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Devadāsīs, Memory, and Modernity in South India

DAVESH SONEJI

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DAVESH SONEJI

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FOR MY FAMILY,
MUTTUKANNAMMAL, AND
HYMAVATHI AKKA

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On Historical, Social, and Aesthetic Borderlands

“REMEMBER ME AS I WAS”

In December 2006, I traveled to the town of Thiruvaidaimarudur in the Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu. Across from the severely dilapidated palace of the Marāṭhā king Amarasiṃha of Tanjore, I was told, lived Thiruvaidaimarudur Nagalakshmi, a woman who was an active dancer in the 1930s–1940s. I knocked on the wooden door, but there was no answer. “Ammā?” I inquired. “Vā (Come),” replied a faint voice from inside the house. I gently pushed open the door, and there, in the middle of the house, seated on a chair in near-darkness, was eighty-year-old Nagalakshmi. As soon as I introduced myself and told her about my interest in her life, Nagalakshmi invited me to pull up a chair. She apologized that she could not offer me anything to eat or drink, because, quite frankly, she had nothing, she said, gesturing to the emptiness of the house. After an hour-long conversation in which she told me about the Tamil *padam* songs she used to perform, I asked if I could take a photograph of her. “*Vēṇṭām, pā* (No thanks)” she said, handing me a dusty old laminated photo (fig. 0.1). “Take a photo of this photo,” she said. “Remember me as I was, not as I am. What would people think if they saw me in this state? This is not how I want to be remembered.”

Nagalakshmi comes from a Tamil-speaking *devadāsī* community. Trained in dance by Kuppaiya Nattuvanar (1887–1981), she performed throughout the Thanjavur region in the 1930s–1940s and also toured Ceylon with her troupe. In the 1940s, however, her teacher moved to Bombay (now Mumbai) to teach dance in its reinvented avatar as middle-class, “classical” Bharatanāṭyam, and Nagalakshmi’s own opportunities to dance were severely diminished, although she continued to perform



o.1 Tiruvidaimarudur Nagalakshmi, dressed to perform in the
Carapēntira Pūpāla Kuṛavañci in Thanjavur, c. 1940.

occasionally at weddings and local festivals. She successfully arranged the marriages of her three daughters, none of whom had anything to do with dance or music, and they, together with her grandchildren, continue to provide for her, although she lives alone in Thiruvudaimarudur. Nagalakshmi is not alone in wanting to be remembered for who she *was* rather than who she *is*. Hundreds of unintegrated individuals, mainly women, from

devadāsī backgrounds in the Tamil- and Telugu-speaking regions of South India contend with this same disenfranchisement. Threaded through this book is an account of this peculiar social, civic, and aesthetic ambiguity, marked by encounters with modernity and voiced through memory.

In this book, I approach the topic of *devadāsīs* over the past two hundred years through slippages, fissures, and movement—Foucauldian “discontinuities that offer history” (1969, 10). This history, like the lives of contemporary women in these communities, is always “in process,” pervaded by a profound sense of incompleteness. Despite being the subject of a diverse range of political investments and competing agendas, this history remains critically unfinished. The loose ends of the moralizing projects of colonial and postcolonial modernity, a dance aesthetic that has lost its value, and incipient possibilities of citizenship for *devadāsīs* are all emblems of the unfinished pasts of *devadāsīs* in South India. Attentive to the historical fissures and uneven movements that underwrite the project of cultural modernity in South India, this study of *devadāsīs* critically foregrounds the interface between politics, aesthetics, and sexuality.

From the late sixteenth-century Nāyaka period onward, *devadāsīs* have functioned as courtesans, secular dance artists organized in guilds called *mēḷams*, and temple workers, some of whom performed in the public spaces of certain Hindu temples. However, these communities have always occupied an ambiguous status in South Indian society. On the one hand, *devadāsīs* possessed a degree of social agency in that they were not restricted by the norms of patrifocal kinship. They lived in quasi-matrilineal communities, had nonconjugal sexual relationships with upper-caste men, and were literate when most South Indian women were not. On the other hand, records from centers of political power such as the court at Tanjore in Tamil Nadu document the fact that courtesans were commodities regularly bought and sold through the intercession of the court. In other contexts, as the concubines, mistresses, or “second wives” of South Indian elites, they were implicated in a larger world of servitude focused on the fulfillment of male desire. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, vociferous social reform movements in South India aimed to dislodge communities of professional dancing women from their hereditary performance practices. Over the next hundred years, their lifestyles were criminalized on the basis of their nonconjugal sexuality, which was understood as prostitution. The Madras Devadasis (Prevention of Dedication) Act, implemented in 1947, officially outlawed the social, ritual, and aesthetic practices of these women.

While the emphasis on the religious lives of *devadāsīs* in some schol-

arly works has provided a “redemptive” narrative for *devadāsī* history, it has also fixed *devadāsīs* in the past, and in idealizing their practices has shifted attention away from women in contemporary *devadāsī* communities. Arguably, scholarly work on *devadāsīs* in South India has tended to focus on three major issues: (1) the precolonial past, usually a medieval past that focuses almost exclusively on the temple as a center of power (see, for example, Orr 2000; Parasher and Naik 1986; Prasad 1990; Sadasi- van 1981, 1993; and others); (2) the period of *devadāsī* reform and its legal interventions (Anandhi 1991, 1997a; Hubel 2005; Jordan 1993, 2003; Kannabiran 1995; Kannabiran and Kannabiran 2003; J. Nair 1994; Parker 1998; Srilata 2003; Sundara Raj 1993; Vijaisri 2004; Whitehead 1998, 2001); and (3) the “dance revival” and the appropriation of *devadāsī* cultural practices by a new class of upper-caste urban performers such as Rukmini Arundale (1904–1986). Indeed, by now, the story of the reinvention of the performing arts under Indian nationalism, the repopulation of hereditary art forms by the urban middle class, and the resignifications these processes effected are well known. Historians, anthropologists, and ethnomusicologists who have worked on music (for example, Bakhle 2005; Neuman 1990; Qureshi 2006; L. Subramanian 2006, 2008; Terada 1992, 2008; Weidman 2006) and those who have worked on dance (for example, Allen 1997; Chakravorty 2008; Gaston 1996; Krishnan 2009; Leucci 2009; Maciszewski 1998, 2006, 2007; Meduri 1996; Srividya Natarajan 1997; O’Shea 2005, 2006, 2007; Sachdeva 2008; A. Srinivasan 1984, 1985, 1998; Walker 2004) have already provided critical and definitive scholarly accounts of these issues. I, too, have been invested in these debates for well over a decade, and a recent volume maps the complexities of this terrain with regard to dance and music in modern South India (Peterson and Soneji 2008).

Many of the questions addressed in this book, however, fall in between these three well-established signposts of *devadāsī* historiography. I focus, for example, on the place of dance in late colonial Tanjore, a quasi-autonomous state eventually brought under complete Company and Crown rule. The place of *devadāsīs* at the Tanjore court—and subsequently the place of Tanjore in the eyes of women from contemporary *devadāsī* communities—complicates received narratives about women’s lives prior to the official beginnings of the “anti-nautch” movement at the end of the nineteenth century. It also forces us to examine the connections between colonial modernity and the production of culture in the courtly milieu, a question that has been addressed, for example, by historians such as Janaki Bakhle (2005, 20–49) who have written about music and modernity

in princely states in North India. I also focus on dance and the culture of courtesans in late colonial Madras, where the kind of dance that fuels the “anti-nautch” campaign—what I call “salon dance”—lives. Images of *devadāsīs* and their aesthetic and sexual practices circulate through vernacular literature in this period, and these literary tropes about *devadāsī* morality add, in no small measure, to the emergent social reform activity directed toward them. It is these salon performances, and *not* performances inside temples, that ignite the vociferous anti-nautch movement in South India toward the end of the nineteenth century. The anti-nautch movement, which lasts almost half a century, brings discussions of non-conjugal forms of sexuality into the realm of public debate. It also results in the radical restructuring of kinship patterns within *devadāsī* communities and the reinvention of male political subjectivity in these communities through the creation of new caste identities such as *icai vēḷāḷa* (lit. “cultivators of music”) or *sūryabaḷija* (lit. “merchants of the sun dynasty of King Mahābali”). Closely allied with both Congress party politics and the non-Brahmin Self-Respect movement, anti-nautch deliberations promised new avenues of citizenship for “reformed” *devadāsīs*. The legal interventions that actually resulted from such deliberations, however, severely curtailed *devadāsī* women’s prospects for the future.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this book asks questions about the period following “reform” and “revival,” and interrogates the afterlives of these events from within *devadāsī* communities. What happens to women in these communities after 1947? How is the Madras Devadasis Act of 1947 implemented? Do cultural practices survive within *devadāsī* communities today? Are there forms of civic, social, and aesthetic marginality that these women live with on a quotidian basis? How are women from *devadāsī* communities—real and imagined—received and “dealt with” in the context of a globalized state and within the capitalist flows of a neoliberal economy? The latter half of this book presents the ethnographic component of this project, engaging over ten different *devadāsī* communities, from the northernmost tip of coastal Andhra Pradesh, to the Tamil-speaking south, in the Pudukkottai district of Tamil Nadu. The ethnography is significant for several reasons. First, it discredits the widespread belief that *devadāsī* communities ceased to exist in South India decades ago. Second, it provides insights grounded in memory, performance, and individual testimony that cannot be recovered from archives or texts. In the last two chapters of this book, I trace the ways in which history, performance, and identity are enmeshed in the mnemonic, focusing on

women from both Tamil- and Telugu-speaking regions. Dance and music practices continue to persist here, usually in the form of very private performances held “behind closed doors” within the community. In these chapters, I discuss some of my own encounters with *devadāsī* dance in this milieu and chart narrations of *devadāsī* history through memory and affect. The second half of *Unfinished Gestures* thus challenges us to dwell on the borderline between the embodied present and the historicized past and to oscillate between the two. It makes available a scholarly approach to *devadāsīs* that includes their self-interpretation as a factor in our own critical formulations, and accepts those self-interpretations as ongoing, unfinished gestures.

DEFINITIONS AND DEGENERATION

I wish to preface our exploration of these communities in modern South India by addressing the problematic nature of the term “*devadāsī*.” From Wikipedia to popular magazine articles to scholarly writing by academics, today the term “*devadāsī*” is used to index a vast number of communities of women who are generally glossed by English phrases such as “sacred prostitute” or “temple dancer.” It collapses a number of regional practices under a singular sign, and the literal translation of the word (“slave of god”) is all too often taken as a closed definition of the category.

As Leslie Orr explains, the term *devadāsī* is rarely encountered in Indian literary or inscriptional material prior to the twentieth century, and the idea of a continuous, pan-Indian “*devadāsī* institution”—so pervasive in Indian historical, sociological, and anthropological literature today—simply cannot be sustained through a critical interrogation of literary and religious texts or inscriptional data (2000, 5–8). Thus, as I explain below, we cannot historicize the contemporary use of the term *devadāsī* without reference to imperial knowledge systems and the irreversible epistemic transformations of individuals, communities, and worldviews they engendered in colonial South India.

The mechanisms of empire transformed a range of diverse, localized practices by subjecting them to standardization through administrative processes. Colonial ethnography, the legal surveillance of sexual morality, and the disciplining of sexualized bodies were central to the new order represented by empire. These new “Orientalist sociologies,” as Philippa Levine calls them, sought to bring order, hierarchy, and ultimately control to the “melting pot of sexual commerce” in India (Levine 2000, 8). Levine notes that these taxonomic exercises were “fundamentally descriptive and



o.2 *Jogatis* and a *jogappa* in Hospet, Bellary district, north Karnataka, dancing and singing devotional songs for the goddess Yellammā, accompanied by musicians playing the stringed-instrument called *caṃḍake*. Photograph by Serena Emerson.

empiricist, a mere catalogue of actualities" (ibid, 11). These processes of data collection conditioned the category of the transregional "*devadāsī*" in the colonial order of things. Missionary accounts, imperial anthropology, and eventually the Anglo-Indian legal system all contributed the "objective knowledge" that would define this category in the social, political, and historical imagination of modern India.¹

In contemporary writings about *devadāsīs*, the practices of Dalit women such as *jogatis* represent one of the most clearly recognizable emblems of civilizational degeneration. *Jogatis* are often defined in scholarly literature as "the last *devadāsīs*" or "contemporary *devadāsīs*" (for example, Evans 1998; Shankar 1994; Tarachand 1991), in a move that posits them as degenerate, residual progeny of the temple dancer of the past and simultaneously enforces the popular notion that communities of South Indian courtesans, such as those who are the subject of this book, no longer exist.²

Localized practices of dedicating Dalit girls as *jogatis* to the goddess Reṇukā-Yellammā-Māriyamma are found throughout much of South India (fig. o.2). The Belgaum district in Karnataka has become extremely well known in the media for these practices, but they are also present in

the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh.³ Regional variations of these traditions—such as the tradition of dedicating Dalit girls as *mātammas* or *mātaṅgis* to the goddess Gaṅgamma in Tirupati, or the dedication of girls to local village goddesses in Villupuram and North Arcot districts in Tamil Nadu—also exist.⁴ Similarly, traditions of dedicating young Dalit boys as representatives of the goddess's guardian Poṭurāju, or the dedication of transgendered men as *jogappas* are found in these regions as well.⁵ However, as Dalit practices, their histories are unknown and, to an extent, irretrievable. Hence, the practices of these *jogatis* are only ever discussed with reference to a transregional idea of “the South Indian *devadāsī*,” which falsely links them to upper-caste temples, lost art forms, and a sometimes idealized form of sexual difference.

In many of these communities, women undergo a ritual of “dedication,” known as “tying beads (*muttu*)” to the village deity, and live by begging for alms (*jogā* or *jogvā*) and singing devotional songs. Until recently in Andhra Pradesh, *jogatis* were also expected to dance at the time of funeral processions in an act that reified their impure status and publicized their sexual availability to upper-caste men. As anthropologist Lucinda Ramberg succinctly puts it, the sexuality of *jogatis* is inevitably “bound up with economies of caste, gender, kinship and rural survival” (2006, 210). These communities began to attract the attention of the global media in the 1980s, when, as Ramberg notes, three significant social movements coalesced around them: (1) the assertion of Dalit party politics that deployed the language of “respectability” and “honour”; (2) local and global feminist mobilizations against forms of gender violence understood as endemic in these communities (these include the prominence of *jogatis* in UN reports related to child prostitution and sex trafficking); and (3) public health initiatives and NGO efforts to curb the spread of HIV among *jogatis* and other sex workers (Ramberg 2006, 10). Legal interventions specifically aimed at Dalit “*devadāsī*” communities are continually ongoing. The Karnataka Devadasis (Prohibition of Dedication) Bill of 1982 has been amended several times throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and most recently, in 2009, an amendment was made that would appoint and empower “Devadasi Dedication Prohibition Officers” who would, among other things, “collect evidence for the effective prosecution of the accused.”⁶ The Andhra Pradesh Devadasis (Prohibition of Dedication) Act of 1988 is similarly aimed at Dalit groups including “Basavi, Jogini, Parvathi, Mathamma and Thyamma.”⁷

In contemporary South India, the term *devadāsī* has become intimately associated with the discourse of development and reform, and these com-

posite historical images of *devadāsīs* travel as much through neoimperial circuits of knowledge as they do through state-endorsed historiographies. In a recent article for the *New Yorker*, for example, William Dalrymple sets out to uncover “the dangerous life of a sacred sex worker.” He travels to Saundatti village, and following a description of HIV-positive *jogatis*, proceeds to tell his readers that these women “stand in the direct line of one of the oldest institutions in India.” His historical narrative is speckled with dislocated references to *padam* songs danced by courtesans in Telugu-speaking South India and the politics of the anti-nautch movement.⁸ Similarly, in a 2004 article for *Tehelka* magazine entitled “Reluctant Inheritors of a Tainted Legacy?” journalist Chinmayee Manjunath, also in search of the “inheritors” of the *devadāsī* tradition, speaks to Dalit *jogatis* in Saundatti:

The children mill around the camera, fascinated; the women giggle when it is trained on them. I bring up the topic of how *devadasis* used to be, hoping that it will ignite memories. But I end up telling them their own history. The story of how *devadasis* were once accepted in society, how their forms of dance like *sadir* evolved into *bharatnatyam* and how their children inherited property from benefactors. How they were sanctified prostitutes, traded by priests and wealthy patrons. “We never knew that *devadasis* were even respected,” gapes Rajeshwari [one of the *jogatis*]. “People don’t even talk to us in our village.”⁹

These narratives of decline inevitably see rural Dalit *jogatis*, *mātammās*, and *basavis* as remnants of the lost “temple dancers” of South India associated with aesthetic practices, matrilineal kinship, and colonial reform movements. These genealogies attempt not only to suture connections between unrelated and distinct groups of women, but also to posit a temple origin for the performing arts in South India, a claim that cannot be substantiated by critical readings of historical material. Contemporary Dalit *jogatis*, on account of the visible ritual dimensions of their lives, are coopted into the “temple narrative” of *devadāsī* historiography. In the piece cited above, the journalist “tells them their own history,” sealing these false sutures, and more importantly, violating Dalit subjectivities.

Indeed, among the hundreds of scholarly writings on *jogatis*, rarely have their practices been historicized without reference to a fall from a celebrated, pan-Indian, “high” *devadāsī* tradition. This obfuscates the complexities of Dalit women’s experiences and does little in terms of foregrounding issues of gender justice for Dalit women. Although, as the work

of Priyadarshini Vijaisri (2004, 2010) has shown, it may be useful to contrast the trajectories of reform discourse between Dalit *jogatis* and non-Dalit courtesan communities in South India, I believe there is more to be gained by examining each on its own terms. This book then, is *not* about *jogatis*, nor should the issues surrounding *jogatis* be read too closely into this project—Dalit women’s struggles are fundamentally very different from those experienced by the women described in my work.

The problems with contemporary representations of *devadāsīs* and *devadāsī* history, however, reach far beyond the issue of naming. Scholarly interpretations of *devadāsīs* can be located between two hermeneutic extremes: radical Marxist critiques on the one hand, that dismiss considerations of identity and agency contingent upon aesthetics or affect, and highly romanticized constructions on the other hand, that focus on recovering the image of the generic “temple dancer” in an effort to make contemporary *devadāsīs* “fit” into a civilizational metanarrative. Flowing through both of these interpretive perspectives is a narrative of degeneration that refuses to accept South Indian *devadāsīs* as perpetually ambiguous and controversial social subjects. The discursive frameworks of early twentieth-century reform debates fuel the narrative of degeneration. They use a limited vocabulary—such as that of “temple dedication,” which saturates scholarship on the subject—and draw the moral ambiguity of *devadāsīs* to the center of public debate, leaving it open to interpretation and a number of ideological permutations.

In a sense, it is nearly impossible for the modern scholar to speak outside the received language of reform. Throughout this book, however, I supplement my use of the term *devadāsī* with the language of courtesanship, rarely used with reference to professional dancing women in South India. This is part of a larger epistemic agenda, in which I foreground the modernity of *devadāsīs*’ social and aesthetic lives not as “temple women” but instead as professional artists in a shifting colonial sexual economy, exceeding the trope of *devadāsīs* as essentially religious subjects. I borrow the English language of courtesanship to strategically align my interpretation with the large, parallel body of critical studies that explore history, identity, and aesthetics in North Indian *tawā’if* or *bāījī* communities (for example, Babiracki 2003; Brown 2000, 2007b, 2007c; Cassio 2005; duPeron 2002, 2007; Maciszewski 1998, 2006, 2007; Oldenburg 1990; Post 1989; Qureshi 2006; V. Rao 1990; Sachdeva 2008; Walker 2004). Indeed, as I note toward the end of chapter 1, there are striking parallels (and perhaps even real historical connections) between these communities and those who

are the focus of this book. These similarities extend beyond those around repertoire and aesthetics and permeate discussions of subjectivity and gender justice.¹⁰

The focus on the temple-based and religious lives of some *devadāsīs* in scholarly and popular writing—the scripting of *devadāsīs* as “temple dancers,” in particular—has done much to efface the socioaesthetic realities of these women’s lives in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Contemporary anthropologists (Marglin 1985; Kersenboom 1987) have deployed structuralist frameworks that have limited interpretations of *devadāsīs*, as Leslie Orr has noted, “almost entirely with reference to abstract, overarching conceptions such as *Śakti* [“sacred power”] or auspiciousness” (2000, 10). These totalizing symbolic and religious interpretations have reified historical narratives about the “degeneration” of *devadāsīs* and, in a sense, have come to justify the politics of revival and the reclamation of a “temple history” for modern Bharatanāṭyam dance by its middle-class, upper-caste practitioners. It is also significant that the temple focus on *devadāsīs* arises only once moral deliberations on these communities come to occupy center stage in twentieth-century Madras.¹¹ In this period, the South Indian temple emerges as an iconic site for discursive and ideological battles about the relationship between religion and the state, but also about modernity, class, and heritage (Waghorne 2004; Hancock 2008).

Standard historical accounts of *devadāsīs* thus fail to address, for example, salon performances in the homes of elite patrons, even though these are the most common site for *devadāsī* dance in this period. The salon performance, marked in Telugu by the Urdu word *mējvāṇi* (“performed for a host”), was characterized by a number of heterogeneous dance and music genres that were unabashedly sexual and undeniably modern, and thus could not be mobilized by nationalist historians in their search for the “authentic,” religious pasts of dance in South India. In the early twentieth century, with the emergence of popular drama (known as *icai nāṭakam*, or “special” *nāṭakam*) in the Tamil-speaking regions, private performances by *devadāsīs* often deployed hybrid visual and performance elements drawn from the Parsi theater (fig. 0.3). By the 1940s, *mējvāṇi*-salon performances in the Godavari Delta included the presentation of popular Telugu film songs. As a discomfited emblem of modernity, the salon performance—the South Indian “nautch,” in colonial parlance—is posited as *the* sign of the moral and aesthetic degeneration of the “*devadāsī* system.”

The recovery of *devadāsīs* from South India’s past has also been the result of very specific “archival desires” (Arondekar 2009) that have shaped



o.3 Sikkil Vedavalli and Kottanarvitu Pappa perform a dance drawing from aesthetic influences of the Parsi theater, c. 1920. Standing behind Vedavalli is Sikkil Ramaswami Nattuvanar (1876–1972).

the making of *devadāsī* historiography over the past century and a half. As feminist historian Anjali Arondekar notes in a recent work, “recuperations of the Devadasi are too often simply mimetic and literalizing, their presence materializing subjects of our own historical desire, rather than opening [up] . . . more complex understandings” (2011, 3). She continues, “Devadasis become figures of radical possibility because they hold out the anachronistic promise of a past fashioned from the desires of the present” (ibid., 4). Although I agree with Arondekar’s position in terms of the scholarly “recuperation” of radical *devadāsī* pasts, this book argues that a methodology grounded in women’s articulatory practices can help us avoid what Arondekar characterizes as the “mimetic and literalizing” scholarly interpretations of *devadāsī* lives. How do women within contemporary *devadāsī* communities stage a historical self-awareness? How are they attentive to the workings of patriarchy at large that resonate with forms of resistance recovered from the archive?

UNFINISHED HISTORIES AND MEMORY

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

—Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*

Methodologically, *Unfinished Gestures* stands at the disciplinary borderlands where history and anthropology intersect. At the same time, its theoretical orientations are culled from ethnomusicology, performance studies, dance history, gender and women’s studies, and religious studies. The idea for this book emerged out of contemporary encounters with Tamil and Telugu-speaking *devadāsīs* living on the margins of their communities.¹² I met women like Kotipalli Hymavathi (fig. 0.4), daughter of Kotipalli Manikyam, in the town of Muramanda in the East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, who opened up new ways of understanding *devadāsī* history as embedded in bodily habitus. Hymavathi became central to my project, and it was through Hymavathi’s own interest in history and aesthetics that I was able to embark on ethnographic work in the *kalāvantula* community of coastal Andhra Pradesh. Women like Hymavathi invited me into self-consciously narrated stories of loss and disenfranchisement in the wake of social reform movements of the twentieth century. They also insisted that aesthetics were central to understanding the past and present from within the communities; nearly all our discussions of the past were punctuated by spontaneous performances of dance and music. Their mnemonic accounts and embodied modalities pointed to significant lacunae in the historicization of *devadāsīs* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and these accounts became the catalyst for many of the arguments I make in this book.

One of my key aims in this book is to move our focus away from discussions of *devadāsīs* that have recovered them solely from within analyses of the structures of power—“the *devadāsī* system”—that complex terrain upon which the forces of indigenous patriarchy, colonialism, and nationalism play out an intense battle over debates between “tradition” and “modernity.” In this book I do not wish to rehearse or challenge the fact that women in *devadāsī* communities were, and still are, subject to structural inequalities, and that “agency,” understood in contemporary feminist terms, is, and for the most part has been, unavailable to most women in these communities. So while I am conscious of the imbrication of *devadāsīs* in what the feminist historian would identify as problematic



o.4 Kotipalli Hymavathi (b. 1950), Muramanda, East Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh.

structures of power, my ethnographic work within these communities opens up imaginative possibilities for understanding women's resilience under patriarchal constraints. This of course does not alter the structure of power and inequity but certainly foregrounds how individuals inhabit and subsequently cope with the spaces of civic, moral, and cultural margins. In other words, I hope, in parts of this book, to shift our attention away from the systemic to the individual; to examine forms of self-presentation, subjectivity, and autocritique that live among individuals in these communities today. The burdens of the unfinished projects of *devadāsī* reform undeniably fall on the shoulders of women such as those who are the subjects of the second half of this book.

This book has developed over a decade, oscillating between ethnographic work with women in the Kaveri and Godavari River deltas and archival research in Chennai (formerly Madras), Thanjavur, Kumbhakonam, Tiruchirappalli, Pudukkottai, Rajahmundry, Kakinada, Delhi, New York, and London. Its sources have been culled from a range of materials, and one of the great challenges of such a project has been the harmonization of oral, mnemonic materials with those taken from written archives and

historiography. To be sure, much of this book is built upon the retrieval of literary and archival material. Chapter 1, for example, represents the first critical engagement with materials related to dance in colonial Tanjore, limited as they are. However, I hope to demonstrate that analyses that foreground only scripted archival sources or “embodied practices” are, on their own, inadequate when it comes to understanding the complex history of *devadāsīs* over the last two hundred years. In this book I demonstrate that a fruitful historicization of *devadāsīs* can only be actualized through rigorous interdisciplinary strategies.

My method bears an imprint of the work of performance studies scholar Diana Taylor, whose book *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003) has shaped my understandings of the relationships between archive, ethnography, performance, and memory. In particular, Taylor’s attentiveness to the constraints and possibilities of embodied and archival systems of knowledge has demonstrated the ways in which the study of performance must extend beyond “disciplinary preoccupations and methodological limitations” (7). According to Taylor, performance and memory map the gendered practices of individual and collective identity; in the spaces of the marginal or subaltern, “the telling is as important as the writing, the doing as central as the recording, the memory passed down through bodies and mnemonic practices” (35).

I also recognize the dangers in succumbing to the notion that ethnography as memory can answer all our questions, or that it can make up for the absences in the historical record. As Kamala Visweswaran notes, “ethnography, like fiction, no matter its pretense to present a self-contained narrative or cultural whole, remains incomplete and detached from the realms to which it points” (Visweswaran 1994, 1). Rather than approaching ethnographic data, therefore, as a repository of totalizing, counter-hegemonic claims opposed to the “errors” conveyed by written histories, I deploy ethnography to identify slippages; these disclose affective and visceral responses to historical processes that have eluded archival technologies.

Ann Gold and Bhoju Ram Gujar point out that “[m]emory has a ‘thick autonomy’; its thickness reveals modes of embodiment, sensuousness, places, materiality, the everyday, and vanished landscapes” (2002, 84). When we think through memory-work with *devadāsīs*, these claims are even more pertinent, because in the evanescent moments of recalling dance, memory and the body are inseparable. To offer a concrete example, in March 2002, I was interviewing a group of five women, all over the age of seventy, from the *kalāvantula* courtesan community in the town

of Mandapeta in coastal Andhra Pradesh. They had all performed professionally in a dance troupe in the 1940s. I began to ask them about the kinds of songs they performed in that period. One of the women started to sing a *jāvaḷi* (love lyric) in the *rāga* (tonic scale) Maṇiraṅgu, interpreting it through gesture. Spontaneously, the other four women joined her and, in the manner of Benjamin's mnemonic "flashes," the idea of a professional troupe (*mēlam*) of courtesans and the performance style it engendered, which until then had only been dimly suggested in archival sources, became visible and tangible through embodiment. This act of recollection did not take the form of a discussion or carefully charted movement through memory; it was eruptive and affective. The memory of bodily habitus, in the form of the repertoire, allows us to perceive connections between history, language, and gestures of the body that would be invisible otherwise, and are impossible to house in the archive. These individual acts of remembering illuminate historical networks and reconfigure pathways for historical study.

