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### When the God Meets a Tribal Girl: Narasiṃha's Second Marriage in the Light of the *Vāsantikāpariṇayam*\*

SUMMARY: A widely diffused pattern of a recognized god who takes a second wife, usually local, has essentially articulated the acculturation of tribes or other spatially and socially separated groups. This motif has been discussed regarding South Indian literary traditions, where two brides are opposites in terms of origin, status and appearance, and a double marriage metaphor that aims at reconciliation of two distant spheres should be often contextualized within *bhakti* ideology. The motif of unconditional devotion of the additional wife to her husband is also closely connected to Vijayanagara politics: a local girl as a spouse may reflect the extension of both royal and spiritual power symbolized by the god. The present paper explores the strategy and purpose of the adaptive re-use of a vernacular legend from the area of Ahobilam about the love between Narasiṃha and a Ceñcū huntress, as extolled by the author of a Sanskrit drama entitled *Vāsantikāpariṇayam*.

KEYWORDS: second marriage myth, second wife, Narasiṃha, *Vāsantikāpariṇayam*, Vijayanagara, Ceñcū, Ahobilam, Śrīvaiṣṇavism, adaptive re-use.

The motif of a recognized god who takes a local girl as a wife, in addition to his traditional and influential spouse, occurs quite often within Indian textual and oral traditions. The earliest myth representing this age-old pattern, widely diffused in folk religions

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of India, is most probably the story of Murugan/Kumāra and Valli, a daughter of the Kuruva tribe chief. Essentially, the double marriage metaphor has mirrored the acculturation of tribal or other spatially separated groups, although it came to be extended to other local communities to be integrated, such as those of fishermen, robbers or even those who wanted to rule (Sontheimer 1985: 147). Depending on the milieu and the means of transmission of the myth—folk/oral or Sanskritized/written—the emphasis on the main characters, supposed to reconcile two distant spheres through a marriage, changes: in the case of oral narratives it is usually the god who must adjust to a new environment; in the written Sanskrit sources it is a local bride (Sontheimer 1985: 146).

The double marriage myths presented by the South Indian literary traditions where two brides are usually opposites—one belonging to the classical pantheon, pale and of high status, the other local, of dark complexion and inferior origin, but, most importantly, much more accessible to men—should be primarily viewed through the lenses of Tamil *bhakti* cults. In Shulman's words, besides showing the opposite nature of a goddess, the aim of the marital metaphor is to illustrate “the divine love between the lowly believer (the soul in its exile) and God” (Shulman 1980: 293–294) or, following Sontheimer, the god's search for a devotee (*bhakta*) in the form of a tribal woman (Sontheimer 1985: 146).

The pattern of a second marriage has also often been contextualized as reflecting political issues, where it follows the multi-layered need for incorporation of various indigenous communities into the state. Since love is the engine of all events constituting the story, the concept of *bhakti* plays a very significant role in such cases as well. In such context, the approval of a marriage by both the god's first wife and the newlywed bride's community confirms that the purpose of the liaison has been realized: the group she belongs to has found recognition within the Brahmanic tradition and, as far as politics is considered, under the royal umbrella. In line with *bhakti* ideology, this is the power of devotion towards the god/husband, which allows the inclusion of

a stranger into the orthodox Hindu hierarchical society, regardless of his/her social status.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the motif of the second marriage of Vaiṣṇava Narasiṃha to a tribal girl as presented in the *Vāsantikā-pariṇayam*, a Sanskrit drama ascribed to the 7<sup>th</sup> superior of the Śrīvaiṣṇava *maṭha* in Ahobilam, Śaṭhakopa Yatīndra Mahādeśika (16<sup>th</sup> century). The motif has been variously retold in the area of modern Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. This particular local “love-story” is my point of departure into analyzing the strategy of acknowledging the presence of the Ceñcū tribe within the Śrīvaiṣṇava religious centre patronized by Vijayanagara kings. My attempt is to examine how, for the sake of “marrying” both realms, the author of the Sanskrit play creatively re-used and adapted to the norms of his own milieu the old, vernacular narrative extolling the love between the Man-Lion and a Ceñcū huntress, which originated from tribal lore and had primarily been circulated orally in the Telugu language. Keeping in mind that the local reality of Ahobilam, the “site of nine Narasiṃhas” (*navanarasimhakṣetra*),<sup>2</sup> is very complex and interwoven with numerous interconnections, my aim is also to offer some reflections upon the internal tensions mirrored both in diversification of the god and the story of Ceñcatā, suggesting the bidirectional flow of local and pan-Indian elements during the development of the site.

### **Narasiṃha of Ahobilam**

The centre of Narasiṃha worship at Ahobilam has never gained pan-Indian recognition, but, after winning the patronage of the rulers of the Vijayanagara Empire, it has become one of the most important Śrīvaiṣṇava centres of Narasiṃha worship along with the Pāñcarātra temple order in South India. The Śrīvaiṣṇava *maṭha* that governs local temples now belongs to a Vadakalai sect, yet according to Rajagopalan it originally was Tengalai, and the turn took place on the eve of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Rajagopalan 2005). Ahobilam is counted among one hundred

<sup>2</sup> The nine temples are extolled in the *Ahobilamāhātmya* (AM): 4.8–111.

and eight holy places of Śrīvaiṣṇavism. It is unique for two reasons: (1) nine iconographic forms of the Man-Lion are said to be worshipped at the site, hence the name *navanarasimhakṣetra* (in fact there are more temples there), (2) although these were the Śrīvaiṣṇavas who for several centuries have laid claims to be spiritual masters of the place, the variation of the Narasiṃha cult they cherish betrays some traces of the indigenous beliefs of the hunter-gatherer Ceñcū tribe that has been living in this area since the Paleolithic Age (Fürer-Haimendorf 1982: 2).

Narasimha is a hero of various legends and songs preserved orally in the Telugu language, which present the oldest layer of the local cult of the Man-Lion there. As well, both literary and paleographical sources, mostly in vernacular Telugu, provide some information regarding the history of the site.<sup>3</sup> However, there are also a few Sanskrit texts referring to the place, most of them composed during the times of the Vijayanagara Empire. The best known, although still scarcely analyzed, are the *Vāsantikāpariṇayam* I am going to explore further on, and the *Rāmābhūdayam*, a panegyric on Sāḷuva Narasiṃha, the ruler who established the Vijayanagara dynasty of Sāḷuvas (reigned in the years 1485–1491). Other barely quoted Sanskrit compositions of different genres shed additional light on various aspects of Narasiṃha worship at Ahobilam. The Pāñcarātra *Vihagendra-saṃhitā* 4.11 counts Ahobilanarasimha among about seventy forms of the Man-Lion. Clearly, besides indicating the impressive profusion of the cult, the passage suggests that Pāñcarātrins knew the place before the 14<sup>th</sup> century, as Vedānta Deśika mentions a *saṃhitā* of this title in his *Pāñcarātrarakṣā* (Gonda 1977: 106, Aiyangar and Venugopalacharya 1996: 23).<sup>4</sup> Narasiṃha of Ahobilam is also referred to in the *Sāḷuvābhūdayam* by Rājanātha Ḍiṇḍima and in the records of two copperplate inscriptions commissioned after Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's

<sup>3</sup> For example, see the list of paleographical and textual sources in: Vasantha 2001: 2–4.

<sup>4</sup> The close connection to the Pāñcarātra tradition is highlighted by several passages of the *Ahobilamāhātmya*, see for example AM 9.67–70, 10.110.

death by his son, Sāluva Immaḍi Narasiṃha (reigned: 1491–1505),<sup>5</sup> in both cases reusing the motif of Sāluva Narasiṃha being born out of Narasiṃha's grace depicted in the *Rāmābhyudayam*. Moreover, the place itself is extensively extolled in the *Ahobilamāhātmya*, the undated Sanskrit work. The Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (undated) mentions it too: in a slightly changed manner the text retells the traditional etymology of the toponym Ahobilam (AM 7.59–60, comp. KM 3.35–37), confirming in this way both a close connection between those two religious centres and the regional importance of Ahobilam.

Tirumaṅkai Ālvār's reference to Ahobilam in his Tamil *Periya Tirumoli* (1.7.1–10) is most probably the earliest one as far as written tradition is considered. He praised it among one hundred and eight *divyadeśas* under the name “the hill of the Lord Narasiṃha” (*ciṅkavēḷkunram*) laying in this way the foundations for including it in the destinations of Śrīvaiṣṇava pilgrimage. Nevertheless, in his times (circa 8<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> century) Ahobilam, situated in dense forests of the Nallamala Hills belonging to the Eastern Ghats, must have been completely off the beaten track, so it is quite doubtful we are dealing with a first-hand relation. In his description Tirumaṅkai Ālvār mentions two issues also appearing in other sources, which are significant for understanding the dynamic of this place: firstly, inconsistently with the pan-Indian myth of Narasiṃha, but in line with local beliefs, he presents the god as descending in this very spot in order to kill the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu, and, secondly, according to the author the area is inhabited by terrifying hunters.

