Chapter 2
Whatever Happened to the South Indian Nautch?: Toward a Cultural History of Salon Dance in Madras

In 2002, while I was conducting ethnographic research on dance traditions in the Godavari delta in Andhra Pradesh, I met Sheikh Sur Jahan (Fig. XX), a musician who accompanied a troupe of Telugu-speaking courtesans on the harmonium in the town of Muramanda. He had been playing for dance troupes (*bhogamelams* or *melams*) since he was twelve years old, and at nearly seventy he was still a fine musician. Sur Jahan and his family regularly participated in *melam* performances in this region, as both musicians and dancers. But Sur Jahan's female relatives were by no means the only Muslim women in the region who performed dance as part of *devadasi* troupes. Late nineteenth and early twentieth-century colonial ethnographies mention Muslim dancing women named as "*turku-sanis*" who performed in famous *melams* in the Godavari delta and also had sexual relations with men from any of the "non-polluting" castes like their Hindu counterparts (Hemingway 1907, 58). They also go to great lengths to demonstrate that the community of "dancing girls" in the region consisted of "both Hindu Bogams and Muhammadan Bogams…and Muhammadan girls are married to a khanjir or dagger." (Ul-Hassan 1920, 91-92).[1] Indeed, figures such as Sur Jahan and lineage of Muslim *bhogams* from which he descends are discomfited signs of the secular nature of the dance *melam* in South India. But why do we not hear of the secular "salon performances" by *devadasis* in cultural histories of South India? Why are historical representations of dance in South India linked almost exclusively to temples and temple culture? Why has the word "*devadasi*," full of ritual and religious connotations, become the hegemonic appellation for dancing women in the entire region?

Fig. XX: Sheikh Sur Jahan (right). Photo by author.

While in many parts of North India, *tawa'if* courtesans in their capacity as entertainers have become part of the cultural and historical imagination of that region, courtesans in South India have for the most part become fossilized into "temple women" – "wives of the god" – and thus ostensibly, it appears that *there is no courtesan culture in South India.* If salon performances are mentioned at all by historians or dance practitioners, they are cast as symbols of the "degeneration" of dance practice in the region, though ironically this period saw the efflorescence of genres and compositions that form the mainstay of "classical Bharatanatyam dance" today.

Though some dancing women in South India have had very important relationships with temples and ritual cultures, and while many South Indian temples supported dancing women who underwent rituals of "dedication" to temple deities, a large number of dancing women did not participate in these religious activities. They were professional dancing women who performed in artistic guilds known as *melams*, and did not have much, if anything, to do with temples. Even in communities such as those of the Kaveri delta region in Tamilnadu where temple dedication was a key marker of status and ritual privilege, normally only one girl in each generation would have such honours. Other girls in the household would simply become non-dedicated dancing women who

lived in the matrifocal home and participated in the non-conjugal sexual lifestyles associated with these communities. As for Tamil-speaking women who did undergo dedication rituals at temples, performances in other contexts, such as weddings and salons, also constituted a very significant aspect of their lives as performers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The rise of the culture of salon performance in Madras, which as I have argued in the previous chapter, may have instigated the radical shifts in the presentation of dance in nineteenth-century Tanjore, roughly corresponds to the growth of the city itself. The distinctly urban culture of salon emerges at a time when a number of commercial groups (and more specifically the *dubash*-brokers employed by the Company) gentrify parts of the city's "Black Town."[2] Although salon performance flourishes in the Madras Presidency in the nineteenth century, it becomes increasingly rare by the third decade of the twentieth century. The disappearance of the salon as a venue for courtesan performance gives rise to publicly funded institutions like the Madras Music Academy (est. 1928) and several other cultural organizations calling themselves *sabhas* ("assemblies"). A handful of *devadasis* perform at these venues until the 1940s, perhaps in a final nod to the culture of the old-style salon, but this too is short-lived. Meanwhile, a small number of *devadasis* living in and around Madras become well-known as "gramophone artists" and film actresses. *Devadasi* dance is thus unhitched from the location of its emergence, only to be imported into diffuse systems of value when it is reinvented by Indian elites as "Bharatanatyam."

Recovering the history of salon performances of dance in South India is an arduous task. In this chapter I chart one of the fundamental ironies of salon culture in South India, namely that the moment of its emergence also signalled the beginnings of its demise. I do this by historicizing salon performances through their most representative performance genre, the *javali*, a short, usually

quick-paced erotic lyric. Like the culture of salon performance itself, the history of the *javali* is unfinished. It has eluded critical historicization and has travelled through salons into the writings of Orientalist scholars, and moved into the cinematic imaginary, only to be neglected as an "inappropriate" dance genre in the contemporary world. Salon dance, as a secular form of entertainment, came to define dance as a specifically urban, cosmopolitan practice and the *javali* travels as a sign of the cultural eclecticism represented by colonial modernity. Bringing together colonial travel accounts, early print material in Tamil and Telugu, and ethnographic data, this chapter offers the first critical account of salon culture in Madras in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By focussing exclusively on the religious dimensions of South Indian dance, scholars and practitioners have missed an opportunity to engage with a unique performance style that offers an expanded view of what South Indian dance accomplished in the moment prior to the dance revival and social reform.

European Engagements with Salon Dance

European administrators, missionaries, and visitors encounter *devadasis* and their performance practices in a variety of contexts from temple and wedding processions to the salons of native elites. They almost always appear as "peripheral (yet riveting) details in the narration of India's erotic landscape." (Taranath 2000, 7) European accounts of *devadasis* are heterogenous and complex, and have already been the subject of several studies (for example Bor 2007; Leucci 2005; Paxton 1999; Spear 2000; and Svejda-Hirsch 1992, among others). As a fundamentally unstable signifier, the South Indian *devadasi*-courtesan is represented in mercurial ways from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. Representations of *devadasis* in this period emerge out of alliances between Christian evangelicalism, colonial anthropology, and imperial medicine, all of

which are directed toward the moral reformation of women from these communities. Many colonial accounts of *devadasis* thus dwell, unsurprisingly, on the morality engendered by their dance. As with representations of *sati*, dancing by *devadasis* is ubiquitously identified – especially in missionary writings – with the civilizational depravity of "the oft-conquered people" of India.[3] By the end of the nineteenth century, mission work had become a highly feminized activity, and some late nineteenth and early twentieth century female missionaries such as Amy Charmichael (1867-1951) focused their efforts specifically on communities of *devadasis*. In many ways, the rhetorical and other strategies deployed in their attempts to "rehabilitate" *devadasis* are echoed in mid-twentieth century reform activities spearheaded by Indian nationalist elites.[4] Consider the somewhat typical evangelical missionary account of the conversion of children born to a Telugu-speaking *devadasi* through her relationship with a British surgeon, from 1853:

> It so happened, that there were two children who had come down from Masulipatnam to Madras, whose father, a European surgeon, had died when they were young; leaving them property. But the mother, a Teloogoo woman, who had been a dancing girl, had brought them up in heathenism. After much legal delay, Mr. Tucker was appointed guardian to these children, a girl fourteen years old and a boy, thirteen…The girl was perfectly wild and ignorant and it was with difficulty she could be taught to use a spoon instead of her fingers, to sit on a chair instead of on the ground, or to wear European dress. Her notions of religion were of the most debasing character, and her mind was thoroughly imbued with the heathen superstitions she had learnt from her mother... Having passed through a preliminary process of breaking in, the character of this girl began rapidly to develop, and greatly to improve. During a residence of two years on the Neilgherries, so great was the change, that she returned to Madras, where she was sent to a boarding school, quite a transformed character…The improvement of her character continued after her removal to school; and there was every reason to believe that she had become a truly converted follower of our Lord, when in the year of 1848, she was removed by an early and sudden death, at the age of nineteen. (Fox 1853, 126-127)

At stake in these representations is the "character" of *devadasis*. As we see in this account, the "wild and ignorant" daughter of the "dancing girl" is transformed into an exemplary, civilized native. More than other natives, *devadasis* and their children, as representatives of "another

kind" of morality are subject to excessive and unusual forms of scrutiny, sympathy and objectification. I wish, however, to shift our focus specifically to colonial representations of the aesthetic practices of *devadasis*, noting that most of these accounts refer not to dancing in temples, but to private soirees, "nautch" performances hosted by Indian elites.

Imbricated in these discursive constructions of the simultaneous sexual and moral vulnerability and danger of *devadasis* is the *fact* of the patronage of *devadasi* dance by European elites. European support of salon performances anchored discursive constructions of native female sexuality that enabled Europeans to profit – economically, sensually and politically – from its exotic, lascivious dimensions. As Anupama Taranath notes, "Metaphorizing Indian, and by extension all racialized sexuality, into the figure of woman...was a colonial strategy to encourage comprehension of the unfamiliar, and on a more general level, to partake in various excesses, sexual and otherwise, that India seemed to offer." (15) As we have already seen in the previous chapter, *devadasis* were mobilized as signs of cultural power and authority by rulers like Serfoji, and certainly also by other landowning elites, especially *zamindars*.[5] As *devadasis* were co-opted into the new economies of the emergent metropolis, their aesthetic practices were found new, albeit highly competitive patronage among native elites and British administrators.

Colonial engagements with cultural forms such as music and dance in South India are documented as early as 1727. That year, South Indian "nautch" dance was introduced into colonial public ceremony, when a *devadasi melam* accompanied Major John Roach in a procession to mark changes to the Royal Charter in Madras.[6] From at least this time onward, the South Indian salon dance or "nautch" was canonized as *the* most viable expression of elite socio-political authority. In some contexts, the space of the salon served to cement relations between Indian elites and Europeans in the "sociological theatre" of colonial Madras. To be sure, women

who performed in these contexts were not only objectified sexually by both groups, but were also racialized by Europeans across axes of imperial power. One only has to look, for example, at the "Nautch Dancing Girls" brought to New York to perform in an opera production in 1880, or those brought to perform in P.T. Barnum's shows in 1884, and the subsequent debates on race and citizenship they engendered in America (Srinivasan 2003; 2009). Returning to nineteenth and early twentieth century Madras, however, *devadasi* dance was instrumentalized largely in the context of the reception and entertainment of guests by the both old aristocracy and the emergent gentry. Lavish dinner parties were hosted for guests, native and European in the homes of these elites, in a manner parallel to concurrent developments in Calcutta. Representations of these performances of salon dance as displays of prestige in colonial Madras are found in a number of sources that traverse visual, literary, and anthropological terrain.

Officers of the Company were quick to capture the "nautch" in visual form. A number of commissioned paintings and later photographs of *devadasis* circulated through imperial networks and these visual representations supplemented written accounts of *devadasis* beginning in the early eighteenth century. Paintings like the one in Fig. XX from early nineteenth century Madras, depict dance *melams* in great detail, usually showing a single performer, inevitably in a dance position, flanked by a *nattuvanar* and other musicians, including drummers (*muttu* or *mrdangam* players), flautists, violinists, and "tutti" players (men who played the bellows to maintain pitch). With the advent of photography in colonial India, images of "nautch girls" became a staple in collections and albums that journeyed from the colony to the metropole. *Devadasis* in Madras were doubly fascinating because of their legacy as "temple dancers" in the colonial imaginary and their very real presence as "nautch" artists in the colonial city. [7] Like salon performances themselves, photographic representations of *devadasis* are undeniably sexually charged. But the

sexuality of most of these photographs is subtly crafted. Indeed, many of the subjects of the photographs are carefully posed, often in positions that intentionally appear “dignified,” and “respectable” enough, likely to assure audiences at home that upright morality prevailed among British men living or travelling in the colony. Indeed, it is rare to see photos of *devadasis* in performance. The photograph on the cover of this book, depicting a Telugu *bhogamelam* performing an acrobatic dance in 1862, presents somewhat of an exception to the rule. On the one hand, photographic representations serve to reify images of a “traditional” India represented by South Indian “temple dancers” found in missionary and travel writings in the nineteenth century, but on the other hand also create a dissonance. Photos of *devadasis* are rarely taken on temple grounds, but almost always posed in salon or outdoor settings with their *melams*.

Fig. XX: “Representation of the Dancing Girls on the Coast of Coromandel,” by Christopher Green (c. 1745-1805). British Library (WD 4510), used with permission.

