CELLULOID CLASSICISM: EARLY TAMIL CINEMA AND THE MAKING OF MODERN BHARATANĀṬYAM

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DEDICATION

For my mother, Vimala Krishnan,
with immense love and gratitude

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The idea for this work was initiated in 2002, when I was introduced to the late dancer-actress Padmini Ramachandran (1932-2006). Over the course of several years, I engaged in spirited conversations with Padmini at her warm and welcoming home in New Jersey. “Pappimā” (as she was affectionately known) and I spoke at length about Bharatanāṭyam, the cinema, and the interconnectedness of the two in her life. This work owes much to those extensive discussions with Padmini, who would have been the nexus of this work had she still been alive. Thank you, Pappimā.

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I love you, Amma. This is for you.

ABSTRACT

HARI KRISHNAN

CELLULOID CLASSICISM: EARLY TAMIL CINEMA AND THE MAKING OF MODERN BHARATANĀṬYAM

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This dissertation investigates how two of the most prominent cultural forms of modern South India—Tamil cinema and Bharatanāṭyam dance—share complex and deeply intertwined histories. It addresses the entangled emergence of these two modern art forms from the 1930s to the 1950s, which were decades marked by distinctly new intermedial modes of cultural production in cosmopolitan Madras. This project unsettles received histories of modern Bharatanāṭyam by arguing that cinema—in all its technological, moral, and visual complexities—bears heavily and irrevocably upon iterations of this "classical" dance. By bringing archival research into conversation with choreographic analysis and ethnography with film performers and Bharatanāṭyam dancers, this work addresses key questions around the fluid and reciprocal exchange of knowledge between film, dance, and stage versions of Bharatanāṭyam during the early decades of the twentieth century. The dissertation includes deliberations on subjects such as the participation of women from the *devadāsī* (courtesan) community in the cinema, the period of the urban "reinvention" of dance from the standpoint of cinematic history, the impact of the forces of cultural nationalism and regionalism, and the making of new aesthetic vocabularies and techniques for Bharatanāṭyam in the cinema. The work

concludes with notes on the persistence of cinema and Bharatanāṭyam as ever-entangled vernacular idioms in the global age of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Taken together, the materials presented in this dissertation provide a detailed cultural history that draws lateral paravisual linkages between the production and circulation of Tamil cinema and Bharatanāṭyam dance.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND SPELLING

In this dissertation, I have used standard Tamil transliteration (following the University of Madras' *Tamil Lexicon*) for all words and text that appear in Tamil sources. Words that appear from Telugu sources or that are of Sanskrit origin also appear in standard transliteration, with *ĕ* and *ŏ* representing short vowels in Telugu.

The names of films are usually spelled as they appear in English-language sources, which are usually advertisements or film credits (e.g., *Thyagabhoomi* rather than *Tiyākapūmi*; *Utthama Puthiran* rather than *Uttama Puttiraṉ*). When I was not able to find English representations of these words, I have transliterated them as per the *Tamil Lexicon.* When English equivalents or translations for the film names are provided in the credits of the film or film advertisements (e.g., the 1948 film *Vedhala Ulagam* was marketed in English as *Demon World*), I have used those translations. For others, I have translated the titles myself. Place names, regardless of their appearance, are spelled using their contemporary "official" spellings (e.g., *Thanjavur* rather than *Tañcāvūr* or *Tañjāvūr; Vazhuvoor* rather than *Vaḻuvūr*).

The names of twentieth-century persons for the most part follow the standard practice of phonetic spelling adopted in the modern Tamil context (e.g., *Sundaram* rather than *Cuntaram; Muthuswamy* rather than *Muttucāmi* or *Muttucuvāmi*). The names of some early twentieth-century and *all* nineteenth-century persons are usually spelled using

standard Tamil transliteration, since most of these are being imported from Tamil-language sources (e.g., *Kurucāmitās* rather than *Gurusāmidās*).

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: ON CONVERGENT HISTORIES

This dissertation investigates how two of the most prominent cultural forms of modern South India—Tamil cinema and Bharatanāṭyam dance—share complex and deeply intertwined histories.[1] It addresses the entangled emergence of these two modern art forms from the 1930s to the 1950s, which were decades that were marked by distinctly new intermedial modes of cultural production in cosmopolitan Madras. This project unsettles received histories of modern Bharatanāṭyam (already explored extensively by scholars such as Avanti Meduri and Janet O'Shea) by arguing that cinema—in all its technological, moral, and visual complexities—bears heavily and irrevocably upon iterations of this "classical" dance. By bringing archival research into conversation with choreographic analysis and ethnography with film performers and Bharatanāṭyam dancers, this work addresses key questions around the fluid and reciprocal exchange of knowledge between the cinematic and stage versions of Bharatanāṭyam during the early decades of the twentieth century. It includes deliberations on subjects such as the participation of women from the *devadāsī* (courtesan) community in the cinema, the period of the urban "reinvention" of dance from the standpoint of cinematic history, the impact of the forces of cultural nationalism and regionalism, and the making of new aesthetic vocabularies and techniques for Bharatanāṭyam in the cinema. The work concludes with notes on the persistence of cinema and Bharatanāṭyam as ever-entangled

vernacular idioms in the global age of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Taken together, the materials presented in this dissertation provide a detailed cultural history that draws lateral paravisual linkages between the production and circulation of Tamil cinema and Bharatanāṭyam dance.

INTERMEDIAL AND INTEROCULAR CULTURES IN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY SOUTH INDIA

Much of this dissertation is concerned with intersections—historical, aesthetic, political, and social—between new cultural forms as they circulated in early to mid twentieth century South India. I argue that these intersections rest upon new ways of seeing and reading that cannot be understood without reference to new visual technologies in colonial South Asia. Photography and, later, the cinema were the harbingers of this new visual world. However, at heart of this dissertation is also an historical inquiry into the social history of individuals and collectivities relevant to the creation of both Bharatanāṭyam and the early Tamil cinema. Indeed, as visual anthropologist Christopher Pinney has recently argued, "[Social] History is intimately related to the visual and the performative" ("The Look of History" 115). The kind of social history I seek to map in this work can only emerge from the "rhizomatic" and lateral linkages that I draw among printed texts and images, live performances, and cinematic representations. I take my cue from the work of Kajri Jain, visual anthropologist of South Asia, who invokes Deleuze and Guattari in thinking about the rhizomatic nature of popular cinema in South Asia:

> I approach the commercial cinema as a node in what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1977, 1987) call a rhizomatic network, whose ceaseless proliferations make various kinds of lateral linkages across heterogeneous categories. The strength of a rhizomatic approach is that it allows us to simultaneously hold in view different registers of efficacy…. Most analyses of visual culture emphasize the effects and affects that flow from the meanings of objects or from their work of representation…however, I want to foreground those that flow from their production and circulation, from the networks they inscribe (local, national, and transnational), and the forms of sociality and mobilty they enable. ("Figures of Locality and Tradition" 72-73)

Closely linked to Jain's concept of the rhizomatic and lateral linkages across visual registers in modern South Asia is the idea of "interocularity" or the "interocular field" as a key signpost of public culture. These terms were first deployed by cultural anthropologists Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, who conceded that "the socializing and regulating of the public gaze is to some degree affected by the experiences of the other sites. The interweaving of ocular experiences, which also subsumes the substantive transfer of meanings, scripts, and symbols from one site to another (in surprising ways), is a critical feature of public culture in contemporary India" (12).

In his discussion of the emergence of mass produced printed images (chromolithographs) in South Asia, Christopher Pinney brings Appadurai and Breckenridge's notion of interocularity to bear on the modern arts in South Asia, arguing that it is intermedial "conversations" across both visual and performative genres that produced cultures of viewing and consumption in modern South Asia:

> Chromolithography was created and consumed within a wider visual culture in which there was a continual slippage between genres. The conversation between the idioms of chromolithography, theatre and photography in late nineteenth- and

> early twentieth-centruy India created mutually reinforcing expectations. These different visual fields crossed each other through processes of "inter-ocularity"—a visual inter-referencing and citation that mirrors the more familiar process of "inter-textuality." (*Photos of the Gods* 34-35)

In this dissertation, I demonstrate how the emergence of Bharatanāṭyam as a modern cultural artifact cannot be disassociated from a wider interocular and intermedial field that fuels the consumption practices and aesthetic taste habits of the Indian middle-class in the twentieth cenutry. The wider interocular field in which Bharatanāṭyam is couched includes the printed book and print culture more generally, the modern Tamil theater (later known as *icai nāṭakam*, which has its origins in the hybrid theater-form often described the "Parsi theater"), and the early Tamil cinema. Fig. 1-1 illustrates how visual and performative themes circulated through the intermedial conversations discovered in my own data.[2] On the left is a famous painting by the artist Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906) entitled "Vishwamitra and Menaka" (1890). Ravi Varma, who was a self-taught artist from Kerala, has been described as embodying the "paradoxical ideology of the Indian renaissance, at once traditionalist and modern" (Kapur 145). Varma's work was among the most widely circulated art in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in India. His hybrid realist aesthetic was redistributed into a range of cultural forms and practices, including the printed chromolithograph, the book, and performance.[3] The image "Vishwamitra and Menaka" depicts a mythic narrative in which the sage Viśvāmitra rejects the daughter, Śakuntalā, who was born from his union with the celestial courtesan Menakā. The story of Śakuntalā was extremely popular in both Indian and European Orientalist representations of literature and drama for centuries. At

the center of fig. 1-1, this image is reproduced on the frontispiece of the script for a play entitled *Pārsi Cakuntalā Carittiram Ṭirāmā* ("The Life of Śakuntalā, in the Pārsi Drama Style"), which was published in 1927. Then, just under a decade later, the same image is reproduced by the bodies of the actors M.K. Gopala Ayyangar and Rajasundari Bai in one of the earliest Tamil sound films, *Viswamitra* (1936), as shown in the third panel of fig. 1-1.

Fig. 1-1. The famous painting "Vishwamitra and Menaka" by Raja Ravi Varma *(left)* inspired the frontispiece from the Tamil Parsi-theater play, *Pārsi Cakuntalā* (*center*; 1927, © British Library Board [pTam.D.2657]) as well as an advertisement for the Tamil film *Viswamitra* (*right*; 1936, Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu).

On the one hand, these three images clearly posit cinema as a site of culmination and of cultural bricolage in which accretions consisting of the influence of text and print culture and the new theater can clearly be seen. On the other hand, these images also speak to the fact that popular culture in early twentieth-century South India was

fundamentally intermedial: it was in fact constituted by a flow of cultural knowledge between medial forms. The most concrete illustration of this intermedial cultural flow comes from the fact that, in the cinema houses of Madras in the 1930s and 1940s, cinema screenings were themselves supplemented by live performance in a range of musical and dance styles, including courtesan dance, Western dance, and, eventually, the reinvented Bharatanāṭyam; this will also be discussed further in Chapter III. In this dissertation, I apply intermedial modalities to thinking about how Bharatanāṭyam itself was reconceived, disseminated, and consumed as a "new" cultural practice. Indeed, to understand Bharatanāṭyam's complexities as a reinvented form, it cannot be forgetten that the cinema constituted a very large component of the interocular and intermedial matrix in which it was born.

FILM AS FOIL: BHARATANĀṬYAM, "CLASSICISM," AND THE LIMITS OF THE POPULAR

As I bring Bharatanāṭyam into dialogue with cinematic history, I hope to convincingly demonstrate that, when taken together, these forms signify a sphere of culture that might better be represented as "popular" rather than "classical." In other words, in discursive invocation of terms like "classical" obfuscate the ways in which Bharatanāṭyam, like the cinema, is really both a product and sign of mass-mediated culture. In their introduction to a volume entitled *Fingerprinting Popular Culture: The Mythic and Iconic in Indian Cinema,* cultural historians Vinay Lal and Ashis Nandy posit Indian cinema as the site for confrontations and negotiations between the various signposts of Indian modernity: "Popular culture, especially popular cinema, now began to

look like a crucial battle ground where the battles between the old and the new, the traditional and modern, the global and the local were being fought through the renegotiation of myth and fantasy life" (xxiv).

I would argue that Bharatanāṭyam—in its post-1930s avatar as a middle-class, semi-professional practice—is imbricated in the same sets of questions and contestations. As will be demonstrated later, the "renegotation of myth and fantasy life" was a central component of Bharatanāṭyam's emergence as an urban, "devotional," and Sanskritized cultural practice. The language of "classicism" was first applied to Bharatanāṭyam only during the process of its reinvention at the hands of the English-educated Brahmin elites in Madras city during the 1930s. In their brilliant introduction to a volume entitled *Performing Pasts: Reinventing the Arts in Modern South India,* cultural historians Indira Peterson and Davesh Soneji remark on the social complexities of the creation of "the classical" in South India during this period:

> From the reformist/revivialist perspective, the dance and music of hereditary and other traditional communities were secret, idiosyncratic, heterogenous, unscientific, non-canonical, hybrid, vernacular, and non-modern. They were transmitted and performed through oral, caste-based, and practice-centred processes. The new classical arts, on the other hand, would be based on "ancient" yet suitably reformed, modernized textual and theoretical canons, and the performers would be modern professionals, untainted by caste associations and non-scientific methods. (7)

"The classical" performing arts—as they are constructed by the Indian elites and the bureaucratic machinery of the nation-state—exist in opposition to "the popular," a category that, by the 1940s, almost exclusively was used to refer to the cinema. Usha Iyer has written most elequently about the ways in which film dance is continuously scripted

as low-brow and "corrupt" and how it produces discourses of moral anxiety and censure in terms of public taste; she also discusses how "[t]he (always unflattering) comparison with classical dance is a regular trope" in such scripts (6). One of the major contributions of this dissertation is the fact that it addresses the complex intersectionality that Bharatanāṭyam occupies. Its contrived "classicism," which is based largely on the grafting of Orientalist discoveries of Sanskritic knowledge systems onto a vernacular dance culture, takes root *in opposition to* the popular cinema, as Iyer notes. However, cinematic iterations of Bharatanāṭyam often construct the dance as "timelessly classical" or distinct from other forms of dance and somatic expression. This, in my opinion, produced deeply affective and long-standing aesthetic parameters that continue to live in both today's Tamil cinema and modern performances of Bharatanāṭyam. Essentially, this project tells the story of Bharatanāṭyam's transformation during the first half of the twentieth century by thinking about the cinema and the urban stage as laboratories of culture. I will argue that the unique idea of the "classical" as used to refer to Bharatanāṭyam simply cannot be understood without reference to the dance's early filmic instantiations—hence the title "Celluloid Classicism."

Moreover, the story of Bharatanāṭyam's emergence as a nationalist art form during the 1930s cannot be separated from the wider political debate surrounding caste and social mobility that framed nationalist modernity in South India. Tamil cinema, too—as the work of Theodore Baskaran (*The Message Bearers*), M.S.S. Pandian ("Tamil Cultural Elites"; *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin*), and others has demonstrated—emerged

from within a frame of non-Brahmin political assertion during this period. In this dissertation, I want to emphasize how representations of dance in the cinema enable slippages of both mobility and oppression under the caste hierarchy. Dance in the cinema produces a seemingly naturalized and "ancient" aesthetic regime for modern Bharatanāṭyam, and it also involves a range of actors who represent themselves (and who are represented) along lines of difference (based on caste, class, and gender) and who are yet homologized through discourses of nationalism and Tamil regionalism.[4] Chapter IV explores the complex interactions that occur among early film dance, caste, regional Tamil politics, and Indian nationalism in greater depth.

MODERN TAMIL DRAMA AS INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN BHARATANĀṬYAM AND THE TAMIL CINEMA

A major gap in the social history of Bharatanāṭyam has been the central role that it played in the emergence of the modern Tamil drama tradition, which is variously known as *icai nāṭakam* ("musical drama"), *Tamiḻ nāṭakam* ("Tamil drama"), boys' company drama, and "special" *nāṭakam* (Araṅkacāmi [*Tamiḻ Nāṭakam*]; Baskaran ["Persistence of Conventions"]; Kiruṣṇamūrtti [*Tamiḻ Nāṭaka Varalāṟu*]; Mangai and Arasu ["Ushering Changes"]; Perumal [*Tamiḻ Nāṭakattiṉ*; *Tamil Drama*; *Irupatām Nūṟṟāṇṭatil*]; Seizer [*Stigmas of the Tamil Stage*]; Sugimoto ["Boys Be Ambitious"]; C. Veṅkaṭarāmaṉ [*Tiraiyulakil Icaik Kalaiñarkaḷ*]). The modern Tamil drama represented an intermediary and socially liminal space that enabled the flow of professional and semi-professional actors into the emergent Tamil cinema; it also enabled women from *devadāsī* (courtesan) backgrounds to enter the world of the professional theater and, by

extension, the early Tamil cinema. This form was born of the interface between old forms of Tamil theater—known variously as *kūttu, terukkūttu,* or *kaṭṭaikkūttu* (de Bruin *Kaṭṭaikkūttu*) and that essentially consisted of songs interpreted through gesture and strung together with spoken dialogue—and a new hybrid form of colonial theater, usually called the "Parsi theater" (Gupt *The Parsi Theatre*; Hansen "Making Women Visible," *Stages of Life*). The Parsi theater was a form of popular drama that grew out of colonial theatrical techniques and modern adaptations of Shakespearean performance by Britons in South Asia during the mid-nineteenth century. When these practices were taken up by natives (initially by the Gujarati-speaking Parsi community in the Bombay Presidency) and indigenized (through the use of Indian narratives and scripts in Indian languages), they came to be known as the "Parsi theater." Parsi theater companies such as the Victoria Parsee Theatrical Company, which was established in 1868 by K.N. Kabra, toured large parts of India and Southeast Asia and held major performances in Madras city during the 1880s.[5] These performances inspired Tamil amateur and semi-professional dramaturges and literary aficionados to create new forms of Tamil theater that drew both content and technique from the Parsi theater but that also retained aspects of performance—such as the gestural interpretation of text (*abhinaya*) and *rāga*-based music—from older traditions such as the *kūttu* theater and even courtesan dance. Hundreds of new Tamil dramas were composed between the 1870s and the 1930s, and these spanned a range of historical, pseudo-historical, mythological, and, later, social themes. As this tradition became increasingly popular, the writers/dramaturges

Caṅkaratās Cuvāmikaḷ (1867-1932) and Pammal Campanta Mutaliyār (1873-1964) were heralded as the pillars of the form. They composed new and highly innovative scripts for performance, even when they drew upon older themes, including mythological ones; fig. 1-2, for example, shows the first print edition of Cuvāmikaḷ's play based on the mythological narrative of the child-devotee Prahlāda. Cuvāmikaḷ only employed young boys to play the parts in his plays, and hence this form of theater came to be known as "boys' company" drama.[6] The new Tamil theater was also a space of intercaste interaction that even brought women performers from the *devadāsī* community into its fold.[7] Indeed, as early as 1876, *devadāsī* dancers were involved in modern Tamil theatrical productions in Madras city.[8]

Fig. 1-2. The cover of the play *Iraṇiyaṉ Nāṭakam allatu Pirahalātā* by Caṅkaratās Cuvāmikaḷ, published by Madurai (*left*; 1926, © British Library Board [pTam.D.2155]). A photo of a rehearsal for a play by Caṅkaratās Cuvāmikaḷ's company (*right*; c. 1925, Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu).

Film historians (e.g., Baskaran [*The Message Bearers*; *The Eye of the Serpent*; "Persistence of Conventions"; *History Through the Lens*]; Guy [*Starlight, Starbright*]) have long dwelled upon the formative influence of the modern Tamil drama on early cinema. Indeed, Pammal Campanta Mutaliyar even directed and acted in some films in the 1930s.[9] However, this matrix of drama and early cinema has never been considered with reference to the emergence of modern Bharatanāṭyam or "classical" (Karṇāṭak) music.[10] Indeed, so many of the actors, techniques, and narratives of the modern Tamil theater are brought into the cinema, and many of these cross over into representations of Bharatanāṭyam on both stage and screen. For example, many of the biggest female stars of the early cinema came from *devadāsī* backgrounds but only entered the cinema after they were established performers in the networks of the emergent Tamil drama; I will take up this point in greater detail in Chapter II.

Moreover, music remained at the heart of the modern Tamil drama, which eventually was known as *icai nāṭakam* ("musical theater"), just as it did in Tamil cinema. From the time of the earliest South Indian "talkie" *Kalidas* ("The Poet Kālīdāsa," 1931), music and dance have occupied a central place in the aesthetic vocabulary of cinema in this region. *Kalidas* itself incorporated songs from the emergent "classical" canon of Karṇāṭak music, including songs attributed to the composer Tyāgarāja (1767-1847) as well as popular Tamil nationalist songs.[11] Thus, the discussion surrounding the intermedial nature of the intertwined histories of cinema and dance exceeds the histories of just these two forms; it seeps into the world of Tamil theater, music history, and print

culture. In this dissertation, I adopt a multi-sited and polyvocal historical approach in which conversations about dance history are linked to larger sets of cultural practices and wider cultural histories.

SITUATING EXTANT SCHOLARSHIP ON FILM DANCE, THE TAMIL CINEMA, AND BHARATANĀṬYAM

Academic work on dance and screen media has taken on a drastically prolific identity with the coming of the digital age. The early anthology *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video* edited by Judy Mitoma and colleagues brought together a number of scholars who were working on representations of dance in a range of established and emerging visual media, including cinema. Recent studies of dance and visual media in Western cultural contexts have included exceptional theoretically oriented works, including Douglas Rosenberg's *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image,* which focuses on the tensions between dance as an ephemeral form and film as a fixed idiom and which draws on both historical and contemporary works that exemplify aspects of this tension. Rosenberg's work explores both the possibilities and limits that emerge from celluloid and digital iterations of the dancing body in Euro-American contexts.

Studies of dance in the cinema itself are relatively few and far between. One of the major works in this vein is Sherril Dodd's *Dance on Screen: Genres and Media from Hollywood to Experimental Art,* which focuses on representations of dance in a range of cinematic genres, from mainstream popular film to the avant-garde cinema of the 1990s. More recently, Erin Brannigan's *DanceFilm: Choreography and the Moving Image* presented a fascinating study of what she calls "dancefilm"—in other words,

representations of the choreographic in film. Brannigan's work represents perhaps one of the most comprehensive studies of dance in popular cinema, from the very beginnings of the medium into the twenty-first century. Drawing insights from both cinema studies and dance studies, Brannigan argues that "dancefilm" expresses choreographic sensibilities that are unique to this idiom. Dance on film produces its own affective and somatic vocabularies to create what Brannigan calls a "polyaesthetic field" (194).

Closer to my field of study, however, are works that have dealt specifically with representations of dance in South Asian cinema, which unfortunately have also been very few in number.[12] A few significant studies of dance and music in Hindi ("Bollywood") cinema have appeared recently, such as the edited volume by Gopal and Moorti entitled *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance,* but these writings categorically exclude discussions of the South Indian cinema. An exceptional work on dance in the Hindi cinema is the unpublished dissertation of Usha Iyer entitled "Film Dance, Female Stardom, and the Production of Gender in Popular Hindi Cinema," which weaves together many of the issues that I am discussing here, albeit from the standpoint of Hindi popular cinema. Iyer's work represents, in my view, some of the finest scholarship on dance and the popular cinema in South Asia, and it reveals the deep intellectual potential that social-history–oriented work on the cinema can offer to the disciplines of both South Asian studies and dance studies. Other minor works on dance and cinema in North India include an essay by Amita Nijhawan, "Excusing the Female Dancer: Tradition and Transgression in Bollywood Dancing," which focuses on themes of sexuality, desire, and

transgression in Bollywood dance sequences. Alternatively, the work of Ann David ("Beyond the Silver Screen," "Dancing the Diasporic Dream?") and Sangita Shresthova (*Is It All About Hips?*) has explored the transnational migration of forms of popular Hindi cinema dance in the United Kingdom, Nepal, and the United States. Most recently, Pallabi Chakravorty's forthcoming book *This is How We Dance Now: Performance in the Age of Bollywood and Reality Shows* examines cultures of dance—especially dance derived from a "Bollywood dance aesthetic"—in the post-liberalization age through new forms of television and social media.

Two recent doctoral dissertations have dealt with dance and the South Indian cinema, but these focus on Telugu cinema and the dance form known as Kūcipūḍi.[13] The first is Rumya Sree Putcha's dissertation entitled "Revisiting the Classical: A Critical History of Kuchipudi Dance," and the second is Katyayani Sree Thota's dissertation entitled "Stage to Screen, and Back: A Study of the Dialogue Between Kuchipudi and Telugu Cinema." Both of these projects have much in common with my own. Putcha's work examines how instantiations of dance in the cinema contributed to the very formation of the regional/nationalized art form of Kūcipūḍi, eclipsing other popular performance traditions that could have vied for status as "the classical dance of Andhra Pradesh." She also demonstrates how Kūcipūḍi dance itself was undergoing a massive aesthetic overhaul in Madras city just as cinematic and staged performances of it were being innovatively showcased for the very first time. Thota's excellent work also dwells on how cinematic iterations of Kūcipūḍi contributed to its sedimentation as "the classical

dance of Andhra Pradesh" in the national imagination, but she also provides detailed life narratives and choreographic analysis of the makers of this kind of dance. Finally, I should also mention a blog run by dance enthusiast Cassidy Behling, cinemanrityagharana.blogspot.com, which focuses on Indian dance traditions in the cinema. The blog has a number of entries that address many of subjects covered in this dissertation, but Behling's writings lack the scholarly apparatuses and critical historical and theoretical perspectives that are at the very heart of my project.

At first glance, English-language scholarship on Tamil cinema appears to be quite vast, and an especially significant number of works address the impact of Tamil cinema on contemporary politics in South India.[14] These have included the works of Theodore Baskaran (*The Message Bearers*, *The Eye of the Serpent*, *History Through the Lens*), M.S.S. Pandian ("Tamil Cultural Elites," *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin*), and a number of others.[15] Two other significant earlier works were the unpublished dissertation of Stephen Hughes entitled "Is There Anyone Out There?: Exhibition and Formation of Silent Film Audiences in South India," which addressed the history of early South Indian cinema, and Sara Dickey's dissertation entitled "Cinema and the Urban Poor in South India," which focused on the reception of Tamil cinema by lower middle class audiences in Tamilnadu. However, it is perhaps Stephen Hughes who has given us some of the richest and most detailed cultural histories of the early Tamil cinema to date. In 2008, Routledge published the first scholarly anthology on Tamil cinema entitled *Tamil Cinema: The Cultural Politics of India's Other Film Industry*, which was edited by Selvaraj

Velayutham. This book provides an overview of the history and distinctive characteristics of Tamil cinema, and the individual essays examine themes such as gender, religion, class, caste, fandom, cinematic genre, the politics of identity, and diaspora. Throughout, the book cogently links cinematic history to the wider social, political, and cultural histories of Tamil-speaking India. Since then, a number of excellent studies on the history and anthropology of Tamil cinema have emerged, including the works of Preminda Jacob on Tamil film advertisements (*Celluloid Deities*), Swarnavel Eswaran Pillai on Madras film production studios (*Madras Studios*), and Anand Pandian (*Reel World*) and Constantine Nakassis (*Doing Style*) on contemporary Tamil film-making and consumption, to name a few.[16] The recent work of Amanda Weidman ("Voices of Meenakumari," "Musical Genres and National Identity") has explored questions of voice and gender in contemporary Tamil cinema music, whereas Kiranmayi Indraganti's book *Her Majestic Voice: South Indian Female Playback Singers and Stardom, 1945-1955* explores the history of female "playback" singing in the Telugu cinema, with some implications for the study of similar issues in Tamil cinema.

Much of my historical thinking around Bharatanāṭyam as a historical form draws from the works of Avanthi Meduri ("Nation, Woman, Representation"), Matthew Harp Allen ("Rewriting the Script"), Janet O'Shea (*At Home in the World*), Indira Peterson ("Rewriting Cultural History"), and Davesh Soneji (*Unfinished Gestures*), who in their path-breaking writings on Bharatanāṭyam have radically altered earlier, nationalist-inflected received histories. All of my earlier published work has been produced in

conversation with this collective of revisionist scholars of Bharatanāṭyam, who have given us a critically engaged and nuanced scholarly discourse that embeds Bharatanāṭyam's history in larger issues that surround nation, body, sexuality, and politics in South India.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This dissertation represents a critical historical inquiry that deploys a hybrid methodology to create new forms of historical knowing that emerge from multi-sited and polyvocal research. I used a diverse array of research apparatuses, including text (primarily film "songbooks" and magazines), films, playbills, programs, posters, and interviewee data drawn from ethnographic work. In the sections that follow, I describe both my methods and materials; I dedicate a significant amount of attention to print material, which forms the core of much of my work, and then I move on to briefly discuss other materials, such as extant films and contemporary ethnography, both of which contribute relatively smaller bodies of data for this work. In terms of the textual materials, much of my work comes out of two major archives: the Roja Muthiah Research Library in Chennai and the massive private archive of film aficionado S.V. Jayababu of Chennai. I made photocopies and electronic scans of all the original materials from both sources. I began doing research at the Roja Muthiah Library in 2008 for another project on courtesan dance after having heard about the library and its collections from my colleagues. At the library, I was fortunate to meet its director, Mr. G. Sundar, who was enthusiastic about my research. We struck up a friendship, and since

then I have been back to the library every time I have visited India, acquainting myself ever more deeply with this vast archive. One of the problems that I encountered over the course of this research had to do with the immense quantity of materials I had to sift through before discovering the specific genres and publications that now form the basis of my dissertation. Much of the archival material that I was interested in had not yet been fully catalogued due to financial constraints at the library. For this reason, I spent a significant amount of time opening dusty old boxes in the collections to gain access to the materials that are now included in this dissertation. As one might expect, I have managed to collect heaps of Tamil language print materials that I hope to use in a separate work following the completion of my dissertation project.

It was also at the Roja Muthiah Research Library where, by pure coincidence, I first met S.V. Jayababu in 2010. We immediately struck up a conversation about cinema and the arts in Tamil-speaking India. Later, in 2012, when I expressed my research interest in dance and cinema to him, he immediately offered to share his vast personal archives with me for this dissertation project. Jayababu's father was an avid collector of Tamil cinematic materials and passed on his love for print materials on to his son. Jayababu manages and curates the material in a remarkably meticulous manner, and he has been very generous in sharing his archive for the purposes of this project. Very quickly I discovered that Jayababu had a personal interest in the historical intersections between the making of modern Bharatanatyam and the Tamil cinema. In fact, Jayababu told me that he had always hoped to meet a researcher who would work on this subject,

and thus he was ever-more generous in his interactions with me. Several times, after I had mentioned a film or even just a dance sequence from a particular film to him, at our next meeting, he would magically produce the playbills or songbooks from these films. These kinds of unconditionally generous transactions continued for three years until I completed my research for this dissertation in 2015. When I returned to North America, Jayababu was always available to answer my questions remotely by phone or email. If he did not know the answer, he would scan or photograph materials from his archive that he thought would help me answer my queries and send these to me over the smartphone-based application "WhatsApp." Jayababu's generosity and knowledge of the textual archive of Tamil cinema remains unparalleled, and his generosity with these precious materials has been integral to the data collection required for this dissertation.

Cinema Ephemera: Print Material as Textual Archive

Many of the original data for this project come from what I call "cinema ephemera"—that is, print materials from the 1930s through the 1950s from two genres: "songbooks" and cinema magazines, almost all of which are exclusively written in the Tamil language. Cinema "songbooks" (see fig. 1-3) are texts that have a relationship to a large cottage industry of popular publishing in the form of low-priced chapbooks that sought to bring Tamil literature to the masses. In his monumental work on Tamil print culture entitled *The Province of the Book*, A.R. Venkatachalapathy has demonstrated how "cinema songbooks" represented the tail end of several decades of popular "chapbook printing," which comprised a certain class of publications known in Tamil as *gujili*

(*kucili*).[17] These popular chapbooks, which were sold for the equivalent of a few cents (e.g., 1 anna, 6 or 9 paisa), were hawked at crossroads and town markets. In Chapter III, I examine one of these chapbooks from 1937; it is a kind of moral tract about the dangers of the cinema, and it was authored by K. Kurucāmitās, a Tamil poet from the town of Kumbhakonam. Venkatachalapathy notes that, although popular publishing and popular "bazaar" literature did not disappear in post-1930s Tamil, much of its energy was redirected into "cinema songbooks, wherein the lyrics of popular cinema are reduced to print" (*Province of the Book* 167). However, these songbooks have been crucial to my work. They have allowed me to access texts related to music and dance, often in the absence of any aural or visual traces of these works. This is particularly important given the emphasis on text and poetry in traditional forms of dance and dance music in South India. In many ways, the text quite literally orients the presentation of the dance. Indeed, courtesan dance in South India may be thought of as a tradition of performed commentary on poems that were composed for this purpose. Throughout this dissertation, it will be evident how important texts are in both staged and cinematic versions of Bharatanāṭyam dance. In Chapter VI in particular, I will explore how a vast amount of genre and repertoire in Bharatanāṭyam is in fact framed *textually*. The "cinema songbooks" thus represent central archival sources that I deploy in my work.

In general, songbooks have been understood as modes through which audiences could access the lyrics of songs in order to recall them during a time outside the viewing of the film. In that sense, the songbook worked in tandem with the gramophone record, as

shown in fig. 1-3, where the songbook for the earliest Tamil talkie, *Kalidas* (1937), advertises the gramophone record for the same film, encouraging readers to "hear" the film again. This movement across reading, hearing, and seeing the film or its ephemera again takes us back to the centrality of intermedial modes of experience to cultural production and consumption during this period. Indeed, in the example presented by fig. 1-3, intermedial sensory engagement and mobility were encouraged by the very producers of culture themselves; the text had to be *read*, the songs *heard*, and the film *seen*.

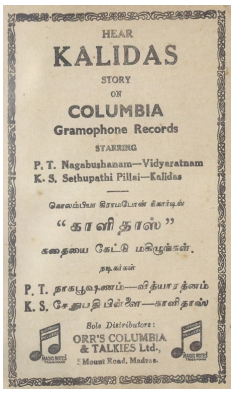

HEAR
KALIDAS
STORY
ON
COLUMBIA
Gramophone Records
STARRING
P. T. Nagabushanam—Vidyaratnam
K. S. Sethupathi Pillai—Kalidas
"காளிதாஸ்"
கதையை கேட்டு மகிழுங்கள்.
P. T. நாகபூஷணம்—வித்யாரத்னம்
K. S. சேதுபதிபிள்ளை—காளிதாஸ்
Sole Distributors:
ORR'S COLUMBIA
& TALKIES Ltd.,
Mount Road, Madras.

Fig. 1-3. A page from the songbook of the first South Indian talkie, *Kalidas* ("The Poet Kālīdāsa," 1937), advertising the gramophone record by Columbia that accompanies the film. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

The songbooks themselves evolve in structure and content from the 1930s through to the 1950s. The earliest songbooks feature a cover page that usually contains a still image from the film, and this is followed by the texts of the songs that are featured in

the film, with headings that indicate the character who performs the song and usually the name of the *rāga* (tonal scale) of the song (see fig. 1-4). The back cover would usually feature advertisements of other publications by the press that printed the book. By the early 1940s, however, the content of songbooks began to change. During this period, the songbook also contained a "cast and crew" list, usually marked by the title *naṭikarkaḷ* ("actors"), often with a separate list for female performers marked *naṭikaikaḷ* ("actresses"). It would also increasingly contain a roughly page-long synopsis of the plot of the film, marked by the Tamil title *kataic curukkam* ("gist of the story"). By the mid-1940s, some songbooks were bilingual, containing the synopsis in both Tamil and English; other important sections of the credits—such as the names of the director and the production studios—were also given in English. This is also the space where, by the 1940s, the credits for dance were often found. The back covers of the books increasingly featured advertisements for forthcoming films, often those produced by the same studio. By the 1950s, these songbooks had reached maturity. They contained numerous photographs from the film along with detailed lists of production credits.

Fig. 1-4. Cover of the songbook for the film *Ekampavāṇaṉ* (1947), starring P.A. Ranganayaki, with dances by Kamala. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

Another major source that I used was Tamil film magazines and journals, which began to circulate during the 1930s. By the late 1940s, these had become the major vehicle for information related to Tamil film production and consumption practices. In a fascinating essay entitled "Emotion, Identity, and the Female Subject: Tamil Women's Magazines in Colonial India, 1890-1940," historian Mytheli Sreenivas established that Tamil popular magazines were central to the formation of new modes of subjectivity for an emergent middle class. Indeed, these magazines produced new subjectivities; in addition, when it came to discourse on the arts and cinema, they were constitutive of new modes of consuming and understanding visual and performative cultures. The deep and long-standing relationship between the publics of magazine reading and cinema can most clearly be seen in the fact that one of the most popular Tamil magazines, *Āṉanta Vikaṭaṉ*, was bought out and subsequently popularized in 1928 by Subramaniam Sreenivasan (more popularly known as S.S. Vasan, 1904-1969), a journalist who went on to become

one of South India's most famous film producers and directors; he was also proprietor of Madras' largest production studios, Gemini.[18] Tamil film magazines themselves performed a kind of commentarial role. They often combined information about film production, actor biographies, and the musical dimensions of films. Indeed, the name of one of the most popular such magazines established in the late 1930s, *Kuṇṭūci* ("Needle"), indexes the constitutive work of such texts, which "sutured" together various strands of cultural production during this period.[19] By far the most successful of these magazines was *Pēcum Paṭam* ("Talking Pictures"), which was founded by the film journalist T.V. Ramnoth in the 1930s. This magazine was so popular that eventually it was brought out in Telugu and English versions, which were entitled *Cinema Rangam* and *PicturePost,* respectively.[20]

Like songbooks, film magazines from this period, right up until the 1950s, also offer windows into films that have become otherwise invisible. Actual film prints of many of the Tamil films that I am examining in this dissertation are simply not available, so published material forms the only historical trace of these films. A case in point is the film *Naṭṭiyarāṇi* ("Queen of Dance," 1949) (see fig. 1-5); this is a relatively late film, but nonetheless it does not exist today. The songbook and advertisements for the film survive, and the photographs in the advertisements give us the only visual cues as to the content of the film. This film is essentially a quasi-historical film in which a milkmaid-turned-dancer named Śāntalā marries the king of a major dynasty known as Hoysala and becomes the queen of the city of Belur.[21] The print materials tell us that the actresses B.S.

Saroja (b. 1922) and Vasundhara Devi (1917-1988; mother of the star dancer-actress Vyjayanthimala, who will be discussed later in this dissertation) starred in the film and that it included other dances by the sisters Lalitha and Padmini. The vernacular magazine thus aids us in repairing—albeit in a limited manner—the ephemeral and fleeting nature of the material dimensions of the early Tamil cinema.

Fig. 1-5. Poster for *Naṭṭiyarāṇi* ("Queen of Dance," 1949) in *Kuṇṭūci* magazine (August 1949, p. 7). (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.)

Magazines such as these, I would argue, are part of a print culture that constituted a new kind of public space in which the arts were taking on a new meaning and being consciously brought into intermedial conversations. For example, magazines such as *Āṭal-Pāṭal* ("Dance and Song") (see fig. 1-6) carried news stories about the latest films but also about figures like Rukmini Arundale and E. Krishna Iyer, local stage performances of Bharatanāṭyam (such as the debut performances of young female dance students [*araṅkēṟṟams*]), features about female morality, and notes on the techniques of

Bharatanāṭyam dance.[22] By the 1940s, other magazines like *Kuṇṭūci* ran large regular features with titles like "Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉar" ("They Danced," referencing the famous song *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār* ["He Danced"], which will be discussed in detail in Chapter VI) and contained news and profiles from the world of live performances of Bharatanāṭyam in Madras (see fig. 1-7). These magazines gave their audiences insight into the overlapping worlds of dance and cinema and facilitated movement between these spheres of cultural production and consumption. They also were also key in establishing discursive spaces around the new forms and modes of cultural production that characterized the early decades of the twentieth century in South India. It is also significant that, unlike many newspapers, these magazines circulated at the local, subnational level. In these vernacular writings, histories that otherwise remain hidden can be traced in the nationalizing discourse surrounding the arts that began to emerge in India during the 1930s. Individual life histories and narratives in particular live almost exclusively in this vernacular archive of the Tamil-language magazine.[23]

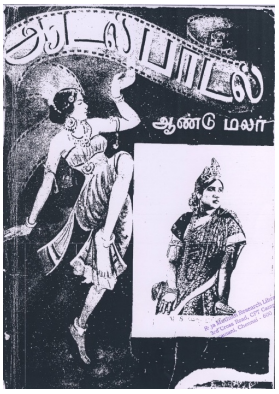


Fig. 1-6. The cover page of *Āṭal Pāṭal* magazine (*Āṇṭu Malar*, 1936). (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.)

Fig. 1-7. The film magazine *Kuṇṭūci* ("Needle") eventually runs a column called "Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉar" ("They Danced"), which featured news and profiles from the world of stage performances of Bharatanāṭyam in Madras. (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.)

Syncretic Sources: Extant Films and Ethnography

In addition to archival materials such as songbooks and vernacular magazines, the primary sources for this dissertation are the films themselves. The recent boom in DVD and VCD technology in South India has made many early Tamil films readily available. The films *Meera* (1945) and *Nam Iruvar* (1947), which are discussed briefly here, are good examples; they are widely circulated as commercial DVDs. However, other films are only available for viewing at the National Film Archives of India in Pune in Maharashtra, and I have had an opportunity to take notes on some early silent Tamil films at this location. I visited these archives once in 2012. Many of the films I was interested in viewing were not readily available and the administration had very strict policies about granting access to some of the older, non-digitized materials. Fortunately, the films that I am most concerned with, which cover the period from the 1940s to the late 1950s, are available commercially or on YouTube; I have also been able to amass my own collection of DVDs and miscellaneous print materials, which have been sourced from private collections (such as those of collector S.V. Jayababu). These form the basis of much of my analysis. My own collection of VHS (and later DVD) materials related to dance in the cinema goes back to some of my earliest exposure to Bharatanatyam as a form through the Tamil cinema. As a child I was dazzled by the spectacular representations of dance in the cinema, and as a teenager I began collecting VHS tapes and later DVDs of older Tamil films. This initial collection became the basis for my long-term intellectual fascination with the intermedial worlds that are at the heart of this

dissertation. I eventually built my own collection of DVDs and several of the dance sequences I have analysed in the dissertation come from this personal collection.

In addition to the textual and audiovisual sources that I have employed in this work, a significant amount of material has come from oral histories and ethnographic methods. Between 2012 and 2014, I made a number of field visits to India to interview former actors, film historians, dancers, and scholars of Bharatanāṭyam. Some of these individuals were already known to me, and others I met for the first time as part of my research. My initial literature review enabled me to locate the names of certain individuals who were active performers in the cinema and on screen, but unfortunately, some of these people had passed away by the time I began my field research. As for the dancers whom I interviewed, I was very keen at the outset about interviewing women from the former courtesan (*devadāsī)* communities who had professionally straddled the worlds of both cinema and stage presentations of Bharatanatyam. Although I was familiar with many women from the former courtesan community due to my own direct training with many of them, my teachers were not a part of the cinema industry but knew others who were. I created a list based on these names, and this formed the basis of much of this ethnographic work. The aim of such work was to capture the life narratives and experiences of individuals like the former actress T.D. Kuchalakumari whom I discuss in Chapter II. In other contexts—such as my interviews with film historians Madabhushi Rangadorai (b. 1937, who writes under the penname "Randor Guy"), V.A.K. Ranga Rao (b. 1939), and Theodore Baskaran (b. 1940)—the aim was to clarify questions around the

caste identities and social backgrounds of the artists of the early Tamil cinema. Again, some of these scholars were already known to me, whereas others (such as Randor Guy) I met for the first time as part of dissertation research. For the most part, such interactions took place in the shape of freeform discussions. These discussions were recorded and subsequently transcribed by myself; where necessary, they were also translated by me from Tamil into English. I did not want to control or limit the intellectual possibilities of the interviews by establishing rigid parameters. Instead, I chose to ask a few lead-in questions and have the participants use these as catalysts or entry points to speak freely about their involvement in cinema, dance, or both. The three common lead-in questions were as follows:

1. Could you please tell me about how you came to be involved in the field of cinema (or dance)?
2. Can you relate what you would characterize as significant moments in your career? Why would you consider these significant?
3. How has the field of cinema (or dance) changed since the time you were an active performer, and why?

My interview experiences were similar in the sense that my participants were all very generous and eager to speak to me about their life and work. I would often follow-up with more detailed questions based on what I was hearing; they, in turn, would add supplemental information. I did not want my own biases as a researcher and performer of Bharatanāṭyam to permeate the interview process, so I encouraged my interlocutors to

speak freely and comfortably without making too many interventions. I would only interject every 15 minutes or so, usually for the purpose of asking them if they would like a break. In their excitement to share their work with me, my interlocutors would often get slightly annoyed when I suggested a break! I especially wanted to ensure that the elderly interviewees were comfortable had appropriate breaks as they spoke to me. In the end, I was deeply inspired by their passion for autobiographical storytelling and their enthusiasm related to sharing their pasts.

Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour. I interviewed a total of 13 participants consisting of dancers, actresses/dancers, scholars, and writers. I would begin each interview by outlining the entire IRB consent process with each participant so that they were completely aware of it. While some of the interviews were in English, the majority were in Tamil. I transcribed each interview and later translated each myself.

Taken together, the multiple sources that comprise this dissertation (i.e., archival print materials, audiovisual sources, and ethnographic interviews) parallel the central argument of the dissertation. Like the convergent intermedial history that lies at the heart of this project, the sources too are multi-sited and multimedial. When I was working with multiple types sources on a single theme or subject, I would oscillate back and forth between these in order to map the spaces of conceptual or thematic overlap.

The process of writing and the constant accretion and adjustment of content is perhaps best explained by way of a discussion of how two central chapters came into being, and how they set the pace for the overall structure for the creation of the rest of the

dissertation. My one of the most consistent themes in my work has to do with the central role played by traditional female courtesan performers (*devadāsīs*) and male dance-masters (*naṭṭuvaṉārs*) in the parallel development of dance and cinema from the 1930s to the 1950s. As I continued to assemble multimedial sets of data, I realized that it would be crucial for me to dedicate separate chapters about these two groups. After reaching the decision to separate these topics into individual chapters, I began populating these chapters by collecting as much archival material as possible about *devadāsīs* and *naṭṭuvaṉārs* who were involved in Tamil cinema and began to construct a narrative that would both include biographical information and clues in such materials that could address questions of class, caste, and gender in modern South India. In many cases, some of this kind of data actually emerged only from conversations with my interlocutors. The chapters thus came into being in a layered, non-lineal process of construction, in which I was constantly revising and revisiting both archival (textual) and ethnographic sets of data.

While my writing was rich in historical complexity thanks to the density and volume of Tamil archival materials, I also realized that a discussion of aesthetic representations of the dance itself remained absent. My interlocutors also referenced some the repertory pieces that they had performed in the cinema and on stage. I thus also began to craft a separate chapter discussing the aesthetic representations of select repertory pieces that were central to the ideas of "celluloid classicism" and the power of intermedial form that are at the heart of the dissertation. After I completed drafts of the

five chapters that constitute the body of the dissertation, I revisited my ethnographic data, archival textual material, and film sequences collectively a final time, with an eye to determine the sequence of chapters and flow of the dissertation as a whole.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

This dissertation consists of the current introductory chapter, five major chapters, and a concluding chapter that brings some of the work's historical discussions to bear on their enduring presence into the present. Chapter II (The *Devadāsī* Community and the Cinematic Imagination: Politics, Participation, and Representation) addresses how, when, and why traditional female courtesan performers (*devadāsīs*) entered the South Indian cinema and how they were able to sustain viable careers for a short while, until their presence was eclipsed by women of higher caste and class backgrounds. This chapter also highlights the deep imbrication of South Indian cinema with Tamil popular drama (known as *icai nāṭakam*) and accounts for the presence of *devadāsī* women from within this matrix. Even though the first South Indian talkie featured a non-*devadāsī* woman as its heroine, women from *devadāsī* communities populated the bulk of films in Tamil and Telugu that were produced between 1937 and 1950. The chapter provides, among other things, a sketch of the life of S.D. Subbulakshmi (b. 1917; not to be confused with singer M.S. Subbulakshmi), a *devadāsī* actress from the town of Srivaikuntam, who became the "second wife" of early Tamil cinema's most celebrated director, K. Subrahmanyam (1904-1971). She was responsible, with Subrahmanyam, for setting up one of Madras' earliest dance institutions, Natana Kala Seva (c. 1945), which later morphed into

Nrithyodaya and which is currently headed by K. Subrahmanyam's daughter, dancer Padma Subrahmanyam. The chapter concludes with a detailed ethnographic portrait of T.D. Kuchalakumari (b. 1937), a former actress whose ancestors performed dance at the Tanjore court during the reign of the Queen Kamakshi Amba Bai Saheb (d. 1892) and at the public festivals of the Bṛhadīśvara temple. Kuchalakumari—whose aunts, cousins, and nieces were (and continue to be) involved in the cinema—traces, in an unapologetic manner, her own family's journey from traditional modes of being from within Tanjore's *devadāsī* community into the world of today's cinema.

Chapter III (The Ocular Politics of Making Modern Bharatanāṭyam) focuses on reinterpreting the so-called "revival" or reinvention of Bharatanāṭyam during the 1930s through the lens of cinematic history. It charts the participation of the major personalities of the reinvention—figures like Rukmini Arundale (1904-1986) and E. Krishna Iyer (1897-1968)—in the world of Tamil cinema, arguing that cinema was just as much at the nexus of debates on morality, the body, religion, and nationalism as was Bharatanāṭyam itself. The chapter also includes the first-ever analysis of traces of the first film in India about dance, *Jalaja* (1938), in which the *devadāsī* artist Kumbhakonam Bhanumathi played the lead character. The chapter ends with reflections on how dance in the cinema allows us to map shifting notions of the morality of Bharatanāṭyam dance itself and how the cross-pollination of screen and stage versions of Bharatanāṭyam radically shifts standard narratives about dance during this period.

While the previous chapter focuses on the ultra-elite activities related to dance and cinema engineered by figures who had institutional affiliations with organizations such as the Madras Music Academy and the Theosophical Society, Chapter IV (Cinema, Dance, and Bourgeois Nationalism: Mediated Morality, "Classicism," and the State in Modern South India) moves into the realm of new instantiations of popular culture that brought some of the elite's activities to a broad range of audiences beginning in the 1930s. Indeed, the major argument of this chapter is that it is the work of cinema—particularly the nationalist cinema that featured directors such as K. Subrahmanyam and then later actresses such as Kamala Lakshman and Padmini Ramachandran—that is responsible for the popularity of the reinvented Bharatanāṭyam. The popularity also brought with it new forms of public somatic morality, which involved resignifications of the body that were in dialogue with anti-nautch politics and the anti-cinema movement (which included figures like Gandhi). This chapter also looks to the incorporation of figures like Gandhi and the Tamil poet Subrahmaniya Bharati into the vocabulary of Bharatanāṭyam *because* of cinema, and it discusses the creation of new ways of seeing dance as embodied national heritage on screen. The end of the chapter focuses on the movement of dance into middle-class communities through the cinema in a radical expansion of the dance's overall cultural presence. By casting dance as compatible with conjugal life and domesticity, this chapter argues, the cinema of the 1940s and 1950s articulates a new moral vision for dance in South India. In some senses, these popular and nationalist-inflected articulations of form, allegory, and technique eclipsed the elite

projects of reinvention that were staged in 1930s Madras. This chapter thus maps the emergence of Bharatanāṭyam's somewhat awkward self-representation as a "classical-yet-popular" dance.

Chapter V (The Emergence of the "Choreographer" and a New Envisioning of Dance) begins by shifting focus onto men in the *devadāsī* community, who commonly took on the professional or semi-professional roles of dance-masters (*naṭṭuvaṉār*). One of the major arguments of this chapter revolves around the fiscal opportunity that both cinema and the new reinvented Bharatanāṭyam afforded men from this community at a time when professional opportunities for women were fast disappearing. As early as the late 1930s, dance sequences in South India required dance-masters, and some men from the *naṭṭuvaṉār* community benefitted tremendously. Their work in the cinema also enabled these same men to participate in the world of modern, urban performances of Bharatanāṭyam on Madras stages. A large portion of the chapter is dedicated to a deep study of the life and labor of Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai (1910-1991), an iconic choreographer for the early cinema and for Madras' new stage performances of Bharatanāṭyam from the 1930s to the 1960s. Ramaiah Pillai's aesthetic sensibilities set the standard for representations of Bharatanāṭyam-style dances on screen, and these ideas filtered back into stage performances in Madras. Indeed, Pillai's prime disciple, Kamala Lakshman, seamlessly moved between stage and screen; the interocular dynamism of Pillai's choreographies on Lakshman was appreciated and deeply internalized by audiences for decades. In addition to Ramaiah Pillai, the chapter also describes four other

men from the *devadāsī* and *naṭṭuvaṉār* communities who became renowned choreographers in the cinema and who in turn attracted a range of students, many from abroad, who wanted to learn Bharatanāṭyam from them.

Chapter VI (Genre, Repertoire, and Technique Between Cinema and the Urban Stage) addresses details about how dance itself—in terms of its aesthetics, technique, and repertoire—is irrevocably transformed through its encounter with cinema. This chapter traces how traditional *devadāsī* dance genres like the Tamil *padam*, an erotic love song, are represented and transformed in the cinema. It analyzes the way that melody (*rāga*), rhythm (*tāla*), and movement technique (*aṭavu, jati, kōṟvai*) are deployed in genres like *padam* as well as in other genres like *jatisvaram* and *tillāṉā* that find their way into the cinema. In some sense, the early cinema is also a way of documenting older dance technique and repertory that have disappeared from today's Bharatanāṭyam but that remain captured on film from the 1930s. It also examines how slippages between idioms were integral to the making of both film dance and stage versions of Bharatanāṭyam during this period. The chapter unpacks these slippages by pointing to the creation of new types of dance that were specifically the products of the encounter between cinema and stage, such as the "snake dance" (*pāmpu naṭaṉam*) and the "dance of Śiva" (*naṭaṉam āṭiṉār*). These new forms breathe a different aesthetic life into the idiom of Bharatanāṭyam, and these new instantiations become representative of Bharatanāṭyam as a whole during the mid-twentieth century.

Chapter VII (Conclusion: The Enduring Pedagogical Afterlives of Bharatanāṭyam's "Celluloid Classicism) dwells on the pedagogical resonances that cinematic representations of Bharatanāṭyam carried for middle-class audiences during this period. Print material from the 1940s and 1950s evinces a clear connection between the culture of "cinema dance" and pedagogy about "the classical." Film magazines contain large spreads that outline, for example, the meaning of hand gestures (*muttiraikaḷ*) as well as advertisements for the debut performances (*araṅkēr̲r̲am*) of young, upper-class, amateur dancers; these appear side-by-side with articles about dance in the cinema, cinema advertisements, and notes about "classical" dance. This collapsing of pedagogy and publicity for screen and stage dance, this chapter argues, gives rise to urban cults of celebrity. As the idea of the "dancer-actress" comes to full fruition in the 1950s—with the popularity of figures such as Kamala Lakshman, Padmini Ramachandran, Vyjayanthimala, Jayalalitha, and others—Bharatanāṭyam itself comes to permanently inhabit the space of a "celluloid classicism" in ever-expanding ways.

CHAPTER II

THE *DEVADĀSĪ* COMMUNITY AND THE CINEMATIC IMAGINATION: POLITICS, PARTICIPATION, AND REPRESENTATION

"…God willing, if one day these prostitutes can be removed and replaced with women from good families, our studios will no longer be compared to whore houses and the prestige of filmmakers and their teams will be salvaged."
—Dadasaheb Phalke (1870-1944; qtd. in Pande "Moving Beyond Themselves" 1649)

"…Of course, all that [the traditional lifestyle of women from *devadasi* communities] has changed now. The films and theatres have opened up a paying career for them which, while bettering their material prospects, have slowly undermined their old traditional outlook and relative morality. Now, they do not hesitate to change hands or run amok among the idle rich and gay bachelors. But there are among them devadasis who stick to their old customs and ways of living and who still cling to one man for a number of years, and to that small band of *cultured* devadasis Balasaraswati belongs."
—G. Venkatachalam (*Dance in India* 57)

This chapter is concerned with real and imagined representations of women from the *devadāsī*-courtesan community in early South Indian cinema. Courtesans (*devadāsīs)* and hereditary dance-masters (*naṭṭuvaṉārs*) have had an iconic presence in the narratives enacted in Tamil cinema from virtually its very beginnings in South India, and yet no critical scholarly commentary exists on these representations. This chapter is also concerned with the participation of real performers from the *devadāsī* community in the making of early cinema. Indeed, before the late 1930s, nearly all female performers in the cinema came from this community, and certainly their presence—albeit dwindling, only to eventually be eclipsed by others—remained central to film production in Madras until the 1970s.

Although recently scholars such as Davesh Soneji (*Unfinished Gestures*) and Sundar Kaali ("Disciplining the Dasi") have pointed to the significance of women from this community as the first actresses of Tamil and Telugu cinema, in this chapter, I restructure the life histories of individual actresses from archival and ethnographical material. I locate the resonances and dissonances that the lives of actresses have embodied with their cinematic roles against the backdrop of the larger historical, social, and political implications of representations of the *devadāsī* community. In that sense, this chapter—like Chapter V, about *naṭṭuvaṉārs*—might well be thought of as a kind of "prosopography" in critical historical perspective; it is a discussion of the characteristics that are common to these social groups or communities through a cumulative study of their lives.[24] The life narratives presented in this chapter (largely constituted through archival retrieval) demonstrate the ways in which labor, morality, and aesthetics are intertwined in the experiences of *devadāsī* women who joined the early Tamil cinema.

SITUATING *DEVADĀSĪ* PERFORMANCE PRACTICES IN THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY MADRAS PRESIDENCY

Prior to the period of the so-called "dance revival" in the 1930s, which I will discuss in Chapter IV, Bharatanāṭyam dance was the exclusive hereditary professional practice of communities of courtesans referred to in colonial discourse by the Sanskrit term *devadāsī* ("servant of god").[25] These women performed music and dance in courts, occasionally in temples, and at private events in the homes of the social and political elite. Scripted in colonial discourse as "temple prostitutes" or "temple dancers," it is known that the artistic, sexual, and social labor of these women extended far beyond the

highly romanticized space of the Hindu temple and that their non-conjugal sexuality differed in form and function from that of the sex workers of colonial South India (Soneji *Unfinished Gestures*).

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in South India, *devadāsī* performance practices were located largely at three sites: courts (including the "little kingdoms" or *zamīndāris*, which were feudal courts set up by landowning elites); temples (most of which were financed by courts and *zamīndāris*); and inside the homes of urban elites (usually upper-caste men, who during the colonial period were afforded a great amount of civic power in Madras city by the colonial government).[26] The bulk of their income came from the funds generated by their performances of dance and music, gifts of cash and jewels given to them by their patrons and sexual partners, and a system of land-tenure known as *ināmdāri* (or *inām*) in which they would receive tax-free land from temples (and/or the courts that managed the temples) in return for "dedicating" women from their families to these institutions, through a ritual known as *poṭṭukkaṭṭutal* ("tying the *poṭṭu* pendant"), which marked women as non-conjugal courtesans.

By the end of the nineteenth century, a number of prominent *devadāsī* families moved from towns and villages in the Tamil- and Telugu-speaking regions of the Madras Presidency to Madras city itself, which had become a major hub in the new order of the colonial economy. Davesh Soneji has suggested that the rise in demand for private salon performances—known in colonial parlance as *nautch*—provided opportunities for professional musicians and dancers in the city, even as these very performances came

under moral and eventually legal scrutiny within a century or so of their very origin. Soneji has also recently suggested that these types of performances—including those of a similar nature taking place in courts such as those at Tanjore and Pudukkottai—may have come into being as an emulation of (and demand for) "nautch" by courtesans in Calcutta, who were patronized by both European officials and native elites (*Unfinished Gestures* 64). Although many scholars have focused on the famous family of T. Balasaraswati (1918-1984), whose great-great-grandmother Kamakshi (1810-1890) moved from Tanjore to Madras around 1857, there are numerous other examples of such migration to Madras. Toward the end of this chapter, I focus on the film star Kuchalakumari (b. 1937), whose great-great-grandmother Tanjore Bhavani (dates unknown) similarly moved from Tanjore to Madras to pursue opportunities as a professional musician and dancer. Madras offered new possibilities to professional women artists, including exposure to the emerging fields of Tamil and Telugu drama, gramophone recording, and, eventually, cinema.

REFORM AND SOCIAL RUPTURE IN DEVADĀSĪ COMMUNITIES

Beginning in approximately the middle of the nineteenth century, a movement to dislodge hereditary professional women artists from the public sphere took the shape of public debate and eventually legal intervention. This movement reached its apex with the passing of the Madras Devadāsīs (Prevention of Dedication) Act in 1947, just months after India attained independence from colonial rule. In Madras, much of this was directed specifically toward the *devadāsī* communities of the region, which included

Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada-speaking professional performers.[27] For almost a century, social reformers and Indian nationalists engaged in voluble debate around the sociolegal status and future of professional female musicians and dancers. Even as standard scholarly representations of *devadāsī* reform characterize it as a project that was "completed" with the 1947 act, for individuals in these communities today, the experience of living *through* and *with* "reform" has left many loose ends. Thus, while *devadāsī* dance was reworked by E. Krishna Iyer, Rukmini Arundale, and others in a class- and caste-restrictive framework (a process discussed in detail in Chapter III) beginning in the 1930s, women from *devadāsī* communities have also never been able to successfully participate in the professional practice of dance in postcolonial India.[28]

I will not rehearse the whole history of social reform in the *devadāsī* community here; this is a task that has most eloquently and recently been undertaken by Davesh Soneji in *Unfinished Gesture: Devadasis, Memory, and Modernity in South India.* I would like to highlight some chronological signposts that are relevant for my study of the interface between women in the *devadāsī* community and the early Tamil cinema. First, it is significant that the first legal intervention against the *devadāsī* community—namely, the resolution put forth to the Madras Legislative Assembly on November 4, 1927, by Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy recommending "the Government to undertake legislation to put a stop to the practice of dedication of young girls and young women to Hindu temples for immoral purposes" (*Unfinished Gestures* 121)—generated a tremendous amount of public debate about the legal and moral status of women from these communities. As

Soneji has shown in his analysis of documents from Muthulakshmi Reddy's archive, this debate was complex and included a range of voices, including voices of protest from *devadāsīs* themselves. These legal interventions coincide not only with the reinvention of dance at the hands of upper-caste urban elites but also with the diverse possibilities opened up by cinematic production in India. The powerful matrix of cultural modernity represented by the making of a new national dance tradition and the new medial form of cinema afforded women from *devadāsī* communities short-lived (but sometimes significant) professional promise, even as anti-*devadāsī* legislation simultaneously curtailed prospects.

Second, anti-*devadāsī* legislation is paired with the emergence of non-Brahmin political assertion through the Self-Respect Movement, which was engineered by the radical political thinker and leader E.V. Ramasami Naicker (1879-1931; also known as *Periyar*).[29] As Soneji has shown, anti-*devadāsī* legislation worked in favor of men in the community, who often rose to great professional heights as women's labor was rendered increasingly invisible during the early decades of the twentieth century (*Unfinished Gestures* 143-150). The entrance of men from *devadāsī* communities into the political world of non-Brahmin assertion in the public sphere produced a long-standing connection between the world of cinema and Tamil politics as well as between the new political face of the *devadāsī* community in public modernity and Tamil politics.[30] This new face of the *devadāsī* community was a distinctly masculine and patrilineal one. As result of anti-*devadāsī* legislation, men reinvented themselves by creating a new caste identity, calling

themselves *icai vēḷāḷars* ("cultivators of music"), an identity that linked them to the world of cultural production, placed them in the "respectable" caste status of *vēḷāḷars* (the mid-caste agricultural community), and removed the female presence (titular, social, and cultural) that earlier was yoked to their self-representation. Together, these two residual effects of anti-*devadāsī* legislation—the production of a new cultural matrix and the political assertion of men from the community—were key aspects in the making of the Tamil cinema. On the one hand, women from *devadāsī* families were encouraged to participate in the cultural labor of the cinema during its early decades. On the other hand, men from the community became involved in a new political assertion in which cinema played a central role. As scriptwriters for many of the earliest explicitly political Tamil films, individuals such as C.N. Annadurai (1909-1969; Chief Minister of Tamilnadu during the 1960s) created a permanent nexus between the political and the cinematic in modern Tamilnadu (Baskaran *The Message Bearers*; Irschick *Tamil Revivalism*; Soneji *Unfinished Gestures*).

DIGLOSSIA: TAMIL- *AND* TELUGU-SPEAKING COURTESAN COMMUNITIES IN THE EARLY CINEMA

It is significant that the Madras legal interventions were aimed at *both* Tamil- and Telugu-speaking courtesans, a fact that is made explicit in the language of the 1947 Act, which lists epithets for *devadāsīs* that are largely only drawn from Telugu linguistic contexts.[31] The legislation drew upon colonial geopolitical configurations (such as that of the "Madras Presidency") to construct a unified sign of a pan-South-Indian *devadāsī* culture. Vernacular traditions—and cultures of naming in particular (such as the use of

the Telugu term *kalāvantulu* or the Tamil term *tēvaraṭiyāḷ*—now collided with the strictures of the state and law, which brought all of these together under the universalized category of *devadāsī.* At the same time, it is true that Tamil- and Telugu-speaking courtesan communities have shared histories and that the flowing of repertoire, technique, and bodies across these linguistic registers was a key feature of courtesan performance traditions throughout South India.

Similarly, the earliest instantiations of a distinctly South Indian cinema in the form of the first "talkies" were aimed at the linguistically diglossic (if not multilingual) Tamil-Telugu audiences of the Madras Presidency.[32] Films like the first talkie, *Kalidas* ("The Poet Kālīdāsa," 1931), contained dialogue in both Tamil and Telugu (and even small portions in Hindi), and actors in the early cinema thus came from both the Tamil- and Telugu-speaking districts of the Madras Presidency.[33] With the political and cultural push toward increased linguistic differentiation close to the time of Indian independence, Tamil and Telugu cinema emerged as somewhat distinct entities by the 1940s, but they certainly continued to share common aesthetic registers, production networks and apparatuses, and even actors and audiences. Thus, women from the Telugu *kalāvantula* courtesan community were key players in both acting and the emergent world of playback singing in Tamil cinema between the 1930s and 1950s.[34] As with many Tamil-speaking actress, the early *kalāvantula* actresses often came into the cinema through the world of popular Telugu drama.[35] The most significant early actress from the *kalāvantula* community to perform in the Tamil cinema was Pasupuleti Kannamba (1911-1964), who

acted in numerous Telugu and Tamil films. She eventually married the drama artist Kadaru Nagabhushanam in 1941 and established the film production company called Rajarajeswari Films. Most notably, Kannamba acted in the film *Kannagi* ("Heroine of the Tamil Epic *Cilappatikāram*," 1942) (see fig. 2-1), one of the earliest films in which the hereditary *naṭṭuvaṉār* Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai was the choreographer (and whose work will be extensively discussed in Chapter V). Another significant figure was Rushyendramani (1917-2002); she was originally an actress in the drama company of Kommuri Pattabhiramaiah called Lakshmi Vilasa Nataka Sabha, and she was later in the Rajarajeswari Nataka Mandali company run by Pasupuleti Kannamba and Kadaru Nagabhushanam. Her first film was the Telugu *Sri Krishna Tulabharam* ("The Weighing Scales of Krishna," 1935), which was produced by Rajarao Naidu. She began acting in Tamil films during the early 1950s. Perhaps the most popular actress who crossed the Tamil-Telugu cinematic worlds in modern memory was Anjali Devi (1929-2014) (see fig. 2-1), who became famous as an actress and dancer and who was known for her bold cinematic presence. She was born into a *kalāvantula* household in the town of Peddapuram in the Godavari district of the Madras Presidency. Like Kannamba, she began as a drama artist in the East Godavari region and entered the cinema as a child actor in 1936. She went on to act in a number of significant Telugu and Tamil films. In 1949, Anjali Devi partnered with the leading male actor of this period, Akkineni Nageswara Rao (1924-2014), to create a production company called Aswini Pictures; in

1951, together with her musician-husband, Adi Narayana Rao, she established her own studio, Anjali Pictures (S.V. Srinivas 82).

Fig. 2-1. *(Left)* The cover of the songbook for *Kannagi* (1942) featuring Pasupuleti Kannamba. *(Right)* Anjali Devi in the pose of the god Śiva-Naṭarāja in a still from the Tamil film *Maṅkaiyarkkaraci* (1949). *Kuṇṭūci* magazine (August 1949, p. 43). (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

The diglossic presence of Tamil *devadāsīs* in Telugu cinema and Telugu *kalāvantulu* in Tamil cinema reflected a wider and older pattern of the circulation of technique and repertoire across these communities throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the work of Davesh Soneji (*Unfinished Gestures*) has shown. At the end of this chapter, it will be demonstrated how the preeminent Tamil *devadāsī* family—namely that of Tanjore Bhavani—had an intergenerational involvement with the South Indian cinema. This family adopted girls from Telugu *kalāvantula* families and

trained them in forms of music and dance as modes of grooming them for careers in the cinema.

THE TROPE OF THE *DEVADĀSĪ*: VERNACULAR LITERATURE, TAMIL DRAMA, AND EARLY FILM AS INTERTEXTUAL MEDIA

Representations of *devadāsīs* circulated widely during the Madras Presidency through a dense and complex world of intertextual and intermedial forms. The recent work of Davesh Soneji has very effectively demonstrated how the "*devadāsī*-as-literary trope" has been present in South India since the seventeenth century in certain Tamil literary genres, including the *viraliviṭutūtu* ("messenger poem of the female bard"). In these poems, which were composed largely under courtly patronage, *devadāsīs* emerge as socially maligned figures who dupe innocent men, ensnaring them in sexual and economic traps. Soneji posits that that these literary texts undergird representations of *devadāsīs* that begin to emerge in the new literary world of print in nineteenth-century Madras (*Unfinished Gestures* 84-95). I would extend Soneji's argument to include not only late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century poems and novels but also Tamil social dramas and eventually scripts for the early cinema. The relation between drama-as-literature and cinema is especially important here: scripts for early cinema drew extensively from the popular dramas that were circulating in print from the 1880s through the late 1930s. This certainly is an area that requires further systematic research. In this section, I would like to simply point to the fact that *devadāsī* labor flowed through a range of medial spaces while at the same time these women were viewed through discursive or narrative constructions that were often pejorative or deeply stereotyped.

The Tamil popular theater of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries represented a kind of aesthetic bricolage that drew from multiple sources that ranged from older forms of Tamil theater (*kūttu*, also known as *terukkūttu* or *kaṭṭaikkūttu*) to Victorian-inspired "Parsi" theater.[36] This hybridized theater, which eventually came to be known in Tamilnadu as *icai nāṭakam* ("musical theater") or sometimes "special *nāṭakam,*" was organized in the form of professional or semi-professional companies; these were often called "boys' companies," because they were constituted largely of young male actors. The most significant figure in the formation of this tradition was Caṅkaratās Cuvāmikaḷ (1867-1932), who wrote, produced, and acted in a number of early *icai nāṭakam* performances and who was the teacher and mentor to a generation of actors, some of whom went on to be become stars of the Tamil cinema.[37] Cuvāmikaḷ was also a musician who composed the music for his own plays. *Icai nāṭakam* matured at the hands of Pāmmal Campanta Mutaliyār (1873-1964), the founder of the famous Suguna Vilasa Sabha theater company in Madras.

