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AESTHETICS OF THE ELEMENTAL BODY : THE CASE OF TANGIBLE WINDS

Priyadarshini Vijaisri



About the Author

Priyadarshini Vijaisri is a cultural historian engaged in exploring aspects of caste/outcaste histories, adivasi culture and violence. She is currently working on folk traditions of non-modern forms of history in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. She is the author of Dangerous Marginality: Rethinking Impurity and Power (2015) and Recasting the Devadasi: Patterns of Sacred Prostitution in Colonial South India (2004).

Abstract

This paper proposes the idea of the elemental body, distinctive from the body imagined in western philosophical discourses, to explore conception of body and mode of being in Indic context. Drawing from cultural practices across hill/forest (tribal) communities on the Eastern Ghats and sedentary caste communities in Southern region, it discerns the shared principles and notions. Building on insights available in these spaces, this paper explores the prototypical relation between elements and senses in Indian metaphysics and orthopraxis, to delineate different complex of significations and the complex formulations. It unfolds the ways in which the elemental body finds expression in different traditions, predicated on the form of enactment, unraveling a different ontology. Within this broad frame, the following interrelated issues are addressed: Firstly, constitution of an aesthetic sensibility in a context where the boundaries between art and religion are literally collapsed. Secondly, it proposes the idea that while there can be no singular overarching form of expression of such aesthetic sensibility, it traces two interconnected strands- one that of ritual enactment and the other that is associated with the everyday forms of enactment focusing, not on the aesthetic senses (sight and sound), but the case of the element of wind and its corresponding sense of touch in tribal and caste cosmology.

Keywords:

Body, senses, elements, touch, aesthetic, enactment, festival, priests, untouchability

'Fantasy' and 'Facts'

Given below are extracts from legend/katha of Chinna Gangamma, Peddha Gangamma and specific customary practices that mark the continuity between idea and its manifested forms.¹ These extracts are drawn from customs and mythology of the Gangamma, the goddess of the tribes of Paderu, inhabiting the Eastern Ghats and the customary practices pertaining to expression of ideas and practices surrounding touch among the caste communities inhabiting the plains in the Telugu speaking regions of Southern India.² Such intertwinement between legends, generally relegated to the realm of fantasy or mythology, and fact, a manifestation of the 'phantasmic' in the phenomenal world, is germane to the shared cultural notions across tribal and caste cultures and offer possibilities of addressing the concerns of this paper.

Extract 1

"In Kiligada Parvatam was born a Mandi (banyan) tree in the midst of rocks, by a narrow stream surrounded by a thicket of wild. In the hill village lived Pedha Perumali with his wife Buddia. They were a childless couple. This man would climb up the mountain every day to collect tubers and give them to the villagers. In return, he received rice with which his wife, Buddi, cooked some gruel. Thus they lived.

The elders of the village summoned the Bariki, the herald of the village. The elder said to him, "Listen Bariki, make this announcement. The elders have withered away, now young ones (kurra kakulu/literally young crows) have to conduct the festivities, and offer sacrifice to Sankudevudu. Then those who go to the forest to hunt or those to the stream hunt have to cease all work from thence". The Bariki, after ablutions, carried a fowl uphill to the shrine of Sankudevudu. Prostrating he said thus, "Oh Sankamma, here we are giving you, we have always done. Look after us and our wellbeing. You will receive our devotion and offerings". After the announcement the village geared up for the solemn occasion. The women commenced to clean, smear their houses with cow dung and merrily busied themselves with other preparations. Sacrificing the fowl at the shrine the men, as each family, partook the roasted offering conversed animatedly about the ritual hunt. The enactment of the primal play would

commence where men would hunt for all kinds of life on the hills, wild, and the streams in for tubers, crabs, fish, wild beasts and return with the bounty.

During ceremonial exultation the Pedha Perumal appeared unusually dull and quiet and abstained from joining the hunt. He had his bath, tied a head gear, with a cloth so light that it would glide off with just a whiff of air. He picked up an iron crow bar and knife and started off to the hills. That day he walked right in the direction of the Mandi tree. She was watching the Pedha Perumali, as he stationed himself in front of her panting and fretting. His eyes scouted the rocky patch. Talli, (mother), in a youthful age of 12 had blossomed in full maturity, like a brawny male buffalo, with her firm and tender branches spreading far and high. The luscious tree exuded wild charm, oozing sensuousness. Her age was eating her. Exhausted Pedha Perumali was gasping for breath. Though perspiring profusely, not a drop of sweat fell on the ground. Pale and weak he looked around for a place of succor to rest his limbs. At that moment, his eyes were drawn to the Mandi tree. Allured by her, he instinctively thought of entering the thicket and sitting under the trunk of the tree. Excited by this pleasant thought, he garnered his strength and pushing aside the thick grass, and holding aside the lush branches made his way to the magnificent tree. As he approached further closer the branches received him into a tender embrace. Sitting under its shade he uncoiled his headgear and placed it by his feet. Intertwined by the branches, in the embrace of the Mandi tree, Pedda Perumali laid down. As he lay there he was invigorated by the eastern, western and southern winds. Soon he fell asleep. Sweating profusely, he felt lifeless. Gangamma (name of Mandi tree introduced at this point) was enraptured by the Pedda Perumali. Time flew. Perumali awoke and suddenly had the urge to urinate. He looked hither and thither. In no mind to crawl out of the thicket he moved closer to the trunk, relieved himself right into the roots of the Mandi tree. ('This is the truth', says the narrator Gangamma). Mandi tree lovingly thought, "After so long my husband has shown sympathy for me. After long my husband has come and consummated love, my desire is fulfilled. I have experienced him." Thus, thinking Mandi tree giggled blissfully. Amused Perumali peered around and saw Gangamma. Seized by her fullness he remained transfixed all the day; didn't stir even for a moment. All the afternoon and evening he lay down there, so smitten that he didn't feel like parting from

the tree. Then at sunset a thought occurred, “What will my old woman say if I return with nothing? The sun is setting and I haven’t collected anything as yet.” Engrossed in such thoughts his fingers nonchalantly played with the leaves, and his eyes suddenly fell upon the fattened tubers underneath. Overjoyed and regaining his usual agility, he dug the roots, uprooted and piled them up. Soon he was surprised by the plenitude he had effortlessly dug out. Finally, he stopped and looked at the large stock he had amassed! They looked exquisite, in their fullness, all ripe and perfect. But how would he carry them home? He then picked up leaves and wove them into a basket and placed the tubers in it. As he looked around and pondered as to how he would carry the basket, Gangamma, who was watching her husband, cast a spell and that very instant he found a stick. He picked and shaped it into a yoke and tied the baskets. Then he picked up the cloth tied it around his head. Prostrated at the tree and turned around to pick up the yoke. The next moment the yoke miraculously clung to his shoulders. As he carried, the yoke, despite its heaviness, unlike other days, was far more light and rested gently on his shoulders. What say of her, Mother Mandi tree herself was carrying the burden for her husband. Miraculous play (lila). He walked and she walked too.

(An episode in the Chinna Gangamma and Peddha Gangamma Katha)

Extract 2. A customary belief in the Eastern Ghats

“The tande tree is sacred. It inheres curative powers. A person who is treated by its leaves is the nestam of the tree, bond in friendship.”

Extract 3. A custom specific to a tribe of Mali

“It happens even now in a small village there sukla snanam (ceremonial bath) for pre- puberty girls. Were a girl to menstruate prior to this ceremony she is taken and cast away or left off at the village boundary. Ostracized by the family, she undertakes an oath to cease all relations with her clan or village. She can be taken away by anybody.”

