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Cosmopolitanism and Imagination in Nayaka South India

Decoding the Brooklyn *Kalamkari*

JOS GOMMANS

ABSTRACT Questions arising from the so-called Brooklyn *kalamkari*, a seven-panel, hand-painted cotton textile, have confronted art historians for decades: what do we see, who produced it for whom, what does it mean? With royal court scenes from all over the Indian Ocean world, the Brooklyn *kalamkari* represents a uniquely cosmopolitan worldview from early-seventeenth-century South India. In this essay I discuss the makings of this particular worldview in the context of early modern processes of globalization and state-formation. By engaging with the work of Indologists Johan Huizinga, Jan Heesterman, and David Shulman on Indian kingship and theater, I then attempt to decode the local and the global, as well as the seen and unseen, meaning of this textile.

KEYWORDS Renaissance, globalization, cosmopolitanism, Vijayanagara, South Indian kingship, theater, clowns, pineapple

Like all other facets of the mind, the imagination must have a history.
And like all histories, there are many ways to tell, or to construct, the story.
—SHULMAN, *More than Real*, ix.

Introduction

For decades, scholars have been puzzled by an extremely rare piece of hand-painted, mordant, and resist-dyed cotton textile known as a *kalamkari* (Figure 1). It dates from the early 1600s and was produced in South India, most probably in the northern Tamil shatter zone of the Tontai area, which surrounded the political centers of Senji and Chandragiri, the latter of which was the capital of the remnants of the Vijayanagara Empire.¹ The uniqueness of this *kalamkari*, now housed in the Brooklyn Museum, derives from its extraordinarily cosmopolitan character, depicting as it does seven different courtly scenes from around the Indian Ocean. Unfortunately, at some point (and for an unknown reason) the piece, which as a whole measured approximately 275 by 95.9 centimeters, was cut into seven panels, each panel representing

one court scene. By carefully examining the fringes of each panel it has been possible to reconstruct the original sequence of the panels.² In doing so, we are confronted with a colorful—red, indigo, green, brown, and yellow—set of panoramas that do indeed reflect a highly cosmopolitan mind-set, one keen to visualize “the other” on the basis of surprisingly accurate ethnographical knowledge. Although dated to the early 1600s based partly on prevailing fashions in Europe (knee breeches, for example, in panel 2) and the Indo-Islamic world (the short *jama* in panel 1), we should bear in mind that, given the stereotypical clothing represented, these court scenes seem to be less neatly historical—courts at this time probably looked more eclectic—and more broadly emblematic in nature. The scenes depict audiences at various royal courts, yet all



are situated in what seems to be a realistic, local, and indeed more eclectic setting, combining Islamicate arched niches, battlements, and dome-shaped pavilions (*chhatris*) with Indic *shikhara* rooftops. Interestingly, with the exception of the middle panel (panel 4), all of the scenes show veiled ladies looking down from the rooftops. Furthermore, the posture of mudras—in most cases symbolizing admonition—taken by some of the *kalamkari*'s main figures gives a definitively Indic, argumentative atmosphere. In other words, the emblematic global scenes are situated in a local historical setting that is reminiscent of a South Indian palace, such as the Raja Mahal of Chandragiri (Figure 2).

Although the makers of these tableaux seem to have been very well informed about the royal courts they depicted, among present-day scholars there is no consensus regarding the actual locations of those courts. As already noted, the uniformity of the costumes suggests that the scenes do not depict any specific contemporaneous royal court but instead symbolize ethnographical stereotypes. As such, there are scenes that can be recognized as Muslim (panel 1), European (panel 2), Javanese/Malay (panel 5), and

local Nayaka (panel 6). The remaining three panels are less clear, and there is ongoing debate about whether the scene depicted in panel 3 represents Vijayanagara or Siam/Ayutthaya, and whether that of panel 7, which looks Central Asian, is actually East Asian.³

So far, however, the panel in the middle, panel 4, has generated the most confusion, which is unfortunate as it seems to be the key panel: as well as being in the center, its main male character towers over the other panels. This suggests that understanding this panel could reveal the meaning of the *kalamkari* as a whole. However, considering the sparsely clothed, “tribal” people who seem to be roaming some kind of wilderness within it, it is also the panel that is the most challenging to situate in both time and space. Colleagues studying the Americas might believe that the tribal figures are Native Americans, perhaps taken from a sixteenth-century print like those by De Bry.⁴ However, similar contemporaneous figures are depicted in the Lepakshi temple, which represents a hunting scene from the Mahabharata in which Shiva appears as the wild hunter Kirata.⁵ Nevertheless, compared to the others, the middle panel is certainly less

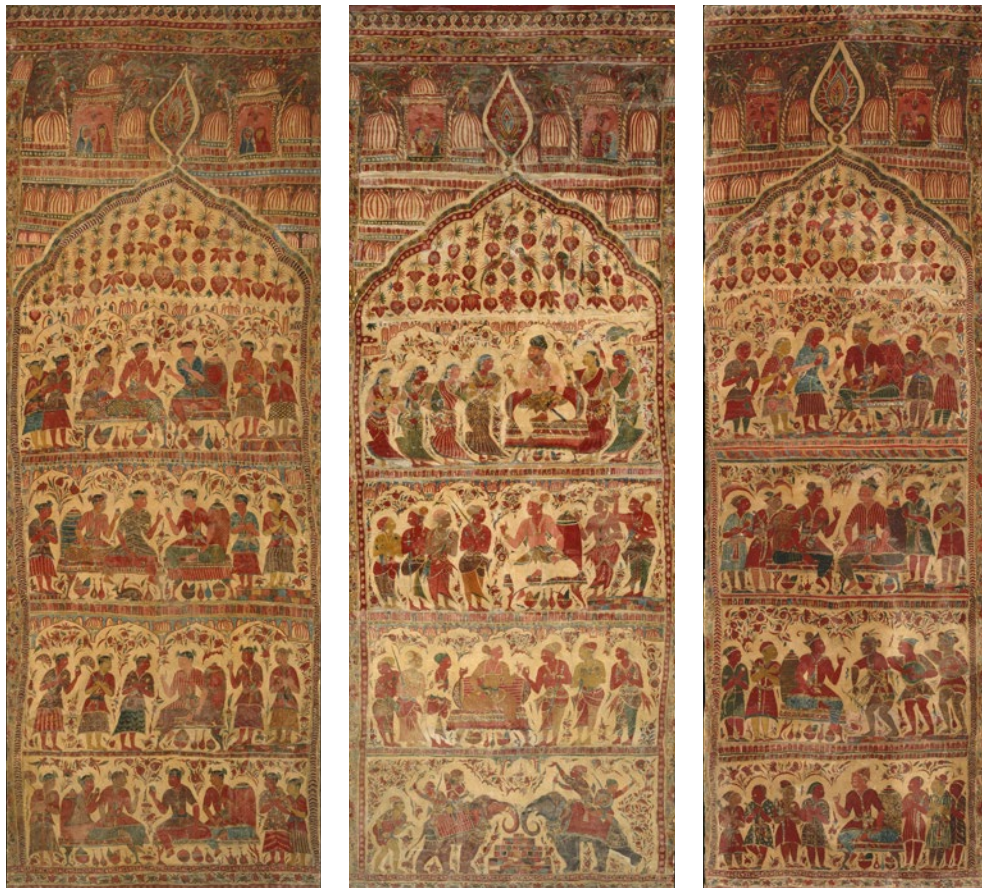


Figure 1. *Hanging, 7 Pieces* [“Brooklyn *kalamkari*”], South India, 1610–1640. *Kalamkari*; cotton, drawn and painted resist and mordants, dyed, 275–277.5 × 95.9–97.8 cm. Brooklyn Museum, Museum Expedition 1913–1914, Museum Collection Fund, 14.719.1–7. Artwork in public domain.

quintessentially courtly and appears to have more of a narrative content in its scenes.

