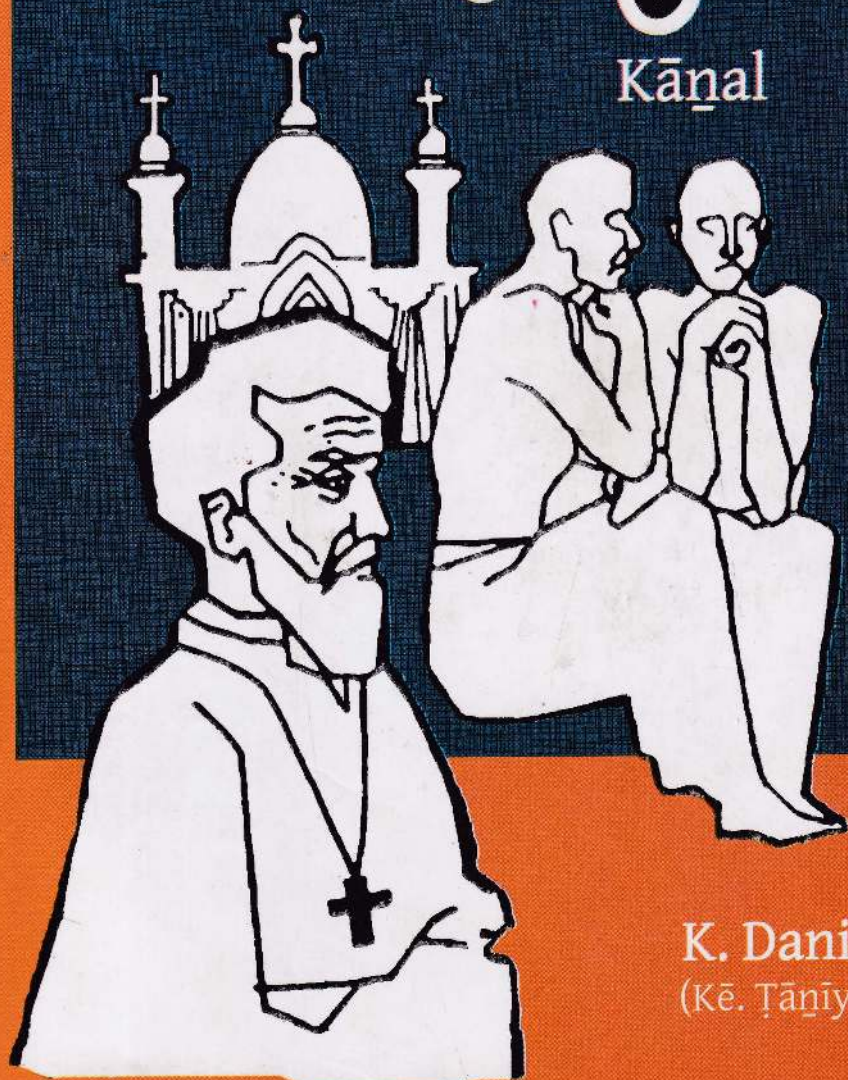


Mirage

Kāṇal



K. Daniel
(Kē. Ṭāṇīyal)

Translated by **Subramaniam Jebanesan**

Edited, Introduced and Annotated by **Richard Fox Young**
with Afterwords

Mirage

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A Sri Lankan Dalit Novel



K. Daniel
(Kē. Ṭāṇiyal)

Originally entitled
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Translated from the Tamil by Subramaniam Jebanesan
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by K. Daniel

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Appreciations

Our collaboration, which has enriched us both, goes beyond 1995 when we co-published *The Bible Trembled: The Hindu-Christian Controversies of Nineteenth-Century Ceylon* (Vienna: Sammlung de Nobili, Indological Institute of the University of Vienna). Begun in Jaffna in the midst of Sri Lanka's fratricidal ethnic conflict a decade earlier, we somehow managed to wrap things up a decade later, long distance, living countries apart. This time around, due to a more settled political ambience, we have been able to work without being affected by the kind of turmoil that intruded upon our quiet labours in the 1980s. Over the last several years, we have travelled far more freely, back and forth between Jaffna and Princeton, pouring over the text of our most recent obsession, a local novel, translated for the first time in this volume, called *Kāṇal—Mirage*—by a Jaffna Dalit, K. Daniel (1927-1986), an author undeservedly unknown outside of the Tamil ecumene. While one hesitates to impose a non-indigenous rubric onto a literary work that emerges from the 'margins' (as it were), Daniel himself, a Catholic by birth but a Marxist by choice, had been thoroughly 'conscientized,' ideologically, and would not have objected (at least not strenuously) to having his novel described as a work of 'historical fiction.' That it was also a work of political commentary and a trenchant critique of Jaffna society will be obvious to all. Back in the early decades of the 1900s, why had largish numbers of Dalits—Paḷḷars and Naḷavars—converted to Catholicism, and how much difference did conversion make to their overall well-being thereafter? Those are some of the most central questions that *Kāṇal/Mirage* addresses, and for us as historians interested in religious change, it was a welcome challenge to step out of the 19th century into the 20th and to work with a 'living' text instead of archival documents (although in the second Afterword we make space for them as well).

Along the way, we found our work easier for having been generously assisted by friends and colleagues in Sri Lanka, the U.K. and the U.S.A. All the way through, Prof. Daniel Jeyaraj of Liverpool-Hope University patiently responded to a myriad of technical questions. And since the author, Daniel, wanted *Kāṇal/Mirage* to reflect the Tamil spoken in Jaffna, it was enormously helpful to have the vigilant attention of two renowned sociolinguists: Prof. Alvapillai Veluppillai (formerly of the universities of Peradeniya, Jaffna, Uppsala, and Arizona State) and Prof. S. Suseendrarajah (formerly of the University of Jaffna), who both come from the area in the North of Sri Lanka where the novel takes place. And for initiating us into the arcana of ‘Catholic’ Tamil and helping us find English equivalents for the prayers that Daniel’s fictionalized converts had to master, we are grateful to Fr. Dr. Nichola Maria Saveri(muttu), S.J., of Jaffna’s Centre of Performing Arts (Tirumarai Kalamanram); and to Fr. Dr. Anton Matthias of the Jaffna Diocese, for background on Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar, one of Jaffna’s most eminent indigenous missionaries and the ‘historical’ figure behind Daniel’s novel. For opening its doors to us, especially their invaluable newspaper archive, the library of the University of Jaffna is to be thanked; likewise, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (O.M.I.) for access to their rich collection of historical materials on Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar, preserved at the Nallur Swami Gñāna Prakāsar Library (Thodarbaham, Jaffna). And, since *Kāṇal/Mirage* is far more than a piece of ‘historical fiction,’ however interesting, but also a window onto being Dalit and a profoundly ethical exploration both of domination and of resistance, we are grateful to Sunder John Boopalan of Princeton Theological Seminary for contributing the first of two Afterwords. Though the novel is polyvalent and readable from a variety of angles, Boopalan opens up a helpful hermeneutical perspective on it that readers will find illuminating.

Locally in Jaffna over the month of December 2011, a great deal of field research was accomplished, thanks to Daniel’s younger (formerly Marxist) contemporaries who had known him and along with him ‘manned the barricades’ (as it were) during the Temple Entry Crisis of 1968. That was the year when for the first time in

a sustained fashion Dalits openly challenged their exclusion from Maviddapuram, one of the peninsula's most orthodox places of Hindu worship. Where Christians seemed (or were) unenthusiastic or even apathetic, Marxists showed themselves to be tireless advocates on behalf of Jaffna's 'minoritized' communities. From Vairavamuttu Sankararaja, now the headman of Savatkattu, we learned much about Daniel's involvement; and from David of Annekottai, a Dalit author in his own right (who goes without a surname), we heard of Daniel's estrangement from Catholicism. Best of all, we were befriended and debriefed by Daniel 'Sam' Vasanthe, the eldest of several siblings who remain in Jaffna (an older brother, an engineer, emigrated to Canada). An ardent fan, Sam anthologized and published his father's major works (except *Kāṇal*/Mirage). Sam not only took time off from his tutorial centre, Jaffna's largest (and arguably most successful) to reminisce with us, he also chauffeured us around Jaffna during our field research in what must surely be one of the snazziest of souped-up roadsters in the North of Sri Lanka today. And since *Kāṇal*/Mirage also tells the origin story of a particular Jaffna Catholic church, Our Lady Who Saves from the Gallows, we are grateful to the parish priest, Fr. Roshan, the sacristan (*caṅkilittām*), and others who shared with us their memories of the oral history of the church fictionalized in the novel that follows.

As always, the intertwining of our professional callings—church and academy, academy and church—with our personal lives has brought us, and our families, too, closer together over the last few years, and that kind of friendship is no *mirage*!

Richard Fox Young, Ph.D.
Timby Chair, History of Religions
Princeton Theological Seminary
Princeton, New Jersey, U.S.A.
richard.young@ptsem.edu

The Rt. Rev. S. Jebanesan, Ph.D.
Bishop (ret'd.), Jaffna Diocese, Church of South India
Jaffna, Sri Lanka
bishop_jebanesan@yahoo.com

The Novel and Its Author

Creating a semi-fictionalized Catholic priest forced to admit defeat in his attempt at converting the Naḷavars and Paḷḷars of a hamlet in Jaffna, K. Daniel (1927–1986), the Tamil Dalit author of *Mirage* (*Kāṇal*), asks what really changes when ‘conversion’ occurs, arguing that a deeper revolution is needed than the Church’s in order to eradicate the scourge of caste. Revered to this day by the Roman Catholics of Sri Lanka’s Jaffna Peninsula for his Tamil scholarship, prowess in Śaiva Siddhānta, and evangelical zeal, Fr. S. Gñāna Prakāsar (1875–1939), the historical figure on whom the novel is loosely based, has been widely hailed as the ‘Apostle to the Untouchables’ for having successfully brought large numbers of the downtrodden from marginalized communities to the baptismal font. While respectful of the integrity of this complex, pre-Vatican II Catholic paragon and disinclined to dismiss ‘conversion’ outright as a catalyst for personal transformation, Daniel opens up for his readers the possibility of a more radical change. In one heart-wrenching scene after another, readers see that very little actually changes in the lives of Daniel’s fictionalized convert flock, socially or economically. Using a quasi-historical literary approach, he envisions in Marxism a more profound source of revolution than the Church’s; for him, nothing else can achieve a truly egalitarian society. Falsely imagining that Christianity affords a once-and-for-all solution to the human condition when the Church itself perpetuates caste (through communalized worship)—that is the *mirage* Daniel’s semi-fictionalized Catholic priest must eventually see through, as he stands by, unable to intervene effectively when his Naḷava and Paḷḷa converts are forced by circumstance to exchange one form of historic caste-based exploitation (serfdom under Veḷḷāḷa domination) for a Christian facsimile (cheap labour at the hands of unpitying Catholic Karaiyāra lagoon-fishing labour contractors).

A Turumpar by caste (dhobis of the dhobis) but a Marxist by conviction, Daniel's ancestors in all probability converted to Catholicism during the Famine of 1878-79, which brought an influx of folk now denominated 'Dalit' into the Church. As a youngster, Daniel suffered humiliation in a Catholic school where the clergy proved helpless to prevent his harassment by higher-caste (*savarna*) students. Dropping out at fifth standard and souring on his faith, Daniel struck out on his own, eventually acquiring the ownership of a welding shop in the Jaffna bazaar. Conscientized by hearing of the travails his Dalit clientele endured, Daniel found himself increasingly drawn to Marxism. Despite being one of the earliest Tamil contributors to the growing genre of Dalit Literature, Daniel remains—undeservedly—an obscure figure outside of Jaffna and contiguous parts of the Indian mainland.

First published in Tamil Nadu in 1986, *Kāṇal* was revised (how and by whom remains unclear) and republished in Colombo in 1993. The translation offered here, based on the Colombo edition, endeavors, insofar as possible, to retain some of the most distinctive sociolinguistic features of the Tamil spoken by Daniel's characters. As a standard for transliteration, we use the University of Madras *Tamil Lexicon*. An asterisk (*) indicates that a passage in the translation is discussed in the Explanatory Notes, found toward the end of the book.

Lastly, we owe a debt of gratitude to the unknown illustrator who designed the cover of the Tamil version printed in Colombo in 1993. Wanting to preserve as much of the original look of the book as possible, we have reproduced it on ours as well, with certain modifications.

The Author's Preface

Inside *Mirage* [Kāṇal]

K. Daniel

The day on which I finished writing this novel was the 9th of May, 1983. From around the 5th of May, I was staying in Tanjore to arrange for the printing of my two-volume novel, *Pañcamar*, which had already gone through a previous edition.¹

At the time, I was in touch with many men of letters and politicians who were friends of mine. Since I was not in good health during that period, my friends arranged for a medical student named Anantharajan to come and see me every day. He would visit me mornings and evenings, regularly. During the three months I was there, not a single day went by when he did not show up. On and off, a Vethiyapuram poet named Vijvanathan also used to come with him.

One day when we were talking about the most progressive journals being published in Tamil Nadu, they both said, "Sir, why don't you write a short story for the journal *Siharam* [*Cikaram* ('Mountain Peak')]?" And so I wrote a short story and gave it to them, which they sent to *Siharam*. Later, I came to know that *Siharam* had ceased publication that very month. It was at this time that in addition to my old friends in the field of writing, namely Prakaj, Chakravarthi Mohan, Pudukkottai Krishnamurthy, and Dorothy Krishnamoorthy, I found a number of new ones in Tamil Nadu, including Marx, Pothiyavetpan, Arivuruvarne, Aranganathan, Mutthu, Velusamy, Moorthy, Maniarasan, Vaiharaivanan, Ramany, Kumarasamy, and Rangasamy. Under these circumstances, the short story I wrote for *Siharam* was very much on my mind. It gestated, and after two years it blossomed into the novel *Mirage* (Kāṇal). It is my fervent hope, as I wrote in the preface to my novel *Pañcamar*, that

1 According to the preface of *Pañcamar*, volume one was first published in Sri Lanka in 1972.

readers who responded positively to the novel *Kovinthan* [Kōvintan̄ ('Cow-Herder')], the next in the series, would also receive *Mirage* in the same way and assess it.

Here, there is no real need to say a great deal about my literary theories. To put such things in a nutshell, 'In the battle of humankind to achieve a classless society, art and literary productions must also be used as weapons.'²

Among the villages that were introduced to the reader through the novels that I have thus far published, one of them happens to be the tiny village of my birth. This particular novel takes place in the village where I was born and grew up, and in its neighbouring areas. All of the characters who pass through it were people I saw with my own eyes. Some are still living. Each incident that occurs in the novel actually happened.

It will be somewhat difficult for readers to keep in focus and study two groups of people whose customs and language differ from each other in so many ways. What, though, could have been done? This was due to the plot I had chosen for the novel.

The depressed classes, which had been Śaivite for generations and were halfway on their life's journey tried to free themselves from their miserable lives by embracing Christianity. This novel is a description of how that venture turned out. Consequently, it became imperative to include in one and the same book something of the lifestyle and idiom of the Śaivite religious tradition, compared with the lifestyle and idiom of the Christian religious tradition. Taking



K. Daniel

2 Daniel's quotations from Marx and Marxist thought are usually extremely loose in the Tamil.

into consideration the difficulties readers will have, I did the novel in two parts. The words, the dialect, and the meanings inherent in the pronunciation of people under Christian influence were born out of reflection on their prayers. Naturally, at first, it would be incomprehensible to people from villages where Christian influence had not yet been felt. Gradually, however, they would imbibe what was inherent in it.

For readers in Tamil Nadu, this will not be that big a problem, since many novels full of Christian terminology and situated in the coastal areas were already coming out when I wrote *Poralikal Karthirukinranar* [*Pōrālikāḷ kātirukkiṇṇaṇar*; *The Combatants Are Waiting*]. In that one, the setting was based entirely on the life one sees and the terminology one hears in the coastal areas. When the book was published, people in such coastal areas who felt that it was actually telling their own stories encouraged me with their praise. This happened ten years ago, but it filled me with confidence at the time, and is the reason why I am bringing out this particular novel about Christian culture. In order to make matters clear to readers, I should point out two examples from the novel itself.

First, about a character called 'Iḷaiyaṇ.' When he becomes a Christian, his name is changed to 'Muṭiyappu' ('Stephen'). In the minds of the readers, however, he had already been associated with the name 'Iḷaiyaṇ' in the first half of the novel. In many instances, as the author, I had to move the story forward by simply referring to 'Iḷaiyaṇ' as 'Iḷaiyaṇ.' Whenever Christian characters met him, I had to make them call him 'Tampi.' And whenever persons who were not Christians met him, I had to make them say 'Iḷaiyaṇ.' When the priest encounters him, I had to have the priest call him 'child.' Likewise, the Catholic priest is addressed as 'Cuvāmi,' 'Father,' 'Lord' and 'Thevareer'.³ It has become customary to call him differently depending on the context. Hence, all such words had to be used.

When the idea for the novel was conceived, I had just finished writing *Aṭimaikaḷ* [*Slaves*], which was released by Tholamai [Tōḷamai]

3 'Thevareer' [Tēvarir; a vocative ('O, God!', as in Psalm 90:1)].

Publishers in Tamil Nadu. When that novel was nearing completion, I had to write the preface. At the time, I was ill and had lost all hope in myself. But after I completed the preface, I was able to finish the writing of this novel as well, without a setback to my health. My productivity, I believe, exceeded the physical strength I seemed to have.

It has been said of the novel that it is a story and that a novel has to have a hero and a heroine, and that all the action and the minor characters should revolve around them. There should be a beginning, a climax, and an end. Over time, this has become the norm. I refuse to accept it. In my previous novels, I broke with it up to a point. But in this one I break with it altogether.

It would be unnatural to remain confined within the limits of the hero-heroine kind of novel and impose on it the pattern of a beginning, a climax, and an ending. Instead, my works are based on the theme of contradictions between communities. One attempts to free itself from its social structure and replace it with another, while the other, entrenched in an earlier structure, tries to make its privileges permanent. In this war of contradiction that takes place in the novel, no single person comes to the forefront. On the contrary, anyone who represents the aspirations of the two social structures may be given prominence.

For these reasons, you do not find a hero or a heroine or even a character who stands out in this novel. Each one represents some aspect of the social structure, and I allow each one to move about with the freedom to create an image and put an emphasis on the point I want my message to make. Many novelists have written novels with these themes, but they were difficult for people to understand. As for myself, I do not engage in such gimmicks. I have no intention of leading the reader into any kind of confusion. I can say, boldly, that *Mirage* coincides with my literary theories and that even ordinary readers will be able to experience and enjoy its message and the other things in it.

Each and every character of the novel makes a contribution to the theme at a different stage and then disappears. They were not introduced just to move the story forward. They appear and speak in order to illustrate the dynamics of natural realities. There is, for instance, a character called 'lion-hearted Cuppar.' When he was young, the most important person in his village was the poet-teacher Kumārācuvāmi Pulavar. Before attaining fame, he ran a school on his veranda. In those days, it was a rule that low-caste people were not allowed to study in schools. Cuppar, however, sitting in the extension of the veranda school, imbibed the lessons on the *Pārata* [Bhārata, or Tamil Mahabharata] given by the teacher. While those who were taught by the teacher in the veranda school moved on, Cuppar, even as an old man, would encourage others by citing illustrative stories from the *Pārata*. This was his only contribution to the struggle and that is the role he plays in *Mirage*.

There is a Christian *cuvāmi* (priest) who also makes an appearance. He is not a fraud. He labors under the conviction that salvaging human beings from sin and getting them into the kingdom of heaven are not that difficult to do. In the end, though, he loses out to a man suffering the burning pangs of hunger in his stomach. At the time of his defeat, everything he had believed in was seen to be a mirage. This is the part he plays in *Mirage*.

Another character is *Pūkkāṇṭar*, who appears as an old and poor but high-caste farmer. In him, class-consciousness overrides casteism. On and off, he makes appearances. Being open-minded, he pronounces on the general ethics of humanity, and then disappears. That is the role he plays in *Mirage*.

Though not a pure-bred, high-caste woman, *Vellaicci Ammāl* preaches to her husband who epitomizes caste arrogance. In the end, her husband beats her to death. It was the part she plays in *Mirage*.

A man called *Tampāppillaiyār* also comes into the story. There was no limit to, or constraint upon, the atrocities he committed. He

was arrogant, believing that the whole world was his. In the end, he killed his wife and went to jail. That was his contribution to *Mirage*.

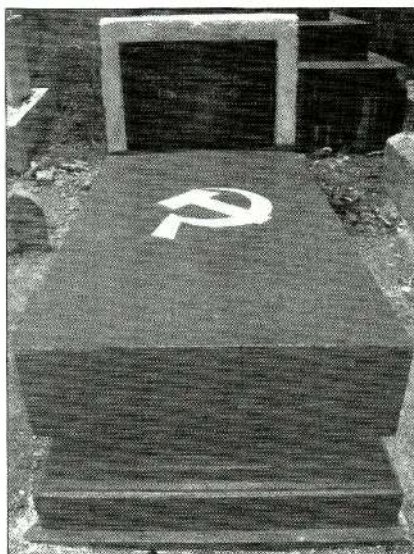
In this manner, each and every character plays a part that serves a particular class interest. This is how *Mirage* came into being.

Literary concepts vary. Sometimes a new theme can be contained in an old literary form; or an old theme can be contained in a new literary form. A theme can be redesigned to suit a new literary form; or a literary form can be redesigned to fit a new theme. In such ways, literary works differ from each other. A work will be deemed worthy if its design does not break the natural form and shows itself capable of containing the required theme within that form. In this manner, I differ from the modern litterateurs, who extoll form and clever verbosity, draw on existentialism even though there is no real need, and in so doing deny evolutionary process and thus baffle their readers.

What I have created as a new form actually reflects the dynamics of social realities. Recently, the allegation has been made that I avoid current issues. I don't understand how such critics define the word 'current.' Are they saying that the prevalent problems of today are the problems of a bye-gone era?

In my novels, I introduce incidents from every period of the past and the personalities who are supposed to have lived at the time. The question is not whether the period covered by the incidents is long or short. It depends on whether the social structure that gave birth to those incidents still exists or not. Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar, the priest whom I introduce into the novel, lived at the time when I was myself first becoming able to think and feel. The only difference is that I have changed his name from Nānappirakācar to Nāṇamuttar. But Cuppar is Cuppar, without any change at all. These two I spoke with and moved among, closely; with them, I also argued. Based on such facts, it might be imagined that I only regard events that occurred within my own lifetime as 'current.' The problem, though, is different. And the real question is, Does oppression continue, or not?

The cuvāmi had all the traits I mention in the novel. That's why the contribution of his time should be discussed in relation to the present. It would be hypocritical to claim that he, an unprejudiced or unbiased individual, acting alone, could have solved or resolved the commonplace and perennial problems of hunger, starvation, and famine; that would be to protect him as a person from having his reputation tarnished. To this day, hunger, starvation, and famine have not come to an end. These *are* current problems, and casteism is one of them.



K. Daniel's grave in Tanjore

In the same way, the characters of the novel come and go with slightly different names. As I mentioned earlier, some are still living today. In any event, in the final analysis, this novel and the four books I previously wrote expound problems that are current.

In conclusion, I want to thank Tholamai Publishers who came forward to print the novel *Mirage*, a novel that does not deviate at all from my literary principles. I also want to thank the many friendly folks who in every imaginable way helped me in this publication. In particular, I am grateful to my friends.

K. Daniel

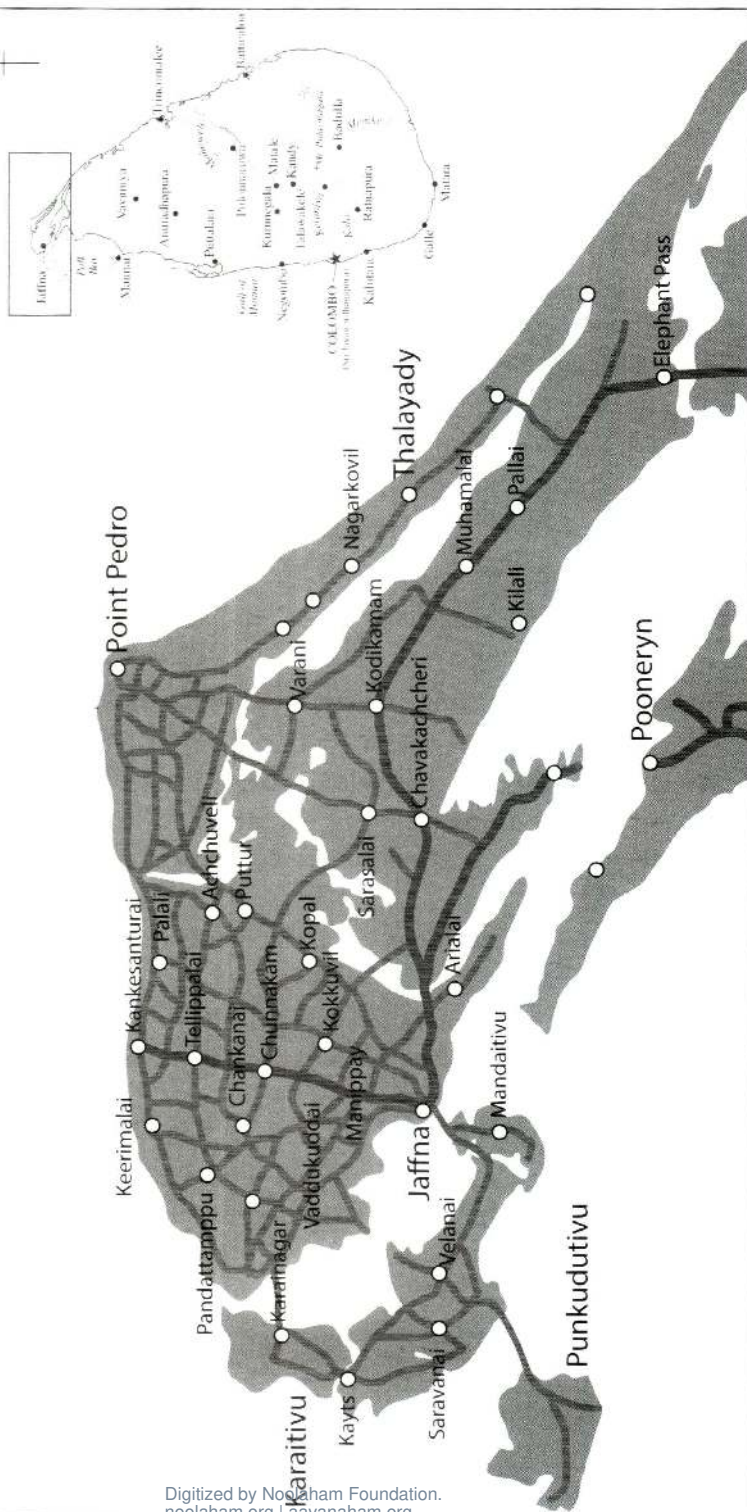
22/09/1983
76/2 Temple Road
Jaffna, Sri Lanka

Main Characters

- Caṇmukam Nayiṇār* - errand boy of Kalaṭṭi village headman
- Cantiāppillai* - a Catholic catechist; catechizes the new Naḷava and Paḷḷa converts
- Cellaiyaṇ* - Son of Mutti; died under suspicious circumstances (may have been murdered by Tampāppillaiyār for taking a liking to Cevvanti, his daughter)
- Cellammā* - Tampāppillaiyār's sister; a landowner herself, and a widow
- Celli* - Naṇṇiyaṇ's wife; shot and killed by Mayilu
- Cevvanti* - Tampāppillaiyār's daughter; dies from shock at her mother's murder
- Cimiyōṇ* - Christian Tamil for 'Simeon'; by caste, a Naḷavar; marries *Ciṇṇi*
- Ciṇṇi* - Naṇṇiyaṇ's daughter; baptismal name, Tirēci (Teresa); marries *Cimiyōṇ*
- Cuppar* - former tavern manager; non-Catholic; friend of Ilaiyaṇ, noted for strength, courage and mastery of the Tamil *Pārata*
- Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar* - Tamil Catholic priest of the Jaffna Diocese (loosely based on Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar [Nānappirakācar], 1875-1947); also referred to, occasionally and honorifically, as 'Guru'
- Ilaiyaṇ* - Naṇṇiyaṇ's younger (second) son; after baptism called Muṭiyappu, 'Stephen'
- Kumāravelu* - Headman of Tāvaṭi Village, appointed after the killing of his predecessor
- Lūrtammā* - Christian Tamil for 'Lourdes'; daughter of Pūkkaṇṭar, whose name before baptism was Carasvati; marries Yākkōpu

- Mayilu* - hunter and marksman; Tampāppillaiyār's partner in crime
- Mūttavaṇ* - Naṇṇiyaṇ's son (from a previous marriage); step-brother of Iḷaiyavaṇ
- Mutti* - a woman of the Kōviya caste; domestic servant in the household of Tampāppillaiyār; mother of three daughters; her one son, Cellaiyaṇ, died under mysterious circumstances (perhaps at the hand of her employer)
- Naṇṇiyaṇ* - landless laborer; by caste, a Naḷavar; convert to Catholicism
- Peruṅkuṭumi Aiyar* - lit., 'Brahmin Who Has a Big Kuṭumi' (s.v., *kuṭumi*); priest of the local Kali temple owned by Tampāppillaiyār
- Ponṇi* - Mūttavaṇ's wife
- Pūkkāṇṭar* - Veḷḷāḷa landowner (poor, in material terms, compared with Tampāppillaiyār); friend to the Naḷavars and Paḷḷars
- Rāyappu* - Christian Tamil for 'Peter,' son of Cuppan the grass vendor; *caṅkilittām* of the Catholic church 'beyond Tinnevēly'
- Tampaṇ* - resident of Periyakkaḷaṭṭi village; a Paḷḷar by caste, he was responsible for reporting incidents to the officials (headman or maṇiyakāraṇ); a Catholic deacon (*mūppar*), his baptismal name was Pēturu
- Tampāppillaiyār* - a villainous Veḷḷāḷa landlord; Naṇṇiyaṇ's erstwhile 'master'
- Veḷḷaicci Ammāl* - wife of Tampāppillaiyār (who murders her); from the weaver caste (the Kaikkuḷavar, on which, see chapter 18, explanatory notes)
- Yākkōpu* - a Veḷḷāḷa Christian from the Church of Saint Cajetan at Iḷavālai; employed by the Star Brand Matchbox Company, owned by Catholic Veḷḷāḷars; marries Lūrtammā, daughter of Pūkkāṇṭar

Map of Jaffna



Mirage

Part One

Three Christian Boys Visit Naṇṇiyaṇ

‘Hello there, *Tampimār*! You’ve all come out without sending word ahead. Anyway, have a seat! Here on the veranda, out of the scorching sun. You look worn out.’

With these words of welcome, Naṇṇiyaṇ bent down enough to keep his head from bumping into the roof of his hut. He then used his shoulder cloth to wipe off the small veranda, even though it had already been polished that morning with a paste of cow dung and *muḷḷu-muruṅkai* juice.

‘There’s no dirt on it, *Aṇṇai*,’ said the oldest. ‘Let it be. We’ll sit.’

And the three sat themselves on the veranda.

‘Hey, child! Tell me, girl, isn’t your mother inside? Put some water on the fire to boil and tell her to come here for a while, so that she can see who came.’

‘She’s been indisposed, boys. At dusk four days ago, she went to put some grass into the manger for the cow and got knocked over. Complaining of back pain, she went to lie down. There’s an Ayurvedic physician named Cellappā who sells an oil made by the man at Oṭṭakappulam. I sent my grandson to buy a quarter *fanam*’s worth, and gave her a massage. When she lay down, she said she was feeling better, but the poor thing must have fallen asleep.’

Naṇṇiyaṇ had not yet finished narrating the story when Celli emerged from inside the hut.

‘Who’s there? My eyes are growing dim. I see three of you, but can’t tell who you are.’

Putting her hand over her eyes, she tried to make out who the visitors were. As she came out, she knotted her *kurukku* tightly and

tucked it into the string loop dangling from her neck. When Celli stood, her head almost touched the roof.

‘It’s us, *Akkai*. We came to talk to *Nannī Aṇṇai*.’

‘Now who might ‘us’ be?’

‘We’re from around the Christian church beyond *Tinnevēly*. I’m the younger son of *Cuppaṇ*, the grass-vendor. The other one is *Vairavaṇ*, son of *Karuttār*. He has a Christian name now—*Cimiyōṇ*. The other boy you would not know even if I introduced him. He’s from *Kuḷavaṅkātu*.’

Introducing himself as the son of *Cuppaṇ* the grass-vendor, he hardly bothered to introduce the others. Meanwhile, Celli had sat on the ground.

‘Ah, yes! Now I recognize you as *Cuppaṇ*’s son—a boy of our same male blood. Isn’t the other fellow a relation of ours too? *Karuttār* is a close relative on my wife’s side, isn’t he?’

And then, to find out what purpose this visit had, *Nannīyaṇ* abruptly asked, ‘Well, then, why have you come all this way, anyway?’

‘Say,’ interrupted Celli. ‘We hear that *Cuppaṇ* and his family have also embraced Christianity. What’s your Christian name, son?’

*‘*Cuvāmi* entered my name in the baptismal register as “*Rāyappu*.” That’s what he calls me. But if you call me that in the village, they won’t know who you mean. You have to say *Caṅkilittām*.’

‘So what does “*Caṅkilittām*” mean? Was it your father who gave you that name, son? A fine name it is!’

Celli asked so much about so many things that *Caṅkilittām Rāyappu* had to explain.

‘Whenever a church is built, the practice of the *Cuvāmis* is to have three persons appointed, one as *Mūppar*, one as *Caṅkilittām*, and one as *Upatēciyār*. Unanimously, the villagers all declared that I was to be their *Caṅkilittām*. *Cimiyōṇ*’s father was chosen as the *Mūppar*, *Cantiāppillai*, who assists *Cuvāmi*, was made the *Upatēciyār*.’

Before Caṅkilittāṃ Rāyappu had finished explaining, coffee in three well-polished coconut shells was brought out, with palmyra jaggery in the same number of tiny baskets. A young woman dressed in kuṛukku brought it out.

Assuming that she was Naṇṇiyaṇ's granddaughter, Caṅkilittāṃ asked, 'Who might she be, Aṇṇai? Your granddaughter?'

'Say now, son, why tease him like that? She's my youngest child!' Celli said.

Caṅkilittāṃ felt himself go numb. The girl in kuṛukku could not have been older than fifteen.

Under the scorching sun over the treeless landscape, a hot wind blew. Now and then, the wind circled round and round, scattering a sandy red dust that left deposits in the cleavages between stones. Here and there, one could see four or five huts, shimmering as if on fire in the heat waves of a mirage. Beyond them, green fields were visible, faintly.

'Naṇṇiyaṇ Aṇṇai! We came to consult you about constructing a Christian church hereabouts. What do you think we should do?' asked Caṅkilittāṃ with only a hint of subtlety.

'What! Build a Christian church? Have you already forgotten the agony your own village underwent ten years ago because of the Christian church you built there? The *Nayinārs* drove you from their lands. They set fire to your houses. They prohibited you from entering their lands and using their wells. Only recently has the situation quieted down, a little. The things that happened then were just awful, don't you think? Put this aside. Talk of something else, if you can. Don't make us their prey,' said Naṇṇiyaṇ in a single breath.

For a while, no one said anything.

Celli picked up the mortar and began pounding areca nut and betel leaves. Inside the hut, a kitchen fire was burning. The young girl in kuṛukku and another older woman whose belly bulged were struggling hard with the smoky fire.

'Here in Cinnakkaḷaṭṭi, boys, even if you count them up, we only come to fifteen families. All of us live off the *Nayinārs*' land. They are the ones to whom we stretch out our hands for our livelihood. They are the ones who pay for our weddings and funerals. In their houses, our children run the errands. Why, the young girl over there has been eating and sleeping in a house of theirs. She did their errands. Nothing ever happened to her that shouldn't have.'

Celli would have kept on speaking but Nanniyan cut her off, saying 'Why say all that now?'

Although he sensed that something was not quite right, Caṅkilittām felt unable to ask about it directly. Changing the subject gave him an opportunity to say what he had come to say.

'All the things you mention may have happened, but the *cuvāmis* will be on hand to help us if a church is built. Nowadays, they rule over large parts of the world. Once they make a decision, they can do anything they want to in our village. We can even give our children an education. Have you heard that the *cuvāmis* have already built a school in our village? That's why we want you to think all these things over. Next Sunday, the Guru is coming to church. We'll bring him here as well in his spring-fitted bullock cart. Now, Aṇṇai, we'll take leave of you.'

And with this, Caṅkilittām got up to go.

Cin̄ni's Rape and Tampāppiḷaiyār's Denial

‘**W**hat’s this, Nan̄niyan? I heard you’re going to build a Christian church! Weren’t there some people who came out to see you yesterday?’ These questions Tampāppiḷaiyār asked as he came walking down the embankment of the field Nan̄niyan was tilling.

‘Who ... whoever told you that, Nayinār? No ... nothing of the sort,’ replied Nan̄niyan, stammering as he removed the turban shielding him from the hot sun. Holding it in his hands, he stepped back a little. His mamoty fell to the side, the soil clinging to it that he had just dug up.

‘Ha! You fellows had better not think our God and theirs are different. Whatever the God, they always get us to the same place. But our Gods are Tamil Gods. Our Gods are the ones who know us best. Now, listen to me, Nan̄niyan! If you get into any foul play, our boys would listen to no one, not even me.’

After this, Tampāppiḷaiyār didn’t say anything. He only walked on the embankment. It was almost noon. Massaging his hip muscles, Nan̄niyan looked in Tampāppiḷaiyār’s direction. After going a short distance, Tampāppiḷaiyār started walking back his way.

‘What’s this rascal coming back for?’ Nan̄niyan said to himself and stood there like a statue.

‘Look here, Nan̄niyan! I came back to ask you something else, but I’ve already forgotten what it was. I’m growing old and getting forgetful. Ah, yes, Nan̄niyan, I’ve heard that you’ve taken that young daughter of yours back home from my sister’s house when she was out. Didn’t my sister look after her and provide for all her needs these last nine or ten years? Without saying anything, you’ve taken her back when my sister was away at the temple. Now why did you go

and do that? If anything untoward happened, you should have told my sister first and then come to take your daughter back. Anyway, did you mention even a word of this to me? Now you've really gone and lost your head. See that she's taken back and left at my sister's.'

Tampāppillaiyār issued his orders and started walking back, without waiting for Naṇṇiyaṇ's reply. For a while, Naṇṇiyaṇ said nothing.

'Nayinār, there's just one problem.'

Tampāppillaiyār spun around where he was standing.

'If something like this had happened to a daughter of yours, Nayinār,' Naṇṇiyaṇ calmly asked, 'what would you do?'

'Ha! You! Talking straight to my face! What're you asking? What would I have done if something like this had happened to my own daughter? Are you now so bold as to ask me like this? Ha! Don't indulge yourself with this kind of talk. By dusk, Ciṇṇi Girl had better be taken back to the house and left there. When she gets married or something, then you can take her back. Do you think you can take her back whenever you please? Idiot! Don't talk so foolishly! Do what I say. You know what'll happen if you don't.'

On hearing this command, Naṇṇiyaṇ should have acquiesced, but persisted.

'In the house there are two young Nayinārs. The younger one, you know ...'

Before Naṇṇiyaṇ could finish, Tampāppillaiyār shouted, 'Ha! *What Naḷa rubbish are you talking, Naṇṇiyaṇ? He's a grown-up boy. *You know he was betrothed to my girl when he was still a babe. And yet you talk like this! If he's disgraced by this kind of slander, mark my words, I'll cut your head off!'

'But, Nayinār, that's why I brought Ciṇṇi Girl back—to avoid any unpleasantness.'

'Are you saying something bad happened? Can you imagine the scandal that will break out in the village if you say that? Has he gobbled up this youngest kid of yours, the one you fathered in

your dotage? Now, listen to what I'm going to tell you, Nanniyaṇ. Find Cinni Girl a husband. A ceremonial exchange of rice can be arranged. Even a widower will do. I'll try to find one. Until I do, keep your mouth shut.'

Like a person of authority, Tampāppillaiyār admonished Nanniyaṇ. And all the time he spoke as if he truly felt compassionate. Nanniyaṇ was fuming, body and soul. He stood there, head bowed. Tampāppillaiyār had gone, but he didn't want to even look in his direction.

Tampāppillaiyār had to be at least five years younger than Nanniyaṇ, but that did not keep him from abusing him and then walking off. The border of his dhoti had been dyed by the best of dyers. It was as white as snow, laundered by the best of dhobis. The edges fell in straight lines. He wore it folded up and knotted at the knee. A Paramas shawl was on his shoulders. *The front of his head was fully shaven. In the back, it was tied into a neat *kuṭumi*. In this attire, Tampāppillaiyār strutted around, majestically.

Nanniyaṇ took no note of it.

Nanniyaṇ at Home, Lamenting with Celli

It was afternoon when Nanniyaṇ came home. Ordinarily, he would not get home as late as this. Somehow or other, he always comes back by noon. Early in the morning when he goes out to till the soil, Celli only gives him some leftover *kañci* to drink. By ten o'clock, its staying power has gone. After that, his stomach begins making all sorts of gurgling noises. He manages, though, and keeps tilling till noon. Then he makes a quick dash for home.

On the edge of the fields, the bell of the Kali [Kālī] Temple chimes out that noon has come. The same bell announces the noontime puja that Peruṅkuṭumi Aiyar performs. The crows, conditioned to the sound of the bell, flock to the front of the temple and begin cawing.

The mid-day *pukkai* never varies. From his youth, Nanniyaṇ had grown accustomed to it. When the bell of the Kali Temple is heard to chime, rung by Peruṅkuṭumi Aiyar, Nanniyaṇ will already be found in his hut. Today was strangely different. The chime was heard. Crows flocked to the temple compound, ate the *pukkai* thrown out, rested on the *marutu* trees, and flew off. Nanniyaṇ, though, did not realize it was time to go back to the hut. Only in the afternoon did he return.

*Before Nanniyaṇ got back, his younger son, Iḷaiyaṇ, had returned from tilling Kotti Corner, one of Tampāppiḷaiyār's tobacco fields. Celli had given him a *kañci* made of millet and he had started drinking it with a spoon made of jak leaf. The *kañci* had mulberry leaves and tasted good.

'Āttai! What's happened?' Iḷaiyaṇ asked. 'Appu hasn't returned yet.'

At that moment, the sound was heard of a mamoty being dropped, striking stony ground in a corner of the compound. When he caught sight of his father, Iḷaiyaṇ moved aside a little.

‘Why don’t you rinse your mouth out,’ said Celli, ‘and have a drink of this millet kañci. If it gets cold, we’ll have to keep it for pukkai.’

Without a word, Nanniyaṇ went over to the water pot, which was kept on coconut husks. He sat there, pouring it out. Celli observed that he sat beside the pot for quite a while.

‘Look here!’ Celli ejaculated, ‘Why are you sitting there like a stone Pillaiyār? The kañci is getting cold.’

Spitting the water out of his mouth, Nanniyaṇ went into the hut. His face had changed. He watched Celli shaping a bowl of jak leaves to serve the kañci in and then put a wooden spoon into the cooking pan.

Celli, who had studied every minute change in Nanniyaṇ’s bodily movements, breath, speech, and posture, sat there, observing him.

After drinking his kañci, Ilaiyaṇ went and slept on the worn-out mat in the veranda extension adjoining the eastern side of the hut. The afternoon shade falls only on that side. Lying in the shade was what he always did.

‘I can’t figure anything out from your behavior. Did anything bad happen out in the fields?’ And, then, not wanting Ilaiyaṇ who was sleeping in the adjoining veranda to hear her, Celli lowered her voice and asked, ‘I wonder, did the farmer scold you?’

‘Where has Ciṇṇi gone?’ was Nanniyaṇ’s only response.

‘She was going to her elder brother’s house for a bath after taking the kañci off the fire,’ Celli answered. ‘It seems that over at the Nayaṇātti’s house, they only pour water into the stone tub for a bath once a month. That’s the same stone tub they fill with water for the cows to drink. She went out saying she loved having a bath in clean water.’

Celli finished talking and Nanniyaṇ silently drank the kañci.

‘Shall I give you some fermented palmyra pulp?’ asked Celli.

Nannayan did not say 'no.' Instead, he just shook his head and finished up the kañci.

'I'm tired, I'm going to lie down a while. Wake me up at dusk so that I can take Ciñni back to the Nayingātti's house.'

'What are you saying?' Celli blurted out, shocked at hearing Nannayan say this.

Nannayan made no reply, lay down inside the hut, and stretched out his limbs.

'I can't fathom what you're saying. I won't agree to such a thing! From now on, she's not going to be sent anywhere. Our poverty is our business. As my mother used to say, 'Even when the famine's over, the scar it leaves won't go away.' If she's going to be taken to the Nayingātti's house again,' said Celli, overcome with emotion, 'it'll be over my dead body!'

Sleeping in the veranda extension added onto the eastern side, Ilayavan could clearly hear his mother's voice. Though he did not understand a word, he knew she was talking about Ciñni, his younger sister. The day before yesterday, when he asked why his father had brought Ciñni back from the Nayingātti's house, he was only told that she was anxious to spend a couple of days in her own home. Apart from what his mother had told him, he did not know anything else. But the tone she spoke in was different now. He closed his eyes and listened intently.

'Hey! Keep your voice down. The boy's lying just over there. Even now, woman, you don't know how to talk in front of other people or how things should be said. Yesterday, you were about to blurt out the truth right in front of those Christian boys. It was good I changed the topic. Otherwise, we would have been disgraced. Our adult daughter's reputation would have been shattered.'

Nannayan spoke softly. Even so, Ilayavan could hear everything he said. Celli said nothing.

'Tampāppillaiyār Nayingār came out to the field and bullied me. He scolded us, saying that if Ciñni were not sent back to his sister's house, the consequences would be disastrous.'

'So he scolded you, did he? Well, where was your mouth? Couldn't you have asked, 'Now, then, should our adult girls fall victim to the fun and games of the young Nayiṇār?' If I were you I would have scolded him so badly his fancy dhoti would have fallen off! And if I don't ask the Nayiṇātti Nācciyār in such a way that the pretty folds of her sari come undone, then my mother conceived me out of wedlock! If I don't prove that I'm the daughter of Kantaṇ, my name isn't Celli!'

Celli blurted this out and left the hut. Even though the sun was hot, she got a broom and started sweeping the compound, which was strewn with pebbles. She always found relief from her broom when she was upset. That's the way she is.

In his heart, Iḷaiyaṇ was fuming. He could understand only a little of what they said, but he was no small boy and was three years older than Ciṇṇi. Naṇṇiyaṇ and Celli thought that after him they would not have another child. But three years later, his mother gave birth to Ciṇṇi. When she gave birth that time, Celli felt shy, thinking she would be teased for conceiving offspring in her old age.

Iḷaiyaṇ was sweating. He got up and went out, untying and retying his kuṭumi.

'Now where's he going?' wondered Celli, who felt it could hardly be good.

She was wondering whether he might have heard what she said and was going to the Nayiṇātti's house to pick a fight or something. Before she could be sure, she saw him clearly proceeding across the open space and Ciṇṇi coming towards him from her bath. She had her wet cloth in her hands after squeezing out the water. Celli could not move. She tried to see with her eyes what the brother and sister were doing, whether they were talking together. Her guess was that under the bent margosa tree at the edge of the open space, Iḷaiyaṇ had asked her a question and that Ciṇṇi was saying something, sobbing.

Ponni's Visit and Muttavan's Fury

Ilayavan and Cinni came back together. Cinni felt helpless and was crying when she came in.

'Look here, Attai, Cinni mustn't be sent back to the Nayinatti's house again.' Ilayavan spoke emotionally as he entered the house. 'There, I've said it.'

Nannayan, pretending to be asleep, heard all these things very clearly. Celli kept quiet. Still crying, Cinni spread the wet cloth she had brought home on the rocks to dry. Then she went into the hut. Her crying did not stop.

'Little One, I have served up some kañci for you. Drink it, please. Let your father get up first. Then we'll talk everything over.'

Cinni had heard her mother speaking, but still she did not move.

'Here, Little One. After you have a head bath, it isn't good to sit around with an empty stomach. Drink the kañci, please.'

Again, Cinni did not move, but only cried louder.

'Come on, you women! With you around, I won't be allowed to get even a little bit of sleep. Why's Cinni Girl crying?'

Asking this, Nannayan got up. For a few minutes, no one spoke. Cinni's crying was softer now.

'Appu, it looks like you're going to leave Cinni at the Nayinatti's house again. You do that, and you won't ever see me in this house again.'

Ilayavan spoke forthrightly. Nannayan, though, said nothing.

'She's determined not to go. And he says he'll up and disappear.'

Without finishing what she wanted to say, Celli stopped.

Nobody openly asked Ciṇṇi about what happened or whether 'it' had happened in the Nayaṇṭti's house. Could such a thing be spoken of, openly, between father and mother, brother and sister?

The sun was setting. Without saying anything, Naṇṇiyaṇ got up and walked out. No one, not even Celli, had the courage to ask him where he was going. It was getting dark. In a mighty big hurry, Poṇṇi, the wife of Celli's stepson, suddenly barged in.

*'Girl,' Celli inquired, 'has Mūttavaṇ returned from toddy tapping?'

'No, Māmi. When he finished tapping over at Cellammā Nayaṇṭti's house, he came home, gave me a message, and went off to Tampāppillaiyār's palmyra grove. What I gather is that when the Nayaṇṭti was not in the house the day before yesterday, Naṇṇi Ammān went there and brought Ciṇṇi back. The Nayaṇṭti told my man off and gave him quite a scolding. That's why he sent me here to find out what this was all about and then went off to tap some palmyra that are heavy with fruit. Why, Māmi, did Ammān do this? She had been living with them eight or ten years. If he did this without telling them, why shouldn't they scold us?'

Asked like this by Poṇṇi, her daughter-in-law, Celli divulged nothing and just kept quiet.

Knowing that his mother was reluctant to discuss such a thing with her daughter-in-law, Iḷaiyaṇ slipped out, quietly. In the corner, Ciṇṇi lay crouched. Since her bath that evening, she had not eaten anything except the millet kañci she had drunk at dusk. She must have fallen asleep immediately.

Celli felt like being watchful. She took her betel box and mortar out to the front yard and sat there pounding betel. Poṇṇi, her daughter-in-law, belly bulging, sat down beside her. As Celli was speaking in a soft voice, Poṇṇi thought she might be going to tell her a secret. Poṇṇi herself began speaking softly, too

In the huts of Ciṇṇakkaḷaṭṭi, one could see kitchen fires flickering. The wind was stirring up the gritty red dust. Mother-in-

law and daughter-in-law went on talking, turning their faces away from the dusty wind. In the distance, one could see a long streak of light moving slowly, making a soft clatter. *This was the time when the trains went by, north to south. Since its loud *cukku cukku* rhythm was carried off by the wind, it seemed to move along slowly, like some dumb creature. When this streak of light is seen behind the ground on which their huts are located, it's got to be half past seven. The engine belched flames out of its mouth two or three times and moved on. It had consumed too much coal and could not digest it all. And so it belched. The evening star was setting. Even so, the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law had not finished talking. After this, Celli would have to put the rice pot on the fire and make dinner. Nanṇiyaṇ would fetch some fish from the market.

Nearby, a cough was heard. It was a sign that Nanṇiyaṇ was coming, and it was he who came. A ray was dangling in his hand, carried by a string through its gills.

'Who's the woman sitting there?' Nanṇiyaṇ asked.

'It's me, Ammān,' replied Poṇṇi.

'Come here!' Nanṇiyaṇ ordered Celli. 'Cut this fish up and give two pieces to the girl. It's good for a pregnant woman.'

Getting up, Celli brought a cooking pan out to the front, with a fish slicer and a flickering lamp. It was Poṇṇi, though, who cut the fish into pieces and put them into the pan to poach. From the backside, she cut three pieces and wrapped them with coir webbing.

'Cut a piece from the fatty part, too,' Celli told Poṇṇi. 'If you don't, the curry won't smell as good.'

Obediently, Poṇṇi cut off a fatty piece and wrapped it with the coir webbing. Then she tipped the water pot to wash her hands and got up.

'I'm going, Māmi. I'll come back in the morning.'

With this, she disappeared into the dark. As she's always fond of wearing blue, she blended into the night. In the same spot, Celli cut the fish into more pieces and took them into the hut.

.....

Cin̄ni got up. The fire was burning. The rice pot that was on it had been removed. The ray was boiling away. In the front yard, Cin̄ni was pounding some parched rice to be added to the cooked rice. Ah, what a smell when she added it to the pan along with some tamarind! Oh, what an appetizing smell! You could eat a whole pan-full!

'What's going on, woman?' Nan̄niyaṇ, asked. 'Iḷaiyaṇ's nowhere to be seen.'

'At dusk, he went off in that direction,' replied Celli. 'Probably he went to his uncle's house.'

'He's not a little boy, is he? If I've told you once I've told you twice. *You shouldn't let him go visiting at his uncle's house where grown-up girls are living. It just isn't right.'

To such things, Celli made no reply. The cooking was over.

'Come listen!' called Celli.

Nan̄niyaṇ got up and went over to her. Celli turned the seat of the coconut scrapper she was sitting on and faced him. The round pot was full of rice. Pieces of fish were lying on top.

'Why did you give me so much, woman?' asked Nan̄niyaṇ, as he started eating. 'Even if Tampāppillaiyār cuts my head off, I won't leave Cin̄ni at the Nayaṇṭti's house.'

Nan̄niyaṇ was mumbling; his voice was faltering. Teardrops fell onto his plate of rice. Soon he was sobbing. Celli kept her eye on him. For a long time, her eyelids would not close. The sound of Iḷaiyaṇ coming in from outside could be heard. The goat tied up in the yard south of the hut always makes a noise when it hears his footstep. And now it did.

'Iḷaiyaṇ!' called Celli.

'Yes, Āttai,' answered Iḷaiyaṇ, showing that he was there.

While his father finished dinner, Iḷaiyaṇ squatted on the front veranda.

'Here, Cin̄ni,' said Celli, 'why don't you light the other tin lamp and use it while you give your elder brother his rice.'

'Let it wait, sister, while father is eating. I'll eat later.' Saying this, *Ilaiyaṇ* leaned against a pillar in the corner.

In between, nobody spoke. The wind stirred up, blew out the flame in the lamp of scrap tin that had no chimney, and then went on its way. *Celli* went to the hearth and stoked the embers, blowing on it with a long puff of breath that made it flame up again. She relit the lamp, putting it in a corner.

After dinner, *Nanniyaṇ* came outdoors. *Celli* served *Ilaiyaṇ* his food. And while he ate, *Ilaiyaṇ* asked his mother, whispering softly, 'What does *Appu* say?'

'He says he won't send her there,' replied *Celli*, raising her voice in satisfaction.

Her answer satisfied *Ilaiyaṇ*, fully, but he looked over at *Cinni*, concerned. Even in the dim light, he could clearly make out her smile. Whenever she smiled, her teeth gleamed, brightly. *Ilaiyaṇ* finished his dinner and then, as usual, went to bed inside the hut.

Celli put the rice into the curry pan that the fish had been cooked in. Then, to water it down, she poured into it the afternoon's leftover millet *kañci*. The liquid dripping, she placed it in *Cinni*'s hands. Serving her, she also served herself. Holding hers in her left hand, she finished eating. A day's life was over. The lamp that had no chimney was put out, and the whole family fell asleep. Now and then, *Ilaiyaṇ* got up to get some *kiḷuvai* leaves out of a bundle to feed the dappled goat tied up in the yard, and then went to bed himself.

'Āttai! Oh, Āttai!'

A voice was heard in the front yard. *Ilaiyaṇ* recognized whose it was—his elder brother's!

'What's up, *Anṇai*, at midnight?' Saying this, *Ilaiyaṇ* got up.

'Well, it looks as if *Mūttavaṇ*'s come. At an hour like this, I wonder why. Get up and go find out,' *Nanniyaṇ* said, waking *Celli* up.

'Why have you come now, at midnight?' asked *Celli*, getting up. 'Is that young wife of yours ill at home? A stomachache or a pain of some kind? She was just here tonight, visiting.'

Saying this, she rekindled the embers in the hearth with a long puff of breath and then lit the lamp that had no chimney.

'Nothing in particular, Āttai. I just thought I would come.' Saying this, Mūttavaṇ sat beside the pillar on the side. His kuṭumi was tightly tied. For a few minutes, nobody spoke. On his own, he could not get the conversation going.

'What do you want to talk about, Mūttavaṇ?' asked Naṇṇiyaṇ. 'You're so quiet.'

'Nothing important, Appu. Cellammā Nācciyār was furious tonight that you had brought Ciṇṇi home without telling her.' But he could not finish saying what he really wanted to say.

'So have you come here at midnight,' Naṇṇiyaṇ asked straight-out, 'to tell me that I ought to take her and leave her there?'

'No, not for that, Appu. I only came to know of all these things when Poṇṇi came just now and told me. Ciṇṇi shouldn't be sent back there. That's what I came to say,' Mūttavaṇ said, sounding blunt.

'Be quiet, you! Your father has already said that she won't be left there,' Celli said, conclusively.

After that, there was a long silence. Mūttavaṇ went out to the front yard.

*'We may be their bonded laborers, but should we live without shame? I'll chop them up with my toddy tapping knife, throw the pieces away, and go to the gallows.' Mūttavaṇ's words poured out like a torrent. And off he went.

Until dawn, Celli got no sleep. *Again and again, she got up, relit the lamp, and then her pipe. Lighting her pipe over and over was what she used to do throughout the night whenever she felt uneasy at heart.

Pūkkarṇṭar Talks with Naṇṇiyaṇ

As usual, Naṇṇiyaṇ got up as soon as the morning star appeared. He woke Celli gently, had her bring him the leftover kañci, and took his mamoty with him out to the fields.

Even when the time for planting is calculated meticulously, the reckoning sometimes goes awry. Another four days and the tobacco seedlings would have to be planted. Before that could be done, though, the fields had to be tilled and leveled and the plant beds dug. Over the last four days, Naṇṇiyaṇ had made beds for three thousand, all by himself. There were another two thousand still to go. If he worked without a break on the beds for these two thousand, he could be finished in another two days. Tampāppillaiyār got others to assist with everything else—the fertilizing, tilling, leveling, embankment building, and watering—but Naṇṇiyaṇ was the only one who could make the beds. Whatever he touched turned to gold, people believed.

Three times in the last twenty years, Māriyaṇ and another fellow had worked together on the beds instead of Naṇṇiyaṇ. Each time, however, just as they were about to be harvested, the tobacco plants were attacked by blight and ruined within a week. Not even a third of the investment was recoverable. At the time, Naṇṇiyaṇ had had a deep mamoty cut in his foot and was in bed at the house of Atikāram, the Ayurvedic physician who tended wounds. The second failure happened because Naṇṇiyaṇ had lost his first wife at childbirth, and the ritual impurity prevented him from entering the fields. At the time, Tampāppillaiyār had to contend with floods brought on by the April rains. For ten days, his low-lying land was under water. Halfway grown, the seedlings began to rot and die. That time, nothing at all could be recovered from the investment. Four years ago, the crop

failed a third time. That was when Mūttavaṇ, Naṇṇiyaṇ's eldest son, slipped and fell from a tree. To care for him, Naṇṇiyaṇ had had to stay with him at the house of the Ayurvedic orthopedic physician in Oṭṭakappulam. That was why he had been unable to go to the fields and make the beds. Only on Tampāppillaiyār's land did the plants die even as they were being watered from palmyra-leaf watering baskets. As the Cōlakam had started blowing, he could not grow any new plants to replace them. Right then, the crop was ruined. After these three failures, he realized that Naṇṇiyaṇ was the one who had to make the beds for his five thousand plants.

Naṇṇiyaṇ picked up where he had left off making plant beds the previous day. The normal time of day for Tampāppillaiyār's visit came and went. Naṇṇiyaṇ's mind went over different possibilities.

'Probably he went over to his sister's house,' he muttered, 'to see if Ciṇṇi had come. After that, he's going to flare up, and I'm going to get an earful. Well, let him shout. I'm not going to give in either. Is he going to eat me up or something? The worst he can do is keep me from going into the fields. Just let him try and stop me.' Naṇṇiyaṇ murmured again, not realizing that anybody was behind him.

'What's this, Naṇṇiyaṇ? You look like you're going to finish the work the high and mighty farmer gave you to do.'

That was the voice of Pūkkaṇṭar Nayaṇār, and Naṇṇiyaṇ was taken aback when he heard it.

'Nayaṇār, tell me again what you were saying just now. I can't seem to understand anything,' asked Naṇṇiyaṇ, dropping the mamoty he was using to level the soil.

'Well, I was out here before dawn to level the soil, but you were here already, ahead of me. That's why I asked why you're so obsessed with getting the high and mighty farmer's work done. Why so excited? Your excitement tells me something is bothering you.'

Talking in this unusual way, Pūkkaṇṭar Nayaṇār touched Naṇṇiyaṇ's heart. Taking the cloth from his head, Naṇṇiyaṇ hesitated, 'No, Nayaṇār, that's not it at all.'

‘Say now, you can’t hide anything from a wise old owl like me. I know everything about everyone. I can tell what you’re thinking just by looking at you. So tell me the whole story and don’t hold anything back. But maybe you’re wondering how you can possibly tell a person like me, a small farmer, about the affairs of a big farmer. Well, then, Naṇṇiyaṇ, why, all of a sudden, did you bring your youngest kid back from the house of Cellammā Nācciyār? After all, the Nācciyār wasn’t even home! To bring a girl back who had been there eight or ten years means you have to have a pretty good reason, right?’ Pūkkaṇṭar Nayiṇār said, and then abruptly stopped.

Unable to say anything, Naṇṇiyaṇ stood there holding his mamoty.

‘Me, a man who lives on the other side of the fence from Tampāppiḷaiyār! Are you and Nācciyār trying to play me for a fool, Naṇṇiyaṇ?’

It was Pūkkaṇṭar who had spoken again.

‘Come on, Naṇṇiyaṇ! She’s not a baby girl. As soon as she came of age, you should have brought her home. But you didn’t. If cotton and fire are kept together, it’s going to go up in flames. On the day you did bring her home, my wife said, the Nācciyār had gone off to the temple, leaving her grown-up boys at home. The younger one, who gets his schooling in town, appears to have chased your little girl all over the back yard. My wife heard this from a woman who saw it happen with her own eyes. The older boy stood beside the well, seeing everything but pretending he didn’t.’

Pūkkaṇṭar stopped speaking, and Naṇṇiyaṇ wiped his face with his head cloth and sobbed.

‘Say there, Naṇṇiyaṇ! Looks like Tampāppiḷaiyār’s on his way over here. His black hair is visible now. Anyway, be smart. I don’t like this either. I’ve got grown-up girls myself,’ said Pūkkaṇṭar, as he stepped quickly through a shortcut in the embankment.

With his dhoti tucked up tight and sand in his kuṭumi, Naṇṇiyaṇ went back to work on the plant beds. In no time at all, Tampāppiḷaiyār was there.

'Hey, Nannīyaṇ! Who was that who just left? Looked like that fellow Pūkkāṇṭaṇ, *the one who eats dried palmyra pulp. What was he doing talking to someone like you?'

'It was nothing, Nayaṇār. He talked about the wells drying up and wondered why we were making beds for five thousand plants. That's all,' Nannīyaṇ answered, plausibly.

'I may plant five thousand or I may plant ten thousand. And if there isn't enough water, I'll urinate on them. What's a guy who eats dried palmyra pulp asking for, anyway? He should have asked me instead. Why ask my bonded laborer?'

By the end, he was sounding arrogantly coarse. Nannīyaṇ, though, said nothing.

'Will the plant beds be ready tomorrow, Nannīyaṇ?' His voice was lower and sounded more solicitous.

'If I work all day today, by sunset tomorrow they should be,' responded Nannīyaṇ pleasantly. 'Looks like the Cōḷakam is about to blow. On the day of the full moon, we'll need to start planting.'

'I've spoken to Kōviya Mutti Girl. I told her to make you some milk coffee and *kurakkaṇ* roṭṭis. She'll bring them now, and I'll have her bring some rice at noon. Stay here till sunset and work on the beds. I've got some important work to do at the home of the village headman. It's going to be okay. My sister came to tell me you haven't brought Ciṇṇi back to her yet. For two or three days, she said, the cow shed has been filling up with dirt and dung. I told her you were busy making the plant beds but that you would take her there tonight. That's what I told her, and then I came out here. When you're done in the field, take Ciṇṇi back.'

Unconcerned with anything Nannīyaṇ might have to say, Tampāppillaiyār walked along the big embankment and disappeared in the direction of the village headman's house.

Just as Tampāppillaiyār had said as he walked toward the west, Mutti came out on the eastern side of the embankment.

'Nan̄ni, the farmer's wife sent me out to bring you some kurakkaṇ roṭṭis and milk coffee. Leave your mamoty there and come.'

Nan̄niyaṇ came over as she sat down on the embankment, opened the plantain-frond containers, and placed the roṭṭi on the ground. There was also a little bit of green chili paste wrapped up in plantain-fronds to go with the kurakkaṇ roṭṭi. When Nan̄niyaṇ sat on the plant bed beside the big embankment, Mutti pushed the plantain-frond containers toward him. Nan̄niyaṇ spat out some betel juice, and she knew he might need a little bit of the milk coffee, which she had poured into a coconut shell from the silver pot at home. First, she wiped it clean. Swishing the milk coffee around, he rinsed his mouth of the betel, spat it out, and bit into the kurakkaṇ roṭṭi. The green chili paste was tasty too.

'Say, Nan̄ni! There's a rumor going around the neighborhood. It seems you brought your daughter home without telling Cellammā Nācciyār. Yesterday morning, she came and shouted at her brother before she left. She was crying and saying you would never have done a thing like this if her husband had still been alive. You shouldn't have done it, Nan̄ni. For eight or ten years she has provided your daughter with food and water and all her clothing. She even took responsibility for her coming of age ceremony. You didn't have any problem with that. So, then, have you done the right thing, or not?'

Mutti said all this, watching eagerly for Nan̄niyaṇ's response.

'It's been three years since my daughter came of age. How many times in those years did my boys tell me I should bring her home? It's not that I'm ungrateful! It was a coincidence that one night I happened to go to Cellammā Nācciyār's house to borrow four fanams, or something like that. I heard my girl shouting in the back of the yard. The young Nayaṇār was holding her and she, she, she was screaming,' Nan̄niyaṇ stammered, unable to say anything more.

Mutti began crying, too. There was silence for a while. With the loose end of her kuṛukku, Mutti wiped her face. She poured coffee from the jug into the coconut shell until it was brim full, made some lumps of sand to brace it from tipping over, got up and left.

Distribution of Kālāñci

At noon, Mutti brought food for Nanniyaṇ. The rice came in a tiny box made of palmyra leaves. The rice had softened because of the curry. On top, it was covered by a small ōlai plate, the one reserved for him, in which his food was always served whenever he went to the farmer's house. Cellammā had carefully kept it aside and sent it out to him today. Mutti had brought him some water in a small clay pot. This time, she did not say anything to Nanniyaṇ at all. When he had finished washing his hands, she unwrapped the small container and put the rice in the ōlai plate. In the rice, there was a good amount of curry, pumpkin and manioc. Silently, Nanniyaṇ began to eat.

That morning, Mutti said Cellammā had come the previous day and left. She hadn't said anything about her coming this morning as well. But Tampāppillaiyār said his sister had come, shouted at him, and left. Nanniyaṇ wanted to know what really happened.

'Mutti child! You said that the lady farmer came yesterday, but was there any sign of her today as well?' Nanniyaṇ asked softly.

'From early morning I was there, Nanni. I saw no sign of her. She might have come when I was out here, but I'm not sure. Why do you ask?'

Nanniyaṇ could not avoid her last question. That morning, he had opened up his heart to her; after that, he would not be able to hide anything from her.

'A minute or so before you came, the farmer was here. He said his sister had come this morning to complain that Ciṇṇi had not been sent yet. That's why I asked,' he said.