Written accounts of performances by professional dancing women in colonial India, as Regula Qureshi has observed, “tend to privilege the visual since these authors lacked the

familiarity and comprehension to relate to the words [of the songs] or their musical setting." (2006, 316). "First hand" accounts of nautch performances in Madras city by British authors are extensive. Indeed, these texts could very well form a major study unto themselves. I will now turn briefly, therefore, to some representative examples in which salon performances are described by colonial administrators. The first specimen comes from 1838, and describes a "subscription nautch" (a commissioned performance, negotiated by contract) hosted by V. Juggarow in honour of Englishman A.R. McDonnell at Vepery, a suburb of Madras:

> The European gentlemen were about sixty in number, principally of the civil and military services; and several ladies were present also. The following programme exhibits the entertainment above stairs.
>
> - A set of three Mahomedan dancing-women, dancing in a circular form round the hall.
> - A young Hindoo girl, dancing on the sharp edges of swords, which are fixed in a ladder, at the same time cutting pieces of sugar-cane, applied below her feet.
> - A set of eight Hindoo dancing-women, each of them holding a string fixed in the ceiling, dancing in different ways, and forming the strings into nets, ropes, &c. at the same time singing and beating time with their feet and hands.
> - A set of three Hindoo dancing-girls, dancing in the Carnatic form.
> - A Hindoo dancing-girl, dancing in the Hindoo form, to an English tune.—Music with European instruments.
>
> …It was said that the value of the jewels on three of the girls, who were dancing together could not have been less than ten thousand pagodas! They were literally covered with brilliants, not excepting their noses, which were positively tortured with precious stones.
>
> The rather alarming exhibition of a young girl dancing on the sharp edges of swords, which formed the second act, was repeated late in the evening; but on the second occasion, she cut limes with her heels, instead of sugar-cane. It appears hardly credible that a delicate little girl should be able to stand on the edge of a sharp sword, and at the same time, by pressing with her heel, cut a lime in two on the same instrument.
>
> Throughout the evening, the European guests, and especially the ladies, experienced the most polite and unremitting attention from the native gentlemen who gave the entertainment. A room was laid out with every luxury to gratify the palates of our omnivorous countrymen – wine cooled to a fault; and indeed, nothing omitted which could render the entertainment worthy of the occasion. (*Herald*, February 7, 1838 cited in *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register*, Vol. XXVI [May-August 1838], 149-150)

This description captures the complexities of European representations of native dancers and their arts. There is certainly a fascination, usually erotic (as we will see more obviously in the example that follows), with any of the visual markers of difference – in this case with the dancers' jewels that subtly evoke an exotic sexuality. But this is immediately juxtaposed with a moral or aesthetic judgement. Here, the observer is disturbed by the risks posed to the "delicate little girl" who dances on the edge of swords. These kinds of representations are best understood as metonymic; the elements of any single version parallel those of imperial adventure in the male imagination: the confrontation, rescue, reform and conquest of natives all live through these tellings.

But this account also reveals the fundamental aesthetic heterogeneity of salon dance itself. The dancers hosted by Juggarow present both "Mohamedan" and "Carnatic" styles of dance, a reference to the presence of North Indian genres and styles alongside South Indian ones. We also see that these courtesans are performing to an "English tune" and with European musical instruments, and this characteristic persists in a number of descriptions. Finally, the dancers are engaged in acrobatic feats, including chopping lime and sugarcane with their heels while dancing on the blades of swords, and the performance of the dance with "string fixed in the ceiling" (*pinnal-kolattam*) that we will discuss below. The inclusion of these kinds of numbers as innovative modes of entertainment was another pervasive aspect of salon dance: Telugu-speaking *devadasis* in the Godavari river delta and in the southern Nellore and Chitoor districts regularly performed dance while standing on the edge of brass plate, for example. In Madras city, Chennai Nellaiyappa Nattuvanar (1859-1905), the grandson of Ponnaiya of the Quartet, choreographed a *varnam* for his students (sisters named Duraikkannu and Parvati) in Mylapore, in which the dancers tied vegetables to their bodies, and at the end of every rhythmic sequence

chopped off one vegetable with a knife (Sundaram 2003, 271). Other devadasis in the city performed a popular Hindustani piece called *pataṅg uḍāī* ("kite flying") that resembled North Indian courtesan dance (Sankaran 1986, 64). These acrobatic and other novel additions to performance practices allowed *devadasis* and *nattuvanars* to thrive in the competitive aesthetic economy of Madras city.

Let us return to Qureshi's notion of the "privileging of the visual" in colonial descriptions of courtesan dance. In 1875, Prince Albert Edward (1841-1910), eldest son of Queen Victoria who would later become King Edward VII, visits Madras. He is treated, in Royapooram, a suburb of Madras, to a performance that he watched, it seems, out of obligation:

> The hall, nearly two hundred yards long, was filled with princes, the Madras staff, and hundreds of ladies. His Royal Highness, who wore his scarlet uniform of field-marshall, was presented with a casket and address when he entered the building. The most enjoyable part of the scene was the stage with the groups of black-haired dancing girls, attired in dresses of white and gold, with shoulder-sashes of yellow and purple and scarlet, and armlets and bracelets of diamonds and all manner of precious stones. In their ears and noses there were rings, which were simply constellations of diamonds. These ladies and their male accompanists with tom-toms, fiddles, and zithers, sang songs and shared in grotesque dances. It was a picture the strange beauty of which could not be eclipsed.
>
> In the nautch dances there are sometimes two or three performers; sometimes, as on this occasion, only one. They are always young, and frequently beautiful. The dancer clashes together the silver bands worn on the feet above the ankles, and raises her arms, jingling the bangles, in alternate movements above her head, to a droning accompaniment from the musicians; now and again she bursts into a twangy song with apparently no distinct air or meaning, and which always ends abruptly. The character of the dance itself is wearyingly changeless, with the exception of an occasional turn which loosens the gauze scarf and reveals for an instant the figure of the still well-clothed chest. There is nothing lively, graceful, or attractive about it. No one cares to see a nautch twice unless the dancers have very pretty faces and very pretty dresses…
>
> The Prince of Wales was obliged to yield to native prejudices and witness the nautches; but long before he reached Madras, His Royal Highness, like every one else with the expedition, seemed to have become thoroughly tired of the stupid spectacle.
>
> There are Hindoo nautch girls and Mahomedan nautch girls all over India, and everywhere they seem to awaken the same veneration in the native mind and to receive abundant presents and remuneration for their services. Perhaps the prettiest execution of this evening was the Kolattam, or plait dance, round a maypole, to the air of "Bonnie Dundee," rather differently rendered from the way we are accustomed to hear it in

> Scotland. A dozen girls of splendid physique took part in the dance; they had castanets in their hands, and their dress, bloomer fashion, was of muslin trimmed with long gold fringe and tassels; their slight waists were encircled with belts of solid gold. During this dance the lime-light was thrown with full fervency upon the waltzers, and the little muster of fairlylike costumes and dark but animated faces was one of unparalleled beauty. (Wheeler 1876, 176-178)

Because these descriptions relied largely upon the ocular, colonial observers almost never comment on the lyric poetry that was at the heart of *devadasi* dance. Instead they view it almost wholly as the skill of displaying the body. Indeed, this writer is disappointed that the dancer's scarf reveals nothing but her "well-clothed chest," and notes that all the dances had a "splendid physique," but comments that no one really cares to see them unless "the dancers have very pretty faces and very pretty dresses." The Prince of Wales is evidently "tired of the stupid spectacle." Aesthetic judgements on the dance are also central to this descriptive mode: the dance is "grotesque" and there is "nothing lively, graceful, or attractive about it." The one dance the writer singles out is precisely one of the visually "novel" type – the *pinnal kolattam* – a group dance performed with sticks, a genre that was also performed by courtesans at Tanjore.[8]

In one final example dated 1888, General E.F. Burton reminisces about a nautch he attended more than thirty years earlier during a visit to Bhowany (presumably the Bhavani river, in the Nilgiris):

> The public bungalow or rest-house at Bhowany…was erected many years ago by a civilian of the old school. He lived in native style, as many people did sixty or seventy years ago, and he left his mark behind him, not only by building this house, but also by establishing a corps de ballet, i.e., set of Nautch girls, whose accomplishments actually extended to singing "God save the Queen,"…and this has been kept up by their descendants, so that in 1852, when I first visited the place, I was greeted by the whole party, bedizened in all their finery, and squalling the National Anthem as fervently as if they understood it, which they did not.

This passage speaks to ways in which dance was mobilized as a sign of the modern. I do not think that these types of compositions served an instrumental function of creating and identifying

Anglophone subjects for cultural proselytization in a Macaulayan sense; it would be difficult to simply dismiss this as a case of mimesis. Rather, the performance of “God Save the Queen” by *devadasis* dramatizes the anxieties of an emergent modernity. As markers of the exigencies of colonial cultural life, they are *embodied* signs and are strategically mobilized interventions that capture and manipulate cultural power in this period. In Chapter Four, I will examine the life of these compositions in greater detail, thinking critically about how *devadasis* understood themselves understand such interventions.

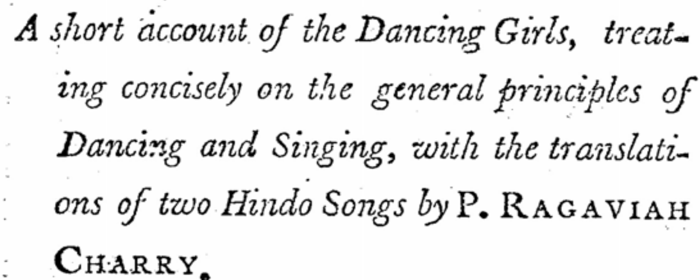

A short account of the Dancing Girls, treating concisely on the general principles of Dancing and Singing, with the translations of two Hindo Songs by P. RAGAVIAH CHARRY.

Fig. XX: The cover of Ragaviah Charry’s text (1802)

European readings of native dance only through its spectacular and ocular dimensions appear to have disturbed some native elites. As early as 1806, a Telugu Brahmin named Partheputt Ragaviah Charry, who was a native informant for Holt Mackenzie’s Mysore Survey Project, wrote a booklet entitled “A short account of the dancing girls, treating concisely on the general principles of Dancing and Singing, with the translations of two Hindo songs.” (Fig. XX) [9] This text was an introduction to South Indian “nautch” dancing for his European employers, whom he felt were missing something as they observed the form. While technical aspects of both music and dance in the *melams* were sometimes formulaic, and thus slightly more accessible to Europeans, the improvisational aspects of courtesan dance, their mode of poetic exegesis through

gestural interpretation (*abhinaya*) was not. Ragaviah Charry writes this tract to help Europeans understand this essential dimension of courtesan performance:

> The habitual politeness of English gentlemen ever induces them to accept the attentive invitations of the Natives to partake in the pleasures of a *natch*, or the feats of Dancing Girls: an entertainment common throughout Hindostan, nay India. But I am inclined to think that many of the Gentlemen, and more particularly the Ladies, who are not acquainted with the Poetical part of the Native languages in which the songs are composed, must remain contented with the information of the eye…Men are inquisitive in the first instance and that very properly to know the history and character of the objects presented to their view.

As Amanda Weidman has noted, "For anything to be properly available to the European gaze…a certain structure or order had to be discernable beneath the surface. To such a gaze, the surface appeared as a kind of mask of insensible repetitions and embellishments" (Weidman 2006, 209). But Ragaviah Charry's work also provides us with some key information on salon performances in Madras at a time when descriptions of these soirees are extremely rare. The document details the performance practices of the dance *melams*. Toward the end of the text, the author proceeds to describe a typical salon performance in its entirety. The essay includes deliberations on aesthetics (*rasa* theory), the classification and names of hand gestures, and *tala* (rhythm). The latter half of the essay describes a performance of *devadasi* dance from beginning to end. It opens with the *nattuvanar* reciting the *melaprapti*, a rhythmic prelude, followed by the *todaya mangalam* (*jaya janaki ramana*, described and translated in the text as "a Prayer to Rama"). Next is the "Hymn of Salam," the *salam jati* or *salam daru*, a composition in honour of the Maratha kings of Tanjore. He provides a translation of the following *salam-daru* in praise of King Pratapasimha (r.1740-63) which is still remembered in courtesan communities in coastal Andhra:

> "Pratapa Sinha, the valiant in war; You are exclusively endowed with the accomplishments of Music and Poetry, in the abstruse science of Bharata Sasha, and in the art of Abhinia or counterfeited – you are well versed on all subjects and your mind is liberal and you posses unbounded courage – To you, O Maha Raja, I render Salam."

