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and an interview with
INDRANI CHATTERJEE

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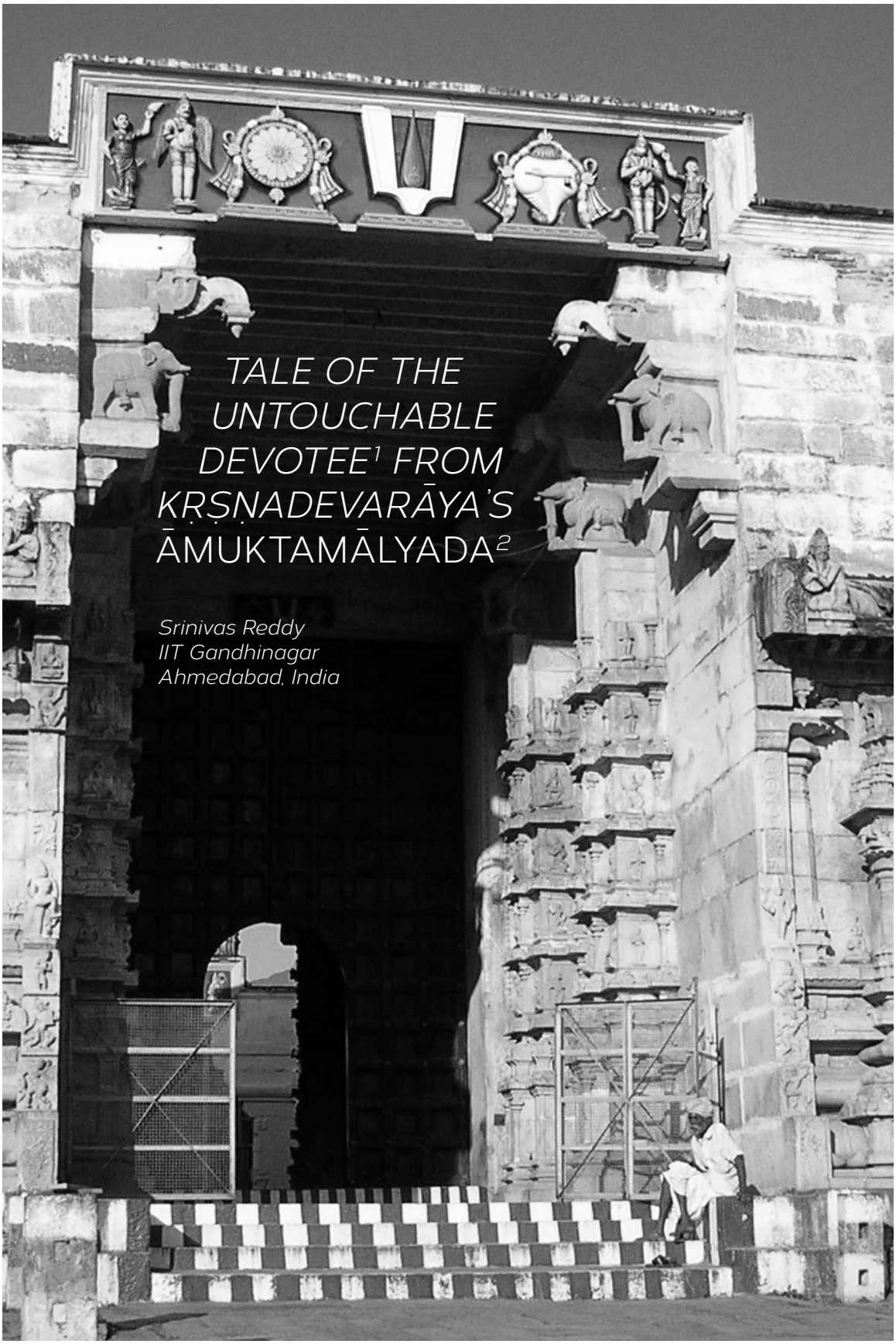
EDITORS' NOTE

Both the 2012-13 and 2013-14 academic years were especially significant for *Sagar*. Thanks largely to the efforts of 2012-13 Chief Editors Matthew Milligan and Suzanne Schulz, in May 2013, Sagar published its first peer-reviewed issue and launched the redesigned and streamlined website, *www.sagarjournal.org*. An editorial board of advanced scholars of South Asia now blindly evaluates full-length articles and translations for our annual print issue. In 2012-13, Milligan and Schulz collaborated with graduate student Dana Johnson to create *Sagar*'s visually stunning new website and print design. Johnson contributed extensively to both building the new website and conceptualizing *Sagar*'s attractive new logo and cover style.

This year's Co-Editors-in-Chief Andrea Gutiérrez and Elizabeth Bolton would like to extend our appreciation to Kamran Ali (South Asia Institute Director) and Rachel Meyer (South Asia Institute Assistant Director), for their guidance and support as we worked to establish *Sagar* in its new peer-reviewed status, continue to build the faculty editorial board, and energize graduate students to serve in the editorial collective. The South Asia Institute has been gracious in funding *Sagar*'s continued functioning. We are also pleased to announce that *Sagar* is now preserved permanently in UT Austin's Digital Repository. For this, the editors thank Colleen Lyon at the UT Libraries Digital Repository for her collaboration in digitizing *Sagar*'s archives and including the journal in the repository. We are grateful for Suzanne Schulz' continued participation in our project as Online Editor and Dana Johnson's continued design work. Finally, we wish to thank the Faculty Editorial Board for their kind and professional assistance and the graduate students in the Editorial Collective for their support and dedication to the journal.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Bolton and Andrea Gutiérrez
Co-Editors-in-Chief, Sagar: A South Asia Research Journal



TALE OF THE UNTOUCHABLE DEVOTEE[1] FROM KṚṢṆADEVARĀYA'S ĀMUKTAMĀLYADA[2]

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IIT Gandhinagar
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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Embedding sub-stories within a larger narrative framework is a ubiquitous literary device employed by Indian poets of every epoch. In the sixteenth century the celebrated poet-king Kṛṣṇadevarāya of Vijayanagara took the story of the Tamil mystic poetess Āṇḍāḷ and expanded it into a sweeping Telugu *mahā-kāvyam* of epic proportions. Per literary convention, he fleshed out the narrative kernel with sumptuous descriptions of urban landscapes, village life, love, war, and natural beauty. In addition, he incorporated three extended branch stories into his master narrative: (1) a philosophical debate between the cousins Khāṇḍikya and Keśidvaja taken from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, (2) a reimagination of the life of the Vaiṣṇava philosopher-saint Yāmunācarya, and (3) a lively tale about an untouchable devotee's encounter with a *brahma-rākṣasa*. This last story, sometimes referred to as the *Māladāsari Katha*,[3] is a fast-paced narrative that showcases the poet's richly descriptive and often humorous style of storytelling. Moreover, the story provides us with a fascinating exploration of the evolving nature of pre-modern bhakti as seen through the eyes of a sixteenth-century poet-king.

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1 There are several terms used throughout the narrative for a person of low caste that I have universally translated as "untouchable." Examples include *suriyāḷu* (VI.6), *caṇḍāluḍu* (VI.7), *divākīrti* (VI.10), *plavuḍu* (VI.46), *mātaṅga* (VI.59), *śvapaca* (VI.61) and *gosaṅgi* (VI.64). The caste identity of the devotee is difficult to ascertain and more research needs to be done into what these categories could have referred to at the time of the text's composition. Verse designations follow T. Koteswara Rao, *Āmuktamālyada Saundaryalaharī Vyākhyānam* (Hyderabad, India: T. Koteswara Rao, 2001), hereafter referred to as TKR, and always refer to Canto VI. TKR divides the entire text into six chapters whereas Vedam Venkataraya Sastry in *Āmuktamālyada Āndhra-vyākhyāna sahitamu* (Madras, India: Vedamu Venkatarayasastri and Brothers, 1964), hereafter referred to as VVS, splits this narrative such that the story of "Soma Śarma" (*brahma-rākṣasuni vṛttāntamu*) begins Chapter VII.

2 Standard Telugu diacritic convention is used throughout the text.

3 The *Māladāsari Katha* is the name of this passage as given in VVS. The actual caste identity of the devotee is not verifiable. Cf. note 1.

<< ENTRANCE TO TIRU KURUNGUDI, WHERE THE "TALE OF THE UNTOUCHABLE DEVOTEE" TAKES PLACE ("THIRUKARUNGUDI TEMPLE" BY DONKEY.TAIL (CC BY-SA)).

The narrative is based on an old story found in the *Kaiśika Purāṇa* section of the *Varāha Purāṇa*. In the twelfth century, Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar (the duly appointed successor of Rāmānuja) composed an exposition of the original Sanskrit story in *maṇi-pravāḷam* and popularized the tale among Śrīvaiṣṇavas. It was most likely this work, rather than the Sanskrit original, that inspired Kṛṣṇadevarāya's retelling.[4] The story describes the humble devotion of a low-caste *bhakta* who sings songs of devotion to the Lord of Kuruḻguḍi. One day he loses his way and is captured by a ferocious man-eating *brahma-rākṣasa* named Kumbhajānu. After a long and entertaining dialogue between the two, the *brahma-rākṣasa* eventually finds salvation at the hands of the untouchable devotee. Like other stories in what maybe called a genre of *bhakti*, class hierarchies are subverted and the ideals of true, heartfelt devotion are elevated. Here the Brahmin is ridiculed, the untouchable is praised, and devotion through song rather than ritual is lauded as the paramount mode of religious worship.

The poet's choice of this particular story is in accordance with the Śrīvaiṣṇava nature of the overall text, but it also reveals aspects of the king's own life and religious sentiment. Kṛṣṇadevarāya was a devout Śrīvaiṣṇava and certainly a mighty king, but he was not a *kṣatriya* in any traditional sense. He was, by all accounts, a newcomer to the Vijayanagara court and exhibited a unique perspective on class, society, and the world around him throughout his life and writings. Chronicles tell us that he was born to the general Narasa Nāyaka and a Tuḷu woman named Nāgāmba. Narayana Rao adds that he "was not born in the

4 There are many parts of the Tamil story that bear a striking resemblance to the Telugu version. Take for example the *dāsarī*'s pleas that not returning to the *brahma-rākṣasa* would be a sin equal to comparing Viṣṇu to another god. Cf. Āmuktamālyada VI.43, hereafter referred to as AM. In the Tamil version, Lord Viṣṇu comes to the *dāsari* in disguise and tests his devotee. He attempts to convince the *dāsari* to renege on his promise to the *brahma-rākṣasa*. This episode is absent in the Telugu version, the tale of "Soma Śarma," however, seems to be a unique addition made by Kṛṣṇadevarāya. A comparison of the Sanskrit, Tamil, and Telugu versions would provide interesting insight into how the ideals of *bhakti* evolved over the centuries in various traditions.

Telugu area … in his own locality, Kṛṣṇadevarāya was only a peasant and, if legends are to be believed, a low-caste peasant at that."[5] Though a proverbial outsider to the customs of court life, Kṛṣṇadevarāya was well educated in mainstream Brāhmaṇical thought[6] and often exhibited conflicting attitudes towards Brahmins, sometimes praising them as gods on earth, while equally reprimanding them for unscrupulous behavior. Here is just one example from the story in which the poet describes the shameless Brahmin Soma Śarma:

> For gold, I offered petty atonements to outcaste Brahmins
> and sat alongside them in a row to eat.
> On holy days, I joined with the priests of merchants
> and fought with them for rice.
> During eclipses I performed recitations, took holy baths, and more,
> but gave away all the benefits at the palace gates of minor lords.
> I contracted every town to provide me with sandals
> made from fresh deer hide and buffalo leather.
> Feigning friendship, I went to funerary ceremonies uninvited
> and ate the leftovers from honoring ancestors.
> And when that wasn't enough, I went to the houses of women cooks
> and ate half-eaten food. And on top of that, worse than the rest,
> I took from the great public scale.[7]

The king's ostensibly contradictory views towards Brahmins are a reflection of the often divergent attitudes towards Brāhmaṇical social normativity found in most *bhakti* traditions. The Śrīvaiṣṇavas in par-

5 Velcheru Narayana Rao, "Coconut and Honey: Sanskrit and Telugu in Medieval Andhra," *Social Scientist* 23, 10/12 (Oct.-Dec. 1995): 25.

6 See Srinivas Sistla, *Āmuktamālyada* (Visakhapatnam: Drusya Kala Deepika, 2010), 46 and 414-7 for a hypothesis concerning the king's education at Ahobila *maṭh* and his initiation into the Śrīvaiṣṇava *sampradāya*. Cf. AM VI.66 for more information that intimates this possibility.

7 AM I.69.

ticular had a long history of negotiating this ambivalent attitude as they sought to align the earthy Tamil poems of the Āḷvār saints with a more Sanskritic, Vedic-based theology, appropriately known as *ubhaya* or dual *Vedānta*.[8] This harmonizing process led to perspectives that distinguished *jāti* (birth) from *guṇa* (quality), such that one's character rather than pedigree determined spiritual worth. For Kṛṣṇdevarāya this evaluation based on merit was just as important to his political agenda as it was to his ideals of religiosity. For example, his appointment of Brahmins to positions of power was not solely based on birthright.[9] As one of his political maxims states:

> When promoting Brahmins, discount those who are
> not well born, forest dwellers or unlearned;
> those who can not control their anger
> or those who speak falsely.
> Avoid foreigners, and the unrighteous,
> the villainous, and the cruel.[10]

The antagonistic rhetoric towards corrupt Brahmins was central to most *bhakti* traditions and ultimately led to a limited inversion of class hierarchies to the extent that the most honored devotees were not upper class Brahmins but low class untouchables. The ideal *bhakta* was likened to a servant or *dāsa/dāsari*—for the lower one's position was, the more humble one could be in the service of god. This elevation of status is most evident in the life of Tŏṇḍaraḍippŏḍi Āḷvār, whose name literally means "the dust at the feet of devotees." Kumbhajānu

8 See John Carman and Vasudha Narayanan, *The Tamil Veda: Piḷḷāṉ's Interpretation of the Tiruvāymoḻi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) for a detailed exploration of this phenomenon.

9 The king had a clear policy of appointing Brahmins as commanders of forts (c.f. AM IV.207 and 261). See also Richard M. Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan, 1300-1761: Eight Indian Lives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 90.

10 AM IV.209.

invokes a similar image when he praises the *dāsari* as being "a bee drinking nectar at the lotus feet of Murāri's devotees."[11] Furthermore, the *brahma-rākṣasa* is so impressed with the *dāsari*'s devotion and noble qualities or *guṇa*s that he claims:

> I've lived on this earth for a long time now and grown old,
> but I've never seen someone hold to a promise like you…
> You who has this resolve, this knowledge, this honesty;
> this way of standing by what you say,
> and this heart that lives to serve Viṣṇu's feet.[12]

Later he bows down to the untouchable and gently places his feet on his own head as if it was the sacred *śaṭhakopa*, a ritual implement adorned with the image of the god's feet and used to bless the heads of devotees. In this context, the *bhakta* rather than the god is praised, and he or she becomes the object of worship. There is even a sense that the poet equates the *bhakta* to god. This sentiment is well evidenced in the initial physical description of the *dāsari* at the beginning of the narrative, in a depiction strikingly similar to the image of Lord Viṣṇu: "His black body was adorned with a big *tulasi* garland and his brow was marked with sacred white paste."[13]

Part of this socio-religious transformation was based on the efforts of low-caste devotees to imitate their upper-caste counterparts by educating themselves and by adhering to long established norms of Brāhmaṇical conduct. Although this process may have resulted in an ennoblement of untouchable *bhakta*s, it seems to have done little in terms of elevating their overall social status or subverting the normative social hierarchy. As Ranajit Guha comments,

11 AM VI.89.

12 AM VI.48-9.

13 AM VI.6.

> It was only by emulating the Brahmin that the Sudra could become an object of Bhakti. In other words, Bhakti could do little to abolish the social distance between the high-born and the low-born, although some of the former's spiritual qualities might, under certain conditions, be acquired by the latter without, however, affecting any change of place.[14]

Kṛṣṇadevarāya seems to echo this sentiment in another political verse about Brahmin commanders when he writes:

> Even if warriors, peasants, or others
> imitate the behavior of Brahmins
> or even claim to know the laws of society,
> only a Brahmin will stand his guard in the face of disaster ... [15]

Inversion is certainly one of the key qualifiers of the *bhakti* modality: it questions, rebukes, and reformulates established notions of purity and rank. Part of this process, however, is the concomitant strengthening and reification of well-established socio-cultural norms. As much as Kṛṣṇadevarāya was challenging caste-based ideals, he was equally re-entrenching them. Guha suggests that "whatever promise there was in this of a dynamic social mobility breaking down the barrier of caste and birth came to nothing, if only because the necessity of the caste system and the Brahmin's spiritual superiority within was presumed in the argument."[16] Here is just one example from the text that vividly exhibits this phenomenon:

> As soon as he saw people of the upper castes
> he would step aside.

14 Ranajit Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony, History And Power In Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 54.

15 AM IV.217.

16 Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*, 54.

Bearing the heat and the wind for a very long time
he would watch and wait as all the *prasādam* was distributed.
A *śūdra* pitied him and kindly
placed some *prasādam* on his outstretched lute.
And then the *dāsari* bowed down with great humility and ate.[17]

In addition to Kṛṣṇadevarāya's commentary on notions of *bhakti*, this episode is an opportunity for the poet to flex his keen skill for narrative composition. Vivid descriptions, colorful characters, witty dialogues, and enchanting story-telling all find their way into this selection. In addition, the poet is able to develop certain poetic *rasa*s that are generally absent from the main text, in which the sentiment of *śṛṅgāra* or romanticism predominates. For example, the poet generates the sentiment of *bhayānaka* or fear in a section that describes a deserted courtyard, littered with foreboding signs of abandoned human habitation. The poet then brings his perceptive and highly detailed style of realism to bear on this frightening scene:

As he walked along the stench-filled path
he saw a heap of skulls with all the brains scooped out
like a pile of tender coconuts, scraped clean and empty.
Raw bones were stripped of flesh and lined with tooth marks.
Swarms of buzzing flies landed on scraps of hides
that hung on prickly shrubs.
Hair soiled with dirt lay scattered all around
like a barber's clippings blown by the wind.
A pack of wild dogs gnawed at severed human limbs,
tugging at each other as they ripped away flesh…
…a rustling in one place would suddenly vanish
and reappear somewhere else.
Seeing all this he could tell that somebody was there,

17 AM VI.9. See also AM VI.52 where the *dāsari* claims that Brahma created untouchables to be food for Brahmins.

and he knew that somebody couldn't be human.
The smell of meat was blowing in the air
and the only way out was a ways away.
And, realizing it wasn't the time for gathering firewood,
he got scared and started to wonder.[18]

In another instance the poet evokes the *rasa* of *bībhatsa* or disgust in a graphically worded outcry by the *brahma-rākṣasa*:

I'll feast on your five lifelines until I'm perfectly full,
and my hunger is satisfied. Then I'll grab my sword,
slice off your head, and happily drink the warm gushing blood!
I'll make you into kabobs for my demonesses!
And then, in this grove of palm trees, I'll swig liquor brewed in human skulls![19]

One final aspect of the story that is important to all *bhakti* traditions is the localization of worship in temples. The practice of *bhakti* is therefore intimately connected to specific physical spaces and geographic histories. This very real sense of time and place lends a powerful immediacy to this form of devotion and connects the worshipper to a divinity that is tangible, visible, and knowable. For the *bhakta*, god does not exclusively reside in a faraway heaven; instead, he lives right here on earth in myriad forms and locales. As Rāmānujan comments: "Bhakti poems celebrate god both as local and translocal, and especially as the nexus of the two…[they] celebrate the giving and the receiving, the reciprocity of human and divine."[20]

This remarkable narrative takes place near the temple town of Kuruṅguḍi in the deep south of Tamil country, close to an area that

18 AM VI.17-8.

19 AM VI.25.

20 A. K. Ramanujan, *Hymns for the Drowning* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1993), 135-6.

was linked back to a more mythic (and Sanskritic) legend concerning Viṣṇu's *avatāra* as the dwarf Vāmana. Tiru Kuruṅguḍi, as it is known today, is one of the 108 Vaiṣṇava *divya-deśam*s or sacred places. Various saints, including Viṣṇucitta in his *Pĕriya Tiru Moḻi*, praised the temple's sanctity for centuries. The significance of this historicity is preserved to this day as worshippers continue to congregate at this important sacred site. Every year on the *Kaiśika ekādaśi*, worshippers gather at the temple and listen to a recitation of the *Kaiśiki Purāṇa*. They take in the story of the untouchable devotee, rejoice at his profound spiritual attainments, and continue to breathe life into a centuries-old tradition.

TRANSLATION OF THE TEXT[21]

Once there was a man from an unnameable caste[22] who was my devotee.
He lived in a village just twelve miles[23] from the sacred place[24] where I once lived as Vāmana.
And before dawn he would come to me and sing the *Maṅgaḷa Kaiśiki rāga*[25] with devotion. //3//
This the great soul[26] did day after day. //4//

21 Passage from *Āmuktamālyada* VI.3-VI.90.

22 "Unnameable caste" is *perukŏnagāni kulambu* and refers to an untouchable caste, literally a group that is unnamed in the four-fold *varṇa* system.

23 "Mile" is actually *yojana*, a traditional measurement of arguable distance, ranging anywhere from two to nine miles. The text mentions a distance of three *yojana*s (*yojana-trayapu*).

24 This "sacred place" or *puṇya-bhūmi* is one of the 108 *Vaiṣṇava divya-deśam*s know today as Tirukuruṅguḍi in southern Tamil Nadu.

25 The phrase here is *maṅgala-nāma kaiśikin*, glossed by TKR as a song (*gānam*), and by VVS as a specific *rāga*. It could also relate to the old Karnartic *rāga* known as *Maṅgala Kaiśiki*.

26 Here the poet refers to the *dāsari* as *mahātmuṇḍu*. Cf. VI.54 where he uses the term *puṇyātma*.

He lived in accordance with his caste
and always kept his heart pure so that he might please me.
And though bound to that body
he was like a gem wrapped in a dirty rag. //5//
He wore a grease-stained leather shirt and cap
and brass earrings shaped like a conch and discus.
He kept a candlestick and a pair of arrows[27]
in a leather bag smeared with turmeric powder
slung around his neck, and he carried an umbrella
made from screw-pine leaves.
He had my footwear, and a lute[28] that was cracked just a bit
but held together with long horse hairs.
He kept small cymbals in a pouch under his arm
that would clang together now and again,
sounding with the speed of his stride.
His black body was adorned with a big *tulasi* garland
and his brow was marked with sacred white paste.
With open red eyes and timid glances
that untouchable[29] *Vaiṣṇava* cheerfully came to serve me. //6//
Streams of joyful tears covered his full cheeks as he sang songs
of praise,
and in his ecstasy, his lute-playing melted stones.
He dropped his heavy belongings nearby
and danced wildly with devotion born from within.
Until noon he endured the wind, the heat and the pangs of hunger
for though he was an untouchable he had the nature of another. //7//

27 "Pair of arrows" is the unclear phrase *joḍu+ammu*, glossed by TKR as an arrow that is thrown rather than used with a bow. VVS corroborates but also reads *boḍu+ammu* for a headless or blunt arrow. Sistla takes the literal meaning as a "pair of arrows."

28 The instrument mentioned here is a *daṇḍĕ*, also referred to as *cāṇḍālika* (VI.7) and is most likely a simple fretless drone instrument like the modern-day *ektāra*.

29 "Untouchable" here is *suriyāḷu*, cf. note 1.

He worshipped me like that for a long time
and made full-body prostrations.
Turbid water used to wash the inner sanctum
filled a stone basin and flowed out of the temple
through a channel where a *śūdra* offered him some to drink. //8//
As soon as he saw people of the upper castes[30]
he would step aside.
Bearing the heat and the wind for a very long time
he would watch and wait as all the *prasādam* was distributed.
A *śūdra*[31] pitied him, and kindly
placed some *prasādam* on his outstretched lute.
The *dāsari* then bowed down with great humility and ate. //9//
In this way he suffered great pains due to his low birth,[32]
but his humility made everyone pity him.
He would stand at the temple drainage grate,
circumambulate the outer enclosure at the peak of day,
and then return to his village.[33] He went on like this until one day... //10//
At midnight in a neighbor's house
a cat caused a cock to crow.
Startled by the sound, and thinking it was morning
the devotee set out singing. //11//
On the way he stepped on an orris root[34] and got turned around.
When he called out to the darkness only darkness echoed back.

30 "Upper castes" is *mukhya-jāti*.

31 "*Śūdra*" is *tri-varṇa-itara-jāti*, literally someone from a group outside the first three *varṇa*s. The poet often uses the terms *varṇa* and *jāti* (and even sometimes *kulam*) interchangeably.

32 "Low birth" is *divākīrti-jani*.

33 Cf. the low-caste Tirupān Āḻvār who would not enter the Śrīraṅgam temple and sang songs of praise for the Lord from the banks of the Kāveri.

34 "Orris root" is *marulu tīga*. VVS comments that anyone who steps on this vine loses his or her way. C. P. Brown adds that it makes one fall in love. C. P. Brown, *Telugu-English Dictionary* (Vijayawada, India: Victory Publishers, 2004), 582.

