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**DISTINGUISHING SELVES:
HISTORY AND IDENTITY IN A SOUTH INDIAN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY
(1844-1999)**

by

James Fremont Richardson

**a dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy
(Anthropology)**

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2002

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A dissertation entitled

**DISTINGUISHING SELVES: HISTORY AND IDENTITY
IN A SOUTH INDIAN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY (1844-1999)**

submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Wisconsin-Madison
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy


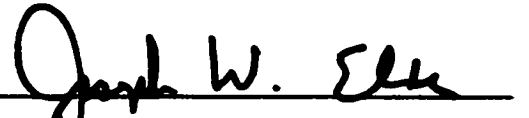


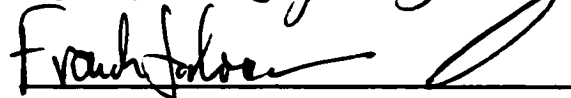
by

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Approval Signatures of Dissertation Committee

Signature, Dean of Graduate School



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To any and all whom I have carelessly forgotten to mention here, accept my apologies and thanks.

A Note on Translations and Transliterations

All quotations from interviews and other Tamil sources in this dissertation are translated by me from the original Tamil, unless otherwise noted. Although I consulted many individuals regarding the connotations of certain words (including my paid transcriptionists), I take full responsibility for the final translations presented here.

Since many Tamil speakers use English words in their speech, I have put all English words in “quotes” to distinguish them from translated portions of specific sentences or phrases.

And, throughout this dissertation, I have used the standard transliteration system found in the Madras University *Tamil Lexicon* (1980).

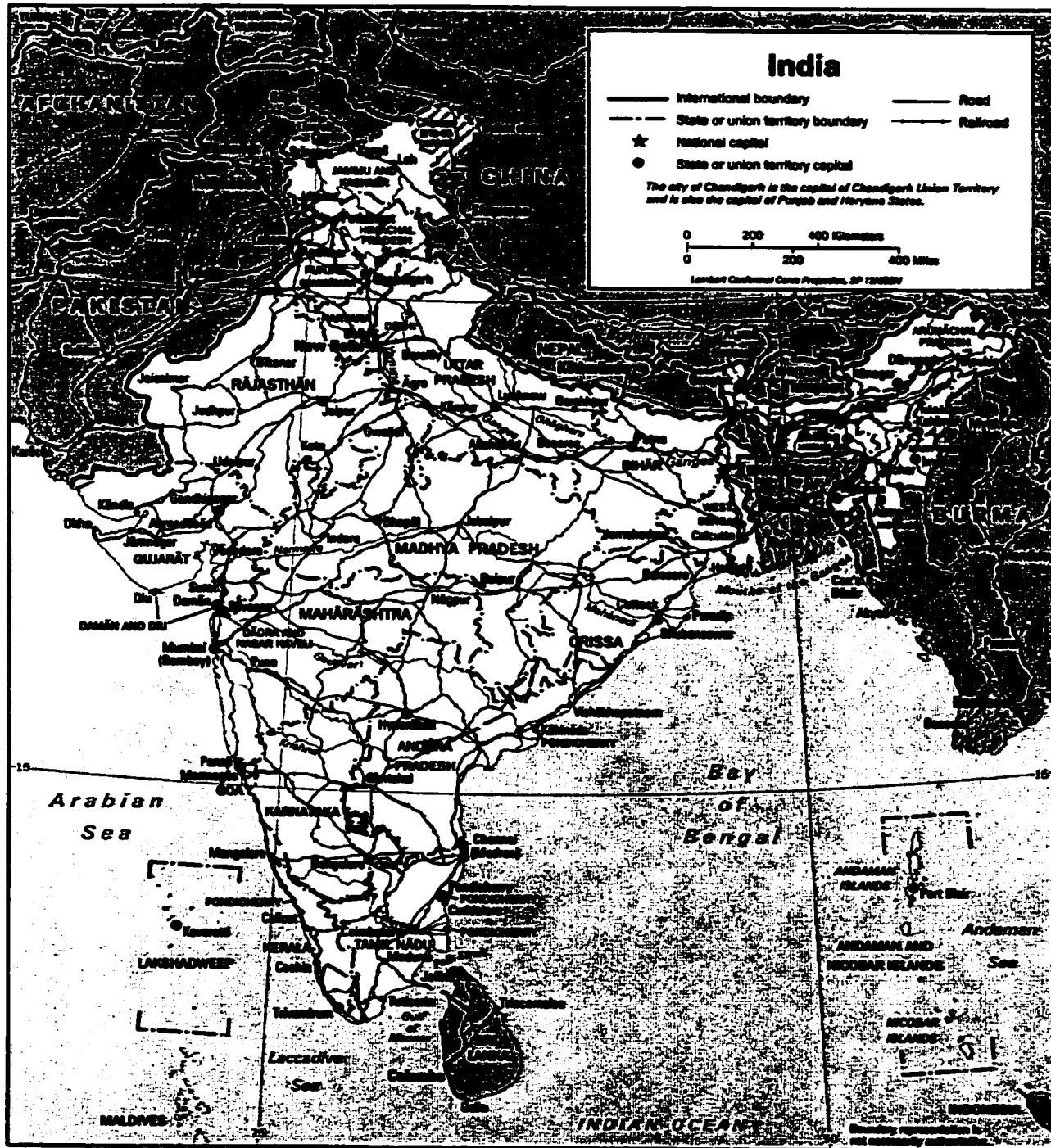
Abbreviations

ABCFM	American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions
AMM	American Madura Mission
BC	Backward Classes
MMS	Madura Mission Sangam
MCC	Madura Church Council
OBC	Other Backward Classes
PK	Pramalai Kallar
SC	Scheduled Castes
TPK	Tirupparankundram
UTC	United Theological Seminary

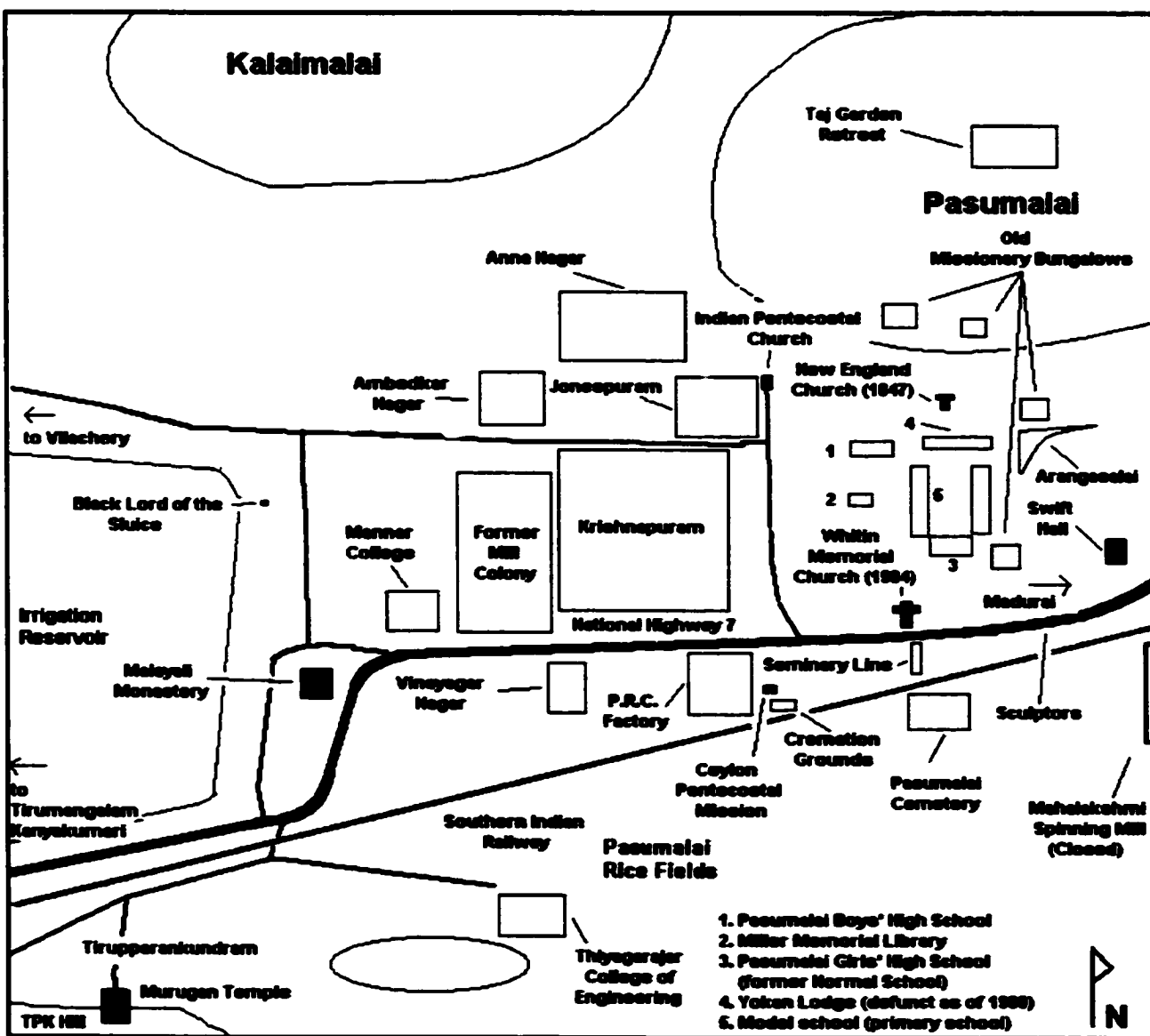
Map 1 Contemporary Indian States, 1996

Note: Approximate boundaries of the former Madras Presidency (1801-1947) are marked by a broken blue line

(Altered from public image available at www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/india_pol96.jpg)

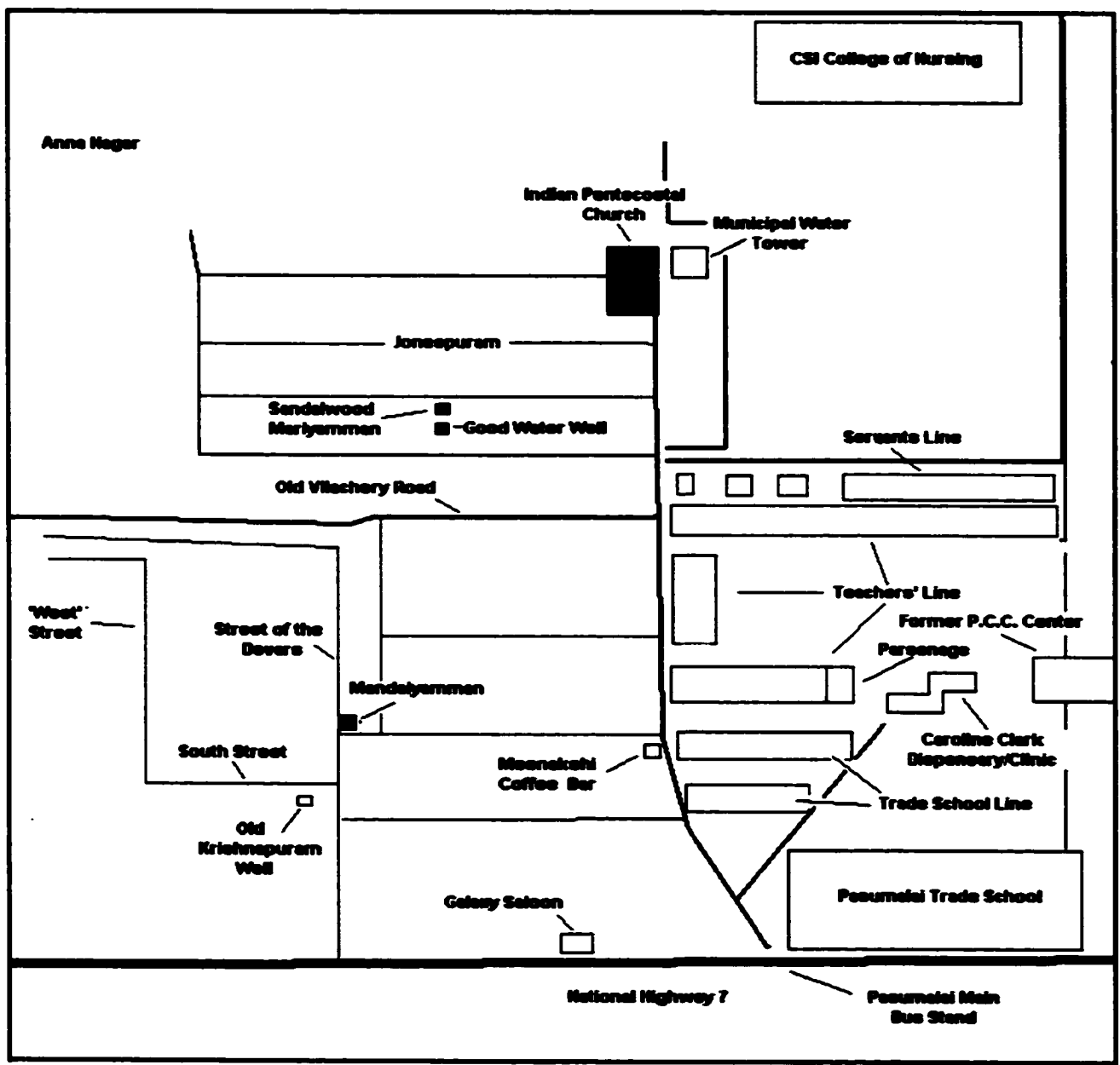


Map 2 Pasumalai and Vicinity (1998-1999)



Note: This map is neither authoritative, comprehensive nor to scale

Map 3 Pasumalai Up Close



Note: This map is neither authoritative, comprehensive nor to scale

Introduction

In the eastern Indian state of Orissa, during the early hours of January 23, 1999, an Australian Protestant missionary and his two young sons climbed into their jeep, parked next to a rural prayer chapel, and went to sleep. They had just attended an evangelical revival meeting held in a remote Santhal tribal community divided into Christian and non-Christian blocs.¹ In addition to running these evangelical camps, 58-year-old Graham Staines had worked for thirty years at a Leprosy Hospital in the Orissa town of Baripada. In fact, it was his early experiences in the Leprosy Mission of Australia itself that had led him to become a permanent resident of Orissa in the 1960s.² That same late January evening, as he and his young sons slept in their jeep, a group of assailants set it on fire, immolating all three of them into charred, ashen corpses which police found the next morning.³

At the time of these nationally televised events, I was living far away from Orissa, in a rented home a stone's throw away from an old American mission compound near the Tamil speaking city of Madurai; and only fifty or so miles away from the only other documented murder site of a foreign Christian missionary to India (1693).⁴ Pasumalai (cow hill) is the hill in Madurai District at whose southern base, in 1844, American missionaries began erecting the architectural metonym of their 19th century evangelical movement: a mission seminary. Reaction to Staines' murder among some Pasumalai Christians was that of a quiet fury. On Sunday, January 24, a group of choir boys passed around a flier after church calling on local Christians not to seek vengeance; they cited the last phrase of Matthew 5: 44, "pray for those who cause you harm."⁵ Their flier revealed most powerfully to me how some evangelically persuaded Pasumalai Christians felt themselves being attacked metonymically through Staines'

distant murder. I feel that one reason for this logic is Pasumalai's history as a site of intimate, long-term relations with foreign missionaries and the manifold evangelical dispositions they embodied.

Whether or not right wing Hindu organizations were directly or indirectly involved in Staines' murder, as many church leaders and secular critics quickly assumed,⁶ symbolically, it is interesting to note that Staines was attacked neither at his residential home nor at his Leprosy Home at the outer edge of Baripada town,⁷ but after a rural revival meeting located well beyond 'the mission compound.' Was the missionary being told, perhaps, to remain within the culturally liminal institutional spaces of his own making?

Influenced by church burnings and violent anti-Christian protests in the Dangs district of Gujarat state precisely one month earlier (cf. Shah 1999), media reports immediately focused on the issues that Staines' murder seemed to conjoin in a macabre symbolic fusion: continued Christian evangelism in the supposedly non-Christian hinterlands of India, conversions resulting from these efforts, and organized right wing Hindu resistance to the expansion of 'foreign' religious faiths into non-mainstream cultural regions. And as a trope, Staines holds enormous symbolic value for right wing Hindu groups. In their imagination, as both a foreign national and an evangelical Christian missionary, he is an apt metonym of Christianity as a destabilizing, anti-national force in post-colonial India. But, in Pasumalai, among Tamil Protestants living in and around an old American mission compound dating to the period of the British East India Company, Staines' murder was clearly a very different order of metonym, one indexing their collective feeling of increasing vulnerability in a post-colonial India now dominated by a ruling coalition whose key leaders share ties of affection to some of India's most reactionary Hindu

organizations, including one whose former member assassinated Mohandas Gandhi in 1948: the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) (Basu 1993: 30).⁸

Although virtually no one I interviewed, both Hindu and Christian, thinks that this order of religious violence will ever rear its ugly face in Pasumalai, the reactions of Pasumalai's Christians to Staines' murder convinced me that my decision, months earlier, to switch my research away from "recent conversions" in the hinterlands of Tamil Nadu toward a more comprehensive historical understanding of Christian identity in Pasumalai would not only yield better scholarship, but also form an inadvertently timely investigation of what Staines, in my view, really indexes: the hundreds of mission compound worlds whose manifold institutions served a wider public while also providing a political economy into which colonial era mission Christians moved their lives and families. While Staines committed himself to the care of India's most outcaste community, one bearing a shocking visual stigma, others bearing an *invisible* stigma also sought out colonial mission compound worlds with their own distinct agendas. On of these agendas, I will argue, was class mobility.

In this dissertation I will therefore question whether religious conversion qua baptism, or intellectual transformation, is necessarily the most important form of identity 'conversion' that missions introduced to the colonial world. What about 'conversions' into modern forms of class identity performance? Furthermore, what happened to forms of identity performance pre-dating the missionary encounter when the baptized entered the mission compound for study or for work? I argue in this dissertation that pedagogy-centered mission compounds, specifically, are historical windows onto on how modern, class mobility all over the world often begins with a dispositional conversion into structured performances of both *existing and novel* social identities.

Through an in-depth historical ethnography of an evangelical Protestant mission school compound in Tamil speaking south India, I will argue that pedagogy-centered mission compounds tended to habituate their Christian students and Christian employees to elitist, performance of multiple identities that rendered certain existing forms of identity illegitimate (caste) while legitimizing imported, novel identities of religious alterity and modern class elitism. I will also argue that mission compounds, and their peculiar habits of multiple identity performance, allowed Christians from stigmatized ancestries of identity rare opportunities to begin ‘converting’ their families into lives of class distinction. As in processes of class mobility throughout the modern world, however, critical opportunities alone have never guaranteed an easy journey through modern social class hierarchies. The mission compound I am about to introduce was, above all, a colonial era theater about new possibilities of identity, new possibilities of seizing one version of a Christian modernity and internalizing it as a ‘progressive’ habit.

A First Impression of Pasumalai

Part myth, part missionary theater and part colonial monument, today, Madurai’s “cow hill” is a post-colonial, religiously plural, Tamil speaking settlement haunted by nostalgic memories of a missionary golden age. Like its much larger metropolitan kin (Madras, Calcutta and Bombay), ‘Christian’ Pasumalai formed during the destabilizing forays and persuasions of the British colonial presence qua trading company, ten years after an ecumenical Protestant mission from the ante-bellum United States had entered the sprawling Madras Presidency in 1834 (see Map 1).

As a monumental space, a brief walk around Pasumalai today would overwhelm the observer's senses with architectural monuments of a late colonial mission. Dating to 1928, a two-story high school building stands 30 feet tall, adorned with Persian minarets that bespeak Old Delhi's Red Fort. Standing a stone's throw away, and dating to 1895, is a student hostel built for mission converts that features more Mughal arches and red painted minarets. Above the school buildings and old hostels, on Pasumalai's gentle southern slope, stand three imposing, two story missionary bungalows with expansive verandahs that still command stunning views of Pasumalai's luxuriant rice fields. In front and in back of the schools and hostel buildings stand two stone churches, like twin temples to some curious guardian deity. T-shaped 'New England' Church, built in 1847, memorializes the iconoclastic Congregationalist architecture of one former British colony, while cross-shaped Whitin Memorial Church, built in 1904, indexes the iconographic, stained glass Anglicanism of an ascendant British empire. All these monuments and others now persist beyond their colonial origins, haunted by evangelical emotions not quite fully spent.

For well over a hundred years, Pasumalai's many educational institutions attracted thousands of students from all over Madurai and Ramnad Districts of the Madras Presidency (est. 1801). These were students often keen on acquiring Western academic and technical knowledge necessary for distinct lives beyond the peasant fold. Among these thousands were many upwardly mobile mission Christians who bore, by virtue of their baptisms in mission churches, a symbolic distinction unavailable to their Hindu and Muslim peers. For some local Christian families, whose larger-than-life patriarchs once taught in Pasumalai's late colonial classrooms, and for many other Christian students who have long since graduated, Pasumalai is a

space often remembered through a mythic veil of nostalgia that fuses a remembered “Christian” discipline with the political economy of pedagogical mission. Removing its nostalgic veil, though, Pasumalai appears to have been one of many empirical theaters in which colonial educational policy in the Madras Presidency was given a concrete theater. It was a theater whose elitist forces became softened, in part, as missionaries allowed unparalleled degrees of protected access to untouchables (as students and as employees). Of course, what may seem like embracing class elitism to a *liberal* Western social critic, is ironically remembered as *liberation* by the children of many late colonial Christian dramatis personae who entered the schools of mission compounds like Pasumalai from highly stigmatized natal origins, never again to return, as they once were, to their ancestral communities of identity.

Mission Compounds and the Anthropology of Christian Missionary Movements

A few scholars have already completed historical ethnographies of colonial evangelism as a complex sociocultural process that transformed missionaries as much as the missionized (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff 1991 and Bugge 1994), while others have focused more intently on the often contradictory, paradoxical ‘missions’ of missionaries themselves (e.g. Beidelman 1982; Huber 1987). More and more ethnographers have written about *contemporary* missionary encounters and their effects within post-colonial cultural communities in which they have conducted field research (e.g. Schieffelin 1981; Barker 1985; Schneider and Lindebaum 1987; James and Johnson 1988; Kammerer 1990; Hefner 1993b). Others have composed broadly framed surveys of post-colonial evangelical Protestant religious movements spreading primarily through modern mass mediation and not through colonial style, institutionalized mission

networks with long term residential missionaries (e.g. Martin 1990; Brouwer et. al. 1996). My perspective here, however, straddles the historical boundary between the colonial and post-colonial, tracing the movement of one colonial era community of Christian identity into the post-colonial moment. In doing so, I follow the lead of those historical ethnographers whose perspective on the 'missionized' emerges primarily from ethnographic fieldwork in post-colonial Christian communities that trace origins to the variegated, institutionalized domain of colonial missions (e.g. Comaroff 1985; Caplan 1987; Constable 1994; Robinson 1998).

Along with the formation of a modern, capitalist world economy (cf. Wolf 1982), the cultural impact of Christian missions on the formerly colonized populations of the world is one of the most important historical processes of the modern era. Modern missionary work became possible, in part, with the development of modern printed mass media, Renaissance-era navigational developments in Europe, and the increasing intensity of Europe-centered global trade relations spawned by the former technologies. Yet, as Peter van Rooden aptly notes, the real explosion of missionary work emerged in the late 18th century, with important sources in Protestant revivalism and a critique of 'Christianity' at home (1996). Regardless of whether missionaries worked within or without directly colonized regions, Western cultures of literacy, pedagogy, bodily hygiene, medicinal practices as well as specific forms of Christian religious practice pervaded most institutionalized mission political economies *simultaneously* as coordinated structuring forces of globalization.

Robert Hefner, in the Introduction to his 1993 edited volume, *Conversion to Christianity*, presents the unifying theme of the book as, "the twin phenomena of Christian conversion and Christianization--the reformulation of social relations, cultural meanings, and personal

experience in terms of putatively Christian ideals (1993a: 34)” And while there are billions in the world who identify themselves as “Christians” and who do share certain meaning-saturated tropes and practices, despite denominational differences and despite cultural boundaries that divide them in other ways, I do not take up this neo-Weberian approach, preferring a focus more on behavioral dispositions as the critical site of cultural transformation in the missionary encounter.

When studying those who baptized themselves into the fold of colonial missions, we might also ask what other ‘conversions’ were intertwined with, or subsequent to, ‘conversions’ to Christian identity performance? Might we not benefit from seeing missionary encounters as sites for conversions in the interrelationship of multiple identities? In the introduction to his edited volume, *Conversion to Modernities*, Peter Van der Veer states, “This volume tries to relate the European development of modern notions of personhood to the missionary project of conversion (1996: 9).” Inspired by this important work, I focus on mission compounds as complex sites of identity transformation within a historically specific genre of Christian modernity: an evangelical Protestant modernity as it emerged within pedagogy-centered mission compound worlds. New possibilities of identity spread within many school-intensive Protestant missionary movements (though not exclusively within them), including identification with a nascent class of literate people liberated from a manual laboring peasant existence (much like the colonizer’s foreign, administrative elite). While we might term them the colonial ‘bourgeois’ or ‘middle’ classes, identification with such a class made one an indubitable elite in the colonized world.

Many 19th century evangelical Protestant missions, especially, became heavily focused on spreading schools within their mission networks, often with the direct or tacit support of various imperial regimes. Although missions and colonial regimes often differed ideologically,⁹ especially regarding the necessity of actively Christianizing ‘the natives’ and because, in some missions, individual late colonial missionaries challenged colonial rule itself (cf. Guha 1999), colonial and mission political economies often did ally with each other, symbolically, in the cause of furthering an educational infrastructure in colonized nations. But rather than seeing missionaries as mere extensions of the colonial state because of aid to mission schools or, on the other extreme, assuming that missions were nervously aloof from colonial structures of rule, it is better to appreciate the complex, often contradictory, relationship missions had with colonial government (cf. Kawashima 1998: 54-81).

Unfortunately, though, I do not have the space in this dissertation to fully explore these issues as the Comaroffs have done so well in their much more extensive work on the Nonconformist encounter with the Tswana of southern Africa (1991). In brief, the contradictory relations that emerged between many missions and both Company Raj and later Crown rule in India can be seen in the fact that while the British never had an official policy of “Christianization” in India, they supported missionary work in education and health. This, in turn, often meant supporting spaces managed by missions, in part, as places for intentional evangelical outreach. Ambitious missionary movements themselves often needed land grants and financial assistance to develop their mission school infrastructures. Thomas Beidelman has already documented the dependence of the Anglican Church Missionary Society on government assistance for running its own schools in East Africa (1982: 26). In British India, this

collaboration was especially intense in the Madras Presidency, because several Protestant missionary enterprises working there, including the one that established Pasumalai, would have been unable to finance the scale of educational institutions they eventually did without generous Grants-in-Aid from Government. While evangelically inclined Protestant missionaries saw mission schools as sites for religious persuasion, administratively inclined colonial governments saw them as a necessary adjunct force needed to produce and to sustain an educated colonial ruling class. One other important consequence of this curious alliance between secular and religious 'missions' was that it encouraged missionary groups to transform themselves into complex, institutionalized theaters of class identity formation centered on modern education.

Such mission school compounds were theaters of pedagogy featuring higher educational institutions that promoted a form of modern class identity based on acquiring advanced degrees of literacy, Western styled educations based on interaction with the printed word and its Western categories of knowledge, and subsequent access to cash salaried employment only accessible by means of such educations. As Beidelman notes in his work on the Church Missionary Society in East Africa, wealthier missions which built large institutional infrastructures, and paid substantial salaries to their workers, implicitly argued for, "the association of material well-being with moral worth (1982: 11)." In many colonial Protestant mission school compounds, like Pasumalai, the resident missionary himself became the key metonym of a morally legitimated, modern material lifestyle, though, often along with adopting local vernacular idioms of power (such as the possession of multiple menial servants that would be unavailable in his native country). Becoming a teacher within such mission schools, in one sense, involved inhabiting both utopian, evangelical Protestant identity dispositions and modern, materialist, and elitist class

identity dispositions. Writing of a Pietist mission among the Ewe of West sub-Saharan Africa, Birgit Meyer writes,

Though proud of their contribution to “civilization,” the missionaries, in line with their beliefs, considered material achievements “outward” things that had to be paralleled by an individual “inner” development. Their stance toward “civilization” was paradoxical: Whereas they considered it a prerequisite for Christianization, they detested it at the same time because it made the Ewe focus on the outward rather than the inward aspects of the Pietist message (1996: 208).

Meyer illuminates a very broad paradox within many Protestant mission compounds during the colonial era, one which Beidelman noted in his earlier study of an Anglican mission in East Africa (1982: 210-11). Becoming a mission school teacher, for example, was often about converting into a performance of self that, as a career, served a modern quest for class distinction in the colonial world and for what was most likely seen by mission Christians as equally ‘progressive’ moral distinction as a Christian. Pasumalai was an embodiment, *par excellence*, of the paradoxical inseparability of the ‘material’ and the ‘spiritual’, the ‘religious’ and the ‘secular’, within the cultural domain of a pedagogy-centered, evangelical Protestant mission compound promoting its own evangelical version of modernity (and not necessarily one widely shared at home in America).

My historical ethnography of Pasumalai qua former mission compound also connects us to the issue of how existing forms of identity prior to the missionary encounter, though hardly frozen in time, altered in their performance by those who came to inhabit a Christian identity *within* missionary religious movements. Several authors have already explored the way that missionary movements played directly into the historical dynamics of local tribes and ethnic groups. For example, Richard Price draws us into the encounter between Dutch Moravian

missionaries and the Saramarka ex-slave populations of 17th century Dutch Guiana (1990). Conversions were few during this short-lived mission, but Price notes how the Saramarka Christianity of one clan fed directly into inter-clan warfare spurred by competition for European goods and supported their defense against Dutch efforts to recapture them as ex-slaves. Nicole Constable's study of Protestants in Hong Kong emphasizes the way that Hakka ethnic identity has been maintained and reaffirmed in part through conversion to, and maintenance of, imported Protestant Christian culture from the colonial period. Despite the shedding of Chinese religious rituals, both Chinese national and Hakka ethnic identities did not disappear after joining a German evangelical mission community (1994). And in India, colonial era missions tended to attract untouchables or members of other stigmatized castes (cf. Hardgrave 1969, Bugge 1994, Dube 1998, Kent 1999) who sometimes sought out missions for religious instruction in new forms of identity making but without leading to any necessary, post-baptismal erasure of their caste identities. Constable and Price direct our attention to the complex transformations of multiple identities within missionary movements from which models of "conversion" and "Christianization" unduly distract our attention. Phenomenological conversion models, especially, tempt us to imagine a substitution of dominant pre-Christian identities with a dominant Christian one, when throughout the world, such inner conversions are often ones that transpire primarily in rhetoric and in narratives of self (cf. Stromberg 1986).

A third major issue in anthropological literature on Christian missionary movements is the relative reception of, and resistance to, cultural practices introduced by missionaries. An important trend in the literature is to see the missionary encounter, and conversion itself, as a dialogic process or conversation and not as monolithic, colonial domination (Comaroff and

Comaroff 1991: 248-251 and Jolly 1996: 234-236). While I do not have the space to explore the dialogue between American missionaries and their colleagues within mission compounds like Pasumalai, I do not assume that the rhetoric or practices introduced by the former were facily accepted by the latter or, even when they were, accepted the way in which missionaries intended. Equally as important, it is not wise to read excessive collegiality into 'dialogues' that were often hierarchical along multiple axes of identity (class, race, etc.), especially before the era of American mission devolution in the 1930s. Each site of encounter between missionaries and targeted groups has to be understood in terms of its own historically specific political qualities.

The most famous political category of missionary encounter in the anthropological literature is the colonial era "revitalization" movement. Africa is perhaps the region of the world *par excellence* where manifold forms of Christian practice have been repeatedly incorporated into creative, some might say "syncretistic", revivalist movements, such as the Fang movement in Gabon known as Bwiti (Fernandez 1982). These movements of imaginative bricolage actively resisted the disciplinary authority of missionaries without completely resisting structures of thought or imagination introduced by them.¹⁰ Similar movements emerged within Native American (cf. Mooney 1991[1896]; Wallace 1969) and Indian communities (cf. Dube 1998) and even in regions of the world never directly, or fully, colonized by European empires and trading companies such as Thailand (cf. Hughes 1984), China (cf. Constable 1994) and Taiwan (cf. Jordan 1993). In 1956, Anthony Wallace published his seminal work on "revitalization movements" which, he argues, center on a "deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture (1956: 265)." Revitalization movements,

though influenced by contact with missionaries, always took place well *beyond* the mission compound.¹¹

Yet, those who live at the periphery of mission or church political economies, form another political order of missionary encounter. While a small minority of these individuals actually have lived urban, middle class lives, the bulk of Christians in formerly colonized regions of the world have always lived, and continue to live, in domains marked out as “rural” or “village”, domains located, culturally and physically, well beyond the mission compound. Many reside in or near their natal villages, continuing much of pre-mission cultural life (for a contemporary discussion of such a situation in New Guinea, see Barker 1993). Traditionally, mediators between the mission compound and rural, hinterland mission communities were the mission catechists (cf. Bugge 1994: 79-110; Orta 1999), individuals caught between two very different worlds of Christian identity performance. Whether recently baptized or the multi-generational descendants of those baptized in colonial mission, rural Christians in the developing world are metonymically indexed by the Santhal Christians of Orissa whom Graham Staines had gone to visit in January of 1999.

But, for those who made, and continue to make, a living *within* the elaborate, institutionalized political economies of colonial missions and their post-colonial churches--whether as teachers, nurses, clerks, pastors, or catechists--one can not assume the same order of Christian identity performance as one would find in the hinterlands of mission or as one might find among the educated, urban, middle class elite who also claim membership in the same Christian communities. Such mission compound Christians, who have become the elite of many post-colonial Christian communities, connect historically to a political order of missionary

encounter that should be analyzed according to its own historical qualities and not blended in uncritically in a unitary concept of “the missionary encounter.” And this dissertation is one of the first historical ethnographies of a post-colonial Christian community historically defined by its former role as a colonial era mission compound.

Toward an Historical Anthropology of Multiple Identity Performance

This study is also my attempt to bring together three seldom conjoined theoretical perspectives in historical ethnography: identity, performance and social class. My theoretical purpose is to develop our analytical understanding of how cultural actors perform modern forms of literate class identity in coordinated, meaningful relation to other critical social identities of cultural relevance to them.

Identity: I use the terms “identity” and “self” in this study as mutually interchangeable terms, while preferring the term “identity.” While the former term has famous origins in Eric Erikson’s multi-staged theory of child development (1950) not relevant to my usage of it, talk of “selves” has partial origins in the philosophical lectures of George Herbert Mead, who saw the self as “...that which can be an object to itself” and formed in social interaction as the internalization of a “generalized other” or social group (1962). Inspired more heavily by James Fernandez’ theoretical work on metaphors in cultural performance (1986), I prefer the term “identity” which I am defining here as a performed tropological relationship connecting a human subject/actor (cf. Fernandez’ “inchoate pronoun”; 1986: 8) to a specific domain of historically shifting, often contested meanings and emotional qualities.¹² However, in contrast to Fernandez’s discussion of an inchoate, singular pronoun becoming choate in verbal

performances, I am focusing on how individuals come to structure the performance of their multiple identities.

Talk of “self” and “personhood” in the tradition of ethnopsychology and psychological anthropology has often tried to compose safe generalizations on how all individuals in a broad cultural community (defined empirically) experience *their* selves (e.g. Hallowell’s “self-orientation” 1955; Hsu 1985; Shweder and Bourne 1984; Rosaldo 1984; Parish 1994). This essentializing tradition has been critiqued by Dorinne Kondo in her own introduction to the anthropology of the self (1990: 36-39).¹³ And she is not alone in paying attention to how an individual has multiple selves, variably manifest in social life (cf. Mead 1962: 144; Fogelson 1982: 78; DeMunck 1992). But rather than assuming an inner, central, or monitoring ‘self’, Kondo challenges us with a critical issue in the anthropology of self, “...how selves in the plural are constructed variously in various situations, how these constructions can be complicated and enlivened by multiplicity and ambiguity (1990: 43).” And I also share this perspective, seeing multiple identities *co-present* in specific performative moments.

But Kondo also raises another problem in theorizing about the cultural construction of selves and identities: the role of creative agency vs. the role of power and other structural forces (such as culture). In part, she sees this stubborn etiological antimony as the result of an older assumption, a “subject-object” dichotomy which sees, “...a ‘person’--that is, human beings as bearers of social roles, on the one hand, and ‘self’, a kind of inner, reflective psychological essence, recapitulating the binary between social and psychological, world and subject (1990: 34).”¹⁴ For Kondo, though, “identity is not a static object, but a creative process...human beings create, construct, work on, and enact their identities, sometimes creatively challenging the limits

of the cultural constraints which constitute both what we call selves and the ways those selves can be crafted (1990: 48).”¹⁵

In this dissertation I am inspired by Kondo’s perspective on “selves in the plural” and how these are *sometimes* “creatively challenged,” not in relation simply to “cultural constraints” or structures of power, but in particular lived historical moments of identity dilemma. Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical model (1959) also influences me to look at the performative arrangement (or occasionally creative re-arrangement) of *multiple* identities into what I am terming audiovisual “identity fronts,” fronts that conceal or demote specific identities while revealing or promoting others. I also take heed of critiques concerning the excessive reliance on language data in cultural studies of selfhood (Fogelson 1982: 85; Harris 1989: 607); “selves in the plural” also find critical expressions in the non-verbal domains of cultural performance.

Performance: But what of this word “performance” and its appearance in the phrase “cultural performance?” The term “performance” has two broad theoretical sources in anthropological theory: linguistic anthropology¹⁶ and ritual studies.¹⁷ While my perspective on performance is much broader than a study of “heightened,” ritual states of temporary “Christian liminality”, the commitment of Victor Turner and Richard Schechner to far more than a *linguistic* analysis of performance deeply influences this study. The potential relevance of color, bodily adornment, aesthetic symbolism, as much as speech utterance and rhetoric, demand our attention in thorough explorations concerning how specific identities get performed. One of the early pioneers in bridging these subfields was James Fernandez, whose early work on metaphor emerged from detailed ethnography of the rituals of a Fang religious movement known as Bwiti (1982).¹⁸

But, the term “performance” also has another source in social science theory: social interactionism. This school’s most famous proponent, Erving Goffman, imbues performance with a much more deliberate, strategic sense, regardless of context. He defines “performance” rather broadly as “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way the other participants (1959: 15).” Rephrasing it in the terms of James Fernandez (1986), performance becomes defined as social interaction that *persuades*. Goffman’s early work has become associated primarily with his latent assumption of a totally rational, deliberate actor, constantly “managing” his “impressions” in ways that seem implausible and misleading, especially for those who believe in the structuring influence of “cultures” (see Cohen 1994: 10 and 27; DeMunck 1992: 169). Nevertheless, his concept of the “front” does include his own admission that the crucial communicating elements of self-performance operate *regardless* of the actor’s intent (Goffman 1959: 22). The part of a “front” which is linked to the individual performing body is what he terms a “personal front,” or what I am calling an “identity front”: “insignia of office or rank; clothing, sex, age, and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures...(24)”¹⁹ And certainly not all these, or certainly not all at once, are fully in anyone’s conscious control.²⁰ Much of any personal front, what I refer to as an “identity front”, emerges merely from habit.

By this, I mean that the identity fronts we tend to perform in specific sociohistorical worlds are enculturated habits partially independent of deliberate agency and do not necessarily rise to reflection, though they are always susceptible to interruption, re-arrangement and challenge. Yet, Goffman’s early theoretical work does not really address how “personal fronts” may or may not emerge as habit and not as more or less conscious “impression management.”

Using the original Latin word for habit,²¹ though, Pierre Bourdieu offers us a theory of practice, a theory of cultural behavior as “habitus”, that best conveys the force I argue dynamically structures the performance of any human individual’s multiple selves,”

...systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (1990: 53).

Bourdieu’s theory of habitus is the best attempt I have encountered at transcending the “usual antimonies...of determinism and freedom, conditioning and creativity, consciousness and the unconscious, or the individual and society (ibid: 55).” Although his application of a “structuring structure” is replete in the dualisms of French structuralism, and encompasses virtually all the practical activities of the Kabyle of Algeria in its symbolic logic (1977: 96-158), I am using habitus here to stand for an embodied force that structures a specific identity front and encourages its perpetuation in many, but not all, domains of activity. It is my assumption, therefore, that we can be influenced by more than one collectively shared habitus.

And while Bourdieu is also dealing with a mystifying, internalized habitus which has no need of a deliberate strategist, “... a spontaneity without consciousness or will (1990: 56),” I re-fashion his model with a Goffman-like interest in the concrete *strategies* incorporated into habitualized identity fronts. Yet, even though habits may not need agency, and certainly abhor “creativity,” the human animal is not mere habit, but also capable of creatively challenging its own habitual dispositions. Human life has many moments when what has been embodied uncritically, what was so persuasive the persuasion itself remained undetected, becomes unpersuasive. In sum, I am fusing the perspectives of Goffman and Bourdieu into a theory of

identity performance that explains how dispositions to perform multiple selves simultaneously, and in coordinated ways as specific “identity fronts,” become inhabited and then re-structured in historical time.

In the historicist tradition of Franz Boas, James Fernandez’ monumental ethnography (1982) and Sherry Ortner’s equally sophisticated work on Sherpa Buddhist monastic institutions (1989), I explore the historical genesis of a specific “structuring structure” that has affected the performance of an identity front among Christian Tamils closely associated with former mission compounds and their specific political economies.²² I will demonstrate how the specific contexts in which a mission compound identity front appears have altered since the late colonial period and also how individuals have re-structured such an embodied habitus of multiple identity performance according to the perceived conditions of the moment. The key is to locate the historical moments of dilemma in which a habitus restructures itself at the level of Bourdieu’s “biological individual”; where a radical degree of agency challenges the dominance of habitus.²³ And I will be looking especially at how such reflective, strategic moments relate to the broader pursuit of religiously veiled class mobility by some of the more persistently stigmatized peoples of colonial and post-colonial India.

Social Class: And this leads me to the third and final area of theoretical concern. As Raymond Smith points out, “class” has often been seen as a term within the broader study of social stratification (1984: 468-9), although Louis Dumont has rejected the latter concept as Eurocentric (1980: 247-66 cited in Smith 1984: 473). Dumont’s controversial stance challenges us to consider to what extent class hierarchies and formations present in the colonial metropole have really been transferred to, or reproduced within, the colonial and post-colonial world

periphery (Smith 1984: 477). The bulk of early anthropological writings dealing with social class in the colonial and post-colonial world derive inspiration from Marx and Engels (e.g. Gough 1981; Wolf 1982; Nash 1979; Taussig 1980) and are especially indebted to theories of a world capitalist economic system first postulated by Wallerstein (1974). Lionel Caplan (1987) and Sara Dickey (2000), however, are cultural anthropologists of South Asia whose fieldwork in Tamil Nadu has led them to view social classes primarily as *cultural* formations defined as much by shared symbolic features as by shared levels of financial capital.

In this dissertation, I use class as an etic category, but one that has become part of contemporary urban Tamil society's shared calculus of relative privilege. Dickey's own research has shown that there is a class of individuals in urban Tamil Nadu who do self-identify using the English phrase "middle class" within a tri-partite phenomenology of class familiar to most middle class Westerners (2000: 465). Yet, she also notes that most members of Tamil society generally see these 'middle class' individuals as "rich people" in an older, feudal and binary class phenomenology (ibid). Yet, in applying this identity category, I am largely inspired by the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu. Writing against the Marxist tradition, Bourdieu argues that, "A social class (in-itself)...is at the same time a class of biological individuals having the same habitus, understood as a system of dispositions common to all products of the same conditionings (1990: 59)." For Bourdieu, such dispositional classes exist in a "social world" that,

...attains, in the objective world itself, the status of a *symbolic system* which...is organized in accordance with the logic of difference, of differential deviation, which is thus constituted as significant *distinction*...Distinction...is the difference written into the very structure of the social space when it is perceived in accordance with the categories adapted to that structure...(1991: 237-8; original emphases).

Social distinction then becomes, "...capital, of whatever kind, when it is perceived by an agent endowed with categories of perception arising from the incorporation of the structure of its distribution. (1991: 238)."

While Bourdieu's early work discusses how one form of capital, "symbolic capital", such as a family reputation, becomes converted into economic capital in ways perhaps crucial for peasant communities in Algeria (1977: 179), I focus here on *three* forms of interrelated capital which facilitate persuasive performances of social distinction beyond the peasant fold and in the eyes of one's class peers. And it is my assumption that such distinction is a performance of self ultimately aimed at convincing oneself and an imagined peerage of a distinct status. This is what I am alternately defining as "middle class" distinction; but, in the context of a predominantly peasant and working class India, it might also be rightly viewed as "elite" distinction. I label these three forms of class capital as: (1) **Financial Capital** or cash salaries predicated on non-peasant forms of knowledge, (2) **Knowledge Capital** or literacy and a knowledge pedigree (i.e. degrees), and (3) **Moral Capital** or an elitist moral image of ascetic self-control accepted by those within a specific moral community. Using this model, I explore why a habitualized mission compound identity front has engendered some measure of class distinction for some Christians living today in Pasumalai and not for others.

The Anthropology of South Asia's Many Selves

Beginning with controversies ensuing from the publication of Louis Dumont's theory of the caste system (1966), there has been wide concern expressed about overly general descriptions of Indian society and the behaviors that facilitate and structure social interaction within it. For

example, Appadurai (1986) and Mines (1994) are two scholars who, from different perspectives, have criticized overly sweeping, reductionist imaginings of “caste India.” Mines, especially, has criticized Marriott’s famous theory of “coded substance” “transactionalism” as a general theory of Hindu society and a theory of Hindu selfhood (1994: 6).²⁴ And, after the December 6, 1992 destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya by right wing Hindu nationalists,²⁵ even the once common mutual iconicity of “India” and “Hindu” has acquired dangerously majoritarian connotations. Even the very word “Hindu” itself has become challenged as misleading (cf. Ludden 1996: 6). With increasing violence aimed at Christians in North India during my own research, I feel that writing beyond *Indian* selves and beyond Indian selves as *Hindu* selves has become even more urgent than it already was.

Closer to the site of this study, the literature on self and person in Tamil Nadu has provided important ethnographic windows onto ways of thinking and speaking as a Tamil person (Beck 1976; Daniel 1983; Daniel 1984), onto peasant transactions according to caste identity (Good 1982), onto identity formation in domestic interactions with close kin (Trawick 1990) and onto notions of Tamil individuality (Mines 1994). Unfortunately, several of these ethnographic portraits use data from rather circumscribed domains of identity performance to construct representations of “Tamil” cultural forms (with the exception of Beck who limits her conclusions to “Hindu Tamil Nadu”). While some heuristic term is always necessary to depict a broad cultural community, beyond discussions of linguistic conventions and verbal performances (cf. Daniel 1984), I feel that excessive solitary use of the “Tamil” language identity tag may overplay a misleading logic.²⁶ A shared language can only index shared cultural values, and or phenomenologies, among its speakers to a limited extent. And precisely because of its excessive

vagueness as a broad heuristic device, “Tamil talk” has, for decades now, been the potent crucible of Dravidian politics.²⁷ Dravidian political rhetoric has taken an idealized, de-Sanskritized *centamil* (pure Tamil) as metonymic of a basal cultural whole, because such a sweeping logic best facilitates political mass mobilization in a state otherwise divided by complex divisions of caste, class, and regional cultural identities.²⁸ Because I am wary of making cultural generalizations that draw too heavily on the logic of an *ahistorical* political rhetoric still dominant in Tamil Nadu, I have minimalized my use of the term as a solitary descriptor throughout this dissertation without denying that the Tamil language itself is a shared cultural form.

Representing Indian Christian Worlds

The study of Indian religions has, by in large, been the study of Hinduism in its many different forms. Since 82% of the Indian population was identified under the colonial category of “Hindu” in the 1991 Census of India, this is hardly surprising. Much other scholarly interest in the “Indian” divine has quickly extended to extreme minority faiths like Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism which, when viewed together, formed only 1.55% of the general population of India in 1991. India’s third largest religious minority in 1991 was actually its Christian population; yet they constituted a mere 2.34% of the general Indian population.²⁹ While the northeastern tribal states and the former Portugese colony of Goa have the highest proportions of Christians in their general populations,³⁰ as of 1991, 56% of India’s Christians actually lived in the deep south, in what are known as the Dravidian language speaking states of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu; 29% in Kerala alone (see Map 1).³¹ These are historical spaces that

once hosted cosmopolitan kingdoms, which, in turn, became the nexus of global spice trading networks pre-dating the Christian era. Modern day Tamil Nadu is part of the former Madras Presidency and home to the old Pasumalai mission compound. As of 1991, 5.69% of Tamil Nadu's 56 million people were Christian, fully 17% of the total Indian Christian population. Based on my own limited survey in 1998-99, at least 40% of Pasumalai's circa 8,000 residents were Christians.

Since the late 1960s, historical work on Indian Christians has grown considerably. The bulk of this literature studies the effects and dynamics of colonial missionization and conversion in southern India.³² Many of these scholars have tried to understand the social and economic factors predisposing conversions *en masse* to Christianity, especially in the late 19th and early twentieth centuries; focusing primarily on caste identity and kinship as the central social variables. For example, Robert Hardgrave's famous study examines the 19th century mass conversions within particular sub-castes of the Nadar community in southern Tamil Nadu. Some Nadars found Christianity and the patronage of Anglican Christian missionaries a means for limited social mobility, horizontal caste organization and a renaissance of caste pride (1969). Some of the more recent studies focus on problematizing what "conversion" has meant beyond the immediate context of grassroots caste politics. For example, Gauri Viswanathan's recent collection of trenchant essays deals most admirably with how conversions in colonial India were often a process revealing the interconnectedness of personal conviction, the cultural politics of dissent and dilemmas of identity construction faced by converts to Christianity in colonial India (1998).

Ethnography on Indian Christians is nascent and also has had its own distinct foci from missiological³³ and anthropological perspectives. Impelled by the surge of empirical ethnographic research on caste in the 1960s and 1970s and by the theoretical controversy ignited by Louis Dumont's original treatise on the caste system (1966), much of the early social science work on Indian Christians was motivated by understanding caste among the "non-Hindu."³⁴ Christopher Fuller's dissertation (1974) and subsequent article (1976) provided early documentation that India's oldest Christian community, the Syrian Christians of southern Kerala,³⁵ share with their Hindu neighbors a fundamental orthopraxy and ideology of caste distinction, but without employing the specific ideology of purity and pollution necessitated by Dumont's sweeping ideological theory of the caste system (1976: 68). Caste rank is, in Fuller's view, independent of affiliation with religious organizations (1974: 61).³⁶

While even earlier studies by Diehl (1965) and by Luke and Carman (1968) noted the continued presence of caste distinctions among Indian Christians in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, David Mosse was the first ethnographer to design an entire study around a comparative exploration of caste hierarchy in Hindu vs. Christian communities. Choosing a village with a long standing Catholic population in southern Tamil Nadu, he found, as Fuller did in Kerala, that Christians and Hindus share a structurally identical practice of inter caste relations and therefore, no necessarily 'Hindu' ideology of purity and pollution undergirds these relations (1986).³⁷

Lionel Caplan's work moved beyond the "caste and Christianity" problem and beyond the worlds of "village Christians," who are arguably the bulk of the Indian Christian population, to focus on Pentecostalism among urban Protestants in Madras (1987).³⁸ His work was the first

to analyze the class differences within urban Indian Christian communities and how contrasting “class cultures” can, in part, explain participation in the growing Pentecostal movement (1987).³⁹

This dissertation contributes to the growing body of ethnographic and historical literature on south Indian Christians in four ways. Firstly, it is a study of a Christian community formed during British colonialism, and, therefore, unlike Kerala’s pre-colonial, Syrian Christian communities, has the largest relevance to the historical pasts of most of India’s Christians. Secondly, this is the first historical ethnography of a former Indian mission compound, its particular historical qualities and the identity performances of Indian Christians who have lived there.⁴⁰ Thirdly, this study contributes to historical ethnography of how caste and class identities get performed in the cultural life of one Indian Christian community.

Since much of the existing literature fails to draw us close to specific Indian Christian lives, the last contribution of my work is that it draws the reader close to the concrete performance of Christian identity in southern India by using narrative vignettes, biographical and family narratives and, where possible, translated voices. At a time when ascendant right wing nationalist narratives of the Christian self have revived a charged colonial axis of tension between “Hindu” and “Christian”, it seems particularly important that we pay some attention to the lived, human experiences of “Indian Christians” in postcolonial India. These are often narratives in which the “Christian” appears, once again, as a key metaphor for the de-nationalized traitor, for the symptoms of a cultural tetanus contracted from the colonial blade.

How I Came to Pasumalai

My selection of Pasumalai remains, in retrospect, as much serendipitous as designed. The community was one introduced to me in June 1995 by a former Madurai resident who spent

most of his youth growing up in Pasumalai. Almost immediately, and despite my secular self-identity, Pasumalai's monumental qualities as a former American mission compound visually enticed me.

And, during the 'winter' of 1997, my weekly trips to the Pasumalai church to develop my understanding of "Christian Tamil" finally persuaded me that Pasumalai qua former mission compound formed a fascinating, less awkward space than a village in which to study the performance of Christian identity as an identity of alterity in contemporary India. As majoritarian Hindu rhetoric grew in volume during 1998, I realized that I also wanted to study a well established Christian community with a strong sense of history and collective self-confidence. I was looking for a Christian community with a habitus of maximal "distinction", in the Bourdieuvian sense; a community where Christian identity performance emerges from a deeply embodied habitus, not as a hurried, awkward improvisation whenever the catechist or pastor appears. While some tried to convince me that "village Christians" have the "real faith," I was not really interested in studying "faith" or religious sincerity (nor did I assume that the rural/urban dichotomy parallels any dichotomy between faith and lack of faith). I was more interested in learning about a public performance of a distinctive "Christian" self, *regardless* of its sincerity. My initial speculation, therefore, was that a mission compound like Pasumalai would be more likely to feature strident, well embodied, performances of a "Christian" identity front.

By July 1998, when I rented the small retirement home built by a former Pasumalai High School headmaster, I had already established 11 months of rapport with dozens of Pasumalai individuals and felt reasonably welcomed by the community. It seemed foolish to throw away

such invaluable symbolic capital and find another former mission compound, when Pasumalai itself had suggested to me the idea of studying a mission compound. Because of this decision, during most of my interviews with Pasumalai Christians, I was talking with individuals I had already known for at least 12 months, if not much longer. This facilitated productive, relatively candid, interviews with people extremely busy managing the affairs of their urban existence. I also had no reason to fear that my very presence in a predominantly middle class Pasumalai Christian community would inspire any adverse, jealous or political reaction from local Hindus who are hardly in any *clear* position of dominance over them.

Methodology and Representational Limits

My fieldwork lasted 16 months, from early July 1998 until the first week of December 1999. During my research, I performed classic “community” ethnography by attending, when possible, local life cycle rituals, church events, by mapping the community, etc. The bulk of the biographical and family narratives I collected come from tape-recorded, semi-structured conversations, nearly 100 interviews with 85 different individuals, roughly 70 of whom are life-long residents of Pasumalai. Aside from some oral history interviews, I did not start intensive interviewing until six months after moving to Pasumalai.

The methods I used in the field recognized that an a priori assumption of some total, context-independent, distinction of “biological individuals” as “Christian selves” is mere missionary fantasy. Such an assumption only resonates, rather eerily, with resurgent caricatures of the “de-nationalized” Christian, the Christian qua ‘foreign element’, perpetrated by paranoid elements of the Hindu nationalist movement. Pasumalai Christians have many identities, like we

all do. They participate in critical communities of identity transecting the Christian community itself (caste, class, gender, occupation, etc). It was towards the performative spaces (and moments) where one can see and hear a collectively shared arrangement of multiple identities in an “identity front” distinctive of mission compound Christians that my ethnographic data gathering worked.

In addition, I need to discuss some of the limitations of this study’s research design. Pasumalai was not necessarily a ‘typical’ mission compound. As Chapter one will demonstrate, it was the symbolic center of the American Madura Mission (AMM) and contained far more schools, a far larger staff and a far larger population of students than most other late colonial AMM mission compounds. It also featured a much denser population of resident missionary families from the 1920s until the early 1960s (from two to four) than other AMM compounds. American cultural influences, therefore, were greatest in the late colonial AMM’s Pasumalai institutions.

One other critical limitation was the interactional consequence of an identity often attributed to me. During my first year in Madurai, I learned a lot about local “stereotypes” of missionaries and “the white man” and about how both categories often overlap in the minds of many older people in Madurai District (only recently penetrated by significant foreign tourism). And, wherever I went in the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese of the Church of South India (including the AMM’s former churches and institutions), I repeatedly encountered individuals confusing me with a missionary or an ardent Christian enthusiast, despite showing a business card that clearly identified me in Tamil as a “research student” in “Anthropology.” For many elderly Christians I met, merely seeing my face generated nostalgic recollections of various American missionaries

they knew as children or as young adults. Regardless of how much I chafed at this identity of attribution, for some, I truly was a living, breathing mnemonic metonym of the late colonial AMM or of more recent, post-colonial Christian missionaries. While I have tried to exercise as much skepticism as possible and to see answers and narratives as both identity positions as well as windows onto the past and present, some local Christians (though not all of them) may have censored both negative feelings towards former American missionaries and allegiance to practices thought to be ‘unorthodox.’

Throughout this study, I use various categorical terms to describe “Christian” communities of varying scales. In Part 1 I will generally use the phrase “Pasumalai Christians” because, in the late colonial period, most self-identifying Christians in Pasumalai shared affiliation with one mission, the AMM, and its version of Christian practices in the Protestant tradition. And, even today, only a minority of Pasumalai Christians identify themselves as Roman Catholics and Pentecostals. Generally, my use of the term “Christian” in this dissertation refers to those whose families became baptized in the churches of the AMM or in its post-colonial form, the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese of the Church of South India (CSI, est. 1947). In Part 2, I often employ the phrase “CSI Tamils” to indicate the potentially broader scope of my ethnographic conclusions to those who may also live and work well beyond the Pasumalai mission compound but who share a common identity as members of a broader church entity.⁴¹ Since most CSI Tamils I worked with do, in the context of their Christian identity performances, actively differentiate themselves from “RC people” (Roman Catholics) and from “Pentecost people”, this label acknowledges an emic denominational self-differentiation that was prevalent during my research.

The CSI is not so much a theologically or liturgically *unified* community as a bricolage of cultural practices shared, at its greatest extent, by members of churches established within several non-Lutheran, colonial Protestant missions. Even before the 1947 formation of the CSI, AMM churches participated in an early ecumenical union with American mission churches in Ceylon and the London Missionary Society churches of the Travancore Kingdom; it was briefly known as the United Church of South India (est. 1905). When the Presbyterian churches of the Scottish missions and the Arcot mission churches (Reformed Church of America) joined three years later, the body became known as the South India United Church.⁴² The AMM's supervisory board, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (est. 1810) had always been fairly ecumenical in the recruitment of its missionaries, drawing many Congregationalists, Presbyterians (until 1870)⁴³ and, later, even Reformed Church members into its missionary ranks. Further complicating the 'denominational' influences in Pasumalai was the periodic hiring of teachers from other missions (especially the Anglican S.P.G. in Tirunelveli) to fill posts in its institutions.⁴⁴ With the 1947 formation of the CSI came an Anglican veneer to liturgy and a formal episcopal structure to church politics within the former AMM churches (church cesses to a Diocese for pastors' salaries, Anglican calendrical and liturgical cycles) but one that still allows room for lay participation at the highest levels. The weekly Sunday liturgy in Pasumalai itself features Anglican processions and altar decorations and the historically Presbyterian use of individual communion cups (rather than a common chalice). All this evidence supports my policy of avoiding Western denominational categories to explain anything in Pasumalai's contemporary Christian scene. Pasumalai has always featured a bricolage of Protestant denominational cultural practices.

Although the word “Hindu” has once again become revived as a nationalist identity category by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and dozens of other right wing Hindu organizations, I use the word “Hindu” in this dissertation as a necessarily abstract descriptor, like “Christian”, to refer to the panoply of diverse religious sects and movements whose historical origins lie within the subcontinent’s diverse cultural worlds. When I use it broadly, I mean to imply individuals who, like most self-identifying Hindus, participate in multiple domains of religious worship, both Brahminical and non-Brahminical.

Since Pasumalai is such an important historical site in the history of southern Tamil Nadu, and because I cite many public, archival documents from the ABCFM collection at Houghton Library that name “Pasumalai”, I have not altered its true name. However, to protect the anonymity of those with whom I lived, spoke and interviewed for my research, I have replaced virtually all real names of interviewees and ethnographic subjects with semantically appropriate pseudonyms. Any correspondence between personal characteristics or reported behaviors and real people who lived in Pasumalai during 1998 or 1999 and who may bear the pseudonyms used in this dissertation is purely coincidental. In some cases, I have also felt it necessary to fictionalize occupations, ages and the exact dates of events. Only the names of American missionaries, the names of deceased individuals mentioned in the context of publicly accessible archival documents, the names of local authors whose works I cite and names discussed in the context of what I feel are non-controversial issues, remain unaltered.

Finally, throughout this manuscript, I employ the ethnographic present very sparingly, using the past and past perfect tenses as much as possible. I believe that good ethnography should acknowledge not only the structuring influence of historical context on everything that an

ethnographer observes in the field, but also the historically positioned process of ethnographic fieldwork itself. My data, therefore, *already* speaks to a past Pasumalai. Historical context is, perhaps, *the* fundamental tool that enables proper ethnographic skepticism of what our informants claim about either the past or the present. Whenever possible, juxtaposing archival texts with the verbal performances of oral history and ethnographic data enables the maximum of scholarly skepticism and insight when assessing our informants' varying claims about the "cultural reality" they inhabit; a reality we struggle to understand, to translate and to narrate.

PART 1
FROM MISSION TO MONUMENT

Chapter 1 Pasumalai's Conversion

One lazy afternoon in December, 1998, reclining supine on a bed with more than a dozen pillows heaped at one end to elevate his heart and aid his failing circulation, one of Pasumalai's most respected Christian elders whispered his version of how an American missionary named William Tracy became attached to a 200 foot hill made of quartz rock, 2.5 miles from Madurai,

I've heard that Reverend Tracy was the first to start a ministry in Tirumangalam. It was during that period, that, one day, he was traveling on the road from Tirumangalam to Madurai, known as Mangammal Road, Queen Mangammal Road [now National Highway 7]. In those days, he traveled throughout that area by horseback, because there were no vehicles available. And he used to travel with his servants. In that period, the area where Pasumalai *alayam* [church; lit. temple] stands today was a large grove, much like a garden. One day Tracy brought his horse to stop at the edge of the road and went into the grove to pray. His prayer's greatest boon was that, later on, great educational institutions and a church were established in Pasumalai.¹

This legend reveals not a verifiable event, but rather two themes in the collective Christian remembering of Pasumalai: (1) Pasumalai's history begins with the missionary presence, and (2) its distinctive historical features are its church and schools. Just as the last sentence conjoins religious and educational institutions, Pasumalai would eventually become a monumental colonial site in which students accrued the knowledge capital necessary for performing a modern middle class identity, but through its proudly *Christian* schools.²

For many Pasumalai Christians, the history of the old mission compound is the primary local history that matters. Written Tamil souvenirs celebrating local jubilees at the Pasumalai Church (1979) and its High school (1995) narrate Pasumalai's history as if it began in 1845.³ A local Tamil teacher has even collected oral and written narratives of Pasumalai's Christian history that also omit any mention of pre-Christian Pasumalai (Devaraj 1995). And,

unsurprisingly, American mission histories also make no mention of Pasumalai *before* 1845.⁴ One local Christian, whose patrilineal ancestors have dwelled in Pasumalai for over a century, even claimed that, “Without the missionaries, there would be no Pasumalai...The place we’re sitting right now was created by them...They’re the ones who gave the very name ‘Pasumalai’ ”⁵ Yet, the 1995 memorial program for Pasumalai’s 150th anniversary acknowledges, in a brief rhetorical whisper, that the name “Pasumalai” (Cow Hill) actually has a pre-Christian monumental function in Madurai’s collective memory.

Pasumalai is one of six hills standing within five miles of Madurai, rocky protuberances on the otherwise dishpan flat, semi-arid Vaigai River plain. Most everyone raised in Madurai knows their names—*Yāñaimalai* (elephant hill), *Nākamalai* (snake hill), *Kiḷakkuyilkuṭi* (village at the eastern fort), *Pasumalai* (cow hill), *Kāḷaimalai* (bull hill) and *Tirupparaṅkuṅṅam* (the sacred mount of heaven). Far fewer, perhaps, can recount the Saivite *stalapurāṅkaḷ* (legends in verse form about specific holy places) that assign three of them magical origins in an old religious feud.⁶

It is in the poetic verse of the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭal Purāṅam* (epic in verse form) that we can locate the earliest written mention of a hill named “Pasumalai.” The Saivite Brahmin poet *Cellinakar Perumparrappuliyūr Nampi* (or Nambi) wrote the oldest, 1,753 verse Tamil version of this *purāṅam* perhaps as early as the 13th century (Nambi 1972); while, in the 16th century, Parancoti Munivar wrote a more elaborate 3,363 verse version (1965).⁷ Near the end of his 36th Chapter Nambi narrates Pasumalai’s origin not in the tectonic upheavals of geologic time but rather in a religious feud between Jains and Saivites (worshippers of Siva) for religious

dominance in the mythical time of medieval Madurai. This feud erupts periodically throughout the *purāṇam* and stands as one of its anchoring ideological themes. Nambi commences his communalist narrative in Chapter 22 where he depicts the Jains conjuring up a magical elephant with which to destroy Madurai only to watch as Siva transforms it into an elongated bald hill known as *Yāṇaimalai*; the name of a hill five miles north of Madurai. Twelve Chapters later Nambi narrates the putative origin of two other hills: *Nākamalai* and *Pasumalai*. After Siva turns a magical snake sent by the Jains into *Nākamalai* (Nambi 1972: Chapter 36, Verse 16), the Jains make another attempt to conquer Madurai by conjuring up the ultimate strategic weapon: a cow.⁸ Euphemistically derogating the Jains as “the shameless ones” (Ibid., verse 17), Nambi describes how they conjure up a magical cow with which to destroy Madurai once and for all, apparently thinking that the reigning Saivite King will be unable to order the cow’s death in the Kingdom’s defense. As the narrative continues, the King sees the approaching cow and runs to Madurai’s main Saivite temple to pray for Siva’s intervention. Siva responds by sending his own vehicle, a bull, to chase the cow and subdue it (Ibid., verses 20-22). And when the Jains’ magical cow sees Siva’s bull, Nampi writes in the idiom of historical event, “it was charmed, gave up all its strength, closed both its eyes and died...(Ibid., verse 23).” Siva, Nambi tells us, then turned its carcass into a hill named “Pasumalai.”⁹

For centuries, two written versions of the *Tiruvīḷaiyāṭal Purāṇam* have presented the very real hills known today as *Yāṇaimalai*, *Nākamalai* and *Pasumalai* as rocky graves, of a sort, in which Siva entombed the Jains’ three magical animal aggressors.¹⁰ Taken as tropes, these three hills serve both as poetic metonyms of a reactionary Saivite critique of Jainism and as

metaphors, perhaps, for specific, barely retrievable, historical moments of religious conflict. As numerous derogatory phrases such as “the shameless ones” reveal, Nambi’s mythic narration of the three hills’ origins also enshrines a triumphant Saivite version of a long since vanished religious feud.

After discussing the formation of the three hills, both Nambi and his poet successor, Parancoti Munivar, recount a climactic series of events in this Jain-Saivite struggle; a struggle historians place somewhere during the reign of a seventh century Pandian King who had apparently converted both himself and the Madurai Kingdom to Jainism *before* marrying a Saivite Chola wife as war booty.¹¹ Both versions of the *purāṇam* claim that, at the secret invitation of the King’s wife, the 7th century Saivite guru, Nāṇacampan̄tar (he who is connected to wisdom) came to “rescue” Madurai from its flirtation with Jainism.¹² Both versions depict Nāṇacampan̄tar trying to humiliate the Jains into defeat. First, he cures their Jain King from a dangerous fever with the central metonym of Saivite worship, *vipūti* (sacred ash), after the King’s Jain priests themselves had failed to heal him. Then Nāṇacampan̄tar engages the Jains in religious debate and wins a contest to see whose sacred texts have the magical power to fly across the Vaigai river and land upon its opposite bank. Building the conflict to a dramatic climax, both poets describe how Nāṇacampan̄tar forces the humiliated Jains to embrace Saivism in a public mass conversion. A mythic ‘8,000’ who refuse to become Saivites are then impaled on *kaḷumarāṅkaḷ* (tall, wooden stakes used for public impaling) (Parancoti Munivar 1965).¹³ Legend has it that Nāṇacampan̄tar eventually succeeded in converting King Arikesari back to Saivism and later went on to found a monastery known as the Madurai *āṭiṇam*, the name of a

local Saivite monastery operating today.¹⁴ Through dramatic conversions and public murders, Saivite poets narrate a pogrom-atic attempt to destroy the Jain whole by killing its most recalcitrant, metonymic parts.¹⁵

From at least 1894 onwards, Parancoti Munivar's expanded version of Nambi's *Tiruvilaiyāṭal Purāṇam* lay painted in a series of rectangular framed scenes along the outer walls of the Golden Lily Tank in Madurai's central Saivite temple to the Goddess Mīnākṣi and her consort, Lord Cuntariṣvarar (Siva).¹⁶ One frame even depicted the mythic pogrom against Jainism until workers recently covered it and the entire series with the paint of temple renovations. At the far left of this haunting frame, a Jain monk mounts a stone dais, with a wooden stake mounted firmly upon it. To his right, eleven of his fellow "shameless ones" hang impaled parallel to their spinal columns on separate *kaḷumaram* stakes mounted, in turn, on separate stone daises.¹⁷ Crows peck away the flesh on their shoulders and chests while stray dogs nibble at their legs and feet, lapping up their 'Jain' blood. At the far right, two Brahmin priests calmly behead the Jain corpses, one by one, disposing of their spiritual opponents as if calmly weeding a garden.

Yet, even beyond the realm of Saivite narratives that invent "Pasumalai" for ideological purposes, the geographical area at its base had a history of residential settlement prior to 1845, one fragment of which transports us to the time when the British East India Company was struggling for control of Tamil speaking south India. One and a half miles to the southwest of Pasumalai, stands a hill called *Tirupparaṅkuṇṇam* (TPK, see Map 2). Built deep into its solid rock north face lies the cave shrine of the Subramania Swami temple, dedicated to the Tamil god

Murugan, one of Siva's two mythical sons. Many of the temple's working Brahmin *paṭṭars* (priests) still live on the dusty *cannati teru* (shrine street) leading due north away from the temple's entrance.¹⁸ On one interior wall of the temple's only tower lies a stone inscription dating to 1792 (Burgess 1886: 41-43). The inscription commemorates the heroic protection of the temple at the hands of "Kutti", a local man who jumped from the temple tower to frighten away a regiment of "white men" which had cut its way through the main door underneath and was rapidly approaching Murugan's shrine. Driving them away with his "blood offering", Kutti received a gift of tax free lands in a nearby area known as the *tenkālpuravu* or, literally, the 'southern channel grant.'¹⁹ This is an area connected to the irrigation network of the famous *tenkālkuḷam* 'southern channel tank' [now called the TPK *kammāy* (reservoir)] that irrigates the rice fields of Pasumalai to this day.²⁰ The inscription's precise description of the gifted land's location reveals that it was east and south of land owned by two of the temple's priests, to the north of the "way to Madurai", and to the west of "Krishnapuram *kuṭiyiruppu* (residential area)" (see Map 2).

And to this day, "Krishnapuram" is still the name of a neighborhood lying just west of the old American Madura Mission compound in Pasumalai (see Map 2).²¹ During my research, its predominantly Pramalai Kallar residents still called it "Krishnapuram" along with most everyone else in the TPK area. The actual arrival date of Pramalai Kallar caste members to "Krishnapuram", however, is not clear. In one patrilineal group, two brothers claimed their clan's residency during the past four centuries, while their paternal aunt talked only of seven generations.²² Regardless, several members of Pasumalai's natal Pramalai Kallar clan claimed that the famous "Kutti" mentioned above was one of their ancestors and that, because of his

iratta kāṇikkai (blood offering) to defend the temple, they continue to receive *parivaṭṭam* (silk shawl) honors in the TPK temple every year.²³

The year 1792 was also one in which a new treaty allied the British and Mohammed Ali, the Muslim Nawab controlling the domains of the old Pandian Kingdom as well as much other territory at the subcontinent's southern tip. The treaty created an oddly bifurcated joint rule over the remnants of the former Madurai Kingdom; one in which the British controlled military and foreign relations while the Nawab administered the Kingdom's revenue affairs (Gowri 1987: 32-33). Whether or not members of Pasumalai's natal PK clan really are descendants of "Kutti", the 1792 TPK temple inscription establishes a local precedent for resistance to nascent British rule in the Pasumalai area backed by local temple political structures; hegemony that would become consolidated militarily in 1801 through the alienation of the Nawab from local administrative control. The temple inscription also reveals that a residential area known as "Krishnapuram" existed as early as 1792 near Pasumalai and may have been inhabited by the same Pramalai Kallar caste that dominated the neighborhood during my research. Finally, it also reveals that local Brahmin priests owned some of the arable land to the east of the TPK irrigation reservoir and therefore controlled a sphere of authority that extended near to the base of Pasumalai hill.

The American Protest Comes to Pasumalai

Many centuries after Nānacampantar's triumphant reclamation of the Pandian Kingdom for Saivism, two and a half centuries after Portuguese and Italian Jesuits first began Christian missionary work in Madurai and other areas of Malabar (including what is now Tamil Nadu state), 138 years after pietist missionaries from the Danish-Halle mission arrived in Tranquebar

near Madras (cf. Hudson 2000), 52 years after “Kutti” jumped off TPK’s Murugan temple tower, 43 years after the British East India Company had finally secured its control over the Madurai region and 11 years after the Company began allowing non-British missionaries licensed access to its Indian territories (cf. Neill 1985: 175-177), an American missionary and Yankee child of America’s second ‘Great Awakening’ began searching near Madurai for a suitable site to build a permanent mission seminary. The year was 1844. 37-year-old William Tracy had been in and around Madurai for nearly 10 years by then as a member of the American Madura Mission (AMM); itself an extension of the American Ceylon Mission in nearby Jaffna (the Tamil speaking region of modern Sri Lanka).²⁴ These men were part of a global surge in missionary evangelism directed by an ecumenical, Protestant organization known as the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM, founded in Boston in 1810). They entered a Madurai District with over a million inhabitants, many of whom would have already been familiar with Christian symbols and the worship of Catholic saints due to earlier Jesuit missionary work. As of 1839, 25,476 Roman Catholics lived in Madurai District, comprising 2% of the general population.²⁵ In Madurai, around 1,000 Catholics formed roughly 3% of its 30,000 inhabitants.²⁶ And, after the 1838 return of Jesuit missionaries to Madurai District, AMM missionaries were no longer the only foreign Christians working in the Madurai area.²⁷

In 1844, William Tracy selected Pasumalai as the site to permanently relocate the mission seminary established in 1842 in Tirumangalam (a small town to the southwest of Madurai and mentioned in this chapter’s opening legend). Pasumalai hill quickly transformed from rocky metaphor for a vanquished Jainism into the site, ironically enough, of yet another spiritual

movement opposing local Saivism. Tracy began erecting seminary buildings in 1844 on newly acquired Pasumalai land, but long before he had received any formal land title. The choice of Pasumalai was strategic, reflecting Tracy's intent to use the seminary to wage a campaign of religious persuasion tantalizingly near a city he imagined, not as a metonym of Nānacampantar's Saivism, but as a metonym of the 'dark, pagan other',

The influence of the Seminary is beginning to be felt, and its privileges valued among the people, and we look forward with much hope of its future usefulness in elevating them, and in dispelling the thick mental and spiritual darkness which now involves them...New and commodious buildings are now in the course of erection, in a pleasant situation near Madura. When these buildings are finished and the Seminary removed to its natural and central place, it must soon begin to attract more notice. Madura is the great stronghold and metropolis of idolatry in Southern India.²⁸

Over the course of the 19th century, in addition to building several boarding school mission compounds in Madurai District, American missionaries slowly secured land and built churches near the former sites of Madurai's four medieval gates, literally surrounding the old *Miṇākṣi* Temple in all four cardinal directions.²⁹ But even more powerfully symbolic than this gradual encompassing of Madurai city, was the AMM's formal, September 1845 occupation of Pasumalai. The historical irony of this occupation was not lost on William Tracy. He cleverly alludes to it eight months later in a letter to the secretary of the American Board,

In September of last year, I removed with my family and the Seminary to Pasumalai 2.25 miles S.W. from Madura...The Seminary compound contains nearly or quite 40 acres, including the side and top of a rocky hill about 200 feet in height, from which there is a fine prospect of the surrounding country. The hill has obtained its name (Pasumalai or Cow Hill) from a story recorded in the local Puranam...in ancient days during a war between the Buddhists and Brahmins, the former sent a cow of immense size to destroy the Brahmins and their followers, who from their religious scruples would be afraid to attack or destroy so sacred an animal. Siva however the god of the Brahmins, interfered and transformed this redoubtable cow into this Hill which remains to this day as a monument to the Hindoos of the prowess and faithfulness of their God. The Brahmins made much opposition to our processing this land. At one time some of them

mortgaged their own land and raised a considerable sum of money to carry on a prosecution against me, on the charge that I had unjustly and by violence siezed land which belongs to them. The case was decided against them without my being called upon to answer the charge. Since then the Governor in Council has given us a formal title to the occupancy of the land so that no further trouble can arise from the hostility of any one.”³⁰

By the spring of 1846 even William Tracy had come to understand that Pasumalai was a metonym for a long dead religious feud involving Madurai’s local Brahmin community, even though he mistakenly refers to the latter’s Jain opponents as “Buddhists.” Without pausing, Tracy implicitly makes his own small scale feud with local Brahmins a poetic allegory of a much more dramatic 7th century religious conflict.³¹

But what of the actual land transaction itself? The AMM’s 75th Jubilee history, written by a former missionary named John Chandler (1910), cites what Tracy’s colleague claims was the actual method of acquiring the land in Pasumalai,

We have been very fortunate in obtaining land for our seminary buildings for, instead of having to pay from Rs. 2,500 to Rs. 3,000 as we feared we would be obliged to do, we have obtained a fine and eligible site about two and a half miles from the city which will cost us in clearing and arranging for the purposes of building not over Rs. 400.³²

Reading the original letter to the American Board Treasurer in the archives yielded no more than this excerpted paragraph does about exactly *from whom* the land was obtained and what part, if any, of the Rs. 400 went to this putative seller. But it is known that this original land, obtained and occupied for the seminary buildings, was classified as roughly 10 “cawnies” (after the Tamil *kāṇi*), or 13-14 acres, of both *nañcey* (fields for wet grains) and *puñcey* (fields for dry grains),³³ arable land much more likely to have prior claims on it by nearby Krishnapuram residents than Pasumalai’s non-arable southern face.

Oral legends from members of Pasumalai's ancestral Pramalai Kallar clan do perpetuate a claim, however, that it was one of *their* ancestors who 'gave' some land to the first American missionaries. I interviewed five members of this large clan about the transfer of local land to American missionaries. And virtually all of them narrated the same brief tale that one of their ancestors gave part of his arable land away free to the missionaries in return for having a stone plaque placed in the "school" which they claim once read "*Paḷḷi Koṭuttāṇ* (lit. he gave the school)."³⁴ S. Lakshmi, the eldest member of the clan I interviewed, even claimed that a plaque still commemorates the gift in one of the local school buildings. I never saw such a plaque anywhere, but even if it had been given, it may well have been removed long ago in historically irretrievable mission renovations.

Whether Tracy actually usurped local Brahmin land or used his financial capital to persuade local inhabitants to relinquish their own land or received the land as gift from Krishnapuram PK, local Brahmins clearly took Tracy's arrival as an act of symbolic aggression to their sphere of authority. They were defensive enough even to mortgage their own land to fight a futile court case. And Tracy clearly sensed that he would quickly have to indicate that, as a Christian missionary, he was a living, breathing metonym of a far more expansive sphere of influence than that of TPK's Brahmin priests. But, unlike the encounter with a British regiment in September of 1792, this time, local Brahmins had no "Kutti" to frighten away their opponents.

In apparent reaction to the court case against Tracy, as well as to prevent what they describe as "annoyance" on empty land adjacent to their original 13 acres, in October of 1845, American missionaries wrote a joint letter to John Blackburne, the Madurai District collector, asking for permission to add some "peramboke" (wasteland), including the entire south side and

peak of the “gravel” hill named Pasumalai (once the site of a gravel quarry), to their current holdings.³⁵ Yet, the East India Company had a well-known dispositional disinterest in, if not outright opposition to, active ‘Christianization.’ In fact, from 1817 until 1841 the Government in the Madras Presidency had exerted direct control and management of Brahminical Hindu temples precisely to lend symbolic support to local elites (Baliga 1960: 230). The 1841 withdrawal of this support suggests, perhaps, a new ambivalence about direct Company encouragement of *any* religious institutions within company territory. So, what hope did AMM missionaries really have of gaining Blackburne’s assistance in legitimizing a land acquisition for an ecumenical Protestant seminary?

As early as 1835, Blackburne gave indirect help to the AMM by allowing missionary James Eckard access to district maps for the implicit purpose of copying them for mission use.³⁶ Blackburne’s motive for helping a revivalist, evangelical mission is best understood in the context of a larger reformist agenda. In 1840, he had sections of Madurai’s exterior fortified wall torn down and began clearing room for five concentric streets within the city center. He designed both measures to alleviate congestion and to prevent further cholera outbreaks among Madurai’s roughly 30,000 inhabitants (Chandler 1910: 13-14). The final, outer street was built just beyond the filled-in moat that had once abutted the city’s fortified exterior wall, a wall that Blackburne had completely torn down by 1841 (ibid:15). Metaphorically, these alterations of Madurai’s public spaces also signaled the irreversible influx of colonial modernity whose other critical aspect was public education in Western disciplines of knowledge with sources in the *printed* word. Yet, after the 1836 Company closing of Madurai district Government schools (Baliga 1960: 264), Blackburne’s pro-education agenda had no proximate government outlet.

Perhaps this is why, on May 4, 1844, he donated Rs. 200 to the AMM to support its fledgling network of English and Tamil medium schools.³⁷ In addition to Blackburne's support, two years after closing Government schools in Madurai, the Government itself donated Rs. 3,000 to the AMM for use in its fledgling school network (Chandler 1910: 239).³⁸ So, as they drafted their 1845 request for land for their mission seminary, American missionaries were most likely relying on the fact that Blackburne's well evidenced pro-education and pro-reform dispositions, as well as prior Government support for their schools, would somehow overcome the Company's dispositional non-alignment with Christian mission qua evangelization.

In their application to Collector Blackburne, Tracy and his fellow AMM missionaries represented their current activities in Pasumalai as follows, "The mission have commenced at this place a High School, or Seminary, for the instruction of natives of all castes in the English language and Sciences."³⁹ There is no mention of Christ, the Gospel or even key evangelical tropes such as the "light of truth" anywhere in their decidedly business-like appeal. They represent the "institution" at Pasumalai not in the triumphant evangelical language of Tracy's private letters but rather in a vague manner waffling between religiously ambiguous "High School" and sectarian "Seminary." Nowhere else in prior missionary letters could I find any explicit plan for a Pasumalai "high school."⁴⁰ The missionaries may have drafted this inchoate statement of purpose to avoid raising the ire of *irreligious* Europeans within Company territory.⁴¹ But, in another sense, it reflects the public face the mission generally wore in order to attract high caste Hindus to their educational institutions as prospective converts. And the seminary, in its early years under Tracy, did indeed offer a pedagogical product local Madurai elites desired-- an English medium education in Western disciplines of knowledge (e.g. Algebra,

Geography, History, Astronomy, Political Economy)--interwoven with biblical and catechetical instruction.⁴²

In a letter dated December 5, 1845, Blackburne appealed on behalf of the missionaries to the Secretary of the Government in Madras who, in turn, summarized the appeal in the records of the Board of Revenue as follows, “an application from Messers Tracy and Cherry on behalf of the American Mission for the grant of a piece of waste land for purposes connected with the Establishment of a School for the Education of Native children at that Station.”⁴³ The religiously ambiguous words “education” and “school” now officially represented the Mission’s institutional presence in Pasumalai to the Government. Blackburne represented the missionaries’ intent along the same lines as they had communicated it to him six months earlier, tactically deleting the word “seminary” and adding a claim that a mission school might generate some popular interest in education in Madurai district,

I ground my recommendation on the apparent impossibility of ever converting this gravel peramboke [Pasumalai Hill] into arable ground, on the utter improbability of its ever being sought for such purposes and the admirably beneficial purpose to which it is being appropriated[. F]or it will be recollected Government has long ceased to give any encouragement whatever to study in the collectorate and without the aid of this mission there would no where be means afforded to obtain beyond the very rudiments of education.⁴⁴

On March 17, 1846, Government quickly granted the AMM both the currently occupied agricultural land (roughly 13 acres) and the additional wasteland (23 cawnies or nearly 30 acres) on the southern side of Pasumalai hill.⁴⁵ For well over a year, therefore, the AMM presence in Pasumalai had been purely a local arrangement. And on April 11, Blackburne wrote to William Tracy with the happy news that they were now authorized by the Company Government to occupy agricultural land previously obtained and the wasteland

of Pasumalai hill itself. In his letter, however, he pronounced the following condition which legally inscribed an ironically inchoate purpose for the occupation of Pasumalai by Protestant evangelicals who bore the rather choate purpose of Christian evangelization, "...so long as they [the occupied land] continue appropriated to scholastic mission purposes."⁴⁶ That the word "scholastic" precedes "mission" here implies a public pretense to foregrounding general education over religious mission in this carefully executed colonial land acquisition. In this phrase, the AMM's conjoined mission of western pedagogy and religious revolution appears legally enshrined in Pasumalai's Christian beginnings much as it is in the legend that opened this chapter.

Within three years of arriving in Madurai, the AMM was educating roughly half of the children in Madura (Chandler 1910: 47) and many others in a network of 59 tuition free schools. In 1846, William Tracy mentions that members of a Hindu revivalist society had recently arrived in Madurai from Madras to establish their own schools; a move he interpreted as a direct threat.⁴⁷ In the 1850s, the colonial Government began to fund Government schools for the first time since 1836, opening Collectorate and Zillah schools that competed for students with the AMM's institutions. Ironically, in 1855, after a visiting ABCFM Deputation from Boston made its recommendations, the AMM shut down all of its English medium schools and virtually all its boarding schools, except for the revolutionary girls' boarding school in Madurai (AMM 1886: 31). Realizing that deleting its broad pedagogical mission greatly weakened the spread of its revolutionary religious ideas, after 1866, the AMM revived the old boarding school system and developed permanent "station"

schools that functioned as both day and boarding schools (admitting both Christian and non-Christian pupils in varying proportions).

In 1845, Pasumalai became the seventh AMM “mission station” or what I am terming “mission compound” (see Map 2). By 1884, the AMM had 14 mission compounds of varying scales throughout what was then called Madurai District (AMM 1886). And Pasumalai eventually became the central pedagogical node to which they all stood connected. William Tracy’s successor at the seminary, George Washburn, spent 31 years in Pasumalai and transformed the compound there from site of a modest mission seminary with a broad curriculum into a large educational center featuring a separate theological seminary for future church workers *only* (after 1870), a printing press (1872), a high school (1875), a college (1881-1904), and a normal or teacher training school (1886). In 1902, after Washburn’s departure, the mission also added a vocational Trade School that operates even today and has provided thousands of students with a working class life beyond the peasant fold. Washburn himself described Pasumalai in the 1882 AMM Mission Report as, “chiefly a collection of educational institutions.”⁴⁸ Qualified students from AMM station schools went to Pasumalai for advanced studies (middle school, high school or Matriculation, and “First in Arts”, or college, curriculum) throughout the colonial period (AMM 1886: 68-69).

By 1910, the AMM had closed a few of the original stations and consolidated one, resulting in ten stations to which the mission eventually added another boarding school compound in Aruppukkottai.⁴⁹ By this point most of the AMM’s stations ran day/boarding schools at the primary school levels that, in turn, fed male students to the high school, seminary and Normal school in Pasumalai and fed female students to a girl’s high school and

a female Normal school in Madurai. Privileged students could also continue on to the AMM's American College (transferred from Pasumalai to Madurai in 1904). With the exception of Bible women, who did receive training at the Pasumalai seminary in the late colonial period, Pasumalai's colonial student body and teaching staff were virtually all male.

The conjoining of western pedagogy to Protestant forms of Christian rhetoric and identity making was an alliance between a primary form of colonial and post-colonial knowledge capital and alternative forms of religious practice. This curious linkage is a central historical theme in the history of Pasumalai's Christian community. Even the printed jubilee souvenirs mentioned earlier, though composed for separate anniversaries of church and school, reveal that "school", "church" and "mission" all find mention within each, blurring the strict Enlightenment boundary between sacred and secular, between evangelical mission and secular education. And even the Pasumalai Boys' High school song "Mother Pasumalai", jointly praises both the biblical wisdom and the educational "arts" associated with Pasumalai in the local Christian imagination and then ends by overtly praising, in reverse order, the first four missionaries who successively managed the mission compound.⁵⁰ This conjoining of modern education and Christianity became embodied in Pasumalai's colonial schoolteachers, clerks, and religious leaders (pastors, catechists, and Bible women). They were simultaneous holders of elite knowledge capital and holders of moral capital in the mission's political economy. Those Christians in the colonial period who moved to Pasumalai, or to other institutional sites within the AMM's political economy, to work as teachers or church workers, learned a conjoined performance of literate class and Christian

identities. These twin identities formed part of an identity front disposed by what I am terming a 'mission compound habitus.'

Yet, if, as Pierre Bourdieu says, a habitus is a "past which survives in the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future (1977: 82)" and an "...embodied history, internalized as second nature...(1990: 56)," then what might we learn from oral memories about what of Pasumalai's late colonial past survives in a post-colonial mission compound habitus of identity performance? While I could have looked for the post-colonial perpetuation of a mission compound habitus within Pasumalai's classrooms, I decided, instead, to see how it has perpetuated itself in social relations that embrace local Hindus, relations initiated beyond the political purview of AMM missionaries and therefore more powerfully revelatory of habitualized performances of Christian and elite class identities. And so, it is toward habitual performances of multiple identity within a broad axis of late colonial "Hindu-Christian" relating that I now turn to begin understanding the historical force that "Christian" identity has for some CSI Tamils living in contemporary Pasumalai. Chapter 2 presents memories of late colonial social relations between Pasumalai's Christian teachers and adjacent Hindus who were once virtually all members of the Pramalai Kallar caste. I will take us into key performative spaces where a mission compound identity front became actively habitualized in relations that crossed the compound wall and explore how a Hindu-Christian boundary has overlapped with other identity boundaries formed by caste and class hierarchies.

Chapter 2 Remembering Mission Compound Selves

Of all the written remembrances of a distinctly proud, “Christian” Pasumalai I could find, none tell us anything of relations between Pasumalai’s Christians and their neighbors in the pre-missionary settlement of Krishnapuram. In a post-colonial moment increasingly poisoned by Hindu-Christian communal rhetoric, it is fitting to begin our exploration of a mission compound identity front in diachronic appreciation of its late colonial origins in social transactions with ‘the Hindu other.’ Such an exploration reveals the interconnectedness of the mission compound and the wider society with which its members interacted. This journey into oral memories also begins my exploration of exactly what of the late colonial past really has survived in the dispositions of a contemporary Pasumalai “Christian” habitus of multiple identity performance.

Pasumalai’s Late Colonial Social Ecology

In early July, 1998 I rented a 56 year-old lime-plastered home built by a famous Pasumalai high school headmaster and ordained minister, the Rev. Samuel David, upon his retirement.¹ He named his retirement home “Dora *Akam*” (Dora’s Home) in honor of his wife. Dora Agam stands along a private road maintained by the David family; a narrow dirt path not much wider than an Ambassador car that serves as the southern boundary of nearly one acre of land purchased by Rev. David as a family asset.

Shortly after I moved into Dora’s old home, my landlord, who spent thirty years as a high school science teacher in East Africa, came in a series of sudden morning visits to ‘guide’ me along. He warned me repeatedly to lock my front and back doors while I was away and even

while I slept, lest local thieves “descend.” He also suggested to me, that if I were going away from Pasumalai for an extended period, I should have some local friend sleep on my front porch at night to deter local purloiners from targeting the house. Locks were not to be trusted. His eyes would widen in an almost child-like terror as he tried to convince me of the local threat of thievery in the night. Thieves might come in the front door. They might jump the compound wall in the back and break through the kitchen’s wire-mesh back door. One never knows. Quietly listening to all these warnings, I wondered why a wealthy middle class Christian, son of one of Pasumalai’s most prestigious late colonial patriarchs, was living in a place that inspired so much klepto-paranoia and unease.

At first, I thought one possible reason for his fear was that his family’s estate also happens to abut “Krishnapuram,” home today to a large Pramalai Kallar (PK) population, or as they prefer to be called: “Devars.” It is also the ancestral soil claimed by members of an old PK patri-clan (see Ch. 1). While “Kallar” is a caste name recognized by local PK in private, as are the two initials (PK) used to mark their own subcaste, they rarely mention the word in public self-representations, because, in Tamil, it means “thief.”²

Both before and during my fieldwork in Pasumalai, some Christians sporadically let loose negative images about local PK (men) to me in private, sometimes glossing them broadly as the local “Hindus”, sublimating their own moral prioritization of religious identity over caste identity. In this genre of identity aspersion, PK are said to be prone to drunkenness and lounging at the wine shop, prone to domestic fights because of their fondness for *carakku* (booze), prone to petty thievery and prone to a general abhorrence of higher education. One old retired Pasumalai teacher described their caste *kunam* (innate, ascribed character) in the following

cryptically dismissive manner, “He [the Kallar man] asks for money. He fights.” One day behind the church a graduate school educated pastorate committee member even suggested sarcastically to me in front of his keenly listening peers that if I wanted to merge with local PK for my research, I should just start drinking with them. Early on, it was not apparent what to make of these disparaging images except that they implied a great deal of social distance. As I slowly began to absorb some of Pasumalai’s social ecology, though, I quickly began to interpret my landlord’s initial warnings about imminent, rapacious thievery as part middle class narrative of morally elitist selfhood and part projection of a wider negative identity aimed at one of Madurai district’s most vilified, grossly stereotyped, and legendary caste communities.

The Pramalai Kallar form one of the three major Kallar subcastes that, in turn, form one of three broader caste blocs (Akampatiyar, Maravar, and Kallar) organized today under the title “*Mukkulattōr*” (lit. ‘those from the three lineages’). They are commonly termed the “Devar” castes, referring to a caste title used regularly by Maravars and Kallars as early as the colonial period. Though intermarriage among Devar castes was once taboo, I was told by some Pasumalai PK individuals that barriers are breaking down. Of the three Devar communities, the Kallars, especially PK, have a reputation for *muruttuttan̄am* (rowdiness), an aggressive masculine style of verbal and bodily performance in public spaces. Devars are the dominant, prevalent land-owning caste in much of Madurai District. The colonial heartland of the PK lies in a triangular region described in detail in Louis Dumont’s exhaustive ethnography (1986) and whose western edge grazes the TPK irrigation reservoir and Pasumalai itself (see Map 2). PK generally consider themselves to rank above Tamil society’s untouchable castes that are now referred to in common journalistic and spoken parlance (and even by PK I met), as “Dalits” (a

Marathi word meaning “oppressed”). The term “Dalit.” while commonly encountered by me while I lived in Madurai, should not create an image of some unified, mobilized, empirical bloc similar in its political or violent capacities to the well-established mobilization of the three main Devar castes in Tamil Nadu’s southern districts. Dalit mobilization is still very recent in Tamil society; jumpstarted during my own research by the “New Tamil Nadu Party” led by Dr. Krishnaswamy. The largest and best known Dalit castes in Tamil society are the Paraiyars, the Pallars and the Chakkiliyars and various subcastes within these communities. The central and state governments legally recognize them as “the Scheduled Castes” (SC). While Devars may condescend to their “SC” neighbors/laborers, as well as to various other non-Dalit service castes, such as barbers and washer men (who do not experience the full brunt of untouchability), they themselves bear a critical social stigma of their own.

The colonial production of caste information itself has burdened the PK subcaste especially with a stigma far worse than that suffered by other Devar castes. From the perspective of colonial policing, it was the PK, more than their “Dalit” peers, who were the real untouchables in colonial fantasies of ordered, colonial public space. As early as the mid nineteenth century, even AMM missionaries began referring to the “Kallar” derisively in their private letters and public reports as “the robber caste” of Madurai District. During this period, PK developed a reputation for nighttime highway robbery and dacoity similar in its hyperbolic overtones to colonial narratives about North India’s “Thugs.”

For many AMM missionaries, this community contained archetypically sinning human subjects needing desperately to undergo the self-purifying transformation evangelical Protestants term: ‘conversion.’ Then, almost as if capitulating to these evangelical desires, on June 5, 1918,

Madurai G.O. 1331 extended the provisions of the 1911 Criminal Tribes and Castes Act to the Pramalai Kallar community through a program run by the Madurai District Police Department known popularly as “Kallar Reclamation” (Dumont 1986: 26). This program combined draconian police action with the establishment of free Kallar schools and inducements to settled agriculturalism. Demeaning “roll-call” measures to control nighttime robbery became enforced from 1918 until 1947. Every night, leaders in most PK villages in Madurai District had to report to the local police station, sign-in and, in some areas, sleep there. According to one local PK friend, this “roll-call” system also impacted Krishnapuram PK where he recalls his own father observing it when he was a young child. This man, Mutturaj, also mentioned the system of “pass-ports” which PK men had to have signed at police stations whenever they left their natal village and, again, whenever they entered another village or town.³ Unsurprisingly, these disciplinary measures created an entire generation of PK children (many of whom are still alive) raised on a profoundly bitter resentment of “white” and “British” authorities. In the words of Mutturaj’s older brother, a farmer and a former mason for the American Madura Mission, the following is typical of popular slogans local PK kids (and many others in support of Independence) once chanted in their opposition to British rule and police regulations, “White man get out! White *kokku* (crane or horse) get out! Leave our country and go back to your own!”⁴

The more puritanical, elitist Tamil castes (members of which have lived for a long time in Madurai District) such as the Chettiars (cf. Rudner 1994), Vellalars (cf. Daniel 1984), and Saivite Brahmins (cf. Fuller 1984) form a bloc whose members might be most quick today to engage the social stigma local PK acquired during the late colonial period. Along with this

broadly construed elite bloc, whose members dominate most positions in Government service, one might also include the Telegu speaking Naidu and the Sourashtra speaking communities of Madurai. Separate from this elite group, but not sharing the kind of stigmatized reputation for violence, disorderliness and barbarism, are the Nadars (cf. Hardgrave 1969), Vanniyars, Konars, and Udaiyars, the latter three being important land-owning Tamil peasant castes who, along with Devar castes, have often been the primary foot soldiers in the bodily enforcement of untouchability.

