

Matta Vilasa Prahasanam
Satire of Drunken Hilarity

Originally written in
Sanskrit
by
Pallava King Mahendravikrama Varma I
(571-630 CE)

తెలుగు అనువాదం: కె. నాగరాజన్ (2024)
English Translation: K. Nagarajan (2025)

email: knr_sh@yahoo.com
website: <http://taoofeverything.in/>

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to my daughters Samragini and Manogna and my best friend and my children's mother Rashmi for their support and encouragement through-out all my translation adventures, starting with **Ponniyin Selvan**.

Nagarajan

Foreword

I first came across a reference to this play while I was translating Kalki's epic historical novel *Sivakamiyin Sabatham* from the original Tamil version to Telugu. From the snippets in that novel, I got an idea that king Mahendra Varma takes a dig at the degenerate religious sects at that time in Tamil Nadu, including kapalika, Pashupati and even Buddhists and Jain monks.

This is a short one-act satire set in Kanchipuram, the then capital of Pallava kingdom. Kanchi was not just the political capital, but the seat of highest education in south India, rivaling Varanasi in the north. Culturally it was highly sophisticated as well and king Mahendra was keen on reviving Hinduism in the south and had done a lot in terms of building cave temples, mostly Shiva temples, encouraging religious studies and so on.

King Mahendra himself was a great scholar and also an accomplished musician. This play is probably the first, or at least one of the earliest, satires in Indian literature.

From the Wikipedia:

"Mattavilasa Prahasana is a [satire](#) that pokes fun at the peculiar aspects of the heretic [Kapalika](#) and [Pasupata](#) Saivite sects, [Buddhists](#) and [Jainism](#). The setting of the play is Kanchipuram, the capital city of the Pallava kingdom in the seventh century. The play revolves around the drunken antics of a Kapalika [mendicant](#), Satyasoma, his woman, Devasoma, and the loss and recovery of their skull-bowl. The cast of characters consists of *Kapali* or Satysoma, an unorthodox Saivite mendicant, *Devasoma*, Satysoma's female partner, a *Buddhist Monk*, whose name is Nagasena, *Pasupata*, a member of another unorthodox Saivite order and a *Madman*. The [act](#) describes a dispute between a drunken Kapali and the [Buddhist monk](#). The inebriated Kapali suspects the Buddhist monk of stealing his begging bowl made from a skull, but after a drawn-out argument it is found to have been taken away by a dog."

References:

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mattavilasa_Prahasana
2. Sanskrit in Latin script:
https://ignca.gov.in/sanskrit/matta_vilasa_prahasanam.pdf
3. Sanskrit: <https://archive.org/details/MattaVilasaPrahasanammulam>
4. Sanskrit: https://sa.wikisource.org/wiki/%E0%A4%B8%E0%A4%9E%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%9A%E0%A4%BF%E0%A4%95%E0%A4%BE:Matta_Vilasa_Prahasanam_Mahendra_Vikrama_Ed._Ganapati_Sastri_T.S._University_of_Travancore_50.pdf

Best regards,
Nagarajan

Matta Vilasa Prahasanam

Cast

Sutradhar or director: stage manager and drama director

Actress: director's first wife and helps in setting up the drama/play

Satyasoma (kapalika): a Kapalika Shaiva mendicant with a skull for a begging bowl and with a dissident faith

Devasoma: Satyasoma's woman

Nagasena: a Buddhist monk belonging to Sakya sect/faith

Babhrukalpa: another Shaiva mendicant belonging to another dissident Shaiva faith called Pashupatha

Unmattha: a mad fellow

Matta Vilasa Prahasam

(Sutradhar enters after prayer)

Sutradhar: Aha! I found a nice way to please my first wife who is angry with me because of my second wife. After a long time, got an order from the king's court to stage a play. Let's ask herself.

(peers back-stage and)

Madam, please come here.

(enter the first wife, who is an actress)

Actress: *(angrily)* What is this, sir? At this old age, you want to stage a satire with young drunkards?

Sutradhar: Yes, that's how it is.

Actress: Then recruit a young actress who will enjoy and appreciate it .

