

Background

Vegavatī brings to life a compelling legend from the ancient Sanskrit text, the *Hastigirimāhātmya*. Likely composed before the 14th century, this text is ritually read out every year during the Pallavotsava temple festival at the Varadarajaswami temple in Kanchipuram.

Today, it forms part of the project Hindu Temple Legends in South India, at the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. The project aims to document, analyze, and preserve the various transmissions of temple legends of Kanchipuram, with the help of a digital environment that enables new forms of scholarly engagement.

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Story

Having felt humiliated by her consort Brahmā, river-goddess Sarasvatī refuses to join his Aśvamedha sacrifice which he performs in the sacred land of Satyavrata (Kanchipuram). She chooses to remain distanced from him, and turns away sage Vasiṣṭha, who comes to call her on her husband's behalf. Unable to wait longer for his consort, Brahmā, accepts goddess Savitṛī as his wife, in order to proceed with his promised ritual in tribute to his revered lord Viṣṇu. The Asuras (demons), feeling ignored during Brahmā's wedding with Savitṛī, secretly inform Sarasvatī of his marriage and thus kindle her wrath. Enraged, she transforms into the torrential river Vegavatī and rushes towards Satyavrata to destroy his sacrifice.

Brahmā and the sages fervently pray to Viṣṇu, who finally manifests and reclines across the river's course. Thus, he halts the river's furious flow and subdues the anger of goddess Sarasvatī. The sacred

rite of Brahmā and the many lives are saved by the grace of Viṣṇu, who is worshipped, even to this day, in this unique reclining form, at the Yathoktakāri Temple in Kanchipuram.

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Performance

Conceived, composed, and choreographed by Sanskrit scholar and Odissi dancer Dr. Aneesh Raghavan, this production brings together more than 25 dancers trained in the classical dances of India. With lyrics drawn directly from the *Hastigirimāhātmya*, the performance highlights the timeless human drama as found in an age-old text. Beyond its artistry, the production celebrates the power of performance itself — showing how dance and theatre keep ancient legends alive in collective memory for centuries.

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