

SYMBOLS OF SUBSTANCE

Court and State in Nāyaka

Period Tamilnadu

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For A.K. RAMANUJAN

master of friendship

nunankiya kēlvīyar

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Preface

This book began with a happy coincidence. Two of the authors found themselves in Philadelphia, under the gracious auspices of the Department of South Asian Regional Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, in 1987-8. Mutual interest in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Tamil Nadu soon elicited areas of complementary frustration: the literary historian looked longingly toward the 'hard' analytical data of the economic historian, while the latter found the Telugu and Tamil sources from the royal courts engaging and vivid in a way quite different from the Dutch, English and Portuguese records. Internal and external perspectives converged, and a picture slowly emerged of the region as viewed by its own articulate elites as well as by those foreign observers who had arrived, with a view to staying, on its shores.

The Nāyaka period in the history of Tamil Nadu, with which this book is concerned, extends roughly from the early sixteenth century to the 1730s, when the last of the 'great' Nāyaka states, Madurai, fell. The three major Nāyaka states—ruled respectively from Senji, Tanjavur and Madurai/Tiruccirappalli—had differing life-spans, developmental patterns, geo-ecological environments, and, inevitably, distinct forms of historical experience; they also shared salient structural features and cultural dynamics. At their height, in the early seventeenth century, they encompassed the greater part of the Tamil country. It is evident though—even from this summary description—that we are dealing with states far smaller than, say, the Mughal empire (which was roughly contemporaneous with the Nāyakas), or the Karnataka (Vijayanagara) empire, from which the Nāyaka kingdoms

derived. In general, these states have been unduly neglected by modern historians: most general histories of India written in the last two decades do not even *mention* the Nāyakas, treating the period from 1565 (the defeat of Vijayanagara at the hands of the Deccan Sultanates) to 1761 (the rise of Haidar Ali in Mysore) as something akin to a black hole in south Indian history. Only recently has this neglect begun to give way to a new interest in the Nāyakas and their time; were it not for these slowly accumulating studies of our scholarly colleagues working in this field—Susan Bayly, Carol Appadurai Breckenridge, Nicholas Dirks, Noboru Karashima, David Ludden, George Michell, R. Nagaswamy, Pamela Price, Burton Stein, Joanne Waghorne, Paul Younger, and others, to all of whom we are indebted in manifold ways—the present work would surely not have been possible.

It is our thesis, set out at length in the following pages, that the Nāyakas witnessed (and partly produced) a profound shift in the conceptual and institutional bases of south Indian civilization. This monograph does not set out to document that shift in a definitive way, for we are only too aware of how far we still remain from the possibility of a Burckhardtean synthesis for this period, to say nothing of our own limited powers. Moreover, as just noted, Nāyaka south India has been largely ignored, its cultural universe devalued and disdained, until very recent times. One of the major reasons for this is surely that the immense wealth of sources from this period remains to a very large extent unexplored. This is partly a question of the heavy linguistic demands made by the materials—in Tamil, Telugu, Sanskrit, Portuguese, Dutch and Italian—but it also stems from deeper methodological roots. Still regnant prejudices ensure that some of the richest sources are treated as somehow illegitimate: for if inscriptions and travel accounts continue to provide the historian's staple fare, literary materials are often regarded with considerable suspicion.

We have sought to redress this imbalance in an experimental mode. To attempt at one and the same time to explore the rich diversity of source materials in Indian and European languages *and* to structure these around unitary themes has proved difficult; if there is any major unifying force to this work, it remains largely methodological, i.e. the Rashomon-like refraction of diverse materials to focus on a single 'screen'. Nor have we pushed the integration of the several chapters

included here beyond the point that seemed natural. These are forays into a still emerging field. As already intimated, part of the enterprise entails the study of sources hitherto either unread, or utilized only in surprisingly restricted ways. This is true both of the literary works known to, but hardly addressed in a serious way by, the modern pioneers of Nāyaka-period history such as R. Satyanatha Aiyar, C.S. Srinivasachari, V. Vriddhagirisan, and N. Venkataramanayya, and of the European materials (in particular those of the Dutch Company), whose potential as narrative sources for understanding south Indian political culture in this age has remained for the most part untapped. Throughout, we have sought to bring these diverse materials into relation with one another, and with the set of analytical questions that guided our research. We have cast out net as widely as possible; an appendix discusses in some detail the various bodies of source material that we have used.

It should be clear that our interest was not in producing another narrative of political history, although an up-to-date revision of the received wisdom in this domain, too, is by now very much needed. Readers can refer to the standard works from the previous generation, cited in the notes and bibliography, for orientation, and to Burton Stein's recent monograph on *Vijayanagara* (in the New Cambridge History of India, I.2) for a discussion of these. While we have sought to go beyond their range, particularly in all that relates to the construction of the inner world peculiar to the Nāyaka elite as well as in proposing more general historical hypotheses, we have also benefited immensely from these earlier compendia of Nāyaka materials and from the fundamental chronological structure that our predecessors drew from them.

In brief, the book is structured as follows. Early chapters set out what we believe to be the fundamental tensions of the period: the social flux caused by the resurgence of certain social groups, which had either intruded into the area from the Telugu country, or entered the mainstream of Nāyaka society from a marginal position (Kaḷḷars, Maṇḍars and others), or were—like the Europeans—perched at the very edges of the Nāyaka world. Related to this, and in part stemming from it, is the central paradox of Nāyaka kingship—the tension between inflated claims, and the limited scale of kingship. Chapters II and III

set out these themes in some detail, and also delineate how such states were founded, what their resource base was, and how this base was portrayed and managed.

The central chapters move on to consider how the social, economic and political flux of the epoch also found its counterpart in the central themes of Nāyaka literature; specifically, we concentrate on perceptions of the body and bodily mutilation and regeneration (here termed 'Nāyaka anthropology'), and on the parodic dialectic that underpins the rhetoric of kingship. In these chapters, our focus is largely on Tanjavur, and to a lesser extent on Madurai. This is not the case in the following chapters, which deal with contestation and war. Chapter VI treats directly the changing art of war and the impact of firearms, while chapter VII describes how states at the physical margins of the Nāyaka order—both to the north and south—attempted to consolidate themselves, by utilizing and modifying the Nāyaka idiom. The final chapter looks to the post-Nāyaka transition, focusing once again on the kingdom that appears to us most of all to epitomize the Nāyaka spirit: Tanjavur.

Each of the chapters bears the marks of all three authors. Triple authorship may seem a mythological construct: the *purāṇas* speak of the demon Triśiras, whose three heads recited the Veda, drank wine, and stared into space, respectively. We will not attempt to disentangle our functional responsibilities in this way, the more so since some of our friends may have their own ways of dismantling this mythological creature. The volume reflects an ongoing, three-way discussion still far from its conclusion. Parts of the book obviously reflect different areas of expertise, but all sections evolved from the same, shared set of basic questions: What is distinctive about the Nāyakas? How do they fit into the wider synchronic realities of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, and into the diachronic continuum stretching backwards toward the early medieval centuries? How can we understand the emergence of new institutional patterns, of the striking artistic and especially literary creations at the Nāyaka courts, of a novel historiography and cultural semantics? How did the central Nāyaka kingdoms—and in particular Tanjavur, from which the bulk of the literary material derives—differ from the little states on the periphery, and from the older, decaying imperial centre to the north, at Candragiri/ Velur/? What was the

effect of the interaction between the imported Telugu-speaking elite and the surrounding Tamil cultural forms? How did the internalized reality and imaginative self-perception of the court relate to the economic and social processes apparent from external sources? How do the political dynamics of Nāyaka south India express the compulsions and fascinations of the newly crystallizing symbolic order?

Perhaps someday a more encompassing study can be attempted. We envisage future volumes—a series of essays on Nāyaka literary forms, and another on painting and sculpture; a study and translation of the Telugu *padam* poets, Kshētrayya and his successors; an edition of some of the principal Portuguese source-materials of the period, including a reconsideration of the accounts of Paes and (the much-misspelt) Nunes; a sequel dealing with the political economy and cultural world of Marāṭhā-period Tanjavur. The cultural and historical riches of late-medieval, or early modern, Tamil Nadu are only beginning to come to light. The present set of forays seek to suggest something of this richness, to put forward certain initial readings and hypotheses, and possibly to convey at least a *vāsanā*—a breath of fragrance, a buried memory—from that time and place.

Two of the authors, Narayana Rao and Shulman, wish to acknowledge with gratitude the support offered by the National Endowment for the Humanities, a federal agency which supports the study of such fields as history, philosophy, literature, and languages.

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The tolerance and, at times, appreciation, shown by seminar audiences ranging from Madison, Philadelphia, Heidelberg and Leiden, to Delhi, Perth and Sydney have given us the courage to sustain ourselves through this project. Dirk Kolff at Leiden helped arrange for at least two stints of archival work at the Hague, under the auspices of the Indo-Netherlands Cultural Exchange. Lotika Varadarajan has been kind enough to contribute to the illustrations. Bachi Ram at the Delhi School of Economics drew the maps.

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kindly read through the manuscript and offered valuable comments, from the perspective of 'medieval' north India.

A brief word on transliteration and diacritics. We have decided, after some debate, to limit the use of diacritics in text or notes. Thus proper names (of places and persons) appear as in modern Indian usage, with the sole exception of the sound 'ch', which appears throughout as 'c'. The palatal sibilant appears as 'ś' and retroflex 'ṣ' as 'sh'; vocalic 'ṛ' is marked as 'ri'. Direct quotations and the Bibliography follow standard Indological conventions.

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August 1990

Abbreviations

- ARA Algemeen Rijksarchief, the Hague
- AS *Ahalyāsankrandanamū* of Venkaṭa Krishṇappa Nāyakuḍu
- BNL Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, Lisbon
- BSOAS Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
- CIS Contributions to Indian Sociology
- HAG Historical Archives, Panaji, Goa
- HS *Hēmābjanāyikāsvayaṃvaramū* of Mannārudēva
- IESHR Indian Economic and Social History Review
- JAS Journal of Asian Studies
- JESHO Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient
- JIH Journal of Indian History
- JIP Journal of Indian Philosophy
- MAS Modern Asian Studies
- M. Bh. *Mahābhārata*
- OB Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren

Ram. *Rāmāyaṇa*

RV *Ṛg Veda*

SII *South Indian Inscriptions, 1890*

TARC *Taṅjāvūri āndhra rājula caritra (anonymous)*

TSV *Tārāsāsāṅkavijayamu of Śeṣamu Venkaṭapati*

VOC *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*

Acknowledgements

- Sections of chapter I.2 and V.3 appear in 'The Powers of Parody in Nāyaka Tañjāvūr', in A. Appadurai, F.J. Korom and M. Mills (eds.), *Gender, Genre and Power in South Asian Expressive Traditions*, Philadelphia, 1991.
- Chapter V.1 appears as 'Marriage-Broker for the God: Vijayarāghava Nāyaka in Tañjāvūr *yakṣagānas*', in a volume edited by H. Bakker on the relations between political and sacred centres, (Groningen Oriental Series, 1992).
- Parts of chapter V.2 appear as 'History, Biography and Poetry at the Tañjāvūr Nāyaka Court', *Social Analysis*, no. 25, special issue edited by H.L. Seneviratne on *Identity, Consciousness and the Past: The South Asia Scene* (1989), pp. 115-30.
- An earlier version of chapter VI has appeared as 'The Kagemusha Effect: The Portuguese, Firearms and the State in Early Modern South India', *Moyen Orient et Océan Indien*, t. IV, 1987.
- Chapter VII.1 has appeared in an earlier version as 'The Men who would be King?—The Politics of Expansion in Early 17th Century Northern Tamilnadu', *Modern Asian Studies*, 24 (1990).
- Chapter VII.2 has largely been incorporated in 'Prince of Poets and Ports: Cītakāti, the Maraikkāyars and Ramnad, ca. 1690-1710', in A.L. Dallapiccola, *et al. Islam in Indian Regions*, Stuttgart (forthcoming).
- Illustrations 4 and 5 have been reproduced from George Michell, *The Vijayanagara Courtly Style*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1991, as Plates 64 and 67

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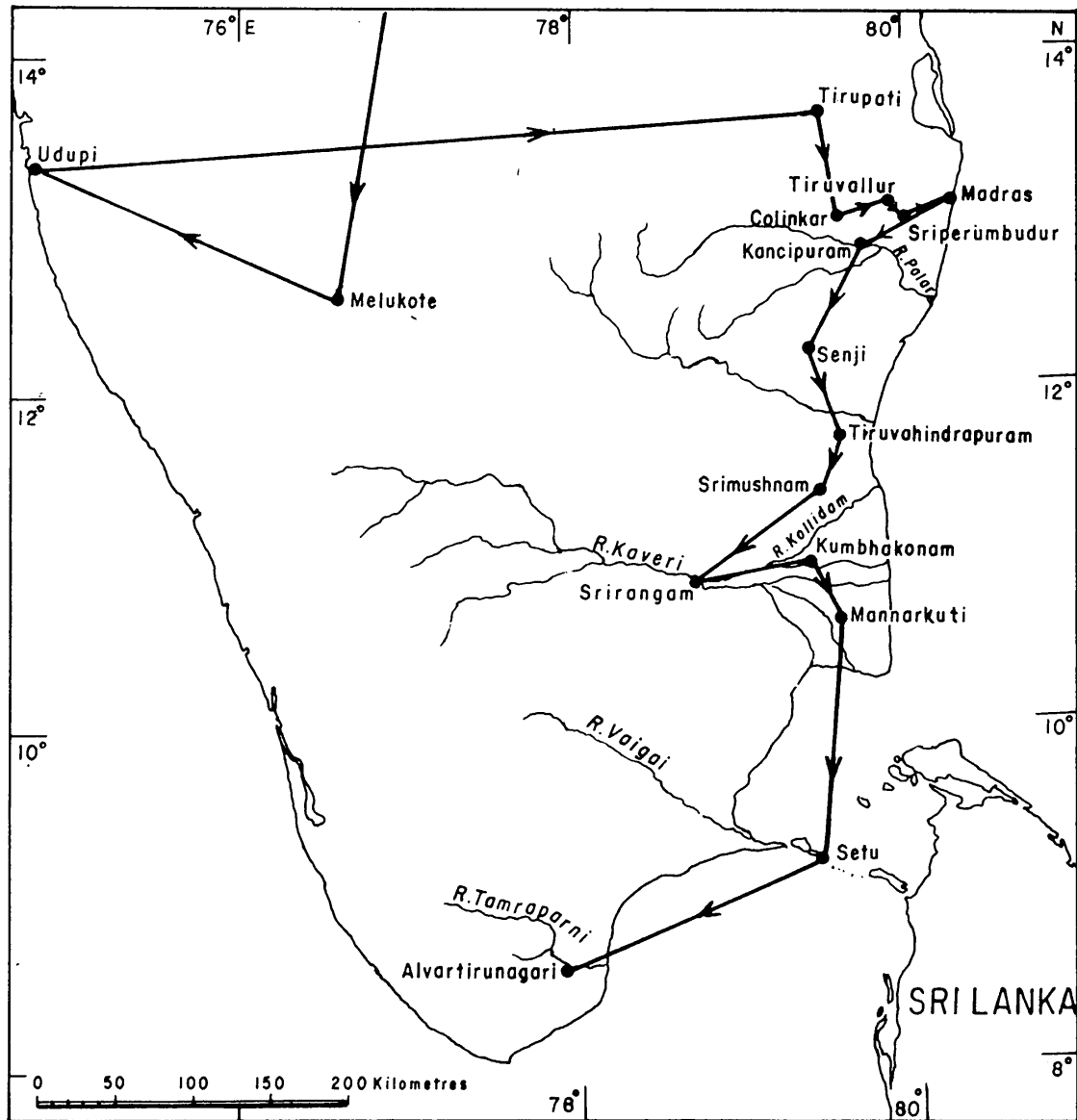
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Map I: The Itinerary of the Two *Gandharvas*

Introduction

1. A GANDHARVA'S-EYE VIEW OF SOUTH INDIA

At some point in the first half of the seventeenth century, two *gandharvas*, celestial musicians from the heaven of Indra, set off for an aerial tour of southern India, and especially the Tamil land. A record of their journey and their impressions survives in the Sanskrit work called *Viśvaguṇādarśacampū*, 'Mirror of all Qualities', by an orthodox Śrīvaiṣṇava Tamil Brahmin, Veṅkaṭādhvarin. This strangely compelling work, with its richly articulated vision of the cultural and social landscape of its time, must have captivated the connoisseurs of Sanskrit poetry in the small-scale royal courts of the south, for we find it imitated, a generation after Veṅkaṭādhvarin, by Rāmacandramakhin in his *Keralābharāṇa* (focused on, and extolling the preeminence of, Kerala). Such travelogues, mordant, perspicacious, and elegant, and saturated with the all-too-conspicuous erudition of their authors, record striking images of the southern part of the subcontinent as seen by the seventeenth-century gandharva jet set from a vantage point high in the skies.¹ We begin our own overview of this period by taking Veṅkaṭādhvarin's observant gandharvas as our guides.

¹ See *Keralābharāṇa* of Rāmacandramakhin (1985). We cite the edition of the *Viśvaguṇādarśa* with Sanskrit commentary (Madras: Vāviḷḷa Rāmasvāmiśāstrulu and Sons, 1934), in Telugu script. For an introduction to this work and its author, see Porcher (1972). Veṅkaṭādhvarin follows the paradigm familiar from Vedāntadeśika's *Saṅkalpasūryodaya*, VI; on other works of this type, such as Samarapuṅgava Dīkṣita's *Tīrthayātrāprabandha* and Annayārya's *Tattvaguṇādarśacampū*, see Lienhard (1984), p. 272.

What they offer us, however, is a kind of oscillating double-vision reflected in the inclusive title of their book—since one of the *gandharvas*, *Viśvāvasu*, is a warm-hearted and innocent optimist who sees only the best in any situation or place, while his companion, *Kriśānu*, is a jaded and embittered pessimist (or realist?). Between them, they delimit the basic interpretative options offered by each of the sites they visit; their descriptions thus veer wildly back and forth from idealized images of piety and social harmony to cynical suggestions of venality and moral degradation. As in the ancient Vedic enigma-exchanges between the affirming *āstika* and the ever-denying *nāstika*,² the 'truth', such as it is, apparently lies either between the two positions, in the space opened up and bounded by their rival opinions, or in the enveloping totality of their discourse. One should note, however, that the positive *Viśvāvasu* usually gets the last word, and *Kriśānu* himself even admits, in his last speech, that his intention throughout was only to strengthen and corroborate the excellent qualities of all that exists by his contrasting, 'spoiling' comments.³ Still, we should take seriously the double-focused pattern of this work—inflated, ideal vision inevitably and immediately punctured by deflating sarcasm and ridicule—for we shall find such a pattern recurring constantly, in interesting variations and forms, in the literature of our period. The alternating structure is pregnant with meaning: *Kriśānu*'s role as *purobhāgin*, the grumpy, satirical detractor (defined in verse 7, at the beginning of the journey), is integral to both the structure and the implicit semantics of this genre.

Take an example. Here is *Kriśānu* on the typical temple-priests of the Kaveri delta (the *gandharvas* are in the air somewhere to the south of Tanjavur, after passing the major shrine of the Tanjavur *Nāyakas* at Mannarkuti):

With hands that have fondled
the courtesans' breasts,
they offer to the god.
The *mantras* they recite
come flavoured with the breath of betel

² Heesterman (1968-9), pp. 171-85.

³ *dārdhyāya guṇasamṛddheḥ / dūṣaṇaphanitis samastavastūnām* (1109).

chewed in their mouths.
 They never hesitate to steal
 the god's own treasure.
 What divinity would reside in images
 served by grasping priests like these? (888)

Kriśānu's critique of the temple-priests, to whom he refers by the standard contemptuous term, *devalaka*, resumes and expands upon themes familiar both from the Epic and from the internal polemics of the Śrīvaishṇava *āgamic* tradition:⁴ according to the dyspeptic gandharva, the one ritual these devalakas can reliably perform is chatting up the courtesans, never the *sandhyāvandanam*; they steal from the blind; they come from evil families. How could God accept offerings of food cooked by such men? (890) In this Kali Age, everyone's mind is hopelessly askew (*anivāryo vivekaparyayaḥ*): offerings cooked by real Brahmins under conditions of perfect purity, in their homes, are actually rejected by the elders in shrines such as these; instead, they eat, inside the temple, food cooked by outlaws (*vrātya*), polluted by the touch of low-caste people, seen by everyone, and offered by ignoramuses (893).

At this point Viśvāvasu intervenes. He admits the validity of his companion's comments but insists that they are beside the point. What really matters is the greatness of the sacred site (*divyakṣetramāhātmya*), which overrides all other considerations; anyone, pure or impure, who serves the temple deserves honour, just as cripples and eunuchs are honoured if they have the protection of a king (904). Faults and failings pale in the miraculous presence of the deity:

Who cares if one worships the lord
 correctly or incorrectly,
 with devotion or without it,
 in a state of purity or pollution?
 What person of faith (*āstika*) could turn away
 from the images of Lord Ajita
 which the very gods come here to worship
 day after day? (898)

Moreover, the excellence of the offering of food, whether prepared in the temple or elsewhere, depends entirely on the emotional ex-

⁴ M. Bh 12.77.8; *Āgamaprāmānya* of Yāmunācārya, 16; cf. Neevel (1977), pp. 31-3.

perience (*anubhava*) of the devotee who brings it (901). Viśvāvasu has clearly shifted the debate to a wholly different level, marked by concerns and values that dwarf Kriśānu's paltry, if realistic, criticisms. This shift allows the happy optimist to assert that the temple priests, however imperfect they may be—and Viśvāvasu seems to believe there are ritual remedies for their failings—clearly perform a great service:

Pure from their bath at dawn,
 trained in their discipline (*śāstra*),
 having overcome their sins,
 these priests tirelessly worship God
 with proper food and other gifts,
 by rite,
 to save the world (896).⁵

And, after this sanguine rebuttal, the two gandharvas proceed on their journey south.

This is the pattern: often Viśvāvasu's initial raptures are brutally debunked by Kriśānu, who is then, in turn, overruled by the indomitable enthusiasm of his friend. For our purposes, the critical element is often the simple exercise of selectivity (note in the above verses the central importance of the gift of food, a Nāyaka obsession played out here in the temple context); themes of general cultural importance tend to emerge, in both positive and negative guises, as the two observers scan the landscape below them. At times it seems as if the Critic's barbs express popular Nāyaka *topoi*—for example, Kriśānu's satirical portraits of professional groups such as grammarians, astrologers, doctors, poets, logicians, and ritualists, which recall images produced by his famous contemporary in Madurai, Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkshita, in his *Kalividāmbana*⁶—whereas the corrective vision of the Enthusiast, oriented toward sustaining the cultural norm, reflects the bias of the author's persona as a strict Śrīvaiṣṇava Brahmin. The latter attitude is evident, for example, in Viśvāvasu's impassioned (and perhaps anachronistic) defense of Vedic animal sacrifice,

⁵ *paritrātum lokān*. I read *pūjanajanaḥ* (i.e. *pūjāri*) with the commentary.

⁶ See *Kalividāmbana* 1-40; the two poets may have studied together—see Porcher (1972), p. 5.

supposedly performed on every river bank in the Tuṇḍīra/Toṇṭai region of northern Tamilnadu (693-710).

In any case, this bifurcated vision, with its inherent suggestion of complexity and totality, encompasses a diversified and rapidly changing world. These changes interest our poet. Listen, for example, to his description (via Kriśānu) of the new city of Madras (perhaps the first extended literary reference to this site):

Here is a populated city filled with evil people, mostly Hūṇas, devoid of all virtue . . . There is no-one worse than Hūṇas in this world: they are merciless, they treat Brahmins with contempt, as if they were no better than blades of grass; language cannot express their vices; they care nothing for rules of purity. (502-3)

The 'Hūṇas' are the European merchants centred in Madras (Cannaṭṭaṇa, in the title to this section); the commentary glosses the term as śvetavadanāḥ, 'White-Faces'. Their alien, polluting presence here, in the otherwise sacred Tuṇḍīra/Toṇṭai region, inspires in Kriśānu one of his more generalized sarcastic paeans, addressed in mock anger to Vidhi, the lord of fate:

Hūṇas and others, devoid of purity, get rich;
paragons of virtue win only misery.
Fools are given regal wealth and power,
and wise men reduced to begging.
Low-caste women have great beauty,
while others, their betters,
are born ugly.
Alas, dreadful Fate,
what a mess you've made
of your creation! (504)

This seems rather damning; the foreign merchants at the expanding commercial centre of Madras are assimilated initially to the menacing barbarian Hūṇas familiar from *purāṇic* descriptions of the tragic Kali Age, which has also produced poverty for pandits and ugliness for high-caste women. But not even this gloomy vision can survive the Enthusiast's gift for discovering the redeeming virtue:

Look, even these people have their own excellent qualities—
They never take others' money unjustly, by force;

they speak no falsehood;
 they create marvellous things;
 they punish offenders in their own manner,
 according to rule.

Observe these virtues even here,
 among the Hūṇas with their many flaws! (506)

Viśvāvasu notices the singular ways of these foreigners—their independent jurisdictions, their mercantile preoccupations (seen as non-violent!), the unusual devices and products (*vastv adbhutam*) they have brought with them to India. A breath of novelty, and of a certain fascination on the part of the Brahmin author, issues from this passage: Madras represents a new departure, which at least one side of the traditional order is prepared to study and absorb.

Veṅkaṭādhvarin also shows us, it is true, predictable elements of relative stability—such as the great Brahminical temples that mark off stages in the gandharvas' progress, from Tirupati (Śeṣhaśaila) via Kāñcīpuram and Vīkshāraṇya (Tiruvullūr), with a stop at Veṅkaṭādhvarin's home village of Araśāṇipāla, to Śrīmushṇam, and then south to the Kāverī and Tāmraparṇī deltas. The southern panorama we are offered is divided and defined, first and foremost, by these major shrines—far more than by any political boundaries. There is, however, a pronounced sense of regionalism: Andhra, Maharashtra, and the Karnata regions are all marked off as deserving of distinct reference and characterization. This is important: the Tamil world sees itself, by this time, in relation to these wider spheres, which impinge upon the far south with very real political and military pressures. Andhra, for example, is alive with a dynamic, and threatening, Muslim presence:

Equipped with horses swifter than the wind,
 intent on cutting off the practice of *dharma*
 at the root,
 terrifying Yavanas are on the move
 against the temples of Śiva and of Viṣṇu
 on his serpent couch. (304)

This, typically, is Kriśānu speaking: *yavana* is the common Sanskrit term for Muslims in this period, and the jaded gandharva, like the contemporary author of the Telugu *Vēṅkaṭācalavihāraśatakamu*,⁷ pro-

⁷ *Vēṅkaṭācalavihāraśatakamu* 6-9.

fesses horror at their desecration of great Hindu shrines. This, indeed, is a standard theme—probably conventionalized beyond historical occurrence, and out of all proportion to the real threat—in Telugu poetry of the seventeenth century. And even here, the hopeful Viśvāvasu finds a redeeming note: ‘What you say is true, but do observe that the Turushkas, Yavanas and others have an unparalleled claim to the virtue of heroism’ (*ananyasādharāṇavikramaguṇa*, 305). In a Nāyaka literary context, heroic achievement is a universalistic value in its own right, transcending even the identity-boundary between Hindu and non-Hindu.

This is a telling point, which, given our primary concern with the Nāyaka political order, we must pursue. Viśvāvasu has touched upon one of the defining features of the Nāyaka ethos—the role of non-ascriptive, heroic criteria in the fashioning of political power. A great wealth of Telugu and Tamil materials, often classed as ‘family histories’ (*vamśāvali*), show us precisely this theme of the unknown, unpedigreed warrior who fights his way into power and a kingdom of his own;⁸ our elitist Sanskrit poet is echoing both an empirical process and a conspicuous rhetorical obsession of his generation. It is of some interest that this value is stressed in relation to the political realities of Andhra, for the Nāyaka elite with which our author, Veṅkaṭādhvarin, was familiar—presumably, the Nāyaka rulers of the northern Tamil region, especially at their centre at Senji—were, after all, Telugu-speaking warriors still oriented in many ways toward their original cultural homeland in the Andhra Deccan. Indeed, Veṅkaṭādhvarin, speaking again through Kriśānu, shows himself to be well aware of another basic element of the Andhra socio-political universe:

In every village the Śūdra lives like a lord,
while, at his side, the Brahmin-turned servant
recites his accounts.⁹

Even if you can find, somewhere or other,
like a lake in the desert,
a Brahmin versed in the Veda,
he’s sure to be busy
scouring someone’s dirty pots. (284)

⁸ See Price (1983); Dirks (1987), pp. 75-96, 156-68; below, chapter 3.

⁹ And not the Veda! The opposition is implicit in the phrase *paṭhati gaṇanām*.

In other words, in the Telugu sphere political power is vested in Śūdra hands, while the Brahmin is subservient. Viśvāvasu is quick to offer an apologetic reading of this situation—bhakti and gifts make up for any lack of Vedic sacrifice or recitation (288)—but the Critic’s perception remains very much on target. We have a remote echo here, in this Sanskrit text by a staunch Śrīvaiṣṇava Brahmin, of the crystallizing Nāyaka ideology of Śūdra pride and Śūdra power with its implicit restructured model of political relations, a model which we will have occasion to explore at length below.

But Veṅkaṭādhvarin has still more to say about the Telugu Nāyaka elite in northern Tamil Nadu. As one would expect, this material emerges from the gandharvas’ flying visit to Senji, the political capital closest to Veṅkaṭādhvarin’s own home territory in the Kanci region. Let us follow the two air-borne figures as they observe the picturesque city of Senji with its famous fortifications spilling over the rocky hills. The first comment comes from Viśvāvasu:

Here is the brilliant city of Senji (Cañjīpurī)
brimming with young men
attuned to the chiming anklets
of women so beautiful
they could cripple your heart:

here Manmatha, the god of love,
once fooled into dying,
has come alive again. (711)

Not, perhaps, a very original description, but it is still noteworthy that Senji is a youthful city—we will see that the Nāyaka elite holds strongly to an ideology of youth—and that the atmosphere is sensual and erotic: Senji is where Kāma, previously burned by Śiva, came back to life. That is the first element that our gandharva selects and reports; the second is the presence of Vedic Brahmins who have exposed the shallowness of the oceans of logic, grammar, and Mīmāṃsā (by mastering them: Veṅkaṭādhvarin is describing epigons of himself).

At this point, the sour Kriśānu intervenes:

This doesn’t look like a city at all.
More like a bog of blood and severed limbs
where the headless bodies of slain soldiers

go on dancing in the thick of battle
while enemy kings attack the impregnable ramparts
on the hill. (713)

Kriśānu, as so often in this perpetually oscillating conversation, is telling us something of real importance. What he sees in the Nāyaka capital is a battle-zone awash with gore—the headless trunks and rivers of blood so popular with south Indian poets of all ages. This time, however, these particular headless corpses receive a more elaborate characterization; the Cynic selects one prototypical figure as a suitable target for his disdain:

Though he has wealth in plenty
and a prosperous kingdom,
this king turns away
from the long-eyed women waiting
to delight him

and, merciless,
with an army set to wrest a country
from his foes,
eagerly seeks
his death in war. (719)

And again, as in the case of the Turushkas/Yavanas, Viśvāvasu protests: You are wrong; this heroic attitude of the Nāyaka warriors is actually a great virtue. They seek their death in the purifying fire of battle, so he says, because they realize that

Wealth
is a waterfall in the wilderness,
power
a streak of lightning;
the youthful grace of women
is like the play of shadow
on a passing cloud,
for a moment caressed
by the sun:

the body
is a lamp without oil.¹⁰

¹⁰ *dehas snehavihīnadīpasakha*, with a double entendre on *sneha*, 'oil' but also 'love'

Heroism is thus a form of self-sacrifice, an ascetic move enlivened by a consciousness of realities that transcend the glistening surface. Note, however, that *both* gandharvas see these heroes as wealthy, endowed with money and prosperous kingdoms. Indeed, for Kriśānu this very fact triggers his guiding sense of incongruity, as if these men were almost too rich to go off to fight. And he is surely right, not only in stressing the apparent incongruity but in identifying the social background of the Senji warrior elite. They are well known from other sources: we are dealing, at least in part, with a configuration of castes, known collectively as Balijas, who are at once martial and mercantile, a so-called left-hand grouping oriented toward trade but also driven by a somewhat surprising set of heroic values and thus perfectly ready, even eager, to fight. Originally part of the great Telugu migrations southward into the Tamil country in the 15th and 16th centuries, the Balija merchant-warriors reveal the rise of hitherto marginal, and only recently politicized, groups to political and cultural power in their new domains. These mobile, aggressive, land-hungry, Telugu-speaking warriors, whose inner world we will be exploring in subsequent chapters, helped to build the Nāyaka state-system and to impregnate it with their particular cultural vision; strong surviving traditions, supported by contemporary evidence, assert Balija origins and/or marital connections for the major Nāyaka dynasties in the Tamil country, quite apart from the well-known Balija role in restructuring the revenue systems of Nāyaka Tanjavur and Madurai.¹¹

Veṅkaṭādhvarin must have known these men, or their representatives in the Toṅṭai region; consciously or not, he lets his gandharva witnesses give voice to something of the Balija universe of values. Only on one point is he somewhat at odds with that universe: the body, however fit for self-sacrifice in combat, is, for these people, anything but an oil-less or loveless lamp. It is, on the contrary, nearly always burning with sensual desire, seen as imbued with its own soteriological

(722).

¹¹. See below, III.2; Nārāyaṇa Dēśāi (no date); for Balijas intermarrying with the Senji royal family, see HAG, Monçês do Reino No. 19-D, fls. 1160-61, letter from the Portuguese viceroy at Goa, Conde de Linhares, to the Portuguese king, 28 November 1634 ; on Balija investment and tax-farming, Ludden (1985), pp. 52, 69-81; Subrahmanyam and Bayly (1988), pp. 406-413.

power. Indeed, in the concluding verse of this section our author seems to reverse himself, and to adopt a less puritanical perspective closer to what we might expect:

Standing, now, ablaze with light,
 in a heavenly chariot,
 the hero who sacrificed his life
 in the fire of battle
 fondles the breasts of the immortal women
 who have come to welcome him, who have wounded him
 with marks of passion
 from their fingernails

as he looks down, full of joy,
 at his own lacklustre corpse
 left behind on the battlefield,
 pierced by a thousand arrows,
 a sword still firmly in its hand. (725)

Death in battle is an erotic experience: the slain hero can expect the welcoming embrace of the heavenly courtesans, who waste no time in inflicting on him the scars of coitus—so often tellingly compared to those of war. One sacrifices one body in order to achieve sensual delight with a new (less perishable) one.¹² The question is partly one of timing: does the hero seek erotic fulfilment at this earthly stage of his career, or only after he has transcended that limiting moment by living out his ethos and his destiny? Put somewhat differently, it would seem that we have two separate stages of a socially determined progression (and here Veṅkaṭādhvarin is, after all, borne out by other contemporary sources): the hero proper is ascetic, self-denying, chaste—in the interests of a fantasy of eventual sensual release; once graduated into full-fledged kingship, with its more elaborate ethical programme, the fantasy can no longer be postponed, and the immediacy of ‘enjoyment’ (*bhoga*) becomes the dominant theme. In either case, the body has its necessary, entirely positive role.¹³

With this sanguinary vision of the northern Nāyaka political centre, we take leave of our two travellers. They will go on to frame the

¹² Compare the verse by Ceṅgalva Kāḷakavi cited below, V.2 at n. 35.

¹³ On *bhoga*, see III.1-2.

whole of the Tamil cultural sphere within the two hyperbolic, distorting poles of the superimposed ideal and the subverted real. We have also seen that the ideal tends to be linked in the poet's mind with stable continuities, while the innovating (perhaps devolving) facets of 17th-century life often gravitate to the Critic's field. In any case, the mere fact that such specifically focused travel-literature exists at all reflects a new conceptualization of geographical space and a sense that the changing world beneath our flying reporters merits attention—both in terms of its predictable, reassuring fixed points and of the various, more or less shocking transgressions of the older norm.¹⁴ The Tamil cultural universe is expanding, pushing against the horizon, defining itself in contrast and connection with the wider spheres of political and institutional growth to the north. Within the range of rich observation opening outwards in this way, we can recognize, even in the small fragments we have somewhat casually cited here, several distinct Nāyaka topoi (and related Nāyaka social types): first, the fascination with food as a strategic semantic vehicle; second, the keen sense of alien identity made present, of outsiders in the process of being assimilated into the southern universe; third, the shifting, evolving ideology of political dominance, proud Śūdra self-consciousness replacing the classical Sanskrit *varṇa*-scheme; fourth, the diversification and extension of the social landscape far beyond any earlier models (with realistic portrayals of predatory bandit-castes,¹⁵ alluring courtesans, pretentious doctors, Mleccha merchants, Deccani soldiers, and local 'little kings' of an altogether new type); fifth, the empirical presentation of the Balija elite, with its heroic ethos, at home, at war, in Senji. It is an engaging series: Sanskrit *kāvya* embodies here an intuition of dynamic growth, affecting differentiated, developing parts of an organic social reality, more than of (the expectable) timeless and perfected essences. Each of these five themes merits further discussion; together, refracted through this curious Sanskritic prism, they suggest certain preliminary parameters for our study. But for now, still by way of introduction, let us briefly switch the lens.

¹⁴ Cf. Stein (1977).

¹⁵ See verses 767-9, on bandits (Kallar?) in the Srirangam region.

2. THE SUBAHDAR OF THE COT

The rich courtly literature of the Nāyakas, in Telugu, Tamil, and Sanskrit, speaks eloquently of their self-perception, their elaborate posturing, their values; it also points indirectly to the structural and conceptual innovations which the Nāyaka elite brought to the Tamil land. The following chapters attempt to tease out major themes and notions implicit in this corpus. But there is another, related vision of these Telugu kings and their politics, a vision preserved and elaborated in a stratum of folk sources which deal explicitly with the political order in society. Here is a Tamil folktale, collected at the turn of this century by the great Pandit Natesa Sastri, but oriented retrospectively toward a period when Tamil Nadu was still part of the Vijayanagara state-system. Although the tale conflates historical periods (note the use of the Mughal administrative title 'subahdar' and the role of Delhi as the ultimate political centre, even *vis-à-vis* Tanjavur), it is firmly located in the early modern Kaveri Delta; thematically, it relates perfectly to our period and its concerns.

In the town of Tanjavur there lived a poor but clever Brahmin priest named Keśava Bhaṭṭa. He earned about two pennies (*paṇam*) a day, one of which he would spend on his household expenses; with the other penny he would hold court each night on a cot hidden in the back room of a vast, seven-storied mansion owned by the rich merchant, Navakoṭi Nārāyaṇa Ceṭṭi. The mansion opened on to West High Street of Tanjavur, but each night Keśava Bhaṭṭa would crawl into the back room from a door in East High Street, where he would be served, as he sat on his cot, by a carpenter, a cobbler, an oil-vendor, and a maker of turbans — each of whom received a quarter of a penny for his service. The carpenter would bring the cot, the oilman would keep two torches burning, the cobbler would bring a pair of costly shoes, and the tier of turbans would adorn the Brahmin's head with a regal turban. In addition, four peons were engaged, for ten gold coins a month, to wait upon the Brahmin, who insisted that he be called the 'Subahdar of the Cot'. At the tenth hour of the night, the lights would be extinguished, the shoes and turban would be removed, the carpenter would carry away the cot, and Keśava Bhaṭṭa would dismiss his servants and return home. The merchant, Navakoṭi Nārāyaṇa Ceṭṭi, had no knowledge of these nocturnal events in the back of his palace.

After one month, the Subahdar of the Cot had a problem. He paid the four artisans every night, but how was he to pay the four peons their golden coins? Seeing no way out, he decided to hang himself from a tree in the garden of his house. As he placed the rope around his neck, a voice rang out: 'Dig at the root of this tree, and you will find seven pots of gold, each with a lakh of gold coins'. The Subahdar came down from the tree, dug up the pots full of gold, and hid them without informing his wife. He paid the four peons their salary, gave them an additional five gold coins as a present, and then sent two of them on a mission to the capital city of Vijayanagara; there they were to deliver the seven pots of gold (except for a hundred coins from each pot, which the Subahdar kept in reserve for himself) to Indumukhī, the favourite courtesan of the emperor, with a letter which read: 'Having heard of your unparalleled beauty, and without wishing to rival the emperor, your lord, we are sending you this small gift to cover one day's expenses for your ladyship; please favour us by accepting it. (Signed), the Subahdar of the Cot.'

When Indumukhī received the gold and read the letter, she was amazed: what great lord could send such an enormous sum as payment for one day's expenses? She was unable to form a clear impression of the Subahdar from the peons who had brought his gift. But, believing him to be the wealthiest man in the whole world, she sent back with these peons a costly throne inlaid with diamonds and other precious stones, with a letter thanking the Subahdar for his gift and declaring herself to be his humble maidservant. After twenty-one days' journey, the peons arrived back in Tanjavur.

There they were amply rewarded by the happy Subahdar. But what was he to do with the precious gift? Having heard of a still more beautiful courtesan called Nurzana, concubine to the emperor at Delhi, he decided to send the throne to her with a note similar to the previous one. So the peons set off on the three-months' journey to Delhi, where Nūrzāna, in her turn, was astonished to receive, as a 'small gift' from the Subahdar of the Cot, a throne such as even the Emperor of India had never owned. And she wrote back to the Subahdar, thanking him and expressing the hope that someday, perhaps within a year or two, she would be able to visit him in person. Since this visit was still an indefinite wish, and no counter-gift had come back to Tanjavur, the

Subahdar put the matter out of his mind and enjoyed his subahdari for an entire year.

But his peons, who had become rich from his presents, became the talk of the town, and soon everyone knew of the Subahdar of the Cot and his nightly council in the Ceṭṭi's house. Finally, even Navakoṭi Nārāyaṇa Ceṭṭi himself heard of the matter and paid a sudden visit, one night, to the back-quarters of his palace. Furious, he had his servants seize the Subahdar, whose peons and other servants fled for their lives. Keśava Bhaṭṭa explained to the merchant how he had come to play at being a subahdar, but he said nothing about the treasures and correspondence with Indumukhī and Nūrzāna; Navakoṭi Nārāyaṇa Ceṭṭi laughed at the tale, took pity on the poor Brahmin and his pretence, and, as punishment for his pride, took him into his service as his head cook.

Keśava Bhaṭṭa served the merchant faithfully and well and soon became, in addition to being cook, his adviser on various affairs; he also managed to bring his former peons into the Ceṭṭi's service. After one month, Nārāyaṇa Ceṭṭi, acting on the Brahmin's advice, set off with a large entourage on a pilgrimage to Benares, in the hope of being granted a child by the god. On the way he visited various other sacred shrines and rivers, including the Tungabhadra, in the vicinity of Vijayanagara city. He stayed for several days in the city, where, one night, he caught a glimpse of a woman of unearthly beauty in the top story of a fine palace. Nārāyaṇa Ceṭṭi fell madly in love. But the woman was none other than the courtesan Indumukhī, jealously guarded by the emperor from contact with any other man. After three days the merchant, sleepless and haggard from hopeless desire, confided in his cook, Keśava Bhaṭṭa: 'I would', he said, 'give all my wealth for a single moment with that lady'. Said the Brahmin: 'I can arrange it for you—and it is enough if you give me but half of your vast riches and restore me to my subahdari in the back of your palace'. The incredulous Nārāyaṇa Ceṭṭi agreed.

At the Brahmin's insistence, the merchant clothed Keśava Bhaṭṭa in his own fine garments and jewels, and retired himself, in the guise of a humble servant, to an inner chamber. The Subahdar's former peons were also regally attired, and the two of them who had formerly gone on the mission to Indumukhī were sent to her again with a letter

summoning her to the Subahdar's presence. In a moment, she stood before him and shyly and humbly offered to serve him as his slave. The Subahdar, however, did not even glance in her direction. 'You surely understand,' he said, 'that we are far above your humble company; but if you are true to your promise, and as a sign of your faithfulness, I order you to go at once to the next room and offer your services to one of our attendants, who is waiting there'. Like a slave at the master's command, Indumukhī at once entered the inner chamber, where she spent the night with Navakoti Nārāyaṇa Ceṭṭi.

By morning, she was back in her palace, and Keśava Bhaṭṭa had resumed his place in the kitchen. At his urging, the pilgrimage proceeded as planned, while he continued to act as the merchant's servant—although Nārāyaṇa Ceṭṭi now treated his cook with new and signal respect. He questioned him many times as to the secret of his power over Indumukhī, but to no avail; and he never ceased to marvel at the fact that all his wealth had been quite useless, and that only the word of his Brahmin cook had brought the woman to his bed. Upon their return from Benares to Tanjavur, Navakoti Nārāyaṇa Ceṭṭi kept his word and gave half his riches to the Brahmin; his great palace was also divided, so that the Subahdar of the Cot could now hold court, openly and lavishly, in the eastern half, where he had once kept his nocturnal councils. Thus a few months went by.

One day a letter arrived by messenger addressed to the Subahdar of the Cot. In it was a message from Nūrzāna, the Delhi Emperor's concubine, announcing that she would be arriving the day after tomorrow in Tanjavur and would come to pay her respects to the Subahdar in person. This news threw the Subahdar into consternation: he was now, it was true, a wealthy man in his own right, but surely not nearly as wealthy as Nūrzāna might imagine from his former gift. How could he receive her without disabusing her of her illusion? Unable to resolve this dilemma, he decided to kill himself and went back to his garden to hang himself on the tree. Once again, as he was arranging the rope, a voice from heaven spoke to him and asked him what he wanted. 'I wish to keep Nūrzāna away from Tanjavur,' said the Brahmin, 'and I cannot do so without help from the gods.' 'What is it you need?' asked the voice. Said the Brahmin: 'I must borrow the services of Rambhā, Urvaśī, Tilottamā, and the other *apsarases* for two hours in the morning,

the day after tomorrow. They are to collect cow-dung on Trichy Road, on the outskirts of Tanjavur; if questioned by Nūrzāna, they must state that they are the sweepers in the house of the Subahdar of the Cot. After two hours, they can return to heaven.' The god agreed to this request.

When the morning came, slightly before sunrise, a hundred divine women took up their posts on Trichy Road, at the entrance to Tanjavur, where they began collecting cow-dung in baskets made of gold. Soon the retinue of Nūrzāna appeared, with the courtesan herself in a fine palankeen carried behind. Seeing the amazing apparition on the road, the entire company came to a halt. Nūrzāna opened the curtain to see why they had stopped. Struck by the great beauty of the women before her, she asked them who they were. 'My lady, we are the sweepers of the Subahdar of the Cot', they replied. 'Each morning we collect cow-dung to smear upon the walls of our lord's house'. And they went on with their work without waiting for Nūrzāna to reply.

The courtesan from Delhi was overcome with fear and wonder. For some moments she gazed at the women as she thought to herself: if these women, who are as beautiful as the very apsarases of heaven, are merely the sweepers in the Subahdar's service, how great must be the beauty of the women in his palace! And, unwilling to put this observation to the test, she ordered her palankeen to be turned away from Tanjavur.¹⁶

Penetrating, cynical, and bold, this story offers a folk commentary on the realities of late-medieval kingship in Tanjavur. It is a story about power, about what constitutes and enhances and preserves power—namely money, honour, display, a certain brazen audacity and vision, a willingness to play at power games. Focusing on the central issue of the story from a different vantage-point, we might say that this is a story about the compelling and creative power of illusion in the service of politics and status. Like so many folktales, this one articulates a distinct vision of reality, a vision endowed with attributes of autonomy and highly specific cultural expressivity as well as pronounced systemic features. We have here the rudiments of a folk counter-system, with its own semantics and values, yet profoundly linked to what we may call, for the time being, the courtly system of Nāyaka literature. It

¹⁶ Natesa Sastri (1908), 506-521.

is also well to remember that one of the diagnostic features of that courtly system was the far-reaching assimilation to the courtly idiom, and to an elitist legitimacy, of genres and attitudes hitherto rooted entirely in the non-courtly, folk milieux. In this sense, the present story possesses certain conspicuous affinities with elements of the courtly dramas, *yakshagāna*, as we shall see.

The poor Brahmin, Keśava Bhaṭṭa, becomes, in effect, a king (note the symbolic interweaving of two normally separated roles).¹⁷ He does so with only very partial premeditation—his whole career actually begins with a private fantasy, which he insists on enacting even though he lacks the means to sustain it. At the end of the first month of his 'subahdari', which is almost his last, he reaches the point of suicide because of this very disability. And this same point is later reached again, when he is actually at the height of his success but again threatened with the ultimate disaster, a puncturing of the regal illusion from an outside source. Something here is, apparently, basic: 'kingship' begins, we might hypothesize, as a kind of uncertain gamble and can always revert to being little more than that. The king is a dice-player—not in the manner, perhaps, that the Epic heroes Yudhishtira and Nala are said to be, or after the model of the Brahminical *rājasūya* ritual, which incorporates royal dicing, but in a mode of gambling with the stuff of reality and illusion. It is just here, in the élan with which the poor Brahmin plays his game, that his power is forged. On the one hand, this power derives from the outrageous manipulation of illusion, a creative pretence lived out to the limit in circumstances that make its survival seem, at best, precarious. On the other hand, the very extremism in evidence here—playing the game, and investing in it, to an ultimate degree—seems to carry with it a certain coercive potential: this is what we see on the two occasions, at the beginning and end of the tale, when Keśava Bhaṭṭa reaches the point of attempting suicide to avoid abandoning the illusion. In both cases, this ultimate threat, an all-or-nothing cast of the dice, produces the necessary result.

But there are other, more tangible aspects to the logic of this game.

¹⁷ There is also a pun implicit in the subahdar's title: *kaṭṭil ēra*, 'to sit on the cot,' is a Tamil idiom meaning also 'to mount the throne' (Fabricius (1972), *s.v.*). The folktale literalizes the idiomatic metaphor, making the cot into a real throne.

If kingship is a brazen gamble, the nurturing (in others) of an illusion heightened, we might almost say existentially, to the point of absurdity, then the economic basis of this traffic in pretence seems to lie in forms of asymmetrical exchange. The aspiring ruler has to give—in fact, he must give all, or nearly all, he has—and the resulting imbalance is the medium of his self-assertion and the precipitating cause of others' recognition of this claim. Service and other obligations flow necessarily out of the initial gift.¹⁸ But the game is one of one-upmanship, and the counter-gift inevitably follows, and inevitably produces a counter-counter-gift, elevated to a wider or still higher sphere (thus the movement in our story is from Tanjavur to Vijayanagara to Delhi to, at the end, the heaven of the gods). Each new round in the cycle raises the ante, even as it expands the sphere of potential interaction. This is not a system of orderly, reciprocal mutuality, or of redistribution rooted in reciprocity—as the political economy of medieval south India is sometimes described, in ideal terms, with the king regulating exchanges through the medium of court and temple—but of symbolic interdependence in a competitive mode which constantly enlarges the circles of political activity and pushes the major actors into new, more elaborate, and more risky exchanges. These are carried out in two disparate coinages, so to speak—one wholly material, the other moral. Service can generate dependency, or the need to fulfil an obligation, no less than a gift of gold. It is this duality that the poor Brahmin subahdar/cook/servant uses to capture his Ceṭṭi patron's 'real' fortune.

Both coinages are, however, consistently inflated, as everyone knows—especially the storyteller, outside the story, and the Brahmin hero within it. In a way, the entire tale is predicated on this awareness. The question that the story proposes is not, essentially, how real the illusion is, or can be—that is more a question for the royal court and its poets—but how effectively illusion can be used. We see this most clearly at precisely the point where 'reality' has seemingly destroyed the illusion forever—when the 'subahdar' has had to confess his counterfeiting and has reverted to the status of servant, cook, and (Brahminical) *mantrin* to the Ceṭṭi lord. If it were only a question of

¹⁸ On giving all to have all, see the folktale on *annadāna*—another major Nāyaka motif—in Ramanujan (1992).

distinguishing true from false, the story should have ended here. Instead, 'illusion' penetrates it in the alluring form of the courtesan Indumukhī and, in the hands of the Brahmin purveyor of illusion, becomes externalized in a concrete, and highly lucrative, form. A similar magical manipulation will take place at the end of the story, with equally successful results (though not without another resort to the coercive suicide motif). In any case, the courtly investment in projected power displays is here turned on its head. The illusion of power, properly managed, turns out to be more real than any nakedly visible forms of control or of accumulated wealth. It is the impudent pseudo-subahdar who presents the love-lorn Ceṭṭi with the object of his desire, and it is this same trickster-like magician who reigns in state, his wealth and prestige intact, at the end. Note, too, that in our tale there is no question of a zero-sum game, with an inevitable loser. The mode is rather one of having one's cake and eating it—perhaps, indeed, a dominant attitude in the South Indian folktale.¹⁹

And the lessons of this tale, for our forays into the art of politics in Nāyaka Tanjavur? We observe the stable dramatis personae of the Nāyaka court: first, the self-made, individualized hero who wins himself a throne, in the complete absence of any proper royal pedigree; second, the merchant-lord who underwrites this assumption of power; third, the courtesans who confer—as only they are able to—symbolic recognition to the achieved status. This trio collapses within its range much of the dynamism of kingship in our period. On a more abstract level, we sense the existence of a counter-vision of power informed by a curious ambivalence. Power, it seems, is precariously balanced in falsehood—the tale consistently and deliberately punctures regal pretence as illusion. Note that major episodes of the story turn upon a kind of *a fortiori* argument: if the subahdar calls *this* a humble gift, what is the real measure of his wealth? Or, explicitly, at the conclusion: if these divine women are his sweepers, how beautiful must the ladies of his harem be! The hidden tenor of this logic might perhaps be formulated as follows: if such is the truth of kingship for Keśava Bhaṭṭa, how much more must this be the case for our local zamindar—or the Nāyaka king! But—this is the other side of the coin—the story also shows us how

¹⁹ Ibid. for several striking examples of this attitude.

regal counterfeit comes true. Exposing the hollowness of the display does not preclude our successfully imitating it. In fact, the mimetic aspect of the story is at least as salient as its satirical, debunking quality. And, indeed, this is what we might expect—because the counter-system presented to us by the South Indian folktale is, not only in this case, much more extensive and complex than the analogous Bakhtinian ideal of an earthy, corporeal ‘grounding’ in relation to the culture’s high-flown ideals (though these elements do also exist in seventeenth-century Tanjavur).²⁰ The folktale is, precisely, a parody of, not a foil to, high-caste, Sanskritic models, a parody which is in some sense mortgaged to its object, which it only partly assimilates to its own radical, folk perspective. Indeed, mimesis infuses parody with its most penetrating power.

To state this differently: parody, as the theorists of comedy have usually recognized, pivots on a hinge that swings in two directions—both toward, and away from, the parodied subject (which the parody partially constructs). By its very nature, it is simultaneously mimetic and subversive. Its mode is ambivalence, never simple, overt hostility. As Margaret Rose remarks in a recent study of literary parody: ‘Unlike satire . . . parody includes the ‘victim’ or object of its attack within its own structure’.²¹ Satire operates, in effect, with a single dominant code, and in the context of clearly articulated boundaries of identity, reality, and ethical judgement; parody deliberately mingles domains and superimposes or interweaves contrasting visions, including competing notions of the real, while always allowing for the presence of at least two operative codes.²² Thus, if Keśava Bhaṭṭa’s kingship is rooted in illusion, an illusion that is systematically exposed by the tale as part of its basic programme, the other essential thrust of his story is to establish this illusory kingship as entirely real. As with Quixote, the folk parody of elite ideals embodies a flexible ontology (again in contrast with satire, which normally depends strongly on the perceived reality of its object); the parodic universe, even as it undermines the taken-for-grantedness of reality, is perfectly capable of creatively investing in another,

²⁰ See Bakhtin (1968); Stallybrass and White (1986), pp. 4-23; and see below, V.3.

²¹ Rose 1979, p. 50.

²² Cf. Duisit (1978).

no less tenuous but possibly more compelling construction. For our purposes, as we embark on this exploration of the Nāyaka political order in relation to the society which generated and sustained it, it is important to keep this expansive ontology in mind: this is a kingship whose conceptual structure allows for an internalized parodic voice, issuing from its most prestigious poets, from folk narrators on the periphery, and from the royal poet-paragons themselves. Rhetorical hyperinflation in the court, reflecting a real shift in the symbolic organization of politics (and of resources), exists in intimate relation to an insistently sceptical, compensating, alternative code.

II

From Vijayanagara to the Nāyakas

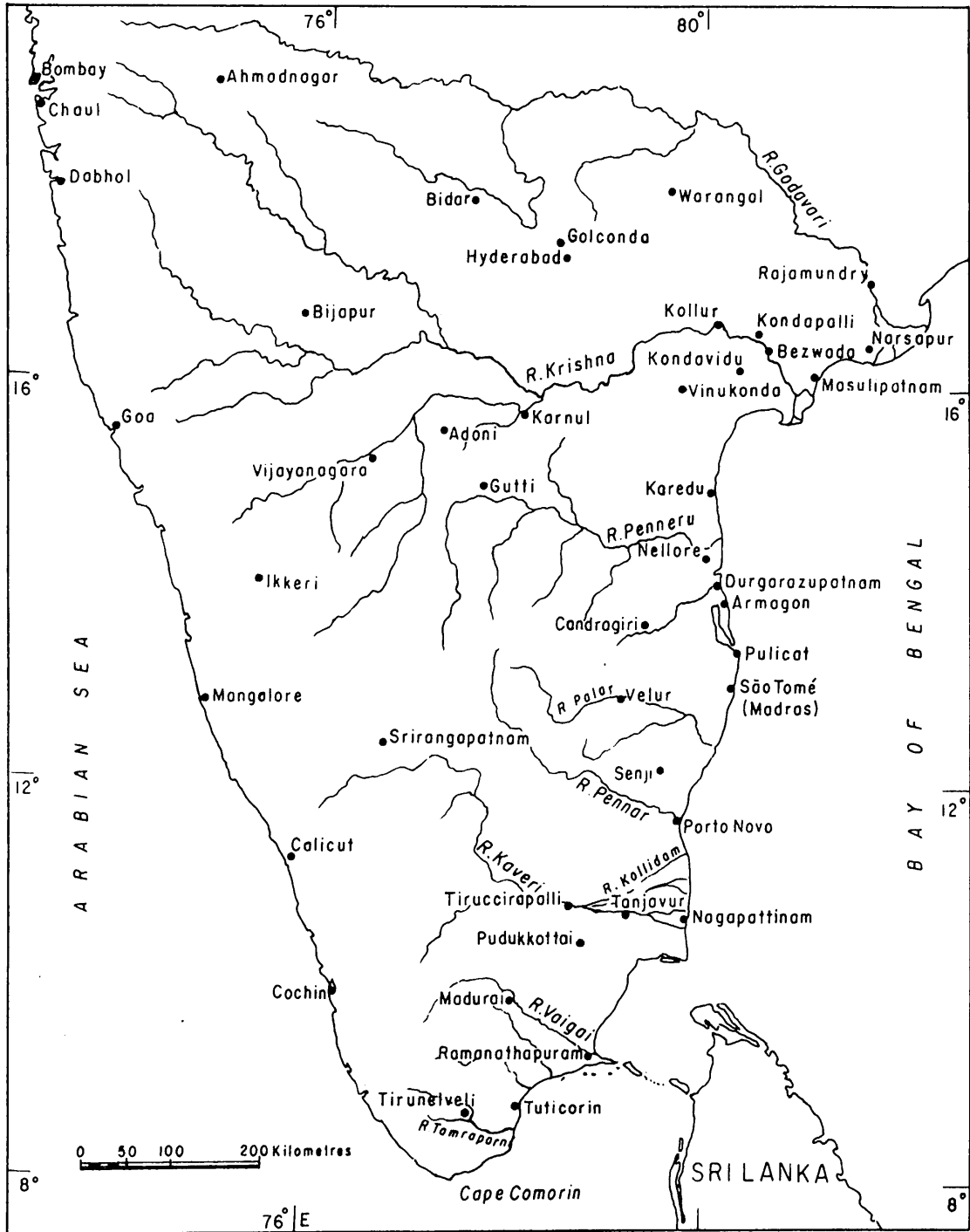
1. OUTLINES OF POLITICAL HISTORY

Writing in around 1745, an anonymous Portuguese Jesuit in Tamil Nadu noted:

The kingdoms of Madurey, Tiruxirapalli, and Tanjaor were dominated for many years by the Cartâccal, legitimate lords, gentiles of the Nayaquen or Varuguen caste. Only the kingdom of Tanjaor, which is to the east of Tirixirapalli, has for many years been under the rule of a Marata king. For, the Maratas arriving, perhaps sixty-five or seventy years ago, with a formidable army in Tanjaor, with the pretext of restituting to its throne one of the claimants, they expelled the king of the Nayaquen caste, and without handing the fortress over to the said pretender, there remained in it as ruler one of the principal lords from amongst those who had come in the army: And when this man was dead, his sons and grandsons continued to reign to the present, without the legitimate claimants and old lords being able to return to the throne until now.¹

Thus, nearly three-quarters of a century after the deposition of the Nāyaka rulers of Tanjavur, they continued to be remembered, in some quarters at least, as the 'legitimate rulers' of that area. Writings subsequent to those of our anonymous Jesuit have not been so kind to the

¹ BNL, Fundo Geral, Códice 4179, 'Relação das Guerras dos Turcos e Maratas nas terras de Madurey', fls. 73-79, especially fl. 73.



Map II: Major Political Centres of the Nāyaka Period

Nāyakas. The period of the Nāyaka states, be it in Tanjavur, Senji, or elsewhere in Tamil Nadu, is a neglected one, and finds little place in both popular post-colonial depictions and in the standard histories of the south. The decline of the state of Vijayanagara, after the 'grand climacteric' of 1565 (the all-too-celebrated battle in which Vijayanagara was defeated by the Deccan Sultanates), is seen in conventional views to signal two and a half centuries of political and general anarchy. Of post-1565 states in Tamil Nadu, even the Marāṭhā dynasty of Tanjavur (though looked at askance by our Jesuit) has sometimes been regarded more favourably than the Nāyakas. If nothing else, the Marāṭhās do occupy a place in the general histories as patrons of the arts, even if they are otherwise seen as dissolute and weak.²

But revisionist views have recently come to affect the historiography of the Tamil country in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Even little kingdoms of the period, such as Pudukkottai and Ramathapuram, earlier abandoned for the most part by historians to the mercies of gazetteer writers, are now the objects of substantial and serious analyses, which serve *inter alia* to question the notion that cycles of material and cultural efflorescence and decline coincide of necessity with the rise and decline of great 'imperial' formations.³ To an extent, what is being questioned is the very notion of a strong causal relationship (flowing in either direction) between material prosperity and cultural complexity and development.⁴ But what is also in the process of being reconsidered, due in large measure to the work of Burton Stein, is the very notion of an imperial structure wherein the balance of power between the central state and all other loci of power is tilted overwhelmingly in favour of the former.⁵

The twentieth-century historian's notion of a large structure to be termed the 'Vijayanagara empire' owes a great deal to Portuguese descriptions of this entity in the sixteenth century. To be sure, the

² See, for instance, Rajayyan (1966); Srinivasan (1945); also Subramanian (1928).

³ Cf. Dirks (1987); Kadhivel (1977); Ludden (1985).

⁴ For a suggestive, though not wholly convincing, formulation in this regard, see Martines (1979).

⁵ We refer here to Stein's much-discussed 'segmentary state' formulation, developed in Stein (1980); but see also Stein (1991).

Portuguese sources are only one set among several now available to historians engaged in research on the theme: the plethora of inscriptions in Telugu, Kannada and Tamil, the narrative sources—both those internal to Vijayanagara and those originating in the Deccan Sultanates—the local *kaifiyats*, including several collected in the early nineteenth century by Colin Mackenzie and his collaborators, as well as other travel accounts (like those of ‘Abd al-Razzāq and Niccolo de’ Conti) must equally be reckoned with.⁶ Nevertheless, it must be said that the source which more than any other defined the ‘Vijayanagara empire’ as an entity for future historians was the so-called *Crónica dos Reis de Bisnaga*, published in the closing years of the last century by the Portuguese Orientalist David Lopes.⁷ The *Crónica* comprised two accounts from the period 1515 to 1540, and should be read together with a third, slightly earlier, account, that of Duarte Barbosa; the three taken together have in the past defined the overarching structure within which historians have ‘fitted in’ the other evidence.

What did Barbosa (c. 1515), Domingos Paes (c. 1518) and Fernão Nunes (c. 1535) (the last two being the authors of the accounts in the *Crónica*) believe the object of their descriptions to be? Certainly, to them it was no ‘empire’ (*império*), a term which for them would have carried very specific connotations; rather it was simply a *reino* (kingdom)—the kingdom of Bisnagua or Narsingua. Besides, Vijayanagara was a kingdom to be placed in its context, which is to say alongside the kingdoms of Orissa and Bengal, which were to these Portuguese as powerful (if not more so) than Vijayanagara itself. The comparison between Vijayanagara and the Deccan Sultanates—Bijapur, Golconda, Ahmadnagar, Berar and Bidar—does not come quite so naturally to these observers. To be sure, they perceive these *senhores do daqué*m (lords of the Deccan) as locked in conflict with Vijayanagara, but they

⁶ For two broad samplings from Indian sources, see Krishnaswami Ayyangar (1919), and Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya (1946). But also see Major (1857), for the account of Conti, and Elliot and Dowson (1867-77), Vol. IV, pp. 89-126, for the travels of Razzāq.

⁷ Cf. Lopes (1897), from a manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, Fonds Portugais, no. 65, fls. 1 to 101. A by-and-large serviceable, but at times misleading, translation appears in Sewell (1900), pp. 236-395. We have therefore preferred to use the Portuguese edition.

are seen as scarcely comparable in strength, and indeed at times portrayed as little more than rebellious subordinate chieftains.⁸

If Vijayanagara's northern limits were relatively easy to define, the rest of its extent proved harder to grasp. To Duarte Barbosa, 'the kingdom of Narsyngua' certainly included the area he termed 'Charamandel', although this did not include the far south-east of the peninsula, whose ruler was 'often at war with the King of Narsyngua . . . and defends himself well from him'.⁹ So too, Barbosa makes it clear that the rulers of Malabar were independent of Vijayanagara, a fact that he attributes to the protection afforded them by the western Ghats.

For Paes, on the other hand, the kingdom of Narsyngua had three hundred *graos* of coast, each *grao* being a league, along the mountain of which I have spoken, until you arrive at Ballagate and Charamãodel, which belong to this kingdom; and in breadth it is one hundred and sixty-four *graos*; each large *grao* measures two of our leagues, so that it has six hundred leagues of coast and across it three hundred and forty-eight (*sic*) leagues, across from Batecalla to the kingdom of Orya'.¹⁰

Once more, the west coast of the kingdom is defined, as is its transpeninsular character, but the extension of Vijayanagara power to the south-east is still unclear.

In fact, to these Portuguese writers, Vijayanagara was fundamentally a kingdom of the Kannada and Telugu areas, and on a little reflection this is not surprising, for their *own* knowledge of the Tamil country was poor in the period. However, with Nunes, the Tamil country enters into a discussion of Vijayanagara power in a far more definite way; this is in particular in the context of a description of 'the manner in which *sallema* (salutation) is made to the King' by the 'captains of his kingdom' (*capitaeēs de seu reyno*). Of the eleven major captains, the one who heads the list is Salvanayque (Sellappa Sāluva Nāyaka), described as the regent (*regedor*) of Acyutadevarāya of Vijayanagara (r. 1530-42).¹¹ Thus :

⁸ Lopes (1897), pp. 24, 26-7.

⁹ Dames (1918/1921), 1:199-200; 2:124.

¹⁰ Lopes (1897), pp. 82-3.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 72.

Firstly, Salvanayque, who is now regent, has as incomes (*remdas*) 1,100,000 gold pardaos, this man is lord of Charamãodel, and of Nagapatão, and Tamgor, and Bomgarim, and Dapatão, and of Truguel, and of Caullim, and all these are cities, and their lands are all very great, and they border Ceilão'.¹²

In contrast, most of the other captains (of whom eight are also denoted by the suffix *nayque*) are associated with areas that would today be in Karnataka or southern Maharashtra, save one Adapanayque (the name is perhaps derived from the office of *aṭaiippakkāraṇ* or betel-carrier for the king) whose case is ambiguous, and another—Ajaparcetimapa—'lord of Hudogary (Udayagiri), and of the city of Comdovim (Kondavidu), and of the city of Penagundim (Penugonda), and of Codegaral; of Cidaota (Siddhavatam)'—in sum, associated with the Telugu areas.

The early Portuguese sources, therefore, originating from the first half of the sixteenth century, do not take us very far in understanding the relationship between Vijayanagara and the Tamil country, beyond positing a tributary flow from the latter to the former, mediated by a powerful military leader, Salvanayque, or Sāluva Nāyaka. Hence, historians of Vijayanagara have taken recourse to the inscriptional record in order, first, to date the origins of such a tributary relationship (on the assumption that it did exist), and second, to trace its evolution over time. The picture that emerges from these writings (amongst which we may take particular note of the contributions of N. Venkataramanayya, A. Krishnaswami, and most recently N. Karashima) is as follows: in the mid fourteenth century, the two most substantial political structures in the Tamil country were, to the north, the Padaividu-based Śāmbuvarāyas, and to the far south, the Sultanate of Madurai (an offshoot of Khalji expeditions in the peninsula). In the 1350s there appear the earliest evidences in inscriptions of a Vijayanagara intrusion into the northern Tamil country, and these are associated with the campaigns in the area of the prince Kumāra Kampana. Kampana's activities are testified to by over a hundred and thirty inscriptions that

¹² Ibid, 'Charamãodel' is of course Coromandel, 'Nagapatão' is Nagapattinam, 'Tamgor' is Tanjavur, and 'Bomgarim' very probably Bhuvanagiri. The other places are not susceptible to easy identification.

bear his name, and which stretch from Cengalpet in the north to Ramanathapuram in the south; claims concerning his conquests are also detailed in such literary works as Gaṅgādevi's *Madhurāvijayam*.¹³

What is one to make of the extravagant claims put forward on behalf of Kampana, including the remark by one relatively recent historian that his 'vicerealty may be regarded as the brightest chapter in the history of Vijayanagar rule in the Tamil country'?¹⁴ While both the inscriptional record and the literary celebration of Kampana's conquests are undoubtedly impressive, they can still be interpreted to suggest that his campaigns (the precise dates of which remain the object of some controversy) represented a first, but far from decisive, blow to pre-existent political structures in the Tamil country. The transformation wrought by Vijayanagara was one that proceeded in fits and starts, and was to endure to the middle of the sixteenth century, reaching a sort of culmination only when the campaigns of Madurai-based Telugu warrior chieftains penetrated as far as Kanyakumari. But with Kampana's campaign there begins a crucial process, that of the settlement of Telugu and Kannadiga warrior lineages in the Tamil country to a far greater extent than had ever been experienced before. Conspicuous figures such as Gaṇḍāraguḷi Mārāyya Nāyaka (a warrior-leader of major significance in the south Arcot region in the third quarter of the fourteenth century), should be seen not merely as the 'agents' of Kampana's will, but as semi-autonomous actors, whose significance for rural political economy was far longer-lasting than the Vijayanagara campaigns orchestrated by Kampana.¹⁵

One feature of the early Vijayanagara inscriptions in Tamil Nadu which has been singled out for attention by some historians is the repeated use of formal titles such as *mahāmaṇḍaleśvara* and *mahāpradhāni*, in association with the personal names of figures associated with the Vijayanagara presence. According to Noboru Karashima, persons who bear such titles must be seen as 'administrators more than anything else', indeed as provincial governors overseeing an elaborate

¹³ Cf. Krishnaswami (1964), pp. 41-70.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 41.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 51-3 ; see in particular the Madambakkam inscription, in *Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy*, 1919, Inscription no. 268.

machinery in which their underlings are designated *adhikāris*.¹⁶ Moreover, he argues, one can infer from the presence of such 'bureaucrats' a distinction between the Vijayanagara presence of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries and that of later periods, when power becomes more diffuse in the countryside. Thus, while 'abundant evidence shows a picture of the direct administration which the Vijayanagar rulers carried on through the employment of *mahāmaṇḍaleśvaras* and *adhikāris* during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries', it is argued that the late fifteenth century saw 'some structural change from the direct administration carried out by the king's officers to the indirect administration through the *nāyakas* who were assigned certain territory for their own control'.¹⁷ This assigned territory, the so-called *nāyak-kattanam* (Telugu *nāyamkāra*), thus enabled Telugu lineages to maintain a presence over several generations in an area, whereas earlier—so Karashima argues—mediation between imperial authority and rural economy had been the business of 'high ranking officers' who 'were transferred rather frequently to some other post or area'.¹⁸ An initial structure of bureaucratic administration thus gives way to a 'feudal' society, wherein the *nāyakas* are of course the feudatories of the Vijayanagara ruler.

Two aspects of this portrayal require highlighting. First, it should be noted that this view depends on the importance given to certain specific pieces of inscriptional evidence; thus, the decline in the number of inscriptions referring to the *nāṭṭār* (or *nāṭṭavar*) and their activities is seen as symptomatic of how the *nāyakas* and their agents displaced this older elite.¹⁹ The successive waves of Vijayanagara-inspired transformation renders both village- and *nāḍu*-level bodies toothless, transferring power first to a bureaucracy and later to the *nāyakas* and village servants (*āyagars*).²⁰ A second aspect to be stressed in Karashima's

¹⁶ Karashima (1985), p. 24. For a persuasive argument against such an interpretation, see Granda (1984), pp. 55-78.

¹⁷ Karashima, Subbarayulu, and Shanmugam (1988), pp. 21-2.

¹⁸ Karashima (1986); for the inscriptional corpus on which the study is based, see *South Indian Inscriptions*, vol. XXIV, (Inscriptions of the Ranganathasvami Temple, Srirangam), Madras, 1982.

¹⁹ Krishnaswami (1964), pp. 93-8; Karashima (1986a), pp. 139-68.

²⁰ On the *āyagars*, see Krishnaswami (1964), pp. 104-105.

formulation is his reference to 'resistance' by the Tamil peasantry to the demands of the *adhikāris* in the first, relatively bureaucratic, phase of Vijayanagara rule ; a handful of inscriptions from the 1420s testify to how peasant bodies appealed over the heads of the *adhikāris* to the Vijayanagara *Rāyas* themselves, and received assurances (as recorded in the inscriptions) that fiscal exactions would be moderated.²¹ Curiously enough, then, some ambiguity exists in this formulation on whether the 'bureaucratic' phase was a harsher one than the 'feudal' phase from the viewpoint of the Tamil peasantry; if at times this is suggested, at others, the extractive character of the *nāyaka* regimes is equally highlighted.

Attractive though these formulations have been to many historians, they rest in fact on the slenderest threads of evidence. Indeed, for the most part, a disjunction exists between the actual process of examination of inscriptions by Karashima and his collaborators, and the positing of general formulations (which seem to be neither validated nor contradicted by the inscriptions). A central issue is clearly the treatment of the inscriptional record, concerning which no real consensus exists among historians. We are aware that the use of inscriptions as a source is rendered difficult by their inherently fragmented nature (particularly when compared to narrative sources); there is also, clearly, the important question of why certain events as opposed to others are chosen for the far from costless process of recording on stone. Moreover, the inscriptions by their very nature tend to cause the historian to lay disproportionate stress on the institutions which house them—namely the temples. It is thus no coincidence that the temple looms so large in so many of the existing formulations on pre-colonial south Indian history, as if all other political, social and economic institutions and processes can be defined only in relation to it. It should be noted that the inscriptional corpus from Tamil Nadu in the period from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries has proved capable of accommodating conflicting (and even polar) interpretations of the political processes of the region, depending on the preconceptions with which historians have approached the inscriptions. The dominant trend, represented in recent times by Karashima, Subba-

²¹ Karashima (1984), p. xxxii ; also see Palat (1985), pp. 534-56.

rayalu and others, is a terminological approach: from the pristine body of the inscription are abstracted the substantives, relating to 'titles', 'revenue-terms', 'crops' and the like; these are then subjected to statistical frequency analysis on the assumption that the rise and decline in the occurrence of these terms would closely mirror the social and political context within which the inscriptions are generated. But in order to further the analysis, it is necessary to classify the substantives themselves in terms of an ordering (usually binary, such as bureaucratic vs. feudal). The increase in the relative incidence of terms deemed 'bureaucratic' is hence taken to be bureaucratisation, and the same applies in turn to the 'feudal' terms. Thus, Karashima's two historical phases in fact represent two terminological phases : in the first, inscriptions frequently contain terms such as mahāmaṇḍaleśvara and adhikāri, and in the second such terms as nāyakkattaṇam are on the increase. We may briefly note that the procedure in fact telescopes two processes, both of which appear somewhat arbitrary. The first lies in the choice of the binary classification scheme, the second in the decision to slot a given term into the one or the other heading. In sum therefore, the edifice stands on theoretical quicksand. In the absence of evidence of a substantial bureaucratic tradition on which the Vijayanagara rulers could draw (and which could be transplanted with relative ease onto the somewhat recalcitrant soil of the Tamil peasantry), it would appear more reasonable to treat Vijayanagara penetration of Tamil country as essentially militaristic in character. This does not necessarily imply that all that was achieved was the result of main force, as it is evident that the Telugu Brahmins, Velamas and Reḍḍis associated with Vijayanagara expansion anxiously sought (even if without consistent success) to portray themselves as restorers of tradition rather than as innovators. Thus, on the one hand, expansion meant the recourse to temple grants and donations (with which the greater part of the inscriptions are concerned); but, equally, the migrants had to declare themselves servants of the Vijayanagara emperor and to articulate this even in their donative inscriptions.²² It was only much later that they gained the self-confidence to assert, rhetorically, a higher

²² This is signified by a number of characteristic phrases, e.g. *kāriyattukkuk kadava*, but is not in itself a peculiar trait of Vijayanagara inscriptions.

degree of independence, although even the very powerful nāyakas of the sixteenth and seventeenth century never wholly freed themselves from the image of being no more than *karttākkal*, 'executors' of the Vijayanagara rule.

The expansion of the *vaḍugas* (generically 'northerners', but especially used for the Telugu migrants into the Tamil country in this period) appears in retrospect to have followed certain clear patterns. From late nineteenth-century district census evidence for Madras Presidency, we note that they were settled in the highest proportions in Coimbatore, followed by Madurai, Salem, Tirunelveli, Cengalpet and Tiruccirappalli, in that order (and all of these districts had over 12 per cent Telugu speakers at the time of the census). In contrast, the district with the lowest proportion of Telugus, was, ironically enough, the seat of one of the major Nāyaka polities, namely Tanjavur. It is possible to explain this distribution by district in a way very similar to the logic of distribution of Telugu speakers *within* each district. As David Ludden notes in his study of Tirunelveli district, 'the Telugu settlers concentrated in the black soil tract . . . (and) in their preference for black soils the Tinnevely Telugus were like other Telugus in Tamil country, who sought black land perhaps because of their received skills in cultivating it productively'.²³ But there was also another reason for the manner in which settlement took place: the Telugu migrants almost invariably chose the areas that were most thinly settled. This led them therefore to concentrate away from Tanjavur—in Madurai and Tirunelveli, to the south of the Kaveri delta, and in Coimbatore, Salem, Arcot and Cengalpet to its west and north. Equally, even within these latter areas, they avoided the major river valley nodes (save when the Telugu migrants were themselves not cultivators but merchants).

A major consequence of this pattern of settlement was that it affected the distribution in the Tamil country of the *pālaiyams* (Telugu *pāleyam*)—or small fortified centres—which are so much a feature of Nāyaka rule. While *pālaiyams* may be found both in the northern and western fringes of the Tamil country, and in the far south, they are conspicuous by their absence in Tanjavur. This lent to the Tanjavur Nāyaka state a character that was rather different from its counterparts

²³ Ludden (1978), p. 66.

in Madurai and Senji. But one should equally note that the pālaiyams that dotted the drier sections of the Tamil country from the fifteenth century on were not always the places of residence of Telugu *pālaiyakkārars*. In the far south, many non-nāyaka pālaiyakkārars existed, frequently drawn from Maṛava and Kaḷḷar stock. Eventually, in the eighteenth century, as the Nāyaka regimes waned in power, the Kaḷḷar and Maṛava rajas (who had earlier been dependent on, and subordinate to them) managed to survive in the forms of the states of Pudukkottai, Ramanathapuram and Sivaganga, among others. Thus, if at times they appear to parallel their vaḍuga counterparts, at other moments their destinies also diverged significantly.

Chronologically, the first conspicuous area of Telugu Nāyaka activity in Tamil Nadu is, not surprisingly, Cengalpet and Arcot, in the area around Padaividu. Here one finds, besides the celebrated figure of Mārayya Nāyaka, other personages such as Maṅgappa Nāyaka, Tiruveṅgaḷanātha Nāyaka, and Sāḷuva Maṅgu; however, there is no evidence that any of these warriors was able to create a lineage-based political structure in the area. Later, towards the close of the fifteenth century, Padaividu emerges as the centre of activity of a Kannadiga Nāyaka lineage (possibly derivative from a certain Marudarasar), of which identifiable figures include Tirumalai Nāyaka (c. 1490-1530) and his son Kāḷattīśura Nāyaka.²⁴ As the sixteenth century runs its course, however, the power of this lineage wanes, and it comes to be overshadowed by the Nāyaka lineage based at Senji further south, of which early representatives are Vaiyappa and Sūrappa Nāyaka. If Padaividu is an early hotbed of Vijayanagara activity, even as far back as Kumāra Kampana's times, the more southerly regions (such as Tanjavur and Madurai) seem to have been relatively slow to feel the influence of Telugu migrants. While it is true that a tenuous relationship between such persons as Gopanārya Gopanāṅga and the Śrīraṅgam temple can be established even in the 1370s, and while, equally, inscriptions mentioning Kampana extend far to the south of the Kaveri, it is only in the first quarter of the fifteenth century that the weight of inscriptional evidence suggests a sustained process of penetration by Vijayanagara-

²⁴ Karashima (1985), pp. 5-6.

associated militia into the area south of Arcot.²⁵ Indeed, many of the Nāyaka migrants into Tamil country in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries followed a peripatetic existence, allying and even subordinating themselves to local powers, before eventually finding a niche. David Ludden cites the case of Eṭṭappa Nāyaka, a migrant from the Candragiri region in the 1420s, who led a considerable and diverse group southward, comprising two other nāyakas as well as a host of other military clients, in all nearly one and a half thousand men. Interestingly, Eṭṭappa's own family history, while insisting that his movements had received the prior sanction of Vijayanagara, nevertheless makes no secret of the fact that Eṭṭappa attached himself to a Pāṇḍya ruler in the Madurai region, aiding him against 'refractory Kallars'.²⁶ It is only in the 1560s that his descendants came to settle in their own pālaiyam centre, namely the eponymous Eṭṭayapuram in Tirunelveli's black-soil area. The relatively unsettled character of these early migrant Nāyakas as well as the competition for resources both amongst them, and between them and other militarized groups (we note here the significance of Eṭṭappa's rivalry with the Kallars), can help explain why in the early phase, few Nāyaka lineages appear associated with a specific place over an extended period of time. It is only from the early sixteenth century that this process—of defining niches for each lineage—can truly be said to achieve fruition.

It may be appropriate at this point to halt briefly in our description of the creeping Nāyaka penetration of the Tamil country, and instead turn our glance backwards—at the origin of the notion of the nāyaka itself. Although nāyakas appear most conspicuously in the south Indian historiography dealing with the period from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries (both in the context of Tamilnadu, and that of Andhra—where the more important of them are even incorporated into the Golconda Sultanate under the Persianised form of *nāyak-wāriān-i 'azam*),²⁷ they had clearly existed before the rise from obscurity of the Saṅgama dynasty of Vijayanagara in the fourteenth century. Now, it is often remarked that, to the extent that the traditions of

²⁵ Karashima (1986), p. 2; also see Venkata Raghottam (1987).

²⁶ Ludden (1985), p. 51.

²⁷ Richards (1975), pp. 18-19.

Vijayanagara kingship are not assumed to have arisen *sui generis*, they may perhaps be traced back to Hoysala roots.²⁸ While this interpretation of the first phase of Vijayanagara kingship is not devoid of utility, it must be stressed that even in the late fourteenth century (and most certainly in later times) the Vijayanagara rulers also drew upon a quite different kingship tradition—that of the Kākatīya state of the period from the twelfth to the fourteenth century. Based at the fortified centre of Warangal in Telengana, the Kākatīya state has been characterized by J.F. Richards as 'a political expression of the settlement of the interior (Andhra) by Telugu warriors'.²⁹ In a process that predates by several centuries, and also parallels in interesting ways, the vaḍuga expansion into the Tamil country, Telugu settlers from the eastern Deccan had expanded into Telengana over the tenth and eleventh centuries, extending the cultivation of paddy on the basis of elaborate rain-fed tank irrigation.³⁰ The villages of the interior Deccan were nucleated and often fortified, and can be seen as a prototype for the pālaiyams that come to characterize Tamil political geography in a later era.

The Kākatīya state of Warangal was built on an agrarian economy which was dominated by the Redḍi and Velama warrior-cultivator, and a part of its resources was recycled into the construction of numerous tanks, irrigation canals and artificial lakes. As described by Somasekhara Sarma and N. Venkataramanayya, the Kākatīya state was relatively compact and militarized, basing itself in part on *leṅkas*—'slaves who had entered into a covenant with their lord to devote themselves exclusively to his service'.³¹ But more significantly from our point of view, it is noted that the kingdom was administered 'on a military basis' by a number of military chiefs termed *nāyakas*. And so, they conclude, 'obviously the *nāyaṅkāra* system which became a prominent feature of the administration under the Vijayanagara em-

²⁸ For the classic expositions of the origins of Vijayanagara, see Venkataramanayya (1933) ; also Derrett (1957), pp. 167-71, *passim*; and for an important reconsideration, Kulke (1985).

