

Velcheru Narayana Rao

Multiple lives of a text:
The *Sumati śatakamu* in colonial Andhra

The nineteenth century was undoubtedly a particularly eventful period in Indian history. This was the century when British rule in India consolidated itself and – after the turbulence of 1857–58 – eventually emerged confidently, not just as the inheritor of the fortunes of a trading company that had ‘accidentally’ found India falling into its lap, but as an agency that had accepted the responsibility to bring India from barbarity into a civilized state. Interactions between Britain and India – the former at the peak of its civilizational achievements and the latter in a perceived state of decline – produced monumental results that are open to varieties of interpretation. India received from British rule the mixed benefits of industrialization, English education, print culture, the ideas of the Enlightenment, Victorian sensibilities, Christian morality and a number of other features which add up to a phenomenon that may be called colonial modernity. And these ideas led in turn to a momentous paradigm shift in Indian thought and a world-view resulting in the formation of what we call modern India.

I want to focus on two features among the many that are said to have ushered in modernity: one is print and the other is public education. In this essay, I examine the impact of both of these new developments on Indian text-culture. The Gutenberg revolution and its influence on India is too large a subject for me to cover in a mere essay, so I want to be modest in studying the fortunes of one text, the *Sumati śatakamu*,¹ a Telugu work, through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By means of examining this one text and its use in public education, I will present the epistemological shifts that colonial modernity brought about in Indian text-culture. I have called this ‘colonial modernity’ to distinguish it from another modernity India had experienced before the colonial version, a subject about which I have written elsewhere.²

¹ Sreenivas Paruchuri and V. S. T. Sayee found and made accessible in record time a number of printed texts of *Sumati śatakamu* dating from the early decades of the 20th century, as well as many obscure secondary sources. Macca Haridasu gave me a copy of his notes about the manuscripts of *Sumati śatakamu*. I am deeply grateful to them for their assistance. Manuscripts of SS were inaccessible to me when I wrote this article. My conclusions should therefore be considered tentative and subject to revision after further research. Parts of this essay draw upon Narayana Rao and Subrahmanyam 2008: 25–65.

² See my afterword to Apparao 2007.

One of the responsibilities that the East India Company undertook was to open schools to teach the natives so they might grow up to be upright subjects. The responsibilities of public instruction gave new powers to the government – of deciding what to teach. By that time, those Indian intellectuals who were trained in English and were enjoying the benefits of their education by landing lucrative jobs in the service of the English East India Company were already convinced of the superiority of British culture. There was a general agreement in their minds that Indians lack morals. Vennelakanti Subbarao (1784–1839), translator for the *Sadr adālat* of the Madras Presidency, a Telugu Niyogi Brahman who rose to the highest post a native could aspire to in the East India Company administration at the time, felt that Indian children should be taught two things: namely, grammar and morals. When he was appointed to the Madras School Book Society, he submitted a report in 1820 on the state of teaching in schools. Addressing the need for teaching morals he recommended that “tales extracted from different books composed chiefly of morals written in modern languages” should be prescribed for study.³

From nīti to morals

Scholars in the service of the East India Company began to scramble for suitable books in Telugu to teach morals to schoolchildren. The closest word they found to ‘morals’ in Telugu and Sanskrit was *nīti*, which had some overlap with the English word in colloquial usage. Assuming that the semantic range of *nīti* and morals were similar, they looked for available texts that could be used to teach *nīti* to school children. The pandits who were associated with the East India Company were competent in Sanskrit and classical Telugu. Based on the general consensus among them that *Pañcatantra* stories were best suited for children, Ravi-pati Gurmurti Sastri retold them in Telugu in 1834 for classroom use. In 1853, Cinnaya Suri rewrote them in what he considered grammatically proper Telugu, under the title *Nīti-candrika*.⁴ The *Pañcatantra* is a well-known book of fables in Sanskrit. Vishnuśarman, its author, had vowed to educate the three idiot sons of a king to make them experts in government

³ Subbarao 1976: 65–75.

⁴ The circumstances that led the *Pañcatantra* fables to be taught to school children are not clear. We, however, know that Cinnaya Suri, who worked as Telugu Headmaster in the Madras University, wrote these fables in a grammatically-acceptable high-flown Telugu. He gave his book a title in English, *Neeti Chandrika or Moral Stories*, which he “Respectfully Dedicated as A Mark of Respect” to A. J. Arbuthnot Esq. Secretary to the Madras University, and College of Fort Saint George. Virabhadra Rao 1986: 239–240.

in six months and wrote this book for that purpose, and not exactly to teach them morals.⁵ Problems of cultural translation are already apparent in the choice. *Nīti* is a concept for which as Arthur W. Ryder, the translator of *Pañcatantra* into English perceptively notes, there is no equivalent in European languages:

The word *nīti* means roughly “the wise conduct of life.” Western civilization must endure a certain shame in realizing that no precise equivalent of the term is found in English, French, Latin, or Greek. Many words are necessary to explain what *nīti* is, though the idea, once grasped, is clear, important and satisfying.⁶

The concept of *nīti* in these stories relates to political policy and strategies suitable for worldly success. It is not in any way related to moral instruction as was understood by colonial administrators, or Christian intellectuals. But this did not deter scholars from teaching these stories for that purpose.

A Telugu book on *nīti*

In 1846, Puduri Sitarama Sastri (Tel. pudūri sitārāma śāstri) compiled his famous *Pēdda bāla śikṣa*, (or the “big book to teach small children”). This book, reprinted again and again for decades, contains moral sayings composed by the author. *Nīti* now acquired a new meaning as a code of morals. Some of the moral sayings Sitarama Sastri included in his book appear as though they are paraphrased from a book called *Sumati śatakamu*, (hereafter *SS*).⁷ A version of *SS* was first published in 1870 by Adi Sarasvati Mudranalayamu,⁸ a family firm which later became the well-known publishing house, Vavilla Ramaswami Sastrulu and Sons.

⁵ Olivelle 1997.

⁶ Ryder 1962: 5.

⁷ See Sitarama Sastri 1916: 46–47. In their preface, the publishers of this book say that they reprinted the 1847 edition free from the errors and alterations that crept into many of its reprints and published it exactly as it was in 1847 “with only minor changes.”

⁸ Nidadavolu Venkata Rao, in his preface to *Sumati śatakamu* (Venkata Rao 1966: 62), reports that the first edition of *PSS* was published by Adisarasvati on April 20, 1868. Such precise information with the date and month of publication is an unusual piece of knowledge about any book in Telugu, more so about a book published almost a hundred years ago, and Venkata Rao does not say how acquired this information. The year of publication is repeated by Macca Haridasu in his *Tathyamu sumati: parisodhana vyasālu*, (Haridasu 1984: 67) and Arudra in his *Samagra āndhra sāhityam* (Arudra 2002: Vol. 1., 224.) I have not found the 1868 edition in any library, nor have I been able to ascertain from any scholar that this edition actually exists. I take the 1870 edition of *PSS* to be its first edition, until the reported 1868 edition is located.

This edition (hereafter the *PSS*) became popular and was printed by a number of publishers again and again, mostly with no publication dates.

In the course of time, a number of verses from this book began to appear in text-books prescribed for grade school students. *Ananda vācakamu*, a Telugu text book for the 3rd grade, compiled in 1930,⁹ and approved for school use by the director of public instruction contains ten verses from the *PSS* under the heading *nīti padyamulu*, moral verses.¹⁰ Some publishers issued the *PSS* with a sub-title: “Morals suitable to be taught for boys and girls”, but there is an awareness on the part of at least some editors that *PSS* is not actually a book of morals, and many of its verses are unsuitable to be taught to young children. One of the volumes of the *PSS* printed in 1922¹¹ carried instructions to teachers on how to teach the verses and separated the verses that should be taught from those that should not be taught, but a glossary and notes were provided for all the verses anyway.¹²

A guide to success

To put the matter simply, the *Sumati śatakamu* is a guide to success in worldly life, in the same class as the Sanskrit *Pañcatantra*, *Hitopadeśa*, and *Nītisāra*, but without their high profile. It is a humble text by an unknown author, more applicable to real life in villages, written in simple verses that are easy to memorize.

