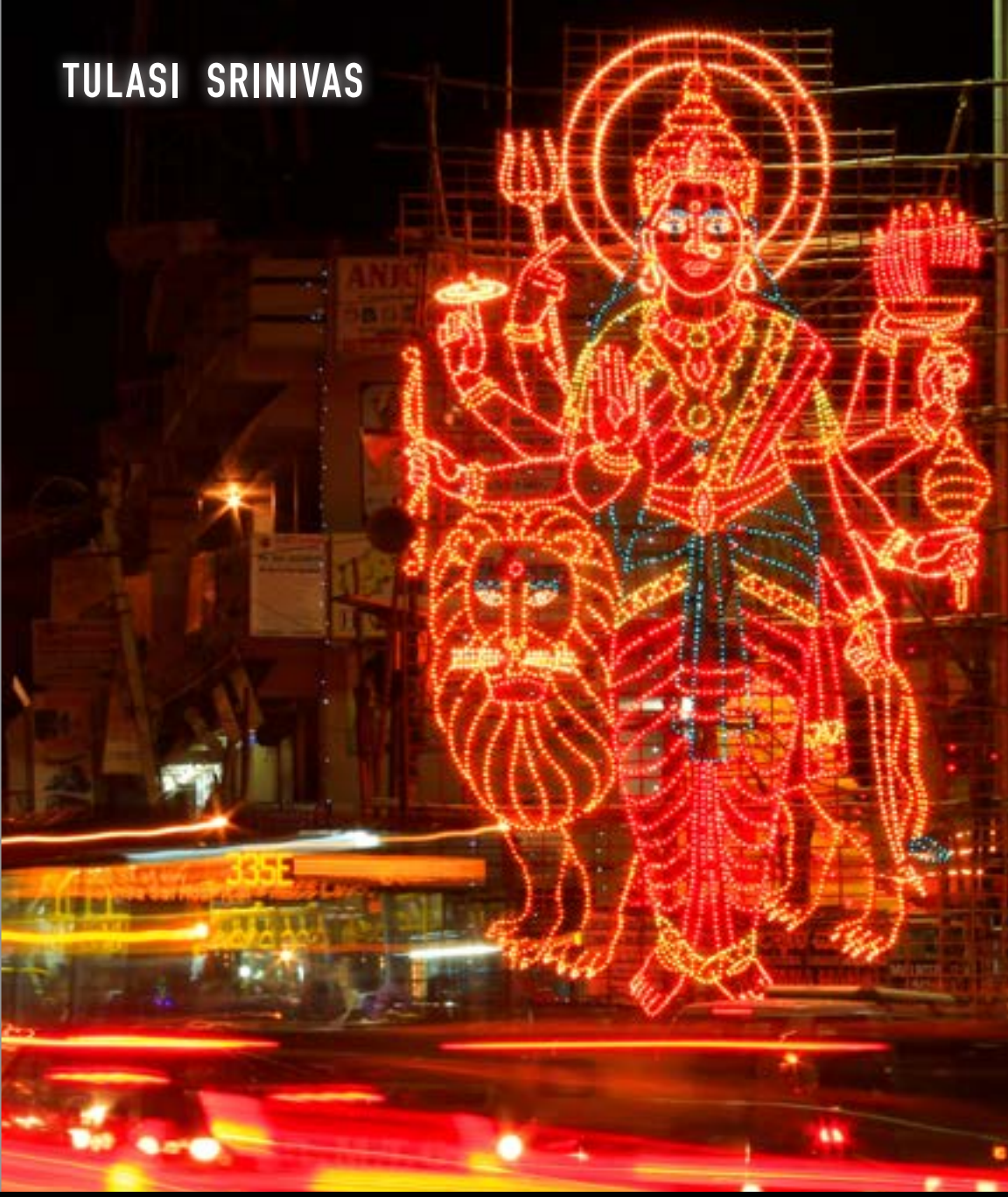
TULASI SRINIVAS



THE COW IN THE ELEVATOR

AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF WONDER

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THE COW IN THE ELEVATOR An Anthropology of Wonder

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Cover art: The Hindu goddess Durga during rush hour traffic. Bangalore, India, 2013. FotoFlirt / Alamy.

For my wonderful mother,
Rukmini Srinivas

CONTENTS

A NOTE ON TRANSLATION

My own efforts to describe practices and processes of wonder in temples in the Malleshwaram neighborhood of Bangalore are dense with a multilingual sociality that is the background of all social interaction in Bangalore. There was constant and endless talk in many different languages—Tamil, Kannada, Hindi, and English—combined with the ethnopoetics of gesture. This linguistic and cultural diversity is not easy to represent. It needs to be tracked through its moves, its imagination, its sites of encounters, and its permeability and vulnerabilities. I have tried different ways that I can imagine to make the reader aware of this rich linguistic and cultural field including dense descriptive interludes, reproduced stories, and explanations.

I have used ethnopoetic notations in an effort to evoke the intensely elaborate linguistic and imaginative poetics of the area. I use italicized lettering at the first use of an Indian-language word, ellipses to indicate pauses, and occasional speech patterns to evoke the dialectical difference from Standard English.

Usually, when quoting a devotee, priest, or ritual practitioner, I give the source language in text, and then for clarity, I translate the non-English words and indicate the source language within parentheses; so, often, the Kannada, Tamil, Hindi, or Sanskrit words appear within the body of the text followed by the English translation with the source language within parentheses, such as *ammelai* (Kannada: afterward). In some cases, for easy reading I use the English translation within the text in which case the original language will occur within parentheses. Brackets are reserved for glosses in translated materials.

Occasionally, I use a Sanskrit word that is known to specialist scholars, so I merely translate in parentheses without references to language of origin. In yet other cases where the word has filtered into English-language

usage, such as the word *karma*, I do not translate after the first usage, nor do I italicize, except when it is used as word qua word, as done here. All words spoken in English in quotations are marked within secondary quotations, so they appear as "Original-language quotation 'Super! Okay.'"

In contrast to standard academic transliteration of Indian-language terms, I have usually elected not to use diacritics, on the assumption that this is an ethnographic text and those who do know Indian languages will not need diacritics to correctly pronounce the word. Rather, I render transliterations as close as possible to what will result in correct English pronunciation. Thus, I render both *ś* and *ṣ* as *sh*; for example, *shakti* (spiritual power) rather than *śakti*. Further, I have indicated aspirated consonants with an *h*—for example, *chaturthi* (the fourth day), such as Ganesha Chaturthi—rather than rendering the word according to the standard academic transliteration of *caturthi*. In direct quotations from authors who have used diacritics, the diacritics will be indicated as in the original; in these cases, the reader will notice, for example, spellings of Shiva as Siva, or Vishnu as Visnu. I have indicated Indian-language terms (except for proper nouns) with italics.

Many terms in this book are shared across Indian languages with slightly different pronunciations, and thus transliterations. For example, in Sanskrit, the name of the god Rama is pronounced with the final *-a*, but in Hindi it is pronounced as Ram, without the final *-a*. Other terms have greater variations; for example, the festival of lights may be called Divali or Dipavali (lit., row of lights). Throughout this text, I will use the Sanskrit transliteration for proper names (Rama, Ganesha) and will add a Sanskrit ending for other nouns (such as *prasadam*) though I will use the more common *darshan* instead of *darshanam*, since these are closer to the vernacular pronunciations used by my collaborators in Bangalore. I also retain the Sanskrit transliteration for *dharma*, both because I draw on and employ definitions of dharma that are outlined in Sanskritic texts and because my collaborators used Sanskrit terms.

Lastly, I retain the name *Bangalore* for continuity throughout the text since that was the city's name when I began fieldwork, though in keeping with many place names in India, it has since reverted to its precolonial name of Bengaluru.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I did not originally set out to write on wonder. This study began life almost twenty years ago as a fragile and unwieldy text on ritual life. My purpose at that time was quite clear to me. It was to write about changes in ritual life in Bangalore as a local case of globalization. But as I looked at my notes, I began to notice how frequently descriptions of the inexplicable and the wondrous lurked. My overstuffed and nervous notes were rife with people describing the conditions of wonder. Some might say I got distracted from discussing religion and globalization. But I learned that the true nature of wonder was to turn the strange and the unexpected into a force of redemption, to use wonder to think about globalization from a different perspective.

Over the years, my original advisors been very supportive of this transformed endeavor. Nur Yalman and Robert P. Weller have been amazing, and Michael M. J. Fischer took the trouble to visit me in Bangalore.

This study would not have been possible without the care of my parents, Rukmini and M. N. Srinivas. They welcomed me back home in 1998. They were generous with their time, ideas, and friends, and they made the return to Bangalore a real pleasure. My mother's warmth and intelligence, her faith and love, and the wonderful meals and conversations she offered made my life easy. My father's amusement at my gaffes in the field, and his delight at sharing the experience of fieldwork, his gentle counsel, and generous offer of reading lists, stay with me.

My in-laws, Mr. Venkatachar and Vanalakshmi, provided me an alternate home closer to Malleshwaram, filled with warmth and good food. To them and to their extended families I owe a great deal. While doing fieldwork, my husband's young cousin Sharath Srinivasan was invaluable help. In the twenty years since, he has become one of the neoliberal elite of the city, a tribute

to his hard work and dedication. Thanks to my friends Surabhi and Ravi Parthasarathy, Manisha Karekar and Seshadri Vasan, Suri Hosakoppal and Sadhana, Subhashini and Vasanth, Sudarshan Holla, Ravina and Sunder Belani, Aditya Sondhi, and Krishna and Aruna Chidambi, who have been unceasingly hospitable to me in Bangalore.

At the National Institute of Advanced Study in Bangalore, my home institution during the period of original fieldwork in 1998–99, I would like to thank the then director, Dr. Roddam Narasimha, for his support; the late Dr. Ravinder Kapur and his wife, Mala Kapur, for their friendship; the late Dr. Raja Ramanna; Professor Sundar Sarukkai and Dhanu Nayak; Hamsa Kalyani, the wonderful librarian, and Manjunath, her scientist-spouse; and Mr. Srinivas Aithal, an indefatigable problem solver. Other colleagues in Bangalore have followed my research and helped in innumerable ways, small and large. Thank you to Professor G. K. Karanth of the Institute of Social and Economic Change, who encouraged my first publication on this material, and to Dr. Kanthi Krishnamurthy for arranging an invitation to speak at Azim Premji University in 2015, thanks to Dr. Carol Upadhya for an invitation to speak at NIAS, the National Institute of Advanced Studies.

But despite the joy of friends, the writing of an inquiry into wonder has been an exercise in sustained suffering, over many continents, for which I was utterly unprepared. Some generous scholars have made this long journey worthwhile. A part of the writing took place in the delightful German town of Bochum. I am indebted to the director of the Kate Hamburger Kolleg at Ruhr-Universitat Bochum, Professor Dr. Volkhard Krech, and Dr. Sven Bretfeld, who invited me to Bochum in 2013 and made my stay there wonderful. During this fellowship year in Germany, I gave a talk in Goettingen, at the Center for Modern Indian Studies, which helped shape my thinking on ritual creativity. I thank Rupa Viswanath, Nate Roberts, Srirupa Roy, Peter Van der Veer, Tam Ngo, and Patrick Eisenlohr. Particular thanks to my research partner in Germany, Dr. Andrew McDowell, now of L'École des Hautes études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, without whose support and intellectual help this book would not have progressed much beyond its first incarnation.

The road of writing about wonder was incalculable to its end in the sense that the process always extends beyond maps employed to negotiate its confusing intersections, switchbacks, and very *longue durée*. The initial research was supported in part by the Pew Charitable Trust and the Lily Endowment and by postdoctoral fellowships at the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University, and the Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs, Boston University. I thank my advisor and friend Peter L. Berger,

then director, Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs. I am grateful to Charles and Cherry Lindholm and Merry White for their warm friendship, to Michael Herzfeld for his hospitality and mind-numbing puns, and to Michael Puett for his generosity in sharing his work on ancient Chinese ritual thought.

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This book owes its genesis and completion to Harvard University, where my cohort mates in the Theory of Anthropology core class—Nicole Newendorp, Vanessa Fong, Sisa Dejesus, Sonja Plesset, and Erica James—helped me conceptualize this study. More recently, it was completed at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, where Dean Liz Cohen, the director of the fellows program, Judy Vichniac, and her incredible team help create an academic idyll that fostered my thinking. I thank my research partners at the Radcliffe, Julia Fine and Apoorva Rangan, for their help in editing this manuscript.