Extract 4. Dakkali, one of the sub-clans of Madigas

“We are sanchari jatulu (non-sedentary castes), always on the move. It has thus been instituted. We saddle our few belongings on the donkeys, hunt, rest and again commence journey by foot to the Mirasi villages. We do this periodically as we are forbidden from settling down permanently. Reaching there we announce our arrival and install tents on the outskirts of the Madiga settlement. All our needs are taken care by them. We narrate to them the puranas, and genealogies. We don’t exceed the stay too much. When we move we receive sacrificial fees/tyagam from each family. Those are emotional moments, we tell them, “if we are alive we will meet again”.

Practitioners of certain strands of rationalism and positivism would find it least befitting their disposition to engage with such sites. There is a certain amount of truth in such imagined possibility for engagement with these spaces calls for a different way of positioning and mode of enquiry. One way of entry into this realm would be to posit these cultural expressions with what has come to be defined as aesthetic sensibility whose wisdom is of a different order, to think about cultural sensibility and implications on sense perception. Needless to say, like all forms of knowing and being this engagement is neither beyond falsification nor devoid of the concerns of human predicament and the recognition of the intense potentiality in such experiences in constituting the world. At the same time, the cultivation of disposition of self is evidenced by the wide range of interpretations of such phenomenon, from frames of dualism to ‘subjective empiricism’ i.e., to the exclusive emphasis on the mental or the ideational.

This paper will try to address a few interrelated issues: Firstly, a preliminary investigation on the constitution of a particular form of aesthetic sensibility in a context where the boundaries between art and religion have literally collapsed. Secondly, while there can be no singular overarching form such disposition assumes, it traces two strands- that of ritual enactments, where the body is attuned to staging out the interconnectedness in splendid ways enlivening symbolism of such interconnectedness and the other of foregrounding this idea in tribal and caste cosmologies by taking up the case of the element of wind and sense of touch.³

This necessitates returning to the original metaphysical idea of the elemental body. This conception of the elemental body is a foundational idea shared by Indian philosophical discourses and resonates with Ayurvedic as well as contemporary spiritual discourses that is fundamentally distinct from and overlaid by the conception of the pure/impure body.⁴ Any account of senses, perception and body in the Indic Indian context necessitates a distinctive approach to these sets of issues from the Western discourses. The prominence accorded to the sense of sight in contemporary western philosophical and epistemological discourses is evidenced by its centrality in classificatory system; like race founded on the secondary property of vision or as a mechanism of power (epitomized in the idea of Panoptican vision) and resonates with the privileging of the concept of gaze in critical theorization of power.⁵ In the Indic context, the sense of touch, the basic, universal sense, is the paradigmatic sense in comparison to the other senses.⁶ Recognition of this fundamental variance is vital for it offers a starting point; whereby trailing the almost impenetrable structures of thought and experience, a different universality unfolds, a substratum superimposed and obviated by complex classificatory structures. It becomes possible to mark the trajectory, shift, potential threads of falsification within discourses, as well as the continuous and divergent flows across tribal and caste cultures.⁷ Here the body, senses and nature of experience can neither be reducible nor available exclusively through non-Indic categories and frames.

Elements and Senses in Western and Indic contexts

To engage with the distinctive conception of the elemental body and nature of sensibilities in the Indic context would require setting out broad contours of classical European philosophical thought and its trajectory. In retracing the complex speculation in the Western context, a connecting link is identifiable in the varying shifting reconfigurations of the conception of elements. Complex histories on the reconfiguration of discourse on elements, i.e., from the idea of arche, to alchemy and latter its locus in science/chemistry, as instantiated by the periodic table, is crucial yet outside the purview of this study. This brief recapitulation here only serves to foreground a broader Western epistemological dominance that has come to pervade theorizing the senses and aesthetic

experience. It needs to be noted that studies suggest that this history has little resonance with other histories of the elements in the West, especially esoteric mystical traditions and alchemy that were viewed as 'superstitious' and not belonging to proper provenance of philosophy.⁸ Classical philosophical commitments to metaphysics, outside theological influence, were inspired by the Pre-Socratic expositions on the physical world independent of supernatural entities. Perhaps, the Pre-Socratic period was the only phase in classical philosophical history when the question of arche "the original, controlling stuff of the universe, the first principle" occupied centrality in expositions of larger metaphysical issues like the origin and nature of the universe.⁹ A range of postulations from single element or first principle proponents to the atomists, of which all matter/objects in the physical world was constituted or was related to the nature and mechanism of the universe; or the idea of the universe as by nature "a hylozoism", "where everything is to some degree animate",¹⁰ to the denial of the idea of origin of the world as "accidental or material necessity" and Aristotle's reluctance to accept even Plato's qualified postulate of demiurge, "the rational, purposive and beneficent agency" as the creator of the cosmos, instead that it was "just as it is", indicate the consistent reflection on the origin of the cosmos and its substratum. Perhaps, Aristotle's expositions on nature and place of humans in it is a sort of rationalist anthropocentrism which would dominate philosophical thinking and the emphasis on ethical and epistemological concerns; "if nature makes nothing without purpose or in vain it follows that nature has made all the animals for the sake of men"; could account for a particular way of thinking and imagination.¹¹

Unbound by mythical and theological influences, through the quest for accounts based on empirical and rational methods and skepticism for any relativist or subjectivist accounts, almost saw the preeminence vested in universal truths and universalism this promised. In such accounts, sense data or sensations were unreliable or had only some value in understanding cognitive process. Hence, in Aristotle's natural philosophy the universe was divided into spheres, separated by their essential nature- the four elements of Earth, Air, Fire and Water belonging to the terrestrial and ether to the celestial sphere. With this cosmology and natural science Aristotle evoked great interest on the structure and mechanism of the senses. Sense perception became important though the Pre-Socratic idea of 'like attracts like' was refined by him. According

to which, “the fundamental community of elementary constitution in sense objects and sense organ is the cause of our being able to observe objects”.¹² Apart from this refinement of the idea of sense perception in the Aristotelean cosmology elements have a natural place and natural motion and move in particular directions and spheres. While scientific thinking brings in a very different exposition which perhaps erased the trace of elements in conceptions of senses and the body.¹³ Such a body dismembered from both the nature and the distant heavenly sphere, and attuned to a radically divergent sensibility, far more skeptical of bodily sensations, emotions and instincts constrains the conception of psychophysical potencies. While in conflict with it and yet complementing this disposition is the idea of universe as made of matter-and this dead mechanical universe further incite a relation of forceful domination over nature.¹⁴