The themes of *icai nāṭakam* plays included those that involved *devadāsī* characters. Often these representations in the plays drew from earlier Tamil literary contexts (such as the *viraliviṭutūtu,* discussed previously). In a forthcoming essay, literary historian Sascha Ebeling examines one such early drama about *devadāsīs* that moves through the realm of popular dramatic print texts and cinema; this particular story was the subject of a public obscenity debate, largely because of its invocation of the protagonist's relationship with the *devadāsī* character.[38] The drama in question—*Ṭampācārivilācam*

("Dalliances of a Dandy") by Caitāpuram Kācivicuvanāta Mutaliyār (1806-1871)—draws on many themes that can be found in early *viraliviṭutūtu* texts. The plot is essentially about a married man named Ṭampācāri who falls in love with a *devadāsī* named Mataṉacuntari and leaves his wife for her. She fleeces him, and soon he is reduced to the status of a beggar. Mataṉacuntari rejects him, and he goes back to his wife, who is waiting for him to return. Through the intervention and grace of the god Śiva, Ṭampācāri finds the inheritance that his father had left for him and is able to pay back his debts. The story has a "happily ever after" ending in which Ṭampācāri finds peace in the conjugal life. The play was produced as a film by A.C. Maruthachalam Chettiar in 1935 under the title *Dumbachary or The Ideal Wife*, with the non-*devadāsī* actress Saraswathi Bai playing Mataṉacuntari (see fig. 2-2).

A similar narrative is iterated in 1877 in another drama entitled *Piratāpacantira Vilācam* ("The Dalliances of Piratāpacantira").[39] The drama, which contained phrases and entire sentences in English, is aimed largely at a young male audience to warn them against indulging in relationships with *devadāsīs*. The English preface by Rāju notes, for example, that "This play is written to reform those young men, who, instead of learning the good aspects of Western culture, like civility and a hygienic way of living and respect for women, only imbibe the bad aspects of their social living like partying and expensive habits" (2). It is clear that dramas like this—and, by extension, films like *Dumbachary*—have a didactic moral orientation.

Fig. 2-2. *(Left)* The cover of the second printed edition of the Tamil play *Ṭampācārivilācam* by Kācivicuvanāta Mutaliyār (1861, reprinted 1871). (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.) *(Right)* Poster for the Tamil film *Ṭampācāri Allatu Uttama Maṉaivi,* rendered in English as "Dumbachary or Ideal Wife" (1935). (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

Representations in the cinema also attempt to excavate *devadāsī* figures from mythical or literary contexts. In many of these representations, narratives hark back to a supposed "golden age" in which *devadāsīs* represented chastity and high morality as opposed to *devadāsīs* in the present, who are framed in what Soneji has termed a "narrative of degeneration" (*Unfinished Gestures* 6-12).[40] I would like to turn to one such example, even though many such representations were common during the 1940s. I have chosen this example because the actress playing the *devadāsī* is T.R. Rajakumari, herself a descendant of the famed *devadāsī* Tanjore Bhavani (whose lineage will be discussed in detail later in this chapter). The film, called *Krishna Bhakthi* ("Devotion to Krsna," 1949) draws its narrative from a curious mélange of sources (see fig. 2-3).

Fig. 2-3. The cover of the songbook of *Krishna Bhakthi* ("Devotion to Krsna," 1949) with an image of the actress T.R. Rajakumari. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

Film historian Randor Guy claims that the assistant director of the film, S. Ramanathan, was inspired to weave the narrative around a figure inspired by the controversial Russian Orthodox priest and political maverick Grigori Rasputin, whom he encountered through an English translation of a French novel called *The Monk* ("Krishna Bhakthi (1948)"). The film is essentially about the liberation of a singer-orator who is an ascetic through devotion to the god Kṛṣṇa, and it describes his love for a chaste courtesan named Devakumāri. In the sequence I examine, the singer-orator protagonist (known as a *harikathā bhāgavatar*) is performing musical storytelling (*harikathā* or *kathākālakṣepam*) at a temple. He begins by singing about how chaste married women are able to attain liberation (*mokṣa*) because of the powers of their devotion to their husbands and families. He is then prodded by his disciple to talk about the moral and soteriological status of *devadāsīs*, who are not family women. The *bhāgavatar* proceeds to narrate the story of a mythical *devadāsī* named Ceṅkamalam ("red lotus") who, unlike many *devadāsīs*, was

honorable.[41] The entire sequence unfolds as a lesson in morality for Devakumāri, who listens to the *bhāgavatar*'s oratory from a distance:

> Devotee: Revered teacher, your servant has a question.
>
> Teacher [named K. R. Ramasami, played by P.U. Chinnappa]: Ask, please ask. It's my duty to clear the doubts of devotees like you.
>
> Devotee: The sermon about chastity makes sense with regards to family women (*kulastrīkaḷ*). But, do those women from the clan of the *devadāsīs* (*tāci kulam*) who make a living as "women of pleasure" (*vilaimātarkaḷ*), do they have any chance to attain salvation?
>
> Teacher: Oh Krishna! Krishna! Why did you utter that word "*vilaimātarkaḷ*"? Oh Lord! Why does that word have to fall upon my ears?
>
> [singing]
> Don't ever say that word, my dear disciple. It's a great sin. When we are born, is there ever caste difference (*kula pētam*)? Speaking ill about women is just evil. Hari! Hari! These words abhorrent to my ears.
>
> [talking]
> Listen, dear disciple. People seem to have forgotten who the real *devadāsīs* are! Women who perform service to god are *devadāsīs*. They themselves seem to have forgotten their birth right. To whom are they servants (*tāci*)? Certainly not to men (*nara maṉitaṉ*). They were called *devadāsīs* because they performed service to gods. But because lust-filled men manipulated them, the great *devadāsīs,* who should have been venerated by everyone, were reduced by society to what you call them today, "women of pleasure" (*vilaimātarkaḷ*). Unfortunate, so very unfortunate! Don't ever put that ill-fated word in my ears.
>
> [singing]
> A woman born as a *devadāsī* should be like Ceṅkamalam, who did not sell her body, did not desire wealth, and did not desire sex. And since she only served god, she received salvation (*mōṭcam*). Only such a person is a <u>true</u> *devadāsī*.
>
> Disciple: My Lord, who is this Ceṅkamalam? It would be instructive if you told us about her.
>
> Teacher: Dear devotees, in the age known as Dvāpara, in the holy city of Śrīraṅgam, there lived a *devadāsī* named Ceṅkamalam. She had great faith in the

power of her devotion. She was the auspicious one (*mahārāci*), unequaled in the arts of dance and music. That was the *devadāsī* named Ceṅkamalam.

Beauty! Beauty! What a beauty she was! Even the local king lusted for her. Ceṅkamalam's mother also tried to force her to give in to his lustful desires. But did Ceṅkamalam give in? No, never! She said, "I will never be a slave to any king. I will be a slave only to Lord Kṛṣṇa."

[singing]
Even though she was possessed of such beauty and so talented, she said she would only be a slave to Lord Kṛṣṇa! She rejected the lustful ways of the ordinary "women of pleasure" but was duped by a holy man.

The holy man raped her. He told the king that if Ceṅkamalam was in love with him, she should marry him. The king was shocked and declared: "Oh pure and chaste Ceṅkamalam, become the spiritual disciple of Paramatattaṉ Vipracīṉai Pākavatar. Become his apprentice and serve him well." Ceṅkamalam did just that and attained salvation!

[The camera then shifts to the corner where a *devadāsī* named Devakumāri and her mother are standing]

Devakumāri's mother [to Devakumāri who has been silently listening to the sermon]: What's wrong with you? You're so still. Won't the king be waiting for you?

Devakumāri (played T.R. Rajakumari): Wait mother…What wise, true words.

Teacher: Hence, a *devadāsī* is not one who marries the man she thinks about and falls in love with. She is one who sees god through art. She does not desire married life even if it is with a great king. A true *devadāsī* is one who performs devotional service to god (*pākavata cēvai*) for her entire life.

Devakumāri: True! True!

The above discussion is continued in a recent essay by Sundar Kaali ("Disciplining the Dasi") in which he discusses the film *Chintamani/Bilwamangal* (1937) in great detail (see fig. 2-4). The representation of the courtesan character here reifies the same images of *devadāsīs* encountered in the print texts of early popular Tamil drama.

The film *Chintamani/Bilwamangal* is also a modern act of hagiographic retrieval and representation. It is the story of the thirteenth-century saint Līlāśuka Bilvamaṅgala (author of a famous Sanskrit devotional text called *Kṛṣṇakarṇāmṛtam*), read through the lens of texts like the nineteenth-century *Ṭampācārivilācam.* The saint, like the "dandy" of *Ṭampācārivilācam,* is infatuated by a courtesan named Cintāmaṇī. She is represented as a dancing courtesan, very much along the lines of late nineteenth-century *devadāsīs*. Such anachronistic readings of courtesans in South India's cultural history are found in many early Tamil films. Consider the example of *Kannagi* (1942), which was mentioned earlier in this chapter. This film represents the sixth-century Tamil epic *Cilappatikāram's* courtesan character Mātavi as if she were a nineteenth-century *devadāsī.* What I wish to highlight here is how the figure of the nineteenth-century *devadāsī* is ubiquitously present in the early cinema, "standing in" for courtesans from far-removed historical contexts.

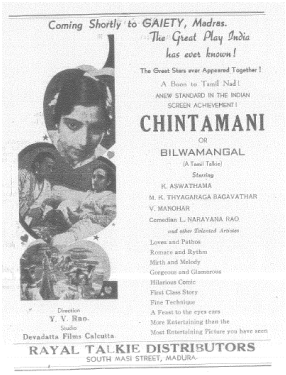


Fig. 2-4. *Chintamani or Bilwamangal* (1937) is the story of Līlāśuka Bilvamaṅgala, the author of the Sanskrit work *Kṛṣṇakarṇāmṛtam*, who is infatuated by the courtesan Cintāmaṇī. (Courtesy Davesh Soneji.)

The final example that I would like to present is a film that is actually titled *Devadasi* (1948), which took three years to produce and starred the actress Leela, about whom not much is known (see fig. 2-5). Although both archival and contemporary sources talk about Leela as "hailing from a family of artists" or "from a family of entertainers," it is almost certain that she came from a *devadāsī* family. Although no print of the film presently exists, in an article for *The Hindu* newspaper in 2013, film historian Randor Guy summarizes the plot of this film as follows:

> *Devadasi* narrated the story of an economically weak girl begging on the streets and picked up by a smart devadasi woman...She changes the girl's name to Devakunjari…and trains her in Bharathanatyam and other dance forms. Many wealthy people fall for the charms of the dancer, but the greedy foster mother looks for the big fish – such as the king himself, who falls in love with her. However, the dancer falls in love with his friend, which complicates matters…Soon the king takes to spirituality and so does [Devakunjari's] lover, who marries [her]…However, both are unable to forget the dancer, and wage a battle of minds. Their spiritual guru tries to change their minds but not with much success. Finally, the dancer, by now deeply religious, surrenders herself to the Lord, and vanishes from their midst. ("Devadasi (1948)")[42]

Fig. 2-5. The film *Devadasi* (1948), directed by Manik Lal Tandon. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

Guy claims that this narrative is inspired by the 1890 French novel *Thaïs* by Anatole France, which is about the fourth-century Roman-Egyptian female saint Thaïs, who is often described as a "repentant courtesan" figure in Catholic hagiography. He also states that this novel was the basis of a Bengali novel that inspired the Hindi film *Chitralekha*, which was first made in 1941 then remade by the same filmmaker in 1964. He believes that *Devadasi,* written by B.S. Ramaiah, is based partly on the 1941 version of *Chitralekha*. It is clear from Guy's description that, on the one hand, this film also draws on the old trope of the courtesan-as-temptress. However, it also addresses *devadāsī* sexuality by sublimating it into the realm of devotion and the grace of god, as was the case with *Krishna Bhakthi*. This representation thus also connects itself to the "golden age" narratives about *devadāsīs*, who, in the ancient past, were considered "pure" and who led pious, devotional lives only to become morally degenerate in the modern age. This "golden age" was key to both the anti-nautch movement as well as the cultural nationalism of the "dance revival" in the 1930s. I will return to this "golden age" representation of Bharatanāṭyam's past in the following chapter, but here, it is sufficient to note that the only extant early film to carry the title *Devadasi* produces this kind of representation. It is also significant that the bold title of the film seems to have made the producers and distributors nervous, since the word *devadāsī* had become such a taboo and potentially volatile one in Madras in the 1940s, following the anti-nautch movement.

AXES OF INVISIBILITY: ARCHIVAL SILENCE AND WOMEN ACTRESSES FROM *DEVADĀSĪ* COMMUNITIES

Much of this chapter involves a retrieval of *devadāsī* women's professional life narratives from archival materials. Oscillating archival absences and presences of *devadāsīs* in the textual archive produce a kind of historical messiness; in many ways, they elude desirable, definitive outcomes. For example, rarely if ever do sources mention terms like *devadāsī*. They gloss over such sites of public discomfort by invoking somewhat slippery language such as "traditional artist" or, in Tamil, phrases like *icai kuṭumpattil vantavaṅkaḷ* ("descended from a music family"). At the same time, notes about certain *devadāsī* artists abound in the archival sources. For example, the actress T.R. Rajakumari, who is discussed later in detail, appears in literally hundreds of sources that comment on her beauty; she occupies the upper rungs of what Neepa Majumdar has termed the "hierarchy of female stardom" in early Indian cinema (97). Alternatively, archival sources only offer traces of women who eluded the category of "star" and who remained on the fringe and yet were recognizable to mass audiences, often because of their marginality. A case in point is P.S. Gnanambal (dates unknown), who acted in a handful of early Tamil films including *Dhruva Charithram* ("The Story of the Devotee Dhruva,"1935). All that is known about her is that she acted in drama companies and was "from a traditional music background"; it is from this last statement that it can be inferred that she was from the *devadāsī* community. A single portrait of her from 1936 exists (see fig. 2-6), and it shows that she has received medals for her performance skills that are

pinned to her *sari;* it was a common practice for *devadāsī* performers to display such medals in this manner.

Fig. 2-6. Portrait of P.S. Gnanambal (1936), *Āṭal Pāṭal* (Āṇṭu Malar, 1936, p. 36). (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.)

In other cases, women from the *devadāsī* community slip into conjugality, "passing," as Soneji puts it (*Unfinished Gestures* 157), as non-*devadāsī* women. The professional and personal complexities of such reconstitutions are perhaps most evident in the famous example of M.S. Subbulakshmi (1916-2004), which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter IV. A more directly pertinent example is that of Rukmani (1929-2007; also known as *Baby Rukmani* or *Kumari Rukmani*) (see fig. 2-7). Like Subbulakshmi, Rukmani was born to a mother who was an active performer of music and dance in early twentieth-century Madras, Nungambakkam Janaki (dates unknown; originally from Thanjavur). Janaki also acted in a single film, the third-ever Tamil talkie, *Harishchandra* ("The King Hariścandra," 1932), in which Rukmani also made her debut

as a child artist. Rukmani went on act in a number of popular films, including *Sri Valli* ("The Goddess Vaḷḷi," 1945), in which she performed a dance piece in the *tillāṉā* genre, which was choreographed by Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai. While working on the film *Lavangi* ("The Courtesan Lavaṅgī," 1946), she married the film's chief actor, director, and producer, Y.V. Rao (1903-1973), who divorced his first wife Rajam to be with Rukmani. The couple's daughter is the actress Lakshmi (b. 1952 as R. Venkatalakshmi), who was popular during the 1970s and 1980s. Lakshmi's daughter Aishwarya (b. 1971) is currently active in the world of Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam films. Even though Rukmani's film career spanned more than a hundred films in Tamil, Telugu, and Hindi, much of her stardom came from her association with Y.V. Rao and later as a producer of two Hindi films. Rukmani, of course, was a "star" in terms of the appeal she appears to have had with mass audiences, but her star status—and her presence in the archive—depended, to some degree, on what Majumdar calls "displacements" of identity (98).[43]

Fig. 2-7. "Baby Rukmani" in a still from the film *Bhagya Leela* (1938). *Āṭal Pāṭal* (Āṇṭu Malar, 1938, p. 62). (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.)

For the most part, the "stars" of Tamil cinema who were from the *devadāsī* community—including the women I discuss below—have long-standing and narrativized presence in the archive. However, I would like to point here to the some of the dangers of what Anjali Arondekar calls the "seductions of recovery and access" ("A Small History" 18). The fact of the matter is that, even in the lives of women such as T.R. Rajakumari, whose professional lives are annotated in the archives, gaps and fissures abound in attempting to claim representation of the complexities of such lives. Therefore, in the sections that follow, I am not making claims to archival truth, insularity, or epistemic totality. At the same time, archival fragments present imaginative potential for rethinking the place of *devadāsī* women in the public life of Madras during the early decades of the twentieth century.

POLYMORPHOUS PERFORMANCE: MUSIC, DANCE, AND CINEMA IN THE LIFE OF S.D. SUBBULAKSHMI

The movement of women from *devadāsī* communities into the emergent world of cinema was a complex process that involves the reconsidering of received ideas about the centers and peripheries of cultural production in Madras during the 1930s and 1940s. It is certainly true that women from *devadāsī* communities remained somewhat on the peripheries of all of the cultural worlds they inhabited during the first half of the twentieth century, be it music, dance, gramophone recording, drama, or cinema. At the same time, it is also true that, in some exceptional cases, women from *devadāsī* communities were able to actively participate in the making and management of the early cinema, even as they continued to weave themselves in and out of the peripheries of other

cultural forms. This type of movement through multiple medial and aesthetic forms—what I call a kind of "polymorphous" engagement with performance in the new public sphere—is perhaps best exemplified through the virtually forgotten figure of S.D. Subbulakshmi (1917-1987; not to be confused with the famous singer, M.S. Subbulakshmi) (see fig. 2-8). Subbulakshmi's life illustrates how *devadāsīs* who were engaged with the emergent world of modern Tamil drama could easily slip into the cinema and achieve a degree of fame in this context. Subbulakshmi is also unique in that she became a second wife to South India's most important film director in this period, Krishnaswami Subrahmanyam (1904-1971), who continued to live (and produce children) with both his Brahmin wife *and* his *devadāsī* wife, much in the manner of the earlier forms of institutionalized concubinage that defined the social organization of *devadāsī* communities in Tamil- and Telugu-speaking South India. Moreover, Subbulakshmi's life is also intimately linked to both live and radio performances of devotional music (in the genre known as *harikathā* or *kathākālakṣepam*), which she became famous for in Madras city well into the 1950s and 1960s. In the section that follows, I reconstitute a life narrative of S.D. Subbulakshmi from the archive (based primarily on a document composed in 1952) in an attempt to map the complexities of *devadāsī* women's polymorphous performance careers and their imbrication in multiple medial and aesthetic forms during the first half of the twentieth century.[44]

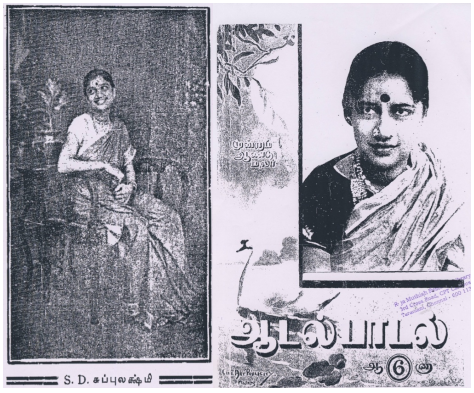


Fig. 2-8. *(Left)* Portrait of S.D. Subbulakshmi in *Āṭal Pāṭal* magazine (Āṇṭu Malar, 1936, p. 51). (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.) *(Right)* S.D. Subbulakshmi on the cover of *Āṭal Pāṭal* magazine (Āṇṭu Malar, 1938). (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.)

S.D. Subbulakshmi (also known by her initials *SDS*) was born in the town of Srivaikuntam (in today's Thoothukudi district) on December 5, 1917. Her father, Doraiswamy Pillai, was an actor in a popular Tamil theater (*icai natakam*) company called the Dantimukhananda Hall Boy's Company. Her mother was Janaki Ammal, a professional dancer within the *devadāsī* community. Her maternal grandmother, Muttulakshmi Ammal, was among the earliest women to perform a type of devotional musical form called *harikathā* or *kathākālakṣepam*.[45] Subbulakshmi's father joined the Dantimukhananda Company when she was just two years old, so she was largely raised by her mother.

When she was five, Subbulakshmi enrolled in public school. When she was eight, her mother made arrangements for her to be trained in dance and music. Her dance

teacher was a *naṭṭuvaṉār* named S. Swaminatha Pillai, who was also her mother's teacher. The archive speaks about her early passion for performance through a number of anecdotes about her early life. Take, for example, the following, which relates to her childhood interest in the theater:

> As she was being trained in dance, the famous Kannaiya [Drama] Company was touring Tirunelveli and the nearby villages. Everyone was talking about how wonderful this theatre company was. So Subbulakshmi and her mother traveled [from Srivaikuntam] to Tirunelveli to watch the play. Subbulakshmi was amazed with the quality of acting in this company. She was determined to act in these kinds of plays. Even without her mother's knowledge, as an 8-year old, she boldly went up to Kannaiya [the company's director] himself, begging him to let her join his company. Kannaiya saw her bright eager face and asked why she wanted to act. He told her his company did not accept female actors but said he had always wanted a daughter, and she should give up the desire to act and become his adopted daughter instead. Subbulakshmi refused and with great sadness returned home because all she wanted to do was to act on stage. (Anonymous, "Es. Ṭi. Cuppulakṣmi" 66)

Around the age of eight or nine, Subbulakshmi acted in her first role in a play staged by the Dantimukhananda Hall Boy's Company, the same company for which her father worked. For reasons unknown, six months after her first performance as a child actor, she and her father stopped working for this company, and her entire family relocated from Srivaikuntam to the city of Madurai. In the city, she was contracted to perform in what were known as "special *nāṭakams,*" in which each actor was hired individually—or "specially"—for each performance, as opposed to the company-based *icai nāṭakam* in which drama companies were commissioned by patrons to enact plays (Seizer 26-28). It was in the context of acting in these "special *nāṭakams*" that Subbulakshmi became very famous in Madurai. When she was twelve, she was honored

in a public ceremony in Madurai in which she was awarded a medal for her acting skills. When she was sixteen, she went to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) to act, and she also performed concerts of *kathākālakṣepam* there. By this time, she had already acted alongside the greatest male drama artists of Tamil-speaking South India, including S.V. Subbiah Bhagavathar and M.K. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar, as well as the actress K.P. Sundarambal.

Subbulakshmi's engagements with music, too, ran deep. Her father knew how to play the harmonium, and she learned the basics of this instrument and vocal music for *nāṭakam* performances from him. At the age of thirteen, she began giving performances of *kathākālakṣepam* in Ramanathapuram, having learned this didactic storytelling musical form from her grandmother. The archive also notes that "in 1932, just before she acted in [her first film] *Pavalakkodi*, she performed *kathākālakṣepam* for the marriage [reception] of [the eminent actor] M.K. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar in Trichy" (Anonymous, "Kuḻantaikaḷē Periyavarkaḷāka Ākiṟārkaḷ" 51). Music was a kind of constant presence in Subbulakshmi's life. Even long after her cinematic acting career came to a close in the 1950s, she continued to give performances of *kathākālakṣepam* in Madras (see fig. 2-9), well into her forties and fifties.

Fig. 2-9. S.D. Subbulakshmi performs *harikathā* (also known as *kathākālakṣepam*) in Madras in the late 1950s. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

Until she was seventeen, Subbulakshmi continued to act in the popular Tamil theater (*icai natakam*). She was often paired with the actor M.K. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar (1910-1959), who would eventually become a superstar of the early Tamil cinema. Their most popular production was a Tamil play entitled *Pavaḷakkoṭi* ("The Coral Queen"), about the love between Arjuna, the hero of the epic *Mahābhārata*, and a princess from a coral island. They toured this play all over the southern part of the Madras Presidency. In 1934, when they were performing it in the town of Karaikkudi, the businessman-turned-producer S.M. Lakshmana Chettiar and his friend, the former lawyer K. Subrahmanyam who had just formed the studio called Meenakshi Cinetone, were in the audience. They immediately decided to transform the play into a film, and they offered M.K. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar and S.D. Subbulakshmi the lead roles. The film version of the play, *Pavalakodi* (1934), was shot entirely in Madras, and it was a huge box office success.[46]

Subbulakshmi was contracted to act in two other Tamil films, both shot in Calcutta and both directed by K. Subrahmanyam: *Naveena Sarangadhara* ("The New *Sāraṅgadhara*," 1936) and *Usha Kalyanam* ("The Wedding of Uṣā," 1936). During this period, a romantic relationship developed between Subbulakshmi and K. Subrahmanyam, who was already married to a woman named Meenakshi, to whom he been had married in a traditional Brahmin child marriage when she was nine years old.[47] The relationship between Subbulakshmi and Subrahmanyam became so intense that, just before the completion of the filming of *Usha Kalyanam*, on September 13, 1935, they had a registry wedding in Calcutta. Subbulakshmi thus became Subrahmanyam's "second wife" (in a mode that resonated with earlier relations of concubinage between Brahmin men and *devadāsīs)* (see fig. 2-10). That same day, they also formed a new production company called the Madras United Arts Cooperation.

Fig. 2-10. Director K. Subrahmanyam on the set of the film *Seva Sadanam* ("House of Service," 1938), which was the debut film for the actress-singer M.S. Subbulakshmi *(far left)*. Also seen here are his eldest daughter Lalitha (*center,* from his first wife) and his

second wife S.D. Subbulakshmi *(far right)*. *Kuṇṭūci* magazine (December 1952, p. 67). (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.)

Over the next decade, the Madras United Arts Cooperation produced a number of films, some of which starred Subbulakshmi (see fig. 2-11). The films that featured her included *Bhakta Kuchela* (“The Devotee Kucela,” 1936), *Balayogini* (“The Girl Yogi,” 1937), *Mr. Ammanji* (1937; a comedy featuring a song in “playback” by Subbulakshmi), *Seva Sadanam* (“The House of Service,” 1938; the debut film for the actress-singer M.S. Subbulakshmi), *Thyagabhoomi* (“The Land of Sacrifice,” 1939), *Anantha Sayanam* (“The Lord Who Reclines on the Serpent,” 1942), and *Mana Samrakshanam* (“The Protection of One’s Reputation,” 1945). This last film marked the end of the professional collaboration between Subrahmanyam and Subbulakshmi.

Fig. 2-11. Posters for the Madras United Arts Cooperation films *Balayogini* (1937) and *Seva Sadanam* (1938) in *Āṭal Pāṭal* (Āṇṭu Malar, 1936, p. 8, and 1938, p. 12). (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.)

During the early 1940s, with the encouragement of Subrahmanyam, Subbulakshmi formed a dance group called Natana Kala Seva ("Service to the Art of Dance") and toured extensively throughout Tamilnadu. By this time, as will be discussed in Chapter III, reinvented Bharatanāṭyam had already made its mark in Madras due to the activities of Rukmini Arundale and the International Academy of Arts (later renamed Kalakshetra). One of the key markers of the reinvented form was the new idiom of the "dance-drama," which will also be discussed in greater detail in Chapter III. One of the first productions of Natana Kala Seva was the dance-drama titled *Pārijātāpaharaṇam*, which was based on the narrative of the god Kṛṣṇa stealing the celestial *pārijāta* tree to please his wife Satyabhāmā (see fig. 2-12). In this production, Subbulakshmi played the male role of Kṛṣṇa, as she had done in some of her hit films, including *Bhakta Kuchela* ("The Devotee Kucela," 1936).

Fig. 2-12. An image from the 1942 dance-drama *Pārijātāpaharaṇam* produced by the dance troupe "Natana Kala Seva" featuring Subbulakshmi as the god Kṛṣṇa *(second from left)*. (Kannan, B., and Gayatri Kannan. *Nrithyodaya Jubilee Commemoration Volume*. Nrithyodaya, 2004, p. 22.)

In 1942, K. Subrahmanyam founded a dance school called Nrithyodaya ("The Dawn of Dance") in which students would be taught dance for free; this was separate from Natana Kala Seva. The archive tells us that Subbulakshmi "ran this dance school for 2 years," a fact that is not mentioned in other accounts of the school's early years (e.g., Kannan and Kannan *Nrithyodaya Jubilee*). K. Subrahmanyam's involvement with the nationalist politics of dance runs deep, as will be shown in Chapter IV. Among other things, in 1945, he began work on an epic film about dance titled *Narttaṉa Muraḷi* ("The Dancing Flute"), which is eventually shelved. Subrahmanyam's daughter through his first wife, the dancer Padma Subrahmanyam, is the current director of Nrithyodaya, which has grown into a large transnational dance institution.

The archive remains somewhat silent about the details of Subbulakshmi's life after the early 1940s. In 1943, she gave birth to a son named Ramachandran (also known as *Ramji*), and she did not again act in films until 1950, when she appeared in a film titled *Panam* ("Money," 1950), her first film not directed by her husband. She later played small supporting roles in the films *Andaman Kaithi* ("The Prisoner on the Andaman Islands," 1952) and *Manamagal* ("The Bride," 1951), by which time a new generation of upper-caste female artists had begun to populate the world of Tamil cinema. In the mid-1950s, she returns to where her career began: the Tamil drama.

Subbulakshmi died in 1987, and she left behind rich and varied contributions to cultural production in modern South India. A professional musician, theater artist, dancer, dance teacher, and cinema actress, Subbulakshmi should have been incorporated into mainstream nationalist-oriented histories of the arts in twentieth-century India. The question of her invisibility, despite her marriage to one of India's most renown upper-caste filmmakers, takes us to the question of stigma and the lives of women from *devadāsī* communities, which persists into the present for many women in the community (Soneji *Unfinished Gestures* 97). One archival source, for example, ends by dwelling on her exceptional moral standing *despite* her background:

> When one sees Subbulakshmi, one does not see the usual traits attributed to an ordinary woman from the film world, but instead one sees the sophisticated attributes of a woman from a good family. Isn't she preserving her integrity, dignity and self-respect very well? (Anonymous "Kuḻantaikaḷē Periyavarkaḷāka Ākiṟārkaḷ" 51)

Here, the "woman from the film world" is pitted against the "woman from a good family" (*uyar kuṭumpa strī*), and it is clear that the reference to the cinema is a kind of euphemistic way of invoking the *devadāsī* community. A similar kind of discomfort and silence exists around her, even within her own family. For example, her stepdaughter Padma Subrahmanyam had the following to say about her:

> If there was one field where caste difference was not observed, it was in the world of dance and music. If anybody tells you otherwise, do not believe them. I have grown up in that atmosphere and so, for me, caste is no barrier. In fact, S.D. Subbulakshmi is my stepmother, and we will always acknowledge this no matter what.... My mother and she were best friends and were like sisters. They both died within sixteen hours of each other. I lost both my mothers within sixteen hours in 1987. Two wives dying at the same time is unheard of. My mother would always praise S.D. Subbulakshmi. Both of them adored each other…. More importantly than introducing *devadāsīs* into films, my father also made a bald old Brahmin widow act in the film *Seva Sadanam*. That was how revolutionary he was.

In Subrahmanyam's discourse, Subbulakshmi's *devadāsī* background is glossed over in favor of a kind of "normalized" reading of her identity and her relationship with her father. However, this "normalization" is also clearly uncomfortable for Subrahmanyam, a fact that is seen in the final sentence, in which the question of *devadāsī* participation in the cinema is trumped by a statement about how representing Brahmin widows on screen was much more of a radical social achievement for her father.

Taken together, these aporetic perspectives about Subbulakshmi speak to the complexities of representing devadāsī women's professional lives in the post-reform period. Relatively speaking, Subbulakshmi's career represents the "successful" end of the spectrum when it comes to thinking about the post-reform lives of individuals from the community. Yet, as has been demonstrated toward the end of this section, the relative

professional success is met with silence, awkwardness, and prickliness when it pushes against questions of *devadāsī* identity.

GRAMOPHONE, CINEMA, AND STAGE: THE FAMILY OF THIRUVIDAIMARUDUR BHAVANI

The intermedial performance lives of women from *devadāsī* families at the turn of the twentieth century and indeed the complexity of such artistic flows can be mapped through the cross-generational life narratives of the women themselves. In the section that follows, I present two additional case studies, both of which surround matriarchs with the same name: Bhavani. The first and less complex familial matrix is that of Thiruvidaimarudur Bhavani; the second highly dense genealogy is that of Tanjore Bhavani. In both cases, women whose families were involved in traditional courtly, salon, and temple-based performance practices now shifted their participation into the emergent economies of new media, including the popular Tamil drama, gramophone recording, and cinema. I was fortunate to meet and interview the last women artists in both of these familial lineages. In the descriptions that follow, I attempt to bring some historical detail to bear on the forms of artistic production in which these women participated.

I begin with the figure of Thiruvidaimarudur Bhavani (1876-1932), who is at the top of a *devadāsī* family tree that extends over several generations of multimedial artists. Bhavani was born in the town of Thiruvidaimarudur, about 50 kilometers from Thanjavur (Tanjore). This town was famous for the small palace built by the Marāṭhā ruler Amar Singh (r. 1793-1798; also known as *Amarasiṃha*), which hosted performances by

courtesan troupes, and also for the old Mahāliṅgasvāmi temple dedicated to the god Śiva, where courtesan troupes were contracted to perform for festival events. Bhavani was born into a *devadāsī* family. Although not much is known about her early life, it is known that she studied vocal music from a Brahmin musician named Thiruvisainallur Narayanasvami Ayyar (Sundaram, *Marapu Tanta Māṇikkaṅkaḷ* 197). At some point in her life, she seems to have moved to the Kanchipuram/Madras area; this can be discerned from the way she is acknowledged in her early gramophone recordings, as "Miss Bhavani—Conjeevaram [Kanchipuram] (Thiruvadamaradur)." During the first couple of years of the twentieth century, Bhavani cut recordings for HMV's 10-inch "e" suffix series and its 12-inch "f" suffix series (Kinnear 214-215, 227-228). Her recordings include Telugu and Sanskrit devotional songs in the *kīrtana* genre as well as *padams* (courtesan songs), mainly in Tamil.[48]

Bhavani had a sister named Rukmini who was a professional dancer. Almost nothing is known about her other than the fact that a painting based on a photograph of her was made to adorn the walls of a pavilion in the Śiva temple in the village of Konerirajapuram in 1923 for the temple's major reconsecration ceremony (*kumbhābhiṣekam*). This image is made to look as if Rukmini's dance troupe (*mēḷam*) is giving gifts to a gathering of colonial officers (see fig. 2-13). It is likely that the image of Rukmini upon which this painting was based (which can no longer be traced) was simply a portrait and that the additional figures (e.g., the colonial officers) were added into the image by the painter.[49] Bhavani and Rukmini had a cousin, their aunt's daughter

Krishnamma, who was a dancer (Sundaram, *Marapu Tanta Māṇikkaṅkaḷ* 197). Not much is known about Krishnamma except that her daughter was a dancer named Nīlāmpāḷ, who trained with a dance-master named Thiruvidaimarudur Cuppayya Naṭṭuvaṉār and who was regularly contracted to dance in the Mahāliṅgasvāmi temple.

Fig. 2-13. A painting based on a photograph of Thiruvidaimarudur Rukmini on the wall of a pavilion (*maṇḍapa*) of the Śiva temple at Konerirajapuram. The painting was completed in August 1923. (Courtesy Davesh Soneji.)

Nīlāmpāḷ's eldest daughter was Rajalakshmi, who was born on November 30, 1916 (see fig. 2-14). Rajalakshmi began her dance training at the age of seven with Thiruvidaimarudur Cuppayya Naṭṭuvaṉār, like her mother. Unlike most women in the *devadāsī* community, her debut performance (*arankerram*) took place at the rather late age of thirty. However, even before her debut as a professional dancer, Rajalakshmi was approached by production agencies to act in films. Her first role was a very minor one as the goddess Kali in the film *Kalamegam* ("The Poet Kalamegham," 1940), which was

produced by Sri Dhandayuthapani Films and Salem Mohini Pictures and directed by the American director Ellis Dungan.

Fig. 2-14. Thiruvidaimarudur N. Rajalakshmi performs *abhinaya* in conversation with Hari Krishnan, Coimbatore, India, December 2006. (Photograph by Hari Krishnan.)

She acted in a few Tamil films in the 1940s, including *Satimurali* ("The Chaste Woman," 1940), *Tilottamma* ("The Celestial Courtesan Tilottamā," 1940), and *Karaikkal Ammaiyar* ("The Tamil Śaiva Poet Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār," 1943). There were two films in which she played significantly large roles: *Chokhamelar* (1942), which was based on the life of the fourteenth-century Marathi saint Cokhāmeḷa, and the courtly drama *Divan Bahudur* ("The Honorable Minister," 1943). By the end of the 1940s, it was clear to Rajalakshmi that she could not make a successful career for herself in the cinema. Disenchanted by the competitive world of cinema, she attempted to resume a career as a professional dancer in the Thanjavur region. Between 1943 and 1968, she gave performances, although such opportunities were increasingly limited for women from the

devadāsī community. Her performances largely took place in smaller towns and cities such as Thanjavur, Trichy, and Kumbhakonam. She most often performed as a soloist, but she sometimes danced with a partner who was also from the *devadāsī* community, Tirubhuvanam Jayalakshmi (Sundaram *Marapu Tanta Māṇikkaṅkaḷ* 198). During this period, she also attempted to teach dance through the aegis of a cultural organization called the Neyveli Kaveri Sangam, but this too turned out to be a fairly peripheral and economically unviable enterprise for her. During the 1980s, she was invited to teach dance to the daughter of a temple trustee in the city of Coimbatore, and she decided to settle there permanently with her son and a daughter. Rajalakshmi represented one of the last *devadāsīs* of her generation who was involved in both cinema and the proscenium stage. Her story represents an important illustration of how intergenerational participation in multiple genres and medial forms comprised a key element of the cultural genealogies of many *devadāsī* families in modern South India.

TANJORE BHAVANI'S DESCENDANTS AND THE TAMIL CINEMA

The deep and long-standing effects that the cinema had on the lives of women from *devadāsī* communities can perhaps be best illustrated by the second family that has had multigenerational, multimedial relationships with the arts, including the cinema. This is the family represented by the matriarch Tanjore Bhavani (dates unknown) (see fig. 2-15), who moved to Madras from Tanjore with her *naṭṭuvaṉār*-teacher, Capāpati (1836-1894), the son of Civāṉantam (1808-1863) of the famous "Tanjore Quartet," a family of court *naṭṭuvaṉārs* of Tanjore during the reign of King Serfoji II (1777-1832). According

to historian B.M. Sundaram, because of her move to Madras (also known as *Chennai* or *Chennapattanam*), Bhavani was known to locals in Tanjore as *Pattanattammal* ("lady from Chennapattanam"), and her house in Tanjore was known as *paṭṭaṇaṭṭammāḷ vīṭu* ("house of the lady from Chennapattanam") (*Marapu Tanta Māṇikkaṅkaḷ* 78-79). Despite the fact that she was living in Madras, Bhavani maintained close relations with Tanjore, and her daughter Kuchalambal and adopted granddaughter Sarasvati continued to dance at the Tanjore court through to the reign of Tanjore's last nominal ruler, Queen Kamakshi Amba Bai Saheb (d. 1892) and at the public festivals of Tanjore's Bṛhadīśvara temple.

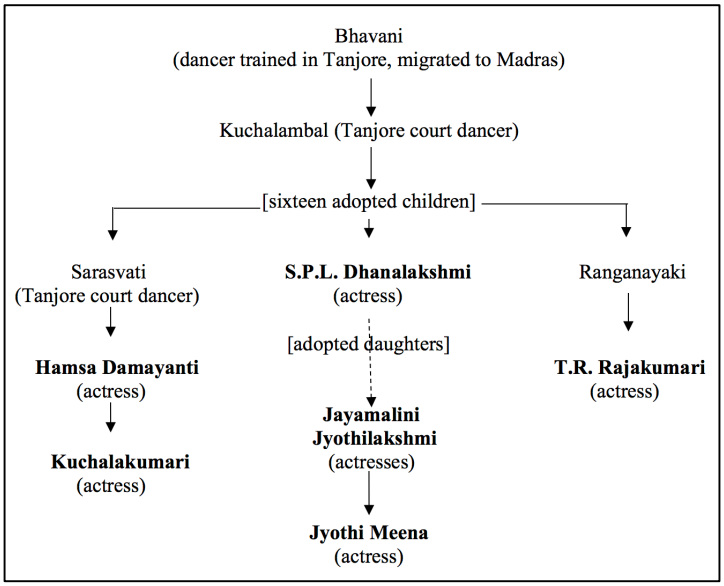


Fig. 2-15. Descendants of Tanjore Bhavani. Women who performed in the cinema are indicated in bold.

T.R. Rajakumari

Rajakumari (born Thanjavur Ranganayaki Rajayi) was born on May 5, 1922, in Thanjavur to Ranganayaki, one of the five daughters of Kuchalambal. She attended the Veeraraghava Secondary School in Thanjavur. For some reason, young Rajayi quit school during her third year of high school. Her youngest aunt, S.P.L. Dhanalakshmi (dates unknown), learned music from a male Brahmin musician named Umayalpuram Kalyanarama Ayyar and began giving full-fledged music concerts at the age of 13. She diversified and went on to performing *kathākālakṣepam*. In 1935, Dhanalakshmi had the opportunity to act in the film *Parvati Parinayam* ("The Wedding of Pārvatī"), which was produced by National Movietone. Through the support of her celebrity aunt Dhanalakshmi, young Rajayi moved to Madras permanently in 1938. She would later act with her aunt in a mythological film entitled *Prabhavathi* ("Effulgent Lady," 1942) (see fig. 2-16). Dhanalakshmi arranged for Rajayi to break into the film world, and her first film was *Kumara Kulottungan* ("Prince Kulottuṅka," 1939), which was produced by Deccan Cinetone and in which she played the heroine opposite the actor C.D. Kannabiran. Rajakumari was also trained in music by Kunnakkudi Venkatarama Ayyar (dates unknown), a Brahmin musician who composed music for many early Tamil films from the late 1930s to the mid 1950s.[50] This unsuccessful film was followed by two others, by which time Rajayi had been renamed "Rajakumari." She played the heroine in both of these films: *Mandiravati* ("The Magician," 1941) and *Suryaputri* ("Daughter of

the Sun," 1940, in which she acted alongside leading stars K.R. Selvam, M.S. Sundaribai, and Kottamangalam Subbu).

Fig. 2-16. Advertisement for the film *Prabhavathi* (1942), which featured both S.P.L. Dhanalakshmi and her niece T.R. Rajakumari. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

Rajakumari's real rise to stardom has been attributed to her interface with director K. Subrahmanyam (Guy, *Starlight, Starbright* 255), even though she had already worked with the American director Ellis Dungan, who directed her earlier film *Suryaputri*. K. Subrahmanyam cast Rajakumari in his film *Kacha Devayani* ("Kaca and Devayāni," 1941), which was inspired by the success of a Telugu film of the same name made in Telugu in 1938 by B.V. Ramanandam.[51] Randor Guy claims that "even though *Kacha Devayani* was her third film…it was released first. It was for this reason that K. Subramaniam claimed that it was he who first discovered Rajakumari" (*Starlight, Starbright* 255). Although this claim is difficult to verify because most film magazines

claim her earlier films were in fact released on time, it is nevertheless clear that *Kacha Devayani* became a major hit and earned much acclaim. Following the success of *Kacha Devayani*, Rajakumari was booked by Modern Theatres to act as heroine two films: *Sati Sukanya* ("The Chaste Woman Sukanyā") and *Manonmani* ("Jewel of the Mind"), both of which were made in 1942.

Another huge turning point came the following year, when S.M. Sriramulu Naidu of Pakshiraja Films and Central Studios booked Rajakumari to star in *Sivakavi* ("The Poet Śivakavi," 1943), pairing her with the rising musician and film star M.K. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar (1910-1959; also known as *MKT*). The film featured one of the early songs in Tamil cinema in praise of dance, *Kavalayai Tīrppatu Nāṭṭiyakalaiyē* ("The Art of Dance Removes All Sorrows"), which will be unpacked in greater detail in Chapter VI.[52] This film was also a major hit, and the pairing of Rajakumari with MKT was understood to be at the core of its commercial success. The following year, the two were paired again in Sunder Rao Nadkarni's *Haridas* ("The Poet Haridās," 1944). In this film, Rajakumari plays the role of a *devadasi* courtesan who attempts to seduce and dupe the pious hero; this is similar to the early literary and dramatic print texts that were discussed earlier in this chapter. Among the most well-annotated scenes in the film is the song *Manmatalīlaiyiṉ Veṉṟār Untō* ("Who Can Match You in the Sports of the God of Love?"), in which Rajakumari dances to a very intimate erotic lyric that mirrors *padams* or *jāvaḷis* from the traditional courtesan dance repertoire. The song also features a sequence in which Rajakumari blows MKT a kiss along with other acts of intimacy that

were considered somewhat scandalous at the time.[53] It is significant that Rajakumari did not learn dance until she entered the cinema, and it appears that *Sivakavi* is the first film in which she performs dance. The sequences here (and in her subsequent film *Haridas*) were choreographed by the dance-master (*naṭṭuvaṉār*) Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai (1910-1991) (see fig. 2-17). As Randor Guy notes, the film *Sivakavi* "created history, with its record 114-week run in one theater [Sun Theatre] in Madras, a record for regional language film which remains unequalled even after half a century" (*Starlight, Starbright* 256).

Fig. 2-17. Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai choreographing on Rajakumari on the set of *Sivakavi* (1943). (From Balakrishnan, Suresh. *Bagavather: His Life and Times*. Sumithra Balakrishnan, 2010.)

Rajakumari's next big success came four years later in a major production of Gemini Studios, *Chandralekha* (1948) (see fig. 2-18), which took five years to complete and which was made in both Tamil and Hindi.[54] A major element of the commercial

success of *Chandralekha* had to do with its fantasy dance sequences. One of the most memorable sequences features Rajakumari performing a kind of "Oriental dance" atop giant drums that line the length of the set. This piece was choreographed by a man named Jaya Sankar (about whom very little is known), and it cost 500,000 rupees to shoot (Dhananjayan 74). The Hindi version allowed Rajakumari to showcase her Hindi language skills: she sang her own songs and also spoke her own dialogue.

Fig. 2-18. The cover of *Pecum Patam* (Cittirai Malar, 1948) featuring Rajakumari in the Tamil version of *Chandralekha* (1948). (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

After *Chandralekha*, Rajakumari acted in a number of films: *Krishna Bhakthi* ("Devotion to Kṛṣṇa," 1948), *Pavalakkodi* ("Red Coral," 1949), *Idaya Geetham* ("Song from the Heart," 1950), *Vijayakumari* ("Woman Victor," 1950), *Vanasundari* ("Forest Beauty,"1951), *Amarakavi* ("The Immortal Poet," 1952), *En Veedu* ("My Home," 1953), and *Pudhumai Pithan* ("The New Madman," 1957). In the mid-1950s, Rajakumari entered a professional partnership with her brother, T.R. Ramachandran (better known as

T.R. Ramanna), to form a production company called "R.R. Pictures."[55] The company produced a number of significant films in which Rajakumari herself acted, including *Gulebakavali* ("The Flower of Bakāvali," 1955, in which she was paired with the emerging superstar M.G. Ramachandran) and *Paasam* ("Noose," 1962). In 1963, Rajakumari had a minor role in her final film, *Vanambadi* ("Nightingale," 1963); the archive is silent on the rest of her life.

Almost nothing is known about Rajakumari's private life, and this is perhaps one of the largest archival gaps in the social history of women film actresses in South India. However, it is certain that, like her mother, she did not get married; she lived with her mother in a house she built in Madras during the early 1950s.[56] Around the same time, she also built a movie theater called Rajakumari Theatre, which provided a substantial income for both her and her mother.

At the same time, the cultic stardom that Rajakumari had achieved by the 1950s can be seen in a number of adoring features about her that were printed during the late 1940s and the early 1950s. The following is an excerpt from such a feature entitled "A Life Portrait of T.R. Rajakumari," which was written by Sampath Kumar for *Pēcum Paṭam* magazine in 1951:

> She is blessed with an attractive figure, great height and beautiful speech. Rajakumari and her mother believe in traditional customs and practices. Rajakumari is very religious. She has built a little temple in her bungalow. She is also a reserved person, keeping her conversation with others limited. To maintain her strength and figure, she regularly does physical exercises. She adores her family. She also has pet dogs, which she loves. She is fearless. She bravely has acted holding live snakes in her hands in her films like *Sukanya* [*Sati Sukanya*, 1943]. She is also an avid reader and is well versed in written and spoken Hindi.

> She lives in style and has employed *gurkhas* (guards or watchmen from Nepal) at her bungalow. (57)

Rajakumari, like Rajalakshmi (who was discussed previously), was an important performer who straddled the worlds of cinema, vocal music, and dance. Her versatility and eventual "star status" bears the imprint of the near-final presence of women from *devadāsī* families in the cinema.

T. Kuchalakumari

T. Kuchalakumari (b. 1937) is the granddaughter of Sarasvati, another one of Kuchalambal's adopted children. Like her mother Kuchalambal, Sarasvati was trained as a court dancer for the Tanjore palace, where she served as an official concubine to the royal house. These concubines had the Marathi honorific title *bāī* ("respected lady") attached to their name. They lived in seclusion from the public or *purdah*, a practice known locally as *kośa* (the term used by Kuchalambal's descendants). Not much is known about Sarasvati's life except that she had a "sword marriage" (*katti kalyāṇam*) to one of the Marāṭhā nobles of the Tanjore palace and became one of his concubines after he saw her performing at a festival at the Puṉṉainallūr Māriyammaṉ temple in Tanjore.[57]

Sarasvati's daughter was named Hamsa Damayanti, and she was also trained in dance in Tanjore. Hamsa Damayanti moved to Madras five months after giving birth to her daughter Kuchalakumari to seek out opportunities in the emergent cinema industry after the success of her adoptive aunt, S.P.L. Dhanalakshmi. Hamsa Damayanti's most popular role was in the mythological film *Bhookailas* (*Pūkailās allatu Maṇṭōtari Pariṇayam*) ("Heaven on Earth, or the Wedding of Maṇḍodarī," 1938). She played the

female lead as the character Maṇḍodarī, the wife of the demon Rāvaṇa from the epic narrative *Rāmāyaṇa*. Hamsa Damayanti played the lead role in *Manimekalai* ("The Tamil Epic *Maṇimēkalai*," 1940), and she also acted in a number of other films, including *Parvathi Kalyanam* ("The Wedding of Pārvatī," 1942), *Gangavathar* ("Descent of the River Gaṅgā," 1942), and *Vikata Yogi* ("The Crooked Yogi," 1946). A single image exists of her in pre-cinema days as a performer of *devadāsī* dance, and this is reproduced below (see fig. 2-19).

Fig. 2-19. A very rare image of Hamsa Damayanti, mother of Kuchalakumari, dressed to perform traditional *devadāsī* dance in Madras. *Citrā* magazine (date unknown). (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

Hamsa Damayanti had two children: a girl named Kuchalakumari and a boy named Kamalasekhar. Kuchalakumari represents the final phase of possibilities of serious involvement in the cinema on the part of women from *devadāsī* communities. Unlike her mother and aunt (S.P.L. Dhanalakshmi), she enters the cinema in the late 1940s and early

1950s, a time when upper-caste women have already gained a strong foothold in Tamil cinema. In other words, Kuchalakumari never "made it" as a star in the manner of her aunt, T.R. Rajakumari, who is hailed by many as "South India's Dream Girl" (Guy, *Starlight, Starbright* 15); she also did not successfully integrate herself into the mechanics of film production like S.D. Subbulakshmi or her own aunt, S.P.L. Dhanalakshmi, who married the producer S.M. Letchumanan Chettiar (popularly known as Lena Chettiar, founder of the production company Krishna Pictures). Kuchalakumari's interface with the cinema was thus clearly more peripheral. She starred mainly in supporting roles and often in scenes involving dance. Another major difference between her and the previous generation of *devadāsī* performers is that all of her training in dance came from post-"reinvention" Madras. In other words, her encounters with dance were not conditioned by training from within the *devadāsī* community through her mother or grandmother, for example. Rather, she came up in the new urban pedagogy of Bharatanāṭyam, which was aimed specifically at middle-class, upper-caste, non-*devadāsī* female performers. She was trained in dance by Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai (who is discussed in greater detail in Chapters IV and V), a *naṭṭuvaṉār* who had reinvented the aesthetics of Bharatanāṭyam performance in a radical manner.

Fig. 2-20. Hari Krishnan in conversation with Kuchalakumari, Chennai, India, December 17, 2012. (Courtesy Davesh Soneji.)

In December 2012, I was fortunate to engage in detailed conversations with Kuchalakumari about her early life, film career, and her thoughts on the relationship between Bharatanāṭyam as it is performed on stage and in the cinema (see fig. 2-20). This day-long set of conversations took place in Tamil in Kuchalakumari's home in Chennai. I have chosen to present her narrative largely in her own words here rather than search for it in archival sources. Kuchalakumari's bold and very honest assertions about her family and professional life represent rare articulations of subjectivity from within this generation of the *devadāsī* community. I begin with some of her thoughts on her ancestry and the *devadāsī* community in general:

> We are all born and raised in Tanjore [Thanjavur]. I was named after our family deity, the goddess Kucalāmpāḷ, and this was also the name of my great-grandmother.[58] Two of her daughters were trained as professional dancers, and she ensured that they danced at the Bṛhadīśvara temple in Tanjore. Her other daughters were vocalists and *kathākālakṣepam* artists, and her sons were musicians, drummers, and players of the *vīṇā* [a stringed instrument]. Once, when my grandmother Sarasvati was performing at the Puṉṉainallūr Māriyammaṉ

> temple, a Maratha nobleman saw her and fell in love with her and at that point kept her in the palace under *kośa*. Even if she would come to visit us at the family home, she would come on a palanquin in seclusion (*kośa*). She also never danced after she married this nobleman. My mother did not live in the palace, but she would visit. Our house in Tanjore was large, with lots of relatives living together in a "joint family" structure. Some of my grandmother's siblings were professionals. One of her brothers was a sub-registrar [the chief official of one of Tanjore district's subdivisions], and another taught music to people like M.K. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar, and he was also a [district] collector. We owned houses in Tanjore district…. [By the time I was born], one of our family homes in Tanjore was given to the bank, another house near the Bṛhadīśvara temple was sold off, and hence there was only house left. Then many of my relatives died, and most of the male family members got married and settled down.
>
> I was born in 1937 in Tanjore. I remember my grandmother well. My mother relocated to Chennai because of her involvement with cinema. When she came to Madras, a producer saw her and offered her opportunities to act. I was a child when I came to Madras with my mother, and my grandmother had died by then. My mother's aunt was S.P.L. Dhanalakshmi, who was a great singer and was also involved in films. My mother and my aunt learned Karṇāṭak vocal music in Madras from Kunrakkudi Vaidyanatha Iyer (1935-2008), and their music *araṅkēṟṟam* (debut performance) was held in Vadapalani (a suburb of Madras). They gave music concerts together, and I was inspired by their music and would dance to it as a very young child. They also both began their film careers at Pragathi Studios in Madras near Greenways Road.[59]

Kuchalakumari also deliberates with great attention on the idea of dance in the cinema and dance on the stages of Madras in the middle of the twentieth century. Kuchalakumari trained in Bharatanāṭyam with Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai, and she often gave stage performances. She speaks with great enthusiasm about her training:

> My mother's cousin was T. R. Rajakumari, and so she was my aunt. Rajakumari was not a formally trained dancer. She worked with a young Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai, who was just coming up as a dance choreographer in the film industry. [In the family], only I trained properly/formally as a classical Bharatanāṭyam dancer. My cousins were Jyothilakshmi and Jayamalini, who were the adopted daughters of S.P.L. Dhanalakshmi, and it was only after I began dancing that they began training in dance. My interest in dance began at a very young age. I used to play [gramophone] records and improvise some kind of dance. At that time, my

> audiences were our house cook and servants! I would invite them to watch me dance. Along with film dance, I also performed extensively on stage too…. I often danced a full suite of Bharatanāṭyam—*alārippu, jatisvaram, śabdam, varṇam, naṭaṉam āṭiṉār* [the dance to the dancing god Śiva-Naṭarāja], *tillāṉā,* and the snake dance (*nātar muṭimēl irukkum*)—all items that my dance-master Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai taught me. I began learning from Ramaiah Pillai when I was six years old. He would come to my house every day to teach me. I also learned from one Chellappa [Chokkalingam?] Nattuvanar of Pandanallur. They were good friends. Later I trained with [Ramaiah Pillai's student] M.S. Ramaswami Pillai of Mayavaram.

She is also conscious of the similarities and differences between her own performances on stage in Madras and her representations of Bharatanāṭyam in the cinema. With great care, Kuchalakumari articulates the rigor and professionalism with which she would approach stage performances of Bharatanāṭyam:

> There *is* a difference between between Bharatanāṭyam on stage and in the cinema. On stage, one has to be very careful because it's live. If you make any mistakes, the audience will know it. All your movements have to [be] perfect, and only then can the audience appreciate your dancing. On stage, the applause and admiration of the audience are very encouraging for the artist. This has always been a great source of encouragement for me. No matter how many films I have done, I've always enjoyed stage performances more, and I've danced live within Tamil Nadu, Andhra, and Karnataka. I've even performed [Bharatanāṭyam] at village shows, large public halls (*sabhas*), charity shows, government-sponsored shows, and marriage shows (*kalyāṇakkaccērikaḷ*). We would always take our "music party" [orchestra] with us. Our shows were billed as "Kuchalakumari and Party." We also brought other dancers with us, because if there was only a solo dancer, we felt the audience would get bored. So, for example, in a stage performance of [the long repertory piece called] *varṇam*, I would dance first, and then two other girls would dance for a while, and then I'd come back on stage again. During a three-hour stage performance, we would dance about fourteen pieces! Ramaiah Pillai would always perform *naṭṭuvāṅkam* for us. His assistants Ramaswami, P.S. Gopalakrishnan, K. J. Sarasa, and Radhakrishnan were the ones directing our rehearsals, giving us corrections. They would also give private classes. The actress Sukumari [cousin of the actress Padmini Ramachandran] used to dance in my troupe. We used to do dance ballets ["dance-dramas" in the new idiom made popular by Rukmini Arundale], too. After 1972, I used to do shows in which my dancing was accompanied by *nāgasvaram* [a double-reed, oboe-like temple

> instrument] music. I was the first one to do this! I was actually inspired by the film *Thillana Mohanambal* [1968, about the love between a *devadāsī* and a *nāgasvaram* musician] to do this.

By contrast, Kuchalakumari's thoughts on dancing in films evince an awareness of the complexities of camera technique, choreography, and space. Indeed, she was among the only dancers with whom I conducted ethnographic work to comment on these themes:

> In films, it's as if we are dancing for the camera. That is, the dance is specifically tailor made for closeups and long shots, so the visual focus is not on the whole body but rather on isolated parts of the face, feet, and torso. There are many takes for each sequence, and this can get really grueling! Although many of the dance movements could be the same whether it's on stage or in the films, we have to remember that there is a larger narrative in the films in which the dance is nested. So, for example, in addition to the choreography of the body, there [is] also sometimes a subtle interface that that dancer makes with other members of the cast while she is dancing. This interaction between the dancer and others adds another layer of complexity to dancing in films.

Kuchalakumari narrates her own life history almost exclusively with reference to dance. It becomes clear that her engagements with film dance are significant signposts not only in her career but also in terms of her own aesthetic enjoyment of dance:

> A producer named Somasundaram from Jupiter Pictures saw me and invited me to act [and] dance in the films when I was six years old. He said there was a film that he felt I could play a small role. This was a role as the daughter of P.U. Chinnappa and Kannambal. The tile of this film was *Mahamaya* ("Great Illusion") made in 1943. This was my first film…. The first film in which I performed a dance was *Krishna Bhakthi* ("Devotion to Kṛṣṇa," 1948), with Ramaiya Pillai's choreography. At that time, he was the dance master in several films for Krishna Pictures, the production company of S.M. Lakshmanan Chettiar. K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai came onto [the] scene a little later. In the film *Manamagal* ("The Bride,"1951), there is a famous song, *Nalla Peṇmaṇi* ("She is a Jewel Among Women") that I am very proud of.[60] The choreography is by K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai. N.S. Krishnan [the director and producer of the film] loved my dancing and was eager to have me dance in the film. The lyrics of that

> song are packed with so many good moral messages about how a married woman should act and how she should behave. Even today, this song is played at many weddings…. This continues to be my favorite cinema dance sequence! Jayalalitha [1948-2016, the late famous actress and Chief Minister of Tamilnadu] used to tell me that it was because of this song that she fell in love with dance and was inspired to learn Bharatanāṭyam! I also loved performing the romantic *padam*-like song, *Āḷayiṉ Caṅkē Nī Ūtāyō* ("Sound the Conch Shell of Humanity") in the movie *Ratha Kanneer* ("Tears of Blood," 1954).
>
> One of my hit dance songs is the dance competition sequence from *Konjum Salangai* ("A Little Jingle of the Dancing Bells," 1962) with Kamala Lakshman. My character's name was Kāmavalli. This was such a lavish, expensive song sequence which took months to film. It was in full technicolor, and there were so many lights on the film set. Sometimes the light bulbs would break because of the high intensity and we would have to reshoot the scene again. The combination of the severe hot lights and makeup actually damaged my skin! Kamala was my senior, and I admired her a lot…. We both learned dance from Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai…. I have worked with so many film dance masters: Ramaiah Pillai, K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai, Vempati Pedda Satyam, Vempati Chinna Satyam, Sohan Lal, and Hira Lal.

Kuchalakumari, who never got married (like her aunt Rajakumari and so many women from the *devadāsī* community who entered the cinema), also evinces a deep understanding of the *devadāsī* aspect of her own identity and unabashedly reminisces with a great sense of pride about this:

> I feel the films have not represented my *devadāsī* heritage (*paramparai*) well at all. I feel sad about that. You must understand that, for us dancers, the *devadāsī paramparai* means "those who are slaves of god" (*tēvaraṭiyāḷ*). The art we perform is divine. We tie the *poṭṭu*. I personally have not had it tied, but my mother and aunts have all tied the *poṭṭu* at the Bṛhadīśvara temple [in Thanjavur]. They were all considered ever-auspicious (*nityasumaṅgalī*). The *poṭṭu* pendant was first tied to a dagger (*katti*) and then tied upon them. This *katti kalyāṇam* ritual consecrated them as part of the devadāsī *paramparai*. The government unfortunately brought a law that prohibited this, and we lost our respect then…. The initial we all take before our given names is "T," which means *Thanjavur,* and this is used by all the ladies in our families [married women take their husband's first initial, but this is not the case in *devadāsī* communities]. Educated people would know the difference between us and others. Only ignorant,

uncultured people would say bad things about our communities. This is so wrong, you know! How dare they speak ill of us without the right knowledge and understanding of who are! Wrong is wrong! There are all kinds of *devadāsīs* from Tamilnadu to Andhra to Karnataka. There were also such women in the north. After the legislation, women from my generation used to get married off to men from our own community. But women still faced stigma. I remember [the actress and niece of *naṭṭuvaṉār* K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai] Sripriya's mother, Girija, who is also from our community, used to scold people who spoke ill of our community. She would say, "How dare they criticize us?" …I am a very audacious person. I did not get married intentionally because I solely focused on my profession. My work ethic means everything to me. I used to work so hard! So much stage dance and film work. Lots of sweat!

S.P.L. Dhanalakshmi and Her Adoptive Daughters Jayamalini and Jyothilakshmi

Fig. 2-21. *(Left)* Jyothilakshmi and *(right)* Jayamalini in "item dances" from Telugu films from the 1970s. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

In an attempt to map some of the complexities of the realities of *devadāsī* women in the cinema, I conclude this chapter with the generation of women in this family who immediately followed Kuchalakumari. While Kuchalakumari left the cinema world by the mid-1960s, the women I discuss here—T. Jyothilakshmi (1948-2016) and T.

Jayamalini (b. 1958)—made their way into the cinema in the 1970s and 1980s, a time when hardly any women from the *devadāsī* community were visibly involved in the cinema. Perhaps as a result of the repopulation of cinema by upper-caste women, Jyothilakshmi and Jayamalini made their careers not as lead actresses like the women in their family who were their predecessors; rather, they worked on the fringes of the South Indian cinema and were largely typecast as what are known as "item dancers" in today's Bollywood jargon (see fig. 2-21). They represent, as one writer put it in a recent obituary of Jyothilakshmi, the "subalterns of the [South Indian] film world" (Chakravarthy 97). Both Jyothilakshmi and Jayamalini were adopted by S.P.L. Dhanalakshmi, who was herself one of the sixteen adopted children of Tanjore Kuchalambal. Dhanalakshmi herself married the wealthy film producer S.M. Letchumanan Chettiar and stopped acting in the cinema by the 1950s. It is unclear exactly how or when Jyothilakshmi and Jayamalini were adopted by Dhanalakshmi; all that is known is that they were born in the Telugu-speaking regions around Madras in a small locale known as Sullurpeta, near the town of Nellore. Through interventions made by Dhanalakshmi, Rajakumari, and apparently also Kuchalakumari, both Jyothilakshmi and Jayamalini were trained in Bharatanāṭyam, first under Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai and then under one of his students, S.K. Kameswaran (1929-2007) (see fig. 2-22).[61]

Fig. 2-22. Jayamalini with *naṭṭuvaṉār* S.K. Kameswaran (1929-2007) following one of her Bharatanāṭyam performances in Madras (c. 1975). (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

Fig. 2-23. Jyothilakshmi and Jayamalini perform on the set of a Telugu film in the 1970s. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

Very occasionally, but significantly, the kinds of dances performed by actresses like Jyothilakshmi and Jayamalini—known variously as "record dance" or "cabaret dance"—were brought into dialogue with the choreographic syntax and visual cultures of

Bharatanāṭyam. For example, in fig. 2-23, which is from an unidentified Telugu film, Jyothilakshmi and Jayamalini are dressed in abstractions of the "reinvented" Bharatanāṭyam costume, and they are posing holding the gesture known as *alapadma* ("lotus").

Traces of Bharatanāṭyam thus come to occupy even the landscape of the highly sexualized and distinctly "male" spectatorial spaces of these film sequences. From the standpoint of most elites who practice "classical" Bharatanāṭyam on the stages of Chennai and beyond, these dances—and, by extension, performers like Jyothilakshmi and Jayamalini—stand in for the "degeneration" of Bharatanāṭyam through the cinema; they are understood as a kind of blemish on a "sacred" tradition. These notions, which were scripted in tandem with the moral registers of the dance "revival," extend these registers into the realm of cinema. They also serve to reify caste-based hierarchies that once again—as in the time of the reinvention of the 1930s—push *devadāsī* performers to the farthest edges of cultural production and cultural labor in the contemporary world.

CHAPTER III

THE OCULAR POLITICS OF MAKING MODERN BHARATANĀṬYAM

"I had to try to make something new—not with the idea of making it *look new,* but with the idea of making it *look old* [emphasis added]."[62]
—Rukmini Arundale (1904-1986; "My Experiments With Dance" 62)

In this chapter, I argue for the recognition of the parallel and symbiotic evolution of the culture of South Indian cinema and the "reinvented" urban versions of Bharatanāṭyam dance that began to circulate among the middle class during the late 1930s. The chapter charts the participation of the major actors of the reinvention—figures like E. Krishna Iyer (1897-1968) and Rukmini Arundale (1904-1986)—in the world of Tamil cinema, arguing that cinema was just as much at the nexus of debates on morality, the body, religion, and nationalism as was Bharatanāṭyam itself. The chapter also includes the first-ever analysis of the extant traces of the first film in India about dance, *Jalaja* (1938), in which the *devadāsī* artist Kumbhakonam Bhanumathi played the lead character. The chapter ends with reflections on how dance in the cinema allows us to map shifting notions of the morality of Bharatanāṭyam dance itself and how a focus on the cross-pollination of dance in the cinema and stage versions of Bharatanāṭyam radically transforms standard discourses that surrounded dance during this period. I contend that the production and consumption of these cultural forms involved common actors and were directed toward common audiences. Just as dance moved into the realm of respectability due to its disassociation with the *devadāsī*-courtesan community and its

attendant social and moral world, so also during the late 1930s did the initial cinephobia that characterized elite disavowals of the medium begin to disappear as the cinema became repopulated by "respectable" individuals. As M.S.S. Pandian put it, the Tamil elite "realised, within years of the arrival of the talkie that [the] cinephobic mode of engagement with the cinema was inadequate" ("Tamil Cultural Elites and Cinema" 952); thus, by the 1930s, there occurred a metamorphosis of cinema into a "respectable" medium that was appropriated by the middle class.

By attempting to inject a cinematic historical consciousness into the critical study of the reinvention of Bharatanāṭyam, I take seriously Gilles Deleuze's insistence that cinema be viewed not as a language but as "signaletic material (*matière signalétique*)" (29). From a Deleuzian standpoint, cinema's affective and political power rests in this matrix, which includes features that are "sensory (visual and sound), kinetic, intensive, affective, rhythmic, tonal and even verbal" (29). For the purposes of this dissertation, the "signaletic material" of Bharatanāṭyam's stage and cinematic versions are inextricably intertwined. In this chapter, I unpack the ways in which visual, sonic, social, and discursive practices mark a way of "knowing" a new Bharatanāṭyam during the 1930s and 1940s. Indeed, as will be demonstrated toward the end of this chapter, the shared histories of the urban "reinvented" Bharatanāṭyam and the early Tamil cinema point to the social and affective powers of interocularity in the nation's new cultural imagination.

E. KRISHNA IYER AND THE TAMIL CINEMA

Before discussing the work of Rukmini Arundale, I begin with the earlier history of another figure, the *smārta* Brahmin lawyer and music and theater enthusiast E. Krishna Iyer, who had already made significant interventions in staging *devadāsī* dance in Madras for urban elites. E. Krishna Iyer was born on August 9, 1897, into a Tamil Brahmin family in the village of Brahmadesam in today's Tirunelveli district. He received his bachelor of arts degree from Madras Christian College in 1918 and then went to Trivandrum to study law in 1921; he practiced as a lawyer at the Madras High Court until 1943. Krishna Iyer was an active member of the Indian National Congress in the 1930s, and, in 1932, he was involved with Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha. During the 1930s he also joined a theatrical company called Suguna Vilasa Sabha (founded by Pammal Campanta Mutaliyār, who was discussed in Chapter I); in preparation for the dance sequences in his plays, he learned the basics of Bharatanāṭyam from a *devadāsī* performer named Madhurantakam Jagadambal (1873-1943).[63] He was also very active in the Music Academy scene, even serving as secretary for a number of years. It was he who sent a personal invitation to Rukmini Arundale to attend the recital by the *devadāsīs* Rajalakshmi and Jeevaratnam in 1933. When Muthulakshmi Reddy introduced her Abolition Bill in the Legislative Assembly in 1927, Krishna Iyer was one of those who opposed her, arguing that the art of dance must be preserved by *devadāsīs* until it can fully be transferred to women from "respectable" families. It is important to note that Krishna Iyer did not empathize with women from *devadāsī* communities as some modern

historians claim. Rather, he sees them as troves of cultural "stuff" that must be mined by "better persons," as is evident in this letter he wrote in a newspaper in response to Muthulakshmi Reddy:

> …The anti-nautch people who have tried to kill the Art, have a heavy responsibility on them to make sufficient arrangements to resuscitate the Art and to put it on a proper basis.… For my part, it is no question of Art at the expense of morality, or even positive encouragement of the present day nautch girls as a class and never a justification for the perpetuation of the Devadasi class as such. The Heavens would not fall and morality would in no way be jeopardised if one or two cases of very good Art is reluctantly tolerated in exceptional instances—without the associated vice—*as a matter of temporary evil necessary, pending the coming up of better persons* [emphasis added]. And exceptions are recognised by the Doctor as well. ("A Reply to Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy")

Indeed, as is seen in his response to Reddy, Krishna Iyer makes clear the doubled and intertwined discourses of respectability of the cinema and the art of the *devadāsīs*:

> With regard to the Cinema: A certain respectable film company desirous of producing at least one Tamil talkie of a high standard is on the look out for cultured and respectable actors and actresses and has requested me to help in their search. The company is willing to provide the necessary facilities and safeguards to make the players feel at home without any violence to their sentiments of a higher nature. I have mooted the matter to some respectable high-placed ladies. As yet, no one has come forward. Will the enthusiastic Doctor and her friends move in the matter and help in a desirable reform to rescue art from unworthy hands? ("A Reply to Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy")

Krishna Iyer championed the dual causes of the repopulation of the fields of both dance and cinema by non-*devadāsī* women. He understood *devadāsīs* to be reservoirs of a knowledge system that could and should be grafted onto the bodies of "respectable," non-*devadāsī* women. In 1948, he wrote an article entitled "Renaissance of Indian Dance and Its Architects" in which he reflects on the reinvention of Bharatanāṭyam and its

repopulation by "respectable" women. He unabashedly takes credit for engineering this process:

> With all these, Bharata Natya was still in the hands of exponents of the old professional class, with all its possible and lurking dangers as pointed out by social reformers. The efforts of the present writer were turned towards steadily taking it out of their hands and introducing it among cultured, family women of respectable classes. (Krishna Iyer, "Renaissance of Indian Dance" 24)

Krishna Iyer himself performed dance in at least one film, acted in a couple of others, and was a "scouting agent" for others. In 1939, the popular magazine *Minnoli* carried a short biography of Krishna Iyer (see fig. 3-1). The two accompanying photographs in this article are from the 1939 film *Cairantiri,* in which E. Krishna Iyer himself acted in both the role of Arjuna, one of the male heroes of the Hindu epic *Mahābhārata*, and the role of Bṛhannalā, who was Arjuna in the guise of an "effeminate" dance teacher. Despite assumptions that the famous Bṛhannalā photograph—which has been reprinted literally hundreds of times in publications about Bharatanāṭyam—was taken during one of Krishna Iyer's stage performances, it is in fact a "cinematic" photo. In the poster for *Cairantiri* (see fig. 3-2), there is also mention of E. Krishna Iyer performing a *tillāṉā*, which is one of the abstract rhythmic genres of the Bharatanāṭyam court repertoire. Again, the juxtaposition of the Mahabharata narrative of Arjuna-Bṛhannalā with the courtly *tillāṉā* dance augments the scripting of a new religious genealogy for Bharatanāṭyam. Once again, it is the medium of cinema that enables the articulation and circulation of this genealogy.

