

Viplava Jānapadam: The Birth of Political Revolutionary Folklore in South India: A Longue Durée Study of Telugu Jānapada Oral Traditions

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Abstract

This paper is an interdisciplinary study of Telugu *Jānapadam* (folk) traditions in the Telugu-speaking states of India, specifically Telangana, from their origins in pre-classical Dravidian expressive cultures (c. 1500 BCE) to the medieval Bhakti period, colonial modernity, the Telangana Peasant Armed Struggle (1946–1951), the emergence of revolutionary cultural organisations, and the emergence of viplava Jānapadalu (revolutionary folk songs) as a mass political medium in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Through the lens of oral poetics, performance studies, subaltern historiography, and decolonial epistemology, the paper shows that *Jānapadam* is not only a relic of the folk but an active, adaptable epistemological system by which communities historically denied access to literacy, land, and institutional power have produced, disseminated, and enacted political knowledge. The paper focuses on the formal aspects of *Jānapada* forms—*Oggū Katha*, *Burra Katha*, *Dappu* performance traditions, *Golla Suddulu*, *Chindu Yakshaganam*, Lambadi dance-song—and key historical actors: Suddala Hanumanthu (1908–1982), Sri Sri / Srirangam Srinivasa Rao (1910–1983), Gaddar / Gummadi Vithal Rao (1949–2023), Varavara Rao (b. 1940), and Vimalakka. The paper concludes by theorising *Jānapadam* as latent social energy—periodically recharged in moments of crisis—and viplavam as the natural cultural-political expression of communities whose epistemology resides on the skin of the drum, in breath, and in collective memory.

Keywords: Jānapadam, viplava Jānapadalu, Telugu oral tradition, Telangana, cultural memory

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Introduction: Two Streams, One Land

The Telugu-speaking region's cultural history has never been a single, cohesive tradition. The lexical history of the word “*Jānapadam*” itself dates back to the *Aitareya Brahmana* (8.14. 4) as well as *Shatapatha Brahmana* (13.4. 2.17), texts that are typically dated to the first half of the first millennium BCE (Prabhakar, 2009; Ramaraju, 1978). This paper carefully addresses that attestation: it shows that the underlying idea, *jana*(people)-based knowledge that is different from courtly or priestly learning, is ancient in the subcontinent's intellectual lexicon; however, it does not prove an uninterrupted performance lineage from the *Vedic* era to the particular Telugu genres covered below. The argument put forth here is more limited: although the conceptual ancestor of *Jānapadam* is ancient, the documented performance history of the forms examined here—*Oggū Katha*, *Burrakatha*, *Dappu*, and related traditions—can only be confidently traced from the *Satavahana period* (c. 2nd century BCE–2nd century CE), and with actual density only starting in the medieval *Bhakti* era. It is best to keep these two assertions apart because doing so would exaggerate the strength of the evidence.

Within that more clearly evidenced frame, expressive culture in the Telugu region evolved along two long-standing, structurally opposed trajectories. The first—textual, courtly, classical—is preserved in manuscript and institutional memory. Beginning with Nannaya Bhatta's Telugu *Mahabharata* (eleventh century CE), flourishing under the Kakatiya dynasty (1163–1323 CE) and reaching its highest elaboration under the Vijayanagara poet-king Krishnadevaraya (r. 1509–1529 CE), this stream produced *Prabandha* literature and court-sponsored performance grounded in Sanskrit textual authority (Narayana Rao and Shulman 2002). Classical dance forms—Kuchipudi, Bharatanatyam, Harikatha, and court Yakshagana—belonged to this stream, their authority derived from patronage, caste custodianship, and institutional preservation (Kersenboom, 1987; Srinivasan, 1984).

The second trajectory—oral, performative, mobile, communally held—was much more socially pervasive but yielded fewer archival records. It was possessed by shepherds, agricultural labourers, artisan castes, Dalit drummers, and itinerant performers (Ramaraju, 1978; Sundaram, 1983). The term *Jānapadam*—*jana* (people) + *pada* (verse/step)—expressed knowledge that travels with the body and is passed on through collective practice rather than writing. This paper contends that, these two streams are not only different in content, but that the folk stream also has its own epistemological form, its own logic of validation, rather than merely reflecting, in a simpler form, the concerns of the literate tradition. It is this difference that helps explain the emergence of *viplava Jānapadalu* (revolutionary folk songs) in the mid-twentieth century, not as a sudden invention of political necessity, but as the most recent activation of a performative knowledge system that had been maturing for centuries, bearing ethical memory and waiting for the time when human suffering demanded human voice.