He headed east through many fields and at the break of light
he entered a grove, deserted and overgrown. //12//
There was a crumbling portico surrounded by brambles and prickly shrubs.
Grain baskets were tipped over and underneath them packs of bandicoots
burrowed down and wasted away in their shaky homes.
Wells and grain pits were half-filled with dirt
and their openings covered with burr grass.
Ants dragged away kernels of wild corn, leaving behind
a row of wilted sprouts like a withered hedgerow.
Briars inside amaranth bushes growing on dung heaps
were caught by the twitching whiskers of aging cats.
The field was filled with weeds, and the paddy with wilting rushes.
He had entered a wasteland where only a post remained
of a broken water pump. //13//
On his way through this pathless land
he jerked his legs up and down
as he plucked out prickly thorns.
And as he walked, he carefully pulled
and tossed aside thorny creepers. //14//
The *Vaiṣṇava* saw a banyan tree that measured half a mile around.
Its twisted mass of roots hung down and branches rose from branches.
Shiny leaves with holes eaten out by caterpillars were scattered to the distance
by the rushing wind, like a written message that cautioned travelers not to pass.
And for offering such a helpful warning the banyan tree flour-

ished with many fruits.[35] //15//
Then he saw a clearing and found a walkway,
and thinking it was good luck he quickened his pace
but then slowly, slowly approached the banyan tree. //16//
As he walked along the stench-filled path
he saw a heap of skulls with all the brains scooped out
like a pile of tender coconuts, scraped clean and empty.
Raw bones were stripped of flesh and lined with tooth marks.
Swarms of buzzing flies landed on scraps of hides
that hung on prickly shrubs.
Hair soiled with dirt lay scattered all around
like a barber's clippings blown by the wind.
A pack of wild dogs gnawed at severed human limbs,
tugging at each other as they ripped away flesh.
And while they fought, a foul odor arose
as their paws kept pouncing on rotten meat. //17//
With their forelegs outstretched, bitches cast furtive glances
as they snatched up bones and ran away.
As eagles screeched and grabbed onto a string of drying meat,
their flapping shook branches, bruising the heads of monkeys
who placed their hands at their waist and turned around to cry.
A rustling in one place would suddenly vanish
and reappear somewhere else.
Seeing all this he could tell that somebody was there,
and he knew that somebody couldn't be human.

35 This stanza contains one of the longest Sanskrit compounds known in Indian *kāvya*. It encompasses almost the entire verse written in the long nineteen-syllable *śārdulam* meter and makes elegant use of several aspirated gutturals and palatals. Unlike other examples of expansive compounds where poets showcase their compositional acumen, Kṛṣṇadevarāya's artful usage only enhances the description of this grand banyan tree and its long, flowing branches. The compound is as follows: *ardha-yojana-jaṭā-ghaṭā-uttha-śākha-upaśākhā-añcat-jhāṭa-carat-marut-raya-davīyaḥ-preṣita-udyat-chada-udañcat-kīṭa-kṛta-vraṇa-chalana-lipi-āpādita-adhvanya-nissañcāra-ātta-mahā-phala-upama-phala-sphayat-vaṭa-kṣmājamun*.

The smell of meat was blowing in the air
and the only way out was a ways away.
And realizing it wasn't the time for gathering firewood
he got scared and started to wonder. //18//
This somebody had a corpse for a loincloth that didn't quite fit,
staining his big belly with blood,
and he wore a Brahmin's thread tied with *muñja* grass.
His dark body was draped in a crimson cloak
like red ants on the curve of a cashew nut.
From his mouth came fangs that reached his chin
like the tusks of an elephant with a lowered head.
His beard was stained brown with dripping saliva
like a smoke-colored hive of wild honey bees.
In search of food he climbed up branches,
and as he looked for passersby, his sacred thread made of intestines
would slip, making him curse at it while he put it back in place.
His fat stomach hung down. He had one leg that was swollen.
His head was shaped like a jug, and even the back of his neck was hairy.
He had sores on his eyes and once in a while,
out of hunger, he would abuse his demonesses with nasty insults.
My devotee saw this night-wandering Brahmin[36]
as big as a mountain, with the fitting name of Kumbhajānu, Kettle Knees. //19-20//[37]
Kumbhajānu spotted my devotee and yelled "Don't move!"
as he jumped to the ground, breaking banyan branches.
But the *dāsari* was strong; he remained a man through night and day,

36 "Night-wandering Brahmin" is *dvija-niśācaruḍu*.

37 VI.19 and VI.20 both describe the *brahma-rākṣasa* Kumbhajānu and have been combined for ease of translation.

and he had once proved his valor in battle.[38]
He stood before the demon with an arrow in his hand and prepared to strike.
But the *brahma-rākṣasa* just broke it, and made him angry… //21//
Kumbhajānu tried to grab him but the *dāsari* stood his ground
and quickly struck the demon's chest as he jumped to another spot.
The *brahma-rākṣasa* threw a punch but the *dāsari* dodged it, moved behind him,
and stopped to await his next move. But the demon pounced on top of him
and landed punches on his chest with his powerful fists. The *dāsari* escaped,
stood up, and ducked as he tried to penetrate a wall of jabbing fists.
He couldn't find an opening so he stepped back, and as the *brahma-rākṣasa* groped
for a killing weapon the *dāsari* found his chance, punched him, and kicked him.
He jumped in front of him, made a fist, moved around him,
squarely hit him on his backside, and then hit him again,
without ever forgetting to meditate on my holy feet.[39] //22//
The *dāsari* kicked him again and ran off but Kumbhajānu called out
to his demoness horde who all clambered down to his rescue.
My poor devotee was escaping but the *brahma-rākṣasa* yelled
"Come on, come on!" as he joined the demonesses and caught him. //23//

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38 "Night and day" is *re-pagaṭi veḷaku yauṭa*. The verse makes clear that the *dāsari* had battle experience and TKR adds that he was likely a paid mercenary (*kaijītagāḍu*) in a local militia.

39 This fast-paced *sīsa padyam* describes the wrestling match between the *brahma-rākṣasa* and the *dāsari*, almost like a play-by-play fight commentary. One difficulty in this translation is the constant shifting of pronominal markers, which are easily taken care of in the Telugu with *vīḍu* and *vāḍu*, or this one and that one. And though the humble *dāsari* is being violent, the poet ensures us that he acts with the Lord in mind, *mat-pada-smṛti ātma emaṟaka*.

Even then, that devotee, like a bull,
resisted with kicks and elbow jabs.
He struck on both sides as he struggled to escape
but was caught and brought back to the banyan tree.
And then Kumbhajānu said… //24//
"I'll feast on your five lifelines[40] until I'm perfectly full,
and my hunger is satisfied. Then I'll grab my sword,
slice off your head, and happily drink the warm gushing blood!
I'll make you into kabobs for my demonesses!
And then, in this grove of palm trees, I'll swig liquor brewed in
human skulls! //25//
"You wretch! You really tired me out!
You think I'd kill you so easy?" he yelled.
His cries reached the sky and he breathed heavy
as he panted and wheezed out words at that lowlife.[41] //26//
"Bring me my sword and a dish!" he ordered.
And then he lassoed my devotee with a rope made of entrails.
He pushed him down and the *dāsari* fell over like a tree.[42]
With no hesitation[43] the untouchable spoke to the *brahma-rākṣasa*
with kind words that explained moral conduct. He said… //27//
"Night-roamer! What's the hurry? Not even the gods can defeat you.
Listen to this one thing. I'm already a meal on a platter,
so where can I go? I only fought back because it's a sin
not to protect life.[44] So don't get mad. I'm not intent
on this body; in fact, it's better if I die. //28//

40 The "five lifelines" are the *prāṇa-pañcakamu*: *prāṇa* (respiration), *apāna* (excretion), *samāna* (digestion), *vyāna* (circulation), and *udāna* (expression). Cf. AM II.28.

41 The *brahma-rākṣasa* addresses the *dāsari* with derogatory terms like *khalu* (wretch) and *nīcuḍu* (lowlife), with no specific reference to caste. Cf. AM VI.9.

42 The actual phrase here is *kujamu-toḍa ŏragi*, literally he fell over along with a tree.

43 "With no hesitation" or *dainya-virahitamuga* implies that the untouchable dāsari speaks to the Brahmin Kumbhajānu with no reluctance, fear, or sense of social impropriety.

44 "Sin not to protect life" is *prāṇa-rakṣaṇamun upekṣa ŏnarcuṭa pāpamu*.

"By ending this lowly birth I can make one soul happy.
Isn't it good that I draw closer to liberation?
Isn't King Śibi[45] the best example?
He offered his mortal body and gained the ultimate! //29//
"I could die from disease, a devil, a scorpion, or poison;
from drowning or assault or a mental illness;
from wild animals, fire, ulcers, or cobras;
from a very big fight or even a lightning bolt!
And then this meager body would perish for nothing.
I'm wasting away on this earth. Isn't it better
that I save at least one person? //30//

"But let that be, let me give you one more helpful message. And don't think it's out of fear for my life, or to escape my duty; take it as an unbiased position and listen. Even if you don't listen to these words that benefit the world, at least god will appreciate them.

"Lions, tigers, boars, wolves, jackals, and others may be carnivores but you're not an animal, you're born from the womb of the goddess.[46] You and I are alike, we have hands and feet, a face, a body, and the ability to speak. We are equals in determining what should and should not be done. Ha! But I forgot something. Your body is far healthier, wiser and stronger than the trees, insects, and wild animals, the cattle and birds, even me, or others like you. Someone like you should be aware of things that cause blame and horror. You should know the difference between punishable and unpunishable, proper and improper, edible and inedible, potable and impotable.

"This disgusting meal of my body is neither pure nor tasty.

45 The story of King Śibi is an old *Jātaka* tale that exemplifies the notion of *deha-dāna* or giving of the body. A dove hunted by a hawk takes refuge with King Śibi who vows to protect the dove's life, but in order to appease the hungry hawk the king readily offers a piece of his own flesh equal in weight to the dove.

46 "Womb of the goddess" is the literal *deva-yoni* and implies the divine ancestry of Brahmins.

It is a mark of all the sins attached to being violent.[47] Don't we suffer for that violence in the afterworld? And doesn't the afterworld come after life ends? Don't think that we, with our healthy long lives, won't experience pain or fear. We are human and we are bound to experience it today, tomorrow, the day after, or at the end of time. Whether the wait is short or long it comes when it comes. Is there any relativity in death? It's all awash when drowning in the primordial sea; is there any difference for a mountain or an atom? So shouldn't you consider the future?

"Long ago, great men like Hiraṇyakaśipu and ten-headed Rāvaṇa performed austerities and humbled the pride of the gods. And though they lived for a hundred thousand countless years, they too fell to the five elements! They may have been conquerors but weren't they conquered by Death? You may be strong here but He is strong there, for all beings are relatively great in their own domain. Even if you could escape the reach of Death, like you evaded me, you'll never escape your suffering. If you consider Death and the other gods to be your brothers than you're great, but you become the tormented and they the tormenters. The difference in your splendor is due to the varying qualities of darkness and purity.[48] The reason for this is that sacred offerings are given to the gods. By having mantras uttered for them and by feeding on burnt oblations of ghee and ground rice, they become purified and gain immortality. That's why they live a lot longer than you.

"Seeing that purity, Soma, the son of four-faced Brahma, who is the moon that shines nectar, wanes and gives chance for all the flavors to be relished as juice and nectar. I can't explain the meaning of this but the Vedas say that in the first phase of the moon,

47 "Violent" is *hiṁsa*, glossed by TKR, 616, as *ghātuka carya*, cruel or murderous behavior.

48 "Varying qualities of darkness and purity" is *tāratamyambunakun tamassattvambulu* and refers to the three constituent *guṇa*s of *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattva*.

Fire drinks the Moon.[49] Moreover they say that each phase of the moon is for a different god. Think all this over and do as you like."
And as the untouchable devotee finished speaking, that enemy of the gods howled and responded like this ... //31//
"Don't kill us[50] with your erudition!
Are there any texts I haven't read, or Vedas I haven't studied?
But they're not appetizing. Don't you believe me?
'*prathamām pibate vahniḥ*.' Isn't that what you wanted to say? //32//
"Oh, hold on! Didn't you say that the gods are our older brothers?
And that they feed on nectar? But food becomes impure in the wrong season.
You said Fire drinks the Moon on the first day of the lunar cycle,
so let me ask you one thing. Doesn't Fire consume everything in this world?
That logic is enough for me. So is it a sin for us to emulate our elders? //33//
"Viṣṇu's friend and vehicle Garuḍa found the immortal nectar
and gave it to the gods. And in return, didn't he ask and receive
the gift of having snakes for his food? Isn't a meal that suits one's nature
just as flavorful as ambrosia? //34//
"I studied without food or sleep, but what did that get me?
Who'd be deceived by your knowledge that's used to make false declarations?
You've displayed your learning before me but that's not enough to earn you a compliment,
not even one, not unless you said, 'A curry made from educated man-flesh
has a wonderful flavor. Fetch me some more!'" //35//

49 This passage refers to the purportedly Vedic statement *prathamām pibate vahniḥ* and is quoted by the *brahma-rākṣasa* in the following verse VI.32. VVS, 627, attributes the mantra to the *Devī Purāṇa*.

50 The honorific plural is used reflexively throughout Kumbhajānu's speech.

So said the *brahma-rākṣasa* as he tried to make a mockery of the untouchable's speech by relying on the doctrines of Gīṣpati.[51] As he listened to the demon's illogical statements the untouchable repeated the holy name Kṛṣṇa and thought, "In this situation, stirring him up with logical responses will only hurt my mind. How many more lies can I listen to? I have a task to fulfill soon and this is a useless effort. So I'll join him and pretend to go along with his intentions, even though I'm disgusted with his lowly nature. And just to keep that expression of delight on his face I'll use deceptive speech. I'll tell him he's all-knowing but I'll keep Buddha in my heart.[52] I'll say, 'I'm a man from a lowly family with no familiarity with scholarly texts. Am I capable of responding to you? Please understand the errors in my speech and forgive me. Trust me and heed my plea.'" //36//

And then the *dāsari* said aloud: "You're already famous among the demons!
Could I brighten your lustrous fame any further?
I won't go back on giving you my body,
but I have one important vow that I've undertaken.
Won't you let me fulfill it?
They say 'Friendship is walking seven steps together'[53]
so think of our relationship as mutually beneficial. //37//
"The vow is like this... //38//
"In nearby Kuruḻguḍi I sing to the Lord of Vaikuṇṭham.
I do this religiously, but luckily today is the last day of the vow.
So after today's service, I'll surrender myself to you," said the *dāsari*. //39//

51 Gīṣpati is another name for Vācaspati/Bṛhaspati, the supposed founder of the *Lokāyata* or *Cārvāka* philosophical school of materialism.

52 Buddha is invoked here as *sarva-jñuḍu*, an all-knowing one, but the context is derogatory and reflects the poet's antagonism towards the so-called *nāstika* traditions, including Buddhism, Jainism, and Cārvāka. Cf. AM IV.30.

53 "Friendship is walking seven steps together" is the aphorism *sakhyam saptapadīnam*.

After he finished talking, the *brahma-rākṣasa* laughed a little
and slapped him on the cheek. "O *dāsari*! What a great way to trick me!
Didn't you just become a devotee yesterday out of disgust for building up your body
by beating and robbing travelers in the forest?[54] Are you belittling us?
Then again, I am impressed that you're thinking of ways to break free of those ropes!" //40//
"No matter where he's from, what kind of a man would listen to such reasoning
when there's food at his lips? And furthermore, what kind of a man,
regardless of where he's from, would offer his own body to keep a vow?
To make you happy, I could let you go and come back; it would be obvious if you didn't return.
But what's the point of all this trouble, worry and grief?
I'm wasting too many words on a low-born wretch like you!" //41//
As the *brahma-rākṣasa* finished, the *dāsari* covered his ears
and called out "Nārayaṇa!" And then he said, "Trust me, you flesh-eater!"
as he went on to make thousands upon thousands of promises
in order to convince the *brahma-rākṣasa* to believe just one of them,
but he wouldn't listen. //42//
"Who creates the universe with just a wink? In whose body does this world exist?
And who destroys it? Who is this? Only Viṣṇu!
I'd be a sinner if I compared him to any other god,[55]
just like if I didn't find some way to come back to you today," said the *dāsari*.

54 This off-hand comment by Kumbhajānu is an interesting foreshadowing of the details of Soma Śarma's demise.

55 Compare this statement to the Tamil version that is almost identical.

And when Kumbhajānu heard this, he untied the ropes. //43//
Then the *dāsari* set out to pay his dues for some little remnant of sin.
He bowed and prostrated before the god with eyes like hundred-petal lotuses
and played his lute while singing songs of praise from the *Divya Prabandham* with ecstasy.[56]
But bearing the fear of being untruthful, he quickly ran back.
His vow now fulfilled and his troubles at ease, he spoke to the night-wanderer like this... //44//
"O night-wanderer! After I was released from your captivity,
I left to worship that god with a discus and grew closer to liberation.
I won't try to escape from your bindings anymore.
The feet, stomach, chest, head, and hands that I had when you let me go
are the same feet, stomach, chest, head, and hands that I have now.[57]
Just check and see!" he said. //45//
Touched by my devotee's truthfulness, Kumbhajānu started to cry.
His body tingled with joy and his big baldhead glistened
in the midday sun as he ran towards the *dāsari*. //46//
Kumbhajānu, who was as big as a mountain, circumambulated the dāsari
and fell at his feet with devotion, like a feverish elephant circling a tree and collapsing.[58]
His forehead was at the *dāsari*'s feet and he cried out with such great praise
that the sound echoed back from the highest hills. And using his fangs as a lift,

56 The *Divya Prabandham* is referred to here as *prabandhamulu* and reinforces the central importance of this performative text in the *Śrīvaiṣṇava* tradition. Cf. AM VI.87.

57 The last two *pāda*s of this verse are almost identical; the body parts mentioned are repeated verbatim and serve to emphasize the *dāsari*'s claim.

58 "Feverish elephant" is *pākalapu enugu*, another example of the poet's fine sense of the natural world and its applications to human behavior.

he raised my devotee's feet, one at a time, and placed them on his head. //47//

"On this all-sustaining earth there have been gods, demons, kings, and sages;

all of them gained great prosperity through austerities of speech,

but your vow isn't like those other deeds - its fulfillment is frightening![59]

I've lived on this earth for a long time now and grown old,

but I've never seen someone hold to a promise like you. //48//

"You received the grace of the Lord of Kuruḻguḍi with your sweet songs of devotion.

It was as if that tied up gourd from your melodious lute became a boat

to float across the ocean waves. Are there any others that compare to you?

You who has this resolve, this knowledge, this honesty,

this way of standing by what you say, and this heart that lives to serve Viṣṇu's feet." //49//

And as he finished, that supreme *bhakta* embraced the *brahmarākṣasa* and said,

"O sinless king of the night-roamers! You're the one who allowed me to fulfill my vow.

It was your great gesture of compassion that made me a noble man. //50//

"Vows are like the turns of a wagon wheel.[60] We make thousands of them

59 "Frightening" is *ghoramu* or terrible and resonates with the horrific (*bhīṣma*) vow made by Prince Śāntanu.

60 The phrase *bāsalu baṇḍikaṇḍlu* is unclear. *Kaṇḍlu* could refer to spokes, axels, wheel shaft bearings, or points around the circumference of a wheel. See TKR, 627, VVS, 636, and Brown, 177. All commentators agree that the statement implies the transient, fleeting nature of most vows. Sistla translates it as follows: "Promises are pot-like spots on the spokes of a wheel" and adds the explanatory phrase "their position changes with the rotation of the wheel!" Sistla, *Āmuktamālyada*, 409.

out of fear for our lives. But is it wise of you to forsake this food that was so hard won?
O meritorious one who was born into a family of Brahmins,
because of your good deeds all demons have gotten a good name! //51//
"Even when you were famished, with a great big hunger in your belly,
you released me and let me to do what I needed to do.
Brahma created our kind to be food for you, so there's not a single sin against you.
What else can I say? We've become friends, so ease your weariness
and break your fast with my body. That's my promise to you! //52//
O enemy of the gods! There's no deception in this talk. God is my witness.
My body is full of brains, feed on this arrogant flesh!"[61] he cried.
And the *brahma-rākṣasa* replied with pain... //53//
"O no! How could you speak without compassion?
For many days I filled my belly with this kind of food and sustained my body,
only to incur great sins. I thought that someday, somehow,
a sage or a keeper of vows would come, show me compassion
and rid me of this life. O pure soul! Now I've found you! //54//
"If devotees[62] like you don't purify me, then where's the hope for people like me?
Don't look at my disgusting past. Show me mercy!" //55//
"It may be a divine weapon, or a knife used to eat a Brahmin,

61 *Mĕyi medo-maya dṛpta āmiṣamulu* appears to be a double entendre where *medo* could refer to *mĕdaḍu* meaning brains or medu meaning marrow, while *dṛpta* could mean either fat or prideful. The line could be interpreted as a self-deprecating statement about the dāsari's arrogance (as translated), or literally as a body filled with marrow and fatty flesh.

62 "Devotees" is *bhāgavatulu* and refers specifically to *Vaiṣṇava* worshippers.

but both are turned to gold by a philosopher's stone.[63]
This uncommon logic should be considered
when people like you enter situations with people like me." //56//
And when he finished, the *dāsari* said, "You didn't accept the offering of my body.
How do you feel about this painful humiliation?"
To which the Kumbhajānu replied, "Saying I'll give you my body isn't compassion.
Ridding me of my sins is compassion! //57//
"Oh! Are my actions worse than those of Ghaṇtākarṇa?[64] Didn't he tear great sages to pieces?
And didn't Viṣṇu absolve him and grant him prosperity?
Can't a devotee give something better than that? Can't you grant good fortune?
Isn't helping another soul a form of worshipping Viṣṇu?" he asked. //58//

The untouchable[65] listened and asked, "How could it be that way?" And the *brahma-rākṣasa* replied, "I'm Kumbhajānu, a knock-kneed *brahma-rākṣasa*, a perpetrator of gruesome acts who took to this banyan tree, tricked human travelers, and ate them. Earlier, in my previous life, I was a compassionate Brahmin priest named Soma Śarma. It was because of just one sinful act that I became like this.

Today you gained merits by singing songs to Viṣṇu. Pass them on to me like a gift sanctified with water. Remove my hor-

63 "Divine weapon" can refer to Indra's thunderbolt (TKR, 629), a sacred knife used by sacrificers (VVS, 639), or simply an axe, Vaman Shivaram Apte, *Revised and Enlarged Edition of Prin. V. S. Apte's The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 3 vol. (Poona, India: Prasad Prakashan, 1957-1959), 1738. "Philosopher's stone" is *parusavedi* from the Sanskrit *sparśa-vedhi*, an alchemical stone used to turn metal into gold.

64 The story of the brahmin-killing Ghaṇtākarṇa's transformation from demonic to divine form by the grace of Lord Kṛṣṇa is told in the *Uttara Harivaṁśa*.

65 "Untouchable" here is *māṭanguṇḍu*, cf. note 1.

rid guilt and purify this life. After relieving my pain, you can go on doing good deeds endlessly. Your body is a house built on a foundation of great dharma," he said.

That devotee of Viṣṇu laughed out loud when he heard those words about the body and replied like this ... //59//

"I've taken many births. Ones like this, some higher, and some lower.
This is just another one of those. How can I give your body
even a fraction of my merits from singing, let alone a whole day's worth? //60//

"How many times were you and I born[66] as guardians[67] and beggars?
How many times as lions and caterpillars?
You and I, how many times were we born as elephants and mosquitoes?
As lords of the earth and then as slaves?
As priests of the *soma* sacrifice and then eaters of dog meat?[68]
How many times were we born into a family of birds or a den of snakes?
And yet, not even once, were we born as devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa. //61//

"The body is like water passing through a fish basket;
like a spider's web, or silk cotton in the breeze.
It's like turmeric drying in the sun, or a faded letter.
Selling the merits of this precious body
is like pawning camphor to buy salt."[69] //62//

And when he finished, Kumbhajānu responded like this... //63//

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66 In a style characteristic of Kṛṣṇadevarāya's *sīsa padyam*s, this verse employs the repeated phrase *yĕnni mārlĕtta mīyenu nīvu* or "how many times have you and I..." The intensity of the verse is heightened by this repetition and the juxtaposition of high and low births. Cf. AM II.3, II.30, V.51 and VI.105.

67 "Guardians" is *dik-pālu*, a protector of one of the eight cardinal directions.

68 "Eaters of dog meat" is *śvapaca* and refers to an untouchable. See TKR, 632, and VVS, 642, for differing interpretations.

69 This beautiful verse includes images that have been variously interpreted by the commentators, see TKR, 633, and VVS, 642-3. *Ūta* is a basket used to catch fish and "faded letter" is *tŏr̲r̲i yakkarambu*.

"O Untouchable![70] Be kind and give me just half
of the fruits from your singing.
Is the ocean lowered when a fish takes a gulp?
Would Viṣṇu's glory be any less?" //64//
"Why upset me by asking for things other than my body?
I gave you my word to offer you the meat of my body,
not the merits of my praise songs to Vāmana?
Stop these hellish questions and take my body!
Are you thinking of using your devilish, deceptive talk to make me back down?
"They say demons are born when you dig a well!" //65//

And as the *dāsari* finished, that Brahmin who was born in the line of the demoness Sālakaṭaḷkaṭa, felt remorse for having been so intent on his task. He held back his tears and said, "Oh! Aren't the beloved servants[71] of Viṣṇu supposed to be compassionate? In the past, a great yogi and philosopher named Lakṣmaṇa[72] commented on the *Brahma Sūtras* of Vyāsa and established the *Vaiṣṇava* doctrine of *Viśiṣṭa Advaita*. His guru who was named Pūrṇa[73] was truly pleased with his service. He showered him with waves of grace and bestowed upon him the meaning of the *Bhagavad Gitā*'s ultimate verse.[74] This he did according to tradition and warned him not to reveal it to any others.

