

Part 1 Madigas for themselves

Chapter 3

Performing arts: Madigas as performers and patrons (2)



Chindu performers on stage at Ravindra Bharathi, Hyderabad, December 2006

Jamba Puranam and beyond: Chindu, Dakkali and other performers

Whereas the horn-blowers go beyond their playing of that instrument to act as bards for the Gollas and this is itself a part of the rich Madiga heritage of significance within their society, it is those who perform that role for Madigas themselves who are most central.

Jānapada Kalā Parisōdhana Vēdika.

[Bittu Venkateswarlu ed.] 1997. *Jāmba purāṇam*
(*Mādiga kula sāmskr̥tika cītram*). Hyderabad: JKPV
[Extract and translation to be added as available]

Y.A. Sudhakar Reddy & R.R. Harischandra 2006. **Story, performance and metaphors: explorations in the art form of Cindu Madigas (1)**. pp 82-100, in Simon Charsley & Laxmi Narayan Kadekar eds. *Performers and their Arts. Folk. Popular and Classical Genres in a Changing India*. New Delhi: Routledge
© Charsley and Kadekar 2006

[pp 83-90]

Among the performances of all the bards of Madigas, the Cindus' are different in that their art form alone is a full-fledged theatrical performance. The rest of the performances of the bards are more narrative than theatrically oriented. The Cindus have a unique way of attiring themselves with make-up, costume and ornament during performances. This art form is more widely prevalent and practised even today in Telangana villages than in the other parts of Andhra Pradesh.

Make-up, costume and ornaments are used as a device in theatre to manifest the text that is presented to the audience. They form the visual component of theatre and possess semiotic value. Without them, theatre remains more verbal than visual, and hence closer to telling a tale. For this reason, in both realistic and non-realistic plays, make-up, costume and ornament provide stylistic indicators. However, in folk theatre they serve more than a stylistic purpose and become the live nerve of the art form. They not only help manifest the text but also represent the community which

performs the text, communicating their worldview. They form, as Geertz (1966: 4 foll.) put it in relation to religion, 'a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations' in the community which owns the art form. They formulate conceptions of a general order of existence with an aura of factuality, so that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

There are two basic types of performances in the Cindu tradition. One is the caste myth performance such as *jambapuranam* and *yellamma vesham*, which tell of the caste's roles and its relationship with other castes in the social system. These performances structure the relationship of the Cindus with their patrons, the Madigas. They can be considered as 'internal' performances meant for the community of Madigas, to inform them of the kin relationship between them on the one hand, and the rights and obligations that exist between them on the other. The performances are exclusively by Cindus. As a caste-myth performance, it is usually conducted once in two or three years in the village communities which the Cindus own as *mirasi*. Before the 1970s, they were performed only in the vicinity of the Madiga hamlets, which were outside the main villages when Untouchability was practised stringently. Due to several legislations and vigilance on the part of successive governments in India, this situation has changed somewhat and the practice of Untouchability has reduced considerably in public places. The communities which continue to follow the tradition of performance have, owing to cultural change, started adapting to modern trends and are also showing the influence of cinema and mass media.

The second type of Cindu performances may be called 'external' because they are meant to entertain the entire village. It is these that identify the Cindu Madigas as performers. These performances are popularly known as *cindu bhagavatam* or *cindu yakshaganam*. [...] The epic stories from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Puranas are the basis and the whole narrative performed as a semi-dance sequence. Performers, ranging in number from 10 to 25 depending upon the nature of the text, take up the roles, with exuberant makeup, costumes and ornaments and perform the narrative in *yakshagana* or *bhagavata* style. The narratives are constructed in the form of songs as if sung by the Yakshas and therefore called as *yakshaganams* (songs of gods) or stories of gods (*bhagavatams*). The text is performed with musical and vocal accompanists. As mentioned, they are usually performed in the *mirasi* villages before and after the caste myth performances, but the performance is for all the villagers. However, since the themes are from the popular epics, they are also performed on festive occasions. The government of Andhra Pradesh stages these performances during cultural festivals for urban and semi-urban audiences and as a tourist attraction. In recent times even the members of the Madiga community and people from the other communities in the villages are learning and performing this art form as a part-time occupation.