Beginning from the thirteenth century, a number of books on *nīti* were written in Telugu. Verses from these books often served as authoritative sources to provide strategies for success in life for upper-caste men who aspired to be kings. While most *nīti* books concern the conduct of kings, ministers, armies, spies, etc., *SS* differs somewhat from such books in its content. Despite occasional references to kings, the focus of *SS* is the

⁹ This book was actually compiled in 1920 by Kuchi Narasimham and Panuganti Lakshmi Narasimha Rao, even though the edition I have is dated 1930. I was not able to find any older elementary school readers, but it is possible that *SS* verses appeared in them as well.

¹⁰ Schoolbooks do not give their sources, but the verses included in them are identical with verses in *PSS*.

¹¹ *Sumati śatakamu* 1922. A number of editions of *PSS* from 1913 on, are spelled *Sumati śatakamu*, with a long /i/, which is how the title *PSS* is pronounced in popular Telugu. Scholars who insisted on grammatically correct Telugu, who most probably edited the first edition of *PSS* spelled it with a short /i/.

¹² During the early decades of twentieth century a large number of books were written for school children teaching them *nīti*, morals. Between the years 1916–1930, a cursory search yielded 92 books on *nīti* such as *Nīti padyamulu*, moral verses, and *Nīti kathalu*, moral tales and so on. (I thank Sreenivas Paruchuri for this information.)

typical Andhra village with its local landlord, a few Brahmans, people of other upper castes, and courtesans. The *SS* is not the product of a king's court, nor was it intended for people in the court.

The *SS* is in sum a manual for success in life for upper-caste men. It is characterized by its proposal for uninhibited enjoyment of wealth and pleasure. In particular, the *SS* is concerned with sexual pleasure. A number of verses extol sexual enjoyment and belittle those who do not enjoy sex. Women are classified as wives or as courtesans. A courtesan never loves any man, no matter how handsome and skilled in the art of love he may be. Even wives do not care for a husband who does not earn money. As a general rule, the *SS* tells you that a woman should never be trusted, and a man should never confide in her. Without her husband's surveillance, a wife will certainly turn to prostitution. While a housewife is neither trusted nor loved, she is, paradoxically, respected as a goddess, as the magical source of all riches. The goddess of riches refuses to stay in a house where women cry. The man who causes grief to his wife risks losing the family's wealth. Although housewives are treated as goddesses, widows are treated as unworthy of respect. A household should be managed by a wife, not a widow, who is considered to be dangerous.

Socially, the *SS* presents a world of interdependence and tensions, of cooperation and mistrust. Considerable attention is given to the king, but it is likely the book is not dealing with any major rulers. Pompous words like *bhūpāludu*, "ruler of the earth", and *maṇḍalapati*, "lord of the country", are used to describe them. Men from literate castes served as their scribes and ministers. A number of verses in *SS* relate to them. For instance, a kingdom without a competent minister is like an elephant without its trunk. Scribes are advised not to serve a king who is himself literate. A scribe should never trust another scribe. He should be strong and never appear harmless. In the world of the *SS* each caste has its inherent defects, and a person's qualities are determined by birth. A *kṣatriya* is difficult to please, a *vēlama* is undependable, a goldsmith is not trustworthy, a *komaṭi* is a liar. Even Brahmans are censured; a *vaidiki* lacks worldly wisdom, and a *karaṇam* is too full of stratagems to be trusted. Literary skills are extolled; to be able to write good poetry is valued highly but teaching the beauty of poetry to an idiot is like blowing a conch before a deaf person.

Low castes, in particular, are denounced. A low-caste person is variously referred to as *durjāti*, "bad caste person", *nīcuḍu*, "low person", *aviveki*, "unwise man", *pāmaruḍu*, "ignorant person", and *mūrkhudu*, "fool". By nature, they are dishonest. Friendship with them is foolish. If a low-caste person happens to be literate, he should be avoided like an elephant in rut. Low-caste people are specifically discouraged from

saving money; their savings are always confiscated by kings, just as honey saved by bees is taken by people passing by. As a general principle, money exists for enjoyment or for charity. If a fool saves money without enjoying it himself or donating to deserving people, then it is confiscated by kings, stolen by thieves, or lost into the bowels of the earth.

Although the message of the *SS* is largely amoral, it does contain what appear to be moral sayings. For instance, desiring sex with another man's wife is wrong, stealing others' wealth is bad, anger is a person's worst enemy, and so on. In general, the *SS* conforms to the traditional scheme of Hindu life in which the four goals of *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa* are evenly balanced. Everything thus has its place.

A man receives rewards or punishments according to his actions in previous lives. If he performed charitable deeds in his previous life, he is rich in this life, whether or not he works. If he was not generous in his previous life, he is poor in this life, no matter what he does to escape from poverty. In general, everything spoils: love ends in enmity, growth leads to destruction, low prices are replaced by high prices, and happiness is transformed into grief.

Probable readership of the SS

By the seventeenth century, a considerably large section of Brahmans known as *karaṇams* took to political occupations and jobs that required worldly skills instead of the usual Brahman profession of studying religious texts and conducting religious rituals. All of them were literate, some of them were scholars, and composed superior poetry in Telugu. They were good diplomats, and proud of their scribal skills with competence in multiple languages and scripts. They were not always associated with a king's court but an imagined royal court served as a model for their behavior. They composed a substantial body of poetry during this period. To attest to their writing skills, they made copies of their work and promoted them without much support from royal patrons. They were respectfully called *mantris*, ministers of kings, even when they actually did not serve a king. This seems to be the community that produced the *Sumati śatakamu*. True to their nature of not appearing important, but always managing affairs from behind the scenes, the *karaṇam* author[s] of *Sumati śatakamu* did not sign his name.

Despite their humble appearances, the self image of *karaṇams* is quite interesting. One of the verses about a *karaṇam* says:

He writes and reads and speaks intelligently.
 He listens to what people say inside and out.
 He interprets foreign languages to the king,
 and controls the assembly if it goes out of line.
 He says the right words and makes hearts unite,
 and sees right away, honesty from trickery.
 He can bring people together and separate them again
 or favor enemies and offer them the throne.
 He is humble, dignified, skilled and giving.
 That's what a good mantri should be.

Karaṇams are portrayed as confident of their skill in manipulating matters to turn any situation favorable. They can make impossible things possible with their diplomatic skills:

If the king is against you, you need to be friends with the scribe.
 When the god of death Yama was angry and declared a person dead, "gatāyu", didn't Chitrugupta, his scribe, change the 'ga' into a 'sa' and make him live a hundred years, a 'śatāyu'?

The *SS* devotes a number of verses to *karaṇams*. However, the *karaṇams* the *SS* talks about seem to refer to the small group of persons employed in the hereditary position of a village revenue accountant – rather than the broad class mentioned above. *SS* also has several verses against the goldsmiths (*agasālē* caste). A legend that has acquired some acceptance, told by the noted intellectual Arudra,¹³ is that in 1145 CE, a certain Rama Pradhani removed goldsmiths from *karaṇam* positions in some 6,000 villages and employed the Brahman *niyogis* in their place. Reading this legend and the negative representation of goldsmiths in the *SS*, Arudra suspects a certain opposition between *karaṇams* and goldsmiths, whereas Macca Haridasu suggests that the author of *SS* was most certainly a *karaṇam* revenue-accountant from the *niyogi* sub-caste of Brahmins.¹⁴ An earlier scholar Vanguri Subbarao (1924) also thought that the author of *SS* was perhaps from the caste of *karaṇams*, (*mantri kulam*) though he does not categorically say that the author of the *SS* was a *karaṇam* revenue-accountant himself.¹⁵

Whatever the historical truth value of Arudra's reading of this legend, there is a prominent group of *niyogis* called *āruvela vāru*, the six thousand. We don't know the real origin of this name, but in Andhra most village revenue-accountants belonged to this group, which was known for their pride and self-confidence. The poet Kaṅkaṇṭhi Pāparāju, (mid 18th century), who came from this group writes in praise of them:

¹³ Arudra 2002: vol. 1, 227–228.