‘He’s pulling your leg, Naṇṇiyaṇ. He’s lying to you to cover up what’s going on at home, to get you to bring Ciṇṇi Girl back. But since you asked me, are you planning on sending her back?’

With this question, she quieted down, trying to appeal to his self-respect. What she hoped for happened.

‘Well, no doubt we lead a hand-to-mouth existence, but we would rather eat poisonous weeds right out of the ground and die than lose our self-respect. Tampāppillaiyār and his people may think they have us under their thumb, but it’s just not going to happen.’

Naṇṇiyaṇ spoke with vigor, and Mutti felt more than satisfied with what he said.

Mutti takes good care of her three daughters. Her eldest is now over twenty. She had also seen to it that until now there had been absolutely no scandal at all about her. As for the second girl, it had been three years since she had come of age. The youngest one might reach puberty anytime. She had one boy, but when he was twenty he hanged himself from the *pūvaracu* tree in the cemetery and died. The village had no idea why he had done this. Mutti, though—she knew. Cellaiyaṇ, her son, used to go looking for her at the Nayaṇār’s house. There, he used to chat and laugh with the young lady, Cevvanti Nācciyār. After that, he died.

Mutti waited until Naṇṇiyaṇ finished eating, and then took out from the loose end of the *kuṟukku* cloth covering her breast an old purse of palmyra leaf and gave him some betel to chew. She gathered up the small palmyra leaf box, the water jug, and got ready to go.

‘They’re wicked devils, Naṇṇi. Watch yourself,’ she warned him in a whisper and walked off.

Somehow or other, a certain number of plant beds had to be finished by the end of the day, and Naṇṇiyaṇ therefore kept on working until dark before he set off for home. It was pitch dark when he got there, and no one could recognize anyone else.

‘Say, there! Where have you been this whole time? Have you had to move mountains for Tampāppillaiyār! At noon, you were starving, too, I bet. Is this how it’s destined to be for you?’ Celli asked, angrily.

The man is suffering, and she starts up with her tale of woe! Nanniyaṇ put his mamoty aside and walked toward the well. In the north end of that stony red land, there was only one well to bathe in for ten or fifteen families. There would be a big crowd there, Celli knew. Before he returned, she thought, she had better put the rice pot on the fire to boil, and drain the water out. His hunger would have to be satisfied.

‘Child! Quickly! Go put some rice in the pot to boil and make a good fire.’

Giving this order, Celli cut up and scraped the fins off the dried, salted *pūñcaikaṇṇi* fish, which had been bought at the market in Ālaṭi.

‘Hasn’t Appu returned yet?’ asked Iḷaiyaṇ, as he walked in with a gardening knife in one hand and a bundle of leaves in the other.

‘The poor man just got here a minute ago and then went off to the well,’ sighed Celli, revealing her grief.

The dappled goat bleated. Taking the bundle of leaves, Iḷaiyaṇ went out to the back yard. In her anxiety to get the rice boiled quickly, Ciṇṇi struggled with the fire in the fire pit.

‘What did Tampāppi Iḷaiyār tell him, Āttai?’ asked Iḷaiyaṇ, his voice audible from behind the hut.

‘The poor man just got back feeling really famished. At a time like that, how could I ask him questions? Let him come back, then we’ll talk,’ answered Celli.

‘Pūkkanṭar spoke to me here just now. He asked me to tell Appu to go see him as soon as he gets back,’ said Iḷaiyaṇ, ‘It seems that **kālāñci* is going to be distributed at the Kali temple to the people who conduct the festival. For our people, too, he said, *kālāñci* would have to be received. He said he wanted Appu to come right away, and then went off. I don’t know when Appu might get home after his bath. Shall I go and tell him to come, Āttai?’

What Iḷaiyaṇ said reminded Celli of a message the *paṇṭāram* boy had brought the other day.

'Ah! I completely forgot that yesterday the paṇṭāram boy came and stood just outside and made a noise to get our attention before he went away. I forgot all about it.'

'How could you forget, woman?' demanded Naṇṇiyaṇ as he came in.

'Haven't you bathed?' asked Celli, caught off guard.

'There was a big crowd, so I had a quick wash and came,' Naṇṇiyaṇ replied.

'It seems that kāḷāñci is going to be distributed at the temple today to the people who conduct the festival. Pūkkarṇṭar gave Ḍaiyavaṇ the message just now. Yesterday at dusk, the paṇṭāram boy came by to say this and left. I forgot to tell you,' Celli deftly owned up.

'Oh, you cursed woman! You're only getting around to telling me now? Can anyone go receive the kāḷāñci without bathing first?' Naṇṇiyaṇ scolded Celli.

'If it's late, why not go over to Mūttavaṇ's house and have a salt water bath?' Celli said, reminding him that the well water at Mūttavaṇ's was saline.

Naṇṇiyaṇ rushed off in the direction of Mūttavaṇ's house and returned a few minutes later with the water from his bath not yet fully wiped off his head. In a hurry, he tied his kuṭumi. The dhoti that had been washed of the stain of red soil and laid out to dry, he tied tightly around his waist. *Taking some sacred ash from the conch container hanging in the hut extension, he daubed a sufficient quantity on his forehead to cover it, flicked the residue into his mouth, and set out for the temple. Were Celli to say anything at a time like this, he would beat her with the first thing he could lay his hands on.

A bell was heard in the direction of the temple, sounding the start of the puja for the distribution of kāḷāñci. In front of the temple, three torches had been lighted. When Naṇṇiyaṇ arrived, the kāḷāñci was ready for giving away. From the sanctuary, Peruṅkuṭumi

Aiyar emerged with seven rolled-up betel leaves. Inside were *terpai*, sandalwood, kumkum, sacred ash, and *piracātam*.

When Aiyar asked if the persons were ready who had come to receive the *kālāñci*, Tampāppiḷaiyār looked around, counted on his fingers the people he saw, and said, 'the Vaṇṇārs have come, the Ampaṭṭars have come, the Mūppaṇs have come, the Paḷḷars have come, the Taccars have come. Our people are also okay.'

But from the Naḷavars, Naṇṇiyaṇ had not yet come.

Tampāppiḷaiyār was grumbling about Naṇṇiyaṇ's absence under his breath when Naṇṇiyaṇ all of a sudden stepped forward out of the shadows, saying, 'I'm here, Nayiṇār,' and stood where the light was better. His dhoti was still wet with water dripping down from his head.

'Ah! Naṇṇiyaṇ's come, too. It's all right, then, Ayyā. Go ahead and distribute the *kālāñci*.

'*Kālāñci* persons of the first flag-hoisting festival!' Aiyar called out.

Tampāppiḷaiyār stepped forward, proudly, to receive the *kālāñci* from Aiyar. *Having kept a ring of *terpai* at the ready in the knot of his dhoti, Aiyar tied it onto Tampāppiḷaiyār's little finger.

'*Kālāñci* persons of the second festival!'

'Come, Kaṭṭāṭi Katirāmul!' Tampāppiḷaiyār called out. 'Come get your *kālāñci*. Make sure the festival comes off without a hitch, the same as last year.'

Aiyar himself handed the *kālāñci* to Kaṭṭāṭi Katirāmu.

'*Kālāñci* persons of the third festival!'

'Now who would you be? Vicuvaṇ Āccāri?' Tampāppiḷaiyār asked. 'I know you won't let anyone top your festival. Surely, it's going to be even better than last year's.'

As Tampāppiḷaiyār spoke, Aiyar gave the *kālāñci* to Vicuvaṇ Āccāri.

‘Who are the kālāñci persons of the fourth festival?’ asked Aiyar.

‘It’s Pariyāri Kaṇavatiyaṇ,’ said Tampāppiḷaiyār. ‘This will be the first time you have received the kālāñci after your father passed away. Keep your father’s reputation up the best you can.’

As Tampāppiḷaiyār went on flattering him, Kaṇavatiyaṇ stretched out his hand to receive the kālāñci. Instead of Aiyar, though, the paṇṭāram boy raised the kālāñci high in the air and dropped it into Kaṇavatiyaṇ’s hand.

‘Kālāñci of the fifth festival!’

Tampaṇ stepped forward.

‘Oh, it’s you, Tampaṇ?’ Tampāppiḷaiyār asked. ‘Whenever the Paḷlars are in charge of the festival, people come from far and wide. I don’t need to tell you that.’

When Tampāppiḷaiyār finished, the paṇṭāram boy raised the kālāñci high in the air and dropped it into Tampaṇ’s hands.’

‘Kālāñci of the sixth festival!’

From the side, Mūppaṇ Mātaṇ stepped forward.

‘You, there, come over here,’ ordered Tampāppiḷaiyār. ‘You may not count for very many families, but your festival isn’t inferior to anyone’s. As I said, this time the festival has to be the best ever, and you should spare no expense. If you want a loan or something, I’ll give you one. Mother Kali will bless you abundantly!’

Even before Tampāppiḷaiyār finished, the paṇṭāram boy had dropped the kālāñci into Mātaṇ’s hands.

‘Which persons will receive the kālāñci for the last festival of all?’ Aiyar asked.

Hesitantly, Naṇṇiyaṇ stepped forward.

‘Look here, Naṇṇiyaṇ, I’ve told you already you’re going to have to work really hard on the festival to merit your kālāñci. *In Jaffna, Ceylon, the talk is that the Naḷava boys never stop their festivities until the goat sacrifice begins in the morning. Need I say more?’ asked Tampāppiḷaiyār, as he finished speaking.

And with that, the paṇṭāram boy dropped the kāḷāñci into Naṇṇiyaṇ's hand. Since the distribution was over, people began dispersing, saying they only had fifteen more days to collect money before the festival began.

When Naṇṇiyaṇ stepped onto the embankment, Pūkkaṇṭar called out, 'Naṇṇiyaṇ!'

'I gather, Nayaṇār,' said a surprised Naṇṇiyaṇ, respectfully, 'that you told ḷaiyaṇ you would be here at the temple, but I didn't see you.'

'You didn't see me,' said Pūkkaṇṭar, 'but I was there, watching Tampāppiḷaiyār ordering each of you around. Forget that, though. Did he say anything to you about your girl and her matter?' Pūkkaṇṭar asked.

As they walked along, Naṇṇiyaṇ recalled for Pūkkaṇṭar what he and Tampāppiḷaiyār had spoken of that morning and about his conversation with Mutti. As they neared his house, Pūkkaṇṭar said he would see him later on.

Seeing Naṇṇiyaṇ, Celli got his food ready to serve.

Going over to the water pot, he rinsed his mouth out and asked, 'Woman, what kind of curry did you cook?'

'There was no fresh fish or anything in the market today, so I made a gravy out of some dried fish ... '

Before she could even finish, Naṇṇiyaṇ grabbed the curry pan, dashed it to the ground, and kicked the rice pot over.

'I was at the house of Mother Kali and am back with her kāḷāñci! And this wretched woman expects these hands, which have received the kāḷāñci, to touch dried fish?'

Tampāppillaiyār Talks to Nanṇiyaṇ about Social Change in Jaffna

Before dawn, Celli's eyes opened. Nanṇiyaṇ was not in bed. She came out and looked in the veranda extension, but his mamoty was not there either. Yesterday morning, he had left for work with only the leftover kañci in his stomach. He had come back after dark, bathed quickly, and gone off to receive the kālāñci. When he came back, he had broken the pots and pans she used for cooking the curry of dried fish. Then he had gone to bed where he remained all hunched down. Even though it was dark, he had got up and gone off to the fields. Celli was moved when she thought of these things and tears came to her eyes. She looked over at Iḷaiyaṇ. It was only then that he got up from his bed, walked out to the fields, and disappeared into the palmyra grove at the far end.

Celli woke Ciṇṇi and asked her to take the pot she used for cooking vegetarian food, which was kept upside down in the backyard, and fill it with water to boil. She told her to make a kañci of coconut milk and add to it the small broken grains of rice set aside yesterday. Ciṇṇi, who still felt sleepy, went to the kitchen. Celli went out and got back before dawn. She was holding two or three branches of *piraṇṭai* leaves, which had new shoots. She quickly pulled the leaves off and bent and broke the stems. Taking four onions, garlic, and ten green chilies, she went over to the grinding stone. You could hear the roller moving quickly over the stone as Celli ground the *piraṇṭai* leaves into a paste.

'Hey, young girl, bring me some salt. I forgot to put some in.' Celli's voice blended in with the sound of the grinding. A few minutes later, the paste was ready.

‘Āttai, the kañci is ready now. Shall I take it off the fire?’ asked Ciṇṇi, and it was taken off.

‘Look there! It’s your brother coming. Give him the kañci and the paste. Let him drink it and go out to the fields. I’ll go give this to Appu and come back. Because I made that curry of dried fish last night, he got upset and went off on an empty stomach.’

Saying this, she set off with the pot of kañci and a coconut shell with the piraṇṭai paste inside. The pot of kañci was too hot to carry, so she found a piece of thick palmyra stem just the right size, put it under the pot, and left.

Nanniyaṇ could see Celli, even though she was still at a distance, and felt sorry for her.

‘Yesterday noon, at least, I was able to eat because of the rice Mutti brought out to me. But this poor thing has been starving the whole of yesterday and last night too. In any case, I shouldn’t have done what I did. If she had remembered that I was going to the temple to receive kālāñci, she would never have cooked a curry of dried fish. Here she comes, up before dawn, hurrying out to bring me something. Poor creature, this woman.’

Celli arrived.

‘I swear, I had completely forgotten about the distribution of the kālāñci,’ Celli declared.

That was all Celli could say, as she poured out the kañci into the coconut shell bowl for Nanniyaṇ, who had come up to the embankment. It was still really hot, but the green paste she put into his palm was icy cold. Watching him relish the kañci, she wiped off the reddish dust that formed a layer on his shoulders. Then she turned her eyes away, feeling embarrassed, and looked around. If somebody saw her, they might think, even though she is an old woman already, that ...

‘Did the farmer come?’ asked Celli. He could, of course, still show up.

'If the Nayaṇār brings Ciṇṇi up, tell him that she started menstruating yesterday and that after she's had her purification bath on the fifth day, we'll send her over. Why should we quarrel with the Nayaṇārs?'

This was Celli's advice.

'Is what you're saying,' asked Naṇṇiyaṇ after mulling it over a while, 'that I'm going to have to take her back in five or six days and leave her?'

'Later, we can give him some other excuse. It would be enough to say that somebody is coming to make us a marriage proposal, and that we'll soon be serving the ceremonial rice.'

'My, woman, what fine advice you give! And *when the farmer asks about the bridegroom, shall I say he lives in the Nilāvarai Pond? Why should we lie? I'm going to tell him straight out that I'm not going to take her back and leave her.'

After that, Naṇṇiyaṇ said no more; neither did Celli.

'I'll be finished with the plant beds today. On the full moon day, I'll plant the seedlings. I'll get the watercourses ready, and without being ungrateful to the house that fed me, I'll say 'goodbye' to the work he gives me. Just because I work for him, he thinks he can dictate the terms to me.'

Celli must have felt that he was right, because she spoke no further. When Naṇṇiyaṇ finished drinking the kañci, she gathered up the vessels and turned to go.

'Shall I bring you something this afternoon, or are you coming back?' she asked.

'Like yesterday, Mutti Girl may bring me some rice,' Naṇṇiyaṇ answered.

Having wanted to make her worry on purpose, he had not told her about the rice that Mutti had brought out to him from Tampāpillaiyār's house. To this day in his married life, he remembers the pranks he used to play on her in his youth when

he pretended to be starving and got some fun out of seeing her fret about him. But this time he told her on his own initiative about the rice Mutti had brought him.

‘Oh, I see! Yesterday, the fellow got a bellyful of food from the Nayaṇār’s house and then tried to tell me he was starving.’ Realizing this, she chuckled and left.

Nanniyaṇ went back to work on the plant beds. At a distance, the sound of the whistle from the morning train could be heard. As it belched out smoke, it made a *pook-pook* noise. Dimly, one could see the train leaving Kokkuvil station and moving slowly through the open fields. The freight cars that had left Colombo two days earlier looked exhausted after the long journey. It moved slowly as it pulled the long freight cars, laboriously. For a few minutes, Nanniyaṇ stood there, watching its movements. His body was bathed in silky rays of light. His wrinkled muscles gleamed, and Nanniyaṇ felt that his vanished youth had returned to him.

‘Why stand there looking at the train, Nanniyaṇ, as if you had never seen one before?’ asked Tampāppillaiyār, who had arrived on the scene.

Nanniyaṇ was at a loss for words.

‘You won’t believe it, Nanniyaṇ. Even though I’m more than sixty now, I have never once gotten into that disgusting train. You want to know why? Well, you’re our Naḷavaṇ, and were you to see me travelling on the train, you’d know how to behave and would at least go and sit on the bench on the other side. How many people get on the train and off, and we have no idea who they are or which caste they belong to? Will anybody know that I’m Tāvaṭi Tampāppillai? They’ll squeeze in between us, irrespective of who we are.’

‘My goodness! I even hear that the Mūppaṇ travel on the trains nowadays. And that brings me to my real point. *Tell me, wouldn’t it just drive you crazy if Mūppaṇs sat down beside you as if they were your equals? Just imagine yourself getting into a bus. The driver knows who gets to sit on a bench and doesn’t. One can be confident

and travel that way. And besides, are there any bus drivers who don't know me, Tāvaṭi Tampāppiḷlai? If I sit in the bus, even Vellāḷa fellows are going to take their seats a little farther away.'

'Twenty-five years have passed since the train began running, Naṇṇiyaṇ, but I have yet to get onto this monster. How do you know I'm telling you the truth? Just walk along the railroad tracks and see whether the crops and other plants in that vicinity are thriving. That's why Ācaippiḷlai, who had the horse carriage business, and I, along with some other prominent people, tried our level best to put a stop to it. *When King George paid a visit to the Jaffna Fort, we drew up a petition and submitted it. He just shook his head and did nothing about it.'

In one long breath, Tampāppiḷaiyār reviewed the whole affair of the train. But why should Tampāppiḷaiyār tell him these things, Naṇṇiyaṇ wondered, as he stood there quietly? This, though, was one of Tampāppiḷaiyār's typical obsessions. When he goes on about some past incident, he dredges up all the minute details and paints a graphic picture that always exaggerates his own role. It never occurs to him to think of whom he might be talking to, or why. He does not even bother to ask if anyone might be interested. Not that he only talks about his successes in these anecdotes; he talks about his failures and disappointments, too. Nor is he shy of talking about his defeats.

In the south, Tampāppiḷaiyār's property begins on the beach at Kākkaitivu and extends all the way to the cemetery at Karaiyāmpitṭi. In between, some of the fields belong to others, and it goes as far as the coconut estate near Paḷakkāṭu junction. On the east, it starts at Kuḷappitṭi junction and ends at the palmyra grove, with the Naḷava colony and the small field near the Kali Temple in the middle. In the north, it spans the Kotti Corner junction and the entire area of the Kali Temple and the bamboo grove up to the property of Tampu Uṭaiyār, except for Parampakkaṭavai. All this land was his and his sister Cellammā's.

With all this to inherit, all that they had for heirs were Cellammā's two sons, who were as good as jujube fruit-worms, and Tampāppiḷaiyār's worm of a daughter, though she was as pretty as a red hibiscus. His sister Cellammā's husband had died a long time back. Tampāppiḷaiyār's old wife still had the youthful frame of a teenager, similar to his. In brief, this is the story of Tampāppiḷaiyār's household and its heritage. He alone was the sole proprietor of the Kali Temple on the edge of his plot of land at Kotti Corner. His father had installed the image beside his compound, but under Tampāppiḷaiyār's oversight it had become the benefactor of the six castes. Naṇṇiyaṇ himself is one of the ones who receive kālāñci for services rendered to the festival.

'It was only because you were watching the train, Naṇṇiyaṇ, that I told you these old stories. Everything's alright. You, too, were one of the ones who stretched out their hands to receive the kālāñci last night, and now you have a lot of money to raise, you know! When are you going to start collecting?' Tampāppiḷaiyār asked, wanting to keep the conversation going.

'I had thought, Nayinār, of starting on Saturday, which happens to be auspicious,' Naṇṇiyaṇ said, very precisely, having resolved to be succinct when speaking to Tampāppiḷaiyār.

'Have you left Ciṇṇi Girl back at the house, Naṇṇiyaṇ?' Tampāppiḷaiyār abruptly asked.

Finding it difficult to reply immediately, Naṇṇiyaṇ eventually said, 'The trouble ... the trouble My wife just came out to tell me that Ciṇṇi's gotten her period.'

At last, Naṇṇiyaṇ managed to blurt it out, but his heart was beating fearfully fast.

For a few minutes, there was silence.

'What would be the harm in telling you, Naṇṇiyaṇ? My heart's been really troubled these last two or three days. I feared the worst. Even my wife refused proper meals. She was afraid for the sake of

her future son-in-law, thinking his reputation might be ruined if anything untoward had happened. But, really, we are truly blessed. When I heard you say just now that Ciṇṇi's having her period, I was much relieved.'

Hearing this, Naṇṇiyaṇ was furious. Tampāppillaiyār may or may not have heard Naṇṇiyaṇ gnashing his teeth, but he started walking off anyway, and Naṇṇiyaṇ was only able to hear his voice as he said, 'Mutti Girl will bring you something to eat. Finish the plant beds and don't go home at noon.'

Planting the Tobacco Seedlings

According to the almanac, the first seedlings have to be planted at five-thirty in the morning on the full moon day. For the last word on these matters, Tampāppillaiyār goes to Irakunātayyar's almanac. As soon as the roman numeral clock hanging on the wall struck five, he got up. According to plan, Naṇṇiyaṇ was to be there at that time. If they left his house at a quarter past five, they would reach the plot of land at Kotti Corner around five-twenty-five. Tampāppillaiyār knew this from years of experience. He had to be right, and in fact, Naṇṇiyaṇ arrived just then at the outer wooden gate.

'I'm here, Nayaṇār.'

Only after hearing his voice, was Tampāppillaiyār's anxiety about Naṇṇiyaṇ showing up on time on this auspicious day relieved. Nakulaṇ, the dog he cherished, went barking and howling toward the gate. Standing outside, Naṇṇiyaṇ snapped his fingers at the dog, noisily, and called out, 'Here doggie, here doggie.' Nakulaṇ, who knew now that the visitor was Naṇṇiyaṇ, lowered its tail, wagged it, and moaned softly. He pushed his snout through the gate and started licking Naṇṇiyaṇ's outstretched hand.

'Come, Naṇṇiyaṇ! I wondered whether you would be here on time, but you are. Good.'

With this, Tampāppillaiyār opened the padlock in the chain holding the two halves of the wooden gate together. It took some time, though. It was a tortoise-shaped padlock, and was almost the size of one. Recently, he had gotten it made by a Kollaṇ named Ellipōlaiyaṇ. The key was a large one. It was a new lock, and so it took a few minutes to open.

‘These fellows, Naṇṇiyaṇ! The locks they make aren’t equal to the locks the Kollaṇs over at Mātaṇai make. Ellippōlaiyaṇ is rather good, though, because his family comes from there.’

Like this, the lock shows us the kind of character it has, and then, before Tampāppiḷaiyār had finished speaking, it opened its mouth with a clicking sound. When Naṇṇiyaṇ was inside, he hung the chain on one side of the gate, adjusted the lock and pressed on it. The latch moved right into place and locked.

‘Getting it to lock isn’t the hard part; it’s getting it to open that takes a bit of struggle,’ said Tampāppiḷaiyār as he walked toward the well.

Naṇṇiyaṇ followed, and behind him the dog. There, in a stone tub were the bundles of seedlings tied up with plantain stems, soaking in water. Naṇṇiyaṇ fitted them carefully into a brand-new basket of palmyra fiber made on the island of Delft.

Because of the full moon, it was bright as day outside. Veḷḷaicci Ammāḷ also got up, and at the shout of ‘Hey, Mutti Girl! Hey!’ Mutti did too. Until late in the night, she had been tearing palmyra leaves into pieces as fodder for the cows. Besides that, some light food had had to be prepared for the ones who were going out to plant seedlings in the morning. She had therefore been asked to spend the night on the veranda of the house.

When the work of arranging the bundles of seedlings was over, Mutti brought Naṇṇiyaṇ’s coffee in a half-full pan and cleaned out the coconut shell in which he was going to have it. While she was doing this, Tampāppiḷaiyār went indoors to get his coffee from Veḷḷaicci Ammāḷ.

‘So, Naṇṇi, how goes it with your small girl, Ciṇṇi?’ whispered Mutti.

Naṇṇiyaṇ hadn’t been expecting the question right then, but said, ‘Somehow or other I managed, with a mixture of truth and lies.’

‘I heard what you told him. Nācciyār told Nayaṇār that Ciṇṇi already had her period just ten or fifteen days ago, so how did she

happen to have it again so soon? She knows that you're trying to fool them, and she's furious. Anyway, act wisely. I've got to go.'

After saying this, Mutti went off, taking the empty pan and coconut shell.

Before going out to plant the seedlings on this auspicious day, Tampāppiḷaiyār checked the clock. In Tāvaṭi village, he was the only person who had one. Its chime could be heard for quite a distance. *His Burgher friend had given it to him as a gift. Now, how did he happen to have a Burgher gentleman as a friend? That's a long story. Quite often, he used to recall it, but today he had no time to linger in his memories. As it was ten past five already, he set off in a hurry wearing his dyed dhoti, the Paramas shawl on his shoulders, and the *poṭṭu* of kumkum on his forehead, even at this early hour. The top of his head was shaven and his kuṭumi had been oiled with gingili oil. He took his silver-tipped walking stick and wore his noisy slippers.

'Look here! Did you prepare any food for the women? Several of them are going to help with the planting.'

'I'll add some chilies and onions to the leftover kañci and send it out with Mutti Girl,' replied Vēḷḷaicci Ammāl, 'along with some palmyra pulp.'

Tampāppiḷaiyār set off, followed by Naṇṇiyaṇ who came behind with the basket of seedlings. Nakulaṇ the dog accompanied them as far as the gate, but no further. He had once gotten a whack from his master for going beyond the gate, and so he stayed behind.

Tampāppiḷaiyār's calculation of the walking distance was correct. So, too, were Naṇṇiyaṇ's astrological prognostications. It should all begin on the northern corner of the field on its eastern side. The first seedling should be planted in the first bed in the corner beside the embankment. Naṇṇiyaṇ watered it well. Despite the dim light, he selected the healthiest seedlings, looked toward the western sky to find where the star was positioned, and said, 'The time's right, Nayinār. I, Naṇṇiyaṇ, am going to plant the seedling.'

‘So you think you can calculate the right time, do you?’ said Tampāppiḷaiyār. ‘Alright, then, go ahead and do it.’

Nanniyaṇ touched his hands to the ground and then to his eyes; he had planted the first seedling.

On the embankment, Tampāppiḷaiyār stood without removing his slippers. It had brightened up, and now the sound of women’s voices could be heard. Tampāppiḷaiyār’s women laborers were arriving. There was Pāri, wife of Paḷ Kantaṇ, Kāri, Nanniyaṇ’s sister-in-law, a widow named Pūti, and Celli, Nanniyaṇ’s wife.

‘Well, Celli, why couldn’t you rush these women along and get them here a little earlier, like Nanniyaṇ? My, my, look how the folded ends of their kuṛukku dance about so alluringly!’

These words of his betrayed his anger, his fussiness, his sexual excitability, and his sarcasm. And yet he was proud of them!

Since Nanniyaṇ had watered the plant beds the previous evening, the planting, which had started, went easily.

‘So, Nanniyaṇ, I’m going off for a while. The two-thousand seedlings ought to be enough if we plant them at intervals of one foot each. Veḷḷaici Ammāḷ will send out some food. With all these damsels and the ends of their cloths dangling around, you won’t be bored.’

This said, Tampāppiḷaiyār disappeared, holding his dyed dhoti in one hand and twirling the silver-tipped walking stick with the other.

‘Did you hear the joke of that old bridegroom? Too bad there’s no one here to break his teeth!’ said Pāri, Paḷ Kantaṇ’s wife.

When Nanniyaṇ heard this, he was indignant, but only for a moment.

The Visit of Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar

Four days had passed before the work in Tampāppillaiyār's fields was over. Bunches of leaves had been fixed into the ground to shade the seedlings from the scorching sun. Nannīyaṇ's constant attention was less needed now. Two women could do the work of watering the seedlings with palmyra-leaf baskets of water on the auspicious day. For this purpose, Tampāppillaiyār's father had made a pond right in the middle of the four rows of plants. To keep its containment-wall intact even in the rainy season, coral stones had been used, and then covered with a plaster made of lime, skins of the palmyra root, and jaggery. To this day, the walls are still intact. Each year just before the seedlings are planted, the pond is cleaned and the mud dredged out so that the springs at the bottom keep flowing. This year, too, ten days before the seedlings were planted, Tampāppillaiyār got Nannīyaṇ to drain the pond and give it a thorough cleaning. Now it was easy for each of the women to walk into the pond and fill up two palmyra-leaf baskets of water to moisten the seedlings.

Tampāppillaiyār had to inform Pāri and Pūti about the watering. Before that, however, he thought of asking Nannīyaṇ about Ciṇṇi Girl. His considered opinion was that it would be wrong to leave Ciṇṇi at his sister's. 'An intelligent cat will leave the curd alone and lick the pan.' But those boys of hers were full of lust. Feeling this way, he decided it would be wrong to be too hard on Nannīyaṇ. Somehow or other they would have to make do. And so he decided they would just have to find another girl among the bonded laborers for his sister.

On a Sunday before noon, a spring-fitted bullock cart came and stopped at the edge of the Kalatṭi grounds. A Cuvāmi got off,

followed by two others. Naṇṇiyaṇ had just returned from the fields and was having a nap when Celli woke him up. It was the bearded Cuvāmi, in a cassock and purple sash, with a cross tucked into it. The others were Caṅkilittām Rāyappu and Cimiyoṇ, son of the Mūppar. When they approached the front of the hut, Naṇṇiyaṇ and Celli got up together. They were tongue-tied and did not know how to welcome or receive their guests.

‘Cuvāmi, this is Naṇṇi Aṇṇan about whom I spoke, and this is Celli Akkai, his wife,’ said Caṅkilittām Rāyappu as he introduced them to the Cuvāmi.

Naṇṇiyaṇ lowered his folded hands and paid his respects to the Cuvāmi two or three times. *When Christians see a cuvāmi they bend down on one knee and greet him with the words ‘Praise Cuvāmi!’ or ‘Praise the Lord!’ In turn, the Cuvāmi raises his right hand and makes the Sign of the Cross, saying ‘Blessings, child.’ Even though neither Naṇṇiyaṇ nor Celli knew anything about this, the Cuvāmi went ahead and performed the blessing. Celli got a piece of white cloth to wipe off the veranda, which had recently been polished with cow dung paste. She then went into the kitchen to get a small, short bench to put on the veranda.

‘It’s alright, child. Enough,’ and with these words the Cuvāmi sat down on the small bench.

Rāyappu and Cimiyoṇ rolled out the mat that was lying there, and Rāyappu said, ‘Sit, Aṇṇai! Sit, Akkai,’ and all sat down. For a time, all were silent, looking at the face of the Cuvāmi.

‘Naṇṇi, child! We came out because you really ought to join the Church of Jesus, the only-begotten Son of God Almighty. The Mūppar and Caṅkilittām have been telling me for a long time about the hardship you have been undergoing. If you tell the Lord Jesus Christ about your suffering, it will quickly vanish. *You are slaves only to Jesus and not to any of the heathen or anyone else.’

Once he had spoken, he glanced around the hut. At that very moment, Ciṇṇi came, holding four or five palmyra stalks. When she

saw from the entrance who was there, the palmyra stalks slipped from her hand and she stood there like a stone. She had been standing in the hot sun.

‘Come here, child!’ said Rāyappu, his hands outstretched, ‘Cuvāmi has come, so greet him!’

Cin̄ni entered and solemnly folded her hands over her breast and greeted the Cuvāmi, and the Cuvāmi blessed her. When she sat and leaned on her mother, her right leg happened to brush against Cimiyoṇ, who was seated on the side. She felt shy and awkward about it, but nobody noticed and Cimiyoṇ himself was not bothered at all.

‘Naṇṇi, *the Novena begins today at St. Xavier’s Church. It goes on for seven days. Come and bring your children, child. Not that I’m trying to bring you into the church of Jesus. Just come and see, child. After that, think about it and make your own decision. So, then, shall we go, Caṅkilittām?’

With these closing words, the Cuvāmi got up and so did everyone else. Again, Naṇṇiyaṇ and Celli paid him their respects.

‘God bless you, child. May the grace of God be with you always.’

Saying this, the Cuvāmi went out and walked toward the spring-fitted bullock cart. Rāyappu and Cimiyoṇ followed him out. Naṇṇiyaṇ, who had followed behind all three, stood there watching until the spring-fitted bullock cart disappeared into the distance.

‘He’s a very good-natured Cuvāmi,’ commented Celli, but Naṇṇiyaṇ said nothing at all.

Nanniyaṇ Assaults Tampāppillaiyār

Day had dawned and the sun was up. Nanniyaṇ, though, was still sleeping. It had been well past midnight when he went to sleep the previous day. There was no watering of seedlings that needing doing today.

‘Hey, Nanniyaṇ! Hey!’

It was Tampāppillai Nayaṇār’s voice that was heard from beyond the edge of the Kalatti grounds.

‘Hey, it’s Tampāppillaiyār!’ said Celli as she shook him excitedly and roused him from sleep.

Nanniyaṇ got up in a hurry and ran out to Tampāppillaiyār.

‘What’s wrong, Nayaṇār? We, we, we aren’t doing any basket watering today,’ he said, stammering.

‘Hey, Nanniyaṇ! Give me some proper answers. Yesterday, it seems, two fellows with bobbed hair and that bearded Cuvāmi were here and left. Why did they come?’

To this question, Nanniyaṇ could make no immediate reply.

‘They happened to be in the area, and so they dropped in. I swear it wasn’t for any other reason, Nayaṇār.’ Nanniyaṇ could only get these things out with great difficulty.

‘Hey, Nanniyaṇ! Getting smart with me, are you? Yesterday, where did you and your wife go, with that teenaged daughter of yours? When I asked you to send your daughter to my sister’s, you tried to fool me by saying that she was having her period. What you really did was take her to the Christian church! Did you leave her there so that she could search for a bridegroom?’

Before he could finish speaking, Nannīyaṇ said, 'Please, Nayiṇār, give some thought to what you're saying. It's not right to talk that way about a girl who's come of age.'

Nannīyaṇ could not finish speaking either, because Tampāppiḷaiyār jumped in and said, 'Ha! Your daughter! She unfastened the ends of her kuṟukku to give my nephew a treat. And you call her a teenager!'

As Tampāppiḷaiyār was about to finish speaking, Nannīyaṇ jumped on top of him and with his two strong hands got hold of the kuṭumi on his shaven head and gave it a good yank. He hesitated, though, to beat him with his hands. Tampāppiḷaiyār, having let himself get into this position with his kuṭumi in Nannīyaṇ's hands, flailed around with his silver-tipped walking stick, trying to free himself.

Celli came running and many others as well, from different places. Mūttavaṇ, who had been going over to the western side with his tapping kit to tap some toddy, came and pulled out the knife he always kept in his waist. A number of people jumped on him and pinned him down. Even now, neither Mūttavaṇ nor anyone else knew what had happened. Mūttavaṇ could guess, though, that the fight had broken out because the girl had not been sent to the Nayiṇātti's.

'Hey! Let me go! I'll cut Tampāppiḷaiyār's throat and bring back the guts of that nephew of his who touched my sister. Leave me alone! Let me go!' shouted Mūttavaṇ, as he tried to wriggle free, unsuccessfully, from the hands of so many people.

Only now did Ciṇṇi wake up and come out of the hut. Tampāppiḷaiyār was struggling to free himself, while others caught hold of Nannīyaṇ and made him release his hold on Tampāppiḷaiyār's kuṭumi. The fine Paramas shawl Tampāppiḷaiyār had been wearing was being dragged on the ground, and his dhoti with the dyed border was hanging down disgracefully. Having neither his silver-tipped walking stick nor his slippers, Tampāppiḷaiyār jumped to his feet and ran off hopping and jumping. His slippers were scattered about and his silver-tipped walking stick was lying on top of a square-shaped cactus.

Tampāppiḷaiyār vanished from the scene, but the people who had gathered did not disperse right away. Women were there, babies and old folks. None of the youth had come, except Mūttavaṇ and four or five others. A little later, however, ḷaiyavaṇ arrived with more than ten boys his age. The fight between Naṇṇiyaṇ and Tampāppiḷaiyār brought fear onto the faces of the older folks. The others were terribly worked up, too.

‘What happened to Naṇṇi’s house may happen to every house tomorrow. What happened to Naṇṇi’s daughter today may happen to our sisters tomorrow. More than ten of our girls work in the houses of the Nayaṇārs. We ought to go, right now, and bring them all back.’

‘In that case, what are we going to do with the boys of ours who also work in the Nayaṇārs’ houses? We’ll have to bring them back, too.’

‘Well, boys! We can’t throw everything away like that! The land, even the land we live on, belongs to them. The palmyra trees we make our living from, belong to them. Our gardens and the well belong to them. We live off their soil. They are the ones who live all around us in Kalaṭṭi, the village headman, uṭaiyār, and everybody who is anybody. We have to think this through, boys, before we do anything at all.’

‘Now, I ask you, Are these girls of ours their playthings? For shame! And you call yourselves men! *We women all ought to perform āraṭṭi in front of you in our menstrual cloths.’

Time was quickly passing as these and other opinions were being voiced, but Naṇṇiyaṇ, as the one in charge of Cinnakkaḷaṭṭi, was the one who would have to make the final decision. Even though there were others there who were older, he had been made their unofficial headman.

*‘I doubt that Tampāppiḷaiyaṇ will keep quiet. He’ll round up some thugs and be up to something tonight. Let me be the one to stick my neck out. We should all remain inside Kalaṭṭi today. Tomorrow or the day after, after we’ve had some time to think, we’ll go back to the question of whether or not we bring our boys and girls back.’

On hearing Nanṇiyaṇ say this, the crowd began dispersing slowly.

‘Hey, Mūttavaṇ! Why on earth did you whip out your tapping knife in such a hurry? I had a tight hold on his kuṭumi. There was no way he could escape from the hold I had on him. Do you have to keep pulling your knife out all the time? You fool!’ Nanṇiyaṇ reprimanded Mūttavaṇ.

‘What else could I do, Appu? How could we allow this fellow to get off without punishment, a fellow who came to our house and insinuated these things about our sister? Anyway, there were people on both sides of me and I couldn’t move one way or the other. What is there to live for after this, Appu?’

Mūttavaṇ could not stop shouting, angrily.

‘There, Appu, I have said it. Mark my words. If he fools around with us again, I’ll cut off the back of his head with the sharp mamoty I use when I dig the watercourses. Until I kill him I won’t eat rice from my mother’s hand again.’

Uttering these words, Ilaiyavaṇ walked off toward the hut. Ciṇṇi, who had watched all of this, fearfully, felt numb. Celli, too, was just squatting there, unable to say a word. The sun was getting hotter and hotter. Not even the little ones of Ciṇṇakkaḷaṭṭi left their huts; it was absolutely quiet.

The sun was hotter than usual that day, but as it was going down a man approached the edge of Kaḷaṭṭi, stood in front of Nanṇiyaṇ’s house and called out to him. Nanṇiyaṇ, who was awake at the time, got up and walked toward him. This was the errand boy, Maṭappaḷḷi Caṇmukam Nayaṇār, who worked for the village headman. Nanṇiyaṇ recognized who he was.

‘Nanṇiyaṇ! Master wants me to bring you back with me. Come, get yourself ready,’ Caṇmukam said, trying to make him hurry.

‘You go ahead, Caṇmukam Nayaṇār. I’ll come a bit later.’ Maṭappaḷḷi are subservient to the Veḷḷāḷars; they are not called ‘Nayaṇār’ without saying their names first.

'I tell you, Master told me to bring you myself, in person,' Caṇmukam Nayaṇār said, trying again to hurry Naṇṇiyaṇ up.

'Really, did the headman tell you to bring me in person, as if I was going to drop everything and go with you? Mind you, I am going to come on my own. I'll come, Caṇmukam Nayaṇār, just wait,' said Naṇṇiyaṇ as he walked toward the hut.

'What's going on? The village headman seems to have sent a messenger for you. Are you going to go?' asked Celli.

'When the headman sends a messenger for you, how can you not go? Anyway, is he going to bite me or burn me? Let me go and see,' replied Naṇṇiyaṇ.

'Appu, should I go with you, too?' asked Iḷaiyavaṇ, who had been sleeping in the veranda extension.

'No, son. I'll go and come,' and with these words Naṇṇiyaṇ went off.

Naṇṇiyaṇ and Caṇmukam Nayaṇār passed Kalattī by, walking along the embankment and the Kali Temple Road.

'Why did the headman ask me to come, Caṇmukam Nayaṇār?' Naṇṇiyaṇ asked.

'I'm just a poor beggar like you, Naṇṇiyaṇ. We have both fathered sons and daughters. Pūkkaṇṭar came to see me yesterday. We're like animals, caught in a trap. Tampāppiḷaiyār came this morning, dead tired, and said something to the headman. The two of them talked, but I don't know what they talked about. In the village, the talk going around is that you had hold of him by his kuṭumi and knocked him down.'

Caṇmukam Nayaṇār stopped the story there, but Naṇṇiyaṇ understood.

'Well, then, I'll just have to go ahead and find out what the headman is thinking of doing.'

Saying this, Naṇṇiyaṇ felt emboldened.

Killing of the Village Headman

Shortly after Naṇṇiyaṇ left with Caṇmukam Nayaṇār, Mūttavaṇ arrived.

‘Āttai! I hear that Caṇmukam Nayaṇār is taking Appu with him. What’s going on?’ Mūttavaṇ asked.

‘The village headman sent word through Caṇmukattār, and that’s why your father went. I have no idea what that headman fellow will do. *And that man went along, even though I warned him not to, again and again.’

As she said this, she looked into Mūttavaṇ’s face, sadly. Mūttavaṇ said nothing; nor did he know what to do.

‘When the headman summons a person, he has to go. The thing you failed to do was send ḷaiyavaṇ with him,’ Mūttavaṇ said, voicing displeasure with his mother.

‘That’s not true. ḷaiyavaṇ also asked if he could go with Appu, but that man said it was unnecessary and started off. What was I to do?’ Celli spoke out, sounding disheartened.

Mūttavaṇ had not been born to Celli; he was the son of Naṇṇiyaṇ’s first wife. When Celli came from Kallākkaṭṭuvaṇ as Naṇṇiyaṇ’s second wife, Mūttavaṇ was only ten. From then until now, she had been a mother to him, too, and he did not think of himself as another woman’s son. To her, he was like the eldest. Long ago, she had stopped thinking of him as another woman’s son.

‘ḷaiyavaṇ, hurry! Let’s go see Appu, and then we’ll come,’ he said to his younger brother.

‘Is it right to go, Aṇṇai, when he said not to go before he left?’ ḷaiyavaṇ asked back.

‘Aṇṇai only said that you shouldn’t go. He didn’t tell *me* not to, and so I’ll go and come.’

As he spoke, Mūttavaṇ walked toward the fields, the handle of his tapping knife visible under his arm.

‘Swear upon your mother—do it, please!—that you will not do anything out of anger,’ Celli pleaded, fearfully.

At this, Iḷaiyavaṇ forgot all about his father’s order preventing him from following.

Celli felt proud, seeing the two brothers, elder and younger, chests thrust out, walking on the embankment beyond Kalaṭṭi. Ciṇṇi, though, was stunned.

After passing by the Kali Temple and stepping into the lane where the village headman lived, Mūttavaṇ said, ‘Hey, Tampi! When we set off, Āttai made us swear an oath. Even if anything happens in the house of the village headman, we must bring Appu home safely. Let’s be careful.’

At first, Iḷaiyavaṇ was silent, but after a few minutes he spoke, ‘Aṇṇai, let me have the tapping knife you’ve tucked into your waist.’

He asked him all of a sudden, knowing his brother’s temperament, that when he got angry he was capable of doing anything without regard for the consequences.

Thinking to himself that he could not allow his younger brother to commit an act out of anger that would get him into trouble, and that if anything had to be done he should be the one to do it, Mūttavaṇ said, as he walked along, ‘Let it be with me. What would you do with it?’

Now they have come to the headman’s house. To get to it, though, you have to walk through a coconut grove after opening the gate in the small gatehouse at the top of the lane. They peered through the openings in the gate, but saw nothing. As there was neither movement nor sound, they opened the gate in the small gatehouse and walked in. The headman had a dog, but it did not leap on them like a lion. It lay on the footpath, bored with seeing the

many people who came to the headman's house each day. It had also lost its valor.

A noise was heard from the house. 'Nayinār! Nayinār! Don't beat me. Tampāppillaiyār insulted my daughter. That's why I grabbed hold of his kuṭumi. But I did not raise my hand against him.'

As Naṇṇiyaṇ could be heard crying out, Mūttavaṇ ran toward the place where the sound was coming from, with Iḷaiyavaṇ behind him. In the front yard, Naṇṇiyaṇ had his arms tightly wrapped around a young mango tree, while the headman gave him a thrashing with a *tuvaram* stick. Naṇṇiyaṇ contorted his body this way and that and kept saying the same thing over and over. Maṭappaḷḷi Caṇmukam stood by, watching this pathetic scene. As the headman's assistant, it was usually he who performed such duties, but today the headman himself inflicted the punishment with his own hands out of the great respect he had for Tampāppillaiyār. Opening the big, single door at the end of the walkway that divided the front veranda in halves, the headman's wife and daughter watched. Mūttavaṇ and Iḷaiyavaṇ had arrived, on the run. Caṇmukam was shocked and so were the wife and daughter.

'Hey, headman!' shouted Mūttavaṇ.

The headman was caught completely off-guard by this and his stick stopped in mid-air.

'Hey, Caṇmukam! Why are these fellows here? Beat them and send them away.'

The headman turned from Naṇṇiyaṇ to give this order, while Naṇṇiyaṇ stood there with his arms around the mango tree. Caṇmukam came, but hesitantly. Mūttavaṇ pulled out the tapping knife that he had thrust into his waist and shouted at Caṇmukam, 'Come any closer and I'll rip your guts out.'

Caṇmukam stopped.

'Appu, come!' said Iḷaiyavaṇ, but Naṇṇiyaṇ stayed where he was without taking his hands off of the tree.

‘Hey, Naḷavaṇ! Did you tell these sons of yours to follow you here to show off how powerful you are?’

Saying this, the headman brought the *tuvaram* stick down onto Naṇṇiyaṇ’s back.

In the twinkle of an eye, Mūttavaṇ’s sharp tapping knife pierced through the right side of the headman’s abdomen. At this, his wife and daughter began to shriek. Caṇmukam was so shocked it felt like his limbs had been paralyzed. When Mūttavaṇ pulled the knife out, blood splashed onto him. Naṇṇiyaṇ still had hold of the mango tree, and so Iḷaiyavaṇ loosened his grip on it for him. At any of this, Iḷaiyavaṇ was not at all surprised. Even as they walked quickly through the gate in the small gatehouse at the top of the lane, the headman’s faithful dog crouched and kept lying in the same position. Did he stir or did he bark? No, not at all.

The Killing of Celli

The village was in turmoil because of the crying and wailing coming from the headman's house. Right there, he had died, and the body was lying on the veranda on the right side of his house. Within minutes, the house had filled up with people. The wooden stick that had been used to beat Naṇṇiyaṇ was lying beside the fence, stained with blood. It took a while for Tampāppiḷaiyār to arrive; when the news came, he was in his house. Still, he did not come right away, but only after an hour. When the headman's wife saw him, she shouted at the top of her voice, *'Aiyō! You have killed my god!' She howled and howled. The crowd was thoroughly confused. Caṇmukam had said that it was Mūttavaṇ, Naṇṇiyaṇ's son, who had stabbed him, but the headman's wife howled that it was Tampāppiḷaiyār. Quite a few thought it was Tampāppiḷaiyār who had instigated Mūttavaṇ to kill him, and so everyone began casting suspicious looks in his direction.

'What's this, Caṇmukam? You're saying one thing and the wife is saying another,' asked a middle-aged man, taking Caṇmukam aside.

'For two days, Tampāppiḷaiyār was coming to the headman and urging him to tell Naṇṇiyaṇ that he should send Ciṇṇi Girl back. And this morning he came with his hair all in a mess,' said Caṇmukam, coming out with the truth but stammering fearfully, 'saying that Naṇṇiyaṇ had held him by his kuṭumi and gave him a beating.'

At last, everybody understood what had happened, and a person in the crowd shouted out, 'The houses of the Naḷavas should be burned to ashes—now!'

'No doubt they should be,' said another. 'But wait, think about it first. Whose houses do we burn? We need to think this through.'

'They have torn out our biggest mountain by the roots. If we don't act now, will the other villages still respect us? 'Whose houses

do we burn?' My, my, don't you ask a fine question! I say burn down all the houses of Cinnakkaḷaṭṭi all at once. But first, these three fellows have got to be killed and disposed of, or else they'll escape.'

At this, one group grabbed hold of all the tools they could lay their hands on and walked out of the gatehouse.

'Tampāppillaiyār,' someone asked, 'have you got your gun ready and all the gadgets you need?'

Right away, Mayilu stood in front of Tampāppillaiyār, who went back home immediately and returned with the gun. It was well-oiled and polished, and when he handed it over to Mayilu, he also gave him a bag with a tin of gunpowder, cartridges and bullets in it. Mayilu was a hunter, and Tampāppillaiyār, as the only gun-owner in the village, knew him well. Mayilu and Tampāppillaiyār used to go rabbit hunting with this gun and—at Tampāppillaiyār's request—Mayilu had also gone human-hunting with him on a couple of occasions.

After being handed the shotgun, Mayilu removed the powder keg that was attached to its belly and cleaned the inside of the barrel with a piece of cloth wrapped around a rod. Taking about a quarter handful of gunpowder in his palm, he put it down the barrel. He tapped the gunstock twice to make sure that the powder had gone to the bottom of the barrel, and lifted the trigger. He made a wad of coconut fiber, as soft as cotton, to put into the barrel and tamped it down more than ten times with the rod. A quarter handful of no. 4 pellets was then put down the barrel. Since they were going to hunt human beings, two S.T. pellets were added to the others. Once more a fiber wad was tamped down onto it. Lifting the trigger once again, he checked everything out and felt satisfied. He smoothed the brim of the barrel by stroking it softly with his fingers and loosened the trigger gently. Tucking the container of gunpowder, the tin box of bullets and the wad of coconut fiber into the fold of his dhoti, he set out.

'Be careful, Tampi Mayilu. Before you can target properly, you have to raise the gun sight a little. And the bullets have a tendency to slide into the lower part of the barrel.'

God knows whether Mayilu heard what Tampāppiḷaiyār said or not, for he had already gone.

Much howling and wailing could be heard from Cinnakkaḷaṭṭi. Here and there, smoke was rising. Young and old were seen running toward the grove in the fields beyond Kalatti. Tampāppiḷaiyār could see these things happening from the far side of the fields, but his ears were alert, eagerly awaiting a sound. All of a sudden, a gunshot was heard, and his face brightened. Raising his folded dhoti, he slapped his thighs. That's what he always does when he's overwhelmed with joy. He knew how long it would take to reload the gun and get all the gadgets ready. But he knew that Mayilu was good and quick, and so he made an allowance for the reloading and then pricked up his ears again. This time, though, no gunshot could be heard. Was it Nanniyaṇ or one of the other two that Mayilu had shot? He could not tell, and was uneasy.

By now, it was fully dark. Over at Cinnakkaḷaṭṭi, lights were visible here and there. He wanted to go see for himself, but was too timid and held back. Out of the darkness, Mayilu emerged.

'What's this, Mayilu!' Tampāppiḷaiyār softly asked. 'You couldn't shoot more than one? After the first gunshot, I didn't hear another.'

'In all the excitement, I dropped the gun powder container somewhere,' Mayilu answered, hesitantly.

'Idiot!' Tampāppiḷaiyār shouted. 'Who fell?' he asked again.

Mayilu was silent.

'Why aren't you saying anything? It looks like you must have fired the blanks.'

'Blanks! Me? I couldn't catch any of the men, but Celli came running with a crowbar and so I shot her. There's no way she could have survived.'

Tampāppiḷaiyār was unable to speak; his heart was racing. It should have been Nanniyaṇ who was shot, or one of the other two ruffians. The one who had fallen was Celli—not at all what he had wanted. He was angry, but did not lose heart. Anyway, it was

gratifying that Celli had been shot, and so he went home, followed by Mayilu.

At home, Tampāppillaiyār's daughter was all alone; his wife had gone out for the headman's funeral. Even though her father and Mayilu had come in with a gun, she seemed indifferent. She was aware that the villagers had gone off to burn Cinnakkaḷaṭṭi to the ground and that Mayilu had come to get the gun a little while earlier. But there was no change at all in her demeanor. This was how she always was. Ever since Cellaian, Mutti's son, had died at the cemetery, this was the way she behaved.

'Idiot! At the crucial moment, you dropped the gunpowder box? What if we need gunpowder tonight, what are we going to do? Until we go to town tomorrow and buy it from the gunpowder-kākkā, nothing can be done.'

Grumbling deep inside himself, Tampāppillaiyār dismissed Mayilu curtly.

Crying and howling could still be heard over at Cinnakkaḷaṭṭi. Tampāppillaiyār headed straight for the headman's house. There were lots of women there, wailing over the headman's body. Caṇmukam was busily running around, attending to everything. Four or five young fellows were helping him, running around as well. Very quietly, Tampāppillaiyār took Caṇmukam outside to the back of the house.

'Caṇmukam! The headman's gone, so it's up to us to finish those fellows off who finished off the headman. The people who went to their neighborhood should have caught them. The police will be here tomorrow. The Maṇiyakāraṇ will come, and the doctor fellow, too. What you have to say is, 'Naṇṇiyan's sons, Mūttavaṇ and Iḷaiyavaṇ, had a firm grip on my Master and Naṇṇiyan stabbed him in the ribs. I was standing in the inner yard and saw it myself.'

While Tampāppillaiyār was coaching him, Caṇmukam said nothing at all. A loud cry was heard from the crowd of women, a signal that a close relative had arrived. Above all the others, the voice of the headman's wife could be heard.

The Maṇiyakāraṇ's Inquiry

Cinnakkaḷaṭṭi kept burning until nothing was left. Ten of the huts lay within Kalāṭṭi and a cluster of five more just outside, making fifteen altogether. The inhabitants of those huts had moved over to Periyakkaḷaṭṭi, which was not far away. If you go through the palmyra grove in between and take ten more steps, you come to Periyakkaḷaṭṭi. In some four or five of the huts, the cattle and goats, calves and kids, had been roasted alive. Everything else had been reduced to ashes.

Periyakkaḷaṭṭi was where Celli's body had been taken. She was still alive when she was brought there, but died immediately afterward, from a bullet that pierced her neck. *Her body lay in the middle of a cadjan pandal, which had been erected overnight in front of Periyakkaḷaṭṭi Tampan's house. Crouched beside Celli's head was Ciṇṇi, crying and wailing. Tampan was the one who had gone to notify the Maṇiyakāraṇ at his house in the early morning; he had not returned yet. Under normal circumstances, the village headman would have been the first to be informed. But the headman had become a corpse. At noon, there was still no news of Tampan or anything else. The Maṇiyakāraṇ, police, and doctor would have to be notified. And since he had been unable to report to the headman, Tampan had gone to the Maṇiyakāraṇ's and waited. At the headman's, the autopsy was finished without a lot a fanfare or damage to the body.

'Naṇṇiyaṇ was here with his two sons. While Mūttavaṇ and ḷaiyavaṇ grabbed the headman and held him tight—the headman had been talking to Mayilu—Naṇṇiyaṇ stabbed him in the side.' This was Caṇmukam's deposition.

'As I was talking to the headman, Mūttavaṇ and ḷaiyavaṇ held him and Naṇṇiyaṇ stabbed him with a knife.' This was Mayilu's deposition.

'When I was inside, I heard my husband shouting 'Aiyō!' and when I came out I saw Naṇṇiyaṇ and his sons running away, and in Naṇṇiyaṇ's hand I saw a knife.' This was the deposition of the headman's wife.

The inquiry was over. Tampāppillaiyār had stood there, orchestrating everything. Everyone was gone now, and it was already dark when the Maṇiyakāraṇ reached home. 'I will inform everyone who needs to be informed,' he said. 'Until then, nobody should touch the corpse.' After this, the Maṇiyakāraṇ walked off toward the well to have a bath.

Darkness was everywhere; the night had come and gone. Day had dawned, but neither the Maṇiyakāraṇ nor anyone else had come. Celli's corpse just lay there.

It was at this time two days previously that Celli lost her life. Two days ago, exactly. Night had come, but no police officers had been sighted. A number of people were there, keeping vigil. Neither Naṇṇiyaṇ nor Mūttavaṇ and ḷaiyavaṇ were anywhere to be seen. Poṇṇi, Mūttavaṇ's wife, was there, clutching her bulging belly. Wailing and fainting, Ciṇṇi was there; during these two days, she had not had even a drop of water.

Although Tampan, a Paḷḷa, was unrelated to Naṇṇiyaṇ, he was a close friend. In all things, he and Naṇṇiyaṇ were of one mind, and so he bore all the expenses of Celli's funeral. Naṇṇiyaṇ's relations at Ciṇṇakkaḷaṭṭi and Tampan's at Periyakkaḷaṭṭi had been mulling over how much each of them should contribute to the expenses, whether one rupee or two per person.

That was when Tampan had spoken up, saying 'Now, Tampimār, it's good of you to offer, and in things like this we need to stand united, but let me cover the cost. If I'm having any difficulty, you chip in. Until then, leave it to me.'

When an old man, one of the elders, said there would surely be a large expenditure at the court and Kaccēri, and that both sides would have to spend a lot, all agreed. When it came to Naṇṇiyaṇ,

Mūttavaṇ, and ḷaiyavaṇ, the talk was more discrete—they had been sent to Caṅkilittām Rāyappu's place in Tinnevēly where they were staying comfortably.

It had been three days since the full moon, and the moon now rose. Before dusk, the body of the village headman had been taken to the big cemetery at Tāvaṭi and cremated. By now, it had become ash and all the rituals in connection with its disposal were over. Still, Celli's corpse was lying there, although two days had passed.

When the sun rose, the spring-fitted bullock cart came and stopped in front of Tampan's house. Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar, in a black cassock, got down from it, followed by Caṅkilittām Rāyappu, Cimiyoṇ, and Cantiāpillai the Upatēciyār. Straightaway, they went to the place where Celli's body was kept. The people who were there for the funeral felt confused. Ciṇṇi sobbed.

'They killed Āttai for going to church, Cuvāmi Nayaṇār!' she cried out, falling at the Cuvāmi's feet.

The women cried out, too. Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar stood silent, until the noise had all subsided. When it was quiet again, he patted Ciṇṇi's head as she sobbed, and said: 'Child, Celli has been called by Almighty God. All who are born must one day die. The Lord will give your mother eternal rest. So, daughter, don't weep.' Kneeling beside her, he gave her comfort, silent all the while, looking at Celli's face.

Caṅkilittām, Cimiyoṇ and the Upatēciyār knelt down, too.

'Almighty God, grant her soul eternal rest. May her soul find peace in heaven.' When the Cuvāmi finished the prayer, softly, the three touched their forehead, chest, and shoulders, and said, in Tamil, 'In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen. Jesus.'

During the funeral, there was absolute silence. Once again, Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar patted Ciṇṇi's head, lifted her chin, wiped the tears from her eyes, and made the sign of the cross on her forehead.

'Be of good courage, Daughter. God Almighty will show you the right direction to take.' Saying this, he got up and got ready to go.

Cimiyōṇ, Upatēciyār, Rāyappaṇ, and Tampan, along with some others, followed behind him.

‘Cuvāmi, two days have passed since Celli died,’ complained Tampan. ‘The body is decomposing. The Maṇiyakāraṇ and the others haven’t arrived yet. But he told us not to touch the corpse until he comes. Yesterday itself, he saw the headman’s corpse, and it was cremated.’

‘I knew this already, child,’ said the Cuvāmi, speaking quietly. ‘In the morning, today, I made arrangements for the inquest. They’ll be coming now. Don’t be afraid. Tell them what you saw. You mustn’t bear false witness, for that would be a sin.’

After this, the Cuvāmi said no more but got up into the spring-fitted bullock cart and sat down. In Kalattī, however, it was too stony, and so the others walked at first and then got up into the cart as well.

The Cuvāmi’s spring-fitted bullock cart had not even gone a mile before the Maṇiyakāraṇ, a couple of policemen, and the coroner arrived.

‘Hey, Tampan! So now you’re trying to bully us with that beef-eating Cuvāmi as your accomplice, are you?’ the Maṇiyakāraṇ said as he came in.

‘No, Master. He came on his own, Master,’ said Tampan, prevaricating.

‘Look, there’s nothing I don’t know. If one of you fellows so much as lets off a fart, I’m going to hear about it. I’ll deal with you later. Right now we’ve got to look into what happened.’

The Maṇiyakāraṇ looked around for something to sit on. Already, a bed had been brought out for them to sit on and kept on one side; all four walked over to it.

‘Who among you are the witnesses of what happened here?’ shouted the Maṇiyakāraṇ. ‘*If you are, come this way and tell Ayyā.’

At this, a middle-aged woman stepped forward, and said ‘Nayinār, when it was dusk I was going over that way, and while I was going over that way, I heard loud cries coming from Cinnakalattī,

and so I ran in that direction. At Kalatti, Nayinār, there were houses burning. There were maybe fifteen or twenty males from other villages standing around. And then Celli-akkai ran up to hit someone with a crowbar. I have no idea who he was. There was something I could see in his hand, like a black palmyra stalk. And I saw that man pointing it at the place where Celli-akkai was standing. Right away, I heard a sound like a firecracker going off. Akkai stooped over and fell. When the people thereabouts carried her away, she was still twitching, but by the time they got her beyond the palmyra grove, she had stopped breathing.'

She was finished with her statement, but the policeman who had to enter all of this into his notebook made her repeat herself over and over.

'If there's anyone else, come!' the Maṇiyakāraṇ called out. It was Tampan who stepped forward.

'Tampan, you had better not bear false witness. If you do, you'll go to jail. Understand?' warned the Maṇiyakāraṇ.

'Why, Master! Would I tell you anything I didn't actually see? My wife woke me up, saying there was some noise over in Ciṇṇakkaḷatti beyond the palmyra grove. I ran over and found all the houses on fire. Four or five people were carrying Naṇṇi Aṇṇan's wife, but when they laid her down in my front yard, she was dead already. When things like this happen, we go inform the village headman. But I was told he was dead, too, and that Naṇṇiyaṇ and the boys who stabbed him had run away. That's why I came to your house, Maṇiyakāraṇ Nayinār. But since you weren't there the first morning, I got up and came again the next day, too.'

Tampan's statement was now over.

'So, you yourself did not see the man who fired the shot?'

This was the only question the Maṇiyakāraṇ asked.

'If I had, Nayinār, don't you think I would have told you so?'

For the Maṇiyakāraṇ, this was all the evidence he needed. Apart from this, further investigation would be unnecessary.

Pūkkāṇṭar Allots Land for Constructing Huts

*Celli's body was buried in the cemetery at the *Kaṇikkai* tree. Since the crematorium and the burial ground were in the same place, the cemetery was common to the whole village. The burial ground is for the low castes, but even among the high castes the custom was to bury the body when a baby dies. There was a separate area for this purpose. After Celli's burial, the villagers had a fellowship meal of *kañci* in which members of the two castes ate together. This was a custom that began at the time of Celli's funeral.

'Say there! Tampan! You were telling us that there's going to be so much litigation and so on that I won't outlive the court case. Right now, then, I'm going to give my share of the expenses.'

With these words, Ellippōlai, the old man, pulled out his coin pouch and with all of the coins that it held in the palm of his hand, gave them to Tampan, who was overwhelmed with emotion. Heavy of heart, he received Ellippōlai's coins with both hands, and for a moment everyone who had gathered there felt overwhelmed with sentimentality. Ciṇṇi had no relations apart from Mūttavaṇ's wife and her two children. Now, all were her relations, including the old man Ellippōlai.

Other people began rebuilding the huts of Kalatti that had burned down. As they were being rebuilt, four or five of the village Nayingārs came and stood around, watching. All of them owned land in Kalatti.

'No one should put up any huts. We need this land. Go find some other!' shouted one. They all just stood there.

'At a time like this, where would we go, Nayingār?' an old man asked.

'You'll just have to disappear. No one can stay in Ciṇṇakalatti anymore. If you erect a hut or anything else, it will only end in murder,' said one of the Nayingārs, giving the final word.

After that, no one remained behind. All left. Leaving whatever they had brought with them to erect their huts, they went to Tampan's house.

On his own, there was nothing Tampan could do. All that he owned was the small plot of land on which he lived. On that small plot, how many huts could be built? Behind his house, there was a small plot of land that belonged to Pūkkaṇṭar, and a bigger one that belonged to Pūkkaṇṭar's brother-in-law who was living in Singapore. Tampan knew that Pūkkaṇṭar was an independent-minded person. He was Tampan's closest friend, and he had his daily drink of toddy at Tampan's.

'Alright! Alright! You've all got to be patient today. Four or five of you can put your huts up behind my house. As for the rest, I need to think of something else.'

Saying this, Tampan walked toward Pūkkaṇṭar's house. Fortunately, Pūkkaṇṭar had just returned from the fields.

'Say there, Tampan! What's the matter?' asked Pūkkaṇṭar as he walked to the gate to meet him.

Tampan got straight to the point and Pūkkaṇṭar did not need long to think things over. That was the kind of person he was.

'Tampan, tell them to put their huts up in my compound. If there's not enough room, tell them to put them up on my brother-in-law's land. I'll handle the formalities. He won't object.'

Hearing this, Tampan's eyes got misty.

Pūkkaṇṭar patted him on the shoulder and said, 'If I wouldn't do this at a time like this, would I be a human being? Do I have a large estate, property, or lots of land? I'm just like you. Apart from my house and this plot of land, I have nothing else, not even an extra set of clothing to change into. I live with my boys and girls, putting my trust in my mamoty.' After saying this, Pūkkaṇṭar went back to his house.

'See you again, Tampi,' said Tampan, his voice showing how very moved he was, and he walked back home again.

*In the village, Paḷḷas could address Vellāḷas as *Kamakkāraṇ* or *Tampi*. Naḷavas did not have the same privilege. A person of any age, young or old, could be addressed as *Tampi* by the Paḷḷars.

When Tampan mentioned these things, all were surprised.

‘What a gentleman that man is! Fit to be called ‘Nayinār.’ Compared with him, all the others are dogs!’ said one woman, who then spat.

By sunset, all the Ciṇṇakkaḷaṭṭi people had been put up in huts built in Periyakkaḷaṭṭi. The hut assigned to Poṇṇi, Mūttavaṇ’s wife, her children, and Ciṇṇi was right behind Tampan’s house. Tampan also liked the arrangement. When the moon rose, Pūkkaṇṭar came over, surprised to see huts spread across the compound. He was there just a short time, spoke to Tampan privately, and left.

‘They’ll try some funny business with me. Just let them!’ he said aloud and walked away.

That night, everyone was served a meal—pumpkin curry, rice, and tamarind-flavored kañci—at Tampan’s expense. The night passed, the morning star appeared, and Tampan got up and went out. It must have been because of what Pūkkaṇṭar had told him privately the night before.

Before dawn, Tampan found himself in the vicinity of the Christian church just beyond Tinnevēly. He had not yet paid a visit to the Caṅkilitāṁ’s house. When he asked for directions to Rāyappaṇ’s, everyone sounded evasive. Tampan, who was not personally acquainted with Rāyappaṇ, then chanced upon Cimiyoṇ. Cimiyoṇ was an acquaintance of Cuntaram, a distant nephew of Tampan’s. Two or three times he had gone to Tampan’s in search of him. He had also seen him when he had come for Celli’s funeral with the Cuvāmi and Rāyappaṇ. Cimiyoṇ welcomed Tampan respectfully and took him to Caṅkilitāṁ Rāyappaṇ’s house. There, Tampan saw Naṇṇiyaṇ, and when Naṇṇiyaṇ saw him, he began sobbing. Cimiyoṇ introduced Tampan to Caṅkilitāṁ through their different connections.

