

Coconut and Honey: Sanskrit and Telugu in Medieval Andhra

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*Coconut and Honey: Sanskrit and Telugu
in Medieval Andhra¹*

It was January 15, 1517. Kṛṣṇadēvarāya, the Vijayanagara king, who was on his way to invade the Kalinga country, stopped at the temple of god Āndhramahāviṣṇu in Śrīkākuḷam on the bank of the Krishna river. That night the god appeared in his dream.² As reported by Kṛṣṇadēvarāya himself in his *Amuktamālyada*, the god said:

You told the *Story of Madālasā*, exciting connoisseurs of poetry
with skillful similes and metaphors and the trope of true description.
You sang of Satyabhāmā, a poem resonant with rich feeling.
You made a collection of superb stories culled from all ancient books.
You composed the *Gem of Wisdom*, an eloquent work
that dispels residues of darkness in those who hear it.
You astounded us with honeyed poems in the language of the gods,
The Pleasures of Poetry and other essays.
Is Telugu beyond you? Make a book in Telugu
now, for my delight.

Why Telugu? You might ask.
This is the Telugu land.
I am the lord of Telugu.
There is nothing sweeter.

You speak many languages
with kings who come to serve you.
Don't you know?
Among all the languages of the land,
Telugu is best. (*Amuktamālyada* 1-13, 15)

The final statement—*dēsabhāṣa' andu telugu lessa*, “among all the languages of the land, Telugu is best”—has acquired new meaning in the context of post-

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nineteenth-century linguistic nationalism, as a slogan of superiority for Telugu people. It even appears on a postal stamp released by the government as a recognition of Telugu pride.

However, there is no evidence of language serving as symbol of “national” identity before the nineteenth century. There were Telugu-speaking people, Telugu land, and even love of one’s own language—but no Telugu people whose identity was formed by the “mother-tongue”. Indeed, there is no such a word as “mother-tongue” in medieval Telugu.³ The modern *māṭṛbhāṣā* is a loan translation from English. Nor there was any opposition between one regional language and the other; the distinction drawn was always between *devabhāṣā* (the language of gods, Sanskrit), and *desabhāṣās* (the languages of people). It is necessary to steer clear of the language nationalism, which has fueled a major political movement in contemporary Andhra and led to a re-drawing of the map of India along linguistic lines in the post-independence period. Care in distancing premodern language sense from the twentieth-century nationalist formations is especially necessary because modern Telugu intellectuals have read into their literary history a sustaining love of language as a means of establishing national identity and have at the same time erased all existing relationships with neighboring languages.

Going back to the words of the god to Kṛṣṇadēvarāya makes this point clear. The king had already achieved the status of a poet in Sanskrit by virtue of his having authored several books in that language. Being a master of the language of gods, controlling a language of humans should be easy for him. But then, while there exist a number of human languages, why choose Telugu?

It should be remembered that Kṛṣṇadēvarāya was not born in the Telugu area. He was a Tuḷuva, from an area of southwestern Karnataka. As the god himself says, he is a Kannada *rāya*—a Karnataka king, though a Telugu speaker all the same. Apparently he spoke more than one language, and found that speaking Telugu made it easier for him to rule what was largely a Telugu area.

The politics of the empire were crucial here to the choice of language. Sanskrit is the language of pride and power. It is already enshrined in the hearts of the scholarly world as a language of great glory. All the great books—*vedas*, *sāstras*, *itiḥāsas* and *kāvya*s—are in that language. What is more, it is the only language that can confer on Kṛṣṇadēvarāya the status of a *ḷṣatriya* in the four-*varṇa* ideology of the Brahminic/Hindu world. In his own locality, Kṛṣṇadēvarāya was only a peasant and, if legends are to be believed, a low-caste peasant at that. But he was a peasant-warrior with aspirations to kingship. Outside his language area, his status did not translate into anything intelligible or respectable. One would not know where to place a Tuḷu Nāyaka in the regional hierarchy of an area outside Karnataka. On the other hand, the pan-Indian categories of status are well-established in the four classes: Brāhmana, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Sūdra. Brahmins,⁴ve obsessively carried the learning of Sanskrit books over generations, created a wider viability to Sanskrit and the Brahminic ideology. It would thus be possible for Kṛṣṇadēvarāya to adopt Kṣatriya status, which in turn can be conferred upon him by the Brahmins. This dialectic of mutual construction—Brahmins conferring the status of Kṣatriyahood

on kings and the Kṣatriyas making Brahmins powerful by their patronage—is predominantly the story of Brahmin ideology in premodern India.⁵

We should pause briefly to observe the nature of this Brahmin class, without understanding which we cannot get an idea of the power of ideology in pre-modern India. Here is a class of people, unlike any other class, who are unusually mobile, in a sense uninterested in acquiring roots in any locality, and therefore no threat to any local peasant or landowner. What they carried with them is an obsessive dedication to the vedic chants—which they preserved in oral tradition with phenomenal patience—to the *sāstra* texts, especially grammar, to the great epics of *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and to a host of literary texts of poets like Kālidāsa. The power of Sanskrit is partly derived from the wide distribution of Brahmins all over the Indian subcontinent and the cultural influence they wielded in working with the local religious and political groups—in some sense “converting” them and their deities to what we now call, for lack of a more suitable word, Hinduism. While preserving their Sanskrit intact, the Brahmins were also proficient in learning the local languages, sometime more than one, and composing poetry in them. Images of a cultural militia, or of an ideological army, would not be too far-fetched to apply to the Brahmins of premodern India, when one sees the scale of their operation and the constancy of their ideological message. Kṛṣṇadēvarāya thus showed profound pragmatism in demonstrating his expertise in Sanskrit and his patronage of Brahmins both as political allies and religious leaders. There was considerable evidence of history before him to show the wisdom of this move. Nearly every family who have aspired to royal status on a scale larger than their limited native locality—Colas, Cālukyas, and Kākatiyas—sought the support of Sanskrit-chanting Brahmins to elevate themselves to the status of Kṣatriyas. Elite and wealthy establishments such as the Śrīvaiṣṇava *maths* (monasteries) patronized and expounded in Sanskrit. Moreover, Brahmins and their Sanskrit texts were predominant in imaging a pan-Indian empire, an empire “encircled by four oceans,” which includes a wide geographical/mythological area—an area that could be as large as South Asia.