Sutradhar: I will perform it right in front of you!

Actress: She brain-washed you thus?

Sutradhar: Leave it aside. If we go to the king's court, we will get royal welcome.

Actress: Only you can boast of that .

Sutradhar: Maybe dear. But with your performance, you will dunk the audience in an ocean of immense happiness!

Actress: *(pleased)* That means we got permission from our respected king?

Sutradhar: Yes.

Actress: Then what gift should I give you for giving me this happy news?

Sutradhar: Your happiness is my gift. What else do I need?

Actress: Then, what play are you going to perform?

Sutradhar: You said yourself, right? 'Satire of Drunken Hilarity'.

Actress: *(to self)* Since whatever I say seems to align with his intention, even my anger seems normal to him. *(aloud)* Who is that poet who is going to be victorious with this play?

Sutradhar: Listen, dear. He is none other than Shree Mahendra Varma, the king of kings. The one who has conquered the evils of lust, anger, arrogance and jealousy, is level-headed and connects with commoners at their level. Beats Kuber in wealth. Beats Lord Indra in valour. With his straight-forward behavior and able administration, has been ruling the kingdoms under him commendably. Mount Meru of the Pallava dynasty! Son of Shree

Vishnusimha. He is the author of this play.

Actress: Then why delay any further? We should perform this wonderful play immediately.

Sutradhar: Forgive me. It's my custom to start the performance only after praising the greatness of my paternal grandfather.

[*in the background*]: O dear, Devasoma!

Sutradhar: Seems, the young lover kapalika with skull as begging bowl is drunk!

(Sutradhar and actress exit)

(end of prologue)

(the young kapalika Satyasoma enters with his woman)

Kapalika: (*in drunken state*) Dear Devasoma! It's true that a fellow, with his power of penance can change to any form. But you, with your religious resolve (*vratham*), have taken a new form altogether !

Face glistening with pearl-like sweat drops,

perfect eyebrows

Delicate lips

Your beauty is beyond description!

Devasoma: My lord, now you are talking to me as if I am drunk.

Kapalika: What are you saying, dear?

Devasoma: My lord, the whole world is twirling like a top! I am afraid I will fall. Please hold me.

Kapalika: Ok, dear. (*tries to hold and steady her, but instead he himself falls down.*) My dear Somadeva, When I came forward to hold and steady you, why did you move away? Are you angry with me?

Devasoma: Yes, Somdeva is angry. Even if you bow your head and beg, she will not oblige.

Kapalika: You are Somadeva, right? (*thinks for a moment*) No, no! You are Devasoma!

Devasoma: It's all fake, You love Somadeva a lot. That's why you are not even calling me by name.

Kapalika: My dearest! That's just slip of tongue. The real criminal is my drunkenness.

Devasoma: Thank god! It's not you.

Kapalika: This drinking habit is causing so much trouble for me, is it not?
From this very moment, I will give up drinking.

Devasoma: No, no my lord! Don't break your vow for my sake and lose the benefit of your penance! (*saying so, falls at his feet.*)

Kapalika: (*with overwhelming joy, lifts and hugs her.*)

Wonderful! Wonderful!

Hail Lord Shiva!

Hail Lord Shiva with the trishul

who prescribed the path to salvation

through drinking and enjoying one's lover's beauty!

Hail Lord Shiva!

Devasoma: My lord, don't say that way. Shramana monks have prescribed the path to salvation in a different way.

Kapalika: My dear, they are all atheists.

Devasoma: Stop! Even talking like this is sin.

Kapalika: Yeah, yeah stop such sinful acts. Those degenerates don't even deserve to be accused. These creatures shave off their heads and resound the material world but lay down rules for even when to eat a meal. So, for praising such atheists, I shall cleanse my mouth by drinking ale (*madhu*).

Devasoma: Then, let's go to another madhu shala (*tavern*).

Kapalika: Ok dear. (*they both walk away.*)

Kapalika: Aha! What a great city this Kanchi is, and what wealth! Going well with the golden tower of that Ekambareshwara temple, we hear the melodious rhythms of mridangam from the temple! The flower shops look like Spring personified! The gentle sound of the anklets of young girls reminds one of Cupid.