Not all of these non-Dalit communities, however, have a deep, pre-colonial historical presence in Madurai District. Some, like the Chettiars, actually claim natal regions in other neighboring Tamil districts, having moved to Madurai city during the colonial period for business purposes. Furthermore, the multi-caste blocs I have just presented represent my own assessment of similar loads of stigma and do not fit into some rigid hierarchy, let alone one accepted by everyone. For example, Tamil Brahmins, who have traditionally ranked themselves as the most elite caste and who have traditionally dominated the elite positions of Government service (e.g. I.A.S. positions), saw their puritanical elitism transformed into a stigma during the famous non-Brahmin political and social movements of early to mid-twentieth century Tamil society.

Information on caste prevalence in late colonial Pasumalai was impossible for me to collect systematically, because many families have simply moved on. But using published church souvenirs and oral informants, I was able to confirm the late colonial presence of families from 12 of the 13 castes present today in Pasumalai (see Chapter 8 and Appendix B). The most elite late colonial Pasumalai Christian families, certainly those whose patriarchs acted as

Headmasters and Managers for Pasumalai's four major schools, were from non-Dalit castes in late colonial Pasumalai (Nadar, Vanniyar, Vellalar, and Devar), though their teaching colleagues included those from Dalit castes. Late colonial Pasumalai, therefore, was primarily a non-Brahmin social space most of whose members were likely to experience some caste stigma beyond domains controlled by their close kin and caste peers. It is likely that the proportion of Dalits, however, was substantially lower than today, due, in part to the very delayed class mobilization of Dalits in the AMM political economy.

But how did local PK and their Christian neighbors really interact in the late colonial period? Did late colonial Pasumalai reproduce or subvert the hierarchical castings of society favored by local PK? Did the Christian community function as a caste of its own? My very own rented house, Dora Agam, quickly revealed itself as a collective mnemonic portal into late colonial Pasumalai social relations and encouraged me to get beyond an exclusive focus on the "Hindu-Christian" axis of identity.

Perduring Dispositions of a Late Colonial Habitus

After a month of battling rain-fed leaks in Dora's old kitchen, in early August, I finally asked my landlord to repair the slanting tiled roof as soon as he could. He dutifully replied that he would be back in a couple of days with a local mason to patch things up. I then climbed to the flat roof over Dora Agam's bedroom and looked down on the dilapidated kitchen tiles only to notice that my landlord had performed the 'usual' cement patching technique many times before. One morning, later in that same week, my landlord arrived in his usual costume of pant and shirt, followed by a thin, scraggy looking elderly man dressed loosely in a white *vēṣṭi* (folded

rectangular cloth) wrapped around his waist to form a short skirt ending right below the knees. The laborer's name was Mutturaj (as male Tamil laborers generally do while working). As Mutturaj and my landlord entered, the latter suddenly began complaining to me in English about how lazy these laborers are these days and how they never come on time, which is why he hadn't come earlier in the week to repair the roof. He even commented to me in fluent English on Mutturaj's rude manners; assuming correctly that the grade school educated Mutturaj wouldn't understand him. Oblivious to the English insults passing by his aged face on their way to my ears, Mutturaj simply marched past us into the kitchen to see the problem at hand. I noticed on this and subsequent encounters that he and my landlord yelled at each other with a surprisingly mutual informality, a tone indicated in their constant use of the informal rank indicator “*ya*” and other informal verb conjugations throughout their dyspeptic dialogue. I had previously never witnessed such a degree of *mutual* informality in wage-based social transactions between Madurai's educated and manual laboring classes.

After patching my roof, Mutturaj returned the next day to make sure I had watered the fresh cement as he had loudly insisted I do (if the local cement dries too quickly it will crack and rapidly crumble away in Madurai's blistering heat). On this second visit, however, he had come alone, which, at first, I thought was strangely presumptuous. And, on his way out, he suddenly glanced to the left and noticed a *murunkaimaram* (horse radish tree) in the sandy front yard, growing rapidly on the soapy effluent draining from my bathing room.⁵ Quickly turning to me, he barked, “James, you can't grow that here! That's bad. I'll get rid of it for you.” I watched dumbfounded as he lifted his *arivā!* (sickle) and hacked the six-foot, fledgling tree to its roots. My first reaction was that control over my own private space had been violated. I vented my

Yankee frustration with my Christian friend Jeremiah who had stopped by at the same moment to check in on me. Jeremiah quickly explained that, according to Hindu Shastras regarding house maintenance, one should not place a *murukai* tree in one's front yard. But Mutturaj's behavior still seemed odd. Why would a hired laborer presume to maintain his employer's rental property so independently, even to the extent of enforcing Hindu notions of domestic landscaping on behalf of a *Christian* landlord?

Soon after this first of several repair jobs, I learned that Mutturaj was actually a lifelong resident of Krishnapuram and, more interestingly, a member of its PK community. Already convinced my landlord had no intimate relationship at all with local PKs based on his constant warnings about local 'thieves', this bit of information perplexed me. But, over the course of the ensuing months after our initial August, 1998 meeting, I slowly learned that this retired mill-worker and part-time mason was not only the regular choice for maintenance problems at Dora Agam, but *the only one* my landlord called to perform virtually every maintenance function on any of his properties. Mutturaj came to Dora Agam for everything from patching leaking roofs to cutting down branches from the sprawling *vēppamaram* (neem tree) in my backyard. My landlord appeared strangely bound to re-enact the same drama of bilious carping that emerged every time he and Mutturaj met at the site of any 'problem.' Are Pasumalai and Tirupparankundram so short of manual labor, I began to wonder, that only this somewhat cranky, retired spinning mill worker from Krishnapuram, is available to perform house maintenance for a retired, middle class, land-owning Christian teacher? What really was their relationship anyway?

One morning in early September, after making an appointment, I climbed the stairs of my landlord's modern two-story home, dubbed "David Agam," to interview this 86-year-old retired

teacher. At the top of my list of questions was a query about his relationship with Mutturaj, so I turned a question about my landlord's friendships across religious lines into a question about this man,

JR: The mason who came to my house, is he a family friend?

Vedamanikkam: Mutturaj? His mother used to come to our house, um, used to help my mother. After their father died, she came and helped with the "cooking." [1920s]

Then, when my landlord went to teach at a model school in Madras [1930s], he took Mutturaj with him as an assistant or errand boy,

Mutturaj was a small boy then. I brought him and kept him with me, to help out. That's it. I've known him very well since he was that old.... That's why I know his "family" kind of well. Beyond that there were a few people I knew very well. If they died, we used to go to their homes, [undecipherable], buy garlands and place them— Even yesterday, Paraman, a mason died. I didn't know. If I were young, I would have known about it. Before, when people who had really helped me a lot died, I, my "friends" and "Christians" would have each bought a garland, gone to Krishnapuram, placed the garland and sat down for a while and then come home. Only those we knew in the old days. Now it's not happening. Now I only know one or two families (among the local PK) well, like Mutturaj's family. If we need help for a few days, we have to tell them, Mutturaj and his younger brother.⁶

Months later, I interviewed Mutturaj on the velvety smooth cement front porch outside his tiny, un-electrified, tile roofed home in neighboring Krishnapuram. He claimed the relationship began by performing odd jobs for my landlord's father, when he was seven years old. At first it included trimming branches and housework. Then my landlord and his younger brother 'hired' him successively as an errand boy/peon while the former taught briefly in Madras and while the latter was studying for his BA in Madras in the 1930s. In return for this 'service', my landlord's father got him a job at Pasumalai's brand new Mahalakshmi Spinning Mill (est. 1929), founded on former Pasumalai farmland by a wealthy Hindu businessman.⁷

Mutturaj had complicated my picture of this relationship by revealing that all sorts of “help” has been offered by *both* sides. I never verified if Mutturaj was actually paid anything for his manual labor during my stay in Pasumalai. I simply assumed he was not. It seemed clear to me that it was both my landlord’s parsimony and Mutturaj’s sense of immense obligation for a stable career *beyond* the peasant fold that really ensured their repetitive histrionics over each new house repair and encouraged the kind of intimacy that might make Mutturaj feel like he really was Dora Agam’s ‘property manager.’ But whether Mutturaj received token payments, gifts or, as is most likely the case, nothing at all, it is definitely less than what my landlord would have had to pay to hire an *unknown* handyman with whom he did not have such a long relationship of interdependency. In doing so, my landlord obeyed both the cash-saving impulse of an upwardly mobile middle class family and more culturally specific notions of *pācam* (attachment) towards social inferiors with whom one has a long relationship, or *paḷakkam*, involving mutual assistance. Mutturaj’s projection of diffusely Hindu domestic landscaping rules was only surprising to me, because, I had incorrectly assumed that the Hindu-Christian boundary would dominate the structuring of a relationship that I later realized was primarily structured within a modern form of inter-class *pācam*. Even more importantly, in this case, I came to see three sloping and overlapping identity boundaries across which Mutturaj and my landlord have always been “attached”; that of Christian over Hindu, that of college educated mind over grade school educated mind and that of middle class wealth over working class survival.

But is the relationship between Mutturaj and my landlord exceptional for Pasumalai? Or is Mutturaj’s continued work for the David family a powerful vestige of a broader late colonial mission social structure in Pasumalai?

Remembering PK-Christian Relations in Late Missionary Pasumalai (1910-1960)

Including headmasters, teachers, writers, 'peons',⁸ press workers, school sweepers, and other missionary servants, around 100 families would have been living in Pasumalai's mission housing during the late colonial period. A few older families built retirement homes in between Krishnapuram and the western boundary of Teachers' Line as early as the 1920s (see Map 3). In the 1940s and 1950s, a few dozen retiring teachers also built homes in a new Christian retirement neighborhood named Jonespuram. At most, by the end of the 1950s, 150 self-identifying Christian families would have probably been living in Pasumalai.

Childhood memories from older Pasumalai Christians, reaching imaginatively back as early as the late 1910s, suggest that only a very small number of PK lived in Krishnapuram in the early part of this century. They represented branches of the ancestral PK patrilineage, perhaps 200 individuals or less, living primarily as farmers, owners and drivers of bullock carts (the prime mode of transport before the spread of lorries), milk-producers and masons. They would have also constituted virtually the entire 'local' Hindu population adjacent to the AMM compound.⁹ They farmed on land west of Krishnapuram and worshipped two gods specific to their community: 1) a 'common deity' known as *Mantaiyamman* (goddess of the village square, see Map 3) and 2) a *kulatēyvam* or lineage god known as *Maṟukkālturaikkaruppu* (lit. The Black Lord of the Sluice), an avatar of the sickle-wielding guardian deity *Karuppusāmi* who, some local PK claim, specifically guards an old overflow water channel at the northeast corner of the TPK irrigation reservoir (see Map 2).

In 1929, a wealthy entrepreneur named Sri Laskmanan Chettiar (from the Nagarattar caste; cf. Rudner 1994 and Nishimura 1998), constructed the Mahalakshmi Spinning Mill on land adjacent to the Pasumalai High School Farm and across the road from Pasumalai's United Theological Seminary (Swift Hall) (see Map 3). This land was sold to him, several sources told me independently, by a wealthy, disgruntled senior Pasumalai teacher from the Vanniyar community. Legend has it that he did so primarily to spurn the authorities in charge for not choosing *him* as the next high school headmaster. Regardless of this legend's truth, this single land transaction would forever alter the postcolonial social ecology of Pasumalai.

The Mahalakshmi Mill was one of eight spinning mills operating at the peak of Madurai district's pre-independence cotton cultivation, featuring 33,000 spindles by 1960¹⁰ and 40,000 by the time of its government ordered closure in the mid 1990s.¹¹ It and the other late colonial mills encouraged a large in-migration of PK to villages and settlements in the Pasumalai/TPK area, including many individuals who moved into Krishnapuram. These PK were not affiliated by lineage or by marriage to the ancestral PK clan (Ch 1) and continued to arrive as late as the 1980s in the hopes of a finding a better life beyond the peasant fold and nearer the burgeoning market city of Madurai. One PK farmer and sand distributor living on Krishnapuram's oldest street told me that there were four main *pañkāli* or patrilineal kin groups during his youth (1950s), including the larger clan that claims ancestral status,¹² while another former Mahalakshmi mill worker mentioned five different lineal groups in the same period.¹³ Yet, anecdotal evidence from other interviews and the presence of many widowed "sisters" of Krishnapuram PK today suggests a more complicated scene. Patrilocality customs of the PK have often not applied to Krishnapuram PK brides. Instead of moving from Krishnapuram to

their husbands' natal villages, many of their husbands have, instead, often set up house in Krishnapuram, most likely because of mill and other urban job opportunities. This uxorilocal residence tendency has not only increased the number of residents beyond what patrilocal marital practices would have otherwise yielded, but has also increased the number of different PK lineages represented in Pasumalai today.¹⁴

Unsurprisingly, some local Christians share dismissive and diminutive historical recollections of the local PK presence, most likely from irritation at the numerical predominance of PK in contemporary Pasumalai. As one respected Christian elder put it to me one afternoon as he worked in his family's granite carving shop across from the Pasumalai Church, "These Kallars just used to lived in a bunch of *kuṭicaika!* (huts)." Several PK themselves freely narrated similar memories of a very small "Devar" population from the 1920s to the late 1950s. But their estimates of *vītu* (homes/families) in Krishnapuram during this period varied so widely (10-100) as to become both anachronistic and meaningless. Yet, even the largest number given was far lower than my own estimate of well over 500 contemporary residences.

One 90 plus year old retired Christian teacher remembers that Krishnapuram had only three streets in the 1910s,¹⁵ old boundary streets still marked today as: "Street of the Devars" (on the east), "Krishnapuram South street", "Krishnapuram West street" (and, on the northern boundary, by "Old Vilachery road"; see Map 3). Despite the fact that everyone knows its official name is Krishnapuram, as one old Christian government officer said to me, "everyone [Christians] calls it 'Kallar Street.'" Whether or not 'everyone' really does call it this, such a substitution is a doubly diminutive metonym.¹⁶ It morally diminishes local PK by referring to them with the sensitive caste name, "Kallar", instead of the more honorable caste title "Devar"

they themselves use to index their eastern border street; and it also diminishes their numeric size by reducing an entire residential area into one street.

Elder PK and Christians both remember Krishnapuram before the 1960s as a place dominated primarily by *kuṭicai vīṭu* (small mud walled homes with woven, thatch peaked roofs) or *kūrai vīṭu* (more substantially walled homes with sloping, thatched roofs), a few *ōṭṭu vīṭu* (sloping, tile roofed homes with brick and mortar walls), and only a few *māṭi vīṭu* (two story homes with brick and mortar walls) featuring *maccu* or flat, terraced roofs typical of all middle class Tamil homes today. Former mill workers and one successful mason in the 1940s built examples of the third type of home. The vernacular architecture of these homes contrasted greatly with the average type of home inhabited by Pasumalai's Christian teachers and seminary students during the same period.

Unlike their Krishnapuram neighbors, from 1895 onwards, most of the teaching staff and seminary students resided in “permanent” brick and mortar homes within rectangular walled compounds. Each mission home guaranteed one “Christian family” a multi-roomed residence with an indoor kitchen, inside a tightly bounded residential space.¹⁷ Use of brick and mortar walls as well as tiled and/or terraced roofing involved a heavy initial cash investment but obviated annual, post-monsoon repairs to mud walls and thatch roofs. Compound walls also allowed concealed private bathing in a corner of each home's backyard, obviating the need for publicly visible well or outdoor bathing most Krishnapuram PK residents would have practiced.¹⁸ In 1929, seven teachers' homes without second story “bedrooms” finally received this added space, including three homes whose slanted “country tile” roofs were replaced with flat “terraced” or *maccu* roofs.¹⁹ By the time of the Mahalakshmi Mill's appearance and the

onset of a worldwide depression in 1929, Pasumalai teachers generally lived in a colony of mission homes with primarily “centered” or flat, terrace roofed main rooms, front and back verandahs, indoor kitchens, and walled backyards.²⁰ A few elite teachers even enjoyed two story homes or “cottages” with a bedroom on the second floor and named after the American donors who had funded them (e.g. Williams College Cottage, Tufts Cottage).²¹ Lower level staff, such as office assistants (known by everyone as “peons”) and sweepers, had small tiled roof homes with brick/mortar walls assigned to them as late as the 1950s; some are still in use today.

After the erection of three new “bungalows” in the 1930s, Pasumalai’s 20th century missionaries lived in larger, more modern homes than ever before. John X. Miller describes the layout of what would soon become the first of three enormous mission homes to line the side of Pasumalai Hill (and known to everyone as Hillcrest Bungalow), “the bungalow is to have a dining hall, living and office rooms on first floor; also kitchen, two storerooms and bathroom and three bedrooms and back room on the second floor...I’m also putting in *running water* and toilets in the bathroom. (my emphasis)”²² And at the peak of the missionary occupation of Pasumalai in the 1940s, four missionary families resided concurrently in four separate bungalows that were colonial monuments of near raja-like status in that period.

An Architectural Hierarchy of Late Colonial Pasumalai 1910-1960:²³

- 1) Missionary “Bungalows”
- 2) “Cottages”: Two-story homes with flat roof over main rooms and tiled roofs over front and back verandahs
- 3) Regular mission homes: One-story with flat, terraced roof over main rooms and sloping tiled roofs over the front and back verandahs
- 4) *Ōṭṭu vīṭu* : Sloping, tiled roof, one story homes (shared by local mission staff, including teachers, and by many local PK)

5) *Kūrai vītu* : Sloping, thatched roof homes (predominant in Krishnapuram)

6) *Kuṭicai vītu* : Small, mud walled, thatched and peaked roof homes (common in Krishnapuram)

In 1920, the young missionary Lloyd Lorbeer wrote a Thanksgiving note to prospective donors and other “friends” in the U.S. that reveals how Tamil Nadu’s annual South East Monsoon exposed the ‘local’ architectural hierarchy:

We are thankful for a clean dry house in which to live and plenty of wholesome food. True the rain did seep thru our flat brick and mortar roof in one place. But the houses of many of our teachers leak right through the water soaked tiles. One of our teachers said he had to use an umbrella in his house in order to keep the rain off as he slept!! And our teachers’ houses are far better than the average. The mud walls of many houses in the surrounding villages are falling. The thatch roof[s] are as water tight as a sieve. And the wet floor is the only bed. And if their few clothes become wet they have no change...²⁴

Even more indicative of the late colonial Pasumalai teacher’s relative privilege vis à vis his PK neighbor in Krishnapuram was the presence of electricity. Pasumalai was one of the first electrified residential areas in Madurai, thanks to a resident missionary engineer and Trade School director, James Dickson, who installed a generator and network of wires in the mid 1920s to electrify the homes of Pasumalai’s Teaching staff from 6-10:30pm every evening.²⁵ The electrification of Krishnapuram, according to Mutturaj and his brother Ramu, did not begin until right around, or shortly after, Independence. And Mutturaj still does not have electricity in his own home, despite a fifty-year *paḷakkam* (relationship) with one of Pasumalai’s most powerful Christian families who all live in their own modern, electrified two story homes.

With this material grounding in Pasumalai’s late colonial hierarchy of financial capital, the final two sections of this chapter explore two transactional axes of social relations that also transected the physical and identity boundaries separating the AMM compound from

neighboring Krishnapuram. While the material privilege of Pasumalai's teachers versus their late colonial PK neighbors was primarily the result of a missionary managed political economy (managed by them alone until the mid 1930s), memories of such privilege alone do not index a late colonial Christian habitus disposed to its own structural reproduction in the post-colonial moment. I argue that it was the intimate social exchanges between PK and mission teacher, neither mandated nor controlled by the AMM, which facilitated the genesis of a shared disposition to perform a mission compound identity front.

Axis 1: Teacher-PK Social Transactions

Twice a year (in January and April), the view from Pasumalai Hill across National Highway 7 grows luxuriantly green as the tank fed rice fields of Pasumalai become flush with wavering rice stalks all the way to the southern horizon and southeastward toward the base of TPK hill (see Map 2). Circa 1920, the vast majority of AMM buildings stood on the northern side of Queen *Manikkammā!* Road (now called National Highway 7), while, on the southern side of the road, three hostels, the mission homes of Seminary Line (see Map 2), several badminton courts, a post office, one or two private residences and the mission cemetery formed small visual interruptions on a triangular expanse of rice fields that lay between the Queen's road and the tracks of the Southern Indian Railway (opened in 1875; see Map 2).

As Pasumalai's Christian teachers became more financially established, many began to buy up small plots in these rice fields. As one old teacher who worked at the Pasumalai High school in the 1930s claimed, land was very affordable, even then, on a teacher's salary.²⁶ So, during their teaching careers in the late colonial period (and even past Independence), most

Pasumalai teachers maintained agricultural land in Pasumalai and/or elsewhere.²⁷ This provided them with some side income, an annual supply of rice for their family and the social status of landowner. A few of the wealthiest staff actually owned rice fields both in Pasumalai and in other villages, extending their feudal authority far beyond the mission compound itself. After I inquired about various employment categories occupied by Hindus and Christians in colonial Pasumalai, my landlord added what he claims was a central ambition of Pasumalai Teachers during his youth (circa 1920s-1930s),

Becoming a teacher in our [inclusive] school was a big “ambition” for everyone [teaching in the school in which you studied] Because, “generally”, the teachers were good. If you went for “Government Service”, it meant “transfers.” [Switching to English] Today you are a clerk in the Madurai Collectorate. [Switching back to Tamil] Tomorrow, Krishna “District” [now part of Andhra Pradesh; see Map 1]...[undecipherable], people had this “ambition” just to stay in one place, build a *vīṭu* (home), have a cow, buy *vayil* (arable land) and farm it. That kind of ambition was common.²⁸

Many Pasumalai teachers, therefore, stood at the apex of both late colonial peasant and urban class hierarchies. They possessed the capital necessary for performing both the identities of landlord and teacher: agricultural land and a higher education.²⁹ Most of the farm-owning teachers mentioned to me were from non-Dalit castes (Nadar, Devar, Vanniyar, Pillai and Konar), the same families who also dominated Pasumalai’s late colonial pastorate committee. Yet, I was able to confirm that at least a few prominent teachers of Dalit heritage did own rice fields in late colonial Pasumalai. Caste heritage was therefore no bar to this dual identity performance, although one’s salary might have been. Earlier in the conversation above, my landlord had mentioned the “worldliness” (using the English word) of local Christian teachers during this period as a negative or ‘un-Christian’ example to have set for local PK of whom virtually none, he kept lamenting, have ever converted to Christianity. In describing this

worldliness, implicitly including his own wealthy family in his candid critique, my landlord mentioned two key material items: *mātu* (cow; here he implies milk cows) and *vayil* or agricultural land. Another teacher who grew up in the same period also described a similarly elite status held by the land-owning Christian teachers and headmasters with the following Victorian English remark, “They were not wanting in anything. They lived comfortably and high.”³⁰ Like my landlord, his father had also been a famous Pasumalai teacher who owned multiple plots of land in Pasumalai and other adjacent villages. One former Pasumalai pastor, church leader, and Pasumalai landowner also owned his own bullock cart and bull for private transportation in a pre-colonial mode.³¹

But these land-owning Pasumalai Christian teachers needed farm labor if they were to preserve their colonial class status as educated people who do not perform publicly visible manual labor. And, unsurprisingly, they generally turned to local PK in Krishnapuram when it came time to locate their farm managers. Several local PK families provided farm labor, especially the all-important *taṇṇir pāyccuvatu* (watering of the fields). These managers performed plowing and watering of the fields and located other laborers to grow the seedlings, transplant them into the fields, weed the stalks, cut them, and thresh the raw rice grains at harvest time. My landlord described it briefly as follows,

Many “Teachers” had their own fields and gave it over to laborers who managed it for them. When the un-threshed rice was ripe for harvest, they would go and collect it, [switching to English] Most of the teachers had their own plots of land... [switching back to Tamil] for “side income”... They were very, very small plots. They produced enough un-threshed rice for a year’s worth of milled rice for the family.³²

Because of the dependence of Pasumalai PK on farming as a livelihood before, and even after, the advent of the Mahalakshmi Mill in 1929, one old Christian teacher of part-Dalit heritage mentioned that farming in Pasumalai brought both PK and Christian communities together in interdependence, “We needed their help and they needed our help.”³³

During this period, conversions into an elite class status, including the acquisition of cash salaries unavailable to the colonial Indian masses, received critical performative expression in a pre-colonial idiom of social dominance prevalent in south India’s rice-growing, riverine social spaces. The conversion of Pasumalai’s teachers into a modern, elite class identity, therefore, was no total substitution of pre-modern for modern identities, but rather a creative identity bricolage.³⁴ And this bricolage apparently took place in Pasumalai *regardless* of the Christian landowner’s caste identity, which allowed a revolutionary degree of status reversal between Devars and Dalits as early as the 1930s. One Vanniyar Christian from a famous lineage mentioned insistently in one interview that local Krishnapuram PK even watered (i.e. managed) the land of local “SC” teachers. He then argued compellingly that this was proof of how local PK never used to project any caste arrogance in front of local Christian teachers of Dalit heritage.³⁵ The status of teacher, the substantial cash salary that came along with this status, and the protection of nearby missionaries, apparently disarmed perceptions of caste identity from influencing local social calculations of who could perform labor for whom. The “structuring structure” of local PK was frustrated in its disposition to dominate the untouchable.

However, employing PK as farm labor did not *necessarily* lead to an intimate social relationship, because, as a few interviewees suggested, teachers only really interacted with them sporadically to give them supplies and to divide the harvest.³⁶ On a much more intimate, daily

basis, many Christian teachers employed Krishnapuram PK as servants who performed myriad acts of manual labor they desired to avoid. My landlord's younger brother voluntarily mentioned this servile relationship between local PK and Christian teacher families in his depiction of Krishnapuram during his own childhood (1920s-1930s), "Their condition was very bad. They all depended on the "teachers." Every house had one of their [PK] women working in it."³⁷ Jeparaj went on to describe how Krishnapuram women cooked for most of the teachers' families.³⁸ Although he most likely exaggerates the prevalence of hired cooking from the perspective of his own wealthy family, I did confirm the general practice of domestic labor in seven important Christian families in Pasumalai during this period. Members of these families, who do not employ PK servants today, remembered PK women doing domestic work for their natal households such as: fetching water, washing dishes, and less rarely, it appears, cooking. Importantly enough, five elderly PK with whom I became friends also confirmed that Krishnapuram women did perform this domestic service, although perhaps not any women from *their* families. One old mason for the American mission and former grave-builder for the Pasumalai cemetery, Ramu, described the prevalence of this practice in a rather halting reply, "Half the women. A lot. For *kūli* [cash wages]. Then. Not now.... No one in our family did this. Our own housework was enough...Half the people in Anna Nagar [PK squatter settlement in Pasumalai] worked in the teachers' homes."³⁹ Most of the PK I talked to about this claimed the practice was less prevalent than their Christian age mates claimed. Only one former Christian teacher I asked doesn't recall such labor in his home or in any other. He claimed that the fear of local PK stealing from inside their home might have ruled out hiring them for such work.⁴⁰ And some Christian families may have chosen not to employ PK women as cooks for

the same reason. However, other work such as fetching water, washing pans, or milking and tending cattle, called *mēlvēlai* or “outside work”, necessitated access only to the walled backyards of the teachers’ homes, which, to this day have their own back entrances.

When I asked members of the ancestral PK patrician I knew to verify this practice of domestic service for Christian teachers, they claimed that it did happen, but that no one in *their* family had performed such domestic labor, even the *mēlvēlai*. One much younger PK man from the clan claimed it was only the truly poor families who felt the need to seek such employment. Yet, one widow born into the lineage did confirm that her father had performed farm labor (watering the fields) for one of Pasumalai’s wealthiest teachers, D. Walter.

A much closer friend and another widow born into the natal PK clan of Krishnapuram, Pecciyamma, described a similar division among Krishnapuram PK one afternoon outside her home. With visible disgust she claimed it was only the *pīlāikkai vanta* PK (in-migrating laborers; lit. ‘those who came to survive’) who used to practice domestic service for local Christian teachers. After she made this proud assertion of her own status as a natal woman from Pasumalai’s original PK clan, she silently screwed up her face in disgust as if she were cleaning someone’s latrine while she mimed the hand motions for washing dirty pots. Her expression that evening came with no interpretation attached. But, time and time again, Pecciyamma had already let loose the misleading generalization that local teachers are “SC” (Scheduled Castes or Dalits). Her pantomime that evening most likely indexes her disgust at the thought of someone in her family washing dishes covered in what she sees as untouchable saliva. She proudly claimed to me that no one in *her* family ever performed such insulting work, “This is *our ūr* [village]. We never did any work like that.” And her father’s side of the family is part of the PK

clan that claims ancestral status in Krishnapuram (see Ch. 1). In a presentist frame of mind, she clearly felt that evening that her family members would have lost honor if they had worked as servants in their own natal *ūr*. But, she continued, those with no honor to protect locally, i.e. the in-migrant PK, could get away with performing this work (being able to conceal this insulting work from relatives living in a distant natal village). And, as an example of the latter category, she quickly mentioned Mutturaj's family.

The Good Water Well

During the late colonial period, an age before piped municipal water and private bore wells, Pasumalai's mission staff had to gather all their drinking, cooking and bathing water daily from open pit wells, much like their Krishnapuram PK neighbors. The mission always maintained special wells for resident staff just as it maintained open pit wells for hostel students and dining hall staff to use at various sites across the AMM compound.⁴¹ Likewise, elderly PK recalled to me that the recently renovated well on Krishnapuram's south street was actually a very old public well they have used for as long as they can remember (see Map 3). Retrieving water, therefore, did not *necessitate* PK-teacher interaction at the same wells, since each community controlled its own separate sources of water. Yet, many of Pasumalai's teachers hired local PK to draw well water for them. And, by the 1940s, one open-pit AMM mission well had become the central site of this hired 'water drawing', while also drawing PK and Christian together into transactional relations. It is remembered to this day as the "good water well."

According to Resolution 60 of the September 1931 Minutes of the AMM, the mission voted to allow Pasumalai Christians to create a new residential settlement on five acres of forest

land north of Krishnapuram which they dubbed “Jonespuram” after the missionary, John P. Jones, who had originally purchased it from the Government.⁴² An AMM missionary living in Pasumalai, James Dickson, quickly encouraged a few employees of Pasumalai’s AMM Lenox Press to build houses there and constructed a public well for use by them. Jonespuram’s well soon provided a new source of public water not only for its original residents and future retired teachers, but also for everyone in Pasumalai who craved its delectable taste. One 58 year old Krishnapuram man even compared its water to the ultimate liquid respite from south India’s brutal summer heat: “coconut water.”

Though all castes and classes apparently drew the well’s sweet, abundant water, they did not necessarily all show up to draw it in person. Drawing water at a public well, even today, is not a task appropriate for the status-conscious, literate middle classes in Tamil society. It is especially degrading as *publicly visible*, and unskilled, manual labor. Despite the institutionalization of mandatory “manual training” classes for teacher training school students during the 1920s and 1930s,⁴³ the general lauding of unskilled manual labor required of Pasumalai High school scholarship recipients during the same period,⁴⁴ and continued rhetorical admiration by some Pasumalai Christians today for the old missionary ideology of “the dignity of labor,” it seems that beyond the immediate purview of the mission’s public institutional spaces, in their domestic rhythms, many Pasumalai teachers eschewed public forms of manual labor that would have eroded their social status.⁴⁵

Another reason why elite classes avoid this labor is that early morning fights over precedence at public wells (or municipal street taps) are quite normal in Tamil society. Two sons of famous Normal school teachers fictionally re-created the good water well’s lively

atmosphere for me, an atmosphere that apparently inclined most teachers, willing to part with a small monthly fee, to hire local PK to get their “good water” for them,

[Starting in English] That was the only well available for total: Krishnapuram, Jonespuram [Switches back to Tamil] All the water was there. If you saw it [the well] in the morning- In the morning while we were studying we used to hear an incredible raucous. ‘Hey! Get the water! Bring over that jug! Bring over that jug! Put that jug down! Take that jug! Put that jug over here, *mā!*⁴⁶

Impossible to appreciate in translation is how this wealthy Christian engineer uses informal and disrespectful verb conjugations to represent the locutionary mood at the Jonespuram well in the late 1950s. This is certainly not the kind of talk that the wives of Christian teachers would have enjoyed exchanging with either their Christian peers or with local PK women for whom such public rancor is not necessarily dishonorable to *their* feminine selves. Nor would any teacher have likely sent his wife into such a fractious social space. This engineer implicitly contrasts this to the quietist morning studying of he and his siblings, upwardly mobile children of a middle class Training School teacher. An elderly local PK man himself confirmed this remembered labor,

Cokkan:...Our Devar people drew [water] for the Christian homes. Back then, they gave money to those who drew [water] and gave it to them, to those who lifted the pots and brought them over. Christians won’t go and draw, right? Because of that, our people, women, drew [water] and brought it to them--

JR: [My interruption]: That was a job?

Cokkan: That was a job. For a while there was a group surviving like that.⁴⁷

But, by paying local PK women to draw their water for them, Christian families implicitly gave them access to the well for their own purposes. And an old widow named Lakshmi explained to me that Krishnapuram residents sought Jonespuram’s sweet water for

drinking and cooking while using the salty water on South Street for their goats, cows and calves.⁴⁸ The quest for sweet drinking water led local PK to enter what was, until the 1950s, de facto “Christian” controlled space. During the later colonial period, under missionary and local Christian supervision, the Jonespuram well was fenced, gated and locked except for the early morning hours. Pecciyamma remembered the well’s discipline during her childhood (late 1940s and early 1950s). She and other women would be waiting with their jugs in front of the well at 5:00 AM when a local Christian doctor and one-time president of the Jonespuram Committee came and unlocked the well for public use.⁴⁹ Yet, while the missionaries were still around (1950s), those PK who wanted the “good water” apparently paid a monthly fee of a quarter to half a rupee. Gradually, though, these fees stopped allowing relatively unfettered access to any and all.⁵⁰

Aside from the public roads and the classroom seats of Pasumalai’s Christian schools, Jonespuram’s “good water well” was one of the first public resources PK and Christians came to share during the late colonial period. And yet, it was a hierarchy of class identity performance that generated access rights for local PK. Following the dispositions of such a collective habitus, other local PK who had masonry skills performed repair work for mission schools and teachers homes in Pasumalai⁵¹ and have, to this day, built the brick graves and above ground tombs for local Christians in the Pasumalai cemetery.⁵² Other PK grazed the milk cows many teachers kept in their backyards during a period before processed “packet milk.”⁵³ According to oral memories of mission rules enforced by resident missionaries from the 1930s-1950s, teachers living on Teachers’ Line could own and keep only one cow and one calf, primarily for the purpose of providing their family with fresh milk.⁵⁴ Excess cattle, however, were easily

maintained on non-mission land. One primary school teacher even had five or six milk cows for which he and his brother actually bought a separate plot of land near Krishnapuram just to stack the hay to feed them. Most importantly, the social life of the “good water well” reveals how daily social interaction between self-identifying “Hindu” and “Christian” in late colonial Pasumalai took place quite regularly in the idiom of a financial class hierarchy. The teacher used cash earned by virtue of his identity as literate “Christian” teacher to purchase the labor of the uneducated poor whom he could simultaneously mark off as “Hindu.”

What emerges here is a continuum of servile labor performed by PK for Pasumalai’s teachers during the late colonial period. It was a continuum some PK elders today remember as containing both honorable and less honorable forms of labor. Those PK especially concerned about social pollution (or social honor) only worked as farm laborers or, perhaps, cow-tenders for local Christians. Others, with more pressing financial needs, apparently accepted more humiliating domestic service for any teacher willing to pay them. This financial dependency also revealed itself in PK asking for loans, a custom mentioned by several Christians I interviewed.⁵⁵

While the financial ability to hire servants and own farmland as a source of “side income” indicates the elite status of many Pasumalai teachers, money alone did not construct or support their complex social position. Here is how one 50-year-old Christian musician narrates Teacher-PK relations during the period his father taught as a primary school teacher [circa 1930s-1950s],

At first we [Christians] were the educated ones and they, the Hindus, were uneducated people. When my father was alive, they used to come to our house to have letters written. If a letter came, they didn’t know how to read. So they used to come to the teachers’ homes, like ours, and say something like, “*Aiyā*, could you please read this

for me?" ...My father was Jeyaraj *Vāttiyār* [Teacher]. Even today we have *mariyātai* [respect/honor] because we are part of Jeyaraj *Vāttiyār*'s family. 'Hey! They are *Jeyaraj Vāttiyār*'s kids, man.' And there were lots of teachers here like that. They gave *mariyātai* [respect] to all the teachers. Why? Because they were uneducated. If they wanted to write a letter or read something they would come here and show it to us. After that, the mill came...⁵⁶

Another son of a famous Pasumalai teacher, Devasahayam, mentioned that his father used to write *vīṭṭupattirams* (house deeds) for local PK, acting as a sort of notary. What these remembrances encode is a presentist concern with how great the difference in average educational attainment 'once was' between Pasumalai Christian and Krishnapuram PK. My landlord even claimed that local Christians' educational attainment itself has prevented any religious conflict in Pasumalai, "There was honor and respect for Christians. They think Christians are 'educated fellows,' so they won't say anything about their religion."⁵⁷ Superior knowledge capital, as well as financial capital, apparently buttressed the social hegemony of the late colonial Christian teacher in Pasumalai, even *beyond* the mission compound's walls.

In contemplating my question about *contemporary* "Hindu-Christian" relations in Pasumalai, another son of a famous Pasumalai teacher argued, "They [Kallar] weren't that close. They were like 'servants' [to the teachers]. 'Servants' for work. They came to ask for money and things or to take loans."⁵⁸ In sharp contrast, my widowed PK friend Pecciyamma quickly remembered a contrasting intimacy during the 'old times', " They [Teachers and PK] were very close. They needed people to work for them, right? To wash pots...for the *vāttiyārs*. There wasn't a division [between Hindus/PK and Christians] then. A few teachers from that period are still around. They still give us *matippu* [respect]." So, who is right? Leaving aside any positivist

quest, these two statements may best reflect each speaker's nostalgic condescension. Child of a late colonial teacher and child of a late colonial PK farmer remember each other's community as somehow subordinate, thereby generating memories of respect shown for their own community. But given the outline of a very sharp, multi-faceted class hierarchy outlined up until now, why would Christian teachers have shown much respect for local PK for whom they read mail, wrote letters, gave loans, wrote deeds, mediated disputes and whom they employed as servants in their homes and as farm laborers on their fields? What manner of "*matippu*" could Pecciyamma possibly mean?

On April 11, 1999, I found myself documenting the wedding for one of Mutturaj's grandsons. Since Pasumalai itself has no publicly owned meeting halls, Mutturaj had rented the upper hall of a nearby Malayali monastery to stage his grandson's wedding (see Map 2). After the groom had tied the *tāli* thread around his new wife's neck, one by one relatives and guests climbed the stage, greeted the newlyweds, handed over *moy* (cash prestation) in envelopes and posed for "snaps" (pictures). While I was filling in gaps in my knowledge of local PK wedding ritual, suddenly, my landlord, his younger brother Jeparaj and the latter's son arrived, climbed the stage to greet the wedded couple and then posed for a photograph. After giving them a gift, they relaxed on some folding chairs *by themselves* for a while and then quietly left without eating. I, however, wasn't culturally fluent enough to escape the fetid, sweltering heat of the dining hall below. None other than Mutturaj himself dragged me downstairs to get me properly fed. Having ignored the ceremony and the feast, Mutturaj's long time social patrons displayed a minimalist *matippu* appropriate for a social inferior in Tamil society, while subtly projecting to observers their own self-understanding as socially superior to a broader PK community

metonymically indexed by the wedding itself. The David family takes Mutturaj's labor, honors his family's life cycle events, but indicates dominance by not taking his food.

Based on my own experiences in Madurai, far from precluding social intimacy with the manual laboring classes, elite class identity performance in Tamil society generally incorporates such intimacy as a valued way to construct and to perpetuate satisfying feelings of social dominance. So, what Pecciyamma perceives as *matippu* from local Christian teachers, who are much wealthier and more educated than she, really is a form of respect in many domains of Tamil society; but such performances of respect are also profoundly condescending, self-directed constructions of social superiority. An employer's respectful attendance at the weddings and funerals of his employees fits within what I observed, in Madurai, as a broader cultural pattern of interactional *pācam* (attachment) between social patrons and the socially patronized. Such "attachments" perpetuate habitual choices about who performs one's manual labor, a further symbolization of a superior's respect for the *paḷakkam* (relationship) aside from whatever small wage is given.⁵⁹

Several other elderly PK I spoke with regularly echoed this view of mutual "respect" between PK and local Christians, both in the past and in the present. Several times I even heard local PK use fictive kin-relations to describe Hindu-Christian relations in Pasumalai, especially during the end of the missionary era. Most often I heard local PK use one of two kinship dyads "Aṇṇan-tambi" (older brother-younger brother) or "Tāy-Piḷḷai" (mother-child) to describe the relationship of Christians to their community. No one used one specific pair of kin terms very consistently with me, which discouraged me from systematically searching for one. The spirit of these remarks is metaphorical not literal; metaphorical of certain sense of hierarchical *pācam*

(attachment) and interdependency between two communities long interwoven in transactional *paḷakkankal*. Krishnapuram PK needed employment and side income. They also needed the assistance and friendship of the literate and educated in a period in which literacy was rare among them. More certainly, Pasumalai teachers needed laborers to perform myriad manual labor tasks unbecoming of an educated person, though, in the case of water fetching and housework, this “need” was really the structural consequence of embodying an elitist habitus of multiple identity performance.

Pecciyamma’s paternal aunt, Lakshmi, described quite vividly the way in which Pasumalai’s teachers used to wield immediate social authority over local PK during her childhood (1940s) when the Christian teacher and PK populations were much smaller than today. The small population of Pasumalai during her youth lent itself, in her depiction, to a tight exertion of teachers’ authority over local PK, the young children of whom studied at Pasumalai’s primary school with increasing frequency by the 1940s and 1950s.

Lakshmi: [explaining why they never asked for help from the teachers]: They and we had a mother-child relationship or, from my point of view, I used to say ‘*Aiyā*’ ... If we went and jumped in the *kammāy* [irrigation reservoir] uh they would assert their authority over us. They might say, ‘Yo! Stop right there!’ Is so-and-so’s daughter behaving like this? Shall I tell your father?’ Then we would get scared, ‘Oh no! Chellappa Teacher saw us. He’s gonna kill us!’ and we’d climb out. They used to assert their authority over us. They can’t do it today, right? Back then, they only had a certain number of family heads. It was because there were only ten families there [AMM compound] and ten families here [Krishnapuram], that they knew that these kids are so-and-so’s daughters or so-and-so’s sons. And we were afraid that Chellappa *Vāttiyār Aiyā* or Charlie *Vāttiyār Aiyā* or Walter *Vāttiyār Aiyā* or Job *Vāttiyār Aiyā* would come and say something. There was lots of *mariyātai* [‘respect’ for the teachers]. They also gave us a lot of *mariyātai*. If a woman died, they would take some clothing and bring it, or, if it was a man, they would bring a *vēṣṭi* and give it before leaving.

JR: [Who?]

Lakshmi: They would bring it with them, the teachers...They would bring a garland.
None of that happens now.⁶⁰

Lakshmi's lucid recall of various key folk heroes honored all four men with the exact same professional title *Vāṭṭiyār* (Teacher) and social title *Aiyā* (sir, master) , masking the fact that they actually hailed from three different castes (Vellalar, Konar and Paraiyar) that, even today, hardly share the same moral capital in the public spaces of Tamil society. She went on to mention how the late Job *Vāṭṭiyār* even used to come to 'the Street of the Devars' and make sure local PK washed their front stoops and kept the street clean. Given that one of the four men she mentioned, Job, was of Paraiyar ancestry, she also reveals, implicitly, how late colonial teachers' caste identities, most likely well known by her parents and their PK peers, did not prevent them from exerting "Christian" discipline with local PK children, even beyond the school classrooms in which they worked or the beyond the mission compound itself.

In this section, we have seen how everything from residential architecture to forms of social transaction based on servile labor once drew local PK and Christians in Pasumalai together in a class hierarchy centered primarily on differentials in financial and knowledge capital. This hierarchy also overlapped the morally charged "Hindu-Christian" boundary and permeated the very borders of the mission compound and the new Christian residential colony of Jonespuram. Importantly, whenever it was Christian teachers of Dalit caste heritages interacting with local PK, the conjoining of class and religious hierarchies simultaneously inverted a prevalent caste hierarchy of Devar over Dalit that still holds, even today, in most villages of Madurai and Ramnad Districts.

Axis 2: Missionary-PK Transactions

Pasumalai's teachers, however, were not the only self-identifying "Christians" interacting with Krishnapuram PK. Their patrons and colleagues, the last wave of American missionaries, also established distinct modes of transaction with local PK, putting on similarly conjoined performances of Christian/middle class identities. Their interactions with local PK, especially, helped bind Krishnapuram and the AMM community together in further relations of interdependence. Memories of the missionary in the aged minds of elderly PK today also form the basis of a nostalgic ethical critique of local Christians. And as these colonial memories fade, so do the final mnemonic whispers of a decades long social pattern of "Hindu-Christian" cooperation in a distinctly interdependent hierarchical mode. It was a domain of identity performance common to many Indian mission compounds where performers of "Christian" identity were generally upwardly mobile, educated individuals occupying elite positions in the late colonial social imagination.

As early as 1920, government officials known as "Kallar Special Officers" condescended to give PK men an option to become exempt from the demeaning system of roll-call and "passports" that had become part of Kallar Reclamation: send your children to school. They contacted the AMM and other missions who helped establish, staff and administer special "Kallar schools" throughout Madurai District, many of which still operate today under a special Kallar Department.⁶¹ And, in the Pasumalai High school, PK students received special Government financed "Kallar" scholarships as late as the 1940s.⁶² This colonial, bureaucratic targeting of the PK community as a recalcitrant, socially maladjusted "caste" only encouraged an effervescent

evangelical zeal in two of Pasumalai's most famous late colonial missionaries. In the raw evangelical verbiage of John X. Miller, the 'great builder' of Pasumalai, "The Kallars are a fine people, strong, brave and manly though ignorant, rough and uncouth. We covet them for Christ."⁶³ The other key Pasumalai missionary, Lloyd Lorbeer, adopted Kallar Reclamation as a personal crusade, making grueling weekend bicycle trips from PK village to PK village; trips that old timers, PK and Christian alike, narrated to me with wide-eyed wonder. Yet, this colonial disciplining of the PK body, and the thieving tendencies imagined to be part of the PK caste *kunam*, was not the only mode of PK-missionary interaction in Pasumalai itself.

The maintenance of missionary bungalows and the schools of Pasumalai's educational colony demanded an immense amount of manual labor. And AMM missionaries, often referred to as *Turai* (an honorific title appended to the given name Europeans), were the petty rajas of this large mission workforce until mission devolution in the 1930s. The schools had their office peons, often Paraiyar village converts, and their sweepers (janitors) from the Chakkiliyar community. For occasional masonry work, bullock cart transportation of mission supplies, and milk for the school dining halls, Pasumalai's missionaries turned to cattle-owning Krishnapuram PK for help. And as early as the late 1920s, scholarship recipients from all castes (dubbed "the work boys") had to perform manual labor on the mission compound to receive their money.⁶⁴ But by the 1930s, the mission compound also had large gardens in order to raise eatables for its school dining halls and, after 1904, a model agricultural farm to which John Miller added an enormous 60 acre fruit tree orchard in the 1930s.⁶⁵ These farms, gardens and orchards needed constant, full-time tending; work performed by local PK men. Then there was the work of running and maintaining the two-story mission bungalows (from two in 1920 to four by the

1940s). Missionaries, like Lorbeer, hired Paraiyars as their cooks. For their bungalow watchmen and the provision of daily milk supplies they turned to local PK. Farming, bullock cart driving, milk production, masonry work, as well as watchman work have all been primary forms of labor commonly practiced by Krishnapuram PK throughout this century. And Pasumalai PK performed every one of these forms of labor by during my own fieldwork.

Local PK labor for the mission and its missionaries took three different forms along a continuum of relative dependency: 1) personal, full-time labor for the missionary, 2) full-time hired labor for the mission gardens and farms, 3) part-time skilled labor. But, wherever I went in Krishnapuram, it seemed that each family could tell of one ancestor who had once worked in some capacity for the American mission. The sense that emerged over the course of my oral history research was of a mission political economy directly bound in relations of labor dependency on local PK.

1) Ponnusami Devar, The Watchman

Beginning in the 1920s, as Lorbeer was making his grueling bicycle trips to organize Kallar schools in PK villages, he handpicked various bright children for education in the Pasumalai boarding schools. Lorbeer eventually selected one such PK boy, named Ponnusami, to become his gardener and, eventually, his bungalow watchman. For most of this century, Madurai District's PK have taken up watchmen work for private homes, stores, factories, school compounds and government offices. Ponnusami Devar's daughter claims that the reason he sought out such employment was actually a fight with his parents. She herself went on to marry another PK man, Velu, who never studied in Pasumalai at all but who worked for a while with her father as part of Lorbeer's domestic staff, then as a watchman for the famous Harvey

Spinning Mill and then for the rest of his life as a ‘mail boy’ at Pasumalai’s Lenox Press.

Because of the latter position, this un-baptized elderly PK couple was allotted a home next to the homes of the mission “sweepers”; yet another example of uxorilocal PK marriage caused by Pasumalai’s vibrant political economy of mission. When invited by Lorbeer to join “the religion,” Ponnusami Devar and his son-in-law politely declined. When asked what Lorbeer’s reply had been, Velu responded, imitating Lorbeer’s American pronunciation of Tamil, “*Uñka! piriya* (as you wish).”

2) Mission Gardeners and Farmers

AMM missionaries Lorbeer and Miller also hired local PK to work as farmers and gardeners for mission properties during the late colonial period. In the historical memory of Pecciyamma and other members of Pasumalai’s natal PK clan, these were always the in-migrant PK who came to work in the Mahalakshmi spinning mill or the mission itself. One 50-year-old grandson of an in-migrant PK, a farmer for mission school rice fields (used in agricultural training classes), recalled how his grandfather once won a prize from Lorbeer for accurate, systematic plowing. It appears that he refers to the annual “Farmers Day” held in the 1920s as a Kallar Reclamation program designed to encourage “criminal” PK caste members to lead a quiet life of klepto-*phobic*, self-reliant agriculturalism.⁶⁶ He was the custodian of the Pasumalai School rice fields; a job still held by his grandson, Pandian, today, in theory, in a traditional *kuttakai* tenancy agreement (see Kapadia 1995: 184-6). But, as a proud owner of bullocks and a bullock cart, Lorbeer used to call on him, Pandian claims, to transport American wheat, sacks of milk powder, and other bulk items from the Pasumalai railway station to the school buildings.⁶⁷

3) Part-time masons and bullock cart drivers

Local PK also found regular part-time work to supplement their mill salary and their agricultural income by working as masons and hired bullock cart drivers for mission schools. Mutturaj's older brother, Ramu, combined regular mason work for AMM mission properties with part-time agricultural labor, avoiding millwork entirely. As usual, my standard question on "which missionaries did you know?" generated another narrative of Krishnapuram PK working for the mission,

The "area" of the "mission" was Madurai. The "mission area" was all of Madurai [District]. I've worked throughout the entire "area" and developed relationships with the missionaries there. Lorbeer. After that, Dudley. After that, Banninga *turai*. Then Lawson *turai*,...uum. Heinemann. Then, in Madurai, there was Long *Ammā* (Mother). Long. Then the [AMM] mission hospital...American college [founded in 1904 by the AMM]...I've worked in all those places...I never went to school. I worked [for the mission]. But I didn't read and write at the school [Pasumalai's Boys' High school].⁶⁸

After finishing his first job working on the mission's Pankujam Clark Child Welfare Center, Ramu was asked to go to Capronur, a Dalit Christian settlement in Sivagangai district, where "Mother Long" had apparently asked Lorbeer to send over a good mason. Ramu's narration of Long's character exposes the immense class hierarchy overlaid across the already parallel boundaries of "Hindu-Christian" and "missionary -PK",

He [Lorbeer] sent me there because she [Mrs. Long] had asked for one of 'your guys.' So I went there and as I was working she was eating the food that they [white people] eat, right? She was eating by stabbing this spoon or something like that, right? Everyone working for her was looking at her. Through the window. That *ammā* [Mrs. Long] came out with spoon in hand, yelling, 'You're bad people! Bad people! Go away! Don't you stay here! Go! Go!' We endured everything she was saying and then, finally...⁶⁹

...he promised Mrs. Long that he would fire the workers at once and took them off into the distance. Then, secretly, he brought them back again to the worksite to finish the work without her noticing. After proudly narrating his duping, he came to the issue of a job recommendation,

So, finally, the work was done. She “typed” a “cover” [letter] and called me over, ‘I’ve written a report for your *turai* [i.e. Lloyd Lorbeer]. You need to take it and give it to him.’ I was terrified of giving it to him. I went. I came back. I went. I came back. Then I toughened up my heart and he said [mocking Lorbeer’s malapropian Tamil], ‘Come clearly! Come clearly!’ [instead of the correct idiomatic phrase, “come boldly!”]⁷⁰

Despite his claim to extensive masonry work for the mission, the theme of resistance to the missionary here suggests, again, no necessary inward respect for the *turai*, despite the very real fear of being fired or being given a bad ‘written’ report (and one Chinnadevar himself could obviously not read). However, only those who became routinely dependent or accustomed to such frequent mission labor were really susceptible to such mission compound forms of discipline.

4) Lower Class Objects of Charity

Finally, as early as 1876, Pasumalai missionaries began a medical dispensary as part of their nascent medical missionary work.⁷¹ In 1909 it became the Caroline Clark Dispensary, treating thousands of cases a year through the 1940s, 1950s and beyond. One of Pasumalai’s surviving octogenarians started his medical career there as a “compounder”, or pharmacist, hand-picked from the Pasumalai High School student body by John X. Miller for both a medical education in Madras and this mission job. He then went on to become a private doctor in the Pasumalai area and made enough for a comfortable, middle class retirement in Jonespuram (although he described himself to me privately as a “poor man” most likely because of his birth into a poor family). Apparently concerned I might read his former work as exploitative and not

as sacrificial Christian service, he quickly made sure to mention that he used to give medicines away for free, since he was being paid a mission salary anyways at the time.⁷² The son of another “compounder” claimed his father made many local PK friends through distributing free medical assistance, backed, of course, by mission funds,⁷³ and occasionally by municipal funds from Madurai city.⁷⁴ And in 1930’s, Frances Dickson, wife of AMM missionary James Dickson, began a child care center that later became the Pankujam Clark Child Welfare Center (PCC center; see Map 3) under the leadership of Lloyd Lorbeer’s equally energetic wife.

The PCC center was the institution most often mentioned by local PK as a source of late colonial Christian philanthropy. Here, wives and daughters of local male teachers, guided by successive missionary wives, delivered PK and Christian babies, administered pre-and post-natal care and free powdered milk to families they determined were needy. For years, free snacks and milk were also distributed to young children in the afternoons, regardless of religious identity. These food items themselves have become key symbols of missionary *anpu* in the collective PK memory of the last years of the missionary period in Pasumalai. Importantly, though, nostalgic narratives of this missionary feeding of local PK children often preceded, and seemed generated by, caustic opinions concerning the relative paucity of *caritas* emanating from Pasumalai’s contemporary Christian community.

Those who worked for the mission full or part time apparently had rights to special charity, if missionaries felt they qualified as deservedly “poor.” Normally, mission servants received free sacks of wheat, free clothes for Christmas, etc. One embittered child of a former baptized PK press employee revived a decades old antipathy for Lorbeer whom he described as a “lunatic”, because he denied his father customary aid given to mission workers on the fallacious

grounds that his wife wore “gold earrings” and was therefore “rich.”⁷⁵ A self-identifying Hindu PK farmer claimed that Lorbeer used to give aid only to those who told him they lived in *ōṭṭu vītu* (tiled roof homes), claiming, contrary to local architectural logic, that those in *kūrai vītu* (thatched roof homes) were somehow the “rich” people.⁷⁶ The common point these men seemed to be making with me was that, in his distribution of mission aid, Lorbeer clearly differentiated along lines of visibly performed poverty.⁷⁷ Disciplining the object of charity appears to have dominated Missionary-PK charitable transactions, dependent on the latter’s performative display of themselves in front of the missionaries as persuasive, ‘deserving’ metonyms of poverty. With Tamil Christians also staffing these charity institutions, uneducated PK who sought charity from them entered spaces in which they would simultaneously feel inferior to both tiers of local ‘Christian’ identity performers. The PCC Center also constructed Tamil staff as joint agents in this foreign and municipally funded philanthropy, even though they were certainly not cutting into their own mission salaries to perform such “service.”

In these flows of charity, a hierarchy of reception emerged with the full-time mission servants on top, regular mission laborers in the middle and those unconnected with the mission receiving no more than the free pre-natal/child care at the PCC Center and free help at the dispensary. Added to relations of transaction between them and Pasumalai’s teachers, a complex hierarchical cluster of transactional flows crossed the spatial and social boundary separating Krishnapuram and local Christian space during the late colonial period. These were definitely not communities living in nervous or suspicious isolation from each other. AMM Christians were certainly not hiding behind their compound walls. These were two small, mutually interdependent social communities relying heavily for their livelihood on the energetic political

economy of the AMM mission. The mission political economy altered, and sometimes inverted, extra-mission colonial social hierarchies of caste, while becoming a colonial theater of nascent middle class identity performance with a heavy Christian veneer.

The transactions discussed in this chapter support Paul Connerton's argument that, "social habits are essentially legitimating performances. (1989: 35)" Late colonial transactions across the mission compound wall helped legitimate the authority of the Pasumalai *vāttiyār* qua Christian/middle class individual. These hierarchical *paḷakkankaḷ* legitimated a mission compound identity front in habitual choices of local PK manual labor in return for elite levels of knowledge and financial capital dominated by local Christian teachers. Encoded within these relationships was the performance of a much older elite status qua agricultural landlord; a performance made possible by cash income earned not by virtue of feudal patterns of kin-based inheritance, but by virtue of a career grounded in higher education and literacy, the critical knowledge capital of modern elite class distinction.

But have these complex transactions become part of a historically perduring habitus of multiple identity performance in post-colonial Pasumalai? Can social memory, which Paul Connerton sees as "social habit-memory" in gestures and in commemorative public rituals of the state (1989), also exist as habitual social transactions that remember past performances of multiple social identities? The next chapter will explore what historical forces beyond a mission compound habitus have done to once habitual Hindu-Christian transactions in Pasumalai.

Chapter 3 Keeping a Proximate Distance

In October 1999, two months before I left Pasumalai, I motor-scooted to the nearby, PK dominated settlement of Baikra to visit a CSI pastor whose grandfather had built a house there decades earlier, when it was all empty “forest” land. I was hoping to fix a time for an interview about his famous Christian patrilineage. When Pastor Jones introduced his son, I immediately recognized the boy and blurted out, “Ohhh! So this is *your* son. I often see him in Pasumalai, but I never knew where he lived.” The pastor immediately chimed in that he didn’t like the “scene” in Pasumalai and preferred that his son not go there. Perhaps half-jokingly, he then asked me to send his son home, if I ever saw him hanging out there again. Had Pasumalai, the once hallowed mission compound, become some morally tendentious space in the local Christian imagination?

Pastor Jones wasn’t the first local Christian to criticize the current Pasumalai scene. In an interview, a local, 10th grade educated folk musician featured later in this chapter, Thomas, answered my standard interview question, “What don’t you like about Pasumalai?” by unleashing the following critique,

Thomas: Standing around in groups...A bunch of guys standing around, teasing girls. Standing at the “bus stop.” Standing in front of the parsonage. This doesn’t resemble Pasumalai’s best habits.

JR: Before, this--

Thomas: [interrupting] This never happened. It’s started just recently, within the past ten years or so. The main reason for it? These Krishnapuram boys. No one else on Teachers’ Line stands around [loiters]...I mean this is a “mission compound,” right? If somebody stands around the same way by the road, they say he’s a little thief boy. And I’m including my son here, too.¹

Despite the initial blaming of local PK youth, Thomas confessed his own son's involvement in a street level youth culture that does transpire both within and without the old AMM compound. And like Thomas' son, Pastor Jones' eldest son is also one of the college-age kids who hang out regularly in front of the "Galaxy Saloon"[Salon], Pasumalai's main barbershop, which lies on the busy side of National Highway 7 (see Map 3). The saloon's owners are descended from the original Hindu Ambattan (barber) man who came to late colonial Pasumalai to service the male heads and faces of local PK and Christians. The shop's very iconography testifies to its religiously diverse clientele, a meeting place of "Hindu" and "Christian." On the far wall, visible after one bends down to enter, hang smooth haloed woodcut images of Christ and the Virgin Mary flanking a framed lithograph of the ubiquitous Hindu triumvirate: Saraswati, Pillaiyar, and Lakshmi.

But, the Galaxy Saloon's location ten feet from the side of National Highway 7 makes it a rather liminal space, where most middle class, adult Christian men I knew generally did not loiter for too long. Several powerful Christian families have modern homes along either side of this road, but all were built years before it had become such a congested, smog-ridden artery; long before dozens of Devar-dominated shops appeared along its sides, and long before the Pandian Roadways Corporation (PRC) bus factory had opened on former Pasumalai school rice fields (see Map 2). Being near the bus stand and the major artery into Pasumalai's residential neighborhoods, though, hardly makes the Galaxy Saloon an inconspicuous place to flout the church's continued ethical rhetoric against smoking, drinking, *kaṇṇiccai* (lust of the eye) aimed at passing females and 'wasting time' with friends.² Pastor Jones seemed to index these rebellious activities in his critique of a son who, on his own free time, was voluntarily hanging out in public

Pasumalai spaces *not* controlled by anything he recognizes as a “Christian” influence. But, ironically, the “saloon” was one of the main Pasumalai spaces where Christians and Devars seemed to act as true peers during my research. One reason is that it was a socially liminal zone where the restraining identity performances of middle class Christian adulthood remain conveniently aloof, something especially liberating for local Christian kids for who there always awaits the specter of married (adult) Christian status and the greater pressure to fully inhabit its elitist, disciplinary habitus of multiple identity performance.

Since Pastor Jones grew up in Pasumalai and was once a former choirboy, his critique is no flippant outsider’s condescension. In hindsight, I believe, some of the nostalgic concern he and Thomas both share has to do with the current demographic and social domination of Pasumalai’s public spaces and public culture by local PK and Devar youth and with a broader non-Brahminical “Hinduization” of Pasumalai as a post-colonial social space. But even long before my research had begun in 1998, a dramatic argument I witnessed in Pasumalai’s Whitin Memorial Church on Sunday, December 28, 1997 had already piqued my interest in the thorny topic of local “Hindu-Christian relations.”

An Ethnographic Rorschach of Pasumalai?

Only four months after arriving in Tamil Nadu, my spoken Tamil still developing and my formal research having not yet begun, I was regularly attending church in Pasumalai, in part, to acquire the arcane Sanskritized dialect of Tamil used in CSI churches and prayer meetings. On the morning in question, after the service had ended, the usual pastorate committee members calmly sat down at the collection table, resting at the intersection of nave and wings directly in front of

the altar steps. While they quietly made the customary piles of 5, 10, 25 and 50 paise coins, counted bills and marked off church subscription cards, the church youth group, defined as all unmarried, confirmed young men (roughly between 15 and 30 years of age), sat with their church appointed adult “convener” on the men’s benches near the noisy church entrance. I also joined them, sitting next to a former Pasumalai choir boy named Michael who was visiting his ‘mother church’ for the holidays.

Suddenly, a heated three-way argument erupted between one of the older youth, Devirakkam, the youth convener, Paul, and another group of youths whom I did not know well at the time. Altogether, no more than thirty young men (out of around 80 eligible or confirmed Christian ‘youth’ I was later told live in the community) were there. Michael summarized the argument for me in English, as my spoken Tamil had not progressed enough by then to understand it fully.

Apparently, the week before, Devaraj, a high school educated pastorate committee member and part-time real estate broker had received a severe public “thrashing” from a local ‘rowdy’ who was also Hindu. That Sunday morning, he had deputized his son to represent him at the church’s youth meeting. Through the son, I learned that Devaraj wanted to ban all Hindus from participating in the church’s annual New Year’s games, slated to begin the next day, in retaliation for the attack that had recently landed him in the hospital.

The debate erupted volcanically at times as Devirakkam, close friend and drinking buddy of Devaraj’s son, kept fighting with the convener, Paul, about how to package the issue verbally for a vote. Devirakkam’s pro-Devaraj bloc didn’t want any local Hindus to participate on the same teams as Christians. Paul offered a compromise position: up to a certain age limit there

would be mixed participation on teams. He suggested 15 but this quickly got bumped up to 18. The yelling got extremely loud while, in the background, the usual pastorate committee members calmly continued to count the Sunday collection. The argument convulsed along with the suggested age limit coming down to 15 again before the collective discussion broken up.

Twenty minutes before the end of the argument, though, a middle class Christian teacher and a powerful Pasumalai pastorate committee member for the previous 20 years, got up from his chair at the offering table, walked calmly up the nave and interrupted the bickering from a standing position. In polished English,³ he began by saying that, while it was good to have “healthy arguments”, people outside, walking by the church, might not understand what all this heated yelling was about; they might come to some mistaken conclusions about what is going in the church. Therefore, he calmly asked again in English that they all please argue more quietly. His stern request in the “colonial language of authority” had little calming effect.

After forty minutes of arguing, Paul finally called everyone to group prayer. The church youth stood in a circle amongst the benches and folding chairs of the men’s half of the church and prayed for two minutes. Meeting adjourned. With argument continuing around me, I approached Devaraj’s son and asked, thru Michael, about the original fight that lay behind this attempt to shut out local Hindus from the annual “Christmas Tournament” or “New Year’s Games.” The story he wanted me to hear was that his father had brokered a land deal in another town (a famous colonial hill station four hours away from Pasumalai by bus) for a wealthy Madurai businessman who had then failed to pay his father the full commission. He claimed his father was beaten up to end a civil case he had filed against the man. And according to Devaraj’s son, even as we spoke that morning, his father was still in the hospital recovering. The link to religion remained vague.

On that Sunday morning, the youth committee made its decision to begin excluding local Hindus from joining the New Year's games. Paul described his vision to me of a slow "Christianization" of the games, arguing that this kind of change should be slow because of the traditionally open Hindu-Christian participation. Eventually, though, by 2000 or 2005, it should probably be for church members only, he added calmly. My interpreter, Michael, disagreed with this proposal arguing that they [local Hindus] have always played peacefully with church members. It is part of Pasumalai tradition, he argued, to let them join in. Furthermore, he continued, during Pasumalai's annual passion play, the Love Divine, "Hindus" have always helped out, especially students from Pasumalai's Trade School who often repaired sets or helped make new ones. Michael added privately that, "conditions were not OK" in Pasumalai. His younger brother and some of his friends also thought Devaraj's revenge tactics were "un-Christian," because they excluded participation in a Christian event on the basis of religion.

After the poorly attended 1998 New Year's morning service, the then Pasumalai pastor, Rev. Swamipillai, and I talked for half an hour in the parsonage about a variety of local church issues. At my request, he gave his own view concerning the recent problem. Apparently, the local communal situation had already been getting worse in recent months. He claimed that six Hindu boys, whom he also called "rowdies", had been causing trouble and had even beaten up some of the Christian youth. Unsure of which kids he was talking about, I mentioned that I had spoken with some Hindu kids in front of the parsonage two weeks earlier on a visit to Pasumalai. Apparently he or someone else had noticed that conversation, because he quickly concurred that they were the kids in question. Regarding the decision to block interfaith participation in the New Year's Games above the age of 15, the pastor said that, although separating by religion was

unnecessary and a bad idea, considering the situation in Pasumalai, perhaps it would be best to set an age cut off which would prevent the six “rowdies”, who I now knew were also Hindus, from causing problems during the games by arguing with their Christian teammates. And this rule had apparently held during the past three days of individual games. He mentioned nothing of Devaraj’s thrashing.

Long before I had absorbed much of Pasumalai’s social history and social ecology, this incident raised for me a basic series of questions: Was this just another example of a stymied Tamil court system tempting frustrated parties to violence and then, more rarely, to lateral sublimations of revenge through a communal idiom? Or was there some dramatic historical change in Hindu-Christian relations going on in Pasumalai? What was buried, if anything, in this small conflict about long-term historical changes in the power of performing a Christian identity in and around a post-colonial mission compound? After describing Pasumalai’s altered social ecology since the 1950s, I will describe what I learned of contemporary PK-Christian social transactions and interdependency to see if the patterns traced in Chapter two have really perdured.

Pasumalai’s Social Ecology

When I lived there in 1998 and 1999, Pasumalai contained many more neighborhoods than it did when Lloyd Lorbeer left in 1957. Within the last twenty years alone ten new neighborhoods have sprouted up, shunting the former AMM mission compound to the northeast corner of a sprawling contemporary “Pasumalai” (see Map 2). These new neighborhoods include: 1) a government colony for Hindu Scheduled Castes entitled Ambedkar Nagar (1981), 2) a wealthy middle class and predominantly high caste Hindu neighborhood named Vinayagar Nagar, 3) a

predominantly Christian middle class neighborhood entitled Jasmine Nagar, 4) a small Christian area near the PRC factory, called Nylon Nagar, 5) two streets built on former rice fields, which were also predominantly Christian, and 6) a squatters' settlement of very poor Hindus, mostly PK, called Anna Nagar (see Maps 2 and 3).

Pasumalai's population stood at around 7,500-8,500 residents during my stay.⁴ Of these, around 5,000-6,000 are self-identifying "Hindus", the rest CSI Tamils. As of 1999, based on my own mapping of this dense area, Krishnapuram alone contained well over 500 residences and a predominantly PK population well in excess of 3,000. Its predominant house types had shifted from the late colonial period. A few, lingering two room mud walled huts with old "country tile" roofs stood in a Krishnapuram now filled predominantly by brick and mortar walled, slanted tile roofed homes and accompanied by dozens of two-story terraced-roof homes; nearly 500 residences packed into an area about the size of a World Cup soccer field. In 1999, the Pasumalai church had 3031 registered members in 669 families, but 1/3 or more of these families do not live in any of Pasumalai's neighborhoods. Some of them pay church dues purely to maintain wedding and burial rights in their "natal church" and actually live elsewhere in Madurai or Tamil Nadu.

Many Pasumalai individuals, Christian and PK, claimed to me that much of the population now present in Pasumalai had arrived "just recently." During the last fifteen years, many Hindus from various castes have apparently moved to Pasumalai to work in the local PRC factory to take appointments in newly built local government offices or to build middle class two story homes on Pasumalai's rapidly vanishing rice fields. In the late colonial period, there was one major artisan family in Pasumalai, a Christian family that still produces most of Pasumalai's granite tombstones while also running a thriving business in granite plaques. Today, twenty or so *ācāri* stone

sculptors have joined them, forming an entire line of shops (and tiny, tiled roof homes behind them) on government land along the south side of the Highway (see Map 2). In an ironic twist of history, most of them actually carve god statues for Hindu temples, a stone's throw away from Pasumalai's church and the original AMM compound. Middle class Hindus from various caste backgrounds now live in homes and rented apartments both in Jonespuram itself and on top of land that once featured a poultry farm for the mission schools. Despite all this recent influx, PK caste members still dominate the local Hindu population in the vicinity of the old AMM compound both in apparent numbers, in their participation in Pasumalai ward politics and in their public presence in Pasumalai's streets, coffee shops, and other gathering places.

With the exception of a squatters' settlement of PK, called Anna Nagar, and some members of Krishnapuram, most every male, 30 and under, in Pasumalai had studied, or was studying, up through secondary school (U.S. 10th grade) as a minimum educational level. But it still appeared from my partial survey that local Christians remained dominant in collegiate and post-collegiate education vis à vis their PK Hindu peers; although a few Krishnapuram PK have gone to college and graduate school. More dramatic, though, has been the increase in education levels and independent income generation held by local PK women. Double cash incomes are now common among PK households, especially after the sudden closure of the Mahalakshmi Mill in the mid 1990s. Teacher, clerk, salesgirl, vegetable seller, and bricklayer are some of the modern urban careers young PK women have adopted. Ambitious young PK men have become videographers, painters, clerks, and teachers while the bulk are former mill workers, peasants, construction laborers, masons, milkmen, watchmen, bullock cart freight transporters, etc.

Economically, however, local Christians drew in more cash income, on average, than most individuals in Krishnapuram. Those that are teachers, headmasters, office assistants or sweepers can generally look forward to Government pensions unavailable to their working class PK peers. Yet, due to decades of millwork, political patronage or other entrepreneurial work, a minority of PK are now enjoying motorcyles, higher educations, modern homes and excellent food in ways that challenge any facile depiction of their community as uniformly 'poor.' This accumulation of financial and knowledge capital notwithstanding, a persistently broad, financial class hierarchy still overlaps the PK-Christian boundary, but not so clearly, so starkly, as in a late colonial Pasumalai remembered in my presence. One choir boy vented his jealous frustration at Christians living like "beggars" in tiny Diocesan homes whose renovations have to be self-financed, while some local PK in Krishnapuram have built two story, terraced roof private homes, including some former mill workers, two Devar politicians, one member of the natal patrician who has become a college professor (Ch. 1) and another local PK man who monopolizes the rental of audio equipment for Pasumalai functions. Thomas' younger brother, Richard, whom I quoted in the previous chapter, said that, "Those [PK] who used to come to us and ask us to read letters now have people in their families who have studied even more than us [he and his brothers], up to BA and MA." During my stay, however, the last generation to work in the local Mahalakshmi spinning mill was experiencing a painful, forced retirement due to the mill's government ordered closure. Some elderly PK mill workers, whose children are now educated and living elsewhere, are surviving their last years, bereft of promised factory pensions, in a poverty they did not know in their middle age. Just to feed themselves, one elderly couple has even had to rent the tile roofed home they

built in Krishnapuram in 1968, living instead in a ramshackle mud-walled room in between Krishnapuram and Teachers' Line, 'like beggars.'

The most important post-colonial transformation of Christian Pasumalai is the substantial de-linking of Pasumalai's residential Christian population from careers in, and/or income dependency on, its remaining mission schools (Boys' and Girls' Higher Secondary schools, the primary school and the famous Pasumalai Trade School). During my complete survey of Pasumalai's Diocesan housing in the former AMM mission compound, I discovered that these homes no longer contained exclusively the current staff of Pasumalai's four remaining Christian schools (Boys and Girls higher secondary schools, the trade school and primary school). Instead, Diocesan staff (pastors, teachers, accountants, clerks, etc.) working elsewhere in the Madurai area have been allotted Diocesan homes in Pasumalai; retirees also have illegally squatted in Diocesan homes forcing some newer teachers and staff, who should get housing there, to rent elsewhere. Furthermore, with the appearance of several primarily middle class Christian residential neighborhoods and the transformation of Jonespuram from a retirement colony for mission teachers and staff into a complex, religiously plural neighborhood, the tight isomorphism of Christian school staff and the local Christian community no longer holds. Other local Christian residents have moved in to rent or to purchase properties in Pasumalai during the last thirty years, having never worked in the local CSI Diocese at all. Only Pasumalai's Whitin Memorial church itself has any hope of uniting the residential Christian population. And so, only the church can sustain a Christian community qua symbolic class vis à vis local PK. But, unlike the vast network of late colonial mission schools, the Pasumalai church alone does not require much regular or intense manual labor. Two local PK families provided lighting and audio for most of the church's

revival meetings and annual festivals during my stay. They are both families from the late colonial period who benefited directly from the mission political economy, one selling its cow milk, the other working in the AMM's Lenox press. But these two families do not depend primarily on this sporadic contract work for the church, and it does not necessarily index mutual respect. It is the withering, collectively enacted social memory of a once habitual interdependency of the Pasumalai Christian community qua mission political economy on its most proximate source of manual laborers.

Contemporary Daily Patterns of PK-Christian Interaction

My initial impressions, after moving to Pasumalai during the summer of 1998, were that local PK and Christians did not necessarily have much to do with each other on a daily basis. And, though they buy tea and coffee from the same Devar and Malayali owned tea stalls, shop at the same convenience stores, walk and ride down the same dirt streets, and vote in the same electoral wards, rarely did I see PK and Christians sitting down on the benches of those tea stalls to chat with each other. Those Christians I did observe hanging out with PK at local coffee stalls were invariably other Devar Christians or other poorly educated Christians who simply have no middle class honor to protect by not lingering there. The one visual metonym of "Hindu-Christian" relations that sticks in my mind is from a daily mid-morning spectacle that transpired around 8:30-10:00AM. During this time, I would often see dozens of middle class Christians, who are employed beyond Pasumalai's schools, whizzing past the predominantly PK consumers at the Meenakshi coffee bar (see Map 3) on their shiny two-wheelers (as their wives sat in back) looking intently ahead to yet another day in the life of a double income earning middle class

family. But behind all this whizzing by the local PK working class, are there still some perduring forms of transactional interdependency between the two communities?

Several hours before all the ‘whizzing by’ began, around 5-6AM, I often saw local PK lead cows or goats past Dora Akam or down Pasumalai’s main road, across National Highway 7, beyond the railway tracks and out onto Pasumalai’s fallow rice fields for grazing. But, unlike in the late colonial period, they were tending exclusively their own milk cows, not those of local teachers. As local Pasumalai teachers stopped maintaining their own milk cows during the post-colonial period, these local, predominantly, PK entrepreneurs stepped in to service the local middle class thirst for fresh milk. My own milkman was one of half a dozen who hand delivered fresh milk to middle class, predominantly Christian, Pasumalai homes in the early morning (5-6AM) and late afternoons (4-5PM). But, during my research, the Aavin milk company also came every morning to empty hundreds of sealed, plastic milk packets from a motorized rickshaw van into a dispensary near the Pasumalai bus stand. Both private and government milk distribution have obviated middle class dependency on fresh cow milk in modern Madurai, in turn, reducing milk-related daily transactions across the communal boundary in Pasumalai. One local Hindu milkman (not a PK, but a Goundar) decried the loss of *parru* (affection) shown by local Christians, quickly indexing (as evidence) his own milk delivery which had once covered the homes of Teachers’ Line but now stands reduced to one Christian house elsewhere in Pasumalai. One PK milk seller, Balamurugan, decried a drastic loss of sales to Jonespuram Christians; sales they once dominated until the recent spread of “packet milk.”

In 1979, the TPK Town Panchayat Union built a municipal water system for Pasumalai, and Jonespuram’s “good water well” rapidly became defunct. During my research, on alternate

days, it provided water for public and private consumption through a system of pipes connected to a forty-foot high water tower standing at the highest corner of Jonespuram (see Map 3). For a monthly fee to the TPK Panchayat Union, many Christians have obtained personal taps that they can access from within their homes. Although municipal water flow was excellent before Pasumalai's recent population explosion, middle class Hindus and Christians, who live on private land, generally now have bore wells to provide extra water for bathing, toilet use and washing clothes. The highly variable, one-hour flow from the municipal pipes is simply no longer enough to meet their 'needs.' These middle class residents tended to use the piped municipal water for cooking and drinking. However, during my research, Pasumalai's PK-dominated areas depended primarily on public street taps connected to this municipal network. One afternoon, while visiting Mutturaj (Ch. 2) and his relatives on Krishnapuram's old West street, I saw him vigorously working a green metal hand pump he had attached to the municipal street tap there so he could literally suck extra water out. When he saw me approach, he called out, "James! Tell everyone in America that there's a 'water famine' in Pasumalai! Tell them, James!" And Mutturaj didn't have it nearly as bad as those living in the PK dominated squatter settlement of Anna Nagar where everyone had to draw water by hand from an open pit well, or as bad as those in the poorest Christian neighborhood who only had one hand-pump bore well, recently built with the help of government funds.

Every two days, on "water" days, the hierarchical distinctions in financial capital became blatantly enacted not in the fetching of water for Christian teachers by local PK women but in the general absence of a burning need for such a transactional relationship. By 5:30 AM, local PK women lined up their water jugs at public taps while many of their middle class Christian

neighbors simply lined their jugs up at their private ¾ inch diameter domestic taps well out of public view. Due, perhaps, to decreasing flow volume, I noticed some Christians on Teachers' line hiring local PK girls or sending their domestic, live-in servants (who function in several homes as nannies) to fetch "extra water" from public taps, because these Diocesan homes do not have bore wells. Even such isolated transactions, however, did not synergistically create a web of transactions that could draw together a bloated PK population and a smaller Christian one to the same degree as would have been possible in a much smaller, more sharply stratified late colonial Pasumalai.

Because of the advent of municipal water distribution, the reliance on private bore wells for excess water needs, the selling off of local farmland and milk cows years ago by local Christians, and the increasing reliance on treated "packet milk", the daily labor transactions narrated in Chapter 2 no longer bind together Krishnapuram PK and their predominantly middle class Christian neighbors. Even the former PK domestic service work has apparently ended, twenty years ago at least, according to Thomas. Replacing these latter relations today are primarily live-in domestic servant girls/nannies who are increasingly common in many middle class Pasumalai Christian homes where both wife and husband work full-time. But these servants are not local PK girls. The only regular transactions between Christian and PK communities I witnessed were poor local PK women, some the elderly wives of laid off mill workers, selling local fish or market vegetables door to door in a desperate attempt to augment an income deprived of a mill pension. But these are hardly relations of mutual interdependency similar to those remembered in oral history interviews. Furthermore, since the PK and Christian communities are far larger than in the late colonial period, the potential for any daily transactions

that do occur to really bind the two communities together is dubious. The increased education and financial capital of local PK, along with their mobilization through Dravidian political parties, have all increased their options far beyond hierarchical relations of labor with local Christians and the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese's institutions.

Pasumalai Residents on PK-Christian Relations

During the pre-dusk afternoon period, from 4-6:30pm, local PK and Christian youth would often begin to relax in front of the parsonage (cf. Thomas' comment above), on the steps of Miller Memorial Library, or near the high school's basketball court, either to play cricket or basketball or simply to lounge around. Since Pasumalai's old mission compound holds the largest open areas of public space, PK and other Hindu youth regularly shared the same recreational space as local Christian youth, though often separating themselves spatially. This proximate distance was overcome sporadically in athletic contests whose institutional antecedents are the classrooms, the physical education classes and the sports teams of the Pasumalai Boys' Higher Secondary School itself, where all these youth were studying, or once studied, together. Though there were well defined separate "sets" or *gōṣṭis* of PK and Christian youth split roughly into two age sets for each community, they occasionally mixed in games of soccer during World Cup season (1998), basketball and less often, in cricket. Mostly though, PK and Christian cliques I observed remained separate, except the younger age groups where I saw a few Christian and PK boys crossing the cliquish boundary between communities with a freedom available especially to those far from marital ages and adult responsibility.

Beyond college or high school age youth in Pasumalai, however, the extent of intimate PK-Christian social ties remained more ambiguous to me. Some families still maintained a *murai collira palakkam*, a relationship based on fictive kin identities and hierarchical relations of respect (Ch. 2), but most people 40 years old and younger did not have relations with local PK as close as those shared by Pasumalai's elders (including my landlord). Of course, the person who pointed this pattern out to me is from a family who moved to Pasumalai in the 1950s (and not for Diocesan employment) and is a man well known for having nothing whatsoever to do with local PK. One of the more prominent PK youth, Balamamurugan, both confirmed and contradicted my Christian friend's point, when he said, "Everyone gets along like mother and child, but indirectly the difference is there." Earlier in our interview, though, he revealed a highly charged theory of local Christian-PK relations and the most candid ever divulged to me,

....no matter how much Christians study and develop and no matter what job they have, what Devars do is--they still think of them and look at them as if they're in 'that condition.'...The Devar people. They only view them on that basis. They were slaves, right? Half the people have arrived there from the depressed community, right?...Because they have money and wealth they don't expect to have to give us respect...[Imaginatively voicing their image of PK] 'Who are these people? We've earned lots of money and wealth. They don't respect us.' This is how they look at us...Because of this, person by person, the unity goes away...They [Christians] stop helping. For example, if you go to a Christian and ask for help, they'll just give the slightest amount possible. They won't help with a good heart.⁵

Similar accusations of Christian selfishness were quite commonly voiced among Pasumalai PK I met, part product of nostalgia about a missionary age of 'open-hearted charity' and part product of the fact that many local PK youth like Balamurugan have recently adopted the same middle class, educational aspirations as their Christian neighbors. But, as children of former mill workers, peasants, milkmen, and manual laborers, they are far more dependent on extra-domestic

patronage than many middle class Pasumalai Christians to fulfill such aspirations. It is important to note that Balamurugan had actually finished his B.A. in economics and was one of few college graduates among Pasumalai PK. He is no doubt more sensitive than most local PK to any local Christian condescension. While most Christians I spoke with agreed that local PK have recently started to take education more seriously, whether this recognition has really changed their opinion of their cultural practices, however, remains dubious in my mind.

It also appears, though, that the post-colonial influx of many Madurai Diocese Christians with no deep historical connection to Pasumalai's late colonial past has increased the proportion of local Christians with no family tradition of interacting with local PK, nothing like the relationship my landlord and Mutturaj shared. One such young man, a former choirboy named Neill, reflected on local PK-Christian relations from this alienated perspective. He argued that there is simply very little intimacy. Only if PK and Christians are neighbors, he claimed, do they ever develop relationships, "Otherwise, the boys. Pasumalai youth. The thing there is that they become "friends" because of "cigarettes." And they all get together and stare at the girls [laughs rather knowingly]." I did notice one local pastorate committee member, also a wealthy local teacher, who appeared as a VIP at the ear-piercings of two local Devar politicians, though he comes from a different caste community. Many similar, sporadic exchanges of *mariyātai* between local Christian and Hindu elites easily blurred the religious boundary, at least temporarily.

Generally, though, during my research stay, when there wasn't mutual avoidance, there was a basic street *mariyātai* exchanged between Pasumalai's PK and Christians, a respect which I

believe everyone indexed whenever they claimed to me how “unified” Pasumalai is, how caste and religious fights would never happen “here.” While this *orrumai* (unity) indexes a certain banal tolerance, it cannot necessarily index mutual, heart-felt respect or some egalitarian phenomenology. It is, I believe, often a euphemistic Tamil way of saying, ‘the social hierarchy in which I see myself as elite persists unchallenged.’ Relations of mutually performed street respect, therefore, can easily mask criss-crossing moral hierarchies in which each community sees the other as inferior on the basis of some identity of attribution. One wealthy Christian engineer, who is, by his own admission, rarely home and not engaged deeply in church life, said that a local PK boy used to bring his lunch to him while studying at American college in the late 1960s (a four mile trip one way). When I expressed surprise at this relationship, he insisted in English and seemingly in their defense, that local PK are “loving people, affectionate people”, which also connotes “helpful” and “servile” when spoken from a position of clear social dominance. He then declared that such close relations of yesteryear are responsible, to some extent, for “peace prevailing” between the two communities today. A local Kallar politician, named Irulandi, argued that the basis for Devar-Christian “unity” is not this memory of *pācam* (affectionate attachment) in hierarchical labor relations, but the fact that Christians are simply afraid to start fights with a community he acknowledged is reputed for its predisposition to hasty, defensive orchestrations of collective violence.⁶

There is a final domain in which mutual respect between PK and Christian might be most likely to emerge through friendship and peelage: Pasumalai’s schools. But, with the emergence of five English medium, private matriculation schools in Pasumalai by 1999, Pasumalai’s Christian

middle class elite has been rapidly abandoning its own Diocesan schools, especially Tamil medium schools like those in Pasumalai. Even proud former graduates of Pasumalai's high schools now refuse to send their own children there. Pasumalai's schools are hardly the throbbing portals of upwardly mobile individuals that they once were in an age before English medium and elite Matriculation schools. During the post-colonial period, local PK enrollment has apparently increased dramatically, a fact which one local Christian teacher lamented out of belief that 'they' had destroyed the school's Christian environment (rather than the tactical withdrawal of local Christian students by their parents). If this trend continues, the one central Pasumalai place where local PK and local Christians meet as symbolic equals will soon evaporate, leaving the only regular Christian-PK interaction in Pasumalai's schools to become indistinguishable from an institutionalized hierarchy of teacher over student. And, then, the words of one retired office assistant may soon haunt the old AMM mission compound, "The reason why caste Hindus and other Christians are so unified in this *ūr* is that these people all study in the same *ūr*, in this school."

Collective Remembering of Late Colonial Mission Philanthropy

The Pasumalai church secretary, Jeevatanni, who was also the Boys' High School assistant headmaster during my research, was one of several Pasumalai teachers I met who have been able to enact relations of both economic and moral hierarchy vis à vis local PK, relations with clear late colonial precedent. Both his own status and his wife's position as a senior girls' school teacher have earned this couple significant moral capital vis à vis local PK families whose children now study longer in Pasumalai's Christian schools and in much greater numbers than during the late

colonial period. Local PK children and Pasumalai's schools may actually be more intertwined today than ever before. Since she is also resident in Pasumalai, echoing the colonial pattern of the AMM compound, Jeevatanni's wife has many friends among her local female PK students, past and present. One of her current students during my research, Priya, lives diagonally across from her Teachers' Line "cottage." Priya is daughter to the owner of Pasumalai's most bustling coffee stall, the *Mīnākṣi* Coffee Bar (named after the goddess residing in Madurai's central Saivite temple). He is a Malayali in-migrant named Raman who married a local Krishnapuram PK woman. Priya was the younger of their two adolescent girls, both of whom attended the Pasumalai Girls' Higher Secondary School along with dozens of other local PK Hindu girls.

Despite standing a stone's throw away from their cottage, I never once saw either Jeevatanni or his wife enter the *Mīnākṣi* Coffee Bar's PK dominated space during my near daily afternoon sojourns there. As one teacher explained to me, local teachers cannot possibly loiter in the social spaces favored by their students or their families; they would lose their "status" and "honor."⁷ And Jeevatanni is committed to taking this avoidance of PK dominated spaces even further than shunning tea and coffee stalls. In his answer to my standard interview question, "What don't you like about Pasumalai?" He was the only one who answered righteously, "What don't I like? The people doing 'idol worship' here, you know? Somehow changing them. Somehow communicating to them that only the Lord Jesus is a true god."⁸

In July 1998, Jeevatanni's wife escorted both Priya and her sister to the Pasumalai Church's annual "family festival." Since this is a festival really designed for church members, Priya and her sister were virtually the only Pasumalai "Hindus" there. This inviting and

welcoming of the ‘non-Christian’ person into Christian rhetorical spaces is, in part, what evangelical Christians mean by “exerting Christian influence”; a process of persuasion that the highly sensitive verb “convert” does not accurately communicate. Months later, Priya also was an enthusiastic participant in Pasumalai’s May 1999 staging of its annual Vacation Bible School (VBS). Dozens of local PK girls, mostly her fellow students at the Pasumalai Girls’ School, also joined her at VBS, where a few of the local Girls’ school teachers themselves functioned as teachers. I would often see Priya hanging out on the verandah of Jeevatanni’s home, studying or playing with her local Christian girlfriends. I also saw her draw water occasionally from a nearby public street tap and carry it awkwardly on her small hips into Jeevatanni’s home to supplement the municipal water available to him via his private municipal tap (I never found out whether or not she was ever paid). As moral object of Christian influence, as occasional household help, and as a young girl she was thoroughly enmeshed in hierarchical relations with this orthodox, middle class Christian couple.

Yet Jeevatanni is not necessarily to be viewed as a typical Pasumalai Christian. His public identity front had colonial and evangelical overtones signaling a man embodying a rather strict version of the mission compound habitus. When I asked him about the careers of his siblings, for example, he proudly gave a list of pastors, evangelists and other “Christian” workers, revealing a family deeply committed to performances of an orthodox Christian self. His strident Christian veneer appeared both more sincere *and* more deliberately fronted than that of others. He was also directly involved, as the church secretary, in the church’s annual Christmas clothing giveaway, a custom started under the former pastor, Rev. Swamipillai. This annual ritual, of no great consequence in terms of the raw numbers of people involved, does form another collective

remembering of late colonial mission PK-Christian interactions in the idiom of philanthropy outlined at the end of Chapter 2.

On the morning of December 23, 1998, the Church's last minute preparations for the Christmas/ New Year's celebrations were rapidly progressing. Local PK men were painting the church's grills and whitewashing the exterior as I approached the church from behind. Others were clearing weeds and grass in front of the church's funeral cart shed. Workers had also arrived to erect large, ten-foot high, thatched awnings on both sides of the church to accommodate the usual overflow crowds. A local Hindu carpenter and his son sat on the floor inside the men's porch repairing some of the benches. This flurry of "Hindu" labor on behalf of a Christian church, reminded me that a primarily middle class Pasumalai church is still dependent on sporadic labor from local "Hindus" to maintain its institutions, though these laborers are not exclusively local PK, nor do they *depend* on such church-related work.

But this was also the morning set aside for the church's annual distribution of free clothes to the poor. And as I walked into the church I noticed five or six women already waiting on the benches. When I asked them where they had come from, they said they were from Anna Nagar, the controversial PK squatter settlement north of Jonespuram. And I vaguely recognized most of their faces from earlier sightings on Pasumalai's streets. The church sexton soon entered the church compound from the back gate bearing on his head a heavy load of wrapped clothes he had just picked up from the parsonage. As he lay them down on the cement stage in back of the church, like a Madurai dhobi about to return a client's pressed clothes, I asked him who 'really' gets these clothes. He said curtly that there is a list of recipients maintained by the church, a

comment that suddenly gave me premonitions of a very middle class filtering out of the 'undeserving.'

Some time later, many other eager recipients began to enter the church, sit down on its benches and await the distribution. The pastor, female church treasurer, and Jeevatanni soon entered, along with the church sexton who was performing the manual labor for the event. I did not recognize any regular church-going poor among the primarily female crowd of 30 to 40. One of my close friends, Maran, one of five children in a struggling Christian family on Teachers' Line, had earlier claimed that the "poor" recipients were usually people from the church's adopted mission villages. And, despite the fact that he and his family definitely needed assistance buying their holiday clothes that year, they were nowhere to be found. Unsurprisingly, no other poor church members known to me submitted themselves to the humiliation of receiving free clothes from the middle class elite of their own parish that morning. Many of them, however, were women I recognized as local PK from Pasumalai.

With this information, the distribution that morning seemingly functioned as a unilateral Christian-Hindu transaction. And the pastor supported this initial hypothesis of mine when he framed his remarks not like those of a local prayer meeting, in which the audience is assumed to be devoutly Christian, but rather with an assumption of non-belief and/or incorrect belief. He began with a prayer, followed by a brief evangelistic sermon about Christ's significance. Combining rhetoric of salvation and healing, he argued very concisely, "Jesus is the Savior. He liberates us from sin and disease. Perhaps you think that all gods are one. But it's not like that. We are the ones who create the other gods. But only Jesus came for mankind." Surely, the pastor would not have looked into the eyes of local church members, life long Christians, and

suggested that they did not believe in the exclusivity of Christian divinity. Yet, that morning, he seemed to imply a lurking Gandhian assumption among the gathered 'poor', the assumption that "All Religions Are One." His pedantic preface to Christian charity was simultaneously an *educated* and a "Christian" patronage, but one whose blatant moral elitism the pastor, and those believing like him, see as a form of "Christian" *anpu* (love).

I noticed four categories of clothes distributed that morning: sarees wrapped in newspaper, unwrapped sarees, *vēṣṭis* (for men) and children's clothes. The variety suggested the church's anticipation of prior recipients' varying needs. And so, distribution began with a classificatory roll call separating out those who had received clothes last year from those who had come for the first time. Only eight people, less than 25%, had not come before. The treasurer had a detailed list of last year's recipients and was preparing a revised list of recipients throughout the distribution. She repeatedly kept telling people she did not already know (from her list) that they needed to come to church and worship, not just take clothes. "The clothes are given to people who attend church," she explicitly said to one PK woman coming for the first time. But, she argued with me in an aside, that baptism is not a pre-requisite. And neither, apparently, is what she herself was just arguing. Using the rhetorical space of captivity created by the distribution, though, she had simply inserted her own evangelical pitch. Even the pastor never laid down such conditions in front of the recipients. Days later, when I relayed her comment to a choir boy friend, he condemned it with a disgusted look on his face, "That's wrong."

Months later, when I interviewed Jeevatanni at his own home, he claimed that it was actually local *church members* who had come that morning. My own limited knowledge and

observations suggested the exact opposite, that they were mainly local PK women, women who I had assumed were self-identifying Hindus. When I voiced this assumption of mine as a question, he quickly revised his assertion arguing that they were actually “converted,” meaning baptized, Christians. He then mentioned a local baptized PK widow by name and one who had received clothing that morning. And so, it was apparently not really intended as an inter-religious event, a transaction between “Hindu” and “Christian.” Yet, the pastor’s message clearly constructed the audience in the rhetorical genre of the evangelistic target. Perhaps the pastor’s strange rhetorical assumption best resembles an old Christian politics from the missionary era, the politics of educated Christians voicing an elitist suspicion of the ‘new’ convert’s spiritual purity.