In a curious way, the distance and the aura that Sanskrit had acquired were related to its unintelligibility. The Vedas and all the prescriptive texts of Sanskrit, including its venerated grammar, derived their power precisely from their being distanced from the ordinary person. However, their ideological impact would not be felt if they were not made somehow accessible. In fact a number of Sanskrit texts, like the Vedas, were considered too pure to be made accessible to the uninitiated, that is, the non-Brahmins. It was in this context that the *mārga* poet—the elevated Sanskritized author—came in. He wrote and commented, interpreted retellings of such texts that could be brought closer to the people—without defiling their purity. Massive retellings of *purāṇa* texts, among which the *Mahābhārata* was the first, were undertaken by a host of Brahmin poets between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, an activity that has gone on virtually unabated right into the twentieth century. The *purāṇas* were not just translated, they were performed in temples and other religious establishments for public hearing, thus bringing the retold Telugu texts closer to the

audience for whom they were intended. Thus, the distance between the unintelligible Sanskrit texts and the audience was systematically bridged—without compromising the pure status of Sanskrit texts. It was an ideal situation where you could have your cake and eat it too. The Sanskrit texts retained their high status and at the same time were made available to the audience through their retellings.⁶

The retellings are not just “translations,” as is sometimes supposed. To take the Telugu example, what Nannayya or Tikkanna did in retelling the *Mahābhārata* in Telugu was to create a domestic *Mahābhārata*, transformed to a regional story of medieval south India, that could happen in any south Indian kingdom or, for that matter, any large joint family. These retellings reinterpreted the Sanskrit texts and at the same time created an elevated and regional discourse and values. This explains why Kṛṣṇadēvarāya chose to represent himself a scholar of Sanskrit and also a creator of an elevated Telugu text. Something more can be learnt from Kṛṣṇadēvarāya’s own statements regarding his choice of Telugu. The following passage in *Āmuktamālyada* reflects a complex ambivalence that marked his relationship with the landed lords of his kingdom, whose language was Telugu. Here Kṛṣṇadēvarāya recommends a course of action for a successful king. He clearly trusts the Brahmins but is a little wary of non-Brahmin (Telugu-speaking) lords:

The king should never go to battle himself. He should elevate someone else to the level of a lord, and send him. It has to be someone strong, equipped with money, land, elephants, and horses. Give him fortified lands. But if such a person is a non-Brahmin, he will soon become a rival. Still, you need him too.⁷

Kṛṣṇadēvarāya’s choice of Telugu was a political choice. He wanted to please the local speakers of Telugu by calling their language “sweet.” He needed their support, as well as the support of Sanskrit. His praise for Telugu is carefully nuanced: the comparison is only between Telugu and other regional languages. As for Sanskrit, it is on a different plane. As the language of gods, it is not in opposition with Telugu or with any other language of the land.

THE ŚAIVA PROTEST

We have to go back a few centuries to detect anything like a hint of conflict between Telugu and Sanskrit—indeed, not just centuries, we also have to cross the boundaries of religion, into the militant Śaiva religion of Basaveśvara of twelfth-century Karnataka, who advocated a creed without caste barriers and gender discriminations. His thirteenth-century follower Pāṅkuriki Sōmanātha is the first to find Sanskrit alienating. He reasons that Sanskrit and books composed in Sanskrit meters are not accessible to ordinary people. He says in his *Basavapurāna*:

Telugu is simple, beautiful to hear.
It reaches all, unlike these big words of verse and prose.

I will therefore sing in *dvipada* couplets. A good poet makes great meaning with small words.⁸

By “big words of verse and prose,” Sōmanātha means the *Mahābhārata* composed in a genre called *campū*, a genre of verse interspersed with rhythmic prose, by Nannayya (eleventh century), who later came to be revered as the first poet of the Telugu literary canon. The genre and style created by Nannayya became the standard for *mārga* poets. Nannayya was a Brahmin and a respected Sanskrit scholar of his time in the court of King Rājarājanarēndra who ruled the central Andhra deltaic region. In all probability he was not local to Rajamahēndravaramu (modern day Rajahmundry on the east coast of Andhra), but migrated with his Tamil-speaking king of the Eastern Cālukya dynasty as his family priest. The king himself was not very strong and stable in his empire, and his rule was rather short-lived. This was the underlying cultural context for Sōmanātha’s thirteenth-century rebellion against Sanskrit forms of literature and Brahmin superiority.

