

4. Making Caste in Nineteenth-Century India: A History of Telling the *Bobbili Katha* and Velama Identity

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Accounts of the siege of Bobbili in South India, which took place in 1757 C.E., agree on precious few points. ¹ All of them, however, acknowledge that after the combined forces of the French troops under the Marquis de Bussy and the army of the Rajah of Vizianagaram had laid waste to the walls of the citadel and subdued those soldiers venturing forth from the fort to contest the onslaught, the victorious parties found almost no survivors remaining in the bastion. All women, children, and noncombatants inside had been martyred to prevent capture at the time of defeat. The gruesomeness seen in and the pride resulting from the martyrdom have kept the story in the telling. The story I am about to tell, however, is not one of military history. It is the story of how the recounting of that event — the siege and mass suicide — in the form of the *Bobbili Katha* (the "Story of Bobbili") ultimately came to reflect new understandings of the character of the caste of people who over time became associated with that martyrdom. The Rajah of Bobbili and "his people" were Velamas — a caste category that would take shape over the next 150 years of telling and retelling the tale of that troubling event.

This chapter offers a look at representations (primarily in the form of a folktale) of an act of solidarity that the people in the fort at Bobbili exhibited almost 250 years ago. When they, according to the story of the battle, willingly died for their king, they were rallying around a heroic chief — an individual whose royal character is central to the story. The significance of this act goes beyond that solidarity. Its repercussions ultimately resulted in the voicing of a new type of categorizing for the people of the area. In the end, an "identity" developed, one that was centered on subsequent changing definitions for the group that participated in the eighteenth-century martyrdom. And, in this case, the emergent identity revealed itself in the guise of a thoroughly examined Indian social institution: the Velama *jāti* and, later, the Velama caste. By tracing this history, I hope to expose the historical formulation of one caste. The Velama category that eventually appears by the twentieth century should alert wider scholarly debates to the increasingly varied historical possibilities for caste formation throughout South Asia, contrary to the existing standard range of opinions on caste as voiced by the likes of Nicholas Dirks and Ronald Inden (caste was made central to Indian society by colonialism and the inherent violence to knowledge it perpetrates, and has succeeded in remaining central to the present), or Louis Dumont (caste is the basic means of representing essential hierarchies of Hindu society). ³

In a break with such authors, I contest the notion that caste, and its corresponding "caste system," was a central feature of Indian society as late as the nineteenth century. My attempt to question the validity of current visions of caste turns its attention to the notion of the link between expression-of-solidarity and formation-of-identity; Velamas came to insist that an understanding of their *jāti* was intricately connected to the story of

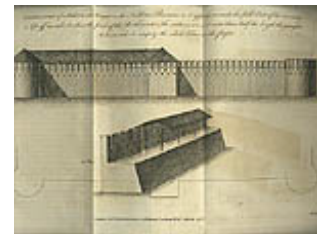
the martyrdom of Velamas for their king. ⁴ The tale told here hints at an alternate model for caste, whereby its commonly attributed hierarchical and imbedded-in-culture implications were only partially accepted by those who invoked jāti names and categories. The telling of the story of the siege of Bobbili in northern Andhra will prove a means to demonstrate the much more metaphorical than substantive understanding of jāti in that period. ⁵ In this case, jāti appears to have existed apart from caste in the nineteenth century, and yet, through reference to this story of the Velamas, did change into, by the twentieth century, something that we recognize as caste itself, a mere 150 years after the siege.

Various tellings of the story of Bobbili refer back to the event of 1757, but they also encompass each other, as they purport to tell the "whole" truth according to their historical contexts. Analysis of these disparate texts, in a somewhat disjointedly chronological order, will indicate that caste here emerged as the articulable form of the solidarity experienced by this particular group of people (jāti), the Velamas of Bobbili. ⁶ "Velama-ness" became an essential feature of identity for those who wished to claim descent from the people who fought and died in the battle at Bobbili. I hope to suggest in the end that a look at the production and power of new meanings (caste creation) for an existing category (Velama), which came about through negotiations within the spaces provided by colonial, bureaucratic, and technological (the advent of Telugu publishing) structures, and that defied the then discursive limits of that category, can guide us toward a better understanding of how the myriad local identities of India could survive the similar process of the historical creation and use, for a time this century, of the concept of the national identity, India.

1757: The Events as Historians Have Rendered Them

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Robert Orme, in his *A History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan*, devotes an entire section to the battle at Bobbili of 1757. ⁷ The siege itself was short-lived. The Marquis de Bussy, commander of the French troops charged with supporting French interests in Hyderabad, used his artillery to begin the assault, and the Raja of Vizianagaram sent his men over Bobbili's walls and through the breaches created by the cannons. Once inside the fort, the invaders found the bodies of Bobbili's subjects strewn throughout the rooms of the king's house, laid to rest not by that onslaught but by the knives and torches of designated courtiers. Orme attempts to depict the horror of those scenes in his history.



The slaughter of the conflict being completed [sic], another much more dreadful, presented itself in the area below: the transport of victory lost all its joy: all gazed on one another with silent astonishment and remorse, and the fiercest could not refuse a tear to the deplorable destruction spread before them. ⁸

It is this version that, though not retold by Telugu speakers, is put to use by British writers chronicling the events of the region and even a Telugu annotator of the *Bobbili Katha*. [9](#)

Orme begins his section on Bobbili the previous year, noting that by late 1756 Bussy had been able again to secure favor with the court of the Nizam at Hyderabad, after the French position had become somewhat tenuous. According to historian Sarojini Regani, "Bussy had come to the Deccan at the head of the mercenary troops that the Nizam had entertained in his [the Nizam's] service." [10](#) But Bussy's inability to stave off Maratha forces with those troops in July of 1756, and the fact that the Nizam acquired support from Mughal troops based in the Deccan, made Bussy temporarily expendable to the Nizam. Bussy, however, managed to hold out against various intrigues until French reinforcements arrived from Masulipatam on the coast, and was then able to reestablish a strong position with the Nizam. At stake for Bussy were the revenues from the Northern Circars on the eastern coast, the land base granted to the French, income from which supplied their mission in the Deccan. [11](#) With his position again secure, Bussy could travel to the coast to collect arrears in rent for the circar lands ([click to see his route](#)). Regani notes that "Of all the zamindars on the East Coast only Vijaya Rama Raju [of Vizianagaram] continued to remit the revenues regularly" during this period. [12](#) Vizianagaram would eventually serve not only as leverage for revenue collection from other chiefs, but he would be Bussy's partner at the siege of Bobbili.

Bussy anticipated, and found, little resistance during his rent-collection campaign. He took with him only five hundred Europeans and four thousand sepoys. [13](#) From Hyderabad, he paralleled the Krishna River to the town of Vijayawada (or Bezwada), where he began meeting with and extracting overdue revenues from local rulers. From there he turned northward, and met the Raja of Vizianagaram at Rajahmundry, on the left bank of the Godavari River. It was there that the two leaders made plans to stem Bobbili's potential power in the region. Bussy would offer the Raja of Bobbili land elsewhere — far from Vizianagaram's borders. In return, Bussy would have a stronger, more confident "renter" in Vizianagaram and his ten thousand troops.

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Explanations for why a battle ultimately ensued vary with each account. Regani's close history attributes only "some ancient enmity with the Rajah [of Bobbili] over the canal waters" to the reasons behind Vizianagaram's willingness to initiate a confrontation. [14](#) Orme tells us that at Bobbili that Raja was unwilling to come to terms with Vizianagaram and Bussy; and it was this stubbornness that forced the hands of the approaching armies. Regani also mentions what a few others have as well, that an ambush of thirty of Bussy's men set the stage for the breaking off of negotiations, though the ambushers were never proven to be connected with Bobbili. [15](#)

Orme, though, does give us a larger picture of French goals in those Circars.

Bussy had led the first major inland expansion into India by the French, away from their coastal factory strongholds. The battle he waged and won at Bobbili was one in a series of battles promoting French designs up and down the eastern coast. That battle, however, was little more than a show of strength, one in a series. After the section on Bobbili, for instance, Orme moves easily on to Bussy's capture of Vizagapatam — an important British factory town, never mentioning the Bobbili battle again. Bobbili would become one stop among many bolstering the French cause. Overall, that encounter had only marginally important consequences in the larger scheme of French interests. Martineau even suggested, "*a vrai dire, étaient de peu d'importance.*" ¹⁶

That battle, nevertheless, did leave its mark on Bussy at a different level. What struck the French envoy was the suicide of the people in the fort. Bussy himself is said to have refused to enter the fort after his victory upon hearing what awaited him inside. This suicide as historical event remains uncontested in all accounts. For Orme it overshadowed all other aspects of that confrontation. "The utmost excess whether of revenge or rage, were exceeded by the atrocious prejudices which dictated and performed this horrible sacrifice." ¹⁷ Significantly, it is this same aspect of the battle that produces a very different effect among later generations of Velamas; it is the source for a history of caste.

For the purposes of this work, the date of the siege of the Raja of Bobbili's fort in 1757 marks less the end of a protracted set of negotiations to establish dominance among Telugu chiefs in that region than the beginning of a new set of negotiations to formulate a jāti history for Velamas, the principal combatants at the fort. The grand historical narrative, à la Orme, is a colorful rendering of a seemingly tragic story. But that history is not the vehicle that brings to Telugu speakers the story of that battle, nor is its recording the source of a new identity.

Regarding the Relationship between an Event and Its Story: 1757 and Beyond

Soon after the events of that day had transpired, the telling of those events and the stories surrounding them began. Telugu speakers throughout the region listened, and then retold the stories. By the time that Charles Philip Brown, a Madras civil servant with an interest in Telugu, asked a minstrel (probably not of the Velama jāti himself) to sing the katha (story) of Bobbili to one of Brown's Bráhma scribes, some seventy years had passed since the actual battle. ¹⁸ And the *Bobbili Katha* had moved into the larger genre of Telugu folk song and story. It had gained a formulaic format that would last, in some ways, to the present day. The relating of events, too, would stay basically unaltered. But between 1757 and later tellings of those events, some basic changes would take place in the *Bobbili Katha* and in the way people otherwise referred to the story. Most notably, perhaps, each generation of retellers of the katha gave new meaning to the groups therein. In this case an event, and later references to it, provided the means for new fashionings of Velama selves. More specifically, an event that required a sizable degree of solidarity on the part of one group here provided for that

group's ability to alter the projection of its own jāti and caste boundaries, even in a pre-bureaucratized, "non-colonized," India.

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This work investigates identity formation by looking at the story of a story. The story of the story of Bobbili — the history of the *Bobbili Katha* — offers a special chance to look at the relationship between the dynamic of the opportunity for expression, and the process of identity formation itself, while the katha's particular historical positioning further highlights the intricacies of this relationship. In a mere 150-plus years, between 1757 and the early twentieth century, the story of Bobbili moved from oral tale sung by minstrels to oral tale transcribed as colonial artifact, then to point of reference for Velamas when petitioning and interacting with British officials, and then, finally, to standardized book and then movie, recounting the events of that year in their own unique but now permanent ways. The katha's salient changes are located in new depictions of Velamas, but the transformation of Velama-ness took place at the conjunction of very specific, changing structures — both Telugu and English, both Indian and colonial. Velama identity emerged through the telling of a story that could be told in different ways, through different media over the course of 150 years. It will thus become clear that factors such as the availability of petitioning a government and the coming of the Telugu printing press are as important in the creation of caste meaning as is the culturally specific imperative to narrate the story of an event and its actors.

I will primarily examine two full versions of the *Bobbili Katha* and, secondarily, two references to the events of 1757 in the Company records. The references in the records present no problems when attempting to attribute dates. The full versions are more difficult to place in time. For the purposes of this work the following, nonchronological, order for the texts will be used:

1. Oral version of the katha: This is the version of the *Bobbili Katha* found in the Tamil Nadu Government Oriental Manuscript Library in Madras. It was recited in 1832 by a minstrel named Mallésam at the request of C. P. Brown, who, at the time, was in the process of having various works of Telugu literature transcribed and collected. This manuscript was also later edited by M. Somasekhara Sarma and published by the Government of Madras. [19](#)
2. 1794 reference in the records: District records from the Northern Circars and Government of Madras records contain certain letters and memoranda that make reference to the Battle at Bobbili. These references were collected by W. Francis and D. F. Carmichael in their gazetteer and manual, respectively. [20](#)
3. 1817 reference in the records: This series of references to the battle at Bobbili is available in the original district records from Vizagapatam. [21](#)



4. Early twentieth-century version of the katha: By the twentieth century, the story of the battle at Bobbili had become quite popular and was presented as a drama and, eventually, even in film. This chapter, however, will address only the printed prose version as its example from this century. [22](#)



In some sense, the issue of ordering these sources is a moot point inasmuch as different uses will be made of different genres of materials. What is significant are the connections individuals made between stories and the historical event. By the time references to 1757 appeared in the records, the siege of Bobbili was understood as both historical happening and subject matter of contemporary folk ballad. For this reason Mallésam's telling to Brown's scribes is positioned before the references from the records, and certainly earlier than the printed version of the katha. This is not to say that Mallésam's is the only authentic or pure version. [23](#) Rather, if Brown knew that such a folk ballad existed, and if Mallésam knew enough to sing this one to Brown's scribes for a few days in 1832, then there should be little doubt that the story's existence is a part of an 1817 reference to the battle of Bobbili of 1757. [24](#)

Beyond 1757: From Historiography to Folklore

The 1832 transcription of the oral version of the tale as told by a minstrel named Mallésam is the earliest available Telugu-language version of the events of 1757. It is the story that was being told and sung about the people and the battle at Bobbili. The *Bobbili Katha* (and the Bobbili Yuddhakatha, its critically edited version) is appropriately titled — the "Story of Bobbili" (and the "Story of the Battle of Bobbili"). [25](#) That is, the story tells of the fighting, strategies, losses, and victories of the participants in the battle to take the fort at Bobbili and render that chief ineffectual in the politics of northern Telugu-speaking areas. Analyzing the text as performance, one notices the narrative's terse, crisp lines. There is cadence and repetition, and the reader can almost hear Mallésam singing. But Mallésam also gives his version some particular characteristics that offer insight into the world of what I understand to be the "prediscourse" self of the eighteenth century. His characterizations are clear. Relationships are strictly defined. There is no need for elaboration on who each of these individuals is. In fact, the form of the telling is revealing in its locating the self, and it tends to follow patterns common to wider oral traditions of India. Any meaning that is connected with labels for characters or with relationship terms is understood, without need for further elucidation: who the people of the katha are is self-evidently explicable.