Following this "bustling and noisy commencement," Ragaviah Charry informs us that that the remainder of the performance consists of *abhinaya* in the form of *varnams*, *padams* and *kirtanas*, and proceeds to describe the genre that comprised the mainstay of the salon performances, the Telugu *padam*. This is a most significant aspect of Ragaviah Charry's work. He presents two full *padams* in English translation. These are certainly the earliest translations of the poems of the seventeenth-century composer Ksetrayya, and are also the first English translations of any of the song-texts associated with dance in South India. Below is Ragaviah Charry's translation of the *padam* "bagaya ni vagalella" in Asaveri *raga*, in which a woman confronts her lover about his infidelity:

> 'Tis very surprising, O Muvva Gopala, all your gallantries,
> 'tis exceedingly pretty.
>
> To you I give the folded beetle, but you hand it over to that lotus-eyed (a pretty woman) with whom this world laughs at your intrigues.
> *'Tis very surprising*
>
> I waste my intreaties on you; but you love her, whose eyes are beautiful as lotus;
> you freely express a contempt of me, and the circumstance is ridiculed at the
> houses of those flowerlike framed women of delicate and elegant constitutions.
> *'Tis very surprising*
>
> I'd throw myself into your arms and take an interest in your amusements,
> Oh Muvva Gopala, but you listen to malicious reports and live at variance, you hold me in disdain, and esteem her, that female friend.
> *'Tis very surprising*

This work provides us with a description of salon dance as it was performed in Madras prior to the advent of the Tanjore Quartet's innovations, and this is still more or less the suite

remembered by the *kalavantula* community in contemporary Andhra Pradesh, as we will see in chapter five.

Devadasis and Salon Dance in Early Telugu and Tamil Print Sources

Some of the earliest texts that describe salon scenes in Madras are in Indian languages – Sanskrit, Telugu and later Tamil. Many of these texts provide us with rich accounts of the lavish lives of modern Indian elites and also furnish details about dance and music practices. Most of these works also point to the always already ambiguous social status of women in *devadasi* communities, who are usually glossed by terms such as *vesya* (courtesan). It is important for us to note that these texts are *not* about the idealized "*devadasi* temple-woman" retrieved by contemporary historians, but rather about the courtesans – "non-dedicated" professional dancing women. It is also important that the stereotypes embedded in this kind of literature fuel the conscious exclusion of the history of salon performances from the writings of nationalist historians of dance.

Literary representations of elite social gatherings for "men of affairs" in colonial Madras provide us with some of the earliest documented scenes of salons in South India. Literary works such as the Sanskrit *Sarvadevavilasa* ("Sport of All the Gods," likely composed around 1820) and the Telugu *Cennapurivilasamu* ("Sports in the City of Chennai," composed by Narasimha Sastri in 1863) describe private gatherings in homes that cemented social relations among high-ranking men.[10] In the *Sarvadevavilasa*, the dubashes of Kovur and Manali, merchants, and non-Brahmin temple administrators (*dharmakartas*), are imaged as regal patrons of learning and the arts, creating the illusion that they were free from any superior authority (Peterson 2001). They hosted lavish assemblies known as *sadas*, both inside and outside temple contexts, and on

festivals such as Navaratri, these soirees revolved around the presentation of concerts of music and dance. In the *Sarvadevavilasa*, many of these men are depicted with their courtesan-mistresses who are described as famous singers and dancers of the time, and are referred to as *ganikas* and *dasis*. Thus we have the names of Narayani of Kumbhakonam, Mangai of Thanjavur, and Minaksi of Salem.[11] The last of these figures was a very prominent courtesan of Madras who paid for the Brahmin vocalist, Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar (1845-1902) to move to the city from Tiruvaiyaru in Thanjavur district, so that he could teach her daughters vocal music. He stayed in the city for 12 years in the outhouse of Salem Minakshi, who paid him Rs. 100 a month. It is here that he composed a large number of *javalis,* songs in that distinctly modern genre that we will discuss later in this chapter.

The advent of print culture in colonial South India, as Stuart Blackburn has demonstrated, "enabled change, allowing certain texts and forms of information to spread…more quickly and widely than was previously possible by speech or writing." (2003, 10) Blackburn concedes that it "...is beyond dispute is that print increased literacy, multiplied the copies and widened the distribution of traditional text; it reached new audiences with new types of information and encouraged new literary forms. And through all these innovations, print facilitated public debate on everything from vernacular education to child marriage and nationalism." (12) Some of the key sources through which we are able to historicize *devadasis* in nineteenth and early twentieth century South India are printed tracts, poems and novels Tamil, Telugu and English that circulate between c. 1850 and 1950.[12] All of these literary works (save one, *Dasikal Mocavalai* [1936], written by Muvalur Ramamirttam which we will discuss in chapter three) are composed by men, and most employ a graphic descriptive mode or satire. As we shall see in the examples below, the texts combine literary virtuosity with a moralizing discourse that inevitably maligns

courtesans and salon culture. The earlier texts among these are precursors of the public "Anti-Nautch" debates that begin with Kandukuri Viresalingam (1848-1919), a Brahmin from Rajahmundry, and then continue in the work of Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy.

In the year 1864, Racavetikavi, a resident of Tiruttani, writes a small text entitled *Ganikagunapravartana Taravali* ("Poem on the Transformation in the Nature of the Courtesan"). Published in Madras, the work is technically a secular poem centred on a female character (a *laghukavya*), and is in the subgenre known as *taravali* ("row of stars," consisting of verses in the *sisapadya* metre). The work focuses almost exclusively on depicting the cunning nature of the *dasis* who ensnare "innocent" men into their traps of sexual pleasure, greed and disease. It juxtaposes graphic descriptions of sexual acts with depictions of the pain of venereal disease that has affected the male protagonist. No doubt, there is a titillating dimension to this literature meant for its elite male consumers. It narrates, in a linear manner, one man's encounters with a courtesan, and consistently oscillates between representations of pleasure and pain. Unlike the other texts we have discussed, *Ganikagunapravartana Taravali* does not dwell on the lure of the aesthetic skills of the courtesan as much as it does on men's vulnerability when they are aroused by the sight of the bodies of available women. Indeed, dance and music are only mentioned once in the text. The courtesans are referred to by the terms *vesya* and *varakanta* ("one who has a new lover each day") or its variant, *varakamini*. The poem opens with an image of a respectable city man who is "born into a good family" and "expresses love toward his wife, embraces her, and kisses her on the cheeks. He meticulously collects all his savings, and thinks about his future." On the next page, we are introduced to the courtesan as kind of sorceress, conjuring a potion that will ensnare young men:

> How the prostitute keeps her man under her control: she makes a potion. Taking *lentils*, garlic, the wax which is in the ear of a dog, she mixes it, boils it, and adds the flesh of a crow, the nerve of a scorpion, the root of the tree of heaven, and the flank of a cat which has been butchered on a Sunday. Bringing these together, she prepares an ointment and applies it on the man's legs. Such *vesyas* should certainly be avoided.

In the following section, the mood shifts dramatically. The text presents explicit images of the same man afflicted by venereal disease after intercourse with the courtesan. This is preceded by a description of the various reasons why men visit courtesans:

> One type of man complains that his wife has no children. A second person says that all his friends and relatives have turned against him. A third man says that he is unable to reach self-awareness (*kaivalyapadavi*). A fourth man complains that he is addressed in a disrespectful manner – "hey!" A fifth one says his body is giving him trouble. A sixth man feels excessive heat all over his body. A seventh is afflicted with various diseases [and so no woman will have relations with him]. An eighth man himself tortures his own body [by masturbating]. These kinds of people want to have relationships with a *varakamini*, and she knows this. He dedicates all the gold he possesses to this woman, yet cannot expect anything in return. But he *does* contract a number of diseases from her, leaves her house, and shamefully returns to his own home. Without even a penny to his name, he admonishes himself for having gone to the *varakanta's* house. His body becomes warped like a half-moon (*ardhacandra*). But full of lust, he feels the urge again…On seeing her, he pulls back the foreskin, and notices a small leakage blood and urine. He looks down into his hand, but now the line of fortune (*dhanarekha*) is in *her* hand! These women's only goal is to attract young men and take away all their money.

The poet also pre-empts any sympathy the reader might feel toward the courtesan. The familiar trope of "rescue" is complete absent in his text. He makes it clear that courtesans are incorrigible and that attempts to engage with them in any way are ultimately futile:

> Even if one is favourable to the *vesya* and makes a gesture to help her, his attempts will ultimately be transformed into the situations described above. Each and every syllable uttered by the *varakanta* is soaked in poison (*visambu*). *Varakaminis* are willing to go to any extreme [to get what they want].

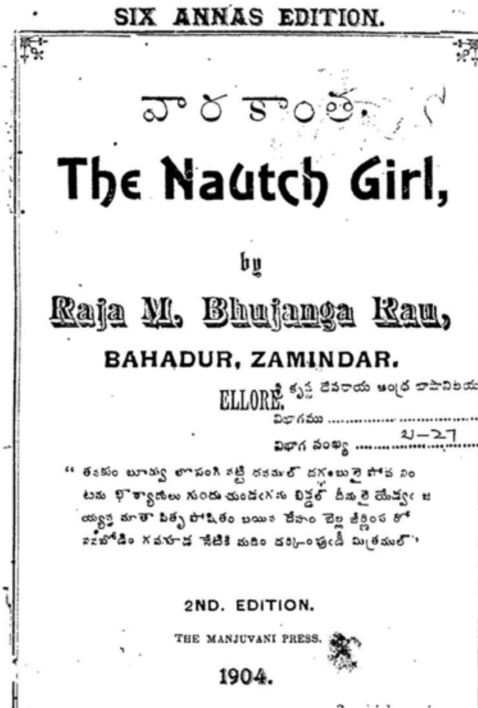
The sexual boldness of the courtesan, titillating as it is, is later transformed into frightful demonic force. The courtesan "swallows" the man and ultimately subjugates him:

> Like water flowing from a tap, they speak obscene words and have cunning eyes… She herself pulls out the organ of the man which looks like a plantain (*rambha-phalam*). She starts to squeeze it, and pulls the foreskin back, and places it in her hole. What should I say about men who resort to the houses of such prostitutes who have the acquisition of wealth as the singular goal of their life?...She makes him happy with her love play and finally she shows him a place in the corner of the house where a curtain is drawn, and makes him join her cohort of cooks and servants! This place is the kitchen, where he becomes one in a line of several others…The man's mind becomes a ball in her hands…She seems to blush at the sight of a man, and her face becomes red. But she swallows the man through her eyes. She holds the smoke from incense up to her genitals as if to dry her wet pubic hair. She ties a knot in her petticoat. She applies perfumed substances to her body and looks out for a prospective client…Discarding shame (*lajja*) or honour, with only the thought of intercourse on his mind, without any fear or sense of propriety, this man is prepared to have union even with his own mother! He comes to surrender his money to her. Such men are cunningly "tonsured" (humiliated) by the *varakamini*.

The courtesan also "emasculates" her partner, by turning him into a cook or servant in her house. This motif appears at least five times throughout the poem in a move that dwells on the valorization of the economics of "respectable" family life in which gender roles are clearly defined.

Another text is *Varakanta*, subtitled in English as "The Nautch Girl," (Fig. 4) a Telugu novel by Raja M. Bhujanga Rau Bahadur, Zamindar of Elluru, published in the year 1904. Bhujanga Rau was a connoisseur of Telugu literature, and in 1928 co-authored an English work called *A History of Telugu Literature* with P. Chenchiah. *Varakanta* is a complex narrative that focuses on a professional dancing woman named Kanakangi and her relationship with a married man named Kesava Rao. The familiar trope of the money-hungry courtesan using black magic is central here as well. Kanakangi and her mother Papa con Kesava Rao into giving up all his money, and eventually take him to court, arguing that even his house should rightfully belong to them. They win the case, since *vesyas* are dharmically entitled to support from their patrons. A broken man, Kesava Rao seeks solace in his virtuous wife and friends, and ultimately is consoled by them. In the end, the novel enforces the triumph of monogamous, conjugal sexuality, and

valorizes the institution of marriage. In addition to very plainly contrasting the figures of courtesan and wife, the novel also casts professional dancing women as temptresses who lure men into the nets of their deceitful love.



SIX ANNAS EDITION.