I began speaking about ritual and emotion initially in 2012 at Cornell and Syracuse universities. Thanks to Dan Gold of Cornell and Ann Gold, Susan Wadley, Joanna Waghorne, and Tula Goenka at Syracuse University. Portions of this work have been presented at the American Association of Religion meetings in 2011; the South Asia meetings at Madison, Wisconsin, in 2011; the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; and the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Kent at Canterbury in 2011. I am grateful to my friend Jeremy Carrette of the University of Kent, who first invited me to speak on wonder at the fiftieth anniversary of the British Association of Studies of Religion. Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen and her spouse, Ulrich Rosenhagen, of Madison, Wisconsin, both scholars of religion, gave me a venue to work through my thoughts on wonder at their conference on Rudolph Otto. Thanks to Ulrich and his sister, Anna, I got a tour of the fleshpots of Hamburg just before I began the fieldwork, which put the ethical lives and moral concerns of the Malleshwaram priests into perspective, and thanks

to Jennifer, who so generously shared thoughts and readings with me. Francis X. Clooney and Anne Monius of the Center for the Study of World Religions were kind to invite me to speak at their colloquium as I worked through some of the material. Levi McLaughlin invited me to North Carolina State University and was so generous with his time, and Lauren Levy arranged for my talk at UNC Chapel Hill, where I met the amazing Leela Prasad, who, with one or two insights, elevated my interest in ritual and ethics in Karnataka. I am grateful too to James Bielo and his colleagues at Miami University at Oxford, Ohio, for inviting me to give a keynote lecture at their conference on Religion and Creativity, and for booking me to stay in an amazing nineteenth-century midwestern farmhouse. Lindsay Harlan gave me a lovely evening at her beautiful home during a visit to speak at Connecticut College, and Richard Sosis's invitation to the University of Connecticut came at an opportune moment as I was wrapping up this book.

In New Zealand, my thanks go to Will Sweetman, Ben Schoenthol, and the members of the Australian and New Zealand Association of Religious Studies not only for an invitation to speak at their national meetings but for the wonder of being able to see the endangered Kea parrot in its cloud forest. While watching the parrots, their innate curiosity and sense of playful mischief, it only takes a bit of insight to see how creative and improvisational enterprises might lead us back to enrich and enliven our original intentions.

I am particularly grateful to Kirin Narayan, a wonderful friend, who after a long flight from Australia listened to my endless stories of the field and stopped me in midsentence to ask incredulously, "A cow in an elevator?" and to add with conviction, "That's the title of the book." My gratitude to her not only for the gift of the title but for her generosity in sharing writing tips and references, and for remembering the perfect epigraph for this volume from her school Sanskrit recitations.

But the *longue durée* of writing and thinking does not mean that we are fated to be perpetually and thoroughly lost, only that our plans and explanations will remain partial and provisional to be joyfully overturned by the uncanny swerves of contingency where expected plans take a creative detour. The serendipity of running into Ken Wissoker on the street in Denver is a moment of wonder. His patience as I stumbled through a description of this work and his wise counsel during the process of getting it to publication make me forever grateful. He, Elizabeth Ault, Susan Albury, and their team have been all that an author could desire. Additionally, I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers who read and commented on the manuscript with such precision and insight.

But centrally, thanks are due to the two priests Krishna Bhattar and Dandu Shastri, and the localites of Malleshwaram. They bore my presence and my frequently annoying and nosy questions with good grace and saw to the task of educating me with kindness. They have given me so much material that this work is the beginning of a two-part book series on Bangalore—a bi-logy, as it were. They saw the pursuit of wonder as a joyful opportunity and in doing so they attuned me to the dawning truth of the importance of the imagination seen beyond disciplinary horizons. It is their devotion, instruction, and creativity that I acknowledge in this work. It is their friendship that I cherish.

Most importantly, my gratitude is to my family. They understood better than did I that through acts of the imagination, we can make a meaningful home. Thanks to my mother, Rukmini Srinivas, to whom I owe such a profound debt that the contours of it are indistinguishable. She is generous with her time and her emotions, and has made so many sacrifices to make my world tenable for me.

Thanks also to my wonderful sister and colleague, Lakshmi Srinivas of the University of Massachusetts, Boston, for her pertinent analytical comments, her storytelling ability, and her sense of humor. When I was down, she would always pick me back up, despite her own writing concerns. Our continuous and wide-ranging discussions about contemporary India, preferably over cups of tea and some cake, have formed the foreground and the background of this book.

And finally, thanks to my spouse, Popsi Narasimhan, who cheerfully packed up our house in Boston and moved "back home" to Bangalore for my fieldwork. In the past twenty years, he has tirelessly dealt with the daily mundanities of our everyday life in Boston, of getting our pet parrots fed and the bills paid, while I mentally inhabited a world in far-off Bangalore. Writing can be a selfish act, and he has been unceasingly supportive of my selfishness in this regard. I am full of gratitude to him for making this, and other explorations of wonder in our lives together, possible.

Tulasi Srinivas
Cambridge, Massachusetts

O Wonderful!

Haavu! Haavu! Haavu!
Aham-annam Aham-annam Aham-annam
Aham-annaado Aham-annaado Aham-annaaadah
Aham-asmi Prathamajaa Ritaasya Poorvam Devebhyo-amritasya Naabhaayi!
Bhuvanamabhyabhavaam
Suvarna Jyotih
Ya Evam Veda Ity'upanishat
Aum Shanti Shanti Shanti!!

O Wonderful! O Wonderful! O Wonderful!
I am food, I am food, I am the food
I am the eater, I am the eater, I am the eater
I am the poet, the scholar, the saint
First born
Earlier than the gods, in the center of immortality.
I have overcome the whole world
I am effulgent!
He who knows this, such is the secret doctrine.
Aum peace, peace, peace!!

—From the *Taittreya Upanishad*

INTRODUCTION

WONDER, CREATIVITY, AND ETHICAL LIFE IN BANGALORE

Anthropology demands the open-mindedness with which one must look and listen, record in astonishment and wonder that which one would not have been able to guess.
—Margaret Mead, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*

You tell stories. Our stories. Telling stories and doing this *kainkaryam* [ritual] is the "same." They both help us dream of a better place.
—Krishna Bhattar, chief priest, Krishna Temple

Cranes in the Sky

August 28th, 1998. Ganesh Visarjana Festival, Malleshwaram, Bangalore city.

On the fourth day in the second half of the lunar month of Bhadrapaada, as happened annually, Hindus were celebrating the festival of Ganesha Chathurthi.[1] In Hindu mythology, the elephant-headed god Ganesha is a protectionary deity with a gargantuan appetite who removes obstacles in the lives of humans. According to custom, a ten-foot-high, brightly colored clay image of the deity was installed in a makeshift pavilion at the popular Ganesha Temple in the neighborhood of Malleshwaram in the city of Bangalore.

Ten days later, on the fourteenth day of the waxing moon known as Ananda Chaturdashi—day of ecstasy—the deity was ceremonially immersed in a local body of water, an annual rite of propitiation and leave-taking, or *visarjana*.

On the day of the visarjana, under dreary gray skies, I, along with several hundred devotees, waited at the temple. Consummate ritual participants knew where they could sit comfortably and wait, and they hung about in small groups under the trees and on the temple steps, chatting desultorily about family, food, and friends.

Suddenly, an enormous, blinding-yellow lorry arrived at the temple gate, honking its loud "heehaw" klaxon horn. On the flatbed was a gilded, crystal-covered, peacock-shaped palette illuminated by rotating lighting chains that spun in a whirling dial behind the lorry's cab. A huge klieg light mounted to the cab sent a single ray deep into the night sky. It was bedazzled and dazzling. The assembled crowd shouted, "*Ayyoo! Nodu, nodu!* [Kannada: Amazing! Look, look!]," nudging one another to take notice.

As the lorry lurched into the temple courtyard, temple-goers scattered and leapt aside. Dandu Shastri, the *pradhan archakar*—chief priest of the temple—took charge. He quickly organized the crowd of neophyte priests, devotees, and hangers-on and had them load the heavy clay deity onto the palette, which held a wooden *mantap*—pavilion—decorated with flower chandeliers. Once the deity was loaded, the driver pressed a switch, and the sound of "Ganesha Sharam, Sharanam Ganesha!," coordinated with flashing lights, blasted into the wet evening air.[2] The delighted devotees exclaimed, "*Bombhat! Su-per! First class!*" They crowded closer, pressing me against the dented green fender of the lorry. Seated on the cab, the priest Dandu Shastri noticed me and asked, clearly expecting a delighted reply, "*Yeppidi irruku?* [Tamil: How is it?]." As we began our procession to the nearby Sankey tank, a local man-made lake, I assured him I had seen nothing like it.[3]

The procession wound through Malleshwaram, rerouting frequently to avoid construction rubble, evidence of the endless building of the city. Cranes and scaffolding rose into the dark sky, a lacy network drawing solid gray boxlike apartment buildings out of the earth. Despite a rolling blackout and the dangerous pits in the street where the government had been inefficiently laying power lines for months, residents poured out of the buildings, drawn first by the ray of the klieg light piercing the sky and then the lights of the procession as it got closer. They prayed in the streets, bowing in submission, thrilled at the serendipitous *darshan*, or sacred sighting. Delighted with this audience, Dandu Shastri stood beaming on top of the truck's cab.

An hour and a half later, we arrived at the edge of Sankey tank just as the sun, low in the sky, emerged from behind the clouds. At the water's edge, new luxury apartment buildings gleamed, while in the distance the ghostly outlines of more tall cranes were visible, marking where a brand new skyline was slated to emerge.

Several other processions had arrived before us. Near the shore, all the activity had churned the water into a deep coffee-brown polluted by the scum and detritus of worship: overripe fruit, sodden flower garlands, torn plastic bags, cups, and dripping clay oil lamps floating in the water. The bands of devotees struggled to plow into water deep enough to successfully immerse their deities. Many gave up and deposited their deities too close to shore, only to have them sink partially, a portent of misfortune in the coming year.

From the cab of the truck, blocked from sight by the blinding glare of the klieg lights, I heard Dandu Shastri exhort the young priests, "*Time bandbittide! Bega, bega!* [Kannada: Time has come! Hurry up!]." The crowd parted, expecting—as did I—that a crowd of youth would swarm onto the lorry to carry the deity into the lake and submerge it.

Instead, the lorry itself seemed to respond to Dandu's call. Growling and whining, an enormous mechanical crane emerged from its base and towered over the cab. The tracks of blue spotlights outlining its frame lent it a surreal, unearthly glow as it slowly unfurled to a huge metal hook at its end, from which dangled the palette, the deity—and Dandu Shastri. The hook had painted omniscient, heavy-lidded eyes in the style of popular calendar art depictions of the god Shiva. The crowd gasped at the unexpected sight and rocked back on its collective heels, pressing me further against the cab.

The crane lifted the palette and the deity swung slowly out over the water. The devotees, now joined by several hundred bystanders, craned their necks for a better view as Dandu Shastri performed the leave-taking *puja* (worship) on the swinging palette high above the water. He garlanded the deity and the crane, hook and all, and offered the one techno-divinity, wondrous in its fusion and terrifying in its monstrosity, the sacred camphor flame. The crowd roared their approval, chanting their hopes for the god's return the next year, "*Ganesha banda! Kai kadubu thinda, Chikkerenall bidda, Doddkerelle yeddha!* [Kannada: Ganesha came! He ate all the sweets, he fell in the small lake and then rose in the big one!]."

The crane extended further out over the water, casting its kaleidoscopic reflections over the waves, thousands of blue-lit fractal images of the deity. Devotees around me clapped and exclaimed, "*Ashcharya vagi idde!* [Kannada: It's amazing!]." Others clicked their tongues in surprise; young men

FIGURE I.1. Flatbed truck holding Ganeshas for immersion.
Photo by Sharath Srinivasan.

emitted piercing whistles and lighting fireworks. Amid the chanting, whooping, whistling, clapping, and the sounding of the lorry's klaxon horn, the deity was released into the deep water, where it sank quickly and completely. Mrs. Shankar Gowda, a local temple-goer and connoisseur of ritual, turned to me and gave a succinct and emphatic summation of the evening's events, "*Adbhutha vagi itthu!* [Kannada: It was wondrous!]."

Beaming as he was swung back over our heads and deposited on solid ground, Dandu was clearly delighted by the success of the new technology of immersion. He stayed for the next hour, accepting the crowd's congratulations and speaking to every single person.

AS EVIDENCED BY the events just described, this work offers an ethnography of amazement, of wonder as a sublime yet everyday experience that emerges and evolves in the performance of ritual in the temples of Bangalore city in South India.[4] My thesis on wonder is simple. I propose that wonder is apparent in everyday ritual in Bangalore, and that practices of wonder align with moments of ritual creativity or improvisation that occur sporadically but then sediment and become instituted as part and parcel of the ritual. Wonder is both a symptom and a mode of challenge to existing ontological

assumptions about being and becoming, a tiny space of resistance that stands within the brokenness and precarity of everyday life in the city.

Victor Turner, *the* student of ritual life, suggests that ritual is a liminal mode of being, a threshold state that is momentary and delimited. In that threshold state, ritualists are encouraged in a collective bonding, which in turn allows resistance to the larger society in limited, carefully circumscribed moments that can quickly be domesticated. He terms this bounded space "anti-structure" and the statis that precedes and follows it "structure" (1969a; 1969b). The key of anti-structure is its ephemerality—that when the ritual ends, or soon thereafter, practitioners fall back into the familiarity and solidity—the durability of structure. For Turner, the statis of structure is eternal and normative. "Disturbances of the normal and regular," he writes, such as conflict and ritual, "merely give us greater insight into the everyday and the normal" (1974, 34). While that is certainly true, Turner's privileging of the fixity of structure as the valid metric of society makes the anti-structure of ritual valuable only as its counterpoint. Anthropologists have largely understood ritual as a sacred process for domestication of dangerous forces both within us and without, to lend stability to structure. So most studies of ritual have focused on the efficacy of the process (Seligman et al. 2008, 368–70; Puett 2013).[5] This is understandable, for after all, durability is the desired state for the society at large, and efficacy of process is valuable. But the notion of fixity has long been overvalued; in contrast, we must also look at the changes and creativity in rituals (Michaels 2016). After witnessing the truck procession and hundreds of other examples like it where wonder and amazement broke through in Bangalore, I wondered, what if the desired state is not stability but fracture? What if today the pursuit of wonder is the point of ritual rather than the quick return to the solidity of structure?