²⁹ Richards (1975), p. 4.

³⁰ Cf. the important statement by Mukerji (1964), pp. 42-58. For a description of this economy from an early nineteenth-century perspective, see Roy (forthcoming).

³¹ Venkataramanayya and Somasekhara Sarma (1960), p. 670.

perors was already in existence at this time, although its character and its political and military obligations are nowhere precisely defined'.³² The nāyakas are said to have been some seventy-five (or at times seventy-seven) in number, largely (though not exclusively) Velamas, and to have paid a tribute in cash to the Kākatīyas, as well as to have maintained a force of cavalry, infantry and elephants. A more recent examination of Kākatīya kingship elaborates, as well as modifies, the analysis summarized above. Its author, Cynthia Talbot, notes the reference in Kākatīya inscriptions to nāyaṃkāra (the Telugu equivalent of the Tamil nāyakkattanam), as well as of the title *nāyakāpuvāru*. The earliest of these inscriptions dates to the reign of the Kākatīya Queen Rudramā-devi (r.1259-95), and the greater part derive from the period of Pratāparudra-deva (r.1295-1323), who was eventually defeated by the forces of the Delhi Sultanate.³³ In the Kākatīya case, the relationship between nāyaka and sovereign ruler is characterized by strong expressions of personal loyalty, and we shall see that this is a feature that continues (albeit with certain changes in form and content) in the case of Vijayanagara dealings with nāyakas. In a crucial way therefore, the paradigm within which the Vijayanagara rulers sought to define their relationship with the militarized bands of vaḍugas who penetrated the Tamil country from the late fourteenth century had already been defined for them by such texts as the *Pratāparudradēva-caritramu*, wherein the Kākatīya ruler is shown to have 'summoned the *padmanāyakas*, greeted them, declared their worthiness for leadership and assigned one man to each stronghold and gave them wealth, gold, vehicles, palanquins and silk cloth. In addition, he gave them umbrellas, fly whisks, processional banners and *birudas* for their heroic deeds'.³⁴

In the light of this description, we can approach afresh Nunes's portrayal of the relationship between the Vijayanagara Rayas and their nāyakas, as well as the foundation-myth (to which we allude below) concerning the relationship between the Madurai Nāyakas and the *pālaiyakkārars* of the far south. Equally, the formulaic phrases with

³² Ibid., pp. 668-9.

³³ Talbot (1986).

³⁴ Ibid., citing the *Pratāparudradēvacaritramu*, pp. 38-9.

which Nāyaka inscriptions in Tamil Nadu commence, and which express what has been termed the Nāyakas' 'worshipful submission' in the face of the Vijayanagara rulers, should be seen as at least in part derived from Kākatīya political vocabulary (where too the merit, *punya*m, stemming from an endowment was dedicated, as is often the case with Vijayanagara Nāyaka inscriptions, to the overlord).³⁵

To return now to our chronological account, after this brief excursus into the Kākatīya origins of the nāyaṃkāra, the transition from the fifteenth to the early sixteenth century, and the reign of Krishṇadevarāya at Vijayanagara (1509-29), mark a further period of development for the nāyaka 'system' (if indeed a system it was) in Tamilnadu. It would appear to be in the 1520s (or perhaps in the early 1530s) that two new, and highly significant, Nāyaka lineages establish themselves in the Tamil country, eventually dominating the old heartlands associated with the Pāṇḍyas and Cōlas—which is to say Madurai and Tanjavur. It is with these two lineages, and to a lesser extent a third—based at the hilltop fortress of Senji in the northern Tamil region—that the greater part of our later discussion will concern itself: the Madurai Nāyakas survive from roughly 1530 to the 1730s, while their counterparts at Tanjavur are extinguished by a combination of Madurai, Marava and Marāṭhā incursions in the 1670s. As for the Senji Nāyakas, their careers come to an unceremonious end in the late 1640s, when their fortress-centre is captured from them, eventually passing from Bijapur to a succession of Mughal and Maratha-derivate potentates (including the celebrated Rajput Tej Singh, protagonist of the folk-ballads of Dēsiṅgurāja).

The origins of all of these three Nāyaka lineages—known on account of references in Jesuit, other Portuguese and Dutch materials as the three 'Great Southern Nāyakas', as distinct from their less successful pāḷaiyakkārar brethren—are to an extent obscure. To be sure, origin myths of greater or lesser scale do exist in each of the three cases; the most celebrated of these, on Nāgama Nāyaka at Madurai, is discussed at length in the following section of this chapter. The picture that emerges is of a Nāyaka adventurer who succeeds, through the political shrewdness of his son Viśvanātha, in setting up a state at once

³⁵ Dirks (1982), especially p. 678.

linked to, and relatively autonomous in action from, the 'imperial' centre in the north. Military incursion provides the initial thrust and basis for this kingship, which then institutionalizes itself in ways detailed by the chronicles. One of the patterns stressed by the foundation-myth, in the Madurai Nāyakas' own chronicle, has to do with relations between the new Nāyaka centre and its scattered subordinates. In the context of a series of political and military acts attributed to the first ruler, Viśvanātha—the building of a large new fort at Madurai, the construction and endowment of temples, the extension of irrigation canals, and the creation of Brahmin settlements—we read the following:

As many of the chiefs of the Tottiyar caste who had earlier served in battle under Nagama Nayakkar had done the same under Visvanatha, the latter divided his country into seventy-two palaiyams and then allocated one each to the chiefs, and then the king built seventy-two bastions on his fort in Madurai and allocated one each as well to the chieftains with the charge that they should defend the same with their soldiers against all attack'.³⁶

In thus describing the relationship between the Nāyaka and his pālaiyakkārars, the Madurai chronicle follows very closely the Kākatīya model of Pratāparudra, who is similarly said to have divided his kingdom among seventy-seven *padmanāyakas*, and to have created a bastion at Warangal for each one to defend. Eventually, from amongst the seventy-two pālaiyakkārars at Madurai some are further elevated and even given symbolic filial status (*kumāravarakkam*), just as Viśvanātha himself had been recognized as a son by the (unnamed) Vijayanagara Rāya. We may note that inscriptions do testify to the presence of Viśvanātha in the Madurai region in the 1530s and, with greater frequency, in the 1540s.³⁷ The coalescence of military power around the Madurai Nāyakas is also testified to by the growing vaḍuga incursions into the Tirunelveli region, where the Madurai Nāyakas succeeded in creating a secondary node, dominated by the Meḍai Daḷavāy

³⁶ Dirks (1987), p. 104, citing 'History of the Carnataca Governors who Ruled Over the Pandiya Mandalam' in Taylor (1835), 2:3-49.

³⁷ Satyanatha Aiyar (1924), pp. 39-47; the earliest inscription of Viśvanātha in the region dates, in fact, to 1533.

Mudaliyār family.³⁸ The Jesuits, resident from the 1540s onwards in the ports and villages of the so-called Fishery Coast, are quite categorical in describing the political flux of the middle decades of the sixteenth century in the region, though posing it in terms of a religious conflict between the northerners and their own client-group, the Paravas.³⁹ Thus, the Madurai Nāyakas quite rapidly managed to extend the network of relations of overlordship and subservience until they reached to the very tip of the peninsula.

The Tanjavur Nāyakas choose a somewhat different route from their Madurai counterparts to explain their rise to prominence. The origin claims begin with the figure of Cevvappa, whose wife, Mūrtimāmba, was the sister-in-law of the Vijayanagara ruler Acyutadeva (the brother and successor of Krishṇadevarāya, in whose reign the Madurai Nāyakas seem to place their origins). Instead of the complex tale of prowess and loyalty which surrounds the Madurai origin-myth, the early eighteenth-century Telugu text *Taṅjāvūri āndhra rājula caritra* suggests that Cevvappa simply received Tanjavur through his marriage-alliance; and other sources do no more than point to his personal service to Acyutarāya as his betel-bearer (*aṭaippakkāraṅ*).⁴⁰ However, since inscriptional evidence mentions Cevvappa's father Timmappa Nāyaka as the holder of a nāyakkattanam in the Arcot region, we may imagine that this family too—like that of Eṭṭappa mentioned earlier—had had to lead something of a peripatetic existence before eventually finding a niche.⁴¹ A figure of some importance in the early history of these Nāyakas is their Brahmin *guru*, the celebrated Govinda Dīkshita, who appears associated with Cevvappa, with his son and successor Acyutappa, and finally with the great Raghunātha. Govinda Dīkshita nicely fits the slot of properly Brahminical mantrin, like Timmarasu in the Krishṇadevarāya legends or Yaugandhara for the Kākatīya Prātāparudra—always a paragon of wisdom, Sanskrit learning, and political cunning paired with a heroic king. In this, as in other respects, the Tanjavur Nāyakas appear to have modelled themselves on rather

³⁸ On this family, see Ludden (1985), pp. 69-70.

³⁹ Cf. Heras (1927), pp. 153-9; numerous references in Wicki and Gomes (1948-84); also the section below, VII.2.

⁴⁰ Krishnaswami (1964), pp. 256-7; see also Vriddhagirisan (1942).

⁴¹ *Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy*, 1906, Inscription no. 455.

different lines than their counterparts at Madurai, and were quite possibly seeking actively to create a polity that was based less on the warrior-oriented, pragmatic Kākatīya model than on the *brāhmaṇa*-dominated structure often attributed, by both court-poets and historians, to Krishṇadevarāya.

The third of the 'Great Nāyaka' lineages proves in many ways the most obscure. Such texts as the *Karnāṭaka rājākaḷ cavistāra caritram* provide a comprehensive explanation for the origins of the three Nāyakas, by portraying them as three generals of an army sent into the Tamil country by Krishṇadevarāya. In this version, the founder of the Senji lineage may be seen as Tubāki Krishṇappa Nāyaka (although his unusual sobriquet, meaning 'gun', does suggest that Seṅji Nārāyaṇa, who was employed in the early nineteenth century to compose this text, confused him with a later seventeenth-century figure, whose activities are detailed in Dutch and English records).⁴² One myth of origins, still current in various forms, connects this Krishṇappa Nāyaka with the magical construction of the great Senji fort: having followed a wild boar, an incarnation of Viṣṇu, from Kancipuram to the Senji area, the king was ordered by the god to serve an ascetic on the mountain.

The ascetic had a magic plant: one needed only to boil its leaves in a large cauldron, throw in a holy man, and the latter's body would turn to gold. When the Nāyak appeared before the ascetic, the ascetic determined to sacrifice him and made preparations accordingly. But the Nāyak suspected his intentions and threw him into the pot instead. The king discovered that when he cut off one of the ascetic's golden limbs, it would grow back the next day. With this inexhaustible treasure, he then built the Singavaram temple and the Gingee fort.⁴³

Sometimes the king is identified as a shepherd, so the origin of Senji is put back before Nāyaka times and linked to the Kōṇārs. In any case, this story embodies what we will come to recognize as characteristic Nāyaka-period themes—especially the image of bodily mutilation and regeneration, and the notion of magical, alchemical transmutation of the physical body. As so often in texts from this period—the Velugōṭi

⁴² See *Karnāṭaka rājākaḷ cavistāra carittiram*; also Stein (1989a).

⁴³ Hildebeitel (1988), pp. 56-7, citing Jagadisa Ayyar and C. S. Srinivasachari.

foundation-myth is another example discussed below⁴⁴—kingship begins with an act of sacrifice; but the other side of this sacrificial beginning is the discovery of treasure, here liquid in essence and eternally replenished. A fortress and a state are created not by conquering new lands but out of an abundance of fluid resources, magically attained and continually reproduced; note, too, that the royal hero saves himself not by martial deeds, but by his wits, from the intended sacrifice. This is a new type of hero, proper to the period—capable of fighting, but more conspicuously ready-witted, especially in the context of potential self-enrichment.

So much for myths of origin; more recent attempts at reconstruction by historians have still failed to provide a comprehensive and plausible genealogical table of the Senji Nāyakas. What does emerge, however, is that after a confused period of several decades, in which Senji-based nāyakas such as Vaiyappa, Krishṇappa and Sūrappa contested control of the Arcot region with their counterparts at Padaividu, their dominance over Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam was finally asserted in the last two decades of the sixteenth century, first under Koṇḍama (or Gaṅgama) Nāyaka (r. 1578-94), and then more particularly under his successor Muttu Krishṇappa.⁴⁵ The fortress at Senji, built in a rough triangle among broken hills and outcrops, began to assume substantial dimensions as did the urban centre around it (compared by at least one early seventeenth-century observer to Amsterdam). However, the Senji Nāyakas faced a set of quite peculiar problems in asserting their own legitimacy. First, they had no clear tradition to hark back to, unlike Tanjavur and Madurai (which claimed respectively the mantle of the Cōlas and Pāṇḍyas); the Pallava tradition in Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam was scarcely a living one by the late sixteenth century. Second, while they did not have to reckon with such an elaborate structure of pālayakkārar authority as obtained in the far south, the Senji Nāyakas did have to come to terms with some powerful nāyaka lineages, such as one at Velur, and another in the coastal fort of Devikkottai. As had happened in Madurai, the Senji Nāyakas had to resort to a powerful *dalavāy* figure, with whom the kingdom was in a certain sense shared

⁴⁴ See below, VII.1.

⁴⁵ Karashima (1985).

in the early seventeenth century. And finally, from the early 1590s, the legitimacy of the Senji Nāyakas was periodically undermined by the interference in the region of the all-too-close overlords, the Aravīḍu lineage who now claimed the title of Rāya, and who were resident at Candragiri (and later Velur).⁴⁶

What had begun to emerge in the Tamil country then in the transition from Krishnadevarāya to Acyutadevarāya at Vijayanagara (that is in the late 1520s and early 1530s) was a structure of power which derived from but was at the same time distinct from the Vijayanagara state. To this form of 'twilight zone' kingship, wherein sovereignty was always hinted at but never fully claimed, historians have given the name of 'Nāyaka kingship'—a confusing epithet, for the peripatetic and small-scale Telugu warlords of the late fourteenth and fifteenth century were equally nāyakas. In a sense, the Nāyakas of Madurai, Tanjavur and Senji commanded resources of sufficient dimensions for us to regard their domains as states, even as the Mughal successor states of the eighteenth century (many of which also showed a marked reluctance to dissociate themselves in formal terms from their overlord at Delhi) may usefully be regarded as state formations in themselves. Militarily and economically the most powerful of the three Nāyakas was the Madurai-based one, for although the control of the territories subordinate to him was largely mediated by pāḷaiyakkārars, it was of far greater extent than that of his two northern neighbours; and by the early seventeenth century it extended from Tirunelveli into Kongunad, and included much of modern-day Tiruccirappalli district as well.⁴⁷ In contrast, Tanjavur comprised a compact domain, essentially congruent with the Kaveri delta, the only areas contested with its neighbours being immediately to the north of the Kollidam's mouth, and in the vicinity of Tiruccirappalli. And finally, the control exercised by Senji stretched north from the Kollidam to what has since the *Tolkāppiyam* been regarded as the very edge of Tamil country, the Tirupati hills. Yet this domain was fiercely contested, by the Candragiri rajas and by the intruding clans from Kalahasti and Venkatagiri, all of whom sought to keep fuelled a process that had continued since Kumāra Kampana. To

⁴⁶ Cf. Subrahmanyam and Shulman (1990); below, VII.1.

⁴⁷ See Arokiaswami (1956), pp. 334-50.

this extent, Senji perhaps more than any of the other Nāyaka states enables us to grasp the essence of the period: not only the constant competition for resources, but the sense that the Nāyaka states were constantly in the process of 'becoming'—and never quite achieving the full cycle of state formation, maturity and then decay.

To understand how this process unfolded, it is perhaps appropriate to begin at the beginning, by way of a tale that echoes—in some respects—the salutary story of the 'Subahdar of the Cot'. Told not by a folk-bard, but by a Telugu chronicler (albeit an anonymous one), this is the paradigmatic tale of Nāgama Nāyaka's rebellion and the foundation of Madurai Nāyaka rule.

2. NĀGAMA NĀYAKA CREATES A STATE

Could a person who hoards money
really be prepared
to throw away his life
in battle?⁴⁸

Among the surviving descriptions of state formation in Nāyaka times, one stands out for its completeness, vividness, and sophistication. This is the version of the foundation of the Madurai Nāyaka kingdom offered by the anonymous author of the Telugu chronicle, *Taṅjāvūri āndhra rājula caritra* (TARC), probably from early eighteenth-century Tanjavur. A Tamil variant of this story, possibly derived from the Telugu text, has been treated in detail by Nicholas Dirks.⁴⁹ Dirks rightly emphasizes the themes of loyalty and service, publicly and dramatically displayed, as constituting the initial basis for kingship; the relationship between the Vijayanagara overlord and his Nāyaka subordinate is then symbolically articulated by the overlord's gifts of honours and emblems to his servant, who carries them with him—tangible representations of the generative bond between them—to his new capital. Moreover, 'the transactions between the Rayar (Vijayanagara king) and the Nayakar closely parallel the transactions of puja, worship'⁵⁰—

⁴⁸ *Ahalyāsankrandanam* 1, p. 43.

⁴⁹ Dirks (1987), pp. 96-106; see also Dirks (1982).

⁵⁰ Dirks (1987), p. 99.

with the king naturally cast in the role of deity. All of this is, indeed, suggested by the Tamil text, which tends slightly to idealize the nature of political relations at this formative moment in the far south. Yet the Tamil historian also reveals, as Dirks perceptively points out, how 'at the very moment he [the Nāyaka] acts out his service to the Vijayanagara king and comes closest to the overlord in whose name he acts, he becomes increasingly "independent"'.⁵¹ This insight, undoubtedly true not only here but also in many similar cases of state formation (including the microcosmic pālaiyam-states documented in the *vaṁśāvali* texts) from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, might well be seen as the hidden point of departure of our Telugu chronicle.

The view propounded there is not a little cynical. One wonders who could have produced this precious reconstruction, so remarkably attuned to the nuances and levels of political discourse, which the chronicle takes great care to convey both in terms of externalized, surface utterance and of the disguised layer of true intentionality lurking below. In the process, our historian also shows us the minimal components of statehood, as seen retrospectively from a point toward the end of Nāyaka times. We will study his portrayal of Nāgama Nāyaka and his son, Viśvanātha, the founders of the Madurai Nāyaka state, from this perspective, as we ask ourselves: Just who are these various protagonists? What are they really saying to one another? What are the means—linguistic, dramatic, affective, economic, strategic—that allow two of them to produce a state? Above all, we must listen carefully to the varied tones and overtones of their recorded verbal exchanges (translated literally in the following summary), which mark off the necessary stages of posturing and calculated decision in a characteristically Nāyaka political progression.

The text begins with the synoptic great king, Krishṇadevarāya, ruling at Vijayanagara. A sordid political scramble in the far south sets the stage: Vīraśekhara Cōḷa, the king of Tanjavur, has overcome the Pāṇḍya king, Candraśekhara, and taken possession of his kingdom. The Pāṇḍya naturally cries out for help from his overlord, and Krishṇa-

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

devarāya at once sends the manager of his treasury (*tōśekhānā adhikāri*), Nāgama Nāyaka, to punish the Cōḷa and restore the Pāṇḍya to his throne.

Taking the Pāṇḍya king and an army, Nāgama Nāyaka rushes south and defeats the unruly Cōḷa in battle. So far so good. But the vigorous and ambitious Nāyaka has to be true to himself, and to his role—a role which, one might almost say, these circumstances compel him to enact. Instead of returning the kingdom to the Pāṇḍya, Nāgama happily installs *himself* at Madurai, at the same time extending his control over new areas. This is the first move toward statehood, still a rather minimal and controlled step forward which allows room for manoeuvre and, if necessary, for retreat. Nāgama is playing for time and testing the response from above.

And the centre, at Vijayanagara, does not overreact: when the disinherited Pāṇḍya now complains against his erstwhile Nāyaka saviour, Krishnadevarāya simply sends letters to Nāgama ordering him to return. Nāgama, still stalling, replies in writing: 'I have spent a lot of money taking care of these villages. Why didn't that Pāṇḍya turn up before? He was just sitting there, indifferent to the fact that this kingdom was not in our control. Now he sees that the kingdom is ours, after I have conquered the Cōḷa. He used to be content with receiving food and clothes; suddenly he has higher hopes. If I give him the kingdom, not even half a rupee will come to the centre (*nagariki*). Moreover, though he claims to be from the Pāṇḍya family, in reality he's of low caste, a bastard. He doesn't deserve the kingdom. That's why the Cōḷa drove him out. Because we're so far away, we aren't familiar with these niceties. Shouldn't I be happy for at least a few days? And I have, after all, spent a lot of money in bringing this country under our control. I'll come back only after recovering my losses'.

Notice the structure of the argument: first the Nāyaka's economic claim, apparently seen as axiomatic, readily intelligible even to the overlord in the centre; then the *ad hominem* attack on the Pāṇḍya, based curiously enough—given what we will see of the Nāyakas' *own* ideology—on his 'low caste' origins; this is followed by a practical note focusing on the self-interest of the centre—if the Pāṇḍya is reinstated, not even half a rupee will reach the royal treasury; more abuse of the Pāṇḍya rival; and, completing a circle, Nāgama's own economic plight

again. The response begins and ends with money, the frame-theme of Nāgama's self-representation. Military campaigns cost money and, if successful, should subsequently produce money, which the Nāyaka seems to feel should be *his* by right. Note, however, the consistent use of the first person plural—*our* control, *our* distance from this scene and *our* consequent ignorance of its subtleties—as if Nāgama were still eager to assert a basic affinity with the Vijayanagara perspective, and to maintain his place within this system. If this is rebellion, it is couched in an idiom at once impudent, self-serving and subservient.

Krishṇadevarāya, however, is now truly angry, and he asks his assembled courtiers and servants if anyone can bring him Nāgama's head. Amazingly, it is Nāgama's own son, Viśvanātha, who volunteers for the mission. When the king questions him, Viśvanātha blandly says, 'We have eaten the king's food; the king's affair is more important than a father'. This is the usual surface discourse of loyalty and interactional bonding, lucidly analysed by Dirks; and there is surely a level at which the Nāyaka ideal of personal loyalty to the overlord is, indeed, felt to cut across primordial, ascriptive ties of various kinds. But one might also wonder, as the Telugu author seems to do throughout this episode, where personal interest intersects this abstract and formal system of values. Viśvanātha has, in effect, the following complicated problem: how can he save 1) his father's life (and fortune) 2) his father's political and economic gains from the Madurai campaign 3) his own political future? All this, of course, without entering into open conflict with a centre which, however uncertain its control, is still clearly strong enough to crush him. Arguably, Viśvanātha's very dramatic and apparently risky solution is the most direct, most promising avenue in a fluid situation rich with opportunity.

So now he, too, goes south, with no additional support (in men or money) from the king, only the usual force of 2000 horse- and 6000 foot-soldiers. Approaching Madurai, he sends word to his father: 'You have disobeyed the lord's command. An order has gone out to have you killed. But don't worry: if you restore the Pāṇḍya's kingdom to him even now, I'll get that order cancelled'.

To which Nāgama replies, by messenger: 'Both you and I have conquered kingdoms in the king's name. Twice or thrice we have restored areas already lost (to the empire). I should get some credit for

the trouble you've taken. What benefit does the king receive if that bastard rules the Pāṇḍya land? And what loss if *we* rule it? You were born only after we performed severe austerities; why are you fighting against me now, for no reason? I only took this kingdom for *your* sake. Come over to me'. One must admire Nāgama's candour; his methods and goals are equally transparent in this message sent to his son. The latter must now choose his course. We hear nothing of any internal debate, any hesitation; Viśvanātha is no less clear than his father as to the best, the most hopeful path. He is, however, anything but transparent. It is time for the dramatic gestures, verbal and substantial, which will, hopefully, be reported back home. So he sends the following message: 'You are disobeying the king. Therefore you are not my father, nor am I your son. I don't need the kingdom you have won. If you choose to fight, God will not give you the power to triumph. I have sworn to bring you to the king'.

Distressed by this announcement, Nāgama bitterly says to himself, 'So this is the kind of son I get after worshipping Viśvanāthasvāmi (Śiva in Benares). He can live or die—it is all the same to me'. And he goes to battle—only to lose to his son. Nāgama is captured unhurt and placed under close guard on a howdah. Viśvanātha is relieved: 'By virtue of the penance I have performed, my father has been taken alive'. Notice this statement—a clear indication of the underlying conception, or calculation, that is guiding Viśvanātha. So far he has achieved the first of the aims we formulated above. His father is alive, and in his power, after a startling public demonstration of Viśvanātha's own overriding loyalty to the centre. He loses no time in sending news of his 'victory' to the king. And Krishnadevarāya is suitably impressed. He announces, rather gleefully, to his assembled generals and courtiers: 'You were all afraid to go to fight Nāgama, but Viśvanātha went in our name and overcame his own father'. They agree, applauding the deed: 'He cannot be considered an ordinary man. He is Lord Viśvanāthasvāmi (Śiva) himself'. A proleptic utterance, pointing clearly at an emerging royal identity of the Nāyaka type: Viśvanātha, soon to be king, is already identified with his namesake god. At this point of transition, the drama is propelled into a new stage, as Krishnadevarāya leaps to the appropriate conclusion. 'You say he is no ordinary human being. Then it is not proper to keep him at our court; that

would be a sin. He deserves a throne equal to our own'.⁵² The assembled court confirms this move: 'Had he joined his father against us, we could never have opposed them. But he is surely a part of the lord himself (*āyana kēvalam svāmivāriyokka aṃśamē*, 39); thus he has completed this task faithfully'. The royal assembly invokes the purāṇic vision of the king as *aṃśa*, a partial embodiment of the god (here: the servant partially embodies his king). In the context, this seems to amplify the earlier equation between Viśvanātha and the deity, even as the king's intention is justified and explained; Viśvanātha, until now another subordinate servant, is being re-created as a great king effectively equal in status to Krishṇadevarāya himself. The latter is the first to acknowledge this new reality.

But it is a reality that must still be verbally and ritually fashioned through the public presence of the major actors. So a final, eloquent scene takes place at court upon Viśvanātha's return, with his captive father. Some of the initial exchanges centre upon the delicate issue of the Pāṇḍya king's residual role. Everyone recognizes, it seems, that this rather inconsequential figure (who nevertheless, it will be recalled, sparked off Nāgama's southern campaign) has become entirely redundant. The question is how to make him disappear elegantly into obscurity. Nāgama, not surprisingly, provides the rationale in his first, self-extenuating address to Krishṇadevarāya, which resumes the tone of his earlier letter to the king: 'Your father, Highness, had mortgaged the Pāṇḍya country to *our* treasury. (Note that he still speaks possessively of the treasury, his former post.) We have lost a lot of money. In the war, a great deal of money was spent—much more than you sent with us. The Pāṇḍya himself admitted that he couldn't control the country; that everyone was simply enjoying his own villages; that even the Cōḷa couldn't control this land after conquering it; that he, the Pāṇḍya, had no legitimate sons (who could inherit the throne) and that he wanted only food and clothing for as long as he lived—and he asked that I, Nāgama, should rule in his name, after excluding his rival, the Cōḷa. Until now it was actually a kingless land; I brought it under

⁵² Krishṇadevarāya mentions at this point two of Viśvanātha's heroic deeds—decapitating a wild buffalo (for Navarātri), and subduing the *parāyi* kings. Both feats are also mentioned in the Tamil version; and see Dirks (1987), pp. 98-99.

control by spending a great deal of money. And now he, the Pāṇḍya, is complaining to you!' Nāgama clearly wastes no opportunity to mention the losses he has supposedly incurred; and he marshalls documents—contracts (*karārlu*), written receipts—to 'prove' this fact to the king. More to the point, he has shown the way to handle the Pāṇḍya, who, reading the situation correctly, conveniently confirms Nāgama's version of events and declares that he will be quite happy to be pensioned off, and even happier to see Nāgama's son, Viśvanātha, ruling Madurai.⁵³ This solves the problem of the Pāṇḍya's remaining claim and leaves the necessary throne vacant for the new king.

There is time for a brief break in the proceedings: Krishṇadevarāya praises Viśvanātha, who was prepared, so the king says, to cut off his own father's head out of loyalty to the king; as a result of this service, Nāgama's sin is forgiven, and he is released from his chains. Father and son can retire to their quarters. They are reconciled—Viśvanātha begs his father to put an end to the enmity between them—and they celebrate by bathing, giving charity, and feeding many Brahmins (we will return to this theme of the gift of food, *annadāna*, the Nāyakas' premier form of conspicuous offering). Now, at home, Nāgama confides in his son: 'I undertook all of this action only because I was determined that you should be a king. It is time for me to strive to reach the other world. What else do I need? Here is all the money I have acquired: take it all. The king will give you a country. Take good care of it'. The future seems almost cut and dry to the father, who has now achieved his life's mission, after all; but Viśvanātha responds in his usual, 'correct' manner: 'I don't need the money you acquired. Use it to perform acts of charity and *dharma* in order to attain the other world'.

This is too much for Nāgama: 'What is going on here! We performed austerities for many days in order to give birth to you; it isn't

⁵³ In a subsequent speech, the Pāṇḍya elaborates: 'I don't need that country. Even if I wanted it, the Cōḷa wouldn't let me get away with my life. Moreover, the bastard sons of my father and grandfather are in Srivilliputtur, Tenkasi, and Rajapaliyam (sic). They won't let me lift up my head. Nāgama Nāyaḍu conquered all but these five places. I will be happy if Viśvanātha Nāyaḍu rules the kingdom, so long as my enemies, the Cōḷa and these Pāṇḍyas (in Srivilliputtur etc.) don't get it. Viśvanātha Nāyaḍu will be like a protective father to me in this world and like a son to me, caring for my welfare, in the next'.

right for you not to take all this money we saved for you'. And he shows it to him—the great wealth stored up by his, Nāgama's, ancestors together with what he himself has been able to add to it. Viśvanātha's eyes turn giddily at this sight. Now the clinching argument, if one is still needed: 'In the Pāṇḍya country', says Nāgama, 'in Madurai, there is the great temple of Mīnākshī and Sundareśvara. One night Mīnākshī came to me in a dream and told me that my son, Viśvanāthanāyudu, is the proper man to rule the kingdom in her (Mīnākshī's) presence. Take all this money and go to the Pāṇḍya country; build temples and ghats, perform *dharmic* acts—for that is how I will be able to reach the other world'.

So a divine revelation has already authorized Viśvanātha's elevation to the throne, and even appropriately specified the site of his rule. Nāgama has brought back from Madurai, along with whatever tangible resources he may have secured, the invaluable currency of verbal communication from the great local goddess. One doubts if Viśvanātha requires any further persuasion—his premeditated goal is within sight—but he nevertheless chooses to make one final dramatic performance at the court. When Krishnadevarāya tells him that he will be the King of the South (*dakṣiṇasimhāsanādhipati*), equal to the emperor himself, Viśvanātha protests (a little too much): 'Seeing you is equivalent in my eyes to being king of all lands. If I go away, I will be denied this sight'. Krishnadevarāya is forced to insist: 'You are speaking with such dispassion (*virakti māṭalu*, i.e. forgoing the kingship) because you are none other than Lord Viśvanāthasvāmi of Kāśī (Śiva). If I allow myself to be served by someone as dispassionate as you, I will suffer a great fault (*dōṣam*). You have saved my throne . . . Moreover, we have said that we would create a kingdom for you equal to ours. If this kingdom is not ruled by you, not even half a rupee will reach the centre. Moreover, the northern kings are likely to join with the five recalcitrant Pāṇḍyas of low caste, to campaign against us. If you don't take control of the southern country, the situation won't be good. If it weren't for you, that country would be without a king, and we would have to be reborn ourselves to struggle with those *pāḷegāllu*. You had best hurry south to be king'.

Genuine royal gratitude for Viśvanātha's feats of loyalty mixes with utilitarian considerations of *raison d'état*; it is pleasant to observe

Nāgama's original argument about tribute—the centre will fail to realize even half a rupee from Madurai—issuing now from the emperor's own mouth. A note of pathos creeps in: the great Krishṇadevarāya himself would have to take on another avatar to fight the Pāṇḍya pālegāllu, were it not for Viśvanātha's presence in the south. One avatar—is not Krishṇadevarāya a form of Krishṇa reborn?⁵⁴—is balanced against another. The first Nāyaka king of Madurai also starts out as a divine embodiment: he is Kāśī Viśvanāthasvāmi incarnate, trusted delegate and equal of the earthly emperor at Vijayanagara, whose throne he has saved. Note the realistic, publicly acknowledged dependence of the overlord upon his supposed servant, for all the latter's rhetoric of renunciation and histrionic self-abasement.

A final gesture cements the relation along these lines. Advised by his mantrins and Niyogis that the king would not refuse him even the image of Durgā that constituted the kingdom's power, Viśvanātha asks this gift of Krishṇadevarāya, who immediately grants it. There is opposition at the court: 'How could you let him take this? Give him any other gift. This city has no power except that of Durgā (*ī paṭṇāniki durgabalam gāni vēṛē lēdu*)'. But the king is determined to go through with this ultimate royal gift: 'Viśvanāthanāyaḍu has never asked for anything, and I have never given him anything. I'm very happy that he has finally opened his mouth and made a request. If he asked for my very body, I would give it to him. This city itself is no more important than that (body of mine). Once I have given my word, even if the sun and moon change their courses, my promise must be kept'. So it happens that Viśvanātha begins his rule by bringing the protective goddess of Vijayanagara, Durgāmahālakshmī, south to his capital. And while the text does not state this explicitly, the implication is, perhaps, that the sack of Vijayanagara in 1565—only a short time after Viśvanātha's death in Madurai and the accession of his son, Kumāra

⁵⁴ See *Pārijātāpaharaṇamu* of Nandi Timmana, *pīṭhika*, v. 17; discussion in Shulman (1985), p. 367f. The view of Krishṇadevarāya as an avatar coexists in the Vijayanagara court with other, more normative views (the king as *aṃṣa* of the god): see Narayana Rao, afterword to Heifetz and Rao (1987), pp. 147-9. But the TARC reflects, and projects backwards, the Nāyaka perspective, in which the king is fully identified as an avatar; see below, V.2.

Krishṇappa—is to be linked to this transfer of the goddess, and of her vitality, to the newly ascendant centre in the far south.

The imperial city far to the north grows weak and ultimately succumbs to Muslim attack; Madurai first, and then Tanjavur, become the major political arenas of interest to the Telugu literati who produced works such as our chronicle during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the Tamil land. This introductory story—actually intended to set the stage for the emergence of the Tanjavur Nāyaka line, not the Madurai kingdom—provides the necessary symbolic linkage with the prestigious past and the defunct centre at Vijayanagara.⁵⁵ We can define this linkage more precisely in light of the subversive rhetoric that the text so brilliantly and consistently records. Both Nāgama and Viśvanātha use language as a screen, a lightly veiled instrument for manipulation in the direction of practical goals wholly transparent to our author, and to his audience. Protesting loyalty, demonstratively enacting loyalty, the Nāyaka hero produces his own, quasi-autonomous state. Human calculation and hidden motivation (and the oblique relation between these forces and all externalized discourse) constitute the central subject of this text. Notice how something close to a Western notion of ‘history’—the record and analysis of events causally related and explicable primarily in terms of human impulses, decisions, and conceptions—has replaced the older purāṇic mode, rich with mythic consciousness, as the domain of potential meaning. The Nāyaka courts were the setting for an emerging school of historiography, of a type previously unknown in south India, focused on the passionate and dramatic acts unfolding around the Nāyaka little kings. It is also significant that these figures—men such as Nāgama and Viśvanātha, and Nāyaka women such as Raṅgājamma and Rāma-bhadrāmba and Muddupaḷani—appear in these historical works, as in court-*kāvya*, as individuals largely responsible for creating their fate. Viśvanātha acts alone, out of his own inner drives, to actualize a self-conceived destiny—even if the heroic mould he chooses is itself overdetermined by the cultural vision of his time and place. We will return to this emerging notion of the individual. For now, let us sum

⁵⁵ A similar drive informs the *Rāyavācakamu*; see Wagoner’s introduction to the text (in press).

up the process of state-formation as refracted through this single, rather powerful episode. In the perspective of this text, there exist, and no doubt *must* exist, the following minimal components of statehood: 1) Money—perhaps the most important item of all. The decisive revelation comes when Nāgama shows his accumulated wealth to his son, the king-to-be. Notice that this wealth is portable, apparently liquid, at any rate not tied down to the land. It requires political expression: with all this money, it simply is not right that Viśvanātha should be without a throne. Most striking here is the reversal of the normal sequence from earlier medieval times: once kings could claim to have a kingdom, and therefore to have wealth or the right to wealth; here Nāgama argues that possession of fluid resources of a certain magnitude makes it imperative that his son be king. Nāgama's repeated complaints to Krishnadevarāya about his own expenditure and losses are simply the obverse of this same coin: in effect, what we see is the martial entrepreneur busily accumulating more investments in order to underwrite a political career.

2) Mobility. Nāgama and Viśvanātha are the tip of a mobile, adventurous elite eager to find its fortunes at a sufficient distance from the imperial centre. They are not bound up with land and the cycle of agricultural production. They are armed, equipped with horses, prepared to move without delay in the direction of opportunity. Heroic acts, such as those of Viśvanātha, can provide such an opening.

3) A horizontal base. A state still requires territory. In our story, the Pāṇḍya country provides this basis for the Nāyaka kingdom; the migratory elite will rapidly set down roots in the southern land, will create both a courtly superstructure in the capital and its mimetic offshoots and an economic infrastructure geared at the resources at large in the countryside. Martial entrepreneurs turn into tax-farmers and investors; peasant cultivators are incorporated (from above) into the emerging state. The *TARC* points at the beginning of this process in its terse description of Viśvanātha's arrival in Madurai and his initial investments, through his famous subordinates Ariyanātha (or Ariyanāyakam) Mudaliyār and Bisapākam Keśavappa Nāyaka, in public works in Madurai city.

4) Vertical linkages. As already hinted, the text elaborates precisely on this point. The entire process of creating a Nāyaka state seems to

depend upon establishing a linkage, articulated in terms of personal loyalty, with a higher centre of authority—here embodied in the Vijayanagara overlord. No Nāyaka king can do without this empowering source from above. On the other hand, this vertical linkage is optimally activated under conditions which effectively undermine its controlling power. Viśvanātha wins the emperor's blessing even as he extricates himself from the latter's proximity and potential demands. Even rhetorically, theoretical subordination becomes translated into the language of equality; while in real terms, the overlord is clearly the more dependent party. Both sides of the relation are perfectly aware of this situation; the 'centre' above continuously invests in attempts at shoring up its symbolic power, while the Nāyaka centres seek continually to enhance their real freedom. In general, Nāyaka history is the tale of their success. We could thus define a paradigmatic Nāyaka state as one in which necessary vertical loyalties are vociferously invoked and symbolically reenacted in order to sustain a process of ever-increasing horizontal autonomy.

5) A deity (or deities). Mīnākshī authorizes the formation of the kingdom in Nāgama's reported dream; Durgāmahālaksmī goes south with Viśvanātha. (Note the conjunction of localized and mobile deities in the formative moment.) In later sections of the *TARC*, as we shall see, the Tanjavur line lives out its devotion to Raṅganātha at Śrīraṅgam (Mannārusvāmi at Mannārkuṭi, according to the court-poets). Demonstrative devotion provides royal access to transcendence. Here too, however, the actual relation of superiors and inferiors expands and transforms its earlier parameters: the stable, localized deity turns out to be in urgent need of the Nāyaka's assistance and protection; and this mobile human king, as we saw, explicitly acquires divinity himself. Viśvanāthanāyaka is none other than Viśvanāthasvāmi-Śiva of Kāśī, set loose to wander in the southern Tamil country. We will explore this reformulated relation in detail in chapter 5.

Before concluding our overview of this story of origins, we should also notice what is *not*, apparently, necessary to create a Nāyaka state. There is no immediate need for Brahmins, whether as ministers and advisers or as the worthy recipients of royal gifts. Nor does the king have to have a 'proper' history or genealogy; nor need he assert ascriptive qualifications of any kind. Viśvanātha is not a Kshatriya and

makes no attempt to claim any such normative identity. He acquires his kingdom not through inherited status, not by fabricating a properly Sanskritized image embedded in a dynastic structure conforming to the standard *purāṇic* type—all such efforts have become quite superfluous by this time—but by virtue of his father's money, the opportunity that arises through Nāgama's brazen adventure, and the universalistic value of personal loyalty that cuts through previous ties. The latter value, histrionically affirmed, cloaks the practical logic of the former factors. Clearly, seen from within as well as from our external, analytic perspective, Nāyaka kingship represents an exotic departure from earlier political forms.

III

The Cultural Economy of Nāyaka Rule

1. THE STRUCTURE OF ENJOYMENT

We have followed one Nāyaka hero in his successful attempt, retrospectively envisioned, to carve out a (rather typical) kingdom in the far south of the peninsula. It is time now to consider, more substantially, the specific conceptual context for Nāyaka-period kingship in its mature forms, as expressed in contemporary sources, literary and other. Our focus in this section shifts somewhat from Madurai, to what we regard as the central of the Nāyaka kingdoms, Tanjavur, founded around 1530 by Nāgama's contemporary, Cevvappa Nāyaka. We will argue that a major shift has taken place in the articulation of traditional political roles: the classical dharma ideology, which coloured Cōla-period politics and which was still largely dominant in sixteenth-century Vijayanagara,¹ has significantly atrophied, to be replaced by a new, self-confident model of Śūdra kingship. Inevitably, the new model embodies a telos with existential features, that is, 'enjoyment' (*bhoga*)—not the investment of the suddenly abun-

¹ See, for example, *Rāmarājīyam* of Veṅkayya, 40: the ideal ruler performs Vedic sacrifice, gives *dāna* to Brahmins, safeguards *varṇāśramadharmā*, maintains Dharma's four feet. *Kāvya* works from Krishṇadevarāya's court subscribe to this vision; cf. *Manucaritramu* of Peddana 1.34, 50.

dant cash resources in shoring up the refashioned political centre, or in establishing its symbolic and organizational autonomy, but their exhaustion in various playful and sensuous modes. At the same time, the political sphere has successfully absorbed the sacred arena of temple and temple-deities; we see the conflation of hitherto clearly divided domains, an interpenetration of attributes and powers that undercuts the older conceptualization of kingship, demotes the Vaidika Brahmin to subservient status, and ramifies into far-reaching institutional change. There is a logic to this set of transformations, partly structural and material, but also intimately linked to emerging notions of human identity and to altered paradigms of knowledge, both of the world and of the self. To begin to trace this logic, we review certain of its most conspicuous empirical manifestations in the literature and graphic art of the Telugu courts, without losing sight of the institutional implications of what the literati and the craftsmen have chosen to represent.

Let us take a wholly concrete image of kingship, stylized but entirely true to form—a calculated encapsulation of the Nāyaka royal ethos. Here is how Cevvappa's grandson, Raghunātha Nāyaka (r. 1612-1634), most beloved, perhaps most emblematic of the Tanjavur Nāyaka line, starts his day:

Holding her hand tightly in his, he climbed slowly out of bed and, still filled with desire, set out through the royal street (*rājavīthi*). Fragrance filled the air—from the cracked, dry sandal on the lovers' cheeks, the betel still held in their mouths, the cooling musk. Their lips were scarred red from love-bites, their eyes heavy from lack of sleep, their pearl necklaces awry, intertwined, flowers falling in confusion from their hair, the *tilaka* mark on their foreheads smudged with sweat; the king's upper cloth bore the fragrant traces of their love-making. Revealing all these signs of passion (*suratāntacihnamulu*), the king, as if the god of desire had taken physical form, entered his palace just before dawn. Then the stars began to fade, like the flowers from the lovers' bed cast aside in the early morning by the servant-women who had come in to clean²

The woman, we hasten to note, is the courtesan Citrarekha, the latest in the series of Raghunātha's necessary, daily conquests; and the de-

² *Raghunāthanāyakābhyudayamu*, 3.866-8.

scription comes from Raghunātha's own son and successor, Vijayarāghava Nāyaka (r. 1634-1673), at the end of the *dvipada* poem entitled *Raghunāthanāyakābhyudayamu*, which we may freely translate as 'A Day in the Life of Raghunātha Nāyaka'. *Abhyudayamu* works of this type were popular in Nāyaka Tanjavur; often composed by sons in honour of their fathers, they show us the king as he proceeds slowly through a typical royal day—typical, that is, in the highly ritualized and strictly patterned vision of the court. It is, of course, intriguing that a son should draw such a picture of his father (in the present case, a picture of a father long since dead), especially since the central focus of this, as most Nāyaka examples of the genre, is on the king's erotic side, worked out in relation to an infatuated courtesan. In itself, this eroticized treatment of the father/king reflects the latter's partial apotheosis, since divine sexuality is a legitimate (if sometimes problematic) theme for courtly poetry—whereas a simple human father's (or mother's) sexuality is not.³ Indeed, at several points in this poem the author, Vijayarāghava, himself explicitly states that he sees his father as a god (*tanataṅḍriyē kuladaivamu*, 1.657; also 'Brahmins declare that there is no other god than one's father', 1.316; 172). We will return to this theme, which has implications far beyond the sphere of family relationships. For now, it is enough to recognize that the *abhyudayamu* genre is articulated in a *pūjā* mode of worship, with the king cast as the divine subject, his daily routine a framework of ritualized revelation.

As such, its structure deserves careful scrutiny. We have seen the king at daybreak, which is where the poem breaks off; let us now retrace his steps through the previous day, described in such loving detail by his son. How does the Nāyaka spend his waking hours? Upon waking, he studies his own image in a standing mirror, glances at two Brahmins, at milk in a golden pot, and at a picture of Garuḍa. After this auspicious start, he is helped by his maidservants into a first formal dressing; then, with his children, grandchildren, and wives, he sits on his throne while a music and dance performance begins. Some of the songs are his own compositions, recited each day in his presence (1.516-22)—and this is but the first of a long series of reflexive circles enveloping the king, who is continually hearing his own words and

³ See Heifetz and Narayana Rao (1987), p. 154; also see below, V.2 at note 43.

music, listening to his formal titles (*birudu*), staring at mirrors, or observing painted images of himself and his outstanding deeds. Life in the court is a montage of endless self-replications. The king is then bathed, dressed again, and taken to see his guru in one of the inner enclosures of the palace, the so-called *Lakshmivilāsa*. He worships his teacher and puts on the Vaishṇava forehead mark; he worships his personal and family deity, Rājagopālasvāmi (Vishṇu at Mannarkuti); he listens to a recitation of *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, and rewards the reciters. Now it is time for yet another change of clothes—to create a more sparkling and military appearance—before the morning court-session (*pēr olagam*) and the day's first major expedition (*svāri*).

The *svāri* might be said to be the king's primary public business, were there really any meaningful distinction between public and private in this crowded schedule. He has to show himself to his people outside the palace; this he accomplishes by a regal procession, on his elephant Airāvata (named after Indra's mount), accompanied by courtiers and heralds. The Nāyaka public *svāri* is the direct descendant of Cōla-period regal *ulā*-processions;⁴ and, as in the Tamil *ulā*, the outstanding element here is an erotic one. The parading hero is keenly watched by women, from every available window, balcony, or perch; and, always, necessarily, one of these women falls so helplessly in love with the king that the poet's attention shifts from him to her, so that the work as a whole now aims at documenting her passion from this first moment of its blossoming to its happy culmination in the coming night.

The present victim of love's madness is Citrarekha, who at once embarks on the normative course of suffering: she hallucinates, weeps for her absent beloved, doubts his willingness to respond; she represents each element of her suddenly transformed world in terms of the passion that has overwhelmed her—the flowers falling from her loosened hair are the arrows of Kāma, god of desire; the chiming of her bracelets seems the flourishing of her lover's swords. 'Fried in the heat of desire', she convinces herself that Raghunātha has materialized before her, and spreads out her arms to embrace him—only to enfold empty space. Her maidservants frantically attempt to cool her off with

⁴ On *ulā*, see Shulman (1985), pp. 312-24, and studies cited there.

sandalpaste, rose-water, a bed of flowers, but to no avail. Together, they perform an intriguing ritual: they produce, with their fingernails dipped in musk, pictures of Manmatha and his wife Rati, of Vasanta—lord of Spring—and the Moon, of the sweet breeze and the intoxicating birds that abet Love's attack; then they station Citrarekha before these images, in a devotional mood. She offers flowers, water, sandalpaste, cloth to the god and begs him to bring Raghunātha to her that same day. When nothing happens, she becomes angry and launches into the traditional tirade against this deity (*kāmopālambha*): 'You are honoured wherever you torment helpless women; but if you were really so powerful, what happened that day you encountered Śiva?' At length, she has recourse to a mediator—a pet parrot which she sends, with a message of love, to the absent king.

The latter, meanwhile, blithely unaware of the devastating effects of his procession on Citrarekha—though, again, this is the opening sequence of a *daily* ritual—has returned to his palace, where he is briefly allowed to supervise a little of what we might consider 'work'. First, there are prostrations to the god Rāma, Raṅganātha, and again, to Rājagopāla (in the section of the palace called the Rāmasaudha); then, an assembly of poets and pandits, who play their learned word-games in his presence; then reports read out from the king's agents, spies, and representatives at various points in south India—including a eulogistic letter to Raghunātha from the *Pāduśālu* (= Padshah) of Bijapur, who has learned the details of the great Tanjavur victory at Toppur. The accountants and heads of departments (*rāyasambulavāru*, *kāraṇikul*) present their sums, in a cantankerous and antagonistic atmosphere (the *yakshagāna* dance-drama called *Raghunāthābhyudayamu*, also by Vijayarāghava, which is a close parallel to our *dvipada* text, expands this section considerably and highlights the incongruities and mutual rivalries of these financial officials, each speaking a different language—Tamil, Telugu, or Kannada—and accusing one another of corruption and incompetence). The king sweeps this raucous crew aside and withdraws for a hurried conference, in secret, with his ministers (*mantrulu*). This private consultation, which one imagines must constitute the active political node of the king's day, gets exactly two lines in Vijayarāghava's text.

Then it is back to what really matters—eating, playing, and making

love, for the rest of the entire poem. It is time for the midday meal, which is lovingly, lavishly described in minute detail—the setting and seating, the king's apparel (he has to dress, once again, for this event), the dozens of sumptuous dishes served, the thronging serving-women, the musicians who play conches and cymbals during the meal. One thing is clear: the king eats not simply for himself, but as a public rite. The concentrated absorption in the panoply of food and feeding speaks not merely of the Nāyaka obsession with eating but also of the king's collectively moulded identity in one of its most accessible and transparent manifestations. Private consumption has become a shared, public event, even if it takes place in the supposedly secluded space of the harem. The king, seen through the normative prism of the abhyudhamu, is a concrete, overt symbol of the cultural order, required to enact a conventionalized daily progression suitable to divinity and allowing for virtually no deviation from sequence. He consumes food, as he consumes women, to express a defined cultural thematic; he is no longer the patron, but has become rather the divinized subject, of his poet's poem; symbol has subsumed substance, has substantialized itself in personified action carried out in a prescribed, elaborately detailed ritual mode.⁵

And the major diagnostic feature of that mode is hypertrophied eroticism. Feeding the king is a prelude to the erotic culmination of the ritual sequence. After lunch, the king goes out to play in his garden—a game of shooting balls at a target (*uṅṭavillu*, 3.271)—where he is accosted by Citrarekha's parrot-messenger. The parrot speaks eloquently of his mistress's charms and poignantly of her suffering; at length, Raghunātha announces, 'If the god of desire is torturing your mistress, our royal duty (*rājadharmambu*) is to protect her' (3.393-4).⁶ The parrot is ecstatic: 'This is amazing: you would not even look at the daughters of the Nepāla, Pāṇḍya, and Tuṅḍīra kings, yet you, who are first among

⁵ There are continuities with older Tamil literary depictions of kingship, such as *Kalīṅkattupparaṇi* 10 (*avatāram*, the ritualized 'biography' of Kulottuṅga) and with medieval genres such as *pillaittamil*; but the full-fledged treatment of the king's daily routine as an object of pūjā is a Nāyaka development.

⁶ Note the ironic use of dharma terminology and ideology, a playful semantics wholly characteristic of Nāyaka Tanjavur. Punning, the king adds: 'In any case, I have to listen to the words of a *dvija* ('bird', but also 'Brahmin') like you'.

southern kings,⁷ have been persuaded by the speech of a bird'. To make sure, he demands that Raghunātha give him his ring as a sign for Citrarekha; and the king, perhaps unconsciously imitating his divine model Rama from the epic, slips the ring off his finger and gives it to the messenger.

At night, the king at last sets out for Citrarekha's house. We first find him in the garden 'holding court' (*koluvunan unḍi*, 572), i.e., playing with his vast assembly of wives and courtesans: begging for a kiss from one, exchanging betel from his mouth with another's, slipping off the knot of one woman's saree, seating another on his thigh, letting himself become aroused by the singing and the dance . . . He is, in short, as the poet tells us, a *śṛṅgāranāyakasekhara* (559), 'crowned lord (or nāyaka) of love'. In this mode, he dresses himself—for the final time in this day of endless changes of apparel—and sets off for the assignation. Citrarekha, who has been languishing between urgent hope, fanned by the parrot's message, and impatient despair, receives him shyly in her home, aptly called the 'gymnasium of desire' (*kāmuni sāmugāriḍi*); she honours him by seating him on a chair (*paraṅgi pīṭa*, 711—no doubt the latest fashion in Tanjavur of the 1620s), then slowly performs with him (or upon him) the prescribed scenario of seduction. This means, among other things, that following the first passionate love-making there must be a lovers' quarrel. It all starts innocently enough; the king is praising Citrarekha's beauty in terms he has no doubt used hundreds of times before: 'Your glistening eyes have acquired the loveliness of the deer (*hariṇi*); your thighs have the agitating beauty of the plantain tree (*rambhā*); your fingernails gleam like the stars (*tārā*); you are altogether charming (*rūpavatī*) . . .' She, however, deliberately misunderstands him by perversely taking these similes as the names of rival women, rather as if Raghunātha were guilty of *nāmaskhalana*—the always dangerous 'slip of the tongue' in passion. She thus turns away from him in the bed. He responds in kind: 'How could I give her my heart without knowing hers? I won't speak to her'. But as they lie side by

⁷ Another pun: Raghunātha is first among southern (*dakṣiṇa*) kings but also an embodiment of the *dakṣiṇa-nāyaka* of Sanskrit poetics, the cultivated aesthete-lover. In Nāyaka texts, Nepāla = Jaffna; Pāṇḍya refers to Madurai; Tuṇḍra = Toṇṭai, i.e. Senji.

side, facing away from one another, each begins to feel remorse. She says to herself: 'I misunderstood his praises. Why did I have to get angry? How can I speak to him now? He may not answer. But if I don't, our love is ruined. Though he came to me, I couldn't hold on to him. Alas, my union with him was like a reflection in a mirror, like a dream I dreamt today'. Meanwhile, he is thinking: 'It is because she is so experienced in love (*prauḍha*) that she thought my praises touched upon other women. Maybe she became angry just as a joke—why should she really be angry? Let me try using *her* name for something else; if she is just playing, she will talk to me then'. So, looking at a picture (*citrapatākāramu*) on the wall, he says, 'What graceful lines (*citrarekhāvilāsambu*) that painting has!' And, hearing him thus call her name (Citrarekha), she turns toward him again, appeased. After all, they have work to do: first the 'inverted' (*viparīta*) posture of making love, then the remaining 84 erotic positions of the *Kāmasūtra* have to be accomplished with the same remorseless attention to detail, sequence, and completeness that one might find, for example, in Vedic sacrifice.

This is the point toward which the *abhyudayamu* has been pushing its royal hero from the start. It is the ritual of love that most effectively brings the king's presence into play—literally re-presenting him—and that also deftly, reflectively illuminates the conventionality of that representation from a point within it. If Citrarekha falsely literalizes the standard similes of desire in order to simulate anger, as the convention requires, Raghunātha reverses this direction—as he must do, if they are to move forward—by allowing her to figuratize (by false metaphor) a calculated literal statement of his own. It is, in a way, all a game—a sophisticated and relatively erudite game, of course—as the text states in Raghunātha's words; but it also has all the seriousness, the intentness, the passion and rule-boundedness of a game, especially one with much at stake. And we can feel something of what *is* at stake in this courtly creation of a regal father's image by a mid seventeenth-century king ruling, precariously enough, in Tanjavur. The Nāyaka royal presence is fashioned precisely through such images of sensual immediacy and exuberance; of ritualized abandon; of the literalizing application of classical norms and models; of the cultivated delicacy of the effete master-connoisseur. The aesthetic presentation of self dominates all others in Nāyaka Tanjavur; aesthetic categories, adapted

from Sanskrit courtly models, are activated, usually in a strikingly literal fashion, and with the loss of the earlier sense of distance and abstraction, in the life of the court; the poets invest in regal images which embody and enact the somewhat theoretical and remote types familiar from classical schemes of classification.⁸ The king is thus the *dhūralalita* hero of Sanskrit drama, wholly alive and visible to his followers (and to his children and wives!). Within this general preference for the aestheticized symbol, the *śringāra* mode of refined, ritualized eroticism achieves primacy. The king can do no better than to give most of his working day, and working night, to breathing life into these alluring images.

We already know how the night ends, and the king returns, hand in hand with his new lover, to his palace. Let us take a minute to note a visual counterpart to this poetic scheme. The 'Day in the Life' genre seems to be brilliantly reflected in the striking Riboud textile, perhaps from Nāyaka Madurai, tentatively dated in the second half of the seventeenth century.⁹ This hanging, in its surviving form, is divided into upper and lower registers, separated by a narrower middle line depicting a royal procession. In the upper register, read from left to right, the central male figure goes from a musical scene to a moment of formal dressing, and thence to an erotic meeting. The three scenes are separated by 'alcoves' filled with gazing female attendants. The lower register shows us, apparently, the same male figure as he sits in state, awaiting the arrival of an unidentified military-regal procession on the right. Nowhere is the public character of the hero's 'private' romance more conspicuous than in this hanging: the public procession in the middle seems but to duplicate the king's progress from court to boudoir in the upper register, where he is studied, and worshipped, in every pose by the overwhelmingly feminized world of the court. As we have seen, the king loves, as he eats, not for himself but for the world. The reflexive, not to say voyeuristic side of Nāyaka art is in evidence: one watches the king as well as the watchers of the king, who

⁸ See below, V.2.

⁹ Gittinger (1982), pp. 121-7, 133. We wish to thank Mattiebelle Gittinger for patiently going over slides of the original hanging together with us and Carol Appadurai-Breckenridge in April 1988. For an extended discussion of this textile, reproduced in plate I; also see Varadarajan et al. (1986).

fix him from every direction with their eyes. One also feels the dynamic, restless quality of the period's large-scale artistic projects: the court is alive with purposeful movement and activity, albeit the highly ritualized activity of listening to concerts, falling in love, walking through the streets around the palace, or greeting one's ally or rival. This is a world which, in this visual representation of its inner power, is aestheticized, ritualized, opened to public wonder, reflexive, feminized, and remarkably alive. We find similar qualities—especially the sense of replicated, restless movement, the reflective feminine observers, visual punctuation by the erotic in the form of courtesans and dancers, and the aestheticized regal exemplar—in the roughly contemporary ceiling murals from the thousand-pillared maṇḍapa in the great temple at Tiruvarur (now unfortunately in a state of considerable decay).¹⁰

Can we generalize, in a preliminary way, from these lively expressive forms? What does it mean to stress, in the *abhyudayamu* manner, the king's erotic and aesthetic roles at the expense of other, certainly necessary attributes? Does not the king, even a king who is primarily recalled as a libertine and an aesthete, have other pressing concerns? Who runs the kingdom? The *daḷavāy*, Commander-in-Chief, perhaps; or a coalition of the latter and the *pradhāni*-Minister, with the aid of the newly powerful accountants, heads of departments, and tax-farmers, whose acrimonious interaction is nicely parodied, as we have seen, in Vijayarāghava's *yakshagāna*. Such an answer naturally assumes that the kingdom is actually 'managed', in at least some tenuous sense, by someone. We know from the history of the Madurai state that a king could be vulnerable, to the point of assassination, to just such a coalition of *Daḷavāy*, *Pradhāni*, and *Rāyasam*.¹¹ In any case, we would clearly do better to picture the king as mainly absorbed in ritual, as opposed to bureaucratic or managerial, roles. Moreover, the lesson of the *abhyudayamu* texts is that these ritual roles tend to involve a central aspect of *bhoga*, sensual enjoyment; the royal exemplar spends his day bathing, dressing, eating, occasionally hunting, and always falling in

¹⁰ We are preparing a complete publication of these murals from Tiruvarur.

¹¹ Thus the young *Cokkanātha* in Madurai barely escaped with his life from such a conspiracy of *Pradhāni*, *Rāyasam*, and *Daḷavāy*: see Satyanatha Aiyar (1924), pp. 155-6, citing Proença (Appendix A,2).

love, and he does all this not for himself, but for the kingdom, in a shockingly public way. The king, presented to us in the pūjā mode as an object of worship, lives out the divine routine of daily sensual experience, as found, for example, in the Vaishṇava temple rituals with which the Nāyakas were especially familiar.

But even this is hardly new: bhoga as royal prerogative, even obsession, goes back to the early medieval period in the South. In Pallava and Cōḷa times, however, as at Hampi, it was balanced by a formal identification of kingship with the ideology of dharmic norms, as well as by the still vital distinction between the worlds of temple and palace. The Nāyakas swept away both of these constraints. The idealized pictures of a dharmic Kshatriya kingship almost never appear in a sustained manner in the courtly literature of the period, not even in the context of the Nāyakas' proclaimed identification with the perfect king Rāma; the latter is now a paragon not of moral decisiveness but rather of physical charm and sexual prowess. The Nāyakas, imitating these accomplishments, also absorb Rāma themes—reworked in the context of the bhoga ideology and an ideal of overpowering sensual allure and refinement—in line with their own claims to avatār status. Moreover, the teleology of enjoyment has now spread beyond the palace into the wider institutional spheres of these little states, which articulate their need for self-transcendence—a dependable component in the dynamics of all south Indian politics—in terms of bhoga rather than, say, Brahminical values and Brahmin support. Bhoga comes to constitute a new, remarkably autonomous arena for transcendence, as we shall see in detail in chapter IV. Of course, the king still looks to the Brahmin, and sometimes states his deference; he still offers gifts. But it is no longer the old royal gift of land (*brahmadeya*) that assumes symbolic primacy in this culture. What the Nāyaka so conspicuously offers to the Brahmins, and to others, is food (*anna-dāna*)—on a vast scale, and with all the single-minded commitment that characterizes an act of ultimate symbolic importance, an act that defines the player in his ritual role.

We have already remarked, at several points, on the consistent Nāyaka interest in the subject of food. The *abhyudayamu* discussed above offers a stunning scene of royal feasting; and it is perhaps not by chance that surviving Nāyaka male portraits show the ruler or hero

with a conspicuous paunch.¹² The annadāna is the corresponding institutional expression of this fascination. Though other forms of gift and endowment (to Brahmins, temples, and mutts) did continue to exist right through the Marāṭhā period, their scale drastically diminished, while the primary cultural attention now attached unambiguously to the royal gift of food. Concomitant with this development in the actual content of the gift is the well-known change in the material forms used to record it: there is a dramatic decrease in the use of stone and copper-plate for donative inscriptions; the act of prestation, like its substance, takes on more fluid, less permanent contours.

This is part of the overall shift we are observing. Annadāna, we submit, is of a different order altogether than the older forms of royal *dāna*. Structured around bhoga, it has features of evanescence and, as we shall see, of potential (perhaps necessary) violation. It is generalized, less a matter of face-to-face interaction, creates no bonds of identity.¹³ Fairly complex organizational skills have to be brought into play to accomplish it on the scale that is usually sought. It does not require the alienation of landed property but does depend on ready access by the centre to massive fluid resources. We can see something of these latter features, as well as the enormous emotional and symbolic investment in the annadāna, in the following story about Vijayarāghava from the *Tañjāvūri āndhra rājula caritra*:

'He (the king) would eat breakfast only after 12,000 Brahmins had been fed, each day at sunrise, with the tastiest food. One year the rains were so heavy that, wherever one looked, it seemed that the cosmic deluge had come; a person could not even pass from one house to the next. There was no way to bring food from outside for cooking, and, once the fuel that had been stored was used up, it was impossible to go on (feeding the Brahmins). The officials in charge of this gift of food came to the king and said, 'Lord! Because of the ceaseless rains, the rivers have overflowed; no-one can leave his home. We are in trouble, because the firewood we had saved has now been exhausted. There is no way we can feed the Brahmins tomorrow. Let us stop until the rains

¹² See below, V.1.

¹³ Our thanks to Veena Das for discussion of this point, to which we return below.

end, when we can collect wood and resume as before'. The king was startled at these words, so harsh to his ears, and, rising, announced: 'In that case, neither I nor anyone in my palace will eat anything either'.

The officials shivered with fear . . . At the king's command, they dismantled old, two-storey houses in the town, tore out rafters, beams, boards, and cots, and used them to fuel the cooking-fires. For two or three days, the 12,000 Brahmins were fed without want. When the officials returned to the king to report that this wood, too, was gone, he ordered the palace treasury to be opened and its priceless garments to be brought out; these were soaked with oil and ghee from the royal kitchens and the city shops, set alight, and used for fuel. But as a result of this attempt, smoke enveloped the kitchens and, however hard the servants tried, they were unable to cook anything. The king kept to his heroic vow not to eat anything before the Brahmins were fed.

While this was going on, at Srirangam the nose-ring of the goddess became lost, and the temple manager had the temple officials and priests severely punished. The goddess then possessed an auspicious Brahmin wife and said (through her): 'Why are these innocent men being hurt? My devotee, Vijayarāghava, has been fasting along with the Brahmins because they couldn't be served quickly enough; so I went there to expedite the cooking in the kitchen. But the room was entirely filled with smoke. As I cleared my nose near a big cauldron for washing rice, the ring came off and fell into the cauldron'. When this became known, the manager released the officials and priests and hurried to inform (the king) Cokkanātha. With his permission, his men and the temple officials went to Tanjavur and informed Vijayarāghava. The latter was amazed, hastened himself to the kitchen, and ordered a search of the cauldron, where the nose-ring was, indeed, discovered. The king bowed down to the ring, pressed it to his eyes, placed it on his head, and wept tears of joy. (To atone for this 'offence', *aparādham*, Vijayarāghava then had the ring returned to Srirangam in a palankeen, together with twelve new, gem-inlaid rings and 24,000 *varāha* coins, as musicians and dancing-girls performed alongside.)¹⁴

This story is meant to show us Vijayarāghava at his characteristic best, as single-minded devotee and impassioned overseer of the anna-

¹⁴ TARC, pp. 46-8.

dāna; as usual for this text, however, it also fills in the picture, in this case by hinting at this king's quixotic and self-defeating side—witness the pathetic attempt to use ghee-soaked silks as firewood. For our present purposes, it is enough to observe that annadāna becomes the touchstone of royal character, the catalyst for emotive and dramatic excess, and even the proximate cause for divine intervention in the affairs of temple and state. Feeding Brahmins is no minor matter, no technical problem for the royal kitchens alone: it motivates and illuminates the machinery of Nāyaka kingship in its most self-conscious and determined modes.

In text after text, it is annadāna that constitutes the major boast, the essential claim to fame, of the political centre. When Vijayarāghava finds himself entertained by Varuṇa at the bottom of the sea, it is the Nāyaka's lavish feeding of Brahmins that his host chooses to celebrate—for news of it has travelled even to the god's watery domain.¹⁵ Cēmakūra Veṅkaṭakavi, court poet of Raghunātha, compares his royal patron to various classical exemplars such as Nala, Rāma, Arjuna—and Yudhisṭhira, whom the king resembles 'not only because of his truthful speech but through the fame of his gifts of food (*annasattrakhyāti*)'.¹⁶ The god Brahmā is asked to protect Vijayarāghava because this king has fed and bathed the Brahmins born 'in Brahmā's line'.¹⁷ And so on: the king makes his presence felt by feeding others—hence, in part, the obsessive quality that attaches to this royal pursuit. Even the Jesuit writers confirm, from their sober perspective, that we are not dealing with merely a literary flourish. Annadāna can shore up a shaky claim to the throne (in the way temple endowment was sometimes used in earlier ages):

The young king Chokkanātha came from Madura to Trichinopoly and gave a public banquet to the poor, who hastened in thousands from all the neighbouring countries. A vast plain, situated on the banks of the Kaveri,

¹⁵ *Hēmābjanāyikāsvayamvaramu*, p. 168; see below, V.1.

¹⁶ *Vijayavilāsamu* 1.27; see also 1.24: no other lord can match Raghunātha's prodigal expenditure on feeding Brahmins.

¹⁷ *Rājagōpālavilāsamu* 1.4. The theme is prominent outside the court as well: see, e.g., *Muttuttāṅṭavar tamiḷcaippāṭalkaḷ* 34.4, for annadāna at Cidambaram. And see discussion of the *Annadānamahānāṭakamu*, below V.3.

formed the dining hall. The plates of the country, that is to say banana leaves, were arranged in several rows. From distance to distance rose heaps of rice, around which were prepared divers condiments, according to Indian custom. Bands of men and women were entrusted with the distribution of food to the guests, each seated before his plate in divers parallel files. At the commencement of the repast, the prince arrived on horseback surrounded by his court. He proceeded along the space between the rows and was pleased to see the poor starving people eat.¹⁸

All this in the context of periodic famine, so graphically described by the missionaries: Here, too, the author dourly adds, 'The abundant relief distributed was not however adequate to the needs. Thousands of people perished of hunger and misery'.¹⁹

What is the meaning of this raising of annadāna to symbolic preeminence in late sixteenth-century south India? The shift is no less impressive or consistent than that from sacrifice, *yajña*, to endowment, *dāna*, in Pallava-Pāṇḍya times, a millenium earlier.²⁰ The changing paradigm doubtless expresses the changing context. Unlike *dāna* in its normative, land-based forms, annadāna is anonymous, almost non-committal. The recipient consumes the offering, like the Vedic sacrificial fire. The gift vanishes as it is given, leaving no residual, re-fashioned identity, no further claims on the donor, no binding web of bilateral relations, no ongoing support for the king from prestigious 'outsiders' like the Vaidika Brahmins of the brahmadeya grants. Transcendence is wholly within the rite, a function of consumption: there is no need to bring the *yajamāna*-patron back down from heaven, or to institute more mundane gifts (like the classical *dakṣhiṇā*). It is enough if the gift be consumed. Annadāna is remarkably self-contained. Here we may follow Veena Das in her typology of sacrificial modes, from a perspective of Mīmāṃsā exegesis. Her first category, connected with the verb *yaj*, is the generalized sacrifice honouring a deity without transfer of substance; this is clearly not the case of the annadāna. Nor is it properly in the third category, connected with $\sqrt{dā}$, 'to give'—the donation to a specifically targeted recipient, who is identified and partly formed, in a stable and ongoing relation, through the gift. Rather,

¹⁸ Satyanatha Aiyar (1956), pp. 78-9, citing Bertrand 3:129-30.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See Dirks (1976).

annadāna belongs in her second type, associated with the verb \sqrt{hu} , 'to offer an oblation', the stress being on the actual transfer of substance by fiery consumption.²¹ To feed a Brahmin at an annadāna is thus not unlike pouring homa offerings into the Vedic fire. In both cases, the offering is substantial, expendable, and liquid.

This 'liquidity'—food as *dravya*, 'flowing' substance, i.e. ultimately cash—must be seen in the light of the wider symbolic transformations of economics in our period. As we turn to this topic, let us note two final features specific to the gift of food. If consumption of liquid offerings represents a reversion of sorts from the classical models of royal dāna to a homa-like sacrificial paradigm, it nevertheless averts the perennial issue of sacrificial violence. Annadāna is a peaceful rite from beginning to end. We might define this as a shift from violence—still implicit in dāna²²—to violation, the dependable shadow of all philosophies of bhoga. The anonymous Brahmin recipients of food can turn out to be parodic caricatures, as we shall see. Secondly, the ideology of bhoga takes us far beyond the latent Vedic models to which we have been referring in at least one crucial way. Where the Mīmāṃsā may read sacrifice as *tyāga*, a form of renunciation aimed at making the sacrificer over as an incarnation of pure, object-less desire (*prīti*,²³ the gift of food is sensual, earthy, happily centred in the human body as it is (not as it potentially could be). Not only does desire, in this context, have an object, but this object is unabashedly bound up with the satisfaction of physical cravings, and with the experience of delight. The lingering descriptions of sumptuous curries in works such as the *Annadānamahānātakamu* and the *Raghunāthanayakābhudayamu* bear witness to this fascination with the hedonic side of ritualized eating. Transcendence, too, can have a taste.

2. THE SPENDTHRIFT ŚŪDRA KING

Food, viewed as liquid substance, is the right gift in a world awash with fluid resources. Never before in south India did floating forms of

²¹ Das (1983), pp. 450-1.

²² See Shulman (1985a).

²³ Das (1983), p. 448.

wealth, including an increasing volume of coinage,²⁴ play so definite a role in the projected images of the political domain. Suddenly, it is money that makes a kingdom (and a king). Not money alone, of course: a veil of rhetorical proprieties and very real ethical concerns (such as the necessary vertical relation to the overlord) often hides and softens the stark claims of accumulating wealth. But the motivating force of liquid resources is usually clear enough: we have seen how Nāgama Nāyaka reverses the classical argument for power by arguing that his hoard of money makes it imperative for him, or for his son, to have a kingdom. This, indeed, is the Nāyaka pattern. In the retrospective vision of the *Rāyavācakamu*, a late seventeenth century text from the Madurai region, the founding of the imperial centre at Vijayanagara itself follows the same logic: the sage Vidyāranya acquires a treasure that he donates to the first king (995.6 million in cash, *dravyam*; 40 million in precious ornaments, 60 million in jewels). First money, then a city and, finally, a great king.²⁵ Clearly, we are dealing with an image of origins that suits a different kind of elite than the land-based warriors who created the great medieval states in the south.

We know something of this elite and of the circumstances of their migration southward from the Deccan into Tamil Nadu, from the late fourteenth century on.²⁶ Many of them followed on the heels of Redḍi and other Telugu-speaking agriculturists, drawn to the dry and mixed zones in the far south of the Tamil country. In Tirunelveli and Ramnad, miniature Nāyaka kingdoms gradually coalesced around successful military adventurers and their clans. The Kaveri delta, by contrast, appears to have absorbed an alien Telugu elite as a superstructure set in place over a relatively stable and conservative agrarian system. But in both Tanjavur and Madurai, the real business of state-building was largely in the hands of a newly prominent set of Telugu castes distinguished by a common set of attributes: they are relatively mobile, not

²⁴ On Nāyaka coinage, see Nagaswamy (1981), pp. 163-79. Nagaswamy notes the irregularity of Nāyaka issues, which leads him to doubt 'whether there was any effective control over the mints' (p. 161).

²⁵ *Rāyavācakamu*, p. 24. Cf. *Sumatiśatakamu* 108: 'A man may be of low caste, / he may be a fool, / he may be a bastard, / but when he has money, / he is king.' Contrast this to Nāgama's complaints against the Pāṇḍya, in Section II.2.

²⁶ Ludden (1985), pp. 50-2, 69-75; above, II.1.

bonded existentially to the land; in terms of the traditional south Indian system of social categorization, they are 'left-hand' Śūdras with strong links to trade and with entrepreneurial and organizational skills; they also have a marked heroic and martial orientation, in contrast with other trading groups such as the Kōmaṭis and Ceṭṭis. These left-Śūdra groups—often referred to by the cover-title 'Balija', but also including Bōyas, left-hand Gollas, Gavaras, and others—were first mobilized politically by Krishṇadevarāya in the Vijayanagara heyday. By Nāyaka times, with the collapse of Krishṇadevarāya's empire, the politicization of the lower range of the social universe has produced a flexible, fighting elite hungry for new horizons. They are, in a sense, left-hand collectivities oriented to the right, toward power and regal identity to be won along with new lands. Above all, they are, in the formative stage in the south, capable of transferring wealth from one place to another; their vision is one of movement and expansion, through a combination of Kshatriya and Vaiśya traits. We have already met this blend of mercantile and military features in Venkaṭādhvarin's depiction of the Senji warrior elite;²⁷ the apparent incongruity, which constitutes a new departure in the ethos of south Indian statehood, becomes a formative element in the evolution of the dominant Nāyaka structures—replete with further incongruities, superimpositions, and incompatibilities—and in the elaboration of themes and attitudes on the level of cultural sensibility. These Balija fighters are not afraid of kings: some stories speak of their killing kings who interfered with their affairs.²⁸ Indeed, the dependence is all in the other direction, for we know that the Nāyaka states, and Madurai in particular, relied on newly institutionalized Balija tax-farming for perhaps the bulk of their income. We may also recall again the persistent traditions internal to this community identifying the Madurai Nāyaka kings themselves as Balija in origin, while other sources speak of marital links between Balijas and the Senji royal Nāyakas.²⁹

These mobile and aggressive Śūdra traders present us with an ideology which colours the inner life of the Nāyaka courts. For one thing, it is now good to be a Śūdra: Nāyaka-period poets constantly

²⁷ Above, I.1.

²⁸ Thurston (1909), 3:117-18; Shulman (1985), p. 84; and see below.

²⁹ *Nārāyaṇa Dēśāi*; Thurston (1909), 1:134.

praise the Śūdra origins of their kings. Thus Cēmakūra Veṅkaṭakavi, himself a Śūdra:

Born from the feet of incarnate Hari,
reaching the head of Hara,
this goddess (Gaṅgā) is celebrated
from tip to toe:
may she, together with *her* lord,
grant perfect lordship
to King Raghunātha, son of Acyutendra,
this precious jewel of a Nāyaka,
scion of a family that shares her place of birth.³⁰

Like the Gaṅgā, the Śūdras emerge from the feet of the god, as the Veda itself proclaims in the famous Purusha hymn (RV 10.90). The Nāyakas can thus claim Gaṅgā as a sister, and their genealogies never hesitate to appropriate her prestigious qualities for themselves:

Virtuous Cevvappa (founder of the Tanjavur line),
delight of the earth,
was born in that pure and brilliant class
(*vimalaśrīruciravarṇamunā*)
that has Gaṅgā of the lotus face,
beloved of God,
for a sister.³¹

Vimalaśrīruciravarṇa: the Śūdra belongs to a class that is 'pure and brilliant', rich with regal splendour, *śrī*—a nice inversion of the classical *varṇa* scheme. Viṣṇu's feet are now, it seems, the very best place from which to be born, especially in the case of a family, or a social class, destined to rule. Note, too, along with this implicit elevation of the feet, the stress on the body as a whole unit: Gaṅgā is 'celebrated from tip to toe'.³² This is a dynasty that stands proudly on its feet, on the ground, both mythically and in terms of the kings' visible physical presence.

³⁰ *Vijayavilāsamu* 8. The Śūdra claims birth from the feet of Viṣṇu in line with the famous Vedic image of the *Puruṣasūkta* (RV 10.90). And see *Bhīmeśvarapurāṇa* of Śrīnātha. 1.31, for a similar notion of 'pure' (*pāvana*) Śūdra birth.

³¹ *Vijayavilāsamu* 9. Cf. *Raghunāthābhyaṅga* of Rāmabhadra, 6.2-3.

³² The stress on the feet may itself reflect an image of sensuous physicality as opposed to the renunciatory associations of the head.

Such rhetorical stress on the purity and prestige of Śūdra origins goes back to Kākatīya models in the eastern Deccan.³³ But by the time it reaches the Nāyaka courts of Tamil Nadu, it forms part of a more generalized pattern of subversion: not only is the ancient varṇa model of social hierarchy stood on its head, but concomitant antinomian themes begin to surface. Some of these will be studied in detail in a subsequent chapter, but at this point we may mention one of the central foundation-myths of Baliya politics, which beautifully illuminates the symbolic departure from earlier royal representations. The Baliya caste-*purāṇa* speaks of an annual ritual referred to, somewhat bombastically, as 'The Amusing Game of Crushing King Bhallāṇa's Head' (*bhallāṇarāya śiraḥkhaṇḍana krīḍāvinōdulu*). The complex story told to explain the ritual is, baldly summarized, as follows:

King Bhallāṇarāya, a hedonist, ruling Sindhurakatakamu in the Kannada land, had a Baliya minister (mantrin) with a very beautiful wife. One night while she was reading the *Virāṭaparvan*, an ascetic came to her and prophesied that she would become a queen. The king, coveting her, engineered the minister's death at the hands of bandits. That very night he came to embrace the widow, but she cried out and threw a stool (*pīṭha*) at him. The king was hit, and she disappeared.

It was the time of the Navarātri festival; Baliya children were celebrating by carrying bows and arrows, singing heroic songs, and recalling the ancient *Mahābhārata* of the heroes. From behind the Gunguntla temple, the widow—a *mahāśakti*—called out, 'The Baliyas are lost; their bows and arrows have become playthings for children, and they have gone to the nether world'. The Baliyas gathered in the temple, and one asked the *śakti* who she was. 'I am a *śakti* who wants the head of an evil man, the head of the man who took my husband's head and dishonoured me', she answered. And, striking her head against a stone until blood flowed, she gave the Baliya heroes forehead-marks of blood (*raktatilakamu*).

The Baliyas were determined to take revenge on the king; the young fighters wanted to go to war against him at once, but one of the older

³³ As observed by Cynthia Talbot (personal communication, November, 1989). The Redḍi kings of Kondavidu follow suit: see the passage from Śrīnātha cited in n. 30 above.

men suggested a different plan: 'We don't have to fight a war if we don't want the kingdom; all we need is his head'. They swore an oath to bring the king's head to the widow within seven days; failing that, they would cut off their own heads in her presence.

On the morning of the seventh day, a barber from the court of the Vijayanagara emperor, Praudhadevarāya, arrived to shave the evil king. Once inside the king's chamber, he cut off the king's head, put it in a basket, and escaped by leaping from a window onto his horse. Together with the Balija heroes, he presented the *śakti* with Bhallāṇa's head. 'We must honour the king', she said—and proceeded to kick him with her feet, clad in sandals; to plaster his head with donkey's excrement, to strike him with a broomstick, and to spit on him. Then, claiming to have been polluted by touching the head with her feet, she ordered a fire of tamarind logs to be lit and jumped into it after exhorting the Balijas: 'Never serve anyone. A life of serving others is the work of a dog. I am going to my husband; never forget your sister'. She went up to heaven in the flames; Gonuguntla became, from that day, a sacred place for the Balijas, and they received the title (*biruda*), 'Those who amuse themselves at the game of crushing King Bhallāṇa's head.'³⁴

It is a dense tale, closely related to other myths about a 'Ballālarāya' current in the northern Tamil country,³⁵ but also suited to the Balija ethos with its curious anomalies—especially the mix of heroism with trickery. The story crosses the boundaries between what has been called the 'martial' and the 'sacrificial' epic-types, in Andhra folk tradition:³⁶ here the Balija warriors are still properly heroic, but the heroine follows a self-sacrificing role in which cunning and trickery have a part. In effect, this produces a new type of hero—active, martial, but nonetheless hidden behind the outraged woman, who sanctions deception in the interests of achieving revenge. This focus on revenge is itself striking: at issue in the story is not the protection of land or property but honour, *māna*—as in other Nāyaka texts.³⁷ Still, this is a

³⁴ *Nārāyaṇa Dēśai* (n.d.), pp. 299-315.

³⁵ See Meyer (1984), pp. 184-201; Hildebeitel (1988), pp. 355-62; Shulman (1985), pp. 332-9.

³⁶ Narayana Rao (1986), pp. 131-64; and see below VII.1.

³⁷ Thus Vijayarāghava goes to war to protect his family's honour in the context

myth about involvement in the political order—if one likes, another Navarātri myth generative of kingship in relation to the goddess, like the Vijayanagara Navarātri rituals which have been studied by Stein and Dirks.³⁸ So we have a Baliya kingship emerging out of injustice, the thirst for revenge, the translation of wronged woman into violent goddess—a common south Indian prototype—and the ritual humiliation of a crowned and sinful king. It is this last theme which is most eloquent for our present purpose: nowhere, it seems, is the Baliya inversion of values so symbolically salient as in this instance where feet triumph over the abused, devalued, violated head. It is worth recalling that this attack on the head is both an annual ritual and, according to our text, the defining epithet of all the Baliya warriors. Note, too, how the entire tale of symbolic inversion is neatly related to the outstanding classical record of such experience—the *Virāṭaparvan* of the Sanskrit epic, here the heroine's proper bedtime reading.³⁹

Such inversion is not always the norm in the Nāyaka context. In general, we would perhaps do better to think simply in terms of a newly emergent, alternate structure, based on the sometimes incongruous combination of hitherto separate symbolic features (the militant merchant), which replaces the ideological paradigms of the classical Brahminical tradition as well as the pragmatic political structures known from earlier periods in the south. In Nāyaka politics, we see that the Śūdra now proudly claims the summit. Along with the recessive role taken by the older dharmic ideology, with its images of the king as guardian of the traditional hierarchy, we observe explicit new claims for Śūdra superiority and for the subordination of Brahmins, among others, to the non-Brahmin king. No longer is the king the last, desperate prop of the one-legged cow of dharma, in the Kali Age; these images have been superseded by those of a new golden age, in which the royal exemplar literally pours out streams of wealth in various fluid forms to anyone who seeks his help.⁴⁰ In Nāyaka litera-

of an unacceptable marriage-proposal for his daughter from the Madurai Nāyakas: *TARC*, pp. 48-55; see below, VIII.1.

³⁸ Stein (1980), pp. 384-92; Dirks (1987), pp. 90-2, 98-9, 166-7; also Fuller and Logan (1985).

³⁹ On *Virāṭa* and kingship, see Shulman (1985), pp. 256-76.