Fig. 3-1. “Sri Ī. Kiruṣṇayyar,” an article about Krishna Iyer in the film magazine *Minnoli* (1939). These famous photos of him—which have been published several times throughout the twentieth century—are actually stills from the film *Cairantiri* (*Kīcakavatam*), in which he played the roles of Arjuna and Bṛhannalā. (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.)

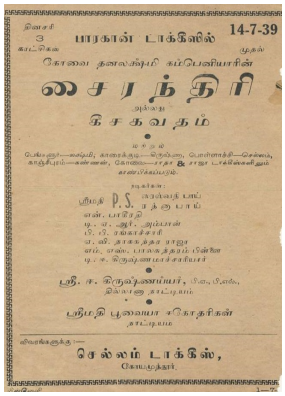


Fig. 3-2. An advertisement for the screening of the film *Cairantiri* or *Kīcakavatam* (1939) with a *tillāṉā* dance by E. Krishna Iyer foregrounded as a special feature. (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.)

RUKMINI ARUNDALE, THEOSOPHICAL OCCULTISM, AND "THE SPIRIT" OF BHARATANĀṬYAM'S PAST

The reinvention of Bharatanāṭyam in the 1930s at the hands of elites in Madras city is a now a thoroughly grounded and well-established signpost of critical histories of the dance. In addition, the central role that Rukmini Arundale plays in this process has been the subject of much critical scholarly work. Dance scholars and ethnomusicologists such Avanthi Meduri ("Nation, Woman, Representation"), Matthew Allen ("Rewriting the Script"), and Janet O'Shea (*At Home in the World*) as well as anthropologists and social historians such as Amrit Srinivasan ("Temple 'Prostitution' and Community Reform") and Davesh Soneji (*Unfinished Gestures*) have contributed to the modern understanding of this very significant period in the dance's history. I do not wish to repeat this history here, but I will briefly recount the life and work of Rukmini Devi Arundale (1904-1986) to contextualize some of my own arguments about this period.

Rukmini Devi Arundale was born in Madurai to Tamil *smārta* Brahmin parents, Neelakanta Sastri and Seshammal. Upon his retirement as an engineer with the Madras Public Works Department, Neelakantha Sastri bought a home in Adyar, a suburb of Madras city, where the Theosophical Society had founded its international headquarters in 1883 under the guidance of the Russian spiritualist Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891) and the American Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907). It is important to remember that "religion" emerges in a uniquely hybrid phenomenon under the powerful sign of Theosophy, which is itself a form of Orientalist occultism that synthesized elements of Christian gnostic mysticism and Neo-Platonism and that included secret languages, levels

of initiation, and elements of upper-caste philosophical (Vedāntic) Hinduism and (Indo-Tibetan and Sinhalese) Buddhism.[64] Urban Tamil- and Telugu-speaking Brahmins in Madras (e.g., Rukmini Arundale's father Neelakanta Sastri) were drawn to the unique blend of old and new "spirituality" that Theosophy signified as well as its clearly visible role as a hub for an emerging internationalism and cosmopolitanism in Madras. At the age of sixteen, young Rukmini was married to George Sydney Arundale (1878-1945), the third President of the Theosophical Society. In 1928, at the age of 24, Rukmini was appointed to the messianic role of "World Mother" by Annie Besant (1847-1933), the heir to the Society, and thus had the honorific title of "Devi" ("goddess") permanently bestowed upon her. In their capacity as figureheads of the Theosophical Society, Rukmini and George Arundale travelled around the world. It was in this capacity that Rukmini was exposed to the emergent, fashionable, Euro-American "Oriental dance" and also to Russian Ballet through the figure of prima ballerina Anna Pavlova (1881-1931), who befriended the couple. Rukmini Arundale herself took lessons in ballet from Mme. Cleo Nordi (1899-1983), who danced with Pavlova and who also later performed experiments with "Oriental dance." Nordi also choreographed a Theosophical Society–produced play called "The Light of Asia" in 1934; this was based on Edwin Arnold's book of the same name and was about the life of Gautama Buddha.

In 1933, Rukmini was invited by E. Krishna Iyer to witness a dance performance by two women from the *devadāsī* community that was sponsored by the Madras Music Academy, an elite institution founded in conjunction with the Indian National Congress.

The two dancers whom Arundale saw perform there were Thiruvalapputtur Rajalakshmi (1900-1969) and Jeevaratnam (1905-1933), who were daughters of the very famous dancer Thiruvalapputtur Kalyani (1873-1958) and disciples of Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai (1869-1954), a descendant of the famous "Tanjore Quartet" dance-masters of the nineteenth century (see fig. 3-3). For over a year after that performance, Rukmini looked for dance-masters to teach her; eventually, she settled on Meenakshisundaram Pillai himself, who after nearly a year of convincing accepted her as his student. After six months of training, in 1935, Rukmini decided that she would give her first public performance for the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations of the Theosophical Society.[65] Her teacher was not convinced of her readiness to perform on stage and so refused to conduct the performance, sending his son-in-law to oversee it instead. This performance was controversial, because prior to that time no Brahmin woman had danced the art of the *devadāsīs*. However, it also held out tremendous possibilities for cultural elites and cultural nationalists, who saw in the dance the promise of a new symbol of Indian heritage. At the same time, this performance was already a highly altered version of the dance from both the visual and epistemic perspectives, as will be demonstrated below.

Arundale had radically revised the presentation and content of the dance. This was a conscious intervention since, in her own words, "some of the dances were quite vulgar and so I wanted to avoid such things" (qtd. in S. Ramani 61). This new dance was aimed at an audience that included both the upper-caste intelligentsia of Madras and the

conglomerate international bourgeois represented by the Theosophists.[66] Although the colonial modernity represented by many *devadāsī* dance practices at the turn of the century was eschewed by Arundale, her own location within the colonial-hybrid matrix of the Theosophical Society and its links to elite Indian nationalism (particularly via the figures of Annie Besant and George Arundale) cannot be ignored. It is from within this matrix of power that Arundale's "taste" (i.e., her aesthetic "reforms" of *devadāsī* dance) was able to command nationwide authority and legitimacy by the 1940s. In 1939, Arundale established the International Academy for the Arts with the institutional support of the Theosophical Society, and this organization was renamed Kalakshetra ("Temple of the Arts") by Sanskritist Dr. P.S. Subrahmanya Sastri (1890-1978) later that same year. Next, I turn to how some of these "reforms" of dance extended into the visual and paravisual world, including in the form of Arundale's iconic reimagining of costuming and her participation in the early Tamil cinema.

Fig. 3-3. Tiruvalapputtur Rajalakshmi and Jeevaratnam, with clarinet player Tiruvalapputtur Pakkirisvami *(left)* and the dance-master Tiruvalapputtur Svaminatha

Nattuvanar *(right)*. This photo was taken after their performance at the Madras Music Academy in January 1933. (Private Collection of B.M. Sundaram.)

OPTICS, ILLUSION, AND ALLEGORY

As is seen in the epitaph at the beginning of this chapter, the visuality of the dance practice of Bharatanāṭyam—"the way it looks"—was at the very heart of its reinvention. Embedded in the realm of the visual were all of the moral, historical, and aesthetic valences that cultural elites wanted scripted onto the form in its new middle-class, Brahminic avatar. The most significant transformations ushered in by the new practitioners of Bharatanāṭyam, as created by Rukmini Arundale herself, thus involved radical interventions in the optics of the form. Most performances of Bharatanāṭyam in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries took place either in private salon settings, at wedding celebrations, or in public spaces, such as the pavilions of temples at the time of calendrical Hindu festivals. In addition, as Davesh Soneji (*Unfinished Gestures*) has noted, markers of colonial modernity had come to characterize these performance practices; thus, the use of Western instruments (e.g., clarinet, violin) to accompany the dance, the use of the English language, and the use of North Indian (Hindustāni) music and culturally hybrid forms of attire had become systemically etched into the dance (see fig. 3-4). Indeed, Western dress and Western musical forms had become integral elements of the complex matrix of dance-music-drama that women from devadāsī communities were involved in as professional artists at the turn of the century. It was

precisely these aspects of *devadāsī* engagement with the hybrid-modern that urban nationalist "revivalists" took issue with during the period between roughly 1930 and 1940. For individuals such as Rukmini Arundale, these features were at odds with the reclamation and resignification of the "pure" precolonial glory of India:

> It must be understood that the present solo recital of Bharata Natya used to be called Sadir Kacheri which had its own associations because of which I preferred to call my recitals Bharata Natya recitals...I have known these [Sadir Kacheri] recitals with Hindustani songs & even English notes. The Hindustani songs were always of a cheap variety. (Arundale, "My Experiments With Dance" 13)[67]

Indeed, for Arundale, *devadāsī* performance represented a kind of foil to her own ideas about "the classical." The hybrid performance styles of *devadāsīs* were seen as degenerate forms of an imagined "classical past," and they were also clearly classified as "low brow" forms of art that stood in sharp contrast with Arundale's project of creating a "classical" cultural vocabulary for the nation. Implicit in these class-based discourses around cultural production—which can be seen in the invocation of terms like *cheap* in the quote above—are ideological moves that discredit the livelihood of traditional performers and their aesthetic sensibilities. They set into high relief the fact that the "reinvention" was actually far from a "democratizing" process for the arts; rather, it created what Anna Morcom has termed "cultures of exclusion" around Indian dance (65).

Fig. 3-4. “Rangapushpa” Chitra, a famous performer from the *kalāvantula*-courtesan community who danced in the court of the Nizam of Hyderabad during the very early part of the twentieth century. Here she is seen wearing tights, slippers, and dancing with a tambourine, likely to a Hindustāni tune. (Courtesy Davesh Soneji.)

These kinds of hybrid performances marked the courtesan community's engagement with forms of colonial modernity, but they were also a source of deep embarrassment for nationalists, who wished to reclaim a “pure” tradition rooted in an Indian “golden age.” Arundale’s own location within the ultra-cosmopolitan Theosophical Society, with its deep Orientalism, shaped a series of taste-habits and aesthetic sensibilities that have become “common sense” in the production and consumption of today’s Bharatanāṭyam. Perhaps most importantly, these influences signify a shift in broader concerns about the nature, form, and purpose of Bharatanāṭyam dance, which in its new configuration has what Arundale, in the shadow of Theosophy, calls an “essence” or “spirit.” In an undated lecture delivered at Kalakshetra, Arundale

expressed the essentially "spiritual" nature of her Bharatanāṭyam by contrasting its hermetic "purity" with the profane, secular world:

> From time to time people have invented new gestures to express new ideas. However, I hope that new gestures will not be made to represent this present material world of money, motorcars, horns, jazz. If you depart from the purely imaginative, the mystical, the religious, you depart from the very spirit of Indian dance. (Arundale, "Bhava, Raga, Tala" 26)

In the sections that follow, I trace Arundale's enunciation of the religious "essence" of Bharatanāṭyam through the radicalization of the visuals of dance. I argue that the three major interventions of temple stage, dress, and narrativization are the sites where the transformation of the dance visibly takes place and where Arundale locates the perceived antiquity and religiousity of the dance. However, it is also within these transformations that the interdependence of the "new" dance and its representation and staging in the cinema can be seen. In each of the three sites—staging, costuming, and narrative—Bharatanāṭyam is simultaneously scripted as an ancient, spiritual, and national dance, both on stage and on screen.

Allegory: The "Temple-Stage"

In a fascinating essay entitled "Temple Stage as Historical Allegory in Bharatanāṭyam," Avanthi Meduri draws attention to the fact that Arundale's interventions constituted "a modern visual and spectatorial epistemology for classical Bharatanāṭyam in the world at large" (156):

> Rukmini Devi mounted the icon of Shiva/Nataraja, the presiding deity of the *Natyashastra*, on a pedestal and placed him on one corner of the Western proscenium. She seated her guru and his musical ensemble along the wings...and designed a temple-stage using temple backdrops and front curtains, with

> traditional imagery from the [Hindu] temple. She then lit, what I describe as her temple-stage constellation, comprising the three historical symbols of god, guru, and temple, with an electrical moving spotlight imported from British stagecraft. By staging Bharatanāṭyam allegorically, with the help of historical symbols from history and antiquity, and dancing reflexively within this symbolic worldview, Rukmini Devi emerged as the first urban dancer allegorist and dancer-historian of Bharatanāṭyam. Urban dancers, trained both within Kalakshetra and outside in the broader mainstream practice, used Rukmini Devi's temple-stage setting to visualize their Bharatanāṭyam recitals. (134)

I take seriously Meduri's claim that the god (Śiva-Naṭarāja), the guru, and the temple served as epistemic framing devices for Arundale's new dance and that these are enduring and even authoritative features of the contemporary practice of the dance.[68] I would argue, however, that the sedimentation of these iconic emblems in the popular practice of Bharatanāṭyam can almost exclusively be attributed to the dance's dialogue with early South Indian cinema. The role of the icon of Śiva-Naṭarāja will be addressed later. For now, I would like to briefly think about the temple backdrop and other accoutrements (i.e., dress and narrativization) that were central to Arundale's restaging of Bharatanāṭyam.

The question of the significance of understandings of the Hindu temple under colonialism cannot be divorced from Orientalist fascinations with the temple as an iconic index of Hindu morality. Although early pre-British forms of colonialism focused on the exotic and "heathen" aspects of Hindu temples, by the time of the "mature phase" of British Orientalism during the nineteenth century, the Madras School of Orientalism in particular highlighted the historical, cultural, aesthetic, and civilizational significance of temples (Trautmann 46). From a literary standpoint, too, there are texts like "Hindoo

Temples and Palace at Madura" (1836) by poet and novelist Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-1838), which focus on the Hindu temple as a site of both romantic beauty and cultural excess (Fernandez). However, the idea of a "Hindu temple" as a backdrop was certainly not an invention of Arundale's. Forms of Indian dance had been staged against temple backdrops for European and Euro-American audiences for a hundred years before Arundale's use of the same in 1937. In 1838, a troupe of five *devadāsī* dancers and three musicians was brought to Europe from the town of Thiruvahindrapuram in South India by French impressario E.C. Tardivel. As the work of Joep Bor has demonstrated, when this troupe performed at the Adelphi Theatre in London, the performers were inserted into prefabricated narratives such as "The Robing of Vishnu" or "The Hindoo Widow," which reified European audiences' received narratives about women, religion, and morality in India during the nineteenth century:

> The Indian dancers showed up in the second piece, a one-act burletta called *The Law of Brahma* or *The Hindoo Widow*.... They were drawn to the front of the stage "upon a moving platform." Sitting with flywhisks in their hands "around a statue of Vishnu, in the interior of a temple, they [were] performing the important duty of fanning the image." (62)

Such dances were inevitably performed against backdrops that vaguely resembled European cathedrals or "Oriental pagodas" (see fig. 3-5). It is a matter of speculation as to whether the Thiruvahindrapuram *devadāsīs* would have even known that their dances (which consisted of courtly repertoire from the Tanjore region) were being framed by Orientalist metanarratives such as that of *satī*.[69] Of course, this staging of real *devadāsīs* in 1830s Europe is modeled on more than three hundred years of theatrical representation

of “Indian temple dancers” in a host of German, Italian, French, and Russian plays, operas, and ballets.[70]

Fig. 3-5. “The Bayadères, or Dancing Girls of India” by N. Whittich (1838). A drawing of the performance by the troupe from Thiruvahindrapuram at the Adelphi in London in 1838. The temple backdrop is clearly visible in this drawing. (Bor, Joep. “Mamia, Ammani and Other Bayaderes: Europe’s Portrayal of India’s Temple Dancers” *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s-1940s*, edited by Martin Clayton and Bennett Zon, Ashgate, 2007, p. 64).

Aside from these early representations, the temple-stage as backdrop for “Indian” (or at least “Indian-inspired”) dance surfaces in the “Oriental dances” of Euro-American dancers such as Ruth St. Denis (1879-1968), La Meri (1899-1988; born Russell Meriwether Hughes), and Ragini Devi (1897-1982; born Esther Luella Sherman). As early as 1908, American dancer Ruth St. Denis was staging versions of “Oriental

dance"—inspired by Indian ideas and aesthetics—against backdrops meant to resemble Hindu temples and including "native Hindus" in the roles of musicians and temple priests (see fig. 3-6).

Fig. 3-6. "Ruth St. Denis with native Hindus in *Radha*" (1908). (Courtesy New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, *MGZEB [*Denishawn,* no. 60]).

Arundale's temple backdrops are thus situated within a long chronology of visual fascinations with Hindu temples and within the visual imbrications of temples and the history of dance in India. According to Meduri, Arundale's temple backdrop was first staged at her public recital at the Madras Museum theater in 1937 (65). Alex Elmore, a theosophist in Madras and a close associate of Arundale's, wrote a review of that performance in *The Young Theosophist* magazine:

> The stage was set to suggest a South Indian temple with four large granite pillars and a temple tower in the background. Into this setting came Rukmini Devi in an exquisite red and gold costume with jewels and a beautiful gold and jeweled belt which gave her the appearance of an ancient bronze statue come to life and color. This effect was never lost and in fact gained when she danced.... One was made

> happy and taken into a world where happiness and divinity were in the very air one breathed. (qtd. in Meduri 143)

Beyond Elmore's thoughts, Arundale herself has written about how she perceived the role of temples in the history of Bharatanāṭyam dance. She understands Bharatanāṭyam fundamentally as a sacred dance and a "temple dance," and this is a historical stance that justifies many of her own interventions. For her, the end of dancing in temples due to anti-nautch legislation represents a "cultural loss," and she hopes that one day the dance might be brought back to its perceived roots as a ritual dance form:

> At that time Bharata Natyam was called Sadir and there were many bad associations connected with that Sadir. It had acquired a very bad reputation because of the lives of the dancers themselves who were not all they should have been. But I felt there was something marvelous in the art which should not be lost. At that time, in fact, there was a campaign to discontinue the dance in the temples. The result was that it was prohibited in the temples and this situation continues even now. I hope a time will come when the dance will find a home in the temple again, at least as far as the Upacharas—the religious aspects—are concerned. (Arundale, "My Experiments With Dance" 60)

Implicit in Arundale's restaging of the dance against a temple backdrop is a politics of cultural retrieval. For Arundale, the temple signifies the lost "golden age" of Bharatanāṭyam:

> India's gift [to the world] is spirituality and when some dancers forsook the idea of dancing to the Deity in the temple and began to dance to the ruler or patron, then the dance became personal and gradually deteriorated to such an extent that it came to be considered a degrading thing to see or learn. (Arundale, "Bhava, Raga, Tala" 20-21)

Arundale's narrative ignores the courtly origins of Bharatanāṭyam, including the very courtly form that she had learned from Meenakshisundaram Pillai. Instead, for her, the form has its *origins* in temples; in her interpretation, it is the *devadāsī* performers who

denigrated the form by making it into an erotic courtly practice in praise of "the ruler or patron." For Arundale, the socioeconomic realities of cultural production, patronage, and, indeed, the very survival of the dance itself are replaced by idealized transcendent notions of a timeless classicism. As will be shown later, the class-based implications of this notion of classicism loom large in the decades that follow the reinvention that took place during the 1930s.

"Dressing the Part"

In Rukmini Arundale's writings, costumes turn out to be a major concern. The costume is itself an index of a wider and deeper concern for the dance's moral and aesthetic status. For Arundale, it was at times difficult to separate morality from aesthetics. In several instances, she makes it a point to iterate that the redesigning of the clothes worn for the practice of contemporary Bharatanāṭyam was one of her key contributions. She thinks of the *saris* and other accoutrements worn by *devadāsīs* as having "no aesthetic sense"; hence, she interjects to "reform" the visual landscape of the dance, literally through "alterations":

> There was no aesthetic sense evident anywhere outside the actual dance. The jewelry was very beautiful, but the kinds of costumes that were used—the saris for example—were very cheap tinsely stuff that did not match the dance and were, according to me, too showy. The *pyjamas* [leggings] that were worn, the Victorian style of *cholis* [bodices]—they all seemed to me to be a mixture of many different civilizations. All these I felt required thought, and after thought, appropriate change…. In other words, create costumes that were in the spirit of what our people wore thousands of years ago. This was not very easy. It was not easy to get help from the sculptures because they are clothed only below the waist! Therefore we had to think creatively in order to catch the old spirit. Gradually I evolved my costume, and those used in Kalakshetra are based on my original design. (Arundale, "My Experiments With Dance" 62)

As can be seen with the temple backdrop, a key concern is the concept of Indian purity. The hybridity of costume that reflects the accretions of cultural encounter in South India is unsuitable for a classicism that is meant to represent, as Arundale put it, the "spirit of India's people" (qtd. in Ramani 45). Somewhat ironically, the costume that would come to represent this spirit was designed by the Europeans Mary Elmore and Madame Cazan and executed through distinctly colonial technologies of tailoring (see fig. 3-7). The final result was the now well-known "temple-sculpture–inspired" Bharatanāṭyam costume (see fig. 3-8), which has become the standard representation in nearly all performances of Bharatanāṭyam today.

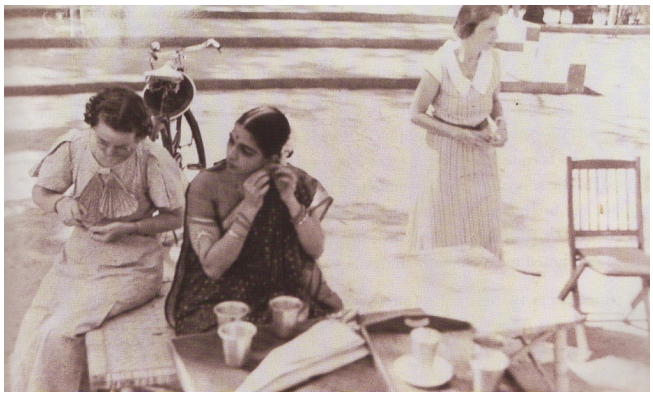


Fig. 3-7. Rukmini Arundale with seamstress Madame Cazan (c. 1939). (Courtesy Kalakshetra Foundation [Ramani, Shakuntala. *Rukmini Devi Arundale: Birth Centenary Volume*. Kalakshetra Foundation, 2003, p. 49].)

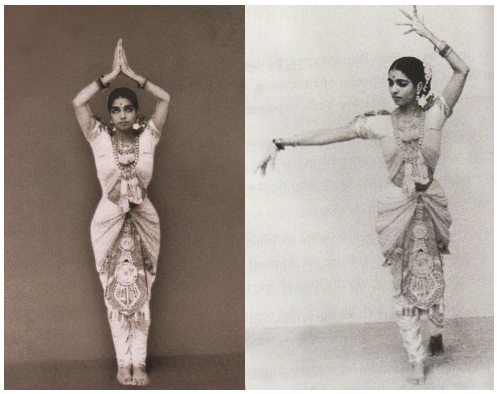


Fig. 3-8. The early costumes codesigned by Mary Elmore and Madame Cazan (c. 1935). (Courtesy Kalakshetra Foundation [Ramani, Shakuntala. *Rukmini Devi Arundale: Birth Centenary Volume*. Kalakshetra Foundation, 2003, p. 100].)

Arundale's own resistance to traces of colonial modernity could only be staged through the power of the distinctly modern and cosmopolitan space that she herself inhabited as "World Mother" of the Theosophical Society. Arundale expended tremendous effort on the optics of the restaging of Bharatanāṭyam. These changes had an enduring presence, and they certainly contributed to the popular narrative of the reinvention of Bharatanāṭyam during the early twentieth century.

It is significant that these changes were very quickly absorbed by the early Tamil cinema. Until the late 1930s, women performers in the cinema wore costumes that resembled those worn by popular *icai nāṭakam* drama performers, which themselves were inspired by those of the colonial Parsi theater. These included crowns and jewelry made of brass and aluminum and saris made of cotton and sometimes synthetics, especially what was known as "imitation silk" (rayon).[71] By the early to mid-1940s, these older-

style costumes virtually disappeared and were replaced by the iconic Bharatanāṭyam costume invented by Arundale's associates. In the world of post-1940 cinema, this costume extends well beyond representations related to dance: it becomes the standard costume of the mythological cinema. To this day, all cinematic (and television) representations of Hindu deities (particularly goddesses) in almost every region of India are represented as wearing the stitched Arundale-inspired "Bharatanāṭyam costume." The enduring presence of the costume and its wider links to the representations of things considered "sacred and divine" takes us to the final visual transformation of the dance: the rendering of the form as both narrative and spectacle.

Narrativization, Mythology, and Spectacle

Perhaps the most obvious parallel between the "re-invented" Bharatanāṭyam and the cinema is the emphasis that they both place on religious narrative. As the work of Guy (*Starlight, Starbright*) and Baskaran (*The Eye of the Serpent*, *History Through the Lens*) has demonstrated, the successes of early cinema did not rely on realism but rather, in the South Indian context, on the popularity of Indian (usually Hindu) mythology. In other words, popular culture—which was shaped largely by theater and cinema during the 1920s and 1930s—relied almost entirely on the iteration of known mythological narratives that were accessible to the masses. It is thus not a stretch to see how the popularity of the re-invented Bharatanāṭyam quite logically was similar. The "dance-drama" idiom cultivated by Rukmini Arundale during the early 1940s had a deep and long-lasting impact on the future of Bharatanāṭyam. Beginning in 1947, Arundale turned

her focus from the "reformation" of solo Bharatanāṭyam to the production of multi-dancer "dance-dramas," which, as many scholars have noted, drew from the Western idiom of the ballet as well as from Indian forms of theater such as the Kathakaḷi of Kerala and the Bhāgavata Mēḷa Nāṭaka of Tanjore district (Meduri, "Nation, Woman, Representation"; Allen, "Rewriting the Script"; O'Shea, *At Home in the World*).[72] However, a major piece of the puzzle is missing in these characterizations of how Arundale's "dance-drama" idiom emerged, and this has to do with the staging of the dance-drama in a manner parallel to the genre of early mythological cinema.

The "dance-drama" idiom mobilized the vocabulary of Bharatanāṭyam to tell stories from Hindu epics and other religious narratives. It was, in other words, like a mythological film brought onto the stage. The audiences who witnessed the emergence of the new Bharatanāṭyam dance-drama form in the 1940s were the same audiences who were the primary consumers of cinema during the same period. As has already been seen in this chapter, Bharatanāṭyam and religious cinema shared a symbiotic relationship in terms of aesthetic and visual conventions, narrativization, and even consumerism.

Rukmini Arundale's first thematic narrative presentation was staged in 1944. Although this was a *kuṟavañci* drama—a narrative about a hill-dwelling fortune teller of the Kura tribe that was also performed by *devadāsīs*—it is significant that Arundale herself had produced a number of mythological dramas for the Theosophical Society during the early 1930s (i.e., before she began learning dance), including *The Light of Asia*, *Bhisma*, *Kuchela Vratam,* and *Karaikkal Ammaiyar*. The first non-*kuṟavañci* drama

produced at Kalakshetra was *Kumarasambhavam* (1947), which is based on the Sanskrit play of the same name and attributed to the poet Kālīdāsa. The play tells the story of the birth of the god Kumāra (also known as *Kārttikeya* or *Murukaṉ*), the son of Śiva. From 1933 to 1946, three Tamil films had already been produced on this theme. Although I do not aim to draw a one-to-one correspondence between Arundale's dance-dramas and Tamil films, it is significant—as seen in Appendix A—that the themes that Arundale chose for her dance presentations have their counterparts in the Tamil cinema of the 1930s and 1940s. However, I would like to emphasize that this only highlights the significance of interocular creative practices in early twentieth-century Madras. Granted, these themes were also common to the style of Tamil popular drama known as *icai nāṭakam* (e.g., the narratives of Damayantī and Āṇṭāḷ), and others were traditional plays in the Bhāgavata Mēḷa Nāṭaka of Tanjore district (e.g., *Rukmāṅgada, Uṣā Pariṇayam, Rukmiṇī Kalyāṇam, Dhruva Caritram*). Nonetheless, Arundale's careful curation and representation of these narratives to the elite Madras audiences at a time when they were circulating through the medium of cinema is significant. As seen in Chapter I, narrative and spectacle—from the consumer's standpoint at least—were part of a common culture of intermediality and narrative frameworks that were shared across visual registers and spaces, as seen in the chart in Appendix A.

It is also significant that there are a number of "crossover" factors in this intermedial world of dance and early cinema, and I'd like to briefly discuss one of these here: music, particularly through the figure of the Brahmin musician Papanasam Sivan

(1890-1973). Sivan was a traditionally trained musician before he moved to Madras in 1933. That same year, he was contracted to compose music for the film *Seetha Kalyanam* (1933-1934) through his contact with producer G.K. Seshagiri (who will be discussed later in this chapter). Months later, Rukmini Arundale hired him as the music teacher at the Besant Theosophical School.[73] Sivan taught at the school for only five years. In 1939, as a result of increasing pressure and demand from the film world, he also left Kalakshetra. It is significant that, while at Kalakshetra, Sigan continued to compose music for a number of Tamil films that shared themes with Arundale's dance-dramas, such as *Bhaktha Kuchela* (1936). Arundale's version of this narrative about Kucela, the devotee of the god Kṛṣṇa, was made into the Sanskrit dance-drama *Kuchelopakhayanam* decades later, in 1972.[74] In 1961, Sivan returned to collaborate with Arundale when he composed the music for Kalakshetra's dance-drama *Andal Charitram*, which was about the early medieval Tamil female saint-poet Āṇṭāḷ. He also composed music for Arundale's *Kannappar Kuravanji* (1962) and *Shakuntalam* (1967; with Turaiyur Rajagopala Sarma).[75] By this time, Sivan's musical style had become somewhat fixed, and his music seamlessly provided a sonic crossover between the tunes (*meṭṭu*) used in the mythologically themed films for which he was the composer and the style of songs he composed for these dance-dramas.[76]

It is significant that the "dance-drama" idiom very quickly became a staple in the burgeoning local Madras dance schools for middle-class young women, such as the Saraswathi Gana Nilayam (established in 1939 by dancer K. Lalitha), and film director K.

Subrahmanyam's Nrithyodaya (established as Natana Kala Seva in 1941). Schools such as these shifted their focus onto the production of thematic narrative dramas not only because they were thought to impart "culture" to young people in a manner that the traditional courtesan repertoire could not but also because of their value as spectacle. The "appeal" factor of these presentations, which are often glossed using the English terms *ballet* or *dance-ballet,* is confirmed by the former actress Rajasulochana (1935-2013), who spoke to me about her training at the Saraswathi Gana Nilayam in her youth:

> Dance ballets are the best way to make people appreciate classical dance. Dance ballets are basically entertaining for audiences (*jaṉa-rañjakam*). This kind of presentation guarantees audience appreciation, as opposed to other kinds of dance presentation.

The elite Madras audiences' desire to witness such spectacular stagings of Hindu mythology were undoubtedly conditioned by the ubiquity and mass circulation of Tamil films, which, by the 1930s and 1940s, were among the few cultural forms to engender both mixed-gender and mixed-caste audiences (Baskaran, "Music for the Masses" 756).

SHIFTING (TOWARD) THE LENS: THE SOUTH INDIAN DANCE "REVIVAL" AND CINEMA

Moral anxieties around the cinema were rampant throughout India during the 1920s and 1930s. Although the nationalist movement opened up possibilities for the creation, dissemination, and consumption of new forms of mass culture, key figures of the movement, including Gandhi, vehemently objected to the cinematic medium on moral grounds. Indeed, in 1942, when asked what would happen if he supported the cinema, Gandhi replied, "...I should lose my caste, my Mahatmaship" (Mukhopadhyay 425). In a

fascinating recent essay, Urvi Mukhodhayay has demonstrated that, despite Gandhi's own condemnation of the early Indian cinema, filmmakers actively allied themselves with the projects of Gandhian nationalism. Thus, nationalist celebrations of Indian (Hindu) history came to permeate the cinema of the 1920s and 1930s (425). This is a point I shall return to in Chapter IV in my discussions of dance and nationalism in the South Indian cinema of the 1940s and 1950s.

For now, however, I would like to turn attention to the fact that, during the Madras Presidency, articulations of the dangers of cinema were ubiquitous, as were those related to dance. A good example comes from the literary works of K. Kurucāmitās, a Tamil poet from the town of Kumbhakonam in the Tanjore district.[77] In 1937, he published a seven-page Tamil song in the *cintu* genre called *Kaliyukattil Naṭaṉamiṭum Ṭākkīs Paritāpac Cintu* ("Song of Suffering About the Talkies of the Kaliyuga") (see fig. 3-9), which addressed the dangers of his "younger brothers (*tampikaḷ*)" watching "talkies in the evening." For the poet, the advent of the cinema represents a disintegration of the Hindu moral order (*dharma*) in the most degenerate of all ages in the Hindu cyclical calendar, the Kaliyuga. The song is written in the four-line metre known as *venpā*. The first few verses run as follows:

1. The plight of India's people is pathetic. Brothers, it's just not right!
   They spend all the money they've earned during the day on talkies at night.
2. Gone are the days of adorning the body with jewels, in the evening it is only talkies!
   People are possessed, as if by the demons who reside in sacred fig trees.
3. It's a bad time. There is no rain, no harvest. It's a bad time. Why go to the talkies?

4. Men just don't go to work anymore, they sleep until well after dawn!
   They pawn their wives' *saris*, just to go watch the talkies! (Kurucāmitās 1)

Fig. 3-9. *Kaliyukattil Naṭaṉamiṭum Ṭākkīs Paritāpac Cintu* ("Song of Suffering About the Talkies of the Kaliyuga") by K. Kurucāmitās (Kumpakōṇam, 1937). (© British Library Board [pTam.B.7514]).

Six years later, in 1943, the same author composed a similar set of songs entitled *Meṭrācai Viṭṭu Nāṭṭipurattukku Oṭṭam Piṭitta Tācikaḷ Taṅkappāṭṭu* ("Songs About the *Dāsīs* Who Left Madras and Ran Away to the Villages"), which is a collection of insulting songs aimed at women from *devadāsī* communities who, the author claims, are running back to their villages from Madras city because of the impending anti-*devadāsī* legislation. The text is full of images of women struck with painful venereal disease as well as the repeated and unrelenting use of slurs and insults. As Davesh Soneji has shown in *Unfinished Gestures: Devadasis, Memory, and Modernity in South India,* this highly misogynistic and casteist work and other earlier works like it "facilitated new urban representations of *devadāsīs* as worthy targets of moral and aesthetic reform" (93-94).

RUKMINI ARUNDALE IN THE TAMIL CINEMA

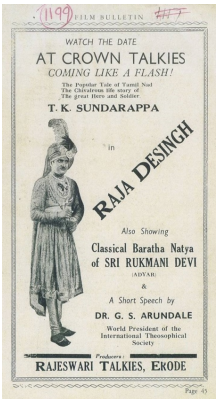


Fig. 3-10. Poster for the Tamil film *Raja Desingh* (1936), produced by Rajeswari Talkies. The poster specifically advertises the live performance of "Classical Baratha Natya *[sic]*" by Rukmini Devi and a speech by George Arundale. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

In 1936, Rukmini Arundale established the International Academy of Arts, which was later renamed Kalakshetra. That same year saw the production of the film *Raja Desingh*[78] starring T.K. Sundarappa (see fig. 3-10); it was based on the famous story of the eighteenth-century Raja Tej Singh of Senji, about whom historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam ("Friday's Child") has written at length. The film itself surprisingly featured three dances by Rukmini Arundale, who otherwise—like Gandhi—disparaged the cinematic medium. During the late 1950s, long after the film *Raja Desingh* had disappeared from memory, Arundale reflected on the relationship between cinema and dance:

> The problem of the cinema is peculiar. The film engages a traditionally trained musician or dancer but very soon these change into a new type. The Indian film has now created a type of music and dance which we can definitely call cinema music and cinema dance. The classical way must be jealously preserved if it is to be presented on the stage because it is easily seen that once an artist is engaged on the films, he or she cannot completely go back to the traditional way; at least not easily, just as the milk that is once curdled can never again be turned into fresh milk. (Arundale, "My Experiments With Dance" 88-89)

In these remarks, film dance is pitted against the "pure and classical" Bharatanāṭyam. In the first passage, trained musicians and dancers who cross over into the world of cinema perform an irrevocable act: they can never be "fresh milk" again, in Arundale's analogy. As with many of her pronouncements on earlier, pre-"revival" forms of dance practiced by *devadāsī* women, she deploys a language of both moral and aesthetic judgment, and, in most instances, the two are collapsed. Film dance—due to its hybridity and cultural bricolage, like the older forms of *devadāsī* dance—is thus cast by Arundale as a "distortion" of the imaginary "purity" of something marked as "classical" and as a "vulgarisation" of "the traditional way."

Coming back to Arundale's own dancing in the film *Raja Desingh*, it is commonly believed that the Arundales paid the film's producers to buy all copies of the film, which were subsequently intentionally destroyed so as to safeguard Arundale's own history from that of the popular cinema. In the words of film dance historian V.A.K. Ranga Rao, in a conversation with me in 2012, "Rukmini Devi Arundale's public stance was against cinema but she herself performed in a Tamil film called *Raja Desingh*. After the movie was made, she herself paid the producer to buy the film back."

Let us now briefly turn to the substantive portion of Rukmini Arundale's involvement with the film *Raja Desingh*. To begin with, it had a live performance component. As Stephen Hughes has demonstrated, cinema initially came to Madras "as a kind of European entertainment using the same local venues as the European variety circuit.... [The] shows conformed to a variety format and they frequently mixed films with other kinds of live performances" ("What is Tamil" 147). In an excellent forthcoming essay entitled "Intermediaries on Stage and Screen: Cinema Stage Dance and the Making of Tamil Cinema," Hughes continues:

> Contrary to our contemporary expectations that stage performance and film screenings were separate media practices that happen at different venues at different times for different audiences, cinema and dance performance had from the late 19th century had an ongoing mixed media relationship. From the earliest film shows at the end of the 19th century, exhibitors had used a format that combined live stage acts, musical accompaniment and films. This continued to be the norm in south India for roughly the first two decades of the cinema. The touring entertainment companies from Europe, the US and Australia that had visited Madras as part of global circuit used a wide variety of different performance genres and formats including the circus, fair ground, variety shows and comic opera.... Amongst all these attractions it was very common for dance to be featured as the primary attraction. (2-3)

Hughes goes to great length to draw attention to the fact that cinema houses in Madras in the 1920s (and even earlier) were sites of multimedial performance and laboratories for new cultures of interocularity. For example, eminent female performers, mostly from *devadāsī* backgrounds (e.g., Gauhar Jan of Calcutta [1873-1930], Bajjar Battoo of Lahore), performed *abhinaya* in Madras' cinema halls ("Intermediaries on Stage and Screen" 10-11). Arundale's participation in this film extended beyond the recorded versions of her dance, which were captured on film; it also included live

performance at the screening of the film. On the days of the screening, commentary about the dance was provided, presumably in English, by her husband George Arundale, who was the World President of the Theosophical Society. While the film reels no longer exist, the synopsis and songbook of the film does (see fig. 3-11).

Fig. 3-11. The cover of the songbook for *Raja Desingh* (1936). (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

From the book, it is evident that Rukmini performed three pieces, all of which are from the courtesan repertoire. The section containing the songs strangely ends with a photo of Rukmini in a North Indian–style costume (perhaps reflective of the theme of the film) with the caption "The World Renowned Rukmini Devi of Adyar: The Best Form of Bharatanāṭyam Will Be Showcased" (see fig. 3-12). The first piece is an interpretation of a song in the Tamil *padam* genre—*Pataṟi Varukutu* ("My Heart Trembles") in the *rāga* Kāmbodhi—in which the heroine addresses the god Murukaṉ as her beloved.[79] A translation of the full text of this song is provided as Appendix B.

The second piece is one centered on abstract dance and rhythm: *Jatisvaram* in the *rāga* Sāveri. This composition is attributed to the famous nineteenth-century dance-masters known as the "Tanjore Quartet" (*tañcai nālvar*). It remains a staple composition for students at Kalakshetra, and nothing is said about it apart from it being labelled with the title *svaram* ("Notes") in the songbook. The final piece is a *padam* in the Telugu language, *Sariga Koṅgu* in the *rāga* Curuṭṭi, which was written by an unknown poet and in which the god Kṛṣṇa of Mannargudi is the beloved. Only two lines of the poem are listed in the text.[80] Both of these *padams* were taught to Arundale by the famous *devadāsī* artist of Madras, Mylapore Gauri Ammal (1892-1971), who for a very brief period was also contracted to teach at Kalakshetra. However, it seems that Rukmini often rejected these interpretations of *abhinaya*, and, as she states in her own writings, after her first performance in 1935, she transformed the *abhinaya* for nearly all of the lyric-based repertoire that she had learned. It is possible that these public performances in 1936 already featured the infamous "cleaned up" *abhinaya,* which was devoid of erotic references and which would have allowed Arundale and her husband to present their "reinvented" art to new (i.e., non-Theosophical) audiences in cinema halls.

Fig. 3-12. "The World Renowned Rukmini Devi of Adyar: The Best Form of Bharatanāṭyam Will Be Showcased" from the songbook of *Raja Desingh* (1936). (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

Although not much is known about the reception of Rukmini Arudale's dancing in *Raja Desingh,* the event certainly created both a new kind of public presence for Arundale and self-conscious reflections on dance among producers and consumers of cinema. For example, on April 4, 1936, the popular film magazine *Silver Screen* featured an article titled "Dance in the Talkies" that specifically referenced Rukmini Arundale's dance in *Raja Desingh* as a major intervention:

> …The wife of the leader of the Theosophical Society, Dr. Arundale, Sri Rukmini Arundale, has been contracted to dance in a film by Rajeswari Talkies. This is truly an extremely admirable moment. In South India, where the nation has been given a second life and there is a renaissance, Bharatanāṭyam is front and center. Regarding Bharatanāṭyam, readers would be familiar with the famous 1932 debate between Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy and Sriman E. Krishnan Iyer. When she said, "Due to the evil ways of the *devadāsīs*, their dance is definitely not longer necessary," Iyer responds by saying "the arts must flourish and the *devadāsīs*' lifestyle (*tācikaḷ vaḻkkai muṟai*) must be remedied."

> At this time, our sisters from high-class families (*uyar kuṭumpattu cakōtarikaḷ*), must come forward to dance and also act in films. This will be good for the arts. More specifically, dance in a film by a world-teacher like Dr. Arundale's wife will certainly not only increase the profile of India's arts around the world, but it will also increase the respectability of Bharatanāṭyam. The film company should be praised. (Anonymous, "Pēcum Paṭaṅkaḷil Naṭaṉam" 2)

It is significant that the writer invokes the "revival" of dance with an eye to the public debates on *devadāsī* morality and the figure of Muthulakshmi Reddy. Again, the "purity" of revived forms of Indian dance is pitted against dance that contains "Western influence" and that is thus perceived as "vulgar." Arundale is championed as an exemplary figure for the future of the dance, which the author hopes will survive through the bodies of "sisters from high-class families" (*uyar kuṭumpattu cakōtarikaḷ*). The presence of Arundale's dance in the cinema will have a global impact on perceptions of Indian culture, he says, and will also "increase the respectability of Bharatanāṭyam" (Anonymous, "Pēcum Paṭaṅkaḷil Naṭaṉam" 26).

REPRESENTATIONS OF ART, ARTIST, AND NATION: THE FIRST FILM *ABOUT* DANCE

As has already been demonstrated, the 1930s represent a crucial period for Bharatanāṭyam dance in Madras city. The Madras Music Academy, which was established in 1928, featured a dance recital by the "Kalyani daughters" (Rajalakshmi and Jeevaratnam) on March 15, 1931. This was followed by another recital on January 1, 1933, and Rukmini Arundale presented her first recital at the Theosophical Society's Diamond Jubilee Celebrations in 1935. As seen earlier, in 1936, she established the International Academy for the Arts, which was later renamed Kalakshetra. Over and

above these well-known signposts of Bharatanāṭyam's reinvention in Madras, however, are several other narratives of the dance from the 1930s that have been rendered invisible in standard histories of the form. This period is also significant from the standpoint of the history of Indian cinema, for it is the first time that a full-length feature film *about dance*—the Tamil film *Jalaja* (1938)—was produced in South India. Dance in the cinema thus took on a uniquely self-reflexive representation, and the discourses that flowed out of such representation resonated deeply with narratives and positionalities that were emerging as Bharatanāṭyam became a visibly public form in Madras during the 1930s.

A key moment is the period between 1936 and 1938. By this time, even though Rukmini Arundale had performed her "reinvented" version of the dance, performances by women within the *devadāsī* community continued. The narrative that follows speaks to the ways in which this kind of dance found its way into cosmopolitan—and even early global—circuits of cultural production and the new medial form of the cinema. At this time, a group of women from the *devadāsī* community in the town of Kumbhakonam were actively learning and performing dance (see fig. 3-13). They came from a distinguished lineage of women performers in the Thanjavur region, and a whole generation of them, all sisters and cousins, were trained by the *naṭṭuvaṉār* Papanasam Vadivelu Pillai (1884-1937).[81] Prominent among these women were Kumbhakonam Varalakshmi (1910-1937), and her cousins, the sisters Saranayaki (dates unknown) and Pattammal (dates unknown) (see fig. 3-14). Their other cousin was Kumbhakonam Bhanumati (1922-2003), who also started training with the same *naṭṭuvaṉār*.

Varalakshmi and Saranayaki had been performing in public as a “duo” in and around Kumbhakonam, and they were invited by the Music Academy to dance in Madras on December 28, 1933. However, soon after Bhanumati came on the scene, Saranayaki was quickly replaced in these “duo dance” presentations. Varalakshmi and Bhanumati thus performed as a “duo” at the Music Academy on December 31, 1934, and again on December 27, 1936.

Fig. 3-13. *(Front row)* Kumbhakonam Varalakshmi, Sulochana, Bhanumati, and Pattammal. In the back *(center)* is Saranayaki and beside her an unnamed cousin. (Courtesy B.M. Sundaram.)

Fig. 3-14. Pattammal (Pattu) in a dance pose. (Courtesy Davesh Soneji.)

Possibly through the acquaintance of E. Krishna Iyer, who was one of the Secretaries of the Madras Music Academy, Bhanumati and Varalakshmi were brought into contact with an impresario and film producer named G.K. Seshagiri. He was the son of the famous Sanskrit scholar S. Kuppuswami Sastri (1880-1943), and he managed The Renaissance Theatre, an arts organization that regularly staged performances of drama and dance as well as cinema screenings at large public venues like the Victoria Public Hall and Gokhale Hall in Madras city.[82] In 1936, the American dancer who would later be known as the "Queen of Ethnic Dance," a woman named "La Meri" (1898-1988; born Russel Meriwether Hughes), arrived in Madras after learning some Kandiyan dance in Colombo, Sri Lanka (Venkateswaran 14). La Meri would later go on to write a book entitled *The Gesture Language of the Hindu Dance,* which contained a foreword by Ananda Coomaraswamy. She would also found, together with Ruth St. Denis, the first school of Indian dance in America, the School of Natya, in New York City in May 1940.[83] Seshagiri invited La Meri to the performance of Varalakshmi and Bhanumati at

the Music Academy (see fig. 3-15). Deeply moved by their performance, La Meri had decided she wanted to learn the dance, and so Seshagiri introduced her to Papanasam Vadivelu Pillai, the teacher of the Bhanumati and Varalakshmi (see fig. 3-16). She trained with him for about three months (Venkateswaran 15).

Fig. 3-15. La Meri with G.K. Seshagiri and "Kalyan Sundaram" (A.N. Kalyanasundaram Iyer who eventually married Bhanumathi), Madras, 1937. (Venkateswaran, Usha. *The Life and Times of La Meri: The Queen of Ethnic Dance.* Indira Gandhi Centre for the Arts, 2005, pp. 14-15).

Fig. 3-16. La Meri with Kumbhakonam Bhanumathi and Varalakshmi. (Venkateswaran, Usha. *The Life and Times of La Meri: The Queen of Ethnic Dance.* Indira Gandhi Centre for the Arts, 2005, pp. 14-15).

At the end of this period, Seshagiri staged a performance under the aegis of The Renaissance Theatre entitled "The Celebrated International Dancer La Meri and the Brilliant Bharata Natya Artists of South India Varalakshmi and Bhanumati." A single copy of the souvenir program for this performance is available at the New York Public Library, which also houses an extensive archive of La Meri's performance career. The souvenir itself does not provide dates, but a Tamil magazine article reveals that there were actually two performances, on February 1 and 3, 1937. The souvenir document itself is strewn with advertisements for South Indian "talkies," and these are interspersed between long descriptions (and, in the case of the Bharatanāṭyam repertoire, translations) of the dance pieces being performed.[84] In any case, it is significant that this was very much a performance intended for cosmopolitan audiences in Madras, one that featured La Meri's dances (labelled "Interpretive Dances" and "Racial Dances") juxtaposed with the

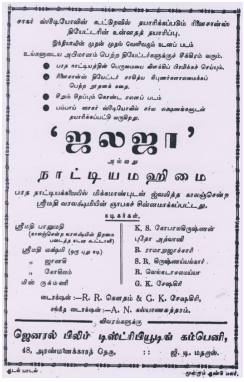
dances by Varalakshmi and Bhanumati (always labelled "Bharata Natya"). La Meri thus performs pieces like "Caprice Viennoise" and "Adoration of the Virgin" under the heading "Interpretive Dances," and she also performed "North American (Red Indian) Hoop" and "Spanish Goyesca" under the heading "Racial Dances." She also brought Bharatanāṭyam into her sphere of "racial dances," for this section ended with her performing an excerpt of the *varṇam* (in the *rāga* Śaṅkarābharaṇam) that she had just learned from Vadivelu Pillai. In this unique juxtaposition of forms, La Meri is simultaneously scripted as the locus of an "international" aesthetic *and* an "authentic" embodiment of Bharatanāṭyam. The souvenir program puts it as follows:

> La Meri is a celebrated International Dancer; she has come to India to study types of Indian Dance. And *Bharata Natya* has known no devotee, more ardent, more sincere; it is the privilege of the Renaissance Theatre, again, to present her along with Varalakshmi and Bhanumati, two of our own talented artists amid ideal conditions, new stage-mountings, appropriate light-effects; a splendid display combining the inventiveness and fluidity of western dancing with the peculiar grace and unique expressiveness of *Bharata Natya.* (Souvenir program*, La Meri, Varalakshmi and Bhanumati* 13)

Varalakshmi and Bhanumati, for their part, performed an entire concert suite of Bharatanāṭyam courtly compositions.[85]

The performance with La Meri gave Varalakshmi and Bhanumati considerable visibility among Madras' cosmopolitan elite audiences. It was around the time of this performance that Varalakshmi had been contracted by Seshagiri to act in a film he wanted to produce in Tamil about the life of a Bharatanāṭyam dancer. The film's story, a fictional account of a young woman from a *devadāsī* background, was co-written by three individuals: 1) Seshagiri himself; 2) the Sanskritist Dr. V. Raghavan, a prime student of

Seshagiri's father S. Kuppuswami Sastri, who was very active in writing about dance during this period and who was also on the board of the Madras Music Academy[86]; and 3) a writer named Manjeri S. Isvaran (see fig. 3-17), who, among other things, had just written the program notes for La Meri's Madras performance. Isvaran, who was a close associate of Seshagiri, later went on to write an English short story about a young (non-*devadāsī*) girl's desire to learn dance—likely inspired by his early experiments writing for *Jalaja*—entitled "No Ankletbells for Her."[87] The film project itself replayed many of the collaborations that went into the performance by La Meri, Bhanumati, and Varalakshmi. In addition to the collaboration of Seshagiri and Isvaran in the scripting of the story, the music for the film was composed by A.N. Kalyanasundaram Iyer (see fig. 3-18) who also helped with the La Meri show and who eventually married Bhanumati.[88] Seshagiri contracted Varalakshmi to act the role of Jalaja, the main female protagonist of the film. He himself played the role of Rajagopalan, the hero of the film. The shooting of the film commenced in 1937 in Bombay, and, tragically, on November 3 of that year, Varalakshmi died in Bombay at the very young age of nineteen (Sundaram *Marapu Tanta Māṇikkaṅkaḷ* 41). Bhanumati was asked to step in to play the role of Jalaja, which she did.



‘ஜலஜா’

நாட்டிய மஹிமை

Fig. 3-17. Advertisement for *Jalaja* (1938), *Āṭal Pāṭal* (Āṇṭu Malar, 1938, p. 7).

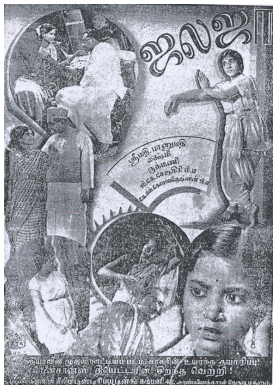


Fig. 3-18. Advertisement for *Jalaja*, source unknown. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

The film’s full title in Tamil was *Jalajā Allatu Nāṭṭiya Mahimai* (“Jalaja, or the Greatness of Dance”), and it is clear from the title that the agenda behind the film was to bring a vision of dance and its newly encoded symbolic meanings to a wider audience. One advertisement in the magazine *Āṭal Pāṭal* (see fig. 3-17) makes it clear that the film is simply about the “greatness of Bharatanāṭyam (*paratanāṭṭiyatiṉ perumai*).”

Unfortunately, no prints of the film have survived. However, I have been able to recover the songbook for the film and a number of publicity materials from a private collection in Chennai (see fig. 3-18). The songbook preserves a rather lengthy synopsis of the film in English, which is certainly the most detailed account of the story; see Appendix C for the full synopsis as it appears in the songbook. The plot of the film reflects a number of tropes about Bharatanāṭyam and its social history that were already crystallized in the public imagination by the late 1930s, including those about the centrality of the god Śiva-Naṭarāja as the "god of dance" and the patron deity of dancers, the old trope of the money-hungry *devadāsī*-courtesan and her mother (which was discussed in the previous chapter), the idea that *devadāsīs* need to be "purified" by their association with elite men in order to have a public presence (as would eventually become the case for the singer/actress M.S. Subbulakshmi), and more. In addition, the film dramatizes the old trope of the tension between the wife and the courtesan, except that now the modern wife yearns to know the courtesan's art, which, in the film, she cannot seem to master. Indeed, the image of the modern Indian women is cast along the lines of a "tradition/modernity" binary here. Lalita is an educated urban woman who can drive a car, whereas Jalaja, the *devadāsī* from a Śiva temple in a South Indian village, evokes the piety and naivety of "traditional India," a remnant of a past that is lost in the modern nation-state. At the climax of the film, it is dance that mediates this tension, literally calming down the "madness" of the wife Lalita. In that sense, Jalaja's dance is not only morally "pure," but it also has a superhuman or otherworldly quality of

transcendence, which is a trope that was deployed throughout the period of Bharatanāṭyam's reinvention. The concluding scene of the film, in which Jalaja "stands in adoration before the image of Lord Nataraja," simply confirms the film's message about the links between the practice of dance and religion, a message that Rukmini Arundale couched in the language of a thoroughly "Indianized" Theosophy. Others such as Ananda Coomaraswamy (*The Dance of Shiva*) and E. Krishna Iyer ("Renaissance of Indian Dance") articulated this idea through the foregrounding of canonical upper-caste Sanskrit textual traditions (*śāstra*) related to philosophy and aesthetics.

The moral register of the film is consistently foregrounded in almost all of the available sources. Bharatanāṭyam is a dance that transforms women's own awareness and inculcates idealized notions of what it means to be a woman. For example, another advertisement from the magazine *Silver Screen* in 1938 begins with the following line: "Music (*pāṭṭu*) is essential for all girls (*peṇkaḷ*), but it is dance (*āṭṭam*) that improves feminine qualities (*peṇmai*)."

By the 1930s, music had already been adopted as a relatively acceptable and respectable pastime for non-*devadāsī* women, largely because of its associations with Indian nationalism and Gandhian politics (Weidman, *Singing the Classical*; Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures*). Dance, on the other hand, was still lurking in the shadows of *devadāsī* reform and the ultra-elite cultural projects of figures of Rukmini Arundale. Although it would take at least another decade for Bharatanāṭyam to become a "popular" cultural form, Seshagiri and the crew behind *Jalaja* likely saw the new medial form of

cinema as a suitable mode for amplifying the public discourses around dance in the 1930s, which had already been set into motion by the Music Academy and Arundale.

Fig. 3-19. Advertisement for the gramophone, from the songbook for *Jalaja* (1938), clearly indicating that is produced by The Renaissance Theatre (run by G.K. Seshagiri), Madras. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

As a film about dance, *Jalaja* contained eight songs, almost all of which were presented as "dance numbers." The songbook also contains an advertisement for the gramophone record of the film's songs (see fig. 3-19) and tells us that Bhanumati rendered the vocals for most of the songs herself.[89] Indeed, this is a major marketing feature for HMV, which produced the gramophone. It is only in the Tamil songbook for the film that one "Es. Caṅmukam" is listed in the credits as "*naṭṭuvaṉār*." Since Varalakshmi and Bhanumati's teacher Vadivelu Pillai died in September 1937, it would be safe to assume that he did not choreograph the dance sequences for the film. Instead,

the figure mentioned as "S. Caṅmukam"—per a conversation that I had with B.M. Sundaram—is likely Shanmukasundara Nattuvanar of Thiruppanandal, a close associate of Vadivelu Pillai. Unfortunately, not much is known about Shanmukasundaram Nattuvanar, except that he lived in the town of Thiruppanandal in Thanjavur district. The texts of the songs themselves are perhaps the closest approximation of the kinds of representations of dance that would have appeared in the film. It is significant that no traditional courtesan repertoire appears in the film. In other words, none of the recognizable genres of the repertoire (e.g., *alārippu, jatisvaram, śabdam, varṇam*) are present in the songbook. Instead, *devadāsī* dance is, for the most part, recast as devotional dance, and the dances appear encased in generic musical forms (known in concert music as *kīrtana* or *kṛti*). Let us begin with one such piece from the film:

> Pallavi:
> God of the Blissful Dance, consort of the Goddess Beautiful as Desire!
> Don't you have compassion on a poor soul like me?
>
> Anupallavi:
> Destroyer of the demon Tripura, please protect me!
> Supreme Soul! Please save me!
>
> Caraṇam:
> Lord of Citamparam who performs the *tāṇṭavam* dance!
> Please rule over me and relieve my uneasiness.

This is a devotional song that Jalaja sings to the god Śiva-Naṭarāja. It includes a number of epithets of the god (God of the Blissful Dance [*āṉantanaṭēcā*], Destroyer of the Demon Tripura [*tiripurāntakā*]), and it also contains references to the localized lore of the Chidambaram temple in Tamilnadu, the cultic center of Tamil Śaivism, where Śiva

is worshipped as Naṭarāja. These descriptive features are formulaic aspects of devotional poetry in South India, and, as in this case, the poem itself represents a plea on the part of the devotee, who has been separated from the god. One can see how such a piece would lend itself to interpretation through gesture, in a literal mimesis of the symbols invoked by the descriptions. Also, as will be discussed later, the interpretation of devotional music pieces called *kīrtanas* in modern Bharatanāṭyam became a trend in stage performances of Bharatanāṭyam and the cinema beginning in the 1940s. Songs dedicated to the newfound "patron deity" of Indian dance, Śiva-Naṭarāja, became somewhat of a staple in the repertoire of the "newly reinvented dance." Another song that was very similar in content perhaps hints, ever so subtly, at a style that resonates with the Tamil *padam* genre (Allen "The Tamil 'Padam'" 105; see also Chapter VI), which was a staple in the repertoire of Varalakshmi and Bhanumati. According to the songbook, it is sung in the film by both the characters Lalita and Jalaja and is in the *rāga* Khamās:

> Pallavi:
> Why hasn't your compassion (*tayavu*) descended?
> Tell me, what kind of a secret is this?
>
> Anupallavi:
> Great Nourisher, dancing in the golden hall (*tillai poṉṉampalattē āṭi*),
> You have enslaved me (*aṭimai koṇṭa*) at such a tender age, my great king (*aracē*)!
>
> Caraṇam:
> You have patiently borne my sins (*piḻai*) in the past, so please continue.
> Only you know my troubles and can take them away.
> Dancing God (*naṭēcaṉē*)! Once you have shown your compassion and ruled over me,
> Make sure no one speaks ill of my clan (*kulam*).

There is a certain self-reflexivity at work in this poem. The woman who sings the song has been "enslaved" to Śiva since a young age, perhaps a reference to the fact that the character of Jalaja references a *devadāsī* who, in undergoing the courtesan initiation ritual known as *poṭṭukkaṭṭutal* in his temple, is considered a slave (*aṭimai*) or courtesan (*kaṇikai*) of Śiva. More importantly, the final line of the song—"make sure no one speaks ill of my clan"—is a potential for multiple readings. For Lalita, it indexes her need to protect her family's reputation because of Jalaja's intrusion into her family life. For Jalaja, it indexes the stigma of being a *devadāsī*, and she beseeches Śiva to protect her particularly vulnerable reputation as a courtesan. In both cases, once again, morality—sexual morality in particular—is at issue. The film's ultimate resolution of the issue of Jalaja's sexual morality allows it to dissipate into a space of transcendence. Hence, in *Jalaja*, it can be seen how the invocation of religion clearly enabled respectability for Bharatanāṭyam's past.

Ultimately, there are no records of *Jalaja*'s performance at the box office other than some anecdotal news of its poor performance (Raman 27). However, it is significant that, regardless of the reach of the film, it provides us with new perspectives on thinking about the ways in which Bharatanāṭyam was circulating during the period immediately following the work of the Music Academy and Rukmini Arundale. The global forces pressing against the form—which included not only the Theosophical Society's international network but also key figures from the world of American dance—enabled new histories and imaginations of the dance to emerge while simultaneously rendering

invisible earlier hereditary traditions and individuals. In that sense, there is of course some poignancy to Bhanumati playing a *devadāsī* character, whose "transcendental disappearance" at the end of the film indexes the widespread disappearance of *devadāsī* women from the world of public dance performance during this period.[90] The figure of Lalita—a married, urban, and definitively "modern" woman who wishes to try her hand at this artform—foreshadows the eclipse of *devadāsī* performers by women who were part of the modern conjugal economy of Madras.

SCREENING RESPECTABILITY: FILMS INDEX THE TRANSITION FROM "TĒVAṬIYĀR-NĀṬYAM" TO "BHARATANĀṬYAM"

The Tamil film *Sabhapathy* ("Lord of the Hall," 1941), a social drama produced by AVM Pictures and directed by A.V. Meyappan and A.T. Krishnaswami, contains a short dialogue that helps to map perceptions of the public transformation of Bharatanāṭyam during the late 1930s and early 1940s. Dialogues such as these demonstrate the degree to which the interventions of figures like Rukmini Arundale and E. Krishna Iyer had a degree of "trickle-down" efficacy. However elite their projects may have been, they would soon affect profound transformations of dance in the public sphere. The scene takes place just before Sivakami, the heroine of the film played by the actress R. Padma (from a *devadāsī* family herself and related to dancers Sayi-Sublakshmi, whom I will discuss in Chapter V), performs a song in the *padam* genre.[91] Two elderly women who are sisters-in-law (one the being the mother of the heroine and the other her mother-in-law) are talking about the heroine's interest in dance:

> Mother-in-law: What's going on [with your daughter]? Why is she dancing the dance of the courtesans (*tēvaṭiyāl kaccēri*)?[92]
>
> Mother: Oh God! In this Kaliyuga [the most degenerate age of the Hindu calendar], there are so many new things taking place! Even in schools today, there is a new dance called "Bharatanāṭyam," which students are required to learn.
>
> Mother-in-law: Yes, Yes.
>
> Mother: My daughter seems to be very talented in this [dance] and has received many medals. A performance has been arranged as part of the war effort at our collector's bungalow. That is why she is practicing.
>
> Mother-in-law: Oh, I see. My son too also loves dance and music (*āṭṭam pāṭṭam*). Last month, as part of the war effort, he staged a play as his contribution.
>
> Mother: Oh, I am so glad. I know there some people who do not like this.

The shifting moral and aesthetic valence of Bharatanāṭyam dance is palpable in the public sphere, and there is no doubt that the cinema—perhaps even more so as a result of films like *Jalaja*—played no small part in both the construction and dissemination of Bharatanāṭyam's respectability and popularity. As early as 1936, the Tamil magazine *Āṭal Pāṭal* ("Dance and Song"; originally a column in the magazine *Āṉanta Vikaṭaṉ*) featured a story about Bharatanāṭyam's unprecedented popularity and acknowledged that the presence of dance in the cinema represented a new yet crucial dimension:

> …Something amazing has happened to Bharatanāṭyam! North India and North Indian dancers have been giving much respect to Bharatanāṭyam. Art aficionados will take great pleasure in the fact that women who are in a very high position in society like Smt. Rukmini Arundale have taken to the art and are practicing it. Some of these dancers have been integrated into talking pictures. The films we see these days also showcase Bharatanāṭyam recitals (*kaccēri*) and enhance the greatness of our country and its heritage. Even though the physical rigor and rhythmic complexity involved has many students struggling to learn this dance,

> many experts are of the belief that with hard work, they will be able to overcome [this] and shine [in the world of dance]. In fact, the newspapers have expressed several opinions about this and I am not sure if people have arrived at any resolution. Once opinions are expressed, then we can start debating the merits and demerits of the physical rigor of Bharatanāṭyam. Lastly, it is gratifying and joyful to see many people taking up Bharatanāṭyam as a full-time profession. (Anonymous, *Āṭal Pāṭal, Āṇṭu Malar* 20-21)

The film *Jalaja* thus offers a window on how the interocular world of Madras in the 1930s and 1940s affects the category of "the classical" and all of the moral, aesthetic, and class-centered complexities that it implies. On the one hand, cinema becomes the perfect "other" of what in the 1930s emerged as "classical" music and dance in Madras. Basically, "classical" music and dance were created in opposition to the "vulgarity" and "popular" nature of cinematic music and dance. As the work of Gaston (*Bharata Natyam*), Peterson and Soneji (*Performing Pasts*), and others has demonstrated, this was certainly a view upheld by most cultural elites in Madras until recently, and it was one of the reasons why film dance in particular was discouraged among students of the "classical" dance traditions. On the other hand, as has been discussed in this chapter, it is clear that cinema actually *constitutes* the very idea of the "classical"; its visual boundaries and extremes are drawn out only by the cinema. As will be shown in Chapter V, explicit articulations of "classical" (*cāttiriya, śāstric*) dance in films—often choreographed by *naṭṭuvaṉārs*—become the aesthetic frames of reference for staged versions of Bharatanāṭyam. In an essay from 1996 entitled "Tamil Cultural Elites and Cinema: Outline of an Argument," M.S.S. Pandian discusses cinema as a site of "intertextual excess." This might be a useful way of thinking specifically about the

imbrications of cinema and Bharatanāṭyam that were discussed in this chapter. It is also this legibility that enables slippages between the forms. Songs and the aesthetics of movement simultaneously live on several registers, each of which is a dimension of the spectacle; they also speak to a range of real and imagined pasts. To this end, Rukmini Arundale's desire to "make dance *look* old" might be thought of as a kind of illusory strategy, much in the way that cinema attempts to construct and order reality through various levels of illusory strategy. I would argue that the "staging" of religious sentiment (*bhakti*) and the perceived "ritualization" of such staging certainly belongs to the realm of illusory strategy, just as much as the "new-yet-old" costumes and the temple-stage. When thinking about the tensions between Brahmins and others that have come to frame the performing arts in modern South India, the question of who speaks—and to whom—is equally complex. These ideas are reflected in Bharatanāṭyam's social history over the past hundred years, which has been inextricably tied to questions of power.

CHAPTER IV

CINEMA, DANCE, AND BOURGEOIS NATIONALISM: MEDIATED MORALITY, "CLASSICISM," AND THE STATE IN MODERN SOUTH INDIA

By now, critical historical work on Bharatanāṭyam has established the complexity of nationalist registers upon which the dance was reimagined, restaged, and re-embodied by urban elites in Madras between the 1930s and the 1950s.[93] This critical turn in understanding the making of the "classical" as a bourgeois project of nationalist modernity has forced the reconsideration of the social and moral consequences of art making as well as of the caste- and class-driven aesthetic sensibilities that govern practices such as today's Bharatanāṭyam. In this chapter, I hope to contribute to the arc of this critical turn by demonstrating how cinematic representations of Bharatanāṭyam are in fact *the* major vehicle through which the nationalist dimensions of the bourgeois "classicization" project were actualized. Although the cultural nationalists discussed in the previous chapter—such as Rukmini Arundale, the Sanskrit scholar V. Raghavan, and the lawyer E. Krishna Iyer—were *discursively* couching Bharatanāṭyam in an elitist nationalist telos, the work of taking this discourse "to the masses" was done by cinema, and ocular cultures more generally were the vehicles through which cultural nationalism in South Asia was staged.

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which the image-field of Bharatanāṭyam in its totality—taking into account both its staged and cinematic forms—is a cultural

product and an "imagined community" that stages a peculiar set of collective national symbolisms (Anderson 97). To a large degree, the elastic folds of religious nationalism in India have enveloped Bharatanāṭyam; they have created a discourse of neoconservativism and figural religious excess that have occluded the dance form's social history on the one hand and yoked the artform to new narratives of patriotic piety and Hindu devotionalism on the other. As a medium that was squarely constructed under the gaze of nationalism from the 1930s to the 1960s, modern Bharatanāṭyam often leads to radicalized forms of Hindu self-assertion (Hindutva) in the public sphere today.