Rāyappaṇ inquired about many things from Tampan, and Tampan gave him a brief account of the incidents that had taken

place, starting with the construction of huts and the permission Pūkkāṇṭar had given them to build them on his land. In turn, Tampan inquired about Mūttavaṇ and Iḷaiyavaṇ. Cimiyoṇ mentioned that Iḷaiyavaṇ was staying with him and that Mūttavaṇ was staying somewhere else. When Tampan said that Ciṇṇi Girl kept crying all the time, Naṇṇiyaṇ wiped his eyes. Hearing this, Cimiyoṇ felt deeply troubled, too, but was able to control himself, which Rāyappaṇ noticed.

Tampan changed the subject and spoke to them of the things that would have to be done. One was that the Paḷḷas and Naḷavas were prepared to collect money across caste lines. It might even be possible to solicit support from the Paraiyas, Vaṇṇars, and Ampaṭṭars discretely, and this might mean that they would not run short of money to conduct the litigation. *Tampan further said that the Kamakkāraṇ party might try to catch them and beat them up or even kill Naṇṇiyaṇ and his sons with the help of the police.

‘Tampan Aṇṇai! Don’t be afraid, the Cuvāmi has said that he will hand them over to the top man in the police or to the supreme court justice. That way they won’t fall into the wrong hands, and the inquiry will be conducted properly.’

‘I don’t think it’s going to be that easy,’ said Tampan. ‘The police are in their pocket, and so are the Maṇiyakāraṇ, the Uṭaiyār, and everyone else who makes an appearance in court. You saw what they did! The man who did the stabbing was Mūttavaṇ, but they made up the story that Mūttavaṇ and Iḷaiyavaṇ pinned the village headman down, who then got stabbed by Naṇṇiyaṇ. *Their plan is to send them all to the gallows.’

‘I have an idea,’ Tampan said. ‘If Naṇṇiyaṇ says in his confession that his sons didn’t go with him and that they didn’t restrain the headman, then he can say that the headman told him to hold onto the tree while he beat him, and he could also say that he lost his temper and stabbed him. In that case, nothing would happen to Mūttavaṇ or Iḷaiyavaṇ. This kind of offense would be considered manslaughter, and he would only be sentenced to jail or something like that. Pūkkāṇṭar had also suggested this before I came.’ In this way, Tampan proposed an idea that was originally Pūkkāṇṭar’s.

'I see! I see! Let's discuss this with Cuvāmi, too. He won't approve of telling any lies. About all this, I'll come out to see you tomorrow or the day after. That teenaged girl is going to cry herself to death. I feel that I should go and offer her some consolation, but I have no time. Tampi Cimiyoṇ, why don't you go with Tampan right away. It will be a comfort to them.'

Even before Rayapan had finished, Cimiyoṇ had agreed and was getting up to go home and change clothes.

'Say there, Cimiyoṇ! Take Tampan Aṇṇai and show him Iḷaiyaṇ.'

When Rāyappan said this, Tampan stood, and when he got to Cimiyoṇ's house, Iḷaiyaṇ was there, drinking coffee Cimiyoṇ's mother had made for him. When Iḷaiyaṇ saw Tampan, he put the tin coffee cup aside and began crying.

'Shame! Shame on you! Are you such a young man? Foolish boy! Is it good to be afraid and weep like this?'

Saying this, Tampan patted Iḷaiyaṇ on the back.

'I wasn't afraid, Tampan Aṇṇai. I would have stabbed him, too, wouldn't I? I felt that Aṇṇai might have done something drastic. He's got his boy and girl to look after. How many times did I ask him for the knife so that I could be the one to stab the headman. Now they're saying that it was Appu who stabbed him. They're determined to send all three of us to the gallows. Āttai is gone too! And now my sister is going to be all alone. That's why I'm crying.'

Iḷaiyaṇ kept talking a little longer; for a few seconds, Cimiyoṇ's eyes misted over. A little later, Tampan and Cimiyoṇ got ready to go.

'Tampi, I will see you again, no doubt about it. Don't be afraid of anything. Ciṇṇi and your elder brother's wife are staying in my compound. I'll take care of everything. You don't need to worry at all. I have explained this to your father, too. Everything will be done with care and deliberation,' said Tampan as he was going out.

Iḷaiyaṇ wiped his tears away. Whatever the reason, Cimiyoṇ kept secret from him that he would be going to see Ciṇṇi.

Cimiyōṇ Falls in Love with Ciṇṇi

It was high noon when Tampan and Cimiyōṇ arrived. Mūttavan's wife came running toward Tampan, children in tow.

'Tell me, Tampan! Did you see that man? How about my father-in-law? And llayavan? Aṇṇai!'

Only then did she see that it was Cimiyōṇ who had come with Tampan. At the funeral, earlier, she had seen him too. That, however, was not the first time, for she had also seen him at the house of her father-in-law. Even then, she felt that it had been somehow wrong to have spoken like that in his presence. Afterwards, she did not ask again. Tampan, though, understood her intention.

'He's one of us, Girl! Your father-in-law and your husband sent him to inquire about your health. He's called 'Cimiyōṇ,' and he's a son of the Mūppar who lives near the Christian church. But tell me,' asked Tampan, 'Where's Ciṇṇi? There's no sign of her anywhere.'

Two or three manioccs from Pūkkaṇṭar Nayiṇār's house had been brought over by Mutti in secret; she left them there, and went home. Ciṇṇi was boiling them now. While saying this, Mūttavan's wife shouted, 'Ciṇṇi! Ciṇṇi! Maccā!'

Ciṇṇi emerged. At first, her eyes only met Cimiyōṇ's. He was recognizable, and she remembered his visit to her house with Caṅkilittām and also how her leg had accidentally brushed against him on his hip. At the thought, she lowered her head.

'Maccā! Ammān has sent a person to see you. That's why Tampi is here,' said Poṇṇi, introducing him.

With his eyes, Cimiyōṇ was secretly sizing Ciṇṇi up. She stood there, unmoving, for quite a while. A number of others had gathered. Everyone was asking about Naṇṇiyan, Mūttavan, and llayavan.

Nobody mentioned anything about what had been happening at the village headman's house. And nobody went to work in the fields of the landowners, to till or level or make plant beds or water. Instead, they went their separate ways, unable to agree on a common course of action.

As Tampāppiḷaiyār had been the first to plant his seedlings, they were dying from not being watered with baskets. He decided to ignore the men from Ciṇṇakkaḷaṭṭi; instead, he tried to get Paḷlas from Periyakkaḷaṭṭi, but failed. And then he tried to get his laborers from around Mantippulam. Again, he failed. He was on good terms—very good terms—with Piḷā Cellappaṇ of Cutumalai on account of his earlier dealings with Ciṅki, Piḷā Cellappaṇ's sister.

'Nayiṇār, ask anything of me but this, and please don't misunderstand me. If I were to get involved, our boys here would beat the life out of me.' With these words, Cellappaṇ also declined to help.

By now, thousands of Tampāppiḷaiyār's seedlings had died off.

'It seems that five or six people came to Pūkkāṇṭar's house this morning,' said Tampan's wife Pāri. 'They wanted to bully him for letting the Ciṇṇakkaḷaṭṭi people put up their huts on his land. The story, though, is that he held his ground.'

To Cimiyoṇ, none of this sounded overly sensational. Ciṇṇi had brought him coffee with jaggery. Then, all of a sudden, a young girl darted into the palmyra grove, and Tampan asked her, 'Hey there! Why the rush?' An automobile was coming, she said, from Ciṇṇakkaḷaṭṭi. All was astir in Periyakkaḷaṭṭi. Tampan and Cimiyoṇ squatted, quietly.

'Let the car come,' said Cimiyoṇ. 'Be quiet! Nobody should be running around.'

They all stood where they were, and a few minutes later the car came and stopped at Tampan's house after coming through the palmyra grove. Two policemen, Tampāppiḷaiyār, and Mayilu—four persons in all—got out of the car, with Tampāppiḷaiyār in front.

'Tampaṇ! It's us, but you're just sitting there in the same place, aren't you? You'd better stand up and get yourself over here!' said Tampāppiḷaiyār domineeringly.

Standing up slowly, Tampaṇ asked, 'What's wrong, Tampi?'

*'Who's the fellow with the bobbed hair?' asked Tampāppiḷaiyār.

'He's one of our boys from over in Tinnevēly who came out for the funeral and then stayed on.'

'Tampaṇ, I wouldn't try to fool me if I were you. I see the cross on the string around his neck. I know that there aren't any Paḷla Christians living in Tinnevēly. You act as if I don't know anything. But leave that aside. Where are you hiding Naṇṇiyaṇ and his sons? Tell me the truth!'

'I swear, Nayaṇār, I don't know anything.'

For his part, Cimiyoṇ had not budged from the place where he was squatting.

'I know that you got up before dawn today and went to Tinnevēly, Tampaṇ,' Tampāppiḷaiyār said. 'And that you returned this afternoon with this bobbed-hair fellow. I know you went to see them. Hey you! You with the bobbed hair! You've got them all hidden in your village, right?'

Cimiyoṇ stayed silent.

'Hey!' shouted Tampāppiḷaiyār. 'Are you just going to sit there without answering my question?'

At this, Mayilu started to approach Cimiyoṇ.

'Mayilu, if you cause a quarrel for no reason with a guest in my house, ...' Tampaṇ warned, making Mayilu retreat.

The policemen stood between them, although neither one understood Tamil, one being a Javanese and the other a Burgher. At this, the owner of the automobile, sensing that things were going to get out of hand, pulled out the crank and began to start the engine. Thinking the car was about to leave without them, the four men let the matter drop, ran to the car, and jumped in. The car drove

through the palmyra-studded countryside, turned at the irrigation ditch at Kalatṭi, and disappeared.

Tampan sensed that Cimiyoṇ must have felt humiliated by the things Mayilu had said, and to make him feel better said, 'Tampi! You may be unfamiliar with Mayilu. It's a little peculiar here in our village, unlike yours.'

'What's so humiliating, Aṇṇai? What affects you, affects me. If he had laid a finger on me, he would have found out the consequences. *It was Jesus who said, "Even a cow can be killed if it tries to kill you."'

'So, are you saying that Mūttavan's murder of the village headman was justifiable?'

'Exactly! That's it,' Cimiyoṇ said, and after this succinct reply nothing else needed to be said.

Pāri, Tampan's wife, had prepared a lunch of boiled manioc and dried-prawn for the two of them. Of all the houses at Periyakkaḷaṭṭi, Tampan's was the only one that had a separate veranda and kitchen. In the kitchen, his little ones were fighting over the manioc. Mūttavan's wife brought them a coconut shell with some campal she had made. They both relished the boiled manioc, which had unfolded like a white flower in bloom, the dried prawn, and the campal. Cimiyoṇ, who consumed so much of the dried prawn and chili that he could not bear the burning sensation in his mouth, smacked his lips nosily. Observing this, Ciṇṇi brought a small pot of water and placed it in front of him. Cimiyoṇ was tempted to raise his head and give her a look. When he did, his burning sensation vanished, even though he did not know why. Ciṇṇi then went inside.

'Please ask Tampi if anything is lacking and serve him well. I'm tired and want to lie down a while.'

With these words, Tampan pulled out a mat that was there on the side, unrolled it, and stretched out onto it. And when Cimiyoṇ had finished eating the manioc, Ciṇṇi brought a small mat and a piece of palmyra log for him to rest his head on, and went inside. Cimiyoṇ stretched his tired body out and fell asleep immediately.

Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar Goes to the Police Station

On the third day, Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar's spring-fitted bullock cart came and stopped in front of the gate of the Police Superintendent's bungalow. Along with the Cuvāmi, Naṇṇiyaṇ, Mūttavaṇ, and Iḷaiyavaṇ got down. When the Police Superintendent saw the Cuvāmi, he showed his reverence for him with folded hands and escorted him to the back veranda. The Cuvāmi asked the three to sit on the bench in the front veranda and spoke to the Police Superintendent privately for a long time in English. The Police Superintendent was a Burgher, a few years past middle age. A little while later, they both emerged. The three got up from their bench and stood. The Police Superintendent looked them over from head to toe.

'Naṇṇi, don't be afraid of anything. I have told the whole story. The Lord will be on the side of justice. If you are innocent, he will protect you,' and with these words the Cuvāmi shook hands with the Police Superintendent and got back into the spring-fitted bullock cart.

Naṇṇiyaṇ, Mūttavaṇ, and Iḷaiyavaṇ gazed in the direction of the spring-fitted bullock cart as it receded into the distance.

News that the police had put Naṇṇiyaṇ and his sons under arrest quietly spread throughout the village. Tampāppillaiyār, however, could not believe that the police had done this. By sundown the same day, however, it was confirmed beyond the shadow of a doubt that Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar had handed them over to the police.

Whatever Tampāppillaiyār planned, it seemed, always ended in failure. The police whom he had set up did not even have a chance to do what he had wanted. All on his own, the Superintendent had recorded their statements, without entrusting this responsibility to

someone else. That very evening, they were taken to the Magistrate's bungalow at Uppumālaṭi, and from there to prison.

Tampāppiḷaiyār and his cronies were badly disappointed and felt that Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar deserved to be beaten to death for this. It was an insult, Tampāppiḷaiyār thought, and would have to be avenged. Somehow or other, somebody would pay.

At seven o'clock that night, Tampāppiḷaiyār arranged with his crony Mayilu to round up around ten of the village men to go with him to Pūkkaṇṭar's house.

'Didn't I tell you on that very day that it lies within my discretion to permit whomever I wish to settle on my property? So why come here and stir up trouble?'

Pūkkaṇṭar was tough right from the start and did not mince his words.

'Look here, Pūkkaṇṭar! Don't antagonize the village unnecessarily, or the fellows who stabbed the village headman yesterday may stab you tomorrow. Next thing they'll ask you for is your daughter. That's because we've been lenient. Now they're refusing to work in our fields and at our wells. There's nothing to talk about. You should evict them from your compound and your Singapore brother-in-law's. What we're telling you to do, you had better do—now!'

All of this came out in one breath, and then Tampāppiḷaiyār stopped.

Just then, Pūkkaṇṭar's two sons returned from the fields after doing the watering. Tiruvāy Cīṇṇaiyaṇ, Pūkkaṇṭar's younger brother, was with them, too. On hearing the noise, his nephews also came. Seeing them all, Pūkkaṇṭar felt emboldened. Tiruvāy Cīṇṇaiyaṇ had a bit of the village ruffian in him.

'Look here, Tampāppiḷai! You're trying to intimidate me, aren't you? That's why you brought some of your village folk along with you. I've said already that the Naḷavas here are no inconvenience

to you. Don't kid yourself that I'll do just anything you say. You concealed the fact that those two nephews of yours, one after the other, chased that teenage-girl around, caught her, and did the most shameful things imaginable to her. And then, to make her prey for your nephews once more, you sacrificed the life of the village headman. You shot Celli dead, a mere woman. Now you come to me as if you were a paragon of virtue. Don't indulge yourself with this kind of hollow talk. Here, it could land you in trouble. Take your cronies and go—now!

Hearing Pūkkaṇṭar speak so harshly, everyone felt surprised.

'Look here, Pūkkaṇṭar, be careful how you talk,' said Mayilu.

'Is it you, Mayilu, Tampāppiḷai's right-hand man, the hero who shot a woman because he couldn't find a man?'

As Pūkkaṇṭar couldn't restrain himself, Mayilu lunged out at him, but Tiruvāy Cinnaiyaṇ, Pūkkaṇṭar's brother gave him a hard blow on the neck. It must have landed on a nerve, because Mayilu bent his neck in pain and fell.

'Get going, you stray dogs!'

At this, Pūkkaṇṭar's three nephews leaped out in front and Pūkkaṇṭar's younger son, raising his mamoty, took a step closer. The gang that had come vanished, and Mayilu, who was lying on the ground, got up, and fled with them. Pūkkaṇṭar's wife, Cītēvi, and his daughter stood to one side, stunned.

Although the adjoining house was his, Tampāppiḷaiyār and his henchmen had gone off somewhere, and he did not arrive back home until midnight.

'May I know what you've been doing this whole time? I've been worried sick and unable to sleep,' asked Vellaicci Ammāl, Tampāppiḷaiyār's wife.

'I was out on business,' was Tampāppiḷaiyār's curt reply.

'Why get yourself into trouble for no good reason? You went hunting to show off how powerful you ...'

‘Oh, yes, you would surely know a lot about honor if only you had been born to a pure Vellāla man and a pure Vellāla woman,’ Tampāppillaiyār replied, saying things that should never be said.

But said them he had, and Vellaiacci Ammāl began to sob. He found it hard to hold up under her crying; quietly, he steadied himself. The clock struck two o’clock and then stopped. He felt like taking the clock and dashing it to the ground, but restrained himself. Vellaiacci Ammāl was there in the room, crying.

Tampāppillaiyār and the Jailer

All night long, Tampāppillaiyār's eyelids would not close because he needed to think through the plans he had discussed with his henchmen. At the same time, he regretted scolding his wife the way he did. If only he could go meet Cuvāmpillai before he had to leave for work, he would have some peace of mind, and so he got up when the late-rising moon reached its apex in the sky. Through sandy lanes and palmyra scrub, he walked, arriving near dawn at Cuvāmpillai's house in the Kacavāra Palmyra Grove near the Piṭāri Amman temple.

Around this time, Nāṇammā, Cuvāmpillai's wife, got up to go attend the morning Mass, and saw Tampāppillaiyār in the front yard. As a rat that pulls back its head from the hole it was about to go through, Nāṇammā hurried back. A few minutes later, Cuvāmpillai came out, covering himself with a striped sheet, yawning, and stretching his limbs to overcome his drowsiness.

'Cuvāmpillai! There's a matter I've come to see you about. Do you have any time now, before you go to work?' asked Tampāppillaiyār to open the conversation.

Cuvāmpillai was well acquainted with Tampāppillaiyār, but there was no friendship between them.

'What's the problem then? Come in. This way.' And with these words Cuvāmpillai rolled up the gunnysack that was covering the veranda and asked him to sit down on it.

'It's not that serious, Cuvāmpillai. If you put your heart into it, it ought to be easy,' started Tampāppillaiyār, unable to come out and say what he wanted.

‘If I can, I surely will. Whom would I help if not you?’ Cuvāmpillai said, giving Tampāpillaiyār some confidence.

‘Well, then, Cuvāmpillai, yesterday, a Naḷava fellow named Naṇṇiyaṇ was placed under arrest and taken to jail along with his two sons. That’s why ...’

‘Yes, yes. I was there when they were brought in. It was I who locked them up in their cell. Is it that you want to send them some betel or some tobacco? Our jail superintendent is a peculiar fellow, but I’ll try my level best to get it to them for your sake. Do you have it with you now?’

Asking this, Cuvāmpillai stopped. Tampāpillaiyār had difficulty saying what he wanted, but felt that he had to. Taking his purse from his waist, he took out cash in the amount of two pounds sterling, counted it, and placed the money in front of Cuvāmpillai.

‘Tampi! These are three really wicked Naḷavas. They hacked the Veḷḷāḷa headman of Tāvaṭi Village to death. *You may be a Karaiyār, but there is no difference between us. The fellows who hacked the Veḷḷāḷa village headman today may hack your people tomorrow, without batting an eyelash. That’s why they need to be taught a good lesson inside the jail. What do you say? If you put your heart into it, it should be easy. There are solid witnesses who are sure that all three will go to the gallows. Even so, before a hanging, they need to be beaten to death, right here in jail. Now just keep this with you here. Later, I shall see to your trouble as well.’

And with this, Tampāpillaiyār said what he had come to say.

Cuvāmpillai took a moment to respond. Then, gently, he pushed the money back toward Tampāpillaiyār and said, ‘When my Cuvāmi got me this job, he told me, ‘Cuvāmpillai, don’t take any bribes. If you do, or do anything against your conscience, the Lord will not forgive you.’ So far, I have not gone against his advice. Out of pity, I have helped some prisoners. Apart from that, I haven’t done anything. In God’s name, don’t ask this of me. Anyway, I will not do it. If they have committed a crime, they have God to answer to, first

of all, and then the courts. In a matter like this, there's nothing I can do. Don't misunderstand me, please.'

All this Cuvāmpillai said very emphatically, in a single breath.

Tampāppillaiyār was dumbfounded. For his part, Cuvāmpillai said nothing more. A few minutes later, without saying anything to him, Tampāppillaiyār got up and left. Cuvāmpillai accompanied him out to the gate, but without saying anything either.

At this same moment, Kaspāru was coming to see Cuvāmpillai.

'Who's that, Tampi? Looks like Tampāppillai. What're you doing here before dawn, Tampāppillai?' asked Kaspāru.

'I came to see Cuvāmpillai about a certain matter, Kaspāru, but he declined to help,' Tampāppillaiyār sighed.

'Why Cuvāmpillai?'

'He's quite a useful person to us! Did you know that the Turaiyaṭi coconut lands on Kākkaitivu are his? Our boys go there with hooks on long sticks to pluck the tender ones and drink the coconut water. Even if he notices, he pretends not to.'

'So, Cuvāmpillai,' asked Kaspāru, 'why won't you do the favor he wants?'

Cuvāmpillai was embarrassed, and Tampāppillaiyār waited for him to reply.

'This is a different kind of thing, Kaspāru. I'll tell you about it later.'

Even with Kaspāru's help, Tampāppillaiyār had failed, and so he started walking back.

'What did Tampāppillaiyār ask of you?' asked Kaspāru.

'Some fellows hacked the Tāvaṭi village headman to death. Three of them, it seems, a father and his two sons, Naḷavas, and now they're in jail. He wants me to beat them to death, and he even tried to give me money. I refused.'

Kaspāru was furious.

'Hey, Tampi! Had you told me this while he was still here, I would have asked him a few embarrassing questions. He's trying to instigate a quarrel between the Naḷava boys and us. I knew the village headman, a nasty fellow. He must have said something impertinent or done something bad, and that's why these fellows hacked him to death. He was bound to get chopped up, I swear. I've thought for a long time that somebody would. It was bound to happen.'

Afterwards, Kaspāru took Cuvāmpīḷḷai inside to talk about the matter that had brought him there. From the church of Our Lady of Refuge, the final bell for Mass was heard. Nāṇammā, Cuvāmpīḷḷai's wife, left the house hastily, holding her rosary in her hands.

Struggle to Conduct the Kali Festival

As Tampāppillaiyār approached the Kali Temple, he crossed paths with Mayilu.

‘Was your mission a success or a failure, Tampāppillai Aṇṇai?’ Mayilu asked.

‘That crow-eating Karaiyāra fellow said it can’t be done. Even these Karaiyārs aren’t submissive to Veḷḷālas the way they used to be. Back when ...’

‘What! You mean he said ‘no’? You mean Cuvāmpillai the Karaiyān? Probably what you should have done was put the money into his hand right at the start.’

‘At first, I only put it in front of him. Look, I brought it back with me. He didn’t even touch it. In no uncertain terms, he said he just couldn’t do it. So, if this Karaiyāra fellow thinks he’s in charge of the jail, then I’ll just have to prove him wrong.’

Together, they walked up to the Kali Temple. Out of the temple kitchen came Peruṅkuṭumi Aiyar, who appeared to have been waiting for Tampāppillaiyār to arrive.

‘What is it, Ayyā? It seems you want to have a word with me. What’s the problem?’

‘Nothing serious. Only that we just have four or five more days until Friday. But no arrangement has been made yet for the flag-hoisting ceremony. That’s why I wanted to find out if we could ...’ Aiyar stopped there and said no more.

‘Ayyā! I am the kālāñci person for the flag-hoisting ceremony. I’m fine with it. Naṇṇiyaṇ is the one in jail, and so the Naḷava festival will not take place. What Paḷ Kantaṇ would say, I don’t know.’

Before Tampāppillaiyār could finish, Aiyar interrupted him.

‘Mūppaṇ Ciṇṇāṇ also came to see me yesterday. His people are afraid to conduct their festival, it seems. He said Tampan’s people and Naṇṇiyaṇ’s were going to disrupt the festival. Right now, I don’t know what the Pariyāris and the Kaṭṭāṭis are thinking of doing.’

As he always did when he had to think about something serious, Tampāppillaiyār bent his head and thought for a while.

‘Mayilu, I’ll be at home. You go see Mūppaṇ Ciṇṇāṇ, Kaṇapati the Pariyāri, and Katirāmaṇ the Ampaṭṭaṇ, and try to get a sense of their mood. After that, we’ll think it over and decide what to do.’

‘It looks like you’re going to give up, if they refuse,’ said Mayilu.

‘We’ll think about that when we have to. Go now and come quickly. Ayyā, when the sun sets, come to my house and we’ll think about it some more.’

Aiyar went off, shaking his head. While Mayilu was going through the bushes on the path, Tampāppillaiyār reached home.

Vellaiacci Ammāl was still in bed, and Tampāppillaiyār’s daughter Cevvanti Nācciyār was happily going up and down in a swing made of palmyra rope. She was more than twenty, but childish. She had cat-like eyes, ruddy skin, and hair the color of dried sand. Her knowledge of the outside world was scant. She was not at all concerned that her mother had refused anything to eat from the time she had quarreled with her father the other night. The Kōviya woman, Mutti, was struggling with the mortar and pestle outdoors.

‘Mutti Girl! Hasn’t Ammā gotten up yet?’ Tampāppillaiyār asked.

‘No, Nayaṇār. And since this morning she hasn’t even had a morsel of food.’

In reply, Tampāppillaiyār said nothing. Instead, he went directly to the well and returned.

Mutti went over to Cevvanti Nācciyār and said to her, quietly, ‘Serve some tōcai to your father.’

Cevvanti Nācciyār got down from the swing and went into the kitchen. Tampāppillaiyār followed her in. Outside, Nakulaṇ the dog could be heard barking.

'Mutti Girl! See who's come,' ordered Tampāppillaiyār from the kitchen.

'It's the dhobi.'

'Who? You mean Katirāmaṇ the dhobi?'

'It's Katirāmaṇ's son, the young dhobi,' said Mutti.

'Ask him to wait. I'm coming,' said Tampāppillaiyār as he went on munching tōcai, famished.

Katirāmaṇ's son put the bundle of laundry on the veranda and stood submissively beside a pillar. A few minutes later, Tampāppillaiyār came out.

'Is it the small dhobi? Where's your father, fellow?'

'Sir, Appu has a funeral now, so he has to put the canopy up. That's why I came. He asked me to hand this laundry over and to bring back any dirty clothes and menstrual cloths.'

'Hey, boy! Tell your father that Friday is the flag-hoisting ceremony. Tell him to come see me today.'

Mutti followed the dhobi boy out and gave him more instructions.

'Nayinātti is not keeping well today. Come tomorrow for the dirty clothes. The menstrual cloths are at the back of the house. Later on, the lady will check the washed linen.'

'Could I please have a dhoti or something to carry the menstrual cloths in?'

When the young dhobi asked this, Mutti pulled down a large turban cloth that was on the clothesline in the front yard.

'Hey, Mutti! Tell Cevvanti not to come out. The dhobi is collecting the menstrual cloths.'

It was Vellaicci Ammāl who gave the warning, lying on the veranda. Mutti found it amusing.

'So Vellaiacci Ammāl thinks that Cevvanti Girl is still a baby! She must be under the illusion that the menstrual cloths collected by the dhobi boy belong to someone else.'

Such thoughts almost made her burst out laughing, but she got hold of herself. The dhobi boy left with the menstrual cloths. Cevvanti Nācciyār had not left the kitchen.

'Tell your father what I said, dhobi boy!' Tampāppiḷaiyār reminded him from the kitchen once again.

.....

The sun had set. The dog barked, but stopped right away and then only groaned. When regular visitors come, this is how it behaves. Lying on his bed and contemplating the affairs of the village, Tampāppiḷaiyār knew that the person who had come was Mayilu. Mayilu came in looking tired. He pulled the cloth from his shoulder and wiped the bed beside Tampāppiḷaiyār's easy chair and sat down on it.

'Tell me, Mayilu, how did things go that you went off to do? Looks as if nothing worked out. On your face, there's a bleak look.'

Seeing that look, Tampāppiḷaiyār knew how the conversation had to start.

'It doesn't seem that anything is going to turn out. Except for the Taccar, all the others are nervous. They're asking what harm there would be if the temple festival were cancelled this year. They cite the death of the village headman as the main reason. They don't want to upset us, so they came up with this as a rationale. The Mūppaṇs are the worst. While saluting us with their folded hands, they undercut us. It doesn't look like anything is going to work.'

As Tampāppiḷaiyār had nothing to say, Mayilu continued.

'I went to see Katirāmaṇ the dhobi. I was told he had to go for a funeral in the neighborhood of Puḷiyaṭi. The son, though,

came here, it seems. He said you had sent word. I met Katirāmaṇ's younger brother and we had a talk. From that I gathered that the participation of the dhobi group is going to fall through.'

To this, too, Tampāppiḷaiyār had nothing to say; he just kept staring at the roof.

'I met Kaṇapati the Ampaṭṭaṇ and his people, too. He wriggled out, saying they would not agree.

After this, Mayilu had nothing more to say. The chimney lamp, which was hanging from the veranda, was giving off only a little light. Cevvanti Nācciyār came out to make it burn more brightly, and then went back. Mayilu's lustful eyes looked her all over once and then relaxed after enjoying what they had seen. In the house, the silence was deep.

Again, Nakulaṇ barked excitedly, but this time the barking did not stop, and this was a signal that a stranger was coming.

'Mayilu, look at the gate and see if it's that Brahmin fellow I asked to come. It must be him.' Still lying on his bed, Tampāppiḷaiyār said this without moving an inch. Mayilu got up and went to the gate. As Tampāppiḷaiyār had foretold, the person coming was Peruṅkuṭumi Aiyar. Mayilu brought Aiyar and stepped onto the veranda.

'Sit here, Ayyā,' Tampāppiḷaiyār welcomed him, curtly, not bothering to rise even for a Brahmin priest.

Without trepidation, Aiyar sat down on one edge of the bed, while Mayilu sat on the other. The amount of respect Mayilu showed Aiyar depended entirely upon the length of the bed.

'Have you heard any news, Ayyā?' asked Tampāppiḷaiyār.

'I haven't heard much, but the general talk is that the festival is not going to take place this year.'

'Did you say they said the festival was not going to take place? What! Ayyā, please note that this Friday the flag hoisting will take place even if I have to do it myself. I'll do the whole thing myself and show them! *And if I'm not as good as my word, my mother must have conceived me by a Kaikkulaṇ. Yes, that's right!'

These last words of Tampāppiḷaiyār's were significant. 'Kaikkulaṇ'—that was strong language. It had come from deep in his heart and had been there from the time he had married Vellaicci Ammāl. Only once before had it come out of his mouth. Now, it did again. It was a word that made looking Vellaicci Ammāl in the face or speaking to her impossible. In her case, it made her refuse even a morsel of food and it kept her lying crouched in a ball inside the house.

Only later did he start worrying whether Vellaicci Ammāl had heard what he said. In his heart of hearts, he felt uneasy, but he managed to control his anxiety. Neither Aiyar nor Mayilu noticed any embarrassment on his part. Mayilu had heard the gossip about Vellaicci Ammāl's origins. Peruṅkuṭumi Aiyar, though, ignored it all. Even though he had been priest of the Kali Temple a long time, he believed it was wrong to pay such things any heed.

'The temple festival can be conducted without a lot of paraphernalia. We can manage with temple drums and torches, the flowers and jewels and vestments for the goddess, and so forth. But where are we going to get male goats for the sacrifice? Cellaṇ will come to do the slaughtering.'

Tampāppiḷaiyār found it difficult to grasp the full implication of what Mayilu was saying.

'Why do you say so, Mayilu? Kōviya Naṇṭaṇ Ciṇṇattampi who lives near the Piṭāri Ammaṇ temple is friendly with the goat herders of Iṇuvil. He's quite fond of Iṇuvil people generally, and he's always talking about a neighborhood in the area called 'Cāvalaṭi.' I'm told he keeps one or two concubines over there. One of the women I know quite well. She has sons who herd goats. Each year a goat of theirs gets chosen as the first to be sacrificed at the Vayiravar temple in Eccāṭṭi. Could you go over there with Naṇṭaṇ Ciṇṇattampi tomorrow?'

Today, for the first time, Tampāppiḷaiyār, who had always bossed Mayilu around, condescended to solicit his concurrence by asking him if he could go. Mayilu expressed his assent, proudly.

‘So, shall I make arrangements for the flag hoisting?’ asked Aiyar.

‘Yes, Aiyar, go look into the arrangements. The goat sacrifice is definitely going to occur.’

With this reassurance, Aiyar got up to go, as did Mayilu.

‘Mayilu, beware of the dog. Escort Aiyar out, carefully, and then come back.’

Having left Aiyar at the gate, Mayilu returned.

‘Mayilu! This Aiyar fellow seems spooked. Come what may, we have to hold the festival and carry out the goat sacrifice. Once it’s all over, we’ll get even with the Naḷam Paḷḷus. Money is no concern. God has blessed me abundantly. Look here, Mayilu, before any of that we’ll have to teach a lesson to those crow-eating Karaiyārs. The empty land where they lay out the prawns and the plot of land where they sell the catch are mine. You just see! Tomorrow, you finish up with Naṇṭaṇ Ciṇṇattampi. Then on the next day, you take ten or fifteen people and stop the Karaiyārs. Tell them they have no permission to enter either the vacant land or the place where they hold their market.’

While saying this, Tampāppiḷaiyār got up from his chair, went inside, put some silver coins into his hands, counted them, and thrust them into Mayilu’s.

‘So, I’m leaving now, and only tomorrow evening am I going to return from Iṇuvil.’

With these words, Mayilu left. Nakulaṇ the dog saw him off with his usual groaning and moaning.

When Tampāppiḷaiyār came back to the veranda from the edge of the backyard where he had gone to urinate, he could hear Vellaiacci Ammāl groaning. Her weeping had not stopped.

‘Even though you knew full well that I was born to a Kaikkuḷavaṇ, you married me because you were greedy for the dowry. Why would you bring such a thing up now? Don’t imagine there aren’t rivers

and ponds around. You just wait! I'll put an end to my life and show you.'

This was how Vellaicci Ammāl raised her lament, inside the house. None of this made an impression on Cevvanti Nācciyār. Nor did she have any idea why her mother had been starving herself since yesterday or why her parents neither looked at each other nor spoke to each other. She was totally disconnected. Even now, she failed to comprehend anything. She was still just a baby. Her skin had the yellow luster of a hibiscus stamen, and the hair heaped up on her head was the color of dry sand. Likewise, her eyes were a tawny color. Her lips were as sleek and shiny as pollen; her breasts were beautiful and erect, and the skin of her neck drooped with folds of fat. The blouse she wore was closed tight across her breasts; and the narrow-waisted skirt revealed her belly. Even though her physical features confirmed her to be a grown-up young woman, she was still immature, mentally. Her condition had worsened after Cellaiyan's death. Her mental age was that of someone under fifteen.

Mayilu Disgraced by the Karaiyāra Fishermen

It was early morning, Thursday. To be exact, it was midnight, Wednesday. Mayilu, with around ten people, had taken control of a part of the beach at Kākkaitivu. Eight or ten bottles of foreign liquor had been opened and shared. The beach at Kākkaitivu was in real turmoil. Only a couple of weeks more and the Cōlakam proper would begin blowing. For now, the early Cōlakam was gently blowing from the south. The soft rustle of coconut leaves on trees near the beach and the quiet sound of the waves blended so well it was difficult to distinguish the one from the other. Off and on, up and down, the motion of the waves sounded like a sigh. On the eastern horizon, lightning flickered, leaping around, suggestive of heavy showers and the coming Cōlakam in another ten or fifteen days. With the lightning in the background, the tufted tops of two palmyras looked like eyebrows, appearing and disappearing.

Beneath the palmyra trees on the surface of the sea, eight or ten lights in a row were visible. In order to catch fish in the morning current, at every burning torch two or three persons were attaching cone-shaped fishing traps. The eastern sky was brightening. Flocks of crows were cawing in jubilation, waiting for the arrival of the prawn catchers. *The first boat, shaped like a toddy cup, had just reached the shore. Two persons got off and lifted two baskets out. Each one carried a basket and walked to the grassy area a short distance from the sea, put the baskets down, and rested.

All of a sudden, Mayilu and his cronies came and surrounded them, making the two fishermen feel very uneasy. As it was still dawn, none of the other fishermen had arrived besides them. Such a thing had never happened before.

‘Nobody should enter this vacant area or use it for sorting prawns,’ said a voice, putting the two men into shock.

In all their many years, nobody had prevented them from doing this.

‘Why not, Tampimār? We have used this place to sort prawns for years and years,’ one said.

‘I wouldn’t know anything about that. From today, nobody can enter this vacant area.’

This was the voice of Mayilu, mingled with the smell of liquor. While this kind of talk continued, another boat touched shore. From that boat, too, another two persons in their loincloths came in, carrying baskets.

‘There’re quite a few people here, talking. What’s going on?’ one of the two asked. They broke through the gang of men and entered the vacant area.

‘Who do you guys think you are? We stopped the others from going in, but now you ignore us and go right in. It’s off-limits here.’

Again, it was Mayilu who gave the orders. But the two who had gone in did not budge.

‘Why can’t we go in?’

‘Look here, a Karaiyāra fellow asking us? Are we supposed to answer you?’ said another member of the gang.

‘Be a little more respectful when you talk to us. Things may turn out differently when you’re saying the word ‘Karaiyār,’ said one of the prawn catchers.

The one who had spoken was probably a young man, for his words were full of arrogance.

‘Listen to these Karaiyāra Nayiṇār talk!’ exclaimed Mayilu. ‘This land belongs to Tampāppillai, the farmer. It’s on his orders that the Karaiyāra Nayiṇārs are not allowed inside.’ The sarcastic tone in Mayilu’s voice was unmistakable.

By this time many more boats had come ashore, and when their men heard the argument they converged on the spot in pairs, more than thirty men in all. One was Kaspāru, and when he approached, everyone stood aside and made way. That was typical of their respect for him, for he was held in high esteem in the village. He was the favorite of Caṭṭāmpiyyappā, the venerable Mūppar of the Church of Our Lady of Refuge. For that reason, he enjoyed a high status. For all events in the village, happy or sad, his word had finality. Despite his youth, Cuvāmi Īyaṇ did nothing without him, and he had an even higher status than the Caṅkilittām, the Mūppar, and the Upatēciyār.

‘Why, Tampimār, from the time of our fathers and mothers, this is where we spread out the prawns and do the sorting. And in that corner over there we sell them,’ Kaspāru said, unpretentiously.

‘Look here, Kaspāru! We have no idea about that kind of thing. Tampāppiḷaiyār sent us here to keep you from doing these things. If you want to argue, you’ll have to go talk with him. *He has an old ōlai deed of ownership for this empty land. He asked us to let you know.’

Mayilu was speaking in a low voice, as now he had to. On the one hand, the liquor had lost its kick, and on the other there were now a lot more people on the opposing side. Some of them had pulled the poles out of their nets and were twirling them in their hands.

‘Oh, now I understand what Tampāppiḷaiyār’s up to. Yesterday morning he came to the house of our jail guard, Cuvāmpillai, and asked him to beat someone up. But Cuvāmpillai refused, and that’s why he’s trying to take revenge on all of us Karaiyāra folk because Cuvāmpillai is a Karaiyār himself.’

Before Kaspāru could finish talking, someone said, ‘Kaspāru Aṇṇai, why go to him? Let him come to us with the ōlai deed so that we can see it, too.’

Kaspāru’s silence was taken to mean approval.

By now, it was bright daylight, and the time had come to sell their catch. Here and there, they emptied their baskets of prawns

and began sorting them out from the seaweed. Out went the kelp and puffer fish. They kept the toadfish, the big prawns, the song prawns, the tiny prawns, and the blind prawns. Business had already begun before they were done. The vendors who had come to buy the catch looked with surprise at the men who were standing there, their eyes half-closed, and whispered among themselves about what was going on. Feeling uneasy, Mayilu and his men left by the culvert with a double-opening, walking from there along the big embankment that ran through the middle of the cemetery of the hanging-tree forest. The arrack bottles they had emptied littered the ground in the coconut grove. Nobody picked them up.

The Cuvāmi Convenes a Meeting of the Karaiyāra Fishermen

The bell went round the village; two young men rang it throughout the whole village and announced, 'No one should go out to sea today. All should assemble at four o'clock near the church house. By order of the parish Cuvāmi.'

At three o'clock, the big bell of the church was rung. It struck only once at the end because this was the first bell-calling of the people to the meeting. When the clock in the church house showed ten minutes to four, the church bell was rung a second time. It stopped with one resounding stroke at the end. This was the second announcement; after this, exactly at four o'clock everyone assembled in front of the church house. For Cuvāmi Īyaṇ, making things happen on time was of prime importance. In this, no concessions were given. According to the announcement, women were not invited. Even so, some came.

Exactly at four, Cuvāmi Īyaṇ came out onto the veranda of the church house. In unison, everyone bent down on one knee and said 'Praise the Lord!' Cuvāmi pulled his hands out from the pockets of his cassock, fondled his bushy white beard with one and made the sign of the cross with the other, and so fulfilled his duty. All rose up from their kneeling positions, sat on the ground, and waited for him to speak.

'Children, I have requested all of you to come because of a problem that occurred at the Kākkaitīvu jetty. Kaspāru will explain.'

As the Cuvāmi spoke, Caṅkilittām Appālai brought a chair and placed it on the veranda. The Cuvāmi sat, and Kaspāru spoke of the incidents at the beach that morning, taking only a few minutes.

‘Children, you have heard what Kaspāru said. Now, speak up and tell us what you think we should do.’

It seemed they had been waiting for the Cuvāmi to ask, because quite a few people got up all at once.

‘Take turns,’ said the Cuvāmi, intervening and enforcing order.

Caṅkilittām Appālai rose to speak, and said, ‘What I want to say is that that place has been under our control for generations, and that we cannot give it up.’

‘If that is so, Caṅkilittām, please tell us what we ought to do,’ someone in the crowd called out.

But Caṅkilittām hesitated and could not answer.

‘We should carry on as usual,’ said Mattēcu, who was the next to get up. ‘Just let him try to litigate. We’ll fight in court—and win!’

‘Why should we even be talking about courts and that kind of thing? We should speak to Tampāppillaiyār, once, and then see. After that, we can decide our course of action.’ Veliccōru expressed his opinion from a seated position.

‘Why should we even talk with them? This morning they used words like ‘Karaiyān’ to abuse us. What’s left to say to them?’ asked another person.

‘That’s silly, Tommai. Why should we talk to the people who spoke that way about us? The only person we should talk with is Tampāppillaiyār. Let’s see what he says. There’s nothing to lose, is there?’

Teyvam expressed his view while seated squarely on the ground, unable to move his gigantic body. For a while, all was silence.

‘Children, the man called Tampāppillai does not belong to our religion. He belongs to a heathen one, but until this morning he never acted like this. There must be a reason for it. We will not be able to prevail in this matter until we find out why.’

With this, the Cuvāmi turned the problem in a new direction. Everyone looked around at one another. All of a sudden Cuvāmpillai arrived running, as if he were late for an appointment.

'I've just now come from work. I was in a big hurry to get here.'

'You've come at the right time, Cuvāmpillai. When you left for work this morning, you already knew about this. The Cuvāmi thinks that Tampāppillaiyār must have done this for a reason. You're the only one who might know what that is. Say it so that everyone can hear. Let them all know what it is,' said Kaspāru.

Cuvāmpillai began talking and told the whole story from Tampāppillaiyār's request that he beat the prisoners to his refusal. Having him tell everything helped the meeting come to a swift conclusion.

'Now leave it to the Cuvāmi to tell us what we should do,' said Tiyō who had been silent this whole time.

'Children! This whole thing started because Cuvāmpillai refused to oblige Tampāppillai, and Tampāppillai will only give his consent if Cuvāmpillai does what he wants. That's why there is no point in going to him. Instead, we must remain united and go about our work in the usual way. Let him go to court. The land may belong to him, but we will argue that we were in possession.'

When the Cuvāmi spoke, his decision was unanimously accepted.

*'Children, may God's judgment fall on the side of the downtrodden.'

When the Cuvāmi was finished, Caṅkilittām rang the bell for saying the Angelus.

Tampāppillaiyār Reminisces about His Youth

When Mayilu exaggerated his story about the argument that took place early in the morning at Kākkaitivu, Tampāppillaiyār got angry and agitated. He was angry with the Karaiyārs for taking possession of his land. But his anger was mixed up with a feeling that he had only succeeded in antagonizing all concerned all of the time. He did not feel like asking any more questions, for if he did it would only reveal how anxious he was.

‘Mayilu, go now but come back this evening.’

Before he had even finished speaking, Mayilu left, realizing it was a good opportunity to escape without a scolding for not dealing more forcefully with the fellows he had argued with.

Tampāppillaiyār sat on his easy chair. For a few minutes, he closed his eyes, but opened them again. The clock on the wall chimed ten times and stopped. Only this morning, Cevvanti Nācciyār had wound it all the way, which was why it chimed so fast. It was hanging on the wall just above his head, its second hand moving. Each time it moved was like a blow to his head. Sixty times a minute, sixty blows.

The last ten days had been the worst of his life. Never before had he suffered this kind of defeat and failure. Since Ciṇṇi Girl, Naṇṇiyaṇ’s daughter, had left his sister’s house ten days ago, he had experienced one disaster after another. Naṇṇiyaṇ had refused to send Ciṇṇi Girl back. Naṇṇiyaṇ’s vice-like grip on his kuṭumi. His failure to procure laborers to water his seedlings, which had subsequently died. The killing of the village headman, the one person who had stood up for him. The shooting of Naṇṇiyaṇ’s wife instead of Naṇṇiyaṇ. The withdrawal from the Kali festival by those low-caste fellows, the Naḷavas, Paḷlas, Vaṇṇārs, and Ampaṭṭars. Unwillingness to conduct the goat sacrifice. Pūkkaṇṭar’s rejection

of his request not to allow the Naḷavas to settle on his land. Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar's thwarting of his plan to have Naṇṇiyaṇ and his sons arrested and tortured. The jail guard Cuvāmpillai's refusal of his bribe for beating them to death. What is more, the confrontation that very day between Cuvāmpillai's people and Mayilu's. Each one seemed like a major defeat, rearing its ugly head in his memory. Adding insult to injury, there was Vellaicci Ammāl's two-day fast and her determination not to look him in the face. Of all these defeats, this was the hardest, because of how obstinate she was about having her revenge. This reminded him of his youth, and he began remembering events that occurred when he was fifteen or sixteen.

Scenes from his past moved through time and returned to the memory of when he abducted Vellaicci Ammāl, and it was difficult not to dwell on that. At the time, he was just sixteen, and *Kokkuvil Kumāracuvāmi Pulavar was still conducting a school on his veranda. Palmleaves for writing on and the stylus were gradually disappearing, replaced by slates and pencils. Kumāracuvāmi Pulavar was not yet called 'Pulavar' and was still known as Kumāracuvāmi Caṭṭāmpiyār instead. Fifteen pupils had been admitted to the veranda school, including himself and a sister of his, Cellammā Nācciyār. Cellammā Nācciyār was as naive as they come. Since Parācakti, the daughter of Kumāracuvāmi Caṭṭāmpiyār's elder brother, was her same age and was already enrolled, Mayilvākaṇam the farmer agreed to send Cellammā Nācciyār as well, for she would then have Parācakti for company.

Of the two girls, Parācakti was the more grown-up, physically. In his studies, Tampāppillaiyār did very badly. Still, he attended the veranda school and listened to the lessons. He would hold the slate close to his face and try to write. Kumāracuvāmi Caṭṭāmpiyār had them write as he dictated, on and on. When all the slates were collected and corrected, on Tampāppillaiyār's there would be only a couple of lines of writing at the top and underneath a couple of doodled sketches of the other students with their names. Tampāppillaiyār would then get four lashes on his back with a green

tulip-tree switch, but he endured all that without showing any pain or remorse. Several times, Caṭṭāmpiyār tried to reform him, but failed. He even found it difficult to have him dismissed from the veranda school. His father, Mayilvākaṇam the farmer, would have been furious.

Of those times, one day in particular stood out from all the others. It came from the time that Kumāracuvāmi Caṭṭāmpiyār started his school. Cuppar lived in the house adjacent and used to watch from outside. From his childhood, people had called him 'Lion-hearted Cuppar.' Caṭṭāmpiyār knew that he was keen on studying at his school, but *Cuppar could not be admitted because it would have gone against the customs and practices of the village, since he came from an untouchable caste.

Not long before, Caṭṭāmpiyār had started a lesson on the Makāpāratam. Cuppar had been listening to the lessons from an extension of the school's veranda. Ten days passed and it would be ten more before the lessons were over. That was the day! Tampāppiḷaiyār's reminiscence was of the lesson on that day. *It had been on Pāñcālī's being stripped naked at Turiyōtanaṇ's command. At the end, Caṭṭāmpiyār recited the verse about it, then asked the pupils to write down the meaning and the context, and sat quietly. When the exercise was over, on Tampāppiḷaiyār's slate there was a pair of big breasts, separated by a thin line, a narrow waist, and two big thighs. At the top of the thighs, the color was slightly faint because the lines had been rubbed out and redrawn several times. There were two figures, actually, one on the right and one on the left. Caṭṭāmpiyār was going around, checking the slates, and was shocked when he got to Tampāppiḷaiyār's. Below them were two names, one was Pāñcālī and the other was Parācakti. Caṭṭāmpiyār smashed the slate to pieces against the edge of his veranda.

Tampāppillaiyār Reminisces about the Iṇuvil Temple Festival

Tampāppillaiyār's student days came to an end just when he reached adolescence. Around age eighteen, he was roaming around the village. At the annual festival of the Kantacuvāmi Temple in Iṇuvil, the sixth day was especially famous. Tampāppillaiyār went to see it with his friends Kaṛuval Vaittiyalin̄kam, Turairājā the son of Koṭṭaṭi kaṛuttār, Kuḷappiṭṭi Kaṇēṣaṇ, Vaṇṇārpaṇṇai Namacivāyam, and Taṭṭāteru Poṇṇucāmi. When they arrived, the Nātasvara drum recital had ended. Everything was ready for the performance of the devadasis [cin̄ṇa mēḷakkāri] when Tampāppillaiyār walked in, surrounded by his friends. Even though the temple was not far from where they lived, they had arrived in Kaṛuttār's horse carriage. In the courtyard, a stage had been erected. Even now, he could recall how the decorations looked. Before the devadasi appeared, the accompanists came out: the dholak [tōlakku] player, Mayilvākaṇam on the mridanga [mirutankam], Cōmacuntaram on the harmonium, Caṅkarapiḷḷai on the mōrcciṇ, Kaṇēṣaṇ on the *Keñcirā*, Vēlaiyā the background vocalist. *All came out in order, followed by Keṅkammā, the devadasi [tēvatāci] who had come from India and was doing her debut dance. The crowd was raucous. Everyone was looking over at the kitchen-side of the temple, but Tampāppillaiyār's eyes were locked in the opposite direction.

In Tampāppillaiyār's eyes, the scene is still clear. The damsel with a mango-red complexion, leaning against the south pillar of the temple. The first glimpse! Coming back to him now, the devadasi Keṅkammā with golden-coloured spots all over her body; her sari end dangling down her back; the red sari with an embroidered fringe; a gold-colored, girdle-like ornament gripping her body

tightly; her hip moving like a creeper. Tampāppiḷaiyār saw her only once or twice, but the sound made by her anklets still rings in his ears. After only a few seconds, though, what comes back into his eyes is the mango-red complexion of the damsel leaning against the pillar. Tampāppiḷaiyār remembers leaving his friends behind and going toward that pillar, but nothing else about Keṅkammā or her performance.

After that ...

'That's the ladies section. Nobody else should stand there!' said a voice.

'I'm Tāvaṭi Tampāppiḷai! Don't talk like that without knowing who you're talking to.'

'Is this Tampāppiḷai fallen down from heaven?' the person replied, getting hold of Tampāppiḷaiyār by the hair and throwing him out.

After that ...

'Hey, they're giving our Tampāppiḷaiyār a beating! Join the fight!'

This was the voice of Kaṛuttār Turairājā.

And then ...

The Kantacuvāmi Temple of Iṇuvil fell into pandemonium.

After finishing the fight successfully, Tampāppiḷaiyār and his friends ran to the horse carriage and jumped in. Would Tampāppiḷaiyār and his friends ever taste defeat? They were tough and had been through many a battle.

The birds, annual visitors who came without fanfare, flew away quietly.

Tampāppillaiyār Reminisces about His Pleasant Days with Ciṅki

Tampāppillaiyār has no memory of the passing away of his father, Mayilvākaṇattār the farmer, because he was away from home when the death occurred. A day after his father had admonished him for some reason or other, he went off and disappeared. Some ten days later he returned, having heard of his demise by word of mouth. *The man who broke the fire pot was a distant relation. It was, however, the prerogative of this distant relation to perform the *antiyēṣṭi* at Kīrimalai for the benefit of the departed soul. That was the custom. The same person who sets the pyre on fire has the right to perform the other ceremony as well. The priest refused to break with tradition.

What did it matter, anyway? It was of no concern to Tampāppillaiyār. In any case, when the *antiyēṣṭi* was over, power would automatically fall into his hands.

There was also that drinking habit of his. Drinking in private—now that, too, was an experience he could not forget! It was a great pleasure. To enjoy it, he had formed a relationship with Cellappaṇ Cutumalai. Just thinking of Cellappaṇ brought a feeling of pleasure back to him. Sweeter than the pure toddy of the male palmyra, was Cellappaṇ himself. At nights, ... when the customers had gone. Sometimes at midnight even. Nowadays as well, though he no longer drank, the toddy of those days continues to taste sweet in his memory.

But Cellappaṇ's widowed sister Ciṅki was sweeter still. Even though years have passed since they knew each other, his memory

of his connection with her remains sweet. Even though Vellaicci Ammāl was as sweet as a fair-complexioned European woman, Ciñki was far sweeter. Her pitch-black complexion, the gathered ends of her garment, and her thick hair bun were all so lovely.

When Ciñki became pregnant, he said, 'Ciñki, I'll keep you openly as my mistress! Why make a fuss as though you're going to die or something? Just swallow this little ball of medicine with a bit of jaggery. Everything's going to be alright.'

She did, and was dead the next morning. No doubt, he had suffered greatly. But now, whenever he thinks of her, it is not her death that he remembers. Rather, the thing uppermost in his mind is the pleasure of her embrace. Her pure black complexion. Her thick bun of gorgeous hair. The cloth wrapped tightly around her body. Her bell-like voice. How sweet everything was. His heart refused to move on. It was adamant.

'Ciñki ... Ciñki,' he murmured.

Tampāppillaiyār Reminisces about the Gang Rape of Menike

After that ... high noon ... scorching sun ... Karuttār Turairājā's ... the veranda. Even though Turairājā had joined him only a few months previously, he was already a fast friend. The trio of Turairājā, Rājacūriyar, and Tampāppillaiyār were seated around a round table. A bottle of Martin Brandy was kept on the table, open. It was the time when brandy was first introduced into Jaffna. It was then that Ciṇṇavan the rickshaw man came along.

'What's the matter, Ciṇṇavan?' Naṭuvil Turairājā asked.

'I came by to see you, Master, about a certain matter. Could you come outside for a moment?'

Turairājā got up and went out.

'Master, from way back you have been telling me of a friend of yours who wanted to find a servant. That's why I've brought a girl here.'

Saying this, Ciṇṇavan went out to the gravel road beyond the house where his rickshaw was waiting. On it, a girl was seated. In a second, Turairājā sized her up with his eyes, and his thoughts strayed off.

'Ciṇṇavan, today isn't auspicious. It's the eighth and ninth phase,' said Turairājā. 'Tomorrow morning would be the earliest we could take her.'

'So let her stay at your house, Master, until she can be taken tomorrow,' Ciṇṇavan replied.

'Hey, Ciṇṇavan! Ammā tends to be a suspicious person. She'll think she's here for something else. Is there any place else where we could keep her for a day?' Turairājā said.

'In that case, Master, *we'll leave her in the back room of my friend Kurucumuttan's saloon. Then in the morning we'll see what we can do.'

'Good idea, Ciṇṇavaṇ. Tell Kurucumuttan and leave her there. I'll get there a little later. Now, go! If Ammā sees ... '

Before Turairājā finished speaking and went inside, he cast his eyes around the rickshaw once more.

'What's wrong? It took you quite a while, talking to the rickshaw man,' Tampāppiḷaiyār asked.

'Nothing serious. A small matter,' replied Turairājā, trying to hide what it was.

'Come on, I don't believe you! Out with it. Don't hide anything. We won't demand our share,' Tampāppiḷaiyār said, sarcastically.

Over whether he should say anything or not, Turairājā hesitated. Even though it was share and share alike in matters like this, in his heart of hearts this was something he did not want to talk about. But he had to. As in so many other things, they were partners.

'You can't hide from us the fact that you've caught wind of something really big,' said Rājacūriyar, judging from the look on Turairājā's face.

'Some stuff has come, it seems,' said Turairājā, truthfully, in a low voice. 'That's what Ciṇṇavaṇ said, and so I went out to have a look.'

'In that case, I have the first go,' said Tampāppiḷaiyār, anxiously.

'Just look at how excited the man is! We'll check it out and decide later. Do we ever make a difference between us?' Turairājā asked, rhetorically, having made his decision.

'Hey, Naṭuvil! In any case, I'm first,' said Tampāppiḷaiyār, keen on having the lion's share.

'Naṭuvil' was always said before 'Turairājā,' to make 'Naṭuvil Turairājā.' *Tampāppiḷaiyār used to call him 'Naṭuvil,' affectionately.

The trio got ready to go.

'Why, Tampimār, the chicken curry has just been taken off the fire, so why not eat your meal and then go?' It was Naṭuvil Turairājā's mother, whose voice was heard from the kitchen.

'That's alright, Ammā. We'll go and come back after a while. Make arrangements for us to have the meal later.'

Having excused themselves, the trio set off.

This was the time when Jaffna's streets first began to be tarred. They walked on the gravel shoulder and turned at First Cross Street. Kurucumuttan's saloon was the first of its kind in Jaffna. He had arranged for a small house, with verandahs front and back, to be converted into a saloon consisting of the front room and the veranda. The room and veranda at the back he kept aside for other purposes.

When the trio arrived, Ciṇṇavaṇ was there, too. When they went in, Kurucumuttan, along with Ciṇṇavaṇ, welcomed them. Ciṇṇavaṇ took Naṭuvil Turairājā inside, followed by Tampāppiḷlaiyār, who said, 'I'm coming, too, Maccāṇ.' Rājacūriyar and Kurucumuttan remained outside.

And there in the backyard was a young girl, fair complexioned, who shone like a pomegranate flower, devoid of any blemish. She wore a half-sleeved blouse having a large white flower design. Around her waist, she had tied a thick, striped cloth, lungi-style.

Tampāppiḷlaiyār's eyes opened wide and devoured her.

'Menike, child! He's the Master I told you about. You are going to work for him at his house. He'll come and take you tomorrow.' With these words, Naṭuvil showed her off to Tampāppiḷlaiyār.

Tampāppiḷlaiyār, who thought that Menike was meant for him, was delighted. Opening the fold in his dhoti, he took out some silver coins and placed them in her hands. She understood nothing of this. Naṭuvil gathered up some silver coins and placed them in Ciṇṇavaṇ's hands, telling him to go buy her some lunch. For a meal of rice, Ciṇṇavaṇ went to the restaurant of the man from Puṅkuṭutivu at Aluppānti. Tampāppiḷlaiyār gave Turairājā a signal that he wanted

him to leave by poking him with his elbow lightly on the belly, which was covered by a net-like banian. Turairājā left, reluctantly.

After a few minutes, all that he heard was, *‘Aiyō, Dorai! What on earth, Dorai, are you doing? Leave me alone, Dorai!’ And then the sound of the back door being slammed shut.

For Tampāppillaiyār, that noon has a permanent place in his memory. The person he first made use of was Naḷatti Ciṅki. But she had already had intercourse with another man. And since her there had been so many others that he had lost count. His wife Vellaiacci Ammāl was herself only one in a long line. But Menike ... that noon ... For her, he must have been the first.

‘What is this, Dorai? Leave me alone, Dorai! Aiyō, Dorai!’

For Tampāppillaiyār, that voice was as sweet as sugar-candy. He had not been sated, and never would be.

Only when Tampāppillaiyār came out looking exhausted, did Kurucumuttan, fearful and trembling, understand. Naṭuvil and Rājacūriyar were sharing a bottle of arrack.

How was the ‘stuff,’ Maccāṇ?’ Naṭuvil asked Tampāppillaiyār.

Tampāppillaiyār did not know what to say, he was so tired. On his fair-complexioned body, there were fingernail scratches with blood oozing from them.

Ciṇṇavaṇ had returned with a food parcel. When he came in, he was given what was left of the arrack in the bottle. Naṭuvil asked him to go in and give Menike the food. As he did, her weeping could be heard. After a while, the weeping stopped, and the noise of a bucket banging against the well was heard instead. She had eaten and Ciṇṇavaṇ was drawing some water for her, they supposed. After a while, Ciṇṇavaṇ returned, his face flushed.

‘What have you done, Tampimār? She’s just a baby girl. I have managed to calm her down a bit.’ This was all Ciṇṇavaṇ could say to them.

Turairājā called both him and Kurucumuttan, warning them that they would return in the evening and that they should stay on

guard. With this, the trio took out some silver coins, placed them in front of the two, and left.

The sun had set, and it was dark when the trio returned. This time they came with three bottles of imported liquor, ten boiled eggs or more, and the chicken curry Naṭuvil's mother had cooked. After they had had a go, Tampāppiḷḷaiyār was given another chance. Kurucumuttan̄ and Ciṇṇavan̄ waited outside the saloon on the road. But when they came inside, they were given a bottle of arrack. Menike was motionless, like a corpse. In this condition, she had not given Tampāppiḷḷaiyār much pleasure. In the dark, she lay like a log of wood.

That night, neither Tampāppiḷḷaiyār nor Rājacūriyar went home. At midnight, they fell asleep right away at Naṭuvil's house, exhausted. At dawn, Kurucumuttan̄ and Ciṇṇavan̄ came. Taking Turairājā out, they whispered something. Stunned, Turairājā went back inside, took out two big notes and placed them in Ciṇṇavan̄'s hands, saying this and that and shaking his head. Then they left. Tampāppiḷḷaiyār guessed that something had gone wrong, but Rājacūriyar was unconcerned. Even today, he's like a baby. After a little while, the three went out.

Four days later, there was excitement in the air. That year, a daily newspaper began publication, carrying serialized news stories. The most important was about

the discovery of the body of an unidentified woman under the Vallai Bridge. The body had been stuffed into a sack and tied with a rope to a millstone. The rope around the sack had broken and the body floated up to the surface. The body found at the Vallai Bridge was that of a girl between the ages of fourteen and fifteen. From the clothing she wore, it was guessed that she was a Sinhalese. So that someone might identify her, the body was kept on the spot under guard.

Under this news item, you see the photograph of the girl lying dead.

The mistress of the young girl, an old woman of Ōṭṭumaṭam in Vaṇṇārpaṇṇai named Vicālāṭciyammāl̄, identified the body at the

bridge. In her testimony, she stated that the deceased had worked in her house for some four years. Her name was Menike. When Vicālāṭciyammāl's husband had gone off to Singapore, Menike had become friendly with the son of Cellammā, the Paraiya woman who lived next door. Vicālāṭciyammāl had reprimanded her. The end of it was that she had asked Ciṇṇavaṇ, who used to take her children to school in his rickshaw, to find her another place to work. Four or five days previously, Ciṇṇavaṇ had arranged a place and had taken her away. The clothing she was wearing when she left was thus and such. She was able to identify the body by the tattoo of a lotus on her left hand. She said that only her husband knew further details about the girl, but he had gone to Singapore.

*Mysterious Death of a Woman at Vallai Bridge
Ciṇṇavaṇ, rickshaw-man, and Kurucumuttan, keeper of the hairdressing
saloon, arrested*

Upon examination of the backroom of the saloon owned by Kurucumuttan at First Cross Street where the body of the woman presumed to have died there was discovered, bloodstains on the earthen floor, two sets of clothing from the house where she worked, ten silver coins, the rinds of pomegranates that had been eaten, and a brandy bottle were found.

The report of the coroner's examination of Menike, the Sinhalese woman found dead under the Vallai Bridge, was as follows: She was raped several times even though unconscious after suffering a seizure of some sort.

Suspicion Looms over Three Prominent Citizens

Murukēcu, driver of the car, has also been arrested. The car used to transport the body was impounded. The following was the driver Murukēcu's confession: 'Normally, I don't take low-caste people in my car. That night, Ciṇṇavaṇ and Kurucumuttan came and gave me a hundred rupees, telling me they had to go somewhere urgently. It was night, so I agreed to take them. They hired the car at ten o'clock, went straight to Kurucumuttan's

shop, left me at the entrance, brought out a sack, and put it in the trunk of the car. From there they went straight to Ciṇṇavaṇ's house, from which they brought out a millstone, and then we started off again. I became suspicious, stopped the car on the way, and inquired. Kurucumuttaṇ poured some arrack into a coconut shell and gave it to me to drink. Ciṇṇavaṇ asked me to drive the car to the Nilāvarai pond. And I did so. Because of the festival in the Piḷḷaiyār temple in that neighborhood, there was a large crowd. Then they asked me to drive straight to Vallai. When I stopped at Vallai Bridge, they both got out, tied the millstone to the sack, and pushed it off the bridge.' This was the driver's statement.

Three Prominent Citizens Wanted in Connection with the Murder of Menike Surrender to Magistrate

Since the police concluded that the evidence against them was inconclusive, Tampāppillaiyār, Rājacūriyar, and Turairājā were all immediately released. Menike's case has been turned over to the Supreme Court where it will be tried at the next session this July. The driver made a voluntary confession and was therefore made a crown witness and released on bail. The other two, namely Ciṇṇavaṇ and Kurucumuttaṇ, were charge-sheeted for murder. The following evidence was provided by a new witness, a Mrs. Ciṇṇamuttu, occupant of the house behind the one where the murder took place: 'At noon on the day the incident took place, I was in the back yard. Kurucumuttaṇ's saloon is situated right behind my house. When I looked through an opening in the fence, I saw a young girl near the well plucking fruits from the pomegranate tree. It was of no concern to me. That night, I could hear the sound of people talking over there in the house. I was unable to sleep. My husband works in the theater of Mr. Ciṇṇivācakam. That day, they were staging a drama by Kōvintacāmi, who had come from India, called 'Vaḷḷi Tirumaṇam,' and so I knew he would be coming late. At midnight, I heard 'Magē Ammē!' 'Magē Ammē!' shouted two or three times.' Afterwards, I heard nothing more.

Magistrate Who Recorded Evidence from Ciṇṇavaṇ Hands Case Over to Supreme Court

At the assize of the Supreme Court, the case of the Sinhala girl Menike was the first to come up for trial. Many observers were of the opinion that the case would take no more than two or three days.

*Menike Case Over
Justice to Sum Up Tomorrow
Thousands Flock to Hear Verdict*

Verdict on Menike Case

After the Justice summed up, the jurors retired for deliberation. As six of the seven said the accused were guilty and one said they were innocent, the Justice sent them back to their chambers. And when five said they were guilty and two said they were innocent, the Justice asked the accused whether they had anything they wanted to say. Both declared, 'We did not commit this offense.' In the end, the Justice sentenced both of them to death.

Even though this part of the story, the most important, did not clearly come into focus for him, the memory of the noon that he had spent with Menike was as fresh to him as if it had occurred only yesterday. Ah! The girl who glowed like a pomegranate. Before the scene at night when she was lying like a corpse, motionless, the part that took place at noon. That other incident was creeping into his awareness, but he made an attempt to push it back. Her desperate attempts to wriggle out, her groaning, the scratches on his body. It was all much sweeter than how she was when she was motionless.