The origin of aesthetics (as a discipline) and primacy accorded to aesthetic senses is a corollary of the classical philosophical correlation of sight and sound with ‘operations of reason’. Platonic metaphysics which had a dominant influence on aesthetic theory, premised on the dualism of not only the body/senses and mind/reason but art itself was dubious; for according to theory of forms, idea being the ultimate reality, art being imitation of nature was twice removed from reality. Berleant notes, Platonic and Christian influence largely shaped dominant thinking in the field of aesthetics, devaluing senses relating to bodily pleasure and with a distinctive quality of immediacy. Thus only those senses that were ‘distant receptor sense’ came to be typified as aesthetic senses for they enabled ‘detachment from direct contact with the physical and may be retained’ and ‘guard the contemplative mind’ from the onslaught of contact senses.¹⁵ Thus, the two essential components of formalism that dominated western aesthetics i.e., immediacy/pleasure and disinterest/psychic distance were formulated on the aesthetic senses. But a parallel trend, although not very influential, recognizes the significance of historical and cultural contexts, emphasizing ‘artworks’ as ‘cultural products,’ whose constituent elements had to be grasped to feel the proper sentiment.¹⁶ This tendency was perhaps reinforced by Cartesian dualism and the mechanistic conceptions of the universe, for Berleant precisely calls for a different aesthetic sensibility to grasp its nature, “a recognition of the continuity of man with nature, the constant transaction between the human organism and his natural surroundings, “that would challenge the

traditional metaphysical commitments” to the “separation between man and nature, discrimination between the sensory data of various receptors, between active involvement and passive contemplation, between the material and the spiritual and their opposing values...” Such “perceptual awareness given the inherent perception of sensation “had the “capacity to unfold the complexity of human/natural existence of the present and is the least illusory of all our experiences”.¹⁷ Bringing in the wisdom of ‘empirical subjectivism’ he reminds, “Nothing is as undoubtedly real as the direct experience of the moment”.¹⁸

In the Indian context, particularly, it would be futile and distorting to reduce sense experience as well as metaphysics to a singular autonomous domain like the religious, the aesthetic or the cultural sphere etc. Such artificial constructs not only have implications on the discourses but also resulted in marginalization and stigmatization of communities, who for modern sensibilities embody ambivalence. With this backdrop it will be useful to note the general features of Indic aesthetics and relate it to cultural issues that operate outside its normative framing. Indic aesthetics as espoused in the *Natyashastra* permeates philosophical discourses, and exudes the very seamless flow of the art forms in different aspects of life. Thus, given the ‘interpenetrative nature of these fields’ (art and religion) both ‘share the specific goal of moksha and liberation’.¹⁹ The other dimensions of its affective quality in its fullness can be grasped by the historical and cultural factors that made possible for artistic form in religion to precisely enable a quality of immediacy and interest in ways that exceed pursuit of moksha or rasa. Thus, to explore the resonance the theatrical universe bears both in the classical text and in contemporary ritual enactments, in artistic form, it would be useful to look into positioning of the text and introduce the issue of alterity (within the sacred/theatrical universe) within this discourse of pleasure and transcendence. Moreover, the systematization and extension of Bharata’s formulations fundamentally shaped metaphysics, orthopraxis while also inspiring radical shifts. Thus, a brief overview of broad developments in these ideas will enable to grapple with the issues mentioned earlier. To rephrase it differently, does the distinction between illusion/imitation and reality at different levels within this cosmology or metaphysics hold and what significations does it have for thinking about the overflow of the aesthetic sensibility in ‘ordinary’ everyday life.

The Natyashastra, a treatise on dramaturgy is preceded by a fundamental transition in the Vedic ritual system. Positioning itself within the Vedic frame, as the fifth Veda, the text ‘assimilates’ ‘Upanishadic worldview and conceptually and structurally the theatrical universe is visualized analogous to the brahmanical ritual/yagna’.²⁰ It is not coincidental that despite its implicit origins the treatise clearly is in the direction towards charting a separate field. Its appearance marks a crucial moment when the artistic form in Vedic rituality was substituted by ‘liturgical and symbolic practices’.²¹ This shift marks a significant transition in Vedic tradition and perhaps this prehistory of treatise on dramaturgy informed the latter discourse on the nature and value of aesthetic experience in relation to religious pursuits. Heesterman, notes the quintessence of pre-classical ritual, which lay in a, “complex of archaic rites, different kinds of contests, singing, dancing, drumming, lute playing and copulation”.²² Similarly, Glucklich analyzing the Mahavrata ceremonies details the several ritual enactments of rivalrous ritual participants (brahman and shudra) ‘alternating praise and abuse towards the participants’, sexual intercourse, a ritual duel between the ‘Arya and Shudra’, the victory of the former over the latter/evil, institution of sovereignty, sacrifice, dance and song etc.²³ The Natyashastra, in its posturing, sustains a clear separation between earlier dramatic ritual enactments, and the artistic devise of drama as an ‘imitation that represented’ a primal event or a representation of the three worlds.²⁴ Indeed, the text mentions ‘the first staging of drama in a festival honoring Indra’s victory over asuras’. This primeval drama is presented as a mere ‘devise of imitation’, in the assemblage of gods, of the situation of triumph by the gods and ‘represented’ the alteration and tumult. The dramatic performance is akin to the yagna, also susceptible to attack by the evil spirits/asuras and the stage itself becomes the centre fortified by the very gods. The stage, like yagna, inheres auspiciousness and is approached with reverence.

Significantly, the Shastra, with shift from ritual combat to normativity, ascribes to dramaturgy a didactic purpose. Thus, while this ‘Veda that is audible and visible’, would be available to all varnas, unlike other Vedas, was especially a deflection through entertainment ‘diversion for people who had strayed from the path of righteousness/shudras’. Through ‘mimicry’ it would ‘counsel’ and conduce people to dharma, kama and artha while also bringing delight to the ‘gods and demons’ by performances. However, a lurking continuity is evidenced in the text itself signifying its permeability to others realms beyond dramaturgy. For instance, dramatic performance, as evident in the text, contains the residue of its earlier ritual potency to ‘destroy evil’ and ‘bring prosperity’. Recognition of potency of music/sound, to ‘drive away evil/rakshashas’ thus rendered music/drama equivalent “to the exposition of the Vedic hymns”.²⁵ This idea is further reaffirmed, “music is superior to a bath, or tapas for a thousand times, thus where such music and performance

occurs will never know any kind of inauspicious happening.” Sacralization of the Natyashastra, having originated from the mouth of Brahma, is encapsulated not only in its etiology but also in its naturally invested forms and acts associated with it a meritorious quality. Therefore, injunctions like, “those who witness the performance will attain the same goal which the masters of the Vedic path and the Vedic lore, the performers of sacrifices or the givers of gifts will attain” will (after death) attain the happy and meritorious path in the company of the Brahmanic sages, preclude a foreclosure of this textual authority to exclusively artistic realm.²⁶ What sustains this double bind is the core formulation of the idea of aesthetic emotion or Bharata’s theory of rasa as constituting the essence of Indic aesthetics.

Rendered in formalistic manner rasa, or “sentiment, is produced by a samyoga/combination of vibhava/determinants, anubhava/consequents and vyabhicharibhava/transitory states.” It would suffice here to focus on the role Bharata attributes to arousing particular bhava/emotion through artistic expressions or gestures. This emotion thus transformed into pleasurable/aesthetic relish, rasa, is conditioned by the spectator’s tasting of the essence of the dominant emotion devoid of any particularity or contingency of space, self and temporality. Much of the interpretations and commentaries on Natyashastra have elaborated and reformulated the idea of rasa and nature of aesthetic experience, the stages involved in it, the emotions, senses and consciousness. The centrality accorded to rasa was due not only to the seamless flow of artistic form but its unparalleled decoding of the basic structure of physical and mental processes and the subtleties and complexities of human emotions bringing in a refined sense of universalism.