Certain aspects of that 1832 source set it apart from later versions of the katha, of which two will be examined here in some detail. First, the nature of the narrative is distinct from later versions: critical for the telling of the story by Mallésam is the core set of historical events and the fact that those events result in the given tragedy that is Bobbili. Each individual or group only happens to show itself and define itself subsidiary to those events, and only then by the actions the individual or group take in connection with

them. The book, by contrast, highlights individuals and their greatness based chiefly on caste, while the plot becomes contingent on those characterizations. This feature is linked to a second distinct aspect to be looked at: the issue of "typing" is much less important for Mallésam than for the author of the later work, as is his "pointing" to (blaming) characters in general. ²⁶ Though Mallésam does not refrain from referring to characters in the story as members of a certain *jāti*, that association between individual and caste, where present, is not introduced in order for the minstrel to participate in a larger heated debate, the likes of which were common by the end of the nineteenth century due to the ongoing process whereby meanings for categories and identities were being challenged to a much higher degree than in 1832.

Narrative in the Epic

Beri Komatis

The best way to see Mallésam's general method, and the importance he gives to events over peoples and cultural politics, is by turning to his working of the course of the battle and the events leading up to it. Central to this early nineteenth-century telling of the *Katha* is the battle itself, and Mallésam's focus on its ever-nearing tragic end. Bobbili's pride and the pride of the Velamas are merely tools in accentuating the palpable irony that builds as the story nears a climax. Caste is certainly not the central feature here. Whatever happens with *jātis* does so as the result of a conjunction of events and positions, not as a result of the nature of *jāti* and society. One small anecdote about a *jāti* group (common to both versions) typifies this approach.

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Mallésam tells us that in one part of the fort lived the Beri Komatis. ²⁷ At the onset of the siege the men of this *jāti* were out gathering their merchandise, while the women were at home. As the French troops came to attack this residential part of the fort, the Beri women were forced into action. With the refrain "*Beri vāri strīlu*" ("women of the Beri people") at the end of each line, Mallésam tells of their heroism:

The Beri women tied their hair in knots (tufts), and swung them behind their heads. They knotted the loose ends of their saris. Then they tied up stones, and the pestles available. And they proceeded to throw the entire collection of rocks on top of the 12,000 Frenchmen and the army gathered nearby. Then they struck the white men where they lay. They hit the heads of 200 soldiers. From the tops of elephants observes gathered and watched in sheer amazement. ²⁸

In fact, the singer then breaks from the story to say that he himself fought at Golconda against the Marathas, but never saw such as this. Mallésam's attention to the exploits of a small *jāti* group in the fort appears to signify important issues of *jāti*-typing.

It is difficult to say why this particular group is depicted, or what resonance

these lines intend to strike. In terms of whether "naming" the *jāti* is the key here, the phrase "*Beri vāri strīlu*" could just as easily be an attempt to retain meter. But other lines from this section suggest something else. The women are presented as bases of comparison for even how much fiercer the men of this *jāti* might have fought were they there at the time. "This is how the battle among women was fought. It would not be possible to stand for a moment if the men were to fight." The singer suggests that had the men of the *Beri jāti* not been forced by the invasion to secure their wares, they would have repulsed the invaders. Of course, such a reverse does not see reality; in the next instant, Bussy's cannons make naught of the ingenuity of these *Beri Strīlu* (women), and destroy all the people in their section of the fort. That entire area becomes a graveyard. [29](#)

More than being anecdotal, this passage sustains the notion that the singer is typing a *jāti* in a way that is not consistent with the narrowly conceived of notion of ascriptive identity many scholars commonly associate with *jāti*, and the ascription logos behind it. The kind of typing that we see here is one that sets up an allowance for the possibility of one *jāti* group to engage in solidarity with another in a particular moment of time. The singer's story reflects the realms of possible action individuals might engage in along *jāti* lines. The *Beri Komati* women are positioned to show an allegiance to the *Velama Raja* of *Bobbili*, and then to adumbrate the strength of their men, who, in turn, would willingly have died as examples of lines of solidarity with *Bobbili* that, in the manuscript, transcend *jāti* categories.

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Furthermore, it is highly significant that this particular anecdote is retained in the book version of the *Bobbili Katha*. In that telling, the exploits of the *Beri* women are even further detailed. They are even more ruthless in their attack on the French soldiers unlucky enough to make it into their part of the fort. While the *Beri* men are off saving the youngest of their children, those women fight like lions, the story tells us. [30](#) They kill thousands. *Jangu ji* (*Hydarujangu*), Bussy's advisor, despairs at one point, "We cannot win, we cannot beat these *Beri* women!" [31](#) But in this version, the context for their fighting is different. More than setting up the ferocity of their men or their allegiance to *Bobbili*, this twentieth-century passage highlights the baseness of Bussy and his army. After destroying the *Beri* women with his artillery, Bussy does not just move further into the fort. First, the story is careful to point out, he collects all the gold and silver from the bodies of the fallen women and has the booty sent back to his tent. [32](#) There will be more to say about Bussy's depiction in these two versions later. For now, the placement of this anecdote in the book is useful in seeing how certain events are retained in the later version, but recontextualized to serve the purposes of the later story.

Mallésam, in contrast to the book later, offers the anecdote to teach us about *Beri Komati* women. He does this by naming them in connection with their exploits and fierceness. He valorizes their potential heroic solidarity with the *Velama* chief of *Bobbili*. In the book their actions are somehow natural, transparent, and even expected as caste-based (not solidarity-based). Caste meanings have taken root, and new, twentieth-century expectations of caste are the focus. Much more critical for the book is the

tale of an outsider's baseness and low character — how this foreigner exemplifies all that the Beri Komati caste does not stand for.

The Killing Narrative

Descriptions of the martyrdom of the people in the fort at Bobbili also provide insight into the shifts in group-meaning between texts. At some point during the siege, the fall of the fort appears inevitable to all those inside. Ranga Rao, the Bobbili Raja, must come to terms with the reality of the situation. This moment of realization makes its appearance in the form of Devi Mallamma (the Raja's wife) and her challenge to all those assembled. ³³ Her resolve had begun to take shape while she was worshipping the gods moments before. There, Devi Mallamma put a curse on Viziarama Raja:

Raja, O Raja, You, Viziarama Raja —

How long will you live after killing us, Pusapati Raja?

35

The third day after the fall of Bobbili will be the day of the death of the King! ³⁴

With Devi Mallamma's curse comes a kind of release for her. She charges into the court of the king to challenge the Velamas assembled. "Have you no mustaches on your faces, Velama Doras? Are you going to have your women eating food from the French? Devi Mallamma then bared her throat saying, 'Cut!'" ³⁵ Mallésam's story unfolds rapidly from that instant. At the challenge Ranga Rao proceeds with knife drawn to another part of the chief's fort. There he sees the eyes of his mother, and says, "In my hand is written your death, Mother, Vengalamma. For each person Brahma has written one death. Saying, 'Narayana! Narayana!' she gave up her life." ³⁶ Mallésam is satisfied that these actions speak for themselves. No description of Ranga Rao, or of how he feels, is forthcoming. How each character must proceed is the one clear aspect of the narrative from this point on. Accordingly, the killing did not stop there, with the king's mother. Men were dispatched to various parts of the fort. They axed pregnant women. The children in their wombs fell to the floor. They axed the infants suckling at their mothers' breasts. They killed students who were in the midst of reading. And then, in answer to her challenge, one representative of Ranga Rao slit Mallamma Devi's throat. ³⁷

The killing continued elsewhere in the fort, with houses being burned to the ground while men waited outside to stab anyone who might yet flee the flames. Ranga Rao's troops came to him and expressed their loyalty. "You have love for [our] wives and children. You show mercy to [our] mothers and fathers. O Great King, we have eaten much of your nourishing soup, we will go out to the town [to help in the killing]. Ranga Rao, we will die with you." ³⁸ They then ran from house to house, killing all women and children, as had been done in the palace earlier. The king stood by, wrapped in his

bloodstained clothes. Servants in the king's house had a similar understanding of their relationship to the Raja. Ranga Rao told all thirty-two of them to flee the fort and thereby survive. Those servants responded with, "We cannot go west and eat the food of the French. We will die as Mallamma Devi died!" ³⁹ A regiment commander went out and set on fire the twelve thatched huts where the servants resided. That Ranga Rao feels distaste for the killing is the most Mallésam will tell us about how all this is affecting the king. If emotional states, however, are not worth reporting, loyalty to the king is. The narrator makes evident that each individual or group acts according to its role in relation to the king. It is this relationship to Ranga Rao that is supreme. Those ties dictate one's possible course of action. In no way do connections based on jāti have anywhere near the potency of the sense of loyalty characters express for the Raja of Bobbili and his place as their leader and benefactor. ⁴⁰

The slaughter in the fort ends when only men of fighting age remain, and all their energies may be directed to the fighting that is yet to occur outside the fort. In fact, apparently the killings inside were necessary so that those soldiers could proceed to the next stage of battle against the enemy. When all are ready, a soldier proclaims, "The chains around our legs have been removed, Ranga Rayudu!" ⁴¹ Mallésam tells us that though only four hundred strong, they appeared to the enemy as a ferocious army. Those Velamas and Telagas began stabbing without relent. ⁴² At every hundred killed a cry rings forth from Ranga Rao and his allies, "Selaga!" If a corpse falls in the way, they step on it, and continue fighting. Blood from the field flows as if it is a river, knee deep. ⁴³ Even Bussy feels great admiration for the tenacity of this contingent. Their efforts, however, cannot last.

Ranga Rao is soon wounded and brought before Bussy. The latter tries to end it there by again offering to the Bobbili Raja a parcel of land elsewhere. Ranga Rao, as with the earlier offers, waves off this one and responds simply but resolutely with a familiar sámeta (proverb):

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పాసిన కూట్లో కలి పోసితే పదునుకు వస్తుందా ।

Pāsina kútlo kali posité padunuku vastundá? ⁴⁴

Can rotten food ever be made sweet?

Ranga Rao explains that his men will fight to their last breaths, and, that said, dies, leaving his remaining forces to be destroyed soon after.

Then, just three days later, exactly as Devi Mallamma had willed it, Vizianagaram dies at the hands of a small pack of Bobbili's soldiers who survived the siege and suicide. Those men sneak into Vizianagaram's tent while he sleeps and his guard is busy elsewhere. In the raja's tent, Tandra Papayya explains that their Ranga Rao has risen on high and has sent them

to bring the king along. ⁴⁵ The trio then proceeds to shred the king's belly and spill his innards onto the ground. ⁴⁶ They are performing here. They are acting out the role of the spirit of Bobbili, the word itself coming from the Telugu word for tiger. ⁴⁷ The men, having dispatched Vizianagaram, lament that there is nothing left for which to live. They also decide that sneaking out might make it appear as if mere thieves had come into the tent. So that all will know their cause, they give themselves up to be killed at the hands of the soldiers now stationed outside the tent.

The "Typing" of and "Pointing" to Characters in the Katha

Within the narrative lies a process that Mallésam uses to great advantage in order to heighten the tension over what is at stake for the characters of the *Bobbili Katha* in terms of their understanding of self. The explicability of the reasons behind actions taken by the people of the epic is based on the freedom the minstrel feels to "type" groups contextually, and according to the needs of the story line. In particular, Mallésam's use of *jāti* labels for "typing" is a complex issue. Turn-of-the-twentieth-century British anthropologists made a living attempting to link castes with, literally, "types" of people. Out of such attempts arose staple classifications for the lexicons of colonialism in India. Perhaps most familiar are the anthropological studies and collections of Sir Herbert Hope Risley and Edgar Thurston, who worked on huge classificatory projects for the Government of India in the last part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. ⁴⁸

Without going into too much detail about this classification project by the British, it should be noted that scholars have correctly documented its resulting use as a tool in the further colonizing of India. ⁴⁹ The point of connection with this Telugu-language katha, however, is just that "typing" along *jāti* lines was never purely a British project alone. Mallésam makes it clear that *jāti* also has a very distinct role as a means to understand the placement and organization of groups in society. The *Bobbili Katha* gives us *jāti* as an organizer of knowledge. That is, epistemologies about groups develop through the employment of *jāti* names in the course of telling the story. Those epistemologies were not immutable prior to the telling of the story, nor would they be so after that telling. *Jāti* invocation for Mallésam and others of the early nineteenth century had a linguistic and epistemological role outside the western colonizing process. The storyteller of the *Bobbili Katha* uses *jāti* names frequently, though carefully and always purposefully.

