was de-legitimized through a shift rooted in the cultural incorporation of Victorian values and a re-awakening of Brahmanical idioms of purity. This phase of the “aesthetic purification” of the emergent nation results in a massive change in the performance culture of the *kalāvantulu*. Their traditional patronage structures collapse, they lose their audiences, and, more poignantly, their very identities are brought into question. These types of changes, symbolized by shifting attitudes towards the meanings embedded in performance, contribute to the homogenizing of images of womanhood under the aegis of a slightly re-worked ideal of *pativrata*.

To conclude, I posit that performance is a core institution of Hindu religious culture. Granted “institution” is an odd word to use here, because of the acephalic characterizations of the radically decentralized nature of Hinduism with its lack of formal bureaucracy or common leaders. However, Hinduism does have its own kind of invisible institutions and structures that function at several levels and are connected through dynamic networks. The performing troupes or *meḷams* of Andhra reflect the peripatetic nature of Hinduism. Continuity and dynamism are provided by the movement between courts and temples as well as public and private spheres. The underlying “institution” of performance, then, is one of the invisible yet central structures of Hindu religious culture. Performances arise but are ephemeral; they perpetually lapse in and out of the cultural pool, simultaneously drawing from it and nourishing it. This is the dynamic of performance that encompasses processes of making, unmaking, and remaking always in new, ever more creative ways.

APPENDIX 1

Kṛṣṇa as Rājagopāla or Rājamannār

Although it is extremely problematic to date this development, another source of the “popularization” of Satyabhāmā comes from iconography. In the Telugu-speaking regions, there is a conspicuous absence of Satyabhāmā icons in temples until after the Nāyaka period. But she does appear in some Tamil temples. We will discuss this curious situation of the presence and absence of Satyabhāmā in iconographic traditions. I begin with a cursory look at South Indian Pāñcarātra texts and Cōla imperial culture in the period from roughly the ninth to twelfth centuries to examine the evolution of the representation of Kṛṣṇa and his consorts from early standing images of Viṣṇu called *bhogasthānakamurti* in the Āgamas. Images of Kṛṣṇa and his two principal consorts emerge in Cōla art from the eleventh century onwards, and usually represent Kṛṣṇa in a peculiar iconic form called Rājagopāla (or in Tamil, Rājamannār, or simply Mannanār), where he is flanked by Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā. This image becomes very popular in the Cōla period and beyond, especially during the Nāyaka rule in Tanjavur.

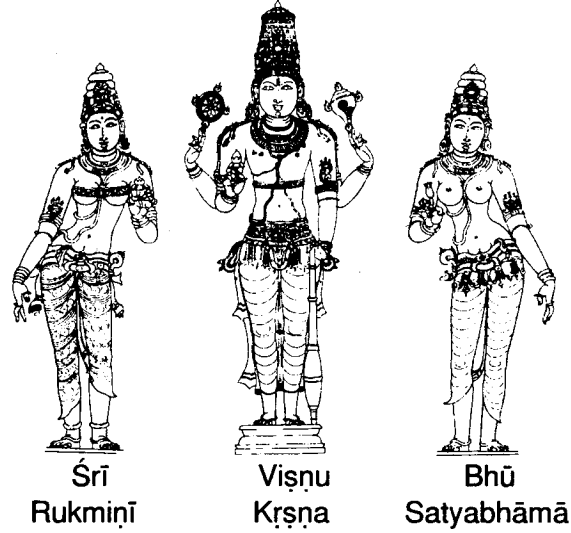
Kṛṣṇa as Rājagopāla or Rājamannār

The presence of Satyabhāmā in images and texts from South India is inextricably linked to a peculiar iconographic conception of Kṛṣṇa, variously known by his Tamil names Rājamannār or Mannanār (‘King’), and Ceṇṭalaṅkāra (‘Adorned with the Cowherd’s Crook [*ceṇṭu*]’), or the Sanskrit equivalent, Rājagopāla (‘Royal Cowherd’). From roughly the eleventh century CE, the imperial Cōlas begin to set up these image of Kṛṣṇa as Mannanār flanked by his consorts, Rukmiṇī (to his right) and Satyabhāmā (to his left).

This image of Kṛṣṇa flanked by his consorts mirrors much earlier standing images of Viṣṇu flanked by Śrī-Lakṣmī and Bhūmi, which Gopinatha Rao classifies as ‘Bhogasthānakamūrti’¹ (1914, 81-83). These were likely the conceptual prototype for the image of Kṛṣṇa as Mannanār. This idea of the Lord surrounded by his two consorts (*upaya nācciyār* in Tamil) eventually becomes a ritual imperative in the form of bronze *karmabimbas*² or *utsava-mūrtis* (processional images) throughout Vaiṣṇava temples in South India.

Some South Indian Pāñcarātrāgama texts dating from roughly the ninth to twelfth centuries in particular refer to such images³. In addition, though the esoteric theology of Pāñcarātrāgama recognizes three consorts of Viṣṇu (Śrī, Bhū and Nīlā>Nappinnai⁴), there is clearly an emphasis on Śrī and Bhūmi as the two primary consorts to be represented in image form.

Table 1: *Configuration of the South Indian Bhogasthānakamūrti*



Pāñcarātra texts call this type of an image (with Viṣṇu flanked by his consorts, devotees and/or other beings) *bahubera* (“many icons”), as opposed to representations of Viṣṇu appearing alone called *ekabera* (Smith 1969, 5). When this configuration is reworked as Rukmiṇī-Kṛṣṇa-Satyabhāmā, Satyabhāmā is identified with Bhūmi. The reworked forms of the Bhogasthānakamūrtis as Rukmiṇī-Kṛṣṇa-Satyabhāmā are mentioned in both early Pāñcarātra⁵- and Vaikhānasāgamas, as well as in Sanskrit Purāṇic texts dealing with iconography such as the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*.⁶ As Jan Gonda has noted, Viṣṇu’s association with Bhūmi has a long and complex history (1969, 125-26) that we cannot explore fully here. Among the earliest images depicting Viṣṇu and Bhūmi are those related to Varāha’s rescue of the earth after slaying the demon Hiranyākṣa (the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* version [3.17-19] of this narrative is the most popular). According to some accounts, Viṣṇu’s contact with Bhūmi creates the demon Naraka, who is later slain by Bhūmi herself in the form of Satyabhāmā. Most Rāmāyaṇa traditions link Sītā to Bhūmi, while the South Indian Śrīvaiṣṇava hagiographic tradition links the ninth-century

female saint Āṇṭāl to Bhūmi. Other than a few stray references in very late Vaiṣṇava Upaniṣads such as the *Kṛṣṇopaniṣat*⁷ and a commentary on the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*⁸, there are not, to my knowledge, any references explicitly connecting Satyabhāmā to Bhūmi in either the Pāñcarātra or Vaikhānasāgamas, nor in the writings of the Ālvārs, nor in Cōla period inscriptions. At this point, other than to suggest that Cōla imperial expansion might have influenced the popularity of “royal” images of deities such as Maṇṇanār, it is difficult to say exactly how or when images such as the Bhogasthānakamūrtis were reinterpreted as Rukmiṇī-Kṛṣṇa-Satyabhāmā images. Regardless though, by the eleventh century CE, this form of Kṛṣṇa is known in Cōla period inscriptions as Maṇṇanār (‘King’), and some of the temples in which such images are found are often given the name *tulāpārattalī*, or the place where the *tulābhāra* ritual (ritual of donating offerings in the amount equal to one’s weight to the temple) takes place (Champakalakshmi 1981, 141).

The origins of the unique posture of the image of Kṛṣṇa as Maṇṇanār are unknown, though Vidya Dehejia suggests that the image of the standing Kṛṣṇa, with one arm resting on Satyabhāmā to his left (Fig. 28) may have been taken from earlier Śaiva images of Śiva standing against the bull Nandi in a form known as Vṛṣabhārūḍhamūrti (Dehejia 1989, 60)⁹. In one of the earliest stone specimens of this image (Fig. 29) Kṛṣṇa is depicted with only one consort, which some have suggested may be Rukmiṇī (Gopinatha Rao 1914, 204). However, given her placement to the left of Kṛṣṇa, and the trace of what appears to be a *yajñopavīta* (sacred thread) across her chest,¹⁰ it is perhaps more likely that this is in fact Satyabhāmā.

Clearly, one of the most important Cōla period monuments to house this image is the temple in the town of Mannargudi (Tanjavur district), named after this form of Kṛṣṇa, dating to the reign of the King Kulottuṅga I (c. 1070-1122). The immovable image (or *mūlasthāna mūrti*) at Mannargudi is known by the name Vāsudeva, and yet it is really the processional image of Maṇṇanār after which the temple is named. In addition to this major centre, smaller temples such as those in Kattumannarkoyil (South Arcot district) and Mannarkoyil (Tirunelveli district) bear the name (‘Maṇṇār’) of this deity. The bronze processional images of Kṛṣṇa as Maṇṇanār become fairly common in Vaiṣṇava temples throughout the Tamil country after the twelfth century, and today the most popular of

these is the one housed in the Mannargudi temple, considered unique because of the dancing bells worn on his feet (Fig. 30).

The significance of the image of Kṛṣṇa as Maṇṇanār to our discussion of Satyabhāmā can most clearly be seen in the Vijayanagara period, then later in Nāyaka-period Tanjavur, when perhaps what we might want to call the “imperial cult of Rājagopāla” (see Fig. 31 for a contemporary representation of Rājagopāla) matures and reaches its apogee. As we saw in Chapter Three, this imperial Nāyaka period cult gives rise to various forms of cultural expressed oriented around Kṛṣṇa as Rājagopāla and his consorts.

¹ Gopinatha Rao evidently takes this term from Vaikhānasa texts. Champakalakshmi employs the same paradigm, distinguishing between *sthānaka* (standing), *āsana* (seated) and *śayana* (reclining) forms. Nowhere are any sources for this paradigm provided. She also notes that the *sthānakamurtis* can be *yogasthānaka* (“standing in the attitude of yoga”), where Viṣṇu is depicted along with sages such as Bhṛgu and Mārkaṇḍeya (along with Bhūmi), and the *bhogasthānaka* (“standing in the attitude of enjoyment”) which we are discussing here (Champakalakshmi 1981, 66-67). Vasudha Narayanan provides a more common list of four major postures of Viṣṇu images corresponding to the four forms of Viṣṇu as per Pāñcarātra tradition (after Narayanan 1985b, 55):

Posture	Form of Viṣṇu
Sitting	<i>para</i> (transcendant)
reclining	<i>vyūha</i> (four primary emanations)
Striding	<i>vibhava</i> or <i>avatāra</i> (“descent forms”)
standing	<i>antaryāmin</i> or <i>hārda</i> (subtle form, inside the hearts of living beings)

The fifth form, *arcā* (“image for worship”), is an embodiment of all the other four, and can be represented in any of the four postures. This five-fold understanding of deity is the way the tradition justifies its name, *pāñcarātra* (*Ahīrbudhnyasaṃhitā*, 11.63b-64a).

² The term *karmabimba* (“image for actions”) is the technical term used in the Pāñcarātra Āgamic context to refer to bronze processional images. *Utsava-mūrti* or *utsavabera* are the terms used in contemporary ritual practice.