What Is *Jānapadam*? Defining a People's Epistemology

Beyond “Folk”: A Structural Definition

To label *Jānapadam* “folk culture” in the Western museum sense—conserved heritage, quaint and marginal—is to misunderstand its purpose. *Jānapadam* is a form of knowledge production that arose outside literate, courtly, and scriptural institutions with its own aesthetics, pedagogy, and social logic: a vernacular epistemology (Mignolo, 2000; Santos, 2014; Spivak, 1988). One of the first comprehensive studies of the Telugu folk literary tradition is Biruduraju Ramaraju's foundational monograph *Telugu Jānapada Geya Sahityam* (1978), which emphasises its

“structural autonomy and social completeness” (Ramaraju, 1978, 43). R.V.S. Sundaram's *Andhrula Jānapada Vignanam* (1983) catalogued over three hundred distinct genres; A.K. Prabhakar's *Telugu Jānapada Vibhagam* (2009) established *Jānapadam* as a legitimate academic subject. Nayani Krishnakumari's *Jānapada Geya Gathalu: Nrusastra Vignanam* and G.V.S. Mohan's *Jānapada Vignana Vyasavali* extend this scholarship with particular attention to oral poetic structures and the sociology of performance communities, while Mikkilineni Radhakrishna Murthy's *Teluguvari Jānapada Kalaroopalu* documents performance communities by caste and regional specificity, identifying the social matrix within which different forms developed. Together, these Telugu-language scholars constitute an intellectual tradition of *Jānapada* studies whose richness has been inadequately acknowledged in Anglophone academic discourse—a lacuna this paper seeks, in a modest way, to address.

The Five Pillars of *Jānapada* Epistemology

Jānapada epistemology rests on five structural pillars distinguishing it from courtly-classical knowledge. The first is *embodiment over textuality*: the body is the primary site of knowledge, and performance is not the representation of a pre-existing reality but “restored behaviour”—action that generates its own mode of knowing (Schechner, 1988, p. 36). The second is *collectivity over individual authorship*: authority arises from community recognition rather than individual genius, since oral tradition involves a “chain of transmission” in which collective validation is more fundamental than individual origination (Vansina, 1985, p. 3). According to Albert Lord (1960) on formulaic composition in oral performance: lyrics and narratives change to suit current circumstances, that bring to the, the third, which is *adaptability over fixity*. The fourth is *participation over spectatorship*: call-and-response replaces the proscenium-audience gap with an interaction frame, blurring the line between performer and public (Goffman, 1959). The fifth is *ethical immediacy*: what Freire (1970) refers to as “generative themes” are metaphors from land, labour, and kinship that locate moral reflection in material reality. Although Telugu *Jānapadam*, which is musical, theatrical, gestural, and ritual, goes beyond his text-versus-speech dichotomy, similar characteristics were noted by Walter Ong (1982, 37–57) in his discussion of primary oral cultures; treating it exclusively through Ong runs the risk of flattening precisely the multi-sensory, embodied quality that this paper considers to be its defining characteristic.

Ancient Roots: From Pre-classical Dravidian Culture to the Bhakti Watershed

Archaeology of the Deccan Plateau, *Satavahana* hero-stone (*viragallu*) traditions, and early narrative rock art evidence a culture of collective memory linked to land, martial honour, and community identity (Sarkar, 1960; Sinopoli, 2001). Telugu folk traditions are among the oldest, spanning over two thousand five hundred years, and were maintained primarily by local communities (Tijer Research Journal, 2023). The Kakatiya period also suggests a “cultural ecology” in which village performance traditions coexisted with court patronage but not in a subordinate way (Talbot, 2001).