⁴⁰ E.g. *Vijayavilāsamu* 1.25.

ture, the Brahmin's presence often tends to the satirical; and even the stock figure of the Brahmin mantrin, such as Govinda Dīkshita at Tanjavur, fails to reproduce the prestige and centrality of say, Yaugandhara at Pratāparudra's legendary court. Clearly, the Dumontian portrayal of a hierarchical order of ever more encompassing forms culminating in the Brahmin (with an encompassed, even 'secularized' Kshatriya ruler beneath him) simply cannot describe Nāyaka society or the political order it produced. Here it is the Śūdra king who is primary, and who proudly asserts his overriding prestige—to the point of claiming divinity, as we shall see; the Brahmin serves this ruler without introducing, as a result, the strident note of ultimate conflict, as the dharma texts would demand; the hierarchy of service is relatively stable and underwritten by economic logic, although parodic counter-vision is also present within the self-vision of the courtly elite. The Nāyaka model is a new one, not rooted in the dharma texts or varṇa-ideology, not articulated primarily in terms of purity or of conventional Hindu social ontology. The king rules, or seeks to rule, as master and lord, a wealthy and mobile, individualized semi-divinity.

This is not to say that, for all the shift in the structural location of kingship in this period, the Nāyakas produced a stable, radical, and consistent breakthrough in the conceptualization of the king. There are hesitations, as well as cumulative residues from the past: we know, from internal as well as Jesuit sources, that Vijayarāghava, for example, performed the *hiranyagarbha* ceremony—in which the king is 'born', with Brahmin mediation, from the womb of a golden cow.⁴¹ The

⁴¹ Satyanatha Aiyar (1956), p. 81, citing Proença of 1665: 'After having been defeated and fleeced by Chokkalinga, . . . he (Vijayarāghava) knew no more how to spend his glorious hours of leisure. His Brahmins persuaded him that he had nothing better to do than to be born again. Immediately the work started: a colossal cow was cast and the king shut himself up in her womb. After many ceremonies which it would be too long to describe, the wonder was revealed: the animal of bronze (sic) brought forth another animal quite alive. The wife of the great Brahman, guru of the Nāyaka, acted as midwife; she received him in her arms, lulled him on her knees, caressed him on her bosom and, to complete the farce, the big infant sought to imitate the cries and wailings of a real new-born. What was not laughable in that comedy was the seriousness assumed by the actors. The spectators laughed in their sleeves, the neighbours laughed all aloud, but those who should have laughed most heartily were the Brahmins, to whom the cere-

ceremony, mocked by its Jesuit observer, speaks to the older ideology of purity to be gained through subservience to Brahminical norms. Indeed, in general it seems that the Balija royal model never went far enough in the search for autonomy; that at many points the insecurity of the newly dominant and wealthy elite kept the potential for social violation and far-reaching restructuring in check. If these left-hand Śūdras were unable to stay within the traditional bounds—if indeed, their experience fashioned symbolic forms of striking novelty, including extreme inversions and transgressions—they were still unable or unwilling to violate the traditional order *in toto*, or even to forgo any of the well-worn devices for the display of power and regal identity. Even an upstart, non-conventional Balija will seek, on occasion, symbolic rebirth from the sacred golden cow, just as he will continue to endow new Brahmin villages. Yet it remains clear that these are kings of a different pattern, developing in a very different direction than either the medieval Tamil or Vijayanagara royal paradigms would allow. We are dealing with an innovative, adventurous, non-ascriptive elite disposing of fluid resources on a scale that allowed for, indeed demanded, considerable experimentation in the political domain.

What is the economic logic hinted at above? As we by now expect, money counts. The Śūdra-king has it, and he must spend it. Never invest it—that is a tactic for temples, and (in almost surreptitious ways) for Cettis and Kōmatīs, with their inescapable public image of miserliness. The Balijas and their royal associates believe in spending with a flourish, in one of two directions—either in dharmic works, as we saw in the story of Nāgama Nāyaka and his son, or in the multifarious modes of bhoga. This conceptualization of the role of wealth is beautifully articulated in a popular Telugu verse (also known in a Sanskrit variant):

dānamu bhōgamu nāsamu
pūnikatō mūḍugatulu bhuvī dhanamunakun
dānamu bhōgamun eragani
hīnuni dhanamunaku bhuvī tṛtīyamu posagun

mony brought enormous sums of money.' The same ritual occasion is referred to in the *Raghunāthanāyakābhyudayamu* 1.87-91 (p. 4).

Giving gifts, enjoyment, loss:
 there are only these three paths
 for money
 on this earth.
 The ignorant fool
 who does not take
 the first two paths
 will see his money take the third.⁴²

Clearly, this is not a culture that consciously encourages either accumulation or investment; even Ceṭṭis, who had such concepts,⁴³ refrained from articulating them as an ideology, preferring to appear in the royal mould of donors and enjoyers.⁴⁴ The great exemplars of wealth—both kings and merchant-princes—project an image of uncalculating, profligate generosity to poets, hungry Brahmins, courtesans, deities, and, above all, their own insatiate bodies. (There is some reason to read this last list as an ascending series, in order of cultural importance.) Put more cautiously, it might be argued that investment, by such figures, is habitually disguised as enjoyment. One spends in order to substantiate an identity, to fuse with the symbol, to be all that the dense web of family, caste, court and collective fantasy demands that one be.

Yet none of this really reaches the heart of the problem posed to us by the centering of Nāyaka court-ideology around sensory 'enjoyment'. The dharmic component of consumption—endowment, public works, charity of various kinds—is understandable enough, especially in light of the continuities with earlier ages. And we can also see a logic in the proclaimed preeminence of the Sūdra king, arising as he does from the background of mobile and aggressive *nouveaux riches* among the Baliyas and other left-hand, non-Brahmin castes. The symbolic importance of money makes excellent sense in this rapidly expanding economy. But why is bhoga the self-evident *raison d'être* of court and king, as well as of devotee and his god? It is not too much to speak of

⁴² The Sanskrit version, recorded in Antoine (1954), 2:141, goes: *dānam bhogo nāśas tisro gatayo bhavanti vittasya/ yo na dadāti na bhunkte tasya tṛtīyā gatir nāśaḥ*.

⁴³ Rudner (1987).

⁴⁴ See below, VII.2 on Cītakāti and Avaci Tippayya Seṭṭi (Śrīnātha's patron of the early fifteenth century).

an existential investment in enjoyment, repeatedly manifest in the literature of this period. We have already hinted at the surprising linkage between bhoga and notions of transcendence, of connection with the divine and the ultimately real. To understand this set of notions, which underlie the role of bhoga in Nāyaka-period kingship, we must explore certain basic issues of Nāyaka anthropology—the implicit conceptualization of the human body, the emerging problem of the individual and his awareness, the changing balance in the relations between humanity and the gods, and the pervasive themes of violation, physical mutilation, linguistic fragmentation, and regeneration. These themes will occupy us in coming chapters; first, however, we examine the functioning of resources within the state system that produced the visions and symbolic forms discussed above.

3. RESOURCES AND THEIR CIRCULATION

(i) Consuming centres

The Nāyaka period encourages us to reverse the usual perspective on the mobilization and use of resources: given the constantly reiterated emphasis on bhoga and dravya, it is tempting to view the circulation of material objects in the economy from the perspective of consumption rather than of production. Where did the centres of consumption and redistribution of resources lie, and how did they mediate the flows of 'liquid wealth' that so obsess writers of the period?

In seeking an answer to this question, it is only natural to turn to the court-towns of the Nāyakas themselves, as well as their smaller-scale imitations; for these have a characteristic flavour and ambience about them in the period. Here, for instance, is the vision of the northern Tamil town of Velur, sometime residence of the Aravīdu rulers of the last dynasty of Vijayanagara in the early seventeenth century, from the pen of a Flemish traveller Jaques de Coutre:

The next day, which was Easter-day, we arrived in the city of Belur, which is also walled, with two walls of stone, and is more than two leagues in circuit, with very deep moats full of water. It seemed to be almost two cities. I have never in Europe seen a city that was so fortified and which had such lovely walls and bastions as this one. We prize the cities of

Antwerp and Flanders, but neither can compare in their fortifications or loveliness to this city.⁴⁵

In his travels in the years 1610-11, Coutre also visited the towns of Madurai, Tiruccirappalli, Senji and Arni, all of which struck him forcefully by the strength of their fortifications, and their dominating presence in the Tamil countryside. Unlike the temple *gopuram*—the ‘pagode’ pointing skyward that had seemed to capture the quintessence of the Tamil landscape since the early medieval period—the walled and fortified urban centre became symptomatic of a *new* political and cultural order. To the Jesuit Baltasar da Costa writing in the 1640s, the most tangible symbol of the Nāyaka of Madurai’s power lay therefore in his two chief fortress-towns. The one, Madurai, he wrote, though ‘very vast, with strong walls and a number of sumptuous pagodes’ did not overly impress him, for ‘most of its houses are built with clay, and covered with thatch’. Not so Tiruccirappalli, which for much of the seventeenth century effectively remained the political capital of the Madurai Nāyakas. Of this city, da Costa writes:

It is not so densely populated as Madurai, but is richer and more attractive in appearance on account of the nearness of the Cavary and Colaram rivers. The fortress is the best in all the country. In addition to its two outer walls that are defended by more than one hundred and thirty crenellated towers, each within bowshot of the other, it has a fine ditch cut in the live rock, and a citadel built on top of that magnificent rock and protected by a wall that is so high that the steps leading up to the top are no fewer than five hundred.⁴⁶

Between Velur, so admired by Coutre, and Tiruccirappalli, equally eulogized by Da Costa, lay other towns, some the creation of Nāyaka political power, others which predated the Nāyakas as centres of importance but which nevertheless had undergone transformations

⁴⁵ Coutre’s account is preserved in the *Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid*, Ms. 2780, ‘La Vida de Jaques de Coutre’. A published translation in Dutch exists: Verberckmoes and Stols (1988). For the passage on Velur, see p. 166; fl. 147-47v of the manuscript. Compare Toy (1965), pp. 96-98.

⁴⁶ ‘Relação Annual da missão de Maduré desde Outubro de 644 até o de 646’, by Baltasar da Costa, 14th October 1646, published in translation in Saulière (1964), pp. 89-105, especially p. 92.

under Nāyaka rule. These towns, together with the temple-complexes often located in the vicinity, were—as our air-borne gandharvas of the mid seventeenth century have already made clear—the signposts used by contemporary writers to orient themselves. Doubtless they were given an unusual importance by European observers of the period, many of whom had lived through the costly and sanguine wars of that century and the preceding one in Europe, and hence almost subconsciously returned to their military potential. But it is equally certain that even towns of great antiquity underwent a facelift under the Nāyakas, and became far more clearly oriented to performing military functions and resisting siege forces. Tanjavur, the capital of the Cōlas, and from the early sixteenth century the seat of a Nāyaka dynasty, was one such centre. Unfortunately, European descriptions of it are often somewhat obscure and even inaccurate in the period (as a comparison with archaeological evidence demonstrates), but we may accept at least the *spirit* of such descriptions as that of the Icelander Jón Ólafsson in the early 1620s:

This royal city Travanzour (*sic*) is large and of a great circumference with eleven gateways, each further in than the last, and at each gateway were two elephants, *filar* as the Indians call them, and two guards who direct them for whatever purpose they may be needed.⁴⁷

An earlier visitor to the same city, the Jesuit Manuel Barradas, adds a rather different perspective, stressing that the fortified character of the city served to separate and distinguish it from the surrounding countryside. Arriving at the Nāyakas' court-town from Nagapattinam by way of Tiruvarur, Barradas writes of:

... passing through infinite villages, which are within sight and at times even in earshot of one another, with none of them having walls or tiles but instead adobe constructions covered with straw, save for the pagodes, which are all made of stone and lime. We arrived at Tanjaor, court of the Naique, which is next to his fortress, and surrounded by strong walls and fine tower-shaped outposts, and with its own moat full of water all around, save at the doors. From a distance of half a league before the city, we travelled on a very broad road, lined with trees on one side and the

⁴⁷ Temple and Anstey (1932), pp. 15-16. For a more accurate description, see Toy (1965), pp. 7-9.

other, which had been planted one next to the other, so that they give perpetual shade to the travellers, and which continue to the suburbs of the city, which are spread out in every direction; here we rested and remained for three days in some houses of pleasure of the Naique, which he ordered placed at our disposal.⁴⁸

But whatever the claims of Tanjavur, transformed into an urban centre in the style of the seventeenth century, or Tiruccirappalli (for which Barradas too, like Da Costa, is all admiration), no centre could claim to epitomize the Nāyaka era as much as Senji, further to the north, set in the midst of far more forbidding country.

It is in the second half of the sixteenth century that Senji was given its definitive shape, and only after the 1580s and more particularly in the reign there of the Nāyaka Muttu Krishṇappa that we have an opportunity to see it as it appeared to visitors. Besides Coutre, who gives us no more than a cursory glimpse, the other easily accessible account of Senji, its fortifications and internal structure, is that of the Jesuit *visitador* Nicolau Pimenta, who sojourned in the northern Tamil city as the sixteenth century drew to its close.⁴⁹ But more evocative even than Pimenta's description is one by the Dutchman Samuel Kindt, who in late 1614 or early 1615 spent almost three weeks in Senji as a representative of the Dutch East India Company. Quoted here at some length is Kindt's description:

'Christopo naicq of Gengier under whose government our factory Tyrepopelier lies, holds his normal residence in the town Gengier, lying some two days' journey to the west, inland from our above-mentioned factory. It is a very considerably populated place situated about the palace of the Naicq. The town lies in a large area more or less as large as Amsterdam, and it has to the south-west a fresh-running river; it is surrounded by mighty double-strengthened walls of blue granite (*arduin steen*), and has besides a stronghold with four great rocky outcrops, on three of which lie three considerable castles, and on the fourth a beautiful pagode, the first with two, the second with four, and the third with seven walls, each wall having an especially great door built in the same way from

⁴⁸ Manuel Barradas, 'Discrição da Cidade de Columbo', (*sic*) in Gomes de Brito (1735), pp. 253-307, especially p. 290.

⁴⁹ For Pimenta's account, see Purchas (1905), Vol. X, pp. 205-22.

blue granite, and the doors are always guarded by strong watches. It is very difficult to get to the top of the castle on account of the frightening height (*schrickelijck hoochste*), there being only one set of carved granite steps, which are hewn from the fast rock. The court of the Naicq stands at the feet of two of these castles, and is truly magnificent, and is also so strong that it might well be a strong fortress in itself. Outside the town lies still another fort atop a great stone hillock, which like the others is meant to protect the principal passage into the town, in addition to the above-mentioned castles. It has lovely tanks and natural fountains made from the rock, with fine fresh water, and also splendid orchards with diverse fruits and lovely pleasure-houses (*spelehuisen*) of the Naicq, which are protected by a few cannon . . .⁵⁰

The construction of such elaborate and extensive fortified centres in this period was evidently no accident. In this activity, we can sense the coalescing of several processes. First, as numerous writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth century noted, it was a characteristic of vaḍuga settlement all over the Tamil country to wall their centres, if not with stone and lime, then with mud; and to some like the Italian Jesuit Alessandro Valignano, this set the Telugu warrior-cultivator apart from the original inhabitants of the Tamil country, making them in his eyes more 'European', and hence more worthy of respect.⁵¹ If the pālaiyam was the focus of rural expansion and the colonization of new lands, the court-town was seen in turn as a sort of super-pālaiyam, to be defined (or redefined) accordingly in its layout. But equally, the new form given to urban space served to set it apart from the countryside far more definitively than had been the case in earlier epochs, and was perhaps also a symbol of the growing distance of the urban-based court from, and its power over, the economy from which it derived resources.⁵²

For, together with the growth of these fortified towns, of which we have listed and described only the very largest and most prominent

⁵⁰ ARA, OB, VOC. 1062, fls. 41-42v, 'Corte descriptie van de vier Nederlantsche comptoiren op de Custe Choromandel van Samuel Kint'. Compare this description with the plan in Michell (1991), showing the three forts of Krishnagiri, Rajagiri and Candrayandrug in Senji.

⁵¹ Valignano (1944), p. 81.

⁵² Cf. Stein (1989a); Stein (1982), pp. 452-7.

(but of which smaller-scale replicas mushroomed not merely on the Coromandel plain, but inland in Salem, Dharmapuri and Coimbatore), there grew up a formidable and cosmopolitan set of fighting-forces, whose presence in the Nāyakas' court-towns was emphatically underlined by their conspicuous position in daily court ritual. Thus, Kindt's description of Senji speaks of the constant stream of warriors who filed through the Nāyaka's chambers on any given day, as well as the cavalymen, elephants and foot-soldiers who were to be found in his town.⁵³ Da Costa, describing the court of Tirumala Nāyaka of Madurai is more graphic still:

Almost every day he appears on the terrace surrounded by his courtiers, while in front of them his elephants are drawn up in two rows, the space between them being occupied by three or four hundred Turks (*Turcos*), who form his bodyguard. When he comes out of the fortress to visit some pagodes, as he is wont to do on days of festivals, he is surrounded with great pomp. Sometimes he rides in a palanquin, at other times he mounts an enormous elephant . . . Next come the elephants in a long file, mounted by his nobles and chief captains, preceded by the arms and insignia of the Nāyaka. Then the cavalry and the rest of the troops follow.⁵⁴

As we have seen, this aspect of Nāyaka daily ritual, involving the passage through the city in procession, is also well represented in visual and literary texts of the period.

Stylistically, the Nāyaka political order, of which the most powerful physical manifestations were the enormously fortified court-town and its cosmopolitan soldiery, was replicated by slightly later polities as well. In the Ramanathapuram of Vijaya Raghunātha (Kilavan) Setupati (r. 1674-1710), an Abyssinian bodyguard (including several eunuchs) was formed, and the Marava ruler also created elaborate fortifications around his capital, such as a stone outer wall eight metres high and one and a half metres thick, surrounded by a moat.⁵⁵ The ruler

⁵³ ARA, OB, VOC. 1062, 'Corte descriptie', fl. 42-42v. On Salem and other regions in interior Tamil Nadu, see Murton (1983).

⁵⁴ Da Costa, 'Relação Anual', pp. 92-3.

⁵⁵ See Kadhivel (1977), p. 25; on the Abyssinians, see ARA, OB, VOC. 1420, fl. 542, letter from Joan van Vliet, et al. at Tuticorin to Laurens Pijl at Colombo, dated 13 November 1686; also ARA, OB, VOC. 1605, fls. 1092-93, report of the VOC employee Arasu, January 1698.

of another little kingdom that came into being as Nāyaka power waned, namely the Kaḷḷar-dominated polity of Pudukkottai, also constructed a substantial fort in his capital (though the walls of this were destroyed following a military reversal in the 1730s), and built up a formidable fighting force comprising not only Kaḷḷars but also Rājputs, Marāṭhās, and Rauts from the Telugu country.⁵⁶

The significance of these dual activities—of military-related construction and of the creation of forces, often through the giving of service tenures and fiscal rights to warrior-leaders—should not be underestimated. But neither should they obscure the fact that other construction activity also continued apace, and may indeed have expanded, in the Nāyaka period. Burton Stein's analysis of data from the 1961 Census of India volumes on Tamil Nadu temples demonstrates that temple-building clearly expanded after 1450, the first phase of Telugu warrior penetration of the Tamil countryside, and still more so after 1550, when two of the major Nāyaka states (Tanjavur and Madurai) had come into being. His figures suggest the following picture:⁵⁷

Temple Construction in Tamil Nadu

<i>Period</i>	<i>Tondai- mandalam</i>	<i>Naduvil- nadu</i>	<i>Kongu- nadu</i>	<i>Pandya- nadu</i>	<i>Total</i>
1300-1450	61	9	6	103	179
1450-1550	53	56	99	123	331
1550-1650	111	111	152	252	626
1650-1750	181	156	260	302	899
Total	406	332	517	780	2035

Besides these temples, which were built *de novo*, we may imagine the existence of additional activity surrounding the extension and modification of existing temple structures and complexes. Carol Breckenridge has written in this context of 'the gradual emergence of a storage economy', and of the building in temple-sites such as Tirupati, Srirangam, Simhacalam and Madurai of elaborate storehouses for the hoard-

⁵⁶ Dirks (1987), p. 163.

⁵⁷ Stein (1980), pp. 456-9.

ing of grain;⁵⁸ many of these extensions to existing temple structures took place in the Nāyaka period. But one also suspects that the nature of the temple's role in the economy, both as consumer and mediator, had begun to undergo a change. The numbers collated by Stein tell a story, but by no means the whole story. We are aware from his data that the expansion in temple construction over the four and a half centuries from 1300 to 1750 was accompanied by a change in the relative importance of the deities to which these were consecrated. If, in the earlier period, Śiva temples had dominated, their share in *new* temple construction declined substantially over the centuries under consideration; and on the other hand, Amman and Gaṇeśa temples increased in relative importance from phase to phase of fresh construction.

It is possible that this shift in the relative importance given to different deities reflects not so much a generalized shift in forms of worship as a shift in the character of patronage to temple-construction. We are aware from Stein's earlier work on the Tirupati temple that after a peak in the second quarter of the sixteenth century, monetary endowments to the temple by 'state donors' declined, and were instead replaced by donations from 'local residents and merchants'.⁵⁹ Equally, we are aware that from the mid sixteenth century, temple inscriptions in Tamilnadu decline substantially in number, and that in the high Nāyaka period (which is to say, the early seventeenth century) temple inscriptions linking the great Nāyaka lineages to these religious establishments are extremely rare.⁶⁰ What this suggests, on the one hand, is that the extent of temple patronage in financial terms (for it is with these relations that the inscriptions largely concern themselves) by the Nāyakas and their intimates had declined; it is possible, therefore, that the change in the relative importance of specific deities reflects a new, more 'popular' and less conspicuous group of financial supporters for temple construction. On the other hand, it is useful to recall that the Nāyakas actively sought to widen the religious bases of their support by spreading their donative activities outside the ambit of Hindu

⁵⁸ Breckenridge (1985a), p. 47.

⁵⁹ Stein (1980), pp. 430-1; also Stein (1960).

⁶⁰ See the compendium of inscriptions in Rangacharya (1919).

religious institutions; we hear, for instance, of land-grants made by the Nāyakas of Tanjavur to Catholic churches in Nagapattinam, while the still-pervasive legend that links Acyutappa Nāyaka of Tanjavur to the land-grant on which the Naguru *dargah* of Sayyid ‘Abd al-Qādir Shah al-Ḥamīd (1502-70) is built, is a useful reminder of the fact that Nāyaka states sought legitimacy through a variety of mechanisms, and had to placate diverse client groups.⁶¹

The building of fortress-towns and temples represents, of course, only two of the most conspicuous ways of orienting a consuming economy, and defining grids through which commodities would flow. These commodities flowed, first, to feed the demands of those engaged in the process of construction itself, and later to meet the requirements of those resident in the urban centres or temple-related complexes that developed. On occasion, the two—fortress-town and major temple and pilgrimage centre—could be fused, as was the case with Candragiri and Tirupati at the northern fringes of the Tamil country. Again, it is the peripatetic Fleming, Jaques de Coutre, who provides us the clearest description, this in the last years of the reign of Araviḍu Venkaṭapati (1580-1614):

And from there (Gurramkonda), we left for the city of Chandreguiri where the emperor had his court after the rebellion. We arrived there, and it was very lovely and walled just like Belur. It had a castle atop a very high rock, and at the foot of it stood the palace of the emperor; it was a large and sumptuous edifice . . . And the city had great suburbs (*arrabales*) and was well-populated. I was there for five days; and went alone from there to the diamond-mine in a palanquin . . . I left the walls of the city and travelled for more than two leagues through its suburbs until Tripiti, the city of the pagode that is called by that name, and it seemed as though the two were one city.⁶²

But abandoning for the moment these great forts and temples, we may descend to a more lowly level of consumption and of exchange: the market-town (*pēṭṭai*) and periodic market (*cantai*) which are also closely

⁶¹ On the Naguru *dargah*, see Susan Bayly (1986), pp. 35-73; also S. Bayly (1989), pp. 91-2, and *passim*.

⁶² Coutre in Verberckmoes and Stols (1988), pp. 169-70; fl. 150v of the manuscript.

associated with Nāyaka political economy. Peter Granda has pointed to how, in the sixteenth century, in Polur taluk of North Arcot district, Telugu migrants such as Ekkappa Nāyaka created pālaiyams and settled cultivating tenants and families of 'all castes there'; the temple inscription that testifies to Ekkappa's activities refers to them with the characteristic phrase *kuṭi ērru*, and appears to be consistent with a world in which Telugu entrepreneurs sought to build small urban centres by means of patronizing specialist cultivator, artisan and trader groups, and by offering them concessions in the form of revenue-remissions (or at least reduced revenue-rates).⁶³ Such pālaiyams were at times carved out of lands that were already settled, and there may have been a real contest for the control of human and natural resources concealed under the bland formulae of the inscriptions. These pālaiyams would in turn become the foci of marketing and consumption activities, in a manner parallel to what C.A. Bayly has termed 'ganj-building' in the context of the eighteenth-century Gangetic plain.⁶⁴ Several inscriptions from the Arcot region testify to this: one from Manalurpet, dating to 1560, refers to a new settlement alternately as pālaiyam and pēṭṭai, and makes mention of the tax-exemptions granted to the kuṭi settled there for three years; still another from Tiruvannamalai in 1569 refers to tax-exemptions on several goods traded in a bi-weekly rural market (*cevvāy putan cantai*), and a third, from Cidambaram in 1596, makes mention of the creation of a new pēṭṭai there by means of tax-concessions to the settlers.⁶⁵

Analysing several of these inscriptions, Noboru Karashima concludes that a demonstrable link exists between Nāyaka initiative and the development of inland commodity circulation, perhaps further to be linked to both artisanal production and commercial agriculture.⁶⁶ The motives of the entrepreneurs who promoted such centres were not altogether altruistic: if on the one hand the growth of markets in the fortified centres they controlled gave them easier access to the goods

⁶³ Granda (1984), pp. 129-30 ; also see Karashima (1984), pp. 159-65.

⁶⁴ C.A. Bayly (1983), pp. 98-102.

⁶⁵ The 1569 inscription is found transcribed in Karashima, Shanmugam and Subbarayalu (1988), Part II, p. 55, no. 450 ; the other two are summarized in Karashima (1985), pp. 11, 14.

⁶⁶ Karashima (1985).

they desired to consume, the founder of a market could also legitimately claim a tax on its trade, often termed *talaiyārikkam*.⁶⁷

In sum then, the Nāyaka order in the Tamil country implied a certain restructuring of consumption, and of the circulation of resources at various levels. We have in this sub-section focused on places—large fortified centres, temples, and smaller market-centres—where the petty nāyakkars and pālaiyakkārars held sway. At all levels in this structure, we may imagine that service-folk were to be found, to tend to the needs and to pamper the pretensions of vaḍuga, Marava, Kallar and Telugu potentates; among these, we may count not only grooms and mahouts, but also poets, mural-painters and stone-carvers, all of whom found employment because of the Nāyaka zest for consumption. But lest this seem, as the late Joseph Schumpeter once wrote in a different context, too much a celebration of ‘Madame de Pompadour and Madame du Barry as the benefactors of mankind’,⁶⁸ we should turn to how this seemingly boundless flow of liquid resources was in fact financed, and whence it came.

(ii) *Fiscality*

Writing in the southern Andhra town of Kalahasti, home of the Dāmarla clan of *pālegāllu* that played no small part in the politics of seventeenth century Tamil Nadu, the sixteenth-century Telugu poet Dhūrjaṭi wrote of the delicate balance that kingship required:

The battle, the fortress,
diplomacy and robbery,
doctoring, serving the kings,
trading in ships on the ocean
and powerful spells -
if they work for someone,
then the fruit will be very great.
But if control is lost
and the wrong things happen,

⁶⁷ Granda (1984); Karashima, Shanmugam and Subbarayalu (1988), index entry under *talaiyārikkam*, Part I, p. 97; also see inscription no. 449, Tirukkoyilur (1568), Part II, p. 54.

⁶⁸ Schumpeter (1936), pp. 791-5.

all that wealth will disappear
and the man's life will hang in the balance,
O God of Kalahasti.⁶⁹

Dhūrjaṭi's vision is not so cynical as that of the anonymous author of the 'Subahdar of the Cot', and it leads us moreover in other directions. Let us limit ourselves here to two aspects of his laconic portrayal: first, the juxtaposition—seemingly careless, but in fact significant—of war, diplomacy, robbery, royal service and oceanic trade; second, the suggestive statement (here closer in spirit to the *poseur* from Tanjavur) that all such agencies were precariously positioned on a knife-edge.

The Nāyaka rulers of Senji, Madurai and Tanjavur, like their later 'progeny' (to literalize the metaphor of the *kumāra varkkam* used in the context of the rulers of Pudukkottai and Ramanathapuram), strove to resolve this difficulty by a variety of means. There was first of all the issue of force and its use, for at all levels Nāyaka rule was intertwined with the use of violence; force, too, demanded the channelling of resources, in the form of service and other tenures to those who were specialists in the generation of violence. Nicholas Dirks demonstrates in his study of eighteenth-century Pudukkottai that an elaborate structure of *cērvaikkārars* (at times termed *sardārs*) who held 'country estates' in that little kingdom, formed the highest level of the military system; below them were the more lowly *amarakkārars*, who too held fiscal rights in land, which had usually been granted them by the *cērvaikkārars*, who in turn held their lands in grant from the Tondaiman raja himself.⁷⁰ The land given in *amaram* in this part of the Tamil country was defined in terms of a unit—the *āl jīvitam*—which had a concrete equivalent in terms of wet and dry land.

It is very likely that the Pudukkottai 'system' represented merely one variant, and that too in a modified form, of what had obtained under the earlier Nāyakas. Recent studies by Peter A. Granda and others suggest that the Tamil country in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries knew a variety of quite complex rights in land held by individuals, corporate bodies, and institutions like temples, *maṭhas* and

⁶⁹ *Kālahastīśvara satakamu* of Dhūrjaṭi, in Heifetz and Narayana Rao (1987), p. 114.

⁷⁰ Dirks (1987), pp. 117-18.

dargāhs. If one were to take a single village and its lands, one would find there a variety of claims on produce, which might derive legitimacy from different sources, of which state power was merely one. To simplify somewhat in the interests of clarity, the most significant of these rights appears to have been one termed *kāṇi*, which has been identified by Noboru Karashima with 'the right of possession', but also 'the right to lead a privileged life in the village based on the possession of land there'.⁷¹ Granda, following Karashima in this aspect, notes the increasing appearance of this term in the Tamil inscriptions from the late Cōla period, and argues that its incidence is particularly significant after the fourteenth century. However, he notes that *kāṇi* 'denoted property in the widest possible sense', was not restricted in its use to agricultural land, and was moreover capable of carrying a multiplicity of meanings. In the case of agriculture, it denoted a fundamental right to land and its produce, but was not necessarily an exclusive right to be held by an individual; in other instances, it could merely refer to material or even intangible 'spiritual' perquisites attached to a position.⁷²

Taken together with other—more Sanskritised—terms such as *cutantiram*, it may be argued that *kāṇi* denotes one level of right on produce. However, this was not the level of right defined by such terms as *amaram* (mentioned above), which brought with them a far greater flavour of fiscality. Granda, whose study of the question once again appears to be the most systematic to date, suggests that rights like *umbalikkai*, *amaram*, *nāyakkattanam* and *pālaiyam* encompass a level quite distinct from *kāṇi* in principle, and were frequently—though not exclusively—held by persons of warrior origin.⁷³ However, it remains unclear from his account whether these three or four rights could be superimposed one upon the other, or whether they were mutually exclusive—thus representing local variants of a single conception of right to surplus. In any event, the clear hierarchy, as well as the identification of *amaram* with the subsistence income of a single warrior, both of which are features that Dirks remarks in the Pudukkottai case, had apparently yet to emerge in the earlier Nāyaka polities.

⁷¹ Karashima (1984), pp. 18, 26.

⁷² Granda (1984), pp. 109-10.

⁷³ *Ibid*, pp. 110-18, 123-32.

The issue of rights to agricultural surplus is further confused if one brings in institutional holdings. For if temples possessed and transacted *kāṇi* in the period, they are also associated with specific tenures such as *devadāna*, *tirunāṁmattukkāṇi* and *tiruvitaiyāṭṭam*.⁷⁴ It has sometimes been argued that while *devadāna* represented a transferred *fiscal* right to the temple, the latter two terms were enhancements of *devadāna* through the addition of the *kāṇi* right as well. While the evidence to support this assertion is by no means conclusive, suffice it to say for the moment that temples and other institutions had rights in land that could be characterized by differing levels of transferred fiscality, and that it is hence important to retain these as a category that is distinct both from *kāṇi* pure and simple and from *nāyakkattaṇam* and *amaram*.

How within this complicated crazy-quilt of competing and overlapping rights did the Nāyaka states draw upon the resources of agriculture? If one adopts the pyramidal model that most writers on Indian history utilize while discussing fiscality, a few suggestive elements emerge, but many other issues remain unresolved. All three major Nāyaka states—Senji, Madurai and Tanjavur—had an ‘administrative structure’ at the level of the court that partook of a common vocabulary: in each, one could find, for instance, a *daḷavāy*, *rāyasam* and *pradhāni*.⁷⁵ But going beyond this, two models seem to emerge. In both Madurai and Senji, the *daḷavāy* appears as a powerful and semi-independent actor, and in the former case, the Mēḍai Daḷavāy Mudaliyār family became the focus of a powerful network of resource-circulation centering around the Tirunelveli-Palaiyamkottai complex, referred to by the Dutch in the seventeenth century as ‘the court-town of the lowland governors’ (‘de hofplaets den benedenlandtse landregenten’).⁷⁶ The crucial role of the *daḷavāy* (or ‘veltoverste’, as the Dutch liked to put it) is less recognized in the Senji historiography than in the

⁷⁴ Ibid, pp. 142-57.

⁷⁵ Cf. Sathyanatha Aiyar (1924); Vriddhagirisan (1942). For a detailed account of the Madurai Nāyaka court, see ARA, OB, VOC. 1468, ‘Copia rapport in forma van dag-register . . . wegens ‘t voorgevallene op de reyse na aenwesen tot en terug comst van Tritchinapaly’, 15 June to 1 September 1689, fls. 239-325v; also the instructions to the envoy Nicolaas Welter, fls. 224v-25.

⁷⁶ ARA, OB, VOC. 1459, fl. 951v, letter from Van Vliet at Tuticorin to Jaffna, dated 27 February 1690.

Madurai one, but European testimonies from the seventeenth century are quite categorical in this respect. Between 1608 and about 1625, the figure of Tiruveṅgalayya ('den grooten Aya') dominates Dutch accounts of Senji politics to such an extent that even the Nāyaka Muttu Krishṇappa is at times overshadowed.⁷⁷ Later, between the 1630s and late 1650s, there appears the formidable figure of another Senji daḷavāy, Tubāki Krishṇappa Nāyaka, whose drive for power led him, after the fall on Senji in 1649 to Bijapur forces, to seek alliances first with Golconda and then with the Mughals.⁷⁸

In contrast, in Tanjavur, the court appears more orderly and less militarized; sedition at the highest level seems a more unlikely prospect than in either of her two neighbours. If there is a threat it comes first from a long-standing rivalry with Madurai, in the second place from the incursions of Bijapur forces to the north, and third from the Marava militia who—as the seventeenth century progresses—coalesce around the Setupati rajas of Ramanathapuram.⁷⁹

As we have remarked in an earlier chapter, Tanjavur also differs from the other two Nāyaka kingdoms in another important respect: the relative absence of a sub-stratum of pāḷaiyakkārars and other 'co-sharers of the realm', such as we find both in Madurai and Senji. In the early seventeenth century, the Senji rulers had to contend with at least three powerful chiefs whom they barely managed to keep subordinate, and besides, numerous other camps of pāḷaiyakkārars dotted the countryside of Cengalpet and Arcot. As for the Madurai Nāyakas, their notional domain extended from Kongunad to Ramesvaram and Kanyakumari, but they suffered within that space the existence of numerous semi-independent militia chiefs, many of whom barely kept their recalcitrance concealed.⁸⁰ That relations between Madurai and Pudukkottai were variable in the seventeenth century is well known;

⁷⁷ Terpstra (1911), pp. 115-17; for one of the last mentions of 'den Grooten Aya off capado', ARA, OB, VOC. 1086, fls. 161-64, letter from Marten Ysbrantsz at Pulicat to Batavia, 14 June 1625.

⁷⁸ Cf. the correspondence between Tubāki Krishṇappa and the Dutch at Pulicat, in January 1657, with enclosures, ARA, OB, VOC. 1215, fls. 1026-1031v.

⁷⁹ On the Setupatis' role in the Tanjavur-Madurai balance, see ARA, OB, VOC. 1295, fls. 54v-55, 59, letter from Jacob van der Meersche at Nagapattinam, January 1673; letter from Anthonij Paviljoen at Pulicat, February 1673.

⁸⁰ Sathyanatha Aiyar (1924); Dirks (1987), pp. 48-52.

but Portuguese and other testimonies argue for a rather prickly relationship with Ramanathapuram as well. In the 1630s, António Bocarro wrote of how Tirumala Nāyaka of Madurai faced an 'impediment' in the Maravar Setupati, both on land and on sea, in the Gulf of Mannar.⁸¹ Another observer, Barradas, writing some two decades earlier, is still more malicious—and probably reflects in this respect Madurai-Marava hostility accurately.

The thieves who infest these hills and forests are called Maravas, for whom skill and impudence in stealing is their dowry for marriage; because if they do not show such talents, no one wishes to marry them; and above all, they are so many and so much the lords of the woods, that not only can the Naique not subject them or bring them under his obedience, but one of these past years when he went in procession to the pagode of Remanacor (Ramesvaram), they attacked the procession from the rear, where his treasure was, and took it from him, and he fearing that they would take him along with it, took to his heels in order not to fall into their hands.⁸²

In such a situation of barely concealed hostility, it is difficult to imagine that a very orderly system of fiscal transfers could have obtained between the Nāyaka and even those of his *kumāra varkkam*. Rather, fiscal transfers are likely to have varied over time, and from one subordinate to another; the formula suggested by earlier writers, in which *pālaiyakkārars* are supposed punctiliously to have handed over a third of their collections to the Nāyaka clearly represented no more than an ideal.

But, on the other hand, there were lands over which the Madurai Nāyakas enjoyed relatively close control, both around Madurai and Tiruccirappalli, and even much farther to the south. Dutch reports of the late seventeenth century from their factory at Alvar Tirunagari—as do other letters from the ports of the Madurai coast—⁸³ speak of *maṇiyakkārars* appointed by the Nāyakas who collected fiscal dues at the village level. Also, the Madurai Nāyakas frequently visited the southern reaches of their domain, which is to say the Tirunelveli region, thus continuing a practice that had existed since the mid sixteenth

⁸¹ Bocarro (1937-8), IV / I, pp. 368-9.

⁸² Barradas, 'Discrição', in Gomes de Brito (1735), pp. 297-8.

⁸³ See for instance the 'Extract uyt het dag-register gehouden werdende in 't Nederlands comptoir Tutucorijn', (1705) ARA, OB, VOC. 1706, fls. 1040-1051v.

century. The complex system that emerged under the Nāyakas in the Tirunelveli region is defined in the following fashion by David Ludden:

There were two distinct political (viz. fiscal) hierarchies under the Delavoy, divided on a principle that remained in use into the twentieth century. Throughout the river valley, in Tenkasy and south of the river and in some places to the north—in short, in a territory only slightly larger than the core area of the former Pandya state—no subordinate military chiefs were formally recognised by the Nāyakas. These were lands directly ruled by the Nāyakas; and because they were not designated at all in available records, we can call them by their designation under the later Muslim and British rulers: 'Circar (viz. *sarkar*) lands'. On the other hand, in areas of Marava and Vaduga settlement concentration, specific chiefs were recognised as the official heads of territorial segments of the state.⁸⁴

The largest of these pālaiyakkārar domains (if one leaves aside the troublesome cases of Ramanathapuram and Pudukkottai) were those of Ettaiyapuram, Cokkampatti, Pancalamkuricci and Sivagiri, but many smaller ones also existed. Ludden's account leaves us in little doubt that despite variations in the internal organization of these territories (some of which like Ettaiyapuram had a system of cērvaik-kārars, with fiscal extraction in others being based on the Marava concept of *kāval*), tribute did flow up the hierarchy, all the way to Tirunelveli. It is only in the latter half of the eighteenth century, after the demise of the Nāyaka state at Madurai, that we can actually quantify the sums of tribute (or 'poligar peshcash' as it was termed), and it is naturally perilous to project these back into the Nāyaka period.⁸⁵ But two aspects of these eighteenth century tribute transactions (when the area was under the rule of the Nawabs of Arcot) are worth remarking: first, the great variability in the amounts paid from year to year, and second the close relationship between the pālaiyakkārars and *sāhukārs*, who advanced money to the former to facilitate the tribute payment. While the first of these was almost certainly a feature of the Nāyaka period as well, we would contend that the second feature was far more typical of the eighteenth than of the seventeenth century.

⁸⁴ Ludden (1978), pp. 136-7; also Ludden (1985).

⁸⁵ Ludden (1978), pp. 150-1; the sums paid are as follows:

Precisely how the Madurai Nāyakas organized the collection of fiscal dues in their 'Circar lands' is a difficult issue to resolve. Ludden suggests that a system of bureaucratic 'state agents' existed, 'who performed intermediary roles between local institutions and the Nāyakas', and goes on to argue that these agents were for the most part drawn from the ranks of local Vellalas and Brahmans, immigrant Brahmans, and Telugu warriors.⁸⁶ But by the middle of the seventeenth century, these agents had often been subsumed under a new system that seems to have come to dominate at least fiscal collection in the Circar lands: revenue-farming.

The description of the dual fiscal system which we have set out for the territories of the Madurai Nāyaka can be extended with minor modifications to the Senji case, where one also observes the emergence of revenue-farming in the early seventeenth century. Tanjavur presents us with a variant model, for here one can scarcely talk of a dual system, since lands under tributary chiefs were quite marginal: most lands were thus Circar lands. If we can extrapolate backwards from the evidence of the Maratha period, the Tanjavur Nāyaka's territories comprised around four thousand revenue-paying villages, with a population of around a million persons.⁸⁷ Most land was used to

(i) Settur Poligar:

<i>Years</i>	<i>Mean collections (cakrams)</i>	<i>% of years when payment made</i>
1744-55	1,554	57
1752-61	2,168	40
1762-71	2,322	60
1772-81	2,524	60
1782-91	2,573	80
1792-1801	5,375	90

(ii) Cokkampatti Poligar:

<i>Years</i>	<i>Mean collections (cakrams)</i>	<i>% of years</i>
1767-76	15,780	50
1777-86	14,515	50
1787-97	6,952	100

⁸⁶ Ibid, pp. 139-40.

⁸⁷ India Office Library and Records, London, Orme Mss. 33, fls. 325-31, 'A

cultivate rice, although other crops like sugar-cane and cotton were not wholly unknown. The fiscal system at the village level seems to have been based very largely on crop-sharing, rather than direct commutation of fiscal dues into cash at specified rates. At the very end of the Nāyaka period, the total production of rice in the kingdom was estimated at just over 32 million *kalams* (1.37 million tons), and of this considerable quantities were exported. Ports such as Nagapattinam were substantially involved in the rice trade to Sri Lanka, and one mid eighteenth-century estimate suggests that as much as ten to twelve per cent of Tanjavur's rice production may have been exported by water, as well as transported by pack-bullock to the interior of the peninsula.⁸⁸

Neither the inscriptions nor later descriptive texts such as the *Taṅjāvūri āndhra rājula caritra* are particularly helpful in delineating how fiscal dues flowed from rice-producing villages to the Nāyaka court at Tanjavur. The inscriptions offer us a plethora of revenue-terms, of which the most significant are *nanjey* and *punjey*—terms used to signify wet and dry land respectively, but employed to denote the taxes on these lands as well.⁸⁹ Given the relatively compact nature of the Tanjavur Nāyakas' territories, and the more or less uniform crop pattern that obtained (save in such areas as Pattukottai), we may imagine that the employment of Brahman and Vēlāḷa agents to supervise collection of taxes at the locality level was the rule. These are the same figures who appear in literary texts of the period, even if parodically represented there in their most cynical and extreme form, as grasping and corrupt agents of state power. However, in Tanjavur too, as one moves from the reign of the Nāyaka Acyutappa to that of his successors Raghunātha and Vijayarāghava, once again one observes the rise of revenue-farming. Thus, by the early seventeenth century, despite certain crucial differences in their political hierarchies and fiscal structures, the three Nāyaka states had begun to exhibit common traits in their resort in their Circar lands to a commercial mode of administration—namely, revenue-farming. One of the earliest his-

General Account of the Kingdom of Tanjour, shewing the names of Provinces and Districts', 7 December 1773; Subrahmanyam (n.d.).

⁸⁸ Subrahmanyam (1990b), pp. 54-5; Arasaratnam (1988).

⁸⁹ Ludden (1978); Karashima, Shanmugam and Subbarayalu (1988), Table 2.

torians to comment on this feature of the Nāyaka states was W.H. Moreland, who thus saw these states as sharing certain traits with their northern neighbour, the Sultanate of Golconda.⁹⁰ Moreland's view of the practice of revenue-farming, both in general and in this particular manifestation, was—it is well-known—negative, and he sought to contrast the disorderly aspect of such a commercial arrangement with the paternalism of more bureaucratic fiscal arrangements. More recent treatments of the phenomenon have been somewhat more equivocal, suggesting that the *effects* of revenue-farming on the agrarian economy depended crucially on such issues as length of tenure, the potential for expansion on the extensive margin, as well as the social and political position of the revenue-farmers themselves, seen in the broadest sense.

From available evidence, we may conclude that revenue-farmers in the Nāyaka states were drawn from a number of groups, including Telugu Niyogi Brahmins, Vēlālas, migrant Telugu warriors, as well as Ceṭṭi groups like the Kōmaṭis and Beri Ceṭṭis. By far the most prominent however are the Baliya Naidus, whose revenue-farming activities are particularly conspicuous in the northern Tamil country, and as far as the Kaveri delta. In order to comprehend the context within which such revenue-farming entrepreneurs functioned, we may cast a glance at the generally accepted notions in the historiography concerning the evolution of the social order in Tamil Nadu in the three centuries prior to 1600. As Burton Stein portrays it, the Vijayanagara period (which for his purposes includes the age of the Nāyakas as well) 'affords the first view of a different land system, one approximating that of the early nineteenth century'. What had changed, he avers, was twofold: first, he argues that a shift took place from locality-based agrarian organization to a more reduced unit of operation, closely approximating the revenue-village of early British India; second, he suggests that in place of locality-oriented collectives, control over agrarian activities came increasingly to be in the hands of 'well-differentiated, individual "big men"'.⁹¹ These powerful 'village big men' are seen by Stein to be substantial rural entrepreneurs, who make use of a variety of institutional arrangements peculiar to the period to further their ends; one of

⁹⁰ See Moreland (1923), pp. 239-45.

⁹¹ Stein (1980), pp. 416-17.

these is what Stein terms the 'rural developmental tenure' of *daśavanda*, of which he cites a few examples from late sixteenth and early seventeenth century Andhra and Karnataka.⁹² *Daśavanda*, as portrayed by Stein, was a means by which an entrepreneur could invest in extending irrigation facilities over an area, for which he would be given a certain proportion (usually a quarter) of the produce that resulted thereby; such arrangements did not require that the entrepreneur hold *kāṇi* or other rights on the land. However, since the term *daśavanda* arises very rarely indeed in the inscriptional corpus from sixteenth and seventeenth century Tamilnadu, this particular form can at best have been a marginal mode of agrarian entrepreneurship in the three major Nāyaka kingdoms.⁹³ The magnates of the Nāyaka period must hence have made use of other possibilities.

In more recent writings, Stein follows the Japanese scholar Tsukasa Mizushima in identifying the 'village big men' of his earlier formulation with a set of persons termed *nāṭṭār*, who were encountered by the first British administrators of late eighteenth century Tonḍai-maṇḍalam. However, despite the etymological relationship between the term *nāṭṭār* and the territorial construct of the *nāḍu*, it is argued that the *nāṭṭār* of the Nāyaka and post-Nāyaka periods had come adrift from their moorings in medieval *nāḍu* assemblies: the term in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, according to Stein, merely signifies 'leaders of the major landholding people of the coast, including Vellalas, Reddis, Nainars and Brahmans . . . (who) were actually small-scale revenue farmers' in many instances.⁹⁴ Mizushima's study of late eighteenth century British documentation enables us to grasp the extent and diversity of the activity of such figures; in the three best-documented households in his study, we find substantial holdings of cattle and sheep, and land held on three kinds of privileged tenure—*mānyam*, *śrotiyam* and high *vāram*; other families hold positions such as village headman or accountant, are involved in the overland trade in foodgrain, and are often also traders in cloth and

⁹² Ibid, pp. 426-7.

⁹³ For example, see Karashima, Shanmugam and Subbarayalu (1988), Part I, p. 44.

⁹⁴ Stein (1989), p. 51 ; also see Mizushima (1986).

other manufactures, as well as farmers of direct and indirect tax collections.⁹⁵

Mizushima's principal purpose in his study is to examine the troubled relationship between these powerful households and early British administration, which was torn between a need to make use of their expertise, and a fear of their power in the locality. For our purposes, it is of more interest to look in the other direction—namely at the historical roots of the position held by the *nāṭṭār* in the late eighteenth century. The Cengalpet and Arcot areas from which the bulk of Mizushima's evidence derives were in the early seventeenth century a part of the Nāyaka of Senji's territory, albeit contested by other *pāḷaiyakkārar* clans such as the Velugōṭi, Dāmarla and Maṭṭa families. The Dutch report of 1615, which we have had occasion to quote before, speaks of how the coastal lands in the vicinity of Tirupapuliyur and Cuddalore (at the time part of the Senji Nāyaka's domain) were under the fiscal control of Tiruveṅgalayya, the Senji *daḷavāy*, who had in turn given them out to revenue-farmers (*renderos de terra*: here the Dutch use the Portuguese term for revenue-farmer). And in later decades we are aware that revenues here were collected by a series of Balija and Ceṭṭi entrepreneurs on behalf, first, of the Senji Nāyakas, and then after 1649 for the Bijapur authorities.⁹⁶

A Dutch report of the same year, 1615, is clearer still on revenue farming somewhat farther to the north, in what would in modern-terms be Ponneri taluk of Cengalpet district. The area was at the time held by Gobbūri Jaggarāya, and included Arni and Ponneri itself. Of this region, a Dutch factor writes:

This government, which in all comprises thirty-two diverse *aldeas* or villages which the great King of Velour had given his queen Obeamma with other revenues as dowry, can yearly yield 12,000 *pagodas*. Palliacatta alone yields around 5,000 *pagodas* according to a *shahbandar* . . .⁹⁷

Moreover, he writes, the revenues are constantly changing as the

⁹⁵ Mizushima (1986), pp. 201, 352-3 ; also see Karashima (1986a), pp. 139-68 ; and finally, Arasaratnam (1990).

⁹⁶ ARA, OB, VOC. 1062, fls. 41-42v, 'Corte descriptie . . . ; also see Subrahmanyam (1990b), pp. 312-13.

⁹⁷ ARA, OB, VOC. 1062, fls. 42v-44.

renderos bid against each other and the revenues go up. As for why the area is so prized as a revenue-farm 'above all others in Carnatica', it is—he writes—because of its trade, and because of the textiles (*doucken*) produced there.

However, the revenue-farmer's task was a delicate one, as later mentions in the Dutch Daily-Diary of the Pulicat fortress show; his role was to collect revenue, but also to placate a host of claimants to subsidiary dues like *kāval*, claimants whom the Dutch generally describe under the head of 'visiadoores'. For instance, between June and August 1624, and then again between May and August of the following year, Acyutappa Ceṭṭi, the Baliya revenue-farmer of the area, had to hold protracted negotiations—at times resorting to the threat of force—to contain the claims of a certain Pedda Rāja and his nephew Krishṇama Rāja, over *kāval* in the region; eventually, he agreed to pay the latter an annual tribute of 300 pagodas and also a part of the octroi collected at the main entrance into Pulicat from the land side.⁹⁸

As can be seen from the above example, the revenue-farmer did not collect land-tax alone, but was usually responsible for a whole host of dues in a region, ranging from taxes on trade (like *cuṅkam*) to taxes on weavers and other manufacturers. Typically, this meant in turn that the revenue-farmer had to possess a high level of commercial acumen, for his task was to assess the revenue-potential of a region and to benefit from his superior information-gathering capacities. At a general level, we can see revenue-farming in the Nāyaka states as reflecting two features of the economic regime: first, the risk-aversion of the state, which wished to stabilize its own revenues and pass on the risks inherent in tax-collection to a private party; second, and perhaps more important, the fact that the period was one in which private entrepreneurs, often emerging from the sphere of commerce, possessed far better *information* on the revenue-potential of the economy than the formal state-apparatus.⁹⁹ At times, the state did make efforts to resume farmed-out territories into a relatively directly-controlled part of the

⁹⁸ ARA, OB, VOC. 1087, fls. 179-211v, 'Dagh-Register Palliacatta', 20 November 1623 to 28 November 1625.

⁹⁹ Cf. Subrahmanyam (1990b), pp. 327-36; for a parallel analysis, see Çizakça (1990).

system, not only because revenue-farmers tended typically to acquire an armed retinue over a period of years, but because there was obviously a loss to the state in terms of revenues foregone to these intermediaries. One such attempt in the Cengalpet-Arcot area was in the late 1620s, under the Candragiri ruler Rāmadeva; quite characteristically, however, the move soon ended.¹⁰⁰

We have so far restricted ourselves largely to the Nāyakas' domains themselves, to the fiscal methods in use there, and to the relationship between the Nāyakas and their tributaries—however recalcitrant these might have been in reality. But there does exist another dimension to the fiscal question: this is the puzzling relationship between the three great Nāyakas and the Vijayanagara super-state, whose centre had shifted in the late sixteenth century to Candragiri and, to an extent, Velur.

Many historians have been reluctant to accept that a fiscal relationship of any sort did indeed exist between Senji, Tanjavur and Madurai and the Aravīdu rulers; others have remained resolutely non-committal on the question.¹⁰¹ Contemporary European observers for their part were not so cautious. Here is one Dutch portrayal.

The Kingdom of Carnatica stretches East and North seventy Badaga miles, each of which is around three Dutch miles, and from Palliacatta right over to the Malabar coast 40 Badaga miles. In this part of Carnatica one finds the three most powerful lords (*mogenste heeren*) Neicqs of the Carnatica kingdom, who must yearly give as homage to the Velour crown 1,200,000 *pagodas*, to wit:

Vyrepanaicq of Madril the King's spittoon-bearer 600,000 *pagodas*

Rachunatanaicq of Tanjouwer, the King's fan-bearer, under whom the trading-town Nagapatan lies, 400,000 *pagodas* and

Christoponaicq of Chingier, the King's betel-giver 200,000 dittos, which offices in former times they personally have performed, but in return for their services they received the three said territories, to wit Madril, Tansjour and Chingier, with the above-mentioned sum of *pagodas* to be contributed yearly to the King, and it remains agreed that their above-mentioned tasks will be always performed by three substantial nobles (*treffelijk*

¹⁰⁰ ARA, OB, VOC. 1100, fls. 61-62, Marten Ysbrantsz at Pulicat to Batavia, 2 October 1629.

¹⁰¹ See Karashima (1985); Stein (1989a), for the most recent examples.

edeleden), but that for the coronation of a legitimate successor, they must on the first day personally perform these duties.¹⁰²

This symbolic tie is commented upon by the Jesuit Baltasar da Costa as well, writing some three decades later. He reports that after a revolt against Aravīḍu Śrīraṅga Rāya, the three Nāyakas were finally reconciled with him in 1646. Śrīraṅga then visited Tanjavur, where he 'received the Nayaks with every mark of honour, nor did he allow them to throw themselves at his feet, as was their desire and duty, but gave them a seat close to himself where each one performed his respective office, that is, one offered him betel, the second fanned him, and the third held his spittoon. However the King did not allow them to perform these mean duties in person, but through their favourites.'¹⁰³

But equally, the European documentation of the period, whether of Jesuit origin or written by traders and Company factors, leaves us in little doubt that the fiscal flow between the Nāyakas and Candragiri-Velur took place in an atmosphere of contestation. The Jesuit Belchior Coutinho at Velur, writes in October 1608, for example, that while the Nāyakas of Tanjavur and Madurai had paid their annual dues (thus, 'the Naiques of Tangior and Madure have sent the King their tribute of 500,000 *cruzados* and a great diversity of presents'), Muttu Krishṇappa of Senji had delayed in doing so; Coutinho further claims that an army was hence sent out against Senji from Velur, and that the Nāyaka finally paid a sum of 60,000 *cruzados*.¹⁰⁴

Also of some significance in this context is Manuel Barradas's description of his visit to the Nāyaka court of Tanjavur a few years later. He writes:

From the court of the Raju (*viz.* the Rāya), who is King over all these Naiques, to whom they pay great tributes, there arrived the principal Brahmin, who is like the Pope (*sic*) among us, to take from this (Nāyaka) of Tanjaor some twelve or fifteen thousand pardaos, which the Raju took as tribute (*páreas*) from this Naique, who in order to honour this Brahmin

¹⁰² ARA, OB, VOC. 1062, fls. 41-42v, 'Corte descriptie . . .', 2 March 1615.

¹⁰³ Da Costa, 'Relação Annual', in Saulière (1964), p. 104.

¹⁰⁴ Belchior Coutinho to Fr. Claudio Aquaviva, Velur, 11 October 1608, published in an appendix to Heras (1927), pp. 612-14.

went one of these days to visit him with a great entourage, taking along the tribute, and on top of them a rich present . . . ¹⁰⁵

Barradas visited the Nāyaka court early in Raghunātha Nāyaka's reign, when Araviḍu Veṅkaṭapati Rāya (r. 1586-1614) was still alive. However, as is well known, after the death of Veṅkaṭapati in 1614, a protracted succession-struggle broke out, in which the Nāyakas were divided, Madurai and Senji supporting one contender, Tanjavur the other. It is clear that from this period, the difficulties of enforcing this tribute payment increased, though late in the 1620s, Araviḍu Rāma-deva enjoyed brief success in this respect, as did his successor Araviḍu Veṅkaṭa in the latter half of the 1630s. If one is to credit later Jesuit writers like Da Costa, the amount claimed by Candragiri-Velur from the Nāyakas was a quite substantial part of the latter's own annual collection—hence the reluctance to pay. He claims, for example, that Tirumala Nāyaka of Madurai was notionally required to transfer roughly a fourth of his revenue to his northern overlords, but also notes significantly that in the early 1640s there were 'arrears of tribute which had not been paid for nearly twenty years and amounted to several millions.'¹⁰⁶

(iii) *Trade and the Nāyakas*

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Tamil region witnesses a marked change in its economic profile, with new crops entering the agricultural domain, an expanded sphere of manufacturing production, and also with the creation of marketing centres—the pēṭṭais and paṭṭinams we have already remarked. These features of what we may loosely term 'Nāyaka political economy' have been accepted in recent years by scholars working from the perspective of the inscriptions, like Noboru Karashima and P. Shanmugam, and hence can no longer be seen solely as a product of the coast-centred perspective of those who work on the basis of European records.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, there can be little doubt that the Nāyakas were keenly aware

¹⁰⁵ Barradas, 'Discrição de Columbo', in Gomes de Brito (1735), pp. 291-2.

¹⁰⁶ Da Costa, in Saulière (1964), pp. 90-1, 93.

¹⁰⁷ Karashima (1985); Shanmugam (1989), pp. 31-49.

of the revenue-potential of trade, and hence at least implicitly followed a sort of 'trade policy'—which even if never explicitly articulated is revealed through their actions.

An important factor in explaining the Nāyaka attitude towards trade is their consumption-centred ideology, as also their fixation upon precious metals—of which they were keen to encourage the import into their kingdoms.¹⁰⁸ This emerges from an analysis of the customs-rates charged at the major ports of the Nāyaka domains—such as Armagon, Pulicat, Puduceri, Nagapattinam, Kayalpatnam and so on—which are oriented essentially towards export duties, and, where imports are concerned, tend by and large either to exempt or to charge light duties on gold and silver. Even if one considers merely the export duties, these are remarkably modest—and can be taken as reflecting an implicit understanding of the notion that gross customs-receipts could be swelled as much by encouraging an increase in trade flows as by taxing a limited trade at high rates.¹⁰⁹ It is significant in this respect, for example, that the Portuguese settlers at Nagapattinam in the early seventeenth century resisted attempts by Goa to impose a Portuguese customs-house in the port, since they felt that the Tanjavur Nāyakas offered them far better terms.¹¹⁰

Both in Nagapattinam and in Mylapur, the other major Portuguese settlement of the region, customs-collection was directly controlled by an *adhikāri* (Portuguese *adigar*), in the first instance appointed from Tanjavur, and in the second from Candragiri or Velur; as later Dutch, English and Danish accounts make clear, these courts were far from thalassophobic, and took a keen interest in maritime matters. In this respect, the Nāyaka kingdoms fit into a particular pattern that had existed in South and Southeast Asia from at least the second quarter of the fifteenth century, and which has been described as a form of mercantilism. Perhaps the clearest instance of this is the fifteenth century Sultanate of Melaka, where the very lifeblood of the state was

¹⁰⁸ See António Bocarro's account from the 1630s, translated in an appendix to Subrahmanyam (1990), pp. 251-52.

¹⁰⁹ Bocarro, in *Ibid*, pp. 252-3; also Temple and Anstey (1932), pp. 22-4; and for a general consideration, Raychaudhuri (1962).

¹¹⁰ Subrahmanyam (1990), ch. 4, pp. 77-80.

trade, with customs-duties accounting for over three-fourths of state revenues.¹¹¹ It is evident that the three major Nāyaka kingdoms (as also the Candragiri super-state) were by no means as dependent on the taxation of seaborne commerce as Melaka, nor is there evidence of direct participation by the Nāyakas themselves in trade (unlike what obtains with the Sultans of Melaka). But certainly well-placed court notables owned ships, as did local warrior-chiefs in areas like Pudukkeri; and in addition, the Nāyakas themselves maintained close links with Baliya families who traded extensively with Burma, the Malay peninsula and Sri Lanka.¹¹²

If one motive for such trade was to encourage the import of precious and semi-precious stones and of precious metals, two other reasons also existed. First, the Nāyakas were keenly interested in the trade in war-animals—both horses and elephants. The demand for these—and in particular horses—was also a feature of sixteenth century Vijayanagara trade on the Indian south-west coast; typically, the local requirements expanded or contracted with the extent of warfare in a particular period. Thus, in the early 1630s, during a major succession struggle at Candragiri between Araviḍu Venkaṭa and Araviḍu Timma Rāya, the Dutch report a great spurt in the demand for Persian horses.¹¹³ Besides west Asia, the trade to Aceh was another source of these animals, though the Acehnese variety was usually reckoned as inferior to those from Persia and Arabia.¹¹⁴

The case of the elephant trade is a more curious one, linking the Coromandel ports to Arakan, lower Burma, the Malay Peninsula, Sri Lanka and Sumatra. In 1614, the Portuguese viceroy D. Jerónimo de Azevedo in a letter to the King made it clear that where the elephant trade from Sri Lanka—at the time extensively under Portuguese control—was concerned, they faced a problem. For confronting this near-monopolist was the countervailing near-monopsony of the Nāyaka of Tanjavur in the elephant trade;

¹¹¹ See Thomaz (1990).

¹¹² Subrahmanyam (1990b), pp. 309-11.

¹¹³ ARA, OB, VOC. 1109, fl. 282v, 'Copie uijt het Dach-register int Casteel Geldria gehouden . . . '.

¹¹⁴ On Acehnese horse trade, see Lombard (1967), p. 89.

There is he wrote no other buyer than the Naique of Tanjaor, for I have tried all the other Naiques and the King of Bisnaga in this instance, and I have never managed to sell any save to the said Naique, for they are liars and untrustworthy (*mentirosos e desconfiados*), and want that they should first take them to their lands and only then pay for them . . . ¹¹⁵

The viceroy exaggerated somewhat, for the other Nāyakas—and in particular the Madurai ruler—also were major buyers of elephants. And, in point of fact, Tirumala Nāyaka of Madurai made the elephant trade an explicit item in the negotiations he conducted in the 1630s and 1640s with the Portuguese, who for their part were interested, also for military reasons, in the saltpeter produced in his lands. In Baltasar da Costa's 1640s account, Tirumala Nāyaka 'has more than three hundred elephants, and he is so keen on having only the fine ones that he does not mind the cost, though it be extravagant.'¹¹⁶ It is probable, however, that the Senji ruler and the Candragiri-based Aravīḍus comprised a less substantial source of demand, since they did after all have superior access to the Burmese and Malay elephants.

Second, it is useful to bear in mind that trade was also encouraged because it went hand in hand with diplomacy, and the Nāyakas were keen to link themselves not only to the distant and still only vaguely-imagined lands of Europe, but to rulers on the opposite coast of the Bay of Bengal, with whom they seem to have maintained intermittent diplomatic contacts, and quite regularly exchanged gifts and curiosities. Dutch reports from the late 1620s mention at least one embassy from Ayuthia to Candragiri, while the Tanjavur Nāyakas too are known to have maintained relations with the Thai kingdom by way of Mergui.¹¹⁷ Later, in the 1630s and 1640s, when ships owned by the

¹¹⁵ 'Apontamentos de Antão Vaz Freire vedor da fazenda da ilha de Ceilão', in R.A. de Bulhão Pato, ed., *Documentos Remettidos da India*, vol. III, Lisbon 1885, pp. 55-6.

¹¹⁶ Da Costa, 'Relação Annual', in Saulière (1964), p. 91.

¹¹⁷ ARA, OB, VOC. 1095, Dagh-Register Palliacatta, entry for 1 April 1627, fl. 37v, '[is] alhier gearriveert een groot schip uyt Tanassery toebehorende de Cooninck van Siam, was geladen met thin ende voorts Chinese waren, quam op dito schip een ambassadeur van den Coninck van Siam aen den Cooninck van Carnatica gesonden'; also fl. 43v, entry for 19 April 1628, on the arrival of another ship the next year. For a later embassy from Ayuthia to Candragiri, see the letter

Sultans of Kedah and Johor appear on the Coromandel scene, they bring such gifts as civet-cats and elephants, intended for the Nāyakas and their courtiers.¹¹⁸

Thus, the Nāyaka interest in trade existed at various levels, from the fiscal to the diplomatic. In addition to the questions discussed above, one should also bear in mind certain specific institutions in which the Nāyaka states had a particular interest—such as the annual pearl-fishery, in which the Madurai Nāyakas in particular were keen participants. For one, these Nāyakas received one day's catch in the fishery from both the Portuguese and later (after 1658) the Dutch; besides, they themselves delegated agents to participate in the fishery on their behalf; and finally, they sought to control and tax the retail-trade in pearls, which was restricted to three or four marketing towns in the Tirunelveli area.¹¹⁹ We cannot estimate the precise economic worth of the annual fishery, but we know it to have been a major operation: often, over ten thousand people were directly involved in the fishing itself, with another forty thousand-odd in ancillary activities. Thus the taxes collected by the Madurai Nāyakas from the retail-trade in pearls at Palaiyakkayal and other centres must have been quite considerable.

(iv) The circulation of resources: Summing up

It is next to impossible in the present state of our knowledge to delineate with any precision the extent of the human and natural resources in the Tamilnadu of the Nāyakas. At a very rough guess, the population of the area which fell under the domains of the Tanjavur, Madurai, and Senji Nāyakas and the Candragiri ruler may in the late sixteenth century have been in the region of six million.¹²⁰ This may not appear a large human corpus by the standards of the Indian sub-continent as a whole in the period (whose population was probab-

from Padre Pero Mexia S.J. to viceroy Linhares at Goa, 13 July 1634, HAG, Monçoês do Reino 19-D, fl. 1154v. Finally, on Tanjavur-Thai relations, see Temple and Anstey (1932), pp. 25-7.

¹¹⁸ ARA, OB, VOC. 1133, fls. 435-36.

¹¹⁹ ARA, OB, VOC. 1756, fls. 1282v-83; also van Dam (1932), pp. 412-33.

¹²⁰ Cf. Subrahmanyam (1990b), pp. 358-9.

ly in the vicinity of a hundred to a hundred and ten million), and all the more so because the Nāyaka states did not command or control these human resources in a fashion that can be deemed complete. From this producing economy, if we are to credit European sources, the three great Nāyakas possibly had a combined fiscal collection of some eight million pagodas in the early seventeenth century, and on this basis built towns and temples, saved and hoarded, consumed with great panache, sponsored choultries and 'populist' public mass-feeding, and maintained extensive if unwieldy war-machines. However, it is well to remember that it was also a fragile tax-base; trade ebbed and flowed on the basis of rhythms which were not wholly under the control either of traders or fiscal authorities, and the agrarian economy too was apt to suffer major convulsions. For, as the Jesuit Da Costa reminds us in the context of Madurai:

This kingdom consists mostly of dry lands, though in certain parts there are rivers with plenty of rice fields along their banks. Those rivers flow early during winter when the rains fall on the Malayalam mountains, but if the winter rains happen to fail no crops can grow and the country suffers terrible famines, as we see with our own eyes at every step we take into the interior of the country.¹²¹

Again, in 1662, the Jesuit Antão de Proença writing from Tirucirappalli speaks of a 'general famine caused by the flight of the inhabitants . . . and by the failure of the monsoon when the rain was most needed'.¹²² However exaggerated his description of 'corpses (that) were heaped up in huge piles' may have been, it serves to underline that outside the still relatively stable environment of the Kaveri delta, the economic expansion of which we have spoken in the context of the Nāyaka period did not free the Tamil countryside from the vagaries of larger economic and natural conjunctural phenomena. In sum, the Nāyakas can hardly be said to have presided over a golden age.

¹²¹ Da Costa, in Saulière (1964), p. 91.

¹²² Proença's letter, reproduced in Saulière (1966a), p. 777.

IV

Nāyaka Anthropology

1. FIRST INSTRUMENT OF DHARMA

Sou místico, mas só com o corpo.¹

If, out of fear of doing wrong,
or out of innocence,
I refrain from making love to her,
Desire lies in wait to kill me
with his deadly arrows.
Remember what we have been taught:
the first instrument of dharma
is the body.²

In this chapter, our focus shifts from the body politic, and the cultural economy of Nāyaka rule, to the body itself as perceived and written about in the literature of the age. It is our contention that Nāyaka-period literature embodies a new sensibility most powerfully marked in relation to the human body and its sensory resources. Not only is there a sudden interest, of a seriousness and scope hitherto unknown, in the body—as a wealth of medical texts from Tanjavur, as well as poetic works from the courts, can attest;³ but this interest extends to

¹ Pessoa (1946), 3:53. 'I am a mystic, but with the body alone.'

² *Tārāśaśāṅkavijayamu*, 1.99. The Sanskrit quotation at the end is *śarīram ādyam khalu dharmasādhanam*; see *Kumārasambhava* of Kālidāsa, 5.33.

³ For a medical text relevant to issues of political symbolism, see *Jivānanda* of Ānandarāyamakhī, from the end of the seventeenth century; Zimmer (1948), pp. 64-8.

I despise it.

Show me in your mercy
some way to be saved,
father, lord dwelling in Itaimarutur.⁵

This same Cuntaramūrṭti is also capable of thinking of god as 'the True One who knows the truth of feeling in the body' (*meyyil ninr' uṇarvu*, punning on Tamil *mey*—both 'body' and 'truth').⁶ The pun is energized by the tension between the truth of bodily experience and the yogic tenet that such experience can and should be transcended.⁷ But on the whole, this is a productive and creative ambivalence which serves to enrich the emotional tone of the devotee's dialogue with his god—himself a figure endowed with physical (usually human) form, a sensual presence, and a stable earthly home.

Too stable, perhaps. Nāyaka bhakti poets, and especially the most gifted of them all, in Telugu—the peripatetic Kshētrayya—have cut the god loose from these moorings. Developing the genre of short *padam* compositions first perfected in the early sixteenth century by the Tāllapāka family of singers at Tirupati, where the *padam* corpus is still wholly centred on the immovable temple deity, Kshētrayya shows us a god who is mobile, remarkably human in his passions, above all sensually alive, hungry for erotic experience—usually with some unnamed courtesan or dancing-girl. Whatever its emotional overtones, this erotic encounter is also often mercenary, a relationship revolving around cash payment, in which the deity is generally on the defensive:

Woman! He's none other
than Cennuḍu of Pālagiri.

⁵ Cuntaramūrṭti, *Tēvāram*, 60.5 (618).

⁶ *Ibid.* 57.11 (591).

⁷ There is another strand here, that develops in later medieval times, in both Tamil and Telugu—that related to the yoga of bodily perfection, *siddhi*. The Siddhas seek immortality through the body. Thus Dhūrjaṭi, in the early sixteenth century: 'Make my body everlasting, / or if not / find a way so that I may never / be born again after I die.' Heifetz and Narayana Rao (1987), p. 49. Similarly, Tāyumāṇavar, *tēcōmayāṇantam* 1 (and see remarks below).

Haven't you heard?
He rules the worlds.

When he wanted you, you took his gold—
but couldn't you tell him your address?
Some lover you are!
He's hooked on you.

He rules the worlds.

I found him wandering the alleyways,
too shy to ask anyone.
I had to bring him home with me.
Would it have been such a crime
if you or your girls
had waited for him
by the door?
You really think it's enough
to get the money in your hand?
Can't you tell who's big, who's small?
Who do you think he is?

He rules the worlds.

This handsome Cennuḍu of Pālagiri,
this Muvva Gopāla,
has fallen to your lot.
When he said he'd come tomorrow,
couldn't you consent
just a little?
Did you really have to say no?

*He rules the worlds.*⁸

The courtesan is being addressed by her senior colleague or Madam, who finds it hard to understand the callousness with which the divine client is being treated: he is God, ruler of the universe, and yet very much in love with the courtesan who has taken his money without even giving him her address! Without any loss in the god's transcendence and wholeness, the balance of forces between human and divine has

⁸ *Kṣētrayya padamulu* 176; translation by A.K. Ramanujan, V. Narayana Rao, and D. Shulman.

shifted dramatically. Where early Tamil bhakti generally leaves the initiative with the god, and, indeed, often protests at the asymmetry between him and his devotees, Kshētrayya gives the courtesan the upper hand: it is the god who pathetically searches for his beloved in the dark alleyways, and who is too ashamed to ask directions. By now we need not be surprised by the atmosphere of easy money, and the transactional language, that permeate this poetry of devotion; these are courtesan songs, rich with metaphysical content, but couched in the realistic idiom of Nāyaka economics and set in the actual context of bordello or women's streets. Later padam-poets, such as Sāraṅgapāṇi in the eighteenth century, go even further, to the point of coarseness; in expressing this blend of female one-upmanship and calculated monetary self-interest *vis-à-vis* the god. Thus a friend addresses the courtesan-lover:

Grab whatever cash he has,
that Veṇugopāla,
and think nothing of the rest.

As they say about lentils,
don't worry about the chaff.

Does it matter to which woman he goes,
or how late he stays there?
Just pass the days,
saying yes and no,
till the month is over,

and grab the cash.

What is it to you
if he runs into debts
or if he has an income?
Quietly and with tact,
lie in wait
like a cat on a wall

and grab the cash.

What if he makes love to her
and then to you?
What's there to be jealous about?

When youth passes,
nothing will go your way,

*so grab the cash.*⁹

The economy of devotion, like that of court and counting-house, now deals mainly in liquid resources. Note that here, as in perhaps a majority of the Kshētrayya padams, the old theme of love-in-separation, *viraha*, has evolved in the direction of jealous anger at the rival woman or women who may have temporarily snatched away the divine customer. Like earlier Tamil *bhakti*-poetry, many of these love-poems are couched in a tone of complaint and frustration; yet nearly every one of them ends in an intimation of orgasm and sensual, if not psychological, fulfilment. The point to be stressed is that the courtesan—whose persona the poet adopts, and who thus comes to represent one dominant model of devotion—acquires knowledge of the god through her body, in an encounter at once sexually explicit and emotionally nuanced and complex. In contrast to the common modern, apologetic exegesis of Kshētrayya's works, we do not believe that they contain the slightest trace of allegory, or of a metaphorically articulated dualism of body and soul. Rather, they reveal a mode of interaction with the deity which is intensely and unashamedly erotic, in a literal fashion, and which makes the human body the primary epistemic tool in the pursuit of transcendence.

Myth follows this pattern, which naturally draws from existing textual and cultic reservoirs of the late medieval period, especially in the Deccan. Here, for example, is the foundation-myth told by the great Śaiva temple at Kalahasti, Chittoor District on the borders of the Tamil country:

Yādavamahārāja ruled in Narayanapuram, in the Toṅṭai region. In order to claim him and enslave him, Śiva took the enchanting form of a libertine-mendicant (*viṭacaṅkamaṅ* = *viṭajaṅgama*), covered with ashes and carrying the *śivaliṅga*, and came to Narayanapuram. The women in the street, overcome with passion, surrounded him and sang his praises. Among them was a serving-girl from the palace, whose task

⁹ Sāraṅgapāṇi 98; translation by A. K. Ramanujan, V. Narayana Rao, and D. Shulman.

was to present the king's vessels at dinner. Her heart melting like ghee in fire, she bowed to the sensuous ascetic and begged him to favour her by eating a meal and resting at her house. He answered: 'Woman beautiful as if love itself had taken physical form, I have been defeated in the wars of desire; if you allow me to take refuge in your tiny waist and swelling breasts, I will come to you.' She accepted, understanding his intention: 'If this leaky body of mine, destined to die, can remove some of your many sorrows, is that not a gift won by the penance I have performed?'

She brought him home, washed his feet with water poured from a golden pitcher, seated him on a stool and fed him; after dinner, she gave him betel-nut with camphor-scented lime. Now he showed signs of desire, and she, too, became eager; elated, that god who had hidden his third eye made love to her, submerging her in a flood of passion.

Because of all this, she completely forgot her duties at the palace. At dinner the king was incensed and sent messengers to fetch her. She begged her lover to wait for her at home and hastened to the king's presence. Still angry, he ordered his servants to cut off her long, beautiful hair (*kulal*). Thus disfigured and shamed, she returned, weeping, to her house. There, at a touch of the *jaṅgama*'s hand, her hair grew back at once. When she next entered the palace, the king saw her luxuriant hair and angrily asked why his order had not been carried out. She explained what had happened, and the king, now amazed and penitent, hurried to see the visitor in her house. The *jaṅgama* accepted his humble worship and ordered the king to build a temple for Śiva at Southern Kailāsa (= Kalatti/Kalahasti).¹⁰

The story comes to us in sixteenth-century Telugu and mid-to-late seventeenth-century Tamil versions; it is firmly located both in period and in place, with themes and figures familiar from elsewhere in the Deccan plateau into which the Toṅṭai region merges. Kalahasti was on the frontier of the slowly crystallizing Nāyaka sensibility. Thus the hero of the story is the libertine-mendicant, *viṭajaṅgama*, so prominent in the Telugu Vīraśaiva tradition;¹¹ and he introduces a frankly sensuous

¹⁰ *Cikāḷatti purāṇam* of Karuṇaippirakācuvāmikaḷ, Civappirakācuvāmikaḷ, and Vēlaiyacuvāmikaḷ, 1.35-86; *Kāḷahastīśvaramāhātmyamu* of Dhūrjaṭi, 1.29-60.

¹¹ See *Basavapurāṇamu* of Pāḷkuriki Sōmanātha, 3 (Narayana Rao, 1990, pp. 89-97).

tone to the otherwise highly puritanical Tamil purāṇic tradition. No matter that the Tamil editor finds it necessary to inform us, in a footnote, that Śiva was only pretending to be moved by libidinous passion in the girl's house; that he was 'putting on a play (*nāṭakam*)' in order to reveal her love and the greatness of Kalatti, and to enslave the king.¹² This is precisely the kind of apologetic metaphorizing that we have objected to in connection with Kshētrayya. The girl has surely got it right: her 'leaky' and mortal body, so often derided in precisely these terms in Tamil bhakti texts, has suddenly acquired a precise and positive significance. She can use it to serve, to satisfy, and to know a hungry god. The sensual motif of the long hair, lost and miraculously regained—a motif itself connected to other Toṇṭai and Andhra sites¹³—visually reinforces this eloquent conclusion that the myth seeks to enact.

One should also note in this story the new relation of surface to exterior: so often at odds in south Indian bhakti and purāṇic texts, here they seem to fulfil and complete one another. This is a crucial indication of the transformation that is occurring in attitudes toward the body; the older hierarchy, in which the subtler, more encompassing interior is clearly preferred to the exterior, is giving way to a new formulation. The girl cannot content herself with feeding the god, worshipping him, becoming his slave; she must also know him and satisfy him in and through her body, and he also demands no less. This newfound harmony of inner and outer spheres (and also of language) is powerfully expressed in a verse from Dhūrjaṭi's Telugu narration of the story:

Each place they touched one another
 became a secret point of pleasure;
 wherever lip grazed the body,
 there was the taste of jaggery;
 every word spoken
 held the essence of the divine;
 however they were together,

¹² *Cīkālattipurāṇam*, p. 18, note.

¹³ See the rich discussion by Hildebeitel (1988), pp. 93-7, referring to materials from Senji and also from as far north as Srikakulam (we are preparing a study of the latter shrine).

delight and beauty were there;
 each movement made
 was an act of love.¹⁴

The physical enactment of this relation has emotional and metaphysical components; the inner world of feeling, fantasy, knowledge and perception, including linguistic perception, flows without break or barrier onto the surface (and vice versa). One has the sense of a unitary and organic relation between parts and whole, with no obvious tension between them; the self, if it exists at all, must surely comprise both surface and depth.

So the body has its uses, its own special links to knowledge. But what kind of knowledge are we dealing with? And what is new in this evolving conceptualization of the embodied person? We can see that the body functions as vehicle, *sādhana*, for sensual contact with what is most real—i.e., the unpredictable, mobile deity. It appears that the feminine body, indeed the feminine persona generally, has certain advantages in this respect—perhaps because of the common south Indian view that the woman has more intense sexual pleasure than the male, or because of the *bhakti* preference for the socially lowly and neglected, or because of the woman's role of absorbing the lover into her body, as the devotee seeks to internalize the god. If the deity is rendered human in a more far-reaching manner than we have seen before in the south, in this context of sensory incorporation, the male devotee simultaneously transforms himself, in no less an extreme fashion, into a woman. The well-known privileging of the feminine voice by south Indian *bhakti* poets both hypertrophies and grounds itself in a literalizing imagination at this time. The epistemology of incorporation thus includes, in the case of the male, an element of retrieval, of bringing forth an imagined feminine component of the personality. An implicit notion of bisexual wholeness seems present, perhaps in relation to the important theme of assembling and reintegrating the dispersed or shattered parts of the physical body, as we shall see. Courtly literature also reveals a striking tendency toward the feminization of the king, his court, and the god himself. This is one element in a scheme of self-transformation in and through the physical

¹⁴ *Kālahastīsvaramāhātmyamu* of Dhūrjaṭi, 1.43.

body. On the other hand, there is also reason to believe that the full-fledged imagining of feminine sensuality by male literati has produced concomitant images of a more wholly sensuous, and indeed more masculine, male, as in the Kshētrayya padams and the Telugu *śringāarakāvya*s. The man may play at being woman, may recover latent female elements, may sensitize himself to a female vision and experience—but he reverts to, or reassimilates, his initial roles in the end.¹⁵

Closely related to this set of features centering on the woman's corporeal as well as emotional presence, but still surprising in the context of traditional south India, is a movement toward individualizing the human—again, first the feminine—body. Suddenly, we are dealing with a unit of existence that, however standardized in perception, is also known to be individually unique. Let us take an example from Samukhamu Veṅkaṭa Kṛṣṇappa Nāyaka's *śringāarakāvya*, *Ahalyāsankrandanam*, from early 18th-century Madurai (we remark in passing that these *śringāarakāvya*s—long narrative poems on the vicissitudes of desire—though often denigrated in present-day south India, in fact offer some of the most trenchant expressions of the Nāyaka sensibility we are seeking to define). This work opens with a ludicrous beauty-contest in Indra's heaven: as the apsaras-courtesans file in to the court, the gods and the crusty old sages who are present vie with one another in describing the charms of their favourites. Each naturally champions the woman who, at some point in his career, mesmerized and seduced him (often ruining his ascetic power in the process); it is as if these supposedly passionless exemplars suddenly gave in to an overpowering, delicious nostalgia for the all-too rare sensual interludes in their lives. So they now argue, push and shove one another, even come to blows over the relative merits of their former lovers. Parāśara recalls Daśakanyā-Satyavatī—her quivering waist, swelling breasts, her armpits and thighs, her eyes darting like fish, that special way she had of leaning over the pole with which she was steering the boat through the river, as she sang the boatmen's refrain, *ēlēlō* . . . Mitra and Varuṇa, on the other hand, believe Urvaśī is by far the most beautiful, and King Purūravas supports them; no other woman is equal

¹⁵ Cf. Kshētrayya 264.

even to Urvaśī's toenail! This incenses Nalakubara, who attacks Purūravas *ad hominem*—'Only your infatuation makes you speak like this'—and puts forward the name of Rambhā instead, even citing a Sanskrit line as proof: *nārīṣu rambhā*, 'Rambhā among women (is best)'. Similarly, Vāyu favours Añjanā; Śiva declares that only the women of the Pine Forest are real women; Nārada recalls Sriñjaya's daughter; Agni argues for the women of the *śaravaṇa*, and so on. What is striking here is the way the stereotypical imagery and standard tropes of erotic description in Telugu and Sanskrit are used repeatedly in an effort to establish singular, individualized claims. The underlying intention is highly individualistic, even if each of the maidens involved turns out to have the same shining eyes and bulging breasts. Occasionally a slight turn of phrase carries the whole force of this intention: thus Viśvāmitra, recalling the ten cosmic ages that he spent with Menakā, always intent on 'just one more day, one more night', attempts a description: 'Her eyes were longer than the *cēra* measure, her waist was poverty itself; her breasts were fuller than the gourd of the *kinnara*-lute, her face resembled the full moon; she had that particular kind of look in her eyes, sharp as arrows . . .'¹⁶ What begins as an unimaginative imitation of the conventionalized models of feminine beauty suddenly comes to life at the end with the recollection of something personal, unique, and hence resistant to simile, 'that particular kind of look.'

