

NARRATIVE TRADITIONS  
OF A TELUGU EPIC

*Palnātivīrula Katha*



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ARUNA BOMMAREDDI



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY  
Rashtrapati Nivas, Shimla

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*For*  
the Vīra Vidyāvantulu  
&  
the Burrakatha Performers



# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
1. Method to the Madness	1
2. Epic and its Environment: Pre-Vijayanagara Andhra	17
3. Of the Narrative	37
4. The Written Texts of Palnātivīra Caritra: Some Themes	69
5. Telugu Consciousness	93
Annexure I	119
Annexure II	156
Annexure III	162
<i>References</i>	167





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## Preface

The manuscript was written towards the fulfilment of a Fellowship for advanced research at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla between 2013 and 2015. The project titled “Narrative Traditions of a Telugu Epic: *Palnātivīrula Katha*” is laid out in five chapters. The first chapter gives a broad outline to Telugu literary history by way of understanding the tradition of *Palnātivīrula Katha* in the available oral and written traditions. It constructs the methodology for understanding the specific epic of Palnādu by using the terms *narrative*, *tradition*, *text* and *epic*. The next chapter makes an attempt to understand the sociological implications of the epic and its times while also resolving some critical issues related to authorship of the written texts of the epic which are entwined with history, religion, caste and gender of the times of the epic. Hence the second chapter lays out some of these configurations with the help of historical and literary material. The third chapter examines oral materials. Apart from the main chapter, which understands the context of these narratives in the 20 C, it contains Annexure I and II that have a description and translation of the oral narratives from the recorded performances specifically done for this project. While the fourth chapter engages with a few written texts, mainly, Unnava Lakshminarayana’s play *Nāyakurālu*, Nazer’s *Palnāti Yuddhamu*, Pingali Lakshmikantham’s *Palnātivīra Caritra* and Nagasri’s *Palnātivīra Caritra* of the epic to ponder over the implications of the *Mahābhārata* for a regional vision of power

and territory. Pingali's text, though its veracity is dubious, brings together the many scattered episodes of the epic into one big written text and hence it is treated as an independent narrative in this project. The last chapter summarises the whole question of Telugu consciousness which is why there seems to be a continuous revisiting of an epic like *Palnātivīrula Katha*, over a period of time, by the Telugu peoples all over the world.

*Shimla*  
*25 May 2020*

ARUNA

# 1

## Method to the Madness

The present enterprise examines “narrative” “traditions” of a Telugu epic *Palnātivīrula Katha*<sup>1</sup> in its various forms as it is available today in Telugu. The much acclaimed epic is widely popular in Telugu culture in the form of oral narratives, printed “texts” both for adults and for children and as popular films. In fact, it is available with slightly variant titles like *Palnātivīra Caritra*, *Palnātivīra Bhāgavatamu*, *Palnātivīra Bhāratamu* and so on. It has an eight hundred<sup>2</sup> year old history and therefore has found a place for itself in the local traditions like the oral singers the *vīra vidyāvāntulu*, *pichikuntalavāllu*, and *burrakatha* as also in the classical tradition in the form of written texts like the *dvipada kāvya* of Srinātha<sup>3</sup> and printed works like novels, plays, critical works based on the *Katha*, based on single characters from the epic and as translations and therefore in the literary imagination of adults and children even in the 20th century. The first challenge to grapple with such a “text” is the non-availability of a complete printed “text” of the epic. This now brings us to the question of which comes first, whether the oral or the written, which will again solve some unclear areas in the history of the epic. The next stage is to approach the epic through the oral singers who have the song completely and sing it fully even now, on certain specific occasions like the festival of the heroes which is conducted in the month of November in Karemāpudi in Andhra Pradesh. Therefore, the challenge here is to understand the epic historically and

culturally of its multi-faceted existence. All primary materials of the project are in Telugu except for two English translations of the epic (which are used only for cross references).

The perceived gaps in all these printed editions of the epic provide exciting material for study, each of these editors making claims for historicity, authenticity to Brahminical sources and authors. It is this kind of variety and incongruity among the oral and the published editions of the story that necessitates academic debates on issues like oral and written traditions and the idea of “text” as a complete entity. The kind of interaction that these different forms of “texts” have had, down their history is an interesting intervention not just of technology but of the various historical and cultural events too. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries whatever was available either in palm-leaf manuscripts or as part of orality, got printed and published. The texts of the epic available now present a complex form of oral and written cultures. The present enterprise includes both oral as well as written sources for an inquiry into the subject.

I have worked with two traditions of oral singers the *vīra vidyāvāntulu*, Kinnera Bramhaiah and his team and with the *burrakatha* singers Babuji and his team. I have about four writings of fiction based on the epic *Palnātivīrula Caritra*, Unnava Lakshminarayana’s play *Nāyakurālu* (1926), based on a character from the epic, Nazer’s *Palnāti Yudhamu* (1945), Pingali Lakshmikantham (ed) *Palnātivīra Caritra*, (1961) and Nagasri’s children’s edition of the text that came out in 2004 as *Palnātivīra Caritra* as part of their Balananda series which has similar other stories for children (it may have been done for children several times over in different kinds of editions). The two English translations that are used for cross reference are Robert Sewell’s *Antiquarian Remains of Madras Presidency*(1882) and Gene Roghair’s *The Epic of Palnādu* (1982). The prolific outpour of creative writing based on the original story of *Palnātivīrula Katha* gives occasion to understand some important questions related to oral tradition, writing technology, print culture and finally, to map, what is claimed as *Telugu consciousness* in all these instances.

How and why the epic is revisited over time and how it survived the travails of time would be part of the present exercise.

## I

The project hopes to tease out some of the complexity of understanding a pre-modern text with the hindsight of nineteenth and twentieth century developments of print culture and particularly the context of the formation of a nation. Because of the immensely complex journey of the epic, there is a need to explain some key terms of the project within which the epic demands to be understood like “text,” “narrative” and “tradition.” And the conceptual category of “epic” itself needs to be explained locally in Telugu culture. Hence the epic *Palnātivīrula Katha* becomes a site to understand a culture of plurality in texts, narratives and traditions. Hence this search for a larger frame- work which can provide a far more fitting insight into the epic and its culture.

An attempt is made to explore these terms in the English and Telugu contexts.

### Text

The dictionary meaning of “text” is the very wording of a passage. Since etymologically it comes from texture, one could evoke an imagery of weaving to bring together all these varied creative writing together. The nature of the project requires handling genres ranging from oral traditions to children’s literature. Therefore, to contain all these varied creative expressions under one umbrella to facilitate an intellectual engagement with it, the term “text” is called for. In a way it also fills in a gap in methodology. Finally, “text” here refers to the epic *Palnātivīrula Katha* in all its available genres and forms like novel, stories, plays and as abridged versions for lack of another term which can convey all these meanings under one rubric. Now this brings us to the conventional understanding of the “texts” (oral and printed) and the intrinsic logic in its “unity” and “fragmentation” and all the

efforts that have been done so far in retaining the “text” in its “original” form or attributing it an imagined unity as a mark of recovering a cultural unity destroyed by colonial intervention. The problematic nature of the *text* or *work* and the unity it “designates” is brought into analysis throughout the project.

Now let us look at the possibilities the epic itself throws up for understanding the term “text”. The epic indeed works upon an extended meaning of the notions of a “text” with its availability in various fragmented forms and with a variety of titles. It is referred to by various names, *Palnātivīrula Katha*, *Palnātivīra Caritra*, *Palnātivīra Bhāgavatamu*, *Palnātivīra Bharatamu* and *Palnāti Yudhamu*. Unfortunately, the epic was never found in one place, in one piece. The story presented here is an interesting ensemble of different “texts”; in effect each part becomes an independent “text” by itself. An episode like *Balachandra Yudhamu* becomes one complete “text” as the remaining parts of the episodes supposedly written by Śrīnātha are missing. However, this episode is published with the title *Palnātivīra Caritra* and not as *Bālachandra Yudhamu*. And each tradition of singing or otherwise becomes another “text”. Only the *vīra vidyāvāntulu*, the oral singers have the epic with them completely but even they sing it selectively and only certain important episodes in any sequence they like. Though several others sing the *Palnātivīrula Katha* especially the *pichikuntalavāllu* and *burrakatha*, it is the *vīra vidyāvāntulu* who sing the epic during the commemorative celebration of the heroes of the epic at Karyamapūdi in the present Guntur district, which is also the battlefield in the epic. So in that sense the oral song is one complete text. Apart from his own translation, Gene Roghair (who has worked with a team of *vidyāvāntulu* for his translation of the epic) notes that Robert Sewell has written the only complete translation of the epic; his long summary of it printed as an Appendix to his *Antiquarian Remains of Madras Presidency* is the only full length rendering of Palnādu tradition into English. Sewell’s translation is based on Mudigonda Vīrabhadrakavi’s *Palnātivīra Bhāgavaramu* but it is said to present the complete version of the story, though it is only a summary.



Since the epic is not available in complete and various episodes are available with different names of writers like Srinātha, Mallanna and Kondaiah, one can only make conjectures of all kinds. Even the epic singers don't have written copies of the epic fully, though Brahmaiah claims that his family had a copy of the palm-leaf manuscript of *Palnātivīrula Katha* but now it has disappeared. None of the oral singers ever have any written copies with them. Their rendition of the epic depends entirely on memory. Whatever episodes are available are also not written during one historical time period as even the quality of language varies: it may have been developed later on during the various attempts by scholars to procure and understand the tradition in its entirety. Also each time an attempt was made to bring the epic together the length and episodes of the epic seem to have been enhanced. For example, the available manuscript informs us, in the Introduction to Pingali's edition of the epic that the episodes of *Kallupratistha* and *Bālacandra Yuddhamu* were written by Srinātha and *Kōllapōru* and *Gōpanna Virugu* are written by Mallanna and that the episode of *Kommarāju Yuddhamu* was written by Kondaiah. But the remaining seven episodes are written by one author but we do not know his name though at the beginning of the epic the author has acknowledged that he is only reciting what has already been written by the great poet Srinātha. Pingali Lakshmikantham estimates that both Mallanna and Kondaiah are writers belonging to the 16th century and later, as in the epic there are references to Sri Krishnadēvarāya and the Muslim invaders. Hence *Palnātivīrula Katha* is an invisible "meta-text" which has generated so many other "texts."

## Narrative

Narrative means to give an account of, especially in the context of dictionary meaning. *Kathā vrittāntamu* or *caritra* are used to denote to "narrative" in Telugu and therefore a narrator is called *kathakudu*. There are multiple narrators of the epic representing each different genre and tradition. We have two sets

of oral singers Bramhaiah the *vīra vidyāvantulu* and Babuji, the *burrakatha* singer. And all the narrators of the fictional writings of *Palnātivīrula Katha*: there is the singer, performer and story teller of the oral tradition, the poet of the *kavya*, the *sūtradhāra* of the play, the *kathakudu* of the novel. All these are male narrators of the epic, though occasionally one finds women accompanists in the *burrakatha* tradition. However, Vallabharya's *Krīdabhirāmamu* alone has a reference to a female performer of the story. A *jakkini* is claimed to have sung the story of the Palnāti heroes in *dhrita tāla*.<sup>4</sup>

## Tradition

The late 14th century French word *tradicion* –meaning handing down, delivering or surrender. It needs to be understood in a nuanced manner in the context of the oral epic in its caste and performative practices. The Telugu/Sanskrit word for tradition is *parampara* but the singers use *kutumba rīti tharatharāluḡa kutmbalo vastunnadi, peddala daggaranunchi*<sup>5</sup> to refer to tradition. The performer of the song says that the *vidyāvantulu* sing only this song and nothing else which also means no other inclusions or exclusions are made to the song. The legacy of the oral singers runs in the family like a family profession. The *vidyāvantulu* sing the epic because they identify themselves with the *māla* hero Kannamadasu of the epic. The oral tradition is not taught to anyone outside of the family by implication outside of the caste of *mālas*. Though *burrakatha* has a more secular appeal and anyone can learn and be part of the tradition, then the *burrakatha* singer I have worked with Babuji acquired it as family tradition from his father, the renowned Nazar. When we observe the word tradition in this specific context, in writing culture, there is the legacy of Srinātha which so many fiction writers pay a tribute to, through their own repetition of *Palnātivīra Caritra* and by extension to the primal poet, Nannaya as someone in the long tradition of Telugu Literature. And lastly, all copies of digital works used for the project, would be classed as non-traditions in the strict sense of the

term. The popular old-world view sees digitization as degeneracy and not as a germination of another culture.

## The Epic

The word is derived from Greek *epikos*. Conventionally in the western context it is a long narrative poem that sings the song of a cultural hero in an elevated style. A western literary genre which definitely eulogises its epic heroes and its origin is always connected with the origin of empire in the sense of a power structure. And it may have originated along with the idea of the empire itself. The first Indian *kāvya*s that way are Valmiki's the *Ramāyana* and Vyasa's the *Mahābhārata*. The latter is undoubtedly a narrative of *rājya* with its dramatized vision for power and polity. Therefore, in the localized sense, in the Indian context *kāvya* is also the poem of *rājya*. An epic in the Indian context has more elaborate structure than a long heroic poem. It has texts and subtexts and chapters devoted to various details of warfare, power, polity and other aspects of life as well, which a heroic poem need not have. The best example of an epic is of course the *Mahābhārata*. To take it a step further *Palnātivīrula Katha* is about *nādu*<sup>6</sup>.

## II

Based on the common understanding among the Telugu intelligentsia, of the historicity of the oral tradition of the epic, there is a gap of three centuries between the supposed emergence of the written text, *Palnātivīrula Caritra* and the oral narrative, and there is every possibility that Srinātha based his text on these singing traditions. So the oral tradition seems to have preceded the written, and therefore the project examines oral traditions like *vidyāvantulu* and the *burrakatha* first and then the written and printed sources in its analysis and chapter divisions. Though the oral and the written culture exhibits a shared history in the Telugu country they do not precede one another.

The Literary historian Arudra informs us that by the time Nannaya was commissioned to write the Telugu *Mahābhārata* in

the 11th century, it was already read out in temples and people had acquired a taste for the subject. So it is an indication of a culture is infused with many kinds of orality. The commonsensical notion of the oral is something spoken and has been continued or handed down to the next generation through word of mouth. But to a perceptive reader, orality is available at least in more than one sense in this context. There is the purely (i)oral tradition which refers to the non-literate, also non-Brahmin performatory oral tradition with a rich repertoire of cultural heritage in their songs and epics and then the (ii) literary orality of a literate poet who renders a poem impromptu on any subject that comes to his mind and these poem are kept alive by a vibrant culture of orality down the ages, which remained in oral circulation until a later period as is evident in the *cātu padyālu*.

All existing texts of *Palnātivīrula Caritra* in whatever form appear to have emerged from the non-written singing traditions of various kinds like the *vīra vidyavantulu*, *pichikuntalavallu*, *pallesuddulavāllu*, *jangamakathas* and the later *burrakatha*. The performer singers committed their lengthy epics to memory and handed it over to the next generation who would keep it alive in the family and in public memory. The first is said to be the *jangamakatha*. They recited stories of the *jangamas*, who are devotees of Lord Siva. These *jangamakathalu* were performed on Sivaratri festival drawing huge crowds<sup>7</sup>. This was the basic structure which was subsequently polished and used by many other oral performatory traditions like the *burrakatha*. Initially they sang only stories of Lord Siva but by the beginning of the nineteenth century, they expanded their repertoire and began singing all other narratives in oral circulation like *Bobbili Yuddham*, *Kātamārāju Katha*, *Bālanagamma Katha*, *Virāta Parvam* and so on. Like all other singing narrative traditions they too began including other local narratives or commissioned projects to make a living. That way they make changes to the tradition.

The earliest known performatory cycle in Andhra is the *Palnāti Katha* about the battle between two cousins Nalagāmarāju and his brothers and Malidēvarāju and his brothers. The battle of the heroes takes place in the 12th century at Kāremapūdi. Even now in

the month of Kartika, a five day festival is celebrated at the temple of the heroes of the epic. The heroes of the epic are worshipped and these performances are mandatory and the *vidyāvāntulu* sing and perform the epic and people who consider themselves from the family of the heroes also invite the *vidyāvāntulu* to perform in their homes. The performers are also called *vīra vidyāvāntulu*, *vīra* being the prefix used to everything related to the epic. The land is called *vīra Palnādu* and the villages that belonged to the heroes are called *vīra grāmālu*. The *Katha* consists of sixteen stories of the genealogies of the birth of heroes or preparations for the war and the actual war. The heroes of the epic and the weapons they used are worshipped by people of all castes during the festival. On the fourth day the *pīthādhīpati* of the temple takes the garb of Bramhanayudu and worships the heroes while thousands follow him. In the subsequent centuries the epic seems to have become popular as it is cited in Vallabharya's *Krīdabhirāmamu* that it was performed in the city of Orugallu. Ankāamma is the chief deity to whom the singers pay obeisance before they begin the ritual of performance.

Yet another oral singing tradition, Oggukatha comes closer to *vīra vidyāvāntulu* in terms of their commitment to a particular tradition of storytelling alone. Most of these are family traditions. The performers are initiated into singing of the stories of Mallanna whose marriage they perform with Bhramarambika. The newly initiated performer is given an *oggu* or a trident. The initiation takes place in all the Saiva *kshetras* of Andhra like Vemulavada, Komarelli, Eileni and Srisailam. It is mainly the story of the wedding of Mallanna and Bhramarambika, in which the performer is the priest and his equipment is very much symbolic of the Saivite convention and of Lord Siva himself.

In the twentieth century, Kakumanu Subbarao developed the *burrakatha* based on the earlier Saivite model of singing, the *jangamakatha* into a fine singing and performing art. He wrote and narrated the story of Tanya a young girl who braved the autocracy of the Czar. This was done for the popular wing of the CPI Praja Natya Mandali for which he wrote various other stories based on the labour struggles of the people of Andhra, like *Kastajīvi*.

Nazar gave the art form a new direction and meaning which got it the popularity and longevity that it enjoys today. More than a hundred troupes of the *burrakatha* performers do various kinds of social and other kinds of stories. His purpose was mainly social to bring about awareness of war and other related social evils like population growth and the importance of family planning which was one of the concerns of the governments too at various points of time. He wrote *Palnāti Yuddhamu* and performed it to spread anti-war message. He contemporized the themes and the significance of the ballad by introducing various musical notes mainly the *ragada* style of poetry. Nazar's son, Babuji claims that his father introduced *dēsi* tunes and meters into his singing. The earlier narratives had only *dvipada* or *manjari dvipada*. Therefore, Nazar is rightly considered the father of *burrakatha*.

In order to broaden the scope of the study on orality it would be fitting to draw in Vemana and his poetry into discussion. Vemana epitomizes the literary orality. He is supposed to have *composed* his poems orally according to Arudra, but CP Brown doesn't make any such distinction between orality and literacy; he acknowledges that he collected Vemana's poems from palm-leaf manuscripts, from individual collectors in the 19th century. Though the technology of writing had been in practice since the times of Nannaya the 11th century Telugu poet and much before that, yet Vemana's poems were in oral circulation till 17th century. He is supposed to be a wandering maverick poet who composed verses and taught to his followers. Vemana provides an important link in oral literature as he was wandering and not interested in patronage or in the worldly affairs. It is people who listened to him that propagated these verses for the next generations till they got written down for posterity to know and learn from Vemana about the intricacies of life. In 1824 CP Brown, for the first time published these verses with the support of Fort William College, Madras. He collected<sup>8</sup>, edited<sup>9</sup> and published what he thought was worth publishing. All these modes of oral poems whether composed on a certain occasion or impromptu illustrate a certain culture of orality which was part of pre-modern Telugu life and literature which existed without any problem along with a very strong and vast

written literature patronized by kings and emperors: when authors did not bother so much for name or for posterity, leaving us with a legacy of *kāvya*s without authors and there are authors without evidence of having written a book.

It conveys a few things in specific about the nature and phenomena of a world filled with an openness of a people who said and did things the way they wanted. A culture of orality co-existed with writing and probably it also manifests something else on the whole notion of canon formation and literary historiography as we understand it now, a sense which was absent in pre-modern Andhra. But a different kind of world view existed which was perhaps in complete harmony with people's sense of time, life and culture, which did not necessarily clash with one another. With the intervention of western scholarship into Telugu culture and literature, it became necessary to understand these things only chronologically, with a written text and by canonizing and therefore prioritizing the written/printed over the oral. In this culture, it seems fixing dates and periodization are more important. Oral poetry is something that flourished outside of the royal courts. Hence orality is relegated to the background privileging the written word. By 1730 Vemana's poems were available in palm leaf manuscripts. A lot of information about Vemana is not available and whatever is gathered is from his poems and the places he visited as part of his wandering life. In keeping with the spirit of oral tradition, I'll cite a verse of Vemana which is in oral circulation among all school children-

తల్లితండ్రులమీద దయలేని పుత్రుడు  
 పుట్టనేమివాడు గిట్టనేమి  
 పుట్టలోని చెదలు పుట్టవాగిట్టవా  
 విశ్వదాభిరామ వినుర వేమా!<sup>10</sup>

Tanjore Saraswati Mahal Library has four palm-leaf manuscript copies of Vemana's poems. Literary historians like Arudra have brought together all copies and have estimated that Vemana had composed about 2000 poems. He composed them in *āaveladi* style of poetry.

## III

Since the oral epic *Palnātivīrula Katha* got written down at some point of its history and later got published, let us look at some details of written texts in Telugu. By the time of Nannaya, Telugu language had undergone sea changes. Early Telugu had a significant influence of Prakrit. Whether Prakrit words remained in Telugu or Telugu words entered Prakrit is not fully known to us, but there seems to have been a continuous interaction between the two languages as is evident from some common coinages in both the languages. We have some evidence of these interactions between the two languages in works like *Gatha Saptasati*, which is filled with stories of ordinary people and concerns. Books on grammar got to be written and they in turn had more or less defined the face and content of Telugu language with a huge Sanskrit influence. *Andhra Sabda Chintamani* the grammar book of Telugu was already written down in Sanskrit and it is attributed to Nannaya by scholars. He was also called *vākānusāsanudu*, someone who could dictate terms of a language. Nannaya brought in Sanskrit culture to Telugu language. Nannaya through his literary achievement was creating a regional world while also laying down the foundation for a new language and literature filled with local idioms and characters. The time was set for the arrival of a Telugu *Mahābhārata* as there was already a translation of the *Mahābhārata* as *Vikramarjunavijaya* by the Kannada poet Pampa.

Shortening the larger vision of *the Mahābhārata* into a local and regional world and to appropriate it into one's own is what the regional versions of the epic did. *Palnātivīrula Katha* is a step ahead of them and brings it closer to people from Sanskrit themes to regional themes and in a language that is locally spoken. That way this epic makes a departure with its specific non-Brahmin, Telugu identity in a culture that is vastly dominated by literature translated from Sanskrit. There was a stark need to have local heroes much closer to one's own life and imagination. And in that sense *Palnātivīrula Katha* fulfils a gap that existed in Telugu cultural life. *Palnādu* story was claimed by the oral singers and later writers as a Telugu national epic.



The central theme of the epic is a cockfight between brothers. The time period of the text can be roughly placed in 12th century. The story has all the trappings of the *Mahābhārata*. In fact, the *Katha* is considered an equivalent to the *Mahābhārata* in Telugu tradition as it is considered the first original work of Telugu nationalism. There is the dispute for kingdom among brothers Nalagaāmarāju, Narasingarāju and Malidēvarāju and there is a cockfight which decides that loser in the fight must leave the kingdom for seven years and Malidevaraju and his brothers lose the fight and complete their exile and return after seven years to reclaim their kingdom but it is denied to them and therefore there is the final battle at Karyamapūdi. Again there are several thematic and plot variants in all these narratives.

The epic *Palnātivīrula Katha* has generated considerable interest among writers and ordinary people alike but most notably in the 20th century. All efforts to consolidate the epic into one piece are done in the 19th century and 20th century. In the Telugu context it has an immensely interesting twist in two ways: 1) CP Brown took up the major enterprise of collecting, editing and publishing manuscripts of Telugu literature and interestingly this specific epic he discarded as he saw no merit in it. He was reinventing and also forming a Telugu literary canon (along the lines of western canonical literature) by collecting manuscripts from various individuals and libraries but it is curious that he did not see much merit in the work.<sup>11</sup> 2) Since Brown discarded it, the Telugu Brahmin scholars too were also engaged in this activity, obtaining similar results, though the anxieties of both may be different for such a project. And one can see that the text *Palnātivīra Caritra* has been recovered to serve a specific purpose at each of these given moments of Telugu literary history.

There cannot be a history of printing in Telugu without a discussion on the contributions of CP Brown. His posting as a civil servant in various parts of Andhra is an important event in the history of Telugu letters and literature. He singlehandedly revived practically all genres of Telugu literature that were almost extinct or not there at all or existed with individual collectors. While Brown must be credited for the revival of Telugu Literature and

Language, it is also to be noted that he not only got these works printed and published, but he also wrote lengthy commentaries, corrected the language and edited the texts before publishing these texts. Therefore the published texts will bear the imprint of his understanding of the text and not always the cultural understanding by its own people though Brown had the help of learned Brahmins who were employed as copiers and teachers of the Telugu language for him. Therefore his learning of the language was methodical but not necessarily his understanding of a culture; which largely gets reflected in commentaries he wrote on various *prabandha kāvyās* and grammars that he edited. He had a particular liking for Saivite literature. And therefore Vemana impressed him for his simplicity of language which can be learnt by any foreigner who intends to learn the language. And of course the secular outlook of Vemana also encouraged him into translating his poems first. He collected various available versions of these poems and verified each with the other and he remained the final authority on what was going to be published. In the process of verifying these copies, he would make a selection of these poems to be printed. For instance, in the publication of Vemana's poems, he faced the difficulty of not even an authentic palm-leaf manuscript. As is well known Vemana did not write down his poems owing to which there were several *obscene* poems in circulation in the name of Vemana: a book of such poems was *Asleela Parvamu* or *Book of Obscene Poems*. Brown exercised his discretion in discarding a selection of these poems and only those which he thought morally appropriate for printing, he got published.

Interestingly in the 20th century, the instance of Nazar's *burrakatha* draws to a close all debates on the implications and meanings involved with the oral & written traditions in Telugu. As the very existence of his text *Palnāti Yudhamu* seems to challenge the conventional debates that surround the oral and written traditions of literature. Nazar reverses the conventional progression of these texts which is normally from oral to written: here first he wrote the story convenient for singing in the *burrakatha* style and then memorized it for his oral rendition. We also learn that some of the classical texts available now in print were available only in

the oral form first. Thus the “norm” should be from oral to written to print but he upsets this order by establishing a new one and indeed challenging the process of standardizing everything into a written text on the one hand, and on the other, tries to rejuvenate a new folk art form at a time when all other oral and folk forms were either in the process of extinction or already extinct. Here there is yet another twist in the tale as the Sundarayya Vignana Kendram digitized the *burrakatha* text in 2006 after a severe monsoon almost drowned the library in Hyderabad around the year 2000. So the transition is from written to oral to print and digitization which is a reflection on the complex print and digital cultures in which the texts survive.

This chapter thus gives a broad outline to Telugu literary history by way of understanding the tradition of *Palnātivīrula Katha* in its many forms. The next chapter hopes to understand the sociological implications of the epic and its times while also resolving some critical issues related to authorship of the written texts of the epic which are entwined with history, religion, caste and gender of its times. The third chapter examines oral materials while the fourth chapter engages with a few written texts of the epic and explores their similarities and differences in themes and genres. The last chapter summarises the whole question of Telugu consciousness which is why there seems to be a continuous revisiting of an epic like *Palnātivīrula Katha* over the last eight hundred years by the Telugu peoples all over the world.

## Notes

1. The oral singers refer to the epic as *Palnātivīrula Katha* and not as *Caritra*. Therefore, throughout the project, I refer to the epic as *Palnātivīrula Katha* as that best describes the nature of the narrative tradition and is closer to the content than *Caritra* which is history. The written texts are referred to as *Caritra* or by the specific title of a published text.
2. That is only a popular claim, there is no historical evidence for the eight hundred year old history.
3. If Srinātha is commonly acknowledged as the author of the available episodes published under one editorship.
4. See Vinukonda Vallabharāya's *Krīdābhirāmamu* edited by Veturi Prabhakara Sastry, 1928, p. 30.

5. The singers of the epic answered in an interview to the researcher.
6. It is the Vijayanagar rulers who divided the *rājya* into *sīma*, *nādu* and *sthala*. Nādu is a small province within a *rājya*. Krishnadevaraya alludes to *dēsa* in his *dēsa bhāshalandu Telugu lessa* for the first time. Ideas gathered from N. Venkata Ramanayya's *Vijayanagara the Empire and the City*, p. 104.
7. Nagabhushana Sarma, M. *Folk Performing Arts of Andhra Pradesh*. Hyderabad: Telugu University, 1995.
8. Some of these poems were collected from Bellary, Cuddapah, Madras and Visakhapatnam as authenticated by CPBrown.
9. On Vemana's poems, whom Brown claims as "my author," he commented that "useful to those who study the language, the style being simple, and the variety of topics very extensive." Instead of the re-workings of the *Purānas* which were mainly the subject of the Telugu Prabandhas, Vemana's poems were original and were composed in simple Telugu. As there wasn't one authentic version of Vemana's poems, and there were many available in palm-leaf manuscripts from which Brown had to choose, edit and publish. He didn't realise that since these poems were in oral circulation, these variations are bound to be there.
10. Listen O Vema!  
What if a son is born or dead  
who has no love for his parents  
The termite in the anthill are also born and die.
11. Telugu Literature as a corpus as it is available to readers today was formed and canonized as a consequence. There is the larger debate related to print culture whether it actually served the purpose of Telugu culture or not, as there was large scale homogenization of the variegated cultural expression and also canon formation.

## 2

### The Epic and its Environment: Pre-Vijayanagara Andhra

This chapter evolves out of a large endnote which could not contain itself and therefore there is a need to expand it, to throw some light on issues which are contingent upon the subject under study, the tradition of *Palnātivīrula Katha*. A text with an eight hundred year<sup>1</sup> old history certainly gets entangled in complexity of sorts. Such a long journey of the epic tradition encompasses almost all periods of Telugu literary history. This chapter takes up some fuzzy areas which are still left unexplained regarding the tradition of *Palnātivīrula Katha* and offers to clarify some of these questions. The tradition includes oral singing, written and digital texts of the epic. More importantly, this chapter revolves around issues of authorship regarding the written text of the epic and a few other questions directly related to the theme of the epic such as history, territory and religion in the twelfth century. Thus this chapter hopes to give a sociological understanding of the epic and its times.

#### I

This section examines and clarifies some positions of existing scholarship on issues of history and authorship of the epic: mainly the liberties that several of the editors of the epic have taken before

publishing one *authentic* edition of the *Palnātivīra Caritra* in the twentieth century. The present generation of Telugu scholars without ever questioning the established authority of the earlier scholars accepted Srinātha as the original author of the written text of the epic. There is almost no effort made to understand the epic with the freedom needed for a genuine enquiry into the subject. All arguments related to authorship of the epic are biased favouring one or the other author. Whereas in the absence of any documentary evidence which could prove any of the claims, it is important to examine these texts without any preconceived ideas. Since the epic *Palnātivīrula Katha* deals with 12th century Andhra historical figures, there have been efforts to understand the history of Andhra through the written texts of the epic and vice versa. There are many ways in which the epic *Palnātivīrula Katha* is understood as a historical text with bearings on the history of the Telugu country of the 12th century on the one hand, and on the other, researchers take the help of available inscriptional sources to understand the history and polity portrayed in the epic.

While both attempts seem to give authenticity to the work, the aim of this chapter is to understand the text in perspective and to understand the pre-modern regional world. What creates a pre-modern region, culturally, linguistically and geographically is not just an intriguing but a fascinating journey into an unknown world (owing to lack of illustrative evidence). However, the markers of a regional world would be deliberated upon through a consideration of history and religion of the time in which the epic is set. A region in pre-modern Andhra was linguistically, and culturally bound but not necessarily politically and geographically unified. Because as we understand history of Andhra in a chronological sequence, it seems as though one ruler followed after another in terms of their invasions and rule of Andhra. But what needs to be seen is that, some of these rulers were ruling different parts of Telugu speaking people at a given point of time in history. For instance, the Eastern Cālukyas were ruling the coastal Andhra regions while the southern part of Andhra was under the control of the Pallavas and the Western Cālukyas. Similarly, later on, even the Kakatiyas could not bring all the Telugu speaking peoples under their rule.

They had about fifteen districts of the present Andhra but the rest of the Telugu speaking regions in later times were with other rulers of Vijayanagar or with the Bahmani sultans in the north.<sup>2</sup> Someone bread on theories of linguistic reorganization of states, learns to look upon region as a unit bound by a shared culture of language and literature. Therefore, it would be difficult to imagine a neighbouring region which shared a commonality of language and culture but was under a different ruler and a different tax paying system. This fissiparous nature of region poses a challenge to a modern observer of the pre-modern world. Region as a culturally, linguistically, historically contained unit with these shared features doesn't lend itself to understand a pre-modern region. The modern notions of country- including large landholdings and populations would be contrary to the small territory and populations in pre-modern polities, which we studied in the name of great dynasties that ruled and dominated Andhra<sup>3</sup> history.

As such this chapter attempts to construct a methodology to comprehend the pre-modern region by understanding notions of history, territory, religion, caste and gender of the Telugu people within which the authors Srinātha and Vallabharāya operated. The epic is of the twelfth century heroes of Palnādu, while there is an evidence to the oral singing tradition of the *Palnātivirula Katha* in a text written by Vallabharāya supposedly a 13th or 15th century poet. What happened to the singing tradition later or to the written text, there is no clue until one comes across these concerted efforts being made by CP Brown in the 19th century and later in 1911 when Umākāntha Vidyāsekharulu brought together episodes of *Palnātivirā Caritra* under his editorship. And some of these episodes are attributed to the 15th century poet Srinātha. This historical amnesia, in fact, helps in further fuelling the controversies. One also needs to look at issues concerning the literary work *Krīdābhirāmamu*, for the reason that this is a text which is also attributed to Srinātha and also it has reference to the oral tradition of *Palnātivirula Katha*. Vinukonda Vallabharāya is the author of *Krīdābhirāmamu* and his time period is approximated closer to Srinātha's in order to convince the Telugu readership that the work is actually written by Srinātha originally, and only later

that was it imitated by Vallabharāya. With this, in fact it serves the dual purpose of crediting Srinātha with the authorship of both *Krīdābhirāmamu* as well as *Palnātivīra Caritra*.

Let's examine some issues related to Srinātha, Vallabharāya and *Krīdābhirāmamu* in order to understand the oral and written texts of *Palnātivīrula Katha*.

## II

### What's in a Name?

In the reflections of the European philosophers like Roland Barthes and Foucault the author is irrelevant to engage with the contents of a text. They argue that as a poem or “work” evolves, the author dies. In the context of *Palnātivīra Caritra* the Telugu critics are in search of an author, largely to appropriate an anonymous and abandoned text into the fold of the brahmanical scholarship. The author acquires a centrality in order to place the text in context; in the line of the Telugu classical tradition and for an assertion of Telugu identity as something belonging to a great brahmanical tradition. The attempts have been to rescue the text from anonymity to fame and rescue it to the ‘rightful’ people and create the right kind of credentials. Hence there is a need for a father figure not only to claim an authentic Telugu identity but also a certain brahmanical identity as the themes of the epic concerns with issues of the pride of Telugus. Barthes in a different context, observes that “the author is a modern figure, produced no doubt by our society in so far as, at the end of middle ages, with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, or to put it more nobly, of the “human person.”<sup>4</sup> He argues that in primitive societies narrative is never undertaken by one person but by many like the performers of the epic or like the *sūradhāra* of a play. There is something called “author-function” in the words of Foucault which is to serve more of a cultural function rather than a functional one, as an authority on the interpretation of the text.



Perhaps that explains why we find so many texts without authors from the pre-modern world.

*Palnātivīra Caritra* as the previous chapter discusses has no single author but many and also the complete epic is not available for today's readership as one book<sup>5</sup>. In this situation, let us engage with some related issues which could lead to a better understanding of the epic in the present day. The first question about the authorship of the epic and the reasons behind his writing, only episodes is something that needs specific attention. Two prominent authors who deserve some attention and description here are Srinātha and Vinukonda Vallabharāya. Srinātha is central to the understanding of the written texts of the epic. And Vinukonda Vallabharāya's *Krīdābhirāmamu* is a closely related epic in many ways, especially since it contains a valuable and earliest reference to the oral tradition of *Palnātivīrula Katha* as being sung by a *jakkini* in Orugallu. In the poetic play which is set in Orugallu with the colourful man Govinda Mancana Sarma and his friend Tittibha go in search of Mancana Sarma's lover, and happen to listen to the song of the heroes of Palnādu. Secondly the text *Krīdābhirāmamu* becomes central in the 19th century, in retrospect, when all evidence to the earliest reference of the oral epic is more or less erased and evidence of a different kind is fabricated to posit Srinātha as the original author. There isn't any other inscriptional or historical evidence available either to counter or to substantiate the prevalent views on the epic tradition.