¹⁴ Haridasu 1984: 52–54.

¹⁵ Subbarao 1924.

They steal the hearts of the members of the courts
 of any king with their learning.
 They give like the wishing tree, the ocean of milk, the legendary Karna and Bali.
 They are known for doing good deeds with no ulterior motive.
 They make the impossible possible to help the master they serve.
 They break the pride of any enemy that stands up to them –
 such are the qualities of the six thousand.¹⁶

However, a close reading of the verses of the *SS* does not seem to support the idea that the author is a *karaṇam* revenue-accountant. The book is critical of the *karaṇam* accountants just as it is critical of all other castes. Its negative representation of goldsmiths reflects the general mistrust of this community prevalent in Andhra and does not reflect any conflict between the Brahmins and goldsmiths. In fact, the *SS* does not seem to carry any personal views of the author, whoever he might be. The text only represents the general perceptions of upper-caste men, their prejudices included. All we can say is that this text is the product of a larger community of upper-caste scribes – whom we may call *karaṇams*. Later in the essay I will discuss the different versions of the *SS* that circulated among different groups of people.

Śataka genre

The *SS* is called a *śataka*, which is a genre containing a notional 100 verses (*śata*). Conventionally it has 108 verses, the first of which begin with the syllable *śrī*, a feature that makes the *śataka* auspicious. Verses in the *śataka* genre are unrelated to each other in terms of a narrative sequence but they are all composed in one kind of meter and carry a common word or phrase at the end of each verse. This is always a vocative, addressing a person or a deity, sometimes the author of the *śataka* himself, and is called *makuṭa*, or crown. The *makuṭa* is the only unifying feature that binds the disparate verses in a *śataka* into one single text. A *śataka* often gets its title by the *makuṭa*, thus the present text is called *Sumati śatakamu* because each of its verses ends in the vocative *sumatī*. *Śatakas* were usually composed by one poet but were almost never read from beginning to end as one unit. Modern scholars classify *śatakas* by their theme – such as *bhakti śatakas*, (which contain verses of devotion to one Hindu god or the other), *nīti śatakas* (which speak of *nīti*), *śrngāra śatakas* (with erotic verses) and so on.¹⁷ The independent nature of the verses in a *śataka*, and their readability make them easy to

¹⁶ Pāparāju 1970: 5.

¹⁷ For instance, see Gopalakrishna Rao 1976.

memorize and recite. Some verses may become more popular than others, and their oral communication from person to person introduces a number of structural and lexical changes in the process. I will have more to say about these changes later.¹⁸ People who recite the verses of a *śataka* sometimes tell legends about the author and his life. Later in the essay we will learn a few legends about a supposed author of the *SS*. The available manuscripts of the *SS* are fragmentary. There is not one manuscript that contains all the verses – we don't even know how many there were to begin with.¹⁹

C. P. Brown and the *SS*

Charles Philip Brown (1798–1884), an employee of the English East India Company, who took a great interest in the study of Telugu language and literature, had an enormous influence on Telugu scholars. Born to evangelical parents in Calcutta, he spent a total of thirty-four years in two equal periods of seventeen years each in India, during which time he served the East India Company in several administrative capacities. He devoted most of his energies to learning Telugu, and trying to 'revive' Telugu literature. Brown's understanding of a literary text was grounded in the nineteenth-century European concept of a fixed, unified text. A text found in fragments or otherwise corrupted, had in his view to be carefully copied from several manuscripts, collated and corrected for inaccuracies and scribal errors. It could then be printed and made available to readers. Print was new to Andhra and Brown himself was largely instrumental in making Telugu texts available in print. Most texts in Telugu literature, which had some nine hundred years of continuous literary production, did not appear in manuscripts that were 'clean' enough for Brown to accept them as authentic. Furthermore, manuscripts were not easily available to Brown when he sought to collect them. Had he lived among Telugu people and tried to gain a proper understanding of the literary culture of this language, he would have had some sense of their textual practices.²⁰

¹⁸ In several cases, only a small number of verses survived from which scholars inferred the rest of the *śataka*. It is hard to say if the author wrote only a few, or if only a few survived from a complete text.

¹⁹ Haridasu 1984 and Arudra 2002 inform us of ten manuscripts of *SS*, each of which has a different number of verses, in the Oriental Manuscript Library in Madras. Haridasu reports another four manuscripts from Saraswati Mahal Library at Tanjavur. An additional 50 verses are reported in *Āndhra sāhitya pariṣat patrika*, August–September, 1938.

²⁰ Brown wrote in his autobiography: "I never mixed with Hindu society, feasts or celebrations, and except those who worked with me I had few Hindu acquaintances. Indeed I was rarely visited by natives; and I was considered a deliberate enemy of the Hindu

However, Brown did not pause to think if the text-culture in Telugu was different from his own. The absence of the kind of texts he had expected assured him that Telugu literature was in a state of decline. His limited knowledge of Telugu coupled with his confidence in the superiority of Western culture made him comfortably assume the responsibility to save this literature.

Brown's interest in the *SS* developed neither because he was attracted to its *nīti* sayings nor because he thought it was an important text, but because it was written in a simple language that was easy for him to learn.²¹ His interest in the text as a useful tool for a beginner like him to learn Telugu as a foreign language prompted him to have a pandit produce a version with a glossary so he could understand the text easily. As he read the text, he began to translate it into English, apparently as part of his exercise to learn Telugu. He collected the *SS* verses in 1832 from some ten manuscripts. Following the methods employed by European philologists in restoring Greek and Latin texts, he had different manuscripts collated by eliminating spurious, blemished or corrupted readings. Thus he created a version of 150 verses and printed it in 1842 with his English translation for 85 of them. No information is available as to how many copies were printed, but scholars have not been able to trace even one copy of this initial edition. The only evidence that Brown printed this edition comes from an advertisement for the book in 1842 reported by Macca Haridasu.²² In 1973 the Andhra Pradesh Sahitya Akademi eventually published Brown's version again from his manuscript. I refer to this text hereafter as the *BSS*.

While we know about the manuscript sources of the *BSS*, we do not know anything about the manuscript sources of the *PSS*. If Adisaraswati based its 1870 edition on a manuscript, it is not reported anywhere. The two major changes in the Adisaraswati edition are that the verses are ordered alphabetically and the spelling confirms to what is by then accepted as the literary standard with features such as the silent nasal marks (*arthānusvāras*). None of the manuscripts of the *SS* carries these features. Later reprints of the *PSS*, either clearly followed the 1870 edition, or more likely later editions of Adisaraswati, which appeared under the imprint of Vavilla Ramaswami Sastrulu and Sons. The 1870 edition of

idolatry." Brown and Reddy 1978: 58–59. Peter Schmitthenner describes in some detail the problems Brown faced in acquiring Telugu manuscripts, Schmitthenner 2001: 94–100.

²¹ It is apparent that Brown assumed *nīti* meant morals, since he included *SS* among texts he thought were written "principally on morals." See Brown 1827: 9. But later he lost interest in *SS* and concentrated on Vemana's verses which were equally easy for him to read and appealed to him for their attack on Brahmins and practices of Hindu society. Schmitthenner 2001: 72–78.

