Introduction

mahi mun vāg-anuśāsanuṇḍu sṛjiyimpan ḵuṇḍalîndruṇḍu ṯan-
mahanīya-sthiti-mūlamai niluva śrīnāthuṇḍu provan mahā-
mahulai somuḍu bhāskaruṇḍu vĕlayimpan sŏmpu vāṭillun ī
bahuḷândhrokti-maya-prapañcamuna tat-prāgalbhyam' ūhiñcĕdan

Live the exuberance of language,
first created by the Maker of Speech.
A thousand tongues at the root,
moon and sun above,
God himself within:
a whole world inheres
in what Telugu says.[1]

This verse by the sixteenth-century poet Rāmarājabhūṣaṇa celebrates
a vital and continuous literary tradition, fully formed and mature, in
the language of Andhra in southern India. The poet, working at a his-
toric moment of intense creativity in Telugu, points to a canon already
in place. Each poet is paronomastically identified with a divinity. First
there is Vāg-anuśāsanuṇḍu, the Maker of Speech—Brahmā, in the
classical Hindu pantheon—who has both created and married
the goddess Vāc, Language or Speech. Within the Telugu tradition,

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1. Rāmarājabhūṣaṇa, *Vasu-caritramu* (Madras: Vavilla Ramasvamisastrulu and
Sons, n.d.), 1.10.

however, this is also the title given to the first poet Nannaya (eleventh century), who established the contours of poetry and poetic style. The thousand tongues belong to the serpent Kundalîndruṇḍu-Ādiśeṣa, who holds the world on his thousand hoods; Ādiśeṣa is also the underlying identity of the great Sanskrit grammarian Patañjali, author of the famous commentary on Pāṇini's foundational *sūtras*.[2] After the creation of speech itself, one needs grammar at the root of language. But the same title applies to the second great Telugu poet, Tikkana, who is said to have performed a sacrifice known as *kuṇḍali* (thus explaining his title here). The moon, Soma, is probably Nācana Somanātha, the author of the Telugu *[Uttara-]harivaṃśamu* (fourteenth century).[3] Bhāskara, the sun, is Huḷakki Bhāskara, who produced a Telugu *Rāmāyaṇa* (late thirteenth to early fourteenth centuries). And God himself, the Lord of Prosperity, is Śrīnātha, the fourteenth-century poet who revolutionized Telugu taste. Together, and also no doubt accompanied by other, unnamed poets, these figures created and maintained—in the eyes of the poet who sang this verse—an entire universe, rich with life and feeling, fashioned in and by language. And it is to this language, imagined as a goddess, that the poet pays tribute.

Our anthology attempts to represent, in a modest way, the world of Telugu poetry as imagined by poets such as Rāmarājabhūṣaṇa. We present selections from each of the major poets over a period of some nine centuries, from the eleventh to the nineteenth, on the verge of modern times (although in some sense the classical tradition has continued in Andhra into the twentieth century).[4] Perhaps something of the integrity of this literary world and the striking originality of its makers will come through the distance of time and language. In the following pages we offer a synoptic overview of the Telugu literary tradition, pausing to consider certain key figures in detail.

2. For a seventeenth-century version of the story identifying Patañjali with the serpent, see Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita, *Patañjali-caritra* (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1934).

3. The original title was probably *Harivaṃśamu*; later generations prefixed *Uttara-* to distinguish his work from Ĕr̤r̤āpragaḍa's *Harivaṃśamu*.

4. Surprisingly, one of the great modern poets, Viśvanātha Satyanārāyaṇa (d. 1976), continued the classical tradition directly. See the concluding section of this introduction, p. 51.

BEGINNINGS

Telugu literature begins with Nannaya, but Telugu language is much more ancient, attested in place names from as early as the second century A.D. Prose inscriptions from the middle of the first millennium show a gradual evolution toward the classical language. Verse and the appearance of a literary style are attested in inscriptions from the late ninth century on (or even earlier: the Turimĕḷḷa inscription of Vikramâditya I, in the seventh century, is sometimes seen as already marked by a "high" style).[5] Early references to the language call it Āndhra-bhāṣā[6] or Tĕnugu or Tĕlugu:[7] the etymology of the latter term has been much debated, with some tenaciously arguing for a Sanskrit folk-etymology from *triliṅga*, the land of the three *liṅgas*,[8] and others deriving it from caste or tribal names (Tĕlĕgas, Tĕlāganya).[9] Most probably the name is related to the Dravidian root *tĕṉ*, "south"; thus, Telugu would be the southern language, in contrast to Sanskrit or any of the Prakrits.[10] Telugu is classed as Dravidian and is thus a sister language to Tamil, the oldest attested Dravidian language, with a continuous literary tradition going back at least to the first century A.D. The cultural presence of Tamil radiated northward into

