

**An Uneasy Alliance: Traders, Missionaries and Tamil
Intermediaries in Eighteenth-Century French India**

by

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List of abbreviations

AN: Archives nationales, Paris

BNF: Bibliothèque nationale française, site Richelieu, Paris

C²: Sous-Série C². Inde et Compagnie des Indes (1649-1808)

CAOM: Centre des archives d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence

Capuchins: Bibliothèque franciscaine des Capucins, Paris

DPPC: Dépôt des papiers publics des colonies

FM: Fonds ministériels

MEP: missions étrangères de Paris

NAF: Nouvelles acquisitions françaises

NAIP: National Archives of India, Pondicherry Record Centre

Vanves: Archives de la Province de France de la Compagnie de Jésus, Vanves

Abstract

This dissertation examines the fraught intersection of commerce and conversion in the eighteenth-century French empire in India. I analyze the profound conflicts between the state-sponsored French projects of trade and religion in the colony of Pondichéry in South India, and by doing so reveal the many internal contradictions that posed a challenge to French aspirations for colonial hegemony. This thesis is equally concerned with the roles filled by Tamil professional intermediaries, employed by French traders and missionaries alike. By juxtaposing an analysis of internal French struggles with a study of colonial go-betweens, the thesis reveals the inherent incompleteness of colonial authority. It thus contributes to our understanding of early modern empires, by suggesting that fluidly distributed and tenuously held authority are the hallmarks of such ventures.

Scholars have studied early modern commercial and religious projects, but rarely in tandem. My project examines the relationship between these two efforts, and reveals that while traders of the French *Compagnie des Indes* and Catholic missionaries were both sent to India to advance the interests of the French Crown, agents of these groups were deeply divided about the goals and practice of empire. I argue that while traders sought to sustain the profitable status quo and insert themselves into long-standing Indian Ocean trading networks based on kinship and confession, French missionaries, and particularly the Jesuits, espoused an ideology of disruption and radical change, in an

effort to reconfigure the local spiritual and social hierarchies. As a result of these fissures among the French, Tamil commercial brokers and religious interpreters were able find a central and influential place in the conflicted crevices of the French project. While recent scholarly focus on colonial mediation has studied interactions between colonizers and colonized, this project demonstrates that a study of the lives and labors of local intermediaries also sheds lights on the internal contestations which shaped the French imperial endeavor. By examining the global project of empire through a resolutely local lens, I show that the colonizing experience is not one that simply divides colonizer and colonized, but rather creates fractures within imperial institutions and among colonizing agents.

Chapter I

Introduction

Puducheri, Pondichéry, Pondicherry

The town which served as the seat of French power in India has been known by many names over the centuries. In its days as a small fishing community on the Coromandel Coast of South India, prior to European rule, it was called “Puducheri,” meaning “new town” in Tamil.¹ The French, who became the town’s rulers in 1674, referred to it as “Pondichéry,” and the anglicized “Pondicherry” was in use until recently. On September 20 2006, lawmakers in India announced that the name of the territory had been changed to Puducheri, in an attempt to reflect its indigenous, pre-colonial history. The people who live there today, whether Tamil-speaking or Francophone, refer to it mostly as Pondy. These name changes, however, do not even begin to reflect all the layers of the town’s history. For a period of four years, late in the seventeenth century, Pondichéry was under Dutch control, and fell into English hands on more than one occasion in the eighteenth century. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was also embedded in the margins of the Mughal sphere of influence and was drawn into conflicts between the sultanates of Golconda and Bijapur in the Deccan, north of

¹ The designation “new” in the town’s name does not refer to the arrival of the French, since it was called by this name decades before French traders first set foot in the region.

Pondichéry.² With its profusion of names and rulers, the town's past vividly reflects the global forces and ambitions which intersected in the early modern Indian Ocean world.

Yet Pondichéry and its French history have been strangely absent from many accounts of Indian Ocean networks, and of early modern European presence in India. Much of the existing work on French India in both Francophone and Anglophone scholarship has focused on the creation and fortunes of the French trading company in its various phases, but has not fully considered the extent to which traders of the Company were involved with oceanic and inland networks, as well as with the concurrent French Catholic missionary project.³ This dissertation considers the two central forces that drove early modern French overseas expansion – commerce and conversion – and takes the colonial city of Pondichéry as a site in which to investigate the relationship between these symbiotic yet conflicted projects.

I focus on events and struggles that took place and shape in Pondichéry early in the eighteenth century, in an attempt to understand how the history and agenda of French empire were constructed simultaneously and contrapuntally in both global and local settings. In the view of French history to which this work contributes, Paris and Pondichéry bump up one against the other, in productive, constitutive and often

² As this project relies on French archives, it utilizes the name Pondichéry, which is the designation that appears in French sources.

³ The foundational and still most comprehensive history of the French Company in India itself is Paul Kaepelin's 1908 study, covering the period 1664-1719. Paul Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des Indes Orientales et François Martin: Etude sur l'histoire du commerce et des établissements français dans l'Inde sous Louis XIV (1664-1719)* (Paris, 1908). Investigation into the institutional history of the *Compagnie des Indes* after 1719 was undertaken, most influentially, by Haudrère and Weber. Philippe Haudrère, *La compagnie française des Indes au XVIIIe siècle*, vol. Seconde édition revue et corrigée. (Paris: Indes savantes, 2005); J. Weber, *Compagnies et comptoirs: l'Inde des français: XVIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Société française d'histoire d'outre-mer, 1991); J. Weber, "Les établissements français en Inde au XIXe siècle, 1816-1914" (Libr. de l'Inde, 1988).

surprising ways.⁴ In the span of a few decades in the beginning of the eighteenth century, a small fishing village which had barely left a prior trace in the historical record was transformed into an important regional center, with several thousand Frenchmen and tens of thousands of mostly Tamil-speaking inhabitants, a growing trade, multiple churches and a role to play in a fraught political landscape in which both European and Indian actors jostled for influence. In the course of this rapid growth and transformation, Pondichéry became a locale where the internal contradictions of the French imperial project, which sought to simultaneously profit, colonize, and proselytize, became glaringly apparent.

Ann Stoler has urged anthropologists and historians to unsettle the tendency to treat colonizers as possessing a shared and uniform European mentality, such that “colonialism and its European agents appear as an abstract force, as a *structure* imposed on local practice.”⁵ Colonial histories must instead pay attention to divisions among colonizers, in order to discern the “unique cultural configuration” which came about when orders and practices were given new meaning in colonial contexts.⁶ Along these lines, this dissertation is principally concerned with the fractures that erupted among lay and religious French arrivals in India, and within these two groups, rather than solely with the conflicts that existed (and they certainly did exist, often in spectacular fashion) between French and Tamil agents. I examine the French institutions that furthered

⁴ In recent years scholars have attempted to correct the tendency of French historiography to write a history of France that paid little or no account to the meaning and legacy of French empires. Useful reviews of this historiographical move can be found in Sophie Dulucq and Colette Zytnicki, “Penser le passé colonial français, entre perspectives historiographiques et résurgence des mémoires,” *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire*, no. 86 (April 1, 2005): 59-69; Alice L. Conklin and Julia Clancy-Smith, “Writing Colonial Histories: Introduction,” *French Historical Studies* 27, no. 3 (Sum 2004): 497-505.

⁵ Ann L. Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 23.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

commerce and conversion – namely, the French trading Company, the *Compagnie des Indes orientales* which also served as the colony’s governing institution, and Catholic missionary orders – and the interaction amongst them. Yet the prism for this examination seeks to account for both French and local aims and constraints, by focusing on the work performed by local Tamil intermediaries who were employed in the furtherance of these twin “French” projects. By examining the role of local, professional go-betweens employed by both traders and missionaries, I aim to reveal the ineluctably local form of colonial authority and the human-scaled fractures that dissected imperial agendas. This, as Francesca Trivellato has recently suggested, is a “global history on a small scale.”⁷

Mediation and Distribution of Authority: Conceptual and Methodological Prisms

This dissertation argues that although French trade and religious mission were reliant on one another for financial, political and moral succor, the two projects were often at cross-purposes. Representatives of commercial and religious projects at times pursued radically different agendas. The central conflict was one which posed officials of the *Compagnie des Indes* against Jesuit missionaries: the Company traders-administrators sought to sustain the profitable status quo and insert themselves into long-standing trading networks based on kinship and confessional affiliation, and to this end pursued a preservationist strategy. French Jesuits, on the other hand, even as they practiced the strategy of accommodation among their own converts, espoused an ideology of disruption and radical change in the city at large, in an effort to fundamentally reconfigure the local spiritual and social hierarchies. As a result of this and other fissures

⁷ Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 30.

among the French, Tamil commercial brokers and religious interpreters were able to find a central place for themselves in the conflicted crevices of the French project.

What are the stakes of such an investigation of French conflict and the lives of intermediaries in eighteenth-century Pondichéry? I would suggest that it makes possible three general observations. First, this inquiry aims to refine understandings of imperial power. While European empires have tended to narrate themselves as being always already hegemonic, this study of Pondichéry reveals the internal contradictions that characterized early French overseas expansion in India, and demonstrates that authority in early colonial ventures was unexpectedly distributed among local and European actors. If these internal fissures are taken as a defining characteristic of early modern overseas expansion, we can see that they posed a challenge and a constraint on the aspiration for hegemony. That is, both the origins and contours of this challenge to imperial power come more clearly into view once we account for the internal contradictions embedded in the overseas project, but is conversely obscured if the focus remains solely on the conflicts between colonizers and colonized.

The second result of this inquiry speaks to the centrality of local mediation in early colonial encounters. Over the past two decades, studies of the colonial world have urgently and compellingly demonstrated the need to consider metropole and colony within one analytic framework.⁸ Yet within this, the primacy of the metropolitan and the peripheral nature of the colony have not often been questioned. The archival and conceptual emphasis here on the experience of local intermediaries as well as French actors living in Pondichéry is an attempt to situate the colonial city at the true center of a

⁸ Most influential in this call has been Fredrick Cooper and Ann L. Stoler, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1-56.

narrative about French expansion. By narrating a history that attempts to simultaneously inhabit the point of view of local intermediaries and French *colons*, I seek to offer a view of Pondichéry that in no way positions it as peripheral.⁹ This in turn speaks to the need of a global history that is sensitive to specific, embodied, and contradictory experiences. Historians should examine the specific distribution of authority and colonial power which resulted from the inherently partial, fractured, fragmented hegemonic potential of early projects of expansion. That is, colonial power and agency are, due in part to their mediated nature, distributed power and agency. The focus on mediation takes up the burden of demonstrating this point, by charting how professional go-betweens were situated in local hierarchies such that authority both flowed their way as a result of French conflict, and was sought out by them.

The focus on intermediaries also attempts to highlight the semiotic instability which is a feature of both cross-cultural encounters and the distributed nature of colonial authority. The incompleteness of hegemony, which contributed to accretion of authority to the persons of local intermediaries, created a field with multiple meanings and agendas, ripe for semiotic fluidity, semiotic flexibility, or semiotic cacophony. While such semiotic boundary crossing is a general feature of cross-cultural encounters, the professional intermediaries examined here were especially adept at deploying this semiotic instability with a great degree of intentionality and expression. What made a professional intermediary good at his job (and by extension a key actor in the colony), I suggest, was the ability to productively play with the semiotic confusion introduced by

⁹ This is similar to the effort undertaken by Megan Vaughn in her compelling study of Mauritius. Megan Vaughn, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Mauritius* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

the colonial encounter.¹⁰ This semiotic play becomes more difficult to discern in later imperial formations, wherein hierarchy is more strictly coded and enforced.

Finally, this project attempts a methodological and narrative answer to the following question: what kinds of stories tell the tale of early imperial formations? I propose that the distributed authority of mediated colonial power produces, by and large, narratives of conflict that are murky, multi-directional, and productively incomplete. This productive incompleteness is what makes such narratives sites for the semiotic confusion described above. The event at the narrative heart of this project is the co-called Nayiniyappa affair, which I analyze from different perspectives in each of the following chapters. The Nayiniyappa affair, roughly 1716-1722, concerned the imprisonment, conviction, death and ultimately exoneration of the French colony's most senior Indian employee and intermediary. Nayiniyappa, a Hindu, was employed as the chief commercial broker of the French trading Company in Pondichéry from 1708 to 1716, when he was removed from his post and jailed. His fall from grace was sudden and brutal: accused of having a hand in the employee uprising that took place in 1715, Nayiniyappa was found guilty of tyranny and sedition. Shortly thereafter he died in his prison cell under somewhat mysterious circumstances. Following massive mobilization on his behalf by French and Tamil actors, in both Pondichéry and Paris, Nayiniyappa was posthumously exculpated by the King Louis XV.

The Nayiniyappa affair and the veritable documentary explosion which it generated serve here as a prism, which sheds light on both the inherent incompleteness of

¹⁰ Eugene Irschik has made a similar point, when he noted in his account of a Tamil region in a slightly later period: "changed significations are the heteroglot and dialogic production of all members of any historical situation, though not always in equal measure; this is so whether they have a Weberian monopoly on violence or not." Eugene F. Irschick, *Dialogue and History: Constructing South India, 1795-1895* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 8.

colonial ambitions for hegemony, and the facility of intermediaries to play in the field of semiotic instability. The metaphor of the prism is especially apt here, for the transparent and sharp prism usefully mimics two aspects of the Nayiniyappa affair as an interpretive tool. As the prism reflects, returns, refracts and distributes light, so the richness of Nayiniyappa affair casts light on received narratives about colonial language, family, and mobility and the distribution of authority. It was also an event in which the power of intermediaries to play with semiosis became a central point of articulation for both French and Tamil actors. The second characteristic of the prism is its sharpness, the ability of glass to cut and shatter. Similarly, the tumult over Nayiniyappa's arrest and conviction not only exposed the French discomfort and disagreement about the role of local intermediaries in Pondichéry, but exacerbated and hardened such divisions. Like the Dreyfus affair of the late nineteenth century, the Nayiniyappa affair not only revealed pre-existing fault lines among the French, but immeasurably deepened them.¹¹

La Compagnie des Indes orientales: 1664-1719

The French were the last to arrive of all the Europeans who established trading posts and colonies in India, following the Portuguese, Dutch, English, even the Danes. The Portuguese, the first European arrivals, had set up a trading post in Cochin as early as 1504, and were the sovereigns of Goa and its surroundings – the only European power prior to the nineteenth-century British Raj that could lay a claim to significant political power in India. The Portuguese success was followed by the early seventeenth-century creation of merchant-run trading companies in both London and Amsterdam, with Dutch

¹¹ Interestingly, a historian of French empire has recently suggested that the Dreyfus itself should be examined through an imperial lens, considering its concurrence with an aggressively expansionist stage in French imperial policies. J.P. Daughton, "A Colonial Affair?: Dreyfus and the French Empire," *Historical Reflections* 31, no. 3 (2005): 469-484.

and English commerce rapidly expanding in the subcontinent with the authorization, albeit ambiguously granted, of the Mughal emperors.

Yet despite the success of European trade in India, French efforts to establish a similar trade repeatedly failed throughout the seventeenth century, notwithstanding the best efforts of both the Crown and private trading interests starting in 1604. It was only in 1664, with the creation of the *Compagnie des Indes orientales*, that France succeeded in creating a durable vehicle for its presence in India.¹² Unlike the merchant-led Dutch and English Companies, the French endeavor was an explicitly royal project, imagined and executed by Colbert, Louis XIV's minister of finance (in office 1665-1683). The creation of the Company was of a piece with Colbert's broader mercantilist vision, according to which control of foreign trade was crucial for the state's well-being, and therefore should fall under the purview of the state.¹³ For Colbert, the *Compagnie des Indes* was meant to fulfill two complementary roles: the new Company, wrote Colbert, would "provide the Kingdom with the benefits of the commerce [of Asia], and prevent the English and the Dutch from being the sole to profit from it, as they have done to date."¹⁴ French presence in India, therefore, was from its inception a project indivisible from European rivalry enacted on a global stage.

The Company was created by a royal charter on September 1, 1664, and its structure bore witness to its royal origins: it was managed by a Paris-based *chambre générale* of Directors appointed by the King, and these Directors were supervised by an

¹² Even after the rise of the British Raj, France maintained a holding in Pondichéry and several other locations in India.

¹³ A classic work on this topic is Charles Cole, *Colbert and a Century of French Mercantilism* (Hamden Conn.: Archon Books, 1964). See also Glenn Ames, *Colbert, mercantilism, and the French quest for Asian trade* (DeKalb Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996).

¹⁴ Cited in Philippe Haudrère, *Les compagnies des Indes orientales: trois siècles de rencontre entre Orientaux et Occidentaux (1600-1858)* (Paris: Ed. Desjonquères, 2006), 71.

official who reported on the progress of the Company directly to the King.¹⁵ The endeavor drew the personal attention of both Louis XIV and his powerful minister: they became major shareholders in the Company, with the King providing more than 3 million *livres* of the original capital subscription to the Company. Colbert regularly participated in early meetings of the Directors, and even the Sun King himself spoke in the first general assembly of Company shareholders, held in December 1668, rather than conveying his message via a chancellor as was more customary. At the same assembly, when a need arose to replace three Directors, Louis asked Colbert for nominees, the minister put forth his candidates, and the King appointed them with no objections raised in the assembly.¹⁶ The King's involvement was also long-standing: in a meeting of the Directors that took place in 1699, 35 years after the founding of the Company, the comte de Pontchartrain, minister of the navy, informed the Directors that "the King continually informs himself about the business of the Company," and that His Majesty was well-versed in the details of the shipments sent to India, the merchandise brought back to France and its sale, and the actions taken by the Directors in the management of these activities.¹⁷ Colbert also corresponded directly with employees of the Company living and working in India, and recruited provincial shareholders of the Company to travel to Asia as Company officials.¹⁸

¹⁵ Colbert and Louis XIV wanted to establish the Company with a capital investment of 15 million *livres*, but they encountered difficulty in raising enough money from potential shareholders, with initial subscriptions totaling only half the desired capital amount. Furthermore, merchants were not the majority among subscribers – not an encouraging sign for a commercial venture, and a very different model from the merchant-led companies of Britain and Holland. Instead, most of the money was raised from the royal family, government ministers and other members of the court at Versailles, and financiers. For a detailed account of the difficulties Colbert encountered in raising sufficient capital, and the recurrent liquidity crises faced by the *Compagnie des Indes*, see Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des Indes Orientales et François Martin*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5, 21–22.

¹⁷ Cited in *Ibid.*, 371.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

The Directors were often experts in maritime commerce, and after the first few decades of the Company's existence, some of them were former employees returned to France from India (for example, Pierre Christophe Lenoir and Pierre Benoît Dumas, who had both served as Governor of Pondichéry, were later Directors in France). The position was often hereditary: on multiple occasions, when a director died or retired he was replaced by a son or a nephew. The Directors oversaw the building of Company ships, raised money and purchased merchandise to send on ships headed East, oversaw the sale of Indian goods (mostly cloth) once the ships returned to France, approved the hiring of Company employees in both France and Asia, and received detailed reports from traders in the East about the goings-on in Company outposts.

The traders who were employed by the Company in India were not of quite the elevated social status of the Directors, although connections with the Directors were an easy path into Company employment. Employment with the Company was organized according to a strict hierarchy: traders joined in the rank of an *écrivain* or *commis en second*. After five years or so, one could advance to *facteur* or *commis*, and three years later advance to *sous-marchand*. Three years later, one could attain the rank of a full merchant. In the first half of the eighteenth century, each European trading company in Asia recruited between 20 to 40 civilian employees a year.¹⁹ The employees of the

¹⁹ Haudrère, *Les compagnies des Indes orientales*, 180. See Haudrère also for a general comparative discussion of the corporate structures of the Dutch, French, English and other European trading Companies in India. In addition to traders, who carried out the Company's key commercial mission, the French Company employed soldiers – in fact, it consistently employed more soldiers than civilians. On this, see Catherine Manning, *Fortunes à faire: The French in Asian Trade, 1719-48* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996). Soldiers were also sent to India in royal fleets, to advance France's military maneuvers in the subcontinent. French military activity in the mid-eighteenth century has drawn a fair amount of contemporary and scholarly attention, but the presence of French and non-French soldiers in the service of the Company in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is a field in need of further exploration. This project, however, focuses on the commercial aspects of the Company's presence in India, and does not delve into life in Pondichéry's fort and garrison.

Compagnie des Indes came from various backgrounds, but the ones who rose to the level of a councilor could usually claim a comfortable social status in France, coming from families of office holders, successful merchants, lawyers or bankers.²⁰

The majority of Company traders in India were single men; of the 70 traders employed by the Company in 1727, only a third were married.²¹ Bachelor traders sometimes set up joint households, sharing costs and gaining companionship. The small French population in India did include some women and children: traders who had established themselves in India sometime sent for their families in France to join them (as did the first Governor, François Martin), and the Pondichéry notarial record attests to marriages made by French traders in Pondichéry, either with daughters of French families or among the local Christian Luso-Indian community. In addition to Company employees, some independent French merchants also settled in India, as well as retired Company employees who decided to make a life for themselves in the East after the end of their term, becoming innkeepers, jewelers, doctors, wigmakers and booksellers, either in French towns or in Dutch, English or Indian settlements.²²

Employment as a trader by the *Compagnie des Indes* carried with it administrative duties, since the Company was also the governing body for French holdings, with traders acting as government officials (for example, serving on Pondichéry's superior council, the colony's highest governing institution). The Directors in Paris and the traders-officials in India often disagreed on how to best run the colony, and these differences were only heightened by the almost two-year delay in communication (ships traveled between France and India in accordance with the monsoon season, and a round-trip could

²⁰ Ibid., 60.

²¹ Ibid., 54–56.

²² Ibid., 56.

take anywhere between 14 to 22 months). The traders who served the Company in the East were sometime acerbic in their evaluation of the Directors, their Parisian supervisors. François Martin, who would become Governor of Pondichéry in 1699 and rose to this position through the Company's ranks, wrote thus in his journal in 1672: "A witty man in Surat who was quite familiar with the guiding genius of the Directors, quipped at this time that Directors could be placed into three categories – those who made their own profits along with those of the Company, those who neglected to advance the success of the Company but did very well in their own private ventures, and finally those who had an equal record of failure both in Company ventures and their own. This classification appeared quite accurate."²³

The following chapters will demonstrate that the recurring conflicts between the Directors in Paris and traders-officials in India early in the eighteenth-century often stemmed from disagreement about the conditions of authority and the politics of proximity. That is, traders in India and Directors in France did not always agree on what kinds of knowledge and attitudes were necessary in order to act effectively in India, and what was the local contribution to the structure of French authority. Struggles over the shape and extent of French power in the colony stemmed in part from the Directors' insistence that they could determine the parameters of French action from afar, while the traders-administrators in Pondichéry argued that such authority was locally embedded, and therefore its construction was best left to them.

²³ François Martin, *India in the 17th Century, 1670-1694 (Social, Economic, and Political: Memoirs of François Martin* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1981), vol. 1, 109.

Searching for an Indian Base: The Road to Pondichéry

The *Compagnie des Indes*' first focus, in the years immediately after its creation, was on the island of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean.²⁴ French traders had first arrived in Madagascar in 1602, and throughout the seventeenth century the French made repeated attempts to colonize the island. But Colbert's new Company interested itself in the island more seriously, conceiving of it as full-fledged French colony, where ships from France could stop on the long voyage to India, China, Japan or Siam. However, French ambitions for a colony on the island were not realized (although Madagascar did become a French colony in the end of the nineteenth century). After encountering repeated difficulties, and at the insistence of the Directors, the Company abandoned the colonization of Madagascar in 1674, retaining just a small coastal trading outpost, and turned its attention and resources toward India (see figures 1 and 2).

It was on Surat, a bustling, cosmopolitan and well-established port in Gujarat in Western India, that the *Compagnie des Indes* now focused its efforts. A French *comptoir*, or trading "factory," was established in Surat in 1666. For centuries, Surat had occupied an important place in the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean, with a wealthy Armenian trading population and English and Dutch factories, established respectively in 1611 and 1616. The status of the French as late-arrivals did not appear initially to be too great of an impediment. Louis XIV sent two emissaries to the court of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, and on September 4, 1666 the French were granted a *firman*, a royal decree, that allowed them the same trading privileges as the Dutch and the English.²⁵

²⁴ On French presence in Madagascar, see Pier Larson, *Ocean of Letters: Language and Creolization in an Indian Ocean Diaspora* (Cambridge UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

²⁵ Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des Indes Orientales et François Martin*, 54.

A French Jesuit, Father Tachard, who arrived in Gujarat late in the seventeenth century, described Surat as “the most beautiful, the wealthiest, and largest commercial city I have seen in the Indies, not even excepting Batavia or Goa.”²⁶ Yet Surat proved to be all *too* bustling: French traders faced intense competition from Dutch and English traders. Like Madagascar, Surat proved inhospitable to French ambitions, and in the 1670s the Company’s traders turned south, to the Coromandel Coast of India. It was there, in the town of Pondichéry, that the French would gain a measure of political sovereignty, but it was an unexpected turn of events that provided them with this opportunity.

Trying to gain a stronger foothold for the Company in India and displace its European rivals, in 1670 Colbert sent a substantial royal fleet to India, led by Jacob Blanquet de la Haye. In 1672 the French fleet took from the Dutch the town of São Tomé de Meliapore (present-day Mylapore) on the Coromandel Coast, just south of Fort St. George. A Frenchman, Bellanger de Lespinay, was currying favor with the local Governor, Sher Khan Lodi, who served the Sultan of Bijapur, a sultanate in the western Deccan. Bellanger de Lespinay was lobbying the Bijapuri Governor for support against the Dutch. The lobbying was sound politics, since the Dutch were allied with the King of Golconda, a Deccani sultanate that was a long-standing rival to Bijapur.

It was Governor Sher Khan Lodi who first suggested that the French might like their own establishment in the region, offering the town of Puducheri as a suitable site.

²⁶ “C’est la plus belle, la plus riche et la plus grande ville de commerce que j’aie vue dans les Indes, je n’en excepte ni Batavia ni Goa.” Tachard, *Relation de voyage aux Indes, 1690-1699*, BNF, Manuscrits français 19030, f. 184 verso. (Note: I cite the original French text in the footnotes when the text in question appears in unpublished archival documents. When quoting from published primary sources, the text appears in translation. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. For ease of reading, French spelling has been modernized.)

According to the memoirs of Bellanger de Lespinay, the Governor suggested – perhaps wryly – that since the French and the Dutch were already neighbors in Europe, they might as well be neighbors in India as well.²⁷ By offering the town to the French, Sher Khan Lodi not only ensured a welcome flow of capital to his region, but made a friend of an enemy’s enemy. It was thus the fortuitous intersection of European rivalries and Indian enmities, rather than any French imperial planning, that brought about the creation of the *Compagnie des Indes*’ colony in Pondichéry. The early history of French India repeatedly demonstrates the dynamics revealed in this founding moment: French presence in India was enacted in an inescapably local idiom. As recent histories of European colonialism have shown, early modern European expansion cannot be properly understood if only European agendas are explained, acknowledged, or given agency.

²⁷ L.A. Bellanger de Lespinay, *Mémoires de L. A. Bellanger de Lespinay, Vendômois, sur son voyage aux Indes Orientales (1670-1675)* (Vendome,: Typ. C. Huet, 1895), 204.



Figure 1: The Indian Ocean.²⁸

²⁸ Source: Manning, *Fortunes à Faire*.



Figure 2: India in 1707.²⁹

²⁹ Source: Neill, *A History of Christianity in India*, Vol. 1

Arriving in Pondichéry

A place named Pudécheira appears in a map drawn by a royal French geographer in 1654, and is mentioned in a Dutch travel narrative of the mid seventeenth century.³⁰ When Bellanger de Lespinay arrived there in 1673, after the place was offered to the French, he found “a small village,” and was the only Frenchman to live there for nearly a year.³¹ In 1674, François Martin, an employee of the *Compagnie des Indes* who was the son of a Parisian grocer, first set foot in the town of Pondichéry, having been sent there by the fleet commander de la Haye. Martin had been driven to India by desperation and ambition. Newly married and out of work, he might have seen one of the posters which papered the walls of Paris in the 1660s, luring Frenchmen with a taste for adventure to Asia in the service of the newly-found Company. Pondichéry was not the first place Martin saw in the East – he had spent four years in Madagascar, before arriving in the Indian port of Surat. But it would be in Pondichéry that Martin would spend most of the remaining years of his life, dying there as Governor of the colony in 1706.

Arriving by sea, accompanied by just a few men and a woefully inadequate amount of money with which to establish a permanent French presence, Martin would likely not have been impressed by the sight of Pondichéry: it was little more than a fishing village, and could not be compared to the English and Dutch colonies on the Coromandel Coast, particularly English-ruled Madras (established in 1639). Yet despite

³⁰ See Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des Indes Orientales et François Martin*, 103. This map was created by Samson d’Abbeville. The travel narrative was written by one Gautier Schouten, who mentioned a village on the Coromandel coast named Poule Cère. See Jean Deloche, *Origins of the urban development of Pondicherry according to seventeenth century Dutch plans* (Pondichéry: Institut français de Pondichéry, 2004), 13.

³¹ Bellanger de Lespinay, *Mémoires de L. A. Bellanger de Lespinay, Vendômois, sur son voyage aux Indes Orientales (1670-1675)*, 204.

this, the place appeared promising to Martin. For one thing, he was impressed by the beauty and fecundity of the landscape he saw, writing in his journal that “the countryside through which we passed [outside of Pondichéry] was well-cultivated and very beautiful. Rice was to be found in abundance in the low-lying regions where there was water while cotton was grown on the higher ground.”³² More importantly, Pondichéry – unlike crowded Surat – was a place where the French traders would have no European competitors, and could build their reputation and credit as a regional commercial power.

In 1683, the Directors and Colbert started sending Company ships to Pondichéry instead of Surat, and by the beginning of the eighteenth century Surat had lost its place of prominence in the French project in India. Colbert was still alive to see ships returning from Pondichéry laden with merchandise, but he died in September 1683, as the Company was entering this new phase in its Indian venture. After Colbert’s death, the Company was supervised by his son, the marquis de Seignelay, who had been appointed Secretary of the navy. Faced with recurrent and debilitating cash shortages, the Company relied on the sale of one load of cargo to finance its next Asia-bound voyage. There were multiple reasons for this plaguing shortage of capital: French merchants and financiers were reluctant to invest in the Company, preferring regional opportunities; the Company had high operating costs; and Louis XIV’s European wars at the end of the seventeenth century posed a serious problem, since on many occasions they led to the capture of French ships and subsequent heavy losses. Under Seignelay, the Company was reorganized and its debts liquidated, with a new charter given by the King in 1685. This Company was to exist until the creation of John Law’s *Compagnie perpetuelle des Indes* in 1719, which united the Companies of the East and West Indies.

³² Martin, *India in the 17th century, 1670-1694 (social, economic, and political)*, 310.

The rivalry with the Dutch, which had been so crucial for the creation of Pondichéry as a French colony, remained central in the decades after its establishment, culminating with an attack by a Dutch fleet in the summer of 1693. The Dutch, drawing on their strong naval capabilities, had been supplanting the Portuguese as the dominant European power in the Indian Ocean over the seventeenth century. The seizure of Pondichéry would allow them to maintain their superior position in Coromandel Coast trade and in the European market-share. After a brief siege, the overwhelmed French forces, lacking men, arms and money, capitulated and the city fell to the Dutch. Pondichéry's small French population, led by François Martin, relocated to Chandernagore, a French *comptoir* in Bengal. However, the Dutch presence in Pondichéry was short-lived, and a peace treaty signed in Europe returned Pondichéry to the hands of the Company in 1699, with François Martin named as its first Governor.

When the *Compagnie des Indes* was created, it had been given a monopoly on navigation and commerce in the East Indies for a period of 50 years, and a right to govern the lands occupied by the Company in Asia. Other articles in the Company's original charter established its right to appoint judges and dispense justice according to the laws of Paris, the right to send ambassadors to Indian kings, make treaties, and if necessary to declare war.³³ But significantly, the charter charged the Company not only with commercial profit-making, but also with propagating Christianity in the territories under its control. When Admiral de la Haye was appointed Governor of Ile Dauphine (Madagascar) in December 1669, his task there was to "increase Christianity, fortify

³³ Articles xxxi, xxxiv, and xxxvi of the Company's charter. Printed in Dernis, *Recueil ou collection des titres, édits, déclarations, arrêts, réglemens et autres pièces concernant la Compagnie des Indes orientales établie au mois d'août 1664* (Paris: impr. Boudet, 1755). See also Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des Indes Orientales et François Martin*, 7.

commerce and grow the colony,” in this order.³⁴ A similar charge was given to employees of the Company in India. As the following chapters will demonstrate, this triple mission – to Christianize, profit, and colonize – would prove complicated and at times contradictory. The fact that employees of the *Compagnie des Indes* in Pondichéry were at the same time both government administrators and traders made their situation especially complex. The same individuals were called upon to further diverse agendas, which were not always complementary: namely, the advancement of French sovereignty on the one hand, and the pursuit of profit on the other.

A French Mission to India

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 28: 18-20

Christianity has always had a strong missionary tradition, but the navigational advances and colonial projects of the early modern period vastly expanded the field in which European missionaries toiled. Missionaries did not await the arrival of European states in order to begin propagating Christianity, but cooperation with the state and state-supported commercial projects could advance conversion agendas. Therefore, missionaries of different orders were eager to benefit from any advantages that could be gained from involvement with political or commercial endeavors.

³⁴ Cited in *Ibid.*, 29.

Perhaps the most extreme example of the entanglement of lay political power and religious propagation in the colonial context was the *Padroado* – the arrangement initially made in 1493 between the Pope and the Portuguese and Spanish Crowns, according to which lay rulers were intimately involved in the administration of religious life in their overseas dominions. In India, the impact of the Portuguese *Padroado* was most easily discerned in Goa, which by the sixteenth-century boasted an archbishop, established secular clergy, and a large Christian population. But this very success meant that Goa was not the most suitable place for missionaries ambitious to harvest new souls for Christ. To this end, missionaries ventured far in the subcontinent, beyond the coastal European enclaves into regions under the control of “Hindu” and Muslim rulers.³⁵

Early in the sixteenth-century it was Franciscans who were most active as missionaries in India, and they were later joined by Dominicans and Augustinians. The seventeenth-century saw the arrival of the orders of Theatines, Oratorians, Carmelites, and Capuchins.³⁶ But the most ambitious missionary work in India was undertaken by Jesuits. The founding of the Society of Jesus by Ignatius Loyola in 1534 marked a new and ambitious chapter in missionary endeavors; Church historian Stephen Neill goes so far as to consider this “perhaps the most important event in the missionary history of the Roman Catholic Church.”³⁷ Travel overseas and the conversion of the pagan world were at the very core of the Jesuit mission, and by the seventeenth century there were few corners of the globe that had not welcomed – or rejected – Jesuit missionaries. And while the Jesuit order was truly cosmopolitan in both scope and ambition, India held a special

³⁵ For a discussion of my use of the category “Hindu”, see chapter 2.

³⁶ Neill, *A History of Christianity in India, I: The Beginnings to AD 1707*.

³⁷ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, Rev. for the 2nd ed. / . (Harmondsworth Middlesex England; New York N.Y. U.S.A.: Penguin Books, 1986), 126.

place in the Jesuit project, stemming from the arrival of Francis Xavier, the so-called Apostle to India, in Goa in 1542.³⁸

In the seventeenth century and early in the eighteenth century, missionary work in India was the exclusive domain of Catholics. The English and the Dutch Companies did not initially overtly support missions in their towns, only hiring chaplains to minister to their employees; the first Protestant missionaries to arrive in India were German Lutherans who came in 1706 to the Danish colony of Tranquebar, 150 miles south of Madras.³⁹ The English East India Company did not formally introduce a missionizing agenda into its charter until 1813.⁴⁰

Early in the eighteenth century, then, the missionary endeavor in India was a Catholic one. But Catholic missionaries of different orders in India, although pursuing similar goals, were often rivals, competing for both new souls and the support of lay European powers. Writing of missionaries in the Belgian Congo, Johannes Fabian

³⁸ On Xavier's special place in the history of Goa, see Pamila Gupta, "St. Francis Xavier, the Corpse of History: Ritual, Representation, and Regeneration" (Columbia University, 2004). Jesuit activity in South India will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters, but see Ines G. Zupanov, *Disputed Mission: Jesuit Experiments and Brahminical Knowledge in Seventeenth-Century India* (Oxford U. Pr., 2000); Ines G. Zupanov, *Missionary Tropics: The Catholic Frontier in India (16th-17th Centuries)* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

³⁹ The Lutherans in the Tranquebar mission were often in a state of conflict with the officials of the Danish trading Company, and the leader of the mission, Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, was even arrested as a result of these conflicts. The struggle between commercial administrators and religious workers in the colonial world is not therefore unique to Catholic settings. For more on the turbulent early years of the Tranquebar mission, see Andreas Gross and Franckesche Stiftungen., *Halle and the beginning of Protestant Christianity in India* (Halle; Delhi: Verlag der Franckesche Stiftungen; Distribution in India by Manohar Books Ltd., 2006). and Heike Leibau, "Country Priests, Catechists, and Schoolmasters as Cultural, Religious, and Social Middlemen in the Context of the Tranquebar Mission.," in *Christians and missionaries in India: cross-cultural communication since 1500, with special reference to caste, conversion, and colonialism*, ed. Robert Eric Frykenberg and Elaine M. Low, Studies in the History of Christian Missions (Grand Rapids, Mich: B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003).

⁴⁰ Protestant missionary projects in India came into their own in the late eighteenth century. On this development in the English context, see Andrew N. Porter, *Religion Versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2004). A work on the state and religion in nineteenth century British India, which offers an important emphasis on the contributions of both women and Indian Christians to the missionary project, is Jeffrey Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India, 1818-1940* (Stanford Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002).

warned: “[t]oo much social-scientific pontificating about the role of the missions has relied on fanciful imputation of motives and ideas and on indiscriminate lumping together of missionary organizations which, even if they belonged to a strongly centralized institution such as the Roman Catholic Church, usually represented a wide spectrum of intellectual, social, and political orientations.”⁴¹ The same warning holds true for missionaries in French India. This adversarial relationship of Catholic missionaries was very much on display in the new French colony of Pondichéry.

The missionaries who made Pondichéry their base were Frenchmen of three separate orders: Jesuits, Capuchins, and members of the *Missions étrangères de Paris*. The first to appear in the colony were the Capuchins, an offshoot of the Franciscans.⁴² Two French Capuchins arrived in India in 1630, charged with founding a mission in Pegu, in Burma (present-day Myanmar). But instead they stopped in Dutch Masulipatam in South India, and later were invited by the English to settle in rapidly-expanding Madras, in order to provide religious care for the Catholic population in the Protestant town. This was a way for the English to make their settlement alluring to Catholics, and provided the Capuchins with a sizable flock. The Roman Catholic parish in Madras was headed by Fr. Ephraim of Nevers and his companion Fr. Zenon, and the first Capuchin church in Madras was consecrated in 1675. The French Capuchins were so committed to their establishment in Madras, that they initially disregarded the arrival of the French on the Coromandel Coast. François Martin related in his memoirs that “the two priests were

⁴¹ Johannes Fabian, *Language and Colonial Power: The Appropriation of Swahili in the Former Belgian Congo, 1880-1938* (University of California Press, 1991), 71–72.

⁴² The following account of Capuchin origins on the Coromandel Coast draws on Neill, *A History of Christianity in India, I: The Beginnings to AD 1707*, 362–363. See also Frank Penny, *The Church in Madras: Being the History of the Ecclesiastical and Missionary Action of the East India Company in the Presidency of Madras* (Lond.: Smith Elder, 1904).

somewhat unpopular with [French commander] de la Haye as they had not come to see him after the capture of San Thomé. The Reverend Fathers had their own reasons for this. They believed that they were bound by reasons of charity not to abandon the Madras mission which they had set up by their own efforts. If they had entered into open relations with de la Haye, they would have become suspect in the eyes of the Moors and the English.”⁴³ French Capuchins in English Madras clearly had to navigate a treacherous terrain, with considerations that superseded any national loyalty they might have felt. But the Capuchins did arrive in Pondichéry shortly after it fell into French hands, establishing the church of *Notre Dame des Anges*, and served as both parish priests to the European Catholics and missionaries to the local population.

From the very earliest days of the *Compagnie des Indes*’ presence in India, the Capuchins often positioned themselves as allies to and participants in the royal commercial project. For example, in Surat a French Capuchin named Fr. Ambrose had been living in the city since 1651 (decades before representatives of the *Compagnie des Indes* first arrived there). Fr. Ambrose had a good relationship with the Mughal Governor of Surat, and he was instrumental in securing the French the *firman* from the Mughal Emperor authorizing their trade.⁴⁴ When Company Director Baron needed to make a decision about a possible treaty with the King of Golconda in 1675, he convened a council in which the participants were senior Company employees – and the

⁴³ Martin, *India in the 17th century, 1670-1694 (social, economic, and political)*, vol. 1, p. 148–149. This was not the first time that Fr. Ephraim was reluctant to tie his fortunes with the French Company. In 1669, when Company Director Caron was trying to further French interests in Ceylon, he wrote to Colbert and suggested that Fr. Ephrem, who spoke Sinhalese, be sent to Kandy to negotiate with the King there on behalf of French interests. But the Capuchin declined to do so. Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des Indes Orientales et François Martin*, 61.

⁴⁴ Martin, *India in the 17th century, 1670-1694 (social, economic, and political)*, vol. 1, 34, footnote 48.

Capuchins.⁴⁵ As the following chapters will demonstrate, the collaboration between the Company and the Capuchins was long-standing, and it both stemmed from and exacerbated the Capuchin rivalry with the Jesuits. The rivalry between Jesuits and Capuchins was so pronounced that a Venetian living in Pondichéry was once asked by some locals whether he worshiped the God of the Jesuits or the God of the Capuchins.⁴⁶

This rivalry originated with the arrival of the Jesuits in Pondichéry in 1689, when the Capuchins' position as sole religious providers was compromised by the ambitious newcomers. The Jesuits first arrived in Pondichéry almost by accident. In March 1685, six missionaries named *Mathématiciens du Roi* left France for Siam, on a mission for amassing scientific knowledge as much as for gathering souls. A coup in the Thai court forced them to flee to India in 1689, in an attempt to find safety in an established French holding. Company officials and Jesuits were often at odds in Pondichéry, but the Jesuit mission was without a doubt a part of the French imperial project in India. *Lettres patentes* given in 1695 established the Jesuits as emissaries in India of Louis XIV.⁴⁷ The first task of the Jesuits, as described in this text, was the propagation of the Christian faith, but that was not their only task: the Jesuits Fathers, “as distinguished for their erudition as for their piety,” were to report back to France in order to further “the perfection of the arts, sciences and navigation.” And in addition to the pursuit of knowledge, the Jesuits were also exhorted to support French commercial efforts in India.

⁴⁵ Kaeppelin, *La Compagnie des Indes Orientales et François Martin*, 149.

⁴⁶ Nicolaò Manucci, *Storia do Mogur, or, Mogul India, 1653-1708*, trans. William Irvine, Indian texts series.1 (London: J. Murray, 1906), vol. 3, 334.

⁴⁷ CAOM, FM, F³/238, ff 263-267. A Copy of the *Lettres patentes* can also be found in Adrien Launay, *Histoire des missions de l'Inde* (Paris: Indes savantes; Missions étrangères de Paris, 2000), vol. 1, 456–457. See also Ines G. Zupanov, “La science et la démonologie: les missions des jésuites français en Inde (XVIIIe siècle),” in *Circulation des savoirs et missions d'évangélisation (XVIe-XVIIIe siècle)*, ed. C. de Castelnau et al. (Madrid: Casa de Velasquez/ EHESS, 2011), 379-400.

Although several French Jesuits settled in the city of Madurai, the center of Jesuit activity in the Tamil region since the early seventeenth century, the first Superior of the French Jesuit contingent in India, Father Guy Tachard (1651-1712), chose to make Pondichéry his home base. The stone for the first Jesuit church in Pondichéry, *Notre Dame de la concéption*, was laid by François Martin in 1691. The Jesuits quickly made their mark on the city: Father Tachard opened the first school in Pondichéry, for Luso-Indian as well as French children, teaching navigation and mathematics, and founded a hospital that tended to Europeans as well as the injured from the nearby battlefields where the Mughal and Maratha armies met and fought.⁴⁸

The deepest and most long-standing struggle between Capuchins and Jesuits in French India revolved around religious ministrations to neophytes and potential converts: who would be in charge of Indian souls? Prior to the arrival of the Jesuits, Capuchins tended to both Europeans, as chaplains, and to the newly-converted Malabars (the common French designation for the Tamil inhabitants). With the Jesuits in town, the field was divided, after Governor Martin declared that the Capuchins would serve as chaplains to the European parish, and Jesuits would tend to the flock of indigenous Christians and potential Christians. This was a compromise that suited neither side, and was at the heart of the internal divisions and bitter exchanges that subsequently erupted among religious workers in French India.⁴⁹

The third religious body active in Pondichéry was the *Société des missions étrangères de Paris* (henceforth MEP), created in 1658 expressly for conversions in

⁴⁸ Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des Indes Orientales et François Martin*, 282.

⁴⁹ The Jesuits were not content with staying in Pondichéry, and in 1703 founded the Carnatic mission, in a mostly Telegu-speaking region north-west of Pondichéry.

Asia.⁵⁰ The MEP seminary, on Rue de Bac in Paris, was established in 1663 (just a year before a charter was given to the *Compagnie des Indes*) to train young priests for the missionary life. Enjoying the support of both Rome and powerful allies in France, the MEP had a small but significant presence in Pondichéry beginning in the late 1680s, with MEP missionaries sending detailed reports on the religious and commercial struggles in the colony back to the Directors of the MEP Seminary in Paris. In these conflicts, more often than not MEP missionaries allied themselves with the Capuchins, and against the Jesuits. When the Society of Jesus was suppressed by the Vatican in 1773, it was MEP missionaries who took over Jesuit holdings and ministrations in India.

French missionaries in Pondichéry and its surroundings were in a somewhat unusual position as regards ecclesiastic authority. They fell under the authority of the Bishop of Mylapore, who was appointed by and acted under the auspices of the Portuguese *Padroado*.⁵¹ Yet the French Jesuits arrived in the East as emissaries of the French King, and therefore acted by his authority, not that of the *Padroado*. Both Capucin missionaries and the MEP *procurateur* (for the small MEP had, for much of the period under discussion, only a single representative in Pondichéry⁵²) also fell under the authority of Louis XIV, stemming from his position as the head of the Gallican Church (following the 1682 Declaration of the Clergy of France). This already murky distribution

⁵⁰ On MEP, see Adrien Launay, *Histoire générale de la société des missions étrangères* (Paris: Téqui, 1894). MEP missionaries were secular priests, not members of an order like the Jesuits and Capuchins.

⁵¹ Bishops in India were appointed by the Portuguese crown, under the *Padroado*; other figures of religious authority were vicars apostolic, who were appointed by the Propaganda Fide, with similar authority to bishops but without territorial powers. For this distinction and the power struggles it entailed, see Stephen Neill, *A history of Christianity in India: 1707-1858* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 436–438. For more detail on the ecclesiastical struggle in Pondichéry, see Paolo Aranha's forthcoming dissertation, from the European University Institute, Florence.

⁵² The MEP *procurateur* early in the eighteenth century, Tessier de Quéralay, was an exceptionally productive letter-writer, and the source of much of the information which appears in the following chapters. On his life and career, see Gita Dharampal, *La religion des Malabars: Tessier de Quéralay et la contribution des missionnaires européens à la naissance de l'indianisme* (Immensee: Nouvelle revue de science missionnaire, 1982).

of power and legitimacy was further compounded by the existence of another institution: wishing to direct global missionary efforts from Rome, Pope Gregory XV created in 1622 the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, which sought to centralize the oversight of missionary work. French missionaries in South India thus occupied a special position, and had to maneuver between rival lay and religious institutions invested in their mission. This politically-fraught negotiation was only rendered more complex by the disagreements among missionaries about strategies of conversion in the colonial mission field.

The alliances made and rivalries championed in Pondichéry are also testament to the variability of the French colonial world: in the period under discussion, the Jesuits in India were antagonistic to the colonial government administered by the commercial Company, and Capuchins and MEP supported it. Yet at the same time, in the French colonies in the Antilles, the Jesuits were praised for their support of the colonial administration, and the Capuchins were the ones who positioned themselves against government policies.⁵³

As J.P. Daughton has astutely shown for the later French empire, the “archives of French colonialism are filled with stories of disagreement, conflict, and reconciliation” between Catholic missionaries and colonial administrators.⁵⁴ Daughton identifies a fundamental contradiction in French empire of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: colonial administrators relied on Catholic missionaries to implement the programs of an expanding empire with a “civilizing mission,” at the exact same time that

⁵³ For these examples from Saint Domingue, see Sue Peabody, “‘A Dangerous Zeal’: Catholic Missions to Slaves in the French Antilles, 1635-1800,” *French Historical Studies* 25, no. 1 (Win 2002): 69.

⁵⁴ J.P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 5.

French anti-clericalism was at its height.⁵⁵ The logic of this conflict is a clear one: republican administrators, devoted to Enlightenment secular ideals, would have been ill at ease to find themselves wedded to Catholic missionaries in overseas ventures. But the struggles I document early in the eighteenth century between missionaries and Company employees, in this earlier stage of empire-building, are more surprising given that administrators and *religieux* alike were sent to India long before the invention of *laïcité* as a French ideal. Commercial and religious agents alike were acting on behalf of a divinely-ruling King at the head of the Gallican Church, and were furthering the ambitions of a state explicitly and timelessly Catholic. Colonial officials and traders in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century would therefore have shared many of the goals and attitudes of their missionary contemporaries. Yet the repeated struggles in Pondichéry among lay and religious agents indicate that the ideal of a shared commercial-religious agenda, manifest in both the charter of the Company and in missionary texts, remained elusive in practice.