Sōmanātha composed in meters close to Telugu women’s songs, *dvipada* “couplets.” Sōmanātha’s movement had all the potential of blossoming into conflict not just on linguistic lines, but also on caste and religious lines. Considering the fact that Sōmanātha was leading a militant anti-Brahminic Śaiva movement, Sanskrit now could become synonymous with Brahmin superiority and Brahmin religion. The potential battle lines are clear:

Bhavis (non-Śaivas)	vs.	Śaivas
Mārga (Sanskritic)	vs.	Dēśi (Indigenous)
Brahmin	vs.	low-caste

However, matters were not that simple. For one thing, Sōmanātha himself did not maintain a consistently anti-Sanskrit stance. His position against Sanskrit meters and the *campū* genre is based on a rationale of easy accessibility. It was in the interest of reaching common readers, especially the “left-hand” groups of artisans and petty traders, that he chose the indigenous *dvipada* couplet meter. Further, there is an unmistakable sense of inferiority he feels in using Telugu:

*telugu māṭalanaṅga valadu. vēdamula
koladiyakā jūḍuḍu....*

Don’t just say
these words are only Telugu; look at them
as Veda.

The communities of people for whom Sōmanātha intended his poetry remained on the periphery of the political system in Andhra (although in Karnataka, to the west, they briefly captured the political center at Kalyan). Moreover, the militant Śaiva message of the *Basavapurāna* presented no program for the acquisition of political power. It offered no role for a king, and no ideology of kingship. In this sense, it makes a striking contrast to the role of Sanskrit and Sanskrit poetry in the construction of political roles for the “right-hand,” land-based communities.

MĀRGA AND DĒŚI

By the time Sōmanātha was writing, Telugu as a language had hardly begun its literary career. To have any status as a literary language, it needed the support of Sanskrit. If Sanskrit is the *mārga*, the “path,” Telugu could only hope to be *dēśi*, “local” or “regional,” if it did its job right. Unlike Tamil, which had a secure and respectable past and sat by the side of Sanskrit as an equal, Telugu had to claim maturity by incorporating from the language of the gods and, by extension, of Brahmins, the gods on earth.

We have on the authority of Nannecōḍa (a twelfth-century poet) that Telugu poetry began as *dēśi* under the patronage of the Cālukyās, who ruled central Andhra during the tenth and eleventh centuries.⁹ But in contrast with Pāḷkuriki Sōmanātha, who developed a more distinctly indigenous style, the courtly poetry of Nannayya became *mārga* itself. From then on, *mārga* and *dēśi* come to mark a distinction in Telugu styles, one more Sanskritic and the other more indigenous. We can see, in centuries that follow, *mārga* poetry receiving more and more patronage from kings and patrons assuming kingly status—which include even deities of temples—while *dēśi* poetry was left more or less as its poor cousin. Though cultivated by poets of high family status like Gōṇa Buddhāreḍḍi, who composed *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa* in *dvipada*, and Kaṭṭā Varadarāju, who composed another *Rāmāyaṇa* in *dvipada* (more about this later), this meter has an unmistakably low status in the eyes of scholars. An oft-quoted segment of a poem from a forgotten source even condemns *dvipada* by grouping it with an old whore, a backyard sewer, and a patron who does not pay.¹⁰

According to legends recorded some three hundred years after Sōmanātha, *dvipada* seems to have faced severe opposition even during the time of the militant author of *Basavapurāṇa*:

Some Śaiva devotees were reading the *Basavapurāṇa* in the Siva temple at Ōrugallu [Warangal]. The Kākatiya King Pratāparudra, who happened to go to the temple at that time, inquired what was going on there. Brahmins who were with the king said that some Śaiva devotees were listening to a reading of *Basavapurāṇa*. When the king wanted to know more about it, an evil Brahmin told him that it was a recent work composed by the sinner Pāḷkuriki Sōmanātha, who had made it in extended *dvipada* couplets with poor caesura (*madhyavaḷḷu peṭṭi penace dvipada*); it was substandard and did not deserve the king’s respect. The king left without paying any more attention to the text.¹¹

With Tikkanna, another thirteenth-century Brahmin poet who retold large parts of the *Mahābhārata*, the militant Śaiva non-Brahmin protest against Sanskrit had been effectively diffused. Tikkanna called himself *ubhaya-kavi-mitra*, a friend of both schools of poets—the Śaiva-Telugu and the Brahminic-Sanskrit. He used a predominantly Telugu style in a text composed in Sanskritic meters. His influence on later generations of poets was enormous. He was not just a poet but also a politician: as the minister of Manumasiddhi, he negotiated and gained the military

support of the mighty Kākatiya king in behalf of his (Tikkanna's) patron. Legends also tell us that Tikanna was effective in having the Kākatiya king annihilate the Jaina temples.¹²

Meanwhile, as we have seen, Sōmanātha's *dvipada* meter itself had lost some of its non-Brahminic Śaiva identity when it was borrowed by authors like Buddhāreḍḍi (fourteenth century) for telling the *Rāmāyaṇa* story, hardly a non-Brahminic narrative. The *dēśi* style of literature continued to thrive, but as a quiet complement to the dominant *mārga* style, which flourished in the courts of royal patrons and even rich temples. So much so that when Annamayya (1408-1503) sang for the god on Tirupati hill in southern Andhra, he had no difficulty in using *dēśi* meters for his Telugu songs while composing songs in Sanskrit in the same vein.

