Part 1

Chapter 5: The Yellamma Cult

Yellamma-Renuka, the goddess sanskritized in the new millennium

Yellamma / Ellamma worship is widespread and Madigas have a key part in it.

The Jambava-Yellamma link was already very clear in the introduction to the cult provided in the late 19th century by Rev. W. Howard Campbell, an LMS missionary stationed at Cuddapah (Kadapa, then in the Madras Presidency). The extracts here begin with his letters to one of the great Telugu scholars of the colonial era, Gustav Oppert, quoted by him in footnotes to his own discussion.

Gustav Oppert 1893. The original inhabitants of Bharatavarsha or India. Westminster: Constable

[pp 465-66]

Ellamma is the Ādiśakti, without father or mother or husband, born out of the earth, a virgin. Before her was Ādijambuvu, a great muni, who was born six months before the Kaliyugam. (The Madigas claim to be his descendants.) He by his mantras caused Ellamma to be born out of the earth. Nine hours after she was born, she attained to maturity and was like a twelve years' old girl. Putting on grand clothes and gold ornaments she went to Ādijambavu and greeted him ‘Trimitramangalam (author of the Shastras who made Ganga speak and helped Rama in the Kritayugam), O grandfather.’ He looked at her and said ‘What is it, O Ādiśakti?’ She replied ‘I have searched all hills and plains and secret places and have found no husband who will satisfy my youthful desires.’ He said ' No gods are yet born with the Kaliyugam, so there is none to satisfy your desire.' She replied ‘I have come to have intercourse with you.’ ‘That,’ he said, ‘cannot be.’ ‘Who then is there’ she asked, ‘to satisfy my desires?’ He replied ‘I give you a Sanjiva root, take it to Matangagiri hill,
plant it there, and with offerings worship me. From this root will spring up a cock, and on its appearance you will become a hen. You will lay three eggs. Of these one will fall down into the Nāgalōkam, and from it will come forth Ādisheshan. One will go bad, and will fall into Balimaharāja's city. The Brahmarakahasi will be born from it. On one you will sit, and from it Brahma, Vishnu and Siva will come forth. On their birth, you will again become a woman.’

It happened as the sage said, and on becoming a woman, Ellamma turning to the Trimurtulu asked them to satisfy her desire. They replied ‘Mother we came from your womb, how can we do this?’ She answered ‘I am not your mother, but only your grandmother, as you were born from an egg, so you need not hesitate.’ They fled from her in fear from place to place, and at length rushed into the presence of Adijambuvu to tell him, who they were, and why they had fled from the Ādiśakti. He turned to Śiva and said ‘It is you she seeks and not the others. When she presses you to comply with her wishes promise to do so on the condition that she gives you her third eye. She will agree to give you her eye, and with it I shall take away her strength, so that her robe will become a burden to her.’ Śiva did according to these directions, and the Ādiśakti’s strength and vigour disappeared. He asked if she still wished him to comply with her request, and she replied that her robe had become a burden to her. The Trimurtulu left her, and after receiving instruction from Ādijambuvu, she returned to Matangagiri hill. Nine hours later the Kaliyuga began and the people came in multitudes to worship her.[a]

This goddess is worshipped by people of all castes. Ceremonies in her honour are performed by dobey's (cākala), toddy-sellers (īdige) and chucklers (mādige). Her temples, which are numerous in this district, are built at a little distance from the villages in the vicinity of the Sudra houses. They should be overshadowed by a margosa tree. There is, as a rule, in each a stone-image representing a woman with three eyes, in the shrine (mūlasthanamu), and near this a small image made of the five metals. In the verandah there is a small palanquin in which this smaller image is carried at festivals. People of all castes, Brahmans included, make offerings to the goddess of cocoanuts, incense, and not infrequently offer sheep. It is an Idige man who acts as pujari in presenting the usual offering, and who when an offering of food (bhojanamu) is presented, places a portion before the idol, and returns the remainder to the offerers. When a sheep is presented it is a dobey who sacrifices it. After he has cut off the head, he places it on the pandal in front of the temple, and those who have presented it, take away the carcase. The Madiga people who are present or rather those of the Mādigas who are set apart for the purpose, the Bainēnivāndlu, play upon the instruments and recite tales of the goddess, while offerings are being presented.

