

CHINTA VENKATARAMAIAH and the Kuchipudi Yakshagana Tradition

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"What every person needs are koodu (food), gudda (clothing) and needa (a roof on our head). If these are essential needs of a person, the same are needed for an art to sustain and please the audience. Bhava is the food (which sustains the art); raga is the appropriate clothing which gives the bhava shape, beauty and musicality; and tala is the dwelling in which we live because the bhava and raga in our art are pegged to the abode of tala".¹

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Thus spake a lean, withering man, in his 80's wearing a lion cloth and an *angavastra*, sitting on the 'portals'¹² of his verandah (a low-roofed thatched house) to a tiny group of youngsters in a low voice, as though he was speaking to himself; as though he was speaking out his conviction of an art form; which he conceived, ordained to his people as their sole property for the next one hundred years and more - almost like a second Siddhendra Yogi, reborn to resurrect the waning lives of the artist community of his village - perhaps to resurrect himself and in the process find the emancipation of the future generations.

The man was Chinta Venkataramaiah, who unknowingly and unconsciously ventured into an artistic exploration of a new medium, the Yakshagana. Finding that his present journey was irksome since the path was thorny and its destiny was indistinct, he was, so to say, trying to find an alternate path to traverse and take his small group of followers with him onto a dependable road and perhaps to a predictable destination. With the help of an ingenious colleague, Hari Madhavayya³, venturesome and bold at the same time, he found the broad skeletons of a danceplay and imbued it with life blood of new and vibrant creativity.

For this man, his art was a sustaining force - both physically and intellectually. Sustenance needs three important things according to him - *koodu* (food), *gudda* (clothing) and *needa* (a dwelling). As a man who lived on the ancient dictum of low living and high thinking, he found that these are the needs of his art as well. The artistic needs were *bhava*, *raga* and *tala*. These, he believed, were the backbone of a successful theatrical performance as he envisaged it. He found these in the new form. And he found this an extension of what they were doing for the last four hundred years. These three elements, he would often say, were the 'thri-karanas' of an artist; the mere transmutations of *mano-vak-kaya*-s enunciated as essences of human activity as per our ancient lore. The mind-mood-movement synthesis was what he aimed at and achieved. Venkataramaiah's greatness lies in the search for a classical form, the norms of which lie within the parameters of his ancestral vocation and evolving the form into a viable alternative (it is not an alternative form as such, but only complementary to the form they were practising). The tripartite division mentioned by him suggests that the essential needs of life are also the life-blood of art; thereby asserting that his art is his life and living one is living the other.

EARLY LIFE

Born in 1860 to Sivaramayya and Arundhati as the third son among four sons⁴, Chinta Venkataramaiah's life was uneventful in his younger days. He was not groomed into dance at the age of five as all the boys of Kuchipudi, as he was reticent (his mother thought it was 'shyness'). However Venkataramaiah had a keen eye and keener ears for the art. His elder brother, Venkataratnam, by then a proven artist and talented performer, assisted his father in imparting dance lessons to the few students assembled, besides doing nattuvangam for *Bhamakalapam*. Venkataramaiah, after the students left, would reproduce *in toto* what was taught to them by his brother - all this before his mother. His retentive power and his

power of reproducing what he saw or heard was unheard of. When his brother heard of this from his mother and saw it for himself hiding behind a paddy stack in the frontyard, he was greatly relieved and delighted. Venkataramaiah was first drawn into Kuchipudi art by Yeleswarapu Narayanappa, a well-known teacher and practitioner. He was slowly groomed into the Chinta group and he soon became an expert



Venkataramaiah and his wife

performer, first doing solo pieces of *sabdam*, *dasavataralu* or *javali*, when his brother did the role of Satyabhama in *Bhamakalapam*.

When Venkataramaiah settled down in the role of 'Bhama', after several years of rigorous training, his brother Venkataratnam, who was god-minded, made Venkataramaiah in - charge of the Melam and went on his spiritual quest. Venkataramaiah was obliged to accept the assignment as he could not say no to his brother., who was his mentor. This was in the year 1876. Thus providence brought him into the centre of an activity the intricacies of which he was not aware.

The situation in the field of dance in 1880's and 90's when Venkataramaiah took over the reins of his company was not bright. There were no opportunities

even for normal sustenance, because the competition was high and the aspiring beneficiaries were numerous. There was bitter competition and animosity among practitioners, vying with one another to grab the few opportunities they got. All of them had to rely only on *Bhamakalapam* and there was no other alternative. The earlier generation of great actors no more existed and the need to perform led them to a nomadic life.

During one such sojourn, Venkataramaiah, along with his brother Narayana Murthy and his friend, colleague and compatriot Hari Madhavaiah was camping at Nellore where Madhavaiah saw a performance of *Prahlada* by a local team.⁵ It was quite different from the type of performances they were doing. Madhavaiah was so impressed by the format of this Yakshaganam that he immediately went to Venkataramaiah and insisted that they do something like this. Venkataramaiah had all his doubts. How could they jump into another type of stage presentation? What would they know about Yakshagana? How would they be sure of its reception? How would they manage to have so many actors to take up male and female roles? Many questions - and no answers.

Madhavaiah, the wise man that he was, told Venkataramaiah that all things would take their own course and argued that they should make a sincere and concerted effort to start something like this. He also argued that their kalapams were for the intellectuals; to reach wider audiences, they needed a more lively and ebullient theatrical form. Venkataramaiah was at least convinced that they should do something in order to sustain people's interest in them and agreed to Madhavaiah's suggestion that they should also include some Yakshaganas in their repertoire.



follow, and proved that Venkataramaiah and his team were worthy of the experiment.

The group got into action. They chose Vedala Tiru Narayanacharya's *Prahlada Natakam*⁶. The choice was partly due to the fact that the group had seen a performance of *Prahlada* earlier. Secondly, the play needed a small cast. Thirdly, the female role in it was not a prominent one that required a lot of training. *Prahlada* was the first of a successful series of Yakshaganas to

Yaksha-ganam* and *Yakshaganam

The word "Yaksha" and "gana" were used as two distinct words to mean the singing of Yakshas (Yaksha's *gana*), probably a tribe in Andhra. Started perhaps as a form of devotional singing in regional metres at religious festivals, Yakshagana soon developed into a full-fledged dramatic form. The word means 'the singing of the Yakshas'. Some argue that there was a particular tribe (Yakshas or Jakkulu) which practised singing as a profession and the native Telugu word "Jakkula" is sanskritised into "Yaksha" when their performances became elitist.

The first reference to a Jakkula woman is found in *Panditaradhyā Charitra* (13thC) and also in *Kridabhiramam* by Vallabha Raya (14thc). Both these texts described a woman singer of Jakkula community singing in a festival to the accompaniment of several instruments⁷. The latter play also described vividly how she looked like. Srinadha's *Bhimeswara Puranam* (C1430) used the compound word "Yakshagana"⁸, (i.e. 'Yakshagana' as a form for the first time), while describing how the sacred place of Daksharama was praised in song by Gandharvas in the Yakshagana style. It is evident that in these hundred years the word got consolidated and there was a shift in the meaning - from the singing of Yakshas, it came to mean the singing style of a particular kind, at one time used by yakshas, but now had acquired the status of a technical word meaning 'a style of singing' or, by extension, a performance that contained the elements of yaksha's singing - with *desi* metres, tuned to *desi ragas*.

The development of *Yaksagana* as a dramatic performance in later years reveals how the folk forms tend to develop from simple to complex forms. The references available both in Telugu and Kannada prove that originally they were musical recitations, with or without the accompaniment of instruments. At that stage they could be independent songs in praise of a god or goddess. When a whole divine story was to be narrated, they developed into narrative stories, including in them the various *desi* metres that hitherto formed the individual songs. Such were the 'ela', 'ragada' etc. There is no evidence to prove that this narrative tradition emerged into a dramatic tradition earlier than the 15th century.