The medieval Bhakti movements (c. twelfth–seventeenth centuries CE) represented the most significant pre-modern transformation of the *Jānapada* stream, in which vernacular language, emotionally direct poetry, and embodied performance were used by lower-caste devotional singers across South India (including the Telugu *Vīraśaiva Vachana* composers and the *Vaishnava Dāsa Sāhitya* tradition, such as *Tallapaka Annamacharya*, 1408–1503, whose songs range from devotional high to folk low registers) to assert spiritual equality and challenge ritual hierarchy (Narayana Rao, 1990; Zelliot, 1982). This set a powerful precedent that later

movements would inherit almost subconsciously: song could challenge power, and vernacular voice carried authentic ethical and spiritual authority, normalising what would later become explicitly political—the claim that performance outside elite institutions could generate truth and mobilise communities. These itinerant performance traditions—*Addamsingvallu*, *Veedhi Bhagavatulu*, *Budige Jangaalu*, *Chinduvallu*, *Dasarivallu*, *Gollasuddulavallu*, *Gondaleelu*, and *Jangaalu*, to name a few, as documented by Krishnakumari, Mohan, and Murthy—each maintained unique performative knowledge systems with their own aesthetic conventions, community ownership structures, and modes of social address by the medieval period.

The Performative Architecture of Telugu *Jānapadam*

The following study is not presented as an inventory in its own right. Each of these forms is included because it provides a particular structural resource that revolutionary movements drew on directly: a narrative grammar for transforming the dead into martyrs (*Oggu Katha*), a dialogic structure built into the form for staging debate and satire (*Burrakatha*), an instrument whose caste history meant that its reappropriation was itself a political act (*Dappu*), and open, unticketed performance spaces that generated solidarity as a physical rather than purely intellectual encounter (*Golla Suddulu* and related forms). The counterargument is that the repertoire of the 1940s–1970s cultural organisations was cobbled together from a pre-existing toolkit, each tool already bearing its social meaning.

Oggu Katha, performed by Kuruma and Yadava pastoral communities, is an extended narrative tradition centred on devotion to the deity Mallanna, combining ethical instruction with cosmic narrative through drum, vocal modulation, and embodied impersonation (Sundaram, 1983, pp. 112–18). Its narrative grammar—a hero encounters injustice, undergoes trials, sacrifices himself, and is transformed into communal memory—provided the template through which revolutionary movements later storified their martyrs, including Doddi Komaraiah, killed on 4 July 1946.

Burrakatha—a three-performer tradition of narrator and two commentators—embeds what Bakhtin (1981, 272) calls social heteroglossia into its very form; Aloysius, Mohan, and Manohar (2006, 34) describe it as “a novel art form of the people born out of political necessity.” The Andhra Praja Natya Mandali made it central to political pedagogy from 1946 (Satyanarayana, 2005, pp. 56–63). The *Dappu*, a frame drum associated with the Dalit Madiga community, was historically confined to Dalit castes as caste-ascribed labour (Ambedkar, 1944), yet its reappropriation from service to political assertion became a gesture of dignity—what Fanon (1961, p. 41) recognised as the reclamation of self-representation. *Golla Suddulu*, associated with Yadava shepherds, enacted what Turner (1969) terms *communitas* in open village spaces without stage barriers; *Chindu Yakshaganam*, Lambadi dance-song, and numerous itinerant forms completed a dense performance ecology across the Deccan, constituting what de Certeau (1984) calls “tactical” practice.

These forms developed not in isolation from classical performance but in structural contrast to it. Kuchipudi's origins in a Brahmin village and its systematisation under Vempati Chinna Satyam through the Kuchipudi Art Academy (Satyam, 1963) situate it within an institutionally managed tradition; Bharatanatyam, originally performed by *Devadasi* women in Tamil Nadu temples, was reconstructed as a purified stage art largely by upper-caste revivalists, particularly Rukmini Devi Arundale, whose Kalakshetra institution (Arundale, 1936) remade the form along lines of Brahminical respectability (O'Shea, 2007; Srinivasan, 1984). They are not lesser forms but exceptional works of art with rich social lives. But their social address was

structurally distinct: *Jānapadam* spoke directly to the masses, in open fields, village grounds, and forest clearings, through collective co-creation transmitted orally in ways structurally more difficult for any authority to suppress than their counterparts in courts, temples, and eventually in urban educated audiences.