This groping toward the individual—the single, feminine human being endowed with a body—is part of a wider process of self-transforming awareness. As already hinted, much of it involves an expanding imagination, which seeks to explore the woman's subjectivity in the contexts of love and bodily experience, always in relation to the male figures surrounding her. Some of the poetic works that express this experiment were themselves composed by women such as Raṅgājamma and Rāmabhadrāmba in Tanjavur and (slightly later) Muddupaḷani in Madurai. But for the male poets, too, it is the woman's sensibility that focuses the emerging notion of the individual subject, alive to a complex series of inner voices. For the first time in Telugu literature, internal monologues appear extensively in the text. The women heroines hesitate, express ambivalence, defy convention, state

¹⁶ *Ahalyāsankrandanam* 1, p. 37: *oka pōlika vālika tūpu cūpu*.

their frustrations, propose an empirically grounded ideology of violation. The latter point is crucial: the major stories all deal in transgression, in ways that transcend by far the inherited purāṇic narratives on which they build. But the selection is, in itself, highly suggestive; this is the age when tales of anti-normative violation, always of a sexual character, fascinate the elite (as they seem always to have fascinated the folk narrators) and demand literary form on a grand scale. The Nāyaka heroes and heroines are Ahalyā and Indra, Tārā and Candra, Ushā and Aniruddha, Rādhā and Krishṇa, Subhadrā and Arjuna, and others like them¹⁷—all protagonists in dramas of sensual excess and violation. No doubt the social upheaval of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries helps explain something of this interest in the anomalous and anti-normative, as a similar flux in nineteenth-century Andhra found partial expression in the renewed vogue of these same stories (now metamorphosed into plays and novels). But the Nāyaka preoccupation with these themes is also rooted in a new anthropology, in an image of the man or woman whose body mediates reality and grants knowledge, status, and power. Muddupaḷani, in eighteenth-century Madurai, states this confident perception directly: only the man who has touched the courtesan's breasts can become the commander of a fort (*durgādhinēta*); only one who has stared in her face can be a king.¹⁸

We will attempt to map out in more detail the course of this development, and its major features, with reference to three major poetic works: Cēmakūra Veṅkaṭakavi's *Sāraṅgadharacaritramu*, one of the outstanding court-*kāvya*s from Nāyaka Tanjavur; Samukhamu Veṅkaṭa Krishṇappa Nāyaka's *Ahalyāsankrandanamu* (cited above), and Śeshamu Veṅkaṭapati's *Tārāśaśāṅkavijayamu*, both the latter from early eighteenth century Madurai. We begin with Sāraṅgadharā at Tanjavur, with a story that also interests itself deeply in the response of the male to the generalized ambience of violation as well as in the closely related themes of physical mutilation and regeneration.

¹⁷ Thus we have prominent works such as *Ahalyāsankrandanamu*, *Tārāśaśāṅkavijayamu*, *Uṣāpariṇayamu* (versions by both Raṅgājamma and Dāmarla Aṅkabhūpāla), *Rādhikāsāntvanamu*, *Vijayavilāsamu*, and so on. These are generally classed as *śrīṅgāra-kāvya*s, narrative poems on erotic themes.

¹⁸ *Rādhikāsāntvanamu* of Muddupaḷani, 1.26.

Sāraṅgadhara: Hesitant Hippolytus

Sāraṅgadhara, enticed by his father's courtesan or wife, rejects her advances; she turns against him, slanders him to his father, the king, who orders him maimed and left to die in the forest. A passing yogi, the Siddha Matsyendranātha, discovers the wounded prince, nurses him back to health, and helps regenerate his lost limbs. Sāraṅgadhara becomes the great Siddha Saurāṅgi. The story, of the well-known type of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, or Hippolytus and Phaedra,¹⁹ exists in south India in numerous versions, oral as well as 'high'-literary; at least one local purāṇic tradition in northern Tamil Nadu has claimed it.²⁰ The earliest complete recording in Telugu is in Gaurana's *Navanāthacaritra*, a work of the late fifteenth century setting out the lives of the famous nine Nāth-Yogins. This framing of the story, in the context of one of the most conspicuous of the medieval esoteric traditions in the south, is itself meaningful, as we shall see. Gaurana's version already contains the basic features of most later tellings.²¹ Around 1560, Dōnūri Kōnērunāthuḍu mentions the story in his *Bālabhāgavatamu*; he also transposes it from Malava (where Gaurana sets it) to Rajamahendravaram in the Andhra country, closer to home.²² The king in the story,

¹⁹ AT 706 (the maiden without hands). See the detailed study by Bloomfield (1947), pp. 141-67 (our thanks to Hananya Goodman for this reference); also Dracott (1906), pp. 186-93. The Punjabi narrative of Pūran Bhagat is a close parallel to the south Indian Sāraṅgadhara, including the crucial element of the hero's transformation into a Siddha at the end (Gorakhnāth replacing Matsyendranātha in the Punjabi tale); these are clearly variants of a common story. On Pūran Bhagat, see the study by Gill (1986), pp. 133-52.

²⁰ At Velur: see Taleyarkan (1873); Shulman (1980), pp. 233-4. Aside from the version by Cēmakūra Veṅkaṭakavi, which forms the basis of our discussion, we may note the following: *Sāraṅgadhara caritramu (Dvipadakāvyaṃ)* of Bāṅāla Śambhudāsuḍu (Madras, 1914); *Sāraṅgadhara caritra jaṅgamakatha* of Tirunagari Veṅkaṭarāmānujasūri (Madras, 1909); and the studies by Jayaprabha (1988) and Candra-sekhara Reddy (1985) (the latter unavailable to us). The story merits a detailed study of its permutations from level to level and its relations with parallel Indian narratives.

²¹ Gaurana, *Navanāthacaritra*, 1-2; both the paintings in Citrāṅgi's palace and the specific yogic sequence of Sāraṅgadhara's regeneration (see below) appear here.

²² See the editor's introduction, *ibid.*, p. 26n; Veṅkaṭa Rāvu (1978), pp. 70-1.

Rājarājanarendra, thus comes to be identified with the Eastern Cāḷukya of that name, reigning in Rajamundry in the early eleventh century. Many of the popular Telugu tellings hold to this identification.²³ But for Cēmakūra Veṅkaṭapati, whose version, composed at Raghunātha Nāyaka's court, we will follow, the setting is still Malava, as in Gaurana.²⁴ Cēmakūra Veṅkaṭapati was a Śūdra poet, and the author of another major kāvya—*Vijayavilāsamu*, on Arjuna's abduction of Subhadra; he praises Raghunātha extensively in the introduction to that work. His version of the Sāraṅgadhara story is by far the most elaborate available; it also presents the narrative in a style and tone that we can easily recognize as typical for the Nāyaka courts. We may well ask ourselves why this particular story achieves its position as a prime subject for kāvya at the court of Raghunātha: is there something here that is specifically suited to that time and space?

Sāraṅgadhara, the handsome son of Rājarājanarendra and his wife Ratnāṅgi, has a pet pigeon which flies one day into the women's quarters of the palace. The king is away, hunting; Sāraṅgadhara decides to enter the harem to reclaim the pigeon, against the advice of his friend, the minister Subuddhi, who foresees the danger he will face. Subuddhi knows that the prince's physical beauty will be too much for Citrāṅgi, the king's courtesan, and that she will attempt to seduce him. And indeed, Citrāṅgi is overwhelmed by her first glimpse of Sāraṅgadhara:

Gold comes only
in tiny coins:
how could anyone even think
of comparing it to the ravishing
wholeness of his body?

²³ But not the *jaṅgamakatha*, which places the king in Hastinapura, while Citrāṅgi comes from the Pāṇḍya country. Still, oral versions tend to make Rājarājanarendra a Telugu king. A tradition recorded by Appakavi builds on the Rajamundry connection by making Sāraṅgadhara a student of Nannaya's; when Bhīmakavi threw Nannaya's *Andhraśabdacintāmaṇi* into the Godavari, Sāraṅgadhara, who had memorized the work, reconstructed it and transmitted it to Bāla-sarasvatī.

²⁴ *Sāraṅgadhara-caritramu* of Cēmakūra Veṅkaṭakavi, 1.5.

Lac is painted in small streaks
on women's fingernails:
no-one would equate it
with his brilliant lips!

His loins are wider than a riverbank
that anyway breaks down
into fine grains of sand . . . (2.46)

The first image that springs to her mind, in this well-known trope built on the inversion of conventional standards of comparison (*pratīpa*), is, not surprisingly, that of gold coins—an appropriate register for this particular palace. It is already clear what she intends: she fusses over the prince, has her servants wash his feet with rose-water, until he exclaims: 'Why all this attention to me, as if I were a stranger, when actually I am your son?' He is speaking figuratively, of course: Citrāṅgi, as his father's woman, is a kind of 'mother' for him. Sāraṅadhara will insist on this relation throughout, even as Citrāṅgi will attempt to subvert it. Her method, characteristic not only of the seductive scenario in general but of the courtly literature of this period specifically, is a transparent and increasingly outrageous paronomasia. Already in her first words to him this splitting of language is at work: he apologizes for coming into her chambers during the king's absence, and she says: 'In fact, you and the king are one and the same to me, O prince born to a marvellous mother (*asamāmbakuṇḍavu*).' The closing epithet looks like a statement of humility: Citrāṅgi is praising the Queen, Ratnāṅgi, Sāraṅadhara's mother, as superior to herself. But the same epithet, read differently, means Manmatha—the god of desire. This is the real identity that she will persistently force upon Sāraṅadhara, at first somewhat coyly but, in the end, with completely literal and concrete intent. As a courtesan, she is also quite right in saying, and meaning literally, that the king and his son are essentially the same to her.

Punning saturates these verses: Citrāṅgi tells the prince that she is honouring him because he is her son (*nā kumāruḍavē*)—but, dividing the words differently, he is also the god of love to her (*nāku māruḍavē*). Note that in one important respect these usages fail to conform to the classic definitions of *śleṣha*, the paronomastic trope par excellence in Indian poetics (and the commentators on this text continually identify

the speakers' puns as ślesha): a ślesha utterance splits into two registers of equal validity, both of them capable of functioning literally on the level of overt intentionality (*vācya*); but Citrāṅgi's speech always disguises an erotic suggestion that is privileged, and that relegates the surface meaning to a lower or secondary status.²⁵ In any case, relentless punning points to a consciousness that is splintering and that, playing with language, is also playing with the world. What is at stake, among other things, is the relation between words and experience, including the compelling experience of the body: this is the level that keeps breaking through the muted discourse of apparent innocence, that harnesses language to its own ends. The crucial point is that Sāraṅgadhara, for all his formal adherence to this muted surface, is deeply engaged in the game; he responds with obvious understanding, and with a certain timid openness, to Citrāṅgi's escalating verbal ploys. The poet, for his part, encompasses both levels; while explicitly he sides with innocence and self-restraint, the whole texture of the passage points to a more basic affinity with Citrāṅgi's dominant, erotic aims.

This erotic tenor is, from the start, remarkably transparent. Citrāṅgi begins by praising Sāraṅgadhara's physical charms—'People are always saying that the Moon, Jayanta, Spring, and the God of Love are truly beautiful, but no-one has ever seen them; seeing you, however, brings instant ecstasy' (2.58)—and moves on to heavily suggestive analogies like the following:

I was troubled before,
 but now that turbulence
 has disappeared, O Lord
 with arrows made of flowers—
 you're the right man
 for any job.
 Why worry that the king's away?
 If I have butter in my hands,
 why should I crave for ghee? (2.59)

²⁵ See *Kāvyaṅgī* of Mammaṭa, 10.8; notes by A. B. Gajendragadkar (1959), pp. 301-6. On ślesha in Sanskrit court-poetry, see also Smith (1985), pp. 100-1, 292-304. This is not to say that in actual practice the two levels are always equal; indeed, one of the effects of ślesha is to open up a surface level of speech to wider expressive forces.

She is using standard rhetorical ploys—the semi-proverbial *arthāntara-nyāsa*, dressed in punning alliteration (*venna bettukoni nētikin ēṭikin angalārpā gan*)—to convey, without actually stating literally, her plan and her desire: she will produce her own ‘ghee’ by ‘churning’ (a sexual metaphor) the raw ‘butter’ she has found. And, so far at least, she is clearly mistress of the situation: Sāraṅadhara allows himself to be beguiled in this way, plied with betel leaf and sandal, and—after a feeble protest to the effect that, after all, he just wants his pigeon and would be happy to go—enticed into visiting the private apartments upstairs. He is by no means unresponsive to her stunning body, as they climb the stairs (69), nor does the beauty of her rooms fail to arouse him. The special feature of these rooms is, it transpires, a wall covered with pornographic murals: wherever one looks, there are scenes depicting the ‘secrets of the arts of love’, such as the 84 sexual positions and the famous courtesans and practised lovers from Indra’s heaven. Citrāṅgi, still punning relentlessly, takes the young prince on a tour of this exhibition:

Have you seen this one?
 Here is that sexy man
 obsessed, *as you well know*,
 with the breasts
 of the cowherd girls,
 the one who practised his tricks
 in the cattle-pens of Vraj—
 and look what *she* has learned from him
 about the delights of playing
 in one’s youth,
before it’s too late,
 the games of love. (2.74)

By an untranslatable pun, Kṛṣṇa’s epithet here—*nera jāṇ’ avu*, ‘that sexy man’—can also be read as a vocative (‘O you skilful lover . . .’). The play intensifies, this time adding an interlinguistic dimension: the next picture is of a man grabbing hold of a woman’s thighs (Skt. *ūru*—but in Telugu *ūru* is a ‘village’), his fingers scrambling at her waistband (*kaṭisīma*); for does not the Sanskrit proverb say, *grāmo nāsti kutas sīmā*, ‘where there is no village, how can there be a boundary?’ Even given the context of transgressing borders, this kind of

manic paronomasia may seem a little forced to our ears. But the forcible distortion of language is really very much to the point, and serves the clear function of allowing the game of pretence and suggestion to proceed, simultaneously concealing and revealing Citrāṅgi's purpose. The fissure that is opening up in language is perfectly suited to the bifurcated awareness that both players share. Thus the narrator tells us that Sāraṅgadhara both 'hears and does not hear' the skilfully woven words of his hostess (76); his internal division is painfully explicit, though he struggles obstinately to twist her utterances into some innocuous direction (*ataḍ' ā kāmīniy anu vākyaṃul' ella vērey arthamugā nērpuna virici*, 80). For example: 'Look,' she says, 'at Gādhī's son (*allana gādhīrājasutuḍu* = Viśvāmitra) gently kissing Menakā and sucking her breasts;' 'of course,' he replies, repeating her sentence word for word with one crucial change in word-boundaries, 'that is the prerogative of that child, the son of the mountain (*alla nagādhīrājasutuḍu* = Mainaka, son of Himālaya), who drinks the milk of his mother Menakā.' Viśvāmitra's seduction by the divinely beautiful Menakā becomes—by verbal magic alone—a placid nursing scene. The prince similarly interprets graphic images of coitus as depictions of athletic wrestlers (*jetlu*) in action. Or, in another attempt to evade the obvious, or to divert it into some more acceptable track, he responds to her enthused description of Kṛṣṇa's climbing the *ponna* tree (or: climbing a woman), while all the *gopīs* bathing in the river were completely exposed, by saying, 'Yes, Lady, it is remarkable—all of this is Kṛṣṇa's game (*kṛṣṇalīla gada*, 79).' Sexual adventures can be framed and slightly distanced by a theology of divine play.

Citrāṅgi is by now becoming understandably impatient; she offers him flowers, musk, sandals, betel to decorate 'this body'—his or hers? Manmatha, the poet tells us, is silently screaming 'Take them!' The ambiguity is wearing a little thin, and the prince is clearly involved in the ongoing *double entendre* as he states: 'The great wealth that parents amass in the world surely belongs to their children; so please take this and keep it safely for me in your box (*nī peṭṭi*, suggesting *peṭṭu*, to insert) until I need them.' This is too much for Citrāṅgi, who complains to herself: 'His heart is like a rock. What can I do? I've come so close—I can't bear it. When Kāma touches you, he is a killer. When the person is right next to me, why waste time sending messages?' Brazenly, she

slips off the top of her sari, loosens the knot at her waist, and tries to grab Sāraṅgadhara. Too late, he says, 'I have to go now, Mother.' She can't allow it: 'I have been waiting for you for so long, do you think I'll let you go?' And, explicitly at last: 'I have longed for you, I crave to make love to you without end, O Prince (*rāsuta*) in Manmatha's form (*ātmajākr̥ti*). Make me float on an ocean of passion. My eyes are like the fawn's—and you are Sāraṅgadhara (i.e. the Moon; literally, 'bearer of the deer' that marks the face of the moon). Is it right to torment me any more?'

Even here, in the crucial verse that finally cancels out the paronomastic split, our hero finds scope for a culminating series of puns, ironically literalizing Citrāṅgi's utterance. He has been forced to choose, and he opts for at least the semblance of innocence by virtue of the same linguistic devices that served him earlier, as he played along with the seduction. 'You say that you long for me, that you crave me, who have the form of your own son (*ātmajākr̥ti*); you say to me, "Come, O Prince, my son (*rā suta*)"—you have confirmed in your words that Sarasvatī, goddess of true speech, cannot lie.' Thus language, divided within itself, and strangely distorted, is still the vehicle of truth—if one only knows how to relocate its internal boundaries. Sāraṅgadhara, *in extremis*, clings to this facility he has, as if by reaffirming in explicit terms the incestuous nature of the proposition, which he discovers pre-existing within the language in which it is couched, he can turn Citrāṅgi back from the brink. What has really happened, of course, is something quite different: where previously both players maintained the double register of erotic innuendo and apparent innocence, now each has opted for one of these domains; Citrāṅgi crosses over to the overtly erotic and seductive, while Sāraṅgadhara chooses propriety. The ślesha has simply distributed its two senses between the two parties. It is very striking that this process takes place in a verse that turns on a final pun involving Sāraṅgadhara's name; the transition reflects the moment of recovered identity, when the prince divests himself of all linguistic and mythic-iconic superimpositions to remain finally himself, alone with his name and his individual experience. He refuses to pun his way through what he perceives, correctly, as a potentially self-destructive violation.

Other versions of the story soften the nature of this violation, for

example, by claiming that Citrāṅgi was originally intended to be betrothed to Sāraṅgadhara himself, not to his father. When the latter saw the woman's beauty, usually as represented in a picture, he tricked her parents by sending his own sword, rather than his son's, to symbolize the groom at the wedding ceremony. Only gradually, inductively, does the young bride discover that she has been duped; her hunger for Sāraṅgadhara thus reflects both an attempt at revenge and the wholly proper desire of a wife for her intended husband.²⁶ Here the violation is of the natural order—the relations of husband and wife—even before the question of the son's attachment to his father's woman comes into play. Another possibility, which we have seen to be present in the *kāvya* telling, is to stress Citrāṅgi's role as a courtesan (*bhōgakutiśirōjātilakamu*, 1.6), with the consequent freedom that this role implies. A curious ambivalence pervades the working out of the seductive encounter: the violation is central and necessary, but our authors blunt its cutting edge. In any case, it is clear that for Cēmakūra Veṅkaṭakavi the charm and fascination of this theme of transgression motivate much of his art. And he is not at all averse to indicating a certain sympathy with the anti-authoritarian position espoused by Citrāṅgi; the poet's own voice also bifurcates as he concludes his description of the aborted seduction. Clearly, 'officially' as it were, he lets the indignant Sāraṅgadhara carry the day in his arguments: no matter what Citrāṅgi may say, how much she may need him, how often she repeats that she is only a courtesan and was always quite separate from the family and its kin-relations (107), the prince refuses to see her as 'just any woman' (*ibid.*). She will always be, in his eyes, a kind of mother (*tallivi nāku*). As her hysteria increases, so does his stubbornness and self-righteousness (perhaps compensating for his earlier willingness to play at this game). When she brings forward various mythic precedents to support her demand, he immediately rejects them:

(Citrāṅgi): We're all alone, and you keep giving me
these lectures.
Stop this useless chatter, that doesn't get us
into bed.

²⁶ See Śambhudāsa, pp. 3-7, and the oral versions cited by Jayaprabha (1988).

Did not Rati seduce Manmatha,
and Rambhā imflame Kubera's son? . . .

What if three-eyed Śiva fell for the Pine Forest women?
He knew less than you.
And the Supreme Lord (Prajāpati) who approached his own
beloved daughter—he, too,
knew less than you.
And wasn't it Indra who touched Ahalyā? But then he also
knew less than you.
The Moon made love to his teacher's wife, because he
knew less than you.

You're clearly better than all of them.
They simply lacked your good sense.
If you had been there at the time,
you would have ruined
all their plans. (116-118)

Disappointment has made her sarcastic; but the verse she utters, patterned after Peddana²⁷ and of a type which we will encounter again, is meant to establish a mythic paradigm for action. Note the references to Indra and especially to Tārā and Candra, whose story hovers as a shadowy presence behind Venkaṭakavi's narration. Sāraṅadhara, of course, makes short shrift of the paradigmatic claim:

(Sāraṅadhara): Listen, Mother:
the gods who create all these worlds,
who maintain them and destroy them,
can do as they please,
but these things won't work
for anyone else.
As for Rambhā and Rati, whom you mention—
did they rape their own sons? (119)

And the lecture continues: 'You don't know how to live; you don't know your husband's mind. You don't listen when I tell you this is wrong. It's time to go.' Sāraṅadhara is by now, inwardly and outwardly, the very model of propriety.

²⁷ *Manucaritramu* 2.73.

But the poet does not leave it at this. A string of lively verses show us the heartbroken Citrāṅgi, in ways which cannot but enlist our empathy. She is no brazen siren, nor, at this point, a crazed and hysterical Phaedra. She is a rejected woman who, after initiating an erotic encounter, has been subtly, and far from innocently, toyed with; and she is suffering now at the level of her very life's-breath (*ucuru*, 122). Even a stone, she says, would have melted at her pleading, but Sāraṅgadhara will not soften in the least. He should have reddened her lips with kisses, not her eyes with his rejection; he has scratched her heart with his fingernails instead of scratching at her eager breasts. And she is trapped in this state of misery, too sick to move: Spring burns her with his hot fragrances; the Wind (another Sāraṅgadhara), unaffected himself by any passion, scorches her with his sharp touch; the god of love throws knives at her Gracefully, still alluring, she flicks tears with the tip of her fingernail from her pale cheeks. However standardized the depiction, Citrāṅgi's torment (*dainyarasambu*, 128) is real enough. To clinch the matter, the poet ends the scene with a veiled protest: Sāraṅgadhara, in a mounting panic, aware that 'words are ineffective against the demon of passion' (129), runs off, leaving his upper cloth in her hands—for 'who would worry about clothes when he is drowning?' And the poet exclaims, punning again: 'What a surprise! Sāraṅgadhara (= Candra, the moon) escaped, this time, the embrace of his father's woman (or: of Brihaspati's wife, *gurubhāma*, 130).' The undercurrent of the Tārā-Śaśāṅka myth of violation, so useful to our poet throughout this scene, has been blocked by a paronomastic dam.

We do not have the space to follow Sāraṅgadhara through the whole course of his subsequent trials. As in the Joseph story, the incriminating garment left behind serves the rejected lover—her desire now changed to fury—in her eagerness to be revenged. Citrāṅgi, in line with the earlier narrowing of her awareness, becomes more and more single-minded and malevolent; and the gullible king, after a fascinating public trial, orders his men to cut off Sāraṅgadhara's arms and legs in the forest. This final episode demands attention. But before we turn, briefly, to this last section of the story, we need to draw in the lines of a comparison that sums up and highlights the distinctive qualities of this Nāyaka scene of violation. There is a sub-text that

haunts Cēmakūra Veṅkaṭakavi's presentation of the encounter between Citrāṅgi and Sāraṅgadhara—a text that the Nāyaka poet certainly knew well. Peddana's *Manucaritramu*, the most outstanding Telugu kāvya and a centrepiece of the Krishṇadevarāya golden age of Telugu poetry, whose ethos it expresses to perfection, is structured largely around a similar failed seduction and its fateful consequences.

Excursus: Peddana as Prototype. The innocent Brahmin householder, Pravara, has been magically transported from his home to the Himalayas; but the day is growing late, the magical ointment that brought him to the mountains has washed off his feet in the snow, and he is desperately seeking a way to return home. As he wanders the mountain paths, he suddenly catches a whiff of unmistakable origins—a mixture of betel with camphor and musk, such as is chewed only by women (2.24). Though he clearly recognizes the odour and makes the proper inference, he is too naive or embarrassed even to articulate it explicitly:

As, one by one, breezes struck him
with this pervading fragrance,
he understood there were people there,
and coming close,
he saw her—

her body a gleam of lightning,
eyes like a hundred-petalled lotus,
long hair black as bees,
face luminous as the moon,
breasts round as Cakravāka birds,
the sunken navel—

surely a woman, and yet divine. (2.25)

The most he will admit to himself is that there must be 'people' nearby; but, following his nose, he is confronted with an apparition of exquisite feminine beauty. We see her with Pravara's far from indifferent eyes, as they complete the proper course, from the top down, for noticing and describing a deity. Something is certainly transpiring within the Brahmin's consciousness, for the poet lingers, in a long *sīsa* verse, over his perception of the woman's emotional and physical presence:

The red petticoat inside the white skirt
 that veiled her thighs
 turned the gleaming moon-stone beneath her
 red, and the gourds of the *vīṇā*
 rubbed against her firm breasts
 as her delicate fingers seemed to caress
 sweet music from the strings,
 and she was languid with longing,
 her eyes half-closed as if,
 flowing with the song, she was slowly
 making love, with expert skill,
 beyond herself with pleasure,
 while the bracelets on her lotus-hands
 chimed the rhythm of the song
 and there was joy, brilliant joy
 as she played on. (2.27)

Meanwhile, as he stares, she has also caught sight of him and immediately decided that she wants him, handsome as he is, and glowing with Brahminical energy. So startled is she by his beauty that she—a celestial apsaras—becomes almost human, blinking, sweating, infatuated and confused (2.33). She approaches him, and he speaks:

Who are you, woman with eyes
 like those of a frightened doe,
 living alone without fear
 in this wild land?
 I am a Brahmin,
 a god on earth, Pravara
 by name, and I have lost my way
 from too much pride (*krovvu*)
 in presuming to visit this mountain peak.
 How can I go home?
 Show me some way, and good
 will come to you. (2.39)

Listen to the epithet he gives her, *bhītahariṇekṣaṇa*, 'with eyes like those of a frightened doe'. He knows her beauty, he responds, and he chooses a word that perhaps unconsciously reflects his inner state—*krovvu*, the excessive pride, presumptuousness, or, often, erotic agitation (Skt.

mada) that is proper to the male. Krovvu here explains his presence in the Himālayas, although the suggestion clearly goes beyond this surface statement. He does, however, have one definite goal, to which he will adhere throughout this passage, under ever greater pressure: he wants to go home. And it is this goal that Varūthini, the apsaras, now sets herself to undermine:

With such big eyes, O god on earth.
 you have to ask the way?
 I think you've found a woman
 in this private place
 and want to make her talk. Surely
 you must know the way you came.
 You ask so fearlessly, it must seem
 that I am easy prey
 for you. (2.41)

She is already flirting with him, teasing him, and now she can introduce herself: she is a woman of love from heaven, Varūthini, a friend of the famous Ghritācī, Tilottomā, Rambhā, and other courtesans of the gods. Like Citrāṅgi in a similar situation, she invites him to 'rest' in her house. Is Pravara tempted? There is never any real sign of this. Instead, he insists again that he must go, that the daily rituals he performs at home must soon be completed; what difference is it to her, he asks, if he comes or goes (2.48)? These innocent protests elicit an explicit declaration on her part. Here we have none of Citrāṅgi's coy *double entendre*; Varūthini, the suave and experienced courtesan, decides the best course is to speak her mind: 'Why hide the truth? My heart is hooked on you. Can you deliver me to the torments of the god of desire?'

The answer, of course, is yes: Pravara will happily deliver her to such torments. In any case, he doesn't much believe in them, certainly not for Brahmins who spend their days performing vows and rituals (2.52). This theme of outstanding ritual duties becomes more and more strident, to the point where it begins to seem as if the primary tension embedded here is between the courtesan's claim to passion and the ritualist's ascetic regimen. Of course, Pravara is also a little worried about his family, especially his aged parents (not, we notice, his wife!), who will be worried about him (2.53). What is Varūthini to make of

these stolid pieties? She is not, after all, doing anything wrong: she is a woman whose life is love, and who also believes in this calling. There is no true violation involved in a liaison of this sort, with a courtesan who volunteers herself out of desire. Pravara's obstinate refusal to accept what she has so happily and readily proffered thus drives Varūthini to an impassioned statement of her credo:

You are as beautiful
 as the god of love himself.
 If you let your youth go by
 in these dreadful Vedic rites,
 when will you have time
 for pleasure?
 Isn't the reward you get for being pure
 at those endless sacrifices of yours
 the joys of making love
 to us? (2.54)

One has to wait through many births, slowly gathering merit, to win the embraces of such beautiful and loving women! But when Pravara, obviously unconvinced, declines again, the courtesan's statement of faith acquires even a metaphysical dimension:

When the heart unfolds
 in love,
 when it finds release, from within,
 in concentrated oneness
 as light blossoms forth
 from a lamp hidden in a pot,
 when the senses attain unwavering delight—
 only that joy
 is the ultimately real (*parabrahmam*).

You should meditate in your inner heart
 on the ancient verse: *ānando brahma*, God
 is joyfulness. (2.62)

Remember this verse: we will have occasion to listen to its echoes in the Nāyaka texts. Here, in Peddana, it is one side of an argument that remains unresolved, and that lends the courtesan's *cri de coeur* a somewhat ironic resonance. Certainly Pravara, for his part, is disgusted at

this manipulation of the *śruti* statement (*ānando brahma*), and at the assimilation of yogic terminology to an erotic aim. Peddana's metaphysics of desire include no simple or literal affirmation of the sensuous; desire, rather, turns out to be a tortuous arena of continuous ironic displacements.²⁸ Pravara thus lectures Varūthini one last time—now it is his turn to be bitterly sardonic—and, through the intervention of the household fire (*gārhapatyavahni*), he disappears, magically transported to his home. Varūthini is left to languish in the mountains, alone.

Here, too, the poet lovingly explores her distress and hints delicately at his own stand. As the day wears on, and twilight comes, nature absorbs and reflects human passions:

“Though she loves no other man,
that cruel, self-centered
scoundrel of a Brahmin
has gone away
and left her prey
to the tortures of Desire,
her body helpless against his lethal
flower-arrows.”

As if in rage and terror
at this thought,
the sun, heaven's glowing jewel,
turned red. (3.10)

This is the poet speaking, in his own voice, interrupting Varūthini's laments with an *utprekshā* ascribing angry emotion to the setting sun. It is not merely the words, but above all the texture of intensity in which they are couched in the original, that suggest Peddana's underlying identification with the plaintive courtesan and his distaste for Pravara's naive and rigid self-righteousness.

The debate between Pravara and Varūthini on the merits of eroticism, indeed, more generally, on the body's claims versus those of normative ritual or social constraints, is resumed in all the major Telugu *śrīṅgārakāvya*s of the Nāyaka period. Peddana's classic articula-

²⁸ See Shulman (in press 2).

tion always lurks in the background of these discussions. It also illuminates, by way of contrast, the different ethos that has evolved by the early seventeenth century. Let us sum up the contrast between this famous passage and the confrontation between Citrāṅgi and Sāraṅgadhara. Three main points of difference are clear. First, the Sāraṅgadhara story is built around the possibility of real, and grimly serious, violation. Even if the contours of that potential violation are somewhat blurred or softened (by the assertion that Citrāṅgi was Sāraṅgadhara's destined bride, or by emphasizing her role as a 'free' courtesan), there is no doubt that the son's intrusion into the sexual sphere claimed by his father is perceived as criminal. No list of mythic precedents, so ably marshalled by the love-sick Citrāṅgi, can cover up this given condition. Had Sāraṅgadhara been truly guilty, his punishment would not have been unjust. When Citrāṅgi asks rhetorically, 'Are women anybody's property?' (2.115), she is stating a fantasy, not a social fact. Not only does the violation exist as a real threat, in contrast to Pravara's far more innocuous temptation, but it in fact imparts to Sāraṅgadhara's trial its basic interest and structure.

Secondly—this is Cēmakūra Veṅkaṭapati's main contribution to the Sāraṅgadhara tradition—the ambivalence of the male protagonist is intensified, externalized, and made explicit. In particular, his pull *toward* the violation becomes evident. Neither Citrāṅgi nor Varūthini has any hesitation at all; the negative response, in both cases, is firmly located in the male. But where Pravara's arousal is only delicately intimated by the suggestive choice of words, the attentiveness to epithet and subtle textures, Sāraṅgadhara at first plays happily along with his seductress. The linguistic expression of this double-edged involvement is the hypertrophied ślesha that pervades the passage. Only when the ślesha collapses through Citrāṅgi's impatience, when she openly literalizes her demands, is Sāraṅgadhara forced to the other pole of denying any erotic implication.

Thirdly, the Nāyaka poet has indicated far more strongly and explicitly than Peddana where his sympathies really lie. Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding—despite the preachy dharma ideology that Sāraṅgadhara voices at many points—Cēmakūra Veṅkaṭapati is with Citrāṅgi, the apostle of sexual violation. In this, he follows the poetic mainstream of his time.

Finally, we must turn to the specific themes that constitute the dénouement of Sāraṅgadhara's story, themes largely (though not entirely) absent from Peddana but quite central to the literature of the Nāyaka courts. Sāraṅgadhara is dying, his limbs cut off, when the Siddha Matsyendranātha finds him, feeds him milk, places him gently on a cot, instructs him in the various disciplines of yoga and prescribes some yogic exercises in meditation and concentration. In particular, Sāraṅgadhara is to stare ceaselessly at a huge rock that his teacher has left hanging in the sky over his head; if he blinks or gazes away, the rock will fall on him and crush him. As the neophyte yogi pursues this exercise, the miracle of regeneration takes place:

First, there were sprouts that could hardly be seen,
 then, slowly, little stubs emerged,
 grew graceful, firm,
 took shape as fingers, toes, and nails
 lovely as leafbuds,
 soon lovelier even
 than lotus blossoms;
 flowered at last into new feet and arms
 of perfect form. (3.257)

This is followed by a gentle verse that describes in detail Sāraṅgadhara's fumbling attempts to learn to walk: the Siddha at first supports him with his index fingers; then urges him to take four steps alone, and catches him as he is about to fall. When he has progressed a little, stumbling forward, he cries to the teacher, 'Help! Catch me!'—and the latter smiles and moves a little farther away. Soon Sāraṅgadhara, now renamed Saurāṅgi, can walk again; Matsyendranātha gives him various magical herbs, gems, and *mantras*. Having attained perfection of body and perfection of language (*kāyasiddhi vacassidhi galigi*, 3.261), the new Siddha finds himself devoid of hunger, thirst, and, of course, desire for women; whatever he touches turns to gold, wherever he walks, treasure appears. A final meeting with his father—who has meanwhile learned the truth from a heavenly voice, *ākāśavāṇi*, and had Citrāṅgi thrown into a well—provides closure to the text; the king pleads with his son to return to rule the kingdom, but Saurāṅgi has found a better way. 'What joy is greater than that of the play of yoga?'

And, just to drive home the direction of transformation: 'Can embracing a woman's breasts make youth permanent?' He promises his parents that a son will be born to them, and returns to his guru and to a long life (*cirāyunnati*) as a practising Siddha.

One should pay special heed to the lively imagining of the process of regeneration, and to the metaphors of vegetable growth that the poet selects. This is a Nāyaka topos, which we will meet again with reference to Ahalyā.²⁹ The atmosphere is one of an organic process, presented with great sensitivity to its visual aspect (as throughout the *Sāraṅgadharacaritramu*). It is not a question of simple and sudden magical recovery—although the esoteric disciplines of Siddha Yoga, with its emphasis on bodily immortality, certainly constitute the background to this scene; rather, spiritual growth is here seen as essentially a matter of physical disintegration and recomposition in a manner that is processual, sensual, and visually striking. Stories of violent mutilation and bodily recovery fill the pages of Nāyaka-period texts; we will observe another example in the Tamil-Muslim *noṭṭinātakam* on Cīta-kkāti. As the violation of social norms absorbs the interest of the court-poets of this period, the violation of the body's integrity comes persistently to focus the development of their narratives. *Śarīram ādyam khalu dharmasādhanam*—the body is the first instrument of dharma. And of spiritual enlightenment. And of knowledge generally. One works with what one has, and what one has is a physical body not easily dissected dualistically into matter and spirit, though it *can* be taken apart and reconstituted, and otherwise experimented with, in the interests of enhancing growth, fertility, 'magical' power, or self-knowledge.

The South Indian folktale has apparently always delighted in such themes, and part of the explanation of their new prevalence in the literature of the elite derives from a general surfacing and legitimizing of folk materials in the courts, beginning in the sixteenth century. To some extent, this process may be related to the transformation that an imported Deccani court-culture, partly alien to the Tamil country, effected on the local literary environment. Note that the entire move-

²⁹ But see *Manucaritramu* 6.96.

ment of assimilation is itself stamped with characteristic signs of this particular moment. Often, when folktales graduate into the 'high'-literary culture of the elite, they are made to conform to the latter's authority structure and norms. Examples abound in Sanskrit works such as the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, or in *nāṭaka*, or in south Indian works such as the Tamil purāṇic corpus. But not here: in the Sāraṅadhara tale, indeed in Nāyaka works generally, the ideological authority of high-caste norms is far from dominant. The explicit focus on incest, the lack of repression in dialogue and description, and the expressive extension of the mutilation motif all carry the forcefulness of the latent folk context. Yet the absorption of specific folk themes such as these was surely part of the general conceptual expansion with which we are concerned—with the emerging Nāyaka anthropology in its various literary forms. In this respect, both the violence of mutilation and the violation of social and sexual taboos can be seen as narrative concomitants of a deepening awareness of the human body, both as symbol and as effective vehicle for essential cultural aims.

3. AHALYĀ AND TĀRĀ: THE IDEOLOGY OF VIOLATION

We can now understand something of the hold that the Sāraṅadhara story, with its condensation of the themes of sensual excess, potential violation, and bodily regeneration, held over the Nāyaka imagination. But there are still more far-reaching and explicit examples of the type. Sāraṅadhara, after all, is a *violateur manqué*: however tempted he may be, he fails Citrāṅgi at the critical moment. The poet derives his effects from studying the charm of a violation that never takes place. It is also striking that Sāraṅadhara, despite his basic innocence (in body if not in mind), still pays a drastic price in physical mutilation, whereas those heroines of *real* violations whom we shall meet in a moment experience a happier course of events. (Ahalyā, it is true, must spend some time as a rock; but the conclusion of her story completely, astonishingly, vitiates this punishment, as we shall see.) It is almost as if the underlying intuition were that violation—in a good cause—ultimately pays off; the only ultimate loss is that of the person who refuses the spontaneous gift of sexual love. Or, as Tārā—another heroine of this type—says in self-justification: 'I care nothing for my honour, or my husband,

or my caste and family . . . Even one day is enough, if it is filled with joy.'³⁰

But there is more to it than this. The Nayaka poets have an interest in violation *per se*—in what might be seen as its philosophical side, and in its psychological and even spiritual power. Such an attitude was by no means invented by these poets, although they have undoubtedly explored its implications more thoroughly than any before them. But the basic formulation of this set of themes exists already in the time of Śrīnātha (fifteenth century), as in the following stray verse of his, couched in the form of a conversation between two women:

'Is he a good lover?'
 'He's great.'
 'Is he inventive in bed?'
 'Full of ideas.'
 'Handsome?'
 'He beats the god of love himself.'
 'But do you love him?'
 'Like no other man.'
 'If that is so, why are you running around
 with someone else?'
 'You're strong, you're experienced,
 you ought to know about these things:
 he has one flaw
 that lays him low—
 his being called
 my husband.'³¹

So one can be driven to betrayal by the very logic of love. Here the domestic, the habitual, the accessible are all enemies of passion. Śrīnātha is not the only poetic precedent in Telugu for this preoccupation. And there are, of course, examples from outside Andhra, examples that certainly left an impact on Nāyaka-period figures—for example, the well-known Krishṇaite poetry of Bengal, which develops the paradigm of adulterous (*parakīyā*) love as the mode of man's absolute and unruly commitment to the god.³²

³⁰ *Tārāśaśāṅkavijayamu* (TSV) 3.85.

³¹ Śrīnivāsācāryulu and Nalinikānta Rāvu (1983), p. 52.

³² See Dimock (1966).

But for the Nāyakas, sensually based violation has become almost an obsession; the majority of Telugu kāvyas from this period present us with examples from this domain, examples which offer, more or less explicitly, an ideology to sustain their vision. Two of the most eloquent works in this respect, from early eighteenth-century Nāyaka Madurai, will serve us as samples. The author of the first, *Ahalyāsankrandanam* (already cited above), was Samukhamu Veṅkaṭa Krishṇappa Nāyakuḍu, well known as the (non-Brahmin) commander of the Madurai forces in their climactic battle against Vijayarāghava at Tanjavur in 1673. The second poet, Śeshamu Veṅkaṭapati, was a Śrīvaishṇava Brahmin scholar patronized by Vaṅgala Sīnaya; what is striking here is the extent to which this Brahmin's work has assimilated the generalized ethos and vision of the Nāyaka śringāra-kāvyas. Both texts, like others of their class, have suffered at the hands of the modern historians of Telugu literature, who uniformly regard them as decadent (or, at the very least, as demanding apology). In fact, they embody a sensibility of great richness, delicacy, and intensity of expression, a sensibility that has largely died—or, to be more exact, that was killed off in the nineteenth century by the lethal combination of imported European Victorianism and indigenous prudishness associated with Brahminical values.

These works deserve far more elaborate discussion than we can give them here. The *Ahalyāsankrandanam* [hereafter: AS], in particular, is a minor masterpiece. Questions of poetics and technique need to be studied, as does the always significant problem of the transformation wrought by the kāvya authors upon their inherited epic and purāṇic narratives. Reluctantly, we ignore this issue of the sources.³³ For our more limited present purposes, we will first summarize the narrative skeleton of these poems, with brief discussion, without reference to other versions, and then attempt to draw out a simple typology of concepts and themes.

Ahalyā, as told by Veṅkaṭa Krishṇappa Nāyakuḍu. Ahalyā was created by Brahmā under highly unusual circumstances: when the gods and sages asked him to adjudicate their argument as to which woman was the

³³ For Ahalyā, see *Rām.* 1.48-49; *Ṣaḍviṃśabrāhmaṇa* 1.1.19-14 ; for Tārā and Candra, *Viṣṇupurāṇa* 4.6.

most beautiful in the world,³⁴ he found some flaw in each of the existing exemplars, including, of course, the divine apsaras-courtesans of Indra's heaven; he therefore produced Ahalyā as the true model of perfect femininity. No sooner was she created than Indra fell in love with her, and she with him, but Brahmā (somewhat perversely) gave her to the wizened old sage, Gautama, for a wife. She went to Gautama's wilderness retreat and performed her wifely duties, assisting him at his rituals, living on roots and vegetables.

But she kept thinking about Indra: she especially liked listening to his praises as they were sung during sacrificial rituals, and she offered the oblation to him with all her heart. Daydreaming about him, she despaired: 'How could someone as luckless as me have such a nāyaka, who would know how to make love at the proper time, who could satisfy me with all the arts of sexual delight, make my heart melt? Married women can never be happy. Being born a woman is no birth at all. One shouldn't dream of things that only kings can dream of.' As for Indra, he, too, was longing for Ahalyā. Soon he took to visiting Gautama's ashram simply in order to see her; he spoke with her when her husband was out, flirted with her, praised her in oblique and punning ways. After a while, he began to commute between heaven and the ashram, like a shuttle on a loom (2.112); he lost his taste for his consort, Śacī, because of his passion for Ahalyā.

One day a Yoginī came to Ahalyā as a messenger, to describe to her Indra's unbearable lovesickness: he no longer ate or slept; his days were spent gazing at a picture of Ahalyā that he had painted, kissing it, embracing it, sighing in pain when it failed to respond. Ahalyā protested that Indra could not possibly want her, a sage's wife dressed in bark, without ornaments, who slept on the ground in the wilderness, when he had all the accomplished courtesans of heaven at his disposal. Anyway, what woman could make him, so skilled a lover, happy on earth? But, said the Yoginī, did not Ahalyā know that all the sacred books referred to Indra as *ahalyāyai jāra*, 'lover of Ahalyā' (3.120)? 'Then,' said Ahalyā, 'let him suffer the pain of desire, as I do.' And she confessed to the Yoginī that she longed for the god; that on those rare occasions when her husband came to sleep with her, she would close

³⁴ See above, III.1.

her eyes and imagine that he was Indra. The Yoginī returned to heaven with this message.

At nightfall, Gautama, exhausted by his studies, lay down under a tree. Ahalyā began to massage his feet amorously, but he pushed her away, remarking that her fertile time was past. 'If it were Indra,' she thought, 'he would know the right moment and satisfy my desire.' But she said, 'It's all right; I have no interest in that either.' And turning her face away, she fell asleep, while her husband slept like a great ocean of calm and repose.

Indra knew this through his yoga. He became a cock and crowed, long before the dawn; Gautama awoke, recited the *vāmanastotra*, and went off to bathe in the Ganges. Taking Gautama's form, Indra appeared before Ahalyā and wanted to make love. She had her doubts: this might be Indra or someone else, but it definitely was not her husband. He said: 'That fool who fails to enjoy pleasure every day before his youth slips away will regret it later; it is like building a dam for water that has long since flowed past. Sin never comes to one who makes love without interruption every day, whether it is the fertile season or not.' Then she knew he was Indra and demanded to see his true form. He revealed himself, pleaded with her: 'Let me taste your lips, to rid my mouth of the insipid taste of ambrosia . . .' He bowed at her feet, and Ahalyā, overcome with shyness and love, raised him up, pressing against him with her breasts. They embraced, like a jasmine creeper wound around a mango tree; they made love joyously. When Indra reluctantly got up to go, Gautama returned. In terrible anger, he cursed Indra to lose his testicles; and he cursed his wife to become a stone.

After many years, Rāma came to that spot together with Lakshmaṇa and Viśvāmitra, and his feet touched the stone. Slowly, it softened, grew round, melted into the charming form of Ahalyā. Gautama arrived and spoke in wonder: 'If this unconscious rock achieved awareness by the touch of your feet, what must be given to those conscious beings—gods, Siddhas, Sādhyas—who bear your feet upon their crowns?' And as Rāma left for Mithila, Gautama was reconciled to Ahalyā; they spent their days in bed, happily inventing new ways of making love.

Such is the story as our Nāyaka poet presents it. Its playful char-

acter should be apparent even from this bald summary; and, as in the case of the *Sāraṅgadhara-caritramu*, much of this playfulness takes the form of ślesha-paronomasia. One should also note the poet's originality—for example in Ahalyā's confession to the Yoginī, which reveals that Indra's assumption of Gautama's form is already present as an inner reality, a doubling within Ahalyā's mind.³⁵ There is also the striking innovation of the ending, which—perhaps not surprisingly, in the milieu of the Nāyaka courts—awakens lust in the cantankerous and aged Gautama and transforms the mismatched couple into a harmonious and vigorous pair of lovers. Reflexive touches enliven the texture of the narrative, as when the Yoginī announces to the hesitant, internally divided Ahalyā that Indra is, after all, inscribed in sacred texts as 'Ahalyā's lover'. But perhaps the most striking quality of all is the extreme development of Ahalyā's internal monologue. This is a woman exploring the reaches of her own mind, her confused and conflicting feelings. At one moment she defends dharma, condemns herself for being swept away by infatuation: 'When Manmatha strikes one, again and again, with his sharp weapons, hitting all the most tender places, all kinds of desires sprout and grow and refuse to go away; the right thing then is to subdue these feelings, make one's heart into a rock, never thinking of delight. Can a woman who has revealed her body to some man make any move? (3.120)' The unconsciously proleptic image of petrification is all too appropriate. But then, immediately, the question of practicality enters: 'A married woman is like money seen in a mirror, like a fruit growing too high on a tree, like a sandal-creeper caught by an angry snake, like a sweet coated in poison (ibid.).' Her husband is the suspicious type, constantly watching her. Not everyone is as lucky, or as courageous, as Tārā and Candra (3.123). And she is a little angry at Indra, who has it all, who can indulge himself in romantic emotion with no great loss to himself; let him suffer some, too, as she does! Then, in a torrent, the wild animating passion bursts out: wherever she may be, she is always by her lover's side; she thinks of him continually, imagines his body, and her body pours sweat 'like a lotus soaked in honey'; her whole world, inner and outer—flowers, moonbeams, her memories and fantasies—is nothing

³⁵ Our thanks to A. K. Ramanujan for this observation.

but torment. Wherever she looks, Manmatha is there. Will it ever end? It is because she is dependent upon, ruled by, another that she burns in pain (3.125). She wants to grow wings, to fly to Indra's side. But no—it is just this passionate confusion, *moha*, that is coming out; let it stop here, at this level, while it is still only in the mind (126).

And so on. She goes back and forth, arguing all the parts in this debate; it is her voice that advocates the normative position of duty and restraint, as it is she who beautifully articulates the urge toward violation; but she also expresses the many ambiguities of her situation, her self-doubt, her sense of the asymmetry built into this love-relation, as well as a more generalized frustration at the woman's place in the scheme of things (thus 3.121-22). Her dialogue takes up a large part of the text; the poet is remarkably attentive to the delicate and shifting tones of her emotions, and he takes the time to represent them in detail. Ahalyā emerges as a woman of intense interiority, her subjectivity always in play. Moreover, the Yoginī who responds to her in the elaborate, invented scene that is the prelude to the seduction also seems to function as a projected *alter ego* externalizing Ahalyā's own experience:

What pleasure is there for a woman
in making love to these graceless,
unfeeling men . . . ,
old ascetics whose bodies have grown lean
from ten million vows and fasts,
who come to their wives with distaste (*arati*),
in total silence,
covering their heads, face turned away,
who get it over with quickly
and then announce: 'Our duty
to the ancestors has been fulfilled?'
These men who torture the hearts of
young, passionate women—
they're no better than cattle!

They let the days go by:
'Tonight is new moon, or full moon,
or *sankrānti*; today is the equinox,
today is inauspicious
This is the eleventh day of the cycle,

or the twelfth,
 or Śivarātri;
 I have taken a vow today;
 your fertile time is past;
 go away,
 I don't feel like it now . . .'

Such weak and wicked men
 waste the milky fullness
 of our youth, and women born
 to be their wives
 are never born at all. (3.112-3)

The other side of this coin is the fantasy of fulfilment—in a verse that mimics and literalizes the courtesan's credo that we met in Peddana:

All senses focused, unmoving,
 with joy in one's heart,
 wholly forgetting oneself
 in delight that surpasses understanding,
 the delight they say is god (*ānandamu brahmam' anduru*)—
 all this comes to a young
 and beautiful woman
 when she finds a handsome man
 to love. (3.115)

This is the Yoginī speaking, but her description is soon to be actualized and corroborated by Ahalyā, who attains this *manmathabrahmānanda*—the delight of the Absolute, that is love—with Indra (3.145; see also 147-8). Note that the Yoginī's verse is utterly devoid of the ironic contextualization that we saw in Peddana. The message is intended literally and unequivocally, and Ahalyā is meant to live it out paradigmatically by the violation-scene that ensues.

With this conclusion in mind, we turn to another pair of lovers, whose hopeful example we have heard cited by both Citrāṅgi and Ahalyā.

Tārā and Candra-Śaśāṅka according to Śeshamu Veṅkaṭapati. Candra, the Moon, was born by the gift of Brahmā to Anasūyā and Atri; at Brahmā's command, Viśvakarma built a city, Pratiṣṭhānapura, for this young

man, who was like Manmatha's vazir—so handsome that all women loved him. Atri sent him to be educated by Brihaspati, the guru of the gods. Brihaspati introduced his new student to Tārā, Brihaspati's wife, and instructed her to feed him, care for him, and get to know his mind.

As the boy grew older, Tārā, too, felt desire waken in her; she began to imagine what it would be like to make love to him. She debated with herself: 'This isn't right. But can I bear it? If I take account only of my family and my reputation, will desire ever be fulfilled? (2.71)' When he was studying with his teacher, she would open the door a crack and stare at him; she would seek him out in narrow passageways, where there was no way to step aside, and, her sari slipping from her shoulder, would press against him with her breasts (2.73). The affectionate names she used for him when he was younger were now exchanged for other epithets, such as 'embodied lord of love (*kāyaja-mohanāṅga*).' She would become anxious if he disappeared for an hour, would send little children to search for him. She asked his opinion as to which saree she should wear, which blouse, which hair-style; she would say to him, 'I have no mirror, please put the mark on my forehead for me'—and extend her lips for a kiss when he drew near. After a while, he began to melt within with desire for Tārā. He strove valiantly to defend himself against this feeling: 'It is an evil' (*dōshamu*); she is out of bounds (*varusa kādu*); it's crazy, I think only of love.' And he would try to concentrate on reciting the names of Hari.

But nothing helped. 'Only a body that has made love to this most beautiful of women is a real body (2.94).'³⁶ All the frustrations and obsessions of adolescence were calling out for release: 'I have never even kissed a woman before, and she is coming to me full of desire. Can fate do anything right? (2.97)' His studies seemed suddenly to have a new and overriding logic: 'If, out of fear of doing wrong, or out of innocence, I refrain from making love to her, Desire lies in wait to kill me with his deadly arrows. Remember what we have been taught: the first instrument of dharma is the bodyWhen she looks at you, what Veda, what *śāstra*, what discriminating judgement can survive? *Tarka* the study of logic, is only for reasoning with her in a lovers'

³⁶ Verses such as this are patterned after Pōtana, *kamalākṣun arcīncu . . .* (7.169); see below at n. 48.

quarrel; the science of sounds (*śabdaśāstra*) is just for learning the murmurs and groans of making love; Yoga is for joining my mouth to hers; Sāṅkhya is for counting her virtues; the whole study of release (*mokshaśāstra*) is for untying the knot of her saree; Dvaita, dualism, is my lying on top of her, still saying "You" and "I"; Advaita is when the two of us become completely one (2.101).' Still, 'My parents wouldn't stand for this, and if my teacher gets angry, I'm in trouble. One should never trust women. Let's wait and see if she forces herself on me.'

Spring came, and with it, an invitation to Brihaspati from Indra, to officiate at a sacrifice in heaven. The old priest and teacher said goodbye to his wife: 'Don't worry, I'll soon be back, with lots of money. Wait for me at the doorstep. Don't comb your hair, or eat tasty food, or put on your ornaments or flowers. This is how wives wait for their absent husbands. And one more word: my dear student Candra will remain here, attentive to all your wishes; don't hesitate to get him to do whatever you want. Though he's only a boy, he's intelligent and mature. Don't think of him as distinct in any way from me (2.125-29).' Tārā protested: 'Are you really going, or is this just to test me? Are you angry with me, or trying to stir up my feelings? How can I survive this separation? You're going to a country that is no country. But if I try to stop you, I will have the sin of ruining the sacrificial rite. Still, true *tapas* is only that performed by husband and wife together, with a single mind, like milk mingled in water. With one thing or another—pilgrimages, sacrifices, innumerable fasts, teaching duties, days when I was not in the fertile period, or when you feigned exhaustion—I have never really known a single embrace of yours. Now my co-wife and rival, Fate, will not allow me to be near you.' He felt a little compassion at these words, from her deceitful heart, and said: 'If I take you with me, who will tend the fires and take care of guests and relatives? Moreover, heaven is full of actors, playboys, and courtesans; it's no place for a married woman.' To this she made no reply; making a pretence of despondency, she saw her husband off.

Then she rushed home to Candra. She prepared a sumptuous meal for him. 'Hurry,' she said to him, 'we have a lot to do today.' She bathed him, dried him, dressed him in soft silks, fed him the curries. She came and sat near him, her body heavy with fragrance. 'Why did you come here?' he asked, 'don't you have anything to do at home? Won't people

be suspicious?' 'I came because I had to,' she replied, 'what do we care what others think? Is there anyone in the world who has not been overcome by love? Because of my merit, at last we have got some privacy. I will speak my desire to your face (3.60-61).' But Candra hesitated: 'If the world hears even a little of this, they will blame the man. You were born in a pure family; women always ruin domestic life, which is like a full meal. Why start this, not thinking about caste and proper conduct? Your father-in-law will crush you in the betel-nut press; your husband, if you talk about it, will try to kill you.' Tārā said: 'Don't give me these lectures; I've heard them a thousand times. Haven't we seen moralists like you giving up their vows and austerities for the true Absolute, the true Release, that is the taste of pleasure, the touch of a woman's breasts? You speak like a fool, just because you've never experienced this joy. You've got it all wrong: you say a woman should not sin against her husband, and I agree. The man a woman loves, that man who is pleasing to her eyes—*he* is her husband; if she denies this and makes love to another, that is truly not right.' She fell on Candra, and they embraced; he wanted to kiss her, but still he hesitated. She mocked him: 'Already on the bed, and you're thinking about kinship rules!'³⁷ She kissed him quickly, and he responded at last.

When Brihaspati returned, he discovered at once that his wife and Candra were lovers. She told him the truth, and he wanted to curse her, but she said to him: 'Don't use your *brahmāstra* weapon against a sparrow. Is there anyone in the world who doesn't make mistakes? Even Ahalyā, Brahmā's own daughter, erred like this. Husbands should be patient; otherwise, you'll be laughed at for nothing (4.19-21).' She cried, and he lifted her up and forgave her. He thought of cursing Candra but held back, hid his anger, and said, 'You have studied all the rules of conduct, the Veda and śāstras. My heart is pleased with your devotion. Your parents will be waiting for you. Go home now.' Thus Candra left, his whole being aching at the separation from Tārā. She, too, could not bear this torment; she sent a messenger

³⁷ This represents a literary transposition of an obscene Telugu idiom: *sagadi peṭṭi mēnatta*, 'halfway in—(you remember that she's) your aunt.'

to Candra in his city, and a secret rendezvous was arranged. They met and made love again, and Tārā returned home with Candra.

This time Brihaspati was not prepared to forgive. He demanded that Indra send an army against Candra. When Candra refused to hand over Tārā to Indra's messenger, a great battle began. Nārada incited the demons to attack the gods at this opportune moment, when they were embattled among themselves. With the appearance of this threat, the Trimūrti intervened and stopped the gods' conflict; they appeased Candra, who was given the 27 daughters of Daksha for his wives, while Tārā returned—pregnant—to Brihaspati's house. Upon the birth of her child, Budha, Candra appeared to claim him. Tārā confirmed that Candra was the father, and Brahmā forced Brihaspati to give Candra the boy.

The *Tārāśaśānkavijayamu* is a much longer and looser work than *Ahalyā-saṅkrandanamu*; we have concentrated in our summary on the central moments of seduction and violation, where the poet has most lavishly displayed his skill and invention. Most of the elements that we have already isolated from the poems on Sāraṅadhara and Ahalyā should be readily apparent from the summary—the heightened interest in the woman's inner experience, with its individuality and multi-faceted quality; the freedom given to her own voice (particularly pronounced here in her bold dialogues with Brihaspati, both at his departure and upon his return); the extended inner monologues, including those specific, in this case, to the maturing adolescent Candra, presented with convincing realism, perspicacity, and wit; the imagery of organic growth, with the powerful visual sensitivity that accompanies it; intertextual references (e.g. to Ahalyā, here an available mythic precedent, as Tārā is in the Ahalyā story); the overt sensuality and the explicit claims made for the body's needs; the subtle subversion of earlier paradigms of normative discourse and normative conduct; the passion for paronomasia, that seems to reflect a divided consciousness and the concomitant drive for literalization on the level of bodily sensation. As in the other two texts, the fascination with erotic violation propels the work forward; and we should note that the form of violation described here is no doubt the most serious we have encountered—for *gurutalpāgamana*, sleeping with the wife of one's teacher, is one of the

five *mahāpātakas*, most dreadful sins. It is thus also curious that this transgression has the least terrible consequences of any we have seen: in effect, both Candra and Tārā get away completely unscathed. No wonder other transgressing heroines are happy to cite this example in extenuation of their own thoughts and actions.

One surely identifies with Tārā at crucial points in the narrative. Thus her complaint against Brihaspati, although set in the context of her underlying desire that he go away and leave her free for Candra, rings true: he has been too busy with his work, his tedious sacrifices and rituals and teaching commitments, for her ever to get to know him (2.136). As always in these śringāra-texts, knowledge means physical, sensual experience. The verse reminds us of the Yoginī's complaint to Ahalyā about ascetic, ritually oriented husbands. But it is Tārā's effective parody of the authoritarian śāstra that deserves particular notice for our purposes. Listen again to her understanding of dharma: a woman should never sin against her husband—but the definition of a husband is 'a man whom a woman loves or desires;' if she denies this and sleeps with someone else, including, no doubt, the man to whom she happens to be married, then and only then is she committing a sin (3.79). In other words, it is a sin for a woman to make love with her own husband, unless she loves him! Statements like this have features of a formal ideology. And Tārā doesn't stop here in her attack on the system that has bound her:

Some impotent men, unable to satisfy their wives,
 very cleverly wrote down on palm leaves
 that it's a sin to make love
 to someone else's wife.
 They just wanted their own wives untouched.
 There is no reason to be disturbed
 by such dried-up,
 fallen leaves. (3.82)³⁸

Ākulapāṭu, the meanness to which the classic dharma-authors stooped, i.e. the lowly state of fallen leaves, is also (ślesha again) the useless anxiety that attends a wished-for violation. Tārā, fully aware of the

³⁸ For an earlier precedent for this verse by Ēlakūci Rāmabhadrakavi (sixteenth century) in his *Sakalakathāsārasaṅgrahamu*, see Venkaṭa Rāvu, p. 134.

tradition against which she is rebelling, turns the old vocabulary of merit and evil to her advantage: if you won't love me, she assures Candra, she will surely die; her body cannot stand it (*nā tanuvu dālā ga lēdu*). Then the sin of killing her will be on his head. On the other hand, if he fulfils her desire, he will have the merit of saving her life—and the sin will be hers (3.83).

Sophistries of this sort are neither random nor improvised. They follow definite patterns that, taken cumulatively, comprise a coherent vision. We can make a simple catalogue of these programmatic statements and patterns of violation as they appear in both the śringāra-texts that we are studying.

1. *Violation for the sake of passion.* Tārā's verse defining husbands, quoted above, is a good example. This is, perhaps, the ultimate ideology of violation presented by our sources: the true wellspring of proper conduct, of dharma, of truth, is the spontaneous emotion that one feels from within. There is no distinction here, nor even the possibility of a distinction, between love and physical desire: the two have coalesced into a single force that can and should sweep all before it.

2. *Violation for its own sake.*

Making love with one's wife
is for having children.
It's no fun.
Courtesans cost money.
Hunting women in the alleyways
is hard work, and not too comfortable.
If you think about it, only sex
with other men's wives
is any good. The whole world
sings its praises.³⁹

Since pleasure is the only standard, and there is pleasure in breaking the bounds—and the orderliness and dutifulness of marriage more or less preclude pleasure—adultery takes on a logical life of its own. Violation is fun. (But note that there are counter-claims to this one: Tārā reminds Brihaspati that the only true tapas is that accomplished

³⁹ TSV 4.69.

jointly, with a single mind, by a husband and wife living their domestic life. There is no need to regard this message cynically; she is expressing a real longing that has been denied by her unfeeling spouse.)

3. *Unconscious violation*. The powerful forces pushing toward the shattering of norms often spill over into playful forms of mini-violations. Thus in a verse describing the onset of darkness, and in imitation of a well-known poem from the Amaru collections:

A married woman failed to find
the place of rendezvous;
she was standing there, in the dark,
when her husband came
and embraced her, certain
she was someone else.
Great was their passion
as they made love,
each of them thrilling to a lover
not there, while the God of Desire
screamed with glee.⁴⁰

The Amaru verse allows the couple to recognize one another by their lovemaking, though they are too embarrassed to admit this; the Nāyaka poet characteristically lets the violation in disguise succeed as such, without 'regressing' to a state of marital propriety. Violation is its own reward.

4. *Mythic paradigm-verses*. We have seen one of these used by Citrāṅgi in her efforts to overcome Sāraṅgadhara's resistance. As noted there, the prototype can be found in Peddana; what is remarkable in the Nāyaka-period instances is the attempt to render the mythic models factual and even binding. Thus Tārā to Candra:

Didn't your grandfather [Brahmā] unite with Bhārati
without worrying that she was his daughter?
Didn't your brother-in-law [Kriṣṇa] make love
with Rādhikā, transgressing the bounds,
for she was his aunt?

⁴⁰ AS 3, p. 129.

Even your guru forgot about kinship
 when he slept with his elder brother's wife [Mamatā]!
 Your fellow-student, Indra, grabbed Ahalyā,
 though she was a sage's wife.

And still you go on lecturing me,
 blaming me, in your ignorance
 of the sexual habits of your own family . . .⁴¹

There is a nice touch of poetic justice in recalling Brihaspati's own violation of Utathya's wife, in the context of Tārā's eagerness to betray *him*. The *kāvya* ties together, often ironically, the various purāṇic loose ends. Here the purāṇic precedents are not simply mythic and paradigmatic but also personalized as Candra's own family history. He will cite them himself, at a later point in the text, when he mocks Indra's messenger: 'We know how pure Indra is: his very body makes it clear. Agni still lusts for the sages' wives. Has Yama forgotten his love for Pāṇḍu's wife [Kuntī]?'⁴² These are deft blows: Dharmarāja, the very incarnation of dharma, was born through violation. Indra is marked with a thousand eyes, that replace the thousand vaginas with which Gautama brands his body as signs of shame. The Nāyaka heroines and heroes have a way of citing one another's stories in just this way: violation breeds and justifies violation. A new intimacy between gods and human beings brings the paradigm down to earth, renders it valid in an everyday, domestic context. This literal application of myth, even in the framework of contrived debate, is an impressive conceptual innovation.

5. *Reverse hierarchies*. When violation becomes an explicit goal, traditional priorities and values are overturned. The lowest may become high. Thus the Yoginī states authoritatively to Ahalyā:

Consciousness is a rare gift.
 To be born human, endowed with consciousness,
 is a gift won only
 by many deeds of merit.
 But a woman's birth
 is beyond price,

⁴¹ TSV 3.81; see also 3.80.

⁴² TSV 4.182.

for such beings have passion
and sexual pleasure
at their most intense.
To reject this gift is a great sin:
is there any evil worse than
destroying oneself?⁴³

This is the obverse of the Yoginī's earlier complaint, that to be born a woman is no birth at all—if she is married to an unfeeling or inhibited husband. Suddenly, the woman has the best of it all—consciousness, humanity, and sensual experience at its most extreme. The progression suits the new hierarchy of knowledge, based on bodily sensation, that we have observed in the Nāyaka sources; it also completely reverses the normative denigration of feminine status and simultaneously provides another rationale for erotic violation—not to realize the woman's priceless potential is a kind of suicide, *ātmahatyā*. Standard dharma terminology is again appropriated for an antinomian end. To be a woman is to partake of a necessary and rewarding teleology of experience, in which violation plays a natural part.

6. *Soteriological violation*. This teleology is worked out with reference to the metaphysics of desire, in literalizing verses that equate sensual delight with ultimacy and absolute being. Sexual union is no longer an analogue to, hence also a metaphor for, the Upanishadic *unio mystica* with the Absolute, brahman,⁴⁴ but rather the true realization of the latter. We have already seen such verses, first in Peddana, where they are framed by ironic distance, then, with literal force, in the *Ahalyā-sankrandanamū*. They recur regularly in the śrīṅgāra-kāvya. Just as the act of violation attracts, in these poems, the lexicon of the dharmasāstra, so the experience of sensual fulfilment by virtue of such violation assumes the vocabulary of Advaita metaphysics:

Their feeling became one,
the whole outer world
disappeared: their awareness
of 'I' and 'you'
was lost, and there emerged

⁴³ AS 3, pp. 115-16.

⁴⁴ E.g. *Brhādarāyaka Upaniṣad* 4.3.21.

a joy beyond words,
undivided, without end,
non-dual, known only
by the inner witness of the Self
as they reached the limit of their love.⁴⁵

So the ultimate is attainable, in orgasm, and always in the context of forbidden love. This is a startling discovery: an entire theology of love-in-separation, a theology which makes the experience of the lover or the god one of frustration, partiality, and longing, has had to fall away before this perspective could crystallize. Where earlier South Indian love-poetry, in both its secular and its bhakti modes, found the experience of separation inherent in all loving, including moments of apparent union and fulfilment, the Nāyaka śrīṅgāra-poets blithely assert that total oneness and wholeness of feeling are possible, and that sexuality, especially when expressed through violation, is the saving path. The torments of viraha, separation, continue to form a large part of the subject-matter of these poems, but viraha is no longer a soteriological instrument, sādhana, in its own right: rather, it points the way to a union of bodies that *is* the final, and entirely accessible, goal. One practises non-dualism not in meditation, not in Yoga, but in bed. These verses would seem merely parodic, playful imitations of Advaita pronouncements, were they not clearly motivated by the ideology and theory of erotic violation.⁴⁶

7. *Parodies and subtle subversions.* Nevertheless, true parodies abound in these works, along with satirical attacks on the natural 'enemies' of violation—usually the dried-up, ascetic sages—and the consistent transposition of ritual images into an erotic key. Indra mimics to perfection the style of Telugu śāstra works when he declares: 'Sin never comes to one who makes love without interruption every day, whether

⁴⁵ AS 3, pp. 147-48: *bāvamul' okkaṭ' ayyenu brapañcam' okiñcuka tōcad' āye ēn' / iṅ anubhēdamun jane yanirvacanīyam' akhaṇḍam' ātmasā- / kṣyāviditambun' advayam' anantamu au sukham' uppatillen* Cf. the well-known verse from the Amaru collections, *prāsāde sā diśi diśi ca sā* (from Arjunavarmadeva's text: C. R. Devadhar, p. 121).

⁴⁶ On the relation between Sanskrit love-poetry (Amaru) and metaphysics (Śāṅkaran *advaita*) see Siegel (1983).

it is the fertile season or not⁴⁷ Tārā, as we saw, offers her own definition of a husband, and of the woman's dharmic duties to him and to herself. The bhakti style familiar from Pōtana's *Bhāgavatamu* is imitated and subsumed: 'Only a face that has pressed against this woman's cheek can be called a face; only a hand that has touched her breasts can be called a hand'⁴⁸ These are parodies of a simple type, with the usual parodic doubling of codes; the implicit structure of authority in the parodied standard, whether dharmasāstra or bhakti hymn, is at once undermined and confirmed.⁴⁹

But what of the sages who have mortgaged all the fruits of their sacrifices for a single kiss from one of Indra's courtesans? These pious sacrificers have gone to heaven, as the rite demands; but no sooner are they there than they divest themselves of their last possessions, out of lust for the divine women: 'The courtesans arrived, wearing toe-rings made from the rare ear-rings of the *atirātra* sacrificers, and ankle-bells fashioned from the silver threads of those who had completed a *sattra*; they were veiled by the golden upper-cloths of priests at the *uktha* rite, and they shaded themselves from the sun with parasols taken from the *vājapeya* specialists'⁵⁰ As usual in these works, the women have the upper hand. The crusty old ascetics turn out to be even more vulnerable than others to the onslaught of desire. They are easily lampooned, just as elsewhere in these poems we are made to observe, not without pathos, their seemingly inhuman avoidance of emotion, of their own bodily needs, and of their wives. The demand for wholeness of sensual and emotional experience, generally voiced here by women and tied in to violation, always triumphs over the classical ideals of self-control. Perhaps the strongest, and also the subtlest, expressions of this shift are built around classical images that have been allegorized in a sexual direction:

⁴⁷ AS 3, p. 134; see above.

⁴⁸ TSV 2.94; cf. AS 3, p. 116; *Bhāgavatamu* X, *Kucēlōpākhyānamu* of Veligandala Nārāya, v. 4.

⁴⁹ See above, I.2 and below, V.3.

⁵⁰ AS 1, p. 30; and see the extra verse (lacking in our edition) cited by Veṅkaṭa Rāvu, p. 346, on the sacrificers who have vowed to offer the fruits of their rites (specified by name) to individual courtesans.

Is there any sacrifice better than
the Rite of Desire, where
lovers' moans are the *mantras*,
the vessels for the offering are
full breasts with golden beauty-spots,
caressed again and again,

where, from the altar that is
the woman's loins,
one can grasp the tongue of flame (*raśana*)
that is her belt (*raśana*)
while drinking Soma
from her perfect lips?⁵¹

Manmathakratuvu, Manmatha's sacrifice, the Rite of Desire, has absorbed and superseded Vedic ritual; every element of the latter can be replaced by its erotic counterpart (identified, we note, through *rū-paka*-metaphors turning, in the end, on another ślesha-pun); as with the *annadāna*, transcendence is embedded within a framework of sensual and unmediated enjoyment. The Rite of Desire produces results: *manmathabrahmānanda*, the absolute joy of desire.⁵² There is no compromise or limitation on the level of the absolute, with its inherent attribute of transcending the contingent and the everyday. But the Upanishadic analogy of sex and sacrifice, now reversed, has also been literalized and concretized in a manner that subverts the very premises of Brahminical ideology, and that implicitly points toward a counter-ideology of transgressing the norm.

8. *Violation as protest.* Very occasionally, a protagonist's arguments in favor of violation sound a more general note of anger at the order of things. Thus Indra, in a despairing soliloquy about Ahalyā's remoteness and inaccessibility:

When Brahmā creates a rich man,
he makes him a miser.
Someone generous
he makes poor.

⁵¹ TSV 2.137. Cf. AS 3, p. 139 (Indra to Ahalyā):

'Let us drive off the demon of desire with the *mantras* of our moans.'

⁵² AS 3, p. 145.

He gives an idiot, utterly
unpractised at love,
a beautiful wife who has mastered
all the sciences of desire.

It must have been in anger
at these awkward habits
of our Creator
that Śiva cut off Brahmā's head.⁵³

Not exactly the stuff of revolutions. Nevertheless, verses such as this allow us to detect, behind the more obvious transformation in the theory of love, and motivating the selectivity at work in bringing these stories to the fore, something of the conceptual ferment accompanying the social flux of Nāyaka times. This is not, we believe, a period of increasingly rigid practice, in line with śāstric authority, as is sometimes claimed for late medieval Tamil Nadu. Rather, the norm is everywhere under attack, and the thrill of violation, in the various patterns we have sketched, enlivens the imagination of all the major Telugu poets.

Summary and Conclusion.

Let us review the major components of the Nāyaka anthropology implicit in the texts we have cited, from diverse domains: erotic bhakti poems (the Kshētrayya and Sāraṅgapāṇi padams), local purāṇic myth, and the narrative śrīṅgāra-kāvya. (One could easily add to this evidence from other areas, e.g., historiography, court-drama, and, above all, the visual arts of painting and sculpture.) Thematic selectivity is itself a major indicator of cultural change: the hypertrophy of violation themes in courtly literature, and the inventive, exhaustive manner in which these themes are manifest, point to a shift in sensibility, which becomes still clearer by contrast with earlier expressions of related concerns. An ideology of bhoga, such as that which emerges in the Nāyaka courts, almost inevitably implies an interest in, perhaps even a corresponding theory of, violation. One begins with the human body regarded now—from the mid sixteenth century on—with a new and far less qualified seriousness. Sensory knowledge, for which the Yogis

⁵³ AS 3, pp. 109-10.

showed contempt and the devotees an unresolved ambivalence, achieves the status of primary epistemological and soteriological potential. The eyes, especially, are upgraded in importance: the sensitivity to visual detail gains force; there are paintings everywhere, and at the slightest excuse the Nāyaka hero or heroine produces another externalized visual representation of his or her inner state. Within this sphere of heightened receptivity to sense-perception, sexuality absorbs metaphysics. But it is a sexuality intensified by emotional experience that is largely centred on an imagined feminine sensibility and that, as such, is slowly and somewhat tentatively beginning to be individualized.

If bhoga presupposes violation, then a society oriented toward it must incorporate antinomian drives. The teleology of growth through violation on the level of the individual is clearly seen as disruptive on the level of social order. Normative hierarchies may be challenged and, as in the case of the Śūdra political ideology discussed earlier, re-ordered or reversed. The disjunctions and discontinuities previously located within the single individual—as in early bhakti poetry—are now partially displaced outwards, to the boundary between the self and others. More generally, the imagined social universe takes shape, it seems, by imaginatively breaking down the existing, external one. The world is decomposing; and the linguistic reflection of this process is manic paronomasia, which drives speech into divided and competing tracks. There is also a symbolic counterpart to this tendency on the level of the individual hero, who frequently suffers bodily mutilation, dismemberment, and reconstitution. As in other, earlier forms of Indian thought, the whole has to be taken apart and reassembled: Prajāpati disperses himself in the process of creation, and the sacrifice then reintegrates the lost or scattered parts. In works by Nāyaka poets, it is the exemplary hero who undergoes such a process, not as metaphor but as experienced corporeal reality. The generative sequence, seen abstractly, is: the awakening of desire, the promising first stage in the teleology of enjoyment; love-madness, the agony of separation, and futile attempts at suppression or control; violation and consequent disintegration, often with powerful consequences, including mutilation; and eventual regeneration which is organic, tangible, and visually engaging. The body is the primary instrument of this process,

as it is of dharma. Elements of this sequence are, of course, derived from existing cultural materials. If the notion of physical dismemberment and recomposition has venerable roots in Indian culture generally, and in the south Indian folk tradition specifically, the Nāyaka reworkings of this theme still reveal a characteristic thrust, which is related to the emerging sense of the embodied subject. Here the body is not a model of or a model for, neither a displacing metaphor nor a useful metaphysical prop (*adhiṣṭhāna*, *upajana*, in the Upanishadic idiom),⁵⁴ but a concrete locus of insistent potentialities which together constitute a dynamic, evolving whole. So entrenched is the new sense of the integrity of the individual—however multiple and conflicting his or her drives—that to deny this integrity, or the possibility of its actualization in action, is to destroy the person entirely (*ātmahatyā*). Such actualization, however, tends to proceed by way of violation and violent disintegration, before the stage of recomposition which generally fulfils the original somatic impulse. This final stage, with its images of organic growth and restored wholeness, of a veritable vegetable unfolding into ripeness and perfect form, often focuses a revealing emotional intensity in Nāyaka works. Let us take one last, contrastive example. Here is Ahalyā as she emerges from the rocky form with which she was cursed:

Slowly softening,
then, after a little while,
becoming rounded,
growing fuller,
melting a little more,
now lengthening and stretching,

that rock acquired beauty,
charm, a delightful,
disconcerting form
radiant with youth

until at last she stood there,
a precious jewel of a woman
and a miracle
to the mind. (AS 3.159)

⁵⁴ *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.12.1-2.

Here not mutilation but petrification has preceded the rebirth. But, as with Sāraṅadhara, the violence that shatters the person's initial completeness is ultimately replaced by gentle somatic fulfilment couched in the language of organic growth. To feel the full force of this passage, with the cultural expressivity, specific to this moment, that pervades it, we need only compare it to another description of this same mythic event. Here is Kampan's verse on Ahalyā's re-emergence as a person, from the twelfth-century Cōla perspective:

As Rāma looked at that stone,
dust from his feet settled on it:
and like a person
cutting loose

from the confusion inside him
and taking on form
with true knowledge
as he reaches the anklets of the Lord,

she stood before him
with all the color and liveliness
she had before.⁵⁵

Kampan's simile turns on the classic themes that occupy him—the play of consciousness and ignorance, the transformation into wakefulness that accompanies a revelation, the relation between containing body and the contained, liquid life-force, *uyir*, that is often identified with the embodied god. Ahalyā's regaining of form is thus an instance of liberated, clarified awareness striving for unity with the incarnate divinity. The Nāyaka poet's verse, on the other hand, is entirely given over to plasticity, visibility, gentle sensuality, and the imagery of organic unfolding. The emphasis is not at all on Ahalyā's consciousness—indeed, as we saw, the conclusion of the entire episode in the AS simply restores her to her former sensual nature, and even brings the irascible, dessicated Gautama into line with her proclivities. Not Ahalyā, the transgressive victim, but her self-righteous, self-denying husband has been taught a lesson; it is his consciousness that has been

⁵⁵ Kampan 1.540: *uṅṭa pēṭaimai mayakkara vērupat!* uruvaṁ/ koṅṭu mey uṅar-pavaṅ kaḷal kūṭiyat' oppa.

undermined and made to grow. Like any proper Nāyaka heroine, Ahalyā wins 'salvation'—we believe this is the right word—through violation, through the pursuit of her own individual voice and drives, through and in the body.

There is, no doubt, a temptation to see a parallel here with the well-known arena of Tantric ritual (especially sexual) violation; and we should admit at once that esoteric, Tantric undercurrents did surface in the Tamil country during Nāyaka times. We hear an unconventional mystic such as Tāyumāṇavar, in the early eighteenth century, give voice to the period theme of finding perfection in his living body—though the perfection he seeks is that of Yogic illumination and a corporeal vision of the divine.⁵⁶ The early sixteenth century also produced the Tamil version, by Vīrai Kavirācapaṇṭitar, of the famous Sākta poem, *Saundaryalahari*; and, in general, we can observe the rise of Tantric and Nāth mythology and cultic practice throughout south India in the late medieval centuries, to some extent through the percolation southwards of religious currents continuously active in Andhra. Perhaps, indeed, these Tantric influences had an impact on the Telugu poets of Tanjavur and Madurai. But it is also crucial to draw in lines of distinction between Tantra and the Nāyaka courtly ethos. For one thing, ritualized Tantric violation tends to be homeostatic in a social sense, reinforcing by transgression the violated boundaries. But still more important is the question of individuation and the emergence of the subject: the whole force of the Nāyaka theory of violation moves in precisely this direction, toward an individualized (especially feminine) person, in clear contrast to the Tantra, which is hardly individualistic in this sense and which focuses rather on its explicit soteriological aims (which may even include certain ascetic choices in the realm of means). The shared emphasis on violation and sensual realization should not obscure the fundamental difference in underlying notions of the person and the self.⁵⁷

The comparison does, however, shed light on another feature of

⁵⁶ Tāyumāṇavar, *tēcōmayāṇantam* 1; Shulman (1991). According to the surviving hagiographical accounts, Tāyumāṇavar was a court-official in Nāyaka Madurai.

⁵⁷ Similarly, we could point to differences in range, emphasis, and selection between the Nāyaka śrīṅgāra-kāvya, taken as a whole in relation to other genres, and the comparable tradition of Sanskrit *kāmasāstra* and erotic verse.

the Nāyaka materials, one not wholly removed from the Tantric vision. For the Nāyaka poets, too, bhoga is never a crudely hedonistic mode. It orients the symbolic universe not toward pleasure for its own sake, but to enjoyment as a means of transcendence, including self-transcendence. The yoga of pleasure always implies an element, usually an entire process, of spiritual growth. Sensuality literally incorporates metaphysics; the body remains an instrument, not an end. But it is an instrument transformed: relations between interior and exterior have been harmonized; the senses make demands of existential urgency, which must not be ignored or suppressed; the head loses something of its symbolic primacy, in favour of the 'lower' parts. Above all, the body now contains and expresses a manifold, more integrated subject, the individual 'I' who speaks—often in ślesha, thus reflecting this innate multiplicity of the self—and who experiences a real, sensually engaging world. One could also disengage from the śringāra-kāvya, as from chronicles such as the *TARC*, an implicit theory of agency and moral responsibility in relation to the newly integrated notion of the person—but this is the subject for another study.

It is to be expected that this set of concepts, this latent anthropology, would have a formative impact on articulated domains such as that of political symbolism and the ideology of kingship. We can now return to this arena, perhaps recalling as we do so Burckhardt's well-known conclusion about the rise of the individual in Renaissance Italy:

An *objective* treatment and consideration of the State and of all the things of this world became possible. The *subjective* side at the same time asserted itself with corresponding emphasis; man became a spiritual *individual*, and recognized himself as such . . . It will not be difficult to show that this result was owing, above all, to the political circumstances of Italy.⁵⁸

One envies the great historian's certainty. But for our purposes, and without insisting on a single direction of explanation, the causal equation should probably be reversed: Nāyaka political structures, and their colourful evocations in courtly poetry and drama, seem everywhere infused with the implicit, still crystallizing images of self and world that we have sought to trace.

⁵⁸ Burckhardt (1958), 1:143.

The Rhetoric of Kingship

1. MARRIAGE-BROKER FOR A GOD

Having moved in the earlier chapter from the largest of units—the kingdom or state—to the smallest of its component parts—the individual body—we turn in the present chapter to the middle ground between the two, the individual who ‘holds up’ the state, the ruler himself and his rhetoric. Our intention is to see how one human body—that of the ruler—comes to assume divine or even supra-divine proportions, to interfere decisively at times in the affairs of the gods, and at other times to be portrayed as no less than an *avatāra*. Now, it may seem that inflation of this kind is inevitable and of little interest given the small scale of Nāyaka kingship: limited temporal horizons are often thought to precipitate rhetorical megalomania. However, the figure of the Nāyaka king in his own realm is not merely inflated by his poets (who are often his own children), but equally often punctured by means of parody in a two-fold process that we seek to analyse below.