There seem to be three stages⁹ in the development of Yakshagana as a dramatic form. The first one was the 'Recitational Stage' when stories were narrated by a single person (a woman) who sang the story in native metres and while narrating enacted the various roles of the character. The second stage is a 'Samvada stage' wherein the chief narrator became the Sutradhara of a two-character play. Strictly

speaking, Kalapam belongs to this stage and is a perfect representative of this genre at this stage. The third one is the 'dramatic' stage of development when more characters acted out a more complex story. Singing, narrative and dramatic elements are present in the form at each stage, but at each one of its stages of development, there is a greater emphasis on one of the elements, the other two subservient to it.

The earliest mention of a *Yaksagana* text dates back to the latter half of the 15th century. It was *Saubhari Caritamu* by Proluganti Channa Sauri. Unfortunately, the text is not available. Among the available *Yakshagana* texts, the earliest is Kandukuri Rudrakavi's (16thC.) *Sugriva Vijayamu*, though Chakrapuri Raghavacharya's *Vipra Narayana Caritra* is claimed by some to be an earlier one. From the 17th C. onwards, both the writing and the performance of *Yaksagana* had been widely popular¹⁰. The Tanjore kings (17th & 18thC.) encouraged several court poets to write *Yakshaganas* and they themselves wrote and produced them in the court theatres¹¹. This was in fact the golden age of *the Yakshaganas*.

A cleared and cleaned place at the centre of a village is its acting area. No curtain is used. *titti* (for *sruti*), maddela and cymbals (for rhythm) are all the instruments used. A 'Sutradhara' introduces the story after the necessary invocation, assisted by a group of 'vanthas' (co-singers) who repeat what either the Sutradhara or the actors sing. The prose connections (*Sandhi-vachanalu*) in the story are supplied by the Sutradhara, who is occasionally aided by a humorous character (*hasyagadu*). Though no female artist participated in *Yaksagana* performance until the 18th C., there are references to their participation later.

There are evidences to show that some performing groups (*melams*) were so popular during the 17th and 18th Centuries that their mention was made even in literary texts. Lepakshi, Vemulapalli and Tadipatri *Melams* of Rayalaseema, Padakandla Swamiraya Kavi's and Twarakavi Ramakrishnayya's *melams* of Nellore, Palnati Seema *melams* and Kandala Chidambara Kavi *melam* in Visakhapatnam attained such popularity.¹²

However, by the time the Kuchipudi group decided to perform *Yakshaganas*, the form had been widely popular in the rural areas since several caste groups took it up and started performing¹³. When it went into the uninitiated novices, the genre lost its well-constructed and elegantly performing norms and remained a mere rustic entertainer. Hari Madhavaiah and the group must have seen one of these at Nellore.

Between 1880 (1896?) and 1920, Chinta and his group produced eight Yakshaganas. They toured with the plays all over Andhra. *Bhamakalapam* stayed with the group all along; occasionally *Golla Kalapam* also was presented if asked for. Venkataramaiah took no time in consolidating the Melam. He consulted the other Melams of the village about the new project and everyone agreed to join hands in this new venture and consented to work under Chinta Vari Melam.

The eight plays¹⁴ that were taken up by the Chinta repertory are:

<i>Play</i>	<i>Author</i>
1. Prahlada Natakam	Vedala Tirunarayanacharyulu
2. Usha Parinayam	Rentachintala Chidambara kavi
3. Mohini Rukmangada (Rukmangada Charitra)	Yenuguluri Papa Raju ¹⁵
4. Rama Natakam	Tirunagaru Ananthadasa Kavi
5. Gaya Natakam	Vallabhaneni Ramakrishnayya
6. Sasirekha Parinayam	Vallabhaneni Choudari
7. Rukmini Parinayam	Gudimella Tirumala Narasimhacharyulu/ Bollareddy Kotireddy ¹⁶
8. Harischandreeyam ¹⁷	V.T. Perumallaiah

At a much later stage, after the demise of the elder Chinta, the group produced *Vipranarayana* and *Ksheerasagara Mathanam*.

Chinta and the making of a Yakshagana

It looks beyond comprehension that a man like Chinta Venkataramaiah, docile and gentlemanly as he was, could undertake and successfully implement such a seemingly difficult project as producing plays in a format altogether new to their professional group. Chinta was always known as a genial man with a touch of humour. His simplicity, in his daily life and his approach to teaching, are proverbial. He is as people say, not well-educated; neither did he reach those heights as were found in any of the Kuchipudi forms, as his two later contemporaries, Vempati Venkatanarayana and Vedantam Laxminarayana Sastry did. But he was a visionary

and was humane. His disciples and friends, members of his household and even mere acquaintances stated that he was always friendly; he reached out to people; they never saw him angry and treated all kindly.

Two important facets of Chinta's personality answer these seemingly contradictory qualities in him; one, his docile character and moderate education vs. his unique productions as a master-craftsman of exceptional theatrical pieces, which implied bold decisions and impeccable discipline. One has to concede that behind this soft visage of the man lies a stubborn personality which is further sharpened by ready wit and natural, inborn spirit of adventurism. Further, a deep sense of the need for finding an alternative vocation and, at the same time, for upholding the classical purity of Kuchipudi art were behind the experiments made by him.

The concept of 'classicism' which beacons the best minds of Kuchipudi into action was simply based on two things (the parameters of "do's" and "don't's" that teacher after teacher insisted upon): firstly, that any work they produce must have *similar* characteristics they find in *Bhamakalapam*, for it is the *sine quo non* of, a kind of an accepted litmus test for, any intellectual and creative preoccupation and secondly, it should be dissimilar to the same kind of plays popular in the rural areas, which presented plays as celebration, which presented them for the story content; not as a piece in which the content and the characters, the abhinaya and the style adhere to principles that eventually lead to aesthetic pleasure. In short, the rural plays were performed for their own pleasure as amateur exercises, whereas theirs were for others, especially for well-informed and knowledgeable audiences.

Chinta's 'stubbornness' is another word for his perseverance of taking any thing he undertakes to its logical end. Seen early in his life as "shyness" by his mother, his "stubbornness" is basically his apathy to 'regimentation' which was the order of his day in imparting training to youngsters. He was on his own when no restrictions were imposed either on him or his creative freedom. That could be seen in his early, momentous and intuitive learning of the art and could again be seen in his venturesome reactivity of an altogether novel form. The second quality that is strikingly obvious in him is his sense of perfection. He was sure that what they were now doing was going to be a bread-winner for several of them in future; but he was also sure that if they fail, they would miss a whole life-time's opportunity. Caught between the dragon and the deep sea, he ventured to plunge into the deep sea. Besides, he had the wise advice of a life-long friend, Hari

Madhavaiah and willing-to-venture group with him. Both his elder and younger brothers were with him although this venture. His colleagues like Hari Chalapati joined him and the elders gladly blessed it.

Venkataramaiah was virtually incharge of everything that went into the production. The first thing that challenged him was the preparation of a performance text. We can take *Prahlada Natakam* as a case in point. The play was perhaps



An early performance photograph of *Prahlada Natakam*

written between 1864 and 1896 and was published in 1896.¹⁸ We do not know when Venkataramaiah produced it. Did he use the manuscript edition that he got from the Nellore team or did he do it after it was published? We cannot for certain say. But, looking at the practicalities, it cannot be immediately after he took over the Chinta vari Melam, i.e., 1876. He was hardly 16 at the time. The production, as it received public acclaim and newspaper reporting, was a very mature one. Even Madhavaiah, who was also of his age would not have advised him to undertake such an irksome job when his friend was in his teens.