Pecciyamma (see Ch. 2) belittled the church’s charity work in our interview and corroborated my own tentative assumption that the majority of those receiving clothes that morning were actually Pasumalai PK women from Anna Nagar. In my view, this charity event was really more a transaction of stylized Christian identity performances: the elitist performance of Christian *anpu* (love) on behalf of a middle class Christian majority in return for a thinly veiled performance of church allegiance. With no way to enforce or to verify regular church attendance (even of dues paying members), who was really playing whom that morning remains rather ambiguous. It was a transaction that constructed a moral *and* financial hierarchy that coincided with the boundary of PK and Christian, and less clearly with the boundary between “Hindu” and “Christian.” But this coincidence itself was as much a performed social memory of transactional hierarchies from late colonial Pasumalai as it was a contemporary enactment of an elite, middle class CSI Tamil habitus vis à vis the local ‘Hindu other.’⁹

While the “Christian Devar” is perhaps the most effective social bridge between the PK and Christian worlds in contemporary Pasumalai, they represent only 10-15% of the local Christian population. And, ironically, Jeevatanni, who is from the Maravar community (one of the three Devar castes), refuses to act as such a bridge or to get involved in “Devar” organizations or with local Devar politicians. Aside from attendance at few a local Devar life cycle functions, he seemed to have nothing to do with local PK in his private life. One evening, in behind-the-church conversation with me, he quite casually referred to his very own Maravar ancestors with the English word, “barbarians.” Clarifying this comment months later in our interview he said, “They believe might is right,” indexing a certain physical aggressiveness that he feels might reduce the moral capital he has accrued as a Christian (headmaster and church secretary).

One of his affinal relatives, Adisayam, however, was a PK entrepreneur who is also a baptized Christian and who had tea nearly daily with Pasumalai’s PK Ward councilors (both Hindus) and two other Devar Christians at one tea stall along National Highway 7. Having married a Hindu wife from another caste and without a CSI wedding, he stands as a marginal Christian Devar who functioned as a very lonely adult bridge between Christian and PK worlds during my research. Here are his comments from the performative margins of Christian Pasumalai,

JR: How many Christians in Pasumalai are like you and socialize with Devars to that extent?

Adisayam: They don’t socialize very much with Devars

JR: Why?

Adisayam: They have this idea that Devars are real rowdies. Secondly, Christians are mainly educated people. Because they are teachers and the like they don’t want to

associate with these *kīlmaṭṭa* (low level) people. That's a reason. It's an honor problem. They just say, 'Ah. Hello, Hello' and go on their way...¹⁰

The New Year's Games Reconsidered

I never learned the precise historical origin of Pasumalai's New Year's games, except that they originated in a nostalgia-laden, late colonial past. Yet, for years, this small, seemingly inconsequential, ritual contest was a metonym of a broader colonial mission habitus, one that disposed the Christian to invite the 'non-Christian' other into Christian dominated spaces for the tacit purpose of 'Christian influence.'

Well over a year after the 1997 exclusion of Hindus over the age of 15 from the church's New Year's games, I learned two important things. 1) The "Hindu rowdies" the former pastor, Rev. Swamipillai, had wanted excluded were all Devars, mostly local PK kids, mixed in with a few in-migrant Devars. 2) Devaraj's attacker, the "rowdy" supposedly hired by a local Madurai businessman, was none other than M.S.L. Ramakrishnan, a local PK Hindu whom locals call "MSL" and who is also a member of Pasumalai's natal PK clan (see Ch. 1). Over the course of my research, I became friends with his estranged older sister, Pecciyamma, who is highly critical of her younger brother's 'descent' into banal political "rowdy"-ism. Remarkably, she was willing to narrate another side to Devaraj's December 1997 thrashing at the hands of her younger brother.

Pecciyamma confirmed the original narrated incident: "MSL" had attacked Devaraj right before Christmas in 1997. But she narrated a different real estate transaction as the precipitating cause. She claimed that the wealthy Jain businessman, whom Devaraj's son had implicated, was

none other than the same man who had recently built a private, English medium Matriculation High School known locally as the “Jain school” on former Diocese land in Pasumalai. He was the same Jain whose name has also been memorialized in small neighborhood of Christian middle class homes built, presumably, on excess land he sold from the original transaction. Pecciyamma argued that Devaraj himself had brokered this controversial land sale for the Diocese. In her version, though, the first communal manifestation of the clash was not in the church’s youth meeting,

Krishnan [MSL]. Krishnan went and beat Devaraj...As soon as he got beaten, he [Devaraj] went and filed a caste “report” and he ‘put him in’ [a Tamil euphemism for getting someone arrested]....He brought charges saying that Kallar people are attacking SCs--attacking Christians--and killing them and put him in [Tamil euphemism for arrest]. Then... they tried to block any Kallar people from using the schools [to hold their life cycle functions] and mixing in anything [organized by Christians]. They kept Krishnan in “jail” for five days. We couldn’t get him out. Then, my younger brother and Logu and Ponnaiya [see Ch.1; both the latter men are her cross-cousins] went directly to the [former] pastor and said, ‘You shouldn’t do this. We also worked hard for the schools in an earlier age. We’ve worked for the schools for 4 or 5 generations. We’ve been true [to you Christians]. How can you go and say there was a caste riot? Perhaps he just beat him [Devaraj] out of anger? Of course, we’ll settle this with some cash. But why did you ‘put him in’ saying there was a caste riot? Up til now there’s been no caste problem here [in Pasumalai]. We’re [as in this oldest Kallar lineage] from the same soil, aren’t we? But today you’ve gone and done this.’ Only after we had talked and taken our decision did we then call Baskaran [a local PK politician, but not a relative] so that this thing would go away...He [MSL] broke his [Devaraj’s] TV, right? And broke his teeth...Baskaran negotiated 7,000 rupees as a fine and he [MSL] paid it. Then they reconciled and got him out [of jail.]...

She confirmed that Devaraj then got the assistance of Devirakkam in lobbying the church youth group to block the participation of Hindus in the New Year’s Games as further revenge, in a religious idiom, for the attack. Pecciyamma makes a crucial, stammering slippage here between “SC”[Scheduled Caste or untouchable] and “Christian”, one she repeated many other times

informally with me. This slippage is an identity aspersion common to several other PKs of her generation with whom I spoke. Even V.S.R. Ramakrishnan, her close relative, confessed to me that many other fellow PK refer to the Pasumalai church as an “SC church.”

On Jan. 1, 1999, I made a special note of going to the New Year’s Games to see if the youth committee decision to ban Hindus over the age of 15 had actually become routinized practice. And, to my surprise, at least twenty to thirty very young Hindu children were there, including three young PK children I had come to know. But the adolescent kids were apparently all Christians. So, the new rule seemed to be in effect in a way that tragically symbolizes the frequent breakdown of inter-religious cooperation when individuals reach the critical ages when an adult disposition toward rigid identity performances becomes more persuasive in settlements containing multiple axes of social hierarchy.

Before heading over to the playground, though, I had eaten a sumptuous New Year’s feast at the house of Paul, a pastorate committee member who had supported the ban from the start. Afterwards, I had asked him why they had decided to block Hindus from freely participating in the games. He replied, with some hesitation, that they stopped inviting Hindu youths, because they consistently did not invite Christians to their festivals. Another friend of mine, a high school educated choirboy, Maran, had told me that it was because local “Hindus” kept coming drunk and causing problems. Two weeks after the games, another pastorate committee member was visiting me in my Pasumalai home. When I asked why Hindus were being blocked from the games, he gave his own explanation: Hindus are no longer *officially* allowed to join. I narrated back to him anonymously the two excuses Paul and Maran had given me for this exclusion. He dismissed them both as nonsense for two reasons: 1) Local PK don’t invite

Christians to their festival functions, because there is no such custom for public events such as temple festivals, ‘Does one really need to be invited to such things?’ he asked rhetorically, ‘You hear the commotion and you just join in. What would be the need of inviting people formally?’ And 2) he argued that the drinking charge is hypocritical since some Christians have been drinking before church events for years now. He argued that the *real* reason for the exclusion of Hindus is that the individuals leading the Hindu and Christian youth cliques have been fighting over who is the real *tātā* (informal, charismatic leader) of the Pasumalai youth. And, from my perspective, it appears that this ongoing battle had merely received more fuel from the Devaraj-“MSL” clash, one that *coincidentally* pitted Hindu against Christian, PK against Dalit.

A younger Christian college student, and also a choirboy, offered a similar argument that the fight had originated between the leaders of local Hindu [PK] and Christian youth cliques.

Phillip: Generally, on January 1, everyone has always played in the “Christmas Tournament.” That is, it happened for all of Pasumalai. No matter who. Whether Muslim or Hindu. Whoever wants to just goes and joins in. No matter what age. Then some kind of fight happened in public...Because of this fight in the big “set” [of youth] -- well, it was a move by one particular guy. One particular guy argued that ‘They started a fight and attacked me—us. So, we shouldn’t include them.’ He advocated a total ban [a reference Devaraj’s son].

JR: On Hindus?

Phillip: mmmmm [yes]. He succeeded, but it’s not acceptable. One guy’s opinion shouldn’t operate like this in the church, right?

One of the local PK boys, Balan, who used to play in the New Year’s games, and who is also a great-grandson of Lorbeer’s old bungalow watchman, gave his version of the boycott, which also concealed more perhaps than it revealed. While hanging out with some of his Devar friends in front of the Pasumalai parsonage one evening, he said that while they do play soccer

with Christians, they don't interact deeply with them. I knew his reference here wasn't fabricated for my consumption, because I had even played soccer a few times in the summer of 1998 with them. World Cup fever had momentarily muted any tension across the religious boundary, muted it enough to allow Balan and his Hindu PK friends to join up with local Christian choir boys for evening soccer matches. During these matches, PK and Christians formed mixed teams and played until the south Indian set. When the 1998 World Cup season ended, though, so did these voluntary symbolic performances of inter-religious co-operation, performances more impressive to me than those institutionally manufactured in Pasumalai's school athletic programs. Yet, this strange friendliness in soccer play juxtaposed strongly with what I repeatedly observed as predominantly Hindu/PK dominated vs. Christian dominated youth cliques. When, I asked Balan why he and his clique of PK friends no longer participated in New Year's Games, he said that the last year they had done so was 1997 [one year before the fight]. Last year at Christmas time, he claimed, an "important church member" told them that, from now on, the games were for Christians only. Balan claimed with me that he doesn't really know why they have suddenly been shut out by the church. He says no reason was ever given to them and remains unsure if religion was it. "You shouldn't separate religions, right?" he asked me rhetorically. When the issue arose last year, Balan said his friends had just let it slip by, "What's this festival to us? What do we care about it?" he continued dismissively, using the loaded Tamil phrase "*Namukku enna?*" (What's it to *us?*).¹¹ Perhaps trying to give his clique a morally vaunted veneer, Balan then added that if he and his friends had objected, perhaps there would have been a huge fight in Pasumalai.

Pecciyamma's son, Balamurugan, is Balan's close friend and also a member of the boycotted clique of college age PK youth. He argued his own interpretation of why some local Christians tried and succeeded in making a religious issue out of the MSL-Devaraj fight,

Balamurugan: A group of guys there [from the Christian community] came to us and said, look we'll put up resistance [to Hindu participation]. Another group apparently said, 'Hey we've always played together with them. Why shouldn't we include Hindus? Let's include them and play. Another couple of guys said, 'Include them? How can we do that? If we include them, if we let Hindus in, they'll bring us down. Power. They'll control everything, the Hindus. Then we won't be able to control anything. They should be separate and we should be separate.' That's what they think. You see, Hindus will go as members of many different castes. But over there, it's all [suddenly catching himself] I'll just say: one community. A low community. They are lots of them over there...A few guys think, 'They'll start looking at status. We'll get brought down. So we shouldn't include Hindus. We shouldn't include Hindus in anything. Let's just keep our contact to small talk and not get involved in anything more.'

JR: Has this kind of problem appeared before with respect to the games?

Balamurugan: Uuuh, within the last five years. Before it wasn't like this at all. Everyone played and made rounds together. Everyone talked. Although I never went, all the boys go to VBS [Vacation Bible School held every year during summer break at the Pasumalai Church]. Hindus go. More Hindus than Christians go to VBS. Whether they go to study or just to get snacks and sweets, I don't know. They take them on trips, touring trips. A lot of Hindu kids go just for that. Now, within the last four or five years, some people are saying, 'We shouldn't include Hindus in the games. They shouldn't come to church.' A lot of stuff like that—

JR: Is it only a few Christians who have that opinion or do all of them think like that?

Balamurugan: Only a few people. Not everyone thinks like this. Some have old relationships. Nowadays, it's just a few who think, 'We're the big guys. We shouldn't include them. We're the educated people. They're all uneducated. We have money and wealth.' Some people think, 'If they come, they'll shove us down and we won't be able to have any authority.'¹²

Balamurugan, I believe, projects much of his own class anxiety here. This is the anxiety of a very poor, yet college educated PK from a community long derided and stereotyped locally as hostile

to education and who still survives as a milkman and peasant, unable yet to deploy his hard won knowledge capital, and unable to wield the financial and moral capital necessary for persuasive middle class identity performance. But he also wisely perceives an identity anxiety that some local Christians from stigmatized caste origins genuinely do feel, an anxiety that, despite their education and money, despite street performances of PK-Christian “unity,” those from castes like PK (that have traditionally exploited untouchables) who live as their neighbors would, somehow, still like to dominate them.

No one argued to me that the communalization of the games happened purely on the basis of religious doctrine, belief, custom or ascribed religious identity. Instead, the New Year’s games became an event through which to sublimate various criss-crossing and overlapping identity struggles in contemporary Pasumalai. For example, it is important to recognize that vocal supporters of the ban (Devaraj, his son and close friend Devirakkam, Paul, the youth convener, and Maran) are all members of two different Dalit castes. And, except for Paul, all of these individuals are part of a small minority who are proud of their Dalit identity and quite ready to interpret some interpersonal conflicts in the idiom of caste struggle.

But why did life pretty much go on in Pasumalai for the rest of my stay as if nothing had happened in December 1997? Why did local PK continue to hold their life cycle rituals in Pasumalai’s many school halls, despite the isolated refusal to MSL in 1998? Why did MSL then go on to help provide bodyguard protection and crowd control for the CSI Madurai Bishop, months later, when the latter held an enormous funeral service for his wife in the Pasumalai church? Why did local PK Hindu boys suddenly play soccer with Christian youth on the very same playground they were not allowed to set foot on the previous New Year?

One interpretation is that daily transactional interdependency no longer binds the PK and Christian communities together in ways that encourage any real *pācam* (affection), the kind of mutual, hierarchical tightness Mutturaj and my landlord share. Therefore, each community, confident of its own worth and superiority, easily separates whenever resistance or tension emerges, saying, “What’s it to us?” Where resistance doesn’t exist, such as the rebellious culture in front of the Galaxy saloon and the enthusiastic space generated by the World Cup, the communities intermingle freely. But the lack of daily interdependence has also enervated the moral authority of CSI Tamils’ performances of a “Christian” self. Displays of elite financial or knowledge capital in Pasumalai no longer appear solely in association with the performance of a *Christian self*. Today, Pasumalai’s PK are a community no longer averse to higher education, a community with its own post-colonial strategies for accruing middle class levels of financial capital beyond the church economy; a community whose adults remain largely unconvinced of the moral superiority of local Christians some of whom, in their view, easily pale in nostalgic comparisons to their former patrons, the long since vanished AMM missionaries.

The post-colonial emboldening of the local PK community, in part aided by the recent mobilization of the three major Devar castes in the wider field of Dravidian politics, has led to dramatic performances of local dominance in Pasumalai. The first was the seizure of formerly private Christian mission land near Jonespuram’s good water well for the erection by local PK residents of a Mariyamman temple, recently funded by a wealthy non-PK Hindu in-migrant family with caste connections to a deceased pastorate committee member (see Map 3). Another more dramatic seizure of “Christian” space occurred during my research on Sunday, September 6, 1998, when a local PK ward councilor (nephew of Mutturaj) staged his wedding in front of

Teachers' Line right next to the parsonage itself (see Map 3), playing loud music during the church service and without asking the formal permission of the local pastor. Another aesthetic claim to dominance appeared during the 1998 birthday celebration for a Devar caste hero especially championed by the Pramalai Kallar. Mutturamalinga Devar, a Maravar and a former Pasumalai student in the 1920s, is attributed with the political feat of getting the PK subcaste removed from the demeaning Notified, or Criminal Castes and Tribes list. And so, on his 'birthday' in 1998, Mutturaj's older brother commissioned a painting of his "leader" bedecked with a large, multicolored flower garland hung over the image as if around Muttaramalinga's very neck. At the bottom, however, a caption read, "Pasumalai Village",¹³ metonymically claiming all of Pasumalai, not just Krishnapuram, as a Devar domain.

Pasumalai was once an elitist, Christian dominated space, one where educational institutions enabled, for some, a much dreamed transition out of the peasant fold and, for some of these lucky individuals (Hindu and Christian), even to middle class existence. With the exception of mission servants and low level school staff, to be Christian in Pasumalai was and still is, for many, "to be going somewhere," somewhere upwards. But this class mobility has always been primarily family-based, a divisive reality that has prevented, along with wider caste divisions, any easy post-colonial collective public mobilization as "Christian." The absence of the *turai*, the foreign missionary with direct ties to local police and the highest levels of government, also weakens local Christians' post-colonial capacity to defend local Diocesan or mission spaces. By not collectively contesting the Jonespuram goddess' arrival or other temporary seizures of Diocesan space I myself witnessed, local Christians reveal the *habitual* priority of maintaining a respectable middle class public image as part of their identity front. The desire to maintain such

an identity front obviates involvement in any kind of collective violence that would be necessary, certainly, to remove the Jonespuram goddess or to intimidate local PK from seizing or misusing Diocesan spaces. Such orchestrations of collective violence would also risk the destruction of life and significant, carefully accumulated financial capital (homes, vehicles). In the words of one venerable Christian elder commenting on the lack of resistance to various local property seizures and misuses, “Throughout the world, when a man becomes well off and comfortable, he doesn’t get involved in anything. He just protects what he has. It’s natural.” It’s “natural,” because such insularity becomes habituated as part of a middle class habitus, but also because the internal caste and class divisions of post-colonial Indian Christian communities like Pasumalai have made collective immobilization as Christians beyond church activities seem to be the ‘natural order of things.’

The mission compound has, in one sense, become dead symbolic space, unable to muster up defense of its territorial integrity from either PK or Christian misuse and unable to dispose PK and Christians to interact systematically and daily along the three sloping boundaries of identity hierarchy remembered by many as part of late colonial Pasumalai culture (Ch. 2). Rare, perduring relationships like that between Mutturaj and my landlord or the church’s recent revival of late colonial philanthropic performances only serve as feeble social habit-memory (cf. Connerton 1989) that may soon become mere *neurological* memory.

We have seen in this chapter how a post-colonial weakening of transactional interdependency between local PK and Christians has encouraged social distance and given the potential for easy, blatant ruptures in inter-religious unity; but ones that generate dyadic or interpersonal, not collective violence. Clearly, part of a late colonial habitus of “Christian”

identity performance has vanished, along with its structural dispositions to perform a complex identity front in frequent interaction with local 'others' who shared a very different histrionics of identity. In post-colonial Pasumalai, middle class CSI Tamils live in an ironically ambivalent position of weakened social authority vis à vis their PK neighbors, despite the monuments to a once powerful Christian mission that loom nearby.

This is not to say there has been some complete abandonment of a late colonial mission compound habitus, that every mission compound habit of identity performance has been shed in the post-colonial era. It only means that the historical load of that habitus in contemporary Pasumalai is largely to be found elsewhere. In the next section, I explore that performative elsewhere, what we might term as a core CSI Tamil habitus, one which was heavily influenced by the historical environment of mission compounds and their peculiarly elitist histrionics of Christian selfhood.

PART 2

AN IDENTITY FRONT'S POST-COLONIAL LEGACY

Chapter 4 Talking about Christian Selves

Just as some caste communities (e.g. Kallars) cultivate distinct dialects of spoken Tamil, Christian Tamils also have a distinct dialect (or dialects) that they employ frequently in liturgical and prayerful talk.¹ Across denominational lines, there is what we might call a broad body of “Christian” Tamil terms which incorporate heavy amounts of Sanskritic terminology to give the original Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic biblical words a Tamil voice.² This lexicon of Christian Tamil is, in one sense, a colonial era transformation of Brahminical/Vellalar talk drawn from both Saivite and Vaishnavite traditions of Hindu rhetoric, especially since it was to such an elite Hindu audience that early translators, especially De Nobili, directed the brunt of their evangelical energies (cf. Zupanov 1999). Although multiple Tamil Bibles are now in circulation, the most popular translations today among CSI Tamils I knew come from the Bible Society of India (BSI) in Bangalore. The 1956 version, now called the “Old Version”, is entitled the *Paricutta Vētākamam*. For most CSI Tamils, the sacred fount of Christian talk heard in their private bible readings, liturgical scripture reading, public prayers, etc.³ The BSI “Old Version” is still widely printed and sold as a gift bible both at the Christian Literature Society bookstores and at most book stalls set up by private dealers at Pentecostal meetings and other Protestant-dominated revival meetings. This was also the version consistently used in Pasumalai church services and Pasumalai prayer meetings. And it is the language of this “Old Version” which CSI Tamils still employ in their personal names, their prayers, their tombstone inscriptions, and the very Bible verses adorning their living room walls.⁴

In Part 2 of this dissertation, I explore a few core structural dispositions of late colonial Christian identity performance that have tended to persist within Pasumalai's post-colonial spaces but which resonate far beyond the old AMM mission compound. I begin this exploration with a discussion of dominant rhetorical tropes I witnessed in Pasumalai and which I believe are widely shared by CSI Tamils, even beyond the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese.⁵ This chapter takes the reader on a brief journey into one regional continuum of a global Protestant rhetorical construction of self; a continuum in which different rhetorical genres have the potential to re-structure and to motivate a dynamic Christian habitus.⁶ I am concerned in this chapter primarily with the ways in which listening to and producing certain kinds of Christian rhetoric, as opposed to others, does or does not provide CSI Tamils with a distinct moral capital that supports middle class performances of self.⁷ Most CSI Tamils participate in a rhetorical continuum in which the central polytrope, Christ, appears in different rhetorical guises; some emphasizing his life as ethical metaphor, others promoting him as metonym of a domain of divine miracles and promises. I further argue that it is rhetoric of Christ as ethical metaphor, and the rhetorical spaces that facilitate such talk, which most strongly express a CSI Tamil habitus' structural disposition to moral elitism and which also provide moral capital necessary for self-distinction as authentically "Christian" in front of one's Christian peers in CSI Tamil spaces like Pasumalai's old mission compound.

Key CSI Tamil Tropes

1. *Vali* (The Path)

Most sermons and evangelistic messages I heard during my research invoked the teleological metaphor of the path with corresponding words in the BSI "Old Version" Bible: the

Sanskrit *pātam* and the Tamil *vali*. This trope has been historically central to continental pietistic and American evangelical traditions and establishes all Christians metaphorically on a linear journey towards the telos of either heaven or hell. From my many hours attending the Pasumalai church, it appears that one broad goal of Sunday sermons was simply to preach and to re-preach a basic teleological theology as a primal disciplinary act that sustains critical ethical dispositions. The Christ of all these sermons is Christ as ethical metaphor, a Christ to be embodied through behavioral mimicry.

The embodiment of Christ as ethical metaphor for how a human becomes ‘godly’ was also one of the dominant passions of early AMM missionaries like Pasumalai’s founder, William Tracy. For this child of the Second Great Awakening, “conversion” was about a radical ethical transformation, a purification of action and thought with which to glorify God (Blaufass 2000: 113). Early missionaries like Tracy even made church baptism (in Pasumalai) conditional on proving one’s ethical purification (to him), a “conversion” that made one deserving of the opportunity to “profess faith” in baptismal ritual (ibid: 114-119). The telos toward which the evangelical path leads is ‘becoming Christ’, a goal to which verbal assent can accumulate crucial moral capital in Christian spaces such as Pasumalai’s old mission compound.⁸ The prime disciplinary function of the CSI Tamil sermon is to keep the metaphor of Christ alive, to keep it from decaying into cliché by the use of ever more clever intermediary metaphors.⁹ In one particularly poetic August, 1998 sermon on 2 Corinthians 3: 2-3, the Pasumalai pastor invoked this common evangelical Protestant trope: Christ as metaphor for ethical purity. To motivate the embodiment of such a Christ that morning, however, Rev. Gnanapirakasam enlisted an intermediary metaphor, the “epistle” as his rhetorical assistant. In the verses above, Paul asks the

Corinthians to see themselves as written epistles, whose behavior, like a text, should be read by others to reveal the presence of Christ. “When others read us,” the pastor argued that morning, “They should see Jesus Christ in us. That’s exactly what the Lord wants.”¹⁰ In this biblical metaphor, the believer becomes a ‘written epistle of the Lord,’ written with the ink of the Holy Spirit. And, a literate, non-peasant audience like Pasumalai’s can relate far better to seeing themselves as “epistles” than seeing themselves as “sheep” (Although, goats, cows and donkeys are part of the daily visual culture of Pasumalai itself).

In the puritanical rhetoric I kept hearing in Pasumalai sermons, a familiar evangelical pessimism about human nature reached my ears again and again. And yet, CSI Tamils I knew who shared this negative anthropology also nurtured an overwhelming optimism about the fate of those who “truly repent” and begin their pilgrimage along the path, guided by God. Rhetorically, the negative anthropology shared by evangelical Protestants around the world creates a burning desire for movement to a *positive* ‘telos’; at least for those persuaded by its metaphors. The “path” is found in between “sin” and “salvation” as a tropic space replete in metaphors, some dead, some alive. For example, one essential metaphor, “conversion,” initiates the self rhetorically to a life “on the path.” The word for “convert” appears three times in the King James Bible (KJB), and in two of those verses (Matthew 13: 15 and 18: 3), the BSI “Old Version” gives the verb *maṅamtirumpa* (lit. “to turn the heart” but also “change of heart”) as the Tamil equivalent of the original Greek word. The related English word “repent” is far more common than “conversion” in the King James version, and, in nearly every verse that it appears, its counterpart in the BSI Old Version is the same Tamil verb *maṅamtirumpa*.¹¹ This verb uses an intransitive form of the Tamil verb “to turn” to index a passive experience of a “heart turning

around.”¹² As I heard it described, these “turnings of the heart” transpire by the seemingly contradictory powers of the Holy Spirit and the believer’s “decision.”¹³ They are what Miyazaki has recently termed, “agency in abeyance,” the notion that the ideal of all “faith” is partially agentive, partially non-agentive (2000).

I also kept hearing in Pasumalai that Christ’s “blood”, shed on the cross, washes our sins away. The trope of the Passion’s blood indexes a potent structuring force that complements the believer’s own agency in a broadly evangelical imagination. Those who have “turned their hearts”, then, become purified by being metaphorically washed with a blood metonymic of the Passion, though this metonymic participation remains subordinate to a new life theoretically disposed to a metaphoric resembling of Christ. Although this eternally purifying, bloodshed also stands ready to transfer *paricuttam* (holiness and purity) to those walking on the path, evangelists and pastors I heard in Pasumalai constantly voiced their warning that such purifying ‘turnings of heart’ alone do not lead facilely to salvation.¹⁴ While some CSI Tamils I interviewed clearly see a “turning of the heart” as the essence of salvation, glossed by CSI Tamils as *iraṭcippu*, some preachers argued that *maṇamtirumpa* (to convert) is really only a beginning. The Pasumalai Pastor, only a month after arriving in Pasumalai, felt comfortable unleashing a Jeremiad chastising a superficial Christianity indexed only in basic performances of Christian identity qua church affiliation: church attendance, taking communion, subscription payment, church baptism, prayers, offerings, public Bible reading, etc, “Those people who wish to follow Jesus Christ must follow along in the footprints of Jesus Christ.”¹⁵ “Accepting Christ,” he argued is easy. There are many places where verbal performances of ‘accepting Christ’ transpire (e.g. Diocesan youth conventions). But ‘true’ Christians, Gnanapirakasam argued that morning, must develop *after*

this acceptance. An evangelist at a Diocesan youth meeting, speaking on the same theme, reminded the youth that salvation has two components, *maṇamtirumpavatu* (conversion) and *vicuvāsam* (faith/loyalty). And the latter, I argue, is a CSI Tamil way of describing the disciplinary power of a Christian habitus to dispose one to an ongoing bodily performance of a Christ-like self, a dimension of Christian identity performance most vulnerable to restructuring or abandonment.

Rhetoricians I heard in Pasumalai and Madurai often emphasized the desirability of being seen/read publicly as walking on the Christian *vaḷi*. I take this as tacit acknowledgement that such performances of identity function in part as displays of moral capital. This odd encouragement to visible performance is true despite the constant warnings about superficial performances of visible Christian identity meant to fool the casual observer. What preachers marked out as “mere” performances of Christian identity are generally the *most easily* performed performances of Christian identity or ones, like paying church subscription, that may be purely political. Paying church subscriptions, for example, is necessary in most CSI Tamil churches to hold weddings, to be buried in a parish cemetery, and to vote in church elections. In the Madurai Diocese during my research, a minimum monthly subscription of Rs. 50 was also necessary to become a candidate in church elections. Explicitly or implicitly talking against the grain of these ‘hollow’ performances, again and again, preachers in Pasumalai told people that Christian identity should be anchored in the most *banal* of behavioral domains as metaphoric of Christ like purity. In the challenging words of one guest evangelist from Madras, “Is what I *say* to your [God] liking? Is what I *look at* to your liking?”

The other implication of ethical rhetoric like that just cited is that a sinless life is possible, that a human being can fully embody the ethical paradigm of the ‘evangelical’ Christ. This ideal is well known and understood even by those Pasumalai Christians who confess they have not lived up to it. For example, after confessing his former drinking problem, my folk musician friend, Richard, said the following in his response to my interview question on the meaning of *iraṭcippu* (salvation), “...You have to tell all your sins, all the sins you’ve committed. Only if you say what’ve you done, do you get saved. After that, you shouldn’t commit those sins again.”¹⁶ He said this acknowledging that he hasn’t yet done this himself. Jeevatanni, the church secretary (Ch. 3), also implied that such a sinless life is possible, “The thing is, we obtain that reward [salvation] by praying and reading the Bible as a means to guide ourselves on the path pleasing to God. A sinning life. Prayer, meditation, and Bible verses help us to put an end to that and help us live a life pleasing to God.”¹⁷ But, unlike Richard, he claimed quite confidently to me that he *was* saved.

Dominant tombstone decoration in Pasumalai’s cemetery (“the Garden of Graves”) reflect a powerful disposition to have one’s close kin promoted as having lived “on the path.” During the course of the late 20th century, middle class CSI Tamil epitaphs have become quite elaborate in Pasumalai and Madurai, as have aboveground, decorative brick monuments to hold vertically mounted gravestones. Many tombstones involve the inscription of the deceased’s favorite Bible verse, if they had one, and/or a short eulogistic praise of the deceased’s Christian purity and loyalty to the faith (in English or Tamil). Whenever possible, any direct service to the church, whether as a teacher, pastor, evangelist, catechist, or Bible woman, receives prominent attention in Pasumalai epitaphs. But one Pasumalai tombstone, as its author made a point of

showing me one day, indexes this pattern precisely because it doesn't fit it at all. Instead, it expresses grave doubts about the purity of the deceased, a man who converted only for marriage and who, his son kept telling me, died an atheist. His Christian tombstone bears not a proud, chiseled attribution of righteous faith or Christian service but, rather, the thundering lament of the tax collector in Luke 18: 13, who, Jesus declares, will be exalted for his honesty, unlike his self-righteous Pharisee peer, for pleading, "Oh Lord! Have mercy upon this sinner!"¹⁸

Engraving Pasumalai tombstones, therefore, often memorializes in granite a pure Christian identity, transforming the deceased simultaneously into an object of honor and into a weak form of written moral capital that supports their mnemonically lingering Christian self, while also honoring their surviving kin.

For the most part, during my research in Pasumalai, the existence of a broad pressure to perform some "pure, Christian image" in a post-colonial church remained ambiguous. The Pasumalai I lived in was no Benedictine monastery. During the colonial period, several older Pasumalai residents told me, service attendance was mandatory for Pasumalai teachers and staff, though I have no corroborating evidence for any written rule to this effect. Staff apparently performed their faith under the implicit threat of losing moral capital in a competitive mission political economy headed by a small committee of larger-than-life Americans who controlled all appointments until the 1930s and who, even after this period, could always write letters of recommendation. However, a church no longer attended exclusively by Diocesan staff, or by Diocesan staff who work in Pasumalai's Christian schools, can not reproduce such a sharp disciplinary focus in Pasumalai's spaces.

And, in many ways, Pasumalai fits right into broader urban patterns of what many Madurai middle class adults would describe as *keṭṭa paḷakkankal* (bad habits). I regularly saw Pasumalai Christian youth smoking in front of the parsonage or on the main road by their favorite hang-out: the Galaxy Saloon. A few others drank at various publicly visible 'locales' along National Highway 7 and without fear of excommunication (for which there is no constitutional basis in the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese).

Yet Pasumalai Christians still loudly applaud ethical rhetoric against drinking, smoking, and, of course, various "lusts." Assent to such rhetoric of detachment from what one guest preacher in Pasumalai termed a 'Babylonian world' constructs the individual as most likely "on the path." While fear of some onlooker's doubt is, I believe, the prime performative "anxiety" of puritanical Protestant identity since the days of Calvin's Geneva (cf. Weber 1958: 95-154), not many in Pasumalai *appeared* to me to share such a hand-wringing anxiety. An octogenarian government officer and former Pasumalai Teacher, Robert, lamented with me that "morality" has decreased because the missionaries left. The pastor has no real disciplinary effect, he claimed. At least, he claimed, no "morality" [he used the English word specifically] is "visible outwardly." While the moral rhetoric of "purity" receives strong and regular voicing, those not inclined to 'obey' can easily front a visible performance of "purity," locally, while drinking and smoking out of sight, often in Madurai. One extremely conservative elder proudly claimed to me one afternoon on his porch that "none of his sons had any bad habits," which may mean that none of them engaged in bad habits where he could *see* them; and such a tactics of secrecy is still broadly shared by some Pasumalai Christians. As we will see in Part 3, however, the moral anxiety caused by caste stigma may continue to persuade some CSI Tamils more than others to

deploy strident puritanical ethical rhetoric as a critical verbal component of their identity front in public spaces where their non-Dalit Christian peers also gather.

2. *Vākkuttattam* (promise)

Every year CSI pastors select a verse from the Bible to become their parish's New Year *vākkuttattam*. During my research, the church printed this verse for prominent living room display, once on its church calendar (1999) and once on a separate piece of cardboard (1998). During both years, it distributed the calendar and church 'promise' during the annual Christmas Carol visits to every dues paying parishioner's home. During the 1998 New Year's Eve "Watch Night Service," as midnight struck, the congregation rose from two minutes of silent prayer on their knees. The crisp rustling of brand new, expensively embroidered saris, many of them silk, briefly swept over the church, though it remained drowned amidst the sounds of blaring lorry horns out front and strip firecrackers being lit behind the church (not by local Christians). The pastor asked the now standing congregation to sing the first two verses of the 103rd Psalm. Then, he read the church's 1999 promise, 'given to him by God in November', liturgically beginning the New (rhetorical) Year with a biblical shove from his bilingual shepherd's staff,

And He shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God; and they shall abide, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth. (The Book of Micah, Chapter 5, verse 4; New King James Version)¹⁹

Grammatically, the Christian Tamil *vākkuttattam* often ends in the Tamil future tense, because this is how these verses are translated in the BSI "Old Version." In Tamil grammar, though, this tense implies regularity and the constancy of habitual action--whether in the present, future or past (i.e. I go to the store on Wednesdays)--not the immediate future such as in the

English future tense (i.e. I will go to the store on Wednesday). The very tense of most Tamil *vākkuttattams* therefore connotes the imagined constancy, and eternal validity of God's promises, whose varying semantic content becomes, in one sense, poetic decoration on top of a much more fundamental argument. As we stood there listening to the verse that would soon hang on all our living room walls, the pastor reminded everyone of the reason behind this annual custom : "We pray that through this year's new verse you will speak with me and with us and make us strong in faith."²⁰ The key verb he used, "to make strong", was the Sanskrit-derived *tiṭapaṭuttu* which is also the root verb used in the CSI Tamil word for "confirmation" (the rite of induction into church membership meant as a confirmation of one's childhood baptism). The mission of the promise in CSI Tamil spaces is therefore an ethical mission.

In addition to the "church promise", CSI Tamils hang their own favorite *vākkuttattam* verses on their living room walls and place them in sticker form on their personal Bibles, bicycles, scooters, motorcycles and cars. They can purchase these painted Bible verse boards and decal stickers at revival meetings, interdenominational faith meetings, or at Christian Literature Society bookstores. And, in 1998, the Pasumalai Church, for what appears the first time ever, even painted a series of *vākkuttattam* verses right onto its exterior compound wall facing National Highway 7. This is rapidly becoming a common decorative feature of CSI church compounds in Madurai, poetically transforming the protective brick perimeters of CSI sacred spaces into metaphors of the protective, strengthening power believers find in these divine promises. From an orthodox perspective, these omnipresent written promises are readily available visual bulwarks, disciplinary fences against apostasy, fear, doubt, weakness, and cowardice. As visible metonyms of divine power, these Bible promises can reinforce the

dispositional power of a CSI Tamil habitus to effect ethical transformation; metonym in the service of metaphor.

The biblical *vākkuttattam* is also the key to a broadly invoked CSI Tamil moral economy that collapses Weber's categories of mysticism vs. asceticism (cf. 1964: 166-183) in emotionally exuberant talk of "promises" supernaturally fulfilled. This talk insinuates the polite expectation of some this-worldly return for loyal faith, while also generating the primal confidence necessary to walk on the ethical "path." It softens the hard rhetorical edge of the puritanical jeremiad and resonates with the emotionally expressive (not repressive) character of non-Brahminical religious practices in Tamil society. Perhaps the most fundamental and most omnipresent of all these CSI Tamil promises is one applicable to virtually any domain of human existence, "*Āṇṭavar vaḷinaṭuttuvār*" (The Lord will lead the way). And, during my research, an English version of this most basic promise lay painted on a local Christian's auto-rickshaw: Jesus Leads.

The promise finds rhetorical validation and fulfillment in a global evangelical Protestant verbal performance known in Tamil as *cāṭci* (testimony). These narratives recount blessings and miracles interpreted as divine interventions in the speakers' lives. Primarily to make the power of God rhetorically real, traveling *ūḷiyakkārarkaḷ* (lit. men of service), or preachers, employ testimonies to promote the basic logic, "If it happened to me, it can happen to you." While many accept these narratives as authentic reports, there is doubt in the minds of some who feel the evangelist is narrating himself in too vaunted a mode, exaggerating the miracles done to him by God, or exaggerating the divine promises fulfilled by *his* faith. For example, one grade school educated Pasumalai Christian, a former office assistant, questioned the hyperbolic tone of many "testimonial" narratives,

He [informal] will really exaggerate things. ‘I lay down at night. At one o’clock he [God] touched me and woke me up and said,’ blah, blah, blah and he goes on saying something like this. Is it really true? Is he really that devout? Is he really that saved? I don’t know. He says this to sway people and to gather a crowd. That’s what I say...that’s my opinion.²¹

There are some “men of ministry” in Tamil Nadu, men like the famous televangelist D.G. S. Dinakaran, who testify about more than biblical promises fulfilled. They actively promise new miracles in the imminent here and now. These “men of service” use the rhetorical power of the biblical promise to create the raw rhetorical material for future testimonies. While Dinakaran cites biblical *vākkuttattam* after *vākkuttattam* in his own preaching (and on his two websites²²), the one night I heard him preach in the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese’s February 1999 “Spring Festival of Praise,” he also produced his own *extra-biblical* promises directed right at named individuals in the audience. And, in *his* promises, he also used the same future tense that most Tamil *vākkuttattams* share,

My dear sister, Asirvadam. [theatrically adopting a weeping tone of voice meant to be hers] ‘Oh No! Only my name is Asirvadam [blessing]. There are so many problems in my family.’ My dear sister Asirvadam, who cries out in the midst of so much discord, the Lord will bandage your family and raise it up. Instead of all these struggles and difficulties you have suffered, you will see one heart and twice as much unity.²³

In this verbal performance, D.G.S. Dinakaran uses a common name used by CSI Tamils, perhaps to guarantee someone will think he is speaking to them or perhaps to inspire a recent letter writer from the area. Several audience members whose name he had earlier called out in weeping intercession appeared later on stage (after careful screening by his personal assistants) to verify that Dinakaran had successfully interceded on their behalf just minutes beforehand.²⁴ In doing so, Dinakaran alters the biblical promise’s implicit sense of temporality, rushing it, shortening it, and making fulfillment rhetorically possible within his own meetings or, perhaps, by the next

one. His prophetic promise talk works against the work of early Bible translators who chose the Tamil future tense and *not* the present tense (the tense of *imminent* fulfillment), to give all those famous Biblical “shalls” a Tamil voice.

Most CSI Tamils I interviewed, or got to know personally, professed belief that miracles (*arputanikal*) do happen to the faithful. They value interpreting past events in their lives in the idiom of the miracle, or the promise fulfilled. Promises and miracles become prime rhetorical metonyms for a dynamic field of divine power. Most CSI Tamils I met do not cling rigidly to talk of Christ as ethical metaphor. Rather than being tropological fundamentalists, they also embrace Christ as a dynamic polytrope; one capable of metonymically indexing a field of divine healing. And, even for Dinakaran’s many critics, it is not that he promises this-worldly miracles or proclaims the reality of divine intervention that bothers them. It is that he attributes the fulfillment of ‘promises’ fulfillment directly to *his* intercessory prayer. A colonial CSI Tamil habitus of imagination, however, disposes individuals to defer to the authority of Christ or God, who will ultimately decide *when* divine promises get fulfilled in a person’s life. That some preachers also may be using instant miracle rhetoric as a cynical device with which to extract thankful donations from those most desperate for instant divine intervention, I believe, insults some CSI Tamils for whom such a display of dependency on a human interceder is antithetical to rhetoric that empowers them to ask God for aid directly and *alone*. Talk of instant “cures” does not necessarily encourage a prolonged disciplinary submission, a lonely Protestant pilgrimage along the “path”; it accrues up moral capital for the gifted interceder, like Dinakaran, not for the listener.

And yet, in one sense, these two key tropes, “path” and “promise”, are widely invoked by evangelical Christians around the world. They have old antecedents in European Protestantism more generally, especially in 18th century continental Pietism. But there is one other trope that bears a particular historical load originating in a collective memory of colonial mission. It reveals a distinctive ethical load born by a decolonizing community of Tamil Christians negotiating their place in a post-colonial, and post-missionary, Indian present. Its constant rhetorical use in Pasumalai during my research made me keenly aware of it as the dispositional consequence of a collective mission compound habitus.

3. *Ūḷiyam* (Service, Ministry)

Christian Tamil has expropriated this word as its main referent to both “ministry” and to a broader notion of Christian “service.” According to the Tamil Lexicon (1980), the word means “service to a deity, a guru, or a superior by birth; natural obligation, obligation of a slave to his master.” As Nicholas Dirks notes, it was a term once used to index village services (barbers, washer men, etc), the guarding of royal lands and of royal palaces themselves and the obligations associated with temple ritual (1993[1987]: 191). It is also the root of the title *ūḷiyakkārar* (substituting for the English words “evangelist”, “preacher” and “minister”) whose literal definition then becomes “slave or servant.”²⁵ Although the term *ūḷiyam* applies to any service to the church--whether as pastor, preacher, catechist, storyteller, Sunday school teacher, etc.--, *ūḷiyakkārar* was a title I generally heard in reference to what we in the English speaking West would call preachers, Christian rhetoricians who are not ordained by a church and who rarely have any formal training in theology. In ironic subversion of what is an immensely honorable title in the CSI Tamil community, however, most Tamil speakers use a related, much less

respectful form, *ūḷiyaṅ*, in reference to low grade government servants: office assistants, mail boys, etc. As *Christian* Tamil terms, *ūḷiyam* and *ūḷiyakkārar* transform feudal metaphors of subordination into metaphors of the Christian believer's voluntary submission to God.

This simple Tamil noun *ūḷiyam* also bears a historically distinctive semantic load in Tamil Christian mission compounds like Pasumalai, monumental spaces still haunted by the folk memories of former missionary “servants.” I often heard elder Pasumalai Christians nostalgically extol former AMM missionaries as practitioners of “true *ūḷiyam*,” but primarily to provide rhetorical momentum with which to critique their Christian peers. Public remembering of missionary *ūḷiyam* takes place with special intensity every year in Pasumalai's celebration of the Tamil passion play Lloyd Lorbeer helped write and begin in the late 1940s, in close consultation with local Christian Tamil teachers, musicians and lyricists. Every year thousands of Christians and Hindus come to view this five hour drama, staged by the Pasumalai Christian community at a permanent outdoor amphitheater known as Arangasalai (see Map 2). In 1999, the customary third performance, held on the evening of Good Friday, drew 4,904 ticket purchasers plus hundreds who simply entered Arangasalai of their own accord. Chronicling the entire life of Jesus and ending with a dramatic pyrotechnic ‘simulation’ of his resurrection, the Love Divine has always intended, in part, to “witness” to non-Christians. It is a highly poetic, soft, and even seductive approach to “evangelism” qua theatrical testimony of the ultimate Christian promise.

A more aggressive, public version of this ministry of evangelical outreach is known as *cuvicēṣa ūḷiyam* (gospel ministry). It resembles what Graham Staines himself was apparently

doing in rural Orissa the night of his murder. This latter “service” was the intercessory target of Pasumalai’s Wednesday evening missionary prayer meetings during my research. For ten years prior to my arrival, the church had been running a small-scale mission to a network of rural villages 5 miles from Pasumalai, villages to which the local Diocesan dispensary was also making monthly rounds to distribute medical aid. The evangelical work itself was conducted by two different hired preachers during my research, the first with heavily Pentecostal ritual leanings; both received stipends from the Pasumalai church treasury. Every year I was there, the church used one of the Gregorian year’s fifth Sundays to celebrate this *ūḷiyam*, itself a collective remembering of colonial, catechist-driven evangelism by the AMM in the Tamil hinterlands. At the 1999 Missionary Sunday, the “Missionary Convener” invited village “converts” to attend the church, read that week’s selected Bible readings and give one *cāṭci* (testimony). This is a rhetorical genre common in Pentecostal services but one I never heard in any other consecrated CSI liturgical space. Unsurprisingly, then, the village woman chosen for this verbal performance stepped up to the lay pulpit and began her “testimony”, as most Pentecostal Tamils do, with a loud “Haleeeeeeeelujah!”, a triumphant sound also never heard by me in a CSI church. In a rhetorical move of remarkable candor, the Pasumalai pastor took the opportunity to chastise the entire congregation, right in front of the “missionized,” for the fact that, the week before, not one single parish member had shown up on Sunday afternoon for the church’s monthly trip to its “mission villages.” In a bold departure from the typical “we” used in most of his rhetorical Jeremiads, the pastor’s rebuke of this evangelistic apathy was cuttingly brief and in the second person, “*You* will bear the guilt,” he charged (bear it, that is, on Judgment Day). After all, he was the only one who *had* shown up. He then warned in a slightly softer tone of how ‘we’ were

all becoming mere “tranquil Christians” (*nirvicāra kiṛistuvarkaḷ*) unwilling to fulfill the so-called ‘great commission’ (Matthew 28: 19-20).²⁶

Based on interviews and private conversations, I feel that there is a substantial portion of the community who support this more aggressive *ūḷiyam* rhetorically, fewer who do financially and very few who do in person. Yet, the annual calendars of evangelistic organizations that conduct this work, such as Word for the World, hang in the homes of many Pasumalai Christians. After that morning’s searing sermon, I made a rare, deliberate attempt to field reactions from choirboys who I knew supported evangelism, but who had also not shown up the prior Sunday. Those I asked said they enjoyed the sermon, even though it clearly implicated them in its charge of apathy.

“Service”, whether as a preacher, a pastor, a volunteer in Pasumalai’s annual passion play, a helper in some church philanthropy or in village evangelism, is about performing one’s self as a metaphor for Christ by re-enacting in the present some element of his own biblically narrated “service.” But, as residents of a former colonial mission compound, Pasumalai Christians also bear the intermediary historical load of larger-than-life missionaries whose “service”, perpetuated in nostalgic folk memories, haunts them more ‘recently’ and, in a mnemonic sense, more intimately, than the “service” of a biblically narrated Christ. The trope of *ūḷiyam*, therefore, is one historically over-elaborated ethical trope for the inheritors of mission. And, finally, CSI Tamils are exposed to many forms of rhetorical “service”, each with its own narrative genres, each emerging in certain concrete rhetorical spaces but not others, each that play on the tropes of “path” and “promise” in different ways.

An Alliance of Ministries, An Alliance of Christs

In February of 1999, at Madurai's enormous Tamukkam festival grounds, I witnessed a historically critical conjoining of two very different forms of *ūliyam*; one *ūliyam* motivated by rhetoric of Christ as ethical metaphor and another motivated by D.G.S. Dinakaran's rhetoric of Christ as metonym of a constantly flowing presence of miracles, of promises fulfilled. This was the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese's first ever "Spring Festival of Praise", mentioned earlier, a fundraising event that collected roughly 6 lakhs of offerings over four days of nightly meetings.²⁷ Announced publicly weeks beforehand, the local CSI Bishop had openly declared that the money would be used to run a hostel for "uneducable children" for whom the Diocese had never before offered any refuge. In doing so, he invoked an old notion of *ūliyam* as an ethical enactment of Christ-like compassion. Thus, it was explicit beforehand that Dinakaran was being used to draw in the largest possible crowd of donors. At the re-dedication of Pasumalai's Caroline Clark Dispensary (see Map 3), weeks prior to the festival, the Bishop also revealed another motive for opening such a hostel: to provide an extra field training site for nurses studying at the soon-to-be-opened CSI College of Nursing in Pasumalai.²⁸ As the Bishop also dressed the new College of Nursing (see Map 3) itself in the trope of Christian *ūliyam*, he transformed the offerings to be generated at the festival from financial applause for rhetoric of miracles promised by a wealthy *ūliyakkārar* into cash to fund a very different *ūliyam* in the distinctly colonial modality of institutionalized philanthropy. This rhetorical transfer of funds also served as, what I believe, is the first, or one of the first, Madurai-Ramnad Diocesan spaces in which Dinakaran's prophetic miracle rhetoric received official church sanction from its top officials.

Despite the Bishop's approval and presence during the festival, many CSI Tamils I know, regardless of their social class, are proud of their independence in spiritual matters and reject the extremely hierarchical rhetorical genre emergent in talk of miracles attributed to the intercession of powerful evangelists. And when miracle-promising Tamil evangelists say, as D.G.S. Dinakaran did in Madurai on February 25, 1999, "According to the authority you [God] have given me, I curse all diseases and their causes!"²⁹ some CSI Tamils cringe. The Pastor of Pasumalai, Gnanapirakasam, mocked the claims of such evangelists in his January 31, 1999 Sunday sermon,

They're a lot of deceptive preachers (*ūḷiyakkāraṅka*) saying, "God has given me a gift. Come! I'll drive away your devil. I'll heal you. I'll do this for you. If I pray for you, everything will happen." What? *We* don't have that faith?³⁰

Although the pastor supports the power of miracles, visions and even ecstatic forms of prayer that others of his peers might view as "Pentecostal",³¹ he does not applaud a hierarchical *mediation* between believer and God. As if enacting his critique silently, the following month, on the same weekend as the Diocese's "Spring Festival of Praise", he deliberately staged a three day "revival meeting" for the Pasumalai church, which, de facto distracted many of its members from hearing Dinakaran's preaching. Others, like my 10th grade educated Christian folk musician friend, Richard, find these miracle talking *ūḷiyakkāraṅka* ("men of service", preachers) suspicious *only* when they precede their prayers with demands for money, "He [Dinakaran's son] made an announcement that he would pray for an entire year for anyone who paid a 100, 200 rupee annual subscription...That's exactly what I don't like. The guy should just send his address. If he [Dinakaran] writes back saying, 'I will pray for you,' then he is a true *ūḷiyakkārar*."³² Finally, in a clear demotion of depending on prophetic promises of miracles, at

the engagement ceremony of a well-educated CSI Tamil couple, one pastor criticized those who try to ‘force’ god through intercessory prayer, “I don’t deny that the Lord does miracles. But, at the same time, we shouldn’t force God by telling him he should do miracles all the time, any old day.”³³ His stated reason that day is an older ethical theology (or theodicy) in which God has the right to test the believer occasionally with suffering. Suffering is part of one’s ethical journey, he reminded everyone; in other words, trust that the ‘the Lord will guide’ without seeking out the fulfilment of promises.

While critique of Dinakaran’s *ūliyam* emerged from all levels of financial and educational capital in Pasumalai during my research, many more, even well educated Christian friends of mine, find preachers like him inspiring, bringers of hope; men whose promise talk is more empowering than the Sunday morning ethical chastisements of many CSI pastors. And I found Dinakaran’s tapes and monthly magazine in the homes of many middle class CSI Tamils in Pasumalai. One of my friend’s Master’s degree-holding sisters, very sincerely concerned with my spiritual apostasy, popped in one of Dinakaran’s English sermons on the family “tape” (tape player) when I arrived one afternoon, hoping fervently for some subtle “Christian influence” on my misguided soul. The college educated Pasumalai church secretary, Jeevatanni (see Ch. 3), even narrated his own miracle, which he attributes partially to the intercession of another famous miracle-talking Tamil evangelist,

One time I had this pain in my intestine. And, you see, “haystacks” for cows are very “strong.” They stand there for a long time and if you pull on the hay, it doesn’t come out easily. You should pull before eating. I ate a whole lot and then realized, ‘I didn’t put any hay out for the cow.’ So, I pulled some out. You shouldn’t pull after eating, because it’s very heavy and “tightly packed.” So I got this “disorder” in my intestine and I had some pain. At that time, a preacher came...Brother Mohan C. Lazarus. He gave a sermon in Pasumalai. He said, ‘If you have any pain, just put your hand there and pray. And I’ll pray for you.’ So I placed my hand and prayed. There was this lively something

or other, I don't know. I prayed and he prayed. Sincerely. From that moment on, the pain really decreased.³⁴

Generally, most CSI Tamils I interviewed, regardless of caste or class, are more than able, once they reach adulthood, to narrate “miraculous” interventions in their lives, whether healings after intercessory prayer, miraculous survivals of vehicular accidents and near drownings, dramatic financial mobility, or the sudden, much prayed for ‘conversions’ of Hindu classmates at Pasumalai’s schools. I found support for miracle-promising talk is very much a pan-class reality in Pasumalai; though many middle class CSI Tamils may not find it acceptable to enter the concrete spaces in which prophetic talk of *imminent* miracles (promises fulfilled) emerges.

The Structural Dispositions of Rhetorical Spaces Entered by CSI Tamils

There are at least five major kinds of rhetorical spaces entered by CSI Tamils I knew in Pasumalai, spaces which all engaged the tropes of path and promise according to distinctive understandings of the third trope, *ūliyam*, and what rhetorical “service” best defines Christianity itself. The distinctive arrangements of these key CSI Tamil tropes in each of the following five rhetorical spaces, support the broader accumulation of middle class moral capital very differently.

1) Sunday liturgies:

These rhetorical spaces jealously guard the colonial heritage of stoic, assemblages of humble, disciplined Protestant bodies. Christ as ethical metaphor remains the dominant, institutionally empowered rhetorical trope in these spaces. Pastors and preachers I heard in Pasumalai’s Whitin Memorial church explicitly framed many of their sermons as ethical

warnings, which is why I heard so many jeremiads; Christian talk that literally scolded the audience, carefully framed to include the pastor in a collective “we.” In CSI Tamil churches I attended, a thundering rhetorical synergy emerged from a historically perduring alliance of an imported Puritan rhetorical legacy of verbal disciplining (the jeremiad) with sometimes thunderously loud, masculine forms of *tairiyamāṇa pēccu* (bold talk) that is generally found in Tamil political speeches.

In CSI churches, men and women sit on opposite sides of the church, dividing caste and class blocs, families and even nuclear households. CSI Tamil liturgy I witnessed in Pasumalai and Madurai was, in varying degrees of uniformity, a corporately enacted disciplining of the self in habitual gestures of humble body language, emotionally restrained prayer and singing, climaxing in disciplining rhetoric and rhetoric of discipline. These services implicitly observed a principle which Asad discusses in relation to medieval monastic rites, “...virtuous desire [has] first to be created before a virtuous choice [can] be made (1993: 126).” Inside “God’s temple,”³⁵ there is no clapping during songs, no vocative praising of God allowed during worship. One former PK student at Pasumalai in the 1950s recalled to me, as we sat in his natal village, how difficult it was for he and his peers to tolerate the discipline of Sunday services, which, as boarding students, they had to attend, “If it was our temple [PK village temples], we could talk and wander around, go somewhere and come back, drink some water and come back, go outside and have some *bīṭi* (Indian cigarettes) and come back. It wasn’t like that there. You had to sit *totally* quiet. For an hour, one and a half hours.”³⁶ One 10th grade educated, Pasumalai girl I came to know indexed another old habit of devotional discipline (practiced by all religious communities in Tamil society), when she chastised D.G.S. Dinakaran for not displaying it at the

Diocese's 1999 Spring Festival of Praise, "He didn't take off his shoes before he spoke." She quickly added that because of this disrespect towards God, she would never again attend one of his meetings. Both shoe removal and stoic quietude at church reveal habitual dispositions performed as visible metaphors of ethical discipline; dispositions enacted by some, upon entering CSI churches.

Whenever I went to church in Pasumalai, without fail, a cluster of adult men always formed behind it during the service, near the men's wing and extension porch, often accompanied by a small line of motorcycles and motor scooters, indicating access to distinctive levels of financial capital. The men around me there were generally from 30-45 years of age, born well *after* the disciplinary presence of AMM missionaries had vanished from Pasumalai. Inevitably, though, their parents were dutifully sitting inside. The explanation I often heard for this behavior was always that "there isn't enough room in the church." But, in the perceptive words of my friend Richard, many people do this, he added, simply to be able to make the claim that, "We came to church."³⁷ For those involved in church politics, such a performance of Christian identity sustains minimum moral capital in a community where the absent, including me, were easily made victim of statements like the following, "Hey! I didn't see you at Church last Sunday." This lounging behind the church so one can say that one attended, then, reveals delayed, developing resistance to a late colonial mission compound habitus.

2) Pentecostal Services

Unlike CSI services, which dispose the body to be quiet, obedient and receptive to the disciplinary power of the sermon's ethical rhetoric, Pentecostal services I witnessed at two Pasumalai churches encourage loud praising of both God and Jesus, even violent histrionics of

bouncing and near trance-like ecstatic bonding with a Holy Spirit imagined to be present right in the rhetorical space itself. Since Independence, Pasumalai has become host to three Pentecostal churches and prayer halls (see Map 2). One old resident of Jonespuram, committed, perhaps, to a tropological emphasis of an earlier era (Christ as metaphor only), bitterly derided the nearby Indian Pentecostal Church as “punishment” for local Christians’ inability to prevent local Hindus from building a temple to a Sandalwood Mariyamman temple right next to the good water well and in the heart of a former Christian retirement neighborhood (see Map 3).³⁸

In the middle of one Pentecostal service I attended at Pasumalai’s Ceylon Pentecostal Mission church (see Map 2), several men and women also stood up to utter *cāṭci* of what “the Lord has done for me” recently. These narratives of promises fulfilled are completely absent from CSI Sunday services. Their presence reveals a greater Pentecostal emphasis on experiencing the promise fulfilled rather than rhetorically placing its fulfillment in the indefinite future. In this sense, local Pentecostal services privileged Christ as metonym of a divine field of power over Christ as metaphor of the power of ethical discipline; though this does not mean that Pentecostal Christians do not care about their own version of ‘Christian’ ethics.

But not all CSI Tamils in Pasumalai shun these rhetorical spaces. Several families actually attend services at *both* Pentecostal churches and Whitin Memorial. Other families lie split in their allegiance. For example, the parents of one of Pasumalai’s pastorate committee members attend the CPM church exclusively, while their son is obligated, more or less, to attend the CSI church on Sundays *exclusively* to maintain his moral/political image. No one I talked to, though, suggested that local Pentecostal services really threatened overall participation at Whitin Memorial.

3) The Spirit-Filled Meeting

Perhaps one reason why no one suggested this to me is that CSI churches themselves have started to incorporate some aspects of Pentecostal rhetoric in regular meetings known as *āvikkūriya* (spirit-filled) meetings. I saw these meetings take place both behind CSI church buildings and on rented public grounds on large temporary stages; the former were often held in celebration of major annual events in the CSI Tamil calendar (Lent, Harvest Festivals, All Souls Day, etc). In Pasumalai, these meetings transpired *behind* the church on a cement stage also used for wedding receptions during my research. These revival spaces shared the ethical rhetoric of Sunday morning Jeremiads but also featured emotional *cāṭci* (testimony) of conversion, or of God's intervention, narrated with varying skill by traveling *ūḷiyakkārarkaḷ* (evangelists, preachers). But, importantly, these testimonies do not come from the audience itself, as in Pentecostal services.

In revival meetings, affective expressions forbidden inside the church (clapping, individual vocative praising of God and bodily expressions of joy, submission, and repentance) and modern forms of Christian music are all acceptable and even encouraged. For example, during one Pasumalai revival meeting being held in honor of the church's annual Harvest Festival, a choir boy even encouraged everyone to clap loudly during each song, but without much enthusiastic consequence. A disposition toward public, bodily histrionics, though implicitly allowed in these spaces, was not enough part of Pasumalai's shared expressive habitus to find much expression during my research.

4) *Jepakkūṭṭam* (prayer meeting)

This rhetorical space is really the pietistic core of community building and symbolic capital manipulation within CSI Tamil parishes. These prayer meetings transpire in homes during life cycle celebrations, house-warmings, Pasumalai's weekly missionary prayer meeting and in Diocesan institutional spaces in the form of "fasting prayer meetings" or prayer meetings to intercede for specific ministries of the church. Even more than the strictly disciplinary spaces of Sunday church liturgies, the prayer meeting is the rhetorical space least easily avoided by CSI Tamils, because it emerges dispositionally to mark out unavoidable points in the life cycle (e.g. female comings of age, weddings, funerals, and death anniversaries).

The basic components of CSI prayer meetings are also found in CSI Sunday liturgies: corporate singing, prayer and a Bible-based message. Most importantly, all these prayer meetings include two kinds of Christian prayer: "prayers of praise" *stōttirajepam* and "prayers of intercession" *maṅṛāṭṭujepam*. Uttering new intercessional requests without thanks for *prior* intercessions, these meetings taught me, is a basic violation of the ethical code inherent in the basic moral economy established by the tropes of "path" and "promise." In many ways, then, the rhetorical environment created lies somewhere in between the Sunday sermon (focused on the ethical "path") and Pentecostal services (focused more on experiencing the promise fulfilled).

Like "spirit-filled meetings," prayer meetings are also rhetorical spaces where vocative praising has tacit permission, though I never saw any bodily histrionics on the order of Pasumalai's Pentecostal services. I did witness controversial forms of verbal praise praying verging on the "Pentecostal" at several different prayer meetings in Pasumalai. On Jan. 31, 1999, the pastor suddenly transformed the calm, dignified, traditional CSI greeting for elders and

church leaders, “*Stōttiram* (Praise be to God),” into a loud, vocative exclamation shooting out of his mouth in loud, machine-gun repetitions that syntactically capped each of his breathless prayers. Afterwards, one pastorate committee member derided this frenzied praising, which others had performed along with the pastor, with his equally shocked friend, wondering why it was that this behavior was entering into the “CSI” community. When I asked him about it directly, he said that recently people have started to acquire this habit. He thinks it is very “artificial” sounding. While CSI pastors I heard often shouted during their blistering Sunday Jeremiads, this loudness was a disciplinary whip upon the “body of Christ,” not part of vocative prayer utterances directed at God. And the latter mode of verbal performance, during a sermon, might set off a firestorm more serious than the mumbled resistance I had heard under the light of that full moon.

5) Miracle Healing Festivals and Crusades

These are multi-day public meetings which feature what, in the West, is known as “charismatic” Christian talk; talk of miracles, healings, and transformations on the very bodies of the praying listener. Much of this rhetoric is found regularly within Tamil Pentecostal Churches but is still unheard and unvoiced within consecrated CSI churches. There are dozens and dozens of preachers (*ūḷiyakkārarkaḷ*) in Tamil Nadu alone who have carefully constructed and cultivated a miracle-working identity for themselves.³⁹ In one sense, these men are no different in status than the independent preachers who appear in CSI churches to preach at lay pulpits. But, in Madurai alone, there are several such “men of service” whose air-conditioned Tata Sumos and ostentatious lifestyles only corroborate the suspicion of their ideological opponents: that they are “serving” primarily themselves. The most famous during my research in Tamil Nadu, were

Mohan C. Lazarus and D. G. S. Dinakaran. The latter is a Tirunelveli Nadar Christian who runs a TV ministry on the scale of Billy Graham's Crusades.

These events feature dramatic moments of intercessory praying, with some audience members displaying bodily histrionics of affliction, loud praising and frequent screaming of the critical CSI Tamil praise phrase "*Yēcuvē stōttiram!*" (Jesus alone be praised!). But, most critically, they feature well orchestrated testimonies and prophetic promises mediated by charismatic preachers standing high up on elevated platforms identical to those used in political party rallies.

Because they happen outside consecrated church buildings, church sponsored spirit-filled meetings and less formal prayer meetings have allowed forms of Pentecostal histrionics and verbal performances (the testimony) some accommodation in post-colonial Pasumalai. One explanation for this ironic accommodation involves resistance to the rhetorical focus of the colonial AMM itself. Many AMM missionaries did not support ecstatic forms of worship, especially inside of churches and, in some cases, even tried to stop ecstatic histrionics, outside church spaces. In one 1861 episode in the Pasumalai Seminary, William Tracy, after two days of a violent, bodily histrionics of repentance, felt the need to talk openly against it, "I cautioned them, with good effect against yielding to mere excitement and urged them to repress as far as possible their violent expressions of their feelings. The effort was made, but some who were unable to restrain their feelings quietly left the room or were removed that they might not disturb the others."⁴⁰ In 1912, the emergence of Pentecostalism in the Madurai area inspired a swift denunciation of the notion "....that noisy and emotional demonstrations and prostrations have any efficacy in bringing the soul under the influence of the Holy Spirit."⁴¹ But like-minded

missionaries clearly never persuaded all the mission's members of this, although CSI Sunday services are still a monument, a recurrent "social habit-memory" (Connerton 1989), of the missionary's banishment of, and condescension towards, ecstasy, or Christ as electric metonym of a field of divine promises waiting to be miraculously fulfilled.⁴²

The Rhetorical Classification of CSI Tamil Selves

Dinakaran's hi-tech, multi-media version of Christian "service" and related Pentecostal miracle rhetoric challenges the primacy of a dominant Sunday morning CSI ethical theology. Rhetoric of Christ as ethical metaphor creates a desire for a disciplined, performed differentiation of self along that parallels, metaphorically, the separation of middle/elite from lower classes of self. And, therefore, assent to, and reproduction of, such rhetoric best generates Christian moral capital that, in turn, buttresses broader claims to middle class identity in front of one's Christian peers. In contrast, pure promise talk is a form of "service" that re-hierarchizes "path" and "promise" by demoting rhetoric of the path in verbally narrated waves of imminent miracles. Such rhetoric does little to distinguish the individual as an embodiment of Christ-like ethical purity; it submerges the individual into a domain where all become indistinguishable recipients of healing intercessory prayer from the preacher.

I found individuals at all levels of financial and knowledge capital in the very different rhetorical spaces of Sunday liturgies, spirit-filled meetings, prayer meetings, miracle healing festivals and Pentecostal meetings. If there are some CSI Tamils who avoid spaces dominated by talk of promises miraculously fulfilled, such as those staged by D.G.S. Dinakaran, I believe one reason is that such spaces dispose the audience to submit themselves primarily to the

interceding “man of ministry” whose moral capital rhetorically then trumps that of everyone else there. Even some well off, educated CSI Tamils I know accept this extreme rhetorical hierarchy of Christian selves and go. Perhaps the needed healing is more important than maintaining their evangelical pride, itself a modality of a distinctly elitist *middle class* pride. However, Sunday sermons, while also gathering in ‘working class’ bodies along with middle class ones, preach *primarily* an elitist puritanical morality of ethical self-distinction; and they are addressed to a collective ‘we’ that does not rhetorically elevate the pastor above the audience in terms of moral capital. So, the moral rhetoric that buttresses a Christian middle class identity received only support on Sunday mornings during my research, not rhetorical threat from talk of miraculous power obtained *without* any necessity of a disciplined embodiment of Christ’s ethical principles. Total non-alignment with promise-centered, or miracle-centered, rhetoric, then, betrays a very middle class confidence over one’s own power to control the circumstances of one’s life *without* divine intervention and without submitting the self to intermediaries like Dinakaran. This is true even for those who do not have middle class financial or knowledge capital, but who may want to appear as morally elitist in line with middle class conventions of self-performance.

And, for elite, upwardly mobile Christians from stigmatized castes, individuals who have good reason to be very anxious about sudden attributions of stigma, even by their Christian peers, performing public allegiance *primarily* to the moral elitism of a colonial ethical theology of self-distinction may also help maintain a distinct level of middle class moral capital, an external image of purity and discipline, whose relative potency and impotency I will be exploring briefly in Chapter 6 and, in depth, in Chapter 9.

Chapter 5 Thy Christian Self Shall Not...

In September 1999, in the archives of Bangalore's United Theological College, I discovered five hand-written letters from the 1860s written in the highly Sanskritized clerical Tamil of colonial officialdom. The letters were contracts between prospective converts and the American missionary C.T. White, contracts that made the construction of church buildings and the provision of a mission catechist conditional on performances of church attendance and allegiance to the new faith. But, at first, I couldn't penetrate the letters' 19th century Tamil handwriting nor could I understand their copious Sanskritic verbiage. One of my former Tamil teachers, Professor S. Bharati of Madura College, transcribed the letters and also suggested I find a city clerk in Tirupparankunram (TPK) to decode a dozen or so undecipherable words remaining. Using a TPK Brahmin friend's living room as an 'office', a local municipal clerk read the first letter carefully with me and then paused to decipher the signers' names, even though I don't recall asking him to do so. Something had clearly intrigued him. Upon reflection, he said that the first name written in the awkward penmanship of a semi-literate person, "*Kaṭṭāri*" (dagger), told us something.¹ "This is an 'SC' [Scheduled Caste/Dalit/untouchable] name," the clerk said, mentioning a specific region north of Madurai where he believes this name is used. I sat there amazed at how powerfully a 133 year old letter could relay names apparently still associated today with Dalit communities living in Tamil Nadu; a "social fact" made hauntingly clear to me that morning in a powerful Brahmin priest's living room. Other names from that letter signal similar levels of social stigma *Karuppanaṅ*, (black older brother)² and untouchable caste names like *Sāmpāṅ* (a caste title once used by the Paraiyar community),³

while other personal names in the very same list (and presumably from the same nuclear family), *Aruṇācalam* (the avatar of Siva at Tiruvannamalai) and *Umaiyaṇ* (containing a root name for Parvatī) do not.

In Tamil speaking society, personal names have no fixed set of obligatory components used by all individuals or by all individuals all the time (Britto 1986). Personal names can have various components: 1) initials marking out ancestral kin or one's place of origin or simply hiding certain names given at birth for other reasons, 2) a given name or names, plus 3) a caste name or caste title (ibid: 350). As Britto notes, most Tamil speakers do not follow a custom of giving patrilineal surnames. Listening to names within one extended family, therefore, is absolutely bewildering to many foreigners, since it is hard to find any connections at all, at first hearing, unless the family appends their caste title to the end of its *men's* names. Following Britto, I also agree, and witnessed the fact, that many Tamil speakers change the presentation of their personal names according to context, hiding some names as initials in certain contexts while outing them in other contexts. Sometimes, they select one of several given names for use in certain contexts and not in others. The contextually shifting performance of Tamil personal names is part of an appellative ambiguity that affords many opportunities for selective concealing and revealing of the social identities indexed by certain appellations. And for those marked out in Tamil society by given names suggesting the social stigma of untouchability, appellative tactics of concealing and revealing are critical. For those bearing a load of stigma implicit in names like "black older brother," hiding stigmatic names as initials or assuming other personal or nicknames that render caste identity ambiguous becomes a critical performative attempt at moral mobility in the most basic performance of self: public self-appellation.

What's in a Christian Tamil Name?

CSI Tamils in elite Christian spaces like Pasumalai generally select names for their children along a wide continuum endowed with the very masking power just mentioned, whether or not they actually are from highly stigmatized castes. This most likely originates in a de facto taboo on caste names (and caste talk) within many Protestant mission compound spaces (see Ch. 7). But names that do not communicate caste identity do not necessarily communicate a specific religious identity in Tamil society. Ironically, the personal names of CSI Tamils I met in Pasumalai and Madurai lie on a continuum of widely varying clarity in their ability to index any clear Christian identity, the one identity about which we might assume they would not want any ambiguity at all. In other words, infant, or even adult, baptism does not necessarily induct one into a tightly defined, exclusive appellative community. The names below are only a tiny proportion of hundreds of names born by CSI Tamils I met in Pasumalai.⁴

1) Tamil names with no religious allusions⁵

Ponṇaiyyā ('The golden one', male)
Celvam ('Wealth', male)
Pirapu ('Rich man', 'nobleman', male)
Rāṇi ('Queen', female)
Ponṇammā ('The Golden Mother', female)

2) Names with no religious allusions but nevertheless disproportionately common among CSI Tamils in Madurai⁶

Cellaiyyā, Cellappā ('Wealthy Father', male)
Cellammā ('Wealthy Mother', female)
Nēsamaṇi ('Jewel of Affection' compound, female)
Māṇikkam ('Ruby', male)
Rājānāyakam ('Hero King', male)

3) Names that draw heavily on terminology found in the “Old Version” of Tamil Protestant Bible⁷

Ācīrvātam (‘Blessing’ Sanskrit)

Vētamānikkam (‘Jewel of the Veda’ Compound Sanskrit, male)

Jeparāṇi (‘Queen of Prayer’ Sanskrit *Jepam* + Tamil *Rāṇi*, female)

Bākkiyam (‘Blessing’ Sanskrit, female)

Tēvasakāyam (‘With God’s help’ Sanskrit compound, male)

Jeyarāj (‘King of Victory’, Sanskrit compound, male)

4) Catholic Saint names⁸

Rāyyappā based on *Irāyappar* and *Irāyappan* which are alternate Catholic translations of the name ‘Peter’ (One of Stone) using the Telegu word for ‘stone’, *rāy*, + the Tamil male pronominal suffixes *appar* and *appan*; cf. Fabricius 1972: 81)

5) Bible names (Old and New Testaments)

Samuel

Daniel

Mary

John

5a) Male Bible names ending with Sanskrit suffixes⁹

SamuelRaj (‘King Samuel’ Bible name + Sanskrit *Raj*)

Jēsutās(an) (‘Disciple of Christ’, Jesus + Sanskrit ‘*dās*’ or ‘*dāsaṅ*’, male)

6) English or Western celebrity names:

Victor

Jennifer

Kennedy

7) Missionary names

Elva (After Elva Lorbeer, wife of AMM missionary, Rev. L.L. Lorbeer)

Stoffer (AMM missionary Rev. Bryan Stoffer)

Many CSI Tamils I met in Pasumalai had anywhere from 2-5 names. One or two may have been “given” to them alone at baptism. A minority of CSI Tamils I met also follow a broader appellative tradition by marking out their immediate patriline in a succession of initials. I couldn’t find any strict pattern in the number of names or which kin they honor. Perhaps there

are too many buried caste and family appellative traditions for any uniformity to emerge. But, importantly, a concatenation of names from *more than one* of the 7 categories above is quite common. This creates semantically rich compound names mixing appellations from English, Hebrew, and Tamil together in ways that are highly distinctive of CSI Tamils living in and beyond Pasumalai.

For CSI Tamils and for other Tamils socially familiar with them, any name from categories 3-7 establishes a clear symbolic identification of the individual with the Christian community. For those Tamils unfamiliar with CSI Tamil names, most names from categories 5-7 will signal Christian identity immediately due to their apparent “English” linguistic origins (although other foreign celebrity names like Lenin and Stalin do not index any specific religious community). Yet, it is names similar to those in category 3, especially, that represent the creative heart of colonial Tamil Protestant naming. These poetic names draw heavily on the Protestant community’s dialect of arcane, Sanskritized, literary Tamil and on key terms still found in the “Old Version” of the BSI Tamil Bible used by them (see Ch. 5). These names directly inscribe Tamil biblical discourse onto the most central metonyms of Christian community: distinctly “Christian” personal names. These names also employ hyperbolic polytropes that often insinuate elite economic power, elite moral status or both. For example, *Vētamāṇikkam* literally means ‘Ruby of the Bible’ (*Vētam* being a Sanskrit word that indexes the Bible in contemporary CSI and Lutheran Tamil parlance; see Tiliander 1974: 64-68). This classic Tamil Christian name makes the bearer out simultaneously as a metaphor for wealth and power (elite financial capital) and as a metonym of Biblical knowledge (elite moral capital). These names often function as metaphors, such as *Ācīrvātam* (blessing) or *Nāṇamuttu* (‘Pearl of

Wisdom’). *Nāṇam* is the word for “wisdom” still used in the old Tamil Christian word for baptism: *nāṇasāṇam*.¹⁰ *Jivarāj* (King of Life) uses the Sanskrit-derived Tamil word “*jīvan*”, found often in the BSI Tamil Bible, instead of the modern Tamil words for “life” (“*uyir*” or “*vālvu*”) and is used to refer to life after conversion or eternal life.¹¹ *Jepamālai* (Garland of Prayer) combines the popular Sanskritized Tamil word “*jepam*,” the central word CSI Tamils use for “prayer”,¹² with the Tamil word for “garland.” One Pasumalai girl I met bears this name because her mother believes that she was born through the aid of prayer during labor. Instead of a flower garland, so commonly used in temple worship and life cycle ceremonies to honor and to bless, *Jepamālai* denotes an *immaterial* garland of ‘prayers.’ Such names silently assert the ideological priority of intercessory prayer over more materialistic ways of blessing a human subject.

The tone of all these creative, Bible-based appellations is one of moral and social superlativeness. They are names denoting ‘wisdom’, ‘gems,’ ‘beauty’, ‘blessing’, ‘mercy’, ‘victory’, ‘happiness’, ‘splendor’, ‘eternal life’, ‘prayer’, ‘God’ and ‘kings’. The semantic momentum they create is upwardly mobile and certainly uplifting. These names intertwine and play upon suggestive rhetoric of moral purity and of elite class identity. Francis Britto argues that there is a broad Tamil penchant for names that “have a desirable quality such as power, happiness, success, prosperity, joy, beauty, victory, greatness, piety, or devotion (1986: 352).” Yet, such a diffuse appellative pattern does not mean the same thing for all Tamils nor does it involve the same choices in uplifting names. As I have pointed out, for CSI Tamils, many of *their* uplifting names directly insert Tamil Bible language into their appellative performances of

self, marking them out as speakers of a peculiar dialect of Tamil and as part of a community committed to the Christian believer's constant interaction with, and embodiment of, biblical verse (echoed in the common CSI Tamil practice of hanging written Bible promises on living room walls).

Names similar to those in category 2, although they generally share the same uplifting moral denotations and tone, communicate Christian identity much less clearly and stridently to the listener. This is most likely because they lack terms from Tamil Bible translations. But the ambiguous relationship between personal names and religious identity reaches its apex with names similar to those listed in category 1. These names belie talk of a neat distinction between 'Hindu' and 'Christian' names commonly heard among CSI Tamils themselves. For example, during my research in Pasumalai, there were at least five men I knew who went by the name "Ponnaiya" (Golden Father) in casual conversation.¹³ One was a local Congress party member, a Hindu Devar who ran a construction business. Another was the Ward Councilor for Pasumalai's third ward (Hindu and PK). A third was none other than V.S.R. Ponnaiya, a local political activist and entrepreneur from Pasumalai's ancestral PK clan. A fourth Ponnaiya ran several medical clinics in the area and is a member of the Pasumalai church. And the final Ponnaiya was a converted, self-identifying Christian and Pasumalai teacher in the same school where his father once worked as an office servant. For months after I arrived in Pasumalai, I often became confused whenever people would drop the name "Ponnaiya" at the Meenakshi coffee bar, the main bus stand or behind the Pasumalai Church. "Wait! Which Ponnaiya?" I often found myself asking in ethnographic frustration. Often enough, all this 'Ponnaiya talk' was gossip about the second man, whose Ward Councilor status made him an important man to discuss. But, on other

occasions, I heard the title *Vāttiyār* (teacher) appended to the name “Ponnaiya”, immediately signaling my Christian friend by a process of elimination and because the very title *Vāttiyār* has historically Christian connotations in Pasumalai. Without using career-specific honorifics, caste titles or without my prodding for more information, I had no other way of figuring out the religious identity of the specific “Ponnaiya” under discussion at any given moment.

Is the Christian Name Not-a-Hindu-Name?

Aside from the de facto taboo against caste-indexing names, I believe that at least one other historically deep pattern in CSI Tamil naming emerges with another glance at my own categorization: the virtual absence of names that index non-Christian gods, goddesses, spirits, etc. For CSI Tamils, having such a name (like Murugan, Lakshmi or Subramaniam) signals unambiguous disloyalty to Christ; it serves as improper metonym for identification with the Christian community. Following this implicit rhetorical logic, common Tamil names from category one, like “Ponnaiya”, are minimally acceptable to CSI Tamils, I argue, only in that they *do not or do not necessarily* signal ‘non-Christian’ divinities. Along with the taboo on names that ‘caste’ the self this taboo becomes a Christian identity performance through a critical, habituated tactics of avoidance.

Yet, in a society where some village gods have dozens of euphemistic or metaphorical names drawing on quite ordinary Tamil words, what seems to an ignorant outsider like a ‘common’ or ‘secular’ name may actually index a specific god or goddess to the insider. This phenomenon appears to have generated some rare exceptions to the CSI Tamil naming rule just mentioned. For example, the apical couple in one Christian patriline, whose descendants now

live in Pasumalai, added an odd prefix *Kaṇ* (eye) to all their children's names. One of their now elderly daughters-in-law told me it is a shortened reference to a Tamil goddess named *Kaṇṇāttāl* once worshipped by her father-in-law, the convert Muttusami. This goddess name literally means "mother's eye," drawing on an honorific Tamil word for mother. Denotatively, though, it just seems like an affectionate Tamil term of endearment. Muttusami's post-baptism use of this goddess name as a prefix for his children's own baptismal names originates in his belief that this goddess had caused the sudden death of one of his earlier infant children as part of a larger curse on his family [perhaps for converting to Christianity?]. A relative then persuaded him to bestow the goddess' name to all his future children in order to appease 'her' wrath. Muttusami's religious imagination therefore yielded an entire generation of baptized CSI Tamils bearing a euphemistic reference to a village goddess attached to more common and less controversial names like Grace, Turai, and Amirtham.¹⁴

Similar to these semantically ambiguous goddess names are names of non-Christian deities that have religiously ambiguous denotations; even though everyone knows they are the names of specific divine incarnations (cf. Britto 1986: 352). A few Pasumalai Christians themselves have even born such names. An old Drawing Master at the Pasumalai High School and former pastorate committee member in Pasumalai bore the given name *Jekanātaṅ* throughout his life. This name is a Sanskrit compound, meaning literally 'Lord of the World', but is also the name of a specific incarnation of Vishnu worshipped at the famous Orissa temple at Jagannath.¹⁵ Another famous Tamil teacher during the late colonial period bore the name *Nātarājaṅ* which is a name for Siva, though it denotatively means 'the King of Dance.'¹⁶ Yet,

like *Jekanātan*, it is hard to imagine how Tamils could fail to interpret *Nātarājan* as a “Hindu” name.

The last two names play denotatively with metaphors of moral self-aggrandization so commonly found in many other names used by CSI Tamils, specifically the feudal idioms of Kingship and Lordship commonly used in reference to Christ all over the world. Perhaps this is why they could gain social acceptance among CSI Tamils.¹⁷ The presence of such names among CSI Tamils reflects, as MaryKutty has noted (1997: 84-85), that Tamil and Keralan Protestant churches (CSI) do not *require* a name change for baptism (a fact which several cases in Pasumalai also confirmed for me). His seemingly tendentious name, however, did not prevent *Jekanātan* from becoming a member of Pasumalai’s Pastorate Committee.¹⁸ *Nātarājan* and his siblings (who had converted as children), however, did face objection from some party in the church and successfully argued before the first Madurai CSI Bishop, the British missionary Leslie Newbiggin, that since westerners use “heathen” names such as “Victoria”, they should also be allowed to keep their “Hindu” birth names.¹⁹ Here we see the political manufacture of acceptability for “pre-baptismal” names whose connotation of “Hindu” identity is recognized as tendentious in the local Christian community. Converts with education and social connections in the mission period, like *Nātarājan*, and in the post-missionary CSI Madurai-Ramnad Diocese, like *Jekanātan*, can apparently thrive *despite* the inability of their personal names to signal clear “Christian” identity.

The presence of Tamil names like Ponnaiya among CSI Tamils belies any simplistic dichotomy between “Hindu” and “Christian” names. Upon his teen-age baptism, Ponnaiya *Vāttiār* apparently did not even feel the need to switch his birth name in order to make it more

blatantly, proudly and unambiguously “Christian” and to prevent being confused with several of his un-baptized neighbors. In fact, he is well accepted and connected in the Christian community of Pasumalai, having spent his whole life there as a boy, as a student and, now, as a teacher; so well connected and accepted that he was even able to arrange for his un-baptized mother’s burial in the Pasumalai cemetery during my field stay. While the use of common Tamil names like “Ponnaiya” is apparently socially acceptable for CSI Tamils; it is certainly not a *proud* performance of Christian identity, and not one very common among multi-generational elite CSI Tamil families predominant in Pasumalai. For some, these names may indeed have an odor of tendentiousness about them. Why would parents trying to appear orthodox, or converts themselves, choose ambiguous, common names such as *Māṇikkam*, *Pirabu*, and *Rājāṇāyakam*? One reason for the continued presence of such names, and a potential suspicion of those who bear or bestow them, will emerge in the final chapter.

The English Name as Christian Name

Despite the religious ambiguity of names used by some baptized CSI Tamils, I found a vague rhetorical pretense to a dichotomy of “Hindu” vs. “Christian” names. The rhetorical construction of a sharp “Hindu-Christian” appellative dichotomy among Madurai area CSI Tamils may have begun with AMM missionaries themselves. It occurred in especially dramatic form in sensational mass baptisms during the early decades of the 20th century associated with an intense campaign of evangelism funded in large part by Charles S. Bates, a wealthy New England lawyer and businessman.

On Sunday, November 25th, 1934, 133 “Harijans” [Dalits] representing 33 individual family groups received a communal baptism in Kallankudi village, Devakkottai taluk, in what is now called Sivagangai District.¹⁹ Each individual is listed in a table with two columns marked “Hindu name” and “Christian name” and designed for consumption by American Board officials. Of the 135 individuals, 64 received names found in categories 1 or 2 such as *Tankamaṇi* (golden jewel) and *Cellammāḷ* (wealthy mother). 53 people received names akin to category 3 names above such as *Ñānamuttu* (pearl of wisdom) or *Ācīrvātam* (blessing). Thirteen received English Bible names such as Solomon, John, and Peter. And one Tamil nickname for Parvati was given as a “Christian name”, perhaps because it denotes “superior gem” while also serving as a nickname for Siva’s wife.²⁰ That half of these “Christian” names are similar to those from category 1 and 2 reveals that the AMM missionaries conferring these names that day accepted them as sufficiently “Christian”, despite their use, even today, by Hindus in Tamil Nadu.

One important effect of these mass orchestrated name changes is that they replaced many names which are signs of stigmatized social status. Although, the “Harijan converts” in 1934 did not, by any means, immediately escape their “depressed” social status, their name change acted, in part, as a re-narration of self using rhetorically uplifting appellations, some being clear metonyms of a broader Tamil Christian community. These new names also erased any negative connotations that might indicate a low caste status or a pre-baptismal “Hindu” identity. A male *Karuppan* (the black one) became *Mācilāmaṇi* (Jewel without Fault). A female *Karuppī* (the black one) became *Maṇṇmaṇi* (lit. superior gem or ‘mica’). A female *Kāli* (the goddess of destruction known as Durga in North India) became *Ponṇammāḷ* (the golden mother). 22 of the

135 individuals listed had names meaning ‘the black one.’ Others bore morally neutral appellations (perhaps the names of lineage deities, goddesses) and, a few others, the names of prominent regional deities in southern Tamil Nadu. Overall, their new “Christian” names also exhibited a pronounced Sanskritization (59 of 135 names have Sanskrit roots) and a shift in tone from self-deprecating or neutral to uniformly self-aggrandizing. Though it was the ‘custom’ for such mass converts to receive their “Christian” names from the missionary,²¹ it is not difficult to imagine how their dramatically hyperbolic and uplifting tone might have been attractive to baptismal candidates from some of the most consistently exploited and vilified caste communities in Tamil Nadu. Their new “Christian” names re-cast(e) them as metonyms of an unambiguously positive moral domain.

Ten years prior to this controversial mass baptism, however, among the upwardly mobile, highly educated class of elite AMM Christian teachers in Pasumalai, a very different appellative situation prevailed. Out of 40 Christian teaching staff working in Pasumalai schools in 1924, nearly 50% (19) had foreign language derived names as part of their personal names (categories 4-7), eleven of these being English Bible names.²² This contrasts strongly with only 13 out of 135, or a mere 10%, of “Harijans” who received English or Bible names at the missionary led Kallankudi mass baptism ten years later.

During my partial census of the Christian community in Pasumalai in 1998, I collected many names of Pasumalai residents, primarily so I could network quickly within the community. Out of roughly 250 Christian names gathered, I identified 120 individuals or 48% with either Bible, missionary or other English names (Categories 4-7) as their baptismal name; including 25 individuals with English Bible names. This suggests a similar proportion of these names to that

found amidst the 1924 Pasumalai teaching staff. This contemporary sample, however, also includes semi-educated, working class Pasumalai Christians practicing diverse occupations other than those dependent on advanced literacy and education (teaching and clerical work).

In the CSI Tamil communities that have developed in and around the former mission compounds of the AMM, like Pasumalai, the use of English has had a long history and rhetorical force; even for residents not even remotely fluent in English. Proximity to English-language use itself has enabled semi-educated individuals to acquire oral fragments of elite identity making less familiar to their rural peers. This may be why I noticed a relative scarcity of heavily Sanskritized names found in category three among the younger generation of Pasumalai youth, where, instead, I constantly encountered English and Bible names like Solomon, David, Sweetie, Allwyn, Victor, Pretty, and Kingsley, names formed from English religious terms like Mercy, and names formed from English translations of common Tamil names like Jasmine.²⁴

One plausible explanation for the predominance of English language names, even extra-biblical ones, is the broadly held assumption by Tamil speakers that any English name is “Christian,”²⁵ regardless of its etymology.²⁶ For example, my landlord’s younger brother, Jeparaj, expressed his disgust that Tamil cinema writers are destroying an image of Christian Tamils as honest, upright people by giving their movie villains Christian names like “Peter” and “Robert.”²⁷ Like several others I interviewed, he seems to assume that the category of “Christian” names includes not only Bible names but also *any English* language name (Robert). The presence of *extra-biblical* English names in the houses of both the Pasumalai Pastor and a famous local preacher signaled to me that even those most concerned with an orthodox performance of Christian identity in public see most English names as sufficient for a

“Christian.” Yet, clearly, AMM missionaries who presided over the 1934 mass baptism saw Tamil names as sufficiently “Christian,” as do many CSI Tamil parents who give similar names to their children even today. English names and other Bible names, however, have a greater rhetorical force in signaling clear Christian identity. This yields important consequences in the governmental sphere of identity certificates and welfare assistance (see Ch. 10).

Christian Names that Attach

Among those names that instantly index Christian identity are those disproportionately encountered in and around former mission compounds like Pasumalai: honorific names derived from those of foreign missionaries themselves (category 7).²⁷ These names act as memorials of thanks and respect to a social superior who has given very material aid in most cases: money for education, job opportunities, etc, but also less tangible ‘advice’, ‘wisdom’ and ‘Christian insight.’ But these names also reflect an intense *pācam*, or “attachment”, that often developed between Tamil Christians and the American missionaries with whom they interacted most often. The story of one Christian patriline illustrates this pattern and is well known to many in Pasumalai.

Mācilāmaṇi. ‘Jewel without Fault.’ Rev. J. S. *Mācilāmaṇi* became one of Pasumalai’s first resident Tamil Christian scholars, working with American missionary John Banninga as Vice Principal of Pasumalai’s ecumenical United Theological Seminary during the 1930s. This seminary was the symbolic heart of the late colonial AMM, the training ground for all its late colonial catechists, pastors, and Bible women. *Mācilāmaṇi*’s grandson described him to me as a brilliant Greek scholar, one of few Tamils who could administer and grade Greek language Bible

exams.²⁹ On page 31 of the Pasumalai Church's 75th anniversary Jubilee souvenir, V. Jeyaraj describes him as the author of many famous scholarly books on religion, including fictional Tamil Christian dramas. Just as interesting as these accomplishments is that he named one of his sons, M. S. Washburn, after the American missionary, George Washburn (see Ch. 2), who transformed Pasumalai into a colonial hotbed of higher education and who had hired his grandfather, *Mācilāmaṇi*'s father, as a domestic servant. M.S. Washburn, in turn, named two of his own sons after American missionaries contemporary to him: John Banninga and Bryan Stoffer. One of these sons, Rev. Banninga Washburn, claimed he is named after John Banninga because of his grandfather's close working relationship with this famous American missionary at the Pasumalai seminary. He also claimed to me he has taken the honorific patron name first used by his own father, "Washburn," and transformed it into a strictly patrilineal surname, having passed it along to his own eldest son.³⁰

The Moral Economy of Christian Names

Although English, Bible or missionary names clearly mark out CSI Tamils as embodied metonyms of a Christian whole, few Pasumalai Christians blindly accept such a performance of identity as a description of inner moral purity. After all, parents are the ones who bestow names and arrange for infant baptisms in which they are given. Naming the self is a *minimally* strategic habituated verbal performance (with the exception of tactically revealing and concealing specific name; see Ch. 10 for more on this topic). Some CSI Tamils appear, nevertheless, to expect a person to live up to the implicit metonymic argument of any names assumed clearly to be "Christian." I also found that Tamil speakers who lack deep experience with Westerners

generally assume that an English or Bible name, especially one associated with a “white face”, signals a practitioner of Christianity.

However, my friend Priya (daughter of the Meenakshi coffee bar owner mentioned in Chapter 3) revealed to me how familiarity with Christians themselves often shatters such naive assumptions. After the 1998 Pasumalai church’s “family festival” had ended and I had recovered from my obligatory afternoon nap, I wandered the hundred or so feet from Dora Agam to the Meenakshi coffee bar to imbibe my habitual afternoon milk coffee(s). Suddenly, Priya, her older sister and another girl ran into the tea stall from Priya’s nearby tiled-roof home. While Priya and her sister are daughters of a self-identifying Hindu father, the third girl was a born Christian. They chatted busily amongst themselves for a while, until they noticed me sitting quietly on one of the coffee bar’s rough-hewn stone benches. Suddenly, Priya approached me and asked innocently if I was Christian, since she knew my name was “James.” Then her Christian girlfriend interjected that of course I was a Christian; my ancestors had brought Christianity here to Pasumalai. Ironically, the *un-baptized* Priya’s query insinuated a more educated skepticism than her baptized girlfriend’s dismissive rejoinder. Although Priya’s polite doubt that a Bible name “James” necessarily signifies Christian identity, her doubt was quite gentle compared to the scathing remarks of one traveling evangelist who preached in Pasumalai on Sunday morning, November 16, 1997.

Standing at the laymen’s pulpit, *ūliyakkārar* Chris Asirvadam cried out that morning on the necessity of living as Christ, not just participating in Christian rituals, ceremonies, etc. At one point, he specifically attacked the assumption that a blatantly Christian name necessarily indexes a ‘Christ-like’ person. After citing Acts 11: 26 in order to remind the audience that the

identity tag “Christian” was originally an *identity of attribution* bestowed by “non-Christians” and not a title chosen by Christians themselves, he launched into a distinctly evangelical deconstruction,

[In English] Not because I am having a Christian name, I am Christian. I would like to repeat it again. [Switching back to Tamil] Just because I have a Christian name does not mean I am a Christian. Do I reveal (*piratipali*) Jesus Christ?...Recently. Last week, on Saturday and Sunday evenings, we had an evangelical camp next to Vilupuram. I had gone there to give messages on both days. At the camp was the son of a fingerprint expert. I asked him a whole lot of questions. His father is a person who can identify murderers or robbers by taking photos of their finger prints. So I asked him,

‘Do you know who took the case of John David the murderer?’³⁰

‘Yes. My dad did.’

I asked him if he would tell me about it. At first he refused to talk about it. Then he said,

‘Older Brother, [Switching to English] That was a professional work [meaning “job”]. [Switching back to Tamil] No first time murderer could have murdered like he did. You know, when doctors operate they say things like, ‘We have to “operate” right here. We have to cut open this much. We have to fix this.’ He cuts people into pieces just like that...If you saw the “photos”, you would be shocked.’