The Nautch Girl,

by

Raja M. Bhujanga Rau,

BAHADUR, ZAMINDAR.

ELLORE.

2ND. EDITION.

THE MANJUVANI PRESS.

1904.

Fig. XX: The cover of *Varakanta: The Nautch Girl* by M. Bhujanga Rau (1904), a Telugu novel that contains long and detailed descriptions of *mejuvani* performances by Telugu-speaking courtesans. Collection of the author.

In the second chapter of the novel, there is a section entitled “The Commencement of the Mejuvani” (*mejuvani prarambhamu*) that runs for two pages. In it we see that the author is clearly conversant with many of the technical dimensions of courtesan performance, but he ultimately foreshadows the tragic end of the narrative with a recurrent moralizing discourse on the dangers of associating with *sanis* or courtesans. I cite this lengthy passage almost in its entirety because the great care with which it treats the dance and music practices of *devadasis* in the *mejuvani* (salon) context. It is clear that the author has witnessed a great number of these performances, and his description of the event is remarkably detailed. It mentions specific genres

such as *padam* and *pallavi* practiced by Telugu-speaking *devadasis*. It also specifically mentions Kanakangi's performance of a *javali* during which she repeats lines again and again, affecting several new, improvised interpretations, in a process referred to as *sandhi-viccheda sancari* among Telugu courtesans.

> The *maddala* drum resounds. Bangles jingle. Some people come to the dance arena and offer obeisance. Some think "How fortunate am I to be here!" Others are quiet. The *sruti* (drone) sounds in a perfect pitch, the musicians tune either instruments in unison, and sit on one side. Then the melodious voices of women are heard. It is like the sound of celestial musicians (*kinnaras*). Then they begin to sing beautifully in chorus. But even the God of Desire hangs his head in shame when the dance begins. The dance is exhibited according to the tenets of Bharata, and to the accompaniment of the bagpipe. Watching the *abhinaya*, you feel the dancer is beckoning you, intoxicating you. With her gorgeous face, she appears exceedingly beautiful. The audience lose themselves in that beauty. Watching the *abhinaya*, one hears exclamations: "Bravo! What is life without dance?" At times she lifts her hands, at times her feet, she whirls, she performs *abhinaya* while reclining. She raises one hand and the other falls. An audience member tries to tie a handkerchief around her. That young girl sings song after song in heavy, difficult ragas (*ghana raga*). She appears like a play-thing revelling in acts of pleasure. She performs various types of footwork that befit the song she is singing. That young, beautiful girl Kanakangi wears various jewels on body. Young and old in the audience are bewildered. "Who will be fortunate enough to get close to her?" they think…Not this one, not that – she sings all the *padas*, *svaras*, *krtis*, and *pallavis*. "Do the *sloka* I taught you, darling" says someone. "Bravo! Bravo!" they cry, as if drowning in the juice of aesthetic pleasure (*ananda rasa*). She turns her face here and there, and finally the dance with a vase is done and the audience is completely spellbound. She performs…*abhinaya* looking at Kesava. [Through her abhinaya] she says to him "you should come at midnight," in a manner smooth as a simile (*upama*)…Kanakangi received accolades for her performances of *abhinaya* in *krtis*, *pallavagitis*, and for showing the various positions of love (*sarasas*)…Looking in the direction of Kesava Rao, she performs *abhinaya* to a *javali* entitled *ninne namminanura* ["I believed in you"]. She expresses that she has so much of love toward him, as if she really does. She repeats the words "ninne, mari ninne, ika ninne, ninne." The [implied] meaning of this can easily be understood by anyone…
>
> "In this world, *sanis* [courtesans] alone can provide such pleasure. Sanis are the only ones who can do this. She sings and dances with a *double entendre*!" they think, until the early hours of the next morning. With the performance of song after song, the *melam* finally comes to an end. Uncontrollable urges overcome those men who watched the performance. Most do not have the courage to act upon their urges, even though they feel them deeply. They get up and leave, cursing the fact that the performance has come to an end.

Much later, just before the promulgation of the Anti-Devadasi Act of 1947, the trope of the excessively erotic and "cunning" courtesan is still present in popular Tamil literature. *Meṭrācai Viṭṭu Nāṭṭipurattukku Oṭṭam Piṭitta Tācikaḷ Taṅkappāṭṭu* ("Songs about the *dasis* who left Madras and ran away to the villages," 1943) is a text by K. Kurucāmitās.[13] The poems centre around the "*vesya* whores" (*veci-muntaikal*) who "pollute" Madras city, and out of fear of being persecuted under the new Devadasi Abolition Bill of 1929 are "running back" to their villages in the Kaveri delta. The writing style and content is continuous with earlier texts such as the *Ganikagunapravartana Taravali.* The focus is on the intensity of the sexual experiences shared by the *dasis* and their lovers, but the "innocent young men" are fleeced by the *dasis*, wander about Madras like emasculated beggars, and ultimately contract venereal disease. The first section cautions the reader against the evils of the *dāsīs'* snares. The second, using images of the "Madras Surgeon's" pronouncements on venereal disease together with the *Devadasi Abolition Bill* introduced in 1929, celebrates the cleansing of Madras city from the moral "filth" represented by *devadāsīs*. The language of the songs is harsh, and threats to *devadāsīs* and their potential male partners pervade the work. The text opens, for example, with the following couplet: "Don't believe them, don't believe them, the *dasi* whores (*tācimuṇṭaikaḷai*). Don't ruin yourself by trusting them, those *vesya* whores (*vēcimuṇṭaikaḷai*)." *Dasis* are vilified as selfish, impure, and diseased women. Kurucamitas explicitly also contrasts courtesans with "good" married women, and curses them repeatedly:

> Virtuous married women (*pattinikal*) are ruined by these whores.
> Great people lose their honour (*mana*) and abandon their virtuous lives. (1.10)
> It seems there are fights over this slough from the gutter
> These folks are buying disease, they just don't know any better. (1.13)
> If these "golden" *dasis* live in this town,
> I will torture them and make sure they flee. (2.10)
> Let the *dasis* and *vecis* rot
> Let the middlemen who earned money rot (2.12)

The *dasi* ran away,
and now Kasi [the middleman, pimp] has been pacified. (2.14)
The age-old filth has disappeared,
and the people of Madras are elated. (2.15)

These early Tamil and Telugu print materials produced in Madras by men – which include poems, tracts, and novels – thus facilitate new urban representations of *devadāsīs* as worthy targets of moral and aesthetic reform. These literary representations of *devadasis* in Madras embody masculine anxieties about the shifting sexual and moral economy of late nineteenth and early twentieth century India. In her work on representations of *devadasis* in British and Ango-Indian novels, Nancy Paxton has noted that the authors of these texts, unlike their Romantic forbearers who idealized *devadasis* as embodiments of sacred sexuality, present them as signs of "unresolved conflicts concerning gender, sex, and romantic love." (1999, 86) I would argue that *devadasis* represent similar concerns for the authors of the Telugu and Tamil early print materials we have examined. In most of this writing, the culture of the salon is pitted directly against that of the home and conjugal unions. As Charu Gupta as demonstrated in her work on sexuality and the mobilization of communal rhetoric in Hindi-speaking India in this period, economic instabilities combined with an emergent public discourse of social purity affected a major reorganization of social space in which courtesans and prostitutes were ultimately "indentified as a malignant sign of the loss of wealth and wasteful expenditure." (2001, 115) Gupta goes on to say that in spite of the displacement of these women through public condemnation (as we have seen in our examples from Telugu and Tamil print materials), courtesan culture continued to thrive, but on the margins. The courtesan "was a threat to civilization and at the same time ensured its sanctity by operating outside the norm, hidden from respectability." (122) In South India too, as we will see through our examinations of the *javali* genre below, the public condemnation of courtesan performance by native elites exists *alongside*

its patronage. Indeed, the highpoint of the aesthetic innovations of salon culture in South India also ironically coincide with the beginnings of its disappearance. Both sides of the coin are fundamentally shaped by transformations of masculinity in the public sphere (Sinha 1995). On the one hand, the male body needed to be secured from pollution and corruption, strengthened by its commitments to the world of monogamous, domesticated sexuality. On the other hand, economic security and power continued to be expressed through displays of non-conjugal female sexuality that were emblematic of engagements with colonial authority and traditional expressions of sexual virility. Courtesans were ultimately pushed to the cultural margins, overwhelmed by the valorization of monogamy and domesticity in nationalist discourse. As we will see in Chapter Three, reinventions of masculinity and citizenship from both within and without the *devadasi* community led to their disappearance from public culture, and rendered hegemonic the authoritarian morality of the patrifocal domicile.

***Javalis* and Salon Performance: Origins and Sources**

In 1960, eminent Sanskritist V. Raghavan was asked to write the preface to a volume of Telugu *javali* songs. Dr. Ragahvan appears frustrated in the preface, unable to crack the historical puzzle of the *javali*. He writes: "curiously for a type which has come up in times so near to us, the Javali is really obscure in its origins."[14] But Raghavan is not alone. Over the past century, the *javali* has been contentious both in terms of its origins and its status. Excepting Raghavan and a few others, most contemporary writers and performers dismiss *javalis* as degenerate expressions of poetry that are meant to arouse the senses, and nothing more.[15] Unlike the songs of the older Telugu *padam* genre from which they derive their structure and narrative contexts, *javalis* are rarely thought of as "highbrow" or "classical" songs. Traditionally associated with *devadasi*s in

colonial Madras and their upper-caste male patrons, *javalis* are the quintessential marker of salon performances by courtesans. They unsettle nationalist re-inventions of dance as temple-based and purely religious, and perhaps because of this, they are rarely heard in contemporary performances of Bharatanatyam dance and Karnatak music. The elusive nature of the javali mirrors that of salon culture more generally, and so now I shift our focus to retrieving the limited, but highly significant, if unfinished, cultural life of this genre.

In form and structure the *javali* is basically indistinguishable from the *padam*, except perhaps for its lighter, more playful style. What makes the *javali* unique, and what has perhaps contributed to its opacity as a form, is the very context of its performance, the relations that it proposes between dancer and audience. The field of its production is also radically different from that of the *padams* composed by apotheosized Telugu poets such as Annamayya and Ksetrayya. While these composers lived and worked at medieval centres of religious pilgrimage and devotion like Tirupati, *javali* composers (*javalikartas*) worked in the civic heart of the colonial city, employed as Taluk clerks or post office workers. Unabashedly erotic, sometimes sarcastic, and always upbeat, *javalis* are also signs of the volatile, sexually-charged space of the salon, one that was diametrically opposed to the contained, private, sexuality of the conjugal home.

Emerging between the demise of courtly forms of the nineteenth-century on the one hand, and India's emergent entertainment industry on the other, the *javali* defies existing generic classification. In this section, I argue that it is precisely this "transitional" status of the *javali* that has made it an unsolvable riddle for scholars and historians like Raghavan. As texts, they are sites for multiple experiments in syncretism with regard to language and music. They are incorporated into Parsi-theatre inspired Tamil plays, sometimes written in a combination of South Indian languages and English, are subject to Orientalist analyses, and even enter films.

For over a century, scholars have grappled with the definition and etymology of the *javali*. In 1894, Reverend F. Kittel in his *Kannada-English Dictionary* defined *javali* as "a kind of lewd poetry," evidently derived from the Kannada word *javala* which he translates as "common, vulgar, or insignificant." Kittel's definition appears to have been the point of reference for nearly all subsequent attempts to pin down an etymology for the word. Similarly, when it comes to the content of the *javali* – namely exactly how it is different from the *padam* – there is an absolute lack of consensus. The *javali* shares the tripartite structure of the *padam*: it contains *pallavi*, *anupallavi*, and *caranam*. This three-fold unravelling of the poem, literally from the "sprout" of the poem (*pallavi*) to the elaborate *caranam* stanzas, enables narrative and aesthetic movement through the text. Like songs in the Telugu *padam* genre, *javalis* are usually dedicated to a localized form of Krishna. Often the *mudra* or "signature" of the composer of the *javali* is the name of the God. So, for example, the *javalis* of Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar are identifiable through their inclusion of the names "Venkatesa" or "Varada-Venkatesa." These similarities, combined with the emphasis on eroticism or *srngara* in both the *padam* and *javali*, make them nearly indistinguishable, so much so that one Telugu scholar, hands thrown up in aggravation, insists on referring to *javalis* as "nothing more than mini *padams*."