Where Do Go-Betweens Go: Professional Intermediaries in South Asia

When employees of the French Company and Catholic missionaries first arrived in Pondichéry in the 1670s, they found a region roiling with political upheaval and mighty military struggles. As discussed above, Pondichéry itself was given to the French as a political maneuver that involved both Dutch-French and Bijapur-Golconda rivalries. The battles between the Deccani sultanates and their increasing attempts to expand their influence in the south of India thus had immediate bearing on the fortunes of the French

⁵⁵ Ibid., 6. In the Revolutionary context, a study that interestingly links the religious and state projects in a French colonial setting was undertaken by Sue Peabody, who argued that that French missionaries' lack of success in conversion among slaves in St. Domingue directly impacted the unfolding of the Haitian revolution. Peabody, "'A Dangerous Zeal': Catholic Missions to Slaves in the French Antilles, 1635-1800."

in India. Wars further afield in the subcontinent were also of import: the Maratha armies led by Shivaji increasingly threatened Mughal hegemony in the late seventeenth century (the period under discussion largely corresponds to the rule of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, who died in 1707). The Maratha Wars were of intense interest for the French, since in 1677 Shivaji's forces emerged victorious from a battle with Sher Khan Lodi – the same Governor who had provided local patronage to the French. Fortunately for the French, in the 1690s (just before the fall of Pondichéry to the Dutch) they managed to secure the patronage of the newly-installed Maratha ruler, Raja Ram. When the Mughals regained control of the region at the turn of the century, they also reaffirmed French claims to Pondichéry.

If the political landscape was in a state of bewildering flux, the commercial world posed a different challenge to French newcomers: the maritime trading associations of the Indian Ocean world were well-established, cemented by centuries of contact and exchange, and based on the familiarity of kinship and religious affiliation. Scholars of Indian Ocean trade have shown that European involvement in the region was less transformative of these networks than previously assumed. The pre-existing structures were sustained throughout most of the eighteenth century, with European traders trying to position themselves within these structures rather than displacing or transfiguring them.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ For an argument that Portuguese involvement in the region did not disrupt the pre-existing trading networks in the eighteenth century, see for example Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Maritime India in the seventeenth century* (Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). C.A. Bayly, in an influential work, has argued that the late eighteenth-century saw strong economic development under the Mughals. C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870*, 1st ed., Cambridge South Asian studies 28 (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press, 1983). More recently, Sugata Bose has argued that even in the nineteenth century, the pathways of mobility which constituted the Indian Ocean system were resilient enough to withstand the onslaught of European empires. Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Trade in India meant involvement in a wide-flung web of ports, radiating out from the coastal cities of the subcontinent to Asia and the Indian Ocean: from Western India to East Africa, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf; from the South of India to Ceylon and the East Indies; and from the Bay of Bengal to China and Japan. More specifically, from French-ruled Pondichéry, trading routes fanned out to both east (to Aceh, Mergui, Pegu, Melaka, Batavia, Manila and China), and west (to Mocha, the Maldives and the French islands of Ile Bourbon and Ile de France in the Indian Ocean).⁵⁷ In all these ports, French traders competed not only with the Dutch, English and Portuguese, but with the tightly-knit commercial communities of Hadramis, Jews, Muslims and Armenians that had preceded them.⁵⁸ Cross-cultural trade, in the Indian Ocean as elsewhere, depended on trust, familiarity and reputation, as merchants tried to establish a stronghold far from home and relied on credit to carry out transactions.

In both commercial and political spheres, therefore, Europeans in general and French newcomers in particular, needed to negotiate a place for themselves in densely-populated and often confusing realms. To do so, they relied on the services of local

⁵⁷ Manning, *Fortunes à Faire*.

⁵⁸ The literature on commercial and other associations in the pre-colonial Indian Ocean world is vast and growing. Historians of maritime trade in the Indian Ocean have charted the long-standing networks of exchange that connected ports such as Goa, Aden, and Aceh. See K.N. Chaudhuri, *Asia before Europe: economy and civilisation of the Indian Ocean from the rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); A. Das Gupta, R. Mukherjee, and L. Subramanian, *Politics and Trade in the Indian Ocean World: Essays in Honour of Ashin Das Gupta* (Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). More recent work has focused on how Indian Ocean communities were constituted by relationships forged beyond the commercial sphere. For the importance of kinship and genealogy in Indian Ocean trade, see E. Ho, *The graves of Tarim: genealogy and mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). For linguistic exchanges in the Indian Ocean, see Larson, *Ocean of letters*. For the binding power of confessional alliances, see Sebastian R Prange, "The Social and Economic Organization of Muslim Trading Communities on the Malabar Coast, Twelfth to Sixteenth centuries" (Doctoral Dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2008). A recent work has suggested a reconfiguration of Indian Ocean studies by offering an organizing framework of "Islamicate Eurasia," encompassing South Asia and the middle East: Gagan D. S. Sood, "Pluralism, Hegemony and Custom in Cosmopolitan Islamic Eurasia, ca. 1720--1790, with Particular Reference to the Mercantile Arena" (Doctoral Dissertation, Yale University, 2008).

intermediaries, who either introduced them into new markets or acted on their behalf. Commercial brokers were employed by the *Compagnie des Indes* and by individual traders, and catechists, or religious interpreters, were hired by missionaries to ease their entry into spiritual domains.

Since Richard White's identification of the middle ground, a place "in between cultures, people, and in between empires and the non-state world of villages," where mediation is relied upon, historians of the early modern world have been increasingly cognizant of the importance of intermediaries in the making of emerging empires.⁵⁹ The many terms used to refer to these actors – intermediaries, go-betweens, middlemen, cultural brokers, middle figures, marginal men, *passeurs culturels* – is perhaps an indication of a certain murkiness inherent in the category under investigation.⁶⁰ My own use of the category of the intermediary is intentionally narrow: the intermediaries I study are men who were retained by French traders and missionaries as paid employees – either as commercial brokers or catechists – and thus intentionally and self-consciously acted as go-betweens. I focus on professional intermediaries because their stated positionality provided both these men and their French employer with opportunities to articulate the aims, limits, and pitfalls of colonial mediation.

⁵⁹ R. White, *The middle ground: Indians, empires, and republics in the Great Lakes region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), x. Following White, intermediaries have been especially well-studied in the North American context. More broadly, a forthcoming investigation into the role of intermediaries in the making of boundary between self and other in early modern empire is Ella-Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2011). For a compelling account of the central role of such intermediaries in the allegedly metropolitan construction of imperial scientific knowledge, see Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650-1900* (Houndmills Basingstoke Hampshire [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁶⁰ While historians have often referred to these figures as intermediaries, the category of the "cultural broker" has been especially important for anthropologists. Two critical works in that field are C. Geertz, "The Javanese Kijaji: The Changing Role of a Cultural Broker," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2, no. 2 (1960): 228-249; Eric R. Wolf, "Aspects of Group Relations in a Complex Society: Mexico," *American Anthropologist* 58, no. 6 (1956): 1065.

Much of the scholarship on mediation has focused on work performed by native go-betweens negotiating interactions between European and indigenous agents.⁶¹ I consider how native colonial intermediaries acted *within* the European imperial structures, mediating, highlighting or benefiting from conflicts among European groups as much as from the differences between new-arrivals and local populations.⁶² In the case of the commercial brokers and catechists I study, the intra-French conflict in question was that among Catholic missionaries and employees of the French trading Company, and within these two groups.

Mediating Trade: Commercial Brokers

French reliance on professional go-betweens attempted to resolve the double-edged problem of unfamiliarity: both French unfamiliarity with Indian mores and markets, and the foreignness of French actors trying to establish themselves in the subcontinent. The archives reveal that this was a problem that occupied the French from the earliest days of their presence in India. In a letter written to Colbert in 1664 by the *attendant* of Rochefort, these were the terms with which this official explained the difficulty of drawing merchants to invest in the newly-formed Company: “I have little

⁶¹ On the role of indigenous elites as power brokers between colonizers and colonized, see Yanna Yannakakis, *The Art of Being In-Between: Native Intermediaries, Indian Identity, and Local Rule in Colonial Oaxaca* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). For an example of colonial intermediaries working to supplant the indigenous elite in the African context, see Emily Lynn Osborn, “Circle of Iron: African Colonial Employees and the Interpretation of Colonial Rule in French West African,” *The Journal of African History* 44 (2003): 27-49. The literature on early modern cultural intermediaries is too large to survey here, but for a discussion of the state of the field, see Ella-Natalie Rothman, “Between Venice and Istanbul: Trans-Imperial Subjects and Cultural Mediation in the Early Modern Mediterranean” (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Michigan, History and Anthropology, 2006). See also the discussion in L.B. Tachot and S. Gruzinski, *Passeurs culturels: mécanismes de métissage* (Paris, Marne-la Vallée: Maison des sciences de l’homme; Presses universitaires de Marne-la-Vallée, 2001). A recent volume dedicated to the work of intermediaries in a global context in a slightly later period is Simon Schaffer, ed., *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770-1820* (Sagamore Beach Mass.: Science History Publications, 2009).

⁶² An example of a project collecting works that similarly examine intermediaries in an intra-imperial context is Tachot and Gruzinski, *Passeurs culturels: mécanismes de métissage*.

hope of success, because our merchants are reluctant to enter into matters that are not well-known to them.”⁶³

Traders and missionaries alike approached this problem with a similar solution: they hired local go-betweens. In both cases, they were drawing on established precedent. This was especially true in the case of commercial brokers: one scholar has argued that to the extent to which the Indian Ocean was an integrated world-system, it relied on the work of commercial brokers.⁶⁴ And while it was not only Europeans who employed commercial brokers to facilitate trade, European trade companies in the Indian Ocean had no established networks of kinship or origin upon which they could draw for support, and thus depended even more heavily on their brokers.⁶⁵

The services provided by commercial brokers in India were diverse; under French employment, their main task was to ensure that enough merchandise would flow into French hands, so that the ships leaving Pondichéry’s port would be fully stocked with the cloth and other commodities which were then sold in European markets. To this end, brokers negotiated with regional merchants who supplied goods, but also set up both farming operations and artisanal centers, where raw materials were produced and

⁶³ Letter of February 12, 1664 by Colbert du Terron to Colbert, cited in Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des Indes Orientales et François Martin*, 3–4.

⁶⁴ M.N. Pearson, “Brokers in Western Indian Port Cities Their Role in Servicing Foreign Merchants,” *Modern Asian Studies* 22, no. 3 (1988): 472. For more on the importance of commercial brokers in Indian Ocean trade, and on brokers in South Asia both prior to and after the arrival of Europeans, see also Sinnappah Arasaratnam, “Indian Intermediaries in the Trade and Administration of the French East India Company in the Coromandel (1670-1760),” in *Maritime trade, society and European influence in South Asia, 1600-1800* (Aldershot Hampshire Great Britain; Brookfield Vt. U.S.A.: Variorum, 1995), 135-144, and other essays in the same volume. Also A. Das Gupta, “The Broker at Mughal Surat,” *Review of Culture (Macao)* 13-14 (1991): 173-80. A.J. Qaisar, “The Role of Brokers in Medieval India,” *Indian Historical Review* 1, no. 2 (1974): 220-246. M.N. Pearson, “Wealth and Power: Indian Groups in the Portuguese Indian Economy,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 3 (1973): 36-44. G.V. Scammell, “Indigenous Assistance in the Establishment of Portuguese Power in India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 14, no. 1 (1980): 1-11. Joseph J. Brenig, “Chief Merchants and the European Enclaves of Seventeenth-Century Coromandel,” *Modern Asian Studies* 11, no. 3 (January 1, 1977): 321-340.

⁶⁵ Pearson, “Brokers in Western Indian Port Cities Their Role in Servicing Foreign Merchants.”

transformed into commodities. In return, brokers received a percentage of the sale they had made possible – generally between two and four percent.

Commercial brokers made possible the trade of the Company, but they also enabled the private trade of French traders who were employed by the Company but eager to take advantage of opportunities to trade on their own account. Brokers could thus serve both the Company and individual Frenchmen. At the very loftiest position was the chief commercial broker to the French Company in Pondichéry. The man in this position, in addition to overseeing the flow of goods into French hands, was more generally responsible for creating a robust market in Pondichéry, drawing capital-rich merchants to settle in the town and enhancing French commercial reputation in the region.

French reliance on commercial brokers dates back to the earliest days of Company presence in India. Caron, the first head of the *Compagnie des Indes* in Surat, hired a man named Samson to serve in this position. According to history of the Company written early in the eighteenth century, Caron's reliance on this man knew no bounds, and it was in him alone that Caron confided.⁶⁶ When French focus shifted from Surat to Pondichéry, dependence on commercial brokers remained constant. In South India, the brokers serving European trade companies could rise to positions of substantial authority, as was the case in both Pondichéry and the English town of Madras.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ BNF, manuscrits français 6231, f. 4 verso, also quoted in Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des Indes Orientales et François Martin*, 55.

⁶⁷ In her work on these brokers in Madras, Neild-Basu argues that this was the major difference between commercial brokers, or dubashes, in South India and their North India equivalents, munshis, who remained in more subaltern positions. See S. Neild-Basu, "The Dubashes of Madras," *Modern Asian Studies* 18, no. 1 (1984): 1-31. For more on North Indian interpreters and intermediaries in the Mughal context, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Making of a Munshi," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, no. 2 (2004): 61-72. A recent investigation into the life of one individual, high-

In Madras, these brokers were known as dubashes – according to one etymology meaning “men of two languages.”⁶⁸ The issue of nomenclature of such brokers in Pondichéry is a surprisingly thorny one. Although “dubashes” is the term commonly used in South Indian historiography, it appears only rarely in French sources of the period. The French equivalent term, usually rendered *daubachy*, does show up in French documents, but the earliest mention I have found dates from 1733.⁶⁹ In the first three decades of the eighteenth century, the period on which this dissertation focuses, several different terms were used to refer to the Tamil men who enabled French trade. One term was “modeliar,” which stems from the Tamil word for “first” (*mudal*), and is commonly used to designate a Vellala caste group to which these men belonged (*Pillai*, the title used by the other family of brokers in Pondichéry, is also used by the same caste group).⁷⁰ The word “modeliar” is used in French archives as the family name of one of two dynasties that served the French as commercial brokers; but the term is also used to refer more generally to the category of commercial brokers.⁷¹ A second term often used to refer to brokers is the French word *courtier*. Most often “courtier” was used to name the highest rank of commercial brokers, hired by the *Compagnie des Indes* as the most senior Tamil

ranking munshi is Rajeev Kumar Kinra, “Secretary-poets in Mughal India and the ethos of Persian: The case of Chandar Bhan Brahman” (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2008).

⁶⁸ Neild-Basu, “The Dubashes of Madras.” “Dubash, Dobash, Debash” see the entry in “Hobson-Jobson: A glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive,” Dictionary, 1903, <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.0:1:834.hobson>.

⁶⁹ The term “daubache” is used in a legal dossier of a case heard in 1733 by Pondichéry’s sovereign council, or its de facto court. CAOM, INDE, série M/46. The pages in the dossier are not numbered, but the term daubache appears in item # 14, the second interrogation of the defendant in the case, one Peroumal. The term also appears in a case heard by the sovereign council in 1743, where the central figure, a man named Arlanden who is accused of illegal slave-trading, is described as the “daubachy” of a French trader. See CAOM, INDE, série M/91. The term is used – and the position discussed at length – in the memoirs of a French trader named Mautort, who arrived in India in 1780. Mautort, *Mémoires du Chevalier de Mautort: Capitaine au régiment d’Aurasie Chevalier de l’ordre royal et militaire de Saint-Louis (1752-1802)* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1895).

⁷⁰ Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (Madras: Government Press, 1909), vol. 1, 84.

⁷¹ For an example of this usage, see BNF Manuscrits français FR 6231, ff. 52.

employee in the colony, and was joined to the designation “*chef de malabars*” (head of all Malabars).⁷² The double title – *courtier et chef de malabars* – points to two different aspects of these men’s position at the crossroads of two cultural systems. As courtiers, they were enmeshed in a French system of service, with a commitment to furthering the agenda of the French Company and the Crown. But simultaneously, they were “*chefs des Malabars*,” local leaders of the Tamil community and therefore responsible also for representing the interests and voices of local merchants and workers back to the Company. In the chapters that follow I demonstrate that it was this double positioning at the heart of both the French and Tamil commercial and social infrastructure in Pondichéry that enabled commercial brokers to become such central figures of authority. This double-sourced authority also motivated French anxiety about the repercussions of intermediaries’ power and influence in the colony and beyond.

Mediating Conversion: Catechists

Missionaries, in South Asia and elsewhere, employed paid native converts in their missions; these men made it possible for a small group of Europeans to spread the word of Christianity to vast swaths of land. “To make up for the lack of missionaries, we put to service the zeal of our converts, full of eagerness as they are for the propagation of the holy Gospel,” wrote a missionary near Madurai in 1643. “We have just set apart a number of them to give themselves wholly to the service of the churches; and, in order that they may devote themselves entirely to this holy work, we give them a small monthly salary for their food and for the maintenance of their families. These are the colleagues whom we call catechists and *pandarams*; this is not something we ourselves have

⁷² See for example CAOM, FM C²/71, ff. 309.

invented; our Fathers have already made excellent use of this method in Japan and elsewhere.”⁷³

In French India, although members of three missionary orders worked in Pondichéry, the aforementioned distribution of religious labor meant that it was Jesuits who were the missionaries to employ catechists most often.⁷⁴ These religious interpreters, who took no vows and were not members of the Society of Jesus, nevertheless took on a central role in the life of the mission. More than mere translators, catechists were sent on behalf of missionaries into the field, using their connections and linguistic advantage to spread the gospel and persuade potential converts to engage with European missionaries. Jesuits were utterly dependant on their catechists, and in their copious correspondence had no qualms about admitting this. With each missionary employing as many as a dozen catechists to act for him, much of the labor carried out in the mission was performed by these employees. Catechists served as an advance force, venturing into new territories and introducing Christianity to the populace. They also translated sermons given by the Jesuits and likely taught Tamil to their employers. On at least one occasion, they violently advanced the Jesuit agenda, breaking into a Hindu temple in Pondichéry and wreaking havoc within.

⁷³ Letter by Father Balthasar da Costa, cited in Neill, *A History of Christianity in India, I: The Beginnings to AD 1707*, 301.

⁷⁴ Two points of clarification should be made here. First, after the suppression of the Order in 1773, the MEP missionaries in South India largely took over Jesuit domains, and with that the employment of catechists; but in the earlier period of which I write, when I refer to missionaries and catechists, it is Jesuits of whom I speak. In addition, on occasion I refer as catechists to men who are not explicitly described as such in the sources, but on these occasions I discuss the circumstances that have led me to identify these actors as catechists.

Catechists have been largely understudied in both religious and colonial histories.⁷⁵ But taken together, the work of catechists and commercial brokers reveals the extent of French dependence on local institutions and networks. Much as Kapil Raj has urged historians to “shift the locus of interest in the nexus between corporate trade and science from the European metropolis to the contact zone and to the dynamics of intercultural encounter,” this dissertation’s focus on commercial brokers and catechists urges a similar relocation for the nexus of commerce and religion.⁷⁶ The simultaneous co-dependence and antagonism between the French projects of commerce and conversion engendered a crisis of authority in Pondichéry. This in turn allowed Tamil intermediaries employed by the French – commercial brokers and religious interpreters – to rise to positions of prominence and power, much to the discomfort of their French employers. Focusing on these intermediaries helps us to understand the tension between French religious and commercial objectives; placing intermediaries and their experience of colonialism at the center of the story also reveals their importance to the French project of empire itself.

Dissertation Outline

To address the issues of religious and commercial conflict of empire, and the disconcerting prominence of professional intermediaries, this dissertation focuses on moments of conflict and rupture, when the sutures of French authority were most strained

⁷⁵ There are of course some notable exceptions. In India, See Leibau, “Country Priests, Catechists, and Schoolmasters as Cultural, Religious, and Social Middlemen in the Context of the Tranquebar Mission.”; E.F. Kent, “Tamil Bible Women and the Zenana Missions of Colonial South India,” *History of Religions* 39, no. 2 (1999): 117. For early use of catechists in Vietnam, see Peter Phan, *Mission and catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes and inculturation in seventeenth-century Vietnam* (Maryknoll N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998). In the Indian Ocean, see Pier M. Larson, “Enslaved Malagasy and ‘Le Travail De La Parole’ in the Pre-Revolutionary Mascarenes,” *The Journal of African History* 48, no. 3 (January 1, 2007): 457-479.

⁷⁶ Raj, *Relocating modern science*, 18.

by the political realities of Pondichéry. This introductory chapter has introduced the institutions and actors who came together in the colony in the late seventeenth century. The following chapters pick up the narrative in 1700, after the colony returned to French hands following a brief period of Dutch rule. The focus therein is on the first three decades of the eighteenth century: it was during this period, when Pondichéry was steadily growing under French rule, and for a time free of the major French military engagements of the mid-eighteenth century, that internal French struggles about the nature of the Indian project came to the fore.

The next chapter, “‘In Full Liberty of Commerce and Conscience’: The Pondichéry Desertions of 1701-1715,” demonstrates how disputes between traders and missionaries about religious life in Pondichéry – namely Hindu parades and holiday celebrations – enabled Indian employees in the town to successfully demand greater lenience for Hindu religious practice. I document a series of four work stoppages that took place in the colony in 1705-1715. All originated from Jesuit attempts to control public space and limit the display of Hindu religiosity, by convincing lay administrators to impose limits on such practices. But following the joint actions of the Tamil merchant class, artisans and laborers, three of these four strikes concluded with complete French capitulation to Tamil demands, and at times even greater religious freedoms for Hindus than those allowed prior to the initial French attempts to curb such practices. By charting the struggles among religious workers of different orders and Company administrators in responding to these indigenous challenges, this chapter demonstrates the fundamentally opposed agendas of Jesuit missionaries and East Indies Company traders and officials, and its result: French hegemony in the colony was a shaky construct. The chapter also

sets the scene for the deeply divisive landscape in which professional intermediaries plied their trade, and reveals that indigenous actors such as brokers and catechists could benefit from the internal splits among French colonists.

The third chapter, “*L’affaire Nayiniyappa: A Colonial Scandal*,” introduces the Nayiniyappa affair, briefly described above, and argues for its general revelatory power about the politics and divisions of Pondichéry. The reason the Nayiniyappa affair drew so much attention in both colony and metropole – and the reason it figures so largely in this work – is because it stunningly revealed the unstable foundations of French authority in the colony. More specifically, it exposed the fundamental conflict between the twin projects of French empire in India, those of trade and religion, and explicitly pitted French colonists and missionaries against one another, either for or against Nayiniyappa. The affair thus brought together a large swath of French and Tamil Pondichéry: traders, commercial brokers, Jesuits, catechists, interpreters, officials in France, and both European and indigenous players in South India.

The concluding three chapters each revisit the Nayiniyappa affair through a different prism. Focusing on the affair but moving beyond it to French encounters with other commercial brokers and catechists, I examine in turn the fields of family, language, and mobility to argue that conflicting French agendas permeated and influenced every aspect of the daily interactions between European colonists and Tamil intermediaries. Chapter four, “Families in the Middle: The Effective Politics of Kinship,” reveals that the conflict between trade and mission did not remain at the institutional level of the state, but permeated into the lives of families, both French and Indian. French *colons* and missionaries both depended on the local familial networks to which intermediaries

belonged. But where traders tried to uphold these networks of affinity and affection, so that they could benefit from their potential for profit, Jesuit missionaries tried – with little success – to create alternative kin relations in which Jesuits filled positions of prominence.

Chapter five, “Mediating a Polyglot Colony: French, Tamil and Portuguese in Pondichéry and in ‘*l’affaire Nayiniyappa*,’” discusses the linguistic ecology of Pondichéry. I argue that Jesuit missionaries and traders subscribed to very different linguistic ideologies, each enabled by their intermediaries. Missionaries prized fluency in Tamil and other local languages, and competed with their catechists over who was the most effective communicator of the Christian message in local forms. Traders and officials, on the other hand, all learned Portuguese, a long-standing lingua franca in Indian Ocean trade (thereby adopting a very different strategy from the *francophonie* of nineteenth-century French empire). I suggest that the disagreement in the colony over linguistic hierarchies created a state of semiotic confusion, made apparent in the course of the Nayiniyappa affair.

The sixth chapter, “Intermediaries on the Move: Mobility, Stability, and the Foreign Condition,” argues that intermediaries enjoyed significant physical mobility, which was in turn accompanied by the ability to mobilize symbolic, social, spiritual and economic resources. This chapter demonstrates that mobility allowed go-betweens to augment their own authority, and overturns conceptions of colonists as mobile agents and natives as static. Mobility was yet another arena in which Jesuits attempted to forge new pathways of social encounters, and tried to lessen their dependence on the travels of catechists; traders and officials, on the other hand, were keen to rely on the established

routes of commerce made accessible by their commercial brokers. In the Conclusion, I offer a reflection on the processes by which the archival collections on which this work is based came into being, and suggest that the agentive history of these documentary repositories allows us to productively position Pondichéry and its inhabitants, French and Indian alike, at the center of the story of early modern French empire.

Chapter II

“Full Liberty of Commerce and Conscience”: The Pondichéry Desertions of 1701-1715

Introduction

In the first two decades of the eighteenth century, on four different occasions, the Indian inhabitants of the French colonial city of Pondichéry threatened to abandon the town. With their belongings and working tools in hand, thousands of Hindu protesters gathered at the city gates and demanded the right to practice their religion in the Catholic-ruled town.¹ If their requests were not met, they promised, they would leave Pondichéry an empty ghost town, taking their labor and their capital elsewhere. Had the threatened exodus taken place, the French rulers of Pondichéry would have struggled to keep the

¹ I use the term “Hindu” throughout as somewhat anachronistic yet useful shorthand (and I dispense henceforth with the surrounding quotation marks). Scholars of South Asia have long debated the existence of a formulated category of “Hindu” or “Hinduism,” in the eighteenth century, with some claiming that the category was at least partially fabricated in order to advance imperial and Brahmanical agendas. See for example P.J. Marshall, *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge [Eng.]: University Press, 1970); Richard King, “Orientalism and the Modern Myth of ‘Hinduism’,” *Numen* 46, no. 2 (January 1, 1999): 146-185. Others have argued that early modern inhabitants of the subcontinent held a shared notion of religious practice which could be reasonably glossed as Hindu. For example, see James Laine, *Shivaji: Hindu King in Islamic India* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). A recent overview of this debate can be found in Brian Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?: Britons, Indians, and Colonial Construction of Religion* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Pennington himself describes the notion that the British “invented” Hinduism to be a “severe historical misrepresentation,” but does advance an argument that not until the nineteenth century did Hinduism exist as a unified world religion, and it became such through the joint efforts of Indians and Englishmen. In the context of Pondichéry, French writers in Pondichéry most often used the term “gentile” to refer to this religious group, sometime replacing it with “idolaters.” In addition to its Hindu majority, Pondichéry had a small Muslim population, but French concerns about the public practice of “idolatry” in the town were focused on Hindu temples and holidays. This attention had an empirical basis: a feature of trade on the Coromandel Coast in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was that it was mostly Hindu merchants who entered into trade relations with Europeans. Sinnappah Arasaratnam, “Trade and Political Dominion in South India, 1750-1790: Changing British-Indian Relationships,” *Modern Asian Studies* 13, no. 1 (1979): 20. The struggles over religious freedom detailed in this chapter thus engaged Catholic administrators and missionaries on the one side, and Hindu workers and merchants of the other.

colony alive: the locals posing the threat were a diverse group, consisting of wealthy Tamil merchants; laborers charged with the fortification of the French holdings; weavers who created the colony's chief export of cotton; and domestic servants who served in the homes of French colonists. The existence of the colony utterly depended on their joint presence, labor, and capital.

On three of these four occasions – in 1701, 1705, and 1714 – the French government officials governing Pondichéry capitulated to local Hindu demands (only in a conflict of 1714 did French officials and missionaries emerge with the upper hand). Citing a tense political landscape, the threat of other European powers eager to diminish Pondichéry's strength, and the sheer impossibility of changing the Hindu nature of the South Indian landscape, the French governors and councilors repeatedly overturned their own previously imposed restrictions on public Hindu religiosity. Facing a relatively united coalition of laborers, artisans and traders, the French colonists were obliged to confront the precariousness of their own hold on the colony. In the process of doing so, deep and fraught divisions were brought to light, both between officials of the French trading Company and the Jesuit missionaries in Pondichéry, and between the Jesuits and members of the two other Catholic orders established in the town, the Capuchins and the *Missions étrangères de Paris*.

Investigations into the history of European trading companies in the East have all-too-often been severed from studies of religious mission, and vice versa.² But trade and mission were connected projects, as demonstrated by the daily, in-depth involvement and mutual entanglements of traders-administrators and missionaries in Pondichéry. This

² A study that exposes the religious content of the French imperial project, albeit in the later, republican period, is Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880-1914*.

entanglement is revealed with particular clarity through an examination of French reaction to the events of 1701-1715, in which the interests of the commercial and religious projects were simultaneously opposed and bound together. This chapter offers an account of the events of 1701-1715, and traces internal conflicts in French reactions to the employee threats of desertion. These conflicts, I suggest, stemmed from a complicated difference in method and agenda. From the perspective of the traders-officials, a ban on non-Christian practice would have had devastating effects on the commercial viability of the colony. A government that did not allow Hindu rites would have been governing an empty town. So although the *Compagnie des Indes* had been charged by King Louis XIV with the propagation of Christian faith in Pondichéry, traders-officials in Pondichéry were nevertheless willing to subordinate this goal to commercial considerations. But although this prioritization was reaffirmed time and time again in the course of the employee uprisings, it nevertheless posed a deep and troubling challenge to French claims to political authority. If the French government was not able to make its subjects conform to Christianity, its sovereignty was shaky at best. After all, the French King – the source for colonial claims to authority – made divine claims for his own authority.

One might expect Catholic missionaries to have banded together against “idolatry” in Pondichéry; but as the events described below reveal, missionaries did not agree on how to resolve the recurring crises. French Jesuits were the key agitators for restricting Hindu practice. They viewed the continuing and public practice of Hindu religiosity in Pondichéry as an affront and a failure. Even while Jesuits admitted that the commercial viability of Pondichéry was a precondition for the success of their own

mission, they repeatedly lobbied for the complete and violent annihilation of Hinduism within the confines of Pondichéry. The Jesuits, so powerful in the courts of Europe, were especially keen to establish an irrevocable link between power and confession. The ability of non-Christian residents to prosper in Pondichéry was especially galling to them. Yet despite the repeated disagreements between Jesuits and traders about how best to manage their interactions with locals, the Jesuits still conceived of their project as intimately linked to the commercial one. In this, their outlook would have been formed by the experiences of their brethren in New France in the mid-seventeenth century: As Neal Salisbury has shown, French Jesuits in Huron villages in the 1640's only found success once conversion to Christianity was linked to better access to French traders and the resulting economic benefits.³

Capuchins and MEP missionaries, on the other hand, repeatedly sided with the traders-officials, and against the Jesuits. The struggle over influence and potential Christian souls in Pondichéry made the success of one order the loss of another, leading Jesuits, Capuchins and MEP missionaries to advocate for very different measures in pursuit of the same ultimate goal. For traders-officials and missionaries alike, then, the events of 1701-1715 were an occasion to expose and articulate the fissures running through the French project.

Seeking a “Beautiful Harmony”

Toward the middle of the eighteenth century, once the French colony in South India was better established, lay and religious authorities were able to come together, and legislated the Christian nature of life in the city. In the 1740s, for example, the Superior

³ Neal Salisbury, “Religious Encounters in a Colonial Context: New England and New France in the Seventeenth Century,” *American Indian Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (October 1, 1992): 501-509.

Council of Pondichéry released a series of religious decrees. In 1746, the Council ordered that no one, “white or black” would be allowed to work without permission on Sundays and Christian holidays.⁴ At the same time, the Council also ordered that all slaves in Pondichéry must be baptized within no more than a year of purchase.⁵ With the city densely populated, and not under direct threat of attack from European or local rivals, missionaries and company employees were secure enough to align their goals, and act accordingly. Yet this was not always the case; as late as 1733, the Directors of the Company in Paris suggested that the Governor and Superior Council of Pondichéry prioritize commercial goals over and above the propagation of faith.⁶ This attitude was even more apparent in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, with recurring Indian employee actions against religious restrictions. With the French worried about attacks by Dutch, British and local Indian rulers, and Pondichéry still far from being a viable commercial operation (due in large part to the *Compagnie des Indes*’ perpetual lack of capital), such bold moves on behalf of Catholicism were deemed too risky by most – including some missionaries.

It was during this period that the French attempted to maintain stability in Pondichéry – but the success of such attempts was short lived, especially in the tumultuous first two decades of the eighteenth century. The sought-after stability proved to be elusive for various reasons, such as European and Indian threats to French sovereignty launched from India, as well as the world-spanning conflicts between France

⁴ CAOM, Inde, B/27. For more on the restriction of work on Sundays, see CAOM, FM, sous-série F³/238, ff. 523-524.

⁵ CAOM, Inde, B/28 and B/29. For more on French-owned slaves’ baptisms, see CAOM, FM, F³/238, ff. 525-526.

⁶ See the Directors’ missive of February 1733, cited in Launay, *Histoire des missions de l’Inde*, xxxiv–xxxv.

and its European neighbors that reverberated in the Indian Ocean. But equally disruptive were more local conflicts and tensions, which erupted in Pondichéry's streets on multiple occasions.

These conflicts undermined the explicit French aspiration for a "harmonious" colony. As Pondichéry governor Beauvillier de Courchant (1723-1726) wrote to his superiors in Paris in 1725, affairs in the colony were of a delicate nature, and in order to succeed, French officials should do all in their power to preserve "this beautiful harmony, so necessary for the good of [the Company's] affairs."⁷ But at the turn of the century, such harmony was more aspiration than reality. The on-going tensions between French colonists (traders-government officials and Catholic missionaries) and Indian inhabitants (merchants, craftsmen, laborers and servants) were to provide a constant challenge to this vision.

That said, such harmony was not completely out of reach. Even during the period 1701-1715, which saw at least four major conflicts in the town, such disruptions were still a departure from the norm. If we were to add up the days of all four documented strikes which accompanied the threatened Hindu departure, they would still account for less than a month in a period of a decade and a half. However, although moments of dispute represented a break from routine interactions between French employers and Indian employees, it is precisely at such moments that we can see the fluidity with which influence, legitimacy and authority were distributed and redistributed.

⁷ "Cette belle harmonie si nécessaire au bien de vos affaires." CAOM, FM, C²/73, f. 155.

Dutch and English Alternatives

By making demands to openly practice their religion, Indian inhabitants of the town both implicitly and explicitly referred back to the period in the late seventeenth century, when Pondichéry was briefly under Dutch rule. Under the Dutch, there likely would have been no reason for religious strife. Tamil townsmen might have known of the relative religious freedoms granted by the Dutch in other towns in the Indian Ocean region in the same period, such as Batavia and Colombo, where officials of the V.O.C. largely turned a blind-eye to the religious activities of non-Christian inhabitants and “the main demeanor was one of religious tolerance.”⁸ When the protestors in Pondichéry linked their demands to the period of Dutch rule, as they occasionally did, they were in effect reminding the French of the tenuous grasp they had over the colony. After all, Pondichéry had fallen to the Dutch with almost embarrassing ease, and was returned to the French only through diplomatic negotiations in Europe.

Not only the Dutch, but the English as well served as silent but important parties to the negotiations between the French and Pondichéry’s local inhabitants. Although the English were rarely mentioned explicitly in the course of these conflicts, the competitive politics between Madras and Pondichéry was never far from French minds, and English authorities similarly did not engage in active missionary work until a much later period. At the same time that the French Company was charged with the propagation of faith, the Directors of the East India Company in London were sending a very different message to their potential subjects, by writing their administrators in India that “we would have you be always most kind and indulgent to the inhabitants that observe our laws and protect

⁸ Remco Raben, “Facing the Crowd: The Urban Ethnic Policy of the Dutch East India Company 1600-1800,” in *Mariners, Merchants and Oceans: Studies in Maritime History*, ed. K.S. Mathew (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1995), 225.

them in the same uninterrupted liberty of their several religions in which they were born and bred as you do those of our church and nation.”⁹ As the account below will show, the reactions to the agitations in Pondichéry had to account for various scales of import and accountability: local, regional, and global.

The Demand for Labor in South India

Prior to the French acquisition of Pondichéry, the town had been sparsely populated, described by its French Governor François Martin upon his arrival there as a small fishermen’s village. During the 15 years in which employee strikes took place, the Indian population had swelled to tens of thousands (between 30,000 and 60,000, according to various estimates). Roughly one third of these were weavers, who manufactured the central commodity of French trade in India, white and blue cotton, and their presence in the colony was therefore of paramount importance. European port towns competed over weavers, attempting to lure them to settle in their respective towns, ensuring a steady supply of textiles, and depriving competitors of a workforce. In 1690 in Madras, for example, the English Governor Elihu Yale promised fifty families of weavers to provide them with plots on which to build houses, the right to practice their religion freely, and ceremonial gifts of betel leaf and rosewater upon their arrival in the town.¹⁰ Yet weavers from Madras were at times lured to Dutch and French settlements by more enticing offers.¹¹

Wealthy Indian merchants, many of whom came to Pondichéry from the English “factory” town of Madras in search of new opportunities, were especially sought-after

⁹ Letter of January 14, 1686, cited in Kanakalatha Mukund, *The View from Below: Indigenous Society, Temples, and the Early Colonial State in Tamilnadu, 1700-1835* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2005), 59.

¹⁰ Kanakalatha Mukund, *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant: Evolution of Merchant Capitalism in the Coromandel* (London: Sangam, 1999), 121.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

settlers, and the French made concerted efforts to lure them to Pondichéry. European imperial projects in the region – French, Dutch and English – keenly competed for the merchants who could make the fortune of a town. The bodies and coffers of Indians were thus another site through and on which imperial rivalry was enacted. French officials were at a disadvantage in this competition, since wealthy Indian and Armenian merchants by and large preferred the towns of Madras, Arcot, and Porto Novo.¹²

French households in Pondichéry also employed numerous Indian servants; a bachelor French trader of middling rank, employed by the French trading company, might employ more than 20 servants, male and female.¹³ And while later in the century the French colonial government passed a law that valets employed by company employees must be Christian, no such decree existed in the early decades, and most domestic servants were likely Hindu. The town's Hindu population was thus made up of a variety of social and economic classes, as well as many different caste groups.¹⁴ Yet when it came to disputes with the French authorities about the practice of religion, these disparate communities came together to act in concert, posing a formidable challenge.¹⁵

When the town's inhabitants threatened to abandon the French colony, as they did during the events detailed below, they were drawing on their experience in the labor

¹² Manning, *Fortunes à Faire*, 79.

¹³ Mautort, *Mémoires du Chevalier de Mautort: Capitaine au régiment d'Austrasie Chevalier de l'ordre royal et militaire de Saint-Louis (1752-1802)*, 265.

¹⁴ For a map detailing the different caste groups in Pondichéry at the end of the seventeenth century, see Deloche, *Origins of the urban development of Pondicherry according to seventeenth century Dutch plans*.

¹⁵ On the relationship between South Indian merchants and weaver communities, see Prasannan Parthasarathi, *The Transition to a Colonial Economy: Weavers, Merchants, and Kings in South India, 1720-1800* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). For the slightly later English context, see Sinnappah Arasaratnam, "Weavers, Merchants and Company: The Handloom Industry in Southeastern India 1750-1790," *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 17, no. 3 (1980): 257-281.

market of South India in the early modern period.¹⁶ The weavers who made up the most important part of the workforce were accustomed to living fairly mobile lives. The terms of weavers' contracts with the merchants who commissioned cloth from them afforded them considerable independence: weavers generally owned their own looms and place of production, with merchants supplying financing for raw materials and guaranteeing the purchase of the finished commodity. As a result, as a scholar of the South Indian cloth industry has noted, "weavers were some of the most peripatetic inhabitants of south India. It was not uncommon for them to pick up and move when they heard word of better prospects or if they faced oppression by merchants or even states."¹⁷ Across India, one can find instances of weavers taking organized actions to improve their conditions.¹⁸ This meant that weavers were used to a measure of power and freedom, and were unlikely to accede to all French demands.

This mobility was not the exclusive prerogative of weavers, but a more general feature of the regional labor market. The South Indian economy early in the eighteenth century experienced a heavy demand for workers around temples, courts, growing towns

¹⁶ In North India, the early eighteenth century saw the widespread occurrence of agrarian uprisings, which led to a destabilization of Mughal authority and power. See Muzaffar, Alam, "Aspects of Agrarian Uprisings in North India in the Early Eighteenth Century," in *The Eighteenth Century in India*, ed. Alavi, Seema (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 84-112. But in those instances, the revolts were led by the powerful, wealthy and well-armed local zamindar ruling class, with little evidence of the involvement of traders and artisans leading the Pondichéry events.

¹⁷ Prasannan Parthasarathi, "Merchants and the Rise of Colonialism," in *The Eighteenth Century in India*, ed. Seema Alavi (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 213. See also Douglas E. Haynes and Tirthankar Roy, "Conceiving Mobility: Weavers' Migrations in Pre-colonial and Colonial India," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* XXXVI, no. 1 (1999): 35-67.

¹⁸ In Pondichéry, the impetus for the strikes, again and again, was that of religious rites. But there are other examples in the period of weavers successfully organizing against the English trading company. On the Andhra coast in the 1720s and 1730s the four principle weaver castes organized against the East India Company, in reaction to attempts to lower their profits, and did so successfully. Parthasarathi, *The transition to a colonial economy*. For a striking example including violent riots from late eighteenth-century Surat, see Lakshmi Subramanian, "Power and the Weave: Weavers, Merchants and Rulers in Eighteenth-century Surat," in *Politics and Trade in the Indian Ocean World: Essays in Honour of Ashin Das Gupta*, ed. Lakshmi Subramanian and Rudrangshu Mukherjee (Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 52-79.

and battling armies.¹⁹ In such a diverse economy, as David Washbrook has observed, there were significant opportunities for physical and social mobility for both landed and landless labor.²⁰

The strategy of deserting a town, as the workers threatened to do during the Pondichéry uprisings, also had precedent in the region. The scholarship on village desertion in South India has largely focused on the agrarian context, and has demonstrated that villages in the Tamil region were abandoned for a wide variety of reasons in the eighteenth century, most often because of war, famine, and epidemics.²¹ Weavers specifically had on occasion deserted a place if they were unable to repay merchants for the debts they had accrued.²² However, the threat of desertion brought forth by weavers and other artisans and laborers in Pondichéry was cut of a different cloth; this was a strategic ploy, a threat made from a position of strength, not weakness or desperation, and stemming directly from impingements on religious practice. The decision to deploy the threat of desertion strategically, as the result of religious

¹⁹ David Washbrook, "Land and Labour in Late Eighteenth-Century South India: The Golden Age of the Pariah?," in *Dalit Movements and the Meanings of Labour in India*, ed. Peter Robb (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 71. Subrahmanyam notes a similar growing demand for labor in the urban economy in the earlier period. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India, 1500-1650* (Cambridge England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

²⁰ Washbrook, "Land and Labour in Late Eighteenth-Century South India: The Golden Age of the Pariah?"

²¹ Roland Lardinois, "Deserted Villages and Depopulation in Rural Tamil Nadu c. 1780-1830," in *India's Historical Demography*, ed. Tim Dyson (London: Curzon, 1989), 16-48. Anand Yang, "Peasants on the Move: A Study of Internal Migration in India," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 10, no. 1 (1979): 37. For a discussion of the strategy of village desertion by textile workers in an earlier period, in protest of tax policies that were not to their liking, see Carla Sinopoli, *The Political Economy of Craft Production: Crafting Empire in South India, c. 1350-1650* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 177.

²² Arasaratnam, "Trade and Political Dominion in South India, 1750-1790," 33-36. Arasaratnam relates how, in struggles between weavers and the English Company later in the eighteenth century, the weavers left for French and Dutch holdings, thereby playing off European rivalries. But it is significant that in this later period, a time of greater stability for English Madras than the early decades of the century were for French Pondichéry, it was the English who prevailed, jailing the weavers they identified as responsible, and bringing the workers back. So while the English were later on able to insist on "labor monogamy," this was not the case for earlier French efforts.

restrictions and not as a response to disaster, is one of the defining features of the Pondichéry strikes. The demand for labor partially explains this strength, but weavers and other artisans benefitted further from the corporate structure of labor in the region, which, as Washbrook notes, allowed “labor at virtually all levels of the economic system... [to put] up its own stiff resistance.”²³ And indeed weavers (as well as merchants) in Pondichéry were organized in corporate groups, and jointly negotiated with the French.²⁴

The weavers and other artisans were thus bargaining from a strong position, but in the course of the Pondichéry strikes they were further strengthened by their alliance with the wealthy merchants whom the French were so desperate to lure to the colony. Conflicts between the merchant class and the state were by no means unique to European enclaves in South India. Prasannan Parthasaranti has suggested that in conflicts between Indian states and the merchant class, the mercantilist policies adopted by states in this period actually “threatened fundamental merchant interests and led to a deeper division between the [indigenous] state and merchants.”²⁵ It is possible that such experiences predisposed the merchants in Pondichéry to preemptively take a strong stance against any French encroachments on their religious rights.

Much like the Tamil actions in Pondichéry drew on a longer history of regional labor conditions, the reactions of French officials in the colony were similarly informed by circumstances in metropolitan France, which shaped how administrators understood and reacted to the recurring strikes. If Tamil weavers were used to deploying their own mobility as a tool for improving conditions, Frenchmen might have harbored concerns

²³ Washbrook, “Land and Labour in Late Eighteenth-Century South India: The Golden Age of the Pariah?,” 77.

²⁴ On the corporate associations of merchants in French India, see Manning, *Fortunes a Faire*, chap. VII.

²⁵ Parthasarathi, “Merchants and the Rise of Colonialism,” 199.

about the economic future of the colony shaped by similar mobility of labor in France. Where *Annales* historiography has, by and large, presented a vision of rural labor in France as being exceedingly stable, with workers tied to the villages of their birth, more recent scholarship of early modern French labor markets has questioned the existence of such stability, pointing instead to the ability of French workers to journey between markets and towns.²⁶ Furthermore, the personal experiences of French administrators in India – who were themselves men who were willing to journey extraordinarily far to improve their own economic opportunities – would likely have been all too receptive to the threat of desertion posed by Tamil artisans and merchants. In addition, by the turn of the eighteenth century, by the time religious practice became a central point of contention, Frenchmen in Pondichéry were all too familiar with the propensity of the town’s Indian inhabitants to pick up and leave if conditions were not to their liking: when the Dutch were advancing on Pondichéry in the 1693, much of the town’s population simply left, awaiting quieter days.²⁷ When the threat of desertion was raised again, Frenchmen would have been all too cognizant of the possibility that the threat would be made good, and their reactions from the outset demonstrate how seriously this threat was taken.

Fighting for Space: The Threat of Exodus in 1701

The first documented explicit conflict between French colonists and the Indians they employed in Pondichéry took place in 1701. The direct impetus was restrictions

²⁶ For historiography that emphasizes the stability of French village life, see Pierre Goubert, *The French peasantry in the seventeenth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). and Gerard Bouchard, *Le village immobile: Sennely-en-Sologne au XVIII^e siècle*. (Paris: Plon, 1972). For a revision of this approach, see James B. Collins, “Geographic and Social Mobility in Early-Modern France,” *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 3 (April 1, 1991): 563-577. A fuller discussion of the issue of mobility in both French and South Asian contexts appears in Chapter 6.

²⁷ Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des Indes Orientales et François Martin*, 311.

placed on religious practice, but two events that had occurred before the threat of Hindu exodus was first posed, both involving Jesuit missionaries, provide important background. On both occasions – the first a series of Catholic processions on the streets of Pondichéry that took place right at the turn of the century, and the second a confrontation between Jesuits and a local religious authority – the Jesuits engaged in behavior that I term conflict-seeking.

Two different accounts describe the Jesuit penchant for holding lavish processions in the streets of the colony to mark the occasion of Christian holidays.²⁸ In the first, a report on goings-on in Pondichéry in 1701-1702, an anonymous author noted that the missionaries of the Society of Jesus accompanied these processions with torches and musical instruments, and these flamboyant demonstrations of religious zeal would go on well into the night. Even the Capuchins and the *missions étrangères* missionaries, wrote the author, did not support such events, insisting that they bore no fruit for the cause of Christianity.²⁹ The second account of these processions, written by a Capuchin missionary who arrived in Pondichéry in 1737, went into more detail, offering some intriguing information.³⁰

²⁸ By taking to the streets as they did, French missionaries were following in a longer history stemming from the sixteenth-century Wars of Religion, in which Catholics and Protestants attempted to wrest symbolic and physical control of public spaces. See Penny Roberts, *A City in Conflict: Troyes during the French Wars of Religion* (Manchester; New York New York, NY: Manchester University Press; Distributed exclusively in the USA and Canada by St. Martin's Press, 1996). Philip Benedict, *Rouen during the Wars of Religion* (Cambridge Eng.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981). For an example from Italy of the Jesuit fondness for elaborate events as a means to win over souls, see Bernadette Majorana, "Une pastorale spectaculaire. Missions et missionnaires jésuites en Italie (XVIe-XVIIe siècle)," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 57, no. 2 (2002): 297-320. In the colonial context, lavish French processions were not the sole domain of missionaries. Patricia Seed offers a fascinating discussion of elaborate French processions in the New World, which were meant to signify native consent to colonial rule. Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²⁹ CAOM, FM, C²/66, f. 24.

³⁰ Norbert de Bar le Duc, the writer of this history (published in 1766), is a somewhat problematic source for any information concerning the Jesuits. He was virulently anti-Jesuit, and his book is in large part an

In 1700, according to the Capuchin Norbert, the Jesuits of Pondichéry held a big procession to celebrate the Assumption of the Virgin, which takes place on August 15. “They did everything they could to make [the holiday] impressive and dazzling, without reflecting on the fact that... this will only make the celebration... scandalous in the eyes of the observers.”³¹ Not only did the Jesuits arrange for drums, oboes, trumpets and other musical instruments to accompany them, but the musicians who played these instruments had actually been brought over from neighboring Hindu temples.³² Incidentally, the use of temple musicians in the Catholic procession demonstrates the difficulty of creating clear-cut separations between colonial communities. Much like the Jesuits must have wanted to have only Christian musicians, the labor market in Pondicherry and the division of expertise made that impossible.³³

A holiday that began so well, continued the Capuchin Norbert (his pen fairly dripping with venom), concluded with a procession that did not end until midnight. During the procession, a statue of the Virgin Mary was carried in a niche attached to a palanquin. This was the exact physical arrangement, noted Norbert, as that used by

explicit attack on Jesuit ways of life and modes of overseas conversion. However, he relies heavily on reliable Company sources, and the existence of lavish Jesuit processions is noted not only by the Company source cited above, but in letters written by the Jesuits themselves, in which they describe similar processions undertaken in the city of Madurai. For a biographical sketch of Norbert’s life, see L.J. Husson, *Etudes Franciscaines: Revue publiée par les frères mineurs Capucins*, vol. XLIX (Paris, 1937), 632–649.