The conversations and exclamations overheard during that visionary immersion convinced me that for ritual practitioners, the moment of fracture contained within the extraordinariness of ritual is the space in which they want to linger.[6] For the practitioners at Sankey tank, the moment that wonder struck was *the* transformative moment, a fracture of the ordinary not merely for the individual, or even for the society, but for the world at large.[7] Jonathan Z. Smith, a scholar of religion, suggests that ritual is "a mode of paying attention" (1987, 104), of attending more closely to the habitus, the *doing* of religion in Hinduism. This book is an invitation to pay attention to this particular mode of paying attention and thus attain a new understanding of contemporary Hindu ritual process that orients toward this fracture—toward wonder.

Indeed, in turning to wonder, what is made apparent is that the processes of ritual interact with new capitalist economies in Malleshwaram and conscript a capitalist bewitchment to a ritual wonder. I explore how priests and ritual practitioners in Malleshwaram co-create wondrous experiences through creative temple rituals that resist, appropriate, replace, and recast modern capitalism—the mechanism of their precariousness.[8] Through the use of creative ritual, they grant themselves agency (*adhikara*) to express and build their own futures through their practices and theologies.[9] A consideration of wonder shifts our focus from textual treatises and tradition to discourses and practices of emotion, expression, and creativity.[10] This allows for the *process* of making,[11] crafting, and manufacturing worlds, possibilities, and dispositions, in its embryonic and collaborative stages. I argue that the changes in ritual—ritual creativity—are the pursuit of the transformative moment of wonder, the impractical and magical, in which religious identity shifts to be located in the emergence and poetics of praxis rather than in the fixed constructions of doctrinal orthodoxy. I document this world-making work of the wondrous (Ramberg 2014) toward a new understanding of ritual process (Durkheim [1915] 1995; Turner 1968, 1969b; Orsi 2005) in which ritual is creative, built through iterative miniscule improvisations for a world in which wonder comes alive.[12]

Ritual process is composed of miniscule iterative small shifts. These small shifts in process, the micro process of ritual, appear dialectical—by which I mean they both rupture and capture elements of ritual life and theology and forms of neoliberal life and ideology simultaneously—but they are dialogic in that they converse and build on one another. This rupture-capture process is what allows for the endemic creativity within the space of fracture that ritual produces despite the overarching precariousness of everyday life in Malleshwaram (Bateson 1936).

Wondering about Wonder

What exactly *is* wonder?[13] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines wonder as "the emotion excited by the perception of something novel and unexpected," and extending to an "astonishment mingled with perplexity or bewildered curiosity." As an essential definition, it brings to the forefront the little that we know about wonder: its extraordinariness, suddenness, and seemingly divine-like rupturing of the mundane (Vasalou 2015). Descriptions of the experience of wonder are even less concrete: a sudden gasp of surprise; childlike amazement. Wonder is experienced as elusive and ineffable. In an attempt to

grasp this slipperiness, Philip Fisher has defined wonder as "a sudden experience of an extraordinary object that produces delight" (1998, 55), which turns us toward the material otherness of the wonderful in an attempt to illuminate an accompanying primary passion that manifests as creativity (Descartes [1649] 1989, 52).[14]

The Western intellectual history of wonder recognizes it as difference that locates sublimity. Beginning with the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle, wonder was seen as the internal state of enlightenment, possibly cohabiting with a Socratic *aporia*, a disorientation of passion (Bynum 1997). Platonic and Aristotelian notions of wonder were significantly different: where Aristotle seeks to dissipate wonder and move toward reason and knowledge, Plato attempted to open us to the passions, to vulnerability and joy, to a different kind of knowing (Rubenstein 2008). Both understood that difference provokes wonder. Critical thinkers who wish to link wonder and alterity in their cultural histories or ethics begin in this shared focus on otherness (Greenblatt 1991; Irigaray 2004).[15] This curiosity about the other manifested in the nineteenth century, in the age of exploration and inquiry.[16] Early scientists and doctors understood wonder as that which clung to the mysterious, fueled curiosity, and edged the curious toward experimental knowledge (Cox and Cohen 2011). Wonder, to them, suggested new realities and new possibilities—a mood that can be created and sustained as a way of contesting the received knowledge of the limits to living, as well as a way to transform the ontological possibilities of life itself (Scott 2016, 474–75).

In the twentieth century, the religion scholar Rudolph Otto wrote *Das Hielige* (*The Idea of the Holy*), a treatise on the unknowability and ineffability of wonder. He argued that wonder returned one to a feeling of the "numinous" ([1923] 1958, 15–17), which encompassed, in alphabetical order, awe, bewilderment, curiosity, confusion, dread, ecstasy, excitement, fear, marvel, mystery, perplexity, reverence, supplication, and surprise. It is also a return to passion, as something not to be discredited as lacking reason, as in the Cartesian view, but to be embraced as an interaction with the inexplicable divine. Within Otto's physiognomic context, wonder included not only "the psychological process of affect, but in turn also its object, the holy," a knowable attribute of the "*mysterium tremendum*," the divine ([1923] 1958, 22).

The enduring history of wonder suggests a human need for it. "Deep inside," as Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park suggest, "beneath tasteful and respectable exteriors, we still crave wonders. . . . We wait for the rare and extraordinary to surprise our souls" (2001, 368).

I found the spaces of the temple and the people in them—who referred to themselves as "localites"—to be that surprise to my soul. Like Dandu Shastri, they were joyful, radiant, and full of a radical hope in the possibilities of the future, despite the everyday precarity of their existence on the margins of the global marketplace. They were anxious as they were buffeted by winds of economic and cultural change entirely beyond their control, and it would be all too understandable if they allowed their humanity to be drowned in the resultant sea of dread. But instead, they seemed to be linked at a level of wondrous and joyful knowing. They joked and laughed together as they adored the gods every day. They sang and worshipped in the hope of a new tomorrow.

Their joyful attitude put me in mind of a poem from the *Taittreya Upanishad*, which I include as an epigraph to this work. Written to be sung in a Sama Vedic musical meter, it is estimated to be some 2,500 years old.[17] Toward the end of the text is a section called the "Bhrigu Valli," which tells the story of a seer who suddenly realizes his interconnectedness with the universe of creation, as both the consumer and the consumed, the eater and the eaten, part of the circle of eternal life. The poem is filled with long drawn-out "aaahs," termed *dirgahs* in Sanskrit poetic meter, evidence of the seer's surprised appreciation and his wonder at the connectivity of life. "*Haavu! Haavu! Haavu!*" he breathes, "O Wonderful! O Wonderful! O Wonderful!"

Feeling wonder, as this Upanishadic seer understood, is a practice and a pursuit that forces us back on our intellectual haunches, as it points both beyond itself and into itself, crossing and recrossing, gathering and dissipating, forcing us into new ways of thinking and recording. An experimental regime of ritual in the pursuit of wonder fuels a sense of creativity and of radical hope that I felt localites inhabit in Malleshwaram. But it is important to note that this radical hope does not merely arise in individuals; it is social, a wider net of tough-minded yet ecstatic inspiration to action to create the world of one's imagination.

This radical social hope was unexpected to me, another wondrous surprise. As I watched the shining truck and the deity at the lakeside and heard the crowd's ecstatic response, I understood that social hope is a necessity in neoliberal reality, for neoliberalism argues for a corrosive individuality—biographical solutions for systemic problems—that creates both alienation and constant dread. The hope I found in Malleshwaram created spaces of resistance to this corrosion of neoliberalism, while allowing for a pragmatic capturing of what might work in the moment. This radical social hope is key

to anti-alienation, to a sense of feeling and being "at home" in the modern world.

And while hope created action, it is also true that action creates hope. I saw the ways that localites understood that in the everyday lay the opportunity for a resistance to neoliberalism's deadening effects, as well as its joyful reconstruction into something bearable. Here was the everyday building of a resilience in the face of sudden and shattering economic and social change.

And so I argue that we need an *anthropology* of wonder, not only as a counterpoint to wonder's rarified existence in Western philosophical and literary texts but also in order to think about wonder as grounded, as birthed, and as stoked by human beings, and which allows for a social hope to grow in communities despite and against the losses that living in the neoliberal moment bequeaths to us.

Modern Fractures

During the immersion, while everyone was delightedly wonderstruck, I watched the gilt crown of the deity slide quietly into the lake with a feeling of sadness at the loss. After everyone had left, and a handful of the temple habitués were getting ready to return to the temple, Dandu Shastri asked me with concern: " 'Why were you sad? No, No!' *Poyatan but thierripi varavaan! Yedir-pudirru . . . Idde yedirkalam ode pirappu* [Tamil: He left but he will come back! The continuity of the past and the future. This is the birthing of a future!]." His words seemed to offer a "twofold vision of an opaque past and an uncertain future" (de Certeau 1984, 159). Ritual practitioners like Dandu Shastri and Krishna Bhattar, the chief priest of the Krishna Temple, recognize these adjacencies, the space between the lost past and envisioned future, as *the* sites for a necessary genesis of wonder.

Indeed, while writing on ethics in South Asia, Anand Pandian and Daud Ali gesture to these double-faced, Janus-like adjacencies between lost past and envisioned future: "Modernity in South Asia has always been two-faced, looking forward to the challenges of contemporary existence only from the standpoint of the inherited traditions that lend meaning and direction to its futures" (2010, 13). I will argue that through the pursuit of wonder—in which wonder is a rhetorical and aspirational catalyst to create rituals that not only rupture and resist but also embrace and extend modernity's enduring and seductive paradigm—ritual practitioners explore, interrogate, and slyly resist the dominant model of a Western-derived neoliberal modernity to which

FIGURE 1.2. Ganesha images on crane floating above the lake. Photo by Sharath Srinivasan.

they are subject,[18] and that these discourses and practices are potentially transformative of contemporary modernity, capturing, yet also rupturing, both past and future conditions. These explorations and resistances are small ethical acts in themselves, and when accumulated, they lead to an interrogation of what constitutes a moral knowing in the contemporary world.

To me the loss of the deity into the lake was weighted with the losses I saw around me in the city that I knew and loved. Bangalore's unchecked development had led to and exacerbated several urban problems: the lack of adequate middle-income housing, water shortages, power cuts, endless traffic jams and attendant pollution, chronic waves of epidemics, breakdown of services, and a complete degradation of the environment (Gadgil and Guha 1995).[19] Under earth movers and power saws, urban sprawl expanded until the city planning authority of Bangalore, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara

Palike (BBMP), was declared the largest municipal corporation in the country. It was small wonder that land prices rose by 300 percent in about ten years. The horrors of neoliberal development were unleashed on an unprepared city.[20]

Krishna Bhattar, the chief priest of the Krishna Temple in the neighborhood, often spoke with bewilderment and wounded sadness of the contemporary everyday. Following the etymology of the word *wonder* in German, *wunder*, we find an indication of a wound, gash, or fracture, small or large, prolonged or rapid, as well as a response to this fracture. Krishna Bhattar spoke of climbing over piles of rubble in the street, of getting lost in neighborhoods he had visited his entire life because all the landmarks he remembered had changed in six short months, of "catching water" that came in a thin trickle despite the overflowing monsoon rains, of the loss of petrol and time following incomprehensible traffic routes and driving in the opposite direction to our destination to avoid yet more roadwork. This vertiginous disorientation was Nietzschean in its cosmic loss.[21] In my own nostalgia for a city lost, I could relate to Krishna Bhattar's sense of fracture and fragmentation, and it brought us closer.

Neoliberal modernity, a phrase I use frequently in this text and by which I mean the current era of global capitalism that began in the mid-1990s, enlarges this sense of fracture and loss: the continuous loss of good jobs, loss of health, loss of equanimity, the loss of eco-habitat toward endless development, lack of resources evidenced in drought and blackouts, and loss of a sense of community and shared culture. All suggest a "being on the edge," an existential threat that is sudden and life changing yet somehow always present. A billboard in Malleshwaram brought this gestalt to a focus. It seemed to be advertising a heart attack though in reality it was a public awareness campaign of the symptoms of a stroke. It seemed to encapsulate the vulnerability of living in a growing megacity like Bangalore.

Out of my sense of loss at the submersion of the deity in the lake and a subsequent leap of faith into the scene of that loss grew an attempt to record my interlocutors' relationships to both faith as it is understood in practice in non-Christian religious worlds and loss in a contemporary neoliberal moment. Taking that moment as a point of departure, I have sought a willing engagement with the loss and incompleteness of modern life. The work of describing ritual practitioners—priests, devotees, ritualists, witnesses, and storytellers—has brought into view the fruitful acts of doing and undoing, formed through relationships between loss of presence and presence of a deep devotion enacted in practice of ritual acts.

FIGURE 1.3. Billboards advertising care for stress-related heart attacks. Photo by the author.