Though the epic is loosely based on the 12th century historical figures, the available evidence of the oral singing tradition or the written text is only from thirteenth/fifteenth century onwards. Unfortunately, even that text is steeped in controversy as there is no clear idea as to who the author of *Krīdābhirāmamu* is and when it was written though the work is set in Kakatiya Warangal. We do have the author's name but apart from the name nothing is known to this generation about Vinukonda Vallabharāya. In the absence of historical evidence to confirm the opinion, all scholars assume that the oral tradition of *Palnātivīrula Katha* has an eight-hundred year old history. They all agree that the oral singing tradition might have come into existence almost during the same period as that

of the time of action of the epic. The existing scholars including Gene Roghair who did extensive work with the singers of the epic, the *vīra vidyāvāntulu* and translated the singing tradition of the epic into English as *The Epic of Palnādu*, fail to explain the eight-hundred-year old tradition. He simply assumes that the epic has an eight-hundred-year old history. To a twentieth century reader, the authorship of this epic, and who first sang or wrote the story will remain shrouded in mystery. It is interesting to see what Foucault says in the context of “What is an author?” on the question of a situation where there is no author for a text or an oral epic: “Even within our civilization, the same types of texts have not always required authors; there was a time when those texts which we now call “literary” (stories, folk tales, epics and tragedies) were accepted, circulated, and valorised without any question about the identity of their author. Their anonymity was ignored because their real or supposed age was a sufficient guarantee of their authenticity.”<sup>6</sup> Going by that precept the fact that the oral tradition survived the test of time is probably reason enough to accept the eight-hundred-year old tradition rather than subject it to a logical scrutiny.

Some of the Telugu critics went to the extent of stating that Srinātha is the author of even *Kridabhiramamu*. In dating the text *Krīdābhirāmamu* closer to Srinātha’s period and later commentary that Vallabharāya has imitated Srinātha’s style, none of the critics is ready to even begin to admit that Srinātha himself could have followed a model of the earlier text *Krīdābhirāmamu*. There is a possibility that Vallabharāya is an earlier poet and the text also belonged to an earlier period. All scholarly contributions in this aspect, seem to be concocted with a single point agenda of making Srinātha, the sole author of not just of *Palnātivīra Caritra* but also of *Krīdābhirāmamu*. He himself has imitated the style of Srinātha in Telugizing *Naisadīya-Carita*. Therefore, it is no wonder if he imitated or borrowed some style of poems which have really impressed him from *Krīdābhirāmamu*. Like the poem describing both Nala and Govinda Macana Sarma. The following lines are from *Krīdābhirāmamu* which scholars find an imitation

of Srinatha's *Naishadiya-carita* where he describes the arrival of Nala to the court in a similar fashion.

A dhoti, light rose in color, its petals carefully pressed;  
A dot of Ganges mud perfumed with rosewater  
Perfectly centred on his forehead;  
silken thread interwoven with gold circling his right wrist;  
woven strands of white silk across his shoulder, each perfectly  
straight;  
red shawl, thick long hair, red lips, a slight smile;  
he's the perfect dandy—Govinda Sarma—  
the very image of love.<sup>7</sup>

Here is a similar description of Prince Nala in *Naisadiya-Carita* “Wearing a fine silk-ochre dhoti which looks more like light rose”<sup>8</sup> Nala on his way to worship is described along the lines of Govinda Mancana Sarma of *Krīdābhirāmamu*.

The next question in this regard is how Srinatha emerged as the inevitable choice for these scholars? It couldn't have been any other poet because by 15th century and after the only figure that looms large and who could have written a work of this order like *Palnātivīra Caritra* would be Srinatha alone because all others belonged to a different era, not just in terms of their life but also the kinds of poetry that they wrote. The Vijayanagara poets who flourished during Krishna Devarāya's period by all means wouldn't have written about the Kakatiya town of Warangal and not the least about the region of Palnādu. A classical scholar-poet of that rank and capability was only Srinatha. His scholarship and the range of poetic oeuvre is so immense that every possible abandoned or orphaned text is attributed to him both enlarging his image and value for the present day Telugu literary scene as well as the text itself. He is also a poet about whom there is plenty of literature available in oral circulation and most stray verses in Telugu are attributed to him. There is a larger than life image of Srinatha available in these stray verses for the reader. Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman argue, by the fifteenth century Srinatha exemplifies an idea of what a poet should be.

It wouldn't be irrelevant to know a few biographical details of Srinātha at this point. He is an important poet of the classical tradition in the late 14th century and early 15th century Andhra *dēsa*. He was the contemporary of the Vijayanagara rulers Harihara II, Devaraya I and Devaraya II. He also declared that his language is *karnata-bhāsha*. The historian Venkata Ramanayya notes that though this statement may look ambiguous to readers of today, it might not have been so for the contemporaries of Srinātha because they knew that he employed a dialect used in Pākanādu his native region included in Karnata country. Venkata Ramanayya also throws some light on Srinātha being a poet of *karnata-bhāsha*. He says that Pākanādu to which Srinātha originally belonged was part of Kannada rule and the dialect which he used might have been called Karnata but that does not mean that the language Srinātha actually used was Kannada.

Though Srinātha has a formidable reputation as a poet in both Sanskrit and Telugu languages, he was never associated with any of the major ruling dynasties of Andhra of this period. But he was employed in the court of Pedakomati Vemareddi and later his son Anavemareddi. He belonged to a region called Pākanādu which was the neighbouring region to Palnādu.<sup>9</sup> He was not the court poet of even the Reddi kings for whom he dedicated most of his works. His patron was Bendapudi Annayya a minister in the Pākanādu region which was the native of both Srinātha himself and Annayya. From the biography of Srinātha of Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman, we learn Srinātha did not enjoy the patronage of any major ruler of Andhra of his times but indeed he moved from place to place and sought patronage for his work. Five major works of Srinātha have survived *Naishadiya-carita*, *Bhimesvarapurānamu*, *Kasi-khandamu*, *Hara-vilasamu*, and *Siva-ratri-mahatyamu*. He was commissioned to write *Naishadiya Carita* and his earlier works are lost to us. Incidentally most of his works also are on Lord Siva and Saivism<sup>10</sup>. "Positioning Srinātha in this way sheds light on the cultural ecology of his time and on the expressive goals of his own works. He freely moves among the various kingdoms, since he is not connected firmly to any single political centre. He has no problem working for Peda

Komati Vema as a vidyadhikāri- basically an epigraphist, scribe and consultant...”<sup>11</sup>

The two texts *Palnātivīra Caritra* and *Krīdābhirāmamu* are more or less abandoned and therefore there needs to be a father figure for these texts and that can only be Srinātha. Therefore the question of authorship becomes very important: a great classic like *Palnātivīra Caritra* which epitomises the Telugu pride must have an author who is of equal importance and *cannot* have its sources to the mālas and mādigas who are considered of the “lower” castes. The available manuscripts of the epic were of uneven quality and it was Pingali Lakshmikāntham who brought all parts together under his editorship in 1961. These various parts are written supposedly by Srinātha and Kondaiah and Mallanna. The latter two authors have no credentials in Telugu literature and one doesn’t get to know anything more about them except the fact that the manuscripts were found with their names. From the available historical and literary evidence it seems that there is a deliberate attempt to smudge evidence and project a different kind of reality which is to see Srinātha as the single author of the epic.

This is an evidence of what twentieth century enthusiasts of Telugu literature actually did to what exists today in the canonical form as “Telugu Literature.” Even before these texts were selected for printing and publishing, there seems to be an obvious effort to obliterate all evidence of writers who did not belong to mainstream Andhra. Vinukonda Vallabharāya falls into this category about whom and whose literature all evidence perhaps has been erased for posterity.

### III

To understand the central figures of the project historically, the heroes of the *Palnātivīrula Katha*, we need to examine the formation of the regional world that the epic depicts. As we understand, territory has always been a contested space over centuries, therefore the polities that controlled Andhra, and the formation of the notion of *deśa* or *rājya* will be investigated in

this segment along with a reflection on the ideas of religion, caste and gender.

## Territory

Territory is an important component which has always been a matter of contention between empires since ages. The battle of Palnādu is also for territory and it gives an occasion to look into the aspects of territorialization over a period of time in Andhra. In order to understand territory in pre-modern Andhra a picture of the polities that controlled Telugu speaking areas in Andhra beginning from 11th century to 15th century which is the period in which most of the epic related sources are embedded in, is drawn here. The pattern of the Kakatiyas is that they divided the country into *rājya*, *sīma*, *nādu* and *sthala* while village is the smallest unit of control. A few villages constituted *sthala* and a few *sthalas* formed a *nādu* and a few *nādus* became a *sīma* and a few *sīmas* could form a *rājya*. This example is also followed later by the Vijayanagar rulers.<sup>12</sup> This gives us a broad sense of the magnitude and influence of these rulers and their territory.

## History

Gene Roghair notes that “unlettered persons sometimes call much local stories as *jarigina kathalu*’ or stories that happened.”<sup>13</sup> This also brings us to the debate on history and fiction; *jarigina kathalu* in that sense is both history and fiction. In Telugu, history is understood as a story that actually happened in the past. Thus it erases a distinction of verifiability of something to be qualified as history. There have been attempts to prove that the epic of Palnādu is based on historical figures belonging to the Haihaya dynasty of 12th century<sup>14</sup> citing the Bētavolu *sāsanamu*. The historian BSL Hanumantha Rao made an attempt to reconstruct the history of Planādu through the texts of Mudigonda Vīrabhadrakavi’s *Palnātivīra Bhāgavatamu* (1862) and Pingali Lakshmikantham’s *Palnātivīra Caritra*, and on the songs of the dāsarlu<sup>15</sup> who sang the songs of Palnādu. To locate centrally the rulers of *Andhradēsa*

in the pre-modern times, let us take a look at the dynasties that ruled various Telugu speaking people between 11th century and 15th century. A prominent feature of Andhra in pre-modern times is the lack of unified political power that brought together all the Telugu speaking peoples under one authority. Therefore, there was no single ruling dynasty under whose rule all the Telugu speaking people were united geographically and linguistically. 12th century Andhra was characterised by political instability due to wars between Eastern and Western Cālukyas. After the decline of Eastern Cālukyas who ruled mainly the coastal Andhra areas between 9th century and 12th century and Kaktiyas' decline in the 14th century, the Telugu speaking people were under the rule of the Karnata rulers of Vijayanagara and then the Bahamani Sultans in the northern part. And in the Southern parts, they were ruled by four different polities in the same time period as that of the Eastern Cālukyas. It's difficult to imagine a unified polity that ruled all over the Telugu speaking areas. Thus the Telugu country was divided into several small polities.

The war of Palnādu was one among the many between these feudatories. The war is supposed to have taken place for a period of thirty six years between two generations. Historians note that among the rulers who participated in this war include, Kālachuri kings, Velanāti Durjayas, the kings of Kota Ballala of Hoyasala dynasty and Cāgi Beta. The Haihayas of Palnādu are feudatories to Eastern Cālukyas. When Tribhuvana Malla waged a war against the Cālukāyas of Vengi, the rulers of Palnādu are supposed to have helped them around the year 1118. Therefore Anugurāju of the epic is the son of Cāgi Beta II and the time of the epic is fixed by historians between 1181 and 82. There are so many variations within the epic and these dates are fixed based on inscriptions and on the written texts of the epic. The epic of Palnādu describes that Anugurāju, the father of Nalagāmarāju came from the North of India and belongs to the dynasty of Haihaya and came to Andhra as a ritual of fulfilling a penance. Historians do not agree with that idea as the court of Anugu had ministers with Telugu names like Doddanāyudu and Peddanna and Pernīdu and Sūrñīdu. The point here is that the whole epic of Palnādu needs to be understood as

fiction based on an actual war that happened and not to treat it as a source for understanding the history of Andhra.<sup>16</sup>

The sources for reconstructing such a history are meagre and therefore historians like BSL Hanumantha Rao depend on literary texts to complete the narrative of the history of Palnādu. Some landmarks are there like the irrigation tank in Kāremapūdi and temples are dedicated to characters like *nāyakurālu* Nāgamma, one of the central characters in the epic and the heroes of the epic also have temples dedicated to them which were built in the twelfth century which are used as evidence to reconstruct history. Hanumantha Rao admits that, he reconstructed the history of Palnādu with the help of about six inscriptions of the family and two poems. The earliest inscriptional evidence to Palnādu comes from the Satrasala inscription dated to be 1103 AD. The Satrasala inscription mentions Dorya Beta i.e, Beta, the son of Dorya I. He notes that Nāyakurālu sought the help of her contemporary rulers in the war of Palnādu. “These rulers include Kota Bimaraja of Dharanikota (AD 1161-90), Rudradeva, the Kāktīya king of Anmakonda (AD 1158-96), Ballala II, the Hoyasala king of Dwarasamudra (A.D 1173-1224), and the king Desinga.”<sup>17</sup> He continues to provide more historical evidence of rulers who could have participated in the war of Palnādu. Even the King of Palnādu, Anugurāju is said to have made the journey from the Haihaya rule of the North and came down and settled down in Andhra. But Hanumantha Rao suggests that “The *Palnātivīra Caritra* calls this ancient abode of the family as Jabhalapura.(Mahismatipura the legendary capital of the Haihayas) But the inscriptions of these families do not contain even the slightest reliable indication regarding the time and cause of their migration to the South from their ancestral home.”<sup>18</sup>

Hanumantha Rao observes that the war of Palnādu characterises the history of Andhra before the rise of Kakatiyas, which was mostly ruled by small feudatories until then. The coastal Andhra fell to the position of a province and was ruled by the subordinates of Velanāti Durjayas of the Cōla empire. “In the mighty Cōla-Chalukya conflict, her strategic position as bridge head between Vengi and Karnata made Palnādu a victim to the repeated Western



Chalukyan invasions. The rulers of Palnādu had therefore a testing time and quite often they adopted the prudent policy of shifting their loyalty to the party whichever was victorious.”<sup>19</sup> They aided the Cōla-Cālukya rulers whenever there was a need to support these powers against external invaders. Eventually the Haihaya prince Betarāja took possession of Palnādu with the help of other local subordinates. Anugurāju who is the first ruler of Palnādu in the epic, and Hanumantha Rao fixes his time period to be around 1138 AD.

In this context, Cynthia Talbot in her seminal work on medieval Andhra *Precolonial India in Practice* observes that, *Palnātivīrula Katha* however is loosely set in the late twelfth century battle of Palnādu. And it is set in the Kākatīya Andhra. Though the Kākatīyas themselves were not directly involved in the war but some small feudatories of the Kākatīyas were. The prominent Kakatiya general made a gift of land in the name of Macerla, one of the main cities in relation to the heroes of the epic. The temples of the heroes were established in Donakonda village in Darsi Taluk, Prakasam district as the fifteenth century record from Donakonda village demonstrates.<sup>20</sup>

This is briefly the cartography of the ruling polities of Andhra between 11th century and 15th century. Let us have a detailed view of the ruling dynasties of Andhra and the territories they controlled for a fuller reflection on Palnādu as a region.

### The Eastern Cālukyas

Eastern Cālukyas ruled Andhra from 624 CE to 1118 CE till the death of Kulóttunga Cōla. Their capital city was initially Vengipura and later Bejawada and then Rajamahendravaram. The territories that they ruled include the East and West Godavari districts during this period. The historians inform us that due to political instability in Andhra, Vengi Cālukya kingdom was divided into regions of Velamanādu, Kammanādu, Pakanādu and Palnādu.

## Pākanādu

The regions of Kadapa and Nellore were included in Pākanādu, which were ruled by the early Vijayanagar rulers<sup>21</sup>. Nellore and eastern part of Kadapa were known as Karnata during the time of Srinātha. He lived in Pākanādu. Before the region became part of the mighty Vijayanagar empire, it was ruled by the Reddi kings of Kondavīdu. Harihara II conquered the areas around Srisailam and Tripurantakam before 1386 and his son Devarāya who was the governor of Udayagiri captured the old Reddi capital and conquered the region up to Motupalli by 1390 AD.

## Palnādu

Palnādu region consists of the present Guntur and Prakasam districts. Mācerla, Gurajāla and Kāremapudi are the important towns of this region. The river Krishna flows on both northern and southern parts of the region. The region in the present is known for its red chilly and tobacco production.

## Kākatīyas

The Kakatiyas were the first to give an “inchoate notion of Andhra” to these diverse polities observes Cynthia Talbot. They were among those who accepted the over lordship of the Western Cālukyas and ruled the Telangāna region by 11th century. Geographical boundaries of the region differed even among the rulers within the same dynasty. The geographic parameters of Kākatīyas Andhra consist of only 14 of its 21 of the present districts. Among the districts excluded in the Kakatiya regime are the present Srikākulam and Visakhapatnam.

After the fall of Warangal many independent kingdoms came into existence. The four important are Warangal, Rācakonda, Kondavīdu and Kōrukonda. The Kondvīdu rulers included both Pākanādu and Palnādu in their kingdom. However, both these regions are central to the understanding of the position of Srinātha and the epic of Palnādu. After the decline of the Kakatiyas, their

officers took charge of different parts of Andhra. Prólāya Véma after the death of Prataparudra, 1323 got control over areas south of Krisna to Kandukuru in the north of the Nellore district and from the Bay of Bengal to the Srisaila mountain in the Kurnool district. The country between the rivers Krisna and Godavari was included in the Reddi kingdom during the reign of Prólāya Véma.<sup>22</sup> He later built a capital on the hills of Palnādu region. In 1328 Vinukonda was the capital city of the Reddi kings for whom Srinātha dedicated most of his works. Prólāya Véma was succeeded by his son Anapóta.

## Religion

Twelfth century is a period of religious contention in the history of *Andhradésa*. The epic under study, *Palnātivīrula Katha* takes up this central issue of religion in its various aspects as exemplified in its characters. It is central to the understanding of the text to know the religious cult of Saiva, Vaishnava and the cult of Ankāamma whom the *vidyāvantulu* invoke in their rendition of the epic of Palnādu.

A brief outline of the religious influences that swept through peoples' lives across ages in Andhra is drawn here. Buddhism and Vaisnavism lived side by side in the 4th century and 5th century. According to *Panditārādhyā Caritra* Buddha worship continued till the end of 12th century in places like Amaravati and coastal Andhra. Vaishnavism had appropriated Buddhism into its fold by granting Buddha the status of being one of the *avatāras* among the ten *avatāras* of Vishnu. People were more flexible in terms of religious beliefs.

All existing traces of Buddhism were wiped out in the wake of a militant Saivism of Panditārādhyā known as Vīrasaivism in the 12th century. Beginning from the Satavahana times, Andhra rulers were Saivite. The eastern Cālukyas were ardent followers of Saivism. Many of their temples still exist in Andhra. The Southern and Western portions of Andhra were under the Pallavas and Cālukyas of Badami and Kalyāni. And these rulers were patrons of Saivism. Saivism is associated with hunter gatherers and from

early times on images of *linga* are available in various Neolithic sites. P.Sreerama Sarma in his essay *Saivism in Andhra Pradesh* notes that “Bhutadhipa, Pramadhhipa, Pasupati and Siva are names used in different verses to indicate his association with *bhutas*, cattle and fierce activity.”<sup>23</sup> In fact Andhra itself was referred to as a land of the *trilinga désa* because of the presence of the major Saivite temples of Dakshramam, Bhimesavaram and Srisailam.

The Siva worship in Andhra culminated in the Vīrasaiva movement in the 12th century pioneered by Basavaeswara in Karnataka and Panditarādhyā in Andhra. Vīrasaivism waged its big war against the Brahmanical *vedic* religion which had become confined only to the monopoly of upper caste men. Vīrasaivism opened its doors to all castes and women were also part of it. *Palnātvīrula Katha* has two ministers supporting each set of brothers belonging to Saivism and Vaishnavism. In fact *nāyakurālu* Nāgamma is an ardent Saivite which in fact seems to be in keeping with the trends prevalent in the 12th century. It was the Kākatīyas who developed and encouraged a religion where people developed equal interest in Saivism and Vaishnavism.

When we examine religions of Andhra over a period of time there is a gradual Brahminization of all religions as it happened with Buddhism. BSL Hanumantha Rao notes that “ritual-dominated brahmanism transformed itself into devotion centred neo-brahmanism with the stamp of Vaisnavism, so that it could be agreeable to all sections of people. The atheistic nature of Buddhism allowed this neo-brahmanism to take over. Vaisnavism is indeed equated with Brahmanism. The period of the Pallavas is the period of brahmanization of the South though they themselves were non-Brahmin in origin.”<sup>24</sup> In the medieval Andhra, castes and religions were mixed and various ruling dynasties tried to brahmanize themselves and thereby brahmanize the ruling public beginning with the Satavahanas and Pallavas.<sup>25</sup>

Let us now examine goddess Ankāamma who is from the local pantheon of gods and goddesses whom the *vidyāvāntulu* worship before every performance of the epic. Ankāamma is also known with other names as Angāamma, Ankamma, Angamma, Angali, Ankali, Ankala Parameswari and Angala Parameswari in

Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu and Karnataka. She signified *vīra rasa*, therefore she is a warrior goddess. She is supposed to be one of the *Sapta Matrikas* and therefore is a form of Kāli. One meaning attributed to the origin of her name is- in Telugu *ankamu* means lap indicative of someone who sits in the lap of lord Siva. The performers of *Palnātivīrula Katha* pray to Ankāamma as the epic is imbued with *vīra rasa* and is a story of the Telugu heroes. She is a village goddess who protects the people and produce in villages. She is the goddess whom the *māla* singers worship unlike the upper caste heroes of the epic who worship the Hindu deities like Siva and Vishnu.

## Caste

Caste is the basis upon which social relations are built and understood in Andhra. The social group *kula* is endogamous and refers to what is known as caste in Andhra country. In Telugu, caste is not indicated by *jāti* unlike in other Indian languages/regions but by *kula*. The war of Palnādu as the historian BSL Hanumantha Rao observes is one of caste war which culminated between the Reddis and the Velamas as at that time the Reddis dominated the Palnādu region. The Reddis and Velamas originally belong to peasant-warrior community. They are basically agriculturists but the caste names were derived from two different regions of Velanādu and Kammanādu. People of Velanādu are Velamas and Kammanādu came to be known as Kammas. Reddis have altogether a different origin. They were office bearers under the Rastrakutas. In the 11th and 12th century *reddikam* was used to denote a position in villages. We have Nāgamma who is the daughter of Rāmireddi while the Palnādu heroes who fight her in the epic are of Velama origin.

In twelfth century, caste was not as stratified as we understand it today. It was more a fluid entity allowing marriages between various kinds of social groups. It was more indicative of social position than of community.<sup>26</sup> B.S.L. Hanumantha Rao observes, “We have one example of a woman whose father was a nayaka but who was married to a reddy (SII5.153). Another had a nāyaka

husband but was the daughter of a boya (SII10.311). A third woman was the sister of a nāyaka and the wife of a reddy (HAS 13.42). Marriage patterns thus indicate much interchange among members of the nayaka, reddy, boya statuses.<sup>27</sup> Caste was a fluid entity and there were marriages occasionally taking place outside the endogamous community.

## Gender

Though gendered relations are a reality across societies, across ages their understanding has changed drastically in the 20th century and accepted roles of men and women have come to be questioned and re-looked at. But a social history of the pre-modern times reveals that women did take part in public life of those times. The epic *Palnātivīrula Katha* places a widow as the central character and as the minister to the rulers of Gurajāla, Nalagāmarajū. She is a worshipper of lord Siva and is well trained in martial arts unlike women in the family like Mancāla or Ratnāla Pērindevī. Her position as a woman is something outside of the realm of family. A historically informed account on the position of women of the twelfth century can give us a clearer understanding of women and the epic under study. Talbot in her study *Pre-colonial India in Practice* observes that, “Another striking feature of the inscriptional corpus is the relatively large number of women represented within it. Women comprise 11 per cent (87 in number) of all individual donors. In ancient India *strīdhana* was restricted to jewelry and other such movable goods. Land in particular, was regarded in the law books as an inappropriate possession for women, although by medieval times the scope of women’s property had broadened. In the event that the land had been given to a woman, by her parents at the time of marriage, for example, it was not supposed to be alienable. She enjoyed usufructory rights, but proprietary rights passed on to either her husband or her brothers (depending upon which family she came from) upon her death. In theory, women were unable to transfer land rights to others but in practice many Kākatīya women have made land grants. All the women who made land grants were unmarried.”<sup>28</sup>

Therefore women did enjoy some rights over property and did enjoy considerable significance in social life of the times.

With these socio-historical principles operating in the background, the next chapter proceeds to engage with the oral traditions of the epic *Palnātivīrula Katha*. I shall next take up two oral traditions like the *vīra vidyāvāntulu* and the *burrakatha* to view the dynamics of these singing performatory traditions to understand them within their historicity and technique.

### Notes

1. The epic is set in the twelfth century, attributed to Srinātha who is considered a fifteenth century writer, therefore the eight hundred year old history remains ambiguous. The other text that is generally referenced to provide evidence to the oral tradition is *Kridābhirāmamu* which is again of uncertain credentials regarding its authorship and therefore its time period.
2. Ideas gathered from Cynthia Talbot's *Precolonial India in Practice*. London: Oxford University Press, 2001.
3. Even as I write the thesis the State formed in 1956 as Andhra Pradesh is divided in to two separate states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh in 2014.
4. See Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in *Image-Music-Text* (1977), London: Fontana Press 1977, p. 2.
5. However, such an attempt was made by Pingali Lakshmikantham who brought together all edited versions of *Palnātivīra Caritra* under one rubric as a book for the modern reader in 1961.
6. See Michale Foucault's essay What is an Author? in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1977, pp. 124-127.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
8. *Ibid.*
9. See Venkata Ramanayya's . *Vijayanagara: The Empire and the City*. New Delhi and Madras: Asian Education Society, 2007.
10. "Srinātha, translator of the *Naishadham*, the *Kasi Khandamu* and *Bhima Khandamu* from the *Scanda Purana*. It is also said that he wrote the *Marudraja Charitra*, the *Hara Vilasam*, and the *Salivahana Sapta Sati*. But I have not met with these books. Srinātha is also said to have written a series of songs called the *Vidhi Natacam* of which only about thirty have been preserved by the oral tradition. Some of these have considerable beauty: but others, written perhaps by his imitators are far inferior. (Brown 23) The Jangamas or Saivite literature is as remarkable for innocence as that of Brahmins is for vice. But the Saiva poems will furnish ample subject for another essay" in *Essay on the Language and Literature of the Telugus* (Part Second). Madras: Asian Educational Service, 1991, p. 25.

11. Narayana Rao and Shulman's *Srīnātha: the poet who made Gods and Kings*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 22.
12. Ideas gathered from Venkata Ramanayya's *Vijayanagara: The Empire and the City*. New Delhi, Madras: Asian Education Society, 2007.
13. See Gene Roghair's *The Epic of Palnadu*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982, p. 34.
14. The Kakatiya ruler Rudramadevi was married to the Haihaya ruler Veerabhadru. Palnativīrulu, the heroes of the epic are supposed to belong to this dynasty of rulers.
15. The historian BSL Hanumantha Rao refers to the singing tradition of *dāsaru* which is not known now, but probably he alludes to the caste of the *vīra vidyāvāntulu* who conventionally sing the epic, *Palnātivīrula Katha*.
16. See Preface to Pingali Lakshmikantham's *Palnātivīra Caritra*. Hyderabad: Visalandhra Publications, 1961.
17. Hanumantha Rao's *Social Mobility in Medieval Andhra*. Hyderabad: Telugu University, 1995, p. 103.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
20. Cynthia Talbot's *Precolonial India in Practice: Society, Region and Identity in Medieval Andhra*. London: OUP, 2001, p. 70.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
24. See BSL Hanumantha Rao's *Social Mobility in Medieval Andhra*. Hyderabad: Telugu University, 1995.
25. The Satavahanas were supposed to be of "low" origin and hence were involved in large scale ritualistic brahminization of themselves and their subjects. There is also historical evidence to suggest that they married brahmin women and took on the *gotra* of their mothers for all public and practical activity; the most eminent example being that of Gautamiputra Satakarni who also assumed the title of *eka brāhmana*.
26. Ideas gathered from BSL Hanumantha Rao's *Social Mobility in Medieval Andhra*. Hyderabad: Telugu University, 1995.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*, p. 83.



## 3

### Of the Narrative

This chapter aims at examining the oral performatory traditions of *Palnātivīrula Katha*, the *vīra vidyāvantulu* and the *burrakatha*. In making an attempt to understand the history of the *Katha* in its entirety, these two traditions will be studied in this segment. The Telugu oral epic *Palnātivīrula Katha* is sung by three different traditions of singers like the *picchiguntala vāllu*, the *vīra vidyāvantulu* and the *burrakatha* performers. Among the three it was difficult to locate the *picchiguntala vāllu* as they are a begging nomadic community of people who sing caste-histories of the Telugus. However, I have worked with the *vīra vidyāvantulu* and the *burrakatha* performers and recorded the song of *Palnātivīrula Katha* and *Palnāti Yuddhamu*<sup>1</sup> which form the basis for this chapter. This chapter is roughly divided into two segments; the first one would discuss the interviews with the singers and their life with the *Katha* and the next section would discuss the *dvipada* and the *ragada* literary traditions in Telugu culture which distinguishes each of these singing performatory practices. The last segment lays down the principles of both the traditions of *vīra vidyāvantulu* and the *burrakatha* as also to suggest some areas of intersection and divergence.

#### I

In order to formulate a concrete research question that logically connects the three issues raised in this chapter, I attempt to explore

the life of the performers to see some continuities and ruptures in the tradition of the epic if possible, to see if the singing tradition has undergone any changes at all, and if so what kind of influences have impacted upon the oral song and how these changes have been accommodated by the singers into their repertoire.<sup>2</sup> The relevance of an oral performance and the nature of an oral story in the twentieth century would also be considered.

### Life with the *Katha*

For most of the performatory oral singers the *vidyāvantulu* or of the *burrakatha*, singing has been either a passion or has come with family tradition. This section explores how the oral singing traditions have interwoven themselves into the lives of the singers and how they have arrived at the present state. It also examines what it means to be the singers of a heroic epic in the twentieth century. Do they look upon it as a profession or does it mean something more than that and does it in any sense define their life style and the choices they make? Or can it sustain itself in the face of the burgeoning commercial and cultural influence of TV & the Telugu cinema<sup>3</sup>?

The earliest singing tradition of *Palnātivīrula Katha* is that of the *vīra vidyāvantulu*. The singing form is also identified with the singing cult of the *vidyāvantulu*. There is no separate name for the singing form. It claims an eight-hundred year old lineage and the epic itself is set in the twelfth century history of Andhra<sup>4</sup>. In Telugu the meaning of the term *vīra vidyāvantulu* is 'a people learned in the heroic cult.' *Vīra* is a prefix used to describe anything related to the heroes of the epic. Therefore, the *vidyāvantulu* claim knowledge of the life and story of the heroes about whom they praise in their song the *Palnātivīrula Katha*.

These are a group of men of *māla* caste in the region of Palnādu or in the present Guntur, Prakasam and Kriṣṇa districts. These are teams of men who train themselves in the singing of the epic of Palnādu. The *vidyāvantulu* distinguish themselves from all other singing performatory traditions of *Palnātivīrula Katha* in not just the technique of the oral epic but the way they practice

what they call *ācāramu*. The *vīra vidyāvāntulu* sing only the epic of *Palnātivīrula Katha* and no other oral epic. Not everyone in the *māla* caste sing the epic but those who sing the *Palnātivīrula Katha* call themselves *ācāravāntulu*, thus preserving the cult of *vīra vidyāvāntulu* exclusively to one community. Though some dalits converted to Christianity in order to obtain benefits of upward mobility in the twentieth century in Andhra, the singers of *Palnātivīrula Katha* remain within the caste and sing the song with a great deal of religious sanctity. They treat the singing of the *Palnātivīrula Katha* as a religion in itself. The song is therefore, by norm, taught to *māla* caste singers alone. The *ācāramu* is prevalent in eleven districts of Andhra Pradesh. These include Prakasam, Gunturu, Nellore, Kurnool, Kadapa, Khammam, Nalgonda, Kriṣṇa, Warangal and Vizianagaram and Visakapatnam.

The *vīra vidyāvāntulu* sing the song as a tribute to the *māla* hero of the epic, Kannamadāsu who is considered the foster son of Brahmanaidu of *Palnātivīrula Katha*. The *mālas* are one of the dalit castes of the *mādigas* and *mālas* of Andhra Pradesh. They form forty five percent of the dalit population in Andhra. Conventionally they were village watchmen, domestic labourers and craftsmen. Land ownership was rare and education was also not very common among people of these castes. But now the situation is changing.

While the singers are of a supposedly low caste origin, the custodians of the tradition have always been the “upper” caste priests and the Kamma landlords adding a complex dimension to the caste composition of the epic culture. The *māla* singers remain the interpreters of the song between the heroes who have attained divinity by being worshipped in temples and their devotees in the present century. The *pitādhipati*<sup>5</sup> of the temple, a brahmin conducts the temple ceremony. They conduct the festival of the heroes in the month of November and invite the *vīra vidyāvāntulu* to perform the song of the heroes of the *Palnātivīrula Katha*. Episodes from the epic are performed in the temple of Lord Cennakeśava in Prakasam district. Now, even during these festivals of the temple, all episodes are not sung but only the important episodes would be sung and performed. Every five years there is a *tirunālla*<sup>6</sup> in

Karemapudi and it is locally believed that the sons of Brahmanaidu conduct the ceremony. Only during the *tirunālla* at Kāryamapudi for nine days, all episodes would be sung and performed by the *vīra vidyāvāntulu*.

For the present study, I worked with the *vīra vidyāvāntulu* Kinnera Brahmaiah, Kinnera Chandraiah, Kinnera Kesavulu, Sāthulūri Madhu and Bathula Malakondaiah and recorded their performance (which was done solely for the project). Brahmaiah doesn't earn a living through the singing of the song, though his life revolves around the *Katha*; for him the performance of the epic is more a way of life than a means of livelihood. He lives with his family in the village of Viraraghavuni Kota in the Kandukuru mandal of the present Prakasam district in Andhra Pradesh which was part of the earlier Palnādu region. He owns an acre of land and works on the farm of another in another acre and a half of land. So with that he makes a living. His team members, Kinnera Chandraiah, Kinnera Kesavulu, and Bathula Malakondaiah live in the same village and work as farm labourers but Sathuluri Madhu lives in Kavali but is in a position to join the team within a short notice. The current generation of singers are literate and have passed the tenth standard examination whereas the earlier generation of singers of the epic were mostly uneducated. Brahmaiah who is the main performer or the *pradhāna kahthakudu* can read and write Telugu. Among his team members Sathuluri Madhu passed the tenth standard exam from the state board, while Malakondaiah and others have completed their fifth standard. They are all literate in Telugu.

Bramhaiah and his team perform the *Palnātivīrula Katha* on invitation at the temple of the heroes in Kāremapūdi and on any other occasion like weddings or the naming ceremonies of children or any other auspicious occasion. The song is also sung when people of the same *ācāramu* die.

Brahmaiah looks upon his role as the narrator of *Palnātivīrula Katha* as something of a privilege. He conducts sessions in his village, to those interested in learning and continuing the tradition of *Palnātivīrula Katha* whenever he gets time. That is how his present team members learn and assist him in carrying out the

performances. None of the performers have any formal training in music or acting. But they learn it up informally when they get time through the sessions that Brahmaiah conducts. They have these sessions in the evenings in a temple or in a public place like the local government school premises, where they gather after a day's tiring work and continue their sessions till late in the evening. The tradition of the *vīra vidyāvāntulu* preserves the oral singing of the *Palnātivīrula Katha* for many generations now and Brahmaiah confirms he has learnt it from his father as the singing tradition runs in his family. His father, grandfather and great grandfathers have preserved the tradition in the family. So he continues this singing performance, though he doesn't take it as his profession. This family continuity of tradition is disrupted when it comes to his children. They don't take up the singing but study in the local school and college. Brahmaiah's son Kinnera Harischandra Prasad is studying in Standard 10 and doesn't perform the *Katha* and the daughter is married off. When asked why his son didn't learn the song, Brahmaiah answered that, one wouldn't be able to make a living with the performance of the song in these times and so his children never showed interest in learning the song. They are not interested in farming either. They look forward to taking up a salaried job. Thus a hiatus in the tradition is created for the first time (more on this later). The other kinds of ruptures or departures in the singing of the song either in the structure or theme are difficult to locate due to lack of earlier points of reference be it in the form of inscriptions or even in the form of an earlier version of the song. All, these suggests the decay of an organic community which is essential for upholding a singing tradition like *vidyāvāntulu*.

Though the world of Brahmaiah and the world of the heroes of the twelfth century may be similar sociologically, their struggles and concerns in life are so far removed from each other. The war of Palnādu as exemplified in the *Katha* is one of power and polity where as Brahmaiah and his team members' concern is a continuous struggle to eke out a decent living in a consumerist society. One of Brahmaiah's longstanding desires is to perform at Ravindrabharati<sup>7</sup> in Hyderabad not just to showcase the art form but also to gain recognition and more profitable performances. It

is undoubtedly a dying art form and there are no institutions to teach or practice the singing form of the *vīra vidyāvāntulu*. There is no government patronage either to the singers or to the art form itself.