³ A detailed description of these is not possible here, but typical examples of Pāñcarātra injunctions for these images include the following (I have translated these from Smith 1969, 183):

devasya dakṣiṇe pārsve lakṣmīm vāme vasundharām | (*Viśvāmitrasaṃhitā*, 22.57a)
To the right side of the Lord [should be] Lakṣmī, and to the left, Vasundharā (Bhūmi)

śrīdakṣiṇe dharā vāme devasya parikalpayet | (Śrīpraśnasamhitā, 14.21a)
Fix Śrī to the right of the Lord and Dharā (Bhūmi) to the left.

⁴ Though it is not possible for us to look into the process that have marginalized representations of the figure of Nappinnai-Nīlā, Hudson (1982), Hardy (1983, 221-25) and Venkatachari (1998) have contributed significantly to the study of this figure. Hudson has suggested her relationship to the goddess Kātyāyanī or Durgā (1982, 258-61). Hardy has clearly established that she is certainly not Rādhā as many earlier scholars had suggested (1983, 221-22). Venkatachari notes that in Tamil textual sources, “Nappinnai is sometimes given even greater importance than Rukmiṇī or Satyabhāmā” (1998, 148). In the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (10.58), Kṛṣṇa wins the hand of King Nagnajit’s daughter Satyā (not to be confused with Satyabhāmā) in marriage, after successfully taming the seven bulls. This myth is generally accepted as a Sanskritized form of earlier Nappinnai myths. Nappinnai is thus brought into the Sanskrit pantheon as Satyā or Nagnajīti, one of Kṛṣṇa’s eight principal wives.

⁵ For example, Smith cites *dhyānas* on Kṛṣṇa from Pāñcarātra texts such as the *Pādmāsamhitā* and *Viṣṇu Tantra* that mention descriptions of Kṛṣṇa with Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā (1969, 153-158).

⁶ *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, 3.85.74-75.

⁷ Kṛṣṇopaniṣat, 15:

dayā sā rohiṇī mātā satyabhāmā dhareti vai |
aghāsuro mahāvyādhiḥ kaliḥ kaṃsaḥ sa bhūpatiḥ ||

⁸ The oldest and perhaps most influential commentary on the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is attributed to Śrīdhara Svāmin (c. 1300-1350). Maheswar Neog notes that in this commentary called *Bhāvārtha-dīpikā*, there is a reference to Satyabhāmā as an incarnation of Bhūmi in the context of the Naraka episode (*Bhāvārtha-dīpikā* 10.59.2 cited in Neog 1965, 203-04).

⁹ Interestingly, the later tradition of depicting the Nāyanārs (Śaiva *bhakti* saints) in the form of bronze images borrows heavily from the earlier Vaiṣṇava bronzes (Dehejia 1988, 59-60). Thus, depictions of the Śaiva saint Cuntaramūrti Nāyanār beginning in the eleventh century and especially those produced between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, look almost exactly like those of Kṛṣṇa as Maṇṇanār. Just as Lakṣmī is identified with Rukmiṇī, and Bhūmi with Satyabhāmā, Cuntaramūrti’s two wives, Caṅkili and Paravai are imaged in the same places as Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā respectively. It is interesting to note that Paravai, Cuntaramūrti’s most beloved wife, is also a temple-woman (*ruttirakannikai*) according to the *Periya Purāṇam* of Cēkkaḷār (Ghose 1996, 212; 233). This parallels the image of Satyabhāmā as Kṛṣṇa’s favourite wife, and in some ways also parallels the depiction of Satyabhāmā as a *devadāsī* among contemporary *kalāvantula* women in coastal Andhra. In addition, just as Satyabhāmā has been singled

out in the Andhra cultural context as opposed to Rukminī, so also Paravai has had independent images built in her honour, whereas Caṅkili has not (Dehejia 1988, 61).

¹⁰ According to Champakalakshmi, one of the distinguishing characteristics of the iconography of Satyabhāmā is the lack of the *kucabandha* (breast band) and the presence of the *yajñopavīta* (1981, 143). Most images of Bhūmi are represented without the *kucabandha* and with a *yajñopavīta* as well.

APPENDIX 2

Satyabhāmā in Mithila, Assam and Bengal

The earliest court dramas dealing specifically with the character of Satyabhāmā come to us from Tirhut (present-day Mithila), in the fourteenth century. Maithili language is thought to have descended from Purbeli Prakrit. Court dramas were popular in this period, and were composed in Sanskrit, strewn with songs in Prakrit. Sometime in the early fourteenth century, a minister-poet in the court of King Harasiṃha of Mithila (c. 1324)¹ named Umāpati Upādhyāya wrote a drama called *Pārijātaḥaraṇa-nāṭaka* (“Drama of the Theft of the Pārijāta Tree”) also known by the name *Nava-pārijāta-maṅgala* (“Auspicious [Songs of the] New Pārijāta”). This work is actually a cluster of twenty-one songs linked together with dialogue in Sanskrit. V. Raghavan has noted the similarity of Umāpati’s work with the later South Indian *yakṣagāna* (Raghavan 1934, 17). Umāpati’s work is subsequently thought to have been an inspiration for the writings of the most famous of Maithili poets, Vidyāpati Ṭhākura.² In Umāpati’s *Pārijātaḥaraṇa-nāṭaka*, then, we have the first attempt to capture the story of the *pārijāta* tree in dramatic form.

Another important dramatic re-configuration of Satyabhāmā comes from sixteenth-century Assam. Śaṅkaradeva (1499-1568), a radical Vaiṣṇava devotee, went to great lengths to reform Vaiṣṇava spiritual practice, even to the extent of denouncing image-worship.³ However, somewhat ironically, Śaṅkaradeva is also remembered for his emphasis on aesthetic experience and spirituality. Śaṅkaradeva is the creator of an Assamese form of drama called *aṅkīyā nāṭ* (also known today as *sattriya*). The word *aṅka* in Sanskrit means “act” and its singular form (in the word *aṅkīyā*) indicates that Śaṅkaradeva’s plays are short, one-act plays. They are not written in Sanskrit, but in Brajabuli (also called Brajāvalībhāṣā), a poetic language that Śaṅkaradeva created, which eventually became popular in parts of Bengal, Assam, Nepal and Bihar.

Śaṅkaradeva is accredited with the composition of seven major dramas: *Cihna-yātrā* (“Procession with Paintings”, the narrative content of which is unknown); *Rāma-vijaya* (“The Victory of Rāma”, based on the *Rāmāyaṇa*); *Kālī-damana-nāṭa* (“The Subjugation of the Serpent Kālīya”); *Patnī-prasāda-nāṭa* (“The Favours Shown by Kṛṣṇa to the wives [of Brāhmaṇas]”); *Rāsa-kṛīḍā* (“Kṛṣṇa’s Love Play”); *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa-nāṭa*

("The Abduction of Rukmiṇī"); and, *Pārijāta-haraṇa-nāṭa* ("The Theft of the Pārijāta Tree").

Āṅkīyā nāṭ continue to be performed today in the traditional *sattras* or Vaiṣṇava monasteries of Assam. Farley Richmond, who studied *āṅkīyā nāṭ* performances in Nowgong and Puranigudam Parghat villages in 1970, notes that in very few performances are the female characters given importance. The one exception he notes is the *Pārijāta-haraṇa-nāṭa*:

More unusual is Śaṅkaradeva's *Pārijāta-haraṇa-nāṭa* (The Theft of the Flowering Pārijāta Tree). In it, the female roles also occupy an importance equal to that of the male. The play centers on the jealousy of Satyabhāmā, one of Kṛṣṇa's wives. Satyabhāmā thinks that Kṛṣṇa loves Rukmiṇī more than he does her because he has given Rukmiṇī a beautiful, fragrant flower from the heavenly *pārijāta* tree. To satisfy Satyabhāmā that she holds an equal if not greater place in his affections, Kṛṣṇa agrees to bring her the whole tree as a gift. Obviously the incident provides ample opportunity for an actress to show the strong contrasts in the heroine's temperament and Śaṅkaradeva has not hesitated to write these into her part (Richmond 1974, 162 n. 20).

Śaṅkaradeva's plays, however, were not meant to be enacted by "actresses" at all. Instead, the Vaiṣṇava monks of the monasteries enact the plays, and these monk-actors are known by the name *bhāvarīyā* (one who can represent another)⁴. They present the dramas to the accompaniment of a large drum called *khol* and two sets of cymbals called *patitāl* and *borātāl*. This is a living tradition that continues into the present in *sattras* in various parts of Assam, although today a reworked form of the dance is also presented by young female dancers on metropolitan stages throughout Northern India.

The full title of Śaṅkaradeva's drama is *Naraka-vadha-pārijāta-haraṇa-līlā-nāṭaka* ("The Drama Depicting the Deeds of the Slaying of Naraka and the Theft of the Pārijāta"). As in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, Kṛṣṇa's slaying of Naraka is sequentially linked to the *pārijāta* episode in Śaṅkaradeva's drama. The classic study of Assamese Vaiṣṇavism continues to be Maheswar Neog's *Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Assam*. In a section devoted to the literary works of Śaṅkaradeva, Neog notes the influence of the *Harivaṃśa* on the *Pārijāta-haraṇa-nāṭa* (Neog 1965, 203). In Śaṅkaradeva's text, we do not find any narrative innovations in terms of the *pārijāta* episode (it is nearly the same as the *Harivaṃśa* version), but it is significant that this is

the only one of the *arīkīyā nāṭ* performances where room is accorded to the representation of female characters, specifically through the figure of Satyabhāmā.

Another major source of Satyabhāmā-oriented drama comes from the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava context of the sixteenth century. In the Prakrit and Sanskrit drama *Lalita-mādhava* of Rūpa Gosvāmī (c. 1500-1550), Satyabhāmā is completely identified with Rādhā, and throughout the play, the two names are used interchangeably. Satyabhāmā makes her appearance, in fact, as an incarnation of Rādhā. The setting of the play moves from the union of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana to their separation in Navavṛndāvana (New Vṛndāvana), where Rādhā has been born as Satyabhāmā, the daughter of King Satrājīt. Using the familiar Indic rhetorical device of rebirth, Rūpa recasts the *dramatis personae* of Vṛndāvana (Candravatī [Rādhā's sister], Rādhā and the other *gopīs*) as Kṛṣṇa's traditional partners in Dvārakā (Rukmiṇī, Satyabhāmā and the other queens). By Rūpa Gosvāmī's time, the figure of Satyabhāmā is already well-known from Sanskrit, Prakrit, Brajabuli and even Telugu sources. His linking of the character of Satyabhāmā with that of Rādhā is significant; in a sense, it legitimates Satyabhāmā in the context of the emergent Vaiṣṇava theology of erotic, devotional aesthetics (what Rūpa himself calls *madhura bhaktirasa*). However, this legitimization is never complete.