When Political Thought Found Its Cultural Home

By the early 20th century, the Telugu-speaking area was characterised by feudal exploitation that was unparalleled in most other parts of British India: the agrarian economy was controlled by landlords (*deshmukhs*, *jagirdars*, *doras*) who held near-absolute power over landless peasants, with the *vetti* system of caste-based forced labour as an additional form of economic enslavement (Ambedkar, 1944), which was structurally inseparable from caste subordination and against which *doras* faced no legal challenge (Pavier, 1981). Telangana also had one of the lowest rates of literacy in rural British India, and Dalit and lower-caste communities were largely excluded from written culture (Sundarayya, 1972, p. 41). However, a fully developed communicative infrastructure already existed, socially embedded in the *Jānapada* tradition described above. From the 1930s onward, when socialist and communist ideas began to circulate through activist networks (through the *Andhra Mahasabha*, founded 1930, the Communist Party of India, and the Progressive Writers' Association, founded 1936, Lucknow), they did not enter cultural emptiness, but a landscape already saturated with ethical frameworks for interpreting injustice and performance formats for collective action. The power of such a communicative infrastructure was recognised by social reformers, such as Gurajada Apparao (1862–1915), whose play *Kanyasulkam* (Apparao, 1892) is one of the most important modern Telugu literary works (Prabhakar 2009, p. 23).

A crucial literary bridge preceded the organised cultural institutions: Srirangam Srinivasa Rao (1910–1983), known as Sri Sri, whose anthology *Maha Prasthanam* (poems written 1930–1940, published 1950) moved Telugu poetry away from classical metre toward rhythms closer to folk cadence, opening with the triple-beat invocation “*Nadavandi, nadavandi, nadavandi*” (“Walk, walk, walk”). By incorporating folk rhythmic patterns and colloquial diction into published poetry, Sri Sri enacted the cross-fertilisation between oral and literary culture that revolutionary institutions would later pursue as deliberate strategy; he became founding president of Virasam in 1970.

The most significant pre-independence institutional development was the formation of Praja Natya Mandali (PNM) in May 1946, the Telugu wing of the Indian People's Theatre Association, distinguished by its engagement with *Burra-katha* and village folk song (Baskaran 1996). Its *Burra-katha* squad—including Mahankali Parvati, Moturu Udayam, and Chintala Koteshwaramma—performed anti-feudal and anti-Nizam songs across Nalgonda, Warangal, and Khammam from 1943. The drama *Maa Bhoomi* (Our Land, c. 1946–47) was staged over a thousand times, seen by more than two million people (Satyanarayana 2005, 56)—a mass mobilisation no print medium could have achieved amid widespread rural illiteracy.

The First Revolution Sung in Song: Telangana, 1946–1951

The Telangana Rebellion began on 4 July 1946, when peasants marched against the *deshmukh* Visnur Ramachandra Reddy in Kadavendi village; his guards killed Doddi Komaraiah, the movement's first martyr. Within a week, peasants had seized and redistributed roughly two hundred acres; the struggle spread across four thousand villages (Pavier, 1981; Sundarayya, 1972). By 1951 it had established village communes, redistributed land, and reduced caste and

gender distinctions in participating areas, at a cost of an estimated four thousand militants killed and over ten thousand imprisoned (Pavier, 1981, pp. 89–112; Stree Shakti Sanghatana, 1989). Stree Shakti Sanghatana's *We Were Making History* (1989) provides valuable testimonies from women participants, documenting both gendered oppression and the role of women's song in sustaining morale.

Song was operational throughout the struggle: used to announce meetings, signal danger, memorialise the fallen, and sustain morale—exemplifying James Scott's (1990) concept of “hidden transcripts,” subaltern counter-discourse whose meaning was opaque to the Nizam's forces but transparent to those for whom it was composed. Suddala Hanumanthu (1908–1982), born to an agricultural labouring family in Nalgonda district, is the defining figure of this phase. His song “*Palleturi Pillagada Pasulagaase Monagada*” recounted the life of a bonded child worker (later set to film in *Maa Bhoomi* in 1979), and his “*Bandenaka Bandi Katti*” described the overthrow of feudal tyranny by depicting a landlord being carted away on a bullock cart. In this way, the songs of Hanumanthu could be considered “weapons of the weak” in the sense of James Scott (1985) — counter-hegemonic tools that encoded moral arguments against feudal authority in a way that non-literate communities could absorb.

This is because unlike printed manifestos or other formal political documents, these songs survived not because they were printed but because they were oral and therefore flexible: lyrics were updated to local contexts, to individual landlords and villages, and melodies were applied to new political situations in the following decades—a process Vansina (1985, 100–20) refers to as structural compression, the condensation of specific historical experience into narrative form that could be reproduced widely in space and time. One such song, which D. Venkateswara Rao (1988, p. 1) opens his historical analysis within *Telangana Praja Savuda Porata Charitra* (1988), recognises what formal historical methodology could not fully accommodate: that the songs conveyed a political-emotional truth that prose history alone could not capture. The act of revision, approval, and mass performance meant that the collectivity of composition constituted a social verification that individual authorship could not offer (Countercurrents.org, 2021). The song lived on, in a sense, because it was endorsed by the community.