A simple description, for example, of various groups might not require Mallésam's own typing of *jāti*, such as when he briefly mentions the constituents in Apparayudu's entourage during the army's march. These people included "gamesters, songsters, and players (of plays)," with no actual *jāti* names included. ⁵⁰ But when it suits his purposes in the next line, Mallésam easily inserts a *jāti* name. Apparayadu, then, upon leaving camp to march to the next night's halt, puts behind him four hundred Velama Doras. ⁵¹ This simple term alone works as a means of impressing on the listeners the importance given to Velama Doras. Their prowess in battle made them the guard of honor. Velama Dora refers, then, both to the *jāti*

group and to the characteristics that Mallésam wants the listener to associate with that *játi*. This association is clearer given the context of the story of Bobbili as a whole. Velama Doras are not only the main characters — that is, Ranga Rao, the chief, and all of his family — but they are also worthy of having a story told about them. And the singer of that story is going to remind us of this with *játi* name placements every chance he gets. Contrast this to the Maharaja of Bobbili's lengthy description of Velama Doras in his *Revised and Enlarged Account of the Bobbili Zemindari in 1907*. At one point he claims,

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The men of this race [Velama Doras] are, as a rule, well-built and of a warlike disposition. They are proverbially haughty, so much so that they are not known to serve any but the chiefs of their own caste They are very daring and reckless of life when their feelings are hurt, or when anything happens to offend their notions of respect. [52](#)

Mallésam's degree of "typing" will seem not just subtle and innocuous, but rather insignificant when we read the later version of the *katha*, which presents Velamas in a similar way to the Maharaja's presentation. At this stage, in 1832, *játi* is more an appropriate and useful metaphor than it is a political label for use in locating a caste in a larger charged atmosphere. Understandings of the category "Velama," however, changed over the course of the nineteenth century with each narration of the *katha* and with the "typing"-of-Velamas process, according to the needs of the moment, inherent in that narration. Eighteenth-century caste will ultimately appear very different from its later namesake when we turn more fully to twentieth-century descriptions of caste.

Linked to the typing of this era is the fact that Mallésam is able to talk about a character without making him a representative of the entire *játi*. That is, a label can be avoided as desired. Thus, after Ranga Rao has proceeded with the killings, Vizianagaram is simply left with the blame for what happened, and gives us an admission himself. He is clearly made out to be the "bad guy," but, in general, little is offered up by the singer of the story to explain why Vizianagaram would take such a hard line against Bobbili other than the notion that Vizianagaram's status in the region was in jeopardy. For Mallésam, the circumstances of kingly relations are sufficient reasons in themselves; neither elaboration nor *játi* reductionism is deemed necessary.

In fact, Mallésam comes to the blame soon after the battle is complete. Bussy has Ranga Rao's body placed in his own, Bussy's, tent, to which he calls Hydarujangu, Vizianagaram, and his dubash. Bussy asks the dubash straight out where blame and auspiciousness should be placed in the matter of Ranga Rao's death, and the defeat of Bobbili as a whole. Lakshmudu replies that the sin lies with Vizianagaram, and "not with us." [53](#)

Hydarujangu concurs. But Vizianagaram claims that the responsibility lies with everyone, as does any merit that might come from it all. This assertion changes, however, as soon as Vizianagaram enters the fort to lay his hands on the spoils of the siege. At the sight of infants suckling at the breasts of their fallen mothers, Vizianagaram, amid his suddenly felt remorse, says to

Bussy, "This is my fault (alone), and not yours." ⁵⁴ Attribution of the blame is confirmed three days later, in the wake of Vizianagaram's assassination. Upon Bussy's arrival at that scene, Mallésam tells us that the commander's one comment was, "The grief of Bobbili has unfailingly touched the Raja. The murder of women, the killing of students — that sin — has come back to the Raja." ⁵⁵ The deeds that Vizianagaram had three days earlier taken responsibility for, have now been avenged. Mallésam's story ends with Bussy granting Ananda Rao, Vizianagaram's son, a jagir that includes the lands of Bobbili.

Events such as this are the epic's center, and do not anticipate the overriding tone of the later version of the story, one that hinges less on the internecine politics of Telugu Rajas than it does on the way a foreigner disrupts the balances that exist among locals. One hundred years brings a retelling of the story in print, a tale that reflects changes in attitudes about politics in northern coastal Telugu-speaking areas, and a definite shift, as we shall see, in where to place the blame for all the killing.

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In the manuscript, local politics are permitted to explain the Raja's actions. This suits both Mallésam and the integrity of the story. By way of contrast, the version that appears one hundred years later does not, nor could it, leave the explanation at that. Then, unlike in 1832, the need to "type" according to caste interferes with an explanation that rests exclusively on the desire of a Raja to secure the lion's share of land and wealth in a region. The year 1900, as we will see, brings with it a tale that reveals the greater substance underlying the presentation of Bobbili as a Velama chief commanding Velamas. By 1900, caste — what it means to be a Velama — has taken on new meaning. And that new meaning incorporates new reasons by which Ranga Rao is able to kill his family. It incorporates new ways to set Bobbili apart from Vizianagaram, making it more than a rift between rivals. And it incorporates new ways for the same actors to express the reasons for that rift, while always keeping most of the tale itself intact. By 1900, who Velamas themselves are is a direct product of the very actions performed by that eighteenth-century Velama chief and the stories of his actions. Definitions and discourse spring up where layers of actions, based purely on understandings of how to act, have collapsed in on themselves. The sheer gravity of the episode itself in 1757, and the 150 years of talking about it, produce a massive corpus of meaning surrounding the Velama jāti.

Given the almost generic nature of Mallésam's story, then, it appears inappropriate to cast the events depicted in that katha as signs of what I shall for the moment refer to as noncolonized jāti relations. Then again, it is also clear that the Katha is not simply about kingly politics and colonial influence in this region; there is something to the story of a Velama chief and his people, and a piece of their history in relation to a hostile, non-Velama world. Therefore, by examining changes in the Katha over time, we will see some of the more-suggestive and perduring underlying meanings to the story, as opposed to what any one version might focus on in particular. For instance, as noted, since the attackers, and the attacked, are of different jātis, non-Velama/Velama, inter-jāti fighting might seem to be at the heart of the katha. But then it is difficult to explain the later book's thorough

attention to the French troops and Bussy. If historian Nicholas Dirks is correct in associating the emergence of a discourse on caste (and the resulting politicization of caste) only after the establishment of a colonial bureaucracy, and the essentializing of Indian society "as caste based," then this eighteenth-century episode could hardly prove useful in understanding *jāti* as an operative category in the politicization of the self. ⁵⁶ The history of the *Bobbili Katha*, however, and its continually changing representations of the roles for caste in Indian society, outside the colonial institutional theater, calls into question Dirks's conclusion about the historical transformation of caste politics in the nineteenth century.

Mallésam's *Bobbili Katha* pits a Velama raja against a non-Velama chief, but this proves to explain little about *jāti* identity (or lack thereof). Certainly, Mallésam's version offers sketches of *jāti*-based activity that enlarge our capability of putting a finger on just what *jāti* meant to eighteenth-century Telugu speakers. What it meant, however, appears to have gone little beyond the happenstance of birth grouping. His story indicates that lines of allegiance and solidarity easily superseded *jāti* affinity. This will not necessarily be the case when caste is hearkened to as the idyll for drawing lines of group identity — an idyll created only later in the opening up of discourse over what caste actually means. In Mallésam's *Bobbili Katha*, meaning arose out of action. Later on, meaning about caste will arise over descriptions, retellings, and expression.

Contextualizing the *Bobbili Katha* within Telugu Oral Narrative

Whatever the *Bobbili Katha* offers on its own, it is important to remember that it is integrated into the larger body of Telugu oral tradition. Of the narratives still sung today, the *Bobbili Katha* is of neither particularly recent nor ancient origin. Gene Roghair, in his *The Epic of Palnadu*, comments that singers of such narratives in the Visakhapatnam District alone have repertoires ranging from the story of *Bobbili* to the great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, to a "story about a clash between two landlords in their own [the singers'] village in 1956." ⁵⁷ Furthermore, it is not lengthy compared to other *kathas*. Roghair notes that the *Bobbili Katha* is considered a standard three-night story, whereas other stories might require up to thirty nights to tell. Nor is the *Bobbili Katha* unusual in its tight narrative connection to a particular historical event. In this way, unlike the *katha* that Roghair studies, we might understand the *Bobbili Katha* as offering a trope similar to the story relating to the dispute in the singers' village. The *Bobbili Katha* focuses on one particular event and the people who played a part in that event.

Moreover, to the extent that this story is based on a specific historical event, it is even possible to make parallels to other parts of India where work on oral narrative traditions has been done. Rosalind O'Hanlon, for instance, has looked at the late nineteenth-century history of a Marathi oral narrative, a *pavada*, about Sivaji in the process of trying to understand how politicians at the time tapped into existing forms and traditions to help them shape caste ideologies. ⁵⁸ So the story of the battle at *Bobbili*, then, does not seem to represent anything unusual within the context of India's traditions of

narrative recitation. Yet, in the hands of a distinct type of analysis, the *Bobbili Katha* allows me to depart from existing conclusions about oral narrative.

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O'Hanlon, for instance, argues that those who enjoyed the ballads before the late nineteenth century were "still rooted in traditional rural culture. Such groups were pre-literate, and they lacked the political and educational skills that would have allowed them to engage directly in the new modes of formal and organized political activity." Thus, she suggests, a successful modern political movement would at the very least hinge on the presence of an urban elite to bridge the gap between "organized" politics and rural (premodern) epistemologies. And because, according to O'Hanlon, "there had always existed a strong identification with the Maratha past amongst social groups at all levels of society," a bridging process, in her view, indeed had potential for the Maratha case she examines. [59](#)

Instead, this work argues that every time a katha was sung, it sought to achieve its own set of political goals. I am suggesting that to depoliticize the ballad in the hands of its singers is to dehistoricize it, and that identities do not exist "always" and for "all" people in a society. Meanings, categories and relationships (and thus identities) that are based on understandings of the past are all constructed historically. And they are constructed through the telling of the very stories O'Hanlon and this work analyze, stories told by no particular "type" of storyteller at all. [60](#) The creation of O'Hanlon's new politicians, their committee meetings, their elections of representatives, and their attendance at conferences, in fact, may not have been the great novelty of the nineteenth century in the opening up of political arenas. Rather, what that period offered was a chance for people who still participated in the trappings of oral culture to engage the new technologies for telling their stories, whether in print or for the colonial archive, and thus widened and made more varied their audiences: indeed, it was this greater exposure itself that led directly to the heightened political charge of each new telling of a narrative.

It should be noted, moreover, that there was no secret formula for regional identity creation; no one particular story was in each case waiting to be uncovered and told in a political venue. There are, for instance, caste components to other stories. Roghair even observes about the Palnadu epic that the "Velama caste" is the "central caste": "Both quantitatively — most of the stories are about them — and qualitatively — they are the central figures — the social and religious world of the epic focuses on and through the Velama caste and its great Heroes Velama women are similarly at the centre of the feminine world." [61](#)

But the quantitative centrality of Velamas, as noted by Roghair, just as they are also central quantitatively in the *Bobbili Katha*, was not, in itself, sufficient to catalyze the Velama-as-politicized-category process. What actually makes these stories special is based on issues that are at odds with his characterization as to why Velamas are central in both; in fact, the opposite is probably the case. Velamas are at the "centre" of the Katha not because of the "reality" of some model for the social structure in the region,

namely, caste structure, but because they are prominent in the history of this particular katha: the history of the telling of the story is itself the tale of the development of their caste identity.

Roghair offers up Velama centrality by way of a specific reading of the role of caste in Indian society. "The social structure presented in *The Epic of Palnadu* is better understood when viewed as concentric rather than hierarchical." Critical, then, to Roghair's analysis of the epic, and the role of Velamas therein, is his depiction of caste as an Indian institution that is opaque, and able to resist scrutiny. "In *The Epic of Palnadu*, as in *Palnadu* and in all of India, society is differentiated by caste." ⁶² Thus, though he suggests that our modeling of caste needs to be reconsidered (concentric, not hierarchical), he nevertheless retains caste as the core element of the society that frames the tellings of these stories. Velamas continue as objects of knowledge in a critical analysis of the makeup of South Asian society, and a kind of Dumontian vision of caste takes over, one that sees caste organizing all other aspects of Indian life, including oral tradition. ⁶³

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It has been the reading of these texts by scholars, and not what the texts themselves have to say about caste, that has, for the most part, determined caste's centrality in the depiction of Indian societies. And on this point I concur with O'Hanlon: the caste-centered aspect of the narrative was not necessarily present in the texts historically. ⁶⁴ Otherwise, there persists an undeniably important caste component for both the *Palnadu* and *Bobbili* stories. One cannot fail to notice that in the *Bobbili Katha* *jāti* names are present throughout and that concerns about *jāti* are everywhere. But *jāti*'s importance in later versions of the kathas (*jāti* as the primary basis for decision-making among characters) was a result of contemporary narrative goals in setting out how Velamas of the kathas should act and be remembered, not because of caste's objective centrality. By the time of those later versions, caste had become a useful category, a politicized identity trope, to help listeners understand the motives of particular characters in the katha.

