



Introduction

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In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (1993), and *Undoing Gender* (2004), Judith Butler explores the fraught terrain of sex, gender, sexuality, and embodiment and advances a performative theory of gender that challenges the heteronormative regimes of discursive power. The articles in this special journal issue *refigure bodies that matter* by engaging Butler and other feminist interlocutors in conversation with Indian perspectives on sex, gender, and alternative bodily identities derived from a range of traditions: Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava devotional discourse, Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* poetry, Telugu dance performance traditions, and Tamil transgender communities.¹ The contributors employ historical, textual, and ethnographic methods to explore these issues in diverse Indian communities across a range of registers, including different historical periods (medieval to contemporary), geographic regions (Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu), languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali, Maithili, Telugu, and Tamil), and social locations (Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical; high caste, low caste, and subaltern). All of the articles highlight the contributions of Butler’s theories while at the same time emphasizing the limitations of their feminist interventions, which are not adequate to account for the *religious dimensions* of bodies that matter in particular Indian communities in various historical, cultural, and religious contexts. This special journal issue is intended as a

¹ See Armour and St. Ville (2006) for an earlier collection of essays in which scholars of religion critically assess the implications of Butler’s theories for a variety of issues in biblical, Christian, Islamic, and Buddhist traditions.

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gesture towards “theory parity”² by providing hermeneutical space to the alternative imaginaries proposed by Indian interlocutors whose theorizing might inspire us to re-vision our own theoretical formulations.

Bodies beyond Matter and Gender beyond Sex in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Discourse

In “Sex, Gender, and Devotional Desire: Refiguring Bodily Identities in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Discourse,” I bring contemporary feminist theorizations of the body, and more specifically of the relationship between sex and gender, into conversation with the distinctive ontological theories of bodily identities espoused by sixteenth-century Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava authorities, who, in formulating their *bhakti-śāstra*, formal discourse of *bhakti*, frame the categories of sex and gender in relation to a third term, *devotional desire*. I focus in particular on ongoing feminist debates about the relationship between the sexed body and the gendered body in which the validity of the distinction between sex (male or female) and gender (feminine or masculine) is itself a topic of contention. On the one hand, feminist proponents of social constructionism propose a base/superstructure model in which the sexed biological body is essentialized as the “natural” base on which gender is superimposed as a second-order ideological construction. On the other hand, feminist advocates of sexual difference seek to dismantle the distinction between sex as an essentialist category and gender as a constructionist category and insist that sex, like gender, is a sociocultural construction bound up in the regulatory regimes of signification and power.

I highlight the contributions of the theory of *écriture féminine* propounded by Luce Irigaray (1985a, 1985b, 1993) and Hélène Cixous (1976, 1994; Cixous and Clément 1986) and the theory of gender performativity espoused by Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 2004), whose feminist interventions have pointed to the liberatory potential of “writing the body” (Irigaray and Cixous), “rematerializing sex,” and “undoing gender” (Butler) in order to generate new bodily inscriptions freed from phallogocentric discursive practices and heteronormative regimes. At the same time, I emphasize the limitations of these feminist interventions, which remain bound to what Michael Radich (2016) has characterized as “the materialist understanding of body” in which the *ordinary human body* composed of flesh and blood persists as the default template. Such feminist theorizations are not adequate to account for the radically different models of *extraordinary* embodiment found in premodern religious traditions such as the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition. The Gauḍīya discourse of embodiment emphasizes distinctions between “body” and “matter” and between “sex” and “gender” on both the human and divine planes and challenges prevailing body theories by positing *bodies beyond matter* and *gender beyond sex*.

In the first phase of my analysis, I focus on the Gauḍīya discourse of divine embodiment, which celebrates the paradigmatic divine body beyond matter: the absolute body of Kṛṣṇa, *svayaṃ* Bhagavān, who exists eternally in his transcendent

² The expression “theory parity” derives from Cabezón (2006: 31).