Who? John David. Christian in name...Who is his father? A Doctor. Who is his mother? A Doctor. I was horribly fascinated. So I went to the fingerprint expert and asked, ‘Son, by investigating this daring murder you’ve caused the Christian community to bow its head in shame. Is that really proper/beautiful (*laṭcaṇam*)?’...[Posing a question for members of the congregation to ask themselves] My dear friends, does Jesus Christ reveal (*piratipali*) himself in my life or is only ugliness (*avalaṭcaṇam*) revealed? Look any day now in the newspapers. Whether it’s murder, prostitution or robbery there’s a Christian name there. There is no such thing as a Christian name. “Christ” is a name. Does Jesus Christ reveal himself in my life? Do I reveal the Lord in my life?³¹

First, Chris tries to disempower the facile metonymical function of the “Christian” name, its ability to index authentic Christian identity with a wider Christian community, arguing that only Christ-like ethical purity, only the metaphorical argument constituted by one’s behavior,

can persuasively argue Christian identity. And he does this near the end of this passage again in a clever juxtaposition of Tamil syntactical forms: He rejects what is a compound phrase in Tamil, “Christian name”, a phrase which literally makes the categories of “Christ” and “name” syntactically contiguous as internal to one metonymic domain. Instead, he argues that “Christ is a name,” syntactically separating the two categories and their respective domains (although Tamil speakers do not use the verb “to be” in statements of equivalence). The syntax of the latter phrase therefore rhetorically protects Christ’s status as metaphor from collapse into metonym. For Chris and most evangelically persuaded CSI Tamils, Christ is the name of that which must be embodied paradigmatically, metaphorically, in one’s daily ethical life. Without the status of metaphor, the evangelical Christ has no power to stimulate ethical mimicry and humble dedication to a life on the “path.” Yet, Chris simultaneously assumes that the ethically impure who bear “Christian names” transfer their “impurity” metonymically (or contagiously?) to the entire Christian community. And he assumes this because the villain, “John David,” has two Bible names. So, while trying to preserve the construction of Christ as a unique name for the ultimate ethical paradigm, he ends up reinforcing the very metonymic logic he is trying to demote.

The source of this preacher’s Jeremiad is the moral ambiguity of even the most obviously “Christian” names used by CSI Tamils (categories 5-7); a negative quality requiring direct ethical effort to counteract. For those like Chris, resting on the ‘metonymic laurels’ of a Bible name is morally impoverished. And, as a corollary, the ambiguity of common Tamil names, like Ponnaiya, as metaphors of ethical purity may also have a negative moral quality.

But, for those who bestow English, missionary or Bible names on their children, such an appellative foregrounding of a proud, unambiguous “Christian” identity stands inversely proportionate to the implicit and total appellative masking of their caste identities and their virtual elision of names a wider public would instantly label “Hindu.” All these principles of negation and avoidance structure an identity front from which Christians from stigmatized castes have the most to gain in terms of sustaining their moral capital during the verbal performance of self-introduction. While the bearing of a “Christian name” may have a morally ambiguous status in the ethical rhetoric of certain CSI Tamils, at least that moral ambiguity is shared *equally* across caste lines. And this ancillary ambiguity has a *positive* quality for many. It is a critical identity mask that preserves their moral capital as members of a Christian symbolic class.

An Appellative Refusal to Caste the Christian Self

Beyond the generally careful exclusion of personal names indexing non-Christian divinity or caste communities, though, CSI Tamils in Pasumalai share a strategic naming practice that the passive ascription of their personal names at baptism excludes: they generally avoid the active use of caste titles.³² This is a practice that dates at least to the late colonial period in the AMM, if not earlier.³³ Caste titles such as *Aiyar*, *Ceṭṭiyār*, *Naiṭu*, *Tēvar* and *Piḷḷai* are honorific words that encompass historically shifting, yet tacitly allied, caste and subcaste groups who claim similar social standing and cultural affinity. For example, in Pasumalai, the most prominent caste title in use today is “*Tēvar*”, now used by three different broad caste communities ancestral to Tamil Nadu’s southern districts. It literally means “Lord” or “God” and derives from the Sanskrit *Tēvaṅ* (ironically a word also used by CSI Tamils to refer to God).

During my research in Pasumalai, I often attended local Pramalai Kallar (PK) life cycle functions and collected many printed invitations for these events. Quite often, elder PK men in each lineal group had the title “*Tēvar*” appended to their person names. *Nāṭar* is an important caste name which today generally functions as an honorific title. It was systematically promoted during a 19th century caste movement by a virtually untouchable community formerly known by the derogatory caste name: “Shanar” (cf. Hardgrave 1969). Honorific caste titles appear appended to the given names on retail shop signs or on other private establishments, such as schools, even today in Madurai, Sivakasi, and elsewhere in southern Tamil Nadu. Despite this outing of caste identity in the public inscription of owners’ names, I never heard of, nor saw any, contemporary CSI Tamils appending a caste title to their given names on a store sign, on their house entrances, in printed church literature or in public speeches. Since it is primarily members of caste communities with a proud self-image, and little stigma to fear, who add these caste titles, public suppression of them by Christians is designed to prevent the *loss* of moral capital within a Christian communities like Pasumalai that remain rhetorically committed to a historical taboo on public caste identity performance (see Chapter 7). While Christians in CSI communities like Pasumalai make a subtle performative statement in any public suppression of traditional caste titles such as *Nāṭar*, *Tēvar* and *Piḷḷai*, for Pasumalai’s Christian majority, who are from highly stigmatized caste communities, there is far less temptation to append a caste title which few would consider “honorable.”

Aside from caste titles, though, CSI Tamils do project professional honorifics that index their middle class identity, specifically their levels of accumulated knowledge capital. The title *Vāṭṭiyār* (teacher) has been the most common and vaunted honorific title in Pasumalai history.

Appending this title, or its modern equivalent *Ācariyar*, to the personal name of a teacher is an honorific verbal performance still audible today throughout Tamil Nadu. This title also serves as an effective appellative substitute for caste titles like the one PK themselves use: “Devar.” And, even Pasumalai PK employ this title when discussing local Christian teachers. For example, Mutturaj’s older brother and Pecciyamma’s aunt both used it to describe local Christian teachers in interviews with me (see quotes in Ch. 2). For people like Ponnaiya *Vāttiyār* and other teachers who have stigmatized caste heritages as “untouchables,” the verbal use of the title *Vāttiyār* by local PK and by local Christians from non-untouchable castes elegantly confirms their own successful transition from a life defined primarily by a burdensome caste stigma to a life defined by an upwardly mobilizing class identity. Like all identity masks, these elite occupational titles deflect attention from other identities, momentarily fronting class as most relevant and worthy of defining one’s relative social prestige. Like those PK who worked the farmland of untouchable teachers or who washed their dishes in late colonial Pasumalai, those today who call local Pasumalai Christian teachers by the title *Vāttiyār* symbolically aid the masking of any stigmatized caste identities.

In the next section, I explore another critical mode of Christian identity performance that is deeply habituated and, like most general patterns I found in naming in Pasumalai, shares the broader theme of performing the “Christian” self through forms of avoidance and negation.

The Naked Foreheads of Pasumalai

In late January 1999, Tamil Nadu’s then Chief Minister, M. *Karuṇāṇiti*, was reported in the Tamil and English medium press condemning the common forehead marking known as a

poṭṭu as counter to the ideals of his party, the Dravidian Progress Association (DMK). He was responding to recent reports of a *poṭṭu* placed on a photo of 'Father Periyar', atheist founder of the DMK's mother party, the Dravidian Association (DK), and also to a recent encounter he had had with a DMK youth leader bearing a *poṭṭu* marking on his forehead.³⁴ The young man in question, Adisankar, was a DMK district youth wing leader who had unwittingly worn a *poṭṭu* when he showed up at a wedding in Villupuram attended by the Chief Minister. In a February 1999 interview with *Tamilan Express*, Adisankar explained that relatives had placed the *poṭṭu* on his forehead earlier that day when he arrived for a ritual *kirakapiravēcam* (house dedication) ceremony at his nephew's new home. He was in such tense anticipation of *Karuṇāṇiti*'s visit later that day that he had forgotten all about the *poṭṭu* on his forehead before going to meet him.³⁵ But *Karuṇāṇiti* apparently noticed it and found that it contradicted the DMK's *atheist* habitus of self-performance. Ultra-orthodox *Hindu Muṇṇaṇi* (front) leader, Ramgopalan, immediately attacked the Chief Minister for insulting Hinduism indirectly, claiming that the *poṭṭu* is a proud Hindu practice. If *Karuṇāṇiti*'s January 1999 statements were an honest reflection of his own dispositions, he is not alone in his desire to keep *poṭṭu* markings off of a naked forehead. Early on in my rapprochement with CSI Tamils, I learned that both they and Pentecostal Tamils also avoid placing auspicious *poṭṭu* markings on their foreheads.³⁶

Various colored substances adorning the foreheads of people walking by often catch the attention of foreign visitors to Tamil Nadu. Tamil women from all castes often place a *poṭṭu* on their forehead between the eyebrows, using either vermilion powder or new designer, stick-on

poṭṭu. Although women place this marking both as a cosmetic decoration and as a sign of auspicious femininity, the vermilion *poṭṭu* marking has a much wider gender-free usage as an auspicious substance in many domains of Tamil society. The other two substances commonly seen on Tamil foreheads are *vipūti* (the white ash of burnt cow dung) and an expensive paste made of *cantaṇam* (sandalwood) tree bark. In this section I will briefly background the common use of auspicious substances as forehead markers and then explain how and why a broadly shared CSI Tamil habitus forbids these substances access to a ‘Christian’ forehead.

Sacred ash appears in manifold acts of worship before gods and goddesses and before the subjects of Tamil life cycle rituals. In Tamil *tīpārāṭaṇai* (worship with camphor flame), for example, a Saivite Brahmin priest or much less formal village priest will wave a metal plate with a small camphor flame in front of the god statue three times in a circular, clockwise motion. He will then extend the plate before each worshipper who touches the flame first and then their forehead (leaving no mark). The worshipper will then quickly place some small paise coins onto the plate as an offering, dab their fingers into the sacred ash lying there, and smear it quickly on their forehead, either as a dot, small bar or in three horizontal stripes known as *paṭṭai*. Sacred ash appears deeply tied to Saivite religious practices. And most Tamils would also comfortably gloss the smearing of *vipūti* on the forehead as a Hindu custom.³⁷

But, in Pasumalai, I also had the chance to see sacred ash regularly used in PK life cycle rituals, where it also transferred the blessings of elders to the ritual subject. For example, in two Pasumalai PK weddings I witnessed in March 1999, relatives worshipped the bride and groom at their respective homes before they processed separately through Pasumalai to the wedding site in

Krishnapuram. Several elder relatives waved a camphor flame seen in temples in front of the ritual subject before wiping some sacred ash onto their foreheads. Secondly, at most Hindu weddings I attended in Pasumalai and Madurai, there was some sort of a receiving line after the ceremony had ended in which relatives and adult friends paid their respects to the couple. As each guest approaches the newlywed couple, the bride and groom both bend down and touch their feet and then their foreheads in a submissive gesture of worshipping the guest's feet. Then, the honored guest takes sacred ash from a tray and wipes it on the forehead of both the bride and groom before handing them their gift. For many Hindu Tamils, then, sacred ash transfers the blessings not only of the gods but also of social elders directly onto their foreheads.³⁹ Christian Tamils (regardless of denomination) do not use sacred ash in their religious or life cycle functions, shunning it as a substance metonymic of Hindu worship. From early on, AMM missionaries also saw it as a sign of "adherence" to "idolatry."⁴⁰

On September 13, 1998 I witnessed, for the first time, the presence of the third forehead marking substance, sandalwood paste, by itself, at a function sponsored by Pasumalai's CSI church. The experience threatened to undercut my hasty assumption that CSI Tamils rejected it, along with sacred ash and the vermilion *poṭṭu*, as Hindu. Or did it? After the regular Sunday service at Pasumalai church, I followed the pastor, some choir boys, three pastorate committee members, a local DMK ward secretary (and church member) and a few church elders on a walk to Arangasalai, site of Pasumalai's annual passion play, to witness the dedication of a new hand-pump, "bore well."

According to a local DMK (Tamil Nadu's ruling party in 1999) ward secretary, "they" had built the new Rs. 35,000, 220ft bore well with half government, half private funds. About

fifty feet across the scraggly, dry scrub brush from the new well, under the shade of a nearby tree, were a bench and two chairs placed there for the pastor and some old men from the church. There was also a metal plate on the table with a pile of large grained sugar and a small dish of sandalwood paste. As soon as the laborers had attached the pump set firmly, they performed the first test. And, then, the ward secretary tied an orange ribbon from the pump handle to the main assembly. But, still, no one had so much as looked at the sandalwood paste, let alone dabbed their fingers gingerly into its creamy yellow surface. I wondered silently what it was doing there at all, if everyone was just going to ignore it.

With the work on the pump finally done, Rev. Gnanapirakasam, the old men and the choir boys gathered around it in a semicircular formation, whereupon everyone sang a church song followed by a Bible verse read by Jeevatanni, the church secretary, and then followed by another prayer from the Pastor. After passing around some caramel sweets, the pastor cut the ribbon and a lungi-clad coolie worker performed the manual labor of pumping the first water. After another short prayer, suddenly, the lonely metal tray bearing sandalwood paste and large grained sugar began to make its way around the crowd. I, however, was one of the few who actually took any sandalwood paste, smearing it lightly on my Adam's apple as I had seen other Tamils do at life cycle events. By then, I already knew that Christians did not put sandalwood (or red, vermilion powder) on their foreheads, but, its very presence that morning made me wonder if, perhaps, they put it on their throats instead, as I had already seen Hindus do in other contexts. I glanced around anxiously but saw no perturbed looks and heard no verbal objections from any one. Most of them had completely ignored the sandalwood paste and, instead, taken some sugar grains to pop in their mouths. Interested that no one present had taken my lead, I

quickly asked one of the pastorate committee members standing there to explain why. Moses said that while Christians do not smear sandalwood paste on their forehead because it is a Hindu custom, they actually do sometimes smear it on their throat at major functions like this.⁴⁰ While I never found out who exactly brought the sandalwood paste that morning, its mere presence clearly raised no objection from the Pastor or from anyone else, even during its perfunctory distribution. From that day onwards I began to see sandalwood paste, at least, not as a taboo substance *per se*, but rather as a substance which should never make its way onto Christian foreheads; a rather subtle performance of distinction.

I noticed sandalwood and vermilion present at the entrance to two out of four CSI engagement ceremonies, two out of five CSI wedding receptions, one of two Christian coming of age ceremonies, and one of two Christian ear-piercings I documented during my Pasumalai fieldwork (7 out of 15 life cycle rituals organized by Christians). Of these seven ritual events, five had the attendance of a substantial portion of Hindu relatives revealing split families and, in a few cases, inter-religious marriages. At the seven rituals where I saw these two forehead substances made available to guests, I occasionally noticed individuals (whose Christian identity was already known to me) take sandalwood paste and then rub it around on their fingers without applying it to their forehead or neck. For example, at the public coming of age ceremony held at the Pasumalai Model School for a girl born to a Christian father and Hindu mother, a CSI pastor invited to help conduct the event approached the ceremonial *pantal* (thatched awning) erected outside the school's entrance and greeted the girl's father. The father promptly extended a dish of sandalwood paste resting on the customary metal tray. The pastor then dipped the fingers of his right hand in it and rubbed it around without spreading any on his neck or forehead as the

girl's maternal relatives (Hindus) later did. And at a 1999 engagement ceremony for a Pasumalai choirboy in his mother's natal town, a young girl, relative of the fiancé, passed around the dish of sandalwood paste for everyone to take. Some just dipped their fingers in, but many smeared it on their throats (more than I had ever seen in a Pasumalai function). A few young adults smeared it on their foreheads as well. Two of the groom's Pasumalai friends stood in a corner of the verandah as the sandalwood paste made its way around, mocking the gesture of its application on the forehead and laughing quietly to themselves about it. Only once, at an ear-piercing for a Pasumalai Christian boy, did I see a Pasumalai Christian adult, the paternal uncle of the ritual subject, smear sandalwood paste on his forehead and neck contrary to the tacit CSI Tamil taboo on forehead markings.

The only deliberately "Christian" incorporation of sandalwood paste I witnessed in a CSI Tamil function had nothing to do with foreheads at all. In June 1999, the Pasumalai pastor led a short prayer to begin the house dedication function for one of his own relatives/caste peers in the rapidly vanishing, fallow rice fields of Pasumalai. While holding a small dish of sandalwood paste in both hands, he led a short prayer of blessing and consecration for his relative's new home, then, he climbed the front steps and drew a small cross to the left of the doorway with the sandalwood paste he had just blessed. With this pastoral use of sandalwood as a blessing substance, in addition to my constant sightings of sandalwood at various Christian life cycle functions, I felt convinced that some CSI Tamils do not consider sandalwood paste *itself* a Hindu substance.

Nine months earlier, however, at the well dedication ceremony led by the same pastor, I had had no idea why substances like sandalwood and vermilion never find their way onto CSI

Tamil foreheads. Moses hadn't really given me a specific reason. But, on Saturday, November 28, 1998 I received one explanation in a humiliating episode similar to Adisankar's sharp chastisement by the Chief Minister. That afternoon I entered the home of a local girl who had come of age in a family headed by a Christian father and a Hindu mother. As I did, though, one of the girl's maternal relatives thrust forward a metal plate bearing dishes of vermilion and sandalwood paste. Out of respect I smeared some of each paste on my forehead hastily and soon forgot all about it as I began to position myself inside Adisayam's two room home to photograph his daughter's ceremonial garlanding.

Leaving their house afterwards, I headed for the church to see what the choirboys were doing, because Saturday evening was the usual night for choir practice. That evening, however, when I walked into the church I saw the usual choirboys and other young Pasumalai musicians packing up their instruments. As I approached, one choirboy said "hello" and instantly commented on the dots of sandalwood and vermilion on my forehead. I quickly explained that I had just come from a Hindu function. Without chastising me, he simply switched topics and told me that there was a convention going on, a gospel meeting. The entire weekend was filled with "Spirit-Filled Gospel Meetings" featuring Protestant evangelists with some former connection to Pasumalai. I picked up a pamphlet and realized that I had stupidly missed a major religious event.

Feeling like a sloppy ethnographer, I exited the church through the back and passed by the open church vestry. As I did, though, I suddenly felt the pastor's gaze upon me. And, like Adisangar would a few months later, I forgot all about the colored substances smeared on my

forehead and, foolishly, stepped inside the tiny, cramped vestry to greet Pasumalai's Christian *talaivar* (leader).

I quickly folded my hands and said "*Vaṇakkam* [Tamil word for "hello"], *Aiyā!*" to both he and the guest evangelist sitting there in the dim glow of a "tube light." The moment of reckoning came quickly. Rev. Gnanapirakasam immediately asked me why I had smeared the substances on my forehead. "You're not Hindu," he declared in an authoritative tone. I replied that I had just come from a Hindu function and I had put the marks there out of respect to the hosts who had offered the substances to me. In a few seconds of verbal performance, we had both used the word "Hindu", the whole (religion), to index one of its alleged parts (substances thought to be representative of it). Yet, that metonymic relationship was exactly what was still confusing me. Suddenly, it was apparent that the same creamy yellow paste that had been passed around a few months earlier at the well dedication had now become a metonym of "Hinduism" on my forehead.

The pastor then said to me, "Well, to show respect we just say '*Vaṇakkam*'," quickly making the formal cupped-hand gesture of "*Vaṇakkam*" Tamils perform in formal moments of greeting. "Do you know what those symbols mean?," he asked me curtly. I hesitated lest I compound my foolishness with a hasty confession of ignorance. I asked him to tell me, "Only you can tell me, *Aiyya*" using a polite Tamil verbal tactic that both evades the question without admitting one's inability to answer it and simultaneously praises the wisdom and authority of the questioner. Not giving in to my evasion, though, the pastor repeatedly asked me the same question in even angrier tones of voice until I finally confessed that I simply didn't know. Apparently assuming I had decorated my forehead in ignorance, he then proceeded to explain

that the marks represent the *Sivakkaṅ* (third eye of Siva), or what Tamils more commonly call the *nerrikkāṅ* (the forehead eye), but, unfortunately, I could not remember much else from his explanation in the emotional aftermath of what he argued next. “Your name is James, right?” he asked rhetorically in Tamil, the guest preacher continuing to remain silent next to him. “Your mother and father had you baptized, right?” Yes. Then, he continued, since I was baptized a Christian, I have already had the sign of the cross put on my forehead with holy water, indicating the blood of Jesus’ sacrifice. In literary terms, I already bear an invisible metonym of Christianity on my forehead. So, he explained, I don’t need any other contradictory *aṭaiyālam* (symbol) on my *nerri* (forehead). In fact, he continued to argue stridently, it is forbidden to put any other religious *aṭaiyālam* on my forehead. “Don’t do it again!” he shouted, ending his chastisement in a curt, authoritarian use of English.

The critical performative issue revealed by my reprimand in the Pasumalai vestry was the importance of preserving a naked forehead for those CSI Tamils interested in displaying an authentic Christian identity. The Pastor had also reminded me that evening that the reason for preserving a naked forehead from alternate symbols is that they would symbolically challenge the one symbol Christian Tamils (CSI and Roman Catholic) do mark on their forehead: the invisible sign of the cross. Instead of a *nerrikkāṅ* (forehead eye) there is a *nerričiluvai* (forehead cross). As with general patterns of CSI Tamil naming, this is also distinction by careful avoidance; the careful avoidance of misleading visual icons.

Among Christian Tamils, CSI and Catholic alike, social elders (pastors, relatives, friends, VIPS) re-draw this invisible sign again and again on “Christian” foreheads at all their major life

cycle functions. In fact, a few weeks before my reprimand, I had commented on this habit in my field notes.⁴¹ It was October 31, 1998 and my granite engraver friend, Ebi, had invited me at the last minute to a small prayer meeting to celebrate his youngest sister's coming of age. His other two sisters escorted the thin, gangly Jennifer into the front living room where the meeting took place. She listened silently to the prayers and homilies of four Diocesan pastors, dressed in a brand new red silk sari with glistening gold embroidery and adorned with a modest rose flower garland around her neck. When the prayers had ended, her sisters pushed Jennifer's shy, nervous frame forward to receive blessings from each of the four cassock-clad men. Each of the pastors laid their hands on her head while interceding prayerfully, quietly and briefly on her behalf. At the end of their prayers, each quickly made the sign of the cross on the girl's forehead and stepped aside. Afterwards, relatives and social elders came up individually to "bless" her with the same invisible marking. This customary blessing happened very quickly while most of the guests began talking and socializing. In other words, they did not pay the slightest attention to Jennifer's intimate reception of Christianity's central metonym on her forehead. Perhaps this indicates in itself the relative unimportance of even this invisible icon compared to the ethical rhetoric that had preceded its drawing.

That week, in my field notes, I noted for the first time my recognition that this brief ritual performance--intercessory prayer followed by the drawing of an invisible cross on the subject's forehead--also represents a CSI Tamil substitute for the majoritarian Hindu custom of wiping sacred ash on the forehead of life cycle ritual subjects (mentioned above). For CSI Tamils, re-drawing this invisible icon becomes a powerful performed metaphor for firmly treading along the Christian *vali* or "path." The concomitant exclusion of other symbols from one's forehead

only reinforces that stubborn performance of strict identity commitment to a distinctly Christian self; although this performative distinction is found mainly in life cycle celebrations themselves.

Even more interesting than the stubborn preservation of a naked forehead is the fact that many CSI Tamils seem to take their ritual of blessing everywhere they are invited as ritual guests, even across the communal boundary. In June 1999, for example, a prominent Pasumalai business entrepreneur, a Hindu Konar whose family had migrated to Pasumalai twenty years earlier and had become involved in microwave tower erection, held an extravagant wedding at one of the most expensive rental venues in Madurai district, the Raja Muttiah Icai Manram in Madurai. As I was noting which of many Pasumalai Christians (neighbors and many others) had shown up for Sundaram's wedding that morning, I noticed for the first time, how CSI Tamils will even carry their ritual of blessing into a life cycle ritual domain not structured at all by their own religious habitus. As dozens of Pasumalai Christians, neighbors, friends, admirers and detractors alike, joined the receiving line on stage, I noticed a rapid display of code switching. After one of the guests had their feet touched by Sundaram and his wife and then smeared sacred ash on the newlywed couple's foreheads, one of Pasumalai's more powerful and wealthy pastorate committee members, Samuel, stepped forward with his own wife. Sundaram and he come from the same caste and are close family friends. Sundaram, therefore, knows quite well Samuel's proud Christian identity and did not bow down to touch his feet as he had just done seconds earlier. Instead, he let Samuel place one hand on his forehead and the other hand on his wife's forehead while he led a short intercessory prayer only they could have possibly heard amidst the din of the crowd exiting the enormous stadium-seated hall for a truly "first class"

vegetarian feast. After his prayer, Samuel quickly raised his right thumb and marked both their foreheads with the sign of the cross, presented his gift and moved off stage.

It is perhaps a little more than ironic that a CSI Tamil might carry such a performed blessing and its key symbol, the invisibly drawn cross, across the communal boundary, when its placement at baptism signals the claim of a forehead as exclusively “Christian” symbolic space. Though orthodox performance of CSI Tamil identity demands no “contradictory” *aṭaiyāḷankaḷ* (symbols) on the forehead, CSI Tamils like Samuel do not necessarily shy away from adding their one sacred forehead symbol onto Hindu foreheads adorned with vermilion, sandalwood and/or sacred ash. Such a willingness to mix the cross with other symbols on the “un-baptized” forehead may insinuate, at a deeper symbolic level, a habitual evangelical desire to include, to embrace and to invite the “non-Christian” whenever the communal boundary becomes present in social life.

Clearly, the marking of a person’s forehead with the invisible sign of the cross is a context-free performance of blessing performed by CSI Tamils. And, conversely, preserving the naked forehead is also a context-free performance appearing even when one is a guest at Hindu life cycle rituals and even when one is a guest to a Christian function where auspicious substances are often presented as a perfunctory act of hospitality or, perhaps, as a cultural concession to Hindu guests.

The naked forehead of CSI Tamils is, I believe, a habitualized, simultaneous subversion of majoritarian Hindu norms at two levels. The invisibility of the finger-drawn cross undercuts the majoritarian value placed on ‘visible’ markings of respect and blessing from social elders and from the gods. At another level, gestures like taking sandalwood but deliberately *not* placing

it on the forehead physically alienates majoritarian substances without necessarily banishing them. This, in turn, serves as a performed bodily metaphor of a delicate alienation from a majoritarian culture often seen as Hindu, without necessarily expunging that culture completely.

Yet, in foregoing the placement of these substances on their foreheads, CSI Tamils do not necessarily perform a distinctive “Christian” identity to outsiders, only to themselves and to those who have prior knowledge of their Christian self-identification. Certainly, no one walking past a CSI Tamil on the road could determine his or her religious identity just by seeing a naked forehead.⁴³ This is because unobservant Hindu, atheist, as well as Muslim Tamils, also forgo auspicious forehead markings.⁴⁴ It is possible that, during the colonial period, when forehead caste markings were once commonly used by members of elite Tamil speaking castes, the naked foreheads of AMM Christians, who even today do not wear distinctive forms of dress like Tamil Muslims, would have more clearly signaled “Christian” identity to strangers.⁴⁵ Today, however, naked foreheads are an ambiguous performance of self mostly aimed at maintaining a proper image of Christian distinction in the eyes of one’s immediate Christian peers. This distinguishes this visual performative domain from the aural domain of personal names whose principles of negation do sometimes communicate Christian identity instantly to the non-Christian listener.

Receiving Blessings From the Hindu Other

While, for many CSI Tamils, substances like sandalwood and vermilion become undeniably Hindu on the forehead, there is another category of substance, one with its own direct connections to performances of religious identity that also raises a similar dilemma: Will I be

polite or totally refuse a gift of food I see as a metonym of Hinduism? Tamils know one such culinary gift as *paṭaiyal* (food offering placed on a banana leaf in front of a deity; cf. Fuller 1992: 74-75).

In Tamil society it is considered very polite to initially refuse food and drink offered by a host multiple times, often with elaborate histrionics and impassioned protests, and then, quietly, to select a food or beverage or to accept whatever is brought out by the host. Total refusal, however, can be seen as insulting, unless one has (or invents) a very good reason (illness, etc.). To the extent that this habitus of politesse structures the reception of *non-food* substances given by a host, like vermilion or sandalwood paste offered by a host at the entrance to a life cycle function, refusing to take forehead marking substances, when deliberately offered them (which they often weren't at Christian functions I saw), could also be interpreted as rude. This is why, no doubt, when hosts remember to offer forehead marking substances to each arriving guest, even CSI Tamils, like the pastor mentioned earlier, feel unable to dismiss it with a "No, thanks" or a "*Vaṇakkam*" as the Pasumalai Pastor claimed was local *Christian* practice. Instead, some find themselves reluctantly dipping their fingers and awkwardly moving on. This compromise action functions as a minimum acceptance of the host's gift without any overt offense implied in direct refusal. This is the one social context, however, where maintaining a naked forehead for the sake of performing one's Christian identity is probably at most risk of undercutting a performance of adequate Tamil politesse as a guest (like I and Adisankar had done, despite our prior identity commitments).⁴⁵ And it also raises a wider dilemma for CSI Tamil identity performance which, in such moments, pushes individuals close to the boundary of rude refusal at

the same moment they may imagine themselves uneasily close to crossing the Hindu-Christian boundary in the ‘wrong’ direction.

Most Pasumalai Christians appear to have exempted themselves, for the most part, from directly entering, and from having to enter, Brahminical and non-Brahminical “Hindu” devotional spaces where sacred ash and *paṭaiyal* might be found, though they may live right next to these spaces and though their sights and sounds are periodically unavoidable, even in Pasumalai’s public spaces. For those who shun Hindu temples, receiving *paṭaiyal* in a Hindu temple ritual, therefore, is a non-issue. “Hindu culture” is, for many CSI Tamils in Pasumalai, an *untouchable* culture. In the words of one Christian teacher, Jeparani (see Ch. 10), who is from an old AMM matrilineage, “If I went into a Hindu temple now, all I would get is a foul stench (*nāṟṟam*).” She made this remark not as a gratuitous aspersion. She is not that tactless. It was her way of describing to me how foreign “Hinduism” is to her family’s Christian traditions *and* to explain the experience of one of her relatives who had married a Hindu man and became awkwardly obligated to attend temple worship with him. She used the word *nāṟṟam* to refer to the pungent odor of burnt camphor and incense usually encountered inside heavily used temple spaces. But this word really connotes the odor of “filth.” For example, it is the very same word Tamils use to describe the raw smell emanating from open sewage canals after a strong rain. And, for CSI Tamils like Jeparani, “Hindu worship” is a foul act of *Christian* impurity. But, importantly, “it” is something whose details most mission compound Christians like her know virtually nothing about by virtue of their careful Christian habitus of avoidance.

In January 1998, a Pasumalai Christian friend offered to take me to a nearby village to see the local celebrations of the famous Tamil harvest festival known by the name of the rice

porridge prepared on the first of its two days, *Ponkal*. He repeatedly declared his pride in this Tamil harvest festival, held annually at the beginning of the lunar month of Tai (beginning mid-January). Naively, I had expected his full participation in what we were about to witness. As we drove southward along National Highway 7 toward Tirumangalam (a town where the AMM set up a compound in 1842) in the cool morning air, I saw a celebration going on at a roadside temple and asked him to pull over. There, local villagers had decorated a small Vinayagar (also known as Ganesh) statue with a thick layer of sandalwood paste and fragrant flower garlands while jaggery sweetened *ponkal* (rice porridge) boiled away on a nearby wood fire. We watched the worship and the blessing of the *ponkal* from a distance, as I took photographs in the early morning light. When the priest came around to distribute the searing sugar *ponkal* on banana leaves, I eagerly took some but had to cajole my friend, a choirboy, repeatedly before he finally took some with visibly pained reluctance. An hour later, we witnessed another *ponkal* blessing at the village to which we had originally been heading. My friend's connection there was to a local converted Pentecostal Christian who is a close family friend. With the 'impressionable convert' standing along with us, though, my choir boy friend, stubbornly refused any *ponkal* in front of *that* Vinayagar statue, while I happily ate some more by myself. Marking a religious identity boundary by refusing *paṭaiyal* blessed in non-Christian worship, I learned that morning, is, like maintaining a naked forehead, clearly *most* important when other Christians are watching. Yet publicly refusing such blessed food from strangers, from the *unknown* 'Hindu other', is one thing. Any rudeness perceived will probably not haunt the Christian refuter afterwards. But can

Pasumalai Christians so easily refuse the ‘blessed’ food from their Hindu neighbors? After all, these are Hindus they might see every day of their lives.

There are several neighborhoods in contemporary Pasumalai where CSI Tamils live as a radical minority among many practicing Hindus. Even within a small community like Pasumalai, slight differences in residential location deeply affect a Christian’s experience with certain boundary-making Christian identity performances, performances that set a morally elitist politics of religious non-commensality on a collision course with the counter pulls of a more diffusely Tamil politesse. Having developed rapport with several individuals then living, or who had once lived, in these neighborhoods, I made sure in interviews with them to ask how they dealt with traditional offerings of *paṭaiyal* on major Hindu holidays and with temple tax collections for neighborhood Hindu temple festivals. Witnessing such fleeting transactions myself, however, was an experience that eluded me.

In Hindu dominated urban neighborhoods, on holidays such as Deepavali and Pongal, the sharing of *paṭaiyal* blessed in domestic worship is common. It is polite, neighborly behavior. But many CSI Tamils imagine *paṭaiyal* as the untouchable product of “idol worship,” a veritable metonym, perhaps, of Satan. But, as with Brahmin refusals of food from individuals they regard as ‘low caste’, this Christian moral elitism contradicts broader notions of politesse I witnessed in Madurai in which one does not refuse offerings of food or drink from the home of an equal or a social superior.

For CSI Tamils, though, the *only* food-based purity concern related to their Christian identity is the consumption of Hindu *paṭaiyal*, ironically considered by their Hindu peers to be the purest possible food. As one woman named Sarah on Teachers’ Line put it, “They give it.

So we take it. But some people know that we don't take it...If they know we don't take it, they won't give it to us." At first glance, she seems to contradict herself here. Does she take it or not? But she is really indexing two different scenarios that I myself witnessed, specifically in the offering of auspicious substances for marking the forehead. In the first scenario, the giver doesn't understand the Christian moral imagination and the Christian therefore allows forms of conventional politesse to override an elitist refusal. In the second scenario, the giver knows the Christian habitus of avoiding Hindu substances, such as *paṭaiyal*, based on prior experience; the performance of politesse and an elitist evangelical moral imagination avoid an awkward performative crash.

Ponnaiya *Vāttiyār*, whose name I discussed earlier, narrated to me his experiences with holiday gifts of *paṭaiyal* while living in a rented apartment in PK dominated Krishnapuram,

Ponnaiya: Whenever they celebrated a Hindu holiday they gave to us. When I was in that house, I was the only Christian there. Everybody else, that whole area is nothing but Hindus. They used to give tons to our house on Deepavali. We got snacks brought to us from *every* single home. There would be tons! I never knew what to do. In the exact same way I had to give [something] to them at Christmas. I had to give [something] to everybody who had given to us. But they ate [it]. We don't eat [it]. The reason why is the idea that they worshipped a god and then gave it to us...

JR: Will it harm you?

Ponnaiya: It's not that it will harm us. What I mean is, you shouldn't knowingly do something wrong, right? We know that what we're going to do is wrong. It's wrong to do something you *know* is wrong, right?

JR: What's wrong?

Ponnaiya: What's wrong is that they worship a god as a Hindu, place the *paṭaiyal* and worship the god and then give it to us. Then there's this feeling of something wrong, right?? So, it seems wrong to us. If you don't know, you may eat it, take it and put it in your mouth

JR: But do they know if you don't eat it?

Ponnaiya: They don't know... What's important to them is "We gave it." It's satisfying. It satisfies their hearts.⁴⁶

Ponnaiya narrates the clash of conventions of politesse with an elitist religious identity held by some CSI Tamils. He solves the dilemma by only *receiving* the *paṭaiyal*, visually satisfying the Hindu giver. But, by not ingesting it, he preserves his own sense of moral distinction from the metonyms of non-Christian religious domains. But his explanation actually placed stress not on the polluting quality of the *paṭaiyal* in a physical sense but rather on its function as a metaphor for evil. Thus, elsewhere in our discussion, he even argued that young Christian children could eat *paṭaiyal*, since they don't know it's wrong to do so. It is the quality of the Christian's ethical intent that is critical for him. Another reason why Ponnaiya may not have been willing to refuse the *paṭaiyal* visibly in front of his specific givers is that he, a Christian who happens to be a Paraiyar, was living in Krishnapuram, whose PK majority generally consider themselves superior in caste rank to him and who might be especially irritated at any public performance that attempted to invert that hierarchy through a refusal of food. At the same time, these gifts can also be seen as potential acts of respect in an idiom of class; because Ponnaiya was a local high school teacher and some of the children of his Hindu neighbors may also have been his students.

Ultimately, the domains of Christian identity performance I have discussed in this chapter fall on a continuum of agency from relatively non-agentive (verbalizing an ascribed personal name) to more strategic and sometimes anxiety inducing performances of Christian identity (maintaining a naked forehead for the invisible sign of the cross and refusing food offerings blessed in Hindu worship). They also share different audiences and contexts. While personal

names may communicate Christian identity to more than a local Christian audience, naked foreheads do not. And while both these domains of identity performance can communicate Christian identity to a Christian audience because they are portable, context-independent performances, refusal of Hindu offerings is generally a private affair invisible to one's Christian neighbors. Marking out a Christian self in such a domain becomes dependent on the relative habituation or persuasiveness of rhetoric concerning the ethics of avoiding the signs, the metonyms, of the non-Christian other.

I do not want to suggest that these performative domains alone form the core of CSI Tamil identity performance, despite their status as common expressions of a wider habitus. Instead, it is important to note that these dimensions of identity performance center on forms of avoidance or what a person does *not* do. In this sense, these performances imply a similar logic of ethical restraint lauded in the rhetoric of Sunday jeremiads. And so, we can see how avoidance is also a performance of Bourdieuvian distinction; one that, in Pasumalai, preserves moral capital especially in front of one's Christian peers. These forms of habitualized avoidance also emerge regardless of a person's caste identity, signaling nothing specific about this charged domain of identity. These performances support the concealing function of an older mission compound identity front by rooting Christian identity in deeply habituated critique and avoidance of public caste-identity making.

In the next chapter, I explore how performances of authentic Christian identity, as the 'good' or 'true' Christian, become interwoven with the performance of middle class identity reflecting the perduring structural influence of the mission compound identity front in the post-colonial mission compound.

Chapter 6 Giving the Life Cycle a “Christian” Color

On Saturday, October 31, 1998, shortly after sunset, my granite engraving artist friend, Ebi (short for Ebenezer), caught me on the main road in Pasumalai and told me to grab my camera and come by his house around 6:00pm. There was going to be a function, he calmly urged, that I would be interested in seeing. After arriving at his home, I soon realized that the “function” was a *stōttira jepakkūttam* (prayer meeting of thanksgiving) modified to celebrate the coming of age for Ebi’s painfully shy sister, Jennifer. My hasty assumption about the Pasumalai Christian community’s collective avoidance of pre-marital life cycle rituals, so popular among many Tamil caste communities, lay thoroughly shattered by evening’s end. And, just two weeks later, in November, another middle class, well-educated Christian family held a small “function” that simultaneously celebrated their daughter’s first birthday while also piercing her ears.

Were these two families exceptions to, or suggestive of, an urban CSI Tamil mainstream? How do other Pasumalai Christians view these two common life cycle ceremonies? What do debates about their propriety or impropriety reveal to us about the continuing habitual performance of an old mission compound identity front? To answer these questions I will explore the contested status of ear piercings and female comings of age and then the urban CSI Tamil wedding cycle as three key performative spaces in the CSI Tamil life cycle (see Appendix C).¹

Piercings of Pasumalai’s Christian Ears

On the evening of November 17, 1998, a pastorate committee member named Moses informed me of an imminent local function he termed an “ear piercing.” And, like Jennifer’s

coming of age, it was one without any formal printed invitations; a feature so common to stagings of ear piercings and comings of age by local Hindu PK during my research. As I arrived at the middle class Jonespuram home of two retired Pasumalai teachers, I noticed clean, colorful blankets lay on the smooth cement floor of the living room. Slightly in front of the far wall stood a small table, covered in cloth and bearing a hexagonal white frosted cake, the kind of expensive Western confection sold at the famous “British Bakeries” in downtown Madurai. Behind the table, propped up on top of a plastic shelf holding the family’s “tape” (tape player) was a maroon felt board with shiny, gold, ten inch high lettering that spelled out the following greeting, “Happy Birthday Priscilla.” A closer look at the cake revealed the same message inscribed on top of the white frosting. Was this a birthday party or an ear piercing?

Somewhat confused, I quickly placed my tape recorder next to the cake as the cassock-clad Pasumalai Pastor entered the room and prepared to begin the “function.” Standing behind the table, Bible in hand, he asked everyone to sing one of many popular Tamil Christian *kīrttaṇai* (religious song) “You Will Be Praised Forever”, indexing to me that this was a *jepakkūṭṭam*.² And following the usual prayer meeting format, the pastor then gave a short ‘message’ preceded by a quick reading of the relevant scripture passages. Once finished with the readings, he welcomed the audience to the “happy occasion” and stated that the purpose of their gathering was, “to thank the Lord for Priscilla’s first year of life.” Citing Psalm 128 first in Tamil, and then again in English, he described children as a blessing, the “fruit of God.” He remarked in English, and then again in Tamil, that every parent [i.e. Christian parents] has the *silākkiam* (CSI Tamil word for god-given privilege or opportunity) and responsibility to raise their children properly as “*uṭanūḷiyakkārarka!*” (which he quickly glossed in English as “co-laborers”) with

God. But, Matthew 18:10,³ he quickly added, contains a warning for parents who might underestimate young children and their capabilities, “We should not forget that every day, every hour, every year in this child’s life is very, very precious.” To further explain his point, he used the analogy of the failing student,

If a child “fails” first grade, do we get very concerned? We don’t get very concerned. Right? Right. If a child “fails” the eighth grade, we get a little concerned. If it “fails” the “12th” grade? Then we say “Hey! What are you doing!?” But how much “failing” are we really talking about? Just one year. First grade is just one year. Eighth grade is just one year. 12th grade is just one year. At the time it seems like a huge year. It seems like 365 days. When they’re studying in the first grade it doesn’t seem like 365 days. This is all because our goal [inclusive ‘we’], our thought is always [switching to a hurried, anxious tone of voice] ‘What’s next?’ ‘What’s next?’ We’re constantly thinking about development [back to normal preaching tone] But both are a “loss of one year. Each failure causes loss of one year.” We never think like that. Why? Because it’s just a little child. That’s why the Bible says don’t think lowly of little children. Every minute every hour of their lives is [tripping over the following archaic word] priceless.

And so he argued that because even young children can learn a lot, “our lives must be established as an example.” Finally, using Luke 11: 9-13⁴ he reminded the parents to ask God for help as they raise their children, advising them to integrate a pietistic relationship with God into their ethics-centered child-rearing efforts.⁵

The pastor’s repeated English/Tamil language switching represents a common CSI Tamil preaching style but only when the pastor is prepared to attribute a vaunted educational level onto the majority of his audience. The implied normality of finishing 12th grade in his narrative even more subtly bespeaks his identification of the audience and Priscilla’s family as a *middle class* one (where college education is indeed now the norm). And although his verbal performance of anxiety over child development is also a universal bourgeois identity statement, he implies, controversially, that such a middle class parental anxiety over ethical behavior starts *too late* in Tamil society, tempting Tamil *Christian* parents to avoid the pro-

active child-rearing of their young children as unnecessary. To counter this cultural construction of the child, he paradoxically connects another stereotype of children as precocious linguists to Christ's warning [in Matthew 18] not to think lowly of little children. This exegesis weaves together cultural critique, a bourgeois view of the child as both precocious and "precious" and gospel narratives of status reversal to jumpstart the active Christianization of Priscilla by her parents. Glossing the function visually as a "birthday" celebration further indexes Priscilla's family as middle class by giving a rationalized, numerical beginning to a long, expensive process of investment in her development.

The pastor ended his verbal performance with a typically loquacious prayer in liturgical Tamil after which the audience repeated with him the central prayer used to close all similar prayer meetings. As soon as the prayer ended, the pastor quickly added, "The mother and father, both of you lift the child. After you've "cut" the "cake", you may make the *tuvāram* (hole)." Without further explanation, the pastor stepped aside to let the parents approach the table as female guests and relatives began to rain advice on the parents about how to cut the cake and how to hold the child.

Calmly enduring this flood of unsolicited advice, Priscilla's father cut the cake (clutching her hand as he did it) and fed her quickly before cutting the rest for distribution among the guests. After the eating had ended, he grabbed Priscilla and placed her on the lap of one her young male relatives. Quickly, a dense crowd coalesced around them. Priscilla's father leaned over to support his daughter as an elderly barber, sitting squat on the floor opposite the bewildered Priscilla, leaned in to pierce each ear and insert new studs. Unlike the ear piercings staged by PK in Pasumalai's various school buildings during my research, this barber smeared

no sandalwood paste on Priscilla's ears before piercing. A ritual oversight? Perhaps. Yet, there was a ceremonial metal plate with a coconut, a bunch of ripe *nāṭṭupaṅka!* (country bananas), *verrilai* (betel leaf) and its partner *bāṅku* (areca nut) revealing to the anthropologist, at least, the presence of a ritual prestation to the barber himself (supplemented later with a Rs. 100 cash payment).

Although a pastorate committee member, Moses, had introduced the function to me that evening as a *kātukuttu* (ear piercing), the actual phrase used on invitations to these events is *kātaṅi viḷā* ; a phrase referring to the ornaments placed in newly pierced ears: *kammal* or *tōṭu* (two kinds of studs). The Pasumalai pastor had used neither phrase, describing it first, in secular terms, as Priscilla's "completion of the first year" and then, veering toward the religious in his closing prayer, as a *tiruvēḷai* (holy moment). He made no mention of ears, studs or jewelry at all. Only after the prayer had ended, did he let slip a casual reference to the upcoming 'hole-making.' The pastor's rather euphemistic reference here to the act of ear piercing came well after his biblical remarks had ended, metaphorically marginalized the act itself from the rhetorical core of the function; he clearly was not interested in dignifying this portion of the "function" with a Christian veneer.

When I asked Priscilla's grandmother after the chicken biriyani feast had ended why she had held this event, she claimed that in her family they generally pierce the ears of daughters at the end of the first year. This confirmed for me that, despite the "happy birthday" sign, she also regarded the function as an ear piercing. She quickly claimed that 'many' Christians do this. But do they?, I wondered to myself. For both girls *and* boys? If they did, why hadn't I heard of a single function like this any earlier? Months later, her son-in-law, Tankamani, claimed to me

that he hadn't really wanted to hold the function at all, but, his parents-in-law, being "villagers", wanted very much to celebrate their grand-daughter's first year in this manner. Here the English word "village" appears to index a performance of identity thought not suitably middle class, becoming or decent. Tankamani would have preferred to erase this function entirely from his daughter's life cycle whereas the mother-in-law preferred an ear piercing rhetorically re-cast as a Christianized, middle class, "birthday party."

The work of class in this "function" to veil or to mask any connotations of "villageness" or 'family' traditions, which may be related to caste traditions, becomes visible not only in the pastor's explicit verbal performance, but also in its very staging. Priscilla's family fed around 40-50 guests (friends and relatives) a lovely chicken biriyani feast with ample vegetables and cooling, but expensive, *tayircātam* (curd rice). Chicken biriyani is one of the most expensive dishes (per head) one can prepare in India, because of its many ingredients and the expensive rice used in it. But, despite the expensive meal, they only spent around Rs. 3,500 on the function, far less than the Rs.10-20,000 average expenses local PK outlaid for similar events during my stay. This was because they only had 40-50 people eat at their home that evening, compared to the hundreds who normally attended PK ear piercings in Pasumalai's school halls during my stay. A high per capita expenditure at such feasts is a subtle way of indexing vaunted middle class status.

This small attendance, in turn, indexes what did *not* take place that evening. There was no collection of *moy* (cash prestations) from affinal kin or guests (common among PK and many other non-Brahmin castes). There was no book in which to record these donations. There was

no vessel in which to place them. In fact, they hadn't even printed invitations with the names of important relatives and guests, thereby obligating them to give *moy*.⁶

Concurrent with this subtle performance of middle class financial privilege was the quiet masking of the family's caste identity the entire evening. Nothing in the ritual details cast any light on the family's stigmatic past. Though I was not very confident about the caste identities of many Pasumalai people there on that evening, I knew at the time that this family carefully masks its links to a stigmatized Tamil community, most likely the Paraiyar community. The knowledge acquired during the ensuing 12 months, and a second look at my photographs and field notes after returning to the U.S. revealed that a Vellalar Christian, members of a powerful local Maravar Christian family, as well as the wife of an equally potent Naidu pastorate committee member were not only guests that evening but also dined there with the other guests on the same cement floor. Three cooks, Priscilla's great grandmother and another female relative helped out with cooking and serving, meaning that non-Dalit Christians ate food prepared, in part, by members of one of Tamil society's untouchable castes who, in Pasumalai, naturally prefer to project themselves as primarily middle class Christians.

Five months later, I received a formal written invitation to a Christian ear piercing for a young, pre-adolescent boy. During my research, David was the son a carpenter working for low wages and residing in a one room, tile-roofed home in the old missionary servant colony of Arangasalai (see Map 2). On its cover is a shiny gold-colored imprint depicting an ear piercing ritual. Everyone in the drawing has a *poṭṭu* on their forehead, revealing the presence of a stock design ready to appeal to a majority Hindu consumer market. Opening the invitation reveals a list of *tāymāmaṇmār* (mothers' brothers) on the left, a feature often highly elaborated by

Pasumalai's PK community as a symbolic means of obligating *moy*. A cross heads the inside page just above the Bible verse, "May the Lord God of Israel be Praised (Luke 1: [68])"⁷ Below this comes the Tamil year and month, day and time for the function, followed by the naming of the ritual subject though a bilateral reckoning of all four grandparents. The final section describes the location, "our home residing in Pasumalai, Hudson Bungalow", the very same bungalow where the much lauded American missionary Charles Heinemann lived during the 1940s and 1950s (southernmost of bungalows indicated on Map 2; now the Pasumalai Girls' High School hostel). David's grandfather and grandmother both worked for Heineman, part time, as domestic servants. The remaining two pages list David's paternal uncles (including his grandfather's brothers' male children).

The night before the event, in line with more broad working class culture in Madurai, the family enjoyed a large box-speaker stereo system they had rented the day before, blasting Tamil cinema music at 600 watts all over Arangasai and the old mission compound. This highly unorthodox celebration of popular culture was entirely absent from Priscilla's "function" (and from the functions of most middle class Pasumalai Christians I attended). Interestingly enough, as I returned to their home the following morning, the sounds of lilting Christian *kirttanai* now blared from the speaker set. I also noticed a cross in silver outline at the apex of the banana-laden decorative arch customarily placed over the front entrance to a Tamil home celebrating a *vaipavam* (celebration or ceremony). Since these old servant homes do not feature the compound walls of Priscilla's grandparents' more vaunted *maccu* house (see Ch. 2), this entrance was more symbolic than functional. A *pantal* (flat, thatched awning) stood over the dirt yard formed by three small, one room, slanted tile roof homes occupied by two of David's paternal uncles and

his widowed grandmother. As at Priscilla's birthday party, David too had a sign honoring his name, this time in white cut-out English letters on a maroon felt background. Yet it mentioned nothing of a "birthday." Present here, but absent at Priscilla's function, were the traditional Tamil substances of welcome: sandalwood, vermilion, and sugar grains on a metal plate. Betel leaf and areca nut were also waiting for guests as a parting gift after they donated *moy*. With the formal invitation, *pantal*, stereo system, and arch, David's family had displayed the common components of Tamil "functions", and, in doing so, failed to connote any distinctly elite or middle class identity in the context of a Pasumalai Christian center.

David's white-collar uncle, a Diocesan office clerk, rode up on a brand new Kawasaki motorcycle and quickly became involved in moving the ritual along. David's extended family assembled along with his mother and her brothers, and walked to the Pasumalai cemetery where they held a brief prayer of thanks and praise to the memory of David's grandfather. Though deceased for four years, the family had still not been able to save aside money to erect a tombstone, a glaring sign of its struggling economic condition. David's father is a second generation Christian who married a baptized Hindu woman from his own caste. There, in the searing heat, the middle class uncle led a prayer as David's maternal uncles (all Hindu) stood by in silence, bewildered by Christian rituals they appeared not to understand.

After this homage, they returned to the *pantal* where a Hindu *tāymāmaṇ* (mother's brother) presented David's parents with ritual plates bearing fruits, flowers, sugar and other auspicious substances, including ritual payment to the barber, as well as a plate of bananas surrounding the studs to be used in the ear piercing itself. Some of the wives of David's *tāymāmaṇmār* (mother's brothers) knelt down and bowed their head to the ground in front of the

plates in a gesture of respect; I didn't notice any of the Christian family members doing this, however.

David's wealthier uncle left on his new motorcycle to escort the Pasumalai Pastor from the parsonage. Upon arrival, the Pastor greeted family members and sat for a while as the family readied itself and continued waiting for other important guests to arrive. The pastor began with a CSI *kīrttaṇai* entitled "Praise Jesus", according to the format of a *stōttira jēpakkūṭṭam* and then introduced Psalm 127-128, also mentioned at Priscilla's function, to ground his message. Following along while scribbling jottings,⁸ I suddenly heard the pastor engage in an elaborate justification of the ritual itself; something he did not even attempt at Priscilla's birthday party. He stated that it is a "Tamil custom" to pierce children's ears to protect them from disease and evil spirits. But as far as he and Psalms 127-8 are concerned, young children are to be thought of primarily as blessings from God that should simply be celebrated. Apparently cognizant by this point that half of the audience/family he was addressing was Hindu (David's maternal kin), he had switched into a more patronizing verbal performance. He seemed to demote popular folk beliefs that often motivate this ceremony and which he apparently assumed some in the audience might be invoking in their minds. He continued by stating that he gathered that the reason the family was having such a celebration of God's blessings *for a boy*, David, was that the family had no daughters. But, since David was not an infant, but rather a young, pre-teen boy, celebrating the blessing of his *recent birth* was an implausible motive. From multiple angles, the pastor directly implied his middle class Christian contempt for the most common motives for piercing boys' ears, motives middle class evangelical Christians might consider superstitious.⁹

He then went on to narrate the story of a fellow pastor who, on returning to his natal village, was shocked at the ragged clothes and poverty of his fellow ‘villagers’ (caste peers) and who realized that, if his family had not kept their “Christian *vicuvācam* (faith)” he too would be living like this. This narrative of how loyalty to Christ leads to class mobility was at one level only meant to remind everyone in the family to be thankful for God’s *ācīrvātam* (blessing). Yet, the implication that Christian faith somehow yields class mobility might be read as a way of motivating a family he sees as ‘unorthodox’ (e.g. the inter-religious marriage of David’s father) with the promise of worldly success if their faith remains true. The haunting irony of this theme is that he presented it not to Priscilla’s middle class family, which had the most reason to feel they had indeed enjoyed the material “blessings” of faith performed in the mission compound (after two teaching careers in the Pasumalai Christian schools), but rather to a struggling working class family, one of the poorest in Pasumalai’s socially ostracized Chakkiliyar Christian community (despite the well-off, Kawasaki-driving uncle who works as a clerk in a Diocesan institution). Furthermore, the pastor did not pepper any of his sentences with redundant English translations as is normally his style, implying even more strongly his attribution of a low class identity onto the family. There was also no talk of “precious children” needing careful “Christian parenting” that morning. After the pastor’s brief message and a brief prayer, David sat on the lap of his Hindu mother’s brother while the barber pierced both ears after rubbing sandalwood paste on them. After this, the Pastor made the sign of the cross on his forehead and blessed the boy in traditional CSI Tamil convention. Quickly, guests began to eat the inexpensive vegetarian fare, the pastor sat alone at a table inside one of the small homes where I was soon cajoled into joining him as the second VIP. He ate quickly, displaying little of the

collegial fellowship I had seen at Priscilla's function (in which he ate along with her grandfather and other church members; all but one from his own Paraiyar community) and exercised the privilege of VIP status by promptly leaving.

Virtually no one in the middle class Christian community of Pasumalai came that morning, nor were they on the list of invited guests either; this confirmed my growing suspicion that these descendants of the last missionary servants have tendentious relations, at best, with Pasumalai's Christian middle class. A few local Devars did attend, however, despite the stigmatized caste community from which David's family shares. The long list of guests featured mainly local politicians, businessmen and *periya ārka!* (big guys) from whom David's father clearly hoped to receive large amounts of *moy*, his own family not at all abundant in thriving middle class kin. Days after the ceremony had ended and the *moy* was counted, David's father confirmed this as a prime motive for the function, when he discouragingly reported that he had only received Rs. 20,000, instead of the Rs. 30,000 he had expected, because half of the 500 invited people to whom he had personally delivered invitations never came. Michael, who makes no more than Rs. 1,500 per month as a carpenter (he claimed Rs. 600 to me privately), spent nearly Rs. 10,000 on an outdoor *pantal*, stereo system, decorations and a simple vegetarian meal to feed 500 people. He therefore spent anywhere from 8-12 times his monthly income and about 3 times what Priscilla's much more educated and financially capable parents did. Ironically, the urban Tamil working class who sometimes stage these life cycle rituals to earn money have to spend more up front than their middle class counterparts spend in total for their non-income generating versions.

A Brief Glance at Female Christian Comings of Age

Many Tamil castes celebrate a girls' first menstruation with a ceremony known as *mañ-caḷ nīr ūṛṛavatu* (pouring of turmeric water) in which pollution is removed from the girl's body with a cooling turmeric water bath. In peasant Devar communities this is often followed by a complex *tiriṣṭi kaḷikkīratu* (removing the evil eye) at the girl's maturation. On the same day, or at a later date convenient to relatives and financially convenient to potentially large donors, families may stage a public "function" known as a *pūpunitanīrāṭṭuviḷā*, where the girl ceremonially ties her first sari as an 'adult' woman.¹⁰ I witnessed two Christian coming of age ceremonies in Pasumalai that, like the ear piercings just reviewed, also straddled the divide between middle class and working class Christian worlds. Most critically, they revealed the same division between income generating and non-income generating life cycle performances that, otherwise, *both* operated as Christian prayer meetings led by the cassock-clad local Pastor.

The Political Economy of Performing the "Good Christian" Life Cycle

Ear piercings and female comings of age receive no mention in the *CSI Book of Worship* (1968). And there are no special songs for "birthday parties", "ear piercings" or "comings of age" in the most recent edition of the *CSI Book of Hymns, Lyrics and Songs of New Life* (CSI 1980).¹¹ Unlike baptisms, weddings, confirmations and funerals, the core of a Christian life cycle habitus introduced by foreign missionaries, during my research, these functions transpired beyond church liturgy but not beyond the disciplining reach of a mission compound habitus of identity performance.

But what historic presence have these two performative domains really had in Pasumalai? Several older Pasumalai Christians claimed to me that ear piercings are a virtually new development in the Pasumalai community. Both a retired, octogenarian professor and a former office assistant argued independently that no ear piercing ceremonies happened during the late missionary period when they both worked at the Pasumalai Training School (1940s and 1950s). The retired office assistant, Devasahayam, went so far as to claim that the missionaries would never have “allowed them.” In contrast, some in Pasumalai have apparently always celebrated female coming of age prayer meetings (even in the late colonial period). But they have always been held as domestic prayer meetings, such as they one held for my friend Ebi’s sister, Jennifer (chapter opening).¹² The Pasumalai Pastor, who is not a Pasumalai native, argued that, while he had *never* encountered ear piercings among Christians he has ministered in the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese until he arrived in Pasumalai, perhaps up to 25% of Christians (CSI Tamils he knows from over 25 years in ministry in the Diocese) hold coming of age prayer meetings.¹³

On February 7, 1999, Devaraj’s son (see Ch. 3), held an ear piercing for his four year old daughter on the same grand scale as local PK ear piercings, collecting *moy* in the manner of Madurai’s manual laboring classes. Behind the church that Sunday morning, one of Pasumalai’s wealthier pastorate committee members and senior Diocesan teachers, a man in his late 40s named Samuel, claimed to me he had never once seen such a public ear piercing “function” held by a Pasumalai Christian. Normally, Samuel claimed, Christians who feel the need to celebrate this event will simply hold a prayer meeting at home (like Priscilla’s family did). And here he reveals his own implicit, middle class critique of such a grand, public ear piercing. For some, ear piercings, it seems, should be quiet, subdued and domestic, if celebrated at all.¹⁴

Even more extreme than Samuel's critique, though, was one I heard three days after David's ear piercing, while sitting in the living room where Jennifer had socially come of age. One of her brother Ebi's friends dared to claim hyperbolically to me that "Christians" (presumably CSI Tamils in Pasumalai/Madurai) don't celebrate ear piercings, by which he perhaps implied "good" or "true" Christians. And Ebi himself argued that it was only during the last five years that some Christians (like Priscilla's parents?) have started to hold ear piercings, quickly adding that they are always prayer meetings. I pressed Ebi to explain why most Christians generally don't seem to observe these two functions: Do Christians think they *shouldn't* be observed? He answered that "Christians" do not feel that it is *necessary* to hold "*caṭaṅkukaḷ*" (ceremonies). In doing so, he echoes what the retired octogenarian Professor told me was a standard missionary argument that the female coming of age was simply a "natural" event requiring no celebration at all. But I believe Ebi also implies a desire among educated middle class CSI Tamils in Pasumalai to be seen as liberated from the "obligatoriness" of these kinds of events; their non-performance thereby creating an image of distinction from the implicitly Hindu Tamil speaking masses.

One evening in August 1999, I spoke with a retired Christian schoolteacher and daughter of an AMM pastor named Cellamma about her family's attitude towards traditional pre-marital life cycle rituals. She said that because her father was a pastor, they did not celebrate any functions like ear piercings or comings of age. Her father's opinion was that these were *unnecessary* functions and that there should be something different about Christians, something separating them from the rest of the people. She noted that most Christians do celebrate one or both of these ceremonies, but that the very poor and the very orthodox do not. The very poor

simply cannot muster up the money to stage them.¹⁵ And, according to Chellamma's theory, those who can, may be looking for income from *moy*.

And the latter is one motive that several financially middle class Pasumalai Christians assigned to those who stage large scale ear piercings and comings of age. It is a common assumption among Pasumalai residents (PK and Christian) that local PK families, specifically, will stage an ear piercing or coming of age ceremony, in part, to earn a cash profit or to receive back in *moy* money given out to many relatives over the years.¹⁶ For example, Pecciyamma's own granddaughter had an ear piercing in which her father pressed hard for customary donations from affinal (maternal) kin, earning 2 lakhs in cash. The intense prestation strategies of their PK neighbors may be one reason why some middle class Pasumalai Christians look down upon the very staging of these common life cycle rituals as crude 'money-making events' and may be precisely why they function as a model less wealthy Pasumalai Christians have begun to imitate. This denigration of a lurking profit motive, especially, insinuates a wider Tamil performance of middle class economic status translated into a deliberately morally elitist *non-collection of moy* (cf. Priscilla's and Jennifer's families).

While some local middle class Christians feel comfortable celebrating ear piercings and comings of age as long as they transpire in the guise of a non-income generating domestic prayer meeting, those I spoke with often marked it out as Hindu or made sure I understood the difference between "Christian" vs. "Hindu" versions of these rituals. One Pasumalai pastor, working in another parish, claimed at least that ear piercings were part of "Tamil culture", and quickly added that there was nothing in the Bible about ear piercings. When I then asked if he thought it was wrong to celebrate them, he disagreed, but quickly added that "good Christians"

won't do it, explaining the customary income motive behind their staging. In this logic, though, middle class Christians able to do without such income from affinal kin and VIPs can more easily perform themselves as "the good Christian."

When I asked the son of a former missionary servant (a peer and close neighbor of David's family) about ear piercings in their family, he took it as an evaluation of their Christian identity, categorizing it as Hindu by indirection,

JR: Have you pierced the ears of children in your house?

Peter: [chuckling briefly] There's been nothing like that.

JR: When you were young--

Peter: [interrupting] Nothing like that. My father came here and changed from "Hindu" to "Christian" right when we were born. They baptized us in the church as soon as we were born and raised us according to the Christian religion.¹⁷

A few others I interviewed also, of their own accord, defined these functions, especially ear piercings, implicitly as "Hindu" by giving their Christian identity as the reason for *not* performing them. Whether this is always the reason for not celebrating them is a different matter. But most interviewees clearly did not want me to think they celebrated these functions at all or, if they did, only as an appropriate prayer meeting. The Lay Secretary of the local CSI Diocese acknowledged the veil of symbolic distinction many CSI Tamils feel obligated to drape over these rituals, "Ceremonies for ear piercing and coming of age?...um...even if they are celebrated according to Hindu custom they will give it a Christian coloring..."¹⁸

A few individuals who even confirmed that their families have celebrated comings of age for sisters or daughters quickly revealed in their choice of words a contempt for those who try to turn these into "grand," public functions. For example, one middle class Christian, in a

thoroughly vitriolic interview, remarked, “They [Christians] pierce girls’ ears. They don’t have an ear piercing like some wedding [said sarcastically], like the Hindus. We just go, pierce her ear, and put in the *kammal* [stud].”¹⁹ In regards to female comings of age, he said,

Vedanayakam: Christians don’t hold them. Today they’re doing it for money. It’s disgusting.

JR: Why don’t they hold them?

Vedanayakam: Our culture is like that. No one does it. We hold “only”...weddings...

JR: Do you think it’s not a good thing?

Vedanayakam: Yes. It’s just for money. “Christians” don’t hold them. It’s insulting. Holding an ear piercing ceremony. Ceremonies are disgusting. Getting all proud and saying, ‘My daughter has come of age, gimme so cash.’ These Kallars do it a lot. To earn money. If we mention it in public, it’s embarrassing, disgusting (his emphasis).²⁰

Contrary to Vedanayakam’s sweeping statement, though, some CSI Tamils in Pasumalai do celebrate female comings of age, but only as prayer meetings. And those with middle class levels of financial and knowledge capital tend to stage them in a middle class manner, out of public view, without the ritual ceremony performed by other Tamil communities, and emphasizing the “Christian coloring” provided by the verbal performances of one’s local pastor (and other pastors). Vedanayakam echoes the contempt for the pre-marital collection of *moy* as implicitly “non-Christian” behavior and even as “Kallar” behavior, the historically perduring, most frequently encountered, metonym of the “non-Christian” in Pasumalai.

This predominantly, middle class Christian rhetoric quietly, and indirectly, derogates working class Christians like David’s parents, for whom affinal ritual prestations may be a critical aid to household economies not aided by elite Christian patrons. This rhetoric of

avoidance emerges from the same habitus of deliberate avoidance discussed in Chapter 5 as critical to the maintenance of CSI Tamil moral capital in front of a middle class Christian peerage historically dominant in mission compound spaces. If collecting ritual prestations is poor “Christian” performance to a Pasumalai Christian center, it is a performance whose avoidance carefully preserves a Bourdieuvian distinction for the *middle class* Christian Tamil. Yet, some middle class CSI Tamils appear to mark out their *distinct* middle class Christian identity front even more stridently by the total non-observance of pre-marital life cycle rituals.

Whether total avoidance of the rituals themselves or staging them as non-income generating prayer meetings, however, these performances play on old class ruptures within the mission compound. In this performative arena, then, the mission compound identity front reveals itself as a perduring habitus that places specific strains on working class descendants of those who moved into colonial mission compound worlds. Unlike the bestowal of Bible names, the maintenance of a naked forehead and the refusal to eat *paṭaiyal*, pre-marital life cycle rituals are sometimes tied to grassroots economic strategies for transforming affinal kin networks into sources of long-term, informal credit. They have become major strategic sites of financial mobilization among Tamil society’s working class poor (not just PK). If staging them as income-generating events somehow becomes “working class,” then financially less privileged CSI Tamils find it harder to sustain critical forms of deliberate avoidance that sustain moral capital among their middle class Christian peers for whom “Christian” and “middle class” (or elite) performances of self have been deeply intertwined in mission compound spaces since the late colonial era (Chapter 2).

Regardless of this class division, no CSI Tamil pre-marital function I witnessed failed to include a common prayer meeting ritual, effectively masking or veiling caste-based rituals from ritual dominance, and the stigmatized identities indexed by them, from blatant projection.²¹ And, in the second half of this chapter, I will be exploring, in a contextualized case study, how the mission compound identity front also emerged in one middle class CSI Tamil wedding I witnessed. This is a life cycle transition where the masking of caste becomes a major, liturgically validated force for maintaining moral capital as Christian; it is also a performance especially meaningful among CSI Tamils from untouchable, or Dalit, castes.

The Wedding Missions of a Colonial Identity Front

“I am in love with a local girl since 8th standard, James, but her parents do not like my caste,” a 26-year-old Paraiyar Christian youth named Michael told me in English as we were waiting for a bus at the river-side Madurai bus stand in July, 1995. His love interest at the time was a Christian girl from the elite Vellalar community. Both Michael and his girlfriend were finishing post-graduate degrees and were still unemployed. Elopement was therefore quite a risky prospect. Despite the fact that he felt better educated and better poised to make a living than anyone in her own family [i.e. a potential male cross-cousin], a recent letter from her had crushed all his hopes. She claimed that her parents had recently found out about his caste background and were refusing to let her see him. He had asked her to leave her family, come away and marry him, but realized that evening with me that this was impossible.²²

“How will you marry her?” I asked him as sympathetically as I could.

“Oh, it will take years and years,” Michael said in knowing exasperation as we boarded a cross-town bus, leaving the topic at the bus stand behind us.

Engaging Christian Selves

Three years later, after Michael had located a successful software job in Vellore capitalizing on his hard won command of English, I was invited at the last minute by his younger brother to attend his engagement. The family had made very quick marital arrangements during the previous summer, the cinematic details of which I would only learn months later. And so, around 9: 00pm on the evening of October 5, 1998 I boarded a rented bus procured to ferry Michael’s friends and relatives to Vellore, a few hundred miles to the northeast of Madurai.

We rolled and lurched all night long towards the first of the three main functions in the CSI Tamil wedding cycle: 1) *niccayatārttam* (engagement ceremony), 2) a liturgical church *tirumaṇam* (wedding), and 3) a *varavēṛppu* (reception). *Niccayatārttam*, or *niccayārttam*,²³ is a word CSI Tamils use to gloss a pre-nuptial function where both families gather in prayer and song, the groom’s family formally asks for the bride, and they ‘confirm’ the privately agreed upon marital arrangements through a symbolic exchange of gold rings and/or flower garlands that intertwine both families, indexed in the bodies of bride and groom. Middle class CSI Tamils in Pasumalai generally staged this function during my research as a semi-public prayer meeting to which they invited pastors and close family members, followed by a “grand” feast. Poorer CSI Tamils, or those tight on credit, I learned, simply have a small prayer meeting at the bride’s home.²⁴ In Michael’s case, it was emotionally imperative for both families to hold the

engagement as an act of confirmation, especially when considering the distance, emotional and physical, between the two allying families.²⁵

Michael's family had rented out a function hall in Vellore as a resting place for their tired, sweaty busload of guests. There we camped all day long, ate lunch, napped, bathed and changed clothes in preparation for the evening engagement. Before boarding the bus to drive to the bride's natal home across town, Michael needed to change into brand new clothes, a common Tamil custom for any life cycle function. Before he donned his ceremonial garb, however, family, friends and a Madurai pastor who had helped mediate the alliance gathered informally for prayer. The pastor, who had up until then blended in to the crowd, quickly donned his black-belted, white *aniki* (cassock) in front of us while Michael bowed his head down in prayer, dressed very casually in a vibrantly colored "Titanic" T-shirt and dark blue jeans. Invoking the ancient, mystical belief that Christ is present when any group earnestly calls his name in prayer, the pastor gave thanks to God for the upcoming *kāriyam* (affair/event). In the middle of his prayer, though, he offered a praise narrative that hauntingly indexes what I would later learn was the barely believable hypergamy about to receive legitimation in a CSI *niccayatārttam*,

The event of marriage is nothing easy. Oh Lord! How many people yearn helplessly for it...As we think of all that, and, how, in such a wondrous manner, in such a short time, without any kind of obstacle, you made everything, every effort possible, and how you blessed every *pēccu* (oral agreement) in order to bring this precious affair to fulfillment. We praise you in thanks, *swāmi*. We now see so clearly how much you love us, how much you love dear Michael. This is a great miracle. This is a great symbol. This is a great blessing. This is a great example. This is a great moment in history...

Quickly shifting focus, the pastor thanked the Lord for the new business suit Michael would soon don for the occasion, incorporating these middle class symbols of financial success into an imagined blessing. Throughout this informal prayer, his grandparents, his father and a few other

friends and relatives quietly vocalized praise utterances like “*Stōttiram swāmi!*” (Praise you, oh master!) *Ēsu stōttiram!*” (Praise Jesus!), while the far less convicted uncle and anthropologist shot pictures of the event for posterity and research respectively. The praises became louder, building to crescendo I only heard in Pentecostal services or in prayer meetings held outside of CSI church buildings, as the pastor neared the end of his effusive prayer. The performative momentum of these prayerful utterances were meant to carry Michael into the ritual confirmation of what would soon be one of the more revolutionary marriages ever to transpire in a family descended from an untouchable AMM convert. Michael quickly changed into his brand new, black suit complete with decorative white handkerchief, black socks and immaculate, black dress shoes.

We arrived two hours late at the home of Michael’s future parents-in-law. While lyric-less Carnatic music pervaded the enormous canvas tent next to their home, Michael’s family climbed to the second floor of the bride’s home and began painstakingly arranging 21 separate metal plates of ritual prestations that would form the groom’s *paricam* (bridewealth) to the bride’s family. Though all the CSI Tamil *niccayatārtams* I witnessed, like Michael’s, were structured as prayer meetings (much like any other Christian life cycle event), these engagements all subsumed another ceremony (practiced among many non-Brahmin Tamil castes) where the family of the groom declares its identity, asks for the bride and then offers a *paricam* to the bride’s family.²⁶ Michael’s family did not actually give any cash that evening, an elision that may function as a middle class identity marker.²⁷ But the several thousand rupees expended by his father for plates of oranges, mangoes, country bananas, grapes, dates, nuts, candy, two

Bibles, and a silk sari for the bride to wear that evening constituted an elite, honorific presentation he felt was required to cement a marriage into a much wealthier family.

The ceremony began with a prayer around 7pm after the sun had finally set.²⁸ The following is a condensed outline of what I later realized was a *niccayatārttam* in the elite register of the *upper* middle class English-speaking CSI Tamil community. As at the life cycle ceremonies of well-connected CSI Tamils in Pasumalai, though, *multiple* cassock-clad pastors were present to officiate, dividing up the function's various verbal performances amongst themselves.²⁹ Two Vellore CSI pastors chosen by the bride's family and two Madurai CSI pastors chosen by Michael's father (and who journeyed with us from Madurai) sat on blue plastic chairs flanked on either side by empty white plastic chairs for Michael and his fiancé.

After we had sung an opening praise *kīrttaṇai*, the first pastor led an opening prayer poetically depicting the soon-to-arrive bridewealth with a metaphor that transformed it into a metonym of the conjoined couple itself, "Swami, we ask by the grace of the Lord Jesus that you bestow and bless with the touch of your wounded hand both the children and the bridewealth items brought here by this precious family for these children. Amen." Michael descended from the second story of the bride's house decked in an expensive sandalwood garland as female relatives brought the 21 bridewealth plates behind him.³⁰ After posing for photographs and video, his relatives laid the bridewealth on the stage while Michael sat down on the empty white chair to the right. With another *kīrttaṇai* sung, the second pastor formally asked the groom's family to introduce itself and give the *paricam* away, describing it as an "ancient Indian tradition." The bride's father verbally accepted the bridewealth plates without objection.³¹ The Madurai CSI pastor who mediated the hotel arrangement of this marriage then blessed the

bridewealth in a prayer in which the two new Bibles received special attention as metonyms of the bridewealth itself and as metaphors of the eternal *uṭanpaṭikkai* (covenant) of marriage,

Now we give thanks for the Bibles lain here as a symbol and witness to the confirmation of these precious children's' covenant. May you bless these Bibles that are going to be the light on their path. Furthermore, may you bless the fruits and all the other items they have brought. We pray through the precious savior Jesus Christ our Lord that however content we now appear looking at them, may we also see the same contentment, satisfaction, happiness and peace and all other things in every day of their married life. May you bless these precious items and the children who are the reason for them, Good Lord, Amen.

Sarah's relatives removed the bridewealth plates except for the two Bibles and the *mālaitaṭṭu* (flower garland plate). While Sarah changed into the silk *paricacēlai* (bridewealth sari) inside her home, the audience sang two more *kīrttaṇai*, largely to stall for time. After she arrived and took the second white chair, Michael presented her with a gold ring with his name upon it as the lead pastor blessed this action in English Christian rhetoric, depicting the ring as a metaphor for the "true ornament" of "inner virtue," the Holy Spirit.³² Then, the lead pastor blessed both the jasmine garlands from the bridewealth in more English allusions to Christian theology. Much of the audience, including Michael's mother, would not have understood these references beyond the fact that they transpired in an elite English register. Michael's mother then took one of the garlands and placed it over the bride's neck. The bride's father then took the other garland and placed it on Michael, metaphorically intertwining the two families and also beginning the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship.³³ After receiving the garlands, Michael's father gave the bride and groom each a Bible that they then exchanged at the lead pastor's request,³⁴

[in English] This is not a formality, but it is a reality that everyday you use this book, as Christians. As days go by, it will lead you and guide you and protect you. You know

what is meant by Bible? B-I-B-L-E. Behold! I Bring Life Eternal. That is what is Bible. Behold I bring life eternal. You are exchanging eternal life. Read it. Use it. I'm sure you'll find eternal life in it.

As if initiating the new Bibles themselves, the fourth pastor then read Genesis 24: 44-60 which, according to his own stated claim, is the 'traditional' bible reading at many CSI Tamil *niccayatārttams*.³⁵ It is a chapter in which Abraham *arranges* his son Isaac's marriage by sending a servant to find a woman from his father's natal clan. In this narrative, the servant also gives gifts to the woman's family, much like a bridewealth, in return for taking her away from her natal home. And just as Abraham's servant vowed to God that whichever woman offered to pour water for his camel at a specific well would be the woman he would bring back for Abraham's son, the pastor here reminded the couple to live a similar life in which they allowed themselves to be led by God, adding that miracles are not to be expected but are nevertheless the fruit of faith.³⁶ Not only does this transform the giving of bridewealth (common to many Tamil caste communities) into a "Christian" action, it also presents a uniquely Christian Tamil approach to arranging marriages. After a long English prayer from the lead pastor, Michael's engagement came to an end, as CSI prayer meetings generally do, with a collective recital of the 103rd Psalm.

An Elite CSI Tamil Wedding in Context³⁷

Whether the day after the engagement or months later, CSI Tamil weddings I witnessed generally took place in the mid morning (when *nalla nēram*, auspicious time, is also frequently found), often on auspicious days for weddings known as *mukūrttam*, though many middle class CSI Tamils who employ such astrological calculi will rarely admit it publicly, let alone write

such information on wedding invitations. Michael's wedding, however, took place mid-morning in the inauspicious month of *Mārkaḷi*.³⁸ Pasumalai has witnessed every kind of wedding available to Tamil Christians: at-home weddings, "registered marriages" to avoid wedding expenses, registered inter-caste marriages after secret elopement, Pentecostal marriages to avoid baptizing non-Christian or non-CSI spouses, and CSI church weddings after the traditional reading of the three wedding *ōlai* (lit. palmyra leaves but translating here the Anglican term 'bann'). Aside from highly dramatic elopements, I personally witnessed all these types of 'wedding' during my 16 months of fieldwork. However, only the last type engages the full symbolic weight of Christian orthodoxy. According to CSI rules, a wedding can only take place between baptized individuals in a specific CSI church in which one member of the family is in good standing (i.e. they have paid their *cantā* [church subscription]) and only after the Anglican custom of reading the wedding *ōlai* in three successive weeks well beforehand.³⁹ The liturgy and songs sung were virtually all identical at every CSI Tamil wedding I witnessed. Nevertheless, each family in Pasumalai printed a separate wedding program and distributed it at the entrance of the church, inserting the appropriate names, date, and, if desired, a favorite Bible verse on the front page. In Pasumalai this printed program generally listed the eight major ritual sections of the liturgy and the Tamil hymns customarily sung during each section.⁴⁰

As in many Western Christian weddings, in every CSI Tamil wedding I witnessed, the groom arrived at the church first in a procession known as the *māppiḷḷai aḷaittal* (bringing the groom). In Michael's Vellore wedding this involved renting an air-conditioned car decorated with roses for the short drive from their hotel to the church.⁴¹ The groom then usually sat in front of the altar of the church in a row of four plastic chairs, flanked by a male member of his

wife's family.⁴² Then the bride made her formal entrance, led by her father. A full Anglican liturgical procession always preceded the bride's arrival, beginning with the church's processional cross, the church choir, followed by the pastor or pastors invited to conduct the ceremony. For Michael's wedding in Vellore, five pastors, including the retired former Bishop of the CSI's Vellore Diocese were present. For the two other weddings I observed in the Pasumalai church, the couple invited four and three pastors respectively. If there were multiple pastors, the current pastor of the church would, at the very least, lead the high liturgical moments: administering the vows, blessing the *tāli* thread [used instead of a ring] at the altar, and then transferring it to the groom.

The wedding liturgies I witnessed all began with a Tamil translation of the English hymn "The Voice That Breathed O'er Eden" set to organ music. After the call for objections to the marriage (to prevent polygamy) went unanswered, bride and groom generally garlanded each other in the ceremony's only symmetrical material exchange. Then came the scripted CSI wedding vows which have two stages. The first involves promising "to love" one's spouse exclusively, using the Tamil verb *paṛṛu* meaning literally "to catch" or "to hold", but here more in the sense of an affectionate love lacking the erotic connotations of the contemporary Tamil word for romantic love *kātal*. Then the bride's father gave the bride's *right* hand to the groom who then joined his right hand with hers. Wrapped in the liturgical shawl of the lead pastor, whose hand then rests upon the couple's clasped hands below, they exchanged the longer, central vows. These are the scripted vows of *nēcittal* ('friendly love' used with respect to friends, relatives, anyone; also non-erotic), and *kāppāṛṛutal* (protection) to which the CSI bride adds a

third self-subordinating vow of *umakku kīlpaṭiyatal* (obedience to “you”, the husband). The vows were then celebrated by another translated Western Hymn “O Perfect Love All Human Thought Transcending.”⁴³

Most Christian Tamil grooms (CSI and Catholic) marry their wives by tying a *tāli* around their neck like their Hindu Tamil peers. That even the graduate school educated Michael tied a *tāli*, suggests the pan-class observation of this custom among CSI Tamils. The CSI wedding liturgy terms the *tāli* a *tirumāṅkaliyam* (holy marriage badge),⁴⁴ built from the Tamil word for auspiciousness (*maṅkaḷam*). CSI Tamils generally attach a heart-shaped gold ornament with an engraved cross to the turmeric-soaked *tāli* thread. Some families, especially from Maravar and Vellalar backgrounds, have Christianized their traditional caste ornaments by having a jeweler engrave a cross onto them. Some CSI Tamils choose family ornament designs. In Pasumalai, though, I saw the pastor liturgically validate the use of a Maravar Christian *tāli* ornament in the same church he had validated one of the caste-less heart-shaped *tāli* ornaments five months earlier. And there is no real ability for him to enforce an idealistic non-performance of caste identity in *tāli* ornament design.⁴⁵

The CSI pastor would then place the *tāli* on the open Church Bible and bless it facing the altar as the audience sings the song reserved for this ritual, replete with much archaic, Sanskritized Tamil. The pastor then carried the *tāli* on the open Church Bible back to the groom who picked it up and tied it around his bride’s neck. Three weeks prior to Michael’s Vellore wedding, as one of his distant relatives, Sam, began tying the *tāli* around his cross-cousin’s neck,

in Pasumalai, the hired marching band standing at the Pasumalai church entrance suddenly exploded in a riotous pounding, banging and brass trumpeting briefly drowning out the highway traffic behind them. In the weddings of elite Hindu Tamils, the audience generally throws rice as Carnatic musicians play loudly until the *tāli* is tied. Like their Hindu Tamil peers, though, the CSI Tamil brides I saw, tied nothing around their grooms' necks.

The weddings I saw then continued with Psalm 128; a recital of the Lord's prayer; three liturgical prayers imploring God to bless the couple's relationship, to encourage them to serve others and to bless the raising of their children; another CSI Tamil wedding song not found anywhere in the CSI hymnal; and, then, the wedding sermon (not necessarily in this order nor in the order printed in the program). The wedding sermon renders CSI Tamil weddings highly distinctive from those staged by Hindus, because it inserts ethical rhetoric directly into the wedding ceremony as a disciplinary rhetorical act (however feeble). The ceremonies I witnessed always generally ended with the singing of the CSI *kīrttaṇai* known as the *maṅkaḷa vāḷttu*, a Tamil Christian lyric in which the audience verbally connects the Tamil concept of *maṅkaḷam* (auspiciousness) to the specific names of the bride and groom. This allows commonly held notions of "auspiciousness" appropriate *iconoclastic* Christian expression that, in most Hindu weddings, would also appear in the visible, auspicious forehead markings most CSI Tamils have banned from their foreheads. The couple then left the church led by the pastors and choir in a full Anglican recessional. After Michael's wedding, he and his new wife descended the grand steps of Vellore's most elite Anglican Church and became the subjects of a long "photo-shoot" in its luxuriant church garden.

Receiving Married Christian Selves in Praise Talk

In CSI Tamil wedding receptions I witnessed, there was a creative fusion of the European Christian wedding toast, the CSI prayer meeting and a Tamil genre of verbal performance known as the *vālturai*. I did not research the colonial history of Protestant Tamil marriage receptions, except to discover that, in Pasumalai, elaborate “toasts” were going on as early as the late colonial period (1930s and 1940s) led by group known as the “Toastmasters.” These were famous local Pasumalai teachers known for their vocal eloquence, sense of humor and intelligence.

After sharing a beverage at the groom’s home (*nallinaiku*), CSI Tamil couples I witnessed in Pasumalai would return to the church in a procession that led to a large, flat thatched awning extending out across the church’s backyard from a small cement stage permanently erected for staging church functions. There transpired the *varavēppu*, a wedding function unique to Christian Tamils, but especially elaborated by CSI Tamils with middle class levels of education.⁴⁶ These receptions generally featured the following components but not necessarily in this order:

Opening Prayer

Varavēppurai (welcome speech) from one or both families

Vālturai (felicitation) or “Toast” (generally one or more for each family)

Cake-Cutting

Bible-reading and/or Bible-based message

Closing prayer

Nanriyurai (thank you) and invitation to eat

(Optional insertion of live singing)

(Optional felicitations by invited VIPs)

Like other life cycle rituals, the broad structure of these receptions was that of a prayer meeting punctuated at some point with a prayer led by one or more cassock-clad CSI pastors, and often surrounding some sort of Christian ethical message. Though CSI Tamil receptions I saw did not always include a sermon, they always featured “toasts” in the form of *mētai vāḷtturai* (platform felicitations).⁴⁷ Despite the elaborate verbal praising of the couple, ritual drinking of wine has never been part of Pasumalai wedding receptions. CSI Tamil wedding “toasts” I saw always transpired apart from both ritual eating and ritual alcohol drinking.

Individuals selected to give *vāḷtturai* included local VIPs, often relatives of bride or groom and/or employers of one of their parents, popular local toast speakers, or individuals who once toasted the parents of bride or groom. At one reception in Pasumalai, three weeks before Michael’s, VIPs included the local president of the Gandhian Kadar Board for which the couple’s mutual grandfather worked, and the brother of a famous former Tamil Nadu State Minister who married into this large Christian clan. At Michael’s Pasumalai reception, however, the presence of VIPs was awe-inspiring: well-over 25 Madurai Diocese pastors, virtually all the Diocesan officers plus the Bishop and his wife came to greet the couple behind the Pasumalai Church.⁴⁸

The content of these *vāḷtturai*, however, is often a verbally conjoined attribution of class and Christian identities onto the couple. The sporadic use of English often occurred in the church receptions of college educated Christians I saw in Pasumalai (as well as wedding sermons). Michael’s enormous Vellore reception even featured a *vāḷtturai* delivered almost exclusively in English. Such talk confirms and attributes distinctive levels of knowledge capital

held by the couple and their families, even if, in Michael's case, it over generously assumed the uniformity of English language knowledge in the audience. At one Pasumalai reception, the groom's English medium education beyond Pasumalai's Tamil medium schools was considered an appropriate enough fact with which to praise the groom and to encourage him to sing an English song. And Michael himself sung a Jim Reeve Christian ballad at his Pasumalai reception, further performing his elite middle class identity in front of an audience that would not necessarily have followed it fluently.

Explicit moral didacticism, regardless of its linguistic identity, might be expected in CSI Tamil wedding sermons, but it emerged crucially in some reception felicitations I heard, especially those staged on behalf of middle class CSI Tamil families interested in avoiding bodily forms of *male* revelry (drinking and dancing) found at or before the working class wedding celebrations of some non-Brahmin Tamil castes (such as Pasumalai's PK).⁴⁹ At Michael's reception, the first preacher argued in his long *vāḷtturai* that 'Christian marriage' is a three-fold covenant: (1) between God and humanity, (2) between the husband's family and the wife's family, (3) between Christ and "these precious children." By avoiding any mention of bride or groom as individuals, he mutes their agency as lovers or as individuals with their own agendas, a common ethical theme in CSI Tamil wedding day talk. Other "toasts" I heard also stressed that bride and groom should cooperate, even using light-hearted Christian folk tales or "tall tales" to make their points about how a "good Christian" couple lives a married life. Comments on gender-specific identities of husband and wife received the most attention, reminding couples not to expect perfection from each other and to cooperate, reminding wives to obey husbands, reminding both to submit themselves to the will of God.

At the reception of one of Pasumalai's Sunday School leaders, John, Pasumalai Pastor Gnanapirakasam praised the groom in the following way by making him the righteous embodiment of the allegory contained in Genesis 24 mentioned customarily at CSI *niccayatārttam* functions,

When we go looking for a girl, we go dreaming that she should be like this... 'This girl should be beautiful. This girl should be tall. She should be educated.' That's what we say. There is a brother of mine whose son is working in Madras. He's kind of a god-fearing boy. He asked me, 'Uncle. I don't want a Madras girl. I don't want a girl who works. I want a colorful girl [fair-skinned.] He also [?] saw 10 to 20 girls. In the end he got a Madras girl, a girl who works, a black girl. What he thought was one thing. What he got was another. But he [the groom sitting behind him] wasn't like that, 'I want this and that'. What I heard he prayed was, 'Whichever girl is wearing a sari of a certain color, I will think of her as the girl you [God] have appointed for me.' [Turning around to face the groom] Was it like that? [Turning back around] Did you see that? Then the news I heard was true [he says laughing].

He went on to show that what the groom had done was to give priority to God's will in his marital decision following the example of Abraham's servant (Genesis 22: 44-60, see p. 233). However, what both this biblical metaphor and the groom's sincere prayer elide is that both Abraham's servant and John simply chose from pools of carefully *pre-selected* candidates. Yet, rhetorically at least, denying one's agency in the pursuit of important life choices is a key rhetorical device among CSI Tamils and their evangelical peers around the world. It enacts a disposition to Christ-like humility and persuades oneself and others of one's authentic Christian identity. It is essential to the evangelical performance of "faith." Thus, this "toast" from the Pasumalai pastor merges praise for the groom as the literal embodiment of Biblical allegory with a didactic message for the audience about how a good Tamil Christian *man* looks for his wife. "Toasts" like this, especially from CSI pastors, drape thick Christian rhetorical cloths over other identities, such as those of caste; identities which, in Hindu Tamil weddings, would be dictating

virtually all the ritual actions quite blatantly. But the CSI Tamil wedding “toast”, and other explicitly ethical talk, also uses the critical life cycle moment as a rhetorical space to impart momentum along the “path”; not in the harsh, colonial tone of a Sunday Jeremiad, but rather in the warm, hyperbolic, emboldening idiom of Tamil *praise* talk.

The second component of some CSI Tamil wedding *vāḷtturai* I heard involved praising the couple’s families in one of two ways: 1) through depictions of Christian service in its various lineages (focused mostly on the righteous nature of *ūḷiyam* for the church) and 2) through short praise utterances taken as charismatic moral validations such as “an exemplary family”, “A God-fearing family.” The second preacher to give a “toast” at Michael’s wedding reception traced the bride’s family back two generations, outlining its members’ prior and contemporary forms of *ūḷiyam* as missionaries, evangelists, pastors, and supporters of various lay evangelistic associations. He then mentioned Michael’s father’s career as a preacher (*ūḷiyakkārar*) to praise Michael’s family. These forms of praise use reverse metonym (whole for part) by depicting a righteous Christian family to index one of its members: the bride or groom. Standing alone, or in combination with more explicit praise of character, these polytropic arguments also imply, through metonym, that the bride or groom is a metaphorical embodiment of CSI Tamil ideals of Christian ethical character. And, as we saw in Chapter 5, this is perhaps the highest form of praise one can shower on CSI Tamils at their weddings or anywhere else.

Casting a Glance at CSI Tamil Weddings

Many families in Madurai, CSI Tamils included, regardless of their financial or educational capital, pay rather close attention to matters of caste endogamy or, if more

deliberately progressive, to tolerable inter-caste alliances (e.g. among castes sharing claim to the same caste title). One of many structuring factors, aside from the potentially bigoted opinions of relatives, is the fact that inter-caste marriage raises the basal problem of what ceremony to use in the marriage itself. For those from elite castes with elaborate rituals conducted by Brahmin priests, inter-caste marriage involves compromising ritual identity performances loaded with powerful historical meanings and for well educated middle class individuals from such elite castes for whom caste pride is habitually denied public expression in banal daily performances of a caste-less, *nākarikamāṇa* (civilized) self, wedding rituals themselves have become one of the last key symbolic spaces where proud, *middle class* caste identity performance is politically correct in Tamil society.

During my time in Madurai District, I had the fortunate opportunity to attend the weddings of several Hindu friends. These included individuals from the Naidu, Saivite Brahmin, Saiva Vellalar, Konar, Maravar and PK communities. Each marriage ceremony I saw, in its broad outline, in its use or elision of ritual specialists, and especially in its small details projected the natal caste, or subcaste (e.g. PK), of the bride and groom in front of a public audience that almost always included friends and VIPs from other castes certain to notice the differences. In many of these weddings families carefully appended the relevant caste title after the names of family elders on printed invitations. One Vellalar wedding I attended in southern Tamil Nadu was even held at a wedding hall owned by the local Vellalar community in the bride's natal village. The larger theme here is that, in contrast to what I have just pointed out, the CSI Tamil wedding liturgy does not blatantly index specific caste identities; and, to a lesser degree, this is also true for ear piercings and comings of age held as prayer meetings.

In CSI Tamil weddings, even if the alliance forms as an act of deliberate caste endogamy, the only possible spaces for the communication of the couple's caste identity are subtle and visually minimized signals easily veiled in the uniform symbolic dynamics of the CSI liturgy and its explicit, symbolically hegemonic moral rhetoric of the ideal Christian family. The following are several indirect sources of information which reveal that even a shared wedding liturgy, however, may only be able to veil caste identity rather than totally mask it. First of all, as noted earlier, the design of the bride's *tāli* ornament may reflect caste heritage. Of course, those who do not already know the couple's caste identity won't be able to ascertain it by an invasive examination of the ornament during the ceremony. Secondly, and more revealingly, is the frequent ritual co-presence of multiple pastors from the couple's caste community in the conduct of the liturgy itself. However, even if a family invites guest pastors exclusively from its own community to a CSI church, there is no guarantee that the current pastor will be of their community. Maintaining caste homogeneity among all the liturgical actors, therefore, would require paying church dues at a church led by a pastor of one's own community. Of the three Pasumalai Church weddings I saw, two were from the same community as the pastor and one was not. Although presence of guest pastors may suggest a person's caste identity to some who know the invited clerics' caste identities prior to the wedding, it will not reveal anything to unrelated guests unfamiliar with the local Christian elite from whom CSI pastors come. A third, inadvertent way to uncover caste identity at a CSI Tamil wedding or any Tamil function, is simply to discover that one guest, whose caste is already known, is actually a relative of the bride or groom. The gathering of many bodies from the same caste community is obviously implicit in the production of most life cycle events. Lastly, constructed family histories that sometimes

emerge in the CSI Tamil wedding *vāḷtturai* may come dangerously close to ‘outing’ caste identities if not carefully delivered or based on censored versions received prior to the functions. The preacher who narrated Michael’s family history at his Vellore reception did not extend his remarks to cover the career of Michael’s grandfather’s as a rural AMM catechist (in the latter’s natal region). Had he done so, of course, strong geographic inferences could have been drawn about the family’s Dalit origins. And, months after the wedding, I discovered a silent story had been unfolding all along behind the stage of this middle class enactment of the CSI Tamil wedding cycle, a narrative of caste hypergamy that reveals the strategic potential of an old mission compound identity front within the wider, urban CSI Tamil community.

“This is no ordinary event”: Understanding the Marital Work of Michael’s Identity Front

In the humiliating aftermath of Michael’s rejection by his girlfriend’s parents in 1995, he simply abandoned the idea of any future love marriage. The idea of romance, he claimed months after his wedding, had lost all its appeal. He put his future marriage in the hands of his father. I sensed that evening that he even blamed *himself* for creating the circumstances where such educated, intelligent, and proud Christians had all been made to feel so “untouchable.” According to Michael’s uncle, Michael’s father had then suggested that he marry his cross-cousin (his father’s sister’s daughter), a common enough custom in southern India, to which the requisite girl (a budding doctor), her parents and Michael’s uncle all stridently objected on grounds of middle class “decency” and medical wisdom. Spurned by his lover and then blocked from marrying the only eligible *muraipeṇ* (female cross-cousin) available to him, Michael could do nothing else but marry an *anniyappeṇ* (unrelated girl). And so, the search began in 1998, led

by his preacher father, Gnanaraj. His father used a third party, a Madurai pastor friend who eventually spoke at Michael's engagement, to introduce him to the bride's father. There is a common belief, he claimed to me, that if a pastor introduces the groom's family to a potential bride's family, the introduction will be respected and powerfully weighted in one's favor.

Gnanaraj, Michael and two pastors (one representing each side of the family) met the bride's father for a meal in a public "Hotel" (restaurant) halfway between Vellore and Madurai. The girl, however, did not come. There was no customary *penpārkkiratu* (viewing of the girl).