The critical possibilities opened up by memory-work among *devadāsī* communities take us back repeatedly to somatic and aesthetic questions. But how can we convincingly account for the place that aesthetic experience holds in the lives of *devadāsīs* without reducing our interpretations to mere aestheticizations? The music and dance repertoire of *devadāsī*-courtesans, I argue, far from being incidental to the larger issue of their economic and political disenfranchisement, is essential to the question of their identities. Indeed, their art is not an ahistorical artifact; it is an embodied form of memory. As Taylor reminds us,

The repertoire . . . enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge. Repertoire, etymologically "a treasury, an inventory," also allows for individual agency, referring also to "the finder, discoverer," and meaning "to find out." The repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by "being there," being part of the transmission . . . The repertoire, like the archive, is mediated. The process of selection, memorization or internalization, and transmission takes place within (and in turn helps constitute) specific systems of representation. Multiple forms of embodied acts are always present, though in a constant state of againness. They reconstitute themselves, transmitting communal memories, and values from one group/generation to the next. (Taylor 2003, 20)

The eruptive and affective moments in my fieldwork that I have described above can perhaps be best understood when we think of the repertoire itself as a *living* site of memory. In his now classic essay “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” Pierre Nora reminds us that “self-consciousness emerges under the sign of that which has already happened, as the fulfillment of something always already begun” (1989, 7)—in other words, as the unfinished. Nora places before us two modes of thinking about memory. The first is what he terms *milieux de mémoire* (“real environments of memory”), residing in “gestures and habits, in skills passed down by unspoken traditions, in the body’s inherent self-knowledge, in unstudied reflexes and ingrained memories” (13). This is the realm of pure memory, unmediated, absolute, and spontaneous. The other is *lieux de mémoire* (“sites of memory”), which exist because *milieux de mémoire* have disappeared and are essentially fictional, mediated, and relative. *Lieux de mémoire* are commemorative of memory but can never substitute for it, and hence move us from the realm of pure memory into that of history. For Nora, “true memory” and “history” are the opposing ends of a binary, existing in a dialectic represented by the past and the present. *Lieux de mémoire* demand that “we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations . . . because such activities no longer occur naturally” (12).

When we examine acts of remembering in contemporary *devadāsī* communities, which rely so heavily on repertoire and spontaneous, embodied performance, they appear to lie in between Nora’s categories. On the one hand, dance and music repertoire could easily be seen as a near-perfect *milieu de mémoire*. In their very personal acts of remembering, *devadāsīs* enter the realm of pure memory, a memory that lives through the body and affect. On the other hand, these mnemonic journeys could also be understood as “sites” that commemorate, through nostalgia, a past that no longer exists and an aesthetic that is no longer viable. Part of the difficulty when it comes to thinking about performance in the context of contemporary memory theory has been articulated by Taylor, and her insights are significant here. Taylor notes that Nora’s differentiation “falls into a temporal before and after, a rift between past . . . and present” (Taylor 2003, 22). My work affirms Taylor’s critique of Nora. Thinking through *memory as performance* and *performance as memory* reveals another kind of mnemonic culture that forces us to reconsider the temporal dimensions of Nora’s *milieux* and *lieux*. Remembering is what connects *devadāsī* women to the past; it is a potent medium for *communitas*. A sequential construction of memory as *milieux* and *lieux* cannot capture the ways in which

memory simultaneously functions as embodied present and a memorialized past. The embodied iteration of repertoire by *devadāsīs* also clearly traces the contexts of its emergence—histories of the colonial experience and marginality, for example, live in this repertoire. Indeed, performance is itself a way of making knowledge present, of dramatizing the subaltern experience. As an active site of memory, *devadāsī* repertoire need not always function as an emblem of social or political constraint. Repertoire, therefore, has a privileged place in this book, as both the catalyst for the memories of living *devadāsīs* and as the object that reconfigures our impression of what dance was like in prereform South India.

Memory-work discloses some of the real effects that social reform had in these communities. While several important works on the “official,” recorded, and archival debates around anti-*devadāsī* legislation have been produced over the past three decades (for example, Hubel 2005; Inoue 2005; Jordan 1989; Kannabiran and Kannabiran 2003; Meduri 1996; Natarajan 1997; A. Srinivasan 1984; Sundara Raj 1993; Vijaisri 2004; Whitehead 1998, 2001), none of these has allowed us to understand exactly how public moral debates and the subsequent criminalization of women’s lifestyles worked “on the ground.” Mnemonic narratives reveal the undocumented side of these debates, at times deeply affecting and troublesome. Various parts of this book follow up on some of these unanswered questions: Were women prosecuted under the new legislation of 1947? How did individual women cope with these radical systemic transformations? A significant aim of this work, therefore, is to illuminate the unforeseen consequence and lingering signs of reform—such as the restitution of patriliney—in these communities.

These questions, however, cannot be answered only through memory-work with living *devadāsīs*. Substantial archives, some of which have remained unexplored, call out to be interpreted alongside the data gathered from ethnographic encounters. The archival sources deployed in *Unfinished Gestures* range from Marathi court records in Moḍi script from colonial Tanjore, to Tamil and Telugu literary materials that circulated in the early print culture of South India, to the personal files of reformer Muthulakshmi Reddy. These material collections, I contend, are also “unfinished” in the sense that they are bound by limitations in a manner parallel to that of performance and memory. The political and gendered subjectifications they house also require supplementation and, I would argue, meet their historical potential only when they are read together with sources that lie beyond them.

UNFINISHED CITIZENSHIP

I appeal to you who are mothers to make the future of your children bright, happy, and glorious and make them respectable and useful citizens.

—Muthulakshmi Reddy (1932, 614)

Another dimension of this book deals with issues of modernity and reform. The near-half-century-long public deliberations and two-decade-long legislative debates on *devadāsīs* in Madras resulted in the state-endorsed criminalization of their lifestyle through the Madras Devadasis Act of 1947. At stake in the contest over the status of *devadāsīs* was the tension between the archaic sign represented by recalcitrant *devadāsī* practices—the ritual of “dedication” (*poṭṭukkaṭṭatal*) and the mode of institutionalized concubinage, in particular—and the new sexual and moral economy represented by colonial and nationalist modernities. *Devadāsīs*, and especially the ritual of *poṭṭukkaṭṭatal*, were projected onto what Anne McClintock calls “anachronistic space: prehistoric, atavistic and irrational, inherently out of place in the historical time of modernity” (1995, 40). The *devadāsī* question was thus framed by a much larger reordering of sociopolitical agendas in the emergent nation-state, which by the beginning of the twentieth century included women as key emissaries of change. As Mrinalini Sinha points out, “the universalizing ambition in making women into a political constituency on the basis of their gender worked in . . . complex ways. It required the incorporation of the poor and of the working-class woman—even the female sex worker—to mobilize a construction of women as *both* the agents *and* the objects of reform” (2006, 191). The logic of reform, often articulated by women reformers, was ubiquitously couched in the language of a nationalist patriarchy that naturalized female chastity and marital fidelity and rendered it “part of the ‘common sense’ of the middle class” (J. Nair 1996, 148). This logic worked through the renegotiation of the public and private spheres, extending, through legal intervention, an accumulative intrusion of criminal law into the realm of sexuality.

And so at the core of *devadāsī* reform lies the pervasive class-inflected irony of Indian nationalism and early Indian feminism (Sarkar 2001; Sinha 1999, 2006). *Devadāsī* reform was necessarily an altruistic act, and in the discourse of “rescue,” *devadāsīs* could only be marked as “victims.”¹³ As Srividya Natarajan observes,

The women campaigners of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries thus became simultaneously symbols of freedom and self-determination (since most of them were highly educated and articulate) and norm-enforcing exemplars. They endorsed middle-class and patriarchal values, though they spent much of their lives mobilizing sympathy or aid for non-middle-class women. There is, consequently, a palpable tension between class and gender positions in most of the debates around the woman questions, especially in the debates on prostitution and on the *devadāsīs*. The gender of the women campaigners allowed them—it was believed—to *feel* for the supposedly miserable *devadāsīs*; but since they were anchored to their superior caste/class position by their impeccable morals . . . this sympathy was prevented from becoming *identification*. The result was their attitude to the object of their altruism was invariably patronizing or censorious. (1997, 131; emphasis in the original)

The legal and bureaucratic regulation of *devadāsī* sexuality brought with it promises of a wholeness, a restructuring of the self based on middle-class sexual ethics. “Reformed” *devadāsīs*, those who were made into “good, pure, and respectable women,” in Reddy’s words, would be able to fully participate in the incipient modernity of the nation as citizens. *Devadāsī* reform certainly worked to consolidate a new nationalist modernity for middle-class women by setting up the *devadāsī* as the marked other, but it offered little to women within *devadāsī* communities. Each of the reformers I discuss in chapter 3, for example, go to great lengths to document and make public the names of “reformed” *devadāsīs* in the 1920s–1930s, likely because there were only a handful of such women. Many of the women who made “good wives” were singled out as exemplary *devadāsīs* (as in the case of the popular singer M. S. Subbulakshmi, for example) but the vast majority of *devadāsīs* did not, indeed could not, be integrated into the moral economy of the middle class. In the families of such unintegrated individuals, we encounter women’s marginalization with all its complexities: some women are commercial sex workers in cities such as Chennai (Sariola 2010); some continue to live as the “second wives” of members of the civic elite; some settle into endogamous marriages; and the older generation of women who lived through the period of radical social reform, many of whom are the focus of this book, invariably see themselves as inhabiting the borderlands of modern citizenship.

The legacy of the failure of *devadāsī* reform and its subterfuges of respectability, I would argue, is visible in the “shame of not belonging” so

evident in these communities today. Like the Tamil drama actresses who are the subjects of Susan Seizer's work, women in *devadāsī* communities today are almost wholly characterized by an "excess born of lack" (2005, 334). They are understood to embody a sexual "abundance that is primarily met with suspicion" (ibid.). Large numbers of these women live in a kind of social and civil limbo. In the Tamil-speaking regions, it is difficult for them to publicly claim caste status as "*icai vēḷāḷar* women" in schools, for example. Unlike the men in this community, women cannot invoke this caste position without it being understood as a euphemism. As I demonstrate in chapter 3, new caste identities provide social mobilization for men in the wake of *devadāsī* reform, usually at the expense of women. Nor are women sufficiently integrated into the social mainstream to be able to "pass" as non-*devadāsīs*. For the "first generation"—women who lived through social reform themselves—and usually also the second generation, "passing" is simply an impossibility—everyone seems to know who they *were*, and consequently, who they *are*. Women from *devadāsī* communities are particularly subject to moral suspicion and harassed in schools and other public spaces. These women are often accused of promiscuity and are the objects of name-calling, the public use of the Tamil words *tāci* or *tēvaṭiyāl* (terms that both denote "whore" and also index the *devadāsī* community) as insults are part of the quotidian negotiation of identity, stigma, and social discrimination that young women contend with in these communities. Their future prospects are almost always restricted to endogamous, arranged marriages, and these occur at a young age—usually as soon as the first available groom presents himself—in a kind of social paranoia about ensuring that girls do not "miss an opportunity" to become socially integrated.

The failure of reform and the spaces of social isolation it engendered for *devadāsīs* foreclosed possibilities for these women in other allied professions that they had only recently entered in the early twentieth century. Figures like Tirugokarnam Kanakambujam (1908–1973), a *devadāsī* from the Pudukkottai region, for example, became one of the first women to enter the largely male- and Brahmin-dominated field of public devotional oratory and singing known as *harikathā* or *kathākālakṣepam* (fig. 0.5), because it was professionally risky for her to continue with her dance training.¹⁴ By the 1920s, a number of *devadāsīs* had joined the emergent world of popular Tamil drama, known variously as *icai nāṭakam*, *tamiḷ nāṭakam*, or "special" *nāṭakam*. Balamani Ammal, born into the *kavarai* merchant community near Kumbhakonam in Thanjavur district, for example, created the first all-woman theater company in Tamil Nadu in the first two de-

cares of the twentieth century. Along with her sister Rajambal, she led the Balamani Drama Company, which created jobs for a number of disenfranchised *devadāsīs* at the height of public debates on social reform (fig. 0.6).¹⁵

Spaces such as Balamani's drama company and the new culture of gramophone recording opened up possibilities for *devadāsī* women in the early years of cinema. Almost all of the earliest female stars of Tamil cinema—T. R. Rajakumari, Sayi-Subbulakshmi, S. P. L. Dhanalakshmi, N. Rajalakshmi, Tiruvelveli Papa, and others—came from *devadāsī* families. Later, of course, they gave way to upper-caste, specifically Brahmin, women, in a move remarkably parallel to the dance "revival" for the 1930s–1940s, as M. S. S. Pandian noted well in a monumental essay on Tamil elites and cinema over a decade ago (Pandian 1996). Traces of *devadāsīs* as actresses remain in cinema today. Women from *devadāsī* backgrounds in the South Indian film industry are for the most part stigmatized and vilified by their peers in the field. Women such as Jyothilakshmi and Jayamalini, descendants of Tanjore Bhavani and her daughter Kuchalambal (who were among the last performers in the princely state), for example, entered South Indian cinema at a time when Brahmin women were already holding the reins, and were typecast as whores, vamps, and "item-dancers." By the 1950s, women from *devadāsī* families could simply no longer "make it" in the world of cinema, just as they could not in the new world of dance.

In this book, I am not concerned with those "exceptional" *devadāsīs*—



0.5 Tirugokarnam Kanakambujam (1908–1973) performing *harikathā* with her troupe. Photograph courtesy of Dr. B. M. Sundaram.



o.6 Balamani Ammal together with K. Rukmini (seated) in drama costume. Rukmini was from a Tamil-speaking *devadāsī* community of Pudukkottai and one of the prominent members of the Balamani Drama Company. Photograph courtesy of Dr. B. M. Sundaram.

the singers Bangalore Nagarathnam, M. S. Subbulakshmi, and M. L. Vasanthakumari or dancer T. Balasaraswati, for example—who achieved iconic status through the endorsement of their aesthetic value by the state and Madras’s bourgeoisie. Rather, I turn my attention to women who did not enter the world of theater, gramophone recording, or cinema and certainly did not become performers of dance or music on the new, urban, middle-class stage. These are the women for whom postreform “respectability” was impossible in any shape or form.

UNFINISHED AESTHETICS

Why should I show anyone this dance? What’s the use? I *know* that no one can appreciate it today.

—Jakkula Radha, Peddapuram

Much of this book is deeply influenced by perspectives drawn from the work of Partha Chatterjee, Ranajit Guha, and other members of the Subaltern Studies collective. Their work has drawn attention to the inven-

tive agency of the colonized and has shaped our discussions of colonial modernity in significant ways. Sustained discussion of *devadāsīs* as subalterns first appeared in the work of Avanthi Meduri (1996), and this compelling and highly cogent study has left a long-standing impression on subsequent works, including my own. In this book, however, I wish to move beyond simply locating *devadāsīs* in the spaces of subalternity, advancing instead a hermeneutic mode that allows us to address the place of aesthetics in the subaltern consciousness. In contrast to Meduri, who thinks of performance as a totalizing experience in which “the *devadāsī* learned to empty her subjectivity” (1996, 22), ethnography with contemporary *devadāsī* women forces us to reconsider the role of performance in fashioning subjectivity. *Unfinished Gestures* follows the orientation of Amelia Maciszewski’s ethnography with *tawā’if* courtesans in North India. In her account, “[the performer] is both an object of the (male) gaze and purveyor of her own artistic (and professional) gaze—thus simultaneously subsuming her individual identity into the extant artistic form *and* deploying her creative agency within it” (1998, 88). So without losing sight of the patriarchal location of *devadāsī* culture or the fact that it is nearly impossible to speak of a “pure aesthetics” in modern South India outside the space of politics, I think of performance as a key modality of subaltern self-presentation and self-consciousness. For *devadāsīs*, performance is both the *subject* of their history and the *medium* through which they express it. Their performances have aesthetic, mnemonic, and affective values that demand our attention. In other words, my analyses of genre and movement do not represent mere evaluative judgments of artworks, but rather a means of taking *devadāsī* performance practices seriously as embodied history. These practices both reference reform’s expurgations and preserve a performance style—sexually explicit, casual, “unclassical”—that is not palatable to the urban middle class. It is this *present* historicity, available only through the performance itself, that cuts through the many layers of idealized representation and enables us to address stigma, history, and *devadāsī* identity itself in more productive ways.

I want to suggest that the disappearance of *devadāsī* dance from the public sphere has to be understood in the context of specific taste hierarchies that were created in the early part of the twentieth century. Although a number of scholars have described the caste politics that undergirded the so-called “dance revival” of the mid-twentieth century, very rarely has this been discussed in terms of the cultivation of specific taste habits among the elites of Madras. Historians and theorists of popular culture in North America have noted that a key marker of the postmodern condition is the

blurring of visual and social boundaries between “high” and “low” culture. While critiques against this Pierre Bourdieu–style class-based bifurcation of taste could certainly be applied when we talk about some forms of popular culture in India (here, I am thinking specifically of commercial cinema, for example), this is not the case with arts that have been marked as “classical” by the Indian state. These arts, by their very social and political constitution, were trapped in class- and caste-inflected stratifications of taste. Upper-caste, nationalist reinventions of Bharatanāṭyam combined social power with cultural capital and highbrow taste. While non-Brahmin individuals do marginally participate in the professional world of Bharatanāṭyam today, it is almost always to reify and even valorize the aesthetic parameters of Brahmin aspirations. The construction of what Kristen Rudisill (2007) in her study of modern Tamil theater has called “Brahmin taste” is significant in terms of its implications for twentieth-century dance history as well.

The South Indian cultural bourgeoisie, and practitioners of Bharatanāṭyam in particular, are quick to assess the past in terms of this hierarchy of taste. In the popular imagination, *devadāsī* dance is understood as both aesthetically impoverished and morally dubious. Loose limbs, footwork, and *mudrās*, or unstructured improvisation, explicit and excessive eroticism (articulated by the Tamil-speaking middle class as *paccai ciṅkāram*, “raw eroticism”), lack of emphasis on “proper” *rāga* and *tāla* (rhythm)—these are the aspects of *devadāsī* performance that were and continue to be configured as “in bad taste.” The perceived aesthetic falsehood of *devadāsī* dance in particular is trumped by the supposed antiquity and universality of religious values that appear embedded in modern Bharatanāṭyam. *Devadāsīs* are an embarrassing sign of India’s feudal past for the middle class, even as the reinvented Bharatanāṭyam is constructed as an enabling, “classical” tradition. Just as *devadāsīs* could not be accommodated as citizens by the modern nation-state on account of their nonconjugal sexuality and caste location, their aesthetic practices, constructed in opposition to the taste habits of the nation, cannot be accommodated today. As a living sign of the past, the persistence of dance in contemporary *devadāsī* communities *despite* the efforts of reform forces us to reconsider the loose ends of the anti-nautch movement and the horizons of modernity and citizenship it promised for *devadāsīs*. Located on the borderline between the demise of colonial courtly culture and the industry of “classical” dance in the twentieth century, these performance practices, like the social location of *devadāsīs*, elude obvious categories. Suspended, hybrid, and polysemous, I understand *devadāsī* subjectivity as symptomatic of what Antoinette Burton (1999) has called the “unfinished business of colonial modernity.”

Performing Untenable Pasts: Aesthetics and Selfhood in Coastal Andhra Pradesh

“Memory can be spiteful.” The town of Peddapuram is known for the exceptionally high numbers of prostitutes who inhabit its streets. Many of them are *kalāvantulu*. In February 2002, I went to the red-light areas of Peddapuram and met Jakkula Radha, considered an elder among local women. Today Radha sells *bīḍīs* (tendu-leaf cigarettes), candy, and other confectionary at a small stall outside her home. Radha was initially reluctant to talk about her past, but once I mentioned that I had heard she used to perform the *varṇam* in the *rāga* Bhairavi, Radha immediately perked up. But she insisted on continuing our conversation elsewhere. I helped her into my rented Ambassador car and started to back out of the lane on which her house was located. Four young men rushed out from nearby houses, and started yelling “*muṇḍālu muṇḍālu*” (“whores! whores!”) at us, throwing small stones at our car. That day Radha wept for about half an hour, and said, “People can be spiteful . . . so can memory.”

The women in Peddapuram’s red-light areas stand at the intersections of a number of very public discourses on health, development, and trafficking. In a provocative essay on sex work in Peddapuram, entitled “Night Claims the Godavari” (2008), writer Kiran Desai presents one side of this very complex culture of sexual commerce. Desai interviewed a number of women from *kalāvantula* backgrounds who manage brothels and refer to themselves as “class” girls, coveted sex workers who cater largely to affluent men. She paints a vivid picture of the trafficking and abuse of women that is rampant in the brothels of towns like Peddapuram and Kakinada. Desai also notes that HIV infection rates in Andhra Pradesh’s East Godavari district are 25 percent higher than in other parts of the state. Undoubtedly a number of *kalāvantula* women are commercial sex workers in places like Peddapuram, but Desai’s straightforward presentation of the

lives of contemporary *kalāvantula* women ignores the tremendous heterogeneity of their experiences. On the one hand, her essay resonates with the totalizing ideology of first-wave and radical feminist discourse on prostitution that, in the manner of nineteenth-century social purity movements, conceives of all sex work as abuse, and casts all sex workers as victims (Bell 1994, 130). In India, these kinds of representations have been critiqued by feminists who work on issues of sexuality, law, and citizenship such as Ratna Kapur (2005, 95–136; 2010). On the other hand, it presupposes that all *kalāvantula* women have become the “victims” of brothel-style sex work. The experiences of *kalāvantula* women in the postreform period, however, are diverse: today some are involved in sex work; others are married; and the older generation of women invariably dwell on their very peculiar social, civic, and aesthetic marginality. This chapter examines a specific set of experiences that are hinged to the past in palpable and affective ways. My interest is in the unfinished dimensions of *kalāvantula* lives, the ways in which some women in these communities—especially those who lived through social reform—fashion distinct identities based on the past that run alongside the cell phones and flat-screen TVs proudly displayed by a younger generation of *kalāvantula* sex workers as signs of their engagements with the flows of advanced global capitalism.

In this chapter, I examine the persistent yet invisible performance practices of a section of the *kalāvantula* community that has witnessed the drastic social and political transformations of their communities we have discussed in chapter 3. Their narrations of selfhood and identity emerge through encounters with their dance and music repertoire, which they are careful to preserve “behind closed doors” in the relative privacy of their homes. These iterations of repertoire that take place with some regularity among *kalāvantula* families are also the sites that produce personal and collective imaginations; identity lives through mnemonic bodily practices. Outside the *kalāvantula* community, the notion of “courtesan dance repertoire” is usually read (and subsequently dismissed) by urban elites as a vestige of feudal history, a sign of the “backward” past that cannot and should not be accommodated in India’s present and future. For some women in courtesan communities today, however, the repertoire is used as a mode of telling; it is mobilized to consolidate an identity they can live with.

What is articulated by women in the Godavari delta is, I think, an alternate mode of being, an identity that uses the past in order to establish a relationship with themselves in the present. In Foucauldian terms, this constitutes an “ethics” of selfhood. Deliberations on the devalued nature

of their cultural practices, their experiences of nonconjugal sexuality and institutionalized concubinage, and their willingness to engage with issues of self-representation are instrumentalized to this end. As Nikolas Rose (1996, 24) points out, Foucault's notion of the *relations* that individuals establish with themselves is central to critical psychocultural constructions and representations of selfhood. *Kalāvantula* women evince an ethical awareness about their own marginality; they dwell on their location within the binary of social centers and peripheries. In inviting women in coastal Andhra Pradesh to tell and perform their own narratives, I write about courtesan identity without subsuming it under preexisting categories, allowing complex and even contradictory subjectivities to emerge and coexist with the archival and other historical constructions of these communities observed in the rest of this book. This chapter stages some of the complex questions of what it means to be a *devadāsī* in contemporary South India.

SOCIAL FAILURES AND UNTENABLE CONCUBINAGE

In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century coastal Andhra Pradesh, the public presence of *kalāvantula* women was visible in the form of *bhogameḷams* ("bands" or "troupes" of *bhogamvāḷḷu* or *kalāvantulu* women). These troupes were, in a sense, professional guilds made up of several women, most of whom were trained in music and dance by one community elder, who would usually be the troupe leader. The "troupe leaders," called *nāyakurāḷus*, directed the troupe in the sense of procuring and negotiating performance contracts, and also by playing the *tāḷam* or cymbals during the performance. For the most part, male dance masters (*naṭṭuvaṇārs*) did not accompany courtesans in this region as they did in the Tamil-speaking regions. The term *meḷam*, in fact, is also used in a verbal sense. *Kalāvantula* dance was also called *meḷam*, and "doing *meḷam*" is how many *kalāvantulu* refer to the practice of their art. Unlike in many parts of Tamil Nadu, after the Madras Devadasis (Prevention of Dedication) Act of 1947 was passed, salon performances of *bhogameḷams* continued in coastal Andhra Pradesh, as these did not seem to interfere with the prohibition on "temple dancing" as described by the act. However, on August 14, 1956, the government carried out a final amendment to the act that outlawed dancing at marriages and other private social events as well.

Each and every one of the women I met in the Godavari delta expressed the opinion that social reform had failed. Even those who were extremely sympathetic to the values represented by the discourses of social purity

were disappointed with the fact that “whatever happened over the last hundred years did not bear any fruit (*phalamu*) for us.” Today “*devadāsī*” and “*kalāvant*” are undeniably unstable social categories. They are pervaded by historical fissures, lived trauma, and a complex and problematic relationship with hegemonic, state-endorsed understandings of gender justice. Most women in the *kalāvantula* communities of coastal Andhra Pradesh speak about themselves as *distinct* from middle-class women, even as they see their female children and grandchildren move, sometimes very painfully and at great personal loss, into that social category. Many of these women are critical of both the system of institutionalized concubinage represented by their past, and the conjugal lifestyle represented by middle-class women.

Women in *kalāvantula* communities commonly identified the men with whom they had relationships using the term *umçukunnāru* (“one who takes care [of you]”), clearly indicating the power dynamic implied by the system of institutionalized concubinage. As mistresses or concubines, the women were sometimes referred to as *abhimāna strīlu* (“affectionate or desirable women”).¹ Almost all of the women I met who lived through the period of social reform, and even a number of relatively younger women, spoke at great length about their male partners. Some women like Subbulakshmi, in her early sixties, who lives in a suburb of Rajahmundry, valorized concubinage; she understands, however, that her situation is exceptional. She lives together with her partner and his wife in their home as a kind of “second wife” and has a relatively comfortable life:

I live with my man in his house. He is a *caudari* (“village headman”). This may seem strange to you, but his wife and I live together, and he thinks of me as a second wife. This is hard in a town like Rajahmundry, where everyone knows everything and gossip is rampant. But what do I have to lose? He looks after me. I am better off than most other *kalāvantulu* whose men have left them out of a feeling of shame. I am also better off than those married women who live like servants in their husband’s house.

Subbulakshmi defends concubinage through a critique of the power relations she understands to be embedded in marriage. Kotipalli Hymavathi, relatively younger than most of the women I worked with, has no more contact with her partner. She does, however, have a daughter who is married and has young children of her own. Hymavathi, by contrast, is adamant in stressing that the “old system” of concubinage cannot be

sustained today and ultimately works against women in the *kalāvantula* community. She evinces an acute awareness of the patriarchal servitude implied in concubinage:

Look, a woman is “kept” (*bandha*) by man as his mistress. Say she has four daughters and two sons through this relationship. If he leaves her—for whatever reason—how can she support the children or herself?

Similarly, Saride Varahalu, living in Duvva village in West Godavari district, explains that sometimes, as in the case of her family, concubinage was “arranged,” in a manner parallel to upper- and middle-caste wedding alliances. She narrates how her father had chosen appropriate partners for her and her sisters, and that each of these men came from different class backgrounds:

Let me give you the example of my own family. We all had relations with men, but all of our men were from different communities [all from elite class backgrounds]. My man was a *saukār*, a *komaṭi* (a businessman). Anusuya had a Brahmin, Seshachalam had a *kamma* (an influential agricultural community) man, and Maithili had a *vēlama dōralu* (a wealthy landlord).

But she continues in a defiant tone, “Where are these men today? Do you see them around? We are left to fend for ourselves. Look at Anusuya [her eight-four-year-old sister]. She has children who can’t stand her. She is virtually blind, and so frail, but no one looks after her except us.” Duggirala Satyavati from Mandapeta town (East Godavari district) expresses a similar frustration: “I used to play harmonium and do ‘record’ dance [dance to popular film songs]. My mother used to do all these *padams*, *jāvaḷis*, and other things. We’re *veśyās*. Nobody cares about us. I could have sex with ten men, but not a single one will look after me when I need it. So why should I care about them? Men are all like that. But then, we also have to live, don’t we?” Many of the women interviewed in this chapter had only one partner over the course of their lives, while others had several. As a result of the public stigma attached to concubinage in the postreform period, many such men abandoned their *kalāvantula* partners in the mid-twentieth century. Others died long before the women themselves.

While some contemporary *kalāvantulu* critique the notion of concubinage, they also adamantly defend the nonconjugal aspects of their lifestyles; they very clearly distinguish their lifestyles from those of middle-class

“householders.” These distinctions are upheld through linguistic markers. *Kalāvantulu* deploy the term *saṃsāri* (from the word *saṃsāra*, “worldly existence”) to refer to householders (*gṛhasthins*, that is, ordinary married couples and their extended families) and the term *sāni* (from *svāminī*, female leader, “respected lady”) to refer to themselves. This clear distinction between the contemporary middle-class “householder” and the courtesan, or *sāni*, was iterated by nearly all the *kalāvantulu* women I worked with. The marked separation of social spheres was enforced, I was told, by the difference in terms used for life cycle rituals. According to Maddula Venkataratnam of Tatipaka village, “*kalāvantulu* do not use the word *pēḷḷi* [marriage], and householders do not use the word *kannērikam* [“initiation of a virgin,” i.e., dedication].”

A brief discussion concerning rituals of “dedication” among contemporary *kalāvantulu* would be useful here. Dedication ceremonies, usually performed at home, were often accompanied by the simultaneous commencement of training in music and dance. The *kannērikam* was usually a “sword marriage” (*katti kalyāṇam* or *khaḍga vivāha*), as discussed in chapter 1. Kotipalli Hymavathi recounts her own *kannērikam*:

I started to learn dance at the age of seven. At the age of eleven, I had *gajjapūjā* [“worship of the ankle bells”] and *kannērikam* performed. During the *gajjapūjā*, my *gurugāru*, my mother, tied my ankle bells for the first time. For just over two years, I performed in the *meḷam* headed by my sister Satyavathi. Let me tell you about this *kannērikam*. *Kannērikam* refers to the transformation of an ordinary girl into a *sāni* when she attains maturity. We celebrate a puberty ritual (*peddamānuṣi paṇḍugalū*) for seven full days. On the last day, the girl is made into a *sāni* by tying a *kaṅkaṇam* [the thread tied around the wrist at the commencement of a marriage] to a knife (*katti*) in the morning. This is done by an elder woman of the family, usually the girl’s aunt. Then a great feast is prepared for lunch, and all the guests are fed goatmeat in celebration of the event. Sometimes the girl’s partner is selected at this point, and he pays a brideprice. If not, the girl will forge a relationship with a man at a later stage.

