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Burnett, M. (2018). Gendered Play and Regional Dialogue in 'Nanjundi Kalyana'. In P. Trivedi, & P. Chakravarti (Eds.), *Shakespeare and Indian Cinemas* (pp. 221-237). (Routledge Studies in Shakespeare). Routledge.

Published in:
Shakespeare and Indian Cinemas

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:
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Gendered Play and Regional Dialogue in *Nanjundi Kalyana*

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This essay understands the highly popular Kannada language film, *Nanjundi Kalyana* (dir. M. S. Rajashekar, 1989), in terms of its rewriting of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. Crucially, *Nanjundi Kalyana* places a regional gloss on its adaptive procedures, continually citing cultural practices and gendered attitudes germane to southern parts of India and to Karnataka in particular. The film functions both as an adaptation and as an intervention in a discussion about regional identity, as evidenced in a dialectic that places rural and urban locales in opposition, in an interplay between the old and the new, in a localizing procedure (comprised of images and references) and in specific deployments of mythological allusion. *Nanjundi Kalyana* takes many of the premises of Shakespeare's play – namely, a concern with shame, the taming of the 'shrew' and ideas of home and domestication – so as to invest them with meanings and resonances particular to a Kannada language milieu. In this sense, it seeks to steer a path between notions of obedience central to the Shakespearean narrative and ideals of family, marriage, reciprocity and honour more familiar to Karnataka cinematic audiences. As a result, *Nanjundi Kalyana* presents itself as a rich fusion of traditions and constructions, one which, in the same moment, testifies to the variety of cinemas in India and to a vibrant history of adapting Shakespeare to different languages and environments.

Shakespeare came early to Karnataka. As Vijaya Guttal notes, the first loose translation of *The Taming of the Shrew* into the Kannada language was in 1897, other translations of the play following in 1910 and 1920 respectively. A more 'faithful' translation was published in 1936. Adaptations and translations went side-by-side, and a healthy

tradition of translating and performing the play has been in evidence in the state for at least the past one hundred and twenty years.¹ The aim, as with other translation and performance practices in India, was to ‘indigenize the alien text to the native context.’² At roughly the same time that *The Taming of the Shrew* was being recast in local guise, the Kannada language film industry, sometimes known as ‘Sandalwood’, was being inaugurated. A number of ‘talkies’ in the 1930s announced the coming into being of the industry (these were melodramas in the main), and, after lulls and setbacks, the production of mythological and historical films in the 1950s testified to a particularly prosperous phase. A period characterised by fewer films and a slower production rate followed before the emergence, in the 1970s and 1980s, of a more diversified film output (popular films and ‘art-house’ films being released together) and so-called ‘parallel cinema’ works. Currently, there are nine hundred and fifty single screen theatres in Karnataka, and over a hundred films are made each year.³ Interestingly, in the film industry of India as a whole, *The Taming of the Shrew* has repeatedly attracted filmic treatment. As Rajiva Verma notes, the ‘*Shrew* theme has easily been the most popular on the Indian screen’, adaptations such as *Chori Chori* (Anant Thakur, 1956), *Ponga Pandit* (Prayag Raj, 1975) and *Betaab* (Rahul Rawail, 1983) reflecting a widespread deployment of the play’s ideas and motifs.⁴ If we understand translation as a potential mode of resistance, moreover, as a practice that elevates, in order to underscore the significance of, the ‘indigenous’, then a film such as *Nanjundi Kalyana* might be seen as affirming the distinctiveness of Kannada culture and language. As I argue in this essay, the film goes beyond itself in terms of its importance, registering not simply an individual engagement with Shakespeare but also the endeavours of a local film industry to establish a uniquely crafted identity.

Shakespearean Variations

Released in 1989, and set in the present day, *Nanjundi Kalyana* quickly established itself as a hit romantic youth film. Part of its impact was due to the friction between the central leads, Ragu/Petruchio and Devi/Katharina, but additional appeal surely inhered in the modern slant placed on the history of ‘shrew’ taming films in Indian cinema. Although the play is not directly referenced as a source of inspiration, *Nanjundi Kalyana* clearly functions as an adaptation, as witnessed in the plotline, the combative relationship between a male wooer and an independent woman, and scenes of taming, humiliation and resistance. The basic situation – two friends love two sisters, but the eldest (third) sister has to marry first – resembles that of *The Taming of the Shrew*, while parts of the dialogue instance the play specifically. Devi/Katharina’s complaint of Ragu/Petruchio – ‘Truly, this is a mental case’ – echoes that of Katharina, when she states, ‘a mad-brain rudesby ... a frantic fool’ (3.2.10, 12), suggesting a degree of linguistic commerce between film and text.⁵ Parallels are also implied in film/stage business. For instance, both Devi and Katharina display a penchant for slapping servants, the idea being that the physical horseplay of *The Taming of the Shrew* functions as a practical point of reference. Even the framing structure of *The Taming of the Shrew* might be said to be internally imitated in *Nanjundi Kalyana*, for the induction with the players is recalled when Ragu/Petruchio hires actors to impersonate his mother and father in an episode that imbues the film with a pronounced theatrical self-consciousness.

While *Nanjundi Kalyana* follows the Shakespearean narrative arc, it is distinguished by plot details and developments that lend it a unique complexity. As the film makes clear, Shankrappa, a wealthy landowner married to Sita, has argued with his brother-in-law, Puthooru, a city-dweller married to Suthooru (who is Shankrappa’s sister). The conflict is a source of continual emotional stress for Shankrappa, to the extent that Ragu/Petruchio, son to Shagrappa and Sita, offers to woo and marry Devi/Katharina, the eldest daughter of Puthooru

and Suthooru, so healing the rift. In order to expedite this plan, and remain under cover, Ragu takes on the identity of Nanjundi, a brother to Shankrappa, who, believed dead, has magically reappeared. From this brief rehearsal emerges a fundamental Shakespearean departure.