A festival is held once a year at each temple. It lasts for three days. On the first day 24 seers of cholam are boiled, poured in a heap in front of the temple, and decorated with flowers and turmeric. A buffalo is brought forward, the Bainēnis (Madigas) tie margosa branches to its neck and drive it three times round the temple. Then they ask the village magistrate, if the sacrifice be performed. On his assenting a dobey comes forward and cuts off the buffalo's head. The Bainēnis rip up the belly, tie the intestines round their arms, mix rice with the dung and march round the temple throwing this into the air and crying out: Kōbali ratha bali. They then prostrate themselves in front of the temple. The reddi (village magistrate) and Karnam come forward, cover them as they lie with a new cloth, and present betel to them. On this all rise to go off to their midday meal. In the evening all assemble again at the temple. A mixture of five seers of milk, five seers of jaghari and twenty-five seers of rice is cooked and placed in the temple. Then the Bainēnis come forward and, after playing some music, tell a story of the goddess. On the second day, at dawn, a square (muggu) is drawn with coloured powder in front of the temple, and on it are placed camphor, betel, limes, toddy and arrack. The goddess is said to be specially fond of liquor. A male goat and a female sheep are brought and placed near the square. The dobey priest sacrifices the sheep in the usual way, and after he has done so, the Bainēnis come forward after they have bowed before the shrine. One of them performs the
gāvu by seizing the goat by the neck and strangling it with his teeth. When he has done this, he sits
down in real or feigned excitement, and eats 1¼ seers of rice, ¼ of a seer of curd, and ¼ of a seer of
ghee. This concludes the morning ceremonies. At night the idegas (toddy-sellers) or bēstas
(fishermen) place the small image in the palanquin and take it to the river. It remains there till dawn,
and the Bainēnis spend the time in repeating their stories. At dawn of the third day they take the
image back to the temple. There are no further ceremonies, but from midday till evening the
Bainēnis tell their stories.

19th century Matangi with attendants, from 'While Sewing Sandals'

*Emma Rauschenbusch-Clough 1899.*

*While Sewing Sandals. Or Tales of a Telugu Pariah Tribe.* London: Hodder
& Stoughton

Rauschenbusch-Clough reports from Ongole in coastal Andhra at the end of the 19th century.

[pp 62-72] The initiation of a Matangi [b]

As I stepped out upon the verandah one morning, I was greeted by the salaam of my old friend,
Konikaluri Yelliah. The dazzling whiteness of his turban emphasized the dark hue of the face
beneath, which beamed in expectation of the things that were to come.

‘Did you come walking all these sixty miles?’

‘How could I walk? Am I not an old man? By your leave I came by bullock-
bandy.’

‘And what have you to tell me now?’

‘Whatever you give leave, that will I tell.’

This was the polite reply which I had heard many a time. It had happened repeatedly that my questions, far from
bringing to light valuable material, only revealed the fact that there was nothing to draw forth. I regarded Yelliah, as he sat facing me, as an experiment.

‘Tell me,’ I said, ‘about the old days.’

‘My mother, Ammah, was a Matangi.’

‘And what is that?’ I asked.

‘A Matangi is a Madiga woman, who is possessed by Ellama.’

‘And who is Ellama?’

‘She is Adimata, the mother who was from the beginning.’

By this time I had straitened myself. I dipped my pen into the ink with an air of business. I took my note-book, and I said, ‘Now, Yelliah, begin at the very beginning.’

And Yelliah began far back with his great-grandmother, who was a Matangi. His grandmother was not invested with the power. He was his mother's eldest child, and when he was about three years old something strange happened to her. She was well, and had been going to her work as usual, when, one Adivaramu, being the first day of the week, after the offering of food had been placed in the Ellama idol-house, she began to act in a peculiar way.