SEPARATION OF STYLES

Thus *dēśi* and *mārga* became complements to each other rather than contestants, as Sōmanātha might have intended them to be. But the awareness that Sanskrit and Telugu represent two distinctly different styles even within the *mārga* category persisted. This is demonstrated with great expressive power in a long metapoetic poem attributed to Peddanna, the court poet of Kṛṣṇadēvarāya, which highlights the distinct separation of Telugu and Sanskrit styles. According to the legend, Kṛṣṇadēvarāya offered a golden anklet, *gaṇḍapenderamu*, to any poet who could excel in composing verses in Sanskrit and Telugu with equal ease. Peddanna accepted the challenge and came up with this extempore verse in *utpala-mālikā*. The king, stunned by the extraordinary performance, personally honored the poet by himself putting the golden anklet on the poet's feet. Here is the poem:

*pūta meruṅgulun basaru pūpabeḍangulu jūpunatti' vā
kaitalu jaḡgu niggu nena gāvale gammuna gammananvalen
rātiriyun baval marapurāni hoyal celi yārajampu nid-
dātariṭipulōyanaga dārasilanvale lō dalañcinan
bātiga baikonanvalenu baidali kuttukalōni pallaṭi
kūtalananvalen sogasu kōrkulu rāvale nālakiñcinan
jētikolandi kaugītanu jērcina kanniya cinni ponni mēl
mūtala cannudōyivale muccaṭa gāvale baṭṭi cūcinan
dātoḍan' unna minnula miṭṭarapu muddula gumma kamman' au
vātera donḍapaṇḍuvale vācavigāvale banta nūdinan
gātala dammicūlidora kaivasapun javarāli sibbepun
mēteli yabburampu jigi nibbarap' ubbagu gabbigubba pon-
būtala nunna kāyasari poḍimi kinnera mēlubanti san-
gātapu sannatanti bayakārapu kannāḍa gauḷa pantukā
sātata tāna tānala pasan divuṭāḍeḍu gōṣa miṣu bal
mrōtalununbalen haruvu mollamu gāvale naccatengu ṭi
ritiga samskr̥tamb' upacariñceḍu paṭṭuna bhārativadhū-
ṭitapanīyagarbhanikaṭibhavadānanaparvasāhiti-
bhautikanāṭakaprakārabhāratābhāratasammata*

*prabhāśītanagātmaṅgirisasēkharasītmayūkharekhi kapātasudhā-
 prapūrabahubhaṅgaghūmaghumaghūmaghumārḥatī-
 jātakatālayugmalayasaṅgaticuñcuvipañcikāmṛdaṅ-
 gātataṭēhitatāhitahādhitadhimḥanudhānudhimdhimi
 vrātanayānukūlapadavārakuhūdvahahārīkīnī
 nūtanaghalghalācarānanūpurajhāḷajhaḷīmarandasaṅ-
 ghātaviyaddhūnicakacakadvikacōtpalasārasaṅgrahā-
 yātakumārāgandhavahahārisugandhāvilāsayuktamai
 cētamu jallajēyavale jillana jallavalen manōhara
 dyōtakagostanīphalamadhudravagōghṛutapāyasaprasā-
 dātīrasaprasāraruḥiraprasarambuga sāre sārekun.*

Is poetry a surface sheen,
 the green delusion of unfolded buds?
 It must be real inside
 and out, exploding fragrance,
 an aching touch your body can't forget
 by day or night, like of your woman,
 whenever you think about it.
 It should come over you, it should murmur
 deep in the throat, as your lover in her dove-like moaning,
 and as you listen, yearning comes in all its beauty.
 If you take hold of it, your fingers tingle
 as if you were tracing the still-hidden breasts
 of a young girl, wholly embraced.
 If you sink your teeth into it, it should be succulent
 as the full lips of a ripe woman from another world,
 sitting on your knees. It should ring
 as when godly Sound strokes with her fingernails
 the strings of her *vina*, with its golden bulbs resting
 on her proud, white, pointed breasts,
 so that the *raga*-notes resound.
 That is the pure Telugu mode.

If you use Sanskrit, then a rushing, gushing
 overflow of moonlight waves, luminous and cool,
 from Siva's crest, the mountain-born goddess beside him,
 enveloping actors and their works, the dramas
 spoken by Speech herself in the presence of the Golden Seed,
 pounding out the powerful rhythms, the beat
 of being, through drums and strings
 and chiming bells and thousands of ringing anklets
 dancing, drawing out the words, the fragrant and subtle
 winds wafting essence of unfolding lotus
 from the Ganges streaming in the sky should

comfort your mind. You should shiver
 in pleasure again and again, each time
 you hear it, as rivulets of honeyed juices and butter
 and sweet milk flow together
 and mix their goodness more and more
 and more.

What we offer here in translation does not reflect the exuberant texture of the poem, which dramatically demonstrates the variation in Telugu and Sanskrit styles, the first with soft, lyrical and intimately murmuring syllables and the second with its high-sounding Sanskrit phrases, infused with the energy of repeated aspirates in an increasingly dense compound. This second style retains the attention and marvel of the listeners even though they are almost certainly unable to follow the precise meaning of this intricately woven and immensely long Sanskrit compound, the like of which one rarely sees even in Sanskrit texts.

Both the marked separation and the close proximity of Sanskrit and Telugu are well-established features in all Telugu literary texts of the *mārga* class, right from Tikkanna onwards. Each poet paid respects to the poets before him (*pūrva-kavistuti*) in the preface to his work. As a matter of convention, respect was always offered to the Sanskrit poets first—Vyāsa, Kālidāsa, Bhavabhūti, Bāṇa and so on—followed by the great poets of Telugu: Nannayya, Tikkanna, Errāpragaḍa and others. The choice of poets is fairly constant through a period of about eight hundred years, indicating a firmly established canon, always including an equally well-established respect for Sanskrit.