Rāmānuja then climbed the golden *gopuram* known as Dāmodara at the abode of Lord Raḻga and spurned his *guru* by crying out, "Master! Is it better to disobey your divine com-

70 "Untouchable" here is *gosaṅgi*, cf. note 1.

71 "Servants" is *ḍiṅgarīlu* and can refer to slaves, students, or devotees.

72 Lakṣmaṇa is another name for Rāmanuja the eleventh-century theologian and founder of the *Śrīvaiṣṇava saṁpradāya*.

73 *Pūrṇa* is the Sanskritized version of Rāmanujan's *guru*'s name who is better known in Tamil as Pĕriya Nambikaḷ.

74 This stanza is held in high esteem by *Śrīvaiṣṇava*s and is considered to be the final verse (*carama śloka*) of the *Bhagavad Gitā*.

mand and condemn just one person to the underworld, or is it better to reveal the highest heaven to this whole congregation of devotees? Think about it. I'm saying exactly what you said." And at this his *guru* was overjoyed. Rāmānuja bestowed the highest heaven upon all the wanting milkmaids and herdsmen who brought dairy products to the quarters of his disciples everyday at dawn without charge.

In another eon, in another incarnation, he was named Sundara Jāmātṛ[75] and was free of attachments. He explained to people of little knowledge the way that liberated souls cut through the sun's atmosphere[76] so that they might taste the sweetness of heaven. Later, when misguided heretics arrived in the area around Yādavagiri,[77] he was born as the famed Śaṭhakopa[78] to remedy that degradation of faith. In Āndhra[79] and other places he conquered the quarters and fiercely debated with scholars about matters relating to Viṣṇu as if he was distributing alms. And at Ahobalam on Garuḍa Hill, Lord Narasiṁha came to him disguised as a sannyāsin. The lord gave him a cushion made of grass, saffron robes and a water pot, and then initiated him into the final stage of life.

Śaṭhakopa taught the philosophies of Patañjali, Kaṇāda, Gautama, Bādarāyaṇa, Kapila, and Jaimini, first to the Brahmins who

75 Sundara Jāmatṛ, literally "beautiful son-in-law," refers to Lord Raṅganātha as Viṣṇucitta's son-in-law. Here it is a Sanskrit back formation of the Tamil name *aḻakīya maṇavāḷan*, another name for the fifteenth-century Tamil *ācārya* Maṇavāḷa Māmunikaḷ.

76 The phrase *arcirādi gati* is unclear. My translation is based on the explanation provided by VVS, 646.

77 Yādavagiri is glossed by VVS, 646, as in the vicinity of Tiru Nārayaṇapuram.

78 Śaṭhakopa is another name for Nammāḻvār but here refers to Yatīndra or Yatīśvara, an *ācārya* who is believed to have founded the *Śrivaiṣṇava maṭh* at Ahobilam. The derivation of the term *śaṭhakopa* is unclear but it also refers to a ritual implement used in *Vaiṣṇava* ceremonies.

79 *Āndhra* is mentioned explicitly by the poet.

worked in the monastery kitchen, and then to his many disciples. He became the ultimate practitioner of the practices of Paramahaṁsa.[80] He entered wastelands and swept away thorns as he purified the earth and taught surrender. The hearts of men found homes at the feet of Lakṣmi and Nārāyaṇa, refuges for the whole world.

And in the future, as a follower of Hayagrīva, yet another scholar named Vedānta Deśika[81] will promote the *Vaiṣṇava* faith. He will write hundreds of treatises and undergo austerities by subsisting on only gleaned corn. He'll even grant *nirvāṇa* to a flax plant for providing him with herbs and ripe leaves.

I've learned of these things yet to come through my divine vision.[82] Isn't my body worthy of respect for having this kind of knowledge of past, present, and future? Even when I say so you'll think it's only due to my birth and not my spiritual attainments, or the control of my inner and outer senses. Even a gypsy fortuneteller tells of the future, but is she pure? Owls, wild fowl, lizards, shrikes, spotted owlets, and other birds of omen can predict the future, but have they performed austerities? My knowledge is like that.

Although I studied and taught in places of learning, I didn't follow or practice the teachings. I distanced myself from the *dharma* due to my disbelief in the self. This is without reason [...] I cannot transcend this existence.[83] Even so, if a body is free of sin, it's not sure to become pure. Therefore, do away with compassion for this deformed body and do something meaningful," he said as he fell to the *dāsarī*'s feet.

"Give me just a quarter of your merits," he asked. "If you say

80 Paramahaṁsa is another name for Śaṭhakopa Yatīndra.

81 "Follower of Hayagrīva" is from *haya-vadana*. Vedānta Deśika is mentioned here as *veṅkaṭeṣuṇḍu*.

82 This addition by the poet seems to justify his anachronistic, and often chronologically inconsistent, summary of various *Śrīvaiṣṇava ācārya*s and their relation to the Ahobila *maṭh*.

83 Part of this *vacanam* is unclear.

you can't, then forget about that. Give me the merits of just your last song, the one you sang at dawn. Give me refuge. Relieve me of my misfortune," he said without rising.

The *dāsari* was moved with great compassion and said, "So it shall be," as he gestured for the *brahma-rākṣasa* to rise and helped him to his feet. The *dāsari* asked Kumbhajānu to explain in detail how he took that form. And so that sorrowful flesh-eater begged him to listen and started: //66//

[SOMA ŚARMA KATHA]

I was living in a town in Coḷa country. And having studied the fourteen arts,[84]
I won debates against logicians with my sharp wit. I pointed out the mistakes
made by ritual specialists. I laughed when men opened up books on debate.
I ridiculed officials at scholarly gatherings and I questioned their mastery of texts.
And, I blabbered. //67//
I carried on like this. I was blinded by pride like an elephant gone mad with cracked temples. With my little knowledge I was like a *Rĕḍḍi* chief easily giving and taking pennies.[85] Those studies were like my ultimate god. I chased elder scholars around until they said, "Okay, we lose!" and when that wasn't enough I made them say, "You're the winner!" I told lies and tricked petty chieftains. And after I watched ritual specialists, I wanted to perform

84 The "fourteen arts" is actually *kaḷal padunālgu*, and both commentators agree that this refers to the fourteen types of Vedic knowledge rather any kind of art, of which there are usually sixteen.

85 "*Rĕḍḍi*" is glossed by TKR, 638, as *grāmādhikāri* or a village chief. Sistla translates "like a Reddy who twirls up his mustache," taking *vīsambu* (a fraction of money) for *mīsambu* (mustache). Sistla, *Āmuktamālyada*, 409. Cf. AM IV.134 for another deriding reference to *Rĕḍḍi*s.

rituals too and become rich, so I went to Madhura to beg for the necessary implements. //68//
For gold, I offered petty atonements to outcaste Brahmins
and sat alongside them in a row to eat.
On holy days, I joined with the priests of merchants
and fought with them for rice.
During eclipses I performed recitations, took holy baths, and more,
but gave away all the benefits at the palace gates of minor lords.
I contracted every town to provide me with sandals
made from fresh deer hide and buffalo leather.
Feigning friendship, I went to funerary ceremonies uninvited
and ate the leftovers from death ceremonies.
And when that wasn't enough, I went to the houses of women cooks[86]
and ate half-eaten food. And on top of that, worse than the rest,
I took from the great public scale. //69//
After I acquired things in this way, I pawned them off to a merchant.
Then, as I was leaving, I went to take everything back. I estimated the interest
to four times what it really was, and pointed out the differences in our calculations.
I riled him up and while he blundered, "I'll pay. No, I won't pay!"
I yelled at him, right there in the open. And as we fought, a man stood watching.
After that... //70//
In an outcaste area,[87] I bought fine new shoes and quickly
rubbed them with oil and lined them with soft cassia leaves.
I shaved my beard and took my time as I washed my head
at a shop that provided hot water.
Instead of going to the houses of cooks every day,

86 "Houses of women cooks" is *akka-vāḍalan*, a street where cook maids live (Brown, Telugu English Dictionary, 12), glossed by TKR, 639, as *pūṭa-kūṭiḷḷalo*, in boarding houses or inns. cf. AM VI.71.

87 "Outcaste area" is *vĕli-vāḍan*.

I sent for milk, yogurt, ghee, and curries as I pleased.
Then I would open up my pouch and joyfully
pack lots of areca nut into a betel leaf.
I brought along with me a Brahmin student
who carried a bag of well-cleaned rice on his shoulder.
And while I eagerly bought the best saris for my wife,
other travelers asked questions about my journey
and learned of my travels. //71//
The travelers joined us and sent a few of their men ahead
to scout out a path. They carried bags like the rest of us.
They slept and rose along with us. And before daybreak,
one said, "We must head north!" //72//
And after he got up and left, his companions grew anxious
and set off. I handed my burdensome bag to my student and followed.
"Come! This way!" they gestured as they led us on a path through the forest.
We climbed down to a mountain stream and then, one of them whistled. //73//
And just when I could see the lines on the palm of my hand,[88]
an arrow fell. Everyone stood still. Rocks whizzed by.
There was no opening in sight, and everyone fell back on each other. //74//
Arrows flew and a pack of untouchable mountain hunters,[89] strong enough
to defeat a demon army, suddenly appeared from the forest
and fell upon us screaming "Attack! Attack!"
They were like three-eyed Śiva's horde of ghosts, causing earthquakes with their trampling,
and rushing with fierce hunger to devour creatures at the end of time.

88 "See the lines on the palm of my hand" is *aṟaceta vrālu kanu* and intimates that the light of day was just breaking.

89 "Untouchable mountain hunters" is *puḷinda plava*.

Even the world-destroying poison was jealous of their array of shining weapons
that was like the sun rising up from the streaks of an eclipse. //75//[90]
This is how they ambushed us from the trees. They surrounded us and braced their bows.
Seeing those dark-skinned men[91] threw us into a state of confusion,
and everyone started to scatter... //76//
One of our men yelled, "Cowards! There's not that many of them. Stand and fight!"
So some flung their ritual implements like weapons.
Others tossed their purses of gold into the bushes and dropped their shawls
as they fled out of fear of being beaten with clubs.
Some put down their bags and dispersed while assailants who held daggers
stood ready and called out, "Come out wherever you are!"
Other begged, "Oh sir! Show compassion. I'll starve without this bag.
Here, take my clothes." And some said, "We'll give you whatever we have in our group.
Just leave. And more thing, don't lay a hand on our women."
We spoke out so that they would take note of our courage, honor, and rank.
And when we submitted to being robbed, some of the thieves stopped and left. //77//
An armed bowman, instead of leaving the way he came, grew angry
with the man facing him and stabbed him amid the confusion.
When a greedy man refused to give anything, a bandit gave him a flesh wound,
albeit not too deep, and grabbed whatever he had in his hands.

90 This complex verse is written in the grand *Mahāsragdhara* meter of twenty-two syllables. The entire stanza is in Sanskrit except for the first word of the poem, *kavisĕn*, a Telugu verb meaning to join, approach, or in this context attack.

91 "Dark-skinned men" is *nalla-prajan*, literally black people.

An armed man swung at a fleeing traveler but missed
and stopped just as he was starting to give chase.
Men were sent out to search for a fat man who fled, even though
he had no money in his hands.
They poked around with spears to find those who had hid in the
shrubs.
They stole the travelers' fine folded clothes
but kindly let them keep their old clothes to use as loincloths.
With arrows fitted with big oleander leaves they searched the
soles of the travelers' shoes,
and they even untied their topknots. //78//
This is how the thieves, amid all the confusion, robbed the traveling party, freely taking at will their fill of various belongings. //79//
At that moment I tried to escape. But I was quickly seen
by a gruesome savage thief named Kākaśmaśru, Crow Mustache.
He had been watching me ever since we were in town
and now he was chasing after me.
He had a long black waistband, tightly wrapped
around his waist from his hips up to his chest.
His mustache had grown longer than a cat's whiskers
and swayed like a swing atop his big potbelly.
His face was smeared with ash, and a bandana covered his mouth
like a dirty old hat stained with wax.
A silk cloth dangled from the joint of his little finger[92]
and sparkled along with the brilliance of his dagger.
He was very very scary. //80//
I abandoned my student and started to run away
but Kākaśmaśru threw his dagger and hit the back of my neck.
I fell over, and he dragged me, and loosened
the soft waistcloth that covered my bulging belly.
And as I resisted, he ripped open my gold purse.

92 "Silk cloth dangled from the joint of his little finger" is a literal translation of *ciṭi-vreli pūsapai ghaṭiyillu vĕḍa paṭṭu*. The image is unclear.

He pulled at my earrings that were like snake hoods
until I had no lobes left. He undid my bandana
and the chinstraps of my hat[93] as he robbed me and fled. //81//
I couldn't control my big mouth[94] and shouted,
"Hey you! You there! What a pity!
You used to live in town, and look at you now.
Go ahead! Let's see how that money helps you!" //82//
And then, thinking that I might complain to the town magistrate
about being robbed of everything, he turned back to finish me off.
He stabbed me with quick thrusts, and ran away
out of fear of the crowd that was following behind him. //83//
Meanwhile a group led by my wife's brother approached
from the nearby main road. He had learned of all the events
that had befallen our traveling party. And when he saw me
he felt sad. He placed my exhausted body in a yoke
and scolded me as he carried me away. And on our way ... //84//
Some, who were cut with crane-shaped swords, held their shoulders in,
pressed their wounds with their fingers and searched for a doctor to give them stitches.[95]
Others wrapped dirty old rags around wounds that they got from clubs
hitting their heads and went from house to house asking for porridge or gruel.
Some told their woes to people who listened with great pity in their hearts,

93 "Chinstraps of my hat" is *kasĕcerula ṭĕkkiyu*. VVS, 664, and TKR, 648, both concur that this a reference to headgear known as a *kuḷḷāyi*. The term seems to be of Persian origin and substantiates the claims made by Phillip Wagoner in reference to the sartorial Islamicization of Vijayanagar culture. See Phillip Wagoner, "Sultan among Hindu Kings: Dress, Titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 55, no. 4 (Nov. 1996): 851-880, for a detailed analysis.

94 "Big mouth" is *noṭi-śani*, literally the mouth's bad luck.

95 "Doctor to give them stitches" is *kuṭṭiḍa vĕjju*.

and when ladies tore their saris to give them fresh cloth, they bid them well.
Others fell upon their relatives and used the robbery as an excuse
to talk about great riches one couldn't even dream about.
My wife's brother continued on through the commotion past town landmarks
and brought me here. He put me down in the shade of this banyan tree
and in the time it took for him to go and fetch some drinking water,
my breathing stopped, and I took this form. //85//
I took on this dreadful body because, at the moment of my death,
it was as if my eyes were tied to that gruesome image of Kākaśmaśru,
that savage who chased me in the conflict, wounded me, and caused a fever of fear.[96]
Couldn't you end this by giving me the fruits of the *Kauśiki* song?"
After he finished, the *dāsari* said, "I know nothing of these fruits.
The only result of divine services willingly performed according
to the rules[97] is the joy on the face of the Great God.[98] How could
a devotee calculate the value of those fruits?" And timidly he
added, "But since you are bound to that body, take some of these
fruits, this much or that much, and god will save you. Be assured."
And while the words were still in his mouth... //86//
He watched and watched as that body transformed into a Brahmin figure,
shining with golden light. Like fire emerging from a cloud of smoke,

96 "Fever of fear" is *vĕṟa-veki*.

97 The poet makes a distinction between two kinds of service (*kaiṅkaryam*), those done according to Vedic prescription (*ājñā*) and those done out of personal volition (*anumati*).

98 "Great God" is *parameśa* and refers here to Viṣṇu rather the epitaph's more common attribution to Śiva.

there stood Śoma Śarma, a *Vaiṣṇava* invested with all the riches of devotion.
His head was shaved smooth in three areas with one lock remaining
and his sacred thread was white as snow.
His upper body was painted with the sacred mark in twelve places[99]
and he wore a row of garlands made of *tulasi* and lotus.
He had a tiny loincloth, a thread around his waist, and clothes the color of saffron.
He carried a clean pot filled with water.
He held a copy of the *Divya Prabandham* in his hand
and recited the holy mantra starting with the second half first.[100],[101] //87//
In this way, due to the power of the devotee's service, he not only regained his Brahminhood but acquired a wealth of devotion, and was filled with supreme joy, like a crystal of salt splitting into two. Soma Śarma, in an act befitting his true form, praised the *dāsari*. //88//
"*Jaya*! *Jaya*! *Jaya*! Supreme master of song!
You are like a drop on a lotus petal, resting on this impassible ocean of life.
You are like a sickle that slices through questions of existence.
Jaya! *Jaya*! *Jaya*! Your sweet tongue savors the taste of Śauri's stories.
Jaya! *Jaya*! *Jaya*! You fooled us by taking birth as a lowly man.[102]

99 "Sacred mark in twelve places" is *ṣaḍḍvita puṇḍravallula* and refers to the *Vaiṣṇava* practice of painting a *paṅga-nāmam* or sacred fork-shaped marker onto various parts of the body above the waist.

100 This is a reference to the second half of the *dvayam* mantra: *śrīmate nārāyaṇāya namaḥ*.

101 This verse contains eight repetitions of the preposition *toḍa*, with, and is reminiscent of another long *sīsa padyam*, cf. AM II.73.

102 "Lowly man" is *jana-arvācīna* and refers to the *dāsari* himself, or possibly other untouchable *bhakta*s.

Jaya! *Jaya*! *Jaya*! You took refuge at the feet of the ultimate teacher.[103]
And you stood by your word, offering your body as food.
Jaya! *Jaya*! *Jaya*! You follow the command of god and treat all creatures equally.
You are imbued with compassion, but deaf to teachings about gods other than Mukunda.
Jaya! *Jaya*! *Jaya*! Your limbs are marked with the eight marks of devotion.[104]
You are like a bee drinking nectar at the lotus feet of Murāri's devotees,"[105] //89//
Sang the Brahmin as he circumambulated the *dāsari*. Soma Śarma had turned his face away from the pleasures of home, wife and other things, and feared a future birth. He went on pilgrimage, again and again, to holy places like the Badarī Grove[106] where the Great Lord resides, and finally attained the supreme happiness.[107]
I told this sacred story in my form as a wild boar while I carried the Lady of the Earth.[108] //90//

103 "Ultimate teacher" is *deśika* and refers to Nārāyaṇa as the first teacher in the *Vaiṣṇava paraṁpara*.

104 "Eight marks of devotion" is *catur-dvaya bhakti-lakṣaṇa citāṅga*.

105 This effusive praise poem is completely in Sanskrit and offers a fascinating point of comparison to Viṣṇucitta's *jaya* poem to Lord Viṣṇu in AM IV.16.

106 "Badarī Grove" is *badarī-vana* and likely refers to the famous Himālayan pilgrimage place know today as Badrināth.

107 "Supreme happiness" is *parama-nirvṛtin* and also implies his ultimate death.

108 Viṣṇu is the narrator of this story; he explains that he originally told this tale to Bhūdevi, goddess of the earth, as he raised her from the bottom the ocean in his *varāha avatāra*. The translation of this *vacanam* has been truncated.

THE PERILS AND POSSIBILITIES OF INTER-RELIGIOUS TRANSLATION: MIRZA MAZHAR JAN-I JANAN ON THE HINDUS

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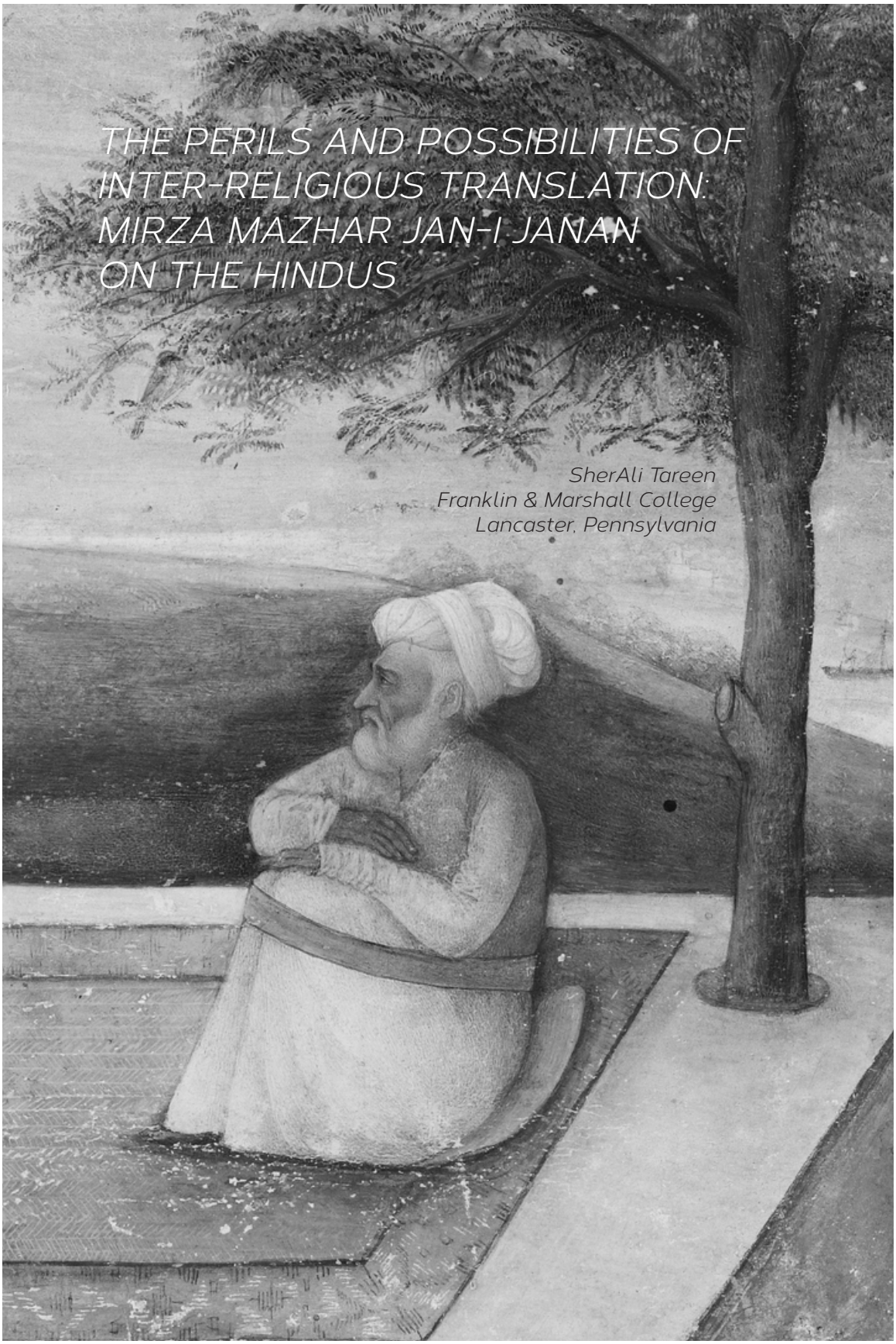

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The text translated below represents the views of a prominent eighteenth-century North Indian Muslim scholar Mirza Mazhar Jan-i Janan (1699-1781) on Hindu thought and practice. Primarily based in Delhi, Jan-i Janan was the leading Sufi master of the Naqshbandi order and among the most respected and influential eighteenth-century Indian Muslim scholars. His immediate master in the Naqshbandi order was the renowned Sufi Nur Muhammad Badayuni (d. 1723) who in turn traced his spiritual lineage to the preeminent late-sixteenth-/early-seventeenth-century Sufi master Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624). Another illustrious contemporary of Jan-i Janan's who was also attached to the Naqshbandi order was the legendary Muslim polymath Shah Wali Allah (d. 1762).[1]

Jan-i Janan's life corresponds with the historical trajectory of eighteenth-century India, a moment of tremendous political and social upheaval. As the political sovereignty of the Muslim elite dwindled, multiple rival claimants to power including the Sikhs, Jats, and Marathas came into central view, resulting in intensified intra-Muslim and inter-communal conflicts as well as collusions. Jan-i Janan's own father, Mirza Jan, was part of the Mughal bureaucracy serving as an officer under the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. The disintegration of Mughal political sovereignty must have affected members of the religious and political elite, such as Jan-i Janan, particularly abrasively. Thus, several of his writings combine a melancholic appraisal of the present with heightened alarm over the moral and political chaos that in his view had enveloped late eighteenth-century Muslim India.

Jan-i Janan wrote extensively on varied themes including Sufi thought, practice, and psychology. In addition, he was also a renowned

1 For more on the Naqshbandi order in South Asia, see Arthur Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi Shaykh* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998).

<< DETAIL OF "SAINTS SEATED ON A TERRACE" (CA. 1630s). IMAGE CREDIT: YALE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY.

Persian and Urdu poet. An important repository of his writings is preserved in a collection of his letters to disciples scattered all over India, though primarily concentrated in North India.