Even the Kuchipudi elders would not have blessed the project unless they were sure that Venkataramaiah was capable of undertaking it. Even before he undertook the production of the Yakshagana, the first task of Venkataramaiah must have

been to consolidate his now-enlarged team containing three Melams of the village and make it the best in the village. It looks as though he later toured virtually every *samsthanam* in Andhra and was honoured for his prortayals of the two *bhama veshams*. It is only safe to presume that the first production of *Prahlada*, in such a case took place in 1896, when the script was frist published. If it were to be earlier than that, we do not have evidences yet.

The published text and the Kuchipudi performance text are always varied and that explains how the performance text is made.¹⁹ For example, the "Amba paraku" and the other *poorava ranga* preliminaries which are traditional pieces and not found in the Yakshagana Texts, are retained. (This is true with all the Yakshaganas). The *patra Pravesa daruvus* and *samvada daruvus* are taken from the text. *Slokas*, *padyams* and other traditional invocatory songs, dandakams, etc. are added; popular poems from Pothana's *Bhagavatham* are incorporated. In addition to the *stotram* (prayer) in the *daruvu* format (in *panthuvarali ragam* and *ata talam*). "Rakshamam sada muda hare..." there is also a popular *dandakam* added to it with the option of leaving one of the two. Similarly, the longish "Singadu - Singi samvadam" which will take a full one-hour in performance was trimmed and their *pravesa daruvu* and Singadu's enumeration of the different types of snakes is retained though in a three-night performance of *Prahlada*, this is also retained.

Further, additions of several *slokas*, *padams*, *tarangams*, *ashtapadis*, *javalis* and other metrical forms had been incorporated wherever necessary. The newly incorporated song or poem must fit into the context and mood of the situation and it should be from well-known texts. Such inclusions are less in *Prahlada*, but in later texts, free borrowing of traditional items find a place.

The careful inclusion of the musical score to several *desi* metres is Chinta's finest achievement. Yogi Ramaiah, a scholar well versed in *sahitya* advised Chinta on the texts.²⁰ Venkataramaiah had also the advantage of having Bokka Kumara Swamy²¹, a proven musician in his team and brother of his eldest son-in-law, Seetaramaiah to help him in music. Very often, Kumaraswamy set the music to the Yakshaganas and was incorporated after a final approval from Venkataramaiah. Though for the first two plays - *Prahlada* and *Usha* - music was done by the group together, from *Mohini Rukmangada* onwards Bokka Kumaraswamy was in-charge of the musical score. He was assisted by Boddapati Sanjeeva Rao of Mukkonda, near Kuchipudi, who was proficient in classical Karnatic Music. It was also said that Venkataramaiah liked two *ragas* especially - *Devagandhari* and *Saurashtra*

and he used them wherever they fitted into the song and the mood. The difficult challenges of giving musical score to *kandardhams* and some *desi* metres like *ela* were successfully overcome thanks to the active participation of actors like Vedantam Chalapati and his elder brother Venkataratnam.

In later plays, performed after 1910, insertions freely followed keeping in view the contemporary trends in mainstream Telugu drama. The contemporary theatre was, by and large, 'musical'. It was called *padya natakam*, in which poems abound; prose is merely used for connecting two poetic renderings. Since *padyam* dominated the contemporary theatre, the team also included poems from popular plays of the day. For example, *Rama natakam* a fine piece with high literary value, has incorporated poems from *Lava Kusa*, a popular play of the day written by Panditha K. Subrahmanya Sastry. Similarly, a sizeable number of poems and passages from Bethapudi Bhagawantha Rao's *Rukmangada* found their place in Kuchipudi performance. *Gaya Natakam* borrowed several poems from Chilakamarti Laxminarasimham's popular play, *Gayopakhyanam*.

The Repertoire

After *Prahlada's* triumphant tour in Andhra districts, the team took up *Usha Parinayam* by Rentachintala Chidambara kavi. One of the most popular plays of Kuchipudi repertoire, this play went into the masses with masterly performances of Vedantam Raghavaiah and Mahankali Satyanarayana in the second generation of Venkataramaiah's disciples and Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma and Mahankali Sriramulu in the fifth generation of actors.



A scene from 'Ushaparinayam'

Rama Natakam by Tirunagaru Ananthadasa Kavi also gained much popularity. Each one of the plays created performance history. Then followed *Sasirekha Parinayam* and *Gaya Natakam*. By the time they took up these two plays, after a decade of hectic schedules of performances,

Venkataramaiah befriended several important patrons all over Andhra. Zamindars invited him to perform in palaces and honoured the group. Patrons came forward

to sponsor their plays. Two instances reveal their popularity. The first one, which is spread by word of mouth (such stories abound in Kuchipudi and several times these are taken as authentic history), is about an incident that occurred in Nellore in one of their early tours. During the temple festival of Ranganatha Swamy, Venkataramaiah's troupe was invited to perform *Prahlada* and reached Nellore a day earlier. That night Rajamani, a dancer from the South performed *abhinaya*, which contained several Kshetravaya and Sarangapani padams. After the show, Chinta Venkataramaiah was invited to speak. Venkataramaiah spoke so eloquently about the *padams* in general and Rajamani's performance in particular, adding colour by his own demonstration that the audience stood up in appreciation and honoured him. For the next night's performance of *Prahlada*, dance lovers and scholars thronged. Venkataramaiah requested Rajamani also to attend. She obliged.

After the performance (it was dawn by the time the play was over), Rajamani was invited to speak. She extolled every one in the cast. She particularly mentioned the excellent "expressive" performance of Vedantam Chalapati (as Leelavathi) who did the one daruvu "kata kata... ee viyogametulorthunu..." in *rag* Neelambari, with elaborate *sangatis* and she told the assemblage that her life had been fully blessed. She was able to take only a spoon-full of water from the ocean of *abhinaya* of the Kuchipudi people. This instance throws light not only on the expert presentation of the troupe, but also on the good rapport built up by Venkataramaiah wherever he went. It was said this one incident earned them 64 *Prahladas* in Nellore district alone!

Another instance from another generation of actors would show how the popularity of the Kuchipudi troupe grew from time to time. In the mid-1920's, the troupe had gone to Kollur in Guntur district, a much respected Brahmin agraharam, known for its munificence. Usually, the Kuchipudi teams are welcome to present their kalapams in the village and the villagers were always generous and munificent. Venkataramaiah went there with *Bhamakalapam* and *Usha Parinayam*. The chief patron of Venkataramaiah was Bhagavathula Laxminarayana, a landlord. After seeing young Raghavaiah in *Bhamakalapam* he was so pleased with his performance that he sent his men to all the neighbouring villages that a new prodigy was going to do 'Usha' that evening. The performance that evening was such a thumping success that people from the neighbouring villages vied with each other to invite the team to perform the play in 'the name of their family'. The team had performed 34 *Usha Parinayams* in Kollur and its neighbouring villages alone and had bookings until the next six months! We are told that the troupe did not go back home those

six months. If their kith and kin wanted to see them, they would cross Krishna and come to Kollur!

A third incident landed them at the threshold of other patrons! Venkataramaiah and his troupe went to perform in Jammi Golvepalli, a village near Gudivada of Krishna District. After they presented *Usha* there, the landlord of the village, Vallabhaneni Ramakrishnaiah showered encomiums on them and told Venkataramaiah that he would provide them all facilities in his village if only they would practise and perform *Gayanatakam*, a Yakshaganam written by him. Venkataramaiah consulted his team members and agreed to do so. Thus the troupe came down to Golvepalli, stayed there for four months to set the play. Its first performance was given in that village when the whole village got together and honoured the Guru with a *Ganda Penderam*. This was in 1908.