abode, the transcendent Vraja-*dhāman*, beyond the material realm of *prakṛti* and even beyond the impersonal, formless Brahman. In Gauḍīya formulations the *vigraha*, absolute body, of Bhagavān is nonmaterial and eternal and, like his *svarūpa*, essential nature, consists of being (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*), and bliss (*ānanda*). At the level of the *sat-cit-ānanda-vigraha* there is no distinction between the body and the possessor of the body, and the distinction between sex and gender also disappears, for gender alone exists beyond the material realm. The integrated personal-cum-bodily identity of Kṛṣṇa is gendered as male/masculine, as reflected in his *svarūpa*, essential nature, and *svayaṃ-rūpa*, essential form, in which, although beyond materiality, he appears in a human-like shape (*narākāra*), and more specifically in the form of a *gopa*, cowherd boy. The transcendent abode of Kṛṣṇa is represented as a gendered world of eternal relationships in which he revels perpetually in an unmanifest *līlā*, divine play, with his eternally perfect associates—the *gopīs* and *gopas* of the transcendent Vraja—who possess nonmaterial bodies, participate in Kṛṣṇa’s essential nature, and relish their all-consuming love for him in distinct *rasas*, flavors of devotion, that are intrinsic to their eternally gendered devotional subjectivities.

In the second phase of my analysis, I interrogate the strategies through which the Gauḍīya path of *sādhana-bhakti* refigures human bodily identities—from ascribed identities to inscribed identities to remembered identities. (1) *Ascribed identity*. The karmically constructed material body into which the *jīva*, individual soul, enters before birth is sexually marked as male or female and may be further delimited by other Brahmanical markers of *ascribed identity*, including social class (*varṇa*), caste (*jāti*), and ethnicity, as determined by the *jīva*’s particular karmic and family heritage in any given lifetime. In Gauḍīya formulations this sexed material body is termed the *sādhaka-rūpa* and is deemed the body of bondage prior to its transformation through the path of *sādhana-bhakti*. (2) *Inscribed identity*. In *vaidhī-bhakti*, the initial phase of *sādhana-bhakti*, the *bhakta* engages in a regimen of bodily practices with the *sādhaka-rūpa* in order to reconstitute the karmically bound material body as a “devotionally informed body” that is *inscribed* with the socioreligious taxonomies and devotional norms of the *bhakta-saṅgha*, the Gauḍīya community of Kṛṣṇa *bhaktas*. (3) *Remembered identity*. *Rāgānugā-bhakti*, the advanced phase of *sādhana-bhakti*, includes a regimen of meditative practices that is designed to catalyze the final stage of realization in which the *jīva* awakens from the sleep of ignorance and *remembers* its *siddha-rūpa*, which in Gauḍīya formulations is ontologically distinct from the *sādhaka-rūpa* and is an eternal, nonmaterial body that, like the absolute body of Kṛṣṇa himself, consists of *cit* and *ānanda*, consciousness and bliss. At the meta-physical level, sex is left behind as an epiphenomenon of the physical body and the *siddha-rūpa* is *eternally gendered* as female/feminine or male/masculine in relation to the male Godhead, Kṛṣṇa. The state of realization is represented as a nonmaterial state of personal-cum-bodily identity in which the *jīva*’s *svarūpa*, essential nature, is simultaneously manifested in its *rasa*, gendered devotional subjectivity, and in the particularized form of the *siddha-rūpa* through which the *jīva* engages the male Godhead. Mirroring the *rasas* of the eternally perfect associates of Kṛṣṇa, the *jīva*’s *siddha-rūpa* may be in the form of either a female lover who embodies *mādhurya-rasa*, a maternal or paternal

elder who embodies *vātsalya-rasa*, a male friend who embodies *sakhya-rasa*, or a male attendant who embodies *dāsyā-rasa*.

I conclude my analysis with a brief consideration of debates in which Gauḍīya authorities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries grappled historically with the existential dilemma posed by contending bodily identities in the state of realization—in particular, the case of a practitioner whose *sādhaka-rūpa*, sexed material body, is male but who inwardly identifies as female on the meta-physical plane of the *siddha-rūpa*. I suggest that these historical debates continue to have important on-the-ground implications to the present day, not only for the living practices of the Gauḍīya community but also for contemporary debates about the sex/gender distinction both within and beyond the academy.