Whereas, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Petruchio is represented as a bounty hunter or man-on-the-make, stating that his mission is ‘Happily ... to wive it wealthily in Padua’ (1.2.53, 72), *Nanjundi Kalyana* discovers Ragu as motivated by a sense of filial duty or *dharma*. The film re-envisioned Petruchio to suit contemporary South Indian *mores*, and in such a way as to play up the importance attached to a principle of familial unity. It is the division between the father and the brother-in-law that shapes and impels the action, and that the fatal argument occurred on a festival day lends the episode a religious if not sacrilegious cast. An audience is never allowed to forget the rift, and the need for reconciliation, making *Nanjundi Kalyana* a youth film centred around themes of family responsibility and commitment and giving a logic to the ways in which characters are elaborated (daughters and sons are realized in terms of professions and parentage).

Localizing Procedures

But, as the film suggests, these types of value are under pressure. Continually, the film maps social relations in a process of flux, as conjured in sequences that set against each other urban pastimes and rural ways. For example, Ragu/Petruchio is represented very much as a product of a farming community; he drives family members and farm workers to a village festival in a tractor, while the surrounding conversation centres on crops and the harvest. When Devi/Katharina arrives with Ragu/Petruchio at his house (a lowly shed designed to convince her that he is a servant), the camera’s focus upon the dwelling’s tools and utensils – pots, pans, farm implements and baskets – not only points up the fact that a

rural setting underpins the action but also demonstrates how, in any move from city to country, issues of class come to the fore. The urban/rural dialectic in *Nanjundi Kalyana* is highlighted in the contrasts the film engineers between the old and the new. Hence, as implied in his yellow open-necked shirt, short-sleeved top, neck-chains and penchant for loud colours, Ragu/Petruchio stands as a figure for the modern; for her part, Devi/Katharina, not least because of the badminton racket she wields, her fashionable stripy dress, sunglasses, bomber jacket, trainers and a love of jogging, is imagined as a contemporary sports-woman characterized by quasi-European sophistication. The house in which she lives – a creamy residence in a wealthy suburb adorned with knick-knacks and an interior fountain – is the very manifestation of bourgeois aspiration fulfilled. The idea of Devi/Katharina as a cosmopolitan late-twentieth-century Indian woman is maintained throughout, and it is most obviously expressed in her reliance on English terms, such as ‘You!’ and ‘Scoundrel!’ (Interestingly, these terms have long been markers of the ‘modern’ in Indian film, suggesting that, at another level of its fabric, *Nanjundi Kalyana* flirts with the ‘spoilt young woman’ stereotype).⁶ However, at the moment where she smashes up her room in a fit of distemper, destroying the television set, an abuse of the bourgeois ideal (and a desecration of the material contentment the family has worked to achieve) is implied. M. K. Raghavendra notes of *Nanjundi Kalyana* that ‘rural life and the village ... are extraneous and have little significance’ and that the ‘city is ... simply a glamorous space’, yet, on close inspection, each of these locales emerges as symbolically coded, connoting, variously, concerns of morality, work, ambition and youth identity.⁷

What distinguishes *Nanjundi Kalyana* from any number of seemingly similar ‘Bollywood’ or Hindi-language Shakespeare adaptations is a carefully-worked localizing representational procedure. Such a mode of representation functions, moreover, to stamp *Nanjundi Kalyana* with a specific sense of itself, to characterize it as possessing a particular

regional attachment. It is no accident that the city in the film is Bangalore, the capital of Karnataka; this is the hub to which much of the action, even if intermittently, is drawn. Cities loom large in the fabric of the dialogue, invariably to underscore an idea of Karnataka as a state with its own cultures and traditions. The scene in which Ragu/Petruchio takes on (successfully) a wrestler (sent against him by Devi/Katharina) is a case in point. Here, it is announced that Ragu/Petruchio ‘won in Bombay’ and that his next fight is to take place in ‘Mavalli’. The equation between Mumbai, in the state of Maharashtra, and Mavalli, a village in the southerly part of Karnataka, is a telling one, reinforcing the idea that Ragu/Petruchio is loyal to his state, that, despite success, he never loses sight of the particularity of his affiliation. Not surprisingly, then, Ragu/Petruchio is described by the master of a martial arts school as having ‘brought fame to our land’, ‘land’ substituting in this formulation for Karnataka and pointing up a region-specific sense of pride. (Of course, the romance between a “salt of the earth” young man and a rich and cosseted woman is a recurring trope in popular Indian cinema, the difference being that *Nanjundi Kalyana* suggests a specifically local engagement with the theme).⁸ The film is even capable of ironizing its own procedures, not least when we learn that Devi/Katharina’s birthday and ‘Karnataka Freedom Day’ share the same date. If only sub-textually, a parallel is drawn between a key political event and Devi/Katharina’s speeches of fiery independence. Beyond these popular culture references, *Nanjundi Kalyana* establishes itself as embracing a discrete demographic via strategically devised scenes and images. There are several shots, for example, of the ‘Hotel Ashok’, a hotel in Bangalore that, because frequently instanced in Kannada language cinema, has become a byword for sumptuousness and luxury. It is to this hotel that Shashidhara, suitor to Devi/Katharina and a version of *The Taming of the Shrew*’s Gremio, gravitates; the detail that he is a doctor from Mysore, the third largest city in Karnataka, works to suggest a network of professional interrelations spanning the state’s urban conurbations. Professionalization and

also education are invariably regionally delineated. The ‘J. C. College of Science and Commerce’, which Devi/Katharina attends as a student, is a fiction, an amalgam of several similarly titled colleges in Karnataka, but its presence in the film testifies both to a long-standing commitment to education in the state and to a generalized idea of modernity.

