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This dissertation is co-dedicated to Penn Folklore because I love what it stands for and what it has contributed to the world: ethnographic fieldwork with participant observation, especially in relation to the study of verbal arts and the *Performance-centered approach to folklore*. Penn Folklore has lived a valiant and world-shaking life, playing an important part in the 1960s revolution in communication -- the *Socio-linguistic moment* -- in which communication came widely to be seen as a collaborative social event, not just the imparting of information. By recognizing and honoring the interactivity between people in both everyday and special-event communication, and by studying these social, psychological, and aesthetic processes in micro-detail, Penn Folklore has helped to frame the communication act and its practitioners in ways that will have intellectually-challenging and life-affirming repercussions for the future of scholarship, and of humanity in general.

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permitting me to begin to experience their culture and learn their language. Humor and kindness are things that I have experienced in India like nowhere else in the world. Also, I feel at home in India because of the delight that so many Indian people seem to take in communication technology -- perhaps in part because Indian culture tends to see the divine as working through technology, rather than seeing technology as something separate from the divine.

The Kani people, of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, India -- all approximately twenty-five thousand of them -- although I have only had the pleasure of meeting a small fraction of the group to date. My fieldwork was based in the village of Vellambi. Many thanks to all of its inhabitants, especially to my primary research-partner, Velmurugan; and to his mother, Rajammal, my guide in regard to traditional Kani culture. Banu, who coached the children in performance, and Marthandan, who has developed a style of dance that incorporates various traditional and modern elements, were also of great assistance.

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I have co-dedicated this dissertation to the Kani people because members of this group have introduced me to a lifestyle and world-view that (in my perception) revolves around nature, and shamanism. These are things that previously I had only read about in books. It is members of groups such as the Kani, an aboriginal tribe, who live closest to nature, and who have the closest cultural connections with that nature. I thank the Kani people for what they have given me, and I hope that they may guide me further in the future. Whatever interaction I might have with tribal people in the future -- and I hope there may be a good deal of it -- will be based on the foundation that members of the Kani people and myself have built together.

The Kani people have a great future ahead of them, although much has to be done in order for that future to develop well. Penn Folklore seems to be coming to a close in its present form: the future will tell in what ways it might transform and be re-born; in any case, its wonderful legacy lives. Both of these groups have made my life infinitely richer.

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¹ <http://www.chennaistream.com> .

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My mother passed away in 1992, eleven years before the fieldwork for this dissertation began; my father passed away in the middle of the fieldwork period (I interrupted the fieldwork and returned to the USA to be with him during his final six weeks).

Myself and my late sister, Diana, were raised by our parents in an apartment building in midtown Manhattan. In a moment of teenage frustration, my sister once said, “No one in this family knows how to talk!” This over-statement drew my attention to the possibilities of conversation, and it may be that my subsequent interest in the back-and-forth of conversation -- in people really listening and responding to each other -- has in part been prompted by this sentiment of my sister’s. Thanks to her for this.

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