Devasoma: My lord, This Kanchi is very tasteful like the heavenly madhu ras.

Kapalika: Dear, look, look! This tavern is so conveniently located next to the yaagashaala (*a hall where religious fire sacrifices are performed*)! See that tall flag post. That is the pillar for the sacred fire place. The madhu we consume is soma ras. The jars are the sacred vessels. Roasted pieces of meat and other eatables are the offerings to the god. Drunken blabberings are Yajurveda mantras. Songs are hymns of Samaveda. This leather bag itself is

the bag to keep the result of the yaaga. Penance is fire. The merchants in the taverns are the organizers of the religious fire sacrifices (*yagna or yaaga*).

Devasoma: The offering we get in our begging bowl is Lord Shiva's share of the result from the sacrificial ritual.

Kapalika: Aha! It's so nice to get drunk and dance. Body moving to the rhythms of the drums, singing voice, moving eyes, adjusting the dhoti and the upper clothing to the rhythms – so wonderful!

Devasoma: Aha! My lord is a connoisseur.

Kapalika: Pour this heavenly drink into the vessel. Don't bother about sartorial elegance. Lovers whose hearts have come together will become one. Young men and women will drop their shyness and become warriors. Long live love! No need for words!

It's a lie that Lord Shiva opened his third eye

And burnt Manmatha (*Cupid*)

Manmatha himself melted into water

And that's what is burning us now;

Devasoma: Maybe. But the god who does everything for the welfare of the world will not burn it to ashes.

(both hit their cheeks with their palms, asking the lord for forgiveness)

Kapalika: Bhvathee, bhikshaam dehi (*Sir/madam! Please give an offering in our begging bowl*).

Unseen person: (*in female voice – from behind the screen*) My lord, here, please take it.

Kapalika: Taking... dear, where is my skull begging bowl?

Devasoma: I also haven't seen it.

Kapalika: (*thinks for a while*) Ah! Must have left it in the previous tavern. Let's go see.

Devasoma: My lord! It's a sin not to receive the offering that's being given with so much respect. What to do now?

Kapalika: Dear, since it's emergency, please receive it in the horn.

Devasoma: Ok, my lord.

(they receive the offering in the horn)

(then both search around for a while)

Kapalika: What?? I can't find it around here (*losing hopes*) Oh!
Gods!! Did you see my begging bowl? What are you saying?
Didn't see? ... I am dead! My hope is totally destroyed. How can I
live as a kapalika? What a hardship!
(*falls on the floor and hits his head.*)
Let it be .This is all a test. I don't lose anything if I don't have the
'kapalika' title.

(*gets up*)

Devasoma: My lord, Who do you think would have taken your begging
bowl?

Kapalika: Dear, There are roasted meat pieces in it. Perhaps a dog or a
buddhist mendicant might have taken it away.

Devasoma: In that case, lets search the entire city of Kanchi.

Kapalika: Let's do that, dear!

(*go around and come back*)

(*a Buddhist mendicant enters with a coconut shell*)

Mendicant: (*holding an umbrella*) Aha! Merchant Dhanadasa's largess is
greater than any other donor's. What a tasty meal! Mouth-watering,
tasty fish curry and other delicacies. Very satisfying meal. I will
go back to royal retreat.

(*goes back, talking to himself.*)

Aha! Living in royal palace, sleeping on soft beds, with morning
meal, tasty drinks in the evening, five fragrant after-meal digestives
(*taamboolam*), attractive clothes and other facilities - Why did the
kindly Buddha allow all this but not wine and women? These
useless old hags, out of jealousy towards youngsters, must have
deleted these two from the text books. Where can I get the
original book in which they are not omitted? If I can find it, I can
help everyone by revealing the full teachings of Buddha to all,
right?

(*keeps going around*)

Devasoma: My lord, look at that saffron-clad fellow. Casting stealthy looks
here and there and hiding among innocent people, he is coming this
way.