When it comes to *burrakatha*, it is of a relatively new origin though it is an improvisation upon the *jāngama katha* used for propagating *vīra* saivism around the twelfth century but later it was used to sing heroic songs. It was reinvented in the twentieth century by Kakumanu Subbarao and Nazer<sup>8</sup> for the purpose of creating awareness among people, of the dangers of war and other social maladies in the society. *Burra* in Telugu refers to a dry pumpkin shell used for making the *tambura*, an instrument used for singing the *burrakatha*. Therefore *burrakatha* is something that is sung using the instrument. *Burrakatha* is learnt either through a family tradition or from the available oral performatory traditions as is evident from the existing artistic patterns.

I worked with Nazer's son S.K. Babuji and recorded the song of *Palnāti Yuddhamu* for this project. He follows the trend created by his father in practicing or in teaching the art of *burrakatha*. Babuji lives in Gunturu. He belongs to the caste of *dūdekula*. *Dūdekula* caste is classified as other backward classes in the list of reservations according to the Andhra government. It is unusual for people of this caste to take up singing as a profession. Conventionally they make cloth with *dūdi* which is a type of coarse cotton. But now, as is the case with people of all other castes, these people too have taken to various other kinds of jobs. Babuji, like his father, is also a trained Carnatic singer and hence it is but natural for him to take up his father's art form and propagate it. He is qualified in basic science; he holds a B.Sc degree from Nagarjuna University, Gunturu. He is currently employed in Potti Sriramulu Telugu University as a Guest Faculty in the Folk Arts Department. For Babuji life with the *Katha* is a long journey, though commercially not beneficial. He conducts workshops for school children on *burrakatha* as an art form in Hyderabad and other parts of Andhra. He runs a school called Padma Sri Nazer Burrakatha Vidyalayam in Gunturu to teach *burrakatha* to interested learners. Though a competent singer himself, for various reasons Babuji couldn't

attain the same name and fame as his father did. His father is a *Padma Sri* awardee but Babuji doesn't seem to use the name of his father either to earn a living or to gain a profitable employment through number of performances.

He takes up programs on behalf of the *Burra-katha Sanchara Vāni* in various parts of Andhra. Babuji, in a sense, is a complete artist as he also knows acting which he says is essential for a *burra-katha* artist. He has acted in a couple of TV serials aired on *Maa TV* like *Sri Bhagavatamu* and *Akshintalu*. Babuji is usually assisted by Sheik Mira, his cousin and one of his students, Mallikaruna Sagar as his *vantalu* in his performances. Sheik Mira is a retired employee of the Andhra government and has learnt singing by listening to his uncle Nazer. Mallikarjuna Sagar is a student, doing his M.A in *Burra-katha* at Telugu University. For both Sheik Mira and Mallikarjuna Sagar participation in a performance is an interesting occasion yet not a full-fledged activity. Sheik Mira is continuing to accompany his cousin out of sheer love for the art form. Apart from *Palnāti Yuddhamu*, Babuji also performs *Bobbili Yuddhamu*, *Virabhimanyu*, *Chatrapati Sivaji*, *Sri Krishanadevaraya* and *Sri Lachumammakatha*. The other stories the singers perform are *Katamaraju Katha*, *Desinguraju Katha* and *Allūri Sitārāmāraju Katha* and any other stories commissioned either by the government or by private people. Babuji also writes and composes new songs for any occasion, for instance, the life story of a prominent local personality, if he is commissioned to sing the story of a local politician or an important authority.

Babuji acknowledges that apart from curiosity value in knowing the art of *burra-katha*, there is no real interest among people, which is needed to sustain the art form *burra-katha*. Government encouragement is also limited and not sufficient to give a new lease of life to the art form or to the artists who depend upon these arts for a living.<sup>9</sup> In spite of the bleak situation Babuji continues to engage with *burra-katha* out of sheer love for the singing art form. His children study in the local school while his wife teaches in an Anganwadi school. But all his children can sing and perform for a *burra-katha* though they haven't independently given a performance so far. There is no uninterrupted eight-hundred-year-old legacy

to be protected, but all his children perform the *burrakatha* as a family practice and also as a departure from the routine of the modern education and occupations. However, they can't afford to take it up as a serious profession.

In order to tie up an earlier point, that there is a paucity of patrons and patronage to oral performatory traditions and performers like the *vidyāvantulu* or the *burrakatha*, it becomes necessary to ask the question why these art forms are dying in the 20th century though they seem to have enjoyed an uninterrupted continuity in their tradition or have sustained the test of time for so many centuries? Babuji answers that there has never been any inscriptional evidence to show them as part of a courtly tradition but they were part of the life of the community or village. He says that the *jangāla katha* was perhaps used by the Eastern Cālukyan kings to sing their heroic deeds. They were part of a community life. Folklorists, Roman Jakobson and Petr Bogatyrev in their path breaking essay *Folklore as a Special Form of Creation* analyze reasons for the fall out of an oral performance in a modern society and also for the relevance of a written text to the same society. They argue, the very existence of folklore depends upon a community acceptance and that *collective creativity* is the essential condition in which an oral performance continues to thrive.

If descriptions of nature displease the community, they are stricken from the folklore repertoire. In short, in folklore only those forms are retained which hold a functional value for the given community. In this way one function of a form may clearly be replaced by another. But as soon as a form becomes non-functional it dies out in folklore, while in a literary work it retains its potential existence.<sup>10</sup>

Hence the failure of the ancient oral performances in modern times. More over the community life of the performer which is an integral part of the performance, is also disrupted due to urbanization and the performers leaving their conventional base in villages towards cities in search of education and livelihood. In modern times literature and oral traditions may have come to coexist. "Here Literature fulfilled one set of cultural tasks, and oral poetry another. Naturally, in the urban situation literature gained



the upper hand over folklore-- market production over production on demand. But to the conservative village, individualized poetry is just as alien as market production."<sup>11</sup> By definition modern life is diverse as the means of production and employment patterns don't require a community life. On the other hand, they are an intrusion into a homogenous community life.

The complexity of the situation is understood in terms of different arguments that Walter Benjamin offers (in the German context) of a work of art in the mechanical age. He explained it in the context of the irrelevance of German art in an age in which everything is available in multiplicity including art, where art has value primarily as a *remote original* with some *cult value*, but the duplicate is as *useful* as its original and therefore the original loses its value. He clearly indicates that the reproduction of a work of art say of a 14th or 15th century in the 20th century would have only lost its relevance in being far removed from its context in time and space in the twentieth century but also because of technology which makes it available in multiple numbers. The tradition of *vidyāvāntulu* was relevant to a people who lived in as an organic community.<sup>12</sup> But the conventional art form that has preserved the story up until the twentieth century loses its patrons and the community of audience--suggesting that the survival of any oral epic necessarily requires the existence of a community rooted in its values.

The originality of an oral performance loses its relevance in such a context and it becomes an encumbrance considering the elaborate preparations required for an oral performance and secondarily when an easy availability of an alternative form of entertainment can only reduce the oral performances to a distant past or as something that can only be valued in a museum. Benjamin's perceptive comment on how much valued traditions and arts at one point of history become completely irrelevant at yet another point of time must be noted here: "The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition. This tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable. An ancient statue of Venus, for example, stood in a different traditional context with the Greeks, who made

it an object of veneration, than with the clerics of the Middle Ages, who viewed it as an ominous idol. Both of them, however, were equally confronted with its uniqueness, that is, its aura. Originally the contextual integration of art in tradition found its expression in the cult<sup>13</sup>.

In addition to the loss of a community, the mechanization of production leads to irrelevance of any form of art that depends on organic means of production. The oral performatory traditions in the new age, have to compete with technological processes that can duplicate a song or performance any number of times, for example with something like cinema. In this case technology interferes at two levels: one by mechanical reproduction and two in the non-conductive nature of a camera to capture a live performance inclusive of an audience. The development in the realm of the camera and movie making actually take away the remotest relevance even of the other performing arts that don't require a camera. "The artistic performance of a stage actor is definitely presented to the public by the actor in person; that of the screen actor, however, is presented by a camera, with a twofold consequence. The camera that presents the performance of the film actor to the public need not respect the performance as an integral whole... This market, where he offers not only his labor but also his whole self, his heart and soul, is beyond his reach. During the shooting he has as little contact with it as any article made in a factory."<sup>14</sup> Now if we take alternatives, the new electronic media has replaced all kinds of public means of entertainment or performances. Can these singers perform through a medium to an audience unlike the earlier phase, where a stage provided the space for a performance in front of a direct audience who could gauge and appreciate a performer? A human connection that an artist could make with his spectators is lost with the emergence of the camera.

Mr. Babuji who also has some experience of having performed for television in front of a camera endorses Bejnamin's view that in order to be relevant to the audience of present day, an oral performer also must make himself more techno-friendly and be able to perform in front of a camera. However, the news coverage cameras which are used to capture the still images of a news reader

are placed in front of the singers, which would dramatically restrict the movement of the performer and the whole purpose of the show would be defeated. The oral performances are not meant for a movie making camera although there have been some efforts being made to record the performances. The performer must make him/herself aware of the camera angle and all the rest of the technology related to it. He must know the specific ways in which an oral performance needs to be directed, produced and transmitted to a television audience in order to reach out to a larger audience and to become popular. This kind of familiarity and privilege an oral performer in the present day is unlikely to possess and therefore the crisis continues.

Lastly, added to the combined aspects of technology and economic interests, there is also a lack of ideological support system in the modern world for these arts. For example, in the brahmanical Hindu tradition what survived the test of time is something that is suitable to the dominant ideology of the modern rulers. But the alternative or non-brahmanical traditions find it difficult to survive in these times. What the historian Champakalakshmi discusses in the context of the Tamil *Tevaram* which was patronized and given a sustenance even in the twentieth century seems to aptly elucidate the context of the Telugu epic under study- “the ideological needs of the Cōla dynasty were fulfilled by the text and its continuing importance in the temple movement. ... what is of special interest is that, at the time of recovery the Cōla king is supposed to have lamented the loss of the several hymns as the palm leaves containing them were moth eaten. The king, however, was consoled by a divine reassurance that what had been recovered fulfilled the ideological needs of the Cōlas.”<sup>15</sup> There is no temple culture or a *matha* which can patronize and give the epic song a new lease of life or sustenance even in the overtly mechanical age.

At a different level on the issue of patronage and sustenance to the *burrakatha*, Babuji, when I interviewed him, put forward yet another set of intricate arguments that explain the present situation. His father Nazer was associated with the Communist Party of India and was with the Praja Natya Mandali for many years, but

eventually he came out of the party as he saw the party leadership changing its nature- he witnessed a certain new breed of leaders who now left the party agenda behind and had individual interests promoted, therefore Nazer dissociated himself from the party and thus from singing the praise of these self-centered ideologues of the CPI. After that both the father and the son received many invitations to join several other political parties but they refused and kept the art form free of these ideological obligations to any of these political parties. This is the primary change because of which *burrakatha* lost one kind of conventional patronage.<sup>16</sup> Consequentially, the art forms like *vidyāvantulu* or the *burrakatha* have to compete with a bewildering range of new entertaining cultures in order to survive.

Lastly, the written text also contributes to the decay of the oral practices by making the text available in multiple copies in print. Jacobson and Bogatyrev state that a live community is a prerequisite for an oral performance whereas that is not a requirement, for a written text. A community that accepts the rendition is necessary in each case of an oral presentation but that is not the case with a text. They have compared the oral and written cultures to *langue* and *parole*, “In the field of folklore the possibility of reactivating poetic facts is significantly smaller. If the bearers of a given poetic tradition should die out, this tradition can no longer be resuscitated, while in literature phenomena which are a hundred or even several hundred years old may revive and become productive once again!”<sup>17</sup> In a written text, the community disappears and the reader emerges; s/he in his/her privacy reads the text. In a written text what remains of the original oral song is only the plot line stripped of all other elements of orality like the ritual, the repetitive techniques and the musicality.

All story is oral according to Walter Benjamin, “Experience which is passed from mouth to mouth is the source from which all story tellers have drawn. Oral tradition has always sustained itself in a culture of story-telling where memory and logic is the resource.”<sup>18</sup> The printed word makes memory redundant: “The art of storytelling is ending because the epic side of truth, wisdom is dying out.”<sup>19</sup> The dependence on book or the printed word was

already popular and therefore the desire to preserve something for posterity only through orality is losing practice in the twentieth/ twenty first century.

## II

### Dvipada and Ragada

For a fuller exploration of these two singing traditions, it would be also necessary to reflect on the literary composition of the song. The song of *Palnativirula Katha* which the *vira vidyāvāntulu* sing is a poetic composition in the *dvipada* meter which was popular in the Telugu country around the 12th century. The *burrakatha* performance on the other hand, is composed in *ragada* meter which is also known as *tripadi*. More over the basis of the oral song of *Palnāti Yuddhamu* is a written text in the *ragada* meter. These two meters would be studied in order to understand the differences between the two literary genres to drive home a point that these traditions in all their forms have been closer to spoken language of the times. *Janapadas*<sup>20</sup> as Babuji notes are fully sung in *pada sāhitya*.

The *dvipada* is also an identifying mark of the twelfth century *vīrasaiva* movement. The genre was invented by Pāḷkuriki Sōmanātha who wished to bring literature closer to people from the high traditions of *mārga* Literature of his times. D.R. Nagaraj in the context of discussing the emergence of diverse literary cultures in Kannada observes that “Literary cultures acquire a particular sort of material practice when royal courts are involved in a significant way. In the context of Kannada literature the court had a magisterial conception of literature, one radically different from the practices of poetry from below. The courtly practice of literature was linked to the emergence of the Sanskrit cultural order and to Sanskrit’s role in defining the forms of cultural power.”<sup>21</sup> When Pāḷkurki composed *Basavapurānamu*, the king was not the centre of the composition, but the revolutionary reformer and founder of *vīrasaivism*, Basaveswara was. Since the aim of the religious movement was to bring God closer to people so also the language

and so the metrical composition of *dvipada* was something that was meant for the understanding of the commoners. Critics like D.R. Nagaraj believe that *dvipada* compositions *expunged* the king from the center of poetry which *campu kāvya* prioritized and thus an opposition both in the poetic grammar and in the ideological form was created.<sup>22</sup> It may be true that the two major compositions of Pāḷkurki are on the lives of the reformers of vīrasaiva movement, Basaveswara and Panditaradhya and it is also true that these writings are composed in the *dvipada* meter, but one would need to disagree with D.R.Nagaraj as in Telugu *dvipada* is used in various other kinds of compositions also including the present *Palnātivīrula Katha* a song in the praise of these powerful local chieftains of Palnādu. So it is not entirely true that the *dvipada* expunged king from the poetic realms. Twelfth century is thus a period that culminated in major religious and political upheavals to bring about a revolutionary change in society. This is precisely the literary scene in which the present epic is set and also this is the time period in which the performatory oral tradition claims its origin.

## Dvipada

*Dvipada* as the term indicates *dvi* being two and *pada* meaning words, hence it is a metrical composition in Telugu which consists of two di-syllabic words and consists of any number of feet in its form. The simplicity of the meter is considered to bring poetry closer to the commoner and to spoken Telugu. The literary historian Arudra observes that the *dvipada* seems to have originated from an earlier *desi* meter called *taruvōja* which is used for composing the songs of working people and women. And the earliest inscriptional evidence also shows that the *taruvōja* meter was used for composing both songs and poems. Later poets worked upon the *madhyākkara* meter and developed it into the finer *dvipada*. Here is an example of a *dvipada* poem-

Eg: అంతట నారాజు|అతివల తోడ  
గురజాలకును వచ్చి|కొన్ని నాళ్లండి

పాలమచా పురి| పయనంబు కాగ  
కలలోన కనిపించి| కనకాద్రి విభుడు

Eg: *Antata nāraju* | *ativala tōda*  
*Gurajālakunu vacci* | *konni nāllundi*  
*Pālamacā puri* | *payanambu kāga*  
*kalalōna kanipinci* | *kanakādri vibudu*

*Antata* and *nāraju* are the two words that form the *dvipada* in the above example and *ativala* and *tōda* form the next set of the word combination which beautifully blends and simplifies the poetic composition to be comprehensible even to ordinary people.

## Ragada

*Ragada* is a literary feature borrowed from Kannada Literature. Basavesvara wrote his *vacana sāhitya* in this metre in the twelfth century to bring about a change in the subject matter, language and the grammar of the heavily Sanskrit and brahmanical influence of the *campu* meter and bring literature closer to people and to spoken Kannada. *Ragada* is also known as *tripadi*. It is a trisyllabic literary form that will have three words/phrases and in two lines or feet, *pōtu pādama* and *penti pādama*. *Pōtu pādama* will have an elongated letter while the *penti pādama* will have the shorter letter. This rule applies to all the *pādama*s or feet. It will have initial and end rhythm. In the present context the *burrakatha* song of *Palnāti Yuddhamu* is composed in the *ragada* meter.

Eg: శ్రీకరుడను పువ్వు|తుమ్మెదా|మూడు  
లోకము |లాయెను| తుమ్మెదా  
సాకరమైయుండు | తుమ్మెదా | పర  
ఏకాంతమున |జుడు| తుమ్మెదా

*Srīkarudanu puvvu* | *tummedā* | *mūdu*  
*lōkamu* | *lāyenu* | *tummedā*  
*sākaramaiyundu* | *tummedā* | *para*  
*yēkantamuna* | *jūdu* | *tummedā*

Eg: నోదర | భారత | వీరుల్లార  
వీర మాత | లా | వనితల్లార

శ్రీగల | భారతమాతను | దలచి  
 శ్రీనాథుని | పోతన్నను | దలచి

*Sódara | bārata | vīrullāra*  
*vīra māta | lau | vanitallāra*  
*srīgala | bhāratamātanu | dalaci*  
*Srīnatuni | Pótannanu | dalaci*

The attempt here is to show that the oral tradition by definition is easily understood even by commoners.

### III

For an easy understanding and analysis, the performative song is divided into two segments as *The Narrative* and *The Narrated*. The section titled *The Narrative* basically discusses the structure and technique of the oral performance of both the *vidyāvantulu* and the *burrakatha* and the next section *the narrated* examines the themes or the episodes of the performance.

#### The Narrative

In the repertoire of the *vidyāvantulu*, the *kathalu* are more in number and each of the *katha* is much longer than any episode in *burrakatha*. Therefore I shall discuss a few relevant aspects of the *vīra vidyāvantulu* and *burrakatha* for a wider insight into the singing art. The role of the narrators, their appearance, the transformation the art form has undergone over a period of time and the method of the story telling and its technique would be discussed in some detail. Let us examine some of the elements of these performances to have an extended understanding of the art form. Both these oral traditions take elements from music, dance and drama.

The grammar of *vidyāvantulu*'s performatory practice doesn't involve an elaborate ornamentation. The accessories required for a performer by way of ornamentation or instruments needed for the background music are minimal though the song itself includes complex elements of drama, music and narration. There



are some common elements between the two oral traditions of *vīra vidyāvantulu* and the *burrakatha*. The composition of the team and the role of the members of the team are similar in both the traditions but the larger structure of the song and narration are completely different. *Burrakatha* has a far more formal and codified structure than the *vidyāvantulu* due to the efforts of Nazer who brought it closer to the classical art forms.

### Instruments

The instruments used in *burrakatha* include a *tambura*, *andelu* and *muvvalu*. The *tambura* is used by the *pradhāna kathakudu* and *gummeta*, *andelu* and *muvvalu* are used by the *vantalu*. In the performance of the *vīra vidyāvantulu* the *pradhana kathakudu* will have the *vīra khadgamu*. The accompanists in both the performances will have a *dōlu* and *jōdu*.

### Prose

In a *burrakatha* performance, prose narration usually gives a break to the narrator and he explains the situation that would follow after the song through prose narration. In the *vīra vidyāvantulu* performance the entire narration is in prose and the narrator takes a break occasionally through the song.

### Song

Music in the *burrakatha* is used according to the moods of the episodes that are sung. *Sri rāga*, *mohana* and *mukhāri* are some of the *rāgās* used for singing. In fact *burrakatha* is more song than prose narration. The song takes the narration ahead and is part of the story. An example of the general song is the song with an appeal to farmers to help people live with their hard work and a good harvest. The *vidyāvantulu* sing the complete song in one tune or *rāga* and Bramhaiah the main performer acknowledges that all the team members need to have a sense of music in order to participate in the performance.

## Dance

Dance adds an element of excitement to the entire narration. In the *vīra vidyāvāntulu*, the *pradhāna kathakudu* uses the sword as a prop and performs rhythmic steps at the end of every bit of song and before he resumes the prose narration. Dance was not part of the original *burrakatha* package but after Nazer there is a rhythmic dance added to some occasions. One need not be a trained dancer in order to do this, but must have a sense of rhythm. And during the war episode taking jumps and steps and squatting on the knees is again considered innovative. The *burrakatha* performer Babuji observes that it is important for the *kathakudu* to have some basic training in stick fighting as that would teach the technique of using feet while performing in a *burrakatha*; particularly for the jumps and the squats and how to have a grip on the ground would be better understood. Also the dance forms of the *kōya*, *lambādi* and *dhimsa* would be useful for an artist to know.

## Acting

Acting is an essential part for both the *vidyāvāntulu* and the *burrakatha* performance where the *kathakudu* plays the role of Bramhanayudu, Nāgamma and all other characters. Babuji observes that the episodes that give great potential for acting are those which describe Nāgamma's learning and growing up years.

## Pradhāna Kathakudu

The *pradhāna kathakudu* must be a person with a wide range of knowledge and must carry the responsibility of the entire narration of the story as well as the coordination with the *vāntalu*. He must have knowledge of the *purānas* and must be a good singer. For a *burrakatha* performance awareness of the contemporary socio-political issues is also essential. The narrator should also be a captivating story teller. He also plays the roles of the hero and heroine and the anti-hero with appropriate actions and gestures while also singing the story. The *pradhāna kathakudu* assumes the

role of a king or a warrior and narrates the story from that person's point of view to an audience. The *pradhāna kathakudu* stands in the middle while the *vantalu* stand on either side of the *kathakudu*. In a *burrakatha* the description of the *pradhāna kathakudu* includes a *tambura* in the right hand and *andelu* in the left hand. The *vidyāvāntulu* wear a dhoti and a shirt which is common in the villages of Andhra for a performance but the *pradhāna kathakudu* dresses up with a symbolic long strip of a black /red decorated cloth which is called *kasi* cloth which indicating that the story is heroic. He wears a red-coloured head-gear with a *candravanka* and *kalikiturāyi* made of silver or any other cheaper material. He also holds a *vīra khadgamu*, the warrior's sword and a *dālu* which he uses as a prop during his performance.

## Vantalu

*Vanta* means turn, which is also indicative of the fact that they indeed give a break to the main narrator during the process of singing. The *vantalu* need to have a good understanding of music and must have good sense of humour and timing while performing in front of an audience. The *vantalu* also play an interesting role in order to relieve the narration from monotony. Usually three or four people assist the *pradhāna kathakudu*. They also help introduce the next episode by repeating the last line of the *pradhāna kathakudu*; they also they work as anchors before the *pradhāna kathakudu* takes the stage over. They take the narrative forward by raising questions sometimes relevant and at other times irrelevant. Eg: "How are farmers growing crops and what do they live by?" asks the narrator. The *vantalu* would respond either comically or seriously depending upon the situation. The role of *vantalu* in the performance is interesting as they are the primary audience and in a sense privileged because they enjoy the closeness to the main narrator to ask questions and to get answers. And these questions in a way take the story forward. They are the coordinators of the narrative between the narrator and the audience in one way and between the various characters and the audience in another way. In the *vidyāvāntulu*, the *vanta* usually repeats the end line

of the *pradhāna kathakudu* or express their surprise or skepticism at the narrative with the use of words like “*etla?*” “*avuna?*” and “*emannadante...*” There are two types of *vantalu* in a *burrakatha* performance. One is the *rājakīya vanta* and the other is the *hāsya vanta*. They are also called *kōnangi* and *vidūsakudu*. They use the terms *bhalananti rā tammudā* or *bhala bhali* or *sai* or *tandāna tānatandanāna* and so on. At the end of an episode the *vantalu* take up contemporary issues and evoke humour or relate it to the next episode.

### Make-up

The *vidyāvantulu* don't wear any make-up for the performances but they wear their everyday clothes and only *pradhāna kathakudu* distinguishes himself in a specific attire with a red coloured head-gear. He wears a white *dhōti* with a full-sleeves shirt while the *kasi* cloth would be worn across the shoulder. The other members of the team wear a *dhōti* and a full sleeves shirt. The make-up of the artist is also an important part of the *burrakatha* performance. This is one of the significant contributions of Nazer to the *burrakatha* art form as earlier the artists didn't take the extra care in decorating themselves for a performance. He believed that they must make themselves attractive to the spectators. A saffron full sleeves shirt and a *pyjama* of the green colour are the clothing for the *pradhāna kathakudu*. He also wears *gajjalu* which will be worn visibly on the *pyjama*. The *rājakiya vanta* wears a rose-coloured garment with a red-coloured cloth tied to his head where as the *hāsya vanta* wears either a multi-coloured garb or a green-coloured one and should tie a red cloth to the waist and to the head. Nazer chose a frock kind of shirt for the top and *pyjama* for the bottom because he wanted the *pradhāna kathakudu* to represent the *ardhanārīsvara*, a form of Lord Siva. According to Nazer the robes are symbolic of the male-female principle in the Universe. Babuji explains that his father had regard for the saffron robe as it was worn by great saints like the Buddha, Sri Sankarācarya and Vivekananda. Hence he also wears the saffron-coloured robe which he describes as the colour of *gold spot* for all his performances.

## Nadaka

*Nadaka* means walk or the narrative style; it is generally refers to the progression of the narrative and is applicable only to the performance of a *burrakatha*. The oral performance of the *vidyāvāntulu* is not understood in terms of its progression. What combination of the elements of music and dance would create the best mood for delineating a specific subject is explained in what Babuji calls *nadaka* of the *burrakatha*. *Nadaka* literally means walk, hence the walk or the progression of the *katha* would be explained with the help of these formulaic *nadakalu* which Nazer has invented for the art form. *Nadaka* is something that attributes variety and versatility to the narrative. Earlier *burrakatha* was sung only in one *rāga* throughout, but Nazer with his knowledge of classical Indian music introduced various *rāgas* that would complement the various moods of the song. Therefore he has planned the *nadaka* of the *Katha* with a combination of each of the *navarasas*. Though there are only nine *rasās* according to Indian aesthetics, Nazer has sung the whole song in thirteen episodes which means some of these episodes would be sung in the same *rāga*<sup>23</sup>. Babuji elaborately explains the grammar of *burrakatha* in his *Burrakatha Kalābōdhini*. For the present purpose, the various *nadakalu* explained in the *Kalābōdhini* are discussed in brief to have a general understanding of the art form to explain the structure of *Palnāti Yuddhamu*. Above all, a *nadaka* explains the nature of the songs in *burrakatha*.

The thirteen *nadakalu* used for singing *Palnāti Yuddhamu* are:

1. *Tandāna* 2. *Denuvugiri* 3. *Jangālakatha* 4. *Durita tandāna* 5. *Sai* 6. *Bhalā bhali* 7. *Vahvāre* 8. *Gēyanadaka* 9. *Damaruka gati* 10. *Rāma rāma jaya* 11. *Harini gati* 12. *Bhalā bhali* 13. *Kīrtanagati nadaka*

Each of these *nadakalu* sets a specific rhythmic pattern which requires a specific literary feature like a *ragada* or a *dvipada* and sung in a particularly popular and melodious *rāga*. Thus unique *nadakalu* are created to sing a chosen episode in the *burrakatha*. Some examples of these *nadakalu* are discussed below.

## Tandāna Nadaka

*Tandāna nadaka* is used for invocatory songs where gods, earlier poets and other elders are worshipped. This is based on the *sānta rasa* so it would be ideal for singing the invocatory song.

Eg: శ్రీనాథుని పోతన్నను తలచి || తందాన తానేతందాన ||  
భరతశాస్త్ర పండితులనుదలచి || తందాన తానేతందాన ||

*Srināthuni pōtannanu talaci || tandāna tanetandāna||*  
*Bharatasāstra panditulanudalaci || tandāna tanetandāna||*

This episode sings the praise of mother India and all the martyrs of the country and this runs with the *tandāna nadaka*. And the song is written in *ardha candrika ragada* which is a literary feature uniquely used for singing the episode.

## Sai Nadaka

The literary feature used in the composition is *ardha candrika* or *ardha ragada* it begins with *sai nadaka* and comes to a closure with *rāma rāma jaya* or with *tandāna nadaka*

Eg: *Okkokka punjunu juciri ||sai||*  
*Ikavarasa parikinciri ||sai||*

### The closure

Eg: *Palanati middelaku vasalulevu ||tandana||*  
*Kondetibramhalaku misalulevu ||tandana||*  
*Gurajalakollaku rosalulevu ||tandana||*

The *tandāna nadaka* is used here to enhance humour and excite the audience.

## Damarukagati

This is convenient for expressing *bhibhatsa* and *bhayanaka rasas*. The rhythm of the *gummeta* is *dhi ta tta*. The episode of war is sung in this *nadaka*. This is taken from a *guddi jangālu* (a blind *jangama* narrator) by Nazer. He has vastly improved upon it.

Eg: పటపటమని పళ్లుకొరుకుతును పట్టుతరగాతివేగా  
పట్టిమీసమును పట్టిదువ్వి కనుబోమ్మలుముడివేయబట్టి  
ఎగబడివచ్చే శత్రుసేనల ఎకంగానరికే

Eg: *Patapatamani pallukorukutunu pattutaragativēga*  
*Pattīmisamunu pattīduvvi kanubommalumudiveyabatti*  
*Egabadvacce satrusenala ekanganarike*

#### IV

For the sake of the integrity of the chapter, only some of the *ghatālu* of the *Palnātivīrula Katha* and *Palnāti Yudhamu* which have comparative value and can provide insights into the understanding of the commonality and the difference of the two oral singing forms, are discussed in this section.

#### The Narrated

Here, in order to see the clear distinction in the rendition of the two traditions I have analyzed one episode titled the *Kóllapóru*, which is common to both the performances. The remaining *ghattālu* which don't have a corresponding episode in the other tradition, find place in Annexures I&II of this chapter. Annexure I contains episodes from the performance of the *vidyāvāntulu* and Annexure II contains episodes from the *burrakatha* performance.

#### The Vīra Vidyāvāntulu

There are ten episodes recorded for this project in the oral narrative and all these episodes are not sung in any sequence or in an order. The complete song is sung only during the festival of heroes in Karemapudi in the month of November. These episodes are:

1. *Ankamma-Póturāju puttuka* 2. *Bramhanāyuni puttuka* 3. *Bālacandrūni puttuka* 4. *Kódipóru* 5. *Alarāju rāyabāramu* 6. *Alugurāju tīrtayātralu* 7. *Dégalapóru* 8. *Kancerlavāri yuddham* 9. *Āranagandla yuddhamu* 10. *Bālacandra yuddhamu*.

Each episode begins with a prayer to goddess Ankamma and ends with a prayer to lord Cennakēśava.

Kódipóru<sup>24</sup>

This episode begins with a prayer to the millions of Andhras. After that the *pradhāna kathakudu* Brahmaiah narrates the beginning of the *Katha* as follows—

Anugurāju has three wives and their children, Nalagāmarāju, and Narasingarāju rule over Gurajāla while Malidevarāju and his brothers rule over Mācerla. Nāgamma lives in Jittagāmālapādu. Mēkapótula Singāreddi's niece and Rāmireddi's daughter is she. She is always referred to as *Nāyakurālu*. She calls out Narasingarāju and insinuates him into a cock fight with Malidevarāju and his brothers who were ruling Mācerla. She says we can invite Malidevarāju over to Gurajāla for a cockfight. She sends an invitation on behalf of Nalagāmarāju to Mācerla. Bālamalidevarāju receives it and informs their minister Brahmanaidu that Nāgamma has sent an invitation for a cock fight. In response Brahmanaidu enquires of Nāgamma what the occasion for the invitation is, then Nāgamma herself goes and meets Brahmanaidu whom she calls *bāva* or brother-in-law. She invites him for the cockfight. He objects to her, saying he cannot fight a woman, but she insists on “next *pancami*”<sup>25</sup> Monday, *amritasiddhi ghadiyalu* we will arrange for a fight. The loser in the battle must give up his kingdom”. So finally the fight is fixed for the next *pancami* Monday. Then she calls the *bhattu* and warns him that Brahmanaidu should not get either cock or hen or even a quill of a cock in the next fourteen miles' distance. Then *bhattu* obeys her and goes to Rāmireddi and buys up all roosters because Nāgamma has challenged to fight Brahmanaidu. Then he confirms that all hens, cock and even the sand in the pot belong to *Nāyakurālu*. The *kathakudu* breaks into a song as the *bantu* moves to Mēkapótula Singareddi's house, and he ensures that all the poultry belongs to *Nāyakurālu*. Then *pancami* Monday approaches and also the *amrita siddhi ghadiya* but Brahmanaidu doesn't get a single rooster. Brahmanaidu sends Kannama in search of a cock for the fight on Monday. Kannama comes over to Rāmireddi's house. The whole episode is narrated through song rather than prose. Kannama's journey through all the places in the fourteen miles' distance is sung through a song.



Kannama fails to obtain a cock or a hen. Peddanna<sup>26</sup> is returning to Mācerla after being married to a girl from Kancerla family. On the way he takes rest with his wife under a tree and ties his horse to the tree. The horse steps on the root of the tree, and a cock was then found in the hollow of the tree. They make a hole and dig out the cock which was like a swan.<sup>27</sup>

### Subtext

A king was ruling the city of Aṅagallu. There were three thieves living by theft for some years in the same kingdom. But one day the king decides to chase them out. The thieves run for life and seek protection with Durvasa *mahāmuni*<sup>28</sup> from the local king. When the king's men approach the saint and ask him about the thieves, he says he hasn't seen them. A woman devotee brings milk to the ascetic every day. He symbolically asks her to take away the roosters under his protection which happens to be the three thieves. The two new born birds were eating some food, an eagle from above sees this and snatches away the cock. The thieves protect the new born rooster from the eagle and take care of it. One day the king of Pāṅagallu comes to the forest hunting. The thieves invite him for lunch and serve him food. As the king is resting, he sees the cock and hen and asks the thief to prepare food with the cock. But the thief refuses and says, "I can't cook food with the rooster". As the king prepares to kill the rooster, it declares war on the king. By the time the king finishes his meal and comes out to see his army being defeated by the rooster. Later, he carries it with him some distance believing that the cock has some divine powers. At that moment he thinks "I cannot bear to bring up this cock with me, so, let me take it and leave it in the forest and leave it in a hole and leave it with enough food for three months". Much later when the kings of Pāṅagallu and Aṅagallu fight in the forest they hear the cock crow and then begin a new fight for the cock. The two kings fight like two mountains, like two proud elephants. This war is witnessed by Brahmanaidu's brother Peddanna who then thinks that this cock would be useful for him someday. Peddanna as soon as he reaches Mācerla enquires after Brahmanaidu and his mother

informs him that Brahmanaidu has been searching for a suitable cock for the fight with Nāgamma on Monday.<sup>29</sup>

Now they need someone who should be newly married and still wearing the turmeric bracelet and who could bring the cock<sup>30</sup>. Only that kind of a person can bring the cock. Now they call for a Brahmin and ask him to see the auspicious moment to bring the cock. They also request him to check the auspicious moment in the name of Peddanna. And then the Brahmin says that he's not the suitable person for this job. The narrator sings the rest of the story through the common song *vinandi rajulāra... aaa...aaa...aaa...*<sup>31</sup> Then the names of Perinaidu, Mallinaidu are considered and then Brahmanaidu asks the Brahmin to see it on his own name... and the Brahmin informs him that there is no auspicious moment in his name either. But anyway Brahmanaidu decides to bring the cock himself. As he's preparing to go he is challenged by opposition from Bālagopanna who comes running after listening to the drums of war from Mācerla.

*Vinavayya naiudaa...aaa...aaa. ...*<sup>32</sup>

He asks Brahmanaidu to give his *mudimuppātu sommulu*.<sup>33</sup> Brahmanaidu goes with his weapon to Uppucengalaiah temple. He promises that if he wins the war he would offer the head of the person whom the sword takes as a sacrifice. The thieves hiding in the temple notice the bejeweled weapon of Brahmanaidu. The thieves try stealing the weapon but instead are caught by Brahmanaidu and are asked to stay put in one place and protect the weapon. In the meanwhile, Brahmanaidu feels thirsty and finds a pond nearby but in order to enter the pond he requires the permission of an ascetic and he gets punished for thinking of stealing water from the pond. After this, he keeps walking towards Ānagallu in search of water as well as the rooster, where he finds the king of Ānagandla. He sees the three thieves wielding a weapon and he asks for the weapon as he knew they would use as firewood. All kinds of quarrels are described as that of a war between two mountains...Brahmanaidu after fighting over the kings and beheading a few of them finds the cock hidden in the hole; and how did he find it? It didn't have one black or one red

quill but was pure white in its form. The kings of Pānugallu come over to him but he has the cock in one hand and sword in the other and fights them. He beheads a few of them and takes their heads and reaches back to the ascetic at the pond. The narrative progresses in a question-answer form and sometimes rounds off by going back to the same places and fulfilling the much needed logic to the story. He advises the ascetic that it is wrong to keep a toll for water as it is very essential for human life and then he moves to Uppucengalaiagh temple and offers the human heads as coconuts and then goes to the thieves and then removes their knots and advises them to live by the righteous way.