The Nāyaka king thus cuts a different figure from his Cōla or Vijayanagara predecessors and counterparts. One can see this quite literally in surviving royal portraits in fresco or stone. Cōla rulers are represented, as a rule, as lithe, delicate, and subtly energized. Vijayanagara portraits from the ‘golden’ years of the early sixteenth century, such as the bronze figure of Krishṇadevarāya at Tirupati, tend to the severe; they are at once visually striking and highly controlled, with the typical Andhra elongation of the human form. Images of the

Nāyakas—as in the *maṇḍapa* at Mannarkuti, the central shrine for Tanjavur, or in the Rāmasvāmi temple in Kumpakonam, or the bronze of Vijayarāghava in the Tanjavur Art Gallery—are heavier, more thick-set, often a little chubby, even slightly effeminate. The Riboud tapestry, discussed in an earlier chapter,¹ confirms this impression: the royal figure, enveloped by the crowding women of his court, conveys an impression of somewhat languorous sensuality and ease. The virile Deccani warrior, settled amidst the paddy-fields of the delta, has undergone a considerable metamorphosis, apparent in visual representations and also trenchantly delineated in literary sources from the courts.

We have already noted certain select aspects of the new royal model, especially in Tanjavur and Madurai. We know that this is a Śūdra king, perhaps of Balija background, and proud of his origins; he is neither subordinated, in his own eyes (or in those of his panegyrists), to the Vaidika Brahmin nor very closely identified with the traditional images and ideology of dharmic kingship. He may very well be a self-made man, or the son of such a man, who achieved kingship on his own merits, without reference to ascriptive criteria. He has money. He is very much an individual, and as such differentiated, in terms of character and personality, from others mentioned by the Telugu chronicles. He is surrounded by hundreds of women, who occupy him daily with the rituals of love.² He also fights (though often rather unsuccessfully), in the no less ritualized domain of intermittent warfare. He has, perhaps, a classical education in Telugu, Sanskrit, and arts such as poetry and music; poet-princes seem, indeed, to be the rule in seventeenth-century Tanjavur.

But these traits, even taken together, hardly define the historic change in the structural location of kingship that has taken place in our period. To move toward such a definition, we have to examine kingship in relation to other institutional spheres, above all that of the temple—the other major locus of political symbolism in medieval south India. And we have to re-construct the way Nāyaka kingship was actually

¹ See above, III.1. On Nāyaka portraits, see Pālacuppiramaṇiyaṅ (1987).

² This is confirmed by Ólafsson (Temple and Anstey [1932] pp. 117-18); and see III.1.

constructed, by courtiers and poets, some of them kings themselves, in the predominant symbolic media of the times. Much, fortunately, has survived, though it has not yet received the kind of attention that its eloquence and liveliness surely merit. Nāyaka courts produced, for example, a genre of dance-dramas—to be performed, we believe, in the presence of the king—not unlike the roughly contemporaneous Elizabethan court masques, and no less expressive of a coherent vision of politics and the world.³ We begin with an analysis of one such work, which focuses on the relations between king and temple-deity and their implications for the shifting balance of power and prestige.

Our text—the *Hēmābjanāyikāsvayaṃvaramu [HS]* of Mannārudeva—is a yakshagāna work of the Nāyaka type (quite distinct from the existing genre of yakshagāna folk-theatre in present-day Karnataka). The courtly yakshagānas emerged out of the classical literary tradition: they are composed, for the most part, in formal literary Telugu; each has an author, whom we know by name, and a fixed text—although these texts, which survived in manuscript, should probably be seen essentially as scripts for performance. Elements of music and dance, which were undoubtedly central, can only be inferred from the stage-directions in the manuscripts. We should imagine the work summarized below to have been performed at court, possibly in a ritual context relating to the Spring Festival (*vasantotsava*) that became a major public event in Nāyaka times.

The Nāyaka rulers were themselves often poet-authors of yakshagāna works, and this is the case with our text: Mannārudeva was the son of the last Nāyaka king of Tanjavur, Vijayarāghava. His yakshagāna thus bears similarities to the abhyudaya works discussed earlier, in which a devoted son celebrates his father—for Vijayarāghava figures prominently in the *HS*. Despite this laudatory orientation evident in the work itself, relations between father and son were anything but harmonious, if we are to believe the historiographical tradition. Vijayarāghava is said to have imprisoned his son in golden chains—according to one version, because of Mannārudeva's love for the daughter of the famous minister, Govinda Dīkshita—until the eve of the final battle against the Madurai forces. Released at this critical

³ See Orgel (1975).

juncture, Mannārudeva fought beside his aged father in the battle in which both were killed.⁴

A final remark by way of introduction: our text focuses on the wedding of the goddess Hēmābjanāyikā (the 'Golden Lotus Lady', also known as Campakalakshmī and Ceṅkamalattāyār) at the shrine of Mannarkuti, some 30 km to the south of Tanjavur city. This temple became the primary ritual centre for the Tanjavur Nāyakas; its deity, Viṣṇu as Rājagopālasvāmi (the 'Royal Cowherd'; also Ceṅdalaṅkāra, 'adorned with the cowherd's crook [*ceṅṭu*']), became their family deity (*kuladevatā*). A replica of the Mannarkuti temple was established inside the Nāyaka palace at Tanjavur, and local tradition still speaks of a mysterious underground passage connecting the temple compound at Mannarkuti with the royal centre in the town.⁵ Both Raghunātha and Vijayarāghava endowed and extended the temple; an expansive, Telugu kāvya-style version of the Mannarkuti purāṇa, the *Rājagōpālavilāsamu* of Ceṅgalva Kālakavi, was composed and performed at Vijayarāghava's court.⁶ We will have occasion to cite this work, which translates Krishṇa's amorous adventures into the language of the courtly erotic tradition, in the course of our analysis of the *HS*. But let us first review the manner in which the *HS* tells its mythic story.

Introductory. As is usual in the yakshagānas, our text opens with an invocation to Krishṇa, identified here with Rājagopāla, the god of Mannarkuti, consort of Ceṅgamala. After a long series of laudatory Sanskrit compounds, the poet switches to Telugu as he asks the god, Ceṅdalaṅkāra, to protect him, 'the son of your son'. This is instructive: Mannārudeva sees himself as the god's grandson; the king, Vijayarāghava, is son to the god.⁷ The standard introductory scenario of

⁴ TARC, pp. 51-2. The story is strikingly reminiscent of that of the Tanjavur Hippolytus, Sāraṅgadhara, mistakenly mutilated by his father: above, IV.2; and see VIII.1.

⁵ Field notes, Mannarkuti, 2 January 1987. On Mannarkuti, see Rāmacēṣaṇ (1985); Irāmanātapillai (1946); SII VI, no. 57.

⁶ The Sanskrit *sthalapurāṇa*, *Campakāraṇyamāhātmya*, also survives (text in the edition we have used of Ceṅgalva Kālakavi); it identifies Mannarkuti as the Campaka Forest and as Southern (dakṣiṇa-) Dvaraka, where Krishṇa performed his mythic amusements (*līlā*) for two brothers, Gopralaya and Gobhila.

⁷ This identity-claim is confirmed in the Jesuit letters: see Proença to Nickel, 1659

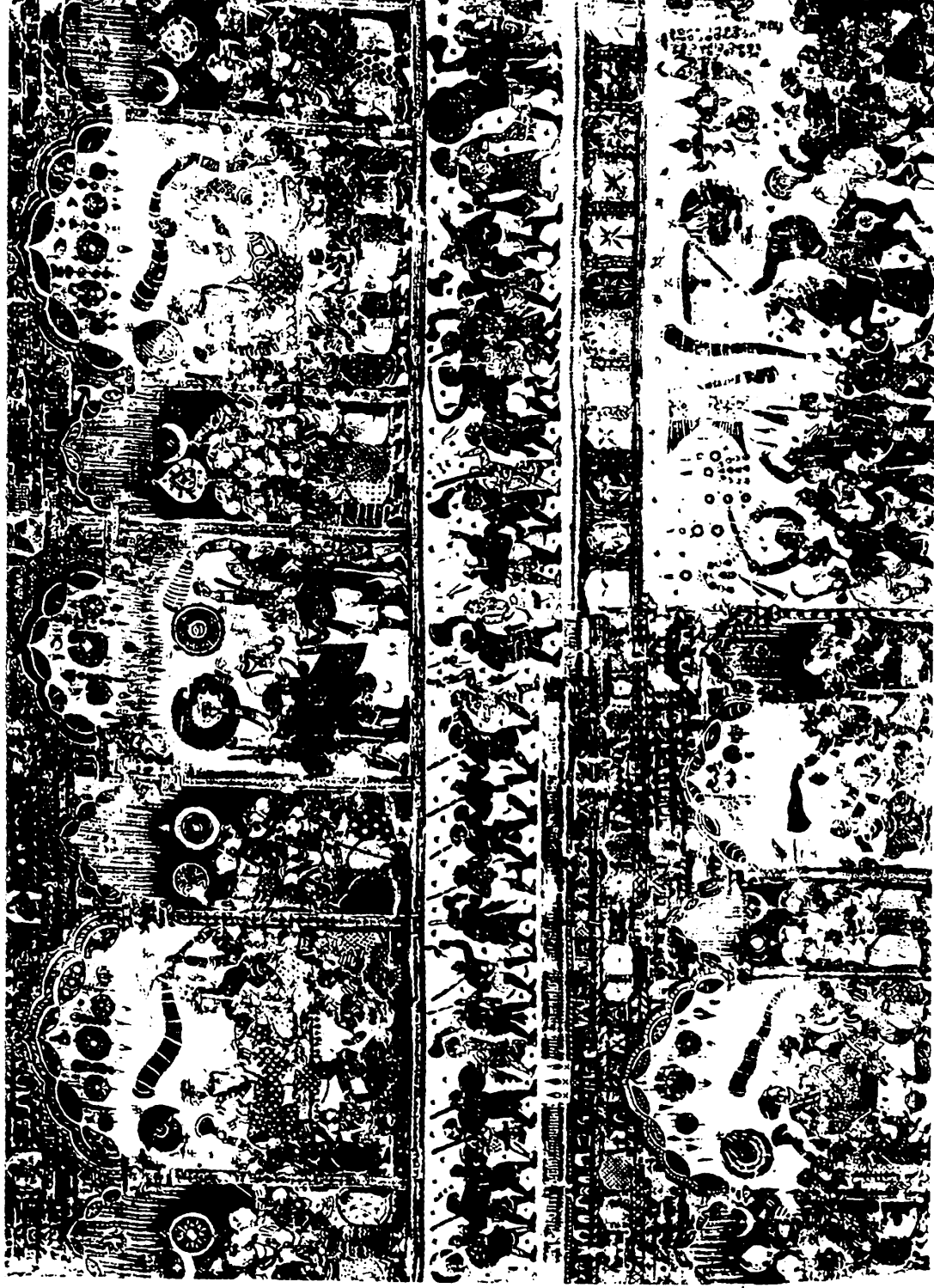


Fig. 1.

Late seventeenth-century tapestry, AEDTA
Collection, Paris (courtesy: Krishna Riboud, AEDTA, Paris)



Fig. 2.
Detail from Fig. 1.
(Courtesy: Krishna Riboud, AEDTA, Paris)

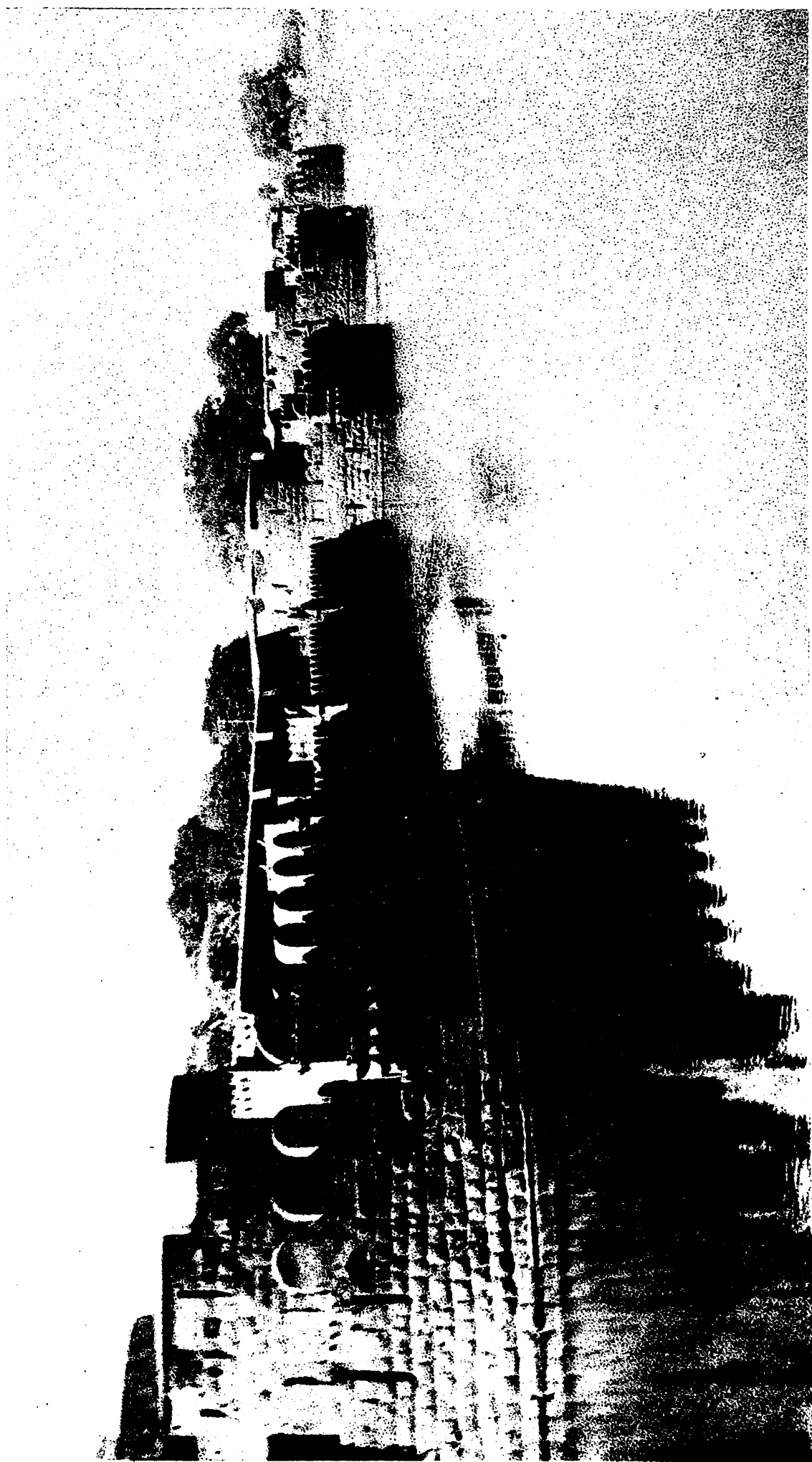


Fig. 3.
View of Velur fort from the northern side, showing the moat, double-walls and bastions (courtesy: Jatinder Singh, Madras)

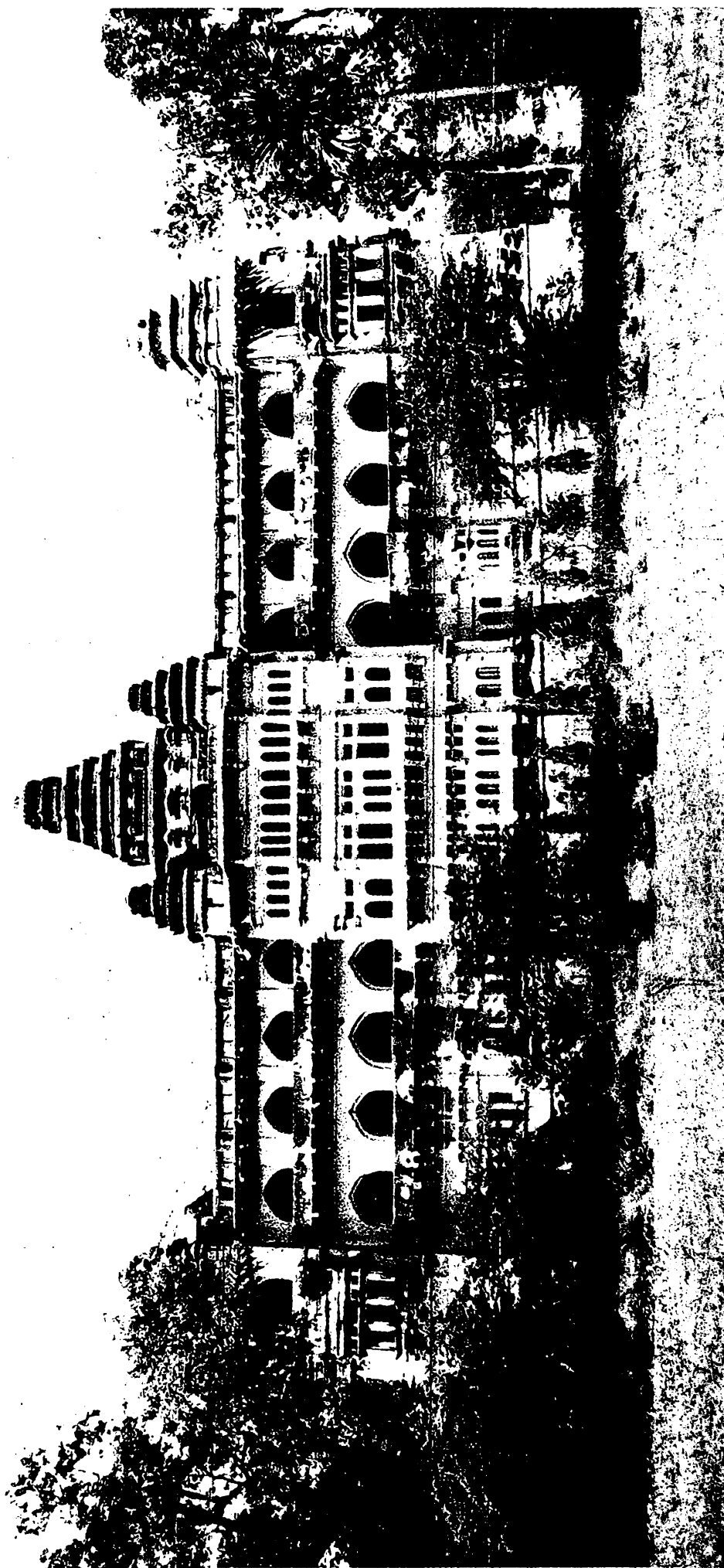


Fig. 4.
Candragiri, view from southwest of Rana Mahal (courtesy: George Michell, London)

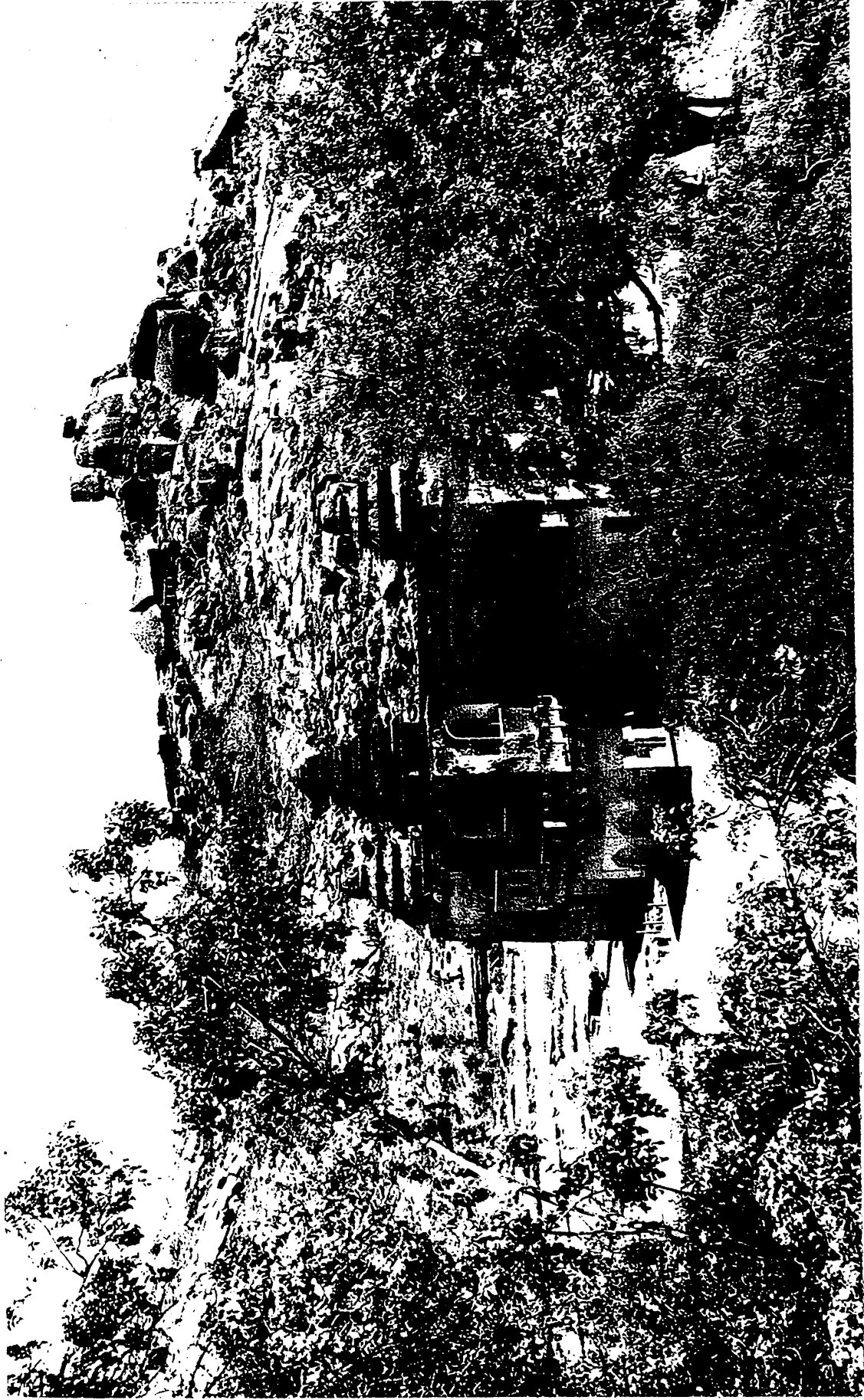


Fig. 5.
Candragiri, view from southwest of Rana Mahal (courtesy: George Michell, London)



Fig. 6.
Raghunātha Nāyaka, with two of his wives, from the mandapa at the
Rāmāsvāmi temple, Kumbhakonam



Fig. 7.
Vijayarāghava Nāyaka, bronze from the Tanjavur Art Gallery



Fig. 8.
Tirumala Nayaka and wife, ivory, temple museum, Srirangam



Fig. 9.

Rajagopalsvami temple, Mannarkuti: Krishna steals the *gopis'* clothes; to the left stands Vishnu/Rajagopala (from the *vimāna* over the main shrine).



Fig. 10.

Qutub Shahi horsemen, Deccani school, Sir Akbar Hyderi collection,
Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay (photograph: Lotika Varadarajan).



Fig. 11.
Ceiling mural at the Valmikanatha shrine, Tiruvarur (late 17th century)



Fig. 12.
Nāyaka horsemen, as above

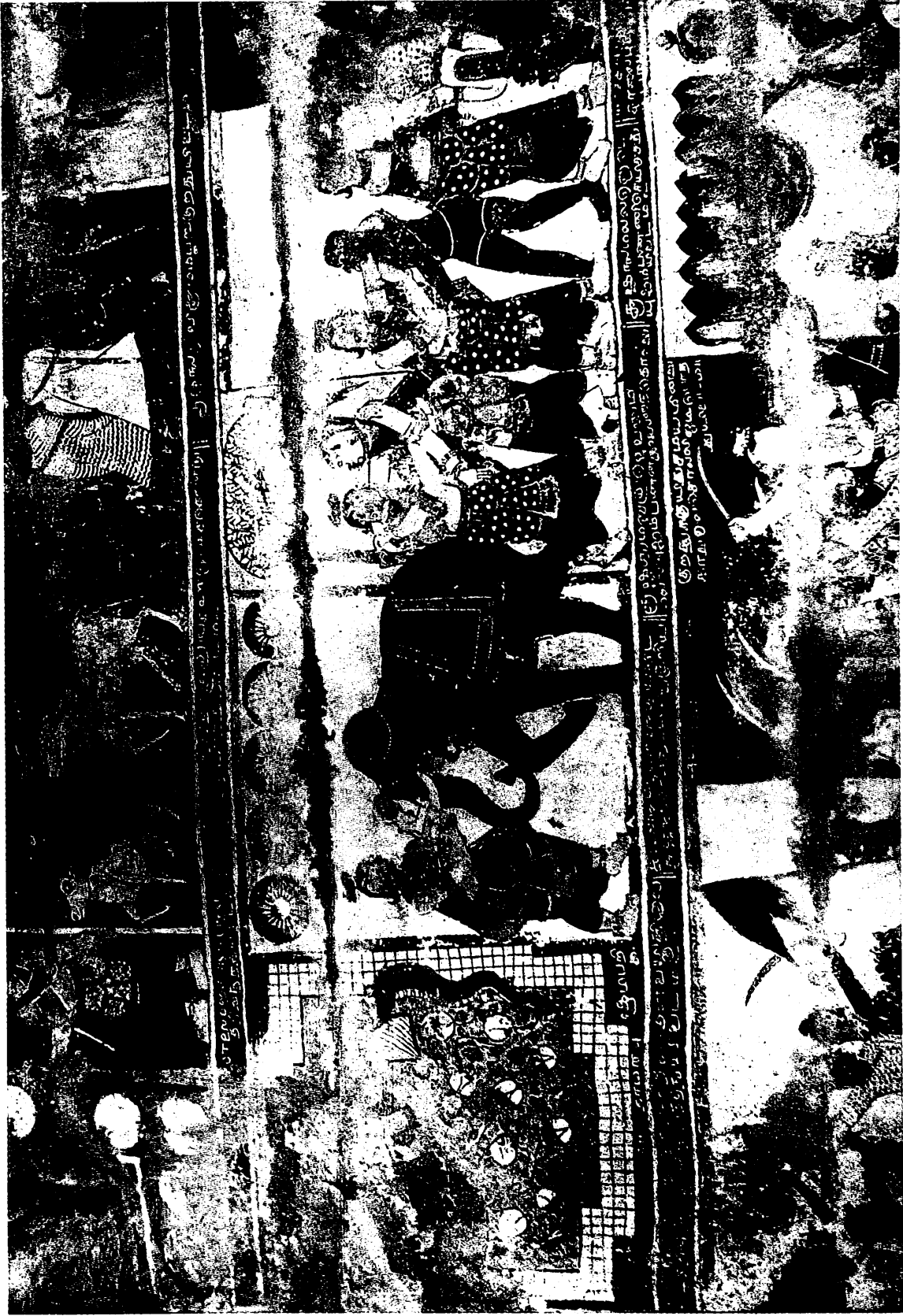


Fig. 13.
Trilokyanāthasvāmi temple, Tiruparutti kunram, Cengalpet

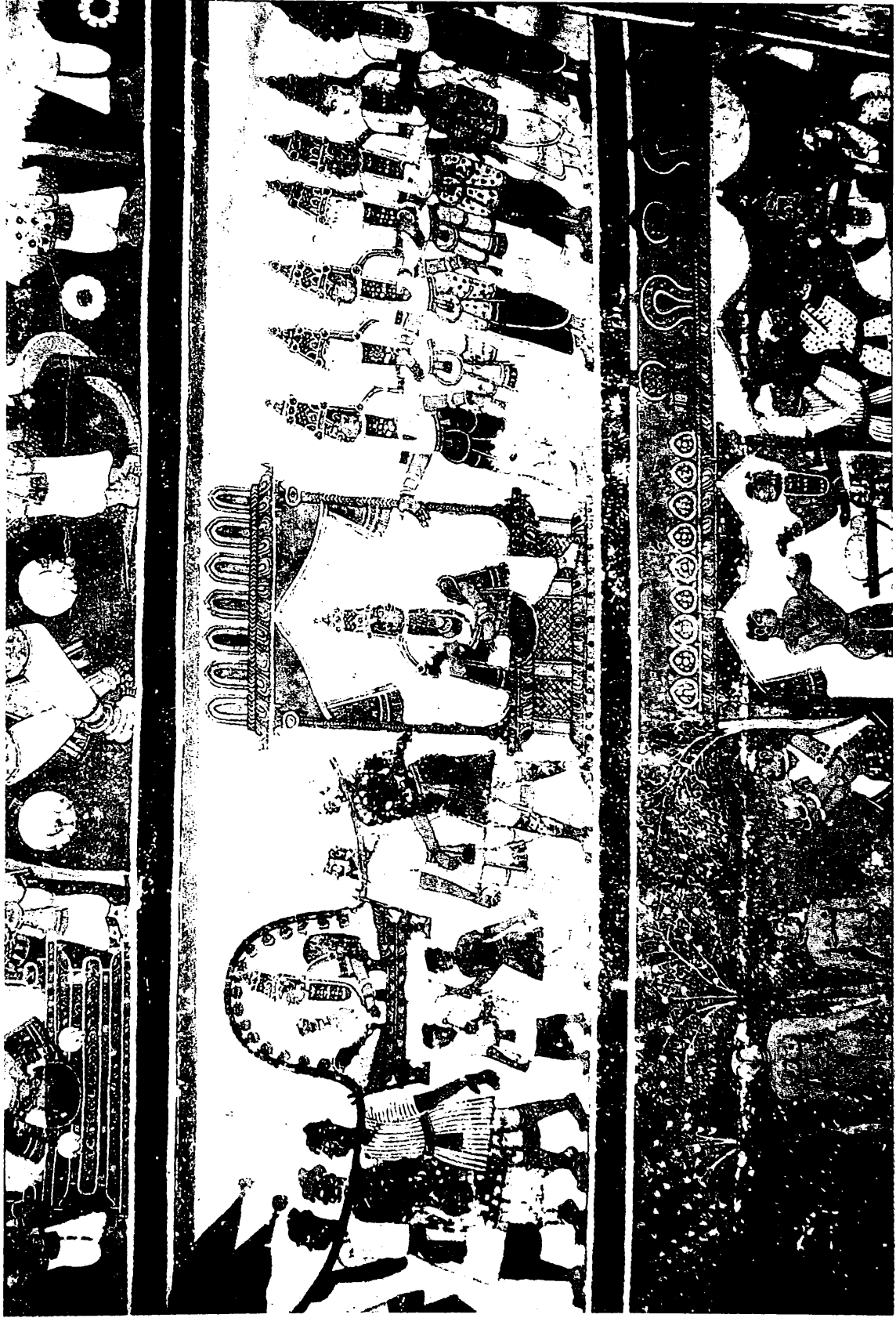


Fig. 14.

Trilokyanāthāśvāmi temple, Tiruparuttī kunram, Cengalpet (courtesy: Lotika Varadarajan, Delhi)



Fig. 15.
Rāmalingavilāsa, Ramanathapuram, Vijaya Raghunātha Setupati
with courtesan (courtesy: Lotika Varadarajan, Delhi)



Fig. 16.

Setupati negotiating with Europeans over pearl-fishery, mural,
Rāmalingavilāsa, Ramanathapuram (courtesy: Lotika Varadarajan, Delhi)

Telugu court-kāvya now unrolls with further invocations and a succinct recapitulation of the family lineage from the founder, Cevva-bhūbharta, through the 'militant Vaishṇava' (*vīravaiṣṇava*) Acyutāḷvar, to Raghunātha, a new Bhoja (*abhinavabhoja*, patron of the arts), and finally to Vijayarāghava, who is to rule the entire earth as long as the sun, moon, and stars continue in their courses. Mannārudeva can now name and characterize himself: he, too, is in some sense the son of the god of Mannarkuti; he has founded many Brahmin *agrahāras*, composed poetic works such as the *Vijayarāghavābhyudayamu* (unfortunately lost to us), and knows the happiness of incomparable devotion to his father and his guru. We should never forget, as we read through his play, this clearly professed context: the work is a gift from son to father, offered in the courtly coin of an idealizing and mythologizing family likeness.

Churning the Ocean. So much for the preliminaries: the play can begin. The first episode of the drama sets the stage for the birth of our heroine, Hēmābjanāyikā, and establishes links between this text and classical purāṇic myth. The opening passage shows us the divine king, Rājagopāla, as he comes to his court (*koluvu*), surrounded by his 16,000 women, in southern Dvaraka, i.e., Mannarkuti. It is a slow beginning, a visual enactment of life at court, in which even the most ordinary actions—walking, standing, sitting down, listening—are imbued with stately grace and a lyrical, almost magical attentiveness. We first see Rājagopāla simultaneously offering his aroused attention to many lovely women—intoxicating one of them with his gentle words, giving betel to another, scratching with his fingernails at the cheeks of another—in a word, 'floating' (*tēlucunna*) through the manifold play of desire (*śṛṅgāralīlan*), in a highly charged, and highly conventional, erotic atmosphere. An expert dancing-girl performs a short padam-composition, very much in the style of the Kshētrayya padams from this period:

Didn't I tell you I'm in love with you? Still you're making such a fuss.
I bow to beautiful Mannāru—please take me now!
I've begged you many times, and still you're being stubborn.
You just don't care. You've exhausted me—take care!

(Satyanatha Aiyar [1924], p. 204), and discussion below.

Always love in a playfully painful mode; always the god-king lovingly rebuked for his apparent heartlessness and betrayals. Mannārusvāmi (=Rājagopāla) hears the song with delight—it is, after all, a tribute to his infinite desirability—and richly rewards the dancer.

Suddenly, the official announcers of times and events (*avasaram-mulavāru*) enter to inform the god of the arrival of Brahmā and other deities. Once they are admitted, the scene becomes the wholly familiar one of the South Indian monarch greeting his *sāmanta*-subordinates; the minor gods play the role of warrior-kings come to make their obeisance and to beg for help from their overlord. They have a specific request from Rājagopāla: will he kindly churn the ocean of milk and distribute the *amrita*-elixir to the gods? The answer, of course, is yes: Viṣṇu repairs to the shore of the ocean and summons the demons, who must take part in the process of churning, despite their justifiable suspicions about the intentions of their divine partners; they express these suspicions in a crudely comic idiom that serves as counterpoint to the dominant lyrical tones of the narration. We will return to this contrapuntal pattern below. The text now passes rapidly through the major elements of this well-known myth—Rājagopāla assumes the form of a tortoise to steady the mountain/churning-rod; Rudra swallows the Hālāhala poison that emerges from the depths; various miraculous entities, such as the horse Uccaiṣravas, the elephant Airāvata, the divine wishing-cow, the *cintāmaṇi* gem, and, finally, the *amrita* and the Kaustubha jewel, now appear. None of this is of particular interest to our poet.

A goddess born. Suddenly, however, a purple passage: Kanakābjadevī, the Golden Lotus Lady, also rises from the ocean—born on a golden lotus, her body radiant as delicately worked gold, her hair darker than the Lady of Twilight, youthful, sexually alluring, an island of love (*valapuladīvi*), fragrant as campaka blossoms . . . The gods and demons stare, spellbound, as she moves from the water to the shore, but she does not even notice them; she has eyes only for the one god, Ceṇḍal-aṅkāra (i.e., Rājagopāla), who stands there, seemingly unmoved (*nir-vikāruḍai*). She is, in fact, already overcome by passion, sweating, horripilating, her nipples standing on end; she asks that her servant identify this person, and the girl replies: 'Lady, he is the lord who took

the form of a fish and gave the Vedas back to Brahmā; he became a tortoise to help the gods . . . He is Gopāla, the Cowherd, Celuva Mannaḍu, from Southern Dvaraka; he has made 16,000 women fall in love with him; he is the god worshipped every day in the home of Vijayarāghava.'

And he, too, has fallen in love: for all his 16,000 other wives, no-one has impressed him as deeply as this graceful girl born from the sea; he can imagine no greater happiness than making love to her. 'Who,' he wonders, 'can unite her and me?' This is not, we note, an idle question, even if it comes from a theoretically omnipotent deity; rather, it might be said to embody the entire programme of this play.

As the two lovers suffer in their new-found longing, the girl's father, Varuṇa, lord of the ocean, arrives to take his daughter home. Hēmābjanāyikā disappears; the remainder of the myth of churning can now be briefly enacted. With the goddess out of the way, the gods and demons revert to their normal oppositional roles. Each group is intent on appropriating the amrita, and, even as they engage in a bitter (but also somewhat grotesque) exchange of insults, they prepare for another in their interminable series of battles. Vishṇu, however, intervenes by appearing before the demons in the beguiling feminine guise of Mohinī, elaborately described by the text—her eyebrows resemble Vishṇu's Śārṅga bow, her nose is like the campaka blossoms he usually carries, her lips have the form of his Kaustubha jewel, her breasts resemble the Govardhana mountain, her waist that of Narasiṃha, etc. This is an iconographic *tour de force*, the point of which is, perhaps, to allow the latent feminine features in Vishṇu's usual iconic images to emerge, for once, as primary; the implicit inversion is, in fact, highly relevant to other problems of this text. In any case, Mohinī concludes the myth: promising to serve the gods and demons a feast of amrita, she arranges the two groups in two separate rows and then proceeds to dish out the elixir to the gods alone. Resuming his masculine form, the god then routs the understandably furious demons and retires to his court at Southern Dvaraka.

Love in separation. From this point onward, the yakshagāna moves into the highly conventionalized mode which we may call 'the separated lunatic-lovers'. We will follow the prescribed swoons, reproaches, and

laments only briefly and schematically, beginning with Hēmābjānāyikā, who has not recovered from her glimpse of the god at the seashore. Lying, at night, on the cool moonstone in her father's palace, she feverishly mumbles to her maidservants and companions: how can she get through the night without making love to Mannārusvāmi? When will he come to her, offer her his heart, fondle her erogenous zones, unite with her? When will she exhaust him by swinging on him in the 'reverse position'? All of this, however tedious it may appear to us, is meant to be quite shocking, and her friends quite properly rebuke her: 'This isn't right, this is a flaw for a woman of good family. Only a few days ago you were just a child. Why this inordinate desire?' She is, after all, a *kulakāntā*, a family woman, not a brazen courtesan.⁸ And this, of course, is just the point—passion has pushed our heroine beyond all normal bounds, brought out her normally repressed boldness, driven her, in a sense, mad. Moreover, the whole process happens before our eyes and achieves an unrestrained (if predictable) verbal form. Falling in love, in this courtly culture, is a public event.

Eventually, a more experienced friend (*proḍhanecceḷi*), Rūpavatī, arrives to make a definitive diagnosis. Even she is taken aback when she hears the girl mention Mannāru's name—marrying the god will not be easy; he already has 16,000 other women in his harem—but, convinced of her friend's desperate state, she goes off as the necessary messenger of love to the court at Southern Dvaraka. Not surprisingly, given all that we have seen so far, she reaches him at a busy moment: the god is amorously engaged with his wives and also, simultaneously it would seem, receiving the daily worship of Mannārudāsa, i.e., Vijayarāghava, the Nāyaka king! Nevertheless, Rūpavatī is announced, and she loses no time in delivering her message of passion: 'Since seeing you yesterday, the Golden Lotus Lady has been adrift on a sea of unbearable desire. She sent me here to get you. She is the most beautiful of beautiful women; she writes poetry, plays the *vīṇā*, knows all the arts. She is suited only to you! Even a woman could fall in love with her dancing and singing. Don't ignore her—embrace her, drink the sweetness of her lips.' But the god needs no persuading; he, too, is

⁸ A *kulakāntā* is not supposed even to look into a mirror during the night, lest she be born a courtesan in her next birth.

in love, and asks only how he can go to her house (proprieties must still be observed). That is easy, the messenger replies, tomorrow he will be invited to the *svayaṃvara* or bride's choice; as a sign that he will come, Rūpavatī asks and receives the ring from his finger (*muddu-tuṅgaramu*).

Mannārusvāmi, meanwhile, has had to go through his own side of this ritualized process. He is hallucinating, his world pervaded by the image of Hēmābjanāyikā, to whom he cries pathetically: 'Won't you rule over me, lovely girl? I am your servant, dependent on you; why remain stubborn? Ever since I parted from you, each minute has become a year. I cannot sleep, I cannot bear it any longer.' And, most emphatically, in a telling image: 'Wherever I look, I see only you. The sword I rattle in exercise sounds like your bangles to my ears.' A more extreme transformation of masculine to feminine imagery is hard to imagine. As usual in South Indian courtly love-poetry, the male is reduced to abject helplessness; but here the male is the god, who concludes his love-lament, suggestively and somewhat ironically, by declaring his bhakti for this girl (*nī mīda batticēta marulu koṭṭini*).

Negotiations. Luckily for him, at this point a new character enters the action—the Nāyaka king, Vijayarāghava himself, who has come to perform his habitual worship. He approaches the god, prostrates himself, offers gifts, and sings a song of praise and thanks to the lord who resides in his (the Nāyaka's) city and who has always cared for the king, his beloved son (*nī muddu paṭṭinai*). But, to the king's surprise, the god pays no attention to these praises, preoccupied as he is with some other matter. Vijayarāghava is unhappy at seeing his deity so miserable, and he addresses him: 'Why are you like this today, Swami? I have come to your presence before, not knowing if it was the proper time, and you have called me to you lovingly, heard my humble requests, shown your affection. Are you having some lovers' quarrel? Would you like to hear Nārada's music, or the praises of the sages? What is your wish, your command?' The god is moved: 'Come, my son,' he says, calling Vijayarāghava by name; he sniffs at the king's head, strokes his back and shoulders with his hand, speaks to him gently: 'You are my young son, who serves me well; you have built towers, walls, and columned porches in my temple, given me ornaments, elephants, and horses; held

festivals for me. You are my son, minister, and general (*dalakarta*); my friend, devotee, and trusted companion (*āptunḍu*); my closest relative; my very life's breath; you seek my welfare in all things.' Now, a little shyly (*siggutō*), smiling, he makes his confession: 'Have I ever hidden anything from you, even in dreams? The day before yesterday, I saw the daughter of the ocean's king; ever since then, I have been prey to the storms of passion. Go today, speak to the lord of the ocean, unite me in marriage to that girl—this wedding can come about only through you.' Vijayarāghava is, of course, only too delighted to be of service: 'Why talk so much to a mere servant (*aḍiyan*)?'⁹ You are including me in the same group with Pradyumna and Sāmba; because of this great respect, I will achieve your aim and fulfil my own desires. Why worry so much? You stay here and enjoy yourself, and I'll bring you back good news this very morning.' And he hurries home to get dressed.

Elaborately attired, the Nāyaka rides off on his horse toward the coast. The lord of the ocean receives him with honour, seats him on his throne, and mentions Vijayarāghava's famed generosity, which is common knowledge even at the bottom of the ocean (especially his lavish feeding of Brahmins).¹⁰ The matter at hand requires little rhetorical effort: Varuṇa announces that he will be happy to marry his daughter to Mannārusvāmi, and that he has already invited the various forms of Vishṇu (*vishṇumūrtulu*) to the bridegroom-choice on the morrow. So Vijayarāghava can hasten back to the god with the good news, and Mannārusvāmi is suitably impressed: 'With someone like you as my dear son, is it any wonder that all my desires are fulfilled?'

Svayaṃvara/Wedding. Now the god must be dressed (by his maid-servants), in a passage almost exactly replicating the earlier description of Vijayarāghava's formal dressing—god and Nāyaka present us with precise images of one another. Rājagopāla arrives at Varuṇa's court holding Vijayarāghava's hand! Other forms of Vishṇu are also on hand—the Boar (Ādivarāha), Raṅganātha (lord of Srirangam), Veṅkaṭeśvara (of Tirupati), Śāraṅgapāṇi (of Kumbhakonam), Varadarāja

⁹ Note the use of this borrowed Tamil term.

¹⁰ On the gift of food, *annadāna*, see above, III.1 and section 3 below. One wonders if the meeting of Vijayarāghava and Varuṇa may not reflect something of the Tanjavur rulers' interest in maritime trade, on which see Section III.3!

(from Kancipuram), Vīrarāghava (of Nellur), and Nīlamegha. The beautiful bride-to-be must now make her choice, and she confidently passes over all these great gods to select Rājagopāla: 'This is the one I saw before, the one with whom I am in love.'

The wedding is celebrated without delay, even as the drama undergoes a sudden and intriguing change of tone. The poet presents us with a shockingly coarse dialogue uttered by the Brahmin wives who have come to prepare the ceremony. We also hear their husbands, the Brahmin priests, arguing over the money they are to receive, their relative seniority, family scandals, and so on. Here, for example, is part of the semi-pornographic banter of the Brahmin wives as they perform their tasks (pounding turmeric, singing auspicious songs):

'They're giving money to every woman who can sing the wedding songs—let's go.'

'That's exactly why I came.'

'My husband says he's too old for this sort of thing, so he pestered me to come, to earn some money for the family.'

'Don't talk like that. Doesn't the author of the śāstra say your husband is your god, your father, your Purushottama (Vishṇu)? That's why I treat *my* husband as if he were my child.'

'If that's how you relate to him, I wonder what you do with your neighbours.'

'Maybe we should swap husbands. Why are you holding on to your back?'

'Last night he made me lift all those baskets of turmeric [*bandhālu*—or, perhaps, the contorted erotic positions of the *Kāmasūtra*?]

The contrapuntal effect is quite astounding, after the elevated discourse of the lovers' romance. As mentioned earlier (in relation to the flying gandharvas of the *Viśvagunādarśacampū*),¹¹ this type of conjunction is typical of the period: the illusion is punctured just as it achieves the closure toward which it has been so ardently striving. Now there is nothing left but for the play to end, with a series of blessings: the newlyweds, who have set up house at Southern Dvaraka, come to visit Tanjavur, where the god speaks, for the last time, to his child, the devoted king. 'O Vijayarāghava, since you performed this wedding,

¹¹ See above, I.1.

our mind is at ease. Live on, in health and good fortune, as long as the moon and stars exist.' And the king replies: You have called me your son, that I might flourish on earth, ever victorious.' All this, we may allow ourselves to note, some four years before the final collapse of the Tanjavur house.

Like other courtly dramas from Tanjavur, the *HS* presents us with remarkably eloquent assertions, especially with regard to the relations of Nāyaka king and temple god. This will be the central issue explored in our discussion; it is here that we can see most clearly, in the light of this and other relevant texts, the evolution that the concept of kingship has undergone. We will argue for the emergence of a new idiom of identity in which the Nāyaka speaks, is spoken to, and acts; and we will seek to characterize this identity in terms of its outstanding symbolic expressions and affective drives. Far from being merely another, particularly colourful form of courtly entertainment, the yakshagāna corpus constitutes a major workshop in which the royal image was fashioned and exposed. The story embodied in the *HS*, and the rhetorical texture of its telling, offer, in effect, a paradigm of political symbolism, one capable of being sustained and rendered systematic by reference to other contemporary sources.

How are we to define the Nāyaka hero of this play? Like all other south Indian Hindu kings from Pallava times onward, Vijayarāghava takes care to appear as the most humble of the god's servants, an exemplary devotee among other devotees; rhetorically, too, this tone survives even within contexts which would seemingly subvert it. In fact, however, it is this subversion that is most salient here. The rhetoric of service and submission masks a reality of restructured power-relations. Not only is the king the god's son (a kin-relationship constantly reiterated, with apparent literal force, in the Nāyaka texts); he is also, in a real sense, the god's intimate confidant and even benefactor, the one person capable of fulfilling Mannārusvāmi's needs and desires, of acting in the world on behalf of a deity rather helplessly locked in his temple and victimized by his passions.¹² In a sense, the traditional patronage relation has been inverted, the servant has risen to mastery

¹²Note that arranging for a god's marriage is a source of eternal fame, according to Tamil folk tradition: *Naḷaccakkiravartti katai*, p. 37.

—even if the older linguistic usages of subservience continue in force. These are not idle claims, nor are they meant ironically, as is sometimes the case in south Indian devotional declarations of intimacy with the divine; rather, they lie at the centre of what this yakshagāna is intent upon expressing. Listen, again, to the god's own description of his relationship with Vijayarāghava:

You are my young son, who serves me well; you have built towers, walls, and columned porches in my temple, given me ornaments, elephants, and horses, held festivals for me. You are my son, minister, and general; my friend, devotee, and trusted companion; my closest relative, my very life's breath; you seek my welfare in all things.

There were times, in South India, when the king was the life-breath of his kingdom;¹³ now he breathes for the god.¹⁴ He also, appropriately, bears the title of the most active and powerful of all courtly functionaries in the Nāyaka kingdom—*daḷavāy*, the royal generalissimo, here serving Mannārusvāmi at the divine court in Maṅṅarkuti. Happily, this *daḷavāy* seeks his lord's welfare; moreover, Mannārusvāmi apparently needs this attentiveness, might even be endangered or impoverished by its absence.

Clearly, several notions are intertwined in this passage, as in the play as a whole. The king is son, servant, commander to the god, but also superior in power; he is the source of gifts to the temple; in another sense, he lives out the deity's daily existence in mimetic equivalence within his own active realm. These claims coalesce, not quite synthetically, into an image of kingship never before seen in the Tamil south. We can still separate the strands, even date some of them historically—since this is, among other things, a cumulative restatement of royal identity, in which earlier themes naturally continue to play a part. But the organization as a whole is a strikingly new one, as are the emphases and strategic sensitivities which it implicitly contains.

¹³ *Puranānūru* 186.

¹⁴ We may notice a progression: in *Puranānūru* 186, the king is the life-breath (*uyir*) of the whole kingdom; according to Kampan (*Irāmāvatāram* 1.4.10), he is the containing *body* for all living beings (*uyir ellam uraivat' or uṭampum*); the yakshagāna makes him *uyir* again, but this time for the deity. (Our thanks to V. S. Rajam for pointing out the transition evident in Kampan's verse.)

Take the notion of royal gifts and exchanges centering on the temple. For a thousand years, the essential pattern of royal endowment has held sway: the king offers wealth to the temple that houses the deity and receives intangible but entirely necessary forms of support in exchange.¹⁵ There is nothing remarkable, then, in the fact that Mannārusvāmi remembers with pleasure the building of *manṭapas* or the gifts of horses and jewels. But observe the opening verse of a contemporary poem by Vijayarāghava's court-poet, Ceṅgalva Kāḷakavi:

Śauri (=Vishṇu /Krishṇa), a simple cowherd (*gōpāludu*), became Rājagopāla, the Cowherd-King, resplendent with Śrī and Earth beside him, because of the endless wealth given him by the heroic Vijayarāghava (*vijayarāghavaśauri*).

May Śauri bless that other Śauri
with fortune.¹⁶

A playful contention, no doubt—but permeated by identity claims. The god of Mannarkuti is, as we know, Rājagopāla, the 'cowherd-king'. This is Krishṇa-Gopāla; but the god's new name, indeed his entire status in this temple most central to the Nāyakas, has emerged out of Vijayarāghava's gifts. There is still some sense of mutuality—the god is asked to give good fortune (*hērālapu bhāgyamul*) in return for the king's lavish, identity-forming generosity—but there is an equally powerful claim to equality; both god and king are, not by accident, Śauri. No doubt, as in the yakshagāna, they mirror one another. The old notion of human, and especially royal, subordination has been stretched to the snapping-point, even as its conventional symbolic correlate continues to be conventionally reenacted. The king gives gifts as before, but the divine recipient needs them in a new way. The entire transaction transpires within a relocated arena—perhaps we should say, with Peter Brown, a rewired circuitry¹⁷—of relations, in which the power flowing from court to temple has acquired a surprising new charge.

¹⁵ Appadurai and Breckenridge (1976); Shulman (1985), pp. 32-9.

¹⁶ *Rājagōpālavilāsamu* of Ceṅgalva Kāḷakavi, 1.1.

¹⁷ Brown (1981), pp. 37-8.

It would be tempting to write all this off as so much courtly flattery, were the patterns not so consistent, and so deeply linked with other features present in the period's literature. The verse just quoted opens a series of invocations to various deities, most of whom turn out to be dependent, each in his or her own way, on the king for some such service as he performed for Rājagopāla.¹⁸ Here service marks the dependence of the served on the supposed servant, exactly as in the yakshagāna. We might see here an extension of Nāyaka-period political realities, in which the titular 'overlord', the Vijayanagara sovereign, was, in fact, dependent upon his Nāyaka 'servant', who regularly boasts of being the real mainstay and renewer of the old imperial system (*karnāṭarājyasamsthāpanācārya*¹⁹). But no less profound is the sudden self-elevation of the king to a kind of divinity, in a manner that far transcends earlier royal portraits in the south. Again, it is the sheer weight of the literary evidence that forces us, a little reluctantly, to stress this element of the picture. No theme is more consistently and eloquently reproduced in the Tanjavur sources, from various authors, in different genres. This is not the familiar playing with similarity that we find in Cōla-period texts, nor does it recall the classical Sanskrit materials, of a normative cast, that celebrate the divine components (*aṃśa*) inherent in kingship.²⁰ All of these earlier precedents take care to draw in the necessary distinction between the king and the deity, however similar their situations, their images, their daily roles. The Nāyaka's claim is of a different order altogether.

¹⁸ Thus Śiva at Tanjavur no longer has a black neck, since the king's dazzling fame has turned it white—to Pārvatī's intense relief (3); Brahmā is pleased by the Nāyaka's support of his 'offspring', the Brahmins (4); Lakshmī is grateful for the house he has built for her (6), etc.

¹⁹ See *Rājagōpālavilāsamu* 1.12; *Paḡhunāthanāyakaḡbhyudayamu* of Vijayarāghava, 1.665-666; *Vijayavilāsamu* of Cēmakūra Veṅkaṭakavi, 1.21 (*karnāṭasimhāsanādhirā-jyabharaṇanipūṇa* . . . 'Raghunātha, who brings his skill to the support of the Karnataka throne'); above, II.2.

²⁰ For this question, see Shulman (1985), pp. 404-5; and, on Tanjavur, cf. Granoff (1984), pp. 291-303. We follow Kulke (1978), in doubting that there was ever any 'genuine divinization' of the king in India before this period. Kulke demands non-rhetorical expressions of divine status, e.g. the actual worship of the king, as proof of any claim to divine kingship; and it is precisely such elements of worshipping the ruler that we find, at least in some form, in the Nāyaka sources.

Take, for example, this passage, composed by Vijayarāghava himself, in which he describes the god's appearance in his dream:

One day, when I was in the mood to compose a *kāvya* on love, there came to me at dawn a graceful and beautiful lord, beautiful as the god of love multiplied ten thousand times, with a delicate smile on his lips and the fragrance of campaka in his hair;²¹ looking at me with compassion, from the corners of his eyes, he came and stood near me, clearly pleased, while a young woman attended him. Looking at him, I knew at once that this great person was my chosen deity (*iṣṭadēvamū*), and as I prostrated myself before him and stood before him, overcome with devotion, he spoke to me: 'Vijayarāghava, my child, you were born during the ceremony of the Gift of the Golden Womb (*hiraṇyagarbhadāna*), when we were present in the form of a painted picture on wood;²² at once your mother, Aruṇābjavalli (= Hēmābjanāyikā, goddess at Mannarkuti) held you, fondled you, nursed you as her child. From the very beginning, we removed all your bodily blemishes and gave you a kingdom to rule securely. We are your father and mother, the Ancient Couple. You have already composed several works—*padas*, a *mañjari*,²³ *kāvya*—and dedicated them to us, and we have given you long life, health, and good fortune. Today we came to receive from you a *dvipadakāvya* on the daily routine of your father, Raghunātha, *who is our avatar*, who can accomplish the impossible. Compose this work, dedicate it to us, and live a thousand years!' Then he disappeared, and the sun came up over the Sunrise Hill.²⁴

The form is taken from a prestigious precedent, the *Amuktamālyada* of Krishnadevarāya, in which the great Vijayanagara king describes Viṣṇu's dream-revelation to him at Srikakulam and the god's commissioning of his poem (1.12-17); but, in stark contrast with the Vijayanagara model, indeed with all earlier royal poetry in the south, the content is unabashedly pretentious—we see, again, the express claim of filiation from the god (amplified here to include Vijayarāghava's

²¹ Recall that Mannarkuti is the 'Campaka Forest'.

²² I.e., an image of the god installed during the ritual? The *hiraṇyagarbha* ceremony mentioned here may well be the same one referred to (in sardonic tones) by Proença in his letter of 1665, describing Vijayarāghava's rebirth from a colossal golden cow: see Satyanatha Aiyar (1956), p. 81.

²³ Or in *mañjaridvipada*.

²⁴ *Raghunāthanāyākābhyudayamu* of Vijayarāghava Nāyaka, 1:3-5.

experiences at the goddess's breast), and, with equal force, the identification of Raghunātha as Mannārusvāmi's avatar. The poem the son is to compose is thus not simply an act of filial piety, pleasing to the god; Vijayarāghava will describe the highly ritualized daily schedule of his father in precisely the same mode applied to the god's daily routine in his temple.²⁵ In a sense he is, as the god tells him, actually portraying Mannārusvāmi himself, in one of his more accessible and visible forms. Temple and court, once again, have merged.

The merger is sustained through numerous other passages. Referring to Acyutanāyaka's building activity at the Srirangam temple complex, Cēmakūra Veṅkaṭakavi says that the god, Raṅganātha, became Acyuta in order to perform service to himself, to build himself a home.²⁶ In Vijayarāghava's own yakshagāna, the *Vipranārāyaṇacaritramu*, the townspeople study mysterious footprints in the streets, marked with the signs of the plough and the thunderbolt; only two people could have left such an imprint—the god, Gopāla, or Vijayarāghava, the king (*bhūpāla*).²⁷ In another yakshagāna portraying this king, the *Vijayarāghavacandrikāvihāramu* of Kāmarusu Vēṅkaṭapati-sōmayāji, a courtesan sees the king in procession, falls in love with him, and then recalls a dream: Vijayarāghava came to her, informed her that he was Arjuna / Vijaya reborn, while she was Urvaśī; in an earlier birth, he had rejected her, but he would marry her in this one. The god he worshipped, Mannāruḍeva, drove his chariot in *that* birth; in this birth, he drove only his desire.²⁸ Punning aside, the point to be stressed is the transfer of the mechanism of the dream-revelation from the divine sphere, where it has a natural and venerable history, to that of the king and his court-romances; Vijayarāghava, like the deity he has become, has the power to enter his devotees' dreams.

He can also enter bodily into his god, if we are to believe the Telugu chronicle that tells of Vijayarāghava's death: at the very moment the king and his son fell in battle outside his palace, after having blown up

²⁵ See above, III.1.

²⁶ *Vijayavilāsamu* 1.13.

²⁷ Veṅkaṭa Rāvu (1978), p. 101.

²⁸ *rathamu nāṭiki manōrathamu nēṭikini . . . naḍapiñcen: Vijayarāghavacandrikāvihāramu* of Kāmarusu Vēṅkaṭatisōmayāji, in Jōgisōmayāji (1956), pp. 26-9. In the *Mahābhārata*, Arjuna refused Urvaśī's advances; Krishṇa served as his charioteer.

his entire harem before the Madurai forces could reach them, the king was seen at Srirangam, together with his wives, children, and friends; the Brahmins opened the sanctuary for him, and he disappeared into the god together with his entire retinue.²⁹ Note that this tradition reaches us from a source outside the realm of courtly poetry, with its lyrical and perhaps hyperbolic tendencies. The relation we are discussing was not limited to the narrow circles of the courtly elite.

The variations are many, some particularly striking, but all pointing in a similar direction. Rangājamma, one of the courtesan/ queen poets from the time of Vijayarāghava, describes the king's birth as follows: his father, Raghunātha—equated with the god Rāma/Raghu-nātha—had two wives, Ceñji Lakshamma and Kaḷāvatī; they worshipped Lord Krishṇa and gave pious gifts in order to win a son. The god, Kastūri Krishṇa, appeared to Ceñji Lakshamma in a dream and said, 'In a former birth, you were Devakī, and Kaḷāvatī was Yaśodā. You gave birth to me from your womb, but Yaśodā had the joy of bringing me up and watching my childhood games (*bālatīla*)—and you were jealous. So this time I will be born to Kaḷāvatī, and you will adopt me as yours. Name me Vijayarāghava, and care for me joyfully.'³⁰ The god, redressing an emotional imbalance left over from his mythic past, chooses to become the Nāyaka king; the identification is straightforward, explicitly stated, and worked out in detail to the extent of providing purāṇic pedigrees for Vijayarāghava's two mothers in the court. The dream-revelation clinches the equation. We will see a similar case—the avatar announced in a dream—in the next section, in connection with Raghunātha's birth.

One could go on, but the primary tenor of the development is apparent. There is no need to deny that a certain duality persists in the king-deity relationship, or to assert that wives, poets, or other attendants at court had any difficulty in telling the two apart. The apparent conflation may even require paradoxical explanations: in the case of Acyutanāyaka, cited above, one wonders if the king has become god

²⁹ *Taṅjāvūri āndhra rājula caritra*, p. 55.

³⁰ *Uṣāpariṇayamu* of Raṅgājamma, 1.9-11. This story is put in the mouth of Raṅgājamma's guru, who also declares that 'your husband (Vijayarāghava) is Mannārudāsa-Gopāla' (7).

precisely *because* of his extreme acts of (all-too-human) service. Like other strands from the past, the culturally given distinction between king and god, which we believe to have been a meaningful part of the early medieval legacy in the Tamil south, also carried over into the new articulation of Nāyaka kingship. But it is not nearly so sharp as it was before, and the inner workings of this boundary have been transformed; the transitions from one side to the other are easier, the kings' claims more dramatic, the entire atmosphere of the court infused with the fragrance of divine service. A padam-poet like Kshētrayya could compose songs, seemingly indiscriminately, to the god Muvvagopāla and to the Tanjavur king, both cast in the role of the exasperating, longed-for lover. In a striking departure from the classical courtly tradition in Telugu, Cēmakūra Venkaṭakavi spontaneously offers his poem (the *Vijayavilāsamu*) to Raghunātha Nāyaka, without being commissioned to compose the work, as an act of exclusive devotion (*kevalabhakti*)—as if he were a temple poet making a devotional offering to his god.³¹ The abhyudaya literature, so prevalent in this period, seems to entail the worship of the ruler in the divine mode. Poetry, outside the temple, directed toward the Nāyaka ruler who has absorbed divine status, has become another form of pūjā.

Underlying this blurring of the boundary is a general fusion of symbolic domains which, we suggest, is a diagnostic feature of the period as a whole. Temple and court, once similar but separate, have redefined themselves as explicit images of one another: we meet Mannārusvāmi at the beginning of our text as he holds court exactly like a Nāyaka king; for his part, the king assumes the identity, and the ritualized routine, of the god in his shrine. Mutual mirroring has penetrated beneath the radiant surface, to a level of real, literally conceived identity. Similarly, courtesans and *devadāsīs* merge into a single role (which even assimilates itself to the hitherto radically 'other' category of wife, in the courtly sphere³²). Often poets and kings, patrons and patronized, have collapsed into a unity; the king as poet

³¹ *Vijayavilāsamu* 1.30-39. The poet states: 'I give this work as a gift to Raghunātha, whom I think of as a god, as (Lord) Rāmabhadra who has fallen to my share, and whom I worship with pūjā of golden flowers' (38).

³² Thus the *Vijayarāghavacandrikāvihāramu* ends, in a new departure, with the king's marriage to the courtesan who has fallen in love with him.

sings of his own father, the avatar, and will be sung as such by his son. The roles of ruler, minister, court-poet, and deity have converged in the refashioned, far more encompassing image of the king. It would seem that even as the geographical scale of the Tamil kingdom has shrunk decisively, while the scale of its cultural complexity has, if anything, expanded and intensified,³³ the rhetoric of kingship is inflated in the midst of a conspicuous conflation of previously autonomous symbolic spheres.

2. VĪRĀŚRĪṄGĀRA: THE KING AS AVATAR

This conflation is not, however, simply a combination of static images, nor a mechanical elevation of the human to the divine. Limiting ourselves, again, to the king-deity relation, we notice that *both* figures have developed in a new direction relative to the earlier medieval past. The convergence signals a crystallization, or an imaginative hypertrophy, of certain qualities that, in the highly specific atmosphere of the central Nāyaka courts, both king and god can share. Bhoga, the domain of sensual delight, an extravagance in consumption and display, is now the hallmark of royalty generally, human and/or divine. The *HS* presents us with a world of erotic longing and of sensual fulfilment—note how naturally the one eventually issues into the other—in which the king's task is to facilitate a new, perhaps ultimately satisfying and necessary alliance for his god. The latter is revealed to us as the epitome of the lovelorn male (though his world is, from the start, saturated with feminine attention—he already has 16,000 wives, with whom he remains erotically engaged). In fact, there is a further transformation here: Rājagopāla has become strikingly feminine himself, to the point where the sword he rattles in exercise sounds like the tingle of bangles; he even assumes a full-fledged feminine form outright as the seductive Mohinī. The Nāyaka court, in its everyday reality no less than in its mythic projections, has been feminized and eroticized to an unprecedented degree.

The king is thus quite properly, even primarily, a marriage-broker, an expert in sexual politics. Indeed, this is how we know Vijayarāghava

³³ See Breckenridge (1985).

best from sources internal to the tradition. Although there is a surprising dearth of legends relating to this last Nāyaka of Tanjavur, he has come down to us as the hero of various literary anecdotes, all centring on his amorous adventures. For example, there is the following *cātuv*-verse attributed to the courtesan Raṅgājamma, in response to a complaint by the Nāyaka's queen that Vijayarāghava was spending all his time with Raṅgājamma:

What business do you have
blaming us, my Lady?
Aren't you a woman yourself?
Don't you know how to make a man
fall in love?
Did I break into *your* home
while he lay in your arms,
call him by name,
force him
to my bed?
Like a Fury, did I steal him
from you?³⁴

Here Vijayarāghava appears as the somewhat passive but utterly desirable lover who becomes the object of a tug-of-war between his (perhaps hyperactive) women. Raṅgājamma has won him, just as Hēmābjanāyikā wins Rājagopāla at her *svayaṃvara*; in this arena, the image of the triumphant martial hero has been inverted, and it is the woman who conquers the somewhat effeminate male by erotic invitation. Listen, too, to Raṅgājamma's resonant, confident voice as she challenges the queen: like Tārā in the *śriṅgāra-kāvya*, the courtesan-poet epitomizes the individualized Nāyaka heroine intent on realizing her desires and prepared to invoke images of violation—albeit sarcastically, on this occasion—as she stakes her claim.

The worlds of court and temple—in effect, now a single world—are populated by innumerable, crazed, lovesick women, dreaming only of the alluring divine king. The latter's prowess, a residue bequeathed him from his fighting ancestors, has been redefined accord-

³⁴ Text in Venkaṭa Rāvu (1978), pp. 158-9.

ingly: he now exemplifies *vīraśringāra*, a heroism not of the battlefield, but of the bedroom:

Twilight retains
the flames of victory,
while brilliant stars—
nodes of his fame—
already burn the sky.
Deep darkness grips the world
in the dust
raised by his horses' hooves.
Like messengers of love,
flashing swords
trace pathways through the night.

They'll have to hurry now,
like a married woman
in bed with her lover,
those moon-faced ladies from heaven
gone to welcome the passionate heroes
fighting Vijayarāghava,
Earth's own lord.³⁵

This is a verse from the battleground (as seen from the safe vantage point of the capital), but its tonality is anything but martial: in accordance with the conventional metaphoric identification of warfare and eroticism, the *rūpaka*-images of the first half turn the field of battle into the familiar scene of the nocturnal tryst, while in the second half the divine *apsaras*-maidens—whose embrace is the prize of dying heroes—are cast as the adulterous *jāriṇī* or *abhisārikā* on her way to her lover. So swift is the Nāyaka's devastation of his foes that, in a remarkable transformation of a hackneyed vignette, there is hardly time for the erotic encounter—the heroes are gone almost before they can be received into the women's waiting arms. Notice their epithet, *vīraśringārulu*, 'heroically passionate,' 'endowed with the passion proper to the hero'; although the poet is speaking of Vijayarāghava's enemies, the concept, so beautifully encapsulated by this term, could apply

³⁵ *Rājagōpālavilāsamu*, 1.65.

emblematically to the Nāyaka rulers themselves. We might even take this as an appropriate motto for the courtly ethos of the time. Indeed, war-poetry of the lurid type traditionally loved by Tamil poets is much diminished in scope by this period, although some examples have survived (especially in the Sanskrit court-kāvya);³⁶ its place seems to have been taken by transposed erotic verses like the above. Thus if Raghunātha goes to battle, it will be as a bridegroom happily rushing to his wedding amidst the sound of drums and shouted blessings.³⁷ It is rather śringāra, sexual passion, with all its associated emotional and existential burdens, that is properly qualified by the title of 'hero', *vīra*, at the Tanjavur court. For all the panegyric fanfares, the very real, recurrent skirmishing and raiding, even the occasional major battles, the art of politics as seen through the prism of Nāyaka poetry seems, on balance, little more than an extension of the boudoir.

But there is another, important facet to this characterization of the royal god-lover, whom we meet in text after text. The king as erotic hero also grounds and concretizes a set of classical images in a manner that radically changes the tradition, and that sheds light on the new divinity with which he is invested. The Nāyaka king is perceived and experienced in an aesthetic mode that draws from the Sanskrit *ālankārika* school of poetics, whose model-figures he embodies and localizes in his own time and space. Part of this process is the king's identification as an avatar—or, more precisely, as the refashioned avatar of a former, mythic avatar-exemplar, brought to a further stage of perfection in this human, or semi-human form. We can observe this development very clearly in an elegant Sanskrit kāvya devoted to Raghunātha Nāyaka, composed by one of his wives, the learned Rāmabhadrāmbā.

This text, the *Raghunāthābhyudaya*, belongs to the abhyudaya class studied earlier;³⁸ but this time we have, instead of a son celebrating his late father in Telugu dvipada, a wife or courtesan praising her living husband/lover in courtly Sanskrit. The poem ranges, in a somewhat

³⁶ E.g., Rāmabhadrāmbā's *Raghunāthābhyudaya*, studied below, and Yajñanārāyaṇa Dīkshita's *Sāhityaratnākara*; and cf. *Vijayavilāsamu* 1.40-46 (said by some to have been interpolated into Cēmakūra Veṅkaṭakavi's text).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.40.

³⁸ See III.1.

disjointed way, from Raghunātha's birth to his various military exploits (for which Rāmabhadrāmbā remains one of our major sources), and thence to his habitual daily, or rather nightly, routine. Throughout, we find a consistent effort to create for Raghunātha a divine identity that is public, ritualized, and patterned after a specific, dominant paradigm—that of Rāma, epic hero and avatar. The poetess tells us as much in many verses, for example the following (the final verse of her *kāvya*):

Those who enshrine Raghunātha, the splendid son of
Acyutendra, in their hearts as (the god) Raghunātha (Rāma)
himself, visibly present (*raghunātham eva sāksāt*), have the
joy of ultimate bliss (*paramānanda*-).³⁹

Thus Raghunātha is, as his very name suggests, none other than the original Raghunātha, i.e., Viṣṇu's avatar as Rāma. Note the unqualified nature of the identification: we are dealing not with a simile (which would have required the particle *iva* rather than the emphatic *eva*) but with an equation.⁴⁰ Note, too, the stress on visibility, and the emotional colouring of the verse: the atmosphere is one of worshipping an image enshrined in the heart, with the resulting experience of *ānanda*. This concluding statement nicely encapsulates much of the major thrust of Rāmabhadrāmbā's text.

The explicit narrative identification of Raghunātha with the divine avatar is worked out in the story of the king's birth, in Canto 6.⁴¹ After a synoptic genealogy of the Tanjavur line, we meet Acyutappa and his wife, Mūrtyambikā, as they seek a son by performing tapas directed to the lord of Srirangam. They have given up the joys of sandal-paste and even—the ultimate sacrifice for a Nāyaka king—of watching dance-performances at court. Responding to this devotion, Viṣṇu appears to them and offers them a boon.⁴² The king, of course, asks for a son and specifies the qualities this son must have: he must be honoured by submissive kings from all eighteen continents; he is to be intent on

³⁹ *Raghunāthābhyudaya* 12.89.

⁴⁰ See also 6.12 on Raghunātha's father, Acyutappa.

⁴¹ An earlier verse, 3.1, already speaks of Raghunātha as *rāmāvatāra*; see discussion of this and other passages by Granoff (1984).

⁴² This passage is partly modelled on *Raghuvamśa* II.

establishing new temples and Brahmin *agrahāras*, and on feeding vast numbers of Brahmins; he must be able to improvise poetry in all languages at a moment's notice; he will overcome his enemies even if they be hidden in the midst of the sea, or in inaccessible fortresses, and he will have the glory of restoring them to their positions, if they bow to him. The god, faced with this list of demands with its rather disconcerting combination of military, artistic, and devotional features, has to confess: 'There is no such person on this earth.' The conclusion is equally clear: 'Pleased with your tapas, I [Vishṇu] will become your son.' (6.29-40).

So Raghunātha is none other than Vishṇu himself—and apparently not just a partial container for Vishṇu's royal power (*aṃśāvatāra*, as in classical purāṇic and dharmasāstric statements on kingship) but a full-fledged embodiment who is worthy of worship. This is what we have, in effect, in the passage that immediately follows upon the story of Raghunātha's birth (7.1-33): here the poetess, unabashedly co-opting the language of divine pūjā,⁴³ takes us on a tour of the king's body, from tip to toe. The direction, too, is important: in Sanskrit poetry, human beings are normally described from the bottom up (*nakhaśikhāparyantam*); only deities merit the reverse order. We may also note the author's explicit interest in the area of the king's genitals and thighs (to which 'the elephants that are the hearts of women are fettered,' 7.23); this is part of the continuous transposition of courtly themes to a mythic or divine register. Earlier works in Sanskrit and Telugu allowed for description of the gods' sexuality (though not without protest, as we know from the traditional handling of *Kumārasambhava* VIII). A certain conflation has taken place between the courtly ālaṅkārika image of the noble lover and the bhakti visions of the god, here fused in a sustained meditational mode.

But this is still only the beginning. The narrative core of the poem now proceeds to flesh out the initial identification of the king with the god by giving it specific form and focus, obviously derived from the prototype of Rāma. Our poetess has, in essence, produced a new and somewhat innovative *Rāmāyaṇa* out of her husband's story. And she is

⁴³ Thus *cetasi bhavayāmi* (7.7); *hr̥di bhavayāmi* (7.19), *smarāmi* (7.23), etc.: 'I visualize (Raghunātha) in my mind/heart'—as in the *stotra* literature.

never reluctant to make this intention clear. Thus Raghunātha first goes to war when the Vijayanagara emperor, Veṅkaṭapatirāya, requests the help of this prince in fighting the foreign enemies of the empire (called *pārasīkas*, usually a term for the Portuguese in this period, in 7.43; *yavanas*, i.e. Muslims, in 7.50). Raghunātha's father, Acyutappa, is reluctant to let his son, who is a mere boy, go to battle; whereupon the emperor explains to him:

The yavanas who prowl this world, devoid of nobility, good deeds, and compassion, are born from the Rākshasas; they cannot be checked by other kings without the help of an incarnation of Viṣṇu. That is why you must give us your son, Raghunātha, who is an avatar of Rāma . . . *That* Rāma destroyed the demons who obstructed the sacrifice of Gādheya [=Viśvāmitra], though he was but a boy; and your son is just like him, bold and energetic. Send him quickly, O king, and you will have the same glory that Paṅktiratha [=Daśaratha, Rāma's father] attained. (7.50-53).

The situation is made to replicate the well-known episode from the *Bālakāṇḍa* (I.17-18) in which Rāma and Lakshmaṇa leave for the forest with Viśvāmitra, who has won the forced consent of their father. It is not, however, an *exact* replication: the *Rāmāyaṇa* takes the young Rāma through the wilderness to Mithila, where he will marry Sītā; Raghunātha, however, has already married various princesses (including a Pāṇḍya, i.e. Madurai bride, 7.34) and even been crowned *yuvārāja*, a clear reversal of the *Rāmāyaṇa* sequence. This is important: the fit between the two stories, classical epic and contemporary history, is never complete. We might also note that the youthful Raghunātha's expedition to the north is given formal justification in terms of 'protecting the Karnata empire' (*karnāṭaraksākarāṇa*, 7.43 and 63; *karnāṭasimhāsanakāryabhāra*, 73). This idea hardly matches the *Rāmāyaṇa* paradigm but is rather couched in terms close to Krishṇa's famous formulation of the avatar ideal in Bhagavadgita 4.7-8. At the same time, there is also an interesting subversion of that ideal: whereas Krishṇa states that he intervenes to re-establish dharma whenever it is threatened, the Nāyaka prince is interested in demonstratively safeguarding his overlord's kingdom. The idiom of violence in the service of dharma has been subtly subsumed by an idiom of personal loyalty to a weakened but still necessary and, in some sense, authoritative superior.

This mix of features—the massive presence of *Rāmāyaṇa* images,

clearly and consciously identified as such; the simultaneous presence of elements that fail to fit this model, that cut across it or exceed it in various ways; and the diffuse assimilation of other conspicuous classical themes—continues to operate in much the same way in the description of Raghunātha's three major campaigns (Cantos 8-10). We will not follow this section in detail; suffice it to say that Rāmabhadrāmbā collapses the king's military exploits (in the years 1615-17) into a patterned series of three—first, the expedition against the troublesome and predatory local ruler of Devikottai at the mouth of the Kollidam, 'Colaga'; then a combined naval, artillery, and infantry attack on the Portuguese in the Jaffna area, in aid of the exiled king of Jaffna; and finally, the famous battle of Toppur in late 1616 or early 1617, in which Tanjavur, acting as head of a 'loyalist' faction fighting for the boy-emperor Rāmadeva, destroyed the coalition of Madurai, Senji, and the 'usurper', Jaggarāya. These encounters have their inevitable *Rāmāyaṇa* connections. Thus Colaga is 'another Rāvaṇa' who became powerful by worshipping Bhairava; who, like Rāvaṇa, lives on an island (in the Kollidam), and who ravishes other men's devoted wives day after day (8.7-10). To reach his fortress, Raghunātha, 'who was Rāma in a former birth' (*prāgjanmadā'sarathi*, 8.83) orders a bridge (*setu*) to be built. After the ensuing battle, when Colaga has been defeated, the Brahmins come to praise the king: 'We know you are none other than Lord Rāma in person together with the goddess Śrī, since you built this bridge over the sea to defeat your enemy' (8.99). Of course, the king still needs the assistance of the original Rāma, as the Brahmins note (8.100), and he does worship this deity frequently in the course of his expeditions. The fusion of the two is not so complete as to obviate the king's role as paradigmatic devotee. Service and devotion thus alternate with successful imitation. After defeating the Portuguese in Jaffna (always referred to as Nepāla in our text), Raghunātha crowns the king who sought his help 'just as Rāma crowned Vibhīshana' (also in Lanka! 9.23). And, although Rāmabhadrāmbā does not mention this, the parallel *kāvya* sources—especially Yajñanārāyaṇa Dīkshita's *Sāhityaratnākara*—make much of Raghunātha's coronation of the young Rāmadeva and the related consecration of the Rāmasvāmi Temple at Kumpakonam—a re-enactment of the epic Rāma's *paṭṭābhisheka*, but this time with the Vijayanagara king, on the one hand, and the god Rāma

in his shrine, on the other, rehearsing the familiar epic role rather than the merely instrumental Raghunātha himself.⁴⁴

Still, none of this, after all, is very surprising. There are other, and earlier, kāvya depictions of Indian kings as Rāma, notably Sandhyākaranandin's *Rāmacarita* (ca. 1100), which manages to tell simultaneously, by ślesha-paronomasia, the stories of the avatar Rāma and of the Bengali King Rāmapāla.⁴⁵ Sandhyākaranandin even calls himself Vālmiki and refers to his work as the *Rāmāyaṇa* of the Kali Age. There is a certain prescribed playfulness about such projects, and, on one level, our author has merely followed suit. Her identification of Raghunātha with Rāma might then be seen, like earlier examples, as an extended and pervasive metaphor—or perhaps it would be better to use the corresponding Indian poetic term, rūpaka, which is traditionally seen as involving a kind of superimposition (*āropa*) of one set of features on another. Moreover, this superimposition, as the poeticians have clearly recognized, also depends for its effect on a persistent awareness of the ultimate distinction (*bheda*) in the two levels (thus Mammaṭa: *anapahnutabhedayor abhedah*⁴⁶). Raghunātha, as we have seen, never wholly disappears into the shadow of the paradigmatic avatar. A tension of sorts always remains in the cognitive experience of the proposed identity. Yet even if this is the case, and the identification has a metaphoric quality, we cannot help but be aware of a tendency toward literalizing the metaphor, thereby abrogating the inherent distance it should contain and turning its subject into an object of actual worship.

This point, adumbrated in an earlier chapter, requires elaboration. The Tanjavur kāvya presents us with a double transformation—first, the production of a different *kind* of *Rāmāyaṇa*, guided by a peculiar selectivity and informed by a distinctive theory of the king as avatar; second, the concretization, localization, and literalization of the classical paradigms in the living, visible reality of the court. Let us take these two developments one by one. Rāmabhadrāmbā unfolds a *Rāmāyaṇa* before our eyes; she repeatedly lets us know that this is her aim, that

⁴⁴ *Sāhityaratnākara* 13.79-80; *Raghunāthanāyākābhyaudayamu* 1.258-9.

⁴⁵ Kulke (1979), p. 108; see Granoff (1984).

⁴⁶ *Kāvya prakāśa* of Mammaṭa, X.138.

Raghunātha is re-enacting the career of the great Rāma. Yet how different—and possibly even superior—the new Rāma is when compared to the old. For one thing, the Nāyaka Rāma, it turns out, is very little concerned with dharma or with perfection in any moral sense. Only very rarely is he described in terms such as *dharmahetu*, ‘impelling cause of dharmic performance’ (2.50). Though he reads the so-called *Bālarāmāyana* each day—that is, the opening chapter of Vāl-mīki’s text, with its portrait of Rāma as the perfect man⁴⁷—the Telugu Nāyaka king has hardly internalized that portrait. Raghunātha is a paragon not of moral conduct but of male beauty, a physically alluring and physically available figure who is, moreover, not at all indifferent to the charms of the beautiful women around him. Reading through the *Raghunāthābhyudaya*, one feels that this aspect of the king’s identity is most central, just as the presence of lovely women is the most salient glory of Tanjavur city (2.1). Tanjavur is a city of erotic delights, its king the exemplary and seemingly inexhaustible lover: the final canto of this *kāvya* shows us Raghunātha as he makes love, in a single endless (and typical) night, to an astounding series of women, some of whom continue to surround his bed and to serenade him softly even when he is finally allowed to get some sleep. It is surely not by chance that our poetess, who sees herself as part of the voluptuous feminine universe that envelops the king, chooses this erotic sequence as the conclusion, and in effect the culmination, of her whole lengthy work.

All this fits closely with the picture that emerged earlier, from our survey of the Telugu *abhyudaya* texts; but its predictability cannot mask the discrepancy between this sensual image of the king and the more usual notions associated with Rāma. Rāmabhadrāmbā shows herself to be aware of this discrepancy and, characteristically, gives it voice in 3.5:

Because of the excellence of his qualities, everyone regards him as the best of the Raghus (i.e., Rāma); but we, who are connoisseurs (*rasikāḥ*), who know the equal love he bears for thousands of women, think of him in our hearts as an avatar of Kṛishṇa.’

⁴⁷ *Raghunāthanāyakābhyudayamu* 3.257; cf. 1.145 and 575.

We see, once again, the tendency toward a diffuse and expansive selection of classical elements, and their transformation: Raghunātha is, and must be, an avatar of Rāma, not because of the specific inherited traits connected with the Rāma story (although he is made to imitate parts of that story, to establish the necessary relation), but because Rāma is the essential paradigm for late medieval kingship in south India, the model of all models and hence, by definition, the most secure and generative source of prestige; but the more usual attributes of this model have been largely set aside in favour of a competing set of images, which also have their classical prototype (the promiscuous lover and much-married Krishṇa), and which have, moreover, been transposed into the idiom of rasa-dominated aesthetics. This is Raghunātha as Rāma, who is a kind of Krishṇa, who is really the noble and graceful dhīralalita hero of the Sanskrit poetic tradition, to be known or, more properly, 'savoured' through the play with essences that lies at the heart of that tradition.

What we are seeing, not only in the passage just quoted but throughout this work, is a striking extension of the avatar concept in the direction of continually greater refinement. Raghunātha is, we should remember, not just an avatar; he is the avatar of *another* avatar (*rāmāvatāra*). We might expect this to mean that he is actually one step farther removed from the source—the transcendent deity—than was his prototype, the original avatar Rāma. In fact, the contrary may well be the case. Each successive embodiment—especially one that is enacted within this highly Sanskritizing and aestheticized environment—might also be seen as a further opportunity for refinement, *sam-skāra*, the self-perfecting path to ultimacy. In this sense, 'our' Raghunātha has advantages that even his supposed model could not claim.⁴⁸ He is, no doubt, 'like' his prototype, but he is also undeniably unique. A couplet attributed to Rāmabhadrāmbā makes this point nicely; asked to complete a verse around the given final phrase *kim te santāna-pādapāyante* ('could they be the gods' wishing-tree?'), she improvised:

⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 1.250-5, on Raghunātha's superiority over Krishṇa: the latter stole the *gopīs'* sarees during their water-sports (*jalakēḷi*), while Raghunātha stole the clothes of his enemies' wives in his 'battle-sports' (*raṇakēḷi*). The conclusion: 'This avatar is more interesting than that one!'

kati kati naḥ kṣitipatayah
kim te raghunāthanāyakāyante |
bhuvī bahavaḥ kila taravaḥ
kim te santānapādapāyante | |

There are kings aplenty, but could any of them live out the life of Raghunātha? There are many trees on this earth, but could just any of them be the gods' wishing-tree?

The verse turns on the way the poetess has created a denominative verb from Raghunātha's name, thereby highlighting his singularity and inimitability and also endowing his existence with the sense of continuous movement. Clearly, the mythic model, far from overwhelming its human reemodiment, is itself largely absorbed by the latter's focused, tendentious, extravagant claims.