³¹ Norbert de Bar-le-Duc, *Mémoires historiques sur les affaires des Jésuites avec le Saint Siège: où l’on verra que le Roi de Portugal, en proscrivant de toutes les terres de sa domination ces religieux révoltés, & le Roi de France voulant qu’à l’avenir leur société n’ait plus lieu dans ses états, n’ont fait qu’exécuter le projet déjà formé par plusieurs grands papes, de la supprimer dans toute l’église* (A Lisbonne: Chez François-Louis Ameno, 1766), vol. 1, p. 62.

³² The Jesuit insistence on lavish celebration was actually at odds with contemporary reform movements in France, in which Bishops attempted to limit the scope and frequency of holidays. Noah Shusterman, “The Decline of Religious Holidays in Old Regime France (1642–1789),” *French History* 23, no. 3 (2009): 289 - 310.

³³ A complaint heard by Pondichéry’s court in 1710 furnishes an example of a musician who plied his trade in both Hindu and Christian events: one of the men questioned in a domestic dispute (in which the Jesuits were involved) testified in passing that he was a trumpeter, and though a Hindu himself he played his instruments in processions, marriages and funerals of Hindus and Christians alike. CAOM, Inde série M, 5. Interrogation of Ayantotty, February 22, 1710.

Hindus to promenade their own idols. “Several people marched alongside the image of the Holy Virgin and carried umbrellas which are used by the gentiles in their ceremonies. Another person... was charged with swatting the flies away from the image, as the gentiles are in the habit of doing, for they fear that the statues of their gods might be uncomfortable.”³⁴ The problem with the procession, in Norbert’s eyes, was twofold: first, its publicity and lavishness were bound to annoy the Hindu population; second (and somewhat paradoxically), its liberal borrowing from Hindu visual and musical norms would only strengthen the Indians of Pondichéry in their devotion to Hinduism.

But extravagant processions were not the only Jesuit action which might have raised local ire. In a ship’s journal describing the events in Pondichéry in 1701-1702, the actions of one particular Jesuit are described. The missionary was not mentioned by name, but he was identified as being Tamil-speaking. This Jesuit, like many of his brethren (the author tells us), was in the habit of walking down the streets of the town, seeking people to whom he could preach the gospel of Christianity. The Jesuit would walk accompanied by his catechists (the converted Indians employed as religious intermediaries), and implore the people to come and listen to him speak on matters of religion, regardless of any objections they might have made.³⁵

This habit, quite understandably, did not endear the Jesuit to Hindu religious leaders, and he became involved in several disputes with a “gentile doctor.” These disputes came about in the following fashion: the catechists, claiming to have identified weakness in this man’s reasoning, insulted him with “a few scornful words.”³⁶ The local people were upset, especially since, the writer reveals, they had already complained

³⁴ de Bar-le-Duc, *Mémoires historiques sur les affaires des Jésuites avec le Saint Siège*, vol. 1, p. 63.

³⁵ CAOM, FM, C²/66, f. 23 verso.

³⁶ “quelques paroles de mépris.” CAOM, FM, C²/66, f. 23 verso.

several times about the relentlessness of the Jesuit, who would attempt to “force them to listen to his exhortations.”³⁷ The author went on to say that he heard many Indians were considering leaving Pondichéry altogether, fearing they would be made captive audiences for the Jesuits.³⁸ This was the first occasion when this formulation was made in Pondichéry: restriction on religious practice (here understood as the right to ignore the Jesuits) would result in the abandonment of the town. The Venetian Niccolao Manucci, who had lived in the Mughal Court as a physician before relocating to Pondichéry, also wrote of these events in his *Storia do Mogor*. Having heard complaints from Indians, Manucci thus describes this zealous Jesuit:

“He would never let them alone, disturbing them at every turn... [he] got it into his head that he could convert the whole of this Hindudom. The design is praiseworthy, glorious, fitted for an apostolic missionary, but the means which he adopted were valueless. They were contrary to the customs and the maxims of these peoples, more particularly of those who live in Pondichéry. They are mostly persons who congregated there from the country outside in the hope of earning something after the recent re-establishment of the French Company.”³⁹

The Father’s attempts were less than successful: “These Hindus, the objects of the reverend father’s zeal, instead of enjoying the teaching that he directed to them... felt nauseated, and rejected what he said. His ardor being too vehement, they, instead of listening to him, uttered a thousand silly jokes over his discourses.”⁴⁰ Nausea and mockery, then, were the chief results of the Jesuit’s efforts. Manucci goes on to say that in order to protect themselves against such onslaughts, the Hindu inhabitants held more and more processions, in an attempt to call on the protection and support of their own

³⁷ “s’était déjà plaint plusieurs fois que l’on les forçait à venir écouter les exhortations du R.P.” CAOM, FM, C²/66, ff. 23 verso-24.

³⁸ CAOM, FM, C²/66, f. 24. This threat is also recounted in Manucci, *Storia do Mogur, or, Mogul India, 1653-1708*, vol. 3, 317.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 315. On the fascinating career of Manucci, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Further Thoughts on an Enigma: The Torturous Life of Nicolo Manucci, 1638-c. 1720,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* Vol. XLV, no. 1 (March 2008): 35-76.

⁴⁰ Manucci, *Storia do Mogur, or, Mogul India, 1653-1708*, vol. 3, 315–316.

gods against such assaults.⁴¹ An escalation in religious conflict took the form of rival processions, a battle for the spiritual seizure of the streets.

In 1700 and 1701, then, the Jesuits were in the habit of holding processions in front of unfriendly audiences, insulting Hindu leaders, and preaching to the uninterested. The processions and the preaching both speak to the problems of public space and observable and therefore public religious practice, which came to stand at the heart of French-Indian conflict in Pondichéry.⁴² By speaking instead of public space, I wish to draw attention to the ways in which French administrators and missionaries alike were invested in the discernable presentation and appearance of the urban landscape. Their discussions surrounding the events discussed here display a keen awareness of the symbolic power of bodies moving through space, devotees celebrating in inappropriate locales, the sound of unacceptable music penetrating invisible walls.

Jesuit Accommodation and Jesuit Refusal

In order to understand Jesuit decisions in the instances of the processions and the unwelcome preaching, as well as in subsequent conflicts with the town's inhabitants, their choices must be located within the Jesuit strategy of accommodation. Matteo Ricci in China and Roberto Nobili in India are generally credited with making the practice of

⁴¹ Ibid., vol. 3, 316.

⁴² A clarification should be made here: when referring to "public space" I speak of activities which took place in spaces that could have been observed or entered into by most inhabitants of the town. I avoid the Habermasian "public sphere," which carries in its very bones the qualification of this public sphere as "a category of bourgeois society, a definition that is not appropriate to the men and women coming together in early eighteenth-century Pondichéry. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989). Swati Chattopadhyay has suggested that Habermasian theory lacks real engagement with the spatial components of the public sphere, see her discussion in Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005). My concern is different, and stems from a belief that Habermas' analysis derives much of its power from being historically and geographically specific, and cannot be transposed to different eras and locales quite so easily as has sometimes been done.

accommodation to local mores central to Jesuit overseas missions. In India, Madurai became the locus of accommodationist practice and ideology.⁴³ The first Jesuit to settle in Madurai was the Portuguese Father Gonçalo Fernandez (1541-1621), who had arrived in India in the late sixteenth century as a soldier. Gonçalo Fernandez tended to the needs of a small parish of Indian Catholics, but as a “fisherman of souls” he proved to be a dismal failure; he managed to convert only one or two Hindus, and those on their deathbeds.⁴⁴ When the aristocratic Roman Jesuit Roberto Nobili (1577-1656) arrived at the mission in 1606, he decided to employ a radically different strategy. He immersed himself in the study of Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit, strictly adhered to caste distinctions (even when visiting other Jesuit missions, he would only eat food prepared by his Brahman cook), and generally took on the life of a *sannyasi*, or Hindu ascetic.⁴⁵ Though Gonçalo Fernandez greatly objected to Nobili’s methods, the Italian missionary-turned-Brahman was much more successful in making converts.⁴⁶ His methods received official support when a papal approval issued by Gregory XV in 1623 sanctioned the practice of

⁴³ For more on Matteo Ricci and the Chinese case, see Matteo Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci, 1583-1610*, trans. Louis J. Gallagher (New York: Random House, 1953), David E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1985), and Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1984). However, a recent claim has been made that Ricci has been too-often credited with responsibility for the mission in China. See Yu Liu, “The True Pioneer of the Jesuit China Mission: Michele Ruggieri,” *History of Religions* 50, no. 4 (2011): 362-383.

⁴⁴ S. Rajamanickam, “Madurai Mission – Old and New, in Jesuit Presence in Indian History,” in *Jesuit Presence in Indian History*, ed. Anand Amaladass (Madras: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand Press, 1988), 301-02.

⁴⁵ Such a totalizing and articulated version of adaptation to local mores was a Jesuit strategy; yet other French visitors to India also tried on occasion to strategically adopt an Indian habitus. When François Bernier sent suggestions on how to establish a French presence under Mughal rule, in a letter sent from Surat in 1668, he suggested that French traders asking for favor in Mughal court perform a salaam. Cited in Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des Indes Orientales et François Martin*, 26–27.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 305. For a comprehensive treatment of Nobili’s life and work, the dispute between Nobili and Gonçalo Fernandez and the controversy engendered by the Malabar rites, see Ines G. Zupanov, *Disputed Mission: Jesuit Experiments and Brahminical Knowledge in Seventeenth-Century India* (Oxford U. Pr., 2000).

“Malabar rites”.⁴⁷ For the rest of the seventeenth century, accommodation was widely accepted, as evidenced by these instructions sent out to missionaries by the Propaganda in Rome in 1659: “Do not regard it as your task, and do not bring any pressure to bear on the people, to change their manners, customs, and uses, unless they are obviously contrary to religion and sound morals. What could be more absurd than to transport France, Spain, Italy or some other European country to China?... Do not draw invidious contrasts between the customs of the peoples and those of Europe; do your utmost to adapt yourselves to them.”⁴⁸

Many of the French Jesuits who arrived in India joined the Madurai mission, the center for accommodationist strategy. The connections between the French Jesuits in Madurai and those in Pondichéry were ongoing, since even the French Jesuits in the Indian city of Madurai were under the jurisdiction of the Superior of the Order in India, initially Father Guy Tachard – who was stationed in Pondichéry.⁴⁹ Accommodation, then, was a strategy the Jesuits employed even in French-ruled Pondichéry, much to the chagrin of the Capuchin missionaries, who believed the practice undermined the Catholic character of the city by reinforcing Hindu norms. The Capuchins, like Norbert, upheld that accommodation to local forms was doctrinally unsound, and would undermine

⁴⁷ Ines G. Zupanov, *Missionary Tropics: The Catholic Frontier in India (16th-17th Centuries)*, History, Languages, and Cultures of the Spanish and Portuguese Worlds (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 12. For a discussion of the Malabar Rites controversy in South India see also Paolo Aranha, “Glocal' Conflicts: Missionary Controversies on the Coromandel Coast between the XVII and the XVIII Centuries,” in *Evangelizzazione e Globalizzazione: Le missioni gesuitiche nell'età moderna tra storia e storiografia*, ed. Michael Catto, Guido Mongini, and Silvia Mostaccio (Castello: Società Editrice Dante Alighieri, 2010), 79-104.

⁴⁸ Cited in Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 153.

⁴⁹ The position of the French Jesuits in Madurai was complicated as regards ecclesiastic authority: they were under the authority of the Portuguese Padroado, although, like their compatriots in Pondichéry, they were also ecclesiastically subject to the French King, head of the Gallican church. Regardless of this administrative split, Jesuits in Madurai and Pondichéry maintained closed contacts, and the French contingent in Madurai soon left and founded the Carnatic mission, closer to Pondichéry.

French authority and, by extension, the attractiveness of Christianity. For Jesuits, however, holding processions that were reminiscent of Hindu holidays, preaching in Tamil and debating with Hindu ascetics were a necessity for the success of their mission. Accommodation was a way for Jesuits to acquire authority in a landscape where religious standing had Hindu forms; as long as they aspired to spiritual authority, they must intimately engage with these forms. But accommodation did more than bestow on Jesuits a mantle of religiosity that resonated with local idioms: it was also a means of offering their newly-Christian followers a conversion process that did not require them to sever ties from their families, communities and histories of religious practice.

Norbert's account of the processions populated by Hindu musicians and umbrella-carrying devotees, mentioned above, is very revealing in the context of accommodation. Studies of Jesuit accommodation in India and in China have often depicted accommodation as being an intellectual strategy developed by Jesuits faced with a difficult task, and daring enough to take an unconventional route. What this example demonstrates, however, is how the nuts and bolts of accommodationist practice – what props one holds, what music sways the worshiper's body – were actually decisions made from the bottom up, by Christians and non-Christians alike.

The procession which drew Capuchin ire is an example of accommodation in practice: the Jesuits' partially preserved the look of local religious forms, with the Virgin on a palanquin, protected by an umbrella. Yet accommodation also entailed reconfiguration, as local signs and artifacts were at least partially evacuated of their meaning, and imbued with new significance. In this way, the umbrella'ed Virgin is an example of the exceptional fluidity and flexibility of colonial semiosis: she could serve as

an icon exceptionally rich in signification, replete with both old and new forms of devotion.⁵⁰ Here, processions meant accommodation to Jesuit missionaries, idolatry to Capuchin missionaries, a new form of devotion to Indian converts, and inoffensive syncretism to non-Christian Indians, some of whom even participated as musicians.

However, Jesuit accommodation should by no means be equated with religious tolerance. The paradox of Jesuit behavior in Pondichéry is that while they allowed significant freedom to Christian converts to behave in ways that carried all the markings of Hindu religiosity and sociability, Jesuits refused to tolerate the same freedom for non-converted Hindus. That is, while Indian Christians converted by Jesuits were allowed to continue incorporating Hindu practice into their devotion, the public practice of Hinduism by Hindus was abhorred by Jesuits, and they went to extraordinary lengths in their attempts to defeat it.

The Temple Dispute

The Indian walkout of 1701 began as a land dispute, intensified by religious tensions. A large Hindu temple occupied a central plot of land in the city (figure 3; the temple is circled – the Jesuit compound is to its west). As if to add insult to injury, the temple was located near the Jesuit compound.

⁵⁰ My thoughts here have been shaped by the semiotic writings of the philosopher Charles Peirce, and his emphasis on the mediating capacity of signs. According to Peirce, there is no inherent quality that makes signs take on a *certain* material aspect, but they do have a relation to the material world. The sign – in this case the paraded Virgin – is never arbitrary à la Saussure, but deeply and irrevocably embedded in the world of materiality. The umbrella and the palanquin surrounding the Virgin, then, adhere to her and attach to her the content of their previous material uses and lives. See C.S. Peirce, “Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs’ and ’Principles of Phenomenology,” in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (New York: Dover, 1955), 74-119. For sensitive use of Peircian semiotics and discussion of its general usefulness for historians, see Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, *Medieval Identity: A Sign and a Concept*. *American Historical Review*, 105/5, (2000): 1489-1533, especially p. 1516-1532.

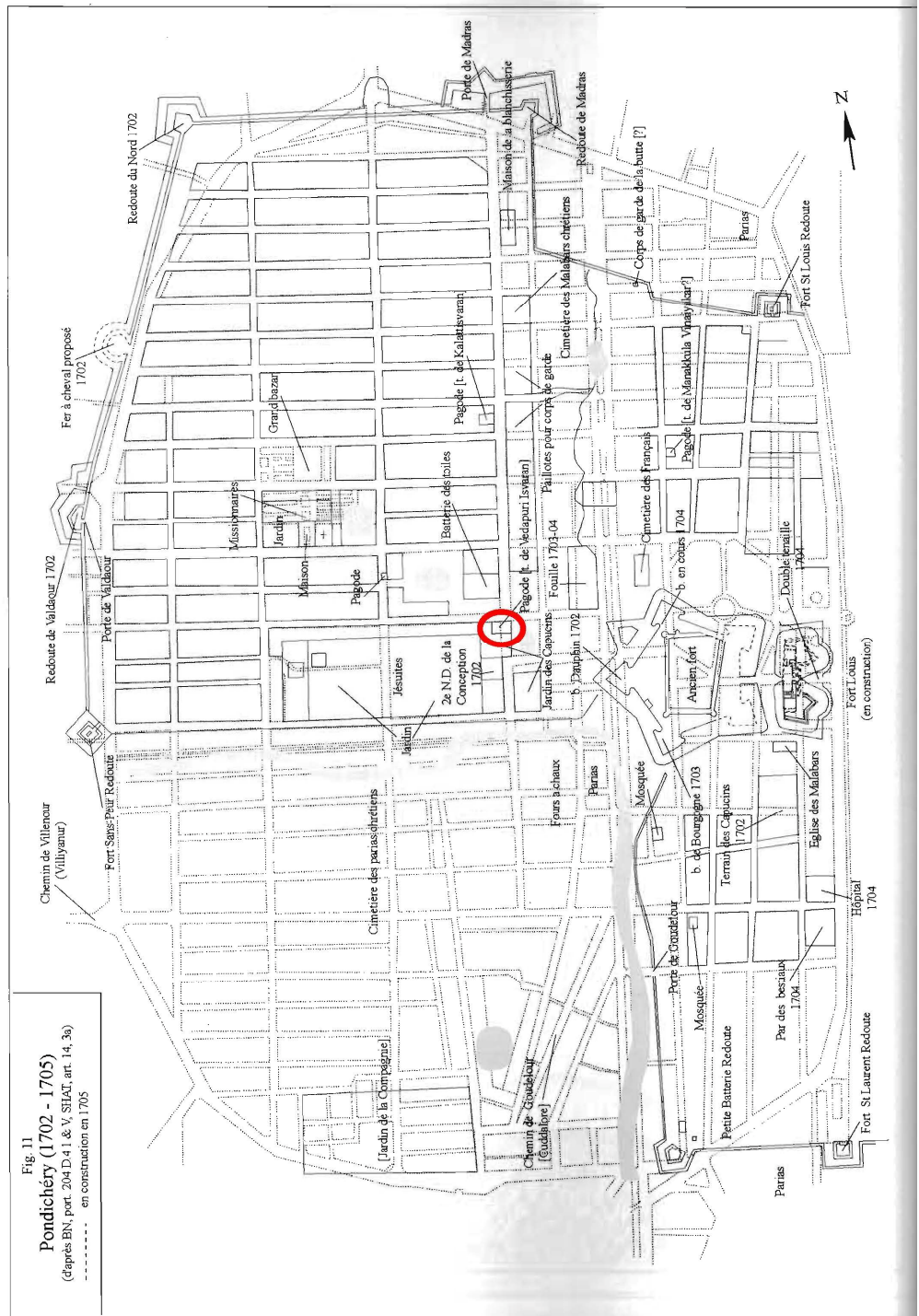


Figure 3: The Disputed Temple in Pondichéry.⁵¹

⁵¹ Source: Jean Deloche and Institut français de Pondichéry.; École française d'Extrême-Orient., *Le vieux Pondichéry (1673-1824): revisité d'après les plans anciens* (Pondichéry: Institut français de Pondichéry; Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, 2005), 44.

The daily stream of devotees arriving to worship at the temple must have seemed like an insufferable taunt to the Jesuits, who enjoyed little success in convincing the local population to convert to Christianity. If the temple were to be destroyed, two goals would be accomplished: the infuriating devotion to Hindu gods would cease, and the plot of land would enhance the Jesuit holdings in the city. According to a Capuchin account, the Jesuits convinced the French Governor François Martin to have the temple demolished. They employed “everything that religion and rhetoric would suggest as being the most persuasive, to convince him to have the Pagoda destroyed.”⁵² As the Capuchin missionary Norbert tells the story, the Jesuits had assured Governor Martin that as soon as his order was made public, the Hindu devotees would rush to him, keys to the temple in hand, eager to destroy their own place of worship. The Governor, “seduced by their solicitations,” published an order to this effect on August 10, 1701.⁵³

According to another, conflicting account, the Jesuits had nothing to do with Martin’s decision to have the temple destroyed. In an early manuscript history of the French Company in India, the governor is described as acting entirely of his own volition, and the Jesuits are not even mentioned. “On the 15th of August, M. Martin prohibited the gentiles from holding their processions and ceremonies, and demanded the keys to their pagodas.”⁵⁴ But despite Governor Martin’s claim of independence, other evidence demonstrates that the Jesuits might indeed have been the instigating force. In a letter written by the Pondichéry Council (headed by Martin) to the Directors in Paris, the

⁵² de Bar-le-Duc, *Mémoires historiques sur les affaires des Jésuites avec le Saint Siège*, vol. 1, p. 65.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 66.

⁵⁴ “Le 15 août M. Martin défend aux gentils leurs processions et cérémonies et leur demande les clefs de leurs pagodes.” BNF, Manuscrits français 6231, “Mémoires sur la compagnie des Indes Orientales 1642-1720,” f. 30. In this version, Martin is described as trying to shut down several temples; however, all other accounts agree that one specific temple was at the center of the dispute.

writers complained of a sermon the Jesuits had given on the feast day of Francis Xavier. French government officials had been invited to the celebration, where the sermon preached by one Father Breuille was meant as a clear rallying cry to the influential audience. In a decidedly aggravated tone, the letter related how the missionary scolded the officials, saying that it was not enough to forbid public gentile processions in Pondichéry. Rather, the Jesuit missionary insisted, “we must destroy these temples, and entirely forbid the practice of paganism in Pondichéry, following the example of our great king who has destroyed heresy in France (those were his words).”⁵⁵ The parentheses at the end of this sentence were perhaps an attempt by the council to distance itself from the Jesuit preachers. This rhetorical distance, the insistence that the words are a quote from the Jesuits, had to be made, even at the risk of implying that the writers were not supportive of the king’s campaigns against heresy.

It is impossible to determine if the decision to demand the destruction of the temple was a Jesuit maneuver or a choice independently made by the government. Either way, Martin posed two choices before the Tamil worshipers: they could either destroy the temple by their own hands – or leave town.⁵⁶ It is ironic that the strategy which was to prove so effective for Indian employees in their negotiations with the French – the threat of leaving town – was actually suggested to them by the French governor himself. It was a gamble on Martin’s part, but one that did not play out according to his expectations. For the first few days after the order was issued, nothing happened. Then, after three days,

⁵⁵ “Il s’expliqua hautement que nous ne sommes pas seulement obligés d’empêcher les gentils de faire des espèces de procession en portant leurs idoles publiquement dans la peuplade, ainsi que nous opposer fortement au culte de leur religion dans leurs pagodes, mais encore de détruire ces pagodes et abolir entièrement le paganisme dans Pondichéry à l’exemple de notre grand roi qui a détruit l’hérésie en France (ce sont ces termes).” BNF, Manuscrits français 6231, ff. 29-29 verso.

⁵⁶ de Bar-le-Duc, *Mémoires historiques sur les affaires des Jésuites avec le Saint Siège*, vol. 1, p. 65.

about 5,000 residents of Pondichéry assembled at the gates of the city, and announced that they had made their choice – they would like to leave the town. In short, they called Martin’s bluff.

Not only did the Tamil inhabitants stand at the gates of the city, but they added material props, to make the danger of their departure even clearer to French onlookers: “The builders and coulees abandoned their work in the fortifications, and five or six thousand inhabitants, weavers and others, assembled at the Porte de Valdour with their working tools in hand, demanding to leave,” described a near-contemporary account.⁵⁷ The image is a striking one: the workers not only took themselves to the outer edges of the city, but they did so while brandishing the tools of their trade. It must have been an all-too-stark reminder of Pondichéry’s future, if it were to be deprived of the source of its wealth.

While some of Pondichéry’s inhabitants gathered at the gates, demonstrations and protests were spreading throughout the town. “The tumult and disorder that was caused by this revolt grew and grew, until the governor realized how wrong he had been to trust in the false promises of the Jesuits,” recounted the Capuchin Norbert. “He was forced to quickly suspend the execution of his order and to forbid the opening of the gates to Pondichéry.”⁵⁸ In rapid succession, the French governor not only had to revoke his ultimatum and retract his demand for Christian purity, but he also had to find a way to retain the workers with whom he had been so high handed.

⁵⁷ “Les maçons et coulys qui travaillent aux fortifications se retirent, cinq à six milles habitants, tisserands et autres, s’assemblent à la porte de Valdour avec leurs métiers, demandent à sortir.” BNF, Manuscrits français 6231, f. 30.

⁵⁸ de Bar-le-Duc, *Mémoires historiques sur les affaires des Jésuites avec le Saint Siège*, vol. 1, 66.

But although the order was quickly revoked, it was not enough – and the crisis escalated. By August 15 (the day of the Assumption of the Virgin, which the Jesuits had so lavishly celebrated the previous year), only five days after the publication of the decree, the number of Tamil protestors kept growing, to an estimated 12,000 to 15,000 people.⁵⁹ A promise made by the French Governor himself was no longer enough – the protestors “closed their ears to these vague speeches, and would only put their trust in promises made in writing.”⁶⁰ And while the demonstrations went on, life and work in the colony quickly ground to a halt. In the summer of 1701, rumors were circulating regarding an impending European war, with mounting tensions between the French and the English in India.⁶¹ Among the protesters were the day laborers who were employed building fortifications to the Pondichéry fort. While they were on strike, and threatening to leave town for good, the town’s security was seriously compromised. Daily life for French colonists became difficult, since “the shops were closed, the houses abandoned.”⁶²

On the 16th of August the conflict was still unresolved, and Governor Martin decided that only his personal involvement would turn the tide. “M. Martin was obliged to come in person, and assure [the protestors] that he had absolutely revoked the order to destroy the Pagoda, and he promised them that it would not be harmed in any way in the future.”⁶³ Despite the fact that Martin was retreating from his earlier position, an account friendly to the governor made the point of noting that Martin addressed the protestors while mounted on a horse – perhaps in an attempt to enforce the authority that was

⁵⁹ BNF, Manuscrits français 6231, f. 30.

⁶⁰ de Bar-le-Duc, *Mémoires historiques sur les affaires des Jésuites avec le Saint Siège*, vol. 1, 66.

⁶¹ A. Ray, *The merchant and the state: the French in India, 1666-1739* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2004), vol. 1, 381.

⁶² “les boutiques se ferment, les maisons abandonnées.” BNF, Manuscrits français 6231, f. 30.

⁶³ de Bar-le-Duc, *Mémoires historiques sur les affaires des Jésuites avec le Saint Siège*, vol. 1, 67.

slipping away from him. This narrative also puts forth a speedy and tidy resolution to the crisis: Martin arrived to speak with the demonstrators, and asked them to come see him at the fort that night, where – so he promised – he would comply with all their wishes; “in two hours, no one could be seen there” – the protests had been quelled.⁶⁴ But what this description obscures is the enforced circumcision of French goals in this struggle. Martin might have managed to disperse the protestors (even though they only returned to work after he promised to agree to their demands); but absolutely no mention is made of the original French agenda to which commercial-official agents and missionaries had originally both subscribed – that is, no keys to the temple were dropped into Martin’s waiting hands.

The French decision to withdraw the original order was a pragmatic one. Norbert highlighted the limited room to maneuver enjoyed by the colonists: “Could [the Jesuits] be so blind, that they would believe that 300 men of the garrison, some of which were not even French, along with 500 Malabar Christians, would be able to confront 30,000 gentiles?”⁶⁵ Clearly, the demographic advantage Indians had in Pondichéry made the French claim to power somewhat shaky. The precariousness of French hold on Pondichéry was intensified by rivalries with other European nations in India, who were also interested in the city and its inhabitants. Among Europeans employed by the Company and serving at the Fort, some were European but not French, and hence could not be completely trusted. “What better occasion could we furnish for the English and the Dutch, nations already disposed against the Roman religion,” asked Norbert. “The English have already solicited the dissatisfied Malabars to abandon Pondichéry and seek

⁶⁴ BNF, Manuscrits français 6231, f. 30.

⁶⁵ de Bar-le-Duc, *Mémoires historiques sur les affaires des Jésuites avec le Saint Siège*, vol. 1, 67.

refuge among them, where they promised them more gracious treatment and more advantageous conditions.”⁶⁶ Thus, in deciding to retreat from their initial position, the French officials had to deal not only with internal pressures, but with external involvement in the colony’s affairs.

The Problem of Public Space

Once Martin made his promise to protect the temple, the Tamil victory was celebrated. In a clear snub to the French authorities, the celebration took place in the very same temple that had been slated for destruction. The celebration lasted a full nine days, and was not restricted to the temple, which was, after all, a defined space of Hindu worship: the protesters also took to the streets of Pondichéry, wrote Norbert. “They triumphantly carried their simulacra in all the streets of the city, in order to mark the joy they felt at such success. Never did they seem more satisfied, vainer, or more magnificent. They praised themselves for having put the Christians in their place.”⁶⁷

The Council of Pondichéry was forced to admit that Tamil dissent had forced French retreat. “We did not entirely succeed in forbidding the gentiles from carrying their idols and publicly performing the ceremonies of their false religion, or tearing down one of their pagodas, which is the main one and close to the fort,” conceded a council report.⁶⁸ This short passage exposes the two central, connected problems French leaders, both lay and religious, had with Hindu religiosity. First among these was the issue of publicity; second, the problem of space. The public nature of Hindu practice was repeatedly singled out as a matter that demanded French action. The carrying of Hindu

⁶⁶ Ibid., vol. 1, 67–68.

⁶⁷ Ibid., vol. 1, 68.

⁶⁸ “Nous n’avons pu réussir entièrement à empêcher les gentils de porter leurs idoles, faire des cérémonies publiques de leur fausse religion et à abattre une de leurs pagodes qui est la principale et proche du fort.” BNF, Manuscrits français 6231, f. 30 verso.

gods in the main streets of the town served as a constant, nagging reminder of the failure of Christianity in Pondichéry. This religious failure, by extension, was also a failing of political authority – a sign of the polity’s weakness and inability to impose its values. The public performance of religion was thus also a lay, political problem, and should not be understood as a concern forced on the colonial government by overzealous missionaries.

Second, Hindu religion was problematic for spatial reasons. Not only was it performed publicly and without fear, but it took over space that was meant to be (in the eyes of colonial rulers) French and Catholic space. The offending temple, the one the Jesuits wanted destroyed, was especially problematic due to its spatial proximity to what should have been symbols of French hegemony: the Jesuit compound and the military fort. In fact, different accounts did not agree on what buildings the temple was actually close to; a Capuchin missionary account stated the temple was close to the Jesuit compound, and thus an implicit threat to Christian authority. However, an account sympathetic to the council stated that the temple was too close to the fort; in this telling, the temple diminished the iconicity of French military and secular might.⁶⁹ In fact, as the map above clearly shows, the section of Pondichéry under discussion was quite small, and the temple was in fact adjacent to the Jesuit compound on one of its side, and to the Fort on its other side.

When describing the aftermath of the uprising, the council wrote that “since the 16th of August, they haven’t paraded their idols in the streets more than once or twice, in

⁶⁹ The temple is described as being close to the temple in de Bar-le-Duc, *Mémoires historiques sur les affaires des Jésuites avec le Saint Siège*, vol. 1, 65. It is described as close to the fort in BNF, Manuscrits français 6231, f. 30 verso.

locales that are far away from the fort or the French quarter.”⁷⁰ Success had been redefined, so that rather than a destruction of a Hindu temple, it was now merely the hiding of such practice away from French eyes. The problem with Hindu practice, then, was not the fact that it existed, but that it nudged too close to markers of ostensible French control, thus mocking any French claim to authority.⁷¹ This incongruous physical proximity helps explain why the two accounts could not agree on where the temple was actually located – next to the Jesuit house or next to the fort. Location mattered, such as identifying a marker of place also helped to identify the relations between buildings – and by extension, between people and polities. It is significant in this context that the debate over local religious practice centered exclusively around visible practices performed in shared places, rather than, say, worship of the gods that took place inside Tamil homes. By focusing its attention on “overt” practices rather than “hidden” ones, the French colonial government was staking a claim only to some, not all, of the varieties of religious practice undertaken in the town.

But although the victory in this first struggle was an Indian one, it was also a more nuanced and complex victory than might initially appear. It is true the French were forced to back down and rescind the order to destroy the temple. But neither was the Tamil request for a written promise granted. Instead, Governor Martin entered the fray in person, and delivered an oral promise. And, as subsequent events will demonstrate, the promise was not one the French felt compelled to keep. Tamil employees, while far from powerless, did not wield complete control over their French employers. Neither was

⁷⁰ “Il est à remarquer pourtant qu’ils n’ont pas promené leurs idoles dans les rues depuis le 16 août qu’une fois ou deux dans les endroits éloignés du fort et du quartier des français.” BNF, Manuscrits français 6231, f. 30 verso.

⁷¹ This analysis borrows from Mary Douglas’s work on proximity and pollution in Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

French political ownership of the town an illusion. In fact, the French had at their disposal very real tools of power, including a fort, a system of judicial authority and bureaucratic apparatus. In clashes between the French authorities and the Indian population, neither side could claim absolute hegemony in the negotiations.

The 1701 struggle over the fate of a Hindu temple was a defining moment for French-Indian relations in the decade to come. The French Governor, prompted by Jesuit agendas, attempted to act from a position of authority that relied on the false premise that the town could survive without Hindu employees. But the Tamil workers were quick to expose the hollow foundations of this threat. An ultimatum is a dangerous ploy: it is a claim to power and independence; when it is proven to be baseless, a recalibration of the relationship it tests becomes necessary. In the days following the publication of Martin's order, and in the three subsequent eruptions of conflict that took place, such a recalibration was an ongoing process, and revealed the fractures among the French as much as it created tensions between *colons* and their Indian employees.

Violence and Tolerance: The Temple Invasion of 1705

Since the threat of abandoning Pondichéry had proven so effective, there were those who were eager to exploit this powerful bargaining tool again. In 1704, according to a précis of orders given by the superior council of Pondichéry, a Tamil merchant named Nallachetty was fined 12 pagodas (a fairly significant amount). His crime had been trying to entice the people of Pondichéry to move to a different town. No information is given as to his motives – we can only hypothesize; perhaps Nallachetty was himself an entrepreneur, who was trying to recruit employees or attract trade to his town. Perhaps he was an agent employed by European or Indian competitors of the

French company.⁷² Whatever his motives may have been, the council's response serves as evidence that any such attempt was seen to be a serious threat to the existence of the French colony. Nalachetty was condemned to stay in prison until he paid his fine, and warned that any future attempt to lure away Pondichéry's inhabitants would result in a harsher punishment.

Perhaps the most revealing aspect of this episode was the method by which the council of Pondichéry learned of Nalachetty's actions. The council heard the declarations of several workers who had been approached by Nalachetty, and they all confirmed these facts. The workers' decision to provide this information to the Council and testify against Nalachetty demonstrates that they were finely attuned to their own value to the Company, and willing to deploy information that would highlight this value. That is, by offering information about attempts to lure them away from Pondichéry, Company workers were both establishing ties with the French colonists, and drawing attention to the crucial role they played in the survival of the colony.⁷³

The Weavers' Petition

In 1705, tensions again erupted into conflict. The archives hold seven different contemporary accounts of the events of 1705: the yearly logs maintained by the French company; a history of Pondichéry written early in the eighteenth century; transcriptions of the deliberations of the council of Pondichéry; opinions offered by three different missionary groups; and a report written by one of the councilors in Pondichéry. Taken

⁷² Unfortunately, the name of the town does not appear in the sources, making it impossible to determine whether or not Nalachetty was a participant in the inter-European competition for population.

⁷³ Gnanou Diagou, *Arreñts du Conseil supérieur de Pondichéry* (Pondichéry, Paris: Bibliothèque publique; Librairie E. Leroux, 1935), vol. 8, p. 28.

together, these sources reveal the complex contours of the dramatic events that took place.

The weavers of Pondichéry put the events in motion. Early in September “the weavers, who make up at least one third of the inhabitants of this city, assembled in order to ask that we lift the ban we imposed regarding the celebration of certain gentile ceremonies they are in the habit of performing... throughout the year, and to which the weavers are strongly attached,” wrote the Council.⁷⁴ Memories from the 1701 threatened exodus were still fresh, and served as an undercurrent for the petition: “they [the weavers] are so attached to these ceremonies, that if we continue to prohibit their celebration there is room to fear they will decide to leave the city altogether. This fear is founded on the vexing experience we already had with these people.”⁷⁵ Indeed, by the time the council assembled to discuss the petition, more than 2,000 families had already left Pondichéry in protest of the religious restriction, and went to settle among the Dutch or the British.

Only one account of the 1705 events provides background regarding the religious prohibitions which brought about the weavers’ petition. In a text written by a high-ranking member of the council (and future Governor of Pondichéry), Prévostière, he revealed the circumstances under which the prohibitions were made. In the preceding months, wrote Prévostière, the Governor of the colony, Martin, had been gravely ill. On February 24, 1705, Governor Martin met with Father Tachard, Superior of the Jesuit

⁷⁴ Société de l’Histoire de l’Inde Française, *Procès-verbaux des délibérations du Conseil Supérieure de Pondichéry*: (Pondichéry: Société de l’Histoire de l’Inde Française, 1913), vol. 1, 24. The same discussion is reproduced in the manuscript report compiled in CAOM, FM C²/67, f. 271.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

mission, who wanted to “profit from his [incapacitated] state.”⁷⁶ Father Tachard allegedly pressured Martin, who was not in full possession of his senses, into agreeing to ban all public Hindu practice in Pondichéry. If Prévostière is to be believed, none of the other councilors had an inkling of the agreement between Martin and Father Tachard – a fact which underlines the extraordinary and privileged influence missionaries had on the daily governance of the colony. Prévostière also claims that Martin himself had no recollection of the decision he had supposedly made while “ravaged by a violent illness.”⁷⁷

In Prévostière’s account, which clearly works to create a narrative favorable to Martin and the council, the lifting of the religious ban was not originated by the weavers’ petition. Rather, when Martin recovered from his illness he decided, in consultation with the other members of the council, to lift the prohibitions, thereby privileging commercial considerations over religious ones. The first reason to lift the ban on Hindu practice, explained Prévostière, was the long-term damage such a restriction would cause to both the aims of Catholic religion and the health of the Company. The second was that the directors in Paris had approved of the way the council had handled the matter of religious practice in Pondichéry, and there was therefore no reason to change it. The decision to lift the ban was made on September 3, 1705.

Martin might have been pressured into instituting the religious prohibitions, but that was not the only reason he would have had to comply with the weavers’ request that he lift the ban. Once again, the Company was forced to confront its complete and utter reliance on the weavers. “These weavers are the ones who populate the city, the inhabitants whom we must retain and treat with consideration and privilege, as much for

⁷⁶ “accablé d’une violente maladie.” MEP, Lettres, Volume 970, p. 133

⁷⁷ MEP, Lettres, Volume 970, p. 133

the commerce of the Company as for the city, which will decline immeasurably if these workers leave,” explained the Council.⁷⁸

The decision to reverse the ban was couched as a return to a former state, and thus a move toward tradition and stability. “It was decided, based on the advice of Father Esprit, curé of Pondichéry, and Father Cima, a missionary, to lift the prohibitions and to allow the [Indians] to celebrate the holidays that they are accustomed to celebrating throughout the year, as they have done in previous years, providing that they agree not to make any changes [to these celebrations].”⁷⁹ This short statement carries in it much information. First, before we are even told what the decision actually was, the responsibility is shifted onto two religious advisors (notably absent here are the Jesuits, who strongly disagreed with the decision and shortly thereafter took matters into their own hands). Second, the language used to describe Hindu practice attempts to paint it as habitual, inevitable and immutable. Finally, the traditional, unchanging nature of this practice was further reinforced by the order that no innovation in this practice will be tolerated. This clause served as a strategy of containment, an attempt to prevent a similar scuffle in the future.

The demand for stability was very much at odds with the actual nature of Hindu practice in South India in the early modern period, where religious syncretism was the norm.⁸⁰ But the logic behind the French demand for immutability is clear: if Hindu

⁷⁸ Société de l’Histoire de l’Inde Française, *Procès-verbaux des délibérations du Conseil Supérieur de Pondichéry*, vol. 1, 24–25.

⁷⁹ “Il fut résolu sur l’avis du Père Esprit curé de Pondichéry et du Père Sima missionnaire de lever ces défenses et de leur tolérer de célébrer les fêtes qu’ils ont coutume d’observer pendant l’année comme ils avaient fait les années précédentes, à la charge qu’ils n’innoveront rien.” CAOM, FM C²/67, ff. 271.

⁸⁰ Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses, and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900* (Cambridge England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Syncretic practices were also common at the foundational colonial site of Jesuit mission, New France. An interesting discussion on the (ultimately failed) syncretic practices of the Montagnais (Innu), can be found in Kenneth M. Morrison,

religiosity is presented as static and unchanging, then the French government cannot reasonably be expected to uproot it. But if it is mutating and fluid, then making excuses for Pondichéry's continued Hindu nature becomes much more difficult.

The Jesuit Raid

The day following the lifting of the ban, the Hindu weavers immediately took advantage of the newly-given permit to resume practice, and held a ceremony in one of their temples. The council's report noted that the ceremony did not include "a single dancer or instruments."⁸¹ The Jesuits, however, already infuriated by the council's reversal of the ban, were not nearly so accepting. That night, after hearing of this gathering, Father Tachard, Father Dolu and Father Turpin entered the temple. What happened in the temple that night was to throw the entire city into a state of turmoil.

Accompanied by their servants and catechists, the three missionaries invaded the temple. "These servants and these Christians forcibly broke down the door of the temple, knocked over the lamps and the torches; then they beat their priest and dragged him by the hair," described a Company report.⁸² This description blamed the Jesuits for the act of trespassing, but claimed that the acts of actual violence and destruction were not performed by the missionaries themselves, but by their followers. Other observers ascribed a more active role to the Jesuits themselves. Father Nicholas Cima, an Augustinian who was at Pondichéry at the time, did not mince words: he described the Jesuit actions in the Hindu temple as "the ruin of the pagoda."⁸³ Father Esprit, the curé of

"Baptism and Alliance: The Symbolic Mediations of Religious Syncretism," *Ethnohistory* 37, no. 4 (Autumn 1990): 416.

⁸¹ CAOM, FM C²/67, ff. 271 verso.

⁸² "ces domestiques et ces chrétiens avaient enfoncé la porte de leur pagode, renversé les lampes et le feu, battu et tiré par les cheveux leur prêtre." CAOM, FM C²/67, ff. 272. Another account of this beating appears in BNF, Manuscrits français 6231, f. 30.

⁸³ MEP, Lettres Vol. 970, p. 71

Pondichéry, also wrote that Indian witnesses reported acts of violence performed by several Fathers of the Society and their servants.⁸⁴

That evening, hearing of the Jesuit invasion of the temple, a large crowd of Indian protestors gathered in the temple and in the streets around it. By the next morning, September 5, 1705, the French were already dealing with what they termed a “sedition.” Governor Martin, hearing of this, sent three of his men to the temple with orders to appease the protestors. “When they arrived on the spot, they found a huge crowd of people, who led them into the pagoda. Once inside, the caste chiefs told them through their interpreters that the preceding night... Fathers Tachard, Dolu and Turpin came to this Pagoda, with their servants and their Christians.”⁸⁵ The three French officials soon realized that the protests kept growing. In an attempt to halt this “popular uprising,” they arrested two of the Indian Christians who had broken into the temple, and they were taken away to the Chaudrie, the “native” prison and court.⁸⁶ French officials, “in order to begin to give some satisfaction to this assembled and mutinous people,” tried to convince the crowd to disperse “with kind words; we promised them that we would execute justice quickly and well.”⁸⁷ The French officials promised the caste chiefs that all those who had been involved in the event would be punished. Here, then, is an example of how far the conflict between missionaries and colonial administrators could go: in this episode,

⁸⁴ MEP, 129, Lettres, volume 970, p. 129-132.

⁸⁵ “Ils se transportèrent sur le lieu, où ils trouvèrent une foule innombrable de gens, ce qui les obligea d’entrer dans la Pagode, où les chefs de Caste leur firent entendre par leurs Interprètes que la nuit précédente sur les 9 heures du soir, les Pères Tachard, Dolu et Turpin étaient venus dans cette pagode avec des domestiques de leur maison et des chrétiens.” CAOM, FM C²/67, f. 272.

⁸⁶ CAOM, FM C²/67, f. 272. The arrested men were “Mouton Chetty and Gegany, son of the catechist.” Gegany, whose father was the chief religious intermediary employed by the Jesuits, came to have a central role in the Nainiyappa affair, described in the following chapters.

⁸⁷ “Pour commencer de donner quelque satisfaction à ce peuple assemblé et mutiné on fit emprisonner quelques uns de ces chrétiens et l’ont essaya de le faire dissiper par de bonnes paroles lui promettant de faire une bonne et brève justice.” BNF, Manuscrits français 6231, f. 37.

officials at least rhetorically pitted themselves against the Jesuits, explicitly taking the side of and aligning themselves with locals.

Yet despite the promises made, there was no indication – either on that first day or later on as events unfolded – that the Jesuits themselves would be punished. And indeed, the next day the caste chiefs made it known that “we [the French] had not satisfied them in the manner we had promised.”⁸⁸ Still unsatisfied, Indian leaders opted for the strategy which had proven so successful in the past. “The people were so upset by this that all the castes rose up, the laborers abandoned their work in the fort, and the weavers stopped working. Finally everyone made ready to empty the town and to settle elsewhere.”⁸⁹ In response to the work stoppage, Governor Martin summoned the leaders of the protest, to ask them what they wanted. “They loudly said [they wished for] the free exercise of their religion, in the same way they were allowed to do under the Dutch.”⁹⁰ This was a very judicious move on the part of the Tamil protestors, for the Dutch threat was never far from the minds of Pondichéry’s traders-administrators.

With the protest spreading, the situation had to be resolved, and resolved quickly. The following day, September 6, was devoted to negotiations between the Tamil protesters and their French employers. In the meantime, a steady flow of people continued to stream out of Pondichéry, despite all French attempts to stop the flow of migrants – including sending French troops to bar the city gates.⁹¹

⁸⁸ CAOM, FM C²/67, f. 272.

⁸⁹ “Le peuple en fut si irrité que toutes les castes se soulevèrent, les ouvriers abandonnèrent les travaux du fort, toutes les boutiques de la ville furent fermées, et les tisserands cessèrent leurs ouvrages. Enfin en chacun se disposait à vider la ville et aller s’établir ailleurs.” BNF, Manuscrits français 6231, f. 37.

⁹⁰ “M Martin envoya pour savoir ce que tous ces gens assemblés demandaient. Ils dirent hautement le libre exercice de leur Religion, de la même manier qu’ils le faisaient du temps des hollandais.” CAOM, FM C²/67, ff. 272-272 verso

⁹¹ CAOM, FM C²/67, f. 272 verso.

Resolving Rebellion

While negotiations were going on, and with the town rapidly depopulating, Governor Martin decided to assemble the council of Pondichéry and a group of religious advisors: the Capuchin missionary, Father Esprit, who served as the curé of Pondichéry; Father Cima, an Augustinian who was visiting Pondichéry; and the Jesuits. The point of this assembly was “to work to find a way to restore calm to the city.”⁹² When the men assembled, they discussed the dangers posed by the turmoil in the city.

Four reasons were put forth as to why the crisis must be resolved immediately. First, any evidence of fraying French power in the colony would be a signal to other powers in South India – both Indian and European – to act against Pondichéry. The departure of Indian inhabitants would be a clear sign that the colony was vulnerable to attacks. This point was not only put forth by the secular authorities, but by a missionary as well. Father Cima starkly noted that in a war with the Dutch and the British, the colonists in Pondichéry stood to lose everything. If the Malabars leave the city, he wrote, the result would be “the destruction and ruin of Pondichéry.”⁹³ The demographic disadvantage was again at issue. According to Father Esprit, 40,000 Indians were settled in Pondichéry at this time. And even though Pondichéry was under French rule, the town was an isolated French stronghold within a decidedly Indian landscape, “whereas we can’t count on more than 500 Frenchmen.”⁹⁴

Second, a massive departure of workers from the town would result in major financial losses to the company. The council claimed that such an outcome would absolutely cripple the French commercial venture in India. If they were to “order the

⁹² CAOM, FM C²/67, f. 272 verso.

⁹³ MEP, Lettres, Vol. 970, p. 75

⁹⁴ MEP, Letters, Vol. 970, p. 131

absolute destruction of idolatry in this city, chased away all the pagans without any regard for commerce or the conservation of this establishment which has been built with enormous expenditure, there would be no doubt that in two days there would not be a single gentile left in Pondichéry – not even those who serve the Jesuits.”⁹⁵

Third, the departure of workers would harm the future chances of massive Christian conversion in the region. If commerce were to fail, and the French forced to withdraw from Pondichéry, the missionaries’ opportunities for conversion would diminish. Pondichéry’s coastal position, argued Father Esprit, was an asset that missionaries should do all in their power to retain. Not only were the French proselytizers allowed to work there without fear of persecution (as they occasionally were persecuted in Madurai, for instance), but the port town served as a stopping point for missionaries on their way to other locals in Asia, especially China.⁹⁶ The harm done to Christianity by the loss of Pondichéry, then, would be of global scale. As this argument clearly demonstrates, the Capuchin missionaries conceptualized their mission as fundamentally dependant on the fortunes of the commercial endeavor. By siding with Company officials, they were not merely thwarting their rivals the Jesuits, but acting to secure future conversions, following their lights. In addition, as one councilor wryly noted, an all-Christian Pondichéry was simply not a realistic goal: “as much as we would like it if this town was populated entirely by Christians, nevertheless the number [of Christians] is so small in relation to others, that if the gentiles left there would only be enough people to

⁹⁵ “[si on a] ordonner de détruire absolument l’idolâtrie à cette ville, en chassant tous les païens, sans avoir égard à son commerce [la compagnie des Indes], ni à la conservation d’un établissement qui a acheté et entretenu avec des frais immenses, ce sera une affaire bientôt fait dans deux jours il ne restera un gentil dans Pondichéry, pas même ceux qui servent les RRPP Jésuites.” MEP, Lettres, Vol. 970, p. 135.

⁹⁶ MEP, Lettres, Vol. 970, p. 131

fill a very small village; and those who stayed would be only paupers.”⁹⁷ The demographic data supports this assessment: according to one estimate, the number of Christians in the town in 1709 was as low as 1,000.⁹⁸

Finally, the on-going strike rapidly and devastatingly showed that everyday life in Pondichéry was simply not sustainable under these conditions. “During this time, everything was in a state of extreme confusion.”⁹⁹ Physical survival was put in jeopardy, since “all the stores and workshops have been closed for three days, no goods necessary for daily life were being sold, and this would, without a shadow of a doubt, bring about the ruin of Pondichéry and the garrison, and consequently that of religion and the company.”¹⁰⁰ French dependency on Indian services was complete. The 500 Frenchmen mentioned by Esprit “entirely depend on [the gentiles] for their food, clothing and other necessary things”; in fact, reliance on Indians was so absolute that the French “can scarcely get water other than from the hands of gentiles.”¹⁰¹ Father Cima noted that with all the shops closed, settlers were also unable to obtain rice.¹⁰²

Not only were the shops closed and laborers did not show up to work, but even daily life in French households was disrupted, since Indian domestic servants joined the demonstrations. The Augustinian Cima, a relative outsider to the events, was the only

⁹⁷ Société de l’Histoire de l’Inde Française, *Procès-verbaux des délibérations du Conseil Supérieur de Pondichéry*, vol. 1, 24–25.