Most of the research on the Brooklyn *kalamkari* has been of an art-historical nature, focusing primarily on the six courtly scenes at the sides and on the Muslim and European scenes in particular, as they seem to be the most historically concrete. In what follows, I do not revisit the main iconographical arguments that have been put forward regarding these court scenes. Instead, I focus exclusively on the neglected but central panel 4 (Figure 3) and explore its meaning in the context of the time and place of its production, that is, early-seventeenth-century South India. I suggest that the *kalamkari* fits the specific cultural conditions at the South Indian Nayaka states, more specifically that of the late Vijayanagar ruler Venkata II (r. 1586–1614) at Chandragiri.⁶ In order to bring this point home, I first briefly describe the ever-expanding horizons of the region by discussing the cosmopolitan context of these Nayaka states as well as the interregional network of Chetti traders that they supported. This will set the scene for a rapidly globalizing world that had a huge cultural impact in the place where Nayakas and

Chettis met: the South Indian court, exemplified by that of Chandragiri. I then speculate on the possible meaning of the middle panel by exploring the various ways it could represent the historical and/or imagined worlds of the region. Finally, I suggest one possible reading of the *kalamkari*, while leaving other options open for future research. Beyond its obvious iconological objective, the wider aim of this exercise is to further our understanding of the process of globalization, which affected South India as much as it did Europe, and to provide one specific South Indian way in which that process was made manifest.

The Real World: Historical Events and Circumstances

Chetti and Nayaka Cosmopolitanism

The world as depicted in the Brooklyn *kalamkari* was real. Around the year 1600—the time the Brooklyn *kalamkari* was produced—South Indian traders connected the Coromandel Coast with various parts of the Indian Ocean, and Southeast Asia in particular. This was hardly a new phenomenon, though, as South Indian traders had frequented the “lands below the



Figure 2. Rani Mahal, Chandragiri, Andhra Pradesh, India, possibly early seventeenth century. Photograph: Archaeological Survey of India, 1894. Source: British Library, London: www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/photocoll/f/019ph00001008s2u00273000.html.

winds” since at least Pallava times (mid-first millennium CE). Yet it seems that in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries those contacts intensified as part of the more general commercial upswing that the historian Anthony Reid has described as an “Age of Commerce.”⁷ By the turn of the sixteenth century, the overseas trading activities of a diasporic South Indian trading community, the *Baliya Chettis*, encompassed such distant places as Arakan, Ayutthaya, Mergui, Pegu, and Sri Lanka, as well as Perak and Kedah in the Malay Peninsula.⁸

A relatively well-studied example is Achyutappa Chetti, a typical portfolio-capitalist—someone who was involved in both trade and politics.⁹ During the first decades of the seventeenth century, he not only served as an autonomous commercial broker for the newly arrived Dutch East India Company (the VOC), he was also a political mediator at the local courts of Chandragiri, Madurai, and Senji, and even beyond, at the courts of Cochin and Arakan.¹⁰ It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the political engagement of such overseas entrepreneurs was really something new within the region. In the past—and as recorded in numerous inscriptions—commercial groups tended

to invest their profits in expanding land cultivation through temple endowments. This should be understood in the context of two other changes. First, it involved the arrival of Europeans—initially the Portuguese and then, in the early seventeenth century, primarily the Danish, Dutch, and English—who started to tap into the existing trading circuit by exporting South Indian textiles to Southeast and East Asia. Although introducing nothing new to the region, their presence led to a significant increase in the quantity of precious metals imported from South America (and later from Japan, through Dutch channels). This stimulated the commercialization of the region as a whole and, as a result, increased both the fiscal base and the bureaucratic efficiency of the state. The emergence of portfolio capitalists in states that were competing with each other more than ever before for the increasingly liquid wealth should be situated within this context. Second, although their newly developing states were far from stable, the Nayaka rulers represented the most successful of the Telugu-speaking warrior lineages from the Deccan and the northern Carnatic who had traded their significant military capability for land-based power in the more southerly and more



Figure 3. The middle panel of the Brooklyn *kalamkari* illustrated in Figure 1.

productive agricultural regions of South India. Some other regional lineages, such as the Damarla, Matla, and Velugoti clans, did not manage to become kings but also became rooted in the region and helped limit the Nayaka rulers' access to agricultural wealth.¹¹

It was within this context of increasing commercialization and military gentrification that many fragile states, each seemingly endlessly crumbling and being rebuilt, were to be found. The cultural corollaries of these developments for the Nayaka states have been analyzed in *Symbols of Substance*, an impressive multidisciplinary study by David Shulman, Velcheru Narayana Rao, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam.¹² This is not the place to discuss fully their pioneering and thought-provoking analysis, but it seems safe to conclude that, over the course of time, ideas of kingship in these particular states became less dependent on the ritual sanction provided by temples and Brahmins. Furthermore, the distinction between the temple and the court was erased as the warrior-king took on the ritual role of the Brahman and, increasingly, non-Brahman poets devotedly started to praise their patrons as gods. Velcheru Narayana Rao even speaks of a "revolutionary reconceptualization of king as the god Vishnu."¹³ Hence, we arrive at a model of Indian kingship that departs from that of the classical, contradictory alliance between king and Brahman, and instead approaches that of Hocartian divine kingship in which the king acts as the main sacrificer (*yajamana*) and the Brahmins merely assist him in this role and keep him from ritual pollution.¹⁴ One particularly clear way in which this new view of kingship was made manifest was through the king's growing obsession with sensual enjoyment (*bhoga*) of food and sex; this was not an expression of conspicuous and hedonistic consumption but an alternative form of "self-transcendence" in order to achieve "connection with the divine and the ultimate real."¹⁵

Vijayanagara Renaissance at Chandragiri

The three authors of *Symbols of Substance* clearly wanted to evoke the notion of a South Indian renaissance, one that was quite different from that of Europe but which did have certain similarities, as may be seen in the king's increasing obsession with his own personal, sensual experience of life. For the moment, setting aside the wider, global ramifications of the cultural developments that occurred at the Nayaka courts, it is safe to observe that, despite its disintegration, there was at least an attempt to revive the idea

of the Vijayanagara Empire. This political and imperial renaissance was focused on the empire's last vestige in Chandragiri.¹⁶

Following the battle of Talikota (1565), which saw the defeat of the Vijayanagara Empire by a coalition of the Deccan sultanates, much of the empire's political power was taken by various Nayaka successor states whose capitals were situated close to the western and southeastern coasts of India. What survived of the empire, under the Telugu Aravidu dynasty, moved toward the Coromandel Coast, first to Penukonda, then toward Chandragiri in 1585, then to Vellore in 1604. It was during the relatively long reign of Venkata II (also Venkatapatiraya; r. 1585–1614) that the idea of empire gained a new—albeit temporary—lease on life. With the help of various local warrior lineages, Venkata II managed to expand his power over the borderlands, keeping the forces of both the Deccan sultanates (Bijapur and Golkonda) and his main Nayaka rivals (Senji and Tanjavur) at bay. After his death, though, everything was lost, the result of one of the frequent succession struggles in the region. This, in turn, gave rise to a further round of state formation, one in which Yachama Nayaka, with the help of Tanjavur and the Portuguese, was able to carve out his own small kingdom to the east of Vellore. With the end of the Aravidu dynasty a decade or so later, the Vijayanagara Empire completely disappeared, although the idea of empire lived on in the various foundation myths and courtly rituals of the various Nayaka states.¹⁷

Yet, for Venkata II, the empire was an ongoing presence. According to one of his land grants (at Vilapaka), his was a Rama-like rule of the world, with five extinct but classical tribes serving as the gatekeepers: the Rattas (in the west), Magadas (in the center), Kambojas (in the north), Bhojas (in the south), and Kalingas (in the east).¹⁸ Apart from such rhetoric, what gave Venkata II a truly imperial perspective was the highly cosmopolitan, intellectual atmosphere at his court, which is reminiscent of the contemporaneous Mughal court of Akbar (r. 1556–1605) and the Bijapur court of Ibrahim Adil Shah II (r. 1580–1627). There are two important parallels between those courts and Venkata II's court that I would like to highlight here because they are crucial for my understanding of the deeper message of the Brooklyn *kalamkari*.