Typically in *Nanjundi Kalyana*, regional detailing is underpinned by a subscription to ritual. It is not accidental that, at the start, the framing *puja* to which Ragu/Petruchio and members of his family are bound is the *Gauri Ganesha* festival, an occasion on which the elephant deity Lord Ganesha is worshipped as a bringer of good luck and a remover of obstacles (the festival holds a particular place in the Karnataka religious calendar). Judging by the *mise-en-scène*, the film takes pains to establish the authenticity of its festive representation, for the clay figurine of the white elephant god is carried with due reverence, and appropriate decorative accoutrements are spotlighted (including banana stem and mango leaf flourishes). Interestingly, a *puja* recurs after the wedding; Ragu/Petruchio and Devi/Katharina sit down in the servant hut to enjoy a celebratory meal, a key moment for newly married couples. The foods themselves are evocative; ‘betel leaves’, ‘Mysore leaves’ and the ‘malenadu areca nut’ are referenced, all of them natural products of different parts of Karnataka. Significantly, Devi/Katharina’s refusal of the local food in this scene illuminates a larger and more dangerous form of resistance. In Karnataka, betel leaves are offered, and then consumed, as a sign of respect and good fortune. When lovers chew the areca nut, combined with the betel leaves, an auspicious union is affirmed (the male nut and the female leaves are symbolic). *Nanjundi Kalyana* is imbricated in local ideologies and attitudes; it also finds in these an index of Devi/Katharina’s departure from the principles, as they are enshrined in the philosophy of Hinduism, of a marital ideal.

Gendered Resistance

The inclusion in the film of a college, the ‘J. C. College of Science and Commerce’, anchors in a regional mode what is perhaps *Nanjundi Kalyana*’s most unsettling type of resistance – Devi/Katharina’s flouting of gendered norms. It is at the College, in a revealing flashback, that Devi/Katharina’s particular mode of ‘shrewishness’ is first realized. Arriving for her class in western denims and a fast car, Devi/Katharina finds that a satirically-minded male student has posted a cartoon in which she is drawn with a moustache, the abusive term ‘Terrorist’ decorating the picture’s margins. At once here, ‘Terrorist’ suggests a figure of terror and a political dissident, arguably one who endangers the organic identity of Karnataka as an Indian state. All around, Devi/Katharina encounters laughing students and, of course, the gleeful moustachioed cartoonist: they join in an amused response to the representation of a Devi/Katharina who becomes aberrant because viewed as male. ‘Are you going to tease me by drawing a moustache on my picture?’ Devi/Katharina demands, and punches the hapless cartoonist across the classroom in an explosion of rage. The sequence is of interest for the contrasts it engineers (the appearance of the other women students in *sarees*, for example, offers a counterpoint to Devi/Katharina’s western-style dress), but it is also striking because it serves to inaugurate the film’s much larger concern with the pervasiveness and extent of Devi/Katharina’s dereliction of the ideal woman’s standards. For instance, her alterity and lack of convention are suggested in the scene where the mother, Suthooru, and Devi/Katharina’s seemingly demure sisters, Lakshmi and Saraswati, versions of Bianca, are represented leaving a temple; Devi/Katharina is conspicuously absent from their devotions. Elsewhere, Devi/Katharina is seen reading a book entitled *Devil*, an indication of an infernal disposition, or reclining on her bed underneath a poster showing Cassius Clay crowing over the broken body of Sony Liston in their infamous 1965 boxing bout; her points of identification, it is implied, are with brutal battles and male victors. Indeed, the martial

character of Devi/Katharina's contests with men is continually stressed. One suitor is hit over the head with a guitar, an instrument associated with female accomplishment; another, who appears on a horse and wearing armour, finds to his chagrin that Devi/Katharina scares the animal away, so derailing the wooing process. Devi/Katharina, then, is discovered as no hapless maiden at home in an epic adventure.

Beyond Devi/Katharina's gendered unorthodoxy is a tangled web of historical determinants. In the late nineteenth century in India, particularly in Bengal, the emergence of the so-called 'modern' woman resulted in a series of vernacular satires. Such expressions of criticism singled out for treatment an imagined man-woman influenced by western mores, a type dressing inordinately and judged unnatural. Cartoons sometimes accompanied the portrayals, suggesting a link with *Nanjundi Kalyana*'s similar deployment of ironic pictorial material. As Partha Chatterjee notes, the satires ridiculed 'the idea of a Bengali woman trying to imitate the ways of a *memsāheb*' via a focused targeting on such elements as 'manners ... clothing ... [and] the use of Western cosmetics and jewellery', the underlining anxiety being that 'the Westernized woman ... cared little for the well-being of the home'.⁹ Various social and political elements can be identified in these developments, and, at a juncture when concepts of the nation were in a process of flux and change, there were attendant attempts to reinstate a seemingly besieged patriarchy and to protest against class differences exacerbated by the foundation of colonial institutions. Part of *Nanjundi Kalyana*'s richness inheres in the fact of its allusiveness, its capacity for taking energy from discussions relating both to the here-and-now and to periods of a much earlier moment.