Satyabhāmā, unlike the Rādhā of the Gauḍīya tradition, does not become a goddess. Though later imaged as a model devotee, Satyabhāmā does not become the subject of an independent "theology" in the same way as Rādhā does. The Gauḍīya and more esoteric Sahajīya traditions use terms such as *hlādinī śakti* ("power of bliss") to refer to Rādhā. As June McDaniel clearly notes, the Gauḍīya theological stance on Rādhā as Śakti is almost Tantric, or Śāktādvaitic:

Rādhā is Krishna's power of bliss, his *hlādinī-śakti*, in its fullest form as *pūrṇa-śakti*. By means of *hlādinī-śakti*, Krishna is bliss itself, becomes blissful, and causes bliss in the devotee. This is the most powerful *śakti*, which incorporates both the energy of existence (*saṁdhinī śakti*) and the knowledge or consciousness of existence (*saṁvit śakti*) within it... Rādhā and Krishna are both different and non-different, like flame and fire. However, together they form a whole, and Krishna without Rādhā is imperfect (*apūrṇa*). (McDaniel 2000, 132)

Sushil Kumar De also notes that in terms of literary style, the *Lalita-mādhava* contains a high level of descriptive content, but very little narrative action. As in the Telugu

kalāpam texts, “comparatively little happens, though much is said” (De 1961, 590). The reason for this is again because Gauḍīya religio-aesthetic texts are primarily meant as literary and theological expositions. They adhere meticulously (and sometimes painstakingly) to tenets of Nāṭyaśāstra and other literary theory. At the same time, their devotional scenes often mirror the long passages describing the devotee (heroine) and the deity (hero) found in texts such as the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* in order to articulate particular theological ideas about the nature of devotion, the nature of God, and soteriological process. As Donna Wulff points out, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava devotees, the traditional enjoyers of Rūpa’s works, are themselves *rasika bhaktas*, or “devotees who are connoisseurs of aesthetics” (1984, 43). She continues,

Rūpa’s theory refers not simply to earthly dramas, but to a cosmic play: the eternal *līlā* of Kṛṣṇa with Rādhā and the other inhabitants of Vṛndāvana. It is in a state of constant absorption in this eternal drama, which is ultimate reality for the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava, that the devotee is to live each day. The subject of Rūpa’s work is thus not primarily aesthetic experience...but rather religious experience in an aesthetic mode, *bhakti* toward the Lord conceived largely through the categories of dramatic analysis (Wulff 1984, 26-27).

Rūpa’s image of Rādhā as Satyabhāmā, then, while legitimating the character of Satyabhāmā as an *aṁśa* (manifestation) of Rādhā, has as its primary goal the elevation of the figure of Rādhā as an aspect of ultimate reality. However, it is a seminal work in the sense that it applies to Satyabhāmā the categories of classical aesthetics. Like Rādhā, Satyabhāmā pines for Kṛṣṇa in archetypal *kāvya* or poetic situations. She is depicted as suffering through love-in-separation (*vipralambha śṛṅgāra*) for much of the play, but even this is framed by the rhetoric of *bhaktirasa* (what Wulff calls “religious experience in an aesthetic mode”). In the later Telugu works beginning in the Vijayanagara period and reaching their high-point in Nāyaka culture, the paradigm has been reversed – aesthetic experience is cast in a religious mode. The courtly culture of the Nāyaka period is rooted in a telos of *bhoga*, “the domain of sensual delight” which has become “feminized and eroticised to an unprecedented degree” (Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam, 1992, 188).

We must also remember that the character of Satyabhāmā/Rādhā in the Gauḍīya texts is created in aesthetic categories in order to facilitate the Gauḍīya adept’s undertaking of a spiritual practice called *rāgānugā bhakti sādhanā*⁵. The Vṛndāvana-līlā

described above is a kind of parallel world, to be imitated or “enacted” by real devotees. In this process of role-playing, the devotee is able to inhabit the world of Kṛṣṇa. Among Rūpa’s other major works is the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, essentially a text on *rasa*. However, as opposed to most other Nāṭyaśāstra-derived texts on aesthetics that posit *śṛṅgāra-rasa* or the sentiment of erotic enjoyment as the primary *rasa*⁶, Rūpa posits *bhakti* as the source of all other *rasas*. It is only in Vṛndāvana, amidst the illicit love-play between Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā and the *gopīs* in the parallel world of the drama that *bhaktirasa* can be realized. De describes the *Lalita-mādhava* as preoccupied with theological concern to demonstrate the “superiority of the Vṛndāvana-līlā” (1961, 589). Interestingly, it is in the Vṛndāvana-līlā, where Kṛṣṇa’s dalliances with the *gopīs* and Rādhā are described, that Gauḍīya tradition asserts that the Lord engages with *mādhurya* (illicit, erotic) love, whereas the Dvārakā-līlā, where Kṛṣṇa lives as a married man with his eight wives in the city of Dvārakā is only the site for *svakīya* (non-illicit) love. It is not surprising, then, that Satyabhāmā and Kṛṣṇa’s others wives are *not* the objects of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theological reflection. However, as we shall see, Telugu court poetry that evolves contemporaneously with Rūpa’s works, in fact does centre on Satyabhāmā, primarily because the focus here is not on theology as aesthetics, but rather on the courtly aesthetics of *śṛṅgāra* (eroticism) on its own terms. The Telugu emphasis on courtly *śṛṅgāra* is not centred in a mystic aesthetic theology such as *rāgānugā bhakti sādhana*. Rather, it is based on ideologies of royal enjoyment (*bhoga*) and indulgence. It is a world inhabited by the imperial patron and the various women around him.

As we move further in the history of Gauḍīya Vaisnava literary works, we find some more stray references to Satyabhāmā. Though it is not possible to survey all of these appearances here, let us look at one representative example. In the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, the principal late seventeenth-century Bengali hagiography of the fifteenth-century saint Caitanya, one of Caitanya’s closest associates, Jagadānanda Paṇḍita, is compared to Satyabhāmā. His love for Caitanya (recognized as a form of Kṛṣṇa) is said to be of *vāmya-svabhāva* (lit. left-oriented or “perverse” disposition), like that of Satyabhāmā⁷. This left-oriented disposition of course refers to Satyabhāmā’s argumentative, intransigent, and dominant nature. Indeed, this type of love marks Jagadānanda as one of Caitanya’s (or Kṛṣṇa’s) most beloved devotees.

In the three early dramatic contexts of Assam, Mithila and Bengal, then, we find some references to Satyabhāmā that begin to place her in new contexts. We see that she has been brought into the realm of literary representation with Umāpati's work, dramatic representation with Śaṅkaradeva's work, and devotional representation through Rūpa Gosvāmī's text. As Telugu literary culture evolves, some of these types of representations are selectively retained, while others recede to the background.

¹ The dates of both Umāpati and Vidyāpati have long been debated by scholars. In fact, there are even controversies as to who came first. I am relying here on the dates put forth by Sukumar Sen (1971).

² It is popularly believed that Vidyāpati was born in a village called Bispi in the Mithila region in the middle of the fourteenth century. When Śiva Siṃha of Tirhut ascended the throne in the year 1400, Vidyapati was made court poet. Śiva Siṃha and his wife Lakṣmī were both patrons of poetry and music. Vidyāpati composed many songs under their patronage. His works are thought to have acted as a catalyst for the development of Brajabuli, a language that became the poetic vehicle *par excellence* in Bengal, Assam, Nepal and parts of Bihar. The works of Jayadeva, Baḍu Caṇḍidāsa and Vidyāpati appear to have been the primary Vaiṣṇava devotional songs-texts of pre-Caitanya North India. It is also thought that Caitanya was himself a great admirer of his songs. For details on Vidyāpati, and the *devanāgarī* transcription and English translations of some of his poems, see Jha (1954). For other translations of Vidyāpati's poems, see Bhattacharya (1987) and Dimock and Levertov (1967).

³ Interestingly, even today, Kṛṣṇa's presence is symbolized and recognized in *sattras* in the form of a written copy of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, which is enshrined on a wooden throne in the central prayer hall called *nām-ghar* (Richmond 1974, 151).

⁴ According to Neog, the monk-actors were earlier known as *naṭuvā*, a term that bears an uncanny resemblance to the Tamil *naṭṭuva* (>*naṭṭuvanār*, "dance-master"). Apparently, this name was abandoned in favour of the term *bhāvarīyā*, and today, the dance of young boy-dancers (similar to the *goṭipūās* of Orissa) is known as '*naṭuvā-nāc*', and is considered by the monks to be a lower, degenerate form of performance (Neog 1965, 268).

⁵ Most of my material on *rāgānugā bhakti sādhanā* is taken from David L. Haberman's excellent study of Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* (Haberman 1988).

⁶ Most notable among the Sanskrit texts that posit *śṛṅgāra* as the primary *rasa* is perhaps Bhoja's monumental eleventh-century theoretical treatise on literary criticism and aesthetics, *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa*. V. Raghavan's study of the *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* remains the classic work on this text (Raghavan 1978).

⁷ *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, Antya-līlā, 7.142:

jagadānanda paṇḍitera śuddha gāḍha bhāva |
satyabhāmā prāya prema 'vāmya-svabhāva ||

APPENDIX 3

The Tañjāvūr Brothers, the *Jāvaḷi* and Colonial Modernity in the Tanjavur Court¹

The Tañjāvūr Brothers (Tam. *tañcai nālvar*, Skt. *sodara catuṣṭaya*)² – Cinnaiyā (b. 1802 or 1803), Ponnaiyā (b. 1804), Civānantam (b. 1808) and Vaṭivēl (b. 1810) – descended from a clan of musicians who were patronized by the Nāyaka and Marāṭhā courts. Their earliest traceable ancestor is one Kōpāla Naṭṭuvaṇār (b. 1638) who served in the Rājagopālasvāmi temple at Maṇṇārguḍi, and was the *āsthāna vidvān* of the court of King Vijayarāghava Nāyaka (r. 1631-1663)³. At the decline of the Nāyaka rule in Tañjāvūr, this family moved to Madurai, and later to Tirunelveli. During the rule of King Tuḷajā II (r. 1763-1787), three descendants of the family -- the brothers Makātēvaṇ (1734-1791), Kaṅkaimuttu (1737-1798)⁴ and Rāmaliṅkam (dates unknown) -- were invited back to the Tañjāvūr court. The present home of K.P. Kittappa Pillai on West Main Street in Tañjāvūr was gifted to the family at this time by Tuḷajā II. Kaṅkaimuttu had two sons, Cupparāyaṇ (1758-1814)⁵ and Citamparam (dates unknown). At around the age of twenty, Citamparam renounced the family at Tañjāvūr. Under his initiation name Cidambaranātha Yogi, he left for Varanasi. One of his music disciples was the composer Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar (1775-1835)⁶, who was in turn the *guru* of Ponnaiyā and Vaṭivēl of the Tañjāvūr Brothers. The *śiṣya-paramparā* of music in the family of the Tañjāvūr brothers thus re-circulates through the person of Dīkṣitar.⁷

Cinnaiyā (1802-1856), the eldest of the four brothers, was a great teacher of dance, and in addition, was supposed to have been one of the few males who actually performed the dance. He later moved to the Mysore court of Kṛṣṇarāja Uṭaiyār III (r. 1811-68). We can thus surmise that of all the extant compositions attributed to the Tañjāvūr Brothers, the few dedicated to Kṛṣṇarāja Uṭaiyār III⁸ are the creations of Cinnaiyā. He also wrote a Tamil text called *Apinaya Laṭṭaṇam*, a re-working of the Sanskrit *Abhinayadarpaṇa* of Nandikeśvara. The colophon of this text reads “as dictated by Cupparāyaṇ”.⁹

Ponnaiyā (1804-1864) was perhaps the most prolific composer among the brothers, and to him is credited the systematization of the *catir kaccēri* (concert dance repertoire). Most of the compositions by the brothers on Bṛhadīśvara as well as several *nṛtta* compositions (*jatisvarams* and *tillānās*) are attributed to him. Ponnaiyā also set the

meṭṭu (tunes) for the *Carapēntira Pūpāla Kuṛavañci*. This text was written by Kottayin Civakoḷuntu Tēcikar, a medical specialist in Sarabhoji II's Dhanvantari Mahal (hospital), and esteemed poet. He also established the two-fold rehearsal schedule of *cinna* and *periya ottikai* ('small' and 'big' dress rehearsals) for the *kuṛavañci* performance, and deemed that it be performed on a small platform inside the Br̥hadīśvara temple complex, which was subsequently referred to as *kuṛavañci mētai* ("stage for the *kuṛavañci*")¹⁰. This *kuṛavañci* continued to be performed here well into the twentieth century on the *aṣṭakoṭi* day (the ninth day when eight flags are ceremoniously hoisted and the Somāskanda image is taken on procession) of the annual eighteen-day long *cittirai brahmotsava* in April-May.¹¹

Civānantam (1808-1863) was both an expert in *abhinaya* (interpretive representation, mime) and a master of the *vīṇā*. He is thought to have been a very close associate of Sarabhoji II (Higgins 1973, 27). Vaṭivēl (1810-1847), was both the youngest of the brothers, and the one with the shortest life-span. In his 37 years, adapted the Western violin for use in Karṇāṭak music, which he learnt at a young age from Christian Frederick Schwartz, a German missionary who came to Tamilnadu in 1750.¹² In 1834, Vaṭivēl and his brothers were invited to perform at the court of Svāti Tirunāl (1813-1846), King of Travancore. Svāti Tirunāl, impressed by Vaṭivēl's mastery of music in general and the violin in particular, appointed him as one of the resident (*āsthāna*) musicians of his court.¹³ Thus all of the compositions referring to Viṣṇu as Padmanābha of Tiruvananthapuram (tutelary deity of the royal house of Travancore) can be attributed to Vaṭivēl.