In the classical literature on ritual and ritual acts, ritual has been understood as embedding itself in routine life but not becoming routinized (Durkheim [1915] 1995; Mauss [1923] 1967; Hertz 2006; Levi-Strauss 1963, 1966). Rituals are a part of everyday ordinary life, yet they allow practitioners to enter another extraordinary state, characterized by an internal, often magical logic. When practitioners step back into the everyday world, they and it are transformed. Anthropologists have understood that ritual as a structure allowed different temporalities to manifest themselves, always, in "another" time while having a narrative continuity with the routine world from which they emerged and returned (Biardeau 1976). For Levi-Strauss, what was surprising was that even though the outcome of ritual was known, yet it enabled a refraction of the world for participants (1966). How this refraction occurred for individuals within the society, and what happened to the structure of the ritual and the society as a result, was the concern of classical ritual studies. More recent schools of thought have rejected this focus on structure, the structure of ritual, or the enduring structure of society, pivoting toward a focus on ritual's efficacy and functionality, its ability to do what it sets out as its objective, what Seligman et al. term its "sincerity" (2008). But what if we are less concerned with structure or function, and more with the processes of ritual refraction?

A reoriented exploration of ritual process toward dynamism suggests that an understanding borne of what ritualists *say* they do and *what* they do over a period of time will move us beyond the pragmatic limitations of what ritual *does* in order to think through what ritual *is*. Or, to put it another way, a focus on what ritual practitioners say they do and what they do moves us from a consideration of efficacy to considerations of imagination, from the depredations of the present to the possibilities in the future. And, if we allow that the ritual practitioners—the Dandu Shastris of this world—have a *philosophy of ritual,* rather than explaining their mores away through philosophy, we require, at the very least, a re-placement of philosophy in anthropological theorizing.

Of Bangalore's Boomtown Bourgeoisie

As my fieldwork continued into the new millennium, luxurious, high-rise gated apartment buildings with gyms, pools, and concierge services became the ideal housing stock of Malleshwaram. Long lines of "foreign" cars such as BMWs and Hondas jockeyed for space in front of the glass walls of Namdari and other organic grocery stores. From being a genteel, elite, upper-caste community of spacious bungalows and gardens for large families, all of whom knew one another, incestuously marrying, feuding, eating, and gossiping, Malleshwaram became a heterogeneous, largely anomic, multiethnic, fast-paced bedroom community of apartment blocks inhabited by career professionals in the information technology (IT) industry. Some were upper caste, but many were dominant or lower-caste educated youth, drawn to Bangalore from all over India. Real estate values in Malleshwaram "hit the roof" while I was doing fieldwork, creating a neighborhood of instant millionaires, land and building rich yet often cash poor, a space of middle-class aspirational dreaming.[22]

It is no accident that this project is set in the megacity of Bangalore at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries, for Bangalore is the home of experimental technology and of "instant" Internet millionaires (Belliappa 2013). The city is the singular home of experimental innovation and creativity in India, the "belly button" of the global IT industry. In the Indian national imagination, Bangalore's "exceptionalism" as a high-tech urban development model made it iconic and emulatable for other Indian cities (L. Srinivas 2016, 2).[23] Its roster of smokeless factories, crucibles of experimentation in the new knowledgeware economy, include many in the global Fortune 500: AT&T, Hewlett Packard (HP), Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC), IBM, Samsung, Texas Instruments, Apple,

and Motorola. Recognized as a specialty technology hub linked to circuits of neoliberal capital that span the world, Bangalore has earned the sobriquet "the Silicon Valley of Asia." It is a city on the cutting edge of innovative scientific, biomedical, genetic, and engineering expertise (Harriss 2007, 4). The urban gestalt of Bangalore is one of experimentation and creativity, largely oriented to an entrepreneurial culture but amorphous enough to include varieties of imaginaries and practices.

In 2005–6 the Indian IT industry generated earnings of US$17.8 billion, an enormous amount of foreign exchange for a poor country.[24] The direct employment figures were roughly 1.3 million, which translated into several million other, indirect jobs in a phenomenon that A. Aneesh has referred to as the "liquefaction of labor" (2006, 9), wherein legions of "flexible" labor grew (Beck 1992; Ong 1999). Bangalore's rapid growth was seen as prophetic for wider-spread economic expansion and soon received the dubious distinction of being the "fastest growing city in Asia" (Kripalani and Engardio 2003), marked by the sudden growth of a bourgeois, consumer-hungry, global elite who style themselves as India's "new middle class" (cf. Waghorne 2004; Derné 2008; Brosius 2010; Dickey 2012).[25] In 2016 the estimated population was a staggering 9.8 million, a true boomtown. I was told that the city grows by approximately eight thousand undocumented in-migrants every day.

Yet despite these statistics of a booming growth, Bangalore remains a middle-class city, not a "maximum city" like Suketu Mehta's (2005) Mumbai. It is a medium, middling city—medium originally as scaled to a provincial metric and a small-scale metropolitan imaginary. It is described in Indian government categories as a "second tier" city.[26] Localites are the middle class that populate Bangalore and who see themselves as ambassadors of a new Indian dream of meritocracy and power. Entering Bangalore's middle class is less about income or land or even consumption habits, though they all play a part (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1995; Liechty 2003; Srivastava 2012). It is about learning to act, look, and sound middle class through status-based practices; it is "not merely a question of money but of linguistic and aesthetic knowledge and respectability" (Fernandes 2006, 34). The boomtown bourgeoisie of this thriving city show a muscular "capacity to aspire," a key metric by which the middle class can be defined (Appadurai 2004), allowing as it does for widening sets of possibilities for upward mobility.

IN MALLESHWARAM, A neighborhood to the north of Bangalore, temple ritual is part of the quotidian lives of people, intertwining their devotional life

and aspirational mobility. During the time of my study, localites often arrived at the temple to greet the deity as one would an old friend, after an evening stroll, or on their way to or from marketing. They would invite the priests home to perform house blessing and prosperity rituals. Young professionals would sometimes stop on their way to or from work, or dressed up while on their way to a pub or party to pray for a promotion or to bless a newly bought car. Still younger devotees, often in gender-specific bands of four or five, would stop off on their way to school or college, particularly if it was a public examination day. Temple publics were not restricted to within the bounded walls of the temple.[27] Processions and festivals elastically stretched into the neighborhood: physically, materially, and visually through the processions; sensually through temporary wooden gateways decorated with flowers for special pujas; through the scents of cooking *prasadam* (consecrated food) which one staunch scientist pronounced "a heavenly smell"; aurally through the sounds of temple bells and music (which neighbors seemed to enjoy); and through the mythic imagination, the *yedir-puddirru* (Tamil: this and that) of daily life.

Against expectations of growing secularism, India has seen a remarkable and visible growth in ritual acts largely due to the growth of the boomtown bourgeoisie. Funds from the market economy have enabled temples to be built and restored, allowed forgotten pujas to take place, revived ancient ancestor sacrificial ceremonies, and resurrected many deities. Popular spending has reinvigorated the traditional festival calendar, and life-cycle rituals such as weddings, funerals, births, birthdays, house-building, and car-buying celebrations have all been energized and made larger than ever before. Ritual life is full, competitive, and intense, not only because it "makes creation again" but also because it seemingly allows people hope to survive and flourish in times of extreme uncertainty and change (Eliade [1957] 1961, 99–100).[28]

Wonder, and its pursuit, both as discourse and practice, through creative rituals expands imaginaries of the possible, destabilizing the statis of both ritual life and social structure. Shot through with improvisation and ingenious variation, ritual creativity forms an experimental habitus of ritual in which ritual practitioners' iterative ritual creativity sediments into an "experimental Hinduism" set in a precarious urban regime where complex, threatening, and uncertain conditions of the contemporary world feed into the quotidian experience (DeNapoli 2017). Experimental Hinduism here describes a whole world of iterative, strategic, and creative improvisations within and around Hindu rituals as they interact with modernity. Hindus in Malleshwaram link the immediate social, economic, and political tissues of their lives with

creative ritual and demonstrate the ongoing relevancy of core Hindu values for dealing with contemporary situations and problems, inspiring people to confront what it means to be Hindu, Indian, moral, and modern as categories of being that are permeable and negotiable (DeNapoli and Srinivas 2016). As these practices help to shape changeable views of power, practice, pluralism, and the problem of how to live with otherness, they sediment into an ongoing interrogation of ethical life.

Krishna Bhattar, Dandu Shastri, and the localites encouraged me to consider the larger question of how these emergent Hindu ritual worlds, defined in the context of Christianity and the colonial definition of religion, resisted and reformed post-Enlightenment European political theology in counterintuitive ways (Asad 1993, 5–15; Sweetman 2003, 15).[29] They gestured toward the building of an indigenous theory of religion through the complex vocabularies for multiple activities that are rather casually grouped under the category of religion, wherein both the contemporary and the comparative are at stake. Studying wonder, as Dandu Shastri and Krishna Bhattar do, makes an anthropology of Hinduism possible whereby the singular Abrahamic model is interrogatable. The question therefore is no longer whether Hinduism qualifies as a religion but rather what it can offer us by way of critical analysis for the category *of* religion. It gets us beyond the frayed questions of the embedded longevity of colonial power differentials, toward a consideration of a renewed agency of the periphery to illuminate the center.

My Guides into Wonder

In my wondering about wonder, three people were my crucial guides: my father, the anthropologist M. N. Srinivas; Dandu Shastri, the pradhan archakar (Sanskrit: chief priest) of the Ganesha Temple; and Krishna Bhattar, the pradhan archakar of the Krishna Temple. Each of them raised three themes regarding my interrogation of wonder: positionality, creativity, and ethics.

ETHNOGRAPHIC POSITIONALITY

In their 2010 article in *Current Anthropology*, João Biehl and Peter Locke call for a Deleuzian anthropology of "becoming"—ethnographic projects that hone in on the messiness and unpredictability of individual lives and that allow us to focus on acts of becoming. They propose that anthropology can learn from literature and process theology and its ability to unpack the inner complexities of the human experience: "Continually adjusting itself to the reality of contemporary lives and worlds, [this] anthropological venture has

the potential of art: to invoke neglected human potentials and to expand the limits of understanding and imagination" (2010, 317–51). Stretching the limits of understanding through continuous adjustment was an immersive, artful endeavor that appealed to me because of its sympathetic relationship to the other.

In August 1993 I was in Bangalore over my summer vacation from graduate school in Boston. I was looking rather vaguely for a topic of study for my research when my family and I happened to visit the Ganesha Temple, something we did not do often. We sat on the granite-paved *katte*, or platform, under the peepul tree and watched with fascination as Dandu Shastri, feet planted apart and hands folded on his stomach, stood, loudly discussing the possibility of installing "*komputer vellake*" (Tamil: computerized lighting chains) for the upcoming festival surrounded by a group of neophyte priests, assorted temple vendors, and supplicants.

After his conversation with the bank manager, Dandu Shastri came to greet us, wiping his brow on his white *angavastram*, or ceremonial shawl. My father told him that we were watching his dispatching of the many tasks, sacred and quotidian, with admiration. Dandu Shastri smiled and said, "*Ayyoo! Yenna pannarde saar? Idde numba 'business' illiya?* [Tamil: What to do sir? This is our 'business,' is it not?]." He spun his wrist, elevating his hand in a series of wavelike upward motions used to indicate both change and progress, and elaborated, almost as though he had read our minds, "Everything is changing so fast. Everything! Everything is new. So we must 'keep up.'" Then he added self-deprecatingly, with a broad smile, "All this is play [Tamil: *valayate*]," indicating how easy his job was despite what we had witnessed. My father watched him intently and then observed, almost casually, "Someone should study this place and these fellows!"

On the car ride home, Dandu Shastri's skillful negotiation of these changing life worlds rattled around in my brain. It lingered in my memory for the whole holiday, along with my father's observation that someone should study the ritual practitioners and priests. Was I that someone? My inexperience and lack of confidence surfaced: I was concerned that it would be thought that my father, a renowned social anthropologist, had picked my topic and field site.

But my initial fascination with watching Dandu Shastri—in Emmanuel Levinas's terms, the moment of rupture—refused to subside. I thought I was simply engaging in "opportunistic research," given that Bangalore was my hometown (L. Srinivas 2016, 1–5) and I had access to these temples, but in point of fact it was ultimately, as many of our studies are, a way of learning to know and understand myself.

Before I entered the temples, I was simply unaware of my caste. To say that I was "unaware" automatically suggests I am upper caste, for how else could I ignore the acts of power and social practices that accompany caste evocations in India? But I was not alone. In the post-Independence generation of Indians, there was a generalized amnesia about caste as applied to self (Krishna 2011, 7–14). In my case, this amnesia was made more complicated by the fact that my parents, both academic idealists, had come of age in the interwar years and had collegiate secular educations. They did not practice caste-based purity rituals at home. My parents were humanists and their friends of different caste and religious backgrounds were invited to, frequently visited, and dined in our home. We never visited temples in Delhi where I grew up, and we had no close family like grandparents who lived with us to maintain our caste boundaries.[30] Our puja room was a small nook, never more, and rituals were minimal in the household, if not largely absent. My parents performed no annual funerary rituals, a rite that most Hindu households undertook, and there were no garlanded photographs of bygone elders to whom we offered ancestor worship. We were Hindu, I knew, but that was about it.