Supposedly, Tirumaṅkai Ālvār means the members of a hunter-gatherer Ceñcū tribe, who are still closely connected to Ahobilam and originally worshipped a theriomorphic deity, originating in a forest and imagined as most probably a lion. Sontheimer has already

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<sup>5</sup> See the abridged translation of copper-plate inscriptions in: *Annual Report of the Mysore Archeological Department for the year 1924*. 1925: Bangalore: Government Press and *Epigraphia Indica*. Vol VII (1902–1903). 1981. New Delhi: Director General Archeological Survey of India.

discussed that the original cult spot at Ahobilam, which predates the Vijayanagara temples, was situated on a hill in the jungle. Eventually, in the process of Sanskritization, the ferocious deity worshipped there came to be called Narasiṃha and was identified with the *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. Yet, local tribesmen and villagers still maintain his character of a dangerous divinity or spirit (*bhūta*) and emphasize this aspect rather than the *avatāra* (Sontheimer 1985: 145–146). In fact, the Andhra versions of Narasiṃha myth have continuously retained the “local flavour” and exist, alongside the Brahmanic tradition, as a kind of a hybrid between the local and pan-Indian realms. Depending on the social and geographical context, on a folk level Narasiṃha still happens to be represented either as a great hunter who chases his prey in dense forests, or as a great thief who steals grazing sheep (Sontheimer 1985: 147–149, Murty 1997: 185).

In the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, along with the spread of settled agriculture, Rāyalasīma, the dry subregion of Andhra where Ahobilam is located, was already starting to gain political importance and a distinct character. Harsh ecological conditions, pre-existing communities, the growing role of Śrīvaiṣṇavism, which started to win a substantial royal patronage, and migrants from coastal Andhra contributed to the dynamics of the area and facilitated socio-religious changes there. Being in fact a frontier zone, Rāyalasīma was inhabited by a mixture of people who were mobile, martial and more concerned with power than caste hierarchy (Talbot 2001: 42–47). It was unavoidable that at some point in time the Śrīvaiṣṇava pilgrims heading courageously to the peripherally situated “*kṣetra* of nine Narasiṃhas” began crossing paths with the Ceñcū, who due to inaccessibility of the place soon started acting as their guides. Through granting limited rights in the local temples, the tribe successfully became a part of the Śrīvaiṣṇava landscape. Distant Ahobilam enhanced its position on the Śrīvaiṣṇava pilgrimage map (alongside such centres as Kāñcī, Śrīraṅgam, Tirupati and Melkote), when for the sake of overseeing the already existing Narasiṃha temples a *maṭha* was established there. The early history of this institution is rife with discrepancies. The official Internet site

of “Sri Ahobila Mutt”<sup>6</sup> informs us enigmatically that it was established six hundred years ago by Ādivān Śaṭhakopa Jīyar, originally known as Kidāmbi Srinivasachar, who studied under Gadikasadam Ammal in Kāñcī. According to the mythicized account of events promulgated by the *maṭha* itself, Narasiṃha appeared to him in a dream and instructed him to proceed to Ahobilam, where he was initiated by the god himself and given the title of Śaṭhakopa Jīyar. Such a dating has been disputed by Rajagopalan (Rajagopalan 2005), in whose opinion the first Pontiff was appointed in Ahobilam in 1513 by the Vijayanagara King Kṛṣṇadeva Rāya (reign: 1509–1529) of the Tuluva dynasty, who visited Ahobilam on the way to the conquest of Kalinga. This view seems to be corroborated by Raman, according to whom the first superior of the Ahobila *maṭha* was linked to Allasāni Pedanna, a poet in the Kṛṣṇadeva Rāya’s court (Raman 1975: 80–81). The reason for traditional claims that the Ahobila *maṭha* was established as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century might be to associate this event with the donation of the idol of Narasiṃha by King Pratāparudra II of the Kākatīya dynasty,<sup>7</sup> in order to show that the origin of the *maṭha* dates back to his times (Rajagopalan 2005: 32).

The efflorescence of the cult of Narasiṃha—a “divine integrator” (Sontheimer 1987: 147)—happened during the times of the Vijayanagara Empire, when settled agriculture was extending into inhabited areas. It was accompanied by the politics of reinforcement of the kingdom through spreading both the political and religious influences by

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ahobilamutt.org/us/home/intro.asp>. The *maṭha* uses modern technologies quite efficiently, including special offers of “tele-upanyasam” for *bhaktas* living all around the world, with special focus on those in the U.S.

<sup>7</sup> The *kaifiyats*, digests of Andhra villages in Telugu, mention Pratāparudra in connection with Ahobilam. While the *Ahobilam Kaifiyat* refers to the king as donating some valuables for the festival image (*utsavamūrti*) of the Narasiṃha of Upper Ahobilam, the *kaifiyat* of Mutyalapadu village states that Pratāparudra stopped near Ahobilam on his way to Rāmeśvaram (Talbot 2001: 203). Traces of the Kākatīya style in one of the temples of Ahobilam are also visible (Sitapati 1982: 13–14).

means of, for example, building temples in distant places and subduing neighbouring tribes. Not unlike other deities belonging to a very inclusive pantheon of Vijayanaga kings, Narasiṃha, as mentioned above, was originally a regional deity worshipped by hunter-gatherers and pastoralists inhabiting areas bordering the empire (Sontheimer 1985, Sinopoli 2000: 375–6). The numerical and economic power of such groups was essential to the development of the state (Durga and Reddy 1992), yet the process of their incorporation was predominantly determined by their eventual martial skills. The deities cherished in Vijayanagara were often characterized by fury, bravery, and attributes of warriors and protectors, and their features clearly resembled the militaristic inclinations of the kingdom (Sinopoli 2000: 376). The Man-Lion perfectly suited both the image of a ferocious god and “the temper of the times” (Verghese 1995: 145). On the one hand, his terrible nature might have caused the rulers of a warring empire to seek his protection and blessing, while on the other, his predator’s features must have been very appealing to various local communities the kings of Vijayanagara intended to integrate.

Verghese suggests that even though the cult of Narasiṃha was most probably the earliest Vaiṣṇava one in the city of Vijayanagara, it could not compete with other deities in prestige and patronage (Verghese 1995: 41). Nevertheless, as we can presume from the content of the earlier mentioned *Rāmābhūdayam*, the Sāluva dynasty had very close links with Narasiṃha, particularly the Narasiṃha from Ahobilam. The panegyric, traditionally attributed to Sāluva Narasiṃha but, as Sudyka has shown (Sudyka 2013: 132–133), perhaps rewritten by Rājanātha Ḍiṇḍima reusing the already existing poem, presents Sāluva Narasiṃha as born out of Narasiṃha’s grace after his parents, Sāluva Guṇḍa/Guṇḍaya and Mallāmbikā, retired to Ahobilam and did penances with the intention of having offspring.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Additionally, in the concluding verses of the subsequent *sargas* Sāluva Narasiṃha is compared to Viṣṇu in his incarnation of Narasiṃha (this is also an allusion to the name of the king) and the victories of the king are compared to those of Rāma (Sudyka 2013: 128).



When a long-awaited son was born, he was named after Narasiṃha, the presiding deity of the place.<sup>9</sup> The kings of the following Tuluva dynasty, among them Kṛṣṇadeva Rāya, who, as was mentioned before, perhaps established the *maṭha* there, held the place in great esteem as well (Raman 1975: 80–81). We may deduce that in time Ahobilam became politically important from the fact that when in 1579 Ibrahim of the Qutb Shahi dynasty together with the Hindu Hande chiefs attacked it and held it for five or six years, it was recaptured by a Vijayanagara subordinate (Talbot 1995: 717, Vasantha 2001: 72–73).