First of all, all three courts promoted debates among people of different intellectual and religious backgrounds. By this time it appears that some intellectuals were starting to question the received wisdom that underscored existing claims to religious and phil-

osophical truth as well as the political authority that it used to support. One could even expand this perspective to include rulers in other parts of the world. In the European context, for example, we see that, amid ever-deepening religious conflict and epistemological uncertainty, kings sought new foundations for their rule. Such is a paradox of that era. On the one hand, there were fierce religious and philosophical clashes along increasingly sharply demarcated fault lines guarded by a wide range of fundamentalist scholars. On the other hand, there were attempts to overcome conflict through a universalizing paradigm that incorporated the antagonism in a South Asian version of a *philosophia perennis* that paid tribute to ancient wisdom while also incorporating new observations. Thus, following another wave of intensive globalization, and in the midst of increasing epistemological and ontological uncertainty, there is no doubt that around the year 1600 many of the royal courts were involved in intense intellectual debates about the meaning of truth and reality. As intellectuals and artists carried out their own “conquests of reality,” imperial rulers in particular had a stake in this as part of their efforts to find new, universal ideological underpinnings for their rule.¹⁹

As a result of this universalizing agenda, Venkata II—not unlike Akbar and Ibrahim Adil Shah II—had a particular predilection for cosmography and mathematics. Like Akbar, Venkata II invited Jesuits to his court to share information about the cosmos and the world. One of them, the mathematician Antonio Rubino (1578–1643), even made a Telugu translation of a cosmographical survey. Its map contained an extensive description of the principal kingdoms, the four elements, and the twelve constellations. According to Rubino, it astonished the court to see “how different our doctrine is from theirs.”²⁰

In the same way that fierce theological debates raged in Europe as a result of the Reformation, South India seems to have been just as deeply immersed in such intellectual polemics, whether the more theological ones between Shaivas and Vaishnavas or the more philosophical ones between dualist (Dvaita) and monist (Advaita) scholars.²¹ Whatever the outcome of those debates, it seems that in South India, Vaishnava and Shaiva “sectarianism” as well as Advaita Vedanta monism were on the rise.²² This combination was made possible by a highly segmented public sphere in which each religious community was allowed to perform its own devotional ritual. At the same time, we witness a growing convergence between monist thought and Tantric rituals that focused on the worship of local god-

esses through imagination. One of the most dominant groups in this period is that of Shrividyā Tantrism, in which the devotee “assumes the form of the divine by identifying with the godhead’s manifestations, particularly in images and icons, sound formulae (*mantra*), and cosmic diagrams (*yantra*) which are then ritually identified with one’s body, speech and intellect.”²³ Hence, South India at this time witnessed the revival of both Shankara (ca. eighth c.) and Kalidasa (ca. fifth c.) to eventually become *the* representatives of, respectively, classical Indian monist thought and classical Indian drama. According to the insightful recent work of Elaine Fisher, this relatively peaceful, segmented coexistence of increasingly diverging theological brands and devotional performances deviates from the monism of Neo-Hindu universalism but represents a particular South Indian version of early modern religious pluralism.²⁴ Although we should be wary to make too much of this, the segmented, emblematic characteristic of the Brooklyn *kalamkari* indeed seems to support this idea of multiple public zones within one local space.

Zooming in on Chandragiri again, a combination of Shaivism and monism is represented most conspicuously by the Tamil Brahman Appayya Dikshita (1520–1593), who not only worked at the Chandragiri court, but also served at the courts of Vellore (under the Bomma Nayaks) and Tanjavur. He is often presented as having been on a mission to reconcile all creeds, cults, and philosophies. When serving Venkata II, it seems that this polymath’s monism was so strong that it could even trump his Shaiva creed, making him empathize, for a time, with the dominant Vaishnava leanings of his patron.²⁵ Indeed, Venkata II himself revived devotion to Venkateshwara—one of the forms of Vishnu—at the famous Venkateshwara temple in Tirumala, as is seen in many of Venkata II’s grants as well as on his coins.²⁶ Meanwhile, South Indian monism even started to affect the important religious center of Benares, in northern India, and from there even influenced the Mughal court.²⁷ From Benares, it made the French physician-*cum*-traveler François Bernier (1620–1688) compare its philosophy with that of the Neoplatonic and Hermetic thinkers of his homeland.²⁸ It was the all-inclusive brand of Hindu monism that mingled so well with the dominant cosmological, Neoplatonic mood at the contemporaneous Mughal and Bijapur courts

However, the most dominant intellectual figure at the Chandragiri courts was not a monist but the Shri Vaishnava guru Tatacharya, who had also anointed Venkata II, while two of his ancestors had converted

the Vijayanagara emperor Virupaksha to Vaishnavism. Tatacharya was not only a ritualist and intellectual but also the manager of various temples, and in that role he wielded significant political and economic power. On several occasions Tatacharya appeared to be a fanatical debater, whether against Jesuits, Appayya Dikshita, or, as shall be seen below, the witty court jester Tenali Rama.²⁹ Yet, despite his own preference for Vaishnavism, Venkata II's court should be viewed as a highly cosmopolitan intellectual center, one that saw a great deal of scholarly curiosity in the midst of increasing political and intellectual uncertainty.

Coming to the second parallel, as at the contemporary Mughal and Bijapur courts, it seems that the heightened ontological obsession of the time also directly impacted the Venkata II court's interest in the visual representation of reality, something that can be seen in the ruler's fascination with European paintings.³⁰ The Jesuits, hoping that this could help convert him, had sent two painters, both lay-brothers, to the court. The first was an Englishman named Alexander Frey, who was there between 1599 and 1602; he was followed, in the years 1607 to 1611, by an Italian named Fontebona. Venkata II's interest was piqued after he had been shown several small portraits of the Portuguese king Dom Sebastião (1554–1578) and some of his predecessors. On his arrival, Frey gifted Venkata II two paintings, one of the Three Magi and one of the Blessed Virgin with Child. Then, encouraged by the stupefied king, he started to work on another piece, one that showed Christ's descent into Hell. Even more successful at the court was Fontebona, who painted the king's portrait and even became his intimate friend. One of his paintings—of the Madonna with Child, with John the Baptist at her side and Saint Joseph in the rear—was hung facing the throne.