Tampāppillaiyār Reminisces about His Life with Vellaicci Ammāl

After the demise of his father, Mayilvākaṇattār, nobody except his mother gave any thought at all to finding a wife for Tampāppillaiyār. Once in a while, he would go home under the pretext of visiting his mother and sister, Cellammā Nācciyār. Once he got the money he needed from his mother, he would go off again. No one among his relations, of their own accord, wanted to seek out a bride for him. All the wealth amassed by Mayilvākaṇattār, all the land, jewelry, the house, the property and fields, were his. He was untroubled in the least that nobody came around in pursuit of his wealth through a marriage alliance. He was busy with other things.

One day, though, he made an odd request to his mother, rather obsequiously. She was shocked when he begged her to arrange a marriage for him with the daughter of Kaṇakacapāpati, the Ayurvedic physician who lived near Nallūr. This came up even though Kaṇakacapāpati was a distant relation. For a whole generation, he had been cut off from his kin because all on his own he had chosen a bride from the Kaikkūḷava neighbourhood. Consequently, all relations with him had been severed, and he was never invited to family get-togethers, feasts, and rituals of any kind.

Among the Kaikkūḷar, there are two types. Years ago, in some unknown place, one of their women must have slept with a white man. Kaṇakacapāpati had fallen in love with a woman of that lineage and married her. *For a whole generation, Kaṇakacapāpati and his wife, a beef-eating white woman, had been cut off from his kin. And now Tampāppillaiyār had his eyes set on someone from the same family.

Vellai Ricci Ammāl was a white woman in every possible way. If she had not had long hair, earrings, a sari, sacred ash and kumkum on her forehead, a golden girdle around her waist, and silver anklets, she could have been mistaken for a white woman. This was how she looked when Tampāppiḷaiyār saw Vellai Ricci Ammāl for the very first time. Kaṇakacāpāti noticed that Tampāppiḷaiyār was coming around rather often, claiming kinship. At times, he wondered if giving his daughter to him in marriage would be a way to renew his ties to the family, but he gave up on the idea when he heard what kind of character Tampāppiḷaiyār was and the friends he kept.

For his part, Tampāppiḷaiyār did not let his longing go unfulfilled. One evening, with the help of his friends, he went to her house and abducted her. And that was that. Kaṇakacāpāti, the Ayurvedic physician, did not breathe a word of protest. Knowing the kind of people Tampāppiḷaiyār and his friends were, he bore it all in silence. She was his only daughter, the sole heir of many properties of childless relations on his mother's side, and of all his earnings over the years. Confidentially, he consulted many who were well-versed in legal affairs. All were of the opinion that as the girl was over twenty-one, nothing could be done about her abduction unless she came back on her own.

Tampāppiḷaiyār still remembers the day he abducted Vellai Ricci Ammāl. It was, however, a memory that was less sweet than the others. She did not provide him as much pleasure as what he had gotten from Ciṅki, Menike, and the other women he had enjoyed with his friends. It had been a long ten years of childless, married life.

One day in the course of an argument they were having, he happened to say, 'Don't talk like you're a woman who comes from a long line of Vellāḷas.'

Next morning, Vellai Ricci Ammāl was missing. Before dawn, she had gotten up and left. From there, it was only a short distance to

Nallūr. She covered her head with her sari and went back to her father's house. There she remained, a self-respecting woman who had been scorned. For all of their ten years of married life, they had had no offspring.

And during the next ten years that Tampāppiḷaiyār would live without a wife, many things happened that were frightening, nauseating and titillating.

At the end of those ten years, Tampāppiḷaiyār's mother died. Having refused to attend the wedding of her sister-in-law Cellammā Nācciyār, this time Vēḷḷaicci Ammāl was brought to see her mother-in-law's body, through the efforts of a good many people.

*Before she left for his home, she said, 'As soon as the corpse leaves, I'll leave too.'

But it turned out that she stayed. Maybe it was Tampāppiḷaiyār's helplessness, which made her sad, or some other reason, but she resolved to remain behind. A year later, she gave birth to a baby, Cevvanti, who looked like a little hibiscus flower. There was gossip going around that a child who is conceived in one's dotage, brings death in its wake.

Tampāppiḷaiyār had become exceedingly cautious about his dealings with his wife. And now, by mistake, he had uttered words implying that she was a *Kaikkūḷatti*. That was when the real agony began. For two days past, Vēḷḷaicci Ammāl had been taking her revenge. Adding to his string of failures, his wife was showing her vengeful side. But the unpleasant things of the past he skipped over, to dwell on the ones that were sweet. Again and again, he tried to close his eyes. Outside, the dog Nakulaṇ barked and barked, but then just groaned and stopped. Someone familiar had come, Kōviya Mutti Girl.

Mirage

Part Two

Trial of the Village-Headman Murder Case

There had been many changes in the village during the last year. Since the village headman had been a representative of government, the case did not drag on for long. It passed through the lower court and then came up for trial at the next assize of the Supreme Court. There was no one at all who would speak up for Nannīyaṇ, Mūttavaṇ, and Ilayavaṇ, and so the government appointed a lawyer to argue their case. In two days, the trial was over. The witnesses were few—Mayilu, Kiṭṭuṇu, and last of all Leṭcumippiḷlai Nācciyār, the headman's wife. It was only these three who were called as witnesses. Of cross-examination, there was almost none. The lawyer appointed for the accused was Mr. Nallaiyāpiḷlai, a famous Jaffna attorney. Nallaiyāpiḷlai happened to be a close relation of Tampāppiḷlaiyār. More importantly, he was cousin-brother of Tampāppiḷlaiyār's bosom buddy Naṭuvil Turairājā. All seven jurors unanimously agreed that all the accused were guilty.

*The Justice who wore a black wig asked the accused whether there was anything they wanted to say. Mūttavaṇ simply said, 'It was I who killed the village headman, on my own.' After writing the verdict, the Justice broke the nib of his pen on the table. All three received the death sentence. No date for the hanging was set; that kind of thing had to be decided by the governor.

This year's festival of the Kali Temple was also fast approaching. This time, however, it would not do if it were cancelled again the way it had been last year, due to the village headman's death. The village would find it odd, and this would affect Tampāppiḷlaiyār's reputation. He tried hard to find new patrons for the festival according to the tradition of the temple, which required that specific castes take responsibility. Likewise, the goat sacrifice simply had

to be performed, as the festival would be incomplete unless one was slaughtered. This time, though, everything was becoming difficult. His land lay fallow and looked forlorn, not having a chili crop in either of the two seasons, or even any small-scale cultivation of brinjal and tobacco. He had failed to hire a single person from outside the village to come and work.

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Ciṇṇi's wedding took place while her father and brothers remained in jail. She received holy baptism, and her holy matrimony to Cimiyoṇ the son of the Mūppar of St. Benedict's was solemnized at its altar. Tampan and Caṅkilittām Rāyappaṇ played important roles in arranging the marriage, and Pūkkaṇṭar did too, behind the scenes. Not only that, rumors were spreading all around that the Periyakkaḷaṭṭi people had agreed to become Christians and were taking catechism classes at St. Benedict's. What is more, in the compound of Pūkkaṇṭar's Singapore brother-in-law, gravel had been unloaded, just behind Tampan's house. A Christian church was going to rise in Periyakkaḷaṭṭi. The news was a shock, a huge issue. Kumāravēlu, the newly-appointed Headman, was a close relation both of Tampāppillaiyār and Pūkkaṇṭar, but Tampāppillaiyār was the one who cultivated good relations with him.

One day Kumāravēlu the headman came to Pūkkaṇṭar's house, but Pūkkaṇṭar was out. Even so, Pūkkaṇṭar's wife and children welcomed him warmly. He explained why Pūkkaṇṭar was his senior-most brother-in-law because of Pūkkaṇṭar's relationship to one of his aunts. Pūkkaṇṭar, worn out, arrived from the fields, followed by his eldest son. That day, they had made plant beds and watercourses so that the watering could start the following day. For these reasons, they had worked incredibly hard.

'Who's that seated there? Well, well, looks like the Headman.'

With these words, Pūkkaṇṭar came inside. In the veranda, a chimney lamp was burning. In the light of the lamp, the headman's face was clearly visible, as he sat on the three-legged stool directly in front of it.

'Yes, Maccāṇ! I happened to come this way and so I thought of visiting your boys and girls. Shouldn't I have?' With these words, the Headman started to talk.

Pūkkaṇṭar, though, sensing that something was up, said, 'Why shouldn't you come? Wait a moment and I'll be back.' Saying this, Pūkkaṇṭar walked toward the well.

Pūkkaṇṭar did all things in moderation. When it came to the gestures and comments of others, he had a sixth sense. Why had the fellow come? On top of it, he claims a relationship. It has already been a year since he was appointed Headman, so why come on a visit now and claim to be related when he never even bothered to have a peep into my house in all this time? Such were the questions on his mind as he washed beside the well.

'Were you waiting a long time, Headman?' asked Pūkkaṇṭar when he returned from the well. 'There was a lot to do in the fields. We had to finish the plant beds and dig the watercourses. Tomorrow's an auspicious day, and so the well water we raise with the sweep has got to be put out for irrigation. I need to go and speak to the fellows who operate the well sweep. Tell me what brought you here, if you will. Hey there! Have you brought anything for the Headman to drink?' he asked of his wife and then stopped.

'Oh, yes, the girls gave him something to drink,' Pūkkaṇṭar's wife replied, from the kitchen.

'I may be the Headman, but call me 'Maccāṇ,' won't you? Just call me 'Maccāṇ,' said the headman, trying to outflank him again.

'Of course, of course, but I'm going to have to go soon to meet the fellows who operate the well sweep. It would help a lot if you tell me straight out what brought you here.'

‘Is it such a difficult thing to find people to operate a well sweep? To the Paḷḷas and the Naḷavas, you are God. All you have to do is lift your finger and a hundred of them will come running. It’s an important matter I came to see you about. Shall we sit and talk at leisure?’

When the Headman finished, Pūkkāṇṭar spread his hand cloth on the veranda, sat down, and looked him straight in the eye. A few minutes later, Pūkkāṇṭar’s wife could be heard from the kitchen where she was washing rice and putting it into a pot to boil: ‘Your silence is puzzling! I can’t hear anything either one of you is saying.’

‘There’s nothing I can do, woman. He said he wanted to talk about something, but now he’s keeping quiet,’ said Pūkkāṇṭar, disappointedly.

‘You know, Maccāṇ, whatever grievances we may hold against each other, it just won’t do to antagonize the whole village,’ said the Headman by way of introduction.

‘And how, I wonder, might I have antagonized the whole village? It was those devils who set fire to the huts of the Naḷava boys from Cinnakkaḷaṭṭi and shot that poor creature of a woman dead. The people who came to me were desperate, and so I gave them land to put their huts on. Now tell me, Was there anything wrong with that?’

‘Hold on, friend! There’s no harm in giving them land for their huts. But I hear that now they’ve unloaded gravel to build a church. Tell me, Is that so or not? Will we be able to face other people in the village? Nothing like this has ever happened in our lineage. Is it right to build a church and introduce filthy beefeaters into the village? Tell me, please? If the Christian fellows hoodwink the Naḷavas and Paḷḷas and win them over to their side, who will ever listen to us again? Will they serve us in our houses or work in our fields? Think this over, would you?’

The Headman had spoken, and Pūkkāṇṭar kept quiet.

'See here, Pūkkaṇṭar Maccāṇ, that's why I say that neither land nor anything else should be given to them for a church,' said the Headman who continued talking and then stopped.

'It's not my land, Headman. It's my brother-in-law's. He wrote and told me to give it to them,' said Pūkkaṇṭar, trying to evade the issue for the time being.

'If you said 'no,' would your brother-in-law go against your wishes? Just write him and say the village is against it, and all will be well.' It was a way out that the Headman had opened for him.

'Headman!' said Pūkkaṇṭar, unable to contain his anger any longer. 'My brother-in-law only said 'yes' after I wrote to him. I have conveyed our decision to Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar, and there's no way I'll go back on that. If the Naḷavas, Paḷḷas, Paraiyas, Vaṇṇars, and Ampaṭṭars are going to be free from trouble, they need to be allowed to build the church. What is that to you? *Haven't you heard, Headman, that even Veḷḷāḷars are joining the church in Iḷavālai, Paṇṭaitteruppu, Cillālai, Accuvēli, and in other places, too? Not only that, in Uppumālaṭi, Navāli, Nāvaṇṭurai, and Āṇaikkōṭṭai, people of other castes like the Karaiyārs, Tīmilars, and Mukkuvars have joined the church. What would be the harm if the people here join, too? You're wasting our time, talking such things. I get it, headman! Tampāppillaiyār's the one who got you to come, wasn't he? He thinks he didn't commit enough crime in his youth, and so he wants to commit some more. I know full well, Headman, that he was the one who gave the man the gun who shot Celli. Everyone knows that the former Headman got killed because of him. I'm not the fickle kind who goes back on his word. I won't be the one to stop them from using the land the way they want.'

And with this, Pūkkaṇṭar got up and went out to the front yard. The Headman saw no reason to stay, but sat there anyway, as motionless as a stone.

Laying the Church's Foundation

The foundation of the church had all been laid; work on the building had started. Under Upatēciyār Cantiāpillai's supervision, well-shaped stones of coral were placed on the small foundation of gravel and the walls had risen to a height of one and a half cubits around the outside in a day. The next day, four masons came out from the area around St. Benedict's, and the whole village of Periyakkaḷaṭṭi got involved in the mixing of lime and clay. Everyone worked till dusk, by which time the building had risen up on all sides to a man's height. For the midday meal, everyone was provided with boiled tapioca, spinach curry, and chili paste.

When darkness was falling, Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar arrived in his spring-fitted bullock cart. He had not expected the construction to be as far along as it was, after just two days. Already he was getting eager to celebrate Holy Mass in the church as soon as possible, maybe even the middle of the following month. It was dark by the time he set off again in the spring-fitted bullock cart, having encouraged all who had labored that day.

Tampaṇ had voiced a concern that it might be imprudent to allow the Cuvāmi to go off alone. This was a gut feeling, based on his observation of the mood in the village. Although Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar felt that Tampaṇ was probably right, his confidence in himself was unshakeable, and he had resolved on returning to his room at the church house without an escort. Tomorrow, the dawn would rise on a Sunday, and no one dared to stand in his way.

The spring-fitted bullock cart started off with three young men and the Upatēciyār who had gotten in and sat down, in addition to the Cuvāmi, although his constant companions, Caṅkilittām Rāyappaṇ and Cimiyoṇ were not with him on this occasion. The

spring-fitted bullock cart had gone about a mile on a narrow path through a cactus patch when all of a sudden stones came flying into the cart from all sides. The bullocks got frightened and began to pull the cart at a gallop. Still, the stones continued to fall in front and behind. One that had been thrown with great force struck the Upatēciyār on the knee. The Cuvāmi himself, however, was surrounded for his protection by the others and unhurt. The cart hurtled along at a terrific speed, bouncing over stones, potholes, and around the bends. Out of range, the stone throwing stopped.

‘Children, we have nothing to fear. For the time being, our path is not going to be an easy one. Only those who demonstrate fortitude under such circumstances can become true Catholic Christians.’

The Cuvāmi spoke, once the journey had slowed down on a smooth stretch of road. He placed his hands on theirs and calmed their fears. It did not take much time for the spring-fitted bullock cart to reach St. Xavier’s, but the Cuvāmi told the men who had gone with him to sleep there on the veranda and return the next morning. Blood was oozing from the wound on the Upatēciyār’s knee, and so he got some cotton gauze from the Cuvāmi to stanch the blood. The Cuvāmi came back from behind the church house where he had gathered some green leaves, telling the Upatēciyār to squeeze them out and dress the wound with the juice. The leaves must have burned, because the Upatēciyār could be heard grinding his teeth in pain.

‘Yuvāni, prepare some food for the children who have come. They are going to stay the night,’ the Cuvāmi was heard to say from inside.

The sound of elaborate kitchen preparations could be heard. Just as the clock of church house struck ten, Yuvāni emerged with meals on plates to serve them. On each one were heaps of rice, leveled off so that the steam could rise. Onto the boiled rice, Yuvāni ladled tomato sambar [cāmpār] and tapioca curry, prepared with chilies. In the dim light of the chimney lamp, he could see that each one of them was covered with a film of reddish dust. Back into the kitchen

the Upatēciyār went. The tomato sambar, thick tapioca curry, and boiled rice tasted good, and everyone ate their fill of the plentiful food. Yuvāni came to retrieve the plates and utensils. Minutes later, he brought out to the veranda some old mats, rolled-up, and gave one to each. All was quiet at church house. In the darkness that surrounded it, St. Xavier's was also dark. From the inside, no ray of light emerged.

When Yuvāni came to take back the chimney lamp, not a single ray of light was left. Even still, the three were unable to sleep. The one place from which light emanated was church house, through an opening in a window. One of the three got up quietly to look through the opening and saw that it was Cuvāmi Nānamuttar inside, kneeling and shedding tears. The person who watched understood nothing of what he saw. Could these tears and this sobbing be coming from the same person who just a few hours before had calmed their fears and patted their heads? All the while, the Cuvāmi gazed intently at Christ on a crucifix, suspended on the wall above his head. Withdrawing quietly, the one who had seen the Cuvāmi whispered to the others and brought them to the window so that they could also witness the scene. They, too, did not comprehend what they saw.

'True Son of God! Forgive them for they know not what they do. Have mercy on them who suffer.'

So saying, the Cuvāmi touched his forehead, softly, his chest and both shoulders, with his right hand, sat down on his bed, and put out the chimney lamp. Likewise, they went back to bed and were able to sleep, soundly.

At the Upatēciyār's ringing of the bell for the Angelus, they awoke. Yuvāni came and spoke, saying, 'Tampimār, if you need to relieve yourselves, go and come, and then wash up,' pointing to the palmyra grove a short distance away on the front side of the church house.

It took Yuvāni some time to go out to the palmyra grove and come back, but when he returned he showed them the well and left.

They wondered aloud whether they could draw their own water by pulling on the rope of the well sweep. They knew from experience that they were prohibited from touching the rope at the houses of other castes, even though they were the ones who made the well-sweep work. They expected Yuvāni would soon return to draw the water for them, but Yuvāni never came. The one who pulled on the palmyra-leaf rope of the well sweep did so with a trembling hand.

‘Tampimār! Come drink your coffee. Today’s Sunday, and the Holy Mass will be celebrated here in the church. The Christians of St. Benedict’s are also coming. Wait and see the Mass, then go,’ said Yuvāni, who then returned to the kitchen.

When the three entered the church house, Yuvāni brought them coffee in three bowls. In Nayaṇār houses, they had seen bowls that were decorated with a flower design, but never once had they dared to touch one.

‘Drink,’ said Yuvāni, and went off.

After the bell was rung once, twice, and a third time, Christians came from all around for the Holy Mass. At the entrance into the church, the three men stood. From there, at a distance, they could see a young couple and were surprised that the pair they saw was Ciṇṇi girl and her husband Cimiyoṇ: ‘Is that Ciṇṇi in a blouse and sari?’ they asked. She was radiant, looking very elegant. *Never had they dreamed of seeing her in such attire.

‘Say there, Tirēci! The Holy Mass is about to start. Go on in. I’ll come after I ring the final bell,’ and with this the Upatēciyār went to the belfry. *So now her name is ‘Tirēci’. She’s not the same old Ciṇṇi Girl anymore, thought the three to themselves, smilingly.

‘Aṇṇaṇ! When did you come?’ Cimiyoṇ asked, as Tirēci bowed her head, still feeling shy, the way she always did, and with the same smile upon her lips.

‘Caṅkilitām and I were planning on coming yesterday to help build the walls. Later, though, the Cuvāmi sent us off on another errand. Today’s a day of rest, and that’s why we’re here, not there.

Tomorrow we'll be coming with two or three others. Please don't take it amiss,' Cimiyoṇ said, apologetically.

As the last bell had rung, the Holy Mass was about to start. From where they stood, they could see the Cuvāmi approach the altar. Through spaces between the curtains, they were able to catch a glimpse. Upatēciyār Cantiāpiḷlai began saying the Rosary. Usually, this was the duty of the Caṅkilittām, but today the Upatēciyār did the prayers. Ācīrvātam, the Caṅkilittām of St. Xavier's had suddenly taken ill that morning, and his duties had therefore fallen to the Upatēciyār. It was after eight when the Holy Mass was over and the Cuvāmi had returned to the church house. The three men spoke to the Upatēciyār and then set off.

'Let the Nayiṇārs and their rascals do whatever they want! We won't back off from finishing our church,' said the three, talking among themselves on their way home.

'We not only have to finish building the building, we have to make sure that everyone joins the Church. Then we'll see whether those Veḷḷāḷa farmers are still able to eat us or not!'

Vandalism of the Church

When the three—Vēlaṇ, Murukaṇ, and Kaṇavatiyaṇ—arrived at the village, they found a large crowd at the church construction site. Seeing this, they came at a run, fearing the worst. All the stones that had been laid on top of the foundation had been knocked down and strewn around. Tampaṇ was there, trying to enforce some calm. The vandalism had occurred in the night while Periyakkaḷaṭṭi was deep in sleep.

‘Hey, Murukaṇ! No question about it—this is the work of Tampāppiḷaiyān. Come on! Get ready, Kaṇavatiyāṇ! We’ll go take off his head. That’s how they’ll know we’re men.’

Saying this, Vēlaṇ went into his house and returned with the knife he used for cutting palmyra leaves. Murukaṇ and Kaṇavatiyaṇ ran home to get theirs, too. Tampaṇ was taken aback and did not know at the time how he could restrain them. They had to be controlled, but how? A few minutes later, Murukaṇ and Vēlaṇ reappeared with their knives, sharpened and shinning. Kaṇavatiyaṇ came with a small but handy iron rod.

Swift to act, Tampaṇ pulled off the shawl from around his waist, a wide cloth of four cubits, flung it on the ground, and declared, ‘Whoever is going, let him cross over to the other side of the shawl and go.’

When a man walks over a shawl worn on the shoulders of another person, it amounts to killing its owner. This was the customary way of urging restraint, and Tampaṇ had recourse to it.

For a few minutes, all were in a daze. Tampaṇ had made himself clear in no uncertain terms, and none of the three had the courage to defy him further. They sat on the stones that were strewn around,

their tongues tied and faces glum, hands on their foreheads. How pathetic they looked! Young men, old folks, boys and girls—all were astonished by this sad state of affairs.

‘Cutting Tampāppiḷaiyār’s head off is no big deal, Tampimār. Finishing what we started—now that would be something! Most of all, what we need to do is finish building the church. Go home now, all of you. I’ll go inform the Cuvāmi and then come back,’ Tampan said as he started to leave.

And then an old man asked, ‘Tampimār, why can’t we report this incident to the Headman first, and then go to the Cuvāmi?’ To Tampan, this seemed a good idea, too.

Around this same time, Pūkkaṇṭar could be seen with his mamoty, returning home from his fields through the palmyra grove on the east. He was unaware of anything. He had set off for the fields as soon as the moon went down, and was only now returning after tilling the soil in some new plant beds. When he noticed the crowd, he came. In his presence, all were quiet.

‘Tampi, the Nayiṇārs did this. That’s why I was about to go to the Headman,’ Tampan explained.

After mulling this over, Pūkkaṇṭar laughed to himself.

‘So, Tampan, do you really think the Headman will be on your side in a matter like this? That’s an empty dream! Do the sensible thing. Mark my words. I may not be alive at the time, but the Headman will be found to have been in cahoots with those fellows. Instead of telling that avaricious rascal, go inform the Cuvāmi. He might be in a position to do something.’

After offering his advice, Pūkkaṇṭar went home to his house, while Tampan headed off on the path through the cactus toward the church house.

Sometime that afternoon, Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar’s spring-fitted bullock cart arrived so that he could survey the damage. The Cuvāmi, Upatēciyār Cantiāppiḷai, Cimiyoṇ, and Tampan alighted, and the Cuvāmi walked around the building.

‘Children! In the aftermath of an incident like this, what can we do?’ the Cuvāmi asked of those who had assembled.

‘Cuvāmi, there’s nothing more to think about. We have already decided to go forward with the construction and finish. Not only that, we have also resolved that everyone, even the littlest ones, should convert to the Church,’ answered Kaṇavatiyaṇ in reply.

‘In that case, children, we’ll ask the Catholics of St. Benedict’s to come tomorrow and work. That way, you can finish constructing the church together in just ten or fifteen days. Starting next month, we’ll celebrate the Holy Mass. The Upatēciyār will remain here the whole time and spend the nights here as well. He will instruct all of you in the Catechism. You have nothing to fear. Jesus, who is All-Powerful, will protect and deliver you.’

Saying this, the Cuvāmi walked toward the cart, followed by the Upatēciyār.

‘They may try to stop the cart by throwing stones, the way they did yesterday. Let’s go with him as security,’ said Vēlaṇ, Murukaṇ, and Kaṇavatiyaṇ, as they set off.

The three followed behind the cart until it had passed through the cactus by-lane onto the broad lane and then returned, persuaded by the Cuvāmi that they were no longer needed.

The next day, all the Christians of St. Benedict’s came out to Periyakkaḷaṭṭi, including Cimiyoṇ and Ciṇṇi. Her name, though, was no longer ‘Ciṇṇi’ but ‘Tirēci.’ Caṅkilittām Rāyappaṇ called her by her new name several times in hopes that it might register in the minds of the people.

The Periyakkaḷaṭṭi people were pleasantly surprised when they saw what Ciṇṇi was wearing and how she comported herself. A few of the older women fondled her face, gently, and cracked their knuckles to protect her from the evil eye. In return, Tirēci behaved herself humbly toward one and all. The days of her youthful demeanor were over. While the construction was going on, she ran here and there like someone in charge, doing what needed doing and

giving out encouragement all around, even to the youngest children. When noontime came, there was a meal for everybody of *piṭṭu* made of red millet, spinach curry, and sambar of loach fish.

Tirēci then went out with two other women to a well that lay in-between Periyakkaḷaṭṭi and Ciṇṇakkaḷaṭṭi. At the time, five or six Nayaṇāttis were on their way home after attending the funeral of a village Nayaṇār. One behind the other, they came walking along the embankment. Two were dressed in saris without blouses; three wore both a sari and a blouse.

‘Who’s the woman in a sari, drawing water?’

‘I have no idea. The other two are Paḷḷis.’

‘I can’t place her. Who among the Paḷḷis would wear a sari?’

‘Strange, isn’t it? Who could she be?’

‘Hey! I know! She’s the daughter of Naṇṇiyaṇ, the fellow who was sentenced to death for stabbing the Headman. She was the bonded laborer over at Cellammā’s house, the one who left.’

‘Oh! The one she chased out for seducing her younger son? So when did she begin wearing a sari? A blouse too! *Looks like she’s married a Christian. They must be the ones who allowed her to wear a sari. And now she’s come over here.’

‘If she wants to wear a sari over there, fine, but not over here. Let’s go tell Tampāppiḷaiyār Aṇṇaṇ and the Headman and see what they say.’

Tirēci was able to observe the women talking and overhear a bit of it, before the three had returned with the water they fetched. She knew that a quarrel was brewing on her account.

The meal ended. Night had come. By now, two more layers of stone had been added to the height of the walls, compared with the day before. Cooking for the evening meal was being done out in the palmyra grove in an open space. The Periyakkaḷaṭṭi people had gone home for their meals, and the cooking out in the grove was for feeding those who came to help from outside. Among themselves, the women whispered that the rice and vegetables had been provided by Pūkkaṇṭar’s house.

The cooking was being done enthusiastically when Pūkkāṇṭar arrived. Everyone stood and paid him their respects. He told the girls to sit and gestured with his hands so that they would, while seating himself on a palymra log. Tall flames were shooting up from the cooking pots.

'Did anything strange happen today?' Pūkkāṇṭar inquired of Tampan.

'Nothing at all, Tampi.'

'But there was a big crowd of women that gathered at Tampāppillaiyār's. That fellow the Headman was there, too. I saw them on my way home, and so I came over to ask about it.'

Having heard what Pūkkāṇṭar said, Tirēci stepped forward. Only then did Pūkkāṇṭar notice that the woman standing in front of him was wearing a sari.

'Now who's that standing there? Ah! Looks like our Naṇṇiyan's Ciṇṇi Girl. I'm seeing you for the first time since you left and had a Christian marriage. Did your husband come with you, child? He and I are unacquainted.'

Even before Pūkkāṇṭar finished, Tampan called Cimiyoṇ, 'Tampi Cimiyoṇ! Come over here. Pūkkāṇṭar wants to meet you.'

Cimiyoṇ, who was standing behind the others, stepped forward, so that both he and Ciṇṇi stood in front of Pūkkāṇṭar. Seeing them together was a new experience, and Pūkkāṇṭar instinctively stood up when he saw them, saying, 'Child! In life, may you do well,' as he patted Tirēci on the shoulder.

'Young man, you are a stranger to me. The girl here is good as gold. It was all for her sake that Naṇṇiyan and his sons were sentenced to death. See to it that she lacks nothing in life.'

Having spoken, Pūkkāṇṭar patted Cimiyoṇ on the shoulders, too, and then sat. The eyes of all who were present misted over. Poṇṇi, the wife of Naṇṇiyan's son Mūttavaṇ, holding her infant in her arms, wiped the tears from her face with the end of her kuṛukku. It was a while before anyone spoke.

‘Some Veḷḷāla women were saying they saw a young woman wearing a sari. That’s why the crowd gathered at Tampāppillaiyār’s. Now, I get it. Tell me, child, did anyone see you?’ Pūkkaṇṭar asked.

‘When I went out at noon to draw water, five or six Nayiṇāttis came walking along the big embankment. They pointed toward me and talked among themselves,’ said Tirēci.

‘Now see, Tampan, if what I’ve been saying hasn’t come true. The Nayiṇāttis were angry that a Naḷatti was wearing a sari. *If the women folk weren’t here, I would tell you just how many Naḷla and Paḷla gigolos those women have. But things are alright, Tampan. Just be a little careful. A quarrel could erupt over Naṇṇiyaṇ’s daughter wearing a sari. There’s nothing these devils won’t stoop to. I’ve got to be going,’ and with this Pūkkaṇṭar stood to go, adding, ‘Hey there, Ciṇṇi! Hey there, son! We’ll meet again.’

‘Her name isn’t Ciṇṇi any longer. Its ‘Tirēci,’ Tampan reminded him.

‘Do I know that name?’ Why did they have to make it so short? They could have called her ‘Teresammā.’ Even so, ‘Tirēci’ seems respectable enough, compared to others. So, see you again, Tirēci Girl.’

With this, Pūkkaṇṭar left and the evening meal came to an end. Somebody, though, would have to keep watch on the new building, and it was decided that three or four persons would take turns. With everyone taking a shift until dawn, the parish security arrangements worked well.

Tirēci Disgraced

Today's work started in the early morning. Instead of everyone from all the families coming and crowding the work area, one person from each family was deputed. The rest devoted themselves to their respective livelihoods. They labored in earnest and with grim determination to complete the project within the timeframe stipulated by the Cuvāmi. One way or another, said Caṅkilitāṁ Rāyappaṇ, constructing the walls would have to be over by the end of the day so that on the next the foundation for the altar could be laid. Everyone worked fast, as if all had given assent to his request.

Noon was fast approaching. Flames leaped into the air around the cooking pots. Taking one of them, Tirēci walked out into the palmyra grove all by herself, only to find that four or five Nayiṇāttis had all of a sudden arrived on the spot. Before she had even noticed, Tirēci was surrounded. One pulled at her sari, another tore her blouse into pieces, while yet a third one removed her sari and tore it to shreds.

'So, does the young Naḷa prostitute now have to wear a sari as well?' one shouted.

'Look at that blouse! Since when has a Naḷatti like you become a Veḷḷāḷa woman?' So saying, another one grabbed her hair and gave it a yank.

Numb with fear, Tirēci could not even let out a shout. Throwing her down, forcefully, into the mud at the side of the well, they walked off.

Tirēci got up. She covered herself with the torn sari and sari blouse, crossed through the palmyra grove and stepped into Kalattī village, the ragged strips dangling down. Everyone was shocked to

see her in such a state. They gathered around her, but Tirēci neither wept nor wailed—she gnashed her teeth. Cimiyoṇ came at a run, with Kaṇavatiyaṇ and the others following behind. Within a few moments, Cimiyoṇ had figured everything out. He grabbed hold of a nearby mamoty and set off for the Kalatti well.

The well, though, was completely deserted. Not a soul was there, to the disappointment of Kaṇavatiyaṇ and the others who had come up behind him. Cimiyoṇ shook with emotion, and so his companions put their arms around him and brought him back. No one uttered a word. Cimiyoṇ wept. He could not bear to speak of the shame his wife had suffered.

‘Now I’m going to have Tirēci put on a sari and go process through each lane of these Nayaṇattis,’ he shouted.

‘Cimiyoṇ! Make no mistake. Our hands are not so weak that all we can do is pluck tamarind fruit. Tirēci! Go put a sari on and a sari blouse!’ exclaimed Kaṇavatiyaṇ.

This was all going on when Tampan returned. In no time, he sized up the situation.

‘So, I could be wrong, but are you going to give up on building the church and get yourselves involved in this business instead? You seem to have forgotten that it was at the Cuvāmi’s request that we were going to build the church before anything else. Well now, Tampimār! What’s come over you? It was out of anger that those people tore her sari off. Can we afford to retaliate to each and every provocation?’

Before Tampan had finished speaking, Upatēciyār Cantiāpillai arrived, his face radiant. Without taking stock of the situation, he came right out and said, ‘Cuvāmi has sent us a message. He’s received word from the Governor, it seems. The death sentence on Naṇṇiyaṇ and Mūttavaṇ has been commuted! And Iḷaiyavaṇ’s been acquitted.’

In surprise and joy, Tirēci cried out. Mūttavaṇ’s wife sobbed and sobbed. The people who were there seemed incredulous. It took a while for things to calm down. Only then was the Upatēciyār

apprised of the incident concerning Tirēci's torn sari. He was, however, not surprised to hear it.

'I would like to tell you all that Holy Mass will be celebrated tomorrow morning at a festival at Our Lady of Refuge, a Karaiyāra church in Uyarappulam. Our Cuvāmi will be there, too. Tirēci must wear a sari, and we should walk through all these lanes on our way, as though we were going on a procession.'

All were exuberant and agreed that this was the thing to do. Tirēci stopped sobbing, and Mūttavaṇ's wife stopped as well.

'Upatēciyār!' said Cimiyoṇ. 'Tomorrow morning, Tirēci should carry a candle as big as she is and go on her knees from the entrance to the altar. I made a vow that she would do this if her father and brothers were saved from execution.'

'The Church of Our Lady of Refuge, Tampi Cimiyoṇ, isn't very large, and I don't know whether it will have a candle her size. I'll buy one at St. Mary's Cathedral in Jaffna and come. In the morning, we'll start from here.'

Cimiyoṇ agreed, went into a hut, brought out some coins, and placed them in the Upatēciyār's hands.

Work on the building did not resume right away. In the interval, Tirēci served coffee to all who were there. Her heart throbbed joyously and she did her work exuberantly. That's how she was—whenever she was happy, there would be a spring in her step. On the day of her wedding, she had come out of the church holding Cimiyoṇ's hands and jumping about, forgetting that she was a bride. There were many people she bewildered. Even now she was jumping around. It was in her nature to be that way.

Tampāppiḷaiyār Kills His Wife

Day dawned. *Tirēci was wearing a white sari, a white blouse, and a white scarf. Cimiyoṇ walked at her side, wearing a white dhoti, a white shirt, a white scarf, and a folded shawl. He walked with his head up. There were thirty or so in the procession, women wrapped in *kuṟukku*, *men whose dhotis had been tied up above their knees, and small children wearing clothes that did not cover them completely. None of the Nayiṇārs and Nayiṇāttis had expected them to process through their lanes. Tirēci carried a candle as tall as herself, looking like a scepter in her hands. The Upatēciyār had decreed that she alone should carry it. Cantiāppiḷai himself, the Upatēciyār, stood head and shoulders above everyone else in the crowd. He had a scarf tied around his neck above his shirt and walked majestically.

At a bend in the lane, small groups of people had gathered who thought the reason for having a procession was for the Naḷavas and Paḷlas to make a show of strength on account of yesterday's incident and the tearing off of Tirēci's sari and blouse. Even so, no one was bold enough to stand in the way of these upstarts. There were a few who ran to Tampāppiḷaiyār's.

'They came through the lane near my house, too.'

Hearing Tampāppiḷaiyār say this, they realized that he was powerless to act. Mayilu asked Tampāppiḷaiyār for his shotgun, but Tampāppiḷaiyār knew that he would be the one to blame if someone used it in broad daylight. He weaseled out by telling Mayilu that the cartridges had all been used up. Everyone knew, the administration included, that nobody in the village had a gun but him. Mayilu knew that Tampāppiḷaiyār was lying but decided a protest would be pointless. Still, he and the other Vellāḷas were itching to act, and

so was Tampāppillaiyār. During all the uproar, the procession had moved quite a distance down the lane.

‘It looks like they’re all headed for the Karaiyāra church. Nobody will stay behind. Come on, boys, let’s go knock down the walls of the church they’re building,’ one of them said, diverting the people’s anger into a different direction.

A group of ten set off for Periyakkaḷaṭṭi but came right back. Standing watch were about twenty people with crowbars and axes. The ten who returned stood there in the palmyra grove near the tank, smarting under their defeat, unable to fathom what had happened.

And then Citamparam, the nephew of Ciṇṇakuṭṭi who had a business selling vegetables at the police station, came running through the palmyra grove, shouting, ‘Did you hear the news?’

Before they could respond, he told them in a rush: ‘It seems that the death sentence on Naṇṇiyaṇ and his sons has been commuted. ḷaiyavaṇ has been acquitted, and the sentence on the others reduced to ten years.’

‘What’s that, Citamparam! Is that the truth you’re telling us? Don’t mess with us. Where did you get this?’ one fellow immediately asked.

‘Would I tell you anything I didn’t know for a fact? My uncle, who heard it at the police station, told me this morning. At first, I didn’t believe it. He said he was going there with a load of vegetables and would confirm it before he returned.’

All were horrified and set off in the direction of Tampāppillaiyār’s house.

‘Tampāppillai Aṇṇai!’ one person called out. ‘It seems the death sentence on Naṇṇiyaṇ and his sons has been commuted.’

At first, Tampāppillaiyār was so shocked he couldn’t utter even a single word. After a while, someone asked, ‘What’s this, Aṇṇai? Can’t talk? So what do we do now?’

‘Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar, that devil from Māṇippāy, he’s the one we have to cut down. You didn’t believe me when I said he’d be the

one who'd try to have the death sentence commuted. Now do you believe me? Would they escape like this if we had cut his head off way back then? How many times did I tell you we ought to finish him off?' Tampāppillaiyār said, without finishing all that he wanted to say.

'No doubt you did,' someone said. 'In the meantime, you also said he was a man of your own lineage, the son of your uncle Cuvāminātan of Mānippāy and was a cousin of yours. Forgot that, have you? Now that the mood around here has changed, you sing a different tune. Are you saying we should have had him killed even though he's a cousin of yours? How often did we tell you to go to him at least once and ask him not to antagonize his relations by taking up the cause of the Naḷavas and Paḷlas? You dithered and dithered and did nothing. Now that the death sentence has been commuted, you raise a hue and cry. Back then, you shouted at us, asking why we would ask you, Tampāppillaiyār, to go see a man who had converted to the beef-eating Christian religion. Now you talk like a big man!'

The person who said this spoke angrily, with conviction. Tampāppillaiyār had no answer.

In his imagination, Tampāppillaiyār had already murdered Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar a thousand times. Two thousand times he had taken hold of his beard, twisted him around, and given him a beating. Three thousand times he had pulled off his cassock, taken the crucifix tucked into his black sash, broken it, and thrown it away.

'What's this, Aṇṇai? You're so quiet,' said Mayilu. 'The Cuvāmi saved the Naḷava fellows from the death penalty. He got a Naḷava girl to wear a sari and blouse. He showed how a procession could be made to go through our lanes. On top of that, now he's having a church constructed. He's a man of your own lineage. Look here, Tampāppillai Aṇṇai, you aren't going to be any use to us anymore. We'll have to start doing things our way. If we finish off that bearded rascal, everything will be just fine.'

Mayilu said this and left, followed by the others. This kind of disgrace was too much for Tampāppillaiyār to bear, and he was truly flabbergasted.

Seated on the back veranda, Vellaiacci Ammāl was using a damp cloth to sponge up some leftover paddy grain. She gave an impression of total disinterest in what had just transpired. Cevvanti Nācciyār was in the kitchen, minding her business. It was in her nature to seem utterly detached from the things around her.

‘He’s obsessed with that lineage of his. It would be that Cuvāmi fellow from his own people who would do this to him. That’s the only way to cut his pride in his ancestry down to size.’

Vellaiacci Ammāl had been talking to herself, chortling between clenched teeth, but her laughter accidentally burst out.

‘What’s that laughter about, woman? You find it amusing, do you? The day I married you was the ruination of my lineage,’ Tampāpillaiyār shouted.

‘Why say that? Did you have to marry me in such a mighty hurry? You could have married one of those women you had fun with when you used to go out carousing. You were so insistent when you came to abduct me at my father’s house. You could have married that Naḷa woman Ciṅki or one of the Iṇuvil devadasis. Why did you have to go to such extremes? Instead of killing that Sinhalese girl, you could have brought her home and solemnized a marriage. So what do you gain by saying that all your misery comes from marrying me, Vellaiacci Ammāl?’

When Vellaiacci Ammāl had finished, Tampāpillaiyār began hitting her and kicking her, scattering the paddy grains that were in her winnowing basket. Cevvanti Nācciyār came running from the kitchen, crying, ‘Aiyō! Appu is going to beat Ammā to death! Aiyō! Aiyō!’ she howled at the top of her voice.

The howling could be heard, clearly, from Pūkkaṇṭar’s house, but when his girls ran over toward the fence in the back he shouted at them from the front, saying, ‘Come back! How many times do I have to tell you that when there’s a fight going on in a neighbor’s house you don’t go trying to see what’s going on?’ And so they turned away and went to the kitchen instead.

‘What are you up to, Master? Each blow a hard one. Why be so brutal?’

These words, overheard from Tampāppillaiyār’s house, came from the voice of the Kōviya woman Mutti.

‘Aiyō! Aiyō! Ammā’s dead. Appu beat her to death. Aiyō! Aiyō!’ Cevvanti was heard to say.

‘Why are you howling, Nācciyār? Your mother is all right. Don’t howl!’ This was what Mutti said, trying to comfort Cevvanti.

Afterwards, there was total silence from their side of the fence. Pūkkaṇṭar pricked up his hears, attentively, but all that could be heard was the barking of Tampāppillaiyār’s dog, Nakulaṇ, and the mooing of a female calf.

‘See, there!’ said Pūkkaṇṭar’s wife. ‘It looks like the wretched fellow has finally beaten his wife to death. Even the dog is barking. The female calf is mooing. *It looks as if Lord Yama has already come and gone.’

Pūkkaṇṭar stopped his wife from talking further, saying, ‘Now, now! Mind your own business.’

And then, muttering beneath his breath, Pūkkaṇṭar left the house: ‘“A dog’s barking. A calf’s mooing. Lord Yama’s come and gone.” It’s as if she’s seen them right in front of her eyes.’

Festival at the Church of Our Lady of Refuge

People who had gathered at the church were surprised to see Tirēci making an appearance as though she were an angel holding a candle as large as herself, with Cimiyoṇ in white clothes at her side, followed by a crowd. Until now, nobody had arrived at church like this. Nor in their church had they ever seen such a huge candle. On all sides, the elderly and the little ones surrounded them.

At the church entrance, a flag post tall enough to fly two flags had been installed. From the top, a flag was flying, and slopping down from the flag post were ten ropes, from each of which smaller flags were suspended. The ropes had been fastened to trees at various places. The interior of the church was decorated with paper festoons. Inside were two rows of pillars made of ironwood. On each of them, two branches of palm leaves had been attached, forming a cross. In the middle of each pillar, wicks in globe-lamps gave off illumination. A long red cloth covered the altar, a large cross made of white cloth stitched to its center.

Recitation of the rituals had to be finished within a few minutes, and the third bell had been rung already. The next one would be the last. Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar could be seen standing in the front veranda of the church house, fondling his beard and watching. In the midst of the crowd, Upatēciyār Cantiāpillai was visible. The Cuvāmi approached the crowd. This was unusual because no priest had ever done this before. Cuvāmi Īyaṇ, the church's parish priest had always waited for the crowd to walk toward him, and he had never gone toward them.

Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar approached Tirēci. Tirēci and Cimiyoṇ paid him their respects, saying, 'Praise the Lord!' and the Cuvāmi in turn reciprocated with the customary blessing.

'I thought only the two of you would be coming, but you've brought a good number of your people along with you. I'm delighted. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, will guide you on the true path.' Saying this, he asked Upatēciyār Cantiāppiḷḷai to have everyone go into the church, while he returned to his room.

The final bell was rung. Outside, the *paraī* drums were being beaten. Recitation of the prayers had started. All eyes were upon Tirēci, who was down on her knees, holding the candle as large as she was. Cimiyoṇ mixed in with the male crowd. Prayers had started, with the Rosary recited in between, followed by the Prayer of Intercession. Afterwards, the tinkling sound of a small bell could be heard from the altar. More *paraī* drums!

In the midst of all this furor, the curtain concealing the altar was pulled back in slow motion. In a white surplice and stole over his white cassock, Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar stepped up to the altar table and began the Holy Mass. Since Cuvāmi Iyaṇ had gone for a few weeks' holiday to Germany, his home country, Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar was performing the duties of parish Cuvāmi. It was a High Mass, and so he sang in Latin, which the acolytes repeated. This was echoed by four or five young girls. A harmonium provided background music. The Mass was reaching its climax and the time had almost come for the Consecration of the Bread, the Body of Jesus, and of the Wine, his Blood. First, however, the Cuvāmi had to preach a sermon, and there was plenty of time for that. Beforehand, Caṅkilittām went around with a plate, collecting the offering.

Going to the pulpit, the Cuvāmi started off with the words 'Beloved Christians!' and went on speaking. The subject he had chosen was 'martyrs and converts.' The sermon was so moving it had everyone weeping and wiping their noses. Even Tirēci's relations, wrapped in their *kuṛukku*, their clothing dirty, kuṭumis carelessly tied up, and everyone all covered with dust, were made to cry at what they heard.

When the sermon ended, the Consecration took place. Caṅkilittām explained each part of the Mass in Tamil. And then to receive the Holy Eucharist, the men, followed by the women, lined

up in a row at the altar railing, opened their mouths for the Bread, which was made into the Body of Jesus, to be placed on their tongues. Only those who had confessed their sins and received Absolution the day before were allowed to receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Although almost everyone lined up in a row to receive it, Tirēci did not. She had been given Absolution a week earlier, the day before the Mass at St. Benedict's. Afterwards, she had gone to Periyakkaḷaṭṭi to work on the church building, and in the meantime had committed a sin. From her seat, she turned to glance at the side where the males were sitting. Cimiyoṇ, too, had not gotten up. Together, they must have committed a sin or two.

Tirēci was feeling shy and thought that everyone must be gazing at her suspiciously. In her heart, there was sin, and it was restless. After receiving her first Absolution, the Cuvāmi had told her, 'From midnight onwards, until you receive the Holy Eucharist, you have to keep a fast. You must stay pure in your fast.' One day this came to mind, and she asked Cimiyoṇ, 'May I know what it means to keep a 'pure fast'?' Cimiyoṇ touched her, saying, 'It's keeping your heart *and* body pure.' That was why she had not gone forward to receive the Holy Eucharist. She had not been able to abstain for the last four days; not only she, but Cimiyoṇ, too. After the Holy Eucharist, there was a Gospel reading by Caṅkilittām, followed by the Benediction, and with that the Holy Mass was over.

Next in the day's program was to process around the village with the statue of Our Lady of Refuge in a splendid-looking casket. When the preparations were ready, Upatēciyār Cantiappaḷḷai approached Tirēci to light the candle she was holding. He had her recite the Our Father and Hail Mary, which she had recently memorized, and then walk on her knees up to the altar where she placed the candle. Everyone watched as she did this, though it took a long time. And when she was done, the casket of pure teak with Our Lady of Refuge in it was carried around again. It was a gorgeous piece of craftsmanship, ornamental and inlaid with ebony. The holy image of Our Lady of Refuge was dressed in silk, adorned with gold necklaces, and on her head was a crown of pearls. Having one

hand raised, the holy image appeared to make a gesture of providing refuge to her devotees.

With Our Lady of Refuge in this dramatic posture, the procession started off, accompanied by the deafening sound of Ṭāṇiyal's mridanga and an ear-piercing rendition by Appālai of a folk tune mixed up with Carnatic music. Around the lanes in the vicinity of the church it went, stopping at each of five small shrines where a prayer was recited and a hymn sung. At junctions, it tarried longer and short musical recitals were performed. By the time the holy image had returned to the church, it was almost noon. The Cuvāmi lifted the holy image down, blessed the crowd with it, and returned it to its place inside the church.

Outside the church, kañci was already being distributed. The expense for this was met by the Anṇammāl household, a Paḷḷa family of the parish, even though the refreshments were meant for everyone. It was other people, though, who poured the kañci. Members of the Anṇammāl household had the specific task of cutting leaves from two or three palmyra trees on the church premises and making receptacles out of them for holding the kañci. They did not think of this work as beneath them, for they were proud that everyone referred to it as 'the Anṇammāl's kañci.' An ample amount was dished out to Tirēci and everyone who had come to church with her. It was sufficient for the noonday meal.

When Tirēci's people were getting themselves ready to go, Upatēciyār Cantiāpillai reminded them that, 'You are welcome to stay for the church feast planned for tonight. *You'll be able to see the staging of a folk drama called *The Golden Rosary*, and you could go home in the morning.'

Eventually, considering the situation back in the village, it was decided that Tirēci and Cimiyoṇ and two others would remain behind while the rest went back. A few of the small ones also stayed.

Preparations had begun for the evening meal of rice. In four or five places, holes had been dug in the ground to hold huge copper vessels on top. The veranda of church house was full of women

slicing vegetables and scrapping coconuts. In one area, men were chopping firewood into small pieces; in another, rice was being taken out of sacks, washed in buckets, and put into the cooking vessels. The fire under the pots was kindled with the fresh stems of palmyra leaves. From there, the boiled rice was taken to an empty corner of the veranda where the rice was leveled on palmyra leaf mats. In another place, a distance away, four or five tortoises were being chopped up into chunks of meat. Others, using fish slicers, chopped the chunks into smaller pieces. Where the cooking was being done, all was lively and brisk.

People bought mats that cost a fanam each. These were spread under the trees so that people could sit and watch the events unfold. The grounds were packed. Part of the multitude consisted of Tirēci and Cimiyoṇ, sitting a little apart from each other. Cimiyoṇ was eager to sit at Tirēci's side and explain what was going on at the church, but in between the two sat some elderly folk and the little ones. Ah well ...

After a while Cimiyoṇ got up to buy some roasted gram and groundnuts. These he brought in a piece of cloth and placed in the middle of his neighbors. Actually, wherever Tirēci was, that was where the center was. There were chickpeas, too, soaked in turmeric and so well-roasted that their pods had opened up. Round garden peas the size of jujube fruits, perfectly roasted, had also opened their pods. Pure white popcorn, popped open to look like clusters of jasmine blossoms had been added. Saffron colored groundnuts, too, as long as a finger, with three or four nuts inside. All this had been heaped together, and for all this Cimiyoṇ had only paid half a fanam.

'How much did you pay for this?' asked an old woman.

'Only half a fanam, Grandmother,' Cimiyoṇ replied.

'That's really cheap! At the Kali Temple festival in our neighborhood we would have had to pay two fanams,' said Tirēci, who found everything satisfactory. Everyone partook of the gram except Cimiyoṇ, who could not reach that far. Over and over, he held out his hand so that Tirēci could give him some. That meant

he could hold her hand a little, too, and her lips parted to reveal her sparkling teeth. This lasted only a second or so before she tried to free her hand. This kind of love-play lasted only a few minutes.

No one realized how fast the time had gone, when all of a sudden the final bell for dinner was rung. Once more, Cimiyoṇ went over to the shop where mats were sold and bought small boxes made out of palmyra leaves to hold their dinners. There were just enough for everyone.

It was now five o'clock, and the seating of people for dinner was being done by the persons in charge. It would, however, be seven before the people had all been seated, the food served and eaten, and the people dispersed. It would not be until around eight that the drama would begin out in the open space near the woodapple tree at Naṭukkuri_{cc}i. And so the fellowship dinner started. The cooked vegetables and the watery turtle curry were poured into the rice that had been put out for the steam to evaporate. This was then all mixed together and rolled into balls to be placed in each palmyra-leaf container. People who were tall or fat were served two each. Even though Kaspāru, Appāllai Caṭṭāmpiyār, Appukkuṭṭi, Teyvam, Estākki, Nikolaṇ, Cuvāmpillai, Muttaiyā, Veliccōr, Avēcu and others ran around sweating and did the best they could, it was only seven o'clock when the serving was over. Only then were the people Vellaicci Ammāl allowed to eat, starting all together. As a signal, a bell was to be rung. It was, and the moon at the time was also at its apex. Once the dinner was over, they all went out to the open-air theater.

While Cimiyoṇ got only one ball of rice, Tirēci happened to get two. Since he was sitting beside her, it was convenient for her to slip one of them into his container. Cimiyoṇ tried to stop her, but she succeeded anyway. He was really concerned that she might not have had enough food, and so he took the ball of rice and returned it to hers. She put it back again into his. In the end, they fell silent and divided the rice balls with their fingers wet with saliva. It was the only way they knew of to quench the thirst in their hearts.

The Golden Rosary

Around eight o'clock the space out in the open air near the Woodapple tree filled up with spectators. Today, for the first time, the drama called *The Golden Rosary* was being performed. For this, they had arranged to get Pēturuppiḷḷai of Nāvānturāi to come down as their resident poet and director of music. He had been put up in the village for a longish period of time. Whenever he dictated songs, two persons were on hand to write them down. Next, after an audition where they had to sing and act, the performers were chosen. The drama was then put to music, using the mridanga. There had been more than fifteen rehearsals. To meet the expenses, an entrance fee had been charged for the last one. On one occasion, prawn nets had been cast into the sea in a collective effort to raise money. Many had taken great pains to make this happen, and today the drama, a six-month effort, was being staged. Pilippar, who came out from town, was an expert in stage scenery, design and decoration, and costumes. Antōṇikkutṭi, a musician from Nāvānturāi, did the mridanga compositions. Kaṇagu, who was known as the 'Kitchen-Light Emperor,' did the lighting. It was not an easy matter to coordinate all these things.

Appālai, the director, and Atikāram, the stage-manager, ran here and there, doing things briskly and whispering into each other's ear. Behind the stage, costumes were being readied. The restlessness of the crowd was increasing. People who had come from other villages parked their bullock carts in a row at the end of the open area. No space was left, however, for the ones that kept coming. Female relatives of the actors crowded the backside of the stage, bumping into each other in their eagerness to be of help to their kin.

It was half-past eight when some people went to bring Cuvāmi Nānamuttar, who was escorted to the stage from the backside of the shed that housed it. The curtain, which had a street scene painted on it, was raised, revealing Cuvāmi Nānamuttar, sitting in a large and beautiful chair. Here and there, firecrackers were heard to go off, and it was quite a while before they stopped. Afterwards, there was perfect silence.

The Cuvāmi stood, surveying the crowd, and began speaking. 'Beloved Christians! I wish to express my thanks to God Almighty for giving me another year to live and for the opportunity to come and participate in the grand festivals of the Church of Our Lady of Refuge.'

'Beloved Christians! In thousands, you have assembled. For you, today is a fortunate day. The Christians of the Church of Our Lady of Refuge are going to stage a musical drama called *The Golden Rosary*. This is more than a mere drama. It will not only show that we have a glorious faith, it will also help us in the task of converting the heathen of other religions.'

'Beloved! May the grace of God Almighty be with you so that you may sit quietly and watch the drama until the end.'

When the Cuvāmi finished, the curtain dropped once more. Having had plenty of work to do that day, the Cuvāmi returned to his room, needing rest. A large number of people walked back to the church house with him.

On stage, the mridanga thundered. A prelude to the drama was sung; the musical drama was about to start. The curtain was pulled aside, revealing a vacant throne on stage. Standing on both sides were the narrators who provided comic relief as well, equipped with walking sticks. Behind the throne were two female-like figures, holding fly whisks. In Act One, King Pālarājā appeared on stage. His long, introductory song about himself could be heard as he approached the stage from inside. Around the stage was an enclosure, two cubits in height, in the shape of a 'U'. The vocalists and the mridanga player remained stationed inside this enclosure, from which they provided background music for the introductory songs.

Now on stage, holding his scepter, King Pālarājā paid his respects to the audience. Finishing the verses that introduced him, he sang a line that said 'I will rule from the majestic throne.' He then jumped onto it like a lion and started singing again: 'You, O Narrator, must listen to what I say!' Ordered by the king to summon a minister to the throne, one of them went inside.

For his role as King Pālarājā in those first few minutes, the audience applauded Tāṇṇiyal. When he had first arrived on stage, a rocket had been launched into the air where it exploded into a shower of sparkles in the shape of an umbrella. This was followed by the rattling sound of 'ship crackers,' as they were called, which were being imported in large quantities from China.

The king's minister was now about to appear, and his verses of self-introduction could be heard from inside. Once it was over, he appeared on stage. The person who played him was Anṇiyās, who had a squint and a leg that was shorter than the other. He did his best to control them both, and was quite successful during his performance, his first. The people who had waited eagerly to laugh at his limp were disappointed. In his honor, firecrackers went off as well.

Afterwards, there was an exchange between the king and his minister on matters of state. On sending the minister off, he then ordered the narrator to summon his wife. Her song of self-introduction could be heard from inside as she approached. Arrived on stage, she looked like an angel in green. Cālamōṇ, who acted the queen, had a very natural gait, and that enhanced his role a lot. The verses he sang began, 'Praise the King of Kings, Praise the precious Lord God! Beloved husband, may I know why you have called me?' Asking this, Cālamōṇ fluttered one end of his sari and sat down on half of the throne. To the audience, the scene was simply enthralling.

From their throne, the king and queen ordered the narrator to bring their beloved son, Pālacuraṇ. Played by Yōccēppu, Pālacuraṇ came out and jumped up onto the throne between his parents. They asked about his health and admonished him to abide by the precepts of God.

The scene ended in in the midst of a great hubbub. The curtain with the street scene came down carefully, lowered by Pilippar, who was in charge of the scenery. Standing behind the scenery, script in hand, was Caṭṭampiyār, who was tired from prompting his actors in such a way that the audience could not hear his voice. That was a tough assignment. Whenever the actors forgot their lines and failed to remember what they were, he had to prompt them with the appropriate words of dialogue.

The first scene alone had taken a good long time; after this, there were fifteen more. The second now got off to a quick start with Valēntirirājan, a Hindu monarch, arriving on stage. The verse he used to introduce himself was heard, and from the stage he paid his respects to the audience and leaped onto the throne. His trousers were as narrow as bamboo poles, and this made it rather difficult to get up on the throne, although he somehow managed.

Playing the role of King Valēntiri, Ācīrvātam sang his introductory verse in a low voice. Even the narrators, standing on opposite sides of the stage enjoyed how he sang and kept time. Afterwards, there was the usual lighting of firecrackers. Aṇṇiyās played the part of minister to both kings, and so a slight change of hairstyle had to suffice. Limping as he normally did, Aṇṇiyās come on stage, and everyone applauded when they recognized him as the short-legged, squint-eyed Aṇṇiyās they knew.

Again, a dialogue took place between King Valēntiri over matters of state, and on the departure of the minister an order was given to bring the queen, who came accordingly. It was Moses who acted the part of the queen, and he had never been to a musical drama like this one in his entire life. Still, his singing of his introductory verses came off quite well for the kind of tune it was, and he walked elegantly, like a swan. He then ran over to King Valēntiri and sat on his right thigh. The scene was a boost to Moses's reputation. The dialogue of the king with the queen was overtly libidinous, as he was, of course, a Hindu king and had to be portrayed that way. Following this lewd exchange, an order was issued for summoning their daughter, Maṇḍōrañcitam.

'Hey! Hey! Maṇōrañcitam is going to appear!' shouted the excited female fans in the audience, as they heard Cuvāmpillai's squeaky voice singing his introductory verses from behind the stage. To blend with his, the vocalists doing the background music also had to sing squeakily, and this they managed to do even though it was quite difficult. Arrived on stage, Maṇōrañcitam looked like an angel in red, her physical features all very pleasing to behold. Getting down from their throne, the king and queen carried her back and seated her in the middle between them. Cuvāmpillai's way of walking had a flounce like that of a young damsel. The applause of the audience filled the sky, the crackle of crackers pierced the ears, and a rocket shot up and exploded, sending out sparkles in the shape of an umbrella that fanned out a good distance before they disappeared.

Tirēci, Cimiyoṇ, and a couple of the young ones were seated on a mat in the middle of the crowd. The women who had the ends of their kuṟukku tucked up and the rest of the children who had come with them, were sitting on another side. Tirēci was holding Cimiyoṇ's hands. He would have preferred to put his arms around her, but that was impossible because every now and then the people would look their way.

After the parents instructed Maṇōrañcitam to abide by the precepts of Hinduism, the second scene came to a close. The moon was about to set, and it was already after ten o'clock. In the next scene, a park, Maṇōrañcitam appeared with two of her handmaids, singing a song, 'In our beloved palace, a beautiful peacock is dancing!' And then in quick succession other scenes, including King Pālarājā sending emissaries to collect tribute from King Valēntiri, King Valēntiri's refusal, the ensuing battle between their armies, Pālarājā's defeat by Valēntiri, and so forth.

Half an hour was needed for the next scene to be gotten ready. As Pālarājā, the vanquished king, prayed in church, a winged-angel descended from heaven to give him a magic sword and rosary before disappearing. Mācilāmaṇi, son of Veliccōr, had been assigned the angel's role. The reason for the long delay was that the angel was

supposed to float through the air for a distance of fifty yards. Pilippar, the one who was in charge of decorations, had tied three stout ropes to a distant palmyra tree. Tables and chairs were piled up on top of each other until Mācilāmaṇi, a handsome lad, was high enough for his wings. Three metal bars were attached to the boy's back, and through them the rope had been threaded. The angel would have to make an appearance on stage at just the right moment.

While rumors of the angel's imminent arrival were circulating through the audience, King Pālarājā started his multi-versed song of supplication from inside the church. Ṭāṇiyal, acting the part of Pālarājā, sang it all with deep emotion. As soon as the song was over, the angel was brought down, almost soundlessly, as if he had descended from the sky. It was a sight to behold; nobody had expected it to happen quite like that. The applause was thunderous. Pilippar, the stage decorator, lifted his shawl and thrust out his chest, accepting the applause, which he deserved.

'Oh yes, indeed, the Naḷa Pilipparṇ has done a mighty fine job,' a voice from behind the audience was heard to say.

'In any case, he's a Naḷava who lives in the Burgher street, so of course he'll do a mighty fine job,' said another voice.

'Instead of admitting that he did a clever job, who's indulging in all this nonsense talk about Naḷas? *Are you going to try to buy his brains, like Turōṇāccāri who wanted Ēkalaivaṇ's thumb?'

This last remark came out sounding pretty gruff; everyone looked around to see where it came from. It was lion-hearted Cuppar of the Naḷas, who was standing in the back, a large figure with a kumkum mark on his forehead and a stick under his arm. Cuppar stood head and shoulders above the others.

'Who does he think he is? What does he care if we happen to talk out loud?' asked the one who had spoken.

'Mind you, I'm Cuppar who's asking. If you're here to see the drama, see it and go. Why do you want to call people 'Naḷam' and 'Paḷ?'" asked lion-hearted Cuppar in a gruff-sounding voice.

At this, everyone in the vicinity felt that something bad was going to happen. They tried to back away, but that only made the crowd surge closer. People came from far off to see the pandemonium about to break out. Kaspāru and Appālai, the old man, came from the stage through the crowd to the place where trouble was brewing.

'Please, Brothers! Don't disturb the drama. Please! Try to get along,' Kaspāru pleaded, raising his clasped hands above his head.

'Do you think I came to disturb anything or start a fight, Kaspāru? These two rascals in the crowd cannot abide the cleverness of our stage decorator, Pilippar. They keep talking 'Naḷam' this and 'Paḷ' that. Well, I'm one, a Naḷava, and if you look around, you see that all the others are Naḷavas, too. *Don't they know that if one of us jumps in for a fight it will be like Kaṭṭōrkacaṇ jumping into the Pārata war? We are being patient, and that's because we don't want to disturb the drama. If we weren't, we would have made chili paste out of them already.'

This was how lion-hearted Cuppar spoke to Kaspāru, in a calm voice. As long as he spoke, the silence was complete.

'Everything's alright now, Cuppu. They'll be quiet. Let it go,' said old-man Appālai, quietly and tenderly, and the matter ended there.

After that, Cuppar stayed quiet, too; no one else spoke, and the furor subsided.

The drama started up again, and the next scene was another battle. Pālarājā fought bravely, having obtained the rosary and magic sword from the angel. This time, Valēntiri was the one who was defeated. He and his retinue fled to the forest and thus escaped. Then, after the curtain was lowered and raised once more, it was a scene about Valēntiri in the forest where he had founded a kingdom of thieves.

As the scene was about to end, a cloth of pure white was held up and carried from the left side of the stage to the right. On it, a phrase had been written in letters made of glitter of the kind that women sometimes use to decorate their foreheads. As it moved

slowly across the stage until it disappeared on the right side, the words 'after some years' could be made out. There was applause from the audience, and when it died down the curtain opened again, this time to a frightening forest scene.

On the stage at various places, tree branches had been placed. Cutout images of does and stags, wild boars and elephants were moved around here and there.

'Come, hunters! Let's kill the wild beast! Slaughter the beast! Come, hunters!'

When his voice rose up to the sky, little Nallaiyā who now played the role of Pālacuraṇ, the second Pālacuraṇ of the drama, entered the forest with his bow stringed, accompanied by two other hunters. 'Shābāsh!' was heard from all sides. *'Once more! Once more!' many loudly requested. When people say that, it's the custom for the actor to repeat the performance, and this was expected. Little Nallaiyā who played the role of Pālacuraṇ, sang the same introductory verse all over again, jumped back into the forest, and went on hunting, hiding here and there. Again, the applause was thunderous.

In the heat of the hunt, however, Nallaiyā got separated from his attendants. The magic sword and rosary, given to him by his father for going out to hunt, were lost, and that was why he had to wander through the forest. At one point, a giant appeared; at another, a Ceṭṭiyār came on the scene; a moment later, a shepherd came along. Finally, while wandering in the forest, Pālacuraṇ came upon Maṇōrañcitam, daughter of Valēntiri who had proclaimed himself king of the forest, accompanied by two of her handmaids. This itself was a separate scene. Soon enough, Maṇōrañcitam and Pālacuraṇ were falling in love. During every moment of the love scene, there was applause for little Nallaiyā who played Pālacuraṇ and Cuvāmpillai who played Maṇōrañcitam.

Now they are singing, changing the tunes and the tempo. At one point, when Maṇōrañcitam leaned back on Pālacuraṇ's chest, Tirēci did the same to Cimiyoṇ, knowingly or unknowingly. It was the love scene everyone had anticipated, and it ended with loud applause. In the next, Maṇōrañcitam took her beloved to her father

to introduce him, but the enraged King Valēntiri cast him into prison. In the scene after that, Maṇōrañcitam explained to Pālacuraṇ the conditions stipulated by her father for their marriage. Pālacuraṇ, though, refused to accept them, vowing that he would never become a Śaivite.