The neoconservativism engendered by contemporary Bharatanāṭyam also harks back to the socially and discursively constructed links between nation and woman in the 1920s and 1930s, and so it is not surprising that women's sexual morality occupies center stage here, too. As has been previously described, anxieties around women's chastity and sexual "purity" are a cornerstone of the whole debate on dance in modern India as well as, as the passage below illustrates, the debate on the cinema as a "national" medial form. In this anonymous piece entitled *Kuṭumpa Stirikaḷum Ciṉimāvum* ("Family Women and Cinema") from 1938, the author presents cinema as a career option for "respectable" women (that is, non-courtesan and upper-caste) in the Gandhian spirit of encouraging women to work for the betterment of the nation:

> …There are still newspapers that continuously and firmly decree that family women should be banned from acting in films, and if they do so, it will affect their chastity (*kaṟpu*) and their family lives will also be adversely affected. But even after such negative and fear-mongering writing, our women are not hiding in fear and shying away from acting in films. There are other more progressive newspapers in our land of Bhārat [India] that proclaim women are very strong and

> have destroyed their subservience, empowering themselves with knowledge and acquiring knowledge of *caṅkītam* (*saṅgīta*, music and dance). They are nowadays seen in public spaces, taking up roles of leadership in government, courts of law, giving public speeches and participating in salt marches, resilient as heroic mothers (*vīrattāy*). Therefore, acting in films is *not* an issue, and it is clear that it will not compromise women's family life…. They realize the beauty of good cinema will give rise to devotion (*bhakti*), knowledge, and values. They also realize that cinema is not a space that gives rise to prostitution (*vipacāram*). (43)

In this chapter, I examine how the forces of various kinds of Indian nationalisms came to bear on representations of dance in the cinema and the effects that such representations had on stage performances of Bharatanāṭyam between the late 1930s and the 1950s. The first half of the chapter focuses on threads of Gandhian nationalism and the vernacular Tamil "Indianism" in the dance-related cinema work of some prominent writers and film directors. The second half of the chapter specifically examines morality and the pedagogic dimensions of the gendered discourse of Bharatanāṭyam-on-screen, with a focus on how Bharatanāṭyam's unique "classicism"—which I term *celluloid classicism*—cannot be understood without reference to the central place of nation and nationalism, morality, and religion in its earliest instantiations as a modern cultural form.

GANDHIAN NATIONALISM, CINEMA, AND THE ARTS

I would like to begin with the figure of M.K. Gandhi (1869-1948). Gandhian politics became deeply rooted during the Madras Presidency between the 1920s and the 1940s, and, as I hope to demonstrate below, it became the the anchor for the distinctly Brahmanic bourgeois cultural nationalism that framed the emergence of Karṇāṭak music and Bharatanāṭyam dance as "classical" arts during the twentieth century. Gandhi's relationship with the arts and with cinema in particular is densely complex. When it

comes to his role in the formation of modern Bharatanāṭyam, he is squarely at the heart of the *devadāsī* abolition debates of the late 1920s. Davesh Soneji's recent work has demonstrated the extent to which Gandhi himself was invested in wider discussions about morality and womanhood in colonial South India and even Ceylon; in both places, *devadāsī* women become the ground upon which he staged such discourses for well over a decade (Soneji, "Siva's Courtesans," *Unfinished Gestures*). As Soneji shows, Gandhi's preoccupation with the supposed moral lack represented by the non-conjugal sexuality of *devadāsī* women meant that he could not accommodate them in his anticolonial political struggle, despite their desire to join him; he was also unable to view them as suitable citizens of the postcolonial nation (*Unfinished Gestures* 133). It is the trace of suspicion around the moral dimensions of the performing arts that follows in his deliberations on the cinema.

As Urvi Mukhopadhyay has argued in a recent essay, Gandhi's antagonistic relationship with the cinematic medium was full of contradictions about not only the medial form but about modernity itself:

> …At the same time, his position visibly hardened when it came to the question of the cinematic medium. Gandhi never acknowledged the cinematic medium as an emerging popular and effective means of mass communication. When in 1927 the Indian Cinematograph Committee approached him for his opinion about the state of Indian films along with a questionnaire, Gandhi showed his disdain for the medium by calling cinema a "sinful technology." (418)

The notion of the "sinful" nature of cinema, as discussed in Chapter III, also becomes a major trope in Tamil vernacular writing. Gandhi's thoughts on the dubious morality represented by the cinema are iterated time and time again. Take, for example,

his famous words to the Indian Cinematograph Committee of 1927: "…I have never been to a cinema. But even to an outsider, the evil that it has done and is doing is patent. The good, if it has done any at all, remains to be proved" (qtd. in Dwyer, "The Case of the Missing Mahatma" 349). Gandhi forever remained morally skeptical about the cinema, even as dozens of films were being made about him during his own lifetime. As film historian Theodore Baskaran has noted, between 1930 and 1932, the state archive records show that thirteen documentaries about Gandhi, mostly produced in Madras, were banned (*The Message Bearers* 200 n.49). Thus, although Gandhi himself eschewed the film medium, it is clear that large numbers of people—perhaps especially in South India—were keen on gathering documentary material about Gandhi through that same medium.

Despite Gandhi's general aversion to new medial forms, the one cultural form that remained central in his political imaginaire was music. In contrast with dance, which was explicitly connected to courtesan communities in both north and south India, music, by the 1920s, had already moved beyond the specters of courtesan cultural production and into the hands of non-hereditary nationalist practitioners. For example, the Marathi Brahmin music reformer Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (1872-1931), who started one of India's earliest systemic "nationalization" projects for music in North India—the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya school for "classical" music, which was established in 1901 in Lahore—also joined Gandhi. In 1921, Lahore performed the famous devotional song (*Bhajan*) *Raghupati Rāghav Rājārām* ("King Rāma, Scion of the Raghu Clan") at a rally in Ahmedabad for Gandhi, and the song subsequently became one of Gandhian

nationalism's most cherished anthems and, by extension, a kind of "national song" (Bakhle 165). The affective potential of music in its various forms was itself a cornerstone of Indian nationalism during the early decades of the twentieth century, even as various forms of music were simultaneously under severe censure, appropriation, and even criminalization. This is perhaps most obvious in the anti-nautch movement, which dislodged professional hereditary female musicians from the public sphere.

Far more straightforward is the question of institutional forms and practices related to music in Madras city. The Madras Music Academy, which was discussed at length in the previous chapter, emerges directly out of the Indian National Congress. In 1927, the Indian National Congress held a meeting in Madras, where S. Satyamurthi (1887-1943), a famous Brahmin lawyer and member of the Madras Legislative Assembly, requested that Congress organize an "All-India Music Conference" to coincide with Congress' annual meeting. In December of that year, such a conference was held, and it was suggested that Congress support the creation of an institution for music in Madras. Thus, the Madras Music Academy was formally inaugurated on August 18, 1928, by eminent Brahmin politician and lawyer Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer (1879-1966).[94] This organization clearly had its roots in the type of cultural nationalism represented and deployed by Gandhi and the Congress, and it had grave consequences for the life of Bharatanāṭyam dance during the post-1930s period.

"BHĀRATI NĀṬYAM" AND BHARATANĀṬYAM: THE POET SUBRAMANIYA BHARATI'S IMPACT ON DANCE AND CINEMA

> *āṭuvōmē paḷḷu pāṭuvōmē āṉanta cutantiram aṭaintu viṭṭōm eṉṟu* ||
> "Let's dance, let's sing, proclaiming that we have achieved ever-blissful freedom!"
> —C. Subrahmaniya Bharati (1882-1921; also danced in the film *Nam Iruvar* [1947])

It would be very difficult to move forward in this discussion of dance and nationalism in 1930s Madras without addressing the question of Tamil politics and the ways in which regional identity politics flow into the realm of popular culture. In the section that follows, I track the representation of nation and region in Tamil cinema and Bharatanāṭyam through the performance of choreographed versions of the poems of the Tamil nationalist poet C. Subramaniya Bharati (1882-1921). Bharati's poetry anchors much of modern Bharatanāṭyam dance in its emergent phase precisely because it addresses the constituent issues of nation, religion, gender, and caste, which were so central to the discursive and somatic reinvention of the dance. Bharati's songs are complex from this standpoint. On the one hand, they deploy strong anticolonial nationalist sentiment, harking to an imagined notion of the nation-as-goddess (Bhārata Mātā) and yet also addressing "real" social issues, such as women's education. In this section, I make connections between the new medial appropriations of Bharati's poetry in Madras city and politics of both nation (India) and region (Tamilnadu), which were at their height during the 1930s.

The discovery and enunciation of the "Dravidian" and "Indo-Aryan" language groups during the nineteenth century gave rise to a distinct political force in the Tamil-

speaking regions of India that is often glossed by the term *Dravidianism* (Trautmann, *Languages and Nations* 103). It is significant, however, that "Dravidianism" is not at all a homogenous or monolithic category. In her definitive work on Tamil language politics entitled *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891-1970*, historian Sumathi Ramaswamy addresses the complex politics of *tamiḻpaṟṟu* or "devotion to the Tamil language" during the same period being examined here. Ramaswamy establishes that Tamil nationalisms around 1920 were multiple and heteroglossic.

From Ramaswamy's work emerges an analysis of three ideological streams that approached Tamil language and civilization from varying perspectives. Each of these ideologies were politicized and exerted considerable influence in the public sphere. As will be demonstrated later in this chapter, each also had its unique perspective on Tamilnadu's relationship to the rest of India at a time when questions of anticolonial nationalism were paramount. The first fraction consists of those whom Ramaswamy glosses as "neo-Śaivas," who dwell on the inherent divinity of the Tamil language draw their inspiration from Śaiva religious reforms that stressed the important of recovering a "pure Tamil" religion that was devoid of Sanskrit or "Āryan" influence. Historian Ravi Vaithees has recently written a masterful work on Maṟaimalai Aṭikaḷ (1876-1950), one of the chief ideologues of neo-Śaivism. The division includes those Ramaswamy calls the "classicists," who, following the work of European Orientalists who had recently "discovered" Tamil texts, deployed Tamil as a marker of civilizational glory and as an ancient language on par with Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin. The "classicists" differed from

European Orientalists, who largely saw Tamil as a vernacular language; thus, the classicists sought to definitively establish it as a "classical language" (*uyartaṉic cemmoḻi*). The third group—and the one that is most relevant for this discussion of Bharati—is that of the "Indianists," who framed their love of Tamil in terms of their love for India, often invoking the idea of a "mother tongue" and "nation-as-mother" in the same breath. As Ramaswamy puts it, "Negotiating gingerly between…the shoals of pride in the nation (*tēṣāpimāṉam*) and pride in their language (*pāṣāpimāṉam*), Indianism reminded Tamil speakers that the liberation of Tamil would have to proceed in tandem with the liberation of India" (*Passions of the Tongue* 48). It is noteworthy that the members of this group largely came from upper-caste (often Brahmin) backgrounds and often allied themselves with pan-Indian Gandhian/Congress politics by the 1920s and 1930s, unlike the neo-Saivas and "classicists," who identified with regional politics and were largely non-Brahmin. Moreover, Ramaswamy notes how some "Indianists" cast doubts on the discourses of "pure Dravidianism" put forth by the classicists and argued that there "was always a place for Sanskrit" in Tamil civilization (*Passions of the Tongue* 49).

The nationalist poet C. Subramaniya Bharati is perhaps the best exemplar of this final category. Bharati was born into a Tamil Brahmin family on December 11, 1882, in the town of Ettayapuram, near the city of Tirunelveli. He was married at the age of fourteen to Chellamma, a girl who was seven, as per the custom of child marriage in Tamil Brahmin families at the time. He was educated in Varanasi, where he learned

Sanskrit, Hindi, and English. Upon his arrival back to Madras, Bharati joined as Assistant Editor of the *Cutēcamittiraṉ*, a Tamil newspaper, in 1904. He joined the Indian National Congress and supported its militant wing along with figures like Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920; also known as *Lokmanya Tilak*) and Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950). In 1908, when faced with the threat of possible arrest, Bharati fled to the French state of Pondicherry; he generated his most creative poetic and political output from this location. In 1918, he re-entered India and was arrested and jailed for several weeks, until he was released through the intervention of Annie Besant. Throughout his life, he was in touch with a wider, pan-Indian nationalist network.[95] Tilak, Aurobindo, Gandhi, and Sister Nivedita (born Margaret Noble, a Western disciple of the protonationalist leader Swami Vivekananda) were all associates of his, and he produced some of the earliest Tamil translations of their speeches. He died unexpectedly in Madras city in 1921 at the age of 39.[96]

Although Bharati did not live long enough to see his poems enter the world of cinema, it is certainly true that his poems were among the most ubiquitous songs to appear in the early Tamil cinema (see table 4-1). Bharati's poetry, which circulated through the very dense nationalist networks represented by both print culture and performance, also became part of the semiosis of Tamil cinema within just four years of its earliest instantiation.[97]

Year	Film	Poem	Music
1935	*Menaka*	*vāḻka nirantaram vāḻka tamiḻ moḻi*	T.K. Muthuswamy
1940	*Uttama Puthiran*	*ceṅtamiḻnāṭṭenum pōtinilē*	S. Velsamy
1947	*Nam Iruvar*	*1. āṭuvōmē paḷḷu pāṭuvōmē* *2. veṟṟiyeṭṭu dikkum*	R. Sudarsanam
1948	*Vedhala Ulagam*	*1. ōṭi vilayāṭu pāppa* *2. tūṇḍir puḻuviṉai pōl* *3. vacam ulla pūparipēnē* *4. koṇṭu kuliviṉai pōl* *5. tīrāṭṭa vilayāṭu piḷḷai*	R. Sudarsanam
1949	*Vazhkai*	*pārata camutāyam vāḻkavē*	R. Sudarsanam

Table 4-1. Some of the earliest (pre-1950) films to incorporate the poems of Subramaniya Bharati.

The first known Tamil film to incorporate the songs of Bharati is *Menaka* ("The Heavenly Courtesan Menakā," 1935). The poem chosen here is *Vāḻka Nirantaram Vāḻka Tamiḻ Moḻi* ("Prosper Forever, May the Tamil Language Prosper"), a song that places the politics of Tamil language devotion into a wider "pan-Indian" notion of civilizational grandeur. During this early phase, the songs of Bharati appear alongside a host of other songs that profess Gandhian "Indianist" nationalism.[98]

Unlike the earlier films, the film *Nam Iruvar* ("We Two," 1947) consciously markets itself as a film that features Bharati. One advertisement explicitly announces it as follows: "Coming! Bharathi in Talkie! Hear the National Songs of the Immortal Poet in AVM Productions' *We Two.*" *Nam Iruvar* will be addressed in greater detail later in this chapter as part of the discussion of the figure of the Brahmin dancer-actress Kamala Lakshman. For now, I would like to focus on another concrete example of the integration of Bharati's poems into Bharatanāṭyam from an archival source dated 1939. This is a

spread in the Tamil magazine called *Hanuman,* written by an anonymous author, that features the *devadāsī* dancer-turned-acttress T.M. Pattammal in an article entitled "Bharati Natyam" (*Pārati Nāṭṭiyam*), a wordplay on the term *Bharatanāṭyam* (see fig. 4-1).

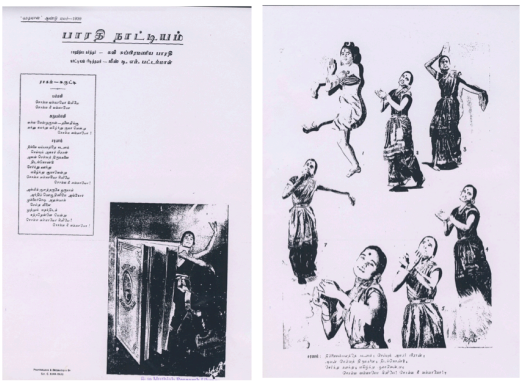


Fig. 4-1. Two pages from a four-page spread of T.M. Pattammal entitled "Bharati Natyam (*Pārati Nāṭṭiyam*)," showing her dancing to the Bharati poem *Colla Vallāyō Kiḻiyē* ("Will You Be Able to Tell, My Bird?"). *Hanumāṉ* (Āṇṭu Malar, 1939, p. 44, 46). (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.)

T.M. Pattammal (dates unknown) came from a *devadāsī* community in the town of Thirukkazhukundram. She was learning dance from Thirukkazhukundram Turaicāmi Naṭṭuvaṉār (dates unknown), who was also teaching Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai. Ramaiah Pillai later started teaching Pattammal. She became known as his first student (Sundaram, *Marapu Vaḻi* 235). It is not clear how she entered the cinema, but she acted in at least two films in 1939: *Jothi* ("Flame," 1939) and *Maya Macchindra* ("Matsyendranātha, the

Magician," 1939), which was inspired by the earlier Hindi/Marathi film of the same name. The original *Maya Macchindra* was produced in 1932, and it was one of the first Indian films to use "special effects" technologies.[99] The poem by Bharati that Pattammal dances to in the magazine spread, entitled *Colla Vallāyō Kiḻiyē,* is in the genre of *kiḻi-pāṭṭu* ("songs to the *kiḻi* or parrot"). In the poem, the lovelorn heroine speaks to a parrot, which is a symbol of erotic love. She asks the parrot to act as a messenger (*dūta*, *tūtaṉ*) and to carry a message to her beloved. In the spread, Pattammal is depicted in a set of photographs that capture explicitly, though gesture, moments from the poem. In one shot, which is a representation of the line in which the god Śiva is invoked, Pattammal dresses as Śiva and assumes the pose of Śiva-Naṭarāja. This poem is perhaps one of those to which Bharati himself assigned a *rāga* (tonic scale), since the *rāga* Curuṭṭi is listed here in 1939, and this is the way the song is rendered in all concerts of Karṇāṭak vocal music today. The text of the poem, as it is reproduced in the spread, is as follows:

> Pallavi
> Will you be able to tell him, O *kiḻi*,
> *will you be able to tell?*
>
> Anupallavi
> Ask the Lord Murukaṉ holding the lance,
> to come and talk to all of us.
>
> Caraṇams
> Ask the darling son of the
> Lord who Dances in Cidambaram (Śiva-Naṭarāja),
> to come here, join us, and be filled with joy

How could he have completely forgotten
what happened that day at dusk
near the water lily pond
amidst the jasmine plants there?

Ask him to recall the beautiful words he spoke
while we were walking hand-in-hand in the desert,
while he uttered an oath to me,
with his lance as witness.

Many of Bharati's other poems, such as the very famous *Ciṉṉanciṟu Kiḷiyē* ("Darling Little Parrot") were performed first in the cinema and then later adapted to stage performances of music and Bharatanāṭyam. *Ciṉṉanciṟu Kiḷiyē* first featured in the 1951 film *Manamagal* ("The Bride"), which, among other things, was the debut film for the dancer-actress Padmini, who will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. In the film, the song is rendered by the playback vocalists M.L. Vasanthakumari (1928-1990; from the *devadāsī* community) and V.N. Sundaram. Although these poems are not nationalist in content, the fact that they are works of Bharati—and explicitly named as such—draws audiences into the political world through aesthetics. Bharati's poems (e.g., *Colla Vallāyō Kiḷiyē, Ciṉṉanciṟu Kiḷiyē)* are thus imbued with nationalist significance due to their authorship and their allegorical or symbolic value as "women's songs" or "*bhakti* [devotional] poetry," both of which are front-and-center literary forms deployed during late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Indian nationalism. The presence of Bharati's poems in the worlds of early twentieth-century Bharatanāṭyam and Tamil cinema index the role of bourgeois nationalism in the crafting of both of these medial forms. The gendered focus—the idea of woman-as-nation, the sexual morality of female

citizens of the nation, and female education—anchors Bharatanāṭyam and the early Tamil cinema in the larger political debates and framework of middle-class nationalism in early twentieth century India.

THE BOURGEOIS PEN: DANCE IN THE WRITER'S IMAGINATION, GANDHIAN NATIONALISM, AND THE CASE OF "KALKI" KRISHNAMURTHY

The early Tamil cinema also cannot be divorced from the writings of another major bourgeois nationalist figure, Ramaswamy Aiyer Krishnamurthy, who wrote under the pen name Kalki (1899-1954). Kalki is significant for this study because he, like K. Subrahmanyam and other Brahmin elites in Madras, was at the epicenter of a new form of cultural nationalism that was staged through intermedial strategies. Although Kalki functioned primarily as a writer, his work flows through popular print culture and enters the modern Tamil theater, the cinema, and even stage performances of Bharatanāṭyam. Kalki is also significant because Gandhian nationalism—and Indian nationalism more generally—is in fact mobilized in Tamilnadu through his intermedial interventions, much as it is through K. Subrahmanyam's films.

Kalki was born in the village of Puttamangalam in Thanjavur district. Early in his life, he met Gandhi, and he later met the Gandhian politician C. Rajagopalachari (1878-1972; also known as Rajaji), both of whom deeply inspired him. In 1923, he moved to Madras, where he began writing in the Tamil literary magazine *Navasakti* (A. Ramnarayan 73). He also translated Gandhi's autobiography into Tamil under the title *Cattiya Cōtaṉai* ("Test for Truth") and he was heavily involved in the production of

anticolonial literature that drew heavily from the idioms of Gandhian nationalism. A large part of Kalki's popularity as a writer and political commentator came from the fact that his writing crossed genres and forms:

> A multi-faceted writer who took on each aspect of the nationalist challenge to British rule, Kalki employed different pen-names (ten in all) under which he successfully experimented with different genres for popular magazines: he wrote fiction as Kalki, nonfiction as Raki, and reviewed the arts under the pseudonym Karnatakam. The pseudonyms afforded [Kalki] Krsnamurti the opportunity to perform a variety of identities for his audiences.... (A. Ramnayaran 8)

He wrote extensively for one of the most widely read middle-class Tamil magazines, *Ānaṉta Vikaṭaṉ.* In 1941, together with T. Sadasivam (the husband of the *devadāsī* artist M.S. Subbulakshmi), he created one of the most widely distributed magazines in the history of Tamil print, which was also called *Kalki*.[100] The startup funds for *Kalki* magazine were raised through screenings of the film *Savitri* (1941), in which M.S. Subbulakshmi reluctantly played the role of the mythical male sage Narada (A. Ramnayaran 77).

In addition to writing serialized novels and reviews of stage Bharatanāṭyam performances, Kalki was also actively involved in the world of the early Tamil cinema, even before he started *Kalki* magazine. During the late 1930s, he wrote a serialized novel in the magazine *Ānaṉta Vikaṭaṉ* called *Tiyākapūmi* ("Land of Sacrifice"), which had questions of Brahmin identity, untouchability, and anticolonial nationalism at its heart. In 1939, the proprietor of *Ānaṉta Vikaṭaṉ* magazine, S.S. Vasan (1904-1969), decided to finance and distribute a film version of *Tiyākapūmi,* with K. Subrahmanyam as director. The musician Papanasam Sivan played the male lead, while K. Subrahmanyam's second

wife, S.D. Subbulakshmi (who was discussed at length in Chapter II) played the female lead. After running for twenty-two weeks, the film was banned by the British Government in India for its alleged anticolonial and pro-Congress stance.[101] Kalki's next major venture in the world of cinema was the scripting of the film *Meera* (1945), which was about the sixteenth-century Rajasthani female saint Mīrābāī.[102] Kalki wrote the script and also penned many of the lyrics for the songs included in the film. The film was produced by Kalki's magazine partner, T. Sadasivam, and featured Sadasivam's wife M.S. Subbulakshmi (1916-2004) in the title role as Mīrābāī. The film was directed by the American filmmaker Ellis R. Dungan (1909-2001). It was so popular that, in 1947—just two years after its original release—it was partly remade, partly dubbed into Hindi, and rereleased nationally. In 1955, Kalki's novel *Kalvaṉiṉ Kātali* ("The Thief's Lover"), which originally appeared as a serialized novel in *Ānaṉta Vikaṭaṉ* in 1935, was made into a Tamil film of the same name, *Kalavanin Kathali.*

Kalki's proximity to the projects of Brahmin cultural custodianship in the twentieth century is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in his celebrations of the "post-revival" Bharatanāṭyam in Madras and his incorporation of dance- and music-related themes into his own work.[103] In 1944, Kalki wrote one of his monumental novels, *Civakāmiyiṉ Capatam* ("Civakāmi's Vow"), a historical romance about the seventh-century Tamil king Narasiṃhavarman and a fictional courtesan named Civakāmi.[104] By the time he wrote this novel, Kalki was already somewhat of a literary celebrity in the world of the early Tamil cinema, and his thoughts immediately turned to making the

novel into a film. Kalki apparently approaches Rukmini Arundale to play the role of Civakāmi. Akhila Ramnarayan narrates the incident as follows:

> …Kalki asked Rukmini Devi Arundale, a controversial practitioner of south Indian dance who founded her own dance academy Kalakshetra in 1936, to play the character of Civakami on film…. In invoking this figure, Kalki's sole aim appears to be the valorization of the form itself for his target audience, largely brahminical and middle-class. In 1936, Kalki wrote a glowing review of a performance by Rukmini Devi Arundale held at the Theosophical Society in Madras, exclaiming: "When Srimati Rukmini Devi Arundale took the stage, for one second, one wondered whether the performance was set in the heavens…. To gain greatness in a chosen art form is not just a matter of pride in its achievement nor the desire to achieve perfection. Each and every art form has some aspects that cannot be learned through diligence, [aspects] that are instinctively known. Rukmini Devi has been endowed with this intrinsic ability in the realm of dance." (qtd. in Sunda 366). Having established Arundale's closeness to divinity, a kind of eulogizing that repeatedly accompanies Civakami's performance in the novel, Kalki remarks approvingly: "Her attire and ornaments were tastefully chosen, befitting the occasion. The costume and ornamentation was in accordance with the ancient traditions of the Tamil people; however, the new was intermingled with the old…. [Her costume] was comfortable enough for dance moves, yet when you observed her in motion, it seemed as though a figurine carved by a sculptor in ancient times had come to life" (qtd. in Sunda 366-67).... Kalki is here a strong advocate of innovations in costuming and performance that he naturalizes as "tasteful," appropriate, and pleasing to the eye, aesthetic and moral categories acceptable to the brahmin palate. (87-88)

Ramnarayan also relates an incident in which Kalki reluctantly went to watch a dance performance by T. Balasaraswati at a wedding in Madras, after which he is convinced of the superiority of Bharatanāṭyam over new medial forms such as the modern cinema, even while he locates the dance in the emergent intermedial cultural world of 1930s Madras. At the same time, he also casts Balasaraswati as an *exceptional devadāsī* artist, enabling him to carefully maneuver around his own moral implication in the act of watching a performance of *devadāsī* dance:

> The descendant of a centuries-old musical and performance lineage patronized by the Tanjore court, Balasaraswati first performed in Kalki's presence at a wedding. Kalki and T.K.C went to see her unwillingly…. "At the time, T.K.C. and Kalki opposed this dance form. They were shocked that it was being performed at a wedding. However, after the kutcheri [concert] they changed their views. After witnessing the kinds of shastras [texts] and traditions contained in the art, they said, 'This art form, with its rich evocations of rasa, has evolved out of the most elevated creative realms; along with the aesthetic response it generates, it is capable of eliciting emotions relating to the divine in the most sophisticated manner'" (qtd. in Sunda 364). Kalki writes of the same performance in 1933: "When I watched Veenai Dhanammal's granddaughter Balasaraswati dance…I realized that she was one performer in Tamilnad who had extraordinary ability…. In modern times, when comparing [this art to] western cinema and talkies and the kinds of dancing we view in them, it is obvious that Bharata Natyam easily outclasses the rest." (qtd. in Sunda 365)

The figure of Kalki is one very concrete example of the emergence of a distinctly Tamil Brahmin cultural nationalism in which Brahmins are understood almost exclusively as custodians and brokers of the arts. This kind of bourgeois Brahmanic nationalism becomes the long-standing and paradigmatic framework in which the arts are understood, institutionalized, and consumed for much of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

K. SUBRAHMANYAM AS FILMMAKER *AND* PATRON OF DANCE

Some aspects of the life of K. Subrahmanyam were discussed in Chapter II, where his "second wife"—S.D. Subbulakshmi from the *devadāsī* community—was also introduced. In the section that follows, however, I would like to elaborate on Subrahmanyam's engagement with nationalism through the cinema and dance. As an iconic filmmaker whose life and work have been memorialized by the nation,

Subrahmanyam has also been the subject of a recent English-language biography by M.R. Rangarajan entitled *K. Subrahmanyam: A Biography.*

K. Subrahmanyam was born on April 20, 1904, in the village of Papanasam near the town of Kumbhakonam, to the eminent Brahmin lawyer C.S. Krishnaswamy Iyer and his wife Venkatalakshmi. Anecdotally, it is known that, as a child, he studied the Brahmin ritual theater form known as Bhāgavata Mēḷa Nāṭakam.[105] Although I do not wish to rehearse his whole life story here, it can be found in the book by Rangarajan mentioned above as well as in *Nrithyodaya Jubilee Commemoration Volume* by Kannan and Kannan (28-32). I would like to focus here on two important aspects of Subrahmanyam's work as a filmmaker: 1) his involvement in the production of films focused on nationalism and issues of social "reform"; and 2) his unfinished project *Narttaṉa Muraḷi* (1945), a film about dance and its consequences for the institutionalization of dance in Madras.

Subrahmanyam gave up a potential career in law after completing a degree at the Madras Law College to take up a position as Assistant Director to Raja Sandow (1895-1943) on some of the earliest silent films produced in South India during the 1930s. He comes into his own by the late 1930s, when he makes films on somewhat unconventional themes such as *Balayogini* ("The Ascetic Girl Child," 1937), which offered some commentary on caste discrimination, child marriage, and the treatment of widows (Baskaran, *The Message Bearers* 131-132). One of Subrahmanyam's monumental films was *Sevasadanam* ("House of Service," 1938). This was based on a Hindi novel by

Munshi Premchand called *Sevasadan* (1918), which was subsequently translated and serialized for publication in S.S. Vasan's magazine *Ānaṉta Vikaṭaṉ*.[106] In 1938, Subrahmanyam bought the rights for the film from Vasan for Rs. 4000, the highest amount paid in South India for such a purchase at the time (Pillai, *Madras Studios* 152). However, Subrahmanyam's most well-known and most feted film was inspired by Kalki's novel of the same name, *Thyagabhoomi* ("Land of Sacrifice," 1939). This film drew heavily from Gandhian nationalist ideology, and it also addressed issues surrounding discrimination against Dalits. The protagonist is a Brahmin "reformer" named Sambhu Sastri (played by the Brahmin musician Papanasam Sivan) who is called "the Gandhi of Tamilnadu" in the film (Baskaran, *The Message Bearers* 138). In the film, the protagonist is depicted as a musician who goes to Madras in search of a job as a music teacher, while his granddaughter is depicted as a child dancer. Not only does the film affirm music and dance's links to Brahmins and Gandhian notions of the utopic nation-state, but it also links these art forms to religion. Indeed, the end products (and success) of elite nationalist projects of cultural "recuperation" can clearly be seen here. Throughout the film, Sambha Sastri's Gandhian project of reform receives divine ordination from a goddess called Ambika. In the words of Baskaran, "As a filmmaker conscious of the religious and social background of his audience, Subrahmanyam established his credibility by affirming his faith in God and religion. Moreover, the anti-caste appeal of the film gained greater impact from the fact that most of the team who worked on the film were Brahmins" (*The Message Bearers* 138). Subrahmanyam's

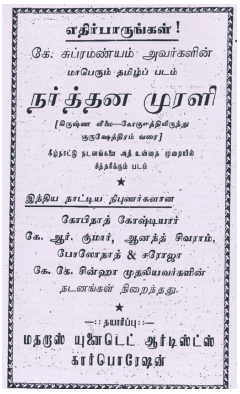
cinematic interventions, which were widely understood as "social breakthroughs," thus cannot be divorced from their location in the project of bourgeois cultural nationalism and the heavily Brahmin-inflected contours of this project in 1930s Madras.

It is against this backdrop that I would like to shift focus to Subrahmanyam's relationship to dance, specifically through a discussion of an unfinished film called *Narttaṉa Muraḷi* ("The Dancing Flute," 1945). The film remained unfinished due to the outbreak of World War II. Like the film *Jalaja* (1938), which was examined in Chapter II, *Narttaṉa Muraḷi* would have been one of the earliest films entirely about dance. Unlike *Jalaja*, however, *Narttaṉa Muraḷi* emerged at a time when Bharatanāṭyam was becoming a "respectable" pastime for young upper-caste women; it also occurred at a time when Bharatanāṭyam's symbolic framework had been fully reworked and Bharatanāṭyam was becoming understood as India's "national" dance form. In *Jalaja*, the central role played by religion in representations of Bharatanāṭyam was evident: in the final scene, the *devadāsī* heroine sublimates her identity into that of the dancing god Śiva-Naṭarāja; *Narttaṉa Muraḷi* affirms a similar representation. *Narttaṉa Muraḷi* is actually a cluster of mythological narratives about the god Krsna, which are represented through the various "classical" dance styles of India. By 1945, when Subrahmanyam conceived of this project, Bharatanāṭyam, Kathak, Manipuri, and Kathakali had all been marked by the term *classical,* having been brought into the ambit of the cultural discourse of a "national cultural revival." Subrahmanyam thus envisaged *Narttaṉa Muraḷi* as film that would bring all of these dance forms into dialogue, in a move that parallels the

state's philosophy of "national integration" that comes into occupy center stage during the period of Nehruvian nationalism from the late 1940s onward (see, for example, Parekh 78).[107]

As has already been demonstrated, Subrahmanyam's ties to dance and music run quite deep, and they are also key elements of his personal life, including his own training in Bhāgavata Mēḷa Nāṭakam as a child and his intimate relationship with the *devadāsī* artist S.D. Subbulakshmi. The film *Narttaṉa Muraḷi* also represents a somewhat mature phase in the "classicization" of the arts; by this time, Kalakshetra has been established in Madras, dance is being taught at a number of private institutions across India, and state-sponsored patronage of the arts is clearly on the horizon. Subrahmanyam himself eventually is involved in such state-sponsored cultural activities during the post-1947 period.[108]

Unlike the sources available for *Jalaja*, archival references to *Narttaṉa Muraḷi* are very few and far between. I have only been able to trace one advertisement for the film (see fig. 4-2), and, to my knowledge, no songbook for the film exists. I draw, therefore, on ethnographic conversations with Subrahmanyam's daughter, Padma Subrahmanyam (b. 1943) for information about the film.


எதிர்பாருங்கள்!

கே. சுப்ரமண்யம் அவர்களின்

மாபெரும் தமிழ்ப் படம்

நர்த்தன முரளி

[பெருஷ்ண லீலை—கோகுலத்திலிருந்து

குருக்ஷேத்திரம் வரை]

கீழ்நாட்டு நடனங்கள் அத்தனையும் முறையாக

சித்தரிக்கும் படம்

★

இந்திய நாட்டிய நிபுணர்களான

கோபிநாத் கோஷ்டியார்

கே. ஆர். குமார், ஆனந்த் சிவராம்,

பேபலோநாத் & சரோஜா

கே. கே. சின்னா முதலியவர்களின்

நடனங்கள் நிறைந்தது.

★

—:: தயாரிப்பு ::—

மதுரன் புனாடெட் ஆர்டிஸ்ட்ஸ்

கார்பொரேஷன்

Fig. 4-2. Advertisement for the film *Narttaṉa Muraḷi* ("The Dancing Flute") directed by K. Subrahmanyam, *Pēcum Paṭam* magazine (March 1945, p. 6). (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

Padma Subrahmanyam clearly understands her father as a cultural nationalist, and she presents him as a steward for "the essence of Indian culture, which for him meant the classical arts." She outlined how her father aligned "classical" dances from various regions of India with various scenes in the film *Narttaṉa Muraḷi.* From the standpoint of Bharatanāṭyam's twentieth-century history, this move brought Bharatanāṭyam into conversation with other dance forms and reified the new narrative of the "pan-Indian" nature of the performing arts, thereby allowing Bharatanāṭyam to flow—through new institutions and new visual representations—into conversation with other regional cultures of India:

> He was a revolutionary—he spoke against caste and child marriage and also spoke about supporting the freedom and liberation of women and other socially relevant issues. But he was very sensitive and conscious about the essence of Indian culture, which for him meant the classical arts. He wanted to produce and direct a full dance film called *Narttaṉa Muraḷi*. They rehearsed for one year. This

> was supposed to be one of the first films entirely about dance and was to be made simultaneously in Tamil and Hindi, from Madras. He conceived the movie with various episodes from [the god] Kṛṣṇa's life being interpreted through the various classical dance styles of India. So, for example, the lullaby for Kṛṣṇa was supposed to be in the Maṇipuri dance style, whereas the episode of his liberating the demoness Pūtanā was supposed to be in Kathakaḷi style. One hundred dancers were trained by six or seven dance teachers for a year. The teachers and choreographers for the film included Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai and Kuttralam Ganesan Pillai for Bharatanāṭyam, Guru Gopinath for Kathakaḷi, Guru Kamini Kumar Sinha for Rabindra Nṛtya, Kumaran Aasan for folk dance, and Guru Gadhak and Guru Bhola Nath Sharma for Kathak. All these masters were brought to Madras. *Narttaṉa Muraḷi* was quite an ambitious project!

Padma Subrahmanyam also described to me how the shelving of *Narttaṉa Muraḷi* was inadvertently the reason for the birth of the dance school created by K. Subrahmanyam, which Padma now heads:

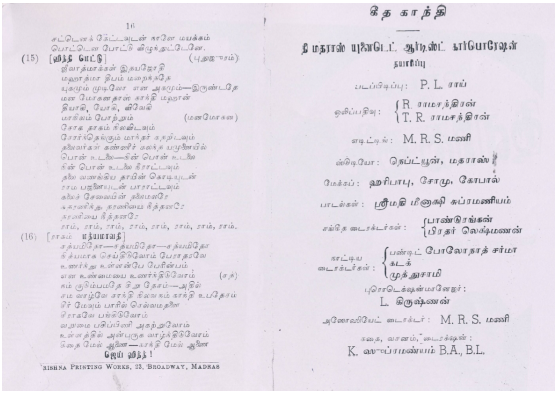
> *Narttaṉa Muraḷi* was not produced because World War II broke out and film was not available. Chennai had to be evacuated. There was a bombing. The music was done by a variety of composers, including a man named Parthasarathy Iyengar (for the Bharatanāṭyam pieces) and Moti Babu (for the Hindustani part), and the lyrics were composed in both Tamil and Hindi. My father had his film company called Madras United Artists Corporation. Even before All India Radio had a *vādya vṛṅda* (orchestra), my father had a classical Karṇāṭak *vādya vṛṅda*, from the 1930s until the war broke out, consisting of thirty musicians. The musicians were all on the payroll of [the Madras United Arts Cooperation], which also cut records. The rehearsals used to take place on Kutcheri Road. When the government declared that Madras had to be evacuated, he told his musicians to return to their villages. My father himself was thinking of going back to his native village Papanasam or my mother's native place, Nagapattinam. All his artists and technicians said, "We'll all stay with you, we won't leave you." He was very paternal in nature, truly loving with no axe to grind. So over 200 people went with him to his village and they were all living together. He made them start teaching music and dance to the people in the village. And that's how my school, Nrithyodaya, was born. When he returned to Madras, he established Nrithyodaya here. He made it so that students could learn dance for free. At that time, in 1942, he thought training in Bharatanāṭyam was becoming too expensive! Can you imagine?

Finally, Padma addressed the afterlives of the incomplete film *Narttaṉa Muraḷi,* stating that the famous dancers from Kerala known as the "Travancore Sisters"—Lalitha (1930-1982), Padmini (1932-2006), and Ragini (1937-1976)—began to use the soundtrack of the film in their own stage performances of Bharatanāṭyam "dance-dramas" during the 1950s:

> So *Narttaṉa Muraḷi* was never made. There were posters though, and the movie was advertised. Our school had a performing wing called "Natana Kala Seva." It was in that institution that the sisters Lalitha, Padmini, and Ragini were constantly featured. They used all the songs from *Narttaṉa Muraḷi* for their own performances. Their dance-dramas "Krishna Tulabharam" and "Parijatapaharanam" featured music and lyrics from my father's unmade film *Narttaṉa Muraḷi*. So although the film was never released, thanks to the trio, its songs and music continued to live on the proscenium stage.

Other elements of *Narttaṉa Muraḷi* also survived in one of K. Subrahmanyam's last films, *Geetha Gandhi* ("Song of Gandhi," 1949), which was completed and released in 1949. This film featured his daughter, Padma, playing the role of the child-god Kṛṣṇa at the age of five. It melded aspects of Hindu mythology with Gandhian nationalism, a strategy that would become a mainstay of popular Bharatanāṭyam in the decades that followed. Fortunately, the songbook for *Geetha Gandhi* still exists (see fig. 4-3), and it states that two choreographers for the film—Pandit Bholanath Sharma and Ghadak—were scheduled to choreograph for *Narttaṉa Muraḷi,* whereas another *naṭṭuvaṉār* is listed only as "Muttucuvāmi," a reference to V.S. Muthuswami Pillai (1921-1992; he will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter V). The songbook also is peppered with nationalist slogans such as *Jai Hind* ("Victory to India").

Therefore, in the figure of K. Subrahmanyam, it is evident how Gandhian nationalism, dance, and the institutionalization of dance and dance pedagogy were linked through the culture of cinema making. Subrahmanyam's legacy ironically did not live through the cinema, but it survives most potently through the dance career of his daughter Padma, who today blends forms of Hindu nationalism with dance and presents a vision of Bharatanāṭyam's past that is rooted in Sanskrit texts, Brahminic Hinduism, and the idea of a Hindu nation.[109]



10

(15) [விந்தி செட்டு] (புதுராகம்)

(16) [ராகம்: மத்யாவதி]

BISHNA PRINTING WORKS, 13, BROADWAY, MADRAS

கீத காந்தி

தி மதராஸ் யுநைடெட் ஆர்டிஸ்ட் காபோரேஷன்
நயர்வு

படப்பிடிப்பு: P. L. ராய்

ஒளிப்பதிவு: R. ராமசந்திரன் / T. R. ராமசந்திரன்

எடிட்டிங்: M. R. S. மணி

லிரிக்ஸ்: நெல்லட்டியன், மதராஸ்

மேக்கப்: ஹரிபாபு, சோமு, கோபால்

பாடல்கள்: ஸ்ரீமதி மீனாக்ஷி சுப்ரமணியம்

சங்கீத டைரக்டர்கள்: பாண்டுரங்கன் / பிரதர் லெக்ஷ்மணன்

நாட்டிய டைரக்டர்கள்: பண்டிட் பேரோராரத் சர்மா / கடக் / முத்துசாமி

பிரொடக்ஷன் மானேஜர்: L. கிருஷ்ணன்

அலைவரிசைட் டைரக்டர்: M. R. S. மணி

கதை, வசனம், டைரக்ஷன்: K. லக்ஷ்மணன் B.A., B.L.

Fig. 4-3. The songbook of *Geetha Gandhi* (1949), mentioning the names of choreographers and the nationalist chant "Jai Hind" (*Jēy Hint!*). (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

HOME, NATION, AND RELIGION: KAMALA AND THE MAKING OF BHARATANĀṬYAM AS POPULAR VISUAL ICON

As has already been demonstrated, by the end of the 1930s, dance had entered the visual space of the cinema in an almost ubiquitous and seamless manner. If the seeds of

nationalism were sown through dance in cinema through films like *Jalaja* and the early films of K. Subrahmanyam during the 1930s, the 1940s marked the entrance of Kamala Lakshman (b. 1934) onto the scene. Kamala's dance repopulated the aesthetic canvas of Bharatanāṭyam dance. Her dance was markedly different; it was athleticized and virtuosic in a new way. Perhaps more importantly, however, Kamala's dance was inextricably yoked to representations of home and nation in distinctly palpable ways. In the section that follows, I track a small number of Kamala's vast representations of Bharatanāṭyam dance on screen to illustrate how the new form of Bharatanāṭyam she came to represent came with nationalist strings attached. In other words, it could not be understood without the discursive and performative scaffolding of nation, womanhood, and religion that came to be the signposts of the new Bharatanāṭyam.

Figures such as Kamala served to visually relocate the dance in a mythical cultural imagination that displaced the dance's real social historical connections to the courtesan community, and they also enforced a social bifurcation of women who were performing dance in the 1930s and 1940s. In the North Indian context, Usha Iyer has referred to this bifurcation as the performative "spaces of the Bai and the Devi" ("Film Dance" 132), with the term *bāī* ("lady") referring to courtesans and the term *devī* ("goddess") being self-consciously appended onto the names of non-courtesan performers in the twentieth century as a sign of respectability. Iyer deploys the *devī* paradigm to refer to figures such as Vyjayanthimala (b. 1933), who are among the earliest generation of upper-caste dancing actresses from South India to perform in the Hindi

cinema. In South India, Kamala undoubtedly occupies such a role. Kamala's cosmopolitan Brahmin identity, coupled with her apprenticeship under the *naṭṭuvaṉār* Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai, set the aesthetic pace for staged performances of Bharatanāṭyam in Madras. It was her work that persistently straddled the stage and cinema (not that of Rukmini Arundale and Madras' intellectual elites) and that brought Bharatanāṭyam to South India's middle class in the 1940s. In that sense, Kamala has become an inconic figure in the worlds of both cinema and reinvented Bharatanāṭyam.[110]

Kamala Lakshman's debut in cinema was as a child actress in the film *Valibar Sangam* ("Association of the Youth," 1938), in which she performed a single dance. Meanwhile, at the Madras Music Academy—an institution that thought of itself as an organ of the Congress Party—a handful of *devadāsīs* were performing in public as part of that institution's attempts to "save the baby from the bathwater." In other words, they were hoping to save Bharatanāṭyam from *devadāsīs,* whose lifestyles were simultaneously being criminalized by the Madras Legislative Assembly. The same year that *Valibar Sangam* was released, a *devadāsī* named Balachandra performed at the Academy. It is in this visual and performative public space of urban consumption that, perhaps even more forcefully than in the legal debates around *devadāsī* reform, the tensions between women's sexuality, domesticity, caste, and aesthetics were foregrounded in a palpable way.

Kamala (also known as Kumari Kamala, before her marriage) was born into a Tamil Brahmin family in 1934 and trained in dance as child, beginning around age four,

in Bombay.[111] When she and her family moved to Madras, she trained with the *naṭṭuvaṉār* Muthukumara Pillai (1874-1960) and later with Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai (1910-1991), eventually becoming a "poster child" for the Vazhuvoor "school" of Bharatanāṭyam, which was really only perpetuated by Ramaiah Pillai.[112] The Kamala-Ramaiah Pillai pairing was extremely popular on urban stages, and Ramaiah Pillai himself was conscious of the snowball effect that Kamala's dance had on Madras audiences. He choreographed the *pāmpu naṭaṉam* ("snake dance"), the *kuṟatti* ("gypsy dance"), and even the ninth-century saint-goddess Āṇṭāḷ's Tamil poems on her, and these were consumed in large doses by urban elites. Indeed, these images—the snake dance, the Āṇṭāḷ dance, and so on—were also simultaneously depicted in cinema (see Chapter VI). It was this "new" Bharatanāṭyam that embodied identifiable resonances between the stage and screen and that "popularized" the form among middle-class women.

In 1947, the same year that India became independent, Kamala acted in a film entitled *Nam Iruvar* ("We Two"). Among other things, this film celebrated the independence movement and the figure of Gandhi in particular. Indeed, the marketing for the film—as seen in the rare image reproduced here as fig. 4-4—prominently displayed the scene inwhich Kamala garlands a statue of Gandhi while dancing.

Fig. 4-4. Advertisements for the film *Nam Iruvar* ("We Two," 1947). (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.)

The song *Makāṉ Kāntiyē Makāṉ* ("Gandhi is Great!") remains one of the most popular sequences in the entire film; it is regularly broadcast on Tamil TV channels, especially on occasions such as Independence Day and Republic Day. The sequence opens with a shot of a framed painting of Bharat Mata (the nation as goddess), a ubiquitous visual symbol that makes the link between women, religion, and nation concrete and ever present in the popular imagination (Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation* 72). The camera then pans to an image of Kamala, who holds a garland in her hand and hums a tune. Like the poster for the film, this clip speaks to several registers: nation, gender, caste, class, and aesthetics. Kamala, who is seen in the midst of middle-class domestic markers—a spacious home, Western-style furniture, and a radio—garlands a home shrine that is dedicated to Gandhi while interpreting a patriotic song through *abhinaya*. By this point, dance has already been brought "into the home." It has become a symbol of what Partha Chatterjee describes as the "inner world" or the home

(*ghar*), which is the space of the ideal female citizen in nationalist rhetoric (Chatterjee 119-121).

The film *Nam Iruvar* also includes a song by Subramania Bharati, *Āṭuvōmē Paḷḷu Pāṭuvōmē* ("Let's Dance, Let's Sing, Proclaiming That We Have Achieved Ever-Blissful Freedom!"), which is perhaps one of the most spectacular moments in the film. This sequence mobilizes the visual and symbolic vocabulary of Gandhian nationalism in unprecedented ways, and Kamala—literally dancing on, in, and through this semiotic world—weaves Bharatanāṭyam into its fabric. The sequence is unique in that a doubling technology makes it appear that there are twin Kamalas dancing throughout the song. The "two Kamalas" dance to backdrops that consist of images of the early Indian flag (marked with Gandhi's spinning wheel), the map of India with an image of Bhārat Mātā inscribed in the middle, a map made of glowing oil lamps, and then, finally, the god Śiva-Naṭarāja, who stands in as a symbol of both nation and religion (see fig. 4-5).

Fig. 4-5. Kamala dances *āṭuvōmē paḷḷu pāṭuvōmē* against the backdrop of the map and Bhārat Mātā in *Nam Iruvar* (1947). (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

Through a number of other films, Kamala traverses the full spectrum of cultural nationalisms in South India. Although the sequences in *Nam Iruvar* actualize a Bharati-Gandhi nationalist matrix, other sequences explicitly foreground the "Tamilness" of the arts in an attempt to offer commentary on Tamil populist politics. In the film *Manthirikumari* ("The Minister's Daughter," 1950) (see fig. 4-6), the last Tamil film directed American filmmaker Ellis Dungan, Kamala performs the song *Icai Tamiḻē Initāṉa* ("There is No Joy Greater Than That of Tamil Music").[113] The film itself stars M.G. Ramachandran in the lead and was written by M. Karunanidhi, both of whom would later go on to become Chief Ministers of Tamilnadu in the 1970s and 1980s. The film is loosely based on the fifth-century Tamil Buddhist epic text *Kuṇṭalakēci*, and it had what Randor Guy once described as a "strong political slant" in its explicit celebration of the Tamil past ("Manthirikumari (1950)"). Kamala's song and dance for *Icai Tamiḻē Initāṉa* also enables Bharatanāṭyam to be incorporated into an emergent "new generation" Dravidianist politics during the 1950s.

Fig. 4-6. Kamala performs the song *Icai Tamiḻē Initāṉa* ("There is No Joy Greater Than That of Tamil Music") in the film *Manthirikumari* (1950). *Kuṇṭūci* magazine (July 1950, p. 26). (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.)

Although so much more could be said about Kamala and her associations with bourgeois nationalist representations of Bharatanāṭyam through the 1940s and early 1950s, I now turn to a film that was made long after Kamala was a recognized celebrity, after she had acted in Hindi films, and also after she had made a very successful career as a Bharatanāṭyam dancer. One of Lakshman's most memorable films was the big-budget Tamil film *Konjum Salangai* ("A Little Jingle of the Dancing Bells," 1962). This film is effectively the "end product" of Kamala's career. It is a complete and near-watertight rescripting of Bharatanāṭyam's history and a radical reformation of its aesthetics; more generally, it reflects a new and explicitly religious spirit that was beginning to dominate the dance's representation and continues to do so up to the present.

Set in nineteenth-century South India, *Konjum Salangai* presents a kind of fantasy world of temple dance and music in resplendent technicolor. The film was directed by

M.V. Raman (1913-?), and the music was composed by M.S. Subbaiah Naidu (1914-1979). The narrative of the film revolved around the love triangle between a young handsome musician (played by actor Gemini Ganesan [1920-2005]), a temple singer (played by actress Savitri [1937-1981]), and a temple dancer (played by Kamala). All three characters represented professional artists from the *devadāsī* community, which by 1962 had reinvented itself as the politically mobile *icai vēḷāḷar* caste.

Kamala plays a *devadāsī* in this film. A woman from a real *devadāsī* background, Kuchalakumari (who was discussed in Chapter II), plays her nemesis. In one scene in the film (see fig. 4-7), Kamala and Kuchalakumari are pitted against each other in a dance competition set in an elaborate palace ornamented with giant images of the dancing Śiva-Naṭarāja. After a sequence that includes both dancers drawing images of animals with their feet after dipping them in colored powder, there is a long and somewhat boisterous rhythmic sequence in which Kuchalakumari loses the competition and Kamala is celebrated for her dancing prowess, which is perhaps a fitting evocation of Bharatanāṭyam's social history. Indeed, Kamala's vigorous, athletic dancing—which will be described in greater detail in the discussion of Ramaiah Pillai in Chapter V—was unmatched by any dancer before her. The point I wish to make here is that this kind of dancing *simply did not exist* before Kamala's appearance on screen.

Fig. 4-7. Screen capture of Kamala *(left)* and Kuchala Kumari *(right)* in the dance competition sequence from *Konjum Salangai* (1962).

In addition to a new kind of highly athleticized virtuosity, sequences from *Konjum Salangai* also provided audiences with commentary on Bharatanāṭyam's past. Arguably the most popular song and dance sequence in the film is *Kāṇa Kaṇ Kōṭi Vēṇṭum* ("You Need a Million Eyes to See") (see fig. 4-8). The lyrics of the song and the choreography are in praise of localized Hindu deities: Śiva at the Chidambaram temple, Viṣṇu at the Srirangam temple, the goddess Mīnākṣī at the Madurai temple, Murukaṉ at the Thiruchendur temple, and, finally, the female saint-goddess Āṇṭāḷ at Srivilliputtur and Srirangam. In the last of these sequences, Kamala dresses as Āṇṭāḷ, which by this time was already an established feature of her stage performances of Bharatanāṭyam.[114] The sequence was choreographed by another popular *naṭṭuvaṉār,* Karaikkal Dandayudhapani Pillai (1923-1974), who was a contemporary of Lakshman's teacher Ramaiah Pillai.

Fig. 4-8. Screen capture of Kamala in two scenes from the song *Kāṇa Kaṇ Kōṭi Vēṇṭum* in the film *Konjum Salangai.* On the left, she plays a *devadāsī* with her music troupe; in the scene on the right, the *devadāsī* is dressed as the saint-goddess Āṇṭāḷ.

This song dramatizes a particular narrativization of Bharatanāṭyam's past that had already occurred by the 1950s and 1960s. The song and the scene present Bharatanāṭyam as "essentially" religious. The scene portrays a transhistorical "temple dance" that projects Bharatanāṭyam away from its uncomfortable social history in local *devadāsī* communities. This rendition of the dance allies it closely with nationalist reinventions and historicizations that occurred during the 1930s and 1940s. The cinematography—particularly the use of new camera techniques and quick-paced edits—accentuated the visual appeal of the dance. Audiences were now transported to sets that resembled the localized temple shrines of various Hindu deities. In fact, this dance sequence could be read as a kind of a virtual temple "pilgrimage." Tamil audiences saw a *darsan*—a sacred vision—of a "pure, golden age" of dance that was once associated with temples.[115] The title and refrain of the song ("You need a million eyes") imply not just seeing god but

also beholding the dance in the nation's Hindu imagination and in the imagination populated by the local shrines of Hindu deities and temple dancing.

The film also comments on the aesthetics of *devadāsī* dance by strategically deploying satirical representations of the older conventions of dance. The scene depicts the *mēḷam* style of presentation in which the *devadāsī* performed in front of musicians who stood at the back of the performance space. This convention was employed by *devadāsī* troupes until the time of Kandappa Pillai (1899-1942), teacher of T. Balasaraswati, who had the orchestra sit on the side of the performance space; this practice was adopted by Rukmini Arundale, and it persists into the present. The *mēḷam*-style presentation was meant for temple or court environments in which the audience was gathered around the dancer who, during the course of her performance, would rotate a full 360 degrees. Mimicking this convention, in this sequence, the exaggerated facial expressions and body language on the part of the musicians are shown. These caricatures represented the *devadāsī* community as fundamentally unsophisticated, crude, and ultimately as unfit citizens of the modern nation. Kamala, however—whom audience members know to be simply "playing" a *devadāsī*—stands apart. Her virtuosic movements, the religious nature of her dancing, and her public persona as a "top" Bharatanāṭyam dancer all enforce this idea. This reading is clear in relation to the previous clip: Kuchalakumari, the loser in the dance competition sequence, is one of "them."

As seen above, the hybridity that affected transformations of Bharatanāṭyam dance at that time was also seen in the picturization of *Konjum Salangai*. These transformations were part of a new way of thinking about Bharatanāṭyam as a malleable form that was not limited by non-Brahmin castes or the *devadāsī* community. The dance and music sequences in *Konjum Salangai* enabled elite audiences to claim Bharatanāṭyam for themselves: the dance was read as a sign of a transhistorical religious past. Even if there *were devadāsīs* and *naṭṭuvaṉārs* in that past—like the dancer Kuchalakumari and choreographer Dandayudhapani Pillai—they are clearly not the focus. Kamala, on the other hand, represents the "reclaimed" Bharatanāṭyam. Many of the songs from movies such as *Konjum Salangai* became extremely popular on stage and continue to be presented as signs of cultural nostalgia on television game shows featuring "classical dance."[116] Indeed, Bharatanāṭyam's domestic avatar was implicated in a larger world of Indian nationalism that brought women, religion, and patriotism together in new ways. It is at this intersection of modernity and mythology that Kamala's performance of hybridized Bharatanāṭyam has to be situated.

Kamala's implication in the recasting of Bharatanāṭyam as a nationalist and religious art form in the twentieth century runs deep. In her stage performances, Kamala performed and popularized a number of devotional songs that went on to become popular numbers of modern Bharatanāṭyam. One of these was *Tāyē Yacotā,* which she included her performance in the Tambaram Sangeeta Sabha in Madras on January 14, 1951.[117] In an interview that she gave to a popular South Indian entertainment website, Kamala tells

the interviewer that she regularly teaches dances from her films to her students at her dance school Sri Bharata Kamalalayam in New Jersey, where she immigrated in 1980. She specifically identifies the nationalistic songs of Subramania Bharati that she danced in the films *Nam Iruvar* (1947) and *Vedhala Ulagam* (1948) as well as the song *Nātar Muṭimēlirukkum* ("Snake Dance") from the film *Digambara Samiyar* (1950).

DANCING DOMESTICITY: "GOOD WIVES" AND DIDACTIC REPRESENTATIONS OF NATIONALIZED WOMANHOOD

> Mother India [Bhārat Mātā] was partly modeled on the "new" mother presiding over the reformed urban middle-class household hesitatingly emerging in different parts of colonial India, itself imitative of Victorian domesticity but yet not sacrificing the essential "tradition" and "spirituality" of an authentic (Hindu) past. This in turn, meant more than ever as nationalism gathered strength, that the representative Indian women's dominant function was the production and reproduction of the nation itself, with her primary identity that of motherhood. It also meant that the nation's women had to remain essentially, authentically, and *visibly* "Indian," even Hindu. (Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation* 238)

As has been shown in the example of the poetry of Bharati, representations of women as keepers of tradition and metonyms for the nation circulated widely in early twentieth-century Tamil cinema. Caste and class were also integral parts of this moral representation. "Good" women were almost always shown as being *both* upper caste *and* middle class. A palpable anxiety around morality characterized the reinvention of dance in Madras during the 1930s, and this anxiety also becomes entrenched in the pedagogical program of Bharatanāṭyam as a middle-class expressive form. Therefore, I would like to shift to a discussion of two examples that clearly illustrate this nexus of morality, caste, and class and that also foreground another dimension of dance in the cinema: its didactic or pedagogical value. The archive records the intersection of aesthetics and moral

pedagogy in fragments such as the statement below, in which bourgeois brokers of culture juxtapose Rukmini Arundale's "positive" reinvention of Bharatanāṭyam with the "atrocious" aesthetics of *devadāsī* dance. This is immediately followed by a recommendation that the "new" Bharatanāṭyam be institutionalized in Madras' public school system for girls:

> Fortunately, Bharatanāṭyam still has some respectability. But those people who claimed that they were going to make changes have still not done so yet. Based on the recent Bharatanāṭyam concert of Mutturatnambal, it is clear that one can still see the atrocious dress and the overall aesthetics [of the presentation] have marred the quality of the dancer's skill. Knowledgeable dance connoisseurs and leaders should come together and make some positive changes to the costumes, design, stage decor and presentation of the dance. To this end, Smt. Rukmini Devi Arundale has been setting a great example. People should certainly follow this and take her lead. Furthermore, as the Chief Minister of Madras [C. Rajagopalachari] says, all girls should be taught dance and music, and if this happens, every home will resound with *caṅkītam* (*saṅgīta*, music and dance). To this end, all girls should learn dance and music in their schools as part of their daily curriculum. This also will inevitably improve the mental faculties of these girls, as well the physical well-being of their bodies. (Anonymous, *Āṭal Pāṭal* 1938 25-26)

The concern over women's bodies, the control of those bodies, and, most importantly, the control of the representation of those bodies remains central to both staged and cinematic stagings of Bharatanāṭyam in the post-1930s world. The *devadāsī* performer who is derided here, Tirunelveli Mutturatnambal (1892-1964), ironically performed at the Madras Music Academy on December 27, 1937. This is likely the performance referenced above, although many of her performances were otherwise considered as contributing to the making of Bharatanāṭyam a "palatable" dance to the middle classes (see fig. 4-9).

Fig. 4-9. Tirunelveli Mutturatnambal (1892-1964), who performed at the Music Academy on December 27, 1937. (Courtesy B.M. Sundaram.)

Returning to the pedagogical underpinnings of the reinvented Bharatanāṭyam for women, I wish to turn to two later (1950s) Bharatanāṭyam pieces in the cinema. In both of these representations, the lyrics are meant to be deeply internalized by the viewing public. At least one of these songs made a regular appearance in Bharatanāṭyam dance recitals in Madras during the late 1950s, thereby enforcing the fact that the moral registers of the cinema and stage versions of Bharatanāṭyam were constantly in intimate dialogue during this period.

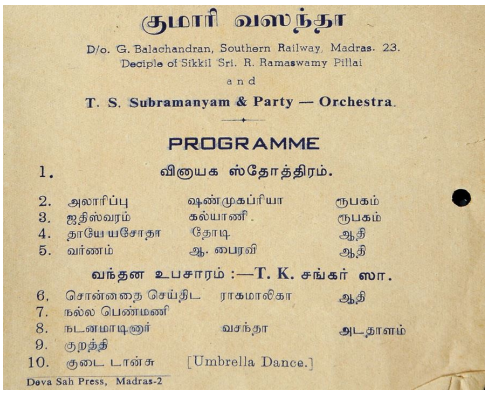
The first example is from the film *Manamagal* ("The Bride," 1951).[118] It is significant that, by this time, Bharatanāṭyam had been a middle-class, upper-caste, expressive form for close to a decade and a half. Thus, it is not surprising to see that questions of upper-caste women's morality have come to occupy center stage and that this upper-caste morality also became an aspirational marker for women from other communities. Indeed, in this sequence, the song is put into the mouth of Kuchalakumari,

an actress from a prominent Thanjavur-based *devadāsī* family that was discussed in Chapter II; Kuchalakumari also performed with Kamala in *Konjum Salangai.* This song from *Manamagal* also sits alongside a poem by Subramaniya Bharati, which is also featured in the film *Ciṉṉanciṟu Kiḷiyē* ("Darling Little Parrot"). The song itself, titled *Nalla Peṇmaṇi* ("She is a Jewel Among Women"), was written by the film lyricist Udumalai Narayana Kavi (1899-1981), and it is clearly didactic: it tells young women how they should behave as citizens of the new Indian nation:

> [Listen!] She is a jewel among women
>
> The one who follows the customs of her Motherland,
> She is a jewel among women
>
> The one who awakens at the first call of the rooster,
> The one who bathes and cleanses her body of dirt, who washes her clothes,
> The one who attends school from dawn to dusk,
> The one who cultivates good habits and reads many books,
> She is a jewel among women
>
> The one who makes it a habit to help her mother and cook rice,
> "First she must do her chores and only then can she rest."
> She mustn't waver from these wise words uttered by her father.
> The one who embodies good qualities like patience and grace everyday,
> She is a jewel among women

Although such didactic songs about women's morality are somewhat ubiquitous in Indian cinema across regions throughout the twentieth century, what makes this piece unique is that its relationship to Bharatanāṭyam runs deep. The text conveyed through the gestural language of *abhinaya* in Kuchalakumari's performance in the film, and the song continued to have an an extra-filmic life that carried over into stage performances of Bharatanāṭyam. Fig. 4-10 shows the program notes from a Bharatanāṭyam concert of

Kumari Vasanta, a disciple of the *naṭṭuvaṉār* Sikkil Ramaswamy Pillai (1876-1972), on July 12, 1959, in Madras. She performs this piece on stage as part of a regular Bharatanāṭyam performance, during the second half of the concert, in lieu of the erotic song genres of *padam* or *jāvaḷi* that would normally be featured during this part of a performance. Indeed, the erotic repertoire has disappeared from this performance almost completely, and it has been replaced by a song devoted to the dancing Śiva (*Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār*), a "gypsy" dance (*kuṟatti*), and the "umbrella dance" (*kuṭai ṭāṉcu*), which are discussed in greater detail in Chapter VI. The iteration of the film song *Nalla Peṇmaṇi* in this context is significant, because it maps the ways in which the moral registers of Bharatanāṭyam have changed by the 1950s: courtesan pieces disappear in favor of pieces that explicitly express a non-courtesan sexual morality. Although much of mainstream Bharatanāṭyam accomplishes this by sublimating sexuality into devotion or by foregrounding mythical women figures (e.g., Sītā, Draupadī, Ahalyā, other "chaste women" or *pativratās*), this song features the middle-class woman herself as protagonist and scripts these discourses onto her through a new, mediatized Bharatanāṭyam.



குமாரி வஸந்தா

D/o. G. Balachandran, Southern Railway, Madras. 23.
Deciple of Sikkil Sri. R. Ramaswamy Pillai
and
T. S. Subramanyam & Party — Orchestra.

PROGRAMME

1. விநாயக ஸ்தோத்திரம்.

2.	அலாரிப்பு	ஷண்முகப்ரியா	ரூபகம்
3.	ஜதிஸ்வரம்	கல்யாணி	ரூபகம்
4.	தாயே யசோதா	தோடி	ஆதி
5.	வர்ணம்	ஆ. பைரவி	ஆதி

வந்தன உபசாரம் :—T. K. சங்கர் ஸா.

6.	சொன்னதை செய்திட	ராகமாலிகா	ஆதி
7.	நல்ல பெண்மணி		
8.	நடனமாடினார்	வசந்தா	அடதாளம்
9.	குறத்தி		
10.	குடை டான்சு	[Umbrella Dance.]	

Deva Sah Press, Madras-2

Fig. 4-10. The film song *Nalla Peṇmaṇi* (item no. 7) included in a stage dance performance by Kumari Vasanta, disciple of Sikkil Ramaswamy Pillai, on July 12, 1959, in Madras. (Courtesy Davesh Soneji.)

The second example, which appears two years after the song from *Manamagal*, comes from the film *Panam* ("Money," 1953). The song, which was written by the same lyricist, Udumalai Narayana Kavi, is entitled *Kuṭumpattiṉ Viḷakku* ("Light of the Family"). Similar in tone and texture to the song just discussed, this song is performed by the dancer-actress Padmini Ramachandran, who is not from the *devadāsī* community. The text of this song, too, is heavily didactic in nature, outlining the characteristics of the "ideal (new, Hindu) woman."

> The light of a good family,
> she is the light of the family.
> Woven into the family as a mother, just as thread is woven into a *sari,*
> she is the light of the family.
> Living in a country where women like her are praised by everyone,
> she is the light of the family.
> Doing her housework, no matter how busy she is,
> she is the light of the family.
> Intelligence quick as that of a fish,

she is the light of the family.
She doesn't gossip or spend time in others' homes,
she is the light of the family.
She never attracts negativity from others,
she is the light of the family.
Of flawless moral character, no one doubts her,
she is the light of the family.
She raises her children with the best habits,
she is the light of the family.
She is always praised by her mother-in-law,
she is the light of the family.
She always delights the heart of her husband,
she is the light of the family.
She stands, serves, and respects her husband's relatives when they come home,
she is the light of the family.
She excels in protecting her family's name and moral character,
she is the light of the family.

These songs push the boundaries of the question of the "function" of Bharatanāṭyam in cinema. Not only does Bharatanāṭyam embody bourgeois nationalist propaganda through women's bodies, but it also becomes a medium through which the highly gendered language of what Kalyani Devaki Menon calls women's "everyday nationalism" lives through didactic constructions of an upper-caste, middle-class, utopic femininity (74). This "prescriptive" nature of Bharatanāṭyam, which voices the deep patriarchy of Indian nationalism, holds one key to its success as a persistent and popular form through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Nationalist symbolism and affect has been so thoroughly woven into Bharatanāṭyam that its gendered language and somatic vocabulary echoes that of nationalism itself.

BRAHMIN DANCER-ACTRESSES AND THE ASPIRATIONAL AESTHETICS OF BHARATANĀṬYAM

I end this chapter with some deliberations on the power of the "new" form of Bharatanāṭyam represented by figures like Kamala and the ways in which it paved the road for what I will call the "aspirational aesthetics" of today's Bharatanāṭyam. I propose that the bourgeois cultural nationalism of the sort encountered here, embodied and disseminated through both cinematic and stage versions of Bharatanāṭyam, shaped the national consensus on notions of "the classical" between the 1930s and the 1950s. New class- and caste-based orientations and aspirations were in fact scripted into the aesthetics of the "new" nationalist Bharatanāṭyam. Although other scholars have referred to these new aesthetics as a kind of "Brahminic" taste habit (Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures* 2012), I would extend this idea to say that it was not only "Brahminic" in the sense that it was perpetuated and embodied almost exclusively by Brahmin women, but it also encoded "aspirational" or upwardly-mobile meaning. Non-Brahmin women who were not *devadāsīs* and who came from relatively upper-caste backgrounds (e.g., Tamil-speaking Mutaliyārs and Nāyars from Kerala) sought to emulate the aesthetics of new Bharatanāṭyam. In addition, they worked together with Brahmin dancers to fortify Bharatanāṭyam's social exclusivity through the language of "the classical," with all of its religious, nationalist, and reformist aesthetic inflections.

The on-screen dancing of Kamala Lakshman undoubtedly represented a kind of social intervention. Before Kamala, very rarely would Brahmin women—or women not associated with the popular theater known as *icai natakam*—perform in public. However,

it would be wrong to assert that Kamala was the "first" Brahmin woman to be known for her dancing in films. A case in point is the little-known actress T. Prabhavathi, who was born in 1924 in Trichur, Kerala to Ramanatha Iyer and Chellamal, both of whom were from the *smārta* Brahmin community (see fig. 4-11).

Fig. 4-11. A still of T. Prabhavathi (1924-?) dancing in the Kannada-language film *Samsāra Naukā* (1948). *Kuṇṭūci* magazine (January 1950, p. 71). (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.)

Very little information is available about Prabhavathi, but it is known that she danced Bharatanāṭyam in a number of films before Kamala entered the scene. I have been able to trace one archival source that features her in the film magazine *Kuṇṭūci* from 1950. This feature provides perhaps the only available biographical information about her training in dance, and how she, as a Brahmin actress, came to represent Bharatanāṭyam on screen before the 1950s.