For example, at the same time as Devi/Katharina's behaviour is imbricated in Victorian satire, so does it recall a key debate about the so-called 'man-woman' from the seventeenth century. In the anonymous pamphlet, *Hic Mulier* (1620), women who act as men, in 'attire, in speech, [and] in manners', are branded 'base, in respect it offends man in the

example and God in the most unnatural use; barbarous, in that it is exorbitant from Nature and an Antithesis to kind, going astray with ill-favoured affectation'.¹⁰ Devi/Katharina is elaborated within such a schema of transgression and, crucially, the racial epithets at work in the *Hic Mulier* description resurface in the film. Several remarks testify to Devi/Katharina's inordinate appetite ('She can eat men', opines Kittu, Ragu/Petruchio's friend, while Ragu/Petruchio himself declares that he is not going to be 'prey' for the 'lioness'), and these are crystallized in the expression, 'She is a wicked cannibal'. Bringing *Othello* to mind, but also the *Hic Mulier* association of the 'man-woman' with Barbary, Africa and all that is barbarous, the statement momentarily pitches Devi/Katharina out of a Southern Indian milieu into an early modern colonial realm in which the woman is 'other' because incompatible with European notions of normalcy. More generally, distinctive in these delineations of Devi/Katharina's discontent is the inventiveness of the Shakespearean translation. Thus, Ragu/Petruchio's animal epithet points up a recasting of the play's reference to Katharina as a 'wildcat' (1.2.191); the *Devil* book over which Devi pours underlines a filmic response to the idea, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, that Katharina is 'a devil, the devil's dam' (3.3.29); and, when Devi smashes the guitar, a parallel is suggested with Katharina's similarly destructive wielding of her lute. If Devi/Katharina's mode of resistance is rooted in a locally-situated evocation of education, then it is also indebted to the descriptors and actions characteristic of Shakespeare's play. The 'man-woman' is objectionable, according to *Hic Mulier*, because he/she is 'unnatural', and an additional area of concern in *Nanjundi Kalyana* is the way in which Devi/Katharina reverses the order of things, emasculating men via assertions of emotion and will. Her physical domination over the cartoonist, and forced removal of his paintbrush, signals the dissolution of his phallic authority. By the same token, when he finds himself, thanks to Devi/Katharina's superior battle skills, without his moustache (she has shaved it off), he is reduced to hiding his lip with his shirt; as he becomes a veiled woman, so

is Devi/Katharina elevated to the position of teacher, director and vengeful barber.¹¹ The motif of male-female inversion is consistently comically rendered. A ‘rowdy’ hired by a suitor who wishes to impress Devi/Katharina is himself vanquished though a well-placed kick in a sensitive area, and Kittu and Puttu, suitors to the sisters, Lakshmi and Saraswati, summarize the situation pithily. Asked by Devi/Katharina, ‘Are you male?’, they reply, ‘We don’t know what we are in front of you’. Such is Devi/Katharina’s effect on men, it is implied, that the presumed solidity of male identity discombobulates, men being reduced to an amorphous and indeterminate state that robs them of customary potency.

Epic Parallels

The central conflict between Ragu/Petruchio and Devi/Katharina takes on an epic dimension in that it is repeatedly realized in mythic terms. In many respects, the confrontation between the two leads is envisaged as a larger-than-life struggle between heroic forces. A measure of his morality, Ragu/Petruchio has a tendency to reference Indian mythology, as when he alludes to the episode in the *Ramayana* in which Rama breaks the ‘Shiva bow’ to win his consort. Associating himself with Rama, Ragu/Petruchio places himself within a key narrative of valour and self-assertion and takes on, as a consequence, wisdom beyond his years. (Raghunath is another name for Rama, meaning King of the dynasty of the Raghuvanshis: hence, Raghu is synonymous with Rama in a literal and figurative sense). Elsewhere, Ragu/Petruchio alludes to Rama’s fifteen-year exile, again as it is described in the *Ramayana*; the idea here, which is consistent with the narrative of the film, is that he will eventually come into his own, that he will recover a status previously eclipsed. As Ragu/Petruchio himself declares, confirming the connection, ‘That Rama is me’. For Devi/Katharina, there is no equivalent paradigm of elevation. For, in her case, the

mythological back-story is a pejorative one. 'She is too arrogant' to be obedient, we learn, 'like Chandi, Chamunda or Shurpanakhi' (either female demons or destructive versions of the mother goddess), the very range of the comparisons pointing up a corresponding effort to approximate the extent of Devi/Katharina's difference.¹² Interestingly, these are all mythic figures that have been, in Indian engagements with Shakespeare, used as correlatives for the 'shrew', an indication of their dangerousness inhering in the insignia or accoutrements with which they are associated – sharp nails or a black appearance.¹³ On another occasion, and in keeping with the particular mythic focus placed on Devi/Katharina, she is labelled as 'Durga Devi'; as Nilima Chitgopekar notes, this is the 'war goddess' and 'buffalo trampler' possessed of a 'violent energy', and she serves therefore as an apt cipher for Devi/Katharina's own brand of aggressiveness.¹⁴

But there is one female goddess with whom Devi/Katharina is indelibly associated. One of the sisters reflects that Devi/Katharina is 'just like Kali' (the female consort of Shiva whose 'dread appearance', in Alain Daniélou's words, 'is the symbol of her boundless destruction'), and it is in the episode centred on the celebration of the engagement that the identification is rendered explicit.¹⁵ As Ragu/Petruchio and his male friends gather, the refrain of their song is heard, the chief cause for jubilation being that the 'arrogance' of Devi/Katharina (apparently, at least) has been broken. Among the dancing crowd can be glimpsed a *hijra*, the transvestite figure, thought to possess divine powers, who traditionally accompanies social gatherings to bestow blessings. (The *hijra* is a devotee of a further mother goddess, Bahuchara Mata, who, after having been attacked, cut off her breasts and was subsequently elevated to the Hindu pantheon). Gradually during the dance, the *hijra* is unveiled, but this is presented as no instance of gender confusion or inversion; instead, the happy participation of the *hijra* suggests his/her approval of Devi/Katharina's 'taming', while the spectacle of bodies dancing in unison points up an idea of men having assumed control.