In the early nineteenth-century oral version of the *Bobbili Katha*, the raja who opposed Bobbili, though not a Velama himself, was depicted as being in most respects on an equal footing with Bobbili as a leader and as a signifier of honor. As we will see, however, any suggestion of equality between the two leaders is completely absent from the twentieth-century telling of the story, at a time when caste has indeed become central. At the very least, therefore, it is important to avoid a reading of caste for 1757 that is based on how we understand it today, centuries later.

Beyond an Oral Narrative Tradition: The Colonial Archive and Two References to the Events at Bobbili

Evidence that the popular legacy of the siege at Bobbili was active and potent long after the 1757 episode comes from petitions and letters to British officials from Velamas near Bobbili. They display a different attitude both about the siege and about "Velama-ness" from the characterization of events we see in Mallésam's rendition. Although the requirements of the

moment are strikingly different (colonial petition), the mode of expression strengthens the proposals I am making here. Telugu speakers (Velamas) took it upon themselves, when it came time to refer to 1757 or to assume the role of "tellers of the katha," to determine how they would be defined according to the needs of the moment.

The first example here is an early source for such expression, and comes via a non-Velama. In 1794 the then Vizianagaram raja (not a Velama) had set up camp near the village of Padmanabham, in the Northern Circars. The Government in Madras had decided that the arrears in revenue from his estate would continue uncollected as long as he was in charge of the management of his own lands. ⁶⁵ Accordingly, he was directed to proceed to

Masulipatam where he would be asked to sign an agreement that granted him a monthly allowance, and relieved him of his managerial duties. ⁶⁶

Initially, the raja appeared willing to comply with the order, and set out from his fort at Vizianagaram. After marching the twelve miles to Padmanabham, on the road to Machilipatnam, with a retinue of troops that would swell to four thousand, however, he stopped and indicated that he had had a change of heart. Spies of the government "returned with the news that it was the Raja's intention to resist the Company's forces to the last, and, if finally overpowered, 'then to do as the Bobbili family did formerly' when their fort was captured by Bussy." ⁶⁷

Despite distinct differences, including jāti, the parallels with 1757 are quite evident (opposition to a more powerful entity — and a foreigner, same locale in the Northern Circars, descendant of one of the original parties). In fact, those parallels provided all involved with a sufficient basis for understanding Vizarama Rau's threat. By the same token it was also clear that the raja was truly a generation apart from his forebears with regard to his avenues for action. In this case, he was forced to act knowing that he lived in the shadow of that earlier event, and his scope for performance was much more limited than Bobbili's had been. The very act by the raja, alluding to the events of forty years earlier in order to evoke sympathy from his contemporaries, meant that Padmanabham could parallel Bobbili as representation only. This event, centering as it did on a non-Velama, was able to do little more than play on tropic similarities (though it did lead to a skirmish). Velamas, by contrast, came to be able to refer to 1757 in more resonant ways.

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The records of the collector at Vizagapatam from 1817, twenty-three years later than the aforementioned episode and sixty years after the actual battle, contain an even more direct, and perhaps more expected, reference to the story of Bobbili. In those records is a letter, translated from the Telugu, from the Bobbili Raja/Zamindar to the Magistrate of the Zillah of Vizagapatam complaining of government harassment. "I do not see how my character can be preserved," he wrote:

I most humbly beg leave to state to your Honor, as to the highest authority, that as my cast is one of rank amongst the Hindoos, and as my ancestors to the number of 4,000 persons of both sexes died in an instant, about sixty years ago, under the idea that

death was preferable to disgrace I hope that your honor will take this into consideration

As my character and respectability has already suffered so much, I ought already to die according to the rules of my cast; but under the apprehension, that my Zemindary will not be continued to my children if I do not show my innocence to your Honor, I have submitted to you this petition. [68](#)

The events of 1757 had clearly taken hold by this time. They were, by 1817, rallying points for the then Raja of Bobbili, parts of the definition of who he was, and who a Velama ought to be. This was not a simple typing of caste. It was a use of caste as a recently politicized category, arrived at through the retelling of the experience of 1757, and the re-creating of its meaning. A Velama chief now had the ability to tell the story of Bobbili, make reference to that event, utter the category "Velama," and exert a newly understood force over his listeners.

Another letter of 1817 from the Bobbili Raja to Major General Rumley, regarding the actions of sepoys sent to deal with the problems at the fort, reaffirms this new understanding. The sepoys came within the Raja's gate

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with the intention of entering the house, where the women reside. We are ready for death by blowing ourselves up with gunpowder, in the event of their entering into the apartments of my family women If you delay doing so (preventing this) my character will be lost, and we will doubtless die in consequence. [69](#)

"Character" here is Velama character. Further, the language of threat is possible because of the shared understanding of the history of the area. A reference in the letter to the concern the raja shows for the continuance of his zamindari exposes an altered basis for the relationship between Velama and outsider. This time a raja's suggestion of suicide actually functioned because the entire environment, one that made such a negotiated statement possible, dictated dialogue.

This is to say, the shifting tactics that members of Bobbili's court employed during the nineteenth-century series of confrontations, and the changing responses they received from the British, speak to the transitional nature of categories in this time frame. Initially, for example, the Raja fasted for some time because, he claimed, the sepoys sent by the magistrate's office had blocked access to good water in his house. The "peons" of the magistrate had also attempted to arrest the raja's wife, Chandrammah, by laying hold of her. This attack on her body prompted her own petition. Then, at the same time that the magistrate heard of the threats of suicide from the raja, that chief's "Dewan," whose failure to deliver himself and the records of the zamindari to the collector had precipitated this entire exchange, wrote to the magistrate with his excuse. He had heard of the raja's intention to threaten suicide and so included this about himself in the letter, "I am the Dewan under the Zemindar of Bobbilee, I have lent more than a lac of Rupees to

the Government, and I am of the Velama Cast." ⁷⁰ By this date, then, the diwan, too, as a Velama-caste member, could exercise the power of invoking the Velama identity.

As late as the early nineteenth century, when signs (caste and kingship, for instance) were contested differently than they came to be later, story tellers could take the narrative and play with those signs, as Mallésam did to some extent. With the coming of colonialism and a shift in the space of the tellings of the katha (from traveling minstrel and singer of repertoire, to minstrel as teller of exemplary Telugu story, to Velamas' referring to the katha as a didactic means of articulating the Velama self), new, contextualized forms of performance, and reference to the katha emerged. Accordingly, incorporated into those new styles were the changing demands that the politics of self among singers and listeners had been calling for; and those changes included new ways to articulate the self. Fresh formulations of the story and altered styles of rendition, however, did not simply supplant the older ones. Every updated telling provided a bridge to the future in terms of the ways that characters in the story could be described, and inevitably included the politics of categories and identity into those descriptions. Thus, not only did the descriptions themselves change, but the parameters for the production of the descriptions were also altered, ultimately having implications for the production of the self in later years. Over the course of the nineteenth century, Velamas of the *Bobbili Katha* became, through renderings of the story, the sites for the production of meaning and knowledge about the category Velama, and about contemporary Velama identity itself. In the late eighteenth century it had been an awareness of the existence of the events related by the katha or the katha's singers that had created meaning. Now, with new forums in which to speak (petitions and, later, print) Velamas produced meanings about themselves through their "own" story of self.

To the Twentieth-Century Printed Version of the Bobbili Narrative: *The Pedda Bobbili Raja Katha*

The main substantive difference in the twentieth-century version of the *Bobbili Katha* is its focus on representation, as opposed to action itself. But the full import of that shift shows itself only slowly. Instead, the first difference one notices in comparing the later version of the *Bobbili Katha* to the earlier version is its appearance as a book, printed in Madras. The 1832 version is a manuscript, transcribed from Mallésam's telling. The printed version has a new feel to it; it is now neither oral tale, nor colonial artifact. Of no little importance in exemplifying this is the absence of any real narrator/minstrel (there is no final "byline" as in the 1832 version); and there is no initial disclaimer that a singer was hired to narrate the story to a British Madras civil servant and his Bráhman transcribers. The *Bobbili Katha* has, in this version, become one of the many examples of the shift from oral to written culture writ small. The story of Bobbili that appeared early in the twentieth century has a new title also. C. P. Brown had written simply "Bobbili Katha" atop his manuscript. The book version is titled "The Story of the King of Big Bobbili — The War That Arose from Wagering on Cocks." ⁷¹

The shift in titles here is from a focus on the locale, and the family that ruled that locale, to the representations of the reasons for the actions of the king of that fort and his people. The narrative in the book reflects this change also. Personalities and how they explain themselves are the focus of this more recent version, more than the events and their details. (As we will see, for instance, the cockfights fit in well here because they allow the reader insight into the motivations of the characters.) In the book, events move to the background, while relationships between characters and the "Velama-ness" of characters move to the fore.

This trend has further implications: politics here emerge through the actions of and options available to these individuals. The characters and their actions all represent larger, firmly established solidarities. Therefore, each character acts as a representative of the solidarity. In contrast to the earlier manuscript, solidarities do not emerge from the actions and pronouncements of the characters. By now solidarities are in place, meant to be understood from the reader's knowledge of Bobbili's history. Thus the pivotal confrontation between the Bobbili Raja and his neighbor, by now firmly linked in popular tradition, remote as it is in time, takes place squarely as the confrontation between a Velama and a non-Velama chief. It is a war that highlights not the courageous deeds of a generic raja, but the now absolutely necessary actions of a Velama warrior. In the earlier version, the possibility of a confrontation is given as a likely part of the general politics of the region. *Jāti* was perhaps little more than a metaphor for possible lines of alliance, not a prescription for action; "heroic solidarity" (à la Marshall Sahlins) was crucial. In the book, the very impossibility of a conflict is nil because of the strength and firmly planted discursive parameters surrounding the power of Velama-ness in the early twentieth century.

Narrative in the Book

The printed story begins with a description of a series of cockfights held between the rajas of Bobbili and Vizianagaram. These fights take on escalating importance as a distinct trend develops. Each new fight brings another victory for Bobbili and deeper anger from Vizianagaram. ⁷²The Vizianagaram raja cannot seem to field a winning cock, and by the end of the first portion of the book he bears a huge amount of resentment toward Bobbili.

Fittingly, the cockfights had been at Vizianagaram's prompting, in a letter to Ranga Rao's younger brother, Vengalarayudu, suggesting that the winner of the matches garner the accompanying fame. ⁷³Clearly, however, all is not well between the two houses, as we can see in Bobbili's reaction to the challenge; Ranga Rao laughed out loud when he read the letter from his neighbor. ⁷⁴Such exchanges are noticeably absent from the manuscript.

The book calls for an understanding of the history that exists between the two rajas and their families. Whatever is about to come is not going to rely on some uncollected revenue to be paid to the French. It will hinge on the existing, historically produced nature of the outcome of the solidarity shown by Velamas decades earlier; it will hinge on the ability of Velamas to express Velama identity.

Upon reading Bobbili's acceptance to the challenge, Vizianagaram begins his plans for the big day. He invites nearby rajas, and prepares a great feast. ⁷⁵ Bobbili, on the other hand, clearly making all the right moves, insists that all the Velama Doras must come to these matches, immediately linking Bobbili with the ideal of Velama solidarity and confirming that ideal with the news that all the Velama Doras were happy to receive invitations. ⁷⁶ Indeed, not only were they honored with invitations, they were asked to bring, and did bring, cocks to contribute to Bobbili's cause. The productive nature of the historical creation of categories is given a positive valence from the outset; being made known to be Velama sets off indicators for right action and success. Vizianagaram, alternatively, is given no specific jāti affiliation at this point, significant because Velama-ness is clearly critical for Bobbili. Although being non-Velama is not given a negative valence at this point (it is merely neutral), it does later serve as a productive antipode to Velama-ness.

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In accordance with the status of Velamas here, the fights progress in a predictable fashion. Each cock that Vizianagaram sends into the ring meets the same fate: it dies while Bobbili's remains unharmed. ⁷⁷ Soon we read that the Raja had never been so angry. When it comes time to conclude the final match, Bobbili's cock "holds the other cock down with one leg while it uses the knife (attached to its anklet) to slit the throat of the (raja's) cock." (The reader immediately understands this to foreshadow the manner of the killings to come later in the story.) The raja's final cock then dies, and members of Bobbili's retinue are seen poorly suppressing their laughter. At this the raja becomes even angrier. ⁷⁸ As all parties decamp from the site of the matches, Vizianagaram is beside himself to think of, and act out, a measure of revenge against Bobbili.