So I read about caste in graduate school in the United States, thirsty to understand my own society and myself. Broadly a system of labor relations in the *jajmani* system (Bayly 2001), it also expressed hierarchies in social and political brokerage practices of the dominant castes (M. N. Srinivas 1956, 1959). But I saw the system from the viewpoint of an urban Indian educated in the West who enthusiastically embraced a global discourse of equality (Béteille 1991; Fuller 1997, 13). Caste, to me, was a system of radical injustice, and one of social interdependence peculiar to India (Hutton 1963; Ghurye 1969).[31] While clear evidence of exploitation *and* governmental efforts to right caste prejudice through affirmative action or caste-based "reservations" existed all around me in India, I knew that in practice, caste, in opposition to the rigid system described in Hindu religious texts, functioned as a flexible system wherein the scriptural norms were routinely interpreted to suit contingent circumstances both making the system more generous and more violent toward individuals and caste groups (M. N. Srinivas 1962a). In service to acknowledging the inhumanity and violence of the caste system toward all lower castes, and in a civil-rights-style push toward building a more egalitarian society that recognizes a need for reparations, both valuable and necessary initiatives, recent scholarship has glossed over this contingent flexibility, making our understandings of the system more rigid still.[32] In the work of my father, M. N. Srinivas, on the Sanskritization and West-

ernization of castes, I understood not only the intersections with status and power but the resilient plasticity of the caste system as a whole, and its adaptive capacity to withstand the stresses of change. While unpalatable to many in its brokerage of power, it also gestured to the innate dynamism of Hinduism in transforming itself according to changing circumstances (M. N. Srinivas 1973).

However, this academic quest to understand caste was set against who I was in the society in which I had arrived for my education. I was an Indian student with little money and no means in President Bush's America. In that part of my life, I understood how the obverse of privilege worked on the ground, a worm's view of the world, lost in the dirt (Parry 2000, 27–29). I was invisible at best, and on some, mercifully few, occasions, visible only as an embodied target for racial and ethnic slurs. Ever-alert and ever-fearful, I felt ground down in this ground. I learned to live on the edge of unbeing and to slink around in spaces not made for me. At the same time, the privilege of education made me appreciative, if not yet understanding, of lives lived in dread and the need for radical social hope.

When I began my fieldwork in early 1998, I was unprepared and largely unaware of my own problematic positionality in Bangalorean publics, in which the expectations of my behavior as an upper-caste South Indian woman would run afoul of other identities I had: as a graduate student, a feminist, a child of a well-known Indian anthropologist, and a daughter who was raised in a secular household. I knew that the temples I was studying were largely, though not exclusively, Tamil Brahmin (known colloquially among the Westernized middle classes of south India as "Tam-Brahm") strongholds. But it was in these temples that I was educated into what it meant to be a Brahmin middle-class woman.

In my upstart foolishness, I began fieldwork wearing loose jeans with a cotton *kurta* (tunic). The first few days I was an oddity and generously smiled at by localites. But as I stayed on and people began to know me, I faced criticism. I was told I needed to comb my hair, that I was not *najuka* (Kannada: refined) enough. Why didn't I wear a little jewelry? Was I married? Why didn't I wear *kumkum* on my forehead? Or my *mangalyam*?[33] Who was I? I was befuddled, and then depressed, by the barrage of criticism even while I understood it to be evidence that I was being absorbed by the field and that my interlocutors had come to feel an attachment to me.

My bewilderment was also an embodied one. My Western education, which entailed being seated at tables and chairs, came back to haunt me. As

I sat for long periods of time taking notes on the stone floor of the temple cross-legged in the lotus pose, my thighs hurt and my legs fell sleep. I would fidget, moving my feet around, trying to get comfortable, on one occasion being rebuked by the male devotees for allowing my feet to point toward the *sanctum sanctorum*, a cardinal sign of disrespect. When I moved to correct this, I thoughtlessly stood in the men's queue and was pushed back, admonished firmly that I was in the wrong place. I was upset for I could never see the deity, blocked by a phalanx of men.

The temple became an everyday space of endless bewilderment and irritation for me. Sam Keen notes that this everydayness is key to a "mature sense of wonder" and "most often called forth by a confrontation with the mysterious depths of meaning at the heart of the quotidian" (1969, 23). And with regard to my near constant bewilderment, James Siegel terms it an "invitation" (where "to invite" is synonymous with to invoke), rather than an introduction. He saw that bewilderment should serve as an active, and therefore positive, tool in the work—a kind of gateway—rather than as just a passive, neutral reaction: "When I began my first work as an anthropologist, I was lost but I did not know it. . . . [But] I had not made enough of my bewilderment; I had merely let it resolve itself. . . . I wanted to become actively confused rather than passively so . . . in order to wander away from what I had been taught. . . . Here, I thought, was the way to find bewilderment" (2011, 1–2). I too was "actively confused," but unlike Siegel I saw no agency there. Rather, I saw it as a failure in myself, a failure not only to "see" properly but to be seen properly as well.

So I retreated to sit on a pavilion threshold away from the temple, yet within its grounds. The pavilion allowed me to see and not be seen. Sitting on the threshold of the pavilion, I turned to Victor Turner, who wrote of thresholds of *rites de passage*, of living "betwixt and between," for I felt he would understand this slow, reluctant self-transformation. Another Turner, Frederick Turner, speaks of the anthropologist, a person "who alters the system studied and is reciprocally altered by it, whose truths are what works best, and who penetrates the hermeneutic circle by a process of successive approximations and corrections" (F. Turner 1986, 89). There on the temple pavilion threshold, I viscerally felt my native nonnativeness.

I had, unbeknownst to myself, followed André Green's proposal to cultivate self-estrangement, but in my case it was doubled, for I was not stepping out of a familiar lifeworld and then reentering it as a stranger, as Green advocates; rather, I was stepping out of a lifeworld from which I was already estranged through my parents' choices to move away from caste-based oc-

cupations, and into secular academic worlds (Green 1999). I had reentered the lifeworlds of the Malleshwaram temples as a trifold stranger, who looked both familiar and not, confusing localites and myself in equal measure. I was an un-Brahmin-Brahmin and an unwomanly woman.

I felt a sense of inquietude—gaps, silences, limits, and opacities—familiar in its promise of intimacy concomitant with refusal. This sense left me on a permanent threshold "betwixt and between" that neither ethnography nor biography could heal or make whole at once. The temple pulled me beyond my taken-for-granted world, yet I never found a home in that beyond. It made fieldwork for me both a normalizing and an exclusivizing endeavor, a political site where the decolonizing of the ethnographic imagination seemed to be the politically correct thing to try to achieve, but one that was far away from my ethnographic self who was trying to "fit in" (Appadurai 1990; Clifford 1988; Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 1997).

In dismay and fear, I began avoiding the temples. I could not look my interlocutors in the eye and feel comfortable in my skin at the same time. After a month of this, my mother, having noticed my avoidance, asked me to break a coconut on her behalf in the Ganesha Temple the next time I was there. So I took the coconut to the temple, determined to perform my errand quickly and leave. Dandu Shastri caught sight of me from where he stood in the lower courtyard of the temple with his big feet spread apart, a stance that made him seem to grow from the very earth he stood on. He hailed me jovially and inquired where I had been. "*Kathe polle poyatte!* [Tamil: You left like the wind]," he exclaimed. The metaphor, that I had come and gone like an untrustworthy breeze, was not lost on me. He reminded me that I had missed the monthly ritual of Sankasth Chathurthi, the fourth day of the new moon when Ganesha cleared the path of all troubles. He had saved me some prasadam from the puja, and he sent a young boy to get a bag that he handed to me. Vishwanatha, Dandu Shastri's son, watched me accept the small bag and said, "Father missed you." I was moved.

Ironically, that very day, Jean-Paul Sartre's *Search for a Method*, in which he elaborates on the theme of relationships, had come to my attention. "Research is a relationship," Sartre writes. "Research is a living relation between men. . . . The sociologist and his 'object' form a couple, each one of which is to be interpreted by the other; the relationship between them must be itself interpreted as a moment of history" ([1960] 1963, 72).[34] My own father's relationship with the other surfaces in his writings about the olfactory and visual charms of Bandikere, a Kuruba shepherd's colony a few hundred feet from his childhood Brahmin neighborhood of College Road.

> As an over-protected Brahmin . . . boy growing up on College Road, I experienced my first culture shocks not more than fifty yards from the back wall of our house. . . . The entire culture of Bandikeri (the area behind our house where lived a colony of Shepherds, immigrants from their village, located a few miles from Mysore) was visibly and olfactorily different from that of College Road. Bandikeri was my Trobriand Islands, my Nuerland, my Navaho country and what have you. In retrospect it is not surprising that I became an anthropologist, all of whose fieldwork was in his own country. (M. N. Srinivas 1992, 141)

My father's published and well-known exhortations to study one's "own" society encouraged me to return to the temple.[35] I paid attention to the words he had written more than thirty years earlier on the importance of considering methodological issues "particularly when the society is undergoing rapid transformation" (M. N. Srinivas 1966, 149). Yet questions of ownership of the society continued to trouble me, leaving me to wonder about my own and others' behavior, my self formation, and giving me classic anxiety dreams that haunt me even today.[36]

I reentered the temples. Krishna Bhattar, the chief priest of the Krishna Temple, noticed that I was being ignored. He asked me, "Are you having difficulty [Tamil: *sankocham*]? Why don't you wear a sari? People will talk to you." I was ambivalent about his advice. "Why should I? God never says anything about saris!" I shot back, inflexible in my righteousness. Krishna Bhattar smiled and said, "Well, God might not, but women do!" The next week, I arrived at the temple wearing my mother's silk sari and an ill-fitting blouse. Immediately, the women of the temple moved toward me, clicking their tongues in delight, "How nice you look!" They discussed their tailors and the problems of getting blouses stitched. They were empathetic and kind. I stood there in the women's queue, dressed in my borrowed sari and talking to my friends, my critique of the literature on caste made real to me: there were no feminist readings of caste to leaven the analysis with generosity.[37] Even the emergent, exciting Dalit literature, a new reading of caste, was focused on maleness.[38] None of the literature illuminated my positionality as a Brahmin *woman* and an anthropologist going back to the unfamiliar familiar.[39]

But as my sari and my self-consciousness tripped me up and made me feel fragile, I asked myself despairingly, "*Why* ethnography?" Kirin Narayan's beautiful words came to rescue me: "For the discipline of paying attention; for becoming more responsibly aware of inequalities; for better understanding of the social forces causing suffering and how people might somehow

find hope; and most generally, for being perpetually pulled beyond the limits of one's own taken-for-granted world" (Narayan qtd. in McGranahan 2014).

I had thought I could enter and remain "myself," but the field changed me. Slowly, I became more observant. I neatly plastered my hair with oil and adorned my forehead with kumkum. I found my place in the "women only" queue rather than remaining with the mix of strangers at the rear. Caste and gender slowly imprinted themselves on me. I had become pliant (Gold 2016, 13). I see now that I made a virtue of necessity, but it made me part of temple life in a way that my plain white kurta could not. I grew used to sitting on the rough stone, and protective callouses formed where previously there were none.

Ethnographic subjectivity is an evolving state that emerges in participant observation (Chawla 2006). I began to discover a deep aesthetic pleasure in my world. I enjoyed picking out the jewel-toned silks from my mother's closet and seeing myself in the mirror. I bought more saris, accompanying my female interlocutors on sari-buying trips that lasted long afternoons and yielded reams of data. My pliancy became more than just survival; from strategy, it shifted to method, and then to an identity. On those trips, I found another part of my feminine self, a joyful self, that stayed with me even after I left the field. But I also found points of confluence with other women of all castes and classes. I found that other women did not like the gender separation in queues at the temple; they did not like that only men were allowed to recite the Vedic scriptures or view the deity up close; they did not like being told who they should be, or what they should do. My appreciation of these women grew as time passed and I was privy to the multiplicity of roles and subjectivities they inhabited. I came to understand from them that all hierarchies, including caste and gender, were capable of being upturned, or "adjusted." I began to see my pliancy anew, not merely as capitulation but as a method and identity that enabled receptivity, openness, compromise, survival, and even resistance—an *active and deliberate* giving-in to wonder, if you will.

I also came to understand that even for my upper-caste and male interlocutors at the temple, all was not easy sailing. Precarity can be part of what seems to be a world of privilege. The creative improvisation of Krishna Bhattar and Dandu Shastri, with its celebration of making do, was for localites a way to find resilience in dread-filled times. In such moments of clarity, I saw the localites as heroic figures, battling a sometimes grim everyday reality

FIGURE 1.4. Dandu Shastri, chief priest of the Ganesha Temple. Photo by the author.

with incredible bravery, joy, and creativity. My obsession with myself and what I was doing ceased as I turned to shared passions.

RITUAL CREATIVITY

Dandu Shastri, the chief priest of the Ganesha Temple, was in his midsixties in 1998. He had been a priest since childhood. A rotund man with elephantine dentition and a thin *rudumi,* or topknot, he had a bellowing laugh, a gargantuan appetite, and a childlike delight in his world. He wore an enormous gold *mala* (necklace) made with rare Rudrakshi beads from the Himalayas.

He told me sotto voce at our first meeting that he was "not from Bangalore" but was a Smartha Brahmin from Andhra Pradesh. He seemed to be suggesting he was an outsider. His mind was always spinning with new ideas, and he would greet localites in midthought, spewing out ideas without preamble, as though his listeners were privy to his thoughts.