She sat apart at meal-time, and refused to eat. It was harvest-time, and for two weeks she went to the fields as usual, but aside from the grain, which she ate as she worked, she would not partake of food. The Sudras, for whom the family worked, noticed this. The whole village began to watch her closely, for she looked this way and that, and laughed to herself. They said, ‘What does it all mean?’

It soon became a matter of discussion in the community, for there were many who worshipped Ellama. No matter whether anyone was a Sivite or a Vishnuite, he yet thought it well to worship Ellama. When it was decided, therefore, that a council should be called to investigate whether this woman was really invested with the power of Ellama, a very general interest was shown. Sudras and Brahmins came, but the man who was head of the council was the headman of the Madiga village, who, as such, had the function of entering the Ellama idol-house once a week with offerings of milk, butter, and fruit.

The test agreed upon was that the Bainurdu, who is the minstrel in the Ellama sect, should recite the story of Ellama in the presence of the woman. If Ellama's power had come upon her, she would dance, inspired by the goddess; if it was an evil spirit that possessed her, the story would not affect her. Without loss of time the test was made; and as soon as the minstrel began the young woman danced, and not only she, but her husband and other members of the family also danced, and thus it was evident that Ellama's power possessed the family.

All were now convinced that they had a new Matangi in this woman. It was considered an event, for Matangis were rare, only one or two in a Taluk. It was decided that an old Matangi from an adjoining Taluk should be called to initiate the new Matangi into the rites of the office. The family had to bear the expense of the initiation, about sixteen rupees, which necessitated a debt; but they did not hesitate, for they knew that afterwards there would be great gain. An atmosphere of expectancy and anticipation was abroad in the community.

There lived a Reddi in the place, who was chief of the Reddis, one of the branches of the Sudra caste. Years before he had had a serpent made, life-size, of silver, gold, copper, and various metals, and then he, and a number of villagers as witnesses, had gone to Sulvesanama Kona [c], where the Gundlacumma River flows through a cave, and where there is a famous place of worship. Here the Reddi fulfilled certain conditions, and went through initiatory rites, for which he received a certificate from the officiating priests. His wife had gone with him, and had also met all conditions, so that she, too, could take a prominent part in the worship of the snake, when, after their return home, they were asked here and there with the serpent.

The great day came when the old Matangi arrived. The Madiga headman went into the little thatch-roof house, sacred to Ellama, and took out the pot, hung to the roof, that contained coins and shells and other articles emblematical of Ellama and her sons. The pot was taken to the village-tank in the morning, and left in the water all day, a man remaining near by as guard. In the evening all went to take it out of the water, worship it, and take it back to the village. One goat was killed near the water, another half-way to the house, and a third after reaching the house, where the blood was painted over the door-frame. The Reddi had brought his serpent and placed it, with its hood spread, where the offerings of rice could be piled up around it.

That same night, after the serpent had been worshipped, the old Matangi and the Reddi's wife sat down together on the back of a goat. It lay down with the weight, but was dragged three times around the spot where the serpent and all the
offerings were. Instruments were played, and the bystanders danced the wild dance of possession. Whatever trouble or sickness there was among the people would, it was believed, fall upon the goat and die with it. It was half dead, after being dragged three times around the circle, and was then taken to one side and killed.

On the next day all the rice and other offerings that had been heaped around the serpent were cooked by Sudras; for Brahmins too were coming to eat, and if Sudras cooked it, the caste prejudices of all were respected.[d] There was a feast, and then all returned to their own houses. The old Matangi also went home. The new Matangi had been passive throughout, had simply looked on. She and her family worshipped Ellama for one week, and then went to their work as usual. She showed no further signs of possession. Only when stories of Ellama were recited, she and others of the family began the dance.

During the year that followed the family and others of the Madigas worked and saved, and laid up grain, and contracted debts to meet the initiatory rites that were to follow. They could not accept help from the Sudras, or any one else, for the Matangi must come from the Madigas. It is a Madiga affair, and while other castes may share, they cannot have any initiative. A new pot was made for Ellama; shells and pebbles were brought from the sea; water from the Krishna River was brought to wash them.