Along with this awareness of separation between Sanskrit and Telugu, there was also a certain sensitivity to the problem of going too far one way or the other. Śrīnātha, the great fifteenth-century poet, is fully aware of the problem of being too Sanskritic in his style. Legend has it that his translation of Śrīharṣa's *Naiṣadhiya-carita* was severely criticized for being too Sanskrit. According to a popular joke, Sanskrit scholars approached Śrīnātha and said: "Take your Telugu case suffixes (*du, mu, vu* and *lu*) and give us our Sanskrit text back." Śrīnātha used long Sanskrit compounds as they appear in the original Sanskrit text verbatim, with only a Telugu suffix added to them. He seems to have anticipated such a criticism:

Śrīharṣa's learned poem
 is juicy and meaty as a ripe coconut.
 You have to break it open
 to taste it.
 Lazy readers can't appreciate it.
 That's how it is.
 When a young woman strokes the cheek of a little boy
 with her fingernail,
 does his heart start pounding
 with love?¹³

Again, in his later work, *Bhīmēśvara-purāṇamu*, Śrīnātha states:

Seeing its erudition, some say it's tough as Sanskrit.
 Hearing the idiom, others say it's nothing but simple Telugu.
 Let them say whatever they want. I couldn't care less.
 My poetry is the true language of this land.

The problem of style does not get resolved. Poet after poet returns to this problem and attempts to resolve it, each in his/her own way. Potanna, of about the same time as Srinātha, tries to be gentle and friendly to both the camps, Sanskrit and Telugu:

Some like Telugu, others like Sanskrit
 and yet others like both languages.
 I will try to please all of them,
 with varying styles in different places.

And Koravi Gōparāju (ca. 16th century) even complains:

If I write lucidly in Telugu, they say
 the poem is not tight, it is too soft, lacks strength.
 If I use Sanskrit with some force,
 they complain it is thorny as *darbha* grass
 and don't listen to it.

So, I will make a judicious mix
 of Telugu and Sanskrit words.¹⁴

Molla, a poetess who produced a version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, tells us in her introduction:

When a drop of honey touches the tongue,
 your whole mouth is filled with sweetness.
 The whole sense of a poem
 should fill you all at once.
 A poem composed with arcane words
 is a dialogue
 of the deaf and the dumb.

Gūḍha-sabdamanu gūrcina kāvyamu, "a poem composed with arcane words," must indicate that a high proportion of obscure Sanskrit words are woven into the Telugu text, as is frequent in Telugu court-poetry.

Nearly every major Telugu poet, especially those who aspired to recognition in royal courts, has declared his competence in Sanskrit *sāstras*. Poets like Srinātha professed profound knowledge in all branches of learning as well as their skill in making poetry in both Sanskrit and Telugu. By convention, scholarship meant scholarship in Sanskrit texts, and poetic skills meant competence in Telugu poetry. This distinction between creativity and scholarship often implied that if a poet were not also a scholar, he or she was a poor poet. Such a poet rarely entered a king's court where Sanskrit scholarship reigned supreme. Proud challenges were issued by pandits to other pandit-poets, and there are reports of public disputations and great

royal honors. The famous disputation between the Telugu poet Srinātha and the Orissa poet Diṇḍima in the court of the Vijayanagar king Praudhadēvarāya is one such instance celebrated in Telugu literary texts. Diṇḍima had a bronze drum made as a demonstration of his undisputed superiority among scholars. Srinātha defeated Diṇḍima and had his bronze drum broken into pieces. However, excessive superiority of Sanskrit scholarship was met with opposition, as is reflected in the following popular legend:

Once, a Sanskrit scholar came to the court of Kṛṣṇadēvarāya and saw all the poetry in Telugu being read there. Impatient with the position Telugu acquired in the court, the Sanskrit pandit blurted out:

āndhrabhāṣāmayam kāvyam ayomayavibhūṣanam

A poem in Telugu is like an ornament made of iron—

Tenāli Rāmalinga, the scholar-poet and court jester, immediately retorted:

samskṛtāranyasañcārividvanmattebhaṣṛṅkhalam

a perfect chain to restrain
pandits prowling like wild elephants
through the Sanskrit jungle trails.

Another, again parodic, formulation of this tension comes from Vallabharāya's *Kṛiḍābhirāmamu* (early fifteenth century). Vallabharāya refers to Sanskrit's alleged status as the mother of all languages, and to the choice of Telugu for practical purposes:

*janani samskṛtambu sakalabhāṣalakunu dēsabhāṣal' andu denugu lessa
jagati dalli kae saubhāgya-sampada meccu! āqubidḍa melu gāde*

They say "Sanskrit is the mother of all languages,
but among the languages of the land
Telugu is best." Of course.
Between the aged mother
and the ravishing young daughter,
I'll take the daughter any day!"¹⁵

The satirist is apparently quoting popular statements, including one we have already seen in Kṛṣṇadēvarāya's sixteenth-century text (*dēsa-bhāṣal' andu denugu lessa*). The identification of Sanskrit as the mother of tongues is also found in Kētana's *Āndhra-bhāṣā-bhūṣanam* (thirteenth century).¹⁶ In any case, the satire drives home the point that Telugu is to be preferred—again for entirely mundane reasons!