The Institutionalisation of Revolution: Virasam, JNM and Gaddar

The organisations examined in this section did not emerge automatically from grievance or from the prior availability of *Jānapada* forms. Each represents a deliberate strategic choice by identifiable actors—Sri Sri, Varavara Rao, B. Narsing Rao, Gaddar—to mobilise an existing cultural repertoire for explicitly political ends: oppressive conditions combined with an available performative infrastructure make revolutionary cultural mobilisation unusually fast and durable when organisers choose to pursue it, not automatic.

On July 4, 1970, radical writers founded the Viplava Rachaitala Sangham (Virasam) under founding president Sri Sri, with Varavara Rao (1940) among its founding executive, which was established during the 1967–1970 Srikakulam peasant rebellion (Pavier 1981, pp. 193–210). As leader P, Virasam made a significant contribution by explicitly bridging poetry and song. “Poetry can be read by educated or elite sections, whereas songs can travel far and wide,” according to Varalakshmi quoted in Countercurrents (2021). Chief Minister N repeatedly banned Virasam. A T. Though unintentionally, Rama Rao's proclamation “*Aata, maata, paata bandh!*” (“performances, speeches, and songs: banned”) acknowledged that the song was more of a political tool than a form of entertainment.

The Art Lovers' Association, founded in Hyderabad by filmmaker B. Narsing Rao, became the Jana Natya Mandali (JNM) in 1972, collecting and reworking thousands of folk and revolutionary songs in a practice Gramsci (1971, p. 9) calls “organic intellectualism.” Songs by Cherabanda Raju and Sivasagar became standard repertoire; many songwriters remain anonymous, reflecting *Jānapadam*'s collective rather than individual ownership.

No figure embodies this paper's thesis better than Gummadi Vithal Rao—born in 1949 into a Dalit family in Toopran, Medak district, who became Gaddar (“Revolt”)—the most celebrated exponent of *viplava Jānapadalu* in the twentieth century. The son of landless peasants from the Dalit Madiga community, he dropped out of engineering college for financial reasons, worked as a manual labourer, and joined the Art Lovers' Association under B. Narsing Rao. Inspired by the Srikakulam armed struggle, he took the name Gaddar in tribute to the Gadar Party of Punjab (1913–1930), the anti-colonial organisation established among Indian immigrants in North America (Puri, 1983). In 1972 he joined the People's War Group; in 1975 he was arrested during the Emergency and jailed for forty-five days; in 1986 he went underground and worked in the Dandakaranya forest region for eight months. By his death on 6 August 2023, at age seventy-four, he had composed nearly five thousand songs, collected in *Taragani Gani: Prajala Patala Puttupuvottaraalu* (1992) and translated in Vasanth Kannabiran's *My Life is a Song: Gaddar's Anthems for Revolution* (Orient BlackSwan, 2021). His performative idiom—barefoot, in the *Gongadi* shawl of the Telangana shepherd community, tight *dhoti*, red scarf, and *gejjelu* anklets—synthesised the dramatic cadence of *Burra-katha*, the devotional intensity of *Oggukatha*, and the rhythmic drive of *Dappu*: what Schechner (1988, p. 45) calls “restored behaviour” invested with political intentionality. A bullet remained lodged in his spine following a 1997 assassination attempt; in a handwritten letter from hospital weeks before his death, Gaddar wrote that “the heartbeat of the people” (*janam gundela chappudu*) had been injured (News Minute, 2023). The metaphor was exact: his body and the body politic were, in his own understanding, the same thing.

The Telangana Statehood Movement: A Second Great Activation

The popular movement for a separate Telangana state, building momentum since the 1990s among the common populations, later under K. Chandrashekhara Rao and the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (formed 2001), expressed itself primarily in *Jānapadam*. The *Dhoom-Dham*, a mass cultural event combining folk performance, political speech, and group music, first held at Kamareddy in 2002 and based on *Burra-katha*, *Oggukatha*, and folk song, with performers such as Gaddar, Rasamayi Balkishen, and Vimalakka (Telangana Today, 2020), became the movement's signature format, and Vimalakka, a folk singer from the Warangal region, was a cultural icon of its gendered aspect, singing in the folk idiom to articulate the statehood demand and the gendered challenges of Telangana women, continuing a tradition of women performers documented in Stree Shakti Sanghatana (1989). On 2 June 2014, Telangana became the twenty-ninth state of India.

