Part 1 Madigas for themselves

Chapter 3
Performing arts: Madigas as performers and patrons (1)

Performing has often been central in Madiga lives: Chapter 1, Roots of Madiga identity, presents a Gosangi Vesham performance of the Jamba Puranam. Sometimes performing has been a specialism from which livelihoods could be won and which provided, as for the Chindu performers, the basis for an in-marrying section within the overall caste cluster; sometimes it may be a personal interest of some who otherwise belong to the main Madiga population. Madigas’ contributions to festivals is clear in a case from 1826/7 in a village of Durvoor Taluk of Cuddapah District and in a report from Guntur 20 years later. The earlier report, terming them ‘Chucklers’, lists their duties, which are also privileges. These include: ‘They are to dance in the village ceremonies or before the deity’, and, marking their connection with leather, ‘they are likewise to hold their cutting knife in one hand and a cloth in another at the time of dancing’.[a]

The report from Guntur in 1845 shows specialised sections of the caste cluster, ‘Brinadi’ or ‘Beinedis’ - in the language of today, Baindlas - and Komulawadu, the horn-blowers. Baindlas played the jamidika[b] a distinctive instrument, mention of which goes back at least to Kakatiya days of the 14th century. ‘Chindugamulu’ are also mentioned as being the Asādis, a kind of officiating priest: ‘They walk the boundary with the Bali of rice and blood shouting, blowing horns and frightening away the demons! They bury the Buffalo’s head in the Boundary. It is called a Poli.’[c]

The most widespread kind of performing art has been the playing of the dappu or tappeta. This is the distinctive single-skinned drum, round and flat and played with two unequal sticks. As has already been noticed and is further examined below, this was given new symbolic impetus in the Dandora movement of the turn of the millennium. With this has gone in recent years the burgeoning of an acrobatic style of group dance with deep roots in the ‘Chindu dance’ of the past but up-dated to provide a popular form of entertainment for today. The dappu has been the instrument of choice for music-making, for their own caste members and for others at family, community and village events and in wider contexts too.[d] Generally there
is a team of players but it has also commonly been played by a single ‘town crier’ in support of public announcements. The widespread playing of dappu by Madiga men means that it has often not resulted in any specialised section.\[e\] Horn-playing also been important but is different in this respect. Like dappu it has supported ritual activities, particularly for Gollas in coastal regions of Andhra Pradesh, but it has not had the same wide range of relevance or potential for general entertainment.

There are doubtless other locally developed performing traditions. A brief comment from 1920 can be noticed: ‘The bear, as a representative of their ancestor Jambavant, is held in special respect, and no Madiga will injure or kill the animal’ (Siraj-ul-Hassan 1920, p. 420). Singh (1969, pp 8-9), found in some villages, also in Telangana but in the 1960s, that ‘In the Holi festival, especially on the second day, a group of Madiga dress like bears and go round the village in a procession. They dance and beg from higher caste people. It is said that Jambavant [referred to in the Ramayana ‘as a wise, courageous and experienced general in the army of Rama’s ally Sugriva’, with ‘a bear-like form’] had engaged bears and monkeys to display acrobatic feats for Rama’s entertainment.’

Chindus, whose name may be linked to ‘Chindu’ as a dancing step but is uncertain as to origin, have been the best known of the specialised performers in recent times. They have not only performed both the Gosangi Vesham explicitly for Madigas, and the Yellamma Vesham that goes with it but carries its relevance across caste boundaries, they have also in Telangana developed their own style of yakshaganam performance for a more general audience. The great stories mainly from the Ramayana and Mahabharata that are widely popular in performance across Andhra Pradesh, and indeed in Southern India generally, have been acted out in dialogue, song and dance, with musical accompaniment. These have been elaborately costumed performances with full make-up. The Dakkalis, formerly thought of as exclusively ‘beggars’ to the Madigas, have also promoted their own style of narration and acting. Kinnera is a stringed instrument played by Dakkalis as they recite the caste myth using scroll-narratives.