Reconstructing biographical details about the Tañjāvūr Brothers is an exceedingly difficult task. Oral accounts have proven to be particularly problematic because of conflicting ideas about the pattern and time-line of their movement in and out of Tañjāvūr, through Madurai, Tirunelveli, Travancore and Mysore. Until recently, the Tañjāvūr Palace Records in Modi script had not been consulted for this purpose. One bundle of the palace records consulted by B.M. Sundaram, however, appears to confirm the basic oral accounts of the lives of the brothers provided by K.P. Sivanandam and K.P. Kittappa. Sundaram's recent work (1997) indicates that the brothers were exiled from Tañjāvūr because of a confrontation with Sarabhoji II:

The service of the brothers continued for only a few years under this nominal ruler [Sarabhoji II]. During that time, they composed a few *varnams* honouring the new king. Ponnayya also composed music to *Sarabhenda Bhoopala Kuravanji* and *Manmatha Vilasam* and staged them in the Brihadeesvara temple each year. But the situation gradually deteriorated. Serfoji II, a ward of Reverend Schwartz, had been educated in English by him...but Western music was more pleasing to his ears. He passed orders that all his court musicians must learn Western music and even went to the extent of fining his own minister, Varahappayya, "because he was not ready to perform Western music"¹⁴. On one occasion, Serfoji sent for the Quartet and declared that he planned to appoint a person for daily service in the Brihadeesvara temple in addition to them. The person was none other than the son of Serfoji's concubine and trained, to some extent, by the brothers themselves. The brothers submitted that the Raja should keep in mind the age and talents of the appointee before taking a decision. But Serfoji promulgated a *firman* [official order] by which the new incumbent would not only be appointed in the temple, but would also have exclusive right to temple honours such as *parivattam* [the ritual honour of wearing the cloth of the deity around one's head]. This was an insult to the brothers so they left Tanjavur. (Sundaram 1997, 34)

This information would account for Cinnaiyā and Vaṭivēl taking up permanent residence in Mysore and Travancore respectively until their deaths. In addition, it attests to the presence of the 'Tanjore Palace Band' in the court, made up of violin, piano, clarinet, bass-drum, tambourine and harp, mentioned in the letters of Silvestre De Costa around 1802 and in *Lord Valentia's Travels*, published in London in 1809.¹⁵ Furthermore, Sundaram also states that it was Sarabhoji II's heir Śivājī II who asked the brothers to return to Tañjāvūr:

When Sivaji, son of Serfoji and the last Maratha ruler of Tanjavur ascended the throne in 1832, he sent messages to all the brothers to come back to Tanjavur. He apologized for the errors of his late father. After some reluctance, Ponnayya and Sivanandam returned and were reinstated in the temple and the court. (Sundaram 1997, 34)

This explains why if the brothers did leave the services of the Tañjāvūr court and temple at some point, their descendants continue to hold hereditary ritual privileges (*mariyātai*)¹⁶ there.

One of the fundamental contributions to the hybridity of the *catir* dance in the nineteenth-century court culture was made by the chief patron of the Tañjāvūr Brothers, Sarabhoji II. In the following two sections, I propose to examine Sarabhoji's involvement in the production of culture from two parallel trajectories: first, reading Sarabhoji II as an

agent for cultural transformation, and second, as a patron of cultural continuity. As an English-educated aristocrat born into a multilingual kingdom about to dissolve its identity into British coloniality, Sarabhoji II pushed the cultural boundaries of Tañjāvūr kingdom by officially injecting the presence of the English language into public (educational) and private (literary, artistic) discursive fields. A symbol for the emergent 'new culture,' Sarabhoji aptly gave his new educational centers titles beginning with phrases such as "nava vidyā" or "nava śikṣā," and in these centers implemented public education in both Tamil and Marathi as well as English. Proudly reminiscing about his ancestor, A. Krishnaswami Raje Mahadik writes of Sarabhoji II:

The meeting of the Western and Eastern currents of thought produced far-reaching effect on the development of Sarabhoji's life. He did not, in the impact and clash of differing cultures, despise anything for the mere reason that it was Indian or foreign nor was he reluctant to adopt readily or eschew as readily anything either of the time-honoured culture of our country or of the new-path opened by the western culture for the proper reason. Thus he carefully made a judicious selection of the best in both cultures and guarded and enriched the ancient heritage of native culture assiduously cultivated by his famous ancestors. He was a zealous student of ancient knowledge and arts of our country, as he was anxious to utilise the contribution of the Western culture and art. No wonder that he thought that a synthesis of both the cultures was necessary in the interest of his people in diverse spheres of life, social, religious, educational and fine arts. His ambition was to combine all that was best in the cultures of the East and West so as to be beneficial to him as well as to the future generation.¹⁷

The 'Tanjore Palace Band,' a permanent fixture in Sarabhoji II's court, consisted of Hindustānī (North Indian), *Karṇāṭak* (South Indian) and Western Instruments. The North Indian presence was due in large part to the reputation of the twin courts of Tañjāvūr (ruled by Sarabhoji) and Tiruviṭaimarutūr (ruled by the exiled King Amarasiṃha). The visits of Hindustānī musicians of repute to the Tañjāvūr kingdom thus became frequent in the early nineteenth century. Mahārājā Svāti Tirunāl, King of Travancore and chief patron of Vaṭivēl, not only invited North Indian (*Hindustānī*) musicians to his court, but also is said to have learnt music from them and composed several compositions in the North Indian concert genre called *bhajan*.¹⁸

In addition, Sarabhoji appears to have been fascinated with popular performance traditions, and S. Seetha writes that he "encouraged Kuravai, Kuravanji, Modi dance, Kinjini, Terukkuttu, dummy horse shows and fifty varieties of Pinnal kolattam." (Seetha 1981: 115) He was particularly fond of *lāvaṇi*, a rustic form of improvisational group

singing performed by women around the time of the *holi* festival in Maharashtra (Rege 1996)¹⁹. Erotic compositions in this genre are also intimately connected with the community of female dancers in Maharashtra called *kalāvantīns* (Kadam 1997: 64). Sarabhoji's pilgrimage to North India is documented in the form of memoirs in the *lāvaṇi* genre, while his pilgrimage to the south is composed by his traveling poet, Śrī Śiva also in the form of Marathi *lāvaṇis*²⁰. Writing in 1951, the descendant of the royal house who edited Sarabhoji's *lāvaṇis* for publication by the Saraswati Mahal Library observes that "Lavanis have captured the imagination of the Tamil[s] so much that it has [sic] practically supplanted the usual indigenous types of folk-songs and to-day the most widespread and living type of folk-music in the Tamil District is the Lavani which are sung during the 'Kaman' festival (Holi festival)"²¹. A mural painting on the south wall of a room attached to the Subrahmanya shrine in the Bṛhadīśvara temple depicts Sarabhoji II enjoying court dance performed by a Hindustānī *kalāvantīn* on the one hand, and a local *cinna mēḷam* artist on the other. I suggest that there may be a possibility that the presence of North Indian dancing women in Sarabhoji's court was due to the quantitative proliferation and increasing visibility of these women at the Maratha court in Satārā (the Bhosala dynasty's capital in Maharashtra) itself. V.S. Kadam²² has traced the history of the visibility of these women in Satārā immediately before the rule of Sarabhoji II in Tañjāvūr, and it would not be surprising if these women were brought into Tañjāvūr during his rule, and represented as 'Hindustānī' dancers by the people of Tañjāvūr, while being indiscriminately grouped together with the indigenous *cinna mēḷam* community as 'nautch-girls' in the colonial eye. Their specialization in the *lāvaṇi* genre coupled with Sarabhoji's personal interest in it, may have been responsible for the popularization of this form in the Tamil country. The *āsthāna vidvān* during the last days of Sarabhoji's son Śivāji II was 'Lāvaṇi' Veṅkaṭa Rāvu (dates unknown). He was a prolific composer of *lāvaṇis*, and was responsible for the 'classicization' of the genre with his *bāhattara mēḷa-rāgamālikā*, a *lāvaṇi* composed in the 72 *mēḷa rāgas*²³.

Sarabhoji's own major contributions to the dance repertoire are his compositions in the *nṛtya nirupaṇa* genre. These are narrative works written specifically for dance in one *rāga* only, and consist of various sub-genres. For example, the *Mahādevāci Prārthanā Nirupaṇa* (*śuddha sāveri rāga, aṭa [khaṇḍajāti] tāla*), a simple story in which Pārvatī expresses her devotion to Śiva, consists of several dance genres that are

founded in early twentieth century *devadāsī* dance repertoires in many parts of South India: *jaya jaya* and *śaraṇu* (found in the *bhajana sampradāya* and *bhāgavata mēla* as well), *śabdam*, *varṇam*, *padam*, *svarajati*, *tillānā* (with *sāhitya*), *abhinaya padam* (*śṛṅgāra*-based), *jakkini* (mostly *svara*, with 1 line of *sāhitya* and *collukaṭṭu*), *gīta* (*svara* only), *prabandha* (a strange configuration of *svara* with vowel sounds – “*u ū*,” “*i ī*” etc.), *śloka-varṇa* (*sāhitya* and *svara*), *kautta* (*collukaṭṭu* and *sāhitya*), and *maṅgala*.

While the promotion of Marathi-language materials in the multilingual Tañjāvūr was certainly not new in Sarabhoji's time, the weaving of the English language into the already multivocal fabric of court life was. The official acceptance of the English language into the discursive field of cultural performance is the ‘rupture’ described by Meduri (Meduri 1996). Sarabhoji sought to expand the linguistic canvas of the court to include Western music and literature as well. The early education provided to him under Christian Frederick Schwartz (1726-1799), tutor and “guardian” of the young prince is well known.²⁴ Schwartz, who originally arrived at Tiruchirapalli for a Tamil Bible-translation project in 1750, taught English in Tanjavur to *brahmins* and *vellāḷars* who were seeking employment with the East India Company. Schwartz had been a long-time friend of Sarabhoji II's father Tulajāī II, and was “unofficially” Sarabhoji's guardian until his coronation in 1798.