Cindu Madigas and Madigas: the ritual relationship

As already noted, the Cindu Madiga are a dependent caste within the Madiga community. They are dependant because they have, by tradition, the ritual right well established with Madigas to perform their caste-myth as their chief occupation. The Cindus establish the relationship in which the Madiga belief system is created, sharing resources as patron and client. In the feudal economy economic compulsions tie clients to a patron through land. The clients under this system have an obligation to serve the patrons through prescribed services. In India, where caste is the source of occupation, services need to be rendered to patrons according to caste. In return the patrons are obliged to reciprocate by sharing resources. Land being the chief resource under the feudal system, it is either a share of the crop produced on their land or a piece of land that is given as *inam* (gift) to the clients. Under the *jajmani* system, which is peculiar to Indian sub-continent, the whole village enters into a dialogical relationship in the process of exchanging goods and services. In South India this system is known as the *mirasidar* system. The word *mirasi* comes from the root word *merah*, which literally means 'share'. The portion which is given to clients is called *mirasi* and one who holds the right to it is called the *mirasidar*.

In the patron and client relationship system of Madigas and Cindu Madigas, ritual rather than economic compulsions created through the belief system are vital for their social organisation. One of the major reasons for this ritual compulsion is enunciated in their sacred texts orally transmitted through the ages which have kept the system intact and alive. Cindu Madigas adopt the role of priests in performing purity-pollution rites in the form of the *yellamma vesham*, making the community feel secure from evil forces and curses of the gods.

***Jambapuram* - The Origin of the Cindu Madigas**

The Cindu Madigas are said to have been born to Jambavamuni, the Madiga ancestral god, from his second wife, Jagadvinutamata. The Madigas, on the other hand, are said to have descended from his first wife, Jagadeswaramata. Thus, the kinship bond is established in the myth of *jambapuram* itself. By and large, according to Indian custom, the elder brother is regarded as the heir to the property of the father. In that position he becomes the natural custodian of the younger brothers. This is explicitly knitted into the Madiga caste-myths when they become the owners of Jambavamuni's possessions and the younger ones are made dependant on them. The sharing of resources is based not in codified or written title deed but survives as a custom. However, the violation of this custom is believed to be punishable as much as under the purview of written law. The mutual reciprocation is imbibed through a process of 'give and take' between the Madigas and Cindu Madigas. It is the latter who propitiate the gods and seek blessings for the Madiga community through ritual performances. This was ritually performed in the past as an annual event. For conducting this ritual service, shares in kind and cash are bestowed on the Cindu Madigas. If any of them violate this norm, it is treated as a curse, detrimental to the existence of community itself. The following myth attests to this and explains how Cindu Madigas have become the performers and Madigas the audience.

The caste-myth, *jambapuram*, narrates an episode in which Jambavamuni gives a performance to quench the fury of the *Adishakti*, the primeval female principle or goddess. Dankasura, a demon (*asura*) who made Tripura his domain, started teasing the gods (*devatas*). Shankara (identified with God Siva), slew him, but from the drops of his own blood and that of his demon supporters falling on the earth, further demons sprang up. *Adishakti*, in order to avoid this, elongated her tongue over the earth and covered it. She drank the blood of the demons, becoming herself malevolent and chasing the *devatas*. They fled and pleaded with Jambavamuni to come to their rescue. Considering the prayers of *devatas*, he decided to take up the performing character of Gosangi. The *devatas* then gave him 32 items as components of his make-up, costumes and ornaments, transforming him into the Gosangi. They are enumerated and referred to in the caste myth as *birudas*, the titles. Vishnu presented the percussion drum (*dappu*) made from his *chakra*; Shankara offered a tiger skin (*puli charmamu*), Ganapati bestowed a large bell (*bodduganta* or body bell), Virabhadra provided a pair of knickers with small bells attached (*gajjalalagu*) and a whip (*vīragola*) and Lakshmi gave lotus flowers (*kaluvalu*). Likewise all the other gods and goddesses also donated different items.