5. See Korada Mahadeva Sastri, *Historical Grammar of Telugu with Special Reference to Old Telugu, ca.* 200 b.c.–1000 a.d. (Anantapur: Sri Venkateswara University, 1969), 35–36; Bh. Krishnamurti, "Shift of Authority in Written and Oral Texts: The Case of Telugu," in *Syllables of Sky*, ed. D. Shulman (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 80–81, referring also to the Vijayavada inscription of Yuddhamala, c. 989.

6. Thus, Ketana in his *Āndhra-bhāṣā-bhūṣaṇamu*, thirteenth century.

7. See Nannaya, *Āndhra-mahābhāratamu* (Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh Sahitya Akademi, 1970), 1.1.26. We cannot say when Andhra and Telugu were first identified as linguistic terms.

8. Supposedly Kāḷahasti in the south, Śrīśailam to the west, and Dakṣarāma in the northern delta. Vidyānātha (fourteenth century) identifies the "country called Triliṅga" as the region marked by the three great shrines of Dakṣarāma, Śrīśaila, and Kāḷeśvaram (Kāḷahasti? Adilabad?); see Vidyānātha, *Pratāpa-rudra-yaśo-bhūṣaṇam* (Madras: The Sanskrit Education Society, 1979), 3.5.22. Recently a derivation has been proposed from *tri-kaliṅga*, the "three Kaliṅgas"; see K. C. Gandhi Babu, "Origin of the Word Telugu," *Proceedings of the Andhra Pradesh History Congress,* 11*th Session* (Nagaram, 1987), 52–55. In any case, it seems likely that the medieval term *tri-liṅga [desa]* derives indirectly from *tri-kaliṅga* and that the association with the three Śaiva shrines is secondary.

9. Perhaps linked to the geographical term Tĕlaṅgāṇa.

10. Cf. Tamil *tĕṉ-mŏḻi*, the southern language, to refer to itself, as opposed to *vaṭa-mŏḻi*, the northern language, Sanskrit.

Andhra from very early times: Nannaya seems aware of a great tradition of Tamil poetry,[11] and the powerful forces of Tamil religion, with its concomitant institutional features, unquestionably played a major role in the history of Telugu culture. It is also important to acknowledge that Telugu crystallized as a distinct literary tradition *after* the full maturation of Sanskrit erudition, including the domains of poetic theory, grammar, social ideology, scholastic philosophy, and so on. Unlike Tamil, which absorbed Sanskrit texts and themes in a slow process of osmosis and adaptation over more than a thousand years, Telugu must have swallowed Sanskrit whole, as it were, even before Nannaya. The enlivening presence of Sanskrit is everywhere evident in Andhra civilization, as it is in the Telugu language: every Sanskrit word is potentially a Telugu word as well, and literary texts in Telugu may be lexically Sanskrit or Sanskritized to an enormous degree, perhaps sixty percent or more. Telugu speech is also rich in Sanskrit loans, although the semantics of Sanskrit in Telugu are entirely distinctive. We will return to this theme.

Already, however, we begin to sense the richly composite nature of the Telugu world. One might think of Andhra as one of the great internal frontier zones of South Indian civilization and at the same time, as such, a melting-pot—a domain of intense interaction among rival cultural currents, with their associated social and historical formations. It is not simple to isolate the various currents or to date their appearance in Andhra history, and one must bear in mind that much of the prehistory—before Nannaya—is hardly known. Still, there are some things that can be said in a general and perhaps slightly abstract manner.

The frontier is structured, in part, along geographic lines. Andhra is divided in three: (1) the coastal zone (Andhra proper), largely deltaic, especially to the north, where the Godāvarī and Kṛṣṇā Rivers flow into the Bay of Bengal (as elsewhere in South India, the delta is associated with heavy Brahmin settlement and influence); (2) Tĕlaṅgāṇa, the dry Deccan plateau, home to peasants, artisans, and warriors; and (3) Rāyalasīma ("the royal domain"), the southern reaches of this plateau, tapering off into the mixed ecological regions of northern Tamil Nadu.[12]

11. Nannaya, 1.1.24 (see selection in the anthology, p. 60).

12. See discussion on Senji in V. Narayana Rao, D. Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance, Court and State in Nāyaka Period Tamilnadu* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 41–44.

