

# Women in Hydromythology: A Discourse on the Representation of Tradition and Counter Tradition in South Indian Folklore

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**Abstract:** By discussing the structural analysis of the narrative of Musamma tradition, this article attempts to describe the socio-cultural and psychological aspects of narrative and show the existence of women in society who offer stubborn resistance to the long cherished value system besides the women who abide the rules of the male dominated society. This further tries to examine how the surface structure and deep structure of the tale unfold the voice of the marginalised challenging the hegemony of the dominant traditions, which represent their 'selves' as righteous and the 'others' as unrighteous or inferior.

Water, as a source of life, figures prominently in expressive cultures around the world, more so in tropical countries like India. Being one among the five sacred elements of the Universe, water is personified and venerated as goddess Ganga in the Indian pantheon<sup>1</sup>. In other words, the word 'Ganga' is used as a synonym for waters. Mostly, all religious behaviour begins and ends with a sacred/ auspicious bath (*mangala snana*) in holy waters/rivers (*tirtha snana*). Water is the medium through which all purificatory (*suddhi*) rituals associated with sacred chanting (*punya vacanas*) takes place. The sacred and secular aspects of human life are intrinsically knitted to water and are overtly expressed both in elite and folk traditions of people across the cultures, especially in the Indian situation. Indian mythology portrays water as a mediator between the gods and humans and also between celestial and terrestrial domains. On the other hand, water is also represented ambivalently, on one side as a benefactor/protector, on the other, as malicious and wretched, causing harm to people. Hence, in order to emphasise the sacro-sanctity of waters, several myths, legends and tales are developed and diffused forming a category called hydro mythology.

Interestingly, femininity is attributed to rivers and rivulets, and they are personified as consorts and goddesses in Hindu mythology. Folk tradition is no exception to this belief. Water as a goddess is always depicted here as a force to suppress the dominance and streamline the anarchies caused due to imbalances. Water and woman are homologised since they both are revered as the source of sustenance to life and therefore, in folk belief, they are quite often represented as inseparable. In the same way as water is ambivalently represented, women are also depicted as the bearers of conformist/normative traditions and rebellious/seditious/mutinuous counter tradition in the folktales connected with water resources. The tales referring to women's sacrifices for protecting water resources are abundant in India and one such folktale (Telugu) from Andhra Pradesh is analysed in this paper. The narrative under study represents both the waters and the women operating ambivalently in society, thereby depicting the prevalence of tradition and counter traditions functioning dialectically to gain supremacy of one over the other, at the same time contributing to the endurance of society, which is nothing but the amalgamation of different walks of folklife.

The tale of Musalamma is well known in the Rayalasila region of Andhra Pradesh in South India. Rayalasila, corresponding to the present districts of Cuddapah, Kurnool, Chittoor and Ananthapur, is a semi-arid region (Spate *et. al.*: 1967-76). The agricultural economy of this region is based chiefly on tank irrigation, an essential feature of this semi-arid belt or dry zone (Washbrook, 1976; Subrahmanyam 1968, Sudhakar Reddy 1986:11-52). Hence, tank construction and maintenance were the two major activities given due priority by both the rulers and the ruled (Venkataramanayya 1935; Satyannarayana 1983:24-36; 336-346; Malhotra 1975:6; Henderson 1853; Francis 1916:90). Interestingly, as cited above, a great deal of folklore has developed in the dry zones related to tank constructions. More specifically, folklore abounds with examples of the sacrifices of females for the cause of maintaining water resources like tanks, wells and canals for the well-being of the people in the village. It seems that where there is a scarcity of water, sanctity is attached to the water resources, rituals are conducted and folk narratives are created to perpetuate the practice of beliefs in the society<sup>2</sup>. Attribution of sanctity and historicity to beliefs and ritual practices for gaining popularity, and thereby legitimacy, is not uncommon in tradition. The belief of folks connected with water resources added further to the growth of different genres of folklore to the category of hydro mythology, a cultural ecotype. An ecotype is a native expressive form, be it a tale or a song or for that matter, any genre that is being fashioned in the light of the geography, environment and tradition of the landscape in which it is formed and widely prevalent. The folk narrative pursued in this paper is an example for such a cultural ecotype that reflects the worldview and the environment of the people of the dry zones.

The lore that deals with female sacrifice in Andhra Pradesh is different from that of the western countries, like Balkan States (Dundes 1989:159-168; Subotik 1932, Kotur 1977:181,184-5; Zimmerman 1974:371-380; Gaster 1984: 110-138; 1950: 4-5) not only in the content but also in form<sup>3</sup>. Geographical and cultural factors make their imprint on the content of the tale in the Balkan States. The dry zone economy and the local cultural systems of the Rayalasila region influenced the sacrifice/immolation of Musamma, performed wilfully, for the cause of hydraulic systems, whereas in the Balkan States, female sacrifice is associated with non-hydraulic constructions like palaces or bridges and is made without the knowledge of the victim<sup>4</sup> (Campbell 1984:52-66; 106-110; Gopalakrishna Sarma, 1992; Hakari 1985:241-63; Varyas 1967:2201; Dundes 1989:165, f.n.25). The generic form is also different in these two regions. In Andhra Pradesh, it is in the form of prose narrative while in the Balkan states, it is a ballad (Varyas 1967:174-177; Satyanarayana 1983:55; Dundes 1989:153)<sup>5</sup>.

The Musamma tradition is also considered to be a legend and is believed by the local people that it happened in the Rayalasila region during the rule of the Vijayanagara dynasty (c A.D.1336-1650)<sup>6</sup>. Tradition connects this narrative to a tank in village *Bukkarayasamudram*, named after the king Bukkaraya I (A.D.1336-1343) the Vijayanagara king in Ananthapur district. However, there is no evidence to associate Musamma, the immolator, with the construction of *Bukkarayasamudram* tank; the tank bund is well known as *Musammakatta*. Generally, places are called by the proper names mentioned in the legends (*sthalapurans*), but in this case it is named after Ananta, the wife of a Bukkaraya<sup>7</sup>. Hence, Musamma tradition cannot be considered as *sthalapuranam*. But folk belief at the same time is both contradictory and complementary to one another. It depicts water firstly as malicious causing harm to the people with its overflow. Later on, the water turns benevolent after the sacrifice of a virtuous woman who, after her death, becomes even more beneficial to society.

The tale represents two women, operating dialectically in two opposite directions within the given social value system, thereby representing tradition and counter tradition. The former depicts a woman who gives up her life and family for the sake of people and society, representing the personification of ideal Indian womanhood, whereas the latter stands for a woman who questions, counters and even rebukes the normative world for the sake of her 'self' and well-being, without any concern for the good or the bad of the society in which she lives.