²² Haridasu 1984: 67.

the *PSS* contains 105 verses, but at some point of time after that the *PSS* acquired a few more verses, the most important of which is a prayer verse at the very beginning, *śrīrāmuni daya cetanu*, (by the kindness of god Rama), which includes the customary auspicious syllable *śrī* and a colophon verse, attributing the authorship to Bhimana (Tel. *bhīmana*). Some editions carry a word-by-word explanation following each verse (*tīka*) and a prose summary of the verse (*tātparya*).²³

Alphabetizing is not common in Telugu; in fact only two more *śatakas*, both of which are printed much later than the *PSS*, are alphabetized.²⁴ As is well known, even dictionaries were not alphabetized until the 19th century. One suggestion is that this is based on *akṣarāṅkagādyā*, ritual verses composed for Siva, where the verses are alphabetized. Another suggestion is that alphabetization is a Jaina influence and that a Jaina monk called Sumati is the author of *SS*. These suggestions are tantalizing at best, and have no real basis to follow through.²⁵ It is also interesting to note that no manuscript of the *SS*, nor the edition created by C. P. Brown are alphabetized, nor do they carry the standard spelling as the *PSS* does.

The name *SS* and the *makūṭa* refrain at the end of each verse was a strong enough indication that all these free-floating verses were generally perceived as belonging to one single text. However, it is the *PSS* that gave it a concrete unity, by making it a book, and truly a *śataka*, with the generic requirement of 108 verses, and with the auspicious syllable *śrī* beginning the first poem and a colophon attributing the authorship of the text to Bhimana.²⁶ The text is further enhanced by the arrangement of the verse in alphabetical order. I located on the internet scanned fragments of a palm leaf manuscript from the Theosophical Society Library at Adyar.²⁷ This manuscript contains among its early verses, but not as its first verse, the prayer poem to Rama that begins with the words, *śrīrāmuni daya cetanu*, "by the kindness of god Rama", which, as we have noted, is printed as the first verse in the *PSS* sometime after 1870. Arudra and Haridasu report that they did not find this poem in any of the manuscripts they had seen. The Adyar manuscript looks interesting because it is the

²³ The prayer verse appears in *PSS* 1913, and the colophon verse appears in *PSS* 1962, though I know these verses must have been included much earlier.

²⁴ The two are: *Bhāskara śatakamu*, attributed to Mādayyagāri Vēṅkanna in collaboration with his younger brother. Sarma 1987, and Venkatarayakavi 1982: 76–123.

²⁵ Venkata Rao 1966: 64, suggests the influence of the Saivite *Aṣarāṅkagādyā*; Kolavennu Malayavasini (oral communication) suggests Jain influence; and *Sumati śatakamu* 1962 suggests a Jain monk, Sumati, as a probable author of the *PSS*.

²⁶ According to Arudra 2002, this colophon verse is in the palm leaf manuscript no. 1810 in the Oriental Manuscript Library at Madras.

²⁷ http://www.gutenberg-e.org/kam01/adyar_sumati/ This is palm-leaf manuscript no. 74882, placed on the internet probably by Michael Katten.

only one that contains the prayer verse, and because it seems to record verses that are closest in style to the *PSS*. However, the verses in the Adyar manuscript are not ordered alphabetically, nor does the spelling conform to the standard given to them by Adisarasvati. Unfortunately, the scanned fragments of the Adyar manuscript are not legible enough for me to make definitive comments.

Features of oral transmission

All the *PSS* verses show features of oral transmission compared to the *BSS* which contains a large number of verses in a literary style. One might say that all Telugu literature before the 20th century is oral in the sense that all verses were recited or sung, but I am making a distinction here between texts that were passed from person to person in a written form and those that were transmitted orally. The verses of the *PSS* were circulated orally, whereas most of the verses in the *BSS* were circulated through writing. In effect, there were two different kinds of transmission – oral and written. Inevitably the verses that entered the oral transmission process spread among a larger community than the ones that remained in writing. Both communities were literate, and both were upper caste. The community amongst whom the verses of the *BSS* were circulated was inhabited by scribes who had a penchant for preserving knowledge in writing. The other community among whom verses of the *PSS* were orally circulated was more accustomed to orality, and was much larger. These verses were good conversation-pieces and were often quoted to legitimize a viewpoint. Upper-caste men in village circles quoted verses in imitation of scholars who quoted from Sastras (Skt. *śāstra*). It was customary to learn the verses orally from a person who had memorized them, and an orally quoted verse had a much higher authority than one written down.

Such oral transmission brings about significant structural changes in the text, which I call oralization. Every single verse of the *PSS* carries features of oralization, which I will elaborate on below. If one person in the chain of oral transmission happened to be a scribe and wanted to have a written copy of an oralized verse, he wrote it as he had heard it, but the verse continued in oral circulation. In fact, one can find several oralized verses in the *BSS*, which as we know, is a collated version from many

manuscripts. For convenience I use the *BSS* to illustrate literary features and the *PSS* to illustrate features of oralization.²⁸

The metrics of *kandamu*

In order to discuss the features of oralization in the *PSS* verses, and contrast them with the literary features in the *BSS*, let me briefly present the metrics of *kandamu*, the meter in which all the *SS* verses were composed.²⁹ This is a meter comprised of four lines where a long syllable has a value of two *mātras* while a short syllable has a value of one. A *gaṇa* (cluster of syllables) used in *kandamu* could consist of two long syllables, or one long syllable and two short syllables, or four short syllables. The first and third lines are composed with three such *gaṇas* while the second and the fourth lines are composed of five. The second syllable of each of the four lines should use the same consonant or consonant cluster. This is called *prāsa*. In the second line and the fourth line, the first syllable of the first *gaṇa* and the first syllable of the fourth *gaṇa* should be euphonicly similar. This is called *yati*. A list of syllables that are euphonicly similar to each other is given in books on meter. The metrics of *kandamu* are presented below as an abstract diagram, where X represents the *yati* and the asterisk represents the *prāsa* and each length of straight line represents a *gaṇa*.



The following is a *kandamu* verse in roman transcription with each syllable separated with spaces. Here, the consonant cluster in the second syllable of each line, /ll/ is the *prāsa*. The first syllable of the first and the fourth *gaṇas* in lines two, /gō/ and /ko/, and five, /tē/ and /tē/, are the *yati*.

a llu ni man ci ta nam bu nu
gō lla ni sā hi tya vi dya – ko ma li ni ja mun
pō llu na dañ ci na bi yya mu
tē lla ni kā ku lu nu le vu – tē li yu ra su ma tī

²⁸ Brown collected every manuscript available to him without regard to the style of the verse and collated them all into *BSS*. Therefore *BSS* includes some verses which look like *PSS* verses.

²⁹ The metrics of *kandamu* are minimally presented here, leaving out details which are not relevant to this discussion.

Features of the *PSS*

An important feature of the *PSS* is the absence of enjambment; there are no run-on lines in its verses. In recitation each short line is one segment, while each long line, broken at the *yati*, makes two segments. Each segment begins with a new word. Rarely does a word extend over two segments. In recitation, it is customary to pause at the end of each segment before picking up the next segment. Since the syntactic structure of the poem corresponds to the pauses at the end of each segment, the meter in *PSS* reinforces the meaning, and the meaning reinforces the meter. Reading *PSS* verses breaking at every segment has given rise to a style of reading *kandamu* now considered by literary people as school-boyish. Another feature of the *PSS* is its simplistic observance of *yati*, using simple euphony as a guiding principle.