Kannērikam ceremonies—including the *gajjapūjā* in which *kalāvantulu* would formally take on the identity of a public performer—were held in conjunction with puberty rituals, which were also common among householding women. As in the Tamil-speaking regions, there also appears to have been a much less prevalent tradition of dedicating girls to temple dei-

ties in coastal Andhra Pradesh. The late Saride Manikyam, whom I met in the village of Kapileswarapuram, was one of the last women to have been dedicated at the Madanagopālasvāmi temple in Ballipadu. She provides an account of this rather rare occurrence:

There are four of us who had *kannē rikam* performed in the temple. My sister and I were brought to Ballipadu together with my cousins Mutyam and Anusuya. I was trained in vocal music by Rudrabhatla Ramamurti, and in dance by my grandmother, Dasari Mahalakshmi, for a period of four years, from age five to nine. I was nine years old when I performed my *gajjapūjā* [ceremony of worshipping the anklebells, a kind of debut performance]. Subsequently, I had a dedication ceremony performed. The *kaṅkaṅam* was tied by a priest from the temple. From that day onward, after the *alaṅkāra* (adorning of the deity) and *bālabhogam* (midmorning meal), I would perform the daily ritual of the *pañca-hārati* (waving five lamps in front of the deity), while singing the song “jaya maṅgalam, mahotsava maṅgalam” . . . Every Friday, at the time of the evening *abhiṣeka*, I would perform a selection of *alarimpu*, *pallavi*, *svarajati*, *varṇam*, *padam*, *jāvali*, and *kīrtana*.

Manikyam’s case is a rarity. The majority of *kannērikam* rituals were performed at home and therefore rarely included the recitation of *mantra* or the presence of a priest. Saride Varahalu of Duvva was adamant about stressing that this was a domestic rite of passage in *kalāvantula* communities, while at the same time commenting on the potential exploitation of women that *kannērikam* rituals can engender today:

Yes, we are *vesyas* (*memu vesyalamu*). We had *kannērikam* performed only in the house (*iṅṭilonē cestunnāru*). They would tie the *kaṅkaṅam* to a knife and this would replace the ritual of marriage for the girl . . . Whatever this meant in the past, today it has become a selfish ritual. The girl is given over to any man who can pay 1,000 or 2,000 rupees. I have seen this happen with other girls in our community. Our situation was different; I was with that *komaṭi* man for so many years. I feel terrible when I see what happens to our girls nowadays.

These accounts present the self-consciousness with which *kalāvantulu* who lived through social reform see its awkward and unresolved consequences in their lives and in the lives of younger women in their communities. The fact that some of these perspectives are contradictory

and varied speaks to the individual complexities of living as a woman in these communities today. As we shall see later in this chapter, *kalāvantula* women seize this ambivalence in their self-representation, and deploy it to narrate, valorize, and critique their circumstances.

REFORM, LOSS, IMPOVERISHMENT

In chapter 3, I outlined how anti-nautch discourse unfolded in the political and administrative center of South India. In many ways, the public deliberations on *devadāsī* sexuality engendered by reform debates stigmatized women even further in local communities; it marked them in new ways as figures of ridicule and sexual objectification. The stigma attached to maintaining concubines forced “respectable” men to withdraw support from their mistresses, and these women and their female children very easily slipped into the contiguous world of brothel-style prostitution.

Stories of disenfranchisement and loss are told and retold within *devadāsī* communities throughout South India. These tellings stand at the crossroads of history and experience, and highlight the problematic consequences of reform debates. Some women live with the burdens of reform extreme stigma being a major dimension of this burden on a daily basis.

The loss of land held by women with links to temples provides us with the most obvious and concrete narratives of *devadāsī* disenfranchisement. As we have already seen, despite Muthulakshmi Reddy’s concerted efforts in 1930 to enfranchise land grants (*mānyālu* in Telugu) in the names of their female holders, very rarely did women benefit from Reddy’s reform; land grants were usually usurped through legislation by men in the community or by temple officials (*dharmakartās*). In the case of women in coastal Andhra Pradesh with temple affiliations, such as Saride Manikyam and her sister Anusuya, the material loss represented by the usurping of their land by temple authorities was traumatic. Manikyam, who held *mānyālu* rights at the Madanagopālasvāmi temple in Ballipadu village, remembers:

I remember, about fifty years ago. Suddenly the temple staff was dismantled. I had nowhere to go. I was miserable. We appealed to have the lands enfranchised in our names, but fought a losing battle in the courts. The case eventually reached the high court, but with no results. Finally, I moved to Duvva [another nearby village]. Then, eventually I moved from there to Kapileswarapuram.

Manikyam owned over twenty acres of land as well as over one hundred *kāṣu* of gold (one *kāṣu* equals roughly eight to ten grams). In 1948, her family was no longer entitled to *patrārthamu* (land ownership) from the temple in a private decision made by the temple authorities. As Manikyam mentioned, she attempted to win back her rights over the land through litigation but was unsuccessful. When she and her sister Anusuya moved to Duvva (about six kilometers away), they formed a *meḷam* (dance troupe). They continued to tour rural Andhra Pradesh, performing *mejuvāṇi* (concert repertoire as entertainment) in the homes of patrons, particularly during weddings. They would occasionally perform court repertoire at the Balipadu temple in the context of the *ūregimpu* (temple processions) but only after the temple had obtained permission from the district authorities.

Devadāsī disenfranchisement thus materializes through the cumulative effects of social marginalization, legal intervention, misapplication of the law, and aesthetic loss. The late Saride Seshachalam, who was on the brink of beginning her performing career at the time of the reforms, remembers: "All we did was sign a bond promising to stop even our private (home) performances after the act came. I know I could have become a great 'class artist.' But now look at me. I have nothing but one room in this small house to my name." Kotipalli Hymavathi described how as performance opportunities for *bhogameḷams* decreased, they would live frugally from performance to performance, borrowing cash from moneylenders:

My mother is Kotipalli Manikyam. There would be very large gaps between performances by her *meḷam* when we were younger. We would live by borrowing money throughout the year, and clear the debt when we received payment after a performance. But we would have to use some of this borrowed money to have jewelry made for the performances. As the troupe leader (*nāyakurālu*) my mother had to divide the money as follows: fifteen rupees for the orchestra, ten rupees for the *meḷam* artists, five rupees (half a share) for child-artists, and thirty rupees for the *nāyakurālu*, who was a "class artist" [English]. It was a very difficult time for us. We simply could not perform in public and so we had no money.

Kola Somasundaram from Muramanda village (East Godavari district), who used to have her own *meḷam* (she was a *nāyakurālu* [troupe leader]), remembers the threat of prosecution, and how she would pray for the success and protection of her *meḷam* in light of efforts by the police to monitor and

raid *meḷam* performances. The sponsorship of performances by courtesans after the passing of the Anti-Devadasi Act in 1947 was carefully monitored by local police in small towns and villages in coastal Andhra Pradesh. This appears to have been a way for corrupt police officers to make some extra money and simultaneously humiliate *kalāvantula* women:

When the act came, I secretly took bookings for *meḷam*. If I was caught, I was arrested by the police. This happened a few times. They took me to the station, and called me all sorts of names, too.

I didn't know what to do—should I leave *meḷam* behind or not? I remember, in those days, Vināyaka Chaturthi [festival dedicated to the god Gaṇeśa] was very important. The *gajja* (ankle bells), *tāḷa* (hand cymbals), *maddaḷa* (*mṛdaṅgam*, double-headed barrel drum), harmonium, and *pīṭha-karra* (wooden board and stick used to keep rhythm) were all placed in front of Lord Gaṇapati. All the *sānis* (*kalāvantulu*) from one neighbourhood (*basti*) would gather at one woman's home. We broke coconuts, performed *pūjā*, and danced for Gaṇapati to ensure that we had success in the future and, more importantly, to ensure that there would be no breaks or halts in our performances.

In chapter 3, I spoke at some length about the “rehabilitation centers,” *śaraṇālayams*, that were established throughout the Tamil- and Telugu-speaking regions. Painful memories of these institutions survive in the contemporary *kalāvantula* community. A seventy-one-year-old woman from Tanuku (West Godavari district), who did not want to be identified by name, remembers:

My mother's sister was taken to the *śaraṇālayam* at Narasapur. I was too young to remember that day, but my mother told me they forced her into going there. They told her what she should wear, how she should speak, everything. After that, nobody in our family wanted to make their daughters into *sānis*. We were so scared. It was difficult for us to survive.

In roughly the late 1960s, as hands-on reform activities in *devadāsī* communities (such as those described in chapter 3) subsided, evangelical Christian missionary groups from North America took up the cause of rescuing the “fallen *devadāsīs*” of coastal Andhra Pradesh. By the early twenty-first century, large numbers of women in the *kalāvantulu* community had converted to Christianity, because this promised them a stable monthly in-

come as members of the new rehabilitation programs of these missions.² At the same time, caste associations headed by men in the *kalāvantula* community enforced the radical seclusion of women in their homes. A year before she passed away, Saride Anusuya told me:

We did what we did with sincerity. But after us, these younger ones do business [*vṛtti*]. Our children get angry with us and say, “Hey, get in the house!” My son doesn’t let me go out. If I do, he threatens to beat me. “Hey you!” he says, “We don’t want to get a name like you.” They allow the boys to study, but the girls can’t even leave the house! They tell us to call ourselves *sūryabaḷija*, if anyone asks.

The term *sūryabaḷija*, as I noted in chapter 3, was the twentieth-century caste identity crafted by men in the Telugu-speaking courtesan community in order to distance themselves from the stigma attached to terms like *kalāvantulu* and *bhogam*.³

Twentieth-century reform discourse, coupled with the emergence of “classical” dance as a pastime for “respectable” women, had significant effects in rural communities where *kalāvantula* women lived as neighbors of middle-class families. Kotipalli Hymavathi, for example, speaks of the ways in which virtuosity was no longer associated with *kalāvantula* performance practices; it had now become identified with the “Bharatanāṭyam” that was presented on urban stages, or in movies, or later on television. What men “expected” aesthetically from women in *kalāvantula* communities changed in the span of one generation. Hymavathi explains:

By the 1960s, people in our community began to abandon their profession; everyone left everything behind. Because I only danced for a few years, I couldn’t learn too many of those dances [*padams*, *jāvaḷis*] or even “record” dances [dances to film songs]. Instead, I performed what people wanted to see—a snake dance, peacock dance, and other acrobatic dances. Sometimes, as a teenager, men would ask me to perform summersaults and throw money at me. Eventually I started to wonder about the past, about what my elders used to do. So I went to them and learned these dances [*padams*, *jāvaḷis*]. We all perform them together today. But today most *sānis* are afraid to come out and talk about their past because of their fears that their children will lose respectability (*paruvu*). When these problems came [because of reform], some women formed *bhajan maṇḍalis*, and sang [devotional songs] for a living. Others focused on making the lives of their children better, and getting

them married so they could avoid this stigma. Some of our women went to places like Peddapuram and started doing business (*vṛtti*). Others are just left with nobody to look after them, and with no options.

The *kalāvantula* body and *kalāvantula* expressivity are scripted in a manner that is personally and aesthetically offensive. By the middle and certainly toward the end of the twentieth century, owing to reform debates, *kalāvantulu* had been conflated with *jogatis* (Dalit women dedicated to the goddess Yellamma) in the popular imagination, especially among a younger generation of men who had not witnessed *mejuvāṇi* performances as they existed in the 1940s and 1950s.

Hymavathi also remembers that some young men would come to the *meḷam* performances led by her sister after having seen the dances of *jogatis* at funerals and expect the same from them. She explains how the requests for songs that subtly equated the identities of *kalāvantulu* with brothel prostitutes became frequent. To illustrate, she sang the following song:

You've done so much, you've ruined my house, you whore.
I'm shocked by all this—you really get around, here and there, you
whore.

The context for this song is actually a quarrel between two women who are fighting for the love of the same man. However, the invocation of the language of stigma (the words *laṃja*, *daṃga*, and *muṇḍa*—all synonyms for “whore”) serves a reflexive function when the *kalāvantulu* are made to perform the composition. It also forces them to enact the role of “whores” while singing lyrics that explicitly insult such women. The song continues,

You've caught [the Brahmin] by the tuft of hair on his head
and you're swinging on it, playing on it, swinging on it, playing
on it . . .⁴

The sexual overtones of the song are clear. As Hymavathi explained, “They enjoyed seeing us talk about each other in that way.” Most of these men were businessmen from the city, tax collectors, and ministers. Undoubtedly, we see a new kind of publicization of *kalāvantula* women's sexual availability in the postsocial reform period.

As the performing arts—music and dance in particular—became “classical” through state interventions in the twentieth century, opportunities for *kalāvantulu* to teach their art to women outside the community for money were rare. According to the late Maddula Venkataratnam from Tatipaka village (West Godavari district), the few women who tried to start dance schools in their villages had to obtain a certificate from the police and hang the certificate in a visible spot outside their homes. The certificate legitimized their status as bone fide dance teachers and made public the fact that they were not bringing young girls into their homes for “other purposes.” In the 1930s, there was a movement to create a “regional” dance form for Andhra Pradesh, much like the newly created “Bharatanāṭyam,” which had become both a national symbol intimately connected with regional (Tamil) cultural identity (O’Shea 2007; 2008). Nationalists and elite philanthropists in Andhra Pradesh accorded a parallel status to a reworked version of the *smārta* Brahmin male dance tradition from Kuchipudi village, and not to the dance of the *kalāvantulu* (Soneji 2004). From 1940 onward, girls came in large numbers to study from the traditional gurus of Kuchipudi village, but the *bhogameḷam* art of Andhra Pradesh was not refashioned or reconstituted by the upper classes until the 1970s. In 1972, Nataraja Ramakrishna, a dance teacher in Hyderabad, held an *abhinaya sadas* (gathering of traditional *abhinaya* artists) and brought many *kalāvantulu* together in Hyderabad for the first time since the passing of the Anti-Devadasi Act. He urged the women to come forth to teach his students. He aided many of them financially, including Saride Manikyam. Together with many *kalāvantulu*, he created a syllabus for teaching the art of the coastal Andhra Pradesh *bhogameḷam* tradition, which he christened “Āndhra Nāṭyam,” modeled, so some degree, after the name selectively foregrounded for the reinvented, middle-class version of the *devadāsī* art from further south, “Bharatanāṭyam.” From 1993 to 1995, Swapnasundari, one of the nation’s most famous dancers, embarked on a project that contested Nataraja Ramakrishna’s codification of *kalāvantulu* performance art. She studied dance and music repertoire under several *kalāvantulu* in coastal Andhra Pradesh, including Maddula Lakshminarayana, Maddula Venkataratnam, Kola Subrahmanyam, a number of women in Muramanda, and the Saride family at Ballipadu, and named her version “Vilāsini Nāṭyam.”⁵ These two reclamations of *kalāvantulu* art circulate as “middle-class” versions of dance in Hyderabad and New Delhi, while *kalāvantulu* women themselves are, for the most, considered “unsuitable” to appear on urban stages.⁶

SITES OF PERFORMANCE AND REPERTOIRE

kalāvantulu aṅṅe kalanu poṣiṅcevāḷḷu

[*Kalāvantulu* refers to those who protect their art.]

—Kotipalli Hymavathi

The performance practices of *kalāvantulu* in coastal Andhra Pradesh are diverse, and many are the same as those found in Tamil-speaking courtesan communities. The Telugu language occupies *the* central place of courtesan performance traditions throughout South India, a fact obscured by the regional chauvinism of many contemporary Tamil cultural historians and dance practitioners.

Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century courtesan performance must be drawn out of these parochial historicizations and understood as pivoting around a common vocabulary of practices that undeniably included those developed in colonial Tanjore. This vocabulary permeates all sites of courtesan performance, from salon-style soirees to dancing in temple processions to the nightlong dramatic performances known as *pārijātam*. Each of these types of performances draws upon the interpretation of lyric poetry in techniques already discussed in previous chapters.

COURTLY/SALON REPERTOIRE (MEJUVĀṆĪ)

The courtly repertoire of the Godavari River delta, which was replicated in salon performances as well, is incredibly rich. In addition to a number of compositions from Tanjore, it includes several compositions and genres that are exclusive to this region or are long-forgotten in Tanjore and Tamil-speaking South India. The concert repertoire is reckoned by a number of names: *kacceri-āṅṅa* or *kacceri*, which we have already encountered in the Tamil-speaking regions; *karṅṅāṅṅakam* (referring to its “southern” or Tanjorean origins, parallel to the term “Karṅṅāṅṅak music”); *keḷika* (“play”); *meḷam* (“troupe or band”); and perhaps most commonly, *mejuvāṅṅi*, from the Urdu word *mezbān* or *mezmān*, meaning “landlord, master of the house, host of a feast, a man who entertains guests.” The movement vocabulary of the dance itself is parallel to that found in Tanjore and the Tamil-speaking regions. The “steps” of abstract movement (*aḍavu-sāmu*), for example, are numerous and complex, and remarkably similar to those from Tanjore.

Kalāvantula performances typically open with a *salām-daruvu*, or song of salutation, usually addressed to one of the Tanjore kings (usually

Pratāpasimha, Tuḷajā II, Serfoji II, or Śivāji II). These are short and fast-paced compositions that describe the splendor of the king, often focusing on his physical attributes. Sometimes it would end with an erotic verse in which the heroine would inevitably request the king to fulfil her desires. This would be followed by a short piece of abstract or nonrepresentational dance, the *pallavi*, similar to the *jatisvaram* of Tanjore but performed to the accompaniment of one simple line of music.⁷

The rest of the evening's performance would be dedicated to the interpretation of lyrics, largely in the *varṇam*, *padam*, and *jāvaḷi* genres. The interpretation of *varṇams* and *padams* was usually performed at a leisurely pace with the dancer seated on the ground. The *varṇam* was a centerpiece in these performances as it was in Tanjore. In coastal Andhra Pradesh, however, there were no bursts of abstract dance that would punctuate the text. So instead of dancing to the solfège passages, *kalāvantulu* would sing them, while keeping time (*tāḷam*) with their hands. The absence of these rhythmic interludes did not take away, however, from the understanding of *varṇam* as a virtuosic form. At some point in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, courtesan performers in this region canonized five *varṇams* as "great *varṇams*" (*peddaidu varṇālu*), which were taught and performed by all serious artists. According to Kotipalli Satyavathi of Muramanda, the ability to "handle" all five of these compositions was the sign of a great performer. The five *varṇams* included three compositions attributed to the Quartet (one in *rāga* Bhairavi dedicated to Serfoji II, which we saw in translation in chapter 1; one in *rāga* Toḍi dedicated to Śivāji II, and one in *rāga* Ānandabhairavi dedicated to Kṛṣṇarāja Uḍaiyār, king of Mysore). Not only did these compositions travel from Tanjore into these areas, but they remained iconic markers of virtuosity as they were in Tanjore. Some early, pre-Quartet *varṇams* that had disappeared from Tanjore and the Tamil-speaking regions were also performed regularly in coastal Andhra Pradesh until the middle of the twentieth century.⁸ In addition to these Tanjore *varṇams*, a number of other "local" *varṇams* were also performed in this region.⁹ The mainstay of *mejuvāṇi*, however, was the performance of Telugu *padams* and *jāvaḷis*.

As already noted in chapters 1 and 2, lyrical interpretation characterized courtesan performance in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The *kalāvantulu* of coastal Andhra Pradesh handled a vast and diverse repertoire of *padams* and *jāvaḷis*, many of which were composed in these regions, and hence are unknown among Tamil-speaking courtesans.¹⁰ I will return to the function of these pieces in contemporary *kalāvantula* communities in a moment, but first I would like to turn to an example

of a *padam* typical of the Godavari delta region. The following *padam*, “*ēnduki tōndara*” in the *rāga* Ānandabhairavi, is dedicated to Ānanda Gajapati Mahārāju (1850–1897), *zamīndār* of Vizianagaram. The maharaja was a key figure in early South Indian nationalist politics and simultaneously was a great patron of music and courtesan dance (Rama Rao, 1985). This *padam* comes from the repertoire of Saride Seshachalam in the village of Duvva, West Godavari district. The *nāyikā*, or heroine, of the poem is married, but her lover can’t wait to be intimate with her. He shows up at her husband’s house, and she has to convince him to leave, with the promise that she will satisfy him (and herself) later:

Why are you in such a hurry, beautiful one?

Be patient, I will come to you soon.

Why are you in such a hurry?

You placed your hand on my breast,
and spoke such lovely words.

You placed your hands all over my body
and spoke such lovely words.

But if the eye of my husband happens
to fall upon us, we’ll be in trouble!

Why are you in such a hurry?

It’s time for me to serve my husband his meal,
but I will return soon.

You are a connoisseur of enjoyment,
like the old King Bhoja
and the god of desire.

Come back soon, and make love to me!

Salutations to you, Ānanda Gajapati Mahārāja!

Why are you in such a hurry?

In 1915, observers were already commenting on what they understood as the “degeneration” of courtly styles of dance in the Godavari delta. That year, Devulapalli Virarāghavamūrti Śāstri, a Brahmin connoisseur of the arts, published a Telugu-language book entitled *Abhinaya Svayambodhini* (“Teach Yourself Abhinaya”), a codification of courtly repertoire that includes five *svarajatis*, seventeen *varṇams*, and eighty-four *padams* (attributed to Kṣetrāyā). For each song, he provides the lyrics together with suggestions on how to perform the *abhinaya* for each word. This text contains the five “great *varṇams*” and a number of other early compositions from Tanjore that are not found elsewhere. In the preface to this lengthy

pedagogical treatise he writes about the failing standards of performances practices in the courtesan (*veśyā*) community:

[*Śāstras* like] *Bharatārṇava* and *Abhinayadarpaṇa* have become rare.¹¹ This art is to be practiced by women. But women cannot read these texts and therefore cannot acquire knowledge (*vidya*) about the art. I have written this text in Telugu to facilitate learning for *veśyā strīs* and other women who wish to learn this art; they need not look elsewhere. One can learn the art with the help of this book. This *abhinaya śāstra* has been composed in a simple style for them; [they can acquire proficiency in *abhinaya*] without the help of the numerous Sanskrit works. With this book in hand, a woman can become a master of the art. The ladies who want to acquire this knowledge (*vidya*) need not spend any money.

Another reason I have taken up the task of writing this work now, is that this art has devolved into a grave state (*bahu hīna daśāku vaccasunnadi*) and everyone knows this. One reason [for its degeneration] is that the art is kept secret (*gūḍha*). Some *veśyās* learn a little bit of *abhinaya* and spend all their time repeating [what little they know]. They don't learn the *śāstra*, which speaks of the varieties of *nāyaka* and *nāyikā* (hero and heroine). Without any experience of how to manipulate the hands, eyes, et cetera, in their ignorance (*ajñānam*), they move their hands here and there and say they have mastered *abhinaya*. They perform before large assemblies, believing that they are master performers. If somebody in the audience raises a question about the *śāstras*, these women [can't respond and] have to leave the assembly [out of sheer embarrassment]. They are not equipped with the knowledge to be able to answer such questions. Therefore [it is my wish that] this tradition of *abhinaya*, which exists in a deteriorated state, should improve. (Śāstri 1915, i–ii)

As we have already seen in chapters 1 and 2, salon performances have always been characterized by hybrid and novel presentations. By the middle of the twentieth century, *mejuvāni* performances in coastal Andhra Pradesh included the performance of film songs alongside *padams* and *jāvalīs*. The term “record dance” gained popularity both within and outside the *kalāvantula* community. While many women revel in their performances of these dances, for which they became justly famous (fig. 5.1), other women see the “intrusion” of film songs as the beginning of the end of *kalāvantula* performance practices. According to Nayudu Chilakamma from Mandapeta village, “When the older people used to do *meḷam*, it was good. But then younger ones started to dance for money [given to the



5.1 Subbulakshmi performs the song “gopāla niku from the Telugu film *Jivitam* (1950) as part of a salon (*mejuvāṇi*) performance in Muramanda, Andhra Pradesh. Photo by author.

performer when she danced a song on request], and they also did “record” dance. Older women such as my sisters wouldn’t allow these women to dance in their *meḷam* if they wanted to perform record dance.” The ambivalence with which women from courtesan communities regard the culture of cinema in India is something I have already touched on, but suffice to say that cinema represented a world of lost opportunities for women who considered themselves “professional performing artists,” while at the same time, it too was marked by a profound stigma that many women, such as Chilakamma’s sisters, wanted to avoid at all costs.

TEMPLE PROCESSIONS (ŪREGIMPU) AND WEDDING PERFORMANCES (KAÑCA)

A great majority of *kalāvantula* women in coastal Andhra Pradesh did not undergo temple dedications. As we have already seen, from the seven-

teenth century onward, many courtesans were not “dedicated” at temples; they may have been marked by rights of passage such as “sword marriage” (*katti kalyāṇam*) discussed in chapter 1, or may have simply been coopted into the courtesan lifestyle without any such rituals. In the Godavari River delta, most women underwent the *kannērikam* ritual that marked them as courtesans. It is true, however, that *some* women were dedicated to temple deities in this region. Elsewhere I have written in detail about the ritual duties and repertoire of the Madanagopālasvāmi temple at Ballipadu in the East Godavari district, for example, where compositions such as *maṅgalahāraṭi pāṭulu* (auspicious songs to accompany the ritual waving of lamps), *lāli-pāṭulu* and *jola-pāṭulu* (lullabies), *hēccarikalū* (“warning” songs sung as part of the *baliharāṇa* rituals to propitiate the *aṣṭadikpālas*, guardian deities of the eight directions), and others were performed regularly (Soneji 2004). But these kinds of ritual performances represented the exception rather than the rule when it came to courtesan performance in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

By contrast, temples regularly hired *bhogameḷams* to perform at temple festivals. Sometimes this was specifically to perform a concert of courtly compositions on makeshift stages (*pandals*) set up for the occasion; at other times, it was to dance with the image of the deity as it was taken on procession around the village streets. This was called *ūregimpu meḷam* (“processional band”) or *tiruvīdhi grāmotsavam* (“village celebration of a procession on the streets surrounding temple”). The processional performances consisted of a random selection of songs and dances taken from the *kacceri* or concert repertoire, most of which would be performed when the deity would periodically stop for “breaks” en route. These *ūregimpu meḷams* represented some of the most “public” of performances by courtesans.

Until recently, the presence of a *bhogameḷam* was an important marker of a high-society wedding in the Godavari delta. Most of the women in the Godavari delta referred to this as *kañca*, after the *kañcamu*, “metal platters” given to them by the hosts at this time. In the Tamil-speaking regions, these performances were called *kalyāṇakkaccēri*, a term that is rarely used in the Godavari delta. The *kalāvantulu* would not only dance *padams*, *jāvalis*, and other erotic compositions at weddings but would also be involved in providing blessings to the bride. By tying the black beads (*nallapūsa*) of the bride’s *maṅgalasūtra*, or wedding necklace, the *kalāvantula* woman would shower auspicious blessings on the bride. The courtesan’s liminal status as neither wedded nor widowed enabled her to stand at social thresholds. The following, in the words of Kotipalli Rajahamsa of Muramanda, is a brief description of a typical *kañca* ritual:

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

At the groom's home, a full-length performance is given by the *kalāvantulu*, and this was a great source of income for *bhogameḷams* in this region. Often, troupes would be booked a year in advance for such performances, and all negotiations would be performed by the *nāyakurālu*, the woman who led the troupe.