Similar was the case with *Sasirekha Parinayam*, written by the younger brother of Ramakrishnaiah, Vallabhaneni Choudary. The troupe again came to the village, stayed there to practise the play. It was performed in 1911 as was mentioned in the printed text of the play published in 1912. Both the plays received extensive patronage over the next 50 years.

According to one important source, even *Rukmini Kalyanam*²² was prepared in the same manner, when Bollareddy Kotireddy, a landlord of Ganapavaram near Mylavaram requested Venkataramaiah to perform his play. The troupe went there to practise the play with the author present during all the rehearsals. The troupe usually contained Chinta Ventaramaiah, Hari Chalapathi, Chinta Audinarayana and Neelachalam from Nangigadda, their first mridangist. (He was the chief mridangist of many Nangigadda Devadasi-s who were taught by Chinta Venkataramaiah and other Kuchipudi gurus). Sri Pasumarthi Venkateswarlu, a grandson of Venkataramaiah, stayed with the team to accompany them on harmonium. Later joined Mahankali Subba Rao who stayed with the team for a long time.

It looked as though that all the plays were selected by Venkataramaiah because they contained several theatrical elements in them; with varying degrees of hero-villain conflict. The bad characters rave and rant with rhythmic thumping to be finally outwitted by innocent youngsters. Only *Harischandra* had a different format, but it is a play which had earned popularity in the mainstream theatre even by 1905, when almost every professional theatre group was performing the play. The Kuchipudi exponents, while retaining the popular poems of Balijepalli

Laxmikantham, added a couple of *daruvus* to Nakshatraka, which became popular in the rural areas.

'Bhakti' or 'Rakti' seems to be the central motif of all these plays. While *Prahlada*, *Rukmangada* and *Harischandra* belong to the first category, *Usha*, *Sasirekha* and *Rukmini Kalyanam* belong to the second. *Gayopakhyanam* and *Rama Natakam* had other component that attracted the audience, popular 'verbal - duel.' Both the *padyams* and *daruvus* used in them are teasingly exhilarating!

As in all professional groups that undertake frequent tours, the Chinta troupe also indulged in type - casting. It is safe since the Melams had a *taamasa* character - a *rajasa* character, a *hasya* character, a child character, a woman-character and *Saantha* (rishi) character. Each character has a special make-up system. The rishi characters wore white facial makeup and white beards with ochre coloured clothes. The *taamasa* characters had red as a dominant colour and the *rajasa* characters blue and yellow.

Chinta as a Teacher

Chinta's work with the actors was both friendly and authoritative. While teaching, this guru was the very symbol of friendship - understanding and felicitous. During performance one saw the other side of him - a strict and punishing disciplinarian! As a guru, he had two qualities that befriended him to the disciples. One was his overbearing attitude of friendship. He would be more a friend than a teacher. He would cajole an iridescent boy, talk to him about nice things and try to convince him about a point he is making. Since all the boys lived around his house, he would go to their houses in the dead of the night, wake the unwilling sleepy boys up to teach them a series of *adavus* or *mudras* that he had forgotten that morning or he thought of at that moment! This attitude of reaching out to the



Mahankali Satyanarayana as Banasura
(in a *taamasa* role)

sishtyas at odd hours was favourably reported not only by his students, but also from his daughter-in-law herself.

Another solicitous quality in him as a teacher was that he wouldn't go further in the lessons until a disciple got the required effect to his satisfaction either in the dialogue or song, the movement or the gestures or in the emoting of *bhavas*. Though the disciples were unhappy about their teacher's "stubbornness" as they called it when they were learning - now they remember the memorable days and agree that if not for such a task master, they would not have learnt. "Perfection" was his aim.

From 1876 to 1890, which was Chinta's apprentice period, he learnt much from his environs, from the world at large, but mainly from his own troupe members. If Hari Madhavaiah stood as a tower of strength by his side, Vedantam Chalapati and his own brother Audinarayana and Yeleswarapu Ramakrishnayya were always with him to give him advice, assurance and comfort. Later, when he came on to his own, when he was recognized and honoured, he took the group along with him. He always claimed that it was a combined effort and a combined success as he would call.

Honours came his way unsought. The Challapalli, Muktyala, Rachur and Nuzivid zamindars honoured him with *ganda penderam* and *simha talatam*. The Kanchi Kama Koti Peethadhipathi Sri Sankaracharya, while travelling from Kollur to Machilipatnam travelled via Kuchipudi, ordered for a performance of *Bhamakalapam* and honoured him with the title "Natya Samrat".²³

The eight Yakshaganas that brought the Chinta vari Melam universal recognition and approbation were extolled for their musical and rhythmical perfection. Each character's own *vachika*-rendering and singing attracted the learned and the knowledgeable. These, along with character portrayal and the expression of the proper emotions were the key to their success.

Chinta Venkataramaiah's troupe used to perform all their plays at a stretch for 15 days. The itinerary would be as follows : *Bhamakalapam* (one night), *Prahlada* (3 nights), *Sasirekha Parinayam* (1night), *Rama Natakam* (2 nights), *Usha Parinayam* (2 nights), *Harischandreeyam* (2 nights) *Mohini Rukmangada* (2 nights), *Gaya Natakam* (1 night) and finally *Golla Kalapam* (1 night). Several village festivals invited the troupe to perform 2 or 3 plays at a time.

Each play has its own scheme of writing as well as its performance strategies. For example, *Prahlada* was performed for 3 nights, but it was also staged for one

night. The plays performed between 1896 and 1936 were numerous and required the participation of young and old in Kuchipudi. There were at least four generations of actors that were trained by Venkataramaiah and almost everyone participated in his plays in one role or the other. It might be difficult to give all the names of people that so participated, but a list of the major participants may be tentatively drawn:

Let us enumerate some major qualities in these Yakshaganas that attracted the attention of both the elite and the common audience:

The Textual Qualities :

1. Themes chosen are from popular epics - Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagavatha. Some of them are already popular in the mainstream theatre.
2. There is a well-knit story and a large variety of characters, dissimilar to each other. There is an overpowering demon or a strong, yet unruly, character whose egoistic temperament faces defeat. The conflict itself is dramatic.
3. The plays have an enthusing admixture of metres to suit the diverse occasions. While *daruvu* is the usual form for all kinds of action-songs, there are *dwipadas* of various types: the *dwipadas* for narration are obvious. The *tera dwipadas* used in *Prahlada* and *Rama Natakam* are used before the first entry of the major character when he or she is still behind the curtain (hence 'tera' (curtain) 'dwipada', which are different from "tera daruvu-s" (curtain songs) which are popularly called "pravesa daruvus" - entry songs of a character.
4. The *daruvus*, set in popular Karanatic or Hindustani *ragas and talas*, consist of the five varieties of *dhruva gana-s* as purported by *Natyasastra*.
5. The variations in metres are sensibly used to serve the occasion and also to take the action further. Narrative metres like *seesa padyams* and *dwipadas* are judiciously fused with action songs like *daruvu-s*, and *kandardha-s*. The *sandhi - vachana-s*, which are connecting links either between two thought - units are between dialogues of two characters are in prose and are invariably 'recited'. Special metres like Bhujangaparayatam, Mattakokila, sloka, taivaram and dandakam are used to enhance the mood of the situation.