⁹⁸ Jean-Baptiste Prashant More, “Hindu-Christian Interaction during French rule in Pondicherry,” in *Religion and society in South India* □: *Hindus, Muslims and Christians* (Kerala: IRISH, 2006), 73.

⁹⁹ “Pendant ce temps tout était dans une confusion extrême, la garnison et les autres habitants ne pouvaient rien trouver des choses nécessaires à la vie.” CAOM, FM C²/67, f. 272 verso.

¹⁰⁰ CAOM, FM C²/67, f. 273.

¹⁰¹ MEP, Lettres, Vol. 970, p. 131

¹⁰² MEP, Lettres, Vol. 970, p. 71. The specific mention of rice as a staple is noteworthy; since wheat was the French staple, the matter-of-fact mention of rice as the food most necessary for survival demonstrates how quickly Indian bodily habitus was taken on by French colonists.

writer to comment on this aspect of the demonstrations, writing that even in French homes “no one was working.”¹⁰³

In light of all these reasons, Governor Martin presented two options before the assembled council: they could open the gates of the city, and allow the Indians to leave Pondichéry. However, he insisted, this path would undoubtedly prove absolutely ruinous, both for the cause of Christianity in India, and the future of the French trading company. The other option would be to tolerate the celebration of some Hindu holidays and ceremonies – even more so than had been the case in the past – in order to keep Hindus in the city. This would be done only until “better circumstances would permit different action.”¹⁰⁴ When speaking of “better circumstances,” Martin might have been referencing events in France, as well as the ongoing crisis in Pondichéry. In 1705, Paris was the site of hard-fought battles between shareholders in the *Compagnie des Indes*, the Directors, and the royal government about the future of the Company.¹⁰⁵ With the very existence of the French project in India at jeopardy, traders-administrators in India might well have felt unable to resolve conflict in the colony.

The council decided to accede to local demands to a surprising extent, even expanding on previously granted religious freedoms: “in order to appease this sedition... we decided to permit the gentiles to go every Friday to the Grand pagoda, according to their custom.”¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, every month another large ceremonial gathering would be permitted, in the weavers’ quarters and in the Grand Bazaar. A few restrictions were added to this permission, in an attempt to make it easier for the French literally to turn a

¹⁰³ MEP, Lettres Vol. 970, p. 88.

¹⁰⁴ CAOM, FM C²/67, ff. 272 verso-273.

¹⁰⁵ For a detailed account of these struggles, see Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des Indes Orientales et François Martin*, 387–437.

¹⁰⁶ CAOM, FM C²/67, f. 273 verso.

deaf ear and a blind eye to these goings-on: “no drums, no trumpets, no dancers, nor any noise” would be allowed.¹⁰⁷ The decision to expand the religious freedom granted to Hindus was presented as a necessary evil, but also a temporary one. At the very first “favorable opportunity,” one councilor promised, the French government would abolish idolatry.

Two of the three religious advisors – the Capuchin and the Augustinian – provided Martin with the advice he so clearly sought. “Being most concerned with the present state of religion in these countries, as well as the state of the colony and the affairs of the royal Company, we responded that we can tolerate, at least for a while, several ceremonies of these gentiles.”¹⁰⁸ The curé of Pondichéry and the Augustinian Cima both understood the fate of religion in the subcontinent as irrevocably intertwined with the fortunes of the colony and its commercial viability.

But there was also a real danger in the decision to tolerate tolerance, and Father Esprit expounded on this. The missionary argued that the danger was political, not spiritual. For if a Christian ruler (in this case, the governor of Pondichéry) cannot compel his subjects to follow the natural law that is Christianity, than how would he be able to compel them to follow any law at all?¹⁰⁹ The problem presented here (to which Esprit could offer no clear solution) lies at the very heart of the problem with religious practice in Pondichéry. Such liberties were disturbing not only for their threat to Christianity, but

¹⁰⁷ “Mais pour apaiser la sédition, on se détermina par l’avis des Pères Capucins et du Père Sima missionnaire à permettre aux gentils d’aller tous les vendredis suivant leur coutume à la grande pagode sans tambours, trompettes, danseurs, ni aucun bruit pour y faire leur cérémonie ordinaire, et de faire tous les mois du côté des rues des tisserands et du grand bazar l’assemblée et cérémonie qu’ils ont faite ci devant, avec défenses néanmoins de rien faire de plus.” CAOM, FM C²/67, f. 273 verso.

¹⁰⁸ MEP, Lettres, Vol. 970, p. 130.

¹⁰⁹ MEP, Lettres, vol. 970, p. 130.

for the threat they posed to the authority of the colonial government, as well as the divine authority of the Crown.

Jesuit Dissent

The Jesuits did not agree with their Capuchin and Augustinian brethren, and were furious at the Council's decision. Rather than negotiating with the protesters, the Jesuits "maintained that we must use violent measures, to the point of taking the canon out of the fort, to force the gentiles to obey us."¹¹⁰ Firmness, vigor, willingness to inspire fear – these were the means advocated by the Jesuits for quelling the uprising (and it is of note here that these are measures that run counter to the acceptance implied in the Jesuits' accommodationist strategy vis-à-vis their Indian converts). In engaging with these "mutinous people," and encouraging them to return to their homes in Pondichéry, the Jesuits suggested that spilling of blood should be avoided; nevertheless, "it is also necessary that these rebels will understand that we are serious."¹¹¹

On other occasions, and even when dealing with their own followers, the Jesuits did not hesitate to use violence. A report filed by an officer in Pondichéry in 1706 attested to this fact. The man reported to the council that on August 16, 1706, he heard screams from the Jesuit house. When he approached the house to inquire, he found a man named Antoine, an Indian Christian, tied to a tree by his hands and legs. Father Turpin (one of the three missionaries who had invaded the temple in 1705) and several servants were flogging the tied man. The officer stopped the beating, detached the man from the tree and took him away to his commander. Antoine told his rescuers that he had received

¹¹⁰ "Les Pères Jésuites soutenaient au contraire que l'on devait se servir des moyens violents jusqu'à tirer le canon du fort pour forcer les gentils à obéir, et donnèrent aussi leur sentiment par écrit." CAOM, FM C²/67, f. 273.

¹¹¹ "Ces mutins... soient bien persuadés qu'on parle sérieusement." MEP, Lettres, Vol. 970, p. 134.

30 lashes of the whip, until the blood flowed down his body.¹¹² Such actions, the report concluded, do not teach the gentiles who might be observing anything, nor do they “inspire much respect for the religion we profess.”¹¹³ The council concluded the report by asking the directors in Paris to consider the grave harm that such actions cause the company, and therefore to forbid “the Jesuits and other missionaries from entering into gentile pagodas, or using any violence against the locals, be it [by the hands of] their servants or others.” Rather, the Jesuits should limit themselves to “giving their opinions charitably and in a Christian manner when they are consulted.”¹¹⁴

The Council, Father Esprit and Father Cima all spoke out against violence as a means of quelling the uprisings. The reasons for their objections were pragmatic rather than moral. The councilors also played upon the existing tensions between the different Catholic orders, taunting the Jesuits with the success of the Capuchins in Madras, “where they converted more than 12,000 souls... and by kindness attracted a number of rich families, whereas only beggars and paupers were converted in Pondichéry.”¹¹⁵ There is no doubt, the writers concluded, that “the methods employed by the Jesuits in India are too violent and alienate the people.”¹¹⁶ Clearly, Jesuit actions in the Hindu temple on the night of September 4, 1705 did not achieve the desired results: rather than crush out the offending practice, the resulting tumult led to the expansion of Hindu practice, and a

¹¹² CAOM, FM C²/67, ff. 271-274.

¹¹³ CAOM, FM C²/67, f. 274.

¹¹⁴ “Pour éviter de pareil troubles dont les suites seraient certainement très fatales pour la compagnie, Monseigneur est très humblement supplié d’avoir la bonté de prendre les ordres du Roy pour faire défenses aux Pères Jésuites et autres Religieux et missionnaires d’entrer dans les pagodes des gentils, n’y deviser d’aucune violence contre les habitants du pays soit leurs domestiques ou d’autres mais seulement de donner charitablement et chrétiennement leurs avis quand ils seront consultés par les chefs des comptoirs et la compagnie.” CAOM, FM C²/67, f. 274.

¹¹⁵ “Leurs [les Jésuites] principes sont très opposés à l’agrandissement de la religion dans les Indes qui ne s’établit point chez des gentils par la violence. Les Pères Capucins n’en usent pas ainsi à Madras ou ils ont converti plus de 12000 âmes depuis qu’ils y sont, et la douceur y a attiré nombre de familles de gens riches au lieu qu’on n’a converti que des gueux et des misérables à Pondichéry.” CAOM, FM C²/67, f. 273 verso.

¹¹⁶ CAOM, FM C²/67, f. 273 verso.

dismissal of Jesuit desires. It would not be too long, however, before the Jesuits succeeded in turning the tables back in their favor.

Negotiating and Renegotiating Religious Practice

The problem of attracting Indian merchants to the French colony was an acknowledged one; what was proving even more difficult was how to convince them to stay put, once settled in Pondichéry. In 1708, three years after the Jesuit invasion of the temple and the subsequent strike, the governing council of Pondichéry assembled in an attempt to solve this predicament. In a meeting on July 29, the councilors announced their decision to bestow “full liberty of commerce and conscience to all the nations who wish to settle in Pondichéry.”¹¹⁷ This decision had been made, the declaration continued, in order to advance commerce and aid the Company, and would be published in the city in copies in French, Portuguese and Tamil, and posted up “in the usual places, as well as several copies distributed among the caste chiefs in order to encourage them to help attract merchants to come live in Pondichéry.”¹¹⁸

In a subsequent declaration signed by the newly-appointed Governor André Hébert, he thus explained the decision: “[A]s there is nothing more advantageous to the growth and wealth of the colonies than the establishment of commerce, we have searched for various means to bring about this growth... and have found none more fitting than to give full and complete liberty to all kinds of nations.” If merchants pay their taxes, he explained, they along with their wives and children, slaves and servants, can “follow their own manners and customs.”¹¹⁹ This was an explicit statement tying commercial

¹¹⁷ Société de l’Histoire de l’Inde Française, *Procès-verbaux des délibérations du Conseil Supérieur de Pondichéry*, vol. 1, 46.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 47. The same declaration is also cited in BNF, Manuscrits français 6231, f. 41 verso.

prosperity to religious freedoms and liberties; in effect, a short-lived but complete reversal of previous attempts by the colonial government to curtail and limit such practices.

But shortly thereafter, in 1714 and 1715, tensions again erupted over the exercise of Hindu ceremonies and the existence of the temple near the Jesuit house. In the fall of 1714, a Hindu protest occurred once more, regarding two matters: the Jesuits' continued insistence on the destruction of the temple; and the decision made by Dulivier, the current governor, to place restrictions on Hindu rites of marriage and funeral rites carried out in public spaces. Only one brief account of this event survives; in it we are told that Hindu leaders "swore they would rather die than allow us to knock down the Pagoda which is close to the Jesuits, and spoke against the prohibitions of their ceremonies. They met and decided to leave town the following Monday, if we did not allow them to use cymbals and other instruments on Sundays."¹²⁰ This time, the threat of departure was not as successful as on previous occasions. The leaders of the uprising were condemned to be banished from Pondichéry, their houses were razed to the ground, and the council prohibited the people from holding gatherings. Clearly, the French were still able to wield considerable power when conditions were favorable.

However, there are indications that current Governor Pierre Dulivier was aware that the commercial success of the town depended on a certain amount of religious tolerance, and he advocated such a strategy in a letter he wrote that year to the Directors of the Company. "Recently three merchants, more considerable than have ever settled in

¹²⁰ "les gentils s'assemblent toutes les nuits, jurent de mourir plutôt que de permettre qu'on abatte la pagode proche les jésuites, et de parler fortement si on veut empêcher leurs cérémonies. Dans une assemblée il a été résolu d'abandonner le lundi suivant si on ne veut pas permettre de battre des timbales et jouer des autres instruments les dimanches." BNF, Manuscrits français 6231, f. 54.

Pondichéry, came to live here,” boasted Dulivier; “these are small beginnings that could have auspicious outcomes,” but only in certain conditions are met. Namely, Dulivier reminded his superiors, “it is necessary to treat them with kindness, and not to disturb them on the subject of religion.”¹²¹ Turning a blind eye to paganism, Dulivier implied, was the worthwhile cost of doing business.

In the same letter Dulivier tried to explain his resistance to the demands the Jesuits had been making for repression of Hindu practice. “We wish to persuade you, Messieurs, that we are as zealous as the most religious people for the advancement of our Christian religion and the destruction of idolatry... but we must tell you again that the loss of this colony would follow the desertion of most of the gentiles.”¹²² The possible loss of the colony’s population to English or Dutch rivals was clearly never far from Governor Dulivier’s mind. As he explained to the Directors, it was relatively easy to forbid the colony’s residents from making innovations to their religious practice. What proved difficult, time and time again, was to “abolish the ceremonies and the freedoms that we have accorded to them for several years.”¹²³ Having acknowledged their weak position in previous struggles, French administrators found themselves in an uncomfortable position, maneuvering between the demands of the Jesuit missionaries and the claims of their local subjects.

¹²¹ “Il s’est établi depuis peu trios marchand plus considérable qu’il n’y en a jamais eu en Pondichéry... ce sont de petits commencements qui pourront avoir des suites avantageux pour Messieurs. Veillent bien faire attention à ce que nous avons pris la liberté de leur représenter, mais pour attirer ici les différent personnes qui ont envie de quitter notre voisinage pour s’y venir établir, il fait nécessairement les traiter avec douceur et ne pas les inquiéter au sujet de la religion.” CAOM, FM C²/69, f. 90.

¹²² “nous vous prions d’être persuader, Messieurs, que nous avons le même zèle que les personnes le plus religieus pour l’avancement de notre sainte religion et pour la destruction d’idolâtrie... mais nous croyons obliger de vous représenter encore une fois que la perte de cette colonie s’en ensuivra par la désertion de la plus part des gentils qui sont ici au nombre de la 60 à 70 mille.” CAOM, FM C²/69, f. 92.

¹²³ “Il est facile d’empêcher aux idolâtres de rien innover, mais il est difficile aux contraire d’abolir des cérémonies et les libertés qu’on leur a accordés depuis quelques années.” CAOM, FM C²/69, f. 91 verso.

The Uprising of 1715: Enter Nayiniyappa

The following year saw a reprisal of events that had by now become familiar. In February 1715 the Indian inhabitants requested permission to celebrate a holiday. Permission was denied (perhaps following the French success of the previous year), and the very next day – without any protracted negotiations – workers began leaving the city. With two ships in the Pondichéry fort waiting to be filled with merchandise, the Company found itself without cloth workers, builders or laborers.¹²⁴ Even worse, the merchants and traders also began leaving Pondichéry, and merchandise that was making its way toward Pondichéry was detained. The Hindu population of the town, which had by this point climbed to 60,000 or 70,000, was making good on its threat; according to one account, very quickly the town was left with few people other than the 2,500 Indian Christians, and several hundred Frenchmen.¹²⁵ Governor Dulivier summoned the French employees, residents and officers, and solicited their opinions. All agreed that the Hindu ceremonies should be allowed, as long as no innovations would be made. The Capuchins once again supported the Company's position.

The sole dissenters were again the Jesuits; the new Jesuit Superior, Father Jean-Venant Bouchet, initially even refused to attend the gathering in person, and in a clear snub to the Council's authority, sent one of his subordinate missionaries in his place. This time, the Jesuits also had a new interpretation of the events: the reason the people of Pondichéry were mutinous, they argued, is that they were incited by Nayiniyappa, a Hindu who was the Company's most senior Indian employee, serving as its chief commercial broker. Nayiniyappa's alleged involvement in this uprising came to stand at

¹²⁴ BNF, Manuscrits français 6231, ff. 55-55 verso.

¹²⁵ BNF, Manuscrits français 6231, ff. 55-55 verso.

the heart of an investigation against him, which was to throw the colony into turmoil for several years.

Oddly, the Jesuit Superior also tried to make the case that the only way to convince the workers to return to Pondichéry would be to destroy their temple. His advice was not taken by colonial administrators. As the exodus continued, and the Pondichéry employees were being offered favorable conditions by both the British and Muslim princes, Governor Dulivier promised the departing workers that all the freedoms which had been theirs when he arrived in India would be returned to them – thus negating the brief success he had in imposing the prohibitions of 1714.

Propagation v. Insinuation

The disputed temple was ultimately destroyed by a French Governor, Dupleix, but not until 1748, a period of much better-established French control.¹²⁶ Not until mid-century would the French find themselves in a position strong enough to take such extreme action. A decade and a half before this decisive action, in a decree written by the Parisian Directors in 1733, they unflinchingly sum up the lessons the Company learned from the employee strikes of 1701-1715. “For the well-being of its commerce, the French Company finds it absolutely necessary to retain the presence of gentiles in Pondichéry, be they rich merchants, laborers, or people of other professions.”¹²⁷ Past experience has

¹²⁶ The temple was rebuilt in 1749 on a different site, with contributions from Ananda Ranga Pillai and the town’s leading Indian merchants. Mukund, *The trading world of the Tamil merchant*, 156. See Ananda Ranga Pillai’s journal entry for September 7, 1748. Ananda Ranga Pillai, *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai, Dubash to Joseph François Dupleix, Knight of the Order of St. Michael, and Governor of Pondichery. A Record of Matters Political, Historical, Social, and Personal, from 1736 to 1761* (Madras,: Printed by the superintendent Government press, 1904), vol. 5. With almost too good to be believed symbolism, the site was then used to build a Jesuit printing house. Destroyed by the English in 1761, the *imprimerie de la mission* was rebuilt early in the nineteenth century. See

http://www.ifpindia.org/ecrire/upload/digital_database/Site/Pondi/data/part_2_1_2_missionpress.html

¹²⁷ Company decree of February 1733, article 19. Quoted in Launay, *Histoire des missions de l’Inde*, xxxiv.

demonstrated, continued the decree, that interfering with matters of religion carries with it a significant risk, as both merchants and laborers are apt to leave the colony, and relocate to more tolerant English or Dutch locales. The Company wishes, continued the decree, to advance the propagation of Christianity in its domains – “circumstances permitting.” This clause is crucial, and the article continues to make this revealing observation: that the pursuit of the colony’s commercial well-being and the advancement of Christianity are “interests *so opposed* to one another,” [emphasis added] that the Governor, the council members and even the missionaries are advised to “wisely tolerate” the practice of gentile religion.¹²⁸ It is desirable, continued the Directors, to abolish idolatry, or at the least to restrain and contain it, limiting its practice to the vicinity of Hindu temples. But any such change in the religious nature of public space of Pondichéry must be undertaken by way of “insinuation,” at least until God see fit to remove idolaters from darkness into the light of Christianity.¹²⁹ Therein lies the central strategic difference between the agendas of traders and Jesuit missionaries as regards their ostensibly shared goal, the propagation of Christianity. Where Jesuits advocated the aggressive repression of Hindu practice, eager to martyr themselves in the process if need be, the administrators of the *Compagnie des Indes* – protestations of their own zeal notwithstanding – were trying to lure Hindu practitioners to the town, and were willing to promise them religious freedom in return for their presence, labor, and capital.

What, then, are we to make of the recurring attempts to curtail public Hindu practice and Hindu spatial dominance, especially in the face of the repeated and resounding French defeats? The Company and the missionaries tried to curtail Hindu

¹²⁸ Ibid., xxxiv–xxxv.

¹²⁹ Ibid., xxxv.

religious practice in an attempt to establish themselves as the undisputed, hegemonic rulers of the colony. Such hegemonic narratives have long been the trademark of how empires tell their own histories. But the repetitive, cyclical negotiations between the French and their employees in Pondichéry reveal how at their outset, colonial endeavors cannot so easily attain such hegemony. And Company traders-administrators and Jesuits in particular, while conceiving of their respective projects as intimately related, still could not agree on how best to manage their interactions with the local population.

The Indian uprisings and French reactions to them demonstrate that despite the interconnectivity of state-run projects of commerce and conversion, missionaries were stalwart supporters of commercial objectives, nor were the Catholic traders-officials always supporters of Christian mission. In fact, the tensions between the missionary project and colonial government and within the missionary project, I would suggest, were a central reason Hindu desertions (or threats of desertion) in Pondichéry were so very successful. Unable to agree on a strategy, yet unwilling to sever their agendas from one another, missionaries and traders-officials were ill-equipped to deal with the united opposition mounted to them by the town's population.

The Pondichéry strikes of the period 1701-1715 also show that relationships among the French and between French colonists and their Indian employees were tense and prone to eruptions of conflict. The negotiations between the two groups were characterized by a constant tug-of-war for power, influence and authority. In the following chapters, I turn to examine a particular subset of Indian employees in the colony – commercial and religious intermediaries – who stepped into the tense middle ground where these conflicts occurred, and maneuvered in this fraught landscape.

Chapter III

L’Affaire Nayiniyappa: A Colonial Scandal

Introduction

When he was twenty years old, Nayiniyappa Pillai, a merchant of Madras, moved to the newly established French colony of Pondichéry. Forty three years later, in 1717, he died in a prison cell in Fort St. Louis, Pondichéry’s center of French administrative and military power in the subcontinent. At the time of his death he was serving out a three year prison sentence, having been removed from his post as the colony’s chief commercial broker and head of the town’s indigenous population (*courtier* and *chef des malabars*), following being convicted of “sedition and tyranny.” As Pondichéry’s chief commercial intermediary, Nayiniyappa had amassed considerable property. All this wealth – including precious gems, horses, elephants and several houses – had been confiscated, and he was publicly administered 50 lashes of the whip in Pondichéry’s main bazaar. Had he lived out his prison term, he and his family would have been banished in perpetuity from Pondichéry. None of these details are contested.¹ Unraveling other aspects of the scandal that came to be known in India and in France as *l’affaire Nayiniyappa* is a more difficult undertaking.

The story of Nayiniyappa’s fall from Pondichéry’s pinnacle of power was told by several of his contemporaries, as well as by the man himself. French government officials, missionaries, friends and relatives of Nayiniyappa, metropolitan traders and,

¹ For a timeline of the Nayiniyappa affair, see the appendix to this chapter.

later on, historians of French India have recounted the details of Nayiniyappa's investigation and conviction. In this chapter, I examine the affair, as it was recounted and interpreted by the four different groups of actors most intimately involved in the event: first, the Jesuit missionaries installed in Pondichéry who had lobbied for Nayiniyappa's dismissal; second, the French Governor of the colony at the start of the *affaire*, André Guillaume Hébert; third, Nayiniyappa himself; and finally, a group of traders from Brittany with business interests in India, who intervened from the metropole on behalf of Nayiniyappa. Through the juxtaposition of these competing interpretations of the affair's origins, development, and crux, a picture of the colony emerges. The implicit narrative framings, inclusions and exclusions in these four different versions of the events shed light on the agendas and motivations that drove the different groups involved in the case, the tellers' understanding of their role in the colony, and their vision of the project of French empire in India, in which they all participated.

I suggest that the reason the Jesuits, the Governor, the accused man and his metropolitan advocates all offered such distinct understandings of the root causes and implications of the affair stems from the very different conceptions they held of Pondichéry as a colonial city, and the role of local intermediaries in the French overseas project. These actors, and more generally the groups they represented, offered various answers to the question: what kind of place should Pondichéry be? To briefly anticipate the answers that emerge from the analysis that follows: Jesuits missionaries propagated the position that Pondichéry should be, above all else, a Catholic space. Governor Hébert put forth a vision of a city controlled by unshakeable French authority, presaging the French paternalism of later imperial efforts. Nayiniyappa, with his strong roots in Madras

and connections in the villages surrounding Pondichéry, presented the colony as a place deeply imbricated in the local and the regional, and attempted to downplay the role of the metropole in the colony's development. And the merchants from Brittany who became involved in the affair chose to adhere to a vision of the colony as a commercial space, where the logic of profit-making would trump affinities of nation or religion. The Nayiniyappa affair, I argue, therefore vividly demonstrates how different groups in the colony subscribed to disparate spatial, temporal and ideological conceptions of the city. The affair came into being as a result of these clashing visions of the city, was a site for the articulation of these different frameworks, and resulted in the deepening of the crevices that ran through the French colony. These tensions divided French lay and religious institutions, members of different religious orders, colonial and metropolitan trading companies, and Indians and Frenchmen.

Yet while each of the four interpretations of the affair examined here offers a different version of the unfolding of the events of the Nayiniyappa affair, I also advance the argument that all shared an underlying concern. Missionaries, colonial officials, Indian employees and metropolitan traders all attempted to offer solutions to a vexing problem: that of the basis for colonial authority and sovereignty. The issue was especially troubling in the early decades of the eighteenth century, when Pondichéry was a relatively new and unsettled seat of French power, under constant threat of military attack and financial collapse. Its sovereignty was a very fragile construct, its hegemony more aspiration than reality. Michel-Rolph Trouillot has argued that success is a matter of continuous articulation rather than of fact.² Colonial empires of the nineteenth century –

² Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1995).

and the British Raj is both the most obvious and the most pertinent example – narrated themselves as inevitably successful. But early French and Indian concerns about the justifications for European sovereignty and the limits of authority offer a different tale – one that sheds light on the conditions in which colonial projects come into being and their subsequent historical and political retellings. Rather than a teleological narrative of hegemony, the tensions percolating and erupting in the retellings of the Nayiniyappa affair allow for a more complicated understanding of the distribution of authority in colonial settings.

The Nayiniyappa affair might seem too minor a prism. These are, after all, the trials and tribulations of one man. Here I follow Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel, who have suggested that historians studying events that might appear at first glance too minor or atypical should adopt “a series of different variations of scale,” simultaneously paying close attention to the minutiae of the archive which “resist generalization and typology and are perhaps ultimately incomprehensible,” as well as to the systemic and structural frameworks in which such events take place and from which they both derive meaning and which they imbue with new signification.³

Lauren Benton has similarly argued for the power of a singular legal case to shed light on global conditions, and suggests that such cases demonstrate the “interconnections between small conflicts in particular historical settings and the revision of ‘master

³ Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel, *The Vanishing Children of Paris: Rumor and Politics Before the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 4. For further reflections on this methodological strategy, and the suggestion that a “case” is neither general nor singular, see Jean-Claude Passeron and Jacques Revel, “Penser par cas: raisonner à partir de singularités,” in *Penser par cas*, ed. Jean-Claude Passeron and Jacques Revel (Paris: Éditions de l’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2005), 9-44. On the necessity of simultaneously employing multiple scales of analysis, see the programmatic suggestions in Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity,” *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (February 1, 2006): 30-50.

narratives' about global change."⁴ Benton further notes the import of legal interactions in colonial context, in which "culturally and religiously different peoples employed legal strategies that exploited (and further complicated) unresolved jurisdictional tensions, particularly those between secular and religious authorities."⁵ Such tensions, I propose here, were indeed a driving force behind the Nayiniyappa affair, and an examination of the affair sheds new light on their significance. That is, the affair reveals the internal conflicts that characterized early colonial Pondichéry, on scales both small and large. The intersection of interests prior to and following Nayiniyappa's arrest demonstrates not only the constant and on-going conflicts between colonizers and colonized – a phenomenon which has received wide analysis – but also the less commented-upon tensions between various branches of the French overseas project.

This inquiry into Nayiniyappa's life and downfall thus starkly reveals the fissures between the commercial and spiritual branches in Pondichéry. We see here a veritable Russian doll of conflict, with institutions fracturing internally, traders against traders, missionaries against missionaries. So while the Nayiniyappa affair pitted government officials and traders on the one side against Jesuit missionaries on the other, it was also the site of even more internal face-offs: current administrators of the *Compagnie des Indes* battling their current and former colleagues; traders in France against traders in India; Jesuits against rival Catholic religious orders, the Capuchins and MEP missionaries. Where one might expect to find a shared purpose, again and again strife

⁴ Lauren Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400-1900* (Cambridge UK; New York NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 28. I would question, however, Benton's use of the qualifier "small." The Nayiniyappa affair would count as small only if we were to suppose in advance that Pondichéry peripheral, and that the matters of colonial intermediaries are enacted on a more diminutive scale.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5–6.

emerges instead. These conflicts, it is worth reiterating, emerged among Frenchmen who purportedly shared a cause – the prosperity of Pondichéry in the name of God and King.

In addition, Nayiniyappa's position as *chef des malabars* and chief commercial broker to the *Compagnie des Indes* allows a privileged view into the roles filled by colonial intermediaries in Pondichéry. Nayiniyappa belonged to a corps of professional intermediaries that included other commercial brokers, catechists, and interpreters. The different versions of the Nayiniyappa affair recounted here, which ascribe dissimilar motivations to Nayiniyappa, speak to the multiplicity of roles and functions filled by professional intermediaries: the fact that so many competing explanations of Nayiniyappa's actions could be plausibly put forth (and only several are presented here, others were offered by contemporary observers) stems from the variety of positions intermediaries occupied. As a professional intermediary par excellence, Nayiniyappa makes possible a reflection on the ways in which the intermediary position is Janus-faced, simultaneously facing home and away, toward past and future, the familiar and the new. Different colonial agents held varying expectations of Nayiniyappa and intermediaries like him, and the global and sustained interest that the Nayiniyappa affair generated was the result, I argue, of French ambivalence in both commercial and religious quarters about dependence on such intermediaries. As the most dramatic example of the explosion of tensions between Indian intermediaries and French employers, the Nayiniyappa affair demonstrates the political and emotional stakes invested in the relationships between French employers and local intermediaries in Pondichéry.⁶

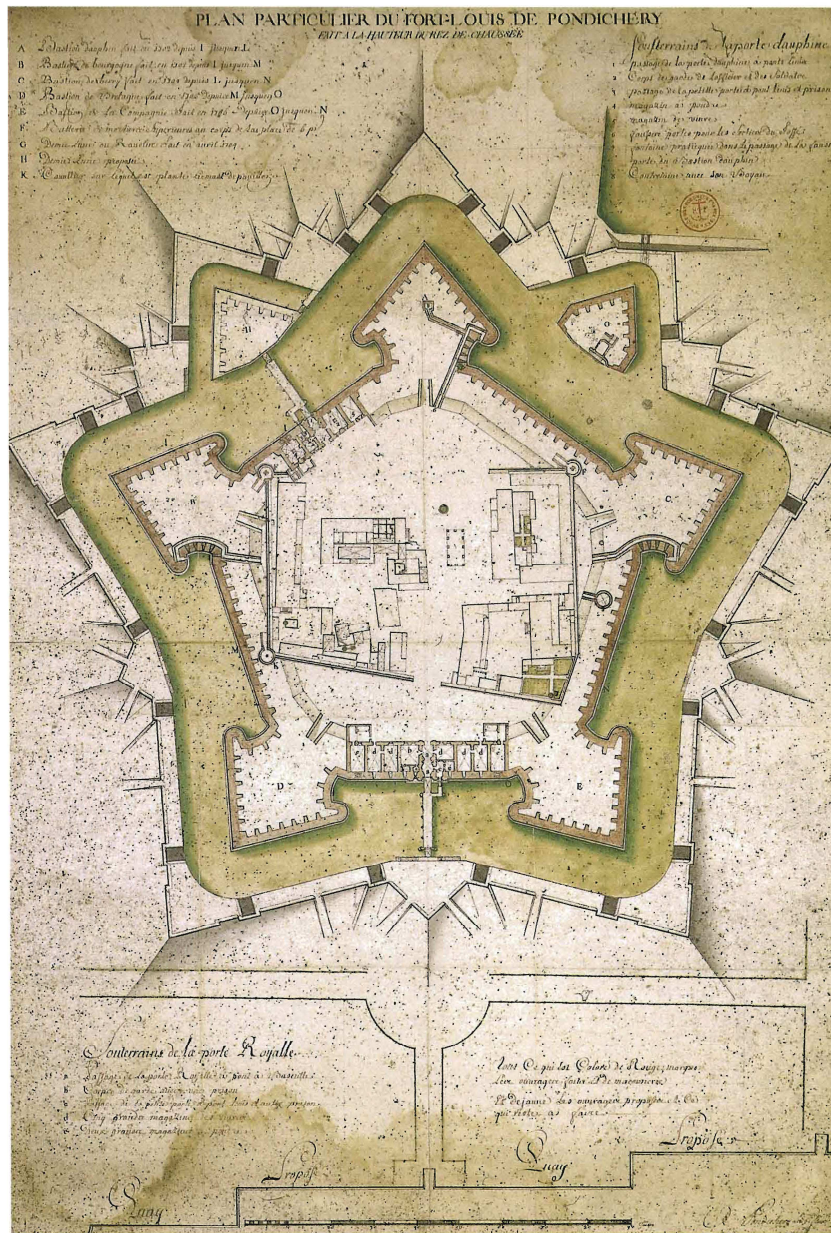
⁶ Scandals concerning commercial brokers also spectacularly erupted in Madras, where these brokers were known as dubashes. But the English debate about the power of dubashes, described by Kanakalatha

Remembering a scandal

There is a haunting quality to the Nayiniyappa affair. Fort St. Louis in Pondichéry, the scene of Nayiniyappa's imprisonment and death, no longer stands (figure 4 shows the Fort in 1709), so his ghost hovers instead in the archives. Officials of the *Compagnie des Indes* in Pondichéry maintained detailed yearly logs of their doings, as well as copies of all correspondence and reports. Most years contained exhaustive and meticulous descriptions of changes in personnel, new building projects, and discussions of the political situation surrounding Pondichéry. But a large portion of the records for the years 1716 to 1722 is devoted to Nayiniyappa's conviction, the subsequent appeals on his behalf, and the resulting investigations. The wealth of documentation attests to the imaginative pull exerted by Nayiniyappa's downfall, as more and more actors participated in the analysis, re-investigation and interpretation of the event. Nor was this interest limited to Nayiniyappa's contemporaries. When the colonial exhibition of 1931 was mounted in Paris, only a small handful of documents were sent from the Pondichéry archives to the capital: three of these documents concerned the Nayiniyappa affair.⁷

Mukund as "bordering on paranoia," did not take place until the end of the eighteenth century, when English hold over the colony was firm, thereby obscuring the more subtle dynamics made visible by the earlier events in Pondichéry. For a discussion of dubashi-related scandal in Madras, see Mukund, *The View from Below*, 147–148.

⁷ The Pondichéry documents presented in the colonial exhibition are today held at CAOM, Inde, série N (a series comprised entirely of sources taken to the exhibition, which were then returned to Pondichéry).



Le Fort Louis en 1709, par Nyon : FR ANOM 26DFC10A SCN, ANOM |Service à Compétence Nationale des Archives Nationales de l'Outre-Mer|.

Figure 4: Fort St. Louis, Pondichéry

The historiography of French India is relatively small, but the Nayiniyappa affair appears, at least briefly, in most accounts of the colony's early days. The most important (and still the only book-length) discussion of the affair is Paul Olganier's 1932 "*Les*

jésuites à Pondichéry et l'affaire Naniapa (1705 à 1720).”⁸ Olganier’s account is especially significant, since it is his work, rather than the contemporary archival documents describing the events, which has provided the source material for many subsequent scholarly discussions of the affair.⁹ Olganier’s version of the affair has a wronged and tragic hero – Nayiniyappa – and a set of irredeemable villains – the Jesuits. In his interpretation, it was the Jesuits and solely the Jesuits who were responsible for Nayiniyappa’s demise, driven by irrational zealotry and religious bigotry. The problem with Olganier’s portrayal, and others that follow his lead, is that it obscures the complex interactions in the colony that informed the way the affair unfolded.¹⁰ The Jesuits are flattened out as historical agents, their “Jesuitness” serving as sufficient explanation for their perfidy.¹¹ I do not wish to offer an apologia for Jesuit wrongdoing, but an explanation that relies exclusively on Jesuit evil does not do justice to the densely populated social, political and spiritual landscape in which the Nayiniyappa affair occurred. It is not my intention to offer a “better” telling of the Nayiniyappa affair, or to provide a new narrative that would reveal the unknown details of the scandal. Nor am I interested in portioning out guilt and innocence, naming heroes and villains. There is no

⁸ Paul Olganier, *Les jésuites à Pondichéry et l'affaire Naniapa (1705 à 1720)* (Paris: Société de l’histoire des colonies françaises, 1932).

⁹ Olganier did not cite the documents he used, simply quoting them (not an uncommon practice at the time he was writing). Unfortunately, Olganier often also neglected to identify the author of a particular quote was, thereby obscuring the agendas that might have driven different accounts. A comparison of the quotes he uses and the archival documents shows that he relied mostly on sources located today in CAOM, FM, *série C*².

¹⁰ Olganier’s interpretation of Jesuit culpability is foundational, but others follow his lead. For examples of this trope see Ray, *The merchant and the state: the French in India, 1666-1739*; Ajit Neogy, “Early Commercial Activities of the French in Pondicherry: The Pondicherry Authorities, the Jesuits and the Mudaliars,” in *Mariners, Merchants and Oceans: Studies in Maritime History*, ed. K.S. Mathew (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1995), 333-340.

¹¹ Such an explanation participates in a broader anti-Jesuit trend which has its origins in the sixteenth century, and culminated in the suppression of the Society in France by 1764, and by Pope Clement XIV in 1773.

doubt Nayiniyappa suffered cruelly, but this is not an attempt to try the case again. It is an inquiry into the way a colony functioned.

Before the Fall: Nayiniyappa in Pondichéry

European trade companies in the colonial era relied on the services of local brokers, who facilitated commercial dealings with local populations. Over several decades of living in the French colony, Nayiniyappa rose to fill the influential and profitable post of chief commercial broker of Pondichéry. According to his own account, he had arrived from Madras as a young man, and traded with the French long before he was employed as chief broker. It is possible he was brought to Pondichéry by the ongoing French attempts to lure prominent and well-connected merchants to the town, in the hope that their credit and reputation would convince others to trade with the French company. Nayiniyappa himself, according to a history written by one of his descendents in the late eighteenth century, persuaded his brother-in-law to relocate from Madras to Pondichéry.¹²

His first appearance in French records introduces us to a man already involved with the commercial doings of the French company, but not yet its employee. In 1704 his name appears in the deliberations of the Superior Council of Pondichéry: “the Council has awarded the farming of tobacco and betel leaf to Naniapa for two years,” note the minutes.¹³ Four years later, in 1708, the Council again discussed its business dealings with Nayiniyappa, but on this occasion things did not proceed quite so smoothly. The

¹² This family history, written in French by Nayiniyappa’s great-nephew (or great-great nephew), is held at NAIP, 18th Century Documents, folder 20.

¹³ Société de l’Histoire de l’Inde Française, *Procès-verbaux des délibérations du Conseil Supérieur de Pondichéry*, vol. 1, 17. French sources use a variety of spellings of the broker’s name, most commonly Nainiapa or Naniapa. The spelling I employ (Nayiniyappa) is a more accurate transliteration of the name in Tamil, as it appears signed by Nayiniyappa himself, at CAOM, FM C²/70, f. 164 verso.

Council members had turned to Nayiniyappa because they were not pleased with the terms offered to them by a more-established group of merchants with whom they usually dealt. But although Nayiniyappa made a better offer, the council was hesitant to entrust such a large transaction in his hands, and after many negotiations decided to deal with the group of merchants with whom they were more familiar.¹⁴

Even though Nayiniyappa did not emerge successful from this negotiation, he must have made a good impression on the members of Pondichéry's Council and the French governor. For by the end of 1708, the very same year the Council decided he did not have sufficient credit to be a business partner of the company, Nayiniyappa was appointed to the post of head commercial broker. His success is especially striking, since Nayiniyappa – a Hindu – was chosen to replace an acting chief broker who was a Christian. The Christian broker was ousted after he had bungled a business deal involving a large quantity of coral that the always cash-strapped French company was eager to sell.¹⁵ “Such conduct by a modeliar [chief commercial broker] deserved chastising,” admitted the members of the council in their deliberations, “but we did not [initially] do so because he was a Christian, and in the hope that the affair could still be resolved.”¹⁶ It is worth highlighting here the fact that it was officials of the *Compagnie des Indes* who were concerned with the religious affiliation of their employees. The trading Company might have been a lay institution, but religious concerns still factored centrally into its decision-making.

¹⁴ Ibid., vol. 1, 42–44.

¹⁵ Ibid., vol. 1, 66–68.

¹⁶ Ibid., vol. 1, 67.

However, far from being resolved, matters took a turn for the worse, and the deal threatened to unravel altogether. At this point the council decided to turn to Nayiniyappa, described here as “a man of spirit and widely respected,” and he successfully negotiated terms advantageous to the company.¹⁷ This success assured his new job, which he was to occupy for the next eight years. The choice to position a Hindu as the public (Indian) face of the colony is what moved the Jesuits to action against Nayiniyappa.

The Nayiniyappa Affair as a Jesuit Crusade

The Jesuits first arrived in Pondichéry almost by accident in 1689, after fleeing a coup in the Court of Siam where they had been installed. Although several French missionaries had settled in the city of Madurai, the center of Jesuit activity in the Tamil region since the early seventeenth century, the Superior of the French Jesuit contingent in India, Father Guy Tachard, chose to make Pondichéry his home base. French Capuchin missionaries who had arrived earlier had already been entrusted with the care of the colony’s French population. The Jesuits, on the other hand, were made responsible for the ministry of several thousand Indians in town who had converted to Christianity. They filled this role alongside a more ambitious endeavor: an ongoing and largely unsuccessful effort to win new souls for Christ in Pondichéry and its surroundings.

Jesuit missionaries had attempted to turn Pondichéry into an exclusively Christian town ever since their arrival in the colony. The previous chapter examined in detail the repeated, failed attempts by Pondichéry’s Jesuits to curtail public religious practice by Hindus. But in the second decade of the century, Jesuit leaders took on a much more circumscribed – and embodied – target. Not an entire religion, practiced by the vast

¹⁷ Ibid.

majority of the city's population, but one man: Nayiniyappa. The Jesuits might have, at least momentarily, conceded that the city as a whole could not be made to conform to a utopian Christian homogeneity. But surely the French government, ran the Jesuit logic, should present an unequivocally Catholic front. That is, a Christian company, running a town with explicitly Christian ambitions, with the support of a Christian king anointed by God Himself, should not have a Hindu man as its most senior and most visible Indian employee.

The Wrong Man for the Job? A Hindu Broker in a Catholic Town

An early mention of tension between Nayiniyappa and the Jesuit missionaries in Pondichéry appears in a letter written in 1714 by then-governor of Pondichéry, Pierre Dulivier. The letter describes how a group of Christian children educated in the Jesuit school had attacked some of the town's Hindus, knocking down their cooking vessels and throwing rocks at a temple on several occasions.¹⁸ As the students were giving raw and violent expression to the Jesuit dogma of Christian dominance in Pondichéry, the Jesuits themselves began taking steps address the most prominent example of Hindu achievement in the colony. "The matter which most concerns the Fathers is that of Nayiniyappa ," wrote Dulivier in the same letter.¹⁹

The Jesuits had petitioned in 1711 for a series of measures meant to boost the number of Christian conversions in the town (a testament to their ongoing difficulties in

¹⁸ The students in this school were a diverse group, described in a Jesuit letter as "two Europeans, one from Paris, the other from London, the son of the British Governor of Gondelour. Africa has sent five students born in the Ile Mascarin; from America, one young Spaniard, born in the Phillipines." See I.a.J.-L. Vissière, *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses des jésuites de l'Inde au dix-huitième siècle* (Paris: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2000), 43.

¹⁹ CAOM, FM, C²/69, f. 91

proselytizing), and sent them directly to the King.²⁰ Following orders received from France, the superior council of Pondichéry gathered in March 1714, to discuss the possibility of granting of these Jesuit requests. The following two requests were discussed at length by the council: first, the Jesuits asked that Hindus be allowed the use of only two temples. All other temples in Pondichéry should be barred shut and allowed to fall into disrepair. Second, the Jesuits argued that in order to attract new converts, marks of distinction must be given to converts, thereby elevating the status of Christianity. To this end, the Jesuits demanded that the post of chief broker be held only by a Christian, and that Nayiniyappa be immediately dismissed.

The two requests are intimately connected. Like the religious processions and public Hindu worship previously discussed, Nayiniyappa's elevation to the post of broker took place prominently in the public arena, and was grating to the Jesuits in a similar manner, a demonstration of Hindu strength in what should have been a Christian cityscape. Nayiniyappa echoed this attitude, when he tellingly referred to his post as that of a "public man."²¹ Not only did he represent French governance to the town's population, he also served as a diplomatic emissary for the Council, and thus was its official representative beyond the confines of the colony. In the eyes of the Jesuits, abolishing processions, limiting Hindu worship, and removing Nayiniyappa would have all served the same aim: the creation of a Christian façade for Pondichéry. The Jesuit attack on Nayiniyappa was both strategic and symbolic: the removal of Nayiniyappa would have advanced the Jesuit agenda by placing a Christian in the powerful position,

²⁰ Société de l'Histoire de l'Inde Française, *Procès-verbaux des délibérations du Conseil Supérieur de Pondichéry*, vol. 1, 139–144.

²¹ CAOM, C²2/70, f. 251 verso.

but also would have more broadly symbolized the desired Catholic dominance of public life in the colony.

Governor Dulivier was willing to entertain the Jesuits demands only grudgingly, no doubt forced to do so because of Louis XIV's staunch support of the Jesuits in France (the King's own confessor was a Jesuit). The council's deliberations (possibly written by Dulivier himself) clearly reflect this reluctance. They also note that the destruction of Hindu temples and the dismissal of Nayiniyappa could have dangerous consequences, which might lead to the "complete ruin of this establishment."²² Nevertheless, Dulivier and the council offered a compromise of sorts. First, the council appointed a Christian co-broker to serve alongside Nayiniyappa . This man, Savari (Chavoury, in the text), was expected to act "conjointly and in concert" with Nayiniyappa, and was endowed with the same "powers, honors, prerogatives and preeminence attached to the post, without any difference or distinction between the two."²³ Savari was also taxed with protecting the interests of Christians, advancing Christian faith in Pondichéry, and making sure that Nayiniyappa would not impede these attempts.

Second, they declared that they had given Nayiniyappa six months in which to be instructed in the mysteries of Christianity and convert. If at the end of this period Nayiniyappa insisted on remaining a Hindu, he would be removed as head broker and replaced with a Christian. Subsequent events proved that this call was a half-hearted one: six months later, Nayiniyappa was still a Hindu, and still serving as head broker. This is not surprising, considering that the council declared that there was not a single Indian, Hindu or Christian, who was as capable as Nayiniyappa at filling the post of chief

²² Société de l'Histoire de l'Inde Française, *Procès-verbaux des délibérations du Conseil Supérieur de Pondichéry*, vol. 1, 140.

²³ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 142; 144.

broker.²⁴ It is to be hoped, the council wrote optimistically, that the force of the Gospel and the good example of Christians would attract Nayiniyappa to the Christian faith.²⁵ In the council's formulation, it was important that Nayiniyappa voluntarily choose to become a Christian for the benefit of the Pondichéry's future commercial well-being, much more than a conversion would be beneficial for the broker's soul. In a letter that Governor Dulivier sent in July of 1714 to Pontchartrain, the French minister in charge of the *Compagnie des Indes*, he advocated for the compromise of the co-broker, and explained why Nayiniyappa was irreplaceable: "this gentile [Nayiniyappa] knows everyone, as your Grace has already been informed, and is one of the most capable of men in India in the art of negotiation. His correspondents are everywhere, there is no service he is incapable of providing, even when the need is most pressing."²⁶ Dulivier explicitly linked the dismissal of Nayiniyappa with the restrictions of religious practice also advocated by the Jesuits, writing that such decisions could have tragic results for the future of Pondichéry.²⁷

But the Council's compromise did not please the Jesuits. The next year the Jesuits mounted another offensive against Nayiniyappa. This time, they did not simply request his removal, but accused him of an act so threatening to Christian – and by extension, French – authority, that his simple removal from his post would not be sufficient. Instead, a punishment was in order. This event, in the Jesuit telling of events, defined the moment at which the Nayiniyappa affair really began.

²⁴ Ibid., vol. 1, 141.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ "ce gentil c'est a la connaissance de tout le monde, comme votre Grandeur ne manqueroi pas d'en être informé, un des plus habiles hommes pour la négociation d'une compagnie qu'il y a dans l'Inde, sa correspondance s'étant par tout, il n'y a point de service qu'il ne pas capable de rendre, même d'une le plus pressant besoin." CAOM, FM C²/69, f. 103.

²⁷ CAOM, FM C²/69, f. 103 verso.

Nayiniyappa's Sin: Rosaries, Cloth, and Semiotic Confusion

Nayiniyappa's crime, in the Jesuit telling, was committed in an unexpected setting: the giving of alms to Pondichéry's Christian poor, an event he hosted in his house. The broker invited several hundred of the town's needy Christian converts, and provided them with food, pieces of fabric, and Christian prayer rosaries. In hosting this event, Nayiniyappa was following a tradition of gift-giving by affluent Indian merchants. As Douglas Haynes has noted in his study of Surat, such acts of patronage were meant to transform financial capital into symbolic capital.²⁸ Officials of the *Compagnie des Indes* similarly engaged in elaborate acts of ritual gift-giving with local Indian rulers.²⁹ Other Tamil brokers in the region similarly performed acts of patronage, specifically in Madras.³⁰

It is likely that the gift of cloth would have held special resonance with the recipients and French observers alike, given that it was the central commodity traded by the *Compagnie des Indes*, and the very fortune of Ponduchéry rested on cloth. A French historian attempting to identify hints of the cultural crisis that precipitated the French Revolution has examined the meaning of cloth (*toile*) in French society of the eighteenth-century and determined that knowledge of cloth was an indicator of familiarity with the institutions of power that structured life in the *ancien régime*.³¹ The same would have held true in a colony so dependant on cloth, and this association between the established

²⁸ Douglas Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India: The Shaping of a Public Culture in Surat City, 1852-1928* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

²⁹ Venkata Raghatham, "Merchant, Courtier, Shipper, Prince: The Social and Intellectual World of an Eighteenth Century Tamil Merchant," *Journal of the Institute of Asian Studies* IX, no. 2 (March 1992): 14-16.