**Dappu playing**

**Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf 1943.**


From the hills of the southern edge of Telangana in the Nizam's period come two stories, one of the origin of this particular drum, the other of how it was brought by immigrants. Chenchus, the tribal people living in that area, were in close touch with Madigas from whom they obtained leather goods, though at the time the story was collected around 1940, it seems that they were not living with them. The Chenchu drum (dapardi) corresponds nearly to the Madiga dappu. It is described as made of a hoop of tamarind wood, 12-18” in diameter. Goat skin is bound over the hoop and tied underneath with fibre or string, being stuck round the edge with tamarind paste. When it has dried out the ties are cut and the skin trimmed back to the edge. It is played with two sticks. In the right hand is held ‘a tapering cylinder of tamarind’, in the left, which also hold the drum up vertically, ‘a splinter of bamboo’. The drum is raised to playing pitch over a fire of quick burning grass (Fürer-Haimendorf 1943, pp 39, 41).

[p 225-26]  **The monkey and the drum**

In the old times, when men had no drums, a man went hunting in the jungle and saw two monkeys, a male and a female, in the branches of a tree. The male monkey was playing on a drum and both monkeys were very happy and danced among the branches of the tree. The man wanted to shoot the male monkey, for in the old days men were not allowed to shoot female animals, but his arrow missed the mark and by mistake wounded the female monkey.

Then the male monkey took the female monkey on his back and carried her to the ground; he put some medicine on the wound and then began playing on the drum to try and divine whether his wife would live. But in spite of the medicine the female monkey died; the male monkey wept and wailed for a long time. In the end he buried the female monkey and heaped stones on the grave and on top of the stones he put his drum.

Now the man had been watching all the time, and when he saw the male monkey leave his drum on
top of the female monkey’s grave, he went and picked it up and took it to his village. There, he told
the other people how he found it and he tapped it with his hands to show how it was played. Only
gradually did men learn to play the drum with sticks.

When the man who had killed the female monkey died, his relatives took the drum, but in the end
it got lost. By that time, however, other people had learnt to make drums out of wood and hide,
and like the monkeys men and women dance when it is played.

Folk Performing Arts of Andhra Pradesh. Hyderabad:
Telugu University.
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‘Dappu’ is the most common instrument used in Andhra for making
people aware of or publicising any event. From selling of pulses to
the calling of the village Panchayat, all secular events are announced
to the public by the local dappu player. Similarly, all rituals and
festivals will invariably have the dappu throughout, both while the
rituals are taking place and in the procession. In some communities
marriages and deaths are also signified by the accompaniment of the
dappu. It is also an accompanying instrument for many folk
performing arts, especially the dances. The "dhup" must have got its
name from the sound it gives […] its umpty types of ‘beating styles’ (debba) generated out of
artistic necessity and social compulsions.

The dappu is the simplest of the traditional percussion instruments. It contains a wooden frame,
fixed at three places, made of either udisa or vēpa [neem] planks with 6" to 8" width. This frame is
called ‘palaka’ in Coastal Andhra and ‘gundu’ in the Telangana area. To one end of this frame is
tightly tied skin of a young he-buffalo. If such a skin is not available, the skin of either a lamb or a
 goat will be used. The preparation of the leather to be used in the making of the dappu is by itself an
art, as it is in case of preparing the skin for making a puppet. The drummer uses two small sticks to
beat the dappu for varying types of sounds he produces. The round stick in the right hand is about
9” long (called sirre) and ¾” in its diameter and at the tail end is ½”. This is the main striking tool.
The other stick (called sitikena - chitikena - pulla) is thin and is a little longer. The drummer
controls the sound by placing his left palm on the upper edge of the frame and uses the stick with
the left hand to control the rhythm. This stick almost serves the purpose of the left circumference of
a mridangam[f].