6. The plays aimed at 'total theatre,' with dance, music and dramatic elements in equal proportion.

Performative Qualities:

1. Each one is a well-knit performance, leading to such aesthetic pleasure that was not possible to achieve in any of the existing visual, performing art forms. It was a totally integrated performance. It was this quality that scholars praised in Kuchipudi Yakshaganas.
2. The *jatis* used, though occasionally, synchronise with the character's nature. *Uddhata* and *sringara* used varying types of *jatis*.²⁴
3. Singing was exceptionally good, intoning the necessary emotional fervour.
4. The characters sing and deliver the dialogues themselves which give an incomparable authenticity to the performance.
5. Songs are embedded in a perfectly classical mould, wherein the *raga* and the *tala* are in perfect synchronization with each other.
6. The diction is perfect. Dialect variation for characters other than the major characters is suitably developed. There are several rustic or village - based characters who speak different dialects. The major characters used a type of sanskritised diction with *Grandhika* verb endings which suited the mythological plays they were performing.
7. Humour is a major component in all the Yakshaganas. Though it does not run along with the story as in *Bhamakalapam*, which has an internal structure of 'alternating proposition' and 'stichomachia', the humour seen in the Yakshaganas belongs to all the three categories of "character humour, verbal humour and situational humour."
8. The *raga*, *bhava* and *tala* are character-specific and so their totality of impressional visual images are complemented by the literary images, thereby achieving a synthesis of the literary, the aural and the visual qualities.
9. Yakshagana and Venkataramaiah's Performance strategies

Kuchipudi Yakshagana's special attributes in performance strategies deserve to be studied. Among the several traditional modes they followed, one is

"mela prapti" - synchronizing all the instrumentalists with the singers as a finale of the *poorva ranga*. The Sutradhara, the main singer, the two pairs of cymbalists and the mridangist join together to achieve this synchronization. The singer recites *jatis* in *dhruta kalam* and the Sutradhara follows on cymbals. By the time the *jati* is finished and a *teermanam* is brought, the *poorvaranga* ritual is performed.

Another important musical rendering is "nritya pallavi" - taking the last one-fourth phrase in the last line of the *daruvu* which is made into a special rhythmic phrase and is transformed into what is popularly called "sabdam". Adding it with appropriate *jatis* and end the *daruvu* on a note of both *sabdam* and *jati* will result in the character's "situational emotion".

Several other special features like introducing of *jathis* between the *pravesa daruvu* and *sandhi vachanam* and to interchange the *tristra* and the *chaturasra jati* modulations are the *forte* of Chinta Venkataramaiah in providing dance music.

Having said this, one should look at the ways in which the team achieved this. Much of it depended on how Venkataramiah's own directorial abilities helped to build such a viable theatre group that specialized in a form to which they were new.

Chinta's major actors in four generations:²⁵

In a sense, Chinta is the most fortunate Kuchipudi *guru* in the last hundred years for he had illustrious *sishyas* to his credit. He groomed, in each generation, one or two able actors who would impersonate in female roles. The list is tentative, but will partly tell us why the Chinta vari Melam achieved such fame:

The 1st Generation actors

(in *Prahlada*)

Hiranya Kasipa	:	Hari Chalapati
Leelavati	:	Vedantam Chalapati
Prahlada	:	Vempati Chalamayya
Chandamarkulu	:	Chinta Venkataramaiah & Narayana Murthy
Sutradhara	:	Chinta Venkataramaiah
Pariparsvaka	:	Vedantam Ramaiah (Raghavaiah's father)
Vidushaka	:	Vedantam Janardanayya

Latter-day Prahlada-s are too numerous. But mention must be made of Vempati Paradesi, Chinta Audinarayana, Vedantam Raghavaiah, Chinta Rama Murthy

Laterday Hiranya Kasipa : Mahankali Satyanarayana

2nd generation :

Chinta Rama Murthy - lead female roles

Vempati Paradeshi,

Vedantam Ramakrishnayya &

Chinta Krishna Murthy - lead male roles

Chinta Audinarayana, Pasumathi Anjaneyulu, Pasumarthi Audinaryana - other male roles

Pasumarti Ramalingam - child roles



Chinta Krishnamurthy



Bokka Kumaraswamy

3rd generation:

Bokka Seetaramaiah

lead male role

Vedantam Raghavaiah

lead female roles

Chinta Seetaramanjaneyulu &

Darbha Venkateswvarlu

Humourous roles & male roles

Pasumarthi Kondalarayudu

Other male roles (especially "Harischandra")

Vedantam Prahlada Sarma

Other male & female roles (especially 'Seeta')

Pasumarthi Venkateswarlu

(specialist in Harmonium) other male roles



Standing : Burra Vijayaramaiah (mrudangist), Vedantam Sambaiah (Violinist), Mahankali Sriramulu, Pasumarti Venkateswarlu, Bhagavathula Narasimham, Chinta Radhakrishnamurthi (Female roles), Darbha Venkateswarlu; Middl Row : Pasumarti Anjaneyulu, Pasumarti Subrahmanyam, Chinta Adinarayana, Mahankali Satyanarayana, Chinta Krishnamurthi, Kothari Sreeramulu; Seated on the floor : Not identified, Bhavathula Seetaramaiah, Pasumarti Seetaramaiah, Chinta Seetaramanjaneyulu, not identified

Bhagavatula Ramakotaiah female roles

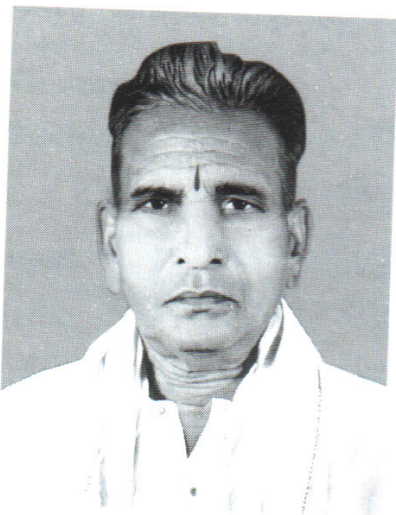
Bhagavatula Rajaiah

Bhagavatula Narasimham (in Kalapams) : female roles

PVG Krishna sarma child roles and later female roles

Chinta Rama murthy Leader & Sutradhari

Chinta Krishna Murthy Leader & Sutradhari



Vedantam Ramakrishnaiah



Darbha Venkateswarlu

4th generation

Pasumarti Subrahmanya Sastry & Lead female roles

Pasumarti Krishna Murthy

Mahankali Sriramulu &

Mahankali Satyanarayana male roles

Darbha Venkateswarlu

Mahankali Venkaiah tamasa roles

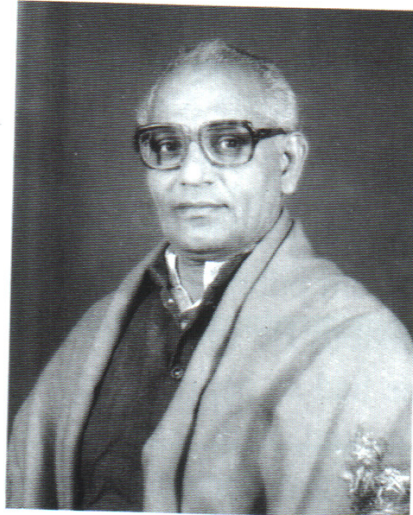
Pasumarti Rattaiah female roles

Chinta Krishna Murthy Sutradhara & leader

PVG Krishana Sarma Nattuvangam and singer



Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma



Mahankali Sriramulu



Vedantam Rattaiah Sarma

The group owes its success to several musicians in Kuchipudi for their guidance. Challapilla Seetharamiah and Yeleswarapu Seetharamanjaneyulu continuously trained actors in music. Several actors were simultaneously students of Chinta Venkataramaiah and Vempati Venkatanarayana, who excelled in *abhinaya*. Pasumarti Seetharamiah, himself a guru, accompanied the team as a harmonist. The 4th generation actors continued to perform even after Chinta's death. Venkatarama Natya Mandali continued the tradition with Chinta Krishna Murthy as the



Yeleswarapu Seetharamanjaneyulu

leader and PVG as a singer. In the next generation came Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma, Vedantam Rattiah Sarma, Mahankali Sreeramulu Sarma, Pasumarthi Rattayya and Darbha Venkateswarlu many of them continuing the tradition.