Vizianagaram's franticness and general weakness of character are important features of the book. But, again, this weakness is not portrayed as the attribute of a jāti. It is the attribute of the antithesis of a Velama. The weak character is critical, for it allows the larger conflict to take place. There is a need for a revenge motive from a weak, and, especially, non-Velama, character to permit such an eventually tragic course of events to happen to the Velamas. Such weakness is evident even when the final battle is about to be won. As Bobbili's men report Ranga Rao's death, Vizianagaram cries out, "Do not believe, do not believe those Bobbili people! We must go near and see that he has (actually) died." ⁷⁹ This cowardice, of course, posits the contrasting level-headedness and general superiority of Bobbili the Velama over Vizianagaram.

In 1757 and 1832, when jāti did not take on the political drive it has here, no such characterization was necessary. Greed and power were sufficient motives for the unfolding of events. By the twentieth century, those are no longer legitimate (or even interesting) premises for the battle to come. This time Velama nīti (a Velama code of conduct), which serves now as a new code for action, will motivate Bobbili and his court to take those last gruesome steps. They will not need the threat to their manliness, the

scoffing insult that Mallamma Devi hurled earlier, to put them on the right course. They will take those steps in accordance with níti, and in opposition to the, by then, thoroughly established inferior and unworthy Vizianagaram and French characters. Velama níti will dictate the drastic path that Bobbili takes.

In addition, along with the late nineteenth-century politicization of *játi* in the book, comes an escalation to a more complex level of the "typing" process; Velama-ness has become internalized, its essence expressed not by the narrators of the story, but by the characters themselves. This is evident early on, as the story of the battle begins to unfold. Ranga Rao suggests that the people of Bobbili take the women out of the fort to a safe refuge. Then the men might return to fight. ⁸⁰ The book, however, does not change basic historical events; the historicity of the story itself is preserved as Ranga Rao's idea is rejected by his younger brother. The latter claims, "If we go outside to take the women to the west, Velama Doras will laugh if they hear of it. If the surrounding rajas hear, they will ridicule (us)." Vengalarayudu implores his brother not to speak "cowardly words." ⁸¹ Importantly, this suggestion from Ranga Rao is entirely absent from the manuscript. Its inclusion indicates a shift from that version. The manuscript allowed individuals to act out their understandings of self and *játi*; by the twentieth century, and in this book, action is supplanted by representation, by a need to explain why action must take place.

Later, for instance, in the midst of battle, Vengalarayudu again speaks of what it means to be a Velama, and how his forces should proceed.

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Older and younger brother Velama Doras —

In this army, you must not look ahead or behind.

The heaven of heroes awaits the men who meet their death here.

We (our fame) will remain here until the end of time on this planet.

You presided over this fort as Sri Rama ruled (his kingdom).

Vengalarayudu spoke such brave words. ⁸²

These "brave" words contrast Ranga Rao's earlier suggestion. Yet they both reinforce the recurring need to explain to the audience what is implicit in being a Velama. These expostulations present a marked departure from the earlier, rather simple, typing process of the manuscript. In a sense, there the presence of Velamas alone is the full extent of the expression of Velama-ness. The thorough representation of Velamas and Velama mores in the book alters the pretext of the story, if not the events depicted therein. Ultimately, the descriptions in the book serve not to tell a tale, but to explain how the events of 1757 could possibly have resulted as everyone knows they did.

Bussy in the Book

Bussy plays a different, more central role in the book. We first learn of him immediately at the conclusion of the cockfight episode. Bussy, "That French Bussy who is one of those people who rule at Pondicherry," we hear, is in the company of the Nizam at Golconda, and is preparing for a tour of the eastern districts. ⁸³ Unlike earlier manuscript usages, his name is written "Práncila Buci." Elsewhere in the book he is "Pránci Dora Gáru," or "Buci Dora Gáru." It would appear problematic to suggest that "French" and "Bussy" are intentionally poorly transliterated into Telugu so that they will be mispronounced. But it is worth noting that the manuscript version uses far less extreme divergence from the French pronunciations, "Busi Dora Gáru," for instance. ⁸⁴ The manuscript also uses the Telugu word "Parásu" when referring to Bussy and his French troops, a term that specifically intended French people. The politics and poetics of such specific name modifications are difficult to interpret. The book might reflect a freedom that Mallésam did not feel when telling the story to C. P. Brown (or that the Bráhman scribes did not convey). It might reflect an attempt by the publishers of the book to put into print nuances that normally only come through in an oral presentation of the story. (This seems even more likely given the usage I cite later for "Buci" as the boogiemán.) In any event, it is probably not too far off to say that the book uses terms, descriptions, and spellings in reference to the French that are intentionally somewhat more disparaging than those present in the manuscript version. This interpretation is born out when we see Bussy in action.

Bussy is made to look pompous in this printed version from the moment of his first interactions with Indians. He tells the Nizam, referred to here as Padusha, not to give him orders. He says that the Nizam must permanently send payments for the use of certain lands. And then the book mocks Bussy's sense of self-importance. Bussy is said to have felt great happiness at (realizing) such great excessiveness (power). The Nizam watches Bussy leave, and says aloud that the Frenchman is not to be trusted. ⁸⁵

Soon after, in a communiqué from Vizianagaram to Vengalarayudu, we learn more about Bussy and his removed position vis-à-vis both the Velama Dora chief and his rival. Vizianagaram tries to reingratiate himself to Vengalarayudu upon having second thoughts about his alliance with Bussy against Bobbili. He writes,

He [Bussy] has a language we do not understand. We have a language he does not understand. In a stupor from drinking bhang and toddy, that French Dora does not even know his own body Let's go together as one, Vengalarayudu, and defeat Bussy ourselves. ⁸⁶

This letter would also seem to be the perfect opportunity for the narrative to take a nationalist turn and allow the Velama and Vizianagaram to embrace, and turn as one against the foreigner. But the suggestion from

Vizianagaram is scoffed at, and the Velamas brace for confrontation. [87](#)

Furthermore, this critique of Bussy's diet, and the lack of attention he shows to his own body, goes on in each scene, especially those that describe him in his tent. On the very next page, for instance, we are again made privy to the contents of a letter from Vizianagaram, this time as Vengalarayudu reads it aloud to the court at Bobbili. Bussy, it seems, is camped in tents at Rajahmundry, and is drunk on a combination of toddy, sara (arrack), and "*ganjáyi*." As if that revelation were not enough, not only does he overindulge as a rule, but we also hear that even his spoken tongue is suspect. "The language of the French people consists of 'kikara' and 'bhakara.'" [88](#) The text here parodies the French language at a time (turn of the twentieth century) when Telugu speakers were keenly interested in promoting Telugu's own greatness and legitimacy. [89](#) This type of condemnation of Bussy as symbol of complete antithesis ran deep into the complexities of Telugu-speaking culture, so much so that another aspect of the man, the parodic figure of Bussy, is alive today among speakers of Telugu. Parents can quiet their children at night by threatening that "Bucci" (a boogiemán) will come to get them if they are noisy. Few people will recognize the origins of the word, but the sign itself has become a part of the language of Telugu speakers. [90](#)

Clearly, there is scope for a nationalist interpretation of this text, given the caricature of Bussy. Nevertheless, it is equally evident that what the author critiques can be interpreted as an affirmation of its opposite (at the more local level) in Telugu and Velama societies. By taking note of the extremeness of the parody, an outline forms around what is being protected from parody. Thus, nearly all of the condemnations of Bussy extol, through their opposing effect, virtues of sobriety, temperance (regarding all aspects of the body), and the specialness of the Telugu language. Furthermore, these jibes at Bussy set up a distinct social core made up of Telugu-speaking Velama Doras who ascribe to the *játi* rules so thoroughly outlined in the tale.

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The contempt for Bussy plays itself out during the battle later. At a time during the fight when no matter how far they went they found only corpses, Vengalarayudu reminds his soldiers that great fame will come from killing Vizianagaram and Bussy. Word of the courage of Bobbili's troops reaches Bussy and his aid, Haidarujangu ji. Haidarujangu ji proclaims that if Vengalarayudu arrives at their tents, their siege will be lost. Bussy hears of this possibility, and quickly mounts his elephant to head for the hills. Vizianagaram at the same time proceeds to investigate how Bussy is holding up under the pressure of the battle. Of course, he finds Bussy has fled. Out loud he scorns the Frenchman, "French Dora, however much physical strength you possess, French Dora, you are a base creature with no mustache!" [91](#) Here Bussy possesses none of the qualities necessary in any way to be positioned on a moral field with these warriors. He has none of the essential characteristics of these chiefs and their soldiers, nothing that would allow him to be identified with them and their status.

Then what of the Velamas versus Vizianagaram? It is not simply that Bussy

here is an outsider, a person from a far off place. The story takes pains to establish that what it means to be an outsider is predicated not on geographical origins, but on not having the qualities inherent in the combatants at the fort. Bussy's relationship with the Telugu Vizianagaram Raja does not raise Bussy's status. That alliance does the opposite: it lowers Vizianagaram's. And this is critical; the relationship exposes Vizianagaram's true weaknesses. In fact, Bussy's total exclusion from the ties that bind in this social setting is only the frontispiece for the next few lines, when Vengalarayudu happens on the Vizianagaram Raja's now empty tent, and wonders, "Why have you [Vizianagaram] come here with no compassion?" The depth of anguish for Bobbili is made clear by the way the story characterizes that ruler's opponents. Much of that tragedy, beyond the killings themselves, is set up through Vizianagaram and the outsider, Bussy. Vizianagaram, in his relationship to Bussy, and his failure to comprehend the importance of Velama solidarity, points to the great tragedy that is the fate of Bobbili. Bussy reveals, by way of his inadequacies, his intemperance, and his cowardice, all the discipline, pride, and honor that are the characteristics of the Velamas at Bobbili.

Thus, while the primary shift from the manuscript to the book is the change from characters "being" to having them represent (themselves and others), that shift is manifested in many ways, one of which is an altered role for Bussy. Whereas Bussy was one character among many before, in the book he wears both the hat of a westerner and of a non-Velama. In the manuscript his presence was as a foil, a provider of reasons to act. So, as a result of Bussy's alliance with Vizianagaram, Bobbili became alienated from the rest of the figures in that region, and was more logically inclined to act in the drastic manner he chose. But Bussy's role as a central character stopped there. We saw little in the manuscript of him beyond those instances when we needed to know why the plot continued to unfold as it did. In the book he becomes an important character in his own right. More important, Bussy now becomes the archetypal outsider, the converse of all that is Indian, Telugu, and, most critically, the antithesis of a Velama. Through his speech and conduct we see what it means not to be righteous. Ironically, were Vizianagaram not a participant in all this, it would be easy to explain Bussy's role as a type of statement for the cause of nationalism: Bussy would embody a presentation of the negated colonizer. Yet Vizianagaram is there. So Bussy becomes more nuanced, making the main obstacle for nationalist speculation, if, indeed, it is intended by the text at all, Vizianagaram himself, the fellow Indian, who becomes a betrayer of sorts. Such interplay drastically changes the weaving of possible oppositions in the narrative, and the overriding message of the narrative becomes that of stating Velama greatness.

Bussy's depiction in the book comes to define the limits of what is meant by the category "Velama" for those Velama Doras in the katha; he is another productive vehicle for the promotion of that category. His particular characterization in the book would not have been possible early in the nineteenth century when a Velama identity did not exist as such, as a political label or as a unit of discourse against which to posit a signifier of its negativity. By the twentieth century the opportunity presented itself to exploit the politicization of a Velama category in such a way as to make

"Velama" a positive module in a field of identities. Bussy is the Velamas' complete Other, that polar opposite discursive site that provided alterity for contemporary productive visions of Velama identity.

The Final Battle and the Ultimate Differences between Manuscript and Book

That the book is about the making of Velama identity and who the Velamas have become is visible also in the depiction of the killings and final moments for the people of the fort at Bobbili. The need to express Velama honor even brings about certain changes in the story line. Thus, though it is Mallamma Devi who throws forth the gauntlet in the manuscript, when she questions Ranga Rao's manhood for intending to allow his women to eat the food of the French, the book gives that "honor" to Vengalarayudu. His dying words urge the men of Bobbili not to allow the French to feed the women of the king. Vengalarayudu dies insisting that the soldiers return to the fort from the field of battle to release those shackles, to usher off the women to their final rest. [92](#)

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In a parallel scene, by way of expressing the honor (and piety) of Velama women, when Mallamma Devi hears of Vengalarayudu's death, she takes all the king's women to perform various pujas, a sequence absent from the manuscript. Before she dies, furthermore, she sends off one of Ranga Rao's sons with a maidservant disguised as a beggar, in the hope that they will make it through enemy lines to safety somewhere beyond. [93](#) Mallamma Devi seeks to insure some continuity — she acts out tradition, and she acts to preserve tradition. [94](#) As the end draws near, the men of Bobbili become the ultimate personifications of male Velama honor, and Mallamma Devi is given the role of a "true" Velama woman.

When the raja's time for action does finally come, Ranga Rao simply calls his brother-in-law, Narsarayudu, and hands him a knife. Ranga Rao commands him to "go, release those shackles." [95](#) With that, Narsarayudu knows what to do, and heads to the women's quarters. Mallamma Devi instantly understands why her brother has come and tells him to carry out his work. "Saying, 'Garagara Garagara,' he slit her throat." [96](#) Narsarayudu then proceeds to slit the throats of the rest of the women in the room, all of them his sisters. As in the manuscript, here we now read of how pregnant women, with full bellies, and students are killed. Other Velama Doras go from room to room grabbing, and then holding heads in the particular way, so as to be able to slit throats. [97](#) The Velama Doras also slit the throats of children. Rangayya Dora Garu says, "Kill everyone, (even) those filling the streets of Bráhmans and Komatis!" [98](#) To ensure their complete success, the chief's men put others in warehouses and burn down the buildings.