> When she was 6 years old, she underwent training in Kathākālakṣepam (Harikathā) from Krishna Bhagavatar. She went to many villages [performing Harikathā] under the name of "Trichur Rukmini." Her sister would accompany her on vocals. Blessed with a beautiful singing voice, Prabhavathi also learnt music from "Kaviñar" Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai and Palaghat Nataraja Vadyar. She also underwent training in Harikathā from the late S.S. Mani Bhagavathar. She has not performed Kathākālakṣepam for a long time, excepting a few performances that included *Vatsalā Kalyāṇam*. She felt incorporating *abhinaya* into Kathākālakṣepam performances would make it appealing to a wider audience, and would make her work more accessible. For this, she went to study under [the *devadāsī* performer] Mylapore Gauri Ammal [1892-1971]. Noting her natural flair for *abhinaya*, her beautiful face and her supple body, Gauri Ammal encouraged her to also formally learn Bharatanāṭyam. In fact, Prabhavathi herself had dreamt of learning Bharatanāṭyam since she was a child. So she began learning from one Kannappa Nattuvanar [dates unknown]. After six months of arduous training, she performed her debut (*araṅkēṟṟam)* at Chembur Railway Institute (in Kerala). After this she also performed at the [Indian] Fine Arts Academy [in Madras]. She then went on to perform in many towns and people immensely appreciated her dancing.
>
> All this praise of her dancing, naturally led film producers to gravitate towards her. Will the film folk keep quiet when there is a talented girl dancing? Invitations to act in films came pouring in. Her first film was *Vipranarayana*, produced by Gopalakrishna Talkies. Incidentally it was also the first movie of Telugu actress Suryakumari…. She is currently acting in Jupiter Pictures' *Krishna Vijaya* as Radha. Because of her busy schedule in films, she was not able to dance Bharatanāṭyam much. However recently, she has been back to presenting recitals of Bharatanāṭyam again. Having lost her parents at a young age, she lives with [her] sister in Chennai. She is fluent in Tamil and Malayalam and also knows some English. She practices very good etiquette and the fact that she is from an upper-class family shines through in how she behaves and acts. Endowed with a beautiful face and amazing dancing and acting skills, she has acted in nine films so far… (Anonymous, "Ṭi. Pirapāvati" 58-63)

In this excerpt from the feature about Prabhavathi, it can be seen very clearly how there is a direct juxtaposition of a narrative about her training in dance, a summary of her work in the cinema, and an explicit foregrounding of her moral virtues, which are understood to be rooted in her upper-class—which can be read as "upper-caste"—

background. Indeed, it is figures like Prabhavathi, straddling the early worlds of cinematic and stage performances of Bharatanāṭyam, who enable the entrance of figures like Kamala into these professional worlds.

A chapter such as this would not be complete without a mention of the star Brahmin dancer-actress Vyjayanthimala (b. 1933). Like Kamala, Vyjayanthimala began her career as a dancer, training at first under Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai, who had already established his presence in the Tamil cinema by the late 1930s, and then later under K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai, who was also initially involved in Rukmini Arundale's institution Kalakshetra and who started choreographing for the cinema during the late 1940s. It was in 1949, during one of her stage performances of Bharatanāṭyam, that A.V. Meiyappa Chettiar (founder of AVM Studios in Madras) and the director M.V. Raman saw Vyjayanthimala for the first time; they contracted her for the Tamil film *Vazhkai* ("Life," 1949; remade in Telugu as *Jeevitham* ["Life," 1950] and in Hindi as *Bahar* ["Springtime," 1951]). During the 1950s, Vyjayanthimala continued her dance training under K.P. Kittappa Pillai of Thanjavur. She also continued to dance Bharatanāṭyam, publish books on the subject, and produce commercial audio recordings of Bharatanāṭyam music alongside her rise to superstardom in the Hindi cinema from the 1950s to the 1970s.[119] Usha Iyer's work on film dance and female stardom in the Hindi cinema has produced an excellent analysis of Vyjayanthimala's role in producing a particular kind of reproducible dance vocabulary for the Hindi cinema, which was based on her training in modern Bharatanāṭyam:

> …Vyjayanthimala's training in and continued performance of the classical dance form Bharatanāṭyam, produced a certain kind of performing body that was employed in a number of costume dramas and the courtesan film genre, and led to the creation of performance spaces [in the form of sets] such as royal courts or the professional stage in order to accommodate her movement vocabulary. Vyjayanthimala's movement vocabulary produced an image markedly imbricated in popular Hindu iconography and extra diegetically, her classical dance training helped create a "clean" star text, more or less insured against scandal and gossip, and served to prop her up an icon of national cultural heritage. (11)

As Iyer notes, Vyjayanthimala (like Prabhavathi and Kamala) straddles the worlds of both screen and stage dance as well as both the South Indian and Hindi cinema industries. Like Kamala, she, too, is "insured" against the kinds of stigma that surrounded hereditary *devadāsī* performers and female drama artists during this period. Iyer's point about Vyjayanthimala's imbrication in nationalist ideologies of "cultural heritage" and the Hindu imagination are perhaps nowhere more obvious than in one of her earliest films, which was made in three languages: *Sangham* ("Confluence," 1953) in Telugu, *Penn* ("Woman," 1954) in Tamil, and *Ladki* ("Girl," 1954) in Hindi. The song that in Telugu is called *Ilalō Sāṭilēni Bhāratadeśam* ("There is No Country Equal to India") is danced by Vyjayanthimala in the same manner in all three versions of the film. The song is divided into three sequences in which Vyjayanthimala is framed against all of the iconic images of "respectable" dancing: an icon of Śiva-Naṭarāja, a map of the nation, and a Hindu temple (see fig. 4-12). It unquestionably harks back to Kamala's spectacular dance for the song *Āṭuvōmē Paḷḷu Pāṭuvōmē* in *Nam Iruvar* (1947), which was examined earlier.

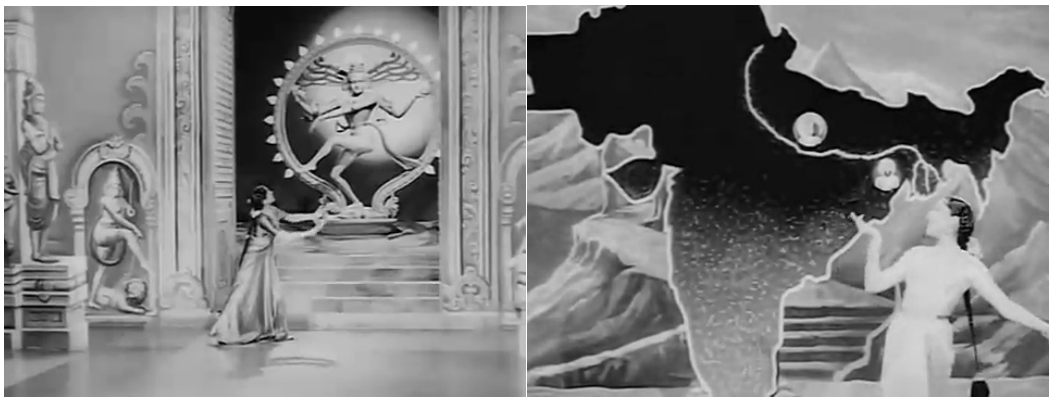


Fig. 4-12. Screen captures of Vyjayanthimala performing the song "Ilalō Sāṭilēni Bhāratadeśam" in the Telugu film *Sangham* (1953). She is framed against the iconic images of "respectable" dancing: Śiva-Naṭarāja, the map of the nation, and the Hindu temple.

Although Kamala and Vyjayanthimala became iconic Brahmin performers who facilitated the caste-bound exclusivity of the new Bharatanāṭyam in public culture, it is another dancer-actress who perhaps best exemplifies the "aspirational" aspect of Bharatanāṭyam's new avatars on stage and screen. This is the figure of Padmini Ramachandran (1932-2006), who was neither a Brahmin woman nor from a *devadāsī* background. Padmini, as she was better known, descended from the Nāyar caste, an upper-caste group that, in the case of Padmini's family, was related to the princely state of Travancore. Padmini, her elder sister Lalitha (1930-1982), and her younger sister Ragini (1937-1976) were eventually known as the "Travancore Sisters" for this reason. They all learned Bharatanāṭyam from the *nattuvanar* Thiruvidaimarudur Mahalingam Pillai (1918-2003) and Kathakaḷi from Perumanoor Gopinath Pillai (1908-1987; also

known as “Guru Gopinath”). Like Vyjayanthimala, Padmini became one of the most famous early South Indian dancer-actresses to perform in the Hindi cinema. In her Tamil films, she often danced to the choreography of the *nattuvanars* Ramaiah Pillai and K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai.

Even though it came relatively late in her career, one of her most popular roles was in the film *Thillana Mohanambal* (“Mōkaṉā Who Dances the Tillāṉā,” 1968), in which she plays the role of a *devadāsī* named Mōkaṉā or Mōkaṉāmpāḷ. This film was based on the Tamil novel of the same name by the Brahmin writer Kothamangalam Subbu (1910-1974).[120] As the work of Indira Peterson (“Rewriting Cultural History”) has demonstrated, the novel and the film offer a new public scripting of the *icai vēḷāḷar* community, in which the art (*kalai*) of men in the community who play the oboe-like reed instrument called *nāgasvaram* is valorized (“Rewriting Cultural History” 261), whereas the figure of the *devadāsī* remains ambiguous and is cast in the a “deeply conservative and reformist” (and Gandhian puritanical) spirit (“Rewriting Cultural History” 260). The filmic version of the novel became famous largely because of its star cast, in which Sivaji Ganesan (1928-2001) played the hero and Padmini the heroine. It was also popular because of its representations of virtuosic *nāgasvaram* performance and Padmini’s highly spectacular dancing, which drew from the aesthetics made popular by Kamala’s “new” form of highly athleticized, fast-paced, and virtuosic Bharatanāṭyam.

As with figures like Kamala and Vyjayanthimala, Padmini—often along with Lalitha and Ragini—continued with the stage performance of Bharatanāṭyam even at the

height of her film career (see fig. 4-13). Often these were performances that, like Kamala's repertoire from Ramaiah Pillai, consisted of traditional genres mixed with "new" or "innovative" pieces. In the program from their 1957 performance in Madras (see fig. 4-14), for example, they perform pieces like the courtly *tillāṉā* alongside the "peacock dance," the "Śiva-Pārvati dance," and even mini "dance-dramas" such as *Pārijātam* (the story of the god Kṛṣṇa gifting the *pārijāta* flower to his consort Satyabhāmā) and *Mīrā* (about the saint Mīrabāī). The themes of these two dramas were undoubtedly chosen because they were the subjects of very popular South Indian films between the 1930s and the 1950s. The program also features the song *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār* (about the dancing Śiva and which is discussed in detail in Chapter VI) and the Kannada-language devotional song *Kṛṣṇa Nī Bēganē Bārō,* which was made popular by the Madras-based *devadāsī* performer T. Balasaraswati). Their repertoire is thus reflective of what might be thought of as "popular Bharatanāṭyam": stage versions of Bharatanāṭyam that draw upon a range of semiotic, textual, and movement registers, including those of the cinema and other imaginings of Bharatanāṭyam in 1930s and 1940s Madras.

Fig. 4-13. *(Left)* Poster for the film *Vinōtiṉi* ("Vinodini," 1949), featuring dances by Padmini and Lalitha. *Kuṇṭūci* magazine (February 1949, p. 7). *(Right)* Still of Padmini from an unknown Tamil film. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

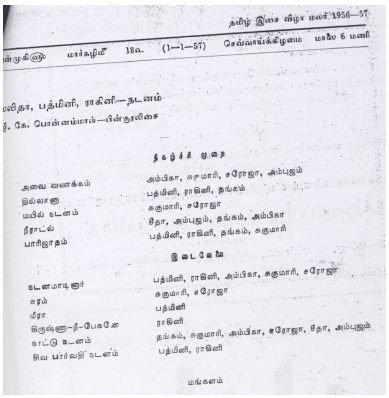


Fig. 4-14. The program listing for a Bharatanāṭyam performance by Padmini, Lalitha, and Ragini in Madras on January 1, 1957, sponsored by the Tamil Isai Sangam. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

In conclusion, I would like to return to the idea of the "aspirational aesthetic" of the dancing of Kamala, Vyjayanthimala, and Padmini, which enables Bharatanāṭyam to

become a popular-yet-"classical" art. The politics of modern Bharatanāṭyam live along this double-reed register of popular yet "classical." Bharatanāṭyam's "classicism" was enunciated and scripted by elite figures like Rukmini Arundale, V. Raghavan, and E. Krishna Iyer. Its popularity was undoubtedly bolstered through its representation in the cinema. However, its cinematic representations have been careful to keep intact certain elements of the dance's discursive and symbolic "classicism" by invoking its ties to religion, nationalism, and by and large eschewing or deriding its sociohistorical roots in courtesan communities. It is this doubling that allows Bharatanāṭyam to travel into new communities and that grants it an aspirational quality in social terms. It is also why, despite Brahminic claims to its custodianship in the present, it is practiced by a range of upper-caste and upper-class groups throughout India. The complex world of modern Bharatanāṭyam's signs and signals—which blends Brahminic stewardship of the arts with devotional forms of religion and counter-narratives about the dance's social roots—cannot be understood without reference to cinematic reifications of this coded world. Indeed, I would suggest that Bharatanāṭyam's claim to classicism can only be understood if it is thought of as a "celluloid classicism." The persistent signposts of its classicism were created not only in the hermetic space of the imagination of the nation's bourgeoisie but also through its interface with the "popular" as it came into being in the age of celluloid. Today's Bharatanāṭyam continues to revere and mobilize these courted signposts, even as much of contemporary Tamil cinema has moved beyond them in today's transnational, post-liberalization India.

CHAPTER V

THE EMERGENCE OF THE "CHOREOGRAPHER" AND A NEW ENVISIONING OF DANCE

This chapter begins by shifting focus onto men related to the *devadāsī* community who commonly took on the professional or semi-professional role of dance-master (*naṭṭuvaṉār*). One of the major arguments of the chapter is that both cinema and the newly reinvented Bharatanāṭyam afforded men from this community (as well as non-hereditary men) new career and financial opportunities at a time when professional opportunities for women were fast disappearing. A second argument is that *naṭṭuvaṉār* participation in the Tamil cinema significantly shaped twentieth-century Bharatanāṭyam. As early as the late 1930s, dance sequences in South Indian cinema required dance-masters, and some men from the *naṭṭuvaṉār* community benefitted tremendously. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, dance in the cinema enabled these same men to participate in the world of modern, urban performances of Bharatanāṭyam on Madras stages.

A large portion of this chapter is dedicated to a study of the life and labor of Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai (1910-1991), an iconic choreographer for the early cinema and Madras' new stage performances of Bharatanāṭyam from the 1930s to the 1960s. Ramaiah Pillai's aesthetic sensibilities set the standard for representations of Bharatanāṭyam-style dances on screen, and these filtered back into stage performances in

Madras. Indeed, Pillai's prime disciple, Kamala Lakshman, seamlessly moved between stage and screen, and the dynamism of Pillai's choreographies on Lakshman was appreciated and deeply internalized by audiences for decades. In addition to Ramaiah Pillai, the chapter also describes four other men from the *naṭṭuvaṉār* community who became renowned choreographers in the cinema and who in turn attracted a range of students, many from abroad, who wanted to learn Bharatanāṭyam from them.

NON-BRAHMIN POLITICS AND ICAI VĒḶĀḶAR MEN

Before the mid-1920s, men who belonged to communities of professional performing artists were usually referred to in Tamil as *mēḷakkārar* ("performers in the *melam* [troupe]"). The term also functioned as a broad umbrella term that could include male musicians who accompanied *devadāsīs* (known by terms such as *pāṭuvār* ["singer"] and *muṭṭukārar* ["player of the *muṭṭu* drum"]), dance-masters (*naṭṭuvaṉārs*), and ritual musicians who played the oboe-like *nāgasvaram* pipe and its accompanying drum, the *tavil*. As the work of Davesh Soneji has shown, these men were sometimes semi-professional artists who also sometimes identified with the barber community (*ampattaṉ*) (*Unfinished Gestures* 145-146). This association with the traditionally low-caste status of the barber meant that men from this community were associated—albeit rather amorphously—with the lower end of the non-Brahmin spectrum of the caste hierarchy in Tamil South India. Caste endogamous marriages were the norm for such men. It is important to remember that *devadāsīs* most often shared intimate relationships with

upper-caste men, and thus the community was necessarily mixed-caste, even as men in the community preferred to marry within the community.

The 1920s saw the development of the mature phase of Tamil Dravidian politics (which was discussed in Chapter IV) and the rise of the work of the radical anti-caste ideologue E.V. Ramasami Naicker (1879-1973; also known as Periyar). The galvanization of anti-caste sentiment under Periyar represented an altogether new social force in Tamilnadu. By the 1930s, this idea had transformed itself into a powerful political presence in the region that offered an alternative to the Gandhian nationalism of the Indian National Congress. Dravidian politics quickly aligned itself with a number of reform projects, and the anti-nautch movement was no exception. Periyar himself wrote extensively about his own anti-*devadāsī* stance, and certainly his successors, who were represented by the architects of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam party, were largely men from within the *mēḷakkārar* community (Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures* 151-152).

This political mobility on the part of men in this community occurred precisely because of the reinvention of *mēḷakkārar* caste identity under the influence of both anti-Brahmin politics and the anti-nautch movement of the late 1920s and early 1930s. During this period, men from this community strategically entered politics by claiming a new caste identity for themselves that allowed them to move out of the amorphous and uncertain umbrella of *mēḷakkārar*. As the work of Davesh Soneji has shown, the archive of Muthulakshmi Reddy preserves a number of documents in which the term *icai vēḷāḷar* ("cultivators of music") is used as a name by which men from the *devadāsī* community

self-identified (*Unfinished Gestures* 143). It is not clear when or by whom this term was invented, but it was in use as early as 1927. This term enabled men to move away from the earlier stigmatized barber status and at the same time allowed them to insert themselves into the larger caste group known as *vēḷāḷars* (i.e., agriculturalists and cultivators), who very unambiguously occupied an upper-caste status among Tamilnadu's non-Brahmin groups. By identifying as *icai vēḷāḷars*, then, men—including traditional *naṭṭuvaṉārs* or dance-masters—re-invented themselves in a new, modern social mold that moved them away from the stigma that still continued to linger among women in this community. By escaping their identification with *devadāsīs*, *naṭṭuvaṉārs* were able to enter not only politics but also the new forces of cultural production in new and very powerful ways, even as almost none of these opportunities were afforded to *devadāsī* women.

SHIFTING REPRESENTATIONS OF MASCULINITY IN BHARATANĀṬYAM

In an essay entitled "From Gynemimesis to Hypermasculinity: The Shifting Orientations of Male Performers of South Indian Court Dance," I have mapped various representations of masculinity that were at work in the production of the nineteenth-century courtly dance form that is known as Bharatanāṭyam today. These included not only the *naṭṭuvaṉār,* who was understood as the "leader" of the courtesan dance troupe, but also male performers of courtesan dance who performed in a gynemimetic mode, deploying all the conventions of traditional courtesan performance.[121] Men's participation in the cultural production of dance prior to the twentieth century was thus not limited, as

is commonly believed, to the role played by the *naṭṭuvaṉār* as pedagogue and "conductor" for performances. Gynemimetic courtly performances were desired in Tanjore in their own right. Thus, dancing by men—albeit men who were dressed and dancing as women—was also a key marker of Bharatanāṭyam before its emergence in Madras as an urban, upper-caste, and socially and aesthetically reinvented cultural practice.

As I argue in that essay, the third decade of the twentieth century marks a distinct break in these older representations of men in relation to Bharatanāṭyam ("From Gynemimesis to Hyper-Masculinity" 383-385). The emergence of the new nationalized form of dance during the 1930s reflected not only a concern for sexual and aesthetic propriety on the part of its upper-class women performers (Srinivasan, "Temple 'Prostitution' and Community Reform"; Meduri, "Nation, Woman, Representation"; Natarajan "Another Stage"; Weidman, *Singing the Classical* 111-149) but also a parallel concern for the nurturing of a new masculine identity for its male performers. This new masculinity, which is a reaction to colonial constructions of South Asian men as "effeminate" (Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*), was also affected by Gandhian nationalism, which was rooted in the ideas of self-control, discipline, and sexual abstinence (Katrak, "Indian Nationalism"; Alter, *The Wrestler's Body*). The new dance and its complex modernity has been commented upon by several scholars (Meduri, "Nation, Woman, Representation"; Allen, "Rewriting the Script"; O'Shea, *At Home in the World*; Soneji *Bharatanatyam*), but what is important to note here is that, in addition to the

resignification and reconstitution of the dance and its social order, the transformation of the *devadāsī* dance into Bharatanāṭyam also involved a restructuring of gender roles and expectations. Indeed, the emphasis on the devotional, narrative, and non-erotic repertoire that characterized the popularization of the art form may well have been designed to allow space for the male performer. The new male performers of the 1930s, such as Ram Gopal (1912-2003), became famous for their dances that described the hypermasculine icon of the god Śiva-Naṭarāja ("King of Dance"), whom they literally "represented" on stage (Allen "Rewriting the Script" 215). As Anne-Marie Gaston ("Dance and the Hindu Woman"), Matthew Allen ("Rewriting the Script"), and Padma Kaimal ("Shiva-Nataraja") have pointed out, the popularization of this image of the "dancing Śiva" was the direct result of turn-of-the-century Orientalist writings on Indian art. The linkage of the icon to the repertoire and presentation of Bharatanāṭyam dance clearly reflected the emergent Indian middle-class' nationalistic pride in its "great civilizational past."

I would argue that cinema also constitutes a major element in these new representations of the masculinity of the dancing body. Early cinematic representations from South India are colored by inflections of Orientalism, class, and caste, which I have already discussed in relation to staged versions of Bharatanāṭyam. Take, for example, one of the earliest extant appearances of a solo male dancer in the South Indian cinema, a short appearance in the Telugu film *Raitu Bidda* (1939) by Vedantam Raghaviah (1919-1971), which has recently been discussed by Rumya Sree Putcha in her dissertation on the reinvention of Kūcipūḍi dance entitled "Revisiting the Classical: A Critical History of

Kuchipudi Dance." In this sequence, a male performer dances to the song *Daśāvatara-śabdam* ("Song of the Ten Incarnations" [of the god Viṣṇu]) and is a dressed in a manner that almost exactly mirrors the costumes conceived and popularized by the "Oriental" dancer Uday Shankar (1900-1977), including the large headdresses he wore when enacting the role of the dancing Śiva.[122] Putcha concludes her analysis by stating that "this scene [in the film *Raitu Bidda*] is reminiscent of the Orientalist aesthetic Uday Shankar was popularizing in the early twentieth-century. In other words, the Kuchipudi dance Raghavayya performs in *Raitu Bidda* is explicitly theatrical and Hindu" (Putcha 116). Gynemimetic modes of dancing for men, which were the norm in the community of male Brahmin Kūcipūḍi performers that Vedantam Raghaviah represents, became nearly invisible by the third decade of the twentieth century (Soneji, "Performing Satyabhama"; H. Krishnan, "From Gynemimesis to Hyper-Masculinity"). They are replaced instead by new modes of figuring the male dancing body that are inseparably hinged to larger, metropolitan discourses around Hinduism understood through the lens of Orientalism and the transnational nature of such Orientalism, which is embodied in the European and North American performances of figures such as Uday Shankar and Ram Gopal. Later, Shankar himself produced and directed a Hindi film called *Kalpana* ("Imagination," 1948), which was supported by S.S. Vasan of Gemini Studios in Madras and which showcased dance technique as modern pan-Indian nationalist heritage. The vernacular press in South India publicized this as a landmark cultural accomplishment (see fig. 5-1).

Fig. 5-1. A still from Uday Shankar's film *Kalpana,* which was publicized in the popular Tamil cinema magazine *Kuṇṭūci* (February 1949, p. 23). (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.)

Indeed, the participation of the vernacular press in the dissemination of new forms of dance is of tremendous consequence. The Tamil press in Madras shaped popular understandings of new cultural forms and helped audiences understand the purport of new medial phenomena. During the 1940s, when the social and aesthetic norms of both cine-dance and stage performances of the reinvented Bharatanāṭyam had crystallized in the popular imagination, the film magazine *Kuṇṭūci* carried a three-page essay entitled *Paratamum Āṇkaḷum* ("Bharatam and Men"). Although the essay does not directly address the relationship between men dancing Bharatanāṭyam and the cinema, it clearly signals the fact that cinema audiences were interested in the "new" phenomenon of the "male dancer":

> It seems that it was only twenty years ago that Bharatanāṭyam spread to family women. Until then, the art was preserved by only certain *devadāsīs* and *naṭṭuvaṉārs*. These days mainly girls perform Bharatanāṭyam. Men learning this

> art form are very few and far between. One wonders, despite the existence of a few men [in this artform] if there any men capable of giving a full performance. Until now, I would say there are no men who have ever performed a full-length dance recital or had an *araṅkēṟṟam* [debut solo performance]. I wouldn't say this is because they have no interest in this art. It seems to be general public opinion that a man's Bharatanāṭyam recital may not be very attractive…. For the performance of *abhinaya*, the *padams* [lyrical love poems] are usually songs about [the gods] Kṛṣṇa and Murukaṉ and they are just love songs (*kātal pāṭṭu*). The lyrics and meanings of the pieces imply that there is a special distinction in a woman performing the *padam*. But this does not mean a man is unable to transform himself metaphorically into a woman and perform the appropriate *abhinaya* for the *padam*!
>
> …Around two thousand years ago, when Bharata Muni wrote his *Nāṭyaśāstra* there were also rules and regulations written in great detail about cross-dressing where men played women (*stiri vēcam*) and women played men. We saw the flourishing of these traditions in Vedic and Purāṇic times, when both men and women were highly skilled in dancing and scaled great heights [in dance]. Because dancing leads to spiritual liberation (*mōṭcam*), there have also been many great [male] sages who were also skilled in dancing. The sages Taṇḍu, Bharata, his hundred sons, and sage Nārada are sufficient examples. Even male Purāṇic characters (*purāṇa purucarkaḷ*) like Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna were skilled in dancing. The dance's original source, [the god Śiva as] Naṭarāja, is of course, the one whom we always invoke [in dance].... (Kirusnamurtti, "Paratamum Āṇkaḷum" 101-103)

The essay, of course, builds on widely circulating modes of writing Bharatanāṭyam's history. The author invokes the idea of the erotic elements of courtesan dance as a malleable allegory that can easily be appropriated by male performers. In doing so, he erases the interpretive possibilities of the queer nature of gynemimetic performance traditions, which certainly would not have been visible or readily available to his readers. In addition, as in most writings on Indian dance during this period, his default position is to refer back to Hindu mythology to explain aspects of the dance to his audiences. Thus, not only is the mythical author of the Sanskrit text *Nāṭyaśāstra*

referenced, but a whole cast of figures from mythology (crowned of course by the figure of Siva-Nataraja) are used in the service of "historicizing" the male presence in the production of Bharatanāṭyam.

NAṬṬUVAṆĀRS MAKE IT BIG: CINEMA, FISCAL OPPORTUNITY, AND THE PEDAGOGY OF THE NEW CLASSICAL DANCE

As previously noted, the anti-*devadāsī* movement during the Madras Presidency created new opportunities and social spaces for men who were tangentially involved in the production of the arts of dance and music, even as it ironically left huge lacunae in the lives of professional female performers. Although many from the community had already shifted their activities from smaller towns and villages to the new center of cultural patronage—Madras city—by the last decades of the nineteenth century (Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures* 59), the shifts brought on by the legal interventions of *devadāsī* reform were of a different nature. These of course broadly coincided with the reinvention of dance in Madras, and many traditional *naṭṭuvaṉār* families saw tremendous fiscal opportunity in moving their families to the city. A case in point is the family of Kuppaiah Pillai (1895-1981; the patriarch of one of the most important *naṭṭuvaṉār* lineages), who was employed by the Tanjore court during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[123] In 1945, the son-in-law of Kuppaiah Pillai, Govindaraj Pillai (1914-1984), founded the Rajarajeswari Bharatha Natya Kala Mandir dance school in Bombay. Shortly thereafter, this entire extended family—including its patriarch, Kuppaiah Pillai—moved to Bombay, where they trained thousands of middle-class students in Bharatanāṭyam, including Hindi film stars such as Kamini Kaushal (b. 1927) and Waheeda Rehman (b. 1938) and even

other choreographers of film dance such as Gopi Krishna (1935-1994).[124] In addition to the example of Kuppaiah Pillai, the remarkable stories of Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai and K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai that form the central foci of this chapter will fully flesh out the remarkable scale on which *naṭṭuvaṉārs* were "in demand" by the new cultural practices of urban Bharatanāṭyam and the Tamil cinema during the period between approximately 1937 and 1960. These stories also set into high relief the fact that such opportunities were next to impossible for women from *devadāsī* communities, who themselves were often blood relatives of these iconic *naṭṭuvaṉārs*.

It is also important to highlight, from the standpoint of the social organization of choreography for the Tamil cinema, that *naṭṭuvaṉārs* were not the only men who were engaged in this work, despite the focus of this chapter on this community. As noted earlier, beginning in the late 1930s, Telugu-speaking Brahmin men from the village known as Kūcipūḍi were already involved in films produced in Madras. Thus, figures like Vedantam Ragaviah (1919-1971) choreographed independently and alongside *naṭṭuvaṉārs* in Tamil cinema between the 1940s and the 1950s. However, unlike the *naṭṭuvaṉārs*, Raghaviah largely abandoned stage performances and did not start teaching dance in Madras; instead, he focused on a career as a film director. Later, three other men from the same community—Vempati Pedda Satyam (1922-1982), Pasumarthi Krishnamurthi (1922-2004), and Vempati Chinna Satyam (1929-2012)—also choreographed intermittently for both the Tamil and Telugu cinema; however, unlike Raghaviah, they maintained primary careers as teachers of the newly invented

"Kūcipūḍi" dance in Madras and Hyderabad. The work of Rumya Putcha and, more recently, Katyayani Thota has provided critical interventions in the history of Kūcipūḍi dance, arguing in part that the cinematic imagining of dance in Telugu films cannot be severed from the production of the aesthetic vocabulary of "classical" Kūcipūḍi.

Apart from these figures from Kuchipudi village, another slightly later genealogy of choreographers in the Tamil cinema consists of men who settled in Madras from North India, including the family of the choreographer named B. Sohanlal (c. 1920-1980). Sohanlal and his three brothers B. Hiralal, B. Chinnilal, and B. Radheshyam were born in Jaipur, Rajasthan, and studied Kathak dance there. During the late 1940s or the early 1950s, they moved from Jaipur to Madras, and Sohanlal and Hiralal quickly became integrated into the Tamil film industry. However, because of the presence of *naṭṭuvaṉārs*, they were rarely invited to choreograph "classical" type dances in Tamil films. This separation of dance genres in the cinema (i.e., "Western" type dance vs. "classical" "South Indian" or "Bharatanāṭyam" type dance) explains why Tamil films often had two or more choreographers for a single film, and this is particularly true by the late 1940s. By the 1950s, Sohanlal and later Hiralal were also choreographing for Hindi films. Their influence on both Tamil and Hindi cine-dance from the 1950s through the 1970s is undeniable, and Sohanlal was the mentor and husband of today's most famous "Bollywood" choreographer, Saroj Khan (b. 1948).[125]

THE CASE OF VAZHUVOOR RAMAIAH PILLAI (1910-1991)

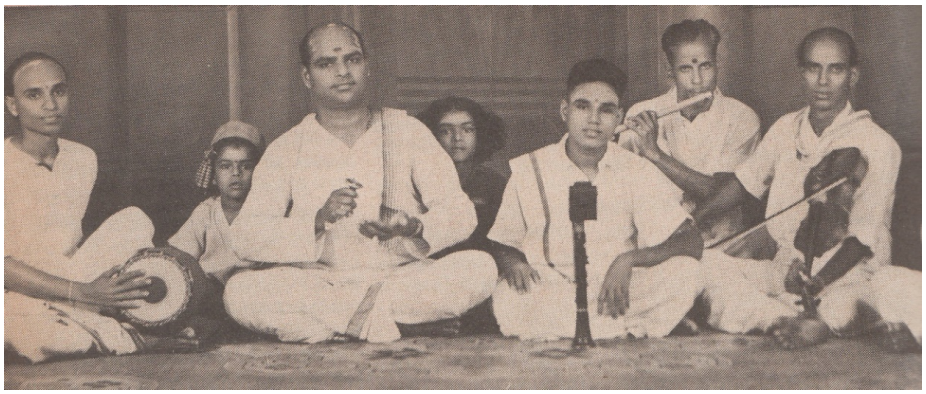


Fig. 5-2. Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai (1910-1991) with his orchestra (c. 1950). (From *Sruti Magazine* [Issue 26, November 1986, p. 24]).

One of the most important figures in the narrative of Bharatanāṭyam's interface with the world of Tamil cinema is Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai (1910-1991) (see fig. 5-2). Ramaiah Pillai's work is exemplary of the fluidity and symbiosis that is at the very heart of this project. His choreographies flowed seamlessly between screen and stage, stage and screen. He singlehandedly crafted a new technique for Bharatanāṭyam, a "style" that came to be popularly known as the "Vazhuvoor lineage" (*vaḻuvūr pāṇi*), which simply did not exist before his interventions.[126] He was one of the earliest *naṭṭuvaṉār* (choreographers) for the South Indian cinema, and later, through his disciple Kumari Kamala (b. 1934; also known as Kamala Lakshman), he transformed the aesthetic, repertoire, and technique of popular Bharatanāṭyam into a middle-class cultural artifact through representations of dance he created on screen. This section maps the

trajectory of Ramaiah Pillai's life, especially with reference to the cinema, and it also tries to give voice to the debates around aesthetics and dancemaking that Ramaiah Pillai finds himself at the center of between the late 1930s and the 1950s.

The tradition of dance in the small village of Vazhuvoor (Va<u>l</u>uvūr, in the Kuthalam taluk of today's Nagapattinam district) can be traced to a figure named Va<u>l</u>uvūr Cāmu Naṭṭuva<u>n</u>ār (1844-1903). He was largely a vocalist for *devadāsī* dance performance, and he later composed music pieces for dance. He also took on a handful of students, among whom the *devadāsī* Vazhuvoor Nagammal (dates unknown) was the most famous.[127] He had several children, including a son named Manikka Naṭṭuva<u>n</u>ār (1867-1949) and a daughter named Bhagyammal (dates unknown). Bhagyammal had a relationship with a man named Parthiban, and they had six children, one of whom was Ramaiah Pillai. Ramaiah Pillai's early life is a bit of a mystery, and there are some conflicting narratives about his career before he moved to Madras around 1938. In an interview for *Sruti* magazine in 1986, Pillai recalls his early life as follows:

> My grandfather Samu Naṭṭuva<u>n</u>ār died when my mother Bhagyamma was only six years old. My father died young. My uncle Manikka Naṭṭuva<u>n</u>ār was my guru from childhood. He was famous as a dance-master and it was he who trained a leading Ceylonese dancer of those times known as Ranjana…. Before [coming to Madras]…I had spent some time in Mayavaram [known today as Mayiladuthurai in Nagapattinam district]. I assisted my uncle in teaching there. As long as he was alive, I never taught anything on my own. (qtd. in Vijayaraghavan, "Natyacharya Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai" 23)

He then continues by marking his journey from the small town of Mayavaram (Mayiladuthurai) into Madras' film world:

> I...came to Madras [from the town of Mayavaram] in 1938 all of a sudden. I started [teaching/choreographing] on my own only after coming to Madras. Raja Chandrasekhar, the film director I mentioned before [the man who produced *Raja Desingh* in which Rukmini Arundale performed dance] invited me to Madras and teach dance to those who performed in films. Apparently no one else was forthcoming. My elders permitted me to go and I agreed. It was then that I started in films. There was no studio in Madras then. Films had to be shot in Calcutta. Later the Newtone Studios opened in Madras. Films were shot there too. Whenever there was a dance sequence in films, I was called in. (qtd. in Vijayaraghavan, "Natyacharya Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai" 23)

Historian B.M. Sundaram provides a slightly varying narrative about Pillai's early life:

> [Pillai] owned a little sundry store (*poṭṭikaṭai*) near Mayiladuthurai…His sister Radha was contracted to act in a film, and the shooting was to take place in Calcutta. Her family, fearing to send her alone, sent Ramaiah Pillai as her chaperone. During the shooting, the producers felt a dance sequence would be appropriate but due to budget and time limitations, bringing in a *naṭṭuvaṉār* [to choreograph the dance] was out of the question. Ramaiah Pillai volunteered to choreograph. VRP choreographed [the sequence] with whatever little dance he knew at that time. This incident ignited a fire [of passion in the heart of] Ramaiah Pillai, and he dreamt of becoming a [professional] *naṭṭuvaṉār*. (*Marapu Vaḻi* 234)

These somewhat conflicting accounts of Ramiah Pillai's life speak to the complexities of representing this now iconic figure. In my interaction with B.M. Sundaram in 2012, he named the film in which Pillai's sister Radha performed (see fig. 5-3). He went on to elaborate:

> There was a movie called *Adrishtam* ("Luck," 1939). There was an actress Radha, from Mayiladuthurai, who was playing a [small] supporting role. When the directors found out she came from a family of dancers, they thought, "why not include a dance sequence?". They asked her immediately to dance and she agreed. There was no choreographer but Radha's brother Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai was chaperoning her at that time. When approached about the dance, he volunteered immediately and began "choreographing" for the first time on the film set, teaching a gesture or so. He had seen his dancers learning from his uncle Manikka Naṭṭuvaṉār.

Fig. 5-3. The cover and synopsis page from the songbook of *Adrishtam* ("Luck," 1939), featuring a photo of a dancer, likely Radha, who is Ramaiah Pillai's sister. This is perhaps the only surviving visual artifact from Ramaiah Pillai's first choreography for film. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

That same year, Pillai choreographed a court dance sequence for the film *Prahlada* ("The Child-Devotee Prahlāda," 1939), directed by B.N. Rao.[128] In this sequence, it is evident how Pillai "fills a gap" by repurposing extant *devadāsī* dance repertoire when he is asked to materialize a "court dance sequence." In this film, there is a scene in which the film's mythological anti-hero, Hiraṇyakaśipu, is entertained by courtesan-dancers in the assembly hall. For this sequence, Ramaiah Pillai chose to insert excerpts from a composition that was very popular among courtesan-dancers at the turn of the century, the *svarajati* in the *rāga* Khamās entitled "*Māmōkalākiri Mīrutē*" ("My Passion is Ever-Increasing"), which was composed by the Brahmin musician Subbarāma Dīkṣitulu (1839-1906) and with words by the court poet Kaṭikai Namaccivāya Pulavar (dates unknown), who were both musicians at the court of Ettayapuram (a "small

kingdom" [*zamīndāri*] in today's Thoothukudi district). In the sequence, six young dancers performed two rhythmic sequences (*jatis*, which are recited by Ramaiah Pillai himself) plus two lines of *svaras* (solfa syllables) that are part of the latter half of the *svarajati* composition. The six dancers simultaneously perform all the dancing. Unlike in Pillai's later cinematic choreographies, the sequences are not distributed among various dancers, nor are there individual shots that focus on the *abhinaya* or *adavus* of the individual dancers. The identities of these dancers are unknown; they are not acknowledged in the credits of the film, and neither is Ramaiah Pillai himself.

According to B.M. Sundaram, Ramaiah Pillai's first formal student was T.M. Pattammal (who was described in Chapter IV as dancing to the nationalist songs of Subramania Bharati), who was likely from a *devadāsī* family of Thirukkazhukundram (*Marapu Vaḻi* 235). She had initially studied dance from Pillai's own teacher, Thirukkazhukundram Turaicāmi Naṭṭuvaṉār. Around this time, Pillai also taught at least one other woman from the *devadāsī* community, Viralimalai Ramani (c. 1938-2010). Ramani had been a disciple of Kalaiyarkovil Chellaiya Naṭṭuvaṉār, but he could not continue to train Ramani due to a stroke. Ramaiah Pillai performed Ramani's *arankerram* (debut solo performance) (Sundaram, *Marapu Tanta* 279-281). However, it should be noted that, during this early stage of his career, Pillai did not achieve much public recognition. Neither Pattammal nor Ramani were part of Madras' emergent middle-class dance scene.

After these somewhat "improvised" encounters with dance in the cinema in 1939, Ramaiah Pillai garnered the support of film director Raja Chandrasekhar (1904-1971; also known as Raja C. Sekhar). In 1941, he choreographed for the film *Ashok Kumar*, in which the actress Pasupuleti Kannamba (1911-1964; from the Telugu-speaking *kalāvantula* courtesan community) danced to a *padam* (love lyric) composed especially for the film.[129] Pillai's choreography for this piece, in which passages of abstract dance were inserted between the verses of the *padam* and set to instrumental music, received critical attention and seems to have set the pace for a number of Pillai's choreographies for film actresses in the 1940s.

During the early 1940s, Pillai was largely setting his choreographies on actresses who were from the *devadāsī-kalāvantula* courtesan communities but who did not receive extensive training in dance. For example, in 1942, he choreographed for *Kannagi* ("Heroine of the Tamil Epic *Cilappatikāram*"), in which the actress N.S. Saroja (dates unknown), who plays the courtesan figure Mātavi, dances to a song that bears all the characteristics of a *padam*. In both structure and lyrical content, the song—in the *rāga* Kāmbodhi and entitled *Mālākiṉāḷ Svāmi Maṅkaiyum uṉ Mēlē* ("This Girl Became a Bride for You, Lord!")—resembles the old courtesan genre of the Tamil *padam*, and Ramaiah Pillai's only innovations here consist of inserting small passages of abstract dance to punctuate the space between the verses of the song.[130] Fig. 5-4 is the cover and credits page of the songbook of *Kannagi;* Ramaiah Pillai's name appears among the very first credits for the film.[131]

Fig. 5-4. The cover and credits page of the songbook of *Kannagi* (1942), with Ramaiah Pillai's name credited for "dance" (*naṭaṉam*). (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

Pillai choreographed one of the earliest songs "in praise of dance" in the Tamil cinema for the film *Sivakavi* (1943), and it was performed by the actress T.R. Rajakumari. The following year, Rajakumari danced in another film, the highly successful landmark film *Haridas* (1944), in which she plays the role of a courtesan dancer. There is a strong possibility that Ramaiah Pillai also choreographed for this film, although no credits are listed for "dance" in the title sequence.

Until around 1946, Pillai's dance remained largely straightforward in the sense that he was fixing gestural interpretation (*abhinaya*) to songs that were similar in content to traditional dance repertoire. He also created very basic passages of abstract dance when they were necessary, and these would usually be performed to instrumental musical passages, either between verses of songs (as is seen in the *padam*-like songs of *Kannagi* and *Haridas*) or at the end of songs as a kind of finale. The sequences in films like

Sivakavi and *Haridas* reflect this early stage of the choreographic trajectory of Ramaiah Pillai.

Later, however, a new kind of drama was injected into dance in the cinema. In the film *Jagathalapratapan* ("Lord of the World," 1944), Ramaiah Pillai choreographed on his student, "Baby Kamala" (b. 1934; also known as Kumari Kamala and, later, as Kamala Lakshman). In this fantasy film, the hero journeys to the nether regions of the world, known in Hindu cosmology as *nāgaloka* and the abode of serpents. Kamala plays one of the serpents who resides in *nāgaloka*, and she dances to a song that became emblematic of Ramaiah Pillai's contribution to Bharatanāṭyam. I will discuss this "snake dance" in detail in Chapter VI, but for now it is important to place the piece in the context of Ramaiah Pillai's career as a film-dance choreographer. This pairing of Ramaiah Pillai and Kamala is very significant. Over the next five years, the pair would radically and irrevocably alter the landscape of Bharatanāṭyam dance in South India. In 1945, Ramaiah Pillai choreographed for the film *Sri Valli* ("Valli [Consort of the God Murukaṉ]), in which Kamala plays the double role of both the god Murukaṉ in his child form and his consort Vaḷḷi in her child form. Here, Kamala dances Bharatanāṭyam in a new mode that can perhaps be best described as "dramatic" in contrast with the earlier, more subtle sequences by performers like T.R. Rajakumari in *Sivakavi,* just two years before.[132]

However, the real aesthetic and conceptual radicalism represented by the Ramaiah Pillai–Kamala pairing is best visible in dances from the 1947 film *Nam Iruvar* ("We Two"). As seen in Chapter IV, this film introduced audiences to the idea that the

nationalist songs of Subramania Bharati could be interpreted and visualized through dance. More importantly, it cast dance as a middle-class art. Kamala performed a new kind of Bharatanāṭyam in the drawing room of a middle-class home, surrounded by a gramophone, a radio, and the accoutrements of early twentieth-century middle-class modernity. I would argue that this new staging of Bharatanāṭyam is mirrored in the new somatic approach to Bharatanāṭyam that is envisaged and deployed by Ramaiah Pillai. Indeed, Kamala's dance looks almost nothing like the dance of N.S Saroja in *Kannagi* or of Rajakumari in *Sivakavi*. What has changed is that Kamala, unlike the hereditary dancers Saroja and Rajakumari, is a product of the so-called "dance revival." Her exposure to dance—in her case, Kathak dance initially, in Bombay—and to Bharatanāṭyam in particular in Madras city after Rukmini Arundale's presentations certainly marks her body and its movement as distinct from that of Saroja or Rajakumari, who trained exclusively in one dance style. Indeed, her investments in a notion of Bharatanāṭyam as a "classical" and "national" dance run deep since she is a dancer trained in multiple Indian dance styles. Kamala invents herself as a dancer to stand out among actresses, whereas *devadāsī* women such as Rajakumari invent themselves as actresses to move away from the stigma of a history associated with dance.

Also in 1947, Pillai choreographs for the film *Kannika* ("The Virgin"), which features a version of the popular devotional song about the god Siva-Nataraja, "*Natanam Atinar,*" which was discussed in detail in Chapter VI. This was danced by Hemamalini Arni, a Brahmin student of Pillai's, and it also included a mini dance-drama sequence that

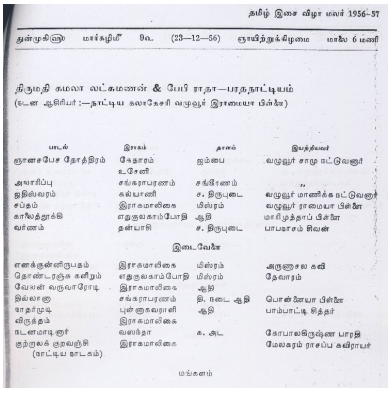
marked the filmic debut of the Travancore Sisters (Padmini and Lalitha, later to be joined by Ragini) and that was performed entirely to instrumental music. In both sequences, Pillai creates a distinctly "new" kind of Bharatanāṭyam that is rooted in athleticism and that involves a layering of fast-paced, agile movements that were clearly designed for the quick cuts of the cinematic lens. These new movements and choreographic patterns will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter VI, where I discuss certain repertory pieces. Indeed, Bharatanāṭyam would not look the same after these innovations, and its aesthetic "yardsticks" would never be the same. These kinds of choreographies catapulted Bharatanāṭyam into new somatic spaces. These fast-paced and highly dynamic movements became the "norm" for stage performances of Bharatanāṭyam during this period. They were consciously desired by audiences who watched Bharatanāṭyam both on stage and in the cinema. Pillai's interventions in the 1940s mark a distinct shift in taste habits around the consumption and production of Bharatanāṭyam, much as did Rukmini Arundale's interventions in the late 1930s.

Throughout the 1950s, Ramaiah Pillai continued to choreograph for a number of Tamil films, and the Ramaiah Pillai–Kamala pairing attained iconic status in the public imagination. Ramaiah Pillai's involvement in the cinema began to wane by the late 1950s. At that time, he continued to focus on training students for stage performances of Bharatanāṭyam, and, undoubtedly, students continued to come to him after hearing about and seeing his cine-dances. During the 1950s, a number of upper and middle-class women, including the daughter of film director K. Subrahmanyam, Padma, started to

learn dance from Ramaiah Pillai. The list of his Bharatanāṭyam students includes dancers such as L. Vijayalakshmi, Kanaka Srinivasan (also known as S. Kanaka), Chitra Visweswaran, and Komala Varadan. Interestingly, the hereditary professional dancing women of the famous Kuchalambal family of Tanjore, who by the 1950s were all settled in Madras, also learned from him. Thus, T.D. Kuchalakumari (b. 1937; she was discussed in great detail in Chapter II) and her adopted cousin T. Jyothilakshmi (1948-2016) were also students of Ramaiah Pillai.

As will be seen in Chapter VI, by the 1950s, the circulation of Ramaiah Pillai's cinema Bharatanāṭyam had come full circle. There was a massive flow of the cinematic creations of Ramaiah Pillai into stage performances of Bharatanāṭyam that were presented by him. The "*vaḻuvūr bāṇi*" ("the Valuvur style") is thus necessarily a bricolage that proactively brings Bharatanāṭyam technique into conversation with cinematic modes of seeing and thus moving the body. These ideas are also in conversation with Pillai's own unique choreographic imagination; this included pieces such as the famous *pāmpu naṭaṉam* ("snake dance") from the 1944 film *Jagathalapratapan,* which became a staple piece in Bharatanāṭyam performances in Madras city by the 1950s. Fig. 5-5 is a published repertoire list of a stage performance of Bharatanāṭyam given by Ramaiah Pillai's students Kamala and Radha [Viswanathan], daughter of M.S. Subbulakshmi. The repertoire features as its centerpiece a devotional *varṇam* composed by Papanasam Sivan (who composed extensively for the cinema) and, more importantly, three of Pillai's most memorable contributions to modern

Bharatanāṭyam: the “snake dance,” the song “*Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār*” about the dancing Śiva (which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter VI), and the dance-drama idiom from the *kuṟavañci* drama *Kuṟṟāla Kuṟavañci*. Documents such as these enable us to track the flows not only of dance repertoire from the cinema to stage performances (mainly due to Ramaiah Pillai) but also inevitably of technique, mannerisms in the performance of *abhinaya*, and the cult of celebrity (Kamala, for example, was a star of both stage and screen). Most importantly, such documents suggest that, by this time, audiences—and certainly the aesthetic expectations and habits of audiences—were shared between cinematic Bharatanāṭyam and its stage versions.



தமிழ் இசை விழா மலர் 1956-57

தன்முகிறு மார்கழிமீ 9உ (23—12—56) ஞாயிற்றுக்கிழமை மாலை 6 மணி

நிருமதி கமலா லட்சுமணன் & பேபி ராதா—பரதநாட்டியம்
(டீன ஆதீயீர் :—நாட்டிய கலாகேசரி வழுவூர் இராமையா பிள்ளை)

பாடல்	இராகம்	தாளம்	இயற்றியவர்
ஞானசபேச தோத்திரம்	கேதாரம்	ரூபகம்	வழுவூர் சாமு ஸட்டுவனார்
	உசேனி		
அலாரிப்பு	சங்கராபரணம்	சங்கீர்ணம்	,,
ஜதிஸ்வரம்	கல்யாணி	ச. திருபுடை	வழுவூர் மாணிக்கஸட்டுவனார்
சப்தம்	இராகமாலிகை	மிஸ்ரம்	வழுவூர் ராமையா பிள்ளை
காலேத்தூக்கி	எதுகுலகாம்போதி	ஆதி	மாரிமுத்தாப் பிள்ளை
வர்ணம்	தன்யாசி	ச. திருபுடை	பாபநாசம் சிவன்
	இடைவேளை		
எனக்குன்னிருபதம்	இராகமாலிகை	மிஸ்ரம்	அருணாசல கவி
தொண்டரதுக்கு களிறும்	எதுகுலகாம்போதி	மிஸ்ரம்	தேவாரம்
வேலன் வருவாரோடி	இராகமாலிகை	ஆதி	
இல்லாரு	சங்கராபரணம்	தி. நடை ஆதி	பொன்னையா பிள்ளை
ஸாதாமுடி	புன்னாகவராளி	ஆதி	பாம்பாட்டி சித்தர்
விருத்தம்	இராகமாலிகை		
நடனமாடி ஞர்	வஸந்தா	க. அட	கோபாலகிருஷ்ண பாரதி
குற்றாலக் குறவஞ்சி (நாட்டிய நாடகம்)	இராகமாலிகை		மேலகரம் ராமப்ப கவிராயர்

மங்களம்

Fig. 5-5. The repertoire list for a stage Bharatanāṭyam performance by Kamala and Radha, conducted by Ramaiah Pillai as *naṭṭuvaṉār* at the Tamil Isai Sangam’s annual festival in Madras, December 23, 1956. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

In 1954, the Tamil film magazine *Citrā* published a piece written by Ramaiah Pillai about the state of dance, both on screen and on the stage, with the provocative title

"*Nāṭṭiyam Āṭiyum Payaṉillai*" ("There is No Point to Dancing"). In the article, which was written at a time when other Bharatanāṭyam choreographers were beginning to surface in the cinema and other forms of dance (largely Western) were becoming the norm, Pillai wrote about how his choreographies were "*śāstric*" and reflected traditional codified forms of knowledge about dance that were fast disappearing. He created a narrative of degeneration surrounding Bharatanāṭyam in the cinema in which he emerged as a signpost for a "purely classical" representation of Bharatanāṭyam as cine-dance:

> The narrow-minded idea that dancing is for only certain people, from certain communities has disappeared and now the flood gates have opened for anyone to partake in the culture of dancing…. However, I am saddened that our films do not realize [the divine nature of dance] and recently have introduced all kinds of [non-Bharatanāṭyam-based] dances and this gives grief to people like me. Not all movement can be considered dance. [Bharatanāṭyam] dance has many rules, traditions and hereditary connections, all of which are steeped in history. The sage Bharata is the one who created the art form we now call "Bharatanāṭyam." The combination of expression (*bhāva*), melody (*rāga*) and rhythm (*tāḷa*) constitute Bharatam…. That's why I've given this article such a title, [I want people to know that] it is important to learn the [*śāstric*] grammar (*laṭcaṇa*) of dance…. My opinion is that if one takes the time to learn the rules and understand dance traditions, then film dances will become much better and only then can we truly take pride in these Indian dances, which the entire world admires. (R. Pillai 28)

In naming Kamala, Vyjayanthimala, and Lalitha-Padmini-Ragini, Ramaiah Pillai endorses non-hereditary, urban, upper-caste womens' dancing as iconic, *śāstric*, and therefore legitimate. In doing so, he also positions himself as the preeminent repository of the aesthetic yardsticks by which cine-dance should be gauged. This is significant because the emerging forms of dance that Pillai derides (such as the "cabaret" dance) are forms of dance that women from traditional *devadāsī* backgrounds performed after upper-caste women such as Vyjayanthimala entered the world of cinema as heroines. The

classic case is that of T. Jyothilakshmi (1948-2016), the adopted daughter of S.P.L. Dhanalakshmi. Even though she was a student of Ramaiah Pillai in Bharatanāṭyam, she took on roles as a "cabaret" dancer and vamp in the South Indian cinema and effectively engineered the image of the South Indian "item dancer."

Perhaps Ramaiah Pillai's final major work in the cinema was for a film about dance called *Konjum Salangai* ("A Little Jingle of the Anklebells," 1962) starring Kamala in the lead (see Chapter IV). By this time, Pillai's Bharatanāṭyam had morphed into something almost completely unrecognizable from his choreographies in earlier films from the 1940s like *Sivakavi* and *Kannagi*. This was the new Bharatanāṭyam, fully inflected by cinematic glamor, displaying the now fully fleshed-out narrative of its temple origins and religious essence and the near-acrobatic athleticism and virtuosity of the Ramaiah Pillai–Kamala pairing.

CONVERGENCES: FOUR NAṬṬUVAṆĀRS IN THE EARLY TAMIL CINEMA

We have already seen how Ramaiah Pillai's narrative traces a new kind of history of Bharatanāṭyam in the twentieth century, one in which seamless flows between stage and screen are central and in which males are able to forge new paths for themselves. If Ramaiah Pillai's story is to be understood as a kind of metonymic narrative for modern Bharatanāṭyam, it is imperative to turn to the lives of other mid-twentieth-century *naṭṭuvaṉārs* in Madras, who were similarly moving between the aesthetic axes of stage and screen. In this section, I turn very briefly to the lives and contributions of four such individuals who all produced cine-dance *and* trained students for stage performances of

Bharatanāṭyam between the 1940s and the late 1950s: 1) Vaideeswarankoyil Meenakshisundaram Naṭṭuvaṉār; 2) Kanchipuram Ellappa Pillai; 3) K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai; and 4) V.S. Muthuswamy Pillai. I realize that so much more could be said about each of these individuals. However, my intention here is simply to demonstrate—both quantitatively and through specific instantiations of form and repertoire—the extent to which *naṭṭuvaṉār* participation in the Tamil cinema shaped twentieth-century Bharatanāṭyam, even as women performers in their own communities were—perhaps because of these very processes—becoming increasingly invisible.

Vaideeswarankoyil Meenakshisundaram Naṭṭuvaṉār

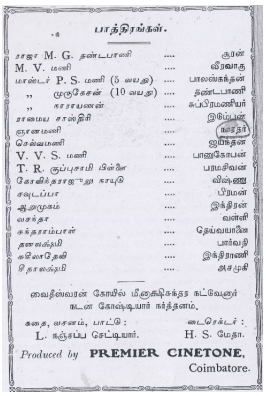
I will begin with the *naṭṭuvaṉār* about whom the least biographical information is available and yet who clearly was one of the first *naṭṭuvaṉārs* credited for "dance" in a Tamil film. Vaideeswarankoyil Meenakshisundaram Naṭṭuvaṉār (see fig. 5-6) was born as the eldest son to Muttuswami Naṭṭuvaṉār I (dates unknown) and Ramatayamma in the town of Vaideeswarankoyil in today's Nagapattinam district. He only learned dance from his father. His local *devadāsī* students included Tirumayiladi Vijayalakshmi (1919-1988) and Vaideeswarankoyil S. Susheela (c. 1928-2003). Susheela (see fig. 5-7) later also acted in three films—*Chitra* (1946), *Chandralekha* (1948), and *Idhaya Geetham* ("Song of the Heart," 1950)—in brief supporting roles.

Fig. 5-6. A rare photograph of Vaideeswarankoyil Meenakshisundaram Naṭṭuvaṉār with Yogam and Mangalam. *Pēcum Paṭam* (June 1945, p. 58). (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.)

Fig. 5-7. Vaideeswarankoyil S. Susheela (c. 1928-2003), one of Meenakshisundaram Naṭṭuvaṉār's few known *devadāsī* disciples. (Courtesy B.M. Sundaram.)

It is not clear when or under what circumstances Meenakshisundaram left the town of Vaideeswarankoyil for Madras. What is known is that he suddenly appears in Madras as the choreographer for two early films made in 1938, *Sri Kanda Leela* ("The

Miraculous Deeds of Lord Murukaṉ") and *Dakshayagnam* ("The Fire Sacrifice of King Daksha"). In the songbook for *Sri Kanda Leela*, Meenakshisundaram's *naṭaṉa kōṣṭi* ("dance troupe") is credited, so it can be assumed that he had been staying in Madras for some time to prepare dancers for this film (see fig. 5-8).



பாத்திரங்கள்.

ராஜா M. G. தண்டபாணி	....	சூரன்
M. V. மணி	....	வீரவாகு
மாஸ்டர் P. S. மணி (5 வயது)	....	பாலஸுப்ரமண்யன்
,, முருகேசன் (10 வயது)	....	தண்டபாணி
,, நாராயணன்	....	சுப்பிரமணியர்
ராமைய சாஸ்திரி	....	இடும்பன்
ஞானமணி	....	வசந்த
செல்வமணி	....	ஜயந்தன்
V. V. S. மணி	....	பாணகோபன்
T. R. சுப்புராமி பிள்ளை	....	பரமசிவன்
கோவிந்தராஜுலு நாயுடு	....	விஷ்ணு
சவுடப்பா	....	பிரமன்
ஆறுமுகம்	....	இந்திரன்
வசந்தா	....	வள்ளி
சுந்தராம்பாள்	....	தேவயானை
தனலக்ஷ்மி	....	பார்வதி
ஸரோஜினி	....	இந்திராணி
தாலக்ஷ்மி	....	அசமுகி

வைதீஸ்வரன் கோயில் மீனாக்ஷிசுந்தர நட்டுவனார் நடன கோஷ்டியார் நர்த்தனம்.

கதை, வசனம், பாட்டு : L. சுப்பிரமணிய செட்டியார்.

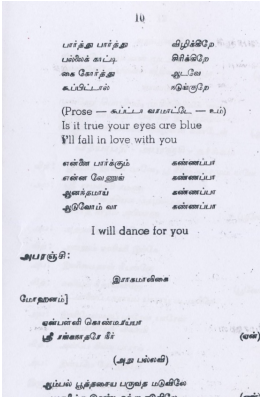
டைரெக்டர் : H. S. மேதா.

Produced by **PREMIER CINETONE,** Coimbatore.

Fig. 5-8. Songbook of *Sri Kanda Leela* (1938) in which Vaideeswarankoyil Meenakshisundaram's "dance troupe" (*naṭaṉa kōṣṭi*) is credited for dance. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

He also choreographed for at least two slightly later films: *Harischandra* (1944) and *Vidyapathi* ("Lord of Knowledge," 1946). He is credited for choreography in the songbooks of both these films. Moreover, the film *Vidyapathi* is important for a number of reasons. First, it contains dance by a *devadāsī* character named Tāci Mōkaṉāmpāḷ, who was played by the actress K. Thavamani Devi (1925-2001).[133] Although most of the sequences were choreographed by Meenakshisundaram (and hence likely consisted of "straightforward" choreography, much like Ramaiah Pillai's early work), the character of

Mōkaṉāmpāḷ also performs a Western-style dance in the film (see fig. 5-9). The songbook for the film, which as far as I can ascertain contains the only extant visual materials, tells us that this "English dance" ("*naṭaṉam—āṅkilam*") was choreographed by a woman who is credited in Tamil as "Mrs. Raiṉperṭ" (perhaps Mrs. Reinbert?). The music for this sequence was composed by a "C.G. Rob and Party," and the song had both Tamil and English words. The assumed cosmopolitan constitution of the audience is of course very telling. The fact that sequences of Bharatanāṭyam choreographed by *naṭṭuvaṉār*s such as Meenakshisundaram stood next to Western-style performance is something that was a reality in the lives of traditional female artists in Madras during the 1930s; this was seen in Chapter III, when the "mixed bill" program of La Meri with the *devadāsīs* Bhanumati and Varalakshmi took place in the Victoria Public Hall in Madras in 1937.



10

பார்த்து பார்த்து விழிக்கிறே
பல்லைக் காட்டி சிரிக்கிறே
கை கோர்த்து ஆடவே
கூப்பிட்டால் நடுங்குறே

(Prose — கப்பட்ட வாசாப்பிட — உம்)
Is it true your eyes are blue
I'll fall in love with you

என்னை பார்க்கும் கண்ணைப்பா
என்ன வேணும் கண்ணைப்பா
ஆனந்தமாய் கண்ணைப்பா
ஆடுவோம் வா கண்ணைப்பா

I will dance for you

அபரஞ்சி:

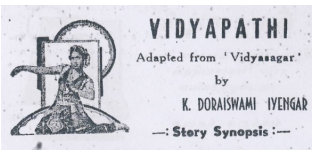
இராகமாலிகை

மோஹனம்]

ஏன்பள்ளி கொண்டாப்பா
ஸ்ரீ சங்கரதரே கீர் (ஏன்)

(அது பல்லவி)

ஆம்பல் பூத்தலைய பருவத மதிலே



சங்கீதம்	....	அடேப்பள்ளி ராமராவ்
நடனம்	....	K. R. குமார் / M. மீனாக்ஷிசுந்தரம் பிள்ளை
,, ,, (ஆங்கிலம்)	....	Mrs ரைன்பெர்ட்
வாத்திய கோஷ்டி	....	சென்ட்ரல் ஸ்டூடியோஸ்

Fig. 5-9. Excerpts from the songbook of *Vidyapathi* (1946) showing the English lines in one song as well as the credits, with Meenakshisundaram's name together with that of "Mrs. Rai<u>n</u>perṭ." (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

Meenakshisundaram is perhaps best known as the teacher of the famous Brahmin film dancers Yogam and Mangalam (c. 1920-1980) (see fig. 5-10). These two sisters danced in many films during the 1940s. However, since they were never "heroines" in the films in which they performed, not much is known about their backgrounds. Fortunately, two small but very important archival sources from the Tamil film magazines *Pecum Patam* (1946) and *Kuṇṭūci* (1948) furnish information about the sisters, who were very popular as film dancers and also later as stage performers of Bharatanāṭyam. I have

translated an abridged version of the *Kuṇṭūci* article as Appendix D, since it is perhaps the only written source entirely dedicated to the dance careers of both of these performers.

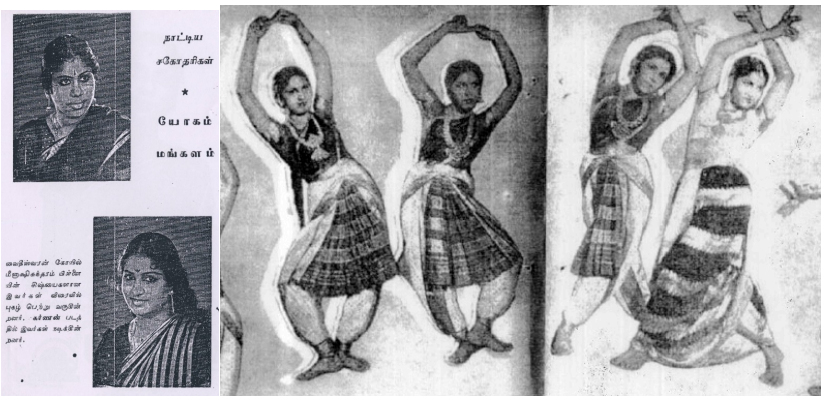


Fig. 5-10. Portraits of Yogam and Mangalam. *(Left)* From *Pecum Patam* (August 1944, p. 32). *(Right)* From *Kuntuci* magazine (February 1948, pp. 18-19). (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.)

Yogam and Mangalam in some ways represent the reverse of most *devadāsī* women's experiences with the cinema. Unlike women from *devadāsī* backgrounds, who entered the cinema and left behind other careers in music, gramophone recording, and theater performance, Yogam and Mangalam *leave* the cinema to pursue careers as "in-demand" stage performers of Bharatanāṭyam. As Brahmin women whose maternal family was very much involved in musical production in Madras city, they were able to fit rather neatly into the emergent elite world of modern Bharatanāṭyam dance in urban Madras in the 1940s. More importantly, for the present discussion, it is Meenakshisundaram

Naṭṭuvaṉār who affects this drastic transformation in their professional lives. Like many of his contemporaries, Meenakshisundaram only "makes it big" when he begins to choreograph for the cinema and produces professional Brahmin "star" dancers (e.g., Ramaiah Pillai and Kamala Lakshman). Their status as Bharatanāṭyam dancers in Madras city can perhaps best be gauged by the fact that they were invited to perform for the Annual Conference of the Madras Music Academy in 1944, the same year as their *araṅkēṟṟam*. The recitals of Yogam and Mangalam are perhaps the last that is heard about the activities of Meenakshisundaram Naṭṭuvaṉār. His legacy lingered in the cinema for another couple of decades because he had also trained V.S. Muthuswamy Pillai (1920-1992), a film choreographer and dance teacher who is discussed below.

K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai

After Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai, it is perhaps K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai (1921-1974) who produced the largest number of Bharatanāṭyam choreographies for the Tamil cinema from roughly 1948 to 1963. He was born to Naṭēca Piḷḷai, a *nāgasvaram* artist, and a woman named Cuppammāḷ in the town of Karaikkal (in today's Union Territory of Puducherry) on July 14, 1923. At a very young age, he learned vocal music from his father and *nattuvankam* from Kattumannarkoyil Muthukumara Pillai. At the age of 17, he joined Kalakshetra and assisted Pandanallur Chockalingam Pillai with *nattuvankam* and with singing for Kalakshetra's dance performances. In 1943, when Chockalingam left Kalakshetra, Dandayudhapani continued on; eventually, however, at the age of 26, he too left Kalakshetra (Sundaram *Marapu Vaḻi* 45).

In 1959, Dandayudhapani Pillai established the dance school Natyakalalayam in Madras. He felt it was necessary to compose versions of the new Bharatanāṭyam for the stage and thus focused much of his effort during the late 1950s and the early 1960s on composing new songs and setting choreography to them. He composed many songs in traditional genres such as *jatisvaram*, *varṇam*, and *tillāṉā*, and he eventually released a book of these compositions in Tamil entitled *Āṭalicai Amutam* ("The Nectar of Dance Music"). Today, these compositions—including some that were originally choreographed for the cinema—have become seamlessly integrated into the repertoire of "traditional" Bharatanāṭyam. In 1972, Dandayudhapani Pillai's compositions were recorded by vocalist M.L. Vasanthakumari (also from the *devadāsī* community)[134] in an album entitled "An Evening of Bharathanatyam" (see fig. 5-11).[135] This recording followed on the coattails of perhaps the earliest commercial recording of a full suite of Bharatanāṭyam music, which was produced by the actress and dancer Vyjayanthimala in 1969.

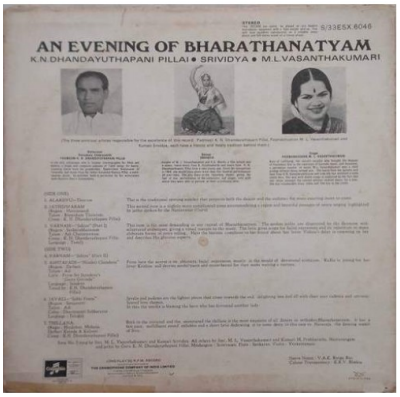


Fig. 5-11. The original vinyl recording of Bharatanāṭyam music by K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai, sung by M.L. Vasanthakumari (S/33ESX 6046, Columbia Black Label, Madras, 1972). (Courtesy Davesh Soneji.)

Like Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai, Dandayudhapani taught Bharatanāṭyam to a number of film stars, including the Travancore Sisters (Lalitha, Padmini, and Ragini), Vyjayanthimala (b. 1933), Rajasulochana (1935-2013), Jayalalitha (1948-2016; the former Chief Minister of Tamilnadu and a former film star), and K. Srividya (1953-2006; the daughter of vocalist M.L. Vasanthakumari). In Chapter III, I discussed how one of the key transformations that occurred during the twentieth-century reinvention of Bharatanāṭyam was the shift away from cyclical, lyrical modes of textual interpretation (*abhinaya*) toward more linear narrative modes. Certainly the new "dance-drama" idiom as it was cultivated at Kalakshetra played no small part in this transformation. Dandayudhapani, who taught for a number of years at Kalakshetra, went on to stage his own "dance-dramas" in Madras, and his film-star students participated in these stagings of "new" Bharatanāṭyam. According to B.M. Sundaram (*Marapu Va*ḻ*i* 46), these included

the dance-dramas *Āṇṭāḷ* ("The Poetess Āṇṭāḷ," in which Vyjayanthimala played the primary role), *Civakāmiyiṉ Capatam* ("The Oath of Civakāmi," with the actress Chandrakantha), *Padmāvati Kalyāṇam* ("The Wedding of the Goddess Padmāvati," with Rajasulochana), and *Kāvēri Tanta Kalaicelvi* ("The Goddess of Arts Who Manifested the Kāvēri River," with Jayalalitha).