Last days of Chinta Venkataramaiah

When he retired from active performance schedule in 1936, Venkataramaiah was a satisfied man. He had done what no man had done in the knowledgeable past, except of course, Siddhendra Yogi and Bhagavatula Ramaiah. He had borrowed a wayward form, gave blood and bones to it and infused breath into it. He had prepared a set of competent actors and singers to carry it further. He received laurels and honours. The honours given to him by the Kanchi Kamakoti Peethadhipati filled him with gratitude. Andhra Nataka Kala Parishad, the premiere theatre organization honoured him in 1935, with P.V. Rajamannar and Gudavalli Ramabrahmam leading the team. They also requested him to present *Usha Parinayam*, with him as the Sutradhara and Vedantam Raghavaiah as Usha. The occasion was memorable. In spite of these honours, he remained a simple man.

Venkataramaiah called it a day 1936 and completely stopped performing in 1940. He slowly withdrew from public life and would only explain things if his disciples came with some doubts. He spent his time in singing to himself the texts of the eight Yakshaganas he had so assiduously prepared. He would particularly recite songs from *Prahlada* and, with tears in his eyes call for Narasimha, the Lord : "Narsimha ! Lord ! My Protector! Take me to you." With those words on his lips, he passed away on Jan.6, 1949.²⁶

Chinta was a far - sighted man, not only with regard to the art form, but also in his family affairs. He treated his sons as his friends and never uttered a harsh word against them. Though the sons were quite accommodative, their wives developed misunderstandings. There was talk of setting up separate family units. The news reached ailing Chinta. He called for the three sons, the eldest having died sometime ago. He told them that they should not think of separating until his death. He had only a few days to live. He wanted them to be together until the first anniversary. He called upon them to celebrate the occasion for three days with a play every evening. The plays chosen by him were *Prahlada*, *Usha Parinayam* and *Rama Natakam*. The sons promised him that they would oblige and did so accordingly.

The three-day festival was a memorable event not only because the entire village was remembering Chinta, but also because the occasion sparked off thoughts

about starting a school for Kuchipudi, a pride of the village. Further, Venkatarama Natya Mandali, a proud possession of Kuchipudi had its origins in the celebrations and the resultant transformation of "Chinta Vari Melam" into the Mandali.

Such was the serene ending of a creative and purposeful life. Venkatarama Natya Mandali²⁷, the one Chinta started in 1876 (with its name as Chinta Vari Melam) continues to flourish even after 130 years. Meanwhile, fifth generation and sixth generation artists are at the centre of Kuchipudi performing tradition. Will they keep up the aspirations of that founder - patriarch or simmer away like the last flames of an extinguishing light? Yakshagana in its classical mould as designed by Chinta had great potential. It is the only classical Natya Mela form in the country which, very appropriately, made the acting character sing and dance. Do we safeguard that tradition? Will the Kuchipudi Kalakshetra, now under the aegis of the Telugu University, remember the need to preserve such a noble and inspiring art form? It is time that all the practitioners and patrons sit together to at least start a **repertory** of talented youngsters (and there are many) under the guidance of a guru (and there are very very few) before it is too late. Our friends from outside Andhra teasingly ask us: "Is Yakshagana on the exit?" If the answer is 'Yes', we are responsible for it. If the answer is 'No', we will have to prove it. Let good sense prevail over the lords that rule us and our art!!

Chinta Venkataramaiah's contribution

If one would like to assess the major attributes of Chinta Venkataramaiah to be called a "Guru's Guru," "Yakshagana Kala Samrat", a builder of an organization in which every Kuchipudi dancer- actor was a member at one time or the other and leader of exceptional brilliance, he would be wonder-struck as to the breadth of his activity, the depth of Venkataramaiah's knowledge and the heights of his achievement.

Ideal teacher

Chinta Venkataramaiah will be long remembered as the architect of the Yakshagana tradition in Kuchipudi and also the architect of the Chinta Vari Melam, which, immediately after his demise, became Venkatarama Natya Mandali, thus making this group as the oldest living troupe of classical Kuchipudi dance - from 1876 to the presentday. It is no exaggeration to say that there was no Kuchipudi dancer-actor that was not his disciple!

Chinta, as a teacher, was exceedingly kind to his students and understanding. But he was also a strict disciplinarian when it came to performances.

He would coax and cajole a boy rather than abuse him or insult him or punish him.

In order to make a point clear to his student, there was no time and place restrictions. He would go in the dead of the night, wake the boy up and correct his *abhinaya*²⁸ (if he went wrong during learning).

He treated his sishyas as friends and shared with them the joys and sorrows of his profession.

He made the open space before his tiny thatched shed, his teaching place (he would joke about it as his 'palace'). There he would sit, cross-legged, with a small wooden block and another stick to beat the rhythm.

Expertise in Choreography

Perhaps to use the word "Choreography" with regard to pre-modern gurus is an anachronism since the word was not in vogue at the time. Chinta would not fit into the category of a director either, for he was doing much more than that. The German word 'Dramaturg' would suit him better. However, he was called, by one and all, the Nayakudu (leader) of the performing troupe. Since all his actors went through rigorous training with him, he is a leader - teacher. As a man incharge of pre-production and production elements he was the supreme authority. He edited the text; allowed incorporations, substitutions and additions. He interpreted the characters; set the characters in motion. He was also responsible for their emotional rendering of dialogues; he was virtually incharge of all the aspects of *abhinaya* as of the entire production.

3. Versatile Actor

Venktaramaiah was an actor of high calibre. He started his career as Bhama, excelled in portraying the nuances in *padams*; was perfect in *laya* in *tarangam* enunciation; his dialogue delivery, as they say, was immaculate.

When he took up the job of producing Yakshaganas he was satisfied with the Sainly roles - those of Narada, Valmiki, Chandamarka, Vasishta and so on. This was because his troupe consisted of excellent actor - singer - dancers who fitted

better in major male and female roles. Besides, he could not spend so much time doing a major role since he had to look after the production.

But the humour in Chandamarka, the suppressed anger of Vasista and the serene nature of Valmiki and the sublime humour of Narada - he brought them all out with finesse.

4. Personal charisma and amiability

Venkataramaiah's directorial skills and expert handling of his actors are often outweighed by his personal endearing qualities. He befriended everyone. His loving and caring enquiries themselves won for him half his battle. He would call all the youngsters *taata* (grandfather). He would call all others with a pet name "Jakka" - a pet name he invented. Even in public contacts, this personal approach gave wonderful dividends. If he were staying for months together in someone's house performing in the nearby villages, he should make friends with the inmates of the house. But when he left the people in the house were in tears, requesting him to come back as early as possible. This is reported from Kollur, a village in Guntur district and such instances were many.

5. Chinta : A natural leader

Chinta could ask anyone to take a role - all with a smile on his face; never effacing - as though he was asking for a favour.

He wielded such power because he was all the time ready to share his expertise; was never greedy; shared equally with the others, intellectually and materialistically.

He was also a natural leader, artistically speaking. He saw the need for Kuchipudi to change. He wanted that everyone should go with him. When once the dream came true, he made every member a part of the enterprise. The system of sharing the remuneration money tells us how he was willing to give more to others than receiving.

6. Public acceptance as the key to success

Chinta played for his audience. After each performances, he would call his actors and discuss with them the pitfalls of a production and never grudging to alter his script or rearrange it for the sake of his audience.

His motto in life has always been: "we pay back to our benefactors (spectators or patrons) more than what they give. Only that way, they will be in debt to us and not we to them."

7. A "Complete" artist and director

Chinta was a man of many parts, all amalgamated in perfect symmetry. A short man in stature, he was taller than many contemporary artists because of his humility and humanity; because he knew what he was doing and what was expected of him.