It is a question, really, of the intensity, and the limits, of the identity that is being fashioned. To be divine is, apparently, only the beginning: even within divinity there are gradations and degrees. The Nāyaka seeks the most extreme and most superior of these, which at the same time is the most immediate and concrete. Witness the following parallel. Another of Raghunātha's courtesan-brides, Madhuravāṇī, has left us (in surviving fragments) a work called the *Śrīrāmāyaṇasāarakāvyaatilaka*—a Sanskrit version of a Telugu epitome of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (no longer extant) that had been composed by Raghunātha himself. The first chapter tells us how Madhuravāṇī came to compose her work. We hear Raghunātha thinking to himself, a little sadly (*unmanāḥ*), during a recital of *his* Telugu *Rāmāyaṇa* by a courtesan:

The delicious tale of Rāma, the deeds of Hari, an elixir to our ears, remains fresh and pleasing even when savoured thousands of times. Women with eyes like the lotus bring down (*avatārayantyaḥ*) thousands of times its manifold glories flowing from the ripe fullness of composition in Sanskrit and Telugu, with their superlative sweetness.⁴⁹

The text, then, also has an avatar which, like the human avatar, is even, in a sense, a kind of improvement on the original—a farther descent, an externalization, but also a further delicious 'ripening' (*paceliman*), to use the word stressed by our text.⁵⁰ One senses, under-

⁴⁹ *Śrīrāmāyaṇasāarakāvyaatilaka* of Madhuravāṇī, 1.82-83.

⁵⁰ The relevant compound is *sarvottarasvādīmasamskṛtāndhraṇprabandhanirmāṇa-*

lying this statement, a vernacular concept or series of concepts having to do with growth and maturation as processes of ripening, unfolding, refining, and revealing the inner, hidden being.⁵¹ The process, at least in relation to the *Rāmāyaṇa* texts, is clearly set out: Raghunātha is left wondering which of his women—it of course never crosses his mind that it could be anyone other than a woman—could translate his Telugu kāvya-précis of the *Rāmāyaṇa* into Sanskrit; that night the god Rāma himself comes to the king in a dream and solves the problem by selecting the gifted Madhuravāṇī (1.85-91). Hence the work as we have it today. On the face of it, this might appear to be a somewhat peculiar enterprise—a Sanskrit adaptation of a Telugu abstraction of the essence of the original Sanskrit epic. But on reflection, this is precisely the direction the Nāyaka poet habitually seeks, a movement of ever great condensation, essentialization, and elevated refinement.

The text reproduces the career of its heroic subject. Always one has the impression of being taken one stage further along a heavily weighted continuum of visible revelation. Thus we find Raghunātha, in Canto 4 of Rāmabhadrāmbā's poem, listening to one of his Brahmins recite, at length, a synoptic kāvya version of the story of Rāma (verses 43-68). The *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki makes a crucial, indeed diagnostic distinction between the external and internal listeners of the text: Rāma hears his own story, *within* the text, from his sons Kuśa and Lava, while we in effect overhear him doing so, from our position outside it. In Rāmabhadrāmbā's poem, we are also in the position of overhearing another's hearing—as we have seen, this is still a *Rāmāyaṇa* of sorts, so the basic disjunction in the narrative frame naturally survives—but this time it is the Nāyaka king who listens to 'his' story, including those parts of it still waiting to be enacted, in the guise of the story of his model, the divine Rāma. We have added one new concentric circle to the pre-existing frames of recitation and reception. (Note, too, that Rāmabhadrāmbā has also erased the old distinction between the hero of a poetic text and the patron who commissions or receives it; both have merged into the figure of the spellbound Raghunātha, the target of this text, who not only listens to the Rāma story inside the poem but

pacelimāni(yasāmsi)

⁵¹ See Egnor (1978), pp. 40-7, 63-4.

also presumably listens to himself listening to it as the courtesan-poet recites her work!) And while the actual *Rāmāyaṇa*-recitation does have a prestige and power clearly acknowledged by our poetess (4.43), it is also the case that the transformation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* model into the living reality of the Nāyaka court manages to subsume and encompass all that went before. What we have earlier regarded as imitation—the re-enactment of the Rāma themes and narrative sequences in order to establish Raghunātha's divine credentials—is both that and something more, a concrete condensation of those themes in 'historical' action that ultimately becomes a form of substitution.

For—this is the other aspect of the extension of the avatar concept in this direction—the conspicuous preference for the visible, present, accessible embodiment over the mythic model comes with a remarkable loss of distance (as with the literalized metaphor cited earlier). The poetics of *saṃskāra*, including the *rasa* aesthetic which we have seen to be lurking here in the wings, normally require a high degree of abstraction and ideation.⁵² The dhīralalita lover and hero, so beloved of the poeticians and the love-poets, exists only at one remove from any living context; aside from his categorical function within the elaborate system of classification (of the field of erotics), he is useful largely as a trigger, a conceptual device in the hands of the poet who wants us to experience something of our own emotions, suitably transformed and refined. The exemplary lover is an idealized ideological construct, not a breathing human being. But not at Tanjavur! What the Nāyaka poets have done, taking their lead from the famous Kākatīya-period textbook of poetics in the service of politics, the *Pratāparudrīya*, is to ground the classical aesthetic ideals in the experienced reality of the court. There is even a Tanjavur imitation of the *Pratāparudrīya*, a still unpublished *alāṅkāra* work by Krishṇakavi called the *Raghunāthabhūpālīya*, which makes Raghunātha the hero of all the illustrative verses of the poetic figures, tropes, and types.⁵³ But the phenomenon itself is a more general one, not simply limited to the narrow domain of poetics; we have also seen it in the Telugu *abhyudaya* works, which similarly literalize classical and mythical antecedents in re-presenting the

⁵² See Narayana Rao and Heifetz (1987), p. 159.

⁵³ We are preparing an edition of this work.

Nāyaka king. The latter has cancelled out the restrictive boundaries built by Sanskrit theory and previous practice into the standard perception of the idealized hero. No longer a restrained patron waiting patiently on the sidelines for the polished presentation of someone else's story, the Nāyaka has, rudely and assertively, taken over the centre—as the reborn, ontologically upgraded avatar who has brought the model to life even as he consciously enacts, and thereby redefines, the role of a god.

The poets—be they sons, wives, ministers, or strangers—actively worship the king; both the yakshagāna and the abhyudaya genres appear as ritual venues for such worship, probably performed in public ways; what was once proper only for the temple now takes place in the court. Two dominant poles of the political universe have fused. The whole flavour of the royal institution has changed dramatically, as has its accompanying rhetoric in all three linguistic media.⁵⁴ The king is an individualized, eroticized divinity, literally incarnate in human form, acting essentially alone. Divinization and literalization go hand in hand with an ontology of saṃskāric perfection and with a reformulated hierarchy, where the king stands highest and most central. Even the god in his shrine depends on his royal servant; the mythic paradigm of the avatar is both superimposed upon and effectively superseded by its tangible human substitute. Not the remembered world of the classical texts, with their distant, lucid prototypes, but the public symbol rich in present substance is experienced as divine.

3. LOVE IN THE SOUP-KITCHEN

Yet, to remain with only this perspective on the historic shift that has taken place is to reduce to manageable and misleading simplicity a much more supple and complicated whole. The vector of divinization—a consistent inflation of royal rhetoric to a hitherto unknown degree—is matched in our texts by a compensating and contrary movement. Indeed, we began our study by observing this double movement, in the antithetical dialogue of Veṅkaṭādhvarin's two flying gandharvas;

⁵⁴ For additional Tamil examples of the themes discussed here, see Shulman (in press).

and we have seen the same tendency to puncture and deflate lyrical hyperbole in the bawdy conclusion to the otherwise elevated and romantic court-drama, the *Hēmābjanāyikāsvayaṃvaramu*. This, too, is a characteristic and recurrent feature of the times, and not only on the level of folk literature, as with the 'Subahdar of the Cot'.⁵⁵ In fact, parodic dis-illusion is built into the very structure of most Nāyaka courtly literature; we find it repeatedly in both yakshagāna and in the genre known as *kuravañci* (which comes into prominence in our period)⁵⁶ and also, on an even larger scale, in the creation of textual doublets or 'echo-texts,' one of which parodies the conventionalized (usually romantic) sentiments of the other.⁵⁷ Within this context of internalized parodic commentary and cognitive disjunction, the inflated imagery of divine kingship constitutes a natural target. We will limit ourselves here to one powerful example linked to the newly prominent institution of annadāna, the gift of food—a basic Nāyaka topic, as we have seen. Our text is the most richly conceived and extravagantly executed of all surviving Nāyaka court comedies, the Brahmin poet Purushottama Dikshituḍu's *Annadānamahānāṭakamu* ('Great Drama of the Gift of Food') or, as the colophon has it, *Satramarulu Nāṭakam* ('Love in the Soup-Kitchen'). The first title is, perhaps, ironic; the existence of a second may well be a sign of the work's popularity. We view this remarkable composition as a farcical and deliberately parodic counterpart to the romantic yakshagāna corpus taken as a whole. In what follows, we summarize the play's main narrative and translate selected passages of the dialogue.⁵⁸

The play opens with the usual *kaivāramu* praises for the king,

⁵⁵ Above, I.2.

⁵⁶ The *kuravañci* balances the elevated love of the heroine for the (divine) hero with a comical, earthy union between the low-caste *kuratti* and her bird-catcher lover. See, e.g. *Tirukkurrālakkuravañci* of Tirikūṭarācappakkavirāyar, the outstanding exemplar of this genre.

⁵⁷ For example, the *Kūḷappanāyakan katal*, which we read together with the *Kūḷappanāyakan virāli viṭu tūtu*, both by Cupratipakkavirāyar: see Shulman (in press).

⁵⁸ We use the edition of Gaṅṭi Jōgisōmayāji (1956). We wish to thank V. S. Rajam for the many hours she spent helping us decipher the colloquial Tamil portions of this text, recorded in Telugu script.

Vijayarāghava (our hero of the *HS*); he is blessed with the grace of his family deity, Rājagopālasvāmi of Mannarkuti. His former births are mentioned: Marutta in the Krita Age, Nābhāga in the Tretā, Yudhishtira in the Dvāpara. Now he is King of Tanjavur, so beautiful in form that he drives courtesans to distraction, and so lavish in his generosity that he constantly feeds one hundred lakhs of Brahmins (*anavarataśatalakṣaviprābhīṣṭamrṣṭānnapradātalū*). It is this unending feast of ghee, jaggery, payasam, cakes, curd and rice that the poet, who names himself at the opening, has made into the drama he calls *Tañjāvūr'annadānamahānāṭakamu*, which, he tells us, has three main rasas—*śringāra*, *hāsya*, and *adbhuta* (the romantic, comic, and marvelous). Coming to this play from the other yakshagāna works, we might not yet suspect that this introduction, with its grandiloquent titles, its resort to rasa terminology, even, perhaps, its depiction of the Nāyaka king in the audience, is couched in wryly ironic, tongue-in-cheek tones.

But we are soon disabused. We meet, at the outset, the royal official in charge of the Tanjavur *satram* or choultry, Nellūri Ellamma Rāju, as he tries in vain to get his Tamil accountant (*kaṇakkapille*) to render an intelligible account of the choultry's finances. 'You're just lying there scratching yourself as if you'd drunk buffalo-milk—what's going on?' The accountant passes the buck: 'Sir, if these Brahmins and the rest spend their time chatting up the dancing-girls (*kūttadiyāl*, *koḍaṅgattiyāl*), to whom am I to render account?' He has been out on tour, in the Tiruvddālūr-sīma; someone else has reported to the palace. How can he be held responsible? And so on—the dialogue, in the colloquial Tamil of the seventeenth century as heard and recorded by native Telugu speakers, in Telugu script, is meant to evoke not only the official apparatus charged with annadāna, the gift of rice, at Tanjavur, but also the vast quantities involved in this daily ritual of such central symbolic importance. 'Our ruler,' says the manager, 'will not tolerate any failings in feeding these lordly Brahmins, these Vaishṇava kings (*vīra-vaishṇavasārvabhaumulū*). Even if they are only Brahmins by virtue of wearing the sacred thread, they must not go hungry in Tanjavur. Is everything ready—the banana leaves, the curries and rice, the salt, dal, condiments, *pāyasam*, pickles?' The cooks assure him that all is ready, and the Brahmins begin to arrive—from Maharashtra, Bengal, Kashmir, the Pāṇḍya country, from Kashi and Kurukshetra, Kambhoja and

Pancala, famine-stricken Badari, Kedara, Prabhasa, the Naimisa Forest. Among them are the true heroes of this play, the Telugu Brahmin Pappu Tippābhaṭṭu⁵⁹ and his family, including his wife Ellamma and their sons, Mañcigāḍu, Pedda Bhikshālugaḍu, and Pinnabhikshālugāḍu. They are hungry, can hardly wait for the choultry's doors to open. But Tippābhaṭṭu wants to establish his Brahmin credentials; he blesses the choultry official: *maṅgalāni bhavantu*. This is followed by a flood of Sanskrit gibberish (*hariḥ om. koṣaṃ dakṣiṇaḥ pakṣaḥ. kuppā uttaraḥ pakṣaḥ . . . gampam nimpayati.*)⁶⁰

Manager: Tippābhaṭṭu, from what Veda is this?

Tippābhaṭṭu: From the fifth Veda.

Manager: The fifth? I thought there were only four. What *aṣṭaka* is it from in this fifth Veda?

Tippābhaṭṭu: The one after the eighth!

Manager: Excellent, Tippābhaṭṭu. You're a fine Brahmin. Can you cast horoscopes?

Of course he can, though he has trouble reading certain letters in his almanac. Eventually, after a brief scatological exchange, he draws a picture of the heavens: Udayam is in the east, Chatram is near the king, Bharani is in the box, the Ram is in the goat herd, the Bull is in the cow herd, the Twins (Mithunam) are where men and women are copulating, the Crab is in its hole, the Lion is in the forest, Virgo is in her father's house, Libra is with the Setṭi merchant, Scorpio is in the cow-dung, the Bow is with the archer, Makaram is in the ocean, the Pot is at the potter's house, Pisces is in the pond, and everything is in place.

This learned discussion is interrupted by the arrival of the courtesans (*bhōgālavāru*) seeking gifts (*tyāgam*). They will provide the second major axis of the play, after the central topic of food and feeding. First, as they sing a love-poem about Vijayarāghava, they must be introduced to the innocent Tippābhaṭṭu:

⁵⁹ The *iṅṭipēru* or ancestral (village) name 'Pappu' may be meant as a pun on *pappu*, lentils or split pulse; the hero is thus 'Lentils Tippābhaṭṭu', just as later we will meet Appam Vātyār, 'Pancake Vātyār'.

⁶⁰ The last phrase is an absurd Sanskritization of Telugu *gampa*, 'basket,' and the verb *nimpu*, 'to fill'—thus, no doubt, 'he fills my basket'.

Tippābhaṭṭu: What's all this noise?

Manager: The courtesans have come here in the hope of receiving gifts.

Tippābhaṭṭu: Are courtesans women? Are all of them women, or only part of them women?

Manager: O Tippābhaṭṭu, what a great connoisseur (*rasikuḍu*) you are!

Tippābhaṭṭu: You mean the dancers are the honourable and respected Lady Whores (*lañjammagāru*)?

Manager: How can you call them honourable and respected?

Tippābhaṭṭu: Why not? Don't you know the mothers, Pōlakamma, Nūkalamma, Puṭṭalamma, Ekkalamma, and Lañjamma? [He is referring to Telugu village deities.] Anyway, what do these courtesans do?

Manager: They collect gold.

Tippābhaṭṭu: Only gold, not silver?

Manager: They take gold for sleeping with you.

Tippābhaṭṭu: If they take gold for sleeping, maybe they take silver for staying awake.

By now, the courtesans' interest is aroused; perhaps they can gain something from this learned Brahmin (*agnihotrācintāmaṇi, vedamūrti*). They sing a *pada* for him: 'How can love ripen without intimacy?' He becomes curious:

Tippābhaṭṭu: Mañcigāḍu, is that a big spoon she's holding in her hand?

Mañcigāḍu: It's a ladle.

Tippābhaṭṭu: Isn't a ladle a spoon? Anyway, what's that noise coming from it?

Mañcigāḍu: Father, a cat is meowing inside it.

Veṅgasāni (a courtesan): Sir, we can see you have fine taste in music. Now that you've shaken your head, it's time to shake your hand a little too.

Hāsyagāḍu (a clown, suddenly present in the group): Lady, he'll die if he has to give money.

As the courtesans become more determined, and more provocative, Tippābhaṭṭu begins to respond without quite understanding why:

Tippābhaṭṭu: Something's coming up inside me.

Tallubhaṭṭu (another Brahmin): Must be your stomach.

Hāsyagāḍu: Maybe it's that basket you're lifting.

Tippābhaṭṭu: O, not that—it's a kind of feeling . . . It's still coming on, still coming . . .

Tallubhaṭṭu: If you're looking at that big stick in the hand of the whore,

maybe you have to pee.

Tippābhaṭṭu: Hold on!

Tallubhaṭṭu: Hold? Why hold on—what, are you giving me a cow (*godāna*)?

Tippābhaṭṭu now knows what he wants and sings a crude, unintentionally comic verse, ludicrously couched in the lyric *śārdūlavikrīḍita* metre: ‘The cuckoos are nesting, making much noise; Manmatha is shooting. You’ve seen my pain over and over—is that your dharma? I’m a Brahmin, very pure. O Lañjamma, won’t you make love to me?’

The courtesan, the hideous hag Veṅgasāni, is alarmed; things have gone too far: ‘Your wife is the one who should make love to you.’ Tippābhaṭṭu wants to bow at her feet. She protests: ‘Tippābhaṭṭu, you’re a Brahmin! If you bow at the feet of a whore, *she* gets the sin.’ The clown has his own suggestion: ‘Leave the whores alone. If you want to bow at someone’s feet, try mine—it’s less dangerous.’ Tippābhaṭṭu is already chasing the courtesan around the stage, despite her panic-stricken cries: ‘Just looking at you makes me sick.’ Nothing can deter him any longer: ‘You are the god of my temple,’ he tells her; he will give her his sacred *darbha* grass, an ochre robe—after all, he assures her, he is a Rigvedin—he will break his sacred thread, offer her all the fruits of his worship of Garuḍa in Kancipuram (*kañcigaruḍasēva*—a Telugu expression denoting useless and never-ending service). Veṅgasāni, is saved, temporarily, only by the arrival of a group of Tamil Brahmins, who develop their own comic dialogue with and about the courtesans.

The two groups, Telugu and Tamil-speaking Brahmins, eye one another suspiciously. Our hero, Tippābhaṭṭu, invites one of the Tamilians, Appam Vātyār, to sit down. The latter turns to one of his friends:

Appam Vātyār: Tippābhaṭṭu is inviting me to sit. Is this place pure enough?

Nāñjin: Must be pure.

Appam Vātyār: How do you know?

Nāñjin: There’s Mahājanamāṇikyattāl.

Appam Vātyār: O, now my mind is at ease (*yinnekkonnō manaśuddhi yācci*).

Ambirāya: What, Appam Vātyār, have you been drinking *nēpālam* herbs for constipation (*malaśuddhi yāgharudukku*)?

Appam Vātyār: No, you idiot, I said *manasuddhi*, not *malaśuddhi*! Don't you know what it says in the *Liṅgapurāṇam*?

veśyāyā darśanam puṇyam sparśanam pāpanāśanam
śayane sarvatīrthāni surataṃ mokṣasādhanam ||

Seeing a courtesan is auspicious; her touch destroys all evil. Her bed is the abode of all sacred sites; making love to her is the way to Release.

Soon it transpires that Appam Vātyār knows these ladies very well— or should, at least, know them:

Appam Vātyār: Who is *she*?

Mahājanamāṇikyattāl: Don't you recognize Pernāṭṭu Māṇikyattāl? After all you've been through together? After you deflowered her at the time of her consecration as a devadāsī, you hung around her for three whole years. Have you forgotten?

Appam Vātyār: Oh, so this is Ternāṭṭu (sic) Māṇikyam. How are you, my dear?

(She kicks him.)

Appam Vātyār: O Ambirāya, I am blessed by the touch of Pernāṭṭu Māṇikyattāl's sacred foot.

Pursuing this logic, he will soon declare that if she bites him, his whole body will become pure. Meanwhile, the predictable competition develops between the Telugu and Tamil Brahmins over the courtesans' attentions. The Tamils try to convince Mahājanamāṇikyam that she belongs to them: 'You used to dance in that *agrahāram*; didn't you enjoy the one-sixteenth of a share that Cevvappanāyaka gave our grandfather there? Now Pappu Tippābhaṭṭan with his eighth of a share is dancing around here. But when the Cetti was making trouble for you last year, who bailed you out? *We did!*' This seems to convince the lady: 'If you're so rich, why do I have to go hunting around elsewhere?' Now Appam Vātyār can take a moment to admire his catch:

Appam Vātyār: Hey, Nāñjan—she's a little small up front, but her back and her breasts are really big (*munnedu cinnedu, muduvum mārum yallām akhaṇḍamay irukkurudu*).

Hāsyāgaḍu (interposing with a characteristically naive but suggestive remark): Appam Vātyār, look at *my* back, just like a slab for pounding sandalwood . . . Why are you staring at her breasts? Look at me!

But Mahājanamāṅkiyam wants the Brahmin's upper cloth as payment for her songs—the cloth given his grandfather, he tells us in another comic verse, by Krishṇadevarāya himself! The Tamil Brahmins begin to extricate themselves from the situation, leaving the girl to 'that Telugu', as they call him; anyway, they note, he is a heavy-set man, and they don't want to tangle with him.

Tippābhaṭṭu meanwhile offers *his* upper cloth (after his wife refuses to part with her saree); but when the courtesan, Veṅgasāni, takes it, he runs to the Manager to complain that she has stolen it. The Manager wearily promises to provide him with another.

At last, it is time for lunch; the erotic slapstick gives way before more pressing preoccupations. The Manager calls the Brahmins to enter according to order (*krama*):

Manager: Let the lame Brahmin come in.

Tippābhaṭṭu: Listen, Mañcigāḍu, he's calling the lame Brahmin first.

How is he related to the Manager?

Mañcigāḍu: He's the brother-in-law of the husband of the granddaughter of his maternal aunt.

Tippābhaṭṭu: If that's the case, we can go in just like that lame Brahmin. (Leaning on a stick, chanting the Veda, he limps toward the choultry.)

Manager: Hey, I called the lame Brahmin, what are you doing here?

Tippābhaṭṭu: In this village, is there anyone more lame than I?

Manager: You're not lame, you're bluffing. Let the short Brahmin enter!

Tippābhaṭṭu: Listen, Mañcigāḍu, he's calling the short Brahmin. How is he related to the Manager?

Mañcigāḍu: He's the elder brother of his paternal uncle.

Tippābhaṭṭu: Then we, too, can go in.

Again the Manager stops him; instead, he calls the tall Brahmin. How is this one related to the Manager? Mañcigāḍu suggests: 'He's his mother's husband.' Another attempt to tiptoe past the door, this time while singing the praises of Vijayarāghava, hero of Tanjavur; and, when challenged by the Manager, Tippābhaṭṭu proudly asserts: 'I'm as tall as the *gopuram* at the Mannāru shrine.' Blocked again. This time the stammering Brahmin is invited in, and Tippābhaṭṭu joins the queue. A Brahmin wife asks him whom she resembles, and he tells her she is just like the heavenly courtesan Rambhā; she reciprocates by comparing him to the god Nārāyaṇa himself.

Now the Brahmin who has carried a *kāvāḍi*-pole from Benares is invited in. What is his relationship to the Manager? Mañcigāḍu: 'He's one of his fathers.' This is Tippābhaṭḷu's chance. He grabs Tallubhaṭḷu's *kāvāḍi* and heads for the door. The Manager stops him: 'Bathe before you come.'

Tippābhaṭḷu: Mañcigāḍu! The Manager says we have to bathe. The river is too far away. We could try the moat, but it's full of crocodiles. Before you know it, we'll miss lunch. We can at least wet the end of our tufts of hair and retie them. Quick, pass a little urine.

Mañcigāḍu: Father, I can't!

Tippābhaṭḷu (in desperation, to his wife): Now, of all times, he can't pee, Yallamma (Tippābhaṭḷu's wife): What can I do about it?

Tippābhaṭḷu: OK, Mañcigāḍu, take some water from Prōlubhaṭḷu's pot for our tufts.

Manager: You've already had your bath?

Tippābhaṭḷu: Oh yes, sir, we've bathed. Look at my wet tuft.

Manager: Where did you bathe?

Tippābhaṭḷu: In the river.

Manager: And just where is the river?

Tippābhaṭḷu: Um, over there, beyond the trees, to the south.

Manager: Some Brahmin you are. Nothing but lies. Wait, wait, come on. Our king respects all Brahmins; we musn't put them to the test. No matter what you may be, we must offer you worship. Come and eat.

And Tippābhaṭḷu joins the throng of pushing, scrambling Brahmins, each fighting for a place before one of the banana leaves.

We can look briefly at the final scene, which resumes the erotic encounter with the courtesans but also turns it in a new and somewhat surprising direction. Having feasted to his fill, and beyond it, Tippābhaṭḷu invokes the blessings of the god, Rājagopālasvāmi, and then summons the Manager to his side.

Tippābhaṭḷu: We have eaten excellent food, by the mercy of our ruler. But we have one more request.

Manager: How fortunate. Tell us what it is.

Tippābhaṭḷu: You tell him, Appam Vātyār.

Appam Vātyār: I don't know Telugu; tell him yourself. You ate in the king's choultry; now tell him what is missing.

Tippābhaṭḷu: To tell you the truth, Manager, we're a little shy to say it.

Manager: *You shy?! Just tell me.*

Tippābhaṭṭu: Appam Vātyār, please!

Appam Vātyār: Tippābhaṭṭa, do you think I know what you're hollering about in that outlandish Telugu?

Tippābhaṭṭu (reluctantly giving in): In that case—it's the whore.

Appam Vātyār (in Tamil): All he ever talks about is that whore; just tell him you want her for free.

Manager: What about the whore?

Tippābhaṭṭu: Make her do it with me, for once. This is our humble request.

Manager (laughing): Hey Veṅgasāni, Jakkula Raṅgasāni, Sānimuddu, come here. Tippābhaṭṭu and Appam Vātyār have come from a long distance. They are very worthy people. They can't just sit around doing nothing. Please satisfy them.

Courtesans: It's Veṅgasāni that he's fallen in love with, why come to us?

Manager: Jakkula Raṅgasāni, Paṭakasānimuddu, is this how you please your customers? What difference does it make? Isn't it your business to fall in love, to make others fall in love, to be mad, to drive others mad, and to use your tricks to keep everything for yourselves?

Courtesans: Just as you say, sir.

Manager: Tippābhaṭṭu, as long as you look like this women will turn away from you in disgust. Use your great ascetic powers, take on a handsome form for making love, as the great Cyavana once did.

Tippābhaṭṭu: Whatever you say.

As Tippābhaṭṭu temporarily disappears from the stage to perform this metamorphosis, the courtesans beg the Manager to give them gifts (*bahumānam*) in his own right; he asks them to perform a song composed by the king, Vijayarāghava. They sing a punning Telugu love-padam in the style current in Tanjavur:

He gave me a paltry five coins (*ayidu varālu*), and when I asked why, he said slyly, 'You're a very auspicious lady (*ayiduvārālavu*)—or so I thought!'

He's good with words, that Mannarudeva; how can I praise him?

I told him, 'You're so good at loving, you have tied me with golden chains (*saripenalu*); but he turned it back by saying, 'Won't you embrace me just the same (*saripenal' iyyavāy*)?'

This is the teasing, playfully irate tone that usually predominates in the *padam* poems—a poetry of love for the god or king as seen through the

eyes of a jealous, repeatedly betrayed, still impassioned woman. Note that in this case the hero and lover is none other than the king himself, who is also said to have composed the verse (about himself, praising himself!) and who must also be assumed to be listening to it from his seat in the audience. The padam marks a moment of transition in this play, to a conclusion informed by a somewhat gentler, perhaps even poignant irony (as we find in the padam corpus generally). For this is the moment when Tippābhaṭṭu reappears; and, miraculously, he is no longer the grotesque and ludicrous old Brahmin lecher but, rather, now bears the alluring form of a new avatar of Manmatha, the god of love (*navyamadanāvataruṇḍu*).

He, too, sings a padam, this time an erotic dialogue couched in a more appropriate idiom than that of his earlier attempt at poetry:

—Won't you let me trace a pattern with my fingernails on your breast?

—No, you musn't touch me now.

—But I love you. Embrace me!

—You're my friend, why be so hasty?

—Won't you kiss me, play with me?

—No, I know the games you play.

—Take me, master me, let's make love!

—You're the god with eyes like arrows. I know all of your illusion (*nī māya vinnānu lēra*).

The crudeness and obscenity of the Tippābhaṭṭu we have grown to know and admire have been replaced by the coquetry and innocuous banter characteristic of the courtly padam tradition. We observe that the padam incorporates a dialogue reflecting both parties to the love-relationship, the urgent suitor and the coy, playfully elusive courtesan—certainly a change from Tippābhaṭṭu's earlier stance of coarsely single-minded pursuit of his own lust. We may mourn the transformation as a loss, but not even Tippābhaṭṭu himself can deny its effectiveness; indeed, in the final dialogue of the play, we hear him giving voice to a strange and somewhat moving confusion about his identity:

Tippābhaṭṭu/Manmatha:⁶¹ Uttarādi Veṅgasāni!

Veṅgasāni: What is it?

Manmatha: Jakkula Raṅgasāni!

⁶¹ The stage directions simply call him Manmatha.

Raṅgasāni: What is it?

Manmatha: Paṭaka Sānimuddu!

Muddu: What?

Manmatha: Where are we?

Muddu: We're in the temple.

Manmatha: Where is the temple?

Muddu: In the fort.

Manmatha: Where is the fort?

Muddu: In Tanjavur.

Manmatha: Oh yes, is that the Tanjavur where our king feeds a lakh of Brahmins?

Veṅgasāni: Hey you old Brahmin, have you forgotten yesterday's feast, when you sat in the row with your wife and children and gorged yourself on lentils, *pāyasam*, pickles?

Manmatha: Veṅgasāni—who am I?

Veṅgasāni: You're the new Manmatha, aren't you?

But by this point, Tippābhaṭṭu, or Manmatha, is beyond words. He mutters incoherently, as he loses consciousness. Somehow he sings a final verse:

I can't bear to be away from you, even for a single second.

I'm intoxicated beyond thought or measure—won't you kiss my lips?

And with this unthinkable intoxication, as the courtesans dance, the drama comes to an end.

The *Annadānamahānāṭakamu*, or Love in the Soup-Kitchen, is surely one of the most engaging literary creations of the Tanjavur Nāyaka court. We will not attempt an exhaustive analysis, which would focus, for example, on the composition of the comic dyads and triads; on the nuances of satire and parody; or on the links to earlier comic figures from the tradition, such as the Vidūshaka of Sanskrit drama—a clear prototype for the ugly and hungry Tippābhaṭṭu (though without the latter's erotic urges). There is also the realistic extension of the social universe, as mediated by formal, written, high-caste literature, to include hitherto marginal or unrecognized types (the Brahmin ignoramus, with his irritable wife and foolish sons; the coarse and cynical prostitutes; the lazy and inefficient accountants; the harassed Manager of the choultry, with his Brahmin cooks); we have seen this development in other Nāyaka-period works. The following remarks are limited

to the play's definition as an echo-text, and to its implications for the area of social, and especially political, symbolism in this royal court.

1. Most obvious, perhaps, is the 'Bakhtinian' side of this play—the obsession with food and sex (rather than love), the emphasis being, clearly, on the pursuit of oral appetites; or, more generally, with the body's assorted apertures. The action is grotesque rather than pornographic, and never far from scatology; its verbal abandon, focusing on crudely physical images—the view from the bottom up, so to speak—stands in fine contrast to the usual high-caste Hindu fastidiousness about body orifices and excretions. As such, it clearly has an affinity with certain representative folk-literary types—one thinks, for example, of the obscene songs associated with the *bharaṇi* festivals to the goddess (a 'carnavalesque' mode, to follow the Bakhtinian analogy);⁶² or, perhaps even closer in language and tone, of the comic introduction and interludes in the south Indian shadow-puppet theatre, which also plays with obscenity, scatological humour, homosexual innuendo (as with the *Hāsyagāḍu* here), and incongruous sexual alliances.⁶³ But there is an equally striking contrast with the rest of the romantic yakshagāna corpus, as we have already indicated. We have no doubt that this contrast is intentional; indeed, the *Annadāna* is, in a sense, deliberately keyed to the dramas of courtly life and love in a way that allows it to serve as reflexive commentary upon them. It even follows the same structure that we find in the *abhyudaya-kāvya*s, with their twin foci of conspicuous feasting and love-making; these are the two major subjects of our play as well. But where Raghunātha Nāyaka dines in state, with elegant abandon, served by a host of delicate women, our rough Brahmin heroes attempt to elbow their way violently into the choultry, where they will gorge themselves in a Rabelaisian mode. And while Raghunātha performs the leisurely daily rituals of falling in love, pining for the beloved, excoriating Manmatha in measured, elevated verses, meeting the girl's messenger, arranging a rendezvous, and, at long last, as evening descends, slowly undergoing the tedious process of seduction,

⁶² E.g. at Kotunkolur.

⁶³ See GoldbergBell (1984); Shulman (1985), pp. 204-10.

lovers' quarrel, and subsequent reconciliation, Tippābhaṭṭu and Appam Vātyār pursue their prostitutes briskly, directly, and rather ludicrously. They are prepared to delay their satisfaction only for one purpose—just long enough to eat. On the one hand, we have courtly manners, grace, a dignified and cultivated indirection; on the other, desire at its coarsest and most absurd. It is difficult to avoid the feeling that the farce aims at piercing the veil of sustained romantic, regal illusion, thereby revealing the raw reality of human drives that lies behind it.

2. This disintegration of illusion goes still deeper. We must remember that this play was performed at court, with the king as spectator. As with other yakshagāna works, the *Annadāna* helps to articulate a certain vision of kingship and identity. These plays shows us the king and his court as they wished to project themselves publicly, to themselves and to others. In part, of course, the projection in evidence in our play is highly positive and flattering to the king, who is intent upon feeding Brahmins of any kind, and at any price; deference and magnanimity are the values repeatedly evoked on the surface. The ironies of farce are bracketed, as it were, by a wholly 'serious' ideology which casts the king in the role of generous patron and donor. On the other hand, Vijayarahava is also present within the erotic fantasy-zone of the farce, as author and subject of one of the love-poems—and thus as a potential target for ridicule, along with all the rest of the apparatus of love in its romantic guise. Once the disjunction of irony is allowed to open up—and the entire play is, after all, a vehicle for just such an opening—it is virtually impossible to limit its range. Our play, seen in the context of the yakshagāna corpus as a whole, presents this disjunction as part and parcel of the court's self-awareness; as such, it casts the whole of the kingly role in a new, corrosive light. *Annadāna*, the cornerstone of royal giving and one of the most expressive symbolic activities in seventeenth-century Tanjavur, is shown in its most ridiculous aspect; both its Brahmin beneficiaries and their somewhat benighted (and pretentious) regal patron are subjected to an examination at once sceptical, farcical, and realistic. Probably more than earlier south Indian conceptualizations of royal identity, Nāyaka kingship, in

its public aspects, seen from within, knows itself to be constructed at least in part around illusion.

3. But it is an illusion that manages to realize itself: this play is not, or not only, an anti-Brahmin satire (it was, we recall, composed by a Brahmin) any more than it is an outright attack on the ideology of the court. Like the 'Subahdar of the Cot', it is a parody, with both the parody's traditional double hinge and something of its playful ontological assertiveness. Comic debunking remains heavily mortgaged to its lampooned ideals. Look at the end of the drama—the actual transformation of our ignorant, lascivious, miserly, repulsive Brahmin into a *real* incarnation of Manmatha, the god of love. This is the point where illusion, knowing itself as such, re-constitutes itself as real. We are reminded of the triumphant conclusion achieved by the Subahdar, whose royal pretence turns out to be more powerful than kingship itself. Here the Brahmin's successful transition to a more attractive identity remains unexplained, the result not of any wisdom, nor of a skill in manipulating illusion, but, apparently, of the sheer magic of desire. Such happy fantasies are, perhaps, no more improbable than the burlesque caricatures that fuel the play from the start. But the process as a whole is remarkably similar to what we observed at the very outset of this study: the comic parody of illusion ultimately issues into another, still more compelling and motivating illusion, visibly and externally established and confirmed. Unlike the companion-examples of the Sanskrit Vidūshaka, or the tales of the south Indian court-jester, Tenāli Rāma—both of whom offer a kind of consistent cognitive disillusion—the Nāyaka farce, like the Nāyaka political folktale, goes through the more complex and intriguing process of taking illusion apart and then putting it back together again.

CONCLUSION

However restricted Nāyaka kingship may appear to us in terms of geographical expanse and physical control, its visual and verbal self-representations exceed, in their extravagance and intensity, anything

known from earlier centuries in this area. We have concentrated in this chapter on examples taken mostly from Tanjavur; but the profound change these sources reveal in the symbolization of kingship, indeed in its structural situation within the state system as a whole, can also be seen in the other major Nāyaka kingdoms and in their small-scale zamindari imitations scattered throughout the Tamil country in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. When Kaṭikai Muttup Pulavar sings, in Tamil, the praises of the zamindar of Eṭṭaiyapuram, he uses the rhetoric of divinity, of truly 'imperial' power, of an eroti-cized avatar, and of worship— precisely like his counterparts at the central courts to the north.⁶⁴ At the same time, his technique is based on ślesha, the splitting and echoing that always allow, in these texts, for a multiple perception, often pregnant with ambiguity and disjunc-tion; the very language of the inflationary Nāyaka rhetoric carries within it a latent, potentially parodic charge.

Quasi-divinity, worthy of pūjā, in a palace turned temple: the new royal identity is constructed of such elevated visions. The Nāyaka's daily routine is a divine, ritualized cycle; he acts and is imagined as a living god. But he is also the object of the court-poet's periodic barbs, in a way no less ritualized and insistent. A principle of compensation seems to have bound together these two extremes. Both divinity and dis-illusion are woven into the public role of the Nāyaka king. Still, we have stressed the conflation of hitherto distinct domains, and this remains diagnostic for this period: not only are temple and temple-deity truly dependent upon the service, support, and intervention of the king, but the latter is himself the centre of a sphere that is now sacred in its own right. We are used to thinking of the temple as patterned after the royal court, its god served in the idiom of kingship; but the Nāyaka political center has reassimilated the regal structure of the sacred centre and then proclaimed the primacy of its own form of the divine—not the frozen, immobile image (*arcāvatāra*) carved out of stone, but the human avatar who moves, breathes, and desires.

And who is also strikingly alone. Another way to describe what has happened is to speak of the collapse of the old dualistic model of

⁶⁴ See the verses by Kaṭikai Muttupulavar on Vēṅkaṭēcarettan in *Tanippāṭarri-rattū*, 1:360-424.

Sanskritic kingship—Kshatriya and Brahmin locked in a tense 'marriage' of unequals, the former's authority partly vested in the latter's recognition and readiness to accept royal gifts. These tensions have been swept away with the traditional *varṇa* ideology, and instead we find a unitary kingship embodied in the lone, individualized, more centred ruler, whose autonomy has been strengthened even *vis-à-vis* the bhakti god. If we need a classical precedent, there is, perhaps, the late Vedic solitary sacrificer, who has placed all his fires in himself.

And yet Nāyaka kingship does *not* represent an attempt at far-reaching autonomization of the political sphere, or at creating an altogether new, more secure basis for royal authority, any more than it shows a more sustained effort to accumulate resources at the centre. The god-king looks still to his weakened overlord for the necessary vertical empowerment; he continues to support Brahmins, though more with food than with land; in other ways, he is overshadowed by, and dependent on, his *daḷavāy*, his accountants, and his Baliya tax-farmers and investment brokers (to say nothing of the foreign merchants with whom he has contact, or the European mercenaries who have joined his army). He has both the audacity and the hesitations of the Baliya *nouveaux riches*. He is, in short, a splendid figure cut out for grandiose display, yet shockingly vulnerable to attack by both external and internal forces, including those of his own subordinates; his wealth, while lavish, is also fragile, and cannot buy him real safety; he makes no serious attempt to transcend the inherent constraints on his power, to reconstruct the wider spheres of politics and the state, beyond the court; he is most at home in the powerful illusion fostered, but also consciously undermined, by his own panegyrists.

These paradoxical elements and structural peculiarities of the Nāyaka state, that emerge so clearly from an examination of the rhetoric of kingship, equally find expression in other spheres. For when the Nāyakas did forsake the boudoir for the battlefield, they took their still-unresolved attitudes towards the old and the new with them, and emerge therefore as ambivalent and self-doubting warriors, whose sense of mission and purpose no longer bears the stamp of single-mindedness that characterized, say, Kumāra Kampana or Gandaraguli Mārayya Nāyaka. Only on the periphery, in the southern lands dominated by Kallars and Maravars, and in the northern shatter-zone

peopled by unreconstructed feudist Telugu warrior clans, do we find the old love of war. It is to such ambiguities and ambivalences which manifest themselves in the Nāyaka art of war that we now turn.

VI

The Art of War under the Nāyakas

INTRODUCTION

To say that the Nāyaka period is one of almost constant conflict and competition over resources is to state the obvious. But, at the same time, it does not require one to subscribe to a view of a *Pax Vijayanagarica*, which collapsed in the aftermath of the celebrated battle of January 1565 when the combined forces of the Deccan Sultans defeated an army led by Aravdīḍu (Aliya) Rāma Rāya. Quite the contrary, we are aware that even the 'Golden Age' of Vijayanagara under Krishṇadevarāya (r. 1509-29) was marked by substantial internal and external conflict—to the north and north-east, as also in the extreme south; the reign of his brother and successor Acyutadevarāya then begins in conditions of conflict with the Aravīḍu family, and continues to be characterized by difficulties not only in the Tamil country but elsewhere.¹ Thus, one can hardly claim that the Nāyaka period was *more* war-torn than the previous epoch; but the more or less incessant fighting is more elaborately described now, not only by European observers but in literary and para-literary sources in Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit, while the forces motivating the participants take on a new and intriguing complexity in these contemporary descriptions.

In earlier chapters we have examined the resources available to the

¹ For the most recent summary of events in this period, see Stein (1989).

Nāyakas, their ideologies and aspirations, as well as their self-images (as refracted through court literature in its various genres); it is time now to examine what was after all one of the principal props for the state as a whole—the generation of ‘legitimate violence’. It is useful to recall here that much of the violence concerning which we have information is internecine—that is, between Nāyaka states, between the Aravīḍu rulers at Candragiri and their Nāyaka subordinates, between the Nāyakas and *their* subordinates and so on. Towards the latter half of the seventeenth century, as the armies of Golconda and Bijapur enter the Tamil scene, they too figure prominently in our sources. But it is not the precise identity of the combatants that is our main concern here; rather, we wish to explore the changes that took place in warfare over the period, focusing in particular on the issue of firearms and their diffusion, and their eventual impact on the structure of the Nāyaka states. This consideration of a ‘gunpowder empires’ or ‘military revolution’ hypothesis will also lead us into an appraisal of the more general issues of the size and composition of armies, and the inter-state balance of power in the epoch.

A MILITARY REVOLUTION PERCEIVED ?

The spread of firearms—cannon, arquebus and matchlock (and later flintlock)—in the early modern world is most certainly integrally linked to a wide variety of changes which occurred in that period. In Europe, many of these changes have been discussed under the head of what Michael Roberts termed ‘the military revolution’; and located as it is in the period 1560 to 1660, this ‘revolution’ must be seen in relation to others—the ‘commercial revolution’ and the growth of long-distance trade, the ‘price revolution’ which supposedly resulted from this growth in trade, and other ‘revolutions’ which occurred in the fields of agriculture, industry and so on.

Even as historians of other parts of the world have sought to import these revolutions into their own historiographies, the ‘military revolution’ too has received its fair share of attention. Also, writers on European expansion have repeatedly addressed with greater or lesser degrees of success and sophistication the problem of ‘Guns and Sails’ (as Carlo Cipolla puts it) in the relations between Europe and the rest

of the early modern world.² Their conclusions, ably summed up by Geoffrey Parker in a recent monograph, are that the spread of the use of firearms in the period from roughly 1500 to 1800 was considerable in some parts of the world, limited in others. Further, the contingent *and* consequent changes in the structures of states tended to vary considerably.³

Within Asia itself, Parker tends to differentiate East Asia (China and Japan) from South-East Asia, and treats India and the Middle East as still distinct from the other two areas. He argues that in China, and more conspicuously in Japan, firearms were rapidly incorporated and caused a true transformation in warfare; indeed he seems to suggest that by the late sixteenth century, the Japanese were if anything more advanced in using firearms than their European contemporaries. Although a subsequent reversal occurred in the Japanese case, with the Tokugawa Shoguns enforcing a 'de-militarization' in the seventeenth century, in one dramatic phase (the late sixteenth century) the changing technology of war had a substantial effect on the processes of state formation, and may be thought to be integrally related to the successful centralization of power in late sixteenth and early seventeenth century Japan.

However, in the case of South-East Asia, it has often been argued (notably by C.R. Boxer) that firearms and artillery remained peripheral to the war machines of sixteenth and seventeenth century states.⁴ The Sultanates of Aceh and Johor, to name two of the most powerful states of the period in this area, are portrayed as notoriously incompetent in their management of these new-fangled weapons, and this contributed in part to the decisive advantage enjoyed over them by far smaller European forces—first the Portuguese, and then the Dutch.

The characterization of the Indian case proves to be a greater problem. While it is possible (as Parker does) to treat northern India as part of a larger spread, embracing the Safavid state and the Ottoman Empire, southern India remains outside the ambit of such a discussion.⁵ Recent writings on the Mughal empire, such as a consideration

² Cipolla (1965); also Chaunu (1969).

³ Cf. Parker (1987), pp. 115-45, and Berg (1985).

⁴ Boxer, (1965), pp. 156-72; also see Reid (1982).

⁵ Cf. Parker (1987), pp. 125-36; this follows, to a certain extent, the categories

of the reign of Akbar by Douglas Streusand, do lay some stress on firearms as a factor in promoting territorial consolidation under these rulers, but fight shy of accepting the 'gunpowder empires' hypothesis of Marshall Hodgson in its entirety. Streusand thus steers a middle course between Hodgson and more recently Burton Stein, who see firearms as highly important in the Indian sub-continent, and Parker, who tends to view Indian armies of the epoch as still largely incompetent in their use until the eighteenth century.⁶

All of these writers tend to rely for the most part on indigenous chronicles and European narrative accounts, particularly those of seventeenth-century travellers like François Bernier and Jean-Baptiste Tavernier. However, in order to understand the impact of firearms on warfare, it is of some utility to consider other literary materials and traditions as well, for these show us the nature and extent of the impact that the new weapons had on the mentalities of the age. Consider the following *kaifiyat* description of a quintessential Nāyaka-period engagement, being fought in southern Andhra, and written in praise of one of the participants, the Telugu warrior-chief, Maṭṭa Ananta, in the 1580s or 1590s:

Unshaken by the bags of gunpowder
 shooting fire into the skies, an uncontainable blaze,
 or by the flames and noise pouring from the *tupāki* guns,
 or by the rocks pouring down like torrential rain,
 or by the cannon shot echoing through the four quarters of the
 universe,
 you fought, winning praise from the Pādushāh and others.⁷

The context here is a siege, and as we shall observe, this is no coincidence. Several contemporary literary descriptions of sieges feature firearms in a prominent position, and this helps us place in perspective the Nāyaka concern with impregnable fortified places such as Senji or

employed in Hodgson (1974).

⁶ Most relevant for our purposes, as an attempt to extend the 'military revolution' to South India, is Stein (1985). On the north, also see Streusand (1989), pp. 65-70, and Kolff (1990), pp. 20-31.

⁷ *Kaifiyat* of Cittiveli, in Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya (1946), No. 216 (b).

Tiruccirappalli. Thus, once again, the early seventeenth century Tanjavur text, *Raghunāthābhyudaya* by Rāmabhadrāmbā, describes the Tanjavur Nāyaka in his campaign against Colaga, chief of the fort of Devikottai at the mouth of the Kollidam river; Colaga, it is noted, is arrogant and confident, because his fort 'with the deep ocean as its moat, (was) unconquerable by others even with the help of *agniantras* (firearms)'. When the engagement with the Tanjavur forces begins, Colaga's men 'standing on the ramparts, staring at the targets in front of them, fired off their *agniantras*, thus filling the air with smoke'.⁸ Similarly, the roughly contemporary *Sāhityaratnākara* offers a description of the Tanjavur palace enclosure where, in the outermost courtyard, we find the Pārasīka (Portuguese) mercenaries, equipped with firearms (*agniantra*), 'their eyes rolling from drinking liquor', and 'near whom the wind, loudly blowing through their metal *agniantras* and filling the inner space, seemed to be proclaiming perpetually the imminent mission to destroy the armies of the King's enemies.'⁹

Even more generally, the courtly and other formal literature of the period suggests a deep fascination with firearms. To the literary sources just cited, we may add numerous others: some of these deal with war, but others use firearms as a poetic device in diverse contexts—a sure if indirect sign of this fascination. Turning to the scenes of war first, besides the campaign against Colaga of Devikottai, the Tanjavur texts of the period of Raghunātha and Vijayarāghava often highlight the use of firearms. Thus, describing Raghunātha's campaigns of the 1620s against Jaffna, the poetess Rāmabhadrāmbā envisions the clever (*paṭavaḥ*) soldiers of the king 'making lightning-flashes with their *agniantras*, as if from the clouds moving over the ocean'. She goes on to speak of how 'they poured sparks of fire from the corners of their eyes, red with fury, and from the iron *nalakas* (cannon or muskets), at the enemies in front of them'. The latter is a particularly interesting use, since it balances a conventional image—the blazing eyes of the inflamed warrior—against the *nalakas* and their effect.¹⁰

Time and again, this poetess returns to the *agniantra* in its various

⁸ *Raghunāthābhyudaya* of Rāmabhadrāmbā, 8.82 and 89.

⁹ *Sāhityaratnākara* of Yajñanārāyaṇa Dīkshita, 13.8-9.

¹⁰ *Raghunāthābhyudaya* 9.17, 9.18, 9.69, 10.2 and 10.10.

forms. A section on the battle of Toppur contains the following images:

'Flames from the burning wicks in the detachment of soldiers using agniyantras shone like serpents blazing with poison, intent on devouring the life-breath of the enemy soldiers' (9.69).

'Both sides in the battle used agniyantras; it soon became impossible to look at the soldiers because of the smoke on the battlefield' (10.2).

'Some of the elephants (in the battle), burned by flames from the incomparable agniyantras, looked like mountains whose wings were cut off by Indra' (10.10).

The *Sāhityaratnākara* describes the army of Tanjavur on its way to the same battle, with its cannon (*nālikāyudhas*), which deafened the women and made them shut their eyes in fear.¹¹

A second level at which firearms enter literary perceptions in this period is through hunting scenes. These scenes had become conventional in the Telugu court-kāvya from the period of Krishnadevarāya, and are subsequently transplanted into the fertile soil of the Nāyaka courts.¹² At least one of the texts of this genre, the *Vijayarāghavakalyāṇamu* of the poet Kōnēṭi Dīkshitulu, which is set in the Tanjavur court in the seventeenth century, includes firearms (*tupākulu*) among the weapons carried to the hunt; in this it diverges from the earlier texts of the sixteenth century for the first time. However, the firearms are used here not to kill animals but to frighten them, so that they may be killed with more conventional weaponry, spear, net and sword.¹³ It is only with the early eighteenth century Tamil text, *Kūḷappanāyakkaṅ kātal* of Cupratīpa Kavirāyar, based in the town of Nilakottai in Ramnad, that the firearm (here *kuṅṭu tunruṅ kulal*) is actually used to full effect: one tiger is killed with conventional weapons (that is, the *vēl* or spear), but another—which proves difficult—has to be overcome with a musket (Tam. *kuṅṭu kulal*, from *kuṅṭu*=bullet, and *kulal*=hollow pipe).¹⁴

¹¹ *Sāhityaratnākara* 15.20-21.

¹² The most famous in this genre is the *Manucaritramu* of Peddana, Canto IV, from the period of Krishnadevarāya.

¹³ Text in Gaṅṭi Jōgisōmayāji (1956), especially pp. 94-5.

¹⁴ *Kūḷappanāyakkaṅ kātal*, verses 84, 90-91.

More remarkable, however, than any of these examples is a third one, in which firearms are dragged willy-nilly into an otherwise thoroughly hackneyed context—the love-lament. In the *Vijayarāghavacandrikāvihāramu* of Kāmarusu Vēṅkaṭapatisōmayāji, a romantic drama centring on Vijayarāghava (1634-73), the heroine of the poem, lovesick for the Nāyaka, sings:

Manmatha (the Love-God) has come through the mountain-pass to attack me; brandishing his spear of *campaka*, he has shot his flower-arrows at me.

O Vijayarāghava, strengthen the fortress of your embrace!

Manmatha is campaigning against me. The soft breezes have set up their camp, the cuckoos are sounding the drums of war. Vijayarāghava, send your bright eyes to save me!

The moon is lurking in ambush in the sky; he (Manmatha) is aiming his lotus-gun at me (*kendammitupāki vañcen*) after packing it full of the gunpowder that is moonlight (*vennelamandu*). Vijayarāghava, let me take shelter in your embrace!¹⁵

It is rather striking that a seventeenth-century poet should transform the Love-God's conventional weaponry—a bow of sugar-cane with a string made of bees, and arrows of flowers—into a lotus-gun, whose barrel must be stuffed with moonlight before taking aim at a victim. We have here another instance of reworking a conventional image- and thus another clear indication of the fascination that firearms exerted.

THE SPREAD OF FIREARMS

How and when did this familiarity and fascination arise? The earliest use of firearms—that is, cannon—in the Indian sub-continent can probably be traced to the second half of the fifteenth century, and the campaigns of Sultan Mahmud Bigarh of Gujarat.¹⁶ However, between then and 1498, when the Portuguese arrived in Calicut on the Indian west coast, neither cannon nor smaller firearms (notably harquebus and matchlock) had come to form an integral part of the Indian arsenal. This situation came to be modified, however, in considerable measure during the first century of the Portuguese presence in India. Thus, by

¹⁵ See *Vijayarāghavacandrikāvihāramu* in Jōgisōmayāji (1956), p. 18.

¹⁶ Qaisar (1984); but also see Khan (1981), pp. 146-164.

the close of the sixteenth century, cannon were to be found in the armouries of every major south Indian ruler.

In the case of northern India, the invasion of Babur, a Timurid ruler based initially in the Oxus basin, and later in Afghanistan, led to the defeat of the Lodi Sultans of Delhi at the battle of Panipat (1526); in this battle, Babur made use of field artillery, a measure which was considered highly unusual in the period, even though (as we have seen) artillery had been known in the broad region from at least the late fifteenth century.¹⁷ Babur's sources of artillery—which arguably did not have a decisive effect on the course of the battle, anyway—were, however, not western European but Turkish. In fact, at least a decade before Panipat, the Ottomans had shown the importance of the use of cannon against the Mamluk kingdom, and against the Safavid forces, on whom they 'wrought havoc' in the battle of Chaldiran (1514), with harquebus and cannon.¹⁸

Following this early success enjoyed by firearms, both on sea (the Portuguese naval successes being predicated in good measure on them), as well as on land, we find mention of their use through the sixteenth century. In southern India, the first conspicuous instance is the battle of Raichur (1520), between the forces of Vijayanagara and the Adil Shahi Sultanate of Bijapur. Here, a group of twenty Portuguese with *espingardas* (a term used indifferently by contemporaries for matchlock and harquebus), under the command of a certain Cristôvão de Figueiredo—a horse-trader—are known to have assisted the Vijayanagara forces by sniping at people who appeared at the ramparts of the besieged town. Further, Fernão Nunes, another Portuguese trader who has left a description of this particular engagement, notes the use on several occasions of artillery by the Adil Shahi forces, against both cavalry and elephants, and infantry. Moreover, he states that when the Vijayanagara forces captured an important Bijapuri noble, Salabat Khan, they took from him many horses and elephants, 'and four hundred heavy cannon, besides small ones; the number of gun-carriages for them was nine hundred'.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid; also Khan (1977).

¹⁸ Cf. Ayalon (1978), pp. 108-10. Parker (1987) notes that some recent literature provides a more complex vision, and cites Savory (1980) as well as Jennings (1980).

¹⁹ Nunes's account is reproduced in Lopes (1897); a slightly defective translation

Nunes's account underlines several aspects of some importance for our discussion. First, while it is evident that artillery had a certain place in southern Indian warfare by the 1520s, it was typically used in siege situations. Second, its use was seldom decisive, and the principal mode of warfare in the early sixteenth century was consequently still seen as lying in the use of heavy cavalry and elephants, supported by a mass of infantry. Third, Nunes's account underlines the close relationship between firearms and the Portuguese mercenary or renegade. As the sixteenth century wore on, the use of firearms in southern India proliferated. This process was aided by the growing presence in the region of European cannon-founders: perhaps the earliest examples of these are two Milanese, who went over from Cochin to Calicut in 1502, there to found artillery and act as bombardiers.²⁰ Moreover, Europeans also sold both cannon and lighter weapons made in Europe (or in the European enclaves in Asia) to their Asian counterparts, an instance of this being a certain trader resident in Goa called Manuel Coutinho, who in the late 1540s sold arquebuses in Bengal.²¹

This type of sale was, of course, illegal in the eyes of the Portuguese *Estado da Índia*, but was facilitated—it has been suggested—by the fact that locally manufactured firearms were of poor quality. Where Indian-made cannon are concerned, for instance, these were described even as late as the 1780s as 'cumbrous, ill-mounted and ill-served', a description not unlike that of 1525, when a Portuguese observer had declared, 'We make little mention of Moorish guns, because they are no good on our ships; however, if the metal is melted down, better guns can be cast.'²² But there can be no denying that the sheer numbers—whether locally manufactured or imported—had attained a certain dimension by the close of the sixteenth century. In the major southern Indian battle of the sixteenth century, Talikota [1565], between the Vijayanagara and Deccani armies, it is claimed by a Telugu source, *Rāmarājana Bakhair*, that the Vijayanagara armies had some 2,300 guns

of the same appears in Sewell (1962), pp. 325-9.

²⁰ Barros (1974), *Década I*, p. 84.

²¹ Letter from Rui Gonçalves de Caminha to D. João de Castro, in Sanceau (1983), pp. 555-6.

²² Cited in Parker (1987), p. 128.

of size, besides several thousand smaller guns.²³ However, while we are frequently assured that these weapons produced 'great carnage', at no point during the battle do they seem to have had a significant effect on its course. This battle—it is generally agreed—was eventually won on the basis of undercover negotiation and fomented sedition.

In the decades that followed this battle, European descriptions of warfare and fortified centres in south India continue to mention the conspicuous role of firearms. Nicolau Pimenta, a Jesuit visitor to the city of Senji, notes the presence therein (circa 1600) of 'much ordnance, powder and shot', and the same is stressed by other writers describing even *pettier forts*.²⁴ A particularly evocative image is provided by Gasparo Balbi, a Venetian resident at the Portuguese settlement of São Tomé de Meliapor (Mylapur, today a suburb of Madras) in the early 1580s. He describes a *pāleyam* (fortified centre) near São Tomé, 'which was surrounded with stockades (*muraglie*) made of adobe, with its walls and ramparts on top', and then goes on to speak of the *pālegāḍu* (chief) resident there. This man, in Balbi's words, 'when he goes out, is accompanied by many harquebusiers on foot, who go about completely naked save for their private parts and are armed with harquebuses with the cartridge belts (*caricature*) slung across their flanks'.²⁵

Firearms figure in descriptions of centres further south as well. While the only detailed European description of the fortified city of Tanjavur in the early seventeenth century mentions no firearms there,²⁶ later Jesuit sources, from the 1640s, claim that Tanjavur was possessed of 'a prodigious quantity of pieces of artillery of every calibre', including one 'big cannon, in the mouth of which a man could conveniently hold himself couchant'.²⁷

The conclusion thus seems inescapable: by the early seventeenth century, the Tamil country was abundantly supplied with firearms ranging from matchlock and harquebus, to the largest of cannon.

²³ *Rāmarājana Bakhair*, in Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya (1946), vol. III, pp. 224-5.

²⁴ 'Jesuit Observations of India', in Purchas (1905), vol. X, pp. 218-19.

²⁵ Cf. *Viaggi alle Indie Orientali di C. Federici e G. Balbi*, ed. Pinto (1962), pp. 162-3.

²⁶ See Ólafsson, in Temple and Anstey (1932), pp. 14-21, 114-19.

²⁷ Cf. Bertrand (1847-54), vol. III, pp. 44-5, cited in Satyanatha Aiyar (1956), pp. 61-2.

Indeed, as we have already remarked, their presence may be detected further north as well, in Telugu lands. A *Kaifiyat* description of an engagement in the Telugu fort of Siddhavatam in the 1580s mentions how the defender of this bastion, a certain Basavana Būya 'made ready a double-barrelled *jajāyī*' (possibly derived from the Arabic *jazā'il*, a wall-piece fired from a swivel, or a long-swivel musket) set up in the area between the outer and inner walls of the bastion, and as the (opposing) Velugōṭi army approached the fort, 'fired it at the commander who was riding in a *howdah* on an elephant'.²⁸

Dutch records, from their fortress at Pulicat, and from their factories further south on the Coromandel coast, are also emphatic on the conspicuous presence of firearms in the region, and record numerous requests from local *pālegāllu* for the loan or outright sale of cannon to them. On some occasions, the Dutch did give in, as when, on more than one occasion, they lent the well-known Baliya entrepreneur Cinanna Ceṭṭi (d. 1659) several pieces. Indeed, we should note that all the trading companies on the Coromandel coast acted in some measure as suppliers of cannon to the Nāyakas, at times with unexpected consequences. When the Danish chief at Tranquebar, Rollant Crappé, arrived there from Europe in 1624, he brought for Raghunātha Nāyaka of Tanjavur 'two new and well-polished bronze cannon, with seven figures of groups of people stamped upon them', which (so the Danes claimed), 'the King had installed in his sleeping apartment'.²⁹

These requests, like the demand for imported horses, naturally acquired a certain urgency in times of war—as, for example, during the struggle over succession at Candragiri in the early 1630s between Araviḍu Venkaṭa and his uncle Araviḍu Timma Rāya. This struggle lasted almost six years, from the death of the previous ruler Rāmadeva in 1629; by 1632, Venkaṭa had managed to make his way from Anegondi—where he was initially located—to Kancipuram, but was not allowed to take possession of Velur by Timma Rāya. Still, little by little, the former gained ground until by early 1635, his position was more or less secure; most of the major forts in the central Coromandel area were

²⁸ *Kaifiyat of Pattapuravi*, in Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya (1946), II, No. 235.

²⁹ Ólafsson, in Temple and Anstey (1932), pp. 182-3

under his control, and Timma Rāya was restricted to the region of Penugonda, and in particular to two forts, described by the Dutch as 'Carangulypaliam' (Karunguli) and 'Sanglepote' (Cengalpet). It remained however to deliver the *coup de grâce*, and this was accomplished in suitably dramatic fashion in July 1635: Timma Raya, on his way to relieve a besieged fort with a force of fifteen thousand, was ambushed by a party of harquebusiers (Dutch: *roers*) when he was marching along a road by a wood with drums and musical instruments playing; in the first volley alone, the Dutch report, six hundred men were killed, including Timma Rāya 'who was hit in the head by a ball, and fell dead to earth.'³⁰

The use of firearms as weapons used from ambush is reiterated elsewhere in the seventeenth century too, for example, in Dutch descriptions of campaigns in the Ramanathapuram region in the 1680s, between warring clans of Maravas. In late 1686, for example, Kilavan (Vijaya Raghunātha) Setupati, ruler of Ramnad, faced a rebellion in his territories, fomented by the *appanār nāṭṭu* Marava chiefs, Rāja Sūrya Tēvār and Raghuvanṇa Tēvar, with the aid of the Madurai Nāyaka and the Tonḍaimān Rāja of Pudukkottai. The Setupati himself barely escaped being assassinated in his camp by the conspirators, but later recovered and turned the tables on his opponents as the following Dutch description shows:

Around Calleacoil (Kalaiyarkoyil) is an earthen fort, which was garrisoned by about 1,500 men of the militia of Regunaden Teuver; the chief of these soldiers left a thousand musketeers in ambush in a well-placed wood, and marched off with the rest of the force in clear light of day, making it clearly known that they were abandoning the fort, and had to leave for Raman-denwaeren at the command of Regunaden Teuver. (N)ot far from this stronghold lay the troops of Raja Tondaiman, and Ragia Sourien Teuver, who quickly came to know of this retreat, and rushed headlong to take possession of the fort, but they had to pass the folk who lay in the woods, and when they opened fire tried too late to retreat, and a great number of

³⁰ ARA, OB, VOC. 1105, fls. 181-87, letter from Arent Gardenijs at Pulicat to Batavia, dated 20 October 1632; the description of Timma Rāya's death is from VOC. 1117, fls. 674-80, 'Journael gehouden bij den Gouverneur Marten Ysbrantsen', 1 July to 24 November 1635, entry for 31 July, fls. 675-75v.

people of the party opposed to the ruling Teuver were killed, and the Teuver remained master of the fort . . . ³¹

These observations, taken together with numerous references in Jesuit letters of the mid seventeenth century, suggest that the use of firearms was most common in two contexts: first, in situations of siege, and second, from ambush. In the first instance, cannon were typically used, as were mines; in the latter case, the use of smaller arms, fired in a volley, was not unknown. It is clear too that a reasonable level of competence existed in both cases, even if the obsession with size (in the case of cannon) sometimes proved counterproductive. Indeed, it stretches credulity to imagine that all seventeenth-century artillerymen in the area were as incompetent as those from Tanjavur, described in a Jesuit account from the late 1640s, who—when a few Golconda cavalry appeared on the horizon—fled ‘in a pure terror’, with even those who remained ‘firing in the air and at random without any other object than that of frightening the besiegers; but the rush handicapping their manoeuvres, the pieces, improperly loaded, did not even produce the desired explosions.’³²

In part, this spread of firearms was related to the composition of the armies in the period, and the fact—already noted above—that mercenaries were frequently employed. As early as the battle of Talikota (1565), one source claims that the Vijayanagara forces could call upon the service of some 3,000 parañgis (probably an exaggeration), and later descriptions of the Nāyaka kingdoms of Tamil Nadu confirm the presence of Portuguese mercenaries there, as noted in the Sanskrit kāvya cited above.³³ According to the Portuguese chronicler, António Bocarro, the Tanjavur court had resident in it during the 1630s a fair number of Portuguese mercenaries (who had passed there from Nagapattinam), whom the Nāyaka treated ‘with great familiarity,’ while they for their part were ‘allowed to sit down and to wear hats in his presence, and to address him merely as *Senhoria*’.³⁴ Again, in the case

³¹ Letter from Joan van Vliet and Council at Tuticorin to Laurens Pijl and Council at Colombo, 5 December 1686, ARA, OB, VOC. 1420, fls. 453v-54; also see an earlier letter, dated 19 November 1686, fls. 450v-52.

³² See the Jesuit Antão de Proença’s letter in Bertrand (1847-54), III, pp. 44-5.

³³ *Rāmarājana Bakhair*, in Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya (1946), 3:224.

³⁴ Cf. Bocarro (1938), p. 4. For a more detailed discussion of relations between

of Madurai in the 1640s, it is claimed that the Nāyaka had 'numerous foreigners' in his pay, including 'three or four hundred Turks (*Turcos*) who form his bodyguard'.³⁵

But not all of these were specialists in the use of firearms, and we must be cautious in seeing a direct equation between mercenaries and a 'military revolution'. For, in the final analysis, the foreign element had to integrate itself into the prevailing and accepted mode of warfare; otherwise, the consequences could be disastrous—as an example from eighteenth-century Mysore shows. In a Portuguese mission letter, originating from Mysore in the 1720s, a Jesuit, Joaquim Dias, describes the siege of a fort in western Mysore; those within were the Wodeyar Mysore forces, their besiegers Kodavas.

During this period, the *cafre* Jerónimo, Constable of the fort, made use of his cannonades to good effect, which being seen by the Brahmin *escrivão* (of the fort), he either felt mercy for the many people who were dying from the cannon balls, or was in reality a traitor, because he ordered the *cafre*, that he should aim his pieces higher, so that the balls would only create fear, and not harm anyone; the Constable obeyed, but the viceroy (of the fort), seeing the little effect that the cannonade now had, came rushing to meet the *cafre*, reprimanding him for not firing direct blasts. With this admonition, the Constable became totally disgusted, and throwing his diamond (ring) on the ground, began to walk out of the doors of the fort, saying, 'One says to me, don't kill, the other reprimands me, because I don't kill. I don't know whom I should obey, and so I don't want to remain here'. The viceroy would have been badly off without him, and worse still if he were to pass to the enemy. So that he ordered him restrained, but the first man who laid hands on him fell dead at his feet from a stab-wound, which the *cafre* gave him through the heart. As soon as the viceroy saw this altercation, he ordered the soldiers to attack him, and that they should cut him to pieces (? text unclear), and thus it was done, and thus ended the much-vaunted Jerónimo, or São João, as he sometimes titled himself.³⁶

Tanjavur and Nagapattinam, see Subrahmanyam (1990), ch. 4.

³⁵ Letter from Baltasar da Costa at Madurai, dated 14 October 1646, in Saulière (1964), p. 92.

³⁶ Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, Fundo Geral, Códice 178, fls. 40-51v, 'Relação das couzas succedidas neste reino de Maĩsur desde mayo de 1724 até agosto de 1725', especially fls. 42-42v.

In this instance then, caught between the one who wished to use the weapons to their full effect, and the other who did not, it was the unfortunate artilleryman who died!

But was this an isolated instance? That is, were firearms as a rule accepted into the war-machine of the Nāyaka period, and made full use of? Some ambiguity exists on this question, for—as we have seen—while mention of the use of firearms in situations of siege, or from ambush, is not uncommon, this does not translate into a general use of firearms, and in particular, harquebus and matchlock.

We are aware of instances in other societies in which the military class actually resisted the incorporation of firearms into warfare in a total sense. A classic case in point is David Ayalon's study of firearms in early sixteenth-century Mamluk Egypt: there, he had argued that the subjugation of the Mamluks by the Ottomans was decisively effected by the use of firearms by the latter.³⁷ This then brought him to the question of why the Mamluks did not adapt to the tactic of their opponents; as to this, Ayalon concludes: 'Firearms, used though they were in the Mamluk kingdom on a very large scale, yet met with total repudiation on the part of the units forming the social and military elite of that army', adding that 'the negative attitude to firearms was enormously reinforced by lack of discipline and internal dissensions, factors resulting from the peculiar structure of Mamluk society'.³⁸ We may ask ourselves to what extent we can adopt the 'Ayalon hypothesis' in the context of southern India in the early modern period. In the present state of our knowledge, the answer to this question can be by no means definitive. However, some suggestive elements are put forward here.

It has already been observed that firearms occupy a prominent and even unexpected place in literary sources of the Nāyaka period, appearing not only in hunting-scenes and descriptions of war, but in what are ostensibly erotic descriptions. All of this points to the fact that firearms exercised a certain hold over the imagination—and yet, for whom, and to what extent? Once we begin to look beyond the surface fascination, a curious ambivalence emerges. The Jesuit Proença, writing of a skirmish between Bijapur forces and those of Tanjavur, on the

³⁷ Cf. Ayalon (1978), pp. 86-111.

³⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 108-09.

outskirts of the latter city, notes the failure of the Nāyaka to use his 'strong artillery and numerous troops' to the best effect. In his quest for an adequate explanation for this, the Jesuit observes that the rājas (that is, *pāḷegāllu*) allied to Vijayarāghava 'are warriors of a very noble caste and renowned for their courage. They use only the sword and the lance; they scorn the bow and the gun, and leave, as they themselves say, these arms to cowards who dare not face danger closely'.³⁹ Is this apparent disdain for firearms among the warriors who perceived themselves as of exalted rank a product of the Jesuit imagination? We may note the close association of firearms with groups like the Bēḍas and Bōyas, who, Burton Stein points out, were largely 'forest people, hunters who had risen to chieftaincies' in the early modern period.⁴⁰ The Matla auxiliary who used the *jajāyī* to such effect at Siddhavatam in the late sixteenth century was a certain Basavana Bōya, and this may be no coincidence, even though he is identified in the text itself as of the *besta* (or fisherman) caste.

A passage from the anonymously authored early eighteenth-century text, *Taṅjāvūri āndhra rājula caritra*, proves particularly illuminating with respect to the attitudes of the warrior elite toward firearms. One of the major events described in the text is the fall of Tanjavur in 1673 to Madurai forces; in this episode, the account repeatedly mentions the use of firearms, including both small arms and cannon mounted on batteries (*mōrjālu*) on the Madurai side. After some 'ten or twenty thousand cannon balls' had been fired, the town capitulated, since 'the defenders on the ramparts could not withstand the attack (from the cannon and muskets)', and the gates gave way under the artillery fire.⁴¹ All being lost, the Tanjavur *mahal* was blown up by those within it with a great blast of gunpowder, and the Nāyaka Vijayarāghava himself and his son Mannārudeva are said to have entered the battlefield, bent on a sort of ritual suicide mission.

After describing in gory detail the death of the son at the hands

³⁹ Letter from Proença, Tiruccirappalli 1659, in Bertrand (1847-54), cited in Vriddhagirisan (1942), p. 142.

⁴⁰ Stein (1985), p. 392.

⁴¹ TARC, p. 50. See also Taylor (1835), 2:191-93 (apparently based on a slightly different version of the TARC from that published later by Vēṭūri Prabhākara Śāstri, which we cite).

of the Madurai daḷavāy Venkaṭa Krishṇappa, who dismembered and finally decapitated him, the text continues:

Seeing this, his father, greatly grieved and angry, unsheathed his sword and began to fight; he was surrounded by the daḷavāy and his forces. Vijayarāghava called out, 'You must order your men not to shoot their guns (*tupākulu*) but to fight only with swords and spears. Do you want to know why? Because if one dies from some lousy bullet shot from a distance, he fails to enter heaven (*paralokahāni*)—that is nothing like a warrior's death (*āyudhamaraṇamu*). Don't you know all this yourself?' As he said this, the daḷavāy ordered his musketeers (*tupākulavāru*) to back away and left only the swordsmen surrounding the king. The king took his sword and began hacking away at the men around him, and they fought back. Several men were cut down in this way by the king. At this, others, standing nearby, became furious and charged at the king with their swords; and Vijayarāghava, calling out, in full consciousness, 'Raṅga-nātha! Rājagopāla!', fell to earth and attained heaven.⁴²

This notion of the ideal warrior's death, which must be through hand to-hand combat at close quarters, rather than through 'some lousy bullet shot from a distance' was, we may note, not a notion peculiar to the Telugu fighter, or even to the non-European. Writing of a Portuguese attack on Dabhol (on the Indian west coast) in the early sixteenth century, the contemporary chronicler João de Barros reports that the Governor D. Francisco de Almeida—anxious to prove his chivalry and his status as *fidalgo*—made sure that 'here, everything was face to face, lance to lance, sword to sword, with neither side taking much recourse to the artillery they had'.⁴³ His logic was impeccable—for these after all were the arms with which the 'clean persons' (*gente limpa*) performed their deeds of valour.

NĀYAKA ARMIES AND THE BALANCE OF POWER

If one thing is clear from the preceding discussion, it is that warfare in the Nāyaka period cannot be reduced simply to the use of firearms: rather, both the means and the mentalities of the period require that a wider view be taken. Of the fact that Nāyaka armies could be extremely

⁴² TARC, pp. 54-5.

⁴³ Barros, *Década I*, p. 465.

large, there is no doubt. When the Dutch factor Carel Reyniersen went to visit the Candragiri ruler Rāmadeva, in October 1629, at his encampment in Tiruttani, he found him with some sixty-five thousand men. The later campaigns of the 1630s, which we have discussed in the context of the death of Araviḍu Timma Rāya, usually involved forces ranging from fifteen to twenty thousand.⁴⁴ Again, the army on the march of Tirumala Nāyaka of Madurai in the 1640s is estimated at thirty thousand; a Portuguese estimate from roughly the same period places Tanjavur forces at some fifty thousand.⁴⁵

The information available from the seventeenth century on the size of armies can hence broadly be summed up as follows.

Table: Estimates of Nāyaka-period Armies

<i>Leader</i>	<i>Size</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Source</i>
Gobbūri Jaggarāya	20,000	1614	Barradas
Velugōṭi Yācama Nāyaka	16,000	1615	Barradas
Gobbūri Jaggarāya	60,000	1615	Barradas
Araviḍu Rāmadeva/ Tañjāvūr / Velugōṭi	100,000	1617 (Toppur)	Barradas
Gobbūri/Madurai/Senji	100,000	1617 (Toppur)	Barradas
Araviḍu Rāmadeva	65,000	1629	Dutch
Araviḍu Timma Rāya	15-20,000	1634	Dutch
Tañjāvūr Nāyaka	40-50,000	1630s	Bocarro
Araviḍu Veṅkaṭa	100,000	1630s	Bocarro
Madurai Nāyaka	100,000	1646	Da Costa
Tañjāvūr Nāyaka	40,000	1656	Proença
Marava Setupati	25,000	1656	Proença
Madurai Nāyaka	40,000	1662	Proença

SOURCE: For Bocarro's account see note 34 above; for the letters of Da Costa and Proença, see Saulière (1966), pp. 89-105, 163-80; and Saulière (1966a), pp. 777-88. For Barradas' estimates, see Sewell (1900), pp. 222-30. Finally, for comparisons with the size of north Indian armies in the period, Kolff (1990), pp. 21-5.

⁴⁴ ARA, OB, VOC. 1100, fls. 77-77v, 'Annotatie vant gepasseerde bij den Coninck deeser plaetsen Carnatica int versoecken van syn caul', October 1629; also see the reference in note 30 *supra*, on Araviḍu Timma Rāya.

⁴⁵ Saulière (1964), p. 95.

The bulk of these forces were made up, needless to add, of infantry, and one cannot see them as anything other than poorly-armed peasant-warriors for the most part. Cavalry contingents are harder to estimate, for none of the Nāyakas truly had a standing army worth speaking of, and European estimates—even impressionistic ones—are hard to come by. However, since the Bijapuri cavalry in the late 1640s, which numbered some seventeen thousand, was sufficient to carry all before it, we may gather some impression of the order of magnitude of cavalry that each of the Nāyakas could muster.⁴⁶ An examination of the extant descriptions of wars and campaigns in the period suggests that three elements played a crucial role in determining the course of military engagements. The first was the intelligent use of terrain, for the victors in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century wars in peninsular India were often those who—like the Maravas, Kallars and Koḍavas—practised what we today would term guerrilla tactics. A second aspect of importance is the role played by sedition and negotiation, particularly in the context of fortified positions which were in fact impregnable in a purely military sense. Related to this is the issue of the control of the fortified, central place, as distinct from the control of the ‘field’ (Portuguese: *campo*) or countryside, from which revenues were drawn. The third element that we must consider—particularly on the Coromandel plain—is that of mobility, and it is here that cavalry played such a crucial role.

But it is the first of these that draws our attention to the wider geo-political context; and here the frontier between Tanjavur and the Marava country provides us with particularly crucial examples. Both during the period of the Nāyakas, and later—during the rule at Tanjavur of the Marāṭhā dynasty—combating the Marava Setupatis proved a major problem for their northern neighbours. Indeed, we will see in a later chapter that the Maravar connection helps explain, to no small degree, the final collapse of the Nāyaka state of Tanjavur.⁴⁷ There is a general issue here relating to the role of the smaller, more peripheral political entities—such as Ramnad and the Kallar rājas of Pudukkottai—in the wider Nāyaka state-system, in particular in terms of the

⁴⁶ Letter from Antão de Proença, 20 September 1656, in Saulière (1966), p. 167.

⁴⁷ See VIII.1 below.

balance of power. Foreign observers were well aware of the crucial role played by these mini-states: thus Proença writes in 1656 of the Marava Setupati as 'the chief of a warlike race which has been so emboldened by its successes that even now it is to be reckoned with by European powers'.⁴⁸ If at times the Maravar allied themselves with the Madurai Nāyakas (as during the campaign against Mysore in 1655-6), on other occasions—and this is the more prevalent pattern—they were a thorn in the flesh of the Madurai and Tanjavur rulers. Where Kallar power was concerned, the Madurai kingdom provides us with numerous instances of its potentially destabilizing character. At a literary level, works such as the well-known *Maturaivīracuvāmikatai*—the hero of which is hired by Tirumala Nāyaka of Madurai to protect the market-place of his capital-town from the Kallars—confirm what we know from contemporary Jesuit sources, which speak of sometimes devastating Kallar raids in the 1650s and 1660s on Madurai, Tanjavur and Tiruccirappalli.⁴⁹ Much of this apparent anarchy can be explained in terms of a sort of 'internal frontier' which existed in the Nāyaka political universe: the Kallars, Maravas and other groups which laid claim to *kāval* dues (a term that appears in contemporary Portuguese as *vigia* and in Dutch as *visie*), inhabited the interstices of the Nāyaka system, and were hence 'co-sharers of the realm'—to use a phrase current in eighteenth-century Maratha history.⁵⁰ The Nāyaka periphery merits attention in its own right (see chapter VII); at this point we simply note that by the second half of the seventeenth century, a complex and delicate skein of alliances held the tattered system together, and that the smaller units from the middle levels were, in many ways, key elements in this equation, primarily as factors of dangerous disruption.

TOWARDS THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Warfare in the Nāyaka period can therefore be seen as representing a moment of transition, with new elements entering the system, but still

⁴⁸ Saulière (1966), p. 171.

⁴⁹ For the *Maturaivīraṇ* story, see Shulman (1980a); cf. also the Jesuit accounts cited in the preceding notes.

⁵⁰ Cf. Wink (1986).

imperfectly incorporated within it. Many of the features that have been seen as characteristic of eighteenth-century warfare in peninsular India can be found, moreover, in embryonic form in this epoch: the use of firearms, the shift toward a higher proportion of cavalry to infantry, the use of mercenaries, and so on. But, as we have seen, we should not be too sanguine in assuming that the desired transitions in the modes of conducting war took place painlessly, or without complex adjustments, both at the level of logistics and of mental structures. In the final analysis, Nāyaka warfare remained largely infantry-based, and took two basic forms. One centred around the relative strengths of those who controlled massively-fortified central places as compared to those who held control of trade routes and agrarian surplus, and it was in this respect that the forces of Bijapur and Golconda—with their greater use of cavalry—eventually overwhelmed the Nāyakas. The other form involved the tactical use of terrain, forest cover, and ambush—and here groups like the Kallars and Maravas remained masters well into the eighteenth century.

How does this compare with eighteenth-century warfare in the same area? Historians of the eighteenth century have frequently posited that warfare destroyed the economy of Tamil Nadu in the period, and this would suggest a contrast with the earlier two centuries—when the sheer numerical frequency of ‘campaigns’ bore no real relationship to the effects that these had on production, trade or welfare.⁵¹ An examination of the history of the Maratha dynasty at Tanjavur suggests that warfare in the region continued until the mid-eighteenth century to exhibit many of the characteristics of the Nāyaka period—with armies, if anything, being smaller in size than before. The Tanjavur Rāja Pratāpasimha commanded a force of some eight thousand horse, and perhaps twice that number of infantry, and these were notoriously unreliable; in one of his letters of 1753, this ruler complains that the Wodeyars were attempting to ‘debauch the people in my service with an offer of rewards’, and adds ruefully that his troops refuse to ‘cross Coladam River and go to fight [as] they must at

⁵¹ For such views of the eighteenth century, see Arasaratnam (1986); Rajayyan (1966). For the most important recent consideration, which distinguishes in this respect between the later and earlier eighteenth century, see Lardinois (1989).

least be paid their balance'.⁵² The desire to avoid disturbing the revenue-economy in the course of war is testified to in turn by a curious letter from Murāri Rāo Ghorpaḍe, a Marāṭhā war-leader, to Pratāpasimha, in the same year, in which he writes:

You declared yourself an Enemy to Hadayet Mohayedeen Cawn alias Muzepher Jung on account of Mahomedally Cawn and lost everything you had, you suffered your country to be ruined, a Peta belonging to your Fort was plundered which ruined a great many Merchants, what have you gained from all those Losses'?⁵³

All this was to change, however, in the late eighteenth century, when warfare became far more ferocious, and aimed at damaging the economic machine of the opponent (rather than merely taking it over, as with the Madurai Nāyakas and Marava Setupatis in their attacks on Tanjavur during the 1670s). In their campaigns of the 1780s, the English Company and the Mysore rulers attacked the irrigation system, deported men and cattle in large numbers, and set a new standard for the conduct of war in the area. If we *must* seek a 'military revolution' in the history of peninsular Indian warfare, it is probably more appropriate to locate it in this later period than in the epoch of the Nāyakas. For all the fascination with technological innovation so evident in the literary sources, and despite the sense of a very real expansion in means and knowledge, the very slowness and unevenness of the transformation under the Nāyakas and their successors suggest that changes in the art of war in this period cannot easily be accommodated to the dramatic framework of a 'revolutionary' shift.

⁵² Pratāpasimha to Fort St. George, letter received 5 March 1753, in Records of Fort St. George, *Country Correspondence (1753)*, Madras 1911, pp. 24-5.

⁵³ Letter from Murāri Rāo Ghorpaḍe to Pratāpasimha (1753), *ibid.*, p. 54.