Dandu Shastri began our meetings in 1998 by talking about the sheer joy of his job as a priest. He identified with his temple's deity. His flashy rings all bore carved images of Ganesha, and his gold imitation Rolex watch

sported a gold Ganesha face. He ascribed all his abilities as a priest to the deity whom he unconditionally adored.

The story Dandu Shastri told me of his call to service was magical. Some eighty-five years earlier, Dandu's father, a poor priest in arid Andhra Pradesh, was given a bus ticket to Bangalore by a friend. It happened that the year before, an image of the deity was found by a group of young men at the top of a rock outcrop in Malleshwaram. Dandu's father arrived in Bangalore and immediately became the head priest of the newly constructed shrine to the deity. He then brought his extended family to Malleshwaram, and his brother became the chief priest of the Kannika Parmeshwari Devi Temple on Eighth Cross Road. Dandu Shastri, trained by his father, inherited the job of chief priest upon his father's death in 1978.

Dandu Shastri lived in a modern home with a Ganesha statue embedded in the wall, close to the Ganesha Temple. He lived with his wife, Mrs. Dandu; his son, Vishwanatha Shastri, who was training to be a priest; and his two grandsons, Ganesh and Subramanya; as well as assorted hangers-on, priestly cousins, and nephews looking for work in Bangalore. An autodidact, Dandu Shastri displayed his credentials prominently; one entire wall of his living room, or "hall" as it was known in Bangalore, was covered with professional certificates and photographs of him with important politicians and celebrities.

I quickly learned that Dandu Shastri was a visionary and a technocrat; he understood the epiphanic power of images to shift our vision of the world. He constantly thought about the change he saw around him, considering how to navigate it and to help others do so through creative rituals.[40] He confessed that he wanted to transform the way we think about ritual—by which he meant puja, *utsava* festivals, and the life-cycle rituals in which he was most involved—in order to make it "modern," and to find a new way to an as yet unimagined future.

In 1991 Dandu Shastri told me tearfully of the government "takeover" of his temple that had occurred a decade prior. According to his telling, his own probity had made him many enemies in the Temple Trust and among the officials of the Government Charitable Endowment Department, known colloquially as the "Muzrai department."[41] The state, through the legal armature of the Karnataka Act no. 33 in 2001—the Hindu Religious Charitable Endowments Act, which answered "a long-standing public demand to bring about a uniform law" for all religious institutions—devolved upon itself the power to abolish occupancy on lands defined as "religious or charitable inam" if illegal usage of money or "mismanagement

of temple funds" was alleged.[42] Indeed, the usage of the word *mismanagement* is telling as it draws together neoliberal understandings of the governance of the sacred polis and the economy into the sacred confines of the temple.[43]

The wording of the act specifically named the priests as the parties responsible for "rendering religious service in or maintaining the institution as a *pujari* (priest) *archak* (ritual priest) or the holder of a similar office by whatever name called." By 1998 the state of Karnataka had forty-three thousand temples, matts (sacred seats), monasteries, *dargahs* (mausoleums), mosques, and other sacred institutions under its fiduciary care, inviting fairly widespread charges of priestly mismanagement. To some, the enormity of the number of institutions in state care pointed not only to the larger cultural distrust of the priesthood, but also to the strategic manipulation of this distrust to render the lands and treasures of religious institutions unto the state.

Dandu Shastri said it was a "*rhomba* 'shock' " (Tamil: too much shock) when his temple was annexed by the Muzrai department. To redeem his reputation, he spent long hours every day burying himself in the work of ritual. To him, the deity was the imaginative resource that enabled his transformation and engendered his respectability. He would frequently gesture to the deity and speak of wonder, in particular his wonder at the kindliness of the deity toward him and his family and the obligation to create a situation in which wonder could exist in the temple for all devotees.

As early as 1966, in a plenary address to the American Anthropological Association, Fredrik Barth suggested that the study of change was urgent and central to the anthropological endeavor. As he said, "We need new concepts that allow us to observe and describe events of change" (1967, 661). The most famous anthropological essay on ritual change is "Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example", Clifford Geertz's study of the stalled funeral of a young boy in Java. First published in the winter of 1957, the essay begins with the problem of "dynamic functionalism" and the shifting of Javanese social and cultural worlds. For Geertz, the failure by anthropologists to treat cultural and social processes on equal terms, either an "omnibus concept of culture" or a "comprehensive concept of social structure," does not allow for the "dynamic elements in social change," born when social structure and culture are misaligned, to be properly formulated or understood (1957, 33). Geertz's example of tracing these "dynamic elements" begins with the unfortunate death of a young Javanese boy. The boy's funeral is halted because of a contentious debate between the pro-Islamic radical reform Masjumi group, or Santri, and the anti-Muslim animist cult of Permai, or Abhagans, over how

the funeral ritual is to be performed. The Muslim priest refuses to perform the funeral since the boy's uncle is Abhagan and therefore automatically suspect. The funeral grinds to a halt for a few hours, leaving the body of the young boy simmering in the sunshine while family members, local politicos, priests, and functionaries engage in a complicated moral drama of warring allegiances and beliefs. Geertz notes that funerals in Java are meant to be a "languid letting-go," but in this case the residents show a froth of "unusual" emotion. They scream, cry, shout, argue, sulk, and storm away. But at the end of the day, the parents of the boy arrive. The priest and the family find a way to perform a suitable funeral for the young boy and the funeral feast is held for the kampong (village).

Geertz suggests that the breakdown in ritual is, both implicitly and explicitly, a result of political and cultural change, where social structure and cultural change are at odds with one another. But what if we engage in a thought experiment? What if, rather than a breakdown of social and ritual relations, this is a story of ritual improvisation?[44] Geertz associates the fluidity of the participants' emotions with disruption. But what if we consider that they might have more to do with the passions of creativity? Indeed, Geertz himself comes to this very conclusion in a later text suggesting that ritual is a site of dynamism for the birth of new cultural orders (1980b). Catherine Bell summarizes this debate as follows: "Ritual as a performative medium for social change emphasizes human creativity and physicality: ritual does not mold people; people fashion rituals that mold their world" (1997, 73).

Linda Penkower and Tracy Pintchman articulate insights that suggest that ritual can be, and usually is, creative. "Appropriating or modifying rituals when convenient or desirable," they suggest, is "the norm" (2014, 17). They highlight an interpretive shift in ritual where the new normal of endless shifts is understood by practitioners as the regenerative power of ritual, where "ritual enables people to experience the ontologically real and meaningful, to regenerate cyclical notions of time, and to renew the prosperity and fecundity of the community" (Bell 1997, 11).[45]

CREATIVE ETHICS

Krishna Bhattar was the charismatic pradhan archakar of the Krishna Temple, two blocks east of the Ganesha Temple. When I began fieldwork, he was in his midthirties, a handsome, slim man with dark, glistening skin and fine, chiseled features. He looked like a movie star artlessly playing a priest. He dressed in white silk, with twelve brilliant red and white *namam* (Tamil: a

FIGURE 1.5. Krishna Bhattar and his father. Photo by the author.

caste mark) of Vaishnavite devotion on his face and body. Like Dandu Shastri, he too wore his hair in a priestly *rudumi*, but his was thick, jet black, and neatly knotted, the envy of many of the female devotees. He gave an impression of being dignified, serious, and in control, inducing the unspoken assumption of distance. As I got to know him, I found him to be thoughtful, well spoken, scholarly, philosophical, confident, and generous. He was a wonderful guide, and I often turned to him with my many questions.

Krishna Bhattar woke every day at 3:45 a.m., bathed in the darkness before dawn as his ritual purity demanded, wore *madi* (Tamil: ritually pure) silk clothing, and then prayed, offering his personal supplication to the deity at dawn (*acamanam*) in private, threading the wicks of the oil lamp by himself. He read and meditated for an hour before heading to the temple. Only on his return did he eat a spare breakfast.

Like his meal, his house and puja room were austere, except for a few beautifully wrought ancient silver idols of Krishna, Rama and other Vaishnavite deities, silver vessels, and a few silver lamps. Krishna Bhattar had one certificate on the wall of his living room—the state-based award of *Agama Ratna* (Sanskrit: jewel of the liturgical texts), designating him a special priest, learned in the scholarship of liturgy.

Krishna Bhattar told me about how he got his job, a story of patronage and divine intervention. After the neighborhood of Malleshwaram was built in 1889, the upper-caste Vaishnavite residents requested of the government a suitable site for a Vishnu temple. After securing the land, they hunted for an appropriate Vaishnavite image to be consecrated in the temple and found a Krishna idol in the Mysore Palace treasury.[46] The consecration of the main shrine and the deity within was celebrated on August 22, 1902. Krishna Bhattar's ancestor became the priest for this new temple.

About a year after I got to know him, Krishna Bhattar confessed that his father was not his biological father but his biological uncle and that he was "gifted" (*datte*) to his uncle in order to inherit his Brahmanical calling of priesthood. He added: "I never thought I'd be a priest. But one day there was *Jeeyar* [Tamil: His Holiness] doing a *homa* [Sanskrit: Vedic fire sacrifice] in the temple. I tried to join and he said, 'No, you cannot because you have a crop'—a modern hair cut without the priestly tuft. I had doubts about whether I should do this job, but I thought God will help me so I am to do it. But I vowed on that day to look like what people think of as a priest." I respected the self-awareness evidenced by his acknowledgment that his traditional garb was a performance and that he had doubts about his belief. His resolution came from critical reflexivity and questioning.

Krishna was the only priest who was cosmopolitan enough to introduce me to his wife, Valù. He referred to her as his "missus." Valù was the daughter of a powerful priestly family in Bangalore. I asked Krishna Bhattar whether it was an "arranged marriage" or had he fallen in love? Krishna Bhattar was amused by my question and said "half and half." Then he added, "To love someone else one should know oneself first, is it not? Mind must be 'mature,'" he said. Then he explained: "Marriage is our *svadharma* [Sanskrit: our dharma]. Our *achara* [Sanskrit: custom]. Our *samskriti* [culture]. Here in our India everything is 'moment.' Love is moment. Life is moment. Everything happens in moment. *Appadi* [Tamil: just like that], we 'adjust'!"

Krishna Bhattar's answer was typical of him. He was a natural philosopher, interrogating the everyday and the normative in crucial, thoughtful ways, crafting an ethics in the everyday. He peppered his conversations with words that demonstrated his ethical leanings: dharma, loosely translated in Sanskrit as duty or moral code; and achara, translated as custom or practice, which he linked implicitly to samskriti, culture.[47] In Hinduism, dharma was initially mostly related to ritual before it also encompassed the morality of actions (Olivelle 2009, xxxviii). Unlike some of my anthropological contemporaries, whose important thinking on ethical formations in

South Asia informs my own thought, Krishna Bhattar's inquiry was less focused on the broad cultural and political implications of "South Asian ethics" or "ethics in South Asia" than on the boundary condition of the ethical in and for itself. Talking with him led me to think about dharma anew in terms of the achara of contemporary creativity.

In the Krishna Temple, I often found liturgical hymnals of mantras strewn about, here collectively called *pratishta* (Sanskrit: textual references). Localites often referenced the hymnals to recite the correct set of Vedic mantras at the proper time. Krishna Bhattar never referenced them at all, having collected the necessary mantras in his memory as part of the Vedic training he underwent to become a *purohit* (temple chaplain). He had learned all the mantras "by heart," he said, employing an expression as popular in India as in the English-speaking world. He distinguished the liturgical texts as dharmic, as prescriptive, to be learned by rote, but what he did liturgically, as achara, as descriptive, and as a space for creativity.[48] Achara, therefore, was "dharma in practice, the practical, 'real' life of dharma that acts as a normative precedent for future action" allowing for a fluidity of dharma in everyday life (Davis 2004, 814). This distinction allowed Krishna Bhattar permission to improvise hacks in the everyday to deal with continuous and life-altering changes—a "creative ethics." Collectively these hacks and creative moments built to an aesthetic poetics of an "experimental Hinduism" (DeNapoli 2017), an ethos and ethics of religious experimentation.[49]

Localites, priests and devotees together, recast the idea of dharma, which operates predominantly as a descriptive category in the scholarship on Hindu traditions and South Asian religions, into an analytical concept for imagining the indeterminacy of the moral (cf. Jain 2011). As we will see in the following pages, dharma becomes fused with achara to create a fluid ethical analytic—a creative ethic—not merely an individual moral code that operates in the everyday as an imagined text (DeNapoli and Srinivas 2016).[50] The idea of a *creative ethic* is a modest one. It is both a creative ethos as well as a process of iterative, poetic, and inspired actions that systematically transform the ordinary into the visionary. The achara of creative ethics suggests, as does Krishna Bhattar, the responsibility to offer other possibilities. On occasion, creative ethics are so nascent as to involve a chaotic improvisational rendering in the moment, in which a range of ethical behaviors that includes the unethical and the morally ambiguous and "what really matters" (Kleinman 1995) are birthed.[51]

Creative ethics involves an anthropological imagining of doing rather than philosophical thinking; it is less a textual discursive model and more

an act of "loosely constructed actions, enunciations, embodiments and articulations" creating an unpredictable trajectory as a sediment of repeated actions that are special to localites themselves (Pinto 2019). Through creative ethics, localites get beyond the tedium of habit, the "uncanny of everyday life" (Das 2015a), where a broader understanding of "new regimes of living" inheres in the category of experience (Collier and Lakoff 2004). There is constant experimentation and constant evolution of the ethical form, not as a singular critical form but as a series of adjacent adjustments and improvisations that are emergent. This is not to say creative ethics cannot come from a position of disempowerment but rather that it emerges from and occupies a reciprocal relationship and mutual recognition between the powerful and powerless, the devotee and god, between priest, devotee, and deity.[52] Creative ethical practices do more than simply engage, highlight limitations, and demand alternatives; they open up the world to creative formations and re-formations of resistance allowing for experiences that are alive, creative, life-affirming, radical, and freeing; an anti-alienation strategy to combat the stresses of modern living.