Then, in a further departure from the manuscript, before himself heading out to fight, Ranga Rao gathers all the gold and silver in the fort, pounds it into one lump, and throws it into a well, along with a rock on which he makes an inscription. The wealth is to be saved for any family member who

may happen to survive the battle. ⁹⁹ This is Ranga Rao's gesture to posterity. (And it is an obvious contrasting gesture to what Bussy does with the gold and silver he obtains from the Beri women of Bobbili.) Though Ranga Rao cannot leave a fort to his children, perhaps he can save the wealth of the zamindari for some future generation. Within a page of this scene, Ranga Rao gives up his life on the field of battle. He dies after his horse is killed and after he axes to death ninety people, despite his intestines' having been spilled on the ground. "Such a life I have lived! Oh, to die at the hands of these (unworthy) people!" ¹⁰⁰

Here ends the battle for Bobbili. With Ranga Rao's death the Velama Doras cannot sustain the fight. Vizianagaram's forces hear of Bobbili's death, end their retreat, and turn back to do battle so as to put a final end to the siege. Vizianagaram inspects Ranga Rao's body to make sure he has died, so afraid is he at the thought that it might be a ploy. Bussy, on the other hand, sees the corpse and begins to grieve, almost sobbing. "I unknowingly killed the tigers of Bobbili!" ¹⁰¹ And then he turns to Vizianagaram and lamenting speaks words noticeably absent from the manuscript, "Viziamaraju is a performer of bad karma, a traitor to his family. I listened to too many words from that outcaste by deed." ¹⁰²

This is a completely new degree of criticism being leveled here against Vizianagaram. Indeed, that censure is precisely by way of contrast with the Velama Doras of Bobbili. In the manuscript Vizianagaram is simply a person who has performed pápam (sin). There he recognizes his wrongdoings and shoulders the burden of those deeds; he also pays for them with his life. But at no point is his role as a fellow warrior, bound by kingly responsibilities, in question. Nor is there any suggestion of some deep character flaw in him. In that manuscript, the perception of his being, and his own conception of self are allowed to reside apart from his actions.

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The book, however, paints a different portrait. Vizianagaram is a performer of actions that confirm who he is as distinct from others, literally, an "outcaste." This is, I believe, is an essential key in the historical shift from *játi* to caste. Vizianagaram's *játi* (birth) is never an issue in any of the works. Rather, when being of a *játi* takes on a subsequent political aspect that prescribes right *játi*-specific action, and when those politics can then refer back to the birth feature of *játi*, then being a member of that *játi* comes closer to what we refer to as caste, now, in the late twentieth century. Vizianagaram became an "outcaste" by virtue of the representations of his actions, just as Bobbili had become the good Velama by virtue of the telling of the *Bobbili Katha*. The book, moreover, even seems to take pleasure in this turn of events, as the "outcaste" insult issues from that lowly Frenchman, Bussy.

Finally, as with the manuscript, the story explains that Paparayudu survived. He takes two men, disguises himself as one of Vizianagaram's servants, and goes to kill the king. Each avenger takes his turn at stabbing Vizianagaram. For the ultimate blows Paparayudu has the king propped up so that he can properly address that chief as he strikes. Unlike the manuscript, he does not

metaphorically change into the tiger of Bobbili and slash the king's gut. He simply asks Vizianagaram if he accomplished what he wanted in coming like a thief to topple Bobbili. A stab to the chest finishes the business, and blood pours to the ground as life leaves the king's body. ¹⁰³ Papparayudu and his men exit the tent to allow themselves to be killed by the guards, and thereby make understood what has occurred.

The Conclusion of Narrative and the Creation of Velama

There is an important trend present in the history of the telling of the *Bobbili Katha* that has not been identified in recent works on orientalism in India. The Velama creation of an epistemology of self through the telling of the *Bobbili Katha*, and the growing politicization of categories therein, gives us a specific production of identity that has generally only been applied to the category "the nation" (in South Asia) to this point. Ronald Inden's book *Imagining India* is perhaps most notable in avoiding consideration of such identity formation. Although he correctly outlines the Western process of essentializing India and Indian society and culture, he does not take note of a corresponding process going on in India by Indians. ¹⁰⁴ Ashis Nandy, on the other hand, has, to some extent, explored Indian reactions to one type of this essentializing. ¹⁰⁵ But he, too, has not elaborated on a process that was somewhat independent of the particular Western nexus of colonialism and orientalism that he investigates. In truth, the nineteenth-century process that we see with the *Bobbili Katha* and Velamas may have informed what those two authors examine, but the creation of categories in that period was certainly not contingent on the rise of colonialism and its attendant systems of dominance.



The story of the *Bobbili Katha* instead offers an alternative means of understanding the historical creation of local epistemologies, epistemologies that most scholars have insisted resulted from a Western intrusion into Indian culture and society. What analysis of this story suggests, in fact, is the presence of a process that actually took place in Europe as well, and which has been thoroughly expounded on. ¹⁰⁶ As opportunities for expression grew, and print media outlets increased, societies developed discourses on themselves, and, in effect, essentialized themselves. Furthermore, this process is similar to the imagined communities that Benedict Anderson posits for nationalism. Again, however, his focus on that category ignores smaller community development. ¹⁰⁷ In fact, I propose that larger discourses on the nation and even language did not arise until discourses on the self, made possible through the expression of historical solidarities at the local level, had emerged. Until people developed a way to articulate who they were in a limited field to those alongside them and to those on the outside, they did not have the tools to link themselves to larger discursive (imagined) units, even with the appearance of such mechanisms as Anderson's print capitalism.

Thus, whereas action was dictated by a deep understanding of the self for Ranga Rao in 1757, sets of possible actions and the ability itself to act, later became predicated on the explicability of the self and the development of what it meant to attach particular definitions to oneself or to one's group. The shift here is critical, and is as clear as that offered by Ernest Gellner regarding the ability of people to sustain loyalty. "Modern man is not loyal to a monarch or a land or a faith, whatever he may say, but to a culture." [108](#)

By the twentieth century, the story of the raja of Bobbili can no longer have that raja act as action would have once seemed fit. He must act in accordance with meanings of Velama identity (Velama culture) that had been stated and developed until they could sustain any attempt at a particular action — loyalty was no longer centered on the raja. This trend is born out by the twentieth-century telling of the Bobbili Katha.

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In the end, the early nineteenth-century story of the battle of Bobbili does prove to be a fruitful source for an exploration of *jāti* politics because it offers up group labels in ways that are unfamiliar to later nineteenth-century understandings of *jāti*, and then caste. What the *Bobbili Katha*, its tellings, and the references that are made by Velamas both to the event and to the telling of the event tell us is that between 1757, when Bobbili was attacked, and the later nineteenth-century discussions surrounding caste and its place in Indian society, there arose a critical series of changes in the way that caste was understood by both Indians and the British. Moreover, these changes in understandings of caste were not purely British or bureaucratic productions. They were produced by Indians who described themselves in connection with colonial bureaucratic institutions made available to Indians. The point here is that an event at a critical moment just before the arrival of those colonial bureaucratic mechanisms offered a basis for the shaping of an identity along caste lines, an identity that was not there in its particular (nineteenth-century) shape at the time of the event, but that emerged through reference to the event over the course of the next century. Of course, the story of the battle of Bobbili is not in itself a story of caste. But the history of the telling of the Katha is about how stories and events came to be the moments of solidarity that led to the experience of identification of the self with the group that experienced that solidarity. In India these events (historical actions and the narration of those actions) became the reference points for new ways to talk about *jāti* and caste. They created a new space for the definition of caste. Therefore, they also provided the substance around which a discourse on caste could arise for Indians and the British. Caste does not exist in its current (late twentieth-century) state solely because of a colonial incursion into India. Caste exists as we now know it because of the negotiations that surrounded identity formation and the use of categories in India early during the encounters between Indians and "others." The story of the battle of Bobbili is the center of one such negotiation.

Epilogue

From 1922 to 1924 in hilly tracts not far from Bobbili, Alluri Sitarama Raju led a revolt against the British and British administration in the area. [109](#) In the history of Indian resistance to British rule, this revolt represents the longest sustained success against attempts at suppression. Though some of

this success lay with British lack of interest — too few people were involved in too remote an area — the genealogy of its meanings for participants can perhaps be traced in such a way as to include the stories of the battle at Bobbili 165 years earlier. Recent work on the revolt has debated whether those who followed Alluri Sitarama Raju — an urban figure amid hill people — did so with an awareness of larger anticolonial issues in mind. ¹¹⁰ This debate is consistent with discussions over whether the so-called subaltern is able or desires to partake in nationalist discourses and actions. Writers have tended to be concerned about whether the subjectivity of the subaltern should begin and end with the larger discourses of nationalism and nationalist struggles or whether it should remain apart, isolated. Murali tries to show that it is possible for the participants in the struggle to understand the nationalist goals, and still have a sense that theirs is a project of their own doing, separate from the totalizing needs of the nation. Arnold, contrarily, hopes to show that subalterns can partake in a nationalist struggle, but that such participation is done primarily through the rigors of class conflict. Murali's critique lies with the idea that Arnold is giving them that basis only in the production of knowledge about the event.

My attempt at middle ground here points to the notion that there is an immense variety of possible genealogies of protest against outside forces from which to draw for virtually all speakers of Telugu, and even non-Telugu speakers who live in this region. ¹¹¹ Not only were there, as Arnold points out, numerous protests in the hilly tracts against control from the plains and the British in the nineteenth century that established a basis for protest in the twentieth century, ¹¹² but even before that there were stories about a siege at Bobbili, quite nearby, where a bold few had attempted to hold out against the strong many, against the Europeans and their allies. It is a similar story, and a likely antecedent in the understanding of what was going on in the 1920s for the people who stood against the British in the hilly tracts of Andhra. Arnold too takes this type of historiographical liberty for the later period by suggesting that "the pattern recurred in the late 1960s with the attempt by Naxalite communists to mobilize hillmen as the initial phase of rural insurrection and revolution in India." ¹¹³ The "patterns" or "aspects" of insurrection are thus now well documented by both Murali and Arnold. This approach completely misses the issue, however, of investigating who the "hillmen" were or how they became who they were.

Indicative of the missed target by historians is that the most palpable tension in the entire episode comes from the background of the "leader" of the movement. This tension is indeed the basis for much of the debate surrounding how the revolt could be nationalist at all. Because lack of sources makes a detailed history of the hillmen almost impossible, research has focused on Alluri Sitarama Raju, who was himself a flatlander. He was not a tribal member and was not even from the hills. What, then, was his relationship with his followers, and how did his presentation of self affect that relationship? Raju's entire presentation of self was, in fact, one that sought to evoke images of an earlier time — Ram Raj (thus his acquisition of the middle name) — a carefully chosen image that did not incite issues surrounding the flatlander/hillman divide. He raided police stations for the arms available, but he sported a bow and arrow in public. He wanted to be

the ideal chief of earlier times. Alluri Sita Rama Raju invoked the images and names of Ram Raj that the contemporary version of the *Bobbili Katha* also did in citing the Velamas' ideas about an ideal kingdom and ruler. ¹¹⁴ Raju, as with the book version of the *Bobbili Katha*, told his own story in a way that earlier rebels (including the Bobbili of 1757) did not feel compelled to tell. It is also clear that his proposals and actions easily fit into the larger discourse of nationalism and Gandhian noncooperation. In important ways Raju had moved beyond the parallel to the Velama chieftain fighting against a rival. Raju employed a discourse on the self and was capable of being an exponent of identity, and of understanding what it meant to be a rebel against the state for such a person. The Velama of the *Bobbili Katha* had been simply and purely a warrior, free to kill himself in battle. Alluri Sitarama Raju must explain why he does what he does. This is also the case in the threats made by Velamas in petitions later to the British about who they are and why they must do what they must do, but in fact can never do what Bobbili himself was able to do.

The Sitarama Raju experience is an important moment in the history of identity formation in Telugu India. It offers us the opportunity to see how previously established identities can play a role in the association of groups with a nationalist agenda. I agree with Atluri Murali in his debate with David Arnold: Sitarama Raju and his followers could understand the wider scope of signs embodied in a nationalist uprising for the very reason that the *Bobbili Katha*, a tale well known throughout the area, as well as scores of others of that ilk, were part of the larger canon of rebellion ideology. The uprising of the twentieth century was not a huge leap into the unknown waters of nationalist discourse and a nationalist consciousness for the followers of the Alluri Sitarama Raju. It was a participation in the nationalist discourse as an outgrowth of the history of the politics of culture of the region.