A significant feature of the style of the *PSS* is its extensive use of filler words. A filler word does not make a specific semantic contribution to the verse; it only helps to fulfill the meter. Filler words almost always occur where the metrical restrictions of *prāsa* and *yati* must be observed. For example, of the 108 verses in the *PSS*, 71 verses use a filler word; 52 use fillers in *yati* places, while 19 use filler words in *prāsa* places. Following is a list of words that occur in the *yati* place:

ilalo	“on the earth”
bhuvilo	”
mahilo	”
medini	”
vasudhanu	”
ērugumu	“know” (imperative)
tēliyura	”
nayam’idi	“this is right”
mari	“and”
nikkamu	“it is true”
tathyamu	”
siddhamu	“that’s how it is”
sahajamu	“it is natural”
gadarā	“is it not?”

Filler words are viewed by scholars as *vyartha padas*, “useless words.” However, in the oral tradition, they have great value; they are predictable and make the verse easy to memorize. They reduce the semantic burden while preserving the euphonic beauty and the metrical structure of the poem.

A number of the *PSS* verses are built on a repetitive formulaic syntax, which helps memorization beyond the devices of *prāsa* and *yati*. For example, a string of negative imperatives followed by a declarative sen-

tence is very common in the *PSS*. The following verse is an example (the *yati* is shown in italics and the *prāsa* is shown in capitals):

naVVakumī sabhalopala
naVVakumī talli daṇḍri – *nā* thula toḍan
 naVVakumī parasatito
naVVakumī vipravarula – *nayam'idi* sumatī

Do not laugh in the assembly.
 Do not laugh with your father, mother or master.
 Do not laugh with another man's wife.
 Do not laugh at a sacred Brahman.
 Sumati, that's the right thing to do.

Also note, the final segment begins with a filler word, *nayam'idi*, thus saving the poet from having to choose a meaningful word that begins with a /na/.

Features of literary style

In contrast to the oralized style of the *PSS*, literary style is compact; it does not use filler words. Complex combinations of *yati* and *prāsa* as well as long and involved sentences are normal features of the literary style. Complexity rather than spontaneity, and manipulation rather than fluidity of phrases, are the predominant qualities of a literary style. A literary stylist works at a slower pace than an oral versifier and therefore has the time to choose his words with an aim to build a tightly composed verse. For an oral versifier, meter and syntax fuse into one structure that organizes both his language and the verse at the same time. For the literate poet, meter structures the verse but not always his language. Therefore, in a literary composition syntax tends to be relatively free from meter. To illustrate this point, I will present a verse, in the same meter, *kandam*, in which all the *SS* verse are composed, written by a literary poet of the first order, the 13th century Tikkana. This poem doesn't need to be translated; just a look at the complex structure of long Sanskrit compounds running into the next line, with *yati* and *prāsa* syllables embedded in them, shown here with strings of syllables with no spaces, visually demonstrates the point (the *yati* is shown in italics and the *prāsa* is shown in capitals):

triBHuvanaśukadṛḍhapañjara-
 viBHavamahitunaku trivishṭapanirmo-

kaBHujanāpatiki sakalajagad-
 aBHinnarūpunaku bhāvanāṭitunakun.³⁰

None of the *SS* verses, the *PSS* or the *BSS* have this kind of high literary style. At no time did the *SS* include verses of great literary complexity. But we can see a literary style in many of the the *BSS* verses, though it is much simpler than Tikkana's verse shown above. Let me take the following verse from the *BSS* as an example (the *yati* is shown in italics and the *prāsa* is shown in capitals):

trāSUnu veśyayun'ōka samam
 au SAndehimpavalavad 'avanīsthalilo
 vīSAm badhikamb'ēccaṭan
 o SARigāk andu mōgguc 'uṇḍunu sumatī

Listen Sumati, a courtesan is like a balance. She tilts to the side which has a little more gold.

The syntax of this verse camouflages the metrical structure. A detailed breakdown of the metrical units and syntactical units of the verse would facilitate examination of this feature.

Metrical Units	Syntactical Units
1. trāsunu veśyayun'ōka sama	1. trāsunu veśyayun'ōka samam'au "A courtesan and a balance are one kind"
2. m'au sandehimpavalava	2. sandehimpavalavad' "There's no doubt about it"
3. d'avanīsthalilo	3. avanīsthalilo "on this earth" (filler word)
4. vīsamb'adhikamb'ēccaṭa	4. vīsamb'adhikamb'ēccaṭano "wherever there is a little more (gold)"
5. no sarigāk'andu mōgguc	5. sarigāk' "without being level"
6. c'uṇḍunu sumatī	6. andu mōgguc'uṇḍunu "to that side (she) tilts"
	7. sumatī "wise man" (vocative)

On the metrical side of the chart, the four lines of the poem are divided into six segments to reflect the way it is recited. On the syntactical side,

³⁰ Tikkana, *Srīmadāndhra-mahā-bhāratamu*, 4.1.33.

one can see the first clause extends by one syllable beyond the first segment of the verse into the second segment where a new clause begins with the *prāsa* syllable /sa/. If a pause is made at the end of the clause to complete the meaning, the euphony of *prāsa* is affected. If, on the other hand, no pause is made so the euphony of *prāsa* is preserved, the clarity of the meaning is compromised. A similar situation occurs at the end of the fourth segment and at the beginning of the fifth segment. The last word, *ēccaṭano*, extends into the fifth segment where a new clause begins with the *prāsa* syllable. Clearly, this verse cannot be read adopting the same style of recitation as a *PSS* verse.

The only oral feature of this verse is its use of the filler word *avanīsthalilo*, “on this earth”, which, however, is a less easily understood Sanskrit phrase, compared to similar filler words in *PSS*. We don’t find this verse in the *PSS*. It did not enter the oral transmission process, apparently because the metrical structure was not amenable to easy alterations to suit oralization.

Let me take a verse found in the *BSS* and show how it changes in the *PSS* to suit an oralized style. First, the verse from the *BSS*: (*yati* marked in italics)

dānamb’ivvani kuḍuvani
vāni dhanamu rājacoravahnula jerun
gānala nīgalu gūrcina
teniya tēvaravula jeru tīruna sumatī

Listen Sumati, a person who does not enjoy or share his wealth, will lose it to the king, thieves, or fire, like honey which bees gather in the forest is taken by the passers-by.

This verse has a long Sanskrit compound, *rājacoravahnulu*, “kings, thieves, or fire”, extending across the two segments of the second line and absorbing the identity of the *yati* syllable /va/, which would have been clearly demarcated in an oralized verse. Furthermore, the verse is a tightly constructed in one long, somewhat complex sentence, which never happens in *PSS*.

Let us see how this verse is transformed in oral transmission though the meaning remains the same. Here is its *PSS* counterpart: (*yati* marked in italics.)

tānu bhujimpani yarthamu
mānavapati jeru gōnta mari bhūgata mau
gānala nīgalu gūrcina
teniya yōru jerunaṭlu tiramuga sumatī

Listen Sumati, if you do not enjoy your wealth, some of it goes to the king, and the rest is lost into the earth, like the honey the bees gather in the forest is taken by others, sure and certain.

Two advantages result from this change. First, the long Sanskrit compound *rājacoravahnula* with the *yati* hidden in it, is eliminated. It is inconvenient for a reciter to remember a long compound which sweeps through two segments of a line particularly if it hides the *yati* syllable. He uses the *yati* as a memory landmark for the segment of the verse that begins with it. Therefore, the long compound is replaced by a line which is broken into two parts which are synchronous with the two segments they cover:

mānavapati jeru kōnta mari bhūgata mau

The use of the filler word *mari* makes it easy to remember the *yati*. The second change is made in the fourth line. In the *BSS* *jeru tīruna* is one word that extends across two segments. In *PSS* the segments are clearly broken, facilitating oralized recitation.

teniya tēvaravula jeru tīruna sumatī (*BSS*)
teniya yōru jerunaṭlu tiramuga sumatī (*PSS*)

In the *PSS* text, a filler word, *tiramuga* (“surely”) begins the sixth segment. The *BSS* version of the line has a more complex arrangement in which the clause *tēvaravula jeru tīruna*, “like (honey) goes to passers-by”, extends across two segments of the line across the *yati* place. Also, the lexical choice of *tēvaravulu*, “passers-by”, is indicative of the interest of the literary stylist who wants three similar “t” sounds repeated in the same line for alliteration, which does not interest the oral reciter, who would prefer regularity and symmetry in a verse.