Both diversification of Narasiṃha forms and the naming pattern of his nine major shrines, scattered around the Upper and Lower Ahobilam, which constitute the sacred complex there glorified in *Ahobilamāhātmya* 4.8–111, suggests a long-lasting development of the place marked by mingling of different traditions. Most of them are dated to the pre-Vijayanagara period. The Ahobilarasiṃha Swamy temple of Upper Ahobilam (shrine dated by Vasantha as early as to the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century, Vasantha 2003: 17) is built on a hill inside the jungle where the indigenous people worshipped their deity before. It hosts the self-manifested (*svayambhu*) fierce (*ugra*) Narasiṃha as the Lord of Ahobilam, ripping apart the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu. In this case, the *garbhagrha* is a natural

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<sup>9</sup> *Rāmābhyudāyam* 1.46–48: *iti cintāparo dhyātvā ṅhariṃ kuladaivatam | sa tayā saha cārīṇyā tapo 'kuruta duścaram ||1.46|| tapasā tena santuṣṭas tasya svapne puro 'bhavat | ahobalanṅsimhas tam abravīd adbhutaṃ vacaḥ ||1.47|| śauryagāmbhīryasaundaryadhairyāudāryādibhūṣaṇaḥ | tavāstu tanayo vatsa! sarvorvīcakanāyakaḥ ||1.48||*—“Lost in thought, having meditated upon ṅhari, the family deity, he [King Guṇḍaya], together with his wife, performed a severe penance. Satisfied with this penance, Ahobalanṅsiṃha appeared before him in his dream and said marvelous words: ‘My dear child, yours will be a son adorned with heroism, dignity, beauty, intelligence and generosity, the leader of troops of the entire earth.’” *Rāmābhyudāyam* 1.51: *tathā guṇḍayabhūhartuḥ tanayo 'bhūt tataḥ phalāt | nanaguṇagaṇas tasyāṃ narasiṃha iti śrutāḥ ||1.51||*—“Thus, as a result, the son of King Guṇḍaya, possessing various qualities, known as Narasiṃha, was conceived in her” (comp. Deḅicka-Borek 2014).

cave. The features of the god bring to mind a dangerous tribal forest god, living in a secluded abode (usually the mountains/a hill) in a distance from human habitations. The Bhārgavanarasimha temple (shrine: 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> century, *ibidem*) is believed to be named after the neighboring Bhārgavafīrtha visited by Rāma; the traditional story of Yogānandanarasimha temple (shrine: 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> century, *ibidem*) is connected to Prahlāda, who was taught *yoga* by Narasimha at the site; the Chatravātanarasimha temple (shrine: early Vijayanagara period, *ibidem*) derives its name from a *chatravāta* tree (peepal), under which the idol is installed; the Karañjanarasimha temple (10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> century, *ibidem*) takes its name from a local *karañja* tree; the name of Pāvānanarasimha temple (shrine: 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century, *ibidem*) refers to the river Pāvāna which flows nearby; the Mālolanarasimha temple is named after Narasimha, who plays with Lakṣmī (shrine: 12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> century, *ibidem*); the Vārāhanarasimha temple (shrine: 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> century, *ibidem*) is situated in the place where Narasimha is worshipped as a boar, whereas the Jvālānarasimha temple (shrine: 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> century, *ibidem*) is believed to be built on the spot where Narasimha killed Hiraṇyakaśipu. The Prahlādavarada temple of Lower Ahobilam with Lakṣmīnarasimha as a presiding deity (shrine: 15<sup>th</sup> century, *ibidem*), which is situated at the feet of the hill and still draws majority of pilgrims, is not included into the nine major temples.

The aim of inscribing the elements of a pan-Indian myth onto the local topography **was most probably to harness the wilderness** of this peripheral site, sanctify it and subjugate by inflowing Śrīvaiṣṇavas. Obviously, the localization of the myth led to its enrichment and variegation through numerous indigenous beliefs and rituals (Vemsani 2009: 36). However, local mythology became dominated by the motif of Narasimha killing Hiraṇyakaśipu. As mentioned before, Tirumaṅkai Ālvār's poems seem to be the earliest written source, where the motif appeared in connection to Ahobilam. Within the broader perspective of medieval South India, a combat between the god and the demon may be interpreted as a metaphor of a Hindu king subduing a local chief (Sontheimer 1997a: 145), which seems to correspond

with the history of the site. Yet, Biardeau observes that situating this particularly bloody episode in this very place must have been problematic for Śrīvaiṣṇavas, who laid the claims for the place, but were basically sensitive to impurity. Hence, as she argues, the strategy to appease the god and, eventually, emphasize his acclaimed function of a guardian of the space and not his ferocious aspect was to represent him with a goddess. Although the local iconography happened to show different forms of the Man-Lion with Lakṣmī, his traditional wife, on his lap, in fact, it was the addition of the image of Ceñcūlakṣmī, his second bride coming from the Ceñcū tribe,<sup>10</sup> which might have significantly transformed the terrifying god: being local and non-vegetarian, the girl could symbolically take over all impurities, including Narasiṃha's task of killing the demon (Biardeau 1975: 60–61).

Expanding Narasiṃha's function as a guardian of the space was predominantly achieved either by portraying him with a beloved Ceñcū girl, both carrying bows and wearing crowns as they go for a hunt, or through extension of his aspect as a *yogin*, who lives in a jungle, beyond inhabited areas, hence watches the site (Biardeau 1975: 54–55).

The originally tribal motif of Narasiṃha who falls in love with Ceñcatā seems to have been conceived naturally—being half man and half lion the god brings associations with a hunter: while on the local level he was imagined as a predator who roams around the jungle chasing his prey, the Sanskritic tradition projected him as a king enjoying royal occupation. Both in oral and Sanskritic literature hunting is closely connected to wilderness, passion, death, fertility, eroticism and often ends with an erotic adventure of a hero (Sontheimer 1997b: 291).

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<sup>10</sup> The Ahobilanarasiṃha Swamy temple of Upper Ahobilam with an *ugra* aspect of the god contains a small shrine of the Ceñcūlakṣmī (Biardeau 1975: 60–61) and the sculptural representation of Narasiṃha and Ceñcatā on a pillar (Narasimhacharya 1989: 106). The latter is to be found also on the veranda of the Mālolanarasiṃha temple (Biardeau 1975: 54) and on a pillar of Prahlādarada temple of the Lower Ahobilam (in both cases: Narasiṃha in a *śānta* form, married to Lakṣmī).

In this light, an encounter of a daughter of the hunter-gatherers' chief, who lives in a forest and herself is experienced in hunting, with Man-Lion seems unavoidable.

We may presume that the appearance of a Ceñcū girl in the Śrīvaiṣṇava circles of Ahobilam concurred with the emergence of a goddess in South India: from the 13<sup>th</sup> century either new shrines of the consorts of Viṣṇu were created, or they were added to the already existing temples of the male deities. Many of these female deities possessed some tribal association; apart from Ceñcūlakṣmī at Ahobilam it was as well the Keralite consort of Viṣṇu at Kāñcī or Uraiur Valli at Śrīraṅgam (Stein 1980: 233–239). Despite being subordinate to a husband who was a Vedic god, they attained a status of a major deity, and according to Stein this was “one of the clearest signs of religious changes in the thirteenth century and marked the deepened connection between the peasant culture and high culture of the age” (Stein 1980: 239).

All this suggests that although the temples of Ahobilam should be perceived as a whole system grouping different incarnations of the one (but transformed and expanded) god, a wide range of his aspects—from a locally rooted bloodthirsty forest deity to a peaceful, married Vaiṣṇava god—may in fact mirror frictions caused by sharing the space between the Ceñcūs and Śrīvaiṣṇavas, mutual endeavours to appropriate, and changing religious and geopolitical situation. The Ceñcū girl who enters Ahobilam plays a significant role in the transformation of the place: not only does she tame a dangerous, impure god, but also, as I will try to show, acts on both religious and political level, reconciling distant worlds.

### **Local brides of Viṣṇu**

Considering marriage to a second wife, the myth of Narasiṃha taking a human consort—a Ceñcū damsel—is not exceptional within the Vaiṣṇava tradition. Shulman remarks that “Vaiṣṇava myths make the most consistent use of the theme of the human consort of the god” (Shulman 1980: 165). In this regard he recalls additional wives of Viṣṇu, such as Āñṭāl, who in fact is Viṣṇu's local bride; Kanakavallī,

Viṣṇu's consort at Tiruvuḷḷūr, originally Vasumatī, the daughter of the king Dharmasena; the daughter of the sage Mārkaṇḍeya whom Viṣṇu weds at Kumbhakonam; and the local wife of Veṅkateśvara.

Yet, two realms intended to be joined through the marriage myths have not exclusively turned out to be pan-Indian and local. There are also stories which use this motif to articulate the presence of Muslims within the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition. Such is the case of the Tulukka Nācciyār (Turkish Girl) story: the daughter of the Sultan of Delhi, who falls in love with an icon of Viṣṇu and follows it to the south of India (Dutta 2003, Davis 2004). This particular myth perhaps alludes to some historical events: in the 14<sup>th</sup> century the Delhi Sultanate armies invaded the south of India, plundered the Raṅganātha temple at Śrīraṅgam, and the icon of Viṣṇu was hidden in the hills of Tirupati (Davis 2004: 140). The legend is preserved in several, slightly differing versions in a few Vaiṣṇava texts (in some cases also orally), and linked to four important Śrīvaiṣṇava temples: the temple of Viṣṇu Raṅganātha at Śrīraṅgam, the temple of Vīrarāghava Perumāḷ at Vandiyūr in Tamilnadu, the Nārāyaṇasvāmi temple at Melkote in Karnataka, and the Veṅkateśvara temple at Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh (Dutta 2003). Some of the versions (for example, the Melkote version) refer to Rāmānuja, who reaches Delhi to reclaim the icon. In the opinion of Davis, the story offers reflections on difficult relations between Muslim and Hindu elites and the space attributed to Muslims inside the established Hindu temples in medieval South India, but also, probably most crucial for all second marriage myths, on the “incorporative possibilities of *bhakti*”, which in fact allow such a process (Davis 2004: 137). As he continues, and his observations might be also applied to the context of Narasiṃha-Ceṅcātā myths, “the Tulukka Nācciyār story seems to propose a way for even the Muslim elite to enter into the relations with a Hindu deity—on Hindu terms” (Davis 2004: 146).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Both in Śrīraṅgam and Melkote the shrines of the Muslim consort were established. In the former case, there is a painting of the princess on a wall and the treatment of the portable image of Viṣṇu when he visits her