Natyashastra’s rasa theory had a pervasive influence on philosophical systems in providing allegories, parallels and further impetus to reformulations and newer ideas and practices. But particularly important was its impact on discourses on the nature of existence and truth revealed by rasa/aesthetic emotion and drama. Particularly in Vedanta and Samkhya it furthered critical discourse on the nature of the phenomenal world and the transcendent world, reality and illusion, senses, consciousness, dispositions and states of being. For the monists, like the dualists, aesthetic experience has value for it unfolds the real nature of existence and the ultimate truth. While for the former aesthetic experience is an end in itself, as it reveals the illusory nature of existence and thus ‘a pathway to reality’ in Samkhya it is a deflection or refuge from the natural world. However, the aim/value of art according to both Vedanta and Samkhya is in its potential to induce a mood of detachment.²⁷ But such depersonalized detached pleasure, grasping the unity in beatitude and momentarily foretasting of moksha was regarded as based on lower truth as it is not true knowledge.²⁸ A major shift was marked in the ninth century when rasa was to be unbound from its classical entrapments and vested

with robust mystical significations and value with rasavada now recognized as analogous to brahmansvada. Formulations on such postulations by Anandavardhana and Bhattanayaka, the Kashmiri Shaiva Abhinavagupta's commentaries on Bharata have been influential also for application of Saiva metaphysics to aesthetics.²⁹ In Shaivism rasa or ananda is postulated as a purified state of undifferentiated experience while in life such state was Shiva. To describe such experience, the term *chamatkara*, used in mystical experience, is introduced to aesthetics wherein it denotes a 'self-luminous' unbound self in a 'state of beatitude.' In the theatrical universe the determinants and consequents are pure categories disassociated as they are from the fetters of temporality, attachments and immediacy.³⁰ Aesthetic experience is characterized by temporariness, unlike moksha or brahmansvada but the affinity between the two is foregrounded to enunciate the efficacy of rasavada in attaining salvific goals.³¹ This quality of universalization/sadharikarana of art awakens the sympathetic spectator/sahradaya to a transcendent state. Thus, rasa is described as *alaukika/supramandane* or *lokattara/transcendent* or *bliss/Ananda*. The aesthetic process thus is the transformation of the individual towards purity, subtlety and universality. The transfer of rasa between wondrous creator and the spectator is mediated by the actor/dancer; "Born in the heart of the poet, it flowers as it were in the actor and bears fruit in the spectator."

With bhakti religiosity another profound shift is affected both in discourse and orthopraxis as it radically reversed the teleos of aesthetic experience. Here rasa and bhava are religious concepts signifying distinctive emotional state and experience. These shifts altered the formalistic tendencies in description and understanding of aesthetics. Employing the categories of rasa in their wholesomeness, to layout and identify the several stages of bhakti, brought about a distinctive aesthetic sensibility to devotionalism. Crucial to Vallabha's aesthetic devotionalism is the introduction of a decisive principle whereby; love, the dominant emotion/rati bhava is transfigured into rasa/ratirasa but far from depersonalized, momentary experience it inaugurates a new stage or consciousness. For Vallabha, "rasa (aesthetic and impersonal) provides an occasion for extraordinary bhava: an intensely personal experience of emotional relationship with Krishna." The quality of such extraordinary emotion ensues a very different perception of self, for Vallabha, "passion (ratih) having the divine as its object is called bhava...The devotees' sense of individual sense is not transcended: it is instead divinized in the experience of intimacy with Krishan".³² For the phenomenal world/prapanca is but a partial manifestation of the divine. Divine bliss is experienced by the 'senses and the mental processes and their essences' that are purified and divinized by the grace of Krishna such that bhava itself becomes the abode of the divine/bhagvad bhava. Thus, the devotee is in a "constant state of absorption in the eternal lila of Krishna" and his associates, the "lila occurring continually in an unmanifest (aprakta) form in the 'heavenly Vrindavan".³³ The most insightful idea here is that of the nature of the phenomenal world as "a simultaneous revealment and concealment avirbhavatirobhava) of god's innumerable contradictory qualities".³⁴

Elemental body, Lila/Play and Enactments

The extracts from sacred lore and modes of life, mentioned in the beginning of the paper, exceed the frames of discourse outlined above though they partake in the broad worldview and basic form and structure of expression. The dominant tendencies that historically contributed to a sort of codification and systematization of rasa theory perfectly resonate with formalism that is dominant in western aesthetics. K.C Pandey's delineation of properties of aesthetics senses as being, non-intrusive into the objects of perception, 'for it is not in the nature of such products/objects not be for a 'particular percipient' is expression of a predominant formalized rasa theory. Such rationality between the objects and percipient precludes distortion of pure experience, which is what active relation endangers.³⁵ The bhakti reconfiguration of the very basic principles and orthopraxis provides a striking instance of the contradistinctive variations in aesthetic practices that lent to modulation by religious and cultural practices. Such frames given the trajectory of Indic aesthetics occlude a bewildering range of experiences, emotions and forms from academic purview.

Ideas as mental artifacts take on a form, manifest and find enactments in ways that exceed apparent reality configuring experience. The elemental body is attuned to a very different reality wherein the nature of relation between the senses and the elements unfolds a distinctive ontology. Aesthetic sensibility could in a simple sense be that profusion of symbolic mediation of the senses with the object; manifesting in symbolic bodily acts, like for instance, gesture, posture, movement that overlay bare or minimalist contact (in the sense of ordinary, mechanical or objectivist field). The fact being that there is nothing like a bare touch,³⁶ how can an aesthetic sensibility in everyday context be unveiled? The elements and senses are subject to varied and complex schema in philosophical schools ranging from pluralistic atomism to monist cosmological origin. What is relevant in this context are the ways in which generic ideas manifest. For absence of abstract codification is, not a negative fact here, but an indication that it appears in the nature of an intrinsic quality, constituting the essence of worldview. It will be useful to briefly note the generic conception of elements especially within a particular category of literature consisting of the Veda, Purana/epic and Dharmashastra. These could serve as broad indicators to further explore the core idea of and consequences of the inextricable fusion of the body and the universe, both being but a modification of the five elements, on the conceived relation between elements and senses in these realms.

According to the Mahabharata, "the primeval being is Manasa, he created Mahat. Mahat created consciousness/Brahma, who created space. The five elements are the brahman of great energy. All created things are the body of brahman. "The mountains from his bones, earth from his fat and flesh, oceans constitute his blood. Space is his stomach. Wind forms

his breath. Fire is his energy. Rivers form his arteries and veins. The sun and moon are his eyes.” The various objects of creation were created by Manasa in his form of Brahma by his will. From infinite space, water originated in darkness. Wind arose from sound and passed through water then fire combined space and water with help of wind. Combining with wind, fire became solidified. The liquid portion of fire solidified and became earth”.³⁷ In the Vedantic conception too, the Brahman is the source from which the universe, in all its organic and inorganic aspects, comes into being. In the first place, it gives rise to ‘elements’ (bhutas) ... and each of these has its own distinctive quality”.³⁸ Angelika Marinar succinctly offers an account of Samkhya cosmogenesis of the sequential ordering and intimate relation between the elements and the senses. Herein, the elements originate from tanmatras/subtle senses, “Creation is a gradual manifestation of tattvas. It begins when the two highest tattvas, prakriti and purusha, come in contact with each other. Purusha is consciousness/ the conscious entity; it has no agency nor creative power. Prakriti is creative power, external nature but no consciousness. It consists of three qualities/ properties/gunas (sattva, rajas and tamas) which are in a harmonious equilibrium in its primal state. The causal agency of Prakriti is activated when it comes in contact with Purusha/consciousness. When Purusha contacts Prakriti it activates the gunas, the properties which produce a gradual hierarchical manifestation of 23 tattvas-each tattva originating from the preceding one- constituents of being- buddhi/intellect/power of discrimination, ahamkara/ego, manas/mind, cognitive instruments/ sense organs, indriya, action instruments/actions organs/karmendriya, subtle senses/tanmatras and gross elements/bhutas”.³⁹ This cosmological position of subtle realms, thus explain why everything in the manifest world consists of a combination of sound, taste, touch, smell and vision. As the corporeal world is made up of the elements that were produced from the senses, sensuousness is cognitive feature of elemental matter not a quality or attribute of matter. Thus, cosmologically and ontologically the senses are modification of the cognitive capacity. They are not products of gross elements as Nyaya and Vaisheshika postulate.⁴⁰ Despite the different schematization in philosophical schools on the relation between the elements and the senses, one of the basic postulation is that the subtle senses possess the potency to effect physical matter or vice-verse. Such intertwinement between elements and senses rather the whole and idea of pervasiveness of the elements and their extraordinary force is evoked by a passage in the Apastamba’s Dharmashastra. Here elements symbolize the ultimate testimony that humans can claim, “when approaching a guru for student has to clarify his caste and conduct. Then he should declare, ‘fire who sees, wind who listens, and sun who reveals’, they vouch for his unrighteousness” .Similarly, a passage in Mahabharata postulates a relationship between elemental testimony and karma.⁴¹