³⁰ Mukund, *The View from Below*. See especially Chapter 7, "Dubashes and Patronage: Construction of Identity and Social Leadership under the Colonial State."

³¹ William M. Reddy, "The Structure of a Cultural Crisis: Thinking about Cloth in France Before and After the Revolution," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. A. Appadurai (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 261-284.

order and the meaning of cloth would have been especially ingrained in merchants of the Company, who had direct and daily cause to make the association between the value of cloth and their own authority. In a more specifically Indian-European context, beginning in the seventeenth century, trade in textile became the central interaction between Indian merchants and Europeans.³² Cloth, then, would have been a particularly loaded material for symbolic exchange. From a strictly Indian perspective, cloth could also “evoke such powerful symbols of community and right conduct... as a thing that can transmit spirit and substance.”³³ This spiritual dimension of the gift of cloth in Indian society was possibly a reason that the French Jesuits – immersed as they were in local systems of hierarchy and spiritual cleanliness through their practice of accommodation – objected so vehemently to Nayiniyappa’s assumption of the role of a giver of cloth. Unfortunately, French accounts provide no information as to the type, color or density of the weave of the cloth provided by Nayiniyappa, all of which would have had innate spiritual significance.

Another objection the Jesuits could have held to Nayiniyappa’s gift-giving might have stemmed from the fact that the receiving of a gift “depressed status” as regards caste.³⁴ Already uncomfortable with the lower caste position of the majority of their converts, the missionaries would have been indignant at ritual actions and gifts that would have reinforced such status.

³² Mukund, *The trading world of the Tamil merchant*, 76.

³³ C.A. Bayly, “The Origins of Swadeshi (Home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society, 1700-1930,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. A. Appadurai (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 285–286. For another account of the exceptionally rich semiotic canvas provided by cloth in India, for both locals and Europeans, see Bernard S. Cohn, “Cloth, Clothes and Colonialism: India in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge: the British in India* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 106-162.

³⁴ Bayly, “The Origins of Swadeshi (Home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society, 1700-1930,” 294.

Nayiniyappa's distribution of Christian rosaries in the course of the event was singled out by Father Bouchet as an act meant to abuse the naiveté of poor Christians, who presumably would not understand that they were being used as the tools of their own humiliation. The council, in its investigation of Bouchet's complaint, also paid special attention to the matter of the rosaries, inquiring how Nayiniyappa had procured so many (the answer: they were widely sold in the bazaar by both Christian and Hindu vendors, although Nayiniyappa had bought his from a sailor), and even producing an "authentic" European rosary, to ask witnesses if they had received a similar object (answer: yes).

The dismay of French observers at Nayiniyappa's distribution of rosaries should perhaps be understood in light of French memory of the Wars of Religion, which had raged in France in the late sixteenth century. Familiar with stories of the brutal bloodbaths performed by Catholics and Protestants over matters of Christian dogma, Nayiniyappa's act of religious cross-gifting must have seemed downright inexplicable to French colonists and missionaries. Yet in the South Indian context, a Hindu giving out Christian prayer implements would not have been so shocking. The distribution of rosaries, succor for the soul, was of a piece with the distribution of cloth and food, succor for the flesh. The kerfuffle over the rosaries is an instance of what I term semiotic confusion: Nayiniyappa and his French employees ascribed different meanings to the same sign – in this case the rosaries – with resulting conflict.³⁵ Yet both Nayiniyappa and

³⁵ For an anthropological discussion of similar issues in South India, which situates both Christianity and Hinduism as "essentially local" see Cecilia Busby, "Renewable Icons: Concepts of Religious Power in a Fishing Village in South India," in *The anthropology of Christianity*, ed. Fenella Cannell (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 98. David Mosse has written about both the historical and contemporary iterations of such religious synthesis in the Tamil religious field. See especially D. Mosse, "Catholic Saints and the Hindu Village Pantheon in Rural Tamil Nadu, South India," *Man* 29, no. 2 (June 1994): 301-332; D. Mosse, "The Politics of Religious Synthesis: Roman Catholicism and Hindu Village Society in Tamil Nadu, India," in *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism, The Politics of Religious Synthesis* (London: Routledge, 1994), 85-107.

French observers would have understood the gift as an act of patronage, with the resulting obligation.³⁶ The fact that the gift had a Christian form might have been a subversive attempt to take over Catholic authority, Nayiniyappa highjacking symbols from the Jesuits' symbolic economy to enhance his own standing. But it is just as likely that Nayiniyappa would have simply attempted to give a desirable gift. The horror that missionary writers evinced when describing "pagan" religious practice was apparently not shared by the broker class to which Nayiniyappa belonged. Ananda Ranga Pillai, Nayiniyappa's nephew and chief broker in Pondichéry under Dupleix, blithely described his travels in pursuit of Christian-oriented tourism: "I intend to stay at Ariyankuppam for a day," he wrote in his diary, "to see the festival there, which the Christians celebrate for ten days in magnificent style."³⁷ Furthermore, the gifting of the rosaries was not the first occasion on which Nayiniyappa himself engaged with the artifacts of Christianity, in an apparently benign fashion. In the appeal put forth by Nayiniyappa's sons, they note on passing that at one time (prior to the affair), Nayiniyappa gave Hébert a cake as a gift to celebrate the Governor's saint's day.³⁸

Asked by the Council why he had held the event, Nayiniyappa did not say that he was offering charity to poor Christians, only that he was in the habit of giving charity every year.³⁹ But this apparent act of goodwill, argued the Jesuits, was in fact a cruel and mocking masquerade. According to the Jesuits, Nayiniyappa gave the food in a manner

³⁶ For a discussion of the *fidélité* created by act of ritualized gift-giving in the context of French patron-client relationships, see Sharon Kettering, "Gift-Giving and Patronage in Early Modern France," *French History* 2, no. 2 (June 1, 1988): 131 -151.

³⁷ Pillai, *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai, Dubash to Joseph François Dupleix, Knight of the Order of St. Michael, and Governor of Pondichery. A Record of Matters Political, Historical, Social, and Personal, from 1736 to 1761*, vol. 1, 237.

³⁸ CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 103

³⁹ CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 209. It is not clear if only Christians were invited to the alms-giving, or whether the correlation between Christianity and low social status meant that an event targeted at the poor would draw a Christian crowd.

meant to humiliate and degrade the Christian recipients of his so-called charity. The Jesuit Superior, Jean-Venant Bouchet, wrote a letter of complaint to Governor Dulivier, claiming that Nayiniyappa had treated Christians “like dogs” with the express intention of humiliating them, and in so doing offering the Hindu residents of the town a spectacle, “a comedy.”⁴⁰

Bouchet asked the Governor to use his authority to “put a stop to such disgraceful acts... so that you will not be blinded by the false appearance of a good work, and thus set straight those who would be inclined to canonize him for this.”⁴¹ As Bouchet’s outrage makes clear, Nayiniyappa’s acts of patronage and charity were effective enough to have earned him a measure of goodwill in the town. Yet for Bouchet, this latest crime was only the last and most audacious in a series of assaults Nayiniyappa committed on Christianity. He had been cruel to various Christians, forbade several Hindus from embracing the Christian faith after they had expressed interest in doing so, and by using promises and threats he had managed to convince several Indian converts to become apostates. As Bouchet’s litany reveals, Nayiniyappa was in a position of such authority in the colony, that his alleged involvement would be forceful enough to persuade potential converts to shun Christianity. Putting a Hindu in the position of chief broker was potentially ruinous to the Catholic cause.

The council investigated Father Bouchet’s complaint by sending out the newly appointed Christian co-broker, Savari, and another trusted Indian Christian to find

⁴⁰ See letter by Bouchet in CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 208. A copy of the same letter also appears in CAOM, FM C²/70, ff. 92-92v, while the original letter in Bouchet’s hand is one of the documents presented in the colonial exhibition of 1931 (see note above), now at CAOM, Inde, série N, folder N 58.

⁴¹ “Agréez, Monsieur, que n’ayant pas moi-même les moyens d’empêcher une action si indigne, j’implore pour cela votre autorité, afin que ne vous laissant pas éblouir pas les fausses couleurs d’une bonne oeuvre, vous ayez la bonté de la lui defender, et de détromper par là ceux que seraient portez à l’en canoniser.” CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 208.

witnesses to the alms-giving at Nayiniyappa's house. They returned with four witnesses, leaders of the Christian community in Pondichéry, who had all participated in the alms-giving event. The witnesses testified before the Council that they went to Nayiniyappa's house of their own free will, because they had heard that the broker was providing "food to the poor, and all those who wished to come would be welcomed; this is why they went there." Once in the compound, they were given food and cloth with which to cover themselves. They went on to say that nothing had been done to belittle the Catholic religion, and "if anything had been done to deride our religion, [we] would not have stayed there."⁴² The council did not pursue the matter any further. In a letter to the Directors in Paris they wrote that if the Jesuits were not ordered to "leave everyone alone," all of the company's principal Tamil employees would abandon it.⁴³

The Jesuit outrage over the alms-giving by Nayiniyappa's must be situated in the context of their ongoing difficulties in the mission field in India. Despite having the support of institutional and military authorities in Pondichéry, their success in making new converts was slim. Three decades after Pondichéry became a French colony, only several thousand of the town's population of 60,000 to 70,000 were Christians. The situation in other towns in the Tamil country, those under Hindu or Muslim rulers, was even worse. Nayiniyappa's act of alms-giving must have been particularly galling in light of these on-going difficulties. By providing the town's poor Christians with food, cloth and prayer rosaries, the Hindu broker was calling attention to the superfluity of Jesuits in

⁴² "Ont répondu que Naynappa leur ayant fait dire qu'il donnait à manger aux pauvres, et que ceux qui voudraient y venir seraient bien reçus; c'est ce qui les avait obligé d'y aller... Enquis s'ils ont connaissance que l'on ait fait ou dit quelque chose au mépris de la Religion Catholique, Apostolique et Romaine? Ont dit que non, et que si l'on avait fait quelque chose au mépris de notre religion, ils n'y auraient pas resté." CAOM, FM C²/70, f. 208 verso. Of note in this statement is the witness' claim for a shared Christian religious authority, which the Council appeared to accept.

⁴³ BNF, Manuscrits français 6231, "Mémoires sur la compagnie des Indes Orientales 1642-1720," f. 55 verso.

Pondichéry. By taking on a role they would have liked to fill – that of a munificent and powerful patron – he strengthened his own already-strong position at the expense of the Jesuits.

The alms-giving was not only a demonstration of his wealth but also of his position as a physical and spiritual caretaker – and it was the Jesuits’ flock to which he was ministering. The first problem with Nayiniyappa’s charity, then, was that it challenged the Jesuits’ position in the colony while their effectiveness was challenged by the low number of conversions. This problem was only compounded by the ongoing struggles between Jesuits and Capuchins in Pondichéry, a drawn-out battle over spiritual turf. It was the Capuchin order, not the Jesuits, which had a gloried tradition of charity (this might explain why the Capuchin missionaries in town raised no complaint about Nayiniyappa’s assistance to the poor). Yet in Pondichéry, because the Malabar parish under the Jesuits’ charge was so poor – much to the missionaries’ displeasure – the Jesuits found themselves tending a flock in need of charity. Nayiniyappa’s alms-giving thus had the effect of encroaching on Jesuit territory.

The accusation that Nayiniyappa fed the poor Christians as if they were dogs speaks to an even more insurmountable difficulty the Jesuits faced. Because so many converts were from the lower castes, and so-called Pariahs, Christianity had come to be seen as a lower caste religion. French Jesuit commentators blamed this on the first Portuguese to arrive in India, arguing that because the Portuguese did not respect the caste system they acquired a bad reputation among all Indians, and thus greatly damaged the cause of Christianization in the subcontinent. Because of the low status of *Paranguis* (the pejorative term used to describe Europeans) in India, the Jesuit missionaries went to

great lengths to disassociate themselves from Europeans, and attempted to “pass” for Brahmans, or simply non-Europeans.

The low status accorded to Christianity meant that there was a social and potentially a financial cost for those who chose to leave the Hindu community. This made Christianity a more attractive choice for those who had less to lose, and both missionary and French government accounts repeatedly lamented that Pondichéry’s Christian community was almost exclusively comprised of poor and lower caste people. When Nayiniyappa gave alms to Christians, he was drawing attention to the very fact that so many of the town’s indigents were Christians. By allegedly giving them food in a degrading manner, Nayiniyappa (in the Jesuit account) was also ensuring that Christians remained objects of pity, and Christianity a religion to be shunned. The act of alms giving, as both a mimicry and mockery of Christian charity, crystallized for the Jesuits both their ongoing difficulties and the bleak prospects for the project of Christianizing India. The fact that their humiliation took place in a town where they should have been in control, and at the hands of a man that should not have enjoyed the power he did, only made their predicament more maddening, and their crusade against Nayiniyappa more pressing.

The Jesuits’ subsequent persecution of Nayiniyappa therefore located the alms-giving, and specifically what I term the religious cross-gifting of the rosaries, as the moment where Nayiniyappa committed a crime meriting his dismissal. By focusing on this very public moment, which the Jesuit missionaries framed as undermining the position of Christianity in Pondichéry, Father Bouchet and his brethren were making a

claim for the Catholic nature of the colony, and positioning Nayiniyappa as an enemy of the faith.

Governor Hébert and the Politics of Governing

The council had steadfastly resisted the Jesuit attacks against Nayiniyappa, although the alms-giving complaint did lead to an investigation of the broker's actions. But in 1716 the Jesuits found a new, surprising and powerful ally: returning Governor Hébert. In 1708 Hébert had first been made Governor of Pondichéry, and had even appointed Nayiniyappa to the post of head broker. When business dealings forced his return to France in 1713, he was replaced by Dulivier. Finding himself in the metropole, low on funds and eager to return to the riches of India, Hébert seems to have experienced a change of heart about Nayiniyappa's appointment, because almost immediately after managing to secure a new appointment, under the new title of *Générale de la nation*, and returning to Pondichéry in 1715, he opened the investigation that resulted in Nayiniyappa's conviction and death.

That Hébert and the Jesuits became allies is one of the most surprising aspects of the Nayiniyappa affair. During his first term in Pondichéry, Hébert was often at cross-purposes with the Jesuit missionaries. In a letter Hébert sent to the Jesuit superior Tachard in 1708 he rebuked him in no uncertain terms, demanding that the Jesuits cease interfering in government affairs: "You are so accustomed to meddling in the affairs of the Company, notwithstanding the fact that I have asked you repeatedly to leave us in peace..." scolded Hébert. "You have often put the previous Governors in an awkward position with your importunities and your constant threats of writing to the King, so that

they were obliged to give in to you in all matters”⁴⁴. On another occasion he went so far as to accuse the Jesuit Superior Tachard of lying to him, saying that the Jesuit came to him to complain about various matters on 25 different occasions, yet every time Hébert inquired into the matter he found that there was no truth to the complaints.⁴⁵ Even the *missions étrangères* missionaries, who would become some of Hébert’s harshest critics, came to the Governor’s defense when the Jesuits attacked him in 1711.⁴⁶

Hébert’s detractors in France and India explained his embrace of the Jesuit agenda as the result of a secret deal made in France. They alleged that Hébert struck a deal with the Jesuits, in which he would further their interests in the colony in exchange for their help in reappointing him to a position of power in Pondichéry. Such a position, in turn, would allow Hébert to restore his financial well-being. If Hébert did indeed desire to return to India because he found himself in dire financial straits, he would have been one of many Frenchmen for whom India presented a new opportunity. Etienne Hargenvillier, a notary of Paris, arrived in Asia in 1728 because of his “*mauvaises affaires*.” François Lemaire of Rouen did the same in 1738. Not only India but the colonial world at large offered the opportunity of turning over a new leaf multiple times, as demonstrated by the case of Pierre Boudet, a merchant who made his first fortune in St. Domingue, and after losing it in 1761 was hired by the Company for service in India in 1765.⁴⁷ Being Governor of Pondichéry, the post coveted by Hébert, appears to have been especially lucrative. When Pierre Christophe Lenoir, who was Governor in 1726-1736, retired to

⁴⁴ Quoted in Vissière, *Lettres Édifiantes Et Curieuses Des Jésuites De L’inde Au Dix-Huitième Siècle*, 43.

⁴⁵ BNF, Manuscrits français 6231, f. 42 verso.

⁴⁶ MEP, *Lettres*, Vol. 959, p. 223-229.

⁴⁷ For these examples, see Haudrière, *Les compagnies des Indes orientales*, 181.

France, he was reported to be shopping for “grand establishments, a sign he handled his business well in India.”⁴⁸

Hébert’s attempts to be reinstated in Pondichéry, and the abrupt change in his attitude (in favor of the Jesuits, against Nayiniyappa), as well as the enormous power the Jesuits enjoyed in France in the first half of the eighteenth century, make the claims of Hébert’s enemies a reasonable hypothesis. But any such deal remains strictly in the realm of hypothesis – there is no way of knowing exactly what transpired between Hébert and the Jesuits in France, and if there was a deal, what made Hébert keep to it despite all the opposition he encountered to the prosecution of Nayiniyappa. More interesting, for the purpose of this discussion, is how Hébert himself chose to present his actions, and how he justified his arrest of Nayiniyappa.

In 1715, when Hébert finally managed to return to Pondichéry, Dulivier was already installed as Governor. But Hébert new position as *général de la nation* made Dulivier his subaltern.⁴⁹ Hébert nevertheless turned his attention to undermining his rival’s hold on the colony’s administration. In a letter sent to Paris early in 1716, shortly after his return to India, Hébert complained that “since my arrival... I found everything here in a state of disorder, due to the weakness of M. Dulivier.” He presented the problem as being one of subverted authority, a colony run amok in which “everyone wants to be the master, so there are as many governors as there are subjects.”⁵⁰ In a later letter, Hébert presented a picture of a town rife with internal tension and strife. According to

⁴⁸ Quoted in Manning, *Fortunes à Faire*, 77.

⁴⁹ For the letter appointing Hébert to the position, see CAOM, FM C²/70, ff. 239-240. For the purposes of consistency, I refer to Hébert as Governor throughout, whether if mentioning his first tenure as Governor or his second tenure as *général de la nation*.

⁵⁰ “A mon arrive, je me suis mis en devoir d’exécuter les ordres de Monseigneur, mais j’ai trouvé toutes choses en si grand désordre par la faiblesse du M. Dulivier... il n’y avait plus aucune subordination, chacun voulant faire le maitre, y ayant autant des gouverneurs que des sujets.” CAOM, FM, C²/69, f. 225

Hébert, Dulivier did everything possible to vex and annoy him, “goaded into this by people who seek only trouble and division.”⁵¹

For Hébert, undermining Dulivier was relatively easy compared to explaining his own about-face in regards to Nayiniyappa – the same man he had appointed to the highest-ranking post of any Indian in his government. To this end, Hébert argued that it was Nayiniyappa who had changed his ways, and committed various crimes and evil deeds during the time Hébert was away in France. The problem of Nayiniyappa’s misbehavior was exacerbated, wrote Hébert, by Dulivier’s supposed weakness as Governor. Hébert also claimed that the broker had bribed Dulivier so that he could keep his job – a charge Nayiniyappa denied in his own appeal.⁵²

Hébert claimed that he had been surprised to receive such bad reports of Nayiniyappa when he first arrived in India. In Hébert’s account, he had no choice but to investigate Nayiniyappa, so overwhelmed was he by popular demand: “every day I received new complaints from the inhabitants, I finally had to decide to have him arrested.” In Hébert’s narrative, the broker’s arrest was a heroic and paternalistic act, which meant liberation for the town’s Indian population. “[R]ight away all the tribes, or castes as they are called here, came to see me in order to thank me, saying that I had rescued them from the tiger that had destroyed and devoured them with his great teeth.”⁵³

What were the specific crimes Nayiniyappa committed against the Indian people of Pondichéry? This is left somewhat vague in Hébert’s letters. He mentioned that some said

⁵¹ CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 221

⁵² CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 252 verso.

⁵³ “Lorsque j’arrivai aux Indes, je fus fort surprise de voir que tout le monde se plaignait du gentil Naniapa, cela m’obligea d’examiner sa conduit. Tous les jours il mes venait de nouvelles plaintes des habitants, je fus enfin contraint de prendre la résolution de le faire arrêter... toutes les tribus, ou castes ainsi que l’on les appelle ici, m’en vinrent faire des remerciements, me disant que je les avais tirés des pattes d’un tigre qui les déchirait et les dévorait à belles dents.” CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 221 verso.

that Nayiniyappa was responsible for fomenting the employee uprising of 1715. He cited the Jesuit claims that Nayiniyappa was impeding Christian conversions. But he insisted that it was the peoples' complaints of Nayiniyappa's unspecified "embezzlements, malpractices, and other crimes" that moved him to arrest the broker. "I can truthfully declare, as if I were about to appear before God, that the principle motivation that made me decide to go to this extreme [of arresting Nayiniyappa] was the wish to render justice to the people who submitted for so many years to the tyranny of this miserable man."⁵⁴

The problem that led to Nayiniyappa's arrest, in Hébert's account, was an action undertaken by the broker himself: his abuse of power, which manifested itself in the cruel mistreatment of the town's Indian population, Hindu and Christian alike. Thus, in Hébert's view of the affair, Nayiniyappa's crime represented a threat to French political authority posed by an Indian employee. If Nayiniyappa's actions were a challenge to French sovereignty, his arrest and conviction were an opportunity for Hébert to affirm his sovereign role and cast himself in the role of a savior. French authority, it appears, was a fragile proposition, a construct that could be compromised.

The severity of Nayiniyappa's punishment is a testament to the threat the broker posed. After all, he could simply have been dismissed, even made to leave Pondichéry. Instead, he was stripped of all his wealth, and was repeatedly flogged at the most public locale in the city, the main bazaar. It seems it was Nayiniyappa's very success as a broker that made him a viable threat, and thus necessitated his complete decimation. This is hinted at in a letter by the council written several years prior to Nayiniyappa's arrest, when he was still being defended by his French employers. Explaining why they did not

⁵⁴ "Je puis protester avec vérité, comme si j'étais prêt apparaitre devant Dieu, que le principal motif qui m'a déterminé a cette extrémité n'a été que ce de rendre justice aux peuples qui gémissait depuis tat d'années sous la tyrannie de ce malheureux." CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 222.

wish to dismiss Nayiniyappa, the council admitted that this was a man who “holds the key to all the company’s secrets.” If he were fired, and chose to go live in a settlement controlled by the Dutch, English, or Mughals, the consequences for the Company and the colony would be dire.⁵⁵ Nayiniyappa’s privileged position as a man who knew too much made it impossible to simply fire him. Hébert’s choice, while brutal, was also effective in its complete eradication of any future claim to power and authority on Nayiniyappa’s behalf.

Nayiniyappa and his Appeals

When Nayiniyappa described his own position in the colony prior to his conviction, he referred to himself as an “ambassador”. He explained: “for there to be communication between the Frenchman and the Indian, there is need for an intelligent man, who will act as an ambassador between the two nations” he explained. “He is called the *Chef des Malabars*, and is a public man. The general [Governor] addresses only him, and he alone is known by the Indians. It is a very distinguished position in this land.”⁵⁶ In Nayiniyappa’s own construction of self, his position was one that depended on effective representation and dignified semiosis.

In the brief period between his arrest and his death in prison Nayiniyappa wrote two appeals against his conviction. The first appeal, a manuscript text written in Portuguese and translated into French, was signed by the imprisoned broker in

⁵⁵ Société de l’Histoire de l’Inde Française, *Procès-verbaux des délibérations du Conseil Supérieur de Pondichéry*, vol. 1, 140–141.

⁵⁶ “Il est besoin pour la communication du Français et de l’Indien, d’avoir un homme intelligent qui soit comme l’Ambassadeur entre les deux Nations, qui fasse savoir à l’Indien ou Malabar les ordres du Général Français : on l’appelle le Chef des Malabars, il est l’homme public : le général ne s’adresse qu’à lui, et lui seul est connu des Indiens pour recevoir les lois de gouvernement de la colonie: il les porte à tous les Chefs de Castes ou Tribus, il les rend comme on les lui donne, les Indiens les reçoivent comme il les lui porte: c’est un emploi très distingué dans le pays.” CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 251 verso.

Pondichéry on December 20, 1716. The second was printed in Paris in 1717. While Nayiniyappa did have French co-authors (an issue discussed in a subsequent chapter), as evidenced by the quotes in Latin and references to scriptures and French law, it seems certain that Nayiniyappa personally participated in the writing of these documents: both appeals display knowledge of the biographical details of his life, and discuss at length details from his multiple interrogations – instances when only Nayiniyappa, Hébert and a Tamil interpreter were in the room.

At the opening of one of the appeals, Nayiniyappa acknowledged the peculiar difficulties of appealing the metropole from the colony. “A process so unjust, striking, and evil... oblige Naynappa, as far away as he is, to put himself at the feet of your Majesty, and those of the Company, to reclaim and demand justice.”⁵⁷ It is noteworthy that that the problem Nayiniyappa identifies is not one of hierarchy, but of location. That is, the appeal is unusual, but not because a colonial subject, an Indian, is addressing the King. Rather, the difficulty arises from Nayiniyappa’s distance from the Court in Versailles – a problem he would share with any inhabitant of the colony approaching the king, French or Indian.

In Nayiniyappa’s tale, his service to the company was distinguished by a series of satisfied employers, a flourishing trade, and a colony beloved by its people: “in this state M. Hébert found this place the first time he arrived here.” The golden days continued during Hébert’s first tenure, and he was pleased with the broker’s “good and agreeable services and fidelity, which attracted the affection [of the colony’s Governors].”⁵⁸ This

⁵⁷ “un si injuste et criant et mauvais procédure... oblige Naynappa, si éloigné qu’il est, de se mettre aux pieds de Votre Royal Majesté, et à ceux de la Compagnie, pour réclamer et demander justice.” CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 200 verso.

⁵⁸ CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 200 verso.

harmonious state was not disrupted until Hébert returned from France for his second period of service in the colony, in July of 1715.

When he tried to explain why Hébert had turned against him, Nayiniyappa turned toward Paris for an explanation. “Hébert returned to France, where he was called due to some ongoing entanglements in France.” Once back in the metropole, Nayiniyappa conjectured, Hébert no longer had the strength of character to ignore the “false persuasions” of troublemakers. Those same meddlers – obviously the Jesuits, though they remain unnamed – are described as being “those who, having become masters due to their adulation of those in power, followed no rule, and did not hesitate to take any means, even the most unjust... to achieve their ends.”⁵⁹

Lured by these “seditious voices” and a desire to amass riches (made more pressing, Nayiniyappa informs us, by a loss Hébert suffered due to a shipwreck), Hébert sided with the Jesuits.⁶⁰ Since Hébert owed his reinstatement in Pondichéry to the Jesuits, claimed Nayiniyappa, he found himself “believing that he may not refuse them anything, regardless of what injustices may accompany their requests.” Upon his return to India, according to the broker, Hébert “executed absolutely all of [the Jesuits’] desires, even the most unreasonable, and would not forgive anyone whom he suspected or presumed of being their enemies.” And since Nayiniyappa was seen as a Jesuit enemy, “without there

⁵⁹ “Les habitants demeurant seraient ravis de contentement, et lui Naynappa n’aurait pas essuyé les sans raison qu’aujourd’hui souffre, si au retour de France dudit sieur Hebert, ou il fut appelé pour raison de plaintes que ledit embrouilleurs supposèrent en cour de la France contre lui, s’il avait eu la même fermeté d’entendement et de volonté, et s’il serait comme la première fois les oreilles aux fausses persuasions de tels esprits des inquiets et turbulents; lesquels s’étant rendus une fois maîtres par leur adulations de ceux qui gouvernent, ils n’observent aucune règle dépendante, ni n’embarrassent de tirer et exécuter par toutes les voies les plus injustes, jusqu’aux derrières extrémités, tant qu’ils peuvent attraper, les excès ou fins qu’ils s’étaient proposés.” CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 201.

⁶⁰ The use of the term “seditious” is significant. Nayiniyappa was convicted of two crimes: tyranny (for his mistreatment of Pondichéry’s people) and sedition (for his involvement in the employee uprising of 1715). Here the appeal uses the same accusation against the Jesuits, implying that their actions were those that posed a real threat to the colony and to long-term French sovereignty.

being any possible reason for this, since he had always provided services to them and to their Christians,” Hébert turned against him.⁶¹

Hébert’s return to Pondichéry is described by Nayiniyappa as the creation of a topsy-turvy world, where the certainties of the old ways disappear in a flash, with no explanation: “from the moment of Hébert’s return to Pondichéry... everything changed in an instant: virtue became a crime, the innocent became the culprit, and Naynapa, until that point honored, praised, endowed with a position of confidence... became nothing more than a victim, suitable to be sacrificed to those whom he had displeased.”⁶² This account starkly evokes the sense of complete and utter semiotic confusion created by the Nayiniyappa affair: nothing is as it seems, nothing is as it should be.

The issue of unwarranted, inexplicable change is central to Nayiniyappa’s understanding of his own downfall. Thus he summed up his second appeal: “Naynapa was innocent during the first government of Hébert but became guilty upon his return to India in 1715... This was the price of his new post as General. After forty three years of

⁶¹ “[Hébert était] de forte persuadé que c’est à eux [les Jésuites] qu’il doit sa nouvelle fortune de son retour à Pondichéry, croit ne leur devoir refuser rien de quelque sorte d’injustice que leurs requêtes puissent être accompagnée, obligé par reconnaissance, et comme il se certifie, par promesses qu’il a fait d’accorder tout, et de suivre tous leurs sentiments, fondé de l’autorité et crédit qu’ils avaient du temps passé en cour duquel ils le certifièrent qu’ils le favoriseraient en toutes occasions, de quelque sorte qu’elles peuvent être... et il exécuté absolument à tous leurs désirs les plus irraisonnable, et n’a pas pardonné à aucun de ceux qu’il soupçonnait et présumait être leur ennemis; et comme l’a été toujours Naynapa considéré en ce nombre, sans qu’il ait été possible d’en savoir la raison pourquoi, et il prouvera qu’il a toujours été porté à leur rendre service et à leurs Chrétiens.” CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 201. The text offers another explanation for why Hébert might have turned against Nayiniyappa. When Hébert arrived in Pondichéry he was, in the broker’s words, “so poor and lost,” that he had to borrow significant amounts of money from the broker on three different occasions. Putting Nayiniyappa in jail was also a way to avoid repaying the debt. This account would explain why Hébert did not renege of his supposed deal with the Jesuits, once back in Pondichéry.

⁶² “Au retour du sieur Hebert en 1715 à Pondichéry, où il vint comme Général, tout changea en un instant: la vertu fut un crime, l’innocent devint coupable, et Naynapa, jusque-là honoré, loué, distingué dans un emploi de confiance et de droit public, ne parut plus qu’une victime, propre à être sacrifiée à ceux qui n’étaient point content de lui.” CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 251 verso.

innocence and good conduct, Naynapa was no longer the same man in the eyes of a man changed by ambition.”⁶³

The affair, as it is presented in Nayiniyappa’s appeals, was divorced from any action he himself had taken. The primary moment was a decision to accuse him, while the content of that accusation was of only secondary importance. To this end his interrogations at Hébert’s hands were a predetermined performance leading to his inevitable conviction: “it was the entire life of a man, all his actions, all his steps that they wanted to examine, in order to find something with which to accuse him. This was a man they wanted to condemn, sacrifice and deliver to his enemies at any price... Where is a just man who could escape such a rigorous examination?”⁶⁴

In Nayiniyappa’s account of events, Pondichéry is conceived as a tranquil place, where money is made and relationships fostered. Problems do not originate in Pondichéry – they are brought there by French ships. Similarly, the moment that led to his own downfall took place in France and not in India. There are several implications of Nayiniyappa’s decision to situate the origin of the affair in France. It conceives of the metropole as a place that is near –near enough that deals that supposedly took place behind closed doors in Paris reverberate quickly and profoundly in Pondichéry. It also creates a moral hierarchy, in which Pondichéry ranks higher than Paris, since evil deeds and projects infiltrate from the metropole toward the colony. This hierarchy of moral

⁶³ “Naynapa était innocent pendant le premier gouvernement de sieur Hébert et son premier séjour aux Indes, mais il devenu coupable à son retour à 1715... c’était le prix de son généralat et de son nouvel emploi. Après quarante-trois ans d’innocence et de bonne conduite, Naynapa n’était plus le même homme aux yeux de celui que son ambition avait changé.” CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 254 verso.

⁶⁴ “C’est toute la vie d’un homme, toutes ses actions, toutes ses démarches que l’on a voulu scrupuleusement examiner pour y trouver une matière d’accusation. C’est un homme que l’on veut, à quelque prix que ce soit, condamner, sacrifier, et livrer à ses ennemis. Il y a dans ce dessein une perversité de cœur et de sentiments que l’on ne saurait trop punir. Où est l’homme juste qui pourra échapper à un si rigoureux examen?” CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 255 verso.

goodness does not, however, overturn the more fixed hierarchies of justice. This is why Nayiniyappa's appeals are sent back to France, in an attempt to fix a wrong at its place of origin. Finally, by stressing the fact that the affair began in France and was imported to the colony, Nayiniyappa positioned his adversaries as usurpers, robbing the colony of its formerly established harmony. But this story of usurpation differs from more familiar instances of subaltern resistance to imperial rule. Instead, Nayiniyappa chooses to conceive of himself as a partner to the colonial project in Pondichéry, but seeks for himself his former role as a respected and influential authority.

A Metropolitan Intervention

Following Nayiniyappa's arrest, actors in both India and France rallied to his cause, demanding his release and, after his death, asking for his vindication. His three sons were responsible for an extraordinarily long appeal, which included reproductions of many of the original documents in the case. Missionaries of the *missions étrangères* in both Pondichéry and Paris lobbied on his behalf, as did several councilmen and traders in Pondichéry. Perhaps the most ambitious of the metropolitan interventions was a detailed complaint regarding the broker's dismissal, written by an association of merchants in St. Malo, in Brittany. The St. Malo appeal of 1717 is presented alongside the response it received by the Directors of the trading company in Paris. It thus appears in the archives as multi-voiced document, presenting a back-and-forth between French entities. It is a text in which two metropolitan institutions face off – in the metropole – in an attempt to define and interpret events occurring in India.

The association of St. Malo merchants first acquired the right to trade in India from the French Company in 1708, and in the period 1712 to 1715 had completely

replaced the Company in trading with the subcontinent.⁶⁵ The cash-strapped *Compagnie des Indes* could not afford the cost of long sea voyages, but while the Malouins were given the trading privilege, the Company maintained its position as the governmental authority of Pondichéry, and was paid a percentage of the goods brought to Europe by the merchants from Brittany.

The fact that the Nayiniyappa affair erupted into being precisely at the time that this transition in power was taking place is surely no accident. As the affair was debated, the Company's *raison d'être*, its identity as a commercial concern, was called into question. With Directors in Paris, administrators in Pondichéry, and merchant capitalists in Brittany all jostling for influence and authority, Nayiniyappa's case became a privileged site for the articulation of struggles over the center of French authority, and what were the conditions that make such authority possible.

In their complaint to the Paris Directors, the St. Malo merchants demanded that the company immediately recall Hébert to France, and that Nayiniyappa be reinstated in his position as chief broker.⁶⁶ The Nayiniyappa affair stands at the heart of the complaint as the exemplar of Hébert's vengeful mismanagement of the colony, which was in turn causing diminished profits for the St. Malo trade in India.

In retelling the story of Nayiniyappa's fall from grace, the St. Malo merchants identified an action taken by Hébert as a defining event: a tax hike. During his second term in India, wrote the merchants, Hébert raised a new four percent tax on the Indian

⁶⁵ On the St. Malo merchants in India, see André Lespagnol, *Messieurs de Saint-Malo: Une élite négociante au temps de Louis XIV* (Saint Malo: Ed. l'Ancre de Marine, 1991); André Lespagnol, "Négociants et commerce Indien au début du xviii^e siècle: l'Episode des Compagnies Malouines, 1707-19," *Annales de Bretagne* 86 (1979).

⁶⁶ It is not clear if the complaint was written in St. Malo before Nayiniyappa's death in August 8, 1717, or whether news of the broker's death had not traveled to France by the time the complaint was sent.

merchants in Pondichéry. In order to recoup their losses, all the merchants in town promptly did one of two things: they either raised the price of the merchandise they sold to the St. Malo traders, or they began to offer goods of lesser quality.⁶⁷ The crucial detail is that this information arrived in Brittany not through the conduits of French officialdom, but through Nayiniyappa himself. As a commercial broker employed by both the French Company's administration and the St. Malo merchants in India, he provided this information to the captain of a St. Malo ship. The captain passed the information on to the partners in the St. Malo association, who thus learned of Hébert's decision and the harm done to their commerce in India.

The complaint insists that Hébert turned on Nayiniyappa precisely because he divulged this information to the Malouin captain. In this telling, the Nayiniyappa affair is an elaborate vendetta orchestrated by Hébert. The act which supposedly gave rise to such virulent anger was the sharing of knowledge, the granting of access to what should have been a privileged relationship between Hébert and Nayiniyappa. The merchants thus frame Nayiniyappa's arrest and conviction within a story that has at its basis a betrayal of one relationship (between Hébert and Nayiniyappa), and the forging of another (between Nayiniyappa and the St. Malo merchants).

The complaint from the St. Malo merchants kicks off with a threat, very clearly couched: "The Directors of the St. Malo Company of the Indies humbly inform his Majesty that they will be forced to abandon their contract... if it does not please his Majesty to immediately recall M. Hébert... and his son, who committed [in Pondichéry] all sorts of injustices, persecutions, and even inhumanities, and who do not cease to

⁶⁷ CAOM FM C²/14 ff. 260 verso.

disturb the commerce of the supplicants.”⁶⁸ The order in which the issues are presented here is worth noting. The Héberts are guilty, first and foremost, of moral crimes – injustice and inhumanity. Only then do the merchants complain of the damage done to their commercial interests. It would initially seem as if the St. Malo merchants are staking claim to an authority that is not based solely on self-interest. Rather, they include Pondichéry in a community of justice, in which they wish to position themselves as arbiters. However, the very next sentence complicates any such claim: “we will not enter here into the details, which would make you tremble with horror; the supplicants speak here only of that which concerns them.”⁶⁹ A clear separation is being made here: there are things that are morally shocking – but they do not concern the merchants. So in fact, the gesture made toward a moral judgment of the Nayiniyappa affair is only that – a gesture which is quickly retracted.

This double rhetorical move – the claim for a moral stance, and its immediate retraction – speaks to the problems the St. Malo merchants faced in making this complaint against Nayiniyappa’s persecution. They were in dire need of a broker’s services: Nayiniyappa’s access to knowledge in Pondichéry, and his unique position at the crossroads of several highways of information, was a condition of possibility for remote commerce. Indeed, praise is lavished upon Nayiniyappa by the St. Malo merchants throughout the text; he is described as “a man very wise in the ways of

⁶⁸ “Les Directeurs de la Compagnie des Indes de Saint Malo, représentent leur humblement à Votre Majesté qu’ils seront forces d’abandonner le traité qu’ils ont fait avec le Compagnie des Indes Orientales pour faire en France le commerce des Indes pendant les dix années qui restent à expirer du privilège, s’il ne plait à Votre Majesté rappeler incessamment le Sr. Hebert général de la nation établi à Pondichéry et son fils, qui y exercent toutes sortes d’injustices, de persécutions, et même d’inhumanités, et qui ne cessent de troubler le commerce dédits suppliants.” CAOM, FM C²/14 f. 260.

⁶⁹ “On n’entrera point ici dans un détail qui serait frémir d’horreur, les suppliants ne parleront que de ce qui les regards.” CAOM, FM C²/14 f. 260.

negotiations, and almost the only one whom [we] could trust.”⁷⁰ Elsewhere he is declared a “loyal and intelligent courtier”⁷¹, and a “zealous and capable man who had served better than anyone else,”⁷² “the best and most highly regarded servant of the Company.”⁷³

Yet although the complaint is based on the St. Malo merchants claiming a right to determine what goes on in Pondichéry, this claim was circumscribed. Situated as they were in France, they were forced to strictly delimit the area over which they could claim substantive knowledge. The difficulty of speaking authoritatively from France about India is precisely why they were so adamant to retain Nayiniyappa: a respected, established Indian broker was the only way a French merchant could profit from trade in India. But the paradox is that if the French traders could claim to speak and act with authority in and of India, then the role of Nayiniyappa and other intermediaries becomes less crucial. That is, if Nayiniyappa was not absolutely crucial, then his dismissal is a matter of lesser urgency; but if he was absolutely necessary, that very necessity highlights the limited knowledge of India the St. Malo merchants could claim. The St. Malo complaint, then, finds itself in somewhat of a logical bind: if the merchants in France are well versed enough in the goings-on in Pondichéry, perhaps they have no need of Nayiniyappa; and if they don’t rely on Nayiniyappa for the continued existence of their trade, then the force of the complaint they are making is diminished.

The complaint presented by the St. Malo merchants demonstrates that access, information, and the justification for acting authoritatively (and profitably) in India were the most important services provided by professional intermediaries like Nayiniyappa.

⁷⁰ CAOM, FM C²/14 f. 261 verso.

⁷¹ CAOM, FM C²/14 f. 262.

⁷² CAOM, FM C²/14 f. 267 verso.

⁷³ CAOM, FM C²/14 f. 268.

However, for metropolitan actors standing at the battle lines drawn by the Nayiniyappa affair, the event also functioned as a threat to such claims for authority. The fact that Nayiniyappa, and other Tamil employees like him, were necessary for the daily functioning of the colony, compromised the position of French colonists in India by exposing their limited knowledge of the ways of India. Go-betweens such as Nayiniyappa enabled their French employers to speak of and in India, but this very dependence on the services provided by go-betweens compromised this authority. This disorienting dependency was the reason the Nayiniyappa affair loomed so large, in both colony and metropole.

A Timeline of the Nayiniyappa Affair

NB: A timeline, with its assumption of linear progression, in some ways defeats the interpretive efforts of this chapter. It implies a clarity and order which are fundamentally opposed to the messiness, multi-vocality and complexity which, I argue, make the Nayiniyappa affair worthy of such close attention. Nevertheless, a timeline is offered here, with the disclaimer that its graphic linearity does not adequately capture the non-linear events it depicts.

The Nayiniyappa Affair

September 1, 1664: The Compagnie royale des Indes Orientales is chartered in Paris.

February 4, 1673: The first Frenchman arrives in Pondichéry, after the town had been given to the Compagnie des Indes by a Bijapuri Governor, Sher Khan Lodi.

January 21, 1701: A royal edict creates the sovereign council of Pondichery, to hear and settle legal matters.

December 31, 1706: François Martin dies. An intermediate government is headed by Pierre Duivier.

July 2, 1708: Guillaume André Hébert replaces Duivier as Governor of Pondichéry.

1709: An association of merchants from St. Malo takes over the shipping route to and from Pondichéry from the cash-strapped Compagnie des Indes.

1712: The Directors of the Compagnie des Indes decide to replace Hébert with Duivier. Duivier travels from France back to India to take up the post the following year.

c. 1674: Nayiniyappa arrives in Pondichéry from the environs of Madras.

1704: The Compagnie des Indes first enters into business dealings with Nanniyappa.

1708: Nanniyappa appointed chef des Malabars and chief broker to the Compagnie des Indes, replacing a Christian.

1711: The Jesuits write to Paris with a list of demands, which include the removal of Nanniyappa from his post.

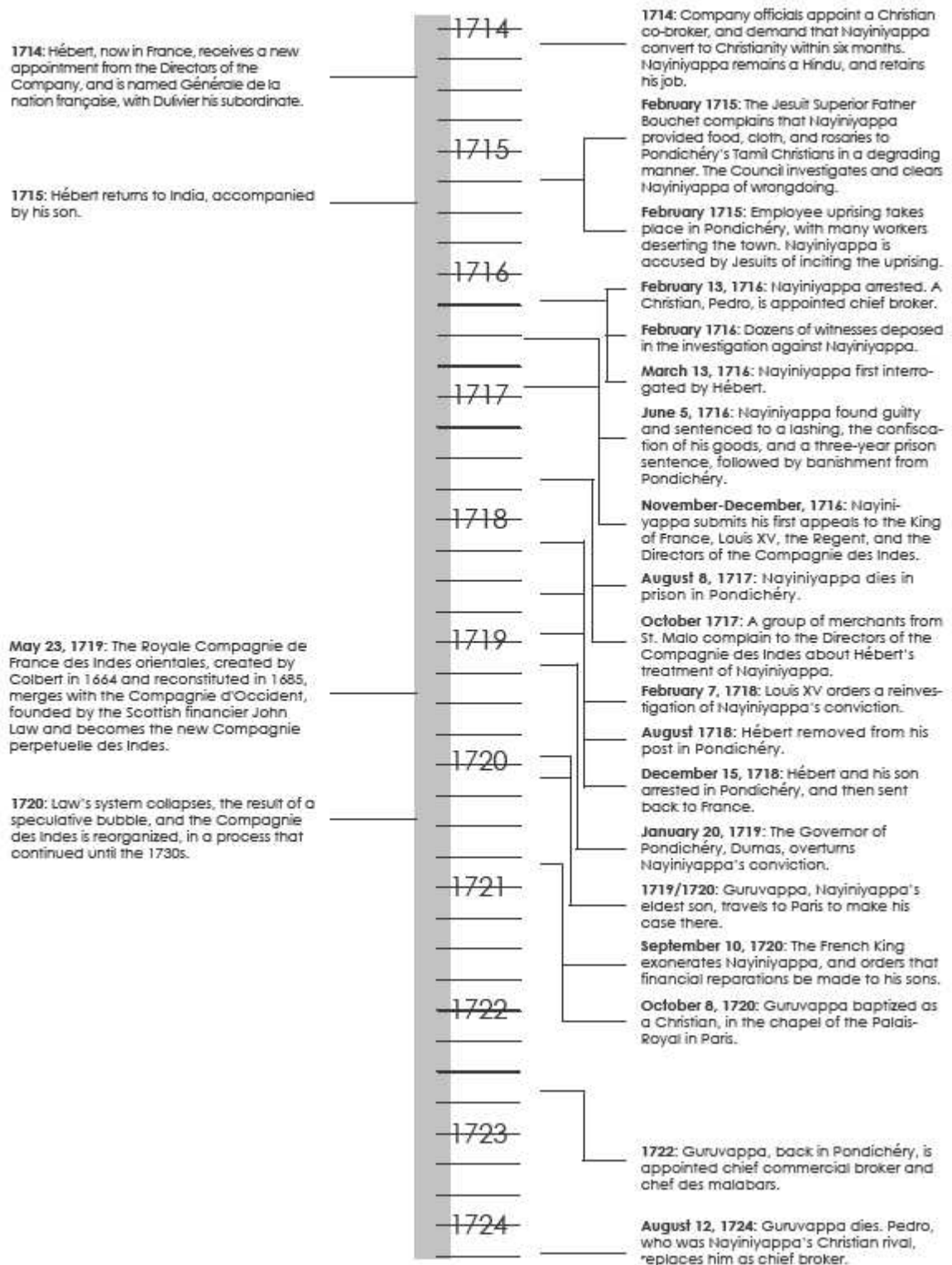


Figure 5: A timeline of the Nayiniyappa Affair

Chapter IV

Families in the Middle: The Effective Politics of Kinship

Introduction

Pondichéry's fate – the multitude of small and large decisions that made up the governance of the colony early in the eighteenth century – was decided in multiple locations. There were the expected sites of decision-making: the offices of the Company in both Paris and in India, the halls of Pondichéry's military fort, the meeting rooms of the colony's sovereign council. But other, more informal sites were just as important: the homes of both French officials and the Indian men they employed; the streets of the city, in both "White Town" and "Black Town," and the permeable border between the two; kitchens and schoolrooms, bedrooms and backyards. A rumor flung between windows or exchanged among market stalls could quickly reverberate in the colony's official hallways of government.

In order to understand the way a colony is governed, then, not only the formal, institutionalized venues of power need to be taken into account. Colonial sovereignty is also constructed and shaped in more intimate, informal spaces of empire. The exchange of gossip between a servant and her mistress; the whispered murmuring of a husband and wife in their bed, going over the events of the day; the long-held grudges nurtured through generations of families, inculcated in children like precious inheritances – all these moments contribute to the decisions made in the official governance of the colony.

In this chapter, I argue that local family networks in Pondichéry were crucially implicated in the French governance and management of the colony, on scales both large and small.

Sociologist Julia Adams has incisively re-evaluated early modern state formation, by highlighting the familial and gendered stresses and commitments that went into the making and governance of early modern states in the Netherlands, France, and England.¹ The commitments of family, I demonstrate here, were also crucial in the making of colonial authority, in both commercial and religious settings.² As Carla Rahn Phillips has argued, early modern colonies were not ruled by Crowns, but by colonists who did so on behalf of the state; these colonists were empowered by their strong, sustained connections to people and places across the sea, in their metropolitan homelands.³ In addition, I show, local families were as important for the French expansionist project as metropolitan families. That is, affective and familial relations sustained, enhanced and shaped imperial projects.⁴

Historians have effectively demonstrated how a history of a particular family can also serve as a revealing history of global empire, in which the traces of kin, connection

¹ Julia Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

² This focus on the conjuncture of family and global structures participates in recent debates. For example, Patrick Manning has suggested that following families is an especially effective method for tracing global patterns of migration, and productively (and unusually) considered both the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean in order to advance “thinking of families in trans-regional terms”. Patrick Manning, “Frontiers of Family Life: Early Modern Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds,” *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 315-333.

³ Carla Rahn Phillips, “The Organization of Oceanic Empires: The Iberian World in the Habsburg Period,” in *Seascapes. Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchanges*, ed. Jerry H. Bentley, Renate Bridenthal, and Kären Wigen (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 71-86.

⁴ For an insightful elaboration of an argument that links the domain of family and the formation of the British colonial state, in the context of nineteenth century Western India, see Rachel Sturman, “Property and Attachments: Defining Autonomy and the Claims of Family in Nineteenth-Century Western India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47, no. 3 (July 1, 2005): 611-637. Sturman’s project, unlike this one, attempts to explain the creation of an explicitly modern subjecthood. Along similar lines, Douglas Haynes has argued against social science models that posit incompatibility between social ties of kin, caste, familial and cliental patronage on the one hand, and market-driven economies on the other. Haynes, *Rhetoric and ritual in colonial India*.

and the quotidian both mirror and underlie the structures of imperial ambition.⁵ In this chapter, I deploy this insight to examine the advancement of French projects of commerce and conversion as they unfolded in Pondichéry. I examine the familial networks that sustained both trade and missionary work, but include in this investigation the families of colonial subjects – specifically, professional intermediaries – as well as those of French *colons*.