DRAMATIC PERFORMANCE (ĀṬA-BHĀGAVATAM)

A unique aspect of the repertoire of many courtesans in the Godavari River delta was known variously as *kalāpam*, *āṭa-bhāgavatam*, or *veṣa-katha* (Soneji 2004).¹² This genre consisted of two types of performance, *Bhāmākalāpam* and *Gollakalāpam*. Like the *kuṛavañci* dramas performed in the Tanjore region, these were nightlong, dramatic performances about archetypal female characters, Satyabhāmā, the consort of Kṛṣṇa, and Gollabhāmā, a highly intelligent milkmaid from the shepherd (*golla*) caste. From both a literary and performance perspective, these dramas were embedded in a larger theatrical ecology that involved the public performance of dramas by male and female troupes, spanning a range of caste backgrounds, from *smārta* Brahmins to Dalits.¹³ In the context of courtesan performance, the *Bhāmākalāpam*, known in *kalāvantula* communities as *pārijātam*, revolves around the separation of Satyabhāmā and Kṛṣṇa after a quarrel, and is told from the standpoint of Satyabhāmā. Like the lovesick heroine of the *kuṛavañci* dramas, Satyabhāmā is depicted in varied states of desire and anguish, described in the language of lyric poetry. Satyabhāmā passes through phases of longing poetically represented by sections of the drama including *manmatha-upāmbhana* (rebuking the god of desire, Manmatha or Kāma), *candra-upāmbhana* (admonishing the moon), *vāyu-upāmbhana* (reprimanding the breeze), and *mūrccha-avasthā* (a state of fainting or swooning). The drama ends when Satyabhāmā's confidante Mādhavi carries a letter to Kṛṣṇa, and he finally

returns to her. The *Gollakalāpam*, by contrast, represents one of the only elements in the courtesan repertoire that does not focus on eroticism and the poetics of longing. Instead, it consists of a dialogue between a clever girl from the shepherd community and an arrogant Brahmin scholar. The character of the girl is represented in a manner similar to that of fortune-telling woman of the Kuṛa tribe in the Tamil *kuṛavañci* dramas. The various episodes in the drama are structured around songs that address a range of issues including indigenous understandings of conception and fetal development. At the end of the drama, the shepherd girl successfully defeats the Brahmin in intellectual debate, a move that appears to critique both caste and gender roles.¹⁴

These performances borrowed technique and other conventions from courtly repertoire and were performed on temporary, makeshift open-air structures (*pandals*), usually set up inside the pavilions of temples. These types of open, public performances helped generate income for the temple. The *āṭa-bhāgavatam* or *pārijātam* was a form of “popular” entertainment that attracted audiences from around the Godavari delta to temples such as the Satyanārāyaṇasvāmi temple in Annavaram. Figure 5.2 shows the *meḷam* of Annabhatula Buli Venkataratnam (from Mummdivaram, East Godavari district) preparing for a performance of *Gollakalāpam*, circa 1950. *Āṭa-bhāgavatam* texts were composed by or commissioned from upper-caste (usually Brahmin) poets by the *kalāvantulu*.¹⁵ In many cases, these men taught the meaning of the poetry to the woman and made suggestions as to how it should be interpreted through *abhinaya*. These men



5.2 The *meḷam* of late Annabhatula Buli Venkataratnam (Mummdivaram, East Godavari district), c. 1950. Photo courtesy the Sunil Kothari Dance Collection.

were referred to respectfully as *gurus* (*gurugāru*). Most *kalāvantula āṭa-bhāgavatam* texts are divided into smaller sections or episodes called *paṭṭu* (“acts”). Often, a full evening would be dedicated to the performance of only one or two *paṭṭus* of the full text, which would be performed over a span of many nights.¹⁶

NIGHTS OF NOSTALGIA: PERFORMANCE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REMEMBERING

In February 2002, Saride Maithili introduced me to the mnemonic culture of the *kalāvantulu* by singing *jāvaḷis*. She had gathered a *meḷam* inside her own house. It was around 11:30 P.M., early for a night of remembering. Spontaneously, her nephew picked up a drum (*mṛdaṅgam*) and a violin player from a few houses down was called in. Maithili began to sing a song of salutation (*salām-daruvu*) dedicated to King Serfoji II of Tanjore, and performed an interpretation of the text through gesture (*abhinaya*). Like Mutukkannammal’s “rooftop” performances discussed in chapter 4, Maithili, her family, and a number of other *kalāvantula* families regularly engage in evening “sessions” of music and dance performed only for each other. These distinctly private performances take place behind closed doors, usually in the late hours of the night. In a sense, *kalāvantulu* performance culture has gone “underground”—it has found itself living inside the homes of *kalāvantula* women. Today there is no audience beyond the walls of their homes, but this is not a criterion for these mnemonic practices. The *meḷams* have become part of women’s interior worlds—they have moved from the realm of public spectacle into the realm of nostalgia and memory.

In an engaging essay entitled “Autobiographical Remembering as Cultural Practice: Understanding the Interplay between Memory, Self and Culture,” Qi Wang and Jens Brockmeier have pointed to the narrow focus on collective and institutional forms of remembering in scholarly work on memory. They shift their emphasis instead to the significance and efficacy of “self-memory.” They argue that “autobiographical memory, self-construction and narrative exhibit a developmental dynamic in which they mutually . . . confirm each other” (2002, 58). Autobiographical telling, as Kamala Visweswaran notes, “is not a mere reflection of self, but another entry point into history, of community refracted through the self” (1994, 137). In the case of contemporary *kalāvantulu*, performance is a mode of inhabiting a personal past, a “cultural genre of remembering” (47). My presence as an observer of these ordinarily “closed doors” events added an-

other dimension: that of “telling.” The performance of the repertoire was now supplemented by the recollection of explicitly autobiographical narratives interspersed throughout the performance. Their self-presentation to outsiders—however rare it might be—involves the strategic elaboration of historical and social positions.

I first became conscious of the relationship between performance and autobiographical remembering through an event coordinated by Kotipalli Hymavathi of Muramanda, who eventually became a central figure in my work and travels throughout the Godavari delta. A few weeks after our initial meeting, Hymavathi invited four women to her house to meet me—Kotipalli Somasundaram, Kotipalli Rajahamsa, Eluru Lakshakasulu, and K. Krishnaveni—who all used to dance in Hymavathi’s grandmother’s *meḷam*. All of them were trained by Hymavathi’s grandmother Kotipalli Subbayi, and all lived in the village of Muramanda like Hymavathi. Some had also performed in her mother Kotipalli Manikyam’s *meḷam*. Our conversations began rather informally around 9:00 P.M. About an hour into our conversation, Hymavathi asked Kotipalli Somasundaram, the senior-most woman in the group, to tell me about *jāvaḷis*. Hymavathi hummed the first line of a *jāvaḷi* in the *rāga* Maṇiraṅgu, *sarasuḍa nīve nāku gati* (“Beautiful lover, you are my destiny”). Somasundaram corrected some of her words, and started to sing the whole song. All of a sudden the rest of the women joined in, and soon they were all sitting in a line and performing *abhinaya*, with slight variations, to this *jāvaḷi*. Somasundaram told me later that she “saw her *meḷam*” that night, and as the night went on, she performed more *abhinaya*, and her performances were laced with autobiographical recollections. After the first *jāvaḷi*, she began her narrative:

My mother was a *veśyā* (*mā amma vesyā*). In my family, one of my sisters was married, and the rest of us became *sānis*. My elder sister was a *nāyakurālu* for about five years, and after that, I took on this role. I was a *nāyakurālu* for almost thirty years.

The *jāvaḷi* over, we began to talk about the *pallavi* genre. Somasundaram and a couple of the other women let out a chuckle when I asked if Somasundaram could dance one. “Are you kidding?” she replied, “I’m too old for that kind of thing, but I know Hymavathi remembers a couple of *pallavis* from our repertoire.” Hymavathi, considerably younger than Somasundaram, moved the small table and chairs that were in the way, tightly wrapped her sari around her waist, and started to dance a *pallavi* as Soma-

sundaram and the others sang. When the *pallavi* ended, Hymavathi sat down, and Somasundaram continued.

But then we faced a lot of problems because of the reforms, and all of a sudden, it seemed, everything came to standstill. My guru was Kotipalli Subbayi, the grandmother of your friend Hymavathi! I have five children through one man, and my third child, a daughter, became a *sāni*. I live with my youngest daughter. I had my *gajjapūjā* [worship of the ankle bells] performed when I was eleven, under the guidance of my guru. As a *nāyakurālu*, I did all the “management” [in English]. I took bookings for performances, brought all the dancers together, and after the performance, I collected payment from the host and distributed it to all the artists in our *meḷam*. Those days were different.

Hymavathi interrupted. “Akka, remember those *aṣṭapadīs*?” Hymavathi had seen Somasundaram perform *aṣṭapadī* poems from the *Gītagovinda* in Sanskrit, and this had apparently left a deep impression on her. The poems of the twelfth-century *Gītagovinda*, like the *pārijātam* dramas, were taught only to highly accomplished courtesan performers in this region by male Brahmin connoisseurs with whom they often shared intimate relationships. Trying her best to remember, Somasundaram began singing and performing *abhinaya* to the first two lines of the twelfth *aṣṭapadī* of the *Gītagovinda*:

atha tāṃ gantumaśaktāṃ ciramanuraktāṃ latāgṛhe dṛṣṭvā
taccaritam govinde manasijamande sakhī prāha ||

paśyati diśi diśi . . .

Unable to remember the rest of the song without her notebook, Somasundaram stopped. Tears streaming into the lower rim of her glasses, she continued.

This is really hard to remember, you know. Nobody wants to hear these songs anymore. These songs were in sweet Telugu or Sanskrit. These were great things. It all makes me very sad. They’ve stopped our dances (*mā ḍānsulu āpesāru*). Look at the state of dance today. Look at cinema dance today. Hymavathi has a TV, she knows—the people in the movies don’t even wear clothes! That kind of dance gets so much respect, but they’ve stopped our dances. *That* is shameful.

Here we see the affective potential of remembering and the oscillation between past and present embodied in these performances of memory. Performance enables a movement between “what was” and “what is”; Somasundaram is conscious of the fact that her art has been stripped of its value as capital today. The aesthetics of *devadāsī* dance is simply not viable in the age of TV, she notes. Her antagonism toward popular cultural forms hinges on the irony of their acceptance, their “respectability” in the face of the social and aesthetic marginalization of her own cultural practices. The retrieval of the past into the present appears disorienting at one level for Somasundaram (“Why have our dances been banned, when this is allowed to continue?”), but at another level, it resists attempts to erase or deny the past. This kind of commemorative nostalgia serves as a mode of suspending the past in a way that makes it available and affective for the shaping of a contemporary selfhood.

Later in February 2002, Kotipalli Hymavathi held a *meḷam* at her home in Muramanda village. This *meḷam* was organized so I could record some *jāvalis* that I had not yet seen. Hymavathi spent some time in her bedroom, now transformed into a greenroom. She applied a variety of makeup, and started to mix sandalwood powder with water in a small bowl. She also took some jasmine flowers that I assumed were meant to ornament her hair, and plucked the buds, and put them on a small plate. I was a bit confused, believing that Hymavathi was going to use these in some way as part of her makeup. When I asked her about the sandalwood paste and flowers, she simply replied “Just wait, you’ll see.”

The *meḷavāṇi* performance began. I was caught up in trying to write down the words to the *jāvalis* I had not heard or seen previously. As soon as Hymavathi’s sister finished her *jāvali*, Hymavathi brought out the bowl of sandalwood paste and plate of flowers. She placed a footstool in the middle of the room, and asked my research assistant Rangamani to sit down on it. Hymavathi started to sing the following song in the *rāga* Jhuñjhūṭi, applying the sandalpaste to Rangamani’s arms and gently showering her with the jasmine buds:

Great Lover! I’m smearing this fragrant sandalpaste on your body!

Leave your doubts behind, my beloved, and come!

Don’t you have any love for me? Come to look after my needs, come!

Leave your doubts behind.

We can live like a pair of lovebirds in our love nest, come!

Leave your doubts behind.

Let’s go for a spin in your motor car!

Leave your doubts behind.

We can make a boat of jasmine flowers and sleep in it!

Leave your doubts behind

Composed in the early twentieth century by an unknown author, this song, “*mandāra gandham idi*,” became one of the staple compositions of salon performances. The performer would request the host to be seated, then would proceed to anoint his arms with sandalwood paste, while interpreting the text of the song, effectively seducing him, in very close contact, with her *abhinaya*. Hymavathi sat down with me after her performance, as the musician and next performer decided on their next piece. My assistant and I asked her about the lyrics of this song, and we started to write them down. As I was writing, Hymavathi engaged in what I think of as “reflective nostalgia.”

You know, I have performed this only once or twice for a real man! Now those days of *zamīndārs* are gone. When this song was composed, things were different. You know there is that line “*moṭaru kārumida . . .*” That was a time when it was very hard to see a motor car. Only *zamīndārs* had those. Other than the wives of *zamīndārs*, only we *kalāvāntulu* could ride in those motor cars! Imagine if there were still *zamīndārs*! Today we would still be riding in motor cars! We could have been part of that.

Hymavathi’s reflections and longing are part of an imaginary in which *kalāvāntula* women were integrated into a new, distinctly “modern” economy, represented by the motor car in the song. Her idealized longing for this past—removed from many of the historical realities of the nineteenth century—nevertheless reflects a nostalgia for an ideal audience and patronage, both of which are impossible for *kalāvāntula* women today.

REMEMBERING AN EROTIC SELF

We have many desires!

—Maddula Venkataratnam

There is little doubt that *devadāsī* performance articulates female desire that is constructed in the male gaze. The audiences for courtesan performance largely consist of men, some of whom have sexual relations with the performers as well. But limiting the expressive possibilities of perfor-

mance solely to the effects of the male gaze curtails any potential for the expression of female desire, *jouissance*, moments of resilience among peripheral subjects such as courtesans. As Amelia Maciszewski reminds us in her work with courtesans in North India,

the woman evoking such [patriarchally constructed] imagery in her performance is exercising creative agency by virtue of using the music, text, and a particular context to elaborate her very own realization of the materials at hand . . . She is both an object of the (male) gaze and purveyor of her own artistic (and professional) gaze—thus simultaneously subsuming her individual identity into the extant artistic form and deploying her creative agency within it. (1998, 88)

I suggest that for some women—and under certain conditions—the visceral, somatic, and material pleasures of performance resonate at a deeply intimate level. My concern here is not with recovering a notion of courtesan agency in the past—in the salons of the Madras Presidency, for example. Instead, I am interested in the mobilization of performance practices as modes of telling in the expression of contemporary *devadāsī* identity. This identity undeniably has aesthetics as its telos, and not religion, as we have seen elsewhere. *Kalāvantula* women in the Godavari delta express an ownership of the idea of the marginal; they articulate an awareness of the socioaesthetics of their past. If we are to envision feminist ethnography, following Chantal Mouffe, as a project of documenting shifting subjectivities that are affected, transformed, and subverted by a range of articulatory practices (1992, 373), then memory-work with *devadāsīs* presents a productive site for such a project.

The freedom to display or discuss sexuality is one way in which contemporary *kalāvantulu* construct themselves in opposition to married women. Again, while it is clear that the foregrounding of female sexuality is meant to titillate the male spectator in performance, our perspective is transformed when we think of performances as primarily mnemonic acts without audiences. In this context, *kalāvantulu* deploy the aestheticized sexuality of the repertoire to articulate a vision of their own sexuality that stands in opposition to that of middle-class, “respectable” women. The affective resonances of the repertoire, made manifest through the inflection and style of courtesan performance, enable women to imagine the past in a manner that has significant personal meaning.

In early March 2002, I met Maddula Venkataratnam (fig. 5.3) at a *mejuvāṇi* session arranged in the village of Manepalli. Venkataratnam



5.3 The author with Maddula Venkataratnam (*center*), Kotipalli Hymavathi, and a number of other *kalāvantula* women in the village of Tatipaka, West Godavari district, in 2002.

was one of the most well-known performing artists of her time. She was born in the village of Tatipaka, where she studied dance under a famous *nāyakurālu*, Maddula Shiromani, and had her *gajjapūjā* performed at the age of nine. She was also a respected performer of *āṭa-bhāgavatam*—both *Bhāmākalāpam* and *Gollakalāpam*—which she studied under Gaddam Subbarayudu Sastri. That day, it was clear that she was the most important figure among those who had gathered for this *mejuvāṇi*. After performing a short *pallavi* in the *rāga* Ānandabhairavi, Venkataratnam began the first major piece. She sat down and began to sing the following *padam* in the *rāga* Mohana, attributed to Kṣetrayya. In this piece, the heroine mocks her lover Kṛṣṇa for not being able to satisfy her sexually. It is a rare example of the explicit expression of a woman’s own sexual desire. The refrain (*pallavī*) of the *padam* is as follows:

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

Venkataratnam performed the *pallavī* alone for close to half an hour. In her performance, Venkataratnam sang the words *makkuva dīrcara* (“Come, fulfill my desires”) over fifty times, and provided a new hand ges-

ture to depict sexual union each time. Later she explained these gestures, known as *rati-mudrās*, using terms like *samarati* ("man on top"), *uparati* ("woman on top," also *viparitarati*), and *nāgabandhamu* ("bodies coiled in the serpent position"). Her performance of the whole *padam* lasted more than an hour, at the end of which she decided to take a break. As we sipped tea, she began to talk about sexuality in highly aestheticized terms. She talked me through *nakha-śikhā varṇana*, a metaphoric description of the female body from the toenails to the crown of the head. "Only we *kalāvantulu* can sing and dance like this. I'm still alive, so you've come to see me and hear these songs. If I die, who will come? What will happen to these songs?" Venkataratnam wondered.

A week later, I visited her in own home in the village of Tatipaka. The first question she asked was, "Did you like the *padam* that day?" "Of course, I learned so much," I replied. "Did you see the *rati-mudrās*? I was about twenty years old when Ramamurtigarū [a local Brahmin scholar] told me about them and taught me them with their Sanskrit names. You know, when we perform these things, we *feel* different." She continued,

There is something about these songs that make you understand your experience (*anubhavam*) of life. We have many desires, just like anyone else! Sometimes those desires are fulfilled, sometimes not. I have fallen in love, too, but maybe not in the same way as those married women. My experience is important, too, just like the *nāyikā* in that *padam*. She has desires that she wants fulfilled.

As Amelia Maciszewski has demonstrated, the *nāyikās* reflect, on the one hand, an abstract, situated, and sexualized subjectivity, and on the other, a distinct corporeality, an affective state and social positioning that "may be internalized, enacted, and appropriated by [courtesan] performers" (1998, 93). More important, Venkataratnam foregrounds the connections between her experience of pleasure in the form of romantic or sexual love and pleasure in the performance of the *padam*.

Another discussion of the erotic took place during a *meḷam* held in the home of Saride Maithili in Duvva village (West Godavari district). Maithili, in her mid-fifties, is a very strong-headed woman, who takes great pride in the very candid and bold personality she has cultivated. As the preparations for the performance were taking place, I asked Maithili if she had children. "For a long time," she replied, "I didn't want them." She explained that many *kalāvantulu* did not want children, especially those who were actively involved in performing dance and music in public. They

employed indigenous forms of contraception. The standard way of expressing this was *pillalni puṭṭānivva ledu* (“I did not let children be born”) and usually involved the insertion of homemade pessaries into the vagina near the cervix. That night, Maithili performed a *jāvaḷi* that opened up a set of related questions. At around 11:30 P.M., Saride Maithili sang this *jāvaḷi*, “cēragu māseyemi setura” in the *rāga* Kalyāṇi, composed by Neti Subbarayudu Sastri, a Brahmin composer from the coastal Andhra Pradesh region:

It’s that time of the month, what can I do?
 I can’t even come close to you!
 You useless god! You create obstacles to intercourse
 For three straight days!

It’s that time of the month.

Even on our first night, we did not make love,
 though I was revelling in thoughts of union.

It’s that time of the month.

Poor Lord of Naupuri with a gentle heart,
 Don’t harbor any worries,
 In another three days
 I’ll give you much satisfaction!

It’s that time of month.¹⁷

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

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

I beg you to come close,
 but you always have second thoughts.

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

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

You don't seem to know yourself.
 Why follow these false taboos?
 Haven't you heard that women like it now?
 It's not like everyday.
 You'll never forget today's joy.
No rules apply. (Narayana Rao and Shulman 2002, 336–337)

Maithili explained to me that night, as did many other *kalāvantulu* over the course of my fieldwork, that they did not observe menstrual pollution. The obvious reason for the lack of menstrual taboo in courtesan communities, I thought to myself, has to do with giving men access to women's sexuality when they desire it. But that night, in the context of the mnemonic appearance of this issue through Maithili's performance, it was given a commentary. After she sang the *jāvaḷi*, Maithili was quick to add that the morality encoded in this song only applies to *saṃsāris* (householders) and not to women such as herself. "But who among the *saṃsāris* will talk about such things? They would be ashamed, no?" she asked. "See, we can do some things they can't, but, you know that they have some comforts we cannot have. Wait, I should say comforts we can *no longer* have." Although it is not possible to go into an elaborate analysis of the performance conventions deployed in the representation of this *jāvaḷi*, one salient point should be noted. In the depiction of the *pallavi* or refrain of the song ("cēragu māseyemi setura"), Maithili holds the *pallu* or end of her sari, as if to confront the *fact* of menstruation, represented by the

soiled clothing. This is not some kind of a stylized, abstract, or displaced representation. It is a way of *marking difference*—the courtesan woman *can* and *will* confront this fact and elaborate upon it in public, whereas according to Maithili, the *samsāris* will not. “They can’t talk about it, but *we* can” she noted.

I am conscious of the dangers in positing statements such as these as radical. While I take *kalāvantula* critiques of middle-class morality seriously, I am also conscious of the fact that *kalāvantula* women were themselves dependent upon the world of men in ways that implicated them in larger, systemic forms of discrimination and potential exploitation. In a recent work, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan has noted that in scholarly works that focus on courtesan and prostitute sexuality,

[these women] are exhorted to serve primarily as adversaries or critics of a “society” whose representatives are (all) men and “respectable” women. What such a representation fails to acknowledge is that prostitutes are necessarily and complexly *connected* both to patriarchy and to women as a class, in ways that cannot be only antagonistic and would in fact include dependence and emulation—an acknowledgment that complicates our view of them as consistently subversive agents as much as it does the view of them as invariant “victims” . . . (2003, 130)

How then, are we to understand the critiques offered by the *kalāvantula* women above? Sunder Rajan’s observation that courtesans and prostitutes inhabit social locations that are dependent upon both men and “respectable” women adds a degree of complexity to the staging of identities in the manner we see among *kalāvantulu*. While *kalāvantulu* no doubt offer critiques of middle-class women’s situations, they also critically reflect on their own situations. Their performative, material iterations of gender roles and difference, in the Butlerean sense, cannot be reduced to antagonism. To dismiss the complexities of their self-awareness would be to deny women’s resilience under patriarchy, to close our eyes to how *individual* women can represent themselves in ways that unsettle our notions of power and pleasure in an unfinished past that lives in the present.

ON THE EFFICACY OF INDIVIDUAL REMEMBERING

The world of individual remembering and performance, however, is not a hermetic one; it is not an example of the anthropological romance repre-

sented by the idea of “insular purity.” It is unfinished, characteristically open, and in contact with social, economic, and cultural developments on the “outside.” Women in contemporary *kalāvantula* communities reflect on loss and aesthetics in a manner that takes, for example, the success of “classical” Indian dance, cinema dance, and other elite cultural practices into account; these provide the foil for their own experiences. Their narrations reveal an acute awareness of their social location outside the middle class and enable them to mark their fractured identities within a historically determinate framework.

Such acts of memory also serve the dual functions of conferring positive self-worth and allowing *kalāvantula* women to retain and express, albeit to each other, elements of their identities that they can no longer display in public. In this chapter, I have not sought to establish or critique “truth claims” expressed by the women in these communities or to provide answers to the problems I have staged. Rather, I have tried to bring focus to the processes and concerns around *kalāvantula* identity and self-representation in their postreform world. While official and national histories want to remember these women as *devadāsīs* in order to authorize religious, moral, and aesthetic justifications for the reinvented “classical” arts, many women in these communities deploy their experiences of “being an artist” to imagine a different subjectivity for themselves, one that stands apart from middle-class morals of citizenship. In a recent essay, Margaret Meibohm suggests that the core questions of identity formation, “Who am I?” and “What do I do?” can be partially addressed through the additional queries of “Where have I come from?” and “Who have I been?” (2002, 61) For *kalāvantulu* in Andhra Pradesh today, the answers to *these* questions can only come from behind closed doors, from what we might call “deep memory”—a process that “remakes the self” and reconstructs identity from fragments of remembrance, knowledge, and experience.

Gesturing to Devadāsī Pasts in Today's Chennai

Much of this book has been concerned with the city of Chennai (formerly Madras), whether the emphasis has fallen on legislative action, the incipient industries of musical and cinematic recording, or the network of salons that formerly covered the city. Even the communities of courtesans living in rural areas considered in the last two chapters must be understood, to some degree, in relation to this nearby metropolis, from which the legal and aesthetic rules that affect them have emanated over the last century. With a population of over 4.5 million, Chennai is one of South Asia's largest cities. Chennai has also been a major site for performative constructions of Indian and particularly Hindu heritage, a place where the gestures of every dancer seem loaded with political significance. Bharatanāṭyam, certainly one of India's most cherished cultural exports, was created in Madras, and this city continues to be considered the capital of "Indian classical dance." The practice and politics of Bharatanāṭyam in today's Chennai make palpable both realist and utopian visions of class, nation, religion, and aesthetics. The invention of South Indian "heritage" is both *told* and *seen* through Bharatanāṭyam. Indeed, embodied heritage, represented by Karṇāṭak music and Bharatanāṭyam dance, is at the heart of South India's urban, middle-class aspirations. In cities like Chennai, dance powerfully mediates the tensions between strangeness and familiarity, tradition and modernity, past and present.

One evening in December 2008, I arrived at an auditorium in Thyagaraya Nagar, Chennai, to attend a dance performance sponsored by the Nungambakkam Cultural Academy Trust, one of the many cultural organizations (*sabhās*) that host the city's annual music and dance events. As I entered through a temporary archway proudly advertising the name of the organization and its corporate supporters, I was greeted by a large

table set up by the Thamizhnadu Brahmin Association (THAMBRAAS). A young girl seated behind the table presented guests with a complimentary copy of *Thambraas* magazine and asked them whether they were already members of the organization. Tickets for the event began at 250 rupees, and the VIP tickets were just over 500 rupees. The dancer performed a “modern” Bharatanāṭyam *varṇam*, one that had been composed just in the past few years by a noted Chennai-based Brahmin composer. Her *varṇam* was about the epic heroine Sītā. It narrated, in an episodic manner similar to that seen in mythological films and television serials, the virtues of Indian womanhood, stressing in particular Sītā’s chaste and self-effacing character, interpreted as her power, *śakti*. The performance lasted approximately an hour and a half. Afterward, the dancer was greeted by a number of her friends and family members. The dancer, as it turns out, was an “NRI” Tamil Brahmin, visiting her hometown of Chennai for the music and dance season. This was her last show of the “season” before catching a flight back to California where, with the support of her engineer husband, she runs a dance school that admits over one hundred students.

This anecdote illustrates many aspects of the transnational middle-class morality and cultural economy in which Bharatanāṭyam lives as an art form today. It dramatizes, for example, the ways in which the Tamil Brahmin middle class valorizes bourgeois constructions of art that are clearly rooted in an ethos of orthodox, domestic roles for women. Moreover, organizations like THAMBRAAS nurture Brahmin custodianship over the arts in public culture; they mobilize ideological connections between Brahmin heritage, the arts as cultural capital, and radical assertions of Hindutva in Tamil Nadu (see, for example, Fuller 2001; Hancock 1999; Pandian 2000, 2007).

Brahmin propriety over Bharatanāṭyam has resulted in a reorientation of the aesthetic parameters of dance. These symbolic and somatic shifts have been documented at length by scholars such as Allen (1997), Gaston (1996), Srividya Natarajan (1997), O’Shea (2007), and Meduri (1996). Religious and mythological themes—such as the interpretation of epic narratives seen in the example above—are key elements that self-consciously mark modern Bharatanāṭyam as distinct from courtesan dance. As Matthew Allen has noted, figures like Rukmini Arundale made no qualms about the repopulation of the dance world by Brahmins (Allen 1997), and certainly as M. S. S. Pandian has eloquently pointed out, Brahmin power in the material and cultural domain has been a signpost of Tamil modernity since the nineteenth century (Pandian 2007, 67–76). Today, Brahmin virtuosity in the arts is read as a sign of moral and cultural eminence. It

has given rise to an aesthetic standard for dance that draws heavily from cinema, particularly religious cinema, and is, to be sure, highly innovative. “Brahmin taste,” to borrow to Kristen Rudisill’s term, is universalized through Chennai’s global, neoliberal economy. Young Americans and Europeans, for example, flock to Chennai’s music and dance season alongside “NRIs” and locals to participate in a moral and aesthetic “tradition” molded by an upper-caste consumer gaze.

Brahmin custodianship of the performing arts, however, does not completely disparage the figure of the *devadāsī*. Today, some of Chennai’s cultural elites—for the most part Brahmins associated with dance and music—have attempted to recuperate histories of certain *devadāsīs* whom they consider central to their enterprises of cultural production in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The art world in modern Chennai thus commemorates a handful of twentieth-century *devadāsī* artists. These women have been strategically coopted into the scripts of cultural history precisely because they demonstrate “exceptional” qualities for women “of their background.” These carefully selected *devadāsī* artists, appropriated and authorized by the world of Chennai’s elites as representatives of tradition and heritage in the nationalist imagination, have come to occupy places in the history of arts that other *devadāsīs* could not. As Indira Peterson and I have argued elsewhere, the nationalist reinvention of the arts cannot be read as *the* totalizing project of cultural modernity in South India (Peterson and Soneji 2008); however, the language of nationalist cultural modernity was clearly the only viable medium through which these “exceptional” *devadāsīs* were able to craft and stage their subjectivities. Thus, photographs of the dancer T. Balasaraswati (1918–1984) have made it into most coffee table books about “Indian classical dance,” tagged with captions like “Queen of Abhinaya,” even though modern performers of Bharatanāṭyam usually mock her dancing as sloppy and unfinished. The vocalist M. S. Subbulakshmi (1916–2004) married prominent Brahmin T. Sadasivam and rose to the cultural front ranks as a domestic icon for Karnāṭak music in its new twentieth-century form (Weidman 2006, 112–114, 123–128, 145–149). Bangalore Nagarathnam (1878–1952) built a memorial (*samādhi*) for the poet-saint Tyāgarāja in 1925, and thus is remembered as an exceptionally pious devotee of the poet-saint himself. Mylapore Gauri Ammal (1892–1971) is commemorated as the first teacher of Rukmini Arundale and was “attached” to the Kapālīśvara temple in Mylapore, the preeminent site of *smārta* Brahmin cultural nostalgia in the heart of the city. These token gestures toward the *devadāsī* community in the cultural life of modern Chennai are always accompanied by narrative manoeuvres—

what Maciszewski (2007, 132–133) has called “mainstream gossip” about courtesans—that reify Brahmin claims over *devadāsī* performance practices. Mainstream gossip about these iconic *devadāsīs* includes, for example, stories that T. Balasaraswati did not want to teach her art or that Rukmini Arundale had to pay for the penniless Gauri’s funeral expenses. The strategic deployment of these narratives, whether they are true or not, allow middle-class practitioners to step into this history almost as “rescuers” who repopulate the degenerate arts world and revivify a lost cultural heritage.