Going Forward

For some, creative ethics as described above might unmoor the certitude of life. For me, it expands boundaries. In keeping with creative ethics, I write what I know, while also, more importantly, I attempt to *write into* what I do not yet know.[53] Given the essential otherness of wonder, I have gradually come to feel that the best way to experience this work is as an experimental folio: notes and scribbles written over a period of time and to some extent mirroring the creative play, open-endedness, and interrogation of its subject rather than as a conventional textual treatise displaying mastery and closure.

The fragments within this folio, a series of notes collected over sixteen years, are brought together by a commitment to "thickness" rather than through a parsimony of material, a layering of experience that leads naturally to an anticipation of the unexpected.[54] Rather than presuming endings and completeness, this text invites the unfurling of wonder and creativity, an opening of its joints.

In keeping with that objective, this ethnography seeks to be part of the ongoing critical discussion in religious studies of the place of "non-Western" "religion" (Carrette and King 2005). Religion in South Asia has had a contradictory history. On the one hand, it has been a trademark of scholarship in the region, a symbol of textual "great" traditions and lived "little" ones.

On the other hand, religion in South Asia, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism, have long troubled the definition of religion itself, being a place where polytropic ambiguities challenge the singular certainties of interpretive categories—an understanding that Western scholarship with its legacy of colonialism and Orientalism brings discourses of power to interpretations of non-Western canonical texts, practices, and indigenous philosophies (Embree 1990; King 1999; McCutcheon 2001, 2007; Pennington 2005; Sweetman and Malik 2016).

If we accept that our conceptual apparatus of religion is haunted by post-Enlightenment European Protestant political theology (Asad 1993; Masuzawa 2005), which still structures our understanding of ritual's efficacy (Seligman et al. 2008, 368–70; Puett 2013), we understand how the problems of universalization create a new set of challenges for a possible "Indian way of thinking" about religion and its study (Ramanujan 1989, 41).

A consideration of what ritualists do, along with serious consideration of what they *say* they do, moves us beyond a consideration of practices of piety and sly resistances to dominant modes of religious being to a nuanced, serendipitous yet strategic rendering of the agentive, joyful, and curious religious being in a neoliberal world. It gifts to us a way of getting beyond the horizon of religious studies while allowing us to ask what is this "beyond"?

The organization of this book charts the significant forces that fashion neoliberal modernity—space, mobility, emotion, money, technology, and time—and the ways in which ritual life in Malleshwaram engages them. Chapter 1 explores the spatial changes in Bangalore and in Malleshwaram, and the rituals that accompany the building of this bewildering landscape, arguing that dwelling in a modern landscape is precarious and requires ritual "permissions" from the gods. It speaks to the nature of the transformation of land from a gift of the gods to a capitalist system of value. Chapter 2 charts the passions of ritual life and the shift from aesthetics to ethics. It is the tracing of a deep emotional journey through the performance of a gender-based quarrel between the gods in which new ways of being and belonging are unexpectedly birthed toward an aesthetic rendering of the emotions of ritual life. Chapter 3 deals with the (im)mobility of global capital within the context of creative rituals. Through an interrogation of the seeming "frictionless surface" of money, I build a political economy of religion. I explore how accumulations of wealth and the depredations of poverty (and perceptions of both) are tied to the enactment of a good and virtuous ritual life in contemporary Bangalore. Chapter 4 focuses on technology and how technological novelty extends the boundaries of the possible, forcing the boundaries of the real to expand as

well. In chapter 5, considerations of ritual time and neoliberal time provoke an interrogation of creativity and novelty and the tedium of work, against the background of fraught salvage of a disused temple and the repurposing of divinity for the contemporary world. It speaks to the nature of sustainability of life, both human and beyond human.

In this work, the anthropology of wonder acknowledges not only the wonder of different worlds but also our own wonder as anthropologists encountering those worlds. Wonder must be shared, for even as it revels in the special or the singular, it contains within it the desire for collaboration or intimacy with others. Krishna Bhattar emphasized this nature of wonderment, drawing a parallel between the "storytelling" of the anthropologist and the creative ritual of the priest: the work of priesthood in storytelling that he compared to the crafting of creative rituals, which I quoted in the epigraph to this chapter: "You tell stories. Our stories [Tamil: *Namblode kathai*]. Telling stories and doing this ritual is the 'same.' They both help us dream [Tamil: *kanavu*] of a better place."

NOTES

INTRODUCTION: WONDER, CREATIVITY, AND ETHICAL LIFE IN BANGALORE

1. Bhadrapaada usually falls in the month of September in the Gregorian calendar.

2. This *bhajan* (hymn) is very popular across India for its rousing tune. It can be roughly translated as "I seek refuge with Lord Ganesha."

3. Man-made lakes are referred to as tanks in Bangalore.

4. I focus on everyday Hindu ritual life as a site of wonder, purely for its enduring and perverse pleasure, for as anthropologists know, ritual is a frayed site of inquiry for us.

5. Frits Staal (1930–2012), in his lifelong work on Hindu Vedic rituals, developed a well-known theory on the meaninglessness of rituals (1989); anthropologists Bruce Kapferer (1983), Stanley Tambiah (1979), and Richard Schechner (1974, 1993, 2002) concentrated on ritual performativity in South Asia; and Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw (1994), writing on Jaina forms of worship, unpacked liturgical rituals. But besides one notable exception (Clooney 1990), the value of the indigenous theories of ritual, for instance the Purvamimaṃsa school, or the theory on (rasa) aesthetics of theater and dance performances (Pollock 2016) have not yet been sufficiently recognized in ritual theory. Most recently, Axel Michaels (2016) has written a comprehensive study of South Asian ritual life that does justice to indigenous theories of ritual life.

6. Ritual is said to be derived from *ṛta*, "order, truth," or from the Indo-European root *srew*, "to flow" (cf. Turner and Turner 1978, 243–44). In the first case, the cosmological order is in the foreground; in the second, the dynamic aspect is in the foreground (Michaels 2016).

7. The sage Bhartṛhari thought that it was this fracture, the *sphoṭa*, or splitting of the absolute itself, that echoed in time and space, through which the world came into being—an existential creativity. This breakage, the crack, is an empty space for creation to manifest. Creativity endures in this space of brokenness.

8. Hindu rituals and their links to the *Dharmashastras* have been descriptively compiled by Indological scholars such as P. V. Kane (1958) and Jan Gonda (1977, 1980).

9. The larger inspiration for this work grows out of a simple premise: that one can tell the all-encompassing story of radical religious change in a complex society like modern India through recording fragmentary creative shifts in practice in urban spaces where wonder discourse and practices inspire greater creativity.

10. We tend to think of expressive creativity as the purview of the arts, such as narrative and poetry (Lavie, Narayan, and Rosaldo 1993), or in the context of media studies, craft, and making (Hallam and Ingold 2007; Ingold 2013), or in the making of movies (Pandian 2015), often to suggest it is the finished work of a lone heroic auteur or a group of artists.

11. The one exception is Sherry Ortner (1978), who early on demonstrated that among the Sherpas of Nepal, rituals are a forum to negotiate status, question existing power relations, and develop new social structures.

12. The study of ritual focusing on its doing has inevitably circled around ritual efficacy (Seligman et al. 2008; Puett 2013), and in accordance with this rubric, changes in ritual practice were seen inevitably as a "mistake" or at best as "practical piety," a "façade of structural consistency that hides the internal tensions and accommodations generated between doctrine and practice by the human foibles and social ambiguities of everyday life" (Herzfeld 2015, 22).

13. In Greek, *thaumatazein*, the sudden descent of wonder, is thought to be evanescent, a descent from the cosmological to the human.

14. Tracing the intellectual history of Western thinking about wonder establishes a comparative framework for an ethnographic approach to wonder, rendering an account of what generates wonder when the ontological premises at stake are those of neither the Cartesian dualism that are the understood characteristic of modernity nor the relational nondualism commonly imputed to anthropological "others" (Scott 2016).

15. As Jerome Miller suggests, wonder creates a new understanding of certain experiences, charging them with ontological significance, because they "transform our knowledge of what is by awakening us to realities of which we would otherwise be oblivious" (1992, xii).

16. Natural philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, Luigi Galvani, and Robert Boyle sought to explore otherness and conducted experiments in the physical and natural sciences in order to grasp the properties of life and the world. Explorers and collectors went to find and to bring back curiosities to fill the *Wunderkammers*, the cabinets of wonders of the European elite (Daston and Park 2001).

17. There are four Vedas, the ancient Hindu religious treatises that encapsulate the moral philosophy of Hindus—the Rig, Atharva, Sama, and Yajur Vedas. Each one is a compilation of thousands of stanzas set in poetic meters to be recited orally. The Sama Veda is unique in terms of its recitation. Believed to be the origin of Indian music, it is recited in a special cadence, with voices of different registers coming together to create a harmony.

18. There are uncanny similarities between what ritual practitioners do in crafting rituals and our work as ethnographers in telling people's stories—their thoughts, expressions, performances, and actions. I intertwine my voice with that of the localites,

with their critical insights, to cast theory in a new narrative register, one that connects the creativity of storytelling with the crafting of ritual in urban temple publics.

19. Two thousand hectares of lakes were infilled, and, in between 2005 and 2010, approximately fifty thousand trees in the city were felled.

20. The mapping of the city became a problematic and hazardous enterprise in this era, for land transformations were hidden, with land "going missing" from books, harassments and threats directed at evaluators and cartographers, and eruptions of turf wars between crime bosses and development syndicates. The local and national newspapers (both in English and Kannada) had stories of crime waves sweeping through the city, tales of murder and mayhem and of the toppling of politicians and corrupt business leaders over land grabbing (Nair 2007, 188–89). It allowed for cynicism, a breaking of the notion of the "common good" and civility, which had wide-ranging consequences for Bangalorean culture. Because of the vast amounts of unaccounted-for capital flowing through the land market in Bangalore, two outcomes were inevitable: first, a building boom in Bangalore that began in the late 1980s and took the form of three different waves lasting until 2011; and second, the influx of several crime and political syndicates, both national and global, aspiring to convert their dubious wealth into saleable assets.

21. The philosopher of religion Mary-Jane Rubenstein suggests that wonder responds to "a destabilizing and unassimilable interruption in the ordinary course of things, an uncanny opening, rift, or wound in the everyday" (2008, 10).

22. Land prices rose from Rs. 500 per square foot (US$10) in 1998 to Rs. 50,000 per square foot (US$1,000) in 2012. More recently, land prices have increased still further with built prices going up to Rs 80,000 per square foot. T. J. S. George, a Bangalorean journalist, writes of the cultural shifts that the IT revolution brought to Bangalore, underlining the insider-outsider dynamics that have played through the city as it has grown: "The old agreeable Bangalore was now replaced by an aggressive Bangalore where no one had time for his neighbours. Everyone was chasing success as measured by a new consumerist value system. A gladiator culture took over with the spirit of combat as its perennial feature. If the pre-IT immigrants made an effort to merge into Bangalore, the new combatants were too disparate to try" (2016, 29–30).

23. To become "Bangalored" in the United States was to be told that one's job had been shipped overseas, but in India, Bangalore has become iconic as an example of successful development.

24. In 2006 India accounted for 65 percent of the global offshore IT services and slightly less than 50 percent of business process outsourcing (BPO) services (Nasscom 2005–6), though the numbers have fallen since then as capital has found newer and cheaper labor. The BPO service industry also saw a boom, generating US$7.2 billion (Nasscom 2005–6) in the same time period.

25. Leela Fernandes suggests that the new middle class "shifted from older ideologies of a state managed economy to a middle class culture of consumption" (2006, xv) where the Indian citizen-consumer is the aspirational ideal. The boundaries of the Indian middle class and its mosaicked composition becomes a key indicator to its vitality.

26. Bangalore's official population of 8.2 million in the 2010 census puts it distinctly behind the major urban centers of Mumbai (approximately 13 million) and Delhi (approximately 10 million). After a decade and a half of economic "liberalization," as the entry into the free market was known in India, the growth rate for India stood at a formidable 9 percent, of which Bangalore contributed a GDP of US$83 billion. According to a picture-based story in Yahoo's finance pages: "A large skilled labour force, growth in manufacturing sectors and considerable foreign investments rank India as one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. The economic growth rate of the country is at 6.5% for 2011–12 and the CIA World Factbook estimated the GDP of India to be $4463 billion derived from purchasing power parity as of 2011." "India's Top 15 Cities with the Highest GDP," accessed November 3, 2012, https://in.finance.yahoo.com/photos/the-top-15-indian-cities-by-gdp-1348807591-slideshow/.