Since Anti Arne's and Stith Thompson (1961) do not mention any female sacrifice of this kind (an intermediary genre), I could not assign any number to it. But the motif Index of Folk Literature of Stith Thompson (1957) refers to sacrifice<sup>8</sup> and adultery<sup>9</sup> motifs in various folktales, which are also found in this narrative.

The paper is divided into three sections; Section A deals with the narrative of Musamma tradition. Section B discusses in detail the structural analysis of the narrative. Section C describes the socio-cultural and psychological aspects of narrative, which further shows the existence of women in society who offer stubborn resistance to the long cherished value system besides the women who abide rules of the male dominated society.

## Section A

I have collected this tale from an old woman of about seventy years. Her name is Narayanavva (65) and she hails from the peasant community. She seems to be an active tradition bearer since she performed to me many tales, proverbs, jokes, riddles etc. One of the narratives she performed was that of Musamma. The following account is an English translation of the narrative.

*Once there was a remote village (kugrama) in Rayalasila region. The village headman (grama pedda) was Peddireddi, a rich landlord. He had more concern for his villagers than for his own family members. He had three sons and all of them were married. Of all, the third son was very dynamic and associated himself with his father in almost all the affairs of the village and shared the fortunes and miseries of the villagers. People called him pious (dharmikudu) and good (manchivadu). His wife Musamma was highly virtuous. She was praised for having all the essential qualities of an ideal daughter-in-law. She not only maintained cordial relations with her in-laws but also performed by words, thoughts and deeds all the duties of a good housewife.*

*In that village, there was big tank, which had been serving the needs of thousands of people in and around several nearby villages<sup>10</sup>. It so happened that once a crack developed in the tank bund. Then Peddireddi took over the responsibility to get it repaired since he was the head of the village. For this, he employed several men and exhausted material resources. His third son supervised the repair work. The labourers cemented the crack with lime and brick. To their surprise, it collapsed within no time. They built it three times, but all three times it collapsed. The labourers and the son went to Peddireddi and reported the matter. Peddireddi rushed to the spot and told them,*

*“Now, fill the crack with lime and bricks in my presence. I will see how it happens.”*

*The labourers did so but again it collapsed. They repeated it thrice. All the times it collapsed. Water began to ooze continuously from the crack. Added to this, suddenly a heavy downpour started, aggravating the situation. The tank was about to overflow, further worsening the situation. The masons got worried and requested him,*

*“Lord (swami), see to an alternative for its repair. If the tank bund breaks, many people will lose their lives due to flooding and afterwards, people have to die for lack of water. Kindly get it done immediately.”*

*Peddireddi called for specialized craftsmen for repair work but in vain. The crack in the bund began to widen further. Peddireddi and his son stayed there day and night to watch the situation. But there was no improvement. He was very depressed with the misfortune. When he went to the fields for night-watching along with his men that night, he was sleeping on a manche, (a thatched bed)<sup>11</sup> (Brown 1852:7; Krishnamurthy 1974:145,213,282), when he had a dream<sup>12</sup>. In that dream, the goddess Ganga appeared before him and asked,*

*“Why are you so worried? What is the matter that makes you sad?”*

*Peddireddi told her, “The bund of tank in our village fissured and water is about to fall on the villagers. Despite the efforts of skilled engineers and labourers, the crack is not repaired. They fill the crack with lime and stones, but it collapses. Heavy down-pour has started, further deteriorating the situation. If the tank bund bursts, several villages will be drowned. The loss of lives cannot be estimated. I am bothered much about the safety of the people. Kindly suggest a way to come out of this grave danger?”*

*The goddess replied, “If you are so concerned with the problem, there is only one way left to you. Why don't you keep one of your daughters-in-law as a substitute for stones to fill the crack and build the wall around her? If you do this, the wall will not collapse and you and your people will be safe.”*

*Telling this the goddess disappeared. Peddireddi could not sleep for the rest of the night. He lost his mental peace. He could not come to a conclusion. He decided to discuss the matter and finalise the issue. He went home and assembled his sons.*

*He told them, “Dear sons, last night I had a dream. In that dream, goddess Ganga appeared and asked the reason for my worry. I narrated the entire episode to her. She suggested an alternative.” He stopped for a while and looked into the faces of his sons. They were anxious to listen to him. Again Peddireddi started narrating, “The goddess told me to substitute one of my daughters-in-law for stones to fill the crack and build the wall around her. Only then, the construction will prevail and the danger will be out. Kindly think over the matter and decide for yourself”.*

*The words of the father shook the family and the sons were left shocked. The two eldest sons openly refused to sacrifice their wives. But the third son readily agreed. He went to his wife and explained, “You already know about the break of the tank bund and the expected danger from it. Last night my father had a dream. In that dream, goddess Ganga suggested that he sacrifice one of his daughters-in-law to bury in the crack of the tank and built the wall around her so that the construction does not collapse. My elder brothers have refused to do it. Now the protection of the villagers is left on our shoulders. What would you like to do? Suggest a way.” His wife Musamma replied with a smile, “I will share your responsibility.”*

*Musamma walked to the spot where the work was going on. She put on new clothes and ornaments. Several people accompanied her with pomp and glory. She broke a coconut and went into the waters. She stood in the break of the bund and requested her husband with folded hands and closed eyes, "Build a wall around me and save the people". But her husband hesitated to do it since he could not bury his wife alive. He cried to himself, "I married Musamma by tying a tali (sacred thread) in the presence of people and the witness of the sacred fire (agnihotram) and other panchabhutas (five sacred elements of nature: fire, water, air, sky and earth) and brought her home promising that I would not leave her in life and death. How can I take back my words"? But when he thought of the enormous loss of lives and the loss of property to the villages, his heart hardened and he abided to the responsibility rather than to his own family ties. Before Musamma was buried, she asked him, "Kindly erect a shrine named after me and conduct regular worship and annual festivities to it. I will be the presiding goddess and will look after the welfare of the village and act as a judge to the villagers." He readily accepted and built a wall around her. To the surprise of the people, the construction did not collapse and the water stopped overflowing.*

When the narrator Nararayanavva was narrating, her daughter, Ravanamma (50) interfered and told me that there is another version of this tale. In her version, she says that the dream came to the son.