In one such letter, Jan-i Janan sought to translate and explain the normative traditions and doctrinal tenets of the Indian Hindu community for his Muslim disciples and for the public at large. This labor of inter-epistemic translation on Jan-i Janan's part forms the focus of the translation presented below. While originally written in Persian, the translation below is based on an Urdu translation of Jan-i Janan's essay letter on "Hinduism" contained in the book *Maqamat-i Mazhari,* an extensive intellectual biography of Jan-i Janan written by Shah Ghulam 'Ali Dihlavi (d. 1824), one of his foremost disciples and his spiritual successor in the Naqshbandi order.[2] *Maqamat-i Mazhari* is a fascinating text that, through a narrative of the history of Jan-i Janan's life, provides an intimate social, political, and religious history of eighteenth-century Muslim India more broadly.

In addition to discussing Jan-i Janan's religious thought, the political context and developments during his life, and the lives and intellectual contributions of his foremost disciples, this text also contains translations of twenty-three of Jan-i Janan's letters. These letters, usually written in response to a question from a disciple, engage multiple religious and political subjects, and at times discuss mundane matters of everyday life and the administration of the Naqshbandi order. Jan-i Janan's views on Hindus are found in letter number fourteen, entitled "A Statement on the Constitution of the Unbelievers of India" (*Kufar-i Hind ke A'yin ka Bayan*).

From the text it appears that it was composed in 1750 in response to a question by one of his disciples on the normative validity of "Hinduism" according to Islam. His translation of Hindu thought seems to have been based on his interactions with the Hindu scholarly elite in Delhi and/or on his readings of texts such as *The Laws of Manu* in

2 Shah Ghulam 'Ali Dihlavi, *Maqamat-i Mazhari: Ahval wa Malfuzat wa Maktubat-i Hazrat Mirza Mazhar Jan-i Janan Shahid* (Lahore: Urdu Science Board, 2001).

translation in Arabic or Persian. There is no indication of Jan-i Janan himself being well versed in Sanskrit. It should also be noted that a number of his disciples were Hindu and his Sufi lodge in Delhi remained an important center of visitation for Hindus and Muslims, both during and after his life.[3]

Some features of Jan-i Janan's exposition should be highlighted here. Overall, readers will notice that Jan-i Janan's explanation of Hindu thought and practice is very generous and sympathetic. More specifically, at the heart of his translation enterprise was the attempt to draw explicit equivalences between Hindu and Muslim scholarly categories. So we find that he translated *Dharmaśāstra* as dialectical theology or *'ilm al-kalam* and *Karmaśāstra* as jurisprudence or *fiqh*. Further, Jan-i Janan also strived to present "Hinduism" as a perfectly monotheistic tradition that contained clear doctrines regarding rewards and punishments in the hereafter, and that explicitly acknowledged the existence of prophets and angels.

He also emphatically asserted that God had indeed sent prophets to India as no part of the world had remained bereft of God's mercy. Jan-i Janan does not seem to have been interested in connecting this theological provision for the existence of prophecy in pre-Islamic India to the question of whether that qualified Hindus as protected minorities (*dhimmi*s) under Islamic law. While Jan-i Janan does not address this question directly, one can speculate that he would answer by distinguishing between the sending of prophets to a particular people and the legal status of "the people of the book." The former does not necessarily qualify a community for the latter. For all his championing of the monotheistic credentials of Hindus, it does not seem that he was willing or interested in pushing the envelope so far as to characterize them as among the "people of the book."

In a particularly fascinating move, Jan-i Janan also defended the

3 See Thomas Dahnhardt, *Change and Continuity in Indian Sufism: A Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi Branch in the Hindu Environmen*t (New Delhi: DK Printworld, 2002).

practice of idol worship among Hindus by likening this practice to the Sufi ritual of meditation through the visualization of Sufi masters. He also argued that Hindu idol worship did not involve polytheism (*shirk*) because the Hindus did not understand their idols as effective and agentive in and of themselves. This clearly demonstrates his anxiety to present "Hinduism" as a monotheistic tradition, similar in its doctrinal architecture to Islam. Curiously, Jan-i Janan concluded his text with the pithy yet ambiguous remark that a "belief in transmigration (*tanasukh*) does not necessarily make one an unbeliever," thus removing the specter of unbelief from the doctrine of transmigration. It is difficult to tell from this text who or what informed Jan-i Janan's charitable attitude towards the normative legitimacy of transmigration.

But despite all his ecumenical gestures, Jan-i Janan nonetheless held on to a triumphalist narrative whereby Islam represented the most ideal and normatively coherent religion. More specifically, he argued that while the "religion" of Hindus may have been normatively valid prior to the emergence of Islam, it was abrogated as soon as the Qur'an was revealed. Therefore, those Hindus who did not accept Islam after Muhammad's arrival were unbelievers. So while allowing for some degree of hermeneutical flexibility in relation to the normative status of "Hinduism," he still maintained the overall superiority and exclusivity of Islam as the only current and normatively sanctioned religion. Therefore, it would be problematic and indeed anachronistic to read Jan-i Janan's favorable views on "Hinduism" as an example of religious pluralism and tolerance.[4]

The text translated below also represents an instructive example of an early modern project of inter-religious translation in South Asia, especially if set in comparison and contrast with later colonial regimes of translating "religion." Certainly, it is difficult not to notice features of Jan-i Janan's exposition that resemble and mirror later British colo-

4 I conduct a fuller examination of Jan-i Janan's understanding of Hinduism in my forthcoming article "Translating the 'Other': Early Modern Muslim Understandings of Hinduism" in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*.

nial attempts at translating varied Hindu traditions as a well-defined and fully translatable "religion" centered on a canon of certain authoritative religious texts. Much like modern approaches to categorizing religion, Jan-i Jan also conducted a rather essentialist reading of "Hinduism" whereby he choose only those aspects of "Hinduism" as objects of his translation and explanation that he saw as most closely resembling Muslim intellectual categories. Moreover, Jan-i Janan also valorized certain Hindus texts (primarily *The Laws of Manu*) as the most definitive and authoritative discursive statements on the Hindu tradition. This reductionist move seems consistent with modern Protestant modes of scripturalism that privilege text or scripture as the underlying and exclusive repository of a religion's most authentic articulation.

However, all that said, one still finds important differences between Jan-i Janan's and modern colonial translations of Hinduism. For one, in Jan-i Janan's text, one does not find the word "Hinduism" or its equivalent. Instead, he simply referred to Hindus as "the people of India" (*ahl-i hind*). While he was obviously discussing the tenets and doctrines of the Hindu community, it is still significant that he did not refer to them as followers of a distinct and fully demarcated religion called "Hinduism." That I have had to employ this category ("Hinduism") in quotations while describing Jan-i Janan's views speaks more to the terminological poverty of Euro-American discourses on religion than about his social imaginary. Further, while British colonial translations of "Hinduism" were part of a broader political project of colonialism, Jan-i Janan's translation was instead focused on the question of community: namely how should Muslims approach and understand the religious doctrines and practices of another community.[5] The political impulse or desire of imperialism does not seem to have been a facet of Jan-i Janan's calculus of translation.

The question of how Indian Muslim scholars imagined the norma-

5 Moreover, during this historical moment, the notion of a distinct religious community was much less demarcated than it was to become during the colonial period.

tive status and validity of "Hinduism" at the cusp of colonial modernity demands much further scholarly attention. This line of inquiry can prove particularly fruitful in understanding the continuities and ruptures in the conceptual landscape of religion as a category during India's transition from the precolonial to the colonial era. The text translated below provides one specific but important example of inter-religious translation that offers important insights into this larger problem-space.[6]

TRANSLATION OF THE TEXT

You [an unnamed disciple of Jan-i Janan's] had asked whether the religion of the unbelievers of India, like that of the pre-Islamic polytheists of Arabia, was absolutely invalid or whether the former used to follow a normatively valid religion that was later abrogated. And you had also inquired as to what opinion we [Indian Muslims] should hold about their ancients and religious leaders.

So, a just and sound exposition on this matter is as follows. What I have come to know from the ancient books of the people of India (*ahl-i hind*) is that at the birth of humanity God had revealed to them a book called *bayd* (Persian for Vedas) through an angel called Brahmā, who is the agent of the world's creation. This book is comprised of four sections. It contains injunctions regarding commanding good and forbidding evil (*'amr wa nahī*) and reports about the past and the future. Their master-jurists have derived six disciplines from this book. Their doctrinal foundations are based on these disciplines. To this they have given the name *Dharmaśāstra* meaning the discipline of faith (*fann-i 'imaniyyat*), which we call *'ilm-i kalam*. They have divided humanity into four divisions and assigned distinct practical duties for each of those divisions. The founda-

6 I would like to thank Dr. Carl Ernst with whom I first read this text as a first-year graduate student at Duke University some eight years ago. I should also thank the reviewers for their helpful comments and feedback, and the editors at *Sagar* for their excellent work.

tion for normative practices has been based on this system. To this they have given the name *Karmaśāstra* meaning the discipline of practices (*fann-i 'amaliyyat*) that we call jurisprudence (*'ilm-i fiqh*).

They have also divided the extensive history of the world into four divisions, And they call each of these divisions "*Jug*." And for every "*jug*" they have derived normative practices from each of the four disciplines in the Vedas. The practices of their moderns cannot be considered normative (*saqit al-i'tibar*). All of their sects are in agreement on the unity of God and they all understand the world as created by Him. Similarly, they all believe in the annihilation of the world, in rewards and punishments for human actions, and in accountability on the Day of Judgment. And they possess deep expertise in revealed and rational knowledges (*'ulum-i 'aqli wa naqli*), meditative practices (*riyazat*), spiritual strivings (*mujahadat*), gnostic knowledge (*tahqiq-i ma'arif*), and mystical unveilings (*mukashafat*). Their libraries are still well preserved.

Their rituals of idol worship do not involve polytheism. The reality of such rituals is something else. Their scholars have apportioned life into four phases. The first is for the acquisition of knowledge, second for livelihood and the rearing of children, third for the correction of practices and the purification of the soul, and fourth for the abnegation of the world; they consider the last stage to be the pinnacle of human perfections. Ultimate salvation (*nijat-i kubra*), what they call *mahāmukt*, is based on this last stage of life. The rules and regulations of this religion have complete harmony and order (*mukammal nazm o nasq*).

This used to be a normatively accepted religion. But it has now been abrogated. Many religious traditions other than Judaism and Christianity were abrogated or were born and later died out, even though the Shari'a only mentions those two. According to the Qur'an, "There is no community to which a warner has not been sent" (*wa inn min ummatin khala fi-ha nazir*).[7] And in another verse it is said, "Every

7 Qur'an: 35:24.

community has been sent a messenger" (*wa li kulli ummatin rasul*).[8]

And there are also several other verses concerning the sending of prophets. Prophets and messengers of God were indeed sent to India. Their conditions are recorded in the books [of the Hindus] and from their traditions it also seems that their prophets had attained the station of perfection. The capacious mercy of God did not forget the humanity of this vast landmass. It is well-known that prior to the arrival of Muhammad, every community (*qawm*) was sent prophets. Moreover, every community was obligated to follow its own prophet sent to them and not any other.

After the appearance of our Prophet [Muhammad], who is the seal of all messengers and who represents the Prophet for all of humanity, his religion [Islam] has abrogated all religions of the West and the East. And as long as the world exists, no one can dare disobey the Prophet. From the time of the Prophet's arrival until now, 1180 years have elapsed. In this time period, whoever did not embrace him [and his religion] is an unbeliever. But people who lived prior to the birth of Islam are not so. As it is said in the normative traditions of Islam, "[from among the previous Prophets], there are some about whom we have told you and there are some about whom we have not told you (*min-hum man qasasna 'alayka wa min-hum man lam naqsus 'alayka*)."

Therefore, we come to know that the Muslim tradition does not reveal the identity of several prophets. Hence, with regards to the prophets of India, it is also best for us to adopt silence. Regarding the followers of such prophets, we need not believe that they are guilty of unbelief and hence liable to be killed nor is it obligatory for us to believe in their salvation. We should simply maintain a positive outlook (*husn-i zann*) so that no dissension (*ta'assub*) is generated. Similarly, with respect to the people of Persia or with respect to people of all countries who preceded Muhammad and about whom the normative sources of Islam provide no explicit judgment, it is best to believe that

8 Qur'an: 10:47.

their laws and traditions were amenable to the path of justice. One should never take lightly charging someone else with unbelief in the absence of an absolutely categorical textual proof (*qat'i dalil*).

And the truth of their idol worship is this: they make idols of certain figures on whom they focus their attention as a form of meditation. Such figures can include angels that through God's command are able to act in this world of existence and corruption, the souls of certain perfect people that, even after being separated from the body, are able to act in this world, or people whom they regard as immortal just as we understand Prophet Khidr to be immortal. Through such focused meditation, they are able to establish a spiritual connection with the object/figure represented by the idol. And on the basis of this connection, they seek to fulfill their worldly and salvational needs. This practice of meditation resembles the common practice of the Sufis who, as part of their meditation, visualize their masters, and by doing so, benefit from the master's emanation (*fayzyab*). The only difference is that Sufis do not make an idol of their masters.

But the practice of idol worship [among the Hindus] is completely unrelated to the doctrinal tenets of the pre-Islamic unbelievers of Arabia. This is so because the pre-Islamic Arabs used to regard their idols as effective and agentive (*mu'assar wa mutasarraf*) in and of themselves and not as instruments (*alih*) of God's actions. They used to regard their idols as Gods of the earth and God as the God of the heaven; this represents polytheism.

The prostration of the Hindus is a prostration of reverence (*sajda-yi tahiyyat*) and not one of submission or devotion (*ubudiyyat*). Because according to their customs, one shows one's respect for parents, elders, and teachers not by saying *Salam* but by prostrating before them. They call this prostration "*dandvat*." And believing in transmigration (*tanasukh*) does not necessarily make one an unbeliever. Peace (*Wassalam*).

TAMIL DIASPORIC IDENTITY MANIFESTED THROUGH THE ARCHITECTURAL HYBRIDIZATION OF TEMPLES

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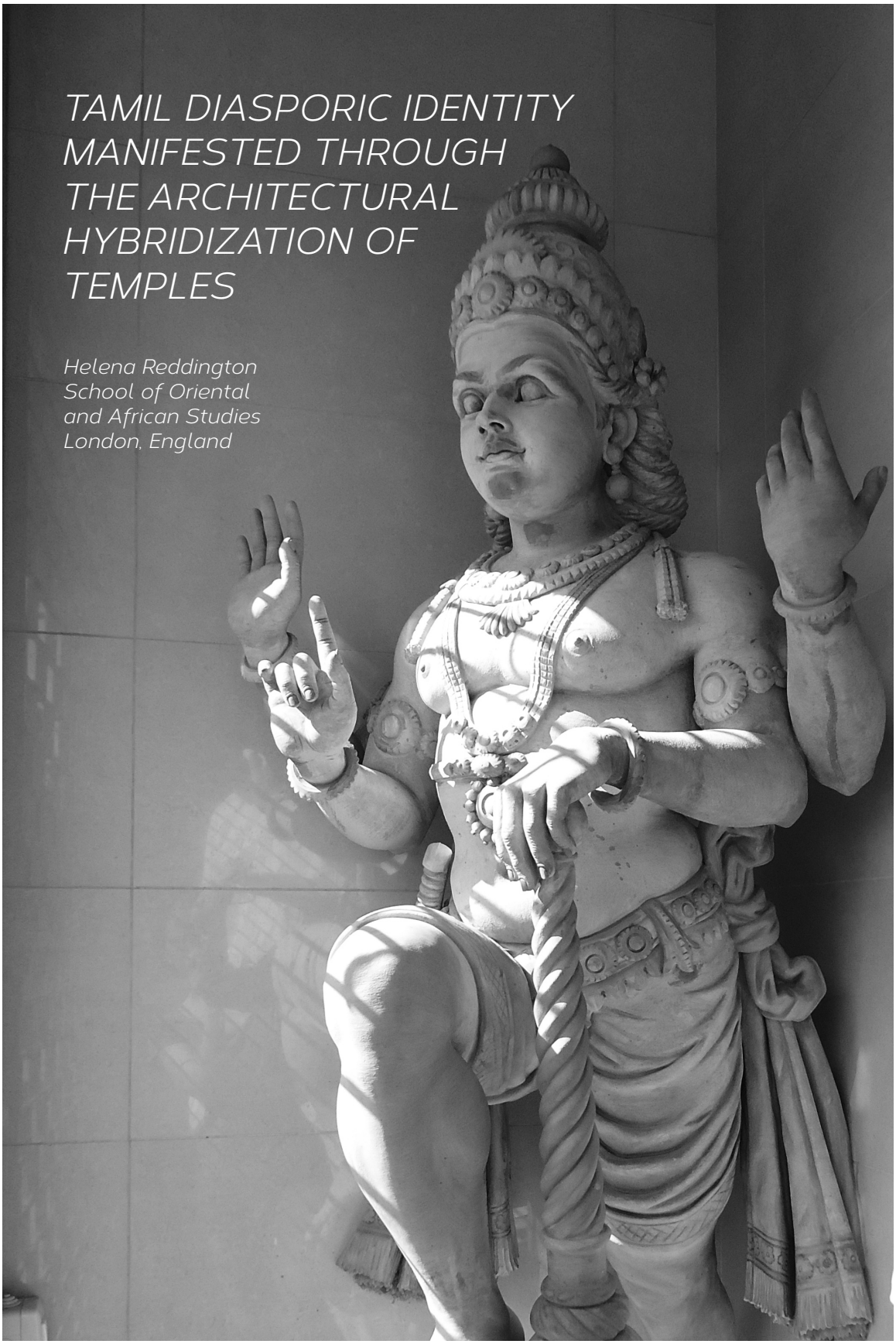


ABSTRACT

Drawing on fieldwork conducted at the Highgatehill Murugan Temple in London, this case study examines how a Tamil worshipping community preserves a distinct cultural and religious identity despite their displacement. This particular identity is expressed through the use of unconventional architectural forms. Because this temple reflects a marker of Tamil identity in London, there is an inherent desire to reconstruct a truly "authentic" temple. The transnational temples of the Tamil diaspora highlight not only the desire to maintain material links to the homeland, but also symbolic links. The symbolic significance of desiring the regional god Murugan as its presiding deity, rather than a pan-Indian one, allows Tamils to differentiate themselves from other Hindu diasporic religious communities. Moreover, the innovative designs of this temple replicate distinct South Indian architectural heritage. In particular, the temple's symbolic new façade reflects a strategy of architectural hybridization integrated within the London landscape. In sum, this study of a Tamil temple explores questions of architectural identity and traditions as well as authenticity and transformation in the diaspora.

INTRODUCTION: TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE, THE DIASPORA, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

200A Archway Road, London, has a compelling history. First constructed as a Baptist church, it later served as a synagogue until its roof was destroyed by fire. A Tamil community subsequently purchased and rebuilt the structure as a temple or *kōvil* as it is called in Tamil. When I first visited the Highgatehill Murugan Temple, tarp mats covered the entrance while workers from India were installing two new door guardians. It was clear that the building was once again undergoing a period of transition. The city council had finally approved the planning permission and major renovation had just begun on the façade of the temple. The once austere place of worship that blended in with the terraced British houses on either side would now stand out with added South Indian architectural elements, giving it a

<< FIG. 9. COMPLETED DOOR GUARDIANS AT HIGHGATEHILL MURUGAN TEMPLE. PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

visually distinctive character and identity. Significantly, the new exterior design plan incorporates an iconic representation of the Tamil god Murugan as well as a *gopuram* elevation, both important architectural features of the entrance to South Indian temples. The form of the building raises issues on the transformation of the architecture of the Tamil temple in the diaspora.

The Highgatehill Murugan Temple demonstrates continuity, but more importantly, innovation. This inevitably leads to issues of the continuity of tradition vis-à-vis modernity. The question arises: can the same definition of an "authentic" South Indian temple be applied to modern temples outside the homeland? Parker aptly asserts that modern Hindu temples, whether in India or abroad:

> ...resist classification as either traditional, modern or postmodern. Perhaps improvisational would be a better label. Like specific performance of a musical mode (*raga*), they give indefinitely variable lift to implicit, fluid structures.[1]

This study asserts that South Indian temples were never really timeless or changeless forms of architecture, but rather, as Parker suggests, fluid structures that can and must adapt to shifting circumstances in the diaspora. I draw on the theoretical narratives of Waghorne, Geaves, Taylor, and Mehra, who have contributed to the body of research on Tamil identity and temple building in the diaspora. However, there is a relatively limited range of literature in the current field. Moreover, this research has been essentially conducted from anthropological or religious studies perspectives. There are still interventions to be made from a visual and architectural point of view.

This study draws on qualitative research conducted at the Highgatehill Murugan Temple over a period of two months. During regular visits to the temple, I collected empirical data through observations as

1 Samuel K. Parker, "Text and Practice in South Asian Art: An Ethnographic Perspective," *Artibus Asiae* 63.1 (2003): 16.

well as interviews with a wide range of people involved in the temple community. Interviews with temple officials, administrative authorities, engineers, craftsmen, workers, priests, and devotees aided in creating a holistic picture of the current renovation project. In my study of the Highgatehill Murugan Temple, I argue that this South Indian diasporic structure represents a new "architectural hybrid," a term used by Mehra in his survey of Hindu temples in Chicago.[2] The temple represents a hybrid in the sense that the new building utilizes an architectural strategy that incorporates both elements from the home country of India and the architecture of the host country, Britain.

My intent is not only to examine the unconventional nature of the architecture of this temple, but also to understand how this space allows the Tamil community to assert their religious identity in the multicultural setting of London. Indeed, the Highgatehill Murugan Temple represents a particular form of Hinduism. It is an explicitly Śaivite temple, and I argue that the presiding deity of the temple, Murugan, becomes an important symbol of Tamil identity. This allows the temple to distinguish itself from other Indian religious communities in the host country. With devotees from the international Tamil diaspora including Sri Lanka, India, Mauritius, and Malaysia, the temple reflects a collage of multiple national, linguistic, and even caste identities. Śaivites of Tamil origin have carried with them their distinct form of worship and rituals, as well as their temple architecture to London. These temples can be characterized as "transnational" as they represent the spread of practices, deities, and devotees across national boundaries.[3] The central question I seek to examine is this: what architectural strategies does this transnational temple use to express Tamil identity in London?

2 Bharat Mehra, "Hindu Temples and Asian-Indian Diasporic Identity in the United States," *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities*, ed. Thomas Turino and James Lea (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park, 2004), 93.

3 Joanne Punzo Waghorne, *Diaspora of the Gods: Modern Hindu Temples in a Middle Class World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 178.

As a point of departure, I begin my analysis of the temple by setting out a few concerns related to the understanding of religious identities in the diaspora, followed by a discussion of Murugan as a symbol of Tamil identity. Regional identity is significant, as it informs the community's architectural heritage. Next, an understanding of the historical context of how the community acquired the temple is important in order to better appreciate the current renovations. The focus will then shift to examining the visual and material aspects of the temple. I will provide a detailed description of the adaptations made to the form of the temple interior, and then discuss how the new external design of the building will reflect a hybrid form of architecture. Finally, conclusions may be drawn on how the temple embodies the need for Tamils to worship distinct gods in a sacred space that remains faithful to their respective traditions.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE TAMIL?

Within the umbrella of "Hinduism" there are distinct identities based on regional practices. Forms of worship vary across India, and these distinctions are reflected in the Hindu temples found across London's landscape. Therefore, the region that a devotee comes from informs the ways in which their religious practices are expressed in the diaspora. Thus, the expression of Tamil ethnicity through architecture at the Highgatehill Murugan Temple must first be understood in light of identity issues that derive from the country of origin. Rayaprol states that many Indian immigrants hold the belief of a shared ancestral homeland and history, or "myth of origin."[4] Notions of a common region, history, and language are encompassed within the notion of *Tamiḻakam*, or the Tamil homeland.[5] More significantly, religion

4 Aparna Rayaprol, *Negotiating Identities: Women in the Indian Diaspora* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 65.

5 Pierre-Yves Trouillet, "Overseas Temples and Tamil Migratory Space," *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 6 (2012): 3.

is a means by which the Tamil community maintains ties with their cultural heritage, as do many others. Although the temple reflects an eclectic group of Tamils from across the globe, the community is able to preserve a strong group identity because they share the essential religious values of a South Indian past. Remembered spaces such as temples serve as "symbolic anchors" in the diasporic consciousness.[6] Consequently, the variations in the visual character of Indian temples are an indication of their distinct historic and socio-cultural identities within the overarching concept of Hinduism.

THE "TAMIL-NESS" OF MURUGAN

The Highgatehill Murugan Temple reflects the need of the Tamil diaspora to provide a sacred shrine for an important South Indian deity, the god Murugan. Indeed, Murugan arguably serves to reinforce regionalist notions of an indigenous Dravidian culture. Devotees are highly conscious of his strong ties to Tamil Nadu, and he is known as a *tamiḻ kaṭavuḷ*, or Tamil god.[7] As an ancient Dravidian hill god prior to the Aryan invasion, he was later assimilated into the Brahmanical and Puranic pantheon.[8] Known as Skanda in North India, he was subsequently included in Śaiva mythology as the son of Śiva and his consort Pārvatī, as well as a brother to Gaṇesh. He has since preserved his status as a popular South Indian god. As Ron Geaves accurately summarizes: "Although the worship of Skanda has almost ceased to exist everywhere, the south Indian cult of Murugan has emerged historically as one of the

6 Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference," *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 39.