In early medieval times, Rāyalasīma was apparently far more fertile than it is today. But even the fertile delta to the north was largely wilderness beyond the immediate proximity of the great rivers; this situation changed dramatically only in the nineteenth century, when the major anicuts were created, thus opening up vast areas for rice cultivation. In medieval times the wild drylands of the interior, peopled by shepherds, artisans, warriors, and a growing proportion of agriculturists, were bound up linguistically, culturally, and sometimes politically with the hardly less untamed but wetter regions of coast and delta.

Andhra history and culture reflect the constant interplay of these ecologically distinct zones, especially of the delta and the Deccan, with cultural innovation often emerging in the latter to be reshaped and domesticated in the former. Over time, ever more serious attempts at integration were in evidence as states based in one region spilled over into, or attempted to absorb, political units rooted in the other areas. Early Andhra history, just this side of prehistory, reveals a Deccan-based kingdom, that of the Sātavāhanas, represented mostly by inscriptions in Prakrit, with only tenuous linkages to the coast. The early state structures in coastal Andhra (especially to the north, in the region known as Vengi) culminated in the rule of the Eastern Chāḷukyas, who eventually married into the Chola system in the Tamil south. Under the Chāḷukya king Rājarājanarendra, Telugu literature as we know it began, with the poet Nannaya. By the thirteenth century, the center of Telugu state-building had shifted to the Deccan plateau under the Kākatīyas, who brought massive tank irrigation to the dry zone and instituted creative forms of military organization based on personal loyalty to the king or queen.[13] Key patterns of Telugu culture were established during this period and later adopted and creatively reworked by the successor-states, including the Vijayanagara super-state based in Hampi, to the west of historic Andhra.

To what extent do these relatively distinct regional-ecological systems combine in awareness to form a single cultural entity—Andhra, as we think of it today? How old is such an awareness? The great poet

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13. On Kākatīya history, see Cynthia Talbot, "Political Intermediaries in Kākatīya Andhra, 1175–1325," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 31.3 (1994), 261–89; idem, "Temples, Donors, and Gifts: Patterns of Patronage in Thirteenth Century South India," *Journal of Asian Studies* 50 (1991), 308–40.

Tikkana, in the thirteenth century, is apparently the first to refer to an imagined community named Andhra (*andhrâvaḷi*),[14] but the boundaries of this community are unknown. Originally, the term seems to be a purely dynastic family title. The earliest fully formed reference to a geographical entity known as Andhra *within* the Telugu tradition may well be Śrīnātha's, in the late fourteenth century: here the temple of Dakṣârāma in Konasīma is said to be the center (*karṇikā*) of a lotus that is itself identified as the middle part of the Andhra country (*āndhra-bhū-bhuvana-madhyamu*).[15] This suggests that Andhra extends far beyond the delta, conceived (perhaps metaphorically) as the center of this cultural and geographical universe; deltaic Andhra, for Śrīnātha, is the symbolic heart of the culture. There are, however, other *maṇḍala*-like schemes superimposed on the geographic realities of medieval Andhra. For example, the important temple to Śiva-Mallikârjunasvāmi at Śrīśailam on the Andhra-Karnataka border to the west is said to have four encompassing gateways: Tripurântakam to the east, Siddhavaṭam to the south, Alampūr to the west, and Umā-māheśvaram in Pālamūru (near Accampeṭa) to the north.[16] In this mapping the center has shifted dramatically to the west, to the point of intersection between Tĕlaṅgāṇa and Rāyalasīma. This tendency to reorient and to situate a new center contextually is perfectly characteristic of the medieval Andhra understanding of place. Like so many parts of India, historic Andhra has no clear boundaries. In the early sixteenth century, the conquering emperor Kṛṣṇadevarāya came from Vijayanagara to Śrīkākuḷam, in Kṛṣṇa District, where the god is known as Āndhra-mahāviṣṇu or Tĕnugu-rāya—perhaps demar-

14. Tikkana, *Āndhra-mahābhāratamu* (Hyderabad: Balasarasvati Book Depot, 1984), 4.1.30.

15. Śrīnātha, *Bhīmeśvara-purāṇamu*, ed. Ra. Venkata Subbayya (Madras: Ananda Press, 1901), 3.50.