VII

On the Periphery: State Formation and Deformation

1. THE NORTH: YĀCAMA NĀYAKA AND THE VELUGŌṬI LINE

So far we have concentrated on the three major Nāyaka states of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—Tanjavur, Madurai, and Senji. We have tried to distinguish roughly between them, stressing Tanjavur's continuities and relative stability, the mixed economy and expansiveness of Madurai, and Senji's somewhat anomalous status at the northern fringe. But we have also seen that the smaller-scale Nāyaka polities were significant elements in the power-equation of the period. These little states, and the Nāyaka periphery generally, present us with their own peculiar lessons for the problems of state-formation. In the far south we find, in the Setupati kingdom of Ramnad, a Nāyaka success-story—a kingdom structured in large part around a surprising combination of predatory raiding and overseas trade, and that survived more or less intact long after the central Nāyaka states had disappeared. To the north, we have a striking Nāyaka failure: the Telugu Velugōṭi lineage, one of the most ambitious and prominent in the map of early seventeenth-century northern Tamil Nadu, did not succeed in carving out a state in the shatter-zone between the Tamil heartland and the Telugu warrior-arena of Rāyalasīma. In both cases we need to ask ourselves why. Both cases, moreover, offer insights into the operation of fundamental political processes of this period, on the

ground, at a stage *before* they acquired the overlay of a formal courtly ideology and projected self-vision, as we find in the bulk of sources from Madurai and Tanjavur. In each of the two cases, we focus on an individual, whose career may be said to encapsulate and symbolize these processes, and who stands out clearly from the mass of both literary and non-literary materials.

For the northern periphery, this figure is the 'kingmaker' Yācama Nāyaka, one of the most heroic and positively depicted of all the famous names of this period. His biography spans a crucial stage of decline in the Vijayanagara state-system—a moment when the spoils of land and power seemed open to contest all over the southern Deccan and northern Tamilnadu. We can observe, through his story, both the dynamics of state-deformation at the level of the barely surviving 'imperial' centre and the attempts to consolidate proto-Nāyaka political formations at the periphery. A peculiar course of development, contextualized by the political and military realities of the time, slowly disengages itself from the wealth of detail preserved in works by Yācama's bards and family panegyrists. We will not rehearse these details here at any length; the reader is referred to another, more technical study.¹ The following pages aim at presenting an outline of the historical sequence in the light of the major themes that have emerged in earlier chapters. To do this, we need first to sketch in the background to the decades of Araviḍu rule from Candragiri and Velur, and, second, to study the context of family and lineage in which Yācama was born.

Vijayanagara after the Fall

The loss of the imperial capital following the battle of Talikota (1565) was only part of a far-reaching transformation of the Vijayanagara political structure. The last third of the sixteenth century saw the completion of dynastic change: the Araviḍu family, itself of Telugu origin, now ruled from bases in the southern Telugu country, first Penugonda and then, from about 1592, Candragiri in the Tirupati hills. This shift is expressive of a general geographical re-configuration and

¹ See Shulman and Subrahmanyam (1990).

of the progressive loss of control over territory; what was left of the Vijayanagara system was now concentrated in the eastern and southern Deccan and in the Tamil region. This area—especially southern Andhra and northern Tamilnadu—was the true frontier for expansion during the reign of Veṅkaṭapatirāya (1586-1614), the last great figure of his line. Other erstwhile portions of the empire were gradually relinquished. Thus, much of the western Deccan was abandoned to the rising Wodeyar power in Mysore, while the north-east was blocked by the increasingly aggressive Quṭub Shāhi state at Golconda. Between this Muslim polity and Penugonda, an open frontier was established, where various pāḷegāḍu lineages were seemingly left to fend for themselves—some accepting Quṭub Shahi sovereignty, others remaining linked to the Aravīḍu rulers. During the 1580s and 1590s, the area between the Penneru and Krishna rivers was nevertheless contested in a series of campaigns; after initial losses to the Golconda forces, Veṅkaṭapati managed to recover control over most of this area, in part with the help of the young Tanjavur ruler, Raghunātha Nāyaka.

Also conspicuous in these campaigns was a broad and somewhat diffuse alliance of various Telugu warrior-lineages, including the Maṭṭa and Velugōṭi lines. In addition to being allies of the Aravīḍu overlords, these warrior families were frequently at odds with one another. We find them fighting both the Muslim armies, and each other, in a nearly continuous series of fairly small-scale battles throughout the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, mostly in Teleṅgāna and Rāyalasīma. This is a period, and a region, of local heroics, of fluid political arrangements and shifting fortunes, with the Aravīḍu line reduced to little more than yet another, perhaps particularly prestigious combatant, largely dependent on its unruly and self-interested subordinates. For all intents and purposes, Candragiri at the turn of the seventeenth century was just another Nāyaka court. For obvious reasons, it sometimes stood to benefit from internecine conflict on the level of its supporters, and hence used its patronage to calculated effect. Thus we see Veṅkaṭapati favouring the Maṭṭa clan against the Velugōṭi warriors in a struggle for control of the region around Sidhvatam, as a result of which the Velugōṭi lineage was eventually displaced southwards into the Tamil country (Madurantakam). Such

movements carried forward the uneven process of expansion, in effect sub-contracted by the Aravīḍu rulers to their allies, with whom they were often related by descent or marriage; usually, at the end of a campaign the Aravīḍu overlord was forced to relinquish effective control over large areas to these very allies, maintaining at best a tributary relation with them. By the close of the sixteenth century, the active centre of this process had shifted southwards to the region between Candragiri and the Kollidam River (thus inevitably pitting Candragiri against the still vigorous Nāyaka state of Senji, in theory an Aravīḍu subordinate). It is here that we find the footloose, militarily powerful Velugōṭi lineage and their conspicuous leader, Velugōṭi Yācama Nāyuḍu, intent on winning for themselves a kingdom.

The Velugōṭi Myth of Origins

Just who were these people? We are lucky in having a genealogical text from this period, the diffuse collection known as *Velugōṭivāri vaṃśāvali*—really a rough compendium of Telugu verses, many of the so-called *biruda-kāvya* type of panegyric, composed over some generations by the family's bards. This text begins, in its present form, with two versions of the family's origin, which bear comparison with other Nāyaka origin-myths discussed above. Both versions speak of Cevvi Reḍḍi, a farmer from Anumanugallu in the northern Deccan, as the founder of the Velugōṭi line. This Reḍḍi was ploughing one day with the help of his Untouchable (*pañcama*) servant Rēca, when the edge of the plough struck a rock and brought a buried treasure to light. A voice from heaven announced that this treasure of nine lakhs would belong to its finder only if he offered a human sacrifice (*narabali*). Cevvi Reḍḍi was dismayed—he had, he said, only himself, his wife, and his son—but Rēca volunteered to undergo the sacrifice for his master, on two conditions: that the Reḍḍi *gotra* be renamed Rēcarla after him, and that whenever someone was to be married in the Reḍḍi family, the Reḍḍis would first perform a wedding for one of the Untouchables. The farmer accepted both these conditions, sacrificed his devoted servant, and got the treasure.

Another version of the same story says that Rēcigāḍu, the Untouchable servant, turned up a copper plate with his plough in a field

protected by Bhairava. He took it to his master, Cevvi Redḍi, who deciphered it: 'O Bhairava, give the nine lakhs to whoever sacrifices to you.' As soon as he heard these words, the servant volunteered to undergo the sacrifice; he asked only that the Redḍis would receive sandal-paste and akshatas from the Untouchable houses each time a ritual took place, and that the name [R]Ēca would pass on in the Redḍi family. Cevvi Redḍi gave his promise, sacrificed the servant, and founded a village named Rēcarla.²

There is also a sequel to this tale: On his way home one night, after dark, during the monsoon, Cevvi Redḍi took shelter under a banyan tree haunted by a Vetāla-demon. When the Vetāla tried to frighten him, the Redḍi stood his ground, unafraid, armed with a wooden stick. Pleased by his courage, the demon embraced him and said, 'If you take my name, you will have regal power (*aiśvaryambu*) for 7000 years.' The villagers heard of this feat, and soon news of it reached even the Kākatīya king Gaṇapati, who summoned the Redḍi, conferred a kingdom on him, gave him other gifts and insignia, and renamed him Pillalamarri Bētāla Rāvu ('lord of the demon from the banyan tree'). Some say that the Redḍi hero asked the Vetāla to walk before the Redḍis whenever they went to battle; the demon promised that his arrival would always give the Redḍis courage.³

All of this, as the Velugōṭi bards make clear in verses that conclude the various pieces of the narration, is meant to explain Cevvi Redḍi's rise to a kind of kingship—he is the overlord of Recarlapura, worshipped even by the Kākatīya kings, his fame (*kīrti*) extending to the moon and the stars⁴—and similarly to sustain, as a result of this, his Velugōṭi-Velama descendants' regal claims and pretensions. And, indeed, these episodes speak eloquently of a certain vision of power that suits the reality of later Velugōṭi history. One notices first, perhaps, the binding connection that the stories establish between the Redḍi farmer and his Untouchable servant, a connection strengthened and persistently reiterated in family ritual. As G. D. Sontheimer aptly remarks apropos of this narrative, 'the existence and practice of values

² Both stories in *Velugōṭivāri vamsāvali*, pp. 1-2, 5-6.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7, v. 10.

of faithfulness and bravery may elevate the devotee or hero while transferring something of his own lowliness to his god or lord.⁵ The lowly Rēca is the true, exemplary hero, prepared to sacrifice himself in order to enrich his master; and this value of ultimate loyalty and service remains part of the clan's ideal, acted out in the Nāyaka context of personal ties between overlord and subordinate. It is striking that the ideal emerges originally from the Untouchable figure, who has to live it out by undergoing an act of violence.

This sacrificial scene, with its ethical overlay of notions of extreme personal loyalty, is also part of a wider ideology centring on possession of land. The Redḍis of this text are a 'right-hand' caste tied to the land, which they are committed to defending by force; their ethos is martial and heroic, like that of other right-hand groups, such as we meet, for example, in Telugu folk-epic (e.g., the *Palnāṭi virula katha*).⁶ 'Martial' epics of this type centre on male warriors whose main source of power is physical strength, and who exert this strength in conflict over control of territory.⁷ The Velugōṭi materials fit this category completely: we are dealing with a warrior lineage equipped with purely heroic ideals (somewhat anachronistically brought into play in the context of seventeenth-century regional politics). Though displaced southward, they remain eager to fix themselves on the ground by carving out a territory to defend—as opposed, for example, to the much more mobile and flexible, though still martial, Balijas.⁸ This intimate connection to the land pervades the Velugōṭi myth of origins: Cevvi Redḍi is a farmer who offers blood to the divinity resident in his field, in order to gain possession of treasure located there, in the earth he works; he also establishes his prowess in relation to a no less localized demon-spirit, the Vetāla in the banyan tree. This identification with chthonic, local forces gives him his title and his fame.

It is, nonetheless, of interest that the Velugōṭi family begins its history with the discovery of treasure, the fluid wealth that we have seen to be so crucial to Nāyaka perceptions of power. By this time, even

⁵ Sontheimer (1989), p. 313.

⁶ See Roghair (1982).

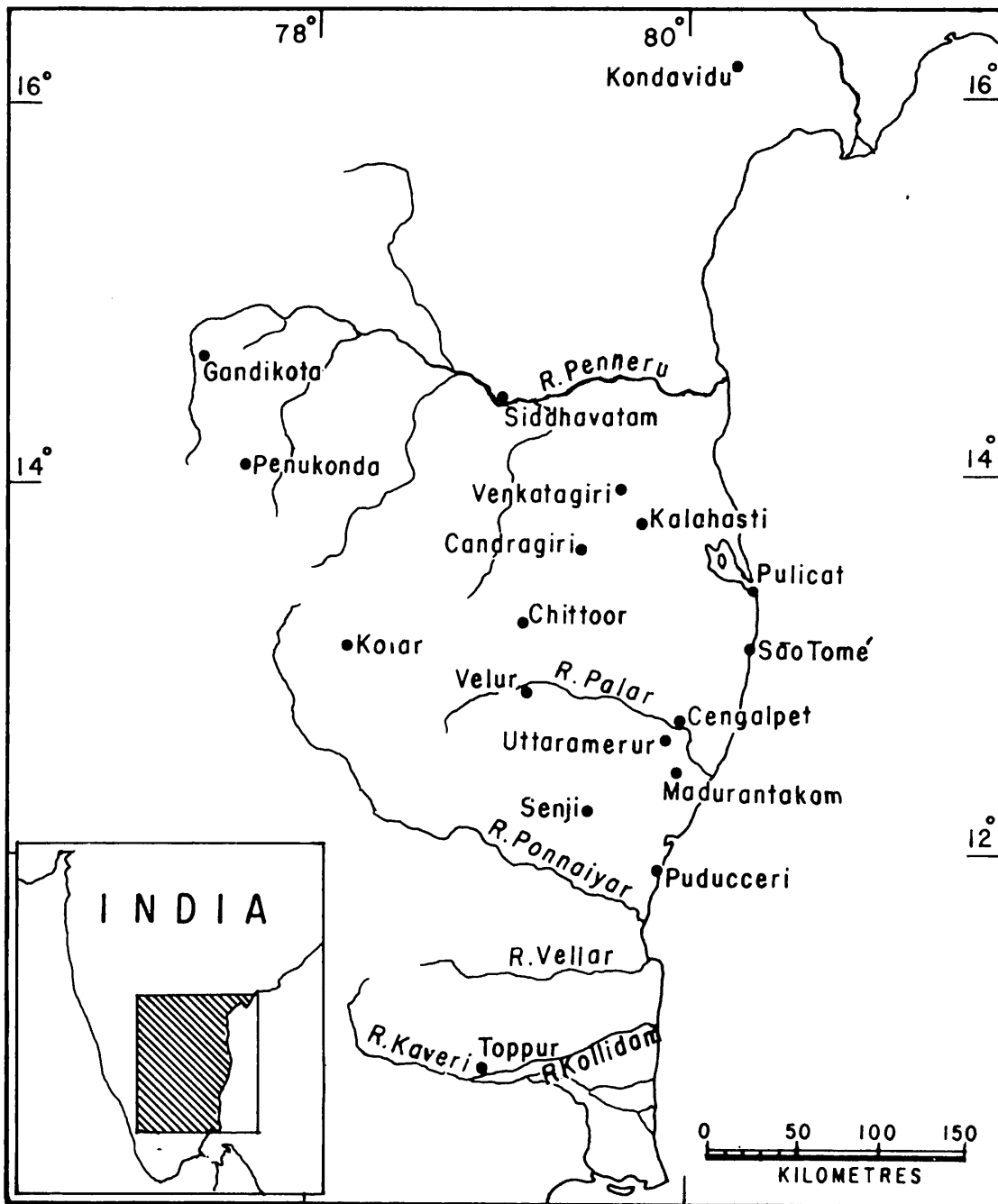
⁷ Narayana Rao (1986), p. 140.

⁸ There is also a Balija story of Untouchable sacrifice in service to the overlords: Thurston (1909), 1:139.

right-hand warrior-farmers are not immune to the need for disposable and movable forms of wealth. Stated more abstractly, the stories point to the interaction of a landed, warrior ethos with a social context of considerable flux activated by fluid resources and non-ascriptive criteria for power. We also observe that for the Velugōṭi bards, the long-dead Kākatīyas were a more salient and useful symbolic support than their contemporary Aravīḍu overlords: it is Gaṇapatideva (not a Vijayanagara predecessor of the Aravīḍu kings!) who propels this line into prominence, thereby supplying the necessary source of vertical authority. We may recall Nāgama Nāyaka's adventures in the far south, and the role played by Krishṇadevarāya in *that* tale of origins. But the most palpable contrast surely lies with the origin-myth of the Tanjavur Nāyakas, who claimed high status by virtue of intermarrying with the Vijayanagara royal family—a marriage arranged by these Nāyakas' founding figure, the famous Brahmin minister and guru Govinda Dīkshita, who fills the pages of the early Tanjavur courtly poems. The Velugōṭi stories have nothing to say about Brahmin power-brokers, nor do they seek an imperial legitimacy of the Tanjavur type, with its temples (Mannarkuti), gurus, Sanskrit poets, and proper imperial umbrella. Rather, their claims to power arise out of a story of legitimating violence, heroic mastery, personal devotion, and landed resources. This is a very different assortment of values, which played a distinctive role in moulding the Velugōṭi career in the Tamil land.

Yācama Nāyaka at the Battle of Uttaramerur

It is time to introduce Yācama, the real hero of this section. He comes to the fore in the second stage of the Velugōṭi historical sequence mentioned earlier. In the first stage, after a long period of warfare in the central Deccan, the Velugōṭi family were displaced—largely by the Maṭṭa clan, as we have seen—to the northern fringes of the Tamil country. Even in this early period, Yācama, the son of Kastūri Raṅgappa, distinguished himself in various battles (at Gandikota, Gutti, and Kandनावolu). But he truly comes into his own in 1601 in a battle at Uttaramerur (Uttaramallur in the Telugu texts) which is seen by the poets as one of the two major events of his life. The background to this battle involves the gift to the Velugōṭi line, by Aravīḍu Venkaṭapati,



Map III: The World of Yācama Nāyaka

of the Perimeṭi-*sīma*, a region including Cengalpet and Velur which Yācama proceeded to take over by force (note that the overlord's gift still requires an act of violent physical appropriation on the ground);⁹ he established a *pāleyam* at Madurantakam and then took possession of the fort at Uttamerur. The emperor's intention was clearly to kill two birds with one stone—first, to settle the Velugōṭi clan in new lands, in place of their former homes around Velugodu; second, to strike a blow against Liṅgama Nāyaka of Velur, and thus implicitly against the Senji Nāyaka as well. Here again we see Venkaṭapati resorting to a classic tactic for expansion on the frontier, by granting to Yācama what was in a sense not his to give.

And, indeed, Liṅgama at Velur responded with the predictable attempt to forestall the Velugōṭi warriors by creating an alliance of *pālegāllu* led by a certain Āraḍi Nāgama Nāyuḍu and, in particular, the latter's brother-in-law, a famous warrior called Dāvāla Pāpa Nāyuḍu. This Dāvāla Pāpayya brought horses and elephants from Senji and Tanjavur and assembled an army of some 30,000 foot-soldiers, with 10,000 bowmen and 12,000 muskets (*tupākipauju*). By contrast, Yācama's army numbered only 12,000 foot-soldiers, of whom only 2,000 actually participated in the decisive attack, if we are to believe the bards. The engagement is described in gory detail by these poets, in the melodramatic tradition of the Telugu folk-epic. They tell us that the arrogant Dāvāla Pāpa, eager for battle, was warned by two of his own allies not to take on Yācama:

To survive a battle against Yēcama Nēḍu is no light matter,
O Dāvāla Pāpi Nēḍu.

You have raised an army; now the most illustrious course
would be to turn back, O Dāvāla Pāpi Nēḍu;
no matter how great our forces, to face him in battle is,
upon reflection, impossible;
to attack him is like holding the Doomsday fire in your palm,
or like bearding a tiger in his lair,
like a ram battering against a mountain,
like waking a noble lion from his sleep . . .

⁹ Thus in the most complete account, gathered from Velugōṭi sources, in *Cāṭupadyamaṇimaṅjari*, p. 86. The territory granted to the Velugōṭi warriors is sometimes referred to as Perumbedu-*sīma*.

What is the use of so many words? The best course is
to make peace now, O Dāvāla Pāpi Nēdu.

This excellent advice was, of course, ignored; in May 1601, Yācama attacked together with his brother Siṅgajananātha, as his bards (*van-dimāgadhajana*) sang praises and Brahmins uttered blessings.

Heedless of the showering arrows and the bullets, untroubled by the trumpeting of the elephants or the clouds of dust raised by the horses' hooves, unafraid, never retreating . . . he fell upon the enemy like the hurricane that destroys the world at the end of days, like a conflagration in the wilderness . . .

There follows, in the bardic text, a long list of the enemy fighters whom Yācama crushed, decapitated, hacked to pieces, disembowelled, pulverized, pierced, or otherwise dispatched, and another list of severed body parts—heads, torsos, noses, arms, feet, fingers, thighs, necks, eyes, etc. etc.—littering the field of battle. Dāvāla Pāpa was himself slain, and his few surviving allies—those who were not captured¹⁰—fled the field; some took refuge in forests, where they fed upon wild grasses; others, in their terror, hid inside anthills. The many wounded were stricken with the wisdom of hindsight: 'If Dāvāla Pāpayya wanted to fight Yācama, why did he have to get *us* mixed up in it? Why did he collect all these armies, and why did we accept his offer? Could *we* overcome King Yāca? It will be worse if we go forward; turn back now!'¹¹

By the end of the fighting, Yācama's triumph was complete; Veṅkaṭapatirāya, the Araviḍu overlord, is said to have rejoiced in his feat and to have bestowed new lands and other precious gifts on the victor, endowed with 'unparalleled prowess, fortitude, dignity, and lordship over his kin'.¹² The victory had further implications of a political nature: Veṅkaṭapati now pressed hard to exercise increased dominance over the Nāyakas of the south; Liṅgamma was again defeated (this time at Minnal), and Velur itself eventually taken by Dāmarla Cenna (one of Yācama's erstwhile enemies at Uttaramerur,

¹⁰ Such as Dāmarla Cenna, later a major ally of the Velugōṭi line.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90, 91, 103.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 94.

who shifted sides). As the Aravīḍu emperor achieved control over both Velur and Candragiri as well as the coastal areas around the ports of São Tomé and Pulicat, the Velugōṭi lineage jostled for power on the southern fringes of this region, in an uneasy struggle with Muttu Krishṇappa Nāyaka of Senji. Yācama himself was now the Velugōṭi equivalent of a king, as his bards made clear in extravagant poems of praise:

He sat on the glorious Rēcerla throne.
 He was incomparable in the power of his arms,
 protector of all who sought refuge with him,
 committed to compassion.
 In his country, all enemies had been scattered;
 he was lordly as Bharata, Ranti, Suhotra, Bhārgava,
 Nābhāga, Rāma, Ambarīsha, and other kings;
 his horses turned the ocean to mud with dust kicked up
 by their flying hooves;
 the whole earth was perfumed by the camphor of his
 shimmering fame.¹³

Yācama as kingmaker: The struggle for succession and Toppur

But Yācama's most famous achievement was yet to come. In October 1614, the ailing Veṅkaṭapati died, and a struggle for power ensued between two factions: one led by Jaggarāya of the Gobbūri family, a brother-in-law of the late king, and the other by Yācama and the Velugōṭi warriors. The story has been told in suitably lurid tones by both the Tanjavur kāvya-poets and by the Portuguese contemporary witness Barradas:¹⁴ Gobbūri Jaggarāya is said to have captured the newly crowned king Śrīraṅga, Veṅkaṭapati's nephew, and to have put forward in his place the claims of an alleged son of Veṅkaṭapati's Gobbūri wife Bayamma; Yācama, heading a loyalist party, managed to smuggle out of the fortress-prison (with the help of a washerman) one of Śrīraṅga's sons, the young prince Rāmadeva. An attempt to free Śrīraṅga himself, by way of an underground escape-tunnel dug by

¹³ Ibid., pp. 94-5.

¹⁴ The latter reproduced in Sewell (1900), pp. 222-31; for a summary of the succession conflict, see Vriddhagirisān (1942), pp. 82-90.

Yācama's men, was foiled at the last moment; Jaggarāya then cruelly murdered Śrīraṅga and the rest of his family. A protracted campaign followed, ranging over the southern Andhra region and large parts of coastal Tamil Nadu.¹⁵ Initially, Yācama could bring to bear only the military power of his own Velugōṭi clan and of the Dāmarla chiefs (one of whom, Cennappa, had married Yācama's sister); however, at a crucial point he was joined by Maṭṭa Tiruveṅṅalanātha, who deserted the Gobbūri camp.¹⁶ The struggle ramified and expanded to include all three of the major Tamil Nāyaka kingdoms: Raghunatha Nāyaka of Tanjavur joined the Velugōṭi 'loyalists,' while both the Senji and Madurai Nāyakas allied themselves with the 'traitor' Jaggarāya.

By December 1616 both sides had assembled large armies— according to Barradas, numbering as many as a million soldiers¹⁷— at Toppur on the northern bank of the Kāverī, in the region of Tiruccirappalli. The battle that took place there in late 1616 or early 1617 tends to be regarded as one of the most striking in Nāyaka-period history, and certainly as the culmination of Yācama Nāyaka's own career. Gobbūri Jaggarāya was killed, as were many of his allies; in the aftermath of the battle, Yācama consolidated his gains by carving himself a large slice of Senji territory, while Raghunātha Nāyaka formally crowned Rāmadeva king.¹⁸ Both the Tanjavur poets and the Velugōṭi bards bring to their portrayals of this campaign the idiom of loyalty and devoted service to the rightful sovereign (while Jaggarāya is seen as an evil *svāmīdrohi*, a betrayer). Thus the coronation of Rāmadeva in the wake of the Velugōṭi-Tanjavur victory becomes a restoration of proper order, including the reaffirmation of vertical hierarchy between the Aravīḍu overlords and their Nāyaka subordinates. The two parties of poets do, however, reverse the roles of the major heroes: for the Tanjavur *kavis*, Toppur was Raghunātha's triumph, with Yācama cast as a useful auxiliary; while the internal Velugōṭi sources claim that all

¹⁵ Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya (1946), 1:330-2; 3:294-6. See also the Dutch account in ARA, OB, VOC. 1059, fls. 64- 64v.

¹⁶ Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya (1946), 1:350-1; Krishnaswami (1964), pp. 327-8.

¹⁷ Barradas, in Sewell (1900), p. 230.

¹⁸ See discussion above, V.2 at note 44, with reference to the concomitant founding of the Rāmasvāmi temple at Kumpakonam.

of Tanjavur's power served Yācama, and that it was the latter who crowned Rāmadeva.¹⁹ Here is an example of this Velugōṭi panegyric addressed to Yācama:

The day Gobbūri Jaggarāya drove the daḷavāy crazy and took over his office; the day he cut down Īṭe Aubaleśuḍu in the fortress at Velur; the day he appropriated for himself the Rāya's rich treasury; the day he remorselessly ordered the Rāya slain, together with his sons, friends, and wives—
already on that day he perished at your hands, even though he managed to go on breathing for two more years, by running away,

O Rangaya Yēca Bhūpa, of graceful deeds, you who have purified the Velugōṭi family, wise in thought and word.²⁰

Moreover, Yācama's heroics are clearly seen as leading to the Velugōṭi clan's signal expansion; the seventeenth-century poet Pasumarti Kōdaṇḍapati goes so far as to declare that Yāca 'made the land to the east of Velur between the Krishna and the Kaveri Rivers into a Velama land'.²¹ Other contemporary poets claim that following on Toppur 'the entire Rēcerla line is established in splendour; the descendants of Sarvajña Siṅgama Nēḍu are honoured; the Velamas have rid their hearts of sorrow.' Yācama, that 'lion of a king who, from the time of his youth, accomplished brilliant deeds of violence', is said to have ruled the earth and protected his subjects 'as in the righteous rule of Rama' (*śrīrāmarājyambugan*).²²

Dispersal and decline

It is not a little ironic, then, that events after Toppur almost wholly reversed the earlier trend. We have outlined, very schematically, the early phases of the Velugōṭi rise to power: the move south to northern Tamil Nadu as a result of conflict with the competing Maṭla lineage; the early period of expansion and consolidation, symbolically focused on the battle of Uttaramerur; the crystallization of this process in the struggle against the Gobbūri rivals, which left the Velugōṭi kingmaker

¹⁹ See the two *sīsa* verses on p. 109 (bottom) and p. 110 (top) in *Cāṭupadya-manīmañjari*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 108 (a verse commissioned by Yācama's son).

at the height of his success, a proto-king ruling, 'like Rāma', over a Velama-dominated landscape. The heroic rhetoric of the Velugōṭi bards, calling until this point on the tradition of sanguinary folk-epic, seems on the verge of breaking into the more controlled and idealized courtly idiom. And yet it never quite crosses this gap. Yācama is never really, like his ally Raghunātha, a Rāma reborn, capable of bearing the entire burden of the semi-divine avatar-king. He is simply not that kind of king, nor do the Velugōṭi warriors constitute alone a sufficient basis for real statehood, despite the evident drift in that direction. If one follows the fortunes of the Velugōṭi clan from the late 1580s, from their earliest conflicts with the Maṭṭa chiefs and campaigns against the Quṭub Shāhi forces, to the evolution of their status in the northern Tamil country, the process seems clearly to be one of forming a proto-Nāyaka state. Logically, by this sequence, Toppur should have been followed by one of two eventualities: either the displacement of the defeated Senji line by the Velugōṭi chiefs, or the creation in the area between Candragiri and Senji of a new Nāyaka kingdom controlled by the Velugōṭi clan. Yet neither of these two possibilities was realized; instead, Yācama and his lineage slid slowly into obscurity.

The Velugōṭi family did achieve control, initially, over several important pāḷeyams: Velugōṭi Timma, Yācama's cousin, held the region around Durgarazupatnam, and was moving to include the island of Sriharikota in his domains; Velugōṭi Siṅgama, Yācama's brother, held Cengalpet. Further south, Velugōṭi Kastūri Raṅgappa, son of Yācama, was in possession of several major pāḷeyams around Puducceri.²³ Yet all of this added up, in the final analysis, to very little. What is more striking, and quite contrary to our expectations, following Toppur the Gobbūri family managed to reassert itself; Gobbūri Eṭirāju, brother of the slain Jaggarāya, even married his daughter to the new king Rāmadeva.²⁴ This reversal is typical of the shifting alliances of this period and is hard to explain if one takes too seriously the contemporary portrayal of Jaggarāya as a latter-day, treacherous Duryodhana. Indeed, this set of images, so assiduously cultivated by the *vamśāvalī* writers and the Tanjavur court-poets, is clearly out of tune

²³ *Velugōṭivāri vamśāvalī*, pp. 57-9; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya (1946), 1:335-6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:335.

with the Araviḍu family's own perceptions. A more plausible suggestion would be that Rāmadeva, once crowned, perceived the major threat to Araviḍu dominance as the kingmaker himself—Velugōṭi Yācama—and thus took steps to balance or undermine the latter's power. In this sense, the Velugōṭi clan was trapped by its own overly conspicuous success.

In any case, the result was a general reconfiguration of political forces, with the Velugōṭi clan's various competitors securing real gains. Muttu Krishṇappa of Senji, aided by Gobbūri Eṭirāju and Rāmadeva, managed by the early 1620s to regain territories lost earlier to Yācama.²⁵ Velugōṭi frustration is nowhere more evident than in Yācama's attempt, in the years from 1622 to 1624, to take Pulicat from the Dutch; this effort was repeatedly frustrated, first by Tiruveṅṅalayya, the daḷavāy of Senji, and later by Gobbūri Eṭirāju.²⁶ After about 1625 there are no further references to Yācama either in the English and Dutch material, or in Telugu sources; there is, however, a record from Udaiyarpalaiyam which suggests that, having lost nearly everything further north, Yācama spent the end of his life under the protection of the Udaiyarpalaiyam chief.²⁷ From this period, the Velugōṭi family enters into a general eclipse: Velugōṭi Timma retained control over the area around Armagon until the early 1640s, despite being under serious threat from Rāmadeva's forces in the late 1620s; Kastūri Raṅgappa's hold on Puducceri proved, however, more tenuous.²⁸ In the 1640s and thereafter, there is the occasional mention of other members of the clan: Yācama's brother, Siṅgama, surfaces in the late 1640s at the seige of Udayagiri by Golconda forces; much later, toward the end of the 1650s, Yācama's son Kumāra Yāca is mentioned among those subordinate to the Sultanate of Golconda.²⁹ In general, we can say that the momentum generated by the Velugōṭi clan in the first

²⁵ Ibid., 1:336-7.

²⁶ AR, OB, VOC. 1087, fls. 179-211v (Dagh-Register Pulicat); also Foster [1622-3], pp. 133-4.

²⁷ Rama Sharma (1980), pp. 175-6.

²⁸ On Kastūri Raṅgappa at Puducceri, see Foster [1624-9], pp. 16, 19, 41; on Velugōṭi Timma, ibid., pp. 117, 120-3, 128, 133-4, 146-7, 346-7, and ibid. [1634-6], pp. 47-8.

²⁹ *Velugōṭivāri vaṃśāvali*, pp. 59-60; Hayavadana Rao (1930), 2:2273-6.

decade and a half of the seventeenth century was gradually dissipated, and their larger ambitions remained unfulfilled.

There is another sequel to this story: the Dāmarla clan, sometime rival of the Velugōṭi people, but also intermarried with the latter, came to claim the mantle of Yācama's succession. Thus Dāmarla Veṅḡaḷabhūpāla dedicated his long poem, *Bahulāśvacaritra*, to Yācama, who is praised at length in the introductory portions; the Dāmarla poet tells us that after Toppur, Yācama's fame filled the ten directions and reached Delhi, Cuttack, Agra, Mecca, and Shiraz.³⁰ Heroic rhetoric of the bardic pattern, fixed on its ever attractive hero, was still worth something in the period of his decline. This attempt to capitalize on the prestige of an illustrious brother-in-law accompanied, and partly legitimated, the Dāmarla rise to regional prominence on the ground and at the Aravīḍu court. In certain ways, the Dāmarla clan roughly recapitulates the Velugōṭi sequence at a later point in time (the 1630s and 1640s)—gradual expansion and consolidation, intervention in court politics at the (fast diminishing) centre, and then sudden reversal and loss of power, partly as a result of the last Aravīḍu ruler's perception of a threat arising from this very ally. But the Dāmarla lineage, still struggling under the burden of an outdated heroic ethos, also had other powerful and effective enemies—for example, the outstanding Baliya entrepreneur Cinanna Ceṭṭi, a major force at the Candragiri court in that generation. As with Yācama and the Velugōṭi line, the result for the Dāmarla clan was not even a mini-kingdom, but a rapid fragmentation, dispersal, and retreat.

How are we to understand this extended process of near-state-formation or, rather, its failure on the northern Nāyaka periphery? What does Yācama's career have to teach us about political processes in this period, and how do the rich Velugōṭi materials relate to the symbols and conceptualizations of royal power that we have extracted from other contemporary sources? What distinguishes the Velugōṭi case from those of Tanjavur or Madurai, for example? Are there structural factors which are conducive to or, alternatively, which preclude state formation? Can we characterize the transition from one level to the next?

The Velugōṭi story can provide only partial answers to the more

³⁰ *Bahulāśvacaritra*, in Krishnaswami Ayyangar (1919), p. 307.

abstract of these issues; and given the wealth of detail that the sources offer, an explanation on the level of structure may not be wholly satisfying. We have, however, already observed something of the political dynamics of the decaying imperial system in which our story is set; and we can, perhaps, formulate in general terms several distinct analytic features of this process.

1. There is, first, the evidently self-limiting dynamic of expansion in such a system. Even the Araviḍu rump-state remained motivated by restless energies aimed at territorial growth, especially in the northern Tamil shatter-zone which was the last, largely internal frontier. But the mechanisms of expansion produced their own constraints. Seen from the top—the Araviḍu ‘centre’—the business of expansion had to be ‘sub-contracted’, farmed out to competing lines of nominal subordinates, as we have seen; thus even successful campaigns ended with no greater control in the hands of the Araviḍu overlord. Moreover, the latter frequently was forced to undermine his own supporters simply in order to secure his own survival in the medium term. This is the perspective on expansion from the bottom up: the original source of hierarchical authority and legitimacy could turn unpredictably against one, thus effectively cancelling out any real gains. Under these conditions, to consolidate even a relatively stable mini-kingdom, with a delimited territorial base, was virtually impossible.
2. Put more abstractly, in terms that should be familiar from our earlier discussion of the Madurai foundation-myth, the creation of a Nāyaka state depended on the success enjoyed by a warrior lineage on two functional axes. On the one hand, horizontal legitimacy had to be assured by winning a territory and successfully defending it against rival claimants. On the other hand, it was crucial to gain vertical legitimacy from the titular overlords—in this case, the Araviḍu lineage. No Nāyaka state could survive for long without this formal, vertical linkage, however tenuous it might appear in terms, say, of fiscal transfers or other public forms of support. But in the northern Nāyaka periphery, this vertical axis was seriously impaired by the time of the

Velugōṭi ascendancy. The Candragiri rājas of the Aravīḍu clan were at one and the same time superior to and rivals of such clans as the Velugōṭi and Dāmarla lineages; they traced their origins to very similar roots, and they consistently intermarried with these 'subordinate' lines. Indeed, the key role of marriage alliances is in many ways symptomatic of the relatively loose structure and vertical mobility of this period;³¹ as we have seen, both the Gobbūri and the Dāmarla families exercised influence over the Aravīḍu line in part through marital ties. In this context, informed by criss-crossing kinship ties, the question of the centre's ultimate authority was necessarily ambiguous, and we should clearly refrain from overemphasizing such dubious rhetorical tags as 'treason' and 'usurpation'. Masters and servants were all too close to one another; and, as in much earlier times in India,³² the political centre kept sinking all too easily back into the encompassing whole.

Here the contrast with Madurai and Tanjavur is particularly illuminating. In the mid-sixteenth century, when these successful Nāyaka states were formed further south, a sufficient social and political distance existed between the Nāyaka lineages and the Tuḷuva dynasty to permit a process by which consolidation on the horizontal axis could be legitimized *ex post facto* on the vertical axis. The Velugōṭi clan, as well as other claimants to Nāyaka status, could not afford such a luxury in the context of the seventeenth century, when overlords had become competitors as well. Paradoxically, the vertical axis was much too weak, as well as too close, to be truly effective.

3. There is also a straightforward geographical or regional side to this equation. The lack of distance was also physical: the new Velugōṭi settlement zone was in Candragiri's backyard, far too close to permit an easy transition to a more durable political edifice. Moreover, this region as a whole—Toṇṭai or Tuṇḍīra, as

³¹ Recall that Aravīḍu Aliya Rāmarāja himself derived his claim to the throne from his marriage to Krishṇadevarāya's daughter. For parallels between this and other kinship-based elite formations, see Leyser (1970).

³² Heesterman (1971).

it tends to be called in Nāyaka texts—was particularly problematic for state-formation. It had no immediate tradition of statehood to appeal to, unlike Tanjavur (with the Cōla model) or Madurai (which claimed continuity with the Pāṇḍyas). Even the one state that did achieve a kind of stable presence—the Nāyaka kingdom of Senji—lacked the cultural vitality of its southern counterparts and never produced an impressive courtly tradition; even militarily, it was certainly the most erratic of the three, and always a weak link in the imperial chain. (It was also the most exposed to threats from the north—hence, not surprisingly, the first to fall.) Equally, the peculiar characteristics of the northern Tamil area must be stressed, particularly the fact that it comprised a far less stable agrarian base than either the Tanjavur or the Madurai country. That two kingdoms—Candragiri and Senji—were able to derive their sustenance from this catchment area was the result of at least two factors: first, the expansion of agriculture, including the production of cotton and to a limited extent indigo, in this area in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries; second, the expansion of manufacturing production and seaborne commerce over the same period.³³ Notwithstanding these facilitating changes, the area still comprised a much less adequate core for a wider political structure than either of the two more traditional political foci further south. Moreover, the situation was exacerbated by the fact that there never developed any real equilibrium between Senji and the domain of the Araviḍu lineage; Tuṇḍīra remained an arena of contest between these two forces, as well as between them and the footloose warrior lineages and pālegāllu displaced southwards by the shifting structure of power in Rāyalasīma. This, then, was the region—sparse in resources, and already overcrowded in terms of its political economy—in which the Velugōṭi ambitions had perforce to be realized.

4. Their failure was not, however, simply *determined* by this ecology of forces and terrains; its overriding aspects are rather social and ethical. The most conspicuous failure lay, perhaps, in being

³³ See Subrahmanyam (1990b).

trapped within the limited constellation of kin and clan. Here there is a suggestive comparison with the developmental cycle of north-Indian Rajput lineages analysed by Richard Fox.³⁴ In his view, factors such as land-availability, the nature and power of the central state, and the extent of stratification within the lineage itself shape the process of expansion. In the first stage, one sees the birth of the lineage, its rise to limited power, and its extension into new cadet lines. The second stage, comprising the rise of the *rāja*, is characterized by competition for territory (this would correspond to the early period of the Velugōṭi wars in the central Deccan, before the move to the south). In the third stage, the central state intervenes to create new elites, causing a struggle between the lineage elite and the state; this then leads to two possibilities—in one, the *rāja* is able to shore up his position, while in the other the lineage elite descends to the level of a yeoman peasantry.

This seductive model, which goes some way toward explaining both the compulsions and the limitations of state-formation for active warrior lineages, skews the Velugōṭi sequence in two important respects. In the first place, it is based on the assumption that the process of formation of the central state, and the extent of this state's power, are wholly independent of what transpires at the level of these warrior lineages. Thus, the central state can, as an outside actor, influence the fate of the lineage, but the lineage cannot undermine the centre. This, as we have seen, does not fit the Velugōṭi situation, in which the warriors were at certain periods decisive actors in the arena of the Araviḍu centre (nor is the latter wholly 'outside' *vis-à-vis* the Velugōṭi lineage). The status distance that was achieved early on in north India between Mughal rulers and zamindar lineages simply did not exist in the context of the Vijayanagara decline.

Secondly, Fox's kinship-based model is strictly applied only in the context of a system of *extensive* marriage pattern;³⁵ but in

³⁴ Fox (1971); for critiques of this model as applied even to Rajput clans in Mughal times, see Alam (1986) and Kolff (1990).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-70.

the case of lineages like the Velugōṭi and Dāmarla, what we find is patterns of *intensive* marriage. It is useful to recall here Thomas Trautmann's warning against the tendency to reduce political systems to kinship systems; rather, Trautmann argues, 'the political system uses the kinship system as the individual does, opportunistically and to purposes of its own that do not belong to the kinship system as such.'³⁶ In the context of relations between clans like those we have studied, which are characterized by repeated cross-cousin marriages, one can see what Trautmann terms 'the perpetuation of affinal relations between unilineal groups over successive generations'. This system thus allows for the appropriation of prestige—even the actual inheritance—of one clan by another, linked to it affinally.³⁷ In the light of this pattern, the continuity between the Velugōṭis and the Dāmarlas—inconceivable perhaps within the Rajput cycle—makes excellent sense.

Nevertheless, the model correctly highlights the kinship factor present throughout the Velugōṭi family's career. In a very real sense, they may be said never to have emerged from this encompassing frame; they remain a clan competing with others, with whom they may be linked through marriage alliances, on levels equal or close to their own. If we think again of the sequence outlined earlier— expansion, consolidation, crisis and crystallization, fragmentation—and, in particular, if we view it in a comparative vein, then the constriction of its social horizon suddenly becomes apparent. The Nāyaka lineages of Madurai and Tanjavur also began in some such limited way (as we saw in the case of Nāgama Nāyaka, discussed at length above); but for both these states, consolidation included not merely physical conquest of new territories but also lateral or concentric expansion into a new social range. The process was one of wider incorporation—not just *rājas* and *vīras*, from within the lineage, but also Brahmins, merchants, artisans, peasants, and others from outside it

³⁶ Trautmann (1981), pp. 357-8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 387-91, adducing the examples of the Cōḷas as well as other southern dynasties.

found their place within the emerging order. Moreover, their assimilation meant the adoption of a new ethos, quite distinct from that of the warrior-founders at the centre.

5. This is the final consideration we wish to propose. It cries out from the whole range of Velugōṭi literary materials, which, as we have seen, are still heavily marked by the heroic and martial orientation of the Deccan folk-epic. The Velugōṭi bards see their patrons as heroes of the classical type, human incarnations of some unbounded natural force, most at home on the battlefield, revelling in its gore. In this, the bards remain faithful to the Velugōṭi myth of origins they have preserved, with its tale of sacrifice, physical courage and devotion, and power rooted in possession of land. Their vision is at once heroic and ascetic (sexual renunciation is one of the dependable attributes of the Deccani *vīra*), in brilliant contrast with the hedonic ideology of consumption that developed in the central Nāyaka courts. The more diffuse and complex royal images and functions of the mature political system—the king's elevation to divinity, his seductive processions, his public eating and loving, his assimilation of the pūjā paradigm *alongside* the residual service-roles of warrior and subordinate—are almost entirely missing from the Velugōṭi corpus. The overbearing image of Yācama—courageous, unswerving, loyal to the death, the perfect man of war—is a far cry from the languorous and disingenuous hero of the Tanjavur courtly romances. This difference in tone and image is full of meaning; even when Yācama achieves a kind of half-way kingship, he belongs to a different world, infused with different values, from that of the central courts. The full-blown Nāyaka state embodied a shift in level—from kin-based warrior networks, properly geared for intermittent small-scale violence, to a kingship which specialized in cultivating and manipulating illusion to various subtle and creative ends. It is this shift, which always involves the operation of vectors of transcendence and potential self-transformation, which failed to take place on the northern Nāyaka periphery.

Part of the failure lay with the actors themselves, who remain

largely cut off from the more dynamic elements in the emerging elite of the early seventeenth century. The Velugōṭi and Dāmarla clans were true to themselves, and to their familiar fate; but the old-fashioned Velama warrior system, with its inherent ethos, was ultimately no match for a world that was opening itself to new political and economic currents. Primary among the possibilities for transformation were the opportunities concentrated in the hands of mobile adventurers and entrepreneurs, some of whom we have met in earlier chapters. In a way, the real contrast is between the Velamas and the Baliyas who, no less martial than the Velugōṭi line, but much less bound to the older heroic vision with its territorial fixations, were everywhere creating the new structures of statehood. An elite relatively free of ascriptive constraints was assuming power throughout the southern reaches of the Nāyaka world; their implicit anthropology gave birth, as we have seen, to the structures of perception and the explicit ideologies of the culturally dominant courts. The Nāyaka rulers of Tanjavur and Madurai absorbed—perhaps as part of their own inheritance—this newly crystallizing vision, with its pragmatic concomitants in the domain of resources and investment-via-consumption; the Velugōṭi warriors, securely embedded in their traditional collective universe, and locked into a process that effectively precluded their successful expansion beyond this given frame, bravely fought their way into marginality and decline.

2. THE SOUTH: MARAVAR, KAḶLAR, AND MARAIKKĀYAR

As we move from the north to the far south, and from the early to the late seventeenth (and early eighteenth) century, the focus changes: our new hero, Cītaḱkāti, is precisely one of those 'new men' who were so conspicuously lacking in the Velugōṭi warrior context; and the state to which this Cītaḱkāti was connected, the Setupati kingdom of the Maravar, enjoyed all the advantages of marginality and distance from the major political centre—not Candragiri (by now defunct) in this case, but the Nāyakas of Madurai. We will observe certain features of the emergence of this little kingdom and its relations within the

regional system. But our primary interest is with Cītakkāti and the career of the late-Nāyaka entrepreneur. We have spoken earlier of the atrophy of ascriptive criteria for power and status in our period, and their replacement by the individual's enterprise, prowess, and imagination; Cītakkāti represents this process to perfection, for he was, in a sense, as much an outsider to traditional Hindu polity as one could be. He was a Tamil Muslim, from the community of maritime traders and magnates settled on the south-eastern coast and known to this period as Maraikkāyar. His story illustrates not only the potential range of an individual's economic and political achievement in his generation but also, somewhat obliquely, the complexities and subtle manoeuvring inherent in successful state-formation on the periphery.

It is difficult to trace the origins of the name Maraikkāyar, often used to distinguish the maritime-oriented Shāfi'i Muslims of Tamilnadu from their Ḥanafi neighbours of the area; it is sometimes derived from Tamil *marakkalam*, 'boat'. Certainly, the distinction drawn between Maraikkāyar and Labbais, the latter being coastal fishermen, divers, weavers, artisans and husbandsmen, is not to be found in the documents of the late seventeenth century, which use the terms in a far looser manner than came to be the case in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Since our concern is with the substantial maritime traders of the coast, and since Cītakkāti himself used the name Maraikkāyar, we hold to this title in the following pages. We should note that the presence of Muslim traders and navigators in south-eastern India goes back (at the very latest) to the second half of the ninth century; two sub-regions in particular were heavily settled by this community—the first extending from Cuddalore to Adirampatnam, the second, later designated the Fishery Coast, from Ramesvaram to Kanyakumari. In the latter area, the setting for our study, the two centres of Kayalpatnam and Kilakkarai were of great importance; Cītakkāti's home—perhaps, more fittingly, his 'court'—was in Kilakkarai.

A few preliminary words on the Ramnad kingdom, which provided the political context for Cītakkāti's career: this state, which survived, not too uncomfortably, in one of the cracks of the Nāyaka regional system, preserved the Maravar tradition of predatory raiding as an essential element in its political ethos; coupled with this was a

growing interest in the commercial possibilities opening up along the south-east coast. This conjunction provided the Setupāti's gradual rise to regional power with its own peculiar flavour. S. Kadhivel, in his *History of the Maravas*, mentions at least five or six junctures between 1600 and 1720 when the Maravas of Ramnad 'truly' assumed independence; this repeated assertion of independence suggests, to the sceptical observer, that this goal was never truly attained. In fact, the Ramnad state of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries occupied a delicate position between two rather more substantial polities, namely Madurai and Tanjavur.³⁸ In terms of formal diplomatic and hierarchical relations, the bond with Madurai appears to have been the closer of the two, but in fact the Tanjavur connection was not devoid of importance either. In many senses, the closest parallel to the Marava state of Ramnad is the Kallar little kingdom of Pudukkottai, also wedged between Tanjavur and Madurai.³⁹ But unlike the Rājā Toṇḍaimān of Pudukkottai, whose claims can at best be traced back to the second half of the seventeenth century, the Marava state of Ramnad was already in existence by around 1600. The *Maravar jāti kaifiyat* informs us that in 1605, the Nāyaka of Madurai, Muttu Krishṇappa, granted the Setupati a limited form of territorial autonomy, which may well have been a belated recognition of *de facto* power relations.⁴⁰ Certainly, from this point on, relations between the two were far from amicable. As we have briefly mentioned earlier (in chapter III), in the early 1630s the Portuguese chronicler António Bocarro writes of how the Nāyaka of Madurai faces an 'impediment' in the form of 'a lord who has rebelled against him, at the edge of the sea in the said Gulf [of Mannar], who is called the Marava, who also sails the sea with his own light vessels, in order to rob all those he encounters, who on land also resists the said Nāyaka, so that he places

³⁸ Kadhivel (1977), pp. 21-50; Ludden (1985), pp. 49-50. Also see ARA, OB, VOC. 1295, fls. 54v-55v, letter from Nagapattinam dated 23-1-1673; fls. 125-28v, as above, dated 16-10-1673. Finally, see the important letter from Anthonij Paviljoen at Pulicat to Johan Maetsuycker, dated 25-2-1673, VOC. 1295, fl. 59. For the Marava intervention in Madurai-Tanjavur politics of the period, see ARA, OB, VOC. 1298, letter dated 23-1-1674 from van Goens at Colombo to Batavia.

³⁹ See Dirks (1987), pp. 96-106; also Filliozat (1980), pp. 103-24.

⁴⁰ Kadhivel (1977), p. 21.

himself with his people in the midst of some very tough forests, and from there fights against his enemies, who not being able to enter into the wildness of those forests, leave him there, so that the Marava afterwards sallies out to make his assaults by land and sea'.⁴¹ Indeed, Bocarro even claims that the Madurai Nāyaka had sought Portuguese assistance against the Maravas; however, Goa refused him this aid, fearing that if the Maravas were defeated, this would facilitate the Nāyaka's access to Mannar and Jaffna.

The Dutch, too, for their part, recognized the importance of the Marava Setupati, especially after they completed their takeover of Sri Lanka from the Portuguese in 1658 and also simultaneously expelled their rivals from the ports of the Fishery Coast. A treaty of 24 April 1660, between Tirumala Setupati of Ramnad and Rijkloff van Goens, *Raad Extraordinaris* of the Dutch Company, recognised the power of the 'Teuverheer' (Tam. *Tēvar*), as the Dutch termed the Marava ruler, and gave him various privileges—such as the use of five toll-free vessels in the annual pearl fishery (which now came to be administered by the Dutch).⁴² From early on, however, Dutch relations with the Setupati kingdom were marked by suspicion of and growing animosity toward the Maraikkāyar component of Ramnad politics, as embodied in men of wealth and influence such as Cītaḱkāti, whom the Dutch rightly saw as particularly menacing rivals.

Cītaḱkāti as Patron of Arts.

Who was Cītaḱkāti? The Tamil literary tradition of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries knows him as a Muslim magnate famed for his generosity to poets and other literati. 'Cītaḱkāti' appears to be a Tamilization of the proper name 'Abd al-Qādir; it is with this title that he appears in the world of Tamil poetry at the end of the 17th century as the very prototype of the magnanimous patron and educated connoisseur. His name has, indeed, become synonymous with the notion of the *vallal*, the wealthy patron in his late-medieval guise (much like Pāri of the Sangam period). It should be stressed that this role is ascribed to Cītaḱkāti within the Tamil Hindu tradition—he in

⁴¹ Bocarro, 'Livro das Plantas', in Bragança Pereira (1937), pp. 368-9.

⁴² Heeres (1931), pp. 161-3.

fact outstrips his contemporary Hindu counterparts in this respect— while the Tamil Muslim tradition knows and emphasizes an additional aspect of his career, that connected to the commissioning and support of the Muslim community's own literature in Tamil, and especially Umaruppulavar's *Cīrāppurāṇam*. We will look briefly at both these aspects of the magnate's image before turning to an examination of the historical materials on Cītakāti contained in the Dutch archives; the final section of this chapter then considers one major text, where we can observe in detail the process of constructing Cītakāti's cultural identity.

The anthologies of single Tamil verses (*tanippāṭal*) from this period include several well-known ones about Cītakāti, by poets such as Namaccivāyappulavar and Paṭikkācuppulavar. They fall into two main classes: eulogy-lamentations at the time of his death, all centring on the memory of his famed generosity; and encomia patterned after classical models, often of an erotic character. Let us begin with an example of the latter category:

His name flies through the heavens,
 his horses pulverise with their hooves
 the crowns of his foes.
 Bees make music in the garland
 that graces Cītakāti's breast:
 and my daughter may well die
 of love.

None of the soothsayers we consulted
 said anything of this!⁴³

What is remarkable, for our purposes, in this very conventional verse is the way it calls upon the expressive devices of ancient Sangam

⁴³ Namaccivayappulavar 16, in *Tanippāṭar riraṭṭu* (1940), 1:326, reading *mārpiṇil* for *marpaṇil*. The text is also given in the *aṇupantam* to the published edition of *Ceytakāti nonṭināṭakam* which we have followed (ed. S. Muhammad Husayn Nainar [1939]). Nainar bases himself on an earlier printed text (1865) and on a single surviving manuscript in the Madras Government Oriental Manuscripts Library. The verse appears as number 12 in the *aṇupantam*. Although we normally use the form Cītakāti, the *nonṭināṭakam* usually uses the (possibly older) form *ceytakāti* (without gemination); in citing this work, we have reproduced its form of the name.

love-poetry to praise the present (Muslim!) patron. The verse is uttered by the fictional persona of a girl's mother, who, frantic at the sickness that has overwhelmed her daughter, has been driven to consult astrologers or other ritual specialists for a diagnosis.⁴⁴ They, inevitably, have mis-diagnosed the case—and only now, when it is probably too late, has the truth come out: the girl is dying of love for Cītakkāti. The latter is described in the hackneyed panegyric style derived ultimately from the ancient *puram* poetry of heroism, though one can also assume some impact of Sanskrit courtly praise-poetry (as in the Kākatīya rhetorical model from Andhra, the *Pratāparudrīya*, popularized in the Tamil country during this period). Even a simple fragment like this verse bears, in condensed fashion, the marks of the literary evolution peculiar to Nāyaka Tamil Nadu: not only have the poetries of love and war, *akam* and *puram*, become fused, but the hitherto vital distinction between the patron and the fictive hero⁴⁵ of the verse has completely collapsed—Cītakkāti is clearly both. Note that we meet him, through the words of his client or dependant, in an erotically appealing form, as a royal figure with whom the young girl necessarily falls in love. It is surely striking that a Maraikkāyar entrepreneur on the south-east coast finds it amusing to hear himself described in this archaic, if refashioned, Tamil mode.

Similar in tone is the following poem, ascribed by some to Paṭik-kācuppulavar :

Spreading to the ends of this earth,
and beyond,
past the very limits of the universe,
but still on everybody's tongue

is the fame of this man, Cītakkāti,
who sailed his ship over the surging
white waves
of this world until, at last,
he reached the shore,
though he is still adrift,

⁴⁴ The colophon insists that these are *cōtiṭar*, astrologers.

⁴⁵ The *pāṭṭuṭai talaivaṇ* and the *kiḷavittalaivaṇ*: see the discussion in Shulman (in press); Cutler (1987), p. 83.

far from shore
in the ocean of
my love.⁴⁶

Again, a classical paradigm : the speaker is a young woman abandoned by her lover, who has gone to seek his fortune. In this case, the poet even tells us, appropriately enough, that he has found his fortune—Cītakāti's ship has successfully reached port—but this patent truth is of little comfort to the heroine, languishing, as all Tamil heroines must, in helpless separation. The mood is one of intense longing for the absent but intensely desirable lover, who has again coalesced with the poet's patron.

A final example of this class, one that extends the inherited imagery in an important and suggestive way:

O Cītakāti from southern Kayal,
who gives so much
day after day:
what I have lost
is not the wealth my family gave me,
or my mother's special presents.
Fool that I am, I put
into that bandit's hand
everything else I owned—
my mind and its passion,
my lips, my pride,
and my two
perfect breasts.⁴⁷

The poet's feminine persona speaks, as usual, of love in separation. Only at first glance might we think that the patron and hero are, as in earlier times, distinct; in fact, there is no doubt that it is Cītakāti himself who is cast in the role of bandit-lover (*kallar*), who has taken the love offered him and then disappeared. As we shall see, this association of Cītakāti with the *Kallar*-thief is not limited to this stray poem.

⁴⁶ Poṛkaḷantaip paṭikkācut tampirān, 10, in *Taṇippāṭar riraṭṭu*, 1:304 (also in Husayn Nainar, *aṇupantam*, 16).

⁴⁷ Poṛkaḷantaip paṭikkācut tampirān, 9, *Taṇippāṭar riraṭṭu* 1:303; (*aṇupantam*, 14, where it is ascribed to a courtesan, *tāci*).

The lamentations follow the familiar pattern of the period; we may quote the following examples:

So what if the Goddess of Wealth
has survived,
or if the Earth still remains?
What if Sarasvatī, Goddess of Wisdom,
is here,
what if *we* are still alive?
When Cītakkāti, prince of poets,
most generous lord,
went and died,
poetry itself
went dead.⁴⁸

What difference does it make
if they live or die, those fools
who won't give you half a *kācu*
even by mistake?
Unless Cītakkāti, Lord of Kayal,
who is dead and in heaven,
comes back to be reborn,
there is no hope left
for poets.⁴⁹

Cītakkāti, Lord of Kayal, of excellent Vajranāḍu,
who sought and found great wealth,
raised up a pillar of praise
for himself—
but he has made poets into bankrupt beggars
and thrown mud in their mouths
by hiding out
in his grave (*camāti*).⁵⁰

Note how the last verse, a sadly ironic instance of praise-through-blame, contrasts the successful magnate with his beggared clientele—an opposition articulated within the terms proper to this new type of merchant-king.

⁴⁸ Namaccivāyap pulavar, 15, *Taṇippāṭar riraṭṭu*, 1:325; *aṇupantam*, 6.

⁴⁹ Poṅkalantaip paṭikkācut tampirāṇ, 19, *Taṇippāṭar riraṭṭu*, 1:309; *aṇupantam*, 9.

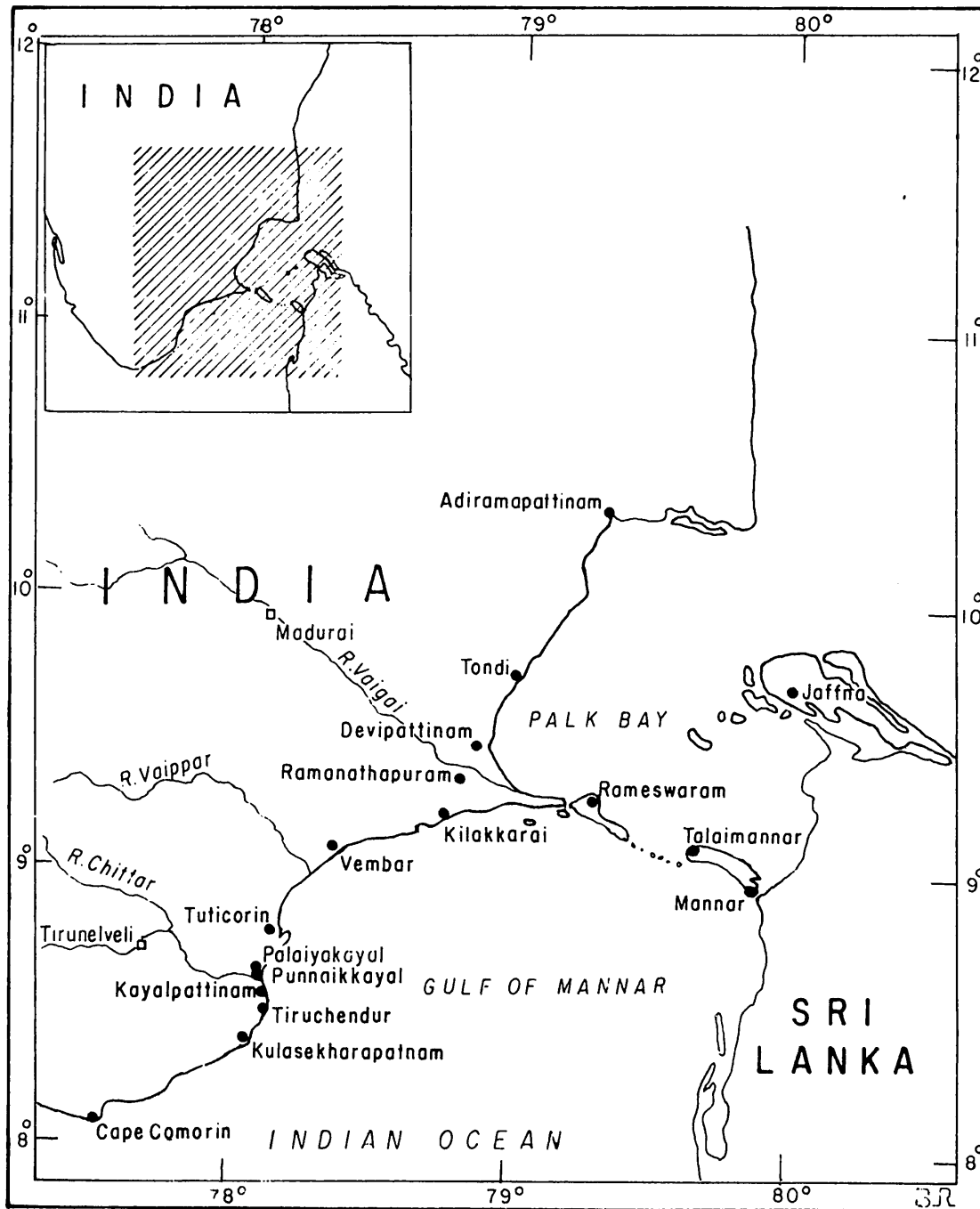
⁵⁰ Poṅkalantaip paṭikkācut tampirāṇ, 8, *Taṇippāṭar riraṭṭu* 1:303; *aṇupantam*, 8.

A proverb still current in the Ramanathapuram area captures this image of the dead patron : *cettuṅ koṭai koṭuttāṅ Cītaṅkāti*, 'even in death, Cītaṅkāti gave gifts.' Legend explicates the proverb by relating how a poet approached the patron's grave and asked for alms; a hand appeared from the grave, and offered him the ring from its finger.⁵¹

So much for Cītaṅkāti's image within the larger Tamil literary tradition. In terms of his own community, his great merit is seen to lie in his sponsoring of the major Tamil Muslim kāvya, *Cīrāppurāṇam* of Umaruṅpulavar. According to the story frequently cited in this connection, Cītaṅkāti was determined that Tamil Muslims should be able to hear their sacred stories in Tamil, instead of studying Hindu works such as *Kamparāmāyaṇam* or the *Mahābhārata*. One day, he met the young Umaru, the court-poet of the lord of Eṭṭaiyapuram and a disciple of the great Kaṭikai Muttupulavar, and commissioned him to compose a Tamil kāvya on the life of the Prophet. Umaru agreed but (like any Tamil purāṇa-poet searching for classical sources) asked for someone to tell him, in simple Tamil prose, the Arabic traditions that he was to turn into poetry. Cītaṅkāti introduced him to the great Shaykh Sadaqatullah (1632-1703), the best-known figure among the Qādiri Sufi line of Kayalpatnam in the seventeenth century. Sadaqatullah was a prolific writer in both Arabic and Tamil (his best-known work being the *Tarjumat al-Bahjah*⁵²) and a major intellectual force in the Muslim community in the south-east. It is striking that the tradition so deftly connects Cītaṅkāti, Umaru and Sadaqatullah, three symbolic exemplars (merchant, poet and 'ālim) of seventeenth-century Tamil Islam, and also notes a certain incongruity in their association: Sadaqatullah is said to have rejected the young poet because the latter first appeared to him, wholly naturally, in a Hindu poet's attire, complete with gold rings on his fingers. (It is important to remember that Umaru, for all his Muslim origin, fit the stereotype of the successful Tamil court-poet; thus we are told that he succeeded in vanquishing a north Indian rival by the magic means proper to a poet, in this case by making his stylus improvise and recite a witheringly sarcastic

⁵¹ Nainar (1939), Introduction, p. viii; oral communication from K. Balachandran of Madurai.

⁵² Susan Bayly (1986), p. 41; also Kokan (1974), pp. 51-69.



Map IV: Ports and Centres of the Pearl-fishery c. 1700

verse). Only the appearance of the Prophet himself in Sadaqatullah's dream could overcome the Shaykh's resistance: Sadaqatullah, together with his pupil Māmu Nayinār Labbai of Parangipettai (Porto Novo), then instructed Umaru in the Arabic *Sīra*, and the latter began to compose his long work. Cītakkāti, sadly, did not live to hear its initial recitation (*arankērram*); his place as patron was taken over by Abū 'l-Qāsim Maraikkāyar, who is gratefully mentioned several times in the text.⁵³

Still another oral tradition, this one recorded early in the present century, reports that the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, a great admirer of Sadaqatullah, repeatedly offered the latter official positions as jurist. On one occasion, the Sufi sent one of his sons in his stead; on another, when asked to go to Bengal, he is said to have sent 'Abd al-Qādir as his representative. But, it is related, 'the new environment and climate did not suit him [and] he resigned his post'. This legend seeks to suggest that Cītakkāti enjoyed extensive contact with Aurangzeb, sending the latter—appropriately enough—a string of pearls each as large as a berry (Tamil *cunṭaikkāy*), and receiving in return a present of sandalwood, ink and tea!⁵⁴

Cītakkāti as Periya Tambi

For all their eulogistic vision of Cītakkāti, the literary materials we have cited relate only vaguely and indirectly to the actual details of his career. This is a lacuna which can, however, be filled by reference to the archives of the Dutch East India Company, where our hero plays a prominent role. Here he appears under yet another name. We know from the literary sources that Cītakkāti was known by the honorific

⁵³ This legend is recorded in *Kaviyēru umaruppulavarkaḷiṅ varālaruc curukkum*, prefaced to *Cīrāppurānam* of Umaruppulavar (1974), pp. vi-x; see also V.I. Subramanian (1955), especially pp. 75-6. For a more general perspective, also see Uwise (1954), pp. 292-6; for further comments, Shulman (1984), pp. 174-6. Umaruppulavar is also credited with a *Mutumolī mālai*, said to have been composed in his despair at being rejected by Sadaqatullah, as well as a *kōvai* on Cītakkāti! Note how the image of Umaru's triumph over his rival at Ettayapuram highlights the magical role of the poet's stylus - perhaps, after all, a Muslim touch in this atmosphere of improvised oral poetry. See also Cōmacuntara Tēcikar (1939), pp. 221-2.

⁵⁴ *Islamia Nesan*, December 1909, cited in Nainar (1939), pp. ix-x.

title 'Periya Tambi Maraikkāyar', granted to his family by Kilavan Setupati, ruler of Ramnad. In a note published somewhat over two decades ago, S. Arasaratnam had pointed to the repeated references in Dutch records between 1682 and 1706 to a certain 'Periatambi Mari-kkar'; and basing himself on some of these references, Arasaratnam drew a brief biographical sketch of a man whom he termed a 'seventeenth-century commercial magnate' and opponent of Dutch ambitions.⁵⁵ The usefulness of the essay is somewhat vitiated by the fact that 'Periya Tambi' was *not* an individual, but a *title* held in succession by several individuals. Over the period 1682 to 1715, we can identify at least three such: one dies in 1698, and another about ten years later. On the basis of a detailed examination of Dutch factory records, it is also possible to conclude that all three individuals belonged to a single Kilakkarai-based Maraikkāyar family, that of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir. Of the three, the first Periya Tambi was in all probability 'Abd al-Qādir's elder brother, the second 'Abd al-Qādir himself, and the third, his son.

The first references to the old Periya Tambi (that is, 'Abd al-Qādir's brother) occur in 1682 in Dutch and English records. The English mention him as 'Pedda Tombe Markcorn', who had helped an English embassy—comprising the factors Bett and Fleetwood—to the Tēvar Setupati (or 'Debora').⁵⁶ The Dutch mention him in a far more significant manner: in these years, Kilavan Setupati, the most outstanding of the Ramnad kings, had begun a push down the Fishery Coast at the expense of the Madurai Nāyakas, and the man appointed to collect taxes from the coastal communities newly brought under the control of the Ramnad state was Periya Tambi. The use of this title by the early 1680s suggests that the special relationship between the Marava Setupatis and the Maraikkāyars had already been cemented by then: the Ramnad rulers' decision to incorporate this Muslim community into their polity is clearly signalled by titling the designated leader of the community at Kilakkarai 'Vijaya Raghunātha Periya Tambi', Vijaya Raghunātha being the Setupati's own name. One can thus see the coalescence of this little kingdom as having several stages. In the early

⁵⁵ Arasaratnam (1964).

⁵⁶ Pringle (1894), pp. 81, 88. Telugu *pedda* = Tamil *periya*.

seventeenth century, we have the explicit recognition by the Madurai Nāyakas of the Setupati's rights of *kumāravarga*; in 1608, the Setupatis advance this a step further by going to Rameswaram and receiving the *ceṅkōl* (sceptre) of kingship from the priests of Rāmanāthaswāmi.⁵⁷ The next clear stage coincides with the reign of Tirumala Setupati (1645-73), who, besides moving his capital to Ramanathapuram from Pogalur (a *pālaiyam* ten miles distant), begins to build a court centred around clearly Vaishṇava motifs. The celebration of navarātri in Ramnad, introduced in about 1660, becomes an event of great importance in the annual calendar, as does the practice of the *hiraṇyagarbha* sacrifice (later adopted in Travancore as well).⁵⁸ But it is with Raghunātha (or Kila-vaṇ) Setupati (r. 1674-1710) that matters take a still more interesting turn. First, we have the unambiguous attempt to incorporate the Maraikkāyars into the polity and court in a position of importance, as has been noted above. Second, the court acquires distinctly 'Sultanist' overlays, including the creation of a corps of Abyssinian bodyguards, with access to the ruler mediated by eunuchs (Dutch: *gelubden*).⁵⁹ Not only this: Marava historians credit this ruler with transforming the mud fort of Ramanathapuram into a substantial stone fortress (with walls eight metres high and one and a half metres thick, surrounded by a moat), and with having the ability to raise forces from 30,000 to 40,000 men at short notice.⁶⁰

But such a transformation carried a concrete price, in the form of earning Dutch disapproval. By the mid 1680s, after various attempts at co-operative ventures, the Dutch had turned against the Periya Tambi Maraikkāyar. The latter's close relations with Timmarasa, the VOC factotum (who enjoyed such power and prestige that he held large

⁵⁷ Cf. Breckenridge (1978), pp. 88-94.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 91; also see ARA, OB, VOC. 1686, fls. 749v-750v, letter from the Setupati to Colombo, October 1704, which mentions 'den grooten feestdagh Nawamiwoertan (de welke door onse al oude voorouders en hare nacomelingen althoos en tot nog geviert is, gelijk U. Ede. kennelijk zij) . . .' On Travancore, see Susan Bayly (1984).

⁵⁹ ARA, OB, VOC. 1420, fl. 542, letter from Joan van Vliet et al. at Tuticorin to Laurens Pijl at Colombo, dated 13-11-1686; also ARA, OB, VOC. 1605, fls. 1092-93, report of the VOC employee Arasu, January 1698.

⁶⁰ Kadhirvel (1977), p. 35.

amounts of land, fruit orchards, houses and revenue-farms in Dutch Ceylon), had led the two in 1683 to propose a syndicate with a certain Hassan Maraikkāyar for the purchase of the entire Kalpatiya crop of areca each year from the Dutch, and to supply the Dutch factories in the region with rice as well.⁶¹ This proposal, acceptable though it was to local VOC factors, did not meet with the approval of Batavia, who considered it downright reprehensible that Timmarasa —sent from Colombo to Ramnad as a Dutch envoy—had begun to espouse the Periya Tambi's case instead.⁶² Things took a turn for the worse in 1684, when Periya Tambi, as farmer of the south-western section of the Ramnad territory, found his tax demands resisted by the Paravas resident there, and proceeded to use force to make them comply.⁶³ This brought bitter complaints from the Dutch, who saw themselves as the patrons of the Paravas, and a war of words ensued which continued into the following year. In early 1685, the VOC went so far as to blockade the ports under the Setupati's control, seizing many vessels, and forcing him to sue for peace. As a consequence, when the VOC now renegotiated its ten-year-old treaty with Ramnad, a clause was inserted to the effect that 'Peretamby-marca with his two sons Tevoray and Chendecady, as also his brother named Audecady-marca ('Abd al-Qādir Maraikkāyar?) as well as all other Moors and those associated with them will from now on be kept out of all rule and administration in the lands from Calimere to Cape Comorin . . .'.⁶⁴ Such a step, it is suggested by VOC documents, was prompted not only by the tax dispute with the Paravas, but by the fact that Periya Tambi had held two friends of another VOC factotum incarcerated for some time in Kilakkarai.

But the treaty of 1685 also differs from earlier ones in some other important respects. It is one of the earliest documents to refer to the Setupati's growing interest and participation in overseas commerce,

⁶¹ Arasaratnam (1964); Coolhaas (1971), pp. 731-2.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 732; on the relations between the Periya Tambi and Timmarasa, see the letter from the former to the latter, dated 26-4-1684, ARA, OB, VOC. 1405, fls. 1840-40v.

⁶³ Arasaratnam (1964); ARA, OB, VOC. 1405, fls. 1833, 1839-39v, letters from the Setupati and Timmarasa, dated April and July 1684.

⁶⁴ Heeres (1934), pp. 377-80.

which was surely another factor that bound him to his Maraikkāyar clientele. As part of the treaty, the Dutch agreed, for example, to release a ship belonging to Kilavan Setupati, which he had sent in 1684 to Hormuz, in order to purchase horses, and which had been captured and taken to Cochin by the Dutch. Further, the treaty refers to still another ship of the Ramnad ruler, this one sent to Bengal, and promises to allow it 'free passage'.⁶⁵ In the immediate aftermath of this treaty, there follows a period when the Periya Tambi disappears from Dutch records; this is also the period when the Setupati was facing internal dissensions among the Maravas. But the Maraikkāyar family finds mention once again in the Dutch-Ramnad treaty of September 1690, as 'the greatest cause of the division and troubles which have ever taken place between the Noble Company and the Tevar'; the clause requiring them to be excluded from all administrative positions is once again to be found in this document.⁶⁶

We are aware from other Dutch documents that the apparent lull in Dutch-Maraikkāyar relations in this period concealed a continuing animosity. This is reflected in such incidents as the one of 25 October 1689, when Cornelis Huys, Dutch resident at Virapandyapattinam was attacked on the beach by a party of Maraikkāyars in two small vessels, whom he challenged and asked to see a Dutch passport. According to the graphic testimony of one Parava witness to the incident, at this stage,

Some Moors came up to the resident, and took away his gun, and took the gunpowder out of the pan . . . and another pulled the resident's ring from his finger with his mouth, and they seized him in order to take him on board [their vessels], but being defenceless, he stepped back a little, and then another Moor came up with shield and sword and gave him a blow on the head, at which he recoiled still further, but another then struck him a blow on the foot so that he fell to earth, and this being done, two or three Moors sprang forward and slashed him with three or four more cuts.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ibid., 'Het schip, doer den theuverheer naer Bengale gesonden, sal, soo het in onse handen is vervallen ofte quam te vervallen, wedergegeven werden, en niet in onse handen wesende, vrye passagie verleent werden . . .'

⁶⁶ Ibid., Treaty of 7/11 September 1690, pp. 531-6.

⁶⁷ ARA, OB, VOC 1468, fls. 327-32v, 'Vijff copie verklaringen wegens d'aenkomst van twee Moorse vaertuijgen op Wierandepatnam.'

At this point, the resident's entourage fled, only to return a short while later to find him—not surprisingly—dead.

When the Periya Tambi reappears in Dutch factory records of the region, such incidents as these had not been forgotten; thus, when the Dutch factor Bourgonje was persuaded in 1694 by the Maraikkāyar to build a warehouse at Kilakkarai, Batavia expressed its discontent in no uncertain terms. The Governor-General and Council also wrote to the Netherlands early in 1696, repeating the same suspicions, and going on to state that 'the old and well-known Moor Periatambi' controlled everything at Kilakkarai, and that 'nothing can be done about it, save not to trust him, Periatambi, too much, and to try through industry and mercantile means to bring the Company the most profit'.⁶⁸ Here, the Dutch were being rather too coy, for they had means other than mercantile ones at their disposal, and usually had little hesitation in using them. All of this emerges quite clearly from the highly significant confrontation that eventually developed with the Periya Tambi in 1697-8.

Whether or not the Maraikkāyar magnate had been formally removed from positions of power as a result of the Dutch-Ramnad treaties of 1685 and 1690 is uncertain; in any event, there is every evidence that these agreements were dead-letters by about 1697. By this point in time, Dutch records consistently refer to the Periya Tambi as 'the Regent Periatambij Markay', and state on more than one occasion that he was in fact and deed the second most powerful man in the Ramnad state after the Setupati. Their confrontation with him began in 1697, during the pearl-fishery held in March-April that year. In the previous year, a Maraikkāyar tax-collector had been attacked by some Paravas, in what eventually developed into a major clash between the two communities; the fact that three or four Paravas had been taken by the Dutch to Colombo to account for the happening during the pearl-fishery was deemed by the Periya Tambi to be less than satisfactory. So, in January 1698, when the Dutch sent out their peons to the coastal villages to announce that a pearl-fishery was to be held again that year, these men were browbeaten and even physically attacked by the Maraikkāyars in positions of power there, such as the *maṇiyakkāraṅs* of

⁶⁸ Coolhaas (1975), p. 764, van Outhoorn et al. at Batavia, letter dated 8-2-1696.

Vedalai and Devipattinam, the latter described as a 'Moor in the friendship of Periatamby'.⁶⁹ The maṇiyakkāraṅ of Vedalai is accused of having refused the Dutch peon (or *lascorijn*) place to sleep in his town, 'so that he went to the resting place of the fackiers'; however, the maṇiyakkāraṅ then sent a *fakīr* after him to drive him away with beatings. The Dutch position on the matter was that such officials as the maṇiyakkāraṅ would never have acted save with sanction from above, and they saw behind such attacks the fine hand of the Periya Tambi. It was also their view that other elements of the Maraikkāyar community were not so concerned to oppose the Dutch as the Periya Tambi: in particular, the VOC seems to have had a relatively favourable opinion of a certain Adam Labbai, whom we shall encounter ahead as well.

Faced with what they saw as a conspiracy hatched by the second man in Ramnad, the VOC sent a small delegation in January 1698 to Kilavaṅ Setupati, comprising Arasu and two *lascorijns*. The trio finally found the Ramnad ruler in Devipattinam, and secured an audience with him on 30 January. When the Dutch complaint was read out, the Setupati (so Arasu reports) called for the Periya Tambi 'with an angry face', but the latter failed to appear. At which the Setupati (mixing metaphors somewhat) 'burst out in angry words, and said where is that dog, I see that now that he has fattened his rump, he begins to rear at me, but I swear that all those who act against me and the Dutch, or seek to divide us will have their heads cut off'.⁷⁰ At this juncture, Periya Tambi entered the room, and a protracted argument followed between him and the VOC employees, each accusing the other of brewing trouble. The matter was eventually resolved with the Setupati agreeing to fine the maṇiyakkāraṅ of Vedalai 120 *pardaus*, and his counterpart

⁶⁹ Barent Gast at Kilakkarai to Krijn Caperman at Tuticorin, January 1698, ARA, OB, VOC. 1605, fls. 1086-86v.

⁷⁰ Report of 'Araatie Chinatricke' and two *lascorijns* sent to the Freelord Setupati Katta Tevar, January 1698, ARA, OB, VOC. 1605, fls. 1091v-97, especially fl. 1092v, '... borst Zijn Excell. in hevige termen uijt, en zeijde waar blijft dien hont, ik sie dat nu hij sijn gat dik heevt begint hij agter uijt te slaan, maar ik sweer dat alle die tegen mij en de hollanders sijn, off tweedragt soeken te brouwen, sal ik de kop aff kappen.'

at Devipattinam 150 pardaus, for their discourtesy to the Dutch Company.

And so, the Dutch believed, matters had been settled to their satisfaction. But this was scarcely the case, as they came to realize when the pearl-fishery was actually held. For by late February, the Tuticorin factors were complaining that the Muslim boat-owners (or *campānōṭṭis*) were refusing to advance money to the divers, as was usually done in preparation for pearl fishing.⁷¹ This, the Dutch factor Krijn Caperman wrote, was on account of 'their fear of Peria Tamby and the obstinate stubbornness of this Moorman and a few of his supporters'.⁷² The Dutch had good reason to feel uneasy, for the pearl fishery of March-April turned out to be a complete failure. A total of 172 *tōnis* and 1305 divers took part, and the Maraikkāyars succeeded not only in their own boycott, but in frightening away a substantial number of Paravas. No vessels at all from Kayalpatanam or Kilakkarai were present, and the 32 Labbai divers who did show up at the fishery were either from Ceylon, or from Tuticorin and Punnaikkayal (where they must have been employed by Parava *campānōṭṭis*). The table below shows the extent of success enjoyed by the 'strike' of 1698, by comparing the number of divers to that in other years.⁷³

Table: Divers at the Pearl Fishery

Category	1698	1699	1708
Christian	1266	2249	2380
Hindu	7	358	390
Muslim	32	1259	1552
Total	1305	3866	4322

The Dutch were quite naturally enraged, and planned to send a far more elaborate embassy to Ramanathapuram, this time headed by

⁷¹ Caperman et al. at Tuticorin to Lucas Pool at Kayalpatnam, 22-2-1698, ARA, OB, VOC. 1605, fls. 1102v-1103v.

⁷² Ibid., ' . . . dogh wij vertrouwen dat de vreesse voor periatamby ende obstinatie halsternigheijt van dien moorman en weijnige zijner aanhangelingen daar van de oorsaake is.'

⁷³ ARA, OB, VOC. 1605, fls. 1050-52v, 'Lijste der thonijs, steenen en personen in d' maand April anno 1698 op de peerlvisscherije van aripo opgenomen.'

Adam van der Duyn and Barent Gast. But by the time these men arrived at the court, affairs had taken a new and dramatic twist. Late in 1698, the old Periya Tambi had died, and consequently the court was in something of a flux. The Dutch seized this opportunity to make some quite extraordinary demands, such as:

- that they be paid 24,000 pardaus as compensation for losses in the pearl fishery of 1698
- that the old Periya Tambi's associates, in particular three other Maraikkāyars, be punished for their part in the 'strike'
- that the Maraikkāyar maṇiyakkāraṇ of Vedalai (one 'Caijvene') be handed over to them, as also two other Muslims, Miyān Nayinār and Kuṭṭi Nayinār.⁷⁴

The Setupati was clearly not about to accede to such demands. He advised the Dutch, quite placidly, that 'since Periatambi was dead, they should forget the past and forgive'.⁷⁵ This piece of Christian-sounding advice was not to Dutch taste, the more so since their demands were rejected outright. Nor could they have been happy with another piece of news: they now found themselves confronting the dead man's brother, Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir, as holder of the title of Vijaya Raghunātha Periya Tambi.

By February 1699, the transition had been completed smoothly. The Dutch representatives to Ramnad wrote in disappointment to Colombo:

It is also certain that even as His Excellency [the Setupati] has not held to his pledged word in so many matters, nor will he do so with his delivered promises concerning the brother of the dead Moor Periatambij, since we do not expect that he will ever be moved to remove him from the government, through which we have seen well enough that he possesses control of his [the Setupati's] heart, and he the Lord Tevar will not undertake any matters of importance without first having had consultation with this proud Moor.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ ARA, OB, VOC. 1615 (III), fls. 641-54v, especially fls. 643-45, 'Rapport opgesteld door den coopman Adam van der Duyn en boekhouder Barent Gast.'

⁷⁵ ARA, OB, VOC. 1615 (III), fl. 645v.

⁷⁶ Ibid., fls. 652v-53.