From these diverse accounts a rudimentary conception of the elemental body unfolds where the body is conceived as embodying

an intrinsic distinctive intimacy between the senses, elements and the universe. At a more complex differentiated level caste introduces the conception of secondary properties into this cosmology premised on different principles, especially karma, guna and varna.⁴² The tribal cosmology retains a certain ‘unobtrusive’ attitude in relation to the elements to the extent that that there is a certain ‘objective’ universalism that brings humans as a unit in relation to the external elemental cosmos. Despite the divergent accounts there is an underlying unity in the basic conception of relation between the senses and elements as well as their mutually affective quality and in continuum with the interconnected spheres of universe. Thus, the realms that figure outside the formal discourse of rasa, (i.e. tribal and shakta), point to perhaps not very different connotations but bring attention to the possible primal meanings of aesthetic sensibility, value and forms they assume. Aesthetic sensibility as a type of engagement or disposition towards self and the world, as it manifests in everyday enactments deviates from mundane or a practical realist disposition. This deflection offers possibilities of discerning related yet different forms; firstly, enactments as (an everyday) form of aesthetic sensibility and secondly, the refined and systematized artistic devices (drama,) that complement such enactments (on ceremonial occasions). Moving to the paradigmatic sense of touch, as it is enunciated in these cosmologies provides an entry point to explore such interconnections.

Interconnection between elements and humans and allusions to relation between element of wind and sense of touch appears strikingly in the tribal sacred lore, in an erotic encounter between the banyan tree and the Pedha Perumali. The sensuous quality is evoked by a primal symbol of touch, the winds. Such rendering, it becomes clear, is not simply a figurative device. Further, illustration of this idea transformed into a custom is available in the deeply cherished practice of establishing ties with specific plants and trees believed to possess special powers. A person healed by such plant/trees is bond in special relationship with it. The term nestam referring to such bond implies friendship, in lieu of which the person is under obligation to ensure its wellness. Or to take a parallel case in the region, responding to query from the healer called in to exorcise a spirit a typical account offered would proceed on these lines, “She was passing by that way when the winds touched her”. The term galipantukunnadi literally means touched by the winds. These indicate occurrences that everybody is susceptible to. Taboo around touch also manifest and find enactment in diverse ways and such taboos of touch or contact are predicated on the idea of contagion as a potential state of danger. For instance, sukla snanam an archaic custom in the Eastern Ghats among the tribals is expressive of this cultural notion. Tis pre-puberty ceremonial bath affects a conducive transitional state to undergo the dangerous moment of puberty. In cases where the girl attains puberty prior to such ceremony she is escorted to the outskirts of the habitation and left there to mark her ostracization. All ties with her clan ceased, abandoned she can be taken by members of any other

clan forbidding her own. Similarly, in the case of the community of Dakkali whose enactment of their fraternal bond with the Madigas (a leather working community) brings to fore the distinctive quality the presentation of their being takes.⁴³ The Dakkalis are always on the move, forbidden as it is to them a state of 'permanency.' The Dakkali men, women and children tread their way to the Mirasi villages, where reside their patrons, with belongings saddled on the donkeys.⁴⁴ Reaching their destination, stationing themselves on the hedges of the Madiga habitation, by the pit, they announce their arrival. Their presence marked by the Madiga elders' tents would be raised with bare needs to meet their bare needs. No hearth would be set up, kindling fire being forbidden too. For the days they reside they would be fed by Madigas who brought them food to the hedge. During evenings the Madigas would gather around the Dakkali at a safe distance. A ceremonial worship is offered to the sacred objects (palmra texts) carried by the Dakkali. Then untying the palmra text and offering salutations to the gods he narrates the sacred puranam that account for the primal play between the divine and the mortals, in which is accounted his own origin too. This revelation holds the way to awareness and anchorage of his own being resonating which he reenacts the series of primal events. It courses through the beginning when his own great grandfather, Jambavamuni, was the counselor to the Trimurtulu/gods. Sivas' wedding that changed it all. It set into motion a series of events: Agastyamuni's rage, the curse on Visvakarma, Jambavamuni's intervention and the fatal sacrifice of his son, Trimurtulu raising the sacrificed from the remains in the pit, the final death contagion and the fall of Jambavamuni. ⁴⁵The primal moment when the divine injunction was uttered, sagacious Jambavamuni's clan transformed into untouchables so did the revival of the sacrificed son and the forbiddance of all ties with the revived son stained by the contagion of death.(Image.1) Since, the Dakkalis have been on the constant move, untouchable to their own. Thus, the primal events had altered the Dakkalis destiny and this ambivalence is enacted and sustained by the artistic devices of recounting/narrating and a specific perceptible form of self-presentation. It transcends ordinariness.⁴⁶

Invocation of another set of rituals in Shakta tradition will enable grasping the flows of everyday enactments mentioned above. Orthopraxis of Shakta religiosity as evident in villages of Southern India is a unique synthesis of the puranic and tantric elements, ancestor worship, and kula puranas. ⁴⁷(Video .1) This cosmology centres around the Adishakti, the primal feminine principle, sexual desire itself being the originary impulse, recurrence of which ensues in different stages of creation. To surmise the Adipurana, Adishakti searching for a mate to consummate her desire finds Mulapursha and expresses her wish. Assuming the form of peacock and peahen in the sexual play she consumes the secreted substances and flies up in the sky. Adi- Shakti is impregnated and lays three eggs. Each egg produced sets of entities consisting of a divine being, elements, forces and animate and inanimate life forms. From the substance of the

first egg, she creates Brahma, and with the remaining gross matter creates the lands, and powers to guard it, the skies and stars. Similarly, from the second egg Vishnu, Sun in the east and Moon in the west, sacred hymns, lakes, insects, forests and seeds of various kinds were created. From the last one, were created Sankara, fire, winds, forests, animals, birds, water bodies, human beings, seven oceans, and seven islands emerged. The next level of creation, which will dissolve and disperse her powers, is catalyzed by sexual desire, this time she approaches the Trimurti's. The terrified sons, ineffectual in the presence of Adishakti's omnipotence, gain possession of her powers by tricking her. With the usurped power she is reduced to ashes and from the remains of each bodily part emerged divine beings. From the head of the Adishakti emerged Saraswathi and offered to Brahma in marriage. While from the ashes of the chest arose Laxmidevi and given to Vishnu. From the naval arose Parvathi Devi and given to Shankara. From the genital area rose Jagadeswari Mata, and Jagadvinita mata. The latter was given in marriage to Jambavamuni. Parabrahma foretells that a male child would be born to Jambava Muni called Matanga Mahamuni, the progenitor of Chapala Mahamuni lineage. That she would give birth to nine daughters and many dynasties would flourish through their offsprings. From the remaining ashes of the feet emerged Shakti/Kali with three heads and six hands and would manifest in different forms of Adishakti.