Before the initiation could take place, however, a final test was ordained, to prove that the woman was really worthy of the office. On the floor of a house a figure in three parts was drawn, with white, red, and yellow powder. In one part the serpent had its place, in the second the Ellama-pot, and in the third the new Matangi was seated. A little earthenware pot was placed in each corner, painted with saffron[e] and red dots, representing Ellama, and filled with buttermilk. Threads were then tied to the pots, brought to the roof and back again, crosswise, four times.

After these preparations had been completed, the Bainurdu began to recite Ellama stories, accompanying himself with his instrument. The possession came upon the woman, but she could not rise up and dance, she had to remain seated and contain it within herself. If she could not do this, she was not worthy. The strings tied across furnished the proof, for if she moved they would break, and the buttermilk in the pots would be spilled. In due time the Bainurdu said soothing words, and the possession slowly disappeared.

A crowd of people had stood by as witnesses, and great was the feeling of relief when the new Matangi had stood the test and proved that she would be able to carry her office with dignity. Again the old Matangi was called; this time to stand by and instruct her colleague in office. First she was decked like the old Matangi, with new clothes, her face and arms were painted with saffron, rice was tied around her waist, and a wreath of margosa leaves was hung around her neck. As her insignia of office, a basket was placed in her left hand, a stick in her right hand, and two small plates, one containing yellow saffron, the other red powder, were held by a woman who was her female attendant. She stood in the middle of the crowd, took buttermilk into her mouth, passed it on a bunch of margosa leaves, and sprinkled it on all who stood near. It was believed that whoever was thus sprinkled would be cleansed from all defilement and pollution; for even the touch of a Matangi is thought to have power. In the night the Reddi’s wife and the new Matangi sat on the goat together; again the serpent was worshipped, and there was great feasting on the day following. After this the new Matangi went about with her husband, performing the ceremonies of her office in the villages of the Taluk. Her husband was passive, for men can never assume the role of a Matangi.

Such was the story of the initiation of a Matangi as told to me. I enquired for legends concerning the Matangi cult, and found one which is not without additional information.

There lived, once upon a time, a king whose name was Dundagheri Rajah. His wife was Jamila Devi. When the king was holding court one day, a beautiful maiden appeared before him. She was an incarnation of the goddess Parvati, the consort of Siva. The king extended his right hand to catch the maiden, but she moved away from him. He and his people followed in pursuit of her, but she receded, and finally disappeared into an ant-hill. The king sent for diggers, and ordered them to dig till they found the girl, and offered large rewards. They began to dig, but soon found that the ant-hill was hard as stone. The king then sent for stone-cutters, and the queen offered them still greater rewards. They too failed. Then the king grew angry, took his spear, and drove it into the ant-hill. The spear pierced the skull of the maiden, and as the king pulled out the spear, the brains of the girl began to ooze out and blood began to flow. The king and all his followers, at sight of this, fell into a swoon.

The maiden then came out of the ant-hill in great majesty and of divine proportions. She held the heavens in her left hand (the basket to-day represents this), in her right hand she held Adisesha, the great serpent (the stick is now substituted for this). She held the sun and moon as plates, in one of which she caught the spilt blood, in the other the scattered brain. Upon the foreheads of the people, that lay in a swoon, she made a mark with the brain and another with the blood. Therefore the Matangi to-day has two plates, one with yellow saffron, the other with red turmeric, with which she marks the foreheads of people. After all those who lay in a swoon had been thus marked, they recovered, and saw the goddess before them in the form of a maiden. The king and queen took her into their house. She was afterwards married to the sage Jamadagni, and had five sons.
About ten miles to the south-west of Cumbum, in the Kurnool district, and within a mile of the village of Tudimilla, there is a narrow pass between two hillocks known as Surabeswara Kona. Besides the more common presences, we find here the following shrines:

(a) Sapathamāthas (seven mothers).
(b) A curious temple, in which are found the idols of Jamadhagni Bagawān - the father of Parasurāma and the local rishi - his wife Renuka Dēvi [g], and the Surabi [h].
(c) Opposite to this temple is the curious shrine, not very much bigger than a railway pointsman's box, dedicated to Māthangi. In this temple are found no less than five idols arranged in the following order:

1) a three-headed snake; (2) another three-headed snake; (3) a female body, with the palms joined reverentially in the worshipping posture in front, with the lower half of the body snaky in form, and with a canopy of snaky hoods above; (4) Māthangi proper - a female figure of about 15 inches in height, made of stone – with a short skirt, below which the feet are visible, but no upper garment, and wearing a garland round the neck. The right hand holds a snake-headed stick, while the left has an adlika, a kind of sieve; (5) another similar figure, but without even the skirt.

The version locally prevalent is somewhat different [to scriptural versions].

Jamadhagni Bagawān's hermitage was near this Kona, and he was worshipping the god Surabeswara, and doing tapas (penance) there. One day, his wife Renuka Dēvi went, very early in the morning, to the river Gundlacama to bathe, and fetch water for her husband's sacrificial rites. She was accompanied, as was her wont on such occasions, by a female slave of the chuckler (leather-worker) caste, as a sort of bodyguard and attendant. While she was bathing, the great warrior Karthaviriyarjuna with a thousand arms happened to fly across the sky on some business of his own, and Renuka saw his form reflected in the water, and was pleased with it in her mind. It must be mentioned that she never used to take any vessel with her to fetch water, for her chastity was such that she had power to roll water into a pot-like shape, as if it were wax, and thus bring it home. On this day, however, she failed to effect this, try what she might, and she was obliged to return home empty-handed.

In the meanwhile, the sage, her husband, finding that his wife did not return as usual, learnt through his ‘wisdom sight’ what had happened, and ordered his son Parasurama to slay his sinful mother. Parasurama went towards the river accordingly, and, seeing his mother returning, aimed an arrow at her, which severed her head from her body, and also similarly severed, with its unspent force, the head of the chuckler woman who was coming immediately behind his mother.

Parasurama returned to his father without even noticing this accident, and when his father, pleased with his prompt obedience, offered him any boon, he prayed for the re-animation of his mother. Jamadhagni then gave him some holy water out of his vessel, and told him to put together the dismembered parts, and sprinkle some water over them. Parasurama went off in great delight and haste, and, as it was still dark and early in the morning, he wrongly put his mother's head on the chuckler woman's trunk, and sprinkled water on them. Then, seeing another head and another body lying close by, he thought that they belonged to the female slave whom he had unwittingly killed, and he put them also together, and re-animated them.
He was extremely vexed when he found out the mistakes he had committed, but, as there was no rectifying them without another double murder, he produced the two women before his father, and begged to be forgiven. The sage finally accepted the person with his late consort's head as his wife, and granted to the other woman the status of an inferior deity, in response to her prayers, and owing to her having his wife's body. This was the origin of Māthangi.

There are some permanent inām (rent-free) lands belonging to this shrine, and there is always a Madiga ‘vestal virgin’ known as Māthangi, who is the high priestess, or rather the embodied representative of the Brahman-chucker goddess, and who enjoys the fruits of the ināms. Māthangi is prohibited from marrying, and, when a Māthangi dies, her successor is chosen in the following manner. All the chuckler girls of the village, between the ages of eight and ten, who have not attained puberty, are assembled before the shrine, and the invoking hymns are chanted amid a flourish of trumpets, drums, and other accessories. The girl who becomes possessed - on whom the goddess descends - is the chosen vessel, and she is invested with the insignia of her office, a round sieve, a bunch of margosa (Melia Azadirachta) leaves, a snake-headed bamboo stick, a piece of cotton thread rope with some cowries (Cypraea moneta) shells strung on it, and a small vessel of kunkuma (coloured aniline powder). A vow of lifelong celibacy is also administered to her. Curiously enough, this shrine is venerated by all castes, from the Brahman downwards. We were informed that, at the time of worship, the chuckler priestess dances about in wild frenzy, and she is given toddy to drink, which she not infrequently spits on her devotees, and even Brahmans regard this as auspicious, and not in the least polluting.