Sexed Poetic Voices and Gendered Devotional Personas in Vaiṣṇava *Bhakti* Poetry

In “Slender Waists and Severed Breasts: The Construction of Female Bodies and Feminine Subjectivities in Vaiṣṇava *Bhakti* Poetry,” Anya P. Foxen interrogates the dynamics of gender construction through which Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* poets of both sexes, male and female, fashion feminine devotional personas that incorporate poetically imagined female bodies and feminine subjectivities. She begins her analysis by invoking Butler’s notion that gender is relational: “One is always ‘doing’ [one’s gender] with or for another” (Butler 2004: 1). However, Foxen suggests that this notion needs to be re-visioned to take into account the religious concerns of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* practitioners in which gender is “ultimately relational” in that the *bhakta* seeks to establish a relationship with a male deity, Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu, who is ascribed the status of the ultimate reality. In Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* traditions such as the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, among the principal modes of devotional relationship the highest status is ascribed to *mādhurya-rasa*, the lover-beloved mode of relationship, in which the *bhakta*, whether male or female, assumes an eroticized feminine position in relation to Kṛṣṇa that emulates the *gopīs*, Kṛṣṇa’s cowmaiden lovers. Foxen’s analysis shifts the focus from devotional discourse to devotional poetry and explores how Vaiṣṇava poet-devotees of both sexes, in seeking to realize a state of union-in-difference with the male deity, speak through a feminine devotional persona, whether that of a *gopī* or another feminine protagonist. In this context she suggests that Butler’s theory of gender performativity may prove fruitful in illuminating certain aspects of the poetic process through which a male poet or a female poet constructs a gender identity and performs a feminine poetic persona. At the same time, she seeks to move beyond Butler’s account of the materialization of bodies, in which agency is constrained by the regulatory regimes of discursive power, by exploring the hermeneutical possibilities that are opened up through an investigation of the religious and aesthetic dimensions of artistic agency.

In her analysis of artistic agency, Foxen distinguishes between three levels: (1) the historical poet, whose ascribed sex is male or female; (2) the sexed voice of the poet, whether male or female; and (3) the gendered poetic persona, which is constructed as feminine by the poet. For example, a male *bhakti* poet may declare

his male identity by adopting a male poetic voice when constructing a feminine devotional persona, or, alternatively, he may choose to adopt a female poetic voice when fashioning a feminine persona. Foxen explores the ways in which male poetic voices, in constructing feminine devotional personas, tend to rely on aestheticized gender norms and tropes in portraying the female body as, on the one hand, a passive body of lovesick longing and, on the other hand, a sexualized body of pleasure. She argues that female poetic voices, in contrast, tend to disrupt gender norms and deconstruct aesthetic tropes as they grapple with portraying the lived realities of the female body as a body of devotional longing that is at the same time an agentive body of desire.

In order to illustrate the ways in which feminine devotional personas are performed differently by male poetic voices and female poetic voices, Foxen provides a comparative analysis of the poetry of four poets: two Tamil Vaiṣṇava poets—the ninth-century male poet Nammālvār and his roughly contemporaneous female counterpart, Āṅṅāl—and two North Indian Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* poets—the fifteenth-century male Maithili poet Vidyāpati and the sixteenth-century female Rajasthani poet Mīrābāī.

In her comparative analysis of the poetry of Nammālvār and Āṅṅāl, Foxen emphasizes that the male poetic voice of Nammālvār relies extensively on the conventions of Tamil Caṅkam poetry in fashioning images of the passive female body as a body of longing languishing in *viraha*, love-in-separation, or as a body possessed, taken over, by the Lord in an all-consuming state of union. The female poetic voice of Āṅṅāl, in contrast, invokes mythological imagery and at times speaks through a *gopī* persona, while at other times she speaks through a feminine persona that defies aesthetic conventions and transforms in the course of a single poem from a languishing *virahinī* into an active agent of desire who seeks out her beloved and draws him into an erotic encounter. Moreover, while at times conforming to aesthetic tropes that emphasize the heaving breasts of the female body, at other times she explodes such tropes and disassembles her own female form, threatening, for example, to rip out her breasts by their roots and cast them at her beloved's chest.

The male poetic voice of Vidyāpati, like that of Nammālvār, relies on gendered aesthetic tropes in constructing a feminine poetic persona. In his Maithili collection of poems celebrating the love between Kṛṣṇa and his favorite *gopī* Rādhā, Vidyāpati deploys many of the aesthetic conventions of Sanskrit love poetry utilized by the poetic craftsman Jayadeva in his *Gītagovinda*. He also invokes the devotional tropes of *mādhurya-bhāva* popularized by Bengali Vaiṣṇava poets such as Caṅḍīdāsa, in which he speaks through the feminine persona of Rādhā, the paradigmatic lover and divine consort of Kṛṣṇa, alternating between plaintive laments of *vipralambha*, love-in-separation, and celebrations of the pleasure-rapt female body in *sambhoga*, love-in-union. The female poetic voice of Mīrābāī, like that of Āṅṅāl and Vidyāpati, at times speaks through the persona of a *gopī*, but she departs from the conventional framing of the *gopī* as an illicit lover by introducing nuptial imagery in which she imagines herself as the wife of Kṛṣṇa. Moreover, she diverges even further from male poetic constructions of normative femininity by at times combining the erotic imagery of marriage with ascetic imagery in which she imagines herself as a *yoginī*

garbed in saffron robes ever wandering, as an agentive body of desire, in search of her beloved Kṛṣṇa.