*In the dream, the goddess Ganga told him, "Offer your virtuous wife Musamma as naivedyam (sacred offering) to me. Then I will see that the construction does not collapse and the crack is repaired properly." Then the son went to his father and reported the matter to him. The father said, "I cannot advise you in this regard. Resolve by yourself whether to sacrifice her or not". Then the son told his wife, "My dear wife, I had a dream last night. In it, goddess Ganga asked me to offer you as naivedyam to her and keep you in the fissure of the tank bund and build a wall around you. I cannot sacrifice you since you are my better half. Kindly escape from this place and run as far as possible from here." She did not give him any answer, but kept smiling. On the next day, when her husband and father-in-law went to the tank bund for supervision, she went there to serve meals to them. When they were busy eating food, she said, "Oh, I forgot to bring the water, now I will get it from the tank". On the pretext of fetching water, Musamma took a jar and rushed to the bund and fixed herself in the crack. By the time her husband and father-in-law reached the spot, she was half buried and asked them to build a wall around her with brick and lime. She then asked her husband, "Kindly build a temple on my name after the wall is built."*

*On the tank bund, a temple of Musamma was constructed where regular worship was held and the villagers conducted annual festivals there with utmost devotion. The front hall (mukhamandapa) of the temple became the seat of all the administrative affairs of the village (grama vyavaharalu). The village head solved the disputes of the villagers in the temple and executed punishments only after*

*the goddess had ratified the judgments. This procedure continued for a long time, and peace and order prevailed everywhere in the village. The goddess kept her word by looking after the welfare of the people.*

*One day, a husband brought his wife to the temple for trial as she was caught red-handed while committing adultery<sup>13</sup>. The headman heard her case. When the guilty is asked for an explanation, she boldly said, "I am an innocent housewife. I do not know anything. I do not know anybody except my husband." In spite of all her pretensions, the case is proved. The headman declared, "This disloyal housewife should be whipped one thousand times by her husband before the public." The goddess Musamma ratified the punishment prescribed by the judge by uttering, "Yes" (aunu), implying that the judgment is right. Immediately, the infidel woman grew wild and began to abuse the goddess, "Even after being buried by your husband, have you not become wise? Is not your pride quelled? Are you not ashamed of taking sides with men even after being humiliated in hard stones and chilled waters? Who knows for what reason you are petrified? If you are a real chaste woman (pativrata), you shut your mouth. In order to exalt your chastity, is it good on your part to question the chastity of the other women and destroy their families? Are you a benevolent or malignant deity of our village? Since your husband punished you, you want the others also to be punished by their husbands. You burn your eyes if a couple lives together. Somehow you want to separate them. Have you fixed your eyes on my husband"? Thus the adulteress woman not only talked ill about the goddess, the deified Musamma, but also questioned her fidelity. The judge and the villagers were shocked by her words. The judge reprimanded her and further begged the pardon of the goddess. There was no reply. The adulteress victoriously laughed at the villagers and shouted to the peak of her voice, "See, till date you all considered Musamma as a goddess who is virtually acting as a judge of your village. But such a great woman who has been winning the laurels of the public is now bent before me. If my words are untrue, why should she be silent? She can prove her chastity against my accusation. Why has she lost her voice? If she were really for the people, she would have answered my questions. She took this guise only for her 'self-exaltation' and for her family prestige. In order to establish her chastity, she became silent. Had she really possessed any concern for the welfare of the people, she would not have ignored my talk and still continued to be 'an answering goddess'. Now it is for you to determine what is what and who is greater. Tell me whether Musamma stands for herself or for the people?, Who is maha pativrata (most chaste lady)? Is it I or Musamma?"*

## **Section B**

Like the other folk narratives, the tradition of Musamma contains the characters that are pertinent to this intermediary generic form. Based on the studies of Alan Dundes (1976: 75-93; 1964; 1979; 1980; 1989) Elliot Oring (1986:1-44,121-146; 1989: 1-20,197-236), Martha W. Beckwith (1986:31), Jecottel

(1899,1901), Theodre Gaster (1984:5-290), Axel Orlic (1984:129-141) and William Basom (1984:5-29), some specific features with special reference to the narrative under study are analysed here.

- Folk tale is a narrative in which events are related and received by the narrator and the audience as a fiction or fantasy. The legend is based on the element of belief and dimension of time (Dundes 1979:164). This narrative has the character of both the folktale and the legend.
- As delineated in the previous pages, the plot or the theme precedes in a logical sequence of the events. Each event in the tale logically conditions the event that follows. The events starting from the dream of Peddireddy till the deification of his daughter-in-law Musamma are logically knit together.
- Peddireddy's getting a message in his dream, the relevance of Musamma's sacrifice for the cause of the tank bund, though logical in their value in terms of tale, pragmatically bear no value.
- Both folktales and legends do not place emphasis on character development. Musamma, the heroine of the tale, is understood as *pativrata* only through her acts and less importance is given to the characterization of her role.
- The tale itself demonstrates that its climax is the logical result of the sequence of the episode. The range of conclusions is finite and predictable, because the events described permit only limited logical sequences of cause and effect.
- Throughout the narrative, from the beginning to the end, Musamma dominates all the characters in Move A. The adulteress dominates all in Move B, a typical feature of the folktales.
- The action of the folktale is often stereotyped and repetitive. Generally, in literature, there are many means of producing emphasis, other than repetition. But in the verbal art forms such as tales, the descriptions are too brief to serve as effective means of emphasis. So repetition of the same act or word is the only alternative to emphasise the significance of any event. In the tale of Musamma, masons repeated the act of filling the break in the tank bund three times. Here the three number, a typical motif of folk narratives, is a stereotype (Dundes 1968:401-424; Beck 1982; 1986:133-4, fn.4). The third son and third daughter-in-law are depicted as righteous persons as in the other folk narratives, but the significant feature are the prevalence of the characters of legend in this oral narrative (Dundes 1979:163-176; Basom 1984:5-29). Axel Orlic holds the view that in the legends (1984:132), the revenge of the dead or punishment of the villain is appeared to be the principal

action. The ending takes the form of a logically established continuation of the plot, the ghost in the ruined caste, the perennial return of the victim and so on. In this narrative, Musamma, who was the victim of the sacrifice, reappears several times as deified spirit (super organic being), reacts to human affairs (organic being) and suddenly becomes silent. The relation and discourse between super-organic (goddess Ganga) and organic (father-in-law/son), inorganic (crack in the tank bund) and organic (crack filled by live-burial of Musamma) in Move A and the super organic (Musamma after deification) and organic (adulteress) in the Move B of this narrative is significant of its own kind and hence, an intermediary genre between a legend and tale.