We had the pleasure of witnessing a ‘possessed dance’ by the reigning Māthangi with her drummer in attendance. She is a chuckler woman, about thirty years of age, and, but for the insignia of her office, not in any way differing from the rest of her class. Though unmarried she had several children, but this was apparently no disqualification. We were standing before the shrine of the seven mothers when the drummer invoked the goddess by chanting a Telugu hymn, keeping time on his drum. The meaning of the hymn was to this effect, as far as we could make out:-

Sathya Surabesa Kona! Gowthama's Kamadhenu! the headless trunk in Sathya Surabesa Kona! your father Giri Rāzu Kamadēva Jamadhagni Mamuni beheaded the trunk; silently Jamadhagni cut off the arms; did you, the headless trunk in Kamadhenuvanam, the headless trunk of Jamadhagni, your father's golden sword, did you ask to be born a virgin in the snake pit?

While chanting the above, the drummer was dancing round and round the woman, and beating wildly on his drum. The woman began to tremble all over, and soon it was visible that the goddess had descended on her. Then the drummer, wilder and more frantic than ever, began to praise the goddess in these words :-

Are you wearing bells to your ankles, O mother? Are you wearing cowries, O mother? Dancing and singing, O mother! We pray to thee, O mother! Possessed and falling on the ground, I implore thee, O mother! O mother, who went to Delhi and Oruganti [i] with a sieve in the right-hand, with a wand in the left; with bells tinkling at her ankles, the mother went to Oruganti town, the mother went away.

During this chant, the woman vies with the drummer, and dances fiercely round and round, always facing him. Then comes the appeasing chant, which the drummer draws out in a quivering and solemn tone, and without dancing about:-

By the feet of the thirty-three crores, by the feet of the sixty crores, by the feet of the Dēvas, peace!

The woman then stands with closed eyes, panting for breath, and quite exhausted.

On ordinary days, the Māthangi goes about the villages, collecting the offerings of her devotees, and, we take it, she is never in much want. There are also local Māthangis in other villages, but they are all said to be subordinate to the Tudimilla woman, who is the high Pontiff of the institution. We were informed that there was an old palmyra-leaf manuscript in existence, describing the institution and the ceremonies (mostly tantric and phallic) in detail.'


[p. 305-07 (from Karnataka, but reaching Oragallu in Telangana and featuring Telugu toddy-drawers)]

Among the Mādīgas of Tumkur in Mysore, the Mātangis must apparently belong to one of two septs, Belliyoru or Malloru. The Mādiga Āsādis, who are males, have to go through an initiation ceremony very similar to that of the Mātangi. But a necklet of pebbles is substituted for the bottu, and the Vakkaliga priest touches the novice's shoulders with flowers, turmeric powder, and kunkumam. The Āsādis are musicians who sing songs and recite stories about Ellamma. They play on a musical instrument called chaudike, which is a combination of a drum and stringed instrument. [j] The Mātangis and Āsādis, both being dedicated to Ellamma, are eminently qualified to remove pollution for many castes who are Ellamma Vokkalu or followers of Ellamma. A lotus device, or
figures of Pothu Raja and Mātangi, are drawn on the ground, after it has been cleansed with cow-dung. The Mātangi, with her insignia, sits in the centre of the device, and the Āsādis, sitting close by, sing the praises of Ellamma to the accompaniment of the chaudike. The Mātangis and Āsādis then drink toddy, and go about the house, wherein the former sprinkle toddy with the margosa twig. Sometimes they pour some of the toddy into their mouths, and spit it out all over the house. The pot, in which the toddy is placed, is, in some places called pallaki (palanquin).