The importance of familial networks deployed by Indian employees of French *colons* and missionaries need not be rescued by the historian, salvaged from nearly-silent archives. On the contrary, French traders-government officials and missionaries in Pondichéry were keenly, desperately aware of the ways their actions were impacted and guided by the flow of information and action in local networks of kinship. When they had to decide who to hire or fire, or how to conduct themselves in the face of the colony's public opinion, French traders and missionaries were careful to take into account the influence of these networks.

The professional intermediaries – commercial brokers and catechists – employed in the French colony were especially adept at weaving together their position in adjacent familial and institutional networks. On the one hand, they were accepted participants in the town's official centers of French power, but they simultaneously benefited from their enmeshment in local and regional networks of family, friendship and familiarity. It was their ability to straddle both systems, to simultaneously draw on connections in French

⁵ Emma Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-century History* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011). Rothschild's study is part of a veritable wave of recent works in British history that examine the global mobility of families and individuals in early imperial contexts. Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560-1660* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007); Miles Ogborn, *Global Lives: Britain and the World, 1550-1800* (Cambridge UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World*, 1st ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011).

offices and Indian homes, Tamil temples and Catholic churches that cemented their position as influential actors in the colony's early days. French officials, missionaries and observers were frank about their desire to access the rich human tapestry their intermediaries could weave, and were often explicit that it was the ways in which go-betweens were able to move back and forth between a variety of settings, finding an accepted place for themselves in multiple sites, that made them such valuable and indispensable employees.

The discussion which follows deploys the terms 'family' and 'kin' both, sometimes interchangeably, but most often using the former to refer to immediate relations (fathers, mothers, siblings, children), and the latter to extended consanguine relations (for examples uncles, daughters and brothers-in-law), non-consanguine kin (such as affines and godparents), and also people identified as relatives, with no specific information given about the nature of the relationship. In this my usage diverges from frameworks that have posited the family as an analytic unit "sharply differentiated from the larger associations of kin and community."⁶ Rather, I conceive of family and kin as respectively smaller and larger units within the same system of affinity, commitment and reciprocity.

In South Asian historiography, caste has long served as a central structuring analytic in discussions of both intimate and official power relations, a focus stemming in part from the much-commented upon centrality ascribed to caste in and by the nineteenth-century British Raj. While I discuss in some detail the caste position of local Tamil intermediaries and its importance for French employers, the family is offered here as an alternative prism: it was the ties of family, more than caste, that emerged as a

⁶ David Herlihy, "Family," *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 1 (February 1, 1991): 1.

crucial shared component in the interactions between Frenchmen and their intermediaries. In shifting the focus away from caste, I attempt to construct a framework which takes into consideration the notion of family at play among both French and local actors. While the focus here is on the families of Tamil intermediaries, I suggest that French conceptions of familial responsibility were as responsible as local ones for the central role ascribed to families in interactions between French employer and their go-betweens.

This analysis demonstrates that as a result of French reliance on local familial networks, commercial dealings with the French or conversion to Christianity did not necessarily entail alienation from natal kin. On the contrary, French desire to access such connections could even lead to the strengthening of these ties, as professional go-betweens took advantage of opportunities to bolster their standing in their family circles.⁷

This chapter is composed of two parts. The first half is concerned with the importance of family and kin for commercial brokers in Pondichéry. The first section offers a new reading of the Nayiniyappa, by revealing it to emerge from a rivalry between two local families, dynasties of commercial brokers who served the French for over a century. The affair was therefore the result of an ongoing feud which both predated and followed French preoccupation with Nayiniyappa. In this reading, local agents took advantage of the way their own agendas dovetailed with those of the French, and vice versa. I then discuss the abilities of women and commercial brokers in more humble positions to both draw on and advance their families in the context of employment by the

⁷ In this sense then, these are markedly different acts of conversion than the conversion narratives studied by Gauri Viswanathan, which entail, in her analysis, a radical, defiant and transgressive epistemological dislocation. Gauri. Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).

French. I explain how reliance on familial networks was shared by Tamil brokers and French traders alike, by showing how the *Compagnie des Indes* was also heavily reliant on the affinity of kin in commercial contexts. Colonial actors, French and Tamil both, shared a reliance on the structures of family for patronage and advancement. I then return once again to the Nayiniyappa affair to demonstrate this point, showing how three sets of fathers and sons, French and Tamil, put the affair into motion.

The second half of the chapter addresses how kin, family and caste community were deployed by local Catholic catechists to further the French missionary project of proselytization. I show how conversion to Christianity by French missionaries relied on the familial relations of their catechists, and discuss the challenge posed by caste: Jesuits especially depended on caste-specific catechists to introduce them into the community, but the taint of Christianity and European origin was too strong. This led to conflicts between Jesuits and catechists, where the missionaries sometimes found themselves the losers, doomed to the position of outsiders to local networks rather than spiritual leaders.

The dependence on local familial networks was, again, a site where the persistent conflict between projects of commerce and conversion was articulated. Religious and commercial agents took different approaches to dealing with this dependence. Traders-administrators were, by and large, comfortable with their reliance on the familial networks made accessible by their brokers, being accustomed to traveling along similar paths of advancement in French institutions. But Jesuits, while just as dependant as the traders on the local entanglements of their employees, were loath to accept the fact they were unable to provide a compelling alternative kin network for their converts.

Inheriting Power: The Broker Dynasties of Pondichéry

For more than a century, the powerful post of chief broker to the *Compagnie des Indes* in Pondichéry moved back and forth between two families, the Pillai and Mudali families. If the Nayiniyappa affair is viewed through the prism of this decades-long competition, a new understanding of it becomes possible. The Nayiniyappa affair was in part a battleground for powerful Jesuits, their missionary rivals, and factions within the French commercial venture – a replication of ongoing struggles in metropolitan France. But if we consider the local push and pull for prominence in Pondichéry, a fuller understanding of events emerges. This entails paying closer attention to long-held grudges and connections, to the finely wrought texture of relationships between relatives, neighbors and business associates. The Nayiniyappa affair, in this telling, is neither a French affair nor an Indian affair, but a Pondichéry affair. It is an event that grew into existence in the landscape of the colony, and thereby it weaves together strands both local and global, French and Indian, bringing together the interests of the town’s petty shopkeepers and its highest ranking officials.

Being employed as a commercial broker by the Company was to a large extent a hereditary position.⁸ In Pondichéry, the position of chief broker went back and forth between two families: Nayiniyappa’s family, and the family of the Christian known as Pedro. Both Pillai and Mudali (or Mudaliar, from the Tamil word meaning “first”) are

⁸ This was not unique to Pondichéry: in the French holding of Chandernagor, in Bengal, the family of one Indranarayan Chaudhuri held the post of broker for decades. The position was also hereditary in Ceylon, where Europeans employed local men in a similar position. For Ceylon, Patrick Peebles, *Social Change in Nineteenth Century Ceylon* (New Delhi: Navrang in collaboration with Lake House Bookshop Colombo, 1995). Generational continuity was also apparent among religious go-betweens as well as commercial ones: in the Tranquebar mission, the post of a catechist moved from one generation to the next. Leibau, “Country Priests, Catechists, and Schoolmasters as Cultural, Religious, and Social Middlemen in the Context of the Tranquebar Mission.,” 75.

titles associated with the Vellala caste group, high ranking agricultural landlords.⁹ The two families competing for the highest post available to Indians in the colony were of the same caste, though the first was Hindu, the second Christian.¹⁰

Nayiniyappa was the first member of his family appointed *chef des malabars* (figure 6). The post was subsequently held, in turn, by his eldest son Guruvappa (chief broker in 1722-1724); his relative (likely nephew) Ananda Ranga (1746-1761); and his (likely) great-great-nephew Tiruvangadan (1790s).

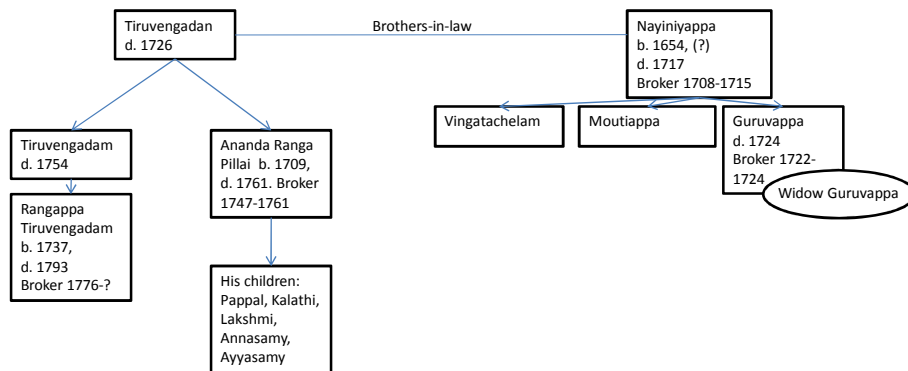


Figure 6: Pillai Family Tree.

The Christian brokers employed by the French had a history of service that stretched back even earlier, to the very first days of the colony’s existence as a French

⁹ Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, vol. 1, 84.

¹⁰ On the joint use of the Mudaly and Pillai suffixes by the Vellala caste, and the caste members’ association with colonial bureaucracy in Madras and Pondichéry, see Arasaratnam, “Trade and Political Dominion in South India, 1750-1790,” 20, 24. In Madras, Telegu Brahmins were often employed in the position of dubash, equivalent to the French courtier. For more on the dubashes of Madras and their caste position, see Neild-Basu, “The Dubashes of Madras.”

holding. The founder of this dynasty was Tanappa Mudali (Modeliar), also known by his Christian name, André (by some accounts Lazare).¹¹

According to the diary of Ananda Ranga, the Christian Tanappa André left the village of Poonnamallee (Poonthamalli), near Madras, and arrived in Pondichéry on January 17, 1674, at the express invitation of the town's first Governor, François Martin.¹² It was this man who donated the land on which Pondichéry's first church was built, in 1686. His son, Lazare Moutiappa, was the courtier found incompetent in a coral deal, whom the Council replaced with Nayiniyappa in 1708. His grandson was Kanakaraya Pedro Mudali (Modeliar). It was this Pedro who replaced Nayiniyappa when the Hindu broker was arrested, who later served again as chief broker to the Company in the period 1724 (when he was appointed to the post upon the death of Nayiniyappa's son, who was briefly chief broker in 1722-1724) to 1746 (when Ananda Ranga Pillai became chief broker). The post of chief broker, then, was an exclusive commodity enjoyed for decades only by members of these two competing families.¹³

As noted in the previous chapter, the Jesuits in Pondichéry objected in principle to Hindus filling positions of prominence in the colony (that of chief broker, but also other Company posts), agitating for Christians to fill these roles. Their reasoning was twofold: first, having a Christian in a prominent post would have boosted the status of Christianity

¹¹ For a rare but incomplete discussion of this family, see Neogy, "Early Commercial Activities of the French in Pondicherry: The Pondicherry Authorities, the Jesuits and the Mudaliars." Neogy's description follows Olagnier in its attack on the Jesuits.

¹² Pillai, *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai, Dubash to Joseph François Dupleix, Knight of the Order of St. Michael, and Governor of Pondichery. A Record of Matters Political, Historical, Social, and Personal, from 1736 to 1761*, vol. 2, 150; vol. 12, 87. Eugene Irschik describes Poonamalee as a locale that "formed a base for the growth of power of many Kondaikatti vellala families"¹² – very likely the caste subgroup to which Lazare and his descendents belonged, since Kondaikatties were known as Mudalis. Irschik, *Dialogue and History: Constructing South India, 1795-1895*, 34–35.

¹³ It is possible, though there is no clear indication of this in the archive, that the French may have deliberately pitted one family against the other, with the position strategically made to oscillate between the two. For a comparable example in Madras see Neild-Basu, "The Dubashes of Madras," 4–5.

in the colony, thereby making the task of conversion easier. Second, the post of chief broker was one that not only relied on family networks but also benefited members of those networks. Therefore, having a Christian broker would have been a boon to the Christian community as a whole (since such a man would presumably tend to direct profitable business opportunities toward other members of the Christian community).

A Council letter from 15 February 1702 conceded that the Jesuits had reproached French authorities for preferring to hire gentiles over Christians for Company positions, and only halfheartedly denied the charge. “The principle jobs suitable for local people... are held by an old Christian family, who began serving the King in St. Thomé under M. de la Haye in 1672, and have been employed by your Company ever since,” wrote the Council, referring to the family headed by the Christian Lazare. They went on to name specific examples of Tamil Christians who held prominent positions in the Company’s ranks: “the most important interpreter, the people who work on the waterfront assisting in the reception... and departure of merchandise are all of this family,” continued the letter. Thus we learn that working as a commercial broker had immediate benefits for members of one’s extended family, providing employment opportunities. Furthermore, it was French *colons* who conceived of the jobs as traveling along familial lines, calling attention to the fact that brokers, interpreters and laborers at the docks were all related. That said, the power of native Christian families to extend their hold in Company positions was limited by Christianity’s lesser status, and the attendant financial consequences. “The merchants who furnish the company with cloth are all, it is true, gentiles,” admitted the Council, “but show us a Christian, other than those [already] in

our service, whom we could trust with a hundred pagodas.”¹⁴ Furthermore, we should question the council’s premise that it was the family’s shared Christianity that ensured them all jobs. Rather, it seems just as likely that it was the familial association – regardless of confessional standing – that would have made the jobs travel across and between generations of one family, with one relative securing a position for another. The fact that Nayiniyappa’s family enjoyed similar benefits, despite its continued Hindu practice, indicates as much.¹⁵

The rivalry between the Pillai and Mudali families began in 1708, when the Christian chief broker was removed from the post and replaced by Nayiniyappa. The Jesuits then lobbied on the Christian Lazare’s behalf, offering his family’s long service to the Company as a mitigating factor for his incompetence.¹⁶ Governor Hébert, then still an enemy of the Jesuits rather than an accomplice, lambasted the Jesuits for this argument in a letter he wrote to the Superior Father Tachard. “Ever since my arrival in Pondichéry,” wrote Hébert, “I have been astonished that we employ Lazare as modeliar, since he has so little ability, and so little credit in the town... having been informed that he reports to

¹⁴ “les principaux emplois qui conviennent aux gens du pays et que l’on est forcé d’y mettre sont occupés par une ancienne famille de chrétiens qui à commencer à servir le Roy à St. Thomé sous M. De la Haye en 1672 et employés depuis par votre compagnie encore à présent, l’interprète qui est le plus considérable, les gens pour assister au bord de la mer à la réception des droits, et à la grand place pour l’entrée et sortie des marchandises et des durées sont de cette famille... les marchands qui fournissent les toiles à votre compagnie sont à la vérité tous gentils, mais que l’on nous présente un chrétien excepté ceux qui sont au service a qui l’on puisse confier cent pagodes.” BNF, Manuscrits français 6231, f. 29 verso.

¹⁵ Nayiniyappa’s son Guruvappa did convert to Christianity, but subsequent family members employed by the Company were Hindu. Furthermore, Guruvappa’s devotion to Christianity was called into question by some observers, an issue which will be discussed in chapter 6.

¹⁶ In the deliberations of the superior council and in several other sources, the broker who was replaced by Nayiniyappa is referred to as Lazare (or Lazarou). However, Jaganou Diago, a Pondichéry lawyer and historian who wrote a slim volume about the first Indian courtiers in the service of the Company, claims that this is a mistake in the council’s record, which has been reproduced many times in the scholarship on French India. According to him, the man whom Nayiniyappa replaced was actually Lazare’s son, André Moutiappa Modelier, first appointed chief broker in 1699. Lazare, he argues, actually died in 1691, as evidenced by a tombstone in Chennai. J. Diagou, *Les Premiers Modeliers de la Compagnie de l’Inde Orientale* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1988), 8–9. However, since I have not been able to examine this tombstone, and the sources consistently refer to the man in question as Lazare, I do so as well.

you about everything that transpires in our affairs, I believed I could not retain him any longer, since he lacked that which is most essential [for a broker], fidelity and discretion.”¹⁷ The fact that his ancestors had provided good service to the Company in the past, continued Hébert, was no reason to retain him as chief broker in the present. Yet Hébert went on to reveal that he did in fact have an inclination to honor the tradition of familial service: it was in respect of the choices made by his predecessor, Governor Martin, that he retained “André’s son” (using a kinship term here rather than Lazare’s proper name). Had Lazare been at all capable of filling the post, continued Hébert, he would have rather employed him than anyone else in the town, seeing that he was “a Christian of good caste and high rank.”¹⁸ Hébert’s anger demonstrates that the problem with Lazare’s service was that he was loyal to the wrong people – i.e. the Jesuits. If Lazare had truly followed in the tradition of his relatives, he would have put his skills and connections to use in servicing the Company and not the agendas of the Jesuits.

After Nayiniyappa’s appointment in 1708, the Christian Mudali family was temporarily removed from its position of influence in the Company, but maintained its close association with the Jesuits. When Nayiniyappa was removed from his office, Pedro (Lazare’s son or nephew) orchestrated the collection of testimonies against Nayiniyappa, and took over as chief broker. Another example of the way in which rivalries between the courtier families impacted the unfolding of the Nayiniyappa affair is the testimony of Carontane, a man who had been Nayiniyappa’s servant. A few years prior to his arrest,

¹⁷ “Depuis que je suis à Pondichéry j’ai été tellement étonné qu’on se soit servi de ce Lazarou pour modeliar pas son peu de capacité, et le peu de crédit qu’il a dans la ville, que j’avais pris résolution de le congédier, mais ayant été informé qu’il vous rapportait tout ce qui se passait dans nos affaires, j’ai cru ne le devoir pas garder plus longtemps après avoir manqué a ce qui est de plus essentiel, qui est la fidélité, et le secret.” CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 90 bis.

¹⁸ CAOM, FM, C²/71, ff. 90 bis-90 bis verso.

Nayiniyappa had accused this servant of stealing from him. Carontane then testified against Nayiniyappa as “one of the key witnesses, and gave a horrible declaration against our father, into which he was pushed by Pedro, Raphael and the whole cabal,” claimed Nayiniyappa’s sons.¹⁹ Two things are of note here: first, witnesses against Nayiniyappa often had cause to hold a grudge against him, for reasons that had little or nothing to do with the charges brought against him by the French. Here, a man had been accused by Nayiniyappa of being a thief, and in turn became a witness against his accuser. In another instance, a group of shopkeepers who testified against Nayiniyappa had previously been involved in a business dispute with him concerning accusations of the use of false weights.²⁰ Second, it was the rivalry between Nayiniyappa and Pedro for the post of chief broker which was the instigating force for many of the testimonies that helped to seal Nayiniyappa’s fate. In this version, the affair was directed by Nayiniyappa’s local competitors, as much as by Hébert and the Jesuits.

In 1722, following Nayiniyappa’s posthumous exoneration, his son Guruvappa was appointed as chief broker – a post he filled only briefly, until his death in 1724. Upon Guruvappa’s death, the struggle for the position of chief broker between the Pillai and Mudali families was reignited. The contenders for the job were, from the Pillai family, Moutiappa (Nayiniyappa’s second son), and Tiruvangadan (Nayiniyappa’s brother-in-law); and from the rival dynasty Pedro, who ultimately won the day and was appointed to the post once again.

¹⁹ CAOM, FM C²/71, f. 117

²⁰ See CAOM, FM C²/71, f. 116. The sons claimed that these shopkeepers were also pushed by Pedro into testifying against Nayiniyappa in the course of the affair. Another witness who had prior disagreements with Nayiniyappa was one Pautrichecli, who was said to have quarreled with Nayiniyappa over tobacco dealings, and then served as a certifier for one of the testimonies against the broker. CAOM, FM C²/71, ff. 296-297 verso.

French correspondence devoted to this struggle reveals that colonial officials were keenly aware of the power and influence attendant on the post; at one point this authority seemed so intimidating to the French, that they decided they would be better off with no chief broker at all. The French Governor at the time of Guruvappa's death, Beauvillier de Courchant, discussed the problem: "the Chevalier Guruvappa having died, and Tiruvangadan [Nayiniyappa's brother-in-law] being the kind of man to take on too much authority were we to make him courtier, we announced to the Blacks (*noirs*) that from now on there will be no modeliar [appointed in Pondichéry]."²¹

The Governor's justification for the decision to eliminate the post of chief broker to the Company touches on the central problem the French encountered when employing professional intermediaries. Tiruvangadan could not be awarded the job because he would amass too much authority – clearly the position was one that enabled such an outcome. Yet authority was absolutely necessary if a broker (or a catechist) was to perform his job well. It appears from this discussion that the element of threat was intrinsic even to the most "valued" of intermediaries, occasioning tremendous colonial anxiety about these men's role in Pondichéry. How much authority was too much authority? What actions or powers would tip the balance, changing an intermediary from a valued helpmeet to a threat? No clear answer could be given, but in the aftermath of Nayiniyappa's trial, French officials were clearly afraid of making another Indian – especially one who was adept at procuring power – such a central actor in the colony. In the aftermath of the Nayiniyappa affair, the inherent problems of dependence on local intermediaries were crystallized in a disconcerting manner.

²¹ "Le Chevalier Gouruapa étant mort et Tiruvangadan étant homme à prendre trop d'autorité si on le faisait courtier, nous déclarâmes aux noirs qu'il n'y avait plus de modeliar." CAOM, FM C²/73, f. 23.

However, Governor Beauvillier de Courchant was not to have his way, since he encountered too much opposition from high-ranking French officials, who insisted that an Indian courtier must be hired. The Governor also wrote that he himself came to the realization that he could not successfully perform his work without the assistance of a broker, who would warn him in advance of all the rumblings and doings in the town's Indian community.²² When the Council discussed the matter, everyone agreed that it would not be prudent to appoint Tiruvangadan to the job, "as he would surely abuse it"; but as it was also agreed that a courtier must be appointed.²³

Nayiniyappa's second son, Moutiappa, also lobbied for the job, enlisting the help of his widowed sister-in-law, Guruvappa's wife, and the *missions étrangères* missionaries, even writing directly to the Company directors in Paris, but to no avail. Governor Beauvillier de Courchant wrote to Paris to explain his objections to Moutiappa: "I feel obliged to alert you that he is the Black here who seems to me least suitable to being a modeliar." Not only had Moutiappa stolen money and jewels from his brother, but "he is a young man of very poor physiognomy, of ill regard, who is hated by everyone... In short, we don't see any talents in him. Furthermore, he is too young, and he would never want to become a Christian."²⁴ It is noteworthy that it was the Council – and not a religious institution – that was making a statement about Moutiappa's potential conversion. Much as missionaries staked a claim for themselves in the affairs of government, the Company officials considered themselves invested in affairs of faith. In addition, this passage reveals that the French Governor was intimately acquainted with

²² CAOM, FM C²/73, f. 23.

²³ CAOM, FM C²/73, f. 23.

²⁴ "il est garçon d'une très mauvaise physionomie, d'un mauvais regard, et il n'est propre qu'à se faire haïr de tous encore plus que son défunt frère qui n'était aimé de qui que ce soit; enfin on ne lui connaît aucune habilité; d'ailleurs il est trop jeune et il n'a jamais voulu se faire chrétien." CAOM, FM C²/73, f. 23 verso.

family squabbles within the Pillai family, and counted them first among the reasons that rendered Moutiappa unsuitable for the job of chief broker. Without the strong support of a family network of connections and commitments, Moutiappa would not be an effective courtier. His general unattractiveness further compromised his appeal as a local ambassador, while his youth would mean that he had not had enough time to position himself as a man to be reckoned with, one with obligations owed to him.

Pedro, the native Christian who had filled the post after Nayiniyappa's arrest in 1716, was chosen for the job for the following reasons: "we could not choose anyone but Pedro, beloved by the *noirs*, and who would never take to himself more authority than that which we had given him."²⁵ Here is an explicit statement by the French of the central problem of employing intermediaries: how were colonial administrators to find a go-between who would take on just enough authority, but never too much? Pedro was chosen precisely because the French council believed he would never cross the boundary into the threatening territory of too much authority.

But Pedro had other attributes that made him especially suitable for the job, other than his allegedly retiring nature (his actions in the course of Nayiniyappa's trial demonstrate he was not quite as retiring as the French officials believed, since he took the central role in inducing and collecting testimonies against his rival). In the French account, it was Pedro's family connections that made him eminently suitable for the post. "We also remembered his father, who was an excellent courtier, much loved by everyone; his uncle was also a modeliar and a very honest man."²⁶ Pedro remained in the

²⁵ CAOM, FM C²/73, f. 23.

²⁶ CAOM, FM C²/73, f. 23. Correspondence between the Company Directors in Paris and the council in Pondichéry in 1725, 1726, 1727 and 1729 reveals that the Parisian directors wanted to dismiss Pedro, but the council resisted and the man retained the position until his death in 1746.

post for more than 20 years. When he died, in 1746, the balance of power shifted again to the Pillai family, when Ananda Ranga was chosen as the colony's chief broker over Pedro's younger brother, Chinna.²⁷

The decades-long rivalry between the Pillai and the Mudali families for colonial influence demonstrates several important facts about the employment of intermediaries in the colony's French commercial institutions. First, the Company was keenly aware of the familial links tying together its employees, and openly eager to pursue and take advantage of them. By repeatedly appointing members of the same families to key positions, Pondichéry's French officials were attempting to forge enduring ties of loyalty and familiarity, and trying to benefit from the pre-existence of such ties. Second, from the viewpoint of local employees, involvement with French institutions by no means entailed alienation from one's community of origin. On the contrary, since go-betweens were called upon to draw on the ties of family and caste, and given opportunities to engage members of their family in prominent positions, such employment actually served to strengthen the enduring stickiness of such ties.²⁸

Nayiniyappa's sons understood the crusade against their father as one that was created by both the Jesuit agenda and the local professional and religious networks that bound together Nayiniyappa's competitors. "We have already spoken enough of the passionate animosity and implacable hatred of these *religieux* [the Jesuits] against our

²⁷ Ananda Ranga Pillai's journal describes this struggle, and is (understandably, considering their rivalry) scathing about Chinna. Pillai, *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai, Dubash to Joseph François Dupleix, Knight of the Order of St. Michael, and Governor of Pondichery. A Record of Matters Political, Historical, Social, and Personal, from 1736 to 1761*, vol. 1, 314; 406.

²⁸ There is a growing literature on the importance of familial and confessional ties in the trade of the Indian Ocean. Recent work includes Enseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Prange, "The Social and Economic Organization of Muslim Trading Communities on the Malabar Coast, Twelfth to Sixteenth centuries"; Sood, "Pluralism, Hegemony and Custom in Cosmopolitan Islamic Eurasia, ca. 1720--1790, with Particular Reference to the Mercantile Arena." For Sood, see especially Chapter 2.

father,” they wrote in one of their appeals. “It is certain... that it was the Jesuits who oppressed our father, the ones who instigated false testimony, the servant for this being Moutapen [Moutiappa], their catechist [Manuel’s father], Pedro the modeliar, Raphael his brother-in-law, Darnacheraon his uncle, and other Christians known for their scandalous lives.”²⁹ In this account, the Jesuits were only able to undertake their persecution of Nayiniyappa because they were assisted by a deeply familial network of accomplices – Pedro, his brother-in-law, his uncle, and their co-religionists, among them the catechist and his son the interpreter. Pedro’s decision to assist the Jesuits might have been partly motivated by his devotion to the missionaries as religious mentors, but his own ambition must have been as much of a motivating force. In fact, as likely a telling of the Nayiniyappa affair would be one in which the Jesuits would be cast as the tools for furthering the agenda of the Mudali family, rather than the other way around.

Wives and Daughters

Women might have not enjoyed the visible markers of authority in the colony, such as official positions in the Company hierarchy, but that did not mean they were not able to exert considerable influence on the shape of the colony’s affairs, utilizing lines of communication established between their families and the French establishment. Wives and daughters could draw their authority from their position in domestic or familial networks, but that influence then extended beyond the confines of the home. In the Nayiniyappa affair, an Indian woman who drew on her status as a wife and daughter-in-law was able to make her voice heard as far afield as Paris, and managed to mobilize

²⁹ “Nous vous avons assez parlé Messieurs en ce manifeste de la passionnante animosité et haine implacable de ce religieux contre notre père... C’était les jésuites qui ont opprimé notre père, c’est eux qui ont été les instigateurs des faux témoins, le servent pour cela de Moutapen leur catéchiste, de Pedro Modeliar, de Raphael son beau-père, Darnacheraon son oncle, et autres chrétiens connus par leur vie scandaleuse.” CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 117 verso.

support on her behalf among *missions étrangères* missionaries and Company officials in both Pondichéry and in the metropole.

She was known in the French documentary record as the Widow Guruvappa, and the letters she wrote are a rare example for the period of a woman speaking in the first person.³⁰ She was a woman of some privilege. Yet even though she had powerful relatives who had long been in the habit of conferring with the colony's highest ranking French officials, she intimated that her act of writing to the directors of the Company in Paris was a surprising one, and perhaps even transgressive. "What will you say of the liberty I take in writing you," she began a letter of 12 August, 1724.³¹ "I admit that it is a great temerity on my part to thus abuse your patience and importune you, but as I think of the equity and justice which have made you so admired among all nations, I dare to flatter myself, messieurs, that you will have the goodwill to forgive me and cast compassionate eyes upon a poor, afflicted widow."³²

³⁰ The Widow's gender makes her case exceptional, but not unique. There are examples of Indian women appealing to the English authorities in Madras regarding a dispute of property rights in late seventeenth century Madras. Lalitha Iyer and Kanakalatha Mukund, "Herstory: Women in South India in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Indica* 32, no. 1 (1995): 31. One of the other few women who made a discernable mark in French archives of the period was the wife of Governor Dupleix, Joanna. A native of Pondichéry of mixed French and Luso-Indian ancestry, fluent in Tamil, she also figures prominently (and in unflattering light) in the diaries of Ananda Ranga Pillai.

³¹ The Widow Guruvappa was not literate in Tamil, marking an x to one of her letters rather than signing her name. Nor was it likely that she spoke the French in which the letter was composed. But although the letter was almost certainly co-authored by a French assistant, there are indications the woman herself was intimately involved in the production of this text. Other than the use of the first person, the letter also contains information about her early childhood, which probably was provided by the Widow Guruvappa herself.

³² "Que direz-vous de la liberté que je prends de vous écrire. J'avoue que c'est une témérité très grand a moi que d'abuser ainsi de votre patience en vous importunant, mais lorsque je pense à cette équité et justice qui vous fait admirer généralement de toutes les nations, j'ose me flatter messieurs que vous avez assez de bonté pour moi que de me pardonner, et jeter sur une pauvre veuve affligée vos yeux de compassion." CAOM, FM C²/73, folio 29. The widow's letter to Paris was not an isolated occasion. In 28 December 1726, the Directors in Paris wrote to the Council in Pondichéry, referring to another letter they had received from the Widow, and ordering the council to assist her. Pondichéry. Conseil supérieur, A.A. Martineau, and Compagnie des Indes., *Correspondance du Conseil supérieur de Pondichéry et de la Compagnie [des Indes]* (Pondichéry,: Société de l'histoire de l'Inde française, 1920), vol. 1, 24–25.

This letter was written shortly after her husband's death (of dropsy), and implied that the Widow had a right to expect assistance from the Company, since her husband had served as courtier "to the great satisfaction of the gentlemen of this town's Superior Council."³³ Her claim on the directors' time and effort was also couched as depending on a long trajectory of family loyalty, mentioning the decades of her father-in-law Nayiniyappa's involvement with the Company. The Widow Guruvappa had very specific ideas about the ways in which the Company should assist her. "I am honored to prostrate myself at your feet and beg you to honor me with your protection, and to appoint my brother-in-law Moutiappa to the position held by his brother, my husband. I dare to hope that he [Moutiappa] will not prove himself unworthy of the grace that you will grant him."³⁴

Moutiappa was not given the job, for the reasons discussed above, but it is noteworthy that the Widow Guruvappa took it upon herself to make a recommendation to the Company on whom it should hire to deal with its business transactions. The Widow positioned herself as a stakeholder in the Company's hiring practices on more than one occasion. In a letter she wrote in 1726 to the *missions étrangères* missionaries she involved herself directly in the ongoing rivalry between the Pillai family and Pedro, the broker who was appointed to replace Guruvappa. She proclaimed that "a certain Pedro should be chased out of the office of modeliar," since he does nothing except under the direction of the Jesuits.³⁵

³³ CAOM, FM C²/73, f. 29 verso.

³⁴ "j'ai l'honneur de me prosterner a vos pieds pour vous supplier de m'honorer de votre protection, et toute notre famille, et de faire remettre mon beau frere Moutiapa dans le poste de son frere mon mari. J'ose esperer messieurs qu'il ne se rendra pas indigne de la grace que vous lui accorder, et qu'il tachera par son assiduite et sa vigilance au biens de la compagnie." CAOM, FM C²/73, f. 29 verso.

³⁵ MEP, *Lettres*, Volume 992, p. 2.

In the years following her husband's death, the Widow Guruvappa lobbied extensively to receive support from French institutions, writing to the Company's Directors, to the Directors of the *missions étrangères* seminary in Paris, and, it seems safe to assume, also contacting the Council in Pondichéry and the colony's *missions étrangères* missionaries. In her letter to the *missions étrangères* seminary in Paris, she explicitly attempted to evoke a familial relationship she enjoyed with the missionaries in Pondichéry, writing that they had "bestowed upon her the honor of receiving her and treating her as their child in their house."³⁶ Two separate rhetorical threads exist in the Widow's communications with the Company and the MEP establishment. On the one hand, by requesting that the post of broker be given to her brother-in-law, she was clearly attempting to bolster the position of her kinsmen in the colony, and by extension her own. That is, the protection she solicited from the Company was configured and accessed through pre-existing networks of family and marriage. Yet on the other hand, she also worked to establish a fictive kin relationship with French institutions, so as to enable her to draw on their support and commitment by positioning herself as a child entitled to their protection.

The Widow Guruvappa's attempts to create an alternative or supplementary kin network with the French might have been influenced by her precarious position within the Pillai family, following her husband's death; French records (as well as the Widow's letters to Paris) attest to the fact that after Guruvappa's death, the family was involved in an inheritance battle, and a widowed woman would have been vulnerable. In a letter to Paris dated August 15, 1725, the Council mentioned the internal squabbles in the Pillai

³⁶ "lui a été fait l'honneur de le recevoir et traiter chez vous comme votre enfant." MEP, Lettres, Volume 992, 2.

family: “ever since the death of the Chevalier Guruvappa, his widow is fighting with the deceased’s heirs, we have awarded her this revenue for her subsistence for the duration of her life”³⁷ Again and again, the Widow Guruvappa managed to obtain the support of the Frenchmen she petitioned. A special circumstance of the Widow’s personal history perhaps helps explain why she was so successful in making demands on the Company and missionaries: she was a Christian. She had been engaged to Guruvappa when she was a child, she wrote, prior to his voyage to France. While in France, Guruvappa converted to Christianity, and “through him I had the joy of sharing this happiness, embracing the same religion.”³⁸

It is suggestive that the 1725 inheritance struggle between the Widow and her husband’s family was settled by the French Council, and not in the *chaudrie* court, which normally heard civil disputes among Indian parties. The fact that the Council heard the case points to the importance of the family in the colony, but is perhaps also indicative of the Widow’s savvy, since women in French courts were, by and large, more likely to prevail than in equivalent Indian contexts. Sara Chapman has studied the history of the Pontchartrain family (a family whose members happened to play a key role in the French project in India as royal ministers), and has shown how (in this admittedly extremely

³⁷ “Depuis la mort de Chevalier Gourouapa sa veuve étant en différend avec les héritiers du défunt, nous lui avons adjugé ce revenu pour sa subsistance sa vie durant, et a sa mort il retournera a ses légitimes propriétaires.” CAOM, FM,C²/73, ff. 210 verso. This is not the sole example of a widow of a French-employed broker falling on hard times, struggling with the family of her late husband. In the diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai, he related in detail the removal of the widow of the chief broker Pedro Modeliar (Kanakaraya Mudali in the diaries) from her home following his death. Ananda Ranga Pillai had very harsh words for the courtier’s brother Chinna, who was responsible for the widow’s removal from her husband’s home (but his judgment was influenced by the fact that at the time of writing, the two men were fighting for the post of chief broker). In an example of how densely woven were the networks described here, Pedro’s widow was moved into a house that was once owned by the catechist Moutiappa – Nayiniyappa’s adversary and the ally of the Jesuits. Pillai, *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai, Dubash to Joseph François Dupleix, Knight of the Order of St. Michael, and Governor of Pondichery. A Record of Matters Political, Historical, Social, and Personal, from 1736 to 1761*, vol. 1, 402–406.

³⁸ MEP, *Lettres*, Volume 992, 2.

elevated sphere), women could benefit from networks of patronage.³⁹ By addressing the Council, the Widow Guruvappa was perhaps trying to make a similar claim for herself in the colonial economy of entitlement and indebtedness.

The correspondence of the Widow Guruvappa reveals that family members of Indian employees were able to draw themselves into the sphere of influence of the French establishment, and to successfully make claims on rights and rewards due to them. The fact that such claims could be made by a woman, and receive favorable hearing, are an indication that the *Compagnie des Indes* was willing, and at times even eager, to draw extended familial networks into the complex calculus of its decision-making in the colony. The Widow Guruvappa's inscription of claims in the French archives is rare because of her gender; but she was by no means the only family member of an intermediary who interacted with the Company or benefited from an association with French *colons*.

The Influence of the Broker in French Households

The Pillai and Mudali families stood at the highest reaches of the colony's hierarchy, so it is perhaps not surprising that they were able to make the benefits they enjoyed radiate through wide circles of their families and acquaintances. Men like Nayiniyappa, Pedro, or Ananda Ranga Pillai were outliers, some of the most influential actors in the colony. But even commercial brokers to individual traders, who filled much more humble positions, could procure similar benefits for their family members. Such valets-cum-brokers, who managed the households of French traders but also facilitated

³⁹ Sara Chapman, "Patronage as Family Economy: The Role of Women in the Patron-Client Network of the Phelypeaux de Pontchartrain Family, 1670-1715," *French Historical Studies* 24, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 11-35. See also on this topic Sharon Kettering, "The Patronage Power of Early Modern French Noblewomen," *Historical Journal* 32, no. 4 (1989): 817.

any personal trade with which their employers tried to bolster their income, moved in more modest spheres than the *chefs des malabars*. But in their worlds, they also discovered that employment by the French was a good that could be shared by family members. An example is provided by the household of Louis-François de Paulle de Mautort, a Captain of a French regiment who arrived in India in 1780, and later wrote his memoirs. When describing the composition of his household in Pondichéry, Mautort seemed surprised to discover it was quite so numerous: “When tallying up the people who made up my household, I find that there were twenty of them.”⁴⁰ These servants were living in Mautort’s household along with their wives, children or other relatives, “so that each month I was providing for the upkeep of more than forty individuals.”⁴¹ When Mautort left Pondichéry for a military campaign, he was accompanied by several members of his household. But the group became even larger after some travel, again somewhat to Mautort’s surprise. “I noticed that my caravan had more than doubled in size, and here’s how: the wives, the children, the brothers, the sisters, the fathers, the mothers of the people I had in my service, who did not dare leave Pondichéry with me out of fear I would oppose it, had met in Vilnour. My dubash [broker] also had his wife, who was young and beautiful.”⁴²

Other sections of the memoir reveal that Mautort’s dubash was responsible for the size of the household, and Mautort prided himself on his complete dependence on his broker in such matters. “Armed with a dubash, my domestic cares were greatly

⁴⁰ Mautort’s surprise at the extent of his household staff suggests that his conception of service differed markedly from concurrent French ideologies regarding service. Sarah Maza has argued that core job of servants in Old regime France was to signify to the world the power and status of their masters, in a way quite distinct from Mautort’s haphazard acquisition of staff. Sarah C. Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France: The Uses of Loyalty* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983).

⁴¹ Mautort, *Mémoires du Chevalier de Mautort: Capitaine au régiment d’Australie Chevalier de l’ordre royal et militaire de Saint-Louis (1752-1802)*, 265.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 228.

simplified,” he recalled. “I only had to give him my orders, and often he improved upon them with suggestion to my original ideas. I entrusted him with the mission of hiring the people necessary to me, and, sure enough, his choice was better than mine.”⁴³ In establishing himself as a superior in the household, the dubash relied on his caste position, wrote Mautort, since “his caste gives him an authority over his subalterns that is never contested.”⁴⁴

Hiring decisions made by the broker were based on familial affiliation, as is demonstrated again and again, and Mautort depicted himself as being incapable of curtailing such practices, despite his best efforts. “My dubash had a brother... For a long time he had asked me to take him into my service. Until this moment, I had resisted. Seeing that I had added [an employee] to my retinue, he [the dubash] once again made this request, and convinced me to engage his brother as a pion.”⁴⁵ As Mautort admitted, he had no need of this pion, so that his hiring was a matter of luxury (*c’était une affaire de luxe*). The luxury, however, was as much enjoyed by the dubash as by Mautort, since the go-between was able to extend material help to his brother. Other members of the dubash’s family also came into Mautort’s household: “[a] short time later, my dubash asked my permission to present before me one of his wife’s brothers... He was a twelve year old child. I resolved not to pay him anything, as he would be absolutely useless to me. He thus entered into my service under this condition. But, as efforts deserve payment, and since I always found him to be alert and always eager to do well, I could not help but occasionally give him something for his upkeep.”⁴⁶ In Mautort’s household,

⁴³ Ibid., 208.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 264.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

it seems as if the responsibilities of the dubash also became the responsibilities of his employer, whether he liked it or not.⁴⁷ On another occasion, the dubash arranged for Mautort to buy a young Indian boy as a slave. The dubash was acquainted with the boy's parents, whose poverty led them to decide to sell their son. The dubash brokered the deal by initiating it, vouching for the child and his parents before Mautort, and drawing up the contract of sale.⁴⁸ Mautort's various stories about the role the dubash filled in his life in India show that in contracting the man, Mautort also received both the benefits – and at times the inconvenience – of his extended family network. For the dubash, employment in the French household was an opportunity to broaden and cement his influence and prominence within his own family circle, by acting as a patron and benefactor.

The Compagnie des Indes as a Familial Institution

The extent to which employees of the *Compagnie des Indes* accepted that their local intermediaries brought with them both the advantages and responsibilities of familial entanglements should not surprise: the *Compagnie des Indes* was itself an

⁴⁷ It should be noted here that Mautort's memoirs were written at a later period, closer to the paternalistic colonial-speak of the so-called "civilizing mission," so such claims should be taken with a grain of salt.

⁴⁸ Mautort, *Mémoires du Chevalier de Mautort: Capitaine au régiment d'Aurasie Chevalier de l'ordre royal et militaire de Saint-Louis (1752-1802)*, 306–307. Mautort later narrates at some length the fate of this slave, a child named Maleapan. When Mautort left Pondichéry for Ile de France, the child accompanied him. Mautort left him there as a gift to the man who had hosted him, under the condition that the slave would not be sold, and that at some undetermined point in the future, he would be given his freedom. Being sold by impoverished parents was a common route into slavery in early modern India. Sylvia Vatuk, "Bharatee's Death: Domestic Slave-Women in Nineteenth Century Madras," in *Slavery and South Asian History*, ed. Indrani Chatterjee and Richard M. Eaton (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2006), 215. However, as Eaton notes in the introduction to this volume, parents who sold their children into slavery could expect those children to maintain "insider" status, as they remained in local networks of patronage. Indrani Chatterjee and Richard M. Eaton, eds., *Slavery in South Asian History* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2006). In this case, Mautort's dubash filled the role of such a patron. When Mautort took the child Maleapan to Ile de France, he broke an unarticulated promise made in the contract drawn up by the dubash. On the introduction of European interests into the Indian Ocean slave trade, see Raben, "Facing the Crowd: The Urban Ethnic Policy of the Dutch East India Company 1600-1800."

institution where advancement often relied on the associations of kinship.⁴⁹ Much like the position of chief broker was an inherited one in Tamil families, and personal brokers recruited family members into the households of their employers in Pondichéry, French traders maintained and benefited from family connections within the institutional setting of the Company. The Company was, by some measures, a familial body: having a father who was Company employee virtually guaranteed a post for the son.⁵⁰ This was true in the lower ranks of the Company, as well as in its highest reaches: when a Director of the Company in Paris died or withdrew, his spot was often inherited by a relative. The Director Delagny, who died in 1700, was replaced by his son; the Director Pocquelin, who resigned due to ill-health, passed his position on to his nephew.⁵¹ The *Compagnie des Indes* was not unique in this regard among European trading companies in India: For example, in the case of the English Company, members of only three families – the Russels, Franklands, and Eyres – supplied ten members to the Council in Bengal (of whom five became governors) early in the eighteenth century.⁵² Closer still, in Madras, members of a handful of families became “dynasties of recruits” for the Company over many generations.⁵³

Traders in the service of the *Compagnie des Indes* stationed in India also sought to secure the patronage of powerful officials by creating kin relations with them through the vehicle of godparentage, and the highest officials in the colony and their wives frequently appear in the Pondichéry notarial record as godparents to children born in the

⁴⁹ For a fascinating and insightful account of the importance of family in global early modern European commerce, see Trivellato, *The familiarity of strangers*.

⁵⁰ Manning, *Fortunes à Faire*, 57.

⁵¹ Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des Indes Orientales et François Martin*, 385.

⁵² Haudrère, *Les compagnies des Indes orientales*, 180.

⁵³ David Washbrook, “South India 1770-1840: The Colonial Transition,” *Modern Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (July 1, 2004): 489.

colony.⁵⁴ The reliance on family as a fount of patronage was by no means exclusive to the *Compagnie des Indes*, but was rather a defining feature of early modern French society, where patronage was “an important family resource,” and a “bond of kinship underlay many patron-client ties.”⁵⁵ French traders and Indian go-betweens therefore drew on a shared understanding of familial patronage, one that allowed for the inclusion of consideration of local familial affinities and rivalries in the governing of Pondichéry, the hiring decisions made by the *Compagnie des Indes*, and the interactions between individual traders and their Tamil employees.⁵⁶

Fathers and Sons in Pondichéry

This section returns to the Nayiniyappa affair, to demonstrate how the family was a locus for the enunciation of various agendas in the governance of Pondichéry, through an examination of the centrality of the bond between fathers and sons in the evolution of the affair. It considers how French and Tamil agents alike were eager to bring together the intimate and institutional facets of their lives.

⁵⁴ For Pondichéry notariat, see CAOM, INDE, série P. On the institution of godparentage creating avenues for patronage within the idiom of kinship in early modern Europe, see Guido Alfani, *Fathers and Godfathers: Spiritual Kinship in Early-Modern Italy* (Aldershot Hants England; Burlington VT: Ashgate Pub. Ltd., 2009). For a discussion of the binding power of constructed, non-consanguine kin relations in a much earlier period, see Bernhard Jussen, *Spiritual Kinship as Social Practice: Godparenthood and Adoption in the Early Middle Ages*, Rev. and expanded English ed. (Newark Del.; London; Cranbury NJ: University of Delaware Press; Associated University Presses, 2000).

⁵⁵ Sharon Kettering, “Patronage and Kinship in Early Modern France,” *French Historical Studies* 16, no. 2 (October 1, 1989): 409.

⁵⁶ Although early modern French society was a patriarchal one, matrilineal kinship and the ties of marriage were as important as patrilineal ties in the realm of patronage. *Ibid.*, 421–422, 426. Since Dravidian kinship structure allows for both matrilineal and patrilineal, this is another realm in which French and Tamil actors might have found a common language. For an overview and discussion of Dravidian kinship structure, with a focus on the Tamil region, see Margaret Trawick, *Notes on love in a Tamil family* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 117–186.

It is a coincidence that in the course of the Nayiniyappa affair, three different sets of fathers and sons filled such crucial roles.⁵⁷ But it is an extremely revealing coincidence, for it demonstrates how the familial and the institutional were inextricably connected in the administration of the colony in general, and in the evolution of the Nayiniyappa affair. André Hébert, the Governor who orchestrated Nayiniyappa's conviction, was assisted by his son, a junior employee of the Company known in the sources as Hébert fils. The appeals on Nayiniyappa's behalf were put forth after his death by his three sons, and his eldest son, Guruavappa, traveled as far as Paris to lobby for clearing his father's name. And the interpreter in Nayiniyappa's investigation, Manuel Geganis, was the son of Moutiappa, the chief catechist employed by the Jesuits, Nayiniyappa's enemies.⁵⁸ In all three cases fathers and sons worked together to further their agendas, taking advantage of the heightened loyalty and commitment afforded by the ties of blood. Working in settings which can be described as institutional (interrogation rooms and legal appeals), they were also able to draw on the ties of kinship such as consanguinity, marriage or godparentage.

André Guillaume Hébert was first appointed to the post of Pondichéry's governorship in 1708. When he returned to India in July 1715 for his second term, he was accompanied by his adult son. According to Nayiniyappa and his sons, the Héberts

⁵⁷ While the focus here is on sons and fathers in Pondichéry, two metropolitan sets of fathers and sons were absolutely foundational in the long history of the *Compagnie des Indes*: Colbert and his son, who were responsible for the sustained royal support granted to the Company in its early and difficult years, and the Duke of Pontchartrain and his son who served in turn as supervising ministers for the Company. On the practice of familial patronage and advancement in Colbert's family, see Jean-Louis Bourgeon, *Les Colbert avant Colbert: Destin d'une famille marchande*, [1. éd.]. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1973). On Pontchartrain, see Sara Chapman, *Private Ambition and Political Alliances in Louis XIV's Government: the Phélypeaux de Pontchartrain Family 1650-1750* (Rochester N.Y.; Woodbridge: University of Rochester Press, 2004). and Luc Boisnard, *Les Phélypeaux: une famille de ministres sous l'Ancien Régime: un essai de généalogie critique* (Paris: Sedopols, 1986).

⁵⁸ There are, somewhat confusingly, two Moutiappas in this story: one is Nayiniyappa's second son and one is the Jesuits' catechist, Manuel's father.

arrived in India saddled by debts. Courting the favor of the influential Jesuits, they agreed to attack Nayiniyappa, thereby hoping to strengthen their position. Enlisting the support of the Jesuits might have been especially appealing to Hébert the younger, who stood to inherit his father's debts. When describing Hébert's change of heart, which led him to turn against the broker he had initially championed, Nayiniyappa himself ascribed a fair portion of the blame to Hébert fils, saying that the governor was pushed into his actions by a "seditious son" (as Nayiniyappa himself was convicted of sedition, this accusation carried special weight, positioning Hébert fils as the true culprit).⁵⁹ Nayiniyappa's sons described Hébert fils as being eager to get rich quick, and there is some indication that the Héberts' financial situation was indeed quite dire, and the future of their family's fortune at risk.⁶⁰ In the appeal put forth by Tiruvangadan, Nayiniyappa's brother-in-law, he mentioned that Hébert fils owed 1,022 pagodas to a merchant of Madras.⁶¹ When he was called upon to repay the sum, Hébert fils instead turned to Tiruvangadan and asked him to repay the merchant for him, promising that this would be a temporary loan. But instead of being reimbursed, Tiruvangadan was imprisoned in February 13, 1716; while he was in jail, claimed his appeal, Hébert fils ransacked his house and destroyed the receipt for the loan he had been given.