Kapalika: You are right dear. Moreover, he is hiding something in his hand.

Devasoma: My lord, we should catch him and enquire.

Kapalika: Let's do that, my girl... hey, you mendicant! Stop!

Mendicant: Whos is calling us like that? (*looks back*) Oh... That mean, bad

kapalika of Ekambareshwar temple. We should not fall prey to his wicked deeds. (*walks ahead hurriedly*)

Kapalika: My dear, we got my begging bowl! See how he is running away as soon as he saw me. This is the proof that he is the thief. (*briskly walks ahead and blocks his way*) Aha! Where can you escape now?

Mendicant: Brother kapalika! Don't do this, it's not right. (*to himself*) Aha! The sister is so beautiful!

Kapalika: Hey! Show it immediately. What are you hiding wrapped in your clothes? I have to see.

Mendicant: What do I have? Just my begging bowl.

Kapalika: That's what I want to see.

Mendicant: Brother, it's not right to behave like this. I am supposed to carry my begging bowl hidden.

Kapalika: That's right. Lord Buddha had dictated that one should wear clothes mainly for the purpose of carrying things hidden.

Mendicant: Yes, that's true.

Kapalika: That's the truth. I want to hear true truth.

Mendicant: Enough of making fun. Let me go. It's time to go for my begging. (*moves forward*)

Kapalika: Hey, cheater? Where are you going? Give me my skull begging bowl and go. (*catches the end of the mendicant's robe and pulls.*)

Mendicant: Hail Buddha!

Kapalika: You should say 'Hail the lord who taught the art of stealing'!

Mendicant: Sin be forgiven! Sin be forgiven!

Kapalika: Why will a good mendicant be not forgiven?

Devasoma: My lord, you are very tired. No easy way to find the missing skull begging bowl. So please partake of the madhu from this horn itself, get back some strength and then continue your argument.

Kapalika: Ok. (*Devasoma offers him the ale/wine*)

Kapalika: Dear, you also should rejuvenate.

Devasoma: Ok, my lord. (*she also drinks*)

Kapalika: This fellow has hit us back. No problem. Give the remaining ale to this respected monk also.

Devasoma: Lord's order. Sir, please accept.

Mendicant: (*to himself*) Got lucky so easily! But the problem is, people will see. (*aloud*) No thanks. We are not supposed to drink alcohol. (*saying that, he wets his lips with his tongue*)

Devasoma: Get lost! Where else will you get this kind of good fortune?

Kapalika: Dear, this fellow's loose talk is revealing his true desires.

Mendicant: Don't you have mercy?

Kapalika: If I have mercy, how will I get emancipation from desire?

Mendicant: If you get emancipated from desire, you will get released from anger as well.

Kapalika: If you give back what belongs to me, I will certainly get released from anger.

Mendicant: Which one of yours?

Kapalika: My skull begging bowl.

Mendicant: Which skull begging bowl?

Kapalika: He is innocently asking 'Which skull begging bowl?' . Perhaps that is the truth?

Devasoma: Sweet talk will not work with him. We have to snatch it by force.

Kapalika: You are right, dear. *(they try to snatch his begging bowl from him)*

Mendicant: You dirty kapalika! May you be destroyed! *(pushes the kapalika with hand and then kicks him)*

Kapalika: Aa! He kicked me!

Devasoma: Worthless fellow, you are dead. *(she leaps ahead to grab his hair but since he has no hair, loses balance and falls down)*

Mendicant: *(to himself)* Should praise Lord Buddha for laying down the clean shave rule. *(aloud)* Get up, sister. *(gives her a hand and gets her up)*

Kapalika: Look, my lords! Look at Nagasena, who claims to be a monk and mendicant but holds my girl's hand!

Mendicant: Please don't say that, brother. It's our duty to help those who are in trouble.

Kapalika: Is it a rule really laid down by Lord Buddha? Let that be. Didn't I fall down first? Leave that as well. Now the skull inside your head is going to be my begging bowl.

(all get into fist fight)

Mendicant: Torture! Torture!