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Yet analysis of the leader and his motives does not clear up any larger questions of identity except that Rama Raju's use of symbols was appealing at some level. ¹¹⁵ On that aspect Arnold continues the trend of imposing limited possibilities for meanings inhering in the struggle by his belief that the meaning of the rebellion for the rebels can be distilled down to that other set of convenient categories: class. "The hillmen's struggle was not, therefore, merely against the British and the colonial system: it was a class struggle quite as much as it was an anti-colonial struggle." ¹¹⁶ Neither is Murali's "Rejoinder" completely satisfying. In denying Arnold's quick caricatures, he proposes that the meaning of the rebellion was arrived at in a different way. "People would invent or choose their own terminology to express their world-view, aspirations, perceptions and grievances." ¹¹⁷ What the story of the *Bobbili Katha* teaches us in its use by Velamas is that choice and invention have little to do with the production of meanings in the course of articulating identity. Historical contingency and the needs of the self or the group at the moment dictated how categories were attributed with new meaning, and not simply invented. Murali gives the hillmen "folk-tradition" to carry on those meanings. But the nineteenth century gave Indians so much more, a multiplicity of opportunities for voicing ideas about the self. The Rampa Rebellion did not come from nowhere. Its wider meanings, and how participants understood the rebellion, were part of the language and

meanings of the telling of the *Bobbili Katha*. Nationalism is not the end of identity formation. It is, along with contemporary caste associations, communal identity, language affiliation, and the like, one of the many discursive outlets for articulations of identity, only made possible by the historically contingent circumstances of the nineteenth century.

Notes:

Note 1: A version of this chapter originally appeared as "Making Caste In Nineteenth-Century India: A History of Telling the *Bobbili Katha* & Velama Identity," *South Asia*, n.s. XXII, no. 2 (Dec. 1999): 1-36. [Back.](#)

Note 2: Marshall Sahlins's observations on history and kingship among many Pacific Islanders are particularly applicable here. See, for instance, his "Other Times, Other Customs: The Anthropology of History," *American Anthropologist* 88 (1983): 517-544. There he suggests that solidarity can, indeed, be centered on the idea of a heroic king. [Back.](#)

Note 3: See Nicholas Dirks, "Castes of Mind," *Representations* 37 (Winter 1992): 75, and Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Cambridge, 1990), 58, for example, as well as Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications* (Chicago, 1980 [1966]). I might also include here Partha Chatterjee and his "imminent critique of caste" in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, 1993), 175-181. Though Chatterjee tries to tear apart the prevailing hierarchicalization of caste by incorporating ideas of subalternity, he still posits the "system of castes" in the historical framework he investigates. I question whether there was caste at all, as we know it, in the early nineteenth century, before attributing to the period a "system" of castes. [Back.](#)

Note 4: Here it will be argued that *jāti*, as it is represented by the use of the label "Velama," in its early nineteenth-century form, is distinctly different from caste. Only by the twentieth century does the invocation of "Velama-ness" clearly bear the traits of framing an essential identity feature for Velamas themselves. [Back.](#)

Note 5: Consistent with this suggestion that *jāti* and caste were not absolutely central to Indian society is work done by Cynthia Talbot in her "A Revised View of 'Traditional' India: Caste, Status, and Social Mobility in Medieval Andhra," *South Asia* 15, no. 1 (1992): 17-52. Talbot distances herself from other scholars by offering an in-depth look at pre-nineteenth century "clans" (what I shall still refer to as "*jātis*") that are strikingly different from twentieth-century castes and the models of caste drawn up by those scholars. In addition to allowing for the individual to act within the social system, Talbot proposes that clans were "vastly different from the rigid, tradition-bound society implied by the common model of a social system composed of hierarchically ranked and hereditary *jātis*" (p. 47). [Back.](#)

Note 6: Reassessments of the importance of the "punctual" historical event, especially when using folk sources has precedents in such writers as Carlo

Ginzburg, *Ecstasies* (New York, 1991), in particular see 12-13 and 22-23, and Jacques Le Goff's introduction to a reprint of Marc Bloch, *Les rois thaumaturges* (Paris, 1983 [1924]), xi-xiii, for example, to name two. [Back.](#)

Note 7: See Robert Orme, *A History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan — From the Year MDCCXLV*, vol. 2 (London, 1763-78), 254-260. [Back.](#)

Note 8: Orme, vol. 2, 258. [Back.](#)

Note 9: Orme is quoted for the accounts of this battle in, among others, the introduction to Sri M. Somasekhara Sarma, ed., *Bobbili Yuddhakatha* (Madras, 1956), xviii-xxii; D. F. Carmichael, *A Manual of the District of Vizagapatam, in the Presidency of Madras* (Madras, 1869), 177-182; and W. Francis, *Madras District Gazetteers, Vizagapatam* (Madras, 1907), 237-241. [Back.](#)

Note 10: Sarojini Regani, *Nizam-British Relations, 1724 to 1857* (Hyderabad, 1963), 96. [Back.](#)

Note 11: Alfred Martineau notes the importance of the income for the troops and for French glory in South India in his *Bussy et l'Inde française, 1720-1785* (Paris, 1935), 134. The original circars granted the French in 1752 were Kondavid, Chicacole, Rajahmundry, Eluru, and Kondapalli. See also P. Raghunada Rao, *History of Modern Andhra Pradesh* (New Delhi, 1991), 34. [Back.](#)

Note 12: Regani, *Nizam-British Relations*, 103. [Back.](#)

Note 13: Martineau, *Bussy et l'Inde française*, 218. [Back.](#)

Note 14: Regani, *Nizam-British Relations*, 104. For some discussion of politics in the region from the late seventeenth century, see John Richards, "Mughal Retreat from Coastal Andhra," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1 (1978): 50-68. Ananda Ranga Pillai's diary attempts to tell a bit of this history as well. See his *Private Diary*, vol. 10 (New Delhi, 1985 [1925]), 335. [Back.](#)

Note 15: Regani, *Nizam-British Relations*, 104. [Back.](#)

Note 16: Martineau, *Bussy et l'Inde française*, 223. [Back.](#)

Note 17: Orme, *History of the Military Transactions*, vol. 2, 258. [Back.](#)

Note 18: Gene Roghair notes that Velamas did not necessarily tell their "own" histories, as is the case in his work, *The Epic of Palnadu: A Study and Translation of Palnati Virula Katha, a Telugu Oral Tradition from Andhra Pradesh, India* (Oxford, 1982). This is the case with the singers of the *Bobbili Katha* today as well. [Back.](#)

Note 19: See "Bobbili Katha," Government Oriental Manuscript Library, Madras, Telugu MS no. 2550, and *Bobbili Yuddhakatha*. C. P. Brown's note on the cover of the transcription he had prepared reads, "The following three tales, viz. Bobbili Catha [sic], Comara Ramudi Catha, Camamma Catha, are popular ballads or histories, which are usually preserved by oral recitation alone: but

meeting with one of the wandering minstrels who subsist by their recitations, I employed him for about a month to recite all the ballads he knew; and these were written down from his dictation. The town of Bobbili is a little to the north west of Chicacole [Srikaukalam]: and the sad tale here told is mentioned by Orme in his history" (*Bobbili Katha*, fol. i). [Back.](#)

Note 20: See both Francis and Carmichael. The manuscript version was sung to Brown's scribes in 1832. Strictly speaking, this would place it later than the references to the events that we see in the records. The liberty I take in antedating the oral version before the references in the records has to do with my understanding of the way oral materials such as the singing of this ballad work. In no way do I intend to make the minstrel's telling a 1757 event. I would, however, suggest that Mallésam's version of the story is close enough to those told a few years earlier that we can take his (and those versions) to predate at least the later references (1817) in the records. [Back.](#)

Note 21: See Vizagapatam District Records, vol. 3737A. [Back.](#)

Note 22: See *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha — Kolla Pandemuna Kaligina Kalahamu* (Madras, n.d.). [Back.](#)

Note 23: It may have been, in fact, just the opposite, because he sang it precisely for the ears of Brown and Brown's servants. [Back.](#)

Note 24: Ginzburg's *Ecstasies* echoes the potentiality, and yet the constraints of this possibility with his work on the history of witches' Sabbaths in Europe. "The price to be paid in terms of precise knowledge became part of the experiment" (p. 22.) And, of course, the supposition I make here is the very staple of Mikhail Bakhtin's "chronotopism." See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin, 1981), 425. For South India, Velcheru Narayana Rao has made similar observations regarding texts arising out of the oral culture of the area. See, among others, his "Afterword" to Hank Heifetz and Velcheru Narayana Rao, *For the Lord of the Animals — Poems From the Telugu: The Kalahastisvara Satakamau of Dhurjāti* (Berkeley, 1987), 131-166. [Back.](#)

Note 25: *Bobbili Katha* and *Bobbili Yuddhakatha*. Unless otherwise stated, I will use these two works interchangeably. Only the slightest differences exist between the manuscript and its edited version. [Back.](#)

Note 26: For instance, though both works try to attribute blame for the deaths of the people at the court of Bobbili, Mallésam does it in a singular way. [Back.](#)

తట్టుకోబలో కాపురమున్నారు బేరి కోమట్లు.

Note 27: *Bobbili Katha*, 71.

Brown refers to this group in his dictionary as a "sub-sect" of merchants — Komatis — who were originally traveling salesmen; see Brown, *A Telugu-English Dictionary* (Madras, 1903), 388. Carmichael lists the Beri jāti in his manual of the district as a group also employed as soldiers. Based on the way he "typed" caste elsewhere in the manual, it may very well be that this description actually sprang from the section on the Beri Komatis in the *Bobbili Katha* itself (Carmichael, *A Manual of the District of Vizagapatam*, 64.) [Back.](#)

Note 28: Bobbili Yuddhakatha, 71: They struck the white men where they lay

— రోకళ్ల గుడ్డి పండ బెట్టిరి తెల్లవాండ్ర నేమి;

The observers even put their fingers to their faces in awe of the spectacle —

ముక్కుమీదనే వేలు పెట్టెను ముసే పన్నవాడు;

Soludárulaku is used

here for "soldiers" — సోలుదారులకు.

Apparently Vizianagaram had forty elephants at the battle (Pillai, vol. 10, 335). [Back.](#)

Note 29: Bobbili Yuddhakatha, 72:

మొగవారు యుద్ధానికి వస్తేను క్షణము నిలువలేము

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Note 30: Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha, 74. [Back.](#)

Note 31: Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha, 75. [Back.](#)

Note 32: Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha, 76. [Back.](#)

Note 33: In the book version she is called Mallamma Devi. [Back.](#)

Note 34: Bobbili Yuddhakatha, 96. [Back.](#)

Note 35: Bobbili Yuddhakatha, 96. [Back.](#)

Note 36: Bobbili Yuddhakatha, 97. [Back.](#)

Note 37: Bobbili Yuddhakatha, 98. [Back.](#)

Note 38: Bobbili Yuddhakatha, 100. [Back.](#)

Note 39: Bobbili Yuddhakatha, 99. [Back.](#)

Note 40: This relates also to an important point that Marshall Sahlins makes about the need to expand on Emile Durkheim's possible solidarities. Sahlins writes, "We need a notion of 'hierarchical solidarity' to go alongside Durkheim's mechanical and organic types. In the heroic societies, the coherence of the members of subgroups is not so much due to their similarity (mechanical solidarity) or their complementarity (organic solidarity) as to their common submission to the ruling power." Thus the cry that Ranga Rao's troops issue is exactly parallel to the quote from Shakespeare that Sahlins uses to elaborate on "hierarchical solidarity."

Upon the king! Let us our lives, our souls, Our debts, our careful wives,
Our children, and our sins, lay on the King! (*Henry V*, IV, i)

See Sahlins, "Other Times, Other Customs: The Anthropology of History," *American Anthropologist* 88 (1983): 522, 524. [Back.](#)

Note 41: Bobbili Yuddhakatha, 100:

మాకు కాళ్ల సంకెళ్లు పదలేసయ్యా రంగారాయడా.

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Note 42: On one hand, the term Telagas refers to another jāti group. But it also heightens the idea of loyalty to the king across jātis. Again, as with the Beris, Carmichael (p. 63) claims they were regularly employed as soldiers. [Back.](#)

Note 43: *Bobbili Yuddhakatha*, 101:

పీనుగు ఏడితీ పీనుగు మీద తొక్కి సరికినారు. మోకాటిలోతున రక్తకాల్వలే పారుతూవున్నవి.

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Note 44: *Bobbili Yuddhakatha*, 102. This translation comes from Captain M. W. Carr, *A Collection of Telugu Proverbs* (New Delhi, 1988; reprint of Madras, 1868), 251, no. 1434. In the manuscript it reads:

పాశిన కూడు ఏదునుకు వస్తున్నదా ?

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Note 45: *Bobbili Yuddhakatha*, 109:

మారంగారాయడు మించిపోయెను ఎదవయ్యా రాజు. నిన్ను తీసుకొని కూడారమ్మని నన్ను ఏంపినాడు.

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Note 46: *Bobbili Yuddhakatha*, 109:

దొక్క బద్దలుగ చీరినాడుగా రాజుగారి నేమి.

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Note 47: "Bussy's guards then heard them saying, '[This is] the coming of the Bobbili tiger!'" MS., 109:

బొబ్బిలి పులీ బచ్చేసంటూ బూసిగారి దండంతా అప్పుడు గల్లంతయినది.

Of course,

Bobbili is derived from the Telugu words for big tiger. The Maharajah of Bobbili in his *A Revised Account*, 20, Carmichael in his *Manual*, 291, and others make reference to this origin for the name of the town. [Back.](#)

Note 48: Herbert H. Risley, *The People of India* (London, 1915) and Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, 7 vols. (Madras, 1909). [Back.](#)

Note 49: See, for instance, Christopher Pinney's annotations of colonial artifacts, "Anthropology and the Colonial Image," in C. A. Bayly, ed., *The Raj: India and the British, 1600-1947* (London, 1990), 278-304. [Back.](#)

Note 50: *Bobbili Yuddhakatha*, 10:

అటలవారు పాటలవారు నాటకాలవారు.