Similarly, spaces associated with dance in the city, from the halls of corporate-sponsored cultural organizations (*sabhās*) to Kalakshetra, the state-sponsored arts institution established by Rukmini Arundale in 1936, belong to the realm of neotraditional public memory. Visitors to these sites encounter the nation and its modernity through gender- and caste-inflected sociomoral discourses encoded in the performances they present. Bharatanāṭyam, as recollected in public memory, celebrates the marriage of capitalism and heritage that is at the core of South India’s neoliberal metropolis, described eloquently by Mary Hancock in her new work *The Politics of Heritage from Madras to Chennai* (2008). Sites such as Chennai’s *sabhā* halls and Kalakshetra (true “*lieux de memoire*,” to return to Pierre Nora) are preservative in nature: they seek to memorialize authenticating traditions. For the urban elite, there simply are no more “real” *devadāsīs* in the city, and thus the commemoration of a few “acceptable” *devadāsī* women becomes a viable, and certainly profitable, enterprise in the neoliberal economy of urban South India. Ultimately this renewed urban nostalgia about *devadāsīs* only reifies middle-class Brahmin claims to the retrieval and stewardship of *devadāsī* dance and music in the twentieth century. It disseminates historical, moral, and aesthetic pronouncements about *devadāsī* communities in a new cultural market, and inevitably dwells on the perceived successes of *devadāsī* reform. The lingering, undesirable differentness of stigma, however, systemically excludes *devadāsīs* from participating in these larger metropolitan and global flows of culture.



“Saraswati” (b. 1931), who did not wish to be named in this study, lives in the shadow of *devadāsī* reform in today’s Chennai. She had *poṭṭukaṭṭutal* performed at the Veīkaṭeṣa Perumāḷ temple in Tanjore in the year 1940 and, like most *devadāsīs*, did not have any ritual obligations in the temple,

nor did she ever learn a ritual dance repertoire. Instead, she was trained in the courtly dance traditions of Tanjore by a well-known *naṭṭuvaṇār* in the city. She stopped dancing in public in 1953, six years after the anti-*devadāsī* legislation had been passed, and attempted to focus on becoming a professional vocalist. But Saraswati did not join the emergent film industry, nor did she succeed as a concert vocalist or gramophone artist. Neither did she marry or “adjust” to a domestic lifestyle; she had a relationship with a man and had children, and moved to Chennai. Living in Tondiarpet (a suburb of Chennai) with her children, she went back to dance, and tried to teach to non-*devadāsī* girls in the city. But this, too, was a futile effort. Urban elites were reluctant to send their daughters to *devadāsīs* for training in dance at a time when hereditary male *naṭṭuvaṇārs* received continuous pedagogical opportunities from middle-class practitioners of Bharatanāṭyam. Today, Saraswati has only one student, a young non-Brahmin woman who holds a master’s degree in dance from the University of Madras but who like Saraswati has understood that it is near-impossible for a woman of her caste and class background to succeed as a professional dancer in today’s Chennai.

Saraswati’s story returns to the question of the unfinished nature of *devadāsī* subjectivity in modern South India. How can we characterize her relation to public culture? Even though Saraswati lives in the same city as India’s most successful Bharatanāṭyam dancers, she must assume a different temporal position; as a non-Brahmin woman from a *devadāsī* background, she remains suspended in a vestigial, twentieth-century modernity and cannot integrate into the present economies of South Indian culture. Thus, while the *devadāsī* as “icon” becomes the object of a peculiar kind of nostalgia among the middle class, actual women from the *devadāsī* community such as Saraswati live on cultural and social borderlands. Saraswati stands completely outside of what she still considers *her* occupation, yet watches on her TV as Bharatanāṭyam dance morphs into the global commodity that it has become in the twenty-first century. For her, as for many of the women discussed in this book, fragments of the repertoire of nineteenth-century Tanjore, the politics and consequences of social reform, and the real marks of stigma press against each other, causing frictions that arrest the possibility of a socially viable selfhood in contemporary South India.

Selected Documents from the Files of Muthulakshmi Reddy

I. LETTER (*IN ENGLISH*)¹

I feel highly thankful to you for your letter of reply to my message of congratulation.

I now want to respectfully inform you that we have started recently a new institution styled "Southern India Yuvathi Saranalayam." This institution is intended for the benefit and upkeep of much of the members of Deva Dhasi Community who at the present moment find themselves helpless if they should abandon their present profession, who all the same dislike a continuance of their profession and who will stop it if they should find the where with all for their future maintenance.

Of course, there may be a number of persons who are well-placed and above want and sufficiently able to live without the assistance such as to be rendered by the above said institution.

In order to efficiently carry on the work it is very necessary that there should be established schools and institutions besides various associations and representative bodies all over the presidency for the promotion of the welfare of the community and for the total abolition of unchastity.

It is also necessary that Government nominates able representation of our community to the local Boards and Municipal Councils so that they man voice forth the grievances and have them redressed.

From your high and noble place, Madam, you have rendered yeoman service for the welfare of this community.

We are also contemplating to hold a conference to concert effective measures for the attainment of our aims.

I am troubling you with the above details only with a view to keep you

informed of the activities of the Sangam here and elsewhere so that you may push forth the suitable legislation in the Council and I beg of you to give us a generous corner in your heart and render us every possible help that lies in your hands for our uplift and institute such measures as would make our aspiration to have its fulfilment.

I beg to assure you, Madam, on this happy occasion of your success, of our deep and sincere loyalty and gratitude to the Government of which you are so distinguished an ornament and which has of late evinced such a real and abiding interest in the elevation of this community in India. We are willing and obedient to render any assistance in the said direction.

Begging to be excused for the trouble and very obediently yours.

P. Shanmuganantha

Vice-President of the Tanjore Dt. Esai Vellalar Sangam

2. HANDBILL (IN TAMIL)²

A Repudiation of the Rutrakaṇikai Caṅkam of Cennai by
the Icaivēḷāḷar Caṅkam of Kudalur, Tanjore district

. . . Unable to tolerate the atrocities committed by women of this community, the merciful Lord bade the goddess Mahālakṣmī herself to incarnate herself as Dr. Muthulakshmi to redeem these women and ensure they live a respectable life . . . Having heard of our support to this bill, some in the Cennai Uruttirakaṇikaiyar Caṅkam have opposed this bill and have described us as “selfish” individuals who have clamped down like an axe on our own clan. In this way, they have revealed their greatness! It is pathetic to know that their intention is to wear the *poṭṭu* under the pretext of serving the god only to satisfy the sexual lust of the so-called aristocratic devotees of the temple. This great “religious” secret is now exposed. It is the traditional practice to honor the 63 *nāyaṇārs* and 12 *āḷvārs* by installing their images in the temples. For some unknown reason, we have assumed that such great men are not seen in these advanced days of *kali-yuga*. It is now clear that the great men who visit the houses of the *rudra-gaṇikās*, “beloved to the Lord,” are none other than the great servants of god. Therefore, we have come forward to deliver some good news. It is as follows:

You seem to have the support of some members of the Legislative Assembly and the public to oppose the bill proposed by Dr. Muthulakshmi. Hence we suggest that in the first place you oppose and reject the bill.

Thereafter, you can compile a list the dignitaries who visit your homes [for sex], and after their death, construct a temple with their images installed. Since it is important to worship these images, you may want to stage a protest demanding allocation of funds collected through land tax for this project over the next ten years. We wish you success in securing these funds from the government.

By the way, we return to you the two epithets—"selfish people" and "harmful traitors of the clan"—that you have conferred upon us because of our support of this bill.

May you delight in stringing these two names to both sides of the emblem of prostitution (*poṭṭu*) worn by your women, just as married women string beads to both sides of their *tāli*.

Members of the Icaivēḷāḷar Caṅkam, Kudalur, Tanjore district

3. NEWSPAPER REPORT (IN TAMIL)³

The Question of *Devadāsīs*: A Meeting of the *Devadāsīs*, Cheyyur

The meeting of the *devadāsīs* of the Devasthanams of temples in Chinglepet district including the Kantasvāmi temple, Valmikanāta temple, and Nīlamānikkasvāmi temple took place in the outer *maṇḍapa* of the Cheyyur Kantasvāmi temple. All the *devadāsīs* and men assembled in large numbers, and the association was formed. Smt. Sharada Ammal and Smt. Doraisani Ammal of Ceyyur were unanimously elected as president and secretary, respectively. Twenty-five people were registered as members of this association.

Following speeches by Smt. Sharada Ammal, Smt. Doraisani Ammal, Smt. Sundarambal, and Smt. Balambal about the importance of unity among *devadāsīs*, their progress, and the bill of Dr. Muthulakshmi Ammal, the following resolutions were proposed and passed unanimously:

1. This meeting severely opposes the resolution brought by Smt. Muthulakshmi Ammal in Chennai Legislative Assembly.
2. The ancient honorable religious practice of tying *poṭṭu* in the temples is not related whatsoever to the mean practice of prostitution. Hence this meeting requests our benevolent Government not to appeal any bill that will put an end to our ancient traditional rights.
3. This meeting vehemently condemns speaking and writing in a base manner about a respectable community, comparing them with dis-

honorable prostitutes, in the context of forging a bill to eradicate prostitution.

4. Individuals will naturally object to any law which goes against their religion, social practices, and rights. It is improper that our Muslim and Christian brothers and sisters also support this bill which has been proposed without proper investigation. The secretary records that the meeting regrets the support of Muslims and Christians for this bill.

4. HANDBILL (IN TAMIL)

Ceṇṇai Uruttirakaṇikaiyar Caṅkam

Printed by V. Nayak & Co. Printers, Madras, 1927⁴

It is certain that the bill to abolish the practice of tying the *poṭṭu* will put an end to the social practices and hereditary rights of our community, and this has created unending worries for us. The intention of this bill is not clear, and likewise it is not clear as to how many sisters of our community support this bill. We have the right to insist that it is improper for an individual to arrive at a conclusion about the practices of a particular community based on the opinion of selfish general public, without obtaining the permission of that community, however. Likewise it is neither appealing to law nor to god, to either support this opinion or seek the government's help in this regard. Though not justifiable by law, will this be effective in fulfilling your intentions and usher in the desired results? It is not so. It is proper to venture into any action only after studying its ability to yield the desired results. It is unbelievable that prostitution can be eliminated by putting an end to the practice of tying the *poṭṭu*. The supporters of this bill give the lame excuse that a majority of *icaivēḷālars* support this agitation to destroy this practice of tying the *poṭṭu*. *Icaivēḷālars* are none other than the male members of this community, and it is strange that they support this agitation. Let us think carefully about the intention behind this, which is nothing but selfishness. It should be noted that women of this community alone are entitled to inherit property and perform funeral rites as well. It is well known that every human being works in his or her selfish interests alone. The men of this community, who are like axes felling their own community, are responsible for this bill. It is clear that they are doing so with the selfish intention to inherit properties.

The members of this association whole-heartedly and unanimously re-

ject and oppose this bill which will put an end to our ancient rights and properties. This is being conveyed to Dr. Muthulakshmi Ammal, members of the Legislative Assembly, and other sympathizers.

5. NEWSPAPER CLIPPING, EXCERPT (IN TAMIL)

*Cutēcamittiraṇ*⁵

Devadāsīs, who are also referred to as *uruttirakaṇikayar*, are a community of women who, out of devotion to god, worshipped him and offered themselves to him. They performed service (*toṇṭu*) in his temples and lived as pure and noble souls. It seems that Śrīmati Muthulakshmi Ammal has proposed a bill to abolish the practice of tying the *poṇṭu* for *devadāsī* women in temples. We learn from newspapers that some of the brothers and sisters in our province support this bill with much sympathy.

. . . The implementation of such a bill will surely affect the age-old traditions and practices that have been followed by *devadāsīs* with the purest of intentions. Moreover, the question also arises of whether this bill will completely eliminate prostitution (*vipacāram*, *vyabhacāra*) in India, and whether women practicing prostitution will become “purified” (*cuttacaitayarkaḷāy*).

. . . In obedience to the will of the omnipotent Lord, Paravai Nācciyār, the beloved of Cuntaramūrṛti Nāyaṇār, was born in this untainted, pure tradition of *devadāsīs* . . . No survey is known to have been conducted to find out whether prostitution was conducted in a huge level by prostitutes or by *devadāsīs* who belonged to a noble clan that gave birth to Tamil scholars such as Pūṅkōtai.

. . . An objection also arises whether to call all *devadāsīs* prostitutes or call all prostitutes *devadāsīs* . . . It is indeed just to enact any legislation to prevent women from turning into prostitutes. At the same time, it is improper to attempt to destroy a practice that is traditionally sanctioned by religion and is practiced by a respectable community . . . If the Indian Penal Code cannot abolish prostitution, it is inconceivable how banning the practice of tying the *poṇṭu* will abolish prostitution . . . We shall write in detail, at the appropriate time, about the high status and dignity of our community.

Sincerely,
Duraikkannu
Parvati
Servants of Ceṇṇai Śrī
Ēkāmparēsvarar

6. HANDBILL (IN ENGLISH)

The Awakening: Demand for Devadasi Legislation
by Muthulakshmi Reddy (Madras Printing Co., 1928)

We humbly beg to submit that the practice existing in this presidency of dedicating young girls to temples and performing "Gazzela Puza" [*gajjala pūjā*, "worship of the ankle-bells," an important rite-of-passage for courtesans who danced professionally] is fraught with the greatest danger to the women of this community in particular and to the society in general.

Whatever might have been the reasons for this practice in ancient times, it is now an established fact, we are sorry to confess, that the Devadasis are forced to lead an immoral life.

We are initiated at a time when we could not for ourselves discriminate the consequences of our future life and some of us are recruited from other classes for this life of ignominy. It has been our unfortunate lot to be spited by all and we bitterly experience the pangs of our miserable existence. We endure the difficulties in silence and can only curse the custom and the women who have victimised us.

The primary reason for the dedication is the holding of imams by our community for the enjoyment of which we have to perform service in temples. When the women grow old in the service, the trustees and villagers are dissatisfied with them, and to satisfy their demand, young girls are brought up for the service. We need not emphasise the necessary evils attending this practice, having ourselves been victims thereof.

We submit that this is the duty of the well-wishers of society and especially the Government to help us in our efforts of reformation and regeneration. The only remedy to root out the evil and help us is to enfranchise the service imams and grant *pattas* to the present holders.

We beg to draw your immediate attention to the necessity of protecting the minor girls of this community, who are daily subjected to the danger of life-long serfdom. It is our earnest desire that the innocent creatures should be saved from the clutches of people who want to make a living out of the immoral life of the girls.

We are members of the respective Associations organised for the reform and betterment of our community in Andhra and Tamil Nadu. We have already submitted memorials and petitions to the Government to help us to eradicate the evil. If any opposition is raised, it is only engineered by interested parties and we pray that it may not be taken heed of.

Finally we submit that the institution of Devadasis was a subject of

condemnation by the poets and sages of India and we have the highest authority to state that there is not even one religious text to sanction this evil practice. We humbly beg to request that you will be graciously pleased to support all measures like the one of Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy conducive to the reformation of Devadasis for which act of kindness we shall as in duty bound ever pray.

We beg to remain,
 PADMAVATI AMMAL
 SARADAMBA
 RANGANAYAKI AMMAL
 BHADRAYAMMA

7. LETTER (IN ENGLISH)

An Open Letter to Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar Avgl. and Doctor
 Muthulakshmmamma Reddi Garoo⁶

Most Honoured Sir & Madam,

The undersigned is the daughter of a respectable devadasi of the original cult here in Bangalore City. Owing to bad Karma she took her birth in the said community and was given training in Arts such as Singing and Abhinaya Shastra as is customary with her profession. She has had good grounding in Arts and won rewards in the Mysore Palace, Sringeri Mutt and such-like places. Though she is middle-aged, she has stopped going for singing parties, being quite disgusted with the deplorable state the Devadasi Institution has reduced itself to.

Without knowing that there are some genuine women in the profession and though there are Shastraic authorities to say that the services to be performed by Devadasees form part and parcel of the worship of God in Hindu temples and that Singing and Dancing in the presence of the Deity are also prescribed, some members of the Madras Legislative Council especially Muthulakshmmamma and some Congress Leaders have been condemning the profession wholesale. They have also been carrying on propaganda work to do away with Devadasi system under misapprehension that the morality of the Hindu Society would be improved thereby.

Admitting that there are some black sheep in the family, the moral aspect of the question will not be solved by simply doing away with dedication of girls to temples. There will be ever so many spinsters who are not married, and that is all. No healthy social conditions can be founded on inequality and injustice. Any system that approves and encourages one

law for men and another for women in matters of morality, even if it has a "reformatory and restraining effect" on women, is in reality only increasing the evils it hopes to check. By simply passing some enactment with regard to the dedication of girls to temples, it is impossible to clear our cities of prostitutes, until men cease to consort with them: for, without male chastity, female chastity is impossible.

If the Government and Congress Leaders want to do away with the so-called black spot in the Hindu Society out of sentimentality, there is no objection for the same.

Devadasees are spoken of as fallen sisters and are said to be helpless victims of a tyrannical pseudo religious custom. If the Govt. and the Congress Leaders really want to introduce reform in the Devadasi system and wean them from the path of wretchedness they should establish at different centres, Rescue Homes, such as Yuvathi Saranalaya at Madras, advise the leading and rich Devadasees to render some help to their community people as the undersigned has been doing in her own humble way (Vide Report on Sree Ramarpana Dhanam), educate their children (male and female) by classifying them as belonging to the Suppressed and Depressed classes and by providing them with liberal scholarships, discourage fostering of children, and encourage marriages amongst them, give some appointments such as nurses in hospitals and Singing mistresses at schools to their community people and amend their law of inheritance.

The humble suggestion of the undersigned is that by introducing such reforms within, the object of the Govt. and the Congress Leaders will be gained and not by any enactment which reduces the status of Devadasees to a more miserable condition by simply doing away with Dedication of girls to temples.

She begs to remain, Most Honoured Sir & Madam,

Your Obedient Servant,
B. Varalakshamma
Bangalore City,
Dated 30th Jan. 1928

The Madras Devadasis (Prevention of Dedication) Act of 1947

An act to prevent the dedication of women as devadasis in the Province of Madras

(Public [A] Section, Ministry of Home Affairs [1947])

Whereas the practice still prevails in certain parts of the Province of Madras of dedicating women as "*devadasis*" to Hindu deities, idols, objects of worship, temples and other religious institutions;

AND WHEREAS such practice, however ancient and pure in its origin, leads many of the women so dedicated to a life of prostitution;

AND WHEREAS it is necessary to put an end to the practice;

It is hereby enacted as follows:

1. (1) This Act may be called the *Madras Devadasi (Prevention of Dedication) Act, 1947*.
(2) It extends to the whole of the Province of Madras
2. In this Act, unless there is anything repugnant in the subject of context –
 - (a) "dedication" means the performance of any ceremony, by whatever name called, by which a woman is dedicated to the service of a Hindu deity, idol, object of worship, temple or other religious institution, and includes '*pottukattu*', '*gajje puja*', '*mudri*' and dancing by '*kumbhaharathy*';
 - (b) "*devadasi*" means any woman so dedicated;
 - (c) "woman" means female of any age.
3. (1) The dedication of a woman as a *devadasi*, whether before or after the commencement of this Act and whether she has consented to such dedication or not, is hereby declared unlawful and void; and

any woman so dedicated shall not thereby be deemed to have become incapable of entering into a valid marriage.

Nothing contained in this sub-section shall be deemed to affect the operation of Section 44-A of the Madras Hindu Religious Endowments Act, 1926, or the rights to which a *devadasi* is entitled under that section.

(2) Any custom or usage prevailing in any Hindu community such as the Bogum, Kalavanthula, Sani, Nagavasulu, Devadasi and Kurmapulu, that a woman of that community who gives or takes part in any *melam* (nautch) dancing or music performance in the course of any procession or otherwise is thereby regarded as having adopted a life of prostitution and becomes incapable of entering into a valid marriage, and the performance of any ceremony or act in accordance with any such custom or usage, whether before or after the commencement of this Act whether the woman concerned has consented to such performance or not, are hereby declared unlawful and void.

(3) Dancing by a woman, with or without *kumbhaharathy*, in the precincts of any temple or other religious institution, or in any procession of a Hindu deity, idol or object of worship installed in any such temple or institution or at any festival or ceremony held in respect of such a deity, idol or object of worship, is hereby declared unlawful.

4. (1) Any person having attained the age of sixteen years who after the commencement of this Act performs, permits, take part in, or bets the performance of any ceremony or act for dedicating a woman as a *devadasi* or any ceremony or act of the nature referred to in Section 3, subsection (2); shall be punishable with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to six months, or with a fine which may extend to five hundred rupees or both.

Explanation: The person referred to in this section shall include the woman in respect of whom such ceremony or act is performed.

(2) Any person having attained the age of sixteen years who dances in contravention of the provisions of Section 3, subsection (3), or who abets dancing in contravention of the said provisions, shall be punishable with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to six months, or with a fine which may extend to five hundred rupees or both.

5. No court inferior to that of a Presidency Magistrate or a Magistrate of the First Class shall inquire into or try any offence punishable under Section 4.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. As early as 1870, the Madras High Court was citing the writings of missionary Abbe Dubois to prove “beyond historical doubt” that a *devadāsī* of the “Soobramania Swamy Pagoda of Tripooror [Tirupporur]” had adopted girl children for the sake of bringing them up as prostitutes, *Madras High Court Reports, Exparte Padmavati* (1870): 416. In 1901, Edgar Thurston (1855–1935) was appointed as the superintendent of ethnography for the Madras presidency. Thurston’s own background was a medical one, and he had, as Nicholas Dirks mentions, a love for anthropometry, which he felt could be useful for the state in helping to identify persons belonging to “criminal tribes” (2000, 165). In 1909, Thurston published his well-known work *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* in seven volumes. The study was produced with the aid of K. Rangachari, a lecturer in botany at Presidency College in Madras. The entry entitled “Dēva-Dāsi” in *Castes and Tribes* runs for twenty-eight pages and is a work that brings census reports and earlier anthropological studies into conversation with a number of legal cases involving *devadāsīs* brought before the Madras High Court from 1876—to 1900. Like the anthropological works he cites, Thurston also conflates the *devadāsīs* of the Tamil- and Telugu-speaking regions with Dalit women known as *basavis*, and several pages are dedicated to “*basavis-as-devadāsīs*” (Thurston and Rangachari 1909, 2: 133–138). But the style of the work makes it appear both comprehensive and systematic, and perhaps for this reason, it is cited in almost all subsequent writing in English on the subject of *devadāsīs*. Thurston continues to be invoked as authoritative by anthropologists writing about *devadāsīs* in the late twentieth century. Amrit Srinivasan, for example, calls Thurston’s work “one of the most exhaustive, descriptive accounts extant on the subject of the period predating the ban on temple dedication” (1984 87). Even though later writings draw extensively from it as if it were a primary source, other than a very brief description of *dāsīs* from the *kaikkōḷar* or weaver community, there is in fact almost nothing original in it. It is representative of what Said has called the “citationary” nature of Orientalism, a selective accumulation of knowledge that results in the “restorative citation of antecedent authority” (Said 1978, 176). Another important point

here is the emphasis that Thurston places on *devadāsīs* in Anglo-Indian courts. The last nine pages of his work are citations from court cases that address issues around rights of inheritance, but also the sale and adoption of girls by *devadāsīs* and temple dedications. Thurston deliberately chooses those passages from the law reports that give the reader a sense of the “customs” of *devadāsīs*, and in doing so he creates accessible, intelligible, and definitive knowledge about these communities—a knowledge drawn from the Anglo-Indian legal system itself. The enduring power of this knowledge can be seen in the fact that Madras High Court cases involving *devadāsīs* that postdate the publication of *Castes and Tribes* cite Thurston as the authority on the legal and cultural practices within the community. For example, in *Bera Chandramma (Wife of Lachanna) v. Chandram Naganna* (April 19, 1923), Thurston’s text is used to establish equal rights of inheritance between men and women in *devadāsī* communities.

2. Scholarly literature on Dalit *jogatis* is extensive, and ranges from popular writings such as those by figures like William Dalrymple to scholarly dissertations. Sustained academic discussions on the subject include those by Assayag (1990), Bradford (1983), Epp (1992, 1995, 1997), Evans (1998), Ramberg (2006), and Vijaisri (2004).

3. Traditions of dedicating girls to the goddess Yellammā or her guardian Poṭurāju are found in and around the Nizamabad district in the Telangana region. For details, see Chakrapani (1992); Chandra Mowli (1992); and Misra and Koteswara Rao (2002). Chandra Mowli notes that in the popular imagination, *jogatis* are often confused with mid-caste courtesans known as *kalāvāntulu* (“women artists”), who are the subject of this book (1992, 5).

4. On the Gaṅgamma tradition of *mātammās*, see Handelman (1995), Flueckiger (2007), and Flueckiger’s forthcoming book, *When the World Becomes Female: The Gaṅgamma Goddess Tradition of South India*. The word *mātamma* comes from Mātāṅgi, a female deity understood in rural South India as the sister of Yellammā-Reṇukā-Māriyamman. The tradition of dedicating girls to local goddesses (*kirāmatēvi*) in northern Tamil Nadu is relatively understudied. The only work on this subject is de Bruin (2007). De Bruin calls these women “rural Devadāsīs” in order to differentiate them from women who performed music and dance in (urban and semiurban) temples dedicated to Śiva and Viṣṇu. In November 2007, a thirteen-year-old Scheduled Caste girl was dedicated to a village deity in Thirukkivilur, Villupuram district. An article in the *Hindu* newspaper entitled “Minor girl made ‘Devadasi’” noted that the girl’s father, the temple priest, and two others were arrested following the incident (anon. 2007).

5. In the Marathi-speaking regions of the Karnataka-Maharashtra border, young Dalit men who came to be known as *vāghyās* (“tigers”) were dedicated to local deities such as Khaṇḍobā and Mhālsā through a “sword marriage,” and dedicated girls were known as *muraḷīs*. For details, see Vijaisri (2004, 109–110) and data from *Tribes and Castes of Bombay* by R. E. Enthoven (1922, 70–72). The most comprehensive discussion of Khaṇḍobā rituals and ritual actors (including *vāghyās* and *muraḷīs*) is provided by Sontheimer (1997). For details on *jogappas* (transgendered men who are dedicated to the goddess Yellammā), see Bradford (1983), Ramberg (2006), and Reddy (2006, 67–72).

6. Several journalists have reported on these recent innovations to *jogati* reform. See, for example, Shiva Kumar (2009).

7. The full text of the Andhra Pradesh Devadasis (Prohibition of Dedication) Act of 1988 is found in various online sources, including at <http://www.lawsofindia.org/statelaw/2693/TheAndhraPradeshDevadasisProhibitionofDedicatedAct1988.html>.

8. Dalrymple's essay "Serving the Goddess: The Dangerous Life of a Sacred Sex Worker" first appeared in the *New Yorker*, August 4, 2008 (Dalrymple 2008a). A slightly different version of this piece was subsequently published as "The Daughters of Yellamma" in *AIDS Sutra: Untold Stories from India*, edited by Negar Akhavi (Dalrymple 2008b). The book was published in collaboration with Avahan, the India AIDS initiative of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

9. Chinmayee Manjunath's article, "Reluctant Inheritors of a Tainted Legacy?" appeared in *Tehelka* on July 17, 2004 (Manjunath 2004).

10. I would like to draw particular attention to the work of ethnomusicologist Amelia Maciszewski (1998, 2006, 2007), whose ongoing work with *tawā'ifs* in North India closely parallels the ethnographic component of my project. The courtesans who are the subject of Maciszewski's research face many of the same problems as women from the Tamil- and Telugu-speaking *devadāsī* communities, and Maciszewski's insights are instructive for those interested in the issue of the displacement of hereditary performers in modern South India.

11. As I have demonstrated elsewhere (Soneji 2010), narratives about temple women pervade the precolonial South Indian literary imagination. For example, in Tamil contexts, we have the figures Paravaiyār, Māṇikkanācciyār, and Koṇṭiyammāl, all temple women associated with the Tyāgarāja temple at Tiruvarur. The narrative of Māṇikkanācciyār, which appears in the obscure seventeenth-century text *Tiyākarājaḷilaikaḷ*, was also likely the inspiration for J. W. Goethe's 1797 German poem "Der Gott und die Bajadere: Indische Legende" (Peterson 2000). On the North Main Street (*vaṭakku vīti*) immediately outlying the Tiruvarur temple complex, there is a small shrine dedicated to Māṇikkanācciyār as a goddess in which she is represented with four arms and worshipped on occasion by the priests of the Tyāgarāja temple. There are also *sthala purāṇa* trans narratives involving temple women such as that of Poṇṇaiyār of Tiruppuvanam (narrated in the *Tiruvīlaiyāṭappurāṇam*) or that of an unnamed woman at the Saurirājaperumāl temple in Tirukkannapuram. Similarly in Telugu-speaking South India, figures such as the temple servant turned goddess Māṇikyāmbā of Draksharamam, and the *sthala purāṇas* trans of the Kōppeśvara temple at Palivela and the Ācaṅṅeśvara at Achanta tell of miracles related to female temple servants, "*devadāsīs*." The point I wish to make here, however, is that the processes by which these literary figures are identified with living communities of professional dancing women must be understood as clearly modern.

12. I am certainly not the first to have conducted ethnography among *devadāsī*-courtesans in South India. Two major scholarly works—one unpublished and the other published, by Amrit Srinivasan (1984) and Saskia Kersenboom (1987)—contain ethnographic work that has been invaluable for dozens of scholars who have subsequently written about *devadāsīs*, myself included. But I concede that their ethnographies are driven by a focus on the temple, by a predetermined telos, which has left us with key questions around the nonreligious lives of the women they studied. The ethnographic dimensions of this book are not the result of an attempt to recover the subject of the

“temple dancer” and in this sense, the starting point of my work differs considerably from that of both Srinivasan and Kersenboom.

13. A brilliant discussion of the enduring “postcolonial tragedy of victimisation” is found in Ratna Kapur’s *Erotic Justice: Law and the New Politics of Postcolonialism* (2005, 95–136).