Two major historical trajectories prevail when it comes to the invention of the *javali* as a musical form. The first, and perhaps more historically accurate narrative, situates the genesis of the genre at the Mysore court under the patronage of the kings Mummadi Krsnaraja Udaiyar III (1799-1868) and Camaraja Udaiyar IX (1881-1894). Two Kannada paper manuscripts from the time of Krsnaraja Utaiyar that are preserved in the library of the Institute of Kannada Studies at the University of Mysore attest to the fact that the genre was in existence during his reign.[16] Later, under the patronage of both of these kings, the dance master Cinnaiya (1802-1856, one

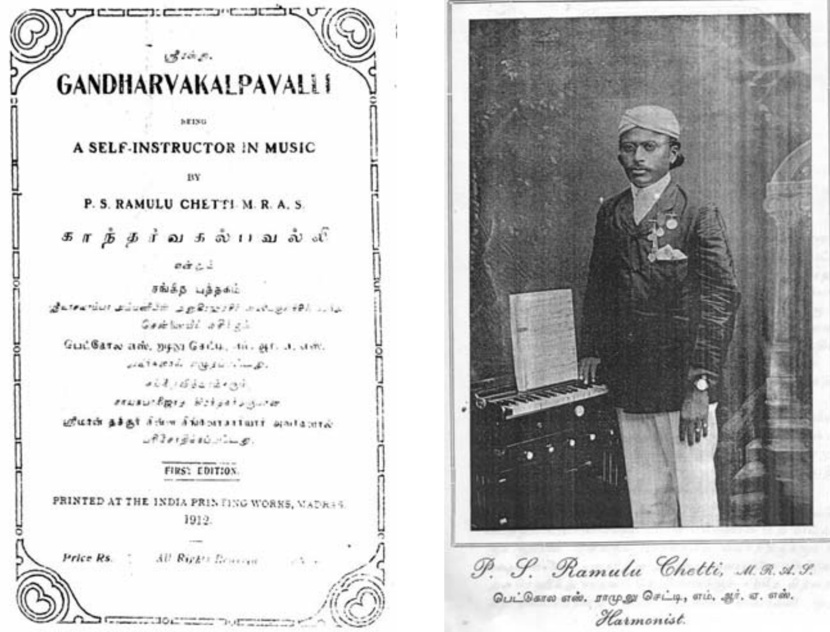
among the famous "Tanjore Quartet") who was employed, among others, by the king, is known to have composed songs that were known as *javadis* or *javalis*. The other narrative revolves around events at the court of the last king of Travancore, Maharaja Svati Tirunal (1813-1846). Here, the first *javali* is said to have been crafted in the hands of the dance-master Vativel of Tanjore (1810-1847, younger brother of Cinnaiya). On the whole, there appears to be less evidence to support such a claim.[17]

Sources for studying *javalis* as literature or as scripts for performance are few and far between. With the exception of the two Kannada paper manuscripts mentioned above, manuscripts of *javalis* do not exist in library collections. Notations of *javalis* can be found in the personal notebooks of some *nattuvanars* or dance-masters, such the one belonging to Chennai Nellaiyappa Nattuvanar (1859-1905) that we discussed in the previous chapter. Other sources include nineteenth and twentieth century print materials in Tamil and Telugu, such the chapbook entitled *Telunku Cinkara Javali* (Telugu Srngara Javalis) published in 1924 (Fig. XX) and more elaborate books on South Indian concert music, such as the treatises of Taccur Singaracharyulu[18] and the *Gandharvakalpavalli* (Fig. XX).[19] This last work by P.S. Ramulu Chetti was published in both Telugu and Tamil versions in Madras from 1911-12. Not much is known about Ramulu Chetti other than the fact that he was a non-Brahmin master of the harmonium, an instrument that was banned by All India Radio in 1930, and much despised by many traditional Brahmin musicians in South India. The large number of compositions in this work that are traditionally associated with *devadasi* performance, points to the fact that he may have been in contact with *devadasi*s, perhaps even in the capacity of an accompanist. We shall return to this text later.

The last and perhaps most abundant source of *javalis* comes from within the traditional community of *javali* performers, the *devadasi*-courtesans of South India themselves. In both the

Tamil and Telugu-speaking regions – from the northern tip of the Godavari delta to the Kanyakumari district in the deep South – these women have continued to preserve the texts and performance techniques of *javalis*. In the latter half of this section, we will observe the ways in which contemporary devadasis talk about and perform texts and performance practices traditionally associated with *javalis* and salons.

Fig. XX: The cover of *Telunku Cinkara Javali* (1924).


GANDHARVAKALPAVALLI

BEING

A SELF-INSTRUCTOR IN MUSIC

BY

P. S. RAMULU CHETTI M. R. A. S.

கா ந் த ர் வ க ல் ப வ ல் லி

சங்கீத புத்தகம்

FIRST EDITION.

PRINTED AT THE INDIA PRINTING WORKS, MADRAS.
1912.

Fig. XX: The cover and frontispiece of the Tamil edition of Ramulu Chetti's *Gandharvakalpavalli* (1912).

Though the *javali* is traditionally understood as a Telugu or Kannada genre, between roughly 1880 and 1910, *javalis* become extremely popular as Tamil *devotional* songs meant for theatrical performance. The new scripting of *javali* in religious language indexes the flexibility of the genre and the heterogeneous constitution of artists and audiences who encountered it as a distinctly modern form. These circulate in the form of small inexpensive chapbooks, usually 8-10 pages in length, each of which consists of a set of songs dedicated to localized Tamil deities. Thus, we have collections of Tamil "javalis" called *Chidambaram Nataraja Civakamiyin Peril Parsi Ati Arputa Javali* (1906) dedicated to Nataraja and his consort at Chidambaram, and *Maturai Cuntaresvarar Javali* (1888) dedicated to Siva as Sundaresvara at Madurai. This is the cover image of a similar book of Tamil *javalis* to Murukan at Palani from 1903. Here the *javali* as a "popular" genre of literature and music easily fits into the emergent contexts of Tamil

theatre that consciously presented itself as *innovative* (note the word *ati arputa* "astonishing," in the title above), and linked itself to the Parsi theatre.

Most of these songs were composed by non-Brahmin Velalars who were involved in the emergent world of Tamil popular drama known as *icai natakam* or 'special' *natakam* that was shaped by Cankaratas Cuvamikal (1867-1922) between 1887 and 1922. Indeed, many of the chapbooks are written and/or published by members of popular early drama companies in Madras with names such as "Chennai Manoranjita Nataka Sabha." These songs are also part of a new set of performance practices deeply affected by Parsi theatre companies that toured the Madras Presidency in this period. As Susan Seizer (2005, 52-54) has convincingly demonstrated, the aesthetics of popular theatre in Tamilnadu emerge out of a peculiar kind of nineteenth-century cultural modernity in which Velalars and Tevars are literally the nouveaux *dramatis personae*, deploying consciously innovative staging, music and acting technique.

More generally, early South Indian print materials on music also contain large sections on "Parsi Pattukal," and often *javalis* are subsumed under this category, which usually contains Hindi and Urdu love songs from Parsi plays such as "Aao ji aao" from the play *King Lear*.[20] These songs, which employed North Indian melodies adapted from Hindustani ragas, gave rise to a catch-all genre in South Indian music, called "*parsi mettu*" or Parsi tunes. Thus, many *javalis* are not in known South Indian ragas, but in their printed forms are listed as set to the "parsi mettu." By the 1920s, the terms "*parsi mettu*" or "Hindustan mettu" referred to any "odd" tune or song that could not be classified as part of the indigenous South Indian music or dance repertoire. These included *javalis*, "gramophone songs," and even popular everyday Tamil song-genres such as *nalanku* (wedding songs) and *otam* ("boat songs"). In the *Gandharvakalpavalli*, the final tune listed under "Parsi Pattukal" is a Sanskrit version of "God Save the King" entitled

"*sarasa sārvabhauma jārjīnāma bhūpa*" in honour of King George V and his wife Queen Mary, who visited India in 1911 and staged the now infamous Coronation Darbar in Delhi that same year (Fig. XX).

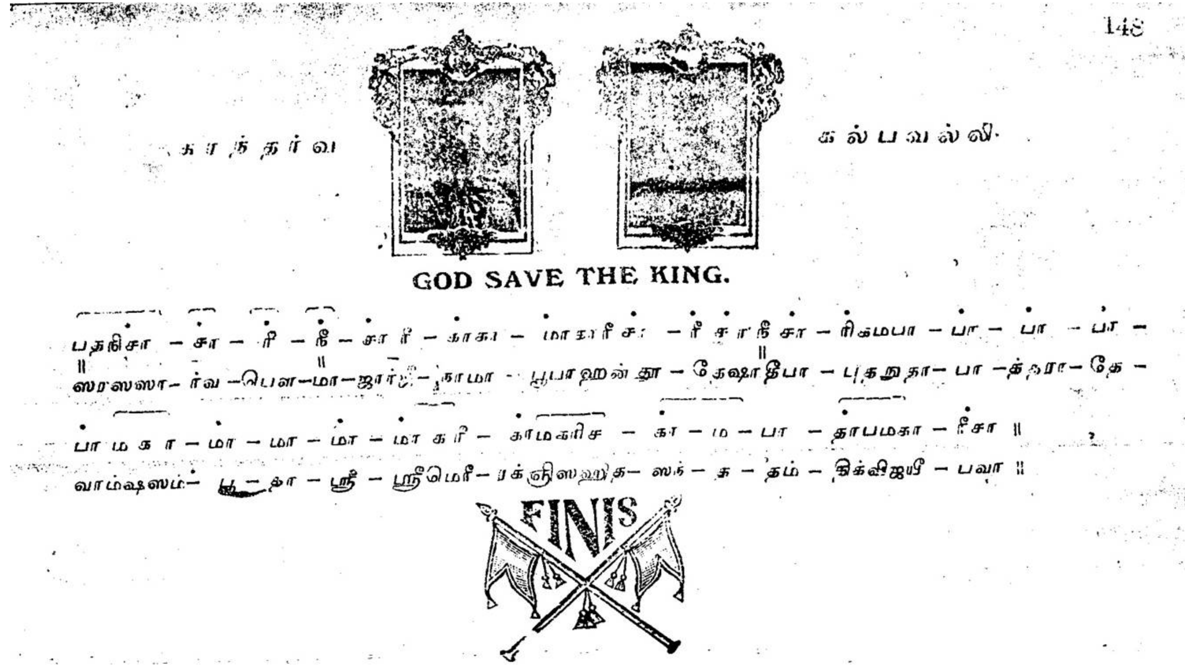


Fig. XX: "God Save the King" in Sanskrit (*sarasa sārvabhauma jārjīnāma bhūpa*) from Ramulu Chetti's *Gandharvakalpavalli* (1912).

The forms of cultural hybridity that surround genres like the *javali* also include radical experiments with language, similar to those we have already seen in Tanjore (in the performance of the kuravanci, for example). In the *Gandharvakalpavalli*, we also find a *javali* in a mixed-language genre, consisting of four languages – Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and English. Composed by a Tamil poet Sivaramayya from the village of Karur near Trichy, nearly each word in this song alternates between the languages, and clearly, the song is meant for consumption by a cosmopolitan audience.[21]

Javali in Four Langauges (*caturbhasa javali*)
Raga: Kambodhi; Tala: Adi; Composer: Karur Sivaramayya (c. 1798-1820)

<u>Pallavi</u> (refrain)

my dear come *varuvai* *i vela*
[English] [Tamil] [Telugu]

<u>Caranam</u> (stanza)

ninnujuci cala *divasa ayite manna* *ni na manasu impaina*
[Telugu] [Kannada] [Telugu]

kalaharanaminca *for me now* *belatingalu bisallavayite*
[Telugu] [English] [Kannada]

kuluku talakugala *come* *birana* *well I shall sing* *Sivaramuni* *songs*
[Telugu] [English] [Telugu] [English] [Telugu] [English]

A translation would read something like this:

> My dear come, come here now! Many days have passed since I have seen you.
> O King! Fill my heart with your sweetness. Why do you delay for me now?
> Months have passed – it all seems a waste!
> With all your charms, come quickly, well I shall sing Sivarama's songs.