The position of other regional languages in the medieval period is also worth investigating. We know that poets knew more than one regional language and often were influenced by poets and texts from various languages of the region. Srinātha makes a proud declaration of his competence in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Saurāṣeni, and other languages. By other languages, he means the rest of the *aṣṭa-bhāṣās*, eight

languages: Māgadhī, Paiśāci, Cūlika, Apabhraṃśa, and Telugu. Poets prided themselves as being capable of composing in these eight languages: *aṣṭa-bhāṣā-kaviśvara*.¹⁷ We know from Srinātha's descriptions that the ministers of his time were veritable polyglots. They knew a number of languages including Arabic, Persian and Turkish, Kannada, Gujarati and Malayalam.¹⁸ An interesting tidbit that might be noted here is that people who ridiculed other languages were supposed to be punished by the king with a fine of one hundred *panas*, and that *arava* is cited as a derogatory word for Tamil!¹⁹

THE LATE-MEDIEVAL CRYSTALLIZATION

There seems to be a significant shift in the status of Telugu and Sanskrit in works composed during the late-medieval period (especially the seventeenth century). During this time, when Telugu-speaking Nāyakas ruled a predominantly Tamil-speaking area of South India, Telugu acquired a status almost similar to that of Sanskrit in the preceding centuries. Now Telugu assumes a position in the court as an intellectual language. *Purāṇas* and *sāstras*, grammars and books on poetics were written in Telugu. Sanskrit was still used, but it was not necessarily the only means of elevating one's status. Telugu was good enough for that purpose. The contrast between Sanskrit and Telugu styles came to occupy less of the poets' attention, as did the contrast between *mārga* and *dēśi*. In a way, the distinction between these styles became less clear, and the court itself began patronizing *dēśi* or *dēśi*-like texts. The Nāyaka kings themselves wrote *yakṣagānas*, a genre of musical play derived from the *dēśi* tradition. More important still, non-brahman poets became prominent. The court was full of them. While there was no great effort to reduce the importance of Sanskrit or to oppose it, and no visible attempt to oppose the Brahmins, there was an unmistakable importance given to Telugu poets —non-Brahmins at that.

This important change expresses the self-confidence acquired by the non-Brahmin king and a new class of merchant-warriors who initiated far-reaching changes in the political and social order. We argued in our *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nāyaka-Period Tamilnāḍu* (Narayana Rao et al. 1992) that the new order reflects a new set of values in poetry, historiography, and political and cultural institutions. One important change that this new order represented touches on is the status of the king in relation to the Brahmin. The king no longer needed the Brahmin to legitimize his status. The king was god himself, and thus the Brahmin became the god-king's servant rather than his superior. This shift, only briefly stated here, is also reflected in the relative status of Sanskrit and Telugu. In the new royal court, Telugu was the language of the king. However, despite the fact that the king was equated with God, Telugu had not been elevated to the level of the language of gods.

At roughly the same time, but further north, in the village of Kamepalli in the interior of Guntur District, there emerged a very influential scholar-poet, Appakavi. His book, a grammar principally of metrics popularly known as *Appakaviyamu*, held sway over the literary tradition for about three hundred years, right until the rise of

modern movements in Telugu poetry in the early decades of the twentieth century. In the introduction to his book, Appakavi tells us a powerful tale—narrated to him by God himself in a dream—about the allegedly “original” grammar of Telugu, composed in Sanskrit (by the great Nannayya, the first poet himself) and then nearly lost and totally destroyed. This story, perhaps more than any other text, reveals the crystallizing structure of the late-medieval tradition at the stage which perhaps marks its intellectual acme.

The power of Sanskrit in medieval Andhra rested on the respect it had acquired as the language of gods, a position sustained because of the supreme awe in which its grammar had been held. Pāṇini, the great grammarian of Sanskrit, his commentator Patañjali, the author of *Mahābhāṣya*, and Kātyāyana, who contributed the *vārttika* rules — all three were revered as divine beings. Grammar, in this culture, was not merely a set of rules that describe the language; it was the knowledge given by god to create a sanctified language—the very essence of ultimate reality.

Telugu had never had a grammar of that power—not until Appakavi “revealed” it. Appakavi tells us (through the mouth of the god in his dream) that Nannayya composed such a grammar in Sanskrit *sūtras*, which were suppressed by his jealous rival Bhīmakavi, who threw the only copy into the Godavari River. Fortunately, a student of Nannayya’s (Sāraṅadhara) had memorized the whole text. We know Sāraṅadhara’s story from a Telugu *kāvya* composed in seventeenth-century Tanjavur by Cēmakūra Venkaṭakavi, as well as from other sources (Gaurana’s *Nava-nāthacaritra*, late fifteenth century). In these texts, Sāraṅadhara is the object of his stepmother’s sexual advances, which he resists; she then slanders him to his father, the king Rājarājanarendra, who orders his hands and legs cut off. Sāraṅadhara survives the unjust punishment and eventually joins the Siddhas, spiritually powerful healers who live forever. Appakavi hints at this story (without mentioning the seduction episode); he identifies Sāraṅadhara as a Siddha, himself magically healed by Matsyendranātha. As a long-lived Siddha, Sāraṅadhara can thus preserve Nannayya’s grammar over the hundreds of years that divide Nannayya from Appakavi. As Appakavi tells the story, Sāraṅadhara transmits the grammar both to Bālasarasvati, a learned Brahmin from Matanga Hill (at Hampi/Vijayanagara?) who will eventually compose a Telugu *ṭikā* on it, and to another text purports to be a Telugu commentary on the *sūtras* of Nannayya’s lost and restored grammar (although in fact we have only Appakavi’s metrical analysis in full).

This fascinating and complicated story achieves two things: It produces a grammar of great antiquity, written by the very first poet of Telugu, one who has been regarded for centuries as the creator-deity (*vāg-anuśāsana*) of Telugu poetry. And it also gives Appakavi god-given authority to comment on Nannayya’s rules. Now, Telugu has a Pāṇini. The language is on its way to be as sanctified as Sanskrit. Incidentally, the foundational Telugu grammar is also brought into line with the standard view of all major texts—beginning with the Veda itself—as having been lost or fragmented and then at least partially restored.