Instead, the two families discussed what their options might be *without* Sarah present. Gnanaraj told me that, as part of their agreement, he had conceded all wedding arrangements in Vellore to the bride's father because the bride was an only child and this would be their family's only wedding. He did not ask for dowry or any gifts from the family. Michael's father-in-law spent at least 2 lakhs (Rs. 200,000) on the Vellore wedding and reception for nearly 2,000 guests. I later found out that Michael's father spent nearly 1.5 lakhs for a reception in Pasumalai, a first class train trip back to Madurai, a wedding sari plus a bride price sari and bridewealth gifts at the engagement. This sum was roughly equivalent to their annual household income at the time. Although his wife took out salary advances, where the rest of the money came from for such a vaunted expense is unclear. At the Pasumalai reception, as I ate with the couple and Michael's parents, Gnanaraj thanked me for a small cash donation, which he said came in handy because they had run out of money while in Vellore. This alliance had clearly pushed Michael's family well beyond the limits of its middle class financial capital.

Seven months after the wedding, in July of 1999, I visited Michael and his wife in Vellore, where he continued to work as a software designer. As we sat alone in the bedroom of

their apartment, his wife was preparing a chicken biriyani dinner for their American guest. I asked Michael quietly how he had selected his wife. He confirmed that his father had made arrangements to see the girl through a pastor. Neither side, Michael then claimed, discussed caste at any stage. Although it is likely that the family investigated Michael's caste background, there was no way for me to ascertain this ethically. Michael, however, did not suggest that he felt this investigation had occurred. Privately, months later, Michael's mother told me Sarah is a Vellalar Christian, from the same broad caste community, ironically enough, to whom his former Pasumalai girlfriend belongs. Michael further claimed in our July rendezvous to me that neither Sarah nor her parents know he is a Dalit. They told him, apparently, that whenever Sarah's relatives ask 'the question', they simply tell them that he's a Nadar (one of the dominant castes in the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese of the CSI).

In the group prayer before Michael donned his engagement suit, the wedding 'arranger', Rev. Devasikamani, had even prayed, "This is no ordinary event...This is a great moment in history." The notion that a Paraiyar man could marry a Vellalar woman is something as unlikely in contemporary Tamil society as an African-American man marrying a white Anglo-Saxon woman still is in contemporary middle class America. While that 1998 hotel meeting was a performative space to which I had no access, it appears to have been the key site wherein Michael's nuclear family confirmed the identity front they are disposed to project: Christian and middle class identities powerfully conjoined to mask any overt semiotics of caste. To have this particular identity front validated in a marital agreement is one pathway to symbolic victory over caste stigma. Few Christian families from untouchable castes, few untouchables at all in Tamil society, have such a revolutionary performative space opened to them. Even fewer could present

and manipulate the symbols of an over-arching moral identity (Christian preacher backed by a CSI pastor) with which to distract inquiries into a stigmatized caste identity. Even if Sarah's family had secretly investigated Michael's background, they clearly accepted the alliance; the trust generated by a mutual friend of both families, who was a CSI pastor, was inescapably part of what generated that minimal acceptance.

The CSI Tamil life cycle, in one sense, becomes a long series of prayer meetings with slightly different rhetorical objects. Christian rhetoric is dominant in all of these prayerful transitions, while varying degrees of knowledge and financial capital become expressed in ritual details. Critical identities comprising a colonial mission compound identity front, therefore, receive most prominent performative display. While ritual details that may originate in particular caste traditions are not necessarily banished (e.g. ear piercings and bridewealth prestations), life cycle practices reviewed in this chapter allow elite CSI Tamils of Dalit heritage, like Michael, to conjoin the moral capital of Christian identity and the financial and knowledge capital of a broader middle class identity in performances of self that mask their stigmatized caste identity from outside discovery and veil it from conscious apperception by those who may already know it but who are at least not seeing it reflected deeply in the ritual proceedings.⁵⁰ For some, these performative spaces may also reinvigorate and inspire a basal social confidence that a mission compound identity front does persuade others of one's distinction *despite* caste. In its demotion of caste semiotics, I believe this repeatedly legitimized identity front perpetuates a utopian sense of the *possibility* of inter-caste alliance for *middle class* CSI Tamils, especially for those well connected within the moral hierarchy of the Christian community (such as Michael's father. In reality, though, the moral capital of a CSI pastor itself may have had more to do with

Michael's marital victory than mere habitual maskings of caste and equally habitual projections of a Christian middle class identity front.

And it is toward the *rhetorical* genesis of a mission compound identity front, whose perduring dispositional presence I have discussed in the last three chapters, that I turn to next in order to expand our understanding of how this identity front originated and how it has persisted, or become restructured or become abandoned by CSI Tamil families in Pasumalai whose Christian origins stretch back to the administrative hegemony of the late colonial AMM. This identity front especially valued by CSI Tamils like Michael and his family. These are hard-working, well educated, middle class Christians from Dalit castes who live lives of quiet anxiety, wondering who will try to break through their identity front next by posing that most searing and most euphemistic of queries, "Yes, but what kind of people are they?"

PART 3

PERFORMING AN IDENTITY FRONT THROUGH TIME

Chapter 7 Casting a Christian Glance

Starting in 1949, a man named Devasahayam worked for forty-four years as an office assistant in Pasumalai's famous Teacher Training School turned Girls' High School (est.1973). During my research, he was approaching seventy years of age, living on Teachers' Line with his much younger second wife and family. But Devasahayam is not the proud son of a late colonial Pasumalai teacher, a multi-generational native of Pasumalai's mission compound world. Instead, he came to Pasumalai from his natal village as a young convert, at the invitation of AMM resident missionary Lloyd Lorbeer. Devasahayam was born around 1930 into a Hindu Paraiyar family in a rural village seventy miles north of Pasumalai, receiving his Christian baptism at the age of 17 at a nearby AMM village church. A stone's throw from the national trunk road to Bangalore, by the banks of a small river, Devasahayam grew up in a field laborer's family well immersed in non-Brahmin musical arts. He also grew up into the moral humiliation of untouchability in a village whose land and public spaces are still dominated by the Konar caste (associated with rural cow herding, but also a dominant mercantile community in Madurai).

One afternoon at Dora Agam, he remembered with me how adolescent Konar kids used to call out to his middle aged father with insulting Tamil vocatives,

They would say things like '*Vā-ṭā! Pō-ṭā!*' (get over here boy! go away boy!). They would never say '*Vāṅku, Pōṅka*' (please come, please go). When my father was fifty years old, and I was a grown boy, boys no more than 15 years old from the high caste [Konar] would appear and call out to my father, 'Hey! Karuppan! Get over here, boy!'...it was that kind of an insulting, cruel and *horrendous* environment.¹

Devasahayam remembers being forced to sit on the ground at tea stalls. As a young child, he remembers being savagely beaten by a Konar landlord when he showed up late one day for

Paraiyar fieldwork. All this formed Devasahayam's explanation to me of what has really been at stake all along in his Pasumalai career, a dream about a *moral* mobility in his public self.

The final part of this dissertation examines contrasting class mobility, especially contrasting moral mobilizations of self, experienced in three different CSI Tamil families who hail from two of Tamil Nadu's most stigmatized caste communities and who all trace their Christian origins to apical baptisms in the political economy of the American Madura Mission (AMM). I will be exploring the work of the old AMM mission compound identity front within a broader process of accruing the three kinds of class capital mentioned in my introduction (financial, knowledge, and moral). In order to underscore the complexities, frustrations and contradictions of class mobility for most Christian Dalits, I have chosen to focus on two families whose class mobility *as Christians* has failed and on only one family connected to Pasumalai who has risen dramatically along all three dimensions of symbolic capital I defined in the beginning as essential to persuasive middle class identity performance. Using multi-generational narrative case studies, Part 3 highlights divergent historical embodiments of an otherwise widely shared mission compound habitus of self, embodiments that reveal the possibility of a "structuring structure" to become restructured in specific historical dilemmas of identity. The dilemma of identity I focus on here is a dishonorable, angering, failure of class mobility within a mission compound that, in some sense, has always been a temple to such transformation.

The majority of CSI Tamils in Pasumalai today have ancestors who had acquired very little of the three forms of middle class "capital" (knowledge, financial, and moral) prior to their colonial baptisms. Even those "converts" from primarily land-owning peasant castes (Konar, Udaiyar, Vanniyar, Maravar, some Nadar lineages, and some PK families) or from more elite

castes (Vellalar) still needed the symbolic capital of western education, and the cash flow obtained from jobs dependent on it, in order to perform an elite status beyond the peasant fold, in a small, colonial ruling class. Such mission Christians, like their Hindu peers in colonial Tamil society, often chose Christian mission schools, like those in Pasumalai, whose disciplinary regimes and English instruction were held in high esteem throughout the colonial Madras Presidency (and still are in post-colonial Madras).

But the majority of CSI Tamils appear to trace heritage to Tamil speaking society's most stigmatized caste communities. They are often called "untouchables" in the West, but mainly "Dalits" in modern Indian academic parlance. Current research suggests strongly that, regardless of denomination, individuals from Dalit castes now constitute the statistical majority of Christian Tamils (cf. Tharamangalam 1996: 281) and Indian Christians in general (Webster 1994); though, in some Dioceses and in some Christian villages, exceptions exist to this rule.² And the majority of those baptized in the AMM, specifically, came from three caste communities still vilified today for their alleged *aciṅkam* (filthiness) and *kīltaram* (low quality). Inspired by these remarkable, yet vague, "social facts," in Part 3, I have chosen to narrate the stories of an implicit, yet still immobilized, 'Dalit Christian' majority.

For upwardly aspiring members of this broad AMM majority, and for any other upwardly aspiring Dalit in modern India, inhabiting an identity front that masks caste in a wide array of social contexts has no doubt always had an attraction.³ As Part 2 has shown, applause for Christ as ethical metaphor (Ch. 4), the banal, habitualized tactics of avoidance in personal names, bodily adornment and 'natural' refusals of food blessed in "Hindu" worship (even by those unburdened by Dalit stigma; Ch. 5), and the careful construction of the CSI Tamil life cycle as a concatenation

of virtually caste-less prayer meetings (Ch. 6) reveals the continued presence, in specific performative spaces and moments, of an identity front that conjoins class and religious identities as a mask over any visible semiotics of caste identity. As I argued in Chapter 2, this identity front was effectively embodied, par excellence, in the person of the mission school *vāttiyār* (teacher) whose authority in colonial era mission compound worlds like Pasumalai often allowed the intersection of Christian and middle class identities in daily transactional performances of elite status.

Although this identity front, and the habitus that generates it, is shared across lines of caste in Pasumalai (and the CSI Tamil community more broadly), those CSI Tamils from stigmatized caste origins who can successfully project such an identity front, defend it stubbornly as a symbolic victory over untouchability. The disposition to inhabit such a utopian habitus of identity performance, now decorated in desperately nostalgic memories of “caste-less” mission compound social worlds like Pasumalai, has been part of a distinctly *Christian* Dalit quest, a quest for class mobility as *moral* mobility in a distinct idiom of radical, religious alterity. This chapter explores the genesis of a caste-less Christian identity front within the cultural limits of the AMM’s political economy and its colonial and post-colonial subversions. This is not the genesis of an essential Christian *phenomenology* of self, but rather the genesis of an outward performance of an identity front according to certain rhetorical/ political conventions originating in mission compound worlds.

Multiple Castings of Pasumalai's Christian Selves

During the first three to four months of my fieldwork, I conducted a systematic house-to-house survey of Pasumalai's oldest Christian neighborhoods. One of my main goals was to collect empirical data on the prevalence of various castes. Long gone are the days of colonial Tamil society, when certain elite castes used specific forehead marks of sandalwood and vermilion and distinct styles of dress to project their caste identities wherever they went, even beyond the confines of their natal villages. And no doubt this is why the Tamil phrase for "discriminating by caste" is literally "looking at caste (*jāti pārppatu*)."⁴ Today, this phrase is still the primary one in use, though it has become an eery metaphor suggesting a world of prying eyes. This idiomatic phrasing resonates with the semantics of the Tamil verb "to know" (*teriya*) which literally means, "to be visible." The result of this fascinating linguistic resonance is that, in modern spoken Tamil, to say that a person's caste is *unknown* is also to argue that it is invisible, invisible, that is, to strangers encountered in public space. The reality these Tamil words conjure up is the primary phenomenological difference between Indian caste and American race, hierarchies of the social imagination that otherwise seem to share so many characteristics.⁴ My survey became, in part, about making the publicly invisible at least privately audible.

Early in this work, I spoke with a retired Pasumalai Girls' High School teacher with a strident personality and a passion for showing off her staccato English (Priscilla's grandmother from Ch. 7). Sitting proudly in her living room, she shouted forth her answers to my survey questions that evening with the bold, fierce pride of a Tamil politician. When she heard my awkward query about her caste heritage, she responded to it first with silent irritation and then

with a proud answer, “We are Indian Christians, James!!” deflecting my inquiry in another direction by then claiming origin in the nearby state of Kerala (a regional identity instead of a caste identity).⁵

I soon learned that many survey answers I received had actually been quite poetic verbal performances. At one home on Teachers’ Line, the adult children of a former Teacher Training School teacher claimed they did not know their caste at all. Some Paraiyar Christian respondents declared to me that they were “SC.” Two Paraiyar pastors used the late colonial euphemism “*āti-trāviṭar*” (original Dravidian). These two latter performances of caste identity are classic examples of what Goffman calls “covering” (1963: 102) and what I would rephrase as identity veiling. These phrases drape rhetorical veils over a verbally performed identity, veils that connote a positive sense of “entitlement” without the vulgar, degrading connotations of untouchable and unspeakable caste names. A few others donned a proud verbal mask of indeterminacy, “Our family has all castes, James.” For CSI Tamils in old mission compounds like Pasumalai, such a statement is a morally proud rhetorical claim to be beyond caste *because* of a Christian identity. Others, like the teacher mentioned earlier, replied that they were “Indian Christian.” This latter phrase is the identity mask currently most widely worn by CSI Tamils of Dalit origin when confronted with a caste inquisition. It allows what Goffman terms “passing” (1963) for someone beyond stigma, but only functions as a mask in the eyes of a strange inquirer who has no other sources of indirect knowledge. The distinction I am making between identity veiling and identity masking is really from the viewer’s phenomenological position.⁶ Whether functioning as veils or masks, these verbal performances of Christian identity engage a deliberate, strategic modality of

the same identity ambiguity found in many personal names used by CSI Tamils. They signal nothing *precise* about caste. An old mission compound performance of conjoined Christian and middle class identities has, as a habitus, carried this strategy within it all along. But other sources of knowledge may render such an identity front unable to mask a stigmatized identity. This is why, of all the Pasumalai survey respondents I later confirmed to be from the Paraiyar community (67), only three individuals (4%) actually mentioned their caste name to me. The majority displayed a disposition to mask caste from outsiders (including me), even though the masking power of the old mission compound identity front is not as effective among their own long term neighbors. That even some respondents were willing to perform themselves as “SC” or “Adi-Dravidar” suggests a growing willingness to divulge a stigmatized caste heritage to strangers while still confirming the deep historical burden of social stigma it bears.

Were I still to take at face value all the verbal performances of caste identity generated by my community survey, I would be able to write confidently that Dalits were a minority of Pasumalai’s Christian community during my research. And this is what I expected to find, having assumed that Christians of Dalit origins had not yet achieved proportionate representation in historically elite AMM mission spaces like Pasumalai. But this social ecology of caste would be an egregious representational fallacy.

As early as 1851, depictions of the AMM’s caste composition declared that the majority of its church members were either “Paraiyans” or others from the major Tamil “outcastes.”⁷ Decades later, in 1938, J.S. Ponniah claims that 85% of AMM church members came from four castes in the following proportions: 47% Paraiyar; 19% Nadar, 10% Chakkiliyar, and 9% Pallar (with the remaining 15% from Nayak, Maravar, Vellalar, Panikka, Vanniyar, Chettiar and Kallar

communities; Ponniah 1938: 33).⁸ Therefore, at least 63% of late colonial AMM Christians, if not more, came from the three major “out-castes” that also form the majority of the contemporary Madurai-Ramnad Diocese (Paraiyar, Pallar, Chakkiliyar).⁹ An early untouchable Christian activist within the AMM estimated 75% of AMM Christians in 1940 were from the “depressed classes.”¹⁰ My own partial community survey of Pasumalai’s six main colonial neighborhoods in 1999 yielded a similar and similarly suggestive figure of 61% belonging to these three castes (see Appendix B). And I heard similar, informal estimates from local Paraiyar Christians themselves.¹¹ More conservatively, I would estimate anywhere from between 60-70% of the Pasumalai community during 1998-1999 had ties to ‘the three communities.’

Despite the fact that these three castes have been united rhetorically as “Dalits” by contemporary scholars and social activists (along with dozens of other smaller scheduled caste communities),¹² in only one house in my survey, that of a Chakkiliyar Christian family, did any respondent identify themselves as “Dalit.” I later met no more than five or six other Pasumalai Christians who were prepared to call themselves “Dalit” in a public manner. The apparent reluctance to assume a Dalit identity publicly, or even in privately performed self-identifications with outsiders, takes place despite the fact that when I used the word in casual conversations and interviews with Pasumalai Christians from the three communities, no one ever asked me what I meant by the term. A few Christians even brought up the “plight of Dalit Christians” in interviews, thereby indirectly outing themselves to me. It is a term well known, yet deliberately shunned as the basis of any *public* identity performance among a silent, still unorganized majority of Pasumalai Christians.

When I asked one self-identifying Dalit activist from the Paraiyar community, a former Pasumalai choirboy named Neill, if he knew of any other Christians in Pasumalai who were prepared to declare themselves “Dalit” in public space, he exaggerated for effect, “*Nobody* else.” Living with elite levels of knowledge and financial capital, perhaps many no longer see themselves as “oppressed” (the literal meaning of the word “Dalit”) but rather as liberated “Christians.”

Near the end of my research, one Paraiyar Christian accountant and local PC member, Albert, even railed against the “Dalit movement” with me on his verandah. He said it was ‘horrible’ that this movement was encouraging kids to adopt this identity, when people like he and his family had struggled so hard to get liberated from the oppressions generated by having it. Like the Pasumalai pastor, Gnanapirakasam, he had grown up in one of the rural AMM settlement colonies near Manamadurai where missionaries had resettled Paraiyar converts on their own land, in part, to liberate them from the brutal political economies of caste that no ceremonial baptism has ever really challenged. In Albert’s somewhat pro-colonial view, former missionaries, and British rule more generally, ‘allowed’ his family to escape the brutality of a stigmatized caste identity. For him, “some people” were now misguidedly trying to get “Dalit” youth to adopt this stigma as a mark of pride. He seemed to fear it would only invite the return of the very nightmare from which families like his had originally tried to escape.

The Rhetorical Genesis of a Caste-Less Mission Compound Identity Front

The ability to inhabit social space where stigmatized caste identities can be masked from *easy* public apperception is a welcome refuge for any Indian. But since the late colonial period, Christian Tamils have always had the historically loaded verbal mask of “Indian Christian”

available to them, one validated as a legal identity category in the governmental sphere of identity certificates (see Ch. 10), and one with a rhetorical force in social interaction equivalent to a Sanskritized god name for a Hindu Dalit. But, even beyond this historically specific mask, Protestant mission compounds like Pasumalai traditionally offered protection for their upwardly mobile baptized untouchable employees by virtue of the on-site residency of the missionary. This was protection born of AMM missionaries' own desire to enforce, when they could, a utopian fantasy of a caste-less convert community within the political economy of their mission's institutional spaces (only more limited help would be possible in the natal villages of mission Christians). This rare protection became most accessible, if not always effective, to those who could somehow insert themselves into the mission compound's political economy or at least gain a mission-backed livelihood beyond their natal political economies (e.g. in urban AMM mission schools not part of a residential compound). But, the AMM, in particular generated a highly utopian ideology where the rhetorical, visible banishment of caste identity/caste distinctions was a long standing performative disposition.

In June of 1847, a Vellalar student at the Pasumalai mission seminary discovered the caste identity of the seminary's Paraiyar cook and promptly ordered him to leave the kitchen. William Tracy quickly intervened and angrily told the student, "I should insist upon sending whomsoever I pleased into every room connected with the seminary whenever I had occasion to do so."¹³ 11 of the students, or roughly half, promptly went home.¹⁴ In July of that year, the missionaries passed a series of resolutions that banned "caste" from the AMM and sanctioned tests of its expungement from the hearts of students and mission employees, especially its village catechists. The resolution defined "giving up caste" as "...at least a readiness to eat under proper circumstances with any

Christians of any caste, and to treat them in respect to hospitality and other acts of kindness as if there had never been any distinction of caste (cited in Chandler 1910:141).” And so, in October, 1847, William Tracy decided to force the Seminary students (mainly Vellalar) and its (Nadar) teacher to pass a “test” in order to remain in the Seminary. The students were to eat a meal prepared by the seminary’s Paraiyar cook to signify their ethical renunciation of caste distinctions. The missionaries termed these public inter-caste sharings of food prepared by an ‘untouchable’ “Love Feasts” or *anpin viruntukaḷ*.¹⁵ As Chandler notes sardonically, “to call it a ‘love feast’ was to emphasize the love that was conspicuous by its absence (1910:144).” And, so, the *performance* of caste-less interaction began under political duress. The relatives of one Vellalar student, named Savarimuttu Alfred Barnes, came to the Seminary and violently attacked Tracy to prevent Barnes’ participation in these feasts (ibid: 142). Again, ten students fled. Barnes stayed on, though, to become a seminary teacher, the first Tamil pastor of the Pasumalai church (1871-1900) and a famous composer of Tamil Christian devotional lyrics.

Although the love feasts of 1847 never became a long standing routinized practice, AMM missionaries continually wrote against “caste”, “caste feeling” and “caste observance” in their correspondence with ABCFM secretaries in Boston. In the 1871 AMM Annual Report, William Capron writes, “While the missionaries are grieved and annoyed by the still remaining evidences of caste feeling in the native church, the catechists insist upon it that the Christians are giving up caste, that there is more harmony and a more friendly feeling between church members of the different castes, more sociability, more visiting each other houses...we rejoice in this testimony to what ought to be true.”¹⁶ ‘What ‘ought to be true’ was a utopian space in which AMM missionaries could expunge caste hierarchy from the mission and create the impression among

local Hindus that caste identity itself did not exist among converted Christians. AMM missionaries tended to define “observing caste” as observing caste *hierarchy*.¹⁷ This radically democratic attack on caste hierarchy was broadly promoted within non-Lutheran, Protestant missions (Forrester 1980) and even appears rhetorically validated in the widely used BSI “Old Version” Bible translation.¹⁸ In a narrated mission utopia, they imagined the eradication of caste prejudice as the triumphant evidence of an unassailable moral hierarchy of “Christianity” over “Hinduism”, equality over hierarchy, enlightened social progressivism over dark social prejudice.

Under the seductive sway of their own utopian imaginations and a burgeoning colonial sociology of caste, as early as 1905, individual AMM missionaries revealed their hesitancy to extend government scholarship money to their Christian pupils if it meant publicly classifying their Christian students according to their caste. Rev. JP Jones, head of the Pasumalai Seminary (1878-1914) and one time secretary of the AMM, expresses this hesitancy to the American Board secretary in Boston,”

A few years ago the gov't offered enhanced rates of grants for the education of Panchama students (i.e. the outcaste classes) and other 'backward classes.' At first they declined to extend this favor to any Christian scholars. *The missionaries demurred inasmuch as most of the Christians hail from these very classes.* The government finally yielded and gave to the Christian student the same grant as the Hindu class from which he hailed. This went on alright until the other day the head of the Educational Department ordered all missionary managers of schools, in their school reports, to classify the Christian scholars as Panchamas and non-Panchamas. *This, of course, is contrary to our principles and we must continue to decline to give under any circumstance a Hindu classification to our Christian children. It will be a distinct countenancing of the Caste system among our Christian people.* [my emphases]¹⁹

At first Jones acknowledges the presence of caste among Christians, indexing it by the modern term “classes,” and even protests against a religious double standard in caste-based concessions.

But, then, he quickly contradicts himself by arguing that “Panchama” is really part of a “Hindu classification” of selves they cannot “countenance.” As head of the AMM seminary, Jones was one of Pasumalai’s long term missionary residents and hardly unaware of the predominance of “Panchamas” (i.e. Dalits) in the AMM. Yet, he still chooses to imply that caste is a form of identity-making only practiced by “Hindus.” The somewhat patronizing use of the word “our” reveals how like minded American missionaries imagined themselves as the sole disciplinary authority to enforce the erasure of caste identity among AMM Christians. Such pedantic preachings even continued with Pasumalai’s late colonial, legendary missionary, Lloyd Lorbeer, who even drafted an English essay in 1937, “Three Principles of Jesus About Caste” in which he showed how Jesus transcended “caste” implicitly by transcending any social hierarchy that limited the inclusiveness of his message.²⁰

As early as the turn of the century, though, some AMM missionaries began to feel it was necessary to pay attention to the caste identities of their catechists when assigning them their “fields of labor,” lest they cause a “backlash” in young congregations.²¹ Then, in 1915, AMM missionaries voted 10 to 7 to allow school managers to accept “extra grants for backward classes” made available by a 1914 G.O. (No. 88-G) designed specifically to allow Mission schools to gain access to these funds on a voluntary basis.²² The closeness of the vote reveals that there was still significant missionary resistance to what might appear as an institutional recognition of caste distinctions among AMM Christians and the denial of the long nurtured fantasy.²³ The need for additional funds for its struggling schools had overcome the stubbornness revealed in Jones’ earlier 1905 letter.²⁴

In 1933, the AMM relinquished control of its institutions (schools, hospitals, dispensaries) and churches to separate joint Tamil/missionary governing boards: the Madura Mission Sangam (MMS) and the Madura Church Council (MCC). The last generation of AMM missionaries no longer had a vise grip over mission social spaces, a disciplinary authority that could enforce the theatrical enactment of a “love feast” utopia as easily as Tracy had done in 1897. In a complex passage written in the 1940s, Pasumalai’s legendary Lloyd Lorbeer writes to his colleague, ABCFM secretary Raymond Dudley, of a recent caste controversy at the AMM’s elite Girls’ High School, named Capron Hall,

I am not sure we should condemn 100% PaulRaj Thomas [Tamil Secretary of the Madura Church Council] when he says that it is unwise for both the Manager and the Head Mistress to come from the same caste ancestry in Hinduism. We must face reality and though we regret that such things need to be considered there is no use denying the fact that they do enter into the thinking of our Indian Christian colleagues. However that does not justify them.²⁵

The days of the 1847 “love feasts” had given way to the brute reality of mission politics in a rapidly devolving mission where caste-based “thinking” belied the public, rhetorical banishment of caste identity performance. And, clearly, Pasumalai’s folk hero, Lloyd Lorbeer, was not happy about it. Yet, Lorbeer’s use of the phrase “from the same caste ancestry in Hinduism” reveals the inability of even some late colonial AMM missionaries to concede that caste is a form of identity-making *independent of* religious identity. The *rhetorical* banishment of caste from the AMM lingered on.²⁶

The primary post-colonial legacy of this missionary fantasy has not been the long dreamed of utopia of a caste-less “body of Christ” or some broad Christian phenomenology beyond caste. Anti-caste rhetoric was constantly subverted in marital alliances, backroom politics, the spatial

organization of a class-divided mission compound, and even in the private letters of AMM missionaries to ABCFM officials.²⁷ Nevertheless, an old rhetorical taboo has perpetuated itself dispositionally in most former AMM social spaces and has largely benefited non-Dalit church elites by preventing public, forthright discussion of caste discrimination and any public “Dalit” mobilization against anti-Dalit discrimination within the CSI’s Dalit dominated Madurai-Ramnad Diocese. Secondly, this politically hegemonic fantasy gave substantial historical momentum to an identity front in which conjoined performances of Christian and middle class identities are still encouraged in public interactions as a polite mask of decency covering any semiotic indices of caste identity.

Memories of Caste Identity-Making in Late Colonial Pasumalai

Several older Pasumalai Christians I interviewed in 1998-99 narrated the “return of caste” or, as one Pastor put it, the “arrival” of the *jāti picācu* (the demon of caste) to a post-missionary church and Diocese. To speak of the ‘return of caste’ implies, of course, that it had once gone away. And, often enough, these same individuals posited nostalgic memories of a caste-less Christian community during the missionary era, utopian mis-readings, perhaps, of their own youthful memories. For example, one octogenarian whose father was a famous Training School teacher claimed in English, “we did not know to which caste others belonged” arguing that only now has it become “clannish.” But, oddly contradicting this nostalgic memory only moments later, he casually mentioned the names of various caste groups in Pasumalai in the 1920s and 1930s.²⁸

Another retired octogenarian Pasumalai Christian, however, spun less nostalgic narratives of caste during the late colonial period. A former Government servant and Pasumalai school teacher, Robert, was comfortably retired during my research in a modern two story house built on land purchased by his own father in the social limbo between Krishnapuram and Teachers' Line. After narrating the 18th century conversion of his patrilineal ancestor one afternoon, he told me the story of how his own father, David Shadrach, came to Pasumalai as a "compounder" trained at Madurai's famous AMM hospital. Shadrach bore the name of an exiled Israelite who, refusing to worship a Babylonian god, was thrown into Nebuchadnezzar's "fiery furnace" and escaped unharmed (cf. The Book of Daniel 3). Suddenly, Robert began to tell me an equally fiery narrative about his father's inter-caste love marriage near the turn of the 20th century,

Robert: My "mother" was from the "south." She is from a different "community" [caste]. She was a "government school teacher." She got a "chance" [job opportunity] in Madurai. At that time, my "father" was "practicing" [medicine] with Dr. Van Allen at East Gate [site of the famous American Mission Hospital]. At that time my father and mother fell in "love" and married.

JR: Was it a love marriage?

Robert: I'd definitely have to say so, because she was from a different "caste" and he was from a different "caste." I don't know his "caste," but she was a Nadar. The Nadars really "objected." It was extremely difficult. But her father [his mother's father] gave "full support." Even in the wedding itself, as the reception was going on, someone threw a torch onto the *pantal* [flat, thatched awning]. They lit some "phosphorous" and threw it. The "phosphorous" burned there as my mother was praying during the reception and some of it fell straight onto her lap. Somehow my father saw it and quickly knocked it away. But as he knocked it off, he was "burned" and there, on his hand, right here [pointing to his palm] he had a huge scar even to his death.²⁹

This Tamil speaking Shadrach had escaped the fires of caste bigotry, though not unharmed. And to this day, urban CSI Tamils from Dalit castes, though liberated from the caste-based political

economies of peasant Tamil Nadu villages, have as much to fear from their fellow Christians as from anyone else when it comes to caste bigotry in marital alliances. The phosphorous torch was metonymic of a wider collective violence that might easily have ensued, perhaps, had Robert's father not been allied intimately to an American missionary. Although Robert claimed not to know his father's caste, others claimed to know his own deceased younger brother as a fellow Paraiyar. His father's inter-caste marriage, therefore, allowed him to wear a narrative mask of caste ambiguity that appears designed precisely to hide a stigmatized patrilineal heritage. His narrative also reveals that, although AMM missionaries had total control over employment in AMM mission institutions until 1933, they had no similar control over the consequences of inter-caste marital alliances, consequences that still weigh heavily on the minds of many CSI Tamils of Dalit heritage and may make arranged caste endogamy a 'safer' decision than a more utopian caste exogamy out of the untouchable fold.

The public, primarily rhetorical, suppression of caste identity-making in late colonial AMM institutional spaces had important sources in the political and charismatic force of missionaries and other Tamil institutional heads who made job appointments. Lloyd Lorbeer, avid proponent of the taboo, was notorious for deliberately omitting the caste title "Devar" when talking to his Hindu PK mission servants or workers. More importantly, he also established a Sunday afternoon meeting or "tea party", at which he required all the official mission servants to attend (baptized Chakkiliyar, Paraiyar and Vannan servants on one side and un-baptized PK gardeners, farmers and watchmen on the other). Several former members, PK and Chakkiliyar, recalled perceptively that the 'real' purpose was to inculcate habits of inter-caste social discourse. It was a mini-revival of the 1847 "love feasts" staged as a pedantic Sunday school class. In this

social space, the missionary projected Christian identity as many Pasumalai Christians prefer it to be seen even today, as an identity of moral cleanliness muting caste differences in social intercourse, a sign of Christ-like purity. Late colonial fear of missionary reprisal for castist behavior was strong enough in Pasumalai that one son of a former sweeper even claimed how a local Devar mission worker who had insulted him with his caste name suddenly caught himself and begged him “not to tell the *turai*” about it.³⁰

Ironically, though, it was the class alienation of Pasumalai’s Chakkiliyar sweepers, oddly reproduced within the mission compound itself, that posed the most glaring, yet silent, contradiction of “love feast” rhetoric. In a 1949 letter outlining plans to renovate and electrify servant housing, Lloyd Lorbeer reveals that, “we were allowing a slum section to grow up in the midst of Pasumalai.”³¹ The English word “slum” here is most likely a translation of the Tamil word *cēri* (lit., village, hamlet), an enormously sensitive word which, today in spoken Tamil, euphemistically indexes primarily Dalit settlements. And, today, there is still a curious line of 12 homes *behind* Teachers’ Line facing away from the church and toward the southern side of Pasumalai hill (see Map 3). Eight homes there stand contiguous to each other and date to the late colonial period, when they housed primarily sweeper families and other mission servants.³² Because of this, today, local Christians still refer to this line of houses in euphemistic English as “scavenger line,” while some local PK referred to it in Tamil as “Chakkiliyar street.” Either way, there seems little reticence in attributing a stigmatized caste identity to a space members of both communities seldom visit.

Lorbeer's desire to soften the hierarchy in mission housing between mission servant and mission teacher, however, only went so far. The new homes still stand today, accompanied by additions, and are, like Devasahayam's home, small slant-roofed *oṭṭu viṭu* (tiled roof homes), not the terraced roof cottages of Teachers' Line. They house descendants of those who have always swept Pasumalai's schools, who once cleaned the dry latrines of its teachers' homes and student hostels by hand and who, to this day, remain socially alienated and aloof from Pasumalai's middle class majority, representatives of which visit their homes to return church subscription cards and during the annual 'Christmas Carol Rounds.' In 1949, they lived in the majority of the twenty servant homes originally affiliated to Pasumalai's four missionary bungalows and built in four distinct clusters *outside* the original AMM compound (see Map 2). During my research, those living in these servant spaces were primarily Chakkiliyars (both Hindu and Christian), a few Paraiyars, two PK families (Hindu) and one Vannan family. While the two PK families had relatives on Teachers' Line and Krishnapuram and one of the Paraiyar families has a son living in Jonespuram, during my research, descendants of former mission "sweepers" still lived *only* in these alienated spaces. My research failed to reveal even one Chakkiliyar Christian living in the middle class Christian spaces of Jonespuram, Teachers' Line, Seminary Line, Trade School Line or any of the newer post-colonial Christian neighborhoods (see Maps 2 and 3).

All late colonial mission servants, including sweepers, received annual disbursements of charity from the missionaries for whom they worked. And they also had to attend Lorbeer's Sunday School classes in the 1940s and 1950s. Yet it is the Chakkiliyar sweepers who received Lorbeer's most severe forms of Christian discipline. He became intent on making abstinent, righteous Christians out of them. And the potential for "Christian influence" was naturally very

high between the *turai* and his most dependent of servants. Justifying the future renovation of servant housing in 1945, Lorbeer writes, “Some of the finest workers in our Mission have been raised in the homes of servants such as Rev. J.S. Masilamani [former vice principal of Pasumalai’s Seminary, but not a Chakkiliyar].”³³ In an essay comparing Madurai of 1915 and Madurai of 1950, the Lorbeers’ section on “prohibition” notes, “Then most all of the scavengers of Pasumalai drank. Now they spend liquor money for educating their children and for better food and clothing. Several families became Christian in the process.”³⁴ Echoing his former mentor’s narrative, an octogenarian retired Professor ‘recalled’ that sweepers often went to the TPK *kaḷḷukaṭai* (toddy shop) after work and then wandered home. Both these comments index a widely held, morally condescending middle class depiction of Chakkiliyars (and other menial laborers) as prone to ‘squandering their money on drink.’ They both attribute the scant moral capital of a ‘lower class’ self to individuals from, what has already become, one of the most stigmatized caste communities in urban Tamil society.

But what Lorbeer elides in his essay is his own frustrated attempts to purify Pasumalai’s sweepers, to purify their ethical behavior in line with middle class evangelical ideals of ascetic restraint. Unlike PK mission servants, whose refusal to ‘join the religion’ was simply accepted, Lorbeer tried hard to make mission sweepers into “professors of faith”,

Jeparaj: These “sweepers”...Back then there weren’t any “flush out latrines.” So, back then, they had to come into the house to remove the “night soil.” That’s why they drink so much. In the “evening.” Then he would go there, Lorbeer. He went with a “cane.” [Switching to English] “He severely beat them. He tried to transform them, convert them to give up-

JR: [interrupting with doubt] Did he really beat them?

Jeparaj: [continuing] to “stop” the “drinking,” he beat them. He beat them a lot...[asking him if he only beat the sweepers, he then added that he was also beaten once for a small transgression]³⁵

When I asked him what he thought of all this, he replied in English, “He was an eccentric type”, going on to disparage Lorbeer’s disposition to violent discipline. His use of the English “convert” here is an interesting slippage, referring, I argue, to a dispositional conversion to visible ethical asceticism, self-abnegation and an avoidance of ‘undisciplined’ recreations; in other words, conversion to a puritanical performance of self AMM missionaries preached and which is still part of a rhetorical continuum indexing authentic Christian “profession of faith” to many CSI Tamils in Pasumalai. It also forms a broader form of identity performance in a middle class mode, because a visible ethical purity, a symbolic negation/avoidance of impure acts and “bad habits,” is, I argue, the moral core of both Tamil middle class *and* global evangelical Christian identity performance. Armed with a dangerously ‘good intention’, Lorbeer was ultimately trying to teach the mission’s sweepers how to accrue the critical moral capital necessary for acceptance in the wider Christian community which would have almost certainly looked down on them.

Lorbeer’s beatings are still known by elders in the local Pasumalai Chakkiliyar community. One Hindu man in his sixties from the nearby Chakkiliyar settlement of Gopalipuram (see Map 2), named Nagappan (who would have been a young boy during Lorbeer’s final years), narrated to me how he and his family avoided working in Pasumalai (for the mission) precisely because of Lorbeer’s ‘cruelty’ and his alleged demand that they become Christian to receive free education. Choosing to maintain their independence, they got their minimal education at a Madurai Catholic school instead. Nagappan also claimed Lorbeer used to beat Chakkiliyars he caught drinking, without specifying where, exactly, he did this (presumably the mission

compound). When I asked for clarification about Lorbeer's discipline, it appears that his prior claim of Lorbeer demanding conversion for education really had to do with him trying to "force" their abstinence from drink. Nagappan countered that this discipline was insensitive to the disgust felt while cleaning dry latrines in Pasumalai's schools, "In those days, they added a lot of grains, no matter what the food was. Whether it was *moccaipayaru* (hyacinth beans), *tattaiyaru* (chowlee beans) or *pāciyaru* (green gram), because they ate all these grains [strong natural laxatives], what did the kids do? They would barely get inside and make it completely filthy, the toilet...only if you went drunk could you wash it."³⁶ And, even today, local Christians complain about Nagappan's neighbors in Gopalipuram, a "Hindu" family from the Totti community, that they claim always comes drunk to clean their septic tanks, to unblock their drainage pipes when necessary and to dig their graves in Pasumalai's Garden of Graves (to my knowledge, the latter is not an occupation Pasumalai's Chakkiliyar Christians have ever performed).³⁷

A 57 year old daughter of one of the *baptized* sweepers, Necamani, did not recount any beatings or violence. Most likely, as a very young girl (fifteen the year Lorbeer left Pasumalai in 1957), she would never have seen this anyway. It would have taken place on the job site or elsewhere in the mission compound itself. Instead, she and her husband, Manikkam, spun a joint narrative that serves as a mnemonic allegory, at least, of Lorbeer's moral surveillance and disposition to discipline,

Necamani: Our grandfather was a "Hindu." He drank. The *turai* didn't like it. He would look through his binoclock [binoculars] from here [referring to the mission bungalow behind us on the hill]. Seeing [him] from there [imitating Lorbeer's voice], 'Sanyasi! *What* are you going to drink?--'

Manikkam: [husband cuts her off] TPK hill is over there, right? He used to drink there.

Necamani : [interrupting] He saw it in the “binoclock”!

Manikkam: From the roof [of his bungalow]...

Necamani: [after interrupting each other multiple times] The next day he comes to work...The next day he [Lorbeer] comes and this is what he says, ‘You [formal] drank toddy Sanyasi’ ‘No, sir.’ ‘You drank [informal]...[I interrupt to confirm whether it was “liquor” or “toddy”] ‘I didn’t drink, sir.’ ‘I saw. I saw through the “binoclock” as you [informal] were drinking...from now on don’t drink [informal]’ He didn’t like it. If you drank, he didn’t like it. He spoke well [properly, appropriately].³⁸

The trope of Lorbeer’s binoculars here indexes, through mnemonic metonym, Necamani’s implicit understanding that it was the *visible* violation of an idealized identity front that inspired acts of highly selective, and in this case, ironically caste-specific forms of mission compound discipline.

Because of their work cleaning the latrines of the schools and teachers’ homes, Robert argued that, “no one used to speak with them.” He then quickly mentioned Lorbeer’s attempt to “raise” their status artificially by holding his Sunday School classes or “tea parties.”³⁹ Lorbeer himself refers to them as “Servants’ Class.”⁴⁰ Necamani, however, mentioned that local teachers would rotate the duty of teaching at these ‘theaters of dispositional conversion’, when, apparently, Lorbeer or other missionaries didn’t want to do it themselves. Thus, Pasumalai’s late colonial Chakkiliyar Christians along with the baptized office peons, became implicitly marked out as “bad Christians” requiring training, given out, at times it appears, by the very same class of people whose excrement they removed by hand on a regular basis. These Sunday school meetings reified a class boundary that still exists today between Pasumalai’s “scavenger” families and their middle class Christian neighbors, while making that class boundary implicitly parallel to what many local middle class Christians see as the boundary between inauthentic and “authentic” Christian identity performance. To some extent, because of the load of moral stigma Lorbeer and

others placed on them, this class condescension reproduced a thinly veiled caste hierarchy within the mission compound itself. All this gives an eery connotation to Lorbeer's own phrase cited earlier, "we were allowing a *slum* section to grow up..."

Despite this ironic conjoining of caste and class stigmas, in the late 1940s, when local Krishnapuram PK tried to prevent the baptized Chakkiliyar mission sweepers from drawing water at Jonespuram's good water well, Lorbeer and the Tamil president of the Jonespuram Committee quickly came in to settle the dispute (according to both Necamani and the committee President).⁴¹ Thus, the presence of the missionary was easily obtained to prevent brute untouchability being practiced on baptized bodies, even if the residential and labor hierarchy of the mission compound itself subtly challenged the utopian rhetoric of a mission compound beyond caste discrimination.⁴²

When speaking of the "return of caste" most individuals really appeared to be indexing the efflorescence of occasionally vicious caste politics 'after the missionaries.' But, even a simple division between missionary and post-missionary church politics is a gross oversimplification. AMM devolution took place gradually through power-sharing that began in 1933 and lasted until the 1947 creation of the Church of South India. After 1947, AMM missionaries only had specific institutional appointments, and did not legally control much beyond the sphere of that specific institution. However, because a British missionary, Leslie Newbigin, served as the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese's first bishop, full-blown displays of high-level caste politics could not emerge until the 1960s when the first *Tamil* bishop of the CSI's Madurai-Ramnad Diocese rose to power.

The Work of Caste in Contemporary Pasumalai

One of my standard ethnographic interview questions was, “Is there caste feeling among Pasumalai Christians?” Intentionally naïve, I wanted to see if anyone would try to pretend that the utopian fantasy was reality by answering, “No.” Instead, this question invariably produced disgusted replies of “yes” or “yes, definitely.” When I prompted for examples of how it operated in the social life of local Christians, I generally received examples related specifically to the administrative politics of various Christian organizations from prayer bands to individual churches in the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese. The most commonly mentioned arena of blatant castism was Pasumalai’s triennial pastorate committee election. And, right before and during my field research, three old colonial Protestant churches broke away from the Madurai Diocese to become fully independent Anglican churches, controlled primarily by Tirunelveli Nadars. A young local PK pastor even explained to me one afternoon how some evangelical mission societies have even acquired caste reputations, mentioning two dominated by Nadars. And one current officer in the Diocese, a prominent Nadar Christian, quite candidly admitted that Nadar-Dalit caste tension has recently become quite intense in the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese. But, he argued, this was primarily because of the direct, cynical instigation of the *former* Bishop (from neither community), not his currently present Nadar successor. Indeed, the current dominance of “Dalits” on the Pasumalai Pastorate committee clearly irritated an old Nadar church member and former pastorate committee member I interviewed, “the low castes...they’re the ones with a majority...” He went on to blame Pasumalai “SCs” [Scheduled Castes or Dalits] for recent castism evidenced, for him, by the fact that such individuals who had formerly voted for him in church elections had started to

vote only for their ‘own people.’⁴³ But, contradicting this man’s hierarchical view, a retired Tamil professor, a Maravar Christian, argued (contra Dumont 1980) that caste differences emerge in the Christian community primarily as power struggles and not because of hierarchical *thinking*, “In Christianity no one thinks of someone as a *tāntavan* (lower person).”⁴⁴ Of course, his evidence for this were customary, public performances of public respect (e.g. folding one’s hands in front of the chest in a very respectful performance of greeting; one also used in the worship of gods and goddesses) that I too saw transpire in front of Dalit and non-Dalit pastors alike. For example, members of the pastorate committee performed the traditional New Year’s ritual of giving limes and fruit to their pastor for both Rev Gnanapirakasam (a Dalit), in 1999, and for the former pastor (a non-Dalit) in 1998. My own experience suggests that it is really *despite* any hierarchical thinking, that caste differences do emerge primarily as pitched power struggles *within* a competitive middle class elite.⁴⁵

For what appears to be the first period ever (1997-2000), the Pasumalai Pastorate Committee, the pre-eminent political body in Pasumalai’s Christian community, actually had a majority of its members from the “three communities” (10 out of 17, including the pastor).⁴⁶ My own research into the caste backgrounds of the Diocesan hierarchy further revealed that those sharing Paraiyar or Pallar heritage comprise half of the current Diocesan officers (though not the Bishop, Treasurer or Manager of Schools). And according to the Pasumalai Pastor, roughly 65% of 80 full-time Madurai-Ramnad Diocese pastors are Dalits.⁴⁷ As noted earlier, one of Devasahayam’s local critics, and fellow Paraiyar caste members, mentioned how he originally got his job at Pasumalai school, thirty years prior, from a Diocesan ‘Manager of Schools’(the official in charge of making school appointments) who had been pro-Paraiyar. But, unsurprisingly, not

one of the Diocese's four bishops has ever been from any of the three "Dalit" castes represented so heavily in the Diocese.⁴⁸

No one mentioned vulgar local displays of caste hierarchy while collectively eating, or simply sitting, at church events or at life cycle functions, in church-organized social life, in casual or formal speech acts, in cemetery burial plot assignment, or in local school classrooms (and I never witnessed any myself). In the telling words of the bitterly defeated Nadar ex-PC member, "They won't show it in public. It is inside [their hearts]." The daily forms of discrimination that still occur in some nearby villages, such as separate drinking vessels at tea stalls, do not occur in Pasumalai or most other public spaces in the Madurai area. Caste bigotry erupts primarily, out of public view, in backstage spaces such as critical political nodes in the Diocesan political economy *and* in the arranging of marriages.⁴⁹ And mono-caste social preferences often remain ambiguous to an external gaze when such friendships are also within a local parish and also within the same social class.

But what about the fate of Pasumalai's "slum?" Now that flush out toilets have come to Pasumalai, the residents of Teachers' line only call upon menial 'privy' labor when sewage pipes get clogged or private septic tanks become full. Jonespuram Christians only call for such help when their septic tanks are full. Yet, today, the descendants of the former mission sweepers no longer perform even this sporadic night-soil work, although this, in itself does not seem to have really improved their local image much. I inadvertently provoked one of Necamani's sons to vent his own class frustration after he led me out of their house after the interview. We paused at the end of "scavenger line," when I noticed a fiercesomely painted *tiriṣṭi* mask [used as a prophylactic against the "evil eye"] hanging a stone's throw away on the upper story balcony of a

newly painted hospital building in Jonespuram (owned by a wealthy Christian doctor and local church member) and pointed it out to Das. He said mockingly, “Look, Christians have put a *tiriṣṭi* on their building. You shouldn’t do that. No one is a pure Christian here.” Whether or not the owner or the construction workers put it there, Das’ comment was an implicit rebuttal to the elitism of Pasumalai’s Christian *middle class*, to which he quickly added another dig. He mentioned that, on New Year’s Day, only ten or fifteen people had shown up with his family for the second 9:00 AM morning service (six hours or so after the traditional Watchnight service usually ends), “We went to *both* services, like you’re supposed to do”; although it appears he went to the morning service to baptize his own son (since it is one of the three main annual services set aside for infant baptisms).

With the exception of one individual I met, inter-caste marriage is unknown among Pasumalai’s Chakkiliyar Christian population and has only happened occasionally in the broader Pasumalai population (e.g. Michael, Robert’s father). My own Nadar landlord claimed he supported it but admitted, in an embarrassed tone of voice, that only one person in his own family’s entire history had married out of the Nadar caste (including his own children). Some Pasumalai Christians claim that inter-caste marriage is on the rise, perhaps because they thought I wanted to hear of such a ‘trend’, or because they hope it will be true for their children. Since I realized from my own limited survey that claiming “inter-caste marriage” was a popular identity mask with which to conceal a stigmatized caste identity, it was difficult for me to confirm more than a few inter-caste Christian marriages by CSI Tamils connected to Pasumalai.⁵⁰

During my community survey, one Maravar Christian man living on Teachers’ Line proudly stated that he was a “Devar, Maravar,” carefully indexing first the broader mobilized

community of Devar castes and then his specific caste name. He even called his wife from the inside of the house and made her show me her specially fashioned Christian version of the Maravar *maṅṭai tāli* ornament. There was no veiling and no masking on that verandah. After my questions were through, he described, of his own accord, his involvement in local Pasumalai life, his attendance at church and his hanging out with friends whom he specifically called, “his *jātikkāranika* (caste people).” When I mentioned that I had seen him at the ear-piercing of a local Hindu Devar Ward Councilor’s son weeks earlier, he included him too among his *jāti* friends. And indeed, I saw him frequently sitting with Pasumalai’s three Devar Ward councilors and a local Devar Christian real estate broker at one of Pasumalai’s many “Devar” tea stalls. As we sat on his renovated verandah, I found it odd we were talking so openly and confidently about caste and castist social life on Teachers’ Line where many of the performances mentioned earlier had transpired.⁵¹

A “Christian Dalit” Violates a Rhetorical Taboo

Even as I was experiencing the careful veiling and masking of stigmatized caste identities during my survey, on the night of December 15, 1998, four Tamil wall posters bearing caste propaganda suddenly appeared in Pasumalai’s old mission compound spaces. As I was accompanying the Pasumalai choir boys on their “Carol Rounds” among Pasumalai parishioners living in TPK, these posters went up in three different highly visible, eye-catching Pasumalai locations, two on walls owned by the Diocese and one on the compound wall to the middle class Jonespuram home where Priscilla had just had her ear-piercing. Each poster bore the face of

B.R. Ambedkar, central author of India's Constitution and the metonymic visage of India's contemporary Dalit movement. Two other posters also bore an image of Christ bearing his cross during the long walk to the site of his crucifixion at Golgotha. Cleverly, the posters combine Christian metaphor and trendy Dalit metonym to project a poetic image of "Dalit Christian" oppression. At the bottom of each poster were the names of three largely rhetorical organizations, "The Movement for Christian Native Tamils, The Federation of Dalit Christian Movements, and the Tamil Nadu Federation of SCs and STs, Pudukottai,"

Poster 1 The C.S.I. Head Bishop Must Intervene!

Oh Thavaraj David Eames, who fell at the feet of the Paraiyar, Pallan and Chakkiliyar to ask for votes in the Bishop's election. Don't start a storm in the *cēri* [euphemism for a rural Dalit settlement] with fascist principles of Dalit exclusion!⁵²

Not only had the over-arching term "Dalit" appeared in Pasumalai's public space, so had the names of 'the three communities' who comprise the majority of members in the CSI Madurai-Ramnad Diocese. Yet the technical anonymity of this propaganda only confirmed to me the immense pressure of the historical taboo on public rhetorical expressions of caste in Pasumalai, even for individuals committed to its backroom discussion and angry manipulation. The author's repeated use of the trendy identity term "Dalit" contrasted strongly with identity masks such as "Indian Christian" and identity veils such as "SC" or "Adi-Dravidar" I had heard in Pasumalai homes during my survey.

The following evening, when I went out around 10:00pm to photograph the posters without attracting needless attention, two local Christian youth approached me and claimed to have put them there. One of them, a young student in the Pasumalai Boys' High school where his father also teaches, extended the posters' hyperbole by arguing that the current Nadar Bishop is

handing out Diocese positions *only* to his Nadar caste-mates. Really?, I wondered. That afternoon, I talked with my landlord again, since I knew he was a relative of the Bishop. I asked him what he thought of the posters. He replied that there are people who are jealous of the Nadar community because they are more educated and better off than other groups in the church. But he doesn't think that the Bishop is castist. Some appointments in the church have been given to Nadars coincidentally, he claimed, triggering off this protest.

I did not notice much of an explosive reaction in the Pasumalai Christian community to these posters. Perhaps I missed most of these private discussions. Mostly, it appeared that everyone ignored them. And, eventually, they were covered by other advertising or ripped off by unknown hands. However, in the January 29, 1999 issue of *Nerrikkāṇ* (the forehead eye)⁵³, a popular muck-raking Tamil magazine, the posters' producers found a non-Christian space where they felt comfortable identifying themselves and where they could unload even more incendiary accusations against the Bishop.⁵⁴ One of the four faces printed in the article was that of my friend, the retired office assistant named Devasahayam.

A month later, in February, the mother of Ponnaiya *Vāṭṭiyār* (Ch. 5), an un-baptized, self-identifying Hindu living in an old mission servant's home, suddenly died. Quickly, Ponnaiya and his father informed relatives while word spread in the Pasumalai community. Out of respect, I joined some local friends sitting on chairs outside their home, including one adjunct CSI pastor, Gnanarattinam, and a retired model school headmaster. Remembering suddenly that they were both Paraiyars, I polled their opinions quietly about the now defunct poster campaign initiated by their caste peer. They both claimed it was foolishness and motivated only by Devasayaham's

inability to get a church job for his son. They said if the Bishop gave his son a job tomorrow, the whole ‘movement’ would end. Gnanarattinam argued that if the church showed proper compassion for its poorer members, this kind of campaign would not arise. He wouldn’t deny there is castism in the Diocese management, but seemed more irritated at the bad image the campaign gives to other “Dalit Christians” and to all Christians. These are two men, of course, who are both high school graduates with teacher training; men both finished with long careers as Pasumalai teachers. Gnanarattinam now even holds both BA and BD degrees that had recently qualified him to become an ‘adjunct’ Diocesan pastor. They are archetypical members of what we might etically term the Diocese’s “Dalit Christian middle class.” But a ‘Dalit Christian’ movement appeared to have little attraction to two men so clearly *not* oppressed. The incendiary Tamil metaphor of the *cēri* in one of the posters has little relevance to their lives.

One of Pasumalai’s choir boys, Christopher, months after these events, gave his opinion on the wall posters as we discussed issues of caste in the Christian community,

JR: So, this year, some people in Pasumalai printed some posters. Printed and stuck them up. They were complaining against our bishop about caste. What is your opinion about that?

Christopher: Well, I didn’t like it. Mainly, because people will see publicly that Christians are like that. That there is caste among Christians. But, uh, if some people’s rights are being taken away they should go straight and ask [for them]. If they print “posters” like this, what will people think? ‘Oh, so it’s like this in Christianity.’

JR: (interjecting) A bad image will form?

Christopher: A bad image will form. That’s not good. But they’re definitely looking at caste, generally, even at the Diocesan level I think they’re looking [at caste].⁵⁵

Christopher reveals what I believe is the wider reason why no fellow Christians in Pasumalai came out to support the campaign. It is a public identity performance they imagine as metonymically derogating a utopian Christian whole. It violates not only the colonial taboo against public caste identity-making, but also the idealized urban CSI Tamil identity front of Christian and middle class identities jointly masking caste. And Christopher's fear of a bad image forming among local non-Christians was not really paranoid, if we look at the comments of a local PK friend of mine, Pecciyamma's son Balamurugan,

JR: Is there caste feeling among Christian people? Do they also look at caste?

Balamurugan: They also look at caste. Among themselves. Just recently they had stuck up some wall posters. A guy had stuck some up. I don't know if you noticed it. They stuck some up. 'We're Dalit. You're helping them. You're helping that caste...

JR: What do you think when you see things like that?

Balamurugan: However much they study they're going back, bringing back caste, religion. I mean, they're very educated as teachers. A lot of them work as teachers. They tell everyone, 'There shouldn't be caste...There shouldn't be this caste stuff.' But they themselves are doing it. Among themselves. No matter how much the missionaries gave them before they left, they're [still] thinking like this. So there's a lot of division even among them.⁵⁶

Balamurugan, like most local PK who have studied at the Pasumalai schools and have social relations with local CSI Tamils, knows very well the anti-caste rhetoric of local Christians. He not only sees hypocrisy in the poster campaign but also registers surprise that "well educated" Christians would behave in such a way. Mistakenly glossing the entire community as well educated is still common among some local PK, a slip that elides the stark divisions in knowledge and financial capital among local Christians, divisions to which the wall poster campaign seemed ultimately pointed. These are the same divisions that, historically, have made the elite mission

compound identity front virtually impossible to inhabit for poor or uneducated Pasumalai Christians.

Five months after the poster campaign, in an interview with Ponnaiya *Vāttiyār* about his teen-age ‘baptism’, I inserted a brief query on his reactions to it, since, by then, I had learned that *his own son* had physically pasted some of the posters up,

JR: Recently, some people stuck some posters up against our Bishop

Ponnaiya: [interjecting] Dalit

JR: Did you notice that?

Ponnaiya: I saw them

JR: What do you think about it?

Ponnaiya: It’s unnecessary... What I mean by unnecessary is that the guys who put up the “notice” did it because someone motivated them to. They didn’t do it by themselves. Something instigated them to do it. But it’s unnecessary. You see, there is a Bishop. If we start criticizing the Bishop, others will criticize him, right? “X or Y”, whoever the Bishop is, he’s our religious leader. We who are Christians have to respect our religious leader. If we don’t respect him, who else will? He[informal] printed and posted that stuff out of some anger about something. Below, there was even the word “Dalit.” [laughs mockingly] But it’s caused a big problem.

JR: How?

Ponnaiya: [informally and as if confronting the posters’ creators] When you say Dalit, who is a Dalit? Who is a Dalit in Pasumalai? Up to this point we didn’t have any Dalit group. We were like one “family.” [talks again as if confronting the poster’s producer] Today, it’s you [informal] who are creating a Dalit group. So, it’s you [informal] who’re creating this caste division. Some people went to the people who put up the “notice” and warned them, ‘From now on, don’t do this.’

JR: Who?

Ponnaiya: Some friends. Friends who are *not* Dalit. They are friends, because that’s how we get along.

JR: High caste people?

Ponnaiya: [Angrily] Not high caste people! There's no high caste in this country! As far as I am concerned there is nobody from a 'high caste.' Everyone is equal before God. *We're the ones who create 'high caste' and 'low caste.'* That's what we think. High caste people. Low caste people. People who have an inferior attitude think like that.⁵⁷

Ponnaiya evaded my next question on “caste in the Madurai Diocese”, claiming not to know what to say. Nevertheless, his verbal performance here communicates what appears to be a common stance in Pasumalai against public self-identification as “Dalit” and public support for any “Dalit” cause, a performative position violated and transgressed by Devasahayam’s poster campaign. Ponnaiya even rejects the posters’ sociological premise--that caste hierarchy exists (in the church)--as the projection of those with an inferiority complex. And, while rejecting that a Dalit group has a right to exist in Pasumalai, he seems to contradict himself later by using the phrase “non-Dalit” in a positivistic way to index powerful Pasumalai church members. Unlike Pastor Gnanarattinam, though, there is little compassion in his critique, despite the fact that his own father once held a low-paying office assistant position concurrently with Devasahayam, but in the Pasumalai Boys’ High School.

One afternoon in Pasumalai, a lonely ideological proponent of Dalit identity-making, Devirakkam, born to a Christian mother and converted father, decried the resistance to the Dalit movement in Pasumalai. As we chatted at his favorite hang-out, a granite engraving workshop across from the church, he recalled the opposition that emerged in 1994 when some of the parishioners organized a group to attend a “Dalit Christian” rally organized by Madurai’s Roman Catholic Diocese. Local Christians, he claims, questioned the point of the rally, ‘Does the Bible say conduct protests and get involved in politics? No. Then, why get involved in this Dalit

Christian movement? The reward is in heaven, for faith, there is no reward on earth worth seeking.’ Devirakkam’s retort to this paraphrased ethical argument was, ‘If everyone lived only according to what is found in the Bible, we couldn’t live. The country couldn’t run.’ Eight months later, sitting outside his Seminary Line home on folding chairs in the waning light of dusk, Devirakkam countered the shame-filled self-identity of Pasumalai’s *will-not-be* ‘Dalit Christians’, with a wry oppositional analogy: Just as *Aiyars* (Saivite Brahmins) live in their *akkirakāram* (name for village or street occupied by Brahmins) directly in front of the Murugan temple in TPK, so do Pasumalai’s Christian *Aiyars*, its “Dalit Christians,” live on their own “*akkirakāram*” named Seminary Line (which lies directly opposite the entrance to their Christian “temple”, Pasumalai Whitin Memorial Church).

Ponnaiya *Vāttiyār*’s attitude towards “Dalit” self-identification is much more typical than Devirakkam’s of most middle class CSI Tamils I met in Pasumalai, individuals who have cherished the ability to mask and/or to veil stigmatized caste identities behind a Christianized middle class identity front. In a 1901 essay entitled “Our Village Congregations,” AMM missionary Hervey Hazen notes in his section on “caste” how, at least for AMM mission workers, “it is also true that when a man’s clothes, hands, mouth, life and heart are clean, when he is discreet and godly the people often welcome him without regard to his caste.”⁵⁸ Hazen describes elements of a middle class habitus of visibly performed purity that also functions as a critical identity mask for many CSI Tamils of Dalit heritage today, distracting the prying eyes of strangers from ‘looking’ at their caste. But such an identity front is also enabled, he does not mention, by education (knowledge capital), by sufficient financial capital to have multiple sets of clean clothes

always ready, and, most critically, by the fluent acquisition of a moral rhetoric of elitist self-distinction.

And part of the post-colonial legacy of AMM mission compounds has been an embodied habitus among some CSI Tamils in Madurai and Ramnad Districts which blocks public rhetorical self-identification by caste as critical to sustaining minimal “Christian” distinction. Yet, the archives tell us that not all AMM Christians shied away from casting their aspersions, creating late colonial precedent for Devasahayam’s violation of a mission compound rhetorical taboo in the public pursuit of social justice within the church. Starting in 1940, one well-educated “depressed class” (Dalit) Christian teacher engaged in an eight year long letter-writing campaign to local church officials and ABCFM secretaries in Boston in order to press for the rights of “depressed class Christians.” His name was KS Ponnuswamy. Since he was employed at the time of his campaign in the Madurai public schools, he was politically immune from intra-church reprisals for his critical talk. On behalf of the “Madura Church Council Poor Christian Forward League”, he wrote many letters decrying the lack of scholarship money available to uplift rural “depressed class” Christians, even asking at one point for Rs. 25,000 in annual expenses on their behalf.⁵⁹ He decried the dominance of AMM mission “Schools, Boardings, Trade-Schools and Hospitals” by people “belonging to a higher society that has already been well-supported and brought forward by the Missionaries.”⁶⁰ He even alluded in his polemics to the inability of even a depressed class Pastor to penetrate the caste endogamy of the AMM’s “high caste Christians.”⁶¹ His campaign was one of the first in a rapidly devolving mission to link “depressed class” (Dalit) caste identity to lower class status and class immobility within the AMM.

Ponnuswamy's protest had little broad effect in lifting the AMM taboo, in altering the mission compound habitus of identity performance that blocked the public mobilization of the AMM's Dalits. In 1947, the Madura Mission Sangam (MMS)(a joint body of Tamil Christians and American missionaries) voted not to use the English word "under-privileged" in the title of a Diocesan charity fund, because its Tamil translation was the adjectival word *tāḷttappaṭṭa*, a common euphemistic reference to what are now called "Scheduled Castes" or "Dalits." As Lloyd Lorbeer noted, for those Tamil Christians in the MMS who objected to the word, it, "seems to imply to many that Christians from certain castes are in mind, and the Sangam is very strong in its feeling that this should not be given on a caste basis, *for we do not recognize caste in Sangam or Church (my emphasis).*"⁶² This passage also reveals a late colonial, missionary-endorsed silencing of any internal categorization of "need" along lines of ascribed Dalit vs. non-Dalit identity. Months after this vote, KS Ponnuswamy wrote indignantly to the new Madurai Bishop, Leslie Newbigin (British missionary), and to the Tamil head of the Madura Church Council (MCC) decrying what he perceived as yet another attempt to squash the class mobility of "depressed class" Christians in the Diocese,

I am very sorry to note that the name of the Poor and Underprivileged Christian Scholarship Fund has been changed as the Sangam [MMS] Self-Help Scholarship fund by printing application forms for the above said fund. I am lead to think that is purposely done to set-back the clock of the higher education to the depressed class Christian children which was so wisely, nobly and foresightedly started recently by Rev. Dudley with support of the American Board....⁶³

The continued post-colonial legacy of the missionary endorsed suppression of any public caste mobilization appears in the section of a 1980 Tamil language souvenir in honor of the Pasumalai Church's 75th Jubilee entitled "Caste and the Missionaries",

...it is dangerous to create sangams in the church, directly or indirectly, on the basis of caste. Giving support to caste sangams in the church is like the church pouring petrol on itself and lighting it. The medicine for this is Romans 15: 26. It is only right to enact the principle ‘The full gospel for the entire man’ by setting aside a “*Kristuva ēḷaikaḷ niti*” (Christian Poor People’s Fund) at the Diocesan level and creating suitable legal rules to decide who is a ‘poor Christian’ on the basis of income, without giving any room to ‘caste talk.’⁶⁴

The editor even cites the Bible to support the moral legitimacy of a taboo against “caste talk” in the contemporary Madurai-Ramnad Diocese.⁶⁵ And yet, he also echoes the 1947 MMS decision to mask open talk of caste distinctions with open talk of *class* distinctions. The author also implies that “caste talk” arises from the economic inequities within the Diocese itself, that it is a product of the church’s undeniable financial class hierarchy. And this is precisely what the Dalit adjunct pastor, Gnanarattinam, had argued with me regarding the fallacy of Devasayaham’s protest against *caste* discrimination.

For similar minded individuals, wearing the mask of “poor Christian” is publicly acceptable, even encouraged, multiple identity performance in the urban CSI Tamil community of Madurai, precisely because class and Christian identity are given *equal* weight in such a performance of self. But to say “Dalit Christian,” just as saying “depressed class Christian” was in the 1940’s, is to make caste and Christian identity rhetorically equal in public, something that violates the structural principle of a widely inhabited identity front among elite CSI Tamils in Pasumalai.

The basic logic of Devasahayam’s protest, however, is not entirely phantasmagoric. That caste discrimination exists as a glass ceiling against class mobility is, after all, the sociological axiom underlying India’s entire reservations apparatus (see Ch. 10). But, in Pasumalai today, one finds Christians from Paraiyar and Pallar heritage at middle class levels of income and education,

including dozens in the college educated ranks of the church's elite. The linkage that Devasayaham and Ponnusamy make between poverty and "Dalit" identity does not hold as well in the elite urban CSI communities of Pasumalai or Madurai as it does in the rural congregations that form a large proportion of the Madurai-Ramnad's Diocese membership (see Ch. 8).

Devasahayam's public protest seems oddly out of place in turn of the 21st century Pasumalai.⁶⁶

And this is no doubt why it was largely ignored, derided and/or mildly challenged.

The following two chapters explore the contrasting class mobility between Devasahayam's family and another Paraiyar Christian family which also entered the AMM's Christian fold during the late colonial period, just as it was beginning to devolve into a more cooperative, joint missionary/Tamil administrative body. These contrasting family narratives will reveal that identity fronts generated by a shared habitus do not magically perpetuate themselves indefinitely or regardless of external forces of history impinging on their performance, even in the historical spaces in which such a dispositional habitus emerged as part of a specific genre of missionary encounter.

Chapter 8 Wherefore “Our Lord of Equality”?

In his monumental three volumes entitled *India's Communities*, KS Singh includes a separate section entitled “Christian,” implying, strangely, that this religious minority constitutes its own caste. The first sentence reports the Christian population in India as of the 1981 Census. Later, though, he writes the following odd phrase, “In Tamil Nadu, the Christian converts number 2,798,048 (1981 census)” (1998: 712; my emphasis). What he means to say is that, according to the 1981 Census of India, the Christian *population* numbered 2,798,048.¹ This unconscious slippage, not made anywhere else, unfortunately reinforces right wing Hindu caricatures of India’s contemporary Christian community as one composed of treacherous converts waiting to be re-converted. In reality, for most Indian Christians, the original baptisms (whether in the father’s or mother’s patriline) lie in their family pasts or in the late colonial youth of their current family patriarchs.² Syrian Christians have lived in Kerala for centuries (cf. Visvanathan 1993; Dempsey 2000). Paravar and Mukkuvar fisher people living on Tamil Nadu’s southern coastline have been Catholics since the 16th century (cf. Bayly 1989 and Ram 1991), while the earliest Protestant communities in Tamil speaking south India emerged in the early 18th century under the leadership of German Moravian missionaries (see Hudson 2000; Singh 1999). Among contemporary descendants of those who received baptism during the existence of the AMM, the vast majority are born Christians for whom this identity is as ascribed as it was for myself, growing up in a Yankee Protestant family in 1980s America.³ This is why I have deliberately delayed discussion of “conversion” until the end of this study, metaphorically arguing for its relative degree of importance in understanding contemporary India’s diverse Christian communities.

Mission historians, church leaders and many historians of Indian Christianity have focused on discerning the motives behind colonial “baptisms” and/or “mass movements” which they gloss as “conversions” (e.g. Ooman 1935; Frykenberg 1976; Caplan 1988:122-123; Grafe 1990: 88-97; Oddie 1997). AMM missionaries also paid considerable attention to matters of motive. During the 19th century, they even classified mission members into two political categories: unbaptized “adherents” and baptized “professors of faith” or “communicants.”⁴ In the AMM’s 50th Anniversary “Mission Jubilee” (in 1884), for example, a large diachronic graph presents the relative proportions of these two kinds of “Christian” to prospective American donors and to ABCFM officials.⁵ “Adherents” were deemed minimally acceptable identity performers, but remained suspect as to impure motives and lack of informed faith. In some documented cases in my possession, specific AMM missionaries actually made prospective village “adherents” [who were also Dalits] who had applied for mission catechists sign contracts written by a local notary in which free church buildings and a paid catechist were made conditional on regular church attendance, renunciation of “ignorant” religious practices and loyalty to Christian tenets. The penalty for any apostasy was full payment for the mission buildings already erected plus the catechist’s salary to date.⁶ This behavior was indicative of a 19th century missionary suspicion of group conversions, especially by “depressed” castes or Dalits; one that would not necessarily go away, even though deliberate AMM evangelistic campaigns among “Harijans” did finally begin in the 1930s.⁷ Unwilling to decimate church attendance as well as their rapport with prospective converts, though, many AMM missionaries tolerated those who, in their view, merited only the

title of “adherent” as part of a long term strategy that did not sacrifice their highly intellectualist, rationalist view of evangelical conversion.⁸

In this chapter I do not attempt to parse the motives behind colonial or contemporary baptisms, because I am not concerned with politicizing a dichotomy between interior vs. exterior by making the former the center of a true, pure faith and the latter mere superficial veneer. It is my assumption that it is in the habitualization of perceptual ‘veneers’ of identity (perceivable by others), what I call identity fronts, that we often become persuaded of who we are in our social lives. In such a view, evangelical “faith” too becomes a habitualized performance of self-alignment that may become *narrated* as ‘real’ and ‘inner’ but which ultimately emerges as a disposition that transcends any strict inner and outer dichotomy. I also agree with Lionel Caplan that the dichotomy between “temporal”/nominal and “spiritual” conversions is analytically fallacious (1987: 37) and quite susceptible to collapse in the consciousness of any “convert.”⁹ For example, a desire for liberation from rural untouchability through the direct patronage of missionaries is one ‘motive’ commonly attributed to the late 19th and early 20th century mass conversions of untouchables in southern India. But such a motive is a profoundly complex emotional gestalt not easily distinguished from so-called ‘spiritual’ motives. Who is to say that such a desire for mobility in one’s public image is more material than spiritual? When people talk of a desire for improved social status, I believe they are really indexing a desire for *moral* mobility in their self-image, the erasure of a stigma that prevents the accumulation of self-distinguishing moral capital. Whether or not such a desire was really concurrent with the baptisms of village Dalits or subsequent to them is

not always clear. What motivates *baptism* may have nothing to do at all with what sustains Christian identity performance afterwards.¹⁰

Instead, I feel it is crucial that transformations of religious identity be understood in the historical context of power relations that structure their concrete performance and long term habitualization. I turn my attention, therefore, from identity “conversion” supposedly indexed in colonial mission *baptisms* to post-baptismal identity “conversions.” The specific “conversion” process that concerns me in the next two chapters involves not the phenomenological conversions of tenderly narrated evangelical hearts, but rather the habituation of baptized bodies to performances of a specific identity front within the political economies of a late colonial mission and its post-colonial church. Just as recent “conversion” literature (cf. Stromberg 1990, 1993) has focused on conversion narratives themselves as a self-making genre, rather than analyzing them as a source of empirical data about an interior event of personal history, in this chapter and in the next, I contrast the public identity fronts habitually performed in two Paraiyar Christian patrilineages as coordinated multiple identity performances that should be always read in their own historical contexts not as a facile portals into the inner world of their performers. Ultimately, I am looking at conversions from an identity front that allows caste identity performative space to one dominated by a public performance of a Christianized middle class identity that strategically denies caste performative expression.

Understanding the Stakes of Dalit Class Mobility within the AMM

In early December 1998, after interviewing a retired Hindu PK mill worker at his home in Jonespuram, we sat talking on his porch as he steadily supplied his inflamed nose with hits of local snuff. Muttukaruppan argued with me in a deep, raspy voice that “SC people” (Dalits) converted to Christianity primarily to hide their caste. I think this was an unlikely motive for rural colonial baptisms, because, without shifting residence, a baptism masks nothing from local landlords or anyone else who knows both you and your family. Yet, Muttukaruppan’s observation may refer to the desire of many *middle class* CSI Tamils from Dalit communities (amidst whom he lives in Pasumalai) who enjoy the privilege, afforded by the invisibility of caste identity beyond their natal villages, of masking their stigmatized caste identities from inquirers through statements like “We are Indian Christians!” While urban passing is clearly available to Dalits of whatever religious persuasion (cf. Mallick 1997), the identity mask of “Indian Christian”, taken from the colonial language of the Indian Census, adds an extra histrionic dimension to a Dalit Christian’s masking of caste.¹¹ Such verbal maskings of caste constitute habitualized strategies for deflecting attention from a stigmatized domain of identity and persuading the viewer to take the fronted identity of “Christian” most seriously amid other visible identities (class, gender, etc). In an historical sense, this phrase qua verbal performance also stands as a rhetorical monument to an older taboo on rhetorical castings of self in the public sphere of colonial Protestant missions like the AMM. But, aside from diffuse desires to avoid stigma, there were *historical* pressures within the AMM, especially its mission

compound political economies, that most likely made such a masking of caste necessary, and perhaps attractive, for the upwardly mobile “Dalit” Christian.

In the 1862 AMM Annual report, AMM missionary J.S. Burnell reveals a tempting generalization that would have faced most AMM Dalits entering the AMM’s political economy from natal communities,

By far the largest proportion of the members of the Church [AMM] are from the lowest ranks of Hindu life, and their poverty, as already shown [,] is extreme. This being the case, we cannot reasonably expect much from them in the way of neatness and food, order in their families and household arrangements, or a very respectable appearance personally.¹²

That Burnell describes *baptized* members of AMM churches as part of “Hindu life” strongly indexes the presence of the “adherent” category being implicitly applied in an elitist fashion to marginalize the uneducated, cash poor masses of the AMM from the status of “true Christian.” At the same time, he implies that behavior contrary to middle class ideals is prevalent among the church’s predominantly Dalit membership. To the extent that other elites in the AMM shared this image, it implies that AMM Dalits trying to achieve class mobility within the mission most likely would have wanted to deflect attention from their “Dalit” identity as a primary act of distinction from the AMM’s rural Dalit masses.

For at least a simple majority of Christian Tamils, whose family matriarchs and/or patriarchs received baptism in the midst of a rural economy ‘beyond cash’, in illiteracy and living under the burden of attributed caste stigma, or who studied as more alienated souls in mission compound boarding schools far from their natal villages, one implicit goal has been to move the visible self beyond a stigmatized past in a broader process of social class mobility. And critical performances of a caste-less “Christian” self, well learned and habitualized, would

have helped maintain moral capital in order to obtain elite forms of patronage from American missionaries or from elite, especially non-Dalit, Christians in the AMM political economy. There was most likely a tactical quality encoded within colonial performances of Christian identity in the AMM, which, to some extent, has been carried into the post-colonial church for those whose livelihood is still dependent on Diocese employment.

Historically, the “conversion” towards a mission compound identity front (described in Ch. 2) may have emerged most strongly among Dalit peasant families in the AMM, when family heads decided to begin their upward climb towards urban, educated, middle class distinction. Once the decision was made to abandon the peasant fold as the basis of one’s livelihood and risk a new life in a mission’s political economy, the weight of caste stigma most likely became even more burdensome and offensive to a morally re-fashioned self at the very same time that its negative impact on one’s *daily* existence probably lessened, provided the “Dalit” Christian did not offend or threaten predominantly high caste church officials and the ideals of AMM missionaries by ‘making it an issue.’ The moral economy of colonial missions nurtured (though not to the exclusion of caste politics) an alternative politics of privilege, presumably unavailable to Dalits in their natal colonies; one fueled by performances of loyalty to Christian rhetoric of “the path”, *ūliyam* to the church and other visible metonyms of an idealized inner ‘faith’ (e.g. acceptable names and a perpetually naked forehead). Those Dalits who carefully inhabited the mission compound identity front, as they entered the political economy of the AMM (or afterwards, perhaps through baptism while studying in its schools), converted themselves into an alternative hierarchy of privilege that implicitly allowed rare

opportunities for conjoined moral, financial and educational mobility, even though no structural force guaranteed such complex mobility to anyone.

Forms of Class Mobility in the AMM

There were many ladders of class mobility leading from peasant existence to middle class life in the AMM, although it appears that only a minority of the AMM's Dalit members ever really changed their social class.¹³ Although disinterest in educating their children may have been a common impediment among the AMM's majority peasant Christians, lack of income to spare their 'childrens' labor' was most likely, as it still is for most of India's asset poor peasants, the most harrowing obstacle,

The reason for the low conditions of the village schools is the fact that the parents place so little value on education, and also that their poverty is so great that they require the aid of the children as soon as they can do the least work, [such] as watering the fields or the cattle and sheep. The teachers also, many of them, have been and still are very incompetent.¹⁴

For AMM Christians from these peasant backgrounds, especially landless Dalit peasants, reduced "mission fees" (based on baptismal affiliation and recommendations) in AMM schools or waivers for manual labor performed on school grounds, mission scholarships or private gifts from missionaries or foreign donors provided virtually the only ways to break the glass ceiling preventing education beyond elementary school during the colonial period.¹⁵ Hindu Dalits trying to get beyond the peasant fold in the colonial Madras Presidency were also solely dependent on social patronage until the late 19th century introduction of education concessions for "Panchama" students.¹⁶ But with the introduction of welfare legislation for Scheduled Castes in 1936, which excluded those legally identified to the Government as "Indian

Christians”, Hindu Dalits had substantially greater sources of government patronage than their Christian caste peers, at least in theory.¹⁷

For those AMM Christians who desired simply to get beyond the peasant fold, one route was as some form of low-level mission employee (e.g. catechist, bible woman, low-grade elementary school teacher, school hostel warden/mistress, mail boy, school writer and office assistant) or to attend Pasumalai’s Trade School for vocational training and seek a working class career as a carpenter, an electrician or a mechanic. I met elderly Pasumalai Christians who had moved along all these various paths in the late colonial period. Others more fortunate could complete high school, obtain a Normal School education and teach in both government and mission schools. During the early colonial period, AMM mission teachers generally got paid somewhat less than their government counterparts; this may have created more interest in mission education than in mission teaching in the minds of AMM Christian students.¹⁸ At some point after Independence, though, grant-in-aid mission schoolteachers began receiving salaries according to Government scales of wage, which is still the prevailing situation today in Tamil Nadu. An elite few who could obtain college degrees in the late colonial period, such as my Pasumalai landlord and his brother, always had the most lucrative employment potential, far beyond the mission, in government service jobs. I even know of several late colonial Pasumalai teachers who eventually went on to get jobs in Government service and retired with more substantial pensions than they would have had they retired as mission or Diocesan teachers. Pasumalai’s Teacher Training School (until 1973), specifically, appears to have been an invaluable late colonial portal to a non-peasant existence, one that was responsible, to a great extent, for the current size of the Diocese’s Dalit middle class. Part of its power, at

least in the 1930s, was that admitted students were matched with employment positions *as they were admitted*.¹⁹ Finally, aside from going into government service, becoming a pastor has been perhaps one of the more vaunted goals, especially for those who started their careers off as teachers. In 1845, William Tracy and Alfred North described the experience of becoming a Christian pastor in South India as an “elevation from deep poverty to tolerable comfort.”²⁰ This elevation in material circumstances, this “tolerable comfort”, was probably the wider goal of many upwardly mobile families in the AMM political economy. Regardless of the particular career path taken (within or without the AMM’s political economy), most significant class mobility for AMM peasants started with admission to AMM boarding schools, among which Pasumalai was the *ultimate* destination for male students in the late colonial and early post-colonial periods. It offered not only primary through high school curriculums with a thriving system of boarding hostels but also teacher training and manual training for interested, qualified high school graduates.

Unfortunately, missionary analyses of class divisions and differential rates of mobility *within* late colonial AMM caste groups are absent; a lacuna symptomatic, perhaps, of a habitual practice of structurally foregrounding class while backgrounding caste in the identity front continually promoted within its mission compounds. How many Christians from the AMM’s rural Dalit congregations actually made the upward journey to a life of “tolerable comfort” remains unknown. And intra-caste class hierarchy remains one of the more unspoken Durkheimian “social facts” in both Pasumalai and the wider CSI Tamil community. But it is the “social fact” which the condemnation of Devasayaham’s pro-Dalit wall poster campaign most powerfully revealed to me (Ch. 7). In the CSI’s Madurai-Ramnad Diocese, perhaps to an

extent unparalleled in most other Indian Christian churches, such class divisions now deeply divide two of the three major Dalit castes present in the colonial AMM, challenging any simple equation of middle class with “high caste.”²¹

Paraiyar, ‘Peon’ and Christian Poet

But what about the story of Devasahayam, whose wall poster campaign we learned about in the last chapter? How can we understand his protest in the context of his own quest for class mobility in post-colonial Pasumalai? How did his 1949 arrival in Pasumalai as an office assistant, specifically, affect his quest? Did he habitualize the identity front promulgated in mission compound spaces and then abandon it recently, or is there some other explanation for his protest? How does his family’s marginality shed light, via contrast, upon the privilege of Pasumalai’s multi-caste, middle class Christian center?

Devasahayam came to Pasumalai in 1949 from his natal village north of Dindigul where he had received his baptism under the influence of his first wife’s brother, who, at the time, was an AMM village catechist and second grade teacher in a nearby AMM primary school (and also after his younger brother had started studying in Pasumalai’s boarding school). In explaining how he came to be offered an office assistant position in Pasumalai’s famous Normal school, he mentioned that Lloyd Lcrbeer had been charmed by his talent for singing Tamil Christian lyrics.²² This signals his own recognition that Christian identity ‘performance’ had tactical qualities that were well understood to many AMM peasants contemplating entry into the mission’s political economy; though the symbolic capital of multiple kinship connections to AMM employees most likely also helped him in this regard.

During my field stay Devasahayam was living on Teachers' Line with five of six children born to a second wife, *despite* his retirement in 1993. Although Diocesan rules provide low rent housing to many Diocesan employees, the rules on vacating after retirement have not been fully enforced for decades.²³ He is one of the several Pasumalai families squatting in a Diocesan home, because, as he explained it, there is no way for his family to survive on his meager pension and pay full rent somewhere else. Regardless, it is a fact that has only sustained a steady antipathy aimed toward him from some of Pasumalai's middle class Christians and from other rent-paying residents of local Diocesan housing. Despite his stubborn residential claim, as his wife often told me, he is actually rarely at home; he is always traveling, always planning. For months, I never figured out where he was always rushing; only that it was nearly impossible to schedule an interview with this grade school educated man whom older Pasumalai residents call a former "peon," a mildly derogatory colonial English term for an office or domestic servant. While never calling *himself* a "peon," he did confess in our first interview that his job positioned him as a *kaṭainilai ūḷiyaṅ* (low grade or class 4 government servant; but still ranked above the unranked class of "sweepers").²⁴

But, whenever I saw Devasahayam in public Pasumalai spaces, his bodily performance hardly connoted "lowest grade" anything. He always wore a meticulously cleaned white *vēṣṭi* (men's full length skirt) and a pressed shirt decorated, without fail, by a colorful red shawl or *poṇṇātai* carefully folded and laid over his left shoulder. This style of dress is still common in his generation; even many of Pasumalai's late colonial teachers wore a special *vēṣṭi* (men's folded skirt) known as a *tārppāyccu*.²⁵ But, today, a *vēṣṭi*-and- shawl sartorial performance is primarily put on by village landlords, urban Tamil politicians and working class men (e.g. mill

workers, construction laborers) and is not a function of financial means. To some, therefore, Devasahayam's sartorial performance might signal working class status or aspirations to landlord or to political status. The carefully folded shawl he habitually wore is certainly a sartorial sign of honored status village Paraiyars have never traditionally worn in their natal villages. Devasahayam's costume signaled, to me, both the archaic costuming habits learned in late colonial rural Tamil Nadu and a desire to violate the sartorial semiotics of a natal caste hierarchy as his own context-free personal habitus of habit. Yet, such a sartorial metaphor for moral victory over a degrading caste stigma is ironic in *Pasumalai*, a place that has, from the 1847 "love feasts" onwards, been relatively free from blatant attributions of caste stigma and where wearing a *vēṣṭi* allies one more with local PK laborers and ex-mill workers than with Pasumalai's middle class pants-and-belt male center.

Devasayaham always walked through Pasumalai's public spaces with an aura of great purpose, head tilted slightly back, and spine perfectly erect. Pressed tight to his *vēṣṭi*-clad side, he often gripped a zippered satchel bearing pressing documents and some travel money. Yet, during my research, Devasayaham earned only a pension of Rs. 2000 on which his household of six residents still had to depend. His eldest son, a high school graduate in his late twenties, was unable to finance an expensive college or technical education and was an office clerk on the basis of a typewriting course. He was living in a distant city earning a paltry, domestic servant's salary of Rs. 500 a month when I last inquired. The second eldest son earned twenty rupees here and thirty rupees there as an electrician's assistant, working part time on behalf of a local Hindu PK electrician and neighbor living on Teachers' Line. This itself was an eery working class analogy in former mission space to more common village caste hierarchies that

subordinate Dalit to Devar in an agricultural political economy. His only daughter was unemployed. Though his third son, Maran, studied and successfully graduated from a local government technical college during 1998-1999, thanks, in part, to a large donation from me, he faced the likely payment of a large cash “donation” to get the most lucrative government jobs for which the training had prepared him. The youngest son was still studying at the Pasmalai Boys’ Higher Secondary School.

Like most working class, struggling families in urban Tamil Nadu, daily nutritious morning and evening snacks made from *māvu* (sour-tasting, fermented rice and lentil batter) were beyond their economic means. They did not eat thick chicken stews every Sunday after church like their middle class Christian neighbors. Although opting for a pants-and-belt performance of modern, urban masculinity (contra their father’s ‘habit’), Devasahayam’s sons could not afford the fancy jeans or hand tailored pure cotton clothes metonymic of Madurai’s urban, male middle classes. Instead, they were forced to don primarily cheap mixed polyester/cotton or pure polyester weaves in ready made sizes along with cheap, often rubber, sandals (so cheap they are often used as house, or backyard, shoes in middle class Tamil homes). While the average monthly per capita income claimed by Teachers’ Line residents during my 1998 survey was roughly Rs. 1,000-1,200, Devasahayam fed his residential family of six on a maximum per capita income of Rs. 400 (before loans and charity are considered). And though this is twice the rural Indian poverty line and slightly higher than the average rural Indian per capita income (cf. Shariff 1999: 46-47), they often ran out of rice during the last week of each month, asking neighbors and friends for loans until the next pension check arrived. The two working sons gave money whenever they could, but the eldest had to spend

most of his cash just to subsist in a far off town, no doubt wondering whether he would ever have enough income to be considered marriageable by anyone other than the family of a *peasant* Paraiyar Christian girl. When compared with Pasumalai's non-Christian residents, Devasayaham's family was actually not suffering nearly as much as some PK squatters living in Anna Nagar several hundred yards away (see Map 3). His children had, after all, all attained what had eluded him in the 1940s: a high school education. But this educational advance is not very impressive to local middle class Christians, nor is his children's' urban survival assured by this achievement. Though a high school education has a certain moral force in Devasahayam's natal village, it has none in *Christian* Pasumalai.

His 21-year-old son, Maran, performed clerical and occasional housework for me in return for my help financing a year of his technical college study. In many visits to Dora Agam, Maran routinely complained to me of his family's poverty. Devasayaham's chronically fatigued, house-bound wife also complained of the excessive special *kāṇikkaika!* (offerings) asked for by the church in addition to a voluntarily set monthly sum to maintain church membership (and rights to weddings and burials): semimonthly communion offerings, "praise" offerings, Harvest Festival offerings, Bethlehem offerings 'for the poor' at Christmas, missionary offerings, New Year's offerings, Easter "self-denial" offerings, birthday offerings, etc. One morning, Maran bemoaned the fact that the church even asks for money on your birthday, money that you are supposed to give the Sunday in which the pastor calls out your name during the service. Although he knows it is voluntary, if you don't give, church officials who have records of birthdays can easily gossip about it to the whole community, or so he feared.

The most painful eruption of the class boundary for young Pasumalai Christians like Maran, however, emerges during the Christmas holiday season. Though admirably less materialistic than American Christmas celebrations (no trees and no elaborate domestic gift exchanges), custom dictates the purchase of two new suits of nice clothes to be worn separately at early morning Christmas and New Year's church services. For many Pasumalai families I knew, this entailed spending upwards of a month's entire income (or more) for two holidays separated by only seven days. To save money, many Pasumalai Christians often head for the annual Deepavali (Diwali) textile sales (late October or early November). And so, during Deepavali 1998, Maran came to me one evening, frustrated that he couldn't go with the other choirboys to shop, because he had no money to spare. For Maran's family, this obligatory middle class holiday expense is simply impossible.

During my research stay, Maran had the awkward reputation for being somewhat of a *pantākkāraṅ* (a show off). Whether from PK neighbors or from his middle class choir boy peers, this office assistant's son received mainly mild to severe contempt. His continuous quest for middle class *mariyātai* (respect) was thwarted everywhere he turned. Trying to claim elite knowledge capital, he once asked me for some paper so he could compose love poetry. He then showed his compositions to his choir boy 'friends', apparently mentioning to them with pride how I had given him the paper. His nemesis in the choir, a college graduate, made sure to mock his verse repeatedly with me afterwards, urging me not to give him any more paper so that the 'torture' would end. The same young man also mocked Maran behind his back as an *akarāti paiyaṅ* ('dictionary boy' or someone who claims more knowledge than they really or really should have) when Maran told him he couldn't attend choir practice one week

because he had to study for his “college exam.” Maran’s attempt at middle class money talk also failed to persuade anyone. After a planning meeting for the church’s annual “Grand Musical Eve,” the most eagerly awaited cultural performance of the year besides the Love Divine passion play, one of the older choir boys mockingly re-enacted Maran’s casually over-confident budget estimates, stroking his hair back in sharp, quick motions as he recounted each sum Maran had mentioned with an implausibly knowing tone of voice, “2,000, 4,000”; sums with which they correctly assumed *he* could have had no prior experience spending.

Little else but the moral rhetoric of Christian talk and his own position in the church choir allowed him any attention at all from Pasumalai’s middle class Christian community. But even that arena of identity performance repeatedly failed to gain him much acceptance. At a revival meeting staged behind the church in 1998, a group of choirboys rose to sing. Maran grabbed the nearby mike and stood there singing into it, proudly projecting his singing through speakers while the others sang “un-plugged.” A tall, over fed, much wealthier middle class peer (roughly the same age) leaned over to me and muttered sarcastically, “Hmm. I can only seem to hear Maran’s voice.” All these awkward attempts to perform a middle class identity only corroded empathy for the son of a former office servant whose ‘show-off’ behavior is actually a desperate cry of frustration from a young man who was slowly coming to realize he may never accrue the material signs of middle class success necessary for acceptance in ‘Christian’ Pasumalai. His participation in the Pasumalai choir did little to overcome his alienation as an undereducated, under funded Christian.

Maran’s alienation was a thundering metonym of the family’s collective alienation in contemporary Pasumalai, an alienation that only became exacerbated with Devasahayam’s wall

poster campaign and published comments in a local magazine. Yet, every year, during the week preceding Easter, Devasayaham dons an elaborate costume that briefly moves his public self beyond the class stigma of being a former office “peon.” Since the late 1940s, at the request of his original employer, Lloyd Lorbeer, he has been singing Carnatic Christian lyrics in Pasumalai’s annual passion play, the Love Divine. In this five hour long cultural performance, he plays one of the three *vāṇacāstirikaḷ* (wise men) who sing haunting Tamil Christian lyrics in the play’s third scene as they make their way from Herod’s Jerusalem palace to Bethlehem.²⁶ For nearly four decades the Love Divine, Pasumalai’s most significant contribution to Tamil folk art, has been artistically dependent on the singing skills of Devasayaham and one other venerable colleague. In other words, an *ūḷiyam* largely controlled by Pasumalai’s middle class Christian center has been dependent on one of its working class peers. And, every year, Devasayaham is honored for his contribution, when he opens the Church’s annual “Love Divine” church service with one of the script’s Tamil *kīrttaṇai* set to haunting *rākams* of Carnatic music (*not* based on Western melodic structures).

For the 50th jubilee for the Love Divine in 1995, Devasahayam composed a special praise poem in honor of the occasion which was published in a written souvenir. And, every year, in December, Devasahayam qua Christian vocalist sits down to compose a metered *centamiḷ* (classical Tamil) poem in celebration of Christmas and the Gregorian New Year. In 1998, he paid Rs. 250 to have his *vāḷttu kavi* (greeting poem) printed on a thin, blue folding “Inland Letter Card” and mailed to 150 friends and relatives, including the “missionary/anthropology researcher.” To the right of the poem appears a picture in which he

has on his customary clean white shirt and red shawl. The caption beneath reads: *Kaviñar* (Poet) S. Devasayaham. His 1998 poem combines metered verse and rhyme with Sanskritized Christian Tamil terminology to praise God and the birth of Jesus. In the fifth stanza, Devasayaham describes the vaunted qualities of Jesus (or “Lord”; referred to in the BSI Old Version by the Tamil word *karttar*) ending each line with the informal vocative *nīrē* (Oh You). The last phrase in this stanza stands out for its democratic social theme, one seldom elaborated in Pasumalai’s sermons during my stay, “*Eñkaḷ camattuva karttarum nīrē*” (Oh you who are also our lord of equality). And it is a quest for equality indexed metonymically by Christ, one requiring moral mobility in his public image, that appears to have occupied much of Poet Devasayaham’s life.

Yet, it appeared to me by the end of my research that Devasahayam has never really been able to convert the moral capital of his Christian identity qua poet and singer into any patronage or unqualified respect from his middle class Christian neighbors. The stigma of being a former “office assistant” seems to have trumped these performances of a Christian self. Despite its almost clerical connotations, this government salaried and government pensioned position originated as a category of unskilled labor in the colonial administrative culture of the British Empire. One of Devasahayam’s colleagues, who worked simultaneously in the same position at Pasumalai’s Boys’ High School, said that the job involves running letters between offices, taking money to the bank, getting coffee and snacks for staff, etc.²⁷ It is a job that definitely requires no more education than Devasahayam had achieved when he arrived in Pasumalai in 1949 to work (5th grade).

And this is hardly a fact lost on most of his middle class Christian neighbors. I rarely saw Devasayaham interacting with the more elite local Christians (even from his own caste), whether in their homes, on Pasumalai's streets or socializing behind the church with members of the church's elite. Without a single member of his family holding a college degree, he has little in common with the family lives and dynamics of Pasumalai's Christian middle class. He cannot share their privileged assumptions about what is even a normal life course. He also cannot mix the requisite amount of English into his Tamil sentences. Charles, son of a famous, late colonial Normal school teacher, grew up on Teachers' Line and remembers Devasayaham working for his father. As we discussed caste in Pasumalai, he suddenly mentioned him, "Devasayaham is a guy who calls himself a Dalit. Devasayaham was a peon to my father. Office peon. [switching to a slightly mocking tone] Now because of the Love Divine, he's changed. He sings lyrics very well. His name is..., "he said, pausing to think, "He calls himself something, uh, poet? He says something, Devasayaham."²⁸ This well housed, dressed and fed government school teacher from Jonespuram mockingly substitutes "peon" for the job's official title "office assistant" in order to establish Devasahayam at the near bottom of Pasumalai's top heavy class hierarchy, and then goes on quickly to question the moral authority of his cherished identity as Christian poet. Devasahayam's habit of "Dalit" self-identification is clearly enough cause for some of his middle class Christian peers to mock him.