Gender Impersonation in South India and Drag Performance in Urban America

In “Vedantam vs. Venus: Drag, Impersonation, and the Limitations of *Gender Trouble*,” Harshita Mruthinti Kamath draws on her ethnographic research in Telugu-speaking South India to interrogate the gender norms at work in the donning of a gender guise in two radically different performative contexts: the practice of female impersonation in the South Indian dance form of Kuchipudi and the performance of drag in urban America as theorized by Judith Butler. She highlights the limitations of Butler’s theories of gender performativity and drag by arguing that Kuchipudi impersonators such as Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma, who was the embodiment of normative brahmin masculinity in the South Indian village of Kuchipudi, represent the antithesis of the drag performers theorized by Butler, who reside at the margins of American urban society and embody nonnormative ideals of gender and sexuality.

Kamath begins with an analysis of Butler’s theories in *Gender Trouble* (1990) in which Butler argues that gender is performative in that it involves a stylized repetition of acts, of bodily gestures and movements, that creates the illusion of a “natural sex” and an “abiding gender self.” The performance of drag reveals the imitative structure of gender and parodies the very notion of an original gender, thus providing an opportunity to disrupt gender norms. Kamath suggests that a more nuanced analysis of drag performance is provided in *Bodies That Matter* (1993), in which Butler explores the ambivalent nature of drag, which can serve not only to subvert but also to reinscribe heterosexual norms of gender and sexuality. Butler’s theoretical reflections are grounded in a discussion of Jennie Livingston’s documentary film *Paris Is Burning* (1991), which chronicles underground drag balls in Harlem featuring drag performers from New York’s Black and Latinx queer communities. Butler focuses in particular on abject figures such as Venus Xtravaganza, a transgender Latinx woman whose subversive crossing of the normative boundaries of gender, sexuality, and race leads to her tragic demise and thus ends up reinscribing the hegemonic privileges of white heterosexual femininity.

In the next phase of her analysis, Kamath turns to an examination of the community of brahmin male performers in the village of Kuchipudi in Andhra Pradesh who are adept at donning a woman’s guise, or *strī-vēṣam*, in Hindu dance dramas such as *Bhāmākalāpam*, in which Kuchipudi performers don the guise more specifically of Satyabhāmā, the wife of the deity Kṛṣṇa. Kamath explores the hagiography of Siddhendra, the founding saint of the Kuchipudi dance form who is credited with composing the *Bhāmākalāpam*. Like the Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* poets discussed in Anya Foxen’s article in this special journal issue, Siddhendra speaks in the songs collected in the *Bhāmākalāpam* through a feminine devotional persona in which he adopts the voice of the lovesick heroine Satyabhāmā languishing in love-in-separation from her beloved consort Kṛṣṇa. In this founding narrative of the practice

of donning a woman's guise, Siddhendra is portrayed as securing a vow from the young brahmin boys of the village of Kuchipudi that they would continue to enact his dance drama and don the guise of Satyabhāmā for generations to come. In accordance with this vow, every Kuchipudi brahmin male performer is required to impersonate Satyabhāmā onstage in the *Bhāmākalāpam* at least once in his lifetime.

Kamath focuses in particular on Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma, who, prior to his passing in 2012, was acclaimed both in the village of Kuchipudi and in the national dance scene in India as the consummate performer of the practice of female impersonation and as “Kali Yuga Satyabhāmā,” the consummate embodiment of Satyabhāmā for our age. Moreover, Kamath argues, Satyanarayana Sarma was the authoritative embodiment of normative brahmin masculinity in the Kuchipudi village whose skill at donning a woman's guise, *strī-vēṣam*, contributed not only to his performative power onstage but also to his high-caste patriarchal privilege and socioeconomic power offstage.