As a dance form the dappu has developed its own style. […] In almost all the castes of the working
classes, dappu dance, along with karra sāmu [stick-fight], is a constant feature. The dancers stop at
village centres and show their expertise both in drumming and in dance. They wear a tala-pāga (a
head-turban), a dhoti, a dhatti and ankle bells as their costume. The dancers usually move in a
circular way while at a standing position and in a linear way of two rows while in procession. Their
steps (movements of the foot called ‘adugu’) include steps with side-long moves (āta dappu), two
steps, one forward and one backward (okka sira dappu), moving side ways with right leap (samidika dappu), two leaps upwards (mādil dappu), moving with one leg side-way and the other in a circular way (gundam dappu), etc. Each dance performance starts with a ‘prādhana dappu’ (invocation) during which the artists move slowly in a circular way. Two important innovations in the dappu dance are the 'kolatam' dappu and dappu accompanied by songs. For the kolatam the players keep their instruments in their arm-pits and use the thicker sticks for striking at each other's. The kolatam also involves singing a folk song of a humorous nature. Some of the groups have developed the rare and very difficult art of picking up coins thrown on the ground with their forehead, all the time playing on the dappu and standing on one leg. Though classicists feel that the drum with the two sides gives better depth and variation to the sound produced, one should see and hear the dappu dancers to believe the different nuances that it can create. In spite of the existence of several other types of drums, none can beat the thrill that a dappu can create in the minds and hearts of countless villagers of Andhra even today.

Horn-blowers (Kommulāvāru)


Kommu Gollalu are minstrels belonging to the Madiga community of Harijans and narrate the ballad of Katamaraju katha to Gollas or Yadavas. They are, according to the tradition, the only ballad singers authorised to sing the Katamaraju stories. They worship Ganga, called by a local name, Donakonda Ganga, whom they treat as an incarnation of Shakti. They also tell the clan histories of the Yadavas, especially on the eleventh day of a dead person and sing a particular story of the ballad cycle, Reddiraju katha.

Katamaraju katha is the second oldest historical ballad cycle of the Andhras (the oldest being Palnati Veera Charitra). The katha describes the events and incidents connected with the Panchalinga Konda and Erragaddapadu battles fought between the Yadava headed by Katamaraju on one side and Nelluru Cholas headed by Nallasiddhi on the other, sometime between 1280 and 1297 AD. On the Yadava side fought warriors like Birnidu and Chennappa belonging to the Harijan community. Bhaktiranna, the eldest son of Polaraju, who survived the battle, ordained the offspring of Birnidu to sing the glory and maintain the family records of the Yadava heroes. The Kommulavaru are said to be the descendants of Bhaktiranna and are thus hereditary custodians of the tradition. That is why these minstrels are patronised by all the Yadavas throughout Andhra Pradesh, especially in the southern parts of coastal Andhra.

As these singer-narrators use a kommu, a hollow horn, at the beginning of their story-telling, they are called Kommulavaru. The 'Kommu' is called by several names – kāle, boora, gavuru, etc. It is usually the horn of a bull or a pottelu (ram) and it is polished and covered at both ends with brass or silver or even gold. It is like a conch and gives a thunderous noise. Today the horns are completely made of brass, or iron or other metals.

The ballad singing contains a team of four people – the narrator and three assistants. The narrator wears a long red coloured gown, a dhoti, a head cloth, a waist cloth and will have kerchief in his right hand and bells to his ankles. One of the assistants helps the narrator in singing by catching the line half way and also providing the refrain. Another member plays on a veeranam, also called
Pamba jōdu – a pair of pambas – the upper one smaller than the lower one. To the left side of the narrator is sruti, provided by a titti[h]. The pamba man stands to the right of the narrator. There is also tākām [small cymbals], providing the basic rhythm. The narration is mostly recitative – prose being read as a song. However, there is not much of singing rāgas. The rāga chāya is certainly there, but many of the narrators cannot identify the rāga. The narrator, in between the narration, dances a little. Unlike in other, more vibrant forms like Burra katha and Oggu katha, the ‘chindu’ is neither mood-creating nor rhythmic. But narrations of war are certainly emotive. As one leader explains, when war scene were being narrated, there used to be inevitable fights between the Yadavas and their opponents.