One example of the introduction of the English language into *catir* culture was brought to my attention by K.P. Kittappa Pillai. In Koṭṭayin Civakoḷuntu Tēcikar's *Carapēntira Pūpāla Kuṛavañci*, the *kuṛa* woman describes how she has been approached by women from various places who ask her to read their palms. A verse describes the English woman's request, “Look my hand” (*oṇṇutal perum inkilīṣ mātu orutti luk mai hāṇṭ enṛā!*...). Whether this song (beginning with the words *conna kuṛikaḷum* in A. Srinivasan's edition of the text)²⁵ was part of the Bṛhadīśvara temple performances is questionable, as we are not yet aware of which parts of the text were performed prior to ca. 1900.

Of the various dance genres developed for court performances by the Quartet, the *jāvaḷi* appears to have had taken on a special contour in the culture of the Andhra *devadāsīs*. The etymology of the word *jāvaḷi* is dubious. V. Raghavan (in Brinda 1960, i-ii) notes the possibility of connecting it with the Sanskrit word *cāpala* or the Kannada *jāvala*. The Madras Tamil Lexicon (3874) lists *jāvaḷi* as derived from the Urdu *jhwāli*,

though here there is no Persian or Urdu source mentioned. According to R. Sathyanarayana, *jāvaḷi* “is a purely Kannada term; *jāvaḷa* in this language means a common and vulgar man and has been used in this sense over the...centuries by the kannadiga in colloquy and in literature.” (Sathyanarayana 1969, 202). Though many scholars claim that the genre is of Kannada origin, by the late nineteenth century, it had become an almost completely Telugu-language genre. The earliest existing *jāvaḷi* is in Telugu, and is attributed to Vaṭivēl of the Tanjavur Quartet (or sometimes his patron, Svāti Tirunāl)²⁶. The structure of the *jāvaḷi* is likely modeled after that of the Telugu *padam*, with the three sections *pallavī*, *anupallavī* and *caraṇam*. *Jāvaḷis* appear to be composed in both *rakti* (“pleasing”) and *deśi* or *deśya* (“country” or “folk”) *rāgas*²⁷. As a musical genre specifically created for use in dance, the *jāvaḷi* came to represent dance culture as a whole particularly in the early twentieth century. C.R. Day, an Orientalist musicologist writing in 1891, attests to the popularity of *jāvaḷis* as visible signs of the culture of the “dancing girls” of Southern India:

Javadis are songs of a light and pleasing nature, such as love songs, cradle songs, &c. They are sung by both Nautch girls and all, especially women, of the higher classes in domestic life. They are of two kinds – ordinary ballads and songs of a more or less indelicate nature, sung during the performance of a peculiar dance called Kārwar. Javadis consist usually of a pallevi, anupallevi, and stanzas, sung in the usual manner as described before, and are chiefly in popular ragas. The tempo is in accordance with the words, and not too slow, the favourite measure being Rupacca. Consequently, many of these songs bear a resemblance to a waltz, only that they are taken at a slightly slower pace.

The words of javadis are often very beautiful; and those upon the loves of Krishna and Radha are always popular. Musicians as a rule sing these songs in their naked form, and with less grace than is their usual custom. Each stanza is sung to the same air.

These songs are of comparatively recent introduction, being first sung by the Kanarese musicians of the Court of Surapuri, a petty state near the celebrated Humpé ruins. The popularity of songs of this kind increases rapidly, and they are now to be heard throughout almost the whole of Southern India, where they take the place of the Tappa of Hindustan.

Among the following examples the air “Anthalone Telavari” is perhaps the most popular – the accompanying rhythm of the tāla falls upon the first and second beat of each bar; this is noticed when it is accompanied by instruments, such as the small tinkling cymbals and drums, which mark the time strongly. This song seems to be known throughout Southern India – the version varies slightly in different places, but on the whole, the air is much the same everywhere.



(Day 1891, 78-80)

The use of the English language in Karṇāṭak (South Indian) music is also linked to the *jāvaḷi*. The engineered, but seemingly 'organic' adaptation of the English language into the multilingual discourse of the Tañjāvūr court continued in the areas of music and dance well beyond Sarabhoji's time, and is likely indicative of the influence that Sarabhoji's court had on the creation of 'new' music and dance immediately after the annexation of Tañjāvūr to the British in 1856. Several composers adopted the new idioms created by the Tañjāvūr Brothers and inspired by their ingenuity, augmented the hybridity of the *catir* dance. Paṭṭābhirāmayyā (1863-?), a taluk clerk from Tiruppanandal near Kumbhakonam, composed four *jāvaḷis* in the English language, the most famous being a translation of his Telugu *jāvaḷi* "nī māṭale māyanurā" (*pūrvikalyāṇī rāga, ādi tāla*), beginning with the words "What Has Become of Thy Promise?"²⁸ During his brief stay in Madras, his students included women from *devadāsī* families (Jayammal [mother of the famous dancer Balasaraswati] and Mylapore Gauri), and this could well account for the popularity of his compositions in the modern 'Bharatanāṭyam' repertoire.²⁹ Another composer of *jāvaḷis* named Civarāmayyā from Karur (dates unknown) who was a contemporary of Paṭṭābhirāmayyā, composed in a hybrid (*maṇipravāḷa*) language alternating between English and Telugu phrases:

My Lovely Lalanā (*kharaharapriyā rāga, ādi tāla*)

Pallavī

Oh! My Lovely Lalanā, *elane pommanṭi*

Anupallavī

emoyani aṇṭi kāmīni ninnu

Caranam 1

iṭuvaṇṭi step – is it fit to take?

Sit awhile here – let me convince you

Caranam 2

evvarivaddanu don't be angry
*śivarāmuni padamulu pāḍu*³⁰

Perhaps following the lead of composers such as Tiruppanandaḷ Paṭṭābhirāmayyā in Madras, several Telugu poets in the coastal Andhra region began to compose *jāvaḷis* for the *kalāvantula* community sometime in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These men were usually high-caste, educated poets who often had relationships with the *kalāvantula* women themselves. The majority of these composers have gone unnamed, although their *jāvaḷis*, usually bearing their *makuṭam* or “signature” still survive in the *kalāvantula* community.

These *jāvaḷis*, however, represent a significant departure from those attributed to the Tanjavur Quartet or the “Madras” *jāvaḷis* composed by men such as Paṭṭābhirāmayyā. They are completely unabashed in terms of their uses of and commentaries on sexuality, which raises the issue of whether scholars composed these songs in consultation with *kalāvantula* women. Certainly this was the case with *Bhāmākalāpam* texts composed for individual women by Brahmin men in the early twentieth century.

In the Marāṭhā-period, in the Tanjavur court, the practice of dance, particularly the court traditions, known variously as *mēḷam* (‘band’), *catir* or *caduru* (‘performed in public’) or *kēlikkai* (‘performance’), had been fostered with great care. For our purposes, it is important to know that the cultural transformations ushered in by the Tanjavur court reverberated throughout much of South India, including the coastal Andhra region. During my fieldwork with *devadāsīs* in coastal Andhra in 2002, I observed that many of the compositions, particularly those in the genres known as *varṇam* and *salām-daru*, had been taken directly from the Tanjavur court. For example, the Telugu *varṇams*³¹ composed by the Tanjavur Quartet in praise of the Maratha rulers, as well as “salutation” songs³² on the kings Pratāpasimḥa (r. 1740-63) and Sarabhoji II (r. 1798-1832)³³ seem to have been regularly performed by the women and their ancestors, even in the nineteenth century. The Tanjavur court dance of nineteenth century South India has a long and complex socio-artistic history that dates back to the Nāyaka period. It was also a hybrid dance culture that brought together aspects of indigenous Tamil culture,

the new Maratha culture of the Bhosala dynasty from Satārā, Telugu literary practice, and eventually colonial modernity.

In the mid-nineteenth century, four brothers known as the Tanjavur Quartet systematized the court dance traditions of Tanjavur, including both repertoire and the abstract dance technique represented by units of movement called *aṭavus*. Building on the already existing genres such as the *padams* of Kṣetrayya, the Tanjavur Brothers created a systematized format for the hitherto diffused and somewhat unstructured presentation of court (or “concert”) dance. Their re-visioning of the court repertoire consisted of seven primary genres: *alāriṭṭu*, *jatisvaram*, *śabdham*, *varṇam*, *padam*, *jāvaḷi* and *tillānā*. The ethos of this repertoire, like that of the *padams* of Kṣetrayya, situated itself very much within the realm of *bhoga* (enjoyment), with the primary agent in the narratives being the dancing woman herself. The brothers were initially patronized by Sarabhoji Mahārāja, and later moved on to serve in the courts of Travancore and Mysore.

¹ Much of this work has been done in collaboration with Hari Krishnan of Wesleyan University. Some of this work is being published as Krishnan (forthcoming).

² Though the Tamil term *tañcai nāḷvar* is frequently used in popular discourse, I have only heard the Sanskrit term *sodara catuṣṭaya* being used by musicologist B.M. Sundaram.

³ Personal communication, B.M. Sundaram, January 1998.

⁴ This is *not* the same Kaṅkaimuttu Naṭṭuvaṇār who was the author of the text *Naṭaṇāṭi Vāṭṭiya Rañcaṇam*. The author of this text came from Pacuvantanai, a village near Tirunelveli. The text was first published in Tirunelveli by the Union Central Press in 1898. According to B.M. Sundaram, the two were “collateral relatives, and there has been great confusion about their identities” (Personal communication, January 1998). However, the *kavutvam* compositions found in the *Naṭaṇāṭi Vāṭṭiya Rañcaṇam* might in fact be those of Kaṅkaimuttu of the Tañjāvūr court.

⁵ According to T. Sankaran, Cupparayan was a musician who was highly respected by his peers including Mēḷaṭṭūr Vēṅkaṭarāma Śāstri, Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar and Śyāma Śāstri. T. Sankaran cited in Higgins (1973, 26).

⁶ Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar’s father, Rāmasvāmi Dīkṣitar (1735-1817) is thought to have studied music with the *devadāsīs* of the Tyāgarājasvāmi temple at Tiruvārūr. He was responsible for the systematization of the *nāgasvara* (ritual oboe) repertoire at Tiruvārūr.

All other Śaiva temples in Tamilnadu subsequently followed his system and repertoire in rendering music on the *nāgasvaram*. See Kersenboom (1987, 42).

⁷ Dīkṣitar's own interactions with the *cinna mēḷam* community were well-known. According to P.R. Thilagam, the last of the *koṇṭi-paramparā devadāsīs* attached to the Tiruvārūr temple, one of her ancestors Kamalamuttu had the Telugu composition *nī sāṭi daivamandu (śrīrañjani rāga)* composed for her by Dīkṣitar, who was also her music guru (Personal communication, January 1999). It is often erroneously stated that Dīkṣitar's son was intimate with Kamalamuttu. See for example, Parthasarathy (1976, 28). For details on Dīkṣitar's musical style, particularly his emphasis on "place," see Peterson (1986) and Emmie Te Nijenhuis and Sanjukta Gupta (1987).