Kamath concludes her analysis by juxtaposing the cases of Kuchipudi female impersonators such as Satyanarayana Sarma and of American drag ball performers such as Venus Xtravaganza, and she argues that this juxtaposition calls for reframing our understanding of gender norms and normativity as theorized by Butler. The Kuchipudi impersonator resides at the center and *creates* gender norms by embodying normative ideals of brahmin masculinity and is thus the antithesis of the American drag ball performer who, in Butler's analysis, resides at the margins and *disrupts* gender norms by embodying nonnormative ideals of gender and sexuality.

Transgender Kinship Networks and Ritual Worlds in Tamil Nadu

In “Divine Power and Fluid Bodies: *Tirunaṅkai*s in Tamil Nadu,” Elaine Craddock draws on her ongoing ethnographic research to interrogate the strategies through which *tirunaṅkai*s, male-to-female transgender persons in Tamil Nadu, negotiate their identities. She invokes Butler's theory of gender performativity, in which the reiterative practices through which sexed and gendered subjects are constituted can serve to reinforce and at the same time to destabilize heterosexual gender norms, and she suggests that Butler's theory can help to illuminate certain aspects of the reiterative practices through which *tirunaṅkai*s construct alternative bodily identities that both reinscribe and subvert heterosexual norms. However, Craddock also emphasizes the limitations of Butler's theorizations, which are not adequate to account for the religious dimensions of the *tirunaṅkai*s' practices. In this context she argues that *tirunaṅkai*s deploy longstanding Tamil religious resources in order to enact nonnormative bodily identities that operate outside of the “secular-liberal assumptions” about the modern subject that undergird the liberatory interventions of Western feminist scholars such as Butler as well as governmental efforts in Tamil Nadu aimed at *tirunaṅkai* “uplift” through normalizing and medicalizing their status as “third gender.” Craddock focuses on three specific contexts in which *tirunaṅkai*s appropriate and reimagine traditional Tamil religious practices to help negotiate and legitimate their nonnormative identities in relationship to the broader social arena:

(1) the *tirunaṅkai* kinship network, (2) the annual Kūttāṅṭavar festival, and (3) rituals in public temple spaces associated with Hindu goddesses.

In the first phase of her analysis, Craddock examines the distinctive *tirunaṅkai* kinship network, which is a matriarchal network organized around houses comprising *gurus* and their *celās*, disciples, that challenges the heteronormative kinship system based on marriage and reproduction as well as the traditional structures of caste, class, and religion. When a *guru* dies the *celās* assume the role of widows and engage in multiple religious rituals, including the enactment of Hindu rites of widowhood and the performance of funeral rites in accordance with Muslim traditions. Those *tirunaṅkai*s who undergo the *nirvāṇam* operation in which the genitalia are excised are ascribed the highest status in the *tirunaṅkai* kinship network, and this gender-affirming surgery is marked by ritually invoking the blessings of the Hindu goddess Bhedrāj Mātā before and during the procedure and in a special ceremony that is performed on the fortieth day after the procedure.

In the second phase of her analysis, Craddock examines *tirunaṅkai*s' participation in the annual Kūttāṅṭavar festival, a popular Hindu festival in Tamil Nadu, in which they ritually enact their marriage to the *Mahābhārata* hero Aravāṇ (Sanskrit, Irāvān), or Kūttāṅṭavar, and their subsequent widowhood when their heroic husband is slain in battle the day after the wedding. In this context the *tirunaṅkai* participants emulate the divine paradigm of the deity Kṛṣṇa, who according to Tamil folk traditions appeared in the form of Mohinī—which *tirunaṅkai*s interpret as a half-male, half-female form—in order to marry Aravāṇ/Kūttāṅṭavar and fulfill his request that he not die unmarried. In other ritual contexts *tirunaṅkai*s identify with the divine paradigm of the deity Śiva in his half-male, half-female form as Ardhanārīśvara.

In the final phase of her analysis, Craddock examines the cases of a number of *tirunaṅkai*s who channel through ritual possession the power of particular Hindu goddesses—more specifically, Kālī, Māriyamman, and Aṅkālamman, who are integral to the Tamil cultural and religious landscape. *Tirunaṅkai*s who are ritual specialists serve as vehicles for the goddess in their own temples, where they mediate the divine presence in response to the needs of devotees from a diverse array of social locations who flock to the temple from the broader Tamil community. Craddock's analysis suggests that *tirunaṅkai* ritual specialists who perform the divine presence and demonstrate their ritual efficacy in public temple spaces achieve a form of social legitimacy that is not entirely legible in terms of the institutional logics and secular categories that undergird governmental reform efforts.