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Note 51: *Bobbili Yuddhakatha*, 11:

నాలుగు వందల వెలను దొరలను వెంబడి బెట్టుకొని.

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Note 52: Venkata Swetachalapati, *A Revised and Enlarged Account of the Bobbili Zemindari* (Madras, 1907), 8. [Back.](#)

Note 53: By "us," Lakshmudu presumably means Bussy. *Bobbili Yuddhakatha*, 103. [Back.](#)

Note 54: *Bobbili Yuddhakatha*, 104:

ఈ పాపమంతను నాడే కాని మీది కాదయ్యో. [Back.](#)

Note 55: *Bobbili Yuddhakatha*, 110:

దొబ్బిలివారి ఉసురూ రాజుకు తప్పుక తగిలింది. స్త్రీహత్యా శిశుహత్యా (పాపం) రాజుకు తప్పుక తగిలింది. [Back.](#)

Note 56: Note, for instance, Dirks's parting comment in his article, "Castes of Mind," *Representations* 37 (Winter 1992): 75: "Transformations [in caste] occurred because of the ways colonial discourse inscribed its peculiar, often masterful, combination of old and new meanings in institutional theaters with major consequences for the colonial subjects." [Back.](#)

Note 57: Roghair, *The Epic of Palnadu*, 35. The *Bobbili Katha* still has a tradition of being sung in the late twentieth century. In 1986 a minstrel chose to sing that katha to me when I asked for a sample of his repertoire. In 2001 a group of singers in the Bobbili area performed the *Bobbili Katha* as part of its repertoire (personal communication, 9 February 2001). [Back.](#)

Note 58: Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Maratha History as Polemic: Low Caste Ideology and Political Debate in Late Nineteenth-Century Western India," *Modern Asian Studies* 17, no. 1 (1983): 1-33. This is also a chapter in her work *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology* (Cambridge, 1985). [Back.](#)

Note 59: O'Hanlon, "Maratha History as Polemic," 6-7. [Back.](#)

Note 60: Ironically, O'Hanlon's potentially creative use of the pavada oral narrative, presumably an attempt at bridging modern and premodern forms of expression, only reasserts the historiographical stance promulgated by the so-called Cambridge School of historians. That canon promotes the idea that it is sufficient to look at Indian elites and how they communicated ideology to the "masses" to understand the social history of South Asia. [Back.](#)

Note 61: Roghair, *The Epic of Palnadu*, 97. [Back.](#)

Note 62: Roghair, *The Epic of Palnadu*, 99-100. [Back.](#)

Note 63: As mentioned earlier, however, some scholars have tried to give caste a historical trait in connection with colonialism. See, for instance, Dirks's "Castes of Mind," 59, or his *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1988), 4 ff. [Back.](#)

Note 64: O'Hanlon, "Maratha History as Polemic," 7. [Back.](#)

Note 65: As noted by Carmichael in W. Francis, *Madras District Gazetteers*, 51. [Back.](#)

Note 66: Arrangements such as this were commonplace in the Northern Circars

and typified what came to be known as "indirect rule" in the British administration of India. [Back.](#)

Note 67: Francis, *Madras District Gazetteers*, 52. Carmichael also notes that all the Raja's "men had sworn to die, sword in hand"; *A Manual of the District of Vizagapatam*, 218. [Back.](#)

Note 68: Vizagapatam District Records, vol. 3737A, fols. 112-114 (29 December 1817). [Back.](#)

Note 69: Vizagapatam District Records, vol. 3737A, fols. 123-124. [Back.](#)

Note 70: Vizagapatam District Records, vol. 3737A, fols. 127-128 (30 December 1817). [Back.](#)

Note 71: *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha — Kolla Pandemuna Kaligina Kalahamu*. [Back.](#)

Note 72: The manuscript moves from a brief introduction to a listing of the succession of halts Bussy made on his march from Hyderabad toward the coast. [Back.](#)

Note 73: *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha*, 5. [Back.](#)

Note 74: *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha*, 7. [Back.](#)

Note 75: *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha*, 8. [Back.](#)

Note 76: *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha*, 9. [Back.](#)

Note 77: *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha*, 12. [Back.](#)

Note 78: *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha*, 15:

పక్క కాలితోక్తి కాలికత్తితో గొంతులు కోసను.

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Note 79: *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha*, 99. [Back.](#)

Note 80: *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha*, 37. [Back.](#)

Note 81: హాళనము is used for "ridicule" in this passage, and పిరికిమాటలు is used for "cowardly words." [Back.](#)

Note 82: *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha*, 82. [Back.](#)

Note 83: *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha*, 16. [Back.](#)

Note 84: "Bobbili Katha," MS, fol. 94 and elsewhere. [Back.](#)

Note 85: *Pedda Bobbili Raja Katha*, 17. [Back.](#)

Note 86: *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha*, 21. [Back.](#)

Note 87: Though this Velama focus corresponds to the tone of the book throughout, the possibility that the story could be construed in a nationalist vein was, in fact, acted upon by two dramatists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sri Padakrishnamurti Sastri (1908) and Vedam Venkataraya Sastri (1916) each wrote a nationalist play based on the story of Bobbili. P. Venkata Rama Sastri notes the nationalist attitude present in both works in his analysis of the two dramas. See P. Venkataramasastry, *Sri Pada Vedamvari Bobbili Yuddhanatakala Tulanatmaka Parisilanam* (Hyderabad, 1988), 4. Of course, the fact that neither of these two dramatists was Velama may account for the plays being less concerned with Velama history than they are interested in promoting nationalism. [Back.](#)

Note 88: *Pedda Bobbili Raja Katha*, 22. Also see page 40. Toddy is a drink made from the fermented fruit of the palmyra tree. Arrack is a distilled drink. "Kikara" and "bhakara" are onomatopoeic words for the author's impression of the sounds that make up French speech. [Back.](#)

Note 89: Here note the efforts of such writers as Kandukuri Viresalingam, G. V. Appa Rao, and G. V. Ramamurthy. All three writers participated in a series of projects to popularize Telugu in print around the turn of the twentieth century. V. Ramakrishna's *Social Reform in Andhra 1848-1919* (New Delhi, 1983), offers a general look at the works of these figures. Also see John Leonard's work on Viresalingam's contributions to this project, "Kandukuri Viresalingam, 1848-1919: A Biography of an Indian Social Reformer" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1970). [Back.](#)

Note 90: Interview with Vanajakshi Chatla, 30 August 1990, and others. [Back.](#)

Note 91: *Pedda Bobbili Raja Katha*, 83. [Back.](#)

Note 92: *Pedda Bobbili Raja Katha*, 86. [Back.](#)

Note 93: *Pedda Bobbili Raja Katha*, 88. [Back.](#)

Note 94: Of course, the changes in general here reflect a certain gendering of caste and tradition in this version of the katha, discussion of which space does not permit. These moves, though, are consistent with the changing status of women near the turn of the century in many parts of India. See, among others, Partha Chatterjee, "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Women: The Contest in India," *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (Nov. 1989): 622-633, or his chapter "The Nation and Its Women," in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, 1993), 116-134; and Sumathi Ramaswamy, "En/gendering Language : The Poetics and Politics of Tamil Identity, 1891-1970" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, 1992). On women becoming the sites for the establishment of control over tradition, see, for example, Lata Mani, "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India," in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History* (New Brunswick, 1990), 91. [Back.](#)

Note 95: *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha*, 91. [Back.](#)

Note 96: *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha*, 92. "Garagara" here is apparently a war cry of sorts. [Back.](#)

Note 97: *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha*, 93. [Back.](#)

Note 98: This is spoken in a way that suggests that these would be the last people he would consider killing. *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha*, 93. [Back.](#)

Note 99: *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha*, 93. [Back.](#)

Note 100: *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha*, 98:
యింతబ్రతుకు బ్రతికినను వీరిచేతిలో చచ్చేద. [Back.](#)

Note 101: *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha*, 99. [Back.](#)

Note 102: *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha*, 99. [Back.](#)

Note 103: *Pedda Bobbili Raju Katha*, 105.
ఎవ్వరి పంతమ సాగిందోయి విజయరామరాజు ? [Back.](#)

Note 104: Inden, for instance, takes great pains to suggest new approaches to historicizing the village and villagers in India. He suggests, for instance, that "If, finally, we gave up the assumption that the actions of villagers are simply expressions of or deviations from an underlying essence — the caste society as the extreme, isolated, and static instance of an Asian or peasant agrarian structure or fixed religious hierarchy (with its attendant mythic and metaleptic mentality) — we would want to focus more carefully on the actions themselves and on their outcomes." Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Cambridge, 1990), 160. Clearly this is consistent with what I suggest throughout this work, but Inden misses the point that "imagining" the village, and even caste, became as much an Indian project as it was a European one. [Back.](#)

Note 105: Nandy's, however, is a psychological approach that attributes meaning to the actions of historical figures who were deeply entrenched in the effects of colonialism, not to those of Indians and British who produced it. See, for example, his description of Gandhi's role in formulating the "most creative response to the perversion of Western culture." Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (Delhi, 1983), 49 ff. [Back.](#)

Note 106: See, for instance, Mikhail Bakhtin's definition of "dialogism" in his *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin, 1981), 426; Foucault's notion of the "silences that permeate discourses," *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York, 1978), 27, is similar; this is also so with Stallybrass's and White's suggestion that "the logic of identity-formation involves distinctive associations and switching between location, class and the body, and these are not imposed upon subject-identity from the outside, they are the core terms of an exchange network, an economy of signs, in which individuals, writers and authors are sometimes but perplexed agencies," *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, 1986), 25. [Back.](#)

Note 107: Anderson claims "that the convergence of capitalism and print

technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation." *Imagined Communities* (London, 1991), 46. [Back.](#)

Note 108: Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, 1983), 36. [Back.](#)

Note 109 For a complete narrative of this revolt based on official records, see J. Mangamma, *Alluri Sitarama Raju* (Hyderabad, 1983). A biography of Alluri Sitarama Raju also details these events.

See Dantulúri Venkatarámaráju, *Viplava Vírudu Allúri Sítarámaráju Caritra* (Bhímavaram, 1984). Both these works base most of their cases on "Rampa Disturbances," Mr. Happell's Report Published, Government of Madras, Public Department, G.O. 572, 23 July 1923. [Back.](#)

Note 110: Atluri Murali, "Alluri Sitarama Raju and the Manyam Rebellion of 1922-1924," *Social Scientist* 12, no. 4 (Apr. 1984): 3-33; David Arnold, "Sitarama Raju's Rebellion: A Response"; and Atluri Murali, "Manyam Rebellion: A Rejoinder," *Social Scientist* 13, no. 4 (Apr. 1985): 44-56. [Back.](#)

Note 111: The hill people did not necessarily speak Telugu as their first language. [Back.](#)

Note 112: See both David Arnold's *Police Power and Colonial Rule, Madras 1859-1947* (Delhi, 1986) and his "Rebellious Hillmen: the Gudem-Rampa Risings, 1839-1924," *Subaltern Studies* I (Delhi, 1982), 88-142. [Back.](#)

Note 113: "Rebellious Hillmen," 141. [Back.](#)

Note 114: The references to the Rámáyana are significant here. Sheldon Pollack has suggested that the basis for the ability of contemporary politics in India to use that epic and the figure of Ráma resides in a centuries-long process that gave Indians a mythic leader whose home was a "divine Hindu realm" and who protected against a "demonic 'outsider.'" For Pollack that formulation explains anti-Muslim sentiments. In the cases of the *Bobbili Katha* and the Rampa Rebellion the figure of Ráma serves in opposition to different sets of outsiders, offering yet another chance to see the impossibility of enclosing a symbol or meaning for use in a particular way. Ráma was as each group succeeded in portraying. See Sheldon Pollack, "Rámáyana and Political Imagination in India," *Journal of Asian Studies* 52, no. 2 (May 1993): 287. Ráma's kingdom is invoked in a number of places in the book version of the *Bobbili Katha*; see, for example, *Pedda Bobbili Raja Katha*, 82 and 110. For contemporary links between Sitarama Raju and the Ramayana, see his likeness in the form of a [statue at Hyderabad](#) and the [image on the cover](#) of D. K. Prabhakar, *Viplava Jyothi Alluri Seetharama Raju* (Vijayawada, 1999). [Back.](#)

Note 115: The Telugu-language movie that was eventually made about this rebellion bore the name of its leader, not the name of the revolt itself. In that film the British are depicted as having instigated matters when two British officers kill a child with their bare hands. Furthermore, the British are made to be revolting in appearance, pasty-faced drunkards, similar to the book version of the *Bobbili Katha*'s depiction of Bussy. [Back.](#)

Note 116: "Sitarama Raju's Rebellion: A Response," *Social Scientist* 13, no 4.

(Apr. 1985): 47. [Back.](#)

Note 117: "Manyam Rebellion: A Rejoinder," *Social Scientist* 13, no. 4 (Apr. 1985): 51. [Back.](#)

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