Kapalika: Lords above! Please see for yourself – this fellow, who calls himself a yogi, not only stole my begging bowl but is shouting his top off!. Let it be, I will also shout. This is unethical! Unethical!

(at that time, one pashupatha enters)

Babhrukalpa (*the pashupatha*): Satyasoma, why are you shouting?

Kapalika: O Babhrukalpa, this fellow who calls himself a mendicant and a monk, not only stole my begging bowl but is refusing to return it.

Babhrukalpa: (*to himself*) The gods in heaven have done what I wanted to do! I will crush this enemy of mine with the help of the kapalika.

(*aloud*) O Nagasena! Is what he is saying true?

Mendicant: Sir, are you also siding with him?

Not taking what we are not given is our principle;

Staying away from empty talk is our principle;

Staying away from humiliations is our principle;

Not eating at wrong time is our principle;

Buddham dharmam sangham sharanam gacchami.

Babhrukalpa: Satyasoma! This shows their good nature and behavior.

What is your reply to it?

Kapalika: Staying away from empty talk is our principle.

Babhrukalpa: Both are right. How to solve this problem?

Mendicant: Why will a follower of the Buddha have the need to even touch an alcohol bowl/vessel?

Babhrukalpa: Imagined excuse can not be the ground for accusation.

Kapalika: No argument can stand in front of what is evident in front of our eyes!

Babhrukalpa: Where is that scene?

Devasoma: My lord, there – the skull begging bowl that he is hiding inside his robes.

Babhrukalpa: Heard?

Mendicant: My lord, this shell doesn't belong to anyone else.

Kapalika: Then show.

Mendicant: Ok. (*he shows it*)

Kapalika: Lord Maheshwara, please see the unjust behaviour of the kapalika and good behaviour of the Buddhist mendicant!

Mendicant: Not taking what we are not given is our principle;

Staying away from empty talk is our principle;

Staying away from humiliations is our principle;

Not eating at wrong time is our principle;

Buddham Dharmam Sangham – our refuge.
(*both the mendicant and the kapalika start swaying*)

Mendicant: Aha! One who should be ashamed is dancing!

Kapalika: Aa! Who is dancing? (*looks around*) undoubtedly!

That's because my begging bowl that went missing is seen now and in this gentle breeze, the vine called my tiredness is swaying.

Looking at that, you are hallucinating that I am dancing!

Mendicant: My lord, Why are you not speaking up? Didn't you see its colour?

Kapalika: What is there to see? I have already seen. It's darker than a crow.

Mendicant: Then you admit that it's mine.

Kapalika: Yeah, yeah! I will agree to your chameleon nature! Like red lotus flowers becoming white when struck by sun rays!

Devasoma: I am dead! Our virtuous begging bowl became black, having been touched by this fellow's dirty black clothes! What to do now?

(*starts crying*)

Kapalika: Don't worry dear. We can wash it and clean it. Just as we wash away our sins with our power of penance, we can cleanse our begging bowl too.

Oh, Babhrukalpa, is it not so?

Babhrukalpa: It's true as per agama shastram.

Mendicant: Ok, colour is because of me but what about size, shape and form?

Kapalika: Don't you belong to the lineage of Mayadevi?

Mendicant: How long can I keep on arguing with you? Here, take it sir.

Kapalika: Good. Buddha became a great donor like this.

Mendicant: If it goes on like this, where is the refuge for me?

Kapalika: Definitely, buddham dharmam sangham.

Babhrukalpa: I am not able to solve this problem. Let's go to the court of justice.

Devasoma: My lord, if we go there we will surely lose our skull begging bowl.

Babhrukalpa: Why do you say that?

Devasoma: This man who lives in the monastery with all facilities, will shut the mouths of all the judges with the wealth he has accumulated. How can we, who have nothing but the clothes we wear, go to the court?

Babhrukalpa: Nothing like that. Those who are honest will certainly get

justice in that court of law. Just like the pillars that are upholding that hall, the judges also uphold justice.

Kapalika: That word is enough. Those who are honest need not fear

Mendicant: Sir, please show the way.

Babhrukalpa: Certainly...