Even though the eastern sky was becoming light, there were still three more scenes to be shown. One would be about the many types of torture inflicted on Pālacuraṇ in prison by King Valēntiri. Another was about Maṇōrañcitam using various stratagems to rescue Pālacuraṇ. And in the one after that, they were both going to come to King Pālarājā and tell him what had happened to them, ending with Pālacuraṇ's coronation. At the end, there was to be an opportunity to honor the poet-director.

Old-man Appālai, Atikāram, and Kaspāru briefly conferred, and the decision was made to cancel two scenes, one that showed the torture inflicted upon Pālacuraṇ and another about Maṇōrañcitam's brave deeds. When the curtain was raised again, King Pālarājā was sitting on the throne, his wife at his side. Pālacuraṇ and Maṇōrañcitam ran towards them and fell at their feet, taking refuge in them. By now, day had dawned. Pālarājā took off his crown and placed it on Pālacuraṇ; mother-in-law embraced daughter-in-law. Formally, Maṇōrañcitam touched the feet of her mother-in-law, reverently, and worshipped her.

The curtain fell, only to rise again, revealing Caṭṭāmpiār, standing on the stage alone, who said, 'Brothers, as we have had to delete some important scenes due to the shortage of time, and even though Pēturuppiḷlai the poet-cum-director has not yet been honored, and most of all because you have requested it, we are going to conclude the drama without singing the final song of blessing. This will be staged again on the sixth of next month instead.'

After this was said in a clear voice, the curtain fell. The rays of the morning sun were spreading everywhere.

The Funeral Arrangements for Vellāicci Ammāl

When the drama ended, they all returned home through the narrow lanes and by-lanes until they reached the broad lane to Tāvaṭi. Cimiyoṇ was shocked to see a big crowd gathered at the gate to Tampāppiḷaiyār's house at the bend in the broad lane. Afraid, Tirēci clasped Cimiyoṇ's hand. The women and children were afraid, too, and held back. Cimiyoṇ knew something bad had happened. As Tirēci was wearing a sari, they all stared at her in wrath, as if they were trying to ignite her in flames with their eyes. Cimiyoṇ held her hand tightly and turned off into the by-lane on the left, seemingly calm. He now had the courage to face any kind of challenge. Tirēci stopped trembling and tried to walk briskly in order to keep pace with Cimiyoṇ. Following behind, the women and children quickened their step as well.

Having gotten beyond the eyes of the crowd, Tirēci asked, 'Why would there be such a large crowd at Tampāppiḷaiyār's house?'

'How would I know? I was with you all last night. We'll go home first and then find out,' Cimiyoṇ said as they walked.

Shortly afterwards, they arrived at the church. The first thing Cimiyoṇ looked for was whether the church building was still intact or not. It was; the people, however, had not come to work yet, and a crowd gathered as soon as Tirēci and Cimiyoṇ were spotted.

'There's a big crowd in front of Tampāppiḷaiyār's. Did something happen?' Tirēci asked a woman.

'It's a pity! Vellāicci Ammāl, the lady, wasn't like her husband Tampāppiḷaiyār at all. It seems she died last night,' the woman replied, feeling sorry for the dead woman.

Tirēci was silent, perhaps because she, too, was paying homage to her.

'Poor lady! She was as good as gold,' said another.

‘That’s not all, though. It seems that ever since noon yesterday Cevvanti Nācciyār has been deranged, and that Vellaicci Ammāl was so depressed over her daughter’s madness that she died,’ someone else said.

Cimiyōṇ was quiet, for he had known nothing of Vellaicci Ammāl or Cevvanti Nācciyār. Even Tampāppiḷaiyār was someone he had only seen once or twice. He had, however, heard a lot about him, *starting with the murder of Cēṇātirājā, whose body had been found hanging in a sack in the forest of Iraṇaimaṭu, to the incident of the Sinhalese girl at Vallai Bridge, *not to mention his way of extracting instant obedience from the Pañcamar.

Cimiyōṇ was finding it hard to fathom all this when Tampan came rushing up. ‘Say, Tampan Aṇṇai! What’s the news?’ Cimiyōṇ asked.

‘What’s the news!’ replied Tampan. ‘Well, Tampāppiḷaiyār finished off his wife, it seems.’

‘That’s what I was thinking, too, Tampan Aṇṇai,’ Cimiyōṇ said, his hunch confirmed.

‘That’s right, Tampi. Vellaicci Ammāl was probably having an affair with some other fellow, and Tampāppiḷaiyār did this when he came to know of it,’ a woman of middle age observed.

‘That’s not what happened, I think. She wasn’t the type,’ another voice was heard to say, in defense of Vellaicci Ammāl.

‘You seem to know quite a lot. The lady had a falling out with her husband, and so they lived apart for ten years. She came back for her mother-in-law’s funeral, and before long she gave birth to a girl.’

‘Was she very old?’ asked the woman who spoke first.

‘Why ask a thing like that? It was a year before she gave birth. Why talk so loosely and wag our tongues? The woman’s a goddess, now that she’s dead,’ another woman said, satisfied that she had found a compromise.

‘Tampi Cimiyōṇ!’ said Tampan. ‘I’m going to inform everyone that work on the church is being cancelled today. It wouldn’t be

right for us to keep on working when something's happened in the neighborhood. Why don't you come with me and we'll tell them together.'

When they were going through the grove of tender palmyras, Tampan whispered into Cimiyoṇ's ears all the things that had taken place since he had met Pūkkaṇṭar that morning.

'Yesterday noon, Tampāppiḷaiyār's daughter Cevvanti was shouting 'Aiyō! Appu is killing Ammā.' Afterwards, it was silent. Pūkkaṇṭar got up for a walk in the lane, thinking the man was beating his wife. There, he saw Kōviya Mutti running worriedly to Mayilu's house. When he returned at four, Pūkkaṇṭar saw the car belonging to Ampalavāṇar, the Ayurvedic physician who treats mental disorders, parked in front of Tampāppiḷaiyār's house. That made him suspicious and so he looked over the fence and saw the doctor and Mayilu carrying Cevvanti out to the car. Once the moon had set, he saw four or five people inside Tampāppiḷaiyār's house.'

Everything Tampan heard from Pūkkaṇṭar he passed on to Cimiyoṇ as they walked along, and Cimiyoṇ got the whole picture.

When the two of them turned into the side lane leading to Tampāppiḷaiyār's house, they could clearly see Kumāravēlu the Headman and two others getting down from Ampalavāṇar's car. Although it was a little difficult to recognize their faces, one of them had to be the new Maṇiyakāraṇ appointed by the Government Agent, and the other had to be Mayilu. Tampan had seen the Maṇiyakāraṇ once before, but still could not be fully sure it was him. Tampan and Cimiyoṇ passed them by and continued on their way.

'Well, Tampi,' said Tampan to Cimiyoṇ, 'it looks like Tampāppiḷaiyār wants to hush things up by getting the Headman and Maṇiyakāraṇ involved. Pūkkaṇṭar's working the other side and went to meet Vellaicci Ammāl's brother-in-law, an attorney who lives in town. Let's wait and see what happens!'

Having said this, Tampan began walking more briskly, and Cimiyoṇ found it difficult to keep up.

The Official Inquiry

As the clock at Tampāppillaiyār's house struck eleven, Ampalavāṇar's small car started off, with the Headman and Maṇiyakāraṇ inside.

Mayilu, who walked to the outer gate, spoke to Ampalavāṇar in a voice that was audible only to him, saying, 'He wants you to drop them off and come right back.'

Mayilu himself stayed. The sound of the first round of drumming could now be heard, the women having finished the first wailing dirge that called the drummers to come. Within an hour, a flat-roofed pandal had been erected; according to the shastras, Kaṭṭāṭi Katirāmaṇ had tied white cloths together to make the canopy. Ampaṭṭa Kaṇavatiyaṇ stood close by, at the ready. While he made a sling in which to carry the clay fire-pan, four persons quickly cut down an areca nut tree near the well to make a kind of bier. No time was lost bringing a coffin out from town in a rickshaw. The old tulip trees in the back yard were chopped down hastily and loaded into a cart pulled by Indian bulls. Koṭṭāṭi Naṭuvil and Rājacūriyar, their most trusted errand boys, and Mayilu supervised and attended to each and every detail. Naṭuvil, Rājacūriyar, and their men had arrived a little early. The car they drove was parked in the open space of the coconut grove in front of the house.

A rumor was going around that the corpse would have to be cremated before two o'clock, *or else it would occur during *pañcami*, the most inauspicious time of early morning. There were a number of rituals that had to be carried out. Some, though, were skipped. The Brahmin priest who performs funeral rites was not called for, and this saved on time. Oil was applied to the body rather quickly,

and the cleansing of it with a compound of *bassia* husks was over in a moment. Only one ritual remained, and that entailed putting grains of rice into the mouth. *Singing of the Tēvāram hymns was omitted so that the body could be placed on the bier right away.

Before that could happen, a khaki-colored vehicle of medium size was seen approaching from the top of the lane.

‘Looks like the police are coming,’ many whispered.

Indeed, it was a police vehicle, which the police station been given only recently. Stopping at the entrance, a gigantic, white-skinned figure got out, holding a cane in his hand. After him came men carrying sturdy, leather-bound batons. As the white officer made his way toward the place where the body of Vellāicci Ammāl lay, men and women both made way for him.

‘Which one of you is Tampāppillai?’ he asked.

Standing at Vellāicci Ammāl’s head, fire-pot in hand and ready to go, Tampāppillaiyār stammered out an answer, ‘Why, sir, that’s me.’

‘The dead woman was your wife, wasn’t she?’

‘Yes, sir, she was.’

‘How did the woman die?’

‘Ampalavāṇar, the Ayurvedic physician, says that she died of congestive heart failure.’

‘Who’s Ampalavāṇar?’ the policeman asked, looking around at the others.

‘He’s their family physician,’ answered Rājacūriyar in English. ‘He came, the Headman came, and the Maṇiyakāraṇ came. They held an inquest and declared that Vellāicci Ammāl died of heart failure induced by the shock of seeing her daughter’s mental state, and that the body could be cremated.’

‘So, these three fellows said that the body could be cremated, did they? Is that what you’re saying?’ the officer asked, sarcastically, shaking his head. ‘We’ve been told that the woman was beaten to

death, and so there will be no cremation of the body. This evening, the doctor and the magistrate will be coming. Cremation can only be authorized after they examine the body and make an investigation. Everyone needs to clear off now.'

This he said to Rājacūriyar in English, asking him to translate into Tamil what he said so that the others would understand. Rājacūriyar did this, and Tampāppiḷḷaiyār was mortally frightened.

Naṭuvil, who had been standing next to Tampāppiḷḷaiyār, slipped away and went behind the house. Mayilu also vanished. Left by himself, Rājacūriyar got three or four chairs to welcome the police officer and his companions and pay them due respect. They were placed a short distance from the pandal, under the shade of a margossa tree beside the well. He escorted the police over to the chairs and had them sit.

With his eyes, Naṭuvil then beckoned Rājacūriyar to come, and so he went to the back of the house where Naṭuvil spoke to him quietly, saying, 'It's all gone wrong, mate. One of Tampāppiḷḷai's enemies must have informed on him. Give them five or six hundred rupees to fix things up. It looks like you're the only one they'll talk to.'

'I doubt we can solve it that way now. Tampāppiḷḷai's a fool. If he'd just gone to town and given them something, they would've been satisfied. But okay. I'll try and see,' Rājacūriyar said and sidled up closer to the margossa tree.

'Where's the Headman's house?' asked the officer in English. 'Where's the Maṇiyakāraṇ's house? And where's Ampalavāṇar's house?'

The officer wanted someone who knew these places to escort his two policemen. To Rājacūriyar, this seemed the opportune moment. He reasoned that it would be easier to negotiate with the officer if the two policemen were somewhere else.

That was the moment when Mayilu reappeared. Rājacūriyar called him over and told him to escort the two policemen. When

Mayilu hesitated, Rājacūriyar signaled with his eyes that he should. This was a language Mayilu recognized, and off they went in the jeep.

The officer had been transferred to this locality only recently, and he had no knowledge of Tampāppiḷaiyār or Rājacūriyar. Rājacūriyar found someone to go buy him a tin of Elephant Brand cigarettes and a sealed bottle of arrack at Ārumukattār's in Tāvaṭi Junction. He pulled out a note from the pocket of his bush shirt and gave it to him. He then found a small chair to sit on and placed it near the officer. Lighting a cigarette from his own pocket, the officer seemed to be a serious type.

Rājacūriyar had to say something.

'Some enemy of Tampāppiḷaiyār's has maliciously filed a complaint with you. ... Tampāppiḷaiyār's an upstanding man, the only humane man around. ... It seems the woman had been suffering from heart disease for a good long time. ... He has enough to spend hundreds of thousands if he has to. ... God only tests people who are good. ... I can arrange it even if you want five or six hundred. ... Somehow or other, hush this up.'

The officer, who had remained silent while Rājacūriyar spoke in English, now said, 'What were you saying? I couldn't catch it.'

Rājacūriyar was not surprised that he had replied with a question. He had had to deal with his type before, and had prevailed.

'If necessary, even a thousand!'

Before he had even finished, the officer said, 'Don't be in such a rush. We'll think it over and then decide.'

Sure of his success, Rājacūriyar's eye's lit up, having heard the officer say, 'We'll think it over and then decide.' Such words had sparked hope, and so he asked the officer to excuse him and went to speak with Naṭuvil.

'Looks like we'll be able to wrap this up. If we can just come up with a thousand to give him before the others get back, it should be okay.'

While Rājacūriyar returned to the officer, Naṭuvil took Tampāppillaiyār inside the house. The funeral had lost its momentum, and fear was on everyone's face. Veḷḷaicci Ammāl had no one to cry for her. Only Nakulaṇ, Tampāppillaiyār's dog, ran around non-stop, barking noisily. That was the way he had been all morning.

In the small pandal, Veḷḷaicci Ammāl lay with some ceremonial grains of rice in her mouth. Nobody was brave enough to go near her. People were standing in groups in different places and gossiping quietly. The drummers, out in the backyard by the fence, were chewing betel and spitting. Kaṇapati's clay fire pan emitted hardly any smoke because the coals were dying down. The bundle of cloths Katirāmaṇ had brought to be used as substitutes lay untouched on the small veranda adjoining the house extension. He and the Pariyāri Kaṇapati had both gone out, probably in search of a drink. Already, it was evening.

Tampāppillaiyār had gone to lie down in the hall of the house where he had no one to comfort him. Naṭuvil came with the money and sat beside Rājacūriyar, who introduced him to the officer with his nickname and spoke of what a great man his father Kaṇuttār had been. Naṭuvil paid his respects to the officer in the Tamil style with his palms pressed together. This was acknowledged by the officer with a nod of his head. The man who had gone for cigarettes and a sealed bottle of arrack was nowhere to be seen. Instead, the police vehicle reappeared. It was like a mold breaking just as the butter was about to set. Had the vehicle delayed a little longer, Rājacūriyar might have accomplished everything successfully, thrusting into the officer's hand the ten folded one-hundred rupee notes that Naṭuvil had brought. No one can say whether he would have pulled it off, but he would most definitely have tried.

The vehicle came in by the bullock-cart gate. Mayilu, the village headman, and the two policemen got out. The constables saluted the officer and reported that the Maṇiyakāraṇ and Ampalavāṇar had not been at home. Kumāravēlu, the headman, trembling all over, was asked by the officer to sit down; he did so, on the edge of a chair, one buttock on, one off. The white officer then asked him in Tamil

for the diary of the case. This, with all its entries in Tamil, he handed over, and the officer had one of the constables read it out for him:

My name is Mutti. I am employed in this house as a bonded laborer. I have worked here for twenty years. Yesterday, I came towards evening. When I arrived, I found Cevvanti, Master's daughter, laughing and crying and babbling incoherently. I also saw the lady sitting on the veranda, crying. Around that time, Mayilu and the Ayurvedic physician came in the motorcar. When the Ayurvedic physician Ampalavāṇar checked her pulse, he said it was very bad and that she would have to be allowed to lie down. That was when Master, who was crying by the side of the lady, Mayilu, and the Ayurvedic physician drove off in the car, taking Cevvanti Nācciyār with them by force. I stayed with the lady until late that night. Off and on, she had hiccups, so I heated a little water for her. Only when it was dark, did Master return. He said we had to have breast milk to dissolve the medicine, and so I brought some from my sister's daughter. That's when I saw Master standing and crying at the head of the lady's bed. 'Where,' I asked, 'was Cevvanti Nācciyār?' He replied that Ampalavāṇar the physician had said that 'his darling daughter' had gone insane and that she had therefore been handcuffed and locked up. He cried as he dissolved the medicine in the breast milk and gave it to her. She could not be made to drink the medicine, however. Her jaws were closed tight. When I opened her mouth with the handle of an areca nut cutter, Master poured the medicine in from a coconut shell. A few minutes later, she began sleeping peacefully. Meanwhile, Mayilu came, he and the master talked, and then slept. I got up once, at midnight, had a look at the lady, and found her fast asleep. At the same time, Master also got up and gave her the medicine dissolved in juice squeezed from betel leaves. This time, the medicine went down without any trouble. Master went off to sleep, saying, 'If she doesn't become conscious by dawn, we'll have to take her to the Provincial Surgeon.' After sunrise, I got up to have a look at the lady, who was lying there like a log of wood. Hearing my shout of 'Aiyō,' Master got up, saw her, and began wailing loudly.

The constable read it out in full; at the end, there was a fingerprint. Below it were the words, 'Muttan's widow, Mutti.'

The next statement, Mayilu's, was also read. It had been written to conform to Mutti's. The babbling of Tampāppillaiyār's daughter; the deceased's crying; Tampāppillaiyār's sending out to fetch the Ayurvedic physician; Ampalavāṇar's checking of her pulse; escorting Cevvanti to the doctor's house; the physician's giving of medicine to be taken with breast milk and betel juice; sleeping at Tampāppillaiyār's house until ten o'clock in the night to assist him; waking up in the morning to the cries of Mutti; seeing Vellāicci Ammāl's dead body—it was all there, signed at the bottom, 'N. Mayilu.'

The third statement was also read out:

I am the family physician for the household of the deceased, who had heart disease. On previous occasions, I was also the one who treated her. The daughter of the deceased suffered from a mental disorder. I examined her phlegm and her pulse. The beating of the pulse was hard. Her illness had taken a turn for the worse because of the shock brought on by her daughter's mental state. That's why I brought the daughter home and kept her shackled. I had Tampāppillaiyār take home with him some Viṣṇucakra tablets and a very special one of cardamom. In the morning, the message I received was that the deceased had passed away.

Under this short statement, he had signed his name in English as 'P. Ampalavāṇar, Doctor of Ayurvedic Medicine and Doctor of Mental Disorders.'

Besides these, there were only three other statements. When the reading was almost over, another car drove up, stopped, and five people got out. The first was a person who looked a lot like Vellāicci Ammāl. Probably, he was the attorney, Vellāicci Ammāl's brother-in-law whom Tampan had referred to that morning. While everyone else went inside, he stood at the head of Vellāicci Ammāl's bier and wept, saying, 'Maccāl, have you left us? Have you gone?'

Vellāicci Ammāl's bier was then removed to the backyard where the proceedings began that they were there to observe. It all took

about an hour, as her body was cut up and torn apart by the doctor and his assistants. Afterwards, the doctor and the others conferred together, aside. One was the coroner; the inquest had begun. First came the evidence of the doctor who had done the post-mortem: death caused by trauma, resulting in severe internal hemorrhaging. The coroner then advised that they should examine the witnesses whose testimony had been placed in the diary of the village headman. Mutti was brought in first, trembling and babbling.

'Aiyō, Nayiṇār! They wrote down whatever they wanted and told me to sign it, so I put my fingerprint on the paper,' Mutti wailed.

Her evidence having been heard, they looked around for Mayilu but found him to be missing. The coroner therefore issued warrants for the arrest of Mayilu, the Maṇiyakāraṇ, and Ampalavāṇar. A charge of murder was decided, and he also ordered the police to arrest Tampāppiḷaiyār and Kumāravēlu, the Headman. Having told the relatives that the body could not be cremated and would have to be buried instead, the coroner got up to leave.

Only Nakulaṇ, the faithful dog, seeing from a distance that Tampāppiḷaiyār's hands were being handcuffed, voiced its sympathy with a few loud barks. As for the others who were present, they just stood there mute and stunned at the sight of such persons being taken away in a police vehicle. Until now, Pūkkaṇṭar had stayed as far away from the funeral as he could get, and so he gave off the impression of someone who had just returned from a long way off. He had come to help give Veḷḷaicci Ammāl a proper burial, for he had had enormous respect for her. Quite often, he used to say, *'It's like a godly being has become the wife of the demon Iraṇiyaṇ.'

Upatēciyār Prepares the Catechumens for Membership

Construction of the church was finished ten days ahead of the schedule stipulated by Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar. Nanniyān's son, Ilayavaṇ, had come home from the prison in Kandy. It was a great boon for Mūttavaṇ's wife, Poṇṇi, and her children that he had come. When he arrived, Tirēci hugged him and wept profusely.

'Life in prison,' he said, 'was a lot better than life in the village.'

What they heard from him gave Poṇṇi and Tirēci a little relief. Quite a few people voiced the opinion that Nanniyān and Mūttavaṇ would be out in seven or eight years, if time was taken off for good behavior. Besides, Upatēciyār Cantiāppiḷlai assured them, they would be brought to the prison in Jaffna every six months so that their relatives could pay them a visit. Such words gave them a good deal of comfort.

To accommodate the Cuvāmi, a small, one-room house was built beside the church. A day in late October was decided on for the first celebration of Holy Mass in the church. Arrangements were made for Cantiāppiḷlai, the Upatēciyār, to come and instruct the catechumens on a daily basis, and for Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar to come and supervise once a week. The Upatēciyār planned to start on a Sunday. On the day before, he came to ask Ilayavaṇ to take responsibility for getting the word to all concerned. Tirēci was asked to come from her husband's house and stay with her sister-in-law at Periyakkaḷaṭṭi until at least the end of the first week. Ilayavaṇ went round to all the forty households of Periyakkaḷaṭṭi and let everyone know.

On Sunday at seven in the evening, the church was packed. People stood outside as well. When Upatēciyār Cantiāppiḷlai began

the catechesis, his first step was to pray the Prayer of the Sign of the Holy Cross, which is *similar to making the mark of Piḷḷaiyār. With his right hand, four of its fingers folded toward the palm and the thumb straight out, he made the sign of the Cross on his forehead, saying, ‘with the Sign of the Holy Cross.’ The catechumens imitated what he did, repeating the words, too. Placing his finger on his nose, he said ‘our’ and everyone did what he did and said the same word. The Upatēciyār then placed his finger on the tip of his chin and said, ‘from our enemies,’ and everyone did likewise. Then he opened his fist and placed all five fingers on his breast, saying, ‘Save us, O Lord!’ and so did the others. Next, with all five fingers, he placed them first on his forehead, then on his breast, and then on his right and left shoulders, concluding with the words, ‘In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Jesus.’ Everyone started repeating the whole prayer and making the gestures. At first, he did the prayer one word at a time. To do this ten times or so took him quite a while, and for the others to repeat after him. He then did it in full with all the words and gestures.

With the sign of the Holy Cross, save us, O Lord, from our enemies.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Jesus.

Everyone repeated the whole prayer and made the gestures, too. Some struggled but managed to say the whole of it; others stopped halfway.

One person recited the prayer with more felicity than anyone else—ḷaiyavaṇ. This was quite a surprise to the Upatēciyār, for in all of his experience he could not recall anyone who had done it so impeccably on the first try. Delighted, he praised ḷaiyavaṇ, saying, ‘A clever chap you are! Indeed, a very clever chap!’

‘I’m pretty proficient, Upatēciyār,’ said ḷaiyavaṇ, not thinking that this might make him feel unimportant. ‘The Christians who were with me in prison used to say it very often. That’s why I’m familiar with it.’

'Ah, so that explains it,' said the Upatēciyār, who was thrown off, but only for a moment.

Starting over again, he had them say the whole prayer in two parts, with all the gestures. This time there was much improvement; most did passably, and the Upatēciyār was satisfied.

It was after ten before the catechesis and practice of the first prayer came to an end. As it was now too late for the Upatēciyār to return to the cathedral at Mīcām, it was decided that he would remain in the village. What, though, was he supposed to eat?

'I expected it would get late,' replied the Upatēciyār, *'so I brought some plantains and braided bread baked by the Sinhalese uncle who supplies the Cuvāmi.'

And as the Upatēciyār would need to have some water to drink, Tampan said to someone, 'Hey, Tampi! Go over to Pūkkaṇṭar's and bring back some water in a clean bottle.'

This, however, posed a new problem for the Upatēciyār. While he was mulling it over, someone took a bottle and ran with it to Pūkkaṇṭar's house.

Hearing someone call 'Tampi! Tampi!' Pūkkaṇṭar stepped outside and asked, 'Who's there at this hour? What's going on?'

'It's only that our Upatēciyār needs some water. That's why I'm here,' explained the boy who had come.

'Why? Your Cinnakkaḷaṭṭi water's good enough, isn't it?' Or do you suppose some high-born Veḷḷāḷa had killed a goat or a cow and dumped it in the well?'

But he took the bottle to the well anyway, filled it up, and returned. On the way, something occurred to him.

'Look here, boy! Haven't you got some water in your own pots? But, ah, yes,' Pūkkaṇṭar said, teasing the boy a little. 'Your Upatēciyār is himself a Veḷḷāḷa from Īccamaṭṭai. That's why he's not going to drink the water from your well.'

To that, the boy who came tried to stammer something out.

‘What’s the matter, Tampi? Can’t say it clearly, can you?’

‘It wasn’t the Upatēciyār who asked. We just thought it wasn’t right to give him our water ...’

After that, Pūkkāṇṭar spoke no more, and the boy who came, went back with the water.

The Upatēciyār stayed overnight in the house beside the church. Early in the morning, he got up and returned home, and came again at six in the evening. As agreed, Cimiyoṇ had brought Tirēci, left her at Periyakkaḷaṭṭi, and then returned home. Tirēci went through the village rounding up the girls, young ones as well as adolescents, to teach them the catechism. Just as he had the previous day, Upatēciyār taught them the prayer, and then asked ten persons to repeat it for him. Five or so passed. Looking at those who failed to memorize it, he asked Tirēci to teach them at home during the daytime, too, if she could. And then he went on to the next lesson, The Lord’s Prayer.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Amen. Jesus.

Taking turns, the Upatēciyār and Tirēci worked through the prayer with them, part by part and in full.

Today, too, the Upatēciyār had brought his own meal in a box, plantains and a loaf of braided bread from the Sinhalese uncle. He also had with him a bottle of water. When the evening meal was over, he went off to bed. To himself, he murmured the compline, but dozed off before he could finish.

At dawn the next day, the Upatēciyār went off and returned that evening. There were fewer who came for catechesis, this time; as they had not memorized the lesson of the previous day, they kept away out of fear. To start things off, there was as usual a test, to see who had memorized the prayer from the day before. Some passed because they did well, while others passed even though their performance was not quite up to the mark. Tirēci was made responsible to keep working on it with them. Today, it was the 'Hail, Mary!' which begins with 'Hail, Mary, full of grace!' Again and again, the Upatēciyār and Tirēci taught them in turns.

Today, too, they happened to go till midnight. As usual, the Upatēciyār ate the plantains and the braided bread baked by the Sinhalese uncle, drank the water he had brought, said his compline prayers, and fell into bed. Early next morning, before sunrise, he left, and came in the evening, the same as always.

Today's prayer was the Prayer of Personal Confession, which begins 'I am a miserable sinner, Almighty God.' Alternately, the Upatēciyār and Tirēci taught this, over and over. This was the pattern: braided bread, plantains, a bottle of water, compline, sleep, up early in the morning, coming back in the evening, and testing of the catechumens. The next day was the Prayer of Penance, which begins 'Most merciful Father, we have not been mindful of our sins,' and ends with the supplication, 'Forgive my sins, O Lord! Forgive my sins, O Lord!'

*When a person had learned all the prayers, the next step was to join the church and confess one's sins. The Upatēciyār's duties were almost over; of course, Tirēci had been there to help them practice. The Upatēciyār went through the whole routine of having braided bread, fruit, and water, followed by a bedtime prayer, and sleep. He would have to get up before dawn, and now it was midnight.

Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar Visits the Catechumens

Sunday had come. As announced by Upatēciyār Cantiāppillai, Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar's spring-fitted bullock cart arrived around ten. From the cart emerged the Cuvāmi, the Upatēciyār, and Caṅkilittām Rāyappaṇ. On the day previous, Cimiyoṇ had come. In front of the church, about fifty people had assembled, including the young ones. Tirēci and Cimiyoṇ were the first to approach the Cuvāmi.

Both of them bent down on one knee, hands folded below their waists, and said, 'Praise the Lord.'

Fondling his beard with one hand, the Cuvāmi made the sign of the cross with the other and blessed them, saying, 'May the grace of the Lord be with you.'

Without going into the adjacent house, the Cuvāmi went directly into the church. Looking all around at what he saw, he felt satisfied. A hundred persons could squeeze inside. Small though it was, the church would be sufficient for the time being.

'I thank you all in the name of the Lord,' said the Cuvāmi in chaste Tamil, 'for uniting as one to build the church in such a short time.'

*Recently, he had been pleading the case with the local Catholic Church to have the Holy Mass and other ceremonies conducted in chaste Tamil. Whenever he had to, though, he would speak in Latin or English, as he would not go against the Church's rules and regulations until his arguments had been accepted.

The Cuvāmi took everyone next door to the church house and had them all sit down. Cimiyoṇ went over to Tampan's house and quickly brought an old chair for the Cuvāmi and placed it beside the wall.

Sitting down, the Cuvāmi said, 'Let's see how many of you have memorized the prayer of the Sign of the Cross. Go ahead, say it.'

All were reluctant, looking blank. Someone had to take the initiative. That was how the whole week of practice had been conducted.

Tirēci started and everyone recited the prayer, following her direction. Some recited the prayer in proper order; some paused in the middle and then resumed again. Some murmured inaudibly. The signs, however, they did correctly. With this, the Cuvāmi was happy. He had confidence in the Upatēciyār, and realized that he himself could not have trained them to a higher standard. He cast a look at Tirēci that was expressive of his gratitude. Whenever he was truly happy, the Cuvāmi showed it mostly with his eyes.

Calling Caṅkilitām Rāyappaṇ, Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar whispered something in his ear, and Rāyappaṇ went out to the spring-fitted bullock cart to bring back a parcel wrapped in paper and a tin box. Opening the parcel, the Cuvāmi took out booklets and colored pictures of the Passion of Jesus. Standing up, he walked around and personally distributed a booklet and a picture to each person. What was left, he gave to Tirēci, and sat down again. Tirēci knew what to do with the extras; they were for the ones who were unable to come. Everyone kept looking at the booklet, turning its pages. Even though the words 'Little Catechism' were printed in big letters on the front cover, they could not read them. Still, they felt grieved at heart when they saw the coloured picture of the Passion of Jesus. The scene of the crucifixion made them very sad.

'Children,' said the Cuvāmi. 'If you cannot read what you see printed in the book, Tirēci will help you because she reads a little. She will work on them with you. The picture you have is of Jesus, God the Son. For all our sins he suffered, died, rose from the grave on the third day, and ascended into heaven. Hang the picture on the walls or place it on the raised, earthen floor of your houses. In the mornings when you get up and when you go to bed in the evenings, pray with your hands folded, and God's grace will be with you.'

Calling Tirēci, the Cuvāmi gave her the tin box and asked her to distribute its contents to the children. When Tirēci opened it, she found sweets of many colors in the shape of orange slices and smelling of the fruit they resembled. Making the children line up for the distribution, she gave each one three or four.

Then, calling Caṅkilitāṃ Rāyappaṇ, Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar whispered something into his ear. The Caṅkilitāṃ then sent everyone home except ten or fifteen people twenty years and older. As the crowd dispersed, the Cuvāmi asked Tirēci to remain behind with them. A discussion of church affairs then began.

The first thing resolved on was that twenty-one persons were to be baptized. Next it was decided to have the first Holy Mass celebrated on the last Sunday. When the question arose of who should be appointed Caṅkilitāṃ, everyone said that Tampanṇ should be. Tampanṇ, though, tried to wriggle out of it by listing all the different commitments he had, but the others would have nothing of it. In the end, Tampanṇ had no choice but to accept the responsibility.

When the matter of naming the church came up, Cimiyoṇ said, 'Why not call it 'Church of Our Lady'?'

'I beg to interrupt,' Tampanṇ replied. 'I hope no one misunderstands me, but it was our Cuvāmi who did everything he possibly could to deliver Nanniyaṇ and his sons from the gallows. So, I ask you all, why not call it the 'Church of Our Lady who Delivers from the Gallows'?'

'We agree!' they all responded, with looks of joy on their faces, and Church of Our Lady who Delivers from the Gallows was how the church was named.

Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar kept his silence, perhaps because he wanted them to make the decision themselves, or for some other reason. He had a great deal of experience building churches and converting people to Christianity. He knew what had to be done, how, and when.

It was after two o'clock already. Tampanṇ said the Cuvāmi needed to eat, and said no more. Putting his hand inside his cassock, Cuvāmi

Ñāṇamuttar pulled out a small round watch on a chain and saw that it was two minutes after two. Tampaṇ's hunch was right, and in his heart the Cuvāmi knew that the right man had been chosen for the office of Caṅkilittām.

Taking Caṅkilittām Rāyappaṇ aside, Tampaṇ voiced concern that the Cuvāmi had not had any water for quite a while. 'If the spring-fitted bullock cart leaves right now,' replied Rāyappaṇ, 'it'll reach Tiṇṇevēly in no time at all. Food will be waiting for him there.'

Right away, Cuvāmi Ñāṇamuttar got ready to go, and the spring-fitted bullock cart was about to set off. Just before he got in, the Cuvāmi told Tirēci to make the arrangements for the baptisms the next week. The Upatēciyār remained behind, since from today the baptisms would occupy his attention completely. Today, it was Caṅkilittām Rāyappaṇ who had come with the Cuvāmi as the driver, and so he went back with him as well.

Now, however, the Upatēciyār was faced with a different problem—pangs of hunger. They felt like they were going to overpower him, and so he told Tirēci and the others that he would have to go out for a while and return later. Tirēci was to have the people assemble early and keep them ready and waiting.

'I'll tell them about the ritual of baptism, and then I'll have to get home by dusk.'

Having issued these instructions, the Upatēciyār crossed over the dry streambed lined with cactus. Tirēci and Cimiyoṇ understood the Upatēciyār's predicament, but could not let on to the others that they did.

Speaking into Cimiyoṇ's ear so that the others would not hear, Tirēci said, *'It seems that the Upatēciyār is going off to have his lunch at the boutique. I don't know whether he has enough money or not. If you've got any, why don't you go give it to him, and then come back?' Cimiyoṇ felt his waist pocket and set off at a fast pace to catch up with the Upatēciyār.

Poverty and Starvation

In the village, there was quite a stir. The excitement had spread to other villages as well. The inhabitants of Periyakkaḷaṭṭi had all brought back home the boys and girls of theirs who were working in the houses of the Nayiṇārs as bonded laborers. This was done without giving the Nayiṇārs any plausible explanation.

‘The Naḷam Paḷḷus and other low castes aren’t behaving the way they used to. They’re all acting on their whims and fancies.’

‘The Naḷa and Paḷḷa women have all stopped tying the ends of their kurukku the way they used to. They’ve started wearing saris and blouses any way they want.’

‘Would such things be happening if Tampāppiḷaiyār had not gone off to prison? There’s no one in the village now as strong as he was. We should have been more vigilant. If we had, we wouldn’t have suffered this disgrace.’

‘We never should have allowed that Cuvāmi-fellow from Māṇippāy to go into the village in the first place. Or if we had, then we should have stopped him when he started building the church. See, did he stop at that, once there was a church? Now he’s teaching them Christianity. He’s ruined the long traditions we’ve preserved and passed on for generations. If that bearded Cuvāmi-fellow had not been born of a mixed-caste marriage, how else could he have done a thing like this?’

‘How ridiculous! Do you have any idea who that Cuvāmi-fellow Nāṇamuttar is? He’s the son of Cāminātapillai of Māṇippāy, a distant uncle of Tampāppiḷaiyār.’

‘You mean it’s a pure-bred Veḷḷāḷa son who’s responsible for all this mischief? Then he’s a disgraceful beggar! He’s the one who got Naṇṇiyaṇ and his sons rescued from the gallows. He’s the one who

got Tampāppillaiyār into all this trouble, even though he's a kind of cousin.'

Many such things were bandied about in the village. Most of the Nayinārs, who were mainly land-owning farmers, agreed not to give any tree for tapping to the Naḷam Paḷḷus, not to employ any one of them, man or woman, and to evict them from their lands.

In the midst of so much turmoil, Pūkkāṇṭar was at a loss to know what to do. Other Vellāḷas challenged his humanitarian efforts. Fortunately for him, no male or female bonded laborers worked for him.

Each Sunday, the Cuvāmi came, gave Absolution, conducted Holy Mass, made inquiries about village life, and assisted the people in a variety of helpful ways. For a few who had lost work and had no land to cultivate, he was able to find jobs here and there. As he himself had worked for the railways before he became a Cuvāmi, he used his old contacts to fix them up as unskilled laborers. And to help them improve their literacy, he appointed an old teacher on a small stipend to teach them twice a week on the church house veranda. Despite his help, there was no way he could manage for all the Periyakkaḷaṭṭi families to eat three meals a day. Their desperation troubled him deeply. How long could they survive after antagonizing the landowners who were the mainstay of their livelihoods?

It was not only the Cuvāmi but Pūkkāṇṭar who was also deeply troubled, and he took pains to find work for at least some of them through his acquaintances in the surrounding villages. Nothing, however, turned up, and his heart was filled with sorrow.

Even though Tampan's baptismal name was 'Pēturu,' Pūkkāṇṭar continued to call him 'Tampan.' One day after he had his customary drink of toddy, Pūkkāṇṭar said to Tampan, just as he was about to leave for home, 'There's something we need to talk about. Would you mind walking with me a way?'

Tampan followed him out, and Pūkkāṇṭar started by saying, 'I hope you won't misunderstand what I'm about to say.'

'Now why would I do that, Tampi?' Tampan replied. 'Do you really think I'm the kind of person who would forget all the good

things you've done? You know I'm not ungrateful.' Like this, Tampan reaffirmed his loyalty to Pūkkaṇṭar.

'Look here, Tampan. I know full well that you and your people embraced the Christian religion because you wanted to be safe from atrocities. I can also see that the children behave better, now that you've all joined the church. That may be, but now there's a lot of suffering because people are out of work. How long can the little ones go without food? I know Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar's trying really hard. Tell me, though, do you really think his hard work on your behalf is going to succeed in filling the stomachs of all these people?' With this, Pūkkaṇṭar stopped.

At the time, they were standing and talking on the path lined with palmyras at the end of the fields. The wind was cold and in the distance they could hear the sound of the train approaching.

'I'm not denying that what you say is true, Tampi. Even so, what's to be done? Are you saying we ought to renounce Christianity and go back to being bonded laborers in the house of the Nayiṇārs?'

Even though Tampan had not finished, Pūkkaṇṭar interrupted, saying, 'Now look! That's why I said I hoped you wouldn't misunderstand me. Am I the kind of person who would say a thing like that? I didn't come to offer you advice. I came to ask you about the situation and find some relief. What you said just now is absolute nonsense.'

In Pūkkaṇṭar's voice, there was a slight tone of annoyance. Tampan kept his silence. The sky was cloudy and a cold wind was blowing, the kind of wind that brings rain in its wake.

'Here's an idea, Tampan. *There's a company based in Colombo that provides the raw materials to villagers who make the matchboxes for them. They get paid four fanams per thousand. The trick is to get the raw materials in the first place, and for that they need a recommendation from some high-and-mighty person they can trust. If the children help with the pasting, you can earn eight fanams a week without even going outdoors. Mention this to your Cuvāmi. He's the kind of man who would do it, once he makes his mind up.'

Pūkkāṇṭar had proffered his advice, and Tampaṇ felt that a solution had been found. 'What you say, Tampi, seems a good idea to me, too. I'll speak to the Cuvāmi tomorrow and see what he says.'

'Then I'll get going,' Pūkkāṇṭar replied. 'Don't let anybody know that it was I who gave you this advice, or else the Nayiṇārs of Tāvaṭi will eat me up.' Leaving this admonition with Tampaṇ, Pūkkāṇṭar set off.

After standing still a moment, Tampaṇ returned home where he found two men waiting for him on his veranda, visible against the flickering light of a lamp.

'Who's come?' asked Tampaṇ as he entered.

'It's me, Caṅkilittāṁ Aṇṇai,' said one, whose voice gave him away as Cālamōṇ, the elder brother of Caṅkilittāṁ Rāyappaṇ of St. Benedict's. The other was Aruḷappaṇ, Cālamōṇ's brother-in-law.

'Oh, is it you, Cālamōṇ? What's the problem?' he asked, as he took his seat beside them. 'It's an odd time of day for you to come all the way out here.' As he spoke, he saw cooking flames from the kitchen. 'Hey there! Have you made coffee or anything for the boys here?' Tampaṇ asked his wife.

'That's what I'm doing right now, can't you tell!' was the answer from inside.

'So what's the matter, Cālamōṇ? You wouldn't have come out unless it was important,' Tampaṇ asked.

'It's not that serious, Aṇṇai. The daughter of my brother-in-law Aruḷappaṇ has come of age, and so we came out to have a talk about finding a bridegroom for her. We also had a talk with Tirēci Girl back in Tinnevēly, but she wondered whether he would agree when his father and elder brother are still in prison. She said we needed to talk to you. That's why ...'

Cālamōṇ somehow or other managed to get out most of what he wanted to say. Now it was Tampaṇ's turn to speak, but he kept quiet. Meanwhile, two bowls of hot coffee were brought in from the kitchen.

Tampan's wife asked, 'Is it about Nanṇiyaṇ's son, ḷaiyavaṇ?'

'Even now you insist on calling him ḷaiyavaṇ! Are you ever going to give that up? After all, his Christian name is 'Muṭiyappu.' If I've told you once I've told you a thousand times, that's the name you're supposed to use. I'm sick and tired of having to remind you,' Tampan admonished her.

'She called him that because it's what's she's used to,' Cālamōṇ said. 'Why get so upset, Caṅkilittām?'

Tampan's wife had gone back to the kitchen to prepare some piṭṭu out of palmyra yam for the visitors.

'What you've come out to talk about is a good thing, indeed,' Tampan said. 'But I'm afraid I won't be able to give you an answer right away. Why be in a hurry? We'll have to ask his sister-in-law, too. That girl is father, mother, and everything else in the world to him. I'll talk this over and come see you after Holy Mass next Sunday. Hey, there, woman! What did you prepare for these boys to eat?' asked Tampan, signaling an end to the conversation.

'Caṅkilittām Aṇṇai, we came here on trust, believing you would know how to make this possible,' said Aruḷappaṇ, who had been silent until now.

'Whatever I can do, I will do, Tampi Aruḷappaṇ,' said Tampan, who then changed the subject to local affairs. He spoke about the famine and of starvation in the village. He brought up the subject of the matchbox company and spoke of his plans to ask the Cuvāmi for help, but without bringing Pūkkāṇṭar's name into it. For their part, Cālamōṇ and Aruḷappaṇ also said they would speak to the Cuvāmi about a decision in the matter of the matchbox idea.

The smell of the palmyra-yam piṭṭu was delectable. As the water boiled, the puffer fish and white prawn from the Cāvarkaṭṭu market, bought for the next day's needs, were added to the pot, along with the fish fat from the ray, which was already melted and mixed in. From the conical basket made of palmleaves, a savory smell wafted out.

Ilaiyavaṇ Employed at the Jetty

Two days had passed before Caṅkilitāṁ Tampaṇ found a chance to speak with Ilaiyavaṇ. In his anxiety to provide food for his elder-brother's wife and three children, Ilaiyavaṇ was running every which way. He was always in a big hurry; even so, he was unable to provide even one decent meal a day. He was only able to earn two and a half fanams carrying heavy loads in gunny bags at the warehouse in Jaffna town. From the jetty at Aluppānti where the train line ended and boats unloaded, the bags had to be taken to the warehouse. At the pick-up point where the bags were lifted onto someone's back, the stick clerk would hand over a one-span stick, one per bag. At the warehouse, the ledger clerk kept a count. At day's end, he would add them up and close the account, making payment at the rate of a quarter cent per stick. From that, the foreman would skim off one cent for every six. And then there was the money deducted for the almsgiving at the Muṇiyappaṇ Temple beside the Fort, one cent for each ten. On top of that, one cent in twenty was deducted for the annual warehouse workers' festival at the Villūṇṇi Piḷḷaiyār Temple. In the end, all that one could keep was three or four fanams.

On his way home after work, Ilaiyavaṇ would buy some fish at the market for half a fanam, some vegetables for half a fanam, rice for half a fanam, and a few sweets for the children. The balance he would hand over to his sister-in-law, Poṇṇi. Already it would be dark when he got home, but Poṇṇi would wait to light the cooking fire until he got back.

All that Ilaiyavaṇ kept for himself went for the mid-day meal, *for which he needed half a fanam at the warehouse canteen managed by a man from Delft. This was served with utter indifference while he sat on a gunny bag in the back of the warehouse. The rice exuded

the odor of areca nut. Nākalinkattār, the canteen keeper, would put four areca nuts into every pot of rice he boiled, making everyone feel nauseous deep in their bowels before they had even had four mouthfuls. The gravy slopped out was even worse; once it hit your tongue, it would make it burn. He would spread *cunnam* on the bottom of his curry pan before he cooked the gravy. The burning sensation would make you drink huge quantities of water to quench the fire. That way, more water went into your stomach than rice. And with that, lunch was over.

As if this were not bad enough, the mere sight of the foreman aroused dread and trepidation, for he was the one who assigned the laborers their various tasks. It was not for nothing that they called him the foreman. Special concessions had to be given to him, and Ilayavaṇ was one of the ones who made a monthly contribution to help settle his account at the liquor shop.

Sunday, though, was a holiday. When the Cuvāmi is unable to come, someone else will be there to conduct the Stations of the Holy Cross in place of the Holy Mass. On this particular day, Upatēciyār Cantiāppillai had conducted the prayers for the Stations of the Holy Cross and had already returned. It was a decree of the Cuvāmi that any Catholic who meets another Catholic must also address him by his baptismal name. This was not easy to do, but at least Caṅkilittām Tampan made an effort. That, indeed, was something; one person, at least, followed instructions!

Just as Ilayavaṇ was about to go home from church, Tampan called him aside, ‘Muṭiyappu! Tampi! Ilayavaṇ Muṭiyappu! I have something important to talk to you about.’

Ilayavaṇ walked on a few more steps and then turned back. It took a while for him to recall that ‘Muṭiyappu’ had been added to his name.

‘Look, Tampi, for the last four or five days I’ve been trying to find a time to talk with you. I don’t get back from my job on the railway until after midnight. And it looks like the only thing you do after carrying loads of gunny bags all day is fall asleep. All I do is

saw wood in my compound at home and go to work at the railway station. How do we find the time?’

‘Yes, it’s Sunday! What’s so important that you want to talk about it today?’

‘It’s an important matter, alright. Did you know someone came around for advice about a marriage proposal—for you?’

‘Come on, Aṇṇai! A marriage proposal for me? You’re pulling my leg!’

‘I’m not. It’s the truth. They came to me, but I sent them home, saying I would discuss it with your sister-in-law, who is more than a mother to you, that I would ask you as well, and that I would inform them afterward. By the way, I gather they’ve also asked Tirēci Girl. She passed the responsibility on to me. Anyway, you’re not a mere boy, are you? There is a saying that there is a proper time to sow.’

‘Give it up, Aṇṇai! I swear on the name of Our Lady that I will not even think of marriage or anything of the sort until my brother comes home from prison. If I get married, who’s going to look after my brother’s wife and children? Once again, I swear on the name of Our Lady that I will not get married. I will ignore all such proposals. Please, I beg of you, don’t bring this up again.’

‘Okay, Tampi!’ said Tampan after thinking a moment or two. When a cow is going to die, does it gather grass for the calf and then go die? When your mother died, did she leave you anything? Your father may still be in prison, but you go on living, don’t you? Whatever happens, God the creator looks after his creatures, right? If we try to figure these things out any more deeply, Tampi, the world would not go on.’

‘Aṇṇai! I’ll tell you one more time. Until my elder brother comes home from prison, I will not marry. I swear on Our Lady that I won’t!’

Iḷaiyaṇ had spoken in terms that were unmistakably clear, and so he started off, slowly, with Tampan following behind. Walking along silently, they were about to part ways when a bicycle coming from the lane on the east stopped right in front of them. The rider

was Cimiyoṇ, but instead of looking straight at him, Tampan looked all around, afraid that someone might have seen Cimiyoṇ riding a bicycle. Fortunately, no one had, but anyway he hurried Cimiyoṇ along with the words, 'Come on, Tampi!' until they reached his house.

At the same time, Mūttavan's wife, Poṇṇi, got back from church where they had been doing the Stations of the Holy Cross, and was beginning to remix the leftover kañci. Near the water pot, the eldest of her girls was washing out the cooking utensils, while the middle one was playing mango seeds in the front yard. The youngest one, her boy, sat in front of the house, his nose snotty and running, babbling to himself. As he entered the front yard, Poṇṇi caught sight of Cimiyoṇ.

'I came in a rush,' Cimiyoṇ said. 'The Cuvāmi borrowed the Upatēciyār's bicycle for me and had me come out. Tomorrow morning, Monday, around ten, your father-in-law and husband will be brought down from Kandy and lodged in the prison here. We are told that tomorrow for an hour they can have visits from five of their relations and five more the day after. That's why he asks me to have you come to the Fort in the morning. It seems that he only got the information yesterday.'

Tears welled up in Poṇṇi's eyes even before Cimiyoṇ had finished. It had not even occurred to her to offer him something to drink. The young ones had gathered around Cimiyoṇ's bicycle. For his part, even while listening to what Cimiyoṇ had come to say, Tampan continued to keep watch on all sides, afraid that outsiders might have observed that he was riding a bicycle, which was now propped against a palmyra tree in the front yard. It was Tampan's wife who prepared Cimiyoṇ's coffee and brought it over with some Vellore jaggery on a tulip-tree leaf.

'I'm going to have to go soon,' Cimiyoṇ said. 'You'll have to come early tomorrow to the Fort. Tirēci and I will meet you there. Only five persons a day, it seems. Tomorrow, it will be the women folk and children. The day after, the men. How does that sound, Caṅkilitām Aṇṇai?'

‘That sounds about right,’ replied Tampan. ‘In the morning, I’ll bring them to the Fort. We’ll have to provide a list of the visitors beforehand, mind you. In any case, we’ll prepare food for them and come. We’ll meet there.’

‘By the way, where’s Iḷaiyaṇ, my young Maccāṇ?’ asked Cimiyoṇ. ‘I don’t see him anywhere.’ At that very moment, Iḷaiyaṇ happened to emerge from the palmyra grove.

‘Now Tampi Cimiyoṇ,’ Tampan said again, quietly and tactfully, still concerned about the bicycle, ‘keep that bicycle somewhere where it’s not going to be easily seen.’

Cimiyoṇ did not really grasp why, but dutifully took the bicycle to the back behind the extension of the house and kept it there.

‘What’s brought you here at a time like this, Maccāṇ?’ asked Iḷaiyaṇ as he got closer.

Ponṇi was the one who spoke up and said, ‘Cimiyoṇ came out to tell us that your father and elder brother are being brought down to the prison here.’

When he looked at his sister-in-law’s face he was saddened to think that the joy in her heart would fade once they were taken back.

‘I’ll be on my way,’ Cimiyoṇ said, getting up.

‘Tampi, not yet, please!’ Tampan advised. ‘When the sun’s gone down, then go. I don’t see the harm in telling you. You live near town, and so it’s natural for you to ride a bicycle. You do whatever you like in town, but out here our boys haven’t even started riding them yet. Right now, the Nayiṇārs are looking for excuses to cause us more trouble. That’s why I’m telling you to go back after dark.’

‘Well,’ said Iḷaiyaṇ. ‘When a man’s drowning, does it make any difference whether his head is a cubit under water or a span? If you die once, that’s better than dying over and over again out of fear. I have to go now, Maccāṇ. Let them go ahead and try their pranks!’

To this, Tampan was at a loss for words, and Ponṇi, too. It was Tampan’s wife who spoke up, saying, ‘Now, what’s wrong with what the boys say? What will our children live for if we go on being

afraid of every little thing. When you started building the church, everyone was furious. Ignore their advice, Tampi, and just go with your brother-in-law.'

That was all it took for Cimiyoṇ to start off on the bicycle across the lowlands on the footpath. When he reached the top of the lane, Iḷaiyaṇ got onto the pillion. But when they rounded the bend, what did they happen to see in the distance but three men waiting at the junction.

'Tell me, Maccāṇ,' asked Iḷaiyaṇ. 'Do you see the three men standing there at the junction? They're up to some mischief, by the look of it. If they try to block the way, don't stop right in front of them. Go a little further and then stop. And don't be afraid.'

As they approached the junction on the bicycle, the men who were standing there stood up and looked them over. Iḷaiyaṇ could see that one of them was Mayilu. ... Nowadays, though, Mayilu was like a snake defanged. After Tampāppiḷaiyār had gone to prison, there was no one to treat him to a drink and help him loosen his tongue. Of the other two, one was Kantacuvāmi Āccāri, but who the other one was Iḷaiyaṇ did not know. No one breathed a word.

As they passed by on the bicycle, Iḷaiyaṇ said, disappointedly, 'They should've tried to stop us!' As he said this, he took out from his waist the sharp metal hook he used for grabbing hold of heavy gunny bags and showed it to Cimiyoṇ.

Cimiyoṇ and Iḷaiyaṇ had not gone very far when they heard a voice at the top of another lane call out, 'Hey, boys, where to?'

Turning his head in that direction, Cimiyoṇ saw a huge, hairy-chested figure around fifty years of age, his hair bobbed, a spot of green kumkum on his forehead and a rosewood walking stick under his arm. Cimiyoṇ did not recognize him, but Iḷaiyaṇ did: 'Hey! It's Cuppar Appā! Stop the bicycle, Maccāṇ.'

'Where to, Iḷaiyaṇ?' Cuppar asked. 'Who's the boy here? We haven't met before. And you! You've gotten fatter in prison. I could hardly recognize you.'

‘Yes, Cuppar Appā,’ answered Ilaiyavaṇ. ‘But you, too, are now so huge I couldn’t recognize you either. It was your voice that gave you away.’

‘You know, Tampi, I haven’t been back to the village the last three years. I was managing Paramu’s third tavern down in Maṇṇār and came back home only yesterday. Down there, I heard all the news and read about it in the papers, too.’

‘You and your elder brother and your father,’ Cuppar continued, ‘did a deed of virtue together! Don’t get me wrong. It was a virtuous act to kill the village headman—that devil! In the Pārata war, when a hundred and one of the enemy laid siege, *Apimaṇyu turned the tide by taking the fight to the enemy and annihilating each and every one of them on the field of battle. But you were smarter than Apimaṇyu because you came back alive! Have you gone to see your father and elder brother? Where are they holding them?’

‘Well, that’s actually what Cimiyoṇ came to tell us about. Tomorrow they’ll be brought to the Jaffna prison. Five people can see them the first day, five people the next. It seems the Cuvāmi was the one who got the message, and my brother-in-law was sent out with the news. He’s the one who married my sister. They call him “the Christian Cimiyoṇ who lives near Nallūr.”’

‘Oh, so that means he’s from around St. Benedict’s, doesn’t it? I knew his father. Wasn’t he the Mūppar there? I can’t recall his Christian name. Earlier, we used to call him Ārumukattāṇ.’

‘I’m his middle child,’ Cimiyoṇ blurted out, before Cuppar had finished.

‘Ah! My friend Ārumukattāṇ’s son! I used to visit him when you were just a boy showing off in the front yard, doing backward somersaults.’

Cimiyoṇ nodded, indicating that he was the one.

‘Tampi Ilaiyavaṇ! *I heard from my son yesterday that you’ve been having a hard time without a proper job. Don’t lose heart! It won’t be like this forever. And don’t forget, boys, that in the Pārata

war justice triumphed in the end. Let go of your worries! Won't you include me as a visitor when you go see your father and elder brother?'

ḷaiyaṇ thought for a moment and said, 'Cuppar Appā, I will think this over and come tell you at your house tonight.' ḷaiyaṇ kept it short, thinking it imprudent to stay there very long with the bicycle.

'All right. You'll come tonight about all this? Be off, then! Death may come when you're six or it may come when you're a hundred. Have no fear.' With this and a slap on their shoulders, Cuppar set off.

'Well, Maccāṇ, that's who they call 'Lion-hearted Cuppar,' and *now you also know why they call him 'Pārata Cuppar.' He's a very good fellow.' Saying this, ḷaiyaṇ got back onto the pillion. As the bicycle rounded a bend, it slowly curved out.

The Prisoners Come to Jaffna from Kandy

That night, when Pūkkaṇṭar came, Tampaṇ informed him that Naṇṇiyaṇ and Mūttavaṇ were going to be brought down to the Jaffna prison. In turn, Pūkkaṇṭar asked who was going to go see them. Tampaṇ explained that women folk and children would go the first day and men the next. Five places were just enough for Poṇṇi, Tirēci and the three children. Since Poṇṇi's youngest was still an infant, it was decided that Tampaṇ's wife could also be squeezed in. For the day after, three of the five places would be for Iḷaiyaṇ, Cimiyoṇ, and Tampaṇ. Two more could be accommodated.

'Tampaṇ, why not include me for one of the two remaining places?' asked Pūkkaṇṭar, causing Tampaṇ something of a jolt. Under the circumstances, his ears could not take it all in.

'What on earth, Tampi, are you saying?' Tampaṇ asked, sounding quite abrupt.

'Have they stated in the prison rules that Pūkkaṇṭar and Naṇṇiyaṇ shall not meet?' Pūkkaṇṭar asked, tongue in cheek, although the question implied a great deal.

'Don't do it, Tampi!' Tampaṇ exclaimed. 'Would the village Nayiṇārs leave you in peace afterward? Would they allow you back into their fellowship or let you participate in their social gatherings? You've also got two or three grown-up girls to think about. It might get difficult for them to get married. And so ... '

'Look here, Tampaṇ!' Pūkkaṇṭar replied, although Tampaṇ was surely making sense. 'I don't depend on any of the Nayiṇārs. They don't invite me to their functions anyway. The one thing they can't do is throw me out of my own house. I won't need any help from them to see that my daughters get married. After all, you know,

I am Pūkkaṇṭar. Whether I live or whether I die, it will be by my own wits. Why talk more? I'll be one of those who go see Naṇṇiyaṇ and Mūttavaṇ. Are you going to include me or not? What's your decision?"

Tampaṇ was so overcome by emotion that he could not utter a single word. Even at his age, hope welled up physically inside of him and his bent body stood erect. 'Tampi is also coming with us the day after tomorrow,' he said. 'By eight in the morning they need to have the names, in black and white. That means the relationship has to be disclosed, I gather.'

'Tampaṇ, I understand your concern,' Pūkkaṇṭar interjected. 'You're pondering the kind of relationship I have to Mūttavaṇ and Naṇṇiyaṇ and what I could possibly mention in writing. Well, in due course you'll find out what I put down about our relationship. I've been telling you for a good long time that no one can hold me back. The day after tomorrow, Tampaṇ, before you arrive at the Fort entrance, I'll be there already and will have written down the relationship of each and every person who's going to be there. Just wait and see.' Pūkkaṇṭar said all this while starting off for home.

Tampaṇ, his wife, and Poṇṇi simply stood there, staring in the direction Pūkkaṇṭar had gone.

'Even in that devilish caste,' Poṇṇi said, 'there are a few good people like him.'

'Child, there are people of all different kinds of character in all castes, but in some more than others. And in every caste there's a caste of the wealthy, and all who belong to that caste are devils.'

When Tampaṇ finished, they all wondered where he had learned to talk that way.

'Pūkkaṇṭar's poor. That's why he's different from the devilish caste,' Tampaṇ said, sounding like a philosopher.

In the front yard, the lamp without a chimney was still burning. Just now Ilaiyaṇ arrived home. He had gone out in the morning with Cimiyoṇ to visit his sister, spent the whole day away, and only now had come back.

‘You must have been dotting on your younger sister,’ Tampan’s wife teased, ‘coming back at this late hour! Has Tirēci’s belly gotten bigger or is it still small? If it’s big, they say it’s going to be a girl. Oh, Our Lady! Whether it’s a boy or a girl, may Tirēci have an easy delivery.’

This was Tampan’s wife’s way of voicing her hopes and longings.

‘Think of that! Just because Tirēci’s my sister, Akkai wants me to examine her belly!’ Ilaiyaṇ exclaimed as he sat on the raised veranda.

Ponni went off in a hurry, brought the pan in which she had kept his evening meal, and went to bring the water pot.

‘Tampi,’ said Tampan to Ilaiyaṇ, ‘have you heard what Pūkkāṇṭar told us just a while ago? He wants to be included among the people who are going to see your father and brother. He’s a real human being, isn’t he?’

‘Caṅkilitām Aṇṇai,’ replied Ilaiyaṇ, ‘shall I tell you something in return?’ When Maccāṇ and I were on our way, we saw our ‘Lion-Hearted’ Cuppar who lives near the Varāri Temple. It seems he came from Maṇṇār just yesterday. He also said he wanted to go along to see my father and elder brother. I gave him all the details and said I would discuss it with all of you at home and then go see him.’

‘Oh, you mean our ‘Pārata Cuppar’? Of course we can take him, Tampi. But even in prison that man is going to go on telling stories about the Pārata war. Still, he’s a useful fellow to have around. He was on intimate terms with your father. And around here, he’s considered a genius in practical knowledge. Here’s what we do. I’ve said ‘yes’ to Pūkkāṇṭar for the day after tomorrow. According to the account, five are going tomorrow, but he can go the day after, the same as Pūkkāṇṭar. Go and tell him that he can come, too.’ With that, their talk came to an end.

The next two days, though, Ilaiyaṇ and Tampan could not go to work, and to make up for their lost earnings Ilaiyaṇ said he would take the women to the Fort so that Tampan could work.

Tampan agreed to get up early in the morning and tap the trees as usual, before going off to work.

Ilayavan finished his meal and, as was his custom, went to sleep on the veranda of Tampan's house where Tampan also slept. The light was put out and the world was deep in slumber. Ponni's youngest child broke the silence and kept on crying.

'Tampi, even at the risk of misunderstanding, I'm going to tell your father and elder brother about the matter we spoke of today on the church premises. Let's see whether you'll defy them if they recommend it.' Somewhat gently, this was how Tampan opened the topic, in the darkness.

'Whether it's my father, my elder brother, or some divine being who asks me, it just isn't going to happen. Let it go. Drop it and let's not let things get unpleasant.'

'You're a hard one to break, Ilayavan,' said Tampan. 'You're of an age when you can even digest a stone if you eat one. There has to be a reason for this stubbornness. If there's a girl you've got your mind set on, tell me who. I'm the one who's responsible for arranging your marriage.'

Ilayavan found it all very irritating. 'I told you this morning why I won't marry. Until my elder brother gets out of prison, I'm responsible for looking after his children. Now, why Caṅkilitām Aṇṇai, don't you accept that as a valid reason? The word the Sinhalese use for 'hunger' is *baḍaḡiṇi*. *Baḍaḡiṇi* means 'fire in the stomach.' Should I have a wedding when my elder brother's wife and children have fire in their stomachs?' And, then, Ilayavan spoke movingly and indignantly, saying, 'Caṅkilitām Aṇṇai, in all seriousness, I ask you to let this matter drop. If you keep bringing this up, I will never set foot in this compound again.'

After that exchange, Tampan spoke no further. The train whistle could be heard, carried by the breeze.

'Why would a train be coming at this odd hour?' asked Ilayavan.

'They're exporting coral stones to Colombo, it seems. They use it to make powder or something. Today, for the first time, they're loading it onto the train at Kāṅkēcanturai. Our assistant stationmaster was talking about it. That must be the one that's carrying the coral.'

After explaining this, Tampan went on to ask, 'Tampi, how are you going to take the women folk and children tomorrow? There's the bus from Tāvaṭi Junction run by the Nākalīṅkam Bus Company, *but on that bus they make us sit in the buck, and if we don't they hurl abuse at us at the top of their voices, 'Hey, Naḷatti! Hey, Paḷli! Sit in the buck!' Ever since we built the Christian church, they've been even meaner. Or if we go by bullock cart, which of our people has one we can hire? Now, Tampi, early in the morning you're going to go to Cuppar's, aren't you? Cuppar has a brother-in-law, Ariyakuṭṭiyan, who has a cart and two Indian bulls. Ask him once to see what he says. We'd be lucky to get it.' As Iḷaiyaṇ was feeling drowsy, all that Tampan said did not fully register.

Iḷaiyaṇ and Tampan got up before dawn, before the crows began to caw. Tampan tied the tapping kit around his waist and went off to make a cut in the tender sheaths of the palymra flowers.

'Get everyone ready and wait till I get back. It won't be long,' Tampan told his wife.

Iḷaiyaṇ had not even washed his face when he set off for the Varāri Temple. Had he still had a kuṭumi, he would have had to tie it tight. That, of course, he no longer had, since coming back from prison. In his sleep, his hair had gotten all messed up. This was Iḷaiyaṇ's state as he made his way toward the neighbourhood of the Varāri Temple, which was close by, *not more than four or five calling distances. Add those up and it would be about two miles (as a calling distance is nearly half a mile). And if one cuts right through the compounds instead of going around through the lanes, it would be no more than two calling distances.

Ilaiyaṇ stood in front of Cuppar's gate and called out, 'Cuppar Appā! Hello, Cuppar Appā!'

'He's not in. He's gone out. Who's that?' asked Cuppar's wife Ittiṇi, as she came out to the gate. Compared with Cuppar, who was gargantuan, Ittiṇi was really tiny, like an emmet. She came slowly out to the gate.

'And who are you, son?' Ittiṇi inquired. 'It's me, Āccil Cinnakkaḷaṭṭi Naṇṇiyaṇ's son, Ilaiyaṇ.'

'Say now, is it Naṇṇiyaṇ's son, Ilaiyaṇ? Yesterday that man of mine went on and on talking about your situation until midnight. Now he's gone over to his brother-in-law's house. Come in and sit for a while. I'll call him.' As she spoke, Ittiṇi went through a gap in the fence to the next-door house.

*Ilaiyaṇ sat on the raised veranda that was thought of as unusual because Cuppar had made the edges with white polished stones fixed into them. For that reason, he had had to wage a war against the Vellālars. When Cuppar emerged through the gap in the fence, Ilaiyaṇ stood up.

'Sit down, son, sit down. I went over to my brother-in-law's on your behalf. How are you going to get the women folk and children over to the Fort? That's why I went and asked him to take the carriage and give them a lift. The cart will follow you home. Did you find out at home if I would be able to join you tomorrow?'

Ilaiyaṇ appreciated Cuppar's magnanimity and in his heart felt nothing but admiration for such a man. 'Yes, they all know I've come over to say that you can join us tomorrow. I'm also here to ask if you could arrange for your brother-in-law's cart, the one that has the Indian bulls, for us to use today. But you've arranged for that already!'

Ilaiyaṇ was hardly finished when Cuppar exclaimed, 'What? The cart with the bulls? Don't be silly! That's the one he uses to carry cow manure to the fields. I told him to take the horse carriage instead.'

As there was a look of shock on Ḵaiyavaṇ's face, Cuppar repeated, 'Yes! The horse carriage!'

Until now, Ariyakuṭṭiyaṇ had only used his carriage for conveying pure-bred Vellāḷas. The Nayinārs had not allowed it to be hired by anyone else. Once, though, the Kollans had used it for a wedding, and Ḵaiyavaṇ could remember the brouhaha that ensued. Even though he was a small boy at the time, it had made a lasting impression on him.

'Ariyakuṭṭiyaṇ!' the Nayinārs had warned him. 'Knowingly or not, you have made a huge mistake. Besides, you've been greedy for money, money that even a dog would turn up its nose at. Mind you, we've warned you once. After this, if you take the wrong people in your carriage ...'

