

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book began as a string of paradoxical and aporetic thoughts around the question of the disappearance of *devadāsīs* from the public life of modern South India. Over a decade ago, I was fortunate to encounter two women—R. Muttukkannammal and Kotipalli Hymavathi—who helped me understand both the complexities and poignancy of women's realities in these communities, and in a very tangible way, forged pathways for the creation of this book. R. Muttukkannammal of Viralimalai in Tamilnadu has shown me limitless affection, openness, and generosity. She has also been a teacher in the fullest possible sense. It was at the home of Kotipalli Hymavathi in Muramanda, Andhra Pradesh, with the blessings of her ailing mother, the late Kotipalli Manikyam, and her sister Kotipalli Sitaramalakshmi (Satyavati), that my work with women on the Telugu-speaking *kalāvantula* communities began. Hymavathi *akka's* wit, humor, and self-reflexivity run through large portions of this work. As a very small token of my immense gratitude and respect, I dedicate this book to them.

This book would not exist without the contribution of two other individuals: Dr. B. M. Sundaram and Voleti Rangamani. Dr. Sundaram, one of the most generous intellectuals I have ever known, has quite literally “held my hand,” guiding me through the dense and often overwhelming amount of cultural and historical data that constitutes the substance of this book. His profound understanding of the history and technique of music and dance in South India is simply unmatched and has never ceased to bewilder me. Dr. Sundaram has also welcomed me into his family, and his nurturing and highly sensitive presence permeates the pages of this book.

My work in Andhra Pradesh would not have been possible without the help, guidance, and warmth of Voleti Rangamani, daughter of the late

C. R. Acharyalu, himself a student of Andhra's courtesan dancers in the early twentieth century. Rangamani *akka* was technically what one could call my "field assistant," but this title by no means does justice to her contribution. For months, she traveled in the Godavari River delta with me and Kotipalli Hymavathi, giving much of her precious time and knowledge for a project to which she remained deeply committed. I am extremely grateful to her for all her help, and for the numerous personal sacrifices I know she made over the course of our fieldwork.

In Muramanda, I was fortunate to meet former members of the late Kotipalli Manikyam's *mēḷam* (troupe), including Kotipalli Somasundaram, Eluru Lakshakasulu, Kotipalli Rajahamsa, and Nayudu Chilakamma. I developed a very close relationship with the late Saride Anusuya, the late Saride Seshachalam, Saride Varahalu, and Saride Mythili (Duvva, West Godavari district), and I thank the women of this family for their passionate and highly erudite self-reflections. I also worked with the late Maddula Venkataratnam, a master artist, for months just before she passed away, and learned a tremendous amount from her improvised performances. Along with Maddula Ramatulasi, I watched for hours and hours as Venkataratnam performed dance and music compositions in the village of Tatipaka, and those are memories that will forever be etched in my mind.

I would like to offer my respectful thanks to the following women in coastal Andhra who openly shared their experiences with me in the most generous and gracious manner: Maddula Mohana, daughter of the late Maddula Lakshminarayana and her family (Manepalli), and the late Saride Manikyamma, along with K. Rukmini, K. Nagamani (Kapileswarapuram), Maddula Janakamma (Manepalli), Anvala Suryakantam, Duggirala Satyavati, Garlanka Pani, Kotipalli Sarasvati, Pendyala Gaggavati, and Pendyala Satyavati (Mandapeta), the late Kola Subrahmanyam and her family (Bommur, outside Rajahmundry), Eluru Krishnaveni (Rajahmundry), and Jakula Radha (Peddapuram).

The following individuals have also helped me understand the complexities of *kalāvantula* performance in the Godavari delta over the years, and I am sincerely grateful for their time and intellectual generosity: Medinti Achyutaramayya, *hāsyā-pātra* artist and singer (Gannavaram), K. Narasimhacharyulu (Vaikhānasa Ācārya, Kuntīmādhava Temple, Pithapuram), P. Purushottamacharyalu (Vaikhānasa Ācārya, Madanagopālasvāmi temple, Ballipadu), the late Arudra (Bhagavatula Sankara Sastri), Nataraja Ramakrishna (Hyderabad), Swapnasundari (New Delhi), and V. A. K. Ranga Rao (Chennai).

I wish to thank the following women from Tamilnadu whose expres-

sions flow in tacit ways through this book: Shanta, granddaughter of the late Subbammal (Pudukkottai); Kumbhakonam Gomati and her family (Oraiyyur); Vaideesvarankoyil Kanakambujam and her family (Chidambaram); Thiruvidaïmarudur N. Rajalakshmi (Coimbatore); and Nagalakshmi (Thiruvidaïmarudur).

I owe a great debt to the late N. Visvanathan, Telugu Pandit at the Sarasvati Mahal Library in Thanjavur, for his guidance and tutelage in Telugu over many years. I am also deeply grateful to the late Thanjavur K. P. Kittappa Pillai; his son, K. P. K. Chandrasekaran; and their family, for allowing me to share in the artistic heritage of the Tanjore Quartet.