- Generally, folktales are two dimensional in nature and have only two characters forming a 'dyad' interacting in any particular scene. The tale abides 'the law of two to a scene' of Axel Orlic, which states that 'two' is the maximum number of characters who appear at one time. The narrative of Musamma had a 'two move structure' with many 'social dyads'. A social dyad involves any two-story characters taken as a pair and it makes that relationship a primary unit of study. Since 'multiple dyads' commonly occur, within this story, coding for all dyads presence is desirable.

The significance of a dyad can be defined by its frequency of occurrence in the story. In the light of classification of Brenda E.F.Breck (1986:81-82), the following dyads are identified, shown in the following Table I.

**Table: I, Nature of Dyads:**

<b>Kin Dyads</b>	<b>Non-Kin Dyads</b>
Father/son	Father/Goddess Ganga
Father-in-law/daughter/in-law; Son/daughter-in-law; Husband/wife	Son/goddess Ganga; Villagers/Musamma Deified Musamma/judge Judge/adulteress, Adulteress/ Villagers

From the above, Table No I, it is observed in the narrative, that the dyads of kin and non-kin, women characters dominate. Out of eleven dyads, ten contain female characters. The frequent occurrences of female characters in the dyads make it clear that it is a 'woman-centred tale' in which almost all characters in the tale revolve round the women.

The events in the two-move structure of the tale are displayed. Though both the moves contain equal elements, they are asymmetrical in structure and also in content. In terms of discussion of A.K. Ramanujan (1982: 267,

225-75; 1986:39), the first move starts in *akam* (domestic) and ends in *puram* (public).

When Propp's (1958:18) morphological framework is applied to the structure of the tale, the asymmetry between Move A and Move B are evident, which is shown in the following Table. II

**Table II: Schematisation of Moves in the Tale:**

MOVE 'A'	MOVE 'B'
1. The village head has three sons.	1. Musalamma as a deity helps the villagers in setting the disputes and executing law and order.
2. The third daughter-in-law is highly virtuous	2. The judge places the adulteress woman on trail.
3. Crack appears in the tank bund.	3. The judge proves the guilt of the adulteress and declares the punishment.
4. The village (version 1) and the third son (version 2) get the suggestion from the goddess Ganga in dream regarding the remedy for tank repair.	4. Goddess Musalamma ratifies the punishment.
5. Musalamma sacrifices her life for the cause of filling the crack in the tank bund.	5. The adulteress woman abuses the goddess Musalamma.
6. Musalamma asks for the construction of a temple in her memory after her sacrifice.	6. The Goddess shuts her voice
7. Musalamma is deified after her sacrifice.	7. The adulteress victoriously questions the chastity of Musalamma and also the faith of villagers towards the goddess.

The function of the motifeme slots (Kenneth Pike: 1954-56; Dundes 1965: 06 –18; 1984:23-26) in Move A suggests that the first part of the tale is concerned with disequilibrium to equilibrium (Levi-Strauss 1960:149) and Alan Dundes (1961:195; 1964:206-18) termed it as lack and lack liquidated in his application of Propp-Pike structural model to North American Indian Folktales. Disequilibrium or lack (Propp function 19) means a state where something lost or stolen is found.

In this folk narrative, Move A suggests two major motifemes. They are water breaking the tank, causing perpetual loss of water (L) and Musalamma, sacrificing herself, and preventing the water from flowing out (LL).

Move B seems to be entirely different from Move A. It is the 'woman versus woman allo-motif, which is strongly significant. The move does not

contain two motifs, i.e. lack and lack liquidated formula as in the Move A. Moreover, move B ends with a question similar to that of a riddle. Even the content is strikingly different in the sense that Levi Strauss' (1976a; 1976, b: 15) binary opposites seem to be vital in the social value system as revealed through the perceptions of both the women.<sup>14</sup> The two-move structure signifies two levels of value systems that represent the temporal and spatial reality of family woman: Move A shows Musamma as a virtuous, obedient and faithful woman who sacrifices her life for a noble cause and attains divinity. Move B shows the antipathy of Musamma over the differential value system (when questioned by unchaste woman) prevalent in the society. Although Move A and Move B appear to be antithetical to one another; at a deeper level they are interrelated. The latter is an offshoot and reaction of the former. The interpretation of the moves is discussed in detail in the next section.

### Section C

The surface structure of the story projects Musamma as a *pativrata* (chaste woman) and her immolation as a divine act performed for the cause of the village welfare. However, the deep structure of the narrative culturally communicates the contrasting meanings. A.K. Ramanujan (1992:267) holds that the structures are not meanings, but carry meanings, signifiers that are rendered into signs by the given culture (in space, time and society). Even the deepest structures have to be interpreted culturally or independently depending upon the point of view.<sup>15</sup>

The first move in the tale shows a sequence of events that leads to the sacrifice of Musamma. The events in a metaphorical and symbolic way represent the ideal role of woman in society. Expectations of society from a woman in the traditional patriarchal framework are well portrayed. During the time of gender construction, the girl child acquires pre-knowledge of her rights and responsibilities and roles and relations to be observed at both the natal as well as in-law's homes and gets tuned in such a way that the girls themselves submit to the tradition in which they are born and brought up<sup>16</sup>. In the tale, Musamma accomplished her role and maintained her gender relations as a good daughter-in-law and a devoted housewife and functioned well up to the satisfaction of everybody in her family. The 'walling motif' though suggesting 'sacrifice' at the surface level, in the deep structure, it symbolically and metaphorically implies the 'marriage institution'<sup>17</sup>. The building of a wall around Musamma in the narrative is done by none other than her own husband, similar to the '*tali*'<sup>18</sup> in the Hindu marriage. Once the *tali* is tied, the woman ideally loses her independent and natal identity and ceases to function according to her own whims and fancies. Preferably, she should think and act from the other's perspective only. Ideally, she is expected to remain devoted to the desires of

her husband and her in-laws. Further, she is supposed to serve them voluntarily by words, deeds and thoughts. Hence, the walling metaphorically refers to the complete and ultimate surrender of the wife to the institution of marriage.

The 'deep structure' of the tale also indicates the nature of exogamous matrimonial relations, where the bride of a village comes to live with the bridegroom of a different village. She is made to act according to the aspirations and values of the family (village) in which she has come to live in. Otherwise, she may become the cause of tensions and splits in the family. In the narrative, the husband clearly tells his wife Musamma about the incoming danger to their village due to the fissure in the tank bund and also enlightens the only way to solve it, but he does not directly ask her to offer herself in self-sacrifice. But, as an ideal better half she understands the implied meaning of his talk and behaves accordingly, up to his expectations.