In Guntur and Prakasam districts the Kommu people are called ‘gudarulu’ because they erect a tent in which they perform and narrate their stories. There are six essential prerequisites for such a Kommu narrative: a tent (gu āram), kommu (horn), veeranam (drum), bollāvu (the image of a white cow), veera taadu (a twined rope) and Basava Devudu (the image of Basava). In the tent are hung large paintings of Gangamma, the clan deity, and Katamaraju, the hero of the Yadavas. These hangings are called ‘tera cheerelu’. It is because of these painted hangings, the Kommus are called ‘Tera Cheerelu Bhaktulu’ – the devotees of hung paintings. The white cow which has a single horn is made of wood or brass. This also forms an important item of their possessions. Basava Deva is the messenger who brought the news of the Yadava leaders death at Erragaddapadu to Donakonda.

When items like ‘Ganga tarkam’ (the reasoning of Ganga) are narrated one of the team members is made up as Ganga and another as Katamaraju. They argue, with swords in hands (with a nimma [lime] fruit at the tip of each sword), and dance to the tune of the veeranam and continue their argument.

The Kommus sing the story of Katamaraju with great devotion and fervour. They can be seen in Guntur, Prakasam and in parts of Nellore district. In Rayalaseema they are called ‘Bhattu Vallu’, the eulogists (of the Yadava community).

Wilber Theodore Elmore, 1915.
Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism. A study of the local and village deities of Southern India. Hamilton, NY: The Author

The author was, like John Clough of Ongole (See Chapter 1: Roots), an American Baptist missionary. He was stationed further south, at Ramapatnam in Nellore district between 1900 and 1915. His book is a great compendium of myths and rituals and is particularly concerned with Brahmin – Dravidian interaction. After a break for academic studies in the Department of Political Science and Sociology, University of Nebraska, USA, the fieldwork was mainly carried out between 1911 and 1913. Credit is given to Mocherla Robert ‘though whose untiring efforts a considerable portion of the material has been secured’.

[pp 67-69]
In a village in the western part of the Kandukuru Taluq [Sathupally, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh] the household gods in a certain house are a small golden horn and a pair of golden drums. The worship of these is said to be not more than twenty years old [i.e. from about 1895]. In explanation of the origins of the worship the following story is told.

A Madiga horn-blower, who was a demon worshiper, was a frequent visitor in the village. He knew many mantrams, and all the people stood in great fear of him. After a time he established illicit relations with a beautiful caste woman, the daughter of a rich man. The matter became known to the people of the house, but they were unable to do anything to prevent it. Soon the villagers heard of what was going on, and they with the girl's father prepared a plan for the murder of the horn-blower.
When the horn-blower again came to the village, the girl's father called him saying, 'There is a devil in my house. A child is sick. The signs are definite. Come and drive out the devil.' The man agreed and came to the house. He performed the usual ceremonies, but the demon would not leave. A midnight visit was then planned to the shrine of Poleramma. Taking the usual pots and other articles, he called about twenty people, and they went to the little temple outside the village.

When they arrived at the temple he called for the goat which was to be sacrificed. The people replied that it was ready and would be produced when he had made the preparations. Accordingly he arranged the pots and offerings, drew the muggu, made an image of a demon in the dust, and then asked that the goat be brought. Then the people cried out, 'You are our goat,' and seizing the sword attempted to cut his throat. But no matter how hard they tried the sword would not cut.