27. Arjun Appadurai (1981) and C. J. Fuller (1984, 1988), in their magisterial studies of ritual life in South Indian Hindu temple publics, organized the everyday of ritual practitioners within the temple as servants of the king-god. The temple was a seat of redistributive economics where hierarchies were reanimated. In their reading, the lines between what is ritual space and nonritual space are held fast. One got the sense that the ritual world ended at the temple walls.

28. Meera Nanda suggests in her polemic *The God Market: How Globalization Is Making India More Hindu* (2011) that the number of adherents to all forms of religiosity has increased since the era of economic reform of the early 1990s.

29. I am referring to the ongoing critical discussion in religious studies of the provenance of a "non-western" religion (King 1999; McCutcheon 2001; Pennington 2005), arguing that the particularities of context and the problems of universalization create a new set of challenges for religious studies (Ramanujam 1989).

30. I knew as an adult, largely from hearsay, that one of my grandmothers who had passed away when I was very young "kept" madi (Tamil: ritual purity), by which it was understood that she kept to a religious and caste-based vegetarian diet that she cooked herself in a kitchen that was ritually cleansed. She would not eat food cooked by anyone else, and she would clean her own clothes and objects of use, ritually sanctifying them after every usage.

31. I was as puzzled as my American classmates by Louis Dumont's assertion that India's anti-individualism spoke to caste as a communitarian interdependence, where economic relations, unlike those in the individualist West, were incapable of exploitation, structured to hold the community together, or, as he put it, "an economic phenomenon [like exploitation] presupposes an individual subject," whereas in caste society, "everything is directed to the whole . . . as part and parcel of the necessary order" ([1966] 1980, 107).

32. The diversity and skill of opposition to Dumontian theory struck me as all of a piece (Marriott 1969; Kolenda 1973; Appadurai 1986a; Berreman 1991). I came away thinking that those writing about caste were doing interesting and valuable scholarship, but they were still merely adding to a body of knowledge already defined (Harriss-White 2003; Pandey 2013). For more on the flexible system, see M. N. Panini,

"M. N. Srinivas—Theory and Method" (talk given at National Institute of Advanced Sciences, Bengaluru, January 2017).

33. A mangalyam is a gold necklace with caste symbols identifying the female wearer as married.

34. Picking up on Sartre, the scholar of religion Robert Orsi asserts that "research is a relationship" between people (2005, 174). Moreover, he suggests that as scholars of religion become preoccupied with themselves as interpreters of meanings, they forget that they also participate in the network of relationships between heaven and earth.

35. Were these localites my "own" society? I wondered. The problem, of course, is with ownership and who or what one considers one's own.

36. John Ruskin, a leading Victorian essayist, Oxford artist, thinker, and social critic, brings together these questions of self-creation and the sublime. For him, the sublime, the wonderful, is a sister to the art of self creation (1849). But wonder, as opposed to wondering or dreaming, is the sudden bewilderment of (mis)recognition, of fascination, is an eruption into perception of another order, one that is creative and generative. And that is what we, as anthropologists, feel. Fieldwork itself is an object of wonder because it is not simple and transparent but vivid, occluded, and complex. Indeed, to wonder is to engage in a cognitive as well as an emotional process.

37. Hopefully, I do not have to point out that patriarchy forces women to do much of the "interpretive labor" to imagine life from a male point of view, an essential violence of omission (Graeber 2005, 407–8).

38. New biographies of Dr. Ambedkar, the Dalit legal scholar and writer of the Indian Constitution (Omvedt 1994; D. Gupta 2000, 218), tracing the historical and contemporary violence of the state on peoples who were "pariahs" (Viswanath 2014), or even the telling contemporary illusion of "merit" in the premier educational systems of new India (Subramanian 2015, 292–95), still dealt with male realms of power and achievement. They all supported the view that systemically caste might be dying, but it was constantly "revitalized" as individual castes gained and regained power (M. N. Srinivas 2003).

39. I turned to Lynn Bennett's (1983) study of Brahmin women in Nepal and Isabelle Clark-Decès's (2005) work on marriage and funerals to find spaces where women lived and breathed. As Bennett notes in her study of upper-caste Brahmin-Chetri Nepali women, women present an oddity within a patrifocal society like Hindu India (1983, 317).

40. Axel Michaels, in his magnum opus on South Asia ritual life, creates a Linnean taxonomy of Hindu ritual (2016). In it are six different families of rituals—*karma kriya* (ritual actions that define karma), *mangala* (auspicious ceremony), *samskara* (life cycle ritual), *kalpa* (set of rules for ritual action), puja (worship, adoration rites), *yajnya* (sacrificial rites), and utsava (festival rituals, usually processionals) (Michaels 2016, 7–9).

41. The etymology of *Muzrai* indicates it is an ancient Indo-Persian word meaning weight and/or measure. The "Muzrai department" is what people call the Department of Religious and Charitable Endowments or the Karnataka Government because I suspect the department measures in the income of all "public" Hindu temples and Islamic mosques under its purview.

42. Prior to the passing of the Hindu Religious Charitable Endowments Act, Hindu religious temples and shrines of the state of Karnataka were governed by five independent acts by territory: (1) the Karnataka Religious and Charitable Institutions Act, 1927; (2) the Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Act, 1951; (3) the Bombay Public Trust Act, 1950; (4) the Hyderabad Endowment Act, Regulations, 2349F; and (5) the Coorg Temple Funds Management Act, 1956. All the disparate acts were conflated into the Hindu Religious Charitable Endowments Act, of the Government of Karnataka, 1997, accessed August 13, 2017, http://dpal.kar.nic.in/33%20of%202001%20%28E%29.pdf.

43. Here *oikonoma* (management) is usefully linked epigrammatically to economy and thrift (Agamben 1998, 4–5). The Hindu Charitable Act of Karnataka states that the state can "initiate action and hold inquiry for misconduct either suo-moto or on complaint received against an Archaka (priest), including an Agamika (liturgical scholar), Thanthri (ritual specialist), or Pradhan Archakar (chief priest), or on temple servants and to impose an appropriate penalty for proven misconduct." Hindu Religious Charitable Endowments Act, chapter III, section 16, accessed August 13, 2017, http://dpal.kar.nic.in/33%20of%202001%20%28E%29.pdf.

44. Studies of ritual process (Gennep [1909] 1960; Evans-Pritchard 1956; Turner 1974; Gluckman 1977) have focused rigidly on the performance of ritual society as a validation of the norms within society, a domestication of all that is dangerous and revolutionary. The Turnerian idea of antistructure was that ritual afforded a space for such limited revolutionary states to exist without affecting larger society. When the ritual ended, or soon thereafter, practitioners fell back into the hierarchy of structure, where "disturbances of the normal and regular" only give us greater insight into the normal (1974, 34–35). In keeping with such theories of religion, ritual worlds have been understood as atypical sites of creativity. Many changes in ritual have been regularly misdiagnosed as a "disruption," a "mistake," a "flaw," a "distortion," an "error," and a "failure" (for example, see Huesken 2007; Grimes 1988). Improvisation in ritual brings to mind Johan Huizinga's work *Homo Ludens* (1955), in which he defines play as marked out in space and time and creating a reality that is manipulatable.

45. Ritual acts are thought to "do" two things: repair the broken, entropic moral world and domesticate dangers within it (Seligman et al. 2008). Enactment of ritual is understood as therapeutic for the world, rendering it anew, transformative, constitutive of the terms of positive community, of recognition by the state, and individual devotion (Bell 1997).

46. The deity came from an old temple in Kudaloor, a town some hundred miles from Bangalore, where the temple had fallen into disuse due to lack of funds.

47. Dharma is a Vedic cosmological set of principles that give order and consonance to the world, morality to a social community, and a code of conduct to an individual. The *Dharmashastras*, a written compendium of ethics, are a comprehensive and cogent understanding of how dharma operates in the everyday lives of Hindus as both a cosmic and social moral order (Olivelle 2008, 503). Yet, as the anthropologist Joyce Flueckiger notes, what may be considered dharmic behavior is unclear: "It is not clear what the minimal practices or theologies might be that identify a person as Hindu. In daily life,

there is no assumption that there is a single *dharma* appropriate for all to follow" (2015, 6). Instead, there is custom, or achara, which leavens the rigidity of dharma. The moral code is built into and out of the symbolic, social, and material practices of everyday Hindu ritual life; the images, mythologies, institutions, performances, textual and vernacular traditions, art and material culture, festivals, and foodways that encoded the shifting moral, economic, political, cultural, and gendered expectations of people's worlds are the means by which novel dharma interpretations are imagined, constructed, and embodied (Flueckiger 2015). From the Sanskrit root *dhr,* meaning "to hold, support, maintain," dharma is the socio-moral grounding of Hindu identity and operates at both universal and individual levels. At the universal level, dharma is that which "holds the world together," a metaphysical concept often translated as "religion" or "way of life."

48. Although rarely mentioned in the Vedas themselves, they are world building and normative all at once (Olivelle 2008, 492). Barbara Holderege suggests that dharma establishes each part in its proper place and ensures that every aspect of the cosmic system is properly balanced and coordinated with every other aspect and thus contributes the maximum to its own evolution and to the evolution of the whole system (2004, 213–14). Written and complied between the fifth and second century BCE, the *Dharmashastra* corpus of the literature includes the *Dharmasutras*, academic treatises written in aphoristic form concerned with rules and conduct; the *Dharmashastras*, treatises on dharmic legal and social codes of conduct written in prose; and various commentaries (*bhyasa*) and digests (*nibandha*), which analyze the meanings of specific sutras and organize sutras according to content.

49. Jennifer Ortegren's dissertation (2016) makes a similar distinction between dharma and achara.

50. The Dharmic code does give elaborate instructions on ethics by caste and stage of life, called *varnashramadharma*, or gender, where *stridharma* dictates the code that women should follow, codified in the main for the three "superior" *varnas* or castes—Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya. In her analysis of the narrative construction of Hindu dharma among Sringeri Brahmins, Leela Prasad suggests that ethical practice is an "imagined text": "Underlying ethical practices is a dynamically constituted 'text' that draws on and weaves together various sources of the normative—a sacred book, an exemplar, a tradition, a principle, and so on. Such a text is essentially an imagined text. It is a fluid 'text' that engages precept and practice and, in a sense, always intermediary. In this imagined text the normative manifests as emergent, situated in the local and the larger-than-local, the historical, and the interpersonal" (2007, 119).

51. Creative ethics may be rooted in violence, a disruption, in failure of that which is familiar and stable, resulting in inevitable moral dilemmas that are unresolvable. It comes closest to what Veena Das imagines ethics to be, as "the expression of life as a whole," where often the ethical and unethical are less opposed than "knotted together" (2015a, 3–4).

52. It is tempting to associate creative ethics with a subaltern underprivileged position of complete resistance, but Dandu Shastri and Krishna Bhattar are not subalterns and neither is the ritual practitioner at the temples. This is a post-subaltern-global-moral-epistemology-in-the-making.

53. I see this as affording a much-needed provocation to a different model of theorizing and writing. It does not offer a concrete argument but rather gives possibilities.

54. Of course, what counts as thickness in ethnographic research has changed. Where it was once exhaustiveness in detail and description, it has shifted to a revelatory narrative unveiling highly integrated and systemic aspects of a culture (Ortner 2006).

CHAPTER 1: ADVENTURES IN MODERN DWELLING

1. As Michael Puett theorizes, subjunctive spaces encourage both the appreciation of perspective and the imagination of horizons (2014).

2. Sacred enspacements are, as Gerard van der Leeuw ([1933] 1986) argued, political. He identified four kinds of politics in the construction of sacred space: a politics of position, where every establishment of a sacred place is a positioning; a politics of property, where a sacred place is appropriated, possessed, and owned; a politics of exclusion, where the sanctity of sacred place is preserved by boundaries; and a politics of exile, a form of a modern loss of, or nostalgia for, the sacred. I suggest that not only must these politics be rethought with reference to emergent sacred spaces in Malleshwaram, but we need to think of ritual as process not as politics, to focus on the dynamism that ritual allows for.

3. One elderly resident, Chellappa, a devotee of the Krishna Temple, suggested that this divine vision, this eye of the lingam, allowed the whole of Malleshwaram to act as a magical lens and "see" the unseeable.

4. The kanne of the Kadu Malleshwara was in homage to a myth concerning the devotion of a forest dweller, Kannappa, who gave his eyes to cure the seeming blindness of god Shiva.

5. The presence of tanks as the appropriate landscape of romantic encounter wove a continuous thread in Kannada movies, bringing the folk love of water into the contemporary. Kings were valued for building public works such as steps into or leisure areas near the river.

6. The neighborhood of Malleshwaram, known in local parlance as a "locality," ran the length of a jagged set of granite hillocks that dipped on both sides into shallow hollows originally occupied by small lake beds but were now covered in small individual housing estates known as "colonies." To the immediate south of Malleshwaram was Swimming Pool colony, and to its north was the Rajajinagar Colony.

7. This grounding was due to an aesthetic understanding of the city that resonated through, and was kept alive by, everyday ritual performance—processions to caves, riparian festivals, woodland rites, and pilgrimages to deities that guard hillocks. Many of the city's foremost shrines were dedicated to gods and goddesses of landscape rocks (Rajajinagar Hanuman Temple), caves (Gavipuram Temple), and hills (Basavangudi Nandi Temple), creating a seamless link between topos, mythos, and divinity. Topological elements and their power in the landscape of the imagination of residents created and sustained an aesthetic understanding of the city that still reverberates