Dutta adds interesting remarks about the oral traditions on the Muslim princess: the temples at Tirupati, Melkote and Vandiyūr were located in unsettled forest areas and emerged due to the patronage of *nāyakas* and merchants. Hunting tribes, which became important for Vijayanagara for their military skills, inhabited the hilly tracts leading to all these places. After some time, the royal armies began to attract also groups from beyond the south: North Indian, Deccani and Rajput troops (Dutta 2003: 161). Oral narratives, popular mostly in Melkote and Tirupati, neither link the Muslim girl with a particular historical context, nor associate her with a particular ethnic identity. While they imagine the girl as a princess of a forest tribe, she is regarded to be a Muslim only popularly. The oral tradition focuses on the motif of her affair with a local form of Viṣṇu, often possessing qualities of a warrior (in Melkote this is Celuvarāya, in Tirupati a local chieftain), and culminates with their wedding and deification of the bride (Dutta 2003: 159). All these factors explain the local colour in the Tulukka Nācciyār story.

Clearly, Śrīvaiṣṇava temples and *maṭhas* played a considerable role in spreading the concept of *bhakti* as opposed to caste rhetoric. The “plural socio-religious context” of Śrīvaiṣṇavism being a result of a constant interaction between the Sanskritic and vernacular traditions represented by its Vadakalai and Tengalai sects, allowed the integration of different non-Brahmanic communities into one framework (Dutta 2003: 159–162). A significant presence of such communities in Śrīvaiṣṇava shrines (for example Śudras called Sāttāda Vaiṣṇavas in the Śrīraṅgam temple) had been noticed since the times of Rāmānuja’s reforms after the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and, as Stein suggests, these developments were possible due to the openness of *bhakti* ritual towards the folk elements of worship (Stein 1980: 233–239).

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involves Muslim elements: for example, he wears a *luṅgi* and is served North Indian food: *roṭi*, *capātī*, cold milk and green *dāl*. In turn in Melkote, there is a shrine of Tulukka Nācciyār beyond the limits of the temple, yet her small metal image rests at the foot of the main temple icons (Davis 2004: 139–140).

### **The marriage of Narasiṃha to Ceñcatā in folk narratives from Andhra**

In the case of folk narratives that consider the marriage of Narasiṃha and Ceñcatā, I will selectively refer to the material collected in the villages of Nallamala forests by Murty (Murty 1997). These old stories were composed in the Telugu language and circulated orally. They differ in details, showing varying degrees of elements borrowed from the pan-Indian version of the Narasiṃha myth.

One of the oldest and most widespread stories concerns the Man-Lion (or rather Lion-Man, as in oral traditions this is usually a lion who changes into a handsome man), who while wandering around Ahobilam meets a Ceñcū huntress. They fall in love. To obtain permission from the Ceñcū chief to marry his daughter, and prove that he is a proper suitor for a girl born among hunter-gatherers, Narasiṃha must undergo various tests climbing high precipices, collecting honey, digging up termite mounds, and demonstrating his hunting skills. Having successfully completed all the tasks, Narasiṃha marries his beloved girl. This variant of the story is particularly interesting since it proves that the history of Ahobilam featured a two-way flow of ideas; here it is Narasiṃha who has to adjust himself to the norms of the hunter-gatherers or, in other words, undergo the process of so-called tribalization.

Other local narratives related by Murty draw more conventionally (but to different extent) on the Sanskrit pan-Indian myth of Narasiṃha showing the gradual progress of Sanskritization of the local legend in this way. One such story commences with Hiranyakaśipu obtaining the blessing of immortality from Śiva. Since the demon wants to test his power on Śiva himself, Pārvatī puts all her *śakti* into a mango fruit and disappears together with her husband. Furious, Hiranyakaśipu directs his anger towards demigods and sages. Since Śiva is absent they approach Viṣṇu to seek help. In the meantime, the sage Nārada offers the mango fruit to the barren Ceñcū queen who has been praying to Śiva with the intention of having offspring. Directly after that,

she gives birth to a beautiful girl, who becomes an expert in archery and hunting. When the Ceñcū princess attains puberty, Viṣṇu assumes a Man-Lion form, kills Hiraṇyakaśipu, and wanders about the Nallamala forest in a rage. There he meets the Ceñcū beauty, and, thinking that she is Lakṣmī, marries her. Having learnt about her origin, he does not change his mind and takes her to heaven (*vaikuṅṭha*) where, as the consort of Viṣṇu, she becomes Ceñcūlakṣmī. According to some versions of the legend the two wives argue and it is Lakṣmī who is offended and leaves the heavenly abode.

There are also songs sung by women in which Narasiṃha begs Ceñcatā to marry him and to convince her he claims that he comes from the Yādava clan.

As Murty remarks, in all folk stories concerning the marriage of Narasiṃha to a Ceñcū girl it is crucial that Narasiṃha functions on a human level and is regarded to be the tribesmen's brother-in-law.

### **The marriage of Narasiṃha to a tribal girl in the *Vāsantikāpariṇayam***

The *Vāsantikāpariṇayam* is a drama of the *nāṭaka* type, written in Sanskrit and Prakrit, ascribed to the 7<sup>th</sup> Jīyar of the Ahobila *maṭha*. According to the introduction of the edition circulated in electronic format by the *maṭha* itself, Śaṭhakopa Yatīndra Mahādeśika renounced the world at the age of twenty-five by the command of Lakṣmī-narasiṃha in 1513. Vasantha proposes to date the composition of the drama to 1579 (Vasantha 2001: 3), which seems to be determined by the above-mentioned historical event of recapturing the town from the Muslims. Per the records of an inscription from Lower Ahobilam issued in 1578–1579, it was the initiative of the 7<sup>th</sup> Jīyar of Ahobilam to ask the Vijayanagara King Raṅga I (Aravidu dynasty) for help in retaking the site, and therefore, since the Pontiff informed the king in time, credit for the victory usually goes to him. Narasiṃhacharya suggests that these particular circumstances might have provoked the author to refer to a local story for the sake of showing the necessity of cooperation in times of Muslim invasion



(Narasimhacharya 1989: 231).<sup>12</sup> However, as I will argue, the content of the Sanskrit adaptation seems rather to reflect the general policy of the Vijayanagara kings, who supported the place and aimed at expanding the borders through drawing indigenous, usually martial, communities. The already mentioned sculptural representations of Narasiṃha and Ceñcatā found, for example, on a pillar of the Prahādavarada temple of Lower Ahobilam and Ahobila Swamy temple of Upper Ahobilam—significantly, both as hunters of the same size, hence of equal status—suggest that the story came into prominence in Vijayanagara times. Whereas the construction of the former temple—more easily accessible than the major nine—might have started during the reign of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha (1485–1506), a dedicated devotee of Narasiṃha (Vasantha 2001: 86), the latter one was subject to reconstruction during the Vijayanagara period.

By means of the *Vāsantikāpariṇayam* the myth of Narasiṃha and Ceñcatā was presented for the first time within Sanskrit literature. Strikingly, the story does not occur in the Sanskrit glorification of the site, the undated *Ahobilamāhātmya* claiming to be a part of the *Brāhmāṇḍa Purāṇa*. The only passage within the text that mentions local hunters calls them non-believers (*mlecchas*) and contrasts them strongly with the peaceful surroundings and Brahmins who share the space with them.<sup>13</sup> This might suggest that the glorification

<sup>12</sup> According to Vasantha, it was already the 1<sup>st</sup> Jiyar who, having settled in inhospitable Ahobilam, realized that Ceñcūs are familiar with and devoted to Narasiṃha, and so he decided to work among them and uplift their status (Vasantha 2001: 48).