Devasahayam's wall poster campaign and published comments, however, were not the first time he had asserted a "Dalit" identity. His was the only Pasumalai Christian house I entered where I found a large picture of a B.R. Ambedkar hanging over the inside of the front entrance. Though hidden from anyone merely looking in, it nevertheless proudly indexes his

“Dalit” identity in a manner considered a poor “Christian” performance, especially among those who share a mission compound habitus. And despite his well-known, domestic honoring of Ambedkar’s image, to my knowledge, he had never before brought this image out into Pasumalai’s public space until the wall poster campaign. Hanging on either side of Ambedkar’s picture were pictures of Annadurai (founder of the DMK party, of which he has been a long time member) and the Tamil poet Tiruvalluvar (indicating Devasahayam’s aspirations to literary status). Many Pasumalai Christians feel that, aside from family photos, only Christ’s picture should be displayed in a “Christian” home. Devasahayam’s domestic iconography is highly marginal in Christian Pasumalai and well known, only further alienating him.

Several months after his wall poster protest, I learned he was a regional secretary for the Ambedkar People’s Party, in which he facilitated implementation of government schemes such as building bore wells for Dalit hamlets, installing road lights, etc. With this information, it had become clear that, *beyond Pasumalai*, Devasahayam clearly felt comfortable publicly performing an identity front that included both Dalit and political party semiotics. When I asked him what might happen if he tried to erect an Ambedkar statue in Pasumalai, though, he replied that it would bring him a bad name, although he noted that he could easily build one on government land straddling either side of National Highway 7 (i.e. regardless of any local Christian disapproval). This local pressure was, most likely, precisely what had prevented him from writing his own name, or placing his own picture, on the wall posters of December 1998, although he allowed his photograph to be published along with images of the posters in the subsequent article in *The Forehead Eye*.

But, if he is willing to perform a Dalit identity publicly beyond Pasumalai to the extent of working for a blatantly pro-Dalit political party, is Devasahayam really rooted *only* in Pasumalai, a place where his caste peer, Ponnaiya *Vāttiyār*, claims there are no Dalits? Intrigued by claims from Maran that his father was a hero in his natal colony of Paraiyars I wanted to find out from where this man had come in 1949 and what legacy of identity performance he had really carried with him to Pasumalai from his natal soil. So, in March of 1999, I asked him to escort me to the village of his birth. Would I meet a different Devasahayam there, I wondered?

Days after we had set a convenient date for a return to his natal soil, on the evening of March 11, I wandered from Dora Akam to Devasayaham's home at the end of Teachers' Line to confirm our trip plans. After sitting down in his living room on one of their two plastic mesh cots, suddenly Devasayaham called to his youngest son to go bring something over to him. Ben quickly brought over a framed photo of his father set strangely onto a dull gray background, like an astral projection of some obscure regional deity. I glanced down and saw a caption mentioning Devasayaham's name and birth date, followed by a lonely dash. Within a chilling instant, the symbolic force of this iconic death wish overtook me. This was no simple portrait. This was an *añcali paṭam* (homage picture), an image hung in Tamil homes to honor the dead and keep their remembrance alive. But, until that moment, I had never heard of anyone actually producing his or her own.

Suddenly worried I was about to go on a trip with a suicidal elderly man, we shifted outside in the warm evening air where he released a depressed monologue that began with a startling confession, "There's no peace in my heart." Bemoaning a career of 40 years which

has yielded no savings, he lamented his inability to provide enough food or clothing for his six children, “I’m embarrassed when I go outside and see other people.” Ironically, while caste identity is often concealed in Pasumalai by visible, sartorial performances of middle class identity, this is precisely the one genre of elite identity performance Devasahayam and his children cannot stage. Even local gossip about his former job marks him out clearly as a member Tamil Nadu’s poorly educated, servile urban classes. Devasahayam told me he had ordered the homage picture made, because he is thinking he wants to die and get out of this world. “What am I here for?” he asked me rhetorically. I told him not to think like that. What else could I say? For a few moments we stood there, silently, in the warm darkness. I remained floored, unable to console him like a good friend should. I also couldn’t help thinking that he didn’t sound at all like a “hero” about to return triumphantly to his natal soil. The bold, political mask of the poster campaign had fallen away, revealing a depressed, vulnerable old villager whose quest for improved *mariyātai*, for the class mobility of his children, remained unfulfilled, despite wearing a carefully folded red shawl over his left shoulder.

The following afternoon, Devasayaham and his two youngest sons appeared at Dora Agam to meet me before departing for his village. After eventually arriving, two hours later, at Dindigul’s main bus stand, Devasayaham told me many times before we got on the local bus to his village that there was no road to it and that we would have to cross a river (!). After disembarking from the bus into the coal-like blackness at the side of the National Highway to Bangalore, we crossed into the fallow fields across the way and trudged toward his natal soil. However, in darkness penetrated only by my Maglite flashlight, we overshot the customary

crossing point, wound back and crossed right into the area of the village where the dominant Konar caste still resides. These are Devasayaham's traditional enemies, against whom he railed in two interviews. We walked silently past their temple and quickly into the Paraiyar *cēri*.

In between pausing to meet relatives, Devasahayam narrated to me his years of political maneuverings with the Dindigul Collector in which he helped to secure a land grant from the government to extend the colony. On this land he had also secured government money to construct a hand pump and a bore well ten years ago. And now, he added, his main battle with the present Collector, ironically a fellow 'Dalit,' was to get a Rs. 4 million bridge built from the National Highway leading into the village at the precise intersecting point of the Dalit and Konar residential areas. It would not only allow vehicles quick access in and out of the village, but would also symbolically balance, via the material practices of modernity, a settlement haunted by a vicious hierarchical caste symbiosis. As this information flowed into my ears, and as I saw him greet relatives fairly casually, without the great emotional outbursts that generally accompany long forestalled reunions, I suddenly realized that Devasayaham had never really 'left' his village at all. He has been thoroughly enmeshed in its struggles and in the issues facing his relatives and caste peers all his life. He is a major local politician, a veritable caste leader in fact. And, most likely, living in Pasumalai has only helped to solidify his leadership status, a palpable *mariyātai*, amongst his relatives.

During our brief stay, I noticed that Devasayaham's entire personality had changed. Instead of the vulnerable, almost suicidal confessor I had heard the night before our trip, he marched with pride around his natal soil and talked with an authoritative air he could never

even begin to perform successfully with middle class Christians behind the Pasumalai church (where I never saw him). Generally quite respectful, sometimes awkwardly deferential, to me in Pasumalai, standing on his natal soil, Devasahayam was suddenly yelling and carping at me like I was his own son. When I realized, after interviewing our host's wife about her conversion, that the microphone had been shut off the whole time, he scoffed in open disgust at my carelessness. Clearly, here was a place where Devasahayam felt like a *periya ā!* (big guy). I realized finally that Devasayaham was capable of projecting a Dalit identity in wall posters and magazine articles not simply because he was politically immune from reprisals in Pasumalai (as a retired Diocesan employee), much like his 1940s' predecessor KS Ponnuswamy, but rather because Devasayaham has never fully relinquished a habitual identity front learned in his youth, one that very much projects his Paraiyar identity. He has never abandoned the struggle for the increased dignity and respect of his own people, despite his career in Pasumalai's mission compound. And, unsurprisingly, all this makes Devasayaham very sensitive, perhaps over-sensitive, to anything that might even hint of caste discrimination beyond his natal village.

The experience of Christians from 'the three communities' who grew up in Pasumalai, like Ponnaiya *Vāttiyaṛ*, couldn't be more different. They have been protected from extreme forms of untouchability by both the historical force of a colonial Christian taboo against vulgar public caste discrimination (assented to even by local Hindu PK) and by their inhabitation of elite class positions in local society. In the words of one well-off pastorate committee member named Paul,

Perhaps if I had been in another place and experienced discrimination or “harassment”, perhaps I could have gone on a different path. By ‘gone on a different path’ I mean, perhaps, I might have even become a “revolutionist.” “But”, because I was here, I never saw any kind of discrimination or “harassment.” So many times I have felt very proud to be in a place like this. Also, because my circumstances and opportunities are high today, uuh, I don’t really look at this as a very big issue.²⁹

This 45 year-old social worker and life-long resident of Pasumalai purchased the home he had been renting in Jonespuram during my fieldwork. By the time I left Pasumalai he was a settled upwardly mobile, middle class home-owner enjoying a *very* “tolerable comfort,” despite growing up poor in Pasumalai as one of nine children born to a low grade Indian Railways employee. In a career beyond the church’s backroom caste politics, and beyond the stigma a Hindu Dalit faces when taking a public service job based on a reserved job quota provided for Dalits, Paul has created *his own* middle class livelihood where caste has no relevance whatsoever.³⁰ As a social worker with regular contact among rural Dalits unable to enjoy the middle class liberation he enjoys in Pasumalai and in his career, Paul understands more deeply than me his own social privilege. Equally understandably, precisely because he sees this enormous contrast so regularly, he has taken advantage of caste’s technical invisibility and is one of Pasumalai’s most stubbornly *will-not-be-Dalit* Christians.

And, even Devasahayam quite consciously enjoys certain social freedoms in Pasumalai that he lacked as a child. I often saw him lounging at Pasumalai’s tea and coffee stalls, Devar dominated working class spaces where he, the Paraiyar Christian, quietly sipped a tea or coffee.³¹ Devasahayam even argued with me privately, on one occasion, that Pasumalai is a safe place for “SCs” (Scheduled Castes) because of the presence of “Christianity” and the Christian community which he claimed does not encourage or tolerate the kind of harassment

seen in what he termed as “Hindu” villages. Devasahayam even received remarkable honors from a local non-Dalit family during my stay. A fellow working class colleague from the Girls’ High school, a Hindu watchman from the much less stigmatized Reddiyar community, invited him to a special reception at the school so he could sing a Christian song in honor of his daughter’s wedding. Beyond this honor, that evening at the reception feast, Devasahayam also helped pass out hot, steaming idlis among the hungry guests with no objection from anyone; though the Konar individuals lingering in his childhood memories would be shocked to know that dozens of non-Dalit guests were eating that evening from the hand of a ‘lowly’ Paraiyar. And perhaps this is the kind of experience, social intimacy beyond caste distinction, that has kept Devasahayam very much attached to living in a Pasumalai where he otherwise suffers the continued stigma of being part of Madurai’s working class.

After fifty years in Pasumalai, Devasayaham’s family was no closer to achieving middle class status than when he himself arrived in 1949. His family’s moral status had risen most in his natal village, not in Pasumalai. This moral impotence in Pasumalai’s Christian social world has its phenomenological corollary in Devasahayam’s casual self-identification as a “low caste.” Unlike Ponnaiya, Devasayaham implicitly accepted the categories of *tāḷntajāti* (low caste) and *uyarnta jāti* (high caste) in both interviews with me. Furthermore, in the first interview, he described caste endogamy in the following way,

Our principle is that there should be no caste in the Christian religion. But *this* [marriage] isn’t like that. Paraiyan. He is a low caste. He can only go to the low caste [for marriage]. But the same Christian can’t go to a high caste and marry.³²

And, again, in our second interview, months later, when I asked him to list what he considered were “high castes” in Tamil society, he quickly produced a list without objecting to my use of

the phrase, as Ponnaiya *Vāṭṭiyār* had done so instantly and so angrily. It is almost as if, despite the political victories won for his natal community and a poem praising “Our Lord of Equality,” he has somehow still internalized a castist idiom of self-degradation. His lack of class mobility and consequent social alienation in Pasumalai may very well contribute to a continued feeling of “lowness”, low in education and low in wealth, low in the collective imagination of a middle class Pasumalai center. In a cruelly ironic way, Devasahayam has escaped the brutality of verbal and bodily caste degradation to experience persistent class degradation in Pasumalai, colonial Christian temple to class mobility. So what, exactly, has Devasahayam done, strategically, to give his children the opportunity to fully inhabit a mission compound identity front in which being *middle class* has always been performatively crucial?

A month before the poster campaign, Maran had claimed to me privately that there was a custom, started by the missionaries, in which people working in Diocesan institutions had the *urimai* (right) to pass down the positions held in their family. Believing this, when his father retired, he claims they went to the former Bishop (a Vellalar) to ask him to pass his office assistant job onto his oldest brother, the underpaid clerk. Had his son received the job, he alone would have been earning Rs. 2550-3200 in 1999.³³ The Bishop said he would help; yet nothing turned up. He also claims the Manager of Schools made similar empty promises. As he argued with me, the Diocese could easily give all ‘its families’ at least one Diocese position, especially if it stopped concentrating jobs in the families of the well off (i.e. the families of clergy which he feels are hoarding positions within the Diocese by virtue of their influence).³⁴ Despite the fact that such a right has no basis in the Diocesan Constitution, I found the widespread acknowledgement by Christians of all castes and all relations to the Diocese, that

every CSI pastor has acquired the de facto right to one Diocese teaching position for their family (usually their wife), reflecting a middle class claim to a nepotistic *urimai* denied as an inheritable, intergenerational concession to the family of Devasahayam, the former “peon.”³⁵

Understanding Class Immobility in the Mission Compound

Devasahayam’s claims to Diocesan employment as an inheritable right and his anger at middle class nepotism in the Diocese (implicitly within a caste community), expressed rather poetically in his wall poster campaign, distract attention from understanding other reasons why his children’s class mobility has really been frustrated. Devasahayam himself explained his class immobility to me in the following way, and without mentioning the former Bishop’s ‘betrayal’ at all,

Because I was an “office assistant” in an ordinary school, I have been poor without much income. I wasn’t able to educate them much. That’s why there is only some “education.” I wasn’t able to give a lot of education...Even though I performed “service” for so long, even though I did it for roughly 44 years, no “bishop,” no “manager,” no official of any kind has ever helped me. I myself, with my own efforts-I didn’t do it with any “scholarship” or with any Diocese help. I have helped my children by using my own salary.³⁶

A dearth of critical patronage is clearly an important factor in his family’s ongoing struggle. Entering the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese’s political economy at the level of office assistant only re-inscribed his caste stigma in terms of a modern Indian idiom of bureaucratic class. But was it this almost negative moral capital alone that alienated him from critical patronage? After all, Ponnaiya *Vāṭṭiyār*, who so sharply condemned Devasahayam’s wall poster campaign in our interview, is also the son of a former office assistant.

Devasayaham's feeble moral capital in Pasumalai owes itself to far more than his former job. Based on two years of experience among the members of Pasumalai's middle class Christian center, I infer that his political activity, his public self-identification as a "Dalit" and his lower class educational status have all compromised the potency of the moral capital he has earned by performing as a 'Christian' poet and muse, especially as a singing wise man in the Love Divine. Such an impotent Christian identity, reproduced in the next generation through the alienation of his choir boy son, Maran, has, in part, blocked much patronage from wealthy local Christians who might, for those they deem 'deserving', easily be able to spare the thousands of rupees necessary to finance the educational mobility of at least one of his sons. Few of these potential donors would be likely to be from his caste; his middle class Paraiyar peers can hardly spare these amounts without sacrificing their own children's accumulation of knowledge capital. But his wall poster campaign in 1999 effectively ensured the destruction of any moral capital necessary to convince non-Paraiyar Christian donors of his 'deservedness,' even if they themselves secretly manipulate the symbolic capital of caste while performing the old identity front in public.

But is enervated moral capital, the only explanation? History renders this unclear. After all, Ponnaiya made it into the ranks of Pasumalai's *Vāttiyārs*, when his father was an office assistant who had even abandoned his Christian identity at his father's request precisely to marry a Hindu relative.³⁷ The latter identity transformation does not seem to be a way to accrue moral capital as 'Christian' in a place like Pasumalai; and yet Ponnaiya's class mobility itself never became derailed.

While Ponnaiya's story is not fully known to me, his success points to larger historical structures that have also played a role in the perpetuating the class stagnancy of Devasahayam's children. One of these forces originates in the governmental sphere. Ponnaiya, unlike Devasahayam's children, has always been registered legally as a "Hindu", despite his adolescent baptism. This would have allowed him access to Scheduled Caste government scholarship assistance during his school years, assistance unavailable to Maran and his siblings who are "Indian Christians" on their identity certificates (see Chapter 10). Secondly, Ponnaiya received his teacher training and job assignment in the early 1970s, a period before "donations" were required for Diocese employment or for admission to its Teacher Training Schools.³⁸ Devasahayam's sons, however, reached college age in the 1990s long after that era had ended.³⁹ And teacher training was one goal whose elusiveness Maran kept lamenting about with me, time and again.

Certainly, long gone are the late colonial days when many *eighth-grade* educated AMM Christians, including Paraiyars and Pallars I met, could receive training in Pasumalai as an elementary school teacher, the prized social identity of *Vāttiyār* (teacher) and some measure of financial stability beyond the peasant fold in government or mission primary schools.⁴⁰ Furthermore, competition for teaching posts in the Madurai Diocese, and throughout the CSI, has increased ever since, in 1972, during the administration of DMK Chief Minister Karunanidhi, the Tamil Christian minority was handed a major political concession: parity of pension scales for private grant-in-aid (including all former mission schools) and government school teachers.⁴¹ But Maran and his older brothers finished high school in a period when there was simply a glut of middle class Christians in the Diocese waiting for teacher training

seats and Diocesan teaching posts, many of whom were much better able to get the college educations required for them and, if necessary, to “donate” their way into teacher training schools and into teaching positions themselves.

For much of his Pasumalai career, Devasahayam appears to have inhabited two separate identity fronts tied to different very different historical spaces. In Pasumalai his identity front has featured a working class identity as semi-educated office assistant and a Christian qua poet/singer identity. Although his caste generally remained masked according to mission compound convention, since he lacked both elite levels of knowledge and financial capital, any moral capital as Christian *alone* could never make him appear middle class in a Pasumalai where “Christian” and “well educated” are still synonymous statuses in the eyes of many Christians and PK alike. He has never been able to fully inhabit a dominant identity front originating in late colonial Pasumalai (see Ch. 2) as *his* habitus. Beyond Pasumalai, especially in his natal village, he has inhabited a very different identity front as Dalit activist, Christian and politician. A glimpse of it has always been available in his home’s Ambedkar and DMK party iconography. His context-sensitive, dual habitus of identity performance appears to have changed after his retirement, after sustained rebuffs from Diocesan management caused him to fear his two high school educated elder sons might never get into the well-educated middle classes. Believing himself the victim of caste bigotry in the church, Devasahayam finally decided to take the metonyms of his Dalit identity out into Pasumalai’s public space. Suddenly an identity front performed largely beyond Pasumalai up until then, appeared in the old mission compound, challenging the persuasive hold of a mission compound habitus; and whose dispositions he would had have learned to inhabit after arriving in Pasumalai as a young man.

That Devasahayam was willing to perform rhetorical allegiance to his “Lord of Equality” (in his Christmas poem) just days after his wall poster campaign had begun reveals that he does value a Christian identity. But he no longer feels the need to perform a strict mission compound identity front that denies caste distinctions a public voice, a silence that benefits non-Dalit elites by protecting them from direct public attack and criticism from working class and peasant Dalits within the church.⁴²

Just as the Pasumalai Christian community itself has restructured itself into a residential community no longer tightly bound to a church political economy, the habitus generating an old mission compound identity front no longer structures the behavior of all those who lived in, or who moved to, Pasumalai in the late colonial and Independence periods. In individual cases like Devasahayam’s, this habitus has become restructured in reaction to post-colonial historical forces and private dilemmas of identity it is not structurally predisposed to handle. For those like him, who came as young adults to mission compound worlds, the critical alienation provided by memories of a childhood identity front opposed to mission compound conventions may allow them greater flexibility in surmounting the persuasiveness of an identity front that masks caste, especially in the face of perceived caste bigotry that obfuscates class mobility within church political economies. But, in the next chapter, I turn our attention toward a very different Paraiyar Christian family, one whose class mobility has been more dramatic, whose quest for critical patronage was less frustrated, and whose post-colonial lives reveal the differing historical legacy of the mission compound identity front I have been exploring throughout this dissertation.

Chapter 9 Converting into Class Distinction

In July of 1995, sitting in the office of his independent field evangelism organization, located in a Madurai suburb, Michael's father, Gnanaraj, began to narrate his family's patrilineal tale of religious identity transformation,

[In English] I'm a first generation Christian [first generation *born* as Christian], because my father, when he was a young boy, about 12 years old, til then he was a Hindu. Til today, many of his relatives, very close blood relations, his cousins, uncles and all these people are Hindus. My grandfather [the one who actually made the decision for baptism] was a very smart agriculturalist. He was owning about 10 acres of land in one place...In Ramnad district.¹

So begins the story of one land-owning Paraiyar who chose baptism for himself and his family in the late colonial AMM. But this is also the story of a Paraiyar Christian patriline that, within three generations, would achieve a very different level of class mobility than Devasahayam's patriline has in the post-colonial Madurai-Ramnad Diocese of the CSI. In part, this family's story is the story of how a daily working self that involves performing the utopian identity front of elite mission compound spaces helped provide some Dalit Christians in the AMM critical moral capital aiding the acquisition of patronage that facilitated their class mobility.

Most of the scholarly literature on elite, or middle class, Dalits in modern India has focused, naturally, on self-identifying "Hindu" Dalits (Isaacs 1965; Sachchidananda 1977; Roy and Singh 1987; Singh and Sundaram 1987; Ram 1988; Mallick 1997) with only passing reference to the circumstances of Dalits from minority communities who have made bids for entrance into the literate, well-educated and well salaried middle classes. And only Mallick has really provided us with a detailed, multi-generational narrative case study of an elite Dalit family.²

For any Indian Dalit, regardless of religious persuasion, to be a member of India's middle class is a rare achievement. Yet, whereas the paths of Dalit Hindu elites have generally been linked heavily to the late colonial and post-colonial welfare apparatus, Dalit Christians, being ineligible for Scheduled Caste welfare benefits and job reservations (cf. Kananaikil 1983), have initially moved beyond the peasant fold due in large part to the portals provided by their local mission and church schools, to their own income and to the sporadic help of proximate social patrons: sometimes missionaries and, in the post-colonial period, wealthy non-Dalit Christians. Literature on Dalit Christians generally focuses on a rural, peasant majority for whom colonial baptisms alone provided little material benefit, no class mobility, and virtually no moral mobility in their natal places of residence (Webster 1994; Kananaikil 1991; Deliége 1988). While Alexander (1977: 64), Caplan (1987: 93 cited in Webster 1994: 178) and Webster have noted that some Christians from these communities have actually achieved middle class status, no one, to my knowledge, has produced a multi-generational narrative case study of such a Dalit Christian family, a family like Gnanaraj's.

This chapter's opening narrative concerns the childhood baptism of Gnanaraj's father, Vedamanikkam, around 1932, perhaps only ten years or so before Devasayaham's own adolescent conversion. Unlike Devasayaham, however, Michael's grandfather took baptism at the apparent instigation of his own father, a land-owning Paraiyar temple priest, and without any other relatives preceding them. In our 1995 interview, Gnanaraj discussed more of his family history with me,

... I don't know who--Actually I am not able to identify the person who went first to my village... Some missionary has gone there to tell about the Lord. Already my grandfather was a rich agriculturalist. And many people used to come and get help from my grandfather, during...the sowing time. They used to come and borrow seeds.

And he was a very pious, very religious Hindu...when I was small boy I went there and I saw the temple. He built his own temple. And he was the priest of that temple. So once a year he used to celebrate, inviting all his relatives [to] cut the goats and chickens and [a] big festival he celebrated. And he was a successful man by himself, by doing all these things. I don't know. There must be vacuum in his life. He was searching for truth, doing all these things. He was not satisfied with what he has been doing, because when someone came and told him about the Lord Jesus. And he was smart. I praise God for that, because he just accept[ed] the Lord as his personal Lord and savior. And that really helped him to have a more satisfied life...

JR: What kind of things changed?

Gnanaraj: First he changed his name. OK. Because previously his name was the name of a god, Hindu god. But he changed to Christudas[pseudonym], servant of Christ, something like that. Then he changed his wife's name to Mary and, uh, then he deserted the Hindu temple. He never worshipped again...And it was ruined. It was lying there. I saw the temple ruin. Nobody takes care of it...But the village people, out of fear, sometimes go and put some incense and something like that. Otherwise there's no big festival... And every year he used to...shave the whole head in order to show the gratitude to his deity. But after he came to know the Lord he didn't do that. Since he was the first Christian, after a period of time, there was great opposition. All the Hindu people, they persecuted him like anything. They took away all the cattles.³

During my October 1999 visit to Gnanaraj's natal soil, I found the ruins of the family's old Muniyandi temple at the base of a tree standing at the edge of fallow land once owned by his father. About ten feet behind the temple site, fallen over in a tangle of bushes, roots and dirt, two rough hewn, cross shaped grave stones dating to 1941 marked the graves of Christudas and Mariyal, Gnanaraj's baptized paternal grandparents. Though they died as Christians, they never abandoned their soil, buried as they were, in the land that Gnanaraj's father, Vedamanikkam, would soon inherit.

In discussions in 1998 and 1999, Gnanaraj's younger brother, Sattiyanesan, claimed to me that his paternal grandfather, the former temple priest who became "Christudas," had actually been a Valluvan priest, member of a community who perform priestly functions and temple worship for the Paraiyar community (see Thurston 1909: Vol 7, 303-310; Vincentnathan 1987:

287-290; Singh 1993:1283-1287); although, he may have simply been a Paraiyar *pūcāri* (priest). Regardless, if such a leader among his caste adopts an exclusively Christian identity, how, one wonders, could local Paraiyars conduct their marriages and propitiate their deities? Gnanaraj claimed, in our 1995 interview, that opposition from within his community had been swift and total,

JR: Before his conversion, your grandfather's conversion, you said that many villagers were dependent upon him for help in farming. So, after he converted, did they still come to him for aid in sowing, seeding?

Gnanaraj: ... They used to come and ask him, 'please give me some seeds and other things.' But now they went to field and [took] all the harvest, because he's now all alone. No relatives [would] come and help him to support him in the village. So, that's why my father, when he was a small guy, he had to come to Pasumalai. He used to live here in Pasumalai itself before he was married. So that is my family's background. But I am very much grateful to the Lord, because he chose my grandfather. Because I look around my relatives now. I'd be one among them. Worshipping the deities and so many things. I'd be nowhere. But I'm glad the Lord has chosen my grandfather so that I can be in that family, and I can serve the Lord as the Lord wants me to do.⁴

In this narrative, Christudas and his young, nuclear family became land-owning outcastes among the landless outcastes, bereft of labor to work their land. Having recently married, his son, Vedamanikkam, off to a Paraiyar girl (he would have been barely pubescent, 11-13 years of age) who had then born him a grandson, Christudas suddenly saw an opportunity for his son's survival in the political economy of the AMM itself.⁵ Seeing little future for his baptized son in his own community or perhaps sensing a potentially far more elite life elsewhere, at some time between 1930 and 1932, he sent the young, recently baptized, Vedamanikkam off to become a catechist at Pasumalai's United Theological seminary;⁶ it was run at the time by a famous AMM missionary, John Banninga. This was a structural entry into the AMM political economy that immediately distinguishes Vedamanikkam from Devasahayam in his moral career.

Leaving the Peasant Fold, but Not the Peasant Soil

The 1920s and 1930s were a peak period for AMM village evangelism and the recruitment of mission *upatēsiyār* (catechists) and also a period of mass Dalit conversions to Christianity (cf. Webster 1994: 33-76). More broadly, though, it was an age of intense Dalit mobilization all over British India, including, among other things, symbolic forms of resistance to non-Dalit hegemony such as agitation for temple entry in Brahminical temples like Madurai's Meenakshi temple (cf. Paramasivan 1995: 93-108). Christian baptism itself was only one of many pre-colonial and colonial strategies with which "untouchables" have tried to re-fashion their identity front in idioms of religious alterity beyond, or in, direct opposition to, a hegemonic Hindu fold (cf. Khare 1984; Deliège 1999: 146-177; Dube 1998; Viswanathan 1998: 211-239).⁷ And, in 1936, a Government of India Act established a welfare category known as the "Scheduled Castes" to facilitate the upward mobility of Dalits (at least in theory); though, initially it may have existed primarily as a symbolic 'uplift' much like rural religious conversions.

Starting as early as 1918, a wealthy New England businessman started funding village catechists in the AMM under his own name: Charles S. Bates, Esq.⁸ And Pasumalai's seminary was the key training center for all AMM catechists, including those who would eventually work as "Bates Evangelists" (21 in 1934; 22 in 1935 and 1936).⁹ During the three years for which his gift data are available, Bates donated \$1,500 a year for evangelists' salaries. Vedamanikkam found a spot in the Pasumalai Seminary's catechist training program at the height of the Bates' program, despite having what he claimed to me was only a third grade education. The arcane

Sanskritized Tamil of the Protestant Bible must have been a crash course in adult literacy as well as a rare venue for a Tamil untouchable to acquire elitist forms of Tamil talk dominated once solely by Brahmin and Vellalar pundits. Upon completion of the program, Vedamanikkam began work in the program in 1935 in the Sivagangai pastorate of the AMM, the same pastorate into which his father, Christudas, had baptized the family several years earlier. Like all AMM and contemporary Diocesan catechists he acquired the verbal honorific *upatēsiyār* (catechist), which, like a caste title becomes appended to one's given name in others' verbal performances of a CSI Tamil catechist's occupational identity. In a potent titular 'conversion', then, Vedamanikkam *Paraiyar* had become Vedamanikkam *Upatēsiyār*. And so, he was able to inhabit an idealized AMM identity front immediately in a career that continually projected his Christian identity as both moral capital *and* knowledge capital (especially in his illiterate natal community) while masking any semiotics of caste in public interaction beyond his natal village and especially among AMM peers ignorant of his natal origins.

Vedamanikkam's original teen-age wife divorced him (either before or as he was studying in Pasumalai), Sattiyanesan claimed to me, disgusted at his new Christian identity.¹⁰ But soon he met a born Christian woman, also from the Paraiyar community, who was studying at the Pasumalai seminary to become an AMM Bible woman. At some point around 1946-47, when they had both become young adults, their marriage was arranged through a pastor's mediation, dressing caste endogamy in the thick symbolic veil provided by an alliance of Christian *ūliyakkārarkaḷ* (see Ch. 4). They then worked their entire careers as a semi-itinerant rural ministry team in their natal region of Ramnad District (now part of Sivagangai District). They helped to Christianize Vedamanikkam's natal community and also to provide some measure of

assistance in dealing with local caste-based harassment of Dalit Christians. In 1936, at the age of 16, Vedamanikkam's catechist salary, funded by Bates' New England money, was roughly Rs. 16 per month.¹¹ At some point, he became a regular AMM catechist, his wife continuing as an eighth grade educated Bible woman. By 1947, well after the Bates program had ended, the newly formed Madurai-Ramnad Diocese's pay scale would only have paid them Rs. 14-18 and Rs. 15-19 a month respectively, based on their differing education levels. This meant a minimum household income of Rs. 30-35 a month just as their first child, Gnanaraj, was born.¹²

With the death of Christudas in 1941, the family's involvement in tending their patrilineal acres of land effectively ended. But unlike Devasahayam, who also had been married at an early age, Vedamanikkam went on to have only three children with his second wife; a move that metaphorically signals their determined transition away from a strategy of procreation best adapted to a labor-intensive, peasant existence.

As Vedamanikkam's youngest son, Sattiyanesan, kept telling me, his father's "ministry" as a catechist was not merely evangelical but also involved various forms of Gandhian social service. To this day, Vedamanikkam, the Paraiyar evangelical Christian, wears only the *katar* (hand-spun, hand woven cotton) *vēṣṭi* and *jibba* (collarless, cuff-less, shirt extending below the waist) that form the south Indian sartorial performance *par excellence* of dedication to Gandhiji. One of his great inspirations in rural ministry had been the Gandhian AMM missionary, Richard Keithan (ironically, a strong opponent of AMM evangelism in the Tamil hinterlands). Together with Pasumalai missionary/engineer Charles Heinemann (director of the Pasumalai Trade School in the 1940s and 50s), Sattiyanesan claimed, these three formed a group of similar minds, bearing liberal Christian theology to the task of "rural uplift." And so, Vedamanikkam acquired

a habit of mediating school admissions for village kids, helping people to the hospital and other activities well beyond the purview of an AMM catechist's job description or even what the average CSI pastor now considers his "duty." Sattiyanesan recalled that there was significant resistance from CSI Tamil pastors to his expansive vision of rural ministry, much as some contemporary CSI pastors see no obligation to get involved in social welfare work as part of their duties.¹³

A Catechist's Symbolic Capital

Such a reputation for marginal forms of ministry may have cut this family off from important Tamil Christian patronage, much like Devasahayam's political identity and "retired peon" status have marginalized him in Pasumalai. But, even if this were true, Vedamanikkam still had the moral capital consistently sustained by his daily work as a church "catechist" as well as deep friendships with two powerful late colonial AMM missionaries who both lived in Tamil Nadu well into the 1970s. He was a literate man in a leadership position among his own natal people, while also functioning as the Church's rural delegate.

Relationships between a rural AMM community's baptized elite (the catechist, a local schoolteacher, etc) and local CSI pastors and AMM missionaries tied village AMM converts to sources of extra-village, third party political mediation that were revolutionary in their time and which, with the absence of both colonial rule and the foreign missionary, have enervated greatly in a post-colonial church.¹⁴ During my brief stay in Vedamanikkam's natal village, I collected a few versions of one key narrative of such a late colonial church intervention on behalf of its rural members.

While resistance to Christudas' conversion came largely from his own community, when Vedamanikkam returned as a teen-age catechist to spread Christianity among his own natal Paraiyar community, tensions between local Udaiyar landlords and their Paraiyar field hands erupted. Vedamanikkam's natal village is an Udaiyar dominated settlement near Sivagangai, surrounded today primarily by fields of groundnuts and other dry-land crops. Ironically, long prior to Christudas' baptism, local Udaiyars were already practicing Roman Catholics under the auspices of French Jesuit missionaries who built a large Catholic church and schools that still operate today in the community.

Sometime in the 1940s, inspired by newly adopted Christian identities and the political backing inherent in Vedamanikkam's status as a mission catechist, Vedamanikkam and four other families helped establish the separate Christian settlement of "Vedapuram" right next to the highway and a few hundred yards away from the village's original Paraiyar *cēri*; which, like many outcaste colonies, lies far from the main road, slightly downhill and at the edge of the village proper. Escaping the stigmatized soil, Vedamanikkam and three other baptized Paraiyars sought refuge on royal land over which their Udaiyar landlords had no hereditary claim.

A nearly 100-year-old peer of Christudas, named Mani, told me how the impetus for creating Vedapuram began when Vedamanikkam's wife, an AMM Bible woman, was raped by a local Udaiyar teen-ager. Vedamanikkam's relatives tied the boy down to keep him prisoner, but somehow he escaped and ran away. When his relatives came to find him and naturally blamed the Paraiyars for their son's disappearance. This incited them to steal a cow from Vedamanikkam's home and to block local Paraiyars from entering the *ūr* [presumably the Udaiyar portion of it]. Quickly, Mani narrated to me how they selected a nearby AMM pastor,

Rev. Selvaraj, as an appropriate intermediary to help calm the situation (most likely because he was from neither caste). And according to Mani, Selvaraj told local Udaiyars that, from then on, they should come first to him with any future grievances against the Paraiyars; a move which apparently mollified them. Shortly after this initial fight, Mani claimed that catechist Vedamanikkam, in association with a foreign AMM missionary, obtained some empty forest land from a local Raja on which to build Vedapuram. Four families, including Vedamanikkam, made this first step, even though the majority remained in the old *cēri* afraid of Udaiyar reprisals if they made such a symbolically loaded withdrawal.¹⁵

Mani's social junior, a peer of Vedamanikkam, recounted another version of the fight and its mediation by AMM authorities,

Then Pastor Selvaraj came from there [Madurai] and left his jeep saying, 'Yo! What are you saying exactly? Will you leave my church people alone or do we have to do something further to you?' He went right up to this Ettappan [Udaiyar leader at the time]...Pastor Selvaraj and all these white people [missionaries] came [giggles with delight as he spins his narrative] This Ettappan guy was a big rowdy. They parked their "pleasure" [Tamil English for car] right at his house... They parked the Jeep at the house and said, 'Yo! What happened to our church people? What's all this cow stealing, calf stealing? Not letting them in the village? What're you doin'? Have you had enough here or are you thinking about doing something more?' They held a big meeting and talked. Then he [the Udaiyar leader] surrendered and said, 'From now on we won't bother any of your church people. Let them come and go as they want.' They got their signatures and after that all these houses came [to Vedapuram]. Before that, there were only four houses.¹⁶

Isaac's narrative comes across as a tall tale in which a Tamil pastor backed up in person by AMM missionaries forced a much more numerous Udaiyar community to back down, bringing the threatening social weight of the AMM's 'petty rajas' directly to bear upon an otherwise local caste flare up. Regardless of the obvious narrative hyperbole here, Isaac indexes the very real possibility of late colonial intervention by American missionaries and a Tamil church leadership

emboldened by their larger-than-life mentors.¹⁷ This narrative reveals how being a catechist allowed one the opportunity to serve one's natal caste community, while masking that service as Christian *ūliyam* so that moral capital sustained by habitualizing a mission compound identity front would not be lost. This contrasts with Devasahayam's "service" to his fellows Dalits in the Ambedkar People's Party, a service that deliberately fronts his caste identity.

Vedamanikkam *Upatēsiyār*, in alliance with powerful Tamil pastors and AMM missionaries, did succeed in creating a residential street for local Paraiyar converts, though it remains a somewhat Pyrrhic victory. While Vedapuram has its own hand drawn well, three public water taps spaced out along its one main dirt street, its own bus stop with a roof and a bench, a recently renovated modern cement walled church accompanied by a thirty foot high cement bell tower, in labor, its Christian Paraiyar residents still remain tied to Udaiyar landlords in relations of economic dependence. They still play ritual music for local Udaiyars, but have also refashioned this stigmatized labor into a source of entrepreneurial income by getting hired "out of station" in neighboring towns and villages. They have also replaced the stereotypical flat cow leather drums (*paṛai*), the prime metonym of their caste's stigma to many orthodox Hindus, with more expensive Carnatic (south Indian) instruments that were once used exclusively by more elite, non-Brahmin castes (e.g. specific Vellalar castes): the *nātaṣvāram* (a 3-4 four foot long flute-like wind instrument ending like a trumpet) and the *tavil* (a large cylindrical drum beaten on both sides and worn with a shoulder strap).¹⁸ In January 1998 they even journeyed to Pasumalai and played these instruments upon the arrival of the Bishop at the Diocesan Youth Convention held in Washburn Hall (the building that once housed Pasumalai's famous Normal School until 1973; see Map 2). They make upwards of Rs. 60 a day per person doing this

sporadic work, substantially more than performing day labor in the fields of their Udaiyar landlords.

The Patriline Leaves the Soil for the Suburbs

Although both Gnanaraj and Sattiyanesan described their grandfather as a “rich man,” both their estimates of the family’s original acreage (10 and 8 acres respectively) were much higher than the estimated 3 acres that local Vedapuram residents claimed during my visit. Christudas the “rich” agriculturalist is part nostalgia, part patrilineal pride and part literal deployment of a peasant calculus of social status that is, ironically, completely irrelevant to their current middle class lives. Other narratives they both offered reveal that whatever wealth Vedamanikkam, an only child, inherited from his father, these assets alone could not guarantee his three children a crucial middle class baptism: college education. While the combined Diocesan salaries of Vedamanikkam and his wife allowed them to manage tuition payments for their children in Diocese boarding schools, college education was where even this privileged, land-owning “Dalit Christian” family almost faced the same frustration Devasahayam’s children were facing during my research,

It [was] very difficult. Moreover, my father was not interested in farming, because he’d become an...village evangelist. So he didn’t take care of the land. So for the education’s sake, we sold...all the land actually. Now [i.e. 1995] we don’t own even a square inch in India.¹⁹

Unable to pay for the “hall ticket” to write his final exams for his last year at Madurai’s American College in 1968, Gnanaraj told me, his father decided to sell off the remaining patrilineal land, a desperate move that threw him into a profound, chronic depression.²⁰ This was far more than a metaphorical separation from one’s natal soil; it was a critical stage in the

patriline's conversion into class distinction. Even with this one hard asset liquefied, though, the other two siblings' higher education still hung in the balance.

Vedamanikkam, a man at once Dalit and landowner, semi educated yet a Christian catechist, carefully played his fortuitous social connections with like-minded AMM missionary friends. The post-secondary education of his last two children, I found out, was made possible entirely to donations from Charles Heinemann (see above) and a German church NGO whose funds Richard Keithan helped Gnanaraj's brother to access.²¹

Unlike Devasahayam's six children, Vedamanikkam's three children grew up in the 1950s and 60s into a profound identity dissonance. Although they spent the bulk of their pre-collegiate lives in several of the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese's famous boarding school hostels, they always returned to Vedapuram on school "leave" periods. For years, they shifted back and forth between spaces where the performance of Christian identity had very different consequences. Most of the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese's urban boarding school compounds were once part of the symbolic heart of the AMM's utopian effort at persuading young students to adopt a *Christianized* middle class identity front. As students, Sattiyanesan and his siblings would have most likely had their Paraiyar identity masked from their fellow students and most of the Christian staff, except for those who had processed his admission or those peers who interrogated them about their natal origin.²² Ever since World War II, both former AMM and other Madurai-Ramnad Diocesan boarding and high schools have been predominantly Hindu in enrollment.²³ Studying there meant encounters with students not at all committed to a mission compound identity front. For Gnanaraj, at least, even if he suffered verbal harassment, it hardly prevented him from graduating or from being elected high school student leader at one point.²⁴

Returning to Vedapuram on school leave from such bizarre theaters of mission must have been severe identity whiplash for Vedamanikkam's children, a jarring shift from being seen primarily as a *Christian* in school compounds to being seen primarily as a *Christian Paraiyar* in Vedapuram, where everyone's existence was still beholden to Udaiyar landlords. Sattiyanesan himself recalled with me how deeply caste bigotry in Vedapuram affected him on his brief school leaves: humiliating separation at local tea stalls, hearing stories of female relatives *still* being raped by local Udaiyar teen-agers.²⁵

Despite this identity whiplash, today, Vedamanikkam's three children are all college-educated parents of even better educated children; one of his granddaughters has even become a doctor. Vedamanikkam's eldest son, Gnanaraj (Michael's father), is one of the more famous preachers in Madurai, a man highly sought after to speak at church revivals and Christian schools. Former director of a powerful Christian youth organization, during my research he ran an evangelism training institute in the very same seminary building in which his father once studied to become an AMM catechist, also funded by an American Christian sponsor. Sattiyanesan, on the other hand, ran an NGO to spread health and social awareness among rural Dalits, inspired by liberation theology and the Gandhian social ideals of his own father, but also funded largely by foreign, Christian NGOs whose directors are primarily interested in his "social" work for the poor. During my research, Gnanaraj and Sattiyanesan's children had enjoyed, or were currently enjoying, the luxury of elite English medium high school, college and "post-graduate" educations.

Moving From One Christian Economy to Another

Michael's patriline has clearly depended for its class mobility on key opportunities seized and hard work but also on patrilineal assets and donations unavailable to fellow Vedapuram Paraiyars; Christians who have also never enjoyed the moral capital of being a catechist or a preacher when American missionaries were still present.²⁶ Using foreign funds acquired, in part, on the basis of moral capital as "Christians", both brothers, in fact, have won precious independence from a church political economy on which their own parents depended (and with no hope of a pension as in the case of AMM teachers).²⁷ In 1995, Gnanaraj narrated to me his born-again experience, a classic verbal performance no doubt given hundreds of times before in front of students at various Christian schools where he has built up a potent moral identity as a Christian preacher. His narrative centered dramatically on the mischievous prodigal son of a mission catechist. At a vacation bible school camp which he attended around the age of 15, an older counselor approached him (a high ranking officer in the Diocese during my research) and asked, "Do you know the Lord Jesus loves you?" The young Gnanaraj replied that he did. The teacher then asked, "Well then, do *you* love the Lord Jesus?" Avoiding the fire and brimstone method, this counselor employed a 'kinder, gentler' guilt-inducing evangelical tactic of persuasion. The counselor's searing question sent him crying to his hostel room where he hid until finally, like a lone, alienated Protestant soul, he "accepted the Lord." Or so Gnanaraj chooses to narrate it.²⁸

Gnanaraj actually appears to have become even more theologically conservative than his own parents. Today, he is an admirer of such evangelical heavyweights as Dwight L. Moody, Hudson Taylor and the aging Billy Graham, whose international conference on evangelism he

once attended in Amsterdam with the help of an American missionary patron. Working first in a Christian bookstore, then for 15 years in a major youth organization in Madurai, Gnanaraj has carefully cultivated a public image as an evangelist or *ūliyakkārar* (see Ch. 5) who does not favor any particular denomination. In one 15-year stretch he even organized 17 inter-denominational Billy Graham style “Crusades” in Madurai that brought together Catholics and Protestants of all denominations, including Pentecostals. After years as a traveling preacher-for-hire, he works today as a partner with an American evangelist from Tennessee, running a Bible College to train intrepid “field evangelists.” One evening at his Madurai home, when I brought up radical leftist theologies telling Christians to re-structure society actively according to principles of social justice (theologies now circulating at the local Protestant seminary in Madurai) Gnanaraj politely listened to my description and replied quietly with revivalist confidence, “Only Jesus changes anything.”

Independent preachers like Gnanaraj enjoy a particular freedom, when compared to their middle class counterparts working as teachers in Christian schools, in that they are not wedded to a Government salary through the political node of a Diocesan job. However, this does not make them totally immune to caste prejudices and caste politics on the part of potential fee-paying churches or school administrators. It is an insecure form of freedom, dependent on diplomatic, performances of a Christian self, where moral rhetoric becomes a critical tool to distract attention away from thoughts and queries on one’s caste identity. In our 1995 interview, he stated that he avoided involvement both in political agitation for minority rights of Christians and in charismatic or healing ministries. The reason for the former avoidance is most likely that these agitations focus specifically on the problems faced by “Dalit Christians” in acquiring adequate

welfare benefits from the government (see Ch. 10), agitations that would dangerously front both caste and Christian identities simultaneously, potentially alienating non-Dalit Christians to whom, and for whom, he also wants to preach. The reason given for eschewing the latter activity was a political concern for his status as a non-sectarian “evangelist,” “... I have a status in the society as an evangelism man. So, I am respected by all the denominations; but once I go and identify myself with one group of people, then I lose that identity....”²⁹

And, for individuals like Gnanaraj, who grew up with the social stigma of being a Paraiyar in their natal villages (even though they may not talk about it), a career built largely, though not exclusively, on the moral capital of a carefully performed Christian self, continually validated in the large crowds of primarily “Hindu” school children and Christian teachers who gather to hear his rhetoric, must be, in one sense, rather pleasing.³⁰ Reticence to self-identify publicly as a Dalit is strategically part of Gnanaraj’s habitualized identity front. And it is the very same strategy encoded in the old mission compound identity front, one he had ample opportunity to learn, not in Vedapuram, but in his years in former AMM boarding schools and at the famous American college in Madurai. And this is also no doubt why he has become so seemingly estranged from his own natal Paraiyar community, afraid perhaps that the kind of aggressive work his own father did for ‘their’ people might cast(e) him in a light that would destroy his moral capital as an impartial, non-partisan ‘independent’ preacher.³¹

Despite habitual, context-free performances of an older mission compound identity front, international sources of financial capital can make Tamil *ūḷiyakkārarkaḷ* like Gnanaraj morally suspect in the eyes of jealous Christians and Hindus alike. The pervasiveness of this suspicion within the Christian community itself was powerfully evidenced to me one Sunday afternoon

when a preacher at the 1999 Diocesan youth convention tried to deflect any similar critique that might undermine his moral authority in the eyes of his young audience, “ [imagining the voice of a hypothetical detractor] ‘There’s dough coming from somewhere. He’s getting bucks from abroad. That’s why he’s yelling like this.’ NO!!!” Because many independent evangelists survive, to some extent, beyond the political economy of the Church (usually by raising their own funds through canvassing Christian peers door to door), there is often no effective political domain in which to crush their career. If blocked from preaching at this school or that church, they simply present themselves to another audience. However, during my research, though funded by American donors, Gnanaraj actually re-entered the political economy of the Diocese by renting a Diocesan building for his new Institute for Field Evangelism (based on an old friendship with a non-Dalit Diocesan officer). In such inter-caste relations between Christian selves, it is important for Dalits to convince non-Dalit superiors of their habitual *inability* to project or to promote a caste identity. Gnanaraj, having learned the mission compound habitus of multiple identity performance very well from a young age, might not even have to consciously avoid such behavior.

But his brother, Sattiyanesan, has chosen to perform himself very differently from his older brother. In an NGO funded, in part, with Western aid money, and he has created a strategic space totally independent from the political economy and the moral politics of the church, and independent of the identity politics of Government service or a career in the private businesses of local Hindu elites unlikely to be Dalit. To even a greater extent than an *ūliyakkārar*, who, like Gnanaraj, has a diplomatic desire to mask caste in order to maintain access to the widest possible target audience, Sattiyanesan has acquired maximal performative freedom to restructure his

identity front in ways that challenge the one dominant in the late colonial AMM. When he lived in Pasumalai during my research, he hung a flat, cow leather drum (*parai*) prominently on the wall of his verandah/office (instrument associated with Dalit village ceremonial drumming), a far older visible metonym of his Dalit identity than Devasayaham's picture of B. R. Ambedkar. Yet, as a social worker, his "work" is hardly the "ritual drumming" fallaciously seen as Paraiyar work in the partisan, derogatory imagination of elitist Tamil castes.³² For Sattiyanesan, Jesus is a patron of social justice, not the resurrected Lord his brother promotes. And Sattiyanesan's liberation theology, commonly heard among elite Catholic priests in Tamil Nadu, was a theme seldom heard during CSI church sermons or weekend 'spirit-filled' testimonies I attended.

In two interviews, though, Sattiyanesan powerfully revealed the enduring, partial presence of a mission compound habitus, in his very insistent denials that he engages in practices widely derogated by CSI Tamils as "Hindu" in origin (e.g. astrology; pre-marital life cycle prostrations, observation of auspicious times and days), in his placement of Christ pictures and *vākkuttattam* Bible verses on the interior walls of his home, and in his claim to play Christian devotional tapes on occasion at home. Yet, he described himself to me as "75% Christian," because of his own college encounters with the writings of Karl Marx, B.R. Ambedkar and Periyar (atheist founder of the first Dravidian political party in Tamil Nadu). He is quite aware that he inhabits an identity front very much at odds with his own brother's and with the dominant habitus of late colonial AMM mission worlds. His childhood experiences with identity whiplash while returning to Vedapuram on school leave, however, appear to have predisposed him to a conscious attention to matters of caste prejudice as an adult; an identity position that no doubt made liberation theology more persuasive to him than his older brother's talk of a heavenly

resurrected Christ. He is not at all reticent to identify himself publicly as a Dalit or to talk at great length about this identity in private. And he has even fashioned nostalgic memories of the AMM missionary to validate his own, highly marginal, re-structured identity front. For example, he insisted in our interview that, unlike their 'greedy' contemporary Tamil successors, the *old* missionaries [Americans] focused *primarily* on social service (i.e. not the kind of evangelism promoted by his older brother).³³

In one sense, I came to realize that Gnanaraj and Sattiyanesan were both 'Christian preachers', but with very different Christian rhetorics and legacies of identity inspiring their work as agents of change. Their revolutionary agendas, however, operate in dialogue with two very different identity fronts. Sattiyanesan's reaction to memories of stigma has been to fight publicly for Dalits, including his relatives in Vedapuram, to help them become empowered in knowledge and to develop their self respect *as* "Dalits." Gnanaraj, however, has chosen to deal with his stigma in the way idealized by AMM missionaries: carefully hide your caste, mask it or veil it, while hoping that your Christian and class identities will somehow deflect or disarm any harassing attributions of social stigma. For left wing Dalit Christian activists, however, Gnanaraj's colonial habitus of identity performance is a capitulation to a church disproportionately dominated by non-Dalit voices and a moral rhetoric eerily resonant with the moral pomp of Tamil society's most elitist castes. It serves the interests of non-Dalit elites, in and beyond the Diocese, because it supports the status quo. It brings no real change in the lived experience of caste stigma to those in the church, like Gnanaraj's relatives in Vedapuram, who lack an identity front featuring a powerful middle class self.

Prior to Michael's wedding in 1998, while visiting him in Vellore, I watched him phone his parents from a pay phone and cancel plans to visit Vedapuram that weekend. It had been the wish of his grandfather, Vedamanikkam, that, before his wedding, he visit the natal soil, pray and make an offering in the CSI church there. It was that very day, I believe, that Michael first confessed to me that he has never been to Vedapuram at all, not even after 29 years. And, I later learned, Gnanaraj never goes there anymore either. When I asked his wife, Jeparani, if her husband might come with us to visit *her* natal village (on a separate trip), she screwed up her face awkwardly and said, "*Aiyā* doesn't like to go to villages." Since, Gnanaraj's institute operates to train "field evangelists," I can only interpret her comment, figuratively, as a profound statement of their current, middle class privilege. Although he visits villages briefly for evangelical work, he does not stay or linger in what, for him, is a 'lower class', morally destabilizing and 'un-Christian' environment.³⁴ And for Gnanaraj and his family, being in Christian-dominated space is the superior way of being middle class, which is why Gnanaraj and Michael independently suggested that I stay at hotel run by a fellow evangelical whenever I went to Madras. They do not consider the "business" hotels I generally stayed at in Egmore to be 'good' middle class spaces. The only member of Michael's patriline who goes to Vedapuram regularly is, unsurprisingly, Gnanaraj's younger brother, Sattiyanesan. He and his wife have even established their NGO's main field office in a rented home a stone's throw away from Vedapuram's CSI church.

Gnanaraj's conscious disconnection from Vedapuram, however, is best seen as unilateral. One of his own female relatives has lived with his family as a cook and domestic servant for years. In one sense, she has been adopted, temporarily, into a life of class distinction (and

Sattiyanesan also had a female relative living and cooking for his family throughout my research stay). But Gnanaraj's disposition to avoid socializing there or returning there is nevertheless a performed metaphor for his strong commitment to foregrounding a proud, context-free Christian-dominated identity front that masks his Paraiyar heritage. In this silent behavioral trope, geographic distancing of self mirrors the distance Gnanaraj tries to keep between his caste identity and any outsider's field of view. Refusing to perform his caste identity, however, does not imply that Gnanaraj denies it or has forgotten it, however. For example, in 1999 he confessed his "Dalit" identity to me privately when he mentioned how his father had once teamed up with a CSI pastor to distribute pants to all of Vedapuram's Paraiyar Christians. This was a plan to prevent an old histrionics of sartorial humiliation in which Dalits once had to "lower" their *vēṣṭis* (wrapped men's skirts) whenever an Udaiyar landlord approached them. Like his more vocal younger brother, he is also quite conscious of a heavy stigmatic load dangling over their heads by a thin string of urban tact and waiting to drop at any moment.

One evening in her home, Gnanaraj's wife, Jeparani, narrated to me two instances of discrimination that happened years before the family's ultimate insult: their son Michael's rejection by his Vellalar girlfriend's family in 1995,

Jeparani: We were in a Nadar [Christian] home, once. They gave it to us because they thought we were Nadars [Since Jeparani's mother was a Nadar who married a Paraiyar Pastor, this would have been a plausible performance]. Afterwards, in the course of time, they figured out who we were. As soon as they did, they told us to get out within an hour...I left my three children and ran [figurative use] to Ramnad where he [Gnanaraj] was holding a convention for three days...[a spinning mill siren cut us off and she left her narrative unfinished]

JR: Has this kind of experience given a lot of encouragement to your faith?

Jeparani: It gives encouragement. It gave encouragement. We pray. There's another story I can tell about being Dalit. You know the Kennet Hospital, right?

JR: Yes, I know.

Jeparani: We were living upstairs. A female doctor came and told us- From an early age my mother and father knew that doctor. They used to go see her a lot. After her, they appointed a new doctor [at the hospital]. He was a Devar. Suddenly, he went and told the owner of the home, 'We want this home.' The home-owner was also a doctor. She is our relative...That's why she said [to us], 'Please stay.' All the Devars got together and pressured her to tell us to leave. We couldn't find any other home, any other decent home. They turned the lights off once and left. They cut the electricity and then left. He [her husband] wasn't there. I was alone. I brought my kids to my parents, left them there and stood it out on my own with a candle burning. We were on the roof. They shouted from below, 'Leave! Leave!' We said, 'We can't leave now. We can't leave for another two or three months.' They shut everything off. Then we struggled on and went to live in an Anglo-Indian home. But one of his friends was a Devar, a guy with Devar and Brahmin parents. He came and shouted at us to leave, chasing us off. Only then did we get the "aim" to build the ministry "center" in Pasumalai. And we built it...³⁵

Jeparani reveals how even college educated, financially middle class "Dalit" Christian Tamils gravitate to networking among their relatives for securing their homes, mainly because they can be assured that discrimination won't suddenly erupt before their eyes.³⁶ Among relatives, there will be no sudden evictions, no needless behind-the-back inquiries. She also reveals how the "Indian Christian" mask can, and often is, ripped off in cruel acts of discrimination easily masked by other motives (I'm the new doctor), even by fellow Christians. In her second narrative, especially, we also see how banal forms of caste mobilization can easily dominate private Christian spaces *rhetorically* beyond caste. Even the mask of preacher, one of the most elite moral identities an urban Tamil Christian can wear in front of his Christian peer, cannot create invulnerability.³⁷

In the early 1980s, a branch of the patriline that got its initial boost from the catechist-training program of the Pasumalai Seminary in the 1930s, found itself returning to a post-colonial Pasumalai to seek refuge in a middle class, modern home dedicated to youth ministry.

Sattiyanesan also joined them in a separate rented Pasumalai apartment, bringing his own family back to where he himself had studied in the 1960s. The move to Pasumalai brought two thirds of the patriline full circle in time but much higher up in a post-colonial histrionics of class distinction. Of course, the new domicile for Gnanaraj's nuclear family was not really *their* home, but rather the home of the organization that raised funds for its erection. And so, when Gnanaraj left this youth organization, he had to find another home for his family like most of the landless, urban middle classes.

As Devasahayam's life trajectory has already shown (Ch 8), class mobility was hardly guaranteed by either baptism or by employment in the mission even at its ceremonial heart: Pasumalai. The story of Michael's patrilineal branch, however, reveals that those few who did 'make it', often made it with the help of prior family assets and critical moral capital provided by careers with well fronted Christian identities at the initial point of their entry into the AMM's political economy; moral capital that, in turn, facilitated access to financial patronage for the next generation's higher education. But, clearly, even after Vedamanikkam became a catechist, the patriline's upward journey had never been 'fated' and has been open to failure at multiple stages. Furthermore, even dramatic forms of public self-identification as the casteless Christian preacher, in very strict accordance with dominant late colonial habitus of multiple identity performance do not miraculously annihilate the stigma of being "Dalit" or "untouchable" within the Christian community itself.

Devasahayam's angry protest has already demonstrated that the old AMM mission compound identity front, still performed faithfully by many CSI Tamils in Pasumalai and elsewhere, is a habitus of multiple identity performance being de-inhabited and/or re-structured

in complex ways that vary according to the individual's strategic positions within political economies of privilege, especially those of local Dioceses. But Sattiyanesan's performance of self also shows how refusal to publicly perform a caste identity among middle class Dalit Christians, though still hegemonic in Pasumalai, is hardly a universal disposition. For those influenced by other-than-evangelical-rhetorics and who have created a strategic space of middle class survival beyond political and moral economies that would require a diplomatic, caste-less performance of self (especially true in the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese), the mission compound habitus, and the identity front it generates dispositionally, can not perpetuate itself. The "structuring structure" (Bourdieu 1977) becomes vulnerable when taken out of the specific historical political economy and rhetorical environment in which it emerged. But there is another post-colonial historical force that challenges the hold of a colonial habitus of public identity performance for many *Dalit* CSI Tamils, regardless of their differing levels of moral, knowledge or financial capital. My final chapter examines this power well beyond a mission compound habitus and the historical dilemmas of identity performance it has raised for the entire Indian Christian community.

Chapter 10 The People with Two Masks?

During one of my earliest trips to Pasumalai's Whiting Memorial church in the fall of 1997, I introduced my research topic as "*matamāṛṛam*" (conversion) to a local pastorate committee member named Paul (see Ch. 7). Sitting next to his expensive motorcycle, he replied quickly in Tamil, "Well, then, you should study *matamāṛṛam* (conversion) and *marumatamāṛṛam* (reconversion)!!" I would eventually learn that Paul's comment contained genuine research advice as well as sarcasm directed at a specific genre of identity performance that, since at least the 1970s, has been an increasing source of controversy in the Indian Christian community. Although "reconversion" has been a term promoted by reformist/nationalist Hindu groups such as the Arya Samaj since the 19th century (Viswanathan 1998: 154-155; Seunarine 1977), both scholars and journalists have used it to refer to any and all identity transformation processes in which Indian Christians (and Muslims) become "Hindus." What concerns me in this final chapter, however, is a form of "reconversion" that challenges the legacy of multiple identity performance legitimated and promoted in colonial Protestant mission compounds like Pasumalai. This is a process wherein a self-identifying Christian becomes a legally recognized, self-identifying Hindu in the governmental spheres of education-related identity certificates and affirmative action welfare benefits. This is a process I am hereafter terming: legal conversion to Hinduism in the governmental sphere. In this chapter I address the interrelationship between post-colonial India's welfare sociologies of caste and religion and legal conversion to Hinduism, as well as the dilemmas posed by this interrelationship for Christians of Dalit origins. Since the statistical majority of Pasumalai's Christian population could trace heritage to Dalit castes during

my research and the AMM itself attracted predominantly Dalits for the rite of baptism into its colonial era churches, this chapter also explores the ways in which the post-colonial Indian state has established structural forces that especially tempt Pasumalai's *will-not-be-Dalit* Christians, like Paul, to reveal to the Government what they are so well disposed, as Christians, to conceal.

Although several scholars have mentioned processes of "reconversion" in passing (Luke and Carmen 1968: 147; Fuller 1977: 58; Alexander 1977: 59; Kananaikil 1983:16; Pandian 1985; Tharamangalam 1996: 281; Deliége 1999: 159), no one has yet produced an in-depth narrative case study of an individual who has reconverted.¹ I offer one such case study in this chapter, because it reveals the power of the modern Indian state, both central and regional, to intervene in the performance of religious identity in ways that have highlighted divisions of class and phenomenology within the silent Dalit majorities of some CSI Tamil communities like Pasumalai. These hierarchies of distinction, when combined with State incentives to "reconvert", have yielded conflicted meanings to the perduring, elitist mission compound identity front we have been exploring in Parts 2 and 3. But, by way of introduction, I first need to explain why, in the governmental sphere, some Indian Christians of Dalit heritage might desire to shed the performative dispositions sustaining a mission compound identity front and become "Hindus."

Indian Welfare Policies and a Scheduled Caste Christian Identity Dilemma²

Since India's independence in 1947, every state has maintained lists according to the following strata of relative backwardness: 1) the Backward Classes (BC) the largest category containing castes thought to have the smallest degree of underprivilege, 2) the Other Backward

Classes (OBC) known as Most Backward Classes (MBC) in Tamil Nadu, which generally includes all denotified “criminal” communities and service castes not traditionally victims of brutal untouchability; 3) the Scheduled Castes (SC) which includes those castes traditionally regarded as untouchable, and 4) the Scheduled Tribes (ST) or those communities (often forest or hill-dwelling) thought to be totally alien to mainstream Indian society (cf. Galanter 1984: 42). Those not in any of these strata, by default, are the most privileged caste groups known as the “Forward Communities” (FC). In one sense, these categories form part of the Indian state’s post-colonial theory of caste stigma. Applying this welfare sociology to the 13 Tamil speaking caste communities in Pasumalai’s Christian community (1998-1999; Appendix B), Konar, Nadar, and most Devar castes are considered “BC”, the Ambattan and the Pramalai Kallar are “OBC”, while Paraiyar, Pallar and Chakkiliyar castes are “SC.”

On August 10, 1950, eight months after the Indian Constitution came into effect, the President of India issued the Scheduled Castes Order. In the third paragraph, it declares that “no person who professes a religion different from Hinduism shall be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled Caste.”³ In its sweeping phraseology, this order de facto precludes those who claim “Indian Christian” identity in the governmental sphere the ability to obtain the full benefits of SC status as their birthright.⁴ And most state governments have tended to interpret the Order in this way. In a 1959 circular, the Home Ministry also implies through indirection that Christian converts forfeit their right to SC status unless they ‘reconvert’ to Hinduism, “.....such reconverts who originally *belonged* to a Scheduled Caste, should be deemed reverted to his original caste and would be eligible for the privileges and assistance provided for the members of Scheduled Castes” (cf. Kananaikil 1983: 13-14).⁵ The use of the past tense here implies that

State Governments should presume that a Christian convert has no legitimate claim to Scheduled Caste identity upon conversion.

In subsequent legal amendments to the 1950 order, the central government has allowed both Sikhs (1956) and Buddhists (1990) to claim SC status, provided they can prove their membership in Dalit communities.⁶ This reinforces the legal presumption that “non-Hindus” are excluded from SC status unless specifically allowed by the central government to claim it. Since 1951, all scheduled caste converts to Christianity in Tamil Nadu have been eligible for Backward Class reservations and concessions.⁷ But, as a consequence of the 1980 Mandal Commission on Backward Classes, Scheduled Caste Christians “regardless of the generation of conversion” have also been accorded Backward Class status in Tamil Nadu “for the purpose of reservation of seats in Educational institutions and for seats in Public services.”⁸ And, of greatest symbolic importance in the performative space of the governmental sphere, Dalit Christians cannot legally obtain scheduled caste certificates, if they identify themselves as “Indian Christians.”⁹ And, so, SC Christians find themselves competing with the majority of Tamil Nadu’s BC individuals for the majority of the most coveted reserved seats in colleges, universities and Government service.¹⁰

It is important to note, however, that what is lost is a *relative* degree of aid. Becoming treated as Backward Class pushes most Dalit Christians two rungs up the welfare hierarchy. From the advent of the scholarship provisions of the 1885 Grant-in-Aid Educational Code of the Madras Presidency,¹¹ members of the Tamil society’s Dalit communities have received welfare benefits designed to give them assistance in overcoming socioeconomic disempowerment presumed to be the result of their ascribed caste stigma.¹² In Tamil Nadu, SCs have 18%

reservations in all major public service posts and educational institutions, while Backward Classes enjoy 30% reservations.¹³ Since as much as half of the Tamil Nadu population might qualify as Backward Class, competition for the 30% BC positions in schools and government service is enormous, while some of the 18% SC posts and seats often go vacant for lack of qualified candidates. SCs have lower entrance examination requirements for colleges and post-graduate programs. For example, in the current Tamil Nadu medical entrance exam for MBBS, BDS, Bpharm, Bsc Nursing degrees, SCs can gain entrance with a mere pass (45%) while others must secure 70% aggregate marks. And SC candidates may apply up to the age of 24, while all others must apply by the age of 21, allowing for delayed attainment of educational prerequisites.¹⁴ SCs generally can receive completely free educations, or “free seats,” through the post-graduate level, if their income is below certain limits, while Backward Class candidates receive only varying amounts of tuition reductions.

To receive any welfare concessions, central and regional governments ask a person to claim both a caste *and* a religious identity. The performance of these twin social identities begins, for many, in their admission to primary school. Schools also issue Transfer Certificates when students transfer to another school or when they finish the Secondary School Leaving Certificate, or SSLC (U.S. 10th grade), and/or “Plus 2” curriculums (U.S. 12th grade). These forms also have blank lines for caste and religion and must be submitted when seeking admission to any post-secondary educational institution which receives government funds. In addition, students need to present a “community certificate” indicating their caste issued by their local V.A.O. (Village Administrative Officer) or Tahsildar. School admission forms and leaving certificates are one critical performative space in the governmental sphere that the phenomenon

of legal conversion to Hinduism addresses obliquely. This is because they establish individuals as rigid metonyms of specific caste and religious communities.

Since most contemporary Tamil Christians of Dalit heritage are only eligible for Backward Class welfare benefits, they have presumably become relatively more dependent than Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh Dalits on their own family's income and on forms of direct social patronage.¹⁵ Dalit Christian families unable to finance their children's post-secondary educations on the basis of Backward Class status alone are perhaps most likely to contemplate some way around the 1950 Order. And the most popular method, involves performing a "Hindu" identity in the governmental sphere and obtaining Scheduled Caste status. But how?

The Religious Persuasions of Legal Names

In 1979, a young Bachelor of Divinity candidate at Serampore University (now Madurai's Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary) completed a thesis on the broad phenomenon indexed by the word "reconversion" within the same Diocese in which my field research took place.¹⁶ His study of Christians "Embracing Hinduism," centers on a centuries old monotheistic anxiety: spiritual apostasy.¹⁷ Amid twelve methods of "embracing Hinduism," Adisayam describes three which involve a legally validated performance of Hindu identity in the governmental sphere.

The first of these three methods, Adisayam informs us, involves Christian parents giving their children common Tamil names at birth, "... names such as *Selvarāj* [King of Wealth], *Rājamāṇikkam* [Ruby King], *Rattinām* [Gem] , *Selvarāṇi* [Queen of Wealth] instead of Christian or Hindu ones. Then they write down "Hindu" in the religion category on the

certificates right when they are admitting their children to schools” (1979: 37). This method takes advantage of a plethora of Tamil names which do not semantically index membership in any specific religious community (see Ch. 5).

The second method of performing a legally valid Hindu identity is open only to baptized individuals whose parents never converted. They can very easily write “Hindu” on any certificates, because, as far as the local government authorities are concerned, their parents and they are still “Hindus” on existing identity certificates (1979: 38). And since Pastors are not required to report Christian baptisms to anyone but church officials, only when a convert registers their new Christian identity through a legal name change will the government have any evidence of their new Christian identity.¹⁸

Those with the names of missionaries, Bible names or English names, however, generally do not have the luxury of any ambiguity in the performance of their religious identity in the governmental sphere. Government or school officials are likely to attribute a Christian identity to any “John David” that comes along.¹⁹ For those whose very baptismal names index clear “Christian” identity, any initial performance of “Hindu” identity becomes rather unpersuasive. And for those who are already marked out as “Indian Christian” on school forms, it is legally impossible. There is, however, an established genre in the governmental sphere that allows the performance of a new religious identity: conversion via a *legal name change*. This appellative conversion takes place in the *Tamil Nadu Government Gazette* and creates the minimal strategic space necessary for a Christian Dalit to obtain a scheduled caste certificate. With a legal name change, Dalit Christians can transform themselves instantly into clear metonyms of a community legally authorized to claim SC status. Whether or not the new names are unambiguously

'Hindu' names is less important, it appears, than the fact that they not be clearly 'Christian.' And so, A. Thomas might become A. Sivamani. S. George might become S. Krishnan. L. Samuel might become L. Pandian. At the time Adisayam wrote his thesis in 1979, this legal name change process, however, involved more than a simple trip to the office of the V.A.O. or District Collector. It began with a trip to a Saivite *ātīṇam* (or monastery) where resident gurus regularly performed *matamāṛṛam* (conversion) ceremonies (1979: 38).

Adisayam explored these ritual "reconversions" ethnographically on several Sunday mornings in 1978. They took place at the ancient Madurai *ātīṇam*'s monastery a few hundred yards from the famous Saivite temple to the fish-eyed goddess: *Mīṇākṣi*. This is the same monastery allegedly founded by Nāṇacampanṭar, the Saivite hero who led the anti-Jain struggle triumphantly commemorated in Madurai's *Tiruvīlaiyāṭal Purāṇam* (see Ch. 1). The *ātīṇam*'s choice of Sunday morning for these reconversion ceremonies was not likely a coincidence. Sunday morning is not on the weekly cycle of auspicious times for local Tamil Saivites. By placing the ceremonies on Sunday morning, the very initiation 'back' into an imagined Hindu fold directly supplanted old Christian habits of worship and identity performance. Adisayam tells us that, from 1972 until 1978, the *ātīṇam*'s register recorded 5576 Christians converting to Hinduism in a Saivite Brahminical ceremony known as a *tīccai*.²⁰ Using certificates authenticating the conversion, and given out after the ceremony, candidates then applied to the *Tamil Nadu Gazette* to change their name and religious identity as a Janus-faced process of identity transformation. Once the legal name change appears in the *Gazette*, Adisayam notes, the

candidate may begin to negotiate with authorities to obtain a Scheduled Caste certificate with the *Gazette* itself as evidence of “Hindu” identity (1979: 54).

On Christmas Day in 1998, an article appeared in the weekly Tamil newsmagazine, *Nakeeran* (named after a famous 9th century Tamil poet), in which we learn from a journalist named Saktivel that “reconversion” ceremonies, and the legal name changes that follow, do not always facilely allow one to claim “SC” status,

...we can see many people becoming Hindu and getting government jobs under the SC quota...Recently, the Talsidar is making good income because of all these people who have left their wax candles [fallacious, metonymic reduction of the category “Christian” to a material sign of *Catholic* devotional practice] and returned to incense and coconuts. One Dalit Christian youth who has become a Mutturaj devotee said, ‘Even if you show the *ānai* [oath/document] certifying your religious change given by the government [presumably a reference to a published name change in the TN Gazette], village authorities, revenue officers and the Tasildar don’t respect it. Only if you give them anywhere from Rs. 1000 to Rs. 10,000 in bribes can you finally get an SC certificate.’²¹

How widespread this kind of extortionate corruption truly is, I do not know. Yet it is related to wider, longstanding processes of verifying identities performed in the governmental sphere, especially for obtaining the benefits of welfare.²²

Legal Conversion to Hinduism in Pasumalai: A Rare Case?

Although the current Madurai *ātīṇam* told me he stopped performing *tīṭccai* for Christians in 1983, there are other institutions which, even today, in Madurai, are providing authentic Hindu conversion ceremonies and issuing certificates accepted by the *Tamil Nadu Government Gazette* for the purpose of the necessary name changes.²³ I met one former Christian who “reconverted” at such a place in 1987. Mutturaj’s conversion to Hinduism is

known to most long term residents of Pasumalai, because everyone has started to call him by his new name, though, for years, they knew him only by his baptismal name, Swamidas.

Mutturaj, now in his early forties, works in a wealthy neighboring middle class community as a clerk in a government ration store. He originally sought me out in Pasumalai, because he wanted me to correct an English draft of by-laws for his proposed “Arunthatiyar Research and Development Institute,” a caste association he was forming to promote the interests of his community, which is also known by the name Chakkiliyar.²⁴ Mutturaj was born into one of the most uniformly derided Scheduled Castes in Tamil Nadu, whose urban members are primarily associated in the Madurai public’s imagination with occupations such as: making and repairing leather sandals, cleaning sewage drains, septic tanks and toilets, digging graves, disposing and skinning dead cows, sweeping streets and buildings, and municipal trash collection.

When I was first getting to know him, Mutturaj lived in a government established colony for Scheduled Castes at the edge of Pasumalai known as Ambedkar Nagar. It is one of Pasumalai’s newest neighborhoods (1981),²⁵ and, as some alleged to me, rests on former mission land (see Map 2). Unlike most residents here, though, Mutturaj wasn’t staying in his own home but rather in a cramped rental unit with only two rooms. This SC colony stands not more than 500 yards from Teachers’ Line. However, no more than ten Pasumalai Christian families actually lived in Ambedkar Nagar during my research and not all of these actually owned homes or land there.²⁶ It is a predominantly middle class community of SC Hindus, some of whom, it appears, are enjoying SC reservations.

In the middle of my research, though, Mutturaj returned with his family to his natal home on what I call “Servants’ Line” or what he calls “Hillcrest Bungalow Compound” (referring to the fact that some of these houses were once affiliated, as servant dwellings, to the Hillcrest missionary bungalow; see Map 3). Until the spread of flush-out latrines in the 1970s, his was one of several Chakkiliyar families who cleaned the dry latrines of the Pasumalai Christian mission schools, hostels and teachers’ homes, by hand, and in addition to other janitorial work. In describing his educational career, Mutturaj said, “I can say today that the fact that I can write with a pen is because my mother scooped excrement and educated me...She would put ash in the toilets of the teachers’ homes and remove it. Removing was one job and sweeping another.”²⁷ Because of this work, Mutturaj claims that his baptized parents never felt confident enough to enter the Pasumalai church during services and sit among the educated teachers whose excrement they collected on a regular basis.²⁸

Despite his natal origin in one of the most stigmatized neighborhoods of Pasumalai (see Ch. 7), Mutturaj’s public performance of self conveyed no sense of humiliation to me. Mutturaj alternated between both pants-and-belt and *veṣṭi*-wrapped clothings of self, but, when headed off to work, definitely preferred the modern, pants-and-belt performance of urban, upwardly aspiring Tamil masculinity. And nothing I saw in his body posture in public space ever connoted excessive deference or feelings of inferiority. I often saw him taking coffee at one of the newest Pasumalai tea stalls, where I also saw Devasahayam on occasion, run and patronized heavily by local laborers, masons, and laid off spinning mill workers from the PK community. The latter are also individuals who generally share scant respect for Chakkiliyars like Mutturaj. Yet, studying up through “plus 2” at the Pasumalai Boys’ Higher Secondary School afforded him

many friendships with people he himself described to me as “high caste,” an experience he described to me as a “gift.” In fact, Mutturaj claimed that it was just such friends who noticed his academic talent and encouraged him to pursue higher studies. And, taking their advice, he eventually obtained an empty seat in English literature at the local Mannar college (see Map 2). That Mutturaj was able to use a PK boy as a social broker the night we first met also reveals how educational status alone can sometimes temporarily overcome the hierarchy of stigma often drives Devar-Dalit social relations.

After abandoning his college studies in 1982, presumably for lack of funds, Mutturaj was without work for five years and rapidly approaching the maximum age limit for obtaining most SC job reservations (32).²⁹ He claimed to me that it was then that he decided to reconvert to obtain a government job. Although his baptismal name, Swamidas, was not as blatantly Christian as a Bible name would be, because he possessed identity certificates clearly marking him out as an “Indian Christian”, Mutturaj found himself unable to use the first or second of Adisayam’s three methods to perform a legal “Hindu” identity in the governmental sphere. So, he resorted to the third, more involved, method which he described to me privately in an extended interview,

Mutturaj: In Madurai there is an organization called the Arya Samaj. There is a “ceremony” like a “baptism”...

JR: How did you come to hear about this organization?

Mutturaj: When I was asking a few people who changed [converted] like me, they said, go and *māru* [change or convert] like this. So I went to the Arya Samaj and asked. They told me they would make arrangements and asked me to come back at a specified date. They performed a sort of *caṭaṅku* (lit. ‘ceremony’; Tamil word used often to refer to life cycle rituals such as female coming of age rituals)...

I took my off my shirt and put on a thread. They spoke a Veda Mantra. 'From now on you [informal] will be understood by the name Mutturaj.' They gave me a certificate. I don't have it with me anymore. I "xeroxed" it and used it to "apply" to the Tamil Nadu "Gazette". From there, "publication"....

What they told me at the "time" was that their only "conditions" were: 1) You need to become a Hindu. 2) You should worship only as a Hindu. Then they went to a man in a nearby temple and said to him, "Older Brother, there is a guy here who wants to join the *matam* (religion)." He put his signature on the certificate which says 'He joined the Hindu *matam*'....[Mutturaj then compares this process to Christian baptism and the issuing of a baptism certificate for those who want to register a name change after converting to Christianity]

JR: Why did you go through the Sangam [Arya Samaj]?

Mutturaj: Ahhhh. That is really the "proper method."

JR: Oh. Otherwise, the government won't accept it?

Mutturaj: They won't accept it....Right now, what "evidence" is there that I am a Christian? I have to go to church, become a member and then I am a Christian. "Father", a "pastor", gives a "certificate" saying 'He converted (using the intransitive verb *māru* literally meaning 'changed') from the Hindu religion to the Christian religion.' So this is just like that...³⁰

Mutturaj's narration of the ritual process of conversion to Hinduism here leaves out much and came out in a tone of thorough disinterest in details. In speaking so, he signaled to me the perfunctory attitude with which he seemed to view the whole affair. As he put it, it was simply the "proper method" of performing himself as a newly self-identified "Hindu" to the *Tamil Nadu Government Gazette*. And the Arya Samaj perhaps felt they had re-claimed yet another errant metonym of a reformed Hindu nation.³¹

Mutturaj also told me that government authorities then came to his house to see if he had "actually" reconverted. He claims that an individual he identified as the "District Certificate Authority" came on two surprise visits to his natal house on "Hill Crest Bungalow Compound." He said that officials generally expect to see a photo of the "converted" worshipping in a Hindu

manner (although I do not recall seeing such a photo in his home) or some “Hindu” icons (which I did see). They also ask neighbors, Mutturaj claimed, if the person has “truly” converted to Hinduism. This state level skepticism of “reconversion” is similar to William Tracy’s 19th century examination of baptismal candidates for sufficient “signs” of conversion (Blaufass 2000: 114-119), except that Tracy, of course, did not have the legitimate violence of the (colonial) state backing up his scrutiny of Christian identity performances in the mission compound.³²

Beyond the details of Mutturaj’s legal conversion to Hinduism, though, where can we place his identity performance within the broader context of strategies used by Dalit Christians as they perform their multiple selves in the governmental sphere? And where does the legacy of an old mission compound identity front appear in these various strategies? And, finally, what relationship do relative financial class privilege and varying religious persuasions play in structuring how individual Dalit Christians in post-colonial Pasumalai choose *their* strategy in the governmental sphere.

Dalit Christian Perspectives from Pasumalai

Pastor Adisayam notes in his thesis what he feels are the potential consequences for those who choose the path of legal conversion to Hinduism,

Those who convert, for the most part, want to hide their conversion. But via gossip in their local village and mail that arrives with their new Hindu name, local people will eventually find out. Furthermore, the *āṭṭṇams* publish lists of the reconverted. Christians who learn of their Hindu conversion will look down on them, their parents and their relatives (Adisayam 1979: 56)

Adisayam goes on to argue that, if the news does come out in public, local retaliation in the Christian community is possible, including becoming blocked from church membership, burial

rights, taking communion, and holding weddings in the church (57). This is all “possible,” I found out when I met him, because all this happened in his own natal village to the first young man who chose this option. The boy was blocked by his fellow villagers/caste mates/church peers from holding weddings, and attending church as a traitor to the faith. Adisayam then noted that after ten or more others had tried the same strategy, local Christians in his village stopped objecting and most likely have just stopped talking about the whole dilemma entirely.³³

Although the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese’s constitution grants each local Pastorate Committee the power to expel members, it does not specifically list “reconversion” as just cause. Nevertheless, I quickly learned, however, that reconverted individuals who do perform a Christian identity at home, at church, and in Pasumalai’s public spaces most likely do not want anyone to know what they have done. As one young Christian man put it to me, “Many people have changed [their names to Hindu ones], but they won’t say it in public.”³⁴ Those who are willing to talk, like Mutturaj, most likely feel no reason to conceal their actions because they no longer perform a Christian identity beyond the governmental sphere either.

From an exploration of four other Dalit Christian perspectives, we can begin to understand Mutturaj’s conversion as only one of several different post-colonial strategies for identity performance used by Dalit Christians in the Tamil governmental sphere. These are strategies in which the enduring legacy of the mission compound identity front mentioned earlier has become either affirmed, re-structured, or simply abandoned in the course of negotiating the meaning of an ascribed Christian identity in post-colonial India.

I begin with the reply of Pasumalai’s pastor to my query on the phenomenon of Christian conversions to Hinduism via a legal name change.

Perspective 1: The Pasumalai Pastor, Gnanapirakasam

Gnanapirakasam: If you're asking my *vicuvāca apipirāyam* (faith-based opinion), one should be in the *vicuvācam* (faith) that 'the Lord will provide.' A Bible verse even says he will provide, 'I will make strong he who strengthens himself.' If we completely depend upon *āṅṅavar* (the Lord, i.e. Jesus), he will provide. This is my experience. I have seen it in my own experience. I have also seen it in my family...Because we depend upon the Lord, The Lord gives us everything we need. Those who do not depend on the Lord in this way, change their *matam* (religion), say that they need to receive government concessions, change their religion and get them. But these are not *ācīrvātamāṇa* (blessed) families. For this, one could go completely to the Hindu religion. To become Hindu for concessions and then in one's faith life to say "we *nampu* (believe) in Jesus Christ" is to deceive the Lord and to deceive the Government. We have a Lord who has given us a guarantee and a conscience. We will act according to the Lord ...I do not see *ācīrvātam* (blessing) in the families of people who do this....³⁵

When I then asked about whether he supported the struggle for parity in SC Christian concessions he had this to say,

We have given a number of "appeals." ...We may appeal the mistakes made by the government. Afterwards, we have to depend on the Lord. What else can we do? At this time, if my daughter were MBC (Most Backward Class), a "free seat" in Engineering would have been available. She got 87% marks. The reason she didn't get a "free seat" is because she is a Backward [Class] Christian...If we were Hindu SCs, we would have come up to the "first level." Or if we were MBC, she would have come to the next "level." It wasn't possible. But the Lord has given us *kaṇam* [strength] Even though it is a "payment seat," last year the Lord helped us. Money came to us from an unexpected source. We received almost half of what we needed as a donation. This year as well we received almost 1/4 . Of this 1/4 I gave about 1/10 to a poor kid in the church- in this church...So because we *nampu* [believe in, trust] the Lord, we have 3/4 left. If another 1/4 came it would be helpful. We will meet 50%. I *vicuvācikkirēn* [have faith] that the Lord will give. If we were Hindu, we wouldn't have this expense. But there would be no blessing. [adopting a child-like, giddy tone] Now just look at how we can *savor* the way the Lord provides for us!!³⁶

In the pastor's strict moral economy, those who trust in the Lord will receive blessings.³⁷

Conversely, those who choose to perform themselves as Hindus in the governmental sphere for concessions are those who are likely to be unblessed. In Gnanapirakasam's moral economy, they

deceive God *despite* their Christian practice and most likely 'deserve' the condition making their deception necessary.

This is a very plausible and persuasive moral economy for those middle class Dalit Christians like him whose children can take Backward Class concessions but without threatening their future class status. For example, although Rev. Gnanapirakasam earned a modest Diocesan salary during my research, his wife was also employed as a teacher in the Pasumalai Girls' High School. Both church positions also entitled them to receive free, middle class housing complete with what I came to recognize as four key symbols of bourgeois victory in urban Madurai: a phone line, a refrigerator, a motorscooter and a 19 inch Color TV. Together they earn almost *six times* the average rural Indian family's annual income (Shariff 1999: 46-7). They are apt metonyms of India's rising middle classes, but individuals who have nevertheless accumulated little in savings due to the ongoing expense of educating four children.

The pastor's self-representation as the loyal believer who deserves the manifest blessings in his family life rationalizes his own class privilege while also reproducing the priority of a Christian moral economy over the stark realities of an everyday Indian political economy. And perhaps remembering that I already knew his household income (which he had divulged in my 1998 house survey), Rev. Gnanapirakasam seemed to anticipate an ethical critique of the 'selfish pastor' on my part, by quickly explaining how he had given away a small portion of his 'blessing' to a 'poor kid.' His ironic use of the word "poor" here implies that he is in the category of the "non-poor." Persuaded by such a verbal self-interpretation, the pastor also elides a discussion of how the moral capital accrued by adopting the title of "Pastor" most likely played

a role in constructing him, and his children by the logic of metonym, as ethically worthy of “blessings” in the eyes of wealthier donors (both Christian and non-Christian).

The Sunday-sermon moral economy Gnanapirakasam deploys here is essentially a theory of ethical merit-based transactionalism and one sharply opposed in its moral assumptions to any modern scheme of affirmative action that takes the metonymical indexing of ascribed group identity itself (i.e. on legally validated identity certificates) as the primary basis of ‘merit.’ Verbally performed allegiance to a such Christian moral economy of merit is also one of the most effective and satisfying performances with which to mask caste stigma in social interaction with others whose knowledge of one’s Dalit origins is itself not always known. For example, the moral economy evidenced by the Pasumalai Pastor, who is a Dalit, also found expression in the Bible verse selected as a rear window decoration for the AC cars used by the current Bishop of the Madurai Diocese, who is not a Dalit, “My grace is sufficient for thee” (from 2 Corinthians 12: 9). Such verbal performances of evangelical reliance on the Lord become unassailable by non-Dalit officials, institutional heads and Christian peers.

Pastor Gnanapirakasam, now in his early sixties, is from an old “settlement” community called Vaughnpuram, named after an American missionary who helped acquire some unused royal land from the Sivagangai Raja to provide Paraiyar Christian converts with their own agricultural land.³⁸ His own father had 12 children by two successive wives and worked as an office assistant (cf. Devasahayam) in a nearby American mission leprosy hospital. His education was artificially halted in the 7th grade, because, apparently, he could no longer pay his own fees and neither a patron nor a mission scholarship was available to him. In the early 1950s, Gnanapirakasam received one of 20-25 Diocese scholarships to study the 9th and 10th grades at

the Pasumalai High school; a rare ‘blessing’ indeed that allowed him to continue studying. After finishing the SSLC at Pasumalai, Gnanapirakasam was able to study at the Pasumalai Teacher Training school before obtaining a job as a second grade teacher in a government middle school. He freely admits today that the Diocese scholarship was economically based and not awarded on merit. Of course, he received this ‘blessing’ at a time in his life, according to his own narration, when he was a “nominal” Christian, without ‘real faith’, oddly contradicting the force of the moral economy in which he now firmly places himself.³⁹

A similar, albeit less rhetorically strident, opinion came to me from a semi-educated Christian electrician who cannot be considered the head of a middle class CSI Tamil family:

Perspective 2: The Electrician, Peter

What I think is that, whether or not there is hardship or suffering, if you come to the Christian *matam* (religion), you shouldn’t expect any concessions. No one should think, “Ooooh. The government will give this concession.” If we are on the Christian *vali* (path) and have to suffer and work hard, that’s fine. Look at my kids. Christians don’t get any scholarships, but they do give them to Hindu boys. Well, they do give some [to Christians]. They put “BC.”

Referring to government scholarships for the trade school technical educations of his two sons, Peter continued with his explanation,

For Hindus, they give the “full amount” Rs. 3,500. For Christians who are struggling they give Rs. 1000. That’s enough. We don’t need more than that. So with that I’m raising my kids. I still have to pay some more fees. They stopped paying and I have to pay an additional Rs. 5000 for “school fees” [remaining balance for both his sons’ tuition at the Pasumalai Trade School, see Map 3]...I myself am earning the money, paying fees and educating my kids. That’s why I have been given this name, John Peter. I can only possibly say that this is a Christian name. How could I say this is a Hindu name? Can I say that “Peter” is a Hindu name? [laughs]. So I’ve given names like that [all his children indeed have Bible names as their given names). If we struggle, OK. I’ve done this so we will be on the *vali* (path) of *Yēcu sāmi* [Jesus].⁴⁰

These are the comments of a 53-year-old resident in one of the former servant homes of Arangasalai (see Map 2), son of a mission sweeper who worked for years in Pasumalai's late colonial Seminary under the employ of AMM missionary John Banninga. And although he echoed the pastor's moral argument, he also indicated his empathy for who decide, like Mutturaj, to legally convert to Hinduism, "There are some important reasons for this. Hardship at home, inability to pay back loans. Life at home may be really difficult."⁴¹ In a second interview, I asked Peter if he supported the award of SC concessions to Dalit Christians to which he replied quite insistently,

They should give them! It's only the *matam* (religion) that's changed...As soon as you say, "Christian" they put you as "BC" or "Forward Community." Because they think Christians are big guys. That's how they think. [Suddenly chuckling to himself] And that's exactly what we [exclusive form] say, 'We're big guys.'⁴²

It's important to note here that Peter and Mutturaj actually come from the same broad caste community. Both are children of Pasumalai's late colonial mission sweepers, though their births lay separated by what may have been a historically critical ten to fifteen years.

Yet, Peter's very different life experiences have only reinforced his own strongly narrated conviction that his family may successfully continue to perform their "Indian Christian" identity and forgo SC welfare benefits. After finishing 9th grade at Pasumalai's Higher Secondary school in 1961, Peter joined a Roman Catholic technical institute in Madurai with tuition paid for by the American missionary Charles Heinemann and by scholarship money from the institute himself. He immediately got a job at a local engineering college in 1965, where he has worked ever since and now earns Rs. 5,000 per month. He credits his being hired there to both his Christian identity and the fact that the man who hired him at the engineering college was a Catholic and felt sympathy towards graduates of his own church's technical school.⁴³ And although Peter's

father died in 1957, when Peter was around eleven years old and still studying in the Pasumalai schools, the family had already received important financial patronage. Peter's older brother informed me that as AMM missionary Charles Heinemann was leaving Pasumalai on mission furlough in 1956 he purchased the family a cow and gave cash [perhaps exaggerated for effect during his narrative] to help educate his children.⁴⁴ Such a concatenation of 'blessings' was never available to Mutturaj, who grew up in the 1970s and only two hundred yards away from where Peter's family did. Although also a direct descendant from a Pasumalai school sweeper, Mutturaj was born and raised in a *post-missionary* Pasumalai and, more importantly, in a family that apparently had no deep connections to them during Mutturaj's childhood.⁴⁵

Along with the pastor, most other Christians from Dalit castes I talked to in Pasumalai, irrespective of their varying socioeconomic conditions, argued that people who still practice Christianity after performing legal conversion to Hinduism are frauds, deceiving God and Government.⁴⁶ In the opinion of one octogenarian retired government officer, Robert (see Ch. 8), "This kind of thing never, ever would have happened during Lorbeer's period or the missionaries' period."⁴⁷ Another middle class Christian who had recently lost his low-paying Diocese job in a manual training institute also registered his bitter derision for, and muted envy of, this practice, "If you take me, if I can't get work, I can become a Hindu sneakily, without anyone knowing, get work and then go to church and worship. Like a thief I could become a Hindu for work."⁴⁸ Yet, there is another, more charitable, perspective.

Perspective 3: The Dalit Activist, Neill

What I say is this: We put down a Christian name but can't even get *kañci* (rice gruel) to eat at home. We have put "Christian". We study. We have no scholarship for higher studies. There's no money at home. But that guy has "Hindu" put down. Just go and study on the government! You want to worship *sāmi* (god)? So go to "church" and worship! Is *sāmi* going to beat you or kill you because of what you put on the 'certificate'? I have "Christian" down for me all the way, for me, for my younger sister; for all three of us we put down "Christian." Christian is on the "certificate." We can't get any "scholarship" help. But even with this, both my younger sisters have struggled and studied. I too have struggled and studied up to where I am. But I know guys doing a lot worse than me. Say a guy has "Christian" put down for him. His name is "Albert." He has put down "Religion: Christian." Absolutely no help will come from the government. But if the same "Albert" puts "Sangaran" or something like that and then "Religion: Hindu", "Community: Paraiyan", there's an *enormous* [his emphasis] amount of "scholarships." So take it and pray to your heart's content!!...⁴⁹

Neill is a bachelor in his late twenties, a high school graduate who then trained as a mechanic.

His father is also a mechanic and his mother, before her tragic death from cancer in 1992, was a Diocesan school teacher. His elder sister has become a nurse. The household income stood at Rs. 7,000 in 1999, placing them in an awkward, liminal space between the working and middle classes; but an income which allowed them a nice rented apartment and decent food and clothing during my stay in Pasumalai. In recent years, though, Neill has drifted away from the church and rarely comes to services, except for Christmas and Easter. He is a vociferous critic of the church's theology, its concept of missionary work and its inability to confront caste discrimination and other exploitations within itself. I rarely saw him at any youth functions during my research, though he did socialize occasionally with the more active church youth and came along during the church's annual Christmas caroling trips. Despite his apparent self-alienation from active church life, on the day of his mother's 6th death anniversary, he went to place a flower garland and light candles at her grave, returning home to help with a prayer

meeting in her honor, led by Rev. Gnanapirakasam. I realized that evening that his disposition to perform a Christian identity had hardly vanished from his life. Prior to my arrival, Neill had become an active part in the nascent Dalit social movement in Madurai, working specifically to organize labor unions for Chakkiliyars (the same caste as Mutturaj and Peter) who work on the Madurai municipal payroll cleaning sewage canals, performing garbage removal and sweeping public streets.

Such public participation in caste mobilization marginalizes him from a Christian center in Pasumalai; a center in which caste talk and caste pride have no public face and no publicly legitimate voice and in which the old mission compound identity front strongly perdures. Like Mutturaj, Neill has grown up to reject this old identity front and its structural denial of caste identity performance. This alienated, ex-choir boy, was the only Pasumalai Christian I asked about legal conversion to Hinduism who argued what seemed like the obvious counter-position to the orthodox one I kept hearing. For Neill, Christian self-identity need not be consistent at all with one's performed religious identity in the governmental sphere. And he quite honestly admits that the reason that neither he nor anyone else in his family have tried this dissonant identity performance themselves is based, in part, on their relative socioeconomic privilege, "a lot of guys are doing a lot worse off than me." The fact that he clearly ranks his caste identity above any lingering sense of Christian self-identity, like Mutturaj, predisposes Neill to feel compassion for economically frustrated Dalit Christians. This disposition to caste his self so proudly alienates him sharply from a Pasumalai center even more than Devasahayam's brief wall poster campaign had alienated him. After all, Devasahayam employed traditional Christian rhetoric and visual tropes to frame his caste-based critique. For Neill, though, caste and religion

seem like completely separate, and unrelated, categories of identity. More importantly, fighting for parity of concessions between Christian SCs and non-Christian SCs is of little interest to him, because he doesn't really see the ethical dilemma most of his Dalit Christian peers would feel if they contemplated re-structuring their identity front to mask their Christian identity for mere 'worldly' gain.

But for the latter Christians of Dalit heritage, who are strongly persuaded by evangelical rhetoric, legal conversion to Hinduism in the governmental sphere is no casual duplicity. In an interview, Michael's mother, Jeparani, a proud Christian from a 19th century AMM family, hinted subtly and powerfully to one possible scriptural analogue to the identity performance indexed by legal conversion to Hinduism,

JR: Some people, in order to get these concessions, have changed their names, become Hindus, received concessions and begun to *pīlaikka* (to survive.) What do you think about that?