7 Trouillet, "Overseas Temples and Tamil Migratory Space," 6.

8 Ron Geaves, *Saivism in the Diaspora: Contemporary Forms of Skanda Worship* (London: Equinox, 2007), 35.

most powerful regional expressions of Indian religiosity."[9]

Fred Clothey also stresses the significance of Murugan as an expression of Tamil identity and culture, describing the god as "riding the crest of Tamil self-consciousness."[10] He argues that the cult of Murugan can be seen as an exponent of Śaiva Siddhānta theology.[11] In this school of thought, the god Śiva is regarded as the supreme reality. According to Geaves, Śaiva Siddhānta incorporated Murugan as a son of Śiva during the medieval period.[12] Greaves continues:

> Saiva Siddhanta gave to Murugan myths, a complex philosophical tradition, (*and*) a metaphysical route to liberation and the Agamic traditions supplied the equally sophisticated forms of ritual practice to live alongside the vernacular forms of worship.[13]

As a sectarian temple, the Highgatehill Murugan Temple strictly follows the orthodox Śaiva Siddhānta practices and worship. The rituals performed by Brahmin priests who live in the temple are conducted according to the prescriptions of sacred texts called *Āgamas*. In fact, an annual temple festival program explicitly states that the "reciting of songs other than those twelve Thirumurai, Thiruppugal, and such religious compositions are not allowed in the Temple complex premises."[14] The exclusive use of Śaiva Tamil hymns at the Highgatehill Murugan Temple in part allows the temple to derive authenticity from them. Thus, with Murugan as the presiding deity, the temple can be seen as an explicit symbol of traditional Tamil Śaivism. Yet what accounts for

9 Ibid., 59.

10 Fred Clothey, *The Many Faces of Murukan: The History and Meaning of a South Indian God* (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), 2.

11 Ibid., 88.

12 Geaves, *Saivism in the Diaspora*, 44.

13 Ibid., 57.

14 *Auspicious Days, Special Poojahs & Festivals*, Highgatehill Murugan Temple Events Calendar, January-December 2013: 5.

the popularity of Murugan rather than Śiva in this context? Taylor explains that Śiva may not be preferred because he is at the top of the hierarchy and mundane requests may insult him, so it is better to address requests to one of his sons.[15] Mr. Thambhirajah, a volunteer at the Highgatehill Temple, provided an intriguing explanation for Murugan's popularity, saying that although Śiva is the patriarch, he wants to take a step back from his responsibilities and let his children do the work.

Murugan thus embodies and asserts a particular identity, which provides the Tamil community with a sense of shared roots within the diaspora. Clothey aptly summarizes: "Some of his devotees find in stressing Murukan's Tamil heritage something of their own identity as Tamilians … in short, the Murukan cult helps many Tamil adherents answer the question – who are we?"[16] Waghorne further defines the worship of this quintessential Tamil deity within the context of diaspora as "globalized localism," in other words, the globalization of more localized Indian traditions.[17] In other words, as identities and religions become delocalized, they do not become detached from the homeland.

The gods of India are often associated with sacred landscapes and specific localities connected to their mythical history. Geaves explains: "For Tamil regional identity politics it becomes crucial that Murugan is purely an indigenous deity identified with the land itself."[18] In the case of Murugan, Tamil Nadu is believed to be the god's domain. There are six major pilgrimage sites marked by temples scattered over the South Indian state, each of which describes an important event in Murugan's life. In fact, the Highgatehill Murugan Temple has six framed posters on the walls of the main shrine room representing these six locations. By referencing the six pilgrimage sites,

15 Donald Taylor, *The Symbolic Construction of the Sri Lankan Hindu Tamil Community in Britain,* Ph.D. dissertation: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1994: 315.

16 Clothey, *The Many Faces of Murukan*, 2.

17 Waghorne, *Diaspora of the Gods*, 172.

18 Geaves, *Saivism in the Diaspora*, 58.

these images invoke symbolic links between the London temple and the Tamil homeland. According to Clothey, these locations hold significance to devotees, as they "sacralize" Tamil Nadu.[19] Waghorne emphasizes that the temples are not famous national pilgrimage sites, but rather, are regionally famous, even locally familiar temples.[20] They are considered local in the sense that they are associated with specific sites of Tamil country, which include Paḻaṇi, Tiruccentūr, Tiruttaṇi, Tirupparaṅkuṉṟam, and Suvāmimalai.[21]

Interestingly, as Clothey explains, there is no specific place ascribed to the sixth pilgrimage site in the region.[22] The sixth site is thought to be every place, and in particular, every hill, where a temple dedicated to the god is erected.[23] In popular mythology, Murugan is thought to reside in the hills. Although the temple on Archway Road is located outside the sacred geography of India, it seems fitting that Murugan resides on Highgate Hill. This landscape reflects sacred Tamil land by establishing sacred space for devotees. As Waghorne argues, Murugan has become a globalized local deity.[24] After the *prāṇa pratiṣṭha*, or breath giving ceremony, Lord Murugan became understood as a living deity residing in the London landscape, making the once localized worship of this Tamil god global.

John Fenton highlights the significance of a diasporic community's ability to continue their religious traditions through the construction of a temple: "Immigrants take an important step toward community formation when they invest in a building and dedicate it for the purpose of group worship."[25] This Tamil religious community evolved

19 Clothey, *The Many Faces of Murukan*, 166.

20 Waghorne, *Diaspora of the Gods*, 173.

21 Clothey, *The Many Faces of Murukan*, 117.

22 Ibid., 117.

23 Ibid., 128.

24 Waghorne, *Diaspora of the Gods*, 177.

25 John Y. Fenton, *Transplanting Relgious Traditions: Asian Indians in America* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 170.

from initially using temporary spaces in the homes of devotees, shared premises in a community hall, and finally, gathering the resources to purchase an existing building. This has eventually led to the current hybridization of the building's architecture. In the next section, I will explore how this lord of the hills came to live on Highgatehill.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE HISTORY OF THE HIGHGATEHILL MURUGAN TEMPLE

In addition to drawing upon the research of Taylor, Waghorne, and Clothey, I obtained material from various temple publications to provide an account of the temple history. These materials include: a souvenir from the "Maha Kumbabishekam Consecration Ceremony," a brochure from the "Centennial Birthday Anniversary of the Hindu Shaiva Pioneer Shri Sabapathipillai," and a pamphlet from the "Twentieth Anniversary Celebrations and Pongal Vizha." I gleaned the following history from these materials.

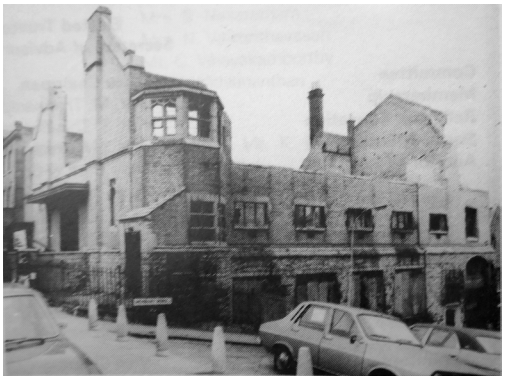
Before the temple was built, devotees would regularly gather in homes to perform Friday evening *pūjā*s or worship. In 1976, as the *pūjā*s attracted a great number of devotees, the weekly gathering location changed to Kenneth Black Memorial Hall in Wimbledon. From 1976 to 1979 the congregation increased in size from one hundred to three hundred members from all over London. In 1977, the time was ripe for the community to purchase a property on Archway Road, North London. The property was formerly a Baptist Church and later a Jewish Synagogue. However, the dilapidated building's roof had been destroyed by a fire (**Fig. 1**). The reason for the temple's location was most likely economic, as it was relatively inexpensive because of its condition. However there was another factor that influenced the selection of this site. The secretary of the temple, Mr. Nagarajah, recounted an anecdote that Mr. Sabapathipillai had chosen the site because of its location on Highgatehill, a location that Murugan, the traditional lord of the hills, would like.

Reconstruction of the building site began in 1977 (**Fig. 2**). Volunteers were instrumental in contributing to the design, engineering, accounting, and legal services required for negotiating with the council for the approval of the plans. Many volunteers helped during the weekends carrying bricks and mortar. To raise money for the construction, volunteers created a scheme which divided the building plan into block units. They then appealed to donors to fund either full or half units. They cleaned the basement and the living quarters for the Brahmin priest and his family, who were due to come from Sri Lanka and installed central heating, plumbing, and other accessories, Lastly the walls and ceilings needed to be strengthened to support the *vimāna*, or the large structure that would house the deity of Murugan on the top floor. On the Hindu New Year in 1980, the priest performed the *prāṇa pratiṣṭha*, or life giving ceremony, for the newly arrived deities of Murugan and his consorts, Vallī and Tevyayāṉai while the building was still only partially completed. These statues were made in the city of Trincomalee in Sri Lanka.

A Brahmin priest was chosen from the Koneswarar Temple in Trincomalee. He arrived in late 1980, and began to conduct both daily rituals and festivals. The final stage of construction began in 1983 when a team of six *sthapati*s, or traditional temple architects, trained at the renowned Government College of Architecture and Sculpture in Mahabalipuram outside of Chennai constructed the *garbhagṛha*, or womb chamber of the deity Murugan. They ensured the work accorded with South Indian architectural style. After they came to the end of their contract, a further six sthapathis completed construction. Prior to completion, the *mahākumbhābhiṣeka*, or consecration ceremony, took place between the 9th and 13th of July 1986. Over a thousand devotees attended. Brahmin priests consecrated the Highgatehill Murugan temple according to the prescriptions of the *Āgama*s in order sanctify it.

The narrative of the history of the temple describes not only the importation of objects of worship and rituals from India, but more significantly, the actual reproduction of a holy place outside of the

Above: *Fig. 2: Old exterior. Image source: "Centennial Birthday Anniversary of the Hindu Shaiva Pioneer Shri Sabapathipillai" brochure, Highgate Hill Murugan Temple.*



Right: *Fig. 1: The condition of the building when purchased by the Trust. Image source: "Maha Kumbhabhishekam Consecration Ceremony" souvenir, Highgate Hill Murugan Temple.*

homeland. As Trouillet states "... the overseas *kovil* is a sign and a si nature of the Tamil presence" in the diasporic landscape.[26] Indeed, I argue that the temple reflects the need to preserve and reconstruct a distinct Tamil identity in the diaspora, one that is constituted though a transnational politics of community identity.

26 Trouillet, "Overseas Temples and Tamil Migratory Space," 17.

TRADITION VS. INNOVATION WITHIN THE TEMPLE INTERIOR

Because the temple was reconstructed from the shell of a former nineteenth century London Baptist church, architects have adapted several features of the traditional Tamil temple in order to comply with local building regulations. These concessions often diverge significantly from the orthodox Tamil Dravida architectural style, highlighting the flexible and often improvisational strategies of temple construction in the diaspora. The Indian temple is traditionally based on the sacred diagram of the *maṇḍala*. As the basis for the layout of the temple, the *maṇḍala* has been interpreted as a miniature replica of the universe.[27] Because this London structure was not originally built as a temple, such a *maṇḍala* design was not possible. Another divergence from tradition is the Highgatehill Murugan Temple entrance that, given the constraints of the location of the pre-exising building, happens to face west. However, the entrance to a traditional Hindu temple almost always faces east, towards the rising sun.

There are other noticeable structural differences between the Highgatehill Murugan Temple and a typical Tamil temple. Whereas Tamil temples typically have only one floor, the Highgatehill Murugan Temple utilizes space between three floors. In her study of temples in the United States, Waghorne draws attention to the unorthodox choice of constructing split-level temples.[28] This architectural feature seems to be a common innovation found in many temples in Europe and North America. The layout of the three-storied Highgatehill Murugan Temple includes the basement floor of the temple,

27 George Michell, *The Hindu Temple: An Introduction to Its Meanings and Forms* (Chicago: Universtiy of Chicago Press, 1997), 71.

28 Joanne Punzo Waghorne, "The Hindu Gods in a Split-Level World: The Sri Siva-Vishnu Temple in Suburban Washington, D.C," *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape*, ed. Robert Orsi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 121.

where there is a wedding hall, or *kalyāṇa maṇḍapa*, as well as a small conference room with a library. The living quarters for the priests are also accessible on the basement level. The temple also includes toilet facilities on the basement and ground floor, which would be unheard of in a traditional Tamil temple, as it is seen as polluting the purity of the sacred space. The community has accepted this non-traditional feature because of the temple's location in London. Offices, a kitchen, and a large congregation hall with a stage to host cultural functions are located on the ground floor of the temple. Incorporation of a non-ritual space for the community to gather on the ground floor is a visible divergence from traditional Tamil temples. Accommodating several hundred people, this venue provides a place for socialization and communal eating. Waghorne also notes that this "upstairs/downstairs" divide of the religious and cultural activities is a common feature in many Indian temples in the United States and in Britain as well.[29] A television screen in this hall allows devotees to sit, chat, and eat food served at the temple while they watch the religious activities occurring on the floor above, a further divergence from the typical Tamil temple as well as an innovative use of technology.

In addition to containing an information desk, a small office, and the *maṭaipaḷḷi*, or priest's kitchen, the second floor of the temple serves as the sacred space where the deities reside. Referred to as the "temple floor," visitors remove their shoes and place them in the shoe racks provided on the ground floor before climbing the stairs to this space. Essentially, the temple's design plan designates the second floor for this purpose as the priests also live within the building and no one should live above the gods. The *garbhagṛha*, or womb chamber, is on this floor, housing the image of the resident deity, Murugan. Branfoot describes this small, dark chamber at the heart of all temples as "the ultimate destination of all devotees."[30] Indeed, the main pur-

29 Ibid., 119.

30 Crispin Branfoot, *Gods on the Move: Architecture and Ritual in the South Indian Temple* (London: Society for South Asian Studies, 2007), 87.

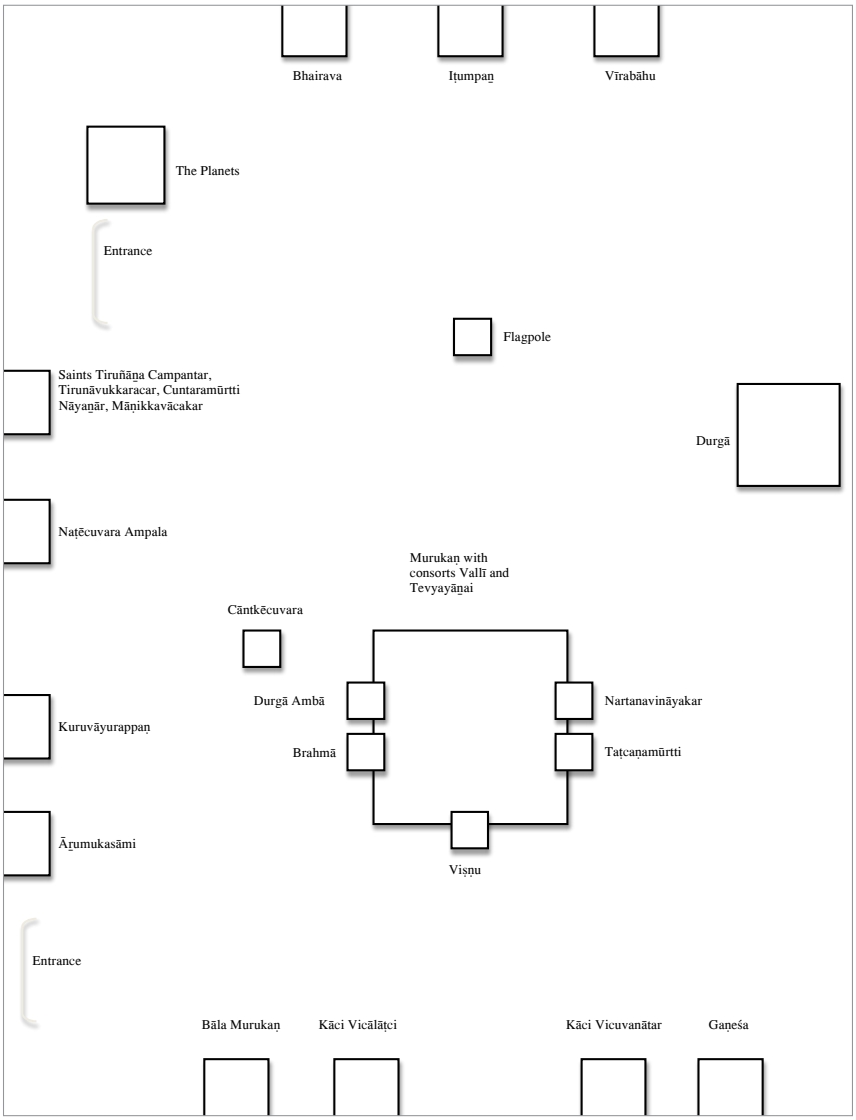


Fig. 3: Floor plan of the deities in the main shrine room, top floor of the temple. Image created by the author.

pose of the Indian temple is to serve as a place to house the *mūrti*, or divine image of the god.

The sanctum's placement on the second floor poses a dilemma, however. Such a temple design would not be found in a Tamil temple in India because the deities should traditionally always have direct contact with the earth. Waghorne and Clothey note that the deities of some temples in the United States are also located on the second floor. In these American temples, columns of dirt were included under the sanctums, connecting the deities to the earth.[31] Similarly, the architects of the Highgatehill Murugan Temple used the same creative solution for this requisite, using copper pipes filled with sand under each separate image. These pipes allow the temple to be adaptive in design while maintaining tradition.

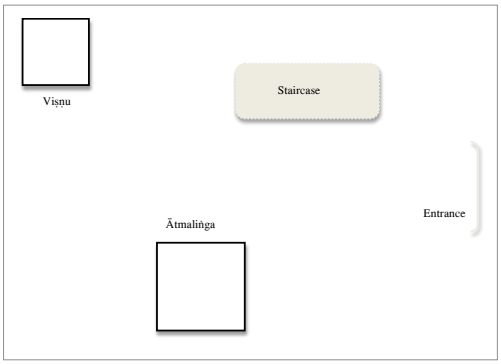


Fig. 4: Floor plan of the deities outside of the main shrine room, top floor of the temple. Image created by the author.

Although Thomas, Waghorne, and Geaves have included the gods of the Highgatehill Muguran Temple in their research, I have included an updated floor plan with deities added more recently (**Fig. 3** and **4**). Smaller shrines for deities commonly associated with god Śiva surround Murugan and his consorts located in the center of the temple floor. While there are many different deities in the temple, according to the Śaivite school of thought, these deities are only believed to be qualities, powers, and functions of one supreme reality, Śiva. As Taylor

31 Fred Clothey, *Ritualizing on the Boundaries: Continuity and Innovation in the Tamil Diaspora* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2006), 52; Waghorne, "The Hindu Gods in a Split-Level World," 116.

succinctly summarizes: "There are many gods but Śiva is one."[32] The temple hall is designed in such a way that the visitor can circumambulate the customary *pradakṣiṇapatha* path in a clockwise direction. All the shrines in the temple, with the exception of the *garbhagṛha*, are set against the outer wall. However, the shrine to the nine planets and moons can be circumambulated independently. Gods are traditionally housed each in their own shrine within the open-air complex of traditional Tamil temples.

Interestingly, although the temple continues to strictly adhere to the Śaiva tradition, a deity of Viṣṇu can be found within the temple, albeit relegated to the space outside of the room containing the central shrine, in a far corner. Members of the temple community strongly opposed plans to install the deity, as evidenced by the rather subjective view of one devotee claiming "some are allergic to Viṣṇu here."[33] It is interesting to note that combining elements of the two major Hindu traditions of Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism within a temple is atypical in the Indian context. When discussing the choice to include Viṣṇu in the temple, Mr. Ranganathan replied that a Śaiva deity would never be found at a Vaiṣṇava temple. Despite the temple's strict sectarian beliefs, this compromise can in a sense be seen as a desire to reach out to the Vaiṣṇava community. Indeed, in a foreign context, it is not practical or even possible in most instances to have temples dedicated to every god as in India. While the temple is a unified sacred space, this accommodation allows devotees of the Highgatehill Murugan Temple to focus on one deity that they may identify with most closely.

One of the most visible differences of the Highgatehill Murugan Temple with that of its counterparts in India is its exterior aesthetic. As a renovated Baptist church, the temple was reconstructed with exposed brick rather than traditional stone. It appears relatively austere when compared to the typically highly ornamented South Indian

32 Taylor, *The Symbolic Construction*, 235.

33 Waghorne, "The Hindu Gods in a Split-Level World," 200.

Fig. 5: A priest standing outside the temple's ornate vimāna. *Photograph by the author.*

temples. Furthermore, the most noticeable missing element is the *gopuram*, an important characteristic of Tamil Dravida architecture. These towering pyramidal gateways traditionally crown the main entrance of the temple. Unfortunately, despite intentions to refashion the destroyed roof of the synagogue into a traditional South Indian style *gopuram*, planning permissions were refused by the local council. The Trust was forced to rebuild the temple in the style of the original church.

However, plans were drawn up to build a *vimāna* within the new roof of the building. The *vimāna* is the principal shrine of the presiding deity in Dravida architecture. It consists of the womb chamber, or *garbhagṛha*, housing the image of the main deities. Today, this towered structure stands in the center of the room on the second floor (**Fig. 5**). In the case of the Highgatehill Murugan Temple, the *vimāna* contains Lord Murugan and his two wives, Vallī and Tevyayāṭai, flanking him on either side. Storied tiers, or *talas*, form the layered pyramid above the shrine.[34] This roof is made up of colorfully decorated sculptures depicting the god's mythology. When gazing at it from below, one can find representations of Murugan and his wives along with saints kneeling before them in devotion. This princi-

34 Branfoot, *Gods on the Move*, 252.

pal tower, however, would normally stand out in the open within the South Indian temple and not under the roof of a building. On either side of the shrine are the *dvārapālaka*s, or door guardians of the sanctum. Running up the center of the temple floor in front of the main shrine are the *yākacālai*, where the sacrificial fire burns for ceremonies and special occasions. This includes an extractor chimney for excess smoke. Next is the *koṭi kampam*, or flagpole, used to mark the beginning and end of festivals. While the flagpole of the Highgatehill Murugan Temple is under the roof of the building, flagpoles in Indian temples are always found outside. This is followed by a long table for offerings.

Devotees entering the traditional Tamil temple often have a long journey to its heart, where the main shrine of the presiding deity is located. Branfoot explains that the Tamil temple "is characterized as a processional space, a space to move through by the approaching devotee moving inward to the heart of the temple and the devotional sight of god."[35] Indeed, in the Highgatehill Murugan Temple, there is arguably the traditional intermediary space between the entrance of the temple on the ground floor and the second floor where the main shrine is located.

Again, various adaptations have been made because of the fact that the temple was not purpose-built and is, rather, contained inside the shell of the former church. The choice to include these innovations to the interior form of this temple can be seen as a process of acculturation. I would argue that it demonstrates the creative reconstruction of a South Indian architectural identity. Moreover, this temple is not disconnected with the country of origin. Although some features may not be found in a typical temple in India, it can be argued that on a conceptual and symbolic level, the historical, cultural, and religious ties remain unfrayed, allowing the temple to function as "authentic."

35 Ibid., 5.

TAMIL IDENTITY VIA ARCHITECTURAL HYBRIDIZATION OF THE TEMPLE'S EXTERIOR

Although the interior of the Highgatehill Murugan Temple reflects an effort to replicate a typical Tamil temple, its exterior features still resemble the original Christian church. In her account of the temple, Waghorne writes that a small "OM" in Tamil script in an upper window "was the only public announcement of a Hindu presence in the large brick church structure."[36] When Waghorne visited the temple in the early 2000s, she noted:

> ... many devotees and donors bemoaned what they perceived as willful obstructionism by borough (local) planning commissions and various safety inspectors in allowing Hindu temples a public face in this city. One founder of a temple called the attitude of many native Londoners 'hypocritical' because, for all of the official talk about multiculturalism, when Hindus apply for planning approval for a new temple, they are frequently delayed or denied on the thinly disguised grounds of the architectural integrity of the neighborhood.[37]

Because it was one of the first temples of its kind in London, the need to build the space was more pressing than recreating a truly authentic Indian architecture.

When I first visited the Highgatehill Murugan Temple in the summer of 2013, the building was at a point of transformation. Although the town council refused permission to reconstruct the roof of the building with a *gopuram* in the 1980s, the board of trustees recently reapplied and received approval from the town council for a roof reconstruction and other changes. Commonly referred to as the "Lift

36 Waghorne, *Diaspora of the Gods*, 196.

37 Ibid., 201-202.

Fig. 6: The new "Lift Project" plans. Image source: http://highgatehillmurugan.org.

Project" around the temple, the major renovation work that is currently in progress includes the installation of a lift, as well as a front extension incorporating a *gopuram* elevation (**Fig. 6**). The new lift will accommodate elderly and disabled devotees as well as mothers with prams who patronize the temple. The front extension and construction of a lift shaft will be completed in four months, while work on the *gopuram* and other structural work to the façade will take another three months to complete. The same block unit strategy that was used to fundraise the reconstruction of the destroyed building in the late 1970s will help to finance the current project. The front elevation of the construction has been divided into equal units, which can be purchased by devotees of the temple. The television screens on the ground and top floor of the temple describe to visitors the work that is taking place and appeal to the community to donate to the Lift Project. A board in the main hall, updated on a weekly basis, displays for devotees the amount of funds that have been collected for the project.