While this is an account of creation, it is the bewildering complex of myths, detailing different episodes in the life of Adishakti that bring in a distinctive quality to rituality. The episodes of her wondrous birth in the wilderness, her appearance and retreat, compassion for siddhulu, longing for Jamadagni, her travails in the forest and transformation into a terrifying goddess, denigration as a demon and unleashing of lethal forces, afflictive powers etc are constituent elements of consciousness and divine referent for mortal emotions and existential predicaments. Such episodes bring in an intimacy, connecting links between occurrence in the transcendental and the mortal realm. Added to this expansive range is the sacred lore of clans/ kula puranas, which in themselves occasion separate rites and drama performances during the invocations of the goddess. The ritual system is patterned on vamachara/tantric left hand practices, ecstatic mediums, and communal worship rendered in various artistic forms. The ritual performances and rites are ecstatic moments when the priest/actor/bard modulates this heightened state of emotion to communicate with ancestors as with the Adishakti/Matangi herself. (Image .2)The kathas or renditions of the accounts of the divine and ancestors, through evocation of sentiments like compassion, or heroism the spectators are roused to an intense emotional state which mediates their communion with the divine/ancestors. (Image. 3)



Image 1
Dakkali narrating the purana



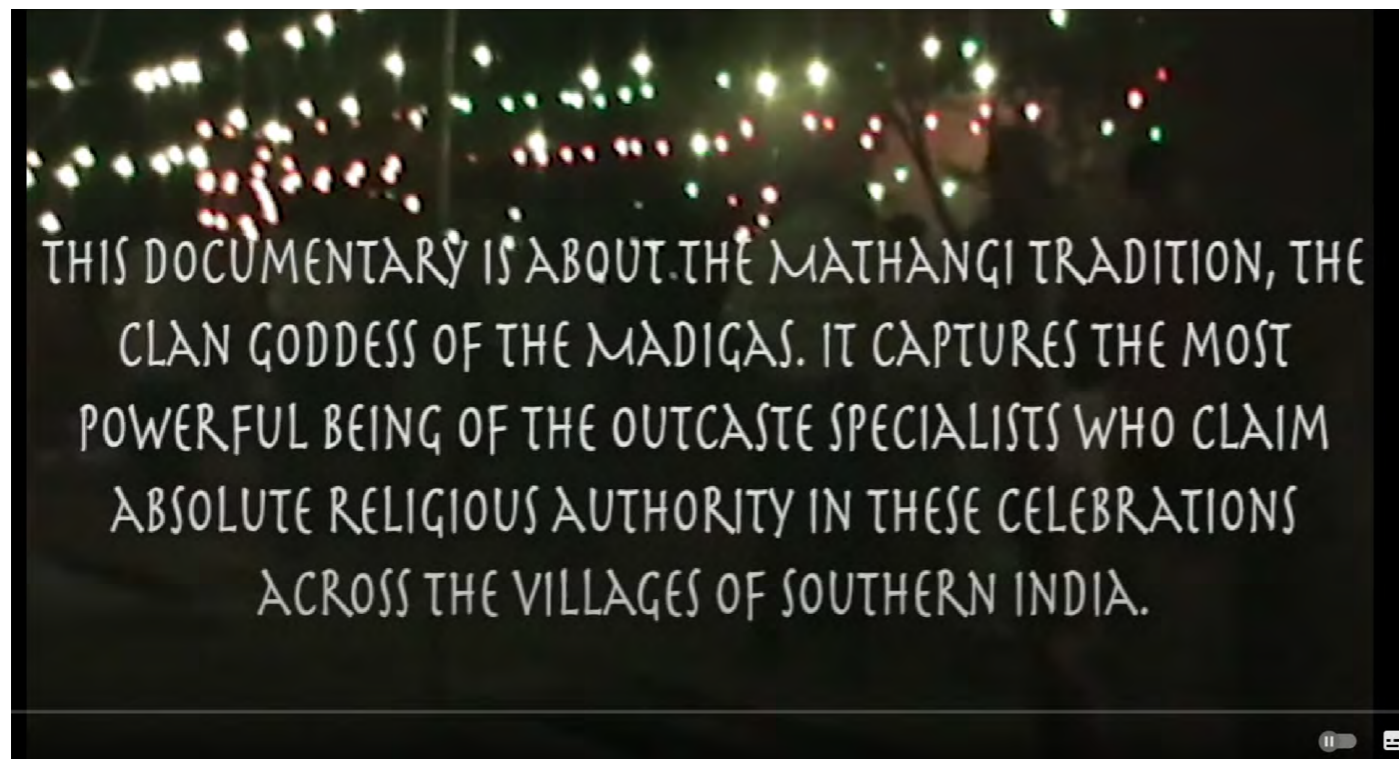
Image 3
Enacting an episode from Ktamarajukatha, a Telugu epic, by priests



Image 2
At the temple, the priests and priestess



Image 4
Enacting the Renuka-Yellamma myth, a villager in the guise of Jamdagniess



Video 1
Clan of Matangi



Video 2
Ritual enactment of slaying the Madigas

Divine Spectacles: Priest/Bard/Sutradhara

The Adishakti is mother/ammavaru invoked through modes of persuasions, appeasements and surrender for fulfilling wishes that relate to individual and collective wellbeing. Several rites of invocation are a fusion of drama and rituals where the entire village participates taking different roles, in the enactment of divine play. (Image. 4) The topography of the village is changed; it is transformed into a metaspace from thence. The very preliminary invocation of the goddess to appear amongst them is at the boundary anthill. It is a transcendental plane devoid of any particularity of time and space. Through songs, drumming and endearing appeals by the priests and elders she reveals herself through the medium of possession. She promises to be present amongst them and receive their worship. Her way to the temple is marked by sacrifices at each home. During her weeklong presence the catalytic episodes from the myths are enacted. The intimacy with the goddess unfolds not only in recalling the primal events but by participating in collective reenactments. One of the spectacular play centering around the Gonekatama katha and enacted by the village recreates the wondrous and terrifying nature of the goddess that signals danger. In the mythic rendering, the Adishakti is enraged by the dishonor, she is subjected to by the arrogant village headman. As a consequence, the entire village is ravaged with afflictions, chaos, disorder and death by the spirits unleashed by the goddess. Then the goddess had threatened to take the daughter of the insolent headman as a sacrificial victim. It is only the penitence of the village headman that order is restored. In another mythic event blended into the play, Renuka is dishonored by thieves in the forest and is transformed into a terrifying deity. Fused yet again with this is the fall of Jambavamuni from being a counsellor of the gods to a fallen primeval man of leather worker. (Video.2) In this replay of primal event by mortals the entire (inter-caste) village assembles in a space that is configured into a forest. The priest assumes the role of the sutradhara/director and directs the sequential unfolding of these triadic fused events. Men, women and children don appropriate roles; Adishakti, Jamadagni, thieves enacting the sequences, as a prelude to the spectacle of the terrifying power of the goddess reclaiming her sacrificial victim. In between the two sequences is played the moment of slaying of Madiga Siddulu by Parashuram and the affirmation that Jambavantudu instituted kulam/clan. (Images 5 and 6) In this sacrifice the goddess (through the medium of the priest) with teeth rips apart the head from the body of the sacrificial victim (substituted by a goat). (Image. 7) This horrifying rite recreates the primal terror reinstating absolute surrender to the sacred. As immersed spectators and participants they course through several sites, all synchronizing in a unity as they partake in the wondrous play of the goddess. Another most common form of presentation during celebrations corresponds to “the three men’s talk” typically with the main priest/sutradhara, another priest assisting him and the third priest donning the character of brahman.⁴⁸(Video. 3)