<sup>13</sup> AM 1.73–75: *kāraṇḍaiḥ kalahaṃsaiś ca nīlakaṇṭhair manoharaiḥ | nīlāñcanasamaprakhyair ghorair paramadāruṇaiḥ ||73|| dhanurbāṇadharair mlecchaiḥ strīyuktair ugradarśanaiḥ | śobhitaiḥ sarvajantūnām rakṣaṇopāyadaśakāḥ ||74|| munīndraiḥ sevitaḥ nityam sadānuṣṭhānataparaiḥ | bhūsurair bhāsītālāpaiḥ gurupūjāparāyanaiḥ ||75||*—“[The place] is adorned with ducks, geese and beautiful peacocks. [However] terryfying, extremely cruel non-believers of dreadful appearance [since they] resemble black antimony, who carry bows and arrows [also live there] together with their

was composed both under different circumstances and/or in different times than the drama. The problem of a mutual relation between these texts, the authorship of the drama and dating of the *māhātmya* needs much closer investigation, hence I will not dwell upon it here. As for now, I would only cautiously propose that the *māhātmya* might have been composed in the circles which, on the one hand, were less influenced by the Vijayanagara policy and, on the other, more attached to Brahmanic ideology than the circles the author of the *Vasāntikāpariṇayam* belonged to. It was hinted several times that the authorship of the drama is ascribed to the 7<sup>th</sup> Pontiff of the *maṭha* at Ahobilam, hence it is uncertain. The first scene of the first act of the play is almost exclusively devoted to the praise of many talents of Śaṭhakopa Yatīndra Mahādeśika, as if to convince the reader that he is truly the author of the *Vāsantikāpariṇayam*. Such a strategy provokes a question about the possibility of any other authorship. Taking into account that the drama genre was quite often entangled into royal issues (Tieken 1993: 104), one could ask whether the actual author could be a poet connected to the Vijayanagara court, whose task was to validate the extension of his patron's rule into forest areas. Quite contrary, as we could see, the author of the *māhātmya* appears unaffected by the Vijayanagara policy aimed at integration of various local communities and his main concern is rather to attract pilgrims. The place names appearing in the drama, such as Garuḍācala or the Bhavanāśinī River, are extolled in detail in the *Ahobilamāhātmya*, a fact that makes one suppose that the author of the former was familiar with the content of the latter.

The re-using of a local story we deal with in the case of the *Vāsantikāpariṇayam* is not a simple one. Clearly, there is no borrowing of concrete textual portions but, instead, an adaptation of the old

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women. [Yet, the place] provides safety to all living beings and is continuously visited by great ascetics, who are always devoted to religious practice, and Brahmins, entirely absorbed in the worship of teachers with splendid words." Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

vernacular motif, which originated in different social and religious contexts and was expressed in a different language, to the norms of the orthodox milieu.

Hegewald and Mitra propose that one of the facets of a broadly understood strategy of re-use applied to both tangible (statues, architectural elements, forms of governance) and intangible objects (motifs, styles, beliefs) is that it “does not imitate and replicate; it is a creative combination of old and novel elements, which takes the item or concept further” (Hegewald and Mitra 2012: 3). The return to earlier forms, be it indigenous as in our case, results in the creation of various hybrid forms and is usually favored in the milieus of potential “social interaction which creates an encounter with the ‘other’”, such as war, conquest, or travel (*ibidem*). Yet, there must be agency, spectators and a specific aim to employ re-use. For example, reusing symbolic or sacred items might serve political matters, express power and play a significant role in the legitimization of a ruling elite. In this respect, re-use is usually “discerning and choosy and [...] whereas some elements are adopted and filled with new significance, others get deprived and emptied of meaning or even destroyed” (Hegewald and Mitra 2012: 4). Sometimes appropriation of different phenomena by a conquering group leads to anxiety and loss felt by the defeated; nevertheless, as Hegewald and Mitra continue, “a compromise, in which not all is lost, but enough is retained to establish a connection with the past, can lead to hybridity, to assimilation, and finally to integration” (*ibidem*).

Contextualizing the case of the *Vāsantikāparinayam* within the theory of re-use, we may say that under the particular geopolitical circumstances the motif of Narasiṃha’s second wedding, originally popular among hunter-gatherers, herders and the folk, was creatively adapted to the norms of Hindu society based on settled agriculture connected to the Sanskrit culture promoted in the area of Ahobilam by the Śrīvaiṣṇava Ahobila *maṭha* patronized by Vijayanagara kings. Factors such as **borrowing the already existing vernacular concept** (and not concrete textual passages), framing it within

cosmopolitan Sanskrit, choosing some elements of the local myth and transforming others, all together to fit the standards and tastes of a new, “high” audience, make one think about the concept of an ‘adaptive reuse’, combining in fact ‘adaptation’ and ‘re-use’. This particular term has been influential in the field of architecture and recently conceptualized as a tool valid for exploring South Asian systems of knowledge, literature and rituals by Elisa Freschi and Philipp A. Maas (Freschi and Maas 2016, forthcoming).<sup>14</sup>

At Ahobilam, composition of the Sanskrit version of the myth was the outcome of the need for the Ceñcū and Śrīvaiṣṇavas to inhabit the same space, or, even more importantly, the inclusive character of the Vijayanagara Empire within the borders of which they lived. Embedding the vernacular motif of Narasiṃha’s second marriage into the Sanskrit drama reflects a reconciliation of both realms “from above” and on Hindu terms, and as such was probably enjoyed by the high stratum of society. Referring to Davis’ words considering the Talukka stories: the drama has officially created a space for the indigenous local community within the limits of Sanskrit culture and under the patronage of Hindu kings. Being, most probably, the point of reference for the *Vāsantikāpariṇayam*’s composer, local versions of the myth had already depicted the coexistence of both traditions; yet, if we consider the extreme indigenous example given before—Narasiṃha’s successful efforts to adjust to the hunter-gatherers’ mode of life—the local perspective is reverse, or, at least, much more concentrated upon the independent huntress, who makes Narasiṃha prove that he is a proper suitor for her. No wonder, that to legitimize this specific place by Hindu emperors and to appropriate it into the orthodox Hindu milieu the myth has been creatively re-used so that, as will be shown, it was definitely Ceñcatā with her co-tribesmen who was integrated, although by the power of mutual love and with the consent of all Hindu gods.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> I am referring to the draft paper available on the Academia.edu.

<sup>15</sup> The re-use of the story goes much further. Over the course of time, and in different communities, it has been retold in several variants and

In short, the plot of the Sanskrit drama goes as follows:

1<sup>st</sup> Act (2<sup>nd</sup> scene): Mahendra together with his charioteer Mātali arrives in Ahobilam to honor Narasiṃha. Among the trees they see a beautiful girl proceeding to a forest temple. Mahendra explains that she is a daughter of the Gandharva-king, re-born in a forest tribe because of a curse cast by Lakṣmī, who felt offended when the girl asked for her husband as a reward for her performance for the Goddess. Yet, the girl's fate is to marry Narasiṃha: eventually Lakṣmī decides to let the Gandharva-princess realize her wish when she is living with a tribe. Suddenly, a troop of hunters belonging to the retinue of the Lord of Ahobilam (Ahobileśa), Narasiṃha, the hero of the play camping nearby, approaches.

(3<sup>rd</sup> scene): Narasiṃha, wearing hunting clothes and equipment, strolls with *vidūṣaka* around the forests of Garuḍācala. Unexpectedly, his right eye throbs, foreshadowing his fate. The hero runs into a forest temple, where some girls are worshipping a forest deity. Among them is a charming lady who steals Narasiṃha's heart at once. From the overheard conversation, he learns that she is an unmarried daughter of Sūrasena (another variant used in the text: Śūrasena), the chief of a local forest tribe (Narasiṃha does not know about the curse). In the meantime, Vāsantikā prays to the forest deity to make Narasiṃha her husband. *Vidūṣaka* persuades his friend to write a letter to the damsel. Through the letter Narasiṃha, signed as Ahobileśa, proposes to Vāsantikā. She reads the letter.

2<sup>nd</sup> Act (1<sup>st</sup> scene): From the conversation between an old attendant and Vāsantikā's maiden we learn that Vāsantikā is in love with Narasiṃha and is already suffering from separation.

(2<sup>nd</sup> scene): Vāsantikā wonders if her origin isn't preventing Narasiṃha from marrying her. She behaves as if she has lost her senses. Narasiṃha reveals himself to her in a dream. Maidens summon

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addressed to various spectators, making it more and more prolific: vernacular legends have been appropriated by *yakṣagāna*, temple art, and modern Telugu cinematography (Vemsani 2009: 47–49).

the old woman to interpret the omens. She assures that Ahobileśa will marry Vāsantikā. Then she uses her powers to visit his court and sees that he is inflicted with love and suffers vehemently. The heroine does not believe her words.

3<sup>rd</sup> Act (1<sup>st</sup> scene): From the conversation between two of Narasiṃha's attendants, we learn that Lakṣmī already knows that her husband fell in love with a tribal girl on his hunting trip: he suffers from the separation and shows no interest in the visiting gods and sages. An attendant, Māyāmaya, adds that her lord has a plan to meet the girl.

(2<sup>nd</sup> scene): The pining Narasiṃha visualizes his beloved and, encouraged by *vidūṣaka*, decides to go to the forests of Garuḍācala to cool his love-fever. Everything there so reminds him of the beautiful girl that he starts to talk to her in his imagination. After a while we learn that he has already sent an attendant to the palace of the hunter chief in order to bring Vāsantikā to the palace garden. Using his magical powers Ahobileśa relocates there with *vidūṣaka* and sees the girl chasing a parrot, Māyāmaya in disguise. The bird conveys the message that Ahobileśa is in love with her. The lord reveals himself to Vāsantikā and her companions for the first time and proposes to her. The girl, already in love with him, leaves, as her mother summons her.