Within the broad frame work of the cock fight, there are many other battles for which preparations are made and battles are won too before finally waging that most important war. Brahmanaidu reaches Mācerla and presents the white cock to the people. The narrator goes into a song which again describes the cock in the same way as it was done before. Brahmanaidu then feels confident and asks Kannama to go and give a message to Nāgamma that the following *pancami* Monday he's ready for the cockfight. Now the singer describes through a song how Kannama prepares to go to Gurajāla. Kannama again in an elaborate fashion delivers the same message to Nāgamma. Brahmanaidu prepares to go to Gurajāla but before that he goes to Cennakeśava temple which is described through a song in the manner of a prayer. There is again another song describing the preparation from the temple. Another song expresses the arrival of Nāyakurālu with her army to a middle point. Brahmanaidu takes his magical cock and ties it to a stake while Nāyakurālu brings her six hundred and six cocks to the battle field but the *vantalu* intervene and say, "But Brahmanaidu has only one". *Nāyakurālu* loses all her flock when Brahmanaidu's cock crows. She senses danger and excuses herself from the fight on the pretext of menstruation. Then the next Monday Brahmanaidu gets ready for the fight. Nāgamma once again reaches the battlefield with a huge army whereas Brahmanaidu comes simply with his one cock. Nāgamma faces the same fate as before and she wonders "what to do?" Nāgamma conspires against him and then she gets the wings of Brahmanaidu's cock clipped which he had managed to

get in spite of her conspiracy. She goes to *kattupótala kannéramu* and brings the *kattupotalavāru*...when they hear that they have to tie the cock of Brahmanaidu they recount that he's the incarnation of Viṣṇu and that they cannot clip the wings of his cock. As long as his gaze is on the cock it is not possible to tie his cock. She assures them that she would somehow avert his gaze and then they can tie the wings of the cock. Consequentially Nāgamma's cock wins the fight and it is declared that Malidevarāju and his brothers along with their Minister Brahmanaidu have to go into exile for seven years.

*Vaikuntha vaikuntha...*

### The Burrakatha

All the episodes of the song are sung in one night which takes about eight hours. All episodes are sung sequentially as the song progresses from beginning to end. The episodes are not divided thematically unlike the *vidyāvāntulu*, but are based on the mood or *rāga* of the song. The *burrakatha* is divided into thirteen episodes based on the *rāgas* and on different prose styles.

1. Introducing the character and prayer 2. Introducing the story line 3. Learning the martial arts 4. Harvest 5. Birth of the hero 6. Cockfight 7. Mission to Gurajāla 8. Episode of diplomacy 9. Giving blessings 10. Cheerful episode 11. War 12. Sorrow 13. Closure

### Kóllapóru

The popular episode even in the *burrakatha* tradition is known as *Kóllapóru* or the cock fight. This establishes *nāyakurālu* as an egotistical character who doesn't hesitate to kill people to achieve an end:

Nāgamma uses craft and cunning to attain power. She uses tricks of word, deed and action as she has reduces Nalagāmarāju to a puppet. She is seen to take decisions on his behalf without his knowledge. It is she who sent a letter to Brahmanaidu. "What is the content of the letter?" questions the *kathakudu*. He

describes each step in the cock fight. They make preparations for the cockfight. Brahmanaidu examines all the cocks fit for a fight of this nature. Once the cock of Brahmanaidu's team runs away from the fray and the other party gets inspired and another time the cock of Nāgamma's party runs away from the fray. With great fervour they make preparations for the cockfight on both sides of Palnādu. Alarāju is selected as a judge for the fight as he is a friend to both the parties. Nāgamma's party also makes its preparations with equal interest. They have selected Muvvala Bhīmanna to be with the cock while it enters the fray, while Brahmanaidu selects Gopanna and they all meet on the banks of a river *kóteru*. The song is supported by *bhala bhali tammuda... and si...*

The losers in the cockfight have to leave their kingdom for seven years and must go incognito and if they succeed in their disguise and exile, the kingdom would be returned to them at the end of the seventh year. That is how it was decided before the cockfight began. All the best quality cocks were taken away by Brahmanaidu and nothing was left for Nāgamma and her party, Nāgamma's cocks were frightened of Brahmanaidu's cocks, so Nāgamma warned her fighter Muvvala Bhīmanna to bring a cock which is neither like a hen nor like a fully grown cock, so that in either case she would have an advantage and not lose her kingdom even if she loses the fight. She could challenge Brahmanaidu if he gains kingdom by defeating a cock that is not fully grown. However, soon there are whistles of joy announcing the victory of Nāgamma's cock. Alarāju didn't even have the opportunity to decide upon the victory, people around decided that Brahmanaidu has lost the fight and without delay, Nāgamma prompts them to leave the Kingdom and Brahmanaidu tells her "I'll never forget my promise, so we will leave the kingdom forthwith!" and for seven years they live in another city called Vīramedapi.

## V

### Differences

The major difference between the *vīra vidyāvantulu* and the *burrakatha* singers is that, the *burrakatha* tradition is more

flexible and is not bound by caste, class or theme limitations. People of all castes can learn and propagate the song and themes also can be innovative. Therefore, there are more than hundred troupes practicing and performing *burrakatha* all over Andhra. The structure of *burrakatha* allows for episodes but it is a free-flowing narrative with divisions which are marked by prose narrative where the *pradhāna kathakudu* pauses and tells the story directly to the audience. The nature of the *burrakatha* is social therefore it takes up the job of disseminating a contemporary message to people. Hence it also includes some popular songs and some popular poems into its fold. Sri Sri's popular poems are included into the last leg of the *katha*. It's a musical composition with elements of drama intertwined into it. *Burraktha* is divided into song and narration with huge potential for improvisation.

Earlier it had very religious and historical themes and so on but after independence *burrakatha* was restricted to narrating only stories of heroes. Later it was secularized and was given a wider range of themes not just Telugu, but also the stories of Russian heroes because of the influence of the Communist Party of India. *Burrakatha* is of 20th century origin and therefore a product of the postcolonial nation-state. The *vīra vidyāvāntulu* on the other hand remains within their tradition and caste. The creation of a set of rules is necessitated by a desire to learn and teach any art form and therefore it becomes closer to classical status or aspiring to be classical. Both these traditions in their styles are highly codified and highly methodical and have a logical structure to the song. In the *burrakatha* the mythical element and the quality of intertextuality are missing which actually are a mark of identity for the *vidyāvāntulu*.

The next chapter engages with the written editions of the *Palnātivīrula Katha* which is mainly known as *Palnātivīra Caritra*, to engage with a different dynamic of the local epic in a new world where printed word dominated the public domain.

## Notes

1. *Palnāti Yuddhamu* is the title of the *burrakatha* rendition of the same epic.

2. See Champakalakshmi's *Religion, Tradition and Ideology*. New Delhi: OUP, 2014 on the transformations the Hindu tradition underwent before finally it was codified as one single monolithic tradition during the colonial period. "When and what kinds of synthesis were achieved in different regions in the making of this tradition, which projected a homogeneity, leading to the modern/colonial construction of a Hindu tradition as a monolithic?"
3. It is said that cinema is self-destructive in the sense that it is defacing its own identity by imitating the West in its themes and techniques.
4. The oral tradition calls the epic *Katha* while most of the written texts use the title *Caritra*.
5. The head and priests of the temple will only deal with the spiritual aspects of the temple like conducting the *puja* or worship.
6. A temple festival or village festival is usually dedicated to the chief deity of a particular region.
7. An important cultural hub in Hyderabad where the government and individual cultural events are regularly organized.
8. Nazer was born into a lower middle class family of farmers in Guntur and learnt classical Carnatic music as a child. He was selected as a singer by the Communist Party of India for their peoples' wing *Praja Natya Mandali*. Since then he has been associated with the party activity and wrote and composed many performatory songs, mainly in the *burrakatha* form. He has written about hundred and fifty different themes to be performed on different stages. The best among these were published as *Burrakatha Vāni* with the aim of training young people in the art of *burrakatha*.
9. He has participated in the *Prapanca Telugu Mahāsabalu* representing the *jānapada kalalu*. He has received the Andhra Pradesh government's *Ugādi Puraskāramu* for his services to *burrakatha*.
10. For a more detailed discussion on the various components of the oral and the written, see Roman Jakobson and Petr Bogatyrev's essay "Folklore as a Special Form of Creation". Roman Jakobson, *Selected Writings*, vol. IV (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), pp. 1-15.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
12. The Palnādu heroes are still claimed as definitive of the identity of the Telugus in print medium and in the motion picture.
13. See Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 1968, p. 223.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 229.
15. See Champakalakshmi's *Religion, Tradition and Ideology*. New Delhi: OUP, 2014, p. 223.
16. Political parties and politicians have promptly taken to the digital media for propaganda: to get the individual as well as party promotional material done by film and TV music composers.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

18. See Walter Benjamin's "The Story Teller" from *from Hale, Dorothy J, Ed. The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000*. Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, p. 84.
19. Ibid.
20. Peoples' song.
21. Quoted from D.R. Nagaraja's essay "Critical Tension in the Kannada Literary Culture" in Sheldon Pollock (ed) *Literary Cultures in History. Reconstructions from South Asia*. Berkley, LA, London: University of Californai Press, 2003, p. 341.
22. See Sheldon Pollock edited volume *Literary Cultures in History. . Reconstructions from South Asia*. Berkley, LA, London: University of Californai Press, 2003.
23. These *nadakalu* are more or less the same for any other *burrakatha* performance.
24. The cock fight.
25. Fifth day of the Hindu calendar which is considered auspicious.
26. Peddanna is the brother of Brahmanaidu.
27. Intertextuality is a feature common to all episodes of the tradition. The story that follows has a subtext. Myth, illusion and superstition is drawn into the narrative of the story. Therefore, it poses difficulty in deducing a logical or rational understanding of the *katha*.
28. A saint from the *Mahābhārata*.
29. All these battles are for small things and for small reasons and not necessarily for big reasons and the instruments used and catalyst could also be very small.
30. Both a bride and a groom would be made to wear a turmeric bracelet which would be removed on the sixteenth day after the wedding.
31. Listen O King...
32. There is no change in the *rāga* of the song whatever the mood of the episode be, only the narrator changes his tone in order to indicate the variation in moods.
33. The three jewels or instruments which the narrator keeps on repeating throughout the narrative.



## The Written Texts of *Palnātivīra Caritra*: Some Themes

This chapter takes up the written texts of *Palnātivīra Caritra* for an understanding of the kind of concerns the regional epic engages with, as a logical corollary to the study of the oral tradition of the epic. As an extension of the journey of the epic which began its course as an oral epic, being textualized became the *only* means of defining its existence and its relevance in a new context and medium to a readership (Telugu) that was getting identified as one linguistic/political community for the first time in the twentieth century. At one level it provides scope for an understanding of the phenomenon of the imitation of the *Mahābhārata* in regional languages, when literature came to be written for the first time in these regional languages like Telugu and Kannada. At another level, this chapter examines the transition from one genre into another like the transition of an oral epic into a readable, printed text. Effectively, the chapter is divided into three segments that deal with matters of (1) the significance and similarities of the printed texts of the local epic to the *Mahābhārata*. (2) the written texts and the contexts in which they emerged in Telugu. (3) and finally an analysis of the many fictional narratives of the *Palnātivīra Caritra*.

## I

Textualization of an oral epic can be understood at two different levels. One is the direct documentation of the oral song of a particular performer/singer in writing (transliteration), the other is rendering the same epic as a written text: an inspired text based on the epic in a specific literary genre like a *kāvya* or as a novel or as a play. The inspired texts recreate the spirit of the object imitated. In the case of the inspired texts of the *Mahābhārata*, it's heroism and it's all other human values and struggles are aspirational, significantly the desire for kingdom.

The historical events which led to the emergence of the Telugu *Mahābhārata*, consequentially the emergence of a regional sensibility would be relevant for a discussion here. This, at the outset is a three-tier process. Firstly, the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* was rendered into Telugu and then secondly from the Telugu *Mahābhārata* we have the oral rendition of the *Palnāti Katha* and finally the emergence of the written texts of the regional epic *Palnāti Caritra*. Rajarajanarendra (1022 CE-1061 CE) expressed his wish that he would like to listen to the story of the Kurus who are Kings of the lunar dynasty to which the Eastern Cālukya rulers believed they themselves belonged. Rajaraja wanted Nannaya to write *Mahābhārata* in Telugu but not exactly translate it into Telugu. The *Mahābhārata* provided the vision for power and polity for these rulers who were inspired to imagine themselves as *cakravartins* of their small polities. Thus Nannaya began to write his *Mahābhārata* in Telugu, at the request of Rajaraja. During the time the *Mahābhārata* was a familiar story as it was read out in temples before it was finally written in Telugu by Nannaya. Nannaya has sometimes compressed or condensed or sometimes even expanded some passages of the epic. The Telugu *Mahābhārata* sticks to the same stylistic pattern as the Sanskrit text with eighteen *parvans* and with all the characters and events in the same order. In the Telugu *Mahābhārata* there is no radical change in the order or in the interpretation of the events of the epic from the Sanskrit epic. Therefore, it is still the *Mahābhārata* with the larger than life characters of Bhīma, Arjuna, Krishna, Karna,

Droṇa and Bhīṣma. Still it seems to have not completely fulfilled the intellectual and cultural needs of the Telugu people of that time and therefore perhaps the need for creating a space for an epic even more closer to Telugu ethos. Hence the *Palnāti Katha*, fulfils the much-desired gap with in the scheme of the regional aesthetics.

So much has been discussed, in Telugu criticism, of the influence of the *Mahābhārata* on the regional epic *Palnātivīrula Caritra* that it would be just right to draw some similarities and differences between the two epics for a further understanding of the regional aesthetics of a story like the *Palnātivīra Caritra*. The *Mahābhārata* is dated between 400 BC and 400 CE, so there is a time lapse of several centuries between the two epics in comparison. *Palnātivīrula Katha*<sup>1</sup> is said to be sung around the 12th century. One is in the classical tradition and the other is in the *jānapada* or folk tradition. Though the entire narrative style of the *Mahābhārata* is not adopted for the localized epic, the basic theme of the loss and gain of kingdom are central to both the epics. In the *Palnātivīrula Caritra*, the characters, the locality and the sensibilities are completely local, whereas the *Mahābhārata* is pan-Indian.

The major events based on which parallels can be drawn with the *Mahābhārata* are the division of land and the aspiration for kingdom. Like the Kauravas and Pandavas who are cousins who fight for the kingdom, in Palnādu it is the sons of Anugurāju from his two wives, who fight for the Kingdom of Palnādu. Dharmarāja plays the dice game twice and goes into exile for fourteen years out of which the last year they needed to go incognito. The Palnādu heroes, Malidēvarāju and his brothers also are made to participate in the cock fight twice before they are declared losers in the fight. Malidēvarāju with his brothers and with his minister Brahmanaidu go into exile for seven years and live in a city that they build near Tripurantaka known as Mēdapi. As it happens with the Pāndavas, even after the completion of the exile, they had to wage a war in order to get their kingdom back, Malidevarāju and his brothers too had to wage a war, the consequences of which are disastrous. In the *Mahābhārata* it is the Pandavas and Krishna who are the main players, but in the epic of Palnādu it is the two ministers who

aid the brothers of Nalagāmarāju and Malidēvarāju, Nāgamma and Brahmanaidu who run the entire story and while the kings themselves play a minor role and are completely guided by these ministers.

There are interesting and strong women in *Mahābhārata*, who lost their husbands and sons for the sake of land in the battlefield like the great characters of Draupadi, Gandhari and Kunti. In the *Palnāti Katha*, there is the widowed maternal figure Mailamadevi and Vīra Vidyaladēvi who lose their husband Anugurāju in a forest while hunting and are left with the orphaned children Nalagāmarāju, Narasingarāju, Juttirāju, Perumāllarāju and Malidēva and his brothers. And of course, there is the young widow Nāgamma who is equal in strength to Draupadi. Brahmaanaidu is at one level can be equated to Bhishma because of his elderly advice and minister-ship with the brothers but he himself (in the narrative) believes that he is Krisna incarnation. There is Māncāla and Bālacandrudu whose marital relationship retains a strong emotional appeal with the readers and sustains an interest throughout the ages like Abhimanyu and his wife's. Apart from this, how characters interact with each other and approach their life are completely filled with elements of the mythical in both the epics.

## II

If the oral epic of *Palnātivīrula Katha* is an attempt to bring the values of the *Mahābhārata* into Telugu, and print culture gave that opportunity once again to reproduce the values in a new society and in a new medium. Print brought back a lost culture but morals and values that would still be relevant to the Telugu society. The story of printing and publishing in Telugu is linked to the revival of the story of the *Palnātivīra Caritra* which is briefly discussed in the introductory chapter. In the 20th century orality has come to coexist with written cultures.

The last segment mentioned in passing the emergence of the Telugu *Mahābhārata* while this segment deliberates upon issues relevant to the publication of fiction based on the *Palnāti Caritra*. If the *Mahābhārata* encompasses all human values including

*vīra rasa*, the outburst of fictional writing based on the local epic *Palnātivīrula Katha* projects similar values in a new context. In the twentieth century a new context is created for the formation and assertion of new identities with the colonial intervention. As can be derived from the following discussion, each of these fictional works addresses and responds to a specific socio-political context. Interestingly all the authors acknowledge Srinātha as the original author of the epic *Palnātivīra Caritra* from which they have drawn inspiration for their fictional works.

There have been several attempts to recreate the spirit of the Palnādu epic in different literary genres: these include novels, plays and children's stories. All the creative writers have used the subject to evoke a modern consciousness, to seek answers for the contemporary predicament in the mega epic and to derive solace for the modern period from the ancient epic and its characters. However, in view of the limitations of the project, only four fictional narratives of the *Caritra* in four different genres have been taken up for study and understanding, in this chapter while there are many more that have been left out of the project. All these four different genres are meant for different reading public: this is mainly to showcase the range and influence of the epic among all the modern Telugus.

This chapter engages with Unnava Lakshminarayana's play *Nāyakurālu* (1926), Nazer's *Palnāti Yuddhamu* (1945), Pingali Lakshmikantham's complete compilation of all episodes of the epic brought together under his editorship as *Palnātivīra Caritra* (1961) by Visālandhra Publication, and Nagasri's children's text of *Palnātivīra Caritra* in (2004). Apart from Pingali Lakshmikantham's work which is steeped in controversy, the other three works that came up in the wake of independence engage with contemporary issues. This chapter overlooks the generic distinctions only to identify some important concerns and themes. These texts also signify the anxiety of the community that needed a literature of its own to stand among equals in the nation state.

One of the initial attempts to write fiction based on *Palnātivīrula Katha* is Mudigonda Virabhadrakavi's *Palnātivīrabhāratamu*, perhaps the only *kāvya* which is based on the oral narration of the

*Katha* which is also the basis for Robert Sewell's translation of the epic into English. The next major publication of the epic is Pandita Umakantham's edited episode "Bālacandra Yuddhamu" in 1911 crediting Srinātha with the authorship of the text, with an extensive introduction. Umakantham's text begins with "Bālacandra Yuddhamu" and progresses toward the war with various incidents of Bālacandrudu learning of the war of Kāryamapūdi through the *kómati* girl and subsequent meeting with his mother, mistress Syāmāngi (who is Sabbai in the oral singing), his wife Māncāla and his finally going to the battle field to kill Narasingarāju in order to avenge the death of Alarāju, his cousin. The episodes dealing with the cockfight and the genealogy of the birth of Bramhanaidu, Nāgamma and other Heroes of the epic are not available in this edition of the epic. In 1938, Umakantham brought together a couple of more episodes of *Palnāti Caritra* and published the second edition of the epic with an updated Introduction. Pingali Lakshmikantham completed the agenda of Umakantham by bringing together these disparate episodes into one text under his editorship in 1961. Pingali's text is unique that way, because it is an effort to bring together all the episodes of the *Caritra* in the written form under one rubric of the *dvipada kāvya as Palnativīra Caritra*. Because of its unity, though manufactured, it functions as a meta-text, to the many other texts that have sprung up in the subsequent period. Though it is an edited text, this chapter engages with the text mainly because it has served the function of a true inspiration to all other narratives of the *Palnativīra Caritra* that have come up in different genres in the twentieth century.

Unnava Lakshminarayana's play *Nāyakurālu* is taken up for two reasons one that it is based on a character of the epic, Nāgamma, a woman minister who is believed to bring destruction to the kingdom and secondly, it portrays her as a strong female character of the twelfth century though in a negative shade. Arudra, the literary historian notes that plays were mainly written to be performed on stage and not meant to be treated as literary texts in themselves. And the trend in the early 1900 was that of mainly historical plays based on episodes of the *Mahābhārata* were written. *Sukhamanjarīparinayam*, *Madālasānātakam* are some

prominent examples of the kind of plays that were performed. Also some stories from the *purānās*, or the *Rāmāyana* or based on imitations of the Sanskrit plays were written. Therefore it comes as no surprise that Unnava Lakshminarayana wrote a historical play *Nāgamma* based on the *Palnātivīra Caritra*.<sup>2</sup>

Yet another commendable and unique work in this direction is Nazer's *Palnāti Yuddhamu* which is also a unique experiment in the sense that Nazer meant to use it as a basis for his *burrakatha* performances of the song of the heroes. It is meant mainly for himself (the singer/performer) and for fellow *burrakatha* performers like him but not strictly for a reading public. Since it is also published as a written text, it is taken up for study in this chapter, but I am not aware if anyone has studied the text independently of the *burrakatha* performance. It is also difficult to classify it under any of the genres usually identified as novels, stories or plays, as it can only be studied as a textualized song.

The next text under study *Palnātivīra Caritra* is not written by a single author but brought together as a single text under the editorship of Pingali Lakshmikantham. Parts of the text are available as independent entities, which were put together and given a final shape by Visalandhra Publishers in 1961. It contains all episodes of the story in a sequential order beginning with Anuguraju's establishing the kingdom at Palnādu and ends with Kallupratishtha and Balacandra Yudhamu.

The last text under study is the *Bommala Bālānanda Palnātivīracaritra*. In the same series, the Navaratna Publishers also publish books like *Alibābā Nalabai Donngalu*, *Akbar Bīrbal*, *Tenāli Rāmakrishna*, and *Allauddin Adbhutadīpam*, obviously, to cultivate a taste for Telugu Literature among children. This text is taken up for study, only to show the range of influence the epic has had on all sections of the reading public. The purpose of the text is to introduce to children the heroism of their forefathers and indeed the importance of the heroism of Telugus, in a world where children depend mostly on English cartoons and cinema and now of course the video games.

As far as children's stories in Telugu are concerned, it is observed that Kandukuri Viresalingam made the first effort of

writing specifically for children with the intention of instructing them of the importance of morals and values of good life. As a beginning he translated Aesop's tales from English into Telugu and he also wrote a book called *Nīti-kathā-manjari* published in 1889 and *Nīti-dīpika* full of moral values for children. The aim was to co-opt both women and children into the agenda of literacy and education programs of the nationalists of the time. Later it was Chinta Diksitulu who specifically wrote for children with themes taken from the world of children without intending to be expressly instructional. But the streak initiated by Viresalingam was carried on by the publishers of a monthly magazine for children, *Candamāma* by B. Nagireddy and Chakrapani for which the Telugu novelist and short story writer Kodavatiganti Kutumbarao was the editor.

Apart from the texts studied in this chapter there are many more inspired texts of the *Palnātivira Caritra* that came up in the twentieth century over a period of time. Another important work based on the *Caritra* is Chittibabu's *Palnāti Vīrabhāratamu* which was written almost a century after Vīrabhadrakavi, with the intention to remind Telugus of their own roots and identity, "if Telugus forget the story and if they can't repeat the story, then they would be a people without history."<sup>23</sup> The novelist Chittibabu was impressed by the challenge that Māncāla throws to her husband to behead Nāgamma and capture Nalagāma in order to establish peace in Mācerla. This is a kind of emotional identity with the characters that makes the story live in the memory of the people. The novel portrays Nāgamma as an evil character who is responsible for all the trouble that befalls the kings of Palnādu and eventually responsible for the war. Within the story the characters remind themselves of the fate of Dharmarāja or Arjuna or of Draupadi and equate each of them with those characters in the *Mahābhārata*. There is also an open debate between Nāgamma and Brahmanaidu on Saivism and Vaishnavism. Each of them complains that the other is influencing people of Palnādu on their religious beliefs. More recently, Koduru Prabhakara Reddy paid a tribute to the *dvipada kāvyā* in a style that reminds one of the



original *Palnāti Caritra* in his *dvipada kāvya* titled *Palnātivīra Caritra* which was published in 2012.

There is some amount of literary criticism available in English on *Palnātivīrula Caritra*. Firstly, Gene Roghair's translation, as *The Epic of Palnādu* is the first work that came up on the oral narrative of the epic. The translation of the epic to a considerable extent is influenced by Sewell's historical approach to the epic. He translates the song into chronological and logically developed passages which he calls *kathalu*. He has worked with two performatory oral singers Alisetti Galeyya and Medukonduru Cennayya. But finally Galeyya's song gets translated because of several practical problems in recording with Cennayya. Roghair has about thirty hours of the recordings taped and he has translated all of it into English through terse and concise prose. The translation begins with Ankamma and Poturāju Puttuka and then ends with Bālacandra Yuddhamu. Each of the episodes which the singers call *ghattālu* are translated and summarized by Roghair as *kathalu*. Above all he uses western musical notation to understand the emotion and melody of the song. The repetitiveness, the mix of myth and reality and the non-sequential pattern of the song which Partha Chatterjee calls in a different context "uncolonized speech"<sup>4</sup> are given up for a rational and chronological thematization of the song, whereas while analyzing the epic he is constantly skipping into the mythical and the actual in the same breath.

Alf Hiltebetel makes a survey of all kinds of heroic poems and epics in India and makes a typology of these epics as also compares one with another based on the existing classifications of these epics. He compares the *Pābūjii Padah* of Rajasthan with the south Indian epics of the *Elder Brother*<sup>5</sup> epic and the *Palnādu* epic and attempts to examine them and their links to the other existing epics of these regions and sees if they feed into one another. Hiltebetel's study of the *Palnādu* epic is based on Gene Roghair's translation. His study makes a comparison of *Palnātivīrula Katha* with the elder brother epic of Tamilnadu. He makes a direct comparison with the castes of Velama and Vellalars and traces the origin of the epic to these castes and their related professions.

He also contends that the epic singers of *Palnādu* as well as the singers of the *Elder Brother* epic may have fed stories from each of the other repertoire of singers in these different lands. For example, he finds affinities between the singers of *picciguntalu* and the *pitcchiguntar* of Tamilnadu. He also finds a similarity in the sub-stories of the epic like the Sivanadlakota episode in which Sivasingaladevi and Sivasingalaraju escape and get married which resonates with the stories of the popularly known Tamil epic of *Poturāja* and *Póramannan*.

Yet another study on the oral epic is Velcheru Narayana Rao's essay on "Epics and ideologies: Six Telugu Folk Epics,"<sup>6</sup> which surveys all available folk and oral epics beginning with *Palnāti Katha*. He makes a clear classification of these heroic tales into martial and sacrificial epics. Martial epics deal with the heroic deeds of male warriors of the Telugu country and the sacrificial epics deal with the travails of women who sacrifice their lives for common good. Among martial epics he includes *Palnāti Katha* along with *Katamaraju Kathalu* and *Bobbili Yuddhamu*. And in the sacrificial epics his work includes, *Kanyaka Ammavari Katha* and *Kamamma Katha*. He points out that *Palnāti Katha* is of the heroes of the Velama caste of Palnādu where as *Katamaraju* and *Kanyaka* stories are appropriated by the *gollas* and the *komatis* respectively. In the sacrificial epics too the women are cast into the roles of deified virgin and chaste wife.

### III

Any society produces literature that can possibly fulfil its current needs and in turn literature itself cannot escape these all-pervasive influences prevalent in a society. The agenda of the published texts of *Palnātivīra Caritra* is modern and it is part of a Telugu modernity that these writings provide an opportunity to review and project themes of the nation to be. Though the original epic is set in the 12th century the written texts redraw attention only to certain issues of contemporary importance and build the narrative of the novel or play accordingly.

The first work under discussion is the play *Nāyakurālu* written

by Unnava Lakshminarayana. It is based on a small portion of the story of the *Palnātivīra Caritra*. It portrays mainly the preparations for war. The story begins with a conversation between two security guards who are from two different sides of Palnādu, Gurajāla and Mācerla. The play is written as a dialogue between the two security personnel and is from the point of view of the underdog. Kāsipati and Pāpanna are the two guards and- who are also new characters whom one doesn't get to find in the other stories based on the epic- they are on the borders of two sides of the divided Palnādu. Pāpanna says, "today Palnādu is divided into two parts and tomorrow it could be further divided into four parts. It is all at the discretion of the rulers and people shouldn't complain about such matters".<sup>7</sup> It is said with a little bit of sarcasm and irony at the fate of people who have no role to play in statecraft, but just be silent subjects to the policies of the rulers. Pāpanna who is from Mācerla tells Kētireddi that Gurajāla is our enemy country from now on. It portrays the characters in their daily activity as we have an example of Nāgamma who returns from Kasi and takes a decision upon the matters to be pursued after the division of the country.

While the small details of an oral epic enhance the magical or mythical powers of characters and situations, in the written text characters are grounded in reality. Even Narasingarāju makes enquiries about the opinion of people on the division of the country. He also discusses the problems of people on the borders who definitely have to cross over to the other side for their livelihood. These are details that are missing in the main narratives of the ritual filled oral performance of *Palnāti Katha*. Narasingarāju asks Kētireddi to prophesy about what's going to come after the partition of the kingdom. They debate who should be the next minister after partition and taking a decision they decide to go to Jittagāmālapādu and inform Nāgamma to be prepared for the visit of the King so that she can make demand for her ministership as promised by Anugurāju. There is a *kāpu* girl singing the song of separation of the kingdom in which she refers to the forests of Mācerla which no longer belong to them. Kētireddi and Narasingarāju find it natural to know that even animals are very

proud to be part of Palnādu. Nalagāmarāju requests Nāgamma to take up the minister's position that is vacant after the separation of Palnādu. Later there is a discussion between the father and the daughter about whether Nāgamma should accept the position at all, as she is someone from the village and would be happy with her animals and her worship of Lord Siva, completely unaware of the protocol of a royal court. Nalagāmarāju informs Kétireddi that Nāgamma protects the *varnāsrama dharma*, whereas Brahmanaidu has joined the *rāmānuja*<sup>8</sup> religion and is equating people of all religions. Such a minister as Nāgamma would really be a great protection to the kingdom.

Equality of caste, gender and education for all are some themes that run through the polemic of the new nation-state. Therefore, the play *Nāyakurālu* comes across as something that reflects the anxiety of the nation to be. Hence even the language and treatment of the play is an echo of the Gandhian sentiments while precolonial independent discourses blend into the language and the themes of the narrative. Brahmanaidu expresses that his aim is to give away the land to people of Palnādu and he would be happy to cultivate his land and live by that. Democratic ideas are presented and the debate is completely along the lines of freedom struggle. There are expressions like *bandi rōddekkindanukunnānu*.<sup>9</sup> There is a debate on bringing about caste equality and there are serious efforts by the courtiers like Bāludu and Kannamadāsu involved in this mission. Bālacandrudu suggests that his friends including the Brahmin Anapótu can be used in this activity. The arguments between the Brahmanaidu and his son Bāludu are completely infused with the language of nationalists. Bāludu and his friends who wish to be recruited into the army describe themselves as god's servants. They look for people of all castes to participate in this activity like brahmins, reddis and mālas. They organise a summit for bringing about unity of all castes. There is a lengthy debate on the inclusion of the people of "lower" castes into the Brahminical fold. Brahmanaidu presents the idea that the people of "lower" castes are not clean in their habits but that can be taught and that people of "upper" castes must develop a patronizing

attitude towards the *pancamas* and make them worthy of life in the society.

If the twelfth century idea of equality was *cāpakudu*, the twentieth century idea is to recruit an army of people including people of all castes. The whole play revolves around preparation for war and between the brothers and their estimation of the opponent's strength. While recruiting *pancamas* into their army, Kannama informs that "how many ever *pancamas* are included into their army it won't be a strong enough force for the Gurajāla forces." Nāgamma begins her harassment of the people in exile by provoking the *cencus*<sup>10</sup> into fighting the cattle herders of Malidēvarāju in the forests of Médapi. Nāgamma is informed that Brahmanaidu is panicky about her redden army. There is an invitation for the cockfight from Nāgamma's camp. In spite of warnings from Alarāju and his father Kommurāju, Brahmanaidu agrees for the cock fight. And Nāgamma wins the fight through deceit. In the final war one by one everyone gets killed, first among them is Narasingarāju and Bālamalidēvudu. After the death of Narasingarāju, who is the military chief of Gurajāla, Nāyakuralu enters the battle field and fights ferociously winning the battle for Nalagāmarāju. The play ends on a spiritual note where Brahmanaidu contemplates of killing himself along with other heroes of the defeated side but they cannot do so. Nāgamma once again becomes the minister for the Palnādu that is united under the rule of Nalagāmarāju thus justifying the title of the play.

The second work that can be discussed in this context is Nazer's *Palnāti Yuddhamu*. The text is completely meant to be sung. Though it is a written work, it follows the episodic pattern of the oral performative tradition. It is also a post-independence production and reverberates with messages of independence and the act of building a new and independent regional identity with the evocation of a story that already had elements of a regional identity. *Palnāti Yuddhamu* begins with a song appealing to the fellow countrymen and to other writers like Srinātha and Pótanna. This text deals fully with the episode of war while briefly touching upon the other relevant episodes of the *Palnāti Caritra*.

It describes the greatness of Palnādu and requests all elders and children to listen to the song with attention. Palnādu is the land of great men where there was a lot of bloodshed for the protection of the land. It was a land of heroes and heroic women. Anugurāju died and made Nalagāmarāju his successor who ruled the land ensuring equality of castes and while taking care of people of all castes. Brahmanaidu was his minister who started the system of *cāpakūdu* because of which all *pettamdārulu* didn't like him and held it against him.

Nāgamma and her education occupy the central concerns of the song and one of the stated agendas of the text as well. The song introduces the character of Nāgamma as someone who is well trained in all the martial arts and education and is suitable for future position in the court. The song describes her as a powerful character. Nāgamma induces Narasingarāju to get hold of his share of the kingdom as Nalagāmarāju doesn't have male heir. Nalagāmarāju gave a share of the Palnādu kingdom to his half-brothers Malidēvarāju, Pinamalidēvarāju and Bālamalidēvarāju with Mācerla as the capital. People complain to Nāgamma about Brahmanaidu's policies of equality and breaking of the caste barrier. Nāgamma feels jealous of Mācerla and its progress. Nāgamma writes a letter to Mācerla inviting them for a cockfight for the coming Sankaranti festival. Though people in Mācerla could see through the tricks of Nāgamma but Bramhanaidu is fond of cock fights and he cannot rule out the invitation and therefore accepts the challenge on behalf of Malidēvarāju and his brothers. Then there is the final battle at Karemapūdi which proves disastrous for both the concerned kingdoms.

The next text in the chronological order is the *dvipada kavya Palnātivīra Caritra* under the editorship of Pingali Lakshmikantham published in the year 1961. This summary of the text is discussed for the present purpose as it is presented in the form of episodes.

### Anugurāju's Acquisition of Palnādu

Anugurāju is a north Indian king who rules Pālamācāpuri. One day on the order of his family deity, Cennakésava he decides to

make amends for his past sins. God in the form of a Brahmin priest informs him that he should take bath in the sacred waters of the country and wherever his clothes become discoloured and turn pale he would be purified of his sins. Therefore, Anugurāju takes his wife and army along with him and begins his journey across the country. They go to Kāsi and take bath in the sacred waters of the Ganges but their clothes remain in the same colour. They continue their journey and finally reach Mótupalli on the banks of the river Krishna. As they take bath in the Krishna river their clothes become discoloured and Anugurāju feels jubilant and stays put with his army of men and cattle and horses and so on for some time in Mótupalli as his sins are purified. To get food for his cattle Anugurāju's army gets into a fight with the local King of Palnādu. Anugurāju wins the battle and is offered the princess Vidyaladēvi in marriage to him. He marries her and gets the Kingdom of Palnādu as dowry.

Thus Anugurāju becomes the King of Palnādu and lives happily with his wives and eight children, Nalagāma, Narasinga, Kāma, Jutti, Perumāllu and Peda, Pina, and Bala Malidēvarāju. He goes for hunting one day and Nāgamma, the daughter of Rāmireddy offers his army great hospitality. Pleased with her sense of duty towards the King, Anugurāju offers her a boon. Nāgamma asks him to make her the Minister of Palnādu for seven minutes whenever she desires. Anugurāju grants her his word for it.

### Division of Palnādu

As Anugurāju grows old his eldest son Nalagāmarāju becomes the king, and Brahmanaidu is the minister of the region. At this time, Nāgamma approaches Nalagāmarāju and asks him to fulfil his father's promise to her. Nalagāmarāju feels obliged and makes Nāgamma the minister of Palnādu. Nāgamma assumes her role seriously and attacks the houses of Brahmanna and Malidēvarāju and recovers gold and wealth and sends Malidēvarāju and his brothers to jail. With the intention of separating Nalagāmarāju from Brahmanna she devises different plans. Brahmanna divides Palnādu and makes Malidēvarāju the ruler under his ministership. Thus Nāgamma becomes responsible for the separation of Palnādu.