Unfortunately, nothing of these paintings survives, nor does any other such work that can be definitively shown to have come from Venkata II's court. However, we do have Venkata II's statue, which, quite tellingly, is in the Venkateshwara temple in Tirumala (Figure 4). Its rounded forms suggest the conspicuous consumption of food and as such it perfectly represents—Venkata II being a Telugu Nayaka himself—the new kind of hedonistic royalty as discussed in *Symbols of Substance*. His passion for European painting was part of a more general obsession with



Figure 4. Statue of Venkata II at the Venkateshwara Temple, Tirumala, Andhra Pradesh. Copper or brass, somewhat smaller than life-size. Source: *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report, 1911–12*. Photograph provided by Crispin Branfoot.

visual culture, confirming the existence of a courtly culture that experienced a heightened receptivity to sensory perception, especially that of sight. In a situation where court and temple are merged, such as occurred at Venkata II's court, the visual signifies more than it depicts; as the atmosphere of the court becomes infused with the fragrance of divine service, its visualizations reflect a hidden or inner meaning that is beyond the visible, something that is "more than real."³¹

**The Enigmatic Middle Panel:
A Wilderness of Comic Chaos**
Visualizing the Exotic

So to what extent can the Brooklyn *kalamkari* as a whole be said to represent the real world? Or, perhaps more important, to what extent can we see new elements—elements that were not part of the preexisting regional repertoire—penetrating conventional, if not classical Indic iconography? In other words, to what extent was such iconography able to accommodate and integrate new people and objects that were becoming known in the subcontinent as a result of globalization?

Answering those questions for these six courtly scenes is not easily done. For example, although the European scene in panel 2 (see Figure 1) looks fairly realistic and ethnographically accurate, the overall impression is emblematic. Depictions of Europeans were not unusual at this time in India, and there are similar images on other *kalamkaris* that represented both real events and real individuals who were in the region at the time, as well as reproductions of European paintings and prints. In the Brooklyn *kalamkari*, the European clothing seems to have been universalized in order to make the panel as a whole emblematic and thus more recognizable as an ethnographic category. Most likely these figures were meant to make an exotic impression, although it was not really necessary to exoticize further something that was already considered exotic. Although slightly less recognizable as a stereotype, other ethnographic categories in other *kalamkaris* are also distinguishable by their clothing, as in the case of a Chinese male and a Turkish male in a Deccani piece that seems to depict the four corners of the world (Figures 5 and 6). Indeed, one might wonder whether the seven scenes of the Brooklyn *kalamkari* represent the mythical seven world-continent of traditional Sanskrit and Tamil cosmography.³²



Figure 5. Detail of the Deccani *kalamkari* illustrated in Figure 6, showing a Chinese male and a Turkish male.



Figure 6. Deccani *kalamkari*, Golconda region, ca. 1640–1650. National Museum, New Delhi, *Kalamkari*: cotton, drawn and painted with resist mordant, 89 × 74 cm (with lining). National Museum, New Delhi, 48.7/103. Source: © National Museum, New Delhi.



Figure 7. *Left:* Standard, made in India, probably Hyderabad, Deccan, late seventeenth–early eighteenth century. Brass, H. 96.5 cm; W. 30.5 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2013.37. *Right:* Ceremonial standard (‘Alam), India, Deccan, 1601–1800. Brass with pierced and engraved decoration, 91.8 × 42.7 × 7.4 cm. Art Institute of Chicago, Russell Tyson Fund, 1981.189. Artworks in public domain.

Focusing on panel 4, what is definitively exotic within it is the repeated depiction of pineapples, which people are carrying and probably offering to the king and queen. Since it is known that the pineapple had been introduced to India from the New World by the Portuguese sometime in the previous century, we are presented with a very early—if not the earliest—Indian depiction of what must have been perceived as an extremely exotic fruit, one that apparently made a deep impression in this part of the subcontinent.³³ It recurs as a motif in various contemporaneous *kalamkari* from the Deccan sultanates and may even have inspired the standards (‘alams) that were used for the Muharram processions there (Figure 7).³⁴ Interestingly, the aforementioned Deccani *kalamkari* depicts an ascetic wearing a tiger skin who is examining a pineapple, perhaps contemplating its deeper, pansemiotic significance in the eye of its Creator (Figure 8).³⁵



Figure 8. Detail of the Deccani *kalamkari* illustrated in Figure 5, showing a yogi contemplating a pineapple.

The Wilderness in Indian Trope

Coming to the middle panel (see Figure 3), its overall setting and narrative mode differentiate it from the other six. To start with the setting, we find ourselves in the midst of a tropical forest. Three of the five layers show hunting scenes, which involve both male and female hunters chasing a tiger (second from the top, far left), two deer (in the middle, far right; Figure 9), and two deer and two hares (at the bottom, far left and right, respectively). Hidden amidst extremely lush vegetation are various other animals that fit well in the natural environment depicted.

The distinction between the settled world and the wilderness is a very well-known Indic trope; it is present in the main epics, the stories about the Buddha, and in various plays. We repeatedly see princes renouncing the world, moving to the jungle, undergoing hardships, meeting gods and goddesses, gaining strength, returning to the world, and then taking up power again, usually after a round of excessive violence. The variety is endless, but the overall theme remains the same: legitimate kingship requires an ongoing, endless interchange between the settled world and the wilderness.³⁶ The jungle conveys a deep and tragic sense of separation, most often from one's beloved. Furthermore, in Tamil Sangam literature, the wasteland (Palai) evokes this sense of separation, and the forest (Mullai) evokes a sense of patiently waiting for reunion.

Discussing the small kingdom of Vizianagaram in Andhra, Don Handelman, M. V. Krishnayya, and David Shulman elaborate on this dichotomy when they stress the “depth” of the wilderness:³⁷

Depth is fluid, labile, and in depth there is the fluidity that is transformation, the fluidity of forming and forms that take shape through one another. Change is the condition of depth. What is often referred to as “wilderness” in India, supposedly on the peripheries of “civilization,” is where depth exists in its natural cosmic condition. Put differently, wilderness is a greater concentration and intensification of depth. In or close to regions of greater depth—seas, lakes, streams, and forested mountains full of caves, whose fluidity or inward-turning of form curves them more naturally are the abodes of depth-specialists: fishers, hunters, healers, and of course, goddesses.³⁸

For Handelman, Krishnayya, and Shulman, the goddess is the most important persona. In their Andhra at least, every king needs a goddess, although, as they add, not every goddess needs a king. “A king needs a goddess who is a sister to him, comforting, consoling, protecting, and saving him without asking questions, without setting conditions. The goddess who is (like) a sister to a king is a goddess to kingdom and kingship precisely because she is (like) a sister. Kingship needs nurturance; it needs to grow, organically, from depth into depth, from depth out of depth, like a field



Figure 9. Middle frame of the middle panel of the Brooklyn *kalamkari* illustrated in Figure 1, showing a hunting scene in the wilderness.

of rice.”³⁹ Therefore, when kings hunt deer in the wilderness they are also chasing this cosmic depth, here assisted by a goddess. Such cannot be achieved when kings sit idly in their courts, holding audiences. Hence, the contrast between the middle panel and the others is not particularly strange; in fact, it is quite conventional; the wilderness helps create a unity that otherwise would be missing. I must emphasize, however, that I do not wish to imply, through these literary considerations, that the existence of the wilderness was irrelevant for the real world; kings really did go hunting, and in many parts of India, until modern times, the wilderness did indeed give access to real power.⁴⁰

The Clown in Indian Theater

As well as the three dynamic hunting scenes, the middle panel has two other, more static frames. The top one shows a towering, kingly figure sitting on a hilltop, while the hunted tiger below him seems to be reflected as a kind of prey in his headgear. There is also a queen or goddess-type figure in the middle of the frame second from the bottom. Zooming in further on the top frame in the left corner, somewhat hidden from the main scene, we see a comical, dwarf-type figure who seems to be hitting a plant or a snake (Figure 10). How should this figure be interpreted? Could this be an Indian clown, known as a *vidushaka*? Is this, perhaps, showing the well-known scene in which the clown mistakes a rope for a snake?⁴¹ Intriguingly, the much taller figure immediately to the left of the main male figure also possesses the traditional attributes of a *vidushaka*. As well as wearing the sacred thread to show that he is a Brahman, he is also limping, has bent legs, uses a curved staff (*kutila*), and has his hands tied with a cord; that combination of elements demands that he be identified as a typical *vidushaka*.⁴² The same figure also seems to appear in the middle scene of the panel (see Figure 9)—as the second figure on the left—where he is part of the hunt. The dwarf who appears in two other scenes may also be associated with the *vidushaka* (in the right corner in both the second from the top and the second from the bottom frames, both in Figure 3). Indeed, his disinterested pose reminds one of his skeptical attitude toward royals and their “stupid” hunting habits in the Indian theatrical tradition. See, for example, this hilarious citation from the satirical account of a royal hunt given by the *vidushaka* Mathavya:

Oh my fate! I am tired of being friend to this king addicted to the hunt! “Here is a deer”, “there is a boar”, “there is a tiger”—in this manner we wander about from forest to forest, in the midst of rows of trees, their shade thinned by summer. We drink hot, foul-smelling water from mountain streams, astringent from their mixture with leaves. We get our meals, mainly consisting of meat roasted on spits, at irregular hours. And even at night, I do not get enough sleep as my joints are dislocated by riding on horseback [during the day]. Then, at the crack of dawn, those sons of slave girls—the fowlers—wake me up with the noise of taking the forest.⁴³

The figure of the *vidushaka* necessarily belongs to the Indian theater, and has attracted significant attention from Indologists. He is the ugly, narrow-minded, yet loyal and good-natured companion of the king. According to the Dutch Indologist Johan Huizinga, his stereotypical nature is, in essence, fixed, and it is dominated by three main characteristics: pettiness, clumsiness, and gourmandizing/indolence.⁴⁴ The clown’s hedonism is earthy and thus contrasts sharply with the *bhoga* at the Nayaka courts.

By far the most important—and for us also the most relevant—study of the *vidushaka* is that by David Shulman.⁴⁵ Shulman understands the *vidushaka* through his relationship with the Indian king, and, regarding the king, he follows in the footsteps of another Dutch Indologist, Jan Heesterman.⁴⁶ For both Heesterman and Shulman, Indian kingship is fundamentally permeated with ambiguity, conflict, and transformation. The main reason for this was that the king continued to act



Figure 10. Top frame of the middle panel of the Brooklyn kalamkari illustrated in Figure 1, showing two *vidushakas* (on the left and the right).

as a sacrificer, one who had to permanently renew his kingship through renunciation—something hinted at earlier in the discussion of the wilderness as the main setting for such. Possessing no permanent legitimacy of his own, he depended for his authority on the Brahman, who would perform the required rituals. Yet the Brahman himself is also a problematic figure because his rituals would be valid only if he could also transcend the world through renunciation. Thus, we have the two main characters within numerous plays—the king and the Brahman—constantly moving their backs toward both each other and worldly power.

In the Sangam context of Tamil South India, the *perpetuum mobile* between the settled world and the wilderness—that is, between the immanent and the transcendent—is translated, in a literary sense, into a tension between, on the one hand, the inner world of emotions and fantasy (*akam*), and, on the other, the outer world of action and kingly deeds (*puram*).⁴⁷ However, whichever metaphorical register is used, this constant, deeply tragic back-and-forth between two contrasting worlds also leaves much room for the observations of the amused clown. With his comical common sense, he stands as a gatekeeper on the boundary of the two worlds, repeatedly reminding the main actor(s) of the absurdity of their existence. In fact, the clown “dissolves, unravels, and undermines perceived reality.” His simplest yet most profound truth is that whatever is perceived as real or common sense is, in fact, both ludicrous and false. The overall result is that the king moves back and forth between the two phases of the royal paradigm, which are symbolically represented as the *tragic* and the *comic* modes of kingship. For Shulman, South Indian kingship is symbolically situated at the intersection of order and necessary disorder, and it is the latter dimension—“the wilderness of comic chaos”—that illuminates the king’s career from within.⁴⁸

But how real is all this? Is this not a far-too-literary, highly structuralist perspective on Indian kingship? Importantly, some Indologists have questioned the existence of the *vidushaka* in real life; for Shulman, for example, it is extremely doubtful. Thus he elaborates on the figure of the court jester in Tamil and Telugu folktales, and refers to another fictive figure, called Tenali Rama (or Tenali Ramalingam),⁴⁹ who is primarily associated with Krishnadevaraya (1509–1529), the greatest of Vijayanagara kings, but is also identified as the court jester of Venkata II. According to the Spanish

Jesuit historian Henry Heras, Tenali Rama became a Vaishnava, to please his patron, and changed his name to Tenali Ramakrishna. He was thoroughly disliked by the aforementioned orthodox Tatacharya because he outwitted the latter through play and mockery.

According to one anecdote, Tatacharya used to visit a cow stall early every morning, blindfolded, and take hold of a cow’s tail and uncover his eyes in order to see the animal’s excrement. This meritorious habit was interrupted when Tenali Rama’s naked body replaced the cow, enraging Tatacharya, who complained to the king. The king sentenced Tenali Rama to death by having him buried, with only his head out of the ground, which was then to be trampled on by some elephants. After the burial but before the trampling, Tenali Ram was able to call to a humped-backed washerman, and falsely told him that he, too, suffered from having a hump but that a sage had told him that he could get rid of it by burying himself in such a manner. Eager to see the result, the washerman freed the jester and saw, to his utter amazement, that, indeed, Tenali Ram had been cured. The washerman asked Tenali Rama to have him similarly buried in the soil. Sometime later, the king was informed that the jester had been trampled by the elephants. When Tenali Rama appeared before the king, he told him that a god had resurrected him. Duly impressed, the king promised to forgive the first hundred crimes that Tenali Ram might commit in the future.⁵⁰

Although the comic role of Tenali Rama compares well with the *vidushaka* of Indian theater, the former is definitely more powerful than the latter. In the folk-tale the king cannot survive without the jester, who becomes the central actor and normally triumphs over the king. The jester orchestrates the action with his comic ingenuity, laughs at the king and, equally important, at the Brahman as well. Something quite similar is demonstrated in the person of Birbal, the famous clown at Akbar’s Mughal court, whose wit attracted the anger of orthodox Muslim jurists.⁵¹ What makes Birbal different from Tenali Rama, however, is that we know he really existed.

Apart from the Mughal parallel, the iconic Indian clown is clearly reminiscent of the court jesters of Renaissance European theater, who constantly questioned reality on stage. Here, too, they act as gatekeeper figures for the audience, explaining what is happening on the stage (Figure 11). In the fascinating global comparative study of the clown by Beatrice Otto, *Fools Are Everywhere*, we see the English court jester quite easily



Figure 11. Shah Jahan and his four sons by Willem Schellinks (1623–1678), Amsterdam, ca 1668. Oil on canvas, 69 × 87 cm. Musée Guimet, Musée national des Arts asiatiques, Paris, MA1909;J3676. Source: © RMN-Grand Palais (MNAAG, Paris) / Thierry Ollivier. The court jester is in the middle of the scene, just in front of the stage.

transmuted into a stage actor who serves as a bridge between the characters in the play and the audience. He was part of the play and often had a central role in it, but he was also detached, and his frequent asides could make it seem that he was aware of the presence of an audience, unlike any of the other characters. This, for Otto, is exactly what court jesters did in real life—they could be at the center of the action, and then suddenly stand outside it and make dispassionate observations. The jesters at both the theater and the royal court were adept at simultaneously being involved and detached, living at the very heart of the action while remaining, in a symbolic sense, peripheral. In the words of Otto, the court jester became “the harbinger of ongoing renewal.”⁵² Such a comment could almost have had come directly from the Indian context as described by Shulman.⁵³