4<sup>th</sup> Act (1<sup>st</sup> scene): From a conversation between two bees we learn that the Gandharva king was re-born on earth to search for his lost daughter.

(2<sup>nd</sup> scene): Narasiṃha meets a forest deity who vainly attempts to relieve his suffering. *Vidūṣaka* informs him that preparations for the wedding have started; yet Vāsantikā is also suffering from longing. He says too that Narasiṃha's wife, Lakṣmī, has agreed to his second marriage with Vāsantikā. Again, using his magical powers, Narasiṃha goes to the shrine of *vanadevatā* where he meets Vāsantikā and assures her about his feelings.

5<sup>th</sup> Act (1<sup>st</sup> scene): From the conversation between Prahlāda and Nārada we learn that there is a rumor that Lakṣmī is envious of the hunter girl. So Sūrasena takes his daughter and approaches Devī. Knowing this from a Brahmin sent by Lakṣmī's attendant, and being inflicted with the pain of longing, the lord dispatches a message to his consort.

(2<sup>nd</sup> scene): The Brahmin relates to Narasiṃha that when Sūrasena approached Lakṣmī to ask her for grace she replied that in the girl's previous life she herself, impressed by the girl's austerities, granted her own husband to her as a blessing. She also reveals that Sūrasena, a Gandharva in his previous life, will regain his former status when he sees Narasiṃha. Devī descends from heaven to attend the second wedding of her husband and guarantees that everything has been arranged for his pleasure. We also learn that the message previously sent to her by Narasiṃha was a wedding invitation. Sūrasena is released from his curse. All the gods arrive to enjoy the wedding festivities.

If analyzed within the Sanskrit drama theory, the *Vāsantikāpariṇayam* clearly features many conventional elements, which, as I will argue further on, facilitate the realization of its superior aim in the sense of joining distant worlds, yet from the superiors' perspective. Despite borrowing the motif of Narasiṃha's second marriage in the settings of dense forests of Ahobilam, the play, being a product of a creative adaptation, is on the whole rather a novel work intended for a (literally) new audience and serving a new aim. Inscribing the story into the frames of a dramatic genre appears to be intentional: the form of a play based on dialogue renders the story more vivid and, perhaps facilitates its presentation to wider, educated circles (provided it was staged at all).

In comparison to oral versions of the myth, the innovations of the Sanskritized plot begin with the heroine having, despite her status as a tribal princess, a peculiar name: Vāsantikā. Hence the title, *Marriage of Vāsantikā (Vāsantikāpariṇayam)*, already brings about two possibilities of interpretation, each alluding to a different stratum of society involved in the play: since its action takes place during the customary festival of spring, the adjective *vāsantika* (f: *vāsantikā*)—‘related to spring’—might be rendered as ‘Spring[-goddess?].’ Yet, *vāsantikā* might just as well be taken as the name of a forest-deity, referring in this way to the local origin of the story.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The name seems quite popular in terms of stories related to forests, indigenous peoples and establishing sovereignty by a king upon such areas.

In tune with most Sanskrit dramas of the *nāṭaka* genre, the protagonists of the *Vāsantikāpariṇayam* are divine/non-human. A very important point for development of the plot is a curse, which postpones the finale and makes the drama's fairy-tale character even deeper, and there is a happy ending.<sup>17</sup> The play fulfills the needs of the *nāṭaka* genre: it is comprised of five acts, uses a widely recognized story and setting, and features a king/god hero (Sudyka 1998: 81–82). However, some of its traditional features are contextualized locally. We may assume that although the plot actually draws on the local legend, it was intended to refer to the pan-Indian Narasiṃha myth. Thus, what allows the experienced audience to follow the play is the conventional structure of a happy love story, rather than the body of the re-used narrative itself. The setting is rooted in the real topography of the nearly inaccessible area of Ahobilam, with many natural features entangled into the local version of Narasiṃha myth (praised extensively in the *Ahobilamāhātmya*). The action takes place either in the (imagined) palace of Narasiṃha, the Lord of Ahobilam (Ahobileśa), situated in Ahobilam itself, or in the surrounding forests, which cover the Garuḍācala and are inhabited by a local tribe. The hero of the *Vāsantikāpariṇayam*, namely Narasiṃha, who in accordance with the requirements of the *nāṭaka* genre is a recognized figure, fulfills the standards developed by the theoreticians of Sanskrit theatre over the course of centuries: he is both a heroic king and a god with unnatural powers. In turn, the heroine's identity is split between that of a tribal princess and a Gandharva girl. Lakṣmī, the first wife of Narasiṃha, whose decision is so important for the acceptance of a stranger, is consistently shown as a goddess. The equivocal statuses of the hero and heroine

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In the context of the Hoysaḷas' foundation myths Bignami calls Vāsantikā a 'goddess of spring', who symbolizes abundance and fertility, see Bignami 2011.

<sup>17</sup> In this context see Ticken's analysis of novelty in Kālidāsa's dramas: as he argues in reference to the *Mālavikāgnimitra*, its innovation lays in the fact that there is no curse, the protagonists are human and the setting is historical (Ticken 2001).



and the divine nature of Lakṣmī seem to have been employed on purpose: they open the possibility of political/religious propaganda aimed at integration of the community of the second spouse. Additionally, the end of the drama brings the revelation of Narasiṃha's divine nature to the heroine's father, in this way providing the *adbhuta rasa* required by the *nāṭaka*. Since the main plot revolves around the love story and culminates with a wedding, the dominant mood of the drama is the *śṛṅgāra rasa*.

Obviously, while recalling the locally known motif the author of the drama put a lot of effort into creating the image of decent and peaceful local hunters inhabiting the serene forests around Ahobilam. I would like to draw attention to several passages that might be especially relevant in regard to the strategy of presenting the forest tribe as suiting the norms of the Hindu tradition.

Although Ceñcūs are not mentioned in the text by their proper name—they are conventionally referred to as Śābaras, Kirātas or Puliṅḍas<sup>18</sup>—the context is obvious: a beautiful girl seen by Narasiṃha while praying to a *vanadevatā* corresponds with the Ceñcatā extolled in vernacular folk songs. As indicated above, the explanation of her identity has already been given in the 2<sup>nd</sup> scene of the 1<sup>st</sup> Act: being a daughter of a Gandharva chief, she was re-born in a hunter tribe as a result of Lakṣmī's curse.

Mahendra: (having looked at [the girl] and recollecting [something] with great esteem) Friend! Listen! Long ago, indeed, this beautifully smiling daughter of a Gandharva king was reborn in a tribe due to the curse of Indirā.

Mātali: (compassionately) What was the reason that such a curse came out of of Abiding in Lotus' [Kamalā's] mouth?

Mahendra: Once upon a time, upon noticing [her] skillfulness in the art of Gandharvas [the Goddess] Abiding in Lotus said: 'choose what you want'.

<sup>18</sup> The terms Śābaras, Kirātas and Puliṅḍas along with some others, like Aṅgas, Niṣādas, Bhillas, Mātaṅgas, Caṅḍālas, or Paulkasas are used interchangeably in Sanskrit literature. Yet, Śābara might be a generic term. Possibly, originally each name denoted a different tribe, but the ancient authors could not distinguish one from another (Zin 2008: 376).

The daughter of Gandharva chose as a reward Ahobileśvara himself.  
 Mātali: (aside) Ah! What a great blessing! (Aloud) So what did Devī do?  
 Mahendra: The Goddess Abiding in Lotus cursed her: ‘O silly girl! Having asked me to [give you] my beloved as your beloved you are rash [and] you deceived me. You will realize your desire, having been reborn in a tribe of deceivers’.<sup>19</sup>

As far as the Vaiṣṇava versions of the second marriage are considered, justification of the presence of a local bride by such means happens quite often. Shulman notices that they “often felt it necessary to provide an explanation for the newcomer in terms of the classical pantheon” (Shulman 1980: 289). Zin remarks that in the context of Buddhist literature the motif of being born under a magical spell was a popular device to give reasons for contact between upper classes and outcasts, as, most probably, it was impossible to find another explanation for such encounters (Zin 2008: 377). In the *Vāsantikāpariṇayam*, involving the girl in the Brahmanical concepts makes her, from the very beginning, a reasonable choice for the lord of Ahobilam: in contrast to local narratives, she is neither a human nor a tribal girl any more, which surely makes it easier to present her as a suitable bride for a recognized god.