Moreover, in the place of the earlier cartoon of a moustachioed Devi/Katharina, now the camera's focus is on a placard showing a crude picture of Devi/Katharina and Ragu/Petruchio side-by-side. 'Happily Married' is the message that supersedes 'Terrorist', the change of caption indicating a switch in the gendered arrangement of things, and the fact that Devi/Katharina is here represented without a moustache implies that her anomalousness has been rectified. In the song's lyrics, Ragu/Petruchio's triumph is equated with the heroic exploits of Arjun (the central protagonist and hero of the Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*) and Shiva; indeed, such is the general confidence of the assembly that the former suitors, who form part of the group, now feel they have the confidence to 'fight with Devi'. Yet, in a counter-move that is so characteristic of the film's procedure, and via a development that demolishes the male mythic/heroic parallels the episode has invoked, the show of confidence is exposed as transitory and insubstantial. For, immediately afterwards, Devi/Katharina appears, dressed in the guise of Kali and bearing a trident. The *mise-en-scène* does not discover Devi/Katharina in Kali's full regalia (that is, archetypally the goddess holds a sword and severed head and wears a garland of skulls), but the identification is there nonetheless.¹⁶ Quickly the heroic postures evinced in the song crumble, not least because a female mythological figure challenges the occasion's discursive conjuration of Arjun and Shiva and breaks up the proceedings. Specifically, Devi/Katharina as Kali routs the celebrants and crushes the placards under her feet, suggesting that she rewrites classic narratives according to her own priorities and executes the mother goddess' vengeful role. Contrary to how the sequence is introduced, a reversal of the male-female order is again prioritized. Of course, none of this should necessarily strike audiences as surprising. Even without the film's mythological echoes, Devi's name is sufficient to bring ideas of female power to the fore. 'Devi', meaning goddess, suggests the woman's *shakti*, energy or divine capacity. Furthermore, the association of Devi with the dark forces of a range of mother goddesses

belongs with the characterization and is in keeping with the discovery, in the play, of Katharina as a type of ‘devil’ (3.3.29). What is distinctive is the local cast of the mythic construction. For example, in her South Indian manifestation, Durga, the war goddess, as Nilima Chitgopekar notes, is constituted as a ‘dangerous ... murderous, bride’ who ‘takes ... energies, strength and potency ... from the male gods in order to perform her own’ deeds; such a figuration is of a piece with *Nanjundi Kalyana*’s depiction of processes of emasculation and also accords with the conceptualization of Devi more generally.¹⁷ A further local-mythic idea is at work in the film’s title. *Nanjundi Kalyana*, or the wedding of Nanjundi, references the area (Nanjangud) in Karnataka where, according to a regional variation of the legend, Shiva (or Nanja or Nanjundeshwara) drank poison. At one point, Ragu/Petruchio even prays to his local namesake. A local habitation for a mythic narrative is suggested here as well as the notion that the title character, Nanjundi/Ragu/Petruchio, is a player in a story of epic proportions.

Shameful Spectacles

The wedding itself suggests Devi/Katharina’s determination to continue in an assertive role. Although, at the ceremony, she is represented wearing traditional garb, her submission to male power is illusory only; as she states in an aside, ‘there is no love ... I married him to take revenge’. Much of the subsequent action takes its impetus from *The Taming of the Shrew*. For example, as in Shakespeare’s play, the move to Ragu/Petruchio’s village from the city entails class reorganization, while the forced conditions in which Devi/Katharina finds herself (she is unable, in that order, to wash, eat or sleep) are precisely those rehearsed in the original ‘shrew’ narrative. The scene in the temple, to which Devi/Katharina is drawn in a vain attempt to find food, seems prompted by Shakespearean

references to ‘beggars’ (4.3.4) and ‘charity’ (4.3.6). Meanwhile, Ragu’s relentlessly chirpy philosophizing recalls Petruchio’s similarly *faux* buoyant reflections. In the play, ‘shame’ (3.2.8) is linked most obviously to Katharina’s reductive experience. By contrast, in *Nanjundi Kalyana*, ‘shame’ is registered as a more widely-felt phenomenon, one that is related to the resentment of Puthooru, brother-in-law to Shankrappa (the former claims that the latter gave evidence against him, thereby leading to a loss of ‘respect’ in the ‘public court’) and also to a series of predicaments in which Devi/Katharina finds herself. As she complains, having to walk in the street in her ‘swimsuit’ is an ‘embarrassment’. (In terms of the representation of women, this is a particularly uncomfortable and gratuitous moment). At issue here is not simply an emphasis on notions of female pride and family honour. Key, too, is the theme that shame is galling precisely because it is visible. Perhaps the most extended and involved elaboration of the idea is reserved for the sequence in which, in order to ‘shame’ Ragu/Petruchio in the eyes of the community, Devi/Katharina elects to leave the servant hut and get drunk, becoming, contrary to her plan, a figure of shame herself. The sequence is premised on ideas of contrariness and inversion; the flashback photonegative images of Devi/Katharina that inaugurate the episode, for example, reinforce a theme of opposites and opposition even as they pave the way for her conversion. Incidental business confirms these associations, as when Devi/Katharina buys a bottle of alcohol in a local shop, eliciting shocked reactions on the part of the customers. Engaged in a demeaning transaction, it is implied, Devi/Katharina has exceeded the bounds of the *domus*. A sense of indecency is additionally conjured in Devi/Katharina’s appearance; with midriff showing, and hair loosened, she is represented as particularly scantily attired. Typically, motifs of male-female confusion recur. ‘When a girl is drunk, she becomes a he-man’, Devi/Katharina sings, showing her muscles in a display of conventional masculinity and recalling both Victorian satire and the *Hic Mulier* tradition of women gone awry. The whole is elaborated as a nadir of