16. There is also a list of four "corners" or secondary gateways in addition to the above four "directions." These include Eleśvara-kṣetra to the northeast of Śrīśailam (near Nāgârjunakŏṇḍa), Somaśila on the Pĕnnāru to the southeast, Prasūnâcala-kṣetra/Puṣpagiri to the southwest (near Kaḍapa), and Saṅgameśvara to the northwest. Allamrāju Jaggarāvu Śarma, *Śrīśaila sampūrṇa caritra* (Rajahmundry: Laksminarayana Book Depot, 1986), 1; P. V. Parabrahma Sastry, *Śrīśailam, Its History and Cult* (Guntur: Laksmi Mallikarjuna Press, 1985), 2–3, 27–32. The complete Śrīśaila geosystem is yet more complicated, extending to eight *śikhara*-sites, each of which has three *tīrthas*.

catng yet another center.[17] This same king also went on pilgrimage to Simhâcalam, at the northern edge of Telugu speech, and to Tirupati, at its southern limit,[18] as if consciously tracing the contours of his kingdom.

The frontier inheres in Andhra culture in several powerful ways. If we look first to the northern delta, we strain to see traces of a largely invisible Buddhist proto-Mahāyāna culture flourishing in what is called Konasīma, "the corner" between the two great rivers. We know something of this Buddhist culture from archaeological findings at Nāgârjunakŏṇḍa and Amarāvati, and from the surviving works of the famous philosopher Nāgârjuna, who may have spoken a language that was a precursor to classical Telugu. Five major temple sites in Andhra—Dakṣârāma, Bhīmârāma, Somârāma, Kṣīrārāma, and Amarârāma—were in all likelihood originally Buddhist shrines, as the name *ārāma* suggests. Today all five are entirely Hindu, though Buddhist statuary is scattered throughout the temple courtyards. This process of Brahmin-izing an early Buddhist substratum, so evident in the five shrines, must have been general and formative. It was successful in the sense that Buddhism disappeared entirely from Andhra. And yet the Buddhist presence seems to have left behind an active and creative level of esotericism in praxis and concept, including Yogic, Tantric, alchemical, and "magical" trends that became a diagnostic feature of medieval Telugu culture.[19] One sees hints of this fascination with esoteric strains of thought in central works of Telugu poetry such as Pĕddana's *Manucaritramu*—

17. Kṛṣṇadevarāya, *Āmukta-mālyada*, ed. Vedamu Venkatarayasastri, 2nd ed. (Madras: Vedamy Venkatarayasastri and Brothers, 1964), 1.11; see p. 168. It is highly unusual for a temple to be named after a community in this way; Āndhra-viṣṇu, in the classical purāṇic tradition, is the name of a king, perhaps a memory going back as far as the Sātavāhanas. "Andhra" here may thus be a dynastic title, and as such extended to the region that became known as historical Andhra. A similar perspective probably applies to the Andhras mentioned in early Sanskrit sources such as *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* [Śunaḥśepha]. By the medieval period, a conflation of the dynastic and regional terms was clearly well-established. On Śrīkākuḷam, see the selection from Kāsula Pruṣottama-kavi, *Āndhra-nāyaka-śatakamu* (Visakhapatram: Nirmala Publications, 1975) on pp. 248–50 and our forthcoming essay on the temple tradition from this site.

18. Veṅkaṭam at Tirupati is already clearly seen as the northern boundary of the Tamil country in Caṅkam poetry, from the early centuries A.D.

19. See our paper [in press] on the assimilation and transformation of a Buddhist ritual in Śrīnātha's *purāṇa* on Dakṣârāma, the *Bhīmeśvara-purāṇamu*.

the height of the classical tradition—as well as in a range of other textual traditions, such as Gaurana's fifteenth-century summation of the Nātha mythology, *Nava-nātha-caritra*, one of the earliest and richest accounts of the magically oriented Nāths in any Indian language. And while we find esoteric praxis and ideology in many forms throughout medieval South India,[20] the organic and generative impact of these strands on Telugu religion and literature were perhaps deeper than in any other major south Indian tradition, with the possible exception of Kerala. There was also, almost certainly, an archaic Jaina impact on Telugu culture, of which little is now known; the oldest extant work on metrics, *Kavi-janâśrayamu*, is by a Jaina author, Malliya Recana.[21]