Brahmanna decides to arrange for the marriage of Malidévarāju and asks for the hand of the daughter of Vīrasóma the ruler of Kalyānapuri. But he refuses, as Brahmanna is Vaishnavite and his family is Saivite. But Nandisomudu's daughter Sivanāguladévi elopes with Sivasingālarāju and marries him. Nandisomudu becomes furious and seeks the help of Brahmanna to attack Sivanandlakóta. At their defeat in the attack, Sivasingālarāju and Sivanāguladévi commit suicide. Brahmanna brings their children and names them as Ranatheppalarāju and Cinakkapinakka. And finally, Vīrasómudu agrees to give his daughter in marriage to Malidévarāju.

### Kóllapóru-Gópanna's Death

This episode discusses Brahmanna's preparations to go to Gurajāla for the cock fight. As he gathers Cittimallu, the rooster prepared for the fight, he takes all his men along with Kannama and begin their journey to Gurajāla. Before beginning the journey, Brahmanaidu asks the rooster what the outcome of the fight would be, to which the rooster croons strongly at first and then meekly. This is interpreted that Brahmanna will lose the second fight. As the journey begins Gópanna follows them and requests them not to go for the cockfight as all signals are against Mācerla's victory. But Bramhanna, sends Kannama to stop Gópanna from following. Kannama draws a line and orders Gopanna not to go beyond that. Anyway Gópanna follows them to Gurjāla. Brahmanna foresees that Gópanna is going to be killed during the fight. They take the hospitality of a local chieftain for a night before reaching Gurajāla. Finally they reach Gurajāla. Nāgamma tricks Cittimallu into losing the fight. Her minions poison the cock and Cittmallu loses the fight. Nāgamma orders that Malidévarāju and his brothers must leave the kingdom and must go into exile from there itself for seven years as it was decided before the fight.

### Exile

After performing the last rites for Gópanna, the next day Brahmanna consoles the defeated leaders Malidévarāju and his



brothers and prepares them and their families to leave Mācerla and leave for a distant destination to spend their exile of seven years. They offer prayers to their family deity Cennakésava and begin their journey. On the way they rest in a forest area with all their cattle and men. There a huge lion attacks a heavy bull, but the chief cattle herder Lankanna aims his arrow at it, when the lion speaks to him in human language and instructs him that he would die only in the hands of Brahmanna and no one else. Lankanna narrates the incident to Brahmanna and requests him to liberate the lion from its present incarnation. Brahmanna does so and the lion assumes the form of a *gandharva* and disappears to his *lóka*. After that Brahmanna blames Lankanna for letting the big bull die and orders that Lankanna must assume the camouflage of a woman and herd the cattle for the rest of their journey. The next day all of them decide to cross the river Krishna and while doing so encounter a crocodile. Brahmanna with his powers chases it in water and kills it. Upon being killed it assumes the form of a *gandharva* woman and narrates her story thus: “ In a city called Madhurāpuri a *gandharva* named Sundudu lived with his wife Sunda. They lived happily and indulged in mating rituals and ignored the great sage Dūrvāsa when he visited them. The sage gets angry and curses them to be born as a crocodile and a tiger. He tells them that they would be redeemed of their fate in *bhūlóka* after being killed by the hands of Brahmanna who is an incarnation of Lord Vishnu himself”. Brahmanna listens to the story and feels happy about it and the whole entourage crosses the river and reaches Mandādi where they plan to spend the remaining seven years of their exile.

### Attack on the Cattle and Lankanna’s Death

Nāgamma comes to know that Malidéva and his brothers are spending their exile very happily in Mandādi. She decides to somehow disturb their peace and she sends a wrestler Vīdula Palinīdu to divert Malidévarāju’s cattle from Mandādi to Gurajāla. Palinīdu leaves for Mandādi with three other men. All of them reach Mandādi and take permission from Sīlamma the mother of Brahmanna, thinking they are men from her own kingdom she allows them to enter the city. These men enter the cattle herding

area and disturb the cattle indiscriminately. In the fight between Nalagāmarāju's men and Lankanna, Lankanna is injured badly and eventually dies. However, Kannamadāsu diverts the cattle from Gurajāla and brings them back to Mandādi.

### The Battle of Gurajāla

After receiving the news of Lankanna's death, Brahmanaidu becomes furious and declares a war against Gurajāla. But Malidēvarāju pacifies him and takes a promise from him that Brahmanna would never kill his brothers. Brahmanna agrees to it but nonetheless, decides to go for the war. Upon receiving the news Vīra Vidyaladēvi gives him jewels to be offered to Lord Cennakēsava before he proceeds for his battle. When he offers the jewels, Cennakēsava in the guise of a brahmin manifests and asks Brahmanna to give the jewels to him. Brahmanna prays to God that Mācerla has lost its former glory and that it should be protected from further damage. Brahmanna reaches the meadows of Révantu when a demon tries to fight with him but after realizing that it is Brahmanna, he narrates his story thus: Kortivīra was a dacoit in his previous incarnation. With the intention of looting Candavólu city, he makes friends with the king of the city, Gókarna. Gókarna invites Kortivīra for a meal, but Kortivīra doesn't attend the banquet, but while the feast goes on he loots the city. The security men arrest him but he escapes to Gurajāla. Nalagāma orders that he must be killed. Then Kortivīra pleads with them that he has not harmed anyone in Gurajāla so he should be left free. Nāgamma agrees to this on one condition that Kortivīra must help them in their wars with Brahmanna. Kortivīra didn't agree to this but instead condemned Nāgamma for such a demand. Thus Kortivīra narrated his story to Brahmanna. That night a Brahmin, Kommaya dreamt that Brahmanna has reached Gurajāla. He wakes up and challenges that he would destroy Brahmanna. But instead he is subdued by Brahmanna and he is sent back to Nalagāma with the message that Brahmanna has come to Gurajāla for a battle. Nāgamma prepares for war but Nalagāma runs away from the battle field and seeks shelter in the temple of a *dēvi*. When

Brahmanna reaches the temple to kill Nalagāma, the dévi appears and orders him to spare Nalagāma of his life. After this Brahmanna returns to Mandādi.

### Alarāju's Mission to Gurajala

After the seven year exile time which they spend in the city of Médapi first and then Mandādi later, Malidévarāju and his brothers decide to go back to Mācerla which is their rightful capital for their part of the Palnādu. They decide to send Alarāju to Nalagāmarāju and ask them to return their kingdom. Alarāju is closely related to both the families. Kommurāju expresses anxiety and fear about his son's safety as an ambassador, but Brahmanna assures him that till Alarāju returns, Kommurāju can keep Bālacandrudu (Brahmanaidu's son) with him. Upon assurances of safety for Alarāju, he is sent as an ambassador to Gurajāla along with an associate called Kannama. Nalagāmarāju receives Alarāju in his court with all the honour due to an ambassador and advises him that he should give up his mission and should take his wife Ratnālapéramma with him and live with her. Nalagāmarāju also argues that Malidévarāju can't get back his kingdom once it is lost in battle. Alarāju replies that if the kingdom is not returned yet another battle would follow and this time only two warriors like Peddanna and Kannama are sufficient to win the war. As the arguments continue between the father-in-law and son-in-law, Cintapalli Reddi interferes and advises Nalagāmarāju to return the kingdom to Malidéva and his brothers. However, Nāgamma assumes her role and warns Alarāju that there is no such deal and that he should go back. Alarāju gets furious and takes out his sword against Nāgamma, but she escapes the attack. In order to take revenge on Alarāju, next morning Nāgamma sends poisoned flowers to his rest house as he is fond of flowers. Kommarājiyāru takes the flowers to Cerlagudipādu and gives them to Alarāju. Alarāju smells the flowers and immediately the poison enters his body and he informs Kannama that he is going to die and that his wife Péramādévi should be brought immediately. Péramādévi comes to Cerlagudipādu cursing her father who is responsible

for the death and approaches the dying Alarāju. He gives her his jewels and other ornaments and instructs her to give them over to Bāludu and dies in her hands. Péramma takes the dead body to Médapi and informs Malidéva of her husband's death. All the people and family members on both sides are stunned at the death of Alarāju. Ratnālapéramma prepares herself for *sati*, to die on the funeral pyre of her husband.

### Kallupratista (Memorial Stone)

After the death of Alarāju, Malidévarāju decides to claim his part of Palnādu kingdom by declaring war against Nalagamarāju. He makes his son Birudurāju the king of Médapi and leaves Bālacandrudu and Anapótu with him and prepares for war at Kāremapudi. The first thing Malidévarāju does is to order a huge stone pillar to be laid in the battle field as a witness to the war between the brothers (*kallupratista*). Brahmanna also accompanies the army to the battlefield. He sanctifies the field with his powers. He informs Kannama that the field is full of bones and other remnants of the dead bodies due to the many battles that it has endured and needs to be purified before they finally wage this righteous war against Nalagāmarāju. After the fields are cleared, the sacred stone is laid in Kāremapūdi and word is sent to Nalagāmarāju that Malidévarāju is about to attack Gurajāla. Nalagāmarāju and Nāgamma though surprised, prepare their army of men and cavalry for the war at Kāremapūdi.

### Balacandruni Yuddhamu

Bālacandrudu is found playing a game of tops with his friends in the street in Médapi. While playing he hurts a *kómati* girl, Annamma. She becomes angry at Bāludu and challenges him to go and play in the battle field where his father and uncles are fighting for their kingdom instead of whiling away his time at the play of tops. Then Bālacandrudu goes back to his mother and asks her about his father and the kings of Médapi. She avoids answering him, but finally tells him that it is true that they are fighting in the

battle at Kāremapūdi to win back their kingdom of Mācerla. Then Bāludu proceeds to meet with his wife Māncāla to take her wishes before leaving for the battle field. His friends accompany him to the battle but Anapótu the brahmin boy is sent back to Médapi on some pretext so that they could avoid the possibility of the killing of a Brahmin in the battle. But Anapótu realizes the plan and feels humiliated and kills himself on the way to Médapi. Meanwhile Bālacandrudu participates in the battle and kills Narasingarāju and in turn Narasingarāju also stabs him before falling a victim to the wounds in the battle. Thus war leaves, nothing but casualty on both sides, leaving no ambition in any one for the kingdom.

Lastly, the text published for children the *Bālānanda* series introduces the story of these Telugu heroes as part of the cultural continuum. It is an irony of sorts to call it an abridged version as it is in fact, the only book that gives the complete story of *Palnātivīrula Katha*. From what sources the story is drawn is not known; but may be from the dominant available material in popular imagination.

This is an abridged edition for children written in the new idiom and language of the nation and gender. The children's version is devoid of all mythical stories and genealogies of the birth of Brahmanaidu and all supernatural intervention in the actual progression of events. The story revolves around the central female character Nāgamma. She is a widow and the story relates how she comes to be called *nāyakurālu* and how she manipulates the rulers of Palnādu, Nalagāmarāju and Narasingarāju. This text almost explains all key motifs in the text of the *Caritra* which were simply suggested in various other texts. The river Krishna runs across the North and West of the region of Palnādu for about seventy miles. Gurajāla the capital city is about hundred and twenty kilometres away from the river. In the south there is a thick forest surrounded by mountains. And on the east there is the river Nāgulēru and Candravanka. In the children's version of the *Caritra*, Brahmanaidu is attributed with the qualities of an anti-hero. It presents a completely different perspective of the story by providing the logic behind the actions of certain characters like Brahmanaidu and Nāgamma. All other editions establish

*nāyakurālu* as a character who exercises her indomitable power and authority unilaterally, and as a frustrated, cruel, and ruthless widow, having no sense of judgment. But in this version she appears as an able female leader concerned with the welfare of women.

Nāgamma, the daughter of Rāmireddi Chaudhuri, is a widow. The story of her birth is as follows. One day while farming, Rāmireddi finds an infant baby in the fields and names her Nāgamma. He and his wife get her educated in all martial arts and also in the languages of Sanskrit and Telugu. She gets married at her eighteenth year to Aravalli Óbulareddi's son Mékapótula Singāreddi. But before long she becomes a widow. She returns to her father's house and devotes her time to organize the youth to fight against dacoits and other evils to protect villages nearby. She is a worshipper of Lord Siva. To protect women from the atrocities of Brahmanaidu and his policies, Nalagāmarāju appoints Nāgamma as his minister. The other versions praise both Alarāju and Bālachandrudu as great men with warrior qualities but the children's text shows them as two libertines who have deserted their wives to the winds. The theme of the novel is completely woman-centric because Nāgamma declares that the kingdom belongs to Vidyaladēvi as it has come to her as *strīdhanamu*. Therefore the only inheritor is Nalagāmarāju and after him it goes to his children but not to his half-brothers. As a wise adviser to the king she suggests that privy purses can be granted to the half-brothers and that there is no need to divide the kingdom. It explains Nāgamma's open disapproval of Brahmanaidu; it is because of Brahmanaidu's illegal activities that have been taking place in the name of *cāpakuṭi sidhāntamu*. There is a discussion on whether brothers get a division of the property at all if it is a matter of kingdom. Only the eldest son inherits the property and if the king has a daughter it is the son-in-law who would inherit property. Nalagāmrāju gives money to the younger brother so that they can build their own cities and rule over them but the kingdom cannot be divided. Narasingarāju and his brother stay with Nalagāmarāju.

Nāgamma plots a cockfight as she knows Brahmanaidu's weakness for the cockfight. Nāgamma organizes a fight on the

occasion of Sankranti and sends an invitation to Mācerla. There is only one cockfight in which Nāgamma uses a metal protection for her cock. Brahmanaidu and Malidevarāju lose the cockfight and are asked to leave their kingdom. They leave Palnādu and build a city named Mandādi and live there the remaining seven years before they make a claim for their land. After seven years, hoping to regain their kingdom Malidēvarāju sends an envoy to Gurajāla. But due to a contraption laid by either Narasingarāju and Nāgamma or due to Bramhanaidu's plans, Alarāju dies on his way back from Gurajāla. As both Narasingarāju and Brahmanaidu can claim the kingdom if Alarāju dies, as he happens to be the only legitimate claimant to the kingdom as the husband of Ratnālaperamma, the daughter of Nalagāmarāju. Nalagāmarāju doesn't agree to return the kingdom and moreover, he suspects the motives of Brahmanaidu who has come with full preparations for a war and is waiting at the battlefield in Karemapūdi. Nalagāmarāju makes preparations and finally reaches Kāremapūdi. Bālacandrudu was playing the game of tops and he injures a Komati girl called Annamma who dares him to go and play in the war with real people and not with a game of tops which is not real. In the battlefield both Bālacandrudu and Narasingarāju die.

#### IV

However, all the four works under study do not have the same conclusion. Pingali Lakshmikantham's compilation of the *Caritra* includes the episode on war, the children's edition also ends with war, and Nazer's whole song is on war; while Unnava Lakshminarayana's story ends after Alarāju's mission to Gurajāla suggestive of the inevitable consequences. And Pingali's text ends with Brahmanaidu's advice to Nalagāmarāju that he should rule the kingdom wisely from thereafter.

Some of these written texts are also digitized by way of preserving them for posterity through the new and ever-changing technology. This chapter based on the written texts of the *Palnātivīrula Katha* should have logically led to the study of other kinds of modern, electronic sources available on the epic in

the following chapter. However, due to the lack mainly of time, the discussion refrains from entering into a new territory, of the publication of the story in the electronic media, both in the form of digital texts and in the form of digital films which would require an understanding of the larger politics of the invasion of not just technology but of the other forces, of the nature of globalization and so on. For the moment the digital texts have to wait, while the last chapter attempts to clinch the argument of the project with a brief commentary on Telugu consciousness.

## Notes

1. The oral tradition of the epic supposedly existed since 12th century, where as it was written down around the 15th century, which is also the period in which Srinātha was prolific in his literary output. The written text is referred to as *Palnātivīra Caritra*.
2. Unnava Lakshminarayana is a barrister who returned from Ireland and participated in the Indian struggle for independence. If the freedom struggle gave an identity to Indians as one nation it was also the time the regional and linguistic identities emerged as specific groups with a historicity and culture of its own. This play, that way is an addition to the discussion of contemporary issues like the military recruitment within the play.
3. Translation mine.
4. Nation and Its Fragments, p. 55.
5. The Ponnar-Sankar story begins from their grandfathers. The chieftain of the Vazhavanthi country in Chera kingdom was Kolaththa Gounder, eldest among the twelve brothers belonging to Urali gounder. Kolaththa Gounder and his wife Pavalaththal decide to leave their country Perungudi because of atrocities of his unjust brothers. They go to Mathukkarai to Goddess Sellandiya Amman temple.
6. Published in *Another Harmony*, (eds.) Stuart Blackburn and AK Ramanujan. Delhi: OUP, 1986.
7. Unnava Lakshminarayana's play *Nāyakurālu*. (1926). Machilipatnam: Triveni Publishers, 1980, p. 26.
8. Meaning Vaishnavism
9. The vehicle is on track.
10. A tribal group that lives in the Nallamala forests.



## Telugu Consciousness<sup>1</sup>

...It is stated that at first the whole world was submerged under waters; that on perceiving this, the god Narayana, assuming the form of Brahma, created all the worlds, in the midst of which was the earth adorned by the Golden Mountain and surrounded by the islands and the seas; that in the centre of the earth and encircled by the salt seas was the jambudvipa divided into nine khandas or continents, of which that extending from the Himalayas to the Southern Ocean was known as Bharata-varsha comprising many countries, where different languages and customs prevailed; and that one of them named Tilinga, through which flowed many holy rivers, contained several rich towns and cities, beautiful mountains, impenetrable forests, deep tanks, and unassailable fortresses. (11.4-13) (*Epigraphia Indica* Vol. 32, 1957-58, 241)

An immediate entry into the main body of the chapter is prevented by two notes, one, a necessary acknowledgement and two, a lengthy prologue. The end note is a reference to the usage of the phrase *Telugu consciousness* which I have done without realizing that twenty years ago the renowned historian S. Nagaraju used it in understanding the early Telugu inscriptions, in a seminal essay “Emergence of Regional Identity and Beginnings of Vernacular Literature: A Case Study of Telugu” published in the *Social Scientist*, a lengthier discussion of which would be made in a later section of this chapter. This chapter is prefaced with a fourteenth century Telugu inscription titled the *Vilasa Grant* of Prolaya

Nāyaka of the Musunuri family, for reasons more than one: primarily to reflect on the totality of the theme under study that of Telugu consciousness. Secondly, to highlight the public intent of the *Grant* which expressly declares, its linguistic moorings, political affiliations and finally the legitimizing factor of both the *pan* Indian language and the *pan* Indian-ness. For a more organic understanding and relevance of the consciousness of a shared past, the inscription is re-invoked at the end of the first segment along with *Rāyavācakamu* a text produced in the Madurai Nayaka court, declaring its ideological subordination to the great Vijayanagara ruler Sri Krisnadevarāya.

The project entitled “Narrative Traditions of a Telugu Epic, *Palnātivīruala Katha*” is brought to a conclusion in this chapter with exploration of some questions that still need a strong and fitting answer though I cannot claim to have fulfilled these issues with equal strength and scholarship. All arguments of the previous chapters are drawn together for an understanding of the epic as part of the consciousness of a people of the region of Andhra. The epic in its many manifestations provides an opportunity for understanding, in this context, at least three issues. Firstly, the entire historicity of the epic in its journey of eight hundred years<sup>2</sup> which also necessitated the study of the emergence of what came to be known as Telugu Literature and literary culture. Secondly the trajectory of the region, Andhra over the centuries and how linguistic identity existed seamlessly across borders in the neighbouring regions. Thirdly, it helps draw parallels with the *Mahābhārata* and to see the whole process of the development of the regional aesthetic in Telugu Literature.

Broadly, this chapter itself engages with the one question, of the formation of the regional consciousness of a people through history, language and literature. The oral epic *Palnātivīrula Katha* raises and engages with some important issues of region, history and language of the Telugus, to begin with. In this segment an attempt is made to understand these aspects as inherent to the composite nature of Telugu consciousness. Therefore, this particular aspect is studied, as expressly contingent upon issues of the evolution of Telugu script, language and literature and a shared historical past.

In the first section, there is an examination of these issues and in the second section *Palnāti Katha* is placed in perspective along with other *jānapada kathalu* for an appropriation of this epic as the essential Telugu heroic epic. *Vīragātha* literature as well as historical material would be used to locate the roots of the notion of *vīradharma*. The third section deliberates the self-awareness of the Telugus in the 20th century.

In order to achieve this end, the chapter would look at available literary and inscriptional sources firstly and secondly it would try to locate the epic in the context of other *vīragātha* literature of the region. This brings us to the point that the community would like to elevate itself and identify with a legacy of heroes who have not only built kingdoms but also have stood by high values and have given primacy to a community identity rather individualistic, self-centred pursuits. This leads us to understand the complexity of why only episodes relating to the war titled *Bālcandra Yuddhamu* are retrieved and published of the *Palnātivīra Caritra* in the 20th century as a mark of celebration of the heroic sentiment.

## I

Telugus identified themselves as belonging to one community, not based on unique qualities but on the commonality of shared cultural and geo-political features of one people across centuries, in spite of not always being under one political rule. While demarcating the awareness of a people as separate from other regional communities, some elements of such a common sensibility as constituted by its language, script, literature, and geography and its history would be examined, without trying to privilege the Telugu community over other cultural regions to elevate its unique place in the history of the other Dravidian cultures. The whole enterprise of comprehending Telugu sensibility all along, has been a two-way process. While distinguishing oneself as against its neighbouring say for instance Kannada or Tamil speaking regions, it also unifies itself with the commonness based on linguistic and cultural identity of its own people. This chapter, in trying to answer certain issues related to the Telugu epic *Palnātivīrula Katha* and its identification with

the Telugus over the centuries, raises some questions regarding the self-perceptions of a community that wishes to identify and project itself through its culture and literature, a certain identity for itself as well as to the people of other regions.

The genealogy and the possible meanings of the terms Andhra and Telugu are mentioned here in brief. Historically, the word Telugu/తెలుగు is used from 5th century, Andhra/ఆంధ్ర from 9th century and Tenugu/తెనుగు from 11th century onwards.<sup>3</sup> Literary historians have tried to explain the term Telugu as something describing a tribe and Tenugu as something that refers to the south whereas Andhra has references to a place and a region only from the 3rd century Maidavolu copper plates. The project prefers to use the term Telugu rather than Andhra because of the political connotations that the latter carries with it. Telugu is more useful for a cultural understanding of a people and their concerns whereas Andhra is more used in its territorial and political indications. Therefore the self-perceptions of the people can be called Telugu consciousness rightly or wrongly and not Andhra consciousness, which is more identified with the geopolitical dimensions than with a cultural, linguistic past. The desire to have a script, a language and a literature, however disconcerted the efforts may be, is an expression of a common ethos which comes through the epic. Though the frame work adopted for this project is seemingly nationalist, it must be stated that it is indeed without the euphoria of the jingoistic sentiments of the nationalists.

Indian philosophical thought believes that everything in the universe is consciousness and human beings, animals and all the flora and fauna are all just a part of this all pervasive consciousness. However, I use the term consciousness against much suspicion and resistance only to capture the components, that the epic projects, by way of understanding aspects of Telugu life. The Telugu words for consciousness are *cétana*/చేతన, *jāgurūkata*/జాగరూకత and *melakuva*/మెలకువ. In this context the denotation is the awakening of a people as a unified community for the first time, is what is termed as consciousness.

A more methodical approach to the subject would be a consideration of matters beginning with the evolution of the

script and of the inscriptional prose narrative in which Telugu language was used that finally led to the flourishing of literature, and with a reflection on the nature of how Telugus looked upon themselves as a community.<sup>4</sup> It is important to separate script from language. Language pre-exists script and hence the evolution of language and script are not simultaneous. It would be ambitious to trace the evolution of the Telugu script, language and literature through successive stages of its evolution, but nonetheless, I have attempted to clarify some of these themes as these issues have a direct bearing on the overall project. Amidst conflicting accounts by different South Indian palaeographers, Nagaswamy and I. Kartikeya Sarma, of the appearance of Telugu and Tamil letters on the coinage of the Satavahanas, a modern student of language and script is left even more dissatisfied than before after the study. However, based on phonological sounds which were closer to the Telugu phonetic system, I.K. Sarma in his work on the *Coinage of the Satavahana Empire* does acknowledge that the first Telugu letters and language were found on the coins issued by the Satavahana kings. His study on the silver coinage of the same rulers reveals that Telugu letters were found to have been on the uni-scriptural but bi-lingual coins of the Satavahana empire. On the obverse, Prakrit letters are found and on the reverse, the script and the phonological sounds found are believed to correspond to Telugu language. These coins are attributed to the period of Vasisthiputra Pulumavi(II).

Obv: Rano Vasethi Putasa Siri Pudu (or lu) mavisā

Rev: Arhanaku Vahitti Mānaku tiru Pulu (or du) maviku

Rev: అర్హణకు వహిత్తి మాకనకు తిరు పులు (or) మావికు

“(the coin) of king Tiru Pulu (or du) mavi son of Vasisthi”<sup>5</sup>

As can be inferred from the above examples, these coins have phrases describing the king’s lineage. To actually bring the coins into discussion, the evidence available on these coins is not overwhelming, but with whatever little is available, it is understood that the phrases found on the reverse of the coins have phonological similarity with the Telugu language. Though the script may be the same for both Prakrit and Telugu, the

phonological correspondence and a Telugu lexeme is found in the letters of the coins. This material illustrates a dual point: that of the usage of Telugu language in public communication as well as the script. The script found on the coins has undergone several changes over time but it has retained a couple of letters found in the same way in the later period as well. I.K. Sarma goes on to the extent of claiming that “the obverse legend is in Prakrit language. The reverse is in old Telugu, that too in verse *ragada* meter, a purely *dēsi* type depending on *mātra* (*chandass*). The line contains twenty letters and three *mātras* (5+5+5+8). All the rev. legends are in verse form and conform to a *dēsi* meter, depending on *mātra chandas* corresponding to *dvipadajāti ragada*. He informs that these bi-lingual coins were minted in the Andhra region at Nagarjunakonda. Arhana/అర్హణ, puta/పుత, makana/మాకన are the words used of Telugu on the coins. This, he believes, the Satavahana emperors did “mainly to proclaim their nativity and mother tongue to their subjects.”<sup>6</sup> However, he continues, that early Telugu lost its footing to Sanskrit and the overwhelming influence of Prakrit of the times both by way of language and orthography.

From the Satavahanas onwards it took about two thousand years for the Telugu language to develop into its present shape and form. Telugu script used for the expression of Telugu language is derived from Asokan Brahmi. A.C. Burnell in his work *South Indian Palaeography* contends that the evolution of Telugu script and language are fully inter-connected with the ruling dynasty of the region. During the early stages of its development, the script was known by the name of the dynasties like the Vēngi script, Cālukya script and Kākatīya script and so on. Visnukundin script is called the *vengi* script and this was the form before Kannada and Telugu began to have a separate the script. This common script was also used in Indonesia, Java and Malaysia for writing the Telugu language. After the Visnukundins in the 7th century the Eastern Cālukyas occupied the Telugu speaking area around Vengi and they commissioned some of the earliest Telugu inscriptions.<sup>7</sup> By the time of the Kākatīyas the Telugu script had distinguished itself. And by the time of the Reddi kings during which period

Srinātha was writing, the Telugu script had acquired all its letters in the present form.

In medieval Andhra, which changed territorial boundaries several times as large kingdoms declined and the small polities became independent, separation of Telugu script in 13th century could also be traced to these historical developments of the region. Such territorial changes owing to political developments also entailed that communication remained within the small region and resulted in loss of contact and loss of the need to communicate with the other regions. With the occasion to communicate with these large groups dwindling, the script may have gradually become separate and unique. Consequentially, the mode of cultural exchange not only changes, and probably sometimes an interval in these exchanges would also lead to a different kind of development in the field of language and literature. Burnell attributes it to the uncertain political environment. According to Burnell, Telugu language and script also saw changes in the patronage of arts and literature also due to considerable turbulence in the realm of religion. Telugu thus began to show a marked difference and this was finally accentuated by the introduction of printing in the nineteenth century. The final changes which were mistakenly introduced by AD Campbell in Telugu grammar like the angular *talakattu* (✓) which is used to indicate *a* sound has been continued into the present times.<sup>8</sup> Telugu has fifty three letters in its script now. After undergoing several phonological and morphological changes, Telugu script acquired its final form. Burnell's study marks this nuanced development of the letters which he claims formed the chief difference between Telugu-Canarese script and the Grantha<sup>9</sup> script. The basic difference started with the separation of the way vowels were written between Telugu and Kannada languages.

The evolution of Telugu language into the present position is also a story of many interventions, native as well as of foreign languages. Telugu belongs to the Dravidian family of languages, to the mid-Dravidian languages like *parji*, *kollami* and *manda* it shares some common features phonetically and grammatically.

The Telugu linguist Tirumala Ramachandra in his essay *Telugulipi Parinamamu*, notes that, it has evolved over a period of two thousand years and definitely has taken elements from various languages.<sup>10</sup> The flexibility to acquire “features of cosmopolitan nature” as also to accommodate foreign language vocabulary and make it one’s own are visible throughout the developmental stages of the language. This can be seen in the influence that Sanskrit, Prakrit and Kannada have had on Telugu script and language. Foreign words which entered Telugu and remained as it is without undergoing the phonological change are called *tatsamālu* and words that underwent phonological changes are called *tadbhavālu*, whereas words of native origin are called *désyālu*. As is recurrently seen, there are very few words in Telugu that have remained in the language of the native origin like *nanjudu*, *ciyya* which are replaced by the Sanskrit *māmusamu* over time. The usage of phonemes like f, z had begun under the rule of the Qutubshahis. Outside of Telangana, these sounds are equated to kha/ఖ, pa/ప pha/ఫ, and ga/గ but within Telangana they are used as it is (1600-1899).<sup>11</sup>

Telugu language has always been accommodative of changes, cultural, social and political. Over a period of its development the language has borrowed words from various sources mainly due to its interactions with people of other cultural regions. These changes have fortified the language over time. Telugu linguists Balasarasvati and Chinnaya Suri observed that writers like Ketana, Vinnakota Peddana, and Kucimanci Timmana have used words that have undergone morphological changes in Telugu from Sanskrit but have excluded the use of words from Prakrit. However, when we observe the language, four fifths of the morphemes are from Prakrit and only one portion is from Sanskrit. Between the 11 and 15 centuries the language has developed the final shape of its present script and this is also a period considered ‘prosperous’ period for its maturity. The influence of Pharsi and Arabic words began after the decline of the Kākatīyas and with the establishment of the Qutubshahi dynasty at Golkonda in 1585. To note some of these influences,



Telugu                      Sanskrit                      Prakrit  
 Soddemu/సోదైము chodya/చోద్య chojjem/చోజ్జెం

Within Dravidian languages the elongated sounds in the middle of a word are rare as in *ingalamu*/ఇంగలము *ingāla*/ఇంగాల *angāra*/అంగార. The Prakrit *angāra* and Sanskrit *ingāla* become *ingalamu* in Telugu. The middle elongated vowel sounds like u: e: o: also become short vowel sounds as in *jalaga*/జలగ, *jalu:ga*/జలూగ and *jalu:ka*/జలూక<sup>12</sup> If one examines the language of the Nizam's rule there were many occupational terms like *katikavāllu*/కటికవాళ్ళు, *kasābuvallu*/ కసాబువాళ్ళు and so on. New occupational words like *chimta*/చిమట, *katāru*/కటారు, clothing related *kalamkāri*/కలంకా<sup>13</sup> *jambukhana*/జంబుఖాన, *kullāya*/కుళ్ళాయ, *jaratāru*/జరతారు and so on enter into Telugu language during this period.

It must be noted that these are occupations and commodities new to the culture but nevertheless assimilated into the language and culture in course of time. Interestingly, cultural practices which are totally identified with Telugus like the honorific suffix of *gāru* is derivative of an Urdu word. Let's look at the next example, an Urdu word like *madadgār*/మాదాయకుడు, the suffix *gār* has become the honorific *gāru* in Telugu phonemic shape. Portuguese words that have become common use in our language such as *bālci*, *mēstri*, *istri*, *giddangi*, *gōdāmu* and *banku* and have remained unchanged in Telugu where as other words can also be found in other Indian languages. Any language would accept these changes in order to reform itself to the changing needs of a new situation, which is acceptance of a new ruler or a new culture. Language interactions have always been associated with the power of the ruling dynasties and the reason why were these are changes naturally accepted is analysed by S. Nagaraju in his essay on regional identities, "if a certain class of people accept language as a communicative means of an elite group that language goes through a process of refinement to evolve itself into an effective medium for complex usages of the sophisticated culture."<sup>14</sup> Thus Telugu accepted words from all sources including vocabulary from different foreign cultures that ruled Andhradēsa.

This brings us to the next closely associated point of linguistic expression and literature. Linguistic expression in Telugu was found from the 6th century in Rayalaseema where we have traces of self-expression of a community becoming manifest in the form of inscriptions during this period. People of Rayalaseema expressed their identity as Telugu people for the first time in these inscriptions. In other parts of Andhra, Telugu inscriptions came up much later around the 11th century. These inscriptions of the 6th century illustrate at a surface level three points: a) that of a sense of identity of Telugu speaking people, b) the evolution of their script, and c) the usage of the language as a medium of public communication. They clarify the fact that these are the earliest evidences of expression of public communication in any language, either in Telugu or in Sanskrit. However the practice of Sanskrit inscriptions was frequent among the rulers of *Andhradésa* as Sanskrit was the language of prestige and therefore the public intent of the inscriptions is always conveyed in Sanskrit whereas the functional aspects would be written in Telugu. We have the most famous instance of the *Vilasa Grant* issued by Prōlaya Nāyaka of the fourteenth century.

The content of these first Telugu inscriptions published in Arudra's *Samgrāndhra Sāhityamu* Vol. I is quoted just to make connections of the script and language to the present day Telugu script and language. An inscription of the Renāti Cōla king, Dhanunjaya's Kalamalla inscription of 575 AD is given below-

1. ....
2. కలమ్ము(తు) రొ
3. జు ధనంజ
4. యన్ము రొనా
5. ణ్ము ఏళన్
6. చ ణు మూబూరొ
7. రొవణకాలు (పం)
8. చొ నూరుకాజు
9. అళక ణ (ఊ) రొ
10. ణ నూరు (ఊరొ)
- 11-14. (నూలుగు పంకమ్ముతులు శొధొలం)

15. ... పంచ (మ)
16. హౌహితక శ
17. కు.<sup>15</sup>

Arudra clarifies that the first line may contain “స్వస్తితీ ఎఱి”, as inferred from other available inscriptions of the same period. The letters in the parenthesis are filled by researchers. The existence of some kind of basic prose is evident in these inscriptions. It begins with the donor’s name and the nature of the donation, and the last line as it is completed in other inscriptions of the same period places a threat of *pancamahā pātakas* (the five great sins) if someone violated the instruction. A different point of relevance on the emergence of regional identity and beginnings of vernacular literature is made, when S. Nagaraju argues that the Telugu linguistic expression in early inscriptional evidence is marked as opposed to the common practice of the usage of Sanskrit which is understood as the result of the new emerging class of the tribal chieftains in Rayalaseema. And this aim was further achieved by establishing Jaina monasteries which believed in preaching religion in the language of the region. “Whatever the circumstances that led to or helped the choice of Telugu to become the vehicle of the newly emerging classes here, it was a conscious choice. It was done deliberately, going against the normal practice of simply copying the well cultivated language and style already current among those who are politically powerful or culturally advanced; despite the fact that Telugu at that time had not geared itself for the requirements of the higher level of state or social organisation emerging then, the local elite avoided the easy choice of adopting Kannada or Tamil, the language of Karnataka or Pallava suzerains with whom they had close interaction, or even Sanskrit, the language of administration and culture used in other parts of the Telugu country itself.”<sup>16</sup> He further argues, such a transformation in terms of a cultural movement the leadership for such a movement is provided by non-brahmanical social groups that emerged as a new class around the third century CE. There were no Brahmins in this region prior to 7th century and therefore Sanskrit was not available for inscriptional expression while it was used as an

expression of, the language of prestige and high culture in other Telugu speaking regions. The tribal chiefs of the Rayalaseema region, participating in the Pallava and Western Cālukya wars, at some point needed to consolidate their own group identity which would be different from the Kannada and Tamil armies and thus declared their aspirations in the inscriptions through the Telugu linguistic expression. Therefore, the consciousness of belonging to one linguistic community is a deliberate choice.

From the 9th century onwards, in addition to the prose we also have inscriptions in the form of poetry. First Telugu poetic expression is found in an inscription of the military official of Gunaga Vijayāditya's Panduranga Senani in a village in Addanki mandalam of the pre-Nannaya period around the 9th century. It is an inscription that informs the donation of twelve *bóya kottams* to the kings of Véngi. This was a stone inscription which was found partially destroyed at the top and the bottom of the stone.