unseemliness, not least because, in this extra-domestic display of disobedience, Devi/Katharina is spectated upon in the street by all and sundry, including appalled lower classes. Admittedly, as the lyrics suggest, at another level the song admits to the challenges facing Indian women in contemporary society (as Devi/Katharina sings, ‘It’s difficult to find the path with so many twists and turns’), but, even here, the dominant impression is of a woman who has failed to live up to expected standards. And, so as to broaden the scope of its applications, *Nanjundi Kalyana* takes the instance of Devi/Katharina’s derelictions and uses it to make a political point. Bringing to mind Indira Gandhi, who served as Prime Minister of India in two separate terms (1966-1977 and 1980-1984), the song continues: ‘Tomorrow, if I became Prime Minister, the arrack shop would be my capital’. Invoking a well-known alcoholic beverage, the song is both retrospective (recalling well-known women-led movements against arrack, which has historically been seen as a trigger for gambling and domestic abuse) and anticipatory, looking forward to Karnataka’s banning of the drink in 2007. Functioning in these dual capacities, the song marks Devi/Katharina as a markedly transgressive political construction. So is Devi/Katharina brought down still further via a comic invocation of a place of trade substituting for government institutions.

Domestic Ideals

In the musical interlude that makes up the shaming ritual, Devi/Katharina’s voice is prioritized. But as a way of taking spoken authority away from the characters and stressing the importance of a general perspective, the final song, which sounds over the scene of Devi/Katharina’s humiliation at her husband’s hands followed by illness, is given to no speaker in the filmic action. Rather, an omniscient voice is heard in keeping with the official philosophy being espoused. *Nanjundi Kalyana* does not enact in dialogue the classic

‘obedience’ (5.2.140-183) speech of the play, but it does analogize and reconceive that speech’s statement of principles in a song concerned with the need in marriage for reciprocity. Notably, then, the lyrics draw attention to forms of ‘harmony’: husband and wife, the song argues, ‘come close with friendship’, they ‘walk together’, and ‘are like two eyes of a family’. Emphasised here are the equal contributions of husband and wife to the marital institution, the idea being that union works best if seen as an arrangement in which both partners honour jointly shared responsibilities. In this connection, matching the instructive bent of the lyrics, the *mise-en-scène* discovers Ragu/Petruchio tending to Devi/Katharina, feeding her and performing domestic tasks. It is such an execution of husbandly *dharma* that provokes in Devi/Katharina a final crumbling of will and the onset of her reformation; as she states, ‘Please forgive me’.

Underpinning the process of Devi/Katharina’s conversion is a subscription to an ideal of ‘home’. In the reciprocity song, and as a key philosophical tenet, the following notion is espoused: ‘When a wife is like a goddess, then the home is like a temple’. And, as a result of her shaming Ragu/Petruchio, Devi/Katharina is thrown out of the servant hut, a move that confirms her alterity. The battle between husband and wife on the threshold is multi-layered, and, in being rejected and forced back onto the street in the wake of her drunken escapade, Devi/Katharina is excluded in gender, class and institutional terms, occupying a non-category. As Ragu/Petruchio exclaims, instancing the ‘home’ as ideological measure and device, ‘You crossed your limit ... You don’t have a place in my house’. The storm that ensues upon his climactic announcement, as well as ramping up melodramatic excess, serves to indicate the seismic shift of Devi/Katharina’s imminent embrace of conformity. Although, elsewhere in the film, mythology and sociality are used to mitigate the patriarchal drift, the move at this point is an entirely typical one in Indian popular cinema and points up the ways in which *Nanjundi Kalyana* legitimizes and sanitizes the masculinist trajectory of film and

play. But the ‘home’ is telling in *Nanjundi Kalyana* not just at the level of the central characters. Its prominence in the film’s philosophical fabric is such that it operates, too, as the instrument of a larger familial reconciliation. (In this connection, the film enacts one of the ‘specific solutions’ for the problem of the Victorian Westernized woman, investing in a set of practices that dispels the threat posed to ‘home and family’ as institutions).¹⁸ When, for example, in the wake of Devi/Katharina’s coming into consciousness of conformity, Shankrappa seeks the forgiveness of Puthooru, and is welcomed back into the fold, he reflects: ‘By calling me inside, he saved his respect in the house’. Notions of inside and outside, and shame and honour, are dramatically rehearsed in a moment of new-found accord. These suggestions reverberate in what is the film’s final reconciliation scene. In a reversal of the play’s movement, *Nanjundi Kalyana* brings the family to Devi/Katharina (rather than the other way around), thereby pointing up the importance attached to rural ways. ‘Come in’, the smiling and ‘tamed’ Devi/Katharina announces to her father and mother, gesturing them into the servant hut; her gorgeous white *saree*, flecked with blue, enacts in a visual register the note of connubial content. (The garish and ‘modern’ clothes of before are no more). ‘We are not here to come into your house’, replies a surprised Puthooru, adding, ‘we are here to take you to our house ... where you were born and grown’. Under the impression that his beloved daughter has been deceived and stolen away by an imposter (a servant using the alias of ‘Nanjundi’), Puthooru is represented as anxious to reinforce paternal authority, as this is expressed in the domestic establishment, and to reinstate Devi/Katharina’s status as daughter rather than wife. Once the confusions have been resolved, and the identity of Nanjundi is revealed (he is, as the audience has always known, Devi/Katharina’s cousin), an all-embracing coming together of the family unit can be facilitated, and key to that development is a rethinking of where the ‘home’ resides. Devi/Katharina’s observation, ‘Now, this is my

only house', is a resonant one, and it encompasses not simply her own acceptance of a wifely role but also a bigger *rapprochement* between locations, generations and modes of thought.