The website of the Highgatehill Murugan Temple conveys the

community's hopes that the building's new façade will give it "a Saiva Temple appearance and identity."[38] This identity carries with it a particular architectural heritage that will be continued in London. As Lal notes: "People who migrate and settle carry with them 'cultural artifacts' – ideas and values in terms of religion and artistic endeavor."[39] It is through these "cultural artifacts," whether a deity of Murugan or a *gopuram*, that the Tamil community is able to visually demarcate itself in a plural society such as London. Adding new South Indian architectural elements to the building will help to legitimize its identity as a Śaiva temple. The new façade of the temple raises not only the issue of identity, but also authenticity, a desired attribute of Hindu temples outside of the homeland. Parker suggests that authenticity "appears as an internally ironic form of value that is fabricated by historical, economic, and disciplinary practices and mythically naturalized as purely objective."[40] The question then arises: do the new plans for the Highgatehill Murugan Temple successfully create the experience of the traditional Tamil architectural style for its devotees? Tensions arise between the desire for the continuation of tradition and the pressure to adapt to the changes of modernity. In many instances, a balance must be struck between the restrictions of the host country and the particular needs of the diasporic community to assert an identity.

How can this new architectural form of sacred space be defined? The building represents the intersection of two cultures, namely, the host country and the homeland, as the architecture combines aspects of both. I argue that this modern design reflects a strategy of architectural hybridization. These plans combine seemingly contradictory design elements, reflecting an innovative expression of archi-

38 Highgatehill Murugan Temple Website, accessed 10th September, 2013, http://www.highgatehillmurugan.org.

39 Brij Lal, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2006), 18.

40 Parker, "Text and Practice in South Asian Art," 28.

tecture. I draw on Mehra's analysis of the architectural form of Hindu temples in Chicago, which he understands as a process of "cultural hybridization."[41] Mehra explains the term as follows:

> ...the various processes of drawing on the values, beliefs, and practices of two or more cultural formations in ways that are new and different from original formations, yet which incorporate and assimilate elements from both of them.[42]

I contend that this argument is very apt when examining the changes being made to the Highgatehill Murugan Temple. However, while the temples that Mehra analyzes are purpose-built, the Highgatehill Murugan Temple provides a different case study as the community is restricted to adapting an existing building. Consequently, the Highgatehill Murugan Temple represents the concept of hybrid architecture as the building quite literally fuses key features of the Tamil Dravida language of architecture into a typical London building.

The current project is significant, as the new façade ideally will strengthen devotees' spiritual ties with their respective homelands. As Mehra argues, the Hindu temple in the diaspora provides a spatial setting for memories of myths of the homeland.[43] Just as sensorial experiences, like the sound of chanting or the smell of incense can have emotional responses to devotees visiting this temple, architectural symbols can also trigger memories of the homeland and evoke powerful feelings of nostalgia. These symbols may construct imaginings for those second-generation Tamils who do not have memories of the homeland. Mehra correctly highlights that the temple in the Tamil migratory space serves "to provide emotional, mental, physical and

41 Mehra, "Hindu Temples and Asian-Indian Diasporic Identity," 93.

42 Ibid., 93.

43 Ibid., 100.

conceptual connections with India."[44] Moreover, the new architecture, shaped by its new London context, will make the temple into a physical space that serves as an important identity marker for the Tamil community. Arguably, the temple will derive its authority as an "authentic" temple from these traditional elements of the Southern Indian style of architecture.

The head engineer of the project, Mr. Jayaraman, conveyed his hope that the new façade would help the temple not only to prosper, but also to become a landmark for the community. When asked where inspiration for the new project came from, he pointed to a photograph of the tallest Murugan statue in the world in Malaysia that hung on the wall in the small temple office. This statue dominates the entrance of the Batu Caves where the famous Sri Subramaniyar Hindu Temple is located. Impressively, the statue stands 42.7 meters high and is made up of 1,550 cubic meters of concrete, 250 tons of steel bars, and 300 liters of gold paint from Thailand. The ambitious project was crafted by fifteen sculptors and took over three years to complete.[45] In particular, Mr. Jayaraman had wanted the chief architect of the project, specialized in the construction of Agamaic temples, and his best craftsmen to renovate the London temple.

The temple derives its authenticity from experienced specialist architects, *sthapati*s, educated in the construction of traditional religious architecture. The skilled craftsmen currently working on the project arrived in the summer of 2013 from the city of Chidambaram in Tamil Nadu. They will remain for the entire duration of the renovation project. As well as attracting many pilgrims to its famous temples, the city of Chidambaram is known for its families of skilled craftsmen and artists who pass down their traditional skills from father to son. These specialists were chosen by the trustees in particular because

44 Ibid., 101.

45 "Tallest Murugan Statue in the World Unveiled at Batu Caves," *Bernama: The Malaysian National News Agency*, Kuala Lumpur, 29 January 2006, http://www.bernama.com.my/bernama/v3/news_lite.php?id=178027.

of their proven track record, having worked on projects abroad in Singapore as well as Malaysia. The qualifications of these men, including a thorough knowledge of the *Āgamas*, will contribute to legitimizing the temple's authenticity. Significantly, temple priests conducted a *pūjā* to receive blessings from the deities before work commenced in order to protect the workmen during the construction and ensure that the renovations ran smoothly.

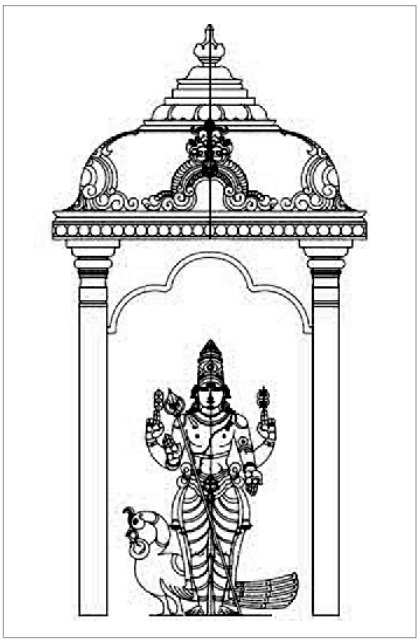


Fig. 7: The new statue of Murugan. Image adapted from http://highgate-hillmurugan.org.

According to Mr. Ranganathan, the main arched window in front of the building cannot be changed under a preservation order from the local council. However, new key features will be added to the temple exterior. Along with ornamental moldings and pillars, two door guardians will be placed in front of the newly extended entrance of the temple, along with two statues on either side of the original arch, representing Śiva's two sons Gaṇeśa and Murugan in their typical iconography. Most importantly, a *gopuram* elevation will be added. These new elements represent symbols associated with Tamil tradition to which members of the community assign meaning. These significant symbols from the homeland, perhaps not understood by those outside their community, further aid group identity formation. I argue that the Murugan statue in particular can be seen as a symbol that reinforces a Tamil identity for devotees.

The new statue of Murugan on the right hand side of the arch will essentially be a replica of the tall Murugan in Malaysia (**Fig. 7**). This Murugan sculpture reflects a particular mythology associated with

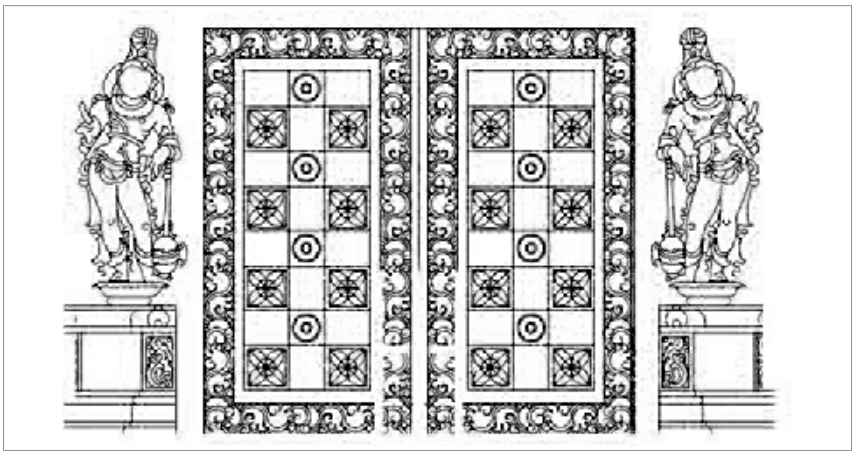


Fig. 8: Plans for the new temple entrance including two door guardians. Image adapted from http://highgatehillmurugan.org.

Tamil culture. The sculpture depicts the typical iconographic depictions of Murugan in his Tiruccentūr form. In this form, he has four hands. Two hands bear the *abhaya mudrā*, the "fear-not" gesture, and the *varadā mudrā*, denoting the granting of wishes. He also holds a *vajra* and carries a spear of energy called the *śakti vēl*, a gift from his mother Parvati. The sculpture also includes the significant symbol of the *vēl*, or a leaf-shaped lance. According to Clothely, the word is in fact synonymous with Murugan, as he his known as Vēlaṉ, the bearer of the lance.[46] While Murugan's weapon can have multiple meanings, Clothey notes that the lance represents the god's destructive power as well as creative power.[47] More importantly, it is understood by devotees as an instrument of spiritual victory.[48] As in this statue, the lance is most commonly depicted slanted diagonally and resting against Murugan's right solider. The only difference between the sculpture in Malaysia and the smaller London one is the choice to include his

46 Clothey, *The Many Faces of Murukan*, 191.

47 Ibid., 192 – 193.

48 Ibid., 192 – 193.

vāhana, or vehicle, the peacock, behind him. The peacock is arguably the most important animal in Murugan symbolism, as the color and fertility of the bird is often equated with the vibrant beauty of the hills where the god resides.[49]

Another unusual feature in the design of these deities on either side of the arch is that they will be protected by a glass enclosure. This would certainly not be done in India. The engineer of the project conveyed his concern that outsiders of the community may throw stones or eggs at the statutes of Gaṇeśa and Murugan. This not only highlights a sense of exclusion, but carries with it connotations of violence. This suggests that the diasporic Tamil community may not perceive itself as being fully accepted by the host country. All too often, minority communities experience feelings of alienation and marginalization. Door guardian figures, or *dvārapāla*s, are a typical architectural feature marking the entrance of many Hindu temples (**Fig. 8**). Male guardian figures stand on either side of the newly carved wooden doors of the temple. Holding a large club, they protect the sacred space of the temple. One hand bears the *tarjanī mudrā* with vigilantly raised forefinger, warning the devotee to be mindful when approaching the sacred space (**Fig. 9**).

It is also important to give a voice to the craftsmen involved in the project. Scholarship discussing the Hindu temple in the diaspora tends to highlight the many differences rather than similarities with temples of the homeland. During an interview with one of the craftsmen, I asked him how his work in London differed from his work in India. Intriguingly, he simply replied that there was no difference. Indeed, Parker begins his study of contemporary South Indian architects and sculptors by explicitly stating: "There is a striking difference between the aesthetic judgments of the living South Indian architects and sculptors who build Hindu temples and academic specialists who write about South Asian art."[50] I realized that perhaps a preconceived

49 Ibid., 181.

50 Samuel K. Parker,"The Matter of Value Inside and Out: Aesthetic Categories in Contemporary HinduTemple Arts," *Ars Orientalis* 22 (1992): 97.

expectation to look for divergences from tradition influenced my own aesthetic judgment of the Highgatehill Murugan Temple, while the craftsmen I spoke to made no such distinction. Parker reminds us that the perception of the academic art historian is not more authoritative or legitimate than those of the Tamil *sthapathi*.[51]

The choice of building materials used for the current renovation as well as the techniques used are also of significance. Because the traditionally used stone is very costly, the material used to construct the new ornamental features of the temple is concrete. The craftsmen sieve sand into a fine powder, which acts as a bonding agent in a mixture of gravel and water to create cement. Steel bars frame and reinforce the sculptures. For creating the new ornamentation, the workers start by using a drawing board carved out of wood as a guide to then create moldings and pillars (**Fig. 10**). Then craftsmen from India come to the temple to paint the statues once they are made.

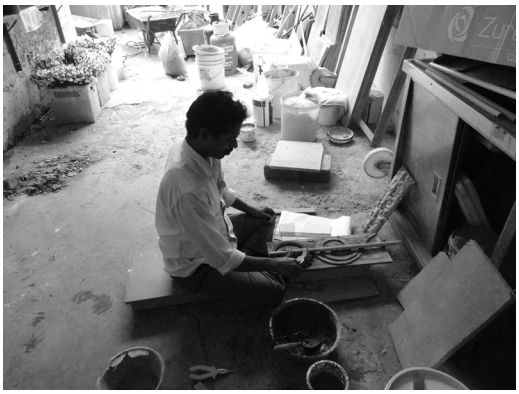


Fig. 10: Craftsman working from a drawing board. Photograph by the author.

One of the most obvious differences between the Highgatehill Murugan Temple and a typical Tamil temple is that the *gopuram* was conspicuously absent. This architectural element is arguably the most iconic feature of South Indian architecture, in its conspicuous adornment of the entrance gateway of a temple. Branfoot highlights the importance of the presence of *gopurams* in the landscape of Tamil Nadu: "The first sight of the temple seen by an approaching devotee is of the *gopurams* that mark

51 Ibid., 107.

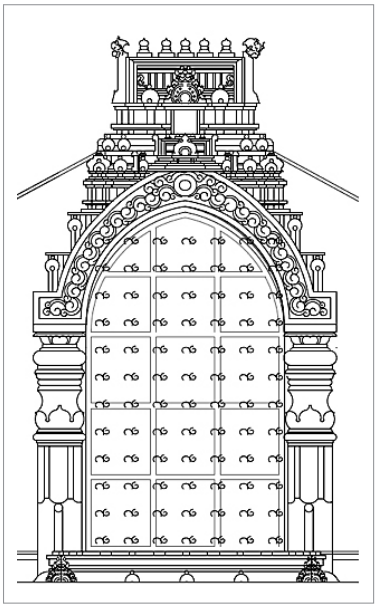


Fig. 11: New gopuram elevation incorporated into the building's original arch. Image adapted from http://highgatehillmurugan.org.

the outermost walls, often towering above all surrounding structures to this day."[52] Rectangular in shape, they vary in size from modest, such as the Highgatehill Murugan Temple, to monumental in some grand Tamil temples. On the top of all *gopurams* is the barrel-vaulted *śālā* roof.[53] The new *gopuram* elevation at Highgatehill will be incorporated around the original arched window of the building (**Fig. 11**). The new structure is yet another demonstration of how Indian architects have been able to incorporate key elements of Dravida architecture creatively into a local London building. Despite having described the planned changes currently being carried out on the temple exterior, I have unfortunately been unable to trace the progress of the entire project to completion. The façade is still under construction, however, and the final outcome of the design is indeed a topic that would merit further investigation.

This resourceful adaptation of the façade into a building that will visually have a Tamil character and identity can be defined as an architectural hybrid. I argue that there are two points of departure in design, namely architectural homogeneity and architectural hybridization. While architectural homogeneity reflects uniform composition or character, architectural hybridization is a blend of two different elements. The integration of various cultural icons and symbols, traditional architectural

52 Branfoot, *Gods on the Move*, 53.

53 Ibid., 54.

methods and strategies from the home country, and the already existing building in the host country create an intriguing juxtaposition. Mehra describes these temples as creating "a new architectural idiom, appropriate for and unique to the new cultural and spatial context."[54] This is why Hindu temples of the diaspora "acquire a new form in the truest sense."[55]

Indeed, the distinctive Tamil Dravida architectural features will contrast greatly with the surrounding urban landscape of London. The renovations made to this existing building will visually distinguish it from the row of uniform buildings on either side. Trouillet rightly argues that temples can be seen as "territorial markers" in the public space, which affirm their distinctiveness and difference.[56] The new design suggests some degree of resistance. Instead of simply assimilating with the host country, the community hopes to rebuild authentic traditions in the South Indian style. However, the new façade of the temple presents some duality. On the one hand, there are architectural elements that reflect the "traditional" Tamil temple, while on the other, the building demonstrates several original design solutions in the new context of London. I argue that given the limitations within a foreign context, the Highgatehill Murugan Temple succeeds in reproducing an authentic experience of worship in the eyes of devotees. The temple can be defined as a "typical" Tamil temple because of the very fact that devotees have assigned that particular meaning to the space. Moreover, the façade creates architectural ties with the homeland, making it an emblem of the Tamil community in the London urban landscape. Clothey sees the temple as affirming "a world – a psychic space – in which the community lives and acts out its identity."[57] Indeed, the new architecture gives expression to this group identity.

54 Mehra, "Hindu Temples and Asian-Indian Diasporic Identity," 100.

55 Ibid., 102.

56 Trouillet, "Overseas Temples and Tamil Migratory Space," 8.

57 Clothey, *Ritualizing on the Boundaries*, 51.

CONCLUSION: FUTURE TRAJECTORIES IN THE STUDY OF MODERN TAMIL TEMPLES

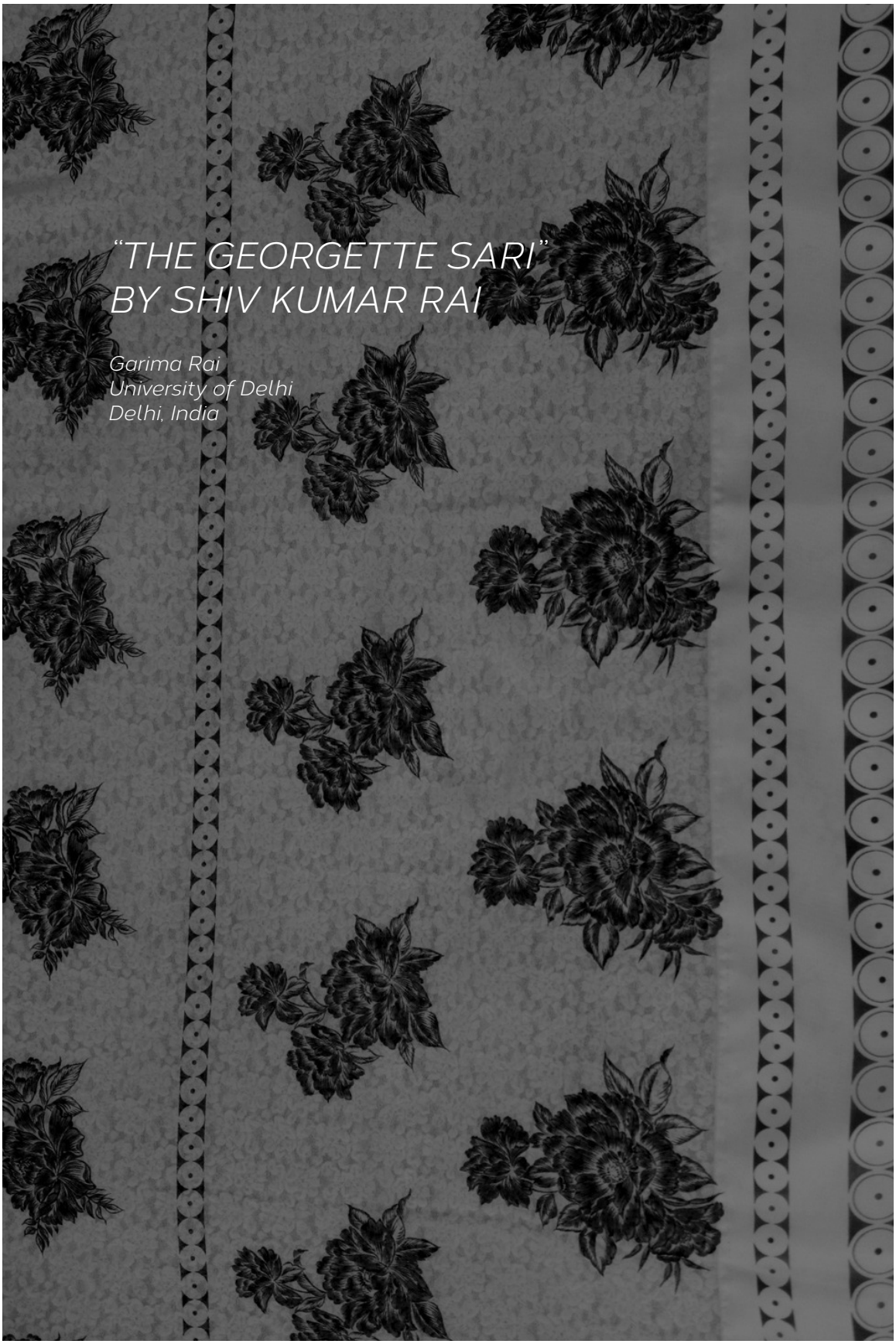
My investigation centers on how a community seeks to replicate the traditional temple outside of the Tamil milieu. The architectural strategy of adaptation reflects a transformation in traditions, specifically, the change in the form of the temple outside of Tamil Nadu. I argue that Hindu temples are not stagnant, but rather fluid structures that are reinvented to suit particular circumstances. The architecture of the Highgatehill Murugan Temple gives expression to a particular community identity. There is an overarching sense of shared history and heritage that forges bonds of belonging within the temple's community. The forms of worship, names of resident gods, and most importantly, the architecture reflect a South Indian temple. More specifically, these elements reflect a Tamil ethnicity with a Śaiva Siddhānta religious affiliation. Murugan is a deity that particularly embodies this Tamil consciousness. Therefore, it is the Tamil region that informs the architectural expression of identity more so than the religious tradition.

As one of the craftsmen of the Highgatehill Murugan Temple aptly summarized, while the temple may not be "typical," it tries to be as close to a traditional temple as possible. Arguably, the temple is able to derive its authenticity through efforts to remain faithful to architectural elements in Murugan temples of the homeland. The Highgatehill Murugan Temple's novel appearance attests to the successful incorporation of the Tamil Dravida language of architecture within the limitations of an urban London context. Despite efforts to remain faithful to the normative temple form, several adaptations had to be made. The Highgatehill Murugan Temple's interior reflects these creative innovations. Moreover, the exterior reflects a strategy of incorporating South Indian architectural idioms to an already existing building, together forming something new. This can be defined as a hybrid style in which diverse conceptions are combined to create a coherent whole. A coping strategy of adaptation is used, the result

being that the temple invokes the home country of India while at the same time reminding the observer of its setting in London.

The recreation of traditions in a foreign context inevitably requires reinvention. Intriguingly, in the process of trying to retain the past, a new future appears. In sum, the Highgatehill Murugan Temple demonstrates how architecture not only reflects the aspirations and needs of a community abroad, but also serves as an important icon of Tamil identity. This temple illustrates a desire for the community to establish permanent cultural roots in a foreign location. I hope that this study highlights the merit of further research utilizing visually and materially oriented perspectives on new trajectories and trends of modern Tamil temples.[58]

58 I wish to convey my heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Arun Gopalakrishnan for his unwavering support throughout this project.



"THE GEORGETTE SARI" BY SHIV KUMAR RAI

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

One of the great Indian storytellers in Nepali, Shiv Kumar Rai (1919-1995) is well known for his depiction of village and town life in Darjeeling. The township of Darjeeling, founded by the British in the nineteenth century, lends its name to the world famous tea grown in and around the northern district of West Bengal, India.

Rai produced some remarkable works of fiction, such as the short story "*Macha ko Mol*" ("The Price of Fish"), a novel, and a number of radio plays. His literary idioms are redolent of rural and urban settings and have the anecdotal quality of a garrulous narrator. Bringing to life the experiences he gathered variously as a teacher, political figure, radio producer, publisher, editor and eminent public figure, his stories range from intense subjective utterances to works of imagination across time and space. He traversed different parts of the hills and plains in the course of his working life, which accounts for some memorable character sketches inspired by figures one might encounter in these lands. One such example is the following scene: a hunter kills a beautiful male *danfe*, a fowl found in the higher reaches of the Himalayas, leaving the female *danfe* futilely waiting for her partner's return in heavy snow. This moment of pain and pity, fraught with the irony of such a cruel act in the land of the Buddha, is most dramatically conceived in the form of his lyrical poem *Danfe Chari* (1954).

Devising a similar interplay of emotions in a more subtle way, the story of Dhanlacchi's desire for a georgette sari presents an opportunity for thinking about the larger social boundaries that restrict us even today. In this context it is the life of a tea garden worker who imagines herself in juxtaposition with the town of Darjeeling. The establishment of over eighty tea gardens in the Darjeeling Hills and the outlying *terai* areas during British India permanently determined the relationship of the gardens vis-à-vis the bustling town-

ships. A large number of people were brought from Nepal to work these plantations, and their settlements were accordingly concentrated across the tea gardens with precarious conduits to the town. The plantations were under the munificence of the tea company management, resulting in the perceived backwardness of these plantations in comparison to the townships. The townships, seen as potential seats where 'culture' lay preserved, contrasted with the plantations, marked by the perception of superstition and 'mumbo jumbo.' Even today, tea plantations still tend to be imagined as enclosed or isolated spaces. However, over time, these conduits have given way to opportunities for movement towards urban spaces.

In the history of mankind, the individual spirit inspired by the quest for something better has always broken the limitations that restrict one to a life akin to slavery. This story captures one such moment in the making as the protagonist, through the resourcefulness of her everyday life, imagines herself elevated above her station. As her struggle for the sari progresses, it unearths the discomfiting realities of her life as a tea plucker, but ultimately the writer appears to have something else in mind to resolve this fraught tension.