In India, the following friends and colleagues have extended much of their time, hospitality, and warmth: S. Babaji Bhonsle Chattrapati (Senior Prince of Thanjavur), Sunil Kothari (Delhi), and Mrinalini and Mallika Sarabhai (Ahmedabad). Ranvir and Nandi Shah, in particular, have looked after me like family in Chennai for over a decade. They have also provided much-needed moral support, and I am indebted to them.

In North America, my work has been inspired and mentored by two individuals to whom I am deeply indebted. Indira Viswanathan Peterson has been a source of inspiration but also a close friend and guide. Her incisive work on colonial modernity in South India and her deep knowledge of multiple languages and literary contexts has played no small part in my own development as scholar, and I am very grateful for the care and rigor with which she has helped me understand so many dimensions of South Indian cultural history. Leslie Orr, whose work on temple women in the Cōla inscriptional record has directly impacted the deep questions of *devadāsī* historiography, has played the role of confidante and advisor for well over a decade. Leslie's presence in Montreal has brought much joy to the study of South India in our local context, and I am grateful for the stability and support she has brought to my work. In Montreal, I also wish to thank Katherine K. Young, under whose watchful and nurturing eye the roots of many of the ideas I engage in this book first emerged when I was a Ph.D. student.

Velcheru Narayana Rao, a visionary scholar, has, from a distance, inspired much of this work. His own work on South Indian literary and cultural history prompted me to take the study of Telugu seriously, and over the years, our conversations about *kalāvantula* women in the Telugu-speaking regions have contributed immensely to the ideas I have tried to develop in this book.

The research for this book has been generously supported by grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and

Fonds québécois de la recherche sur la société et la culture. I am also grateful to the following institutions and individuals for their support: the British Library (London), the Victoria and Albert Museum (London), Sri Veeraghavan and the Sarasvati Mahal Library (Thanjavur), and G. Sundar and the Roja Muthiah Research Library (Chennai).

I am extremely grateful to the editors of the South Asia Across the Disciplines Series, Sheldon Pollock, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, for their support of this work, and to the anonymous readers at the University of Chicago Press for their insightful comments. I also thank the staff at the University of Chicago Press, T. David Brent, Laura Avey, Priya Nelson, Maia Rigas, and Carol Saller, for their patience, guidance, and good spirits throughout the production of this book.

Earlier versions of chapters of this book have been presented at invited lectures, seminars, workshops, and conferences in India, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. I thank those who have given me the benefit of their insights on those occasions. Many of these colleagues have continued to be important interlocutors and well-wishers, and I remain grateful to them for our ongoing conversations: Yigal Bronner, Brenda Cantelo, Vasudha Dalmia, Richard Davis, Sascha Ebeling, Kathryn Hansen, Jack Hawley, George and Kauslaya Hart, Steven Hopkins, Robert Hueckstedt, Gene Irschick, Anuradha Jonnalagadda, Padma Kaimal, Philip Lutgendorf, Amelia Maciszewski, Vasudha Narayanan, Regula Qureshi, Himanshu Prabha Ray, Sumathi Ramaswamy, Kristin Rudisill, Adheesh Sathaye, Anna Schultz, David Shulman, Joanne Waghorne, and Margaret Walker.

When I was a teenaged, overzealous student of Karnāṭak music, I came across Saskia Kersenboom's *Nityasumaṅgalī: Devadāsī Tradition in South India*, which undeniably shaped the trajectory of my entire professional life. To Saskia I owe much—not only for her pathfinding work on *devadāsīs*, but also for her support, warmth, and friendship over a decade and a half, and for our conversations that took place across North America, Europe, and India. I wish to acknowledge my colleagues who have worked on many of the issues surrounding *devadāsīs* that have both informed and challenged my ideas over the years: Matthew Allen, Joep Bor, Sudha Jagannath, Kay Jordan, Douglas Knight, Tiziana Leucci, Avanthi Meduri, Janaki Nair, Srividya Natarajan, Amrit Srinivasan, Lakshmi Subramanian, and Priyadarshini Vijaisri. I wish to thank Janet O'Shea in particular for her sustained and stimulating conversations, and for her friendship and support.

I am grateful to my students, friends, and colleagues in Canada—Lisa Blake, Lara Braitstein, Mohini Datta-Ray, Sujata Ghosh, Meera Kachroo,

Shahin Parhami, Tanisha Ramachandran, Shital Sharma, Chetan Soni, and Elena Young, especially for those “okay, let’s talk about something other than *devadāsīs*” moments. I also thank Archana Venkatesan and Layne Little for their long-standing friendship and support of this research.

The always-forgiving, boundless love and energy of my parents Minal and Ranjit Soneji and my sister Sarita have raised my spirits under the most trying circumstances. Their love has supported me in ways that lie far beyond words.

Finally, I owe my utmost gratitude to Hari Krishnan and Rajavairan Rajendran (“Rex”)—my closest friends and surrogate family—whose overall support, warmth, patience, criticisms, good humor, and love have been invaluable in sustaining me through the ups and downs of this project, and of life in general. Hari Krishnan’s intellectual and artistic camaraderie has supported me for almost two decades, and in so many ways, this research could not be sustained without him.