Jeparani: They are surviving, but it's not blessed. Many families have split up. Many families are doing work, while they shout, "I denied. I denied."*[marutalittēn]* An LIS [Life Insurance Society of India] officer denied, got a position and then came to our house. As soon as he came here, his entire prayer was "I denied. I denied." That guilty feeling.⁵⁰

As she drew me into a critical evangelical phenomenology, Jeparani could have used the modern spoken Tamil verb *maru* to index "denial", but she chose the archaic form *marutali*. And *marutali* is the same Tamil verb used in the BSI "Old Version" Bible⁵¹ to portray Simon Peter's legendary public denials of association with Jesus the morning of the latter's arrest in Jerusalem by Roman centurions. In all four synoptic gospels, at the end of the Last Supper, Jesus makes a bold prediction that his disciple Peter will deny him three times before the cock crows twice (i.e. by the following dawn). Later that same evening, Jesus conducts his famous "watchnight"

prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, asking his disciples to stay awake as guards. After Jesus is arrested, guards take him to the high priest of Israel, named Caiaphas, whereupon Peter follows him secretly and receives a terrifying harbinger of the persecution to come. It is during this moment of understandable terror that Peter publicly denies any knowledge of Jesus to three different inquirers. Three of the four synoptic gospels make explicit reference to Peter's sudden, haunting realization that he has fulfilled Christ's stern prediction of an imminent public denial. However, these three gospels only mention that Peter "wept" or "wept bitterly" upon his realization.⁵² Yet, in the corresponding part of the script for Pasumalai's passion play, the Love Divine, Peter unleashes a mea culpa monologue about his "denial" using the same archaic Tamil verb *marutali*.⁵³ For some CSI Tamils, then, this verb itself appears to connote "denial of faith."

Unlike the biblically narrated Judas, who simply betrayed Christ for money and abandoned his disciple identity, the Peter of gospel narratives retains his faith secretly but wonders if he might escape the stigma of that faith through a public masking of self. In the rhetorical imagination of many Protestant Tamils like Jeparani, Christians who are persuaded by orthodox rhetoric of a context-independent performance of Christian loyalty, playing Peter in public means something very different than playing Judas. For them, it is about the ultimate spiritual cowardice. It also risks dishonor within the public sphere of the church.

While Adisayam implies in his 1979 thesis that conversion to Hinduism via a name change is equivalent to "embracing Hinduism," there is no concrete evidence available to me that those who change their names and perform a "Hindu" identity in the governmental sphere are adopting different religious practices or that they necessarily have any less interest in performing a Christian identity beyond the governmental sphere than those who do not. What we can infer

from legal conversions to Hinduism in the governmental sphere is that, at most, the individuals doing so have lost their commitment to performing their Christian identity regardless of the performative context. The ideal of a rigid, context-free identity front in which Christian identity always receives prominence, and certainly not outright denial, dates back to the colonial era mission compound itself. While Dalit Christians who seek Backward Class status perform their caste identities alongside their Christian identities, and thereby challenge the legacy of a caste-less mission compound identity front, they render these two identities symbolically equal in the governmental sphere. Legal conversion to Hinduism, however, implies the total erasure of Christian identity. It appears that Peter, Gnanapirakasam and other like minded Dalit Christians desire the ability to obtain SC concessions by performing their caste and religious identities as *equally* important on government validated identity certificates.⁵⁴ And this latter goal is what I believe is really motivating much middle class Dalit and non-Dalit Christian support for the amendment of the 1950 Presidential Order.⁵⁵

Legal Validations of a Mission Compound Identity Front

Yet, there is at least a fourth perspective on Dalit Christian identity performance in the governmental sphere; one originating in the colonial construction of the category “Native Christian” which eventually became reworded as “Indian Christian.” It is a strategy distinctly opposed to Mutturaj’s and even more strident than that employed by the children of Peter and Reverend Gnanapirakasam. This is a strategy which some middle class Dalit Christian families continue to enact, regardless of their ability to receive Backward Class benefits. They forgo virtually any reservation benefits in a bid to maintain “Indian Christian”

as their *only* recognized social identity in the governmental sphere. Their religious identity then functions as a substitute for, rather than a complement to, caste self-identification.

Michael's mother, Jeparani, proudly claimed that all her children had performed their selves in this manner,

...whenever [our children] go for some big course of study they ask, 'What is your caste?' But not even one of our children has put down their caste. "Indian Christian." If you'll give, then give. If not, then go away! My father and my husband have always been very "forward." They never go around as anyone else's slaves.⁵⁶

As Jeparani suggests in her response, declaring a Paraiyar caste name during admission to schools is tantamount to self-identifying in the governmental sphere in a feudal Tamil idiom of slave-master relations. So, some middle class Dalit Christians, like her children, have chosen to have their family's multi-generational identity "conversion" legally validated in the very identity certificates produced by the government in the process of higher education. Taking advantage of their legal right not to disclose either caste or religious identities, some middle class Christian Tamils deliberately leave the caste line blank.⁵⁷ In one sense, those who employ this strategy become virtual Tamil Brahmins in the governmental sphere, treated as if from a "forward community," because even claiming Backward Class welfare benefits currently requires some form of caste self-identification. Although many friends know their caste identity, the governmental sphere can not know it, because its invisibility has become legal truth on identity certificates. Certainly, for many Dalit Christians, this is also a proud identity performance whose dramatic, bold energy is directed as much at themselves as at the prying eyes of the government. It is a legally inscribed moral victory over a stigmatized caste identity in the one strategic space they can render the mask of "Indian Christian" identity thoroughly opaque.

But I have a feeling that Jeparani's family would have avoided SC benefits, even if they hadn't had to publicly deny their Christian identity to acquire them. One evening in 1999, as I ate with Gnanaraj at their rented two story home, I asked this famous Madurai preacher what he thought about the denial of SC benefits to "Dalit Christians." He replied, "That would bother us, James, if we were low caste people. But we are high caste people." He said this knowing full well that I already knew the family's Dalit background. Confused by a literal interpretation of his utterance, I turned my head quickly to the left looking for Jeparani's reaction as she sat deferentially on the floor. There was no smile, not even a smirk on her proudly solemn face. Quickly, I looked behind me and saw the equally blank, serious faces of her children. And then, suddenly, a profound ethnographic irony overwhelmed me while Gnanaraj calmly continued with his dinner in silence.

This simple verbal performance represents Gnanaraj's personal self-understanding as someone who has won a personal moral victory over caste stigma, although hardly a social victory over it in his family's life. Persuaded by its poetic momentum, I now saw that those who are branded "low caste" in Tamil society have declared themselves people cast high in what they see as the morally elite domain of Christianity. And for him, his wife and his children, part of inhabiting this morally elite domain is the performance of an "Indian Christian" identity in the governmental sphere unaccompanied by the historical load of identity stigma they and all other Dalits continue to bear in their lives beyond it. Gnanaraj's subtle Christian inversion of low and high may convey an communal undertone to reactionary Hindus and to radically secular listeners, those unconvinced of the vaunted moral claims of Christians like him. But, precisely as a secular witness, I believe Gnanaraj's intentionally ironic poetic inversion is rooted in a

passionate cultural politics struggling for total “salvation” from moral stigma not a grandiose communal politics struggling for a total usurpation of the Indian nation. His comment also helps us understand Ponnaiya’s denial of “low” and “high” caste distinctions earlier (Ch. 8), not as the hypocritical duplicity I had initially assumed it to be, but as the essence of a stubborn identity narrative that makes the mission compound fantasy of a caste-less Christian community rhetorically real, that does not even allow the phrase “Dalit Christian” itself to emerge in verbal performances of self, even well beyond the confines of elite Christian social spaces.

Gnanaraj’s wry performance of self that evening backgrounded what his wife would later say in our private interview a few weeks later,

...whenever they say “I’m a Dalit” in public others will respect them less. Therefore, in my view, without protesting [to obtain scheduled caste reservations] study well, get “first class marks”....and go forward on “merit.” That’s my thought. As far as I’m concerned, if you protest, your *mariyātai* (respect) will decrease. Without protesting, you just work hard and come to the front...If you’re in a factory and are diligent and earn a lot and build a big house, those below you will respect you. Even if you’re a Dalit. There is only respect for work and “merit.” If you protest, “no use.” If you go stand in a line and protest and then go ask for a place in “college”, they’ll say, ‘Hey. That’s the guy who protested.’⁵⁸

Jeparani presents her concern with respect here as very much other-directed. What will others think of self-identifying “Dalits” fighting for welfare benefits? Instead of justice in the arena of competing caste identities, Jeparani places emphasis on a merit based theory of success and wealth. It is also a moral theory of self that assumes suffering and hard work are part of life; the same moral economy that makes ‘enduring’ the loss of SC concessions while remaining “Christian” in the governmental sphere acceptable to an evangelical imagination. The short cuts of welfare benefits in India have a heavy stigma associated with them, much as affirmative action does in the United States. And, as Isaacs notes in his famous study, Hindu Dalits who

have used welfare benefits for education or obtained government service jobs via the SC quota never escape their constant visibility as ‘Scheduled Castes’; such a path of dependency on straight Government careers ultimately prevents any hope of escape from a natal stigma (1965: 120).⁵⁹ Michael’s family has taken strategic advantage of its privilege and the existence of an alienated position as “Indian Christians.” Using these twin positions, they would rather perform the old mission compound identity front within the governmental sphere, independent of any welfare apparatus that would entice them to perform their caste identity.⁶⁰

I do not know what proportion of Dalit Christians, in Pasumalai, Madurai or elsewhere, actually perform themselves exclusively as “Indian Christian” in the governmental sphere. I have heard from some sources that it was once the prevailing practice, before the 1980 Mandal commission. And further research might reveal that some of these contemporary dilemmas have late colonial roots in the 1936 Scheduled Castes Act (which also excluded Indian Christians from claiming SC status). But even a middle class Dalit Christian family does not put on such a performance without losing something. During a 1995 pre-dissertation interview, Gnanaraj revealed the price he feels his children have paid,

... I am from the Dalit community. If I am a Hindu, my son or my second son, who is going for MS, he should have had a place in medical school. He was a intelligent guy. He got good marks and other things. As a Dalit Hindu he would have received a seat for a medical school, but since he is Christian he is not able to get at that privilege. And I am not worried about it, because I’m happy because the Lord has chosen us from a very heathen background.⁶¹

While he may be exaggerating here to make himself look like a Christian stalwart, his children, like the Pasumalai pastor’s, are precisely those privileged enough to be able to avail of the most lucrative SC welfare benefits: “free seats” in colleges and professional schools.

Mutturaj Revisited

During my gathering of opinions, I was surprised by the diversity of assumptions concerning the phenomenology of the Christian revert to Hinduism. By placing legal conversion to Hinduism within a broader, partisan lament about Christians “embracing Hinduism,” the author quoted earlier, Adisayam, assumes that Christian conversion to Hinduism in the governmental sphere corresponds to some evangelical phenomenology losing its persuasive grip. And a few others I interviewed also seemed to assume that legal conversion to Hinduism involves a denial or a rejection of Christian faith. Yet, the lay secretary of the Madurai Diocese claimed to me in his home office that he knew many “very good” Christians who had become “Hindus” on their identity certificates.⁶² This may also be why, one time in casual conversation, my Christian friend, Ebi, derisively referred to the “scavengers” living on Servants’ Line as *irattai vēṣakkāranika* (the people with two masks). The pastorate committee member I introduced at the beginning, Paul, offered yet another theory: that no one with any “faith” would legally convert to Hinduism. Yet, the agonized lament of Jeparani’s anonymous LIS officer friend suggests that some *are* willing to enact a Peter-like identity strategy, though not willing to talk about it.

Adding to this local debate, I argue that it is unwise to assume that replacing a Christian mask in the governmental sphere with a Hindu one necessarily constitutes some ‘return’ to Hinduism as the term “reconversion” implies. But what about Mutturaj himself? When I asked Swamidas-turned-Mutturaj about which religious practices he now observed, he dressed himself in very secular, almost deist, verbal garb,

JR: As far as *matam* (religion) is concerned, what practices do you observe?

Mutturaj: I said I am “neutral.”...I don’t go to Christian temples or Hindu temples. I just think of some *tēyvam* (god) in my heart...I don’t have any affection for or participation in any particular religion...we (referring to his caste) have absolutely no need to join hands with religion. But I am in favor of joining hands with caste. Religion is “second.” Religion won’t pour me *kañci* (rice porridge). Why? Because they always think of some true god who is above and beyond man. They think of him as Jesus. They think of him as Siva. They think of him as Allah. But they aren’t going to pour me *kañci*. I have to work. If I work, I get something to eat....

Mutturaj clearly reveals an identity front similar to the ex-choirboy Neill, one proudly featuring his caste identity. Later in the same interview he even noted, “There should be caste, just not caste brutality.” If caste pride is so important to him, perhaps Mutturaj’s legal conversion to Hinduism had something to do with feeling insulted within the church as a Chakkiliyar?

In our conversations, though, Mutturaj never mentioned castism as a blatant motive for his conversion, only the betrayal of a Christian political economy which he thinks should function as he feels it once did in the era of colonial mission, as a community based on a reciprocal logic of loyal service rewarded by loyal patronage.⁶³ However, Mutturaj did index the spectre of caste favoritism, indirectly, through the euphemistic charge of ‘nepotism,’⁶⁴ arguing that he couldn’t get a Diocese job before his conversion because,

They [Diocese officials] give work to their older brother, younger brother, uncle, brother-in-law and so many others. Do you understand what I’m saying? There is no one to “represent” we Dalits....Say there is a vacancy. You’re on the “committee.” What are you thinking about? You want to give it to your older brother, to your younger brother, to your younger sister or to any one else dependent on you.⁶⁵

And, while Mutturaj may exaggerate here, as a Chakkiliyar Christian, he is at an even greater political disadvantage than individuals from other Dalit castes when jockeying for coveted

Diocese jobs.⁶⁶ None of his caste members are Diocesan officers. None have, to my knowledge, even attained the position of pastor in the Diocese.

Mutturaj claimed in private conversations that the reason for his conversion to Hinduism in the governmental sphere was that, in 1987, he could not get work in the Diocese. He had asked the local Diocese for a job, but they wouldn't give him one. He also presented a claim, similar in its logic to Devasahayam's, that since his father and grandfather had worked for the American missionaries as "sweepers" in the Pasumalai schools since the late colonial period, he, as one of their descendants, should be entitled to some work, somewhere in the Diocese.⁶⁷

But, near the end of our discussion, Mutturaj suddenly seemed to contradict himself when he turned the table of ethnographic inquiry around and asked me,

Mutturaj: ...Why do you think the rights and concessions available to Hindu Dalits haven't been given to Christian Dalits? You probably have realized this by now.

JR: No. I don't understand why.

Mutturaj: There are so many "voluntary agencies" which are doing lots of things in "education", "health" and all "aspects" to "uplift" Dalits in India. There are many religious organizations, missions. Crores and crores of money are coming to them. Foreigners are giving it to them. "Initially" they say they are doing this and that, but really they aren't doing anything "properly."... There is so much money coming in. There are so many "funding" agencies. They [Dalit Christians] are getting more concessions than those offered by the Indian Government. And that's why they are denied concessions...⁶⁸

But, if Dalit Christians are so well funded, why couldn't he get a job from 1982-1987?

The comments of a local Christian friend, Thomas, encouraged me to see Mutturaj's justification for the denial of SC benefits to Dalit Christians not merely as spite aimed at those Dalit Christians who have obtained employment in the Diocese but also as a direct form of moral protest,

Right now, Dalit Christians completely detest the way they [Diocese officials] are running things. If the Bishop only gives work to his own people, where will the Dalit Christians go? Who will they ask?... He'll shout. Then he'll put up "posters" [reference to Devasahayam's protest]. Finally, he'll declare, 'I don't want your religion at all!' and take off.⁶⁹

What Thomas describes here, hypothetically, is the rejection of a mission compound habitus, the motivation for which is the frustration of being a working class Dalit Christian poorly positioned in two spheres of potential patronage and class mobilization: church and government.

But what really facilitated Mutturaj's violation of the conventional mission compound identity front to whose performance many of his Christian peers from Dalit backgrounds remain well disposed? Mutturaj's self-narration conveyed to me a sense that, in 1987, he felt there was no other alternative than legal conversion to Hinduism. He needed some kind of a job. Yet, this feeling of 'no way out' may be partly a result of his own access to a high school education in Pasumalai where a Christian histrionics of self-distinction and moral elitism also surrounded him from childhood. Growing up in such a middle class space and studying as far as he did has, I feel, imparted to Mutturaj the same upward class aspirations as his Christian neighbors from other Dalit castes. This, in turn, means Mutturaj was unlikely to have accepted his father's old sweeper job, had it even been available to him in 1987, and certainly not forms of urban menial labor stigmatically associated with his community since the colonial period. Well before his legal conversion to Hinduism, in his very choice to study English literature, Mutturaj had committed himself to performing a middle class identity based on elite levels of knowledge capital; a middle class identity commensurate with taking a reformist leadership position within his own caste community.

But another factor facilitated the strategy he took. Mutturaj's retreat from local church life around the 8th grade means that, many years later, he could not have felt like he was playing "Peter" in the governmental sphere during his reconversion. Lacking any evangelical phenomenology of *vicuvāsam* (faith), the action he took could not have invoked the dilemma others like Jeparani's children might well feel. The historical irony here is that this also means that he would have lacked critical moral capital necessary to accrue proximate Christian patronage from the Diocese's wider middle class elite (beyond his caste). And, as Devasahayam's case has revealed, family participation in low level mission/Diocesan jobs such as "office assistant" and "sweeper" does not really accrue much moral capital. Certainly, jobs requiring virtually no middle class knowledge capital are not as prestigious as being a *vāttiyār* or an *ūliyakkārar*, individuals who arguably perform *ūliyam* (service) to some cause they can easily narrate as 'Christian.'

But, in resistance to the elitist CSI Tamil connotations of this old Tamil word, *ūliyam*, Mutturaj's own mother applied it to *their* family's manual labor in a narrative about her husband's death two years or so after Swamidas had become Mutturaj,

We went and asked for a grave. He died around 10 o'clock at night. So we went to the house [parsonage] knocked on the door and woke him [the former pastor] up and asked. Then he said, 'You didn't pay your church subscription for a while. So we'll have to have a "meeting" in the "church" in order to give you a grave [plot]....It really hurt. We've been here 40 years. We performed *ūliyam* for the school. For what?'⁷⁰

Humiliated and unwilling to wait for the "meeting," Mutturaj's mother tried to get her husband buried at Pasumalai's Devar dominated, municipally funded *cūtukkātu* (technically managed by the TPK panchayat union but really controlled by Pasumalai's Devar community; see 'cremation

grounds' on Map 2).⁷¹ Unsurprisingly, they declined, and so she had to take her husband's corpse 2 km away to the nearest, segregated Dalit burial/cremation grounds in the village of Vilachery (see Map 2). Whether some subtle revenge for Mutturaj's 'conversion' or not, it glaringly indexes the fact that 'removing and sweeping' are not considered proud *ūliyam* by those who control Pasumalai's Christian center.

In sum, it appears that not only did Mutturaj not convert to Hinduism in the governmental sphere under the stress of denying his faith, he does not have any desire to mask or to veil his caste identity in Christian moral rhetoric. And episodes like the one just narrated most likely only reinforce a sense of being burdened by a weighty stigma within the local Christian community. Mutturaj has chosen a different path to winning *mariyātai* (respect) than that lauded by the "high caste" Indian Christian selves of Gnanaraj, Jeparani and their children. While masking a Dalit caste identity in church life *and* the governmental sphere ironically confirms its very stigma, Mutturaj clearly does not accept the stigmatic load placed on his community. His is a quest for class mobility *as* a Dalit, and not despite it. For his middle class CSI Tamil neighbors in Pasumalai, though, this was probably the single most offensive aspect of his "reconversion."

My goal here has been to portray how one critical historical force well beyond the church political economy and a perduring mission compound habitus, the 1950 Scheduled Castes Order, has created different dilemmas of identity for Dalit Christians according to their various degrees of class privilege and their varying embodiments of an evangelical phenomenology that has always been rhetorically allied with the mission compound identity front explored throughout this dissertation. Those Dalit Christians, like Mutturaj, who never really embodied a mission

compound habitus at all, nor any evangelical phenomenology, can simply reject a perfunctory “Christian” identity attached to them in the governmental sphere. Silent others, caught between being loyal ‘Christians’ and obtaining just compensation for social stigma, have to re-structure their identity front in ways that soon gain a sense of new “naturalness” all their own. For them, this has meant being “Hindu” and “Dalit” in the governmental sphere, while remaining a casteless “Christian” in the public sphere of the church. Others, like Jeparani and her family, enjoy their hard won, considerable class privilege and use their “Indian Christian” identity in the governmental sphere in performances that fulfill the masking potential of an old mission compound identity front in ways never fully possible in their lives beyond the governmental sphere.

Conclusion

Living and researching in Pasumalai in the late 1990s meant waking up daily amidst a rather monument-rich exhibit on colonial era Protestant missions. Of course, the cultural colonialism that transpired there for well over a century involved a complex political alliance of American evangelical zeal(s) and the educational and administrative policies of the Madras Presidency. And because of its institutional and colonial qualities, Pasumalai is not, by any means, a typical post-colonial Indian Christian space. This is why I began this dissertation by narrating Pasumalai's 'conversion' into a colonized Christian space qua American Madura Mission (AMM) compound (Chapter 1), rooting us firmly in historical space and time.

In Chapter 2, I then examined the partial genesis of a mission compound identity front within transactional flows of knowledge, labor and cash connecting AMM Christians to local Hindus. We saw how there was a circumstantial conjoining of middle class and Christian identities in the bodies of its "Christian teachers," one that effectively masked any semiotics of caste and, to a large degree, disarmed caste stigma in late colonial Pasumalai. And so, although I have shied away from Bourdieu's highly dualistic understanding of 'structure' in my analysis, the identity front that emerged among Christian teachers in Pasumalai's late colonial mission compound, and the AMM more widely, contained at least one dualistic principle: a structurally firm concealing of illegitimate identities (caste) and a legitimized revealing of others (class and religion).

Chapter 3 revealed the post-colonial weakening of the transactional interdependency between middle class Christian and working class/peasant Hindu in Pasumalai and the consequent loss of a key performative space wherein a mission compound identity front was able

to legitimate itself in proximate public spaces. From this we can learn that a habitus of identity performance that emerges in close relationship to one specific historical political economy (the mission compound) cannot sustain all of its structural dispositions when that political economy itself alters over time. This is the work of history on a habitus, not a habitus as perduring history.

This notion that a mission compound habitus has limits on its post-colonial structuring power (discussed in Chapters 3 and 4) points us to a critical weakness in Bourdieu's practice theory. Conceiving a habitus beyond creative intervention *in history*, the ethnography we obtain in Outline (1977) is about a habitus manifest in concrete "taxonomies" and "structures" which the Algerian peasants involved, seem disposed to enact collectively *without* dilemma, regardless of the flow of time. As Sherry Ortner has already noted (1989: 12), Bourdieu himself does not do historical analysis anywhere in his original monograph (1977). And, although Bourdieu deliberately includes a concept of history in his theory of practice; for him, history seems to be 'more of the same' habitus,

The habitus, a product of history, produces individual and collective practice-more history- in accordance with the schemes generated by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which...tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms (1990: 55)

His theory cannot explain how a habitus changes historically without, at some level, this change being influenced or potentially influenced by forces beyond a habitus. But, if we see the power of habitus not so much in "doxas" that sustain "domination" (1977:168-169) but in habitual dispositions that influence, or *persuade* actors, we leave room for the occasional emergence of radical agency in moments when historical forces challenge the structural limits of a particular habitus to satisfy the strategic needs of individual lives.

Part 2 explored where else exactly the mission compound identity front continues to emerge as a habitus in post-missionary Pasumalai. In Chapter 4, I argued how Christ as metaphor for ethical purity is the enduring trope of colonial era mission rhetoric, which, when applauded helps accrue moral capital that may persuade Christian peers of a distinctly “middle class” Christian identity front. While Christ as metonym for a healing domain of power and promises has become a major post-colonial force, it is a trope that erases individual distinction and cannot bolster an elite class identity; it does not really support an older mission compound identity front. Yet, Pasumalai Christians, across lines of class, do not necessarily avoid such alternative rhetoric of Christ in the same way that they habitually avoid certain kinds of names or bodily adornment that might violate the structural arrangement of a mission compound identity front with the semiotics of caste or of ‘the Hindu fold’ (Chapter 5).

In Chapter 5 I explored personal naming practices and bodily practices that form the most basal habits of Christian self-distinction among not only Pasumalai Christians, but many CSI Tamils. They center on modes of symbolic negation and avoidance that do not necessarily signal Christian identity to strangers but maintain one’s moral capital as a Christian among a peerage who already assigns one a Christian identity. Without meeting these minimal performative standards, however, the mission compound identity front loses some of its religious alterity to Christian eyes and individuals may be seen as sliding into a majoritarian performance of multiple selves indistinguishable from a ‘Hindu other.’

In Chapter 6 I explored the performance of a mission compound identity front in the cultural domains of pre-marital and marital life cycle celebrations. Even though Pasumalai Christians have no clear consensus about pre-marital celebrations, those who do celebrate

common Tamil pre-marital transitions (originating often in caste traditions) generally transform them into prayer meetings that render them acceptably “Christian” events. The lack of consensus also reveals that a shared habitus that disposes one to critical, very specific, habits of avoidance in some cultural domains (e.g. naming, bodily adornment, refusing products of Hindu worship) may yield ambiguous results in other cultural domains. And this reflects a wider strategic ambiguity between avoidance and active “Christianizing” of majoritarian cultural practices among CSI Tamils more broadly. Both options persist, perhaps, because both produce some measure of meaningful distinction in front of a Christian peerage. Yet, as I indicated for working class Christians, the collection of cash prestations in pre-marital celebrations violates a middle class demurrer on such income generation, reproducing their continued alienation from the elite class component of a locally dominant mission compound identity front. A caste-less Christian identity front that projects a *working class* semiotics (one shared especially by former mission servants and their descendants) continues to marginalize some born into a former mission compound’s cultural periphery. In contrast to such alienation, within the cultural domain of CSI Tamil *weddings*, some middle class CSI Tamils, like Michael, have seen the same identity front facilitate, in part, rare instances of unwitting caste hypergamy in the post-colonial era; especially for those able to manipulate significant moral capital in careers as preachers or pastors.

I began Part 3 with the momentum of Michael’s marital victory over caste stigma, which was, in one sense, an exploration of class mobility among Pasumalai Christians of Dalit heritage. In Chapter 7, I directed our attention to the partial *rhetorical* genesis of a mission compound identity front in a taboo on public castings of self and caste talk, one that supported the broader

structuring of that identity front by encouraging dispositions to suppress visual and rhetorical semiotics of caste identity. Despite the dominant status of the taboo, though, I pointed out ways in which it became silently subverted in the family lives of Christians and in the missionary-sponsored domiciling of mission labor within the mission compound. And I finished with the case of one working class Pasumalai Christian, Devasahayam, who violated the colonial taboo during my research, but to no avail. His pro-Dalit campaign only alienated him further from middle class Dalit peers, revealing that the dominant mission compound identity front still primarily serves the interests of an elite middle class Dalit minority and other equally elite non-Dalit church members and officials they do not wish to offend.

Chapters 8 and 9 then contrasted Devasahayam's family with Michael's patriline in a discussion of why some have, and some have not, been able to 'convert' themselves into class distinction, in part, by inhabiting the dominant identity front of mission compound worlds. Although both families share initial baptisms that date to the late colonial AMM, their post-colonial levels of class capital differ vastly. These two chapters revealed not only the historical construction of intra-caste class differences in some post-colonial CSI Tamil communities but also how initial moral capital related to a Dalit Christian family's entrance into the AMM's political economy often had substantial, lingering effects in facilitating or blocking its class mobility. It also reveals the capriciousness of moral capital qua Christian identity performance, alone, to facilitate class mobility within the political economy of a post-colonial church.

In the cases of Devasahayam and Michael's uncle, Sattiyanesan, we also learned how a mission compound identity front can not perdure in the face of at least two historical factors: (1) a well developed alternative identity front performed since youth and (2) leaving the political

economy that historically generated a specific identity front. Both factors may generate moments of either identity dilemma or critical perspective on a habituated identity front. In Devasahayam's case, it was the constant, natal disposition to perform an identity front beyond the mission compound that included caste identity as legitimate which gave him the strategic space to resist the taboo on public castings of self in places like Pasumalai when he felt victimized as a Dalit. Devasahayam's specific identity dilemma was the failure of the Diocese to yield upwardly mobilizing patronage for his children. In Sattiyanesan's case, he has restructured his multiple identities into a Dalit-middle class-Christian identity front after encountering novel rhetoric of caste pride, especially Dalit pride, in his youth and after establishing himself as independent of the political and moral economies of the church. In one sense, the process of a mission compound habitus of identity performance being carried by individuals into a political economy alien to its genesis is similar to what might happen if one of Bourdieu's Algerian peasants suddenly moved to Algiers, bearing with him a peasant habitus and its now irrelevant structural dispositions to seasonal activity, peasant house architecture, gendered divisions of labor, etc. (1977). That peasant would need to learn other dispositions of self, ones that might force the substantial restructuring of a peasant identity front.

Finally, chapter 10 explored the most crucial post colonial historical force affecting identity performance among India's Christians: the performance of "Indian Christian" identity in the governmental sphere of identity certificates and welfare assistance. The continued denial of Scheduled Caste affirmative action benefits to Dalits who are "Indian Christians" has exposed the post-colonial limitations of the mission compound identity front. For those whose Dalit identity is strong, the possibility of accessing SC benefits through a conversion to Hinduism on

identity certificates, becomes an incentive to restructure their identity fronts in the governmental sphere. For some, like Mutturaj, this has meant totally abandoning a mission compound identity front they never fully inhabited and had been alienated from due to working class levels of financial and knowledge capital. For others, it has meant a context-sensitive hybridization of their habitus of identity performance that engenders disturbing dilemmas for those persuaded by evangelical rhetoric proscribing any and all denials of faith. For those Dalit Christians like Gnanaraj's children, though, class privilege has afforded them the luxury of wearing "Indian Christian" as an opaque mask in the governmental sphere, avoiding both significant benefits *and* the dilemma of violating an evangelical faith.

The family and biographical narratives in Part 3 also indicated that embodying a mission compound identity front has never been associated simply with baptism into mission or church. For those, like a baptized Dalit peasant in the late colonial AMM, whose natal forms of stigma fueled sustained dilemmas beyond their natal worlds, the dominant identity front of AMM mission compounds like Pasumalai offered a proximate performative method to 'convert' into class distinction. But for them, more than non-Dalit peers, such relatively rare 'conversions' (available technically to those from all castes) have always had a price: the habitualized disposition to avoid public castings of self weakens effective mobilization against anti-Dalit discrimination within and beyond the church.

By restricting the scope of Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" purely to the generation of habitualized identity fronts, I have offered a perspective on structured multiple identity performance as a cultural process lived historically through individual lives. While a habitus may be shared, the work of history at the level of individual lives is where we need to look to see

a habitus restructuring itself according to the strategic dilemmas of identity that appear from time to time in human life. Whether that restructuring hybridizes identity fronts into separate context-specific performances of multiple identities or leads to a chronological substitution, or conversion, of identity fronts, it is important to recognize that performances of multiple identities often function as habitualized dispositions. But these identity fronts may encode strategies for the performance of “selves in the plural” (to borrow Kondo’s phrase [1990]). In the case of this study, these have been dispositional strategies of concealing and revealing identities that emerged in specific historical political economies, like the colonial mission compound, which become habitualized by some but do not simply reproduce themselves forever in a conversion from history to *permanent* disposition.

While the Christian missionary is still very much a loaded category in contemporary India, with people like the late Graham Staines made metonymic of aggressive, foreign cultural intrusions, I have tried to show that the foreign missionary best indexes the colonial mission compound, not the extroverted campaigns of evangelism associated with missions. Mission compounds, like Pasumalai, were elitist sites wherein some of the missionized tried to convert the mission into facilitating their own quest for class distinction. This was a quest to move beyond natal stigmas in an idiom of religious alterity. As with most such efforts among the most stigmatized members of any society, some have succeeded, while others have only seen their caste stigma converted into a very public, and often tragic, working class stigma.

Notes to Introduction

¹ *India Today*, 2/8/99, p. 22

² *Ibid.*

³ Most evidence points to the fact that a man named Dara Singh organized the attack. Prior to the attacks, he was a man with a record of opposing both conversion and missionary work and had a record of petty crimes. On Jan. 31, 2000, police finally arrested him after a year long manhunt (see www.the-week.com/20feb13/events3.htm).

⁴ Although an old Syrian Christian legend has it that St. Thomas himself was murdered in India (a shrine to his honor lies outside of Madras), the first confirmed foreign missionary to be murdered in India was a Portugese Jesuit named John de Britto. As he was recruiting Christians in the hinterlands dominated by local Maravar rajas, a local Maravar leader converted and renounced all but one of his wives. The Setupati Raja, named Rakunata Tevar, was uncle to one of the 'rejected' wives and was so insulted that he had him exiled to the region controlled by his brother who then executed de Britto on February 4, 1693 (Neill 1984: 307). Quickly 'converted' into a martyr by local Jesuits (Bayly 1989: 399), Tamils of all religious persuasions have worshipped de Britto as a warrior deity; worship that continues even to this day (cf. Mosse 1986). The Vatican canonized John de Britto in 1946.

⁵ The Bible Society of India's Old Version Tamil Bible (*Paricutta Vētākamam* 1956) uses the word *tunpapaṭutta* to correspond with "persecute" found in the King James version. The Tamil verb, however, literally means "to cause harm" according to the Kriya Modern Tamil Dictionary (1992).

⁶ On June 21, 1999, the Justice D.P. Wadhwa Commission of Inquiry came to the conclusion that there was no conclusive evidence for direct links to specific right wing Hindu organizations, let alone to agents of the ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Many secular and Christian leaders angrily critiqued the report's conclusions as politically convenient for the ruling coalition in Delhi (cf. South Asian Human Rights Documentation Centre; www.hri.ca/partners/sahrhc/wadhwa/fulltext.shtml).

⁷ The location is mentioned in *India Today*, 2/8/99, p. 20

⁸ The RSS's euphemistic title translates literally as "Organization of National Volunteers." The RSS formed in the early 1920s and developed Hindu nationalist training camps for youth. The RSS was a vociferous critic of Gandhi's promotion of inter-religious harmony, which they saw as 'appeasing' both Muslims and Christians (cf. Basu 1993: 27-9).

⁹ The Comaroffs have rightly criticized an oversimplified equation of missionary work with colonialism or colonial domination (1991: 7). Saraubh Dube has also argued against a common equation mission with colonialism, as if these two political economies were always in agreement, "we need to turn instead to the contradictory location of the mission project within colonial cultures of rule (1995: 199)."

¹⁰ Beidelman's 1982 study contains a long list of this enormous literature (1982: 8). Although he terms them oddly as "separatist" groups, following Anthony Wallace's classic term (1956), many might also be called "revitalization movements."

¹¹ While most of the members of such movements did not really identify themselves as "Christians," starting in the late colonial period, Pentecostal religious practices also began to spread globally from North America throughout the colonized world. Pentecostalism brought a cultural politics of "revitalization" to self-identifying Christians across the colonial world. As in the movements led by their more pluralistic religious bricoleurs, Pentecostal

rhetoric also spread well beyond the purview of mission compounds and their institutionalized politics of Christian identity performance, but often by persuading the descendants of converts to established colonial missions (cf. Comaroff 1985; Caplan 1987) to revitalize a 'dry', rationalistic faith, overly wedded to modern material practices.

¹² This is in keeping with Aristotle's definition of "identification" as a tropological, or rhetorical, process (Crocker 1977: 61).

¹³ "Anthropological imperatives to generalize at the cultural level often mean that we construct collective identity through a similar kind of logocentrism or metaphysics of presence, positing the existence of an undifferentiated collective subject (Kondo 1990: 38)."

¹⁴ See Rosaldo 1984 for a similar critique. It was Milton Singer who first offered a Piercian semiotics of self to overcome this very dichotomy (1980) that was later modified by Valentine Daniel in his famous ethnography of Tamil personhood (1984).

¹⁵ Another similar view, but one employing the term "identity," comes from social anthropologist Anthony Cohen who sees a long tendency to view the self as opposed to society, and to interpret the self in other cultures as primarily a social construct or a social imprint (1994). He traces this view of the self, in part, to Durkheim and to Robert Park's theory of social roles (Cohen 1994: 25-27). His literature review writes passionately against representations with "no sense that the self is an active and creative agent in managing and reconciling the plethora of obligations which tug its bearer in different directions" and which see the self as "the determinate creature of its ecology (1994: 26)."

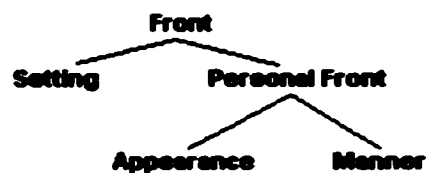
¹⁶ Regarding language based theories, there is an entire body of theory on speech performances drawing on Bakhtin's theory of the "utterance" (1986); one extensively reviewed by Baumann and Briggs (1990). In addition, there are more hermeneutical approaches to verbal performance as text (Hanks 1989). But there is also a broader tradition of trope analysis originating in the Aristotelian notion of rhetoric (e.g. Sapir and Crocker 1977; Fernandez 1986; 1991)

¹⁷ Ritual theory is generally committed to a sometimes excessively maligned dichotomy of performance/ritual vs. everyday life (Turner 1969, 1974; Singer 1959: xii cited in MacAloon 1984: 4; Kapferer 1986). Even recent theoretical work defines performance as "scheduled", "temporally bounded", "spatially bounded", "programmed," "coordinated public" and "heightened" (Baumann 1992: 45-48). Victor Turner's theory of performance is based on the theatrical analogy of life as dramatic conflict (1982: 105); and, therefore, he tends to see conflict as the basis of all rituals (ibid: 110) and social dramas (1974; 1979: 63). While Turner's 1979 essay on the "Anthropology of Performance" actually acknowledges, following Goffman, that "the basic stuff of social life is performance," his own work continually focused on genres of "ritual, carnival, theater, spectacle, film, etc. (1979: 72-73)" and pilgrimage. More banal forms of behavior such as habitual dress or body decoration do not get acknowledged as "performances" in their own right. This is why Richard Schechner argues that, "performativity is everywhere in life... from ordinary gestures to macrodramas (1990: 45)" and that performance happens at seven different levels of magnitude from neurological processes to "macrodramas" (akin to Turner's "social dramas"). Edward Schieffelin has also argued for seeing ritual performance as more than mere communication of shared meanings but as the social construction of meaning, a process always open to change (1985). And, in a more explicitly phenomenological way, Kapferer's theoretical analysis of Sinhala exorcism ritual (1986) looks at performances that bring about the possibility of shared collective experience inside ritual space.

¹⁸ In sharp contrast to Turner, James Fernandez' work moves us toward a dynamic, poetic understanding of the tropological "movements in quality space" (cf. 1986: 1-25) generated by the performance of metaphors, metonyms, ironies and polytropes (also see 1991); a view of human life as tropological argument (1986: vii-ix). His early theoretical work emerged from work on revitalization movements produced from "culture contact" and led to

important definition of ritual as “...the acting out of metaphoric predication upon inchoate pronouns which are in need of movement” (1986: 23). In another famous essay on “the mission of metaphor”, the first three “missions” involve *moving* the self somewhere (1986 [1974]: 28-72). In such a view, ritual performance becomes not mere transition between, or re-adjustment of, structurally arranged statuses (e.g. Turner’s model [1969]) but a metaphoric transformation of individual qua pronoun, often from “I-ness” to “We-ness”; what he terms, in the case of the Bwiti religious movement in Gabon, as a “return to the whole” (cf. Fernandez 1982: 562).

¹⁹ “It will be convenient to label as ‘front’ that part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance” (1959: 22). For Goffman, the “front” includes both a “setting”, not really controlled by the actors themselves (i.e. scenery, decorations, props), and a “personal front” where the issue of agency comes more to the fore and in which “appearance” and “manner” are critical components.



²⁰ In fact, Goffman’s theory of identity performance as a “personal front” obviates the constant danger of slipping into evaluations of a performer’s inner motive when analyzing the persuasiveness of self-performances. The issue of sincerity, Goffman wisely argues, is only relevant in that the observer, the audience, must be persuaded of a performance’s sincerity (1959: 71).

²¹ cf. the most common definition of the word “habit” in modern English, “A settled disposition or tendency to act in a certain way, esp. one acquired by frequent repetition of the same act until it becomes almost or quite involuntary; a settled practice, custom, usage; a customary way or manner of acting (The most usual current sense...) (Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition)”

²² And, following Ortner’s dichotomous categorization of we categorizers (1989:16), I see myself more as an “ethnographic historian” than as a strict political economist of culture, “The ethnographic historical anthropologists, however...still seek much more extensively to show the way in which the impact of external forces is internally mediated, not only by social structural arrangements...but also by cultural patterns and structures of various kinds” (Ortner 1989: 17).

²³ But, as Pierre Bourdieu himself aptly notes, “interactionism” (e.g. Goffman 1959) never looks far beyond the characteristics of the interactional context; other, hidden contexts remain ignored (1977: 81); especially historical structures of political economy.

²⁴ The use of Sanskrit, Brahminical texts by Dumont (1980) and by Marriott (1977) as the intellectual inspiration for their theoretical models reveals an implied mutual iconicity of “Brahmin” social theory and “Hindu India”, an iconicity thoroughly inimical to well documented untouchable self-understandings (cf. Khare 1984; Vicentnathan 1993; Mosse 1994). All three of these latter authors have challenged, explicitly or implicitly, the argument put forward by Michael Moffat which holds that untouchable castes have internalized a Brahminical logic of caste hierarchy that subordinates them (1979). Vincentnathan, especially, champions the equally controversial view that untouchables have an egalitarian world view and concept of self (1993).

²⁵ See Van der Veer’s discussion of these events (1994: 152-162).

²⁶ It is, ironically, the same trope that Valentine Daniel privileges in his analysis of Tamil personhood (1984), though in the semiotic terminology of Charles Pierce.

²⁷ This political movement started with E.V. Ramasami's famous Self-Respect Movement (1925) which later became the *Tirāvita Kaḷakam* (DK) in 1944 (cf. Subramaniam 1999: 16n) and which further splintered into several Dravidian parties (DMK, ADMK, MDMK) hotly contesting each other all over Tamil Nadu.

²⁸ This is a "Tamil whole" Dravidian activists like E.V. Ramasami and later DMK leaders very much needed in order to alienate a diametrically opposed "Brahmin" enemy reducible to 'his' Sanskrit language (cf. Ramasamy 1999: 29-32 and figure 5); a logic that even generated constructions of the Tamil language as a mother goddess (ibid: 79-134).

²⁹ Table C-9, Census of India 1991, Part VB(ii)-Religion. Muslims accounted for 12.12% of the population in 1991.

³⁰ The former Portuguese colony of Goa (30%) and the tribal states of Manipur (34%), Meghalaya (65%), Mizoram (85%), and Nagaland (87%) are the regions of India with the highest proportion of Christians in their general populations. Their absolute Christian populations combined, however, account for only 19% of the Indian Christian population according to the 1991 Census of India.

³¹ Based on my compilation of data from 1991 Census of India Tables available online: 1) 1991 Population By States and Territories www.censusindia.net/cendat/datatable2.html and 2) 1991 Table on Major Religions www.censusindia.net/cendat/datatable23.html These numbers concern only the 23 Indian States where Census was collected. Data for Jammu and Kashmir is not available.

³² e.g. Bayly 1989; Fernandes 1981; Forrester 1980; Frykenberg 1976; Hardgrave 1969; Manickam 1977; Grafe 1990; Webster 1994; Oddie 1997; Kent 1999. Challenging the disproportionate conjoining of "Indian Christian" talk and "conversion" talk, however, several recent historical studies have appeared on mission organizations themselves (Kawashima 1999, Singh 2000), on missionary rhetoric (Zupanov 1999), on individual missionaries (Singh 1999; Singh 2000), on the influence of missionary rhetoric on Hindu revivalism (Young and Jebanesan 1995) and on the specific Christian communities that formed from, but ultimately transcend, specific "missions" (Hudson 2000), and on syncretistic religious movements, like that of the Satnamis, influenced by interaction with colonial missionaries and their rhetoric (Dube 1998).

³³ Diehl (1965) and Luke and Carman (1968) focused their survey research primarily on surveying Hindu-Christian syncretism among village Christians most marginalized from the political economies and disciplinary routines of mission compound life and on the factors influencing recent conversions. From a more secular perspective, Keshari Sahay has also studied Hindu-Christian syncretism, specifically among the Oroan tribals of Bihar province in north India (1976). His five-stage model of religious change, however, devolves into a timeless taxonomy of various combinations of "Christian" and "tribal" practice. These studies all problematically incorporate, indirectly, an intellectualist concern with an inner "conversion" and its degrees of purity.

³⁴ A collection of essays under this name has also appeared during this dynamic period of Indian social theorizing (Singh 1977).

³⁵ Local myths have argued consistently that this community is the result of conversions persuaded by St. Thomas himself in 52 A.D. (Dempsey 2000: 5).

³⁶ Koilarampil's ethnography of Kerala's Catholics confirms Fuller's findings by showing the presence of a virtual caste distinction between Syrian (virtual Brahmin status) and Latin Catholic (predominantly untouchables)

communities (1982). Important exceptions to the heavy focus on caste are Susan Visvanathan's historical ethnography of Syrian Christians (1993) and Rowena Robinson's historical ethnography of Goan Catholics (1998)

³⁷ Certainly, dominant castes who have not converted are not going to change their performances of dominance just because their caste subordinates have adopted 'Christian' rhetoric of egalitarianism. Catholic villagers of untouchable heritage, Mosse argues, participate in the same inter-caste hierarchical relations, and, like their Hindu peers, account for their subordination primarily in terms of the idioms of slavery and poverty, not a demeaning theory of ritual pollution (1994: 82). In a later study focused on Catholic Mukkuvar fisherwomen in Tamil Nadu, Kalpana Ram describes how Mukkuvars, classifiable as untouchables with respect to the Hindu caste system, use Catholic identity to differentiate themselves from a Hindu fold which, in some sense, has always rejected them as base and polluted (1991).

³⁸ Aside from Caplan's work, much of the literature draws our attention immediately to "the village Christians," who, like their "Hindu" peers, have become unnecessarily metonymic of a broader social landscape actually ruptured by multiple identity hierarchies (class, religion, gender, race).

³⁹ Other work by Caplan explores how Pentecostalism has revealed ideological bonds of affinity across the Hindu-Christian boundary, especially in the cultural imagination of supernatural evil (1988: 51-71).

⁴⁰ While Fischer has done an intensive historical study of a 19th century Basel Mission Society compound in Kerala (1978), historical ethnographies of these monumental spaces have, to my knowledge, never been done.

⁴¹ While the phrase "CSI Tamil" may seem to reify the dangerously broad identity tag of "Tamil" I earlier cautioned against using, I use it precisely because of its vagueness as a broad *linguistic* identity marker, not as a referent to a shared cultural base my own limited work cannot possibly index. If I were, instead, to label CSI Tamils everywhere as "Tamil Christians," or as "Indian Christians," I would be confirming the legal marginalization of the "Christian" in personal laws. I would also be fallaciously suggesting a phenomenological primacy to their "Christian" identity amid other identities all CSI Tamils perform, such as caste, gender and class. But no one I label as a CSI Tamil would argue they are *not* a Tamil language speaker.

⁴² Facts derived from a written lecture intended for distribution to members of The National Council of the Congregational Churches of the United States, America by John J. Banninga, Pasumalai, March 25, 1930 (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 32:13)

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 2

⁴⁴ Lionel Caplan also mentions the movement of Anglicans, mostly from the Nadar caste community, into employment within other missions than the ones into which they were born (1980: 655).

Notes to Chapter One

¹ Interview with Victor Isaiah, Pasumalai, 12/13/99

² The blurring of the boundary between pedagogical and religious spaces in Pasumalai's collective memory appears in the fact that the Pasumalai Schools celebrated their *100th* anniversary in 1945, even though the only educational institution that really operated for that entire century was the Seminary. And, in 1995, the Pasumalai Boys' Higher Secondary School celebrated its 150th anniversary, even though the original school established in 1845 was actually a mission seminary and not the high school where the 150th anniversary transpired. Finally, the 75th anniversary jubilee souvenir for Whitin Memorial Church (see Map 2) discusses not only the history of the church, but also entire missionary legacy and important Pasumalai Christian patrilineages; it blurs into a social history of the entire Pasumalai Christian community at large metonymically indexed by the current Boys' Higher Secondary School.

³ The first is a jubilee souvenir entitled *Uvaiṭṭiṅ Niṅaivālaya 75 āṅṅu Niṅaivu Viḷā 1904-1979*, the 75th anniversary of Pasumalai's second church. The second is an anniversary of Pasumalai's high school composed by D. Devaraj (1995).

⁴ During the American Madura Mission's 50th anniversary, in 1884, Rev. W.S. Howland gave an oral address on "Pasumalai in the Past" on February 27, but I do not know if it referred to history before 1845.

⁵ Interview with Thomas, Pasumalai, 4/17/99

⁶ I thank Mr. D. Devaraj (Tamil Teacher at the Pasumalai Boys' Higher Secondary school during my research) for first alerting me to the myth of Pasumalai's origin and for walking me through an abridged, modern Tamil version of it in the staff room one morning.

⁷ This period is an estimate made by Dr. U.V. Swaminadaiyan (Nambi 1972: 23). Scholars preceding him, like Nilakanta Sastri, are skeptical about this customary dating of Nambi's *purāṇam* (Sastri 1975: 387).

⁸ The formation of *Yāṅṅaimalai* comes in Chapter 26 of Nambi's version and in Chapter 22 of Parancoti Munivar's version. The formation of *Nākamalai* comes in Chapter 36 of Nambi (1972) and in Chapter 28 of Parancoti Munivar (1965). The formation of Pasumalai comes in Chapter 36 of Nambi (1972) and in Chapter 29 of Parancoti Munivar (1965). Yet, in both versions, all three hills are formed in the same order.

⁹ I thank Professor Norman Cutler for going over the eight relevant verses of Chapter 36 in Nambi's older version at some length during a late July, 2000 visit to his University of Chicago office.

¹⁰ Condensed English versions of these mythic narratives appear in various Gazetteers of the Madurai District and other works of Madurai city as well (Nelson 1868; Shenoy 1935; Baliga 1960: 391-404)

¹¹ Historians can confirm only that this king was a Jain at some point in his life and that he subsequently converted to Saivism (cf. Subramaniam 1993: 74; Sastri 1929: 96-97).

¹² *Nānacampantar* is a poet known for ending his verses with anti-Jain rhetoric (Sastri 1975: 369) and for leading opposition to both Jainism and Buddhism during this period (Subramaniam 1993: 292).

¹³ Nambi's version describes this final pogrom, and events leading up to it, just two Chapters after the narration of *Nākamalai* and Pasumalai's origins. Parancoti Munivar's version, however, waits 34 Chapters to narrate its own

version of the massacre. Secondly, while Sastri does not deny Nānacampantar's campaign to reconvert the Pandian Kingdom to Saivism, he believes the figure of 8,000 mentioned in the *purāṇam* is hyperbolic, if not completely apocryphal (Sastri 1929: 97)

¹⁴ A small framed painting of Tiru Nānacampantar hangs over the entrance to the main shrine to Siva in the Madurai *āṭiṇam*, claiming him as the 1st of 292 successive men to hold the *āṭiṇam* post. And the current *āṭiṇam* also made the claim to me that Nānacampantar had actually founded the *āṭiṇam*. Of course, he mentioned nothing of his founder's anti-Jain propaganda (Interview with the Madurai *āṭiṇam*, Madurai, 11/10/99).

¹⁵ The time period of this pogrom comes from Subramaniam's periodization of the Pandian Dynasty (1993: 83-84)

¹⁶ This date and the use of Parancoti Munivar's version as the basis for the paintings are both facts noted by the French scholars who photographed the entire painting in the late 1950s [Dessigane et. al. 1960: ii]. I thank Professor Norman Cutler of the University of Chicago for alerting me to this important text.

¹⁷ Every year, on the sixth day of the Panguni festival of the Murugan temple in Tirupparankundram (TPK), only 3 miles from Madurai, temple servants narrate this bloody pogrom and memorialize it at the Sivagangai Raja Mandapam (Interview with Subramaniam, TPK, 6/20/99).

¹⁸ This temple has strong social and ritual ties to Madurai's Meenaskhi temple; one of its priestly families is directly related to a family working there. During the annual Panguni festival, when TPK priests re-enact Murugan's marriage, Madura priests bring Meenakshi and Lord Sundaresvarar from Madurai to pay their respects. And, finally, until 1983, the Tamil Nadu Department of Hindu and Charitable Endowments ran the temple jointly as part of the Meenakshi temple.

¹⁹ Firstly, the inscription mentions nothing specific about Kutti's death and declares that the land was given to him. Secondly, Natesa Sastri translates the word *renkālpuravil* as "in the village of *renkālpuravu*." I never heard of such a village in the vicinity of Tirupparankundram, nor did I find it on any survey maps I collected. Nor is it listed in a 1914 list of colonial villages in the Madura Taluk (*Alphabetical List of Villages in the Taluks and Districts of the Madras Presidency*, Government Press: Madras, 1914). I believe Sastri may have simply taken this word for a village, since its literal meaning "in the southern channel grant" is of great local significance.

²⁰ Today, this giant tank receives Vaigai river water during the rainy season through a system of channels and linked reservoirs that greatly enhance its water level.

²¹ An 1855 letter from the Madurai District Collector to the Treasurer of the Madura Mission refers to the Pasumalai seminary compound as "land held by you in the village of Krishnapuram in the Madacolam Taluqu, or as it is commonly called, Pasumalai..." Feb. 14, 1855, R.D. Parkin, Collector of Madurai to Rev. J. Rendall, Treasurer of the American Madura Mission, (AMM Collection, Box 5, Folder 7, UTC). "Krishnapuram" is the also the name of a village in the Taluk of Tirumangalam, one with former royal lands (*Alphabetical List of Villages in the Taluks and Districts of the Madras Presidency*, Government Press: Madras, 1914), but it does not appear to be to what Sastri is referring.

²² Interviews with V.S.R. Ponnaiya, Pasumalai, 8/19/99; V.S.R. Logunathan, Pasumalai, 10/3/99; S. Lakshmi, Pasumalai, 10/26/99

²³ The Tamil phrase "blood offering" is found in the 1792 temple inscription and in the narratives of the two brothers themselves.

²⁴ Recent research on the AMM (Blaufuss 2000; Kent 1999) and its parent body (the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) in Ceylon (Young and Jebanesan 1995) is worth noting.

²⁵ These statistics come from a handwritten copy of *The Collectorate of Madura and Dindigul* by John Blackburne copied and sent as letter by William Todd of the AMM, Madras, Feb. 16, 1839 to ABCFM secretaries in Boston (ABC 16.1.9 Vol 1: 8)

²⁶ The Madurai population figures come from William Todd's 'A Sketch of the Madura District with reference to the selection of Mission Stations' sent to ABCFM Secretary, Rufus Anderson, 1839 (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 1: 9)

²⁷ The AMM was not the first Christian mission to Tamil Nadu or even to Madurai itself. Portugese Jesuits worked there as early as 1595 (Houpert 1937: 36). Robert De Nobili established a radical Jesuit mission in Madurai in 1606. This was the peak of the Nayakkar dynasty in Madurai, during the reign of the famous Tirumalai Nayakkar; one of the great Saivite temple builders of pre-colonial Madurai. Jesuits lived on in Madurai even after the Jesuit order was suppressed in the mid-eighteenth century (Zupanov 1999: 235). AMM missionaries chose Madurai District in 1834, because there was no *current* Christian mission working there. And, to them, it no doubt seemed like a place un-reached by the "true gospel", despite the long Catholic presence. French Jesuits eventually returned to Madurai in 1838 to revive Madurai's Catholic community (Houpert 1937: 68).

²⁸ ABC 16.1.5, Letter # 165, 1844, Annual Report of AMM, Author unknown but most likely William Tracy, director of the Seminary, would have written about these developments.

²⁹ East Gate (established in 1845 and renovated in 1872), West Gate (est.1868), North Gate (est. 1891), and South Gate (est. 1894) These years appear in Chandler (1910).

³⁰ William Tracy to Rev. R. Anderson, May 25, 1846, Pasumalai, pp 7-8 (ABC 16.1.5, Letter # 222)

³¹ He does not mention the Brahmins' place of residence. However, the presence of Brahmin priests in nearby TPK, plus their ownership of land west of Krishnapuram, makes it plausible to infer that these were TPK Brahmins.

³² Rev. Henry Cherry to Treasurer Hill, March 1, 1845 (cited in Chandler 1910: 63)

³³ "The land already in the possession of a Messers Tracy and Cherry upon which their buildings have been erected, consists of Nunjah and Poonjah measuring 10-10.75 [cawnies]..." From a summary of John Blackburne's December 5, 1845 appeal recopied by the Secretary of the Board of Revenue, F. Pycroft for the Governor in Council, Jan. 12, 1846, *Proceedings of the Board of Revenue*, Vol. 2006, pp. 535-7, Tamil Nadu State Archives, Madras.

³⁴ Further validating the plausibility of such a memorial plaque, AMM historian, Rev. John Chandler, claims that deeds from the period often assigned a name that represented the object given or a description of it but without ever mentioning the true name of the donor or the recipient (1910: 121-122).

³⁵ Oct. 26, 1845 (AMM collection, Box 1, Folder 5, UTC).

³⁶ A dramatic narrative in the AMM's 50th Anniversary mission jubilee volume recounts this encounter based on Eckard's own reminiscences (AMM 1886: 12-3).

³⁷ From J. Blackburne to the Rev'd H. Cherry, Madura, May 4, 1844 (AMM Collection , Box 4, Folder 20, UTC).

³⁸ After 1855, the American Board set a policy of refusing such aid (which lasted until 1870) on the grounds that it might compromise the mission's control over its religious instruction (Chandler 1910: 237-239).

³⁹ Oct. 26, 1845 (AMM collection, Box 1, Folder 5, UTC).

⁴⁰ We know that Tracy was not interested in running a purely theological school for mission agents, because he admitted un-baptized Hindus and, before 1870, offered subjects such as science, algebra and geography that had little to do with pastoral training (cf. Chandler 1910: 62-65).

⁴¹ In a June 15, 1847 letter to ABCFM Secretary Rufus Anderson, Tracy writes that a plan by the Governor of Madras to introduce the Bible in government schools had raised "a torrent of opposition which has been awakened and directed to a great extent by certain Europeans at Madras who are bitterly hostile to the propagation of Christianity among the natives...although it is well known that Mission Schools in every part of the country are filled with scholars of all castes, although the Bible is regularly used in them, and with the direct object of conversion openly avowed." (ABC 16.1.9 3: 358)

⁴² Subject headings taken from books listed by William Tracy as in the seminary curriculum in his section of the AMM's 1846 Annual Report (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 2: 2, pp. 4-5)

⁴³ Secretary of the Board of Revenue, F. Pycroft, to Governor in Council, Jan. 12, 1846, *Proceedings of the Board of Revenue*, Vol. 2006, pp. 535-7, Tamil Nadu State Archives, Madras.

⁴⁴ Fort St. George, 5th March 1846; transcription of letter received from J. Blackburne To S. Pycroft, Esq. Secretary to the Board of Revenue, Fort St. George *Proceedings of the Board of Revenue*, Vol. 2014, pp. 3323-3326, Tamil Nadu State Archives, Madras. Seven years prior to this appeal, William Todd writes the following to ABCFM Secretary Rufus Anderson concerning Blackburne's policy towards missions, "While he takes a neutral stand on the subject of introducing Christianity, he is decidedly favorable to all judicious attempts to promote Native education." (*Sketch of the Madura District with reference to the selection of Mission Stations*, 1839, [ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 1: 9, p. 2])

⁴⁵ Secretary to the Government, EP Thompson recorded in the *Proceedings of the Board of Revenue*, Vol. 2018, pp. 4734-5, March 17, 1846, Tamil Nadu State Archives, Madras.

⁴⁶ From J. Blackburne, Principal Collector of Madura to the Rev. Mssrs. Tracy and Cherry, American Missionaries, Madura, Madura, April 11th, 1846, Box 4, Folder 1, no. 249, American Madura Mission Collection, UTC.

⁴⁷ William Tracy to Rev'd R. Anderson, May 25, 1846, Pasumalai, pp 4 (ABC 16.1.5, Letter # 222)

⁴⁸ Annual Report of 1882 American Madura Mission, handwritten copy, (ABC 16.1.9 8: 5).

⁴⁹ Based on information in Chandler 1910: 69-77.

⁵⁰ Mother Pasumalai, Mother Pasumalai

Long live mother Pasumalai, eternal nurturer

At hill's base, at field's edge

Strong in supporting the courage of all who yearn to study

Long live mother Pasumalai, eternal nurturer

Oh mother who gathers the ambrosia of wisdom,
drives away the darkness of sin and shows the light of mercy

Long live mother Pasumalai, eternal nurturer

Great in manual training and the arts for youth
who recite the *Vēta Sāstiram* (Bible) in their preaching

Long live mother Pasumalai, eternal nurturer

Miller, Zumbro, Washburn, Jones and Tracy first of all [early missionaries in reverse order of their arrival]
Hastened to make your glory shine
Oh light of the Earth

Long live mother Pasumalai, eternal nurturer

By L. Samuel (real name), Pasumalai (former training school teacher) (my translation)

Notes to Chapter Two

¹ While I stayed there, Dora Agam lacked most domestic facilities demanded by the rising urban middle classes in Tamil Nadu: indoor plumbing with a roof-top water tank, copious water from a private bore well, a roof that doesn't leak, an indoor bathroom, modern tiled-floors that can easily be swept, etc.

² “Kallar “ and the subcaste abbreviation “PK” are names that all Madurai district residents, including the PK, use to describe members of this community in casual speech. The prefix *Prāṇmalai* indexes the particular endogamous Kallar subcaste living in Krishnapuram and is also the name of a hill in a neighboring Tamil district. However, Dumont does not record any PK claim of an origin from that area (Dumont 1986:16).

³ Interview with Mutturaj, Pasumalai, 3/18/99

⁴ Interview with Ramu, Pasumalai, 3/18/99

⁵ *Muruikaikāy* fruit find their way regularly into noontime vegetarian stews in Tamil Nadu; so, even though I never planted it there, I had hoped to harvest some for my own use.

⁶ Interview with Vedamanikkam David, Pasumalai, 9/9/98

⁷ Interview with Mutturaj, Pasumalai, 3/18/99

⁸ “Peon” is a Portugese derived word used to describe certain classes of menial servants in the former British Empire. Definition 1c from the OED reads, “An attendant or orderly, a footman or messenger. Also, a person who does minor work in an office.”

⁹ I did meet one PK mason who claimed his ancestors moved to Pasumalai five generations earlier and who are not part of the so-called ancestral PK clan. PK from other lineages present before the mill's 1929 appearance most likely were descendants of men who had married women from the natal clan, though I was unable to conduct an exhaustive genealogical survey of such a large contemporary population.

¹⁰ The first was Harvey Mills, founded in 1892. By 1960, eight different spinning mills had been established in the Madurai area employing nearly 20,000 people (Baliga 1960:173).

¹¹ Interview with former Mill owner, grandson of Laskhmanan Chettiar, Madurai, 6/6/99

¹² An elder Christian teacher who grew up in Pasumalai in the 1920s remembered four patrilineal groups in Krishnapuram: The *talaiyāri* (headman) family, *pucāri* (priest) family (for the Krishnapuram *Mantaiyamman* temple; see Map 3), the natal clan, and the family of a former Pasumalai *tapālkkārar* (postman).

¹³ Interview with Muttukaruppan, Pasumalai, 1/9/99

¹⁴ Since PK wives adopt the lineages and lineage deities of their husbands, in-migrating husbands end up creating small local branches of *their* natal lineages.

¹⁵ Interview with L. S. Jesupillai, Pasumalai, 5/14/99

¹⁶ Interview with Jeparaj David, Pasumalai, 2/12/99 and Interview with L. S. Jesupillai, Pasumalai, 5/14/99

¹⁷ By this year, 14 of 17 houses for Teaching staff and seminary students were now brick and mortar homes dubbed “permanent”, because they did not require substantial annual post-monsoon repairs (George Washburn to Rev. NG Clark, Jan. 10, 1895 [ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 15:157]).

¹⁸ Floor plans of the houses built by Rev. John. P. Jones on Seminary Line as of 1892 reveal a clear two-tiered hierarchy of homes: 1) single story homes with front and back verandah, two rooms, kitchen and backyard and 2) two story homes with a backyard staircase leading to rooms on a second floor (ABC 16.1.9 13: 249).

¹⁹ Pasumalai High and Training School Report, 1929-1930, (AMM collection, Box 9, Folder on Pasumalai High and Training School, UTC, Bangalore. p. 5). Many of these mission “cottages” bore plaques with the names of the American donors who had financed them, such as the Congregationalist parishes of Waterbury, North Bennington, Barre and Montpelier, Vermont. Most of these names are listed in a letter from John X. Miller to “Friends”, Pasumalai, April 13, 1932, (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 38: 242).

²⁰ But such middle class comfort did not always so clearly separate Pasumalai’s teachers from their Krishnapuram neighbors. Tracy could only afford to build five brick and mortar homes for seminary teachers in 1845. So, as late as 1886, additional homes for Christian staff and their families were made of “mud and thatch” or equivalent to *kuṭicai viṭu* predominant in Tamil villages of that period (Rev. George Washburn bemoans this situation in an 1886 letter to Joint Secretaries of the Board, Rev. Alden and Clark, March 26, 1886, [ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 10: 469]). Four new “permanent” (brick and mortar) homes for teaching staff were not built until 1895 and after the receipt of foreign donations (Annual Report of the AMM for 1895, p. 30 [ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 11:15]). During the first forty years of “Christian” Pasumalai, the majority of Pasumalai teaching staff, therefore, actually lived in mud and thatch homes similar in quality to their PK neighbors. Unlike the latter, however, they had access to mission funds for the obligatory, post-monsoon repairs of eroded, weakened walls. However, by 1900, a Plan of Pasumalai reveals the locations of 16 permanent homes for teachers plus 19 smaller homes for theological students (“AMM Mission—Plan of Pasumalai Buildings and Grounds”, [Zumbro, et.al. 1900: 32]).

²¹ In 1924, John X. Miller built the grandest of the surviving staff houses, Harriet Keith Cottage, for the Pasumalai High School Headmaster, spending \$1000 (June 28, 1925, ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 29: 266) [Rs. 2750, according to the 1925 exchange rate, or 20 times the salary of the headmaster himself in 1924 (cf. letter from John Miller to ABCFM, March 11, 1924, ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 29: 246)].

²² John X. Miller to Rev. Strong, Secretary of the ABCFM, Pasumalai, February 2, 1923 (ABC 16.1.9 Vol 29: 225)

²³ Archival information is added here to my own visual exploration of mission homes still in use in Pasumalai today.

²⁴ L.L. Lorbeer to “Friends”, Pasumalai, Thanksgiving Day, 1920 (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 29:54)

²⁵ Interview with Vedamanikkam David, Pasumalai, 9/9/98

²⁶ The 1924 budgeted monthly salaries I discovered for the Pasumalai High School (from Rs. 36 and 1 Anna up to Rs. 140 and 5 Annas for the Headmaster; Average monthly pay: Rs. 65) and the Training School (from Rs. 18 to Rs. 133; Average: Rs. 39) display quite a range (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 29: 248). In 1940, the pay scale for AMM Teachers ranged from Rs. 11 for lowest grade elementary school teachers to Rs. 60 for senior teachers with college degrees) After the end of the war and the establishment of the Church of South India in 1947, salary scales rebounded slightly (Rs. 14 for married women in Elementary Schools to Rs. 85 for senior college educated teachers) (ABC 16.1.9 1940-49 Box 3, Folder 22 “M.C.C. Salary Scales from Jan. 1 1940 to date [1947]”). Most of the names mentioned to me in interviews as the ‘farming teachers’ were those individuals at the higher end of these pay scales: Normal school teachers, senior Pasumalai High school teachers, headmasters and managers.

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- ²⁷ Vedamanikkam David specifically claimed this in our interview.
- ²⁸ Interview with Vedamanikkam David, Pasumalai, 9/9/98
- ²⁹ Eight individuals confirmed the generalization that many teachers owned farmland in Pasumalai during the missionary period and afterwards. And I collected a dozen or so names of those who did. I did not systematically attempt a historical land survey which would have been a full time research activity in and of itself and likely to encounter much local obfuscation.
- ³⁰ Interview with L.S. Jesupillai, Pasumalai, 5/14/99
- ³¹ Interview with DR Joshua, Pasumalai 9/11/99
- ³² Interview with Vedamanikkam David, Pasumalai, 9/9/98
- ³³ Interview with D. Robert, Pasumalai, 10/22/98
- ³⁴ Three interviewees, children of famous late colonial Pasumalai residents, claimed that their fathers once acted as periodic arbitrators of internal disputes among Krishnapuram PK families, at the latters' request (Pasumalai interviews with Charles [9/19/99], Isaiah Paulraj [3/26/99], and D. Robert [10/22/98]). This particular performance of elite status may also have been allied with a rural landlord identity.
- ³⁵ Interview with DR Joshua, Pasumalai, 9/11/99
- ³⁶ One exception was the home of the wealthiest colonial teacher, the first Indian school manager in Pasumalai, who had extensive land holdings in Pasumalai. According to his elderly daughter, his own wife managed the fields *in person* on a daily basis, because they had enough live-in servants brought from their own natal village to relieve her of virtually all the housework.
- ³⁷ Interview with Jeparaj David, Pasumalai, 2/12/99
- ³⁸ His tone that afternoon seemed calculated to highlight local PK's prior diminutive social status in contrast to what we shall see (Ch. 3) has become their current social dominance of Pasumalai, a sore point with this retired teacher; a man who remembers a colonial Pasumalai under the tight disciplinary rein of American missionaries.
- ³⁹ Interview with Ramu, Pasumalai, 3/18/99
- ⁴⁰ Interview with DMR Dasan, Pasumalai, 8/14/99
- ⁴¹ In 1923, AMM missionary wife, Margaret Miller, organized a central well with pipes and pumps to bring "protected" water to public taps near hostels and staff homes. According to a 1900 "Plan of Pasumalai," Teachers' Line featured its own public well (Zumbro et. al. 1900: 32). The AMM schools and hostels also had their own wells.
- ⁴² ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 33:18

⁴³ Page 3 of the 1925-26 Report of the Pasumalai High and Training Schools (AMM Collection, Box 19, Folder on Pasumalai High and Training School, UTC, Bangalore)

⁴⁴ Page 3 of the 1929-30 Report of the Pasumalai High and Training Schools by Rev. Jeparaj David, 11/4/1930 (AMM Collection, Box 19, Folder on Pasumalai High and Training School, UTC, Bangalore)

⁴⁵ In 1901, founder of Pasumalai's Trade School, AMM missionary William Zumbro, decried what he called an "Indian" avoidance of manual labor after some education has been attained. What he really refers to is not the avoidance of unskilled manual labor as a career (something common to well educated middle classes from any cultural background) but a culturally constructed, context-free avoidance of manual labor, even if it will finance one's further education or eventual class mobility. His evidence is a narrative about a church member, an AMM Bible woman's son, whose mother refused to let him take needed High school scholarship money Zumbro had made contingent on performing manual labor in the Pasumalai compound. The boy simply abandoned his higher education and returned home (William Zumbro, Pasumalai, Sep. 18, 1901 to Rev. C. H. Daniels, D.D., Boston [ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 19: 83]).

⁴⁶ Interview with S. Luke, Pasumalai, 9/19/99

⁴⁷ Interview with Cokkan, Pasumalai, 5/9/99

⁴⁸ Interview with S. Lakshmi, Pasumalai, 10/26/99

⁴⁹ Interview with Pecciyamma, Pasumalai, 8/30/99

⁵⁰ This is based on memories from two PK men in their 50s concerning childhoods in the 1950s.

⁵¹ Interview with Cokkan, Pasumalai, 5/9/99

⁵² Interview with Ramu, Pasumalai, 3/18/99

⁵³ Interview with L.S. Jesupillai, Pasumalai, 5/14/99

⁵⁴ Interview with D. Robert, Pasumalai, 10/22/98. But, as he also noted, this rule was as often broken as it was enforced through random inspections by resident AMM missionaries such as Lloyd Lorbeer.

⁵⁵ Interviews with Charles, Pasumalai, 9/19/99 and L.S. Jesupillai, Pasumalai, 5/14/99

⁵⁶ Interview with Richard, Pasumalai, 1/23/99. One local PK laborer confirmed this practice (Interview with Pandian, Pasumalai, 4/26/99) And, I also saw a related practice once at the Meenakshi Coffee Bar during my own fieldwork (see Map 3). One afternoon, during my customary, post-nap coffee there I met a local government middle school headmaster, one of few middle class Christians who frequented the bar and lounged there. As a Maravar, when chatting with local PK, he is among his "Devar" friends, though these friends are mostly semi-educated farmers and retired mill workers. On one afternoon, I saw him reading the afternoon paper out loud to Mutturaj who was looking over his shoulder but barely able to follow the text himself.

⁵⁷ Interview with Vedamanikkam David, Pasumalai, 9/9/98

⁵⁸ Interview with L.S. Jesupillai, Pasumalai, 5/14/99

⁵⁹ Such interactional respect for the subordinate is one many Western middle class individuals would find horribly awkward, primarily because they often believe that interactional *separation* from “the working classes”, except for encounters with them as paid laborers, is a necessary minimal performance of elite class status.

⁶⁰ Interview with S. Lakshmi, Pasumalai, 10/26/99

⁶¹ In 1914, the AMM appointed a committee of five missionaries, two from Pasumalai, to work with the Superintendent of Police in Madurai District in setting up a 400 acre Kallar settlement colony (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 23: 174). In 1920, the work of AMM missionaries with PK had developed immensely at the specific request of the “Kallar Special Officer,” a Brahmin graduate of Madras Christian College (From “The Kallars of Madurai”, Raymond Dudley to Secretaries of the ABCFM, Feb. 10, 1923, [ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 27: 31]). By 1921, they had opened 60 Government financed Kallar schools under their direct administration (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 29:194) and had tacit permission to insert the Bible and Christian knowledge into the curriculum (Lorbeer to Rev. Bates, Jan. 2, 1922, [ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 29: 63]).

⁶² Interview with DMR Dasan, Pasumalai, 8/14/99

⁶³ John X. Miller to “Friends” [in America] August, 1, 1922 (ABC 16.1.9 29: 205)

⁶⁴ p. 3, “Report of the Pasumalai High and Training Schools for 1929-1930” by Rev. Jeparaj James, (Box 19, Folder on “Pasumalai High and Training Schools”, AMM Collection, UTC)

⁶⁵ From a memorial essay in honor of John X. Miller by I. Sam Benjamin, Headmaster Pasumalai Training School, copied from No 1951 issue of “Pasumalai Progress” (ABC Biographical Collection, Box 41, Folder 46)

⁶⁶ His paternal uncle confirmed the story with me (Interview with Palanisami, Pasumalai, 2/23/99).

⁶⁷ Interview with Pandian, Pasumalai, 4/26/99

⁶⁸ Interview with Ramu, Pasumalai, 3/18/99

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ George Washburn mentions the Pasumalai dispensary for the first time in page 75 of the AMM’s 1876 Annual Report (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 6: 6).

⁷² Interview with E.D. Samuel, Pasumalai, 12/13/98

⁷³ Interview with D. Robert, Pasumalai, 10/22/98

⁷⁴ One reference to this practice is found in the AMM’s 1876 annual report, but how often this happened afterwards is not known (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 6: 6).

⁷⁵ Interview with Arputasami, Pasumalai, 1/14/99. Many Tamil women wear gold jewelry proudly as a sign of status and because, for many working class women, this is the only real wealth they possess. Its display is a

performance that indicates nothing by itself about the bearer's financial situation, contrary to what Lorbeer apparently used to think. Both wealthy and relatively poor Tamil may wear their wedding jewelry in public. As Eliza Kent has noted about Indian women in her discussion of why 19th century Nadar Christian women adopted the practice of wearing gold jewelry, "...a woman without jewelry appeared to be one of three very marginalized types of women: an inauspicious widow, a polluting untouchable, or a pitiable indigent (1999: 390)." Accumulated at pre-marital and marital life cycle rituals, such gold jewelry, far from being a clear material sign of extravagance, is also, in many cases, the primary form of savings or investment available to struggling working class families.

⁷⁶ Interview with Pandian, Pasumalai, 4/26/99

⁷⁷ Another Christian housewife, who worked directly under Lorbeer's wife distributing milk to pregnant mothers in the PCC Center, remembers the strict maintenance of a list of local mothers, including PK mothers. She claimed that those that did not come regularly would also be cut off as undeserving (Interview with W. Grace, Pasumalai, 1/9/99).

Notes to Chapter Three

¹ Interview with Thomas, Pasumalai, 4/17/99

² This kind of rhetoric resonates widely across the Tamil middle class.

³ I noticed many middle class Pasumalai Christians often use English words or full sentences in moments of anger, when seizing authority or when disciplining others. While this betrays the potency of English itself in post-colonial India, it may also be powerful speech for local Christians because it is a language with a local history of symbolic power. Local mission staff who could speak English with the “turai” no doubt had an edge up in the fractious, competitive political space of the colonial mission compound.

⁴ This total is based on 1999 statistics of ration cardholders for Pasumalai’s 3 Wards (6,300), plus the Anna Nagar squatters’ settlement (1,328).

⁵ Interview with Balamurugan, Pasumalai, 6/15/99

⁶ Interview with Irulandi, Pasumalai, 9/1/99

⁷ Interview with Jeparani, Madurai, 10/4/99

⁸ Interview with Jeevatanni, Pasumalai, 5/22/99

⁹ I am drawing here on Paul Connerton’s notion of collective social memory, or “habit-memory”, which is a form of collective memory of the past, especially in commemorative ceremonies and bodily habits (1989).

¹⁰ Interview with Adisayam, Pasumalai, 9/13/99

¹¹ This easily translated phrase, however, has connotations in Tamil that are somewhat untranslatable. It is a common boundary-marking, in-group phrase often said with scorn and derision and directed at some moralistic social hierarchy excluding or insulting one of the speaker’s identity groups.

¹² Interview with Balamurugan, Pasumalai, 6/15/99

¹³ The phrase used was “Pasumalai *kirāman*” using the geographical term for “village.” This word refers to a politically legitimated tax revenue, or Governmental, entity and has very different connotations from the word “ūr” (cf. Daniel 1984: 61-79).

Notes to Chapter Four

¹ A broad body of Tamil terms devised by early Bible translators like Robert De Nobili, Bartholomew Ziegenbald and Johann Fabricius (who all worked closely with Brahmin and/or Vellalar pundits) were once common to all Tamil Christians, both Roman Catholic and Protestant (cf. Tiliander 1974). Since the days of Enrique Enriquez (a 16th century Portugese missionary) and Robert De Nobili (an Italian Jesuit missionary who lived in the 17th century Madurai of Raja Tirumalai Nayakkar), Christian missionaries have struggled with the translation of their theological terms and ideas, their rhetorical practices, into the Tamil language (cf. Tiliander 1974: 27-40; Zupanov 1999). Moravian missionaries added different minds to this ongoing task in the early 18th century Danish colony of Tranquebar (Singh 1999), well before the arrival of American Board missionaries in Jaffna (in 1815) and Madurai (in 1834) (see Anderson 1874). In recent decades, the Catholic Church has apparently engaged in a partial Dravidianization of its “Christian talk”, leaving much of the old Sanskritic Christian Tamil to become, residually, more or less Protestant Tamil. Slowly, some CSI pastors are beginning to tone down the excessive Sanskrit sound of their Christian talk in a state where the Sanskrit/Tamil dichotomy was once a key ideological foil in the creation of the Dravidian political movement that still dominates the state (cf. Ramasamy 1999). One Pasumalai pastor is quite fond of this process and, on occasion beyond the pulpit, actively substituted more common Tamil words for “God” (e.g. *kaṭavuḷ* or *iṟaiṅṅ*) and “the Lord” (*Āṅṅavar*) for their respective Sanskrit-derived equivalents used by CSI Tamils and found in the currently dominant Protestant Tamil Bible (*Paricutta Vēṭakamam* 1956), *tēvaṅ* and *karttar*.

² T. Dayanandan Francis has written a short paper discussing the presence of “Hindu terminology” in Christian Tamil (1980), but, unlike Bror Tiliander (1974), his use of “Hinduism” does not explicitly refer to the fact that it is Sanskritic, Brahminical rhetoric that yielded most of the terms he cites. This is a slippage that ignores the profound cultural politics behind certain religious terminology that is not at all inclusive of popular Tamil religious parlance.

³ In 1996, a new ‘pure Tamil’, interdenominational or “common”, BSI translation appeared, produced by a joint committee of Roman Catholics and Protestants and entitled *Tiruviviliyam*. While I did notice copies of it in the homes of more progressive CSI pastors and evangelists, a wider, urban CSI Tamil rhetorical habitus did not dispose its use in prayer meetings or church services I attended.

⁴ The Brahminical and elitist caste tone of Indian Christian theology more generally stands ironically at odds with the fact that most Indian Christians come from India’s Scheduled Caste or Dalit communities; a point of great concern to liberation theologians (cf. Clarke 1998). And there is a loose movement to create specific “Dalit Christian” theologies led both by left wing Catholics and Protestants (cf. Irudayaraj 1990; Katirvelu 1998; Clarke 1998)

⁵ In this chapter I follow Kenneth Burke’s model of rhetoric and the “master tropes” outlined by him, with the exception that I include what he calls “synecdoche” under the term metonym. For Burke, rhetoric is “...the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” (Burke 1989:188). The master tropes of human rhetoric in his scheme are metaphor, metonym, synecdoche and irony. I will be referring to the first two tropes, which he defines respectively and succinctly as *perspective*, “seeing something in terms of something else” and *reduction*, “to convey something...intangible in terms of the...tangible”. But my use of “metonym” here includes his definition of synecdoche as *representation*, “part for the whole, whole for the part...a relationship of convertibility... (Burke 1989: 247-251)”

⁶ In my discussion of different “rhetorical spaces” I am influenced by Talal Asad’s work on religious rituals as “embodied practices” that create and control “moral dispositions” (Asad 1993: 65), not as systems of intellectual meanings (Geertz 1973a) or as spaces for the generation of shared “experiences” (Kapferer 1986). Specifically, I am influenced by analogies I see between Protestant liturgy and the “disciplinary practices” of medieval monastic rituals he examines in another chapter of the same work (Asad 1993: 125-167).

⁷ This brief anthropology of CSI Tamil tropes draws inspiration from the theoretical work Fernandez (1986), Stromberg (1986), and Poewe (1989) who have explored the vital role of tropes in diverse rhetorical domains of Christian affiliation.

⁸ In this sense, the emphasis in evangelical Protestant Sunday liturgy is very different from what Susan Visvanathan describes as the overwhelmingly eucharistic emphasis in the Syrian Christian Quarbana, “The movement from the profane to the sacred state through the participation in the Quarbana is not to become the Christ but to participate in the nature of Christ (1993: 175).” The latter is what we might term a “metonymical” view of Christian liturgy. This tropic emphasis is one Karla Poewe has argued is also dominant in charismatic Christian movements (1989). While CSI churches celebrate communion, in Pasumalai, this is only done twice a month, ritually alienating the primacy of “participating” in Christ as secondary to the *weekly* disciplinary practice of the sermon that encourages inhabiting Christ metaphorically. Because of this sharp contrast in tropological emphasis, I cannot agree with Visvanathan that the “Eucharist is the central motif of the Christian ritual life (Visvanathan 1993: 168).”

⁹ J. David Sapir discusses the process of metaphoric death in a famous essay, “When commonplace knowledge of the discontinuous term and its associated semantic domain is merely perfunctory or has been reduced to the level of almost total ignorance, the metaphor becomes an ornamental cliché (1977:10).” This is what the metaphor of believer as sheep has become for most Western middle class Christians and for many middle class Protestants in Pasumalai who are now as distanced as their Western counterparts from peasant traditions of livestock management.

¹⁰ From Pasumalai Sunday Service, 8/2/99

¹¹ Though “conversion” and “repentance” have two different corresponding words in both Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Greek (cf. Myers 1987: 233 and 880), this distinction is largely lost in the BSI Old Version Tamil Bible.

¹² And the Pasumalai pastor himself translated the verb’s gerund form *maṇamīrumpavatu*, as “conversion” in the bilingual delivery of his 1999 New Year’s sermon.

¹³ To the great irritation of orthodox Tamil Christians, the more common Tamil gloss for “conversion” is the word *matamāṛṛam* (change of religion). When I asked one octogenarian Pasumalai Christian about his “*matamāṛṛam*” while studying at the Pasumalai High School in the 1930s, he retorted brusquely, “I don’t know anything about *matamāṛṛam*, only *maṇamāṛṛam* (change of heart)”

¹⁴ I frequently heard the Tamil word for “sinner,” *pāvi*, made synonymous with *acuttan* (unclean one); thereby conjoining Tamil rhetoric of purity/impurity with a biblical rhetoric of sin. The spoken Tamil word for ritual “pollution” is *tīṭṭu* while the most commonly spoken corresponding words for “purity” are *maṭi* (referring to ceremonial bathing specifically), *cuttam* and *tūymai*. I never heard CSI Tamils invoking the word *tīṭṭu*, but many are comfortable using the latter two words for “purity”, along with their non-Christian peers, to index a “sin-less” state. In fact, Christian Tamil has willingly adopted the related Sanskritized Tamil verb “to purify” (*cuttikari*) as one way to gloss the ultimate consequence of “repentance/conversion.” But the BSI “Old Version” Bible, and rhetoric supported by it, generally feature a Sanskritized Tamil word not part of modern spoken Tamil, *paricuttam* (holy, pure), as the key referent to its concept of an “ethical purity” as idealized in the life of Christ. This “purity” appears not only in the term for “Holy Spirit”, *paricutta āvi*, but also in the root of the translation for “Saint,” *paricuttavar*.

¹⁵ From Sunday sermon, Pasumalai, 7/12/98

¹⁶ Interview with Richard, Pasumalai, 1/23/99

¹⁷ Interview with Jeevatanni, Pasumalai, 5/22/99

¹⁸ In the BSI's New King James Version, verses 13 and 14 read,

13: "And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven but beat his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!'

14: "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

¹⁹ Avar ninrukoṇṭu karttaruṭaiya paḷattōṭum tammūṭaiya tēvaṇākiya karttaruṭaiya nāmattiṇ makattuvattōṭum mēyppār (future transitive of mēy, to graze).

²⁰ Pasumalai New Year's "Watchnight" Service, 1/1/99

²¹ Interview with Devasahayam, Pasumalai, 2/15/99

²² See his Tamil website, www.jepamjeyam.com, and his English website, www.jesuscalls.com.

²³ D.G.S. Dinakaran, Tamukkam Grounds, Madurai, 2/25/99

²⁴ Of course, not all those he called out actually came to the stage that evening. And most of the "problems" for which he promised deliverance were quite vague or broadly applicable to an audience of thousands (fear, suicidal thoughts, exam failures, etc). The selection of very common names like "Selvi", "Ester", "Mariyal", "Saraswati", and "Pirabakaran" also made the likelihood of applicability (even to Hindus) very high. In another example, Dinakaran's "witness" gave away the prime information gathering device, personal letters to himself from the "healed" whose information he recycles at his meetings and whose devoted authors he can reasonably expect will show up at meetings staged near their cities of residence.

²⁵ In addition to a term used by the Pudukkottai Raja to indicate his palace guards (Dirks 1993[1987]:191), a Brahmin priest explained to me that, in Saivite temples like TPK's Murugan temple, *ūḷiyakkārar* is also a title held by those individuals who ensure each morning that the street on which Lord Murugan will travel on a given festival day is free from death pollution. This "service" to Murugan ensures 'his Lord's purity' will not be compromised (Interview with Subramaniam, TPK, 6/20/99).

²⁶ "[19] Go Ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: [20] Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (King James Version Bible)

²⁷ This information was divulged to me by an official of the Diocese of Madurai-Ramnad

²⁸ That the money for this college comes from a millionaire Tirulnelveli Nadar Christian, the same 'Anglican' caste as the current Bishop himself, did not escape most people in Pasumalai.

²⁹ D.G.S. Dinakaran, Tamukkam Grounds, Madurai, 2/25/99

³⁰ From Sunday Sermon, Pasumalai, 1/31/99

³¹ Interview with Rev. Gnanapirakasam, Pasumalai, 8/27/99

³² Interview with Richard, Pasumalai, 1/23/99

³³ From the engagement ceremony of G. Michael (see Ch. 6).

³⁴ Interview with Jeevatanni, Pasumalai, 5/22/99

³⁵ Although many CSI Tamils use the English word “church”, just as many alternate between this word and the Tamil word, *kōyil*, used to refer to Hindu “temples.” The formal word for CSI churches is *tēvālayam*, combining a Sanskrit word for God with a more classical Tamil word for “temple.”

³⁶ Interview with Muttu, Karumattur, 6/21/99

³⁷ Interview with Richard, Pasumalai, 1/23/99

³⁸ Interview with Jesudas, Pasumalai, 12/13/98

³⁹ Lionel Caplan describes them as “prophets”, perhaps because some are viewed as *tirkkatarici*, although, from my experience, the more general term *ūḷiyakkārar* is generally applied to them (cf. 1988: 94-114).

⁴⁰ William Tracy to Rev. Rufus Anderson, Pasumalai, May 27, 1861 (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 5: 394)

⁴¹ Taken from “Resolution of the Central Circle Committee Regarding the Influence of Certain Religious Practices Taking Place in Madura and Vicinity”, J.S. Chandler, Chairman, C.C. Madura, August 6, 1912, (ABC Vol. 21: 237). Though he mentions no denominational name or church name, it is clear from his other charges of “silly distortions of Scripture” that he refers to some new Christian movement, though the issue of syncretism with popular Tamil religious practices is uncertain. He also mentions that the movement is promoting its own form of baptism and inspiring AMM members to receive it.

⁴² See Poewe (1989) for an important essay regarding the metonymical structure of Charismatic Christian religious rhetoric around the world.

Notes to Chapter Five

¹ According to Edgar Thurston, this is actually an exogamous lineage, or sept, name used by a variety of Telegu castes, including several castes regarded as untouchable (Mala and Madiga) (cf. entry in Thurston 1909, Vol. III, p. 256). I could not find mention of this exogamous unit in Singh's comprehensive list of surnames, lineage names, and caste names (1996), but, since my Brahmin friend and the clerk knew the letter originated from Palani (a famous hill shrine region roughly 75 miles northwest of Madurai), perhaps they knew that it was a lineage name still used by certain untouchable, Telegu speaking caste residing near there. Whether their comment was accurate or not, it still reveals the power of some Tamil names, placed in context, to suggest powerful degrees of social stigma.

² Perhaps this is a name that was given by that family's landlord. Isaacs notes the custom of North Indian landlords naming their untouchable laborers' children (1965: 45-6).

³ It has its root in a name for Siva (Singh 1993:1138). Two other letters bore the Christian names of Catholics converting to the AMM. And the final letter contained names from which the clerk could not read a caste identity.

⁴ The following discussion derives from my own analysis of names collected during fieldwork in Pasumalai and from printed mission histories, church histories, printed pamphlets and archival materials on the AMM. All the examples of personal names given in the list below are the real names of individuals encountered during my fieldwork in Pasumalai and Madurai and especially common names used in the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese of the CSI for much of this century (if not longer). Personal names of Christians analyzed elsewhere in this section on CSI Tamil names (pp. 166-187) are the individuals' real names, except where noted. I did not engage in a systematic ethnographic survey of CSI Tamil naming strategies, but many people brought up the issue of their names and their origins without my eliciting the information. This discussion therefore focuses on the power of names as habitualized performances to communicate "Christian" identity and on what collective meanings common CSI names suggest. What follows are *not* generalizations about how CSI Tamil individuals personally feel about their specific names or why they front certain portions of their personal names according to shifting contexts; topics requiring more systematic investigation.

⁵ The following names of this type appear in a list of the Pasumalai Seminary's first 106 students (1842-1859): *Ciṅṅappaṅ and Piccaimuttu* (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 2:126).

⁶ The following names of this type appear in the same list quoted in the previous note: *Selvaṅṅayakam, Rājāṅṅayakam, Mutturājāṅṅayakam, Mācilāmaṅṅi, Vātam, Māṅṅikkam*, (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 2:126). Marykutty notes a very similar pattern of certain common Malayali names being distinctive of Christian identity because of their *disproportionate use* in Christian communities, not because of any semantics encoded within them (1997: 75).

⁷ The following names of this type appear in the same list quoted in Note 5: *Tēvasikāmaṅṅi, Nāṅṅamuttu, Pirakācam, ācīrvātam, Nāṅṅarattinaṅṅam, Bāṅṅkiyam* (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 2:126).

⁸ Many other names exist from this category exist--*Aruṅṅantam* and *Savariyappaṅṅ, Savarimuttu* (Pearl of [St.] Xavier), and *Chiṅṅappaṅ* (for St. Paul; cf. Marykutty 1997:85)--but do not appear common any longer in Pasumalai or Madurai. In the 19th century, some Vanniyar, Vellalar, PK and Maravar Catholics joined the AMM but retained their Catholic baptismal names after their Protestant baptisms, leading to a temporary influx of Catholic Saint names. The following names commonly used by Tamil Catholics appear in a list of the Pasumalai Seminary's first 106 students (1842-1859): *Arōṅṅkiyam, Savarimuttu, Rāyappaṅṅ* (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 2:126).

⁹ An anonymous index of Tamil names lists other common suffixes such as *sāmi, liṅṅkam, īsvaraṅṅ, lakṣmi* and *rāmaṅṅ* which all rather clearly index non-Christian divinities (*Tūya Tamīṅṅpeyar Mālai*, p. 22-25)

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- ¹⁰ According to Tiliander, Robert de Nobili uses this term in his own writings, and later Protestants accepted it in their own Bible translations (1974: 63-64)
- ¹¹ Tiliander notes that “Jivaṅṅ” is still in common usage despite the fact that Revised Versions of the Tamil Protestant Bible and the new common Bible generally use Tamil words as part of a conscious attempt at Dravidianizing Christian Tamil discourse (1974: 249-251).
- ¹² Tiliander cites his colleague Carl Gustav Diehl to claim that use of the word “Jepam” is distinctly Christian Tamil and goes on to clarify that this word accompanies other Tamil words for prayer in liturgical and biblical verse (1974: 285-6). A Madurai theologian, Dayanandan Francis confirms his argument (1980:105).
- ¹³ Ponnaiya is a pseudonym.
- ¹⁴ It is likely that this Christian family would not have been able to conceal the reference of their names’ prefix from local Christians had they continued to live in close proximity with the un-baptized relatives from their natal community. In that social context, the goddess’ name would still be well known.
- ¹⁵ An early Pasumalai seminary student also bore this name, though it is not known if this is because he was one of the un-baptized students or because William Tracy accepted this pre-baptismal name’s literal denotation as a reference to Christ without realizing its Vaishnavite reference (seminary student list (1842-1859), [ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 2:126]).
- ¹⁶ His father was an orthodox Saivite convert to the AMM and two of his sons, at least, have not abandoned their patrilineal identity, retaining a series of three initials, VPK, in front of their given name. Both names were given before the family converted and, in their Sanskrit derivation, index the father’s pre-baptismal rejection of his natal Maravar religious culture in favor of the more Sanskritized, literary Saivite culture of Tamil Pundits.
- ¹⁷ Totally inexplicable to me is how one Christian named *Aḷakarsāmi Perumāl* (the full name of an important local god of especial importance to the Kallar community near Melur) became an AMM pastor in 1885 without changing his name to something more arguably “Christian” (cf. Chandler 1910: 463). Exceptions like this, especially among Tamil church leaders, may indicate political double standards in the imposition of mission compound conventions.
- ¹⁸ Verified with the list of current PC members in the 75th Jubilee Malar for the Pasumalai Church, 1980.
- ¹⁹ Interview with VPK Sundaram, Pasumalai, 6/22/99. Sundaram freely claims to this day his name is a “heathen” name, even though it means “Beauty.” Of course, it is also a modifying prefix given to the local incarnation of Siva in Madurai: *Suntariṣvarar*.
- ²⁰ The list was prepared as part of a report for Charles S. Bates, since this mass conversion transpired in areas where evangelists funded by him were working (“American Madura Mission. Devakottai Area. Baptism of 135 persons, Devakottai and Kallangudi. Sunday November 25, 1934.” [Folder 13 of the Charles S. Bates Correspondence and Reports, Folder 13, ABCFM, Houghton Library]). AMM missionaries at the time, John Banninga (ABC 16.1.9 45:12) and Richard Keithan (ABC 16.1.9 45: 150) both termed the entire group as “Harijans” in separate letters to ABCFM officials. “Harijan” is a Gandhian term for ‘untouchable’ that was in vogue during this period. Most likely these were *Paraiyar* or *Pallar* families, since members of both castes in that immediate area were already members of the AMM.