Although Hébert fils was only a junior employee of the Company, a *second du commerce*, he took on an outsized role in the course of the Nayiniyappa affair.⁶² Hébert

⁵⁹ CAOM, FM, C²/70, ff. 201. On the weightiness of the accusation of sedition in the absolutist context of the Old Regime, see Lisa Graham, *If The King Only Knew: Seditious Speech in the Reign of Louis XV* (Charlottesville; London: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

⁶⁰ CAOM, FM, C²/71, ff. 103 verso.

⁶¹ In the appeals penned by Tiruvangadan, he does not specify the nature of the familial relationship between himself and Nayiniyappa, focusing instead on their business transactions. However, in a memoir written in French by Tiruvangadan's grandson, he describes Nayiniyappa as Tiruvangadan's *beau-frère*. NAIP, Eighteenth-Century Documents, Folder 20, f. 1.

⁶² CAOM, FM C²/71, ff. 97

père used his son as an emissary, to carry out queries that might have been embarrassing for the Governor of the colony to undertake himself. According to Nayiniyappa's sons, when the Héberts returned to India in 1715, it was Hébert the younger who was sent to talk to the Jesuit Superior Father Bouchet, to inform him that the Governor had had a change of heart and was now amenable to a persecution of Nayiniyappa.⁶³ It was also Hébert fils who reviewed the testimonies of the witnesses against Nayiniyappa.⁶⁴ Hébert fils was so central in the affair that Nayiniyappa's sons referred to both father and son as being de facto governors of the colony, writing that their avarice had led them to conspire with the Jesuits, so that "they [father and son] could retain the government of Pondichéry"⁶⁵

While Governor Hébert and his son made no effort to hide the fact that they were operating in concert, furthering a shared agenda, the catechist Moutiappa and his son the interpreter Manuel were not quite as frank about acting in tandem. As chief catechist to Pondichéry's Jesuits, Moutiappa held a position of considerable influence, acting as a stand-in for the missionaries among the town's Christian population. His son Manuel, also a Christian, was clearly an intimate of the Jesuits as well. There exists an early indication of the ways the commitments taken on by the catechist father were maintained by the interpreter son. The first mention of Manuel in the French archives dates to 1705, and in it his devotion to Jesuit religious and political ambition is demonstrated. As I discussed in chapter 1, the Jesuits had long tried to bring about the closure of a large Hindu temple which was located right next to the Jesuit compound. In 1705 matters took

⁶³ Nayiniyappa's sons are, of course, a partisan source; but there is no reason to doubt their claim that initial overtures were made by Hébert fils, since this rendition of the affair is actually less damaging to Governor Hébert.

⁶⁴ CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 293 verso.

⁶⁵ CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 83 verso.

a violent turn, and several native Christian men were arrested.⁶⁶ One of these men is described in the French report as “Gegany, son of the catechist.”⁶⁷ Manuel’s commitment to the Jesuits – as well as to his father, who was already acting as the missionaries’ most trusted employee – was therefore intense enough for him to take actions so extreme that they led to his arrest.

Although Manuel was employed as an interpreter by the French Company, it was his affiliation with the Jesuits, through his father, which was often remarked upon. Observers of the Nayiniyappa affair repeatedly and consistently referred to him as “the catechist’s son.” With his father an intimate of Pondichéry’s Jesuits, Manuel was a man of divided obligations, constantly moving back and forth between the Council and the Jesuits. Although Manuel is never described working as a catechist himself, his father did secure him temporary and unusual employment with the Jesuits. At a certain time (prior to the explosion of the Nayiniyappa affair) Manuel had left India, and traveled to France with one of the missionaries. Manuel was thus a man of split loyalties. His salary was paid by the Company, but his confessional and familial devotion were surely to his father and, by extension, the Jesuits. In the course of the Nayiniyappa affair, when Governor Hébert joined forces with the Jesuits, this condition changed from a liability to an asset. Hébert chose to use Manuel as the central interpreter in Nayiniyappa’s investigation, and he was also charged with arranging for the translation of witness testimonies from Tamil to French.

Manuel also provided Hébert with easy access to a whole set of other actors involved in the production of evidence against Nayiniyappa: his father Moutiappa, the

⁶⁶ CAOM, FM C²/67, f. 272. Another account of this beating appears in BNF, Manuscrits français 6231, f. 30.

⁶⁷ CAOM, FM C²/67, f. 272.

Christian Pedro, who was to replace Nayiniyappa as broker (as a central figure in Pondichéry's Christian community, Pedro was most likely an intimate of the catechist Moutiappa), and the Jesuit fathers. Although Hébert and the Jesuits had joined forces against Nayiniyappa, there are indications that the Governor found it awkward to involve the Jesuits directly in the proceedings of the official trial. The archives of the Company demonstrate the long-standing conflicts between the Company and the Jesuits, and even though Hébert had a change of heart regarding the Jesuits, his colleagues in Pondichéry's government would have been loath to give the Jesuits too much access to the company's affairs, making credible the notion that Hébert would have wished to keep his association with the Jesuits in the shadows. When Nayiniyappa was first imprisoned in 1716, Hébert asked Manuel to inform the missionaries of this fact. The testimonies solicited from Tamil witnesses were collected in the house of Manuel's father, Moutiappa, and Manuel ferried the documented testimonies from place to place. As the catechist's son, though not himself an employee of the Jesuits, Manuel was just close enough – but not too close – to serve as a perfect intermediary for interactions between Hébert and the Jesuits. We might expect local intermediaries to be especially useful in creating connections between French and Indian networks, so it is somewhat ironic that it took the services of two Indians - Moutiappa and Manuel – to establish a link between two parties of the colony's French establishment, Hébert and the Jesuits.

Nayiniyappa was also the beneficiary of the special loyalty enjoyed between fathers and sons. His three sons - Guruvappa, Moutiappa and Vingatachelam – were responsible for two of the appeals submitted on his behalf, and his eldest son traveled to France to plead the case for overturning Nayiniyappa's conviction. In the course of their

appeals, the sons (along with Frenchman who assisted with the production of the French texts) were continually highlighting the familial ties which motivated their efforts, consistently referring to “our father” rather than the more impersonal “Nayiniyappa.” But the sons’ intense efforts to overturn the conviction were motivated by more than filial concern for their father’s honor, important as such regard undoubtedly was. The punishment which was visited on Nayiniyappa included his sons as well, as the council decreed in 1716 that they were to be banished from Pondichéry in perpetuity. Guruvappa, the eldest son, especially benefited from the success of these appeals, since he later filled the post of chief broker himself.

In the course of the Nayiniyappa affair, the blood ties between fathers and sons – both local intermediaries and French *colons* – were effectively and affectively used to further various agendas. The bonding power of consanguinity was vividly demonstrated when compared to another paternal relationship which did not enjoy the special stickiness of blood – that between Jesuit missionaries and their converted, spiritual “children.” The Jesuits were drawing on a long Christian tradition when they described their converts, and especially their catechists, as their spiritual children. In the preface to the ninth volume of the “*Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*,” editor J.B. du Halde used an image which illustrated the intimate, corporeal relation the missionaries envisioned with their employees the catechists; an image which situated the catechists as emerging from Jesuit bodies, much as sons are created by fathers. He wrote: “a missionary is multiplied in strength several times in distributing these catechists in various locations of the

missions.”⁶⁸ The catechists, then, enabled the missionary to multiply himself, sending pieces of his body away, in a form of celibate generation.

But Governor Hébert, in a letter he penned on 5 February 1710 (when he was still a foe to the Jesuits, not an accomplice) pointed to the limits of such relationships. “[O]ne Christian Father leaves upon his death ten Christian children,” wrote Hébert. Yet unlike the presumably enduring loyalties of consanguine kin relations, the generative powers of Jesuits were severely circumscribed by the fleeting nature of the commitment they were able to inspire in their converted “children,” or so claimed Hébert: “for at the end of ten years, you can scarcely find even one who still adheres to the true religion.”⁶⁹

The benefit of an extended family network was that longstanding familial ties enabled one to extend relationships across time and space, securing support through successive generations and in different locales (for Nayiniyappa’s family, for example, this meant enjoying the boomtown opportunities of Pondichéry while also drawing on the established trade of Madras). The spiritual family that Jesuits tried to construct in the subcontinent did not prove quite so enduring, as people moved back and forth between confessional practices, enjoying a variety of syncretic practices.

Catechists and Kin

The importance of family relations was paramount for catechists as well as for commercial brokers. Conversion could move along maps which were not charted by the Jesuits, but instead followed lines of blood, caste, and familiarity. Despite the Jesuits' best efforts to insert themselves into such networks, their own stories demonstrate again and

⁶⁸ Jesuits., *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des missions étrangères* (A Paris: Chez Nicolas Le Clerc, Ruë Saint Jacques, porche Saint Yves, à l’image Saint Lambert, 1703), volume 9. Préface.

⁶⁹ CAOM, FM, C²/69, ff. 18 verso.

again how they were not the authors of many of the most successful conversions enjoyed by the mission. Rather, it was the connections of catechists and other converts that made the leap into Christianity both imaginable and possible.

Jesuit training would have predisposed the missionaries of the Society to shy away from too-heavy a reliance on the worldly ties of family connections. Upon entering the Society, candidates were required to perform the *Spiritual Exercises* devised by the Society's founder, Ignatius Loyola; the exercises were meant, suggests one scholar, to lessen the hold of ties outside the society, such that the community of the order would supplant the support and affective relationships of family.⁷⁰ Although many individual Jesuits maintained close connections with their kin, the official position of the Society discouraged this. Loyola was explicit about this in the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*: "Everyone who enters the Society... should leave his father, mother, brothers, sisters, and whatever he had in the world."⁷¹ Missionaries in India had chosen to replace the connections of natal responsibility and reciprocity with spiritual brotherhood. How galling, then, to find themselves utterly reliant on the ties of kin in India. Furthermore, not only did Jesuits depend on the familial relations of their native converts, but they were not even allowed to enter as equals, let alone superiors, into the networks on which they now relied. Jesuit missionaries thus found themselves denied membership in an association – that of the temporal family – to which they did not truly wish to belong.

⁷⁰ A. Lynn Martin, "Jesuits and Their Families: The Experience in Sixteenth Century France," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 13, no. 1 (April 1, 1982): 3-24.

⁷¹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 5.

Paths of Conversion

French missionaries, both in Pondichéry and other regions of South India, repeatedly benefited from the familial connections of their catechists. Father Pierre Martin told the story of a lady of the Indian court in Madurai, a woman named Minakchiamal, who was raised in the palace from a young age and given the task of administering to consecrated images of the deities that were worshipped there. After her marriage, she occasionally ventured out of the palace, and made the acquaintance of several newly converted Christians. One of these, a woman with whom Minakchiamal had close relations, acquainted her with a “pious and wise catechist”⁷². From the very beginning of this conversion (an important one, since it involved a woman of high standing), the missionaries were completely out of the loop. The catechists did not serve as intermediaries, their ostensible position, but stood in for the missionaries, making the Jesuits seem superfluous to the process. “This zealous servant of Jesus Christ [the catechist] often talked to [Minakchiamal] about the grandeur of God whom we adore, and inspired in her, by his speeches, a high regard for our sainted religion.”⁷³ This was in marked contrast to Martin himself, who elsewhere admitted he lacked the ability to make inspiring speeches in Tamil.⁷⁴ The catechist’s success in gaining a soul for Christ was assured, when he and the woman discovered they were related, thus facilitating the conversion; “it also came to pass during their many talks, that they discovered that they

⁷² “Lettre du Père Martin, missionnaire de la Compagnie de Jésus aux Indes: au Père de Villette de la même Compagnie.” Jesuits., *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des missions étrangères*, vol. 9, 173.

⁷³ “Lettre du Père Martin, missionnaire de la Compagnie de Jésus aux Indes: au Père de Villette de la même Compagnie.” Ibid.

⁷⁴ “Lettre du Père Martin, missionnaire de la Compagnie de Jésus, au Père Le Gobien de la même Compagnie.” Camien-naiken-patty, Madurai, June 1, 1700. Ibid., vol. 5, 94.

were quite closely related. The ties of blood intensified [her] esteem and confidence.”⁷⁵

The catechist was thus able to offer the woman a conversion which did not entail a severing of all links to her community. The catechists’ ability to draw on ties of consanguinity was both a central offering they could make to the Jesuits, and a durable source of their success in conversion.

When the same Father Martin took a journey from Aour to Pondichéry in 1701, he was privy to the ways conversion could bypass the European missionaries altogether, and propagate itself among pre-existing kin networks. Martin arrived in a small village named Papacurrichi, where a local man had become a Christian. Acting as a self-appointed catechist, the man brought about the conversions of most of his relatives, and built a church in the village, thereby also converting the physical landscape of the village into a place marked by Christianity.⁷⁶

In another village, the unlikely path of conversion traveled from a lower caste Christian servant to his Hindu employer, a rich high caste merchant. The merchant first heard of the glories of Christianity from his servant, in an unlikely transmission of knowledge from the lower rungs of the social ladder on up. Once the servant told his master all he knew of Christian teaching, he arranged for a catechist to come to the village, so that the instruction could be more thorough.⁷⁷ In Martin's own account, the Christian servant chose to call on a catechist to further the process of conversion, and not a missionary. A catechist would be more effective, speaking the language of the merchant, but was also a more accessible teacher – perhaps it was even the same catechist who had facilitated the servant's own conversion. The catechist’s visit was “such a happy

⁷⁵ Ibid., vol. 9, 173.

⁷⁶ BNF, NAF 11168, ff. 61-61 verso.

⁷⁷ BNF, NAF 11168, f. 63 verso.

one, that the merchant, charmed by everything the catechist told him, decided to become a Christian, regardless of what the cost would be” (the cost was presumably a social one, a devaluing of the merchant's status in the community).⁷⁸

The conversion of even one man could do wonders for the success of the Jesuit project, if the convert was well-respected in his community. Such was the case of a deathbed conversion performed by Martin and his catechist in the village of Verugapatty.⁷⁹ When Father Martin returned to Pondichéry, he learned that the day after the hasty baptism, the man had died, “blessing the Lord a thousand times for his grace in granting him sacred baptism.” This prompt death, wrote Martin, did not dispose the people of his village to view Christianity with suspicion. On the contrary, they were so impressed with the joy and tranquility with which this neophyte embraced his death that on that day 33 people of his village decided to convert to Christianity.⁸⁰ Christianity could move virally, and in ways which were not the direct results of actions taken by missionaries. In this example, the missionary was not even in the village when its people decide to embrace Christianity. Furthermore, it was not the words of the Jesuits, but the example of their neighbor which convinced them to do so.

Caste and Catechists

As a tenet of accommodation, Jesuits attempted to insert themselves into the hierarchy of caste, most often positioning themselves as the equivalents of Brahman priests.⁸¹ The catechists could help them navigate this territory, veiling the missionaries’

⁷⁸ BNF, NAF 11168, f. 63 verso.

⁷⁹ Death-bed conversions were quite common in the Indian mission field, an indication of the missionaries’ lack of success among more robust potential converts.

⁸⁰ BNF, NAF 11168, ff. 72 verso-73.

⁸¹ Zupanov, *Disputed Mission: Jesuit Experiments and Brahminical Knowledge in Seventeenth-Century India*.

relative helplessness. Adherence to caste customs among Jesuit missionaries dates back to Nobili, who in the seventeenth century divided the missionaries who worked with him into two groups – those that serviced the upper castes, and those that worked with pariah or untouchable castes (Dalits, in today's parlance).⁸² The Jesuits thus not only accepted local caste hierarchy, but went as far as replicating it within the order and in churches. Father de Bourzes cited the employment of untouchable castes among the European colonists as especially wrong-minded. “[T]his conduct on the part of the first Portuguese shocked the Indians and was very prejudicial to our sacred religion, because since that time they regard Europeans as foul and contemptible men, and consider that any dealings with them can only lead to dishonor.”⁸³ While trying to gain souls for Christ by respecting caste traditions, the Jesuits found themselves in a theological conundrum. All souls are equal in the eyes of God, yet the missionaries sanctioned partitions between castes in churches, and in some cases built separate churches for separate castes.⁸⁴

Observance of caste customs did not apply solely to the missionaries, but to their catechists as well. In fact, since it was the catechists who came into intimate contact with the converts or prospective converts, their caste position was arguably even more important than that of the Jesuits.⁸⁵ Where the missionaries had to go to extreme lengths in order to find a place themselves in the caste system, the catechists were already enmeshed in it, and able to draw on an established caste and kinship network. The Jesuits

⁸² Isabelle and Jean-Louis Vissière, *Lettres Édifiantes Et Curieuses Des Jésuites De L'inde Au Dix-Huitième Siècle* (Paris: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2000), 12.

⁸³ “Lettre du Père de Bourzes, missionnaire de la Compagnie des Jésus, à Madame la Comtesse de Soudé.” Madurai, September 21, 1713. Jesuits., *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des missions étrangères*, vol. 12, 56–118. Also quoted in Vissière, *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses des jésuites de l'Inde au dix-huitième siècle*, 126.

⁸⁴ “Lettre du Père Pierre Martin, missionnaire de la Compagnie de Jésus, au Père Le Gobien de la Même Compagnie.” Aour, Madurai, December 11, 1700, Volume 6, p. 107-228. Also quoted in *Ibid.*, 67.

⁸⁵ For an anthropological discussion of caste and Christianity in India, see David Mosse, “Catholic Saints and the Hindu Village Pantheon in Rural Tamil Nadu, South India,” *Man* 29, no. 2 (1994): 306.

understood that they must deploy this privileged position. “It is necessary to always have a large number [of catechists]; for apart from the fact that there is much work, a catechist of a low caste cannot serve as an instructor of Indians of a higher caste...,” wrote Father Mauduit. “We must have Pariah catechists for Pariahs and Brahman catechists for Brahmans, which presents us with serious obstacle, since it is not easy to train them, especially the latter, for the conversion of Brahmans is very difficult.”⁸⁶

Jesuit missionaries were careful to observe caste customs in French-ruled Pondichéry, and not only in the lands beyond European dominion. Father Martin noted how crucial catechists were for the potential conversion of Pondichéry to Christianity, writing that “[the Jesuit missionaries in Pondichéry] attracted catechists here, in order to instruct the various castes.”⁸⁷ A letter written by Father Mauduit in 1702 also addresses this issue. “The catechists of a low caste cannot serve to instruct Indians of a higher caste,” he explained in a letter addressed to Le Gobien, the editor of the *Lettres édifiantes*. “The Brahmans and the Shudras, who are the principle castes and the most listened to, have such a deep disdain for the Pariahs... They would be dishonored in their country and stripped of the rights of their caste if they listened to the teachings of a man they consider to be miserable (*malheureux*).”⁸⁸ The difficulty of seducing Brahmans into the fold of Christianity was described by Father Mauduit as being a matter of familial

⁸⁶ "Lettre du Père Mauduit, missionnaire de la Compagnie de Jésus, au Père Le Gobien de la même Compagnie." Carouvepondi, Carnat, January 1, 1702. Jesuits., *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des missions étrangères*, vol. 6, 4–5.

⁸⁷ BNF, NAF 11168, ff. 73 verso.

⁸⁸ BNF, Manuscrits français 9711, « Mélanges », f. 334. At this section in the manuscript, the editor Le Gobien, made a marginal note, glossing the term “caste”: “caste in India is the *assemblage* of several families of the same rank or of the same profession.” This, then, is a very different understanding of caste from the more fixedly racialized categories of high colonialism.

loyalty. “The conversion of Brahmans is very difficult because they are naturally proud of their birth and their superiority over other castes.”⁸⁹

The Taint of Christianity

For catechists to succeed in their mission, they had to occupy positions of some authority among local communities. However, being employed by Europeans was a tainting occupation, as the Jesuits themselves noted repeatedly. A missionary account from 1741 expanded on this problem more generally, noting that following service on European ships, Indian employees would undertake extensive cleansing and purifying rituals.⁹⁰ Accusations of contact with Europeans could also serve as a powerful tool to lower one’s status in the community. “Occasionally some Indians accuse others... that they had eaten with or in the homes of *gens à chapeau* (a category which includes Europeans, métis and topaz). What a brouhaha, what a racket, what a fracas on this subject! An entire quarter of the city is thrust into turmoil,” wrote the missionary, conjuring up images of outraged whispers flying between windows and courtyards, spreading the word effectively and devastatingly across the neighborhood. “[N]othing is spoken of besides this degradation of caste... If an innocent man is accused of this crime, it is up to him to clear himself with conclusive proof.”⁹¹

⁸⁹ “ La conversion des Brames est très difficile à cause qu’étant fiers naturellement et entêtés de leur naissance et de leur supériorité au dessous des autres castes.” BNF, Manuscrits français 9711, « Mélanges », f. 334 verso.

⁹⁰ BNF, NAF 2627. « Le paganisme des Indiens, nommés Tamouls... » p. 580.

⁹¹ “Il arrive de temps en temps que quelques indiens intentent contre d’autres comme une accusation capitale, l’action d’avoir mangé chez ou avec quelques gens à chapeau (ce qui comprend européen, métis, et Topase). Quel bruit, quel vacarme, quel fracas à ce sujet ! Tout un quartier de la ville en est troublé, on ne parle que de dégradation de caste, que d’expulsion, que d’excoriation, que de retranchement de la société civile, que d’interdiction de feu et d’eau. Si l’accusé est innocent de ce crime, quitte à lui de se bien justifier par des preuves recevables.” BNF, NAF 2627, p. 580.

The problem created by association with the missionaries was even more extreme for catechists than for the ship's servants described above. How were catechists to become men whose example of faith was to be followed, if their association with the missionaries made them men to be avoided? This conundrum was demonstrated by the difficulties surrounding the marriage of one of the missionaries' young converts. This young man, who came from a family of "good caste," had served the Jesuit missionaries from an early age, in an unnamed coastal city – perhaps even Pondichéry. Although the text does not explicitly refer to this man as a catechist, his close and intimate association with the missionaries as a member of their household makes it likely that he served them in this capacity. In the course of his life with the missionaries, he had on many occasions eaten with the Jesuits. When the missionaries decided it was time for him to be married to a young woman of his caste, "according to the custom," it was quite difficult to find a bride of his caste, because he had eaten at the missionaries' house. "Nevertheless, after much effort, a family of gentiles that was much pressed by poverty agreed to give their daughter, and to have her instructed in [Christian] religion and baptized." No Christian girl of the appropriate caste could be found, but had one had been found, the missionary admitted, even a Christian family of this caste would have also hesitated to give a daughter in marriage to a man who had regularly eaten, drunk and lived among Europeans – "even if they were missionaries."⁹²

⁹² "Je me remets ici devant les yeux à ce sujet un fait assez nouveau d'un jeune chrétien de bonne caste qui avait servi dès le bas âge les missionnaires d'une certaine ville de la côte et avait été nourri à leur cuisine. Ces pères missionnaires jugent à propos de le marier, et avec une femme de sa caste selon la coutume. La difficulté de lui en trouver une n'était pas petite à cause des circonstances d'avoir été nourri chez les P.P. missionnaires. Cependant après bien des peines, une famille de gentils que la pauvreté pressait beaucoup, voulut bien donner une fille, consentant qu'elle fut instruite dans la religion et reçut le baptême, il ne se trouva pas de fille chrétienne de la côte pour ce mariage, mais quand bien même il s'en serait trouvé quelqu'une on verra par la suite de la narration que les bons chrétiens de cette caste n'auraient point fait

But the difficulties did not end once a bride was found. The missionaries went to considerable expense, and hosted a large banquet to celebrate the marriage, inviting Christians of the young man's caste, and other guests. Yet even the Christians among the guests were loath to accept the invitation, being reluctant to eat with the missionaries and consume food prepared by European hands. The Christians who refused this invitation explained that were they to break bread with Europeans, they would be despised by the gentiles (Hindus) and cast out of their society.⁹³ Clearly, conversion to Christianity still enabled converts to remain active and respected members of the larger Tamil community, under certain conditions. It was Jesuit missionaries who faced a choice between Christian devotion and social acceptance, being continually rebuffed in their attempts to carve out a respectable foothold in the local landscape. When the Jesuits tried to find a bride for their young protégé, they were attempting to use him as an avatar for their own participation in these social and familial affiliations. The difficulty they had in securing a foothold speaks to the limits of the use of intermediaries in such ways. Catechists could, on occasion, allow Jesuits a way into the lives they lived apart from their Christian identities, but the missionaries inevitably came across barriers which could not be traversed. Because marriage meant the linkage of lineages, the Jesuits – with their murky and problematic social status and background – would have made for problematic and undesirable affines.

In the story of this marriage, which the missionary related in an aggrieved and accusatory tone, we can sense the Jesuits' frustration. Even after their protégé was deemed an unworthy suitor due to eating with the missionaries, they insisted of hosting a feast for their guests, as if refusing to acknowledge their exclusion from local networks of

peu de difficulté pour donner une épouse à un homme qui avait toujours bu, mangé, et logé chez des européens quoique missionnaires." BNF, NAF 2627, p. 582.

⁹³ BNF, NAF 2627, p. 583

celebration and conviviality. They attempted to act as the young man's surrogate family, trying to arrange for his marriage, and the local Christian community – the very same people who should have looked up to the missionaries as their spiritual fathers – refused to grant them such status, refused to create lasting bonds of kinship with the children of their household, refused even to share a meal with them.⁹⁴

Conflicts between Jesuits and Catechists

Although the Jesuits often paid tribute to the benefits their mission reaped from the catechists' position in their communities of origin, elsewhere they were clearly resentful of this dependence, in a way distinct from their commercial counterparts. Discussing the difficulties faced by newly converted Christians, Father Martin wrote that the catechists were sometimes those who provide the worst examples. "The catechists are often the first to scandalize the people with the bad example they provide, or obstruct the missionaries in the exercise of their ministry, due to their stubbornness and opinionated nature; and yet the missionaries dare not punish the catechists, for fear of bringing a cruel persecution on the whole mission."⁹⁵ An obvious power struggle is revealed in this passage, and it is unclear who possessed the upper hand. The catechists are described as headstrong, refusing to accede to the judgment of the Jesuits. Yet the Jesuits could not retaliate, not only because they were dependant on the catechists for their work, but

⁹⁴ The celebration of marriages was fertile ground for such fissures in the Christian community to emerge, revealing the difficulties of being a Christian in a Hindu land. A memoir of Pondichéry's early days recounts an occasion in 1704, when a catechist of the Jesuits performed a Christian wedding ceremony, in which the bride's gentile relatives refused to participate. See BNF, Manuscrits français, 6231, ff. 33-33 verso.

⁹⁵ "Lettre du Père Pierre Martin, missionnaire de la Compagnie de Jésus, au Père Le Gobien de la même Compagnie." Aour, Madurai, December 11, 1700. Jesuits., *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des missions étrangères*, vol. 6, 180–181.

because the catechists were too well-connected in the community; any action against them might prove dangerous for the Jesuits and the mission.

In a letter of December 10, 1718, Father Le Gac created an interesting juxtaposition between two stories concerning catechists. In the first story, a catechist is commended, in the second a catechist is rebuked. By presenting these two tales side by side, Le Gac made a clear statement about the desirable behavior in a catechist, but also revealed how catechists acted unlike Jesuits, as they negotiated their positions in the local setting. Le Gac began by narrating the doings of a catechist who came to a village in order to instruct a group that expressed interest in Christianity. Upon his arrival in the village, where he was unknown, the catechist was arrested as a spy.⁹⁶ He was then presented before the village head, and told him that the Sanyassi (meaning the missionaries, described here with the Hindu term for ascetic) for whom he worked enjoy the protection of the governor. The catechist was nevertheless put in prison, but throughout the night he fearlessly read aloud Christian texts.⁹⁷ He was delivered when two important men from a neighboring village, who were personally acquainted with the catechist, came and vouched for his innocence and virtue.⁹⁸ The missionaries did not get a chance to participate in the liberation of their employee; again, it was an intimate network in which they were unable to participate, connections forged of neighborhood and family ties, which proved to be efficient.

The second story, presented a few pages later in the letter, concerns a catechist who failed to fulfill his duty, according to the Jesuit interpretation. A Hindu man who

⁹⁶ "Lettre du Père Le Gac, missionnaire de la Compagnie de Jésus, à Monsieur le Chevalier Hébert, Gouverneur De Pondichéry." Chruchnabouram, December 10, 1718. *Ibid.*, vol. 16, 176–177.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 16, 178–179.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 16, 179.

was interested in Christianity summoned the catechist to instruct him in his village. But the catechist made various excuses, and only when he could delay his arrival no longer, did he go to the village. Once there, he remained in place a mere three days before returning to the mission. The reason for the catechist's reluctance to stay in the village was concern for his own safety, for it was known that in this village strangers were often subject to severe punishments.⁹⁹ When the Jesuit returned, and learned of this sequence of events, he was very unhappy with the catechist, blaming him for his timidity.¹⁰⁰

Taken together, the two stories demonstrate that the Jesuits demanded fearlessness from the catechists, and a disregard for their safety. A catechist who brought persecution on himself was presented in heroic terms, while a catechist who demonstrated warranted caution (for cruel treatment was often the lot of imprisoned catechists) was denigrated as a coward. But the refusal of the second catechist to travel to the village also highlights the difficulty the missionaries encountered in their relations with the catechists and in the mission field in general. The catechist did not want to put himself in a situation where he would be penalized for being a stranger, by traveling to an unknown village. But for the Jesuits, the experience and danger of being a stranger was inescapable, for wherever they were in India they were worried of being taken for *Paranguis*. The missionary's anger at the timid catechist might have been sharpened by this realization of the catechist's ability to enjoy the benefits of belonging.

Brokerage and Belonging

This chapter has argued that a description of the politics of Pondichéry must account for the families of Pondichéry. The colony was a place where French and Tamil

⁹⁹ Ibid., vol. 16, 188–190.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., vol. 16, 190.

families – both actual families and different conceptions of the family – collided and colluded. In order to understand the relationships between the French and the professional go-betweens they employed, we must take into consideration not only the interactions between these two groups, but also the position of intermediaries in their communities of origin, and how these positions would have been understood and valued by French employers, themselves involved in familial networks of patronage and reciprocity. French officials, traders and missionaries were intensely aware of the importance of local associations of kin and caste. In hiring go-betweens, they attempted to insert themselves and their interests into such networks, with only partial success. At the same time, intermediaries (at both the highest reaches of power and more humble spheres) could leverage their employment by the French to strengthen their position in natal and affinal networks, by using their authority in the colony to act as patrons and protectors. There was a particular paradox embedded in French dependency on local familial networks: this dependence ensured that French *colons* and missionaries would perpetually remain outsiders, since they could never truly become integral members of a kin-based structure. While this held true for both commercial and missionary actors, the fundamentally distinct agendas of these projects meant that Company employees and Jesuit missionaries reacted very differently to this paradoxical dependence.

In the diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai, the entry for June 17, 1737 recounts an encounter between the diarist and a friend and the French official Dumeslier.

“We both asked M. Dumeslier whether he meant to stay in India, or return to Europe. He replied that he did not see what advantage he could gain when he was separated and far away from his parents, brothers, sisters, and kindred. Alluding to his earnings in this country, he asked us whether we did not think that he could obtain the same in his own. He said that it was better to earn ten pagodas in one’s

own land, than 100 in a foreign one; as in the former case a man need not give up friends and relatives.”¹⁰¹

Dumeslier’s plaintive summary of his position, severed from the ties of family, helps explain French dependence on local employees. And Ananda Ranga Pillai, comfortably relaying this anecdote, secure with a friend by his side and a vast network of family and acquaintance around him, seems to have realized that in this instance, his position was the more enviable.

¹⁰¹ Pillai, *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai, Dubash to Joseph François Dupleix, Knight of the Order of St. Michael, and Governor of Pondichery. A Record of Matters Political, Historical, Social, and Personal, from 1736 to 1761*, vol. 1, 21.

Chapter V

Mediating a Polyglot Colony: French, Tamil and Portuguese in Pondichéry and in *l'affaire Nayiniyappa*

Introduction

Less than a decade after the conclusion of the Nayiniyappa affair, the Directors of the French trading company in Paris decided that dependence on native interpreters must come to an end. The problem with Malabar interpreters, the company opined, was that their station and timidity prevented them from taking a firm tone and demanding the terms that would be most beneficial to the French, on those occasions when they negotiated on behalf of their employers with Indian leaders. In a letter sent from Paris to Pondichéry in 1727, the Directors suggested a new scheme for dealing with this problem: “you must choose several young children of French birth, and instruct them in the languages used in the lands where [French] trading posts are located, so that these young men can serve as your interpreters in the future... This seems extremely necessary, and you must give the same orders to [the French establishments] in Chandernagor and Mahé.”¹ French officials had a long history of training youth in foreign languages for service in France’s expanding overseas project. In 1669, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, following the Venetian example, founded the *École des Jeunes de langues* in Paris, which provided dragomans-in-training with language instruction (in Turkish, Arabic, Persian, and Armenian) for diplomatic service in the Ottoman lands. Fittingly, it was the Jesuits –

¹ Pondicherry. Conseil superieur., Martineau, and Compagnie des Indes., *Correspondance du Conseil superieur de Pondichéry et de la Compagnie [des Indes]*, vol. 1, p. 165.

strong advocates of linguistic immersion – who were entrusted with instruction in the Parisian school.² Indian languages, alas, were not taught at this institution, therefore a different solution was required for the colonies in South Asia.

The French government in Pondichéry voiced unequivocal support for the idea of tutoring French youth in Indian languages, admitting that “not being able to write or speak to make ourselves understood has caused us great difficulty in many small matters.”³ The colonial Council had even gone so far as to offer a cash prize of 1,000 livres – a substantial sum – to whichever young resident who would become most proficient in an Indian language. In fact, similar suggestions had been made by Company officials from the earliest days of French presence in India. However, in practice, the Pondichéry council warned, reliance on local linguistic intermediaries would not be quite so easy to curtail. The obstacles to the course charted by the Parisian Directors were numerous. To start, the local French youth were not eager to undertake the rigors of the study of Indian languages. Only three local boys were mentioned as potential interpreters, but two of them were weakly and of delicate temperament, and their health did not allow taxing language studies. But even if they were so inclined, the councilors in Pondichéry claimed, there was no one who could teach them. The Pondichéry council also limited its response to a discussion of Persian, the language used by the Mughal court, and made no reference to study of Tamil – even though finding a language teacher in Tamil-speaking Pondichéry would have posed no difficulty. Problematic as reliance on Indian interpreters

² François Pouillon, *Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue française* (KARTHALA Editions, 2008), 348–349.

³ Pondicherry. Conseil supérieur., Martineau, and Compagnie des Indes., *Correspondance du Conseil supérieur de Pondichéry et de la Compagnie [des Indes]*, vol. 1, p. 165.

might be, no other solution seemed more tenable to the French administrators in Pondichéry, and the advantages outweighed the disadvantages.⁴

The predicament of interpretation went beyond the issue of interpreters' supposed timidity. Dependence on linguistic intermediaries was disturbing precisely because of its inevitability, the inability to conceive of a way out of this dependence. The problem of interpretation was especially salient in a new colony, as Pondichéry was early in the eighteenth-century. In the early days of the colony, the vast majority of its French inhabitants had recently arrived from France, and seemed to have considered the study of Tamil an insurmountable task. This meant that local go-betweens took the lead in all negotiations and transactions, leaving their French employers partially in the dark about their own affairs.⁵

Reliance on linguistic mediation had been the norm in Pondichéry since its earliest days, and had by no means abated even after several decades of French rule. The reason was that unlike the *Francophonie* policy of nineteenth and twentieth century French empire, neither French traders or missionaries pursued the goal of making French the language most commonly spoken by the Indian inhabitants of Pondichéry. Pondichéry

⁴ Two centuries later, French colonial administrators were Africa were still facing very similar problems, and were prompted to "learn the language of the country that they govern." Emily Lynn Osborn, "Interpreting Colonial Power in French Guinea: The Boubou Penda-Ernest Noiroto Affair of 1905," in *Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa*, ed. Benjamin N. Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn, and Richard L. Roberts (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 56-76.

⁵ For an important discussion of later English discomfort and reaction to the power of Tamil scribes in Madras, see Bhavani Raman, "Document Raj: Scribes and Writing under Early Colonial Rule in Madras, 1771-1860" (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2007).

– like many Indian locales, large swathes of metropolitan France⁶ and virtually all colonies – was a polyglot city, with a diverse and complex linguistic ecology.⁷ This chapter describes this polyglot context, and identifies divergent strategies used by French administrators-traders and missionaries, as well as local go-betweens, for managing this confusing and productive overlay of languages.

Writing of communication in colonial regimes, Johannes Fabian noted that “such exchanges depended on a shared communicative praxis providing the common ground on which unilateral claims could be imposed.”⁸ In this chapter I investigate the “shared communicative practice” which made up the interactions between French traders and missionaries and their colonial employees. Departing from Fabian (whose focus is on European dominion by way of linguistic classification), I demonstrate that in early eighteenth century Pondichéry, this “communicative praxis” was premised on the emphatically non-unilateral nature of communicative claims. Using the Nayiniyappa affair as a prism through which to demonstrate this, I suggest that the Nayiniyappa affair

⁶ Well into the seventeenth century, extreme linguistic diversity was a defining feature of French society. Paul Cohen, “Courtly French, Learned Latin, and Peasant Patois: The Making of a National Language in Early Modern France” (Doctoral Dissertation, Princeton University, 2001). This dissertation (soon to be published) revises historiographic interpretations which ascribe great efficacy to the French Crown in spreading French as a national language in the sixteenth century. Instead, Cohen argues, deep-seated polyglot culture was the early modern norm. More recently, Cohen has demonstrated how polyglossia – of French, Latin, and regional languages – was the norm in French courts of law. Prior to 1789, judges, lawyers and scribes all accommodated linguistic diversity in the courts. Paul Cohen, “Judging a Multilingual Society: The Accommodation of Linguistic Diversity in French Law Courts, Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries” (presented at the American Historical Association Annual Meeting, Boston, 2011).

⁷ In speaking of a “linguistic ecology” in Pondichéry I borrow from Einar Haugen, who coined the term “language ecology” to refer to the “study of interactions between any given language and its environment.” Einar Haugen, *The ecology of language* (Stanford Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1972), 325. Haugen was particularly interested in multilingual environments, and moments in which different languages met and grappled either in the minds of bi- or multilingual speakers, or among different speakers. For applications of his suggestions in disciplinary linguistics, see Stig Eliasson and Ernst Hakon Jahr, *Language and Its Ecology: Essays in Memory of Einar Haugen* (Mouton De Gruyter, 1997).. Yet Haugen, by situating language in culture more than in structure, has also provided a useful paradigm for historians; my thanks to Paul Cohen, whose work brought this term to my attention, and has argued for its relevance for early modern French history.

⁸ Fabian, *Language and colonial power*, 3.

became a scandal, and was understood as such by both Tamil and French supporters of the jailed broker, precisely because it changed the rules of the game, creating a communicative praxis which left little or no room for previously established bilateral claims or agreements.

The Power of Portuguese, the Lure of Linguistic Immersion

Perhaps the key difference between the interpretive services provided by Christian catechists and those offered by commercial brokers was the language in which communication took place. Where French Jesuits and other missionaries in Pondichéry highly valued the use of indigenous languages, and acquired new languages as they moved between different mission fields, French traders and their employees in South India most commonly used Portuguese as their common language. In choosing Portuguese, the French were participating in a norm common to merchant maritime communities across the Indian Ocean, from China to Goa to Africa, and stemming from the former supremacy of Portuguese ships in the region. Even as Portuguese power declined in the seventeenth century, Portuguese language remained essential for doing business.

The choice of Company traders to rely on Portuguese might seem surprising, considering the paradigm of *Francophonie* which was so central to later French imperial efforts. But Frenchmen of the Old Regime, as Cohen has shown, would have felt right at home in a “multilingual universe.”⁹ The majority of texts inscribed in the archives of the French trading company in India thus underwent several processes of transformation. For example, when a Tamil witness appeared before the Sovereign Council, one of the

⁹ Cohen, “Courtly French, learned Latin, and peasant patois,” 19–20.

colony's judicial bodies, the chain of communication was performed thus: the witness spoke in Tamil, the interpreter translated the response into Portuguese for the benefit of the French audience, and a French (but Portuguese-speaking) secretary then wrote down the response in French. There were thus two separate and simultaneous processes of interpretation going on: between languages (Tamil to Portuguese to French) and from oral to written communication.¹⁰

In an unstable political context, such as the one in Pondichéry late in the seventeenth century and early in the eighteenth century, keeping Portuguese as a common commercial language made sense. When the Dutch took control of Pondichéry in the late seventeenth century, the colony's new rulers (themselves fluent in Portuguese) could communicate with the town's Portuguese-speaking population. When a treaty signed in Europe restored control of the colony to the French, the linguistic transition was just as smooth. As the discussion below will demonstrate, a central issue of the Nayiniyappa affair revolved around the fact that Portuguese was forsaken as a common language during the course of the broker's investigation. For Nayiniyappa, even though he was the colony's most senior Indian employee and a resident of Pondichéry for more than four decades, did not speak French. This was the norm, rather than the exception. Ten years after Nayiniyappa's death, when the presiding chief broker, Pedro Modeliar, served as a witness in a case heard in 1729 by Pondichéry's Sovereign Council, he gave his testimony in Portuguese.¹¹ It was only much later in the eighteenth century – once

¹⁰ Scholars of medieval and early modern Europe have examined the transmission of data from scribal and printed forms to oral ones and vice versa. A brief review of this literature can be found in *Ibid.*, 296, footnote 1.

¹¹ CAOM, INDE, Série M 25.

French rule had been in place for many decades - that professional intermediaries regularly spoke French.¹²

A French missionary reflecting on the Portuguese linguistic legacy was clearly bitter, describing the European lingua franca as “corrupted Portuguese which the Portuguese have left behind in all the parts of India from which they have been driven out. This jargon is perpetuated among the Indians, so that the other nations of Europe are forced to learn it.”¹³ Catholic Missionaries of all orders adopted a different strategy, trying to become fluent in as many local languages as possible.¹⁴

Not everywhere in the colonial world did French missionaries make similar efforts to become fluent in local languages. For example, in the French Antilles in the same period, Jesuit, Capuchin and Dominican missionaries attempting to convert Caribs and enslaved Africans made little effort to learn their languages, relying instead on a creolized French.¹⁵ But in India, missionaries – and especially Jesuits – believed direct communication with potential converts was crucial if India was to be won for Christ. For Jesuits, language was not simply a way of communicating the truth of the gospel. It was a yardstick by which to measure success in the context of accommodation, which relied on the comprehension and affinity a joint language can engender. Therefore, to be a good Jesuit, one must have demonstrated a knack for learning new languages, and Jesuits in

¹² See, for example, the French speaking dubash, David Moutou, employed by Mautort. Mautort, *Mémoires du Chevalier de Mautort: Capitaine au régiment d'Austrasie Chevalier de l'ordre royal et militaire de Saint-Louis (1752-1802)*, 207.

¹³ “Ajoutez y encore si vous voulez une sixième langue qui est un Portugais corrompu que les Portugais ont laissé dans toutes les parties de l'Inde d'où ils ont été chassé. Ce jargon est perpétué parmi les Indiens de manière que les autres nations d'Europe sont obligés de l'apprendre.” BNF, NAF 6557, f. 64 verso.

¹⁴ In Protestant contexts, like in commercial spheres, Portuguese was sometimes used as a lingua franca. In English Madras in the late seventeenth century, for example, some Anglican services were conducted in Portuguese. Neill, *A History of Christianity in India, I: The Beginnings to AD 1707*, 372. Needless to say, Portuguese was used by Catholic priests in Portuguese-ruled Goa.

¹⁵ Peabody, “‘A Dangerous Zeal’: Catholic Missions to Slaves in the French Antilles, 1635-1800,” 61.

India who were sent to difficult inland missions, away from the Christianized coastal towns like Pondichéry and Goa, were handpicked based on their demonstrated academic prowess and linguistic faculty.¹⁶

An example is the case of Father Pierre Martin, a missionary who moved between the Nayak-ruled city of Madurai and French Pondichéry. Father Martin put exceptionally high value on linguistic prowess, and was convinced that the ability to speak several languages saved him from death at the hands of the Muslims, when he was captured at sea on his way to India. His knowledge of Turkish, Persian and Arabic, both spoken and written, convinced his captors (or so, at least, he believed) that though he might be a Christian, he could not possibly be a European. Upon his arrival in India, his first task was to learn Bengali and Tamil.¹⁷ Language also provided familiarity and assurance in an unknown land. When Father Guy Tachard was sent from Pondichéry to Chandernagor in Bengal, he couched his displeasure in linguistic terms. His mastery of Tamil, he wrote, was by this point good enough to allow him to “confess, catechize, as well as read and understand the books of the land.”¹⁸ In Bengal he would have to undertake the study of a new language, “not an easy task when one is sixty years old.”¹⁹ The relationship between age and language acquisition was remarked upon by other missionaries in the region. A French Lazariste missionary in Ile Bourbon, having received materials that would have enabled him to study Malagasy, a language spoken by many on the island, wrote back to

¹⁶ Zupanov, *Missionary Tropics: The Catholic Frontier in India (16th-17th Centuries)*, 14.

¹⁷ "Lettre du Père Martin, Missionnaire de la Compagnie de Jésus, au P. de Villette, de la même Compagnie." Balassor, Royaume de Bengale, January 30, 1699. In Jesuits., *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des missions étrangères*.

¹⁸ "Lettre du Père Tachard, Missionnaire de la Compagnie de Jésus, au R. P. du Trevou, de la même Compagnie, confesseur de S.A.R. Monseigneur de Duc d'Orléans." Chandernagore, January 18, 1711. *Lettres édifiantes*, volume 12, p. 366-442. Also quoted in Vissière, *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses des jésuites de l'Inde au dix-huitième siècle*, 42.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Paris: “I am indebted to you for the books you had the kindness to send me, and although they are for acquiring the language of the island of Madagascar they are useless for me because I am too old to learn a foreign language. I will keep them safe for those who are young and who would come after me so they can apply themselves to learn this language if they would like to.”²⁰

The question of which language a missionary should learn was not self-evident or transparent. As shown in the case of the *Compagnie des Indes*, the Directors in Paris advocated the study of Persian in the Tamil region, presuming that access to Mughal power was most valuable. For missionaries a similar issue arose, especially after French Jesuits founded the Carnatic mission at the turn of the eighteenth century, which was largely located in a Telugu-speaking region.²¹

The Jesuits were not alone in pursuing proficiency in Indian languages. When the Jesuits and Capuchins established in Pondichéry struggled for the right to minister to the Malabar Christian parish, the Jesuit Superior Tachard argued that the Capuchins could not possibly be given this responsibility because none of them spoke Tamil. Outraged, the Capuchin Father Paul Vendôme wrote in 1703 that Tachard was a liar, and attached testimonies to his letter, attesting that the Capuchin curé Father Esprit, “who has been living in Pondichéry ever since the town was given to the Royal Company, both preaches and catechizes in the Malabar language.”²² The MEP seminary was similarly committed

²⁰ Père Igou to Noiret, 1734 or 1735, quoted in Larson, *Ocean of letters*, 113.

²¹ Fabian describes a similar conundrum facing missionaries in the nineteenth-century Congo, who had some difficulty determining toward which language they should direct their efforts. Fabian, *Language and colonial power*, 7. In India and elsewhere then, multilingualism posed a specific challenge to missionaries, who largely staked their claim to moral authority on linguistic proficiency, but the specific form of such proficiency was not always immediately apparent.

²² “...C’est le même P. Tachard, qui après avoir prît Dieu à témoin qu’il ne dira que la vérité, ose cependant protester dans un de ses mémoires qu’il n’y a aucun Capucin qui sache la langue malabare. Mais vous avez en main des attestations qui prouvent le contraire, et qui font foi que le P. Esprit qui demeure à Pondichéry,

to training missionaries in native languages. In a statement made in Paris in 1700, the Directors of the MEP seminary declared that a native clergy must be created over time, and the reason was in part linguistic: “it will be difficult for Europe to go on forever supplying priests, who take a long time to learn the language, and in the time of persecution are easily recognized, arrested, driven out, or put to death, while priests of the country are able more easily to remain in concealment.”²³

Both Jesuits and Capuchins admitted that they found the study of Tamil extremely taxing. A Capuchin writer described Tamil as “harsh, crudely fashioned, unpleasant, and repelling, especially in its pronunciation. It is only a zeal for the propagation of faith which makes it possible to learn this language.”²⁴ Another missionary writer blamed the intemperate weather in South India for making missionaries lethargic, rendering them the equivalent of convalescents in Europe. The only task which the newly-arrived missionaries still took on, despite their sorry state, was the study of languages – a priority that could not be forsaken, regardless of one’s health.²⁵

Saving Language: Catechists and Missionaries

Catechists were constantly at the missionaries’ side, and the linguistic services they provided – preaching sermons, catechizing new converts, even listening to confessions – were invaluable, leading one Jesuit missionary to admit that “one can do

depuis que cette place a été rendu à messieurs de la Compagnie Royale, prêche et catéchise en langue Malabare.” Capuchins, MS 192, 1703 letter by P. Paul Vendôme, f. 158 verso.

²³ Quoted in Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 153–154.

²⁴ “La langue Tamoul est rude, grossière, désagréable, et rebutante surtout dans la prononciation. Il n’y a que le zèle de la propagation de la foi dans les missionnaires qui soit capable de porter de l’apprendre.” BNF, NAF 2627, « Le paganisme des Indiens, nommés Tamouls... », p. 15. On Jesuit struggles with Tamil, see also Ines G. Zupanov, “Twisting a Pagan Tongue: Portuguese and Tamil in Sixteenth-Century Jesuit Translations,” in *Conversion: old worlds and new* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2003).