In an ideal patriarchal society, when once the husband is mentally set to give up his wife for some or the other cause, be it domestic or philanthropic, she feels that there may not be any meaning in her survival. Her endurance without the endorsement of her husband makes her dead psychologically. In this state of mind, physical immolation does not hurt her any more and hence she gets ready for leaving the mundane world. The character of Musamma is ideally depicted so as to perpetuate the peace and prosperity in the family and, in a broader sense, the village. By performing self-sacrifice, she not only upheld the ego of her husband and prestige of her in-laws and the village, but also the stature of her parents<sup>19</sup>. She navigated between the domestic to the public realm, thereby depicting her transcendence from mortal to immortal endurance. She became a goddess since her realm of passion was extended beyond the selfish realm of her family i.e., to the entire society of which she herself was a part and parcel. She showed her steadfast loyalty to the society even after her death by looking after the ethical issues and jurisprudence of the village. Musamma's complete surrender and submission to the symbolic fashion of 'walling' gave her the status of goddess in the village.<sup>20</sup>

The second move is asymmetrical and antithetical to the first move in the deep structure. Obviously, a non-conformist being always questions the value system and the worldview of the traditional society. In this context, for the adulteress, the concept of *pativrata* (chastity) is a norm of *super ego* that directs and regulates the female by the male dominated society. For her, *id* is a reality. Since her *ego* is being directed and dominated by the *id* she refuses to be judged by the '*super ego*' of the male dominated society. In the struggle between the *id* and *super ego*, in her, the former superseded the latter and hence she functioned according to its 'pleasure principle', which can be understood as a demand to take care of needs immediately. Hence, she can talk in the way she wants and act in the pattern she likes having no

regard for age-old traditions and values; she even wounds the feelings of the deified Musamma and makes her keep quiet, for her immediate need was to disprove her guilt. Her worldview appears to be antithetical to that of the traditional woman who always functions in the society guided by her *super ego*, i.e. in the way the dominant culture expects her to be. The psyche of such a virtuous woman would always function at ideal levels, catering to the needs of the 'larger whole', the community or village, for the very nature of the *super ego* is to find solutions for problems created by *id* and *ego*.

Since Musamma is concerned for the entire populace in the village, but not for her own sake, she feels the flood and break in the bund as burning problems that devastate the entire settlement. As a chaste woman, her *super ego* tunes her *self* or *ego* to sacrifice her for the noble cause as a solution to the life problem of the village. But the antagonistic woman operates in the manner she desires to be, not as per the expectations of the society, the *super ego*. She behaves in the way she wants, not according to the descriptions and prescriptions of the 'ideal' society. Hence, she does not even accept the judgment given by a male judge upon her guilt. She is antagonistic to traditional value systems. The fact that Musamma keeps silent and refuses to respond further (to the accusation of the adulteress) reflects the binary opposition in the female value system between the chaste and those of easy virtue. The folktale apparently conveys through the character of Musamma the virtues a woman should possess.<sup>21</sup> The adulterous woman represents the worldview of a non-conformist, which is also a part of the entire society.

In other words, conformists and non-conformists are two sides of a society, the obverse and reverse sides of which are spatio-temporally dynamic in nature. Both the ideologies go hand in hand in the same society with mutual ridicules and tensions. Normally, in any society when norms are fixed and rules are imposed sternly, resistance develops. As a result, counter ideologies emanate for retaliating the hegemonic traditions. In a nutshell, counter traditions evolve in response to (hegemonic) traditions. The walling motif, that signifier of 'chastity' (*pativratiya*) of Musamma, which is being 'signified' in her acts of jurisprudence, were being questioned and challenged by the adulterous woman. For her, 'chastity' is an ideal and hence difficult to be maintained by everybody in society due to variations in psychosomatic constitutions. She does not want to be punished by such an 'idealist' jury and thus uses the same ideal of 'chastity' as a weapon to snub the 'tradition' and establish 'counter tradition' for the time being. She says if the goddess (when she was alive) were really a chaste woman, she would definitely shut her mouth. The adulteress keeps the goddess in a dilemma. If the goddess opens her mouth, she will herself be proof of not being a chaste woman. There will not be any meaning for her sacrifice and also her services to the society until that date. She does not want to lose her integrity before

a woman whom she considers a replica of an anti-normative society. The goddess understands the dynamics of virtue and vice in society and hence becomes voiceless. The adulteress exploits the mind of the goddess and safely plays the trick, leaving the public in a predicament about whom to believe and whom to deny.

This situation releases the tension of the adulteress and at the same time leaves the people to think in the way they prefer to act. The narrator of the tale told me in the end that, since the values are changed, the climate has also changed. She attributes all vagaries in climate like untimely rains, floods, famines, earthquakes etc, to unruliness in virtues and domination of easy values in human life. In this tale, the narrator homologised both the climatic fluctuations in nature and gender anarchy in society. Women and water in a way are analogous to one another, since water takes the form of the container and always flows down as indicated by the symbol of a 'triangle pointing downwards', which is also a sign for femininity. In the same way as different types of landscapes alter the course of water into different forms like rivers/lakes/ponds/waterfalls; multicultural societies pattern women with multiple mindsets, having either idyllic or counter ideologies. Water, still, or flowing calmly in rivers and ponds designates contentment and flood waters/ waterfalls imply disgruntlement/ restlessness. The former type of water is beneficial to living beings whereas the latter category dismantles life and peace. Hence, women like Musamma can be compared to the beneficial waters and ultimately advantageous to society whereas the second woman in the tale is the personification of floodwaters which causes more danger than help. In the same way as floodwaters devastate lives indiscriminately; the thoughtless/self-centred expressive behaviour affects the positive tendencies in society. Likewise, the self-protective measure taken by the second woman in the tale not only snubs perpetually the voice of the deified woman but also tries to legitimise the existence of women with defiant mindsets. However, the teller of the tale appears to correlate the truth and prosperity of society with the establishment of ideal and virtuous people, especially women like Musamma, who are the bearers of tradition and the source of life of human kind.