It is also striking that, according to Appakavi, during the long centuries when

Nannayya's grammar was lost, poets used only such words as were attested in Nannayya's surviving works:

Later a mighty poet, *Kavi-rākṣasa*, in Dakṣāvati made a rule:
Telugu poets must never use a single word unless it is attested
in the *Bhārata* of Nannayya, the lawmaker of language,
since no rules of grammar survived.

From that time on, the great poets of the past, Tikkana and the rest, composed their works following the words and ways of Nannayya, in his three volumes.

Such is the medieval tradition's ultimate view of itself, its prehistory, and its structures of authority. It is in this context that we can also observe the mature tradition's vision of the peculiar merits of Telugu. Appakavi cites the following Sanskrit *sūtra* attributed to Nannayya:

*svasthānaveṣabhāṣābhimatāḥ santo rasapralubhadhiyah
loke bahumanyante vaiṛtakāvyaṇi cānyad apahāya (2)*

"Learned scholars love the language and dress of their region, and have a weakness for aesthetic joy. Therefore they respect poetry in their language, in preference to other languages."

Now Appakavi adds, in his commentary (first reformulating the Sanskrit *sūtra*): Intelligent scholars love the language and dress of their own region, and have a weakness for aesthetic joy. They always take as their own what belongs to their region and have no liking for poetry of other places, because it is not immediately evocative. Poetry of each region is good for that region, but not appropriate for other areas, whereas poetry in the language of the gods (*amarōktulu*) is good for all lands. Sanskrit books give all four benefits²⁰ for human beings, even if their meaning is not always clear. Although they refer to the stories of Viṣṇu, the beautiful texts of another regional language²¹ cannot bring release if you don't experience their flavor or their meaning. Poetry in the language of your own region gives the same benefits as Sanskrit to its readers. Women and *śūdras* who know no Sanskrit will need to have texts retold to them in their own language. The language of the barbarians (*mlecchabhāṣā*) is despised by the Veda, but still should not be rejected in disgust, because without it daily life will be affected (*Appakaviyamu* 1.60-67).

Here the linguistic map is fully worked out and arranged in accordance with its new hierarchies and the values of the late-medieval system. Sanskrit gives benefit no matter what—whether it is intelligible or not. Tamil poetry for Viṣṇu would perhaps count as useful, if only it could be understood. Telugu—the obvious paradigm for a regional language—is equal to Sanskrit, autonomous, worthy of complete respect. Poetry in the regional language has its own necessity—it communicates Sanskrit texts to women and non-Brahmins. Finally, even barbaric tongues such as Arabic and Persian have a utilitarian value and should not be left out.

Still, complaints against difficult Sanskrit continue right into the modern period.

Let me conclude with a poem parodying Viśvanātha Satyanārāyaṇa, who is known for his hard-to-follow Sanskrit style:

Torture us, please,
impossible poet,
with your exuberance of stunning words
and delicious feeling slightly mixed
with bitter dryness. We need jaws of stone
to grind the elevated phrases you utter with ease
as you tease us through your labyrinths,
books cooked to the texture of rock.²²

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. I am deeply indebted to David Shulman, whose insights and scholarship have greatly enriched this paper. All translations are done in collaboration with him.
2. The date is suggested by Cāgaṅṭi Sēshayya. See his note in his grandfather Vēdam Venkaṭarāya Śāstri's edition of *Āmuktamālyada* (1964:21).
3. An undated medieval Tamil verse ascribed to the poetess Auvaiyār does use the Tamil term *rāymoli*, "mother tongue":

*aimporuḷum nārporuḷum mupporuḷum pey' amaitta
cemporuḷai emmaraikkum cepporuḷait taṅkurukūrc
ceymoliya t'enpar cilariyan ivvulakil
raymoliya t'enpen takaintu*

Five, four, three,
and the one, beyond all knowledge,
that flows through them all—

it belongs
in a distant tongue

in this temple of Kurukūr,
or so they say,

but as for me, it's all there
in my mother tongue.

[Five elements, four goals of human life, the three great gods—Śiva, Viṣṇu, Brahmā—all these are externalizations of true being (poruḷḷ) identified as the god at the temple of Tirukkukūr. When the poetess Auvaiyār arrived there, she was drawn into a discussion as to the relative merits of Sanskrit and Tamil in the liturgy. This verse is her response.]