However, the stylistic gap between these two poems is too wide to permit a precise mapping of the process of transition of literary style into an oralized style. A better opportunity for observing this transition is provided by examination of the following two verses in the *BSS* and the *PSS*. Here are verses with the lines numbered for reference (*yati* syllables are in italics):

BSS:

1. mantri gala vāni rājyamu
2. tantrambula jēdaka śāśvatambai nilucun

3. mantri vihīnuni rājyamu
4. jantrapu kil'ūḍinaṭṭu jarugunu sumatī

PSS:

1. mantri gaḷa vāni rājyamu
2. tantramū cēḍak'ūṇḍa nilucu taracuga dharalo
3. mantri vihīnuni rājyamu
4. jantrapu kil'ūḍinaṭṭu jarugadu sumatī

The variations in these two texts are limited to lines 2 and 4. The variations in line 2 are of two kinds. One is stylistic while the other is syntactic. The word *śāśvatamb'ai* ("permanently") in the BSS text extends across two segments of the line. The first segment of the line ends at *śāśva* and the next segment begins with *tambai*. A customary pause in oral recitation at the end of each segment would break the word unnaturally and awkwardly into two parts: *śāśva* and *tamb'ai*. If, on the other hand, the line is recited as one unit, the euphony between the initial *ta-* and the *ta-* in the *yati* place in the middle of *śāśvatamb'ai* loses its emphasis. Furthermore, it is inconvenient to memorize a line that does not have the usual break at the end of each segment.

A reciter resolves these problems by making appropriate changes in the text. A rephrasing of the text with the filler word *taracuga dharalo* ("frequently in the world") restores the break at the end of the first segment. The change makes the poem easy to memorize and recite.

As may be seen from the discussion above, the preferences of the literary style are very different from those of the oral style. A literary poet considers it more artful to compose a tight verse in which *yati* places are filled with meaningful words, not fillers. He avoids breaking at the end of each segment and aims at more complex line movements; his *yati* and *prāsa* places are usually hidden in long words. A literary stylist considers it artless to compose verses that break at every joint. Such composition is compared to the weaving of a fish basket, *cepala butṭa*, loose with a lot of holes in it. The use of filler words to satisfy *yati* and *prāsa* is especially undesirable because they show that the poet does not have a mastery over meter, and is rather led by it. The literary features discussed above were greatly admired by learned poets who scorned oral poetry.

The other variation in line 2, which is syntactic, is the result of a change in dialects. The BSS has *tantrambula jēḍaka*, whereas PSS has *tantramū cēḍak'ūṇḍa*, both meaning "without losing administrative efficiency." Old Telugu uses both negatives freely while modern Telugu retains the non-progressive non-finite negative (the *-aka* form) for the specialized use of indicating a condition for an inevitable consequence; the progressive non-finite negative (the *-akunḍa* form) is used in all other situations. The following sentences are acceptable both in Old Telugu and

modern Telugu since the clause ending with the *-aka* form marks a condition, an inevitable consequence which is revealed in the principle clause. Here are a few examples to illustrate this point:

Modern Telugu:

- vānalu *leka* paṅṭalu poyāyi
 "The crops failed for lack of rain."
 tiṅḍi *leka* prajalu bādhaḍuṭunnāru
 "People are suffering for lack of food."
 nidra *cālaka* kaḷḷu baruv'ēkkāyi
 "The eyes are heavy because of lack of sleep."

Old Telugu:

- vānalu *leka* paṅṭalu poyinavi
 "The crops failed for lack of rain."
 tiṅḍi *leka* prajalu bādhaḍucunnāru
 "People are suffering for lack of food."
 nidra *cālaka* kaḷḷu baruv'ēkkinavi
 "The eyes are heavy because of lack of sleep."

The following sentences, which use *-aka* forms, acceptable in Old Telugu, are not acceptable in modern Telugu because the event indicated by the finite verb is not an inevitable consequence of the event indicated by the non-finite.

Old Telugu:

- atanu nāto *cēppaka* vēḍalipoyēnu
 "He left without informing me."
 i pustakamu *caduvaka* māṭṭlāḍakuḍu
 "Do not talk without reading this book."
 i goḍa *paḍipoka* nilucunā?
 "Does this wall stand without falling?"

Consequently, these sentences have to be rephrased with the *-akunḍa* form in modern Telugu:

Modern Telugu:

- atanu nāto *cēppakunḍa* vēḷḷipoyāḍu
 "He left without informing me."
 i pustakam *cadavakunḍa* māṭṭlāḍakaṇḍi
 "Do not talk without reading this book."
 i goḍa *paḍipokunḍa* nilustunḍā?
 "Does this wall stand without falling?"

Preference for the *-akunḍa* form in the PSS indicates the influence of modern syntax on the reciter. The *-aka* form is syntactically obsolete and is consequently rejected in favor of the modern *-akunḍa* form. The process is perhaps not deliberate but a natural propensity of the reciter to

adopt a modern syntax. This brings into focus an important change that enters into an orally transmitted text: its syntax gets updated with time.

A comparison of verses in the *BSS* and the *PSS* suggests that most variations fall into the two categories discussed above: 1) stylistic variations introduced to render the verse easier to memorize and recite, and 2) dialectical variations to update the grammar of the verse.

Occasionally, a line or two in a verse composed in an especially intricate literary style becomes unintelligible to the oral reciter. In such instances, the line is altered to make it more intelligible, even if it results in a change in meaning. The following verse exemplifies this:

BSS:

kāraṇamu leka navvunu
preraṇamunu leni prema priyaratikeḷul
pūraṇamu leni būrēlu
vīraṇamunu leni pēṇḍli vṛtharā sumatī

Listen Sumati, a laugh without a reason, love play with a woman who is not aroused, dumplings without (sweet) stuffing, and a wedding without music – these are futile.

The second line of the verse is difficult for the oral reciter not only because of the Sanskrit compound *priyaratikeḷul* (“love play with / of the beloved”) but also because of the number of *pra* sounds. The *PSS* alters the line:

peraṇamunu leni lema prthivīsthalilo

The oralized style brings in the filler words *prthivīsthalilo* (“in the earth”) to replace the difficult compound *priyaratikeḷul* in the second segment of the line. This change also makes it easy to remember the segment, because it begins with the *yati* syllable. But now the line means “a woman who does not have a blouse.” This change works perfectly for the oral reciter because it reflects a new style of wearing stitched clothes that came into vogue around the 17th century because of the cultural influence of Persianized Islam. Upper caste women began to wear blouses, which the lower castes did not adopt.³¹ A woman without a blouse is therefore low caste and not desirable.

³¹ New styles, from a foreign, likely Persian influence in the sixteenth century made sewn clothes popular among the upper castes in Andhra. Brahman men, however, did not wear stitched clothes when they performed religious rituals.