“పట్టంబు గట్టిన ప్రథమంబు నేణ్ణు  
 బలగర్వ మొప్పుంగ బై లేచి సేన  
 పట్టంబు గట్టిన ప్రభు పండురంగు  
 బంచిన సామంతపడువతో బోయి  
 కోట్టముల్ పండ్రెండు గొని వేంగి నంటి  
 గొల్చి యాత్రిబువనాంకుశబాణనిల్చి  
 కట్టెపు దుర్గంబు గడు బయల్పేసి  
 కస్తుకూ ర్పెజవాడ గావించె మెచ్చి”<sup>17</sup>

Arudra copied these poetic expressions from the available inscriptions. It is a declaration of the donations made by Panduranga, the military chief of Gunaga Vijayāditya, the Eastern Cālukya king. There is another evidence of poetry in Gunaga Vijayāditya's brother Yuddhamalla's inscription in a Kumaraswami temple in Bejwada in the meter *madhyākkara*.<sup>18</sup>

స్వస్తి శ్రీ నృపాంకుశత్యంత వత్స  
 ల సత్య-త్రినేత్ర -విస్తార శ్రీ యుద్ధ  
 మల్లుండు -అనవద్య విఖ్యాత కీర్తి  
 ప్రస్తుత రాజాశ్రయుండు ద్రిభు  
 వన్-ఆభరనుండు సకల వస్తు సమేతుండు

These are some instances of the kind of metrical expressions and the contents which paved the way for an expression of more complex forms of poetry in Telugu as it becomes evident in Nannaya's poetry by the 11th century. These poems are recalled not only to exemplify the simplicity and progression of poetic expression in the pre-Nannaya period but also to gauge the literary culture and an awareness of one's own receptivity as Telugus. These poems cited above are in the *dési* meter of *madhyākkara* and *taruvōja*, usually found in women's songs. Though there are these rare instances of poetic outburst available to the modern reader in the form of inscriptional writing there is no full-fledged work of Literature of this period available for us today and thus making Nannaya the *ādikavi*, the primal poet in Telugu.

The beginning of prose writings can be very evidently seen from these inscriptions as well as in the more elaborate royal panegyric like the *Vilasa Grant*. Therefore, the earliest evidence of anything closer to the sense of commonality or consciousness of a people is evident in the 6th century inscriptions. S. Nagaraju elaborates such an outburst of a linguistic expression as more than merely linguistic, "This happens at a time when there is a sudden change in the socio-economic structure in such regions, which throws up a new dominant class from within its social fabric. The new class with its rising social aspiration and class consciousness tries to find various cultural mechanisms that could help to maintain its status, identity, and social cohesion (ideology, script, language, status symbols, etc). Among these, one of the powerful cohesive mechanisms would be the use of the local language, which is spoken commonly by all the members of this class. This would also help to maintain their identity intact."<sup>19</sup> Thus these inscriptional writings paved the path for the subsequent stages of development of what later on came to be known as Literature.

To move on to the next aspect, of how a historic consciousness specific to Telugus is reflected, both the *Vilasa Grant* of Prōlaya Nāyaka and *Rāyavācakamu*, a seventeenth century text, will be examined here. The generic differences of these texts are overlooked in this case for a fuller engagement with the theme of history and historic sensibility of the Telugus. The *Vilasa Grant*,

which is an inscription, will be used for cross reference throughout the chapter to understand various issues of consciousness of the Telugus not just of language but also of their sense of history and hero-worship. The inscription is in Sanskrit in the Telugu/Bramhi script and declares its unrestrained subordination to the greater power of Bharatavarsha. There is a consciousness of the shared past, in the *Grant* as well as in *Rāyavācakamu*, where both the documents commemorate their heroes, Prataparudra and Krishnadevarayalu to create an ideological political legitimacy to their own (the local) rule over the land of the Telugu speaking people: in this context, the rule of Prólāya Nāyaka and the Madurai chieftains in whose court the text *Rāyavācakamu* was produced.

To engage with the historic consciousness in the chronological order, I describe the contents of the *Vilāsa Grant* a little. This is an inscription dated after the decline of the Kakatiya empire, after Prataparudra II in 1323 AD, was taken as a hostage by the military general of Md-bin Tughluk/Ulugh Khan. Kakatiyas (1083 CE to 1323 CE) are the first Telugu dynasty that ruled the major areas of the Telugus. The Kakatiya rulers Rudrama and Prataparudra are celebrated in glorious terms in Literature. Prataparudra who ruled the Telugu country between 1290 and 1323 CE is idolized in the *Grant* by Prólāya Nāyaka. Prataparudra is the most eulogized historical figure as is evident from the fact that an entire inscription devoted to his memory called the *Vilasa Grant* and his court poet Vidyānātha wrote a play, called *Pratāparudrīya*. In the *Grant*, he is exalted as a Telugu ruler who protected the land against the Muslim invaders, thus becoming the iconic Telugu hero by any standards. An excerpt is quoted from the *Vilasa Grant*, “Several kings of the past, both the Solar and Lunar families held sway over this country extending from the sea, without swerving from the path of righteousness. During the Kali Age, the kings of the Kakati family ruled over Tilinga from their capital Ekasila, like the Ikshvakus from Ayodhya. When several rulers of the dynasty passed away, Prataparudra, a monarch famous for his prowess ascended the throne and ruled the country with truth and justice so that such famous monarchs of yore as Yayati, Nābhāga and Bhagīratha were completely forgotten. While king Prataparudra was ruling

the kingdom in this manner, bitter hostility arose between him and Ahammada Suratrana, the lord of the Turushkas.” The inscription continues, “while being carried away by the Turushka monarch to his capital Delhi, Prataparudra departed, by the decree of the Providence, to the world of the gods on the banks of the river Sōmōdbhavā (11. 13-28). When the sun, viz. Prataparudra, set, the world was enveloped in Turushka darkness.”<sup>20</sup> Prataparudra, the last of the Kakatiya rulers is doubly relevant in this context for his definitive heroism which protected the land from the outreaching clutches of the *suratranas*, the Muslims. This is the kind of heroism which the epic heroes of Palnādu exuded in an earlier period. The next part of the same inscription mentions the purpose for which Prataparudra’s heroism was resurrected through this donation of the village of Vilasa. “The land of Tilinga left without a protector, suffered destruction from the Yavanas like a forest subject to devastating wild fire (11. 28-29) Then was born as if an *amsa* of the god Vishnu, who took (sic) pity on the suffering of the people, had descended from heaven, king Prola of the Musunuri family of the fourth caste, who assumed the sovereignty of the earth.” The larger purpose of the *Grant* is to eulogize Prataparudra as an acknowledgement to his heroism but it is also a process of claiming legitimacy by Prōlaya Vema for his own rule as a former Kakatiya chieftain and the present Musunuri ruler.

While some of the evidence discussed serves the dual purpose of creating history as well as language like the preceding instance of the *Vilasa Grant*, the next text under study *Rāyavācakamu*<sup>21</sup> undertakes a similar exercise of claiming legitimacy for their rule by the Madurai Nayakas after the decline of the Vijayanagara empire. For this chapter I have used *Rāyavācakamu* edited by C.V. Ramachandra Rao in 1982. The work is an expression in Telugu of the heroism of Srikrishnadevaraya. His patronage to Telugu language and literature is well known and that makes it evident to recapitulate *Rāyavācakamu* as a text that spells a feeling of history of the Telugus.

Phillip Wagoner who translated the text as *Tidings of a King* and attempted to understand the historical significance emphasises, “My reading suggests that knowledge of the Vijayanagara past

was constructed and developed in the *Rāyavācakamu* as part of an ideological argument for the political legitimacy of the Madurai Nayaka regime. Exploring Vijayanagara's past in search of an alternate source for the legitimacy that had been lost under Venkatapati the then Nayaka ruler, and finding it in the reign of Krishnadevaraya our author sets about to produce a freely creative construction of the recent past.<sup>22</sup> As different from the aims of Wagoner who claims to have studied an ethnohistory, the purpose of the present study is to document a sense of history of the Telugus .

The text is in the form of a report (*vācakamu*). The entire report is an imaginary world which would recreate the court activity, of Krishnadevaraya and his manner of statecraft, through this reportage of a *sthāpathi* to the governor Visvanatha Nayanayya. Srikrishnadevaraya's discussions with Timmarusu and his way of dealing with the newly established Turushka kingdoms of Bidar, Berar and Golkonda are described in the report. The narrative contains no direct account of events in Madurai at the opening of the seventeenth century. Yet to the extent that a text is a representation of the intellectual world of the times, the *Rāyavācakamu* has a high value as a true ideological document. The well known courtiers of the Nayaka<sup>23</sup> court like Matla Anantarāju and Velugoti Yacamanaidu are found holding a conversation with Krishnadevaraya in this fictional report to the governor of a province under Krishnadevaraya by name Visvanatha Nayanayya, at the imperial headquarters. The text's relevance in this context is- it projects an elevated sense of historical consciousness. Also, it declares its ideological subordination to the Vijayanagara rulers by way of legitimizing the Nayaka rule and their new found independence in Madurai.<sup>24</sup>

While understanding the self, it is inevitable to understand what the other constitutes of. That's a way in which the heroism of the self gets elevated. The impressions early literature carried of the other is an interesting point of discussion, while constructing the history of one's own community. *Vilasa Grant* and *Rāyavācakamu* have several references to the other the Turushka as opposed to the heroism of their own Hindu heroes. The other in these instances



are Turushka, Yavana and Suratrana.<sup>25</sup> Tajika, Turuska, Gaurī, Mudgala, Turuti (Turbati), Pathana are references to foreigners of Islamic origin. B.D. Chattopadhyaya in his work *Representing the Other* notes that “these are references used simultaneously, and one doesn’t necessarily replace the other. For example, the word Musalman has been in use since 13th century but it doesn’t find currency till about the colonial period.”<sup>26</sup>

The symbol of the self and the other presented in the *Grant* is critical to the present setting- while Prataparudra is the hero of the Telugus, the Turuska chief Ulugh Khan who caused his death is their foe. B.D. Chattopadhyaya observes that “Sanskrit texts which style themselves as Mahakavyas, often refer to the Yavanas, Mlecchas, Turuskas interchangeably, and they too do not carry the impression of the emergence of the single foe as a literary motif, posing threat to the military might of the central character of the Mahakavya.”<sup>27</sup> The inscription treats Turushkas as enemy who are suspected and looked upon as foreigners whereas in *Rāyavācakamu* the report of the spies only ridicules them as opium eaters and lazy people who cannot face the might of the great Krishnadevaraya. The spies who had just returned from a visit to Bijapur give a report to the minister Timmarusu of their last visit to the city and their humorous observations of the Qutubshahi rulers of Golconda. “Yes indeed-what are the Turks but drunkards and opium eaters! It’s because of their intoxication that they are always in a state of fear like this. Whenever they’ve been drinking, they don’t even know their own bodies, so naturally they haven’t the faintest idea of what they’re doing. If someone happens to come to their way, they simply chop him to pieces. Indeed, they act like the demons of the Kali age. When they finally come to their senses, they pause for a moment and reflect, ‘Well, this is just the nature of our race, now isn’t it? The Brahmans, on the other hand, they aren’t like us-thanks to their diet of rice with salt and *sāmbār*, they don’t suffer from pride and malice.”<sup>28</sup> If in the *Grant* they are rightly condemned and treated as more fierce than any villain, then in *Rāyavācakamu* they are treated as complete foreigners to be ridiculed and sneered at.

An interrelated aspect, that of geography, is examined as a composite part of understanding the epic. A Telugu speaking geographical notion seems to have existed in common circulation, as it becomes evident in the Kakatiya court poet Vidyanatha's *Pratāparudrīya* in Act V where there is a reference to *tilinga-dēsa* which is the land of the three Saivite temples of Kalahasti, Srisailam and Daksharamam. There are references to Andhra as one cultural unit in descriptions like *Andhrāvali*, cape of Andhra. A linguistic and political region certainly existed as it comes through the expression of inscriptions in Telugu from 6th century onwards. However, Kākātīyas rulers consolidated their power and sovereignty in Andhra in 1198, which was till then largely ruled by small feudatories and therefore the public imagination as Andhra was largely linguistic and not territorial. Telugu speaking people were ruled by four different rulers at Warangal, Racakonda, Kondavidu and Korukonda around the 14th century.<sup>29</sup> One third of the land inhabited by Telugu speaking people around the 15th century was known as Karnata under the Kannada rule of Bukka I and Harihara II and the official language was Kannada while people spoke Telugu in their daily lives.

## II

While theorizing *vīragātha* narratives like the *Palnāti Katha* it would be fitting to locate the source or root of the concepts of *vīradharma* in the Indian context and how it got into literature gradually. It is to be understood that when a community looks at itself as belonging to a heroic race and spirit, then the representation of the spirit in literature and other areas of public expression like inscriptional and political ambition becomes evident. We are a people, who have been taught over millennia to worship success and achievement and therefore it is not surprising if our collective consciousness is actively filled with great warriors from epics like the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana* who fought for land and fought for a collective cause greater than the *self*. Hence this study aims to locate the *vīragātha* literature as an exploration into Telugu

consciousness. When exactly did the *vīragātha* become part of the public expression of an identity are two questions that can lead us further into the subject and the present epic under study. The question of why this one epic is important among so many other later Telugu epics available today like *Bobbili Yuddhamu* and *Kātamārāju Katha* or for that matter, epic songs with woman-centric themes like *Bālanāgama Katha* and *Lakshumamma Katha* provides some insight into the heroic notions of the Telugus.

This segment traces the evolution of the expression of the heroic sentiment in Indian thought and culture as is well evident in the epic literature like the *Mahābhārata*. The *Mahābhārata* sets the model for all kinds of heroic activity with its unchallenged heroes like Arjuna, Bhiima, Drona, Karna and Duryodhana. When literatures in the vernaculars were produced, it was a natural course to reproduce the *Mahābhārata* in the regional languages. And the heroic spirit exuded in the epic is even more relevant and of significance. Literature is another way of singing the praise of heroes and the epic provides the right kind of scale and grandeur to pay a tribute to the heroes in a new genre. “That is why Indian poetics prescribe the rule that a hero in a poem should be of noble and exalted personage.”<sup>30</sup>

There is a strong current of Indian thought which believes in two worlds or *lōkas iha* and *para*, “And only a man with heroic and good deeds in this world would secure a place in the other world. Therefore, were it possible for everyone to attain this possibility is questionable but undoubtedly there are some who overcome the normal fears of ordinary people and attain heroic heights. It is believed that when blood flows from his body, he is liberated of all sins...” That is, a hero attains his legitimate place in the other world. I quote, “In the Santiparva, Bhishma expounds the rules of conduct, the code of honour and of bravery, which a king should follow, when he goes to war and conquest. Yuddhistira objects that violence and bloodshed are sinful, and asks: “By which act does the king win upper worlds (*loka*)?” Bhishma goes on to show the difference between the ordinary man who is filled with fear, and the hero who rushes to fight. “A hero should not die at home,

for natural death resulting from disease is to be despised...The *ksatriya* deserves the death caused by sharp arrows.”<sup>231</sup> That is the *vīradharma*.

And such men and women are worshipped as heroes across the country in many different ways. And this belief is equally well demonstrated in the hero stones erected across the country like in Rajasthan and Andhra in memory of many of the heroes who fought for the country. However, as historical evidence shows, memorial stones don't just stop with warrior heroes but we have examples of memorial stones of Buddhist and Jaina monks as well as for women who committed *Sati*. There are extreme examples of memorial stones being erected for birds and animals of royal families. Here only a few of these instances from the great epics of the hero cult in Andhra are discussed.

One of the instances of the hero cult and hero worship was the erection of memorial stones by various kings and chieftains. Religious saints also have been commemorated through different kinds of stone pillars being erected for them. So there is a point at which the saint and the hero attain a similar kind of state in public memory. As K. Krishnamurti notes in his study of “Hero:Death: Commemoration as Reflected in Sanskrit Literature-A Study”, the hero cult is perhaps the beginning of image worship as there was common practice of worshipping the images of gods and goddesses in Vedic times but the worship of heroes along with gods became popular during the period/ time of the great epics, the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*. Saints also were commemorated by their disciples. Buddhism has a history of having the first memorial stones erected for the monks. In Andhra the Nagarjunakonda *vīrakallu* seems to be the earliest testimony of Buddhist memorial stone. The prevalence and the availability of the Buddhist *caityas* and *vihāras* and the *cāyastambhas* are all silent testimonies of the religious and cultural heroes of the Telugu region. But historical evidence also stands witness to this fact that there were hero stones erected in honour of the heroes who died in war and various other kinds of heroic deeds like *sati* and so on. It is very much part of the religious and courtly culture to raise hero stones in memory of the dead heroes. If a memorial stone is raised for a woman, it

is usually a *sati* stone raised in the honour of a woman who burns herself up along with her husband in the funeral pyre. This is a common feature across cultures in various parts of India. M.L.K. Murty in an interesting essay on the various hero stones available in Andhra, points out that “the erection and worship of *vīrakallu* gave rise to a religious cult called in Telugu *vīrācāramu* (hero-cult), and grants were made for the worship of these stones by the end of the Kakatiya period.”<sup>32</sup> The epic *Palnātivīrula Katha* and its survival over centuries itself is a definition of a culture of a people, who wish to commemorate the deeds of their heroes for posterity.

## (a)

There is plenty of work done on *Palnāti Katha* in Telugu over a period of time apart from the creative works that came up based on the epic (which formed the basis for the previous chapter). I will recount some of the other heroic narratives which are orally sung and performed in India and in Andhra in order to place the present epic of Palnādu in the other *vīragātha* traditions. I would examine *Pabuji ki Phad*, *Katamarāju Kathalu* and *Bobbili Yuddhamu* for a broader perspective on the subject.

*Pabuji ki Phad* is a major heroic narrative of India which is celebrated in the scroll paintings of Rajasthan of the heroism of Pabuji Rathore, the Rajput chieftain. Pabuji is worshipped as a village deity in Rajasthan. According to the narrative Pabuji lived in the village of Kulu in the 14th century. Dhadal Rathore of village Kolu had four children: two boys, Buro the older and Pabuji the younger brother, and two girls, Sona and Pema. Pabuji was supposed to be born to a nymph who was going to be with him after twelve years. Pabuji fought with Jindrav Kinchi to evict the Kinchi clan from his land which they had forcefully occupied. The most important part of this narrative is the marriage of his favourite niece Kelam to his friend Gogaji. While all other guests present the couple valuable wedding gifts, Pabuji promises to give her camels from Lanka. He then goes in search of camels and after defeating Ravana he brings the camels and presents them to

Kelam. On the way back at Umarkot, he falls in love with Phulvati and after much persuasion, she marries him.<sup>33</sup>

*Kātamarāju Kathalu* is sung in the Prakasam district of Andhra by the people of cowherd caste and *kommuvāru* on the banks of the river Pāleru. This is an epic cycle that contains more than hundred inter-related stories. This *Kātamarāju Kathalu* recollects the story of the chieftain of Kanigiri, Kātamarāju in the 13th century, who migrated to Nellore due to severe drought conditions in his homeland. He enters into a pact with Nalla Siddhi, the King of Nellore for grazing his cattle and sheep in the meadows of Nellore bordering Kanigiri. The agreement breaks and there is misunderstanding resulting in war in which many heroes of both sides lose their lives. The feud arises on the question of the rights of the two provinces to use the meadows for grazing Kātamarāju's cattle and sheep. The battle was fought on the banks of river Pāleru and Nalla Siddhi's side was led by Khadga Tikkana, believed to be the cousin of the poet Tikkana. In the battle the warrior hero Khadga Tikkana dies after winning the battle for Nellore. These themes and the battle and its consequences are sung in several cycles with each subtext leading to an independent story, in circulation even today in the Prakasam district of the Andhra Pradesh.<sup>34</sup>

*Bobbili Yuddhamu* is yet another valorous story of the Velama caste heroes of Bobbili, a Zamindari, in the northern Andhra in the eighteenth century. The military operations of the French commander, General Bussey causes intense conflict between chiefdoms of Bobbili and Vijayanagaram. When the French commander visits Vijayanagaram, the king seeks his support and help to settle scores with the Velama king of Bobbili, Ranga Rao. The French commander is manipulated into attacking the Bobbili fort. And all the Velama heroes including Ranga Rao die in the battle defending the fort while their women commit suicide by jumping into fire. This story is perhaps viewed as limited to the protection of one single province from the French commander and doesn't have a wider narrative and plot which could appeal to the sentiments of a whole population of Telugus. Therefore, *Palnātivīrula Katha* remains the only narrative with a far-reaching appeal.

## III

If *Vilasa Grant* and *Rāyavācakamu* identified the Turushka as a foreigner and enemy against whom the valour of their heroes is defined and magnified, in the nineteenth century it is the European counterpart, the colonizer who poses a challenge for ones' search for roots and identities. Therefore, there is a revival of interest in epics like *Palnātivīrula Katha* in the 20th century. The epic serves as a means to appeal to the Telugu pride which was necessary in order to build an identity in a colonial state at one level and at another to appeal to the "linguistic nationalism" a phrase coined by C.P. Brown to understand the phenomenon of the Telugenesss, of a region that was part of what was called the Madras Presidency. Upholding and salvaging the Telugu pride also became necessary due to many other impending forces of a global nature in course of time. The song *ma telugu talliki mallepudanda ma kanna talliki mangalaratulu* was composed in 1942 by Sankarambadi Sundaracarya and was used extensively to evoke a passion among the Telugu speaking people of Madras Presidency, to demand for a separate state based on this consciousness. In the twentieth century that the linguistic and territorial boundaries came to correspond and became known as Andhra Pradesh in 1956<sup>35</sup> as a result of the recommendations of the States Reorganization Committee.

## Notes

1. I use the term without actually realizing that exactly twenty years ago a historian had used it to describe the same phenomenon that I wish to delve into, which is the phenomenon of the process of vernacularization in Andhra which finally led to the development of Telugu Literature.
2. It is only a claim, there is no historical or inscriptional evidence for this claim.
3. See Bhadriraju Krishnamurti's *Telugu Bhāshā Caritra* published by the Telugu Sahitya Academy in 1979.
4. What is it to be amnesic? If we detect consciousness, measure it, or even define it properly, then we might get different answers, but all we can do is observe people's behaviour and listen to what they say. From observing them, they are obviously conscious in some senses; they are awake, alert. This is a two way process, while distinguishing oneself from others it is

also a unification process from Susan Blackmore. *Consciousness*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

5. See I.K.Sarma's *Coinage of the Satavahana Empire*. Delhi: Agam Kala Prakasan, 1980, p. 118.
6. Ibid.
7. Ideas gathered from AC Burnell's *Elements of South Indian Palaeography*. New Delhi, Madras: Asian Educational Services, 1994.
8. Ibid. p. 22.
9. It is an Indian script used to write Tamil and Malayalam languages from 6th century onwards.
10. See Bhadriraju Krishnamurti's. *Telugu Bhashacaritra*. Hyderabad: Sahitya Academy, 1979, p. 343.
11. Biruduraju Ramaraju's essay "Kāvya Bhāsa Parināmamu" from, *Telugu Bhāshācaritra*, p. 241.
12. Ibid., p. 327.
13. Ibid., p. 330 .
14. See S. Nagaraju's "Emergence of Regional Identity and Beginnings of Vernacular Literature: A Case Study of Telugu." In *Literary History, Region and Nation in South India*," edited by Sheldon Pollock. Special Issue , *Social Scientist* 23. 1995, p. 9.
15. See Arudra's *Samagrāndhra Sāhityamu Vol. I*. Hyderabad: Telugu Academy, 2002, p. 41.
16. Quoted from S. Nagaraju's "Emergence of Regional Identity and Beginnings of Vernacular Literature: A Case Study of Telugu." In *Literary History, Region and Nation in South India*," edited by Sheldon Pollock. Special Issue , *Social Scientist* 23. 10-12;8-23. 1995, p. 14.
17. Interpretation of the inscription as given in N. Venkataramanayya's work *Vēngi Tōrpu Cālukyulu*, 2013, p. 18.

(విజయాదిత్యుడు)

తను పట్టాభిషిక్తుడైన మొదటి సమ్వత్సరంలో  
 బలగార్యము పెరిగి సైనిక ప్రభువైన  
 పాండురంగడు తన సామంత సేనలతోపాటు  
 బోయకొట్టములను పండ్లెండు తీసుకొని  
 వేంగిని ముట్టడించి ఆ త్రిభువనంకుసున్ని ప్రార్థించి  
 కట్టెపు కోటను విస్తరించి  
 కందుకూర్ బెజవాడ చూచి మెచ్చెను.

Quoted from Arudra's *Samagrāndhra Sāhityamu Vol.I*. Hyderabad: Telugu Academy, 2002, p. 49.

18. Here is an example of a women's songs sung in the *madhyākkara* meter-  
 "అంతటా రాములావారూ అంగనా సీతనూ గూడీ  
 సంతసామందుచూ వేగా స్వాపురామునకు చనుదెంచి  
 తమ్ములా తోడనూ గలసీ నమ్మదీ రాజ్యము లోలే  
 ధర్మాముతో ప్రజలేల్లా తమరాటంపరాలైరీ"



19. S. Nagaraju's article "Emergence of Regional Identity and Beginnings of Vernacular Literature: A Case Study of Telugu." In *Literary History, Region and Nation in South India*, edited by Sheldon Pollock. Special Issue, *Social Scientist* 23. 1995, p. 9.
20. *Vilasa Grant* from D.C. Sircar (ed) *Epigraphia Indica* Vol. 32, 1957-58, 241.
21. Translated as as *Tidings of the King: a Translation and Ethnohistorical Analysis of Rāyavācakamu*. *Rāyavācakamu* is an early seventeenth century text recounted by a *sthāpati* to his Nayaka ruler. Like many other texts recovered, of this period this text too doesn't have an author.
22. See Phillip Wagoner's *Tidings of the King*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993.
23. ...the Tamil country was dominated by the Nayaka houses of Gingee, Tanjore and Madurai situated, respectively, in the old Tondai, Cola and Pandya Mandalams. Although the various Nayaka dynasties were unrelated genealogically, they were united by their common political origins.
24. After the fall of the great Vijayanagara empire in 1565 their chieftains established independent kingdoms at Madurai and Tanjore historically known as Nayaka kingdoms.
25. There was, apart from the usual Sanskritization of individual names and names of lineages, the modification of the title Sultan to Suratrana, which gave it the literal meaning 'Saviour of Gods', p. 53.
26. "Turushka is mentioned in early Indian literary sources from about the seventh century onward: References to tajikas in inscriptions appear to discontinue after the tenth century, although, judging from the history of commercial and other contacts with the Arab world, it is rather surprising that the term does not continue to figure with any importance in epigraphic and other records of western india. The term which assumes increasing importance is Turushka" Quoted from Chattopadhyaya, B.D. *Representing the Other?*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1998, p. 30.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
28. See Phillip Wagoner's *Tidings of the King*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993, p. 113.
29. See Venkata Ramanayya, N. *Vijayanagara the Empire and the City*. New Delhi, Madras: Asian Education Society, 2007, p. 115. for a lengthier discussion and inscriptional evidence.
30. Shettar and Sontheimar (eds). *Memorial Stones*. Dharwad and Heidelberg, Karnataka University, University of Heidelberg, 1982, p. 10.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
33. See John D Smith's . *The Epic of Pabuji*. New Delhi: Katha Publications, 2005.

34. Taken from *Tangirala Venkatasubbarao.(ed) Kātamarāju Kathalu. Vol.I&II.Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh Sahitya Academy, 1978.*
35. Andhra Pradesh was one of the first states to be formed on linguistic basis along with Kerala, Maharashtra, and Tamilnadu after the enactment of the States Reorganization Act in 1956. And it was separated in 2014 into Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

## Annexure I<sup>1</sup>

Rendition by the Vīra Vidyāvāntulu Bramhaiah,  
Mala Kondiah and Madhu—

Ammavāri Puttuka<sup>2</sup>

The episode begins with a prayer which pays a tribute to all the gods and patrons including the poet Sṛīnātha. The *pradhāna kathakudu* says that he will sing the song as narrated by Sṛīnātha. All the singers pray to the chief deity of Palnādu Cennakésava and Ankamma. The *pradhāna kathakudu* says, “I am going to narrate the story of the birth of Ammarvāru<sup>3</sup> and how she became the chief deity of Palnādu and how she reached Brahmanaidu.” The family of gods like Vināyaka, Subrahmanya, Pārvati or Paramésvara are present in the court, in Kailāsa. Then both Lord Siva and Pārvati get into an argument and ask of each other: “how many people in this land worship you and how many worship me?” Then Lord Siva says “*Prānakulāngi*, I cannot give the right number of devotees to you, but we must call our son Nārada and ask him for the count.” Then Nārada arrives at Kailāsa and presents himself in front of Paramésvara.<sup>4</sup> Paramésvara orders him to go and see how many people worship him and how many people worship his consort Pārvati. Nārada travels across towns and cities and kingdoms in search of this truth. He travels east, west, south and realizes that those who worship the Lord and

Ammarvāru are in equal number in all directions. Finally he travels to Sivakalyānapuri city in the northern direction. In that city food, water and air is filled with the sense of Lord Siva. There when he reaches the eastern gate of the city, there people inform him that “there are only devotees of Siva in this city and no other God is worshipped. If the king comes to know that you’re making such enquiries you’ll be beheaded.” From there Nāradamuni travels towards the south and meets with Daitava<sup>5</sup> who informs him that there are only devotees of Siva and none of Hari<sup>6</sup>, if at all anyone is found worshipping Lord Hari they will be killed. The western gate of the city is looked after by Bhairava who tells Nārada that, “in this Sivapuri, all the kings are a devotees of Siva and since you are a devotee of Viṣṇu, you can’t enter the city; if anyone sees you they will kill you, so you make scarce from here, though they know that killing a woman, a child, a cow and Brahmin is a sin.” From thence he goes towards the northern gate and finds Malayamāñcālasakti and can’t gain an entry into the city. He makes himself up like the Lord Paramésvara and approaches the *sakti* and then worships her as if he was Lord Īsvara himself. The *sakti* goes inside the fort and informs the king that the Lord Paramésvara himself has arrived to the city and the king comes seven steps ahead and takes the disguised Nārada inside the fort, with flowers and make him seated on the throne and worships him with all devotion. But Nārada couldn’t keep quiet, even in this disguise he was worshipping Lord Viṣṇu. Then the king immediately orders that, Nārada who has spoilt the environment must be killed. The butchers take hold of him and bring him to the tree of Sanésvara and then they think that they cannot kill this rogue as he’s a brahmin and that they would accumulate sin by killing this fellow. So they tie his hands and feet and leave him under a tree. Nārada starts wailing loudly and then Lord Siva and his consort Pārvasī mistake it for *ómkara*. Then both of them come over to the tree. They ask of him what has brought him to this condition? Pārvasī asks him, “What has happened to the job given to you?” He replies, “In all directions you have equal number of devotees except in the north in the Sivākalyānapuri city where they worship only Siva and if anyone utters the name of Viṣṇu or

anyone else they slit their tongue and throat. There is no silence in the city, it is filled with the sound of Siva.” He also tells her “when I took bath in the lake water, it all turned into fish and when I took bath with the water in the well it all turned into frogs. So now I take bath with the waters from hundred and one wells.”

Pārvati wails over the plight of Nārada and then in *bhulōka*<sup>7</sup> there is another *sakti* who is known as *jalakanya* Pārvati. She is awake for six months of the year and asleep with open hair for the rest of the six months. Her hair is spread all over *bhūmañdala*. When Pārvati in Kailāsa weeps, her tear drops fall on the tree of Sanēswara. The tree breaks down and the tear drops fall on the *jalaganga* Pārvati and her long and wild tresses start combusting. Instantaneously she wakes up from sleep and calls out to all gods and kings to protect her from the burns. All gods and kings come to her and console her and gather the ashes of her burnt tresses. When they see Ammavāru out of the ashes, they all run away from the place. Then she reveals her identity to these kings; she says, “I am not *sakti*, my name is Īralankamma.” Then the kings ask her, “Mother who are you? And what do you want?” She says “I am Bhavāni, I am hungry, give me some food. Fulfilling my first need, make me seated on a multi-coloured lotus and offer me fresh coconut *pāyasamu*, *vadapappu*, *annamu* and *pindi vantalu*.<sup>8</sup> My fifth offering can be given early morning before anyone even wakes up- huge quantities of *pongali* and *sāmbraṇi* must be lit. Five sheep must be sacrificed for all these quantities of *pongali*. My sixth need is toddy, seventh need is arrack. My eighth need is offer of saris, ninth need is *siddi yogamu* must be offered to me.”

Then the gods answer her, “Mother, we are gods, we can only offer you fresh coconut and we don’t have anything to do with all the bloodshed required. However, we can suggest you to a great king who can feed you and maintain your upkeep.” They arrange for her happiness for those two days with dance and music and then finally suggest the name of Nalagāma from Palanādu. They suggest “in the city of Mācerla Sīlamadoddanaidu’s son Sīlamabramhanaidu, can fulfil your needs”. They arrange a chariot for her and send her to Mācerla. And then Brahmanaidu was with Kannama while the goddess arrived in Mācerla and he

asks Kannama to check who it is that is arriving, Kannama goes ahead and asks her, “Mother, who are you?” She answers, “Don’t you know who I am? My name is Īralankamma, I am hungry, give me a meal.” She reveals more information about herself to Brahmanaidu, and says, “I had stayed in the court of gods and was called Dēvatalankamma, but now I want to be known as Palanātiānkamma”. He responds “I will worship you but you have to do something for us in Sivākalyanapuri. All those who take the name of Vishnu are butchered in the city, because all those kings are worshippers of Lord Siva. If you can go to those kings and be worshipped there, then I will also worship you.”

All the seven kings of that city, are thieves and theft is their profession. On one of these events, while they were travelling through the forest, the goddess sees these kings and thinks that, “I must somehow catch these kings and be worshipped by them.” With that intention, she makes a small hutment for herself in the forest and wears a jute sari and becomes an old woman and sleeps in the hut. The kings were in the forest; through her magical powers Ammavāru creates fire in the forest. The seven kings become thirsty and when they look for water, they find the hutment of Ammavāru nearby. When they approach the hutment and look inside they find a glittering golden box and decide to steal it so that they can become millionaires at once and there wouldn’t be any further need for theft. They begin to move the golden box but all of them together cannot move it because of its weight. Then they decide to break the box and to take the treasure in small portions every day. As they open the lid of the box, Ammavāru jumps out of the box and sits on the tree. Immediately the seven kings were blinded by the power of Ammavāru, while the kings wonder what is in this box and they pray to Īswara. Even then their vision doesn’t come back. Then Īralankamma reveals her identity and tells them that they’ll gain vision if they worshipped her. The kings then introduce themselves as kings of the solar dynasty, worshippers of Lord Siva and not of Hari or any other god. Īralankamma tells them that if they worship her they’ll have everything they want in your city and that they’ll never lack anything. The kings then ask how they should worship her. She instructs them that they must

have a forty-pillared temple built for her. The *pradhāna kathakudu* repeats for the third time the clauses of Īralankamma which her devotees have to fulfil. They tell her that they are vegetarian and against bloodshed and therefore cannot fulfil some of her thirst for blood. But the goddess insists that she'll cover the city with gold if she's worshipped with the demands she makes. Then they agree to her suggestion and say they will worship her. At last they regain their vision and begin preparations for building of the temple as ordered by her. After sometime they begin to question themselves and think that they are the kings of the solar dynasty and therefore there is no need to worship a female deity. They stop worshipping her and try to chase her out of the city. Then she goes to the hill of *mallekonda* and stays there for sometime but after that she thinks that she must be worshipped in Sivākalyanapuri, and so she returns to the city. She notices that the city is overlooked by the *dikpālakulu*, and she decides to enter the city in the guise of a woman selling tamarind leaves. The kings of the city throw her out then she takes goose berries and sells them in the city. Once again, she was caught by the king's men and sent out. Then she is determined somehow to be worshipped by the kings of the city. Therefore, she devises a plan. That the son of the Pedakommurāju, Ranakommurāju is just three days old and by her magical powers she prevents him from having milk from his mother's breast. Pedavankīdēvamamma then comes to her king Vīraswāmīrāju who was in his court. She explains the situation to him that their son is not able to drink milk and so he is starved for food. He asks her to go get some soothsayers if they can be found anywhere at all. Then Ammavāru through her magic makes all the soothsayers disappear. At the end of the city among the hutments of the poor and among the *erukala*<sup>9</sup> people she is found as an old woman wearing an old sari.<sup>10</sup> The king's men come and ask her, "Mother, where have all these *erukala* people disappeared?" She replies that they all have gone to earn something for the day. The king's men then ask her, "Can you be the soothsayer? Can you tell *eruka sódi*, can you tell *gaddi*?" Then she says, "Yes I can, O men of the king, those who listen to my *sódi*, old people will become young and young people will become old." Then the king's men invite her to the court but

she says, “I am old, so I need a horse to reach the court of the king.” The king then sends his horse to bring the old woman. When she steps on the horse, the horse immediately collapses owing to her weight. Then she asks them how she could reach the palace. They suggest she could walk to the palace. But she refuses and demands that the king send his elephant so that she could go on it. But as she steps on the elephant, the elephant also collapses. Then they tell her that since both the horse and the elephant are killed, at least now she should go on foot. “Go and bring the bejewelled palanquin, only in that I will come now to the palace,” she says but then that also collapses, but the men of the palanquin lift her up on their shoulders and bring her to PedaNārada’s palace. Vankidēvi asks her, “Mother, can you say *sōdi*?” Then Ammavāru says “I can say but those who listen to me, the old become young and the young become old.” Vankidēvi brings pearls in her sari to be given to Ammavāru for the soothsaying. Then Ammavāru begins the list of her nine needs which the *kathakudu* repeats in his narration. Then Vankidēvi also begs her that in Sivākalyānapuri they don’t do bloodshed, so they can’t fulfil all her needs. They decide to make an imitation sheep with rice flour and offer it as a sacrifice to the goddess. Then Ammavāru agrees to such a sacrifice. While the kings were fulfilling all her demands, and when they try to slit the throat of the flour sheep, Ammavāru’s soul enters the sheep and it comes alive. As a consequence, the Sivākalyānapuri city was filled with blood. As soon as the sacrifice was made, the child who couldn’t be breast-fed begins to drink milk.