The Nayinārs let it go at that, but ever since, Ariyakuṭṭiyaṇ had not violated their injunction.

'But that's the carriage the Nayinārs go around in. This could lead to ...', Ḵaiyavaṇ was saying when all of a sudden Cuppar interrupted.

'Now look here, Tampi! On my brother-in-law's carriage there's no sign that says 'Reserved for Nayinārs only,' like the a sign in Turairācaṇ's drama theater that says 'Reserved for Paṇcamas.' Nanniyaṇ's children will ride in that very carriage, so you go ahead and get them ready. Don't be afraid, the carriage will come. I'll come along to put everybody in.'

When he was done speaking, Cuppar went back through the gap in the fence to the other side, while Ḵaiyavaṇ walked slowly home, wiping tears from his eyes.

'Tampi, there's something else I need to tell you. Hear me out and then go.'

Hearing himself called back, Ḵaiyavaṇ returned, deep in thought.

'Look here, Ḵaiyavaṇ. Don't fret too much that we might get involved in some kind of fray. *In the Pārata war, Arjuṇa was sunk in

thought when he got onto his chariot. Had he continued to ponder things like that, he might have dropped his bow or even broken it, and then Turiyōṭanaṇ and his side would have won. Don't think too deeply, Tampi. Don't hesitate, get on with it! I'll come with the horse carriage.'

Hearing this last part of Cuppar's speech, Iḷaiyaṇ walked on, chin up and chest out.

A few minutes after Iḷaiyaṇ had left, Ariyakuṭṭiyaṇ's horse carriage made a majestic start, Cuppar seated at his side. It was Cuppar's habit to wear a turban whenever he did anything new. And now he was wearing a turban made of a pure white shawl. Before the carriage had gone through the lanes around the Varari Temple and gotten to the big road that led to Kalaṭṭi, people had come out to the roadside and gawk at the sight.

'Hey! Take a look at the style Cuppar's affecting. *It's really true, the Kali Yuga has begun. The way he looks in that turban, there's nothing that'll stop him. No pure-bred Vellāḷa in the village should ever get into Ariyakuṭṭiyaṇ's horse carriage again. These low-caste fellows have lost their minds!'

*Looking like a veritable Vīmaṇ, Cuppar paid no heed to anything the Vellāḷas said, even though it wasn't Vīmaṇ's mace that he had under his arm but only a rosewood walking stick.

From there, the carriage went straight to Tampan's house where children surrounded it. Iḷaiyaṇ saw how majestic Cuppar looked and felt enormously proud. The people waiting were all dressed up, Tampan's wife, Mūttavaṇ's wife, Mūttavaṇ's daughter and infant daughter, and the stocky boy in the middle. They all got into the horse carriage and sat.

'I've just heard that you work at Aluppānti,' Cuppar said to Iḷaiyaṇ. 'Don't make it difficult for yourself at work. Get into the carriage but get down before we get there. I'll take everyone else, see them taken care of, and bring them home.'

Ilaiyaṇ could not object, and he understood why, but it still upset him and he got into the carriage shaking his head.

Passing by the front of the church, the carriage went down the cactus-lined lane through the stony countryside, observed by many. Various things were said. 'Well, that Christian Cuvāmi, the beef-eater from Māṇippāy, he's come here at last. The village's reputation is ruined.' It was an old man who said this in a loud voice. The people around him nodded their heads in approval.

Seeing them, Cuppar sat erect and spoke up, his words audible all around, *'It was because of Cakuṇi that the Pārata war broke out. That's why Turiyōṭaṇaṇ's side was annihilated.'

As the carriage moved on, Ilaiyaṇ brought Cuppar up to date on Pūkkaṇṭar, in particular that he had said that he, too, would be at the prison tomorrow. Cuppar was quiet for a while. He knew Pūkkaṇṭar well, having played *kaṇṭṭi* [*kabaddi*] and *kilittatṭu* with him as a child and Parucēyar when they were adolescents. All this came back to him in a flash. They had lost contact with each other for more than five or ten years, and now they were going to start their friendship all over again.

'Say, Tampi!' said Cuppar after a while, from the rider's seat. 'In order to show that there were people of good character everywhere in the world, *Villiputtūr Ālvār created a character in the Pārata called Vituraṇ who was on Turiyōṭaṇaṇ's side. I am reminded of how he broke his bow and threw it away in support of the Pāṇṭavars during the assembly of Turiyōṭaṇaṇ's clan.'

Ilaiyaṇ was unable to say anything at all in reply, as he was utterly ignorant of Vituraṇ and Villiputtūr Ālvār. By now, however, the carriage was nearing the town.

Pūkkaṇṭar Walks out of a Church Meeting

Two months had passed when one day Upatēciyār Cantiāppiḷlai, Cimiyoṇ, a young man who was new in the village, and a man of middle age, arrived in a small car and got down near the church. At the time, neither Tambaṇ nor ḷaiyavaṇ was home. Some unusual items, packed in three wooden boxes, came in the car, too. The two new persons who had come out were from the Jaffna advertising unit of the Star Brand matchbox company. They got the boxes out and stacked them on the veranda of the church house, while the Upatēciyār and Cimiyoṇ went off for a time and returned with some of the younger men and women.

The middle-aged man among the people who came by car, opened the boxes. He lifted out the packets of dark blue paper, which was uniformly cut. There were also thin slices of wood, a little thicker than paper, also uniformly cut in two sizes, and these he arranged neatly. Two wooden molds in different sizes and a tin of glue were also brought out of the boxes. The thin slices of wood were placed in piles on all sides of the wooden mold. A thin slice of wood was placed on top, which he held down with his hands. Glue was then spread on the blue sheets of paper, which were wrapped around the mold and folded to fit the shape. When the thin slice of wood was taken off the mold, it had been turned into the inner drawer of a matchbox. He then took the bigger mold, placed the broader slices of wood around it and pasted the paper on. When removed from the mold, it had been turned into the outer covering of the matchbox. Everyone found it quite mysterious. He demonstrated how to do it, over and over. In thirty minutes, around twenty-five pairs had been made and the glue had dried a little. He inserted the inner drawer into the outer cover, and counted how many there were—twenty-five exactly.

The man then asked ten persons to try. Five or six could do it well.

‘What else do we need?’ asked the Upatēciyār. ‘When the eyes see, the hands work. Everything will be alright.’

Each of the ten persons was given five hundred pieces of material, a small parcel of flour for glue, and a small amount of copper sulfate as a preservative. Molds, also, were given out. The ten were instructed to make the boxes and keep them ready for pick-up the following week.

And then the men who had come got ready to go. It was actually the young man who was in charge, not one who was middle-aged. His appearance was quite neat; he had white trousers on, a long-sleeved blue shirt and a red tie. He spoke in a dignified way and every now and then used English words. He walked majestically, having black socks and polished shoes. The sound made by his shoes harmonized with his gait. Everything about him was impressive. He and his assistants came weekly to count the matchboxes, pay out the wages, and bring the raw materials. In all, around twenty-five people in the village were making matchboxes. To a certain extent, it helped them make a living.

Nowadays, Tampan and Ilayavan were close friends of the matchbox man. He told them he was called ‘Yākkōpu’ and that he came from Iḷavālai. He and his parents, he said, were Christians of the Church of Our Lord. But they were not confident enough to ask about his caste. They knew that the Church of Our Lord had Veḷḷālas and Karaiyārs but no one from other castes. Most people in the village assumed he was a Karaiyāra boy.

When the number of matchbox workers in the village reached a certain point, Yākkōpu found that he, too, could not finish his work during the daytime, and so on certain days he also spent the nights in the village, along with his assistant.

‘Tampi!’ said Tampan. ‘Yākkōpu and the other fellow who stay here at night have nothing to eat. All they have is bread and water. Is

there anything we can do? Is there any reason why we can't arrange for them to stay at Pūkkaṇṭar's house? I'm hopeful he'll agree.'

Ḫaiyavaṇ thought it was a good idea, too, and Tampan therefore asked Pūkkaṇṭar right away. Pūkkaṇṭar thought it over and agreed.

For four or five months, the arrangement worked out. And then a rumor started going around the village that Yākkōpu had fallen in love with Pūkkaṇṭar's eldest daughter and that Pūkkaṇṭar and his wife were well-disposed to it.

'Say, Tampil!' said Tampan to Ḫaiyavaṇ. 'We thought he was a Karaiyāra boy, but it seems that he's a Veḷḷāḷa boy from Ḫavālai. Pūkkaṇṭar had made inquiries. Anyway, these people have been Śaivites for generations. I really don't understand how they agreed to this.'

'I'm as puzzled as you are. Pūkkaṇṭar doesn't take caste and religion all that seriously. That's why he consented, I suppose.' That was Ḫaiyavaṇ's opinion, and Tampan had to take it more seriously when he heard from Pūkkaṇṭar himself that the betrothal would take place at the Periyakkaḷaṭṭi church.

On a Sunday, in the middle of Holy Mass, Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar himself baptized Pūkkaṇṭar's eldest daughter, giving her the Christian name 'Lūrtammā,' which is how Carasvati is now called. And the week after, the betrothal of Lūrtammā, the Christian girl of the Church of Our Lady Who Delivers from the Gallows, and Yākkōpu the Christian boy from the Church of Our Lord at Ḫavālai, was ceremoniously performed in Periyakkaḷaṭṭi.

The village, though, was in absolute turmoil. Pūkkaṇṭar had been stigmatized and everyone vowed to ostracize him. Not only was Pūkkaṇṭar defiant, just to annoy the village he had all of those under his influence convert. Before the marriage of Yākkōpu and Lūrtammā, there were more than twenty-five, including Pūkkaṇṭar, his wife and other children. It was a great victory for Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar, and he was obviously delighted.

Our Lady at Periyakkaḷaṭṭi was in thriving condition. People had begun going there morning and evening. Yākkōpu played a key role in making the building bigger. Money was raised in Iḷavālai, Mātakal, and Paṇṭaitteruppu where Yākkōpu had relatives. At each Holy Mass, special supplication was made to Our Lady with the words, 'Let us pray for the repentance of the Heathen.' In Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar's personal baptism register the number was already in excess of one hundred and fifty. Some of his converts were people from mixed-caste backgrounds. Some fifteen families of those who were baptized were Karaiyāra Śaivites employed in the cigar industry. The church had become a big one within two years, with members from several castes.

Celebrations for the third anniversary of the church were being planned for the last Friday of October, but since the construction was already over in April many were anxious to advance the date and have the celebrations that month itself. On a certain Sunday after the Holy Mass, a meeting presided over by Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar commenced on the newly-enlarged veranda of the church house.

'Beloved Christians! What I wish to say is that since we now have a good number of members from different castes and the building of the church was recently finished, instead of processing with the statue of Our Lady for just a two-day Novena, I would like to make it longer.'

When the Cuvāmi finished speaking, he paused to hear what people would say. Quite a few expressed the opinion that the Novenas could be increased to seven, that on the eighth day the statue of Our Lady could be taken out in procession, that a High Mass could be celebrated, and that a feast could be sponsored in which everyone could participate. It was therefore a good idea for things to change.

One Novena, it was suggested, could be for Yākkōpu's people. Another could be for those who came from mixed-caste backgrounds. There might also be a Novena for the cigar-maker Karaiyārs. And since there were only a few members from the Vaṇṇar and Ampaṭṭar,

they could be combined into a group for one Novena. One could be for Tampan's people, the Paḷḷas. Another for Iḷaiyavaṇ's, the Naḷavas. And when all the Novenas were divided up this way, six seemed enough.

At the end, Yākkōpu requested that the Christians from Iḷavālai, Mātakal, and Cillālai, who had contributed generously to the construction of the Periyakkaḷaṭṭi church might want to have a Novena for themselves. Here, Tampan proposed an alternative, saying that his people and Iḷaiyavaṇ's could be responsible for a single Novena, leaving five Novenas and one Vesper service. That would make six in all, solving the problem. *It was further agreed to allocate the special Novena Vesper service on the final day to the fishing contractors of Cillālai and Iḷavālai, and other Christians from farther away.

Another proposal was that instead of having the Upatēciyār say the prayers at Holy Mass every Sunday in place of the Caṅkilittām, it would be better to appoint a literate person to that position. Some mentioned that Yākkōpu might be a good person to appoint.

Iḷaiyavaṇ, however, found this troubling. 'How can we just drop a man who has been serving in this capacity from the very beginning of the church?'

'I, too, wish to make a suggestion,' said the Upatēciyār. 'Do so, if you wish, but don't blame me later. What would be the harm in appointing Yākkōpu as the new Caṅkilittām and then appointing the old Caṅkilittām as Mūppar? Actually, he's older than all of us, and he must be the Mūppar for all of us.'

Everyone nodded in agreement, and the problem of the Caṅkilittām now stood resolved. The meeting was adjourned and everyone started looking for Pūkkaṇṭar, the new Christian, but he had left the meeting a few minutes earlier.

Īlaiyavaṇ Loses His Job at the Jetty

Two days later, when Tampan was returning from a half day's work, he met Pūkkaṇṭar on the way. During those two days, Pūkkaṇṭar had felt an urgent need to reconnect with Tampan, with whom he had had no contact.

'Tampan,' he said, thinking of a way to start the conversation, 'I had to go for the funeral of a relative of my in-laws, and only got back today. What's the news of the village?'

'Oh, yes, that's right. On the fourth day, you just up and disappeared from the church premises. I thought you were upset by the proceedings. Now I see it was just that you needed to go for a funeral.' Though this was how Tampan talked, he had also had the feeling that something was amiss during the discussion of the other Novena days when Pūkkaṇṭar could not be seen.

'No, no, I didn't leave because I had to go to a funeral. Why should I hide it from you, Tampan? I walked out because I was unhappy with the proceedings.' Pūkkaṇṭar did not conceal his feelings, but neither did he reveal what was really on his mind.

'What was that you were saying, Tampi? Your son-in-law is a newly appointed Caṅkilitāṁ. We did that unanimously. New people are coming into the church. They also agreed on doing the Novena this way. So why be upset, Tampi? I swear I don't understand what this resentment is all about,' Tampan said, bewildered.

'Whether the Caṅkilitāṁ is my son-in-law or my very own son makes no difference to me. All the devils in the world are struggling mightily to force you back into the old ways of the past. At the Kali Temple festival, Tampāppiḷaiyār and his people allocated one day of the festival to one particular caste. What's the difference between

that and this, I ask you? I realize that being in the post of Caṅkilittām means that you do not have a lot of authority. Even so, since you have this post, they thought that in certain matters they would have to take your opinions seriously. That's the reason they made my son-in-law Caṅkilittām and gave you the Mūppar's post, which has absolutely no power. This is an honorary position they gave you to make you feel important, even though you aren't. I must also tell you the things I've seen the last few days. *I went for Holy Mass to my son-in-law's church where there's a rope to keep your people separate. None of the women of your caste had a scarf on. Instead, they covered their heads with the ends of their cloths. I saw this with my own eyes. I asked why, and they said, 'Those filthy low-caste people may be Christians, but that's something we don't let them do.'

'Instead of leaving well enough alone, I went out for a bath to the Kīrimalai tank,' Pūkkaṇṭar continued. 'My God! Those sinful devils thrashed a small boy for having his bath there. Would you like to know who it was that gave him a beating? Well, one was the Upatēciyār of Our Lord's! There's something I'd like to ask you. What's the difference between your people worshipping from outside the Kali Temple and worshipping on the other side of a rope inside the church? Tampan, you get the point, I think. Soon enough they'll be doing the same thing here. Even Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar is helpless to stop it. He will pretend not to see these things. After all, he came here to propagate Christianity.'

After going on like this for a long time, Pūkkaṇṭar went on his way, and Tampan returned home with a heavy heart. There, he found Ilayavaṇṭ siting on the veranda, looking long-faced.

'What's this, Tampi, aren't you going to the Aluppānti?' Tampan asked.

'Aṇṇai, I went and came. They said they wouldn't give me any more work. It seems the foreman of our crew of six is a friend of Tampāppillaiyār and Naṭuvil. It seems that he only found out today that I was Naṇṇiyaṇ's son, and so he refused to let me work.'

Tampan understood what Ilayavan said, but assumed he could still work for another foreman, and so he said, casually, 'If he won't let you work, some other foreman will. Why look so grim?'

'Aṇṇai, they have a custom there that if someone gets dismissed by one foreman the others will not employ him either.' Hearing this, Tampan felt terribly upset.

Ponni, who had brought coffee in tin cups with spouts, looked ashen-faced. 'Why get all upset, girl?' Tampan admonished. 'I will see if somebody can arrange a job for him at the railway station.' He knew, though, that getting a job there was not an easy matter. Nevertheless, that was what he said.

The frustration Tampan had been feeling because of what he had heard from Pūkkāṇṭar was only compounded by Ilayavan's predicament. He may have spoken casually in front of Ilayavan, but he felt crestfallen and his mind flitted here and there. One moment he remembered what Pūkkāṇṭar said, the next he thought of Ilayavan's being out of work.

Tampan also realized that Ilayavan must have come home hungry and that there was nothing at all for Ponni to feed him with. Having lost his job, he would have returned on an empty stomach. In any case, only in the nighttime would Ponni make a fire to cook the rice. Tampan's wife therefore brought over some boiled Vattāḷa yam for them to eat. It was the kind of thing you could eat without a side dish and still be palatable.

'Look, Akka, I've just boiled the yam you gave me, so let me serve it,' Ponni said from inside her hut.

'Won't it be given if I serve it?' With these words, Tampan's wife brought the pot and put it down in front of them.

Ponni and Ilayavan finished the Vattāḷa yam, and Ilayavan now felt so exhausted that he wiped the veranda off with his shoulder cloth and lay down.

As Ilayavan did, something poked him in the waist—the hook that he used to lift the heavy gunny bags. He pulled it out and tossed

it angrily into the back of the house, either because it was annoying to be poked or because it reminded him that he wouldn't be carrying any more gunny bags.

'Why don't you lie down for a while, Tampi. After that, you can figure out what to do,' said Tampan, who then got up and left. A few minutes later, clouds gathered and the village was shrouded in darkness.

'Oh my, looks like it's going to be a downpour!' Tampan's wife said. 'Why don't you sit it out and see what happens?'

Tampan sat down on the veranda and said, irritatedly, 'Wouldn't you know it! I'm just about to go off on an important errand, and *this sinful woman of mine pulls me back like some kind of poisonous gecko.'

All of a sudden, the rain came crashing down without even starting as a drizzle. Huge raindrops fell like stones. A cyclone seemed to be underway.

Pūkkaṇṭar's Lecture on Economic Exploitation

The rain, unaccompanied by thunder and lightning, turned out to be prolonged and heavy, not just for one day or two but four. During the four days, the Periyakkaḷaṭṭi people only had kañci to drink, once a day. At Iḷaiyaṇ's, they did not even have that. Neither Yākkōpu nor anyone else from the company came to pick-up the matchboxes Poṇṇi and her eldest daughter had made. As soon as the meeting at church ended, Yākkōpu and his wife had gone off on business having to do with the festival at the church in his home village, and had not yet returned. Even if he had come back, a count of the boxes would have been impossible because they had not yet dried.

Somehow or other, enough toddy still flowed from Tampan's four or five coconut trees to provide some support for Iḷaiyaṇ as well. Despite the heavy rain, Tampan was able to keep the sheath on the trees dry with some coconut webbing. Even though he had quite a few long-time customers, none of them would drink on credit, out of principle; Pūkkaṇṭar was the one who had introduced the practice of payment on receipt. And so a small amount of money managed to come their way. Tampan had very little to share, but with what he was able to provide, Iḷaiyaṇ's family somehow got through the days of constant rain.

Iḷaiyaṇ, however, did not want to depend on Tampan any more than he had to, and when the thunder and lightning was all over and the sky had been cleared of clouds by the Cōḷakam wind, Iḷaiyaṇ went out in pursuit of work. He walked around and around the fields where he and his father used to do the tilling, but it only made him feel even more discouraged. Most of the land belonged to Tampāppiḷaiyār and was barren now. There was land, but it had no master.

Cevvanti Nācciyār had been Tampāppiḷaiyār's only heir, but she had died of a broken heart when the Ayurvedic physician Ampalavāṇar kept her tied up at his house. Had Tampāppiḷaiyār simply died instead of going to prison, at least someone from his lineage would have assumed ownership and done something to cultivate the land. He was alive, though, and that's why nobody could even put a foot on his property. It was like a goldmine, and it made ḷaiyavaṇ sad to stand there looking at it.

ḷaiyavaṇ walked around the village and when he found himself in the vicinity of Tampāppiḷaiyār's domain, his eyes turned toward the house. The palmyra leaf fence around the compound had fallen down, eaten up by white ants; even the fence posts were gone. There had been anthills on the rooftop, but the rains had dissolved them, and now there were big holes in the roof. The front yard was full of debris—leaves, dirt, broken twigs. In the posts that had held the well sweep, the ropes on one side had fallen loose, making the cross-bar go crooked. The well sweep itself was lying on the ground in a pathetic state. Village cattle were roaming freely throughout the compound. One of the outer wooden gates was missing. Someone must have pulled it out and carried it off. Without realizing it, he had become nostalgic.

Since Pūkkāṇṭar's house was next-door to Tampāppiḷaiyār's, ḷaiyavaṇ wondered whether he might be noticed. At that very moment, just as he expected, the gate opened and out came Pūkkāṇṭar.

'What's up ḷaiyavaṇ? Have some old memories brought you back to Tampāppiḷaiyār's?'

'Not really,' replied ḷaiyavaṇ, evasively. 'I just happened to be in the neighborhood.'

'That's fine. No problem. Were you looking for a job in town? Your foreman, I hear, was a friend of Tampāppiḷaiyār's. Tampan tells me he's the one who fired you. They say that even a calf that runs with a pig will eat excreta. If he's Tampāppiḷaiyār's friend, that's the kind of character he'll have.'

As Pūkkaṇṭar spoke, a thunderous noise was heard on the horizon, as if the sky were breaking apart. Whatever it was, it went up and up to the top of the sky, making the earth tremble. From all sides, a tumult broke out. For the first time, an airplane was flying over Tāvaṭi. Everyone, young or old, ran behind in the same direction, shouting 'Airplane! Airplane!' Pūkkaṇṭar and Iḷaiyaṇ, however, stayed put, their hands over their eyes as they looked up at the sky in search of the airplane. To their eyes, it was easily visible and not so very high. It flew above the clouds as well as below. The airplane had two layers of wings. Its back was long, and at the end it jutted up like the tail of a shark. It was the color of ash and appeared to be an airplane that could land in water. It flew off into the distance and disappeared, although the vibration it caused lingered on for quite a while.

After a few minutes, Pūkkaṇṭar returned to the conversation, saying, 'We got distracted by the airplane and forgot what we were talking about. I'll try to get hold of some people I know. Poor Poṇṇi! Even if she and her daughter make matchboxes for two fanams, will that be sufficient? I have to tell you, Tampan, my son-in-law may work for them, but they will exploit the hunger and disease of our people. They will not pay their wages fairly and promptly. Last week I heard that people representing a soap company go around visiting houses and distributing free soap. Pretty soon they'll be doing the same thing in our area. You may think they're doing it for the good of the people. That's what I thought, too. My son-in-law tells me that a tea company is planning to give their tea away, too, free of charge, all over the area daily for a whole year. Now why would they do that? Well, if people get into the habit of drinking tea, later on they'll pay for the tea themselves. That's how it works. Do you really think the matchbox company personnel are doing all this for you out of sympathy? But is there anything we can do about it? To a drowning man, even a small piece of wood seems enormous. Do your people know how much money they're making?'

Ḵaiyavaṇ returned home, burdened down by the things Pūḱkaṇṭar had told him. Already, it was past noon. Poṇṇi had something for him to eat, although it was not rice—far from it. It was two lumps of boiled palmyra yam ground up in the mortar with coconut shavings added. In any case, something went into his stomach, and so he fell asleep. When he opened his eyes, it was dark.

‘The man is not to be seen, Tampi,’ Tampan’s wife said to Ḵaiyavaṇ, sounding concerned. The tapping needs to be done, and it’s already after seven. His work at the railway station usually gets over at six. Instead of allaying her concern, Ḵaiyavaṇ looked apprehensive, too. And then, all of a sudden, Tampan walked in.

‘What’s this? Both of you deep in thought?’ Tampan commented.

‘What happened? Why on earth are you so late?’

Before answering his wife’s question, Tampan cleared his throat a little. ‘Today in the ocean off Uppumāl Beach, the airplane flew over and then landed. Everybody rushed there to have a look. After work, we all went, too. From the beach, we couldn’t see it clearly enough, so we hired a boat shaped like a toddy-cup and went out to see it up close.’ Tampan described the airplane with pride in his voice.

Tampan’s middle child, who was listening attentively, spoke up and said, ‘We saw it, too, when it flew over our compound.’

Ḵaiyavaṇ was unable to enter into the conversation, his mind was so preoccupied with the things Pūḱkaṇṭar had told him earlier that day—about the matchboxes, the soap, and the tea.

Ilaiyavan's Moral Dilemma

Friday was still five days away when Cuvāmi Nānamuttar, Yuvāni the cook, and Upatēciyār Cantiāpillai came to the church house. For their meals, Tampan, the newly-appointed Mūppar, rendered his assistance enthusiastically. From the very moment of his arrival and without stopping at all since then, the Cuvāmi spent his time in the church house, writing something, with the door locked from inside. He would only go to bed around midnight. Otherwise, he would emerge just once a day at noon, summoned by the bell. And once he returned, he would not come out again until five o'clock in the evening. If anyone wanted time to talk with him, it had to be found between five and the Angelus at six. Until then, the church house would remain quiet, apart from the sounds coming from the kitchen made by Yuvāni when he cooked with the pots and pans. Each day the Upatēciyār made his rounds from house to house, teaching the catechism.

'What's going on, Upatēciyār?' asked Tampan. 'Nowadays we never see the Cuvāmi out of doors.'

'Well, Mūppar, that's because the Cuvāmi is writing a book called *The History of Jaffna*. It's going to contain the history of all the Jaffna castes. Last year there was another book he had given to the printers after working on it for three years, called *A Dictionary of Tamil Words*. These are the man's obsessions,' said Upatēciyār, based on the facts as he had gleaned them from Cuvāmi. After this, Tampan asked no further questions.

Around this time, the Upatēciyār made an announcement, saying, 'For the Novena which begins on Friday, confession will take place from 7 to 8 pm on Thursday. Christians who receive Absolution may take the Eucharist at the Holy Mass the following day.'

When confession started at seven on Thursday, a chair was placed in the center of the church for the Cuvāmi to sit on. On the right and left were tall screens made of cane. They were there so that men and women could be separate when they knelt down for confession. On the inside of the cane screens white cloths with crosses stitched onto them had been hung. The screens also kept the Cuvāmi's face hidden so that sinners could confess their sins without inhibition.

The Cuvāmi came dressed in a white cassock with a voile surplice on top and a purple stole draped around his neck. He was fondling his beard when he arrived. Since it was the first confession, many who had sinned came. One after the other, he gave Absolution, first to a man, then to a woman, alternately. Many came to the confessional and then went back home. First, they would say the words, 'Cuvāmi, bless me, a sinner.' The Cuvāmi would then pronounce the words, 'Bless you, my child,' with a wave of his hand. To one he would prescribe the Prayer of the Act of Contrition and to another the Prayer of the Confession of Sins. A penance was sometimes stipulated for Absolution, ten recitations of the Lord's Prayer or ten Hail Marys. Sometimes it was both, depending on the gravity of the sin. On certain occasions, one also had to do four recitations of the Prayer of the Act of Contrition. When talking to people about their sins, the Cuvāmi classified them as mortal, venial, original, or personal. Each was classified and an appropriate penance prescribed.

Ilaiyaṇ was one of those who came for confession. He was, however, unhurried, and saw no reason for haste. He was unemployed, after all, and came to the confessional as the last person in the line for males. During this short interval, he had struggled to remember the sins he had committed since his last confession. Some he had forgotten, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he remembered them, for he wanted his confession to be a serious act. Without being serious, he would feel burdened with yet another sin—a false confession.

The procedure was followed. Now he recollected his sins and began to confess them in the form of a report. He took a little more time than the others because he wanted to make a true confession.

The Cuvāmi gave Ḥaiyavaṇ Absolution, but stipulated a penance of ten recitations of the Lord's Prayer, Hail Marys, and one Prayer of the Act of Contrition, to be performed in solitude. With this, the confession was over, and the Cuvāmi returned to his room.

When Ḥaiyavaṇ got home after finishing the penance, it was already past nine. Mūttavaṇ's middle child was crying and restless. Before going to church, he had eaten some rice his sister-in-law had given him. In quantity, this was no more than what might have fit into the lid of the pot it was cooked in, and was barely enough to keep him going until evening. What had gone into his stomach was already digested. The middle child was still restless and crying, pestering his mother for food, saying, 'Give me rice! I want some rice!' Tampaṇ and his family had gone away to the house of his relation several miles away for a girl's coming of age ceremony. Had Tampaṇ's wife been around, she would have brought over some food for the insistent youngster. She had done the same thing many times before. It was terribly distressing for Ḥaiyavaṇ to hear the child howl, and in his heart he cried out for the boy. And then ... And then ...

As soon as it was dawn, the Holy Mass of the day began. The people who had been absolved of their sins for the Eucharist, who had broken the Ten Commandments of the Lord or the Six Commandments of the Church had become new human beings through their confession to the Cuvāmi. Afterwards, they were to follow one of the Church's Commandments, namely, fasting from midnight until the Eucharist was received. One had to take the Bread of the Holy Eucharist on the tongue and swallow it without touching the teeth. Only if they did it that way would the full benefits of confession accrue to the sinful soul. And this was just one of many more canons of the Church.

When the Holy Mass began, the Rosary was sung and the prayers were recited. When Caṅkilittām Yākkōpu recited the 'Hail

Mary, Mother of Jesus,' the others repeated after him. Yākkōpu had a sweeter-sounding voice than the gravely voice of Cantiāppillai the Upatēciyār. At this point, the Mass was half over and the consecration of the Bread had just occurred. Yākkōpu, the new Caṅkilittām, was ready with the responsive prayers and did them flawlessly. With the consecration over, the time had come for the sinners to consume the Bread, symbol of the Holy Sacrament, and imbibe the benefit to the full. Of those who had received Absolution the previous day, only Iḷaiyavaṇ was missing. The eyes of the Cuvāmi searched all around for him, but he was nowhere to be seen.

Ilaiyavan Refuses the Eucharist

The Novenas had begun. As planned, the first six were successfully conducted. Only one was left, and it was to be a special one. Vespers would be sung, and it was to have other distinctive features. The patrons of that Novena, from Mātakal, Paṇṭaitteruppu, Iḷavālai, and Cillālai had arrived. People from each of those villages had erected temporary shelters around the church so that they would have a place to spend the day. Cooking had started. The bullock carts that had brought rice, vegetables, dried fish, and cooking utensils were parked on the edge of the church compound. Whenever the bullocks shook their heads, the round bells around their necks tinkled noisily.

Water, though, was needed for cooking, and Yuvāni the cook was asked about it. Yuvāni was having the same problem when he arrived, but found a smart solution. Without the Cuvāmi knowing, he had gone over to Pūkkāṇṭar's house and got the water he needed. Had the Cuvāmi found out, he would have said, 'Why did you get water from somewhere else when you could have gotten it from the well over on the boundary of Ciṇṇakkaḷaṭṭi?' In the last ten days, Yuvāni had had to get the Cuvāmi's bath ready only twice. Both times, however, he gave the excuse that as there was no curtain around the Ciṇṇakkaḷaṭṭi well, he would have to take him to Pūkkāṇṭar's house instead. And so he gave the same information to the people who asked and showed them the way to Pūkkāṇṭar's. It was what everybody did, and the Cuvāmi was unaware of it.

When the Cuvāmi woke up from the nap he took after lunch, Yākkōpu and the patrons for the Novena of the day went to speak with him about various things having to do with its observance. Additionally, they raised another matter.

‘Don’t misunderstand us for saying this, Cuvāmi, but in our own villages we never allow all the castes to sit together indiscriminately. And so ...’

The Cuvāmi did not say anything. His eyes looked each person up and down, appraisingly, and they all felt afraid. As he did so, he fondled his white beard. Nobody knew what he was thinking, and even Caṅkilittām Yākkōpu stayed quiet. After a while, Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar went back to the church house and closed the door behind him, while the others went their separate ways. At sunset, he had Upatēciyār Cantiāppillai go call Caṅkilittām Yākkōpu and Tampan Pēturu to the church house.

When the two arrived, the three talked behind closed doors about the request made earlier by the patrons of that day’s Novena.

‘Thus far, more than three quarters of the construction costs of the church have been raised from their donations,’ Caṅkilittām Yākkōpu explained. ‘Aside from that, some benefactors of the Novena are wealthy fishing contractors from the Karaiyāra community. Given the kind of situation we have in the village right now, the most urgent need is for work and wages. The fishing contractors are prepared to employ everyone in shallow-water net-cast fishing. They do that out at Mullaittivu, and it’s absolutely no problem to employ them all. That’s why it’s prudent to make a compromise.’

To that, Tampan added, ‘Work is badly needed, at least to give us some relief in our present circumstances. There are some issues we need to give in on, and then Christianity will spread and we will also flourish.’ This was the view that Tampan expressed, out of his very own mouth.

Now the decision was up to the Cuvāmi. He said that the arrangements for the Novena ought to go ahead, and then went off to the confessional where the only persons who came for Absolution were the patrons of the last Novena, along with one or two of the villagers. One, though, was Ilayavaṇ, who made a formal confession of his sins. They were rather few, but it took him a long time to say

what they were, even though he had received Absolution the week before. The Cuvāmi did not press him on why he had failed to take the Holy Sacrament. After receiving Absolution, Iḷaiyaṇ left. Three bells and then the last one rang the beginning of the Novena. The church was beautifully decorated, far beyond what had been done in the past. Before the Novena could begin, however, firecrackers and fireworks were set off.

A few minutes later, a cart drawn by two Indian bulls arrived. Four persons were riding in it, and in the back were their drums, two big ones and two small ones. They had come from Iḷavālai, and the Novena was going to start in Iḷavālai style with the beating of drums. They were beaten just twice, though, and then stopped. Since the very first Vesper Novena was going to be held that day, the Cuvāmi ascended the pulpit and preached a sermon. All fell silent and listened as he spoke for more than half an hour. He spoke of Jesus' Passion, of how he was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of the construction of the church, the situation in the village, and last of all on the necessity of some sort of compromise for the sake of Christianity's propagation.

In conclusion, the Cuvāmi said, 'Beloved Christians! To make it easy for the statue of Our Lady to be taken up to the entrance in procession and back again at Vespers, we will all need to work together for the sole purpose of propagating Christianity. *Would the Christians of this village kindly sit on the left, and would the Christians from outlying villages kindly sit on the right, along with their relations from the village here, leaving a pathway down the middle. I ask this of you in the name of the Omnipotent God. I bless you all.' Here, the Cuvāmi made the sign of the Cross with his right hand and finished the sermon.

Perfect silence reigned in the church. Immediately, the Cuvāmi's request was fulfilled, people changed places, order was restored, and the Rosary started, sung by Yākkōpu, the new Caṅkilittām, in his tinkling voice. Iḷaiyaṇ, who had been listening to the sermon

from the middle of the church, stood up in anger, removed his shawl, shook it, put it back on, and stormed out, pushing people out of his way.

Tampan, who had observed all this, followed Ilayavan out. Having walked a short distance, he called out, 'Tampi! What are you doing? Is it right to leave that way and make everyone upset? Come now, Tampi!'

'What kind of rubbish was the Cuvāmi talking, anyway? All those sons of bitches are trying to hoodwink us. If there's a single Naḷavan, Paḷḷan, Paraiyan, Vaṇṇān, or Ampaṭṭan who's a man and not a bastard, let him walk out like I did!'

Ilayavan went on and on in the same vein. His voice must have carried back to the church, because the praying of the Rosary stopped, if only for a moment, and then picked up again. Tampan, though, had returned to church, and all eyes were upon him.

Labour Recruitment by the Wealthy Fishing Contractors

As soon as the Novena was over, Tampan rushed home, wondering if a way could be found to pacify Iḷaiyaṇ. Tampan knew him well enough to know that Iḷaiyaṇ would burst out with whatever happened to be on his mind. That's why he ran home, thinking of how he might pacify him tactfully. Otherwise, Iḷaiyaṇ might do something drastic.

Tampan found Iḷaiyaṇ on the raised veranda, awake. 'Haven't you fallen asleep yet, Tampi?'

'How can I?' asked Iḷaiyaṇ in return, 'when there isn't a single self-respecting man in the whole of Periyakkaḷaṭṭi?'

'I understand what you're saying, Tampi, but if you're upset about what the Cuvāmi said in his sermon then I have to tell you that he asked me about it before he said it.'

To this, Iḷaiyaṇ made no reply. Instead, he simply stretched himself out and lay as still as a log of wood. After a while, Tampan spoke again. He related all the details of the conversation he and Caṅkilittām Yākkōpu had had with the Cuvāmi that evening. He further explained that the most urgent need was to find work for the village youth, and that the only work to be had was in shallow-water net-casting. He had given his consent because he did not want to antagonize the fishing contractors.

Despite a feeling that Tampan was probably right, deep in his heart Iḷaiyaṇ felt that the Cuvāmi had been wrong to say what he said. And he could not help but blurt out, 'Aṇṇai! Be that as it may, I still don't think the Cuvāmi should have said what he did.'

'You're absolutely right, Iḷaiyavaṇ. Even so, I believe the Cuvāmi, who has done so much for our well-being, also meant this for our good when he said it. Anyway, we'll have to see how things go from now on. Tomorrow, when the Holy Mass is over and the Stations of the Cross, we'll talk the whole thing over again. Until then, we'll just have to put up with it. Please, don't upset anything.'

While Tampan was speaking, the women folk returned from church with the boys and girls. 'Back at church, everyone's talking about Iḷaiyavaṇ storming out angrily. What happened?' asked Tampan's wife.

'Has the news spread so quickly' Tampan exclaimed, much annoyed.

'Has it spread?' you ask! The whole church was in turmoil. Someone must have told the Cuvāmi right after the Novena, because he was searching around for you and Iḷaiyavaṇ.' But before Tampan's wife could even finish, the Upatēciyār had come.

'What's this, Tampil!' exclaimed the Upatēciyār as soon as he walked in. 'It seems you disturbed the Holy Mass by walking out. I'm supposed to ask the Mūppar to send you to the Cuvāmi.'

Iḷaiyavaṇ remained silent.

'Tell me, Upatēciyār. Is it such a serious thing? I don't see why I shouldn't say it, so I will: the boy was annoyed that the Cuvāmi asked us all to segregate ourselves. That's why he left. Now tell me,' Tampan asked the Upatēciyār, 'do you think the Cuvāmi harbors a prejudice against any of the castes?'

'Are you joking? The Cuvāmi harbor any caste prejudice! From the time he was ordained, how much suffering has he undergone on behalf of your people? How many times has he gotten himself deep into trouble? You don't know the half of it. They shot him for building a church in the Paḷḷa area at Tēvaraṭṭu, but he escaped, fortunately. Even then, was he shaken up at all? But why digress? Recently, they harassed him no end for building the Church of Our

Divine Mother at Urumpirāy. Because he built the church at Mulavai they gave him a hard time, too. Two years back he built the Church of Our Savior of the World in the Turumpa area of Uṭuppiṭṭi. When they took the procession out through the lanes of the village, people of the Taṇakkārar caste caused all sorts of trouble. In spite of it all, he is the kind of man who endures tribulation and triumphs in the end. If that's the kind of opinion you have of the man, Mūppar, I must tell you how very offended I am. And if this is what the boy thinks of the man who not only saved him from the gallows but his father and brother as well, then it's an act of ingratitude. I tell you all this without hiding what I really feel.'

When the Upatēciyār stopped speaking, Iḷaiyaṇ and Tampaṇ got ready to go with him. While the Upatēciyār walked in front and they followed behind, they passed people seated here and there around the bullock carts that had come in from the outstations.

The door of the church house stood open. Looking inside through the door, Tampaṇ saw the light of a candle, illuminating a remarkable sight. There was the Cuvāmi, kneeling before the crucifix, deep in contemplation. Tears poured from his eyes, and his beard was soaked. His eyes were fixed on the crucifix and his hands clasped in adoration. He was frozen like a statue. Deeply distressed, Tampaṇ took Iḷaiyaṇ by the hand and had him look through the window. Seeing what a state the Cuvāmi was in, Iḷaiyaṇ's heart broke and he wept profusely. Had he watched any longer, he would have howled at the top of his voice. The Upatēciyār could see how moved they were and led them out.

Outside, the sound of the round bells on the bullocks could be heard here and there. Standing in front were Yākkōpu and others from his village, along with the patrons of that day's Novena—namely, Cimiyoṇpillai and Mariyāmpillai, the fishing contractors.

'Cammattiyār, this is the young man about whom I spoke. The other is the Mūppar of the church,' said Yākkōpu, introducing them to the fishing contractors.

'The young man seems well-built for hauling in the shallow-water net. Mūppar! How many more like him can we recruit? Each of us can employ at least twenty-five. Next Friday, you must have them ready and send them out to Iḷavālai. The Cōḷakam may start blowing the next full moon day. The boat to Mullaittīvu leaves on Saturday.'

'There are only around thirty more like this one,' Tampan replied. 'I'll send you different sizes, but try to make the best of them that you can.'

Iḷaiyaṇ, who had not spoken yet, was asked by Mariyāmpillai the fishing contractor, 'What have you got to say, son? Are you prepared to leave on Friday?'

All that Iḷaiyaṇ could do was nod his head in assent. At this, the fishing contractors left with Yākkōpu and the Upatēciyār.

Tampan and Iḷaiyaṇ, however, stayed on, waiting to see the Cuvāmi, who even now remained in prayer. Around the next full moon, the Cōḷakam would begin blowing, and before that they would have to get to Mullaittīvu.

Pūkkaṇṭar Criticizes the Wealthy Fishing Contractors

The Holy Mass was over. The procession of the casket holding the statue of Our Lady was over, too. The kañci provided by the fishing contractors of Iḷavālai and other benefactors from outlying areas had all been served. Before noon, the church had been deserted of people. The decorative festoons had all been removed. The flag that had been hoisted, along with its flagpole, were no longer in sight. Yuvāni was hastily preparing a meal for the Cuvāmi.

Caṅkilittām Yākkōpu was feeling proud of himself due to the efficiency of the day's festival under his supervision. He wanted to treat Upatēciyār Cantiāppillai, since it was thanks to his backing that he had become Caṅkilittām, and so he took him to his house. The Upatēciyār was used to having a bit of alcohol, although he did not imbibe on a daily basis. Whenever he felt happy, he would have a drink without anybody knowing it. He was quite sure that even the Cuvāmi was unaware, but the smell of onion on his breath was a dead give away. The Upatēciyār, though, did not know this, and so whenever he drank he tried to hide the smell on his breath with a bit of onion. To the Cuvāmi, however, this was the very thing that gave him away.

When Yākkōpu and the Upatēciyār arrived, Pūkkaṇṭar, Yākkōpu's father-in-law, was there at home. Pūkkaṇṭar hardly spent any time at all around the church, and it must have irked him to see the people who had come from Iḷavālai to enjoy the festival. It must have made him even angrier to find out that the fishing contractors had arranged for the Periyakkaḷaṭṭi people to start shallow-water net-casting the week after. When the Upatēciyār appeared, Pūkkaṇṭar thought they were going to be able to have a long conversation, but

as his son-in-law was also there he realized that such a thing would never happen.

Even so, he asked the Upatēciyār, 'What's this I hear, Upatēciyār? The ḷavālai fishing contractors are doing some fishing in troubled waters? They seem pretty smart to me. What's your opinion?'

As he was also involved in recruiting people to work, the Upatēciyār said nothing.

'What's that, Upatēciyār! Nothing to say?' Pūkkaṇṭar asked again.

'Wouldn't you know! They seem so genuinely enthusiastic about helping other people. Their real intentions aren't understood.'

Without actually saying so, the Upatēciyār protested that Pūkkaṇṭar himself was the one who failed to understand.

'What's this, Upatēciyār! You're not trying to hoodwink us, are you? They seem to be on the lookout for muscular young men in need of help, like ḷaiyavaṇṇ.' Pūkkaṇṭar did not beat around the bush because he wanted the Upatēciyār to know that he knew what he was up to.

Even though the sun was hot, Pūkkaṇṭar picked up his mamoty for working in dry soil and went out.

'He's the kind who gets fussy about the most trivial things. Come this way, Upatēciyār, and don't take him seriously,' said Yākkōpu as he invited the Upatēciyār into his private room.

'I do believe I know your father-in-law's character,' said the Upatēciyār, confidently, as if he knew Pūkkaṇṭar inside and out, and then went in.

Even though Pūkkaṇṭar had taken his mamoty, he did not go out to the field; instead, he went straight to Tampan's house. He had never gone there with a mamoty before, and only rarely did he show up in the hot sun.

'Say, Tampi, you seem to be in a mighty big hurry, and with your dry-soil mamoty no less.' Observing this, Tampan went out to meet

Pūkkāṇṭar as he approached through the palmyra grove. It was high noon and the shadows of the palmyra were etched on the ground.

'It's not that urgent, Tampaṇ. Your Upatēciyār came home with my son-in-law and I wasn't comfortable being there any longer. I got up and left, taking my mamoty so that my son-in-law wouldn't misunderstand me.

'You all worked hard together and pulled off something really splendid,' Pūkkāṇṭar continued, referring to the Novenas. When Tampāppiḷaiyār and his minions took the money you collected for their celebration of the festival at their Kali Temple, they didn't even allow you in. You weren't permitted to touch the cart on which Kali was pulled around. What's different now? They conduct the festival in your church, in your village, and with your money. You were all sitting on the left side of the church, and people from the other castes were all sitting on the right. What's the difference between this and all of you standing outside the Kali Temple?'

To this, Tampaṇ said nothing.

'Then the fishing contractors of Iḷavālai get together, make some kañci, give it away to Periyakkaḷaṭṭi people who were starving, and take their leave.'

To this, Tampaṇ again said nothing.

'Lastly, Tampaṇ, may I ask if your well has run dry? After all, they had the kañci prepared with water from the well at my house.'

Tampaṇ did not respond to this either.

'You see! Those fellows who came around saying that they only wanted to help you build a church, were really out to recruit muscular young men like Iḷaiyavaṇ to haul their shallow-water fishing nets. What do you imagine it's like to haul a shallow-water fishing net? It isn't something weaklings like you and I can do! I saw it only once, at Mullaittivu. It would wring out of you the milk you suckled from your mother's breast.'

'Onto the boiled rice with sand mixed into it, they pour some watery gravy made of dried fish, and serve it in a box of palmleaves. Then, if that devil of an overseer sees a shoal of fish approach he'll toss sand over the open palmleaf boxes. You can't imagine the agony on the faces of the people, their food half-eaten. To drink, do you think they give you decent water? Curse those overseers! They tell the people to dig holes in the beach and drink whatever water they get.'

'Are you supposing they allow people to go home once in a while to see their wives and children? Anyone who leaves before the end of the shallow-water fishing season will have his life snuffed out. How many have been killed just for that! Even if they bear it all in silence and stick it out until the end, they will be thrown into the sea if they don't spring into action fast enough when there's a sighting of the Indian archery fish.'

Still, Tampan kept silent.

'Several varieties of the Indian archery fish fetch big money to the tune of about a hundred or two hundred pounds sterling. But even though the business is profitable, do you think they will pay their workers generously? Their own people know what these hardships are like, and that's why none of them will go out to haul the nets. Could it be clearer why they come here to hustle starving people? Before I came, that's what I was telling the Upatēciyār. The Iļavālai fishing contractors are pretty smart about fishing in troubled waters.'

Even now, Tampan did not speak.

'I heard that you were also doing some of their recruiting. It would appear that you and my son-in-law have taken care of everything. Am I supposed to call him a big man just because he's my son-in-law? I call things as I see them. If something is right, I'll call it 'right,' if it's wrong I'll call it 'wrong.'

This time Pūkkaṇṭar did not wait for Tampan to reply. Putting the dry-soil mamot over his shoulder, he set off. But that was just

like Pūkkāṇṭar. Whenever he had a strong opinion on a matter of justice, he would come right out and say it and then disappear. In his heart of hearts, though, Tampaṇ was uneasy and restless. It was Pūkkāṇṭar who had made him feel that way.

There was no cooking being done at home that noon. All the Periyakkaḷaṭṭi people, including Tampaṇ's wife, had brought home the leftover kañci from the church to have for their midday meal. Already, though, it was evening. Iḷaiyaṇ got up and went to church, hoping to get Absolution today so that he could at least receive the Eucharist the next day.

The Cuvāmi was pacing back and forth on the veranda, reading a small book. Iḷaiyaṇ waited, hesitant. Four or five times more, the Cuvāmi paced back and forth, finished a section of the book, and then said, 'What can I do for you, child?'

Iḷaiyaṇ knelt on one knee, bowed, and said, 'Praise the Lord!' Raising his hand, the Cuvāmi blessed him. On receiving the blessing, Iḷaiyaṇ said, 'I need Absolution, Lord.' 'Go to the church and get ready for your confession, child,' answered the Cuvāmi. Iḷaiyaṇ went and a few minutes later the Cuvāmi came to the confessional, wearing the robes of a confessor. Iḷaiyaṇ approached the confessional, recited the prescribed prayers, and began to confess his sins. It was over fairly quickly, and the Absolution was brief.

Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar Accepts Defeat

Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar's heart was heavy and troubled. A feeling of melancholy had overtaken him, ever since Iḷaiyaṇ had confessed, received Absolution, and left. Iḷaiyaṇ was not someone he considered a sinner. The week before, he had also received Absolution, and although he had not showed up to partake of the Holy Sacrament, the Cuvāmi did not feel that he needed to be questioned as to why. What Iḷaiyaṇ confessed to having done during the interval since his last confession was to commit a venal sin. It was a venal sin that had not had serious repercussions. That he had not asked the reason for it and also because he had said nothing about how to avoid it in the future made the Cuvāmi even sadder. The whole day he had had no respite. All the many visitors gave him no rest. After eating the evening meal Yuvāni had prepared, he headed for bed, earlier than usual, so early that Yuvāni and the Upatēciyār were surprised. Meanwhile, Caṅkilittām Yākkōpu arrived to see him. Even though he heard him call out that he was there, the Cuvāmi did not emerge.

'It seems the Cuvāmi is ill and went to bed early,' said Upatēciyār.

From this, it occurred to the Cuvāmi that the Upatēciyār was going out and that he was taking Yākkōpu with him.

'I may only come late, Yuvāni, as I'm going over to Caṅkilittām's. Don't keep anything for me to eat.'

This snippet of the Upatēciyār's conversation was the only thing the Cuvāmi could hear, barely.

Having said Compline, the Cuvāmi sat silently for a few minutes in front of the Crucifix, lay down on the bed and closed his eyes. Sleep, though, did not come, and so he closed his eyes even more tightly. Nor did it help to empty his mind of any and all thoughts.

That was something that always helped whenever sleep had eluded him before. It was a habit, but today it failed to work. Whenever he tried, thoughts of *Ilaiyavan* flooded in, and he could not get him out of his thoughts.

Childhood memories resurfaced through the Cuvāmi's closed eyes, like scenes moving on a screen. School life from his early years. The death of his mother's first husband. The love showered on him by his step-father. His employment with the railways. His resignation. Entry into seminary. Ordination. Similar memories kept coming back. Familiar figures from his lifetime after ordination flitted in front of his eyes. *'Speak up on behalf of the poor, and for justice to the destitute.' To hold fast to these words of Jesus—that was what he had lived for. Building churches in the villages of the downtrodden, lowly and lost. Undergoing suffering on their account. Saving large numbers of sinners. Spending the nights in villages, hungry. Abused by caste fanatics and the heathen. Providing education for children where there were no schools. Bearing up under the cynical remarks of other *cuvāmis* from his very own Order. Tearfully interceding with the Omnipotent God for the salvation of sinners. Baptizing countless heathen by showing them the light of wisdom. Washing their sins away with his blessings upon them. Zealously laboring for the Kingdom of God and for each one's eternal rest. Sacrificing his life to relieve others of their suffering. In between these memories, *Ilaiyavan* inserted himself. It was as if he was determined to disturb all his memories of the past. The Cuvāmi tried again to forget him, but was unable. Nor did it help to curse him and say, 'Get away, Devil!'

Yesterday's words, uttered at the Vesper Novena, now came back to the Cuvāmi for him to ponder how he could have said them.

'Christians of this village on the left, Christians of outlying villages on the right.'

As he recalled them, these words of his sounded loud and piercing. Getting up from bed, he raised his hands before the statue of Jesus, illuminated by the light of a candle that had almost burned out.

Lifting his eyes, the Cuvāmi called out, 'My Lord! The one true God! Have mercy, save me, and take me to your feet! My Lord! The one true God! Save me, a sinner! Take me to your feet and grant me eternal rest!'

When he had finished praying, he lowered his hands to his chest, kept them there, and bowed his head. Tears poured from his eyes like a stream. His beard was soaked with tears. The Cōlakam had started early and was now howling through the open window, extinguishing the single candle.

No one knew whether he was still in that state or whether he had gone to bed. A while later, the sound of the Cuvāmi restlessly tossing and turning on the bed, trying to sleep, could be heard. Iḷaiyaṇ's not being around any longer, two days from now, and his going away with all those other unfortunate creatures hauling the shallow-water fishing nets—these were the things that preoccupied the Cuvāmi's thoughts.

The Cuvāmi must have known this would happen, and memories of the shallow-water fishing camps now came back to him. During his many years of public life, he had gone out to the camps several times to provide an opportunity for the people in them to have Absolution for their sins. There, he had seen for himself the agony of these unfortunate human insects. Once a month at least, he did not fail to offer a Mass on their behalf, or whenever they were on his mind. Whenever the Cuvāmi was at the camps, the shallow-water fishing contractors would look after him. They would receive Absolution but without having to confess the hardships they inflicted upon their workers. Instead, they asked Absolution for the jealousy they felt when other fishing contractors caught more than they did, or when they had committed some kind of sexual immorality because their bodies demanded physical pleasure. They did not regard anyone working for them as a human being, and so the injustices and atrocities they committed were not things they included in the account they made of their sins. Even though the

Cuvāmi himself was well aware of these things, at the impromptu Mass at the camp one of the fishing contractors would say, 'Let us pray for a good catch of fish,' and everybody would say it as if it were their prayer as well. At first, whenever the Cuvāmi thought of it, he simply found it amusing. Now, though, he recalls that Iḷaiyaṇ and his people are going to be there, too, and that he, as their Cuvāmi, was not ignorant of how they were recruited. The swift precursor of the Cōḷakam wind was already slowing down; today or tomorrow, the real Cōḷakam would start blowing. The crows were already cawing, and dawn was about to come.

Mirage

Quite a few people felt worn out after the grand Mass and festivities of the previous day, and only a few had come for Holy Mass. When the Angelus was over, the first, second, and third bells had been rung, and the final one in haste. The Holy Mass had begun. The Cuvāmi had performed the Mass about halfway when all of a sudden Iḷaiyaṇ rushed in. Already, the Elevation of the Consecrated Host had taken place, and now was the time to receive the Eucharist. First to queue up were the males, but Iḷaiyaṇ could not be found among them. Looking concerned, the Cuvāmi could be seen searching for him with his eyes. In a corner of the church, he was found, down on his knees, gazing upon the Cuvāmi in sorrow. When his eyes met the Cuvāmi's, they lowered, making the Cuvāmi feel strangely ill at ease. It was as if someone had hold of his liver or was squeezing his heart.

The Holy Mass had ended; all had gone, and the church premises were deserted. The Cuvāmi went into the church house and did not open the door, even for his morning meal. Yuvāni, who had brought him breakfast, knocked at the door, but it remained closed, and so the food was returned to the kitchen. The Upatēciyār had gone out somewhere. It was around noon that a voice was heard speaking with Yuvāni—Iḷaiyaṇ's. The door of the church house opened up and out came the Cuvāmi.

Very properly, Iḷaiyaṇ bent down on one knee and said, 'Lord, bless me, a sinner.'

The Cuvāmi did so, very formally, and asked, 'What troubles you, child?'

'I came for confession,' Iḷaiyaṇ replied.

Wordlessly, the Cuvāmi went back inside and returned wearing his confessor's robe, motioning to Iḷaiyavaṇ to follow him to the confessional where the prescribed prayers were said.

Iḷaiyavaṇ began his confession, but the Cuvāmi interrupted, asking, 'Why didn't you receive the Holy Eucharist today, child?'

Iḷaiyavaṇ struggled to find words, but couldn't at first.

'Tell me, child! Hiding something from a Cuvāmi is like hiding it from God. In the name of God, tell me!' the Cuvāmi urged.

'Yesterday, Cuvāmi, after I drank the milk kañci here at church, I had nothing else to eat. Later in the night, my sister-in-law gave the children the kañci to drink that she had brought home from church. She left some for me to have, but I refused, had them drink it instead and sent them off to bed. After confession, I did not even have a drop of water to drink. Early this morning, I couldn't endure the hunger pangs any longer. Lord, they were so bad I thought I was going to die. So I went next door to the coconut grove and plucked two young coconuts on the sly and drank them up. Cuvāmi, I sinned, and that is why I could not receive the Eucharist. I stole. That's why I couldn't come,' Iḷaiyavaṇ answered.

It took some time before the Cuvāmi said anything.

'Well, then, child, why didn't you come for the Eucharist yesterday, after having been absolved the day before.'

'In the sermon you gave the day before yesterday, Cuvāmi, you made a distinction based on caste and accordingly asked our people to sit on one side of the church. Feeling disillusioned, I rushed out of church and abused you in foul language right in front of Tampan Aṇṇai. It was because I sinned, Cuvāmi, that I did not come for the Eucharist yesterday,' Iḷaiyavaṇ bravely answered the second of the Cuvāmi's questions.

Without so much as a pause, the Cuvāmi asked a third, 'Last week as well, child, you received Absolution but failed to come for the next day's Eucharist.'

'At noon that day, Cuvāmi, my sister-in-law made porridge. She gave some to the children, some to me, and had some herself. Around midnight, my elder-brother's middle child cried out, 'I'm hungry! I'm hungry!' And so I got up around midnight, went to Pūkkāṇṭar's garden and pulled out two tapioca yams. Without my sister-in-law's knowledge, I boiled them, and fed them to him. I sinned, Cuvāmi—*baḍaḡiṇi*, Cuvāmi.'

Thus did Iḷaiyavaṇ answer the Cuvāmi's third question. As though of its own accord, his mouth spoke the answer at the very end when he came out with the Sinhala word for 'hunger.' After this, the Cuvāmi had nothing more to ask, aware that Iḷaiyavaṇ must have learned the Sinhala word in prison.

Neither was Absolution pronounced, nor penance prescribed. The Cuvāmi sat, unmoving, and Iḷaiyavaṇ found it perplexing. He then got up, shedding tears, went to the crucifix and knelt before it, weeping. Seated on the ground, Iḷaiyavaṇ stayed put, like a statue.

It was a long time before the Cuvāmi went out to the veranda, using the stole to wipe his tears away. As he sat in a chair, he gazed into the distance across the barren land spread out before him. On something in the distance, his eyes settled and lingered—a mirage caused by the scorching sun, looking like waves on water. It was the mirage that disillusioned him, the mirage that he saw through the tears in his eyes. Ah!—*baḍaḡiṇi*. When the literal meaning of the Sinhala word—*fire in the stomach*—welled up in the heart of this scholar of many languages and echoed in his ears, a vast emptiness opened up, right before his eyes.

Explanatory Notes

Three Christian Boys Visit Naṇṇiyaṇ

**‘Cuvāmi entered my name in the baptismal register as “Rāyappu”’*

In Christian Tamil, ‘Rāyappu’ means ‘Peter.’ As Rāyappu was a convert, the priest chose his baptismal name for him; naturally, had Rāyappu been born a Christian, his parents would have exercised their own prerogative. In *Mirage*, Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar decides what his first-generation Naḷava and Paḷḷa converts will be called. Note, however, that Daniel regards renaming as deculturizing—as well as difficult for the converts themselves to remember. In Bama’s *Karukku* (translated from the Tamil by Lakshmi Holmström; New Delhi, 2nd ed.: Oxford, 2012), currently one of the most widely-read Dalit novels, one finds a similar attitude toward ‘baptismal names’ (p. 8): ‘The names you heard along our streets would really surprise you. People’s baptismal names, given at church, were one thing; the names we used in the street were quite another.’

Cinṇi’s Rape and Tampāppillaiyār’s Denial

**‘What Naḷa rubbish are you talking, Naṇṇiyaṇ?’*

Here, Tampāppillaiyār uses the word ‘Naḷa’ in a derogatory way to refer to the Naḷavars, Naṇṇiyaṇ’s caste group. In Jaffna, Naḷavars tapped trees and brewed toddy, the local palm wine. Though widespread, the consumption of alcohol was prohibited by Hindu religious law; for this reason (among others), Naḷavars were considered ‘impure’ by the higher castes. As was the case with Naṇṇiyaṇ, Naḷavars were mostly landless agricultural laborers.

**‘You know he was betrothed to my girl when he was still a babe’*

Cross-cousin marriages of this kind were (and are) permissible in Tamil society. At the time, marriage arrangements could be agreed upon while children were still in their infancy.

**The front of his head was fully shaven. In the back, it was tied into a neat kuṭumi.*

Males typically kept their heads shaven; on the crown or in the back, there would be a hairlock or topknot or tuft—the *kuṭumi* (in Skt., śikhā). In Jaffna today, the *kuṭumi* can be seen, but uncommonly. In chapter 11, Tampāppillaiyār will remark on the fact that Naṇṇiyaṇ had been visited by some Christian boys who wore their hair bobbed and not in the traditional *kuṭumi* style. Semiotically, their appearance was therefore a matter of alarm. And in chapter 16, Tampāppillaiyār will again give voice to his suspicion that a certain person must be a Christian on the basis of his not having a *kuṭumi*. When exactly, and in what numbers, Jaffna's Christians gave up the *kuṭumi* remains uncertain. Noteworthy about the males who appear in *Mirage* and convert to Christianity is that at no point are they ever required to shave off their *kuṭumis*. Historically, however, missionaries (those in particular who were Protestant) did attempt to curtail the practice. For helpful background based on cases from the South Indian mainland, see 'Tempest over a Topknot: Refashioning Men's Bodies,' in Eliza F. Kent, *Converting Women: Gender and Protestant Christianity in Colonial South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 226-233.

— 3 —

Naṇṇiyaṇ at Home, Lamenting with Celli

**Before Naṇṇiyaṇ got back, his younger son, Ilayavaṇ, had returned from tilling Kotti Corner, one of Tampāppillaiyār's tobacco fields.*

This particular tobacco field, named after Kotti, an evil spirit who prowls around after nightfall and preys upon the new-born, must have seemed particularly eerie and isolated. In such lonely locales, prophylactic rituals are performed on behalf of the parents by the midwife who assists at the birth of their child.

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Ponni's Visit and Mūttavaṇ's Fury

**'Girl,' Celli inquired, 'has Mūttavaṇ returned from toddy tapping?'*

Toddy, also called palm wine, is a mildly alcoholic drink made from the fermented sap of the palmyra. Scattered throughout *Mirage* are the details of how toddy is tapped, usually by cutting the palmyra flower, to the stump of which a pot is attached to collect the sap. Important to note is that the toddy tappers—who can be either Naḷavars (such as Mūttavaṇ) or Paḷḷars—are not the owners of the trees they tap. Usually, these are the property of Veḷḷāḷars, Jaffna's dominant cultivator caste. For details on traditional forms of exchange and payment between Veḷḷāḷars, Naḷavars and Paḷḷars, see W. Robert Holmes, *Jaffna (Sri Lanka) 1980* (Jaffna: Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society of Jaffna College, 1980), pp. 208-210. Since the consumption of alcohol is proscribed by the *dharmaśāstras* (Hindu legal texts), the production of it carries an indelible stigma, more so than its consumption—a conundrum that has elicited considerable anthropological comment. 'Veḷḷāḷars,' writes Bryan Pfaffenberger, 'particularly if they work hard during the day consume [toddy] eagerly and in copious amounts. There is nothing wrong about toddy-drinking that is held reprehensible Notwithstanding the fact that much of the toddy they tap is destined for Veḷḷāḷa refreshment, Naḷavars and Paḷḷars are nonetheless held to be impure on account of toddy-tapping.' *Caste in Tamil Culture: The Religious Foundations of Sudra Domination in Tamil Sri Lanka* (Syracuse, NY: Maxwell School of Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1982), pp. 50-51. For a contemporaneous account from rural Sri Lanka, where toddy consumption continues to be an exclusively male activity, see Michele Ruth Gamburd, 'Breadwinners No More: Identities in Flux,' in *Everyday Life in South Asia*, edited by Diane P. Mines and Sarah Lamb, 2nd ed. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), pp. 112-114.

**This was the time when the trains went by, north to south.*

Besides the trains, Daniel will refer to a number of other Jaffna firsts (the first tarred roads, the first daily newspapers with serialized news stories, the first airplanes, etc.). Such references provide historical hooks on which to hang the novel (as it were). They are, however, not entirely consistent chronologically, and the novel could plausibly take place almost anytime in the first several decades of the twentieth century. On the railroad, which first reached Jaffna in 1905, see L. S. de Silva (ed.), *A History of the Sri Lanka Government Railway* (Colombo: The Institution of Engineers, 1989).

**‘You shouldn’t let him go visiting at his uncle’s house where grown-up girls are living. It just isn’t right.’*

By making Nanṇiyaṇ sound prudish, Daniel wants to project an image of the Naḷavars as a people of exceptionally high moral standards.

**‘We may be their bonded laborers’*

Throughout the novel (with an important exception discussed below in the note on ‘slaves’ in chapter nine), Naḷavars such as Mūttavaṇ and Paḷḷars such as Tampan, refer to themselves as ‘bonded laborers,’ *ciraikkuṭikaḷ*, a standardized term of modern vintage. So also does Tampāppiḷaiyār, the Veḷḷāḷa landlord whose menials they are. Technically, in the era of the novel bonded laborers were not ‘slaves’ (in the sense of ‘chattel slaves’ who could be bought and sold). However, their subordination amounted to a condition close to it, living, as they did, on Veḷḷāḷa land, providing labour on Veḷḷāḷa demand, and receiving only a subsistence livelihood from Veḷḷāḷars in return. For all this and more (e.g., wedding expenses, which in chapter two Tampāppiḷaiyār offered to pay as a cover-up for the rape of Ciṇṇi by his nephew), a number of castes became so entangled with the Veḷḷāḷars, economically and financially, even after the British abolition of slavery in 1844, that being ‘bonded laborers’ was hardly a less odious and onerous condition of servitude. Indeed, in

avoid the impurity of physical contact. Note that even though Dalit communities were 'allowed' to sponsor a festival day, they would even then not have been allowed to actually enter the temple's inner precincts.

**Taking some sacred ash from the conch container*

A person who identifies as a Śaivite, applies three horizontal stripes of *tirunīru*, 'sacred ash' (Skt., *vibhūti*), to the forehead (and other specified parts of the body). The process by which *tirunīru* is produced from incinerated cow dung, its application and sectarian significance are described at length in *Hindu-Christian Epistolary Self-Disclosures: 'Malabarian Correspondence' between German Pietist Missionaries and South Indian Hindus (1712-1714)*, translated and edited by Daniel Jeyaraj and Richard Fox Young (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2013), pp. 179-180. Here, the most important thing to note is that Naṇṇiyaṇ does not routinely wear the 'sacred ash.' On this occasion, he applies it to his forehead only because he has received a summons from Tampāppillaiyār to participate in a ritual performance at the Kali Temple. Although his participation can be considered a form of temple service (*tonṭu*), an element of coercion is also evident. Note, too, that being identified as a Śaivite may be one thing, but actually having access to the temple's inner sanctum quite another. As a Naḷavar, Naṇṇiyaṇ would profane the temple were he to violate the boundaries of the outer precincts by going inside. For a discussion of the Temple-Entry Controversy in Jaffna in the post-Independence period and its formative influence on K. Daniel, see Richard Fox Young's Afterword.