What distinguishes Dandayudhapani's choreographic inventions in the cinema from those of Ramaiah Pillai is the incredible range of sequences that he choreographs, from "obviously" Bharatanāṭyam-type dances to those resembling the North Indian form Kathak to Western-style numbers that are reflective of a new type of dance that moves away from traditional idioms altogether. Thus, in many of Dandayudhapani's early choreographies, such as those for English film *The River* (1951), only Bharatanāṭyam is seen. In this case, the dancer Radha Burnier (a niece of Rukmini Arundale) performs a *varnam* that was written, tuned, and choreographed by him. In films such as *Penn* (1951; later remade in Telugu as *Sangham* [1951] and in Hindi as *Ladki* [1953], all of which were choreographed by Dandayudhapani), the influence of Ramaiah Pillai's style of "new" Bharatanāṭyam can be seen; it is particularly evident in the deeply nationalistic sequences in this film, which were discussed in Chapter IV. A few years later, in the Hindi film *Chori Chori* (1956; distributed by AVM Madras), there are two sequences choreographed by him. The first is a *tillāṉā* performed by Kamala Lakshman and sung by M.L. Vasanthakumari. As with the sequences in *Penn*, Kamala is depicted dancing in a stage Bharatanāṭyam performance against a set that glorifies the notion of Bharatanāṭyam

as the “ancient temple dance” of South India, replete with a large image of the god Siva-Nataraja. The second sequence features the dancers Sayi and Subbulakshmi dressed in “Kathak”-style costumes and performing dance at a wedding reception. The movements are loosely inspired by Kathak dance vocabulary, and it is clear in these sequences that Bharatanāṭyam movements actually form the basis of the choreography. (I have already noted the importance of mixing various Indian classical dance styles in the discussion about Ramaiah Pillai.) Later, in the Telugu film *Bhookailas* (“Siva’s Heaven on Earth,” 1958) Dandayudhapani choreographs on the Kathak dancer Gopi Krishna, who was also trained in Bharatanāṭyam by T.K. Mahalingam Pillai. Here, too, loosely “Kathak”-type movement is grafted onto a basic movement structure derived from Bharatanāṭyam. Dandayudhapani’s choreographic diversity is due in no small part to his movement into the Hindi cinema in the 1950s; at this time, Bharatanāṭyam was also being introduced to North Indian audiences, and this was facilitated by AVM Studios, one of Madras’ largest production studios, which remade many successful Tamil films in Hindi. In these projects, Dandayudhapani interfaced with North Indian dance directors such as B. Hiralal (a Kathak dancer from Jaipur who had settled in Madras) and A.K. Chopra. Some of his later work in the Hindi cinema, in films like *Bindiya* (“The Woman Named Bindiya,” 1960), thus created a new vocabulary for dance in “social” or “romantic” Indian films. In *Bindiya*, for example, the heroine is Padmini (of the Travancore sisters), and yet most of the dance sequences have her coupled with the film’s hero. In these “romantic” dances, she will occasionally assume a posture that is reminiscent of Bharatanāṭyam.

Dandayudhapani's choreographies in the Hindi cinema thus serve two important functions. First, they bring Bharatanāṭyam to North Indian cinematic audiences, as seen in films such as *Ladki* ("Woman," 1953; the Hindi remake of the Tamil film *Penn*) and *Chori Chori* ("Surreptitiously," 1956). In these films, the dancers Vyjayanthimala and Kamala Lakshman bring Bharatanāṭyam genres such as *tillāṉā* to Hindi-speaking cinematic audiences through the music and choreography of Dandayudhapani. Second, the emergence of "social" or "romantic" dances such as those seen in Dandayudhapani's later Hindi film choreographies represents a new instantiation of "film dance" to which South Indian artists—both as dancers and choreographers—were central.

Although it would be impossible to comment on all of the complexities of Dandayudhapani's major choreographies in the cinema, it is significant that he filled a void left by the slowly waning presence of Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai, who by the 1950s had largely been responsible for establishing the aesthetic parameters of celluloid classicism. (In Appendix E, I have compiled a list of the major Tamil, Telugu, and Hindi films featuring choreography by K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai from 1948 to 1963.) Dandayudhapani's Bharatanāṭyam choreography very closely resembles that of Ramaiah Pillai, and indeed it is set on dancers such as Kamala, Padmini, Vyjayanthimala, and Sayi-Subbulakshmi, all of whom were once muses for Ramaiah Pillai's work.

V.S. Muthuswami Pillai

The next *nattuvanar* I would like to briefly discuss is V.S. Muthuswami Pillai (1921-1992). I include information about him in this chapter—even though he has

already received considerable attention—because of this extremely prolific contribution to Bharatanāṭyam in the cinema during the 1940s and 1950s, which is matched perhaps only by Ramaiah Pillai's efforts. The blog run by dance enthusiast Cassidy Behling, *cinemanrityagharana.blogspot.com,* has compiled a number of videos that feature his work; in addition, his student, dance historian Tiziana Leucci, has a forthcoming essay about him entitled "The Ambiguous Patronage of Hereditary Performing Artists in Tamil Cinema: The Case of V.S. Muthuswamy Pillai."[136] By providing a brief sketch of his background and some of his contributions to the cinema here, I wish to highlight the similarities between his experiences and those of other hereditary dance-masters who engaged with the cinema. Leucci's essay describes this engagement as "ambiguous": on the one hand, it provided a livelihood and fiscal stability, but on the other it was both a transient and aesthetically suspect enterprise. Although Muthuswami Pillai began his career in films as an apprentice to Vaideeswarankoyil Meenakshisundaram Pillai in the late 1940s, by the time he was recognized as a noteworthy independent choreographer during the late 1950s and 1960s, there was an increasing rift between stage versions of Bharatanāṭyam—which were seen as the hermetic, insular interpretations of "pure" and "classical" Indian "tradition"—and "filmy" dance, which was increasingly understood as a low-brow art, even if it featured movement that was dramatically and unquestionably similar to stage Bharatanāṭyam. Leucci herself lived through the fallout of these understandings of dance in Madras during the 1980s, when she was studying with Muthuswami Pillai. He never quite "made it" to the top ranks as a dance teacher in

Madras, likely because of his association with the later Tamil cinema. Indeed, his most prominent Bharatanāṭyam students in Madras were Europeans (mostly from France), who did not have much of an understanding of his involvement in the cinema. In that sense, Muthuswami's narrative is very different from that of Ramaiah Pillai, whose cine-dance actually shaped and directed the taste habits of audiences who watched Bharatanāṭyam on stage.

Muthuswami Pillai was a *naṭṭuvaṉār* who was born into a matrilineal *devadāsī* family of artists. His grandmother was a dancer named Vaḷḷampāḷ (dates unknown), and her daughter Cēturāmu Ammāḷ (dates unknown), who was talented singer, gave birth to Muthuswami Pillai on October 21, 1920 (Sundaram *Marapu Vaḻi* 245). He first learned dance and *naṭṭuvāṅkam* from Vaideeswarankoyil Meenakshisundaram Naṭṭuvaṉār (who has already been discussed in detail) and later from Kattumannarkoyil Muttukumara Pillai (1874-1960), who also had a brief stint as a choreographer for Tamil films.[137] Once again, as with Dandayudhapani Pillai, it is not clear when Muthuswami Pillai began his work in the cinema. At some point during the early 1940s, he works for Nrithyodaya, the dance school founded by film director K. Subrahmanyam. It was likely through his exposure to Subrahmanyam's cinematic network that he began to accompany his teacher, Meenakshisundaram Naṭṭuvaṉār, as an apprentice on film sets. I am also not able to pinpoint with any degree of accuracy when he detached from the role of choreographic apprentice and began to choreograph himself. Speculations from one of the few written pieces about Muthuswami Pillai, an article in the magazine *Sruti* by Sujatha

Vijayaraghavan, have proven to be incorrect. The article lists ten films from 1939 to 1949 for which the author claims that Muthuswami was choreographer. I have been able to trace the credits of these films through songbooks, and, in most, it is either Meenakshisundaram Naṭṭuvaṉār or Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai whose name appears for "dance." In the 1941 film *Sabapathi* ("Lord of the Assembly"), his name appears together with that of Meenakshisundaram. In this film, Muthuswami is credited as a "junior" artist, which is indicated by the prefix "Master" attached to his name. By the late 1940s, in films such as *Paittiyakkāraṉ* ("Madman," 1947), his name appears together with other choreographers, such as Vedantam Raghavaih (1919-1971). It is also often confusingly rendered as "Muttukumāracāmi," which casts some doubt about whether this could be referring to Kattumannarkoyil Muthukumara Pillai, with whom Muthuswamy studied.

By this time, Muthuswami gains a reputation as a choreographer, particularly for films produced by A.V. Meiyappan of AVM Studios. During the late 1940s, he choreographs for a number of films, such as *Rukmangadan* ("The Epic of Rukmāṅgada," 1947), *Apurva Chintamani* ("Wonderous Crest-Jewel," 1947), *Devadāsī* (1948), *Vedhala Ulagam* ("Demon Land," 1948), and *Inbavalli* ("Affectionate Woman," 1949). When he was in Salem for the shooting of the last of these films, he was approached by P.A. Periyanayaki to teach dance to her niece, Sayi, and her cousin, Subbulakshmi. Periyanayaki, who came from a *devadāsī* family in Panruti (today's Cuddalore district), was herself one of the first playback singers for the early Tamil cinema, and she was recording songs for the film *Inbavalli*. In 1953, Muthuswami performed the *arankerram*

(debut performance) for Sayi and Subbulakshmi in Madras. Thereafter, he was almost completely identified with these star performers, who gave both stage performances of Bharatanāṭyam and danced in a number of hit films during the 1950s, such as *Malaikkallan* ("Mountain Bandit," 1954) and *Ratthakanneer* ("Tears of Blood," 1954), both of which were choreographed by Muthuswami. These and other sequences have already received attention on Behling's blog and in the forthcoming work by Tiziana Leucci, so I only want to point here to the tutelage and mentorship of Sayi and Subbulakshmi under Muthuswami as a significant signpost in his own career; I also want to mention the awareness of Bharatanāṭyam within the milieu of Tamil cinema. Again, in terms of aesthetic shifts, it is very important to realize that Ramaiah Pillai's radical transformations of the aesthetic of dance during the early 1940s had deep, wide-ranging, and irrevocable effects. Thus, the work of both V.S Muthuswami and K.N. Dandayudhapani cannot be severed from the aesthetic epicenter represented by the choreographic inventions of Ramaiah Pillai. It is the joint contribution of all these *naṭṭuvaṉārs* from the 1930s until the 1950s who gave prominence to the rise of Bharatanāṭyam in Tamil cinema, thereby making the form popular in Madras city and Tamil Nadu. From the 1960s onward, Muthuswami attracted a number of Bharatanāṭyam disciples, some from India, such as Pratibha Prahalad of Bangalore (b. 1962) and Kalamandalam Kshemavathy (b. 1948); he also attracted a number of European dancers, including Dominique Delorme and Tiziana Leucci. Muthuswami's son, M. Selvam,

continues to teach a new generation of both Indian and European dancers in Chennai today.

Kanchipuram Ellappa Pillai (Mudaliar)

The final *naṭṭuvaṉār* whom I would like to briefly discuss is Kanchipuram Ellappa Mudaliar (1908-1974) (see fig. 5-12). Ellappa was very marginally involved in the cinema, and that, too, at a very late stage, during the 1960s. However, one of Ellappa's prime disciples, a Brahmin man named Udupi Laxminarayan, had produced students who figure prominently in today's world of Tamil cine-dance such as Prabhu Deva. Ellappa's aesthetic genealogy thus survives through two generations in the cinema. Although these instantiations of Tamil cine-dance fall outside of the historical parameters of this project, they represent significant interventions that have long-standing effects on the practice and perception of Bharatanāṭyam during this later period.

Fig. 5-12. Kanchipuram Ellappa Pillai (1908-1974). (Courtesy B.M. Sundaram.)

Ellappa was born in the town of Kanchipuram (near Madras) to a musician named Gurusvami Mudaliar and his wife Krishnammal, who died when Ellappa was only three years old (Sundaram, *Marapu Vaḻi* 35). Ellappa's elder brother was a drummer named Kuppuswamy Mudaliar, who was the resident drummer for the famous dancer T. Balasaraswati. Ellappa was initially trained by his uncle, a *naṭṭuvaṉār* named Tiruvengada Pillai. Ellappa was also trained in music by his own father and in playing the *mṛdaṅgam* drum from another relative named Varadaraja Mudaliar. Later, he trained with Kandappa Pillai (1899-1942), the primary teacher of T. Balasaraswati. When Kandappa left for Almora (in today's Uttarakhand state) in the late 1930s, Ellappa became the regular conductor of Balasaraswati's orchestra. A few years later, when Kandappa's son K. Ganesan Pillai (1923-1987) joined Balasaraswati's troupe, Ellappa gave him some training and then left the group in 1959. Ellappa married a woman named Varalakshmi and had a number of children, including E. Gnanasundaram, who was trained by Ellappa to be a dance teacher but who moved to Calcutta and died prematurely. Ellappa himself passed away in Madras on July 22, 1974.

As with Vaideeswarankoyil Meenakshisundaram, is not clear how or when Ellappa began to choreograph for films. By the late 1940s, Ellappa was teaching elite, non-hereditary dancers in Madras city and giving private classes to a number of young dancers. It was likely around the mid-1950s that he began to choreograph for films. One of the earliest set of film credits that mentions him is from the film *Valliyin Selvam* ("The Son of Valli," 1955). In this film, he choreographs the song *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār*, which will

be discussed in detail in Chapter VI. In 1958, he recited the rhythmic syllables for the same song, which he choreographed again for the film *Manamaalai* ("Garland of the Heart," 1958), and it is around this time that his students begin to present the song in their stage performances at the Madras Music Academy; this topic will be discussed again in Chapter VI.

One of the final two films that Ellappa is associated with is *Parthiban Kanavu* ("Pārttipaṉ's Dream," 1960) (see fig. 5-13), in which his name appears together with Vaideeswarankoyil Meenakshisundaram Naṭṭuvaṉār. This is a fantasy film set in the early medieval days of the Tamil Cola empire. Although it mostly contains dance that is clearly not meant to look like Bharatanāṭyam, there is one long sequence of Bharatanāṭyam rhythmic dance (performed to vocalized rhythms or *jatis*). This appears to be choreographed by Ellappa, and it is his voice reciting the rhythms. The sequence is performed by Kamala Lakshman, who plays a court dancer. By this time, Kamala and the film's heroine, Vyjayanthimala, have clearly established their presence in the world of both cinema and stage versions of Bharatanāṭyam. The choreography for this sequence is remarkably reminiscent of Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai's choreographies for Kamala, which contain displays of rhythmic virtuosity, are athletic in nature, and appear "polished" as compared with performances by T.R. Rajakumari and other early *devadāsī* performers before the mid-1940s.

Fig. 5-13. Screen capture of the credits from the film *Parthiban Kanavu* ("Pārttipaṉ's Dream," 1960), which mentions both Kanchipuram G. Ellappa and Vaideeswarankoyil Meenakshisundaram.

One of the last sequences in which the names of Ramaiah Pillai and Ellappa appear—together with those of Ramaiah Pillai's students, M.S. Ramasami Pillai and Thangappan—is in the credits for the film *Konjum Salangai* ("A Little Jingle of the Anklebells," 1962) Some of the content of this film was already discussed in Chapter IV.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have provided a brief overview of men from traditional *naṭṭuvaṉār* families who, by following the experience of Ramaiah Pillai, carved out careers for themselves that oscillated between stage and cinematic performances of Bharatanāṭyam. I mapped the complex and challenging roles played by men who were involved in the production of Bharatanāṭyam as cine-dance during the early to mid-twentieth century. Men from hereditary *naṭṭuvaṉār* communities in particular not only participated in the remaking of Bharatanāṭyam as simultaneously a stage and screen art

but also, to a large extent, shaped its emerging aesthetics. Nowhere is this more evident than in the work of Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai and in that of those *naṭṭuvaṉārs* such as V.S. Muthuswami Pillai and K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai, who followed the path forged by Ramaiah Pillai. This chapter also highlighted the deep entanglement between the cinema and stage representations of Bharatanāṭyam by focusing on the pedagogical lives of these *naṭṭuvaṉārs*. Teaching Bharatanāṭyam to middle-class (mostly upper-caste) women in Madras wove new forms of so-called "respectability" into the social fabric of the new Bharatanāṭyam, certainly, but also into the lives of these teachers. Had they remained solely in the world of cinema alone, they likely would not have achieved the levels of professional success that allowed them to be characterized as celebrated *gurus* in modern India's dance scene. Strains of the danger of this potential cultural marginalization are seen in the case of V.S. Muthuswami Pillai, for example, who never quite reached the level of fame of Ramaiah Pillai or Dandayudhapani, because so much more of his early professional career focused on the cinema rather than the stage. Regardless, the life narratives of these figures all dramatize negotiations and slippages between form and discourse, between ideas about "the popular" and "the classical," and between Bharatanāṭyam and its discontents. The sociotechnological interventions represented by the advent of cine-dance and the consequent emergence of the "dance choreographer" in South India had significant consequences for stage versions of the dance as well. The idea that Bharatanāṭyam could in fact be "choreographed"—in terms of both its abstract dance (*aṭavukaḷ*) and its textual interpretation (*abhinaya*)—evolved at

the hands of the very *naṭṭuvaṉārs* who moved between stage and screen. Indeed, it may even be said that the idea of "choreographing" a composition in modern Bharatanāṭyam takes its cues from the ways in which dance was reworked by *naṭṭuvaṉārs* in the cinema, again, with Ramaiah Pillai's choreographic formulae and vocabularies at the very heart of such an enterprise. In the next chapter, I examine several such cinematic representations of choreography across Bharatanāṭyam genres in detail to understand these shifts from generic, aesthetic, and technical standpoints.

CHAPTER VI

GENRE, REPERTOIRE, AND TECHNIQUE BETWEEN CINEMA AND THE URBAN STAGE

This chapter addresses details about how the embodied and material significations of Bharatanāṭyam dance itself—in terms of its aesthetics, technique, and repertoire—are irrevocably transformed through their encounter with cinema. It traces the ways in which traditional *devadāsī* dance genres like the Tamil *padam*, an erotic love song, are reprised and renovated in the cinema. It analyzes the way that tune (*meṭṭu* or *varṇameṭṭu*), gestural exegesis of poetry (*abhinaya*), and movement technique (*aṭavu, jati,* or *kōṟvai*) are deployed in genres like *padam* as well as in other genres like *tillāṉā* and new devotional genres (*kīrtana*) that find their way into the cinema. In some sense, the early cinema also provides a window into older dance technique and repertory that have disappeared from today's Bharatanāṭyam but that remain captured in films from the 1930s to the early 1950s. This chapter also examines how slippages *between* idioms were integral to the making of both cinema dance and stage versions of Bharatanāṭyam during this period. These slippages are unpacked by pointing to the creation of new types of dance that were specifically the products of the encounter between cinema and stage, such as the "snake dance" (*pāmpu naṭaṉam*), and by studying dances that narrativize devotion to the dancing god Śiva-Naṭarāja. These new forms breathe a different aesthetic life into the idiom of Bharatanāṭyam, and they become representative of Bharatanāṭyam as a whole during the

mid-twentieth century. Finally, when thinking about dance repertoire itself, it is imperative to seriously consider the idea of intermedial cultural formations in early twentieth-century Madras. In this chapter, print culture—in the form of both film songbooks and chapbook-style compilations of traditional dance and music repertoire—again plays a major role, not only as an idiom that "documents" or "preserves" repertoire but also as a key mode through which music, dance, and cinema interface. Throughout the chapter, emphasis will be on the centrality of *text* in the production and dissemination of Bharatanāṭyam in its staged and cinematic iterations. Indeed, even when visual sources are available, they must be brought into dialogue with the textual archive that, in many ways, contextualizes the movement that is seen in celluloid representations. It is this deeply intermedial and cross-pollinizing play among text, music, the dancing body, and celluloid representation that, I argue, constitutes the modern idea of "the classical" as it is expressed in twentieth-century Indian dance.

OLD REPERTOIRE IN NEW MEDIA: COURTESAN DANCE REPERTOIRE AND TECHNIQUE IN THE CINEMA

From the very first instantiations of dance in the South Indian cinema, it is clear that courtesan dance provided a kind of extant template for choreographic representation. Although the reinvented Bharatanāṭyam was already clearly on the horizon as cinema was becoming a popular cultural form, the cinema of the 1930s and the early 1940s also preserves a record of the residual aesthetics of the pre-"revival" dance. As seen in the previous chapter, the earliest choreographers to be credited in the Tamil cinema (e.g., Vaideeswarankoyil Meenakshisundaram Naṭṭuvaṉār, Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai)

emerged from within the *devadāsī* or *icai vēḷāḷar* community and thus brought a keen awareness of courtesan dance technique and repertoire into their work in the cinema. In this chapter, I trace some of the ways in which traditional courtesan genres—such as *padam, jāvaḷi, svarajati,* and *tillāṉā,* all of which were exclusively the preserve of *devadāsī* artists in the nineteenth century—become modes of performance that traveled widely through the cinema. It is also significant that genres like *padam* and *jāvaḷi* are also present in the world of Tamil drama. Although some of the published scripts for Tamil *icai nāṭakam* plays simply label their songs using the generic Tamil term *pāṭṭu* ("song"), others consciously use terms borrowed from earlier indigenous theater forms, such as the term *taru* (*daruvu*), or terms borrowed from courtesan dance, such as *padam* or *javali*.[138] The presence of courtesan genres in the drama thus also enables their movement into the new spaces of the early cinema. This happens because, as seen in Chapter I, many of the iconic visual and musical features of the Tamil drama also traveled from stage to screen. In the process of this new mobility, these genres are often repurposed, transformed, and then circulated, in their new forms, in the world of stage performances of the reinvented Bharatanāṭyam.

REPURPOSED REPERTOIRE: THE *SVARAJATI* AND *TILLANA* IN THE CINEMA

One of the earliest examples of such repurposing comes from the mythological film *Prahlada* ("The Devotee Prahlāda," 1933), which was produced by Salem Shankar and directed by B.N. Rao. In this film, there is a scene in which the demonic father of the child-devotee Prahlāda, named Hiraṇyakaśipu, is being entertained by courtesans in his

palace. This film is one of the earliest choreographic projects of Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai. For this sequence, he chooses to repurpose a piece that is in wide circulation among *devadāsī* performers and *naṭṭuvaṉārs* in Madras at the time, a *svarajati* entitled *Māmōkalākiri Mīṟutē* ("My Passion is Ever-Growing") in the *rāga* Khamās, which was written by the poet Kaṭikai Namaccivāya Pulavar and tuned by the musician Subbarāma Dīkṣituḍu, both of whom were associated with the small court of Ettayapuram in today's Thoothukudi district.[139] The *svarajati* is a virtuosic piece in the *devadāsī* repertoire that alternates between poetic interpretation through gesture (*abhinaya*) and passages of abstract movement (*jatis, kōṟvais*). The text of this *svarajati* in the *rāga* Khamās is dedicated to both the deity Murukaṉ and the Raja of Ettayapuram, Rāma Kumāra Eṭṭappā Nāyakkar (r. 1868-1890). In his filmic repurposing of the song for *Prahlada*, Ramaiah Pillai deletes the textual references to Eṭṭappā Nāyakkar so that it appears that the courtesans are performing a dance dedicated to Hiraṇyakaśipu. Thus, only an excerpt of the full *svarajati* is performed, and this becomes somewhat of a precedent for similar instances of repurposing that occur later.

Another instance that I would like to briefly discuss here—the repurposing of a piece in the *tillāṉā* genre in the Telugu film *Swarna Sundari* ("Golden Beauty," 1957), which was remade into Tamil as *Manaalane Mangaiyin Bhagyam* ("A Husband is a Woman's Good Fortune," 1957)—was significant for two reasons. First, it is a composition by K. Ponnaiya Pillai (1888-1945), a descendant of the famous "Tanjore Quartet" (1802-1864; Ciṉṉaiyā, Poṉṉaiyā, Civāṉantam, and Vaṭivēl), who were four

dance-masters who served at the Tanjore court during the nineteenth century. This is significant because this family had no other involvement with dance in the cinema, despite being at the very helm of the reinvention of Bharatanāṭyam for the stage. (Rukmini Arundale's teacher, Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai, was also a descendant of this family.) Unlike other *naṭṭuvaṉārs* (e.g. Ramaiah Pillai, K.N. Dandayuthapani Pillai), members of this family did not choreograph for the South Indian cinema. The second reason is linked to the first in that the "repurposing" of the piece and its presence in the cinema became points of contention for this family. The piece was used in the film without the permission of the family, and a legal battle ensued between the film's producers and K. Sivanandam Pillai (1913-2003), the son of the composer K. Ponnaiya Pillai. Musicologist B.M. Sundaram, a close associate of the family who was apparently involved in the legal process, provided me with an anecdotal account of the incident as follows:

> At the time of filming both Telugu and Tamil versions, Sivananadam was very upset and asked me why they would have used his family's *tillāṉā* in the films without acknowledging them. Immediately, at his request, the advocate Sarangapani, who was also a patron of this family, issued a lawyer's notice to the producer (and the star of the films), Anjali Devi, requesting one lakh rupees (approximately US $1500 today) as compensation. The judge in this case, named Seshagiri Rao, asked Sivanandam if the abstract drum syllables like "*udana,*" "*tom*," and "*tanana*" (which are used in the composition) have any meaning. Sivanandam looked at me, and I said, "Yes, they have meanings." The judge then gave him fifteen days to come up with what these mean [arguing that Sivanandam could claim copyright infringement on the text of the song itself]. I went to the Sarasvati Mahal Library in Thanjavur and researched their meanings as they appeared in some old manuscripts and gave these to Sivanandam in Madras, who in turn immediately gave it to the judge. The judge passed the judgment, and Sivanandam was awarded the one lakh rupees.

The *tillāṉā* was composed in the *rāga* Aṭhānā, and it ends with a Telugu benediction to the goddess Veṇubhujāmbikā, the consort of Śiva-Paśupatīśvara in the town of Pandanallur (see fig. 6-1). It was a popular composition in this family's repertoire, and several students from both courtesan and non-courtesan families performed this piece during the early decades of the twentieth century. It is translated as follows:

> *ī vasudhalo nīku sāṭi daivamu ledanucu nā madini dalaci ninu* |
> On this earth, there is no deity comparable to you, this is what I believe in my heart,
> *mari mariyĕnto balkitinamma paśupateśvaruni rāṇi kŏmma* ||
> I've entreated you time and time again, Queen of Śiva-Paśupatīśvara.

For the Tamil version of the film, the lyrics were essentially translated into Tamil:

> *pārainilē uṉ pātāmpujamelil karula uṉ malarē caraṇākati*
> On this earth, I surrender to your lotus like, most beautiful feet
> *paṇintuṉai nane makiḻtiṭuvēṉē pacupatē makilum lōkanāyaki*
> I worship you with joy, mother of the world, celebrated by the rider of the bull (Śiva).

Fig. 6-1. Screen capture of Rajasulochana and Girija performing *tillana* in the *rāga* Aṭhānā from *Swarna Sundari* (1957).

In both films, the choreography is by Vempati Peda Satyam (1922-1982), a Brahmin dancer from Kuchipudi village, whose life and work in the Telugu cinema have been tracked extensively by Katyayani Thota. The music composition for the film is attributed to P. Adinarayana Rao, and the lyrical composition is attributed to Tanjai Ramaiah Das and Kosaraju. In both films, the *tillāṉā* is sung by P. Leela (1934-2005) and A.P. Komala (b. 1934). In the films' narrative, the court dancer Jayantī (played by Rajasulochana) teaches this *tillāṉā* to the young princess Pratimā Devī (played by Girija). This lesson takes place in a "royal dance hall" in a mythic palace setting. Although the film is set an unmarked "ancient time," the court dancers perform a piece that was only composed by Ponnaiya Pillai in the twentieth century. The choreography is slightly longer than two minutes, but it contains all three sections of the composition: *pallavi, anupallavi* and *caraṇam.* Interspersed between these sections are passages of spoken rhythmic syllables (*jatis*), and the choreography of these oscillates between recognizably Kuchipudi and Bharatanāṭyam movement, a pattern that the work of Putcha and Thota shows to be characteristic of dance in the Telugu cinema of this period.

LOVE RECAST: THE TAMIL *PADAM* IN CINEMA

Perhaps one of the most frequent, amorphous, and complex representations of *devadāsī* repertoire in the Tamil cinema comes in the form of the Tamil *padam, a* genre of erotic love poetry set to the tripartite structure of *pallavi*, *anupallavi,* and *caraṇam*, which dates back to the late seventeenth century. As the meticulous work of Matthew Allen ("The Tamil 'Padam'") on the Tamil *padam* has shown, the earliest compositions

in the *padam* genre were likely in Telugu, but very soon they were also composed in Tamil and, later, even in Marathi.[140] Among the earliest Tamil *padam* poets were Muttutāṇṭavar (c. early seventeenth century) and Mārimuttā Piḷḷai (1712-1787), both *icai vēḷāḷar* poets in whose hands the genre takes on some of its most characteristic features. However, the genre is perhaps most closely identified with the prolific nineteenth-century Brahmin composer Vaitīcuvaraṉkōyil [or Pikṣāṇṭarkōyil] Cupparāma Aiyar (c. 1829-1880). Ayyar's *padams* indeed became emblematic of the genre, traveling throughout *devadāsī* and *naṭṭuvaṉār* communities all over the Tamil-speaking regions of the Madras Presidency. In terms of content, the *padam*—like most pieces in the courtesan dance repertoire—almost always revolves around three heavily stylized narrative presences: the heroine (*nāyikā*), her female confidante (*sakhī*), and the male hero (*nāyaka*). Most commonly, the *padam* is written in the voice of either the *nāyikā*, who has been estranged from her beloved, or in the voice of the *sakhī*, who has been entrusted with the task of bringing the *nāyaka* back to the heroine.

Allen ("The Tamil 'Padam,'" "Tales Tunes Tell") also discusses another aspect of the *padam:* the genre's highly malleable status, which is based on the interchangeability of tune (known as *meṭṭu* or *varṇameṭṭu*) and text that seem to be at the very heart of its performative life. Allen calls this the phenomenon of "the common tune," noting that *padams* are often characterized by "fuzzy boundaries," both textually and musically (Allen, "The Tamil 'Padam'" 358, 368). He notes that a large number of Tamil *padams* have the same tunes but alternate texts, or the same texts may have alternating tunes. This

flexibility and adaptability are clearly also at the center of the repurposing of *padams* in film. Two of the best-known examples of this come from songs that were originally Telugu-language *jāvaḷis*, which are "close cousins" of the *padam* genre that are reworked as explicitly devotional Tamil *padams* in their filmic iterations.[141] These come from the two films *Meera* (1945) and *Chandralekha* (1948). In both films, the tunes of nineteenth-century Telugu *jāvaḷis* are grafted onto songs that are completely unrelated in content to the original *jāvaḷis* to essentially *become* Tamil *padams* in their new form. Thus, in the film *Meera,* a Telugu *jāvaḷi* in the *rāga* Paras attributed to the poet Tiruppanandal Pattabhiramayya (c. 1863-?) and entitled *"celi neneṭlu sahintune"* ("Friend, I Can't Bear This Agony") is transformed into a devotional *padam* in Tamil, beginning with the words "*maravēnē eṉṉālilumē*" ("I will never forget your grace, Kṛṣṇa"), simply by overlaying the new words onto the tune of the older *jāvaḷi*. In *Chandralekha*, the Telugu *jāvaḷi* in the *rāga* Yaman Kalyāṇī that has attributed to the poet Dharmapuri Subbarāya Ayyar (c. 1864-1927) and that is entitled "*adi nīpai marulu kŏnnadirā"* ("That Girl is Deeply in Love with You") is changed into the Tamil devotional song to the child Kṛṣṇa, beginning with the words "*pālaṉ karuṇai purivāy*" ("Child-god, please bestow your compassion"). In both cases, there is a sublimation of the erotic qualities of the *jāvaḷi* in favor of a more devotional composition that also speaks to the new audiences for both the cinema and the reinvented Bharatanāṭyam by the 1940s.

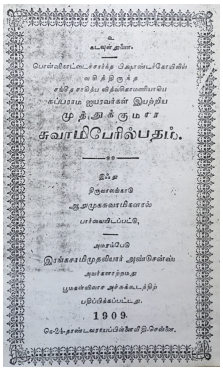
Although the early Tamil cinema can boast of many examples of the repurposing of *padams*, in the section that follows, I want to briefly focus on two types of

representations of *padams:* one in which a traditional *padam* is depicted "as is" from within the courtesan repertoire by way of two examples from 1940s films and another in which the *padam* framework is used for the composition of new songs that are intentionally made to "feel" like *padams*.[142] Because of the ubiquitous presence of the *padam* in both courtesan traditions and beyond (especially in the Tamil drama), it seemed only natural that this would be a kind of default music composition for the new medium of cinema. In both contexts, I hope to demonstrate how filmic mediation recasts the genre as suitable for representation on stage.

Representations of Older *Padams*

In this section, I wish to examine two *padams*, one from the social drama *Sabhapathy* ("Lord of the Assembly," 1941) and another from the film *Jagathalapratapan* ("Lord of the World," 1944), both of which were choreographed by among the earliest *naṭṭuvaṉārs* in the cinema, Vaideeswarankoyil Meenakshisundaram Naṭṭuvaṉār and Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai, respectively.

Sabhapathy contains one of Vaitīcuvaraṉkōyil Cupparāma Aiyar's most well-known *padams*, which appears in print sources that are almost contemporaneous with the composer's own lifetime (see fig. 6-2).[143] The *padam* represented in the film is "*nāṉ aṅkē varuvēṉō"* ("Should I Go There?"), which appears in almost all of the early print compilations of Cupparama Aiyar's *padams* and which is usually among the first five *padams* listed in these sources.[144]



கடவுளுதவி.

பெரம்பலூர்-டைச்சேரிக் கோரன்பிரேமியின்
மகிழ்ச்சிக்கு
சத்தியாபிமானியான
கப்பரை ஐயரவர்கள் இயற்றிய

முத்துக்குமார
சுவாமிபேரில்பதம்.

இஃது
சிதம்பரக்கவி
ஆறுமுகசுவாமிகளால்
பரிசோதிக்கப்பட்டு,

அரும்பெரு
இரங்கசாமிமுதலியார் அன்பெல்லை
அவர்களாற்றமது
முயற்சியாலே அச்சுக்கூடத்திற்
பதிப்பிக்கப்பட்டது.

1909.

Fig. 6-2. An early print compilation of the Tamil *padams* of the poet Cupparāma Aiyar (c. 1829-1880) entitled *Cupparāma Aiyaravarkaḷ Iya<u>r</u>riya Muttukkumāra Cuvāmipēril Patam* ("Padams Composed by Cupparāma Aiyar Dedicated to the God Muttukkumāra [Murukan<u>n</u>]," 1909). (Private Collection of Hari Krishnan.)

In the film, the *padam* is performed by R. Padma (see fig. 6-3), who was from a *devadāsī* background and who was the mother-in-law of the dancer Sayi of the famous duo Sayi and Subbulakshmi, who were discussed in Chapter V.[145] The piece is choreographed by Vaideeswarankoyil Meenakshisundaram Naṭṭuvan<u>n</u>ār, with the assistance of his disciple V.S. Muthuswami Pillai. R. Padma plays the character of Sivakami, a young (non-*devadāsī*) middle-class woman who is to marry the hero of the film, Sabhapathy (played by actor T.R. Ramachandran). The scene for this dance is typical of many social dramas of the time: a young woman is dancing for relatives and in-laws so that they may to assess her "cultural" accomplishments and thus her eligibility for marriage. Bharatanāṭyam dance and Karnatak music figure in this scene, indexing the fact that, by 1941, dance had already become a "respectable" and almost fully domesticated

art (Weidman, *Singing the Classical*; Soneji, "Siva's Courtesans"). Moreover, Padma performs in front of her mother and her future mother-in-law against a background depicting a clearly domestic setting of a living room replete with colonial furniture, flower pots, and picture frames (with a picture of a Hollywood star [perhaps Jean Harlow] holding a cigarette). She wears a modern-style stitched Bharatanāṭyam costume that is very similar to those designed for Rukmini Arundale by Mary Elmore and Madame Cazan, which I discussed in Chapter III.

Fig. 6-3. Screen capture of the performance of the *padam* "*nāṉ aṅkē varuvēṉō*" by R. Padma in the film *Sabhapathy* (1941).

The *padam* "*nāṉ aṅkē varuvēṉō*" has been discussed at length by ethnomusicologist Matthew Allen ("The Tamil 'Padam'" 260-261). Below, I provide an abridged translation of the *padam*.[146] It is significant that the last line of the *padam* as it appears in the film (represented in bold here) does not appear in any of the early print

editions of Cupparama Aiyar's songs; it appears to have been composed for the film itself:

> Pallavi
> *nāṉ aṅkē varuvēṉō turai tāṉ iṅkē varuvārō eṉṟu*
> Should I go there, or will my Lord come here?
> *nayantu pēci maṉatai aṟintu vāṭi*
> Go speak to him gently, and understand his feelings.
>
> Anupallavi
> *vāṇavar paṇiyum vēḷūr taṉil vaḷar muttukumarēcar mītu*
> He is Muttukumāra [Murukaṉ] of Vēḷūr, worshipped by the celestials.
> *maiyal akutu iṉi tāḷātu māṉē aṭi tēṉē*
> I fell in love with him, and cannot bear this separation, my sweet gazelle!
>
> Caraṇam
> ***paṭukkai vīṭu jōṭittu vaḷi pārttu viḷiyum pūrttutē***
> My eyes are increasing exhausted as I look for him from my bedroom
> ***pāti jāmam āccutē ūrpaṭaiyum oṭuṅkip pōccutē***
> It's beyond midnight, and the people of the town are fast asleep
> ***utukai uṉavatum vērukutē caki aṭikkaṭi virakam perukutē***
> I abhor ornaments and cannot eat, my friend, I am constantly longing.

In the filmic representation, there is a clear displacement of the erotic by situating it in the controlled and tempered space of the home, with the primary audience consisting not of male spectators but of elderly women. Although the choreography by Vaideeswarankoyil Meenakshisundaram Naṭṭuvaṉār makes use of the typical gestural language for a *padam*, the emphasis on the use of erotic or suggestive gestures for such a song has clearly been lessened. For example, dance interpretations of many *padams* about longing make use of erotic gestures known as *rati mudrās* ("passion gestures") to depict remembrances of lovemaking and erotic desire.[147] By contrast, Padma's character Sivakami is supposed to be a student who has learned the dance as part of her school's

curricular program. The choreography is thus deliberately made to appear "student-like," with no metaphoric elaboration or improvisation. This kind of straightforward representation of courtesan dances like the *padam* and the *jāvaḷi* became the normative, erotically neutralizing mode in which these genres reappeared on stage in Madras during the 1940s, as discussed in Chapters III and IV. Although the presentation of this *padam* eschews the erotic dimensions of courtesan performance, it cannot escape other elements. As with most representations of *padams* and *jāvaḷis* in both Tamil and Telugu cinema, passages of instrumental music are interspersed between the various sections of the song (i.e., the *pallavi, anupallavi,* and *caraṇam*). At the end of the sequence, Padma performs a courtesan technique known in Telugu as *gaptu-varusa* ("string of movement"), a kind of improvised rhythmic flourish performed only to instrumental music that brings an upbeat closure to the textual interpretation through the *abhinaya* that has just preceded it.

The second example of an "old *padam*" representation comes from the film *Jagathalapratapan* ("Lord of the World," 1944) by Pakshiraja Studios, which was produced and directed by Sriramulu Naidu. The movie catapulted the non-Brahmin singer Pudukottai Ulanganatha Chinnappa (P.U. Chinnappa, [1916-1951]) to stardom. The mythic narrative of the film was "about a prince (played by Chinnappa) who incurs the wrath of his father (played by P.B. Rangachari) when he expresses his heartfelt desire to spend his life in the company of four angelic women, Indrani (played by M.S. Sarojini), Nagakumari (U.R. Jeevaratnam), Agnikumari (S. Varalakshmi) and Varunakumari (T.A. Jayalakshmi), princesses of [the celestial realms] Indraloka, Nagaloka, Agniloka, and

Varunaloka respectively" (Guy "Jagathalaprathapan (1944)"). The songbook for the film also contains an elaborate synopsis of the film in English, along with the texts for the two *padams* that appear in the film, both of which are marked with the title *Naṭaṉam* ("Dance") (see fig. 6-4).

Fig. 6-4. Songbook for *Jagathalapratapan* ("Lord of the World," 1944) with the text for the Tamil *padam Ētukkittaṉai*. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

Among a host of other dance pieces (including another Tamil *padam*),[148] the film features the Tamil *Padam Ētukkittaṇai* ("Why This Indifference?") in the *rāga* Curuṭi, which was composed by Mārimuttā Piḷḷai (1712-1787) and performed by courtesan communities throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The song also appears in what I believe is the earliest print edition of *padams* by this composer alongside the songs of another early Tamil *padam* composer, Muttutāṇṭavar (see fig. 6-5).

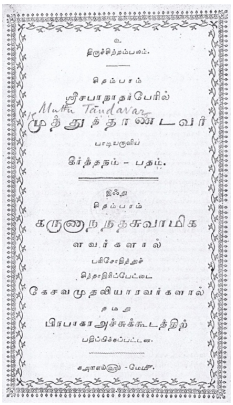


Fig. 6-5. An early print compilation of the Tamil *padams* of Muttutāṇṭavar and Mārimuttā Piḷḷai, dated 1870. This edition contains perhaps the earliest print iteration of the song *Ētukkittaṉai*. (© British Library Board [pTam 14170.k.20]).

This *padam* is composed in a particular register of poetry known in Tamil as *ēcal* ("abuse, slander") and in Sanskrit as *nindā-stuti* ("blame-praise"). In this register, the heroine (*nāyikā*) rebukes the hero (*nāyaka*) by insulting and abusing him, but this is all understood to be a form of praise that speaks to the deep levels of intimacy that exist between the two. A translation of the song runs as follows:

<u>Pallavi</u>
Why this indifference toward me, Lord?

<u>Anupallavi</u>
You wear the half-moon in the locks of your hair,
and you are the King of Dance in the city of Cidambaram

<u>Caranam 1</u>
Did I say anything when you danced on a single leg in the dancing hall, Lord?
Did the astrologer announce out loud that you ride upon a bull?
Did I expose the truth when you begged with a bowl made from a skull and ate from it?

Did I complain even when you smirked in front of everyone, after contaminating food with your saliva?

Caranam 2
Did I announce that you don't have a father, mother or caste?
Did I ever say you had a woman on one half of your body, or call you an untouchable, even though you consumed alcohol?
Did I call you out when you accepted a daughter-in-law from a different caste for your son?
And did I not refer to you as peerless, flawless, and praised in the holy scriptures?

Caranam 3
Did I announce that you were once forcefully beaten with a cane, like a commoner?
Did I refer to you as the madman worshipped by the poor?
Did I embarrass you by saying you have no clothes and so have to wear a tiger's skin?
Did I say anything even when you came as an old man to slay the dwarf-demon?

In the film *Jagathalapratapan* (see fig. 6-6), the *padam* does not further the narrative of the film; it is inserted into the film in a scene where the lead male character, played by Chinnappa, is being entertained by his wives. The king Pratāpaṉ, played by Chinnappa, is sitting on his throne together with three of his wives: Intirakumāri, Nākakumāri, and Varuṇakumāri. Each of them performs a section of the *padam*. The first and fifth sections (the *pallavi* and the third *caranam*) are performed by M.S. Sarojini, the second caranam is performed by T.A. Jayalakshmi, and the third stanza (the first *caranam*) is performed by U.R. Jeevaratnam. According to a conversation that I had with film historian Theodore Baskaran in 2012, except for U.R. Jeevaratnam, the other two actresses (in addition to the hero's fourth wife, who was played by S. Varalakshmi but who is not depicted in this song) were all from the *devadāsī* community. The sequence was choreographed by Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai.

Fig. 6-6. Screen capture of the Tamil *padam "Ētukkittaṉai"* by Mārimuttā Piḷḷai, from *Jagathalapratapan* ("Lord of the World," 1944). The dancer is M.S. Sarojini.

Here, too, there is a "repurposing" of the *padam*. The lyric itself clearly has the god Śiva as the *nāyaka* (hero); all of the coded references, such as the moon in his hair, his residence in Cidambaram, the tiger skin, and the dwarf-demon Muyalakaṉ clearly establish this. However, in the film, the women perform the *padam* as if these references are to the king Pratāpaṉ himself, thereby collapsing the difference between the king and the god Śiva.

Each dancer performs the *abhinaya* (the interpretation of the text through gesture) in a conventional manner, matching each lyric to a specific gesture. The *abhinaya* is quite subtle and not overly theatrical, as seen in Ramaiah Pillai's later choreographies from the 1960s. Each dancer interprets each word of the song with a particular gesture and then walks back for another line of music, which is reminiscent of a technique in courtesan dance that serves to signal the change to the next line of text. Ramaiah Pillai strategically inserts the popular pose of the "dancing Śiva-Naṭarāja" (with the left leg raised) during

the words "*tillai pati naṭēcaṉē*" ("Naṭeśa, Lord of Cidambaram") and "*ampalattiṉ niṉṟu*" ("standing in the dancing hall"), words for which the obvious reference point would be the icon of Naṭarāja. This choreographic motif of creating a chain of "poses" also signals a change from the lyrical and cyclical mode of courtesan *abhinaya* into the more popular style of choreography seen in Bharatanāṭyam today.

New Iterations of the *Padam*

A key strategy for the cultivation of a public notion of a "classical" dance is the remaking of older genres in innovative ways that speak to the politics and desires of the project of "reinvention." In this section, I wish to draw attention to "new" *padams* that were scripted to resemble the older *padam* compositions performed by *devadāsī* artists. However, each of these examples has an element of "newness" in that is not simply a representation of an old song on film but rather a constitutive process in which a new aesthetic canon for dance—understood as "classical dance"—is being drawn up through dialogical communication between the reinvented Bharatanāṭyam and the Tamil cinema. It is also crucial that, in both of the examples I discuss below, the choreography is by Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai, so the idea of "repertory innovation" as it becomes entrenched in the world of Madras' stage performances of Bharatanāṭyam becomes inextricably linked to his aesthetic vision as early as the late 1930s. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that "innovation" in the idiom of modern Bharatanāṭyam owes most of its existence to these early filmic experiments by Ramaiah Pillai.

The first example I would like to explore comes from the film *Sivakavi* ("Śiva's Poet," 1943), which was produced by Pakshiraja Film Studios and directed by S.M. Sriramulu Naidu. The story revolves around the life of a mythical poet named Poyyamoḻi Pulavar. This role was played by M.K. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar, and T.R. Rajakumari plays the role of Vañciyammai, an arrogant court dancer. The music is by Papanasam Sivan. The *padam* here appears in a scene in which the character played by Bhagavathar, who is a court poet, is asked to improvise a new composition about the "greatness of dance." Bhagavathar insists that his song should be accompanied by a dance interpretation. Rajakumari, who is the court dancer, acquiesces to his request and dances to the song. Below is a translation based on the Tamil transcription of the song as it appears on page 6 of the film's songbook (see fig. 6-7):

Fig. 6-7. The cover and page 6 of the songbook for *Sivakavi* (1943), containing the song *"nāṭṭiya kalaiyē."* (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

Pallavi:
kavalaiyait tīrppatu nāṭṭiyak kalaiyē
The art of dance removes all suffering
kaṇikaiyar kaṇkaḷē mataṉviṭum valaiyē
The net of God of Desire is cast from the eyes of the courtesan

Anupallavi:
navarasaṅkaḷilum cruṅkāramē talaiyē
The erotic sentiment is king among all the nine emotions
naḷiṉa naṭaiyaḻakiṟ kīṭeṅkum illaiyē
So there is no harm in appreciating the beauty of a graceful walk

Caraṇam:
pujamiraṇṭu mūṅkil taḷarnaṭai yañci
A hypnotic walk emerges from the swaying of both arms,
puruvam iṭaiyuṭalum vaḷaiyumē keñci
and an ideal body is borne of beautiful eyebrows and curvaceous frame
rasikat taṉmaiyil kaitōntavaḷ vañci
Such a dancing woman is also a supreme connoisseur of art,
rākattil ciṟantatu nāṭak kuṟiñci
just as Nāṭakkuṟiñci is supreme among all the *rāgas*.

The trace of the traditional *padam* survives here in the form of the allegorical references to women's beauty, but perhaps more importantly, it is an early example of a song that is actually *about* dance. As seen in Chapter III, Tamil films like *Jalaja* (1938) represented very early examples of this phenomenon of songs in praise of dance, but this example is significant because, by 1943, Bharatanāṭyam in its reinvented avatar has reached its maturity as a civilizational symbol, a cultural artifact that metonymically "stands in" for nation, religion, and identity. The lyrics of this "*padam*" therefore, read more as lyrics about a new notion of art than they do about the affective dimensions of love and eroticism.

This is one of Ramaiah Pillai's early choreographies in which a choreographic structure and his calculated use of space can very obviously be discerned. The set for the sequence includes a circular floor pattern, and Pillai uses this in framing the way he represents the song. During the first half of all of the musical interludes in between the stanzas, Rajakumari dances in the outer portion of the circle, and each musical interlude ends with a performance of a three-fold flourish, known as *aruti*. When the rendering of the text for each stanza begins, Rajakumari makes her way to the center of the space and begins her gestural interpretation (*abhinaya*) for the text. Over and above this interesting spatial separation between rhythmic movement and *abhinaya*, the sequence also depicts Rajakumari walking forward and backward, always facing the king, as she performs the *abhinaya* portions. This convention of walking up and down the depth of the performance space while performing *abhinaya*, which was very common among *devadāsī* performers, had for the most part been excised in the reinvented Bharatanāṭyam, so perhaps is a veiled reference to "older practices" given that the scene takes place in an imagined courtly context.

The second example of a "new *padam*" appears just a year after *Sivakavi* in the record-breaking film *Haridas* ("Servant of God," 1944), which played continuously for a record three years in Madras theaters.[149] In the film, Rajakumari plays a courtesan by name of Rambhā, who at one point performs at a salon concert in the house of a patron named Hari, played by M.K. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar. The dance piece here is meant to be a song of seduction that flows back and forth between the characters Rambhā and

Hari. The song, *"maṉmata līlaiyai veṉṟāruṇṭō"* ("Have You Ever Won at the Games of the God of Love?"), is set to the *rāga* called Cārukeśī and choreographed by Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai (whose voice appears in the soundtrack as he recites a rhythmic passage [*jati*]).[150] In many ways, the text of the song captures how courtesan dance performance is morphed into the "romantic cinema song" that becomes the staple of later Indian popular cinema. In Tamil cinema, a number of early romantic songs cannot be understood without reference to the erotic framework of the Tamil *padam*, and this song in particular brings into sharp relief the "slippery slope" between the Tamil *padam* of the courtesan repertoire and the early cinematic romantic film song. Below is a translation based on the Tamil transcription of the song as it appears on page 6 of the film's songbook (see fig. 6-8):

Fig. 6-8. The songbook for *Haridas* (1944), containing the text of the song "*maṉmata līlaiyai"*. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

Pallavi:
maṉmata līlaiyai veṉṟāruṇṭō
Have you ever won at the games of the God of Love?
eṉmēl uṉakkēṉō parāmukam
Why do you show such indifference towards me?

Anupallavi:
niṉ mati vataṉamum nīḷ viḷiyum kaṇṭu
Your face bright as the moon and fish-shaped eyes
eṉ mati mayaṅkiṉēṉ mūṉṟu ulakilum
have cast a spell upon me in these three worlds

Caranam:
eṉṉuṭaṉē nī pēciṉāl vāy muttutirntu viṭumō
I wonder, if you spoke to me, would pearls fall from your tongue?
uṉai ennēramum niṉainturukum eṉṉiṭam vantāl meṉak keṭumō
I think of you all the time. Would it be so difficult for you to come to me?
uṉṉai nayantu nāṉ vēṇṭiyumōrmuttam tantāl kuṟaintiṭumō
I'm just asking you for a kiss. Would this belittle you?
orupiḷai yaṟiyā eṉmaṉam malarkkaṇai pāyntu allalpaṭumō
I haven't committed but one sin, yet the flowery arrows [of the God of Love] pierce my heart. Won't my heart suffer?

The song is set in a kind of private salon context, which as the work of Davesh Soneji (*Unfinished Gestures*) has shown, was a primary site for *devadāsī* performance at the turn of the century. As the sequence unfolds, Bhagavathar is dressed in a "king's costume" (*rājā pārṭ* or *rājā vēcam*) like those used in the early Tamil theater (*icai natakam*), and this is followed by a very brief cutaway showing his character's Brahmin wife, played by actor-singer N.C. Vasanthakokilam (1919-1951), wearing a typical nine-yard *sari* (*maṭicār*) that unquestionably marks her as a Brahmin character. As the music begins, the courtesan Rambha, played by Rajakumari, appears against a backdrop of the rising sun and is dressed like the God of Desire (Manmatha), holding a bow and the five flowery arrows of desire (see fig. 6-9). She shoots an arrow toward Bhagavathar, and the

arrow punctures a vessel that hangs above him. Flower petals fall from the vessel and are strewn all over Bhagavathar. He appears to be in ecstasy. Rajakumari dashes toward Bhagavathar as he begins to sing the main choric line of the song, "Have you ever won at the games of the God of Love?"

One of the main conceptual links between this song and a traditional courtesan *padam* is the very invocation of the God of Desire (Manmatha), who often torments either the hero or heroine of the *padam* and whose flowery arrows are a constant motif in Tamil *padams* throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Fig. 6-9. Screen capture of T.R. Rajakumari dressed as Manmatha, the God of Desire, in the song *"maṉmata līlaiyai."*

The choreography for the song itself follows the conventions of courtesan dance, in which the lyrics and the gestures generally operate along the same registers. However, it differs from courtesan dancein that there is a clear lack of improvisation, which is so characteristic of *devadāsī abhinaya* for *padams;* this may be due to the temporal

limitations of song sequences in the cinema. In traditional improvisation, the courtesan performer moves beyond a literal gestural interpretation of the text and moves her gestures onto metaphoric and allegorical registers. By contrast, in "*maṉmata līlaiyai*", the choreography is set and structured, even though there are spaces that create the illusion of an impending improvisation. So, for example, after a few lines of *abhinaya*, when the line is repeated, Rajakumari walks backward (in a move typical of courtesan performance), which allows the dancer to think about her gestural improvisation for the next repetition of the line of text. The "choreography" for post-reinvention Bharatanāṭyam become structured and fixed by the early 1940s, and this was clearly reflected in cinematic representations of the dance from this decade.

Interspersed between the various lines of text are passages of instrumental music at a slightly faster pace. This is a musical technique that became popular in the early cinema and eventually entered a range of popular cultures of music in South Asia. These instrumental musical passages, as previously noted, mark the differences between the major sections of the composition (i.e., *pallavi*, *anupallavi*, and *caranam*), but they also break the monotony of *abhinaya* through the insertion of a dynamic, usually rhythmic interlude of both music and dance. It was, I would thus argue, Bharatanāṭyam choreography in the cinema that established the trend of fast-paced, energetic movement sequences as important and attractive hallmarks of the dance in its stage versions. This sequence from *Haridas* is thus a crucial mapping of the disappearance of courtesan dance technique from the public sphere in favor of a distinctly "modern" version of

Bharatanāṭyam for new audiences. The "*maṉmata līlaiyai"* sequence itself marks a kind of transitory moment; there are elements of the old-style courtesan *abhinaya* as well as some of the earliest reconfigurations of new modes of approaching "choreography" for a *padam*-like song.

Moreover, inextricably linked to these shifts in representation is the question of the morality of the dancing body, and, again, "*maṉmata līlaiyai"* reflects the ever-changing registers of propriety for women and morality. In this sequence, Rajakumari performs typical courtesan-style movements during the instrumental passages, which include movements of the hips and waist. Movements in the courtesan dance technique—such as the stamping of the feet in rhythm while performing *abhinaya*, which is known as *taṭṭumeṭṭu* in the courtesan tradition from Pudukkottai—relied on movements in which the waist juts out and the hips move from side to side. For the most part, such movements were eliminated in Bharatanāṭyam on the proscenium stage by the 1940s. Somewhat ironically, such movements were excised from the stage that came to be repopulated by upper-caste women, but they continued to live on in the "less respectable" spaces of the early cinema. This created a fundamental moral tension that characterized the relationship between Bharatanāṭyam's new middle-class "gurus" and the world of cinema. Movements of the hip and waist were eliminated in favor of an exaggerated geometry, angularity, and Russian ballet–inflected use of line,[151] which can be seen most clearly in Rukmini Arundale's conception of Bharatanāṭyam technique. This new austere body

represented the outer manifestation of a spiritual body shaped by both Theosophical occultism and Brahminic orthodoxy in 1930s Madras.

Finally, there is another consequential scene that appears toward the end of the song. This scene features Rajakumari blowing a "flying kiss" to Bhagavathar in close proximity, replete with a sound design that featured the sound of kiss dropped in. This represented a very controversial moment in early Tamil film history, and it is significant that it is couched in a Bharatanāṭyam dance sequence. It marks the space of filmic Bharatanāṭyam as an open, morally ambiguous space. Indeed, it would be hard for such a scene to exist anywhere else in an early Tamil film, except perhaps in a scene about courtesans or about dance. It thus also marked a kind of moral diglossia around the primary sites of Bharatanāṭyam performance. As discussed in previous chapters, cinematic Bharatanāṭyam was often morally ambiguous and a space of sensual and erotic excess, whereas stage Bharatanāṭyam was supposed to represent moral propriety, asceticism, and the sublimation of desire.

OTHERNESS, OCULARITY, AND ORIENTALISM: THE SNAKE DANCE IN CINEMA AND ON STAGE

In a fascinating new essay entitled "Domesticating Othernesss: The Snake Charmer in Popular American Culture," ethnomusicologist A.J. Racy traces the expressive complexities of the motif of snake charming in popular Western culture. Racy argues that the notion of the "otherness" triggered by the snake charmer and embedded in the popular American imagination represents a kind of experiential bricolage, drawing from sources ranging from Rudyard Kipling to Indiana Jones. Although the American

experience clearly draws from modes of Orientalist and imperial power that are felt and negotiated very differently in South Asia, Racy's observations about the multiplicity of influences that fuel popular representations of the snake charmer are certainly relevant for the next pivotal discussion of repertoire that focuses on the so-called "snake dance," which is known in Tamil as *pāmpu naṭaṉam*. These references also include the fact that the appearance of an "Indian snake dance" was alive and well in the European Orientalist filmic imagination during the early twentieth century. The German film *Das Indische Grabmal* ("The Indian Tomb," 1921) and its remakes (in 1938 and 1959) all feature a snake dance performed by a "temple dancer" before images that supposedly represent Hindu deities. In the last remake of *Das Indische Grabmal,* directed by Fritz Lang (1959), American actress Debra Paget's iconic snake dance continues to be a landmark sequence in the genre of the modern adventure film (Plass "Dialectic of Regression"). This section thus explores the history and aesthetics of the *pāmpu naṭaṉam* as it appears in the early Tamil cinema, and it posits the dance's hybridity as metonymic of the hybridity inherent in cinematic representations of Bharatanāṭyam. This chapter will also explore the unique popular-yet-"classical" status that Bharatanāṭyam has come to occupy in the imagination of its modern practitioners. The *pāmpu naṭaṉam* is simultaneously seen as a "low-brow" expressive form (invoking the "otherness" of the figure of the low-caste snake charmer in Tamil society) while at the same time being firmly embedded in the "classical" idiom of Bharatanāṭyam, thereby illustrating one of the many

contradictions and anxieties that are at the center of the notion of "the classical" in the world of Indian dance.

The *pāmpu naṭaṉam* itself was a piece invented for the cinema. However, before this piece can be discussed, it is important to note that serpent symbolism and the image of the snake charmer (*pāmpāṭṭi*) both have long and complex histories in Tamil civilization at large and also specifically within the courtesan dance repertoire. Among a number of *devadāsī* families and in the family of my own teacher R. Muttukkannammal of Viralimalai, there exists a dance piece called *mōṭi-eṭukkiṟatu* or simply *mōṭi,* which is about a love quarrel between a snake charmer and his female lover. Davesh Soneji (*Unfinished Gestures* 181-184) has written extensively about this piece on the basis of his observation of my own training in it with Muttukkannammal. Soneji has traced this dance back to the time of King Serfoji II of Tanjore (1777-1832) through a Marathi court document dated 1820 (*Unfinished Gestures* 181), and he notes its persistence in a range of documents throughout the nineteenth century. In the version as it survives in the family of Muttukkannammal, it is a romantic quarrel, and the word *mōṭi* here is a *double entendre*. It is a reference to both the pipe played by the snake charmer (normally known as *makuṭi* in Tamil) as well as to a kind of magic of illusion practiced by both the snake charmer and his lover. The song that accompanies this dance is in Tamil. It is sung in the *rāga* Punnāgavarāḷi, which is associated with serpents and the same *rāga* used in the cinematic *pāmpu naṭaṉam.*

Moreover, reverence for serpents in the Tamil regions has had an intimate connection to goddess worship there (Allocco 47). Often the *rāga* Punnāgavarāḷi is played on the oboe-like instrument called *nāgasvaram* ("sound of serpents") to induce goddess possession among both men and women in a range of religious contexts. In addition—and perhaps more directly relevant to the discussion of the filmic iteration of the *pāmpu naṭaṉam*—a major esoteric stratum of medieval Tamil religion is that of the quasi-mythical poet-alchemists known as *cittar* (*siddha*, "accomplished ones"). One of the most popular Tamil *cittars* is the fifteenth-century figure known as Pāmpāṭṭi Cittar ("the snake-charmer *cittar*").[152] One of Pāmpāṭṭi Cittar's surviving poems forms the textual basis of the *pāmpu naṭaṉam.* This is the poem called "*nātar muṭimēlirukkum"* ("Snake, You Reside atop the Head of Śiva"), which is also sung in the *rāga* Punnāgavarāḷi (Buck, *Dance, Snake! Dance!* 89).

Before this discussion begins, I provide here a composite text (in transliteration and translation) of the poem as it appears in various filmic renditions:

nātar muṭimēlirukkum nākapāmpē
Snake, you reside atop the head of Śiva
naccuppaiyai vaittirukkum nallapāmpē
Cobra, you hold poison in your mouth
pātalattiṟ kuṭipukum paikoḷ pāmpē
Snake, you dwell in the netherworld
pāṭippāṭi niṉṟu vilayāṭu pāmpē
Snake, sing and play!
kuṟṟamaṟṟa civaṉukkuk kuṇṭalamāṉāy
You are the earrings worn by the flawless Śiva
kuṟun tirumāliṉukkuk kuṭaiyumāṉay
Your hood provides shelter for the head of Viṣṇu
kaṟṟaikkuḻal pārvatikkuṅ kaṅkaṇamāṉay
You are the bangles worn by Pārvati with curled locks of hair

karavāmal uḷaṅkaḷittāṭu pāmpē
Dancing Snake, you move with a fearless gait
āṭu pāmpē vilayāṭu pāmpē[153]
Dance, Snake! Dance!

The *pāmpu naṭaṉam*'s earliest instantiations in the Tamil cinema are associated with Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai. Lacking evidence to the contrary, it seems that he identified this poem and was the first to choreograph it during the twentieth century. It is also significant that this first appearance, in the film *Jagathalapratapan* ("Lord of the World," 1944) (see fig. 6-10), is also linked to a very young Kamala Lakshman, who performs the sequence in this film. Indeed, Kamala's presence here enforces the argument that I made in Chapter IV, in which I posit Kamala—in her role as muse for Ramaiah Pillai's choreographic experiments—as the harbinger of a distinctly new movement vocabulary for Bharatanāṭyam in the twentieth century. Her associations with the *pāmpu naṭaṉam* illustrate the innovative dimensions of the new Bharatanāṭyam beyond any doubt.

Fig. 6-10. Screen capture of Kamala performing the snake dance from *Jagathalapratapan* (1944).

In the film, a ten-year-old Kamala performs the *pāmpu naṭaṉam* to instrumental music played by various Indian and Western wind instruments. There are no lyrics used in this sequence, only the tune (*meṭṭu*) in the *rāga* Punnāgavarāḷi. Pillai's choreography successfully displays the extreme flexibility of the youthful and energetic Kamala through an explicitly acrobatic dance. Kamala begins the sequence by taking on the role of a snake charmer (*pāmpāṭṭi*) and simulating, with gestures, the pipe that he plays. Pillai makes use of Kamala's initial training in Kathak dance and fuses this movement vocabulary into his choreography, in combination with the creative or "free" movements that he has invented. This kind of hybridity—in which Kathak's fast spins and heavily rhythmic foot work fuse with the *aṭavus* (basic units of movement) of Bharatanāṭyam in the context of a markedly "innovative" piece of dance—becomes a kind of choreographic norm in both the cinema and other popular representations of twentieth-century Bharatanāṭyam.[154] Next, Kamala performs the role of the snake, and the pace and aesthetic of the choreography becomes fluid, with waves of the arms and shoulders mimicking serpentine movement. Overall, in this initial instantiation, there is more Kathak and Bharatanāṭyam phrasing; this is perhaps meant to showcase newcomer Kamala's classical dance prowess rather than emphasizing realism in the representation.

By contrast, in the 1947 film *Kannika* (see fig. 6-11), the pendulum of realism swings to the other end. Here, a snake dance is again set to the melody of Pāmpāṭṭi Cittar's poem in the *rāga* Punnāgavarāḷi. Even though Ramaiah Pillai is credited as the choreographer in this film, the dancer performing this dance seems to be Caucasian,

perhaps a contortionist from a touring circus company. In a kind of inversion of the South Asian performer at American circuses during this period—which promulgated "a racial hierarchy in which South Asians were depicted to be static, and unable to keep pace with the Anglo-American 'race'" (Davis 1121)—this performer, dressed in a somewhat revealing black unitard, represents the excess and otherness of the Western dancing body. Here, the dancer is "indigenized" and made into a palatable spectacle through both the plot of the film as well as the use of Pāmpāṭṭi Cittar's poem. Unfortunately, the performer's name is nowhere to be found in the credits of the film.

Fig. 6-11. Screen capture of the unknown Caucasian female artist from *Kannika* (1947).

The sequence is embedded in the fantasy-adventure plot of the film *Kannika*. It begins when a demon-king (played by D. Balasubramaniam) commands the celestial dancer Tilottamā (played by an unknown actress), whom he has abducted, to perform for him. Tilottamā tells the demon-king that she must transform herself in order to be able to perform. She transforms into the Caucasian contortionist, who is dressed in a black, tight-

fitting unitard with large open patches along the entire side of her costume. As the dancer performs a series of highly acrobatic movements that develop from simple configurations into more complex ones, she turns her body upside-down, flips back and forth, and morphs herself into various poses that are meant to replicate the shapes of a serpent. She performs the entire sequence against a sonic backdrop that consists of music played on the South Indian flute (*veṇu*) and a stringed, fretted instrument (*vīṇā*), the pulse and count of which have little to nothing to do with the choreography. The disjuncture between the dance and the music appears somewhat jarring given that, during this period, there was normally a direct correspondence between text, music, and gestural movement.

Indian classical music is clearly used as a legitimizing factor for the inclusion of the Western female dancing body in the fantasy-mythological Tamil film *Vedhala Ulagam* ("Demon Land") in 1948. This mythological film was produced and directed by A.V. Meiyappan (1907-1979), and it is a story about a human prince falling in love with a princess born into a clan of demons. Of the many dances choreographed by Ramaiah Pillai in the movie, the song *"vacam ulla pūp parippēṉ"* ("I'll Pick the Most Fragrant Flower") is performed by dancers Lalitha and Padmini as a "dance-drama" that portrays a snake charmer and his wife. The dance is framed as a kind of courtly entertainment for the demon king and his wife. The choreography begins with Padmini, in the role of the snake charmer, getting bitten by a snake and fainting. Lalitha then enters as the snake-charmer's wife and picks the most fragrant flower to revive her husband. After this scene, the *pāmpu naṭaṉam* is performed by both of them. What makes this iteration different

from previous ones is that other verses from the original poem by Pāmpāṭṭi Cittar have been included, thus expanding the scope of the song to include stanzas that have not been heard in cinema before. Ramaiah Pillai chooses not to focus on acrobatic serpentine poses in this dance and instead focuses on more lyrical storytelling in the choreography, thereby showcasing his versatility and adding a fresh dimension to *pāmpu naṭaṉam*. The dance ends with a radical costume change after which both dancers perform a kind of salutation (*salām*) to the king as they exit the stage area. In this version of *pāmpu naṭaṉam*, the dance has been reimagined as a duet; it is an extended version of the dance that showcases its dynamic lyricism and choreographic potential to be a full-fledged dance number for the stage.

The next appearance of the *pāmpu naṭaṉam* occurs two years later in 1950, with a teenaged Kamala Lakshman performing this dance as a full-fledged Bharatanāṭyam repertory number in *Digambara Samiyar* ("The Naked Sage," 1950) (see fig. 6-12), which was directed by T.R. Sundaram (1907-1963) and produced by Modern Theaters. Kamala's *pāmpu naṭaṉam* appears toward the end of the film, in which she plays a courtesan dancer named Duraikannu. She performs the dance as a kind of ploy to trick the villain of the movie, the corrupt lawyer Cattanātaṉ. The choreography is by Ramaiah Pillai, but it is couched in a medley that consists of three dances: the snake dance; a "modern" double-act duet in which she plays both the young male lover and his female love interest; and a "folk" Rajasthani dance about love and seduction.

Fig. 6-12. Screen capture of Kamala performing snake dance from *Digambara Samiyar* (1950). *Pāmpu naṭaṉam* made another striking appearance as a duet in the blockbuster film.

Kamala performs the tripartite piece in a kind of makeshift theater in Cattanātaṉ's home, which is populated with Western furniture. The constant visual of the moving clock suggests that Kamala has been performing dances for him for several hours. Kamala performs the snake dance to a backdrop of a forest full of anthills, which simulate the shrines of snake deities in rural South India. Kamala wears a modern Bharatanāṭyam dance costume dotted with textures and colors meant to represent a snake. Her hairstyle too is "different" in that is contains a high bun that is meant to invoke the locks of the god Śiva, where—as per the poem of Pāmpāṭṭi Cittar—the snake rests. The music for the piece is the poem, but this time it is tuned to two *rāgas*, Ābheri and Punnāgavarāḷi, by the composers G. Ramanathan (d. 1963) and S.M. Subbaiah Naidu (1914-1979). Kamala performs the dance, lip synching the text of the poem to the "playback" vocals of singer P. Leela (1934-2005). Kamala begins the sequence with an

instrumental passage and performs the *abhinaya* to the lyrics of the song, matching each word to a gesture. During the chorus of the song—the line "*āṭu pāmpē vilayāṭu pāmbē*" ("dance snake dance!")—Kamala strikes a series of acrobatic poses; these are nothing of course as compared with those of the Caucasian performer in *Kannika,* but nevertheless Ramaiah Pillai creates a series of serpentine poses suited for a Bharatanāṭyam-trained body.

These three filmic iterations of the *pāmpu naṭaṉam* gave rise to stage performances of the dance by Bharatanāṭyam dancers. According to Anne-Marie Gaston, the dance was first performed on stage in 1955 by Kamala herself at the Madras Music Academy, choreographed by Ramaiah Pillai (Gaston, *Bharata Natyam* 308). The persistence of the *pāmpu naṭaṉam* and its incorporation into the body of work understood and accepted as "classical" Bharatanāṭyam speaks to how the category of "the classical" in Indian dance itself cannot be unyoked from the world of the Tamil cinema. The example of the *pāmpu naṭaṉam* ultimately demonstrates how cinematic representations of Bharatanāṭyam were constitutive spaces in which new genres and forms were created for the cinema but then traveled, through the dancing bodies of figures like Kamala, through the various spaces that modern Bharatanāṭyam came to occupy as the twentieth century progressed.