To sum up, the Musamma tradition is an ecotype, a native expressive narrative reflecting the environment and culture in which it is formed, transformed and transmitted to different regions having similar eco systems. This motif became popular in the dry zones of Andhra Pradesh. It is an intermediary genre between a legend and a folktale. The narrative has a two- move structure in which Move A and Move B are contradictory and complementary to each other. While move A falls under the category of "Prop and Kenneth Pike" structural model, move B displays the binary opposite structure of Levi-Strauss. When the structures and functions are interpreted from socio-cultural and psychological perspectives<sup>22</sup>, two levels

(surface and deep) of operation within a given value system are evident, but operating in relation to one another. Tradition and counter tradition though apparently binary in their relationship, they are not isolates. The 'difference' between these two women, representing two diverse systems, can be interpreted in terms of the cultural meanings of the roles they enact in their power domains to perceive an inherent relationship that nourishes both traditions to flourish in the society. Both the traditions are dynamic, operating in the matrix of power/resistance, sexuality and gender relations. Power/resistance is vital to the gender roles. Changes in gender roles would affect their power domains and *vice-versa*. The tradition and counter tradition represented by people existing in different gender/power relations becomes dominant and recessive in different cultural contexts. When the 'difference', which forms the basis for the sustenance and liveliness of different traditions and associated expressive behaviour in society, is deconstructed, it demystifies their cultural texts, whether oral/written/visual/aural, and reveals its internal, arbitrary hierarchies and presuppositions. It lays out the flaws and the latent metaphysical structures of a text.

A deconstructive reading of the text seeks to discover its ambivalence, blindness and logocentricity. (Johnson 1980: 5). Instead of sorting out the central arguments of a text, deconstruction examines the margins (Hoy 1985:44) and penetrates to the very core of the text and examines what it represses and how it is caught in the contradictions and inconsistencies. A deconstruction approach examines what is left out of a text, what is unnamed, what is excluded and what is concealed. But the goal is to do more than overrun oppositions, but this would permit new hierarchies to be reappropriated (Derrida 1981: 59). It aims to transport a text – transforming and redefining it — while simultaneously operating within the deconstructed text itself. It attempts to undo, reverse, displace and resituate the hierarchies involved in polar opposites such as subject/object, right/wrong, good/bad, tradition/ counter tradition, normative/ anti-normative and so on. (Culler 1982:150). When the hierarchies of women representing two systems, tradition and counter tradition, are perceived in the light of the above discourse, it appears that society prevails in a culture wherein there are women who show active resistance against the long cherished values of an ultimate social system, besides the ideal women who voluntarily remain subaltern, submissive and subservient to it, thereby representing dynamic multicultural traditions in heterogeneous Indian society.

The tale further questions the universal value system represented by hegemonic traditions and expects a space for individual and subjectivist interpretation, which is inter-textual, but not casual. The tale unfolds the voice of the marginalized / counter traditions challenging the hegemony and universality of the 'dominant traditions', which represent their 'selves' as 'righteous' and 'others' as 'unrighteous' or 'inferior'. It further reflects

the wishful thinking of the marginalized for having a society wherein a reversal of the norms occurs. It further challenges the modernist representation of society only by a single universal jury and upholds a post-modernist world of plural constructions (Derrida 1978:182-183), diverse realities, an absence of certainty, and a multiplicity of readings. It further refuses the privileging one statement over another and equality of all interpretations (Miller 1972:8; 1977:447). To be precise, the homologisation of women and water in nature, as discussed in the above belief system, gave space for the growth of enormous folklore, especially myths that reflect the worldview and traditions of multicultural people in society.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Goddess Ganga is worshipped as a wife of Lord Siva, who adorned her as an ornament on his head on the plaited hair (*jatajuta*). Folk tradition mentions that Siva, unable to bear the struggle between the co-wives, Ganga and Gauri, gives the left half of his body to Gauri and became a hermaphrodite god — *ardhanrisvra* (being half female and half male); and kept Ganga on his head. The poetic narrative *Ganga Gauri Samvada* (Discourse between Ganga and Gauri), performed mostly by women folk as a domestic genre, gives at the outset, a lucid picture of the nature of conflict and negotiation that usually occur between co-wives; and also the stratagem of the husband to maintain peace in his family. At a deeper level, the significance of water as a source of life to living and non-living beings of the world is highlighted by adorning Ganga on his head as a goddess to be revered by all (Viraswamy, G 1989: 101-106). This ideology is reflected in the pomp and glorious celebrations of annual and periodical ritual festivities observed in various places, especially in the dry zones of Andhra Pradesh as Ganga Jatara and other relevant ritual acts in folk religious belief systems (Srinivasula Reddy: 1995).

<sup>2</sup> I have collected two more tales from Narayanavva on the same motif. Tales with this theme are common in draught prone areas, with slight changes in the proper names and sequence of events. (i) Once there was a remote village in Rayalasima region where the people suffered from draught and famine frequently. To protect the people from these natural calamities, the village head dug a big well in the village, in which no water emanated despite the enormous expenditure incurred. In a dream, the goddess Ganga wanted him to give his third daughter-in-law who is a newly wedded virgin in a sacrifice to her if he really wished to get water in the well. He told his wife about the dream. Early in the morning, the mother-in-law took the new bride to the stepped well on the pretext that it was their family custom to offer worship to Gangadevi, the goddess of water, by the new daughter-in-law. After the worship, they returned, but the former asked the latter to bring the saffron box (*bharini*), which she forgot on the steps of the well. The daughter-in-law returns to the well and collects the saffron box. By the time she comes out, water from the well gushes out and drowns the innocent daughter-in-law. Since then, there has been no scarcity of water or dearth of rainfall in the village. Later, a shrine was erected in her name and she became the tutelary deity of the family of the headman of the village.

(ii) Once, there was a small village in a drought prone region. The villagers consistently suffered due to famines. The marriage of the third son of the village head took place. All the people of the village attended it. They praised the bride as the personification of all godly virtues. Then the goddess Lakshmi (the goddess of fortune) out of anxiety came in disguise to the house of the village head to see the bride. But the new bride recognized the entry of the goddess of fortune into the village since the entire village turned into greenery and at once the entire vegetation was in full bloom. She invited the goddess warmly and asked her to sit. She offered *tambula* (*bananas, betel leaves, and arecanuts*) to everybody except the Goddess. So she asked her to wait till she receives her *tambula*. The goddess nodded her head implying her acceptance to wait. She went into the kitchen to prepare *tambula*. The daughter-in-law knows that if she offers *tambula*, the goddess of fortune will leave her house and ultimately the village. So she thought for a while about how to retain the goddess of fortune in their home. She closed the door of the kitchen and jumped into the well located in their back yard. The goddess remained in their house waiting to receive *tambula* from the daughter-in-law, who went away to a place from where she could never return. Similar narratives with minor variations are collected in Palanadu region (corresponding to present Sattenapalli, Gurizala, Piduguralla taluks of Guntur district in Andhra Pradesh (South India) which is also a 'dry zone'. See also (Mackenzie, 1883:163; Krishna Rao and Balarammurty, 1987:884; Rajgopal, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Alan Dundes in his article "Building of Skadar: The Measure of Meaning of a Ballad of Balkans" gave an exhaustive list of articles published on this ballad (1989:153-155). He questioned the credibility of the 'myth-ritual theory' applied to this ballad by former folklorists who believed that all myths are supposed to be derived from some earlier type of ritual (Subotic 1932; Kotur: 1977; 181,184,195; Zimmerman 1974: 371-80). Dundes argues that the 'construction sacrifice ritual' even though it is valid, there is no single piece of evidence to show that the ballad or legend was even sung or recited in relation to the actual construction of ritual. Like Gaster (1950: 4-5) and Segal (1980: Vol.9, 173-195), Dundes surmised that the myth ritual theory does not offer ultimate origin merely in earlier rituals. They are parallel expressions but not the derivatives from one another. The ballad is a metaphorical expression of the fate and role of women not only in the Balkans but also in places where similar ballads are found (for details, see Dundes 1989: 160-8).