Having transformed into Gosangi, Jambavamuni formed a procession with his two wives, sons, guru and the *devatas*. [...] He keeps ringing the bells. The *devatas* followed him to the court of Parabrahma, the original god. At the court amidst the sounds of percussion and string instruments, the Gosangi danced vibrantly with 32 steps in different styles (*cindus*). They sacrificed buffaloes and goats and also offered coconut, incense, jaggery, fruits and flowers for nine days. Then the *Adishakti* in her fierce (*raudra*) form became peaceful. She gave Jambavamuni two gifts, a headgear worn as a crown (*kali kommu*) and *kalkiturai*, an ornament for the headgear, symbolically representing 'a feather in his cap'. Jambavamuni, with his 32 gifts, then returned home.

This myth explains how the ancestral god of Madigas got the make-up, costumes, ornaments and properties to perform the Gosangi role. However, this myth did not yet tell how the make-up,

costumes, ornaments and properties were acquired by the sons of Cindu Jihva Mahamuni, that is, the Cindu Madigas.

Another myth is interwoven with this one to legitimise their role as performers. This myth appears to be a version of the narrative of Jamadagni and his wife Renukadevi. According to this, Jamadagni, a Brahmin sage, orders his son Parasurama to behead Renukadevi who had committed a sin equivalent to adultery. Parasurama killed Renukadevi while she tried to hide in the leather sack of the sons of Jambavamuni. Renukadevi came out furiously in the form of Yellamma and went after the people to swallow them. Jambavamuni, not knowing what to do, approached his guru and his first wife's sons to pacify Renuka/Yellamma, but they expressed their inability to do so. Finally Jambavamuni called his second wife's Cindu son to pacify her. He told his father: 'you have already pacified the Adishakti once, so why not do it again this time'. But Jambavamuni declared that his knee had been pierced by a mountain injuring his knee-cap, and that he could not dance due to pain. He requested his Cindu son to take up his role on this occasion to pacify the angry goddess. He accepted but demanded that he should be given the 32 titles that were given to Jambavamuni by the gods to transform himself into Gosangi. Wearing them all like his father, Cindu Jihva Mahamuni then went in procession to pacify Renuka. Several others playing percussion, string and other instruments, accompanied him. Endowed also with the 32 dance steps, he pacified her. She blessed him and his wife Sri Devalasani, and conferred on them the right to perform the characters of Gosangi and Yellamma, respectively, in order to narrate the caste myth to the Madigas. She also bestowed on them the right to claim shares from the Madigas in kind and cash. From then on, the Cindu Madigas became bards to the Madiga community and survived by performing the caste-myth for them.

Make-up, costumes and ornaments of Gosangi

[...] In the past, all the make-up used for the character of Gosangi was indigenously prepared. At least seven colours were used to create the right hue in the make-up. It is interesting to note that there are no shades achieved by mixing colours for the make-up of Gosangi. Since the performance does not take place on a proscenium stage or at night, there is no need to use lights to create shade and contours through the make-up. The tone of the make-up in general is crude, vibrant with colour, and distinguishes parts of the body. Make-up here is not an indicator of the character but reflects the actions of the body parts through colour symbolism. The colour blue predominates, representing divinity in the *avatara* (divine incarnation) concept of Indian mythology. Blue is also the colour of divine beings such as Krishna and Rama. Symbols are explicitly drawn on the face as part of make-up [...]. In this way the make-up becomes an interpretant of the text that is shared.

The ornaments and properties used by Gosangi also form a major component in the appearance of the character. They construct the character into a traditionally divine figure but they run counter to more general perceptions of other gods. One interesting feature is that the Sanskritic gods do not usually appear with a moustache, but here, true to the folk ethos, the Gosangi wears an elongated moustache. His crown does not resemble a normal crown as worn by royal personages. The myth narrates, as has been mentioned, that goddess Lakshmi gifted lotus flowers to Gosangi to ornament his crown, and Siva's retinue (*pramadha ganas*) gave. Another major part of ornamentation is done with shells. According to the myth, Jambavamuni was born in a shell, even before the earth was created. Shells in this sense represent his primordial existence. Other prominent ornaments are the bell, *neem* (margosa) leaves, and a curved sword. Gosangi wears and carries them since they were given as gifts by gods, as stated in the myth which is told in the verbal section of the performance.