The horn-blower feeling that he had been disgraced, and not wanting to live any longer, now said, 'O fools, what are you doing? Why are you thus persecuting me? It is impossible for you to kill me. You have satisfied your vengeance, and now I wish to die. There is a knot in my hair. Cut it out and take out the amulet and you will succeed.' They did as directed, and two little sticks flew out of the knot of hair. The charm was now gone, and the people killed him, throwing his body into a hole, trod on it.

The villagers now went to their homes, but their troubles were only beginning. In the morning the village was filled with consternation. Some of the people went mad, and some children and cattle sickened and died. When the people turned their eyes towards their fields they saw that a blight was already destroying the standing grain.

The afflicted villagers now visited a diviner. She became possessed of a spirit which proved to be that of the dead man who now spoke, accusing them of his murder, and saying that the only relief would be to worship him. But they said, 'Chee, would we worship a Madiga?' Then they went to another diviner, and again to a third, with the same result. Finally the rich man consented and had the horn and drums made and the worship instituted.

This story is rather unusual. It is probably true in its main points, for it happened recently, and is agreed to by all the villagers. These stories are told by the horn-blowers, and the desire of this class of people to instill into the villagers a proper respect for themselves may account for some features of it. [...] The general interest which the villagers took in this dead man, and the general nature of the disasters which came upon them, would most certainly have created a village deity, had the spirit been that of a woman[ ]

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From fieldwork centred in a village in the far south of Nellore district in the coastal region of Andhra Pradesh in 1990-91 comes this fine study. Within the village itself, Madigas were by far the largest caste community, with 106 families. Together with Harijan Malas and Vetti Malas they made up almost a third of the total population. Though the study's distinctive focus is on the mica mining industry and its effects through time on power and control within the one village, it is exceptionally sensitive to the concerns and struggles of people of lower castes, particularly the Madigas and Malas, and over a wider area. This recent study is quoted repeatedly in this collection (Chapters 4, 8 and 9, as well as in the present context).

[pp 212-3]

Funeral ceremonies are often concluded by arranging a performance of story-telling by bards from low caste, Dasari, or Madiga sub-caste, Kommulollu. Usually the high castes engage the Dasaris, whereas the low castes and Untouchables the latter. However, the Gollas invariably engage the Kommulollu because of mutual symbiotic ritual relationship between the Gollas and the Madigas [k]. Not all villages have these bard castes; for instance these are absent even in Anthatipuram. The Dasari or Kommulollu families share a few villages among themselves. For example, the
Kommulollu of Thokalapudi village, which is located about thirty kilometres south of Anthatipuram, whom I met in their village, informed that they have ‘rights’ over twenty villages, within the boundaries of Venkatagiri in the south, Rapuru in the west, Podalakuru in the north and Guduru in the east. Each of the families has ‘right’ over twenty villages, including Anthatipuram.

These singers go in troupes by invitation for a payment of cash around two hundred rupees with free food for a day. Each troupe consists of, in the case of the Dasaris, at least three persons – one main singer and two assistants who can be men or women; in the case of the Kommulollu, there may be five or more – one main singer, two assistants and another two or three to provide music and support. These assistants are always men. Both the bards have traditional musical instruments of their own. They sing stories of historical and mythological culture heroes which were composed by unknown authors and transmitted by oral tradition, but these days they are being printed. The performers do not use much make-up but have distinct attire. They are very articulate, vocal and smart in attracting the audience with their jokes and the art of story-telling.

The performance takes place near the house of the sponsor. The high caste audience sits on cots or raised platforms at their houses, whereas the low castes sit on the ground in front of the performers. It starts around 9 o’clock at night and continues for four or five hours, with an intermission once or twice. The story begins with the invoking of the gods and praising the village elders and sponsors of the performance. The story is sung with appropriate actions, change of tone and musical notes, according to the context and subjects of the story. The singing is stopped by the main singer now and then so that the assistants can repeat the bits of the songs or enter into dialogues of the characters in prose.