<sup>4</sup> Dundes (1989:165) asserts that the victimization of the female in the form of sacrifice is invariably duped by the Indian tradition. The victims know about the sacrifice to be made for a righteous cause and knowingly invite their death, as the Indian women are imbued with the ideology of immolation termed *sati* or *sahagamana* right from childhood. *Sahagamana* literally means 'following along with'. This idiom is meant to designate a ritual act of woman, mostly 'wife following her husband not only during lifetime but also after his death by burning herself on the funeral pyre of her husband'. *Augamana* is another such act of following her husband by self-immolation, though not on the funeral pyre. The women who perform *sati* are known in Andhra Pradesh as *Perantallu*. The *satikals* or *sati silalu* (*sati* stones) are erected in commemoration of those who perform *sati* and are worshipped by the people. The *satikals* that perpetuate the act of *sati*,

the symbolic representation of devotion of a wife towards her husband, are erected to inspire the women to get name and fame by being subservient to patriarchal society. Since the Indian women are trained in this manner, there is no wonder that the woman did sacrifice voluntarily for the welfare of her husband or the family or the village that would earn good will for her husband (for details, see M.G.S.Narayanan and V. Kesavan 1986:348-347; Ralgan 1949:80; R. Chandrasekara Reddy 1989; T.Subba Rao 1976-78 Vol.I, 283,424,427 No.Vol.II.56).

<sup>5</sup> Building of Skadar is a widely prevalent female sacrifice episode of Balkan States occurring in different generic forms: both poetic (ballad and folksong) and prose (legend). The plot of the Balkan legend or ballad revolves round an attempt by a group of masons to construct a castle or bridge or monastery. Due to some supernatural curse, whatever the builders construct in the daytime is undone magically at night. The builders or masons are advised in a dream to wall up the first woman (sister or wife) that comes there bringing food to the foundation. The masons agree not to inform their wives so that the person to be victimized may be selected by fate or chance. All the masons except one fail to honour the agreement. The dutiful wife of that mason brings food for her husband despite the heavy downpour with thunderstorm and lightning. As soon his wife comes to the site, she is told that she has to be buried as a game, to find the the wedding ring thrown by her husband into the foundation. Before she realises that it is not a joke, she is walled up forever. The young pregnant wife cries that her breasts and baby are being crushed by the hard wall and requests them to leave an aperture for her to suckle her child. The account is famous in that forty Hungarian, eighty seven Bulgarian, forty nine Rumanian, thirty seven Serbo Croatian, fourteen Albanian, two hundred and ninety seven Greek versions are found (Vargyas: 967:174-177, Vol. II. 55).

<sup>6</sup> The tradition of Musamma is widely prevalent in Andhra Pradesh. Scholars like K. Ramalinga Reddy and C. Narayana Rao in Telugu and G. Chennaya in Kannada produced literary works *Musamma maranam* (1900), *Musamma* (1930) and *Atmarpana* (1930) respectively. C.P. Brown in his History of Anantpur district mentions that Chikkappa Odeyar, a minister of Bukka I constructed an embankment in A.D.1365 across a stream called Pandu, thus forming a tank south of Vijayanagar. This was situated near Devarakonda in Nandyala *rastra*. Along with this, he built two villages *Bukkasagaram* and *Anantasagaram* on either side of the dam. It is further mentioned that it so happened once that the tank in Bukkarayasamudram was overflowing with floodwaters and the bund was about to break. Meanwhile a woman, having been possessed by goddess Ganga, tells the people that she would stay there if she is offered human sacrifice. When all the village elders were thinking, Musamma, the seventh daughter-in-law of Basireddi, the village head gets possessed by Ganga devi and instructs her that she would be the sacrificed. By this time, she has not even reached the stage of puberty. She dresses herself in a new sari, puts on saffron and turmeric, holds two lemon fruits and reaches the tank bund. She takes blessings from her father-in-law and the villagers and stands in the fissure that appeared above the sluice in the tank bund. The villagers fill the crack with lime and mortars. The next day, Musamma gets angry with the women folk of the village and asks them to install an idol of her on the bund where she is immolated and offer prayers to her. They install an idol and offer prayers. But there was no temple. Musamma

replies to those who call her name while passing by that way. One day when some people who passed by that way to cut grass called her name, she answered. They get wild and ridicule her, saying "Even after your death, your vigour has not yet been put down". She shuts her mouth once and for all. People still worship her. K Ramalinga Reddy, *Musalamma Maranam*, (ed). A. Bhumayya (1994), Hyderabad, Telugu University, pp. x-xiii, and passim.

<sup>7</sup> In relation to the construction of Rayalacheruvu, Punganur and Nagulapuram tanks in Anantapur district, female sacrifice is associated in which there is no relevance between the name of the tank and the person sacrificed for the cause of the tank (Sankaranarayana 1970; Sewell 1968: 365) and hence myth-ritual theory cannot hold good to these tales, particularly to the present narrative.

<sup>8</sup> Woman drowns herself as a sacrifice to water gods to secure her husband's boat from capsizing: T. 211.11; Woman sacrificed to water spirits to secure water supply: 283.23; Daughter is sacrificed to avert famine: 262.22; 263.4; Women sacrificed to gods and seas: 264; Man sacrificed his wife to procure wealth 263.6; Flood stopped by the sacrifice of a boy and a girl; 267; (Thompson 1957 Vol. V); Human blood makes leaky tank hold waters; 262.0.1; Beheading in water tank: F.558.2; Tank has no water despite rains; F.935.1; No water remains in the tanks D.1542.3.5; A human being buried alive at the base of the foundation of building or a bridge; 261.1; (Thompson, 1958; Vol.VI); Huge tank has no water in spite of plentiful rains; F.935(Thompson, 1956:Vol. II).