Process of make-up

Since the performance is considered sacred and intrinsic to the community, the make-up, costumes

and ornaments are given much attention and the whole process could take at least three to four hours. [...] The performer who plays the role of Gosangi has to follow certain austerities before applying make-up to his body. He prepares himself a day before by following a certain diet. He cannot indulge in sex. After attending to the call of nature in the morning, he takes a bath and participates in rituals. Yellamma, their deity, is invoked to seek blessings. The box (*yellamma petti*) containing the make-up, costumes and ornaments is placed in front of the image of the goddess. He breaks a coconut before Yellamma, represented in the village in the form of a stone termed Yellamma *gudi* (temple). He also offers a bottle of toddy to the goddess. He wears vermilion powder on his forehead to indicate the blessing of the goddess. The Cindu Madigas then give him toddy, which too is placed before the goddess as *naivedyam* (sacred offering). The process of make-up commences with this ritual.

The ornaments and properties used by Gosangi also form a major component in the appearance of the character. They construct the character into a traditionally divine figure but they run counter to more general perceptions of other gods. One interesting feature is that the Sanskritic gods do not usually appear with a moustache, but here, true to the folk ethos, the Gosangi wears an elongated moustache. His crown does not resemble a normal crown as worn by royal personages. The myth narrates, as has been mentioned, that goddess Lakshmi gifted lotus flowers to Gosangi to ornament his crown, and Siva's retinue (*pramadha ganas*) gave. Another major part of ornamentation is done with shells. According to the myth, Jambavamuni was born in a shell, even before the earth was created. Shells in this sense represent his primordial existence. Other prominent ornaments are the bell, *neem* (margosa) leaves, and a curved sword. Gosangi wears and carries them since they were given as gifts by gods, as stated in the myth which is told in the verbal section of the performance.

Process of make-up

Since the performance is considered sacred and intrinsic to the community, the make-up, costumes and ornaments are given much attention and the whole process could take at least three to four hours. [...] The performer who plays the role of Gosangi has to follow certain austerities before applying make-up to his body. He prepares himself a day before by following a certain diet. He cannot indulge in sex. After attending to the call of nature in the morning, he takes a bath and participates in rituals. Yellamma, their deity, is invoked to seek blessings. The box (*yellamma petti*) containing the make-up, costumes and ornaments is placed in front of the image of the goddess. He breaks a coconut before Yellamma, represented in the village in the form of a stone termed Yellamma *gudi* (temple). He also offers a bottle of toddy to the goddess. He wears vermilion powder on his forehead to indicate the blessing of the goddess. The Cindu Madigas then give him toddy, which too is placed before the goddess as *naivedyam* (sacred offering). The process of make-up commences with this ritual.

[pp 92-93]

[...] Facial make-up is completed with a big moustache made from the wool of a sheep, not painted but fixed. As has been noted before, in the Sanskritic tradition gods do not have moustaches. The concept of divinity in this community is that their ancestral god is as much human as divine. In other words, he belongs to two realms, that of divinity and humanity.

After this is completed, the performer dons the costume. The costume is divided into upper and lower garments, the upper basically covers the torso, and the lower extends from hip to ankle. He wears an undergarment over which he puts on a pair of colourful knickers, usually red, with designs. Small bells (*gajjelu*) are tied to the edges, and the entire lower garment is called *gajjelalagu*. According to the myth, it was Virabhadra who gave these knickers to Jambavamuni, and they represent, through a complex but well-known mythological sequence, the dance through which the god exerted his power in an episode known as 'Dakshayajnam'. The *gajjelalagu* adds rhythm to such vibrant dancing and the community believes that it was the same kind of powerful