Alternative Bodily Identities

The Indian traditions addressed in these articles—Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava devotional discourse, Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* poetry, Telugu dance performance traditions, and Tamil transgender communities—grapple with issues pertaining to sex, gender, and bodily identities in a range of historical, cultural, and religious contexts in which the categories of sex and gender are deeply implicated in the intersectional matrix of

race, ethnicity, class, caste, and sexual orientation. The contributors also emphasize the embeddedness of the categories of sex, gender, and embodiment in a complex network of issues pertaining to religious identity, authority, and practice. They explore an array of extraordinary and alternative modes of embodiment theorized by religious communities in India long before the rise of the Western “secular-liberal” constructions of the modern subject and “materialist” understandings of the body that undergird contemporary theories of the body in the academy.

Before concluding, I would like to briefly consider the ways in which the Indian traditions addressed in these articles posit bodily identities that are *alternative* in that they do not conform to conventional understandings of the human body or gender norms. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava authorities posit bodily identities that are alternative in two different senses. First, beyond the ordinary material human body that is composed of flesh and blood and sexed as male or female, which they term the *sādhaka-rūpa*, they posit an extraordinary human body that is nonmaterial and eternally gendered, which they term the *siddha-rūpa*. Second, they grappled historically with the dilemma posed by contending bodily identities in the state of realization and were concerned in particular with the case of practitioners whose *sādhaka-rūpas* are sexually marked as male but who awaken in the state of realization to an alternative bodily state in which they inwardly identify as female on the level of the *siddha-rūpa*. Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* poetic traditions also posit the possibility of alternative bodily identities in which, for example, a *bhakti* poet-devotee whose ascribed sex is male adopts a feminine poetic persona in which he fashions for himself a female body and feminine devotional subjectivity in relation to the male deity. The practice of a male author adopting an alternative bodily identity in the form of a feminine devotional persona is also instantiated in the figure of Siddhendra, the founding saint of the Kuchipudi dance tradition in Telugu-speaking South India. According to the hagiography of Siddhendra, this practice found expression not only in his composition of a dance drama, the *Bhāmākalāpam*, but also in his establishment of an ongoing Kuchipudi performance tradition in which the dance drama would be enacted by male brahmins who would don onstage an alternative bodily identity in the form of a woman’s guise, *strī-vēṣam*. Finally, in the case of *tirunaṅkai* communities in Tamil Nadu, we move to a consideration of the lived practices of male-to-female transgender persons who negotiate and legitimate their alternative bodily identities in relationship to mainstream Tamil society.

Each of these cases involves gender crossings that have been ascribed different degrees of social legitimacy in their particular cultural and religious milieus. I find it striking that in all of these cases the cross-gender movement is only one way—from male to female. Although exemplars of the cross-gender movement in the opposite direction—from female to male—have existed in India in different historical periods and geographic regions to the present day, their voices have largely been muted in the historical record and popular imagination as part of the abiding legacy of patriarchal privilege. Thus we have no historical record of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava authorities debating the case of practitioners whose *sādhaka-rūpas* are sexually marked as female but who inwardly identify as male on the level of the *siddha-rūpa*. We do not hear about the cases of *bhakti* poets whose ascribed sex is female but who

fashion masculine poetic personas in relation to the deity. Until recently, we have also not heard about female performers donning the guise of a woman—let alone that of a man—in Kuchipudi dance dramas, for historically only a select group of brahmin male performers in the Kuchipudi village have been eligible to don *strī-vēṣam*, a woman's guise, and female performers have been prohibited—a trend that has only recently begun to change with increased participation of women in Kuchipudi dance outside the village context. With respect to transgender communities, it appears that male-to-female transgender persons, including *tirunaṅkai*s in Tamil Nadu and *hijras* in other parts of India, have achieved certain limited forms of social legitimacy in circumscribed ritual spaces that have not been afforded to their less visible female-to-male counterparts.

The full spectrum and multiform possibilities of alternative bodily identities—male-to-female, female-to-male, male-and-female, nonbinary, nonconforming, and beyond—remain to be excavated and explored in the historical archive as well as in contemporary sociocultural practices in India.

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