⁸ There is some discrepancy about the dates of Cinnaiyā. Many of the compositions attributed to him are dedicated to Cāmarājendra Uṭaiyār (r. 1868-1894), son of Kṛṣṇarāja Uṭaiyār III. However, Cāmarājendra only ascended the throne in 1868, and Cinnaiyā is thought to have passed away sometime in the 1860's. K.P. Kittappa has insisted that all of the compositions on Cāmarājendra are in fact by Cinnaiyā, and that he may have been alive well into the rule of Cāmarājendra.

⁹ The text is currently being edited by musicologist B.M. Sundaram and should be available in the next two years.

¹⁰ Personal communication, late K.P. Kittappa Pillai (1919-1999), December 1997. K.P. Kittappa was the last of the descendants of the Tanjavur Brothers to have accompanied *devadāsī* dance as a musician. Much of my information about performance culture in Tanjavur comes from studying under his guidance.

¹¹ The last time the *kuṛavañci* was performed in the Bṛhadīśvara temple was ca. 1947, when K.P. Kittappa Pillai provided vocal music for it. In 1994, he edited the musical notation of the entire text, and this was subsequently published by the Tamil University, Tañjāvūr. This text was erased from contemporary performances of "Bharatanāṭyam" dance, deemed too "base" by revivalists such as Rukmini Arundale. See Peterson (1998) for an excellent critical study of the *kuṛavañci* genre in transition.

¹² For a detailed description of Schwartz's interaction with the Marāṭhā rulers of Tanjavur, see Jackson (1991, 83-90), and Peterson (1999). Generally, for excellent studies of Sarabhoji II and complex and hybrid cultural life of nineteenth-century Tanjavur, see the work of Peterson (1995, 1999, 2002).

¹³ For details, see Subramaniam (1986, 47). In the year 1834, Svāti Tirunāl gave Vaṭivēl an ivory violin, which today is considered a family heirloom in the West Main Street home of the descendants of the brothers in Tañjāvūr.

¹⁴ This is a reference to Varāhappa Dīkṣita Paṇḍita (1795-1869). Eventually, he became one of the most respected musicians of Sarabhoji's court. He was a master of the piano

and violin and is said to have performed for Western audiences in the court. For details, see Seetha (1981), pp. 257-259.

¹⁵ Details are found in Seetha, (1981), p. 111-116, and Valentia (1809).

¹⁶ To this day, male members of K.P. Kittappa's family must be present to play the cymbals (*tālam*) during the *ārudra* festival (*tiruvātirai* in December-January) as the image of Naṭarāja is taken on procession. Five deities, the *pañca-devatās* of the cluster of *pañcamūrti kavutvams* (Gaṇeśa, Murukan, Naṭarāja, and the *nāyanārs* Campantar and Caṇḍikeśvara) are supposed to be invoked at this point. I witnessed this in December 1998 when Kittappa's son Chandrasekhar performed the ritual. Apparently this event was earlier the site for the recitation of these *kavutvams* (Personal communication, K.P. Kittappa Pillai, December 1998).

¹⁷ A. Krishnaswami Raje Mahadik in his Introduction to *Śrī Gaṇeśalīlārṇava Nāṭaka* and *Naṭeśa Vilāsa Nāṭaka* (1988), p. xiv.

¹⁸ The Hindustāni music *bhajans* of Svāti Tirunāl were compiled and published with musical notation by a committee of the Sree Swati Tirunal Sangeetha Sabha, Trivandrum, in 1972 under the title *Mahārājā Śrī Svāti Tirunāl Ke Racit Hindī Bhajan Hindustānī Rāgōṃ Meṃ Svarlipi Baddh*.

¹⁹ For a comprehensive and critical study of the social contexts of *lāvaṇi* performances in Maharashtra, see Sharmila Rege's recent work, 'The Hegemonic Appropriation of Sexuality: The Case of the Lavani Performers of Maharashtra.' (Rege 1996).

²⁰ Both Sarabhoji's own travel memoirs and Śrī Śiva's "documentation" are published as *Tristhaḷi Yātreçyā Lāvanyā* and *Śarabhendra Tīrthāvaḷi*, edited by A. Krishnaswami Mahadik Rao Sahib (1951).

²¹ Ibid., p. 3.

²² Kadam (1997) is a thorough work on the history of dancing women in the Marathi-speaking region in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

²³ Details about 'Lāvaṇi' Veṅkaṭa Rāvu and his compositions can be found in Seetha (1981), pp. 254-256.

²⁴ For details on Schwartz's interaction with the Marāṭhā rulers, see Jackson (1991), pp. 83-90.

²⁵ *Carapēntira Pūpāla Kuṛavañci*, ed. A. Srinivasan (1988), song 43.

²⁶ This is the *jāvaḷi* "*iṭu sāhasamulu*" (*rāga Saindhavī*). For details see Arudra (1986a, 143-44).

²⁷ Examples of *rakti* rāgas include the most popular rāgas used in contemporary concert music, such as Ānandabhairavī, Bhairavī, Devagāndhārī, Kalyāṇī, Kāmbhojī, Kedāragaula, Mukhārī, Pūrvikalyāṇī, Śaṅkarābharaṇam, Śaṅmukhapriyā, Sāveri and Toḍi. Generally, today the term *deśi* or *deśya* has become synonymous with rāgas identified as either (a) being inspired by “folk” culture in South India, or (b) borrowed from North Indian music. Thus rāgas such as Jhañjhūṭi, Kuṛaṅci, Nīlāmbārī and Punnāgavarāḷi are thought to be *deśya* rāgas inspired from “folk” music, while rāgas such as Bāgeśrī, Br̥ṇḍāvana-sāraṅga, Deś, Dvijāvanti, Darbārī-kāṇaḍa, Husenī, Khamās, Paras, and Sindhu-bhairavī are *deśya* rāgas thought to have been adapted from North India.

²⁸The following are the *pallavī*, *anupallavī* and the first *caraṇam* of Paṭṭābhirāmayyā’s English version of *nī māṭalu e māyenurā*:

Pallavī

What has become of thy promise, tell me dear friend.

Anupallavī

What! Does thou forget your inducing and honeyed words?

Caraṇam

*Why can’t you be a gentleman? Kissing the beautiful cheek,
Promising diamond jewels proved to be false in the end.*

The Telugu original is as follows:

Pallavī

nī māṭalu e māyanurā sāmi balkarā

Anupallavī

ememo bodhiñci nanne mēcci yāḍina

Caraṇam 1

*cakkani sāmi vale cēkkili nōkki [rāve]
mukkerā nī kiccēnani takkulace sōkkiñcina*

²⁹ The home of Vina Dhanammal in Madras, was a place where several *jāvalis* that are popular today were composed. It is well known that Vina Dhanammal herself had relationships with *jāvali* composers (*jāvalikartas*) such as Dharmapuri Subbayar (b. 1864). These *jāvalis* became exceedingly popular when the *devadāsī* dance of Tamilnadu was re-named “Bharatanāṭyam” in Madras city in the 1930s. Many of these “Madras” *jāvalis*, as I call them, were performed by Dhanammal’s descendants, T. Balasaraswati and T. Viswanathan, and were popularized largely through their performances. Many of these have been edited by Balasaraswati’s cousin T. Brinda, and published by the Madras Music Academy in 1960 under the title *Javalis of Patnam Subrahmanya Iyer, Tiruppanandal Pattabhiramayya, Dharmapuri Subbarayar, Tirupati Narayanaswami and Others*. In this collection, there is one *jāvali* by Vidyala Narayanaswami Nayudu, in the rāga Behāg (*vagalāḍi bodhanalaku*), which is not one of the “Madras” compositions. However, we should also note that there seems to be a small amount of overlap between the Andhra and Madras *jāvali* repertoires. So while

the *jāvaḷi* by Narayanasvami Nayudu is found in the repertoire of the descendants of Vina Dhannamal, I also witnessed the performance of a Madras *jāvaḷi* written by Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar (1845-1902) among the *kalāvantulu* of coastal Andhra. This was the *jāvaḷi* in *rāga* Khamās, *apuḍumanasu*, performed by Saride Maithili on March 12, 2002.

³⁰ I am grateful to the late Arudra for this text.

³¹ The *varṇam* or *padavarṇam* is a music genre that figures prominently in the *devadāsī* dance repertoire in present-day Tamilnadu, Andhra and Kerala. The Tanjavur Brothers composed several *padavarṇams* for dance, usually addressed to localized deities such as Śiva-Bṛhadīśvara of Tanjavur or Kṛṣṇa-Rājagopāla of Mannargudi. Below is an example of the text of a *padavarṇam*. This particular *varṇam*, in the *rāga* Bhairavī is well-known in its Tamil form, beginning with the words *mōhamāṇa eṇmītil* (filled with the intoxication [of love]...). This composition, dedicated to the god Śiva in his local form of Tyāgarāja enshrined in the city of Tiruvarur, forms the subject of Saskia Kersenboom's book, *Word, Sound, Image: The Life of a Tamil Text*. However, in coastal Andhra, I found that the Telugu version of this song (beginning with the words *nī sāṭi dōra*), dedicated to the King Sarabhoji II, is still very much a part of the living (or rather remembered) performance culture of the *kalāvantulu*:

Pallavī

I believed that there was no King equal to you.
Listen to me at this time [now], my Lord.

Anupallavī

O Son of King Tuḷajājī II, of the Bhosala clan,
King Sarabhoji II, one who engages in sensual enjoyment like the King of the gods.

Muktayi Svāra-sāhitya

[I thought] I was a befitting woman for you, so I came before you [into your presence].
Now you must protect me and look after me.
I am in love with you, I can't [afford to] be tired; I can't be separated from you for even a minute.
Great Lover, I've come to actualize the techniques of the Manuals of Erotics!

Caranam

Manmantha has come here, I can't bear it!

Carana Svāra-sāhitya

[Manmantha] has begun to release his flowery arrows upon my breast,
At this time, the [harsh] moonbeams dart forcefully [towards me].
The *kokila* birds are incessantly making the sound "kū". This is the time [for union]. Come, don't be stubborn, come, don't be angry, come now.

Why this anger [towards me]? One full of beautiful qualities, rise, for I will not leave you even for a minute. Take me in your embrace, and give me the sweet nectar (*rasa*) from your lips. Why are you not granting me the pleasures of love-making (*ratulu*)? I am waiting! Listen to the pleas of my heart, let us live in happiness, let us have union!

I thought you were a great King, so I came [to you]. You are the one [who will] protect me, you alone are like a husband to me.

I have been waiting for so long, I cannot bear it, O Ocean of Compassion!

Please oblige me. Take your hand and press it on my heavy breast!

This is the time to show me your charms in love-making!

Let me experience the beauty of your love. *Akaṭa!* What you are doing now is not befitting. Please listen to me.

³² These are the *salām-darus*, also called *tāla-colkattu* or *śabdam*. Usually addressed to a king of a local deity, they involve the recitation of rhythmic utterances (*colkaṭṭu*) and epithets of the hero. They usually end with Urdu words like *salām* (hence the name of the genre, *salām-daru*) or *śābās* ("well done!" or "bravo!"), reflective of the multilingual nature of the Tanjavur court. For details, see N. Visvanathan's Tamil work (1985), *Sabdam alias Tala Solkattu of Bharatam Kasinathakavi, King Sahaji and Bharatam Narana Kavi* [Captam eṇṇum tālaccorṇkaṭṭu paratam kācinātakavi, manṇar cakaci, paratam naraṇakavi ākiyōr iyarriyavai].