dance that Gosangi performed to diminish the fury of the goddess Yellamma. Over the knickers the performer puts on the first of seven 12-foot-long saris by tying it tightly criss-crossed, making it look like a man's outer garment. This is known as *kashe*. [...] Over the costumes, Gosangi wears various objects made of leather, shells, metal and threads as ornaments. Traditionally the most prominent among these are known as *darsanams*, which literally means vision or that which is visible. There are altogether seven *darsanams*. They are neither a costume nor ornament although to an outsider they may look like ornaments. The first of these covers Gosangi's chest and back, and is identified as *rommu* or *sanku darsanam*. The second is tied around the neck and called *kanta darsanam*. The third and fourth are tied around the left and right arms, and the fifth and sixth to the left and right wrists. Performers mention various names for these. The seventh is known as *siro darsanam*, and it is tied around the already tied hair (*koppu*). These *darsanams*, except the *rommu darsanam*, are also known as *dasthavejulu* (records). The myth behind them concerns the Adishakti, the primordial power.

**D. Venkat Rao 2002. Mnemocultures of hospitality,
Hindi: Language, discourse, writing, 2, 4: 145-64**

The title here refers particularly to Jambapuram of Dakkalis and the nature of the relationship between performing castes and their patrons more generally, to be characterised as 'hospitality'. The author is one of very few so far to work on the distinctiveness of the genres applied by different performers to the caste myths of the Madigas. On a theoretically more ambitious level he addresses in often dazzling language the problems of using Western academic traditions attached to the term 'myth' for understanding mnemocultures from the periphery.

[pp 152-53]

In the larger work of this project I am hoping to develop a detailed account of the differentiated and variegated structure of the Purana from the margin. For the purpose of demonstration the pre-eminent and quintessential text, Jambapurana of the Madiga (SC) communities is taken up here. An iconic and emblematic text of the internally demarcated communities of Malas and Madigas, Jambapurana is rendered by specific groups within three or four subgroups of the Madiga communities. Members of Chindu, Nulaka Chandaiah, Dakkali and (minimally) Mashteedulu narrate and perform the Purana. Thematically, constructionally and compositionally the rendering of the Purana differs in the case of each of these communities. The Dakkali, for instance, structure their rendering in five parts but for the Chindus it is only one long continuum (this observation is based on the one printed version available); Nulaka Chandaiah and Dakkali use elaborate mythological visuals on cloth (developed again by another community from the margin (2)), but the Chindus and Mashteedulu don't. Thematically as well, if the Chindus plot the Purana as an extended and intense interrogation of community ontologies, from the received positions of the Brahmin and the Madiga communities, the Dakkalis enact this drama, with a different emphasis, as a contention between the Shudra-peasant-landowner and the marginalised Madigas; the Dakkalis also enact this as a profoundly mediated sacrificial ritual – now enacted by the paradoxical figure of the 'parasitical' community.

The larger work aims at examining the variations in the rendering of the Puranas not only among the communities, but hopes to identify the specificity of rendering, hence the distinction and difference, within a particular, demarcated community. Despite all the seeming unities in the rendering of the Purana in these communities, each group of a specific community (say that of the Chindus of Uppal) differentiates its performance and narration from another group of the same community (say that of the Chindus of Aler or Vangapadu).

[...]

The complexity and substance of the *Jambapuranas* demand serious attention. In terms of the language used in these various compositions and renderings (Sanskrit, Telangana idiom, localised Urdu), the themes contained (incest and its taboo, genealogies, Vedic sacrificial ritual, myth, logical argumentation, and the origin myths concerning caste forms and technology), the speech genres deployed (stanzaic verse, hymns, prayers, eulogies, dialogue, etc.) – all these elements are of central significance in any meditation on Indian cultural fabric. They demand intimately critical exploration.

[pp 156-60]

If generally myths are restive, thematically they are incorrigibly disloyal. Mnemocultural Purana has space for any use of language, any signficatory system. Tales of gods, animals, humans and demons, themes of divinity, incest, marriage, ritual sacrifice, infanticide, boons and curses, eulogies and tirades, agriculture and magic, bondage and wandering, tools and bodies – in short, any theme can be gobbled up in the open-ended world of myth. [...]