In the karamanthram ritual of an old Golla woman in Anthatipuram, the Kommulollu were invited. But the performance was cancelled because there was a heavy downpour of rain on that particular day and night. So I missed this performance. Therefore, I visited Thokalapudi village, interviewed the Kommulollu and collected a story in narrative prosaic format [… from] one main singer […].

[pp 217-20]

**Story of Yadava Peddi Raju:** In this story, with the help of a god and a goddess, a boy of seven years of age brings to life his dead father who is killed in a battle. The goddess falls in love and desires to marry the boy. But the boy manages to avoid the marriage by playing a trick on her.

Once there was a king by the name of Peddi Raju of the Golla caste (also called the Yadava caste). He did not have children. So he and his wife visited the Somappa temple and worshipped the god Shiva for three years. Finally, on the suggestion of someone, the king stayed in the house of a Mutharachi (a low caste) family, and worshipped Shiva. The god Shiva was pleased with the devotion of Peddi Raju and appeared to the queen in a dream and gave a fruit symbolizing the gift of a child. The queen soon became pregnant and delivered a male child after ten months. The boy was named as Katama Raju. When the boy grew, he was sent to a hermitage for an education.

When the boy was seven years old, Valikethu Raju of Arlapeta waged a war against the Maharajah Ganga Raju, the overlord of Peddi Raju. Peddi Raju being the feudatory of Ganga Raju, had to get involved in the war against Valikethu Raju near Kanaka Repalle village. At that time, his wife was in the advanced stage of pregnancy. The battle was severe, and several soldiers were killed on both the sides. Peddi Raju fought ferociously yet could not withstand the onslaught of Valikethu Raju's forces. In spite of his valour and strength, Peddi Raju was killed in the battle. The death news was carried to the young Katama Raju. The boy could not believe that his father, such a mighty man of skill in wars was killed. He at once decided to take revenge on his father's killer. He immediately rushed to his palace.
At that time his mother was with a seven-day-old baby girl who was named Papanuka, and she was in a sea of sorrow. She begged her son Katama Raju not to go on war, since her husband was killed in the battle even though he was very brave and skilful. She told her son not to get involved in the battle at this age because it was of no use. She had already lost her husband and did not want to lose her son also. But the boy did not listen to his mother's words. He insisted that he should be blessed and sent. He promised that he would bring back his father, even from death. His mother's requests did not prevent him from going to the battlefield. He worshipped god Shiva, by whose grace he was born to his parents, and Shiva, pleased with the boy's devotion and courage, and as a reward he transformed himself into a parrot and sat on the shoulders of Katama Raju to guide, instruct and help him in need.

Kantha Peddamma, the village goddess of Kanaka Repalle rushed to the spot of the battle and stood near the corpse of Peddi Raju. She was a ferocious and mighty goddess who could rise as tall as a palmyrah tree. She needed thirty bags of rice, three gardens of drumstick trees, seven sheep and one tank full of water for a single meal. She called her brother Pothuraju to assist her in driving away the devils, demons, ghosts and spirits hovering on the battle to devour the dead soldiers. Suddenly one night, the goddess Ganga came there like a whirlwind, drove away all the ghosts, including Kantha Peddamma, and stood on the battle ground.

As Katama Raju was fast approaching the battle ground, Ganga the goddess came in his way and shouted at him to stop and tell who he was, or he would be killed instantly. The boy was not afraid of her. Instead he asked in return who she was. She said that she was *chikkala chikkala beerakayi* (netted ridged gourd). The parrot on his shoulder immediately told him in his ear what he should reply. The boy said that he was *tharigetanduku kodavali* (a sickle to cut the gourd into pieces). Again Ganga said that she was *samudram meeda thirige konga* (a crane that flies over sea). The boy Katama Raju replied prompted by the parrot, that he was *salu dega* (a seagull that flies higher than the crane). Again she said that she was *samudralaku samudralaku nippu pettedi* (the one who inflicts fire between the seas). At this Katma Raju said that he was *kondalaku kondalaku thagavu pettevadu* (the one inflicts quarrel between the mountains).