The Production and Performance of *Javalis*

Many prominent *devadasis* and *nattuvanars* from Thanjavur moved to Madras after the annexation of Thanjavur to the British in 1856.[22] Among them was Thanjavur Kamakshi (1810-1890) whom we met toward the end of the previous chapter. Kamakshi supplemented her income as a dancer by giving private recitals of *Tiruppukal* hymns at the family shrine in the home of a prominent merchant named Rangoon Krishnaswami Mudaliar every week (Menon 1999, 56). Vina Dhanammal (1867-1939), Kamakshi's granddaughter, was one of the most celebrated female artists of her time, and as Lakshmi Subramanian (2009) has demonstrated in a recent biography, became a symbol of "authentic" Karnatak music on the eve of its reinvention in the mid-twentieth century. Dhanammal became famous for the musical soirees she hosted – "salon

performances" in her own home – every Friday from 6:00 to 8:00 in the evening. In addition to these performances amidst boughs of jasmine flowers, Dhanammal also performed in the homes of a number of Madras' commercial elite – Tirumalaiya Naidu, T. Sitapati Iyer, Raja Sir Ramaswami Mudaliyar, and A. Rangaswami Iyengar (Editor of The Hindu newspaper) and others. Dhanammal met Dharmapuri Subbaraya Ayyar (Fig. XX), a clerk in the Taluk office at Hosur while she was singing at a festival in Tiruvottriyur just outside Madras (Sankaran 1982, 24). The two shared an intimate relationship, and it was for her and her family that Subbaraya Ayyar, who was also an accomplished musician, composed over thirty *javalis*. Several of these make anecdotal references to their sexual relationship.[23] In some senses, this exemplifies the social dynamics that characterize the creation of most *javalis* – composed by upper-caste men, performed by courtesans, and usually symptomatic of an intimate relationship between the two.

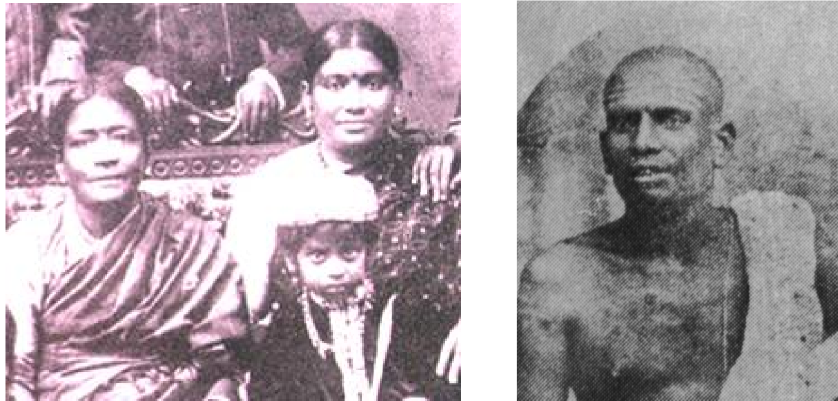


Fig. XX: Vina Dhanammal with her daughter Lakshmiratnam, 1918, and Dharmapuri Subbbaraya Ayyar. Photos courtesy the late T. Sankaran.

This tradition of salon-based performance was also very common in the Telugu-speaking parts of the Madras Presidency from the late eighteenth century onward. Here, troupes of courtesan performers who were known as *bhogamvallu* were contracted to perform in the homes of Brahmin and non-Brahmin elites, and would receive obligatory fees and gifts called *osagulu* for their performances. In Telugu these salon performances were called *mejuvani* or *mezuvani*,

from the Urdu word *mezban* or *mezman*, meaning "landlord, master of the house, host of a feast, a man who entertains guests." But in fact the repertoire they performed was continuous with the repertoire of their Tamil-speaking counterparts. For example, they performed compositions dedicated to the Thanjavur kings, Serfoji and Sivaji, and also *javalis* composed by Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar of Madras, whom we have already discussed.[24]

Literally embodying the aestheticized ideal of the *nayika* or heroine of the *padams* and *javalis*, the South Indian dancing woman relied on artful self-representation in the salon context. The bulk of Telugu *javali* texts are written from the perspective of the *nayika*, and it is not surprising that there is a certain self-consciousness among courtesans today when they talk about these texts. Kotipalli Hymavathi, from a *bhogam* community in the village of Muramanda in coastal Andhra, told me "Javalis are my favourite songs. I like how the woman talks to the *nayaka* in these songs. She can tell him what she really thinks, and there's nothing wrong with that (*emi tappu ledu*)!"

Indeed, the themes of *javalis* are sometimes bolder than those of the Telugu *padam*. In one very popular *javali* from coastal Andhra composed by Neti Subbarayudu Sastri (c. 1880-1950), the heroine admonishes Krsna for approaching her on the days of her menstrual period. She says "*you* made the rules of purity and pollution, and now you want to break them? No way! You'll just have to wait."[25] *Javalis* also commonly deploy rhetorical strategies familiar from other *bhakti* contexts, such as those of *ninda-stuti* ("complaint-praise"), and of course the allegorical uses of sexual imagery. But when we watch a performance of *javalis* by courtesans, these ideas clearly recede to the background. The *javali* is, like the *thumri* of the North Indian *baiji*, or the *lavani* of Maharashtrian *kalavant*, a dance genre whose primary function is to entertain. The aesthetics of the genre – as an erotic composition meant specifically to entertain urban audiences – drew from the

standard tropes that already existed in the texts for courtesan performance. As with Telugu and Tamil *padams*, the primary actors in *javali* poetry are the heroine (*nayika*), the hero (*nayaka*) and the heroine's confidante (*sakhi*). As Matthew Allen notes in his discussion of Tamil *padams*, courtesan poetry employs both direct and indirect rhetorical stances, with the *nayika* or heroine either directly addressing the hero, or speaking to him through her confidante (Allen 1992, 337-339).

The movement through the poetry of a *javali*, like that of a *padam*, is cyclical. The performance of *padams* and *javalis* as music for dance is itself a lyrical act. The artist renders the text through a movement that returns to a central theme encapsulated in the refrain or *pallavi* (Fig. XX). The *anupallavi* and multiple *caranams* have the *pallavi* as their point of reference. Poems meant for performance by *devadasi*-courtesans are rarely linear "story-telling," but rather cyclical, lyrical texts that suggest emotive landscapes and invoke fleeting visions of erotic and social situations. The cyclical nature of this rendition also allows *javalis* to invoke memory and oscillate between past and present.

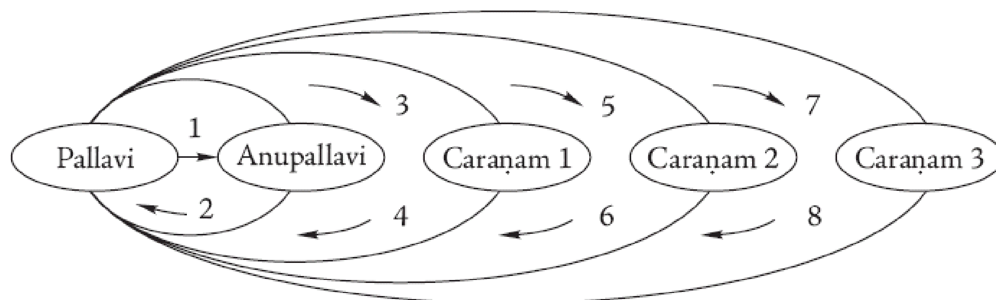


Fig. XX: Movement through the text of a *javali*, after Matthew Allen (1992, 288)

The *javali* that follows was composed for the family of Vina Dhanammal in Madras by Dharmapuri Subbaraya Ayyar in the raga Khamas. In it, the heroine's confidante speaks to the hero, asking him to re-unite with the heroine who is longs to make love to him:

<u>Pallavi</u>

narimani nikainadira jaracora ma	Crafty lover! This matchless woman is the one for you.

<u>Anupallavi</u>

dhira vinara sri dharmapuradhipa ma cakkani	Listen, Sweet Hero of Dharmapuri *She's the one*

<u>Caranam 1</u>

boti nercina ratipatalu saiyatale *vadhutiyu sarisatila patiyana kadata ma*	She has learnt her erotic lessons. No woman can outplay her! *She's the one*

<u>Caranam 2</u>

marubalkerugani manini gadara kamini *taradhipa ni bhavakadanare sarasaku*	She'll never say no to you, moon-faced one, she knows all your lovemaking moods *She's the one*

<u>Caranam 3</u>

maraviruni virisaramula korvadika *rara saragunanu cekora marukeliki ma*	She can't suffer Kama's arrows anymore -- come play his games with her *She's the one*

Fig. 7: Maddula Janakamma (b. 1932) demonstrates the use of *rati-mudras* in the rendering of compositions like *padams* and *javalis*. Manepalli village, East Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh, 2002. Photograph by author.

In her attempts to entice the hero, the confidante extols the heroine's skills in lovemaking, and these kinds of poetic passages traditionally provide courtesans ample scope for depicting various kinds of sexual union through elaborate metaphors and complex gestural vocabulary. The Telugu-speaking courtesans of the Godavari river delta deployed *rati-mudras* -- a set of over fifty different hand gestures that depicted the positions (*bandhalu*) of lovemaking -- in their performances of *javalis* (Fig. 7). They also performed another technique known as *nakha-sikha varnanam*, "praise [of a woman's body] from the toenails to the crown of the head." Here, the various parts of a woman's body are compared to images found in the natural world, largely in keeping with lyrical conventions used by Telugu and Sanskrit poets. Variation and improvisation are at the heart of courtesan interpretations of songs like *padams* and *javalis*; therefore the texts themselves are often open-ended to allow for flexibility in their interpretation through *abhinaya*. In addition to the complex improvisations in *abhinaya*, *javalis* in also provided an occasion for

the display of improvised patterns of abstract movement for the body (*adavu* or *adagulu*) among Telugu-speaking courtesans. At the conclusion of the last line of the *javali*, the musicians improvise on the *raga* and abstract dance movements are performed to this musical sequence. The clusters of movement end with a tripartite cadence called *muktayi*. This technique, which almost always follows the rendition of *javalis* by Telugu-speaking courtesans, is called *gaptu-varusa*, a "string of dance movements," and was an indispensable technique in the performance of *javalis* in the Godavari delta region.

Javalis and New Media

Another new performance opportunity is presented to professional dancing women in the first decades of the twentieth century, namely that of gramophone recordings. As Stephen Hughes (2002, 450-51) has noted, recording companies promoted these recordings by emphasizing the "respectability" of the listening experience – that is, enjoying *devadasi* music without any personal contact with performer herself. Printed indexes to gramophone recordings with titles like "Gramophone Kirttanamirtam," contain the texts of several *javalis* sung by *devadasis* such as Tiruchendur Shanmukhavadivu, Tiruvidaimarudur Bhavani, Coimbatore Thayi, and Salem Godavari, all of whom produced top-selling records for company labels such as HMV in the first two decades of the twentieth century (Hughes 2002; 2007, Weidman 2006).[26]

The first women to appear on gramophone recordings made in India were courtesans from Calcutta – Soshi Mukhi, Fani Bala, Saila Bai and Gauhar Jan (Kinnear 1994). Gauhar Jan, born to Jewish-Armenian parents as Angelina Yeoward, produced some of the most famous recordings of all. [27] In 1910, Gauhar Jan came to Madras for a performance at the Victoria Public Hall, organized by C. Gopala Chetty, a wealthy textile merchant and music connoisseur.[28] By

this time, Gauhar Jan was a celebrity, with hundreds of her songs circulating across India from 1903 onward. In Madras, Gauhar Jan was hosted by a *devadasi* named Salem Godavari. Vina Dhanammal organized a catered dinner in honour of Gauhar Jan, and taught her a Telugu *kirtana* by Tyagaraja which Gauhar Jan recorded a year later. By 1912, the texts of Gauhan Jan's recordings of Hindi songs were already circulating in Tamil print, for example in our *Gandharvakalpavalli*, where they are found under the heading "Songs by Gauhar Jan of Calcutta" (*kalkatta kohar jan pattukal*), but still under the meta-genre of Parsi theatre songs.[29]

Devadasis were also in high demand by early Indian cinema. Prominent early film producers and directors such as Lakshmana Chettiyar and K. Subrahmanyam recruited *devadasis* to act in their films, some of whom, like M.S. Subbulakshmi, gained iconic status largely because they *left* cinema to pursue more "respectable" professions early in their career. In the context of cinema, we see how the *javali* indexes a major cultural transition -- from the intimate salons of Madras elites to the artefacts of mass culture. The journey of one *javali*, travelling from a traditional community of performers, through the fieldnotes of an Orientalist musicologist, and into a Telugu film, foregrounds the genre's distinctively modern life. The *javali* "amtalone tellavare" has been attributed to Dharmapuri Subbaraya Ayyar, but this is open to debate. It describes a married woman after a night of illicit lovemaking. She wakes in the bed of Krishna who is "full of desire," (*makkuvato gopaludu*) and sings: "In the meanwhile, dawn has come. Ayyo! What can I do?" This composition makes an early appearance in a text by Captain C.P. Day**,** who wrote his famous work the *Music and Musical Instruments of Southern India and the Deccan* in 1891. This work provides the *javali* in Western staff notation and indicates that it is in the Sankarabharanam *raga*, and *rupaka tala*. Captain Day also notes that this "perhaps the most popular" of "*javadi* airs" danced by the nautch girls of the Madras Presidency (Fig. 8).