As far as the theater is concerned, such global parallels make sense. However, when dealing with the real life of the clown, the Indic courts appear to have been unique. Not only in Europe, but in China, too, stage and court jesters existed side by side. In England, the stage jester had a career as brief as it was glorious. After the mid-seventeenth century there is little sign of him; the real English court jester had disappeared over a century earlier (although he has reappeared in modern Western drama). Hence, if correct, the Indian sit-

uation approaches the modern Western one in which the stage jester remains a notable phenomenon but his counterpart at the real court has disappeared.⁵⁴

Reading the Middle Panel through Indian Theater: *Bhavana-purushottama* *Ad fontes*

What we are looking at in the middle panel of the Brooklyn *kalamkari* (see Figure 3) is indeed very much a wilderness of comic chaos. In addition to its setting, this panel has a dynamic narrative mode that seems to distinguish it from the other six, which are more static. Nevertheless, it may also be viewed as a court scene. And in view of his tiger crown, could it be Shiva sitting on Mount Kailas at the top of the panel? Yet the presence of the *vidushaka* makes this unlikely and forces us to look instead for a more suitable theater setting. In so doing, we should take into account the viewer’s familiarity with the episode being depicted; its importance lies not in telling a story but in evoking the viewer’s recall and re-experience of it, which should occur in the proper, empathic mood (*rasa*).⁵⁵

This immediately raises a problem. Can one really expect a twenty-first-century Dutch historian to bridge the huge cultural gap between early-modern Indian theater and his own world? Was it not Johan

Huizinga who, even though he wrote his dissertation on the *vidushaka*, decided that he lacked the intuition—or the “historical sensation,” as he called it—to be able to continue his Indian studies?⁵⁶ What makes the issue even more complicated is the fact that we are dealing with hundreds of plays, most of which have disappeared or, if still extant, are only in manuscript form, untranslated and hidden away in the most obscure places.

However, sometimes one has to be lucky, as is the case here, thanks to the pioneering work of David Shulman on the South Indian theater traditions. Taking all the ingredients discussed above—Tontai area, forest, clown, king, hunting, and goddesses—as points of departure, one arrives at a piece that could be a very good candidate: the *Bhavana-purushottama*, an allegorical play in Sanskrit by one Ratnakheta Shrinivasa Dikshita.⁵⁷ Hence I will add another possible interpretation of the Brooklyn *kalamkari* by inscribing this play into its visual scenes, in particular those of the middle panel, in the hope that this will serve as an interpretative exercise to demonstrate the importance of taking an emic perspective on Indian visual culture, one that seriously takes into account the intellectual milieu of a certain time and place. I am very much aware that such can succeed only on the basis of deep philological analysis, and my interpretation has been possible only thanks to the philological spade work of David Shulman and some of his colleagues.

The temporal and spatial coordinates of the proposed *Bhavana-purushottama* seem to fit. The author was born in Tupplu (near Kancipuram) and served as a court poet of Surappa Nayaka, the mid-sixteenth-century ruler of Senji.⁵⁸ As well as being an important Advaita philosopher, Ratnakheta Shrinivasa Dikshita is also known for having had two famous sons (Rajachudamani Dikshita and Ardhanarishvara Dikshita) and a son-in-law who was even more famous—the great Appayya Dikshita, discussed above. Apart from being followers of the Advaita school of Vedanta philosophy, these Shaiva Brahmans can also be associated with the Samaya branch of Shrividyā, the Tantric cult mentioned above, which focused on devotion through mental visualization.⁵⁹ The playwright Ratnakheta was also called Pratidina-prabandha-karta, meaning “author of a book a day,” which suggests that *Bhavana-purushottama* is just one of many works he composed. In fact, we know that he wrote eighteen dramas and sixty epics, as well as several works on rhetoric and a large number of commentaries. The *Bhavana-purushottama* could certainly fit the scenes

in the *kalamkari*. The following explorative exercise builds on Shulman’s extensive summary of the story as well as my own imagination.

Imagination

Although the main character is a heroic prince called Vishnu-Purushottama (lit. “Best of All Males”; hereafter V-P), a disguise for Vishnu, the play actually centers on the importance of imagination, represented by the invisible Princess Bhavana (lit. “Imagination”), the daughter of King Jiva-deva (“King Lord of Life”) of Nava-dvara-pura (“The Town of Nine Gates”). Although V-P and Bhavana cannot see each other, through the mediation of a wandering ascetic woman—one Yoga-vidya (“Knowledge of Yoga”)—they fall in love. Bhavana sees V-P in a portrait produced by Yoga-vidya, who also has sent a messenger—Hamsa, a goose—to V-P to tell him about Bhavana’s virtues.⁶⁰ Most of the subsequent action in the play deals with V-P’s quest to find the invisible Bhavana. V-P and his followers—both male and female—move into the wilderness, seeking not only Bhavana but also a deer called Dharma (“Order”) and a doe called Kamana (“Desire”). All of this has been planned out by Yoga-vidya, who then sends her disciple Sattva-shuddha (“Purified by Truth”) to enter the deer and thereby lead the royal party to the shrine of the goddess Tulasi on Anjana Mountain (which is, in fact, near the temple of Venkateshwara at Tirumala) to meet Bhavana. Arriving there, V-P takes the form of a human hero while his eagle (Vainateya) is turned into a *vidushaka*. Later in the story, the comic shape-shifting is continued when the *vidushaka* changes into a monkey; at the end of the first act, this same *vidushaka* mistakes a dark Tamala-Sala tree for a ghost and starts crying out of fear.

V-P finally manages to see Bhavana through her reflection in a glossy moonstone. Mistaking the image for the real thing, he finds himself in “a tantalizing house of mirrors,” where he repeatedly and desperately tries to embrace her. Suddenly, though, when he is distracted and starts to dream of another woman, Bhavana becomes envious and, full of distress, decides that she wants to renounce the world. At that very moment, V-P (“the Lord of All the Worlds, four-armed Ocean of Compassion, with the *kaustubha* jewel on your breast”) reveals his true self (Vishnu). The two recognize each other and decide to get married, although this can only happen after a long process of testing—a *svayamvara* or bridegroom-choice ceremony—in which V-P has to

prove his mettle at the court of Bhavana's father. There V-P is challenged by a large number of other, highly-competitive candidates from far-off places. Shulman mentions Cheras, Cholas, Pandyas, Huns, and people from Gandhara. In the fifth and final act, Bhavana fails to recognize V-P among the suitable candidates. Luckily, V-P is saved by the goddess Tulasi, who throws her garland around his neck, after which he emerges as the victor.

The story provides a wonderful illustration of the key importance of Bhavana—that is, how imagination gives access to a world that is beyond the real and which is, as Shulman puts it, “more than real.” Looking at the play, we are confronted with a reflection on the sheer power of imagination in deciphering the various layers of existence in order to facilitate awareness of the very highest level of being. Indeed, this obsession with imagination as a tool to understand the real links up quite well with the ontological debates that occurred at the Nayaka courts mentioned above. Some of its heated spirit is reflected in the *svayamvara* competition, in which various “heretics” (*pashanda*) competed for Bhavana's hand, only to be beaten by the one and only Vishnu.

To what extent can this particular story be seen in our *kalamkari*? The key remains the *vidushaka*, because he indicates drama. As already mentioned, this play has the right temporal and spatial coordinates—although, of course, for a piece of theatre this is not essential for our test. The hunting scenes are most clearly reminiscent of the events in the play, although I do not think they depict real events but rather are meant simply to provide the proper mood or atmosphere (*rasa*) for the viewers-cum-worshippers.