As time passes by, the kings think that they need not worship a woman goddess and then they chase her out once again. She also decides to come out of the city after having satisfied herself that she was being worshipped by these kings as well. The kings then begin their worship of Paramésvara as before. They need plenty of flowers for the worship of the Lord, but Ammavāru makes a flower garden nearby with her magic and makes all the flowers from the city disappear. The kings decide to steal some flowers from somewhere and set out on their journey to steal. They see the magical flower garden and think that they can take flowers from this garden every day for the worship of their Lord. The next day



also the kings come to the flower garden and begin to pluck flowers. She catches hold of the thieves and hangs them from the nearby toddy branches. The kings pray to their chief deity Paraméswara to save them from this punishment. Then Paraméswara drops his *vibhuṭi* on the toddy branches so that the kings are released from them. The toddy branches turn into iron roads and one of the kings, Vīraswamirāju, plucks one of these and begins his journey towards Mācerla. Then Ammavāru chases him out from her garden and follows him. Before she could catch him Vīraswamirāju reaches Brahmanaidu's court for protection. Then Brahmanaidu says, "I cannot hand over someone who seeks protection from me." But Ammavāru insists that Brahmanaidu release him for some time so that she could drink a few drops of his blood. Then she requests him, "I have been worshipped by all the nearby kings of Palnādu, now I have the desire to be worshipped by the people of Palnādu, so you must make me the deity of Palnādu." But Brahmanaidu informs her that Lord Cennakésava is the chief deity of Palnādu and people worship only him. But then he tells her that she is a woman goddess she needs to be treated to the sacrifice of a he-buffalo and then tells her that he would agree to all her wishes and make her one of the deities of Palnādu and thus he begins to fulfil her demands, but Ammavāru tells him that this time as her fourth demand she has to get *anāndasiddi yōgamu*. After fulfilling all her demands Ammavāru decides to stay in Palnādu as the chief deity of the city along with Lord Cennakesāvara.

*Vaikuntha vaikuntha...*

### *Peddanna Puttuka*

The child was named Bādarāju Peddanna. The boy is educated in all spheres of martial arts. The boy grows up into a young man and his mother is writing letters to kings asking for suitable girls in marriage for her son. She asks for a girl from the *nalāta* family to be married to her son of the *velama* family. The song usually describes all activity in the continuous tense and that is how there is scope for the song; otherwise, it just becomes a story which describes every action as it completes. The song also asks and

describes the manner of Sīlamma’s writing the letter and to whom she writes it. The first alliance that she seeks is from *nalāta* family. This narration is punctuated by the song *vinandi rāajulārā...aaa...*

Then, Bādarāju Peddanna tells his mother not to worry about his marriage and tells her that he would get a girl from the other side of Candravanka and she should give him permission to do so and so he goes to Candravanka. There he finds his brother Bramhanaidu worshipping Cennkésava and then he requests him to take a message of love and marriage on his behalf. Then Bramhanaidu goes to Nāguléru. They find the only daughter of a King in a far off land. Then Bramhanaidu gives directions to his brother how to reach the far off kingdom. “The king is ailing from an illness. On the way there is a huge peepul tree on which you find huge eagles, if you kill one of them and take the blood and give it to the king he would agree to give his daughter in marriage to you.”<sup>11</sup> Peddanna reaches the peepul tree as indicated by his brother, there he takes out his lion-skin mat and sleeps on it under the tree. There he sees an eagle trying to kill the birds on the tree. Then Peddanna immediately kills the eagle and saves the birds. Then the birds want to know more about him and the mission on which he has arrived. The young birds protest with their mother saying, “we will have our food only if you find out these details from him and help him”. Then all the birds approach him and ask him but he dismisses their enquiries; however, the birds insist on knowing his whereabouts so that they could help him in some manner. These birds talk like they are human beings. This is another feature of *jānapada* literature. Then he introduces himself as the son of Sīlamma and Doddanaidu from Mācerla. He then asks for a magic skin for his horse and for himself. The birds now pray, “*naksatra mandalā...*”

He takes these and then begins his journey. On the journey he contracts leprosy and is bleeding with wounds and he has to cross the Pasupuléru river to meet the king and ask for his daughter’s hand in marriage. But on the way he meets many other competitors who make fun of him saying he won’t be able to cross Pasupuléru and marry Lakumāmba. Bramhanaidu prays to god and makes Pasupuléru break into two parts giving way to his

brother Peddanna. He reaches the other side of the town and asks an old woman to give him some food while he made a garland for Lakumāmbadēvi. When the old woman takes the garland to Lakumāmbadēvi she immediately recognizes that this garland is magically beautiful. Then she enquires after the maker of the garland. Then Lakumāmba asks her father, is there any suitor who has crossed Pasupulēru.

They search all around and find a diseased and bleeding Peddanna and condescendingly remark, “*Chi* this ugly creature couldn’t have crossed Pasupulēru.” Then Laumādēvi says, “I will marry him alone if he has crossed Pasupulēru.” But the king warns his daughter that he seems to be full of wounds dripping puss. Nevertheless she marries him but the marriage is not consummated. The couple begins their journey of married life. While Lakumāmba is sleeping, he wears the magic skin placed on the horse and becomes as handsome as Lord Indra himself and he achieves all the physical strength by performing all the necessary physical feats. Later Lakumāmba’s brothers invite Peddanna to go with them for hunting some birds.

Peddanna reveals his real face to his wife and takes her to his kingdom. Then he formally gets an invitation from the family of Kancerla and they express their shock at seeing Peddanna’s ugliness. Lakumāmba’s father advises her to find his secretive self and his look beyond the camouflage. And then Peddanna was found to be as handsome as Devendra himself. There is a description of how the *bhattu* discovers a new and handsome man Peddanna whom Lakumāmba had married instead of the ugly and diseased man. They take this handsome man to the presence of Kṛṣṇagandarvudu, who is the father of Lakumāmba. Kṛṣṇagandarva refuses to accept that the new handsome Peddanna is his son-in-law. All the rituals to be performed in order to get out of a difficulty are clearly described in the narration. Because Lakumāmba has married him against the family wish, the Kancerla family makes an elaborate conspiracy to kill Peddanna and it is all described in detail. Lakumāmba begs for the life of her husband from her father. Peddanna is asked to take his wife and leave to a far off place. He takes leave of his wife and reaches out to the horse.

The horse, and climbing the horse, and the response of the horse are all described in great detail. “What do the horses say about the good looks of Peddanna?” asks the *kathakudu*. The family of Kancerla makes Lakumāmba commit *sati* while Peddanna was away. When she tries to commit suicide in the fire, the fire disappears. Peddanna is approaching Milapūr Rāmalingeswara temple and forest. Because he didn’t get an opportunity to war with anyone, he starts plucking the forest. The devotees complain to God saying, “*Swami*, someone is plucking the forest.” Then God becomes furious over Peddanna. Then God sends a dog to fight over him. Then Bramhanaidu stops the dogs from attacking Peddanna. God waits for the dogs for some time and then checks out with what happened...As Lakumāmba is sent to the fire then the Kancerla family hears the sounds from the battle field with the noise of the elephants. Then Parameswara gets furious and comes over to Khāndava forest and angrily asks Peddanna who he was and whose son he was. Peddanna replies with a lot of arrogance that his parents are Sīlamma and Doddanaidu. Then God immediately recognizes him and then informs him that Lakumāmba is forced to commit suicide by the Kancerla family. When the Kancerla family thinks that both Peddanna and Lakumāmbadēvi are dead, they find them next day sitting together. Then Kṛṣṇagandarvarāju comes for a battle with Peddanna. Peddanna beheads Kṛṣṇagandarva king, but the head falls back and attaches itself to the body of Kṛṣṇagandarva. Therefore Peddanna takes the head on top of the sword and shuts it up in a box. He also kills all the three hundred other kings with Kṛṣṇagandarva. Then he rolls the body in the blood of war and takes his queen Lakumāmba. He thus starts towards Mācerla. The episode ends with a lengthy song...

*Vaikuntha vaikuntha...*

### Ārangandla Yuddhamu

The episode that is going to be narrated is *Bramhanāini Āranagandla Yuddhamu* and the birth of the weapon. Bramhanaidu takes the new born baby and comes to Mācerla and hands him to Anugurāju. He looks at the baby and asks Brahmanaidu, “Why

have you given me such a small child?” Brahmanaidu replies, “if we leave this child now this boy is going to take revenge on us.” This boy is taken out prematurely by slitting the womb of his mother Vūramatalli. The king organizes a *bārasāla*<sup>12</sup> for the child. Anugu<sup>13</sup> invites Brahmins to the court and asks them to give him a suitable name. The Brahmins refuse to name the boy as he doesn’t belong to their city. Because the boy is brought from Āranagandla from the north they name him Uttara Késavudu. “How are they bringing up the boy?” the *pradhāna kathakudu* asks the *vantalu* “They are teaching him all the martial arts like *garidi*, *sāmu*, *yōdhamu sādumu*.” The boy was happily learning these fights. Anugurāju is bringing up the child like his own son. He somehow grows up to be a young man. “What do the people in the city think of him?” the *pradhāna kathakudu* asks the *vantalu*. “They think that this boy is not our boy; he’s from the North.” This boy is from Āranagandla, after killing Vūrabhīmaraju and Vūramāganya this boy is brought here to Palnādu. The boy comes to know of this soon. He gets angry with his foster father after realizing that these villains have killed his biological parents and have brought him here. Usually the boy calls his father, “Father Alugurāju,” but today he called him “Alugurāja.” At this Alugurāju is shocked and asks the boy, “How dare you, Uttarakésava, call me by name?” Then the boy reveals to Anugurāju that he knows the story of his birth and therefore that he wants to go to his country. On hearing this Alugurāju pleads with the boy to stay back in the country, as he’s going to give him half his city and the overlordship of the city. The boy refuses to accept the offer and tells the father that he has his own kingdom and I doesn’t need his. He starts for the city of Mallināthapattana and then sees that the city is destroyed by other kings. Uttarakésava begins to grieve over his dead parents, and prays to Paramésvara. Paramésvara manifests himself to Uttarakésavudu and asks him what he wants. Then Uttarakésava answers that his kingdom is in ruins, in order to rebuild it, he requests Parameswara to provide him with people and an army. Paramésvara grants him horses, elephants and chariots. After gathering the military, he writes a letter<sup>14</sup> of good intentions to Alugurāju. It says “If you have a moustache on your face, you

come for a war with me.” Alugurāju thinks this boy is brought up by us how can fight him in the battle? Therefore they return the letter to Uttarakésavudu. Uttarakésavudu sends another letter in which he says, “Mācerla kings don’t have moustache and the houses of Palnādu don’t have beams.” Anugurāju gathers all his ministers and consults them about the correctness of fighting the boy whom they had brought up with their own hands. So he writes another letter to the boy. The letter says that it is impossible to fight him in a war, and “so you take care of your city, get married and rule over your country.” Périnaidu, Sūrinaidu, Mallinaidu and Bramhanaidu ring the bell of war.

Bandalarāju’s wife Syāmalādēvi didn’t have children, though they had everything. So they pray to Paramésvara for children. “What did they do then”, asks the *kathakudu*. The Paramésvara that they know of, they pray to him. Then Paramésvara manifests himself to Syāmalādēvi and gives her a baby after being impressed with her devotion. Nine days and nine *ghadiyalu* after that she conceives a baby. They organize a *bārasāla* for the baby and get his horoscope written. His horoscope announces that both his parents die if the baby lives longer. Bandalarāju and Syamalādēvi keep the baby in a box and decided to throw it away into the sea. In the meanwhile, the people of Palnādu were giving bath to Lord Cennakésava in Nāgulēru. Anugurāju who was taking bath in the river finds the box and alerts his men to get the box for him. He says whoever gets the box can have whatever is inside the box. His men swim across the sea and bring the box and remove the lock. Cinaganganna and Pedaganganna take the baby and hand it over to the king. “How could we bring up the child, we are your servants and won’t be able to bring up the child ourselves. You please take the child and bring him up,” they plead. Alugurāju decides to bring up the child himself. Then they invite Brahmins and name the child. Because the boy was found in the rafts, he’s called Ranateppalarāju.<sup>15</sup> They teach him all martial arts and prepare him for war. Before he goes on war he seeks the blessings of Lord Cennakésava. And he reaches Āranagandla for war with those kings, who they were all set for the war with the kings of Palnādu. One must note that when Uttarakésavudu left Palnādu

for Āranagandla the war was supposed to be waged, but since then Alugurāju finds another boy and brings him up for the next twenty years for the war, which means they wait for the war for twenty years!<sup>16</sup> Then Teppala participates in the war and kills many soldiers creating a lot of bloodshed. In order to kill or subdue the kings of Palnādu the kings of Āranagandla break down the flag post and the flag of Palnādu. Ranateppalarāju who sees this embraces the flag post with one hand and fights with his sword in the other hand. But Teppala is fully wounded by arrows and swords all over his body. Teppala collapses with the flag post held to his heart dearly while Uttarakésavudu runs towards Palnādu and challenges the kings: “if you’ve moustache on your face, come and fight with me! Your son Teppala has already collapsed.” Alugurāju consults Brahmanaidu about fighting Uttarakésavudu, who was brought up by them. Then they call Kannama and inform him that he should take a message to Uttarakésavudu that he should stop war, “It is not a big deal killing him, but he’s a boy brought up by us.” Kannama warns Uttarakésavudu that he should stop the war and go back and rule his own kingdom. But Uttarakésavudu refuses to take the warning and challenges them “I am a king and I have a moustache on the face, and if you are a king and has a moustache on the face you fight me and win my kingdom over.” Kannama takes the message back to them that Uttarakésavudu wants to continue the war. Then Kannama throws an iron weapon at him and asks him to destroy it. Only then they all would agree for the war. Uttarakésavudu tries but fails and then he says “if anyone wants to fight me, fight me directly and not throw weapons at me”. Brahmanaidu comes to the battle field and finds Ranateppala struggling for life and gives the sacred water and then Ranateppala leaves his body and his soul reaches *kailāsa*.<sup>17</sup> Brahmanaidu begins his fight with Uttarakésavudu and upsets everything in the battle field. Then all the gods begin to worry and call Nārada and tell him about Brahmanaidu’s war and express their anxiety that the *dévalōka* is upset because of the war and that something must be done to rescue the situation. They decide to send celestial women to distract Brahmanaidu from the war so they send these four women, Rambha, Ūrvasi, Tilóttama and Ménaka to *bhulōka*

to perform this job. The celestial women tell him that they like him for the way he's been battling in the battle field and that they have come down to *bhuloka* out of love for him. Brahmanaidu sends them back saying that they are all like his mother Silamambadevi. Immediately he makes all four women lactate so that they can be his mothers and not his lovers. The women go back to *devaloka* and report to Indra that they can't distract him. Then they send Lakshmi, Parvati and Sarasvati to bring him over, "if he refuses then curse him to be a stone or a boulder or something like that." The three goddesses make him sit in the chariot and take him to the celestial world. There he demands for a weapon which they ask Viswakarma<sup>18</sup> to manufacture. They also inform him the measurements and the qualities of the instrument to be made. Thirty six feet width and fifty six feet length with wedges at every inch were the specifications of the instrument that was meant to help Brahmanaidu kill people better. They warn the Viswabramha<sup>19</sup> that if he fails in achieving this job, he would be beheaded. Viswabramha reaches his palace thinking his life would end the next day and he's anxious and worried. His daughter Subakanya comes to the river bank for bath, and the Sun god wishes to marry her, but she escapes him as usual and returns home to find her father who has been worried and starved for the last couple of days. She finds out the real reason for her father's worry and consoles him that a solution could be found out and that he should eat and sleep for now. The next day Subakanya goes to the sea for her bath. As she finds the Sun god, she accosts him and reminds him of his desire for her. She says if you can get me a weapon made, then I will fulfil your wish. Then the sun god goes invisible for one whole day and the whole universe becomes dark for one full day and the gods beg the Sun god to come out and give light and life to human beings and gods. Then he places his demand to them that they should get him a special weapon to be made. The gods agree to make the weapon and then when the Sun god comes out of his hiding, the weapon comes out of the earth. Brahmanaidu takes the weapon and comes down to Macerla.

*Vaikuntha ... Vaikuntha...*



## Bramhanāini Puttuka

Sīlamma along with her husband and king Doddnaidu decide thus: “Let us go to Cennakésava Swami and pray to him for children.”<sup>20</sup>

She prays to God and He appears and asks her what her problem is. Then she appeals to him that they have everything, horses, money and a kingdom but not children. He asks them to wash the feet of God with the canal water and then he gives her a plant and asks her to take the *gajanimma* tree which was dry and she takes it home and the next day the tree starts new leaves and branches. On the sixth day it bears some raw fruit but by the seventh day, it was fully ripe.

Sīlamma becomes pregnant with Brahmanaidu. And the symptoms of his greatness become manifest even at the stage of the foetus. When he opens his left eye in his mother’s womb, the *dévalóka* feels upset and they realise that Brahmanaidu is doing this in his mother’s womb. All gods conspire to kill Brahmanaidu inside the mother’s womb. And the manner of conspiracy is described. And Nāyakurālu is born as the *mañtrasāni*<sup>21</sup> who would carry out the mission of killing the foetus. She asks for the *mudimuppāvula sottulu*<sup>22</sup> which are, a mega scissors, five false iron nails, and *kālakuta* poison to which the *vantalu* will say “Yes we will provide.” Only Nāgamma can kill Brahmanaidu. She takes these and comes to *bhulókamu* especially to Mācerla. Brahmanaidu is troubling his mother very much inside the womb. All the women think there is some ghost or a wooden log in Sīlamba’s womb. “What could it be?” They wonder. Meanwhile, she gets into an argument with them and the women inform Nāyakurālu that Sīlamma hasn’t delivered the baby even after the completion of nine months, “Oh she hasn’t delivered the baby?” Nāgamma informs these women that “if someone comes and takes me to the palace I would go and help Sīlamma.” The narrative describes the whole conversation that takes place between all the people concerned. Nāgamma agrees to come only if taken on Anugurāju’s horse. The horse dies as soon as Nāgamma steps on it. But she scolds them for bringing an old horse. She refuses to come on foot. She wants to come only on the horse of Anugu. When she steps on the elephant, even that

dies. Now they request her to walk to the palace. Then she asks for the bejewelled palanquin of the King. Then they bring it to take her to the palace. She sits in the palanquin and the twelve bearers take her to the palace and there she asks them “How should I deliver the baby? Should it be done according to the norms of your country or my country?” They tell her to do it according their procedure. Then she says the pregnant woman should climb the stairs up and down seven times and at seven stairs height. They blindfold Sīlamma and make her climb the flight of stairs seven times, but even then she doesn’t deliver the baby. The whole village of Palnādu is weeping, watching Sīlamma climb the stairs so many times. Then she gives the medicine of *kālakuīta* poison. The singer describes Nāgamma’s efforts to kill Brahmanaidu as if it’s a play between the two characters, one in the womb the other outside. She wants to kill him with her iron nails but he’s escaping her grip and is almost playing with her giving her a tough time. She tries to kill him with the giant scissors, and then she boils oil to kill him. Then Brahmanaidu takes to *matsyāvatāra*<sup>23</sup> and then Nāgamma becomes a crane and chases him but he’s not available to her. Then he explains to Nāgamma that they both will be born in Palnādu as Nāgamma and Brahmanaidu and serve in the court of two opposite kings. They both go to *dēvalōka* and there they find a twelve hooded snake *ādisēsa*. The gods find the small boy Brahmanaidu there and put him in a cradle shaded by *ādisēsa*. Here in the *bhulōka*, Sīlāmba thinks what happened to the baby born from her womb.

Then the *mantrasāni* Nāgamma shows a round stone and informs Sīlāmba that, that was what she gave birth to. But the mother refuses to accept saying “I know Brahmanaidu is born in my womb” and then she prays to Lord Cennakésava. There she finds a mighty eagle and asks him the whereabouts of her son. Then the eagle says “I will tell you the details but what do I get in return?” She tells him Brahmanaidu will have Bālacandrudu as his son who will kill Narasingarāju in the battle of Kāremapuḍi “I will bring his intestines and garland you.” The *kathakudu* asks his assistant how she knew all this. They reply, “because she has the ability of foresight”.

Brahmanaidu has to grow up, then his wife gives birth to Bālacandrudu and then there must be the war at Karemapūdi and then the eagle would get the intestines from the dead bodies of the enemies. Hearing this, the mighty eagle reveals her that Brahmanaidu is in *dévalóka*. She goes to *dévalóka* in search of her son and appeals to the gods. The gods decide to test her motherhood. The first trial is that she has to get the baby that is placed on top of the hood of the mighty snake, *ādisésa*. She has to agree to these tests. You have to get the betel leaf from the hood of *ādisésa* if the baby is your son. She prays to Póturāju, she also prays to the mighty eagle, then the eagle comes and helps Sīlamāmba to get the *kódiguddu tāmbūlamu*<sup>24</sup> which she takes it to the gods. The next test is that she has to pass through fire, along with the child, and she passes through fire without any harm to the child. The third test is that the child has to take to her breast feeding. If she succeeds in this, then, she could take the child with her, assure the gods. The child really takes to her breast feeding. Then the gods celebrate the *bārasāla* of Brahmanaidu. Then the mother is purified by gods and the gods take food on this occasion. Bālacāñdrudu who is a school teacher in the *dévalóka* also takes the food given on the occasion of his father's naming ceremony. Balacāñdrudu, in this song is many people and takes many *avatāras* like Abhimanyu, Gópanna and so on but the school teacher's *avatāra* in the *dévalóka* is the best. The gods name the new born child as Brahmanaidu.

The child is brought to Mācerla and he is someone with the sense of God. One day he is taking bath in Nāguléru to go to Cennakésava temple. During the Cennakésava festival for nine days, the eagle is supposed to be fed and worshipped. Therefore, Doddanaidu sends people to bring these eagles and orders to feed them. But they can't find any, but finds it in Rāmireddi's fields. They find them chasing a small *kamju* bird. The singer describes the whole process of the bird and the eagerness of the eagle to kill it. The bird enters the field of Rāmireddi and the eagles lay in wait for the bird. Then Anugurāju calls Doddanaidu and tells him that the eagles have gone out of Palnādu and haven't returned so far and asks him to send someone to find out what has happened. Then he sends Brahmanaidu to fetch the eagle back. Doddanaidu

comes to his palace and persuades his son, Bramhanaidu to go on the mission to get the eagle back to Palnādu. Anugurāju says Brahmanaidu should come to his court and obey his orders because he is the king, but Bramhanaidu is the incarnation of Lord Krishna and he cannot obey a mere mortal king that would only ruin the king. Therefore, they make an iron statue of the king from which Brahmanaidu can take orders and obey. But the iron statue with the touch of Brahmanaidu breaks down and then Anugurāju asks Brahmanaidu to protect his children Nalagāma, Narasinga, Jutti, Perumāllu and Malidevādulu. Then Brahmanaidu promises to protect Malidēvarāju and his brothers.

*Vaikuntha vaikuntha...*

### Alarāju Rāyabhāramu<sup>25</sup>

Brahmanaidu asks Nāgamma to return the kingdom to him. Without answering him directly Nāgamma asks for an emissary to be sent on a mission to Gurajāla in order to negotiate. This is sung with a lengthy *ālāp* in the style of Telugu drama.

Brahmanaidu invites Brahmins to decide upon the auspicious moment. In the name of Peddanna an auspicious moment was looked up but the *bhattu* informs that “Surnīdu, Pernīdu, and Malirāju all these are not worth carrying the mission of diplomacy, including yourself, but there are two strong names that can carry the mission to Gurajāla, that is your son Bālacandrudu and the other is Alarāju.” Then finally Brahmanaidu says Bālacandrudu can go for the battle in Kāremapūdi if needed but for now it can be Alarāju.

Kannama is asked to carry a message to *vankīdēvi samsthānamu*<sup>26</sup> that Bramhanaidu would arrive at twelve o’ clock and visit them. Kannama prepares himself to go to Caṅdravaṅka<sup>27</sup>. He arms himself with the best of armours and gets ready to go to *vanki samsthānamu* crossing forts and buildings. Kannama arrives at the centre of the town and is asked by the king why he has arrived, and then he says that his father Bramhanaidu has a message for *vanki samsthānamu*. The song, as it continues, contemplates why Brahmanaidu comes to vanki samsthanamu at that hour,

which is neither morning nor evening: “*Bāva* Nalakommurāja, why Brahmanaidu is coming? I have no idea; I am here only to inform you that he would be coming”. Then Kannama moves to Cellamādevi’s house to see if he can find out the real reason for Bramhanaidu’s arrival- “Akka Cellamadevi my father has asked me to inform you of his travel to *vankīdēvi samsthānamu*. Cellamadevi’s response is expressed through a song *vinavayya Kannama.....aa..aa...aa...* “Bramhanaidu will come for death not for happy occasions” Thus the conversation between Kannama and Cellamma continues, who finally says “Let Bramhanaidu come, he won’t stop at my intervention anyway.”

Kannama goes to Mācerla and informs Brahmanaidu- in a rhetorical manner -that he has given the message. Brahmanaidu prepares to go to *vankīdēvivāri samsthānamu*. Nalakommurāju comes to receive him. Both the heroes prepare to go to the centre of the village, *raccabanda*. The two well built fighters who were present there already ask Brahmanaidu about the war, then he replies that Alarāju will go to Gurajāla. The rest of the story is narrated in the manner of the rhetorical and theatrical practice of singing a *padyamu*.

Brahmanaidu and Kommurāju take the advice of the muscle men who explain the qualities of Alarāju as a suitable emissary to Gurajāla. The narrative runs in the mode of a medieval catechism with the rhetorical emphasis on question and answers rather than in the progression of the story. Alarāju has won victory over the sun god, with all other gods, so he is qualified to be an emissary. Brahmanaidu has to convince Alarāju’s parents to send him as an envoy. Now again the song describes the arrival of Brahmanaidu to Cellamādevi’s bungalow. The arrival and departure of characters and the messages and the arguments are presented in a repeated rhetoric. Brahmanaidu is treated to a grand welcome. And it is described poetically. On these occasions the *pradhāna kathakudu* breaks into a spontaneous dance indicating the happiness and grand nature of the situation. Brahmanaidu slowly reveals the mission on which he has arrived at this moment. This is punctuated by a song *vinavayya nāyudaa...aaa...aa..aaa...* But Alarāju’s parents refuse to send him on this mission as he is the only son for them and

therefore plead and beg . “How can I have my food and sleep well after sending Alarāju for the mission to Gurajāla?” asks Cellamma. The *kathakudu* continues the song in which Cellamma pleads with Brahmanaidu why only her son was chosen for this mission ... *vinavayya nāyudaa*....There is so much in the Universe, there are fruits in Nature, why do you ask for raw fruits, while your own son, you are not considering for the mission? Then Brahmanaidu convinces Cellamma that Alarāju is someone with unmatched qualities in all the seven worlds, so unless he goes to Gurajāla they can’t win back the kingdom of Palnādu.

After a lengthy conversation through song and *padayamu*, now we reach the man concerned in the whole episode, Alarāju who is sleeping on his silken bed. The mother wakes the son up, asking the same questions that she asked Brahmanaidu and how she could send him on a mission to Gurajāla. Alarāju dramatically wakes up after seeing the river of his mother’s tears. The *pradhāna kathakudu* describes the scene, the props, the mood of the character and then finally impersonates the character and emotions. “Why are you in sorrow?” asks Alarāju of his mother. The mother answers him “Alarāja, vinavo...ooo...ooo your uncle Brahmanaidu has come asking you to go on a mission to Gurajāla.” The singers sing the answer of Alarāju along with the *pradhāna kathakudu*. Alarāju explains that he has already had the knowledge of the mission to Gurajāla while having gone on hunting where he and his brother Ranakommurāju had encountered Durvāsamuni.<sup>28</sup> “We killed the deer of Durvāsa who then informed us that we have killed his wife who was in disguise and therefore we were cursed by the saint.” Ranakommurāju had to get into an argument with Durvāsa and the brothers had to explain that they are from *vanki samsthānamu* and so on, but then Durvāsa gives a curse on Alarāju because he has killed his wife: “When you go on a mission to Gurajāla you would see your death on the way back with jasmine flowers in your hands.” In turn Alarāju also places a curse on Durvāsa. Here there is a subtext, “Lingadharudu Gangadharudu is my horse and Peddanna and I went on hunting.” Here is a description of how Peddanna’s horse influences Lingādhara Gangādhara, so that it doesn’t take food and water. The narrative progresses from one

instance to another and comes back to the main point of the theme may be after half an hour of narration. Now the narration goes back to sometime ago when Alarāju was in Palnādu observing the horses- “After breaking its head I want to eat its flesh and blood” says Peddanna. Alarāju out of anger brings gold and melts it into molten rock and gets the statue of Peddanna made. (We must remember that Alarāju still has to give answer to his mother who conveys to him about his mission to Gurajāla). He then gets the figure on top of a horse and makes it obey his horse because it had this bad influence during his hunting. This Peddanna understands...and the women around are bemused thinking how humiliating it is for his uncle (Peddanna is Brahmanaidu’s elder brother and therefore maternal uncle to Alarāju).

Peddanna comes to know of this and then he calls for a Bhattu and sends him to find out with whose permission he has done this? Then Bhattu comes along... the preparation of Bhattu’s coming is sung...Then Alarāju tells Bhattu that “in the name of the one who has come to ask and the one who has sent you to ask I have done this. Go and tell this...” Peddanna is incensed and becomes the Indra himself... the *kathakudu* creates that atmosphere of animosity around him through the song alone. And *bhattu* is sent to Alarāju once again with the same purpose. This time again Alarāju excludes *bhattu* from the guilt and says “I have made the statue in the name of Peddanna himself...” When *bhattu* gives the message back to Peddanna, he challenges Alarāju if he’s a man and has a moustache on the face, to fight him on the banks of Candravanka. The repeated rounds of messenger’s arrival and departure would be narrated any number of times without abbreviating it. Alarāju also challenges Peddanna to fight him on the same *pancami* Monday on the banks of Candravanka. Now there is a description of the armed forces that were coming from Palnādu to fight Peddanna. Both the forces arrive on the banks of Candravanka like two mountains, like two arrogant elephants clash with each other. Even while the king and his general were fighting each other, the weapons didn’t touch the other. While the war was going on, Brahmanaidu was taking bath in Nāgulēru but hears the noise and asks Kannama to see what is the noise to which

Kannama replies that Alarāju and Peddanna are fighting each other. “After another *ghadiya* Peddanna is sure to be defeated,” predicts Brahmanaidu and asks Kannama to stop the battle for one *ghadia*, a moment. Kannama stops Peddanna forcefully. Then Brahmanaidu reprimands Alarāju about fighting his own maternal uncle. All the action sequences are described in song and the connecting sequences are described through a prose narrative and all action is described as if it is happening in one scene. Alarāju answers that he cannot take back his sword and that only after satisfying his sword would he bring it down. Brahmanaidu advises that the sword should be symbolically given a sacrifice by killing the turmeric figure of Brahmanaidu. The complete rituals required of the sacrifice are then described, like that of placing seven lemons and a sword across. Then immediately the weapon cuts the symbolic figure and the lemons and then vanishes into the world of *nāgās*. And then Alarāju requests everyone around to get the weapon. None helps him and when he finally plucks it, it comes with a lot of mud which hits Brahmanaidu on the forehead and he suffers a great deal as a consequence. Now it is connected with the main narrative where he says that Brahmanaidu didn’t commit any mistakes and that it was not a mistake of Peddanna that they fought, and that now he would go on the mission to Gurajāla. Then he asks Brahmanaidu for a certain ornament after receiving which he would go as an ambassador. He asks for the necklace with stars, the yellow toe ring and the hand ornament. After completing the job, Brahmanaidu prepares to return to Mācerla. After returning, he provokes his son Bālacandrudu to fight Alarāju and win back the three jewels given to Alarāju on the banks of *Vanki* river. Alarāju, after taking bath in Candravanka, and after having eaten the grand meal prepared by his mother prepares to go to Gurajāla. Cellamādevi prays to Mother goddess and Mācerla Cennakésava to protect her son from all evil. The mother gives her blessings to her son Alarācamallu. And then after looking up an auspicious moment both Brahmanaidu and Alarācamallu begin their journey for Gurajāla.

Bālacandrudu catches up with Alarāju and challenges him saying, “*Māma* Alarāja, if my horse is defeated by yours, I will



give you the *mudimuppāvula sottulu* (the three jewels) and if you are defeated, you have to give those of yours”- to which Alarāju agrees. Then both the horses go through a fierce battle in which Bālacandrudu wins. Alarāju is offered some food by Kannama which he offers to a dog nearby. The *kathakudu* sings the condition of the dog which is about to die after eating the poisoned food. After seeing the dog die of the food, Alarāju becomes furious at Kannama and enquires who sent the poisoned food to his palace.

Immediately the scene is connected with just another line, in which Nāyakurālu talks to Narasingarāju. She informs him the situation of the kingdom in which Alarāju is the heir apparent as Nalagamarāju doesn't have male children. Nāyakurālu tells Narasingarāju: “But if you can get rid of Alarāju, you would be the king, but it is not easy to slay any king.” “Alarāju has a weakness for flowers, so when he comes we should present him with these poisoned jasmine flowers,” she advises. Alarāju will smell the flowers and then die (thus fulfilling Durvāsa's curse as well; this epic has an interesting intervention, to kill Alarāju the motive is very much different from many other stories of the *Palnāti Katha*) Thamballa Vīraiah brings flower garlands to Nāgamma. When the garlands were brought, Nāyakurālu poisons the garlands with *kālakūta*, a deadly poison. Then she instructs Tamballa Vīraiah to go around the tent where Alarāju is stationed and then “he will certainly call you in about the flowers. He will ask you about the garlands, then tell him the first one is for Nalagāma, the second for Narasingarāju, third for Perumallarāju, fourth for Juttirāju and the fifth for Nāgamma. Then he will say Nāgamma is a widow, she can't have flowers, so give it to me. Then give it to him for rupees five. Only the fifth garland is poisoned.” As is anticipated by Nāgamma, Alarāju buys the fifth garland. But the *kathakudu* narrates the whole incident as it happens between Alarāju and Tamballa Vīraiah. Kannama watches Alarāju die and Périndévi, his wife almost senses evil, and who is soon revealed of her husband's death. Nalagāmarāju receives the news. Alarāju who came to Gurajāla on a mission dies in the *samsthānamu* of Nalagāmarāju. Périndévi prepares herself to die along with her husband on the funeral pyre. They take the dead body to Mācerla and bury,

but before that Périndévi wants the head of Narasingarāju to be brought over and then finally Bramhanaidu demands the return of Mācerla to them from Nāgamma. But Nāgamma challenges them to take the kingdom back from them in the Kāremapuḍi battle. *Govinda Govinda...*

### Bālacandruni Puttuka – Yuddhamu<sup>29</sup>

The episode begins with a song describing a *muddugumma* literally a pretty woman. The *pradhāna kathakudu* declares that the episode that is to be narrated is from the birth of Bālacandru to his participation in the battle of Kāremapuḍi.

While Brahmanaidu was busy with his activity in the court, his wife Aitāmbadévi was in the palace, Brahmaniadu's mother Sīlāmbadévi is preparing to come to Aitāmbadévi's palace. She finally reaches the palace and calls out to the daughter-in-law, "Daughter-in-law Aitāmbadévi", then the daughter-in-law replies, "What is it mother-in-law?" The mother-in-law agonises, "We have lands to rule over, and palaces to live in but we don't have children." Then the daughter-in-law replies, "Mother-in-law, your son Brahmanaidu, you and I can go to the temple of Lord Cennakésava and get his blessings in order to beget children." Though Brahmanaidu was not in town the two women go to the temple of Lord Cennakésava and pray to Cennudu: "O our family deity Cennudā, we have lands to cultivate and horses to climb on and go for a ride, but our family doesn't have children, kindly give us children!" Then Cennudu answers their prayers and asks them to follow a ritual. He says, "The dry and denuded tree nearby the temple needs some water, so take seven pots of milk and Ganga water from Kasi and mix it in the tank of Cennakésava temple and give it to that tree then you'll beget children." Then Aitāmba takes six women servants and takes seven pots of butter and seven pots of milk and gives it to the dry *gajanimma*<sup>30</sup> tree. They wash the feet of Cennudu with the tank water and seven pots of butter and seven pots of milk is offered to the lemon tree along with the Ganga water of Kāsi. They all return to the palace and then the next day they make yet another visit to the tree. When they

reach there, the dry lemon tree is slowly sprouting new leaves. The second day also they worship the tree with seven pots of butter and seven pots of milk. Then after three days, the tree starts giving life to branches. By the fourth day it was growing into a big tree, and by the fifth day, it was flowering, the sixth day it had raw fruit and by the seventh day it had full-grown lemon fruit. The family of Brahmanaidu then takes the fruit of the tree and keeps it in the sanctum sanctorum of the Lord and pray. Lord Cennakésava appears to Sīlamma and asks her to distribute clothes to all the women around and keep one with her. All the six women are given a portion of the branch of lemon tree but the last bit is kept with Aitamāmba for herself. However, this is taken to a forest and an eagle starts plucking into it and eating it. The seventh ball of food was eaten by Aitāmba. There in the forest, there was a forest ewe that ate the branch of the lemon tree and gave birth to a lion.