Popularity of the *SS*

In economics, Fisher’s Equation in relation to the Quantity Theory of Money states that the velocity of the circulation of money should be factored in while measuring the quantity of money in use.³² A million dollars kept in a safe for one year has a value of zero, while a dollar bill that changes hands a million times in one year does the work of a million dollars exchanged just once. A similar measure applies to the social impact of literature. A poem by a scholar-poet which is read by an elite group has less influence on popular ideas than a poem by a minor poet which is read, remembered and recited by a large community. In the world of ideas, the *PSS* was like a dollar bill that changed hands a million times while the verses of great poets were like a million dollars kept in a safe, or perhaps transacted just once in a while. The popularity of a book is usually established by the number of press runs and copies sold. This standard, of course, is not valid in the oral tradition. The *PSS*’s popularity indicates the general acceptability of its ideas to the community in which they circulated. Some verses of the *PSS* appear to be metrical restatements of well-known proverbs, and accepted prejudices, while other verses seem to carry the wisdom imparted by the poet. The epigrammatic nature of the text, the simplicity of the language, the prescriptive tone of the verses, and above all their immense quotability imbued the *PSS* with the power of a Sastra in the popular mind.

Critical editions of *SS* and authorship of *SS*

Another concept that became acceptable to Indian literary scholars during the colonial period is that every text must have a unique and historically identifiable author. It is true that in our own experience a text comes into existence because an author writes it. The sequence is as follows:

author > text > reader.

In pre-colonial India, with its oral tradition and written culture operating in tandem, the situation was somewhat different. Here the author does not necessarily write the text. Rather it may well be the other way around: the text writes the author. For instance, a text received by its listeners / readers as an epic / *itihāsa*, generates an author of superhuman powers like the sage Vālmīki for the Ramayana. If the same text is read as bhakti / devotional text, a text that gives religious merit to its readers, the

³² Fisher’s equation, used in the quantity theory of money is: $MV = PT$, where M represents the money supply, V represents the velocity of money, P represents the average price level and T represents the volume of transactions in the economy.

author is given a different 'biography'. This Vālmīki is a bandit who turns into a sage by repeating Rama's name. In effect, if a text changes its function, the author changes along with it.³³ A number of legends are told about authors of texts in the oral tradition. Such legends about an author mark an important shift in the meaning of the text, or indicate a new status to which the text is elevated. Legends about authors are in effect parts of the text. But the new concepts of an original author and an Ur-text led to such questions as who the author of *Sumati śatakamu* was and where and when he lived. The next task would be to establish the Ur-text by the original author, free from interpolations and spurious verses. Legends told about authors were of no use for the new scholars of literature, because they were unhistorical. C. P. Brown trained a number of scholars who worked under him in the methods of collating texts, and creating 'authentic editions'. Following Brown's ideas, the search for 'authentic editions' and reliable information about the real 'authors' became a major occupation for scholars of literature. It is striking that these scholars rejected concepts of author and text from their own culture. As late as 1988, Arudra, the influential poet and historian of Telugu literature writes in his magnum opus *Samagra āndhra sāhityam* (comprehensive history of Telugu literature):

We need to produce a critical edition (*samsodhita-prati*) of the *Sumati śatakamu* to find out what interpolations the scribes indulged in, and this in turn would also resolve the question of authorship.

From the early decades of the twentieth century, scholars began to argue whether Baddēna or Bhimana was the author of the *SS*. Those who argued in favor of Bhimana, based their belief on a poem found in some manuscript copies of the *SS*.³⁴ Furthermore, Kūcīmañci Timmakavi (mid 18th century) identifies Bhimana as the author of the *SS*, in his *Sarvalakṣaṇsārasaṅgrahamu*, a book on meter. The following is the poem:

srī karamuga bhīmana munu
lokamunaku bōgaḍagā vilokinci madin
brākaṭamuga sumatiki mati
cekūḍaga sumatinīti cēppadōḍaṅgen

Auspiciously Bhīmana, while the people admired him, thought well in his mind to teach good sense to Sumati and began to tell *Sumati-nīti*.

³³ This idea, presented all too briefly here, needs a longer essay, which I am writing.

³⁴ Haridasu 1984 identifies this verse in manuscript No. 1810 from the Oriental Manuscript Library, Madras (now Chennai). Unconfirmed reports say that all Telugu manuscripts from this library were moved to the Oriental Manuscript Library, Tirupati.

Note that here the text is not called *Sumati śatakamu* but *Sumati-nīti*, a name that brings to mind *Baddē-nīti*, a text scholars agree was written by Baddēna. Interestingly, the same poem also appears at the end of several printed *PSS* texts.

However, Manavalli Ramakrishna Kavi, Vanguri Subbarao, N. Venkata Rao and other scholars argued that Baddēna composed the *SS*. They base their arguments on the following verse from Baddēna's *Nītiśāstra-muktāvali*, a book of *nīti* verses:

śrīvibhuḍa garvitāri
kṣmāvaradaḷanopalabdhajayalaksmīsam
bhāvituḍa sumatiśatakamu
gāvīñcina proḍa gāvyaakamalāsanuḍan

I am the lord of the goddess of wealth, honored by the goddess of victory for destroying the proud enemy kings, and I am the expert composer of *Sumati śatakamu* and the creator of many other poems.

Bhimana vs. Baddēna

However, not much is reliably known about Baddēna. Scholars, such as Vedam Venkataraya Sastri and Manavalli Ramakrishna Kavi, suggest that he was a king of a principality in Andhra during the 11th–12th century. His book, *Nīti-śāstra-muktāvali*, is also known as *Baddē-nīti*. In this small book of 162 verses, he follows the tradition of such Sanskrit books as *Kāmandaka*, which prescribe the code of conduct for kings and courtiers. He was clearly a scholar competent in writing a well-turned verse, and a person with considerable understanding and perhaps experience in the political strategies of running a kingdom. His book seems to have been popular among the class of people who aspired to kingship or worked for kings. In any case, we know that Madiki Singana (14th century), the editor / compiler of the *Sakala-nīti-sammataṃ*, included in his volume as many as 38 verses from *Baddē-nīti*, which indicates Baddēna's popularity among the class of people who were politically minded.³⁵

Not much is known about Bhimana either, if such a person ever existed. Legends told about him say that he lived in the village of Vemulavāḍa. His mother was a Brahman widow who conceived him after the death of her husband. She went to the Bhīmeśvara-śiva temple in Daksharama along with a group of women who had husbands. When they all asked the god for a son, she naively followed their example and asked for a son as well. The God Bhimesvara (Skt. bhīmeśvara) blessed her and gave her a

³⁵ See Narayana Rao and Subrahmanyam 2008: 26–65.

son. But because of his suspected illegitimacy, the young boy was badly treated by people in the temple town. One day he demanded that his mother tell him who his father was. She told him that the god Bhimesvara in the temple was his father. Angry that god Bhimesvara had never showed up to admit his paternity nor had ever taken care of him, the boy rushed into the temple with a big rock in his hands. He stood before the god and yelled, "Are you my father? If so, speak or I am going to hit you with this rock." The god Bhimesvara, who was himself a big rock *liṅga*, spoke: "Son, I am your father. From now on, no one shall ever call you a bastard. If anyone does, you may teach them a lesson. I give you the power to curse or bless. Whatever you utter will come true. You will be known as *śāpānugraha-samartha*, 'one who can curse and bless as well'."

From then on, everything Bhimana uttered came true because his power derived from god. Once, the young boy was expelled from a feast by Brahmans who objected to the presence of a bastard in their company. Bhimana angrily said:

annam'antā sunnam'avāli.
appāl'annī kappal'avāli.
ayyal'andarū kōyyal'avāli.

The rice should become lime.
The sweet cakes should become frogs.
All the men should turn into wood.