Look now to the harsh Deccan hinterland, a true frontier in many senses. A long process of settlement privileged the resilient warrior, perhaps epitomized by the Deccani god Vīrabhadra—Śiva as hero. We find him at Lepâksi, in Rāyalasīma, at the southern edge of today's Andhra—a black, furious deity.[22] The cultic history of the Deccan must include the expansion of Vīraśaivism, originally a militant movement of antinomian worshipers of Śiva drawn mostly from the so-called "left-hand" castes, that is, those not tied to the land (artisans, merchants, migratory groups, and so on). At Śrīśailam, in the midst of the wilderness, one can observe stages of a long process—still encapsulated in the temple ritual—that seems to have taken this shrine through Buddhist, Vīraśaiva, more normative Śaiva, and finally Brahminized/Sanskritized phases. The exotic "heroic" mode is, in any case, still apparent throughout this region, and we may look here for the first signs of that characteristic individualism—a surprisingly powerful and self-conscious presentation of self as subject—that turns up with consistency in Telugu poetry from at least the time of Śrīnātha onward. We would go so far as to posit this interest in the uniquely individual subject, initially present in unsystematic occurrences in the

20. For example, in the Tamil Cittar/Siddhas.

21. The common place-name ending *-pāḍu* may reflect Jaina settlement. Jaina works may well have been destroyed in the course of prolonged conflict with Vīraśaivas (vying for the same "left-hand" constituency), as Pālkuriki Somanātha's *Basava-purāṇamu* suggests.

22. See D. Shulman, "The Masked Goddess in the Mirror," in *Festschrift Günther Sontheimer*.

literature but later exfoliated luxuriantly in Nāyaka-period texts,[23] as a diagnostic feature of the Telugu tradition over many centuries.

To these two prominent thematic drives, each in its own way born of the frontier, that cut through varying strata, periods, and milieux, we may add a third, from the still more deeply internalized boundary zone of language. As the verse quoted at the beginning of this essay suggests, Telugu poets have consistently been drawn to an examination of language in its life-creating, world-generating aspect. Perhaps something of this fascination derives from the experience of living within a linguistic reality that is itself unusually lyrical and fluid, a constant exposure to language itself as musical sound. It is probably not by chance that Telugu became the predominant vehicle of south Indian classical music. This association of Telugu speakers with music is an old one, clearly attested in Tamil in Cayaṅkŏṇṭār's *Kaliṅkattup-paraṇi* in the early twelfth century.[24] Certainly, the Telugu tradition has pushed the exploration of problems of language (speech, grammar, meter, words) in relation to story, perception, and creativity to a point of unusually powerful feeling and insight.

FIRST POET: NANNAYA

Great literatures classicize their own texts, selecting certain major works or authors over others; they also tend to produce retrospective narratives to make sense of this selection. The result, in the case of Telugu, is a simple developmental scheme that can be found, in one form or another, in all modern histories of this literature, in Telugu or other languages. In this framing of the tradition, all begins with Nannaya, the First Poet (and First Grammarian, since an ordered, premeditated grammar must, in this perspective, precede both normal linguistic reality and the creation of poetry). Earlier poetic works may be presumed to have existed, but they are lost. Nannaya is said to have

23. This led directly to the appearance of the first personal diaries in South India, beginning with Ānandaraṅga Piḷḷai in the mid–eighteenth century, writing in Tamil but still within the late-Nāyaka cultural mode.

24. Cayaṅkŏṇṭār, *Kaliṅkattup-paraṇi* (Madras: South India Saiva Siddhanta Works, 1975), 470: some of the survivors of the defeated Kaliṅga army disguise themselves as musicans (*pāṇar*) from the Telugu country as they flee the conquering Chola force.

initiated the age of *purāṇa*-like compositions with his adaptation of the first two and a half books of the *Mahābhārata* epic into Telugu.[25] After some four centuries, this vogue in *purāṇic* poetry gave way to full-fledged *kāvya* or *prabandha* texts—elevated and sustained courtly compositions. The transition to *kāvya* of this type is usually said to have reached its apogee in the Golden Age of Telugu literature at the court of Kṛṣṇadevarāya of Vijayanagara (1509–1529). Following the breakdown of the Vijayanagara state-system in 1565, literature is seen as slowly sinking; with the displacement southward of Telugu political power into the Tamil country under the Nāyaka kings (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries), new forms of poetic production, some of them supposedly "decadent," became prominent in the afterglow of the classical efflorescence. Modern poetry then represents a blinding flash of revolutionary brilliance against the smoldering backdrop of the Nāyaka and post-Nāyaka decline.