14. Kanakambujam became famous for singing and performing *harikathā* at Chettiyar weddings all over Madras Presidency. She eventually amassed a large amount of money through her performances and built a palatial home called Kanaka Vilas just across from the Bṛhadambāl temple in Pudukkottai. To be sure, *harikathā* provided opportunities for many other women of *devadāsī* backgrounds as well. Women such as Thiruvidadaimarudur Rajambal (1893–1933) and Chidambaram Jnanambal (1889–1984) preceded Kanakambujam. Some—such as Trisoor Rukmini and Premavati (dates unknown)—used *harikathā* as a “stepping stone” to enter the world of cinema (Sundaram 2001, 47–50).

15. The Balamani Drama Company also enabled women to watch Tamil drama performances by allotting separate ticketed spaces to women audiences. It is also significant that Balamani’s company was not the only all-women’s company. Many others were performing contemporaneously (such as the Kannamani Company and Danuvambal Company), but in the case of the Balamani Company, there is some specific information available about the background of its female performers.

CHAPTER ONE

1. This is excerpted from an anonymous article entitled “Tanjore” that appeared in the October 27, 1894, edition of *All the Year Round*, a British literary magazine founded by Charles Dickens. The author dedicates nearly half of his essay to a discussion of “Nautch girls” in the city of Tanjore. It mentions that these dancing women underwent a “symbolical marriage rite with dagger” (*katti kalyāṇam*), which I will discuss in detail below. The importance and visibility of professional dancing women at Tanjore even after the kingdom’s complete annexation by the British in 1856 is stressed time and time again in travel writings and histories of British conquest in India. In *A Familiar History of British India* (1858), for example, J. H. Stocqueler writes, “Perhaps in no part of India had the old Hindoo institutions been preserved with greater purity. Every village possessed its temple, with a lofty gateway of massive structure, and an establishment of Brahmins, musicians, and Nautch girls, whose province it was to dance before the idols on festive occasions. It was the very centre of bigotry” (96). Indeed, in the nineteenth century, few writers spoke of Tanjore without reference to its dancers.

2. Olafsson’s memoirs refer to *devadāsīs* as *pagóga sárke* (perhaps from the Tamil *cirukki*, “girl”), and *naṭṭuvaṇārs* as *baldor*, from the Portuguese *bailador*, which is related to the well-known term *bayadère*, often used in various European contexts to refer to South Indian *devadāsīs*. See volume 2 of *The life of the Icelander Jon Olafsson, traveller to India written by himself about 1661 A.D. with a continuation by another hand up to his death in 1679*, translated from the Icelandic edition of Sigfus Blondal by Bertha S. Phillpotts (London: Hakluyt Society, 1931), 122–123.

3. Although some scholars have posited a theory of mass migration of performing artists out of Tanjore after its annexation to the British empire in 1856 (Kersenboom 1987, 59; Meduri 1996), I have not seen any evidence of this in the Moḍi documents. Rather, dance and music repertoire from Tanjore traveled to courts as far away as Bobbili, Vizianagaram, Pithapuram, Gadval, Venkatagiri, Mysore, Travancore, Ramanathapuram, and other places with the regular flows of artists from these regions to Tanjore and back throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Courtly repertoire, we must also remember, also travels through noncourtly patronage, as we see in the salons of colonial Madras. Rather than positing a single moment for the dissemination of these practices, I prefer to think of this as an ongoing process that spanned almost half a century.

4. The one notable exception is an unpublished Ph.D. dissertation from the University of Hyderabad by V.S. Radhika entitled “Development of Sadir in the Court of King Serfoji II (1798–1832) of Tanjore” (1996).

5. Leslie Orr has recently commented on the problematic construction of the “transhistorical *devadāsī*” in scholarly works from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As she notes, “the *devadāsīs*’ role has been interpreted almost entirely with reference to abstract, overarching conceptions such *śakti* or auspiciousness . . . This approach obscures historical and regional variations in the activities and circumstances of [these] women, effaces the individuality of temple women, and conceals change” (2000, 10).

6. Rāmabhadraṁba, a highly learned courtesan and consort of King Raghunātha Nāyaka (r. 1600–1634), composed a Sanskrit literary masterpiece called *Raghunāthābhyaḍaya*, valorizing the deeds of the king and linking him explicitly to god by positing his royal career as a reenactment of Rāma’s life (for details, see Hiebert 1988). Raṅgāmma was the author of two dramas in the Telugu literary genre known as *yaḱṣagāna*: *Uṣāpariṇayamu*, describing the love and eventual marriage of the demon Bāṇāsura’s daughter Uṣā with Kṛṣṇa’s grandson Aniruddha; and *Mannārudāsa Vilāsamu*, celebrating the marriage of King Vijayarāghava Nāyaka and the courtesan Kāntimati.

7. For example, the Telugu literary work *Rājagopāla Vilāsamu* by Ceṅgalvakāḷakavi composed during the reign of Vijayarāghava names several courtesans who dance, sing, and play instruments at the court (Seetha 1981, 52–57; Kusuma Bai 2000, 128–150). A serious study of dance at the Tanjore Nāyaka court is yet to be written.

8. This period is ubiquitously discussed as one of “degeneracy” by early twentieth-century writers. K. R. Subramanian (1928), for example, states that the “isolated Tanjore Raj had no function or mission in the nineteenth century. It had fallen under effete and helpless rulers who fell easy victims to the might and diplomacy of the Nawab and the Company” (73).

9. The Tanjore Moḍi records are written using a unique vocabulary of “Tanjore Marathi” (Tulpule 1973), which includes loan words from Tamil and Telugu. Dates are also reckoned using Muslim Suhura-sana and hegira eras, the Hindu cycle of Bṛhaspati, or the Christian Gregorian calendar.

10. These do not include the very small collection held in Denmark at the National Archives and the National Museum in Copenhagen, and the Maritime Museum in

Elsinore. These records, most of which relate to Tranquebar, were brought to Denmark when Tranquebar was sold to the East India Company in 1845. Sixty-two of these documents have been meticulously edited and translated by Strandberg (1983).

11. This set is referenced in this chapter as TSML, while the published Tamil translations of the Tamil University set are indicated as TU. The numeric indicators refer first to the bundle number, followed by the subbundle number and folio number (where applicable).

12. Statements about sati are also found in the *Strīdharmapaddhati*, a Sanskrit compendium of orthodox *dhārmic* prescriptions for women written by the court scholar Tryambakayavan during the rule of Śāhājī (Leslie 1989). The text was likely commissioned by his dowager queen mother Dīpāmbā, who is herself the subject of a hagiography in the Sanskrit text *Dīpāmbāmāhātyam* (N. Srinivasan 1984).

13. Venkataramaiya cites a document dated 1912 in which Hīrā and Komaḷam, two “dancing girls” are included on a list of residents of Maṅgala Vilāsam who continued to receive a pension from the palace (1984, 331).

14. The fine was 1 *cakram* and 2 *paṇams*. Moḍi record dated 1825, Tamil University (hereafter TU), 1–263. According to Rajayyan (1969, 55), 1 Tanjore *cakram* was equal to roughly 2.5 to 3 Company rupees.

15. Sayajīrao Gaekwad III (1863–1939) belonged to the Marāṭhā Gāyakavāḍa dynasty, which historically had associations with both the Peśvās and the Bhosale dynasty. Sayajīrao ascended the throne at Baroda in 1875 by selection of the British government. In 1880, he married a woman named Rani Chimnabai (1864–1884), the daughter of a Marāṭhā noble from Tanjore. As part of her dowry, two *naṭṭuvaṇārs*, one *devadāsī*, one *muttu* drummer, and a *nāgasvaram* and *tavil* player were sent to Baroda. The *naṭṭuvaṇārs* were Kannusvami Nattuvanar (1864–1923), who was the grandson of Civāṇantam of the Quartet, and Kuppusvami Nattuvanar (1843–1914). The *devadāsī* was Gauri (1871–1950). Later, the *naṭṭuvaṇār* Appāsvāmi (1862–1935) and the dancer Kanti-mati (1872–1953) were also brought to Baroda.

16. In the Moḍi records, the variation *kaḷāvantiṇī* is used most often.

17. The romance between the Muslim *kaḷāvantiṇī* Mastānī and Peśvā Bājīrāv I became one of the most controversial events of the period, and sparked protest among the Citpāvan or Koṅkaṇastha Brahmins who were the family priests or *purohitas* for the Peśvā rulers (Kadam 1998, 70–73).

18. Venkaṭ Narsī was from Karnataka and is known to have performed at the court of Peśvā Bājīrāv II for at least seventeen years after he ascended the throne in 1796. The names of some of her accompanists, such as the vocalist Bhikobā and the female drummer Gaṅgā Pakhvājī, are preserved in the Peśvā Daftar (Kadam 1998). For a three-night-long performance in 1802, she was paid Rs. 26,000 (Shirgaonkar 1995, 65–66; 2010).

19. The name Hīrā (“diamond” in Hindi) appears in a couple of Moḍi documents from the rule of Serfojī II. One Hīrā was a *dāsī* who had her *poṭṭu* tied at the Kāśī Viśvanātha temple at Orattanadu (Muktambalpuram) (TSML, 9/13, 1819).

20. Variations on *śūlā* are found in Tamil (*cūlai*) and Konkani and Tulu (*sūle*). The term is also commonplace in modern Kannada.

21. Moḍi record, dated 1847, Thanjavur Sarasvati Mahal Library, Thanjavur (hereafter TSML), 548.

22. Moḍi record, dated 1847, TSML 104–104.
23. Tanjore “Saraswati” (born 1931), for example, had her *poṭṭukkaṭṭu* ceremony performed at the Prasanna Veṅkaṭeṣa Perumā temple in 1940. She was trained in dance by Chinnaiya Nattuvanar (1876–1956) and Picchaiya Nattuvanar (1880–1945). She currently lives outside Chennai, and we shall discuss her in greater detail later.
24. Moḍi record, 1882, TSML, 817–6/19.
25. Moḍi record, TSML 123C/11.
26. Moḍi record, TSML 2C-17/3.
27. Moḍi record, dated 1802, TSML, 104C.
28. The *Bṛhadīśvaramāhātmyam* is a thirty-chapter text in Sanskrit about various Cōla, Cēra, Pāṇṭiya, and Vikrama kings who patronize, renovate, and worship at the Bṛhadīśvara temple in Tanjore as well as several other important Śaiva temples in the region. It was translated into Marathi as *Taṅjapurī Mahātmya* by a court poet named Śeṣakavi during the rule of King Amarasimha. It was then translated into Tamil during Serfoji’s rule. Another Sanskrit text, the *Taṅjāpurīmāhātmyam*, is about the Vaiṣṇava temples in and around Tanjore city. Each of these texts has been edited and published by the Sarasvati Mahal Library.
29. The Quartet also composed a number of *kīrtanas* (devotional songs) on Bṛhadīśvara and Bṛhannāyaki.
30. Civakkoḷuntu Tēcikar was born in the town of Kottaiyur in Sivagangai district and worked in Serfoji’s experimental hospital, Dhanvantari Mahal. He was eventually appointed Tamil *pandit* at the College of Fort St. George in Madras. Another text, the *Devendra Koravañji* in Marathi, is attributed to Serfoji himself. In this unique work, the Kura woman narrates her travels in the form of a geography of the modern world (Peterson 2008a).
31. The *kuṛavañci* as a literary genre has been the focus of several important scholarly studies, including those by Buck (2005), Muilwijk (1996), and Peterson (1998a, 2008a, forthcoming). Peterson’s approach emphasizes the performative nature of the genre, and she is currently preparing a book-length study on the subject that addresses many of the *kuṛavañci* texts danced by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *devadāsīs* in the Kaveri river delta.
32. The first of these rehearsals took place two days before *aṣṭakkoṭi* and was known as *ciṁma ottikai*. The second took place the following day and was known as *periyā ottikai*; it was performed as a dress rehearsal in costume. Both took place in the shrine of Bṛhannāyaki (K. P. Kittappa Pillai, personal communication; Kalyanasuntaravalli 1958).
33. Moḍi record, dated 1801, TSML, 201C-10/987.
34. Moḍi record, TSML, 622-C/36.
35. The available Moḍi records mention the names of “departments” that specialized in music and dance. The “Huzūr Nāṭyaśālā” is one of these, as is the “Saṅgīt Vidyādhik” (music department). We know the names of individuals associated with these departments, but very little else can be said about their location, operating budget, etc.
36. Moḍi record, dated 1845, TSML 90–40/1.
37. A number of *yakṣagāna* texts (Telugu and multilingual ones) are created during

the rule of Śāhajī right through the rule of Śivājī II. Indira Peterson's work on the court dramas (2004a, 2004b, forthcoming) illuminates the complexities of these dramas and the social, religious, and political agendas they engendered.

38. Historically, the Marāṭhā kings patronized these devotional dramas in five vil-lages—Melattur, Saliyamangalam, Tepperumanallur, Uttukkadu, and Sulamangalam. Today, *bhāgavata mēḷa* only survives in three villages: Melattur, Saliyamangalam, and Tepperumanallur. Most writing on *bhāgavata mēḷa* provides only a vague sense of its history and performance practices, and most works inevitably focus on the village of Melattur (for example, Arudra 1986c; Krishna Iyer 1966, 1969; Natarajan 1990; I. Raman 1999; Ranganathan 1982). Critical academic writing on the topic is virtually absent. A brief article by Clifford Jones in the *Journal of Asian Studies* (1963) provides a cursory overview of the form, while a more substantial recent essay has been written by Japanese ethnomusicologist Takako Inoue (2008). It is significant that the *bhāgavata mēḷa* referred to in the Modi records is not limited to the repertoire performed in Melattur, Saliyamangalam, and Tepperumanallur today. A vast number of *bhāgavata mēḷa* plays appear to have been enacted at the court, and although these exist in manuscript form, they do not survive in performance today.

39. Modi record, TSML, 22/24.

40. Modi record, dated 1814, TSML, 184C/21.

41. Modi record, dated 1811, TSML, 123C.

42. The manuscripts are N2464 and T2803, which have been edited by R. Vivekanandagopal and published by the library under the title *Thanjavur Marathi Lavani Songs: Tañjāvūr Marāṭhī Lāvānī Vāñmaya* (1998).

43. For more on *gondhaḷa* traditions in Maharashtra, see Dhere (1988).

44. The texts of some traditional *gondhaḷa* songs from Tanjore have been published by the Sarasvati Mahal Library. See Bhima Rao (1990).

45. Modi record, dated 1819, TSML, 503.

46. Modi record, dated 1829, TU, 165C-32.

47. Modi record, dated 1837, TSML, 1–133.

48. One writer, in 1935 notes that “‘Kinjin’ corresponds to the ‘tillana’ in the Southern dramatic tradition; and it is said of Sitarama Bhagavatar of Soolamangalam, an expert in feminine dance and a consummate master of the art of revelation in concealment, that hundreds of professional dancing girls would hasten to witness his renderings to learn therefrom” (Ramachandran 1935, 3). Another Brahmin performer of *bhāgavata mēḷa* plays was popularly known as “Kinjin” Kodandarama Ayyar, and by the twentieth century, the term *kiñjin* also came to refer to a kind of marionette puppet theater, in which the marionettes were invariably dressed as North Indian dancers. This type of performance, known as *kiñjin bommalāṭṭam*, was presented regularly at the Mangala Gana Sabha in Kumbhakonam well into the twentieth century.

49. Modi record, TSML, 2–6/46.

50. For more on the tradition of males performing courtesan dance at the Tanjore court, see Krishnan (2009).

51. Modi record, dated 1844, TU, 4–263.

52. This painting was the subject of a short essay by archaeologist and historian R. Nagaswamy entitled “Thanjavur Natya on Canvas” (1989). However, Nagaswamy

only understood this as a representation of North Indian cultural practices at the court, and not as a sign of the court's hybrid cultural practices.

53. Moḍi record, dated 1770, TU, 8–9.

54. Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar and his brother Bālusvāmi were patronized by Venkatakriṣṇa Mudaliyar, an agent-*dubash* for the East India Company. Venkatakriṣṇa Mudaliyar (d. 1817) and his father, Muddukriṣṇa Mudaliyar (d. 1792) were both *dubashes* of George Pigot (1719–1777), governor of Fort St. George (Madras) in 1755–1763 and 1775–1777. Venkatakriṣṇa Mudaliyar is also mentioned in the *Sarvadēvavilāsa*, will I discuss in chapter 2. They were the *zamīndārs* of Manali, a small suburb of Madras near Tiruvottriyur. Venkatakriṣṇa Mudaliyar would often take the two brothers to Fort St. George to listen to the Company's marching bands. According to one narrative, this is how Bālusvāmi learned the violin, which subsequently became the major melodic accompaniment for Karṇāṭak vocal music (Weidman 2006, 29–30).

55. Consider the following anecdote about Rukmini Arundale (1904–1986), one of the key figures who enabled the repopulation of *devadāsī* dance by middle-class women. In her search for the present-day “remnants” of a classical performance heritage, Arundale traveled to Tanjore where she saw one of the last performances of the *Carapēntira Pūpāla Kuṛavañci* by *devadāsīs* at the Bṛhadīśvara temple. She dismissed the performance as artless and low, as it was written in praise of a *mortal*, not a *god*. She vowed to recapture the former “glory” of the *kuṛavañci* and later choreographed the *Tirukkuṛāla Kuṛavañci*, which was dedicated to the god Śiva but only existed in textual form. She had the text tuned, and presented this in Madras in 1944.

56. Ciṅṇaiyā moved to the Mysore court at the invitation of Kṛṣṇarāja Uḍaiyār III (r. 1811–1868), and in 1834, the brothers were invited to perform at the court of Svāti Tirunāl (1813–1846), king of Travancore. Impressed by Vaṭivēl's mastery of music in general and the violin in particular, Svāti Tirunāl appointed him as one of the resident musicians of his court. He also gifted Vaṭivēl with an ivory violin marked with the date “1834” (currently in the house on West Main Street) and an ivory box filled with jewels inscribed with an image of the Travancore palace (currently held by descendants in Chennai). Ciṅṇaiyā and Vaṭivēl lived in Mysore and Travancore, respectively, for the entire duration of their later careers, and the critical aesthetic innovations they had earlier made at Tanjore traveled into these regions by the middle of the nineteenth century.

57. Rāmu Naṭṭuvanār served in Pratāpasimha's court and was the guru of Muddupaḷani, a courtesan who wrote the Telugu text *Rādhikā Sāntvanamu*. His descendants Vaṭivēlu Naṭṭuvanār (c. 1870–1930) and his brother Ciṅṇaiyā Naṭṭuvanār (1876–1956) were the last dance -masters in this family. Vocalist M. Thyagarajan (d. 2007) was the last musician in this family. Venkaṭakiruṣṇa Naṭṭuvanār served in the court of Serfoji II, and his descendant Pañcāpakēca Naṭṭuvanār (1842–1902) coauthored a Tamil work called *Apiṇaya Navanītam* (“Clarified Essence of Abhinaya”) in 1886 (Krishnan 2008). Their lineage continued with Kuppaiya Pillai (1887–1981) and his family, who established the dance academy Rajarajeswari Bharata Natya Kala Mandir in Mumbai in the 1940s.

58. Strategic colonial deployments of “nautch” in Madras date back to 1727, as we shall see in the next chapter. My point here is that “salon” style performances and the mobilization of *devadāsī* dance to express power relations between colonial admin-

istrators and natives existed in Madras city even before the time of Serfoji II and the Quartet. It is not a stretch, therefore, to conceive of “Tanjore court dance” (as it evolved at the hands of the Quartet, for example) as created specifically for a new culture of colonial, salon-style presentation.

59. The manuscripts were discovered by B. M. Sundaram in the home of Chokkalingam Pillai (1892–1972), son of Svaminatha Nattuvanar, a descendent of the Quartet, in Thiruthuraiipoondi. Most of the horoscope or *jātakam* manuscripts were written by a man named Govindaraja Pillai, an astrologer-cousin of Svaminatha Nattuvanar, but many such as those of Gopala Nattuvanar, appear to be early nineteenth-century texts. An example of the full text of one of these birth *jātakams*, that of Vaṭivēlu (of the Quartet), reads as follows:

Birth Horoscope of Vaṭivēlu, with Blessings of Long Life

In the auspicious Pramodūta year, the month of Puraṭṭāci, on the morning of Monday the 24th morning at 21–22 [these are *nāḷikai*, 2 ½ *nāḷikais* make one hour, counted from the moment of sunrise] of sunrise hour 11–8, under the star *tiruvōṇam*, at the auspicious moment of 8.12 in the morning, Centilvēl alias Vaṭivēlu, the youngest son of Cuppirāya Naṭṭuvanār of the Tanjavur fort was born. With the star *tiruvōṇam*, the powerful effects of the moon (*candra-mahādaśā*) will last for another 3 years, 5 months 2 days. The end of *candra-daśā* will be on 10–3-1814.

60. The family was led by Makātēva Naṭṭuvanār (1734–1791), and his two brothers Kaṅkaimuttu (1737–1798) and Irāmaliṅkam (dates unknown). Tuḷajā II granted Cupparāya Naṭṭuvanār five units (*veḷis*) of wet land and the house (Sundaram 1997, 31). In 1917, Abraham Pandither, in his encyclopedic work on South Indian music, *Karunamirtha Sagaram*, also mentions Cupparāya Naṭṭuvanār:

Subbaraya Nattuvanar. Proficient in Bharata Sangeeta Sahityam. His Varnams and Keertanams are in praise of Tulajaji maharajah and the deity. He was presented by the Maharajah with a palanquin and other paraphernalia, with land, jewels and with the residence known as Nattuvan Chavadi. (Pandither 1917, 179)

61. Moḍi record, dated 1780, TSML, 545–12. The full text of this Moḍi document reads as follows:

parvāṅgī hujūr: mahārāja tuḷajarāje sāheb kaḷāvanta subarāyapaikī vilāyatīce kaḷāvantiṇī va naṭhamūṭhagāra dikhiḷa—hujūr simaṅgiyāce saṇā badala hājīr jāhale tyāsapoṭaḡi daṇḍaka pramāṇe roja 9 phalaṃ pramāṇe hājīra jāhale terike pāsuna simaḡi paurṇimā tāḡāyī roja dar-roja deṇe

62. TU 4–263, 1844.

63. The available Moḍi records themselves surprisingly contain no references to the brothers, with the exception of one letter signed in Tamil by “Civāṇanta Naṭṭuvan.” Unfortunately this document exists in two versions—one which identifies Civāṇanta Naṭṭuvan as the son of Cupparāyan, and another as the son of Paramāṇanta Naṭṭuvan.

64. Sundaram (2002b) also notes that two other untitled manuscripts at Sarasvati Mahal (B11618 and B11605C) also contain *varṇams* and *svaraḡatis* attributed to the Quartet.

65. The “fact” of this standardization of courtly performance can only be documented through oral narratives. For this reason, even the *content* of this suite is contested. For example, in some accounts, another genre, *jāvāḷi*, which we discuss in detail in the next chapter, is included in the suite, and the *śloka* is not.

66. The descendants of the Quartet survive in several lineages located across contemporary Tamil Nadu. While one small branch of the family continues to live in the ancestral home on West Main Street, and others are settled in Chennai, a great number also live in Pandanallur village, Ammachatram, and Thiruthuraipoondi. My main source for oral narratives about the Quartet was the late K. P. Kittappa Pillai (1919–1999), a fifth-generation descendant of the Quartet who taught dance and also was responsible in the 1950s for publishing the earliest notated versions of the Quartet’s compositions.

67. Some of these compositions include a number of *svarajatis* dedicated to figures such as Pāṇṭitturai Tēvar (1867–1911), the *zamīndār* of Palavanattam (Ramanathapuram district), which are actually the compositions of Vadivelu Nattuvanar II (1869–1914), the grandson of Civāṇantam of the Quartet.

68. Unlike his contemporaries Tyāgarāja (1767–1847) and Śyāma Śāstri (1762–1827), Dikṣitar is remembered for his interactions with the *devadāsī* and *naṭṭuvaṇār* community, and this forms an important part of biographical sources about Dikṣitar. One of his main disciples was “Suddhamaddaḷam” Tampiyappaṇ, son of Gurumūrti Naṭṭuvaṇār (1760–1802), who, like the Quartet’s father, was also invited to Tanjavur by King Tulaja II (Sundaram 1997, 32; 2002a, 173). According to P. R. Thilagam (b. 1926), the last descendant of the *koṭṭi-paramparā devadāsīs* of the Tiruvārūr temple, one of her ancestors Kamalamuttu had the Telugu song “*nī sāṭi daivamandu*” (Śrīraṅjani *rāga*) composed for her by Dikṣitar, who was also her music guru (P. R. Thilagam, personal communication, January 1999). There is also a set of nine Telugu *kīrtanas* (devotional songs) said to be composed by the brothers as a tribute to their *guru*, Dikṣitar. These were edited and published by K. Ponnaiya Pillai in 1940 in a book of notations entitled *Taṅcai Peruvuṭṭayan Pericai*. For details on Dikṣitar’s life, see Dikṣitulu (1904); for notes on his musical style, particularly his emphasis on “place,” see Peterson (1986) and Te Nijenhuis and Gupta (1987).

69. We know that both of these women were historical figures. Mīnākṣī of Mannargudi was the great-grandmother of the famous contemporary *tavil* (drum) percussionist Mannargudi Rajagopala Pillai, and Pudukkottai Ammaḷu lived from 1835 to 1886 (Sundaram 2003, 243–247).

70. References to the performance of Kṣetrāyā’s *padams* appear in a variety of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century print materials that discuss dance by courtesans. A very early English essay by P. Ragaviah Charry, published in 1801 (the period of Serfoji II) that we will discuss in detail in chapter 3 notes that Kṣetrāyā’s *padams* were central to courtesan performance in Madras at the turn of the century. It also provides the first-ever English translation of two *padams*. *Abhinaya Svayambodhini* (1915), a Telugu work by Virārāghava Śāstri, contains a large number of Kṣetrāyā *padams* with instructions for how to perform *abhinaya* for each.

71. The focus on the continued patronage of drama and linear narrative, as Indira Peterson notes, indexes the early Marāṭhā interest “in the power of *emplotment* in action, the actual enactment of texts and narratives through gesture, mime and dance

[and thus in] the representational power and dialogism of *drama in performance*, a quality unavailable in other literary forms" (2004, 6).

72. Śāhaji's *padams* on Śiva-Tyāgarāja have been edited by N. Visvanathan (1980). The court poet Vāsudeva Kavi produced a vast number of Sanskrit and Tamil *padas* on Śāhaji and other local landowners. These have been edited by N. Srinivasan (1999, 2006). The *śabdās* and *salām-daruvus* (salutation songs) by Kāśināthayya and Nāraṇa Kavi have been edited by N. Visvanathan (1985).

73. Śāhaji's court was marked by a proliferation of dramas, some of which were among the earliest multilingual literature produced under Marāṭhā patronage. Indira Peterson has written extensively about the production of drama at the Tanjore court (Peterson 1998a, 2004a, 2004b, forthcoming). The *Śaṅkara-kālī-naṭana-saṃvāda-nāṭaka*, for example, describes a dance contest between Bhadrakālī and Śiva of Tiruvenkadu (Śvetāranya), and is written in Marathi, Telugu, Tamil, and Sanskrit. The *Pañcabhāṣā-vilāsa*, as Peterson has noted, is "not only a multilingual play, but a play about multilingualism" (Peterson, forthcoming). Composed in Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Hindi, and Sanskrit, it aestheticizes language in an eighteenth-century "response to the pleasures and burdens of polyglossia" (20). Other major dramatic works produced under Śāhaji's patronage include *Gaṅgā-kāverī-saṃvāda-nāṭaka* (The argument between Gaṅgā and Kāverī) and *Satidāna Śūramu*, recently discussed by Narayana Rao and Shulman (2002, 354–380). Of particular note for our purposes is the text known as *Śaṅkara Pallaki Seva Prabandhamu*, which describes the daily palanquin service (*pallaki sevā*) of Śiva as Tyāgarāja that was performed in the Tiruvarur temple. Excerpts from this text were apparently sung by *devadāsīs* in that temple at the time of certain festivals, and their tunes were notated for posterity by musicologist P. Sambamoorthy in 1955. A Telugu text specifically meant for *bhāgavata mēḷa* performance, *Sītā Kalyāṇamu*, is also attributed to Śāhaji (Visvanathan and Srinivasan 1993).

74. The *Śāhāvilāsa Gītam* consists of *aṣṭapadīs* that are parallel in form and content to those in the *Gītagovinda*. The text has been edited by S. Ramanathan (1985).

75. The word *koravañji* is used in the Telugu literary work *Raghunāthanāya-kābhyaḍayamu* (1.499), produced in Nāyaka-period Tanjore. However, the earliest extant *kuṛavañci* text in Tamil appears to be the *Tiyākēcar Kuṛavañci*, dedicated to Śiva at Tiruvarur. It is almost universally believed that this text was composed during the reign of Śāhaji because of the king's devotion to Śiva-Tyāgarāja, and because his name is mentioned in one of the benedictory verses of the text. In addition, the only *kuṛavañci* text in Sanskrit, the *Mohinivilāsa Kuravañji Nāṭakam* attributed to a court poet named Kavi Saptarṣi, was also composed during Śāhaji's reign. This text has been edited by N. Srinivasan (1985).

76. During the rule of Serfoji I, the court composer Girirāja Kavi, who also served during Śāhaji's rule, composed a number of erotic *padas*, perhaps meant for dance (Seetha 1981, 87). Two important *yakṣagāna* texts, the Telugu *Śivakāmasundari Parināya Nāṭakamu* (Seetha 1971; Peterson 2004a) and the Sanskrit *Rājarañjana Vidyā Vilāsa Nāṭaka* (Seetha 1981, 92–94) were also written during his reign. During the reign of Venkoji II, son and successor of Tuḷajā I, *yakṣagāna* dramas continued to proliferate. We also hear of a court dancer, Muddumaṅgā, receiving special honors from Venkoji II (Seetha 1981, 96).