Instantly his words came true, and all the rice turned into a heap of lime and frogs began to jump across the dinner plates, and the offending Brahmans turned to wood. Others in the room fell at the feet of the young boy asking for forgiveness. Bhimana then uttered a reversal of the curse and everything turned to normal. Other legends about Bhimana tell of how kings who ignored him lost their kingdoms and regained them only after repenting.³⁶ Śrināthuḍu (in the 15th century) includes Bhimana at the head of a chronologically-ordered list of several great Telugu poets who preceded him.³⁷ Piṅgaḷi Sūranna, of the late 16th century, refers to Bhimana as one who reportedly wrote a bi-textual narrative poem *Rāghava-pāṇḍavīyam*, a single text that can be read as the *Ramāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* as well, the like of which he (Sūranna) was commissioned to write.³⁸ Appakavi (in the 17th century) mentions Bhimana's name in the context of telling a legend about Bhimana's

³⁶ A good source for legends about Bhimana is Seshayya 1959-1971: vol. 1, 208-265.

³⁷ Śrināthuḍu 1969.

³⁸ Sūranna 1968: Pīṭhika, verse 11.

rivalry with Nannaya (11th century).³⁹ None of the above authors who invoke Bhimana's name give any verifiable information about him.⁴⁰ Their knowledge of Bhimana was probably based on legends and not necessarily on any hard facts. However, the fact that they mention his name clearly indicates that Bhimana's name was revered as early as the 15th century, that he was respected as a legendary poet, feared and honored as a poet of super-human powers.

Rival claims of authorship become meaningful when they are related to the mode of transmission and to the clientele of the *SS*. For *karaṇams* who wanted this text to be treated as authoritative guide to success, an author like Baddēna would be preferable because he has the stature of a wise ruler. However, for the oralized *PSS*, which became popular among a larger readership and acquired the status of a Sastra, an author with superhuman powers like Bhimana would be preferable. All Sastras in Sanskrit were written by people who were known only from legends. One important point that needs to be noted here is that a real person called Bhimana need not actually exist for a legend to be generated about him. An historical evidence one way or the other does not make any difference for those who believe that he existed. Legends of his birth and his superhuman powers make him the right kind of a person to authorize a Sastra. Such an author allows for a consistency in legends about him and the possibility for him to live over many centuries.⁴¹

Nor was *SS* the only text attributed to Bhimana to elevate the status of the text. A book on meter of unknown date, *Kavijanāśrayamu*, perhaps written by a certain Malliya Recana, is popularly known as Bhimana's work. Appakavi, clearly says *Kavijanāśrayamu* is Bhimana's work. However, one of the manuscripts carries several prefatory verses where Bhimana says that he wrote the book for Recana and made it look like Recana himself wrote it. Recana is said to be a Jaina that belongs to a merchant (*vaiśya*) caste. Scholars went to town with the problem of authorship, when Jayanti Ramayya Pantulu edited *Kavijānāśrayamu* and published it with his preface defending Bhimana's authorship.⁴²⁻⁴³ Other

³⁹ Appakavi 1962: Pīṭhika, 44.

⁴⁰ Arudra identifies nine different Bhimanas and complicates this matter even further.

⁴¹ The Telugu literary tradition speaks of at least one other invented person: Tenali Ramalingadu, who is said to be active in the court of Krishnadevaraya, the emperor of Vijayanagara, and about whom a number of stories are popularly told. For more about this poet, see Narayana Rao and Shulman 1998.

⁴² Nidadavolu Venkata Rao adds another wrinkle to the already tangled question of authorship of this text on metrics. Citing the fact that one of the many titles Baddēna uses to refer to himself in his *Nīti-śastra-muktāvali* is Komaru Bhima. Venkata Rao argues that people may have called Baddēna by his title Bhima(na) when they identified him as the author of *Kavijanāśrayamu*. This argument does not explain why this particular title, among many titles of Baddēna, came to be chosen.

scholars that entered the debate and defended Recana's authorship include such famous names as Kandukuri Viresalingam and Arudra. The fact is that during pre-colonial times this work was consistently called *Bhīmana-chandamu*, the metrics of Bhimana. Arudra picked up on the caste status of Recana and strongly argued that attributing the text to Bhimana was a Brahman conspiracy against merchant castes and Jains. Now the debate included caste and religion in addition to nineteenth-century ideas of text and author. It would be more logical to argue that *Kavijanāśrayamu* needed an elevated status as the first infallible prescriptive book, i. e. a Sastra on meter and the name of Bhimana provided such a status to the work.

I would imagine that the community of *Niyogis*, who initially made the *SS* their own, apparently found it very comforting to see that it had acquired such a high status, and they found no reason to interfere with Bhimana's authorship, while they themselves believed the text was authored by Baddēna. It is interesting to note that the verse that attributes authorship of the *SS* to Baddēna is in a high literary style, whereas the verse that claims Bhimana as the author has the features of the oral style, with filler words and segment breaks.

Conclusion

The *Sumati śatakamu* has traveled a long way from *nīti* to morals. Most people in Andhra today do not even remember that the *SS* was a guide to *nīti*, as a policy for success for upper-caste men. The epistemological shift that colonial thinking has brought about was more or less thorough in this regard. *Nīti* in Telugu usage now only means morals.

In this essay, I have tried to demonstrate the effects of the epistemological shifts that colonial education brought about in the concepts of texts and authors in India. Using the *Sumati śatakamu* as an example, I indicated that such Western ideas are unsuitable to understand the nature of Indian texts. I have also suggested that legends about authors and texts cannot be dismissed as unhistorical, and that they are valuable sources to understand the nature of indigenous text-culture. During the past several decades, especially under the influence of the postmodern ideas of Foucault and Derrida, a new thinking has effectively dismantled most of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century concepts of texts and authors. Scholars have used postmodern ideas effectively to revise our understanding of Indian texts as well. I have tried to argue in this essay that indigenous concepts of texts and author in India are, in themselves,

⁴³ Bhimakavi 1959.

already very sophisticated and can be efficiently employed for a better understanding of Indian text-culture.

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Appendix I

T. Velayuda Mudaliar vs. N. Chidambaram Iyer on the
message of Ramalinga Adigal
(From: *The Theosophist* 4 [1882/1883] 61–64)

THE UTTERANCES OF RAMALINGAM PILLAI

The communication from an esteemed brother, Mr. Velayudam Mudaliar, F. T. S., Tamil Pandit in the Madras Presidency College, which appeared in the THEOSOPHIST for July last, has been excepted to by Mr. N. Chidambaram Iyer, of Trivadi, Madras Presidency, who sends us his criticisms thereupon, together with a joint reply to certain questions of his addressed to a well-known *Chela*, or pupil, of the late Ramalingam Swami. The gentleman says, in a private note to us, that he has "the greatest respect for the Adept Brothers, for the Founders of the Theosophical Society, and for Ramalingam himself, who was no doubt a great man in his own way." He fully believes in the existence of the Brothers, and appreciates the work done by our Society "in so far as it tends to awaken in the minds of the Hindus a respect for the wisdom and learnings of their eminent ancestors." So far, well; but having thus wreathed his rapier with flowers he then makes a lunge with it at the Founders' ribs. "But, I do not at all approve," says he, "either their *indirect attempts* to spread Buddhism in the land of the Hindus, or the apathy with which the elite of the Hindu community view the evil that threatens to seriously injure the religion of their forefathers." This – if we may be pardoned the liberty of saying so – is rhetorical nonsense. The public discourses and private conversations of Colonel Olcott in India will be scrutinised in vain for the slightest evidence upon which the charge of Buddhistic propagandism could be based. That work is confined to Ceylon. His addresses to Hindus have so faithfully mirrored the religious and moral sentiments and aspirations of the people, that they have been voluntarily translated by Hindus into various Indian vernaculars, published by them at their own cost, and circulated all over the Peninsula. They have – as abundant published native testimony proves – stimulated a fervid love for India and her glorious Aryan past, and begun to revive the taste for Sanskrit literature. As for the tone of this magazine, it speaks for itself. Take the thirty-nine numbers thus far issued, and count the articles upon Buddhism in comparison with those upon Hinduism, and it will be found that while confessedly an esoteric