4. By Brahmins, I intend the *varṇa* category, and not the many endogamous groups generally known by the cover word brahmin. Just as only a few of the many endogamous groups of peasants acquired the *varṇa* status of the Kṣatriya, only a small number of the endogamous groups of brahmins acquired the *varṇa* status of the Brahmin in premodern India.
5. See Rao and Heifetz 1987:131-36 for another discussion of the relationship between the king and his court poet in medieval Andhra.
6. For the ideological nature of Sanskrit purāṇas see Rao 1993:85-100.
7. *dharaṇipuḍ' endunē dagadu tā janana ūraṭak' okkanin dagun doran onariñci pampan ari durbaluce jedaḍ' ātaḍ' artha-bhū-kari-turagārdhhi lēka kōragāḍ' aṣu sēya dvijāmyuḍ' alkakun nerav' agun' ātaḍun valayu niḍina durga-balōrvi yḷ dagun.*
Amuktamāhyada 4.155.
8. *urutara-gadya-padyōktula kante sarasamai paragina jānudenuṅgu carcimpagā sarva-sāmānyam' aguṭa gūrceda dvipadalu gōrki daivāra.... alpāksaramulan analpārtharacana kalpiñciṭuaya kāde kavi vivēkambu*
Pāḷkuriki Sōmanātha, *Basavapurāṇa* 1.165-74.
9. "While *mārga* poetry flourished in the world from times long ago, the Cāḷukya king and many others made *deśi* poetry in Telugu stand firm in the Andhra area" (Nannecoda, *Kumārasambhavam* 1.23).
10. *yambu mudilañja diḍḍikanta iyyanērani raṇḍa nālg' ēkājāti.*
From a verse in *Veṅugopāla Śatakamu* attributed to Śāraṅgapāṇi (early eighteenth century), but probably written by a later poet at the Kārveṭinagaram court, Pōlipeddi Venkatarāyakavi.
11. Pidaparti Sōmanātha, a devoted follower of Pāḷkuriki Sōmanātha, records this legend in his retelling of the *Basavapurāṇa* in *campū*, a genre from the *mārga* tradition current from the time of Nannayya's *Mahābhārata*, but opposed by Pāḷkuriki Sōmanātha. For further discussion of *mārga* and *deśi*, see Rao and Roghair 1990:3-31.
12. See *Siddhēśvaracaritramu* of Kāse Sarvappa (early seventeenth century).
13. *panivaḍi nārikēla-phala-pakamunan javiyaina bhāṭṭaha-rṣuni kavitaṅgumbhamulu sōmari-pōtulu kondar' ayyal' au-n' ani koniyāḍa nērar' adi yattida lē-javarālu cekku gī-ṭina vasa valcu bālakuḍu ḍendamunan galaganga nērcunē*
Srinātha, *Sṛṅgāranaiṣadhamu* 1.17.
14. *kondaraku denugu guṇamaḡu gondarikini saṃskṛtambu guṇamaḡu reṇḍun gondariki guṇamul' agu nē nandari meppintu gṛtulan ayyai' yeḍalan*
Sṛimahābhāḡavatamu, 1.16.
15. *tenuguna tēḡagā kathalu telpina kāvyamu pondulēdu nēi-tana pasacāladanḍru viśadambuga saṃskṛtaśabdām' ūda jep-pinan avi darbhamaṇḍl' amucu beṭṭaru vīnula gāvunan rucul*

danara denunḡu dēsiyumu dadbhavamun galayaṅga jeppeḡan.

Sihāsanadvātriṃśika, 1.32.

16. *Kriḡābhirāmamu*, 37. My reading differs from the conventional reading by Telugu scholars, who fail to see the parodic tone of the verse.
17. Ketana, *Āndhra-bhāṣa-bhūṣaṅamu* 14, cited in Arudra 1990, 2:158.
18. The regions where the eight languages are spoken are: Sanskrit in heaven, Prakrit in the Maharashtra region, Saurāṣeni in the Surasena region, Māgadhi in Magadha, Paisāci [the demons' language] in the Pāṇḡya, Kekaya, Sālva, Bāhlika, Anūpa, Gandhāra, Nepāla, Kuntala, Sudeṣṇa, Bhoja and Kannoja areas, Paisācika-Cūlikā and Apabhraṃśa in the Ābhīra region, and Telugu in the Āndhra area (*Appakaviyamu*, 1.81).
19. This is how, for instance, Srinātha describes the polyglot capabilities of his patron Areṡi Annaya, a minister of king Allāḡareḡḡi:
*arabī bhāṣa turuṣka bhāṣa gaja karṇāṡā'ndhra gāndhāra ghū-
rjara bhāṣal malayāṡa bhāṣa sakabhāṣa sindhu sauvīra bar-
barabhāṣal karahāṡabhāṣa mariyun bhāṣaviṣeṣambul
accervavai vaccun arēṡi yannaniki gosṡhīsamprayōḡambulan.*
Bhīmeṡvarapurāṅamu 1.73.
"Arabic, Turkish, the languages of Gaja, Karṇāta, Āndhra, and Gandhāra, Gujarati, Malayalam, the Śaka language, the barbarian languages of Sindhu and Sauvira, Konkani, and many others—Areṡi Anna can use them all in royal assemblies."
Another verse also speaks of his beautiful calligraphy in Persian (*pāraṡi-bhāṡā*) on paper (*kākitam*).
20. *murikināṡivāru morakulu penaparu
l'aravavāru dvijulak' āsa pedda
anucu deṡabhāṡalanu kulambunu diṡṡun'
ataḡu daṅḡuvaccu saṡa phaṅamulu.*
Ketana, *Vijñāṡeṡvartiyamu* 2.56 (thirteenth century), as quoted by Arudra 1990, 2:163.
21. *Appakaviyamu pīṡhika*, 46-47.
22. All four benefits: *dharma* (religious merit), *arṡha* (wealth), *kāma* (desire), and *mokṡa* (release).
23. Here Appakavi seems to be referring to the Tamil Vaiṡṇava texts (the *Divyaprabandham*).
24. *kiṡci-tikta-kaṡāya-ṡāḡāba-rasa-kṡēpāṡirēkātivāk-
samcāra-pracayāvakaṡāmulalō kavy-udḡha gandāṡmamul
cañcal-llan' udāṡṡa-vāḡ-garimatō sādhinci vēdhincumā
pañcārīñci pravahlikā-kṡṡa-kṡṡin pāṡāna-pāka-prabhū*

This verse was composed by Jalasutram Rukminīnātha Sāstri ("Jaruk" Sastri) in ironic praise of the great Viṡvanātha Satyanārayaṅa, whom he regarded as his guru. The texture of rock (*pāṡana-pāka*) is a parodic addition to the well-known three textures (*pāka*, literally "cooking to a certain consistency"): *drākṡa-pāka*, "the grape," as in a poem savored without effort; *kadalī-pāka*, "the banana," which requires peeling before tasting; and *nārikēṡa-pāka*, "the coconut," where the thick fibrous exterior has to be removed and then the hard nut broken open.