<sup>9</sup> Adulteress: J.125.2; K.1582; T.232.2; J.1151.4; K.2051; K.223.1; K.1510 (Thompson 1958: Vol.VI); Husband deceived by adulteress (wife); K.1510.1.1; Husband discovers wife's adultery (Thompson 1957,Vol.IV).

<sup>10</sup> Here it is to be remembered that in Rayalasila where there are scanty irrigational facilities, the pattern of 'settle peasant village' was that of the 'nucleated' type. These nucleated villages cluster around tanks and water resources, generally numbering 5 to 6 with in a radius of 15 to 20 kms (Nandi and Tyagi, 1978:210; Visvanath, 1926)

<sup>11</sup> The *manche* (watch tower) is a thatched platform raised on four strong bamboo poles in four corners and ten to twelve feet height. One can reach the thatched platform by a ladder. The *manches* are erected in the farms or near the tank bunds where one can sit and watch crops and tanks against theft and misuse of water resources during the watering and harvesting seasons. (C.P.Brown 1966:7; Krishnamurti 1974, 145,213,282).

<sup>12</sup> Advice through dream, D.1814; Prophecy through the dream M.302.7 (Thomson 1958, Vol. VI; Abraham, 1913.

<sup>13</sup> Husband deceived by adultery of his wife, K.1500.1 (Thompson 1957; Vol.VI) (2) Sexual themes :( c) Parent-child dyad (d). Sibling-Sibling dyad.

<sup>14</sup> (Dundes, 1971:171-2) considers the model of Levi-Struass 1976a; 1976b: 15) as 'paradigmatic structuralism' in which the material is rearranged in search of structural opposition, which gave a pattern to the narrative; Pace (1982:249) holds that Levi-Strauss draws binary opposition through which the native culture speaks.

<sup>15</sup> A. K. Ramanujan (1982:267); According to Levi- Strauss (1963:121) structures are entities independent of man's consciousness although they in fact govern man's existence; Turner (1974; 236)

<sup>16</sup> The females ever since their childhood are taught the virtues to be developed to become an ideal Indian woman. The elder women give instructions to them whenever the occasion arises, especially on the eve of the rites of passage, such as the childbirth, puberty, marriage etc. (See Van Gennep 1960). For the girl child, even at the age of being rocked in the cradle, her gender-specificity is prescribed through the lullabies. The expectations of society from the girl child are enlightened to her as a lullaby and inspire her to learn and recite the history of Sita, the heroine of Ramayana, who jumped into fire to prove her chastity to her husband Rama. In the wedding songs performed, particularly when the bride is ritually handed over (*appaginta*) to the in-law's house (*appaginta patalu*), the bride is instructed that she should never trespass the verdict of her husband, should never reveal her hunger, should not eat before her husband and in-laws eat, and should not go to bed before they sleep etc. In another song, the girl is made to understand that she was gifted (*kanya dana*) to her husband and hence her parents have no right on her, just as the cow after having been gifted away, cannot be with her former master. The woman should remain tied with her husband. (Songs are from the personal collections of the author). The female minds are tuned by their elders, especially mother and other women folk who were designated as 'instructors', (Victor Turner 1967:94-111) in every 'stage' of 'transition' from one 'state' to the other so that they may be well acquainted with the pros and cons of the next threshold and not become 'misfits' in their roles. This is the reason for which the women in Indian culture, especially in Andhra region sing many songs, which are the embodiment of a message to the girls about the do's and don'ts in every 'state' on the eve of the 'rites of passage'.

<sup>17</sup> The marriage is a social bond to which men and women are tied permanently. The female minds are tuned in line with that of the patriarchal virtues so as to make them fit to function without any friction in their changed gender roles. Examples abound in folk literature in this regard. Even in the wedding songs of Rumania, the marriage of a girl is metaphorically equated to death (Kligman 1984,n.8; Soskolova 1911:153, 160-66).

<sup>18</sup> The *tali* is a sacred thread coated with turmeric paste to which golden discs of small size, generally two, are strung and tied to the neck of the women on the occasion of marriage, which symbolizes a permanent sacred rather social bond between wife and husband. *Tali* represents husband and married status. In other words, it is a personification of the husband and the un-widowed life of the woman. It is more than her parents and wealth. The *tali* is the costliest jewel for women and one should take pride to wear the *tali* since it gives them everlasting bliss. (Ramaraju et.al, 1986:80-99): The walling of Musamma in the tank bund conveys her total submission to the institution of marriage through her sacrifice.

<sup>19</sup> Usually when the girls are sent to their in-laws houses, the elders always bless them that they should behave in such a way that their conduct would bring name and fame to their natal as well as their in-law's families.

<sup>20</sup> Velcheru Narayana Rao holds the view that the *pativrata* is considered to be strong because of total faithfulness and devotion to her husband. She becomes a goddess by being sexually faithful to her husband and by dying before he dies. Power is available to curse only when her chastity is threatened (1986:140). This notion holds good to the sanskritised versions of the tales or epics whereas in the folk belief system, the power of the *pativrata* is revealed in both benevolent and malevolent occasions to bless or curse, depending upon the situation. In the present narrative, Musamma who was defied after her sacrifice became benevolent. She remained in the same state even after the adulteress ridiculed her. The defied Musamma became silent when her chastity is questioned but does not curse or punish the guilty woman. The 'ego' that is seen in the classical chaste woman is not noticed in the folk chaste women. However, in the wedding songs, the girl is instructed and warned that she should never look at the face of the other men, should not laugh loudly, should not comb her hair and adorn flowers in the absence of her husband, which indirectly stresses the sexual abstinence prescribed to Indian women (songs from personal collections of the author). Mandel (1983:173) depicts the women as the liminal linking between the insider and the outsider).

<sup>21</sup> In this connection, I would like to recall a proverb in Telugu collected from female folk during my fieldwork, which is appropriate to cite in this context. ***Illalini lanja ante intlo duri talupu vesukuntundi; lanjanu lanja ante vidhikekki raccha cestundi.*** This is a free phrase proverb that in general means that if a chaste woman is accused of adultery, she keeps quiet and gets herself locked in her home. If a woman of easy virtue is made conscious of her guilt, she hurts not only the person, who tried to awaken her guilt, but also curses her, her parents and forefathers and thereby creates an unsolicited scene in the entire street. In the same way, the adulteress chatted back and questioned the chastity of Musamma.

<sup>22</sup> The Proppian and Levi Straussian structural analysis enables the folklorists to make syntagmatic and paradigmatic study of the narratives in their ethno cultural settings (Pace 1982:1-7)

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