Theoretical Framework and Methodological Approach

This study deploys an interdisciplinary methodology at the intersection of four traditions. Oral poetics (Lord, 1960; Ong, 1982; Vansina, 1985) illuminates how *Jānapada* songs function as memory systems through formulaic repetition and rhythm. Performance studies (Schechner, 1988; Turner, 1969) reveals how collective performance produces solidarity as a physical, felt experience—what Turner calls *communitas*. By treating songs as historical sources of validity on par with written documents, subaltern historiography (Spivak, 1988) offers a framework for

regaining agency that has been methodically removed from elite historical records. Decolonial epistemology (Mignolo, 2000; Santos, 2014) offers the vocabulary to place *Jānapadam* as vernacular theory—an already-constituted epistemological system producing knowledge through its own internal criteria—rather than as pre-political expression awaiting development from above. In order to make their significance understandable without undermining their own claims to authority, the paper reads Telugu-language primary material—song compilations, monographs, and oral histories—alongside Anglophone theoretical literature.

Dormant Energy and Cyclical Activation

The Latency Model

One of the central theoretical contributions of this paper is what we term the latency model of *Jānapada*'s political function—offered here as a defined construct rather than a suggestive image. The model specifies three elements. First, what is stored during the latent phase: not political content itself, but a transmissible infrastructure—repertoire, performance formats (the *Burra-katha* triad, the *Oggu Katha* hero-narrative, open-ground gathering conventions), and the caste- and community-based networks of practitioners who carry technical competence across generations. Gramsci's (1971, pp. 419–25) analysis of subaltern folklore is instructive: folklore is not simply the backward persistence of pre-capitalist consciousness but the “sediment of conceptions of the world” accumulated by communities excluded from hegemonic culture. Second, what triggers reactivation: reactivation required both a material precipitant—intensified feudal exploitation in 1946, the Srikakulam uprising and Emergency-era repression in the 1970s, perceived regional marginalisation from the 1990s—and the presence of specific organisers able and willing to broker between aggrieved communities and the existing performance infrastructure. Grievance alone does not appear, on this evidence, to be sufficient. Third, what would count as disconfirming evidence: a case of comparable grievance and infrastructure but no organiser willing to broker, and consequently no reactivation. This paper does not test such a negative case directly, and doing so is flagged as a limitation and a direction for further research.

With that qualification in place, the structural mechanics of the Latency Model explain three distinct moments of activation: the 1946–1951 armed struggle, the revolutionary mobilisation of the 1970s–1990s, and the Telangana statehood movement. In each case, the forms already existed in latent, non-political use; organisational choices redirected their content; and the redirection proceeded with a speed that reflects the depth of the pre-existing infrastructure rather than any inevitability in the underlying culture.

Transmission Across Generations

A crucial dimension of *Jānapada*'s resilience is its capacity for generational transmission even when the political conditions that originally activated it are in abeyance. Young people in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh encounter *Jānapadam* through family and community performance at festivals and agricultural events, school and university cultural programmes, and, critically in the contemporary context, digital and social media. JNM's and Virasam's social media presence has extended the reach of revolutionary folk songs into digital space, enabling the circulation of Gaddar's performances among diaspora communities and urban youth with no direct experience of the agrarian contexts in which the songs were composed (Telangana Today, 2020). The body of revolutionary folk songs recorded on cassette from the late 1970s, on VCD from the 1990s, and on streaming platforms thereafter constitutes what

might be termed a “digital latency”: the archive of embodied political culture preserved in digital form, available for reactivation when conditions require.

Structural Unsuppressibility

Virasam was banned, Varavara Rao was arrested, and Gaddar was shot in 1997, but the state's repeated attempts to put an end to revolutionary *Jānapadam* were unsuccessful. This failure can be explained structurally: *Jānapadam* does not reside in named leaders who can be imprisoned, in books that can be banned, or in institutions that can be closed down. It lives in collective memory and performers' bodies; according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), it is rhizomatic rather than arborescent, with no central trunk that can be felled and no single root that can be cut. According to the evidence gathered here, Varavara Rao's own observation that true history is written in the hearts of the people should be interpreted as an accurate description of how *Jānapadam* serves as a historical archive rather than just a rhetorical device.