³³ King Sarabhoji II's contribution to the evolution of the systematized concert-dance repertoire in Tanjavur is significant. He was the author and/or patron of a cluster of Marathi texts for dance called *nirūpaṇa* in the Marathi language that presented a series of new dance genres such as *śervā*, *tarānā* and *tripuṭa* along with existing genres such as *varṇam*, *abhinaya pada* and *śabda*, couched in the context of a linear narrative presentation similar to the Telugu *yakṣagāna* court-dramas of the Nāyaka and early Marāṭhā periods. These were written down in the form of Marathi texts referred to by their Tamil name, *kōrvai* ("links" or "chain"). For details see Krishnan (forthcoming).

APPENDIX 4

Translated Examples of Nineteenth and Twentieth Century *Jāvaḷis* Performed by Kalāvantula Women

A Woman to Her Lover

1. O Great Lover! I'm applying fragrant sandalpaste to your body!
Leave your doubts behind, my beloved, and come!

Don't you have any love for me? Come to look after my needs, come!
Leave your doubts behind

We can live like a pair of love-birds in our love nest, come!
Leave your doubts behind

Let's go for a spin in your Motor Car!
Leave your doubts behind

We can make a boat of jasmine flowers, and sleep in it!
Leave your doubts behind

māṇḍara gandham

rāga: seṇḍurutti, tāla: tiśragati ādi

As sung by Kotipalli Haimavati, Murmanda village

A Woman to Her Lover

2. Why are you in such a hurry, beautiful one?
I will have union with you, just wait...

You should know that in the evening, my in-laws are around.
We can't make love *here*!

I'll come [out of my house and meet you] at our special love-nest,
and we will be able to make love on a large wooden bed fit for a king!

Don't follow me around!
I'm telling you, I'll come to meet you!
Alas, it seems as though you don't believe me!

You place your hand on my breast (*caṇṭi*) and body (*vaṇṭi*),
and speak such sweet words to me.
But, if my husband's eye falls on us, we're in big trouble!

I've told you not to do it in my house,
and my heart aches because of that.
I will be yours in one hour. But for now, please go –

look, there's the road to your house.

It's been so long since I've been with you –
I can't leave you!

My heart trembles with fear.

But, what will my "agent" (*yejaṇṭu* - English word – i.e. husband) think?

You are so intelligent, such a connoisseur, an expert in the arts of love
just like the God of Love, and full of lustre –

I will certainly come and make love to you!

Oh King Ānanda of the Gajapati lineage, salutations to you (*bhaḷire*)!

ēnduki tōndara

rāga: ānandabhairavī, tāla: miśracāpu

As sung by Saride Seshachalam in Duvva village, West Godavari district

A Woman to Her Lover

3. Why are you coming *now*?
It's morning already!

You insulted me in front of everyone,
and immersed yourself in total pleasure
With that lady of beautiful limbs!

Have you brought
Those beautiful marks of union
To show me?
Did you enjoy her body?

Why are you coming now?

On that full-moon night
When we were out on the bed strewn with flowers,
You made love to me
In a variety of ways,
And said so many things.

But yesterday,
you walked away in broad daylight
and got together with that bitch!
Now, my eyes
can't even stand the sight of you! *Akaṭā!*

Why are you coming now?

What can I say,
Lord Gopāla of Navapuri?
This is an insult,
and all my eager anticipation
has been wasted.

Last night
I was so intoxicated by memories of you...
my desire was ever-increasing,
I couldn't sleep.
Enough! This humiliation is too much!
Don't even lay a hand on me!

Why are you coming now?

ēndukīpuḍe rākā
rāga: unknown, tāla: cāpu
As performed by Saride Mythili, Duvva village, West Godavari district

A Woman to Her Lover

4. Is this fair, Lord?
You're making love to others!

Is this fair?

When I was young,
you took my hand.
You told me you wouldn't leave me.
but those words meant nothing.

Is this fair?

With such passion
You made love to me,
And did a lot of wondrous things.
But I was so young,
you tricked me and went away.

Is this fair?

Lord Gopabāla, praised by the Śivaliṅgam,¹
I couldn't imagine your deceptions
even in a dream!

Is this fair?

idi nyāyamā

rāga: unknown, tāla: ādi

Sung by Saride Anusuya, Duvva village, West Godavari district

A Woman to Her Friend

5. Friend, did you really see Him in her house?
My Lord, Janārdanasvāmi (Kṛṣṇa),
beautiful as Kāma?

Did you really see Him?

Did you see the flute in His hand?
Wasn't he afraid to enter her house in broad daylight?
[Alright, let's make a plan.]
I will secretly stand beside her house tomorrow afternoon –
will you show him to me?

Did you really see Him?

On this earth, he is the one who lives in the city of Penugonḍa.
Could such a God
be the same one who is worshipped by the poet Hari?

Did you really see Him?

nijamuga jūcitivā

rāga: khamās, tāla: ādi

As performed by Saride Mythili, Duvva village, West Godavari district

A Woman to Her Friend

6. Friend, how can my heart remain still?
What kind of talk is this?

Even if my lover is very intelligent,
my fickle heart will not be steady.

How can my heart remain still?

What, with all these beautiful men and women around,
talking and making erotic glances with their eyes!

How can my heart remain still?

When the Lord Varada-Veṅkaṭeśa (Kṛṣṇa) was telling me
about the various ways of making love,
at that very time, the God of Desire shot his arrows
into my heart like a torrent.

How can my heart remain still?

apuḍu manasu nilacunaṭe
rāga: khamās, tāla: ādi
As performed by Saride Mythili, Duvva village

A Woman to Her Lover

7. Hey! Handsome! Why are you late?
I can't stand this agony, quick, embrace me, darling!

Hey! Handsome!

I desire you, the one with a brilliant body!
I've come with lots of love to give, don't you feel even a little compassion?
Why this indifference? Enough! Get out of here!

Hey! Handsome!

Fulfill this lady's desire, oh beloved.
I know that soon you'll be giving me a kiss!
I've desired you deep down in my heart, haven't I?
Immerse me in love-play, since I have such strong sexual prowess.
Come, and drink from these lips!

Hey! Handsome!

I thought you were an expert at lovemaking, so I asked a lot of you.
Do you only have this much stuff?
Ah, now I know you! Get out of here!
You're not what you seem.
Alas! My desire still remains unquenched even after seeing you!

Hey! Handsome!

On this earth, you live in Jagannāthapura [Puri, Orissa], and you are the child
Kṛṣṇa who protects the poet Nārāyaṇa.

Hey! Handsome!

o ho ho sundaruḍa
folk melody, tāla: tīśragati ādi
As performed by Saride Mythili, Duvva village, West Godavari district

A Woman to her Lover

8. Come back tomorrow,
it's morning in the east, please go for now!
Come back tomorrow

My husband will give me trouble if he sees you,
And today my family will face great difficulties.
Come back tomorrow

Let go of this anger, and free me
of the burden of desire.
I will give you great pleasure, O Gopālabāla of Naupuri.
Come back tomorrow

repu ṭttuvugāni
rāga: bhairavī, tāla: cāpu
Sung by Kotipalli Sitaramalakshmi, Muramanda village

¹ This is a reference to the Śivaliṅgam behind the Western wall of the Ballipāḍu Madanagopālasvāmi temple. The unusual placement of a *liṅgam* within a Vaiṣṇava temple complex is explained by devotees as indicative of Śiva's desire to eternally sing the praises of Lord Madanagopālasvāmi.



Fig. 1

P.S. Ratna Bai as Satyabhāmā holding a sword
in the Tamil film *Bhama Vijayam* (1934)
(Still from *The Hindu*, January 24, 2002)



Fig. 2

VCD jacket for the Telugu film "Dipavali" (1960), showing the popular actress Jamuna as Satyabhāmā, holding a bow.



a



b

Fig. 3 (a & b)

Bontalakoti Jagannadam, one of the last Tūrupu Bhāgavatam artists from the Godavari delta as Satyabhāmā in *Bhāmākalāpam*
(Photos courtesy Sangeet Natak Academy)



Fig. 4

Chindula Yellamma with her troupe, c. 1998
(Venkateswara Rao, *Steps to Liberate the Steps*, 1999, p. 32)



Fig. 5

Saride Manikyam at her present home in Kapileswarapuram, East Godavari,
January, 2002
(Photo by Author)



Fig. 6
Madanagopālasvāmi Temple, Ballipadu
(view from South side)
(Photo by Author)

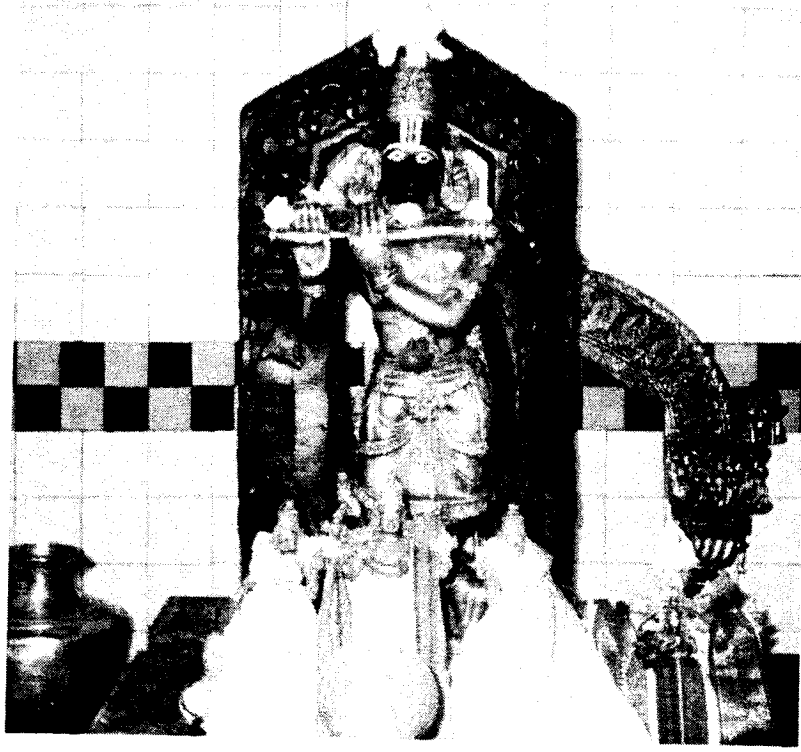


Fig. 7
Śrī Rukmiṇī-Satyabhāmā Sameta
Śrī Madanagopālasvāmi, Ballipadu, West Godavari
(Photo by Author)



Fig. 8
Marampalli Induvadana and Chittajallu Vaidehi
Hyderabad, 1958.
(Courtesy the Sangeet Natak Academy)



Fig. 9

The late Annabhaddula Buli Venkataratnam
in a *meḷam* performance of *Gollakalāpam* (c. 1950?)
(Photo Courtesy Sunil Kothari Dance Collection)