This charming woman covers her body with leaves and feathers characteristic of a popular Sanskrit imaginary of tribal people,<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> VP: 34: *mahendraḥ: (vilokya sānusmaranabahumānam) sakhe, śrūyatām purā khalu gandharvarājanandinīyaṃ indirāśāpena pulindakulam avatīrṇavatī sudatī | mātaliḥ: (sakarūṇam): asyāḥ kena vā kāraṇena kamalāmukhāt īdṛśāśāpopalambhaḥ | mahendraḥ: kadācana gandharvakalākauśalaniśamanaparavaśatayā tavābhimataṃ vṛṇīṣveti kathitavatyaṃ kamalālayāyāṃ ahobileśvaram eva varaṃ varayāmāsa gandharvanandinī | mātaliḥ (svagatam) aho mahān prasādaḥ (prakāśam) tataḥ kim ācaritaṃ devyā | mahendraḥ: mugdhe madīyadayitaṃ dayitaṃ tavāpi samprcchya sāhasavatī yad avañcayo mām | āsādyā vañcakakirītakule ‘vatāraṃ kāñkṣāṃ bhaja tvam iti tāṃ kamalā śāśāpa*

<sup>20</sup> In Indian narratives tribesmen are usually depicted as carrying peacock feathers and ivory and wearing animal skins (Zin 2008: 376).

but the reader does not know of this until she is being prepared for a wedding and must change from her customary clothes into ‘proper’ ones. Unlike the folk versions of the myth, its Sanskrit variant lacks references to various tests undertaken by Narasiṃha in order to prove that he can lead a hunter-gatherer way of life. Here, it is definitely the girl who has to adjust to new norms, and abandoning her garment is the beginning of the appropriative process she is supposed to undergo:

Brahmā (describing): Ah! The immortal beings decorate the tribal-girl. Beautiful celestial women adorn Śabarikā—having thrown down a peacock-feather, [they replace it] with a flower instead of that crest, having taken a row of *guñja* fruit, [they put] a necklace on her breast, having removed a leafy cloth, [they put] a white silk garment on her hips.<sup>21</sup>

Narasiṃha does not know the girl’s past, although when he learns that she was born in a forest tribe, it does not discourage him:

God: From the context of a prayer with the intention [to get] a desired bride-groom it seems that she is unmarried.

Vidūṣaka: (thoughtfully) Being born in a tribe is the deficiency of her, who is endowed with all qualities, just like a spot [is the deficiency] on the face of the moon.

God: (longingly) This gem among girls should not be rejected because she is the offspring of Kirātas. For instance: Why dismiss a pearl born from oyster on the earth? Or abandon a lotus born out of mud? Why leave honey moistened by the mouth of a bee? The source of good things should not be feared.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> VP: 207: *pitāmahaḥ: (nirvarṇya) āḥ prasādhayanti śabarīm amarī-janāḥ ākṣipyā barhaṃ avataṃsapade prasūnam guñjāvalīm samapanīya kuce’pi hāraṃ | prāvālam aṃśukam apohya katau dukūlam sandhāryate śabarikā surasundarībhiḥ ||* I read *prāvālam* as a derivative of *pravāla*: a young sprout, leaf, hence: leafy.

<sup>22</sup> VP: 51–52: *devaḥ: abhimatavaraprārthanāprasaṅgāt anūdheyam iti pratibhāti | vidūṣakaḥ (savitarkam) imāe saalaguṇa saṃpunnāe samarittaṇa doso candamaṇḍalie kalaṃgovva jādo (asyāḥ sakalaguṇasampūrṇāyāḥ śabarītvadoṣaḥ candramaṇḍalyāḥ kaḷaṅkaka iva jātaḥ) | devaḥ: (sotkaṅṭham) kirātāpatyam iti na tyajanīyam idaṃ kanyāratnam | tathāhi muktāpi śuktijanitā bhuvī mucyate kiṃ || paṅkoditaṃ ca nalinam pariḥyate vā | satyajyate madhu*

Being unaware that the beautiful girl is a daughter of a Gandharva, the King of Ahobilam falls in love with her. Such enchantment with tribal women is one of the motifs noted within Sanskrit narratives indicating ambivalence towards outcasts. Zin observes that despite the contempt directed mostly towards those who lived as foreigners/strangers in the kingdom societies, the jungle people happen to be depicted with some degree of respect. In the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, ignoring the *śāstric* prescriptions that prohibit contact with the unclean from beyond the stratified Hindu society, the high-class members who visit the so called “jungle kingdoms” cannot suppress their admiration for the charm of tribal women, and even eat with the tribesmen, although from a distance. The displaying of such an attitude by a narrative literature perhaps supported the strategy of gaining the favor of jungle neighbors, as they could influence the kingdom’s politics (Zin 1999: 376).

In the case of the *Vāsantikāpariṇayam*, when the question of different statuses between Narasiṃha and Vāsantikā is finally articulated, the well-known Śaiva motif of Kumāra marrying a tribal girl, Valli, is recalled to justify such a relation.

Bhramarikā (with worry and anxiety): What is the position of the daughter of Śabara, and what of Ahobileśa, a crest-jewel among all gods? How will her expectations be realized?

Caturikā: Enough of your doubt! Did not you hear about the union of Valli and Kumāra? In the same way they will be united!<sup>23</sup>

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*ca kiṃ saradhāmukhottam | sadvastuno na khalu śaṅkayata eva hetuḥ ||*  
I read *saradhāmukhottam* as *sarāghamukhottam*.

<sup>23</sup> VP: 73–74: *bhramarikā (sacintātaṅkam): kudo vā samaraṇandinī kudo vā saalacurindacūḍāmaṇī so ahobileso? kahaṃ imā e apekkhā suhodaā havissadi? (kuto vā śabaranandinī kuto vā sakalasurendracūḍāmaṇīḥ so ‘hobileśaḥ | kathaṃ asyāḥ apekṣā sukhodarkā bhaviṣyati?) | caturikā: alam alam tuha viāreṇa na sudam vā valli kumārāṇaṃ saṃjoaṇaṃ | taha evva tassa vi imāe saṃjoaṇaṃ hodu (alam alam tava vicāreṇa na śrutam vā vallikumārayoḥ saṃyojanam | tathaiva tasyāpi asyāḥ saṃyojanam bhavatu) |*

The author of the *Vāsantikāpariṇayam* presents the Śābaras as a relatively advanced people. In the light of the play the tribe lives in a well-organized society ruled by King Sūrasena. Recognized sages inhabit this area as well, reminding us of a strategy employed commonly in the case of *sthalapurāṇas* / *māhātmyas* for the sake of sanctifying a given place and situating it within the Brahmanic tradition:

God: This is a leaf-hut of the sage Paraśara, this is a hermitage of Vasiṣṭha, this is the penance-grove where the sage Prahāda lives and this one, made out of leaves, belongs to Puṇḍarīka. This resting-place belongs to the sage Sanatkumāra/Nārada. Those [dwellings] belong to Vyāsa and the earlier [sages]. [They are] the best of Bhāgavatas of the first assembly; [their] leaf-huts are holy.<sup>24</sup>

Significantly, Śābaras are shown as skillful hunters rather than gatherers. When Narasiṃha visits their hamlet, he beholds the children who play-hunt using puerile versions of customary (and stereotypical for the image of tribesmen) weapons such as hunting-nets. Yet, they also have a plaything, rendered by the translator, Parthasarathy Desikan, as a “hollow shooting tube” (*nāladaṇḍa*). As he claims, it might be identified as a rifle:<sup>25</sup>

God: In their natural innocence, having turned the string of a lute into a net and [an element of a] whole *vīṇā* into a hollow stick, the children of Siddhas and Gandharvas, excited by hunting, roam around constantly with the sons of princely Śābaras here.<sup>26</sup>

Being characterized in this way, the tribesmen suit the need of the state to incorporate forest tribes of certain occupations: their potential

<sup>24</sup> VP: 112: *devaḥ: eṣā parṇakuṭī parāśaramuneḥ etat vasiṣṭhāśramam prahlādasya munes tapovanam idam tat puṇḍarīkoṭajam | vaidhātrasya muneḥ niveśanam idam vyāsādimānām ime prācyām bhāgavatāgraṇīḥ pariśadām parṇālayāḥ pāvanāḥ |*

<sup>25</sup> The first record of usage of gunpowder in Deccan comes from 1472 (Eaton 2005: 71) so the author of the text might have already known about it.

<sup>26</sup> VP: 111: *devaḥ: prakṛtiparamamaughdhyāt pāsāyantram ca tantrīm sakalam api ca vīṇām nāladaṇḍam vidhāya | śabaravarakumārīḥ sākam ākhetalolāḥ ciram iha viharante siddhagandharvabālāḥ |*

martial skills—although limited to operating bows and nets—make them valuable to the army. It is thus meaningful that in many narratives, usually composed in vernacular languages and circulated orally, a recognized god, who very often possesses qualities of a warrior, falls in love with an autochthonous goddess/girl, born in an inferior community/tribe known for its combat skills, who herself is a huntress (Dutta 2003: 172). The common interests of a potential couple create the chance to meet in the forest. Importantly, apart from Narasiṃha’s regional association with hunting expressed *verbatim* in local myths—such oral traditions depict him carrying a bow and wearing sandals protecting him from thorns—the hero of the drama is the king of Ahobilam, and in line with the Sanskrit tradition hunting is a royal occupation. Oral literature expresses very bluntly the result of such an encounter: it usually culminates in sexual intercourse, which, as Sontheimer argues, symbolizes the king acquiring the powers of the forest embodied by the local huntress (Sontheimer 1997b: 291–2). If we transpose this concept into terms crucial for medieval South Indian policy, an encounter may also symbolize the king subduing a local community. Interpretation in the religious context may refer, in turn, to the absorption of a local cult symbolized by a chthonic goddess.