The Āsādis’ version of the story of Ellammā is as follows. She is the goddess for all, and is present in the tongues of all except dumb people, because they have to pronounce the syllable elli (where) whenever they ask a question containing the word where. She is a mysterious being, who often exhibits herself in the form of light or flames. She is the cause of the universe, and the one Sakthi in existence thereon. She is supposed to be the daughter of Girirāja Mūni and Javanikadēvi, and the wife of Jamadhagni Rishi. Her son is Parusurāma, carrying a plough. The town where she lives has three names, Jambupuri, Isampuri, and Vijayanagara, has eighty-seven gates, and is fortified by seven walls. She is believed to have for her dress all kinds of snakes. Several groves of margosa trees are said to flourish in her vicinity. She is worshipped under many names, and has become Lakshmi, Gauramma, and Saraswati in Brāhman houses, or Akkumari in Vakkaliga houses. To the Īdīgas she is Gatabaghya Lakshmi, to the Kurubas Ganga Mari, to the Oddes Peddamma and Chinnamma, and so on.

She is said to have proceeded on a certain day to the town of Oragallu, accompanied by Jana Mātangi. On the way thither, the soles of Mātangi’s feet blistered, and she sat down with Ellammā beneath a margosa tree. After resting a short time Mātangi asked Ellamma's permission to go to a neighbouring Īdiga (Telugu toddy-drawer), and get some toddy to drink. Ellamma objected, as the Īdiga Gauda was a Lingayat, and Mātangi would be compelled to wear the lingam. When Mātangi persisted, Ellamma transformed herself into an ant-hill, and Mātangi, in the guise of a young woman, went to the Īdiga Gauda with her cane (Jogi kolu) and basket, and asked for toddy. The Gauda became angry, and, tying her to a date-palm (Phoenix sylvestris), beat her, and gave her cane and basket to his groom. Mātangi was further ill-treated by the Gauda and his wives, but escaped, and went to the Gauda's brother, who treated her kindly, and offered her toddy, of which he had sixty loads on bullocks. All this he poured into the shell of a margosa fruit which Mātangi held in her hand, and yet it was not filled. Eventually the toddy extracted from a few palms was brought, and the shell became full. So pleased was Mātangi with the Īdiga's treatment of her, that she blessed him, and instructed him to leave three date-palms untapped as Basavi trees in every grove.

She then returned to Ellammā, and it was resolved to afflict the Gauda who had treated her badly with all kinds of diseases. Still disguised as a young woman, she went to him with sweet-smelling powders, which he purchased for a large sum of money. But, when he used them, he became afflicted with manifold diseases, including small-pox, measles, cancer, asthma, gout, rheumatism, abscesses, and bed-sores. Mātangi then appeared before him as an old fortune-teller woman, whom the Īdiga consulted, and doing as he was told by her, was cured. Subsequently, learning that all his misfortunes were due to his want of respect to Mātangi, he became one of Ellammā's Vokkalu.[k]  

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A survey of deities represented in the Madiga households of a somewhat isolated village in Mahbubnagar district in the mid-1960s showed the close but not exclusive relationship of Madigas with Yellamma. She was found in 32 of the 33 households, as well as in all the other four castes surveyed: Barbers 14/14, Farmers 9/10, Weavers 28/31 and Washermen 19/27. ‘Jamavanthudu, god of the Leatherworkers’, had a small shrine in their own section of the village but, unlike Madel of the Washermen, another male deity, was not to be found within homes. Four village goddesses were also popular in Madiga's households: Balamma (28), Maicamma (19), Poshamma (12) and Pinnamma (6). Five also had Venkatesvarudu, the only Brahminical deity represented (Hiebert 1971, pp 135-36).
In contrast, from Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh, Mathamma is reported as the Madiga caste goddess, with a temple for her constructed by a local mica mine owner, a Reddy. When such goddesses are worshipped, 'usually on different dates and years, no other caste participates. The object of worship in each case is to seek the benevolence of the goddess, protecting them from diseases and misfortunes and promoting their welfare.' Sriramanavami is celebrated by each of the three dalit castes present, Madigas, Malas and Vetti Malas, but on different dates (Sudhakar Rao 1998, p. 29).