What in fact the *Jambapurana* (Dakkali version) enacts is a confrontation of singular individuals (Adishakti and the trinity – each at a time, Vishwakarma and Agasthya, Parvati-Shiva, Shiva-Balabhadra, etc.) Here more than affirming a specific identity, what we seem to get is a commonality of beings. But on the contrary we find challenges to ontological assertions. Curiously, of the five parts of the narrative and performative composition called *Jambapurana*, none actually bears the protagonist's name (Jambava). Although Jambava appears in some of these sections at crucial moments, each part offers a performative thematic account of classical issues like incest and law, desire and its containment, technology and body, filicide and sacrifice, ritual and pollution, ontology and difference, and, above all, women and sharing. In other words, none of the parts is solely about lineages or totalising identity, affirmed in the name of a founding ancestor. Lineages are referred to and affirmed only contextually and contentiously.

[... An important theoretical discussion of mnemocultures and 'the practical sharing or partaking' follows here. ...]

In matters of life, economy, culture and politics, it is precisely the so-called dependency and parasitism [of those such as the Dakkali] that underwrite an agonistic relation to their respective others. Consequently, the relation between the so-called host and its parasite gains a new significance; this would be an undecidable and unresolvable relationship. Let's explore this in the context of the mnemocultural communities. The peculiar bond between the caste (host) group and the cultural (parasite or soliciting) community is that the latter alone is the 'source' for asserting the former's singularity and distinction. That is, every caste group demarcates and distinguishes itself from its other, only through the extraordinary resources of the 'parasite'. The desire to consolidate an immanence, a community's unity, irrespective of whether the community is 'dominant' or 'subordinated' – as the subalternists described them – is deeply contingent upon the community's gatherings. In a word, the caste group's much coveted singular identity is nurtured and enhanced by the so-called dependant parasite or the soliciting other.

If the host depends on the parasite, and not the other way round, as usually represented, what kind of relationship can be envisaged from this overturned hierarchy? *The 'new' relationship must emerge as a space of hospitality.* This is what mnemocultures of margin perform in every iterable rendering of their acts. If community is made of beings-in-common, then the relation among singular beings is that of partaking, or participating and sharing. All these elements imply partiality or particularity. Every particularity, in its repeatability, its recurrence, suggests the impossibility of a

completed totality. Sharing without end, partaking without finality is the imperative of incompleting communities.

In a significant scene of the *Jambapurana*, after Shiva repeatedly fails to receive hospitality from the landowner, Jambava insists on the ethics of sharing. Without such sharing there is neither an order nor hospitality or cordiality ('*Iokari kindu okaru vundaru. Daya Vundadu*' (One won't follow another. There won't be cordiality.)). If there is a single practice that moves across in time and space, vertically and horizontally, on the Indian cultural fabric – a practice repeatedly affirmed throughout – it is, in its idiomatic formulation: *Bhiksha(mu)*. Every Indian language in all its various manifestations is endowed with this idiomatic locution. Although the term can be conflated with beggary, its connotations, in terms of practised circulation of it, are deeply connected to acts of sharing/partaking and hospitality and cordiality. The singular term that can come closer to that practice could be 'solicitation' (in all its senses). Buddhism, in its own challenges to received hierarchies, has given pride of place to the practice of *Bhiksha* or soliciting. Every Buddhist monk is a *Bhikku* – the partaker. Buddhism in a way continues a well-established practice of surviving through solicitation, which every Brahmin was expected to practice at some stage of life.

If the *Jambapurana* thematises the acts of sharing, all mnemocultural communities yearn for and enact these acts. The *Jambapurana* thematises these double acts of community. If the Dakkali community is hospitable to the Madigas by repeatedly affirming the latter's singularity through its resources, it also yearns for acts of sharing from this community. This double movement is inverted in the Dakkali relation with the Eenelavadu. Similarly, another inversion forms the bond between the Eenela and the Shankamookala, between the latter and Burrakayala and so on till we reach the singular performer-narrator Mondivadu (the latter's unexplored narrative tradition is worth a deeper study). Across all these simulacral doubles – not just within the Madiga community, but all the way from the other caste groups and their internally divided and distanced doubles – one can track the dual yearning for a share, enacting hospitality to the other. (The themes of partaking and remainders have profound significance in Indian cultural practices).