Picture insert here and caption: Devi/Katharina, reformed, greets her parents.

The Taming of the Shrew closes on a note of doubt and ambivalence. ‘Tis a wonder, by your leave, she will be tamed so’ (5.2.193), observes Lucentio in a remark that has been used to undergird an extended debate about the performativity of Katharina’s acceptance of wifely obedience.¹⁹ An echo of that debate sounds in *Nanjundi Kalyana* at the moment where, faced with the reconciled members of their families, Devi/Katharina and Ragu/Petruchio playfully nudge each other. But such a gesture, I suggest, amounts to no more than a teasing reference to stage and film adaptations in which the ‘taming’ of Katharina is

left open. Instead, because of the ways in which *Nanjundi Kalyana* concludes, the emphasis of its closing moments would appear to reside far more with the multiple elements with which this regional rewriting of *The Taming of the Shrew* has been preoccupied. Bringing the title of the film to mind, the final stages revolve around the wedding's symbolic functions.²⁰ Clearly, the reinstatement of the family is a crucial concern here, but so too is the sacramental dimension of Devi/Katharina and Ragu/Petruchio's union. In showing how a family might be reconstituted, and in representing Devi/Katharina ushering into the 'house' her mother and father with all due formality, *Nanjundi Kalyana* harks back to the broken *puja* of the start and highlights again the importance of a local culture. Implicitly in this manoeuvre, the city is rejected as a place of positive interaction and, in this film's vision of the state of Karnataka, it is the country that is foregrounded, the village operating as an ideological destination-point.²¹ With the rifts opened by the rupture of the *puja* healed, the action can point up a further localizing feature. That is, because of the familial link between Devi/Katharina and Ragu/Petruchio, the virtues of endogamy are alluded to; bonding and integration are made possible because the two belong to a community based on consanguinity.²² The restitution of the *puja* is significant in another way, for, as Alain Daniélou notes, the image of Lord Ganesha traditionally adorns a house's entrance, while the appearance of the deity (his elephant ears resemble winnowing trays) invokes the harvest.²³ Bringing back so as to re-enact this *puja* in particular affirms not only the place of 'home' but also its positioning in rural (as opposed to urban) environs. Beyond the resonances of locale, the concluding montage is of interest for the ways in which it re-introduces the film's mythological sub-texts. In being 'tamed', Devi/Katharina can no longer be identified as a type of Kali; rather, she is more akin in her reformation to Shiva's wife, Parvati, a goddess linked to fertility, love, devotion and gentleness. Where Kali represents the destroyer, Parvati, by contrast, suggests nurturing functions. In this connection, the lyrics to the reciprocity song spring to mind, for

Shiva and Parvati traditionally have need of each other; theirs is an ongoing relationship in which complementary forces are continually evolving. If *Nanjundi Kalyana* occupies a final position with respect to male-female relations, then a constantly developing, but also deeply co-dependent, union is the idea we are invited to contemplate.

Conclusions

M. K. Raghavendra writes that, in the Kannada language film, there are ‘two overlapping narratives, a local one pertaining to the immediate milieu and another pertaining to the nation’.²⁴ *Nanjundi Kalyana* is a film which answers to this dual imperative. At once, the film mobilises local registers in its representation of women, family and *dharma*, investing in a regionally-based dialogue as part of its negotiation with the gendered questions thrown up by Shakespeare’s play. As earlier parts of this essay have argued, there is, in the interstices of the film’s engagement with gender, a back-story. In more ways than one, *Nanjundi Kalyana* is concerned with the situation of the ‘modern woman’, and, interestingly, in common with the Victorian satires on which it might be said to draw, the film finally answers its questions on this score by espousing, in Partha Chatterjee’s words, notions of ‘modesty, or decorum’ which extend to ‘orderliness, thrift, cleanliness, and a personal sense of responsibility’.²⁵ Or, to make a similar point for a later period, as does Tejaswini Niranjana, although, in the Post-Independence period, there were ‘spaces for women’ and ‘a new visibility’, this was often illusory or short-lived, ‘folded back into the very spectacularization that some feminists might challenge’.²⁶ As part of its discovery of this process, *The Taming of the Shrew* is updated not only via a reimagining of the Petruchio/Katharina relationship but also by a cultural and, specifically, Karnataka-based transposition that imbues the original play with new meanings and applications. In this sense,

Nanjundi Kalyana accords with a definition elaborated by Julie Sanders: ‘adaptation’, she writes, can fruitfully be understood as a ‘transposition’ that takes ‘a text from one genre and’ delivers ‘it to new audiences ... in cultural, geographical and temporal terms’.²⁷ More broadly, the figure of Devi/Katharina, it might be suggested, operates as a cipher for some of the hopes and aspirations of a regional film industry pitted against the ‘Bollywood’ cinema machine. As this essay has suggested, *Nanjundi Kalyana* is distinctive in the ways in which it takes ‘Bollywood’ conventions and plays with them, sounding subtle variations on a theme. In this connection, Shakespeare serves a key function, stressing the ways in which a classic English dramatist can be mortgaged to support the vitality and significance of southern Indian cinematic industries inside a larger national system. (It might be mentioned here that in Kannada there was for a period a move to ban Bollywood features so as to play up the value and contribution of a native *mentalité*). To judge from the previous productions of the director, M. S. Rajashekar (mainly adaptations of novels and remakes), there is no consciously enunciated political stance developed in *Nanjundi Kalyana* around these issues; rather, what may be deemed political is a by-product of the film’s subscription to the local, an effect of its mode of representation. Shakespeare emerges from the work of adaptation as infinitely malleable, as a dramatist whose creations can find a ‘home’ in representational practices that compete with, even as they find inspiration in, the more mainstream forms of Indian cinema with which the Bard has most often been allied.²⁸