77. Pratāpasimha's court is also significant because of the presence of Muddupaḷani, a courtesan and poet of great accomplishment. Muddupaḷani is the author of *Rādhikā Sāntvanamu* ("Appeasing Rādhā") that describes the passion between Kṛṣṇa and his young new wife Iḷādevī. For details on Muddupaḷani, see Tharu and Lalitha (1993) and Narayana Rao and Shulman (2002, 396–399).

78. An extended discussion of Vīrabhadrayya is found in Sundaram (2002b 24–35). Court musicians composed a number of virtuosic pieces for vocal music performances in this period as well. The *varṇam* genre was also likely crystallized in this period. A figure named Govindasāmayya (eighteenth century, dates unknown) and Paccimiriyaṃ Ādiyappayya (c. 1750–1820), are generally understood as the "fathers" of the complex *varṇam* genre. Ādiyappayya was a contemporary of Vīrabhadrayya (ibid., 28–29). The *varṇam* has been a part of the dance repertoire almost since the inception of the genre, and Govindasāmayya's *varṇams* are still remembered among Telugu-speaking courtesans in the Godavari delta region.

79. The *svarajati* in Huseni *rāga* is rewritten a number of times. One early version is addressed to King Pratāpasimha, attributed to Ponnaiyā of the Quartet, beginning with the words "e mandayānarā," while another is dedicated to the god Viṣṇu as Varadarāja attributed to Melattur Venkaṭarāma Śāstri (1743–1809), a *bhāgavata mēla* dance master. Yet another version exists in Marathi, dedicated to Śivājī II (beginning with the words "e mājha velhālā gehālāgi"), and the author of this piece is unknown. Many of these versions are preserved in manuscripts such as *Varṇa Svara Jati* in the Sarasvati Mahal Library (Sundaram 2002b), or in the notebooks of nineteenth-century dance masters such as that of Nellaiyappa Nattuvanar (1859–1905), whom we will encounter in the next chapter. In the early twentieth century, this *svarajati* was also translated into Tamil. Three of the four extant versions are still performed by contemporary urban middle-class Bharatanāṭyam dancers, and have been published with musical notation (Kittappa 1961, 1999).

80. The Tamil version of this *varṇam*, "mōhamāṇa eṇmīl," has been the subject of a major study by Saskia Kersenboom (1995). While oral tradition (and subsequently Kersenboom herself) attributes this version to the Quartet, it is anomalous for two reasons. It is the only composition on this deity attributed to the brothers, and it does not appear in any of the manuscript materials at the Sarasvati Mahal Library in which we find other compositions by the Quartet. For these reasons, like many of the other Tamil compositions attributed to the Quartet, it is safe to say that it was actually composed by one of their later descendants, likely K. Ponnaiya Pillai (1888–1945).

81. A document from 1860 entitled *Native Petition to the Imperial Parliament for the Restitution of the Raj of Tanjore and the Restoration of the Property Confiscated by the Madras Government* contains a very dramatic description of how the colonial government seized palace property as part of the "annexation":

Besides the sequestration of the elephants, camels, horses, cattle, and carriages, sent up to Madras for sale, posts, pans, and such like culinary utensils were sold off within the palace, in which the Ranees were at the time residing, the doors of private apartments were broken open, and valuable property together with the garments of the ladies carried away; the playthings of the children . . . have been

claimed by the East India Company as “State property”; nothing being too great or too small to escape the rapacity of the marauding inquisitors; or as Her Majesty’s Attorney general described it “the universal drag net of the all-grasping Company”; but all and everything, valuable or invaluable, was pounced upon indiscriminately.” (1860, 11)

82. Mahātēvaṇ is known to have taught dance to men of the royal Marāṭhā household (Krishnan 2009), and introduced the use of the clarinet in performances of dance by *devadāsīs* (Sundaram 1997, 34). The descendants of the family who continued to live in Tanjore and Pandanallur village ensured that the annual performance of *Carapēntira Pūpāla Kūṛavañci* was kept up until the 1940s.

CHAPTER TWO

1. The patronage of *devadāsī* troupes by Muslims is also found in *Qanoon-e-Islam, or the Customs of the Moosulmans of India* (Shureef and Herklots 1832, lxxxii). This account notes that *mēlams* are generally invited to perform at weddings, and mentions the *nutwa* (*naṭṭuvaṇār*) 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 “Hindustānī” style. The participation of Tanjore’s *devadāsīs* in Muslim weddings is also confirmed by musicologist B. M. Sundaram:

“In Tanjore, there were some *devadāsī* 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 *devadāsī* 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 dancer “Rangapushpa” Chitra of Tenali district, for example, performed frequently at the Nizam’s darbar. The title “Rangapushpa” was given to her by the Nizam in the early twentieth century. She also often performed with tambourines and ribbons, dressed in tights, in a manner consistent with the “Parsi dance” performances described in the introduction. For details on Rangapushpa Chitra, see Ramakrishna (1995, 157).

3. The Mutaliyār *dubash* family of Manali, just outside Madras, maintained connections with the Tanjore 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 Lakshmi Subramanian (2006, 2009).

4. The term “oft-conquered people” is used by missionary Caroline Atwater Mason in her discussion of *devadāsī* immorality (1902, 103–105).

5. Amy Charmichael was the author of a book published in 1912 entitled *Lotus Buds* (a reference to the innocence of young *devadāsī* 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). Nancy 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 *devadāsī* communities, but rather was very common, largely because of traditions of child marriage among all castes (see, for example, Sarkar 2001, 240).

6. *Devadāsīs* were regularly hired by a number of *zamīndāri* courts (*samasthānams*) in the Madras Presidency. In chapter 4, I explore *devadāsī* performance in the context of Pudukkottai, one of the major “princely states” in Madras. In the nineteenth century, *devadāsīs* also performed at the *samasthānam* 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, Gadval, and Kollapuram in the Telugu-speaking regions.

7. 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” (T. Wheeler 1878, 133).

8. 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. More 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).

9. *Herald*, February 7, 1838 cited in the *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register* 26 (May–August 1838): 149–150.

10. British observers’ incredulity at the native ability to endure pain and the resonances of such observations in colonial anthropology is the focus of Nicholas Dirks’s (1997) brilliant essay “The Policing of Tradition: Colonialism and the Anthropology of Southern India.”

11. A sort of “instruction manual” for *pinṇal kōlāṭṭam* at Tanjore exists in the form of a Marathi manuscript entitled *Dorā Dharūṇa Gopha Veṇi Paddhati* (Krishnaswamy Mahadik Rao, 2005). The performance of *pinṇal kōlāṭṭam* by *devadāsīs* is also mentioned in some detail by Dr. John Shortt in his anthropological essay “The Bayadère; or, Dancing Girls of Southern India” (1867–1869, 190–191).

12. 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 that 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 his works, he advocates the formation of a literary association in Madras whose aim would be to facilitate dialogue between natives and Europeans.

13. Cupratīpa Kavirāyar was one of the Tamil teachers of the Jesuit missionary Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi (1680–1747), who is credited with authoring Tamil texts such as the *Tēmpāvaṇi*, an epic poem about Saint Joseph, in addition to other works on Tamil grammar and polemical works against the Lutherans.

14. Here, for example, is an excerpt from the "Veśyā Prakaraṇam" chapter of the *Čēnnapurivīlāsamu* that describes the courtesans' quarters in Madras:

There are many girls with pleasant eyes and full breasts who have been taught rhythms like *jhampa-tāla* [a ten-beat rhythm cycle] by dance-masters (*nāṭya bharatācāryas*). In Sūryam Paśyālpuri there are plenty of *veśyās* on the street called *nōḍakāl vīdhi*. They have beautiful teeth, *kumkuma* marking on their foreheads, and their faces shine bright as blue lilies. As they perform the beautiful *lāsya* dance, their graceful gait appears like that of swans. Like lotuses swaying from side to side, they enact a play (*līlā*) of *abhinaya*. They are born of the secret desire of Rati and Kāma. In that *nōḍakāl vīdhi*, live the women who are victorious over Kāma himself (*smara jāya strīlu*). 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 *veśyās* live on that street. The sweet ambrosia of their music (*gānāmṛta*) showers down like flowers falling from the branches of a beautiful tree. Those who witness their performances are knowledgeable in the art of *lāsya*. This assembly of connoisseurs adds lustre to the art of the *veśyās*. On this street, live these *veśyās* who are like the mantric powers of illusion wielded by Kāma. (Nṛsiṃhaśāstri 1864, 63–64)

15. These names are mentioned in *Sarvadevavilāsa*, 5.21–26.

16. In 1876, a man (presumably a *naṭṭuvanār*) named Arapatta Nāvalar published a Tamil text called *Paratacāsttiram* ("Bharata Śāstra"), which mentions the performance of the pot-lamp ritual (*maṅkaḷa kumpa tīpam*) of the *devadāsīs* and talks about the performance of *nāgasvaram* in temples, but also speaks about the complexity of rhythmic theory and the technical dimensions of drumming for court dance (Arapatta Nāvalar, 1876). Similarly, some patrons of dance, such as Sarvajña Kumāra Gopālakṛṣṇa Yācendra, the *zamīndār* of Venkatagiri in Andhra Pradesh, wrote works such as *Sabhā Rañjani* (1890), about aesthetic theory as it related to the performance of poetry, music and dance in courtly contexts.

17. As Krishnan (2008, 77–78) points out, predating the *Naṭaṅṅāti Vāttiya Rāncāṇam*, are two Tamil texts, *Apīṇayacāracampuṭa* and *Apīṇaya Navanītam*, collaborations between a Brahmin connoisseur, Chetlur Narayana Ayyankar, and Panchapakesha Nattuvanar (1842–1902), a descendant of Venkaṭakīruṣṇa Naṭṭuvanār who served at the Tanjore court during the reign of Serfoji.

18. Over and above the few works I have mentioned in this essay, a number of others in Tamil also exist. A very early example, a Tamil drama titled *Tēvatāci* (“Devadāsī”), was composed in the early nineteenth century by a poet named Paracūrāma Kavirāyar, and then translated in 1868 into French by Louis Jacolliot under the title *La Devadassi, Bayadere* (Zvelebil 1998). Other literary works about *devadāsī*-courtesans in Madras include *Mattāppucuntaram allatu Tācikaḷiṅ Ceykai* (“The Beauty of Fireworks, or The Deeds of the Dāsīs,” 1916) by Kuruṣṇacāmi Ayyar, *Taṇapāḷaṅ allatu Tācikaḷiṅ Māyāvaṅcaka Cūḷccikaḷ* (“Dhanapalan, or the Devious Crimes of the Dāsīs,” 1931) by Kōvintacāmi Piḷḷai, and the play *Tācikaḷum Tācikaṅṅaṅkaḷum* (“Dāsīs and the Dāsīs’ Lovers,” 1947) by E. Kokkaliṅkam Piḷḷai. 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 deeply with Victorian writing in English on concubines and professional performing artists in colonial India. For an example of such writing, see *The Romance of a Nautch Girl: A Novel* by Mrs. Frank Penny (1898); for an analysis, see Paxton (1999).

19. K. Kurucāmitās was a fairly prolific writer who composed several such poems. He published his own work from 1943 to 1945, 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 *Kumpakōṅam Kaikkāṭṭi Marattēruvil Naṅanta Rāmacāmi Kolaiccintu* (“Collection of Songs about the Murder Committed by Rāmacāmi in Kumbhakonam,” 1943), which describes the case of Rāmacāmi from Kumbhakonam who murdered a prostitute named Sitāḷcumi for jilting him.

20. This was for a volume of *jāvaḷis* 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 thirty *jāvaḷis* with *svara* notation, many of which were composed during Dhanammal’s lifetime. See Brinda (1960).

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

22. MSS KB 240/2, Kannada Adhyayana Samsthe (Institute of Kannada Studies), Mysore. For more on Kannada *jāvaḷis* and the Mysore court, see Sastri (1974) and Pranesh (2003). *Jāvaḷis* continued to be popular in the Kannada-speaking regions until the middle of the twentieth century. Poets such as Hullāhalli Rāmānā (1854–1918) were among the most famous *jāvaḷikartas* from this region (Chennakeshaviah 1974; Sastri 1974). To be sure, hundreds of *jāvaḷis* 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 Jeamma, Mysore Sundaramma, and Nangangud Nagaratamma performed *jāvalis* on a regular basis in and around Mysore and Bengaluru.

23. This is an oral tradition that has been maintained by the descendants of the Quartet. They claim that a single *jāvali*, “*iṭu sāhasamulu elarā*” in Saindhavi *rāga*, 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 Vaṭivēlu did indeed teach dance at the Travancore court, and in the year 1834 was gifted by the Mahārāja Svāti Tirunāl 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.

24. Tacchur Singaracharyulu (1834–1892) and his brother Chinna Singaracharyulu wrote seven treatises on music that were commissioned by Nālvaḍi Kṛṣṇarāja Uḍaiyār. These included *Gāyakapārijātam* (1882), *Gāyakalocana* (1884), *Saṅgita Kalānidhi* (1889), *Gāyaka Siddhānjanam* (part 1, 1890; part 2, 1905), *Gānendu Śekharam* (1912), and *Svaramañjari* (1914). All were published in Madras. Singaracharyulu also organized annual “salon style” concerts on the festival of Rāmanavamī near his house in Georgetown.

25. The *Gāndharvakalpavalli* has an English subtitle, “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 Virarāghavamūrti Śāstri. In the preface to this work, the author talks about the instrumentality of the book: “To make it easy for *vesyā strīs* 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).

26. Agha Mohammad Shah (1879–1935), later known as Agha Hashr Kashmiri, wrote an Urdu adaptation of *King Lear* for Parsi theater entitled *Safed Khūn* (“White Blood,” 1906). This combined Urdu prose and poetry with Hindustāni music. For details, see A. Kapur (2006). Also see *The Parsi Theatre: Its Origins and Development* by Somnath Gupt (translated and edited by Kathryn Hansen, 2005).

27. Karur Śivarāmaya also composed the *jāvali* “O My Lovely Lalanā” (Kharaharapriya *rāga*) in a mix of English and Telugu, which also appears in the *Gāndharvakalpavalli*. Śivarāmaya lived most of his life in Karur, near Trichy. One of his descendants was the famous violinist Papa Venkataramaya (1901–1972).

28. Rāga: Kāmbodhi; Tāla: Ādi; Composer: Karur Śivarāmaya (c. 1798–1820).

29. A great number of *naṭṭuvanārs* 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 Andal (1871–1919) performed on the premises on the Cennamallikeśvara temple; Mylapore Duraikannammal (1864–1952) performed at the Kapālīśvara temple; and Tiruvallikkeni Krishna (1804–1855) and Nila (1830–1891) performed at the Triplicane Parthasārathi temple.

30. Musicologist T. Sankaran has also written a short essay on Suriseti Ramaniah Chettiar, an important patron and connoisseur of music and dance in Madras city in the early part of the twentieth century. He hosted a monthlong Rāmanavamī festival in his home every year, where the city’s top musicians and dancers would gather for salon

performances. Dhanammal and even her granddaughter T. Balasaraswati performed here (Sankaran 1984b).

31. For example, in the *jāvali* in Paras *rāga*, “smara sundarāṅguni sari ēvvare,” the heroine notes that as she plays her *vīṇā*, her lover encourages her by exclaiming “*śābās* (bravo)!” In a biographical essay on Subbaraya Ayyar, T. Sankaran, a descendant of Dhanammal, notes that another *jāvali* in Jhañjhūṭi *rāga*, “prāṇa sakhudīṭu,” 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 1982a, 25). For more on Dhanammal, see L. Subramanian (2009) and Knight (2010).

32. Having noted the continuities between dance and aesthetics throughout the colonial Madras Presidency, it is significant that a number of *jāvalis* were composed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries exclusively for professional dancing women in the coastal Andhra Pradesh region. These include the *jāvalis* of Neti Subbarayudu Sastri. Another example of a localized *jāvali* tradition comes from the village of Ballipadu in the West Godavari district, where courtesans who had connections with the festival worship of Kṛṣṇa at the Madanagopālasvāmi temple sang a number of *jāvalis* composed for this purpose. During my fieldwork with Saride Anusuya (1910–2005), who was dedicated to this temple, I recorded one such *jāvali*, “*idi nyāyamā sāmi*” in Jhañjhūṭi *rāga*, which made specific reference to the temple at Ballipadu, and it was clearly used in this highly localized context.

33. This is the *jāvali* in Kalyāṇi *rāga* “*cēragu māse emi seturā*” by Neti Subbraya Sastri that I discuss in detail in chapter 5.

34. The story of Coimbatore Thai is particularly interesting. Her lineage can be traced to a *devadāsī* named Visalakshi in the village of Avinasi in the Kongu region. Visalakshi had two daughters, Shanmukattammal and Venkatammal, both of whom settled in Coimbatore city. In 1872, Venkatammal gave birth to a daughter whom she named Palanikunjaram, nicknamed “Thai.” Thai had her formal debut in dance (*araṅkēṛam*) 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 Thai 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 ones 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, 1912–1913), inspired largely by North Indian music, and *Ragamalika* (Garland of Ragas, 1912–1922), a virtual recreation of a single recording

by Coimbatore Thayi. *Ragamalika* is based on Thayi's recording of Tamil devotional hymns called *Aruṭpā* or *Tiruvaruṭpā* by the saint Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷār (1823–1874). Thayi died on August 17, 1917.

35. 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 *tawā'ifs* and recording artists, see Sachdeva-Jha (2009). Details about Gauhar Van are also found in a recent biography (Sampath 2010).

36. This was not Gauhar Jan's only visit to South India. Toward the end of her life, in 1928, she was invited to the Mysore court of Nālvaḍi Kṛṣṇarāja Uḍaiyār (r. 1902–1940). She was appointed as a palace musician, and died of pneumonia at the Krishnarajendra Hospital in 1930 at the age of fifty-seven.

37. 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 *Gāndharvakalpavalli* (1912).

38. 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 “aṃtalone tēllavāre.” In the film, the *jāvaḷi* was sung by playback singer P. Susheela (b. 1935).

39. The scene with the dance sequence is notable for a number of reasons. While the main dancer is played by a woman from the *kalāvantula* community, the woman playing the troupe leader (*nāyakurālu*) is Surabhi Kamalabai (1913–1977), a woman born into a community of Telugu drama artists and the first woman to act in a Telugu film (she played the role of Līlavati in the 1931 Telugu film *Bhakta Prahlada*). The *nāyakurālu* is also supplemented by a Brahmin dance-master from the all-male *kūcipūḍi* village tradition. The film was made at a time when *kūcipūḍi* was being reinvented as an urban, “classical” dance form in Madras, and thus the idea of Brahmin men as teachers (and thus custodians) of courtesan dance was ubiquitous (Soneji 2004, 166–170).

CHAPTER THREE

1. A large body of scholarly writing exists on the topic of the Indian Contagious Diseases Acts and Victorian perspectives on prostitution in India. Particularly noteworthy are works that address the fascinating figure of British feminist Josephine Butler (1828–1906) and the “white woman's burden.” See, for example, Burton (1994, 127–169) and Wallace (1998).

2. Lock hospitals were scattered throughout the colonies and the metropole. They were sites where “the contrapuntal forces of colonial social hygiene and military discipline were brought to bear on the diseased bodies of women inmates” (Hodges 2005a, 381). For details on the conditions of lock hospital inmates in the empire, see Levine (2003, 70–80).

3. *Report on Public Instruction in the Madras Presidency for 1875–76*, 203.
4. Madras Government Order 271, June 6, 1877, no. 3–4, cited in Anantha Raman (1996), 36.
5. Having noted the institutional and political frameworks through which these women were given voice, I also take seriously Kalpana Kannabiran's observation that there is an ambivalence in Reddy's position: "While on the one hand she consciously sets herself apart from the community whose cause she espouses (and in doing this she is in a sense reiterating a distinction that already exists and is based on class and political power), on the other hand the sheer range of issues she raises, some of them explicitly feminist, sets her apart from the class she identifies with and the people and institutions she shares power with" (1995, 65).
6. An extensive discussion of Dadabhoy's interventions is found in Jordan (2003, 75–86).
7. It is significant that scholars often gloss Reddy as "the daughter of a *devadāsī*" or simply as a *devadāsī* herself. To be sure, Reddy did not grow up in a courtesan household, and her early academic progress can be attributed to her influential Brahmin father, who brought her to Madras and ensured that she was admitted into the medical college. Although in Reddy's own account (1964, 1–11) it appears that her mother and father were actually married, this may have not been the case.
8. S. Anandhi is currently completing a major work dealing with the life of Muthulakshmi Reddy.
9. The topic of land tenure and *devadāsīs* in colonial South India is a complex one, but this is also terrain that has already been covered by a number of scholars. For a general overview on nineteenth-century South Indian systems of land tenure, particularly with reference to temple and courtly *ināms*, see Appadurai (1981); Dirks (1993, 2001) and Good (2004). For details on *devadāsīs* and *inām* lands, see Kannabiran (1995); J. Nair (1994); Parker (1998); Ramachendrier (1892); A. Srinivasan (1984).
10. As Michelle Elizabeth Tusan (2003) has shown, Reddy was also a close associate of Margaret Cousins (1878–1954), a radical Irish feminist who came to India at the invitation of Annie Besant. Cousins was instrumental in appointing Reddy and Malati Patwardhan as the two Indian general editors of the journal *Stri Dharma*, started in 1918 by British feminists.
11. Meetings of "*devadāsī* associations" were held, for example, in Kanchipuram, Madhurantakam, Tiruchendur, and as far south as the Tirunelveli district.
12. T. Duraikkannu, handbill, dated 1927, the Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers (*hereafter* MRP), Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, subject file 11, (part II), 72, emphasis added.
13. On November 5, 1927, the Madras Devadasi Association resolved to "unanimously and emphatically" protest Reddy's resolution. This statement was typed and sent as a letter to C. P. Ramaswami Iyer and to the governor's office. On November 10, 1927, Iyer responded with a request that the association draft a full memo outlining the grievances of its members. By the next day, on November 11, 1927, the memorandum had already been composed and sent to Iyer's residence. The memorandum has also been discussed at length in works by Jordan (2003), Kannabiran and Kannabiran (2003), Meduri (1996), Srividya Natarajan (1997), and others.

14. Bangalore Nagaratnammal is a significant figure in the context of *devadāsīs* and texts in colonial South India. She was responsible for publishing *Rādhikā Sāntvanamu* (“Appeasing Rādhā”), an erotic text attributed to a courtesan named Muddupaḷani who lived during the reign of King Pratāpasimha (r. 1739–1763) at the Tanjavur Marāṭhā court. Considered a masterpiece of Telugu literature, Nagaratnammal had the text published in Madras in 1910, and this sparked considerable debate about *devadāsīs* in the public sphere. Police seized copies of the book in 1911, and its publishers were charged with violating obscenity laws. An official ban on the book was imposed in 1927, and lifted only twenty years later. For more on Nagaratnammal, see Tharu and Lalitha (1993), Jackson (1994), and Sriram (2007).

15. Madras Devadasi Association, memorandum entitled “The Humble Memorial of Devadasis of the Madras Presidency,” 2. MRP, subject file 11 (part II), 283–287.

16. MRP, subject file 12 (part II), 90–91. A longer excerpt from this letter is reproduced in appendix 1.

17. Muthulakshmi Reddy to A. R. MacEwen, MRP, subject file 11 (part II), 282.

18. Satyamurti’s conservatism surfaced in a number of important debates around sexuality, marriage, and family in the Madras Legislative Assembly. S. Anandhi’s insightful essay “Sexuality and Nation” (1997) describes Satyamurti’s protests against the Child Marriage Restraint Act (the purpose of which was to outlaw child marriage) and the Hindu Marriage Dissolution Bill (granting the legal right of divorce to Hindus).

19. *Tamiḷ Nāṭu*, November 5, 1927, in MRP, subject file 12 (part II), p. 11.

20. This is cataloged as manuscript 6523B. This manuscript is believed to be in the author’s own handwriting. Another (presumably later) copy of this same work exists in the library, under the title *Vēciyā Tarmam* (6523A), but this copy omits many portions found in the original work. I am presently completing an essay about *Tācikaḷ Tarmam*, which will include translations of large portions of the text.

21. Cēṣacāyī Ayyaṅkār’s other Sanskrit works also housed in the Sarasvati Mahal Library include *Puruṣārthakalpalatā* (“Compendium on the Four Aims of Man”), *Ṛgveda Viṣayaḥ* (“On the Ṛgveda”), *Gāyatrī Japakāla Kartavyam* (“Duty of the Timely Recitation of the Gāyatrī Mantra”), and *Rāmāyaṇa Nāṭakah* (“Drama based on the Rāmāyaṇa”).

22. The Sanskrit sources he cites in his discussions of *veśyās* include *Smṛticandrikā*, *Nāradaśmṛti*, and *Śukranīti* (Dharmaśāstric texts), the *Skandapurāṇa* and *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, and even the Sanskrit plays *Mṛcchakaṭikam* and *Vikramorvaṣīyam*, whose heroines are understood as “ideal” courtesans because, Cēṣacāyī claims, they were monogamous (*ekacāriṇī*).

23. This is found in an English newspaper clipping entitled “Kalavanthulus in Conference,” dated August 15, 1927, MRP, subject file 11 (part II), 66.

24. G. Nagabhushanam to Reddy dated October 10, 1929, MRP, subject file 11 (part II), 373.

25. We have already seen examples of this type of writing. Yūcup *Tācikaḷ Vēcam Maṇarkaḷ Mōcam* includes passages such as the following:

Friends, think carefully about the behavior of these *dāsīs*. Let me tell you about them. They are born as female demons, born for the sake of money. They will

profess love to anyone right from God to the lowest class, as long as he has money. If you have money they will welcome you; if not, they'll abuse you like you are a pariah (6) . . . It is said that earlier Brahmā had created these ladies to work as slaves (*aṭimai toḷiḷ*). But in reality, they have the *poṭṭu* tied, and just swindle money from everyone. Do these ladies who have deviated from the righteous path and become prostitutes (*viḷai mātar*), do these bloody women need to justify their existence based on *śāstra*? (7)

26. Both of these essays were published in the Self-Respect Movement's Tamil weekly *Kuṭi Aracu* ("The Republic"), on March 23 and March 30, 1930, respectively. Discussions of these texts and other writing by women of the Self-Respect Movement are found in Srilata (2003).

27. Muvalur Ramamirttamal to Reddy, dated October 13, 1927, MRP, subject file 11 (part III), 461.

28. A recent Tamil feature film, *Periyar* (2006), directed by Gnana Rajasekharan and partially funded by the Tamil Nadu State Government, contains an interesting scene featuring Muvalur Ramamirttamal. The scene opens with a *devadāsī* dancing in a temple *maṇḍapa* before a large image of the god Śiva-Naṭarāja. The song she sings is about her oppression, couched in the metaphoric language of *bhakti*. Suddenly, Ramamirttamal bursts onto the *maṇḍapa* accompanied by a young man who has come forth to marry the *devadāsī*. Periyar too arrives, and after a lengthy debate with the audience gathered at the *maṇḍapa* about the oppressive nature of *devadāsī* culture, Periyar marries the couple right there and then. The film was funded by the Tamil Nadu State Government through a grant of 95 lakh rupees, and Karunanidhi presided over a major function to celebrate the film's 100 day in theaters on August 8, 2007. These kinds of popular depictions of Ramamirttamal inevitably frame the "normalizing" of non-Brahmin women's sexuality as one of the key features of non-Brahmin respectability, a position that is certainly maintained in the contemporary *icai vēḷāḷar* community.

29. The scheme was briefly advertised by the Kanchipuram district website in 2006 immediately following Karunanidhi's victory in the elections that year, but later removed. <http://kanchi.nic.in/social.htm>.

30. The scheme was officially relaunched on Karunanidhi's eighty-third birthday, less than a month after he was reelected. <http://www.hindu.com/2006/06/03/stories/2006060314550100.htm>.

31. Amrit Srinivasan notes that one of these meetings took place "around 1948" in Kuttalam. Although this particular meeting might have adopted a motion to publically use only the name *icai vēḷāḷar*, it is clear that the term was being used in an official capacity over two decades earlier. A thorough historicization of this process is severely lacking and offers tremendous scope for future research.

32. In his autobiography, nationalist reformer D. Chenchaiyah claims that the name "Kalavantula Samskarana Sangam" was first created by a man named M. Venkata Rao, the first president of that organization, sometime in the late 1920s (Cēṃcayya 1952, 178).

In her 1928 essay entitled *The Awakening Demand for Devadasi Legislation*, Reddy provides a list of the *devadāsī* associations that support her actions. Many of these are

kalāvantula organizations in the Telugu-speaking regions, including the Devadasi Association of Tenali Taluq, Repalle Taluq Female Devadasi Sangam, Anantapur District Kalavanthulu Reformation Society, Anantapur District Kalavanthulu Reformation Society (Tadpatri), Kalavanthulu Social Reform Association of Guntur, Kalavanthulu Association of Bapatla, Kalavanthulu Sevasangam of Amalapuram, and the Andhradesa Devadasis' Sangha Sanskarana Sabha of Tirupati.

33. The most systematic studies of the complexities of *jāti* issues in these communities are found in A. Srinivasan (1984, 75–167) and Terada (1992, 174–243).

34. In the Tanjavur district, life-cycle rituals were overseen by a man from the community who was given the title *rāyar*. The *rāyar* was a key officiant during marriage and funeral ceremonies. He cemented social relations in the community and often mediated between the subgroups within the community.

35. MRP, subject file 11 (part III), 482–485. The full text of this letter is reproduced in Appendix 1.

36. MRP, subject file 11 (part III), 442–443. The full text of this letter is reproduced in Appendix 1.

37. Court case involving Sree Venkateswara Swami and Sree Visweswara Swamy temple in Vadapalle (East Godavari district), dated November 1929, MRP, subject file 11 (part II), 259–260.