Another extremely valued sentiment in this tradition, apart from filial love, cultivated for its inherent potentiality, is heroism and a hero/Vira is regarded as a person possessing extraordinary abilities. In Tantricism Vira connotes an initiate who has overcome a state of pasu (individual soul/ordinary mortal) and transformed into a heroic man. The hero personifies traits of courage, resolve, intellect, alert, and one who strives for the wellbeing of others. It signifies an “intermediary stage between pasu and divya where his acquired qualities become part and parcel of himself and cannot be disassociated from his own entity”.⁴⁹ Though the Golla/pastoral community recognize that members of their clan are in proximity to mystical forces, the Vira signifies a active state of being in whom these traits flow naturally within his self and thus is the ideal ritual head and the partner of the Matangi/priestess in communal invocation ceremonies. The ideal Vira is a man of refined attainment, who has learnt the art of blowing the heroic horn and dancing chindu. It is mandatory for the headman/Virudu, along with the priestess, to offer chindu arati to the goddess.

The cosmic as well as the mortal universe are subject to the dynamic cyclical play of creation and destruction. Thus a spectacular range of latent potential in emotions are evoked and channelized to accomplish goals. It is through heightening of intentionality emotional states are channelized by sensuous/artistic devices, pathways of contact with sacred and ancestors are created. The priest creates avenues for navigating through these processes of concealment/absence and revelation/presence to entrap the propitious moment of contact with the different transcendental entities. Ancestors like the divine are forces that affect lives in manifold ways. Intense mediations and forms of contact render possible that which is an impossibility in the sensuous body or consciousness of ordinary mortals.⁵⁰ The exquisite combination of all emotions in the divine play and the intense immersion in this ultimate reality, produces ecstatic state of bliss/anandam/santosham. It is the essence partaken with the sacred. Wondrous here is not just not a transcendent state of bliss but the very recreation of the sublime communion brought about by the fusion of all spheres. Theatrical universe, sacred universe and the mortal spheres are all conjured into a totality where divinity, ancestors, spirits and forces become accessible to mortals as they appear on a single plane in this experience of the ultimate reality. It is within this locus of heightened, intense moment and spatial conjuring that the avenues for power and its enunciation find manifestation. (Video.4)

Disposition is shaped by the horizons of possibilities that worldview opens up. The generic belief in multiple planes of existence /or spheres of reality pervading intrinsic connection between the subtle and gross entities inaugurates a different ontology. Such totality is sustained by cultivation of particular kind of disposition through different modes of enactments. The mediation of senses, unless in unconditioned pure state of being, is deeply conditioned by worldview, mental artefacts and modify



Image 5
Another priest as Parashuram



Image 6
Priest as Parashuram



Image 7
Sacred terror



Video 3
Subversive enactment



Video 4
Religious power

the complex process of sense perception and interaction with the world producing frame of cognition and experience. It also is a superimposition on sense perception as it transforms the relation between senses and sense objects so as to produce a certain desired effect that becomes a condition for conferring upon it a meaning and a value within a particular whole. Thus, as philosophical common sense informs, experience of touch is not as much impelled by primary qualities of the object but through the mediation of secondary qualities. This crafted intentionality, that radically shapes one's encounter with the other, catalyzes a particular emotional response. Eventually such enactments/experiences are predicated on the modification of perceptual experience which in effect reinforces a particular sensibility or aesthetic disposition. Also, a primary quality of aesthetic perception perhaps lies in the inherent human instinct towards extensiveness with the outside that surpasses bare sense experience mediated by a dense field of symbolism. Affecting the appearance of such effusiveness of different spheres and forces human intimacy with these planes of existence is accompanied through everyday enactments in cyclical time, whereby the commencement of the ritual celebrations mark a certain beginning and continuity until its dissolution, mandating its renewal periodically. Here enactment becomes a form of creative synthesis of perceptions, emotions and ideals that play out life.

Despite the preeminence of artistic form, the fall of mythical artist to lowly status is paradoxical. One possible way of thinking about this fundamental feature could be to look for nature of power inherent in the artistic form and the embodied source the artist. Given the essential nature of creative imagination coextensive with creative force, being analogous to creation, the extraordinary potency of the artist is presented as comparable to that of the creator or saint. Vedantic doctrine elucidates this in relation to real world/nature, "nature is beautiful in an inward harmony. Thus the saint is the greatest artist, everything delights him. We can derive enjoyment from nature but we are too dull to perceive beauty of nature. This experience is mediated by the artist. Art is nature itself presented in such a manner that it appeals." According to Maya, the theory of illusion the everyday world of becoming manifested in name and form is the work of the divine conjurer.⁵¹ Evoking similar analogy is the metaphysical idea of creation itself as a mysterious drama/kapatanataka of play/lila and the creator as the sutradhara.⁵² Similarly, the "the creative activity of god is called lila" and the "world is seen as the stage for the divine play".⁵³ Indeed in Abhinavagupta's Abhinavabharati the wondrous creations of the poet/kavi is evocatively presented, "the poet is like Prajapati, from whose will this world arises. For the poet is endowed with a power to create wondrous and unheard of things. This power emerges from vac (speech) which is just another word for poetic imagination (Pratibha) and which is eternally in creative motion".⁵⁴ In Bhakti compositions divine play/rasa lila is the ultimate reality and it is Krishna's conjured act of appearance and disappearance, and emotional states provide 'new avenues for liberation'.⁵⁵ For Shakta the artistic form

is itself a sacred device, originating in primal time, bestowed by the gods as a technique of effecting a desired state of harmony between the parallel realms of the divine, ancestral/spirits and the mortals.⁵⁶ Thus, the poet is simultaneously a bard and an actor and guides others into partaking in the bliss of the wondrous divine play. In Natyashastra, the reason for the fall of the artist is indicated to be arrogance, pride and irreverence showed by the sons of Bharata to the brahman sages. This narrative of the fall of artist to ignominy is portent with significations for reflecting on the status of artists through history, marked either by ambivalence or low status. Inferences can be drawn from such 'fall.' Firstly, the disjunctive move of ritual from its earlier entrenchment in art mandated its invalidity as a religious device with other forms of substitution. Hence, its disassociation was perhaps a deontological presentation as a loss of original purity. Though this injunction serves crucially to affirm a fundamental shift in Vedic rituality this transition did not involve a singular overarching change. In non-Vedic systems artistic forms continued to be crucial for accomplishment of religious goals. Secondly, efficacy of arts to create parallel reality, the marvelous capacities it inherited for mediations between different planes of reality suggest the power innate in the artistic form and the authority consecrated onto the artist. The power to arouse the potentialities and evoke wondrous sentiments had indeed nurtured a distinctive religious being within whose persona was fused the bard, the priest, the conjurer, the artist and the healer. Vedic injunctions preempt the creative power of the artist through a motif of 'irrevocable fall' and thereby contain the dangers of abrogation of this creative power to recreate reality.