- ²¹ Only one person did not change their name, because it apparently already was the Sanskrit *Bākkīyam* (a commonly used word in the Old Version of the CSI Tamil Bible).
- ²² AMM missionary Harold Cooper, Chairman of the Madura City Evangelistic Campaign, revealed this to be true in a 1918 letter reporting of an even earlier mass baptism under the aegis of the Bates Evangelism program. (Rev. Harold Cooper to Rev. W.E. Strong, D.D. (secretary of the ABCFM), Madura, India, July 5th, 1918, ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 21: 281).
- ²³ According to staff names listed in the 1924–25 Pasumalai Budget for High, Training and Model School Staff (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 29: 248).
- ²⁴ This may suggest a generational shift currently going on towards a heavy Anglicization of CSI names in a period when Sanskritic ‘talk’ contained in category 3 names is much less clearly ‘powerful talk’ in contemporary Tamil Nadu. Neither Sanskrit nor even *mēḷaittamīl* can rival English as ‘power languages’ in contemporary Tamil Nadu. And, therefore, category 5-7 names appear to be *the* ‘power names’ in urban CSI Tamil communities like Pasumalai; these “English” names are used by those at all socioeconomic levels of the Pasumalai Christian community.
- ²⁵ Of course, as Bible names do for Tamil Christians, other ‘god-names’, like *Siva, Murugan, Meenakshi, Subramaniam* or *Raman*, clearly index a “Hindu” religious identity in Tamil Nadu. Thus, each religious community can claim certain names distinctively metonymic of itself.
- ²⁶ For example, the anonymous list of Tamil names mentioned earlier even categorizes extra-Biblical names from Western cultures transliterated into Tamil as “Christian names” (*Tūya Tamilḷpeyar Mālai*, p. 7-10).
- ²⁷ Interview with Jeparaj David, Pasumalai, 2/12/99
- ²⁸ Naming one’s self or one’s children after missionaries is not a postcolonial phenomenon. One of the early students at the Pasumalai Seminary, presumably born Hindu and then converted, bore the name Rufus Anderson, the man who was also secretary of the ABCFM at the time (seminary student list [1842-1859], ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 2:126). How much power William Tracy had in the naming, I do not know.
- ²⁹ Interview with Banninga Washburn, Baikra, 9/19/99
- ³⁰ Interview with Banninga Washburn, Baikra, 9/19/99. My landlord’s father also turned one of his given names, David, into a surname for all his male children. Interestingly enough, Washburn’s younger brother, Stoffer, who died tragically of heart failure in 1998, apparently, bore the name “Washburn” according to Tamil custom as a first initial and *not* as a surname (i.e. W. Stoffer).
- ³¹ John David was eventually sentenced to life in prison for murdering a fellow medical student during a period of campus “ragging” on November 6, 1996 at Annamalai University’s Raja Muthiah Medical College.
- ³² From guest sermon delivered in Pasumalai Church, 11/16/97. (300-330)
- ³³ This forms a taboo similar to cultural communities where, for example, uttering elders’ personal names is not allowed. In a summation of anthropological literature on naming taboos Alford argues that taboos regarding the use of personal names for specific kin reflects a desire to maintain social distance (1988: 110-118). However, here, the strategy is really one of communicating to one’s Christian peers a certain distinction from those Hindus who proudly caste their selves in public. The distinctiveness of this avoidance behavior, however, has waned considerably during

the 20th century, because deliberate non-castings of self are now part of a broadly middle class notion of politically correct, 'civilized' identity performance in public spaces.

³⁴ The January 1938 minutes of the Madura Church Council, the joint body of Tamil Christians and AMM missionaries who controlled the AMM's pastorates, resolved the following, "The council instructs all of its pastors and agents to avoid the use of caste titles after the names of Christians in church records and in all other ways. The Council also urges the members of its Churches to refrain from the use of case titles after their own names and the names of Christians" (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 33: 91). In practice, this rule was most likely aimed at Vellalar and Nadar church members for whom the use of caste titles would not draw any great stigma at all. The fact that this instruction even had to be issued, reveals that some individuals were using caste titles in the 1930s, but to what extent is unclear. Perhaps some church members felt freed from anti-caste taboos, as a result of the fact that devolution in the mission had begun in 1933 and the political dominance of the foreign missionary was waning rapidly. Although caste titles are absent from pre-devolution AMM records I consulted, one group of individuals who controlled Madurai's West Gate AMM Church in the 1860's sent a printed English fundraising appeal to the American Board secretary in Boston in which every one of them appended "Pillai" to their baptismal name (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 4, unmarked, undated letter). How common this sort of performance was, though, is unclear.

³⁵ "Don't apply tilak, Karunanidhi tells party youth." Express News Service, Chennai, Jan. 26, 1999. (www.indian-express.com/ie/daily/19990126/02650925.html)

³⁶ See "Poṭṭu-Irāmakōpālan Avēcam!" *Tamilan Express*, Vol 4:4, Feb. 3-9, 1999, pp. 2-5.

³⁷ In doing so, CSI Tamil women distinguish themselves from the 'Hindu other' as well as from Catholic Christian women who generally do make these markings.

³⁸ In Brahminical temples, there are two main sectarian divisions: Saivite and Vaishnavite. The former use only *vipūti* in worship rituals, while the latter use both *vipūti* and *kunkumam* (red vermilion powder).

³⁹ The forehead is a central symbolic space in Tamil religious practices. But, even without the use of substances like *vipūti*, gestures of worship connecting one's forehead to another human being also abound in Tamil performances of self. For example, when someone accidentally bumps into or hits a stranger on the street, it is customary to extend the hand towards the region hit and then touch one's forehead, symbolizing regret and respect for the slighted.

⁴⁰ The Rev. C.F. Muzzy conveyed this argument in his journal entry for April 20, 1837 which he later sent in letter form to the American Board secretary,

20th. Had some conversation with a respectable young man, a moonshee [pundit], on the religion and customs of the Hindoos. In the course of the conversation he said that he does not now worship Vishnu, Siva or any other of the heathen gods, but spends his leisure hours in reading the Bible, he prays, he says, to the Holy Spirit to teach him the truth, and yet he is so much under the influence of the fear of man that he continues to rub ashes on his forehead as a sign of his adherence to the worship of Siva. He endeavoured to excuse this by saying that God looks not on the outward appearance but on the heart and therefore the rubbing of ashes on his face was of no consequence. When told that the mark on his face was an indication of a feeling in the heart which God would condemn, he acknowledged the fallacy of his reasoning...(Rev. C.F. Muzzy to Br. Anderson, Madras, Aug. 9, 1837, ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 1:198)

⁴¹ Interestingly, this argument contradicts Robert De Nobili's 17th century defense of the use of sandalwood paste by Christians as a practice semantically dependent on the religious intent of the user (Zupanov 1999:159).

⁴² I had actually seen this brief ritual for the first time, months earlier, at a family prayer held for a groom before his engagement ceremony in Madras (see Ch. 6).

⁴³ Since CSI Tamils, unlike their orthodox Muslim peers, do not dress differently than other Tamils of similar class status, the ambiguity of religious identity in personal adornment only increases. This may be why I noticed so many CSI men in Pasumalai wearing 'cross chains' around their necks.

⁴⁴ A dramatic minimalization of forehead markings is quite obvious in Tamil Nadu's urban centers, especially among the educated middle class I often saw at pricy restaurants, hotels, camera stores, etc. How *dramatically* they minimalize these markings, however, did not consciously strike me until I attended a puja at a Karuppusami temple in a rural PK dominated village on Siva Rattiri, Feb 14, 1999. That evening, the temple priest emptied an enormous bag of *vipūti* onto his worship plate and, after completing the puja, started rapidly slapping it onto all of our foreheads and throwing some roughly over each of our heads until we all stood there in a cloud of *vipūti* and incense barely able to breathe. I never saw well-fed middle class devotees, or their Brahmin priests in the large government managed temples of Madurai and TPK distributing *vipūti* so copiously. In fact, Saivites who cover their entire foreheads with *vipūti* or prominent *pattai*, are often openly stared at and mocked in town. I often saw middle class businessmen emerging from urban temples with an almost infinitesimally small white dot of *vipūti* on their forehead; sometimes no bigger than a pencil point.

⁴⁵ Fischer notes for 19th century mission compound Christians in Kerala, that uniformed adornment made converts instantly recognizable, because they did not wear the intricately caste-specific forms of adornment of Hindus (1991).

⁴⁶ One Christian friend, and son a famous preacher, confessed to me privately during my first trip to Madurai that he often smeared *kurikumam* on his forehead when visiting the homes of "Hindu" friends; but such transgressive acts happen in secret and might be less possible to conceal after marriage, when such visits would often be in the company of one's Christian wife and when identity performances in general become more rigidified in most cultural communities.

⁴⁷ Interview with Ponnaiya, Pasumalai, 4/23/99

Notes to Chapter Six

¹ I personally attended, or heard of, three ear piercings and only two coming of age ceremonies held by local Christian families, whereas roughly 10-12 weddings transpired at the Pasumalai Church during my 16 month field research. I don't mention this as some positivistic measurement of average frequency but rather as a metaphor of their respective ranking along a continuum of relative necessity, importance and social honor among elite, primarily middle class CSI Tamils.

² Separate subsections of hymns (*pāmālai*) and lyrics (*kīrttaṇai*) in the CSI Book of Hymns, Lyrics and Songs of New Life (CSI 1980) are marked off as songs for “*vicēṣa camayaṅkaḷ*” or special moments. But these songs only cover two life cycle stages “Weddings” and “Death.”

³ “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven” (King James Version)

⁴ “And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. [10] For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. [11] If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? [12] Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? [13] If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask for him?” (King James Version) This is a classic example of a Bible “promise.” And here the promise is also vague and put to the service of crafting Priscilla's developing self along the ethical lines of Christ as metaphor.

⁵ The other implicit allusion here is to the CSI concept of Christian life as *vaḷi*, an ethical journey beginning at home but eventually and ideally leading to *maṇamtirumpuvatu* in young adulthood.

⁶ The crowd was small and intimate; it was not designed to accrue copious donations for a family financially stable enough to forgo affinal kin prestations common at these life cycle events.

⁷ They did not actually specify the verse; a strange oversight. Secondly, this my translation of the 1956 Old Version Tamil Bible verse, which is substantially different than the King James version.

⁸ Since there was no mike system, and I was unable to find a convenient place to rest my tape recorder near enough to the pastor to pick up his voice amidst the background noise (especially the roaring traffic of national highway seven a hundred yards away), I had to forgo an accurate recording of his brief verbal performance.

⁹ Most Christians I interviewed mentioned that they had their daughters' ears pierced by simply taking them to an *ācāri* at a local jewelry shop. Middle class Christians can easily explain away the piercing of *female ears* as preparation for wearing gold jewelry as an adult Tamil woman, dispelling any suspicion of a latent motive to “remove the effects of the evil eye” (a motive that might problematically index the domain of non-Christian belief). Although many Tamil boys have their ears pierced, the custom of actually wearing studs or earrings apparently disappeared as early as the 1930s, according to one Pasumalai Christian carpenter who recalls having his ears pierced in his natal village (Interview with Sampson, Pasumalai, 5/2/99). With the absence of a contemporary adult male Tamil practice of wearing earrings, to pierce a boy's ear has no cosmetic motive. Instead, one of two motives are generally attributed to such an event, motives middle class, self-consciously orthodox CSI Tamils would not want attributed to them: a belief in the need to remove the effects of the evil eye, thus indexing the presence of ‘non-Christian’ beliefs, and/or a desire to make up for “income” lost because one has no daughter for whom to stage income-generating functions. The Pastor's deliberate justification of David's ear piercing may have been a

sympathetic attempt to mask the profit motive at work while also revealing his own middle class Christian assumption that ear piercings should, if they happen at all, be perfunctorily female affairs.

¹⁰ Both Pasumalai Devars and Christians were clear to remind me that this is primarily a public announcement of a girl's eligibility for marriage, even if the family has no intention of marrying her off imminently (and, for those so inclined, an opportunity to collect *moy* for use in assembling the girl's eventual dowry).

¹¹ Susan Visvanathan, in her nuanced ethnography of Syrian Christians near Kottayam, also notes the performance of domestic rites common to a cultural domain broader than the Syrian Christian one she was studying (1993:102-151). Though she labels this as a "Hindu" domain (102), this artificially reifies a communal boundary as "social fact" when, her evidence and mine suggest that these are not ritual "vestiges" of a "Hindu" past in a "Christian" present; their performance by Christians suggest that they should be termed as common cultural performances, irrespective of religious identity.

¹² The lay secretary of the Diocese, who had presided over Jennifer's coming of age prayer meeting, concurred with the Professor, arguing that female comings of age have always been celebrated by Christians as God's blessing with, at most, a prayer meeting.

¹³ Interview with Rev. Gnanapirakasam, 8/27/99. Another Christian teacher, who claimed his family did hold a prayer meeting for their daughter, echoed this argument that not all Christians celebrate their daughters' coming of age with a prayer meeting.

¹⁴ I later learned that heavy pressure from Devaraj's daughter-in-law's family (all Hindu from the same caste) had influenced the staging of the function as a semi-public, or extra-domestic, function that morning.

¹⁵ One middle class Christian born to a carpenter trained at the Pasumalai Trade School claimed that the absence of either ear piercings or coming of age "functions" in her natal home was as much due to their Christian identity as to their poverty,

Ponnammal: We never had *caṭanku*. We just—it was very difficult in our home back then. We didn't think much of these things—[quickly rephrasing her point] It wasn't so much that it was difficult. We have never observed these things. We are "Christian". What's the point of all that? We didn't think about it. We had no means and we also didn't believe in it.

JR: Why? Should you not have *caṭanku*?

Ponnammal: We didn't. Just—We just ate some nutritious food and lived on like that. We didn't have that kind of means. There wasn't anything. Perhaps we ate a lot once a week or every ten days. But other than that they didn't do anything special for us (Interview with Ponnammal, Pasumalai, 4/24/99).

Whether or not her family really couldn't afford to stage a function like David's is impossible to know, but, most likely her parents also wanted to invest what little money they had in other things, such as the education of their children.

¹⁶ Local PK occasionally admitted to me the presence of such a profit-motive, even if not directly about themselves. There are important reasons for seeking such profits, especially for the working urban poor feeling 'burdened' with daughters whose increasingly exorbitant dowries threaten to cripple families financially. One local PK man claimed he was trying to amass money to purchase a plot of land to build a house.

¹⁷ Interview with Peter, Pasumalai, 4/18/99

¹⁸ Interview with Rev. Jeremiah, Madurai, 6/2/99

¹⁹ Interview with Vedanayakam, Pasumalai, 10/2/99

²⁰ Interview with Vedanayakam, Pasumalai, 10/2/99

²¹ This prioritization of caste and religious identities contrasts with what Singh and Sundaram found to be the case among elite Hindu Dalits in Uttar Pradesh, "...the extent of perceived identification in relation to various categories was found to be maximum relation to 'humanity', followed by that for 'Indianness', 'his own caste', 'Hindu community as a whole' and 'other castes' in descending order (1987:175).

²² The idea of eloping to perform a "registered marriage" is a common dream for Tamils deeply in love across caste and/or religious boundaries.

²³ This is a Sanskritized Tamil compound word metonymic of CSI Tamil rhetoric in general. These are two alternatives for *niccayatāmpūlam*, a custom in which two sets of parents confirm an arranged marriage through the exchange of *tampūlam* (betel leaves).

²⁴ A current trend, witnessed several times in Pasumalai, is to hold the *niccayatārttam* the night before the wedding itself, thereby forgoing the need for relatives and friends to travel twice from out of town and to make sure that the ceremony it contains is completed. But this practice requires an immense amount of trust between both families, and is more likely to happen in a cross-cousin marriage than in an arranged marriage between two families without a prior relationship. One Pasumalai friend told me that night-before-the wedding engagements are not traditional, but performed by those who simply feel the need to complete the *caṭaṅku* it contains (payment of the bridewealth).

²⁵ One family in Pasumalai used a ceremony called *pū vaittal* (lit. placing of flowers) to replace the confirming function of the engagement, perhaps, because the groom was himself unemployed at the time of the marital 'arranging' and the bride's family wanted assurance for the marriage. Interestingly enough, it did not replace the *niccayatārttam* held the night before the May wedding. This suggests that the 'night-before-engagement' has, for some, become a semi-obligatory part of an urban middle class CSI Tamil wedding cycle.

²⁶ Who asks, how they ask and what the *paricam* contains varies by caste and by the personal taste of the families involved. Before the current elaboration of *cīr* (dowry), this was often a small gift of cash accompanied by ceremonial plates of auspicious items. The number of *paricattattū* (bride-place plates) exchanged at these functions is a potent symbol of the groom's family's estimation of the required *mariyātai* (respect) needed to be shown to the bride's family.

²⁷ Another occasion for not giving a bridewealth may be in cross-cousin marriages, if relations between the two families are congenial.

²⁸ As far as I know, this was not an auspicious time either. Nor is Michael's family, at least, concerned with observing *nalla nēram* (good time), a practice common to most Tamils, including urban CSI Tamils, and which I did see observed in several other Christian wedding functions during my research. Michael's father and younger brother declared themselves independently as quite adamantly opposed to observing notions of auspicious time.

²⁹ This happened at all five Christian weddings I attended during my field research. A former pastor at the Pasumalai Church apparently invited 11 pastors plus the bishop for the wedding of his daughter!

³⁰ This is an extremely large bridewealth prestation compared to two others I observed in Pasumalai Christian engagement ceremonies (7 plates, 14 plates). While the number is not fixed, it may be generally in multiples of the auspicious number seven.

³¹ The use of fathers as ritual metonyms of the family in the bridewealth exchange here may be an isolated incident. In the only other engagement I documented (in Pasumalai), it was the *tāymāmaṅ* (maternal uncle) of the bride and groom who performed this role as is also the case for bridewealth ceremonies of the PK I witnessed in Pasumalai during my stay. No cash was exchanged publicly, or privately, at Michael's *niccayātārttam*. Yet, in the one Pasumalai engagement I witnessed, after the pastors explicitly asked the bride's father to confirm that all the "necessary" items were there, he took the ritual moment offered him and reminded the groom's family that they had forgotten the ritual prestation of cash which they hurriedly assembled on a plate and presented to him.

³² At Michael's engagement in Pasumalai, he gave a gold ring to his future wife.

³³ This ritual privileging of parents is not necessarily common among Tamils and most likely indexes a profoundly middle class family structure focused intensely on the nuclear family and not at all dependent on the ritual prestations of affinal kin who usually receive prominent ritual places in non-Brahmin life cycle functions (see Kapadia 1995). For example, in one Pasumalai engagement I saw, it was the groom's older sister who garlanded the bride and the bride's older brother (*maittuṅār*) who garlanded the groom. A groom's *maittuṅār* receives special recognition in Tamil culture because he will become a *tāymāmaṅ* (mother's brother) to the groom's children, a central ritual player in their children's life cycle rituals. This role is taken quite seriously by certain castes like the PK and, apparently, by this Chakkiliyar Christian family as well. But these ritual kinship relations do not receive as much importance, it appears, in some middle class CSI Tamil families.

³⁴ In the engagement of another Pasumalai woman, Jemima, the bride and groom exchanged Bibles in the bride wealth presentation, but before the bride had actually gone to don her bridewealth sari. Whereas in the engagement of Sam, relative of Michael, two rings were exchanged instead of Bibles. It does not appear to be obligatory, but only common practice.

³⁵ This same passage was also used at the only *niccayātārttam* I attended in Pasumalai itself, specifically verse 50. At another wedding reception I attended months later, the Pasumalai Pastor also referred to it.

³⁶ The Pasumalai engagement, a Madras pastor who accompanied the groom's family also discussed much more briefly the same theme that *inta kāriyam karttarāl vantatu*.

³⁷ I attended five CSI weddings during my research, documenting four for analysis.

³⁸ While Michael's family adamantly and deliberately stages their functions during inauspicious months, most CSI Tamils, it appears, do share a minimal concern with auspicious timing.

³⁹ This creates many problems for families who have found a bride who meets all their requirements, except for religion or Christian denomination. Such a potential partner must be baptized in the CSI before anyone can schedule a reading of wedding banns. For those families which don't want to bother with this or which need to marry a child off quickly, one option other than civil marriage is hiring a Pentecostal minister licensed by the Tamil Nadu government to solemnize Christian weddings and holding the wedding in either a Pentecostal church, a rented hall or at home.

⁴⁰ In Michael's wedding, the entire CSI liturgy was merged into the program along with the songs. It is important to note that no other 'community' in Tamil society I know of prints a wedding 'program' to be used at its ceremonies.

⁴¹ In the other Pasumalai wedding ceremonies I documented, local grooms rented less distinguished "Ambassador" cars to drive from their homes to the Pasumalai church, led always first by a local red-uniformed marching band hired from Madurai.

⁴² This is usually the groom's *maittuṅar*, but in Michael's case it was his own brother, because his bride is an only child.

⁴³ It is important to recognize how, in this post-colonial CSI liturgy, so dominated by translated Western hymns and foreign liturgical influences and produced long after the West had incorporated romantic love as the basis of Christian marriage, the words in this liturgy corresponding to the wildly ambiguous English word "love" deliberately connote neither romance nor anything erotic. In doing so, they mute any erotic agency of Christian bride and groom in the arranging of the marriage, a narrative move that receives active, prayerful reiteration in CSI wedding sermons and reception speeches. CSI Tamils have adopted a Western Christian wedding vows without threatening the dominance of prescriptive marriage in south Indian society.

⁴⁴ Fabricius defines *māṅkaliyam* as a synonym of *maṅkaliyam*, meaning marriage-badge or *tāli*.

⁴⁵ I never heard of a caste design for any of Tamil Nadu's Dalit communities, however.

⁴⁶ Of all the Hindu and Muslim weddings I attended in Madurai during my 2.25 years there, I never once saw a separate "reception" function, although I did witness speeches at some weddings of the politically well connected. After the tying of the *tāli*, most Hindu weddings I saw, regardless of caste, ended in either a ritual garlanding of the couple by important relatives (common to PK weddings) and, sometimes, in a "receiving line" in which guests and relatives handed *moy* or gifts to the groom and blessed the couple's foreheads with sacred ash.

⁴⁷ I did witness felicitations by politicians at two PK weddings, but primarily because either the groom was a ward councilor, or one of his close relatives was well connected to local Devar politicians. Needless to say, these VIP felicitations of PK selves did not produce anything recognizable as "Hindu" religious rhetoric to praise the couple.

⁴⁸ As with my landlord's appearance at the wedding of Mutturaj's grandson (Ch. 2), who is honoring whom at such functions is not always so clear; the invitation of VIPs to receptions often indexes complex hierarchical relations of *interdependence*.

⁴⁹ In one rural village of the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese, which I visited briefly, a young man claimed that it was mainly the "educated" Christians who had a lot of speeches at their receptions. His Pallar Christian relatives, he claimed, mainly play music, dance and perform traditional a martial art known as *cilampam*. But dancing, especially the erotically charged kind featured in Tamil films, is virtually taboo at middle class CSI Tamil weddings.

⁵⁰ This allows CSI Tamils in Pasumalai an ability to avoid the extremely disjunctive lifestyle described by Isaacs as "semi-passing", in which Hindu Dalits perform pseudo elite caste identity at work or in public and yet have a blatantly Dalit identity in private affairs (1965:147-149).

Notes to Chapter Seven

¹ Interview with Devasahayam, Pasumalai, 2/15/99

²The most famous exceptions are entire villages of Nadar Christians, especially Tirunelveli Nadar Christians formed under the auspices of the Anglican SPG and CMS missions (cf. Hardgrave 1969; Kent 1999). While Kent is right to include Nadars in a wider bloc of “low caste” converts in her historical study of *19th century conversions to Christianity*, today Nadar Christians, especially those in or near Tirunelveli and Sivakasi, are not treated with much stigma; and neither are their Hindu caste peers. Hindu Nadars are in fact classified only as Backward Class castes, not Scheduled Castes in contemporary Tamil Nadu. For Paraiyar, Pallar, and Chakkiliyars, though, the wider society’s image of their castes has not changed much at all. Yet, the stigma that once weighted heavily upon Nadar shoulders, when they were called “Shanars”, still oppresses Dalit communities.

³ Of course, finding morally self-righteous individuals wielding the same Christian rhetoric among elite castes is not hard. For those Tamil Christians from privileged caste communities (e.g. Vellalar), though, such a moral rhetoric lacks necessity and urgency as a social mask. Their ancestors may have adopted Christian identities for a variety of reasons, but urgent moral rehabilitation of their public self-image was not likely to be one of them. Other extreme minority castes in the wider AMM community, like the Maravars and the Pramalai Kallars, also suffered from a historical load of stigma as “violent”, “barbaric” communities. But this stigma only really affects them when they leave their natal areas and try to merge into Tamil Nadu’s urban middle class where others may still harbor prejudicial suspicions about their collective character.

⁴ Roy and Singh have already noted this distinction in their own study (1987: 67), as has Ross Mallick (1997: 362). See Berreman (1979: 178-214) for a full comparison of these categories and his argument for the profound similarity of race and caste (1979: 265-266).

⁵ Caplan also heard this phrase given many times; 25% of 160 individuals he met would not identify themselves by caste at all (1988:129). Fuller also mentions the deliberate erasure of caste identity among Dalit Christians in Kerala (1976: 57 cited in Caplan 1988: 129n.)

⁶ Erving Goffman’s work on stigma management also wisely notes the critical distinction between the visibility of stigma and other factors affecting its recognition, “the known-aboutness of the attribute, its obtrusiveness, and its perceived focus [the arena of life in which a stigma disqualifies a person] (1963: 50).”

⁷ “The members in good standing are mostly Paraians. Besides there are Pallans (very few in Madura), Vellala (mostly in Dindigul), and Shanans.” Dr. R. Graul quoted from un-referenced manuscript dated to 1851 (Chandler 1910: 147). In 1901, George Washburn writes, “When our missionaries began work in Ceylon and India they addressed themselves chiefly to the self-respecting middle classes through their schools...But God’s plans for our work were different. After we had worked on 9 years with little result [,] He began a movement in the remote villages among the outcaste castes to whom we had scarcely gone at all, the poorest, most oppressed and most unlikely part of the population- a movement which has furnished us the larger part of our Christian community and that from these very people. Almost all of them belong to these or other of the slave castes, proclaimed for by the E.I. Company only a few years before our mission established itself in the district.” From Washburn to Rev. J.L. Barton, Meriden, Conn., Feb. 28, 1901 (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 19: 46)

⁸ Fully one third of the pastorates in the Madura Church Council (the body that directly governed the AMM pastorates until the formation of the CSI in 1947) did not return complete information on caste composition.

⁹ After 1947, the Diocese of Madura-Ramnad added to itself several pastorates from the old Tirunelveli Diocese of the SPG Anglican mission bringing into itself large groups of Pallars and Nadars especially. How this has affected the overall proportions of these caste groups in the resulting Diocesan body is not at all clear and would require extensive field research likely to encounter immense obstacles. The current Diocese does not keep or collect caste statistics on its congregations.

¹⁰ This figure may be exaggerated for polemical effect. It emerges from a protest letter written to the secretary of the ABCFM from K.S. Ponnusami, secretary of the "M.C.C. Poor Christian Forward League, Madura." K.S. Ponnusamy to Rev. Alden Clark, Aug. 20, 1941, (ABC 16.1.9 1940-49, Box 3: Folder 27).

¹¹ The Pasumalai pastor estimated around 70% of the Diocese come from one of three communities known today as "Dalit" castes: Paraiyars, Pallars, and Chakkiliyars (the latter being former servants to missionaries and sweepers for mission institutions). Neither the central nor Tamil Nadu governments have ever compiled statistics on caste and Christian self-identification. It was beyond the scope of my research and beyond my capabilities to survey the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese. Yet a former research assistant to a British theologian argued to me privately that, during their extensive tours of the Diocese, they had both discovered 80% of the Diocese's population belonged to "Dalit" communities. Other Pasumalai individuals from these communities estimated the percentage of their fellow "Dalits" in the Madurai Diocese as anywhere from 60-80%. Naturally, those committed to Dalit mobilization in the Diocese, are apt to exaggerate the proportions to suit their dramatic narrations of suffering and discrimination at the hands of a "tiny" non-Dalit caste minority.

¹² Current Government lists of Scheduled Castes in Tamil Nadu contain 76 different names, but not all these are actually wholly separate social communities; redundancy on these lists is common, because certain names are used by all Dalits and some castes go by multiple names.

¹³ Rev. William Tracy to Rev. R. Anderson, Pasumalai, June 15, 1847 (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 3: 358).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ The "love feast" represents an even bolder version of the traditional Tamil *camapanti* where a group sits and eats without distinctions of rank. The exact phrase is found in the Old Version of the Protestant Tamil Bible in Jude 12. This same phrase is found as "feasts of charity" in the King James version. The common word here is the Greek *agape*, translated most commonly as "love" in modern Bibles, but alternately as "love" and "charity" in the King James version (cf. OED definition of "charity"). According to Tiliander, *anpu* is the most common modern translation of the Greek *agape* in current Tamil New Testaments, including the current Tamil Protestant Bible. While Tiliander cites the Madras Lexicon to note how *anpu* has been made a synonym of *kāmam* (lust) (1974: 208), from my own limited experience, I never heard *anpu* used in the context of describing sexual or erotic desire. The Kriya Modern Tamil dictionary confirms the Lexicon and Tiliander's interpretation by including "(sexual) love" as a definition for *anpu*. Yet, in 1990's Tamil parlance, *kātal* seems to have taken over this connotation in media depictions of erotic and romantic love.

¹⁶ (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 4: 22) In 1862, Rev. Rendall wrote a handwritten report on the AMM for 1861 in which he proudly instances a case of inter-caste commensality in the Mandapasalai station, "A meeting of the Native Association of that station in the early part of the year was one of much interest, and one incident connected with it as showing the efforts of the native church to overcome the caste system of the Hindus is worthy of mention. The Christians of the village, where the association met, are of the pallan caste. These prepared food for all present, and, with the exception of one vellalan, a new member, who made some excuses for his absence, all publicly ate

together, having first craved the divine blessing. Among those signifying that they felt themselves one in Christ Jesus were vellalars, and chuklers, pallars and pariahs, pastors and catechists teachers and taught, a varied group and thus a joint emblem of that diverse and yet united company..." (Rendall to Rev. R. Anderson, Melur, Jan. 12, 1862, ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 4:13; his underlining). Rendall does not mention the presence of the local station missionary, which no doubt facilitated the performance he narrates. And in 1901, Rev.H.C. Hazen noted with pride various signs of 'progress' in the eradication of caste, all of which, involved public commensality displayed within *mission compound* spaces, "When we see our mission agents, representing all castes, taking appams [sweet bread-like, fried snack] and coffee together at the bungalow and this prepared by Pariah servants, when we see them all eating together in peace on the itineracy, when we think of a Pariah cook in one of our Boarding schools, where there are children of several castes..." (From an essay, "Our Village Congregations" sent to the ABCFM Secretary, Sept. 12, 1901, ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 16:182) The idea that this might be a performative mirage, easily belied beyond the mission compound, does not receive mention.

¹⁷ Vellalar Christians from the colonial Danish mission in Tranquebar, like the famous Christian poet Vedanayakam Sastriar, strongly objected to this missionary logic, primarily to reserve for themselves the right to caste endogamy and caste elitism masked as "cultural freedom" within the mission (cf. Hudson 2000: 160). Other Vellalar Christians even published tracts regarding this position (Hudson 1970: 444 et passim cited in Caplan 1988:135). Most Protestant missions, except for German Lutheran missions, rejected caste categorically as a morally inferior form of identity making and took some efforts to politically ban it from their missions' respective public spheres (see Forrester 1980).

¹⁸ The most important example of the Tamil scriptural basis for a rhetoric of Christian community *beyond* caste differences appears in the Tamil translation of the verse that evangelicals have termed "The Great Commission", the verse that they believe justifies the evangelization of the world: Matthew 28:19. In the BSI Old Version Bible, the counterpart to the phrase "all nations" in the King James version is "*ellā jātikal* (all castes)."

¹⁹ From Rev. JP Jones, Secretary of the AMM to Rev. JL Barton, DD. Secretary, ABCFM Kodaikanal, S. India, May 1, 1905, (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 16: 35). "Panchama" refers to an archaic Tamil word, *Pañcamāṇ*, meaning literally "the fifth one" used to refer to the "fifth varna" category outside the fold of society cast(e) in the Brahmin mind's eye. This was the predominant 19th century Tamil term used to refer to the untouchable castes until the development of the phrase "depressed classes." The Government still uses the constitutional classification, "Scheduled Castes," while popular journalistic parlance has now accepted the term "Dalit."

²⁰ This passage from Lorbeer's essay comes from a circa 1937, printed document with no addressee and not in the form of a letter, but clearly mailed to the ABCFM secretary in Boston ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 43:199).

²¹ In a 1901 essay entitled, "Our Village Congregations," H.C. Hazen writes, "Caste is not dead even in the Church. We are sometimes hindered in assigning workers by caste differences and some painful experiences remind us that the serpent is not dead, though our heel is upon it. True we sometimes have to consider a man's caste in assigning him to a field, lest we destroy his usefulness and throw a firebrand into the church...(ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 16: 182).

²² Page 9 of the January 1915 AMM Minutes (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 21: 25) Appendix G-1 of same Minutes,

The Inspecting Officers are informed that, if the managers of mission Schools choose to show in the remark column of the annual returns which of those whom they classify as Christians are Panchamas or Pareiyas or pupils originally belonging to kindred or backward classes or castes, they may do so. If they choose to do so, the fees forgone in the Secondary Schools will be allowed for and the concession regarding Stipendiary grants and Capitation grants in Elementary Schools will be given.”

(Signed) R. G. Grieve,
for Director of Public Instruction.

²³ According to Stanley Vaughan, this is precisely what the pre-vote discussion revolved around (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 24: 21)

²⁴ After the 1936 Scheduled Castes Order, “Indian Christians” could no longer claim Scheduled Caste status in the public sphere welfare benefits, including education scholarships. In 1942, a resolution was debated in the Madura Mission Sangam (which controlled all the AMM’s schools) whether to allow Dalit Christians, who were presumably not legally registered in the public sphere as “Indian Christians”, access to caste-based welfare aid then available to students in the form of scholarships. Two AMM missionaries demurred on the idea of inscribing caste distinctions among these Dalit Christians in school records, even when they knew access to caste-based welfare aid was clearly affected, appears in a letter from Rev. EE White,

“Res. no 31. Scholarships on a caste Basis. The Sangam, like the Mission, is opposed to the use of caste titles or recognition of caste distinctions among Indian Christians, believing that communalism or racialism has always been one of the gravest evils of society in recent times. In the opinion of a large number of Christian workers in India, Christian boys and girls whose parentage is of depressed-class origin ought not to be penalized from receiving such scholarship aid as Government is willing to give, even if it be on a caste basis-providing they are financially in need of such aid. The Sangam Secretary, however, personally believes that as long as Christian missions take the stand outlined in this resolution, so long it will be increasingly difficult to root out caste on the basis where it ought to be- namely, that of human need and worth, regardless of caste or color of skin. Hence my vote in the negative (to ABCFM secretaries, Sept. 26, 1942” [ABC 16.1.9 1940-49 Box 2, Folder 20]).

“The question of using caste names and classifications in order to get government grants has long been before the Mission and Sangam. I have always stood against any such action even if it lost the grants. But it is a difficult question unless the Sangam can substitute the grant for the government. If a family becomes Christian and thus loses the grants the children have been getting in the Boarding Schools it means real hardship on the family and they are likely to hesitate to become registered Christians if they thereby lose the grants” (John Banninga to Rev. Alden Clark, Dec. 18, 1942 [ABC 16.1.9 1940-49, Box 4, Folder 2]).

Maintaining a caste-less identity on school documents and encouraging people to register publicly as “Indian Christians”, a process not inherent at all in church baptism, was paramount in the eyes of these two missionaries.

²⁵ Letter of Lloyd Lorbeer Secretary of the AMM to Raymond Dudley, Secretary of the ABCFM (ABC 16.1.9 1940-1949 Box 5: 21).

²⁶ In contrast to this tension between the old missionary fantasy and the counterpulls of both government grants and the need for political harmony, the AMM was very willing to transfer caste-specific Government grants to “Hindus” in its schools. In May of 1918, the AMM voted to participate in a reclamation scheme for Kuravar children, four years after beginning its involvement in “Kallar Reclamation” (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 21:50 AMM

Minutes May, 1918, page 4; see Ch. 2) . During the same quarterly meetings, the AMM also voted to begin a Training School for Panchamas “on condition that the Government is prepared to meet the entire cost of plant equipment and maintenance...” John X. Miller’s proposal for such a school was accepted in the October 1918 meetings in which government money would fund 20 Panchama students and enlargements to the hostel (Ibid, AMM Minutes for October, 1918, p. 10-11). Shortly after the May meetings, Stanley Vaughan, current secretary of the AMM, notes that because this government money was for “Hindu” Panchamas, “...the proposition does not compromise the Mission in any way on the caste question, but does offer an opportunity to combat it in an unobjectionable way and at the same time opens a large door of opportunity for [Christian] influence...”(Rev. Stanley Vaughan to Rev. W.E. Strong, D.D. Manamadura, 25th May, 1918. [ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 24: 94]). That these were to be “Hindu” Panchamas is confirmed in Vaughan’s October 17, 1918 letter to Strong in which he writes, “So, should the presence of a class of Panchamas scare away a few Brahmin or high caste Hindus, their place will at once be taken by Christians and this, from the Mission standpoint, is all to the good.” (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 24:104). As in the 1892 erection of Pasumalai’s Southfold Hostel for Brahmin (Hindu) students, Pasumalai missionaries were ready to accommodate caste distinctions among un-baptized Hindus to sustain a social proximity necessary for evangelical outreach; but their behavior only confirmed the colonial sociology of caste as a “Hindu” social phenomenon. Even as late as 1935, Lloyd Lorbeer reports that some Hindu Brahmin students of the Teacher Training School, though fewer than in years past, were still refusing to eat with other students (i.e. Christians from non-Brahmin castes) (“Twenty years in India 1915-1935”, Nov. 9, 1935, Pasumalai, [ABC Biographical, Box 37, Folder 13]).

²⁷ Blatant discussions of specific castes and their specific relationship to the church or to the mission were quite common throughout the period of the AMM, as numerous archived letters between missionaries and ABCFM secretaries reveal. Missionaries paid close attention to caste differences in their personal decision-making and analyses of mission, while, no doubt, remaining silent about them in the public sphere of mission institutions and in front of an audience of Tamil Christians. This performance parallels that of AMM Christians themselves.

²⁸ Interview with L. S. Jesupillai, Pasumalai, 5/14/99 Joseph Elder notes a similar pattern of verbally denying caste, followed quickly by contradictory statements (1954: 131)

²⁹ Interview with D. Robert, Pasumalai, 10/22/98

³⁰ Interview with R. Albert, Pasumalai, 2/13/99

³¹ LL Lorbeer to Raymond [Dudley, then secretary of the ABCFM], Pasumalai, May 31, 1949, ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 1940-49 Box 5: Folder 23.

³² As Vijay Prashad has recently noted was the case in Delhi, the category of “sweeper” was largely a colonial invention within metropolitan areas (or, in this case, mission compounds) in which colonizing communities decided, on the basis of an elitist misrepresentation, that manual removal of sewage and trash would be cheaper and more effective than teaching ‘hygiene’ to Indians who they presumed had no notion of it (Prashad 2000: 46-64).

³³ LL Lorbeer, Secretary of the AMM, to Rev. Alden Clark, Boston from Pasumalai, Sept. 4, 1945, ABC 16.1.9 1940-49 Box 1: Folder 7

³⁴ LL and Elva Lorbeer to “Friends Overseas”, Then and Now 1915-1950, Pasumalai, November 9, 1950 (ABC 16.1.9 Biographical Collection, Box 37, Folder 13)

³⁵ Interview with Jeparaj David, Pasumalai, 2/12/99

³⁶ Interview with Nagappan, Pasumalai, 2/18/99

³⁷ One of the family identified himself as a “Totti”, a caste traditionally associated with cleaning privies. The Fabricius Dictionary associates it with privy cleaning but also with the name “Vettiyan” (1972), another caste traditionally associated with grave-digging (Singh 1993:1296).

³⁸ Interview with Necamani and Manikkam, Pasumalai, 7/1/99

³⁹ Interview with Robert, Pasumalai, 10/22/98

⁴⁰ p. 26 of Pasumalai Schools, Centenary Souvenir. 1845-1945. n.p.

⁴¹ Interview with Necamani and Manikkam, Pasumalai, 7/1/99 and Interview with L.M. Jeevaraj, Pasumalai, 12/13/98

⁴² It should be added that it is not really clear if, by the late colonial period, AMM missionaries really had any alternative in hiring people from multiple castes to perform the regular cleaning of dry latrines. The late colonial process of selecting Chakkiliyars for this work remains unclear to me. I do not know, for example, whether missionaries sought people out from this caste, because they knew they were the only community who would do the work, or whether Chakkiliyar individuals themselves came forward of their own initiative, because they realized the colonial municipality had already constructed it as ‘their’ work.

⁴³ Interview with Isaiah Paulraj, Pasumalai, 3/26/99

⁴⁴ Interview with D.M.R. Dasan, Pasumalai,

⁴⁵ Joseph Elder’s empirical research among four elite congregations in 1953 leads to the conclusion that pastorate committee memberships generally reflected the local proportion of various castes in the parishes (1954: 87). This was true in Pasumalai as well, during my research. During the 1994-1997 term, however, Pasumalai’s Pastorate committee had only 6 of 16 members from Dalit castes. Since it seems implausible to me that the caste composition of Pasumalai’s church membership was only 38% in 1994, considering that my 1998-99 sample survey of resident Christians yielded a figure of 64% Dalit, it appears that there was lag between when Pasumalai’s church membership became predominantly Dalit and when its pastorate committee began to reflect that shift.

⁴⁶ In 1980, the Pasumalai pastorate committee had 19 members, only 5-6 of whom were from Pallar or Paraiyar communities. To my knowledge, no Chakkiliyar Christians have ever been on the pastorate committee; their class status alone makes this unlikely as does continued caste stigma.

⁴⁷ The first 100 AMM “workers”, as of 1851, belonged to different castes in the following proportions: Vellalar (40%); Paraiyar (28%); Nadars (8%); Vanniyars (5%); Chettiyar (4%); Pallars (3%); Ambattan (3%); Akamutiyar [Devar caste] (2%); 1 each from Gentu (?), Reddiyar, Maravar, Kapiliar, and Valluvar castes (Chandler 1910: 98; I have altered spellings to their modern, conventional equivalents). Including the Valluvar individual we see that fully 32% of the earliest mission workers were from communities now considered “SC” or “Dalit.” Dalits therefore were most likely underrepresented, but not, by any means, totally neglected from the mission’s political hierarchy. Since many of the early AMM workers came from other missions, however, and even from Roman

Catholic families, it is not at all clear how many of these early Dalit leaders in the church were really from Dalit communities initially baptized within the AMM itself. Many of the Nadar teachers and pastors during the late 19th century actually came from Tirunelveli district and were descendants of converts within the Anglican S.P.G. mission (Devaraj 1998). Their privileged, leveraged entrance into the AMM mission hierarchy, along with similar high level entry by non-Dalits born into other colonial missions, created large lineages of Nadar Christians better poised than most Dalit Christians in the late colonial AMM to obtain elite positions within the mission's vast network of schools and institutions.

⁴⁸ The Pasumalai pastor himself failed in his own 1996 attempt in a four way competition between two Dalit and two Nadar candidates. And the wealthiest Christian families in contemporary Pasumalai still do not include more than a few Christians from these castes, and are still primarily Nadar, Vellalar, Vanniyar, Konar and Maravar families.

⁴⁹ The sole remaining form of untouchability still practiced in Pasumalai is the exclusion of Dalits from Pasumalai's municipally funded Hindu cremation grounds by the southern railway tracks (see Map 2).

⁵⁰ With the added influence of cross-cousin marriage among many Tamil castes, however, widespread inter-caste marriage is as unlikely among CSI Tamils as it is among other Tamils.

⁵¹ While an affinity for intra-caste socializing is evident among other Pasumalai Christians, no one I knew from "the three communities" ever talked with me about it openly or with pride.

⁵² *Cēri* is a Tamil word that literally means "village or hamlet." Although some Tamil village combine the dominant land-owning caste name plus this word as a suffix, the word, used alone, connotes the geographically alienated social space where *Dalits* live throughout rural Tamil Nadu. This is why Tamil friends frequently cautioned me not to use this word in public discourse.

⁵³ This refers to Siva's mythical third eye with which he annihilates "sinners" in various Saivite narratives.

⁵⁴ *Nerrikkan* 4, no. 44 (Jan. 29, 1999)

⁵⁵ Interview with Christopher, Pasumalai, 6/2/99

⁵⁶ Interview with Balamurugan, Pasumalai, 6/15/99

⁵⁷ Interview with C. Ponnaiya, Pasumalai, 4/23/99

⁵⁸ Rev. H.C. Hazen, Sept. 2, 1901, (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 16:182)

⁵⁹ Ponnuswamy offered a 10 year development plan (1945-55), apparently mimicking this Soviet Bloc governmental practice which also became the practice of post-colonial India until 1991 (K.S. Ponnuswamy to Secretary of ABCFM and Executive Secretary of the Madura Church Council, Tirumangalam, September 2, 1944 [ABC 16.1.9 1940-49 Box 3: Folder 27]).

⁶⁰ KS Ponnuswamy to the MCC, the Executive Secretary of the MCC, the Secretary of the Madura Mission Sangam and the Secretary of ABCFM, December 17, 1940 (ABC 16.1.9 1940-49 Box 3: Folder 27).

⁶¹ “No one will gainsay the fact that Christians—from the ordinary layman to the leaders of our Church Council— are caste conscious and caste centred. He who denies it, is a deliberate liar. For instance, however much a depressed class Pastor has advanced in learning and status, a fellow Pastor of a Higher caste will never consent to have any connection with him by marriage” (KS Ponnusamy to Rev. Alden. H. Clarke, Executive Secretary of the ABCFM, Aug. 20, 1941 [ABC 16.1.9 1940-49 Box 3: Folder 27]).

⁶² L.L. Lorbeer, Secretary of the MMS, to Rev. R.A. Dudley, Secretary ABCFM Missions, January 21, 1947 (ABC 16.1.9 1940-49 Box 3: Folder 3)

⁶³ KS Ponnusamy to The Bishop in Charge, M and R Diocese, and the Rev. PaulRaj Thomas, the convenor, and the Members of the Unprivileged Christian Scholarship Committee, Tirumangalam. July 30, 1948 (ABC 16.1.9 1940-49 Box 3: Folder 27).

⁶⁴ *Uvaiṭṭin niṇaivālaya 75 āṇṭu niṇaivu viḷā malar 1904-1979*, page 25-26.

⁶⁵ Despite his desire to prevent caste mobilization within the public sphere of the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese, Jeyaraj’s extensive collection of Pasumalai hagiographies and family histories mentions the specific caste origin of one Pasumalai family whose Maravar lineage Robert married into so controversially in 1949. And in one other family history the caste title “Pillai” is connected to a matrilineal family ancestor. (*Uvaiṭṭin niṇaivālaya 75 āṇṭu niṇaivu viḷā malar 1904-1979*, pages 18 and 33 respectively). Otherwise, caste backgrounds are conveniently elided. That only non-Dalit caste names ‘slipped’ in to this manuscript is *not* a coincidence.

⁶⁶ In Pasumalai, not surprisingly, it is primarily the small Chakkiliyar Christian community in which stigmatized caste identity seems most highly correlated with poverty and under-education.

Notes to Chapter Eight

¹ As of 1991, the Tamil Christian population increased to 3,178, 374 (Based on compiling 1991 Census of India Tables available online: 1) 1991 Population By States and Territories www.censusindia.net/cendat/datatable2.html, and 2) 1991 Table on Major Religions www.censusindia.net/cendat/datatable23.html)

² Jose Kanaikil's empirical survey of 322 Catholic Dalit Christians in Tamil Nadu revealed that 92.2% of the respondents were born Christians, with 67.6% locating the original conversion in their grandparents' generation or earlier (1991: 8).

³ Joseph Elder, in his 1954 Masters' Thesis, documents that only 1.8% of Christians in Madurai's four downtown urban CSI congregations were "converts" (122). Pasumalai would have probably had a similar proportion of baptized converts, being a colony of primarily teachers. In Pasumalai, I only met around 20-30 individuals who had received baptism during their lifetimes. There may be more, but most individuals I met during my community survey had lineal branches that have been Christian for at least 2 or more generations.

⁴ "The policy of our mission from the very first has been to receive under instruction all who apply for Christian teaching, whether they come from one motive or another, hoping to confirm in them a desire for, and secure in them the beginnings of a religious life which may go onto baptism and church membership when they have been prepared to receive these high principles by proper instructors and intelligent choice. Persons so received are classed as adherents, because they regard themselves and are regarded by the Hindu community, as having chosen Christianity and turned their backs on Hinduism" (AMM Annual Report for 1900, pp. 28-29 [ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 11: 5]).

⁵ A large fold out chart is appended to the volume (American Madura Mission Jubilee Volume 1834-1884. Madras: S.P.C.K. Press. 1886) Rufus Anderson's 1874 history of ABCFM missions includes a fold out map of the AMM's mission stations listing the number of "adherents" and "communicants" at each station.

⁶ I found five such Tamil contracts in the AMM records at the Bangalore United Theological Seminary. Box 9, AMM Collection, UTC.

⁷ It is important to note that missionaries were really responding to the widespread self-mobilization of Dalits all over India during the 1930s, especially under the influence of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (a famous Dalit intellectual and critic of Mahatma Gandhi's version of Indian nationalism). Eight months after Ambedkar's announcement that he would convert out of Hinduism, and in the wake of his efforts to get Dalit leaders to abandon Hinduism as well, AMM seminary director, John Banninga, wrote a brief letter in to ABCFM secretaries in Boston (and, perhaps, to potential American funding sources as well) on "Awakening of the Harijans" (Pasumalai, February, 1936; ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 42: 4). Three months later, B.R. Ambedkar gave his famous speech "Why Go for Conversion?" at a conference of Mahars in Bombay (cf. Ambedkar 1981). In his February 1936 letter, Banninga also mentioned the fact that Harijan leaders were actively seeking out church leaders and missionaries to inquire about converting en masse and that 5,000 Dalits in the Madurai area were "waiting to be baptized" (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 42: 4). And, in a fund-raising pamphlet for Pasumalai's institutions, Banninga mentions how he actively got involved in persuading local Dalit leaders to consider mass conversion to Christianity, in September 1936, when he delivered a speech entitled "What Christ and His followers can do for the Oppressed" at a meeting in the village of Tevaram (village sixty miles west of Madurai, at the foot of the western Ghats) held by a Dalit organization entitled "Devandra Vellala Sangam" (in which the famous Dravida Kalakam founder, E.V. Ramasami Naicker also spoke; [ABC 16.1.9 Co. 42: 16]). In January 1938, the Madura Church Council (joint Tamil/missionary body) recorded minute 24 "Evangelism and Harijans. Every pastorate committee is also asked to get full information concerning the number of Harijans living in their pastorate and conditions under which they live and the present movement among them and as well as to do such evangelistic work among them as is possible" (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 33: 91). This stands in sharp contrast to the early work of the Jesuit missionaries to Madurai, for whom Brahmin and other elite castes were the

prime rhetorical target of Christian evangelization (cf. Zupanov 1998). And early on in the ABCFM's dominance of Tamil printed media in 19th century Jaffna, Sri Lanka (circa the 1820s), propaganda and translation work also directed itself primarily at local elite Hindus, who were the only literate people in the period. Highly Sanskritized tracts such as "The Blind Way" presupposed an elite caste audience as well (Young and Jepsen 1995: 146). It wasn't really until the mid-1930s that AMM missionaries like Banninga began to see Dalits as a group to court, even though, up until then, the majority of AMM converts appear to have been Dalits. Certainly, AMM catechists, who were from Dalit castes, and who worked in their natal areas would have targeted their own relatives for Christian evangelization. George Washburn himself 'confessed' the AMM's early intent to evangelize the "self-respecting middle classes" of Madurai (see Ch. 7, note 7). One missionary, William Capron, harbored blatantly anti-Dalit sentiments, perhaps overly influenced by his non-Dalit AMM Christian colleagues, when he wrote the following in the 1871 AMM Annual Report (handwritten), "It should be noted that the greatest sticklers for caste are those whose caste is of the lowest grade, or rather who are outcastes...men of the lowest castes flourish their observance of caste in a manner which is simply contemptible (Madura, January 1872; ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 4: 22)"

⁸ More recently, right wing Hindus have increasingly employed this old evangelical politics of 'marking out the nominal Christian' in order to attack the controversial evangelical work conducted by Indian missionaries in Northern Indian states like Gujarat and Maharashtra (cf. Shah 1999). Charges of "forced conversions" throughout my research stay cleverly employed both a conveniently literal reading of Christian rhetoric about 'converting the heathen object' and the missionary's epistemological obsession with knowing the "true" convert from his nominal peer in order to mark out the crowds of recently baptized tribals as mere adherents.

⁹ Much anthropological literature on conversion, as a whole, seems to reproduce this problematic dichotomy in analyses of political economic or "social" factors (Reina and Schwartz 1974; Firth 1970; Fernandes 1981; Hefner 1987; Kammerer 1990; Merrill 1993; Kipp 1995), on the one hand, and in analyses of intellectualist or phenomenological sources (Horton 1975, Geertz 1973b; Hefner 1993b; Yengoyam 1993: 250; Saunders 1995; Cucchiari 1988) on the other. Such empirical analyses not only presuppose a unitary process of "conversion" but also, as the Comaroffs have rightly pointed out, fail to deal with the historical evangelical connotations of the term in modern parlance (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 248-251). Part of the reason for such divergent models of "conversion" is that the empirical data in each case emerge from Christian communities with vastly different historical forces at work, belying the very notion of a "Christianity" itself. I believe that the vague category of "religion" addresses fundamental matters of human emotion not easily divided into material vs. immaterial or political vs. intellectual motives. And B.R. Ambedkar himself placed the former dichotomy *within* the conversion process itself, seeing spiritual vs. material "aspects" to all conversions (Ambedkar 1981: 9).

¹⁰ Mary Jo Neitz has argued against classic deprivation theories of conversion, which equate motivations of socially disadvantaged group members for joining religious movements with motivations for staying, writing alternatively, "... rewards [for participation] may or may not be what motivated individuals to join in the first place. (1987: 65)"

¹¹ Harold Isaacs mentions how even Hindu Dalits, have been known to identify as Christian or Muslim, interactionally, as a deflecting device (1965: 145)

¹² 47th Annual Report of the AMM by J.S. Burnell, sent to Rufus Anderson from Melur, Jan. 12, 1862, p. 7 (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 4: 13)

¹³ I have only no data concerning what proportion of AMM Dalits were living a middle class lifestyle, because the only analyses that exist do not discuss class divisions within castes. By 1901, with a majority "outcaste" church membership, and 67 years after the AMM had begun missionary work in Madurai district, "one in ten of the community gets its living from mission funds, 2 in ten are so far independent as to be able to live without mission funds or coolie labor, while 7 in ten live in the most hand to mouth manner conceivable." ["The Social and Material Condition of the Native Christian Community with reference to Mission Work" By C.S. Vaughan, Aug. 30, 1901

(ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 16:194)] Only 20% were declared the independent, “most favorable class.” Nearly 50% subsisted as “common coolies”; this phrase most likely indexes Paraiyar and Pallar members of the AMM. But how many of the “most favorable class” were Dalits in 1901 is unclear. For the contemporary period (1999), the Pasumalai pastor guessed that perhaps 20% of his fellow Dalit village Christians in the Diocese have made it to middle class status.

¹⁴ 47th Annual Report of the AMM by J.S. Burnell, sent to Rufus Anderson from Melur, Jan. 12, 1862, p. 13 (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 4: 13)

¹⁵ As early as 1901, in Pasumalai, William Zumbro mentions that both Hindus and AMM Christians were unable to come to the boarding school (for high school) because of the fees charged (William Zumbro to Rev. J. L. Barton, Pasumalai July 22, 1901 (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 19:79). Even the more elite ‘salary earners’ in the AMM at that time—catechists, pastors and teachers—earned anywhere from 7 to 15 rupees per month. As of 1901, he estimates the monthly expenses for one Pasumalai student at 3 rupees (20–45% of these elite monthly incomes) (William Zumbro to Rev. C.H. Daniels, Pasumalai, Sept. 18, 1901. ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 19: 83). Imagining the expenses for educating multiple children on one such income reveals how even the turn of the century AMM “middle class” would have struggled to maintain its own class position. In 1913, John X. Miller writes that 80% of the Pasumalai High School’s Christian students were studying at the expense of American and missionary donors (John X. Miller to Mr. Bell, Pasumalai, Jan. 15, 1914 (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 22: 273); and this was also at a time when Pasumalai schools did have a majority student body (see Appendix A). In 1921, John X. Miller writes in one of his customary “appeal” letters, “We have hundred of poor boys who cannot possibly receive an education unless it is given to them. It is such boys educated in this way that most of our Christian workers come (John X. Miller to Rev. W.E. Strong, March 1, 1921 (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 29:192).” In Pasumalai, John X. Miller took it upon himself to finance scholarships for Christian boys to promote the upward class mobility of an elite few, most likely also screened for what he thought was “good Christian character.” These were in addition to scholarships also given to “Hindus.” Under Miller’s leadership, scholarships also required manual labor (“Report of the Pasumalai High and Training Schools for 1929–1930” by GP James, Headmaster, Box 19, Folder on Pasumalai High and Training School, AMM collection, UTC.). Since the Madras Presidency DPI had offered caste based tuition assistance to Panchama Christians in mission schools as of 1914 (see Ch. 7, note 22), it is not clear that John Miller really needed to have these scholarships. Although direct evidence is not available, he may have used foreign donations and a manual labor policy to allow Christians to forgo caste-based government aid and preserve the utopian identity front he and others advocated among their Christian pupils. The children of Pasumalai’s *Vāttiyārs*, however, would have most likely avoided such ‘degrading’ work, even if it did strain their families’ incomes.

¹⁶ The 1885 Grant-in-Aid Educational code provided the first structured aid to encourage Dalits to attend school (Sandanshiv 1986: 3). Right before and after the turn of the 20th century various programs to help “Panchamas” came into existence, including funding for teacher training (see Chapter 7, endnote 26). Hindu Dalits often received the patronage of missionaries in mission schools (Mallick 1997: 349). Mendelsohn and Vicziany note that Christian missionaries generally were the first to offer untouchables access to education (and obviously in mission schools) (1998: 86). The de facto lack of access to government schools in the late 19th century, due to anti-untouchable discrimination, led to a curious irony: most of India’s early untouchable leaders went to Christian mission schools (though most did not convert) (ibid).

¹⁷ Of course, as Sachchidananda notes, any totally resourceless Dalit, even today, usually needs some form of immediate social patronage to attend school (1977: 85); their laboring income must be substituted from some other source.

¹⁸ In 1878, George Washburn reported that Pasumalai teachers could be earning 5 times as much income in similar positions in Government schools (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 7: 437). In 1914, John X. Miller reports that four teachers resigned because of “low salaries” even compared to other Christian mission schools (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 23: 168). How much lower these were than government salaries at the time is not clear, but, in 1937, Lloyd Lorbeer casually refers to differing rate of salary between MCC teachers and Government teachers in his request for a salary cut

(ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 43: 200). This salary difference was still present as late as Independence, because Madurai District private school teachers went on strike in February 1947 to demand pay equity with Government school teachers (Feb. 18, 1947 letter from Lloyd Lorbeer to the ABCFM secretary [ABC 16.1.9 Box 1940-49, Box 5]).

¹⁹ As Stanley Vaughan noted in 1918, the Normal school had a distinct policy of preferential admission for Christians (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 24:106). It was also part of a broader plan to increase the influence of *Christian* teachers in the educational field but primarily helped create a significant middle class Christian teaching elite in the Diocese. As of 1935, R.A. Dudley, then secretary of the Madura Mission Sangam, noted that “We admit no student whose application is not signed by some school manager who promises to employ the teacher after his training...” (R.A. Dudley to Dr. Clark and Miss Emerson, Secretaries of the ABCFM, [ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 34: 61]).

²⁰ “When our Seminary shall have been in operation a considerable time, it will set before the eyes of the people a class of men, of confessedly superior knowledge, comfortably supported, and consequently respectable. Many will naturally desire such situations for their sons and orphan nephews. If none but preachers could obtain them, the native ministry would probably become a very corrupt body, whereas, a free choice of employment will operate as a safety valve [with] which to let off the secularity, and keep the ministry pure. It is always to be kept in mind that to become a preacher in this country, is not looked upon as cutting off a man from all hope of pecuniary profit above a slender maintenance, as it does in most cases in America; but rather as an elevation from deep poverty to tolerable comfort” (Tracy and North hoped for a time when more lucrative financial opportunities would appear to tempt the ‘worldly’ out of clerical work; William Tracy and Alfred North to Rev. R Anderson, Madura, Oct. 21, 1845, [ABC 16.1.5]).

²¹ The Pasumalai Pastor estimated that 20% of the Diocese’s “Dalit” Christians might be described as educated and well off. Another pastor from the same community placed a lower guess at 10%. A survey of this kind was beyond my ability and means. But it is commonly understood that the larger Catholic Tamil population has a much lower percentage of privileged Dalits in its ranks, a social community where “middle class” and elite, dominant caste status truly are synonymous (Irudayaraj 1990: 23-26).

²² Interview with Devasahayam, Pasumalai, 10/99

²³ As early as the 1940s, Pasumalai teachers began this tradition of squatting in their allotted mission homes after retirement, “At Pasumalai two teachers retired from service two or three years ago but we have been unable to persuade them to vacate their houses, even though several present teachers are without houses on the compound” (Lloyd Lorbeer, Kodaikanal to Alden Clark and R.A. Dudley, Secretaries of the ABCFM, May 9, 1944, [ABC 16.1.9 1940-49 Box 1, Folder 7]).

²⁴ My recognition of this Government grade hierarchy owes itself to Isaacs’ explanation (1965:109-110)

²⁵ This is an extra long *vēṣṭi*, wrapped around the waist first, then tucked through the legs and tied in the back as a divided skirt. My landlord confirmed the use of this vestment by late colonial Pasumalai teachers.

²⁶ The actual word in the Old Version BSI Tamil Bible (*Paricutta Vētākamam*) is simply *cāstiri* (learned man). The word in the play, however, is based on the Tamil word for “astronomy”: *vāṇacāstiram* (see Fabricius 1972: 869). While the very text of Matthew makes no attempt to hide the fact that these three men were using astrological hermeneutics to predict Christ’s birth, the play’s authors avoided the Tamilized Sanskrit word used by most Tamil Hindus for “astrologer” *jōṭṭar*.

²⁷ Interview with Tankam, Pasumalai, 3/28/99

²⁸ Interview with Charles, Pasumalai, 9/19/99

²⁹ Interview with Paul, Pasumalai, 2/15/99

³⁰ Pasumalai has several Dalit Christian social workers, including Paul and his older brother. Sachchidananda has already documented the maximal mobility experienced by public servants, social workers and legislators of Dalit background, yet he notes that most of those performing social work were doing so because “they have nothing else to do. They are in search of some employment (1976: 97).” This is an unfair depiction, because it overlooks the fact that social work may be one rare social space where vulgar discrimination at the work place or outing one’s caste to get a job (as in government careers based on government quotas for Scheduled Castes) is potentially obviated.

³¹ Middle class Christians generally do not lounge alone, or for very long with Christian friends, at these Devar-dominated spaces which are, for them, also lower class, semi-educated spaces where middle class *māṇam* (honor) can only corrode with prolonged exposure.

³² Interview with Devasahayam, Pasumalai, 9/98

³³ According to the 1999-2000 Statement of Posts and Scales of Pay, Tamil Nadu, page 95.

³⁴ Interview with Devasahayam, Pasumalai 2/15/99

³⁵ For working class Dalit Christians like Devasahayam, the position of Bishop itself has become a metonym for a greedy, insensitive church elite (which some feel is anti-Dalit). Certainly, the visible material culture of the Bishop was well elaborated during my research. Multiple air-conditioned cars, a sealed, modern air conditioned office in a dilapidated Diocesan office building with purely decorative ceiling fans in all the other rooms, and accommodation in a large two story missionary bungalow are only some of the reasons for a quiet resentment toward the church hierarchy.

³⁶ Interview with Devasahayam, Pasumalai, 2/15/99

³⁷ Interview with Tankam, Pasumalai, 3/28/99

³⁸ One Diocesan official I spoke with argued that stringent annual accreditation for the school has incurred large annual expenses that simply didn’t exist before. Therefore, the Diocese has no other choice than to ask for help from those who will soon be benefiting from teacher training or the Government salaries acquired through Diocesan or Government school employment (Interview with Christudas, Madurai, 6/2/99).

³⁹ According to Christudas, the Diocese now even asks for 50% of an office “peon’s” first year salary as a “donation” (Rs. 15,000 as against the Rs. 50,000 Devasahayam claims he was asked) to acquire the position and even larger “donations” to get a seat in the Teachers’ Training School.

⁴⁰ This was still possible in the late 1940’s, according to the salary scale for the new Madurai-Ramnad Diocese of the Church of South India. Men who had graduated the 5th form (U.S. eighth grade) and had obtained teacher training could earn Rs. 21-27 a month, more than a church catechist (ABC 16.1.9 1940-49 Box 3, Folder 22, “M.C.C. Salary Scales from Jan. 1 1940 to date” [January 1947]).

⁴¹ Interview with D.R. Joshua, Pasumalai, 9/11/99. Apparently, before 1972, low-grade teachers in Christian schools, especially, faced a perilous retirement if they had not amassed considerable savings earlier through side income such as “owning milk cows and rice fields” (see Ch. 2).

⁴² Near the end of my stay, Devasahayam's old habit of public political mobilization, though primarily in a pro-Dalit idiom, paid off in an ironic way. Much as he had fought for and won various concessions his natal people, as a *Christian* member of the then ruling DMK party, near the end of my stay, he was able to fight and win a government loan to operate a private, Christian Teacher Training School, based on government funds available to members of "Minority" communities such as the Christian and Muslim populations. On July 1, 1999, Tamil Nadu established the Tamil Nadu Minorities Economic Development Corporation, which may have provided money for his school. Political connections in the ruling DMK provided an alternative space where this fifth grade educated villager, a former office assistant, a man without even a bicycle (Rs. 1,500 and up), obtained some measure of symbolic revenge *as a Christian* for what he perceives as his family's cruel rebuff in a Diocese where one's Christian identity *alone* is not always sufficient to yield the patronage necessary to mobilize working class selves upward.

Notes to Chapter Nine

¹ Interview with V. Gnanaraj, Pasumalai, 6/95

² The reader should also be aware of two very famous elite Dalit autobiographies (Hazari 1969; Singh 1997).

³ Interview with V. Gnanaraj, Pasumalai, 6/95

⁴ Interview with V. Gnanaraj, Pasumalai, 6/95

⁵ Interview with Sattiyanesan, Pasumalai, 5/4/99

⁶ Gnanaraj claimed his father was 75 years old in 1995, meaning he was born in 1920. He also claimed he was around ten years old when he came to Pasumalai for schooling and catechist training. Oddly, though, he claimed that his father received baptism at the age of 12. Since I know he began his catechist fieldwork by 1935, in the Bates Evangelist program (see notes below), he would have had at least two years of training at the Pasumalai seminary prior to this date. But it is possible he was there for three or four years, considering the fact that he would have had very poor literacy skills upon arrival. I briefly attempted to interview Vedamanikkam myself in 1999; but after twenty minutes collecting basic information, I realized his habitual laconicism masked a painful senility that would have made the dredging of distant memories difficult.

⁷ And, even in the early years of the AMM's work in Madurai District, there is evidence of organized Paraiyar group interest in the mission and its version of Christianity. The earliest example of Paraiyars actively seeking out the mission comes from an 1846 letter from William Tracy to ABCFM secretary Rufus Anderson, "The spirit of inquiry has been excited in many other places and repeated calls have been made for catechists. In one place 40 or 50 families of Pariahs have expressed a desire to renounce heathenism." (ABC 16.1.5: 222, p. 4)

⁸ The earliest evidence of Bates being associated with AMM evangelism is a 1918 letter from Rev. Harold Cooper to Rev. W.E. Strong, Madura, 7/5/1918, (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 21: 281).

⁹ *Charles S. Bates Correspondence and Reports*, Folder 13, ABCFM, Houghton Library

¹⁰ This is one variant of a common problem during this early period of Indian Dalit class mobility. Isaacs notes that child marriages often became problematic after a Dalit man became educated (Isaacs 1965:98); a similar shift in class identity to that Vedamanikkam enacted, though without the added divisiveness engendered by a religious conversion.

¹¹ An entry for him in the 1935 Bates Evangelist Expense list indicates \$36 spent on his salary during his first six months under the fund (roughly \$6 a month). And, in 1936, the exchange rate was 2.6 rupees to the U.S. Dollar (1936 Bates Evangelist Expenses, *Charles S. Bates Correspondence and Reports*, Folder 13, ABCFM, Houghton Library).

¹² This was a salary on par with that of a first year Diocesan teacher who had passed the "intermediate" or pre-matriculation curriculum (U.S. 11th and 12th grades) plus Teacher Training requirements (ABC 16.1.9 1940-49 Box 3, Folder 22, "M.C.C. Salary Scales from Jan. 1 1940 to date" [January 1947]). Their

salaries, separately, were equivalent to what untrained men with only an eighth grade education would have received as Diocesan teachers.

¹³ Interview with Sattiyanesan, Pasumalai, 5/4/99

¹⁴ David Mosse has already noted the dramatic withdrawal of these key sources of missionary patronage among both Protestant and Catholic Tamils in one rural Ramnad District village during the early 1980s (1994: 84 and 88).

¹⁵ Interview with Mani, Vedapuram, 10/18/99. Isaac told me another version of this fight, from the perspective of *childhood* memories. Vedapuram's land was, he agreed, formerly land owned by a Raja living in Devakkottai and related, by caste/kinship, to the nearby Sivagangai Raja. The early Paraiyar converts had originally worshipped at an AMM church in Devakkottai town, near a Brahmin neighborhood. Upset at this, Isaac claims, the Brahmins complained to the Raja about the "Veda people" and their "Veda hut" being so near to them. The Raja then donated some of his own land to the Paraiyar converts to build their own thatch roofed church near their own natal village. Isaac feels that the acquisition of nearby land 'arrogantly' close to the road was what made local Udaiyars jealous *and* nervous. They wondered if 'their' Paraiyar laborers would suddenly "stop respecting their talk," if they joined the same religion. Thus started the stealing of Vedamanikkam's cows (cf. Mani's story) and the fighting and the ban on entering the *ūr* (also a de facto boycott on hiring them for ritual and other labor).

¹⁶ Interview with Isaac, Vedapuram, 10/19/99

¹⁷ David Mosse mentions how Christian Dalits in Ramnad District have historically manipulated sources of missionary patronage as a means of protesting and re-negotiating their subordination to other local castes, especially in so-called "ritual labor" (1994).

¹⁸ David Mosse's research in the early 1980s also revealed that Christian Dalits in rural Ramnad district had replaced the traditional *parai* with these two "Carnatic" instruments, referring to the former as *acinkam* (Mosse 1994: 87-88). In other words, they appear to have internalized the stigma placed on these older, less costly instruments, the stigma that marks them out as metonyms of untouchable ritual labor in Tamil society. Despite this internalization of stigma, Sattiyathan Clarke (1999) has made the controversial theological suggestion that the *parai* drum might actually become a positive metonym of a proud, liberative, Dalit Christian theology.

¹⁹ Interview with V. Gnanaraj, Madurai, 6/95

²⁰ Interview with V. Gnanaraj, Madurai, 6/95

²¹ Interview with Sattiyanesan, Pasumalai, 5/4/99

²² For many similar "Dalit" Christians in Christian boarding schools, private outings of caste identity by fellow students, such as in an incident that one of Isaacs' informants narrates (1965:43), would most likely have been less frequent than in schools attended in or near one's natal village where most everyone would know 'from where' you walked to school every day.

²³ See Appendix B for Pasumalai's data. Gnanaraj himself mentioned in 1995 that the famous Tamil medium, O.C.P.M. Girls High School in Madurai is "97% Hindu" (Interview with V. Gnanaraj, Madurai, 6/95). In Chapter 3 I referred to the contemporary Hindu domination of former AMM schools like

Pasumalai which are Tamil medium in a moment when Madurai's CSI Tamil middle class are rapidly abandoning the old mission schools their parents attended, in favor of newer English medium high schools. But, by the late 1940s, Pasumalai's schools had already become primarily Hindu dominated. In a 1949 letter from Lloyd Lorbeer to Raymond Dudley, Lorbeer explains why, after World War II, former AMM schools became Hindu dominated: "I am afraid that we have gone after large enrolments to increase our fees with a result that some times hardly 10 per cent of a class is Christian...[handwritten] What applies to Pasumalai is also widespread in "Christian" institutions" (Lloyd Lorbeer to Raymond Dudley, Pasumalai, 9/21/1949, ABC 16.1.9 1940-49, Box 5, Folder 22). Keeping large high schools financially afloat apparently required larger enrollments, decreasing the *proportion of Christians*. Several missionaries decried this conversion of formerly Christian dominated AMM schools as a "secularization" or "communalization" process.

²⁴ Interview with V. Gnanaraj, Madurai, 6/95

²⁵ Interview with Sattiyanesan, Pasumalai, 5/4/99

²⁶ During my research, one of Gnanaraj's relatives from Vedapuram was working as a temporary adjunct teacher in one of Pasumalai's Diocesan schools for the domestic servant's salary of Rs. 500 per month. He was in the same financial position as Devasahayam's eldest son (see Ch. 8).

²⁷ My own, admittedly non-quantitative, impression is that the wider Dalit Christian middle class of the CSI's Madurai-Ramnad Diocese is still disproportionately more dependent on church jobs than their non-Dalit middle class peers, lacking the kind of savings or property that have facilitated further mobility out of the church political economy. This situation is rapidly changing, however.

²⁸ Interview with V. Gnanaraj, Madurai, 6/95

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ And, in contrast to the most sought after path to social mobility in the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese, a job as a Diocesan schoolteacher, Gnanaraj's choice of career very much foregrounds his Christian identity by virtue of the very verbal performances that constitute it. While, in battles for promotion and seniority, Christian teachers may and do argue they have performed Christian "service" during long careers at Diocesan schools, the status of *Vāṭṭiyār* (teacher) is not primarily grounded in moral capital. It is understood primarily as a career based on knowledge and economic capital. During my research, many Christian teachers from Dalit backgrounds in Madurai-Ramnad Diocesan schools were caught in a surging Nadar-Dalit caste politics emergent within a broader institutional politics of seniority and promotion, all the while unable to accrue anything comparable to the moral capital earned by performing one's self as a 'righteous preacher of the Word.'

³¹ Sachchidananda notes that elite Dalits in Bihar tend to avoid networking with their caste peers, though the reasons are not always precisely clear (1977: 83).

³² Vincentnathan critiques the "folk" association of Paraiyars with certain forms of ritual labor, which, she argues, has never been their prime occupation (1987: 256-258).

³³ This distorted vision is no doubt due primarily to his mentor, Richard Keithan, a highly unique AMM missionary who opposed Christian evangelism and, instead, supported grassroots social gospel philanthropy and Gandhian community transformation (cf. Keithan 1973). Richard Keithan and Charles

Heinemann were part of the last wave of AMM missionaries who had always shared power with local Tamil Christians and whose version of the “social gospel” was both central to their work and unaccompanied by the class elitist lifestyle led by the previous generation of AMM missionaries. The beginning of social welfare ministry in the AMM [e.g. rural uplift, vocational and technical training, and medical mission work], however, actually dates to the turn of the century (cf. Blaufass 2000)

³⁴ And, if they can avoid it, most CSI pastors and middle class CSI teachers do not live in the villages in which they work. For example, I knew two CSI pastors living in Pasumalai, in Diocesan housing, whose pastorates were actually rural towns in Madurai District far from the elite schools and urban rhythms of Madurai city.

³⁵ Interview with J. Jeparani, Madurai, 10/4/99

³⁶ Isaacs received similar narratives of rental discrimination (1965:134-136).

³⁷ Confirming Ram’s sociological findings, Michael’s family history indicates that middle class Dalits living beyond their natal regions share a problematic incongruity between their class and caste statuses (1995: 444), the latter bearing the lurking weight of a continued stigma.

Notes to Chapter Ten

¹ Gustav Diehl's 1953 survey-based field study of Lutheran Christian villages in southern India does not address the issue of reconversion at all (Diehl 1965). J. F. Seumarine's detailed case study of the Arya Samaj's reconversion ritual known as 'suddhi' (1977) is very well detailed but, oddly enough, does not explore anywhere the various motives for Indian Christians who undergo this ritual purification ceremony.

² Throughout this chapter, I will use "welfare" to gloss two Indian English terms and their Tamil correlates, "reservations" (*otukkīnu*) and "concessions" (*calukai*). As Galanter phrases it, "compensatory discrimination" includes three major components in modern India: 1) "reservations which allot or facilitate access to valued positions or resources" (seats in educational institutions and political bodies), 2) "programs involving expenditure or provision of services—e.g., scholarships, grants, loans, land allotments, health care, legal aid to a beneficiary group beyond comparable expenditures for others", and 3) "special protections" such as laws against forced labor and the practice of untouchability (1984: 43-44).

³ Cited in Kananaikil 1983:13 and Galanter 1984:144 in Webster 1994:137.

⁴ This order confirmed the 1936 colonial Scheduled Castes act that also argued that no "Indian Christian" would be considered a Scheduled Caste (Kananaikil 1983:12). And, in a 1944 letter, American missionary Lloyd Lorbeer passed on information from the Department of Public Instruction that Indian Christians from Scheduled Castes were not being classified only as "Indian Christians" in statistics of "Scheduled Caste" educational attainment rates (ABC 16.1.9 1940-49 Box 5, Folder 21, Lorbeer to Raymond Dudley, 11/25/1944). Marc Galanter mentioned this double standard in a 1966 article on the intersection of religious and caste identities in Indian law. He asks the three crucial questions raised by this presidential order, "Who is a Hindu? What is the role of caste in deciding who is a Hindu? What is the role of Hinduism in determining membership in a caste group?" (1966: 299). It should also be noted that Christians from Scheduled Tribes are *not* excluded from ST status. Neither are MBC fisherpeople from the old Catholic Paravar and Mukkuvar communities excluded from that reservation category, at least in Tamil Nadu.

⁵ Letter No. 18/4/58-SCT IV dated 23 July 1959 from the Deputy Secretary to Gov't of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi, to all State Governments and Union Administrations (Copied in Kananaikil 1983: Appendix V).

⁶ See Ministry of Law and Justice, Act. No. 15 of 1990, 3-6-1990, reproduced in Muttuswamy and Brinda 1996:172.

⁷ Backward Classes Commission of Tamil Nadu 1970, Vol. 1, p. 16

⁸ This is based on current Tamil Nadu Government lists passed on as a personal internet communication (10/4/01) by Dr. M.S.S. Pandian, Madras, India.

⁹ Marc Galanter cites two post-colonial Tamil court cases (in 1952 and in 1969) in which Christians unsuccessfully challenged the 1950 Order. But, in both cases, the judges justified the denial of SC status on the basis that Christians, upon conversion or birth, have no caste, because "Christianity" prohibits caste distinctions (1984: 312-318). The assumption made by the judges concerned, and elsewhere in the Indian public sphere, is that since Christian rhetoric prohibits caste, it is not reasonable to assume the experience of caste stigma by anyone calling themselves a Christian. Whether knowingly or not, these court judges have transformed an old, often privately subverted, Protestant taboo against caste identity performance in the public sphere of mission institutions into legal presumption about the objective experience of untouchability or anti-Dalit prejudice [as

Galanter also notes (1984: 318)]. In 1985, a fourth generation Chakilayar Catholic Tamil named Soosai lost a famous Supreme Court case arguing against the 1950 order, reaffirming the firm position of Dalit Christians in the Backward Classes.

¹⁰ In Tamil Nadu today, Christians are automatically eligible for BC status unless they are verifiable converts. In partial concession to complaints by Christian leaders, they are also entitled to *limited* central government OBC privileges, “Converts to Christianity from scheduled castes, irrespective of the generation of conversion for the purpose of reservation of seats in Educational Institutions and for seats in Public Service (Muttuswamy and Brinda 1996: 801).” In the 1970s, four states, in particular, developed provisions to give *some* state aid to converts from Scheduled Castes on par with Scheduled Caste Hindus (Kananaikil 1983: 15).

¹¹ I thank Sandanshiv for alerting me to the specific act that initiated welfare for the “depressed” communities (1986: 3)

¹² They were initially termed “Panchamas” and then the “Depressed Classes.” Then, with the Government of India Act of 1936, they became the “Scheduled Castes.”

¹³ “Policy Note on Backward Classes, Most Backward Classes and Minorities Welfare Department” available at www.tn.gov.in/policy/bcmbc%2De%Dp.html

¹⁴ From public information posted on educationindia.com at www.educationinfoindia.com/compExams/Tamilnadu%20medical.html

¹⁵ I did not collect data on prevalence of Pasumalai’s SC Christians applying for their BC welfare benefits. One church member, however, told me that, initially, “When [they] entered ‘Indian Christian’...they were not aware of the privileges and benefits given to the BC/OBC/SC/STs as they worked in Christian schools-institutions and lived in institution-houses at Christian compounds. (personal correspondence, 5/18/2001)” The sheltering effect of being a Diocesan employee in a mission compound like Pasumalai delayed the quest for welfare concessions necessary. Andrew Wingate also noted, during his 1981-1982 field research among Madurai-Ramnad Diocese’s rural congregations, that many recent “converts” were ignorant of the fact that becoming “Christian” [legally] might mean losing welfare concessions (1997: 182). During my research, however, I did sense that knowledge of reservation benefits does exist among rural CSI Tamils in the Madurai Diocese and certainly among those living in Pasumalai. But, this contemporary awareness is also part of the Pasumalai Christian community’s increasing independence from the political economy of the church which, for so long, was the main pathway of class mobility for CSI Tamils in Pasumalai. Now, educated CSI Tamils, even SC Christians, are seeking other modes of middle class life.

¹⁶ The title of this thesis is *Kiristuvarkaḷ Intu Camayattai Taḷuvutal Kāraṇaṇiḷaḷum Matippitum* (Reasons for, and an Evaluation of, Christians Embracing the Hindu Religion).

¹⁷ Adisayam does not use a Tamil translation of the phrase “reconversion” *marumatamāṛṛam* to describe the phenomenon of Christian conversion to Hinduism, but rather a phrase best translated as ‘embracing Hinduism.’ The word “reconversion” may have offensive implications for some Indian Christians in that it implies a return to “Hinduism” inapplicable to any *born* Christian. This verb *taḷuva* (to embrace, to hug) is a customary Tamil metaphor for adopting a religion but also connotes more of an emotional involvement than the Tamil word commonly used to gloss the English “conversion” *matamāṛṛam* (lit. religious change).

¹⁸ I confirmed this legal issue with a current CSI Pastor who lives in Pasumalai (Interview with Rev. Selvaraj, Pasumalai, 6/14/99)

¹⁹ It is also possible that some Indian Christians may simply substitute ancillary Tamil names for any foreign-sounding Bible names, so they can claim “Hindu” identity.

²⁰ Adisayam described the stages of the ritual as follows: 1) Purchase pamphlets criticizing Christianity and published by the *Intu Tarma Pirācāra Saikam* (Hindu Dharma Preaching Society). 2) Enter the Monastery shirtless. 3) Worship the *ātīṇam* in full prostration. 4) Smear sacred ash (*vipuṭi*) on the *ātīṇam*'s forehead. 5) Give two oranges as an offering to the *ātīṇam* and receive sacred ash from him. 6) Listen to the *ātīṇam* preach against Christianity. 7) Receive a new name from the *ātīṇam*. 8) Receive three certificates, one of which is used to authenticate one's conversion to Hinduism for use by government authorities (Adisayam 1978: 41-49). Diehl notes, as did a Brahmin priest I interviewed in TPK, that Saivites have traditionally cultivated four forms of *tīṭccai* each corresponding to a higher grade of devotion (see Diehl 1965: 84n).

²¹ From “Matam Māṇum Kristuvarkaḷ”, by Saktivel, *Nakeeran*, 25-12-98, pp. 6-7

²² Verifying SC and ST identity has already been the subject of numerous Government Orders from both central and Tamil Nadu governments. And, on September 19, 2000, the Tamil Nadu Adi-Dravidar Welfare Department issued Letter 81 instructing district collectorates *not* to issue Scheduled Caste certificates to Christian reconverts to Hinduism who had been born to Christian parents. The letter bases its recommendations on the dismissal of a 1996 Supreme Court case in which the petitioner's birth as a Christian was deemed to nullify all claims to Scheduled Caste status, despite his reconversion to Hinduism at the age of 14. This new development will either slow the trend to reconversion itself, or it may simply increase the amount of local graft passing from legal reconverts to certificate issuing authorities.

²³ The current *ātīṇam* confirmed that his predecessor, whom Adisayam had met, had conducted reconversion ceremonies for Christians.

²⁴ The caste name in his organization is derived from the name Arunthathi, a character in the Ramayana, who is mythically linked to the origin of this caste. ‘Originally’ he claimed, the caste was high status, but has become degraded. This fits a broader pattern of caste renaissance movements in which ‘low castes’ project myths of vaunted origin (cf. Hardgrave 1969).

²⁵ This is the date given to me by a local Hindu ADMK political activist who moved to Ambedkar Nagar in 1983. She said the ADMK party leader at the time, “MGR”, ‘gave her this land’, referring to the fact that it was under MGR's rule that this government scheme for free SC house plots began.

²⁶ This conclusion is based on participation in the Pasumalai Church's 1998 Carol Rounds tour of Ambedkar Nagar. And I only really confirmed that one of these land-owning families is a SC Christian family.

²⁷ Interview with Mutturaj, Pasumalai, 1/5/99

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Although I never got his exact birth year, he was born no earlier than 1956, since that was the year his mother was married. The other factor here is that non-SC job reservations have a lower age limit than SC reservations. Of the 5576 individuals who converted at the Madurai Adeenam between 1972 and 1978, 90% declared themselves unemployed and half were over the age of 26. These two statistics strongly suggest the

preponderance of SC Christians, even though Adisayam presents no direct evidence that this was the case. As of 1979, the cut off date for receiving most job reservations was age 26, whereas, for Scheduled Castes, it was 32 (1979: 53-54). Interviewees I spoke with confirmed that the 32 age limit still held for SCs in the late 1990s.

³⁰ Interview with Mutturaj, Pasumalai, 1/5/99

³¹ The Arya Samaj's involvement in "reconversion" is not a recent development but has been going on for much of this century. As J.F. Seunarine notes, the Samaj has had the goal of "uplifting" untouchables from the early days of Swami Dayananda in the late 19th century (1977:13). Part of this uplift project, apparently, includes reclaiming untouchable bodies gone 'astray' from the Hindu fold.

³² This development complicates what Marc Galanter observes in his famous volume *Competing Equalities*, namely that the 1950 Scheduled Castes Order "does not establish or sanction such a positive religious test. It does not require anyone to profess Hinduism, much less practice it. It merely requires that he does not profess a different religion (1984: 311)." A new interest in knowing the "true reconvert", in assessing the "Hindu" practice of the reconverted individual, has apparently emerged without any clear legal justification.

³³ Interview with Adisayam, 10/19/00

³⁴ Interview with Neill, Pasumalai, 9/6/99

³⁵ Interview with Rev. Gnanapirakasam, 8/27/99

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ This concept of *ācīrvātam* (blessing) bespeaks the moral economy of the "promise" discussed in Chapter 4; but, in the example he gave, the promise fulfilled itself unexpectedly, thus distinguishing this view of promise fulfillment from the miracle talk of preachers like D.G.S. Dinagan.

³⁸ From an essay "Industrial Work and Rural Reconstruction in the American Madura Mission" in the *Madura Mission Centenary: Scrapbook of the American Madura Mission of the A.B.C.F.M.*, 1934, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, folio 817.69 A513.1 A512ma 1934, p. 31

³⁹ Interview with Rev. Gnanapirakasam, 8/27/99

⁴⁰ Interview with J. Thomas, Pasumalai, 4/9/99

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Interview with J. Thomas, Pasumalai, 4/18/99

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Interview with R. Albert, Pasumalai, 2/13/99

⁴⁵ Interview with Mutturaj's mother, Pasumalai, 4/25/99. In fact, Mutturaj's mother says no missionaries at all were here when she came to Pasumalai in 1956. The last long term missionary residents, Lorbeer and Heinemann were both gone by April 1957. Rev. C. P. Heinemann left on furlough by 1956 and never worked in Pasumalai again. Lloyd Lorbeer left India permanently in April, 1957.

⁴⁶ I did not make a survey of non-Dalit Christian opinions on this matter, because I assumed that caste jealousy more than religious ideology would color any opinion on the matter.

⁴⁷ Interview with Robert, Pasumalai, 10/22/98

⁴⁸ Interview with S. Rajanayaham, Pasumalai, 10/2/99.

⁴⁹ Interview with Neill, Pasumalai, 9/6/99.

⁵⁰ Interview with G. Jeparani, Tirunagar, 10/4/99

⁵¹ For example, see Matthew 26:34 in the Old Version of the BSI Tamil Bible (1956).

⁵² Matthew 27: 75; Mark 14: 72; Luke 22: 61-62.

⁵³

Act 10, Scene 3 Peter's *Maṛutalippu* (Denial)

Guard 1: (shivering) Will they soon catch the disciples of the one from Nazareth?

Guard 2: If they do catch them, it will soon get rather entertaining.

Female Servant of Caiaphas [High Priest of the Jews] (sprinkling water in the courtyard, she sees Peter in the light and stares at him) Are you also one who wanders with Jesus of Nazareth?

Peter: I have never been with him.⁵³ I don't know the man of whom you speak. I have never known him.

(Peter rises and slowly departs)

Guard 1: It's cold. Come. We'll bring him [Jesus] over there. (As they bring Jesus past, he meets Peter and looks at him lovingly)

Peter: (his eyes closed, unable to tolerate the sight) Ahh! What a tender and merciful gaze. Oh blessed one! Am I your disciple, having just denied (*maṛutali*) you? Am I your friend? No. No. I am a thankless sinner. Oh merciful lord! You gave me the name "He of stone"!⁵³ But alas! I stood without the courage to say the truth before even a woman. Is my guru *bakti* (devotion) nothing more than this? Did I follow you for this? Even though you warned me that before the cock crows twice I would deny (*maṛutali*) you, I denied (*maṛutali*) you. Your merciful gaze is upon I who have denied (*maṛutali*) you, and it pains my heart so. Ahh! Is there anyone who does not know the power of the love divine! Oh friend of sinners who weep with broken hearts. You alone are my refuge! Please endure this crime. Oh being of love! Oh cloud that pours forth mercy! *Apayam! Apayam!*

My translation from the third and final printed edition of the script *Teyviha Anpu: Kīristu Perumāṇ Vāḷkkaiyiṅ Tirukkāṭci* Love Divine: the Life of Jesus in Drama Form, Prepared by the Pasumalai Community, edited by VPK Sundaram and LL Lorbeer, 1957.

⁵⁴ No self-identifying Christian of Dalit heritage I talked to argued that parity in concessions should not be given. Even several non-Dalit Christians, including the Nadar Bishop of the CSI Madurai Diocese supported the removal of the 1950 Order's religious double standard. Such apparently widespread support suggests that even church elites have accepted the performance of caste identities in the governmental sphere as necessary and implicitly acceptable.

⁵⁵ At another level, though, the struggle for parity of concessions may also help reduce political pressure heaped on non-Dalit bishops and church leaders who, as we saw in Ch. 7, often become targets of local Dalit Christian frustration. In other words, such support is also a diversionary tactic for Indian Christian church leaders who would very much like to transfer the problem of their underdeveloped SC Christian membership back onto the central and state governments. And Dalit church leaders, like the Pasumalai Pastor, also gain politically by such support as they try to rally their less privileged caste peers around them in their own pursuit of political mobility within a church hierarchy.

⁵⁶ Interview with Jeparani, Madurai, 10/4/99

⁵⁷ Many people believe that performances of caste and religious identity are *required*, although a 1973 Tamil Nadu G.O. makes it clear that disclosing one's caste or religion is voluntary (TN G.O. #1210, Education Department, dated July 2, 1973). And, in confirmation of this GO's de facto non-enforcement, in July, 2000 the TN government reissued the 1973 orders, publicly acknowledging that many school authorities are not granting people their right to non-disclosure (TN G.O. #205, Education Department, dated July 31, 2000).

⁵⁸ Interview with G. Jeparani, Madurai, 10/4/99

⁵⁹ Ram echoes Isaacs' comment in his study of urban Dalit elites in Uttar Pradesh. Elite Hindu Dalits who have taken job reservations, he argues, experience deep ambivalence because, though they hide their caste identity as a moral performance, they still perform that identity to obtain welfare and reservation benefits (1988: 119).

⁶⁰ Isaacs records similar pangs of conscience in the case of Mahar man in the 1950s who had become Buddhist but had never legally converted to Buddhism and was therefore still able to claim SC status. He claimed to Isaacs that he planned to solve this contradiction by making his son declare himself only as a Buddhist (1965: 140-141).

⁶¹ Interview with V. Gnanaraj, Madurai, 6/95

⁶² Interview with Jesusahayam, Madurai, 6/2/99.

⁶³ Mutturaj's concept of "service" here refers to any labor or to work done for the benefit of the Christian community. However, the CSI Tamil concept of *ūliyam* (see Ch. 4) generally refers to service to 'Christian' evangelical causes (as a catechist, Bible woman, pastor, preacher, worker in church hospitals, dispensaries, etc.).

⁶⁴ The difference between nepotistic support of close kin and castism is never clear in many empirical cases of favoritism in church appointments, as we saw in Chapter 7.

⁶⁵ Interview with Mutturaj, Pasumalai, 1/5/99

⁶⁶ For example, I neither heard of nor met any Pastor in the Madurai-Ramnad Diocese who is a Chakkiliyar.

⁶⁷ Interview with Mutturaj, Pasumalai, 1/5/99

⁶⁸ Interview with Mutturaj, Pasumalai, 1/5/99

⁶⁹ Interview with J. Thomas, Pasumalai, 4/17/99

⁷⁰ Interview with Mutturaj's Mother, Pasumalai, 4/25/99

⁷¹ The Diocesan constitution as of 1999 allowed pastorates to demand upfront payment of a burial fee and any un-paid church dues prior to plot allotment.

Appendix A

Proportion of Christians Among Pasumalai's Colonial Student Population (1842-1949)

Year	Hindu	Christian
1842-1847	61%	39%
1846	66%	34%
1884	33%	67%
1885	27%	73%
1886	63%	38%
1895	21%	79%
1899	25%	75%
1906	25%	75%
1921-22	33%	65%
1925-6	28%	71%
1945	69%	29%
1947-48	71%	27%
1948-49	66%	30%

Sources:

- 1842-1847:** Seminary students: 35 of Hindu parentage, 57 born Christians (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 8: 20).
1844: Seminary has 38 students, or 50%, who are "members of the church" (ABC 16.1.5: 165)
1846: (Seminary only) 21 are "members of the church" (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 2: 2, p. 3)
1884: Of 95 High School students: 32 Hindus, 63 Christians (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 8: 4, p. 35)
1885: College, High School, Seminary 57 Hindus, 156 Christians (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 8: 14, p. 50)
1886: College, High School, Seminary 120 Hindus, 200 Christians (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 8: 1886 Annual Report)
1891: Reduction in Hindu day scholars due to opening of major Hindu schools in Madurai (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 11: 3, Annual Report)
1895: 68 Hindus 245 Christians (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 11: 21, 1895 Annual Report)
1899: College, High School, Seminary, Primary, Normal School 283 Christians, 94 Hindus (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 11: 24, 1899 Annual Report)
1906: 75% Christians "Statement" (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 16: 162)
1921-22: High and Training Schools: 586 Christians, 296 Hindus (ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 27: 25)
1925-26: High and Training Schools (including Trade School): 71% Christian, 28% Hindu, 1% Muslim (The Report of the Pasumalai Schools for 1925-26 [printed], ABC 16.1.9 Vol. 27)
1945: 29% Christians, 69% Hindus, 2% Muslims p. 26, Pasumalai Centennial Souvenir
1947-48: (excluding Trade School) 452 Christians, 1185 Hindus 36 Muslims (ABC 16.1.9 1940-49 Box 2, Folder 10, 102nd Annual Report of Pasumalai High School)
1948-49: (excluding Trade School) 542 Christians, 1,160 Hindus, 48 Muslims (ABC 16.1.9 1940-49 Box 2, Folder 10, 103rd Annual Report of Pasumalai High School)

Note: Statistics before 1921 frequently include the purely Christian seminary student population. This slightly raises the percentage of Christians for those years.

Appendix B

Survey Sample on Caste Identities of Christians in Pasumalai's Old Neighborhoods:

Caste Name/Caste Title	# of Individuals Identified	Percentage of Total
Paraiyar (including two families identifying as Adi-Dravidar)	87	22%
"SC"	86	22%
Chakkiliyar	52	13%
/Arunthaiyar		
Nadar	41	11%
Vellalar/Pillai	26	7%
Maravar	24	6%
Pramalai Kallar	16	4%
Pallar	12	3%
Naidu (caste title)	11	3%
Konar	10	3%
Vannan	9	2%
Ambattan	7	2%
Acari	6	1%
Akampatiyar	3	.5%
Total	390	100%
All Dalit (Paraiyar, Pallar, Chakkiliyar, "SC")	237	61%

This survey of Seminary Line, Jonespuram, Teachers' and Trade School Lines, Arangasalai and "Servants' Line" was based on a 70% sampling rate or data from 110 of 156 known residences self-identifying as "Christian" in these neighborhoods.

Appendix C

A Possible Urban CSI Tamil Life Cycle

The following outline is based on life cycle events I witnessed or heard mentioned in the Pasumalai Christian community during my fieldwork. **Bold faced rituals** indicate those that have corresponding liturgies in the CSI Book of Worship (CSI 1968). [Bracketed rituals] indicate those ceremonies with debated status among elite CSI Tamils.

Birth optional *stōttira jepakūṭṭam* (thanksgiving prayer meeting)

Infant baptism (within first year)

[Ear piercing (generally for girls, if at all)]

[Coming of Age Prayer Meeting for Women]

Tiṭappaṭuttal Church Confirmation by Bishop

Ōlai Viruntu (feast celebrating the end of the wedding banns)

Nicciyatārttam Engagement

Wedding

[***Araṭṭi***] (post-marital removal of the evil eye with turmeric water and camphor flame)

Nalliṇaṅku (post-marital sharing of a beverage--milk or soda--in the groom's house)

Varavēppu (public wedding reception)

Talai-Christmas (paralleling Talai-Deepavali; a special Christmas feast held for a newlywed couple at the wife's natal home)

[***Vaḷaikkāppu*** Prayer Meeting (related to broader 'bangle' ceremony for women, held during their 7th month of pregnancy)]

Death (domestic prayer with pastor)

Funeral Service (optional)

Nallaṭakkam Burial Service

Tukkanivartti Prayer meeting (mourning prayer meeting, usually within one month of burial)

1st Death Anniversary Prayer meeting

Subsequent Anniversary Prayer meetings

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