(all depart)

(a mad fellow enters at that time)

Unmattha (mad fellow): There, there it is, the wicked dog. You are running away, clutching in your mouth the skull begging bowl with roasted meat pieces. You worthless fellow, where can you go? Now it has dropped it and is coming towards me *(looks around)* I will break its teeth with this stone. You bloody dog, why are running away, dropping the skull? Are you trying to beat me in valour? I.. I will mount a stray pig and fly to the sky. Making the ocean as my weapon, I defeated the heavenly elephant *airavat* . Hey idiot, what are you saying? That it's all a lie? Then, this ugly frog is our witness. What? Why does one, famous for his valour in all the three world, need a witness? Ok, I will do this. I will eat the meat pieces left behind by that dog. *(eats. Then he really becomes lunatic)* My own tears are killing me. *(looks around, crying)* Who is hitting me? *(looks around)* You bad guys! Just like Ghatotkacha to Bhima, I am nephew to someone.

Please don't harrass me for these meat pieces.

(looks around) Our teacher *(acharya)* Suranandi is there. I will go to him.

(he runs)

Babhrukalpa: Hey, watch out! That mad fellow is coming right here!.

Unmattha: I will go that fellow himself. *(approaching)* My lord, please accept this skull begging bowl that I obtained from a high-class dog that belongs to a low caste fellow.

Babhrukalpa: *(carefully examines it)* Give it to a deserving fellow.

Unmattha: Oh great soul, please accept it happily.

Mendicant: This respectful pashupatha is the deserving person to receive it.

Unmattha: *(comes in front of kapalika and keeps the skull begging bowl in front of him. Then goes around him from the left and falls at his feet)* Oh Lord! May happiness grow! Many respects to you.

Kapalika: This is our skull begging bowl!

Devasoma: Yes!

Kapalika: By god's grace, I again became a kapalika. *(he approaches it)*

Unmattha: You worthless fellow! Go drink poison *(steals the skull and runs)*

Kapalika: *(chasing him)* This servant of the god of death *(Yama)* is taking away my life *(prana)* . Both of you, save me!

Both: Ok. We both will help you.
(all go off the path.)

Kapalika: Hey, stop!

Unmattha: Why are you blocking me?

Kapalika: Give back our skull begging bowl and go.

Unmattha: Idiot! Can't you see? This is a gold bowl.

Kapalika: Who could have made such a gold bowl?

Unmattha: I said this is a gold bowl because, this was made by the brother-in-law of a goldsmith who wears only golden clothes.

Mendicant: What are you saying?

Unmattha: That this is a gold bowl.

Mendicant: What? This is a mad fellow!

Unmattha: A label that I hear frequently; Here, take this. Show me the mad fellow.

(he gives the skull begging bowl to kapalika)

Kapalika: *(taking the skull begging bowl)* Now he went behind that wall. Go fast behind him!

Unmattha: I am honoured. *(mad fellow goes in a hurry)*

Mendicant: Aha! Wonderful! I am glad about the good fortune that had befallen my enemy.

Kapalika: *(hugging the skull begging bowl)*

I devoted all my time to penance

And offered myself to Lord Maheshwara

The moment I saw this sacred bowl

My heart relaxed and went to his feet!

Devasoma: My lord! Like the evening moon you seem very cool to my eyes.

Babhrukalpa: Luckily, you won.

Kapalika: All that good fortune is yours.

Babhrukalpa: (*to himself*) Those who are innocent need not fear anything.
That is why this Buddhist mendicant escaped from this tiger's
mouth. (*aloud*) I will remember our friend's good fortune when I
do my morning prayer.

(*pashupatha exits*)

Kapalika: O Nagasena, I request you to forgive my mistakes.

Mendicant: No problem. What shall I do to please you?

Kapalika: If you are going to be happy because of me, what more can I
ask?

Mendicant: Shall I take leave?

Kapalika: Very well. Shall meet again.

Mendicant: Ok. (*they get going*)

Kapalika: My dear Devasoma, let's also leave.

(*both exit*)

-: thus ends the satire *Matta Vilasa Prahasanam* :-