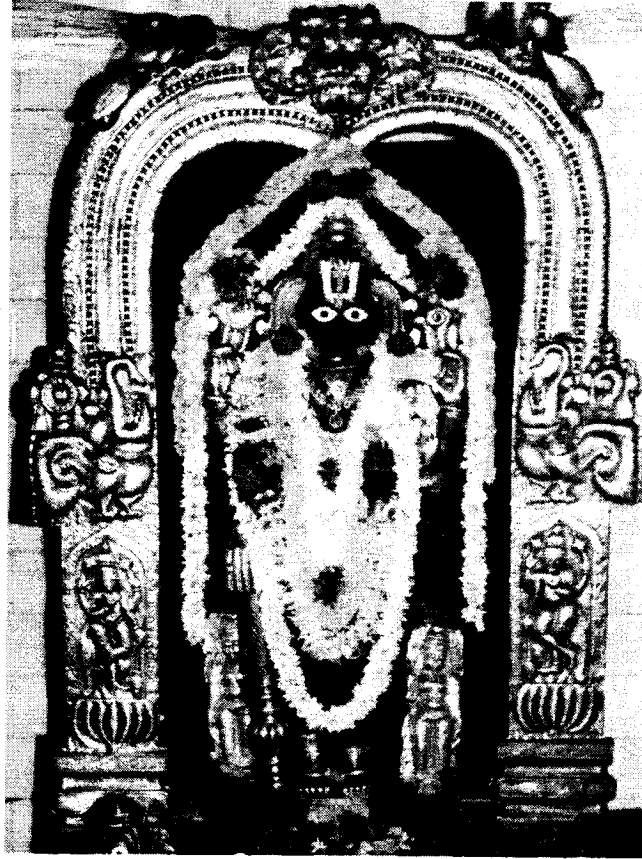


Fig. 10
Kuntimādhavasvāmi, Pithapuram
East Godavari
(Photo by Author)



Fig. 11

The *mahāmaṇḍapam* of the Kuntimādhavasvāmi Temple, Pithapuram
The site where performances of *navajanārdana pārijāta* used to take place.
The roof was added to the structure in the year 1961.
(Photo by Author)



Fig. 12

Saride Seshachalam performing a *jāvaḷi* during a *meḷam* performance at her home in Duvva, West Godavari, March 2002
(Photo by Author)



Fig. 13

Maddula Janakamma depicts one of the *rati-hastas* depicting sexual union while singing a *padam*.

An outdoor *meḷam* performance at the home of Maddula Mohana in Manepalli village, East Godavari, February, 2002.

(Photo by Author)



a



b



c

Fig. 14 (a, b, c)

Maddula Venkataratnam performs a *jāvālī* and depicts the *nāyikā* (a) parting, (b) combing, and (c) tying her hair.

An outdoor *meḷam* performance at the home of Maddula Mohana in Manepalli village, East Godavari, February, 2002.

(Photo by Author)



Fig. 15

A "red-light" street in the town of Peddapuram, where descendants of the *kalāvantulu* live and work.
(Photo by Author)



Fig. 16
Devulapalli Viraraghavamurti Sastri,
author of *Abhinaya Svayambodhini*
(From the frontispiece of the 1915 edition)



Fig. 17

Saride Anusuya accompanies her sisters by singing and playing the *tālam* during a *melam* performance at her home in Duvva, West Godavari, March 2002
(Photo by Author)



Fig. 18

Saride Maithili, performing the *jāvali* “*ceragu māse*” during a *melam* performance
at her home in Duvva, West Godavari, March 2002
(Photo by Author)



Fig. 19

Saride Varahalu sings a *padyam* from her notebook during a *meḷam* performance
at her home in Duvva, West Godavari, March 2002
(Photo by Author)



Fig. 20

Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma outside his home in Kuchipudi, June 1995
(Photo by Author)



Fig. 21

Vedantam Parvatisam reciting *Bhāmākalāpam* in front of the
Rāmaliṅgeśvarasvāmi temple, Kuchipudi, June 1995
(Photo by Author)



Fig. 22

Chintavari Melam, Kuchipudi, c. 1952.
(Photo Courtesy Sunil Kothari Dance Collection)



Fig. 23

A performance of *Bhāmākalāpam* outside the shrine to the Goddess
Bālatripurasundarī in Kuchipudi village, artist unknown, ca. 1940s (?)
(Photo Courtesy Sunil Kothari Dance Collection)



Fig. 24

Contemporary portrait of Siddhendrayogi
(With Kṛṣṇa and Satyabhāmā depicted in upper left corner)
(Photo by Author)



Fig. 25

Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma as Satyabhāmā in front of the
Bālatripurasundarī shrine, Kuchipudi village, c. 1955.

(Photo Courtesy Sunil Kothari Dance Collection)



Fig. 26

Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma in *Bhāmākalāpam*, ca. 1960.
(Photo Courtesy Sangeet Natak Academy)



Fig. 27

Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma in *Bhāmākalāpam*
with Chinta Krishnamurti in *sūtradhāri-veṣam*, ca. 1960.
(Photo Courtesy Sangeet Natak Academy)



Fig. 28

Kṛṣṇa as Rājamānār, with Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā
Cōḷa, location unknown, 12th Century
(Dehejia, *Slaves of the Lord*, 1988, Fig. 29)



Fig. 29
Kṛṣṇa with Devī (Satyabhāmā?)
Cōla, c. 11th-12th Century
(Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, 1914, 204)



Fig. 30

The *utsava-mūrti* of Śrī Rājagopālasvāmi, Mannargudi
(Photo Courtesy Rajagopalasvami Devasthanam, Mannargudi)

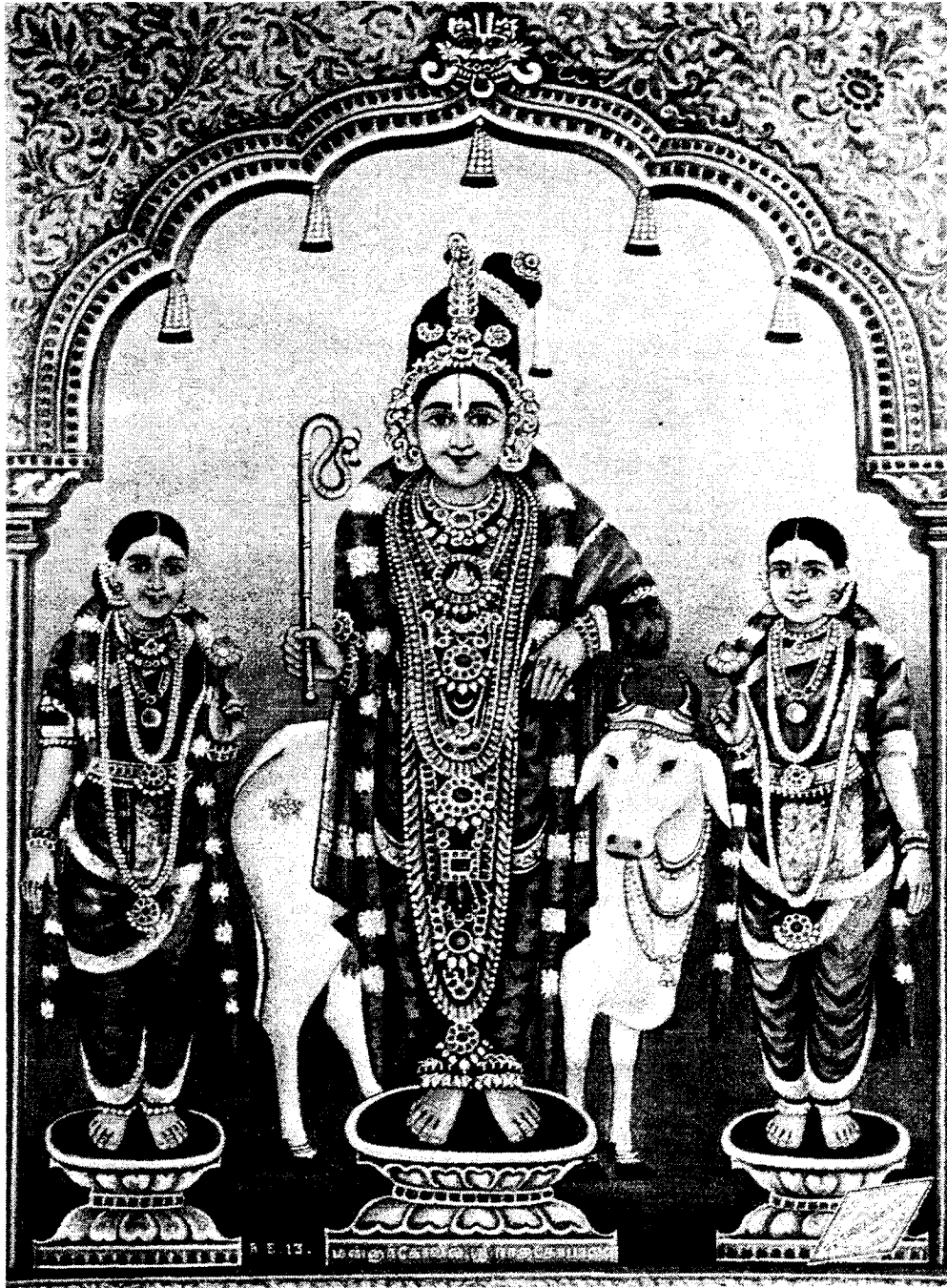


Fig. 31

Śrī Rājagopālasvāmi, Mannargudi, flanked by Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā
(Popular Calendar Print)

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Saride Family and Relatives

Saride Anusuya, Duvva
Saride Manikyamma, Kapilesapuram
Saride Mythili, Duvva
Saride Seshachalam, Duvva
Saride Varahalu, Duvva
K. Rukmini, Kapilesapuram
K. Nagamani, Kapilesapuram

Maddula Family and Relatives

Maddula Janakamma, Tatipaka
Maddula Mohana, Manepalli
Maddula Ramatulasi, Tatipaka
Maddula Venkataratnam, Tatipaka

Other East Godavari Kalāvantulu

Anvala Suryakantam, Mandapeta
Duggirala Satyavati, Mandapeta
Kola Sundaram, Muramanda
Kola Subrahmanyam, Bommur (Rajahmundry)
Kotipalli Haimavati, Muramanda
Kotipalli Sitaramalakshmi, Muramanda
Eluri Lakshakasulu, Muramanda
Eluru Krishnaveni, Rajahmundry
Garlanka Pani, Mandapeta
Jakkula Radha, Peddapuram
Kotipalli Rajahamsa, Muramanda
Kotipalli Sarasvati, Mandapeta
Nayudu Chilakamma, Muramanda
Pendyala Gaggavati, Mandapeta
Pendyala Satyavati, Mandapeta

b) Temple Priests

K. Narasimhacharyulu, Vaikhānasa Arcaka, Kuntimādhava Temple, Pithapuram
P. Purushottamacharyulu, Viakhānasa Arcaka, Madanagopālasvāmi temple, Ballipadu

c) Others

C.R. Acharyalu, Hereditary Devadāsī Dance Teacher, Non-Hereditary Kuchipudi Artist, Ahmedabad
Arudra, Literary Historian, Writer, Chennai
Kottuvada Anjali, Hereditary Tūrupu Bhāgavatam Artist, Singavaram (Nidadavolu)
Medinti Achyutaramayya, *Hāsya-pātra* Artist and Singer, Kotipalli (Gannavaram)
Nataraja Ramakrishna, Non-Hereditary Devadāsī Dance Artist and Teacher, Hyderabad
R.V. Subbarayudu, Hereditary Trustee, Śrī Madanagopālasvāmi Temple (Ballipadu), Malikipuram
Swapnasundari, Contemporary Kuchipudi and 'Vilasini Natyam' Dancer, New Delhi
Vedantam Parvatisam Sarma, Brahmin Bhāgavatar, Kuchipudi
Vedantam Radheshyam, Brahmin Bhāgavatar, Kuchipudi
Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma, Brahmin Bhāgavatar, Kuchipudi

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