SONGS TO THE DANCING ŚIVA-NAṬARĀJA

It is well established in critical scholarly writing on Bharatanāṭyam that a major dimension of the so-called "revival" or reinvention of the dance in the 1930s was the

displacement of the traditional *devadāsī* repertoire and its replacement by new genres and compositions that enabled middle-class dancers and dance teachers to transform Bharatanāṭyam into a (Hindu) religious expressive form. Devotional dance compositions that drew from musical genres such as *kīrtana* or liturgical verses for domestic prayers (known as *stotra*) were thus consciously incorporated into the performance practice of Bharatanāṭyam, eclipsing traditional genres of courtesan performance such as the *padam*.[155] This shift in repertoire as it was performed on stage has been documented quite thoroughly (e.g., Allen, "Rewriting the Script"; Gaston, *Bharata Natyam;* Meduri, "Nation, Woman, Representation"). In the section that follows, I focus on representations of the mythology and iconography of the dancing god Siva-Nataraja by foregrounding cinematic versions of the Tamil song *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār* ("He Danced…"), a song in the devotional *kīrtana* music genre composed by the poet Kōpālakiruṣṇa Pārati (1810-1896). The text of the song is as follows:

> Pallavi
> *naṭaṉam āṭiṉār veku nākarīkamākavē kaṉaka capaiyil āṉanta*
> He danced so beautifully, so artfully, a blissful dance in the golden hall of Cidambaram
>
> Anupallavi
> *vaṭa kayilaiyil muṉṉāḷ māmuṉikku aruḷceytapaṭi*
> *tavaṟāmal tillai patiyil vantu taimātattil kuru pūcattil pakal nēratattil*
> Long ago on Mount Kailasa in the North,
> Keeping his promise to the great sages
> Without fail, he came to the city of Cidambaram
> In the month of Tai, on the full moon anniversary of the guru
>
> Jati
> *tām takiṭa taka jam taka ṇam* […]
> And he danced: "tām takiṭa taka jam taka ṇam"

Caraṇam
aṣṭa ticaiyum kiṭukiṭuṅka cēṭaṇ talai naṭuṅka
aṇṭamatira kaṅkai tuḷicitaṟa poṇṇāṭarum koṇṭāṭa |
iṣṭamuṭaṇē kōpālakiruṣṇaṇ pāṭa caṭaiyāṭa aravampaṭamāṭa
atilum naṭamāṭa tontōmeṇṟu patavikaḷ tantōmeṇṟu ||
He danced, and all the eight directions shook "gidu gidunga"
The head of the cosmic snake trembled, the whole earth shivered
Water drops from the Ganges splashed over the land and the gods celebrated
Krishna sang lovingly for his [Nataraja's] dance
Siva's matted locks swayed in the air while the cobra danced with its hood spread
He danced about, giving all assembled his blessings with the sound of "tontom tantom" (Allen "The Tamil 'Padam'" 270 and "Rewriting the Script" 81)

This song is brought into the dance repertoire at the moment of the dance's reinvention in Madras during the 1930s (Allen, "Rewriting the Script" 99), with a range of performers claiming that they were the first to perform it through choreography composed by Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai. For example, the male dancer Ram Gopal (1912-2003), who was one of the first non-*devadāsī* performers of Bharatanāṭyam, claimed the following: "*Nadanam Adinar* was composed specially for me by Minakshisundaram. I was the first to perform it. Now they don't do it properly. It should be danced by a man" (Gaston, *Bharata Natyam* 103). By contrast, as Matthew Allen has demonstrated ("Rewriting the Script" 80-81), the first documented performance of the song at the Madras Music Academy was in 1939; it was performed by Lakshmi Sastri (1926-2013; later known as the Hindustani vocalist Lakshmi Shankar), a disciple of Pandanallur Chokkalingam Pillai (1893-1968; son of Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai). There is also an anecdotal reference to *Naṭaṇam Āṭiṇār* having been choreographed for Rukmini Arundale alongside another composition on Siva-Nataraja by her teacher Meenakshisundaram Pillai.[156] The dance was performed by a number of

devadāsī and non-*devadāsī* performers in Madras during the 1940s and 1950s, and, as Anne-Marie Gaston observes, it was often performed as a finale for dance recitals, replacing the courtesan dance genre known as *tillāṉā,* which traditionally functioned in this capacity (*Bharata Natyam* 275).[157] Regardless of who *first* performed it in Madras, by the early 1940s, the dance had become deeply embedded as a crowning—albeit new—piece in the modern Bharatanāṭyam dance repertoire.

Before the discussion of the appearance of this song on stage and then in the cinema, it is significant that, alongside the insertion of new songs such as *naṭaṉam āṭiṉār,* representations of the dancing Siva on stage circulated in the imperial world from America (with Ted Shawn's famous "Cosmic Dance of Shiva" [1925]) to Paris (with the Calcutta-born Uday Shankar's performances of "Tandava Nrittya" and "Shiva-Parvati Nrittya Dwandva" in 1931).[158] As the work of Allen ("Rewriting the Script" 83) has shown, a key influence on the insertion of the figure of Siva-Nataraja into the public sphere was the publication, in 1912, of the essay "The Dance of Siva" by Orientalist and Art-Historian Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877-1947). The imbrication of this text in emergent forms of cultural nationalism that gave rise to new, fundamentally religious interpretations of Indian art has been observed by many scholars (e.g., Allen "Rewriting the Script"; Meduri "Nation, Woman, Representation"; Kaimal "Shiva-Nataraja"); it suffices to say that dance and its metaphysical interpretations lie at the heart of such reformulations.

These early stage representations of the dance of Siva also make their way into the world of the early South Indian cinema, with one of the earliest documentable instances occurring in the Tamil film *Karaikkal Ammaiyar* ("Mother of Kāraikkāl," 1943), which featured the dancers Nataraj and Shakuntala (dates unknown), who are dressed in costumes that almost exactly mirror the ones worn by Uday Shankar and his partners (see fig. 6-13). The film *Sri Murugan* ("The God Murukaṉ," 1946) featured a similar dance performed by the rising star M.G. Ramachandran (who would later go on to become the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu) dancing as Śiva and an actress named Malathi, a Telugu performer from the *kalāvantula* courtesan community in Kakinada, performing as Pārvatī (see fig. 6-14, left). Similarly, a Tamil film called *Ciyāmalā* ("Śyāmalā," 1952) featured another such dance, which was performed by unknown dancers in similar costumes and choreographed by the Telugu choreographer Pasumarti Krishnamurthy (1927-2004) (see fig. 6-14, right). As previously noted, Uday Shankar's film *Kalpana* (see fig. 6-15) was also released in Madras during the mid-1940s; however, Shankar's "Oriental dance" aesthetic was circulating in South India long before this, and it influenced representations of both Bharatanāṭyam and Kuchipudi throughout the 1940s and the 1950s (Thota 92-95).

By the late 1940s, when the dance *natanam atinar* had firmly established a bona fide space for itself in the repertoire of the new "classical" Bharatanāṭyam, Uday Shankar's aesthetic legacy of the Siva-Parvati dance was alive and well, and it continued to circulate adjacent to renderings of *natanam atinar* in the form of his film *Kalpana*

("Imagination," 1948), which was released in Madras in 1948. Almost all of the advertisements for the film in Madras featured Shankar's iconic costume for the Siva-Parvati dance (see fig. 6-15).

Fig. 6-13. The Tamil film *Karaikkal Ammaiyar* ("Mother of Kāraikkāl," 1943) featured a Siva-Parvati dance by the dancers Nataraj and Shakuntala. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

Fig. 6-14. *(Left)* Still from the film *Sri Murugan* (1946), with M.G. Ramachandran dancing as Śiva and Malathi performing as Pārvatī. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

(Right) Siva-Parvati Dance from the film *Ciyāmalā* ("Śyāmalā," 1952) choreographed by Pasumarti Krishnamurthy, dancers unknown. *Kuṇṭūci* magazine (December 1952, p. 38). (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.)

Fig. 6-15. A Tamil advertisement for Uday Shankar's film *Kalpana* ("Imagination," 1948), with Shankar and Amala Shankar as Siva and Parvati. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

Taken together, these representations illustrate how, alongside the textual and stage performances of the mythology and iconography of the dancing Siva, filmic renditions also served to enforce the links between religion, esotericism, and cultural nationalism that were being forged through the reinvention of India's "classical" dances. Aligning the courtesan dance traditions of Bharatanāṭyam with a new and transcendental interpretation of dance as a kind of spiritual, ascetic, and otherworldly practice was a mode through which the dance became an iconic marker of India's national culture.[159] In the final pages of this chapter that follow, I would like to shift focus to the song *Naṭaṉam*

Āṭiṉār to demonstrate how a single composition flows through the various spaces of textual discourse, stage performance, and cinema. *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār*'s rich history of performance enables the tracking of both the constitution and legitimization of the category of "the classical" as "metaphysical" and "spiritual."

***Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār*: The Dance of Śiva on Screen**

As *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār* was gaining momentum on the proscenium stage, it also gained major traction in the early Tamil cinema. In this section, I discuss the dance as it appeared in three early films: *Kannika* (1947); *Valliyin Selvan* (1955); and *Manamalai* (1958). Perhaps due to the popularity of this song on the emerging Bharatanāṭyam stage, an excerpt of this composition already makes appearance in the 1945 film *Sri Valli*, which is about the deity Murukaṉ's marriage to the forest princess Valli. The film was directed by A.V. Meyappan and. A.T. Krishnaswamy, with music by T. M. Rajagoplala Sharma and R. Sudarsanam and lyrics by Papanasam Sivan and Rajagopala Iyer (Guy "Sri Valli (1945)"). Kamala Lakshman performs the role of the young Valli, and, in the dance sequence toward the beginning of the film, she performs a devotional song written for the film entitled *Yār Uṉkalaippōl Aṟṟaipavar Ārumuka Aracē* ("None Other Than You Can Protect Us, Six-Faced Lord!"). The choreography by Ramaiah Pillai features Kamala's initial dance training in Kathak for the first instrumental sequence and then proceeds to include Bharatanāṭyam choreography for the rest of the song. What is interesting here is that, between the first section (*pallavi*) and the second section (*anupallavi*) of the song, there is a sung rhythmic passage, called *colkaṭṭu svara*. This

entire passage is clearly adapted from a *jati* passage that occurs in the song *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār*. Although the melody (*rāga*) and the rhythmic cycle (*tāla*) have been changed for this film, the actual drum syllables (*colkaṭṭu*) and their sequencing remain identical to those of *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār*. Pillai's choreography, too, is similar to what he would later produce for the 1947 film *Kannika,* which will be discussed below. The first instance of the appearance of an element of *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār* in the cinema thus also deploys the method of musical and textual "repurposing."

Fig. 6-16. The songbook for *Kannika* (1947), with the page providing the lyrics for *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār.* (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

Kannika ("The Virgin," 1947), which is the first film in which *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār* appears in its totality, was produced by S.M. Sriramulu Naidu (1910-1976) of Pakshiraja Studios (see fig. 6-16). The fantasy story revolves around a demon (played by D. Balasubramaniam) whose spirit is imprisoned in a pigeon. During the climax of the film, a young man (played by T.E. Varadan) destroys the demon and marries his daughter,

Kannika (played by M.S. Sarojini). The choreography of the dance sequences was created by Ramiah Pillai, although as discussed in Chapter V, Kattumannarkoyil Muttukumara Pillai (1874-1960) makes an appearance and was said to have choreographed other dance sequences for the film. According to a personal communication with B.M. Sundaram, one of these was a mini dance-drama, "Siva-Mohini," which was performed by Lalitha and Padmini and marked the very first time they performed in a Tamil film. The other sequence is the *pāmpu naṭaṉam,* which has already been discussed.

Fig. 6-17. Screen capture of Hemamalini Arni performing *naṭaṉam āṭiṉār* in the film *Kannika* (1947).

Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār occurs at the very beginning of the film (see fig. 6-17), when the young character of Kannika—the demon princess and heroine of the film—dances at the royal court of the demon king. The role of Kannika is played by Hemamalini Arni (b. 1934; also known as Hemamalini Vijayaraghavan). She was one the foremost students of

Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai, and she was from the Tamil Brahmin community. Her father, C.K. Vijayaraghavan (d. 1950), was India's first Inspector General and later became Home Secretary in the Government of Madras. Her mother was an amateur vocalist. Hemamalini and her sister Padmini were taught dance and music from a young age, and Hemamalini also sang the vocals for the soundtrack of *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār* in *Kannika*. On her website, Hemamalini describes her experiences dancing in *Kannika* as follows:

> Around 1947/48 Mr. S.M. Sreeramulu Naidu, the famous Film Producer and Director approached my father and wanted me to act in a film "Kannika" in a role portraying Kannika in her youth. He agreed and we made about 4 to 5 trips from our home in Adyar, Madras to his Pakshiraja Studios in Coimbatore where the film was shot. My role required dancing and some singing too. I danced 'Natanam Adinaar' and sung a prayer composed by the famous Papanasam Sivan. One of the presents given to me was a standard car.

The dance sequence has passages of instrumental interludes that break up the verses of text. The original *rāga* (tonic scale) of *naṭaṉam āṭiṉār* is Vasantā, but, in the film, the first verse retains the original melody of Vasantā while the second and third sections are retuned to other *rāgas,* such as Ārabhi and Madhyamāvatī. This speaks to the popularity of the original song (so much so that it could have been recognized by audiences), and so, perhaps to showcase his innovation, the composer changed the melody. This kind of experimentation with changing the extant melodies of older compositions became a kind of norm in staged performances of Bharatanāṭyam during the later decades of the twentieth century. Another feature of this scene is the presence of the *naṭṭuvaṉār* Kattumannarkoyil Muttukumara Pillai as one of the courtiers in the royal assembly. According to historian B.M. Sundaram, "When he [Muttukumara Pillai] was in

Kovai, [the producer] Srimulu Naidu of Pakshiraja Pictures was preparing to produce his film *Kannika*, he contracted Muttukumaran to appear in the film" (Sundaram *Marapu Vaḻi* 43; see also Behling "Muthukumara Pillai on Screen").

At the commencement of the dance, Hemamalini performs a salutation to the king by bowing to him and holding the gesture known as *añjali*. The music for this is an instrumental passage in the *rāga* Vasantā, after which she begins the interpretation of the text of the song through *abhinaya*. The choreography is filled with poses of Siva-Nataraja. The idea of combining movement with static poses that resemble images on Hindu temples, which is a hallmark of Ramaiah Pillai's choreography, became a choreographic norm in most staged performances of twentieth century Bharatanāṭyam.[160] Hemamalini performs the *abhinaya* to the text as a word-for-word interpretation in this dance, aligning each gesture with the rhythmic cadences of the song. In this rendition of *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār,* there are also no passages of *jatis* (clusters of vocalized drum syllables recited by the *naṭṭuvaṉār*). This extension is captured in the next appearance of *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār* in the film *Valliyin Selvan*.

Fig. 6-18. Screen capture from *naṭaṉam āṭiṉār* performed by a dancer named Vanaja in the film *Valliyin Selvan* ("Valli's Son," 1955).

As *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār* became more popular on the proscenium stage, later films adopted a more speedy, showy version of this dance. A clear example occurs in *Valliyin Selvan* ("Valli's Son," 1955), which was directed by Kottamangalam Subbu (1910-1974; he also wrote the novel *Tillāṉā Mōkaṉāmpāḷ,* which was discussed in Chapter IV) and produced by United Film Arts, Gemini Studios. The music composer is P.S. Anantharaman, the singer is Seerkazhi Govindarjan (1933-1988), and the choreographer is Bhaskar Roy Chowdhury (1930-2003), an actor and dancer who studied with Kanchipuram Ellappa Pillai.[161] It is thus highly likely that the choreography for *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār* here is deeply influenced by Ellappa Pillai's interpretation of this piece for stage performances (a version of which will be discussed in the final example). The dancer in *Valliyin Selvan* is an artist named Vanaja, about whom nothing else is known; in fact, her identity is only known from the songbook. Unlike the previous rendition of *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār,* which was set in a mythological court, this version is set in what is clearly a

middle-class living room in Madras city (see fig. 6-18). The dancer is dressed in a modern *kurta-pyjama* and depicted as practicing her dance in the comfort of her own home. This marks a major intervention in the history of Bharatanāṭyam, as seen with Kamala's performance in the film *Nam Iruvar* (1947): the dance is now being consciously brought into the domestic setting. The dancer performs amidst a number of visual signposts of middle-class modernity in South India. This includes colonial furniture such as a cupboard, picture frames, curtains, carpets, and, most importantly, the gramophone player (on which the music she rehearses to is played). However, there are also markers of Indian heritage making, such as a statue of Siva-Nataraja, musical instruments (such as the stringed *vīṇā*), and brass oil lamps. Along with the shift in the location of the dance to the domestic space comes the amateurization of its practice as a "hobby." The young woman in the scene compartmentalizes her dance as one small part of her life, which is made clear when she turns on and off the gramophone player before and after her rehearsal. Unlike the earlier *Kannika*, in this version of *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār*, there are additional passages of spoken rhythmic syllables recited to further enhance the dynamism of the song. The dancer speeds up her movements and creates a more counterintuitive response to the song. This choreography has few moments of stillness. The dancer is constantly moving, and the choreography often appears frenzied and very quickly paced.

Three years after *Valliyin Selvan*, *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār* was performed once again in the film *Manamalai* ("Garland of the Heart," 1958), which was directed by Chitrapu

Narayana Rao (1913-?) and produced by Janatha Pictures. Unfortunately, I have not had access to the film, but I do have the audio track of *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār* as well as the songbook from the film. In the songbook, choreography for the film is attributed to *naṭṭuvaṉār* P.S. Gopalakrishnan (student of Ramaiah Pillai); however, in the audio track, it is Kanchipuram Ellappa Pillai who recites the drum syllables (*jati*). The dancers are Ragini (1937-1976; one of the Travancore Sisters) and her cousin Sukumari (1940-2013). The singers are popular Brahmin singers Radha (1932-?) and Jayalakshmi (?-2014) as well as Malayali singer P. Leela (1934-2005). The music for the film is attributed to S. Vedha. In this version of *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār*, the composition is reimagined to include several layers of rhythms and orchestration. The main chorus line is retuned to include several different *rāgas*. There is an extended recited drum syllabic sequence that opens the composition. Perhaps due to Ellappa's connection to the courtesan performer T. Balasaraswati (1918-1984)—for whose performances he was often the *naṭṭuvaṉār*—one can hear obvious similarities to Balasaraswati's very personal dance style in the composition and arrangement of the drum syllables, thereby illustrating once again how echoes of the styles of stage performances of Bharatanāṭyam resonate in the Tamil cinema. This version of *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār* also ends with a phrase of calculated and arranged *solfa* syllables (known in Karṇāṭak vocal music as *svara-kalpana*) that are reminiscent of a music concert. Perhaps because music composers for the cinema were becoming increasingly distanced from the older musical forms that constituted the

traditional genres of courtesan performers, from the early 1950s, more and more elements of Karṇāṭak vocal concert music were inserted into music for dance.

This chapter has demonstrated the deep and wide-ranging cross-fertilization that occurred between dance on stage and on screen through a discussion of the flow of repertoire in both directions. Repertoire itself in many ways offers a lens into many of the larger issues represented by the reformation and repopulation of dance that resulted from the so-called "dance revival" of the 1930s. As previously discussed, Bharatanāṭyam's "domestication" and the ameteurization of its practice as a "hobby," its links to middle-class cultural identity, and of course its connection to religion are all dramatized through representations of *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār* in the cinema. By contrast, the *pāmpu naṭaṉam* demonstrates the ways in which choreographic innovation recast Bharatanāṭyam at the crossroads of a revived notion of "Tamil tradition" and Orientalism. Finally, the example of the *padam*'s ever-shifting and malleable presence in the Tamil cinema highlights the ways in which modern Bharatanāṭyam itself was constituted, as a plastic and unstable form, through a repurposing of textual, musical, and choreographic materials. As a complex relay of intermedial materials, Bharatanāṭyam's new post-1930s significations produced a debris of choreographic methods—in the form of repertoire, technique, and semiotics—that create the basis of the dance's life for the remainder of the twentieth century and beyond.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: THE ENDURING PEDAGOGICAL AFTERLIVES OF BHARATANĀṬYAM'S "CELLULOID CLASSICISM"

This dissertation has attempted to trace the relationships of dependency and cultures of co-mingling that are at the heart of the emergence of South India's most visible cultural forms. It has done so by reading historical data through a prism of intermediality in which the worlds of cinema and an emergent "classical" dance are not so far apart. Indeed, they both evolve in direct contact with the other.[162] Bharatanāṭyam, as a modern practice, is heavily mediated by notions of social organization, morality, nationhood, and aesthetics as they emerge in the early cinema. Far from being a hermetically sealed-off cultural space of an unsullied and timeless "classicism," its aesthetic self-perception—as timeless, religious, national, and Brahminic—cannot be understood without reference to the cinema. This constitutive dynamic in which one form actually makes the other through refraction, representation, and reprisal forces us to reconsider the modern social and aesthetic history of Bharatanāṭyam. Bharatanāṭyam's interface with the cinema produces a kind of aesthetic, a somatic *habitus*, and a social world that exceeds the categories—such as "the classical"—through which it represents itself.[163] By widening the lens and placing cinema at the heart of Bharatanāṭyam's life in the modern world, this dissertation has sought to offer a new trajectory for thinking about the relationships between new medial forms in early twentieth-century South India.

In October 2001, JAYA TV—the television channel founded by former dancer-actress and Chief Minister of Tamilnadu, Jayalalitha Jayaram (1948-2016)—broadcast the first-ever television reality show centered on Bharatanāṭyam. It was called *TakaDhimiTa* to reflect the vocalized rhythms (*colkaṭṭu*) of South Indian music. This radically new venture, which brought the new post-liberalization private TV networks into conversation with the "classical" arts and new forms of corporate sponsorship, heralded a new beginning; in many ways, it represented the catapulting of Bharatanāṭyam into the fully globalized twenty-first century. Integral to this new life of the dance was an acknowledgement—indeed a foregrounding—of the relationship between stage forms of Bharatanāṭyam and its cinematic iterations. The televised experience of Bharatanāṭyam, as it was mediated by this program, was in fact an extension of the intermedial lives of Bharatanāṭyam and its representations, which have formed the heart of this dissertation. Indeed, on television, Bharatanāṭyam was suitably repackaged to resonate with the new aesthetic economy of satellite television.

The show's creator and producer, Radhika Shurajit, is a former Bharatanāṭyam dancer who has been bridging the worlds of Bharatanāṭyam and cinema dance for well over two decades. She has choreographed Bharatanāṭyam sequences for a number of Tamil films; she is the Vice President of the Association of Bharatanāṭyam Artists of India; and she runs her own dance school, the Thrayee School of Bharatanāṭyam.[164] The show is hosted by contemporary celebrity actresses who are also "classical" dancers (e.g., Bhanupriya [b. 1967], Shobana [b. 1970; niece of Padmini], Sukanya [b. 1969]), and it

has also featured guest appearances by dancer-actresses of an older generation (e.g., Vyjayanthimala and Padmini, who were discussed previously). The show initially functioned as a straightforward dance competition judged by prominent Bharatanāṭyam dancers, mostly from Chennai. However, in 2004, the show introduced a mandatory "film song" round in which contestants had to interpret a film song using Bharatanāṭyam technique. In an interview I conducted with Radhika in 2012, just as *TakaDhimiTa* was about to complete its 425th episode, she shared her thoughts about the show in relation to Bharatanāṭyam's recent history:

> I had to glamorize Bharatanāṭyam. So what? I reached people [through the show]. To "glamorize" means using captivating shots, having a set, exciting edits…
>
> As a dancer, I think the cinema songs of that [earlier] period [the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s] are eternal. I would say the poetry of [the film lyricist] Kannadasan [1927-1981] is equal to that of the Tanjore Quartet…. The films' songs about love give me the same feeling as dancing to a *padam* does. The great masters like Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai and K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai understood the old-world logic of Bharatanāṭyam very well, and that lent itself very easily to choreography in films. Hence the logic of film, the logic of the camera, and the logic of Bharatanāṭyam choreography blended so beautifully together.
>
> [For "TakaDhimiTa",] we brought in judges who were all the superstars of dance. I must thank all these artists for trusting me. Eventually "TakaDhimiTa" became a status symbol and everyone came from all over the world not only to participate in the dancing, but also to judge. "TakaDhimiTa" is about bringing the old-world charm of Bharatanāṭyam into people's living rooms…. It is a marriage of electronic and visual art.

On the one hand, Shurajit's notions represent what Usha Iyer calls "somatic nostalgia" about the embeddedness of Indian dance in the cinema, a "citationary" recuperation of older sequences of song and dance (224-225). On the other hand, it may be important to ask other questions about how such projects of recuperation and

embodied nostalgia are generated and transmitted. In other words, what are the afterlives of the issues addressed in this dissertation? More specifically, how could some of the ideas presented in this dissertation project be mobilized to think through current trends in the world of Bharatanāṭyam today? From innovative pedagogical methods and the proliferation of urban "film dance" schools, to the creation of "celebrity dancers" modelled after the paradigmatic celebrities of cinema in South India, to the performance of contemporary film songs in stage and television performance of Bharatanāṭyam, the idea of "celluloid classicism" that undergirds the form resonates, and indeed thrives, well beyond its earliest instantiations.

By keeping the archival materials that are at the core of this dissertation as well as some of these issues in mind, it is evident how the print materials from the 1940s and 1950s tirelessly foreground pedagogical ideas; articles in film magazines about training and accomplishment in Bharatanāṭyam dance sit comfortably next to star gossip, film and vinyl record advertisements, and other cinematic paraphernalia. For example, in April 1953, *Kuntūci* magazine features a series of articles entitled "Nāṭṭiya Muttiraikaḷ" ("Gestures of Dance") (see fig. 7-1); these articles were meant to educate film audiences about the meanings of Bharatanāṭyam gestures and to introduce their Sanskrit names and applications (*prayogas*). This is an older practice that was brought into modern Bharatanāṭyam pedagogy through the work of Rukmini Arundale and Kalakshetra ("My Experiments With Dance").

Fig. 7-1. An article entitled "Nāṭṭiya Muttiraikaḷ" ("Gestures of Dance") by A. Rā. Kiruṣṇamūrtti. (*Kuntuci* magazine [April 1953, p. 26-27]).

It is clear from the example of above article that Bharatanāṭyam practice sits comfortably nestled in the same optic world as the cinema, and it is assumed that the audiences and consumers of both dance and the cinema are one and the same. Moreover, "teaching" audiences about Bharatanāṭyam—and the notion of education around the "classical" arts, especially dance—seems to be a preoccupation in the world of cinema. For example, consider the statement below from an article entitled "Nāṭṭiyam Paṭum Pāṭu," ("The Hardship Dance is Facing") by a woman named Malavika in *Kuṇṭūci* magazine from August 1950. When speaking about the modern challenges for Bharatanāṭyam, she invokes the idea of a deep institutionalization of the dance and state-sponsored competitive training:

> Given the state of affairs today, the government can play an important role and make arrangements. The government should go through a rigorous selection process [for funding dance training]. Even if [the government] is unable to have a separate university-like educational institution dedicated to dance, it should set up proficiency tests (*pariccaikaḷ*). [The government should] conduct yearly exams

> [for dancers], and issue certificates as they do for typewriting, playing the *vīṇā*, tailoring, vocal music, and playing the fiddle [violin]. They should focus on the most proficient dancers and have them take exams. They can extract the best dancers in this process. These dancers should be invited by cultural organizations (*sabhās*) to give recitals. In this process, the true essence of Bharatanāṭyam will come shining through. The government need not spend any money on this. The revenue can be earned by the fees the students will pay. (Malavika 44)

Why should a cinema magazine discuss such issues at all? Part of the answer to this question rests upon the fact that the elements of modern Bharatanāṭyam construed as "classical" are dependent upon the visual and symbolic world of the cinema and the movement between media of dance teachers and "star" performers. Indeed, it seems as though people gravitate toward Bharatanāṭyam through a language of dance that circulates almost exclusively via the cinema. Certainly the movement of cinematic songs into stage performances of "classical" Bharatanāṭyam confirms this.

I have already discussed how Kalakshetra's classicizing project remained a hyper-elite one and how it was really figures like Kamala Lakshman and Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai who brought the idea of "classical" dance to the masses through cinema. Similarly, the pedagogical experiments of Kalakshetra, although paradigmatic (as demonstrated by the hand gestures discussed previously), remained elite projects nonetheless. At the popular level, it was later provincial institutions such as Saraswathi Gana Nilayam (established in 1939 by dancer K. Lalitha), film director K. Subrahmanyam's Nrithyodaya (established as Natana Kala Seva in 1941), and Sri Sai Natyalayam in Madras (established in 1950 by J. Vijayamohana, the daughter of M.S. Ramaswamy Pillai, first disciple of Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai) that began to include songs from the

films of the 1930s through the 1950s in their teaching repertoire. Fig. 7-2 offers up yet another example. Here, in April 1953, are images of two young dancers named P. Chandra and R. Lila who are students of a dance teacher and actress named Neela Balasubramaniam, who directs the school called Nataraja Natya Nilayam. The notice published in *Kuntūci* magazine states that, in their recent performance at the Sanatana Marga Sabha in Kodambakkam (Madras), they performed, among other songs, the "Marwadi dance" (the song *Naṉtakōpālaṉoṭu Nāṉ Āṭuvēnē* ["I'll Dance With Kṛṣṇa"]) from the Tamil film *Vazhkai* (1949), which was discussed in Chapter IV and originally danced by Vyjayanthimala.


சிறிய மேடையில் பெரிய விருந்து

Fig. 7-2. Two dancers—P. Chandra and R. Lila—perform the "Marwadi dance" from the film *Vazhkai* (1949) in a stage performance at the Sanatana Marga Sabha, Madras. *Kuṇṭūci* magazine (April 1953, p. 4). (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.)

Their performance of a dance made popular by the dancer-actress Vyjayanthimala also speaks to the celebrity and aspirational status that many dancer-actresses had accrued by the 1950s; this point will be addressed in more detail later. For now, it is significant to note that ideas of the classical—fully inflected with all its pedagogical, moral, religious, and aesthetic implications—thrive in a middle-class world in which Bharatanāṭyam has become a near-fully amateurized practice and that the culture of the cinema is close at hand. In its new urban avatar, Bharatanāṭyam is a "hobby"; it is morally and culturally loaded, of course, but it is an amateur practice nonetheless. Perhaps one of the clearest illustrations of Bharatanāṭyam's amateurization in the post-1930s period is the culture of the the debut performance or *araṅkēṟṟam*. As Janet O'Shea points out, "The *arangetram*, for many young women, marks their entry into a middle-class…community rather than into the performance milieu, often terminating a period of dance study instead of inaugurating a dance career" (*At Home in the World* 3). The culture of having a middle-class girl present an *araṅkēṟṟam* is a necessary element in the new pedagogy of "the classical." The *araṅkēṟṟam*—originally an event that marked a *devadāsī* artist's professional public debut—is transformed into a rite of passage that marks a dancer's accomplishment. This was often glossed over, especially during the Indian diaspora, by the use of the English term *dance graduation.*[165] To be sure, publicity around the *araṅkēṟṟam* was present even during the 1940s and 1950s, when film magazines like *Kuṇṭūci* carried announcements for *araṅkēṟṟams* taking place in Madras city side by side

with advertisements for new film releases and gossip about film stars. One such announcement from *Kuṇṭūci* magazine dated December 1952 reads as follows:

> On the 12th of last month [November], Kumari Ramani performed her Bharatanāṭyam *araṅkēṟṟam* at Mylapore Rasika Ranjani Sabha. For that *araṅkēṟṟam*, the respected minister Krishna Rao was the chief guest. Ramani is the student of Saraswati, who herself is a student of Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai.
>
> The *araṅkēṟṟam* of the "Kochi sisters" (Kumari N. Saroja and Kumari N. Shakuntala) took place on the 14th of November at Mylapore Rasika Ranjani Sabha. They are students of M.S. Ramasami Pillai, who is a student of Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai. On that occasion, respected judge M.S.P. Iyer was the chief guest (76).

Indeed, the *araṅkēṟṟams* of dancer-actresses were announced and publicized with great pomp even into the 1970s. In fig. 7-3, Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai and his son Samaraj present the *araṅkēṟṟam* of the Malayalam film star Jayabharathi (b. 1954) in 1974 in Ettumanoor, Kerala. On the invitation card seen here, Jayabharathi is very prominently shown performing a "cinematic-yet-classical" dance, the "Āṇṭāḷ dance," which was created for Kamala Lakshman by Ramaiah Pillai.

Fig. 7-3. The Malayalam actress Jayabharathi performs the "Āṇṭāḷ dance" during her Bharatanāṭyam *araṅkēr̲r̲am* with Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai in August 1974. (Private Collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

The example of Jayabharathi takes us to a point I wish to make about the pedagogical and didactic nature of the idea of "the classical" as it is constituted through the always-already cross-pollinated space of cinema and Bharatanāṭyam. This point has to do with cults of celebrity in Bharatanāṭyam, which structurally evolve from stardom as it is imagined and lived in the cinema. As the work of Usha Iyer has eloquently shown, "classical dance" is deployed as a key aspect of female celebrity in the Hindi cinema. For example, dancer-actresses such as Vyjayanthimala are celebrated largely because of their dancing ability, which stands in for a number of moral, cultural, and sexual significations. However, I am interested in thinking about how the cinema consequently enables a cult of stardom in the realm of the "classical arts." Today, generations of "classical"

Bharatanāṭyam dancers (e.g., Padma Subrahmanyam) surely own and negotiate "star status," a phenomenon that they have co-opted through a range of opportunities, including innovative pedagogy. In an earlier time, these opportunities largely revolved around state sponsorship and international touring through organizations such as the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. Today, it is wide-scale transnational connections, globalized "Indian classical dance" schools, and online pedagogy that enable such stardom.

In turning back to the primary sources, it can be seen how the archive contains some early iterations of the "star" Bharatanāṭyam dancer (see fig. 7-4). On the one hand, dancers who achieved "star status" may have performed in the cinema, as was seen with figures like Kamala Lakshman, Padmini, and Vyjayanthimala. Another lesser-known example comes in the figure of the dancer-actress Tara Chaudhri (d. 2013).[166] Chaudhri was born in Punjab and initially trained in Kathak together with her sister. In 1943, she moved to the South to train in Bharatanāṭyam and Kathakali. She studied Bharatanāṭyam with Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai, the same *nattuvanar* who trained Rukmini Arundale. For a brief time, while she lived in Madras, Chaudhri was co-opted into the world of the Tamil cinema. She performed dances in Tamil films such as *Vedhala Ulagam* ("Demon World," 1948) and *Parijatam* ("The Wish-Fulfilling Tree," 1950). Although Chaudhri was primarily a stage performer, in a pattern quite opposite to the figures discussed by Usha Iyer, her presence in the cinema contributed to her popularity as a stage performer. Publicity and "star status" enabled the sedimentation of upper- and

middle-class identities not only for the dancer but also for Bharatanāṭyam. Indeed, the accoutrements of the modern Bharatanāṭyam dancer—expensive *saris*, jewels, international travel, the management of dance institutions, and so on—are signs of class status; in a sense, they function as gatekeepers for the class-based insularity of the dance (Soneji, "Siva's Courtesans" xii). For many dancers of the 1940s and 1950s, their presence in popular magazines and other forms of publicity that were allied with the film world enabled them to inhabit, in a seamless and unquestioning manner, a certain class identity that came to be associated with "being a Bharatanāṭyam dancer."

Fig. 7-4. Dancer Tara Chaudhri (d. 2013), a student of Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai, performs in the Tamil film *Parijatam* (1950). *Kuṇṭūci* magazine (December 1949, p. 34). (Courtesy Roja Muthiah Research Library.)

The archive also documents how "celebrity dancers" who had nothing to do with the cinema at all were co-opted into cinematic discourse as "keepers of classical tradition." This argument complements the work of Neepa Majumdar (*Wanted, Cultured*

Ladies Only) and Usha Iyer ("Film Dance"), who have argued that moral anxieties around "tradition" and idealized forms of womanhood are at the center of Indian configurations of female celebrity and of stardom more generally. Fig. 7-5 is a two-page spread in *Kuṇṭūci* magazine from August 1949 about the dancer Mrinalini Sarabhai (1918-2016), who was raised in Madras, educated in Switzerland, and married a leading scientist in Gujarat while maintaining a career as a Bharatanāṭyam dancer who had been trained by Meenakshisundaram Pillai. Unlike Tara Chaudhri (who was marginally present in the cinema) or Kamala Lakshman and Vyjayanthimala (who were filmic celebrities), Sarabhai did not have any involvement in the cinema. However, she still becomes an iconic figure whose dancing images and life narrative circulate as part of the discursive construction of the "star" Bharatanāṭyam dancer. The film magazine spread calls her work in the field of dance a "service" (*cēvai*) in a move that frames the "classicism" of dance in a mode that ascribes to art making a moral high ground; indeed, the term *cēvai,* from the Sanskrit *sevā* ("service"), is most frequently used to depict selfless acts of piety or devotion). The "stars" of the dance world are covered in publications like *Kuṇṭūci* in a manner that is strikingly similar to those of the cinema world. Indeed, this spread on Sarabhai reads very similar in tone to the feature on the actress T.K. Rajakumari that was discussed in Chapter II. In the intertwined world of Bharatanāṭyam and the early Tamil cinema, "stardom" thus represented another mode of positioning and representing women actors and dancers in the vernacular press.


மிருணாலினியின் அரிய சேவை

Fig. 7-5. Article about Mrinalini Sarabhai (1918-2016) entitled “Miruṇāḷiṉiyiṉ Ariya Cēvai” (“The Unique Services of Mrinalini”). *Kuṇṭūci* magazine (August 1949, pp. 6-7.) (Private collection of S.V. Jayababu.)

While my inquiry in this project has been limited to the period between the 1930s and the 1950s, Bharatanāṭyam and Tamil cinema continue their cross-polination well into the twenty-first century. I conclude, therefore, with some examples of the enduring ways in which the links I have attempted to foreground between Bharatanāṭyam and the Tamil cinema thrive in today’s globalized economic and cultural industries.

One of my interlocutors in the dissertation, the dancer Radhika Shurajit, continues to create full-length Bharatanāṭyam performances using only Tamil film songs. On December 2, 2011 as part of a major dance festival in Chennai presented by the cultural organization Kartik Fine Arts, she created a full suite of Bharatanāṭyam dances drawn from Tamil cinematic songs from the 1950s to the present. She had titled this production “G. Ramanathan mutal A.R. Rahamn varai” (“From [composer] G. Ramanathan to [composer] A.R. Rahman”), which was titled on youtube as “*Radhika Shurajit’s dance*

show based on evergreen Tamil film songs". The production focused on an iconic film music composer from each decade beginning in the 1950s, and showcased their most popular film songs interpreted through Bharatanāṭyam choreography by Shurajit. These composers range from G. Ramanathan from 1950s, Vishwanathan Ramamurthy from the 1960s, Illayaraja from 1970s and 1980s and Oscar award winner A.R Rahman from the 1990s. As Shurajit told me in an interview in 2012, "this is my attempt to bring the art of Bharatanāṭyam to the common people in India via the medium of Tamil cinema". Clearly, this is an explicit continuation of the complex yolking of Bharatanāṭyam and the cinema that began in the 1930s, albeit in a highly systemized, structured, and "professional" manner, that foregrounds the hybid aesthetic of the "celluloid classical."

Another example of this type of sustained performance of the "celluloid classical" comes from another one of my interlocutors, the dancer Padma Subrahmanyam. In November 2001, she created a new dance work entitled "Nāṭṭiya Cāstiramum Naṭikar Tilakamum" (The *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the Crest-Jewel of Acting) in which she integrated a compilation of fifty films of iconic Tamil actor Sivaji Ganesan (1928-2001) and demonstrated how his various facial expressions from these films were congruous to that of the facial expressions of Bharatanāṭyam dancers as laid out in the Sanskrit text, the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Here, we see how the juxtapositioning of the Sanskrit *Nāṭyaśāstra*, which was a key tool in the legitimation of Bharatanāṭyam's perceived "classical" status at the time of its reinvention, and the performanaces of a celebrity actor of the modern Tamil cinema constitutes a narrative can best be understood by invoking the idea of "celluloid

classicism." In other words, for Subrahmanyam, actor Sivaji Ganesan's performance on the screen is wholly compatible with the aesthetic parameters of the "ancient" and "classical" idiom of Bharatanāṭyam (represented here by the *Nāṭyaśāstra)*. Bharatanāṭyam's essential aesthetic characteristics cannot be understood outside the aesthetic frameworks instantiated and actualized in the cinema.

On the one hand, the politics of the "dance revival" of the 1930s, created a perceived binary in the dance world of modern South India between "the classical" (represented by stage versions of Bharatanāṭyam) and the popular (represented by dance in cinema). On the other, as cinema became a more respectable idiom and was repopulated by women from upper-caste and upper-class urban backgrounds, it became increasingly possible for flows between stage and screen to exist, in a process that both simultaneously celebrated and broke-down the supposed "insularity" of the "pure and sacred" idiom of the post-revival Bharatanāṭyam. The rhetoric of "breaking-down" the earlier binaries became so ubiquitous in the 1980s and 1990s that it became routine to see such "cross-over" performances (such as those by Radhika Shurajit I discuss earlier) even in the Indian diaspora. Today, Bharatanāṭyam dancers all over the world choreograph the latest Tamil blockbuster film songs through the idiom of Bharatanatyam and these circulate widely through a range of social media, most commonly on YouTube. To cite one very recent example, the song *Kanna Nee Thoongadaa* or "muṟaiyāṉa mukunta" ("Is this right, Mukunda?") from the film *Bahubali 2* ("Warrior with Strong Arms," 2017, made in Tamil, Telugu, and Hindi), directed by S. S. Rajamouli, is the subject of

hundreds of stage choreographies. Indeed, this is celluloid classicism "gone viral." Among the dozens of such choreographies on YouTube is one by members of the Irudaya Dance Company from Toronto, Canada. The members of Irudaya Dance Company have set specific Bharatanāṭyam gestures to the various words in the song, transforming it into piece with a visibly "Bharatanāṭyam optic."

Finally, repertory items made popular in Tamil cinema, such as the snake dance performed by Kamala Lakshman since the 1940s, continue to have lingering afterlives on the proscenium stage today. Again, by way of a very recent example, in August 2016, California-based Bharatanāṭyam dancer Surabhi Bharadwaj performed *Aadu Pambe*, the snake dance at Wagner Park in New York as part of the "Erasing Borders Festival of Indian Dance." Like Kamala, Bharadwaj also performs a heavily acrobatic version of Bharatanāṭyam for New York audiences to popular acclaim. However unlike Kamala's cinematic version, Bharadwaj expanded the physicality of the serpentine movements, in a kind of intense dramatization of pushing the limits of the physical endurance of the twenty-first century Bharatanāṭyam dancer. In a future project, I hope to be able to map with more precision and deep analysis the enduring presence of the relationship between "classical" dance and the Tamil cinema of the post 1960s period, paying particular attention issues of India's economic liberalization and cultural globalization, and the new class formations and identities they enable.

As we have seen, cinema plays a crucial role in the multiple formations (aesthetic, social, and political) that center around the multiple iterations of Bharatanāṭyam

throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This dissertation has sought to offer new possibilities for thinking through Bharatanāṭyam's complex and differing representations. In the always-already hybridized space of "Bharatanatyam-in-and-as-cinema," songs and the aesthetics of movement simultaneously live on several registers, each a valid dimension of the spectacle, and also speak to a range of real and imagined pasts.

NOTES

[1] The interrelated cultural histories of Bharatanāṭyam and the early Tamil cinema have hardly received any critical attention by the cultural historians of South India. A notable exception is M.S.S. Pandian's short but insightful essay "Tamil Cultural Elites and Cinema: Outline of an Argument," which locates both contemporary Bharatanāṭyam and popular cinema along a continuum of class- and caste-bound taste habits among South Indian cultural elites. A recent essay by Sundar Kaali discusses the Tamil film *Cintamani* ("The Wish-Fulfilling Gem," 1931) in relation to discourses on *devadāsī* reform during the Madras Presidency. Apart from these two short essays, scholarly work on the core issues of this dissertation is virtually absent.

[2] "Intermedial studies" and the related "transmedial studies" are growing areas of interest in the study of literature and the arts. Excellent work in these new subfields includes the titles in the "Studies in Intermediality" series recently published by E.J. Brill. Of direct interest is the work of Marcsek-Fuchs in this series, which discusses British literature and dance in the nineteenth century.

[3] Raja Ravi Varma has been discussed extensively by scholars of visual culture in South Asia. For more on Ravi Varma's work and the afterlives of his paintings and their chromolithographic reproductions, see the work of Tapati Guha-Thakurta ("Westernization and Tradition"), Geeta Kapur *(When Was Modernism?)*, Kajri Jain *(Gods in the Bazaar)*, Erwin Neumayer and Christine Schelberger (*Popular Indian Art; Portrait of an Artist*), and Christopher Pinney (*Photos of the Gods*).

[4] A very significant amount of work has been done on the unique ideological axes that come together to constitute the political and cultural worlds of the Madras Presidency during the early twentieth century. Among these, the work of historical anthropologists and historians Bernard Bate (*Tamil Oratory*), Eugene Irschick (*Tamil Revivalism*), Sumathi Ramaswamy (*Passions of the Tongue*), M.S.S. Pandian ("Tamil Cultural Elites"; *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin*), and Ravi Vaithees (*Religion, Caste, and Nation*) trace the emergence of Dravidian politics and describe its implications for various aspects of South India's cultural history.

[5] Davesh Soneji is currently working on a project that extensively documents the ways in which musical cultures in South India were transformed by the advent of the Parsi theater

and its offshoot, *icai nāṭakam*, in Tamil-speaking South India. Much of the material in this section—especially the idea of "*rāga*-based music"—is indebted to his unpublished paper entitled "*Indra's Court* in Madras: The Urdu Theatre and the Cosmopolitan Origins of Modern Tamil 'Musical Drama.'"

[6] Cuvāmikaḷ's "boys' company," which was founded in 1910, was called Camaraca Caṅmārka Nāṭaka Capā. Later, older male actors were also sometimes recruited to act in it. The name reflects the growing influence of Tamil nationalism, with its Śaiva religious leanings, on the project of cultural modernity. The term *camaraca caṅmārka* ("universal path of truth") is a theological phrase that was deployed as part of neo-Śaiva Tamil nationalist discourse during the early twentieth century. Tamil nationalism will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

[7] As Soneji's recent work describes ("*Indra's Court* in Madras"), many of the scripts for the modern Tamil theater were written by Brahmins but funded and published by upper-caste non-Brahmins, such as Mutaliyārs, Ceṭṭiyārs, and Vēḷāḷars. Drama performers themselves came from a range of lower-caste backgrounds, although, even here, there is often marginal upper-caste involvement. The relatively inclusive and cosmopolitan nature of the new drama was perhaps one of the reasons for its tremendous appeal and fiscal success during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

[8] This is a reference to a performance of the Tamil play *Ṭampācārivilācam* ("Dalliances of a Dandy") by Caitāpuram Kācivicuvanāta Mutaliyār (1806-1871), which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two. I'm grateful to Davesh Soneji for the following reference from the *Madras Mail* newspaper, dated August 24, 1876:

> Native Female Amateurs—A number of wealthy Hindus of Madras are about getting up a drama entitled "Dumbacharri Velasam," the principle actors in which are to be Nautch, or Dancing Girls, who are undergoing a course of lessons in a house in Black Town. The performance will take place in the early part of next month.

[9] Mutaliyar directed the Tamil film *Sati Sulochana* ("The Virtuous Woman Sulocanā," 1934) and wrote a book in Tamil with an English title, *Talkie Experiences in Tamil*, about the process of directing the film as well as his experiences acting in the film *Manohara* (1936, based on his 1920 play of the same name) produced by Bharath Films, Coimbatore. This book has recently been translated into English by Sugeeth Krishnamoorthy.

[10] That is, with the exception of anthropologist Stephen Hughes' excellent essay entitled "Music in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Drama, Gramophone, and the Beginnings of Tamil Cinema."

[11] The film *Kalidas* was produced by Ardeshir Irani (1886-1969), who was also the maker of *Alam Ara* (1931), India's first talkie; it was directed by his former assistant H.M. Reddy for the Imperial Movi-Tone Studios. Although it may be fair to say that *Kalidas* was the first talkie to contain Tamil, it was in reality a multilingual film with characters speaking in Tamil, Telugu, and Hindi. However, all of its songs were *rāga*-based and in the mold of what is considered "classical Karṇāṭak" music today. For example, it contained Rajalakshmi's rendition of the devotional song (*kīrtana*) by the composer Tyāgarāja entitled *Ĕnta Nercina* ("No Matter How Erudite…") in *rāga* Śuddha Dhanyāsi. This of course has a parallel with the ways in which song genres such as *kīrtanas, padams*, and *jāvaḷis* flowed through the early Tamil drama during a slightly earlier period. It speaks to the dialectical relationship between these cultural forms as well as to the malleability and flexibility of the genres; this theme will be taken up in greater detail in Chapter Six.

[12] Early works included anecdotal and celebratory writings by a number of Indian scholars. See, for example, V.A.K. Ranga Rao's essays, including "Dance in Indian Cinema."

[13] Kūcipūḍi is a form with a recent history that is highly contested. At first glance, it appears to be very similar to Bharatanāṭyam, largely because it was refashioned after the "post-reinvention" Bharatanāṭyam during the 1950s. Critical rereadings of Kūcipūḍi's recent history began with the work of Jonnalagadda ("Traditions and Innovations") and Soneji ("Performing Satyabhama") and have continued with reference to the Telugu cinema in the work of Putcha ("Revisiting the Classical") and Thota ("Stage to Screen, and Back").

[14] An important work that focuses on the Telugu cinema and that also addresses questions of social history and politics is S.V. Srinivas' *Politics as Performance: A Social History of the Telugu Cinema.* Unfortunately, no real parallel work exists on the Tamil cinema.

[15] Some of the major earlier works on Tamil cinema include those by Baskaran (*The Eye of the Serpent*, *History Through the Lens*); Dickey ("Cinema and the Urban Poor"; "Consuming Utopia"); Gopalan (*Cinema of Interruptions*); Guy (*Starlight, Starbright*); Hardgrave (*When Stars Displace the Gods*); Hariharan ("Who is the Bad Guy?); Lakshmi ("Seduction, Speeches and Lullaby"; "A Good Woman"); M.S.S. Pandian ("Tamil Cultural Elites," *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin*); and Velayutham (*Tamil Cinema*). Important works that discuss the relationship between Tamil cinema and regional politics

include Barnett (*The Politics of Cultural Nationalism*); Baskaran (*The Message Bearers*); Hardgrave (*When Stars Displace the Gods*; "Politics and the Film in Tamil Nadu"); Jacob ("From Co-Star to Deity"); Sivathamby (*The Tamil Film*); and Vaasanthi (*Cut-Outs, Caste and Cine Stars*).

[16] A very recent work on this topic is Lakshmi Srinivas' *House Full: Indian Cinema and the Active Audience,* which maps—through an innovative ethnographic method—the filmgoing experience in Bangalore, including everything from buying tickets to voicing reactions in the theater during the screening, largely among Kannada- and Hindi-speaking audiences.

[17] Venkatachalapathy wonderfully has a whole chapter of his book dedicated to this class of Tamil publications. He traces the origin of the term *gujili* (*kucili*) to an area of Madras city known as Gujili Bazaar near the Central Railway Station; it was named after the large numbers of Gujarati people who lived in this area (*The Province of the Book* 134-135).

[18] A detailed account of S.S. Vasan and Gemini Studio is found in Randor Guy's *Starlight, Starbright: The Early Tamil Cinema* (236-251). A more critical account of Gemini Studios is found in Chapter 3 of Swarnavel Eswaran Pillai's *Madras Studios: Narrative, Genre, and Ideology in Tamil Cinema*.

[19] This magazine's title was chosen to reflect the pen name of the film journalist P.R.S. Gopal, who made his name writing for another film magazine, *Silver Screen*. *Kuṇṭūci* was managed by a man who came to be known as "Gundoosi" Radhakrishnan. A recent biography of P.R.S. Gopal has been written in Tamil by the contemporary Tamil writer Vāmaṉaṉ.

[20] Other important early Tamil film magazines include *Ciṉimā Ulakam* ("The World of Cinema") and *Hanumāṉ* ("The Monkey God Hanuman"), the latter of which was popularized by the writings of the Tamil writer Ka. Na. Subramanyam (1912-1988). *Silver Screen,* which was the other popular early film magazine, was largely an English-language publication, which was founded by a man named Ramaratnam during the late 1930s.

[21] In 1954, a few years after the release of this film, the Kannada writer G.V. Iyer wrote a historical novel entitled *Śāntalā,* which tells the quasi-historical story of Viṣṇuvardhana (r. 1108-1152 CE), king of the Hoysala dynasty, and his love for a court dancer named Śāntalā, whom he apparently married. In the novel, she cannot produce a male heir for the kingdom and so tragically ends her own life. The novel may have been inspired in part by the circulation of the film.

[22] The magazine *Atal Patal* draws its title from a column on music and dance that used to be written in the magazine *Āṉanta Vikaṭaṉ* by the famous Gandhian writer "Kalki" R. Krishnamurthy (1899-1954). Krishnamurthy eventually founded the tremendously popular Tamil magazine *Kalki* in 1941. This is discussed further in Chapter Four.

[23] Ironically, in most English-language writing about Bharatanāṭyam from the 1930s and 1940s, *devadāsī* dancers who performed in the cinema were glossed over or mentioned only in passing, if at all. Many of these women, who will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two, were critical players in the representation of Bharatanāṭyam as a legitimate artistic practice in the film industry. It is only in the vernacular archive that they are discussed in greater detail.

[24] I draw my invocation of "prosopography" from the classic essay simply titled "Prosopography" by historian Lawrence Stone that appeared in *Daedelus* in 1971. The essay offers perspectives on the epistemic value of collective biography. Of course, I only use this as a point of reference in the sense that I am not attempting to create a "database," nor am I invocating the term in a social science sense, as a sociologist might. I simply want to highlight the importance of recovering, juxtaposing, and combining life narratives that have otherwise eluded critical historicization.

[25] Davesh Soneji has recently pointed to the colonial discursive formation and political mobilization of the Sanskrit term *devadasi* (*Unfinished Gestures*). Following Leslie Orr (*Donors, Devotees, and Daughters of God*), Soneji argues that *devadāsī* as an "umbrella term" comes to signify a range of separate local communities of unrelated women who are brought together under this sign for the purposes of colonial bureaucracy and administration (*Unfinished Gestures* 6).

[26] On civic (Brahmin) elites and colonial bureaucracy, see the work of Hancock (*Womanhood in the Making*) and, more recently, the work of Fuller and Narasimhan (*Tamil Brahmans*).

[27] Outside the Madras Presidency, there were a number of interventions aimed at other courtesan communities and communities of professional performers, such as the Marathi- and Konkani-speaking *kaḷāvant* communities of Bombay (see the work of Arondekar ["A Small History"]) and the *tawā'if* and *bāījī* courtesans of North India and Bengal (see the work of Du Perron [*Hindi Poetry*]; Maciszewski ["Gendered Stories, Gendered Styles"; "Tawa'if, Tourism, and Tales"; "Texts, Tunes, and Talking Heads"]; Sachdeva ["In Search of the Tawa'if in History"]; Qureshi ["Female Agency"]). Some the earliest attempts to make legal interventions against professional female performers come from Bombay Presidency in 1912 (Jordan 75-86).

[28] Of course there are notable exceptions, such as the famous dancer T. Balasaraswati and the singer M.S. Subbulakshmi (who will be discussed elsewhere in this chapter). However, as Soneji points out, it is significant that these women were *exceptions* in the sense that they engaged with the structures of the state and elite politics in Madras in a matter that was not at all possible for the majority of women from *devadāsī* backgrounds, who were neither living in Madras nor receiving patronage from urban elites and emergent cultural institutions (*Unfinished Gestures* 22-23).

[29] Scholarly writing on the Self-Respect Movement in English is meagre. Major texts on the subject include the work of Irschick (*Tamil Revivalism*), Geetha and Rajadurai (*Towards a Non-Brahmin Millenium*), and M.S.S. Pandian (*Brahmin and Non-Brahmin*). Excellent work on gender and sexuality in the Self-Respect Movement has been done by K. Srilata (*The Other Half of the Coconut*).

[30] On the linkages between Tamil politics of the 1920s and 1930s and cinema, see the work of Irschick (*Tamil Revivalism*), Baskaran (*The Message Bearers*), Dickey ("Cinema and the Urban Poor"), and Jacob (*Celluloid Deities*). The work of Irschick in particular focuses on the participation of men from the *devadāsī* community (e.g., C.N. Annadurai, M. Karunanidhi) in the making of modern Tamil politics.

[31] Subsection 3.2 of the 1947 Act in fact only includes Telugu-language words (other than the Sanskrit "*devadāsī*") to refer to these women: "Any custom or usage in the Hindu community such as the Bogum [*bhogam,* Telugu], Kalavanthula [Telugu], Sani [Telugu], Nagavasulu [Telugu], Devadāsī, and Kurmapulu [Telugu]…are hereby declared unlawful and void" (Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures* 236).

[32] In a brilliant essay entitled "What is Tamil About Tamil Cinema?," Stephen Hughes addresses the question of language in the early talkies. He argues that the issue of "Tamilness" and linguistic differentiation in the South Indian cinema cannot be read outside of the emergence of Dravidian politics in combination with the increasing quantitative output of film production in Madras.

[33] The first South Indian talkie, *Kalidas* (1931), starred T.P. Rajakumari (1911-1964) as the heroine, and she was not from the *devadāsī* community. Her life was rather exceptional in that she was a Brahmin. At the age of eleven, she joined a drama troupe to support herself and her mother (Guy, *Starlight, Starbright* 53-54). There is almost nothing known about the actress Jeevarathnam who performed in the first silent film made in South India, *Keechaka Vadham* (1918). It is only known that she was a drama actress prior to acting in the cinema, so there exists the possibility that she may have been from a *devadāsī* background.

[34] For more on early Telugu women playback singers, see Kiranmayi Indraganti's recent book *Her Majestic Voice: South Indian Female Playback Singers and Stardom, 1945-1955,* and the excellent work of Weidman ("Voices of Meenakumari"; "Musical Genres and National Identity").

[35] The most famous of these companies was the Surabhi Drama Company, founded by the actor Vanarasa Govinda Rao in 1885 in Surabhi, a village in the Kadapa District. The company was the first to encourage women to play female roles in the modern Telugu theater (Indraganti, *Her Majestic Voice* 39). The female lead in the first Telugu film, *Bhakta Prahlada* ("The Devotee Prahlada," 1931), was the actress Surabhi Kamalabai (1913-1977), who was not from the courtesan community. However, it is significant that the company also enabled a number of women from the *kalavantula* community to enter the professional world of theater and cinema. The most famous of these women *kalavantula* artists who started with Surabhi and went on to act in both Telugu and Tamil films from the 1940s to early 1960s was Surabhi Balasaraswati (dates unknown).

[36] The Parsi theater is a distinctly modern theatrical form that integrated older forms of Indian theater with aesthetic modes and narratives drawn from traveling Shakespearean theater troupes that moved through colonial South Asia. During the Bombay Presidency, many of these plays were initially translated into Hindi/Urdu and Gujarati. They were staged in these languages with the use of staging techniques, costumes, and narratives drawn from the traveling troupes. This hybrid type of theater eventually came to be known as "Parsi theater," because it was patronized by the upwardly mobile Parsi or Zoroastrian community in Bombay. The Bombay Presidency Parsi theater troupes eventually toured South India and thus had an impact on local theater traditions. The development of the popular Tamil theater, known as *icai nāṭakam*, thus owes a great deal to the Parsi theater. For more about the Parsi theater, see the work of Kathryn Hansen ("Theatrical Transvestism"; "Languages on Stage"; "Staging Composite Culture"; *Stages of Life*).

[37] Writings on Cuvāmikaḷ in English are meagre. Only the work of Susan Seizer (*Stigmas of the Tamil Stage*) and a short essay by Yoshio Sugimoto ("'Boys Be Ambitious'") mention him. However, there is a sizeable amount of writing about him and his plays in Tamil, and much of this literature has been mentioned in the references of Chapter One of this dissertation.

[38] The essay by Ebeling is entitled "The Scandal of the Devadāsī in Nineteenth-Century Tamil Theater: Caitapuram Kacivicuvanata Mutaliyar's Drama *Tampacari Vilacam*" and is forthcoming in a volume I am co-editing with Davesh Soneji, entitled *Dance and the Early South Indian Cinema*.

[39] In addition to the *Piratāpacantira Vilācam*, he also wrote an English play entitled *Urjoon Sing, or the Princess Regained* (c. 1875); a Tamil translation of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet entitled *Rōmiyō Jūliyaṭṭu Eṉpavarkaḷuṭaiya Katai* (1877), which was commissioned by the Madras Vernacular Literature Society; a children's book called *Indian Fables* (Sonnenschein & Co., 1889); and *Sreemat Rajangala Mahodayam* (1894), a Sanskrit verse narrative of the rise of the British Empire that also contains a long piece called *Sreemat Pandita Rajatarangini*, an account of the life of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, the prominent Bengali social reformer and writer.

[40] Soneji has also shown how *devadāsīs* writing during the early twentieth century connected themselves to such mythical *devadāsī* figures to provide themselves with a genealogy at the height of the anti-*devadāsī* movement. Soneji notes this in the case of the Tamil book entitled *Śiva's Courtesans* (*Uruttirakaṇikaiyar*) written by the *devadāsī* K. Añcukam in 1911 (Soneji, *Bharatanatyam*) as well as in the context of written protest letters produced by *devadāsīs* opposing the legal interventions of Muthulakshmi Reddy (Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures*).

[41] The use of the name Ceṅkamalam to refer to a *devadāsī* character also appears later, in the novel *Pāvaiviḷakku* ("Votive Lamp") by the Tamil writer Akilaṉ (1922-1988). Akilaṉ's novel was made into a film with the same title (*Pavai Vilakku*, 1960) starring the Brahmin dancer Kamala Lakshman and Sivaji Ganesan.

[42] Guy retrieved this description from a print source that is evidently no longer available. I have retrieved Guy's article, "Devadasi (1948)," from the online archives of *The Hindu.*

[43] Contemporary sources on Rukmani—for example, her Wikipedia page and an obituary that appeared on her in *The Hindu* newspaper on September 5, 2007—do not mention anything about her early years nor about her mother's professional engagements with dance and music.

[44] In this section, I draw from two major anonymous archival sources from the film magazines *Kuṇṭūci* and *Āṭal Pāṭal*. These are "Es. Ṭi. Cuppulakṣmi: Vāḻkkai Varṇaṉai" ("A Description of the Life of S.D. Subbulakshmi") in *Kuṇṭūci* and a short early essay entitled "Kuḻantaikaḷē Periyavarkaḷāka Ākiṟārkaḷ" ("The One Who Has Grown From Being a Child to an Adult") in *Āṭal Pāṭal*.

[45] *Harikathā* or *kathākālakṣepam* is derived from the Marathi devotional practice known as *kīrtan*, which combines song, storytelling about the lives of Vaiṣṇava saints, and commentary (Schultz, *Singing in a Hindu Nation*). During the eighteenth century, Marathi traditions of *kīrtan* were brought to Tanjore. By the late nineteenth century, these

forms had been appropriated, transformed by Tamil Brahmin musicians, and given the name *kathākālakṣepam* ("passing time by narrating sacred stories"). For more on this form, see the work of Gurumurthy (*Kalakalakshep*) and Soneji's essay "The Powers of Polyglossia" (2013). This was originally an all-male, Brahmin performance tradition, but, by the early twentieth century, women from *devadāsī* communities began to perform it, and Brahmin women themselves performed it by the 1930s (Soneji, "The Powers of Polyglossia" 2013).

[46] The film *Pavalakodi* (1934) had approximately 55 songs in it. The music was composed by Papanasam Sivan, who will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

[47] This Meenakshi Iyer was the granddaughter of Rao Bahadur K.S. Venkatarama Iyer of Nagapattinam. In 1920, She married K. Subrahmanyam when she was nine and he was sixteen (Kannan and Kannan 28).

[48] One of her famous recordings is of a Tamil *padam* in the rāga Kāmbodhi entitled *Uṉakkō Maṉamillai* ("Don't You Have a Heart?"), which was written by an unknown composer. She also recorded the Telugu *kīrtana* or devotional lyric *Bhajana Seya Rādā* ("Shouldn't We Sing [His] Praises?") in the *rāga* Aṭhānā by the composer Tyāgarāja (1767-1847) and the Sanskrit *kīrtana* entitled *Cintaya Makanda Mūlakandam* ("Meditate Upon the Lord Who is at the Base of the Mango Tree") in the *rāga* Bhairavī by Muddusvāmi Dīkṣitulu (1775-1835). This is in addition to at least one song in the *tillāṉā* genre in the *rāga* Kāpi, various verses from the Tamil Śaiva canonical hymns known as *Tēvāram*, as well as one piece simply labeled "Comic Song." For a complete list, as per the gramophone labels, see Kinnear (*The Gramophone*).

[49] This is likely true, because there are other examples of photographs that have been incorporated into the Konerirajapuram murals where this is the case. The most famous image on these murals is that of the *tavil* (drum) player Ammapettai Pakkiri Pillai (1874-1920), whose image was copied onto the murals from a photograph (Sundaram, *Mankala Icai Mannarkal* 259-262).

[50] Almost nothing is known about Kunnakudi Venkatrama Iyer aside from the films for which he composed music. These included the film *Krishna Bhakthi* ("Devotion to Kṛṣṇa," 1949), in which Rajakumari acted.

[51] The narrative of *Kacha Devayani* is taken from the epic *Mahābhārata* and is about the illicit love between Kaca, the son of Bṛhaspati and the priest of the gods, and Devayāni, the daughter of the priest of the demons, Śukrācārya. The story was the subject of three silent films made in the years 1919, 1926, and 1929 in Bombay. The 1929 version was made by Dhundiraj Govind Phalke himself.

[52] This song was written and composed by Papanasam Sivan in the *rāga* Nāṭakuṟañci and sung by M.K. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar in the film.

[53] The song was written by Papanasam Sivan, composed in the *rāga* Cārukeśī, and sung by M.K. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar in the film. Its popularity has been commented upon by Randor Guy (*Starlight, Starbright* 257), and the refrain "*maṉmatalīlai"* ("glories of the god of love") was the title of a Tamil film starring Kamala Haasan in 1976. The refrain of the song itself was incorporated into a song for another of Kamala Haasan's films, *Panchathantiram* (2002).

[54] Between the production of *Haridas* and *Chandralekha*, it is known that Rajakumari acted in at least two other films: *Vikatayogi* ("The Wicked Yogi," 1946), directed by K. Subrahmanyam, and *Pankajavalli* ("Lady of the Lotus," 1947), directed by S. Soundararajan Ayyangar.

[55] T.R. Ramanna, Rajakumari's brother, married the actress B.S. Saroja (b. 1922) in 1949. Saroja was born into a Malayali family and initially entered films as a chorus singer, since both her parents were musicians. She acted and danced in many Tamil (and later Malayalam) films, including *Nattiyarani* ("Queen of Dance," 1949).

[56] This bungalow was named Kanyakumari Bhavanam ("Abode of the Virgin Goddess") and was on Habibullah Street in T. Nagar, Madras (Sampath Kumar, "[Ṭi. Ār. Rājakumāri]" 57).

[57] For more on *katti kalyāṇam* and its wider courtly and social meanings, see Soneji (*Unfinished Gestures* 34-36) for details on the practice in Tanjore and see Sreenivas (*Wives, Widows, and Concubines*) for more general information.

[58] This is a reference to a local goddess, whose temple is located in the town of Thiruvidaimarudur. She is called Bṛhat Sundara Kucāmbā ("The Mother with Beautiful Large Breasts") in Sanskrit and Nanmulaināyaki or Perum Mulaināyaki ("The Lady With Full Breasts") in Tamil.

[59] Pragathi Studio was owned by A.V.M. Chettiar. Because of the war, the studio's location eventually shifted from Madras to Karaikkudi, further south (S.E. Pillai, *Madras Studios* 59).

[60] This song, together with a discussion of its gendered and nationalist implications, is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

[61] S.K. Kameswaran (1929-2007) was born in the city of Madurai into a *naṭṭuvaṉār* family. He initially trained under a *naṭṭuvaṉār* named Vaideeswarankoyil Mahadeva Pillai (1904-1965). When he moved to Madras in 1945, he became an assistant to Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai and ran a school called Mahalakshmi Natyalaya. His daughter, K. Mahalakshmi, is a professional dancer today.

[62] This quote is from a talk entitled "My Experiments with Dance" delivered by Arundale at the Sangeet Natak Akademi in New Delhi on April 2, 1958. A full transcript of the talk was published in S. Ramani (62).

[63] Jagadambal was a famous *devadāsī* who lived in Madras until 1929 and who was a disciple of the dance-master Vazhuvoor Samu Nattuvanar (1844-1903). Later, Krishna Iyer trained with a Brahmin dance-master named A. P. Natesa Ayyar from the village of Melattur, who practiced a form of dance theater called Bhagavata Mela Nataka. Natesa Ayyar also taught *abhinaya* to several *devadāsīs* in Madras.

[64] One of the most interesting new pieces of scholarship to address the complex intersections between religion and Indian nationalism that unfolded under the aegis of the Theosophical Society is Isaac Lubelsky's *Celestial India: Madame Blavatsky and the Birth of Indian Nationalism.*

[65] This is significant not only in that Arundale was a Brahmin woman learning dance from a *naṭṭuvaṉār* but also because she was a relatively mature woman who only trained for six months under his guidance. This would have seemed surprising from the standpoint of her *naṭṭuvaṉār* teacher, who ordinarily would have been training women in the *devadāsī* community from a young age who would then spend years under his apprenticeship.

[66] For more on the cosmopolitan identities of urban Tamil Brahmins at the turn of the century, see the work of Mary Hancock (*Womanhood in the Making*) and the more recent work of Fuller and Narasimhan (*Tamil Brahmans*).

[67] Of course, it is important to note that Arundale was not offended by Hindustāni (North Indian) dance and music *per se*, only when it was performed by hereditary professional artists. Later, she herself choreographed a dance-drama called *Meera of Mewar* (1985) about the late-medieval North Indian mystic poetess Mīrābāī, with music tuned by Bengali *dhrupad* musician Falguni Mitra. Toward the end of her life, she had also expressed her desire to choreograph the North Indian Hindi Rāmāyaṇa telling known as *Rāmcaritmānas* as a dance-drama (S. Ramani, *Rukmini Devi Arundale*). However, it is important to remember that it is because of the religious content (particularly in its nationalized form as part of a "pan-Indian devotional Hinduism") that Hindustāni music

appealed to Rukmini Arundale. In other words, unlike the Pārsi-theater Hindi songs danced by *devadāsīs* (which were invariably considered "low-brow" art by figures like Arundale), it was the "spirituality" and "nationalist unity" represented by the devotional works of Mīrābāī or the *Rāmcaritmānas* that enabled their presence in the new institutions of "classical" dance and music in South India.

[68] The major ocular interventions characterize staged performances of Bharatanāṭyam, and contemporary Bharatanāṭyam dancers also celebrate the "revival" history through productions that dramatize their perceptions of this period of history. See, for example, Janet O'Shea's fascinating study of historical representation in the dance production entitled *Vata Vriksha* or *The Banyan Tree* about Rukmini Arundale's "rediscovery" of Bharatanāṭyam, which was staged in Chennai in January 1996 (O'Shea, *At Home in the World* 139-144).

[69] For example, they regularly performed a piece from the Tanjore court called *malaippu (jati).* This piece no longer exists in today's Bharatanāṭyam, but it was danced by courtesans in Tanjore, and it is also found in Telugu manuscripts in the Tanjore Sarasvati Mahal Library (Soneji, personal communication).

[70] Examples of such representations include the French *ballet de cour* entitled *Le Triomphe de L'Amour* (1681); the operas *La Vestale* (1807) and *Les Bayadères* (1810), both with librettos by Etienne de Jouy (1764-1846); and the very popular opera-ballet *Le Dieu et la Bayadère ou la Courtisane Amoureuse* ("The God and the Bayadere or The Courtesan in Love," 1830), which was known in England as *The Maid of Cashmere*. Each of these included temple backdrops alongside highly romanticized, fantastical depictions of "Hindu temple dancers." The most famous post-1838 production was of course Marius Petipa's *Bayaderka* (1877), which is still very much a staple in the Russian Ballet repertoire. For details of these and many other such European representations, see Leucci (*Devadasi e Bayaderes*; "Du Dasi Attam au Bharata Natyam").