***Viplava Jānapadalu* in Global Perspective**

The phenomenon documented in this paper is not unique to Telangana; it is a globally recurring pattern at the intersection of oral tradition and political resistance. *Nueva Canción* in Latin America (Violeta Parra, Victor Jara, Mercedes Sosa; 1960s–80s) adapted traditional folk melodies to carry anti-dictatorship content, with state repression including the murder of Victor Jara in 1973 (Reyes Matta, 1988). Anti-apartheid song in South Africa—Miriam Makeba, the Freedom Songs, *Senzeni Na?*—drew on Zulu, Xhosa, and Sotho oral traditions and worker *izibongo* praise poetry (Coplan, 1985; Erlmann, 1991). *Chimurenga* music in Zimbabwe (Thomas Mapfumo and the Blacks Unlimited) carried anti-colonial and land-rights politics through Shona traditional music and mbira *dzavadzimu* (Turino, 2000). Civil Rights Freedom Songs in the United States (We Shall Overcome, Oh Freedom, 1950s–60s) adapted African-American gospel and work-song traditions for mass mobilisation (Carawan and Carawan, 1963; Reagon, 1987), and Haitian *rara* carnival performance connected Afro-Haitian ritual music and Vodou percussion to the historical memory of the Haitian Revolution (Averill, 1997). What unites these traditions, and what Eyerman and Jamison (1998) in *Music and Social Movements* term “cognitive praxis,” is that wherever oral cultures possess deep performative traditions and marginalised communities face concentrated exploitation, musical traditions function as the production and transmission of political knowledge in aesthetic form. Telugu *viplava Jānapadalu* is distinguished within this global pattern by the depth of its roots across two millennia, the sophistication of its institutional framework (PNM, Virasam, JNM), the specificity of its caste and class politics—requiring the combined analytical resources of Marxist political economy and Ambedkarite caste critique—and the extraordinary figure of Gaddar, whose nearly five thousand songs constitute perhaps the largest individual body of revolutionary folk composition in modern world history.

Conclusions

This study has explored the arc of *Jānapadam* from its ancient origins to the emergence of the cultural-political tradition of *viplava Jānapadalu*, contending that *Jānapadam* is not folklore in the Western archival sense but epistemology—a means of knowing and disseminating social reality that emerged outside literate and courtly institutions, whose longevity is rooted in its decentralisation, communal ownership, and embodiment rather than textual archiving.

The parallel stream of Telugu culture, running alongside Kuchipudi, Yakshagana, and the classical literary canon, was never peripheral; it was the primary cultural infrastructure of the majority. Its political reactivation in the 1940s, 1970s, and 2000s was not an anomaly of radical politics, but nor was it automatic. The latency model developed in Section X specifies the conditions under which reactivation occurred: an existing performative infrastructure, an intensifying material grievance, and organisers willing and able to broker between the two. Where those conditions converged, activation was fast and durable; the model makes no claim about what would have happened in their absence.

Suddala Hanumanthu composed in the fields of Nalgonda while the Nizam's police mobilised against the peasant movement; Sri Sri's verses became anthems for a generation with no political party to represent them; the Jana Natya Mandali built political analysis into aesthetic structures communities already inhabited; Gaddar carried a bullet in his spine for twenty-five years and called the people his heartbeat; Vimalakka brought the specific dignity of Telangana's rural women into the political arena.

The history of Telugu *Jānapadam* is the history of a people thinking in rhythm, metaphor, and collective sound—epistemology as survival, aesthetics as resistance, performance as politics. None of this makes revolutionary reactivation inevitable. What the evidence assembled here does show is that a culture stored in people's bodies, in community memory, and in collectively owned performance is markedly harder to suppress than a culture stored in institutions, books, or named leaders alone—and that where the right conditions converge, such a culture provides an unusually fast and legible route from grievance to organised collective voice. *Jānapadam* is not, on this reading, simply a genre; it is a durable and continuing form of political potential. *Viplavam*—revolution—is one, but not the only, possible expression of that potential, and this paper has tried to show both why it recurred in Telugu history and under what conditions it did so.

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