**Having kept a ring of terpai at the ready*

Terpai (*taruppai*; Skt., *darbha*) is a kind of grass, made sacred ritually and commonly used on all kinds of religious occasions. Important to note is that Tampāppillaiyār is the only recipient of the ring (more accurately, a circlet of grass) and that Peruṅkuṭumi Aiyar, the

Brahmin, personally ties it around the finger of his Veḷḷāḷa patron, unconcerned about the possibility of becoming impure, ritually.

**‘In Jaffna, Ceylon, the talk is that the Naḷava boys never stop their festivities until the goat sacrifice begins in the morning.’*

Due to the zeal of Ārumuka Nāvalar, Jaffna’s mid 19th-century Śaivite reformer, the practice of goat sacrifice was discontinued at most peninsular temples in a hard-fought campaign to conform them to the Āgamas (ancient ritual manuals that prohibit animal sacrifice). On this, see Richard Fox Young and Subramaniam Jebanesan, *The Bible Trembled: The Hindu-Christian Controversies of Nineteenth-Century Ceylon* (Vienna: Sammlung de Nobili, University of Vienna, 1995). Here and there, however, the practice continued (in Kāṅkēcaṇṭurai, among other places), and Daniel makes Tampāppiḷaiyār an even more vile character by associating him with the kind of blood sacrifice that much of Veḷḷāḷa society had long since begun to shun. Dedicated to the goddess Kali (Kāḷi, in Tamil), Tampāppiḷaiyār’s temple is depicted by Daniel as a substantial establishment. As such, it should not be confused with the simpler roadway shrines, often found at the base of a tree, dedicated to Kāḷiyammaṇ, one of the more ferocious Tamil village goddesses. This one has a Brahmin officiant, Peruṅkuṭumi Aiyar, who may on other occasions and in other contexts perform more orthodox Āgamic rituals on his patron’s behalf. From Ārumuka Nāvalar down to the present, however, all forms of animal sacrifice have been hugely controversial, not only in Jaffna but also island-wide, with political and interreligious complications and ramifications. For background, see Bryan Pfaffenberger, *Caste in Tamil Culture: The Religious Foundations of Sudra Domination in Tamil Sri Lanka* (Syracuse, NY: Maxwell School of Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1982), pp. 185-87. A Google search with the right keywords will yield a variety of local reports on the recurring incidence of goat sacrifice in some Jaffna temples and the vigorous protest the practice always generates. In recent years, it appears that such practices may even occur on a larger scale than ever before.

the Marxist terms Daniel might have used, one could say that *Mirage* was written as a literary act of ‘conscientization,’ to subvert the very conditions that allowed such injustices to continue virtually unabated and unchecked in the author’s lifetime.

On all such matters, reference may be had to the magisterial work of Bryan Pfaffenberger, *Caste in Tamil Culture: The Religious Foundations of Sudra Domination in Tamil Sri Lanka* (Syracuse, NY: Maxwell School of Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1982). See chapter two in particular, ‘The Form of Sudra Domination in Jaffna,’ pp. 35-59. From this, for illumination of the novel, it helps to note that Mūttavaṇ and Tampan, along with the whole village of Cinnakkaḷaṭṭi, Naḷavars and Paḷlars alike, who become Catholic Christians *en masse*, had been, historically, *aṭimaikaḷ*, that is, Veḷḷāla chattel slaves, along with several other castes (the Kōviyar, primarily). For this reason and because of the stigma of ‘untouchability’ that they also bore (but not, as such, the Kōviyar), castes like these have been called (in Sri Lankan officialese) ‘Minority Tamils.’ That is why, in keeping with broader usage throughout South Asia, we refer in this book to the oppressed caste groups at the heart of *Mirage* as ‘Dalits.’

****Again and again, she got up, re-lit the lamp, and then her pipe.***

Throughout the novel, one gets a sense of tobacco’s importance to the Jaffna economy. Introduced into South Asia by the Portuguese, tobacco was grown commercially in the peninsula from the early decades of the 17th century; by mid-century under the Dutch, Jaffna had become a major producer, regionally. Despite further commercialisation under the British, tobacco became less of an export crop after independence as India imposed controls on exports to Kerala and production was mainly aimed at domestic consumption throughout the country. While smoking was not a gendered activity (among the laborers who actually cultivated tobacco), Celli’s use of a pipe may have been atypical. More commonly, hand-rolled cigars and cheroots (from the Tamil *curuṭṭu*, ‘to roll’) would have been smoked. A wealth of detail from a cultural history perspective can be

found in A. R. Venkatachalapathy, 'Triumph of Tobacco: The Tamil Experience,' in *South-Indian Horizons: Felicitation Volume on François Gros*, edited by Jean-Luc Chevillard (Pondichery: Institut français de Pondichéry, 2004), pp. 635-641. On the local methods of producing cigars and cheroots in Jaffna, famed for their potency, see Holmes, *Jaffna (Sri Lanka) 1980*, pp. 362-363.

— 5 —

Pūkkaṇṭar Talks with Naṇṇiyaṇ

**the one who eats dried palmyra pulp.*

Tampāppiḷaiyār means to demean Pūkkaṇṭar by referring to one of the staples of his diet—palmyra pulp, instead of rice—as a relatively poor Veḷḷāḷar. A dietary commonplace, the starchy pulp Pūkkaṇṭar eats comes from the dried palmyra fruit. Ground up, it can be used as flour. On the myriad ways in which the palmyra plays a role in Jaffna life, see Holmes, *Jaffna (Sri Lanka) 1980*, pp. 433-445.

— 6 —

Distribution of Kālāñci

**kālāñci is going to be distributed at the Kali temple to the people who conduct the festival*

Here, *kālāñci* is successively awarded as a kind of symbolic authorization to one caste community or another that then enjoys the 'privilege' of being responsible for a particular day of a multiday temple festival. As if in a microcosm, one sees in this ceremony the hierarchy of Jaffna castes, from the Veḷḷāḷars to the Naḷavars. Purity and impurity are evident in the willingness—or unwillingness—of the Brahmin, Peruṅkuṭumi Iyer, to personally hand over to the recipient his respective *kālāñci*. Note the point at which this task is performed by the paṇṭāram boy, a non-brahmin temple officiant, who drops the *kālāñci* from above into the hands of the recipient to

— 7 —

Tampāppillaiyār Talks to Naṇṇiyaṇ about Social Change in Jaffna

**when the farmer asks about the bridegroom, shall I say he lives in the Nilāvarai Pond?'*

Spring-fed and located near the village called Puttūr in Jaffna, the Nilāvarai Pond is popularly thought of as being 'bottomless.' Local tradition attributes its origin to an arrow that fell to earth in Rāma's battle with Rāvaṇa.

**"Tell me, wouldn't it just drive you crazy?"*

Here, Tampāppillaiyār attributes to Naṇṇiyaṇ the same disdain for other Dalits that he himself evinces towards anyone not a Veḷḷāḷar. One might consider this a strategy of 'divide and rule,' fostering intra-caste rivalry to shore up Veḷḷāḷa dominance. On the contrary, *Mirage* offers a vision of Dalit solidarity, of collaboration between Pañcamars, with enlightened Veḷḷāḷars who strive together for justice on behalf of Dalits (Pūkkaṇṭar being the prime instance).

**"When King George paid a visit to the Jaffna Fort, we drew up a petition and submitted it."*

Here, Daniel has his monarchs mixed up and his chronology confused. No 'George' who was a king of England ever came to Jaffna. Edward Albert, the Prince of Wales, who became Edward VII upon the death of Queen Victoria, came to Ceylon in 1875, a quarter century before the railway reached Jaffna. The majestic clock tower on the Jaffna esplanade, built a few years later, commemorates his visit.

— 8 —

Planting the Tobacco Seedlings

**His Burgher friend had given it to him as a gift.*

‘Burgher’ is a word with a complicated history. Provisionally, one could take it to refer to the ‘Euro-Ceylonese,’ and in that sense it approximates the more familiar ‘Eurasian.’ Enclosed within the term, however, are a multiplicity of racial and ethnolinguistic histories, each with its own particularities, starting with the Portuguese colonization of the Sri Lankan littoral in the 16th century. The Portuguese were followed by the Dutch in the 17th, and the Dutch by the British in the late 18th. Linguistically, a creolization of language occurred, along with a mestizoization, racially. When speaking of Burghers, therefore, Daniel does not specifically have in mind persons descended from the Dutch who came to Ceylon in the colonial era. In *Mirage*, Burghers reappear several times, which does not seem unusual given that Jaffna had the third largest population (after Colombo and Galle). In chapters 16 and 17, we find that Burghers hold high positions in the police. In both places, they are monolingual, fluent in English but not in Tamil. Ethnographically, this would seem accurate (by and large at least), indicating, as it does, the gradual Anglicization of the Burghers, who by this time had largely abandoned the Indo-Portuguese creole spoken on the island’s littorals. In other respects, however, Daniel plays on—and perhaps perpetuates—Burgher stereotypes. One has to do their punctiliousness: the clock on the wall, gifted by a Burgher. And in Daniel’s hesitancy to reveal the details of Tampāppillaiyār’s friendship with a Burgher (‘That’s a long story.’), there could be a hint of the disreputable. Here, one might plausibly imagine that it could have had something to do with indigenous perceptions of Burghers, liquor and the socially-inappropriate behaviors associated with the consumption of it. Altogether, the Burghers of *Mirage* are an exotified and privileged people. Not all such associations are negative, however, although the praise becomes a put down in reverse: in chapter 32 a

Vellālar dismissively attributes the intelligence of a Naḷavar to the fact that he happens to live on a ‘Burgher street’ in Jaffna town. For background, see Michael Roberts et al., *People Inbetween: The Burghers and the Middle Class in the Transformations within Sri Lanka, 1790s–1960s* (Ratmalana, Sri Lanka: Sarvodaya Book Publishing Services, 1989).

— 9 —

The Visit of Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar

**When Christians see a cuvāmi, they bend down on one knee and greet him with the words ‘Praise Cuvāmi!’ or ‘Praise the Lord!’*

Ethnographically, *Mirage* is a largely accurate portrayal of interactions within the Catholic community, between priests and parishioners in particular, during the late decades of the 19th century and the early ones of the 20th, around the time of Daniel’s youth. On the part of parishioners, all such interactions were characterized by extraordinary deference; apart from ‘cuvāmi’, the standard term for a priest, priests were sometimes addressed as āṇṭavar, ‘Lord,’ as Daniel also notes in this passage. Note that in Tamil Bible translations, āṇṭavar is often used for ‘the Lord God’. Even Iḷaiyavaṇ, at the end of the novel when he feels most disaffected from Catholicism, continues to address Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar honorifically in the same maximally deferential way: ‘I need Absolution, Lord’ (chapter 44) and ‘Lord, bless me, a sinner!’ (chapter 48).

**‘You are slaves only to Jesus’*

Here, the Tamil word for ‘slaves’ is aṭimaikaḷ. For a summary of its complex background, see the note on **‘We may be their bonded laborers’* in chapter four (*supra*). And, for a more complete discussion, see the comments in section I of Afterword (2) by Richard Fox Young. In this play on the meaning of the word, which evokes the condition of abject servitude to which Naṇṇiyaṇ’s Naḷava forebears—along with the Paḷlars—had been historically subject (as aṭimaikaḷ, or chattel slaves

of the Veḷḷāḷars), Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar declares their subordination to Tampāppillaiyār to be tantamount to the slavery of the past. At the same time, he opens up for them a socially-transformative vision of how life might be lived differently—unbeholden ‘to anyone’—if Naṇṇiyaṇ, his family, and the village of Ciṇṇakkaḷaṭṭi would only become Christians. Beginning here, one finds a number of passages throughout the novel that make Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar sound more like a contemporary liberation theologian than seems plausible (compared with Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar, the historical figure who lies behind him). See, for instance, the notes on **‘may God’s judgment fall on the side of the downtrodden’* in chapter 20 (*infra*) and **‘speak up on behalf of the poor’* in chapter 47 (*infra*). Anachronistic as it sounds, slavery was a familiar institution in the era of early Christianity, and many of the first converts were themselves slaves. Having been raised Catholic, Daniel was presumably familiar with New Testament passages such as Ephesians 6:6 (1 Corinthians 7:22ff., etc.) where Paul uses the language of ‘slaves of Christ,’ and the Gospel of Matthew 11:29-30 where Jesus speaks of his ‘yoke’ as ‘easy’ and his ‘burden’ as ‘light.’ And while this may imbue the novel with a quality of biblical authenticity, Daniel makes *Mirage* play out in such a way that all such visions are eventually recognized for the chimeras they are. When the post-conversion exploitation of the Ciṇṇakkaḷaṭṭi converts turns out to be just as odious and onerous as the pre-conversion variety, having Jesus as a master instead of Tampāppillaiyār will not seem a whole lot better.

****the Novena begins today at St. Xavier’s Church***

Novenas have a long history in Jaffna, probably dating back to the mid-1500s and the arrival of Portuguese Catholicism. A festival of nine nights’ duration, a Novena ends when the church’s patron saint is carried around the parish precincts in procession. For details, see section IV of the Afterword by Richard Fox Young, n. 38 in particular.

— 10 —

Nanniyaṇ Assaults Tampāppiḷaiyār

**‘We women all ought to perform āṛātti in front of you’*

Their husbands’ response to Tampāppiḷaiyār’s aspersions upon Ciṇṇi’s honor being so feckless, the women of Ciṇṇakkaḷaṭṭi taunt them in a way that cannot be fully reproduced in English. Here, āṛātti refers to waving a lighted lamp of camphor oil in the presence of a divine image, a commonplace ritual of temple worship. Other contexts in which āṛātti is performed include welcoming an eminent guest or invoking a blessing upon newly married couples and young girls upon coming of age. One or more of these multiple associations may be at play here. That the women would perform āṛātti while menstruating shows how unworthy of such an act their men would be.

**‘I doubt that Tampāppiḷaiyaṇ will keep quiet’*

Until now, even behind the back of his Vellāla master, Nanniyaṇ had always referred to him politely as ‘Tampāppiḷaiyār.’ Now, however, such deference no longer makes sense, and in the Tamil all this can be effectively expressed by a minor change of inflection at the end of his name, from ‘ār’ to ‘aṇ’.

— 11 —

Killing of the Village Headman

**‘And that man went along’*

Mindful of the widely-observed taboo on a wife pronouncing her husband’s name, Celli here refers to Nanniyaṇ, even though talking to her son. Throughout the novel, women show proper reserve about uttering something so precious. In chapter 42, Tampan’s wife uses a similar circumlocution when answering a direct question from ḷaiyaṇ about her husband’s whereabouts.

— 12 —

The Killing of Celli

**‘Aiyō! You have killed my god!’*

Here, the headman’s wife refers to her dead husband as her *deva*, lit., ‘god’ or ‘deity,’ and doing so would be typical of a woman’s devotion to her husband.

— 13 —

The Maṇiyakāraṇ’s inquiry

**Her body lay in the middle of a cadjan pandal*

Here, the ‘pandal’ is a temporary structure, erected for a specifically religious purpose—Vellaiacci Ammaḷ’s funeral. Under a roof of cadjan (palmyra) leaves, a canopy of white cloth would have been erected. In chapter 18, we learn that the washermen (*dhobis*) are the ones who ordinarily erect this kind of pandal.

**If you are, come this way and tell Ayyā’*

Although the coroner may not be a Brahmin (and probably is not, due to the stigma of pollution associated with death), the Maṇiyakāraṇ refers to him in polite speech as ‘Ayyā’, a person of stature, and instructs the witnesses, most of whom are persons of marginal caste background (Naḷavars, Paḷḷars, etc.), to speak to him both as an official of government and as one who was considered their superior, socially. How such distinctions might have affected the proceedings is easy to imagine.

— 14 —

Pūkkāṇṭar Allots Land for Constructing Huts

**Celli's body was buried in the cemetery at the Kaṇikkai tree*

Although no study has been made of the subject, in Jaffna at the time of the novel, inhumation, not cremation, appears to have been the standard practice in Dalit communities such as Celli's. Nowadays, inhumation almost never occurs (Daniel draws attention to a possible exception: the death of young, presumably unmarried, children). In some communities—not the one depicted here—the cemeteries where cremation is performed may remain caste-specific. The general rule, however, would be different.

**In the village, Paḷḷas could address Veḷḷāḷas as Kamakkāraṇ or Tampi.*

Here, too, *Mirage* is a largely accurate ethnography of caste interactions in Jaffna at the time of the novel, and Daniel often provides helpful details in narrative asides such as this one. Tampan having called Pūkkāṇṭar 'Tampi' when bidding him farewell, Daniel wants to clarify, sociolinguistically, how it could have been possible for a Paḷḷar to address a Veḷḷāḷar with a word of affectionate familiarity. It goes without saying that in the Jaffna caste hierarchy, what might have been allowed in the speech of a Paḷḷar might have been prohibited in the speech of a Naḷavar. For background, see the twin articles by S. Suseendrarajah: 1) 'Caste and Language in Jaffna Society,' *Anthropological Linguistics* 20/7 (1978): 312-319, and 2) 'Religion and Language in Jaffna Society,' *Anthropological Linguistics* 22/8 (1980): 345-362.

**Tampan further said that the Kamakkāraṇ party might try to catch them*

Throughout the novel, Veḷḷāḷars are referred to as Kamakkāraṇ, 'farmers' or 'cultivators', and vice versa. Besides constituting the dominant caste in Jaffna by virtue of their numbers (more than half

of the population), they have historically owned the land as well as farmed it, the manual labor being provided by landless castes such as the Naḷava and Paḷḷa, until recent times as ‘bonded laborers’ and historically as chattel slaves. Naturally, ‘dominance’ needs to be understood in context, and inside the temple Vellāḷars have very little, being identified in the caste hierarchy as Śūdras. In the Kali temple, of which he is the ‘owner,’ even the high and mighty Tampāppillaiyār must defer (however sullenly) to the Brahmin ritualist, Peruṅkuṭumi Aiyar. In chapter 18, note the haughty manner in which he is addressed: ‘Sit here, Ayyā,’ Tampāppillaiyār welcomed [Peruṅkuṭumi Aiyar], curtly, not bothering to rise even for a Brahmin priest.’ On the complexities of Vellāḷa dominance, an excellent study is Bryan Pfaffenberger’s *Caste in Tamil Culture: The Religious Foundations of Sudra Domination in Tamil Sri Lanka* (Syracuse, NY: Maxwell School of Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1982).

***‘Their plan is to send them all to the gallows.’**

According to John Rogers, ‘Treason and murder were the only capital crimes after the assumption of British control [in Sri Lanka] in 1796,’ even though ‘the death sentence continued to be imposed in Britain for less serious offenses until around 1830.’ *Crime, Justice and Society in Colonial Sri Lanka* (London: Curzon Press, 1987), p. 7. Homicide continued to be a capital offense in the era of the novel.

— 15 —

Cimiyōṇ Falls in Love with Ciṇṇi

***‘Who’s the fellow with the bobbed hair?’**

For background on the semiotics of hairstyles associated by Tampāppillaiyār with Hindus and Christians, see the note on the *kuṭumi* in chapter 2 (*supra*): *The front of his head was fully shaven. In the back, it was tied into a neat kuṭumi.*

**“It was Jesus who said, ‘Even a cow can be killed if it tries to kill you.’”*

While this saying obviously does not originate with Jesus—or the Gospels of the New Testament—and has been variously traced back to Mahatma Gandhi or, even further, to the Chānakya of Indian antiquity (author of the *Rājanīti*), it hardly seems likely that Daniel himself thought of this as a bona fide biblical maxim. While his point may have been the shallowness of Cimiyōṇ’s faith and his ignorance of Christian teachings, it could also be argued—plausibly—that Cimiyōṇ’s only mistake may have been to put the words of an Old Testament passage such as Exodus 21:28 into Jesus’ mouth. On the possibility of seeing in this an emerging Dalit Christian hermeneutics, rudimentary but still authentic, see the Afterword by Sunder John Boopalan.

— 17 —

Tampāppiḷaiyār and the Jailer

**“You may be a Karaiyār, but there is no difference between us.”*

In the hierarchy of caste, the Karaiyārs, a coastal fishing community (for the most part staunchly Catholic from the Portuguese era), fall somewhere into the middle. Here, Tampāppiḷaiyār does not so much deny a difference of status between them and his own caste, the Vellāḷa, as make a claim that the common interests of both are endangered by the insubordination of the Naḷavars and the Paḷḷars. In chapter 18, Mayilu, Tampāppiḷaiyār’s Vellāḷa henchman, will complain to him that *‘Even these Karaiyārs aren’t submissive to Vellāḷas the way they used to be’*, making it absolutely clear that a parity of status was unimaginable from the very beginning.

— 18 —

Struggle to Conduct the Kali Festival

**And if I'm not as good as my word, my mother must have conceived me by a Kaikkuḷavarṇ.'*

Here, in this twistedly-revealing oath, Tampāppillaiyār shows us another side of his troubled personality: his hatred for his intercaste wife, Vellaiacci Ammāl, a Kaikkuḷavar woman whom he had held in contempt since the time of their marriage (the derogatory '-an' ending on the name of her caste underscores the intensity of his prejudice). The marriage, it should be understood, was not consensual; Vellaiacci Ammāl had been abducted and taken to Tampāppillaiyār's household involuntarily. Originally, as chapter 25 will soon explain, Tampāppillaiyār's fascination for her mainly had to do with the fairness of her complexion. Tampāppillaiyār's infatuation, however, did not last long, and his matrimonial interactions from then on appear to mirror the same kind of rivalry that historically characterized interactions between Vellāḷars and Kaikkuḷavars. On this, the field work of anthropologist Mattison Mines in Tamil Nadu for *The Warrior Merchants: Textiles, Trade, and Territory in South India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) proves to be especially helpful. 'Weavers by occupation and warriors by ancient heritage' (11), the Kaikkuḷavars are a larger and more widely-dispersed community on the mainland than in Jaffna where their numbers are minuscule. Epigraphic evidence at least a thousand years old speaks of their mercantile power and military prowess (the latter being needed to provide protection for the cloth goods they both produced and distributed in a far-flung network of markets). Unlike Vellāḷars, whose clout depended on agriculture, Kaikkuḷavars were artisan-merchants without a 'primary attachment to the land' and therefore more independent of the Vellāḷars, unlike the service-based castes. While Mines argues for a higher degree of status ambiguity between Vellāḷars and Kaikkuḷavars than seems to be the case in Jaffna, Vellaiacci Ammāl does indeed come into and out

of Tampāppillaiyār's life more or less on her own terms (with help from her Kaikkulaṭavar relations in Nallūr), and it may be this quasi-independence that irks her Vellāla husband more than anything else—all the folk of other castes being so utterly dependent upon him, and therefore subordinate.

— 19 —

Mayilu Disgraced by the Karaiyāra Fishermen

**The first boat, shaped like a toddy cup, had just reached the shore.*

For a Jaffna reader familiar with taverns where toddy is sold, 'shaped like a toddy cup' might seem an apt metaphor, toddy being served in cups made out of green palmyra leaves shaped to resemble this very kind of boat. What that actually looks like, Daniel does not need to say.

**He has an old ōlai deed of ownership for this empty land.'*

Ōlai is the Tamil term for pre-European paper, made of palmleaves, on which lettering is inscribed with an iron stylus and the grooves filled in with powdered ink. Although in all probability a forgery, Tampāppillaiyār's deed is called an ōlai to enhance its pretended antiquity.

— 20 —

The Cuvāmi Convenes a Meeting of the Karaiyāra Fishermen

**Children, may God's judgment fall on the side of the downtrodden.'*

Here, the novel sounds more than a bit anachronistic. Daniel uses Cuvāmi Īyan (a Tamilized form of the European name 'Jan', a missionary diocesan priest) to voice a distinctive theme of Catholic liberation theology: God's preferential option for the poor. For the era of the novel, such a theology would have seemed strange

indeed, and the historical Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar, on whom Daniel loosely bases Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar, would have been implacably opposed to it. Despite Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar's dedication to the low-caste poor, a commitment he sustained in the face of intractable ecclesiastical hostility, Marxist social analysis would have struck him as unacceptably materialistic.

— 21 —

Tampāppillaiyār Reminisces about his Youth

**Kokkuvil Kumāracuvāmi Pulavar was still conducting a school on his veranda*

A renowned 19th-century scholar of Tamil literature (known honorifically as a 'poet,' (*pulavar*), a field of knowledge being eclipsed by English education, Kumāracuvāmi directed a 'veranda' school at his home in Kokkuvil. Such schools were called *tiṇṇai* (*tiṇṇai*), from *tiṇṇai*, the word for 'veranda'). For background, see the outstanding research of Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), Chapter Four especially, 'Schools and Writing'. Although satirical, Daniel's description of the Kokkuvil *tiṇṇai* school matches Raman's account of the pedagogy ordinarily employed. Although multicaste in composition, *tiṇṇai* students were, as she says, 'the children of artisanal and resource-bearing castes', 'lower-caste children' being 'generally barred' (pp. 110, 111). Raman reproduces an illustration of one such school by a mid 19th-century artist in the vicinity of Trichinopoly on p. 111. One reason adduced by Raman for the exclusion of lower-castes was that passages from sacred texts such as the Ramayana were recited and memorized by the regularly-admitted (higher-caste) children. This helps explain why Tampāppillaiyār, on whom all such instruction was wasted, had been admitted, but not Dalits such as the Naḷava Cuppar, a gifted student whose moral formation was largely-shaped by overhearing the Ramayana recited, even at a distance. On the use of sacred texts in *tiṇṇai* schools, see Raman, p. 116.

**Cuppar could not be admitted because it would have gone against the customs and practices of the village, since he came from an untouchable caste.*

On this, see the note on **Kokkuvil Kumāracuvāmi Pulavar* (*supra*).

**It had been on Pāñcālī's being stripped of her clothes at Turiyōṭaṇṇ's command.*

Pāñcālī is another name for Tiraupatai [Draupadī], the daughter of King Pāñcāla and wife of the five Pāṇṭava brothers. For the story of her humiliation at the hand of Turiyōṭaṇṇ (Duryodhana), followed by the exile of the Pāṇṭavas, see Book Two—the Sabhāparva—of the Pārata.

— 22 —

Tampāppillaiyār Reminisces about the Iṇuvil Temple Festival

**All came out in order, followed by Keṅkammā, the devadasi who had come from India*

In the note on goat sacrifice in chapter six (*supra*), the point was made that Tampāppillaiyār was made more vile by having him preside over a temple unaffected by the Āgamic reforms introduced in the second half of the 19th century by Ārumuka Nāvalar, Jaffna's foremost Śaivite revivalist. Convinced that Devadasis had no place in a properly-managed temple, Nāvalar campaigned relentlessly against the ones where they performed during festivals such as the one at Iṇuvil. The following extract from an 1875 tract by Nāvalar is typical of the relentless crusade for reform that he waged:

Festivals as they are at present conducted tend to promote vice and immorality especially among the young boys who attend temples in order to see the performance of the dancing girls and to hear their sexual and impure songs, contract bad habits and practices which ruin them once and forever. They lose their health and before going to sleep they neglect their studies and become rather too fond

of dance and song. Thus, many fine lads after attending school for many long years, draining all the time their parents' pocketbooks in the end have turned out downright blockheads unable to read and write and unfit for any business of life. ... Nor is this all. They gather together in companies to chew bhang, eat opium, play at cards, and hunt after parties of dancing girls. And thus in the course of time their parents can no longer support them, and they become vagabonds and fugitives, hated and shunned by all, pests to society and a burden to themselves. (Young and Jebanesan *The Bible Trembled: The Hindu-Christian Controversies of Nineteenth-Century Ceylon* [Vienna: Sammlung de Nobili, University of Vienna, 1995], p. 171.)

By having Tampāppillaiyār attend such a festival, Daniel succeeds in making him even more deviant, a Vellālar whom reformed Vellāla Śaivites would also find loathsome. Clearly, though, the incident at Iṇuvil was not the fault of Keṅkammā the devadasi but of Tampāppillaiyār himself. For background on the devadasi tradition, see Devesh Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures: Devadāsīs, Memory, and Modernity in South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

— 23 —

Tampāppillaiyār Reminisces about His Pleasant Days with Ciṅki

**The man who broke the fire pot was a distant relation.*

Ordinarily, the funeral rites or funeral obsequies (*antiyēṣṭi*; Skt., *antyeṣṭi*) described here are performed by the eldest son, who in this case was Tampāppillaiyār. However, his unfilial act of being away when his father died and leaving the conduct of the rites to a distant (male) relation, underscores the depth of his depravity. The 'fire pot' contains the residue of ash and bone from the cremation. In Jaffna, these are usually submersed in the ocean at Kīrimalai, a seaside village, 31 days after the death.

— 24 —

Tampāppillaiyār Reminisces about the Death of Menike

**‘we’ll leave her in the back room of my friend Kurucumuttan’s saloon.’*

In Jaffna, ‘saloon’ conveys the meaning of ‘salon.’ Ordinarily, a ‘saloon’ is a barbershop or a hairdresser’s, not a place where alcohol would be consumed.

**Tampāppillaiyār used to call him ‘Naṭuvil’, affectionately.*

‘Naṭuvil,’ literally meaning ‘the middle one,’ is normally used by parents, close relations, and friends as an informal way of referring to a middle son or brother.

**‘Aiyō, Dorai!’ What on earth, Dorai, are you doing? Leave me alone, Dorai!’*

‘Dorai’ (‘sir,’ ‘master’) is a Tamil word that in the time of the novel was used by Tamil laborers in the Central Highlands when addressing estate superintendents and British officials. From there, ‘Dorai’ found its way into Sinhalese. In Jaffna, it was used honorifically by Sinhalese speakers such as Menike toward Tamil superiors.

— 25 —

Tampāppillaiyār Reminisces about His Life with Vellāicci Ammāl

**For a whole generation, Kaṇakacāpāpati and his wife, a beef-eating white woman, had been cut off from his kin.*

Daniel’s story about Vellāicci Ammāl’s pedigree (as it were)—that she was herself the daughter of an intercaste marriage between a Kaikkūḷavar woman and a distant Vellāḷa relation of Tampāppillaiyār’s—reveals a great deal about the rivalry between the two castes, discussed above in the note on Kaikkūḷavars in

chapter 18. Here, the stigma of miscegenation—a sexual liaison with ‘a white man’—is attached to the weaver-merchant community into which Vellāicci Ammāl was born. While her mother’s (alleged) ‘beef-eating’ dietary habits seem a natural fit for her pale complexion, the association of prohibited forms of meat-consumption with the Kaikkūlavars has evidently had a fairly long history, making an old bias look (as it were) new. Locality counts, of course, and while some Kaikkūlavars were strictly vegetarian, others were not (especially where the temples of which they were the patrons practiced animal sacrifice): ‘[Some] are not only nonvegetarians, but also pork eaters’, observes Mines in *The Warrior Merchants: Textiles, Trade, and Territory in South India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 15: ‘Pork is considered by most [including Vellālars] to be the food only of untouchables. This means that by Brahmanical standards, the Kaikoolars [sic] are of low rank.’

**Before she left for his home, she said, ‘As soon as the corpse leaves, I’ll leave too.’*

That is, once the corpse of her mother-in-law had been taken from the house to the cremation ground, Vellāicci Ammāl intended to return to Nallūr in Jaffna where she had been living separately from Tampāppiḷaiyār. Note that women do not ordinarily accompany the mourners (mainly or exclusively male) who carry the bier with a corpse to the funeral pyre in the cemetery.

— 26 —

Trial of the Village-Headman Murder Case

**The Justice who wore a black wig asked the accused whether there was anything they wanted to say.*

Although Daniel’s description of the assize hearings of the Supreme Court (which met periodically in Jaffna) seems largely correct, there is no precedent we know for judges to have worn a ‘black wig’

(instead of the customary ‘white wig’), even when pronouncing a death sentence, or for breaking the nib of the pen on which the order of execution had been signed.

**‘Haven’t you heard, Headman, that even Vellāḷars are joining the church in Iḷavālai, Paṇṭaitteruppu, Cillālai, Accuvēli, and in other places, too?’*

Although the Headman and Pūkkaṇṭar are both Vellāḷars, the Headman discovers to his dismay that Pūkkaṇṭar’s sympathies are more with the Christians than the Hindus. To pry apart the conflation of ‘Hindu’ and ‘Vellāḷar’, Pūkkaṇṭar points out that there was a growing population of Vellāḷa Catholics in certain areas (the four mentioned were by no means exhaustive, since on the island of Kayts certain hamlets had long been predominantly both Vellāḷa and Catholic). And in chapter 40, we learn that Pūkkaṇṭar’s own daughter converted to Catholicism (receiving the baptismal name ‘Lūrtammā’, or ‘Lourdes’) in order to marry Yākkōpu, ‘a Vellāḷa boy from Iḷavālai’. However sympathetic to Christianity Pūkkaṇṭar may seem, Daniel has him keep all religion at arm’s distance, and before the novel is over Pūkkaṇṭar will denounce Christianity as irredeemably compromised by caste.

— 27 —

Laying the Church’s Foundation

**Never had they dreamed of seeing her in such attire.*

As a Naḷava woman, Tirēci should have been wearing a kuṟukku. Her new sartorial style not only suits her nicely, it also symbolizes, semiotically, her rejection of the sumptuary regulations in Jaffna governing the kinds of clothing (and jewelry) that Dalit women could and could not wear (males, too, were subject to similar restrictions). For details, see the note on **Tirēci was wearing a white sari* in chapter 30 (*infra*).

**So now her name is 'Tirēci'.*

Ciṇṇi's new—baptismal—name, 'Tirēci', is a Tamilized form of 'Teresa'. In chapter 28, Pūkkāṇṭar will astutely ask, 'Why did they have to make [her name] so short?' As a general rule, Dalit and non-Dalit names are more similar than dissimilar, except in length, the longer forms being considered appropriate for persons of the higher castes. And so, 'ammā' would have been added to the Tamilized form of 'Teresa' had Ciṇṇi been a Vellāḷa Catholic. Being a person, but not quite on a par with others from the higher castes, she is called with typical succinctness, 'Tirēci', similar to Ciṇṇi, her pre-Christian name. Contrast this with 'Lūrtammā' (Lourdes), the baptismal name Pūkkāṇṭar's own daughter receives, prior to her marriage with Yākkōpu, also a Vellāḷar.

— 28 —

Vandalism of the Church

**'Looks like she's married a Christian.'*

To the Vellāḷa women of Periyakkaḷaṭṭi, Tirēci (Ciṇṇi) looks, semiotically, like a 'Christian' (or the wife of one), because they see her in a sari—and not only a sari but a sari blouse as well—instead of the kuṟukku that Dalit women would ordinarily wear. On conversion and sartorial style, see the notes on **The front of his head was fully shaven* in chapter 2 (*supra*) and **Tirēci was wearing a white sari* in chapter 30 (*infra*).

**'If the women folk weren't here, I would tell you just how many Naḷḷa and Paḷḷa gigolos those women have.'*

Of Daniel's many 'hard sayings' about the Vellāḷars in *Mirage*, this would be one of the hardest, being so very sweeping instead of directed specifically at Tampāppillaiyār, a particularly depraved individual who happened to be a member of the dominant caste.

It is, however, consistent with Daniel's literary rehabilitation of the Dalit community by constructing an image of it that borders on the puritanical (e.g., Naṇṇiyaṇ's pique at being told by Celli that Iḷaiyaṇ had gone for a visit to a neighbouring household where there were unmarried daughters). Note, too, that the condemnation of Veḷḷāḷa sexual morality is made by Pūḷkaṇṭar, the 'good' Veḷḷāḷar whose sterling integrity is the one redeeming feature in an otherwise unremittingly negative portrayal of Jaffna's dominant caste.

— 30 —

Tampāppiḷaiyār Kills his Wife

**Tirēci was wearing a white sari, a white blouse, and a white scarf.*

Throughout South Asia, identity was claimed, marked and defended by a complex set of sumptuary regulations governing personal appearance. Particular communities (most often, the dominant castes) were thereby privileged at the expense of others considered inferior, hierarchically. In part, such regulations were colour-coded, and in Jaffna (as elsewhere) Dalits such as Tirēci and Cimiyoṇ were prohibited from wearing 'white'. Upon conversion, the avoidance of white was one of the first habits of dress that changed—hence the repeated stress Daniel places on the whiteness of the Naḷava couple's clothing. For details on the gender-based transformations that conversion catalyzed, see 'Gold and Cholis: Indian Christian Sartorial Style,' chapter six in Eliza F. Kent, *Converting Women: Gender and Protestant Christianity in Colonial South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). And for a discussion of whether conversion might have been a backdoor into Sanskritization (that is, a way of improving one's positional status in the caste hierarchy), see part III of the Afterword by Richard Fox Young, notes 30-33 in particular.

**men whose dhotis had been tied up above their knees*

As Tirēci and Cimiyoṇ processed around the parish of Ciṇṇakkaḷaṭṭi, they were joined by a crowd of fellow converts, Naḷava and Paḷḷa, all

traditionally dressed. Besides the women in *kurukku*, note that the male Dalits wore their dhotis rolled up to their knees. In the public space of a village lane, they could have been mistaken for landowning Vellāḷars had they worn them unrolled to their ankles. The rolled-up dhoti was thus an identifier of laborers from the landless castes.

**‘It looks as if Lord Yama has already come and gone.’*

As an ominous sign that something dreadful has happened, the nocturnal barking of a dog has been associated with Yama, the god of death, from Vedic antiquity (see, for example, Rig Veda 10.14.10-12). Locally, the mooing of a cow was apparently also considered inauspicious, although its basis remains uncertain, the interpretation of animal sounds being a complex and elaborate lore.

— 31 —

Festival at the Church of Our Lady of Refuge

**‘You’ll be able to see the staging of a folk drama called The Golden Rosary’*

Still periodically performed in Catholic parishes around the South Asian and Sri Lankan littoral wherever the Portuguese found a foothold, folk dramas of the kind so superbly depicted in this chapter were performed in Ceylon from at least the early 1600s, reaching their peak period of creativity in the late 18th century. Called *nāṭakam* in Tamil and *nāḍagama* in Sinhalese, they are perhaps best referred to as liturgical or catechetical theatre. Thematically, their Portuguese templates were indigenized and musically there was Konkani (Goan) influence. *The Golden Rosary*, however, goes unmentioned in the still rather smallish research literature on the subject, although it or another like it may have been performed in Jaffna, given the vividness of Daniel’s depiction. True to form, *The Golden Rosary* unmistakably echoes Catholicism’s pre-Vatican II claim to salvific preeminence. As Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar says, just

before the curtain rises: 'This is more than a mere drama. It will not only show that we have a glorious faith, it will also help us in the task of converting the heathen of other religions.' And, indeed, the performance draws a large audience, including non-Catholics, whose presence will soon become more obvious. Whatever evangelical value such a *nāṭakam* may have had, its aim was also liturgical and catechetical, since at various points liturgical formulae, prayers and creeds would have been woven into the plot. The still unsurpassed overview is M. H. Goonatilleka, *Nāḍagama: The First Sri Lankan Theatre* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1984). See also S. Jeyaseela Stephen, *Caste, Catholic Christianity and the Language of Conversion: Social Change and Cultural Translation in Tamil Country, 1519-1774* (New Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2008).

— 32 —

The Golden Rosary

**'Are you going to try to buy his brains, like Turōṇāccāri who wanted Ēkalaivaṇ's thumb?'*

In the Mahabharata, Turōṇāccāri (Skt., Droṇācārya) was a much-esteemed archery master, the teacher of Arjuna, among others. One incident, however, tarnished his reputation: his outrageous demand that Ēkalaivaṇ, a promising pupil (but a potential rival), cut off his right thumb as *dakṣiṇā* (the symbolic but mandatory gift to a guru from an aspiring student).

**'Don't they know that if one of us jumps in for a fight it will be like Kaṭōrkacaṇ jumping into the Pārata war?'*

Kaṭōrkacaṇ (lit., 'Bald-Headed Powerful Giant'; Skt., Ghaṭotkaca), the son of Vīmaṇ (Bhīma), the second of the five Pāṇṭava brothers, and the giantess Hiḍimbā, was famous in the Mahabharata for his size and strength.

*‘Once more! Once more!’

In Daniel’s text, the words ‘Once more!’ are spoken in English.

— 33 —

The Funeral Arrangements for Vellaicci Ammāl

*starting with the murder of Cēṇātirājā

A slip of the author’s pen, perhaps? Although Tampāppillaiyār was guilty of many murders, this is the first we hear of a victim named Cēṇātirājā.

*‘not to mention his way of extracting instant obedience from the Pañcamar’

Though a major focus, thematically, in Daniel’s overall *oeuvre*, Pañcamars are referred to collectively in this way only once in *Mirage*, and that is here. Formerly called ‘untouchables’, but nowadays called Dalits, the Pañcamars consist of Vaṇṇars, Ampaṭṭars, Paḷlars, Naḷavars, and Paṛaiyars. *Mirage* is primarily about two in particular, the Paḷlars and the Naḷavars. Philologically, however, ‘Pañcamar’ conveys the idea of a fifth *varṇa* outside the four that are commonly mentioned in orthodox sources (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras).

— 34 —

The Official Inquiry

*or else it would occur during the most inauspicious time of early morning on a pañchami day

Pañcami, the fifth day of either the waning or the waxing moon, is proverbially associated with evil and misfortune. For an example of the anxiety it arouses, see our account of the death of a Tamil student at Batticotta Seminary (forerunner of today’s Jaffna College) on a

pañcami day in the 1830s and the immediate abandonment of the school by his classmates, in *The Bible Trembled: The Hindu-Christian Controversies of Nineteenth-Century Ceylon* (Vienna: Sammlung de Nobili, University of Vienna, 1995), pp. 63-64.

**singing of the Tēvāram hymns was omitted*

A 7th-8th century collection of Śaivite hymns composed by the Tamil saints (Appar, Campantar, Cuntarar), the Tēvāram—or selections from it—would have been sung on occasions such as a funeral. Its omission here underscores how anxious Tampāppiḷaiyār was to dispose of the body of his wife before the authorities arrived.

**‘It’s like a godly being has become the wife of the Demon Iraṇiyaṇ.’*

‘Iraṇiyaṇ’ is the Tamil name of the fearsome demon (*asura*) called Hiraṇya (or, Hiraṇyakaśipu) in the Sanskrit epics, who was slain by the Narasiṃha (Man-Lion) avatar of the god Viṣṇu.

— 35 —

Upatēciyār Prepares the Catechumens for Membership

**similar to making the mark of Piḷḷaiyār*

Piḷḷaiyār is the Tamil name of the god Gaṇesh, Śiva’s son, and a symbol (or mark) associated with him, called the Piḷḷaiyār-cuḷi, is always written at the top of a page when documents of any importance are written, to make an auspicious beginning.

**‘so I brought some plantains with me and some braided bread baked by the Sinhalese uncle who supplies the Cuvāmi.’*

Until the fratricidal ethnic conflict beginning in the 1980s, many of Jaffna’s bakers were Sinhalese. Here, ‘uncle’ is an expression of affectionate respect.

**When a person had learned all the prayers, the next step was to join the church and confess one's sins.*

Though tedious from a literary point of view, the foregoing passage conveys Daniel's cynicism toward conversion: after all, to become a Christian all one had to do was recite a few obscure prayers, parrot-like and uncomprehendingly. Rote memorization, led by a catechist (the Upatēciyār) preoccupied with food and drink, whose cognitive grasp of the Christian faith seems superficial at best, adds to the farce—or so it would seem.

— 36 —

Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar Visits the Catechumens

**Recently, he had been pleading the case with the local Catholic Church to have the Holy Mass and other ceremonies conducted in chaste Tamil*

Here, one has the impression that, for all the imperfections of Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar, the historical figure on whom Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar is based, Daniel had immense respect for his linguistic and literary endeavors on behalf of Tamil. Besides being a lexicographer of some renown, internationally, Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar campaigned tirelessly for the adoption of a Tamil liturgy, years in advance of the changes wrought by Vatican II in the early 1960s.

**'It seems that the Upatēciyār is going off to have his lunch at the boutique.'*

In Jaffna, the word 'boutique' is used for food stalls or small restaurants where simple, low-cost meals are available ('short eats', in the local parlance).

— 37 —

Poverty and Starvation

** There's a company based in Colombo that provides the raw materials to villagers who make the matchboxes for them.*

Although no Jaffna-based study of matchbox making, a labour-intensive industry only slightly less odious than match production itself, has come to our attention, informants remember a time when it had a niche in the local economy. Not, however, on nearly the same scale as in Civakāci on the Indian mainland (Tamil Nadu), on which the bulk of contemporary research has been done. An industry notorious for its exploitation of child labour, Daniel's depiction of its ill-effects seems almost understated.

— 38 —

Ilaiyavan Employed at the Jetty

**'for which he needed half a fanam at the warehouse canteen managed by a man from Delft'*

'Delft' was the Dutch name for Neṭuntīvu, an island some ten miles offshore from Jaffna.

**'keep that bicycle somewhere where it's not going to be easily seen.'*

Sumptuary regulations have already been mentioned in previous notes, on **Never had they dreamed of seeing her in such attire* (chapter 27, *infra*) and on **Tirēci was wearing a white sari* (chapter 30, *infra*), and here we have another example—a prohibition on bicycles. While a more complete inventory would take up too much space, Pfaffenberger provides a more representative sampling than we have yet attempted: 'In Jaffna in the 1940s and 1950s, for instance, minority Tamils were forbidden to enter or live near temples; to draw water from the wells of high-caste families; to enter laundries, barber shops, cafes, or taxis; to keep women in seclusion and protect

them by enacting domestic rituals; to wear shoes; to sit on bus seats; to attend school; to cover the upper part of the body; to wear gold earrings; if male, to cut one's hair; to use umbrellas; to own a bicycle or car; to cremate the dead; or to convert to Christianity or Buddhism.' From 'The Political Construction of Defensive Nationalism: The 1968 Temple Entry Crisis in Sri Lanka,' in *The Sri Lankan Tamils: Ethnicity and Identity*, ed. Chelvadurai Manogaran and Bryan Pfaffenberger (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), p. 145.

** 'Apimanyu turned the tide by taking the fight to the enemy'*

In the Mahabharata, Apimanyu (Skt. Abhimanyu), the son of Arjuna, was a valiant warrior and brilliant strategist remembered for a battle formation, the Padmavyūha, which enabled his soldiers to break through the enemy ranks on the field of Kurukṣetra.

** 'I heard from my son yesterday that you've been having a hard time without a proper job.'*

Here, indirectly and for the first time, we hear that Iḷaiyavaṇ had been laid-off from his warehouse job at the Aluppānti jetty. It is not until chapter 41 that Daniel actually informs readers of this new piece of bad news.

** 'now you also know why they call him 'Pārata Cuppar'.*

Cuppar earned his soubriquet because of his mastery—gained in adverse circumstances—over the Pārata (Bhārata), the Tamil version of the Mahabharata. On his learning about the epic at a distance, see the note on *Kokkuvil Kumārācuvāmi Pulavar in chapter 21 (*supra*).

— 39 —

The Prisoners Come to Jaffna from Kandy

**but on that bus they make us sit in the buck*

In Jaffna, ‘buck’ referred to the space on a bus where people were made to sit who were not passengers from the higher castes. That space was the aisle floor between the seats, running from the front to the back, the level of which was lower than the level of the passenger seats. To sit in a seat, one would step up into it from the buck. A person made to ride in the buck would be sitting at a lower level than the floor of the seats, and would be—in effect—*under* the feet of the more privileged passengers. Evidently, Dalits were made to ride on buses in this demeaning way even when regular seats were available.

**not more than four or five calling distances*

A unit of measure still used in Jaffna, a ‘calling distance’—half a mile, roughly, as Daniel says—is the distance from which a shout can be heard, one person to another.

**‘Ilaiyavan sat on the raised veranda that was thought of as unusual because Cuppar had made the edges with polished stones fixed into them.’*

What made this kind of structural ornamentation unusual is that Dalits were customarily prohibited from enhancing the external appearance of their dwellings in ways that the higher castes reserved to themselves.

**‘In the Pārata war, Arjuna was sunk in thought when he got onto his chariot’.*

Here, Cuppar alludes to the well-known story from the Bhagavad Gita (itself a part of the Mahabharata) about Arjuna’s faintheartedness about going into battle until his charioteer, the god Krishna, awakens him to his warrior dharma.

***‘It’s really true, the Kali Yuga has begun’.**

In the four-phase, cyclical scheme of cosmic time, the Kali Age (or, Yuga) is the last, and the worst, the age in which dharma sinks to its nadir. Conversion from ‘Hinduism’ to another religion, Christianity in particular, frequently elicits this kind of response, as if something so unimaginably horrific and seemingly irreversible could happen only because of cosmic changes beyond human ability to prevent.

***Looking like a veritable Vīmaṇ**

Vīmaṇ (Skt., Bhīma), one of the five Pāṇṭava brothers, was a great warrior in the battle of Kurukṣetra told in the Mahabharata.

***‘It was because of Cakuṇi that the Pārata war broke out’.**

Cakuṇi, the maternal uncle of Turiyōtaṇaṇ, the one who was responsible for Tiraupatai’s [Draupadī’s] humiliation, is often held ultimately responsible for the outbreak of the Kurukṣetra war. It was Cakuṇi who drew Yutiṭṭiraṇ [Yudhiṣṭhira] into the game of ‘chance’ that turned from bad to worse as he progressively lost all that he had, including his kingdom, until Tiraupatai was all that was left. Egged on by Cakuṇi, Yutiṭṭiraṇ played and lost her as well, exposing her to humiliation at the hands of Turiyōtaṇaṇ. By invoking Tiraupatai’s story, Cuppar accomplishes two things: 1) he asserts an equivalence between Tirēci’s humiliation and that of a high-caste paragon of womanly virtue; and 2) he signals a warning to the jeering Vellāḷa onlookers that their abuse of Tirēci could become a *casus belli*. All in all, one finds in this a remarkable example of Dalit hermeneutical ‘rethinking’ of the Pārata (Bhārata, or Mahabharata), making it relevant to the experience of the marginalized in their own local context. For comparison, see Alf Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking India’s Oral and Classical Epics: Draupadī among Rajputs, Muslims, and Dalits* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

**‘Villiputtūr Ālvār created a character in the Pārata called Vituraṇ who was on Turiyōṭaṇaṇ’s side’.*

Vituraṇ (Skt., Vidura), the foremost exemplar of dharmic wisdom in the Pārata (Bhārata or Mahabharata), was initially on the wrong side of the epic conflict—viz. Turiyōṭaṇaṇ’s [Duryodhana]—until as a witness to the humiliation of Tiraupatai [Draupadī] he had the courage to switch sides and join the Pāṇṭavas in the Kurukṣetra war. On this basis, Cuppar can assert an equivalence between Vituraṇ and Pūkkaṇṭar. Like his epic corollary, Pūkkaṇṭar belonged (as it were) to the ‘enemy’; however, unable to stomach the humiliation of Tirēci, he joined ranks with the Naḷavars and Paḷḷars in subverting their domination by his caste fellows, the Veḷḷāḷars. Here, it may also be noted, the Pārata from which Cuppar absorbed so much is not the Sanskrit Mahabharata but the 15th-century Tamil Makāpāratam attributed to Villiputtūr Ālvār.

— 40 —

Pūkkaṇṭar Walks out of a Church Meeting

**It was further agreed to allocate the special Novena Vesper service on the final day to the fish contractors of Cillālai and Iḷavālai*

The ‘fish contractors’ of Cillālai and Iḷavālai were Jaffna-based Catholic Karaiyārs whose wealth was acquired from skimming the wages of poor folk employed in shallow-water net-cast fishing, also called lagoon fishing. As we learn from chapter 44, such fishing was mostly done in Mullaittivu District in northeastern Sri Lanka. For background, see Dennis B. McGilvray, *Crucible of Conflict: Tamil and Muslim Society on the East Coast of Sri Lanka* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 169.

— 41 —

Iḷaiyavaṇ Loses His Job at the Jetty

**‘I went for Holy Mass to my son-in-law’s church where there’s a rope to keep your people separate’.*

The situation at the Church of Our Lord in Iḷavālai, the home church of Yākkōpu, Pūkkaṇṭar’s son-in-law, was not uncommon in the era of Daniel’s novel. While many of the Catholic congregations in the Diocese of Jaffna would have been caste-specific, in others that were multicaste—Iḷavālai with its preponderantly Veḷḷāḷa and Karaiyāra makeup being only one—worship space was often cordoned off in the way depicted, with a rope. Such flagrantly discriminatory practices (which, of course, were not limited to the seating arrangements) have all but vanished in urban settings. In rural areas, where multicaste churches are more rare, no such barrier is needed, or was. Any particular church would be a Veḷḷāḷa church, a Karaiyāra church, a Naḷava church, or something else. Here, it should be noted that Protestant churches of the same era as the novel were hardly exempt from the Catholic practices Daniel exposes. In them, Dalit Christians generally had to sit in pews at the back—if they could sit at all—or on the floor at the rear of the sanctuary. In Jaffna Catholicism, as was the case throughout South Asia, caste was historically regarded—since the early mission era in the 1600s—as a civil instead of religious institution. On that basis, practices such as the ones at Iḷavālai that troubled Pūkkaṇṭar could be rationalized, and in chapter 44 we see Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar doing exactly that.

**‘this sinful woman of mine pulls me back like some kind of poisonous gecko’.*

As an omen, the chirping of a gecko is considered one of the most inauspicious. Hearing it, one can feel deterred from an undertaking of the most trivial kind, such as going on an errand, as Tampan was about to do. Here, though, it was his traditionally Veḷḷāḷa wife who

felt uneasy, rather than Pūkkāṇṭar himself, a secular free-thinker. Ironically, the wife happened to be right, considering the intensity of the storm that broke out moments later.

— 44 —

Iḷaiyavaṇ Refuses the Eucharist

**‘Would the Christians of this village kindly sit on the left, and would the Christians from outlying villages kindly sit on the right, along with their relations from the village here, leaving a pathway down the middle’.*

In effect, Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar is asking for a voluntary separation—enforceable without a rope—along caste lines, with Naḷavars and Paḷḷars on the left, Vellāḷars and Karaiyārs on the right, with a gap in-between (Our Lady Who Saves from the Gallows evidently did not have pews). Conceptualizing caste as a repugnant but not intolerable civic institution (discussed above in the note on chapter 41), Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar rationalizes his concession to Yākkōpu and the powerful fish contractor cartel first in terms of practicality (the easier to process out the door with the statue of the Holy Mother) and then as a means toward a higher end (‘the conversion of the heathen’). Although one can question Daniel’s overall characterization of Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar, the real-life figure behind Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar, *Mirage* may at least in this respect have history on its side. On Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar’s complex legacy—complex because of his transparently utilitarian toleration of church-based discrimination in spite of his undoubtedly sincere efforts on behalf of Dalit emancipation—see section III of the Afterword by Richard Fox Young.

Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar Accepts Defeat

**‘Speak up on behalf of the poor, and for justice to the destitute’.*

While the Bible is no stranger to concerns of this kind, Daniel again retrojects into the past an idiom redolent of liberation theologies from a more recent period in Catholic church history. Out of context, they would have struck a dissonant cord in the era of Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar, the historical figure at the heart of the novel. On this, see the note on **‘may God’s judgment fall on the side of the downtrodden’*, in chapter 20.

Afterword (1)

Sunder John Boopalan

Justice Amidst Violence: Missed and Available Opportunities

Timeless and, therefore, timely. K. Daniel's *Kāṇal* (*Mirage*) is a work of historical fiction with two arms. One reaches back to the past grasping the many details, both good and bad, in their ordinariness, and the other reaches out with an open hand in the present offering itself as an opportunity for life. In doing that, *Kāṇal* reveals both the heights of compassion and the depths of cruelty that human persons are capable of and how each moment is a moment of opportunity for redemption from violence¹ and simultaneously a moment for furthering the good that is common to us all. *Kāṇal* seems to be intentionally ambiguous—the plot is neither defeatist nor triumphalistic. It is this plot that gives the novel its power and therefore its timeless relevance.

This double edge in *Kāṇal* buttresses its literary prowess and highlights *Kāṇal*'s ability to engage readers across time and space. On the one hand, *Kāṇal* is particular and local in its scope and contextual response. Its insightful interrogation of caste psyche; the account of conversion; and the revelation of the depth of human character are all dependent on such particular local details. At the same time, *Kāṇal* imaginatively narrates a fundamental feature of human existence that is marked by a necessary interdependence and self-implicating mutual responsibility. On the one hand, there is the narrative of people (Dalits in particular) losing land and status and life itself (an ongoing struggle today), pointing to the ways in which 'dispossession,'² in its negative sense, occurs. On the other hand, through the evocative portrayal of human interdependence

and the entailing disillusion that such an interdependence can give rise in a caste-ridden context if not interrogated, the novel continuously calls into question the reader's self-understanding and worldview, pointing to ways in which human persons are complicit in the occurrence of violence. In doing so, *Kāṇal* offers ways in which such violent complicity can be transcended through another kind of 'dispossession' of the self through responsible and compassionate human response. This second positive sense in which dispossession³ is used refers to the ways in which human persons are moved by other persons and situations outside of themselves 'in ways that disconcert, displace, and *dispossess*'⁴ them in instances of grief, passion, and affection.

When we consider this 'double valence' of 'dispossession,'⁵—that is its double-edged negative and positive—*Kāṇal* offers many rich and complex ethical plots. However, we also notice that in each of these two kinds of dispossession, there are stages and layers. Depending on whether the kind of dispossession is positive or negative, the stages and layers either evocatively depict compassion or cruelty.

'Human-hunting': Negative Dispossession

Ciṇṇi, Naṇṇiyaṇ's daughter, becomes the site of 'the double valence of dispossession.' The first 11 chapters revolve around her. Ciṇṇi is raped by Tampāppillaiyār's son. Naṇṇiyaṇ, unable to turn a blind eye (which is what is cruelly expected by Tampāppillaiyār) takes her back home from Tampāppillaiyār's sister's home where she had been kept in a state of semi-slavery. There is a constant exchange between Naṇṇiyaṇ and Tampāppillaiyār over Ciṇṇi, who becomes a site of contestation between Tampāppillaiyār who demands that Ciṇṇi be taken back to his sister's house and Naṇṇiyaṇ who is unable to ignore the wrong done to Ciṇṇi and wants to prevent it from happening again. After a period of silent unease, Tampāppillaiyār's (and others') insults pile up and Naṇṇiyaṇ's (and others') defiance of caste oppression gets firmer.

Tampāppillaiyār, a Vellālar, occupying a dominant position in the caste hierarchy, is presented with multiple opportunities to undergo a positive dispossession. To use Butler's vocabulary, we can say that Tampāppillaiyār could have allowed himself to be 'impinged upon by otherness.'⁷ He could have embraced the interdependency that is an inherent and inseparable part of collective human living as a condition for 'thinking about ways of countering violent suppression and occupation.'⁸ But he refuses to positively acknowledge this interdependency. He chooses to continue his violent ways and resolves to suppress and occupy. He does not consider Ciṇṇi's departure as an opportunity for re-centering his life in a way that is non-violent and just. To the contrary, he thinks of Ciṇṇi's departure as equivalent to 'defeat' and 'failure,' thus setting up a violent 'us vs. them' dialectic and 'reminisces about his youth' (chapter 21), considering the past as 'the golden age' and the present as a time of 'ill-fate.'⁹

Not willing to embrace vulnerability and the de-centering that such a vulnerability calls for, Tampāppillaiyār decides to 'strike back.' The 'human-hunting' that he is used to is undertaken once more. The prime targets seem to be Naṇṇiyaṇ and his sons, but as 'hunting' cannot always be micro-managed, Mayilu, his cruel companion, shoots Celli, Naṇṇiyaṇ's wife—'the wrong target.' Although the wrong target, Celli's death is described as 'gratifying' (chapter 12) from Tampāppillaiyār's perspective. Such gratification over the negative dispossession of the weaker other makes Tampāppillaiyār cruel. This is what Butler calls 'precaritization,'¹⁰ that is, a process of 'allocating precarity' and 'assigning disposability'¹¹ that makes certain people more insecure than others, rendering them precarious and disposable.

As 'Celli's corpse just lay there' (chapter 13)—another number in the list of human 'hunts'—Tampāppillaiyār recalls other instances of gratification and expendability. One of his memories was when he got Ciṅki, Cellappaṇ's widowed sister, pregnant and killed her by making her swallow poison. Despite this cruel act, Tampāppillaiyār

remembers ‘not her death’ but rather ‘the pleasure of her embrace’ (chapter 23). Such a cruelty brings to mind the cold and inhuman implications of the refusal to undergo positive dispossession by making oneself ‘impervious to the ethical command.’¹² Such a refusal depoliticizes and eroticizes the other ‘in order to construct the fantasy of a lover who spices up their lives without making any demands on them,’ thus further strengthening the dominant desire to continue to enjoy privilege ‘without giving up its power.’¹³

Chapter 24, titled ‘Tampāppillaiyār Reminisces about the Gang Rape of Menike,’ captures further in piercing detail the cruel refusal to undergo positive dispossession and the resolve to glory in the negative dispossession of the other. *Cinnavaṇ*, the rickshaw man, brings Menike to Turairājā, a ‘fast friend’ of Tampāppillaiyār, who conspires to rape her. Although a part of Turairājā wants ‘the girl’ for himself, his friends find out and in response to their inquiries, he replies, ‘Some stuff has come, it seems’ (chapter 24), referring to Menike in clearly objectifying terms that are dehumanizing. But no one is appalled. Tampāppillaiyār wastes no time. ‘I’m first,’ he says. As ‘Tampāppillaiyār’s eyes opened wide and devoured her’ (chapter 24), a voice announces, ‘Menike, child! He’s the master I told you about. You are going to work for him at his house. He’ll come and take you tomorrow’ (chapter 24).

One would think that in the kind of reminiscing that Tampāppillaiyār is engaged, where the past along with the inflicted wrongs is remembered, one would be dispossessed. But no. There is only sorrow for not having had enough of such ‘opportunities.’ We are offered a narrative glimpse into Tampāppillaiyār’s psyche after he rapes Menike. After we are told that the person he first made use of (an expression for rape) was *Cin̄ki*, the text reads: ‘And since her there had been so many others that he had lost count’ (chapter 24). As Menike shouts in horror, ‘What is this, Dorai? Leave me alone, Dorai! Aiyō, Dorai!’ for Tampāppillaiyār, in retrospect, ‘that voice was as sweet as sugar-candy’ (chapter 24).

‘How was the ‘stuff,’ Maccāṇ?’ asks Naṭuvil (as Turairājā is affectionately called by Tampāppiḷaiyār; chapter 24). Ciṇṇavan, shocked to find out that the girl has been brutalized, asks, ‘What have you done, Tampimār? She’s just a baby girl’ (chapter 24). Ciṇṇavan is ignored and, to make matters worse, he and the owner of the building where the rape occurs are given silver coins to guard the place as the trio go out to fetch more alcohol and food. The other two ‘had a go’ and ‘Tampāppiḷaiyār was given another chance’ (chapter 24). Menike thereafter is described as ‘motionless, like a corpse’ and that ‘she lay like a log of wood’ (chapter 24). The trio are described as ‘exhausted’ after raping Menike (chapter 24).

Menike, now dead, is put in a sack and thrown into a river after having a millstone tied to the sack. The coroner’s report after the post-mortem is described in cold detail: Menike, the Sinhalese woman (between the ages of fourteen and fifteen) ‘was raped several times even though unconscious after suffering a seizure of some sort’ (chapter 24). There are other piercing cold and cruel details too. The body is identified as Menike by her mistress, her previous owner who had sent her away because she started to become friendly with a Dalit boy, ‘the son of Cellammā, the Paraiyar woman who lived next door’ (chapter 24). I was first puzzled as to why K. Daniel offers this narrative. On second reading, the text offers itself with a complex richness that depicts cruel reality. What is cruel here is that Menike is seen as ‘property’ that gets ‘out of hand.’ Menike is deprived of a possible love with a Dalit boy. Love is killed. ‘Property’ exchanges hands. There are other exchanges that occur over her body, through her body, and in her body. ‘Stuff,’ she is deemed, after all.

To reiterate the point that the caste psyche that *Kāṇal* depicts is timeless, one could enumerate countless instances of cruelty in present-day India that reveal similar details of the caste psyche. I would like to bring to the reader’s attention one – the brutal murder of the Bhotmange family, a Dalit family at Khairlanji.¹⁴ I do this for many reasons, but the primary reason is that such instances of violence are erased from dominant accounts of history and

story-telling. In *Kāṇal*, although the ‘three prominent citizens’ are temporarily charged, they are ‘immediately released’ because ‘the evidence against them was inconclusive’ (chapter 24; emphasis mine). I recall the question, ‘where is the evidence?’¹⁵ that comes howling in all its cruelty, in response to the mention of the Khairlanji murders at a public event in March 2011 on the campus of Princeton University, one the leading universities in the U.S. where one would expect the audience to be informed or, at least, civil. *Kāṇal*, in pointing to the caste psyche that is capable of both perpetrating violence and excluding the mention of such violence from an account of history thereafter, makes itself relevant to our times and, in that sense, is *timeless*.

De-centering and Re-centering: Positive Dispossession

Tampāppiḷaiyār, a Vellāḷar, born into a dominant caste, neglects, ignores, and pushes away ethical opportunities to be positively dispossessed. The cruel power of caste and its connectedness to other social institutions—judiciary, police machinery, village life and land—is availed by Tampāppiḷaiyār (and others) to cause, without guilt or de-centering of the self, the negative dispossession of others who have been historically disadvantaged by caste oppression. We find, however, that this is not the only plot in the story. There are others. Pūkkaṇṭar, another Vellāḷar – born into the same dominant caste –chooses, in contradistinction to Tampāppiḷaiyār, to undergo a process of positive dispossession. Interestingly and significantly, Pūkkaṇṭar is not portrayed as flaunting his virtuousness. Pūkkaṇṭar is clearly a lead protagonist, but *Kāṇal* is simultaneously intent on not depicting Pūkkaṇṭar as a ‘hero.’ Pūkkaṇṭar does not augment himself with virtuousness when he acts responsibly in solidarity with those who are marginalized, but gives himself over ‘to the broader sociality’¹⁶ that he is part of.

When Naṇṇiyaṇ and other Naḷavars are forcefully evicted from land that they had been traditionally using, Pūkkaṇṭar, described as ‘an independent-minded person’ (chapter 14), gives permission

for huts to be put up in his compound for those Dalits who are negatively dispossessed. Pūkkāṇṭar's positively self-implicating question, 'If I wouldn't do this at a time like this would I be a human being?' (chapter 14), brings us to a central point in *Kāṇal*. Pūkkāṇṭar, unlike many others in his caste position for whom 'oppression and dispossession are not audible,'¹⁷ recognizes 'forms of injurability' and comes to grips with such wrongs and resolves to act responsibly. Pūkkāṇṭar, through his actions, offers 'a defense of our collective precarity,'¹⁸ recognizing wrongs committed against others and interrogating caste complicity in an account of wrongs. Pūkkāṇṭar is seen as embracing vulnerability and the de-entering of the caste-self, realizing that although loss cannot be fully reversed, loss can always be *addressed* in more ways than one. This choosing to be addressed and response-able makes Pūkkāṇṭar both responsive and responsible for others. If a precarious life offers itself to either cruelty (that is, 'dispossession' in the negative sense) or compassion (that is, 'dispossession' in the positive sense), Pūkkāṇṭar chooses the latter. This is positive dispossession.