The georgette sari, such a cause for tension in this story, had become famous in India and in Darjeeling by the Forties and Fifties of the twentieth century. Mostly a town or urban fashion, the photographic record of women genteelly dressed in floral printed georgettes attests to the garment as both a sign of modern dress, and a signifier that those who wore them could afford such luxury items. In other words, the delicate nature of the fabric itself implied a similar nature for its wearers. This delicacy itself plays a determining role in the narrative of the following story.

TRANSLATION OF THE TEXT[1]

It was the rainy season. The rain had abruptly stopped after a torrential downpour. Tender maize shoots washed in the shower stood fresh and tall in the recently fallow fields. The smell of sun-scorched earth washed in the rain spread everywhere. Countless insects were swarming out of tiny holes at the base of the broom plants growing along the edges of the terraced field. Crows and sparrows were wheeling in the sky, speckled hens with stretched necks ran after insects in the verandah, and a rainbow had formed from the tip of the Rakti rivulet to the bottom of the dry grass fields.

After four o'clock, the coolies, having stocked their tea leaves in the godown, were returning home. Momentarily, the main pathway of the tea garden came to life. The oldies clutching their rain gear under their arms formed a single file while the young folk would frolic and brighten up the path with their laughter and flirtation. Soon the paths forked into trails separating from one another and the hills resounded from afar with their voices, "See you *jetha*;[2] see you *kanchi*[3] ... so long."

The sun was about to set and the rainbow on the other side of the hill had almost disappeared when Dhanlacchi came home thoroughly drenched in the rain. After putting away her rain gear and bamboo basket in one corner she came out to the verandah and squeezed the end of her *faria*. She began to curse aloud, "What's this? It rains like anything; when it rains it pours as though a milk-can has been overturned!" A pool of water had collected in the verandah. She raised the *faria*, the lower garment of her dress, and began washing away the dirt from her leg with that water. There were leech bites, and clots of blood had formed in places where they had sucked. She turned her legs and began to pick at the leeches. Fresh red blood oozed from the leech bites on those fair,

1 The following is a translation of Shiv Kumar Rai's short story "*Georgette ko Sāṛī*" from the collection *Yātrī* (1956).

2 Eldest-born boy.

3 Youngest-born girl.

sturdy calves. Just then her mother came out shouting, "Chyauki, look, your sister has been bloodied by leeches! Get a ladle of ash and put it there." Chyauki brought a ladle of hot ash from the fire-lighting place and put it on the leeches. The greedy leeches began to squirm in it.

There were five of them living under the same roof. The eldest brother had got married and had a separate household. He worked as the tea maker in the godown. Their father also worked in the godown as the watchman. Dhanlacchi and her youngest brother, whom Chyauki looked after, went to work in the tea garden.

This season the tea leaves had come out very healthy. The garden coolies were already so busy plucking leaves that extra hands from the villages had to be called in. Turgid green buds had come out. The young women counted—two leaves and a bud—as they plucked the tea leaves. Dhanlacchi was very skillful in plucking tea leaves. She left her friends way behind when it came to plucking and this season she showed greater enthusiasm. She would finish her share of plucking in the early half of the day and earn her pay. She had made plans with her friends to buy a georgette sari for Dasai that year. There was still some time left for Dasai but the plan to go and watch the sights and sounds in Darjeeling wearing the georgette sari had already been made. She had even asked the cloth merchant to get several georgettes since Phoolmati and Dhanmaya would also be buying them.

Dasai was around the corner in no time. Dhanlacchi would go ten times to the merchant's shop and ask if the sari had come but the merchant would say with unctuous lips, "Oh *jethi*! Why such haste? There is still some time left for Dasai to come. I have ordered great stuff for you from Calcutta."

Pleased, Dhanlacchi would say, "Yes, and if I don't get to wear it in Dasai I am for sure going to uproot those two remaining teeth of yours!"

Right from the onset of Navratha people began to crowd in the merchant's shop. Otherwise, the saying "eat and dress when alive; later death flattens us all" would go in vain. Both the elder and younger merchants were having a tough time satisfying the customers and remained busy from sun rise to sun set.

Successful salesmen study the psychology of the customers. Things like who gets affected by what and which article catches whose fancy can be easily divined by the merchants, and therefore they talk to everyone with great tact. For the merchants it was like *asar ko pandhra*, the busiest day of planting paddy in the fields. They never let anyone return empty handed. If the head officer, doctor, or sardar from the tea garden came to their shop, they never failed to offer them a seat along with a cheroot and matchstick saying, "Sardar sahib, shall I get some refreshments for you?" If the sardar said, "O! I haven't brought enough money. I will settle the account next time," then the merchant would reply with ostensible generosity, "Why bother about money? It's your shop. Please take what you will. Pay when you will. That's all!" If someone insisted on the account being noted down in writing, then showing great credibility he would say, "What's there to note? Don't I know you, sir?" But when it came to the coolies he did not give them even a single paisa on credit and would tick them off saying ten things. However, if they still insisted then he would say, "Alright, deposit whatever you have by way of gold and silver as your security."

Almost everyone had bought clothes for Dasai and Dhanlacchi's sari had still not come. On the day of Phoolpati, when almost all the clothes had run out, Dhanmaya and Phoolmati began to feel that they would have to do with the leftovers! They thought that waiting like this would not do and that something would be better than nothing, even if a speckled *faria* had to be bought. They went to Dhanlacchi, "Listen friend, it seems like the merchant has fooled us! When will that georgette come if it hasn't even come till Phoolpati? Even if it is a speckled *faria* we have to buy one." Dhanlacchi did not budge an inch. When Phoolmati and Dhanmaya returned with *faria* from the merchant's shop Dhanlacchi too began to wonder if the merchant had really lied to them. This made her sour at heart. She immediately left for the merchant's shop and asked, "What is this today-tomorrow thing you keep saying? If the sari isn't coming then say so, but why lie to others?"

A lot of people had gathered in the shop, and as he cut out a piece

of cloth he said, "Why should we lie? The stuff will be coming tomorrow. A new bundle has arrived in Jorebangla and I have sent *kancha* to sort them out." Dhanlacchi felt the same joy and assurance at this statement as a student caught between passing and failing feels when he is told: 'You have passed.'

The following day the new bundle arrived. There were three colors of georgette in three different lots. Dhanlacchi was dazzled. She would pick up the white georgette, caress it, then pick up the black one and leave it, and pick up the saffron one and ponder over it. After fifteen minutes of inspection, she decided that white looked better on her and asked the merchant to cut the cloth from the bundle. She had already bought the blouse, scarf, and stole to go with the sari so she did not have to buy them. Only after she had asked for the cloth to be cut out did she realize that her money could be insufficient. When she unfolded her cloth money belt, a total amount of ten rupees, five annas, and one paise came out, whereas the merchant calculated the cost of the georgette to be fifteen rupees, eleven annas, and one paisa.

Dhanlacchi said that she would pay the remaining five rupees and six annas with next month's wage but the merchant wouldn't listen. Finally she left one of her silver bangles as security for the sari. Nevertheless, she was happy that her long cherished desire had been fulfilled. She told herself that a bangle was something one had put on from childhood. Besides, her fancy for bangles was now over. So what if her wrists looked empty for a week or two? She would redeem the bangle with the next wage but imagine what would have happened if she hadn't got the georgette? Even the head office clerk and sardar had ordered georgette for their daughters. This way Dhanlacchi was able to eschew her love for the bangle. When she reached home she removed the other bangle too, covered it with the georgette sari, and put it away in a tin box.

Dusk had fallen. Her mother was serving rice for Dhanlacchi and her sister. Their father had not yet returned from work. The flames on the burning maize cob were flickering in the fireplace. Her old mother had found something off about the way in which her daughter was

eating her food. It was then that her eyes fell on Dhanlacchi's empty wrists and she immediately asked, "Where are your bangles?" To this Dhanlacchi coolly replied, "I have given it to the carver at Bagdhara to make some money out of it." Before the old woman could open her mouth to say anything, Chyauki screamed out even as she was being elbowed by her sister, "She left them with the merchant to buy that sari. O look at her pinching me just because I told you." After that, the secret was out. The old woman began cursing, "Despite telling you ten times not to buy it, you ended up buying one! Out of everyone in the world, this cursed woman had to have that georgette. Of what use are such fancy clothes to workers like us in forests and tea gardens? We were once young but such mischief never occurred to us. What were you thinking of while you were putting in so much money on a piece of rag? Now wear it—your mother's shroud!"

As she picked up the rice scattered around her plate Dhanlacchi said, "Why are you shouting like this? Fine. I will return it tomorrow, the one thing that I have ever bought out of my heart's desire, since it has caused you so much pain!"

"If one can afford it then of course go ahead and wear it every day! Why should it cause me pain? Once you get married and the burden falls on your head, you will come to understand!" The quarrel between mother and daughter continued for a long time.

On the ninth day of the festival, when animals are sacrificed, the tea garden was shut down. Everyone was busy with their own affairs. The buffalo bought from Panighatta was slaughtered by Bagarey next to the water spring and everywhere people were feasting on meat. A *madal* could be heard being played in the upper reaches of the hill, while across the river, a motley crowd of young men and women gathered around a swing. The swishing sound of the swing cutting through the air was carried across to the opposite hills. Dhanlacchi was looking in that direction, immersed in deep thought. On this day, even amid such difficult circumstances, she could not give up her desire for the georgette sari. If an animal such as the fox is said to grow hoarse in

its youth, then Dhanlacchi was human in her desire! After all, in this wide world, there must be someone who noticed her too? She must have felt like going in front of the "overlord of her heart" in fineries, but why couldn't her mother understand this? These thoughts sent pangs of inexpressible sorrow to the deepest recesses of her heart. As a result two drops of tears fell like molten wax, but were soon evaporated by the heat of her stifled heart even before they could harden.

Something came to her mind. She turned and went inside the house, took out the georgette sari from the tin box, and began to make tiny folds. Chyauki came to her and said, "Let me wear it, too, sister."

"As if I will! Go and tattle to Mother."

"From now on I won't tattle."

"No, I won't give it to you!"

At that Chyauki began to scream, "Look, Mother! She is not letting me wear it even once!"

Their mother had been listening to their bickering from the other room, and taking sides with the younger daughter she shouted, "Let her have it for a while! Let her also satisfy her whim. It won't disappear if she wears it."

"She will only drag it and make it dirty."

"Drape it higher so it won't drag."

It was not clear if Chyauki had draped the sari or just knotted it at her waist, but she could be seen walking about the front yard, thinking of herself as the prettiest girl in the world! As she was walking about, she went near the dish-washing place to get something when she suddenly slipped and fell on her back. The sari became dirty. Dhanlacchi came screaming, "Look mother! She ruined the sari. Remove it right now. There is no need for you to wear it." She began to collect the sari smudged in dirt. Their mother also came out running and gave two hard slaps to Chyauki: "What did you go there for? Why did you have to go there wearing this kind of clothing?" Chyauki started to wail aloud.

Dhanlacchi was struck by the fact that she had to wash the sari even before she could wear it. She wondered if it would shrink after washing.

Amid much misgiving she washed the sari with great care and spread it out to dry on the bamboo frame at the back of the house. Dhanlacchi's mother was plaiting her hair in the verandah when she saw her coming from the kitchen garden with a bunch of spinach in her hands and asked,

"Didn't you go and wash the sari? Where have you put it to dry?" Dhanlacchi sat down with a sullen expression.

With a heavy heart she said, "At the back of the house."

"But I didn't see it."

"Isn't it there on the bamboo frame?"

"Not if it has fallen somewhere."

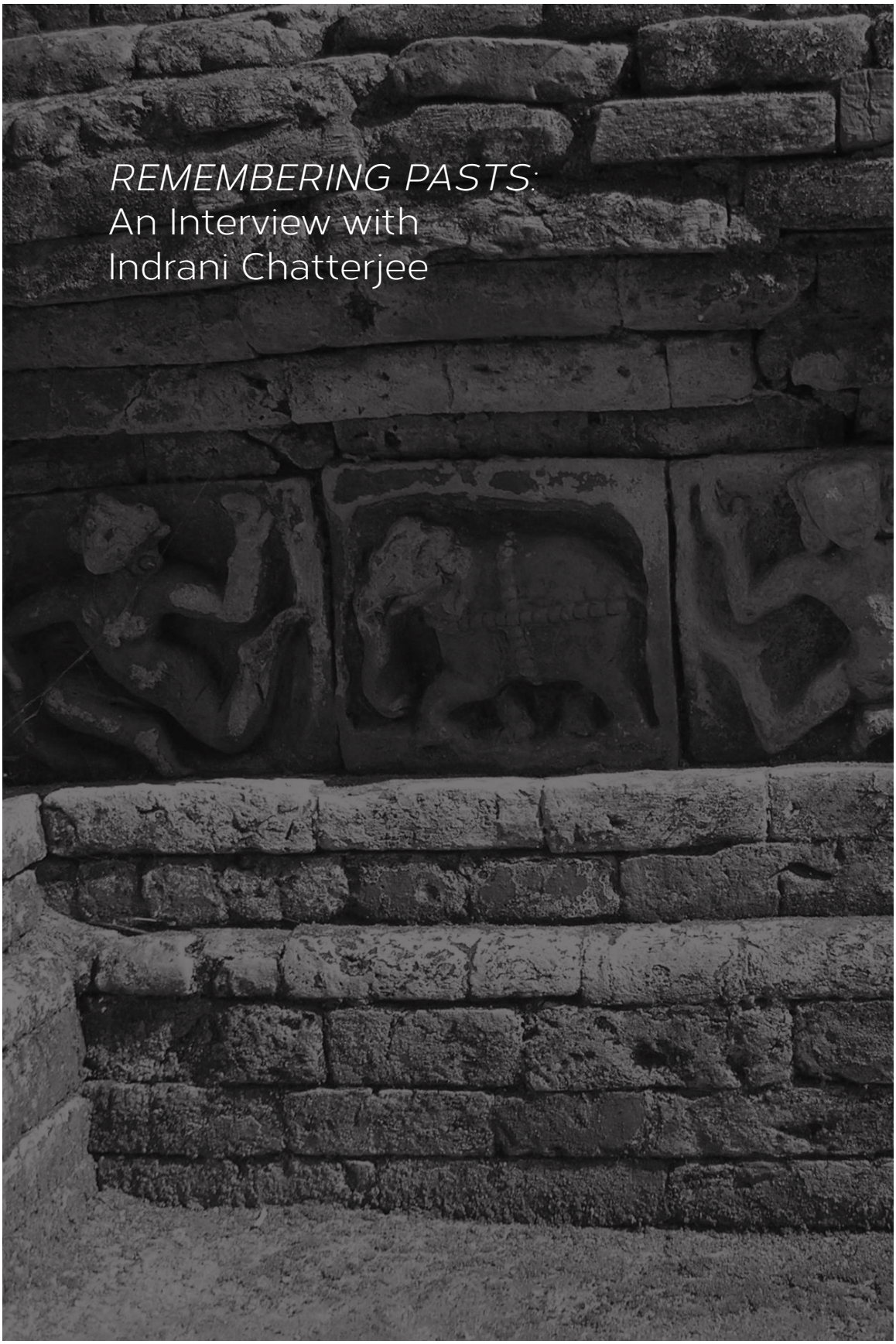
Both the mother and daughter immediately went to the back of the house looking for it. How surprising! The georgette sari put out to dry wasn't there! They thought that it must have blown away and went looking for it, but could not find it anywhere. Suspecting that Chyauki must have hidden it somewhere out of spite they went looking for her, but she was still sulking and sniffing inside the house. If it had not fallen into someone else's hands then it ought to be here somewhere? For sure, it must have fallen into someone else's hands.

Only a while ago a man in tattered clothes who had never been seen before had come begging. Just when they were beginning to think that it must have been that beggar, Kainla Magar dropped in. Being quick, agile, and full of energy, the sardar always called Kainla Magar to slaughter and prepare the goat. That day a goat was to be slaughtered at the sardar's house and he had come to get a *khukuri*. He also did some kind of healing in the village. If the children began to vomit or had dysentery, then everyone said, "Now someone go and quickly fetch Kainla Magar." In turn, he too averted the occurrence of inauspicious events by chanting charms in the water or 'shaking off' ailments with the sprinkling of ashes. Some had their problems alleviated, while others showed no change at all. Nevertheless, in their hour of need, they all depended on him.

As soon as the old woman saw him, she said, "O! what perfect timing you have! Come in. You can take that *khukuri* later but first there

is a prediction you have to make. A sari that Dhanlacchi just washed and put out to dry has disappeared. It is nowhere to be found. We have been looking for it all over the place but we can't even find a trace of it." On a bronze plate Dhanlacchi brought two handfuls of rice grains, two annas, and a couple of marigolds. Kainla Magar sat on a low stool made of maize cobs and began his prediction. At first he parted the grains on one side of the plate, put some grains in the center, and applied the force of his index finger to arrange them. After fifteen minutes had lapsed he shook his head and said, "I see that it is very difficult to get that sari. It has fallen into another's hand, and that person is from this village. The prediction tells that it is an unmarried woman, dark in color, with a round face. The door of her house is shown to be facing north."

There was an exchange of glances between mother and daughter, and the mother said aloud, "I had already suspected as much. Who else could it be but Lakandray's daughter. Didn't you say she was your 'friend'?" Just then Goray Baidar was heard shouting from above, "Whose cloth is in that wretched condition?" Mother, daughter, and healer all went running in that direction. Above the cowshed in a thorny bush of wild berries, half of what used to be the georgette sari hung in tatters, while the other half was in the mouth of a tethered cow which had no idea what had come to pass in the world around her. Staring blankly at the three of them, the cow kept chewing and foaming from the piece of cloth. Kainla Magar vanished on the spot without the *khukuri*.



REMEMBERING PASTS: An Interview with Indrani Chatterjee

A prominent historian of colonial South Asia, Indrani Chatterjee has researched, worked, and taught on three continents. She challenges the past readings of South Asian history with her thought-provoking contributions to post-colonial studies, slavery and labor studies, and gender studies. Her first book, Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India *(1999), overturns our notions of slavery and kinship as it addresses problematic categories of caste, gender, and family relations. Chatterjee's first edited volume,* Unfamiliar Relations: Family and History in South Asia *(2004), revises the categories of family and kin by focusing on the household or domestic group to explore what might be unexpected formations of intimate alliances. Chatterjee consolidates her status as an authority on the history of slavery in the subcontinent with a second edited volume co-edited with Richard Eaton,* Slavery in South Asian History *(2007). Her recent book titled* Forgotten Friends: Monks, Marriages, and Memories of Northeast India *(2013) explores a plurality of monastic traditions as it re-introduces readers to ignored and forgotten persons. Chatterjee's project of re-translating and un-translating the stories we have been told about South Asia's past illumines under-explored areas of Indic history and opens new fields of vision for scholars today.*

—Andrea Gutiérrez, Sagar *Co-Editor*

THE INTERVIEW

AG — Would you tell us a bit about why it is important to question how history has been written and through whose voice? What particular concerns are there for scholars of South Asia as regards what has been remembered and what has been forgotten? For example, you often mention the plurality of practices and modes of social organization versus cubby-holing into convenient boxes. One example I have studied recently is the Gāndhārī documents. How can we make sense of different Buddhist traditions, like for example the Gāndhārī Buddhist monk householders of the third and fourth centuries CE of northwest South Asia and Central Asia who married, adopted children, and wore normal dress? They certainly couldn't fit the ideal of a monk or nun

<< TERRACOTTA PLAQUES ON BUDDHIST STŪPA AT PILAK, TRIPURA. PHOTOGRAPH BY INDRANI CHATTERJEE.

living in a monastery and practicing abstinence, nor of the lay practitioner. What would you comment about this plurality we observe?

IC — With this question you've clearly given me the kind of support I need by mentioning the Gāndhārī Buddhist evidence. I have sensed it existed, I have read fragments, I've read about these documents, and have a sense there are married or at least householder monks in this plural landscape but I think they have not been admitted to be monks precisely because of the overwhelming nature of post-Enlightenment studies of monasticity. Then in 2008 Shayne Clarke published his readings on the *pārājika* offences of monks. According to him, lapses from monastic vows of celibacy were accommodated within the Order. I was reading the histories of particular *Vaiṣṇava sattra* (monasteries) at the time, and it clicked into place then. There were only four monastic lineages of celibate monks; many non-celibate monks made up the sixteen hundred-odd monasteries that have been counted by scholars. Imagine! The celibate pattern of monastic life is very, very small compared to the dominant and much bigger pattern of householder monks. Yet I'd never been told about them. I'd never had a historical model held up to me for South Asia that allowed me to think with that pattern.

AG — So it's a case of ideals versus practice.

IC — Perhaps. But also I think that the householder monks wrote texts and narratives that need to be re-read with the household in mind. We need to reinterpret those texts with the history of plural and divergent social structures in our heads. Only then will scholars of texts perhaps see the structure in the texts. Right now, for instance, I am reading *maṅgalkāvya* and recognizing the possibility that the poets were either monks or lay subjects of such monastic lineages and were therefore talking about each other.

AG — You mean not building mental constructs that are very restric-

tive and being open to look for more from the start.

IC — Right. That's why I think my work might provide bridges between 'modern' and earlier periods of South Asian history, between critical literatures and feminist histories, between different ecologies. The householder monks were a dominant model for South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the societies we are all concerned with. Here what I'm suggesting is the pattern of households, monks, and women's roles in them. Sometimes there was conflict between monastic lineages about resources, fields, or marriage alliances that they don't want the other lineage or monastery to have. Sometimes there was conflict within a lineage about rights to headship and offices of dignity and authority. Reading literary texts for such tensions can make them come alive to us. As a child, these *kāvya* had been narrated to me, I had heard all the legends and stories, but precisely because there was no author, I had been made to feel that they were unhistorical, that the fiction told no truths. But once you have the structure within which these stories are being narrated, re-narrated, and re-re-re-interpreted ten thousand times, we begin to have a much deeper appreciation for those stories.

AG — We definitely have the model for older Brahmanical structure in the non-ascetic mode of a priest being married or a sage being married. That would be the standard model of social organization and not an abnormal one.

IC — Yes. Women have been part of the landscape even when men were speaking. These texts are supposed to have been created by men and for men. Well, okay, but they rest on the work of women, and they're being written with women in the audience.

AG — You don't think the Buddhist case would have been any different.

IC — It depends upon which Buddhist lineage you are studying,

where, and when. Some older Tibetan Buddhist lineages had householder monks, which again, only becomes clear when you read their histories in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. I became extremely curious about why so many of us practicing modern South Asian historians didn't know these Tibetan histories and didn't even know Tibetan. This came as a huge shock to me especially after I read in a history of seventh and eighth-century Tibet that *paṇḍit*s from India had helped to devise the Tibetan script. So there were many similar letters between classical Tibetan script and what I had thought was a script in which Bengali was written. Learning that was a shock. It opened my eyes in a way that nothing before had about how much had not been told to us, how much had been forgotten or deliberately ignored, and that we were not supposed to know our common pasts.

AG — So, a greater ethnological divide had been created than ought to be suggested geographically or linguistically.

IC — Absolutely, and this is horrible to recognize. We've been made to see other people as foreigners, as aliens, and as strangers when they are not.

AG — They're next-door neighbors in most cases.

IC — Or friends. There's also been intermarriages between such households. We have interacted with all kinds of people in the past.

AG — Regarding methodology, I've heard you say that there's an urgent need to bring material studies into treatments of history and text. What kind of advice could you offer as to how to incorporate material studies successfully into historical or textual research? What has material culture taught you about textual histories?

IC — I have taken material histories as the foreground from which to push back against the narratives of the past inherited through history

textbooks. Study every object—statuary, buildings, coins, seals, archaeological sites—you can find about a time, region, or persons you are studying. I've tested everyone's patience in walking around and asking site managers to show me yields from digs, walking through museums, and trying to read up everything on my own. In India, local aficionados, local lovers of the region and the past—what they imagined was history—had built up private collections of material from sites around them that students like us need to visit. A lot of very important stuff is not in museums and is beyond the "official" archive as it were, in unofficial collections.

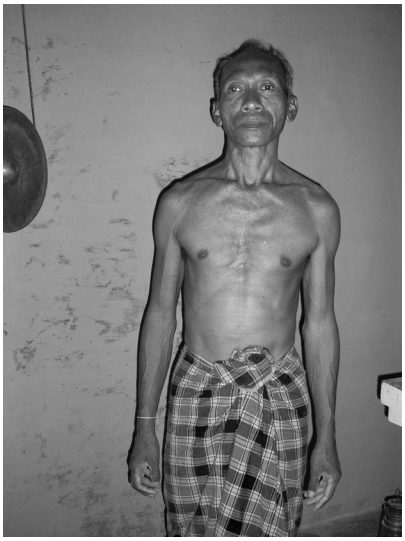
Rongfrucha Mog's khyong, *located at the Buddhist community settlement in Pilak, in south Tripura. Photograph by Indrani Chatterjee.*

AG — How would you access this? Simply by speaking to people and trying to get as many conversations going around physical sites?

IC — Absolutely. People will tell you or bring things to you, or bring you to those sites if you are open to those conversations and are not just passing through.

AG — You have to be receptive to the (hi)stories, then, and keep your ears open.