Such is the standard format, a still regnant mythology of poetic evolution, useful, perhaps, for rudimentary classification of the poets. It bears almost no relation to the deeper currents of this amazingly rich and intricate tradition. It seems likely that this schematic vision is itself derived from a seventeenth-century retrospective ordering of previous works in a manner that first produced the idealized image of a Golden Age centered around Kṛṣṇadevarāya with his eight great poets, the *aṣṭa-dig-gajas*, homologized to the eight elephants who hold up the cardinal points of space. (In this sense, literary history and traditional history have marched in tandem; seventeenth-century texts first seem to have imagined Kṛṣṇadevarāya in the mode of synoptic "great king.") Indeed, one could argue that it was this later moment of integration, self-reflection, synthesis in grammar and linguistic metaphysics, and retrospective narrativization, in the mid-seventeenth-century Deccan, that marks the true peak of originality in the mature medieval tradition, if such a temporal definition has any meaning.

We can attempt to substitute for the standard evolutionary scheme a more subtle template that will take account of the profound shifts in style and expressivity as well as changes in major cultural themes and premises. Certain key, perhaps emblematic, figures help us to orient

25. The term *purāṇa* in Telugu, unlike the Sanskrit usage, usually applies to *campū* compositions of mixed prose and verse with a strong narrative intent.

this picture of the tradition: Nannaya, Tikkana, Śrīnātha, Pĕddana, and Kṛṣṇadevarāya, in the early stages. Each of these poets, by virtue of creative innovation, changed the rules of play and transformed the classical tradition. Here again we must begin with Nannaya, not as grammarian[26] but as the poet who first produced a Telugu style commensurate with a complex, and entirely Telugu, sensibility. Clearly, he knew that he was doing this—knew that he was innovative in creating a musical and flowing poetic form, dense with expressive possibilities and unique to his mother tongue. Listen to the way he describes himself (in the third person):

> *sāramatin kavîndrulu prasanna-kathā-kalitârtha-yukti-lon*
> *ārasi melu nān itarul' akṣara-ramyatan ādarimpa nā-*
> *nā-rucirârtha-sūkti-nidhi nannaya bhaṭṭu tĕnungunan mahā-*
> *bhārata-saṃhitā-racana-bandhuruḍ' ayyĕ jagad-dhitambugan*

> Nannaya then became absorbed in composing in Tenungu
> the whole *Mahābhārata* collection. His carefully uttered words
> glow with multiple meanings: poets with penetrating minds
> follow the lively narrative through to its inner purpose,
> while others give themselves to the harmony of the sounds.[27]

Let us restate this achievement in somewhat different terms: what Nannaya invented was a style of poetic narrative in which the story line is clear, pleasing, and uninterrupted, but that at the same time allows the hearer/reader to reflect on it and to appreciate the subtleties of meaning. Moreover, the texture—which includes such components as lexical choices, the play of meter, and, above all, the way Sanskrit and Telugu are combined—is harmonious, economical, and musical. Nannaya himself suggests the following two hallmarks of his poetry: *prasanna-kathā-kalitârtha-yukti*, "lively narrative . . . with its inner purpose"—a feature perceptible only to "poets with penetrating minds"—and *akṣara-ramyata*, "the harmony of sounds," the phonoaesthetic interplay of syllables. All of this requires a particular and characteristic blending of Sanskrit and Dravidian words and a creative use of Sanskrit compounds, in a manner unknown in "pure" Sanskrit but, after Nannaya, paradigmatic for Telugu. The long Sanskrit compounds that appear

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26. On the cultural importance of the image of the first grammarian, see p. 49.
27. Nannaya, 1.1.25.