Pūkkāṇṭar's case brings to mind K. Balagopal's observation that 'when one starts viewing caste as a social institution, and its impact on all other social institutions – that is, how it perverts the democratic content of every institution – one develops a certain way of looking at things.'¹⁹ Pūkkāṇṭar is portrayed in *Kāṇal* as one who hones this 'way of looking at things' to see caste oppression as a 'human rights problem'²⁰ and not merely as an area for extra-curricular work. Balagopal is dependent upon B. R. Ambedkar's analysis of caste as being irreconcilable with democratic principles²¹ unless one undergoes dispossession. *Kāṇal* privileges the character of Pūkkāṇṭar, a Veḷḷāḷar and therefore a non-Dalit by birth, and subverts the violent 'us-them' dialectic that bifurcates issues of common concern violently as either 'our concerns' or 'their concerns.' *Kāṇal* insightfully reveals that *all* concerns are *our* concerns. By being born into a particular caste – 'even a dominating one'²² – one is not necessarily undemocratic; however, one notes that it usually is the

case unless the caste-self is critically interrogated and the consequent dispossession that such a critical interrogation entails is embraced. When one comes to terms with the asymmetrical allocation of power and precarity that comes with being born into particular castes, one realizes that ‘thinking’ and ‘acting’ in certain ways can either further collective life or hinder it; one can either be compassionate or cruel. ‘There are a few good people like him’ (chapter 39) is the accolade that Pūkkāṇṭar is given for going beyond caste prejudice. ‘Regardless of wherever you are born,’²³ a responsible life always offers itself as a possibility for embrace. However, embracing such a responsibility entails dispossession and is no easy task.

Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar is the second example of a person belonging to a dominant caste—Vellāla, in this case—who chooses to undergo positive dispossession, but after a long and hard struggle. Cuvāmi is divided against himself. On the one hand, he preaches about ‘the necessity of some sort of compromise for the sake of Christianity’s propagation’ (chapter 44) and calls for segregation in church seating by caste. However, seeing Ilayavaṇ stand up in anger and storm out of the church because of his decision, Cuvāmi is torn within himself. He remembers the biblical injunctions to ‘speak up on behalf of the poor, and for justice to the destitute,’ and his own words come back to haunt him: ‘Christians of this village on the left, Christians of outlying villages on the right’ (chapter 47). When Cuvāmi’s eyes meet Ilayavaṇ’s during the Holy Mass, ‘it was as if someone had hold of his liver or was squeezing his heart’ (chapter 48). It does seem that Cuvāmi is undergoing a process of being dispossessed because of the just agency of Ilayavaṇ, a Dalit. In a reversal of the confession scene, it is Cuvāmi who kneels before the crucifix, weeping as Ilayavaṇ remains seated. The Cuvāmi’s struggle is long and hard, but he is responsive to the precarity that he sees around him, and, as a consequence, begins the journey of responsibility *for* life, a life that we cannot choose to share with just some.

Dalit Liberative Praxis: The Performative and Liberatory Aspects of Conversion and the Question of ‘Mirage’

Did conversion change everything for the better? Is the supposed liberation real, or is it a *mirage*? These questions are asked by the author of the novel himself. The reader is not left to his/her own resources without narrative help. Even after conversion, Pūkkāṇṭar’s skepticism about the liberatory aspects of conversion is given voice in the statement ‘All the devils in the world are struggling mightily to force you back into the old ways of the past’ (chapter 41), criticizing casteist practices in the church. At the same time, Pūkkāṇṭar acknowledges that ‘Even Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar is helpless to stop it’ (chapter 41).

On the one hand, one could interpret K. Daniel’s narrative as a critique of the supposed liberation that conversion to Christianity is understood to bring about. On the other hand, one could see *Kāṇal* as pointing to the continuing struggle of overcoming the caste psyche even after conversion. I am in favor of this second interpretation. As Philip Peacock and Sathianathan Clarke argue, ‘We do not wish to promote an idea that through religious conversion to Christianity, Dalits can escape all mechanisms of the caste hegemony that operate on overdrive to shape their identity in keeping with the overall logic and structure of the Hindu social order.’²⁴ However, at the same time, conversion brings with it a pool of socio-religious symbolic resources that transform the caste psyche;²⁵ these resources that are found in and among Dalit converts are to be taken seriously

Peniel Rajkumar, a Dalit theologian, pointing to such an agency that is found among Dalit converts, notes how in addition to ‘trans-textual’ biblical interpretation, there is also ‘textual appropriation’²⁶ of biblical sources. Rajkumar offers an example of a claim made by Ebenezer, a Madiga²⁷ village elder who claims that “‘St. Thomas the Apostle was a Madiga because he dared to place his fingers into the wounded flesh of Jesus,” in what is an obvious reference to Jesus’ post-resurrection conversation with Thomas found in John 20:26-9.’²⁸ We have a similar example in *Kāṇal*. As a theological justification

for Dalit assertion, Cimiyoṇ argues, ‘It was Jesus who said, “Even a cow can be killed if it tries to kill you”’ (chapter 15). Jesus, of course, is not recorded in the Bible as having said that. However, it is not that there is no scriptural precedent for such a Dalit Christian claim. The first part of Exodus 21:28 reads, ‘When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned.’²⁹ Although not equivalent to ‘Even a cow can be killed if it tries to kill you,’ the biblical verse is interpreted authentically to speak to a current situation. In this Dalit Christian claim, the emphasis on ‘Dalit’ reveals Dalit liberative praxis by employing the agency that is already present and available in Dalit communities.

There are other performative and liberatory aspects of conversion to Christianity that are found among Dalits. *Kāṇal* contains some examples. When some Dalit men see Tirēci, now Cimiyoṇ’s wife, she is described as ‘radiant, looking very elegant’ (chapter 27), in an attire that reflects her changed status. ‘Tirēci,’ Ciṇṇi’s Christian name, is not the only thing that the three Dalit men perceive as being different about her. They think to themselves, with happiness, ‘She’s not the same old Ciṇṇi Girl anymore’ (chapter 27). The plot has changed. At one point, Tirēci is described as ‘the center’: ‘Actually, wherever Tirēci was, that was where the center was’ (chapter 31), the narrative reads. Tirēci is indeed the center. In the beginning too she is the center and now, in the end, she is again the center, but in a radically different way. In the first instance, she is the site of negative dispossession, and, in the second (after her conversion), she is portrayed as the center of Dalit pride.

To sum up these reflections, *Kāṇal* presents multiple vantage points for the reader. It actively remembers the past. In actively remembering the past, *Kāṇal* simultaneously calls us to re-think our collective life and re-member it in the present and for the future. It offers itself as an analysis of the self, both individual and collective, lifting up interdependency, vulnerability, and responsibility as ethical categories that are to be actively embraced for a life together. *Kāṇal* was written in 1984, two years after I was born. I was intrigued

by the year of the work's writing. Much of the narrative details depict a past that, on the one hand, seems long gone. However, *Kāṇal*, as historical fiction, is very much an ethical commentary of our own times. I am reminded of Khairlanji. I am also reminded of the rape of a Dalit girl in Jind³⁰ in the North Indian state of Haryana; this 20-year old girl's mutilated lifeless body found near a canal in August 2013 is not dissimilar from Menike's mutilated body thrown into the river by Tampāppillaiyār and his cruel companions. The fight over her Dalit body; the reluctance of the authorized investigators to speedily follow-up the demand of justice; and the continuing efforts of the girl's family members and other civil-rights collectives throw before us the question, 'how long?' Cruelties based on caste directed against the bodies of Dalits continue to occur in broad daylight.³¹ We may decide to act justly and interrogate forms of cruelty both locally and globally and may ask with Pūkkarṇṭar, 'If I wouldn't do this at a time like this would I be a human being?' Or, we may choose to not let such stories occupy a place in our thinking, story-telling and accounting of history and may ask as did a member of the audience at Princeton, 'Where is the evidence?' Urgent compassion or inevitable cruelty? Authentic transformation or mere mirage? These questions are before us, as they have always been. Reading *Kāṇal* helps us to re-read ourselves and re-orient ourselves responsibly, both individually and collectively, making the most of every moment as a moment of opportunity for redemption from violent ways and working towards just and loving living.

Endnotes

- 1 This brings to mind the point Walter Benjamin makes in the seventh thesis in his essay, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, edited and introduced by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 2007), p. 256, where he makes the point that 'there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.' Although categories like 'civilization' and 'barbarism' are problematic for many reasons, we can aver that

they stand as conceptual synonyms in *Kāṇal*, indicating cruelty and compassion, respectively.

- 2 Judith Butler, an influential voice in the field of literary theory and culture, in her conversation with Athena Athanasiou, talks about the 'double valence' of 'dispossession.' This concept simultaneously refers to two phenomena. On the one hand, 'dispossession' refers to the loss of land, citizenship and other statuses, means of livelihood and so on. This is the negative sense of dispossession. See Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p. 3. I choose the concept of 'dispossession' from this work for two reasons: one, I admire Butler's academic and personal integrity in speaking to issues of justice globally; and, two, this is her most recent work and it supports my claim that *Kāṇal* has timeless relevance since it offers narrational material that speaks to some of the most-discussed conceptual categories in literary theory and culture today.
- 3 Thus we see that 'dispossession' as a concept simultaneously refers to two phenomena.
- 4 Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession*, p. 3; emphasis mine. Butler argues that these two senses of 'dispossession' are connected.
- 5 See note 2.
- 6 In *Kāṇal* (chapter 12), we are told that Tampāppillaiyār and Mayilu go 'human-hunting,' literally; the 'game' often consists of persons who are considered 'lower' in the caste hierarchy and therefore as 'dispensable' at 'upper-caste' will.
- 7 *Dispossession*, p. 92.
- 8 *Dispossession*, p. 94.
- 9 This violent dialectic of the caste psyche is often seen in present-day India. Those dominant in the caste hierarchy consider Dalit assertion and the overcoming of historical disadvantage by Dalits as something that is the antithesis of a desirable state of progress. As Gopal Guru notes, Dalits are often perceived as 'sociological' and 'biological' dangers; along with this, he insightfully refers to the caste psyche which fears Dalit assertion as 'the arrival of 'Kaliyug'. See Gopal Guru

(ed.), *Humiliation: Claims and Context* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 213-214, 220. In the popular use of the term, yug (or yuga; originally meaning 'yoke') is seen in relation to four 'world-ages' and the Kali-yuga is considered as the last in the gradual deterioration from an idealized 'golden age.' See Klaus K. Klostermaier, 'Yuga' in *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, edited by Denise Cush, Catherine Robinson, and Michael York (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 1043-1044.

- 10 *Dispossession*, p. 43.
- 11 *Dispossession*, pp. 20-21.
- 12 Lisa Guenther, 'The Ethics and Politics of Otherness: Negotiating Alterity and Racial Difference' in *philoSOPHIA* 1:2 (2011), p. 208.
- 13 Guenther is dependent on Bell Hooks' insights to make this point; see Guenther, 'The Ethics and Politics of Otherness,' p. 197.
- 14 For an analytical treatment of the murders, see Anand Teltumbde, *Khairlanji: A Strange and Bitter Crop* (New Delhi: Navayana, 2008). Also see Teltumbde's *The Persistence of Caste: The Khairlanji Murders and India's Hidden Apartheid* (New York: Zed Books, 2010).
- 15 An event was organized at Friend Centre on the campus of Princeton University (Princeton, New Jersey) featuring Rajiv Malhotra as the speaker on the topic 'Are Western forces conspiring to destroy India from the inside out?' Noticing the peremptory tone with which Dalit concerns were dismissed, Yogeshwar, a Dalit activist, spoke about the Khairlanji murders and challenged Malhotra's dismissal of Dalit concerns. As Yogeshwar was speaking, a voice from the audience interrupted him, asking 'Where is the evidence?' This uncivil outburst can be heard at <http://www.breakingindia.com/princeton-video-10/>, 'Questions and Answers, Unfortunate Incident', 02:18, and Yogeshwar's parting insults at 03:27 (accessed 20/12/2015). For a more detailed account of the context, see Richard Fox Young and Sunder John Boopalan, 'Studied Silences?: Diasporic Nationalism, 'Kshatriya Intellectuals' and the Hindu American Critique of Dalit Christianity's Indianness.' In *Constructing Indian Christianities: Culture, Conversion and Caste* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014), pp. 215-238.

- 16 *Dispossession*, p. 108. Earlier, as Butler further rightly notes (p. 107), 'The question of ethics is always a question of an ethical relation, that is, the question of what binds me to another and in what way this obligation suggests that the "I" is invariably implicated in the "we"'
- 17 *Dispossession*, p. 132.
- 18 *Dispossession*, p. 197.
- 19 K. Balagopal, 'Caste and Civil Rights,' in K. Balagopal, *Ear to the Ground: Selected Writings on Class and Caste* (New Delhi: Navayana, 2011), p. 378.
- 20 Balagopal, 'Caste and Civil Rights,' in *Ear to the Ground*, p. 378.
- 21 Balagopal, 'Caste and Civil Rights,' in *Ear to the Ground*, p. 378.
- 22 Balagopal, 'Caste and Civil Rights,' in *Ear to the Ground*, p. 391.
- 23 Balagopal, 'Caste and Civil Rights,' in *Ear to the Ground*, p. 391.
- 24 Sathianathan Clarke and Philip Vinod Peacock, 'Dalits and Religious Conversion: Slippery Identities and Shrewd Identifications,' in Sathianathan Clarke, Deenabandhu Manchala, and Philip Vinod Peacock (eds.), *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first Century* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 190.
- 25 Clarke and Peacock, 'Dalits and Religious Conversion,' in *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first Century*, pp. 190-191.
- 26 Peniel Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation: Problems, Paradigms and Possibilities* (England: Ashgate, 2010), p. 57.
- 27 Madiga is the name of a Dalit community in South India associated with the handling of dead flesh and leather.
- 28 Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, p. 75. Rajkumar is dependent on Jose D. Maliekal's account of this real example.
- 29 NRSV (New Revised Standard Version). I am thankful to Kristin Wendland of Princeton Theological Seminary for her help in finding this verse.
- 30 <http://www.ndtv.com/article/cities/20-year-old-girl-found-murdered-in-jind-mob-goes-on-rampage-410243>; accessed 20/12/2015.

- 31 In March 2014, in the same North Indian state, four Dalit girls were abducted, raped and left half-unconscious by men from a dominant caste. When protests were staged, it was the girls and their families that were ostracized. See Jyotsna Siddharth's essay 'Bhagana Outrage: On the Dire Need for a Collective Struggle' at http://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7463:bhagana-outrage-on-the-dire-need-for-a-collective-struggle&catid=119&Itemid=132; accessed 20/12/2015. I mention these examples because remembrance is an act of compassionate resistance. The list of cruelties is long, but collective will is divided and wrongs based on caste are easily erased from the dominant imagination if not for the embrace of available opportunities for compassionate justice.

Afterword (2)

Richard Fox Young

Seeing Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar (Cuvāmi Nānappirakācar)
through Daniel's *Mirage*:
Marxist Perspectives on Caste, Conversion, and Catholicism

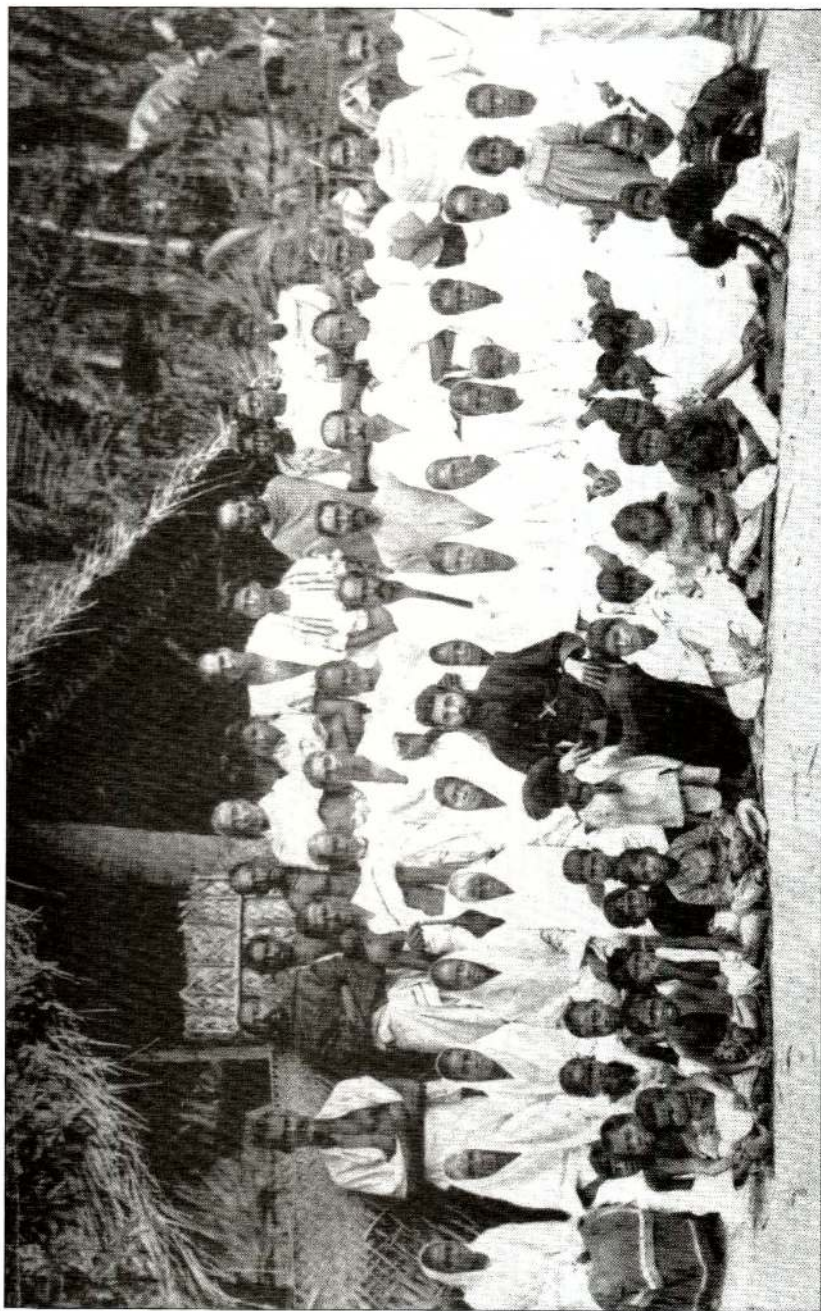
'You are Jesus' slaves,' says Cuvāmi Nānamuttar, a semi-fictionalized Catholic priest in *Mirage* (*Kāṇal*), a late 20th-century Tamil novel from Jaffna in the north of Sri Lanka. The Cuvāmi, who in 'real' life was called Cuvāmi Nānappirakācar (or, Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar), then goes on to declare that Jesus' slaves are his and his only, 'not the heathens' or anyone else's.¹ Theologically redolent of Christianity's liberative potential, the Cuvāmi's words inspire hope and kindle a spirit of resistance in the Naḷava converts who hear them. As former chattel slaves (*aṭimai*) of the Veḷḷāḷars, Jaffna's dominant caste, they know whom the Cuvāmi has in mind—their ancient masters and modern-day oppressors, the 'heathen' (Śaivite) Veḷḷāḷars—and being Jesus' slaves (*aṭimai*) therefore sounds to them a whole lot better. That's how things stand, upbeat and optimistic, about 30 pages into the novel. About 30 pages from the end, however, things turn bleak again, and there I am reminded of Mathew Schmalz's concept of 'subversive marginality.' On hearing his Dalit Catholic informants in North India (eastern Uttar Pradesh) speak of being like 'crabs' unable to climb all the way out of a basket because the other crabs keep pulling them back, Schmalz extrapolates from this an indigenous view of agency: like crabs 'on [the basket's] raised edges,' they at least experience a degree of autonomy, less than what they had dreamed of, but more than they had before becoming Catholic.²

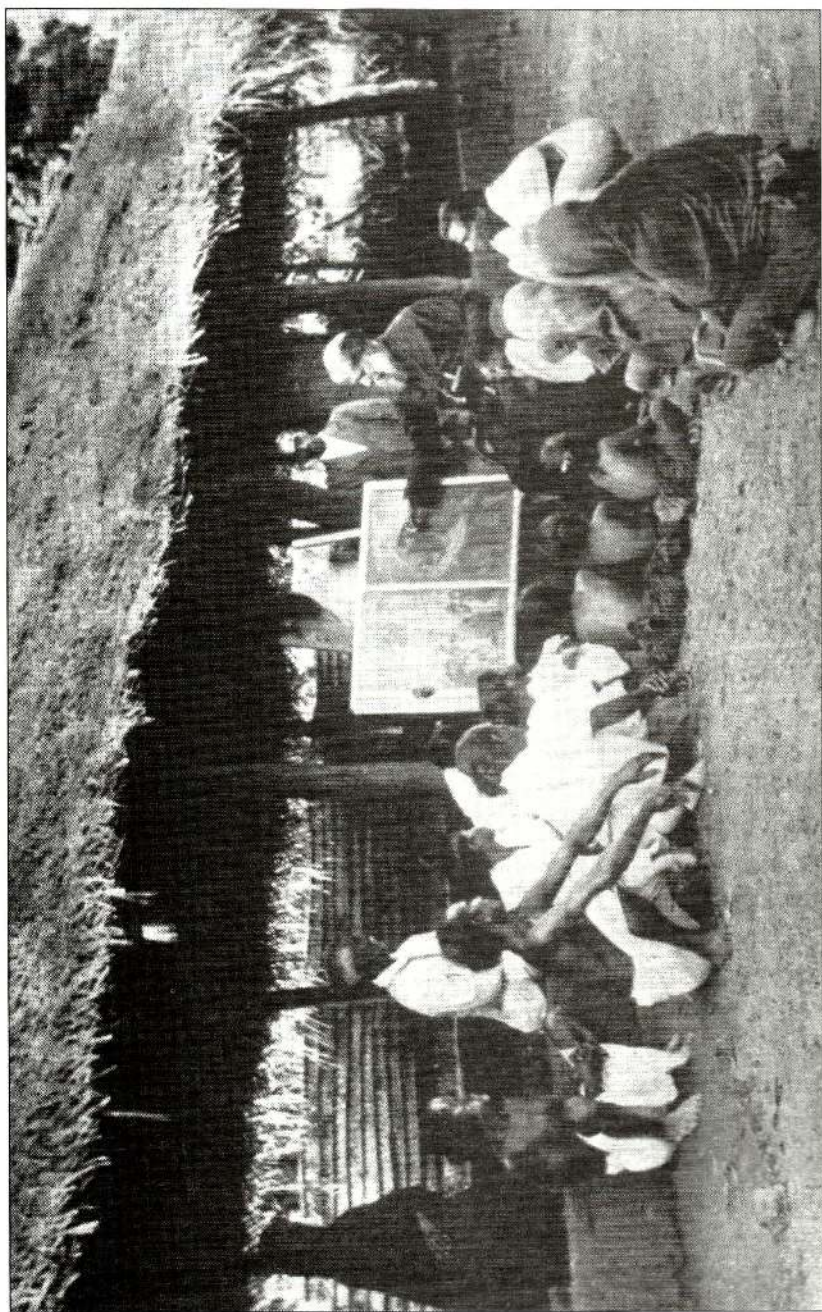
The Sri Lankan Dalit author of the novel, K. Daniel (Kē. Ṭāṇīyal, 1927-1986), a Catholic who had soured on Catholicism, had this same kind of point in mind—the false hope of a total rupture with

ascribed identity—when he has a good Vellālar, a Marxist Vellālar, warn Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar's Naḷava converts of how 'all the devils in the world are struggling to force [them] back into the old ways of the past.' As it turns out, this last-ditch attempt at fostering 'critical consciousness' fails, and without their being fully cognizant of how it happens, the Naḷavars find that having shaken off one kind of oppression (Vellāla), they have been shackled with another that cloaks itself in the piety of faith (Catholic). That the novel is asking a question about what really changes when 'conversion' occurs seems to me enormously interesting; not only that, but its analysis as well. And here at the beginning nothing is given away if I plainly state that Daniel's overall point is *not* that nothing changes; it's that to really count, the change has to be more consequential than simply a new locus of identity. That is why, a little trepidatiously, I follow V. Geetha,³ a proponent of the kind of approach I emulate, and attempt a reading of *Mirage* in terms of its historical context, mindful of the red flags raised by K.W. Christopher over 'non-Dalit interpretations of Dalit literature'⁴ and by Anushiya Sivanarayan over the ethics of translation and the commodification of culture.⁵

I.

Besides the Turumpars, Daniel's caste, no other ranks lower; as the washermen of the lower castes, they should remain 'unseeable.' As late as 1960, Turumpars were still said, by and large, to 'only flit about at twilight.'⁶ While Daniel's descendants claim that their ancestors became Catholic under the Portuguese in the 1500s, a more likely scenario is the famine of 1878-79 when the first Naḷavars converted and their dependents along with them, including Turumpars.⁷ Coming into the daylight from the twilight did not mean leaving the shadows overnight; from the Daniel family, I heard of high-caste bullying in the Catholic school he attended, until he dropped out after the fifth standard, put off by the timid efforts of priests who would not—or could not—intervene effectively. Determined to claw





his way out of the basket (as it were), Daniel eventually achieved success, entrepreneurially, as the owner of a welding shop in the town bazaar. There, informants say, his ‘conscientization’ began, as he listened to customers talking of their travails under Vellāḷa domination. And the catalyst of his radicalization—the thing that got him out of the shop into the streets—was the Temple Entry Crisis of 1968.⁸ Centered on the archly-orthodox (i.e., Āgamic) Kantacuvāmi temple at Maviddapuram where protestors conducting a *satyagraha* were attacked by Vellāḷars using ‘iron rods and sand-filled bottles,’ the crisis became a prolonged campaign.⁹ Critics complained that ‘Marxist mischief makers’ were capitalizing upon the agitation.¹⁰ For Daniel and other minoritized Tamils, however, the Marxist vision of a ‘classless society’ looked a whole lot better than Vellāḷa servitude—or being ‘slaves’ of Jesus.¹¹ Even so, when I heard a Jaffna informant claim that ‘Marxism gave [Daniel] a hatred of the church,’¹² I wondered how generalized an animosity this could have been, given the fact that the *Mirage* hardly seems an overly-ideological portrayal of the Catholic priesthood or of Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar.^{13, 14}

Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar (Cuvāmi Nānappirakācar, 1875-1947), the historical figure behind Daniel’s Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar, was born Hindu in the peninsular hamlet of Māṇippāy where his Vellāḷa father managed a temple. Soon bereaved, the mother remarried a Catholic; upon baptism, the son was disinherited. Inducted into the Oblates in 1898 and ordained a priest in 1901, Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar’s Catholicism was not of the Vatican II variety. His was an era of expansion, and he devoted his prodigious energies to the Nallūr Mission, planting numerous congregations, mainly Naḷava.¹⁵ Naturally, Vellāḷa wrath was provoked, and in Daniel’s novel they call him ‘the Devil from Māṇippāy.’ At the time, protocols required Catholics to go down on one knee on seeing a priest, whom they would greet with the word *āṇṭavar* (in Tamil, *āṇṭavar* can also mean ‘the Lord God’), saying, ‘Praise the Lord!’¹⁶ Commanding enormous respect, Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar strode across Jaffna like a colossus, or so it seemed, a person of power and patronage, mediator between

God and government, defender of the downtrodden. Over the years, situations occurred in which conversions (usually of kinship groups, rarely of villages) might not have been sustained were it not for his advocacy 'from above' when Vellāḷars felt that their dominance was threatened 'from below.'¹⁷ Understanding that 'Conversion is rarely the outcome of intellectual appeal alone,'¹⁸ Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar had a high threshold of tolerance for the utilitarian motivations of his converts. His opponents, however, were less indulgent, and their client-like relations were criticized and contested, by fair means and foul.¹⁹ That he himself might have manufactured the opposition he complains of seems a distinct possibility. Theologically, his pre-Vatican II idiom makes him sound as if he actually thrived on conflict and persecution, since he welcomed them as divine signs of 'external grace.'²⁰ And his nose for this kind of opportunity was his 'hunting dog,' the term he used for the catechist who would scour the countryside and return with news of trouble.²¹

II.

Ideologically, Daniel thought of literature in the Marxist way, as a weapon in class warfare, but the novel *Mirage* also has the familiar feel of a traditional *sthala-purāṇa*. In this case, however, the story it tells has to do with a Catholic church, not a temple, and how the church got its unusual name, Our Lady Who Saves from the Gallows (*Kolai nīkki mātā kōvil*). Located in Vaṇṇārpaṇṇai (Ancanantālvu), where Śaivism had reigned uncontested from the time of its revival in the 19th century, the Church of Our Lady was thronged when I arrived for an early-morning mass (December, 2011). Afterwards, with help from the youngish parish priest, Fr. Roshan, I had a conversation about the church's history; joining us were the sexton (*caṅkilitām*) and several of the most elderly members.²² Long ago, they said—1914 or thereabouts—a crime had been committed in the neighbourhood: one night, a Naḷavar named Valli had stabbed and killed a Vellāḷa policeman during a shakedown while escorting his

sisters home. One sister was pregnant; pushed to the ground, she was beaten with a baton. On Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar's intervention, the death sentence was commuted and Valli was baptized in prison. Had the *cuvāmi* placed any conditions on his assistance, I asked? 'Yes,' they said, 'on conversion,' adding the caveat—a bit late—that it had not really made a difference. Why? Because 'Valli had converted voluntarily.'²³ This, it turns out from archival research, was only the first of five such interventions by Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar. None, however, was so unambiguously successful as the first,²⁴ or as controversial. In Jaffna's Hindu press, a distinguished critic, Sabāratna Mudaliyār (1853-1922) wrote censoriously of 'proselytizers' who pounce on 'murderers condemned to death.'²⁵ Naturally, Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar rose to his own defense.²⁶ Today, even his Oblate biographers sound unconvinced.²⁷

III.

Instead of providing a full synopsis of the novel, here I simply note that *Mirage* is Daniel's (re)imagining of these events. In the process, the context changes, from the town to the countryside, along with the characters: instead of Valli, we get Naṇṇiyaṇ, a Naḷavar, and a headman, also Veḷḷāḷar, instead of a policeman. Inured by years of servitude, Naṇṇiyaṇ snaps one day when told by his Veḷḷāḷa master (*Nayinār*) that his daughter would have to go live at his house as a kind of concubine. In the most cathartic scene (chapter 10), 'Naṇṇiyaṇ jumped on top of him and with his two strong hands got hold of the kuṭumi on his shaven head and gave it a good yank.' For this, Naṇṇiyaṇ is whipped by the headman, who is stabbed and killed by one of Naṇṇiyaṇ's sons. Taking the blame, Naṇṇiyaṇ is condemned to death. *Cuvāmi* Nāṇamuttar becomes involved, the death penalty is rescinded, and the building of Our Lady gets underway right away.

Now, going out on a limb, I argue two things:

First, the historical Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar was an *accelerator* of such events, not their *cause*. Earlier, when I mentioned Valli, a

crucial detail had to be left out: prior to his death-row baptism, Valli had met Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar at Maṭu (Madu), a Marian shrine, which he had visited as a pilgrim, not as a Catholic. And in *Mirage*, too, the sequence is similar: in one chapter, Nanniyaṇ hears about being a ‘slave’ of Jesus, and in the next he (re)claims his dignity by humiliating his oppressor.

Second, once ‘a new locus of identity’ comes into focus, events occur at an accelerated rate and in ways that cannot always be controlled. An unrelated but contemporaneous instance suggests that minoritized Tamils were ‘fight[ing] for their right to be Sanskritized’ in becoming Catholic (Protestant, etc.).^{28, 29} Here, Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar talks of Paḷḷa converts and of harassment by their erstwhile owners, the Vellāḷars. ‘The Paḷḷar [have] now begun to breathe freely,’ he reports, once the violence had subsided. ‘As an outward mark of their emancipation they had the lower lobes of the ears of their females bored—this was not allowed formerly. And some young women began to dress with ‘marady’ [‘breast cloth,’ *māraṭi*].’³⁰ In *Mirage*, sumptuary restrictions of many kinds are violated.³¹ Nanniyaṇ’s daughter Ciṇṇi (the one who almost became a Vellāḷa concubine) makes a vow in the hope that her father will be saved from execution. When that happens, she dresses in a white sari and a white sari blouse, and with her husband, dressed in a white dhoti and white shirt, carries a lighted candle up and down the Vellāḷa neighbourhoods surrounding Our Lady Who Saves from the Gallows. Years later, after witnessing many processions similar to the one described in *Mirage*, Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar complained that they were ‘more a point of honour than anything else.’³²

IV.

While change of this kind is not to be trivialized, the novel now begins to sound like a textbook demonstration of sanskritization theory, especially M. N. Srinivas’s point about *positional* change within the caste hierarchy being a different kind of change than

structural change.³³ As a Marxist, Daniel wants to foster a 'critical consciousness,' and he therefore uses the good Vellālar as his mouthpiece, the one who had warned of the devils that were 'struggling to force [the Naḷava converts] back into the old ways of the past.' First, they should realize that 'shares' (*paṅku*)³⁴ for the up-coming novena at Our Lady—a novena being the annual festival of nine nights ending with the patron saint being carried in procession around the parish—were distributed on the basis on each participating church's caste.³⁵ Of these nights, the Naḷavars of Our Lady get the last, while Catholic Vellālar from elsewhere get the first. Have they forgotten, asks the good Vellālar, that Nanniyān's wicked landlord, who was also the Vellāla proprietor of the local Kali Temple, allocated shares for its annual nine-night festival in this same way? There, too, Naḷavars came last and were saddled with the cost of a goat sacrifice. In an early chapter (chapter six), the novel depicts the distribution of shares at the Kali Temple³⁶; phenomenologically, the one mirrors the other, and between the pre-Christian past and the Christian present the difference seems marginal.³⁷ Naḷavars may not have been allowed inside the temple, even on the festival night of which they were the patrons, but in the sanctuary of Our Lady, warns the good Vellālar, they would be cordoned off from Catholic visitors of the higher castes: 'Even Cuvāmi ... is helpless to stop it,' he claims (chapter 41). On the night of the last novena, the truth of that prediction is borne out when Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar announces (chapter 44), 'Would the Christians of this village kindly sit on the left [a mix of Naḷavars and Paḷlars], and would the Christians from outlying villages [mainly Vellālar] kindly sit on the right.'

My reading of *Mirage* in relation to its context confirms the overall accuracy of Daniel's fictionalized portrayal of the historical Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar's ambivalence toward caste (in his view a civil, not religious, institution, which was the prevailing Catholic view³⁸) and his toleration of it in the church. On this, my best source is a short tract by Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar, called *Universal Religion* (1933).³⁹ Meant for distribution at the Marian shrine at Madu (where Gñāna

Prakāsar originally met Valli), it was a dialogue sermon, designed to be read aloud, outdoors, on raised platforms, Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar (the *guru*) on one and on the other another priest (the *śiṣya*) playing the role of a curious Hindu with questions on his mind about Catholic social praxis. Technically, *Universal Religion* was a work of pre-Vatican II apologetics (*tarkapiracaṅkam*), and it first of all boasts of Catholicism's universality as proof of its truth. It has become a global religion, the Catholic guru claims, because 'the priests obey the bishop, and the bishops obey the pope.' And then, abruptly, the 'Hindu' actor sounds a wee bit cheeky: 'Don't be angry with me for asking, Cuvāmi, but why are caste distinctions observed in Catholic churches?' Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar's choice of a public gathering drawing thousands of pilgrims—Catholic and Hindu—to address the issue of caste also strikes me as politically risky: 'It is a diabolical lie,' he declares, 'for anyone to claim that [Catholicism] practices casteism. [Catholicism] permits people of all castes to enter the church and dispenses the same sacraments to all who come.' Hold on! the Hindu interlocutor persists, 'Why don't you call it casteism when certain churches confine certain castes to certain spaces?' And so, having argued for Catholicism's universality, Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar must now defend its particularity. Blaming Śaivite scruples about the mixing of castes, he acknowledges—disingenuously—that there are *rural* churches (in fact, all Nallūr Mission churches were caste-specific) where this kind of thing happens.⁴⁰ And 'What,' he concludes rhetorically, 'is wrong with that?' For one thing, as it turned out, the Catholic Paraiyars thought he was talking about them and took umbrage, firing off a broadside in a tract of their own, while the Catholic Vellālars took umbrage that the Paraiyars took umbrage, and did the same.⁴¹

V.

A better—and, indeed, more ironic—proof of Srinivas's maxim about positional change in the caste hierarchy being a different kind of change than structural change is hard to imagine. It's why Daniel's question about 'conversion' and what really happens when

it occurs begs to be asked and answered, from *below* and not from *above*. And as one might imagine, Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar, the figure at the heart of Daniel's novel, is the one who stands in most need of a breakthrough in critical consciousness. It is not that nothing has changed in the lives of his Naḷava converts, but that not enough of consequence has; a new locus of identity helps, but will not satisfy the fiercely urgent needs of a people whose very survival is at stake. And here the novel could be read as a textbook demonstration of Dick Kooiman's findings from mainland South India, about Christian converts released from domination by 'the lordship of the privileged Hindus' only to have it replaced with a similar bondage under the lordship of privileged Indian Christians.⁴² Unemployed and starving, Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar's converts fall prey first of all to the Star Brand Matchbox Company, owned by Catholic Veḷḷāḷars, and when child labour fails, they are suckered into the servitude of bonded labour, doing shallow-water net fishing, in a deal brokered by Karaiyāra contractors who are Catholic, too.

As one might suppose, imagining conversion both as a necessary and also sufficient change for improving the well-being of his converts now becomes the *mirage* that Cuvāmi Nāṇamuttar must see through. In a most improbable denouement (given the kind of historical figure Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar was known to have been), he repents of having believed that positional change was the same kind of change as structural change (or, in words to that effect).⁴³ And while all of this may substitute a counter-myth about Marxism for another about Catholicism,⁴⁴ Daniel has it right again, historically: like (most) other Veḷḷāḷars, Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar was leery of 'economic revolution' and scoffed at accusations that this was what he really wanted.⁴⁵ 'An ideological attack on hierarchy,' wrote M. N. Srinivas, 'is unable to alter the ground realities, unless it is backed up by creating an alternative system of production that ignores if not deliberately violates the *jati* based division of labour.'⁴⁶ In that same well-known essay, Srinivas adduced the absence of structural change as *the* reason why Jainism, Buddhism and Hindu bhakti had 'failed to make

a dent on [the] caste hierarchy.' While the essay makes no mention of Catholicism (or, more inclusively, Christianity), Daniel would surely have wanted to add it to Srinivas's list of failed religions, *not because nothing changes but because not enough does*.

Endnotes

- 1 Here, I am using the translation in this volume, based on the second edition of *Kāṇal*, printed in Colombo in 1993, not the first edition of 1986, printed in India. The differences are few and mainly stylistic, the Colombo edition being the fuller. The complete anthology of Daniel's six major novels is available in *Kē. Ṭāṇiyal Paṭaippukaḷ* [K. Daniel's Works], ed. Ṭāṇiyal Vacantam (Putunattam, Tamil Nadu: Aṭaiyāḷam, 2005). Although *Mirage* is left out, K. A. Geetha is a good introduction to the larger corpus of Daniel's novels. See 'In Need of Translation: An Analysis of Sri Lankan Tamil Dalit Literature,' *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 41, nos. 3-4 (2011): 33-44. And for a local perspective on Daniel's significance, see the learned appraisal of the late Karthigesu Sivathamby of the University of Jaffna, '50 Years of Sri Lankan Tamil Literature,' <http://tamilelibrary.org/teli/srilitt.html> (accessed 31 December 2013).
- 2 Mathew N. Schmalz, 'Dalit Catholic Tactics of Marginality at a North Indian Mission,' *History of Religions* 44, no. 3 (2005): 249-50.
- 3 V. Geetha, 'History and the Caste Imagination: Some Notes on Contemporary Tamil Fiction,' in *History and Imagination: Tamil Culture in the Global Context*, ed. Darshan Ambalavanar et al. (Toronto: TSAR Canada, 2007), pp. 76-89.
- 4 K. W. Christopher, 'Between Two Worlds: The Predicament of Dalit Christians in Bama's Works,' *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 47, no. 1 (2012): 7-25.
- 5 Anushiya Sivanarayanan, 'Translation and Globalization: Tamil Dalit Literature and Bama's *Karukku*,' in *Other Tongues: Rethinking the Language Debates in India*, ed. Nalini Iyer and Bonnie Zare (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 135-54.

- 6 Michael Banks, 'Caste in Jaffna,' in *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon, and North-West Pakistan*, ed. E. R. Leach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 65. For one of the most contemporary accounts on the Turumpar (from Batticaloa, not Jaffna), see Dennis B. McGilvray, *Crucible of Conflict: Tamil and Muslim Society on the East Coast of Sri Lanka* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 236-237. One of the earliest accounts, written by Gabriel Tissera, a Burgher convert from Catholicism and a catechist for the American Ceylon Mission in Jaffna, reads as follows: 'The Tooroompen (which name signifies a man that is not worth more than a rush) is the lowest. This last is so low a cast [*sic*], that people of the high casts often strike them if they come into contact with them; for the latter consider it a bad omen, if one of so low a cast should meet them in the way. People of this lowest cast are washermen to the low casts immediately above them; for a common washerman would not wash for any of the low casts, nor would a common barber shave them; they have to shave each other.' 'Extract from the Journal of Gabriel Tissera,' *Missionary Herald* 4, no. 4 (1824): 103.
- 7 Compared with other castes, Catholic sources have almost nothing to say about the origins of Turumpa Catholicism. A reference to their conversions piggybacking (as it were) on those of the Naḷavars whom they served as washermen is found in the *Codex Historicus* of the Nallūr Mission (Pt. 1, p. 4), a diary kept by Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar from the inauguration of the mission until his retirement. A typescript of the original is preserved in the archive of the Oblate Fathers at the Nallūr Swami Gnanapragasar Library (Thodarbaham, Jaffna).
- 8 I learned of Daniel's involvement in the Maviddapuram incidents from interviews (Dec., 2011) with Vairavamuttu Caṅkararāja, headman of Savatkattu village (Jaffna), who was 19 at the time and an active member of the Peking wing of the Ceylon Communist Party, along with Daniel. While rank-and-file members were mostly minoritized Tamils, the leadership was largely Veḷḷāḷa. The party official in charge of the 'untouchability' campaign in those years was a much beloved figure who later taught at Jaffna Hindu College. In *Mirage*, the good Veḷḷāḷar, a Marxist Veḷḷāḷar, is modeled upon him. A memorial pamphlet [in Tamil] is available: *Kārttikēcaṇ Master, Lover of the People* (Vaṭṭukkōṭṭai: privately published, 1993).

- 9 On the Maviddapuram troubles, see Bryan Pffafenberger, 'The Political Construction of Defensive Nationalism: The 1968 Temple Entry Crisis in Sri Lanka,' in *The Sri Lankan Tamils: Ethnicity and Identity*, ed. Chelvadurai Manogaran and Bryan Pffafenberger (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 143-68. At the end of *Pañcamar*, a novel by Daniel in which the Temple Entry Crisis of 1968 serves as a backdrop, a long list of contemporaneous headlines from the Jaffna newspapers can be found as an appendix. Though included in the Daniel anthology (n. 1), the pagination is missing.
- 10 'Correct Course,' *The Hindu Organ* [Jaffna], March 15, 1968. Besides Marxists, Christians and Buddhists (Sinhalese, from the South) were likewise accused of meddling in local affairs. Pffafenberger (n. 9) argues that the origins of Tamil 'defensive nationalism' are to be traced to the Temple Entry Crisis and that an independent Tamil state was first broached as a way of shielding Śaivism from outside violation. That could well be, and Jaffna's sectarian Hindu press claimed on the revealed authority of the Āgamas that 'Panchamars' had no right of temple entry. 'Any breach of the Agamas with its attendant evils will shake the foundations of the Hindu religion and open the door for Communism,' warned Thambipillai Sivalingam, president of the 'All Ceylon Hindu (Saiva) Practices and Observances Society,' adding that 'caste distinctions will prevail in this world so long as the world exists.' From 'Temple Entry for Minority Tamils and Caste,' *The Hindu Organ*, March 3, 1967.
- 11 In comparison with the Pulaya Anglicans of Central Kerala in the same period, cadres such as Daniel appear to have found it harder to arrive at a *modus vivendi* between Marxism and Christian faith: 'Pulaya Christians recognizing that the church no longer attended to their socio-economic needs looked to the Party to fulfill that role while the church was seen as still continuing to look after their spiritual wants. They seem to have compartmentalized the two.' George Oommen, 'Communist Influence on Dalit Christians—The Kerala Experience,' *Bangalore Theological Forum* 26, nos. 3-4 (1994): 56.
- 12 From an interview with 'David' (who goes by only one name), a Dalit author and former inspector of schools, Chavakaccēri, related to the Daniel family through marriage (Dec., 2011, in Annekottai).

- 13 In the preface to the novel, Daniel says that as a young man he was acquainted with Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar and that he used to 'argue' with him. 'I did not want to malign his name,' he went on to say. 'At the same time, it would be hypocritical to claim that he, an unprejudiced or unbiased individual, acting alone, could have solved or resolved the commonplace and perpetual problems of hunger, starvation, and famine.'
- 14 To Daniel 'Sam' Vasanthé, I owe a debt of gratitude for numerous conversations during December, 2011, at his home in Jaffna and for arranging interviews with siblings and friends of his father. Were it not for him, I would have garnered fewer personal details. An educator and entrepreneur, Sam has transformed his father's welding shop into one of the largest tutorial centers in the whole of Jaffna. Though Sam himself claims to be thoroughly secular in outlook, Catholicism has returned to the family home, re-introduced through a sister's marriage. A crucifix now hangs on the wall, alongside of photos of the father.
- 15 Although Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar founded 37 churches, how many of these survive remains uncertain, and mergers have occurred. Congregationally, a breakdown of the social composition shows that they were predominantly single-caste. See F. W. Stanislaus, 'The Missionary "ad Paganos": An Assessment of His Special Apostolate,' in *Cuvāmi Nāṇappirakācar nūrrāṇṭu niṇaivu malar 1875-1975* (Jaffna: Diocesan Press, 1975), p. 67.
- 16 'When Christians see a cuvāmi they bend down on one knee and greet him with the words 'Praise Swami!' or 'Praise the Lord!' In turn, the cuvāmi raises his right hand and makes the Sign of the Cross, saying 'Blessings, child.' So says Daniel in *Mirage*, chapter 9.
- 17 Although Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar was a Tamil indigene, Catholicism was not of Indian origin, and the events under discussion occurred in the colonial era. In such a context, questions of agency become especially acute. My view finds expression in the following: 'In and of themselves, ... colonial-era Christian missionaries ... are never sufficient as a cause (much less, *the* cause) of conversion; at best, they are a helpful, although unnecessary presence. By and large, but not invariably, the most interesting action, on the ground, involves converts themselves, or those who, more properly, are engaged in the process of converting

(conversion, as such, is never finally over in any aoristic sense).’ Chad M. Bauman and Richard F. Young, ‘Minorities and the Politics of Conversion: With Special Reference to Indian Christianity,’ in *Minority Studies*, ed. Rowena M. Robinson (Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 187.

- 18 The quotation is from Robert W. Hefner, a leading social science theorist on conversion, in *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), p. 110. A partially congruent view on the essentially non-cognitive nature of conversion was held by Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar, at least toward the end of his life: ‘Even Christians do not understand all the Christian doctrines at a time; they understand them gradually. The downtrodden are like children. We should teach them only what they are capable of understanding. When they grow up in their religion, they will understand the rest.’ Cited in Anton Matthias, *The Catholic Church in Jaffna, 1875-1925: With Special Reference to the Ministry of Fr. S. Gnana Prakasar, OMI* (Jaffna: Good Shepherd Centre, 1992), p. 155.
- 19 With the benefit of hindsight, Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar’s biographers are understandably ambivalent about the tactics and strategies he employed while serving with the Nallūr Mission for nearly half a century. Stanislaus, a fellow Oblate, is the most explicitly critical: ‘Gnanaprakasar found the ground fertile for emancipating [the former chattel-slaves of the Veļļālar], economically and educationally, *provided they embraced Catholicism*.’ Stanislaus, ‘The Missionary “ad Paganos,”’ p. 68 (italics added). To me, the evidence warrants a more nuanced assessment, as I know of no instances—unequivocally clear—in which assistance was made contingent upon conversion. That said, most converts (or all converts) initially had utilitarian reasons for approaching Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar. On the other side of the coin, the work of mission can become a self-perpetuating endeavor, its long-term success dependent on short-term gains. As no one is fully self-transparent to himself or herself, Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar’s ideal of ‘disinterested service’ cannot have made him entirely immune to self-interest. An early entry in the *Codex Historicus*, his daily logbook, dating almost to the beginning of the Nallūr Mission, reads as follows: ‘Some families seem to have been never converted to Christianity although baptized in a body. Experience has later shown that the less temporal

advantage held out to the neophytes the better. I remark that those who have received the most are they who have now fallen back.'

- 20 *Codex Historicus*, Pt. II, p. 40, entry dated 1929. The full context reads as follows: 'At 1 am receive visit from heads of 7 families from Anaikkoddai (barber) offering to become Catholics. These had approached me on the subject last year also but disappeared eventually. Now owing to the 'external grace' of persecution by the Vellalas they say they are definitely determined to come over. I promise to go and see them Sunday morning next. After the usual negotiations they left at about 3 am.'
- 21 Stanislaus, 'Missionary "ad Paganos,"' p. 68.
- 22 Besides the sexton, three others were present: a businessman, a housewife, a teacher. Though elderly, none were alive at the time the incidents occurred. On matters of factuality, their account of the church's origin largely meshes with those derived from archival sources.
- 23 Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar's only explicit reference to the Valli incident occurs in the *Codex Historicus* (Pt. I, 20-1; emphasis added): 'Early in February [1914] Vally stabs a policeman who dies at once. Vally absconds himself. The people of Anjanantalvu come to me asking for instruction [that is, they ask to become catechumens]. *I agree to it on condition that nothing will be done by us with Government on the affairs of Vally.* They declare that they are coming over not because of Vally's murder but because they see they were wrong in not becoming Catholics earlier. Vally too had come to see me two years ago for baptism and had for worldly motives neglected that good inspiration. Gabrielpillai and Marian sent to instruct the people. Vally is caught subsequently and gets sentence of death contrary to the expectation of everyone in Jaffna, for his stabbing of the Policeman was under extraordinary provocation. The people however continue to be under instruction. Vally's wife is made to petition Governor.' An entry in the *Codex* (Pt. II, p. 20) for 1926 indicating that Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar visited Valli in prison on Easter, might be suggestive of a more than client-like relationship, twelve years later.

- 24 Details on the four subsequent cases are found in Nicholapillai Maria Saveri[muttu], *A Catholic-Hindu Encounter: Relations between Roman Catholics and Hindus in Jaffna, Sri Lanka, 1900-1926* (n. p., n. pub., n. d.), pp. 299-301. This is a local reprint of his 1978 doctoral dissertation, University of London (School of Oriental and African Studies).
- 25 Sabaratna Mudaliyar, 'Proselytism,' *The Hindu Organ*, Jan. 20, 1916. The article was serialized, starting on Nov. 5, 1915, and concluding on Jan. 24, 1916. In the same installment, a long list of grievances was voiced, of which the following is representative: 'Schools are opened, appointments carrying monthly salaries are offered, better social enjoyments are vouchsafed, and as a result, the ignorant mass are tempted to give up their original faith, but it cannot be said, with any real conviction.'
- 26 'Criminals condemned to death are indeed often approached by missionaries but always at their insistence, the government gaol regulations strictly requiring this preliminary. In most cases where such criminals were converted it was with the certainty of impending execution, and the Catholic Priest has always accompanied the victim to the foot of the scaffold consoling him to the last.' Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar, 'Mr. Sabaratnam and Hypocrisy,' *Jaffna Catholic Guardian*, Feb. 26, 1916.
- 27 When Saveri[muttu], for example, writes of the Valli incident, he makes Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar into a calculating individual, justifying the means by the ends: 'In 1914 Gñāna Prakāsar realized one of his dreams, namely, that of establishing a foothold at Vaṇṇārpaṇṇai, the staunchest of Hindu strongholds. ... It all started with the murder of a policeman by a Hindu Naḷava.' *A Catholic-Hindu Encounter*, p. 181.
- 28 From an astute observation, made by Karthigesu Sivathamby in private correspondence with Bryan Pffafenberger. Cited by Pffafenberger, 'The 1968 Temple Crisis in Sri Lanka,' p. 154.
- 29 The *locus classicus* for this kind of analysis is Chad M. Bauman, who argues that Christianization and sanskritization are not 'discrete and competing processes.' Critical to his perspective is the way that gender rises to the fore in Dalit communities who convert—something that *Cinni*, Nanniyān's daughter, perfectly exemplifies: 'There is good reason ... to conclude that the transformation of Christian attitudes

and deportment with regard to women represents not a simple rejection of old and retrogressive values and behaviors in favor of new and progressive ones, but also the appropriation and reconfiguration of pre-existing upper-caste Hindu mores and mien.' *Christian Identity and Dalit Religion in Hindu India, 1868-1947* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), p. 187

- 30 *Codex Historicus*, Pt. I, p. 34, of uncertain date, c. 1914.
- 31 A regulation may be thought of as a 'boundary-making device' (Pfaffenberger), imposed from above on those below, or as emblems of power and prestige (McGilvray). On such restrictions in Jaffna, see Pfaffenberger, 'The Political Construction of Defensive Nationalism,' pp. 148-50, and on Batticaloa, McGilvray, *Crucible of Conflict*, pp. 163-5.
- 32 *Codex Historicus*, Pt. II, p. 65, dated 1935. As a Veḷḷāḷar who never had to chafe under sumptuary restrictions, Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar may well have underestimated the meaning of 'honour' among the Dalit Catholics he labored among for so many years, especially women, their social roles and status. On this, see chapter six, 'Gold and Cholis: Indian Christian Sartorial Style,' in Eliza F. Kent, *Converting Women: Gender and Protestant Christianity in Colonial South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 33 For this distinction, see M. N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), p. 7. I owe this reference to Chad M. Bauman, *Christian Identity and Dalit Religion*, p. 94, where Srinivas is helpfully related to questions of conversion to Christianity.
- 34 'Shares' (*paṅku*) are defined by McGilvray as 'a recognized right to a standard portion of something, ranging from legal shares of paddy-cultivation rights to collective shares of sponsorship of rituals at temple festivals.' *Crucible of Conflict*, p. 392. For discussion of how such shares (or honours) are allocated, caste-wise, at temple festivals, see pp. 135-45.
- 35 In a study of Catholicism in the Sinhalese South, R. L. Stirrat argues that priests who distributed novena shares based on caste imbued this kind of social ranking with 'a new substantiality,' at a time when the system was still 'highly fluid.' That could be, although caste is

always fluid, and the argument seems a stretch when the population concerned was not the dominant population. Within that minoritized population, however, it seems reasonable to propose that, 'Caste boundaries hardened and caste competition intensified.' *Power and Religiosity in a Post-Colonial Setting: Sinhala Catholics in Contemporary Sri Lanka* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 16.

- 36 To see how 'shares' in temple festivals are ritually distributed in Batticaloa on the basis of caste, see McGilvray, *Crucible of Conflict*, pp. 204-08. There, he describes how the ritual may be thought of as a 'symbolic focus for the entire Tamil caste hierarchy.' Reading Daniel in the light of McGilvray, one finds that the rituals they describe are virtually identical. From Daniel, however, one can learn what it means to be a Dalit participant. As such, the 'share' is symbolized by various sacred substances (sacred ash [*vibhūti*], etc.) wrapped in betel leaf. Each caste's representative receives one, but differently, depending on their status. Starting with the Vellāḷar, the Brahmin officiant literally hands it over, physically, with his own hand. However, by the time the Naḷavar's turn arrives, a non-brahmin priest called a paṇṭāram drops the symbolic 'share' from above into the open hand below, thus avoiding contact.
- 37 While Hindu festivals (*tiruvīḷā*) and Catholic novenas are irreducibly different, their components are strikingly similar, from the flag raisings (*koṭiyēṛram*) that are featured in each to the neighbourhood procession with the sacred figures they celebrate, divinity or saint. Novenas in Jaffna may have arrived in the 1500s with the Portuguese. Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar was hugely fond of them, and constantly talks about them in the *Codex Historicus* of the Nallūr Mission. In parishes served intermittently by a circuit priest, novenas are a fixture of Catholic life in Jaffna. When novenas are held, a raised flag indicates that a priest has arrived, marking the beginning of (ideally) a nine-day period of prayer, preaching, and the sacraments, concluding with a procession through the parish with the patron saint, stopping at houses wherever someone might be ill. Behind the outdoor cross in front of a church, there will be a flag stand, dug deep into the ground, sufficient to hold a palmyra pole of considerable height. During the off-season, such poles are stored in the sanctuary itself.

- 38 On caste in the Indian churches, Protestant as well as Catholic, some of the most pioneering work was done by Duncan B. Forrester, who published his essays on this and related subjects in *Forrester on Christian Ethics and Practical Theology: Collected Writings on Christianity, India, and the Social Order* (Farnham, Surrey, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009). On Catholicism, see Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Caste, Class and Catholicism in India, 1789-1914* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1998); and on Christianity more inclusively, see Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- 39 *Universal Religion* is a rare work. The copy used is preserved in the Oblate library and archives in Jaffna (n. 10). The tract is in Tamil, although the title is English.
- 40 On the island of Delft, some ten miles offshore from Jaffna, the dwindling but still substantial Catholic population remains divided into nine (largely) caste-specific churches: St. Xavier's (Vellālar and Vaḍuhar [Baḍaga]), St. Anthony's (Karaiyār), Our Lady of Fatima (Karaiyār), St. James (Paḷlar), St. Thomas (Paḷlar and Paraīyar), St. Lawrence (Ampaṭṭar and Paraīyar), St. Mary's (Paraīyar), St. John the Baptist (Paraīyar) and Our Lady of Divine Mercy (Karaiyār). In an interview (Dec., 2011) with the parish priest, Fr. Amalraj, I learned that he makes a circuit of all these churches on a regular basis and holds novenas at each. Although most of them are a walkable distance from each other, their congregations continue to resist the idea of amalgamation; even those that belong to the same caste, differ in terms of sub-caste.
- 41 Additional background details are found in Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar's entry in the *Codex Historicus*, Pt. II, p. 57, dated Feb. 13, 1934: 'Chunnakam Paraīers publish leaflets against the Madhu tract on Universal Religion thinking that their caste was attacked in it whereas there was no such thing. Written for non-Christians and answering their objection that if one became Catholic one will have to mix up with all sorts of people, it said that although the Church does not observe caste distinction, Catholics in our land are obliged by circumstances to tolerate certain usages such as, sitting apart in church and no one obliges the faithful to mix up pell-mell in church. ... I held my peace but some Catholic young men took up the gauntlet and wrote strong things against the Chunnakam people who retorted by leaflets. Things went too far and

the ecclesiastical authorities had to stop further publishing of leaflets by the Vellala section.'

- 42 Dick Kooiman, 'Conversion from Slavery to Plantation Labour,' *Social Scientist* 19, nos. 8-9 (1991): 68.
- 43 Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar's way of repenting for a lifetime of having tolerated caste as a hierarchy while working to improve the status of his converts within it, is vividly depicted by Daniel in following extract from chapter 47:

'Yesterday's words, uttered at the Vesper Novena, now came back to the Cuvāmi for him to ponder how he could have said them.

'Christians of this village on the left, Christians of outlying villages on the right.'

As he recalled them, these words of his sounded loud and piercing. Getting up from bed, he raised his hands before the statue of Jesus, illuminated by the light of a candle that had almost burned out.

Lifting his eyes, the Cuvāmi called out, 'My Lord! The one true God! Have mercy, save me, and take me to your feet! My Lord! The one true God! Save me, a sinner! Take me to your feet and grant me eternal rest!'

When he had finished praying, he lowered his hands to his chest, kept them there, and bowed his head. Tears poured from his eyes like a stream. His beard was soaked with tears. The Cōlakam had started and was now howling through the open window, extinguishing the single candle.'

- 44 A helpful starting point for such an appraisal from a Dalit Christian theological perspective would be Daniel Jeyaraj, 'The Struggle of Dalit Christians in South India for Their Identity and Recognition,' *Theology* 100 (1997): 242-250.
- 45 One revealing admission of this kind comes in a periodical published by the Nallūr Mission. In a certain hamlet where Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar had been hard at work, he reports as follows: 'Our progress had not been all plain sailing. We had much opposition from a certain section of the local Hindus. The converts here are from the poor, who were once slaves and are still laboring under many disabilities, although they

were legally emancipated a hundred years ago. The landed [Veḷḷāḷa] class misunderstood our purpose as usual, and took alarm, imagining that we were out to create an economic revolution in the village by withdrawing our converts from their service.' Fr. Gñāna Prakāsar, 'Progress at Udupiddy,' *Pagan Mission News-Letter*, no. 13 (1939), pp. 1-2.

- 46 M. N. Srinivas, 'An Obituary on Caste as a System,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Feb. 1, 2003, p. 458.

Glossary

Āccāri

a carpenter caste

Aiyar

a caste of Tamil Śaivite Brahmins (spelled variously, 'Iyer,' etc.)

'Aiyō, aiyō!'

an exclamation (e.g., 'Oh no, oh no!')

akkai

elder sister (nowadays rarely used)

ammā

'mother', 'lady'

Ampaṭṭar

a caste of barbers

aṇṇai/aṇṇan

elder brother

antiyēṣṭi

funeral rites or obsequies

appā/appu

father (the later nowadays rarely used)

āttai

mother (nowadays rarely used)

ayyā

honorific term of address (similar to 'sir') for one's (male) superiors

baḍagiṇi

hunger (Sinhalese)

Cammaṭṭiyār

fishing contractors (usually, Karaiyāra)

caṅkilittām

in Christian Tamil, the sexton of a church whose duties include various kinds of teaching; possibly derived from ‘sacristan’

Ceṭṭiyar

merchant and/or moneylender

Cōlakam

monsoon wind that brings rain and blows from the South, June to September (but dry when it blows from the North)

cuṇṇam

lime

cuvāmi

in Christian Tamil Catholic priest; title used by the Hindus also to address their priests

dorai

master (Sinhalese), used by Tamils of the Central Hills and Sinhalese (at the time, in Jaffna) when addressing Tamil superiors

fanam

a coin (*paṇam*) of varying value; in Jaffna at the time, 1/16th of a rupee

Kaikkūḷavar

originally a warrior-merchant weaver caste (see chapter 18, explanatory notes)

kākkā

used by Tamil-speaking Muslims for ‘elder brother’; derogatory when applied to non-Muslim Tamils

kāḷāñci

A symbolic gift given by a Brahmin priest after a puja. Holy ash (*vibhuti*), sandalwood paste, kumkum, areca nut, plantain, and other (sacred) substances, are wrapped inside a betel leaf (or, alternatively, in one half of a ritually-broken coconut). *Kāḷāñci* are given to representative individuals whose castes are thereby made publicly responsible for provisioning a temple during one of its festival days. For details, see Explanatory Notes, chapter 6.

kamakkāraṇ

farmer, cultivator (generally a Vellāḷar)

kañci

conjee; rice-water; water in which rice has been boiled and then drained off

Kaṭṭāṭi

a caste of dhobis (washermen)

kīḷittattū

a popular Tamil field sport

kīḷuvai

a thorny hedge plant; Indian balm of Gilead

Kollaṇ

a caste of blacksmiths

Kōviyar

a mid-level caste, often employed in Vellāḷa households for cooking and cleaning; believed to be the Tamilized form of *goyigama*, a Sinhalese caste

kuru

guru; in Christian Tamil, a Catholic priest (honorific)

Kurakkan

finger millet; also called ‘ragi’

kurukku

a garment mainly worn by Dalit women; wrapped around the body from above the breast to mid-calf; knotted at the end and tucked above the breast

kuṭumi

a hair tuft, especially men's, worn at the back of their (shaven) heads

maccāl

wife's sister, sister-in-law

maccāṇ

sister's husband, brother-in-law; also a form of address between friends

Maḡē Ammē

'O, Mother!' (Sinhalese)

māmi

mother-in-law, father's sister

mamoty

'a hand tool for digging, shaped like a hoe, with a blade at an acute angle to the handle' (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

maṇiyakāraṇ

chief administrator of a district sub-division, appointed by the colonial authorities; responsible for fiscal and judicial affairs

marutu

the flowering mardah tree

Maṭappalli

a caste of cultivators; usually considered assimilated to the Vellālars

Mukkuvar

a caste of fishermen

muḷḷu-muruṅkai
holly-leaved barberry

Mūppan
a scavenger caste

mūppar
in Christian Tamil, a Catholic deacon

nācciyār
lady, queen, mistress-of-the-house

Naḷavar
a Dalit caste; historically, toddy-tappers (fem. sg.: Naḷatti)

nayinār
lord, master, feudal landlord

nayinātti
fem. of *nayinār*

ōlai
palmyra leaf, used for writing purposes

Paḷḷar
a caste of agricultural laborers

Pañcamar
'non-caste Hindus outside the four-fold caste system' (Madras Tamil Lexicon)

pañcami
fifth day after a new or full moon

pandal
a canopy, often of (decorated) cloth, erected out of doors on various occasions whether auspicious or inauspicious

paṇṭāram

temple-ritualist (non-Brahmin)

Paraiyar

a caste of drummers (from *parai*, 'drum'); in certain places, scavengers

Pārata

the 15th-century Tamil *Makāpāratam* (Mahabharata) attributed to Villiputtūr Ālvār.

Pariyāri

a barber caste

Piḷḷaiyār

Tamil name for Ganesha

piracātam

food, sweets, etc., offered to a divinity and distributed afterwards by a temple priest to the devotees

piṭṭu

rice or millet flour, steamed (traditionally) in a hollow bamboo

poṭṭu

forehead mark, made with kumkum or sandal paste

pukkai

a porridge of boiled rice

Taccar

a carpenter caste

Tampi/Tampimār

term of affection for a younger male or males (sg., pl.)

Taṇakkārar

a caste of elephant-keepers

terpai

a kind of sacred grass (Skt. *darbha*), used ritually

Timilaṇ

a fisher caste

Turumpar

washer caste of the Pañcamars

upatēciyār

in Christian Tamil, a catechist (Catholic or Protestant)

uṭaiyār

a village official, superior in status to the village headman

Vaṇṇar

a caste of dhobis (washermen)

Veḷḷālar

a landowning, cultivator caste, dominant in Jaffna (at the time of the novel)

Mirage (*Kāṇal*), a Dalit 'historical' novel first published in 1986 by K. Daniel of Jaffna (Sri Lanka), a Catholic by birth but a Marxist by choice, makes a probing inquiry into the early 20th-century 'conversion' to Catholicism of the Naḷavars and the Paḷḷars, two of the region's most downtrodden castes, asking what difference the change of religion made to their overall well-being.

From chapter two, an exchange full of friction, between Tampāppiḷaiyār, a Veḷḷāḷa (dominant caste) cultivator-landowner, and Nanniyāṇ, a landless bonded laborer thinking of converting to Christianity:

'What's this, Nanniyāṇ? I heard you're going to build a Christian church! Weren't there some people [Catholics] who came out to see you yesterday?' These questions Tampāppiḷaiyār asked as he came walking down the embankment of the field Nanniyāṇ was tilling.

'Who ... whoever told you that, Nayingār [Master]? No ... nothing of the sort,' replied Nanniyāṇ, stammering as he removed the turban shielding him from the hot sun. Holding it in his hands, he stepped back a little. His mamoty fell to the side, the soil clinging to it that he had just dug up.

'Ha! You fellows had better not think our God and theirs are different. Whatever the God, they always get us to the same place. But our Gods are Tamil Gods. Our Gods are the ones who know us best. Now, listen to me, Nanniyāṇ! If you get into any foul play, our boys would listen to no one, not even me.'

Until his retirement, the translator, the Rt. Rev. S. Jebanesan, Ph.D., was Bishop of the Jaffna (Sri Lanka) Diocese of the Church of South India. The editor, annotator and commentator, Richard Fox Young, Ph.D., holds the Timby Chair in the History of Religions at Princeton Theological Seminary (Princeton, New Jersey, U.S.A.). Their collaboration began in Jaffna over 35 years ago, issuing in a major monograph entitled *The Bible Trembled: The Hindu-Christian Controversies of Nineteenth-Century Ceylon* (Vienna, 1995: Sammlung de Nobili, Indological Institute of the University of Vienna). Their collateral interests range from history and literature to intercultural theology and interreligious dialogue.