IC — This is how I was taken to a Buddhist site: I was walking around a site called Pilak, which had been mentioned in a report of the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* in 1965. The site is in the southern



Rongfrucha Mog, a monk of the Buddhist community near Pilak stūpa *site. Photograph by Indrani Chatterjee.*

tip of the modern Indian state of Tripura. It was excavated seriously only in 1998-99. The ASI uncovered the base of a *stūpa* there, with terracotta plaques much like those of Mahasthan (Bogra, in modern Bangladesh). I had found my way there and was making my father, who had come along with me, count the number of terracotta plaques on the walls when this young man came up to me and said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "I'm interested in Buddhist histories and I'm trying to find out a little bit more." He said, "Buddhist histories? You mean those tribals?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Oh, there are those tribals next door. I'll take you to them." That's how I was taken to some very poor sharecroppers at a monastic dormitory and was introduced to the leader, who was a householder monk. I got to walk with him and chat with him. My eyes were opened to the fact that next to a material site was a living population of Buddhists.

AG — Was that a continuous lineage from long ago or a recent occurrence?

IC — It's likely a more recent occurrence. They didn't have a great deal of documentary records of any kind. They may have been refugees or post-1947 or even post-1971 settlers and had been employed as sharecroppers and been allowed to live on these margins of fields. There were rice fields in the region so they were making a living by sharecropping. This man explained to me how it worked. He saved up every three years to go on a *parikrama*. He went from Agartala to Sarnath

Excavation site of a Buddhist stūpa at Pilak, Tripura. Note empty central chamber, in line with śūnyatā doctrine. Photograph by Indrani Chatterjee.

and Benares. If he could afford it he went to Lumbini and came back. Consider this: he's telling me about the vitality of his practice, but he's a very, very poor man. He won't enter a text. So using material sites and objects alongside the conversations around those sites is as important as reading the texts and stories. I like to think that is how the older scholars would have proceeded.

AG — In your publications, one can trace a progression of themes in social history. Your work has often traced associations and groupings of humans and sometimes their environments. These formations might range from clans to monastic institutions as governmental bodies to an expanded vision of family that incorporates servants who participated in sexual relations with a patriarch or sometimes provided heirs for a lineage. Recently, your concerns of wealth, financial exchange, accumulation, and merit might place you among a different

mode of historical thinkers, concerned primarily with economies, bullion, and so on. Doubtlessly you are inspired by other motives, activism, perhaps, or feminist theory. Of course, flows of economy are a social concern intimately tied to politics, social status, and more. How would you describe this progression in your studies?

IC — I've been playing with economic data for a very long time. My first book told a social history based off account books. So I've been dabbling in accounts for the last twenty years. I've always come to my social history by first looking at numbers. As a result, I've been struck by how little work was done by economists or economic historians around the household, around women's work, and its valuation. Of course I came to my sensitivity about these issues because I'd read Marx, Engels, and then feminist socialists. Our generation had to. But I began to get frustrated with Marx and Engels shortly afterwards because theirs was a model that just didn't accommodate other kinds of commodity, or how to think about capital before capitalism, as it were. I think the Marxian logic began from first principles that just didn't fit the historical evidence from South Asia. What is a commodity in Marxist terms? It would be the congealing of a certain set of relationships and its values into an object.

View from hill in modern Mizoram, east of the border of modern Tripura. Photograph by Indrani Chatterjee.

It clicked in my head only in 2008 that actually the Buddhists had had a commodities market and merit was that commodity. They traded it, exchanged it, shared it with people, and circulated it. Mercifully I found Walsh's work that was thinking along those lines. So, I began to read Lopez and Schopen again, go back to Himanshu

Prabha Ray's work, and re-read Furui's work on the Bengal traders of twelveth- and thirteenth-century Eastern India. Finally, I found the evidence of the eighteenth-century charters that the various Mughal *zamindar*s and soldiers, etc. had given to women to organize production, the *madad-i-ma'ash*, rent-exempt, tax-exempt grants of land, of shares of money taken by taxing merchants and shopkeepers. I have now compiled a body of evidence identifying women as a major source of funding. They are the fulcrum of a wide range of commercial and economic enterprises in the early eighteenth century. When they gave some goods—say, salt—from their households to a monastic lineage as a gift, and one man from that monastery took the salt and traded it somewhere else or bartered it for some other goods, I think the woman who has initiated the salt *dān* is the primary economic actor in this.

AG — So there's also a shift from some sort of ideal of commodity or good as an abstract notion of "good act" to material goods with women's direct involvement?

IC — Totally. The conversion of invisible goods into visible goods and vice versa is going on constantly, but women are the centers of this set of transactions and conversions.

AG — I have another question about how you have addressed finance and wealth in recent research. In *Forgotten Friends*, you have written that donative inscriptions often served to record one's good for the greater benefit of a family, lineage, or clan. In particular you attribute some examples of this sort of act to women in Buddhist spheres, who were effectively "voicing their merit" for posterity. Interestingly, we see this in some of the earliest epigraphic records going back to the Aśokan period with the famous "Queen's Edict."

IC — I love that one!

AG — It was inscribed that "whatever may be the gift of the second queen (of Aśoka), whether a mango-grove, a monastery, an institution for dispensing charity or any other donation, it is to be counted to the credit of that queen .... the second queen, the mother of Tīvala, Kāruvākī."[1] Incidentally, scholars generally have concluded that the text was meant to be promulgated among officials and administrators only, but not inscribed in stone. Nonetheless, it is one of the first written texts on the subcontinent (third century BCE). Certainly it's a powerful verbal expression of a woman's economic power, credit, and merit. You have made reference to Michael Walsh's treatment of commodity within Buddhist modes, calling these acts "moral capital," "spiritual futures," and investments. One is also reminded of Gregory Schopen's research on Buddhist monks, debt, inheritance, moneylenders, endowed monastic buildings, or even the archaeological finds of troves of coins in Buddhist monks' cells and caves. Of course in "Hindu" ideology there also is a discussion of debt to your ancestors and so on, but would you say this fixation on money matters is a particularly Buddhist mode of managing institutions, despite the idealized renunciation of accumulated goods or wealth?

IC — I would love more work to be done on this but I don't know right now that this is particular to the Buddhists. I think it depends upon which period and which lineage you are studying. My friends who are studying, say, fourteenth- and fifteenth-century western India have also said that it's specific to the Jains. Jain monks were not supposed to till soil in agricultural activities, just like the Buddhist monks were not supposed to, because they'd kill living beings. So a large majority of Jain monks and novices were invested in commerce. That's where great financial and accounting skills were developed: many related households supplied financiers and traders across western India into Rajasthan and into northern India. I think they have a point there but I

1 Romila Thapar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 260.

also find that in the eighteenth century, for instance, in northern Bengal, it's a mixed group of people. In the *daśanāmis* sects of Vaiṣṇavas, there are some lineages that are vested in money-lending, trading, and finance. They're very clear about accounting rates and things like that. I also found some amount of fairly orthodox Islamic interest in charity that therefore had to manage its finances and ensure that the objects towards which they were making these donations were transported safely and were deposited at the site that they were supposed to go towards. I found different ways of being invested in finance and the safe transportation of cash and goods across many groups.

AG — Was this Islamic case around the eighteenth century as well?

IC — Yes, which gave me the sense that I was looking at the same subcontinental phenomenon across the various religious divides. Maybe we needed to think in more minute ways, into how, say, a Jain trading household would compete with, interact with, or depend upon a Vaiṣṇava trading household. In what ways would they have carved out economic relationships, guarantees, and spheres of specialization?

AG — And not rely on categorical divisions between groups so heavily.

IC — When studying the eighteenth century, taking that tack would lead to failure for a historian. In fact, looking at the household-based women would be more useful. In some instances I'm researching at the moment, the elder women's account books tell me that they were the ones who were supplying, say, salt to one house, money to another, cloth to a third.

AG — Crossing non-existent religious boundaries we have imposed on them.

IC — Perhaps because we're lazy! Or we have invested too much in

becoming monoglots, monotheists, monographists, and monopolists. We can't bear pluralism.

AG — Continuing the discussion of money, when you have discussed gifting as a way of accruing moral capital, it reminded me of French philosopher George Bataille's notion of royal gifting within his little-known work of economic theory, *The Accursed Share*. Bataille discusses wealth, commodities, growth, and so on. He identifies that the paradox of gifting is that the giver receives the acquisition of some sort of power. In his words, a giver "enriches himself (via) his contempt for riches."[2] Expenditure, which ought to be a financial loss, results in gain. This is the power of gifting according to Bataille. Would you say this applies to the Buddhist donative mode? Since I mention a philosopher, must we outright reject "western" theorists in attempting to conceive of Indic modes of living? Of course, we must first give preference to any existing vernacular categories, but can scholars safely incorporate "western" theory into our work?

IC — Yes, of course we can. Especially when, my hunch is, a lot of mid-twentieth century western European theorists were in fact interacting with or visiting scholars from India, or interacting with ideas of Indian "classical" origins and re-writing them in different ways. Take the Beat Generation: they were so significant in so many different ways. I don't see "western" as cut off from the colonial Indian context or the anti-colonial movement, even from the relationship between Charles Andrews and Gandhi. It's a very old and ongoing set of collaborations between those who were anti-establishment in Europe making alliances with anti-establishment figures elsewhere. That pattern of alliance-making politics was also very much the context out of which many of these theorists came. So I don't reject western theories per se. When I reject a theory it's because it's either incomplete or its

2 Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 69.

first principles are not applicable in pluralist South Asian evidence. That's when I'd call for the pushing back of the theory, redefining it, rendering it more capacious. I'm willing to investigate and play with all kinds of theories.

In this particular case, Bataille's theory is at least closer to the South Asian historical modes of giving, gifting, and exchange that we need to think about than, say, Derrida's theory of the gift, which has to be somehow pure. He more or less says any gift that has exchange built into it is not a gift. This has nothing to do with South Asian gifting, clearly. That's my problem: a definition of gift with absolutely no attention to all the evidence of the other kind of gift-giving, which is the dominant kind. It's that kind of unwillingness even to consider the world beyond the first principles upon which you have based your theory that I would find objectionable and grounds for rejecting a theory. I'll go back and re-read Bataille now that you have reminded me of him. Everything is worth re-thinking. That's the whole point of research, going through life and coming to newer boundaries, horizons, and steps, which then become the first principles or boundaries for something else. That's how you learn.

AG — As you may know, *Sagar* has a special online feature in which we review archives and libraries in the subcontinent to aid future scholars who might like to access materials at these sites. Our reviews inform scholars of how to access material at different sites, the bureaucracy they might encounter, and basic practical information for a given location. As someone who has spent lengths of time researching on different continents, what advice would you give to junior scholars interested in completing effective research in South Asia? I mean, of course, in addition to cultivating patience and setting realistic goals for what one can achieve in a given amount of time.

IC — Yes. Each regional archive has its own special character. In North India, perhaps, it's much more bureaucratized. In eastern India it is

not so heavily bureaucratized as it is personalized. You have to be able to cultivate good social skills and be able to engage the "gate-keepers" of the record rooms as respected individuals, especially if you've come from the first world and are obviously well-off, well-resourced, and funded. Basically, be respectful before such individuals because there's a great feeling that they also were and are intellectuals and are not being treated as such by us. I would advise all young scholars to be humble and to suspend their hubris about knowing everything. We've got to train ourselves to learn from others.

AG — These "gate-keepers" of knowledge can be useful resources in and of themselves and a prime source of support for one's work.

IC — Absolutely. Cultivate good relationships, patience, and some degree of empathy. For instance, I worked in the Guwahati Archives in Dispur for a long stretch. There wasn't even a whole chair to sit on. I kid you not. There was just a wooden frame.

AG — So bring a cushion, you're saying?

IC — Don't bring a cushion! It won't help. It wouldn't have done anything. But learn that you are in for very austere and sometimes very difficult living and working conditions. There was no bathroom that a woman could go to. There was no water. These are pretty serious handicaps under which to work in an archive. But you have to cultivate empathy for those young men who are your record fetchers, because perhaps they haven't been paid for years on end. They are extremely disgruntled. It's not because they're evil but because the structure has become so unfair to them. So, if they don't bring more than three files at a time, you have to learn compassion. If you are going in there with a very tight schedule it just isn't going to happen. Archives are a great teacher of human and social skills.

AG — Something which you have written on translation in your newly-published volume *Forgotten Friends* might be pertinent to our readers, since we aim to feature translations of South Asian texts. You wrote:

> In choosing linguistic and cultural translation as an interpretative stance towards both hybrid regional and English-language written sources, one of my goals is to reinstate translation to its intellectual dignity as a historically established scholarly activity. Translation has a hoary literary genealogy especially in the medieval and early modern periods during which texts and teachers from eastern India travelled and taught in Himalayan terrain; translations also engaged visiting Moroccan Muslim scholars and craftsmen at the same time. In keeping with that past, I subject English language colonial records to translation.[3]

Here your reading of the colonial archives, which transmits them to the present day for us, "remembers" forgotten or ignored realities, but also potentially might obscure other details. Would you mind elaborating on the importance of a revised "translation" of texts for historiography today? How has linguistic translation proved important in your research?

IC — For this book I was thinking about two layers. One of linguistic translation and the second was of cultural translation. Regarding linguistic translation, for example, in the colonial record, there are embedded terms like *lushei*, *kuki*, etc. which a whole body of scholarship before me has treated as tribals, because these scholars didn't know Tibetan. But if you know Tibetan, you'll know that *kuki* stands for incarnate Buddhas, as *lushei* stands for "choral group." These are all embedded linguistic terms that need translating. Once they're translated, they lose their alienness. They are exactly on our terrain.

3 Indrani Chatterjee, *Forgotten Friends: Monks, Marriages, and Memories of Northeast India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 27.

The literary and cultural translation parts of it centered around these very dense *kāvya* and poetic narratives that people had printed in a bunch of societies in easternmost Bengal and Assam. For instance, I had struggled for a decade or more with a text called the *Rājamālā*, a *kāvya* on a list of kings. Since I hadn't trained in religious studies, I couldn't figure out that the 'kings' in the description were heads of tantric assemblies. Once I started reading histories of tantra, I could translate 'kingship' appropriately. The *kāvya* too had embedded the same terms that I had found in the English language archives, like *kuki*, or *kotsari* / *kachári*, which in English has been written as Kachar. There's a whole historiography about this region or state called "Kachar" but is actually just a Tibetan term for people on the foothills, on the range of societies say, between Nepal, Sikkim, eastern Bhutan, and the lower Himalayas. These are the foothills of the Himalayas; the fringes of something, like of a purse, would be *kotsari*. That's exactly what's being referred to.

AG — So this is more a matter of understanding the cultural realm to grasp the semantics of a text.

IC — Yes, and then to be able to get the story that knits together this text, to get the conflict-ridden world in which it is embedded. Again, it's what I said at the beginning, *kāvya* suddenly becoming rich with meaning once you have dis-embedded these strange terms, opened them to the light, and re-learnt them for yourself.

A third level of translation that happened for me was because of all the terms we've been using slapdash in English to theorize with, terms like feudalism or slavery. They have acquired solidity within the historiography of medieval and modern Europe. I was aware of some attempts to re-investigate those terms in the historiography of medieval South Asia. But the historiography of modern South Asia had not done as much. Reading the English-language archives and records with the knowledge of a monastic governmental order outside

those records meant that the English terms that had undergirded so much of our theorizing could now be re-translated into the cultural units of monastic discourses. I like to think that my book enables such re-translations.

AG — Meaning some vernacular contextual ideas might never be grasped with some English terms.

IC — It's like saying, "Here's this monastic governmental order, and here's the *dikṣa* or the *bait* or whatever you want to call it. This is how a young person would enter a lineage, would commit to protecting a *guru* with his or her life, etc., would give labor, land." Here it is laid out as a political world. Because of the multiple languages that are being used by people coming from all parts into this system, there are innumerable terms, but we can't keep using five thousand words each time. So when a colonial regime uses English to describe different parts of the monastic governmental order, scholars studying South Asia should simply translate the colonial English term for themselves into the vernacular idiom of the monastic governmental order I outlined.

AG — Here in the colonial record we might find an oversimplification of the situation in order to make something intelligible but which in fact makes it unintelligible to readers today.

IC — I try to make it intelligible again by opening English itself up to translation rather than treat English as self-evident. I'm saying English itself needs to be translated, because it's Victorian English, because it's Edwardian English. Here it is, here is the world against which it needs to be unpacked. That's my project.

AG — To continue this linguistic line of questions, in a recent article ("When Sexuality Floated Free of Histories in South Asia") you point out that some European languages' lack of nominal neuter gender

has affected historical analyses, including an obfuscation of the spectrum of genders recorded in South Asian material. You also mention that the colonial reductionist languaging of sexual practices and behaviors has brought an artificial "translation" of what were modes of sexualities in South Asia, as is evident if one looks at the vernacular languages. What role should language or translation play in bringing to light "forgotten friends" that are in an original text?

IC — Precisely because English is limited in this way, it needs help from the conceptual worlds of non-English texts and users. But which non-English tradition should determine the translation? In the aftermath of the ban on Wendy Doniger's book [*The Hindus: An Alternative History*], I have become even more aware of the need to foreground the particular monastic and epistemic linelineage age training from within which a practice would be written about, and would in turn be heard or /understood within. So the multiple acts of translation at linguistic, conceptual, and cultural levels needs to be foregrounded when re-reading the texts of any of the lineages created in the past. I began my research on sexuality studies by actually thinking about the *Kokaśāstra*. I was reading through that text in an eighteenth-century Sanskrit publication interlarded with English translations. I was very baffled by the multiple identities coming up, not just the actions, but the identities suggested in that text. I began to wonder what was missing. How would I even translate or write about it? He/she/it? But there is no "it-ness." "It" is presumed in English to be an object and non-human. "It-ness" doesn't have life. For us, the evidence was very clear that "it-ness" was valued, it had life, and it could even be something that was aspired to. I was really struck by what it means to try to translate between a plural-gendered language landscape into literally a bi-polar, bi-morphic model. *Napuṁsaka* (neuter gender in human) is not always treated as bad or deficient. Sometimes a comic character can be *napuṁsaka* but also a wise counsel, a sage, or an echo. All kinds of positions are occupied by such beings and that really was not avail-

able for us to theorize with.

So, it became a huge gap and I stopped trying to think about sexualities at that moment and began to think of personhood, a much bigger issue, within the context of a continuum of life-forms. If a text such as the *Kokaśāstra* pushes you into thinking about life-forms, then it is forcing readers to be aware of the monastic order or an intellectual lineage within which the text is composed as well as where the reader was located. For instance, the he/she/it question, how you think about personhood, or your relation to personhood, animality, or object-hood is determined by which kind of monastic lineage and genealogy you've been trained in. Whether you are going to be a Vaiṣṇava or a tantric Śaiva or whatever, that is the key to how you are taught to think about personhood as an extension of divinity or not. If you've been initiated into tantra you'll be taught to think about personhood as this much bigger "he/she/it-ness" within the same body, and the cultivation of all of these lead into the mode of becoming divine and becoming empowered. If you're not in the tantric model and you're in a much more traditional Vaiṣṇava model of *guru* and *śiṣya* and *bhakta* then it's a different kind of understanding of what your personhood is, or whose personhood, etc. So then it's not about sexualities alone but a bigger issue.

AG — So lineage-aligned positions determine perspective for these cases, irrespective of language?

IC — Yes, and how you would then conduct your sexual life would be dependent or conditional upon that. That is what I came to, at least provisionally.

AG — Well, you have certainly written material for us to think about in that article. This issue of *Sagar* includes a translated Nepali story written by Shiv Kumar Rai. The narrative concerns a female worker on a tea plantation in Darjeeling. There's a substratum of different social geographies that certain classes or people may or may not be

able to enter. Here, the girl wants a georgette sari, an item of luxury associated with a determined social status. The story has a lightness I can't reveal here (no spoilers!), but the nature of labor and agricultural services that women perform across much of South Asia is taken as a given in the story. The protagonist's desire for acquisitional power, narrated sweetly, chimes in with the interplay of economies with social structures that you discuss in your latest book. This struggle for any sort of consumptive financial capacity certainly is an everyday reality for many people in the modern period. Would you like to discuss any ideas about expressions of economic power and different social geographies for the tea plantation and hill regions of Bengal, Assam, Sikkim, Nepal, and on?

IC — It's time for us all to think across these national boundaries, about the amount of labor services that women have to provide and had to provide across different areas of the economy. The tea plantations were a peculiar kind of economy, a kind of colonially-managed, private, European investment in the 1840s and 50s, only being given over to India, Nepal, or other capital later. Now it's transnational capital. What we find is that historians or theorists of labor don't look at labor services as part of this continuum that allowed one dominant style of production to shift to another form. For instance, the fact that women provided labor services in road-building and transportation in various forms in the pre-colonial world needs to be put side by side with the ease with which similar groups of women provided labor on the tea plantations. We haven't yet understood enough of that transition. We haven't understood how easy it was for colonial regimes to turn what existed on the land into private capital's use.

AG — So you are saying that the social structure was already in place and the colonial regime just took over and displaced different types of tasks.

IC — Yes, and it turned them about into producing different kinds

of goods. The colonial regime also organized the transport of lots of different kinds of workers from central India to the hills. So what the colonial regime organized was a kind of demographic re-population of a region. It organized particular ways of not seeing the region as a hybrid space. I think post-1947, it's become even harder to talk about any of these issues because of land-centered politics. There's so much resentment on each side of the various borders about lands lost. Since 1947 till the present, there have been refugees from Nepal in Bhutan, refugees from Bangladesh in India, from Indian Assam in Bangladesh, and from Bangladesh in Assam. All refugees have had a very hard time resettling in new places. Many have been blamed for the lands taken away from local populations for their resettlement. Additionally, when refugees have been from faith groups different from those of the local residents, as for instance Muslim peasants around the borderlands between Indian Assam, Meghalaya, and Bangladesh, they have borne the brunt of the anger about lands from varieties of Assamese nationalists, many of who are Vaiṣṇava. Similarly, in southern Bangladesh, Buddhist Bengali-speakers have borne the brunt of hostility from Muslim co-residents and Muslim Burmese have been attacked by Burmese Buddhists. There's a piling up of 'communal religious' conflicts building up on the lands. These conflicts inevitably focus on the bodies of the laborers, very often, the women cultivators on these lands. That is why scholars need to study labor-services, especially when these labor-services were provided by women and the young. We need their needs to be better historical investigations of how these were organized in the past, and how their reorganization was fundamental to the transitions to colonial capital and thereafter.

AG — Furthering this topic of historical remembrances of women, in a recent monograph (Sree Padma, *The Vicissitudes of the Goddess: Reconstructions of the Gramadevata in India's Religious Traditions*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), Sree Padma has convincingly argued that modern-era *satī* practices such as *sahagamana* and

anumaraṇa (when a woman places herself on a funeral pyre immediately following her husband's death, either with him on his pyre or as soon after as possible) might be considered expressions of female empowerment. For example, a woman might prefer to join her husband beyond the realm of this earth rather than submit herself to a local or regional patriarchal authority who may have interests in her and who might pursue her for marriage after her husband's death. So her death might be an act of rebellion against regional authority. Likewise, in the colonial period, with the imposition of colonial laws prohibiting *satī*, a widow who took her own life articulated a form of native defiance of foreign or imposed rule which dictated what people could or could not do. This was surely a powerful act defying social norms that expressed an individual woman's will. Of course, this mode of *satī* might have been regional. Padma discusses south Indian *satī* as vastly different from Rajput *satī*. Certainly, the majority of cases of satī must have been different from these acts of rebellion, and intense family political matters often determined a woman's life or death. What would you comment about *satī* as an act of rebellion against authority or within the context of family structures, since you have worked extensively on family social organizations?

IC — I've also worked on *satī* lately. I haven't read Sree Padma's entire book but I think she may have a point here. I've found that in the eighteenth-century eastern Indian case, in the one we've all been taught was the bad one that Ram Mohan Roy helped to put down (meaning the practice of *satī* in Bengal), there's actually enough evidence to show that women were also practicing *satī* as protest. If you look at the records closely, and I'm doing exactly that, you'll find that some men were also the holders of *la khiraj* land (land given as gifts that would not be taxed) and from the 1780s onwards, the East India Company was actually taxing what were hitherto tax-exempt lands. So, when husbands died, if the land was supposed to come to the widows, then they were not going to get it and were not going to get the benefit

of exemption. This is the shifting colonial political economy within which many women started to, in fact, commit protest suicide.

AG — For inheritance purposes, if they committed suicide, could they transfer the wealth to their sons?

IC — No, it seemed to be a sort of despair suicide, much like the monks in Tibet are protesting against the Chinese by self-immolation. These are very similar kinds of protest though we may not be able to fully flesh out that the women were saying, "We are protesting." But if you put together all the economic decisions around each of their households, each of their estates, each of their lands, this is what is emerging.

AG — This doesn't seem to present the idea of Ram Mohan Roy as an "illuminated, liberal, modern" thinker and supporter of some sort of women's rights in his aim to abolish *satī*.

IC — It's very clear that Ram Mohan Roy himself was complicit in some decisions that went against his own sister-in-law. He had taken money from his sister-in-law and then not returned it. When his sister-in-law tried to claim it back, there was a court case. The judges decided against her. His sister-in-law is believed to have committed suicide. His mother left the house and never returned. There's a sad and ironic story right there.

AG — Sad, but on a positive note, it's perfect for our readers that this is an article you have published very recently. There is always something more to explore and more forgotten friends to recall to the present.

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