As mentioned, the action in the hunting scenes contrasts with the more static scenes, in the top and second-from-the-bottom scenes, which seem to be more informative about the actual narrative. If we base our analysis on the plot of *Bhavana-purushottama*, the lady at the center of the lower scene (Figure 12) would represent the goddess Tulasi, the other major female character, who sits on a hilly abode welcoming the royal party. If we look at the lower right corner of the scene, there is even room for our *vidushaka* who—according to the play—is running into the bushes, where a woman was hidden to play the *vina* for the goddess.

Taking the panel as a whole, the sequence of the play is far from straightforward. The various hunting scenes surround the main scene in which the royal party meets Tulasi. Each horizontal frame, though, appears to have its own linear narrative. The main characters are not repeated as they are in a continuous narration, one common mode of Indian visual narration.⁶¹ Only at the very top of the panel (see Figure 14) do we see a trailer-like introduction to the story, with two different kinds of *vidushakas*: one small and fat, the other clumsy and tall (see Figure 10). As well as these, who seem like a South Indian version of Laurel and Hardy, there are two male figures at the main protagonist's left and right who are difficult to pin down. At his immediate right, though, is an ash-gray (perhaps female) figure who looks like an ascetic (Figure 13). In his/her left arm is a bird that very much looks like a goose. If that is correct, we are almost certainly dealing with Yoga-vidya, the wandering ascetic woman, the mastermind of the story, who sent V-P her goose



Figure 12. Detail from the middle panel of the Brooklyn *kalamkari* illustrated in Figure 1, second frame from the bottom, showing a female figure sitting on a hill receiving guests. (Goddess Tulasi receiving the royal party of V-P with a *vidushaka* in the lower right corner?)



Figure 13. Detail from the top frame of the middle panel of the Brooklyn *kalamkari* illustrated in Figure 1, showing an ascetic gray-blue figure with a goose (Yoga-vidya and Hamsa?).

to tell him about the wonderful Bhavana. Being on this track already, nobody should doubt that the central figure who sits at the top of the panel is V-P, and that the top frame—by using a synoptic mode of narration—serves to introduce the narrative by showing some of the key figures and the main events in order to make it identifiable for the audience. The middle panel, then, is not about the whole play, but only the first act.

However, what about Bhavana herself? Where is she, if the two main ladies in the tableau are the goddess Tulasi and Yoga-vidya? I suggest that we simply follow the very meaning of her name, as well as the gist of the play, and assume that she remains unseen, and must be imagined by an audience of devotees who can bring her to life only through contemplation. It is very possible that the *kalamkari* was used as a devotional wall painting in a temple or palace, or perhaps served

as a mobile scroll to illustrate the play while it went on tour. There are plenty of examples of such a practice from all over the subcontinent.⁶²

If all of this is essentially correct, how do the other six panels of the *kalamkari* relate to the *Bhavana-purushottama*? In addition to the general observation that the wilderness creates cohesion, there are two further possibilities. One is that, because the central panel covers only the first act, the other six could be used as the background for telling the stories of the various competitors who traveled across the known world in hopes of marrying Bhavana. The six panels may represent countries in that world by anachronistically transposing their contemporaneous image to the past—something not at all unusual in Indian, nor in medieval European, visual culture. Alternatively, we could interpret the *kalamkari* philosophically, taking up the playwright's monist viewpoint to suggest that it conveys the idea that imagination—as represented in the *Bhavana-purushottama*—enables us to bring unity to a highly diverse world, one that keeps changing and expanding. From that perspective, the six courts, realistic as they are, provide a suitable backdrop to tell the story of imagination. Only with the help of Bhavana can we detect a unity that is both beyond reality and “more real than reality.”

Conclusion

What I have attempted to do in this essay is bring together history and Indology in order to help understand the Brooklyn *kalamkari*. The *kalamkari* itself seems to convey the continuing gap between these



Figure 14. Detail from the middle panel of the Brooklyn *kalamkari* illustrated in Figure 1, first frame from the top, showing a trailer-like introduction to the *Bhavana-purushottama*.

two disciplines: the six court panels appear to be ethnographically accurate—perhaps even too accurate, the result of their emblematic nature—and depict the royal courts in realistic terms; the middle panel builds upon the rich imagination of India’s prolific literary tradition. As such, it is clear that the historical context—that of Chetti and Nayaka cosmopolitanism—does much to reveal the sources that informed the production of this piece, although this can tell only part of the story. The world of South Indian theater tells the other, as argued above. In my interpretation of the middle panel we see some key scenes of the first act of the Sanskrit play *Bhavana-purushottama*, which were meant to facilitate the viewers’ devotion of Vishnu through imagination. One of the challenges ahead is to gain a better understanding of the relationship between the side panels and the one in the middle. What can we make of the relationship between imagination and the various layers of the real world? What can the historian learn from the fact that the *vidushaka* remained an important figure in the theater but apparently did not exist in the real world of the Nayaka courts? As with the *vidushaka*, the split king of the Indian Vedas appears to have lived on in Indian fiction, whereas the real kings of seventeenth-century South India seem to have followed a very different path. What caused this persistence of *vidushaka* and king in the theater, and how long did this comic duo continue to be of importance in the historical milieu? These are questions that still need to be resolved.

As far as the timeframe of the *kalamkari* is concerned, we have already highlighted the remarkable parallel in the ways that the royal courts of Akbar, Ibrahim Adil Shah II, and Venkata II attempted to deal with the rapidly changing times. All three sought to attract and exploit new knowledge to construct cosmographies that fitted the inclusive and universal nature of their empires. The “late and long” sixteenth century (1550–1650) was an age of large-scale exploration dur-

ing which enormous quantities of new information about both current and ancient civilizations started to flood into the knowledge systems of India as well as many other parts of the world. Although not the first, this was unquestionably the most intensive age of globalization the world had ever experienced, and it created an almost universal sense of epistemological and ontological uncertainty, and the intellectual and cultural dimensions of this period are underexplored. The fact that globalization affected not only the West but the world at large is often ignored, yet in regions with deep scriptural traditions, such as China, India, and West Asia, its cultural effects are visible through analysis of the increased production of texts and images at various royal courts, something that was instigated by rulers looking for new rationalizations for their rule. Philosophical monism around 1600—whether in the form of Advaita or one of the many branches of Neoplatonism—appears to have been a very attractive option in this regard. This also triggered a renewed fascination with the relationship between the imagination/*phantasia* and the real.⁶³ While a few specialists have started to perceive something of a worldwide Renaissance, the dominant impression remains that the West not only initiated this cultural globalization but also exclusively experienced it. As this essay shows, that is far from true.

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Notes

1. The iconographical description of the *kalamkari* that follows is based on Irwin, “Golkonda Cotton Paintings”; Gwatkin,

“Brooklyn Museum Hanging”; and Morris, “Enter the Royal Encampment.”

2. Note that the Brooklyn Museum’s accession numbers of the panels do not fit their sequence. My numbers correspond to the sequence of the panels from left to right.

3. Early-seventeenth-century Dutch sources mention the annual arrival in Pulicat of ships owned by the Ayutthaya rulers Song Tham and Prasat Thong. Subrahmanyam, *Political Economy of Commerce*, 307.

4. See Groesen, *Representations of the Overseas World*. See also the early comments by Culin in “Story of the Painted Curtain.”

5. Gopala Rao, *Lepakshi*, Plate V and p. 84.

6. More generally, Nayaka refers to the military elites under the Vijayanagara Empire who carved out their own little kingdoms in South India after the sixteenth-century decline of that empire. Although technically a member of the last Vijayanagara dynasty, the Aravidu, the court of Venkata II fits the characterization of the seventeenth-century Nayaka courts.

7. Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce*.

8. Subrahmanyam, *Political Economy of Commerce*; Mukund, *Trading World of the Tamil Merchant*.

9. For the concept of “portfolio-capitalist,” see Bayly and Subrahmanyam, “Portfolio Capitalists.”

10. Subrahmanyam, *Political Economy of Commerce*, 298–314.

11. Shulman and Subrahmanyam, “The Men Who Would Be King?”; and Narayana Rao et al., *Symbols of Substance*, 242–64.

12. Narayana Rao et al., *Symbols of Substance*.

13. Narayana Rao, *Text and Tradition in South Asia*, 63.

14. For a discussion of the Hocartian view of caste and kingship, see Quigley, “Kings and Priests.”

15. Narayana Rao et al., *Symbols of Substance*, 67, 82, 168. Two landmark exhibitions in 2015—one in New Delhi and one in New York—have made it increasingly clear that this new focus on sensual enjoyment extended at least as far as the Deccan courts. See Najat Haidar and Sardar, *Sultans of Deccan India 1500–1700*; and Singh, *Scent upon a Southern Breeze*.

16. A basic historical outline can be found in the still very useful book by Heras, *Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*.

17. Bes, “Heirs of Vijayanagara.”

18. Heras, *Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, 510.

19. The term *conquest of reality* derives from E. H. Gombrich (see

Kaufmann, *Mastery of Nature*, 3).

Comparisons with the courts of the unruly Holy Roman Empire are the most striking; see, e.g., Evans, *Rudolf II and His World*; Hammerstein and Walther, *Späthumanismus*; and Mulsow, *Spätrenaissance-Philosophie in Deutschland*.

20. Rubiés, “Jesuit Discovery of Hinduism.”

21. Minkowski, “Advaita Vedānta in Early Modern History.”

22. It would go beyond the iconological objective of this article to elaborate on the various Indian philosophical traditions on monism, but basically in monism it is believed that world and souls are ultimately illusory manifestations of Brahman. This is supposed to represent the thought of Advaita Vedānta going back to Shankara (ca. 800 CE). Within the monist tradition, though, one can make a distinction between Shankara’s unqualified non-dualism (in which the absolute is the core identity of everything that exists, including the souls, the world, and its products) and qualified non-dualism (in which Brahman or Shiva is the fundamental reality yet is characterized by [real] multiplicity and differentiation). Here I am following the comments of Duquette in his “Is Sivadaita Vedānta a Saiddhāntika School?,” 37.

23. Brooks, “Encountering the Hindu ‘Other,’” 412.

24. Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism*. To stress the distinction between the two different kinds of monism, Allen has labeled the early-modern variety “Greater Advaita Vedānta”; see Allen, “Greater Advaita Vedānta.”

25. See the contributions to the special issue of the *Journal of Indian Philosophy* (2014) that was devoted to Appayya Dikshita: Minkowski, “Apūrvaṃ Pāṇḍityam”; Bronner, “Renaissance Man in Memory”; and Rao, “Vaiṣṇava Writings of a Śaiva Intellectual.” In the issue’s introduction, Minkowski raises the peculiar question of whether it is proper for Indologists to write biographies.

26. Heras, *Aravidu Dynasty*, 517–54.

27. Minkowski, “Advaita Vedānta in Early Modern History,” 85–86, which is partly based on Gode, “Bernier and Kavindrācārya Sarasvatī.” For the historical context of the Mughals’ interest in Sanskrit philosophy, see Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*.

28. App, *Cult of Emptiness*.

29. For Tatacharya, see Heras, *Aravidu Dynasty*, 304–6, 519, 552; Rubiés, “Jesuit Discovery,” 226; Rao, “Vaiṣṇava Writings of a Śaiva Intellectual,” 46–47.

30. Heras, *Aravidu Dynasty*, 486–93; Rubiés, “Jesuit Discovery,” 219–20.

31. For this divine atmosphere at the court, see Narayana Rao et al., *Symbols of Substance*, 164, 185, 187.

32. Ramaswami and Singh, “Nauras: The Many Arts of the Deccan.”

33. Kapil and Bhatnagar, “Portuguese Contributions to Indian Botany.”

34. Najat Haidar and Sardar, *Sultans of Deccan*, 214–16.

35. For the meaning and early modern context of this pansemiotic view, see Westerhoff, “World of Signs.” See also the related idea of an “emblematic worldview” as proposed by Ashworth, “Emblematic Worldview.” Both derive their inspiration from Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*. Of course, the global dimension of such a worldview is merely suggested here and awaits some further scrutiny.

36. See Heesterman, “Warrior, Peasant and Brahmin.”

37. Handelman et al., “Growing a Kingdom.”

38. *Ibid.*, 117–18.

39. *Ibid.*, 116.

40. However, this was more in arid north India than the south; see Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*.

41. Doniger O’Flaherty provides numerous examples in her *Dreams, Illusions and Other Realities*, index, s.v. “rope-snake.”

42. Zin, “One Who Was Against the Pavvajjā.”

43. Singh, *Political Violence in Ancient India*, 447.

44. Huizinga, “De Vidūshaka in het Indisch Tooneel,” 1:60: “kleinzieligheid, onhandigheid en smul- en gemakzucht.”

45. Shulman, *King and the Clown*.

46. For Heesterman, see his *Inner Conflict of Tradition*.

47. See, e.g., Cutler, “Four Spatial Realms in Tirukkōvaiyar.”

48. Shulman, *King and the Clown*, 292.

49. *Ibid.*, 180–200.

50. Heras, *Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, 520, based on the folk-stories collected by the Indian anthropologist Subramiah Pantulu.

51. Naim, “Popular Jokes and Political History.”

52. Otto, *Fools Are Everywhere*, 187–230.

53. Interestingly, as in Indian theater, the jesters in Javanese shadow puppet (*wayang*) also link the unseen and seen worlds. While the divine and nobility figures speak Old Javanese, which only the puppeteers and a certain class of people understand, the jesters speak the language of the ordinary people, and they interpret what those figures communicate for the audience. In Indian theater, too, the clown is mostly speaking in Prakrit, a stylish vernacular that was meant to contrast with

the more civilized Sanskrit (from which it derived). I am grateful to one of the external referees for drawing this parallel. See also the classic study on this by Becker from 1979, "Text-Building."

54. For these global observations, see Otto, *Fools Are Everywhere*, passim.

55. For this, see Huizinga, "De Vidūshaka," in *Verzamelde werken*, 1:88ff.

56. See Huizinga, "Mijn weg tot de historie" (My road to history), in *Verzamelde werken*, 1:32. Huizinga's dissertation, "De Vidūshaka in het Indisch Tooneel" (The Vidushaka in the Indian theater) was defended at the University of Groningen in 1897, and published by P. Noordhoff.

57. This entire section is based on Shulman, *More than Real*, 232–65.

58. At the time of Venkata's reign, Senji was ruled by one Krishnappa Nayaka, who followed his predecessor in his zeal for Vaishnavism; see Srinivasachari, *History of Gingee*, 120ff.

59. Fisher, "Just like Kālidāsa."

60. This falling in love via a picture that raises the lovers' imagination and refers to the deeper issue about what is real is also a well-known trope in the Indo-Persian literature of that time (and earlier); see Pellö, "Portraits in the Mirror."

61. For these narrative modes in Indian painting, see Dehejia, "On Modes of Visual Narration."

62. For a survey of South Asian mural painting, see Seastrand, "Praise, Politics, and Language."

63. Interestingly, David Shulman comes close to drawing a parallel with Neoplatonism, stating, "Neoplatonic notions of the imagination have almost an Indian flavor and invite systematic comparison" (Shulman, *More than Real*, 275).

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