His insistence on clear and perfect diction and on the need to emote properly was due to the fact that he was himself a great actor and he knew the demands and nuances in each character's portrayal. His sense of "proportion" was superb. By intuition, he knew what fitted where.

A superb artist, an incomparable teacher, a man with a vision - personal as well as his community's, founder of a multi-nuanced theatre tradition, Chinta Venkataramiah is a synonym for "completeness". His contribution to Kuchipudi art is so worthwhile that he was rightly called "Natya Samrat" - only next to Siddhendra Yogi and perhaps Bhagavathula Ramaiah.

Let all lovers of Kuchipudi pay their homage to this illustrious son of the land, who made Telugu people proud by his devoted contribution to the art of dance and remember that a fitting tribute to him will only be to uphold his ideals and to help the practitioners of Yakshagana to continue the tradition with the same professional zeal and perfection as Guru Chinta Venkataramaiah practised it for six decades.

Acknowledgements

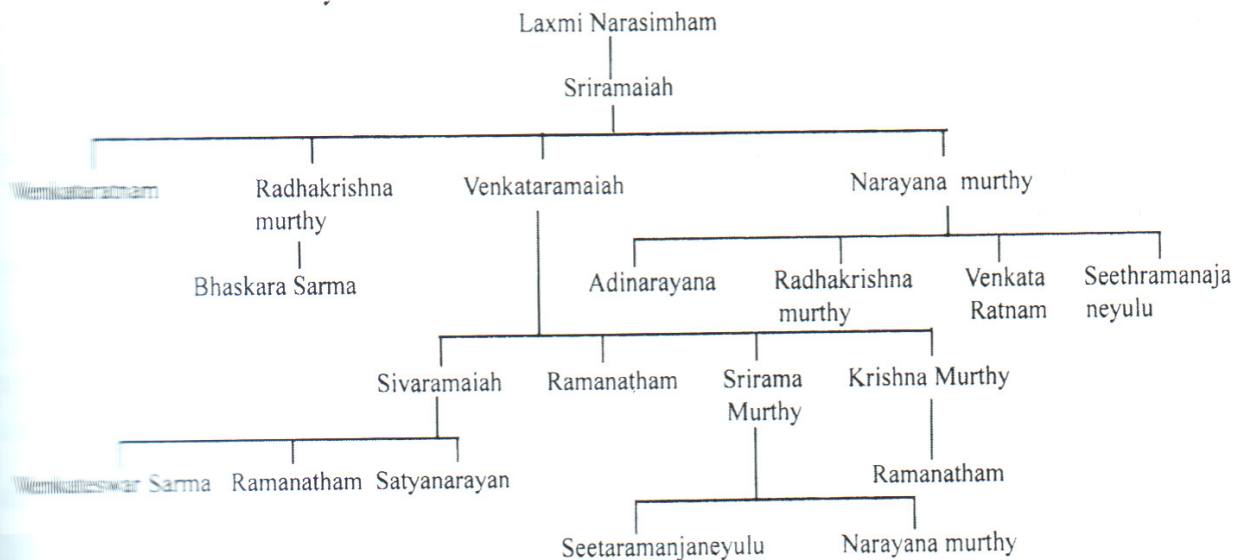
The Author is indebted to Sri Pasumarti Venkateswarlu (95), Chinta Venkataramaiah's grandson (son of Chinta's second daughter) for giving several important details of Chinta's life and work. He was the son of Pasumarti Ramaiah, a life-long associate of Chinta, both on stage and off stage. He was with his grandfather for over 12 years travelling with the Melam. He was a harmonist and accompanied the team during the first decades of the 20th c. He later left dance to become a postmaster. In his last years he came back to Kuchipudi and now resides at Kuchipudi. The interview was taken on 28th and 29th, Dec., 2007 at Kuchipudi.

The author is also indebted to Smt. Chinta Seetaramamma, daughter-in-law of Chinta Venkataramaiah and wife of Chinta Krishna Murthy. Her valuable information on the familial life of the father and the son is very useful.

Thanks are also due to Sri PVG Krishna Sarma and to Sri Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma for information on Chinta's training methods

Notes:

1. This equialence of *koodu*, *gudda* and *needa* to the three artistic needs of *bhava*, *raga*, and *tala* was Venkataramaiah's favourite analogy. *Interview with Vedantam Prahlada Sarma*, on 8th June, 1988 at Eluru.
2. Venkataramaiah used to call his small thatched house as "my palace". He enjoyed sitting on the threshold of the Verandah, teaching the students, who sit on the "nadi veedehi", (centre of the road) the road before his house. Mentioned in the "Interview with Sri Pasumarti Venkateswarlu" and Interview with Smt Chinta Seethamma both recorded on 28-12-2007 and 29-12-2007 at Kuchipudi.
3. Hari Madhavayya (1854-1918) was born to Peramma and Sriramulu and known as a prodigy. Innovative and dashing, he was himself a superb performer, besides inspiring several youngsters in the field. He taught Chinta Venkataratnam, elder brother of Venkataramaiah, who took over the leadership of "Hari Vari Melam" for sometime. It is misconstrued by may scholars that he brought the Yakshaganam form to Kuchipudi. He, of course, was the first influenced by it and made the Chinta vari Melam adopt Hari Madhavaiah was the inspiration behind it.
4. The Chinta Family Tree:



5. The story is based on hearsay because of lack of evidences. Chintalapati Laxminarasimha Sastry attributes to Hari Madhavaiah the credit of adopting the yakshagana form. See his *Kuchipudi Bhagavatulu*, 1983, pp. 274-275. Anuradha Jonnalagadda follows this account and Arudra's to say that Madhavayya toured extensively and was influenced by Melattur Kasinathayya and Venkatarama Sastry's yakshaganas. See her *Kuchipudi Dance : Who is Who*, 1993. p. 58. I have followed the eye witness account who was present when the history was being made. No records are available to prove either this or that account creditably. Also see, Arudra : Samagra Andhra Sahityamu, Vol VII, 1990 : pp 399-401.
6. Though early records mention that only Vedala Tiru Narayanacharya's *Prahlada* is taken up for production, Vedantam Pravateesam was sure that the Kuchipudi *Prahlada* was based on two texts, i.e. Vedala Tiru Narayanacharya's and Tiruvalikkeli Ramanujacharyulu's. See his *Prahlada Natakamu* (1981) p ii.
7. See for details of the relationship between Jakkula Katha and Yakshaganam, S.V. Joga Rao, *Andhra Yakshagana Vamgmaya Charitra*, 1961. PP. 27-31
8. Srinatha's use of the compound word "Yakshagana" occurs in his *Bheemeswara Puranam*, III Aswasa, 65
9. My theory is based on the analogy of a worldwide phenomenon of the evolution of classical art from simple to complex forms. History also tells us that in the initial stages Yakshagana was a single person's singing of a story. "Harikatha", a single man's dramatic narration of a story was termed by the maestro Adibhatla Narayana Das., as "Yakshagana". Naturally, the one - actor narration grows into actor - questioner duo's (Samvada) explication of a theme in a systematized argumentation. But, when a story is to be visually presented - not merely an explication of an idea - the Yakshagana as a dramatic mode evolved.
10. For the early history of Yakshagana, see S.V. Joga Rao, *Op.cit*
11. The contribution of the Nayaka and Martha kings to the art of Yakshagana is discussed elaborately by Dr.S. Seetha in her authoritative work, *Tanjore as a Seat of Music*, Univ. of Madras, 1981.
12. After the fall of the Maratha Kingdom, patronage for Yakshagana dwindled and enthusiastic amateur groups in villages continued it in their own rustic way.
13. Side by side with the Court Theaters, rural theatre groups which were largely amateur and local, gradually got themselves formulated into caste-based performing groupes.
14. That Chinta Venkataramiah produced three more plays was suggested by Chinta Ramandham, in his book *Kuchipudi Kalasagaram*, 1994, P. 54.
15. The Ms. of the text is not available.