38. In some cases it was unclear whether *devadāsīs* were entitled to the *inām* lands or to a portion of the revenue generated from it. In many of these cases, *devadāsīs* petitioned *inām* commissioners to reexamine their original land tenure deeds. An example of this is found in Muthulakshmi Reddy's files (MRP, subject file 11 [part II], 275–276). Two women, Dharanikota Sambrajjam and Kalava Sarasiruham, "in possession of the Kumbaharathi inams" at the "Sree Venkateswara Someswara Kudaleswaraswami temple" situated at Sekur in the Guntur District, asked the Guntur commissioner to reexamine the original land deeds to ascertain that they in fact were the rightful owners of the land.

39. MRP, subject file 11 (part II), 239.

40. To be sure, the informal alignment between sons of *devadāsīs* and *naṭṭuvanārs* with *vēlālas* and *mutaliyārs* goes much further back, as illustrated by a British anthropologist writing in 1871. However, it is significant that anti-nautch debates formalized and politicized these identifications.

The greater part of the singers now-a-days belong to the anomalous class called *nattuvan*, the sons of dancing girls, knowing nothing of their fathers and, therefore, of the caste to which they should belong. Formerly they were rigorously shut out of the Hindu body politic, yet as their mothers, they were not despised or treated as outcastes. They were the property of the God, bound to his service, entitled to a share in his offerings. They grew up as musicians, as lighters of lamps, as stewards and general servants in the pagodas. In modern times the English law has made a vast difference in their condition. If the mother be well-to-do and can give her son a good education, she tacks the caste title "Moodelliar" after his name and sends him away from the place of his birth to a district where his antecedents are not known. In his new position none can deny that he is a Vellala. If he becomes rich

none would wish to refuse him the privilege. Choosing the daughter of some poor Vellala who finds it prudent to ask no questions, he marries into his assumed caste. The issue of the marriage are as good as Vellalas as those who came in the train of Agastya. In this way the sons of the temple women are constantly absorbed. Formerly such things could not be done. The Nattuvan found himself an outsider, civilly treated it is true, but yet without a privilege and almost without a right. (Gover 1871, xv–xvi)

41. Interestingly, as this book was being written, Karunanidhi's daughter, Kanimozhi (b. 1968 in Chennai), rose to phenomenal success, becoming a member of Parliament and representing Tamil Nadu in the Rajya Sabha (the upper house of India's Parliament). Kanimozhi has become well known for her support of women's welfare programs and the transgendered *aravani* community in Tamil Nadu. Kanimozhi, however, does not, to my knowledge, publicly claim *icai vēḷāḷar* status as her father does.

42. <http://www.isaivelalar.com/aboutus.htm> (accessed December 1, 2009).

43. These cases are found in the following periodicals: *Madras [Chennai] High Court Reports* (1953–2001); the *Madras Law Journal* (1953–1980), the *Andhra High Court Reports* (1961–2001), and the *Indian Law Reports* (1950–present).

44. The proceedings note, for example, that “Ranganayaki and the plaintiff used to give public performance in ‘Golla Kalapam’ and ‘Bhama Kalapam’ etc., before the plaintiff settled in married life with the eighth defendant.” These are the *kalāvantula āta-bhāgavatam* performances that I discuss briefly in chapter 5.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. A prominent NGO called the Weaker Section Welfare Association (WESWA) based in Viralmalai has a page on its website entitled “Legacy of the Devadasi System: Background of Hereditary Prostitution in Pudukottai District” (<http://weswa.org/devadasi.htm>.) that reads as follows:

India is a country known for its temples. The gods and goddesses were worshipped with dance according to the Indian tradition. To dance regularly in these temples nobody came forward. So to find and get regularly girls for dancing in these temples they introduced a system called “Devadasi System.” Devadasi means ‘maid-servant of God.’ Originally they were provided with houses to stay and lands to earn their livelihood. Thus they were living a pious, devoted and decent life.

But in the course of the time rich land lords, zamindars and even petty kings lured these dancing girls with their money and comforts and involved them in prostitution. Thus they, in the course of the time became property of pleasure for royal and rich people.

As the number of dancing girls increased and as the landlord and zamindari systems were abolished in India after independence these dancing girls were not entertained by these rich and royal people. They stopped dancing in the temples. The original purpose for which this systems was introduced was lost the deviation of the systems gained momentum they become full time prostitutes as they are not used to hard work in the field and used only to comfort. Luxury and pleasure in

the past. Now they are available to anyone who is ready to pay them . . . There are 80 families in this place involving in prostitution presently. They are often taken to various towns for prostitution. Many rich people visit them also from towns regularly.

2. Murukaṅ is said to have appeared to Anuṅakiri in the form of a hunter, and led him to the temple atop the Viralimalai hill, where he is thought to have composed sixteen hymns to Murukaṅ as Caṅmukanātar that are found in the *Tiruppukal*. Several other Tamil *bhakti* poems are attributed to Aruṅakiri, including *Kantar Alaṅkāram*, *Kantaraṅtāti*, *Vēl Viruttam*, *Mayil Viruttam*, *Cēval Viruttam*, *Tiruvelukūṟṟirukkai*, and *Tiruvakuppu*. Aruṅakiri becomes an iconic figure among *icai vēlāḷars* in the twentieth century. Many *icai vēlāḷar* caste organizations are called “Aruṅakirinātar Caṅkam,” and statues of Aruṅakiri have been funded by men from the *icai vēlāḷar* community. This has to do with their support of the “Tamil music” (*tamiḷ icai*) movement, which sought to revitalize a distinctly Tamil (as opposed to Telugu or Sanskrit) music tradition in Tamil Nadu, and drew in large part from the emergence of Dravidian politics. The relationship between the “Tamil music” movement and Dravidian politics has been described at length by L. Subramanian (2006, 2007), Terada (1992), and Weidman (2006).

3. Other shrines in the temple complex include those to the goddess Maik-kaṅṅutaiyāl (a small *ammaṅ* shrine located at the base of the hill), the guardian deity Iṅṅumpan, and a smaller cave shrine for Mīṅāṅci of Madurai and her consort Cuntarēcuvarar. The Caṅmukamūrtti *maṅḍapam* also houses a *palliyarai*, or bedchamber, which is used during the nightly *palliyarai cēvai* (“bedchamber ritual”) in which the god and his consort are ceremonially put to sleep for the night.

4. *Naṅṅuvaṅārs* who were actively performing in the temple and court, and women who had undergone *poṅṅukkaṅṅu* were allotted *māṅiyam* grants. The *māṅiyam* was divided into shares (*paṅkus*), which would be managed internally by elders in the family. In the case of Ramachandra Nattuvanar, he received twenty acres of land as an ancestral service allotment from his mother Nagammal, who also received the same.

5. Ulaganatha Pillai, son of Sivarama Nattuvanar, narrated a story about the brothers, which involved the performance of a text called *Rakunātarāya Kuṅavaṅci*. The premiere (*araṅkēṅṅam*) of the *kuṅavaṅci* was staged at the *darbār* in the presence of the king. The role of the Ciṅkaṅ was danced by Ramasvami and the Kuṅatti (Ciṅki) by his wife Akhilandam. Over the course of the performance, the couple divined that the *rājā* would soon become the father of a male child. The *naṅṅuvaṅār* was of course handsomely rewarded by Raja Vijaya Raghunatha Raya Tondaiman who gave him a house, jewels, and eight *devadāsīs* to work with so that his presentations at the *darbār* and Tirugokarnam temple would remain of a high standard. Personal communication, December 27, 2004.

6. Detailed information about Martanda Bhairava is found in Waghorne (1994). In many respects, he was the ideal gentleman-*raja*; his life is described by Waghorne as follows:

Now the *raja* of Pudukkottai no longer spent money uselessly on palanquins, jewels for inveigling wives, or extravagant religious ceremonies. Thos. Cook & Son’s

Information for Travelers, and catalogs for fine leather saddles, silver teapots, tennis rackets, steamer trunks, and of course the latest prices for Rolls Royces are still among the artifacts of this gentleman-*raja* in the old palace record boxes . . . But this perfect picture of colonialism ended ironically. By 1917, neither His Highness's subjects nor the British could relish his presence; the lovelorn prince married an Australian beauty, much to the chagrin of his colonial keepers, who recoiled as he stepped too firmly into their world. (1994, 81)

Native and British dissatisfaction with Martanda Bhairava following his marriage to Molly Fink is also discussed at length by Dirks (1993, 391–397).

7. The story of “Sayimata” Siva Brindadevi (1927–1998) is unique. She was an informant for Saskia Kersenboom's ethnographic work on *devadāsīs* in the early 1980s, and a ritual composition (swing song or *ūñjal*) she knew is recorded in Kersenboom's book (Kersenboom 1987, 160). Around this time, she had just founded the Thilagavathiar Thiruvarul Adheenam in Pudukkottai, on the grounds of the former home of S. Narayanaswami, Muthulakshmi Reddy's father. She became an ascetic sometime in the 1970s. She was the first female head of a Śaiva *ādhīnam*. She was also the president of the World Hindu Women's Organization (WHWO), which she also founded in Pudukkottai in 1984. In 1986, she traveled to Malaysia to inaugurate the second conference of the organization, where she was described as the “sannyasini abbess of an Indian adheenam monastery” (Thiruvassagam 1986, 23). In 1997, reacting strongly to a performance entitled “Vata Vriksha: Banyan Tree” (1996) by Bharatanāṭyam dancer Lakshmi Viswanathan, she wrote a forceful letter to the editor of *Sruti*, a popular music and dance magazine from Chennai. Her concern was that “devadasis were portrayed in a very bad light” in the dance production, as was her maternal aunt, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy. In the letter, she speaks passionately about the stigma of being a *devadāsī*: “[I]t was common to abuse a girl of any community for using even cosmetics by asking her rhetorically: ‘Why do you make-up like a tevadiyal?’ Applying facial makeup was not the habit solely of the devadasi-s, but the abuse directly or indirectly pointed to them” (Siva Brindadevi 1997, 5). She was known to have discussed her *devadāsī* past quite freely and openly with others. She died in 2000. Today, her disciples run her monastery, which is named after Tilakavatiyār, the sister of the Tamil saint Appar. The monastery also houses a state government-approved English medium school called the Muthulakshmi Reddi Nursery and Primary School. Sayimata's successor Dayananda Chandrasekaran has authored a major biography on her (2003), and has also recently written a book on Muthulakshmi Reddy (2007).

The organization also runs a website, <http://sivabrindadevi.org>, and a channel on YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/sivabrindadevi>.

8. A major biography of Sashiah Sastri was written in 1902 (Aiyar 1902). An engaging, critical discussion of Sashiah Sastri based on the Pudukkottai palace records is found in Waghorne (1994).

9. Joanne Waghorne's work with the Pudukkottai palace records has unearthed correspondence between Sashiah Sastri and the government of India to this effect:

Next I found it necessary to nail up a secret door which opened directly to the apartments of the Senior Princess and allowing all sorts of characters at all hours of

the day and night. Next I stopped the ingress of all dancing girls who were found in constant company with the Princess . . . (Waghorne 1994, 63)

10. The Madras Devadasi Association wrote letters denouncing the bill that then circulated in the press. In reaction, caste organizations consisting of men from the *devadāsī* community published letters that taunted the Madras Devadasi Association for its justifications of *devadāsī* lifestyles. The letter from the Isai Velalar Sangam in Kadalur is found in appendix 1.

11. The proceedings of these debates are reproduced in MRP, subject file 11 (part III), 561–574.

12. The son of Martanda Bhairava Tondaiman and Molly Fink, Martanda Sydney Tondaiman, was born in 1916 in Sydney, Australia. But there was opposition to his succession of the Pudukkottai throne, and the decision to declare Rajagopala Tondaiman ruler in 1928 was made by the government of India, apparently owing to public opinion (Ayyar 1940, 905; Dirks 1993, 396).

13. MRP, subject file 11 (part III), 574.

14. Pandanallur Kumarasvami Nattuvanar (1846–1907) was one of the most famous dance masters of the Tanjore region. He was the first disciple of Civānantam of the Tanjore Quartet. He was also the teacher of Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai (1869–1954), one of the first *nattuvanārs* to teach urban middle-class women in the 1930s–1940s.

15. Chennai-based dancer Padma Subrahmanyam and her late sister-in-law Shyamala Balakrishnan came to Viralimalai in the 1960s to learn this *kuṟavañci* as part of Shyamala's doctoral research on Tamil folk music. Ramachandra Nattuvanar, his family, and his *devadāsī* student Ammakannu taught them the songs over a two-day period, though an acknowledgement of his contribution is largely excluded from the reworked versions of the *kuṟavañci* as it has been presented on urban stages and television since 1986. There is also another *kuṟavañci* text dedicated to Murukan at Viralimalai, the *Virālimalai Vēlavar Kuṟavañci*, written by one Piḷḷaipperumāḷ Kavirāyar, which exists only in textual form—it has no extant music or choreography. It was edited by V. R. Madhavan, and published in Madras in 1983. Another popular drama was *Kapilai Nāṭakam*, attributed to one Keśavabhārati of Sendamangalam, which was performed not at Viralimalai, but at the Tirugokarnam temple. This is a dramatization of the *sthala purāṇa* of Tirugokarnam, in which a cow who comes to worship Śiva by carrying water in her ears for the temple rituals is granted liberation by the god. It was performed once annually on the day of *āvaṇi mūlotsava* in August–September, by *devadāsīs* and temple priests who would sing the songs of the drama. This tradition is said to have come to an end during the rule of Martanda Bhairava Tondaiman.

16. Ramachandra Nattuvanar's students included nearly all the *devadāsīs* of Viralimalai who lived in the early twentieth century. Picchaiyammal (dates unknown), Nallammal (1913–1976) and her sister Ammakannu (1915–1974), Sarasvati (b. 1922), and Marikkannu (b. 1924), all *devadāsīs* living in Viralimalai, were his students, in addition to his own daughter Muttukkannammal.

17. The music troupe that would accompany *devadāsīs* in performance also acquired the name *kañceṭṭu* (the English term “gunset”). This term was used in Tanjore

and Pudukkottai, and usually referred to a band made up of the bellows, clarinet, and *mṛdaṅgam* or *muṭṭu* drum.

18. My interviews and documentation project with Muttukkannammal took place over a period of four years, from 2005 to 2009. These were facilitated by her only student, Hari Krishnan.

19. There is a great deal of controversy around the etymology of the term *catir*. A number of scholars including B. M. Sundaram have noted the use of the Tamil word *catir*, likely a cognate of the Sanskrit *catura* (“clever,” “beautiful”) in early medieval Tamil sources. Others like Arudra have argued that it is derived from the Telugu *caduru*, referring to a court, *sabhā* or throne (Arudra 1986/87, 30). I am inclined to believe that since the term is always prefixed to the Urdu word *kaḥarī*, the use of this compound to refer to *devadāsī* dance has to be attributed to the courtly multilingualism of the eighteenth century. Thus, while earlier a term like *catir* may have been used in Tamil to refer to dance, the compound *catirkkaccēri* almost certainly reflects the distinctive Tanjorean cosmopolitanism discussed in chapter 1.

20. This is the song “kaṇṇūñjal āṭi-iruntāl” in the *rāga* Ānandabhairavī. *Devadāsīs* were often invited to sing these songs at upper-caste weddings, and these concerts were known as *kalyāṇakkaccēri*. A fascinating early twentieth-century collection of “wedding songs” (*kalyāṇappāṭṭu*) in Tamil entitled *Śrī Cāratā Caṅkita Kalyāṇap Pāṭṭu* (Kaṇṇaiyātās 1922) contains “swing songs” next to the *padams* of Kṣetrayya, implying that these genres were simultaneously performed by *devadāsīs* at weddings.

21. Dated 1820, TSML, 2C/17, also cited in Shelvankar 933, 15.

22. The Hindustānī portion of this song is fairly difficult to decipher. It appears to be written in the loose Braj-bhāṣā style that we see at the courts of Tanjore and Travancore in the nineteenth century. There is also a strong possibility that this portion of the song has come from the repertoire of the Tanjore *naṭṭuvaṇārs* who migrated to Baroda in the late nineteenth century. Gauri (1871–1950) and Kantimati (1872–1953), two *devadāsīs* who lived much of their lives in Baroda, danced a piece sometimes referred to as *madhumatta naṭanam* (“intoxicated dance”), which began with the same words as Muttukkannammal’s *mōṭi*. Gauri and Kantimati performed it at the Baroda court with a number of other “entertaining” pieces such as “Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Naṭanam” and “Pataṅg Uḍāi” (Sundaram 2003, 253). From a formal perspective, the text of the *mōṭi* dance is grammatically “incorrect,” but this of course does not diminish its value as cultural capital. Details about this style of Hindustānī language and music have already been discussed in chapter 1.

23. Brown, *Telugu-English Dictionary* (1903), s.v. “jātivāḷlu,” 462.

24. This song is not mentioned in the *Jātisvara Sāhityamulu* manuscript but is entitled “vande minākṣī tvam sarasija vaktre.” It is present in the Telugu treatise *Saṅgīta Saṃpradāya Pradarśini* prepared by Dikṣitar’s descendant Subbarāma Dikṣitulu, published in 1904.

25. Muttukkannammal’s repertoire also includes a large number of songs dedicated to Martanda Bhairava Tondaiman. These include an important *maṅgalam* (song of auspicious praise) in the *rāga* Sindhubhairavī on Murukaṇ at Vivalimalai, which ends with a verse dedicated to Martanda Bhairava, plus several *kummi* and *kōlāṭṭam* songs that would be danced by groups of *devadāsīs* in public settings. According to Muttuk-

kannammal, there seem to have been around a hundred compositions in total dedicated to Martanda Bhairava. This is corroborated by Joanne Waghorne, who provides the text of a song dedicated to Martanda Bhairava sung for her by Tirugokarnam Saraswati, a *devadāsī* she interviewed in Pudukkottai (Waghorne 1994, 180).

CHAPTER FIVE

1. The term *abhimāna strī* was used by several *kalāvantula* women in coastal Andhra Pradesh but also appears in turn-of-the-century writing by Tamil *devadāsīs*. A case in point is a Tamil text published in 1911 entitled *Uruttirakaṇikaiyar Katācāratiraṭṭu* by Ka. Añcukam, a *devadāsī* from Colombo, Sri Lanka. In the autobiographical section of the work, she refers to herself as the “*apimāna strī*” of Ka. Cinnaiyā Piḷḷai, a wealthy merchant in Colombo (Añcukam 1911, 226; Soneji 2010).

2. The most prominent of these organizations was the AMG India International, established in 1968. I have written about the representations of *kalāvantulu* in the rehabilitation programs of this organization elsewhere (Soneji 2008).

3. Caste associations in some parts of coastal Andhra Pradesh are still quite active. In Duvva village (West Godavari district), for example, Saride Seshagiri Rao and Saride Narasimha Rao head the Kalavanthulu Sangham (Reg. 308/88), which seeks to regulate outsiders’ representation of and accessibility to *kalāvantula* women in the region.

4. The first line of the text of the song is *ḅṃto jesināve ḅlamaḅi kōmpamāpitivi, o laṃjamuṇḅa*.

5. For celebratory readings of “*Vilāsini Nāṭyam*” see Jyoti (2010) and Swapnasundari’s own book entitled *Vilasini Natyam: Bharatam of Telugu Court and Temple Dancers* (2010).

6. There are a couple of exceptions to this general observation. One is the case of Annabhatula Lakshmi Mangatayaru, granddaughter of Annabhatula Buli Venkataratnam. Mangatayaru lives in her ancestral home in the village of Mummidivaram in the East Godavari district, but also performs quite regularly in public. She runs a small dance school in Mummidivaram as well. Much of this is due to the encouragement her family was provided by Nataraja Ramakrishna in the 1970s. Another example is that of the young dancer Yashoda Thakore, who did not know that she was from a *kalāvantula* background until after she decided to take up dance professionally. Thakore grew up in Hyderabad, where she currently lives and works. She holds a Ph.D. in dance from the University of Hyderabad, and has recently charted her own social and aesthetic journey in a fascinating essay published in a Telugu-language newspaper (Thakore, 2009).

7. In the *pallavi* (“sprout”), one line of music is repeated over and over again, and the dancer performs specific sets of “choreographed” movement. There are actually three types of *pallavis*: *svrapallavi* (performed to a song consisting of notes, called *svaras*), *śabdapallavi* (performed to a song consisting of rhythmic syllables set to a melody), and *sāhityapallavi*, considerably shorter and performed to a song with lyrics. These three forms of *pallavi* still survive in the *kalāvantula* community (I have seen performances of *svrapallavi* in the *rāga* Ārabhi, and *śabdapallavis* in the *rāgas* Ānandabhairavi and Maṅiraṅgu), and are also found in a set of manuscripts from Viz-

ianagaram thought to be approximately 150 years old (Appa Rao 1952). For a brief note on the *svrapallavi* as a musical genre, see Satyanarayana Rao (1965).

8. An example is the famous *varṇam* in the *rāga* Reguṭṭi (Mohanam) “sarigā dānīpai,” attributed to the composer Karvetinagaram Govindasāmyya (c. 1680–1740). This is a very early example of the kind of virtuosic piece that was later foregrounded by the Quartet. This composition is found in two printed texts, the *Saṅgīta Saṃpradāya Pradarśini* (1904) of Subbarāma Dikṣitulu (1839–1906), and in the *Abhinaya Svayambodhini* (1915) discussed later in this chapter.

9. An example of one of these “local” *varṇams* is referred to popularly as *pedda bhairavi varṇam*, “great Bhairavi *varṇam*,” to distinguish it from the other Bhairavi *varṇam* (dedicated to King Serfoji II of Tanjore), which I examined in chapter 1. This one, beginning with the words “sāmi vinarā,” is dedicated to the god Śiva as Kōppeśvara in the temple at Palivela in East Godavari district.

10. Composers such as Vidyala Narayanasvami Nayudu of Tirupati (1875–1942) and Neti Subbaraya Sastri (c. 1880–1940), for example, composed *jāvālis* that became tremendously popular in the coastal Andhra Pradesh region (Arudra 1986b). The poets themselves had close interactions with the *kalāvantula* women of their times. Vidyala Narayanasvami Nayudu’s mother was from the *kalāvantula* community, and he regularly sang for the dance performances of Nayudupeta Rajamma, a famous courtesan from Sri Kalahasti (Chittoor district). I have had the opportunity to see a number of Neti Subbaraya Sastri’s compositions in performance, marked by his “signature” or *makuṭa* “*naupuriṣa*.”

11. Sastri’s evocation of Sanskrit treatises on dance such as *Bharatārṇava* and *Abhinayadarpaṇa* is significant. Most palm leaf manuscripts of the *Abhinayadarpaṇa* were in Telugu script, and were found, like many manuscripts of *Bhāmākalāpam* and the *Gītagovinda*, in the homes of Brahmin scholar-poets who interacted with Telugu-speaking *devadāsīs*. South Indian Brahmin men were involved in the production of courtesan dance as composers, scholar-teachers, and interpreters. Brahmin men were also involved as the scholarly collaborators of *devadāsīs* and *naṭṭuvanārs* in some parts of South India. Chetlur Narayana Ayyankar, for example, coauthored the Tamil text *Apiṇaya Navanītam* in 1886 with Panchapakesa Nattuvanar of Tanjore (1842–1902). The silence around much of this nineteenth- and early twentieth-century intercaste collaboration has to do with the fact that Brahmin men were also largely the sexual partners of *devadāsīs*. This, combined with political non-Brahmin assertion and the appropriation of courtesan dance by Brahmins in the middle of the twentieth century, has created serious, palpable caste-based tensions around dance in contemporary Tamil Nadu.

12. The term *kalāpam*, which is one of the most common ways of referring to the texts or scripts for these performances, has several meanings. First, it can simply mean “bundle” or “assemblage,” a meaning that is reflected in the structure of the genre as a collection of literary forms such as *daruvu*, *cūrṇika*, and *padyam*, all linked by a single narrative framework. Another meaning of the word *kalāpam* that elaborates upon this idea is “a peacock’s tail,” where again, each of the forms that constitute the *kalāpam* are seen as comprising various hues and shades, yet all held together by conceptual or narrative uniformity. One of the earliest of such texts that survives in a nearly

complete form is the *Āṭabhāgavatam Bhāmaveśakatha*, written by the poet Narakuri Nārāyaṇa, under the patronage of Velugoṭi Kumāra Yācendra Nāyūḍu (r. 1777–1804), the *zamīndār* of Venkatagiri (Nellore district), held at the Oriental Research Institute, Tirupati (D1899). By the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Velugoṭi *zamīndārs* of Venkatagiri were great patrons of courtesan dance. A. Sastri (1922) and Sadāśiva Śāstri (1910) provide accounts of cultural patronage at Venkatagiri.

13. Elsewhere (2004, 74–91) I have proposed a tripartite typology of *yakṣagāna*, *kalāpam*, and *veṣam* to understand the complex metagenres of traditional theater in Telugu-speaking South India. *Yakṣagāna* refers to full-length dramas that tell linear narratives, in which multiple actors play various roles. Examples include the mid- to upper-caste *vīdhi-nāṭakam* (also called *bayalāṭa*) and the *cindu-bhāgavatam* performed by Dalits from the *māḍiga* community. *Kalāpam* involves one, or at most two, characters; it has little narrative content but usually explores a particular mood or *bhāva*. Examples include *kūcipūḍi-bhāgavatam* performed by *smārta* Brahmins, *tūrupu-bhāgavatam* performed by the goldsmith (*kammari*) community, and the *kalāvāntulu āṭa-bhāgavatam* that we are discussing here. The final metagenre is *veṣam* or *veṣālu* (lit. “guises”) in which one character performs a monologue or a scene from a known drama. An example is the genre of *paḡaṭi veṣālu*, which include *bahurūpulu* (a more formal, usually upper-caste version) and *jātra veṣālu* (performed at the time of festivals or *jātras* such as those for the goddess Gaṅgama in Tirupati).

14. For a discussion of some dimensions of the *kalāpam* or *āṭa-bhāgavatam* genre as social critique, see Jonnalagadda (1997).

15. For example, the famous poet of the Godavari delta, Gaddam Subbarayudu Sastri (d. 1940) composed individual *Bhāmākalāpam* librettos for fourteen *kalāvāntulu* in the East Godavari region, including the famed Maddula Lakshminarayana and Maddula Venkataratnam. Atkuri Subba Rao, a contemporary of Sastri, composed similar librettos for the *kalāvāntulu* of the famous Annabhatula family of Mummidivaram.

16. In one exceptional, localized instance, courtesan *āṭa-bhāgavatam* was performed on a large scale, and this was known as *navajanārdana pārijātam*. In the late nineteenth century, when Gangadhara Rama Rao ruled the *zamīndāri* of Pithapuram (c. 1877), a woman named Pendela Satyabhama was the primary dancer of the Kuntimādhava temple there. She participated in the performance called *navajanārdanam* (“nine Janārdanas” [Janārdana is a name of Viṣṇu]), held annually in the *māhamaṇḍapa* (main pavilion) of the temple. In the *navajanārdana* ritual, usually hosted by the *zamīndār* of Pithapuram, nine *devadāsī meḷams* would perform *Bhāmākalāpam* for nine consecutive nights. This was done in relay fashion, in which one *devadāsī* would resume the drama where the previous performer had left off. The text of the songs interpreted during the *navajanārdana* ritual thus consisted of a number of individual librettos coming together over the course of the nine night-long performance. On the evening of the tenth night, the tenth canto of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* would be recited in Sanskrit, and the local ruler, the Maharaja of Pithapuram [the *zamīndār*] as the commissioner (*yajamāna*) of the ritual, along with the *kalāvāntulu*, would receive ritual honors and gifts from the temple. The name *navajanārdanam* is derived from a circuit of nine Vaiṣṇava temples in the Godavari River delta. Although the Kuntimādhava temple in Pithapuram is oddly not one of the *navajanārdana* temples, it appears to have been the site where such perfor-

mances, in honor of the nine localized forms of Viṣṇu-Janārdanasvāmi, were held. Some of the songs from the text for this performance were dedicated to Viṣṇu as the “Lord of Piṭhikāpura” (Pithapuram). Several accomplished women artists were called upon to perform in the *navajanārdana pārijātam*. For example, according to Saride Manikyam, her aunt, Saride Chandramma, was brought to Pithapuram by the Maharaja to take part in the *navarajanārdanam* in the early part of the 1920s. The *meḷams* were carefully chosen by the Maharaja on the basis of the skills and accomplishments of the performers. Today what is left of the *navajanārdanam* survives in the form of a few songs taught to dance teacher Nataraja Ramakrishna by Pendela Satyabhama. These songs obviously represent only a very small portion of the whole gamut of the texts meant for *navajanārdanam* performance.

17. To my knowledge, this composition, like many of the *jāvaḷis* of coastal Andhra Pradesh, has never been published. Therefore, the full text (*sāhitya*) is fragmented and has been pieced together by Saride Maithili. Her memory of the composition is vague but nonetheless conveys much of the spirit of the text.

APPENDIX ONE

1. MRP, subject file 11 (part III), 482–485.
2. MRP, subject file 11 (part III), 442–443.
3. *Cutēcamittiraṅ*, n.d.
4. MRP, subject file 11 (part II), 72.
5. Date unavailable. MRP, subject file 12 (part II), 90–91.
6. MRP, subject file 11 (part II), 58.

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Unfinished Gestures presents the social and cultural history of courtesans in South India who are generally called *devadāsīs*, focusing on their encounters with colonial modernity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Following a hundred years of vociferous social reform, including a 1947 law that criminalized their lifestyles, the women in *devadāsī* communities contend with severe social stigma and economic and cultural disenfranchisement. Adroitly combining ethnographic fieldwork with historical research, Davesh Soneji provides a comprehensive portrait of these marginalized women and unsettles received ideas about relations among them, the aesthetic roots of their performances, and the political efficacy of social reform in their communities.

"Sensitive, sympathetic, and very well written, *Unfinished Gestures* moves the debate about *devadāsīs* in a new and interesting direction and will be the standard-bearer in the field. Soneji's ethnographic work supports his historical claims and brings to life the poignancy of contemporary *devadāsīs*' lives."

JANAKI BAKHLE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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