Rather than resist the inevitable, the Dutch temporarily abandoned the enterprise of expelling ‘Abd al-Qādir from positions of importance. In end-January 1699, before leaving Kilakkarai for Tuticorin, the VOC factors invited ‘Abd al-Qādir to their lodge, and asked him ‘earnestly’ to help promote the Company’s trade; they also assured him and the other Maraikkāyars of the town that ‘all their past unreasonablenesses were forgiven and forgotten’.⁷⁷ Having thus beaten a tactical retreat, the Dutch also toyed with the idea of offering ‘Abd al-Qādir an additional sop, to ensure his active co-operation in the pearl-fishery to be held in some weeks’ time. This took the form of the right to use twenty-seven Muslim divers in the fishery without paying taxes to the Dutch (as was normally required). However, the Dutch governor at Colombo assured the Setupati that the grant should not be regarded as the Periya Tambi’s right, and finally decided that the Dutch would act only after having seen ‘what this Perie Tambij is like as a man, and if his deeds are to the Company’s service’.⁷⁸

For a short period thereafter, friction seems to have been kept to a minimum. ‘Abd al-Qādir continued to co-operate with the Dutch in their commodity procurement in the Ramnad-Madurai area, in respect both of textiles and rockfish skins (*rogevellien*). Since in this period the Ramnad-Madurai area annually supplied the Dutch Company with somewhat over 130,000 pieces of textiles, this was a key service, especially because the Dutch believed that the Periya Tambis could significantly influence Muslim weavers, and thereby fix prices more or less at will.⁷⁹ But once again, tensions surfaced within a few years. Even more than his brother, ‘Abd al-Qādir appears as a favourite of the Setupati ruler in the latter’s correspondence with the Dutch, and the Ramnad ruler frequently used the Maraikkāyar as an intermediary in dealings with the VOC—a fact that was scarcely pleasing to the latter. In March 1702, for example, Dutch factors at Kilakkarai reported that

⁷⁷ Ibid., fl. 653v.

⁷⁸ Gerrit de Meere at Colombo to the Setupati, 28-4-1699, ARA, OB, VOC. 1615 (III), fls. 661-64v.

⁷⁹ ARA, OB, VOC. 1655, fls. 667-67v; for Dutch procurement of textiles in the region, also see ARA, OB, VOC. 1805, fls. 1009-1011; for a general discussion, also Arasaratnam (1964).

'the regent Periatambij Markaij with two servants called Auwerbraetje Ayen and Kilgader Ajen arrived here and sent word to us that they had been sent here by His Excellency the Lord Tevar to speak to us about certain matters';⁸⁰ this turned out to be a request for Dutch naval assistance (in the form of four shallops), to be used against the rulers of Madurai and Tanjavur. The Dutch refused, claiming that they had to remain neutral in respect of other south Indian rulers, but this remained a sore point even in later years. It was the VOC's belief that from roughly this juncture, 'Abd al-Qādir persuaded the Setupati that the Dutch were fair-weather friends, and that while they demanded all manner of exclusive rights, they constantly excused themselves from reciprocating by claiming that they had other treaty obligations.

In the game with the Dutch, the Ramnad ruler had one major card to play, and this was the control of the Pamban channel, which lay between the island of Ramesvaram and the mainland. Since the late fifteenth century, when a cyclonic storm had led to the broadening of the Pamban channel, the passage through the Straits of Mannar had, for the most part, been abandoned in favour of this route. The only other realistic alternative available to ships wishing to pass from the Bay of Bengal to the western Indian Ocean (or vice-versa) was to sail around Sri Lanka, a far more time-consuming affair. In view of the strategic importance of this route, the Dutch wished primarily to prevent other Europeans—whether English, Portuguese, Danes, or French—from gaining access to it. They also wished to restrict even Asian shipping on this route, as far as possible. Control over the channel thus remained a constant issue in Dutch negotiations with the Setupati, who steadfastly resisted Dutch petitions to allow them to station their own men on Ramesvaram for this purpose. But from about 1703-4, the Dutch complained that 'Abd al-Qādir had entered into relations with both English and Danes, in order to sell them goods from the area (frequently in violation, it should be added, of Dutch monopolistic claims), and that in return he persuaded the Setupati to allow these other Europeans access to the channel. Once again, the Periya

⁸⁰ ARA, OB, VOC. 1643, fls. 336v-37, letter from the Setupati to Colombo dated July 1701; also VOC. 1655, fls. 662-64, letter from the Kilakkarai factors to Tuticorin, 3-3-1702.

Tambi appears in Dutch eyes as one of their most irritating and powerful opponents.

In late 1703 and early 1704, there also occurred a somewhat acrimonious exchange of letters between 'Abd al-Qādir and the Dutch in relation to his own maritime trade to Sri Lanka, which he conducted using a fleet of medium-sized vessels. Two of these vessels ran into difficulties with the Dutch, one at Colombo, the other at Galle. While 'Abd al-Qādir in his letters to Colombo claimed that the vessels were looted by Dutch factors out of sheer malice, the Dutch for their part claimed that the ships carried goods including areca, pepper, cowries and iron, which had been purchased 'without license', and that one of them was trying to evade Dutch customs to boot.⁸¹ Whatever the rights of the matter, 'Abd al-Qādir was never compensated for the goods taken off his vessels, despite several letters written to the Dutch by the Setupati, who interceded on his behalf

Of some interest in the same correspondence is the evidence of close collaboration between the Setupati and his Maraikkāyar protégé in other maritime and commercial matters. It has already been noted that from the mid 1680s the Ramnad ruler had adopted the practice of trading on his own account in Bengal, and at times in the Persian Gulf. Now Dutch sources in the first decade of the eighteenth century suggest that this had become a cover (and a thin one at that) for trade conducted by the Periya Tambi Maraikkāyar.⁸² In May 1705, for example, the Setupati wrote to the Dutch governor at Colombo, Cornelis Joan Simons, declaring:

I have made three of my ships ready, in order to send them, the one with a lading of conch-shells to Bengal, one to Aceh, and one to Maskat with other goods, and now that they are ready to depart, I request that Your Nobility see fit to supply me with passports for the same, on the basis of our friendship and signed contract.⁸³

⁸¹ Translated *ōlai* from Vijaya Raghunātha Periya Tambi to the Governor of Ceylon, Cornelis Joan Simons, dated December 1703/January 1704, ARA, OB, VOC. 1686, fls. 758-60; also see the reply by Simons to the Setupati, dated 20-2-1704, VOC. 1686, fls. 751-55.

⁸² See, in addition to the references in notes 94 and 95 below, ARA, OB, VOC. 1771, fl. 1514.

⁸³ ARA, OB, VOC. 1706, fls. 1027v-28.

The Dutch, while reluctantly providing the passports, were certain that things were not as they appeared on surface. A letter from Colombo to Tuticorin in March 1708 described the Setupati's entire trade as 'a great pretext using which the Moor Peria Tamby can play his role, and bring in all kinds of contraband goods in the name of his master'.⁸⁴ Later that year, when the Setupati's ship, which he had sent to the Persian Gulf in 1706, returned after a long but commercially disastrous voyage, the Dutch reported with malicious glee that 'only time will tell how the Regent Periatambij will make good this account with His Excellency'.⁸⁵ And not all co-operation between the ruler and the 'regent' was so covert. In a letter to the Dutch written in late 1703 (to which we have already referred above), 'Abd al-Qādir himself stated that the Setupati needed a ship armed with cannon, to carry a hundred men in order to patrol the Pamban channel, and that he ('Abd al-Qādir) had agreed to construct it for the ruler.⁸⁶ However, when he requested Dutch assistance to further his plans, he was flatly turned down.

The first open rupture between the Maraikkāyar magnate and the Dutch had taken place, in 1703. From this time on, things went from bad to worse. In May 1705, the Dutch governor at Colombo wrote the Setupati a long and complaining letter, which was in essence a diatribe directed at the Vijaya Raghunātha Periya Tambi. The Dutchman Simons wrote:

Your Excellency as an understanding and wise lord can well think that when we wish to live in peace and friendship with each other, that the said contract must also be adhered to on Your Excellency's side, and that as a consequence the ship in which Your Excellency is to transport conch-shells must go to no other place than Bengal, even as is stated on the passport given to Your Excellency now. But last year, Your Excellency's folk have traded against the contract and sold conch-shells to strange Europeans at Tranquebar, concerning which the commander His Noble Lordship Nico-

⁸⁴ Letter from Colombo to Tuticorin, dated 17-3-1708, ARA, OB, VOC. 1756, fls. 1304-1305.

⁸⁵ Letter from Tuticorin to Colombo, dated 10-4-1708, ARA, OB, VOC. 1756, fls. 1305v-1306.

⁸⁶ See ARA, OB, VOC. 1686, fl. 758v, for the reference to 'een chialoup de welke 100 man met eenige stucken canon door pambenaer naar rammanacoil soude comen overbrengen.'

laas Welter wrote to Your Excellency strongly on the 10th November of the same year, and stated that Your Excellency's Vijaya Raghunātha Periya Tambi played the master in this matter, and through his evil deeds did the Illustrious Company much damage and that he should not be permitted to do this ever if our face-to-face (*sic*) friendship is to remain fast and constant.⁸⁷

This relationship with 'strange Europeans'—in the case at hand the Danes—was later described in greater detail by the Dutch. It was claimed that 'the Moorish regent Peria Tambij had taken a considerable sum of money on interest from the Danish nation, and could not return or pay the same back at the proper time, so that those at Tranquebar held his brother, or cousin, hostage for over two years.'⁸⁸ The Periya Tambi being forced to think of other ways to extricate his relative (the Dutch wrote), he hit upon the expedient of allowing the Danes passage through the Pamban channel. Not only this, the VOC accused Periya Tambi of collecting a toll from the Danes, which he used to repay the debt; later, he is alleged to have allowed the English the same right. The Dutch—who were anxious to see this action as that of a 'sinister Moor'—decided that the Setupati was being swindled by 'Abd al-Qādir, and knew nothing at all about the matter, but this is contradicted by their own assertions that 'Abd al-Qādir in fact enjoyed the right to collect duties on goods passing through the channel, and hence was certainly not 'swindling the treasury' as alleged.

While these accusations were made, and complaints to the Setupati continued, the VOC continued to deal with the Periya Tambi and his associates in a variety of commercial and political matters. One of the most significant of these was the pearl-fishery, which had by the early eighteenth century become something less than an annual affair. The administration of the fishery had been 'inherited' by the Dutch from the Portuguese, as had the right to tax the fishery (the latter right being shared, however, with the Nāyakas of Madurai). According to an elaborate report on the workings of the fishery, prepared in 1691 by the Commissioner-General Hendrik Adriaan van Rheede, the role of the

⁸⁷ ARA, OB, VOC. 1706, fls. 1037v-38.

⁸⁸ ARA, OB, VOC. 1771, fl. 1514, Dagh-Register held by Cornelis Taay and Barent Gast on their mission to Ramanathapuram, July 1709.

Dutch took the following form. Initially, in October, the VOC organized an inspection of the pearl-banks: those in the inspecting team included the Dutch *opperhoofd* for the Fishery Coast, several important Parava *paṭṭānkattis*, and also a Kayalpatnam Muslim notable.⁸⁹ An estimate was prepared of the value of a sample of one thousand oysters from each bank, and a judgement was made on this basis concerning whether or not a fishery was to be held, and if so of what duration it was to be. Even before the decision to hold the fishery had been made, advances were given out to divers by boat-owning entrepreneurs (the *campāṇōṭṭis*). These advances served to ensure a supply of labour for each vessel for the duration of the fishery, which is to say for a period from a month to forty-five days in March and April.

We are aware that in the early eighteenth century, Maraikkāyar investment in the fishery was considerable. Pearl-fishing drew boats from a diversity of centres, including some on the Coromandel coast, Malabar and Sri Lanka. The major participant ports (excluding those in Sri Lanka) were Tuticorin, Kilakkarai, Kayalpatnam, Sundarapandyapatnam and Punnaikayal, in that order; of these, Tuticorin and Punnaikayal were clearly Parava dominated, both in terms of divers and boat-owners, while the major centres of Labbai/Maraikkāyar participation in the fishery were Kilakkarai, Kayalpatnam, Sundarapandyapatnam, Karaikal and Adirampatnam, in roughly that order. In fact, Dutch records from 1708 provide us details of the ownership and operation of individual boats in the fishery: important operators at Kilakkarai include Ādam Labbai, a certain Cinna Maraikkāyar, as well as the Periya Tambi. Twenty-one Kilakkarai boats are identified by the Dutch as 'van de regent Perie Tambij', although each has a different supervisor (e.g., Qādir Nabi, or Cinna Mera Ghani) in charge; this is from a Kilakkarai total of seventy-three boats in this particular fishery.⁹⁰ The Adirampatnam contingent is dominated by another figure, Husain Nayiṇār Maraikkāyar, owner of six boats and employer of thirty-nine divers.

⁸⁹ 'Bericht, raekende de peerlbancken van Manaer en Aripo', 16-1-1691, in van Dam (1932), pp. 412-33. For further details, also see for instance ARA, OB, VOC. 1655, fls. 672-79, a report dated 29-3-1702.

⁹⁰ ARA, OB, VOC. 1756, fls. 1177-88, 'Lijste der vaartuijgen personen duyckers en steenen, die in de peerlvisscherije van Tuticorin Anno 1708 sijn bevonden.'

As organized by the Dutch, the pearl-fishery involved quite an elaborate set of rules. The area set aside in any given year for the fishery camp was demarcated by flags, and Dutch Company servants were sent out to coastal settlements to announce the location and dates for the fishery. All boats were to gather at that spot to be registered by the Dutch, and to have such details as the owner/supervisor's name, the length of the boat, the number of divers and their religion, and so on noted for the VOC's records. Two other rules existed that were the matter of some dispute: first, that pearls could be sold only to merchants from Tuticorin, Palaiyakkayal and Kayalpatnam, and second, that the proceeds of one day's fishing were to be handed over to the Nāyaka of Madurai.⁹¹ The troubles of 1708, involving the Dutch and the Periya Tambi, centred around precisely these issues.

In this year, the camp was held in Madurai territory, not far from Tuticorin. The Madurai authorities hence set up a local toll-booth to collect duties on goods brought into the fishery camp, including food-stuff. It is alleged by the Dutch that 'Abd al-Qādir and his associates resented the presence of this toll; hence, they deliberately engineered a quarrel with the toll-collector, and then insulted him in a variety of ways (some of them quite imaginative, such as sending a 'Moor' with a package of excrement wrapped in cloth to the toll-house, which the toll-keeper opened thinking it to contain goods of great worth).⁹² Further, when the pearl-fishing vessels were called upon to register themselves, the Kilakkarai Muslims—so the Dutch allege—refused to do so for two days, thus delaying the start of the fishery. Equally, they refused to obey the rule concerning restrictions on pearl transactions, and in this context three 'ringleaders' were mentioned, all associated with 'Abd al-Qādir, including his brother-in-law and a certain Māmu Nayiṅār. The Madurai-appointed administrator of the camp, a certain Cittappa Nāyaka, appealed to the Kilakkarai Muslims considered to be the least sympathetic to 'Abd al-Qādir and his family (namely Ādam Labbai and *his* associates), but it was all to no avail. Later, the Kilakkarai boat-operators also resisted the handing-over of one day's proceeds in

⁹¹ ARA, OB, VOC. 1756, fls. 1282v-83.

⁹² ARA, OB, VOC. 1756, fls. 1284-85.

the fishery to the Madurai Nāyaka, and some of the vessels made off at night to Kilakkarai, taking their pearls along.⁹³

The Dutch immediately complained at great length to the Setupati, claiming that this was really the last straw. Kilavan Setupati, for his part, wrote the VOC a long reply in May 1708, justifying the actions of the Periya Tambi and his associates, and claiming that they had been maltreated by the Madurai toll-keepers and camp-administrators. As for why several boats had left the camp for Kilakkarai surreptitiously and by night, it was—so the Setupati averred—because the Periya Tambi was indisposed and needed to return home.⁹⁴ Circumstantial evidence favours at least this last claim, for a few months later a *new* Periya Tambi appears on the scene, suggesting either that ‘Abd al-Qādir had died in late 1708, or that he had withdrawn totally from trade and administration. No direct reference to the magnate’s death has been found so far in Dutch records, but by 1709, the Dutch refer constantly to the ‘young Periya Tambi’, and on one occasion even describe him as a ‘senseless youngster’—a description that could scarcely be applied to ‘Abd al-Qādir, who had been born in around 1650.⁹⁵ One is left, at any rate, with a faint sense of *déjà vu*: the events of 1698-9 find an echo in those that transpired ten years later. But there was a difference. In 1709, the VOC pushed insistently to have the young Periya Tambi removed from *all* positions of power, and devoted a great deal of time and effort to this end. Two emissaries, Cornelis Taay and Barent Gast, were sent from Colombo to Ramnad, and they spent nearly ten weeks on their expedition. From the very outset, they made no bones about their purpose, writing to the Setupati from Kilakkarai on 30 May 1709:

We find placed close to Your Excellency the son of the former malicious Periya Tambi, who besides held control over Pamban and the Moorish

⁹³ ARA, OB, VOC. 1756, fl. 1286v.

⁹⁴ ARA, OB, VOC. 1762, fls. 885-86, letter from the Setupati to Jan Bierens at Tuticorin, dated 4-6-1708.

⁹⁵ For the description of the ‘jongen’ Periya Tambi, see ARA, OB, VOC. 1771, fl. 1499. Susan Bayly (1989), p. 83, puts forward the view that ‘Abd al-Qādir died only in 1715, which is at variance with the indirect Dutch evidence. She cites Ameer Ali (1983), where on p. 58 one encounters no more than the suggestion that ‘Abd al-Qādir may have died in 1713.

weavers at Kilakkarai, and who by his express orders to the said Kilakkarai Moors (so we are told), has shown himself to be a disturbance to the common peace, and an enemy of Your Excellency and of the Noble Company.⁹⁶

The Dutch factors claimed that the young Periya Tambi had had the VOC lodge at Kilakkarai attacked by a crowd of over two hundred Muslims, who had thrown the Dutch goods out on the street, and had even attacked one of the Setupati's representatives who attempted to interfere. The Dutch envoys also noted in their daily diary some weeks later that 'almost all the court-nobles (*hofsgrooten*) and heads of the Kilakkarai Moors' were advising the Setupati to rid himself of the young Maraikkāyar, who had turned into something of an embarrassment.⁹⁷ And finally, in August 1709, the Dutch got what they so ardently wanted: the young Periya Tambi was formally removed from all positions of power, and Ādam Labbai appointed in his place.

But there is also an intriguing postscript. In January 1711, the Tuticorin factors of the Dutch Company wrote to Colombo with further news of the Periya Tambi. The relevant section of their letter runs:

We have received word from the Kilakkarai residents that the Lord Tevar has had Periatambij Marcaij and his associates apprehended, and has had him tortured with pincers on the fingers, as also by other extraordinary means, and has also had his wives affronted in a manner contrary to custom, stating that he and some others had promised to finance the cavalry of Madurai and the Raja Tondaiman to the sum of 11,000 pardaus, of which 3,000 had already been made over, transforming all his ready goods to cash for this end.⁹⁸

It is crucial to recall that the 'lord Tevar' referred to here was no longer Kilavan Setupati, but his successor Vijaya Raghunātha (r. 1710-20). We are aware that the latter ruler's position in the early years of his reign was exceedingly precarious, on account of the existence of a pretender—namely Kilavan's illegitimate son Bhavāni Śaṅkara—who sought assistance from Pudukkottai, Madurai and Tanjavur. Evidently the

⁹⁶ ARA, OB, VOC. 1771, fl. 1496, letter from Taay and Gast to the Setupati, 30-5-1709.

⁹⁷ ARA, OB, VOC. 1771, fl. 1506.

⁹⁸ Letter from Tuticorin to Colombo, in ARA, OB, VOC. 1805, fl. 1049.

young Periya Tambi had embroiled himself in one such adventure, eventually paying the price for it. Later Dutch records almost wholly ignore the family; instead, repeated mention is made of other powerful Maraikkāyar notables associated with the Ramnad state, as Ādam Labbai is, eventually succeeded, by 1715, as 'regent' by a certain Nayiṅār Labbai.⁹⁹

'Abd al-Qādir as Cītakāti

This then is as far as one can proceed using the Dutch sources. One gains a picture of an economically powerful, but not wholly politically secure Maraikkāyar family, who have rivals at the Ramnad court and within their own community, and whose commercial and political ambitions also bring them into conflict with the Dutch Company. During the reign at Ramnad of Kīlavanṅ Setupati, the family of 'Abd al-Qādir was clearly given considerable latitude, and protected by the ruler himself from the wrath of the Dutch. In return, the family played a multiplicity of roles, as merchants, brokers, revenue-farmers and intermediaries for the Setupati ruler, and, by virtue of the proclaimed ambiguity of the relationship, also entered into diplomatic manoeuvres from which the Setupati could distance himself if the need arose. Thus, the equation between the little king (a self-proclaimed devout Vaishṇava), and the semi-official head of a powerful Islamic client community resident in his territories acted to the benefit of both.

Against this background, we may consider the most intriguing literary work concerning Cītakāti, the so-called *Ceytakāti nonṭināṭakam*, an anonymously authored work of the early eighteenth century. As has been noted elsewhere, the nonṭināṭakam is a picaresque genre, which emerges out of a folk-poetic milieu in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. The title, literally translated, means 'the cripple's play', since its chief protagonist is—for reasons central to the plot—of necessity a cripple; he is usually also a Kaḷḷar. The nonṭināṭakam is recited by a single narrator/actor, dressed to impersonate the crippled internal narrator of the text; the actor describes himself and his attire after the opening invocations and before he begins the

⁹⁹ Letter from Tuticorin to Colombo dated 7-12-1715, in ARA, OB, VOC. 1865, fl. 989.

actual narration of the story. The plays possess an almost invariant plot, which runs broadly as follows: the Kaḷḷar protagonist falls in love with a devadāsī (or *tēvaṭiyāl*), is made bankrupt by her, and is forced to turn to stealing horses (his 'hereditary' occupation); he enters a military camp in disguise, but bungles his attempt and is punished by having a limb (or several) severed; a patron materializes unexpectedly and finances the maimed hero's pilgrimage to a deity, who in turn restores the limb (or limbs) in question. This basic outline is followed, for example, by the *Tiruccentūr nonṭinaṭakam* of Kantaccāmiṭṭavar: the specific elements peculiar to that work include a detailed description of the late seventeenth-century conflict between Cokkanātha Nāyaka of Madurai and Shāhāji Rāja of Tanjavur, as well as of the camp of the Rāja Toṇḍaimāṇ at Tirukkattuppalli. In this instance, the divine restoration of the severed limb of the central character (here a Kaḷḷar called Matappuli) involves the god Murugan at Tiruccentūr, and the pilgrimage is financed by a certain Ananta Padmanābhaṇ.¹⁰⁰

The *Ceytakāti nonṭinaṭakam*, for its part, is immediately distinguishable from other examples of the genre by its Islamic orientation. The introductory section, beginning with the *bi'smi'llah* and continuing through a series of eight invocations, (to Allah, Muḥammad, Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān, 'Alī, Ḥasan and Ḥusain, and Muḥyī al-Dīn/'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlāni, founder of the Qādiriyya line), is a clear-cut Muslim reworking of the conventional Tamil model of beginning a poem. A *kāppu* verse—aimed at establishing an auspicious tone at the onset, with an address to the deity who alone can help the poet to complete his task—invokes the protection of Allah, the First Deity (*mutalvaṇ*), so that the author can sing the praises of 'guru Ceytakāti, who removes the suffering inherent in this age (*kali tīrkkum*), the lord (*maṇṭalikan*) from Vakutai (= Baghdad!, the first instance of a recurrent attempt to establish a connection with the prestigious Arab East), who is (also known as) Periya Tambi Maraikkāyar'. Note that the anonymous author makes no attempt to disguise the true purpose of his composition, that is, the praise of his patron. It is also very striking that each of the following invocations pairs Cītakāti, the patron, who is always

¹⁰⁰ See Zvelebil (1974), pp. 224-5; for a detailed analysis of the *Tiruccentūr nonṭinaṭakam*, see Shulman (1985), pp. 373-9.

mentioned first, with the Islamic paragon to whom the verse is directed. Thus:

Let me celebrate this accessible
 god of desire (*kāmaṇ*)
 called Ceytakāti, who comes from Baghdad where Lakshmī plays,
 who is an ocean of compassion (*karuṇaivāriti*)
 and a treasure of dharma and good qualities (*kuṇam*),
 O First God (*oruvan*), my support, who is neither
 formed nor lacking form. (1)

Leaving aside the insistent theological point stated at the end—a basic theme in nearly all Tamil Muslim works—we should observe both the proximity of patron and deity and the ‘syncretistic’ depiction of the former: Baghdad is home to Lakshmī, goddess of wealth; Cītakāti exemplifies the standard Hindu royal virtues from this period, including an association with the alluring Kāma, god of desire; these attributes are even articulated in the highly Sanskritized diction popularized by the Nāyaka courts. The borrowing of Hindu metaphors—soon ‘Ā’isha will be described as similar to Tirumakal/Lakshmī, sitting on the lotus; while the Qur’ān, collected by ‘Uthmān, is the Veda (*marainūl*, 5)—should not be seen as reflecting the superficial Islamization of the author, or his recent conversion (as some commentators have assumed); rather we have here an attempt to develop a vocabulary appropriate to the context, and to the audience at which the text is directed. The particular cultural flavour of Tamil Islam is present throughout, in a variety of details—the love or devotion (*aṇpu*, the major *bhakti* term) with which the poet worships the feet of the Prophet (2); the persistent concern with place, especially Kayal, described in formulaic terms; the selective assimilation of themes known from classical tradition, filtered here through local sources and interests and reformulated in a Tamil mode, exactly as we find in the *Cīrāppurāṇam* (thus, in verse 4, ‘Umar’s claim to honour is the tradition that he killed both his own son and his uncle for deviating from the proper path of conduct, *muraimai tavarinatāl*);¹⁰¹ the inclusion of Ḥasan and Ḥusain,

¹⁰¹ For the well-known tradition that ‘Umar had his own son (Abu Shaḥma) punished—to the point where he died as a result of flogging—for the sin of drinking wine, see, for example, Ibn Qudāma, *Al-Tabayīn fī ansāb al-Qurashiyīn*, ed.

seen as a kind of composite person (*acanaiyucaṇai*, 7), and the culmination of the entire series in the Sufi founder Muḥyī al-Dīn. Clearly, this is the cultivated idiom of a community rooted in its own specific cultural ambience and self-conscious enough to produce works of art expressive of that specificity.

Within this opening context, we can also define more precisely the emerging image of Cītakāti himself. We have seen that he is a royal figure, wealthy, committed to dharma and the proper *guṇas*, at home in Kayal but also eager to establish a link with Baghdad, and also physically arousing, an incarnation of the god of love (*alaku matanavēl*, 7). A further trait—his fascination with and support for Tamil poets—is also hinted at in these early verses, to be worked out more fully in the context of the narrative. By the time the story proper can begin, Cītakāti's virtues have been compressed into a single striking verse uttered by the lame *noṇṭi*-reciter who represents the actual hero of the poem:

I am the cripple
 who sings the praises
 of Ceytakāti Turai, King of Kayal,
 who protects eloquent Tamil poets
 even as he protects the wide earth
 and the whole community of believers (*tīṇavar kulam*)
 with his arms, stout
 as mountains. (introducing verse 5)

The progression is of some interest: first come the poets, then the mundane world (the king's normal preoccupation), and finally the *umma*, the Muslim community (at least in its Tamil extension). In the latter connection, it should be noted that the crippled narrator, in the course of presenting himself (in partly humorous terms) to the audi-

Dulaimi, Beirut 1988, p. 414 (our thanks to Michael Lecker for this reference). The tradition relating to 'Umar's uncle is less prevalent, but see Zubayr ibn Bakkar, *Kitāb nasab quraysh*, Oxford Bod. Marsh 384, fol. 138a (our thanks to Professor M. J. Kister); Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 5:31 ('Umar kills his *maternal* uncle at Badr). The Tamil poet seeks to assimilate the killing of the (paternal) uncle to the pattern of dharmic severity on the part of the king, as with the prototypical Manunītakanṭacōḷan.

ence, declares that he intends to hack all heretics to pieces (*kupirāṇa pērkalaṭ tuṇippēn*, from Ar. *kufr*), that he worships at the feet of the Muslims (*tīnōrkaḷ*), and that he will hammer spikes into the breasts of the Christians (*nacurāṇikal*, 13)—no doubt an echo of the political struggles with which the earlier part of this chapter was concerned.

The plot of the *noṭṭināṭakam* itself follows the formulaic pattern delineated above. Indeed, one of the striking facts about this genre is the degree to which it had formalized and standardized itself, with remarkably limited variation from one little court, one self-adulating patron, to another. The hero, Indomitable Tiger (*oṭṭuṅkāppuli*), is born a *Kallaṇ* in Colaikkiri in the Madurai region. Having mastered all the arts of theft and deceit, he goes to worship his caste deity (Cokkar = Sundareśvara/Śiva, the great god of the Madurai temple). There he is snared by a dancing-girl (*tevaṭiyāl*) who serves the god and his consort *Mīnākshī*. She takes him home, feeds him, makes love to him, and soon milks him of all that he owns. (As usual, it is the girl's mother, the stock figure of the merciless *veśyāmātā*, who treats him most cruelly, 'like a spider that devours flies', 35). A break-in to one of the wealthy homes in Madurai, very professionally accomplished, wins him a reprieve; but soon the girl's demands propel him to leave Madurai in search of greater wealth. He begins well, in Srirangam, where he joins forces with another *Kallaṇ*-adventurer, from Tirupati; after one more erotic adventure with a local temple-girl, our hero makes off with the girl's jewels as well as his friend's stash of loot.

Having thus established the Tiger's impeccable status as a rogue—a status not wholly unrelated to the projected image of the drama's patron, *Cītaṅkāṭi*—the poet can now proceed to the main narrative sequence, which takes place at Senji during the famous Mughal siege (1697-8). *Oṭṭuṅkāppuli* makes his way north to Senji, where he is first cared for by a priest at the *Māriyammaṇ* temple (note the easy intrusion of this folk-deity into the description). The army of Aurangzeb (*Aparaṅkucēkucāyvu*), led by *Zulfiqār Khān* (*Cūlupakāṇ*, 69), has invested the great fort, held by the Maratha prince *Rāmarāja*; Telugu and Kannadiga warriors are camped out in the groves and mutts, and the town and its surroundings are awash with the tents and gaudy banners (*nicāṅkal*, Per. *nishān*) of the Khans. But this is also a scene of great human misery, succinctly depicted by the narrator: terrified by the

'Turks' of alien tongue (*pecc'ariyāt tulukkar*, 80), the townspeople have fled to the forests, having abandoned in haste their homes, their cattle, in some cases even their own children. Hungry and hopeless, grief-stricken, they wander aimlessly, or seek refuge in the mutts. Like other comic genres that achieve legitimacy in the court-poetry of the period, the *noṇṇinātakam* presents us with a peculiar brand of realism. The Tiger should, by all accounts, profit from this desperate situation, and indeed he freely enters into the deserted homes, 'like a rat in a tiger's lair' (87); but, by the reverses of Time (*kālaviparītattināl*, 88), he finds all too little there. His only hope—remember that he is still thinking of the rapacious dancing-girl from Madurai, whom he loves—is to steal a horse from the Mughal camp.

To this end, he disguises himself as a wandering ascetic, equipped with peacock feathers, a coconut shell for smoking opium, a conch and a *cakra*, a small axe, a coarse blanket, waistband, ragged clothes; he smears his body with sacred ash. This prestigious attire wins him immediate access to the military camp (*pālaiyam*), where he is cared for by the retainers of the famous Ēcappa Nāyakkaṅ (who naturally speak to him in Telugu—our poet has no difficulty in moving, without straying from the fixed metrical scheme, from Tamil to Telugu, to Deccani, in the context of reported conversation). Over a period of fifteen days, he familiarizes himself with the camp, especially its Pathan contingent, its guards (*talaiyāri*, 103), and, above all the area of the stables, where he befriends the grooms and masters their special language (*kutiraip pāṣai*, 105). By the night of the new moon, he is ready; and, of course, he wants none other than the superb horse of Cūlupukāṅ himself, leader of the Mughal host. At midnight, he makes his way to the tent where this horse, beautiful as a mountain of emerald, is tethered; he bows down to the animal, touches its hoof, loosens its bonds, and begins to lead it away. Unfortunately, just as he is about to mount, a dog awakens and starts barking. In a panic, our hero tries to hide from the suddenly wakeful and active guards in a variety of uncomfortable places—for example, in a pile of firewood, where he is tortured by the bite of a scorpion and cannot even cry out, 'like a Brahmin woman who has lost the salted meat she kept in secret' (121). In agony, he rolls through a patch of prickly thorns—an embodiment of the evil karma he has amassed (123)—and falls deep into a cesspool.

The guards, holding their noses in disgust, retrieve him from there, clean him off, and, in the morning, drag him before Tāvutukāṇ (Dā'ūd Khān), in the presence of the Pathans and all the other lords and pālaiyakkārars.

But this is a matter for the highest authority: the thief is presented to Cūlupukāṇ himself. The latter interrogates him in Urdu, and our hero pleads : 'Sahib, don't be angry—I am not a Muslim!' (*nān kāpar*, Ar. *kāfir*). The general only smiles and summons the *qādis* (Tamil *kātimār*) to pronounce a punishment according to the Qur'ān (*porukkāṇ* = *furqān*). They demand that his hand and leg be cut off, and the sentence is immediately carried out with the help of the guards and a barber (*ampattap piraman*, 149) summoned for this task.

This is the crucial moment of transition. As our hero lies, maimed and writhing in pain, bemoaning the workings of fate (*vitippaṭi yācuttu*, 153) and the fact that he ever left his native Colaimalai to worship Cokkar / Śiva in Madurai, he is visited by Māmunayināppillai, Cītakāti's younger brother, who has come (on business?) to Senji from Madras (here *Cennapaṭṭanam*, 158—perhaps the earliest literary reference in Tamil to that name). The great lord (*kaṇaturai . . . makarācan*) takes pity on the thief, gives him lime and oil for his wounds as well as money that will help him reach Kilakkarai and his brother Periya Tambi Maraikkāyar. After three days, when the wounds have begun to heal, the crippled hero buys a horse, engages a servant, and sets off for the south, with the feeling that the various evils of Senji have finally been dispelled. He passes through Ariyalur, Pudukkottai, and the Setupati capital of Ramanathapuram (Ramnad), where Cītakāti keeps a great house. Finally he reaches Kilakkarai and Cītakāti's 'court'. He is welcomed by his benefactor Māmunayinār, who asks him simply, 'When, my child?' 'Now', answers the hero—and is at once led into the presence of Cītakāti, ruling in state in the midst of his courtiers, his business associates, notables, officials, accountants and merchants from as far away as Gujarat, musicians playing *kīrttanams* in his honour, dancing-girls waving lamps and *cāmara* fans, and, most conspicuous of all, Tamil poets singing his praises. These poets are mentioned by name: Umaruppulavar, 'who knows Tamil and metrics', and Kantaccāmiṭṭavan (one of the outstanding figures of seventeenth- and eighteenth century Tamil letters); and there is also an unidentified

poet (or poets) referred to as *Mututamilkkavirācar*, 'who knows the three kinds of Tamil' (189)—perhaps a fleeting self-portrait by the unknown author of our verse-drama.¹⁰² All in all, it is a most complete royal scene, which receives an appropriately elaborate description. As the poet states, borrowing again from conventional Hindu metaphors: 'Lakshmī, the brilliant goddess of the lotus, as well as Vīralakshmī (goddess of victory in battle) and Sarasvatī (goddess of the arts) bowed to him (Cītakkāti) as their lord (*karttan*)(89) and then danced before him.' (190)

Cītakkāti himself—that 'god of love to all beautiful women, desired even by the courtesans of heaven' (194-5)—shows compassion, treats our hero like a familiar friend, and decides that, for his own good, he is to become a Muslim (*nām iculām ākkuvōm*, 198). The conversion is accomplished at the hands of the great Shaykh Sadaqatullah himself, who teaches him the *kalima* and all its meaning, the Muslim's daily duties (*parutu = farḍ*), the *sunna*, supererogatory prayers (*navil = nafl*), and the *fātiḥa* (*pāttikā*). He is now pronounced a proper Muslim, and accomplishes the daily prayers, pays the *zakāt*, fasts during Ramadan (*nōṇpu*). To cap this process, he is sent on a pilgrimage to Mecca (*kacu = ḥajj ceyya*, 204); after paying his *salāms* to Sadaqatullah and Cītakkāti, he leaves on one of the latter's boats (*pattāci*) for Calicut, whence another ship takes him to the Holy Cities. After worshipping the *ka'ba* in Mecca, where he also meets many other Labbais (!) along with Arab *sharīfs*, *sayyids*, and *shaykhs*, he proceeds to Madina. He prays to the Prophet to alleviate his sorrow (*tuṅvā = du'ā vōtiyē*); overcome by emotion (*paravacamāy*), he falls asleep beside Muḥammad's tomb. He awakes to find his limbs restored 'by the grace of the Prophet' (*iracūl arulāl*, 218). The *noṇṇināṭakam* can now conclude with a series of blessings—on Cītakkāti, the great king of Kayal; Māmunayinār, 'who treated me like a mother'; the kings of Mecca and the Arab coast;

¹⁰² *Camukattil mututamilkkavirācar* looks like a title (note Samukhamu as the initial element in the courtly title of poets in Nāyaka-period Madurai, thus Samukhamu Veṅkaṭa Krishṇappa Nāyaka); the poet mentioned in this verse, who concludes the series of Tamil bards, is said to be 'uttering *patams*' (*patam uraikka*). It is not unusual in works of this class for the poet to refer to himself, in grandiose fashion, in the course of the narrative: see *Tiruccentūr noṇṇināṭakam* of Muttāl-aṅkuricik Kantacāmiṇṇavar, pp. 265-6; Shulman (1985), p. 377.

Quraish, the Shaykhs, the Qur'ān; then—a striking transition back home, to the poet's own world—the earth and the Setupati king (who protects it); Kilakkarai and Sadaqatullah, 'the great lion'; the *umma* (*tīnavar kulam*), and the wealth and learning of Cītakāti. 'May rain nourish everyone three months a year, O Lord of the Worlds!' (*rappil ālamīnē*). The Qur'ānic phrase, nicely fitted into the final slot of the last Tamil couplet, brings to a close this tale of the thief's transformation and restoration through the medium of a heavily Tamilized Islam.

In its main features, as stated earlier, the *Ceytakāti nonṭināṭakam* is cast in the common mould of the late-medieval genre; its distinctiveness lies only in its Muslim colouring and in the poet's elaborate portrait of the work's famous patron. This is also the motivation for our interest in the poem, which is not by any means a literary tour de force but which, like its kindred contemporary genres in Tamil and Telugu, does embody a particular cultural expressivity that calls for analysis. In summarizing the import of this work, in a historical mode, three main areas seem to be of special significance. First, we observe here, despite the relatively minor status of this one poem, the emergence to self-consciousness of the Tamil Muslim community. The late seventeenth century marks, in this respect, the first major creative outburst in Tamil of this group, with the various features we have noted—above all, the elaboration of a literary idiom suited to the specific cultural and religious context of Tamil Islam. Lexical as well as conceptual borrowings from Tamil Hindu contexts constitute one element in the crystallization of this idiom, which nevertheless achieves a unique flavour and an expressive power all its own. In terms of the linguistic texture of Tamil Muslim works such as the *nonṭināṭakam*, large-scale borrowings from Persian and Arabic serve conspicuously to create an atmosphere imbued with classical (and elitist) Islamic associations. Within this general process, major social types—the magnate-patron, the Sufi teacher, and the Tamil poet, to name the ones that have been relevant here—find their proper definitions.

Secondly, we have been concerned with the articulation of Cītakāti's cultural image as seen in this work. Indeed, the poem is aimed precisely in this direction, as the author repeatedly tells us. Here we can observe the extension to the far south, and to a non-Hindu community, of a paradigm familiar from at least the fifteenth century in

south India—that of the ‘royal’ Vaiśya who imitates the king’s natural patronage of poets. Among various figures, probably the most prominent early model of the type is Avāri Tippayya Seṭṭi, the merchant from Nellur who supported the great Telugu poet Śrīnātha (early fifteenth century) and who is praised at length in the introduction to the latter’s *Haravilāsamu*. The similarities with Cītakkāti are quite striking—the role of seaborne trade as a primary source of the merchant’s wealth; his close relations with the royal court of the area, and his consequent royal pretensions, worked out in relation to the poets. But there are also signal differences: Tippayya Seṭṭi appears in a role that is clearly ancillary to that of the contemporary Redḍi kings, whom he sustains in various ways; Cītakkāti seems to have taken his own kingly powers far more seriously, and more literally, at least if we are to judge from the panegyric in our text. It is also striking that what Cītakkāti receives from his poet is not a traditional purāṇa—Umaruppulavar’s *Cīrāppurāṇam* does *not* celebrate Cītakkāti as Śrīnātha did his patron—but a ‘sub-literary’ text, the nonṭināṭakam, which is largely dependent on folk themes of a racy and partly comic nature. The inflated panegyric that characterizes our work is decidedly not in the ‘imperial’ mode: it is familiar, localized, even a little crude, as befits this confident but small-scale ‘kingship’ and its self-made little lord. Cītakkāti is assimilated not only to the idealised dharmic norms of the Hindu king, but to the sensual image of the erotic hero that this period so enjoys, and even—at least implicitly—to the roguish anti-hero of the play. We have seen that even his bards do not hesitate to call their patron Kaḷḷar, a thief. On some level, this merchant-prince is utterly at home in a world of mercenary courtesans, predatory bandits, tricksters and thieves. At the same time, he is linked in relations of pious deference to the Sufi teacher, Sadaqatullah, and to the world of mosques and the pilgrimage—hence, also, to the motif of conversion, the turning point of the narrative. Four major elements thus merge to compose the patron’s symbolic image: the royal assertiveness, seen especially in his magnanimity, and in the panegyric responses it inspires; his identification as an alluring erotic hero (particularly evident in the adapted love-poems) as befits any royal or quasi-royal figure in the period; his Muslim piety, promotion of conversion, and relations with the ‘ulamā and Sufi practice; and his potentially unruly or roguish qualities, no

doubt linked in turn to the social and economic milieu within which this Muslim merchant functioned so successfully. In short, this is a local 'king' with definite anti-normative potential who is nevertheless closely bound up with the institutionalized spheres of power in the Hindu court and the Muslim religious establishment, and who uses his vast resources to build up a symbolic presence in the works of Hindu and Muslim Tamil poets alike.

Finally, the *noṭṭināṭakam* offers us another glimpse of the predominant cultural thematics of the period. In this respect, the Muslim tone is even perhaps overshadowed by more general preoccupations, above all with the by-now-familiar themes of violation and mutilation. The Kaḷḷar anti-hero of the text is a proper Nāyaka-period protagonist—magically gifted, eager to turn social conventions to his own advantage, always prepared to violate the norm in his search for cash or other forms of floating wealth. His initial successes in this direction pale, perhaps, before his ultimate failure and subsequent conversion (he is also, even in his early, unreconstructed period, an easy dupe for the unscrupulous courtesans he loves); still, the bold portrayal of this antinomian *picaro*, from the lower margins of society, speaks eloquently of the expanding literary horizons of this period, as of its changing formulations of human models and ideals. The Kaḷḷar horse-thief has his own proper place within the varied, rapidly transforming social order. Nor is it by chance that Indomitable Tiger has to undergo bodily mutilation as the precondition for a switch in awareness—and as a prelude to eventual bodily regeneration; we have seen this pattern worked out with reference to Sāraṅgadhara and Ahalyā, and we have noted its roots in the newly legitimized folk traditions active within the emerging discourse of the courts. For the Nāyaka hero of this innovating minor genre of *noṭṭināṭakam*—so useful in shaping the image of this powerful late-Nāyaka patron and public figure—growth and self-transformation require the prior, violent dis-articulation of the body's wholeness in the context of an individual's private assault upon the wholeness of the regulated social body

The fact that this process takes a Muslim direction here is not, of course, an accident. It is determined by the specifics of the cultural occasion—a Muslim entrepreneur's self-reflection in the mirror of his time, community, and place. But neither can this process be seen in

isolation from the general fascination with themes of violation, physical mutilation, and regeneration; the Islamic orientation has been projected onto an existing literary and conceptual trend. Indeed, one of the most striking features of this case is the apparent ease with which its characteristic Tamil Muslim elements find their place within the wider sphere of the shared south Indian political culture at the end of the seventeenth century. The *Ceytakāti nonṭinātakam* is the poetic witness to an ongoing social event. A community from outside the Hindu fold, its leaders among the most sophisticated and calculating members of a new elite, has established itself inside the political and economic centre of this small, 'peripheral', yet strikingly successful Nāyaka state.

CONCLUSION

The late seventeenth century saw a substantial rise in the fortunes of the Tamil Muslim mercantile community; this process underpins many of the events and cultural movements described at length above. In the particular case of the Fishery Coast, a century of suppressed ambitions (if not eclipse) under the strain of combating the Portuguese-Parava alliance was succeeded, from about 1650, by a new configuration, in which the growing power of the Ramnad state dovetailed with the ambitions of the Maraikkāyars. Maravar state-formation, delicately poised between the larger Nāyaka polities, on the one hand, and the European presence on the coast, on the other, incorporated the Maraikkāyars as a major formative element (in this the Setupati kingdom contrasts strongly with the Velugōḍu experience further north). Susan Bayly has recently written of how 'Abd al-Qādir' played a key role in the process of commercialisation which made it possible for this powerful South Indian Marava warrior line to consolidate their new domain';¹⁰³ as her summary statement makes clear, one cannot assert with any degree of certainty the extent of subordination or direction of dependence in this nuanced and complex relationship. From the literary corpus of the period comes evidence of Cītakāti's projected self-image and the extent of his pretensions; from the Dutch records, equally, one sees that the Setupati was hard put to dispense with his

¹⁰³ Bayly (1989), p. 83.

services, even under intense Dutch pressure. We have also suggested, on the basis of our reading of Dutch documentation, that the very ambiguity of the relationship was often exploited by the Setupati to use the Maraikkāyar, as it were, to draw the Europeans' fire; it may have been necessary in this context to build the Maraikkāyar magnate into a larger-than-life figure.

On the other hand, our exploration of the literary corpus surrounding Cītakāti has focused on his links northwards, to the wider world of late Nāyaka-period literature and cultural expression, and to an audience that went beyond the 'purist' Muslim elite of ports such as Kayalpatnam or Kilakkarai. In this context, the use of a 'syncretic' vocabulary reflects not merely the mixed cultural formation of the writers of these literary works, but equally the predilections and character of the target audience. Thus, the 'conversion' motif of the *Ceytakāti nonṭināṭakam* is rich in meaning: the intention was to be inclusive rather than exclusive. At the same time, we see in this and similar texts a continuous experimentation with local literary and cultural forms—as opposed to the countervailing tendency, also conspicuous in Tamil Muslim materials, toward localizing and reformulating 'classical' Islamic themes—the result being an organic, richly expressive system of linkages with the surrounding social and conceptual environment.

This said, we must also bear in mind that the creation of a larger-than-life-sized myth around a magnate figure such as 'Abd al-Qādir either within his own lifetime or shortly thereafter placed him and his family in a rather perilous position in respect to the increasingly ill-tempered employees of the Dutch East India Company, to say nothing of other forms of temporal and state authority, such as Ramnad. For, besides playing a central role in the Maraikkāyar opposition to Dutch ambitions, Cītakāti had to maintain his community's position *vis-à-vis* the state that harboured them. Managing this bewildering 'portfolio' of roles with success was what set this Maraikkāyar magnate apart, and as it happened the tide of historical events ran—if only briefly—in his favour.

VIII

Conclusion

1. VISIONS OF THE FALL: TANJAVUR, SEPTEMBER 1673

The Madurai forces are at the gates. They are led by a very able commander, the *dalavāy*-poet Venkaṭa Krishṇappa Nāyaka;¹ their advance has been rapid and easy, perhaps because of the bizarre magic performed on their behalf by the Tantric guru Bhaktapriyasvāmi, who filled the Kāverī River with thousands of smashed, magically charged pumpkins; whoever drinks of this water at once deserts to the conquering Madurai army. They have cannon and many muskets, which have been firing steadily at the walls of and the entrances to the Tanjavur fort. At least a thousand Tanjavur soldiers already lie dead. As the defenders fall back before the cannon shot and musket volleys, the first Madurai warriors scale the walls.

Time to inform the king. But Vijayarāghava is busy at his devotions, submerged in single-minded meditation on his god, Vishṇu of Mannarkuti. They cry out to him nonetheless, in panic: 'O Mahārāja, the enemy has broken into the fort.' But the king cannot break off his prayers. He refuses even to rise to his feet, and instead merely signals silently with his hand: 'Let them come; we shall see.'

Venkaṭa Krishṇappa is a wise man. What is the point of further bloodshed? He wants to stop the battle, to come to terms with the stubborn, 80-year-old King of Tanjavur. So he sends him a message: 'Many of our men are already inside your fort. Your army and your fort are entirely in our possession. What is the use of further effort?

¹ The author of the *Ahalyāsaiṅkrandanam*, studied in IV.3 above.

Even now we can talk peace. We can withdraw our army. You are a great warrior; but why be obstinate? The alliance we are proposing is nothing new. The two royal houses have intermarried before, like water mixing with milk.' This is the voice of reason: Madurai wants a Tanjavur bride for her king, and Tanjavur has indignantly refused; hence this war, despite the precedents of the past.² But the *daḷavāy*'s arguments fail to sway the old king. By now he has, at last, finished his *pūjā*, and can reply to his foes: 'Even if our kingdom goes, and everything else with it, we will not compromise ourselves by giving you the girl. You want us to give in to you out of fear. Don't you know what they say: *prāṇam eva parityajya mānam evābhirakṣatu*, one should protect one's honour even at the cost of life itself? Whatever happens, we must safeguard our honour and achieve fame. Stop thinking, come and fight!'

Noblesse oblige. The old man is left without an army; the enemy is swarming everywhere, even inside the palace. There is no hope of repulsing them; the dynasty of Cevvappa, and the state he founded, are coming to an end. There is, however, still hope for a grand gesture, and this, it seems, is what really matters. A life devoted to display, to creative play with appearances, to the seductive masks of sensuous and heroic posturing, requires that illusion be lived through to the end. So the king straps on his swords. He is, indeed, an amazing apparition—covered in ornaments studded with precious stones, his flabby paunch draped, like the body of the god he imitates and worships, in golden garments (*pītāmbaramulu*), his huge eyebrows so overgrown with age that he has to pin them up with golden wires in order to see. He now gives his last commands. First, there is the matter of his son, Mannārudeva, who has been kept imprisoned in golden chains because of some fault;³ the king orders him released. As the son meets his father again, at this penultimate moment, all the bitterness of years

² These precedents for intermarriage between the two Nāyaka lines are dubious enough: see Vriddhagirisan (1942), pp. 150-1. We have conflated the two messages and the two responses given in disjointed sequence in *TARC*.

³ See above, V.1. Mannārudeva is the author of the *Hēmābjanāyikāsvayaṃvaramu*; some say his offence was to fall in love with the daughter of Govinda Dīkshita.

comes welling up. There is always time for at least one more Telugu verse:

Throw a ruby and a straw into the sea:
 the ruby sinks, the straw floats to the top.
 Only the ocean is at fault.
 The ruby remains a ruby,
 and a straw is but a straw,
 O victorious king of this earth,
 Vijayarāghava!

As he sings this verse, with its reproachful and sardonic implications, the son prostrates himself at his father's feet. Are both father and son perhaps remembering Sāraṅadhara, another victim of a father's haste, from the major Telugu kāvya of the previous generation at Tanjavur? Like Sāraṅadhara's royal father, Vijayarāghava is filled with belated regret; but at least the two have now been reconciled, and can go together to their deaths.

Second, another consideration of honour. It is crucial that the Tanjavur princess sought by the Madurai foes not fall into their hands; this is a matter of manly pride (*paurusham*). Before going out to battle, Vijayarāghava sends his son, this same devoted and embittered Mannārudeva, together with one other trusted servant, to see to the harem. The hundreds of wives and courtesans have been anxiously awaiting the king's command, with swords and daggers ready in their hands. Mannārappa delivers his message. Some of the queens kill themselves, or one another, with the daggers. The rest are consumed when the prince sets off a tremendous explosion of gunpowder, that destroys the women's quarters entirely. (There is one important survivor—a four-year-old prince whose mother, with marvellous prescience, has sent him with a servant-nurse out of the harem; they escape Tanjavur and find refuge with a merchant in Nagapattinam).

The king remains unmoved by sorrow. 'Mannārudeva, this offering was for you': that is as far as he will go. He faces the shrine of his family god, Rājagopāla, for a last gesture of piety. Then he and his son emerge to do battle. Who is to go first? Each wants this privilege; the father is afraid that he will weep upon seeing his son die, and this might endanger his translation to the warriors' heaven. But the prince is

equally adamant, and he invokes all too appropriately, *in extremis*, the Nāyaka ethos: 'You are the father, and I the son; you are the king, and I the servant. It is time to repay the debt I owe you for giving birth to me and raising me; I must act so that nothing tarnishes the honour of being your son.' There is no answer that a Nāyaka king can give to such a statement; to deny it is to unravel the world, at the very moment when its continued coherence is supremely necessary; the values of service, loyalty, personal honour and personal devotion—the sustaining logic and conscious ideology of a Nāyaka state—compel a single conclusion. Vijayarāghava must therefore watch as Mannārudeva is cut down by Venkaṭa Krishṇappa Nāyaka himself, after a long duel. Now the king is truly grieved, and also angry. He demands that the riflemen be distanced from him, lest he die ignominiously from 'some lousy bullet'⁴ and thus, again, fail to reach heaven. The enemy daḷavāy accedes. Vijayarāghava throws himself at the Madurai soldiers surrounding him, cuts down several with his sword; others, enraged, strike back at him, and he falls to the ground, crying with his last breath, 'Raṅganātha! Rājagopāla!'

He has, it seems, achieved his aim. There are those who say that, at this very moment, the priests in the Raṅganātha temple at Srirangam, 60 miles away, saw Vijayarāghava enter the shrine together with a great retinue—and disappear into the god.⁵

In the south Indian folk-epic, the tragic hero is often destroyed, in heroic circumstances, by the constricted reality that he has devoted his life to maintaining. The Tanjavur chronicle presents us in its melodramatic articulation of this scene with a similar surface-vision: the aged king goes nobly to his fate after ordering and witnessing the complete destruction of his (still beautifully coherent) world. But, as throughout this text, there are undercurrents of corrosive irony which eat away at the illusionary rhetoric voiced by the major actors. It is thus significant that the horrible object Vijayaraghava supposedly died to prevent—the intermarriage between the Tanjavur and Madurai Nāyaka lines—takes place nonetheless, in a later generation, *after* the collapse of the Tanjavur Nāyaka state. Our chronicler wryly concludes

⁴ See discussion above in chapter VI at n. 42.

⁵ TARC, pp. 49-56.

his tale with this very eventuality.⁶ Vijayarāghava thus seems, in the perspective of the early eighteenth-century Telugu historian, to have died in a somewhat foolish and foredoomed over-reaction, whose major effect was to preserve the integrity of the regal illusion so deftly lampooned throughout the pathos-laden narration. Even the king's extreme devotion, poignantly enacted by his refusal to rise from pūjā as enemies pour through the gates, seems partly ludicrous in the critical light of this delicately cynical text. The pathetic gesture typically overrules all other considerations in the hero's mind, and the chronicler intimates its price. This is one, rather sophisticated way of handling the tradition, which the author of the *TARC* knew so well, perhaps from his own experiences at or around the Marāṭhā successor-court. From our still more distant vantage point, we might even be tempted to dismiss the whole story as so much inflated hyperbole, like other romantic courtly productions from Tanjavur with their images of the king as marriage-broker in the temple, or as ever-triumphant hero, or as an inexhaustible Manmatha reborn, or as god.

But we would be wrong to do so. Some two weeks after the events just described, a Dutch observer writing from Nagapattinam to Batavia offers his own version of the fall of Tanjavur, including an analysis of the background leading up to the war. He points to the crucial role played by the Marava Setupati of Ramnad as catalyst to the conflict (as we have seen, it was frequently these small-scale, middle-range polities that held the balance of power in the Nāyaka system⁷): at the beginning of the 1670s, Marava forces had made great inroads into Tanjavur, even capturing the Tanjavur Nāyakas' central shrine of Mannarkuti. Tanjavur had lost control not only of the Pattukottai region and ports such as Adirampatnam but of much of the rice-producing Kaveri delta as well. Vijayarāghava, more or less confined within his fortress-capital, and cut off from his chosen deity, was forced to appeal to Cokkanātha Nāyaka of Madurai for assistance. The latter defeated the Maravas and demanded, in accordance with Vijayarāghava's promise of 'een groote somme gelts', a large indemnity from Tanjavur; when this failed to

⁶ Ibid., p. 70: the grandson of Ceṅgamaladāsa is said to have given his sister to Vijayaraṅga Cokkanātha.

⁷ See above, concluding section of chapter VI.

arrive by early 1673, the Madurai Nāyaka 'brought in all his adigaers or regents to collect the revenues, without the owner (viz., Vijayarāghava) being able to do anything about it'. Another Dutch report informs us that the Madurai ruler had taken over all the 'Tanjouwerse tolls and incomes . . . leaving at present the same faint-hearted Neijck and all his multiple wives with nothing more than his capital and fort of Tansjouwer.'⁸

So the Maravar threat had led to an intervention by Madurai, which ended with Madurai agents taking over the revenue administration of Tanjavur; and it was this intolerable state that, in the understanding of the Dutch writer, produced the final war between Tanjavur and Madurai. We quote the Dutch report, no less picturesque than the Telugu chronicle, at length:

It has already been communicated to Your Excellencies [writes the Dutch factor] how some three years ago now, the Teuver [Tēvar = the Setupati] had made himself the lord of these Tansjouwer lands by force of weapons, and continued to hold it for some time, yea, until by means of helping troops from Madure, Visiagaragua [*sic* = Vijayarāghava] came back into power; soon thereafter the Teuver died, and his brother's son (for he had no male heir) took his place, and the Neyck of Madure entered into a new war with his confrere the Tansiouwerse prince, over a payment for the help that he had given him against the Lord of Pampenaer, wherein the weaker (Tanjavur) was soon worsted, and so he was soon once more robbed of most of his provinces and incomes, so that there was no more left for him than the capital and castle, also named Tansjouwer, which was so strongly besieged by the general (*veltheer*) of Madure with an army of fighting-men that as a consequence Visiagaragie came to suffer a great shortage of supplies, and finding no other remedy but to ask the Teuver for help, to this end sent one of his sons there, called Singamandasj, who was some 12 or 13 years old, who managed to achieve so much that the Lord of Pampenaer personally accompanied him on the way back with a good number of folk, with a quantity of supplies with him, but on setting out (so it is said) they did not keep an adequate watch, so that not only was this army slain, but the Teuver himself was captured, and taken as prisoner to the Neyck of Madure and handed over at Trissenapilly.

⁸ Jacob van den Meersche and Council at Nagapattinam to Batavia, 23 January 1673, ARA, OB, VOC. 1295, fls. 54v-55; also the letter from Anthonij Paviljoen at Pulicat to Batavia, 25 February 1673, fl. 59.

Visaigaragia Neyck, finding himself thereby bereft of all help and support, took the final and most desperate resolution, and in order not to fall alive into the enemy's hands had two deep pits dug inside his fort, in which (after fires were made in them) he threw in all his children and children's children large and small (save the oldest son, who remained with his father) and had some three hundred and seventy wives and concubines, together with some servant-women (*dienaeressen*) leap in there, which was done, so that not one remained, and also [threw] all treasures, jewels and any other things of worth which remained to this poor ruler into the same fire, so as not to leave them for his enemies; this horrible act and unheard-of tragedy took place on the 28th of last September, in the evening.

[And] the aforesaid Neyck, with his oldest son Mannerapa Neyck, and his chief Brahmin passed the night in sorrow (*droefheyd*), and when day broke the largest door of the fort was opened, from which these two princes supported by around 300 soldiers, all of the raja caste (*alle kasta radjes*), who from all of the rest of this ruler were the only ones who remained, fell stoutly on their enemies and after a short (but furiously-fought) battle, both lost their lives; their heads were cut off, and taken to Sockenada Neyck as the victor, and these were shown to the imprisoned Teuver to give him a fright (*schrick*) and later burned with the bodies, and thus it is (Noble and Respected Sirs) that the old house of the Tansjouwerse rulers has come to an end, save the youth mentioned above, who, when the Teuver was captured, escaped⁹

The surviving 'youth' is Ceṅgamaladāsa, whom the TARC mentions as the young boy of four years sent away, at the last moment, by his mother in the Tanjavur harem; this same Ceṅgamaladāsa, last scion of the Tanjavur line, will have a role to play in the transition to Marāṭhā rule.¹⁰ Apart from the discrepancy in the boy's age, the Dutch account surprisingly confirms and even strengthens the TARC's vision of the end, including the mass destruction in the palace and the heroic values

⁹ Jacob van den Meersche and Council at Nagapattinam to Batavia, 16 October 1673, ARA, OB, VOC. 1295, fls. 127-27v; for later mentions of Ceṅgamaladāsa, see Rijkloff van Goens and Council at Colombo to Batavia, 23 January 1674, ARA, OB, VOC. 1298, fl. 325.

¹⁰ The Dutch letter helps make sense of the time-sequence, apparently confused in the TARC, where Ceṅgamaladāsa escapes to Nagapattinam as a four-year-old child; but we find him back in Tanjavur as transitional king in 1675.

motivating Vijayarāghava's suicidal sortie. We understand better the political configuration that fuelled the Tanjavur-Madurai confrontation—not a repugnant demand for a Tanjavur bride, but a reality of dependence and humiliation leads Vijayarāghava into war. But within the contours of this configuration, the self-dramatizing Nāyaka ethos still operates to its limits, controlling the imaginations, and hence the actions, of the major figures. Conflict is not merely an arena for the calculations of *Realpolitik*; it is also a stage for the dramatic demonstration of the real. And what was most real, it would appear, for the last Nāyaka king of Tanjavur—as for many of his counterparts in the contemporaneous Nāyaka elite—was the effective living out of the primary values of extreme devotion, commitment to honour, individual fame, and vainglorious heroics which, taken together, moulded into a nurturing matrix of illusion, point a path to transcendence.

Vijayarāghava dies as one of the Velugōṭi heroes might—a hero's death in a hopeless struggle, that is itself a strong statement of values and identity. In this sense, this dénouement is almost a throwback to an earlier age and an older paradigm. But the kingship Vijayarāghava embodied and pursued was clearly of the more complex, expansive, and enduring Nāyaka type. That it involved the creative manipulation, hence tangible realization, of illusion—as in the case of the Subahdar of the Cot, who suddenly seems remarkably close to this last Nāyaka of Tanjavur—one sees clearly enough from the slow unfolding of the final catastrophe, when the bankrupt king went on playing desperately for ever higher stakes. (Even the Subahdar knew that the provocative gamble that is kingship might not always pay off.) But one also thinks of this same king's elevation to quasi-divine status, for example in the yakshagāna composed by his son, Mannārudeva, in the unstable years preceding the fall; or of Vijayarāghava's own eulogizing vision of his divine father, Raghunātha, whose erotic adventures the son so happily catalogues in his Telugu *abhyudayamu*. These are individualized, self-aggrandizing kings of flesh and blood who persistently claim to embody forces greater than the merely human; who, indeed, symbolize the reality and accessibility of such forces to the kingdom aggregated around this living, moving centre. And if dynastic collapse and the king's own manner of dying produced, in this case, the kind of parodic commentary on such a kingship usually reserved for the Nāyaka

court-poets, the political paradigm itself remained, predictably, very much in place. Not only did the Madurai Nāyaka kingdom survive for another two to three turbulent generations; the Marāṭhā successor-state at Tanjavur also inherited many of the Nāyakas' peculiar obsessions and constraints. Indeed, in many ways the Marāṭhā dynasty mediated the Nāyaka cultural enterprise for modern southern India. Let us, then, take a moment, in concluding this text, to glance at Marāṭhā Tanjavur.

2. TOWARDS THE MARĀṬHĀS

Writing of the history of the Italian city-states, Lauro Martines notes:

The Italian Renaissance came forth in two stages. The first extended from the eleventh century to about 1300, the second from the late thirteenth to the late sixteenth centuries. In the first stage, social energies—economics, politics, a vibrant demography—were primary and foremost; in the second, the lead went to cultural energies.¹¹

Such a view, implicitly suggesting a 'law of conservation of energy', wherein social energies and cultural energies are *inversely* related to one another is relatively rarely held by historians of India. It is far more common in the Indian case to assume a linear logic, that is one in which periods of economic dislocation and political fragmentation are *simultaneously* seen as characterized by cultural crisis and decline. Equally, it is assumed that only powerful and wealthy states can generate the patronage and infrastructure necessary for cultural florescence.

Such linkages are usually misleading. The dualism inherent in the very distinction between 'material' and 'cultural' is surely false, and vitiates both the linear logic mentioned above and its inversion in Martines's model of cultural energy. In part, our study has aimed at showing the mutual constitutive power of domains that we conventionally keep separate, to little purpose—say, politics and poetics, or money and metaphysics. In the Nāyaka period, we see an expanding agrarian economy, characterized moreover by growing trade, and

¹¹ Martines (1979), p. 332; for an Indian version of this thesis, see Goetz (1938), pp. 5-8.

shaped by a social flux within which new groups are incorporated into Nāyaka society, and others redefine their social identity. A new elite comes to the fore in the context of political institutions which are also evolving, somewhat hesitantly, and at considerable cost in violent conflict, in new directions. A certain precariousness remains characteristic of all these developing structures. At the same time, when one looks to the Nāyaka literary corpus, one sees experimentation, the creative domestication and transformation of folk genres and themes, the extension of inherited classical forms from Sanskrit and Telugu, and a new range of expressivity keyed to a changing anthropology. This period produces splendid examples of parodic and otherwise reflexive and self-critical works, in an evolving conceptual context in which mutilation and transformation of self are seen as central problems. It is a time of movement, innovation, and rapid cultural growth.

There is something artificial about delimiting these energies in dynastic terms. Take the instance of Tanjavur. As we have noted earlier, the three Nāyaka kingdoms had differing political fates: while Senji passed to the control of Bijapur by 1650, Madurai remained nominally autonomous until as late as the 1730s. The case of Tanjavur is the median one, for after a brief interregnum in 1673-5 (when it was ruled over by a Madurai-nominated Nāyaka), it passed by the mid 1670s to the definitive control of a section of the Marāṭhā Bhonsle clan, who ruled it until 1855, when the British resumed it under the Doctrine of Lapse. Although praised by some for their cultural contributions, these Marāṭhā rulers have, in general, been harshly treated by the historians—like their Nāyaka predecessors. Here, for example, is William Hickey's late nineteenth-century judgement:

Of the Mahratta dynasty of Tanjore we have no authentic records. It lasted about 176 years . . . The country they obtained, through easy treachery, they had a wealthy people to rule over and a rich province to support them, and in the process of time they sunk into listlessness and luxury.¹²

Were they any more 'listless' or luxury-prone than Vijayarāghava? As with the Nāyakas, such statements can only obscure the real processes of change and cultural production. Even a superficial survey allows for

¹² Hickey (1874), p. 76.

the beginning of a more differentiated stance. Thus we notice powerful cultural continuities in a deteriorating economic setting. Marāṭhā court-culture assumed the pleasing burden of Nāyaka political symbolism—the king is still identified as an avatar (though now he may be Rāma-turned-Śiva),¹³ still an exemplary paragon of sensual excess, still driven to erotic display and an economy of incessant consumption. Courtesans sing padams celebrating his attributes (as hero, god, and lover). He even composes Telugu dance-dramas for the court, in a striking assimilation of the cultural idiom—pregnant with the conceptual contents we have studied—of the kings he has displaced. But he can afford all this much less than could his Nāyaka predecessors, so much less that the political centre is almost always on the edge of bankruptcy and crisis.

For many reasons, royal rhetoric sounds increasingly empty. The already fragmented Tamil political universe has continued to break down into ever smaller units; the Mughal presence, though somewhat indirect, has acquired legitimacy and dominance. Broadly speaking, it would appear that rice production—the main source of agrarian income in the area—first stagnated and then declined over the eighteenth century, with the period 1776-96 marking the most dramatic crisis, but only putting the seal on a process that had begun in the second quarter of the century. From an average production of 32 million *kalams* in the years 1675-1711, the Tanjavur rice harvest was down to an average of some 24 million in the next two and a half decades (1711-35), touched a level of just over 20 million in the early 1770s, and then dropped precipitously in the following decade. By the end of the eighteenth century, the levels of the early 1770s were only just being achieved once again.¹⁴ Equally, when one looks to manufacturing production and external trade, it is hard in the present state of our knowledge to argue for anything but stagnation or very slow growth for the greater part of the Marāṭhā period. The available evidence on demography similarly suggests little change to the 1770s, and a sharp decline thereafter; it is

¹³ *Śāhendraṅgavilāsa* of Śrīdhara Veṅkaṭeṣa, 2.93-94.

¹⁴ *Reports of the House of Commons, 1782*, vol. VII, Fourth Report from the Committee of Secrecy on the State of the East India Company, cited in Arasaratnam (1988), p. 540; also Gough (1981), pp. 10-11.

only in the 1820s that the Tanjavur population reaches the 1779-80 figure of 1.06 million again.¹⁵

Thus, to use the categories of Martines, the 'social energies' that assured the buoyancy of Nāyaka society had evidently run their course by the Marāṭhā period, which was instead one of a relatively stagnant economy. Seen in terms of social structure too, the migration, mobility and 'peasantisation' of Nāyaka times (in the course of which groups like the Maravas and Kallars became settled cultivators on a considerable scale) have no real counterpart during the Marāṭhā period. And yet, the literary and artistic explosion of the Nāyaka period is in no real sense reversed. Only its terms have been revised, often in intriguing ways. The inherited fascination with violation, especially of an erotic cast, drives the poets toward yet more extreme expressions, as parody issues into outright satire: the outstanding example is Śāhji's own Telugu yakshagāna, the *Satīdānaśūramu*, in which a Brahmin 'scholar' falls in love with, and aggressively courts, an Untouchable woman. This delightful and outrageous work goes beyond anything we have seen in Nāyaka Tanjavur. Similarly, the Marāṭhā-period courtesans, very prominent in the artistic domain, assume a brazen self-confidence that builds upon the earlier articulation of their role: they establish agrahārams named after themselves, build and endow temples and tanks, perform annadāna on a grand scale, celebrate the marriage of the temple-gods, support scholars with gifts of money, have literary works dedicated to them, and, of course, receive the patronage of kings. Muddupaḷani, as we have seen, claims that a man *becomes* king only by virtue of studying the courtesan's face, while the commander of a fortress achieves his position by touching her breasts.¹⁶ One might, she says, compare the courtesan to the goddess Lakshmī, were it not for the latter's fickleness; or to Pārvatī, if the latter had not reduced her husband's body by half!¹⁷ We recognize the stress on the body's vital potential, a primary theme drawing upon Nāyaka-period antecedents; by now the courtesan has become a paragon of power, piety, magnanimity, and even of the wifely virtue of faithfulness.

¹⁵ Lardinois (1989); for the early nineteenth century figures, see Kumar (1965), pp. 120-1.

¹⁶ *Rādhikāsāntvanamu* of Muddupaḷani, 1.25-26, 32.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.29.

This was also a time of synthesis in the philosophical and learned traditions; great scholars, such as Rāmabhadra Dīkshita and Śrīdhara Veṅkaṭeśa (Ayyāvāl), produced an astounding literature of Sanskrit commentary, kāvya, and compendia. (The study of grammar, in particular, stands out in Marāṭhā Tanjavur.) The Nāyaka experimentation with new genres continued apace; kuṛavañci and yakshagāna texts, of various types, were produced at court (usually in Telugu), and popular forms such as *harikathā* and Tamil *terukkūttu*, or the brilliant musical dramas of poets such as Aruṇācalakkavirāyar and his successors, proliferated outside it. Devotional poetry assumed the creative form of the *kīrttaṇai* (among others); much of the classical corpus of Carnatic music emerged during this period. In short, a great richness unfolded in the intellectual and artistic realm, still heavily charged with the cultural thematics first expressed by major Nāyaka poets in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in works studied in these chapters.

By 1767, the Marāṭhā kings owed their debtors the staggering sum of 2,200,000 pagodas.¹⁸ They were, in a sense, trapped within the lavish Nāyaka mould. Saraphoji still boasts that his forefathers had supported over a thousand choultries and large temples, housing (and, of course, feeding) some 40,000 pilgrims and ritual specialists a year;¹⁹ but the boast no longer carries conviction. It is really more a desperate clinging to a once-generative convention. After all, is there another way to show oneself a king? No voice from heaven, no divine courtesans, came down to rescue the bankrupt dynasty in its decline. Yet Marāṭhā Tanjavur is still remembered as a kind of last golden age of pre-colonial culture. In poetry, music, and erudition, in devotional forms, in the rampant symbolism of the royal court, the Nāyakas' power could still be felt, shaping and acting upon their successors. Indeed, there are ways in which it can still be felt today, despite the definite passing of the Nāyaka artistic and poetic sensibility. As always, the web of continuities and discontinuities is delicate and complex; to trace its patterns must remain the task of another study.

Still, we can readily recognize tones such as these, directed toward

¹⁸ Cf. Phillips (1986), p. 2.

¹⁹ Cited in Bayly and Bayly (1988), pp. 66-90.

the appealing figure of Śāhji, perhaps the closest of all the Tanjavur Marāṭhā line to the Nāyaka prototype:

In his forest hide-out, the cowardly
king of Delhi hears the drums
of *our* king's victory-parade, and looks for comfort
to the crickets' broken song.

The king of Tanjavur—a tiny, all-too-vulnerable state in the Kāverī delta—has driven the Mughal emperor into the wilderness, where the crickets are his only bards. This is one side of the hyperbolic royal portrait; the other closely follows:

He (Śāhji) is like the Moon come down to earth.
Still, women who stare at him
with lotus-eyes
find reason to be amazed:
'He is surely the god of love himself,
emerging in the mind.
Where, then, are his arrows formed of flowers?
Where his bow of sugar-cane?'²⁰

²⁰ Śāhendravilāsa, 8.68 and 75.

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Sources for Nāyaka History

The Nāyaka courts produced a large literature in Telugu, Sanskrit, and Tamil, aimed at an educated, multi-lingual audience of courtiers, courtesans, pandits and officials. Many of these works have not yet been published. We can categorize the major areas of creativity as follows:

1. Courtly dramas: These include the yakshagāna plays, mainly composed from Tanjavur, discussed in chapter V. Most are in Telugu, some composed by members of the royal family. The Nāyaka yakshagānas, unlike the folk plays of the same title still current in Karnataka, are elite works, each with a known author and fixed text. They clearly included dances and song; occasionally, as in the *Annadānamahānāṭakamu* (among others), they mix Telugu with colloquial Tamil (recorded in Telugu script). These plays presuppose a familiarity with classical literary works in Telugu, just as they also incorporate local, folk elements derived from Tamil tradition. We can imagine them performed at court before an audience that would include the king and his women. Many are romantic in theme, describing the king's love-affairs with the courtesans of Tanjavur; others, however, enact mythological topics (Gajendra, Prahlāda, Kṛṣṇa's love for the gopīs—another refraction of the Nāyaka romantic ethos —etc.). Towards the end of our period, Tamil plays of this type become prevalent; the kuṛavañci, expanding on an episode that already

exists within the Telugu yakshagāna texts (the prognostication by a Kuratti fortune-teller for a love-sick heroine), is first attested at Tanjavur in Tamil during the time of Vijayarāghava (*Tañcai vellai pillaiyār kuravañci*) and reaches its most expressive height in the *Tirukkurrālalak kuravañci* of Tirikūṭarācappakkavirāyar in the early eighteenth century at Madurai. Yakshagāna texts in Telugu continued to be composed in large numbers during the period of Marāṭhā rule at Tanjavur.

2. Kāvya: Sustained narrative texts in elevated style, frequently in *campū* form (mixed poetry and prose), exist in all three languages from this period. Major poets patronized by the Nāyakas would produce works of this type dedicated to their lord: thus we have Cēmakūra Veṅkaṭakavi's two poems, *Sāraṅgadhara caritramu* and *Vijayavilāsamu*, both on mythological themes. In the following generation, Ceṅgalva Kālakavi composed the *Rājagōpālavilāsamu*, incorporating the local purāṇa of Mannarkuti as well as a reworking of Kṛiṣṇa materials in terms of the Sanskrit alaṅkāra typologies. Nāyaka Madurai saw the efflorescence of śriṅgāra-kāvya, 'poems of passion', on purāṇic heroines such as Ahalyā and Tārā (see chapter IV). Similar in orientation is the Tamil *Camuttiravilācam* of Kaṭikai Muttup Pulavar (early eighteenth century), which also exemplifies the fascination with ślesha-paronomasia. Lengthy narrative kāvya in Sanskrit focus on the 'biography' of one Nāyaka king: Rāmabhadrāmbā's *Raghunāthābhyudaya* and Yajñanārāyaṇa Dikṣita's *Sāhityaratnākara* tell the story of Raghunātha in ornate and stylized detail. A précis of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Madhuravāṇī's *Śrīrāmāyaṇasāra-kāvyaatilaka*, is said to reproduce in Sanskrit a Telugu synopsis by Raghunātha himself.
3. Dvipada-kāvya in Telugu: Composed in dvipada metre, and a popular, flowing style, these works are also extended narratives. Most conspicuous are the abhyudayamu compositions, which we refer to as a 'A Day in the Life of . . .' Here, the Nāyaka hero is pictured as he proceeds through his highly ritualized daily routine, from rising in the morning through the public procession where he, inevitably, sparks an erotic obsession in some cour-

tesan, to the nocturnal consummation of this new love. Vijayarāghava's *Raghunāthanāyakābhyaḍayamu* thus paints the picture of his father, Raghunātha (a picture duplicated in the corresponding yakshagāna, *Raghunāthābhyaḍayamu*, by the same author). Images of life at court, including meetings with the king's officials, are inserted into this general romantic frame.

Panegyric works of this type, always narrative in form, also exist in Tamil: thus the *Kūḷappanāyakkaṅ kātal* of Cupratīpak Kavirāyar (early eighteenth century), in *kaṅṅi* couplets, describes the Nāyaka hero's hunting expedition and consequent romantic entanglement with the heroine.

4. **Chronicles:** The outstanding example from our period, in Telugu, is the *Tanjāvūri āndhra rājula caritra*, evidently composed in the early eighteenth century in a milieu not far removed from the Tanjavur court; the anonymous author mentions, in the closing lines, a great-grandson of Vijayarāghava. A related work is the *Rāyavācakamu* from the Madurai region, a retrospective prose envisioning of Krishnadevarāya's imperial heyday; this text shares some of the interest in daily routine at court that we have noticed in the abhyudaya-kāvya. (The *Rāyavācakamu* is the subject of an extensive forthcoming study and translation by Phil Wagoner). 'Histories' of this sort, which also exist in Tamil (e.g. the Madurai chronicle published by Taylor in *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, 1835), are composed in fairly straightforward prose, not of the kāvya type. Their sudden appearance in the Nāyaka context suggests that in southern India, as elsewhere in the sub-continent in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a new historiographical impulse, and a related historical consciousness, were beginning to make themselves felt. The *Tanjāvūri āndhra rājula caritra*, in particular, evinces a critical awareness couched in subtle, highly expressive, tones.
5. **Learned literature:** An enormous corpus of Sanskrit works reflects the accumulated erudition of late medieval south India. Grammar, ritual, *jyotiṣa*, dharma-literature, and philosophy (especially Advaita) all find elaborate exposition in śāstra and commentary. At times, this literature impinges on courtly panegyric;

thus Krishṇakavi produced a (still unpublished) summation of alaṅkāra theory, the *Raghunāthabhūpālīya*, with Raghunātha as the hero of all the exemplary verses (after the model of Vidyānātha's *Pratāparudrīya*).

6. 'Minor' works (*laghukāvya*, *prabandha*): A wide range of compositions reflects the creative branching-out toward new genres, especially in Tamil and Sanskrit. In Nāyaka-period Tamil poetry, we find a richness of *prabandha* or *cirri*'*ilakkiyam* works, often reflecting folk types and themes; thus, there are 'messenger-poems' (*tūtu*), cautionary narratives about courtesans and harlots (*virali viṭu tūtu*), the 'drama about a cripple' (*nonṭināṭakam* — describing the picaresque adventures of a Kallar horse-thief), praise-poems on the hero or deity as a child (*pillaittamil*), and so on. Many of these works are devotional in character, aimed at praising a god; others depict a human hero. This boundary also blurs on occasion: Kaṭikai Muttup Pulavar composes a lengthy string of verses on his divinised patron, Vēṅkaṭēcareṭṭan, in the form of *kōvai* verses sung by a love-sick heroine.

In Sanskrit, there is a pronounced tendency towards satirical works of this scale: the great Nīlakaṅṭha Dīkshita in seventeenth century Madurai composed a portrait of his age, the mordant *Kaliviḍambana*, as well as a work of cryptic and sardonic *anyāpadeśa* verses. From outside the court, we have the roughly contemporaneous Venkaṭādhvarin's *Viśvaguṇādarśacampū*, one of a series of imaginative 'travelogues' offering detailed descriptions—again, partly ironic and satirical—of southern India.

This survey by no means exhausts the literary production of our period; we have concentrated on works composed at, or directly related to, the political centres. From the broader circles beyond those centres, mention should be made of innovative forms such as the Telugu *padam*—a devotional poetry fixed in the courtesans' milieu and picturing the god as lover. The *padam* genre crystallized first at Tirupati in the early sixteenth century, with the Tāllapāka family's bhakti poems; in Kshētrayya and his successors, such as Sāraṅgapaṇi of Karvetinagaram, it cut itself loose from the temple setting and developed its expressive potential in new directions, including praise

of the human patron/customer or king. Padams were also composed, beginning in our period, in Tamil (see the forthcoming dissertation by Matthew Allen).

For political and economic historians of the medieval period in south India, the major source-materials conventionally used are temple and other inscriptions, of which summaries are available in the *Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy* (Madras 1887-on), with complete texts at times published in such series as *South Indian Inscriptions* (Madras 1890-on) and *Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanam Inscriptions*, 6 volumes (Madras 1931-8). These are sometimes supplemented with foreign travellers' accounts.

With inscriptional materials running thin from the second half of the sixteenth century, historians of the Nāyaka period have turned in the past three-quarters of a century or so not primarily to the literary materials discussed at some length above, but to European sources. These sources can be divided under three heads. First, there are travel accounts such as those of the Italians Cesare Federici and Gasparo Balbi (1560s and 1580s), the Fleming Jaques de Coutre, and the Icelander Jón Ólafsson, which are available in published editions, and in some instances even in translation. Second, we have the Jesuit letters (dating from the 1540s on, for southern India), which are perhaps the best-known and most widely disseminated of the three sets of sources, on account of the excerpts published in Joseph Bertrand (ed.), *La Mission de Maduré d'après de documents inédits*, 4 volumes, Paris 1847-54. Bertrand's translations are at times idiosyncratic, and a rather better translation of some of these letters (from the mid seventeenth century) was published by A. Saulière in *The Journal of Indian History* in the 1960s (see Bibliography). In more recent years, we are increasingly well-served for the latter half of the sixteenth century by a far more reliable series than either of the two mentioned above, namely *Documenta Indica*, 16 volumes, Rome 1948-84, edited by Josef Wicki (with the assistance of John Gomes). A quite comprehensive listing of post-1700 letters is available in Robert Streit and Johannes Dindinger, *Bibliotheca Missionum*, vol. VI (Missionsliteratur Indiens, Der Philippinen, Japans und Indochinas, 1700-99), Aachen 1931.

The systematic use of Jesuit (and more generally Portuguese, Italian and Latin) materials on late Vijayanagara and the Nāyakas was

pioneered by the Spanish Jesuit H. Heras in his *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, Madras 1927, which also contains a valuable appendix with transcribed documentation. Naturally the Jesuit materials are to be used with caution, but as was remarked even in the Japanese context by George Sansom, they are remarkable for their close and caustic observation of court politics and intrigues, as well as of social conditions, and are also often characterized by a vivacious and highly readable prose.

More generally, Portuguese materials on the Nāyakas are available in the major sixteenth and seventeenth century series at the Historical Archives, Goa (such as the *Monçoes do Reino*), in the *Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo*, Lisbon (*Documentos Remetidos da Índia*), and the *Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa (Fundo Geral)*; these materials often derive from the Portuguese settlements of Nagapattinam, São Tomé or Tuticorin, and are partly touched on by Heras in *The Aravidu Dynasty*. While useful, and occasionally penetrating, they are generally of less importance than the Jesuit or Dutch materials.

For the seventeenth century, English and Dutch Company records also become available, from such centres as Armagon, Madras and Pulicat. These were used by H.D. Love, and C. Hayavadana Rao to reconstruct the political situation on the Coromandel plain in the 1640s and 1650s, and are available in the well-known *The English Factories in India* series edited by William Foster (see Bibliography). But a far more important, and highly neglected, set of sources is that of the Dutch *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC)*, in particular, the *Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren Series*, at the *Algemeen Rijksarchief*, The Hague. We have in this book made use of materials pertaining to the Coromandel and Ceylon 'governments', which have hitherto been used by historians not as narrative sources but rather as statistical tools for the reconstruction of trade flows.

Far from being dull and repetitive, these materials are of immense importance—and are at times far richer than even the Jesuit materials. The problem, however, is that they are too extensive for adequate justice to be done to them in the space available in a book such as this; we refer in particular to the *Dag-Registers* maintained at factories like Pulicat, Nagapattinam or Tuticorin, to elaborate descriptions of Dutch missions to local courts (of which there are several late seventeenth-and

early eighteenth-century examples for Madurai), and to other texts lying untouched in the archives that deserve critical editions of the sort given by the Dutch Linschoten Vereniging to Dircq van Adrichem and J.J. Ketelaar's embassies (*hofreisen*) to the Mughal court. However, in order to do so, the prevailing prejudices among historians of early modern South Asian political culture—who tend to fetishize indigenous chronicles and inscriptions to the *exclusion* of all else—have to be overcome.

Index

Terms used throughout the text, such as Andhra, Nāyaka, Tamil, Tāmīl Nadu, and Telugu, have not been marked in the index. Names of minor characters in the literary creations of the Nāyaka period have also been excluded.

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