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¹ Viyaya Guttal, 'Translation and Performance of Shakespeare in Kannada', in Poonam Trivedi and Dennis Bartholomeusz, eds, *India's Shakespeare: Translation, Interpretation, and Performance* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), pp. 110, 116, 117, 118.

² Guttal, 'Translation and Performance', in Trivedi and Bartholomeusz, eds, *India's Shakespeare*, p. 108.

³ M. K. Raghavendra, *Bipolar Identity: Region, Nation, and the Kannada Language Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. xi-xlvii.

⁴ Rajiva Verma, 'Shakespeare in Hindi Cinema,' in Trivedi and Bartholomeusz, eds, *India's Shakespeare*, p. 752. Ruth Vanita notes that, in modern India, a play such as *The Taming of the Shrew* possesses a particular force because 'members of the college-educated public routinely participate in the drama of family-arranged marriage and the exchanges of dowries, and often witness male violence against women' ('"When Men and Women are alone": Framing the Taming in India', *Shakespeare Survey*, 60 (2007), p. 86).

⁵ Quotations from *The Taming of the Shrew* are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al (New York: Norton, 1997).

⁶ For typical examples, see Rachel Dwyer, *100 Bollywood Films* (London: BFI Publishing, 2005), pp. 18, 154.

⁷ Raghavendra, *Bipolar Identity*, p. 91.

⁸ See Dwyer, *100*, pp. 94, 120.

⁹ Partha Chatterjee, 'Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Women: The Contest in India', *American Ethnologist*, 16.4 (1989), p. 625.

¹⁰ *Hic Mulier* (1620), in Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus, eds, *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540-1640* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), p. 268.

¹¹ The episode may refer to the fate in the *Ramayana* of Shurpanakhi (with whom Devi/Katharina is associated) who is reduced to covering her face after Lakshmana has cut off her nose.

¹² The sub-titles to the DVD targeted at an international market identify only some of the figures mentioned in the filmic dialogue, and the list continues by referencing such mythological types as Kannagi, noted for enacting revenge on the king who had murdered her husband.

¹³ Alain Daniélou, *The Myths and Gods of India: The Classic Work on Hindu Polytheism* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1991), pp. 135, 286; Sisir Kumar Das, 'Shakespeare in Indian Languages', in Trivedi and Bartholomeusz, eds, *India's Shakespeare*, p. 54.

¹⁴ Nilima Chitgopekar, *The Book of Durga* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2009), pp. 5, 15, 19.

¹⁵ Daniélou, *Myths*, p. 271.

¹⁶ See Daniélou, *Myths*, p. 271. It is also possible to see Devi/Katharina in this scene as a version of Durga (see note 13) or Chamundeshwari. There are several myths about this figure in Kannada-language and site-specific (Mysore) contexts. On Chamundeshwari, see 'Mysore District: Chamundi Hills', <http://mysore.nic.in/tourism> (accessed 30 April 2016).

¹⁷ Chitgopekar, *Book*, pp. 39, 53. Durga is also a simultaneously destructive and nurturing mother; this aspect is kept alive in the figuration of Devi/Katharina in such a way as to bolster her ambiguity (particularly in the light of her eventual transformation).

¹⁸ See Chatterjee, 'Colonialism', pp. 626, 627.

¹⁹ For typical theatrical manifestations in the West of the performed nature of Katharina's speech, see Elizabeth Klett, *Cross-Gender Shakespeare and English National Identity: Wearing the Codpiece* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), p. 160.

²⁰ The film title is richly evocative. In Hindi, *kalyana* translates as welfare, prosperity and good fortune *and also* virtuous and auspicious action. By extension, in other linguistic and cultural contexts, the title invokes both Nanjundi's virtuous actions and his wedding/union.

²¹ By contrast, Kittu and Puttu, who marry Devi/Katharina's sisters, Lakshmi and Saraswati, and remain in Bangalore, discover to their discontent that they have, as in the play, joined not with demure women but 'shrews'. (The mythological associations – wealth/prosperity and knowledge/learning – embodied in the sisters' names, therefore, turn out to be fallacious).

²² On the controversies surrounding consanguinity and marriage, see G. Kumaramanickavel, 'Problems with consanguineous marriages', *The Hindu*, 29 April 2004, <http://www.thehindu.com.seta/2004>.

²³ Danielou, *Myths*, pp. 293, 297.

²⁴ Raghavendra, *Bipolar*, p. xxi.

²⁵ Chatterjee, 'Colonialism', pp. 626, 629.

²⁶ Tijaswini Niranjana, 'Nationalism Refigured: Contemporary South Indian Cinema and the Subject of Feminism', *Subaltern Studies*, 11 (2000), pp. 140, 151.

²⁷ Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 20.

²⁸ I would like to thank Poonam Trivedi and Paromita Chakravarti for their astute and enabling comments on an earlier version of this essay. I am also grateful to Sujata Iyengar and Mythili Iyengar for their generous and penetrating remarks concerning the local contexts for the film.