On the seventh day, when Brahmanaidu returns from the court, his mother Sīlāmba informs him that he has had a son. Then Brahmanaidu asks “How was he born while I was away?” Explain it to me” he demands. Sīlāmba answers that the son was born due to the blessings of Lord Cennakésava . Then he tells his mother, “I will give three tests to my wife (*mudi muppāvula parīksalu*). If she wins these tests then I will agree that the child was born of the Lord’s blessings. The first one is to spread seven times cooked rice on the fields of Palnādu; then if they sprout by next morning, then I will agree that the boy was born of the Lord’s blessings. If otherwise then the boy is not born due to the blessings of the lord.” As required by her husband, the great mother Aitāmba, cooks rice seven times and takes it herself to the fields of Palnādu and spreads it across. By the next day morning, it had given rise to nice sprouts, then Brahmanaidu thinks: “I am going to lose the challenge if this is the case,” so he provokes all the buffaloes of Palnādu to the fields. The Lord sees him and thinks “Brahmanaidu has come to do such evil!” and the Lord chases all the buffaloes back to the village. Then Brahmanaidu gives a second test, in which he says, “If our family cow conceives by the same blessings of the Lord then I will agree that Aitāmba gave birth to the child due to the blessings of the Lord.” Then both Sīlamma and Aitamma take the

cow to the temple of Lord Cennakésava. They take the cow around the temple for circumambulations and then they pray to the Lord. Then both the women worship the cow also and put some green grass for the cow. Within the next nine *ghadiyalu*<sup>31</sup> the cow conceives. When Brahmanaidu sees that the cow has conceived, and then he plans to give his third and final test to Aitāmba. Then he tells his mother and wife, “If you win the last challenge, then I will accept that the child is born of the Lord’s blessings.” “What is the challenge? Tell us O Brahmanaidu!” asks his mother. The last challenge is that the mother and the child have to climb seven flights of stairs and from there jump down into a fire and if they both are spotless and safe then he would agree that the child was born of the blessings of the Lord but if they are harmed then he won’t agree that, the child is born of the blessings of the Lord. Then Aitāmba ties the child to her waist and prays to Ammavāru which the *pradhāna kathakudu* describes in the song *nakstra mandala*... After the prayer she jumps down into the fire and the mother and the child are taken out of fire and they are unaffected, with not even a blister as small as the green gram. Then Sīlāmba asks him “Brahmanaidu do you agree at least now, that the child was born of the blessings of the Lord?” Then Brahmanaidu agrees and then asks a Brahmin to look up the horoscope of the child. The Brahmin who has eaten Brahmanaidu’s food and served him and has taken a salary feels compelled to say that there is no problem with the birth star and that the time is auspicious.” Then Lord Cennakésava comes and asks the Brahmin, “Tell us once again the birth star of the child.” Then the Brahmin asks Brahmanaidu: “Do you want me to say the truth or a lie?” Then Brahmanaidu says, “Please say the truth and the truth. And the truth is revealed in the song “*vinavayya naiuda*...” “The truth is that the boy is born with a problem in his birth star which will harm his parents and his maternal uncle and aunt. Ten to fourteen years after his birth, you’ll be defeated in a cockfight. Ten to fourteen years after the birth of Bāludu, people of Palnādu will stop worshipping Ammavāru. This kind of a boy born with a birth defect, should not be kept in the family.” Then they place some amount of paddy, gold and some weapons in a huge box and place

the new-born baby in the box along with these things. Surprisingly, the boy didn't touch any of these things, but he touched the weapons first. And then Brahmanaidu locks the box and orders Kannama to take and put it in the sea. Kannama along with other men take it away. While these men were carrying the box towards the milk sea, they rest under a tree. Meanwhile Périnaidu passes through the path and sees this and then he hears the cry of the baby and then he gets down from his chariot and then comes towards Kannamadāsu. Then he asks: "*Bantu*<sup>32</sup> what is in this box?" Then Kannama asks him in return: "Which is your city? What is your name? Why do you want to know what is in the box?" Then they start off a battle over the argument, like two great mountains and like two great elephants. Then Périnaidu replies, "*Bantu* ours is the city of Mācerla." Then he says, "My name is Sīlam Périnaidu." Then Kannama realizes that this is his father Brahmanaidu's brother and therefore he drops his weapons and seeks Périnaidu's blessings. Then Kannama explains to Périnaidu that "Father, a son is born in our family, but because his birth star is defective, Brahmanaidu has ordered this boy to be thrown into the milk sea." Then Périnaidu orders the box to be open but he says, "Father only you have to open the box." Then the box is broken open and the lock taken out. As soon as the box is open the baby jumps into the hands of Périnaidu. Then Périnaidu asks Kannama "Why did Brahmanaidu ask such a beautiful boy to be thrown into the milk sea?" Kannama explains the whole story once again to Périnaidu which the *pradhāna kathakudu* repeats as it was told by the Brahmin priest to Brahmanaidu. Then Périnaidu asks Kannama "What if Ammavāru is not worshipped after ten fourteen years after the birth of Bāludu. He is the star of the family. How could we throw him into the milk sea! This boy I am going to bring up as my son, you go and inform Brahmanaidu that he has been thrown into the sea." Périnaidu comes to the palace of Peraladēvi with Bāludu and then he tells her, "Peralādēvi, you have to bring up this child as your own." Then she says, "How can I bring up a bastard child?" Then he reassures her that "this child is our own, you bring him up well." Then Peraladēvi tells him, "If this boy is from our own family then milk should be produced in my breast

immediately and he should immediately take to my breast feeding.” The boy immediately takes to her breast feeding. Périnaidu teaches the boy all kinds of martial arts to make him a warrior. One day, seventy *reddi* men, sixty four warrior and others get together and Brahmanaidu was also present in that meet, and Gañdu Gajarāju was also present in the meet. What does that Gañdu Gajarāju say? He says, “If you have an eligible and warrior like son I will give my daughter Māncāla in marriage to him.” Then the next day Bāludu makes his appearance in the court and Brahmanaidu sees him for the first time after many years. Then he gets angry like fire, and he asks Kannama, “I had ordered you to throw this boy into the milk sea but what have you done? Why didn’t you obey my orders?” Then Gañdu Gajarāju says, “If you have gold and jewels worth our daughter I will give my daughter in marriage to him,” to which Brahmanaidu, since he’s the father, responds by showing them the gold that he’s going to offer Māncāla; then Gañdu Gajarāju gets the buffaloes of Palnādu and gets it trampled upon and tests if it is good quality gold or not and then they decide to marry the three year old Māncāla to the five year old Bālacandru. The family of Gañdu and the family of Brahmanaidu decide to marry Bāludu with Māncāla. The next *pancami* Monday in the *amrita siddi ghadiya* the marriage is fixed. On the same auspicious moment as that of Bālacandru hundreds of people fixed the weddings of their children like *ītamvāru* and *sātamuvāru*. However there is only one Brahmin in the city of Mācerla so he brings another Brahmin to help perform so many weddings at the same time and tells him, “I will perform all the weddings in the city but you have to stay at the wedding of Bālacandrudu.” While the first Brahmin was performing all the other weddings in the city, the second Brahmin eats his stomach full and then he falls asleep and then the auspicious moment is past and the inauspicious moment was approaching. Then Gajarāju sees that the inauspicious moment was approaching, but then Brahmanaidu says, whether the moment is auspicious or inauspicious a wedding should not be stopped. Then they bring Māncāla on one side and Bālacandru on the other side and perform the wedding. In the palace of Māncāla and Bāludu they have two weapons standing for each of them and all

the rituals are performed between the two weapons. Both Māncāla and Bāludu stay in their respective family palaces while the wedding is performed between the two weapons. It so happens that Māncāla and Bāludu have not seen each other.

Soon after the marriage they receive information that Brahmanaidu has lost his lands and is asked to go into exile after losing the cock fight. But after returning Brahmanaidu asks Nāgamma to return his lands to him. Then the mission to Gurajāla fails and then Nāgamma says: “Fight me in the battle of Kāremapūdi and win back your lands.” The whole story of Palnādu is briefly described by the narrator once again. Then Brahmanaidu, Périnaidu, Mallinaidu and Sūrinaidu all set out for the battle of Kāremapūdi, which is the information they receive. Bālacandrudu was busy playing the game of tops. As he twirls the top into the air, it reaches the sky and falls down on the foot of *kómati*<sup>33</sup> Annamma. The *kómati* girl faints and then Bālacandrudu takes water and wakes her up. She condescendingly challenge him, “All your fathers<sup>34</sup> are fighting the battle in Kāremapūdi and you are here playing a game of tops?” She somehow reminds him of his *vīradharma*. Then he comes running to the palace and asks his mother, “Where are my father and his brothers gone, tell me?” Then she says, “You are a child, you need not know, they have gone to the north towards *kóteru*.” Then he insists on knowing where all his fathers have been. Then he tells her, “I know where my fathers have been, I’ll tell you, listen. “They all have gone to Kāremapūdi battle.” The mother sighs, describing the evil nature of Kāremapūdi. Even then he insists on going to Kāremapūdi. Then she tells him, “You’ll have my leave but you must go get your wife Māncāla’s leave before that. Then he says, “Ever since the wedding I have never seen her nor been to her palace in all these years, how could I go now?” Then all his five mothers get themselves ready to go to the palace of Māncāla. Māncāla was fast asleep when her mothers-in-law arrive. So they go to the palace of Māncāla’s mother Gaṇḍu Rekamma, there they go. The mother wakes the daughter up and tells her to honour her mothers-in-law who have come to see her. Then Māncāla spreads five mats for all five mothers-in-law and prepares a feast herself and serves it

herself. They all have the feast and then Aitāmba asks her, “Daughter-in-law can you tell me the dream that I dreamt while I slept in my palace?” Then Māncāla tells her that fifteen days from now Bālacandru is going for the battle in Kāremapūdi. She asks her mother-in-law, “Why do you weep?” The mother-in-law replies, “Your husband is going to come and see you before he goes to the battlefield at Kāremapūdi, you must somehow make him forget about the battle and all the rest of it.” All the mothers request Bāludu to go to Candravanka and take bath. At the palace a big feast was prepared for all the friends who are referred as the brothers of Bāludu. Each of the brothers is treated according to his caste and social status. All others were sitting together and eating their food but the Brahmin boy was sitting away and eating his food. In spite of all the misgivings from his mother and other family members, Bālacandru begins his journey to the battlefield in Kāremapūdi. He climbs his elephant and takes leave of his mother and begins his journey to Kāremapūdi. By afternoon they reach a road that is divided into three separate roads. Then his friends explain to him the importance of these roads and then the Brahmin boy explains that the first road leads to Kāremapūdi and the second one leads to Māncāla’s palace and the third road leads to Sabbai’s palace. If you take the first road and go to Kāremapūdi, a warrior’s death awaits and you might go to heaven, but if you take the second road to Māncāla’s palace Sabbai will be hurt and if we go to Sabbai’s palace, Māncāla will be hurt. Finally Bāludu asks the Brahmin boy to inform Sabbai about his arrival. He then climbs the horse and then begins his journey to Sabbai’s<sup>35</sup> palace. Sabbai, unaware of the arrival was sleeping in her palace. Then the Brahmin boy gives her the message that his brother is leaving for Kāremapūdi and that she needs to be informed of this. As soon as she hears this, she informs him she cannot go to Kāremapūdi. As the Brahmin boy leaves, Sabbai’s mother enters the palace and asks her, “Who is the boy that just left the house?” Sabbai says, “He has come to give information about Bālacandrudu’s journey to the battle field.” Then the mother scolds her, “I have made friends only with kings who had money and I have earned millions, but what have you earned in the last so many years after being



friends with that Bālacandru?” She also orders Sabbai to ask Bāludu to visit her before he leaves for Kāremapūdi. Then she sends an invitation to Bāludu through her brother, and on receiving the invite Bāludu starts his journey to Sabbai’s palace. She instructs her brother to inform Bāludu that he has spent three hundred gold coins for getting medicine for Sabbai’s illness and that she has assured him that Bāludu will repay the money, but he never came and never repaid the amount. She bribes the boy with five gold coins for fabricating the false message to Bāludu. So Bāludu is not only made to give three hundred gold coins, but also lots of gold ornaments for Sabbai’s sisters who are always assisting her in the music and dance that goes on at her place. Before he reaches the chamber of Sabbai he is obstructed by many of her sisters who ask Bālacandru for gifts, then he replies, “What do I have? I am on my way to Kāremapūdi war.” But the women insist that he must present them with something as he is off to war. Then he promises to give them things many times more than now after he returns from the war. But finally when he does get access to Sabbai and he asks her to accompany him to the battle, she refuses and then he comes out and asks his friends to go to Māncāla’s palace and get an impression of her face and features and describe it to him. They reach the palace of Māncāla and find her asleep. And then the Brahmin boy tells the others that they should not disturb their sister-in-law at this hour. Nonetheless they make an attempt to see the face of Māncāla without either touching or disturbing her. The *pradhāna kathakudu* describes her beauty in a lengthy and melodious song. Then the Brahmin boy writes a letter to his brother Bālacandru and tells him that, “Brother Bālacandru, if you see the beauty of our sister-in-law you’ll forget the war of Kāremapūdi.” When Bālacandru reaches Māncāla’s palace to take leave of her as soon as he enters the house he gets into a debate with Māncāla’s brothers who ask him about whose family is more reputed and therefore whose family is greater. Whether for an argument or for a kingdom all fighting is in the nature of two mountains or two elephants fighting the *kathakudu* sings. Before he finally reaches the bed chamber of Māncāla, his friends inform him of the story of his marriage to Māncāla seven years ago. The

*kathakudu* repeats the whole story once again with all the details of the deal. As he enters the fifth level of the bed chamber he finds the effigy of Sabbai but imagines that it is Sabbai herself, but his friends inform him that, their sister-in-law Māncāla has made a wax doll resembling Sabbai just to find out the truth of the affair between Bāludu and Sabbai. After reaching the final stage of the bed chamber he is almost overwhelmed by the wealth and the beauty of the chamber and he prays to his father Brahmanaidu. Māncāla's mother Gaṇḍu Rēkhamma also visits her palace and advises the daughter about fulfilling her duty towards her husband who is going to the battle field. Māncāla then asks her mother, "Has he ever come to my palace mother? Let me tell you something. He has come to me after seven years of marriage but spent all his time and life in Palnādu. I have never seen him nor heard him. And there are seven men in all. Who is my husband among these men?" Then the mother says, "I will tell you. Listen!" Māncāla takes water to wash the feet of her husband but in the confusion she begins to wash the feet of the Brahmin boy. But the Brahmin boy tells her, "Sister-in-law your husband is sitting elsewhere." Then she replies, "I know you are not my husband, but since my husband didn't come to see me for seven years and has come now, I had taken a vow to wash the feet of a Brahmin the day I see him. This is just to fulfil that wish." Since Māncāla is a *pativrata* like Sāvītri and Anasūya, she worships her husband's feet and takes the water and puts it on her head. Bālacandrudu enters the ninth chamber of Māncāla, there he finds the bed and above that he finds her in wait for him. Then Bālacandru and Māncāla indulge in many games involving many rituals. Then he feels thirsty and get down into the well to get some water. When she asks him, "You are someone who drinks water in a golden glass. Why do you go into the well?" Māncāla while they were making these circumambulations, breaks one of her golden chains in her neck. He asks her, "Why did you break such a beautiful necklace?" She replies, "Alright then you can pick up all the jewels from the ground and put them in a plate." Then she also orders him to make the chain with the golden beads. The whole night he will be making the golden chain with beads so that he stays back in her palace till morning and forgets about the

battle of Kāremapūdi. But early in the morning, he tells Māncāla that he hears the bells of war from somewhere, but she tells him that she doesn't hear anything of that kind. But all six brothers in a song sing about how Māncāla has poisoned his mind against going to the battlefield. They begin to come towards Māncāla's palace to take Bāludu away to Kāremapūdi. Bālacandrudu asks her, "How can I take my brother a Brahmin, to the battlefield? It's not his job." Then she says, "Send him back on the pretext of having forgotten your *mudimuppāvula sottulu* here in my palace." All six brothers<sup>36</sup> of Bāludu take leave of Māncāla and begin their journey to Kāremapūdi. On the way he tells his brother Anapótu that he has forgotten his *mudimuppāvula sottulu* back in Māncāla's palace, so he should go and get them back. The *déva bramhana* goes to her and gives her the identity of the jewels that Bāludu has forgotten and returns to meet Bālacandru. But Bālacandrudu draws a line with seven stones and leaves a letter to his brother that says: "In the name of Lord Cennakésava, Ammavāru and in the name of Palanāti Ankamma and other gods, you should not cross this line before I return from Kāremapūdi." Once the Brahmin boy reaches the mark drawn by Bālacandru he realizes that Bālacandrudu didn't want him to go to the battle field, and he feels humiliated and kills himself by slitting his throat. He's found in a pool of blood very soon.

Bāludu participates in the war heroically and captures six thousand soldiers of the Gurajāla kings. In the meanwhile, when they feel thirsty, they dig a pit nearby and find blood seeping through the pit. Then Bāludu orders a second pit to be dug in the name of his Brahmin brother in which he sees the face of his Brahmin brother and realizes that he's no more. Then he tells himself: "What a mistake I've committed listening to the words of a woman!" at which point he finds Akka Pinnakka coming from Palnādu who was taking food for the warriors like Sūrinīdu, and Périnīdu. After they finish the meal they call her and tell her to bring more food from Mācerla. On the way when she reaches the well where the Brahmin boy killed himself in the most violent way, she finds him in a pool of blood. Then she tries to communicate with him, "Listening to the words of Māncāla my brother lost his

senses and has humiliated me in this way. Without me he won't be able to enter the inner circles of the battle field, so the sacred thread on my body I will give it to you and you have to in turn give it to my brother in the battlefield" he requests her. After receiving the sacred thread of the Brahmin boy, Bālacandrudu fights a fierce battle. He beheads the Bhargavarāju. After that Bālacandrudu proceeds to the camp of the people of Palnādu. He enters the camp of Kannama and tears the tent into pieces thinking it's the camp of his arch rival Narasingarāju's. Then Kannama gets up in a fury and retaliates the attack and asks him who he was. Both brothers not knowing they are brothers fight each other in the battle of Kāremapūdi. The *kathakudu* breaks into a song *vinandi rājulāra*... They challenge each other asking each other's family names, teachers names and so on. When Bālacandrudu introduces himself as the son of Bramhanaidu of Mācerla, then Kannama realizing his mistake throws his weapons down and apologizes to his brother. Both the brothers come to meet their father Bramhanaidu who is camping in the battle field. The father warns his son saying that, "you are too young for the gory and violent war that's happening here with Nāgamma and her army. "Green harvesting fields are turned into ashes, blood flows like rivers," saying so the father pleads with the boy. But Bāludu doesn't listen to his father's misgivings but wants to fight the battle. He also warns Bāludu that it's not easy to kill Narasingarāju, as he always has Lord Īswara in his heart. Unless you kill that Iswara you won't be able to kill Narasingarāju. But Bālacandru refuses to listen to him and then Bramhanaidu challenges his son to go and get a egg and betel leaf offering from *adisésa* after which he can go the battle field and fight the war. Bālacandrudu reaches the anthill and remembers his grandmother when she went to look for her son in the *dévalōka*, who had taken the help of the giant eagle to assist her getting the egg-betel leaf offering in return for which she offers to get the intestines of Narasingarāju and put them around the neck of the giant eagle. Remembering that promise, Bālacandru prays to the giant eagle in order to help him kill Narasingarāju. When the giant eagle starts revolving around the snake *adisésa* it bends its head, and at that moment Bālacandru quickly takes the egg-betel leaf

offering and returns to the battle field. He enters the fray with a great deal of fervour and heroism. Narasingarāju sees Bāludu entering the fray and therefore he approaches him on his elephant. He finds Nandula Sādu next to him whom he thrusts his sword into. Narasingarāju lifts Bāludu on the edge of his sword and lifts him up and threatens him saying that, “unless you stop participating in the war I am going to kill you here and now.” But Bāludu challenges him and says, “Neither you nor your father who begot you would be able to kill me.” Bāludu in the skirmish manages to pull out the intestines of Narasingarāju and takes it to the giant eagle fulfilling his promise. Bāludu kills the enemy like one would a bird or an insect. But Bāludu could not quite kill Narasingarāju as he is a devotee of Lord Siva. The *pradhāna kathakudu* here connects Bāludu’s birth in another incarnation as Sīriyāla’s son who is also a saivite. Now Bālacandrudu prays to Lord Siva to help him kill Narasingarāju in the battle. Bālacandrudu once again reaches Narasingarāju and pulls him down from the elephant and this time he didn’t use the weapon to behead Narasingarāju but he just twirls the head around with his hands. Māncāla hearing the news of her husband also wants to help him in the battle and so begins her journey to Kāremapuḍi.<sup>37</sup> Bāludu and his wife Māncāla also die in the battle. Bramhanaidu sees this and goes to the king of Palnādu Nalagāmarāju and tells him: “You rule over this bloody kingdom, I don’t want it at this cost.” He relinquishes his rights of the victor of the war. He goes to the cave of Guttikonda where Nāgamma is waiting for him in a giant form and asks him to enter into the cave from under her feet. He just removes her obstacle and then goes into the cave to attain sainthood and spend the rest of his life.

*Vaikuntha... vaikuntha...*

## Notes

1. Annexure I contains episodes of *Palnātivīrula Katha* which are recorded but not directly cited in Chapter 3 but used for the integral discussion of the chapter.
2. The birth of Ammavāru, the mother goddess Ankamma.
3. Ammavāru is the generic reference to all important female deities.

4. Īswara, Paramēswara are the other names of Lord Siva. The *kathakudu* uses these names interchangeably.
5. The deity of the southern direction of Space and one of the *asta dikpālakas*. The others guardians of the directions are Kubera, Indra, Varuna, Agni, Vayu, Isana and Nirrti.
6. Hari is one of the thousand names of Lord Viṣṇu.
7. The world on the earth.
8. Soaked green gram and jaggery, rice and fried dishes made with flour.
9. Caste name of a nomadic tribe in Andhra. The women of this caste tell palmistry in return for alms. *Sodi*, *gaddi* and *eruka* are the names by which such soothsaying is known in the Telugu country.
10. The *kathakudu* repeats almost the same lines twice or more sometimes to get a grip of the story or sometimes as a rhetorical device.
11. This is a recurring motif usually in all the *jānapada* stories or songs like *Bālanāgammakatha* and so on.
12. Ritual purification of the mother and the baby after child-birth.
13. The King of Palnādu is variously referred to as Anugu, Anugurāju or Alugurāju in throughout the narrative.
14. The *kathakudu* refers to all kinds of letters as *subalékha* meaning a letter of good intentions.
15. Within the narrative the *kathakudu* explains the meaning of the name as *rana* or *racca* to mean war or public space and *teppa* is a raft. So a boy found on a raft is named as Ranateppalarāju.
16. The sense of time is definitely different and non-linear in the narrative.
17. The abode of Lord Siva.
18. The celestial architect.
19. Viswabramha is another reference to Viswakarma.
20. All important characters are called kings.
21. A woman who helps pregnant women at the time of giving birth to children.
22. The three jewels or three instruments which are referred to throughout the narrative.
23. Reference to Lord Visnu's ten incarnations, one of which is that of the fish.
24. A betel nut offering with an egg to the Naga god.
25. Alarāju's Mission.
26. Alarāju's father Kommurāju's chieftaincy.
27. Name of the river that flows across Palnādu.
28. A character from the *Mahābhārata*.
29. The episode on the birth of Balacandrudu and war.
30. *Gaja* means an elephant. Here the reference is the to the elephant-sized lemon tree.
31. The *kathakudu* uses phrases like *nava tommidi ghadiyalu* in which words are repeated. *Nav* is nine and *tommidi* also means nine where as *ghadiya* means a moment.

32. *Bantu* and *bhattu* are references to a man servant and to a Brahmin respectively.
33. *Kómati* is trading caste in Andhra.
34. Fathers is a general reference to father's brothers too who in Telugu would be referred to as elder father and younger father.
35. She is a prostitute the adolescent Bālacandrudu is supposed to be visiting.
36. All friends of Bāludu are referred to as brothers in the whole narrative.
37. No other story of the *Palnātivīrula Katha* story actually shows Māncāla participating in the war of Kāremapūdi, but here it is narrated that she fights the battle in the true spirit of a hero's wife.

## Annexure II\*

Burrakatha Rendition by Babuji, Sheik Mira  
and Mallikarjuna Sagar—

### 1. Introducing the Character and Prayer

The main narration begins with a tribute to Srīnātha. The narrator begins by saying that “I shall narrate that story which Srīnātha narrated to *Candravanka* eight hundred years ago.” The *pradhāna kathakudu* invokes the *bhārata māta*, the heroes of India, hero mothers of India and all the bright lights of India. The invocatory song is punctuated with *tandāna*, *tandāna devanandanāna*. The audience for the song is children, adults, other heroes of India. It is also meant for farmers who toil in sun and rain.

### 2. Introducing the Story Line

Anugurāju was ruling Palnādu with his wives and sons. He had a minister named Brahmanaidu. Nalagāmarāju, Narasingarāju, Peda Malidēvarāju, Pina Malidēvarāju and Bāla Malidevarāju are his five sons. This episode describes the geographical boundaries of Palnādu and also the recruitment of the armed forces of his

\* Annexure II contains episodes of *Palnāti Yuddhamu* which are not fully cited in Chapter 3 as the length of the narration would obstruct an immediate point being made.



kingdom. The narrator introduces the characters, Brahmanaidu, Nāgamma, Kannamadāsu and also introduces the formation of the polity and its military commanders. Narasingarāju makes Nāgamma another minister of the Kingdom. Nalagāmarāju himself divides the kingdom into two parts with Mācerla as another capital and Brahmanaidu as the minister.

Māla Kannama is made the Chief of Armed forces. Māla Kannama's introduction is given as someone brought up by Brahmanaidu as a son. Brahmanaidu has organized community meals where people of all castes like the washerman, the barber and the carpenter can come together. In the name of Brahmanaidu, the narrator questions the role of caste and religion, also the inequality in society. When we examine the law books of the land, we would know how human development has taken place: how man went through the primitive stages and then found his moorings in the present civilization, and the true nature of civilization is not being the caste system. The narrator breaks into a melodious song *mānava janmamé mancidirā...* The *vantalu* sing *mancidirā, mancidira... mānava janmame mancidirā...* There is also a reference to the *purānas* and the various *avatāras* before man took to the present life style. The song is interrupted with prose narrative of the *purānas* and the *pradhāna kathakudu* resumes the song-

Brahmanaidu builds schools for children. *Rā rā poligada...* Because of the drought and atrocity in the town, people appeal to Brahmanaidu to redeem them from Nāgamma's tyranny. Nāgamma uses craft and cunning to achieve any end. Because Brahmanaidu, a minister, was causing trouble by equating people of all castes and classes together, the king thought of bringing in another leader who could be a competition for him. Therefore he promised all the farmers that they would be provided all facility for their welfare.

### 3. Learning of the Martial Arts

The narrator breaks into another song *sāginadirā nāguléti dorsāni, nāgasāni...* *sai* and introduces the character of Nāgamma. Nāgamma is from Jittagāmālapādu, well trained in all martial arts. Mācerla was prospering well, under the rule of Malidevarāju who

was following the advice of Bramhanaidu. Roads were laid, as the song describes. Nalagāmarāju rules Gurajāla *sīma*, colonies and forts were built, schools were built with great grandeur and a temple was built for Cennudu. People of all castes worshipped and welcomed these changes. The farmers were very happy with Brahmanaidu in Mācerla and in Cennakesava temple there was a community meal. Under these circumstances, there were early rains too to cheer up farmers.

#### 4. Harvest

There was very good harvest while Brahmanna was ruling Gurajāla. Nāgamma was busy recruiting armed forces for her army obviously making preparations for a war. There is drought everywhere and people are dying or are leaving their families for better places. The plight of the farmers' families is described in a moving song...*ennāllī kāpurālū...?* "How were the farmers cultivating their harvest?" ask the *vantalu*. All the farmers were happy with the reforms that Bramhanaidu was bringing in and Nature also cooperated in this mission and there were rains at the right time for the harvest and they pay a tribute to Bramhanaidu. The song on farmers is the narrator's intervention into the story where he appeals to the farmer to have a good harvest and provide food for the people of the kingdom. There is one lengthy song describing the progress of farmers under the rule of Bramhanaidu and there is another song describing the atrocities of Nāgamma on farmers and how she spends time gathering her military army while Bramhanaidu was busy with the developmental activity. Farmers suffer all kinds of drought and poverty under Nāgamma's tyrannical rule. Nalagāmarāju believes only in the advice and strength of Nāgamma and places his complete trust in her efficiency.

#### 5. Alarāju Rāyabhāramu

The next important event in the *burrakatha* is *Alarāju Rāyabhāramu* or mission of Alarāju. After the mandatory seven

years away from the kingdom, the brothers Malidevarāju, Pina Malidevarāju, Bāla Malidevarāju and their minister Brahmanaidu return along with their men to Mācerla to reclaim their kingdom but they are shocked at the denial of their kingdom. And therefore there is the mission to Gurajāla through Alarāju. He is married to Ratnāla Perindevi, the daughter of Nalagāmarāju and he is Malidevarāju's sister's son. Hence he is asked to carry the mission to Gurajāla to the court of Nalagāmarāju as he is related to both the families. Brahmanaidu prepares to go to forests along with Bālacandrudu and others and spend time there and therefore considers sending a peace mission to Gurajāla through Alarāju. Alarāju comes to the court of Nalagāmarāju and asks them to return Mācerla to Brahmanaidu. Then Nāgamma asks Alarāju to listen to her. Finally, Alarāju delivers his message at Gurajāla and he reminds Nāgamma and Narasingarāju that Brahmanaidu and Malidevarāju and his brothers have completed the seven-year exile, therefore their kingdom Mācerla needs to be returned to them. Now as the occasion demands Nāgamma provokes Narasingarāju into killing Alarāju. She exhorts him that Nalagāmarāju doesn't have male children and therefore Narasingarāju will be the next king if Alarāju is killed. Therefore, he must get rid of Alarāju in the fight for the throne. On the other hand, she also attempts to entice Alarāju by telling him that he should leave Mācerla and live with Perindevi in Gurajāla as she lives with her parents and therefore he should join her in Gurajāla and rule Palnādu as its King. Alarāju refuses to stay back with his wife in Gurajāla. Nāgamma explains the importance of kingdom for a hero and Alarāju replies to her that he is not interested in such an activity. Nāgamma conspires with Narasingarāju. Killing someone who comes as an emissary is a crime, so the neighbouring kings would turn against Nalagāmarāju and that would be an advantage for Brahmanaidu who can easily martial armies against Gurajāla. She tells Narasingarāju that the kingdom belongs to those who survive as Nalagāmarāju is growing old and therefore this is the time to make a strong decision as to who should survive the battle. This episode is highly dramatic, filled with melodious music and song. The *burrakatha* performer through modulations in his

song creates a conspiratorial atmosphere. Alarāju is advised to stay back in Gurajāla so that they can rule the undivided Palnādu by themselves as he is married to Pēṛindēvi, Nalagāmarāju's daughter. But he refuses to do so. Once her proposition is rejected, Nāgamma vengefully goes to Narasingarāju and provokes him into killing Alarāju. She exhorts him that if Alarāju were not there, the kingdom would be entirely his and he would be the King of Palnādu. If he doesn't respond on time, Brahmanaidu will take away the kingdom from Nalagāmarāju who is growing older by the day. The narrator doesn't take sides while narrating but is on the side of all characters. He is more or less neutral. But the narrative itself has a point of view. Early next morning when sun was breaking, Nāgamma informs Nalagmarāju of the death of Alarāju who is supposed to have been killed by Brahmanaidu in the outskirts of Gurajāla. The *pradhāna kathakudu* uses a song to comment on the plight of Alarāju who seems to be tricked into a situation of no return. Nāgamma is the main character who leads the episode towards a climax. She confirms the death of Alarāju to Nalagāmarāju and also she explains to him that the murder might have been prompted by Brahmanaidu's desire for kingdom and power. The narrator breaks into a song expressing the sorrow and shock of Nalagamarāju whose daughter is married to Alarāju. Pēṛindēvi goes into a deep shock as her marriage is not yet consummated because of Alarāju's commitment to his maternal uncle Malidēvarāju who was serving exile for seven years. Pēṛindēvi on hearing the news, burns herself on funeral pyre. The episode ends with a song in fast pace. A poem of Sri Sri is selected to suit the pace of the end of an episode. It also makes an appeal to *bhārata vīrulu* the heroes of India.

## 6. Bālachandra Yuddhamu

The last episode is that of *Bālachandra Yuddhamu*. This begins with Bālacandrudu hurting a *kómati* girl who reminds him of the duty of a warrior and the duty of a warrior's son is to be in the battle field and not while away his time with his childish play in the streets. And it culminates in the death of Narasingarāju.

Brahmanaidu is in the forests and on hearing the news of Alarāju's death prepares himself for the final battle. His son Bālacandrudu goes to play a game of tops with his friends in the street. While playing he hurts a *kómati* girl who was carrying water. Enraged, she humiliates Bāludu that he's whiling away his time while his father is fighting a battle. Bāludu goes home and asks his mother where all the men of Palnādu have disappeared? She answers that they have gone fighting for the land. Then he asks her why he was not informed of such a big event. She informs him with sadness that, he was born after many prayers and that they didn't want him to go to war and die in the war. The mother advises him that he should meet his wife Māncāla before he leaves for war. So he meets her. She inspires him to leave her and go to war in a beautifully melodious song. She explains to him that if he spends time with her while all the men in the family are fighting for the kingdom people will laugh at him. He asks for forgiveness and leaves for the battle field while the wife also weeps and asks him to remember her in the battle field which she compares to a thousand-hooded snake. The song builds a high tempo of the war with different heroes with their weapons fighting for the kingdom of Palnādu. Battle field is a bloody scene with severed heads and bodies and men running hither thither with some running for life. In the middle of the battlefield Bāludu finds Narasigarāju and beheads him but before that he fiercely stabs Bāludu with his sword who dies instantaneously. Thus Bālacandrudu attains a hero's death.

పటపట పండ్లు కొరికె నా...  
వినరా భారత వీరకుమారా...

The *kathakudu* assumes the role of an unknown person who is afraid of Bālacandrudu and surmises in fear and then resumes singing...and ends with a song appealing to the audience to keep encouraging the *burrakatha* performers.

## Annexure III



1. Kalikiturai a decorative ornament used by the *pradhāna kathakudu*.



2. Bramhaiah, the *pradhāna kathakudu* during a performance.



3. *Vidyāvantulu*: one of the *vantalu*.

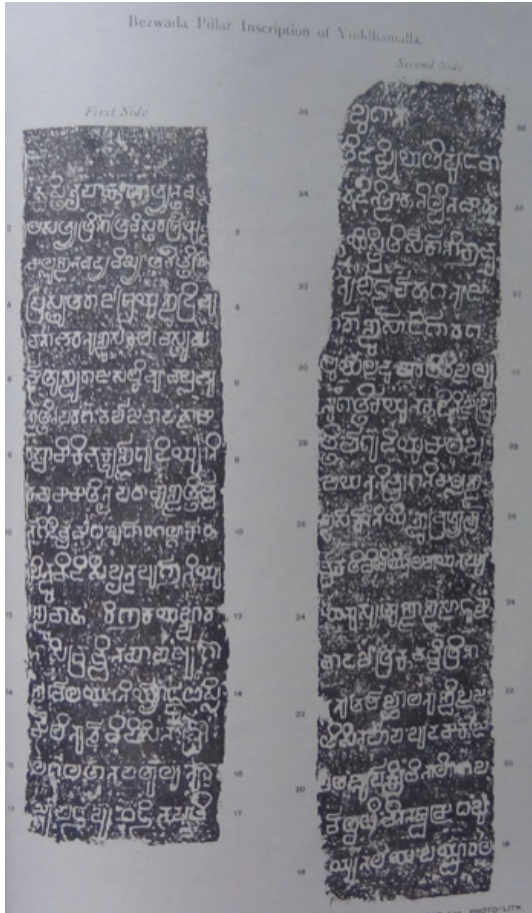


4. The *Vantalu* of the *Vīra Vidyāvantalu*.





5.The *Burrakatha* performers, Babuji, Sheik Mira and Mallikarjuna Sagar getting ready to perform.



6. The three sides of Yuddhamalla's Telugu inscription, taken from *Epigraphia Indica*.

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