[71] The popularity of rayon is palpable at this time. For example, a short Tamil drama entitled *Tācikaḷ Vēcam Eṉṉum Imiṭēṣaṉ Kalar Cilku* ("The Dāsīs' Guises or Imitation Color Silk," 1930) invokes the idea of "imitation silk" as a metaphor for the "imitational" love of the *devadasi* courtesan. This drama, published in Madras, was likely performed by local *icai nāṭakam* companies.

[72] Arundale's first narrative work was the staging of a Tamil text, *Kuṟṟāla Kuṟavañci* ("The Kuṟa Fortune Teller from Kuṟṟālam"), a literary work composed in 1715 by the poet Mēlakaram Tirikūṭarācappak Kavirāyar. *Kuṟavañci* (or "fortune teller") dramas were often performed by *devadāsīs* on special calendrical festivals in local temples in Tamilnadu, particularly in the Kaveri river delta region. However, unlike the very

popular *Carapēntira Pūpāla Kuṟavañci* and the *Virālimalai Kuṟavañci,* which were still being performed in temples by *devadāsīs* until the 1940s, Arundale chose the *Kuṟṟāla Kuṟavañci*, which had no living performance tradition associated with it but which was dedicated to the god Śiva. The other aforementioned *kuṟavañcis* were in honor of King Serfoji II (r. 1798-1832) and Cuppiramaṇiya Mutaliyār, a minister of the King Vijaya Raghunātha Rāya Toṇḍaimān (r. 1807-1825), respectively. Arundale considered traditional repertoire in praise of humans to be of a lower class and hence chose to dramatize the *Kuṟṟāla Kuṟavañci.* Her choreography of this text was first staged in Madras, then Bombay, and then later inside the temple in the town of Kuṟṟālam itself (known today as Courtallam or Kutralam). For more on the *kuṟavañci* genre, see Muilwijk (*The Divine Kura Tribe*) and Peterson ("The Evolution of the Kuravanci Dance-Drama"; "The Drama of the Kuravanci Fortune-Teller"). For a full translation of the *Kuṟṟāla Kuṟavañci,* see Buck (*A Kuravanji in Kuttralam*).

[73] Details about Sivan's early life and the dates cited here can be found in Caṅkar Veṅkaṭarāmaṉ's Tamil book *Tiraiyulakil Icaik Kalaiñarkaḷ* (15-25).

[74] Arundale's dance-drama was based on a musical play in Sanskrit written by Mahārāja Svāti Tirunāl of Travancore (1813-1846). The play was first published in Devanagari script in Trivandrum in 1932.

[75] Sivan is also listed as a co-composer for the dance-dramas *Krishnamari Kuravanji* (1971) and *Matsya Kurma Avataram* (1974) together with Bhagavatula Seetharama Sarma and Turaiyur Rajagopala Sarma (Samson, *Rukmini Devi* 234).

[76] Sivan's compositions had a remarkable "crossover" effect: they flowed seamlessly from stage to cinema and vice versa. A case in point is his *kīrtana* in Tamil, *Āṉanta Naṭamiṭum Pātaṉ* ("The Foot That Performed the Dance of Bliss"), in the *rāga* Kedāragaula. This became a staple song about the god Śiva-Naṭarāja in Bharatanāṭyam concerts from the early 1940s onward, but its first appearance is actually during the opening credits of the Tamil film *Nandanar* (1942).

[77] Davesh Soneji (*Unfinished Gestures* 253, n. 19) has the following to say about Kurucāmitās' work:

> K. Kurucāmitās was a fairly prolific writer who composed several such poems. He published his own work from 1943-45, and it spans a range of subjects, from murders in the Presidency, to cattle markets in the suburbs of Kumbhakonam, to the British victory over Tunisia during World War I. Another significant work is *Kumpakōṇam Kaikkāṭṭi Maratteruvil Naṭanta Rāmacāmi Kolaiccintu* ("Collection of Songs about the Murder Committed by Rāmacāmi in Kumbhakonam," 1943)

which describes the case of Rāmacāmi from Kumbhakonam who murdered a prostitute named Sītālaṭcumi for jilting him.

[78] *Raja Desingh* was later remade as *Raja Desingu* in 1960 by director T. R. Raghunath, and it features iconic stars M.G. Ramachandran and dancer-actress Padmini. In this version, instead of the *padam pataṟi varukutu*, Padmini's dance number *pāṟkaṭal alaimēlē* is featured. This is a "new" devotional song specially composed for the film that describes the god Viṣṇu at Srirangam, a move that furthers the scripting of Bharatanāṭyam as an *essentially devotional* art form. This song was written by the film lyricist Udumalai Narayana (1899-1981), set to music by my maternal uncle G. Ramanathan (c. 1899-1963), and sung in playback by M.L. Vasanthakumari (1928-1990), a very famous twentieth-century concert vocalist from the *devadāsī* community.

[79] This Tamil *padam* has a long and complex performance history. It was likely composed during the mid-nineteenth century by either Kaṉam Kiruṣṇa Ayyar (c. 1790-1854) or Vaitīcuvaraṉkōyil Cupparāma Ayyar (c. 1829-1867), and it was quite popular in the traditional courtesan community. Between the 1920s and the 1930s, *devadāsī* artists such as T.S. Rangammal and Bangalore Thayee recorded the piece on 78 RPM phonograph records. Details of this history can be found in the work of Allen ("The Tamil 'Padam'" 208-210).

[80] The text of this Telugu *padam* is as follows:

> sariga kŏṅgu musugu dānito vāḍu saiga jesinadi kaṇṭine ||
> tirigi tirigi jūcukŏni sŏgasugā devuḍaina mannāru raṅguḍu ||

> He makes signs to her under the veil of her *sāri*
> that handsome Lord Mannāru Raṅga [Kṛṣṇa] repeatedly turns to glance at her.

[81] Papanasam Vadivelu Pillai (1884-1937) was a disciple of Thanjavur Kannuswami Nattuvanar (1864-1923), who was the grandfather of my own teacher, Thanjavur K.P. Kittappa Pillai. He was the son of a well-known *naṭṭuvaṉār* named Svaminatha Pillai, and he died on September 9, 1937, very soon after La Meri's performance in Madras (Sundaram, *Marapu Vaḻi* 220-221).

[82] The Renaissance Theatre was inaugurated in September 1932, and it first produced two Shakespearean plays. This was followed by Seshagiri's forays into the cinematic world, in which The Renaissance Theatre financially backed the Tamil talkies *Sita Kalyanam* ("The Marriage of Sita," 1934) and *Chandrasena* (1935). Both of these films were also made in Marathi and Hindi, and they were directed by Marathi filmmakers Baburao Phendarkar and V. Shantaram, respectively. The Renaissance Theatre then went on to

produce a Tamil play entitled *Kaṭṭaivaṇṭi* ("The Bullock Cart"), an adaptation of the Savoy opera *The Gondoliers; or, The King of Barataria* by Gilbert and Sullivan (1889). In the souvenir of the program by La Meri, The Renaissance Theatre takes credit for revitalizing Bharatanāṭyam dance:

> In the meantime, a morass was expanding, sucking into its foul bosom Bharata Natya, the Indian Dance with a tradition extending to centuries…. The Renaissance Theatre group of dance-critics and enthusiasts came to the rescue, did discriminating propaganda for preserving the purity of Bharata Natya as a great and noble art with a status of its own in the scheme of our life, discovered artists, brought them from the temple percincts [*sic*] to the platform of the music hall, cheered them, footlighted them; and to-day that much-maligned "Nautch" smiles with a dignity like that of the gods

[83] The book *Gesture Language of the Hindu Dance* was published in New York by King's Crown Press (Columbia University) in 1941. It was published in a second edition in 1966 by Blen Press, New York. The "School of Natya" was cofounded by La Meri and Ruth St. Denis in May 1940 at 66 Fifth Avenue in New York (Venkateswaran *The Life and Times of La Meri* 40, 106). La Meri also collaborated with the Indian-Burmese dancer Ram Gopal (1912-2003) for a brief period.

[84] The films that are advertised in the souvenir include the Telugu *Sarangadhara* (1937), the Tamil *Sethu Bandhan* (1937), *Chintamani* (1937), *Sati Anusuya* (1937), *Miss Sundari* (1937; advertised as featuring "Azuri's dagger dance, a speciality"), *Sati Ahalya* (1937), and the bilingual *Bala Yogini* (1937).

[85] The following Bharatanāṭyam compositions are listed in the souvenir sections describing Varalakshmi and Bhanumati's dance: *alārippu* (no *tāla* listed), *jatisvaram* (*rāga* Kalyāṇī), *padam* (*dāri jūcucunnadi* in *rāga* Sankarabharanam), *svarajati* (*ēmāyalāḍirā* in *rāga* Huseni), *śabdam* (*veṇyuḍa* in *rāga* Kāmbhoji), *padam* (*uṉṉai tūtaṉuppinēṉ* in *rāga* Sāveri), *padam* (*patari varukutu* in *rāga* Kāmbhoji), and *tillāṉā* (in *rāga* Kāpi).

[86] Dr. V. [Venkataraman] Raghavan (1908-1979) was a Sanskrit scholar who was the head of the Sanskrit Department at Madras University from 1935 to 1968. He was Secretary of the Madras Music Academy for more than four decades as well as the editor of the *Journal of the Music Academy* (1935-1979). He authored a number of articles about Bharatanāṭyam during the formative period of its "reinvention" in Madras during the 1930s, sometimes under the pen names "Bhava-Raga-Tala" and "Bhavuka." He also edited and published several important Sanskrit texts related to dance in medieval South India, such as Akbar Shah's seventeenth-century text *Śṛṅgāramañjarī* (1951) and

Jāyappa Senāpati's thirteenth cenutry *Nṛttaratnāvali* (1965). He was very close to the family of the famous dancer T. Balasaraswati, and his daughters became her first students at the short-lived dance school called the Balasaraswati School of Indian Music and Dance on the grounds of the Madras Music Academy in 1953 (Knight *Balasaraswati* 146). He also collaborated with Balasaraswati on a small book in Tamil entitled *Paratanāṭṭiyam* (*Bharatanāṭyam*, 1959). In addition to cowriting the story for *Jalaja*, he also wrote compositions for Bharatanāṭyam in Sanskrit that were choreographed by T. Balasaraswati.

[87] The short story was first published, along with eleven others, by Manjeri Isvaran in a volume with the same name—*No Ankletbells for Her*—in Madras in 1949. The foreword to the book was written by British novelist John Hampson (1901-1955). The four-page story is the first in the collection, and it recalls the fantasy of a young girl who desires to perform in Madras city. This theme that is at the center of the film *Jalaja*. Amidst lengthy poetic descriptions of Hillman Minx cars, the concrete urban landscape of the city (presumably Madras during the 1930s and 40s), and the upper-class, "chic-as-a-film-star" setting, the viewer encounters a young woman who dreams of dancing on stage. At the climax of her fantasy, her mother calls out to her, and the spell is broken. The girl, it turns out, is a scavenger who collects sticks with her mother (Isvaran *No Ankletbells* 1-4). The short story highlights modern Bharatanāṭyam's embeddedness in a deeply classist economy and the unevenness that underwrites access to dance, even during this period immediately following its reinvention in Madras.

[88] Bhanumati and Kalyanasundaram had two sons and a daughter. The daughter, named Mallika, married a prominent politician in the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam party, Murasoli Maran (1935-2003), who was the nephew of Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi. This reflects the continued participation of men from *devadāsī* communities in the civic life of South India and the caste-endogamous marriages that define life for most women in this community today.

[89] The other two vocalists mentioned are named Shakuntala and Kokilam. Kokilam also appears in the list of credits in the songbook as playing the role of "Singer."

[90] Bhanumati's own career trajectory—like that of a handful of other women from this community who were active in Madras' cultural scene during the 1930s (e.g., T. Balasaraswati, M.S. Subbulakshmi—is highly anomalous. She continued giving performances of Bharatanāṭyam even after the release of *Jalaja*, until around 1954 (Pattabhi Raman "Bharatanatyam Artist K. Bhanumathi" 28). As the work of Davesh Soneji (*Unfinished Gestures*) has shown, these "exceptional" women obfuscate the life stories of thousands of other women from courtesan communities, who could not "make

it" in the new world. The story of *Jalaja* itself, perhaps unintentionally, captures the spirit of such failure.

[91] The piece she performs—the Tamil *padam* in the *rāga* Khamās, called *Nāṉ Aṅkē Varuvēnō* ("Should I Go to Him?")—is attributed to the nineteenth-century poet Vaitīcuvaraṉkōyil Cupparāma Ayyar. The representations of Tamil *padams* in the cinema will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.

[92] The term *tēvaṭiyāl kaccēri* ("concert by *devadāsīs*") is used liberally to describe *devadāsī* dance performances in the early Tamil cinema. The term *tēvaṭiyāl,* which literally means "servant of god," is also a euphemism for a female sex worker and thus normally used in a pejorative sense in modern Tamil. The songbooks of the films *Dambachari* (1935; this was discussed in detail in Chapter Two), *Tiruneelakandar* (1939), *Dasi Aparanji* (1944), and *Devadasi* (1948; this was also discussed in Chapter Two) show that these films deploy the language of *tēvaṭiyāl* when referring to women in courtesan communities.

[93] See, for example, the unpublished Ph.D. dissertations of Amrit Srinivasan ("Temple 'Prostitution' and Community Reform") and Avanthi Meduri ("Nation, Woman, Representation") as well as the later work of Matthew Allen ("Rewriting the Script"), Pallabi Chakravorty ("Hegemony, Dance and the Nation"), Janet O'Shea (*At Home in the World*), and Davesh Soneji ("Siva's Courtesans").

[94] For details of the foundation, inauguration, and early years of the Madras Music Academy, see Sriram (*Four Score and More*) and Subramanian (*From the Tanjore Court*).

[95] For example, in 1905, Bharati translated Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's 1882 anti-colonial Sanskrit anthem to "Mother India," which was entitled *Vande Mātaram* ("Salutations to the Motherland"), into Tamil and published it in his own magazine, *Cakkravartaṉi*.

[96] Details on Bharati's life and his work are found in the excellent work of Venkatachalapathy (*Pāratiyiṉ "Vijaya" Katturaikaḷ; Pārati Kaṟuvūlam*). Other English language scholarship on Bharati includes Frost ("Bhakti and Nationalism"), P. Srinivasan ("Nationalist Fabric"), and Sundara Rajan ("Moral Rights in the Public Domain").

[97] For a brief history of the dissemination of Bharati's works in print after his death and a discussion of the copyright issues that ensued, see Sundara Rajan ("Moral Rights in the Public Domain").

[98] For example, *Thyagabhoomi* (1939), which was already discussed, featured patriotic Gandhian songs written by Kalki. The film *Mathrubhoomi* ("Motherland," 1939) featured deeply nationalistic songs written and composed by Papanasam Sivan, including those that dwelt on the nation-as-mother, such as *Namatu Janmapūmi* ("Our Birthland"), *Aṉṉaiyiṉ Kālil Vilaṅkukalō* ("Are the Mother's Feet in Shackles?"), and *He Pārata Vīrarkaḷē* ("O Heroes of India!"). Theodore Baskaran's book *The Message Bearers: Nationalist Politics and the Entertainment Media in South India, 1880-1945*, contains a lengthy section on nationalist songs in the early Tamil cinema (69-83).

[99] The original Hindi/Marathi version of *Maya Macchindra* (1932) was produced by Prabhat Films and directed by the very famous filmmaker V. Shantaram (1901-1990). Both the Hindi/Marathi and Tamil *Maya Macchindra* films were based on the narrative of the tenth-century Nātha *yogi*, Matsyendranātha, and his disciple Gorakhanātha.

[100] The early issues of *Kalki* magazine contained a separate section for the discussion of issues related to dance and music, called *Āṭal-Pāṭal* ("Dance and Music"). It is noteworthy that these early issues folded reviews and opinions on cinema dance and music into this section. Later, *Āṭal-Pāṭal* becomes the name of an independent yet short-lived magazine exclusively devoted to the performing arts, both on stage and on film.

[101] The film version of Kalki's novel *Tiyākapūmi*, *Thyagabhoomi* (1939), juxtaposed representations of Brahmins and Dalits marching together with real clips of Gandhi's speeches. For this reason, it was by and large understood as a propaganda film for the Indian National Congress (Baskaran, *The Message Bearers* 135).

[102] The historical figure of Mīrābāī is shrouded in controversy and historical uncertainty. Scholars such as Mukta (*Upholding the Common Life*), Martin-Kershaw ("Dyed Deep"), and Hawley (*Three Bhakti Voices*) have created some critical awareness around the problem of the historical Mīrābāī and her songs. It is significant, however, that Mīrābāī's story likely comes to twentieth-century Tamilnadu through the writings of Annie Besant (1847-1933), the leader of the Theosophical Society and eventually the President of the Indian National Congress. Her book, *Children of the Motherland,* which features the story of Mīrābāī, inspires the first Tamil drama about Mīrābāī, written by R. Srinivasan and published in Madurai in 1919. In his preface, Srinivasan talks about how Besant's narration of Mīrābāī's story first inspired him to perform *kathākālakṣēpam* or *harikathā* centered on the theme of Mīrābāī's life, and he later transformed this into a formal play (R. Srinivasan, *Mīrāpāy, Meerabai* 1). The play first appeared in serialized form in the Tamil magazine *Pūrṇacantrōtayam* (R. Srinivasan, *Mīrāpāy, Meerabai* 2). Although it is not certain, this play could explain *how* and *why* there may have been an interest in presenting the life story of Mīrābāī through the idiom of a Tamil film in 1940s Madras.

[103] Kalki's investments in cultural nationalism run deep and wide. According to A. Ramnarayan ("Kalki's Avatars" 76), he—along with C. Rajagopalachari and Tamil scholar T.K. Chidambaranatan—actually coined the modern, widely-used Tamil word for "culture," *paṇpāṭu*.

[104] The novel is the subject of the Ph.D. dissertation of Akhila Ramnarayan ("Kalki's Avatars"), Kalki's great-granddaughter. Details about its narrative politics, publication, circulation, and reception are found in Ramnarayan's work, and so I will not repeat those here.

[105] The Bhāgavata Mēḷa Nāṭakam is a Telugu-language theater form that has its origins in the seventeenth century and that had a symbiotic relationship with *devadāsī* dance until the early part of the twentieth century (Inoue, "Between Art and Religion"; Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures* 48). Today, it is performed in only three villages in the Thanjavur region: Melattur, Saliyamangalam, and Tepperumanallur. Subrahmanyam's relationship with this form is mentioned in Kannan and Kannan (28), and it was also conveyed to me in conversation with his daughter, the dancer Padma Subrahmanyam, who mentioned that he studied this form under a "guru from Melattur [village] by the name of Kinjin Kondandarama Aiyyar" (Personal communication).

[106] The novel *Sevāsadan* was originally titled *Bāzār-e-Husn* ("Marketplace of Beauty"). It was published first in Calcutta in Hindi in 1919 and then in Urdu in Lahore in 1924. It was the first major novel by the author who used the pseudonymn "Mushi Premchand" and whose real name was Dhanpat Rai Srivastava (1880-1936). A full English translation of *Sevāsadan* has been produced by Snehal Shingavi, with a critical introduction by Vasudha Dalmia.

[107] Subrahmanyam was offered the position of Minister of Information and Broadcasting by Jawaharlal Nehru, which he declined (Kannan and Kannan 31).

[108] Later in his life, he was also the first Vice-Chairman of the Tamilnadu State Sangeetha Nataka Sangam (now renamed as the Tamilnadu Eyal Isai Nataka Manram). In that capacity, he was involved in the establishment of policy related to the arts within the Tamilnadu State Government (Kannan and Kannan 31).

[109] References to these ideas can be seen in her documentary film *Bharatiya Natyashastra* ("The Indian *Nāṭyaśāstra*," 1992; produced by Doordarshan, the state-run TV channel) and her book *Nāṭyaśāstra and National Unity.*

[110] Kamala has been the subject of much writing that celebrates her accomplishments as a Bharatanāṭyam dancer in the cinema. An anonymous piece and another one by V.A.K.

Ranga Rao ("Excellence on the Filmic Grid") published in the magazine *Sruti* are among these.

[111] Kamala was known by various names through her career. She is initially acknowledged as "Baby Kamala" and then as "Kumari ["maiden"] Kamala." As a young woman, she married Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Laxman (1921-2015), who went on to become one of India's most famous cartoonists). Thus, for a number of decades, when she was at the peak of her dance career, she was known as Kamala Laxman or Kamala Lakshman, which is the name I use throughout this project. In 1960, she divorced Laxman, married T.V. Lakshminarayanan, and eventually moved to New Jersey in the United States. Later in her life, she adopted the name Kamala Narayan or Kamala Narayanan, which is a surname drawn from her second husband's name.

[112] Kamala's formal debut (*araṅkēr̲r̲am)* was performed in 1941. She also studied Kathak in Bombay under Pandit Sundar Prasad (?-1970) and Lacchu Maharaj (1907-1978).

[113] The choreography in this film was jointly done by non-*naṭṭuvan̲ārs*, Krishnamurti, Hiralal, and Madhavan.

[114] As previously noted, Kamala's stage performances often included an "Āṇṭāḷ dance," which was choreographed by her teacher Ramaiah Pillai. Kamala would dress like the Vaiṣṇava saint-poet Āṇṭāḷ and dance to one or two verses from the Tamil poems attributed to her. Āṇṭāḷ's enduring popularity among Tamil-speaking Brahmins has also been noted in Archana Venkatesan's recent work on the interpretation of Āṇṭāḷ's poetry and its reception (*The Secret Garland*; *In Andal's Garden* [with Crispin Branfoot]).

[115] The idea of *darśana* ("sacred vision") generally refers to a central act of a Hindu temple ritual: seeing and being seen by the sacred icon of the deity (Eck *Darśan*). The invocation of this logic of visual transaction in Indian cinema has been commented on by a number of scholars, including Dwyer (*Filming the Gods*) and Taylor ("Penetrating Gazes").

[116] The song *Ciṅkāra Vēlan̲ē* in the *rāga* Ābheri from *Konjum Salangai*, for example, is regularly featured on Tamil gameshows on Vijay TV, and it is also frequently played by *nāgasvaram* artists for rituals to the god Murukan̲ at Tamil temples in India and elsewhere in the diaspora.

[117] This performance is described in a review in *Kuṇṭūci* magazine (February 1951, p. 58). The song *Tāyē Yacotā* is a musical composition in the devotional singing style known as *bhajana saṃpradāya* in the Tanjore region. It is a composition of the poet

Uttukkadu Veṅkaṭa Kavi (c. 1700-1765), and it was brought into the dance repertoire during the reinvention in the 1930s.

[118] This film was based on a popular Malayalam-language play entitled *Suprabha* by noted playwright Munshi Paramu Pillai (1902-1962). The dialogues for *Manamagal* were written by Mu. Karunanidhi, from the *icai vēḷāḷar* community, who later went on to become Chief Minister of Tamilnadu.

[119] A program list for her performance at the Tamil Isai Sangam in Madras on January 2, 1954, for example, mentions her performing Bharatanāṭyam repertoire (including *alārippu, jatisvaram,* and the song *naṭaṉam āṭiṉār*) as she learned it from the *naṭṭuvaṉār* K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai (*Tamiḻ Icai Caṅkam Tamiḻicai Malar*, 1954, p. 67).

[120] Kothamangalam Subbu himself directed a number of important early Tamil films, including *Kannamma En Kadhali* ("Kaṇṇammā is My Love," 1945) and *Avvaiyar* ("The Poetess Avvaiyār," 1953). He also acted in a number of films, including *Miss Malini* (1947) and *Valliyin Selvan* ("Son of Vaḷḷi," 1955) both which he also directed. He was a close associate of S.S. Vasan, who ran Gemini Studios and the Tamil magazine *Āṉanta Vikaṭaṉ*, in which the novel *Tillāṉā Mōkaṉāmpāḷ* first appeared in serialized form in 1956 and 1957.

[121] The essay provides examples of traditional *naṭṭuvaṉār* figures such as Tañjāvūr Ciṉṉaiyā (1802-1856), one among the famous "Tanjore Quartet," as engaging in gynemimetic forms of dance. Various other men at the Marāṭhā court in Tanjore in the nineteenth century also did this, including the Brahmin court musician Muvālūr Sabhāpatayya (c. early nineteenth century) and the Marāṭhā noble Kṛṣṇasvāmi Rāv Jādav (c. 1820-1870) (H. Krishnan, "From Gynemimesis to Hyper-Masculinity").

[122] Uday Shankar (1900-1977) and his performances have been the subjects of a number of scholarly works. See, for example, Abrahams ("Uday Shankar"); Erdman ("Performance as Translation"; "Dance Discourses"); and Purkayastha ("Dancing Otherness"). I do not wish to rehash their arguments here, except to draw attention to the fact that the new forms of vocabulary and symbol that Shankar created as "Oriental dance" were in fact "re-incorporated" into the new dance culture of urban South India. Thus, Uday Shankar had a lasting influence on the choreographic presentations of figures like Vedantam Lakshminarayana Sastri (c. 1886-1956), who reinvented Kūcipūḍi dance in Madras city (Putcha, "Revisiting the Classical" 99-101). He also inevitably influenced male dancers who performed and represented Bharatanāṭyam during the period immediately following its reinvention, such as Ram Gopal, Bhaskar Roy Chowdhury (1930-2003), and a host of others who would follow by the middle of the twentieth century.

[123] This family's involvement with the court of Tanjore can be traced to the figure of Venkatakrsna Nattuvanar (dates unknown), who was a chief *nattuvanar* at the court of King Serfoji II (1777-1832). Venkatakrsna Nattuvanar's son was Viracami Nattuvanar (dates unknown), and his son was Pancapakeca Nattuvanar (1842-1902). Kuppiah Pillai was the only son of Pancapakeca Nattuvanar. For details, see Sundaram (*Marapu Vaḻi*) and the website of the Rajarajeswari Bharatha Natya Kala Mandir (bharathanatyam.com/raj.html).

[124] Gopi Krishna (1935-1994) was the grandson of Sukhdev Maharaj, a male teacher of Kathak dance. Gopi Krishna garnered national attention as the main actor in the Hindi film *Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baje* ("The Anklebells Make the Sound 'Jhanak,'" 1955), which was directed by V. Shantaram. This film tells the story of a courtesan who is "reformed" by being initiated into the "classical" (*śāstric*) traditions of Kathak by male gurus, one of whom becomes her dancing partner and lover. Following the tremendous success of this film, Gopi Krishna went on to choreograph dance for more than 60 Hindi films as well as a range of South Indian films. He trained in Bharatanāṭyam with K. Mahalingam Pillai (1917-2002) and A.T. Govindaraj Pillai (1914-1984) at Rajarajeswari Bharatha Natya Kala Mandir in Mumbai.

[125] Considering their influence on Hindi cinema, it is surprising that very little scholarly attention has been paid to Sohanlal and his family. Works such as those of Kishore and Kerrigan ("Designing the Song and Dance Sequences"), which seek to analyze "the rise of the Bollywood dance director," only mention them in passing.

[126] Ramaiah Pillai's family and students sometimes claim that this distinct "style" of Bharatanāṭyam, which was separate from the Tanjore courtly tradition, existed in the time of Pillai's ancestors, such as Vazhuvoor Samu Nattuvanar (1844-1903). However, this is simply not the case. The *nattuvanars* who lived in the towns of Vazhuvoor and Thirukkazhukundram, where Pillai's ancestors and teachers lived, were all in communication with the Tanjore traditions, and repertoire and technique from Tanjore was certainly at the heart of their practices during the late nineteenth century. The distinction only arises when Ramaiah Pillai and his students begin to claim a distinct "dance style" for themselves, in part to set Ramaiah Pillai's dance apart from that of the Tanjorean *nattuvanar* families (e.g., the family of Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai), who were involved with the reinvention of Bharatanāṭyam in Madras. It may also occur when these groups seek to legitamize Ramaiah Pillai's aesthetic innovations "as tradition" in this moment of great aesthetic flux, transformation, and competition for men from *nattuvanar* families.

[127] Nagamma, about whom almost nothing is known, apparently danced at the Mysore court, at which time one of Camu Nattuvanar's only surviving musical compositions (a *tillāṉā* in the *rāga* Curuṭṭi) was composed in honor of the King of Mysore, Cāmarājendra Wodeyar IX (r. 1881-1894). This is mentioned in the *Sruti* magazine feature on Ramaiah Pillai from 1986 (p. 21).

[128] The story of the child devotee of Viṣṇu, Prahlāda, is a popular Hindu narrative that finds its most popular representation in the tenth-century Sanskrit text known as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The narrative is also popular in certain localized South Indian theater forms, such as the Bhāgavata Mēḷa Nāṭaka of the Tanjore region (Inoue "Between Art and Religion"). The story revolves around the pious devotee Prahlāda, who is born to a wicked and tyrannical demon named Hiraṇyakaśipu. After torturing the child Prahlāda for his devotion to Viṣṇu, Hiraṇyakaśipu is slain by Viṣṇu himself, who descends to the earth (*avatāra*) in a half-man, half-lion form known as Narasiṃha.

[129] This is the *padam* "*uṉṉai kaṇṭu*" in the *rāga* Bhairavi, composed by Papanasam Sivan.

[130] Another instance in the film in which Saroja performs "traditional" *abhinaya* is the song "*Vantaṉaṉ Oru Cuntari,*" which is tuned to a folk melody (*tēcikac cintu*). The words for this song are found on p. 11 of the songbook.

[131] Listed along with Ramaiah Pillai is a man named "Pōlānāt": this is Pandit Bholanath Sharma, a Kashmiri who moved to Madras for some time and who likely choreographed the dance sequence depicting the god Śiva dancing at the very beginning of the film, which appears very much to be in the vein of "Oriental dancing."

[132] Interestingly, in the same film, Ramaiah Pillai choreographs a traditional *tillāṉā* (a composition of just abstract rhythmic movement) in the *rāga* Khamās for Kumari Rukmini, the heroine of the film. Rukmini, unlike Kamala, was from the *devadāsī* community; she was the daughter of dancer Nungambakkam Janaki and eventually became the "second wife" of filmmaker Y.V. Rao. The *tillāṉā* also borders on the "new" kind of Bharatanāṭyam, which matured at the hands of Pillai by the late 1940s and early 1950s. This is also the case with another *padam*-like sequence that Rukmini performs for the song *Cintai Aṟintu Vāṭi* ("Friend, Go Figure Out His Intentions") in the *rāga* Ṣaṇmukhapriyā, in which Pillai "narrativizes" the love lyrics through flashback sequences, thereby making the *padam*-like lyric into a kind of dance-drama. This song is so popular that it is repeated and performed with *abhinaya* by the star male actor Sivaji Ganesan (1928-2001) in the film *Kaveri* ("The Kaveri River," 1955).

[133] Thavamani Devi (1925-2001) was born in Jaffna, Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon). She acted in a number of films produced in Madras in the 1940s. It is unclear how or from

whom she learned dance and music, but she was famous for her rendition of vocals for her own songs in the period before the advent of playback singing. She also acted alongside M.S. Subbulakshmi in the 1940 film *Shakuntalai* ("The Story of Śakuntalā"), which was directed by Ellis Dungan.

[134] M.L. Vasanthakumari (1928-1990)—popularly known as MLV—was a highly accomplished musician who worked largely in Madras during the early twentieth century. She was the daughter of Madras Lalithangi (c. 1910-1955; a noted singer and gramophone artist from the *devadāsī* community) and the Brahmin musician Kutthanur Ayyasvami Ayyar. In addition to being one of the few highly regarded hereditary female musicians to thrive in the new world of twentieth-century Karṇāṭak music in Madras city, Vasanthakumari also provided "playback" vocals for Tamil films between approximately 1946 and 1970. Her daughter, K. Srividya (1953-2006), was a Bharatanāṭyam dancer who studied under K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai and who was also a very prominent Tamil and Malayalam film star from the 1970s to the mid-1990s. The choreography for the recording "An Evening of Bharathanatyam" was set on Srividya, who is also credited on the LP.

[135] This recording featured the following of K.N. Dandayudhapani's compositions: a *jatisvaram* in the *raga* Hamsanandi, a *varnam* in the *raga* Sankarabharanam, and a *tillana* in the *raga* Hindolam.

[136] Leucci's essay is in a forthcoming volume that I am presently co-editing with her and Davesh Soneji entitled *Dance and the Early South Indian Cinema.*

[137] Kattumannarkoyil Muthukumara Pillai (1874-1960) was born on October 27, 1874. He stands at a crossroad that connects most of the major figures in the world of early twentieth-century Bharatanāṭyam. He moved from his native village of Kattumannarkoyil to Madras in 1936, where he taught at Kalakshetra for less than a year before joining the troupe of Ram Gopal in Bangalore. He was also the first Bharatanāṭyam teacher of Kamala Lakshman; when he could no longer teach her, he sent her to learn from Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai. He also trained V.S. Muthuswami Pillai and K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai in *nattuvangam*. His involvement with the cinema was minor, even though he had cultivated photography as a hobby. He is known to have choreographed for one film, *Kannika* ("The Virgin," 1947), in which he makes a brief appearance as a *nattuvanar*. Much has been written about this on the blog run by Cassidy Behling ("Muthukumara Pillai on Screen"), and it will be referred to again in the section about the song *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār* in Chapter Six. B.M. Sundaram narrates how it is that Muthukumara Pillai became involved with the cinema as follows:

> The T.K. Shanmukha brothers (TKS Brothers) had their drama group in the town of Coimbatore. They were seeking for a talented teacher who could teach dance to their actors. When Muthukumaran was returning back to his village from Madanapalli [in Andhra Pradesh, where he stayed for a brief time], the TKS brothers invited him to come to teach in their company. Thus by the end of 1944, Muthukumaran became the dance teacher for the troupe…. When he was in Kovai [Coimbatore], Sriramulu Naidu who was in charge of Pakshi Raja Pictures was preparing to produce his film *Kannika*. He contracted Muthukumaran to be the choreographer for the film. (Sundaram, *Marapu Vaḻi* 43)

One of Muthukumaran's chief students, M.K. Saroja, also performed in a couple of films, such as *Paittiyakkāraṉ* ("Madman," 1947; choreographed by V.S. Muthuswamy Pillai), and *Nalla Thambi* ("The Good Younger Brother," 1949; choreographed by Vedantam Raghaviah and Dandayudhapani Pillai).

[138] For example, the published plays of Caṅkaratās Cuvāmikaḷ (1867-1922), who is often thought of as the "father" of modern Tamil drama, use the term *pāṭṭu* to refer to the songs. However, plays such as the *Periya Intiracapā* (dates unknown) by the earlier dramaturge T.T. Appāvupiḷḷai (c. 1860-1930) use the term *jāvaḷi* in strategic places to refer to certain kinds of romantic or erotic songs. Davesh Soneji's forthcoming work on the Parsi theater in South India ("*Indra's Court* in Madras") discusses these difference in detail. The term *taru* (in Telugu, *daruvu*) is also sometimes used, and this comes from the Tamil *kūttu* theater tradition, in which songs are called *taru*. The term *taru* is also used in the *devadāsī kuṟavañci* dramas and the Telugu dramatic tradition in Thanjavur known as *bhāgavata mēḷa nāṭakam*.

[139] The popularity of this composition among traditional performers cannot be understated. It was first published in the Telugu text written by the song's composer, Subbarāma Dīkṣituḍu (1839-1906), entitled *Saṅgīta Saṃpradāya Pradarśini* ("The Book that Illuminates the Tradition of Music") in 1904. Anecdotally, it is also often claimed that Dīkṣituḍu and Pulavar collaborated on a Tamil drama called *Valli Paratam* ("Dance of Murukaṉ's Consort Valli") and that this *svarajati* was initially part of that drama, although this is unverifiable (i.e., I have not been able to trace a printed edition of this drama). The *Saṅgīta Saṃpradāya Pradarśini* was republished in Tamil script by the Madras Music Academy while it was under the direction of V. Raghavan from 1961 to 1977.

[140] The *padam* is generally thought to have its origin in the late seventeenth-century Telugu compositions of a poet referred to as Kṣetrayya, who may or may not have been a real historical figure. (For more about Kṣetrayya, see the work of Ramanujan, Narayana Rao, and Shulman [*When God is a Customer*]). Nevertheless, a canon of songs calling

themselves "*padams* of Kṣetrayya" (*kṣetrayya padamulu*) begin to emerge in manuscript sources from the early eighteenth century (Davesh Soneji, personal communication, June 8, 2017). These early Telugu compositions may have formed the basis of the early Tamil *padams* by figures like Cupparāma Aiyar and others.

[141] For more on the relationship between *padam* and *jāvaḷi* and for a similar argument about the fundamental flexibility and malleability of the *jāvaḷi* as a genre that crosses medial boundaries, see Soneji (*Bharatanatyam* 87-111; *Unfinished Gestures* 95-111).

[142] A slightly later but important example of the malleability of the *padam* genre in cinema comes from the film *Mangayarkarasi* ("Queen Among Women," 1949), in which a *padam* entitled *Kātal Kaṉiracamē* ("You Are the Sweet Essence of Love") is written for the film. The lyric is performed by the dancer Anjali Devi (who was discussed in Chapter Two), and the choreography is by Vedantam Raghaviah. Here, the new lyrics are grafted onto the extant tune (*meṭṭu*) of the Sanskrit devotional song (*Kīrtana*) *Nāda Tanumaniśaṃ Śaṅkaram* ("Śiva, the Embodiment of All Sound") by the composer Tyāgarāja (1767-1847) in the *rāga* Cittarañjanī. In the new lyric, the devotional register is transformed into an erotic one, and yet there is an emphasis on repeating the name of the *rāga* Cittarañjanī, as if to remind the audience that the piece is thoroughly "classical" (by way of its relationship to the original song by Tyāgarāja) *despite* being a courtesan piece.

[143] The *padams* of Cupparama Aiyar are among the most frequently published Tamil songs of the late nineteenth century. I have been able to trace more than twenty separate editions of song collections of Cupparama Aiyar *padams*, with the earliest dated 1876 and the latest 1912. The contents of these collections are almost identical. The coherence and consistency with which these songs are represented in print materials demonstrate how remarkably popular and well-circulated these songs must have been during this period.

[144] Cupparāma Aiyar's Tamil *padams* appear in a number of places in the early Tamil cinema, sometimes even in a highly coded form. For example, the opening credits of the film *Kalamegam* ("The Poet Kālamegham," 1940), directed by the American director Ellis Dungan, feature the *padam* entitled *Kaiyil Paṇam Illāmal*" ("If You Don't Have Money in Hand…"). However, no lyrics are sung, and only the tune is played on a range of instruments.

[145] Padma is also briefly discussed in a blog entry by Cassidy Behling about Sayi-Subbulakshmi ("Sayee and Subbulakshmi's Film-Industry Relatives").

[146] The *padam*, as Allen shows ("The Tamil 'Padam'"), originally seems to have three *caraṇams* ("verses"). However, in the film, there is only one *caraṇam,* and it is the one that appears as the second *caraṇam* in most early print editions.

[147] The deployment of *rati mudrās* was deliberately excised from modern representations of courtesan dance forms throughout South India during the process of their reinvention as "classical" dance. For more on the use of *rati mudrās* in courtesan performance in coastal Andhra Pradesh, see Soneji (*Unfinished Gestures* 105, 217).

[148] Page 8 of the songbook of the film also notes the Tamil *padam* entitled *Vēlavarē Umait Tēṭi Oru Maṭantai* ("Murukaṉ, a Young Woman Has Been Searching for You") in the *rāga* Bhairavī, which has been attributed to the composer Kaṉam Kiruṣṇaiyar (c.1790-1854). This is another example of a Tamil *padam* that very widely circulated among *devadāsīs* and *naṭṭuvaṉārs*. For details regarding this *padam* in performance, see Allen ("The Tamil 'Padam'" 211-212).

[149] According to Randor Guy, the film played at both the Broadway Cinema and Sun Cinema in Madras, beginning on the day of the Hindu festival of *dīpāvalī* in 1944; it ran uninterruptedly for 114 weeks until the day of the same festival in 1946, which was a record for any regional language film in India ("Haridas (1944)").

[150] This is one of the earliest available recordings of Ramaiah Pillai's voice. Moreover, the song itself was also apparently a crowd pleaser for a number of reasons, including the fact that, in one segment, Rajakumari blows Bhagavathar a flying kiss. Film historian Randor Guy writes:

> One song in particular song celebrating erotic love, "Manmathan leelayai…", drove people crazy and became an all-time hit. Indeed, this song became part of Tamil colloquial idiom! The melody, the simple but effective orchestration, the lyrics, Bhagavathar's sensuous rendering…everything was perfect, making the song memorable…. In this song, Rajakumari gives Bhagavathar a flying kiss which was considered revolutionary in those days! ("Haridas (1944)").

[151] The Russian ballet dimension comes from Arundale's own training in Russian ballet with Cleo Nordi. In the 1930s, when she established the International Academy for the Arts (later renamed Kalakshetra), she instituted mandatory ballet classes that she felt would make the "adavus [*aṭavus*] accurate in form," but this practice was later dropped.

[152] David Buck (*Dance, Snake! Dance!*) has produced a translation of Pāmpāṭṭi Cittar's surviving poems. For more about the tradition of the Tamil *cittars* and the encounter of

this tradition with modernity in Tamilnadu, see the excellent work of Weiss (*Recipes for Immortality*) and Little ("Bowl Full of Sky").

[153] The transliteration for the Tamil text of Pāmpāṭṭi Cittar's poem here follows the version found in a popular modern compilation of *cittar* poems entitled *Cittar Pāṭalkaḷ (Periya Ñāṉakkōvai)*, edited by Ci. Es. Murukēcaṉ (189-190).

[154] Usha Iyer's work ("Film Dance") contains extensive information about the "fusion" of multiple Indian "classical" dance styles in cinema dance during the mid-twentieth century.

[155] For an excellent discussion of the production, circulation, and consumption of popular devotional music in South India, see Hughes ("Play it Again, Saraswathi").

[156] The other piece is the Sanskrit devotional song (*Kīrtana*) *Ānanda Naṭana Prakāśam* ("Illuminator of the Blissful Dance") in the *rāga* Kedāram by the composer Muddusvāmi Dīkṣituḍu (1775-1835). The reference to Pillai choreographing this piece for Rukmini Arundale is found in an article by G. Ramnarayan ("Rukmini Devi" 19).

[157] Anne-Marie Gaston notes that, in the dance performances at the Madras Music Academy's annual conferences, a number of dancers performed *Naṭaṉam Āṭiṉār*. Her list from 1944 to 1960 is as follows (including *naṭṭuvaṉār* names, with "VRP" indicating Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai and "KND" indicating K.N. Dandayudhapani):

> 1944 (P. Jayalakshmi); 1945 (Hemamalini Vijayaraghavan-VRP); 1948 (Anandi, Radha-VRP and Kamala-VRP [twice]); 1949 (Hemamalini Vijayaraghavan-VRP); 1952 (Kamala-VRP); 1953 (Hemamalini Vijayaraghavan-VRP); 1954 (Nirmala Ramachandran-T. Swaminathan); 1955 (Kamala-VRP); 1956 (Chandralekha-K. Ellappa); 1956 (R.K. Jivaratnam-P.M Mutthaiya and P.C. Subbarayan); 1956 (Kamala-VRP); 1957 (Sarala- Gopalakrishnan [VRP's student]); 1957 (Kamala-VRP); 1957 (Chitralekha [*sic* Chandralekha]-K. Ellappa); 1958 (Kamala, Radha-VRP); 1958 (Vyjayantimala-KND); 1960 (Vyjayantimala-Adyar Lakshman). (Gaston, *Bharata Natyam* 307)

[158] For more on Uday Shankar's deployment of the image of the dancing Siva-Nataraja, see Diana Brenscheidt gen. Jost's *Shiva Onstage: Uday Shankar's Company of Dancers and Musicians in Europe and the United States, 1931-38*.

[159] Although Rukmini Arundale's project under the aegis of the Theosophical Society could be seen as the best example of the alignment of Bharatanāṭyam with a new occultism and the agenda of cultural nationalism, many other such examples followed.

The dancer Ram Gopal clearly interpreted the dance *naṭaṉam āṭiṉār* as reflective of the otherworldly nature of Bharatanāṭyam. For example, he says that, "[a]t the very beginning of the dance, I often preferred to do a few Siva poses and get into a sort of a trance" (Gaston, *Bharata Natyam* 275).

[160] "Poses" were a feature of modern Bharatanāṭyam choreography that many dancers I interviewed commented on. For example, dancer and teacher Nandini Ramani told me this:

> But the problem was, Ramaiah Pillai's style in the films shifted onto the stage. Poses, additional scintillating embellishments…made Bharatanāṭyam look attractive and spectacular [on screen]. All this was shifted onto Bharatanāṭyam as it was performed on stage. In earlier days, the dancer on stage would go forward and backwards. Ramaiah Pillai imbued his choreography with sideways and angular walks, and various kinds of walks to cover the stage. Unfortunately, today, the poses [introduced by Pillai] have become Bharatanāṭyam now, directly because of the films…. [T]hese techniques stemming from cinema are in the mainstay of staged versions of Bharatanāṭyam now.

Dancer and teacher Sudharani Raghupathy added, in a personal communication to me, "Whatever Ramaiah Pillai did was very big [in terms of scale], such as all those massive poses in *naṭaṉam āṭiṉār*."

[161] Bhaskar (often credited in cinema as "Roy Chowdhury") was an actor and dancer who eventually moved to the United States in 1955. Just before his move, he worked at Gemini Studio in Madras, where he acted in Gemini's Hindi films such as *Bahut Din Huwe* ("Many Days Have Passed," 1954) and *Insaniyat* ("Humanity," 1955; for this film, he is credited as "Dance Director"). He also appeared in Gemini's Tamil films *Kanavane Kankanda Deivam* ("One's Husband Alone is the Living God," 1955) and *Rajee En Kanmani* ("Rājī My Darling," 1954; this was also remade into Telugu the same year, under the title *Rājī Nā Prāṇam*). Roy trained in Bharatanāṭyam under Kanchipuram Ellappa Pillai and Pandanallur Chokkalingam Pillai in Madras, and he had his debut performance at Victoria Public Hall in Madras. A detailed biography of Roy by an unnamed author can be found in *Sruti* magazine (Anonymous, "Bhaskar Roy Choudhary").

[162] An excellent recent study that discusses tensions between the perceived monomedial nature of literature and its interface with performance (specifically dance) in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain is Maria Marcsek-Fuchs' *Dance and British Literature: An Intermedial Encounter.*

[163] In their extended discussion of the emergence of the idea of "the classical" in South India, Indira Peterson and Davesh Soneji refer to the distinctly "classical imperative" that governs the reinvention of the performing arts in this region (*Performing Pasts* 1-40). They refer to "the classical" as not only an "invention of tradition" but also as a new bourgeois formulation that is inextricably linked to ideas around nation, heritage, and civilizational greatness; in addition, it encompasses science, theoretical knowledge, and intellectual hegemony.

[164] Radhika had a rather extensive performing career as a Bharatanāṭyam dancer. She performed together with her sisters Gayathri Krishnamurthy and Shobana Bhalchandra giving performances as a trio, which earned them the professional nickname "Trio Sisters." They trained under the Kalakshetra-trained couple, V.P. Dhananjayan and his wife, Shanta, for a number of years. Radhika's own career, for more than a decade and half, has focused on connecting "classical" Bharatanāṭyam with the Tamil cinema. She has hosted a number of dance events and stage shows in which old Tamil film songs are reinterpreted in Bharatanāṭyam. Her major contributions, including detailed facts about "TakaDhimiTa," are listed on her website.

[165] For more on the *araṅkēṟṟam,* see Gaston ("Dance and the Hindu Woman" 155-156; *Bharata Natyam*). For more about *araṅkēṟṟam* in the context of *devadāsī* lives, see Srinivasan ("Temple 'Prostitution' and Community Reform") and Kersenboom (*Nityasumangali*).

[166] For more on Chaudhri's life, see an entry entitled "Remembering the Late Tara Chaudhri" on Cassidy Behling's blog.

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APPENDIX A

Concurrent Themes in Kalakshetra Dance-Dramas and the Early Tamil Cinema

Concurrent Themes in Kalakshetra Dance-Dramas and the Early Tamil Cinema

Rukmini Arundale Dance-Drama	**Relevant Early Tamil Films**
Kumarasambhavam (1947)	*Sri Valli* (1933); *Kanda Leela* (1938); *Sri Murugan* (1946)
Ramayana Suite: Sita Swayamvaram (1955) Sri Rama Vanagamanam (1960) Paduka Pattabhishekam (1960) Sabari Moksham (1965) Choodamani Pradanam (1968) Maha Pattabhishekam (1969)	*Ramayanam* (1932); *Seetha Kalyanam* (1933-1934); *Lava Kusa* (1934); *Lanka Dahanam* (1935); *Sati Ahalya* (1937); *Kambar* (1938); *Rama Nama Mahimai* (1939); *Seethapaharanam* (1939); *Seetha Jananam* or *Vedavati* (1941); *Valmeeki* (1946); *Sampoorna Ramayanam* (1958)
Rukmangada Charitram (1959)	*Mohini Rukmangada* (1935); *Rukmangada* (1947)
Geeta Govinda (1959)	*Bhakta Jayadevar* (1937)
Usha Parinayam (1959)	*Usha Kalyanam* (1936)
Andal Charitram (1961)	*Andal Tirukalyanam* (1937); *Sri Andal* (1948)
Kannappar Kuravanji (1962)	*Kannappa Nayanar* (1938)
Rukmini Kalyanam (1964)	*Rukmini Kalyanam* (1936)
Shakuntalam (1967)	*Sakuntala* (1934); *Sakuntalai* (1940)
Dhruva Charitram (1971)	*Dhruva Charitram* (1935)
Kuchelopakhayanam (1972)	*Bhaktha Kuchela* (1936)
Matsya Kurma Avataram (1974)	*Dasavataram* (1934)
Meenakshi Vijayam (1977)	*Meenakshi Kalyanam* (1940)
Damayanti Swayamvaram (1978)	*Nala Damayanti* (1935)
Meera of Mewar (1984)	*Meera Bai* (1936); *Bhakta Meera* (1938); *Meera* (1945)

APPENDIX B

Translation of the Padam *Pataṟi Varukutu* (“My Heart Trembles”)

Translation of the Padam *Pataṟi Varukutu* ("My Heart Trembles")

A translation of the song as it appears in the film (with only one verse or *caraṇam*) is as follows:

Pallavi
My heart is trembling, clinging, clasping, melting
...go and tell him, *aṭi*!

Anupallavi
This Vēlavar (Murukaṉ) who dwells in Paḻaṉi, the place that has no equal
I have kept him within my heart; what is happening? Mataṉ's arrows in my breast make me swoon—go and bring my lord Murukaṉ to me.

Caraṇam
Come, *aṭi*, bring my lord Murukaṉ to me.
To play with me...getting together...embracing and loving.
He will sing Kāmpōti *rāga*, and he'll sprinkle magic powder [*māyappoṭi*] right on me.
Go, *aṭi*! Is there any equal to him? He took my hand, he gave me a ruby.
Seeking him, sing his favorite beautifully-worded *padam* for him
and without delaying or quarreling, come running and bring him to me!

(Adapted from a translation by Matthew Harp Allen in "The Tamil 'Padam': A Dance Music Genre of South India." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Wesleyan University, 1992.
p. 210.)

APPENDIX C

English Synopsis of *Jalaja* From the Film's Songbook (1938, p. 2-4)

English Synopsis of *Jalaja* From the Film's Songbook (1938, p. 2-4)

It is the hour of midnight worship in the temple, in the Rangamangalam village, Tanjore District. The bell tolls twelve; with the last stroke fading away into a tremble, Jalaja dances in the Mantapa [pavilion] before Lord Nataraja, to the rhythmic beat of the drum and to the tinkle of little cymbals.

Rajagopalan, a lover of art and one specially devoted to dance enters the scene and recognizes in Jalaja the perfect Bharata Natya artist he has been in long and arduous search of. It is a miracle of a chance. And then and there he decides to take Jalaja to Madras to present her genius to a wider and more artistic public. For this he seeks the help of the temple priest and with him talks it out with Doraikannu, Jalaja's mother who has high ambitions for her daughter.

Rajagopalan is rich, handsome and young—not a bad catch, decides Doraikannu. The Mudaliar, the local Mirasdar and Temple trustee who is amorously keen on Jalaja can be a permanent patron; and so with Jalaja she leaves the village for Madras. Coming to know that the priest had helped them in their decision, the Mudaliar dismisses him from the temple service. His next act is to set his agent to track out Jalaja and bring her back to the village.

In the city, events in Rajagopalan's house move fast, scandal growing to its full outside, that undercover of regenerating Art, Rajagopalan is living a companionate life with Jalaja. Rajagopalan himself has purified Jalaja, inculcating in her the supreme idea that her Dance is greater than herself—this the public never knows nor cares to know—; he brings about a meeting of his wife Lalita with Jalaja, on purpose of Jalaja learning a song from Lalita; the two quarrel. Rajagopalan's home begins rapidly to disintegrate, Kittu a gentleman vagabond making good in scandal-mongering what he could not in lawyering, carrying tales to Sivarama Iyer, Rajagopalan's father, setting his wife Pankajam to do the same with Lalita. It crashes when Sivarama Iyer sees his son sit publicly with Jalaja in the course of her dance recital in a public hall, challenge the dancer and proclaim that Jalaja is the only genuine Bharaya Natya artist. The crowd hoots, cat-calls and disperses in a general stampede. Sivarama Iyer comes home, a vessel of shame and wrath ready at any moment to burst.

It is twelve o'clock in the night. Lalita is anxiously waiting the arrival of Rajagopalan. Sivarama Iyer enters. Lalita is taken aback at the anger which glitters unmistakably on her father-in-law's face; soon Rajagopalan steps in and Sivarama Iyer confronts him, talks heatedly and throws the ultimatum before him: "Either live in my house as behoves a decent man or get out of it altogether." The rest of the night is full of terrible conflict for both Jalaja and Lalita; and in the small hours of the morning after coaxing Lalita to sleep, Raja leaves the house, taking a final sorrowful glance of the sleeping wife.

The publicity of the first appearance of Jalaja at Madras is in full swing. Meanwhile the Mudaliar has been quick. He sets his minions to kidnap Jalaja; his agent and Kittu have ably planned it. Things go very badly with Lalita. Raja's leaving the house badly unhinges her mind. A sudden yearning for a child makes her pathetically

lullaby a toy and is a strange obsession trip over dance phrases and bits of dance technique. The doctor in attendance prescribes a dance cure for her at which Sivarama Iyer is shocked: A family woman to become a dancer!

The evening, two days prior to the performance, Jalaja accompanied by Doraikannu, Alagappan: and her little sister Rukmini go to the temple for the matin worship (*morning prayers*). Worship over, Jalaja walks swiftly out of the temple at the appearance of the disgusting agent. Doraikannu and the Agent exchange whispered words; now the sound of the car starting is heard from outside; they smile significantly. Their own driver who has been previously bribed is rapidly whisking along Jalaja in the car to the Mudaliar's riverside bungalow at Rangamangalam.

The Mudaliar is wild with happiness at having Jalaja at first within his Juandom [perhaps "kingdom"?]. But fond love-sick fool that he is, he does not reckon with: "shut the door on a woman's wit; she will be up at the casement." Jalaja vamps him; leading him into the garden dancing, and there with the help of the priest ties the Mudaliar fastly to a tree, and makes her escape to Madras.

In the meantime, obsessed with the idea that it was Jalaja's dance which drew her husband to her, Lalita tries to learn some steps, fails; and the obsession grows upon her day by day, making her queerer and queerer.

Rajagopalan is happy that Jalaja has returned safe in time for her big dance recital for which he has made the whole town expectant. But he wants at the same time, to book the Mudaliar for his villanies. The Mudaliar, not to be outwitted, prefers a complaint to the village Police that Jalaja had stolen five thousand rupees worth of jewels from his house and run away to Madras; while Rajagopalan in his turn prefers a complaint to the Police in the City against the Mudaliar for the kidnapping and wrongful confinement of Jalaja. The police complaints move briskly. Jalaja is indescribably happy. Unaware of the presence of Rajagopalan, she dances the dance ecstatic in the garden under the smiling 'moon and the peeping eyes of the stars; lulled by the flower-laden breezes; and her song grows lyrical with a soft shower of the playing fountain'. It is a Chopin-like Nocturne. Doraikannu disturbs her trance, calls her in, and giving her a flask of milk asks her to take it to Rajagopalan. Jalaja does so and just when Rajagopalan is about to drink, Rukmini who has followed unseen dashes it out of his hands. She explains to the astounded Rajagopalan that her mother and Alagappan have drugged the milk. It is now the turn of Jalaja to be astounded; the seed of a faint suspicion takes root in Rajagolapan's mind but quite discreetly he hushes up the matter, as Jalaja's great dance-recital is to come off on the morrow night. The midnight hour strikes its doleful twelve. The owl hoots. The night-bird shrieks and a distant dog wails. Lalita sleep-walks her chambers, recollecting sad and sweet memories of old. The next day night. It is the theatre. The dance-hour is about to strike. The audience sits expectant. The Mudaliar with the village Sub-Inspector and a couple of constables enters by the wing to arrest Jalaja, only to find himself smartly arrested by the City Police who had followed him quickly, silently. The curtain parts. The dance begins. Jalaja does an item. The audience cheers. Lalita, at home, is attempting to learn some dance-poses. She fails, she seems to hear the dance-music, coming sweetly, plaintively; she becomes agitated. Jalaja does another

item. The excited Lalita comes crashing to the theatre in a car driven by herself.

The curtain is rung down. Interval.

Lalita jumps out of her car and dashes through the crowd of audience, elbowing her way madly. Jalaja sits before a mirror, against the make-up table in the green room. Rajagopalan stands near her, congratulating her on the glory of her performance. The last word is still on his lips when the two are startled by a hysterical laughter. They see Lalita, haggard, disheveled, advancing towards them. Lalita violently accuses Jalaja for having bewitched her husband away from her through thousand disgusting viles and base strategems. Jalaja meets all her mad actions and madder words with absolute calmness. And Jalaja dances the Tillana as her reply. Lalita's ruffled features soften with every foot-beat of the dance measure; finally she reaches her normality. The transformation is miraculous. Lalita praises Jalaja lyrically. Rajagoplan leads Lalita out. Jalaja stands in adoration before the image of Lord Nataraja, her hands folded, her face a light of beatitude.

APPENDIX D

Translation of Biographical Article About Yogam-Mangalam

Translation of Biographical Article About Yogam-Mangalam

This article is entitled "Naṭaṉa Cakōtarikaḷ Yōkam-Maṅkaḷam: Vāḻkkai Varṇaṉai" ("The Dancing Sisters Yogam Mangalam: A Description of Their Lives"), which was published in *Kuṇṭūci* magazine in February 1948 (pp. 16-21):

The sisters Yogam-Mangalam were born in Thiruvaiyaru (just outside Tanjore)…into a Saiva Brahmin, land owning (*mirācutār*) family. Their mother, Meenakshi Ammal, came from family of Karnatak musicians. Her grandfather was Kottavasal Venkatarama Ayyar [c. 1820-1880], a learned musician (*vidvān*). He had composed some *varnams*. Meenakshi Ammals sister's father-in-law was the great musician Patnam Subrahmanya Ayyar [1845-1902]…. Several of Yogam-Mangalam's relatives are well-placed in important positions in Chennai.

When they were children, Yogam-Mangalam's father Subrahmanya Ayyar passed away. Their mother Meenakshi Ammal took them (along with their other sister) to her father's house and lived there for a while. After that, Meenakshi Ammal took her daughters to Kumbhakonam to study and lived in her sister's house. When [the film director] R. Dwarakanath wanted Baby Thangam [Yogam-Mangalam's other sister] to act [in his film], Meenakshi Ammal vehemently refused. Even the people in her household disagreed. They hated the medium of cinema. But Dwarakanath was persistent. He made a case that girls and boys from good families are now participating in cinema and that Thangam would be continuing this trend. It was then that Meenakshi Ammal had a change of heart and agreed to let Thangam act in the film. Thangam garnered some praise for this and the following year, she acted in another film, *Chitra* ["The Woman Named Chitra," 1946], produced by N.S. Krishnan.

In 1941, Meenakshi Ammal brought her other two daughters, Yogam and Mangalam, to Madras in the hope of having them act in films…. Both sisters acted and danced in the film, *Tamilariyum Peruman* ("The Lord Who Understood Tamil," 1942), produced by R.M. Ramanathan Chettiar of Uma Pictures, and directed by T.R. Raghunath. When that movie came out, audiences were very attracted by Yogam-Mangalam…. But even before their first film came out, they were already contracted for other films such as *Naveena Vikramadithyan* ("The New Vikramaditya," 1942)…. Only [one of the sisters] Yogam, acted in the film *Kannagi* (1942). The sisters also danced in the Telugu film, *Patni* ["The Wife," 1942]. In the movie *Panchamirtham* ("Sacred Elixir of Five Substances," 1942) Mangalam acted in the lead role of the [hero's] sister's, while Yogam only danced in it.

[We all know that] the [dancer] who had a beautiful swan-like gait and set an example on the stage, was T. Balasaraswati [1918-1984]. After her, Mangalam is the next star [of the dance world]. She has the all the necessary attributes required for the stage, according to the *śāstras*.

They also knew some Kathak and Manipuri. But interestingly, they didn't know Bharatanāṭyam. So when they were invited to perform *śāstric* dances, they could not accept these invitations. At that precarious time, they were taken to Vaideeswarankoyil

Meenakshisundaram Pillai in order to learn proper Bharatanāṭyam. Pillai himself learnt from the distinguished teacher from Melattur, Sri Natesa Ayyar, who also taught Mr. [E.] Krishna Iyer.... Pillai was thus able to teach Yogam and Mangalam very quickly and trained them to be expert and popular dancers.

Yogam-Mangalam had their *araṅkēr̲r̲am* [debut dance performance] on May 27, 1944 at Mayilai Sangeetha Sabha. Mrs. Ammu Swaminathan [1894-1978; mother of the Bharatanāṭyam dancer Mrinalini Sarabhai] was the chief guest at the *araṅkēr̲r̲am*…. That recital astonished the audience and created quite a stir. From that day onwards, Yogam-Mangalam had no rest—they were in much demand as dancers. This is why after *Jagathalapratapan* ["Lord of the World," 1944], they had to take a sabbatical from the film industry.

Their dance recitals took place in many parts of Tamilnadu. They received an immense amount of support from the public. Even the great dancer Uday Shankar who was making the film *Kalpana*, was the chief guest for one of their recitals. Uday Shankar was residing in Chennai for 2-3 years at that time. It must be noted that he never accepted to be chief guest at any other dance recital other than that of Yogam-Mangalam. He even invited the sisters to participate in his film, *Kalpana,* but for some reason they were not able to do so.

…After this in 1945, Yogam-Mangalam and their troupe toured Calcutta for two months and gave around 15 dance recitals. They cause such a stir in this city and the press raved about them…. They performed at the most prestigious theatres. While in Calcutta, the sisters were also invited to perform at the Bengal Music Conference….

APPENDIX E

Major Film Choreographies of K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai, 1948-1963

Major Film Choreographies of K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai, 1948-1963

Table of films in Tamil, Telugu, and Hindi featuring choreography by K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai, from 1948 to 1963:

Year	**Films**
1948	*Samasara Nauka*
1949	*Nalla Thambi* (with Vedantam Raghaviah, credited as "Taṇṭapāṇi Piḷḷai")
1951	*Manamagal* (with Hiralal); *The River*
1952	*Kalyani; Moonru Pillaigal; Panam; Valayapati*
1953	*Avvaiyar; Penn*; *Anbu; Kangal*
1954	*Ratha Kanneer; Ladki* (Hindi); *Sangham* (Telugu); *Sri Kalahastheeswara Mahatmyam* (Telugu); *Raja Guruvu* (Telugu); *Thuli Visham*; *Pehli Jhalak* (Hindi)
1955	*Chellappillai; Miss Mary*; *Missiamma; Gomatiyin Kadalan*
1956	*Chori Chori* (Hindi); *Bhai Bhai* (Hindi)*; Ali Babavum 40 Tirudargallum; Kuladaivam; Rangoon Radha*
1957	*Vananga Mudi; Hum Pancchi Ek Daal Ke* (Hindi); *Karpukarasi*
1958	*Sarangadhara* (with Madhavan); *Illarame Nallaram; Bhookailas* (Telugu)
1959	*Sivagangai Seemai; Thilakam; Abalai Anjukam; Adhisaya Penn; Engal Kuladevi; Koodi Vaazhnthaal Kodi Nanmai; Pandithevan*
1960	*Padikkadha Medhai; Paavai Vilakku; Daivapiravi; Kaithi Kannayiram, Kalattur Kannamma; Kavalai Illatha Manithan; Kuravanji; Petra Manam; Rathinapuri Ilavarasi; Raja Desingu; Veerakanal; Bindiya* (Hindi, with A.K. Chopra and Padma)
1961	*Chhaya* (Hindi, with A.K. Chopra)
1962	*Man Mauji* (Hindi, with A.K. Chopra and Rathan Kumar)
1963	*Nan Vanangum Daivum* (with B. Chinnilal, Sampath, and Madhavan)

APPENDIX F

IRB Approval Letter

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: Celluloid Classicism: Intertwined Histories of Early Tamil Cinema, Devadasi Dance, and Bharatanatyam

Investigator: Hari Krishnan . . . . . .hkrishnan@twu.edu 416/574-4435
Advisor: Linda Caldwell, Ph.D. . . . . .lcaldwell2@twu.edu 940/898-2093

Explanation and Purpose of the Research
You are being asked to participate in a research study providing important information for Mr. Hari Krishnan's dissertation at Texas Woman's University. Mr. Krishnan is a Ph.D. candidate at Texas Woman's University and is studying the relationship between Bharatanatyam, Devadasi dance, and early Tamil cinema. The purpose of this research is to engage in the "lost vocabulary" of Bharatanatyam dance as it is depicted in early Tamil cinema from 1930s to the 1950s and as it shifted between dancers from Devadasi and other diverse communities moving between the proscenium stage and the cinematic set. You have been asked to participate in this study based on your expertise in Bharatanatyam and early Tamil cinema. Your expertise in your professional field allows you to speak with authority about these topics. This research is important in order to generate an integrated discourse between Bharatanatyam and early Tamil cinema.

Description of Procedures
As a participant in this study you will be asked to spend one half hour in open-ended dialogue with the researcher in either a face to face or phone interview format. You will not need to spend any more than another two hours clarifying important interview information as well as reviewing materials and dialogue transcriptions concerning your ideas and experience of Bharatanatyam and early Tamil cinema. The interviews will take place at a time, date, and place that are mutually convenient to you and the researcher. Even though the researcher will schedule a single half hour time initially, clarification of important issues within the interview may arise. In this case, the researcher will contact you for one additional interview that will not exceed one half hour. If your preference is to address questions of clarification via e-mail, you may elect to do so. It will take you a complete time of 3 to 3.5 hours to participate in this study.

During the interview process, you are free to ask the researcher questions, re-direct questions, or refuse to answer questions. You may also terminate the interview at any time. For purposes of transcription and documentation, the researcher will make audio and video recordings of the interview(s). The researcher will then use the transcriptions from the interview to create narratives addressing Bharatanatyam and early Tamil cinema. You have the right to edit or delete any of your materials at any time during the research process.

_____
Initials

Approved by the
Texas Woman's University
Institutional Review Board
Date: 9-20-14

Potential Risks

The researcher will ask you open-ended questions about connections between Bharatanatyam and Devadasi dance forms, and early Tamil cinema.

During the interview, please note of the following possible risks and the steps we'll take to minimize those risks:

Loss of confidentiality- Participants in this study will be named. There is a risk of loss of confidentiality regarding aspects of Bharatanatyam and Devadasi dance as well as Tamil cinema which the participants may not have disclosed publically. The participant may elect at several junctures in the study's process to have data deemed sensitive deleted or attributed to an anonymous source. There is also potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all e-mail, downloading, and internet communications. The researcher will store all materials in locked storage and destroy them after 5 years. Further, participants will be given access to and copies of all data collected in order that they can amend or delete raw data that they view to be sensitive. The principal investigator will not use in the dissertation, nor make available to the public, any of the deleted data. There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email downloading, and internet transactions.

Loss of privacy- Data, such as home address, contact details and other information that could compromise the privacy of the participants, will not be made available to the public through this research unless participants give written permission to do so.

Public embarrassment- All participants will be able to read or view data collected and will have the right to amend and/or delete any raw data that they view to be sensitive. The principal investigator will not use in the dissertation, nor make available to the public, any of the deleted data. The participants may also choose to pull out from the study at any time.

Fatigue during possible personal or phone communications- Personal or phone communications will be scheduled for no more than 30 minutes at the convenience of the participant. All real time conversations will include needed breaks and participants may exercise their rights to stop the interview at any time. Some of the participants may be in their eighties. Special care will be taken to make sure they are comfortable throughout the interview process. If the participants wish for family members to bring them a drink of water during the interview, that will be made possible. When interviewing older participants, the primary researcher will intervene periodically making sure the participant is comfortable and is able to continue with the interview.

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Initials

Emotional discomfort during possible personal or phone communications- Personal or phone communications will be scheduled for no more than 30 minutes at the convenience of the participant. All real time conversations will include needed breaks and participants may exercise their rights to stop the interview at any time. Some of the participants may be in their eighties. Special care will be taken to make sure they are comfortable throughout the interview process. If the participants wish for family members or assistants to be present during the interview, that will be made possible. When interviewing older participants, the primary researcher will intervene periodically making sure the participant is comfortable and is able to continue with the interview.

Risk of loss of time- Before commencing each interview, participants will be notified in advance that participation in the study will necessarily take up their time and that this commitment is wholly voluntary. Participants can stop the interview at anytime or take breaks as needed.

Potential loss of anonymity - The principal researcher will inform the participants that the data will not be anonymous but steps to maintain confidentiality will be taken. There is a potential loss of anonymity. The majority of interviews will be one-on-one (i.e. only the principal researcher and the interviewee are present) The occasional time where there will be someone else present is when the interviewee is an elderly person and needs a drink of water to be brought to that person by a family member. When this happens, the interview will be stopped and will be resumed when the family member has left the room where the interview is being conducted. In the event that the participants need to speak to a professional therapist or counselor in India, they will be provided with the following names, telephone numbers and websites that offer these services-

a .Navjyoti Seva Samithi- Tel: 91- 44 - 2241 3809
Website- http://www.navjyothi.org/free_family_individual_counselling.htm or

b. Chennai Counseling Services- Tel: 91-9362-994035
Website- http://counselingchennai.com/

Participants will be mailed or emailed drafts of the dissertation with those sections that feature the name, ideas and comments of the participant highlighted. If requested, each participant will receive a copy of the completed dissertation as well as requested copies of any and all transcripts, constructed narratives, and audio and video recordings. Participants will retain the right to review, censor, edit and comment further on any and all drafts of the dissertation. The researchers will try to prevent any problem that could happen because of this research. You should let the researchers know at once if there is a problem and they will help you. However, TWU does not provide medical services or financial assistance for injuries that might happen because you are taking part in this research.

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Initials

Approved by the
Texas Woman's University
Institutional Review Board
Date: 9-20-14

Participation and Benefits

Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you would like to know the results of this study, Mr, Krishnan will mail them to you.*

Questions Regarding the Study

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep. If you have any questions about the research study you should ask the researchers; their phone numbers are at the top of this form. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research or the way this study has been conducted, you may contact the Texas Woman's University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 940-898-3378 or via e-mail at IRB@twu.edu.

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

*If you would like to know the results of this study tell us where you want them to be sent:

Email: _____
or
Address:

_____

_____

_____

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Date: 9-20-14