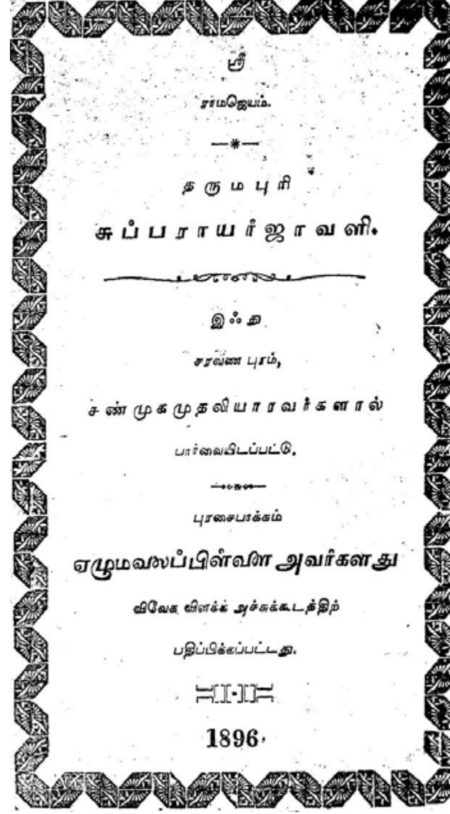
“ANTHALONA TELAVARI.”

Pallevi. Anupallevi. Stanzas. rall. a tempo.

Râga S'ankârabharna.
Tâla Rupacca.

Fig. XX: The *javali* “amtalone tellavare” from C.P. Day’s *Music and Musical Instruments of Southern India and the Deccan* (1891).

Oddly, the same song also appears as one of the *javalis* composed by Dharmapuri Subbaraya Ayyar in a text called *Tarumapuri Cupparayar Javali* (1896) which was published during the composer’s own lifetime. Here we see it in the *raga* Behag (Fig. 9). It is highly improbable that Dharmapuri Subbaraya Ayyar composed this song, since it does not contain the characteristic “signature words” (*mukuta* or *mudra*) used by Subbaraya Ayyar, but instead contains the obscure signature “*simhabhupala*.”



ஸ்ரீ

ராமஜெயம்.

—*—

தருமபுரி

சுப்பராயர்ஜாவளி.

இஃது

சரவண புரம்,

சண்முகமுதலியாரவர்களால்

பார்வையிடப்பட்டு.

புரசைபாக்கம்

ஏழுமலைப்பிள்ளை அவர்களது

விவேக விளக்க அச்சுக்கூடத்திற்

பதிப்பிக்கப்பட்டது.

1896.

Fig. XX: The cover of *Tarumapuri Cupparayar Javali* (1896), an anthology of *javalis* attributed to Dharmapuri Subbaraya Ayyar published during his own lifetime.

The next appearance of this *javali* is in the Telugu film *Muddu Bidda* ("Darling Boy") directed by K.B. Tilak in the year 1956 (Fig. 10).[30] In this film, one of the young male protagonists is chastised for watching a performance of dance by the courtesans or *bhogamvallu*. But the scene that depicts the performance by the *bhogamelam* seems to celebrate the culture of courtesan dance, leaving the viewer confounded by a spectacle that animates the simultaneous desirability and vilification of the courtesan and her art, an anxiety that is so much a part of reform discourse in this period, which is largely engineered by *smarta* Brahmins, Chettiyars, Mudaliyars and other elite men. The release of this film also happens to coincide with another intervention – the passing of the Andhra Pradesh State Government's amendment to the Madras Anti-Devadasi Act, on August 14th, 1956. The original *Madras Devadasi (Prevention of*

Dedication) Act of 1947 only banned the temple dedication rituals and temple-oriented performances by *devadasis*, and so in most parts of South India, especially coastal Andhra, salon performances by courtesan troupes continued well into the 1950s. This 1956 amendment criminalized performances by women from hereditary courtesan communities at marriages and other private social events. This film, in many ways, represents one of the last official nods to the culture of the salon in Telugu-speaking South India. The poignancy of the film sequence is remarkable – the women performing in the troupe are likely *bhogamvallu* from the region around the town of Manepalli in East Godavari district, whose names do not appear in the credits. The distinctive feature of *javali* rendition in that region – the *gaptu-varusa* or improvised dance sequence at the end – undeniably marks the technical and aesthetic continuity of *javali* rendition in the courtesan community. It is a reminder of the precarious fate of traditional *javali* performance. The social reform movement directed toward *devadasis* in this period was not so much directed at dancing in temples, but toward dance performed at private events, or in colonial parlance, the South Indian *nautch*. For the women who were the traditional keepers of these cultural practices, the *javali* oddly presented an opportunity in the new world of colonial modernity, but also would come to be seen as morally questionable and would eventually play a role in the criminalization of their lifestyles.

Fig. XX: Stills from the Telugu film *Muddu Bidda* (1956) depicting a performance of the *javali* "amtalone tellavare." Performers unknown.

As indices of the transformations of culture – salons, print materials, gramophone recordings, and films – *javalis* live complex and multivalent lives. The various historical, aesthetic, and even affective registers of *javalis* can only be understood in the context of a hybrid, cosmopolitan Madras Presidency, in which the new flows of culture involved Telugu poetics, European languages and performance idioms, and an unstable political and sexual economy. I would argue that it is the fundamental linguistic, social, and choreographic hybridity of *devadasi* dance in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – expressed exclusively through the culture of salon performance – that enables the development of the *javali*, and allows it to move so quickly and effortlessly though the sites of urban cultural practice and innovation that we have discussed. Lodged as they were in the liminal space between colonial modernity and the emergent nationalist reinvention of South India's arts in the 1930s, it is easy to imagine how *javalis*, like the salon lives of *devadasis*, slipped through the cracks of historicization and historiography.

[1] The patronage of *devadasi* troupes by Muslims is also found in *Qanoon-e-Islam, or the Customs of the Moosulmans of India* (Shurreef and Herklots 1832, lxxxii). This account notes that *melams* are generally invited to perform at weddings, and mentions the *nutwa* (*nattuvanar*) who leads the troupe. Professional dancers in Tanjore also performed in Muslim homes, particularly at the time of marriages. A mid-nineteenth century painting from Tanjore currently held at the Victoria and Albert Museum (2006AV2428-01) depicts a Muslim marriage procession led by dancers performing in the "Hindustani" style. The participation of Tanjore's *devadasis* in Muslim weddings is also confirmed by musicologist B.M. Sundaram:

> "In Tanjore, there were some *devadasi* dancers who used to give regular performances in the homes of Muslims, whenever marriages take place there. When someone in those Muslim families died, it was a custom for the *dasis* who danced in these homes to gift a goat for the [funerary] meal...It shows a mutual respect, a mutual affinity." (Sundaram, personal communication).

[2] The Mutaliyar *dubash* family of Manali, just outside Madras, maintained connections with the Thanjavur court. For more on these connections see Neild (1977); for details on *dubashes* and culture in colonial Madras, see Hancock (2008), Mukund (2005), Neild-Basu (1984), and Waghorne (2004). For a discussion of the patronage of music by *dubashes* and other commercial elites, see the recent work of Subramanian (2006, 2009).

[3] The term "oft-conquered people" is used by missionary Caroline Atwater Mason in her discussion of *devadasi* immorality (1902, 103-105).

[4] Amy Charmichael was the author of a book published in 1909 entitled *Lotus Buds* (a reference to the innocence of young *devadasi* girls) strewn with photos of girl infants. Charmichael founded the Dohnavur Fellowship, and her work was admired by a number of British feminists including Katherine Mayo, author of the controversial *Mother India* (1927). Cho (2009) offers a somewhat celebratory reading of Charmichael that does not problematize her representations of systemic child sexual abuse in colonial India, an issue that was by no means limited to girls in *devadasi* communities.

[5] *Devadasis* were regularly hired by a number of *zamindari* courts (*samasthanams*) in the Madras Presidency. In Chapter Four, I explore *devadasi* performance in the context of Pudukkottai, one of the major "princely states" in Madras. In the nineteenth-century, *devadasis* also performed at the *samasthanam*-courts in Ramanathapuram, Sivaganga, Ettayapuram, Ayyampalayam, Settur, Marungapuri, Ukkadai, and Palavanattam in the Tamil-speaking regions, and Karvetinagaram, Kalahasti, Pithapuram, Tuni, Nuzvid, Bobbili, Vizianagaram, Jayapuram, Venkatagiri, Vanaparti, Gadvala, and Kollapuram in the Telugu-speaking regions. This

[6] The Mayor's Court at Madras was reorganized on this occasion, consisting of a Mayor and nine Aldermen with the power to make decisions on all civil court cases among English inhabitants. The procession included Major John Roach on horseback, followed by foot soldiers playing drums, trumpets and other instruments, and a troupe of "dancing girls with country music." (Wheeler 1878, 133)

[7] Unfortunately, critical analysis of photographic representations of professional dancers from colonial South India is severely lacking, despite the great abundance of photos available in archival sources. With the exception of one essay by Joachim Bautze (2006) which is largely descriptive and very brief, and an unpublished work by Sujatha Meegama (2004) dealing with photographic representations of dancers from Ceylon, almost no scholarly writing exists on this subject. Recently, Saloni Mathur's work which interrogates issues around gender and the visual archive, has included a short but critical analysis of representations of "nautch girls" in photographs from North India (2007, 109-132).

[8] A sort of "instruction manual" for *pinnal-kolattam* at Tanjore exists in the form of a Marathi manuscript entitled *Dora Dharuna Gopha Veni Paddhati* (Krishnaswamy Mahadik Rao, 2005). The performance of *pinnal-kolattam* by *devadasis* is also mentioned in some detail by Dr. John Shortt in his anthropological paper entitled "The Bayadère; or, Dancing Girls of Southern India." (1867, 190-191).

[9] Ragaviah Charry was a "native informant" for Holt Mackenzie's Mysore Survey Project. Holt Mackenzie (1787-1876) is best remembered for drafting a memorandum on land revenue in northern India which became the template for the revenue systems that were implemented by the British in northern and central India. In addition, Mackenzie was also President of the Council of the College of Fort William in Calcutta. Ragaviah Charry, whose dates are unknown, was educated in mission schools and at the College of Fort William. A number of manuscripts attributed to him are preserved at the British Library in London. These include his polemics against Thomas Newnham's essay entitled "The Character and Capacity of the Asiaticks" published in 1802. Ragaviah resisted Christian critiques of Hinduism as a religion of "horrid" practices and beliefs. In one of this works, he advocates the formation of a literary association in Madras whose aim would be to facilitate dialogue between natives and Europeans.

[10] Here, for example, is an excerpt from the "Vesya Prakaranam" chapter of the *Cennapurivilasamu* that describes the courtesans' quarters in Madras:

> There are many girls with pleasant eyes and full breasts who have been taught rhythms like *jhampa-tala* [a 10-beat rhythm cycle] by dance-masters (*natya bharatacaryas*). In Suryam Pasyalpuri there are plenty of *vesyas* on the *nodakal vidhi*. They have beautiful teeth, a *kumkuma* marking on their foreheads, and their faces shine bright as blue lilies. As they perform the beautiful *lasya* dance, their graceful gait appears like that of swans. Like lotuses swaying from side to side, they enact a play (*lila*) of *abhinaya*. They are born of the secret desire of Rati and Kama. In that *nodakal vidhi*, live the women who are victorious over Kama himself (*smara jaya strilu*). They exhibit beautiful bodily movements and other alluring traits. They do not appear to be worried about anything. Their attractive features hunt down young men, and they wait, keeping their doors open. Such *vesyas* live on that street. The sweet ambrosia of their music (*ganamrta*) showers down like flowers falling from the branches of a beautiful tree. Those who witness their performances are knowledgeable in the art of *lasya*. This assembly of connoisseurs adds

lustre to the art of the *vesyas*. On this street, live these *vesyas* who are like the mantric powers of illusion wielded by Kama.