throughout Nannaya's poetry, in meters often adapted, again creatively, from Sanskrit into Telugu, are organized semantically rather than metrically. They tend to be longer than is common in earlier Sanskrit poems, and they often spill over line endings, since Telugu meter, unlike Sanskrit, allows complex enjambment. Put differently, the Telugu patterns established by Nannaya's work are not limited by meter: one reads a Telugu verse by breaking at syntactic-semantic pauses. As a result, the stanza allows for more complex syntactic structures and tremendous variation in cadence. The metrical skeleton hardly ever shows through the poem. What one hears, or notices, is the play of muscle and flesh that constitutes texture. By contrast, a verse that mechanically reveals its metrical organization, its caesura breaks and line endings, is considered either as a failure or as belonging to another level of the tradition, perhaps purely oral. It is this kind of sophisticated texturing, with its complex flow of subtle words and sentences, that Nannaya pioneered, and it is this that helps to explain the miracle of transmutation so characteristic of Telugu literature from that time onward, whereby whole pieces of Sanskrit phraseology can be lifted from a Sanskrit source and reworked into a borrowed Sanskrit meter, and yet be entirely and amazingly Telugu.

This same process applies to the transformation of genre. Nannaya's *Mahābhārata* both is and is not a *purāṇa*. It follows the inherited story line, usually with remarkable fidelity to the prototype. But it also allows, indeed demands, reflection upon this narrative and an aesthetic savoring of the texture of its telling on the part of the reader, a process mostly unknown to Sanskrit *purāṇas*.[28] Something quite new happened, and it became the starting point of a process that continued for a thousand years of Telugu literary production. Technically, too, there is the pattern of interspersing verse, in varying meters, and rhythmic prose (the *campū* style that became normative). At the same time, there is a unique quality that is wholly Nannaya's and could never even be imitated by his successors: a gentleness in tone and a freshness in depiction of characters who are domesticated, but only to a certain point. His Sanskrit kings remain dignified and slightly remote, though they are also brought closer to the familiar range of experience of an Andhra

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28. It appears that a similar or parallel process was also taking place in Kannada poetry roughly during this same period (in Pampa, for example).

listener. The vehemence and wildness of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* are softened and partly tamed, even as the inner world of the characters becomes more familiar. In this sense, as in the stylistic domain discussed earlier, the existence of the Sanskrit prototype becomes a relatively abstract presence that hardly impinges upon the dynamic world of the Telugu text. Only the modern misapplication of the notion of "translation" to Telugu literary creation could see Nannaya—and a host of other Telugu poets—as primarily "translators."

Nannaya's adapation of the *campū* style also implies a particularly active, participatory role for the listener. The *itihāsa* epic frame normally requires the presence of a speaker and a listener; for example, Sañjaya speaks to Dhṛtarāṣṭra *within* the story, describing the battle to his blind master, but his words are reported by the Sūta-narrator to the "original" listener, Śaunaka, and other sages. The Sūta, however, is merely repeating what Vaiśampāyana recited, on the basis of his teacher Vyāsa's composition, to King Janamejaya at the time of the latter's sacrifice of snakes. These concentric frames are reframed by Nannaya, who sings the same story to his patron, Rājarājanarendra. And we, listening to a *paurāṇika* reciter, find ourselves in precisely the same dialogic situation. The innovation lies in the assimilation of this format to what is, in effect, a *kāvya:* an aesthetic, self-conscious literary work. Sanskrit literary *kāvya*, for whatever reason, does not share this need to internalize the listener. Part of the great power of Nannaya's *campū* lies precisely in this activation and co-option of the listener—a characteristic feature of the oral storytelling mode—within a reinvented literary genre.

In general, Nannaya's manner of narration skillfully combines an economy of words with a perfect choice of phrases that embody the emotional progression in events.[29] The story often unfolds with great rapidity that unexpectedly allows room for reflection on the depth of feeling: this is the "lively narrative with inner purpose" of which the poet himself speaks. Sometimes a single verse encompasses a carefully articulated transition in state or a progression in emotion. For example, King Yayāti, riding through the forest, hears a young woman—

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29. Perhaps the first to articulate this feature of Nannaya's poetry analytically and persuasively was Visvanatha Satyanarayana in his *Nannayagari prasanna-kathā-kalitârtha-yukti*, 4th ed. (Vijayavada: Visvanatha Satyanarayana, 1970).