Ganga finally gave up the verbal combat and declared herself Ganga (goddess of water). She admired the boy's courage and smartness and promised to help him in battle. Then the boy asked her to bring back his father, Peddi Raju, back to life. She promised to do this, provided he would promise to marry her. The boy agreed to the proposal.

On hearing of Katama Raju's arrival at the battlefield, Valikethu Raju came there with his forces and fell upon him like a heavy downpour of rain. The boy fought courageously and was successful in beheading Valikethu Raju with his powerful arrows. But every time, the decapitated body got back its head, and the fighting continued. Then Ganga suggested to Katama Raju that he should throw two arrows simultaneously so that one would cut the head and the other would cut it into pieces before it attached itself to the body again. This advice was followed, and Valikethu Raju was finally killed. Then Katama Raju requested Ganga to give back his father's life.

Ganga told him that his father would survive only for a day, and therefore it was of no use, even if his father were alive. But Katama Raju wanted his father's life back, even for a day, so that he could take him home and show him to his mother. Ganga granted his request, and Katama Raju took his father immediately to his home, but Peddi Raju could live only a few hours at home. After his death, Ganga asked Katama Raju to fulfill the promise made to her. But Katama Raju asked her to take pity on his mother who was a widow in deep sorrow. Also he needed to cremate his father first. Further he said that since he was under state of pollution for one year, it would be impossible for him to marry her immediately. Then Ganga left him for ever.
At the outset, the story portrays the son's devotion to his father. It also deals with the theme of the conquest of death. The motif of battle takes the story to the historical period, bringing in a nostalgia about wars and victories. The story is about some people of Golla caste who ruled in certain places according to oral tradition. Ganga is their main deity. The story tells about her help to the Gollas. […] The Gollas are herdsmen who depend on water for the growth of grass, the fodder of cattle. They are also experts in curing diseases of cattle. The main occupation of the Madigas is making sandals and agricultural implements with the leather of dead buffalos and cows. Therefore, they depend on dead cattle for their subsistence. These interrelationships are explained in the characters of the story and the performers. Because this story praises the Gollas as kings, it is liked by them.

[pp 222-23]
The performers are either of a low caste or an Untouchable caste. For them, the motivation of the performance is to earn their living; it is their main occupation. As artists, they try to be skillful storytellers by using techniques of facial expression, postures and gestures, in addition to shifting to prose and explanation. Every performance is supposed to be impressive to the audience so as to obtain a demand for another occasion of performance. As artists, the performers are given respect by high castes, but at the same time, they are not excluded from the usual ill-treatment given to low castes and Untouchables. Their relationship is structured according to the social hierarchy of castes. The singing provides a space where they can project their views, alternatives to dominant values and themes. They disguise themselves by using different characters as their mouthpieces to criticize existing social order. Sarcasm forms an important means of criticism against the high castes and their ideologies. The criticism cannot be direct for two reasons: the performance itself is arranged by the high castes, and a criticism against them would be unethical. Also, criticism at the performance discourages the high caste people from inviting them once again. Therefore, the criticism must be indirect. For instance, Papaiah, the main singer of the Kommulollu in Thokalapudi, while narrating to me the story of Yadavapeddiraju said, when he came to the end of the story, ‘Look how cunning the Yadava lords! Sir, do you think these (pointing to Bukkaiah, a Golla, who took me to the Kommulollu) are verri Gollalu (mad Gollas)? They are not. They cheated the goddess!’ At this, Bukkaiah burst into laughter, but I was amazed at how skillfully Papaiah dug at Bukkaiah and other Gollas, stating that they are cheaters and cunning people. The themes of love, death, battle and gods in stories create emotion, honour, glory, laughter and fun among the audience. The performers let out emotions (developed in them due to exclusion, poverty and inferiority) through their sarcasm in the social action of storytelling.