Conclusion

The extracts from different sites bring to the fore the 'phantasmic' elements, that underlie everyday life. Such creative imagination is generally attributed to fiction, and while one could say it is in ordinary sense excruciating to sift elements of fiction from reality it may be useful to recognize, as a connoisseur/Rasika of Bhakti rasa would say; that life is an interplay between veiling/absence and unveiling/presence, a good measure of wisdom and refined sensibilities unfold in such interplay. To a great extent, both in artistic universe (in terms of 'pure' art, as the formalist would define) and in the cultural/normative universe, the principle of 'willing suspension of disbelief' as a psychic mechanism is underplay; radically transfiguring our relation to the apparent world, and meaningful experience is predicated on creative figuration of illusion in anchoring reality within an ungraspable totality.

Notes and References

1. This paper is based on ethnography conducted in the tribal villages of Eastern Ghats (2014-2016) as well as earlier research on the Shakta tradition in Andhra (2007-2011). I am thankful to fellows at the IEA, Nantes (2011-12) for kindling interest in philosophy and colleagues at the CSDS for their helpful suggestions, especially Hilal Ahmed for his critical comments and editorial inputs.
2. The mythic narratives of the tribes dwell on the intimate relationship between the wilderness and the human settlements on the one hand and the intimacy between the sacred (goddess Gangamma) and the mortals in the context of sacred cosmology of the region. These fragments of cultural ideas are based on oral narratives and conversations as well as personal observations during several field visits conducted in Telegana and Andhra Pradesh since 2008 and the Eastern Ghats between 2014-2018.
3. Studies on the senses in relation to caste have been gaining significance only in recent decades. Sundar Sarukkai “Phenomenology of untouchability” and Gopal Guru “Archaeology of untouchability” in *Economic & Political Weekly*, 2009, XLIV, No.37. Alex Michaels and Christoff Wulf (eds). *Exploring the senses: South Asian and European perspectives on ritual and performativity: Exploring the Senses* Routledge, Delhi, 2014. Sarukai’s seminal article provided a basic theoretical framework for thinking about the sense of touch by bringing into conversation discourses on senses from the western and Indian philosophical traditions. Though it draws from a critical revisionist anthropological studies on caste, it is entangled in the binary opposition between the brahman and the untouchable as inbuilt in such a model whereby the only mode of resolution available seems to be in the idea of supplementation. While logically such rationalization seems to explain a certain cultural dynamic it obscures cultural meanings of touch beyond this central binary opposition. For instance, what are the possible primal meanings of touch and relations that operate beyond the dynamic of domination, the meanings of touch that tend to be subsumed under ideology of caste or gender but not necessarily evacuated of these structures. Gopal Guru extends Sarukkai’s ideas by drawing attention to an ontology that rests on the transvaluation of the five elements to produce pure and impure bodies undergird by brahmanical power. Michaels and Wulf’s collections of explorations on the senses in South Asian and European contexts is a valuable text to engage with the different dimensions of the sensorial experience (This discussion should be placed in the main text).
4. The idea of consonance between universe and body as a play of five elements charts a distinctive relation to self and universe in spiritual discourse and practices of gurus like Guru Sadguru, the founder of Isha Foundation as well as Sri Sri Ravi Shankar founder of The Art of

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38. M. Hiriyanna The Essentials of Indian Philosophy, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1995 p.24
39. Angelika Malinar "Sensory perception and notion of the senses in Samkhya philosophy" in Alex Michaels and Christoff Wulf (eds) Exploring the senses: South Asian and European perspectives in rituals and performativity, London, Routledge, 2014.
40. Angelika Malinar "Sensory perception and notion of the senses in Samkhya philosophy" Op.cit Also see, M. Hiriyanna, The Essentials of Indian Philosophy, Op.cit pp.86-87.
41. Apastamba's Dharmashastra. In Patrick Olivelle Dharmasutras: The Law Codes of Apastamba, Gautama, Baudhayana and Vasistha Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi 2003 M.N Dutt Mahabharata Vol.VI Op.cit P.50
42. James McHugh, "The classifications of Smells and the Order of the Senses in Indian Religious Traditions" in Numen, Vol.54, No.4, Religion through the Senses, (2007), pp.374-419.
43. Madigas are leather workers constituting a major untouchable community in Southern India. For details see T.R Singh, The Madigas: A study in Social Structure and Change, Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society, Lucknow, 1969.
44. Edgar Thurston Castes and Tribes of Southern India, Vol. 4, Madras Government Press, 1909; T.R Singh, The Madigas: A study in Social Structure and Change, Simon Charsley "Interpreting Untouchability: The Performance of Caste in Andhra Pradesh, South India" Asian Folklore Studies, Vol.63, 2004. pp 267-290. Also the recent ethnographic account Cultural History of Madigas, edited by Thallapally Manohar Pragma Publications, Hyderabad, 2016 pp.60-73.
45. The myth is narrated in detail in Priyadarshini Vijaisri Dangerous Marginality: Rethinking Impurity and Power Primus Publishers, Delhi 2015 P.
46. In what can be an intriguing feature of art history Dakkalis along with similar ties with patron communities, associated with traditional artistic forms and whose life is characterized by transience are referred as sanchari jatulu. To recall the elucidation of rasa theory one of the crucial component of rasa is to do with sanchari bhava, an transitory emotional state. This offers possibilities of thinking about permanence and transience of being and becoming in terms of collectivities and from a different perspective.

47. The link to documentary, Clan of Matangi, created during my fellowship at the Institut d'etudes avancees de Nantes, 2012.
48. Manmohan Ghosh Natyashastra describes it as follows, 'the three men's talk' act where the sutradhara, assistant and the jester perform is a standard part of the repertoire. , p.80.
49. N.N Bhattacharya History of Tantric Religion: A Historical, Ritualistic and Philosophical Study. Manohar, Delhi 1982, p. 317.
50. See for instance Patrick Olivelle Dharmasutras Op.cit p. 101, 157, 391.
51. Teun Godriaan Maya: Divine and Human, Motilal Banarsidas Delhi, 1978.
52. V. Raghavan "The Aesthetic of Ancient Indian Drama" in Indian Literature, Vol.1, No.2 (Apr-Sept 1958, pp. 67-74), p. 67.
53. Fritjol Capra, The Tao of Physics: An exploration of the parallels between modern physics and eastern mysticism Shambala Boulder, 1957.
54. Ibid., p.157.
55. Jeffery R.Timm "The celebration of emotion", Op.cit p. 68
56. Simon Charsley "Interpreting Untouchability: The Performance of Caste in Andhra Pradesh, South India", Op.cit pp.280-281. The artistic form itself becomes a sacred device which the gods entrusted to Jambavamuni for pacifying the terrifying fury of the Adishakti. To undertake this cosmic performance, the gods bestowed him with distinctive symbols of honor (eg. drum, ankle bells, peacock feather, costumes etc). This investiture of performance and honorary symbols unlike the version in Natyaveda is related to the cosmic events, dance/ chindu originates as a technique of effecting a desired state of harmony. This bestowal of honor for a divine purpose is radically distinct from that of 'diversion' as in the Natyashastra Bharataprovides an account of Lord Brahma himself having assigning him the task of creating 'an audible and visible object'.

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