[11] These names are mentioned in *Sarvadevavilasa*, 5.21-26.

[12] Over and above the few works I have mentioned in this essay, a number of others in Tamil also exist. A very early example, in the form of a Tamil drama titled *Tevataci* ("Devadasi") was composed in the early nineteenth century by a poet named Paracurama Kavirayar, and then translated in 1868 into French by Louis Jacolliot under the title *La Devadassi, Bayadere* (Zvelebil 1998). Other literary works about *devadasi*-courtesans in Madras include *Mattappucuntaram allatu Tacikalin Ceykai* ("The Beauty of Fireworks, or the Deeds of the Dasis", 1916) by Kirusnacami Ayyar, *Tanapalan allatu Tacikalin Mayavancaka Culccikal*. ("Dhanapalan, or the Devious Crimes of the Dasis," 1931) by Kovintacami Pillai, and the play *Tacikalum Tacikantarkalum* ("Dasis and the Dasis' Lovers", 1947) by E. Cokkalinkam Pillai. This type of writing also includes works in English, such as *The Days of a Dancing Girl, or, The Inner Life of India Unveiled: A Book of Revelations in the Life of the Rich and Religious in India as seen through the Private Life of an Indian Prostitute* by R. Balasundara Mudali (1913) and the essay *Pen-Pictures of the Dancing Girl*, by M.S. Mani in 1926. Many of these works also resonated with deeply with Victorian writing in English on concubines and professional performing artists in colonial India. For an example of such writing see Penny (1898); for an analysis see Paxton (1999).

[13] K. Kurucamitas was a fairly prolific writer who composed several such poems. He published his own work from 1943-45, and it spans a range of subjects, from murders in the Presidency, to cattle markets in the suburbs of Kumbhakonam, to the British victory over Tunisia during World War I. Another significant work is *Kumpakonam Kaikkatti Maratteruvil Natanta Ramacami Kolaiccintu* ("Collection of Songs about the Murder Committed by Ramacami in Kumbhakonam," 1943) which describes the case of Ramacami from Kumbhakonam who murdered a prostitute named Sitalatcumi for jilting him.

[14] This was for a volume of *javalis* edited by T. Brinda (1912-1996), granddaughter of Vina Dhanammal (1867-1939), one of the most prominent courtesans in colonial Madras. The volume, dedicated to the memory of Dhanammal, consists of 30 *javalis* with *svara* notation, many of which were composed during Dhanammal's lifetime. See Brinda (1960).

[15] Studies on the *javali* as a genre are few and far between. Excepting the studies by Arudra (1986a; 1986b), Chennakeshaviah (1974), Sastri (1974), Suryanarayana Rao (1964) and a few others, most writing on *javalis* consists of short introductions to compilations of *javalis* meant for performers (see for example Brinda 1960; Kittappa 1979; Kuppuswamy and Hariharan 1996; and Parthasarathi and Parthasarathi 1980). The essays by Arudra (1986a; 1986b) and also T. Sankaran (1982a; 1982b) contain some invaluable biographical information about *javali* composers.

[16] Mss. KB 240/2, Kannada Adhyayana Samsthe (Institute of Kannada Studies), Mysore. For more on Kannada *javalis* and the Mysore court, see Sastri (1974) and Pranesh (2003). *Javalis*

continue to be popular in the Kannada-speaking regions until the middle of the twentieth century. Poets such as Ullahalli Ramanna (1854-1918) were among the most famous *javalikartas* from this region (Chennakeshavaiah 1974; Sastri 1974). To be sure, hundreds of *javalis* exist in Kannada, and these were performed by courtesans at the Mysore court and at privately sponsored performances inside homes. In the recent past, late nineteenth and early twentieth-century courtesans such as Mugur Jejamma, K. Venkatalakshamma, Mysore Sundaramma, and Nangangud Nagaratamma performed *javalis* on a regular basis in and around Mysore and Bengaluru.

[17] This is an oral tradition that has been maintained by the descendants of the Thanjavur Quartet. They claim that a single *javali*, "itu sahasamulu elara" in Saindhavi *raga* is the earliest song in this genre, and was composed at the Travancore court. There are no records to substantiate this claim, although we do know that Vativelu did indeed teach dance at the Travancore court, and in the year 1834, Maharaja Svati Tirunal gifted him with an ivory violin and an ivory box full of jewels. Both of these artifacts are in the possession of the descendants of the Quartet who live in Thanjavur and Chennai.

[18] Tacchur Singaracharyulu (1834-1892) and his brother Chinna Singaracharyulu, wrote seven treatises on music that were commissioned by Nalvadi Krishnaraja Utaiyar. These included *Gayakaparijatam* (1882); *Gayakalocana* (1884); *Sangita Kalanidhi* (1889); *Gayaka Siddhanjanam* (Part I, 1890; Part II, 1905); *Ganendu Sekharam* (1912), and *Svaramanjari* (1914). All were published in Madras. Singaracaryulu also organized annual "salon style" concerts on the festival of Ramanavami near his house in Georgetown.

[19] The *Gandharvakalpavalli* is subtitled in English as "A Self-Instructor in Music." Many such "teach yourself" books on music and dance were composed in the early twentieth century. Another important example related to dance is *Abhinaya Svayambodhini* ("Teach Yourself Abhinaya," 1915) by Devulapalli Viraraghavamurti Sastri. In the preface to this work, the author talks about the instrumentality of the book: "To make it easy for *vesya stris* and other women who wish to learn this art, I have written this text in Telugu, so they need not look elsewhere. One can [now] learn the art with the help of this book." This text has also been discussed in Krishnan (2008).

[20] Agha Mohammad Shah (1879-1935), later known as Agha Hashr Kashmiri, wrote an Urdu adaptation of *King Lear* for Parsi theatre entitled *Safed Khun* ("White Blood," 1906). This combined Urdu prose and poetry with Hindustani music. For details see Kapur (2006). Also see *The Parsi Theatre: Its Origins and Development* by Somnath Gupt (translated and edited by Kathryn Hansen, 2005).

[21] Karur Sivaramayya (c. 1798-1820) also composed the *javali* "O My Lovely Lalana" (Kharaharapriya *raga*) in a mix of English and Telugu which also appears in the *Gandharvakalpavalli*. Sivaramayya lived most of his life in Karur, near Trichy. One of his descendants was the famous violinist Papa Venkataramayya (1901-1972).

[22] A great number of *nattuvanars* moved to Madras throughout the nineteenth century, including Pattnam Muttusvami Nattuvanar (1781-1846) who was originally from Tiruvarur. A number of women who lived in Madras and its suburbs performed regularly at festivals hosted by local temples: Chennai Antal (1871-1919) performed on the premises on the Cennamallikesvara temple; Mylapore Duraikannammal (1864-1952) performed at the Kapalisvara temple; and Tiruvallikkeni Krishna (1804-1855) and Nila (1830-1891) performed at the Triplicane Parthasarathi temple.

[23] For example, in the *javali* in Paras *raga*, "smara sundaranguni sari evvare," the heroine notes that as she plays her vina, her lover encourages her by exclaiming "*sabash* (bravo)!" T. Sankaran, a descendant of Dhanammal, in a biographical essay on Subbaraya Ayyar notes that another *javali* in Jhanjhuti *raga*, "prana sakhuditu" also refers to the relationship between Ayyar and Dhanammal. He writes: "Some time before his death, he had left Madras, promising Dhanammal that he would return soon. But circumstances beyond his control detained him at Dharmapuri…When he came back, on learning that Dhanammal was going through hard times, instead of the usual paltry monetary help, he gifted to her this priceless javali." (Sankaran 1982, 25)

[24] Having noted the continuities between dance and aesthetics throughout the colonial Madras Presidency, it is significant that a number of *javalis* were composed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries exclusively for professional dancing women in the coastal Andhra region. These include the *javalis* of Neti Subbarayudu Sastri. Another example of a localized *javali* tradition comes from the village of Ballipadu in the West Godavari district, where courtesans who had connections with the festival worship of Krsna at the Madanagopalasvami temple sang a number of *javalis* composed for this purpose. During my fieldwork with Saride Anusuya (1910-2005) who was dedicated to this temple, I recorded one such *javali*, "idi nyayama sami" in Jhanjhuti (Cencurutti) *raga,* which made specific reference to the temple at Ballipadu, and it was clearly used in this highly localized context.

[25] This is the *javali* in Kalyani raga "ceragu mase emi setura" by Neti Subbraya Sastri that we discuss in detail in chapter five.

[26] The story of Coimbatore Thayi is particularly interesting. Her lineage can be traced to a *devadasi* named Visalakshi in the village of Avinasi in the Kongu region. Visalakshi had two daughters, Shanmukattammal and Venkammal, both of whom settled in Coimbatore city. In 1872, Venkatammal gave birth to a daughter whom she named Palanikunjaram, nicknamed "Thayi." She had her formal debut in dance (*arankerram*) at the age of eleven, and continued to perform dance till she was nineteen, when she shifted her focus to vocal music performances. She purchased a house on Nattu Pillaiyar Koyil Street in Georgetown, Madras, and moved there around 1892. In Madras, she received further training in music from Tiruvottriyur Tyagayyar (1845-1917) and Dharmapuri Subbaraya Ayyar. Coimbatore Thayi was also the inspiration for a somewhat unique European experiment in music. Maurice Delage (1879-1961), an amateur French composer, came to India in 1912. Delage wanted to access music from all over the country, and so began to purchase gramophone records, including those produced in Madras (Pasler 2000, 102). As Jann Pasler has observed, Delage's interest in India was rooted in his

"own essentially Western preoccupations," namely his obsession with modernist aesthetics. Delage was attracted to the techniques of Indian music largely with an eye to mine them for a "future-oriented" modernism in European music (ibid., 102). His stay in India resulted in two major musical works, *Quatre poèmes hindous* (Four Hindu Poems, 1912-13), inspired largely by North Indian music, and *Ragamalika* (Garland of Ragas, 1912-22), a virtual re-creation of a single recording by Coimbatore Thayi. *Ragamalika* is based on Thayi's recording of Tamil devotional hymns called *Arutpa* or *Tiruvarutpa* by the saint Iramalinka Atikalar (1823-1874). Thayi died on August 17, 1917.

[27] The first women to appear on gramophone recordings made in India were courtesans from Calcutta – Soshi Mukhi, Fani Bala, Saila Bai and Gauhar Jan (1873-1930). Born to Jewish-Armenian parents as Angelina Yeoward, Gauhar Jan and her mother converted to Islam in 1881, and changed their names to Gauhar Jan and Badi Malka Jan respectively. Both mother and daughter were trained in music and dance, and eventually became renowned courtesan-artists. Badi Malka Jan received the patronage of Wajid Ali Shah (1822-1887) who was exiled from Awadh to Matiaburj outside Calcutta following the annexation of Awadh to the British in 1856. At Wajid Ali's relocated court, Gauhar Jan learnt Kathak dance under Bindadin Maharaj (1830-1918), and studied music with respected teachers such as Kale Khan of Patiala. For an excellent discussion of Eurasian women as *tawa'ifs* and recording artists see Sachdeva-Jha (2009).

[28] This was not Gauhar Jan's only visit to South India. Toward the end of her life, in the year 1928, Gauhar Jan was invited to the Mysore court of Nalvadi Krishnaraja Utaiyar (r. 1902-1940). She was appointed as a palace musician, and died of pneumonia at the Krishnarajendra Hospital in 1930 at the age of 57.

[29] Three of Gauhar Jan's songs are listed with South Indian *svara* (solfa) notation in both the Tamil and Telugu editions of P.S. Ramulu Chetti's *Gandharvakalpavalli* (1912).

[30] The music for this film was by Pendyala Nageshwara Rao (1924-1984), and the lyrics were by the poet and historian Arudra (1925-1998), who also likely wrote two of the *caranams* in this version of "amtalone tellavare." In the film, the *javali* was sung by playback singer P. Susheela (b. 1935).