Devayāni—calling for help from the dry well into which she has been pushed by her rival. The king dutifully extends his hand to help her out:

> jaladhi-vilola-vīci-vilasat-kala-kāñci-samañcitâvanī-
> tala-vahana-kṣamamb' aina dakṣiṇa-hastamunan ṭad-unnamad-
> gaḷad-uru-gharma-vāri-kaṇa-kamra-karâbjamu vaṭṭi nūti-lo
> vĕluvaḍa komalin divicĕ viśruta-kīrti yayāti prītiton (3.1.141)

> With his right hand, that was equal
> to the weight of the whole world
> circled by shimmering waves of many oceans,
> he grasped hers, held out to him,
> as befits a proper king. Drops of sweat
> were trickling down her delicate skin,
> as he helped her from the well,
> with love.

First, there is the hand itself—strong enough to bear the earth with its surrounding oceans, all part of a single strong compound. On the other end, another hand, raised, ready to be grasped, wet with the delicate drops of her perspiration that make it even more beautiful, *kamra*. Everything lies in the readiness that reflects an intention: Devayāni wants to marry this king. But Yayāti as yet knows nothing of this, and feels nothing; he pulls her out, *divicĕ*, with a neutral, simple verb, utterly without feeling. Why does he do this? Because he is *vísruta-kīrti*, a man of good name; he is doing his duty—all part of a day's work. And then, suddenly, unexpectedly, in the very last word of the verse, there *is* feeling: *prītiton*, "with love." Before he realizes it himself, he is lost, taken with her beauty, and not only the beauty of her out-stretched arm, which he has held and pulled, but also that of her whole body, since Devayāni was pushed naked into the well. We are not, however, told this explicitly; it is implicit in the earlier part of the story, which the listener certainly knows. A lesser narrator might have elaborated the point, but Nannaya is content to suggest it, or to remind his audience of it, with a single word that closes the verse by revealing the shift in the king's perception. It is one thing to show an object, another to reveal this object through the feelings of a participant or onlooker within the story.

There is yet another aspect to Nannaya's originality, at the very limit of linguistic expression. Perhaps more than any later Telugu poet, with the possible exception of Śrīnātha in his *Bhīmeśvara-purāṇ*

amu, Nannaya produces a "magical" or "mantric" effect. At certain points—for example, in the hymn to the snakes in the Udaṅka section translated below—he exceeds the bounds of poetry, or of reference.

> *bahu-vana-pādapâbdhi-kula-parvata-pūrṇa-saras-sarij-jharī-*
> *sahita-mahā-mahī-bharam' ajasra sahasra-phaṇâḷi dālci dus-*
> *sahatara-mūrtikin jaladhi-śāyiki pāyaka śayyayainan ay-*
> *yahi-pati duṣkṛtântakuḍ' anantuḍu māku prasannuḍ' ayyĕdun*

> Sustaining always on his thousand hoods
> the dense burden of the earth,
> the forests and oceans and rooted mountains
> and rushing rivers and lakes, the Snake
> called Infinite softly bears the unbearable body
> of the god who sleeps on water.
> Won't he make an end to whatever
> was badly done, and be kind to me?

One long Sanskrit compound gives us the whole massiveness and heaviness of earth, indicated both by the long string of elements (forests, oceans, mountains, rivers, and lakes) and by the repeated *ha* sounds—also built into the rhyme scheme in the second syllable of each line—as if to demonstrate the breathlessness of the great snake who bears this burden on his thousand heads. But this dense alliteration has only begun: it is resumed by a dangling, unusual adverb: *ajasra*, "always," another Sanskrit loan that would normally require a Telugu case-ending but which here simply flows into the line, rhyming with the following word, *sahasra* ("thousand"). The dangling adverb, in the rush of alliterating sound, suggests the uninterrupted process of bearing the earth's burden. Now, at last, there is a small piece of Dravidian, the nonfinite verb *dālci*, "bearing." The work is thus still incomplete; another burden must still be borne. The snake Ādiśeṣa, along with bearing the earth, is also the bed on which the god Viṣṇu sleeps in the ocean of milk, and the poet makes sure that we feel this additional, indeed infinite, weight of the god by another gush of sibilants and aspirates, spilling over the line-break: *duS-SaHatara-mūrtikin jalaDHi-Śāyiki pāyaka Śayyayaina ay-yaHi-pati. . . .* These two burdens, incidentally, are never seen together in iconography or joined in story; Nannaya has fused them, doubling the snake's dreadful task and arousing our admiration for him. The listener, by now bent double himself under this weight, miraculously made present through the language,