The mnemocultural communities, in their characteristic disregard of borders and boundaries, deploy a number of terms (the way they proliferate their cultural practices) to embody the structure of the dual act – sharing, gifting, sheltering and soliciting. Some of the idiomatic terms have their tracks in larger historical terrains. The community terms for the double acts are: *Daana, Dharma, Bhiksha, Daya, Katna, Kanuka, Tyaga, Yachana, Aduguta*, etc. Once again the specificity of each of these terms is maintained in the community performances – but their overall reiteration of the bond of sharing and sheltering remains common to the entire set.

M. Nagabhushana Sarma 1995.

Folk Performing Arts of Andhra Pradesh. Hyderabad:

Telugu University.

© Telugu University 1995

[pp 106-07]

'**Chindu Yakshagānam**' or '**Chindu Bhāgavatham**' is a unique dramatic performance prevalent in the northern districts of Telangana. Performed by professional Harijan groups, usually for Harijan audiences, it is one of the very few performing art forms in which women have a major share. It started as a ritual form, presenting the caste myth of the Harijans and, in course of time, included stories from the Rāmāyanam, the Bharatham and the Bhāgavatham. They also perform plays based on local legends among which the story of Chenchu Laxmi is famous.

[...] All plays, especially Jāmba Purāṇam, will end with ‘Yellamma Vēsham’, presenting the role of their caste goddess, Yellamma. Though both men and women participate in the performances, the ‘Yellamma Vēsham’ must be performed by a woman. As they perform for the poorest of the poor, who cannot afford large-scale preparations, their performances always take place during daytime and both the stage and its requirements including stage properties are minimal. But in performance quality, theirs does not lag behind the other well-equipped theatre forms.

In almost all the folk theatres of Andhra men take up both male and female roles. However, there is no strict demarcation like that in ‘Chindu Bāgavatham’. Men take up female roles and women do the male roles as well. Chindula Yellamma, a veteran performer, takes up both male and female roles; so does Chindula Shyam. The women also have another major role in Chindu Yakshagānam; it is only they that participate in the chorus, whoever be the performer. It is, again, a woman who takes up the role of Yellamma, who appears at the end of the performance to bless both the actors and the audience. The whole performance situation immediately changes into a ritual when Yellamma appears. The play ends with a *mangalam* to the Goddess. [...] Besides Jamba Purāṇam, the Chindu groups (called ‘melams’) perform more than thirty Yakshagānams which include Sati Savitri, Bhakta Prahlada, Satya Harischandra, Chenchu Laxmi, Alli Rāni, Veerabhimanya, Ganga-Gauri Samvadam and Balanamma.

Though the artists themselves are unaware of how they came to perform plays other than their Kula Purāṇam (caste-myth), it is evident from their performance traditions that they are greatly influenced by the Vaishnava performers. They start any of their performances with the dance of the child Krishna, followed by Rambha. Then appears the king and the queen and the other characters. There are entrance-songs only for the king and the queen. This must be a later inclusion.

Chindu Bhāgavatham retained its age-old traditions intact, since it is not ‘contaminated’ by outside influences. The women artists who participate in the chorus sing *jatis* at the end of each song, for which the actor dances. Among the *rāgas*, they mainly use Kambhoja, Asaveri, Mohana and Sobhvarali. They also use Rupaka, Adī, Julva and Triputa *tālas*. The entire group knows the *rāgas* and *tālas*. Harmonium, which replaced *titti*, is used only for *shruti*. Mridangam and tabla are used for rhythm. Everyone wears ankle-bells. The chorus women use cymbals.

The costume of these artists is simple but elegant. Both male and female artists, besides an appropriate costume, use an *angavastram* which is placed on the shoulders and falls on both sides up to their knees. On this is a *patka* or *dhatti* which keeps the upper cloth tight. For the make-up old items like *addalam* are still in use.

This style of Yakshagānam is still very popular in Nizamabad district, especially around Armour. Among the teams that are active, Chindula Yellamma’s team, Chindula Shyam’s and Chindula Gopal’s are the more prominent ones.[1]

Backstage at Ravindra Bharathi



Backstage at Ravindra Bharathi





Backstageat Ravindra Bharathi