16. While there are five Rukmini Kalyanam-s in Yakshagana format written during 1890 and 1926, we are not certain whose work is taken up by the Kuchipudi Melam. While the authorship was attributed to the former by Chinta Ramanatham, my present version was based on my Interview with Pasumarthi Venkateswarlu. He says that he was with the camp in 1914 during the rehearsals.
17. *Harischandreeyam*, a 2-night performance of the Kuchipudi group achieved popularity in later years. This was a favourite play of the Melam especially after Vedantam Raghavaiah left for cinema and the Melam was yet to get an actor proficient in doing female roles. In those "lean" years, *Harischandra* was popular.
18. These dates are controversial. The year 1896 is a tentative one. I presume the play must have had its premiere by about 1886-87 since by 1899, it already had several performances to its credit. See *Andhra Patrika*: Tummalapalli Seetharama Rao's article "Kuchipudi Bhagavathula Melam", July 15, 1956.
19. A detailed study is to be made on the modalities followed by the Guru in formulating a "performance text".
20. References to Yogi Ramaiah are made by Bh.L. Narasimham's manuscript article, "Yakshagana Pitamaha Sri Chinta Venkataramaiah". The author has kindly sent me a copy of the article.
21. Bokka Kumara Swamy (1912-?), son of Ramalaxmi and Sitaramayya, was a student of Varanasi Brahmayya in Karnatic Music and of Chinta Venkataramaiah in Yakshagana music. It was said he was an asset to Venkatarama Natya Mandali. That he started scoring music from *Mohini Rukmangada* on wards was referred to by Pasumarti Venkateswarlu in his interview.
22. Interview with Pasumarti Venkateswarlu.
23. The title is mentioned in *Andhra Patrika*, Jan. 14, 1949.
24. The *jati* formulations and their use as winding up tonalities of character - songs in Kuchipudi are to be studied from the point of view of a shift from the folk to the classical. A detailed discussion of the metrical forms used in Yakshaganas and their dramatic relevance was earlier done by Vedantam Prahlada Sarma. His interview recorded on 8.6.1988.
25. The list should include every dance - actor in Kuchipudi as everyone who look to dance between 1890-1936 was a disciple of Venkataramaiah. This is only a select list of some notable performers - generation-wise. See for another list of actors play-wise, published in this issue.
26. Obituary published in *Andhra Patrika*, Jan.,14, 1949. Smt. Chinta Seethamma, his daughter-in-law, vividly described these last days of Venkataramaiah with great feeling.

27. It is obvious that the Chinta Vari Melam, the combined Melam of three individual family groups was started as early as 1876 when Venkataramaiah took over the leadership. Venkatarama Natya Mandali, of which Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma is the present president, is a continuation of the Melam with a changed name, the change occurred to commemorate Chinta's contribution.
28. This is corroborated both by Chinta Seethamma and PVG Krishna Sarma.



Venkatarama Natyamandali's *Ramanatakam*

Major actors in the plays during the last 100 years:

Prahlada

Chinta Venkataramaiah (Sutradhara & Narada),

Hari Chalapati, Mahankali Sriramulu, Mahankali Satyanarayana (Hiranya Kasipa),

Vedantam Chalapati (Leelavati),

Vempati Chalamaiah, Vempati Paradesi, Chinta Audinarayana (Prahlada);

Vedantam Ramaiah (Pariparsvaka),

Vedantam Janardanayya (Vidushaka),

Mahankali Subba Rao (Narada)

Pasumarti Anjaneyulu, Mahankali Venkayya(Chandamarka)

Usha Parinayam

Hari Chalapati, Mahankali Sriramulu, Mahankali Satyanarayana, Hari Punnaiah, Vedantam Rattaiah Sarma, Mahankali Subba Rao (Banasura)

Vedantam Raghavaiah, Chinta Radhakrishna Murthy, Chinta Seetharamanjaneyulu, Pasumarthi Krishna Murthy, Vendantam Satyanarayana Sarma (Usha),

Vedantam Prahlada Sarma, Vedantam China Raghavaiah, Pasumarthi Rattaiah Sarma (Chitralkha)

Bokka Seetharamaiah, Pasumarti Ramu, Chinhta Krishna Murthy, Mahankali Sriramulu Sarma (Anirudha)

Chinta Rama Murthy and Krishna Murthy (Sutradhara & Pariparsvaka)

Rama Natakam

Vedantam Ramakrishnayya, Chinta Krishna Murthy (Rama)

Chinta Krishna Murthy, Darbha Venkateswarlu, Pasumarti Kondala

Rayudu (Laxmana)

Pasumarthi Krishna Murthy, Bhagavathula Ramakotaiah (Lava-Kusa)

Chinta Venkataramaiah, Chinta Audinarayana (Valmiki)

Vedantam Prahlada Sarma, Vedantam Raghavaiah, Chinta Rama Murthy,
Vedantam Prahlada Sarma (Seeta)

Mahankali Subba Rao, Pasumarthi Audinarayana (Boatmen,
washermen)

Mohini Rukmangada

Bokka Seetharamaiah, Chinta Audinarayana, Chinta Krishna Murthy,
Mahankali Sreeramulu Sarma (Rukmangada)

Vedantam Raghavaiah, Chinta Audinarayana, Bhagavathula
Ramakotaiah, Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma (Mohini)

Hari Punnaiah, Mahankali Satyanarayana (Yama Dharamaraja)

Darbha Venkateswarlu (Chitragupta)

Pasumarti Krishna Murthy, Bhagavathula Ramakotaiah (Dharmangada)

Pasumarti Ramaiah (Brahma)

Chinta Rama Murthy, Chinta Krishna Murthy (Sutradhara),

PVG Krishna Sarma (Pariparsvaka)

Harischandreeyam

Vedantam Ramakrishnaya, Pasumarti Kondlarayudu, Chinta Krishna
Murthy (Harischandra)

Vedantam Raghavaiah, Chinta Radhakrishna Murthy, Pasumarti
Subrahmanya Sastry, Vedantam Prahlada Sarma (Chandramati)

Chinta Krishna Murthy, Darbha Venkateswarlu, Kothari Sreeramulu,
Pasumarti Audinarayana (Nakshatraka)

Mahankali Venkaiah, Chinta Audinarayana, Kavuri Srirama Murthy,
Mahankali Peda Venkaiah (Kala Kausika or Vasishta)

Bhagavathula Ramakotaiah, Pasumarti Venkateswarlu (Kalahakanthi)
Pasumarti Krishna Murthy, Bhagavathula Ramakotaiah, Chinta
Seetharamanjaneyulu, PVG Krishna Sarma (Matanga Kanyas)
Hari Chalapati, Bhagavathula Laxminarasimham, Mahankali
Satyanarayana (Viswamitra)
Mahankali Satyanarayana, Bhagavathula Laxmi Narasimham, Vedantam
Rattayya Sarma (Veerabahu)

Sesirekha Parinayam

Vedantam Raghavaiah, Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma (Sasirekha)
Bokka Seetharamayya, Mahankali Sriramulu Sarma (Abhimanya)
Hari Punnayya, Mahankali Satyanarayana (Ghatotkacha)

Gaya Natakam

Chinta Krishna Murthy, Mahankali Sriramulu Sarma (Sri Krishna)
Bokka Seetharamaiah, Pasumarti Kondala Rayudu (Arjuna)
Pasumarti Kondala Rayudu, Kavuri Srirama Murthy (Gaya)
Pasumarti Krishna Murthy, Pasumarti Subrahmanya Sastry (Chitrarekha)

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