In the light of the *Vāsantikāpariṇayam*, the hero and heroine conventionally suffer for a long time from separation. A happy ending eventually reconciles not only Narasiṃha and the girl, but also both co-wives, showing that two levels of the Narasiṃha cult have been “married” successfully, yet without compromises on the orthodox side as sometimes happens in folk traditions. In the terms of the drama, Lakṣmī claims that she attends the second wedding of her husband with pleasure since this is how the good and pious married women (*pativrata*) should behave: her decision is motivated by a statement that she strengthens her own wedding vows through finding young girls for her husband to wed and satisfy him.

Vidūṣaka: (having approached [Narasiṃha] and bowing down before Devī)  
Oh Lord! Devī’s way of acting was devoid of anger towards you. Simply, being conversant with the knowledge regarding the secret of all *āgamas*, she decided to invite Vāsantikā with the intention of [realizing] a vow to offer you a desired girl for the sake of strengthening her own marital bond [lit. wedding-thread]. This is indeed an act of [a wife] caring about the welfare of [her husband].

(switching into Sanskrit):

It is remembered that good wives who wish to make their wedding-vows [lit. wedding-threads] firm offer a desired girl to a husband.

This practice is frequent all around the world. Every year great rivers, headed by Bhāgīrathī, perform this vow for the ocean, leading to him a number of streams.<sup>27</sup>

Both employing the motif of a curse, as well as Lakṣmī's entanglement into it (a talented girl of the Gandharva race is reborn as tribal Vāsantikā) appear to be helpful devices in the process of showing the forest tribe as integrated: not only does the audience quickly learn that a girl is a proper bride for Narasiṃha, but this is also a guarantee that the first wife, an embodiment of Brahmanic tradition, will finally approve of a stranger.

The fact that it is the power of unconditional love between Vāsantikā and the god which is the motivating force of all the events and which makes a happy ending possible<sup>28</sup> suggests that the whole project

<sup>27</sup> VP: 199–200: *vidūṣakaḥ: (upasṛtya devīm praṇamya) bhaavaṃ attabhavantassauvarim kuvidāe ṇa gadī devie | kevalaṃ saalāma rahāsa viṇṇāṇa ṇibuṇāe attaṇo maṅgalia sūttassa dhīrattaṇa lāhanthaṃ tuṃhāṇaṃ ahimada kaṇṇaādāṇavvada vahicchāe imaṃ vāsantiaṃ āāreduṃ ujjo | atti khu evvaṃ sumaṅgalivadakappo (bhagavan atrabhavataḥ upari kupitāyāḥ na gatiṃ devyāḥ | kevalam sakalāgamarahasyavijñānanipuṇyāḥ ātmano māṅgalyasūtrasya sthīrasya lābhārthaṃ yūṣmakam abhimatakanyakādān avratavidhīsayā imāṃ vāsantikāṃ ākārāyitum udyogaḥ | asti khalvevaṃ sumaṅgalivratākalpaḥ) | (saṃskṛtam āśrītya) maṅgalyasūtrasthāsnutvaṃ kāṅkṣamāṇāḥ pativratāḥ | kām apy abhimatām bhartre kanyām dādyur iti smṛtiḥ || adibahulaṃ loe imassa ācaraṇaṃ vi | paḍivarasamedāṃ vadam kuṇanti sindhurāṃ khudṇāñāṭṭaṃ pāvīṇa bhāgīrahīppamuhā mahāṇaḥīo (atibahulaṃ loke asya ācaraṇaṃ api prativaṛṣam etat vrataṃ kurvanti sindhurājaṃ kṣudranadīkulaṃ prāpyya bhāgīrathīpramukhā mahānadyāḥ) |*

<sup>28</sup> VP: 210: *pitāmahāḥ: (ity uktvā devasya hastaṃ grhītvā vāsantikāyāḥ kareṇa saṃyojya) ūrjitam premasauhārdaṃ ubhavor yuvavor api | ananya-janasāmānyam anyonyam abhivardhatām ||— “Brahmā (having said so, taken the god's hand and joined it with a hand of Vāsantikā): The affection*

of Sanskritization of the local story for the sake of joining two traditions should be contextualized within the concept of *bhakti*, so important for Śrīvaiṣṇava circles. Davis' remark supports this point of view: *bhakti* "validates the devotion of those otherwise excluded from proper society" and therefore the relationships which customarily would be perceived as socially improper would be justified: the standards of *bhakti* annihilate the shortcomings of *dharma* (Davis 2004: 143). This concept seems to be already traceable at the beginning of the drama, when the actor introducing the audience to its theme says:

Actor: (gladly) Most probably, this is a rule of love that is able to unite a man and a woman: it does not take into account a virtue, it does not know a caste, it does not think about suitability.<sup>29</sup>

The Sanskrit version of the story shows that in a new context the usage of the metaphor of marriage aims at the acceptance of a strange bride, stressing, quite typically for the Brahmanic tradition, her subordination. To quote Dutta: "(s)ince marriage is a life-cycle ritual, where the interaction between the two genders is magnified, the texts used the marital metaphors to highlight domination and submission" (Dutta 2003: 175). In line with the orthodox prescriptions, her father sends Vāsantikā to the house of her husband, where she is supposed to be obedient. Symbolically, thanks to the grace of the God all the newcomers are accepted with her; nevertheless, they should remain in a subordinate position. Vāsantikā's father, who out of Narasiṃha's grace has finally regained a Gandharva-form, advises her:

Śūrasena: You have adorned my family, Gem among Girls. [Knowing that] you have been favoured by [the Lord] wearing yellow garments, I will be never disheartened by giving you to your husband's house. [One should strive] to be obedient, not otherwise. Be pleased with being obedient to your

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for a beloved between each of you is indeed powerful. Let this mutual [love], uncommon for other people, grow."

<sup>29</sup> VP: 20: *naṭaḥ: (sahaṣam) na guṇam gaṇayati naiva hi jātiṃ jānāti nocitaṃ manute | prāyeṇa strīpumsau prabhavati yoktuṃ mitho 'nurāga-vidhiḥ ||*



husband. The Master of the World has no father or mother. Once again, I am addressing you: always be subordinate and fearful of your husband.<sup>30</sup>

All the gods' enjoyment of the wedding symbolizes the final acceptance of the bride and her tribesmen.

## Conclusions

The choice of a Sanskrit drama as a medium to convey the message about the acceptance of Ceñcūs within the net of religious and political relations mingling in Ahobilam seems to serve particular aims. The cosmopolitan and divine character of Sanskrit allowed the locally known story to reach wider circles and, at least theoretically, transferred it from the local level onto the regional or even pan-Indian. The usage of the language of gods was likewise a means to express legitimization of influences spread over a distant area of hunter-gatherers by the Śrīvaiṣṇava priests and the Vijayanagara kings. The metaphor of a double marriage may symbolically indicate extension of both spiritual and royal sovereignty: while on the mythical level it is a god who through taking a local girl combines the upper and the lower world, on the mundane level it is a king, whose supremacy is extended into the pastoral and forested areas (Sontheimer 1985: 152). As far as the expediency of the employed genre is considered, it also seems not without meaning that being patronized by Hindu kings, the Sanskrit dramas have been strongly entangled in royal concerns, and their themes, usually in the guise of ancient myths, referred to the kings' successes in founding the dynasty and gaining political allies (Tieken 1993: 104). Through a creative re-usage of the marital metaphor, the *Vāsantikāpariṇayam*

<sup>30</sup> VP: 211: *sūrasena: alamkṛtaṃ tvayā mama kuḷam kanyāratnena yat | anugrhitāsi bhagavatā pītāmbareṇa kadācid api mām na duḥkhāpayati te patigrhāddivāsah | pradiṣṭam anu naivetat bhartṛśuśrūṣaṇe ratā | bhava tvam na pitā naiva jananī ca jagadguroḥ | kiṃ ca idam eva punar api āvedayāmi sarvadā ca bhartur anukaghalā bhava ||* I read *pradiṣṭam anu naivetat* as *pradiṣṭam anu naivaitat* (I would like to thank Professor Lidia Sudyka for this suggestion) and *anukaghalā* as *anukāghalā*.

reflects upon the mutually connected issue of expanding religious and political power of those who claimed and patronized the place. Similar to other love-stories intended to express integration, in this case it is the concept of *bhakti*, unconditional love towards the god/husband regardless of the bride's origin, which both facilitated and justified lifting of a social status of the local group so that it might be appropriated to the norms of the orthodox milieu, yet under Hindu conditions.

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