²⁵ BNF, NAF 6557, f. 64.

almost nothing in this country without the help of the catechists.”²⁶ The catechists were able to put their linguistic capability to work on behalf of the cause of Christianity, by enthraling the people in a way that eluded the foreign missionaries. As Jesuit Father Jean-Venant Bouchet related, the catechists were quick to make use of this ability whenever a crowd gathered: “The catechists, seeing this multitude of people, profited from the occasion in order to announce [to the crowd] the truths of Christianity, and each one of them made a touching speech. They spoke with such force... Most of the audience seemed moved.”²⁷

It was the catechists’ linguistic superiority – the very faculty on which the Jesuits so heavily relied – that occasioned feelings of inadequacy and resentment towards the catechists. The Jesuit Martin was frank on the topic of his failures of communication:

“Confessions exhaust me exceedingly, because of the difficulty I have in understanding them. For these people speak with extraordinary quickness, or perhaps it just seems to me so, because I do not yet have a good ear for their language. Tears often come to my eyes when I am able to understand what they are saying to me, which they must start over again three or four times. And these good people do so with marvelous patience, searching for easier words or styles of expression... Nevertheless, when I make numerous mistakes, whether in the style of the language or in pronunciation, which is very difficult, they do not seem to discourage me, saying that they would rather listen to four words from the mouths of the Fathers, even mispronounced and badly arranged, than the grand speeches that their catechists can make”²⁸.

Though he admitted his failings, Martin clung to the belief that his mangled Tamil was more valuable than the speeches the catechists were capable of making. Implicit in

²⁶ "Lettre du Père Mauduit, missionnaire de la compagnie de Jésus, au Père Le Gobien de la même compagnie," Carouvepondi, Carnat, January 1, 1702. Jesuits., *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des missions étrangères*, vol. 6, 4–5.

²⁷ "Lettre du P. Bouchet, missionnaire de la compagnie de Jésus, à Monsieur Cochet de Saint-Valliér, président des requêtes du palais à Paris." Ibid., vol. 11, 7.

²⁸ "Lettre Du Père Martin, Missionnaire De La Compagnie De Jésus, Au Père Le Gobien De La Même Compagnie." Camien-naiken-patty, Madurai, June 1, 1700. Ibid., vol. 5, 92–93.

the letter is a competition between the two groups, Jesuits and catechists; and even though Martin presented the Jesuits as the victors in this battle, a shadow of failure lingers over the letter. The difficulties of the Jesuits were brought into further relief when Martin related the procession of the Passion. When a big crowd of Christians gathered in front of the church, the catechist told the “story of the Passion of our Lord” loudly and at length, while Martin himself made what he described as a “little speech.”²⁹ The force and emotion which are bestowed by spontaneity, the ability to create the gripping narrative that “stories” contain, must have been lacking from this little speech, for Martin admitted elsewhere that he had to prepare his Tamil sermons in advance and learn them by heart.³⁰

Catechists did not hesitate to use the direct paths of communication open to them to overrule the desires of their missionary employers. The complex negotiation that took place between missionaries, catechists and converts can be observed in the following passage, in which Martin discussed neophytes who were barred from participating in Easter rites, due to their less-than-satisfactory spiritual standing.

“It is incredible how sensitive these people are, when we are obliged to postpone their absolution. One must be well on one’s guard, in order not to be swayed by their requests and pleas. If they can make no progress with us, they do not blush at turning to the catechists, and revealing to them the secret faults for which they were deferred [from receiving absolution]. In vain do we advise the catechists to dismiss the neophytes who come thus to confide in them; there can always be found someone to intercede on the part of the penitents. Nothing pains the missionaries more, particularly when these overtures are made to the less discreet of the catechists, who do not feel strongly enough the obligation imposed by the seal of confession”³¹.

²⁹ Ibid., vol. 5, 94. Jesuit attitudes toward Latin as the ultimate language with which to communicate with God would have made these preliminary Tamil efforts seem even less effective by comparison.

³⁰ Ibid., vol. 5, 93.

³¹ "Seconde Lettre Du Père Martin, Missionnaire De La Compagnie De Jésus Aux Indes: Au Père De Villette De La Même Compagnie." Ibid., vol. 9, 231–232.

This passage offers us a glimpse into daily mission life, and exposes some of its communicative complexities. First, the converts were adept at manipulating the space between catechists and missionaries. When they were refused by the missionaries, they were quick to turn to the catechists, who had the power to overrule the Jesuits; since Martin admitted that the missionaries were “pained” by the intercession of the catechists, it would seem that these intercessions must have been successful at times. Clearly, the control the Jesuits had over the catechists, who were meant to be at their service, was shaky at best. For despite the pain caused to the Fathers by the involvement of the catechists, this involvement continued, and the pleas of the Jesuits are all made “in vain.” The catechists did not subscribe to the rules of conduct the missionaries attempted to put in place. Where the missionaries considered confidences to be protected by the confessional setting, the catechists, described here as indiscreet, had a different set of criteria by which they decide what is to be kept secret and what can be shared with the community. It is worth noting here that Martin did not claim that this supposed indiscretion bothered the converts, whose secrets were made public; rather, it was the sensibility of the missionaries and their belief in the sacredness of confession which was offended.

Most important for the purpose of this discussion are the means of communication that were open to the catechists and closed to the missionaries. The catechists were not only able to hear confessions (with the ease that eluded Martin) and make decisions that ran counter to the Fathers’ wishes, but they could then disseminate the information as they saw fit amongst the community of converts. The ability to receive secrets and reveal them would have made catechists influential among the members of the congregations,

and especially useful employees for missionaries trying to create a place for themselves. But in the process, Jesuits did not have a chance to participate in conversations they should have controlled. Furthermore, the sacrament of confession was meant to create a direct and sacred conduit to God, via the body of the priest, as a means for absolution. By displacing this sacred role onto the body of a catechist, communion and communication with God was compromised, and the very sacrament tarnished.

Exchanging Language: Commercial Brokers and French Traders

The Jesuits were explicit about the importance of linguistic services provided by their religious intermediaries. For commercial intermediaries, the most important attribute was possession of an extensive network of kin and trade relationships, which could facilitate European entry into local systems of trade. Yet the ability of brokers to serve as linguistic interpreters was commented upon and valued as well. When Louis-François de Paule de Mautort, a captain in a French regiment, first set foot in India late in the eighteenth century, his first task was to find and hire a commercial broker or dubash, “an essential man.” His description of the traits of a desirable dubash began with linguistic competency. “A dubash is a kind of steward (*intendant*) who, other than his own language, also speaks the language of the powers that be in the place where he lives. My dubash, then, speaks French.”³² Mautort’s description of the dubash should also be understood more metaphorically: a competent broker could speak not only the language of those in power – be that Persian, French, Tamil or Dutch – but also the language of power. A broker must be multilingual not only in speaking different languages and

³² Mautort, *Mémoires du Chevalier de Mautort: Capitaine au régiment d’Australasie Chevalier de l’ordre royal et militaire de Saint-Louis (1752-1802)*, 207.

different idioms of doing business, but also different registers of authority and knowledge.

This was how Nayiniyappa himself understood his position in the nascent colony. He described the transmission of information in different contexts as the primary task filled by a courtier employed by the Company: “for there to be communication between the Frenchman and the Indian, there is need for an intelligent man, who acts as an ambassador between the two nations.” In doing so, explained Nayiniyappa, the go-between can “inform the Indian or the Malabar of the orders of the French general [i.e., governor]... the general speaks only to him [the broker], and he alone is known by the Indians.” The broker then takes the orders given by the French authority, “relates them as they were given to him, and the Indians accept [these orders] as he conveys them.”³³ Nayiniyappa here fashioned his relationship with the French Governor as an exclusive one. He positioned himself not simply as a tool enabling the easier flow of information, but as the very condition of possibility for any form of communication to take place.

Nayiniyappa offered this description of his labor in the text of one of the appeals to overturn his conviction. Writing for French authorities, he had a vested interest in presenting himself as passing on the information provided by the French exactly as he received it. It seems more likely that he took certain freedoms in reshaping information as it passed between his hands, rendering it more comprehensible as it made the leap

³³ “Il est besoin pour la communication du Français et de l’Indien, d’avoir un homme intelligent qui soit comme l’Ambassadeur entre les deux Nations, qui fasse savoir à l’Indien ou Malabar les ordres du Général Français: on l’appelle le Chef des Malabars, il est l’homme public: le général ne s’adresse qu’à lui, et lui seul est connu des Indiens pour recevoir les lois de gouvernement de la colonie: il les porte à tous les Chefs de Castes ou Tribus, il les rend comme on les lui donne, les Indiens les reçoivent comme il les lui porte: c’est un emploi très distingué dans le pays.” CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 251 verso.

between social contexts and languages. However, the crucial point is that Nayiniyappa presented his key task as enabling communication between mutually mute parties.

In addition to commercial brokers, the French trading company in Pondichéry also employed translators in the *chaudrie*, or native court. The *chaudrie* was presided over by three members of Pondichéry's Superior Council (all French traders), and heard non-capital offense cases involving natives.³⁴ Since the French judges could not understand the Tamil witnesses' testimonies, all information was conveyed through the interpreters. The *chaudrie* interpreters, though not quite as powerful as some of the colony's high-ranking commercial brokers, nevertheless enjoyed positions of some influence. The prime example of this is Nayiniyappa himself, since prior to his appointment as Pondichéry's chief broker, he was employed as a *chaudrie* interpreter.³⁵ Nayiniyappa was already well-established as a merchant prior to his appointment as courtier (the council records list several business transactions in which he was involved). His work in the *chaudrie*, then, was likely undertaken for reasons other than what must have been a modest salary. The intimate connection he could have forged with French traders as he whispered into their ears would have cemented his position as a man to be trusted. But working in the *chaudrie* would have also fortified his place among the town's Tamil population, as a man directly involved in the settlement of disputes.

When the time came for him to leave the *chaudrie*, Nayiniyappa attempted to maintain his connection to this center of power, by having a friend of his appointed to

³⁴ On the constitution and role of the *chaudrie*, see the introduction to J.-C. Bonan, *Jugements de la tribunal de la Chaudrie de Pondichéry 1766-1817* (Pondicherry: Institut française de Pondichéry, Ecole française d'Extrême Orient, 2001). For a general overview of the judicial set-up in Pondichéry, see Marcel Thomas, *Le Conseil supérieur de Pondichéry, 1702-1820: Essai sur les institutions judiciaires de l'Inde française* (Paris: l'auteur, 1953).

³⁵ CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 86.

replace him in the post.³⁶ Governor Hébert also thought the position of a chaudrie interpreter was a plum: he allegedly bestowed it as a reward on a man who had testified against Nayiniyappa in his trial.³⁷ The influence of Tamil interpreters in the chaudrie was so pronounced that a high-ranking French official ascribed more power to the interpreters than to the French judges ostensibly making the decisions. Bertrand-François Mahé, who served in India in the 1720s, noted that money was an important factor in the operation of the chaudrie: “I don’t mean to say that the chief judge, who is a councilor, allows himself to be suborned... it isn’t [the judges], it is always the Malabar scribes [*écrivains*] who serve as interpreters, who provide their explanations in such a way that affairs will take the turn they desire, so that often without intending it, the judge is responsible for injustices.”³⁸ This comment, though pejorative, is nevertheless rare in that it acknowledges the power of interpreters to direct events. More often than not, reliance on local interpreters in the collection and creation of political, commercial, or religious knowledge by European was elided in colonial archives.³⁹

³⁶ CAOM, FM, C²/71, ff. 88 verso-89.

³⁷ This claim is made by Nayiniyappa’s sons in CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 129 verso

³⁸ Quoted in Thomas, *Le Conseil supérieur de Pondichéry*, 104.

³⁹ A well-known exception is Colin Mackenzie’s admitted reliance on his informants and interpreters in Madras. On this relationship, and its significance for the study of colonial history and historicity, see Nicholas B. Dirks, “Colonial Histories and Native Informants: Biography of an Archive,” in *Orientalism and the postcolonial predicament: perspectives on South Asia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 279-313. Dirks has elaborated on this topic recently, in Nicholas B. Dirks, “Colin Mackenzie: Autobiography of an Archive,” in *The Madras school of Orientalism: producing knowledge in colonial South India*, ed. Thomas R. Trautmann (New Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 29-47. An examination of the lives of the informants who collaborated with Mackenzie can be found in Rama Sundari Mantena, “The Kavali Brothers: Intellectual Life in Early Colonial Madras,” in *The Madras school of Orientalism: producing knowledge in colonial South India*, ed. Thomas R. Trautmann (New Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 126-150. The volume in which both articles appear offers several nuanced and insightful entries into the roles of colonial intermediaries in the production of knowledge in Madras.

Interpreting the Nayiniyappa Affair

The Nayiniyappa affair, once again, allows us to examine the explicit and implicit conflicts woven through the fabric of the young colony. Incompetent and vicious interpretation was understood by Nayiniyappa and some French and Tamil observers as the central wrongdoing of the investigation against the broker. Nayiniyappa was denied the tools to communicate his own demands and desires, or so claimed the appeals on his behalf, and linguistic barriers were erected so that he could not understand the proceedings against him. That is, the reversal in Nayiniyappa's fortunes was one that hinged on reversals in languages and communicative practices. Nayiniyappa again and again presented the denial of language as an act of violence, one that stripped him of his humanity by "stealing his language, his ears, his eyes, until he didn't speak at all, could understand nothing of what was said to him, and could not see what was written against him."⁴⁰ Rendered mute, deaf, and blind, this state of enforced non-communication was as much a part of Nayiniyappa's punishment as the public flogging, the confiscation of wealth, or the long imprisonment.

Nayiniyappa's outrage at the silence and incomprehension imposed on him during his trial stems from the striking difference between his position as a go-between prior to his fall from grace, and that in which he found himself in the course of his investigation. As both a chaudrie interpreter and as the company's head broker, Nayiniyappa had made his fortune and his reputation due to his ability to communicate information. He was

⁴⁰ "Il était réservé à la vengeance du sieur Hébert de violer toutes sortes de droits, et d'ôter à l'accusé sa langue, ses oreilles, ses yeux, afin qu'il ne parlât point, qu'il n'entendit point ce qu'on lui dirait, et qu'il ne vît point ce qu'on écrivait contre lui." CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 255. This heart-rending lament calls to mind the litigants in medieval Marseille described by Daniel Smail; they, like Nayiniyappa, were intent on utilizing the legal arena for the display of individual emotion. Daniel Lord Smail, *The Consumption of Justice: Emotions, Publicity, and Legal Culture in Marseille, 1264-1423*, Conjunctions of religion & power in the medieval past (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

accustomed to moving fluently between Tamil and Portuguese, conferring with South Indian rulers on behalf of the French government, firmly negotiating terms of trade with Pondichéry's merchants or laborers, giving loud orders to the members of his household or speaking to large crowds of the poor receiving his largesse. His life was a noisy, productive symphony of overlapping yet comprehensible speech. How different were the months he spent locked up in a prison cell at Pondichéry's Fort St. Louis. Which would have been worse – the long hours of imposed and solitary silence, when he was not allowed to speak even to his guards, or the incomprehensible babble of French in the interrogation room, where he must have been all too aware that the impenetrable noise was the sound of his fate being sealed?

The problem of interpretation in the Nayiniyappa affair was an epistemological one: what are the proper and just conditions for actionable knowledge? Language and communication are situated so centrally in the appeals on behalf of Nayiniyappa precisely because as a professional go-between, his whole career had been devoted to solving this thorny problem. The problem French *colons* faced in the early, unstable days of the colony was how to obtain reliable information upon which to act, and how to communicate with the colony's population in the most effective way. Catechists, brokers and other interpreters offered a solution to the vexing problem of a communicative gap, selectively dispensing information to further both their own agendas and those of their employers. Yet after years of addressing this problem, it was precisely such a communicative gap, argued Nayiniyappa and his supporters, that was intentionally and cruelly deployed against him in the course of the affair.

According to Nayiniyappa and his sons, there were four central problems pertaining to communication in the proceedings of his trial. First, although Nayiniyappa and Governor Hébert, who served as his interrogator, had for many years shared Portuguese as a common language, the services of a French-speaking Tamil interpreter were used. Hébert posed his question in French, and Nayiniyappa was required to answer in Tamil, so they could not understand each other directly. Second, Nayiniyappa was not confronted and allowed to speak with the witnesses who had testified against him, as was required by French legal procedure. Third, his repeated requests for a lawyer well-versed in French language and law were denied. And finally, Nayiniyappa was compelled to sign his name to documents in French, without receiving adequate explanation of their contents.

One of Nayiniyappa's appeals appears in the archives accompanied by its Portuguese original, while the other offers only the French text.⁴¹ The issue of the French co-authorship of Nayiniyappa's appeal is obscured in the text, but other sources reveal that the man who helped in the creation of these documents was a Company trader named Morandière, who was actually one of the councilmen who originally convicted Nayiniyappa.⁴² Morandière, who had been pressured by Hébert into a guilty verdict (see discussion below), became the unacknowledged French voice behind Nayiniyappa and his associates' calls for justice. Thus, even as Nayiniyappa was claiming that translated

⁴¹ The 1716 Portuguese appeal is held at CAOM, FM, C²/70, ff. 155-166. The French translation of this text is at CAOM, FM, C²/70, ff. 200-207 verso. Nayiniyappa's 1717 appeal is at CAOM, FM, C²/70, ff. 251-256.

⁴² Morandière was first "outed" as author-translator of the appeals submitted by Indians in a letter written by Hébert in January 14, 1719 by his adversary Hébert. CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 255 verso. In a letter written just 10 days later to the Directors in Paris, Morandière acknowledged his role in the writing of the appeals of 1717, submitted by Nayiniyappa, his brother-in-law Tiruvangadan, and his business associate Ramanada, and specifically discusses how he shaped and improved earlier appeals. CAOM, FM C²/71 ff. 54-65. Hébert also accused his arch-rival, Dulivier (the man who served as Governor upon Hébert's return to India) of having an authorial role in the Indians' appeals. CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 260.

communication was suspect, he and Morandière were involved in an authorial strategy that relied on occluding the act of translation and mediation.

The Interpreter: Manuel Geganis at the Crossroads

Nayiniyappa was brought before Hébert for questioning on seven different occasions during the course of his 1716 investigation. An interpreter was used every time: the man preferred for the job was the Tamil Christian Manuel Geganis, who served as interpreter for five of those sessions. Manuel's position in the colony and his actions in the course of the investigation and later sheds light on the powerful role interpreters could fill. He also calls attention to the densely populated field of Tamil agendas and ambitions which remain in the margins of the French archive. Finally, his personal history highlights the special role of Jesuits in Pondichéry as brokers of behind-the-scenes power. Manuel's personal history, as an employee of both the Jesuits and the French trading Company, further highlights the recurring struggles between these two groups. The Nayiniyappa affair tested Manuel's attempts to fill a role in rival institutions, by bringing him to the center of the stage in a way not often seen as regards interpreters.⁴³

It was Manuel Geganis' parentage that drew the most attention from commentators on the Nayiniyappa affair. His father, Moutiappa, was the head catechist employed by the Jesuits in Pondichéry. In fact, rarely was Manuel mentioned without the preceding identifier "son of the Jesuits' catechist." His personal history was an unusual one: at a certain time (prior to the explosion of the Nayiniyappa affair) he had left India,

⁴³ In Danish Tranquebar, later in the eighteenth century, there was another example of a go-between who straddled the divide between commerce and mission. Daniel Pullei, a Christian who was broker and chief interpreter to the Danish East India Company, had been educated in a missionary school and had served the missionaries before becoming translator to the Danish Governor in 1760. Leibau, "Country Priests, Catechists, and Schoolmasters as Cultural, Religious, and Social Middlemen in the Context of the Tranquebar Mission.," 86.

and traveled to France with one of the missionaries, spending ten years in the metropole (his journey there is discussed in greater detail in the following chapter). As a foreigner in France, Manuel would have had to learn how to speak French quickly, if he was to communicate with anyone other than his missionary employer. By the time he served as the interpreter in Nayiniyappa's investigation, he was already a fluent speaker, though by his own admission he could not read French.⁴⁴ The fact that he had traveled to the metropole, spoke French fluently, was employed by Pondichéry's government as an interpreter, and had close, familial ties to the Jesuit mission through his father, put Manuel Geganis in a special position at the intersection of different streams of knowledge and information in the colony.

Moving as he did between the colony's religious and secular institutions, employed by powerful Frenchmen in various positions, Manuel Geganis must have amassed significant power and influence. In Nayiniyappa's third interrogation, the broker claimed that the general lack of gentile residents in town around 1715 was the fault of the catechist's son: Nayiniyappa argued that Manuel had shown such preferential treatment to Christians, that gentile Malabars were reluctant to base themselves in Pondichéry. Whether or not the claim had merit, Manuel was a man of enough significance for Nayiniyappa to assign him the blame for the issue that most concerned the colony's government, namely, retaining skilled workers and merchants in the town.⁴⁵ More importantly, argued Nayiniyappa and his supporters, Manuel's relationship with the Jesuits rendered him absolutely unsuitable as an interpreter, as his commitment to the Jesuit agenda deprived him of objectivity.

⁴⁴ CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 293 verso.

⁴⁵ CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 252 verso.

In 1718 Manuel Geganis was questioned by a commission appointed by the King to re-investigate Nayiniyappa's conviction, and gave a lengthy testimony on his involvement in the affair, submitted in both French and Tamil.⁴⁶ By his own account, his official involvement in the affair dates to the very first moments after Nayiniyappa's imprisonment. On February 13, 1716, when Nayiniyappa was first taken to the Fort as a prisoner, Manuel was already on the spot – perhaps by mere chance, perhaps the Jesuits had sent him there, knowing that his services would be needed. Governor Hébert summoned him a few moments after Nayiniyappa was brought in, “and sent me to tell the Jesuits that he had put his plan into execution.” Finding the Jesuits assembled together in their house, Manuel conveyed Hébert's message. After speaking amongst themselves for a quarter of an hour, they told Manuel that Governor Hébert “was a great man who had a lot of spirit, and knew what he was doing, and he could therefore do no better than to consult his [Hébert's] own opinion in the present affair.”⁴⁷

Two or three days later Manuel was again summoned by Hébert, who gave him three palm leaf manuscripts (*olles* in the French text, *olai* in Tamil) which had been taken from Nayiniyappa's house, and that Manuel then translated into French (presumably dictating them to a French scribe, as by his own admission Manuel could not write or read in French).⁴⁸ These translations were handed over to Hébert's son, who pronounced

⁴⁶ Manuel's statement is cited here from CAOM, FM, C²/71, ff. 293 verso-294 verso. The same text is also reproduced in C²/71, ff. 82, as well as C²/71, ff. 156.

⁴⁷ “Le 13 Février 1716 j'étais dans le Fort, lorsque Nanyapa fut emprisonné, un moment après Monsieur Hébert Général me fit appeler, et me dit d'aller de sa part, dire aux Pères Jésuites, qu'il avait mis à exécution son projet; j'y allai, et je trouvai tous les Pères assembles ensemble, je m'acquittai de ma commission, les Pères restèrent un quart d'heure à parler entre eux, et me dirent ensuite, Monsieur le Général est un grand homme, qui a beaucoup d'esprit, et qui sait ce qu'il à faire, il ne peut prendre de meilleur conseil que de lui-même dans l'affaire présente.” CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 293 verso.

⁴⁸ Writing on palm leaves remained a common form for Tamil writing until the end of the nineteenth century. See Stuart H. Blackburn, *Print, folklore, and nationalism in colonial South India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2006), 21–23.

them unsatisfactory. Since Hébert fils could not read Tamil, this judgment could not have been a critique of the exactitude of Manuel's version as compared with the original. Rather, the content was not the sought-after information. Instead of seeking out different documents, Hébert's son, taking a more pragmatic view of the art of translation, ordered Manuel to take the *olles* to the Jesuit Father Turpin, who was proficient in Tamil, and have him translate the documents again. In due course Turpin translated other Tamil documents for the Héberts.⁴⁹

Thus a veritable translation factory was put into place, its workings revealed in Manuel Geganis' testimony. Nayiniyappa's official investigation took place in Fort St. Louis, in broad daylight. At the same time, at night and in the more distant Malabar neighborhoods, a parallel shadow process was taking place. "I know that at night, Pedro, the new Malabar modeliar, had Malabars brought to his house to testify against Nayiniyappa," admitted Manuel. "Xaveri Moutou [likely the Christian who had been appointed co-broker with Nayiniyappa in 1714] and other scribes wrote these depositions on olles, which in the morning were sent to me, along with the witnesses who had made these declarations... I then took the olles to Father Turpin, who translated them into French. I am not sure the translation was accurate, because I never read them, and I don't read French."⁵⁰

Although Manuel tried to downplay his own initiative in the production of these documents, other accounts make it clear that he was more than a mere document mule.

⁴⁹ CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 293 verso.

⁵⁰ "Je sais que pendant les nuits, Pedro Modeliar, nouveau Courtier de la Compagnie, faisait venir chez lui des Malabars pour faire des dépositions contre Nanyapa; Xaveri Mouttou, et autres écrivains, écrivaient sur des olles les dépositions; on m'envoyait le matin lesdites olles, avec les personnes qui avoient déposé, je ne puis assurer, si ces Malabars qu'on m'envoyait, avoient effectivement d'eux-mêmes, et sans contrainte, fait lesdites dépositions; tout ce que je puis dire, c'est que lesdites olles n'étoient pas signées des plaignants, je les portais ainsi au Père Turpin qui les traduisait en Français, je n'assure pas que sa traduction fut fidele, parce qu'il ne me les a jamais lues, et que je ne pas lire en Français." CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 293 verso.

The witness Volderen, for example, who had originally testified against Nayiniyappa and was later questioned by the investigative commission appointed in 1718, said that it was “Geganis, son of the catechist, who told him in his room, ‘you must please the General’ [Hébert], to which he replied, ‘I cannot tell a lie.’”⁵¹

The complaint Nanniyappa made against Manuel was that his presence was completely unnecessary. Since Governor Hébert and Nayiniyappa both spoke Portuguese – and that was the language they had used during the years of their close professional association – the interrogations should have been conducted in that language, and not with Manuel interpreting between French and Tamil. Nayiniyappa and his French co-author also cited a French law from 1670, decreeing that if there is a common language shared by the accused, the judge and the witnesses, the trial will not be valid unless that shared language is used in the course of the proceedings.⁵²

Nayiniyappa’s appeals also attack Manuel as incompetent and devious. The fallen broker singled out Manuel’s supposed interpretive failings, saying that “the General and his secretary came to the interrogation along with the son of the Jesuits’ catechist, who served as interpreter: a bad interpreter of the truth.”⁵³ The problem Manuel embodied was procedural, linguistic, and moral. He should not have been there in the first place, the language he used was the wrong one, and his familial entanglement with the Jesuits made

⁵¹ “A dit que Geganis, fils du catéchiste des jésuites, lui avait dit dans sa chambre, il faut que tu fasses plaisir au Général, à quoi il avait répondu, je ne suis pas capable de dire fausseté.” FM, C²/71, f. 297 verso.

⁵² CAOM, FM, C²/70, ff. 255. The appeal cites here from Philippe Bornier’s compilation of laws, from the ordinance of 1670, article II of title 14. Philippe Bornier, *Conférences des nouvelles ordonnances de Louis XIV roy de France et de Navarre, Avec celles des rois predecesseurs de Sa Majesté, le droit écrit, & les arrests*, Nouvelle édition revue, corrigée & augmentée. (A Paris chez les associez choisis par ordre de Sa Majesté pour l’impression de ses nouvelles ordonnances. M. D C C. Avec privilege du roy, 1700).

⁵³ “On le fit venir de sa prison pour la première fois: le général et son secrétaire parurent pour l’interroger avec le fils du Catéchiste des Pères Jésuites qui servait d’interprète: mauvais interprète de la vérité.” CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 252.

him uniquely unqualified to transmit accurate information about Nayiniyappa, calling into question the validity of the knowledge he supplied.

Manuel himself made a curious statement about the quality of his performance as an interpreter. When he was questioned in 1718 about some details regarding witness testimonies, Manuel said he could not answer the question; since Hébert had told him that if he ever spoke to anyone of the details of what had transpired in Nayiniyappa's interrogations he would be punished, he chose not to pay close attention to the proceedings. This way he ensured he would not have any sensitive information to divulge.⁵⁴ He thus claimed to be an interpreter who made a deliberate effort not to listen. Manuel's claim should not be taken at face value. It seems highly unlikely that as the sole interpreter, and one with such a deep personal investment in the case, he could have worked mechanically, transmitting information without paying attention to the contents. But what his claim reveals is precisely the threat posed by the presence of an interpreter: that by paying close attention, he is able to manipulate the events and acquire potentially dangerous knowledge. By trying to minimize his own presence in the process of interrogation, Manuel was responding to such anxieties, and offering implicit commentary on the inherent dangers of being an interpreter – the man who knows too much.

Although Manuel Geganis was the central interpreter in the case, with a role that extended beyond the interrogation room, he was not the only one. On two occasions, when Manuel was not available, Hébert used the services of a French lieutenant in the Pondichéry garrison named Cordier. Cordier, the son of a councilor on Pondichéry's

⁵⁴ CAOM, FM, C²/71, ff. 292 verso-293.

superior council, had been born in India.⁵⁵ But his native-born status did not translate, it appears, into a fluency in Tamil. In 1718, when Cordier was questioned by the commission reviewing Nayiniyappa's conviction, he made a surprising revelation. Cordier testified that "Hébert held a paper in his hand, and told [Cordier] what he must say to Nayiniyappa. Hébert used the Portuguese language, and [Cordier] also spoke Portuguese to Nayiniyappa, who responded in the same language, and that [Cordier] then repeated Nayiniyappa's response to Hébert."⁵⁶

Cordier, clearly, was not so much an interpreter as a buffer: he did little more than repeat Hébert's words, which were already understood by the Portuguese-speaking Nayiniyappa, and then repeated the same act for Nayiniyappa's response – merely transmitting through another voice what had already been heard by the Portuguese-speaking Hébert. Cordier's evidence bolsters Nayiniyappa's claim that the sole purpose of using an interpreter was to engender willful miscomprehension. Hébert's commitment to avoiding direct communication with Nayiniyappa was so complete, that he preferred to use a puppet-interpreter, a place holder of contrived distance, rather than talk to and with Nayiniyappa and acknowledge the long history of understanding the two men shared.

Nayiniyappa's sons mentioned in their narrative of the affair only one occasion on which Hébert spoke to Nayiniyappa directly in Portuguese in the course of his incarceration. One day, Hébert and his son came to Nayiniyappa's cell, claimed the sons. They made him a stark offer: if he were to pay them 2,000 pagodas, his freedom would be restored to him. The crucial point is that this offer was made in Portuguese, and

⁵⁵ For mentions of Cordier and his biography, see CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 292 verso and CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 82. Cordier the elder arrived in India as a *sous-marchand* in 1686, and was the chief official of a small French presence in Caveripatam (Kaveripakkam). Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des Indes Orientales et François Martin*, 252.

⁵⁶ CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 292 verso.

without the services of the interpreter.⁵⁷ The joint language which had been conveniently forgotten in an attempt to assert the “Frenchness” of Hébert’s regime was suddenly restored, and the path of direct communication tantalizingly – albeit briefly – reopened. This clandestine visit (if it indeed took place) also calls attention to the risks of using an interpreter: the interpreter leaves a trace, and, as Manuel’s testimony demonstrates, can act as a witness. Secret negotiations are thus made vulnerable if an interpreter is involved.

Witnesses and Lawyers: In Search of Proper Procedure

Hébert’s refusal to use Portuguese in his communication with Nayiniyappa was not the only procedural complaint made by the imprisoned broker. The extensive document production operation run by Manuel, the new chief broker Pedro and the Jesuits resulted in dozens of testimonies against Nayiniyappa. These witnesses were then brought before the French authorities, so that their complaints could be filed in a formal way, and they were questioned by Hébert. However, a crucial stage in the deposition of these witnesses should have been a confrontation with Nayiniyappa, wherein the accused would have had a chance to make his case vis-à-vis each accusation, and the witness made to claim ownership of the charge made. This procedure was routinely performed in cases heard before the Sovereign Council, and was not limited to French colonists – the confrontation process was regularly granted to Tamil defendants.⁵⁸ The only time witnesses were brought before Nayiniyappa, according to his own account, was during his seventh and last interrogation. But even then the witnesses were not allowed to speak

⁵⁷ CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 110 verso.

⁵⁸ On French criminal procedure, see Arlette Lebigre, *Les Institutions de l’Ancien régime* (Paris: les Cours de droit, 1976). More generally, for a recent review of the quickly growing field of early modern French legal history, see Michael Breen, “Law, Society, and the State in Early Modern France,” *Journal of Modern History* 83, no. 2 (June 2011): 346-386.

to him directly, but instead “spoke very quietly with the judge.”⁵⁹ Many of the witnesses who had testified in 1716 against Nayiniyappa withdrew their accusations when they were questioned again in the re-investigation of the affair in 1718. It is quite possible that they had initially testified against Nayiniyappa because the powerful man had fallen out of favor, and then reversed their accounts when the winds again changed. But the grounds on which they withdrew their testimonies were procedural, as recounted by Nayiniyappa’s sons, claiming among other things that they had been “brought only once, or at most twice, before Hébert, and most of them never saw Nanyapa.”⁶⁰

Another complaint made by Nayiniyappa was that his requests for a lawyer were repeatedly denied. Describing himself as “a man of this land’s countryside” (not an adequate or honest description, considering he had spent his life in commercial, urban and cosmopolitan centers like Madras and Pondichéry), Nayiniyappa claimed that that he was not familiar with the intricacies of French law.⁶¹ Elsewhere he distinguished between two modes of miscomprehension, saying that he did not understand “the language or the law.”⁶² The problem he identified was not simply one of linguistic misunderstanding created by the use of Portuguese, but a misunderstanding of code, of the legal jargon and conventions to which he was made subject. A lawyer (*avocat* or *procureur*) would defend his rights, and could explain to him the contents of the documents in the case. Nayiniyappa further explained that a lawyer would fill three distinct roles: he “who would know the language, could instruct him in the formality of the law, and could help

⁵⁹ CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 253 verso.

⁶⁰ CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 299.

⁶¹ CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 202.

⁶² CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 252 verso.

him prove his innocence.”⁶³ The request for a lawyer calls attention to the paradoxical situation in which Nayiniyappa found himself: denied the freedom to speak, the interpreter was in desperate need of an interpreter. Removed from the commercial sphere where his expertise was celebrated, this middleman was in need of his own middleman. The man who had been a partner to the highest authorities in Pondichéry could not even argue for his own innocence. However, the demand was refused, and on one occasion Nayiniyappa was allegedly beaten when he again asked for legal help.⁶⁴

But are we to accept Nayiniyappa’s claim that he was a complete legal innocent, that without a lawyer he found himself completely lost in a forest of unfamiliar regulations? His personal history and some of his statements run counter to these claims. For instance, when describing his own punishment, Nayiniyappa concluded: “This is what was done to the head of the Malabars, a man honored by his nation for such a considerable post, who had lived with honor in Pondichéry for 43 years under the laws of His Majesty.”⁶⁵ Here the broker reminded his audience that he had spent a long life under the auspices of the very same laws of which he now purported to have no knowledge, thereby undermining one of his central claims. Even more significant is his tenure as an interpreter in the *chaudrie*, where the law was an amalgamation of common local law and French imports, and where he must have picked up some knowledge of French law.

Furthermore, Nayiniyappa’s demands for proper procedures imply the existence of some ideal and uniform French law. In reality, however, litigants and defendants in metropolitan France during the Old Regime might have found themselves just as

⁶³ “Dans cet état il crut qu’on ne lui pouvait pas refuser un conseil, un avocat ou un procureur qui saurait la langue, qui ferait instruit des formalités et des lois, et qui pourrait aider son innocence.” CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 252.

⁶⁴ CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 254.

⁶⁵ CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 254.

confused as Nayiniyappa because, as Voltaire noted with typical pithiness, “a man travelling in this country changes laws almost as often as he changes horses.”⁶⁶

The Signature: A Perverted Sign

Signatures played an important role in the Nayiniyappa affair, most often discussed as signs of questionable and deceptive authority. The confounding use of signatures was an issue not only for Nayiniyappa, who centered much of his appeals on untrustworthy acts of signing, but also for Tamil witnesses and the French judges who had signed Nayiniyappa’s sentence. The discussion of signatures and acts of signing in the Nayiniyappa affair reveals the semiotic instability of an interpreted world.

In the course of Nayiniyappa’s interrogations, Hébert’s secretary, a man named Le Roux, kept a record in French of the course of questioning. At the conclusion of each interrogation, Nayiniyappa was required to sign his name, in Tamil, to the French document. According to his own account, Nayiniyappa repeatedly asked that these documents be fully explained to him before he signed them. This was verified by Manuel Geganis’ testimony, in which he recalled that Nayiniyappa had asked for a “word by word” explanation of the documents he was asked to sign. However, the only answer he was given was that the documents contained nothing but his own responses.⁶⁷

The practice of putting Tamil signatures to French documents was very much the norm in Pondichéry. Whenever literate Tamil witnesses or defendants were heard in cases brought before the sovereign council, they were asked to sign the French documents recording their hearing. The French records scrupulously documented this

⁶⁶ Quoted in Suzanne Desan, “‘War between Brothers and Sisters’: Inheritance Law and Gender Politics in Revolutionary France,” *French Historical Studies* 20, no. 4 (October 1, 1997): 602.

⁶⁷ CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 294.

stage in the proceedings, stating that the interpreter in each case had carefully explained the contents of the text before it was signed by the witness.⁶⁸ Nayiniyappa's complaint, then, did not stem from the semiotic discrepancy between the French source and the Tamil authorization of it; the problem was that the text was not explained to him in full before he was asked to sign his name in approval of its accuracy.⁶⁹

Why did Nayiniyappa sign the documents – including the one declaring his own guilt – if he was not allowed access to their contents? He supplied two different explanations of this act. First, he claimed that whenever he expressed his qualms about signing, Governor Hébert exploded in rage, on one occasion “roaring in French and slandering and confronting him.”⁷⁰ Not only did Hébert himself forcefully demanded that Nayiniyappa sign, but elsewhere the broker claimed that when he refused to sign, Hébert, his son and the interpreter Manuel Geganis “all fell into a furious rage.”⁷¹ Beyond the pressure exerted on him, Nayiniyappa explained that another reason he acquiesced was that the thought that Hébert would try to frame him by using his own signature never even entered his mind. The idea that “a Catholic and Christian judge” such a Hébert would ask him to sign a false document was inconceivable, wrote Nayiniyappa.⁷² Manuel and Hébert's son also reassured him that he had nothing to fear in signing, and could do so without any qualms. Frightened and intimidated, he concluded that he had few choices. “[H]e was presented with a paper written in the French language; he knew well

⁶⁸ See the dossiers held in CAOM, INDE, Série M.

⁶⁹ That said, the Nayiniyappa affair was not the only case heard by Pondichéry's Sovereign Council in which Tamil witnesses deposed by the council claimed that they had signed documents in French without understanding their contents. In a case heard in 1729, regarding the forging of Tamil receipts, the Brahman Vingayen testified that only after he had signed a certain French document, was it read to him. CAOM, INDE, Série M 25.

⁷⁰ CAOM, FM, C²/70 f. 202.

⁷¹ CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 252 verso.

⁷² CAOM, FM, C²/70 f. 202.

that it was his own condemnation,” but also knew that it was futile to resist, “with the Governor so passionate and driven by his ambition.”⁷³ Resolved to his fate, Nayiniyappa “signed the paper while lifting his eyes to the heavens asking for justice” – having despaired, presumably, from finding such justice on earth.⁷⁴

When witnesses who had testified against Nayiniyappa were re-questioned two years later, many of them also claimed that they had signed their depositions without knowing their contents. The sons summarized these questionings, writing that “every single witness stated that his testimony had not been explained or read to him... that when someone made some resistance or refused to sign, he was threatened... if something was written in their presence, they did not know what it was... and when the witnesses or Nanyapa asked that something be read or explained to them, this was refused.”⁷⁵

Various methods were employed to persuade the witnesses into signing the papers put before them. Some witnesses said that they did so out of fear, worried that Hébert would take vengeance upon them if they did not comply. Some might have been tempted by the potential benefits of getting on Hébert’s good side (like the man mentioned earlier, who was given the post of chaudrie interpreter in gratitude for his testimony). The choice between the two options – punishment or perk – was starkly presented on one occasion,

⁷³ “lui fit signer en un papier qu’il lui présenta en langue française, ledit Naynappa voyait bien que c’était sa condamnation, mais aussi il savait que de répugner il ne lui servait pas de plus d’utilité que de lui faire de nouveaux affronts, et aussi de ce que ses clameurs et réequipements ne seraient pas écoutés en aucune façon, pour être M. le général fort passionné et possédé d’ambition.” CAOM, FM, C²/70 f. 205 verso.

⁷⁴ “Le Général, son fils, l’interprète, tous se mirent dans une colère furieuse; et l’accusé se voyant troublé et désorienté (porte le manifeste) signa ce papier en levant les yeux au ciel et demandant justice.” CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 252 verso.

⁷⁵ “Il résulte de la nouvelle instruction faite de l’arrêt de conseil du 7 février 1718 qu’il n’y a pas un seul témoin de l’information faite par sieur Hébert qui n’ait déclaré qu’on ne lui a ni lu ni expliqué ce qu’on lui a fait signer... que quand quelqu’un fait quelque résistance, ou refus de signer, on l’a menacé... que si l’on a écrit quelque chose en leur présence, ils n’ont pas su ce qu’on écrivait... que quand les témoins ou Nanyapa ont demandé qu’on leur lût ou qu’on leur expliquât ce qu’on leur présenter à signer, on l’a refusé.” CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 299.

according to Nayiniyappa's sons. The new chief broker Pedro told a group of potential witnesses that if they testified they would receive 24 pagodas as compensation, but if they refused they would be given 24 lashes of the whip.⁷⁶ Other witnesses might have been convinced by Hébert's claim that since everyone else had signed, they might as well sign as well. According to Nayiniyappa's sons, Hébert told the witnesses: "your friends all signed this, you must sign this."⁷⁷

Several witnesses tried to avoid such a devaluing of their signatures by claiming that they did not know how to write.⁷⁸ The witness Andiapen, for instance, admitted to making such a claim. Andiapen also testified that while the documents pertaining to his deposition made it appear as if he had come to the fort three times - once for inquiry, a second time for *recollement*, and a third time for a confrontation with Nayiniyappa - he was only called in one time.⁷⁹ Again, the documents' ability to accurately reflect reality is

⁷⁶ CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 296 verso.

⁷⁷ CAOM, FM, C²/71, ff. 295.

⁷⁸ In so doing, these witnesses were likely trying to protect their reputation within a broad Indian field of attestation, where promissory notes commonly known as hundis were accepted or denied based on the recipient's recognition of the validity of the style and form of the note, based on personal experience of previous notes. By signing a document they believed to be false, the witnesses would have been jeopardizing their future reliability, and by extension their credit. Such a concern would have been validated, for a French writer in 1756, reflecting on the difficulty of the French in obtaining credit - both literal and moral - claimed that lingering memories of the Nayiniyappa affair "discredited the French in Pondichéry." Duval d'Espreménil, "*Sur le Crédit de la Nation dans l'Inde*," quoted in Manning, *Fortunes a Faire*, 147. For a description of the Hundi system, see F.s. Martin and L. Varadarajan, *India in the 17th century, 1670-1694 (social, economic, and political): memoirs of François Martin* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1981), vol. 1, appendix 2. See also Lakshmi Subramanian, *Indigenous capital and imperial expansion: Bombay, Surat, and the West Coast* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996). Originally cited in Claude Markovits, Jacques Pouchepadass, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750-1950* (Delhi; Bangalore: Permanent Black; Distributed by Orient Longman, 2003), 5. For a critical evaluation of the system, focusing on recent usage but providing historical background, see Marina Martin, "Hundi/Hawala: The Problem of Definition," *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 4 (July 1, 2009): 909-937. Bhavani Raman has suggested that British actions regarding practices of attestation played a crucial role in the formation of the colonial state. In "The Making of Credible Evidence: Forgery, Perjury, and the Attestation of Documents" (chapter IV of her dissertation, below) Raman argues that in nineteenth-century Madras, the outlawing of indigenous forms of attestation and creating "new forms of credible evidence" was a technology that enhanced the colonial regime's power. Raman, "Document Raj: Scribes and Writing under Early Colonial Rule in Madras, 1771-1860," 235.

⁷⁹ CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 296.

here called into question. Such a falsification of official documents threatened the very ability to act with purpose, and to trust that certain actions (here, the act of putting your name to a text) will produce certain results (an unbreakable tie between the signed document and the actor who signed it).

The witnesses and Nayiniyappa alike never claimed that the signatures were not made by their own hand. Rather, what they questioned was the value of that signature as a mark of authentication, and as grounds on which to act. The issue is one of semiotic integrity: a signature is an index of both presence and intention. A signature makes the claim “I was here,” and the accompanying statement “I agree.”⁸⁰ While presence was not called into question (that is, none of the signers claimed that it was not their physical body that originated the signature), intention posed more of a problem. When witnesses claimed that they had signed their name only because Hébert threatened them, or promised to reward them, their signatures lost their power as marks of verification. Hébert’s crime, in this regard, was one of semiotic perversion. As Nayiniyappa’s sons argued, Hébert and his secretary “abused the signatures of these Malabars.”⁸¹ In a world where there were few shared signs between French authorities and the local population – signs like language, modes of doing business, rites of religious practice – the manipulation of a signature’s meaning only accentuated the semiotic cacophony.

But while it was a central claim of the appeals made by Nayiniyappa and on his behalf that witnesses were not able to understand the documents they signed, this

⁸⁰ As Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak has suggested in her study of European medieval practices of seal usage, “there is a symbiotic relationship between human presence and representation, one in which representation matches real presence, and second in that the written text is an embodiment of its author and articulates a notion of authenticity revolving around authority and identity.” Bedos-Rezak, *Medieval identity*, 1489–1490.

⁸¹ “ainsi ces deux Messieurs abousaient de la signature de ces malabars.”CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 108.

statement should be questioned. Was it really the case that the documents remained completely indecipherable to those who signed them? This argument would be completely persuasive only if the written form was the only mode of communication utilized in the course of questioning. It appears much more likely that the combination of interpreted oral communication and the gestures and tone used by Hébert would have made it quite clear that, whatever the specific content of each piece of paper might have been, the mood in general was distinctly anti-Nayiniyappa. A case in point is the interrogation of Ramanada, one of Nayiniyappa's business associates. Hébert repeatedly asked Ramanada to admit that he had undertaken a certain action on behalf of Nayiniyappa's orders. Ramanada denied this again and again, which prompted Hébert to fly into a rage and call Ramanada a liar.⁸² Immediately following this, the secretary Le Roux drew together a document for Ramanada to sign. When he refused to do so, Hébert threatened him repeatedly. When describing this episode, Manuel Geganis concluded by saying that he and Ramanada signed the document "without either of us knowing what it was we had been made to sign."⁸³ This claim seems farfetched, since Hébert's anger and threats must have made the nature of the document quite clear. The unspoken cues were resolutely denied and ignored, at least retroactively, and only the explicit text of the interaction is given a hearing, so as to make a stronger argument about the denial of comprehension. Here we see how claims for miscomprehension and lack of communication can be just as productive as complete understanding. The witnesses here

⁸² CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 294 verso.

⁸³ "Après tout cela, on lui dit de signer un papier que le sieur le Roux avait écrit, il [Ramanada] refusa de le faire, disant ne savoir pas ce que c'était, Monsieur le Général le menaça de lui en faire autant qu'à Nanyapa, s'il ne signait ledit papier, il le signa et moi aussi, sans que nous sachions ni l'un ni l'autre ce qu'on nous a fait signer; voila tout dont je me souviens, si l'on m'interroge sur l'autre chose, peut-être que la mémoire me reviendra." CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 294 verso.

might have been engaged in a form of willful and intentional misunderstanding, just as the French questioners were trying to create an environment of indecipherably foreign noise. But neither side was precisely falling short in its communicative strategies. Instead, these are examples of the creative, productive uses of “failed” communication and semiosis.

Misunderstanding in a French-Speaking World

Misunderstanding – willful or unintentional – was by no means limited to exchanges between Tamil and French speaking actors. Both the French judges who signed Nayiniyappa’s sentencing and the directors of the Company in Paris argued that communication in the course of the affair was complicated by various obstacles. For Nayiniyappa’s judges – all councilors on Pondichéry’s Superior Council – the problem stemmed from the murmured, whispered manner in which Hébert chose to communicate with them, speaking softly in their ear, and thus preventing them from participating in an inclusive discussion. For the Company’s Parisian directors, it was geographical distance and the subsequent lack of the physical presence of documents which engendered miscomprehension. Paradoxically, then, both distance and proximity proved problematic for complete understanding.

Several Tamil witnesses testified that they had been intimidated into making accusations against Nayiniyappa. French members of the Superior Council – who were some of the most powerful and influential men in the colony – made similar claims. Besides Hébert and his son, four other councilors served as judges in the Nayiniyappa affair: Flacourt, Lorme, Morandière, and Legou. When they were questioned in the course of the re-investigation of the affair, it was revealed that they had favored a much

milder punishment for Nayiniyappa than the one advocated by Hébert. Flacourt admitted that he did not agree with the sentencing, and when he was asked why he agreed to sign it he explained: “seeing the others sign, he had signed out of fear of causing problems for himself with Hébert.”⁸⁴ Just like the Tamil witnesses, Flacourt provided two explanations: first, he was intimidated by Hébert; and second, he was just following the crowd. Other judges, Morandière and Lorme, made similar admissions. After acknowledging that they did not agree with the sentence proposed by Hébert, they said that they nonetheless signed it, because they believed that this was the wish of the majority of the judges.

Since three of these four judges had been opposed to the harsh sentencing of Nayiniyappa, how could they have thought that they were following the majority opinion by going along with Hébert’s wishes? The question arises even more forcefully, when we take into consideration the accounts that one of the judges, Legou, clearly and loudly voiced his disagreement with the sentence proposed by Hébert. However, Hébert found an effective physical solution to this problem: rather than speaking with all the judges together, he addressed each of them separately, asking for their opinion in a low voice. Thus, even in a room shared by French-speaking men, comprehension could be muddled, and a whisper served the same goal as an unfamiliar language. Not knowing that they in fact were in agreement with one another (or so they at least claimed after the fact), the judges were more easily intimidated into complying with Hébert’s wishes. This information calls into question any facile assumptions about the distribution of power in the colony, regarding who had the power to intimidate and who could be intimidated.

⁸⁴ CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 299.

Given the proper conditions – which here included lack of open conversation – French councilors could be as easily intimidated as the Tamil witnesses.

French judges in the colony were confused by murmured and whispered communication, by bodies coming too close together for transparency. French Directors of the *Compagnie des Indes* in Paris also found themselves confused, but for them the problem was one of distance, not of proximity. The Directors did not benefit from the physical presence of the documents in the case, and were obliged to wait for as long as two years for a response to their letters to arrive from Pondichéry. The Directors found themselves in an informational limbo: much like Nayiniyappa, they were aware that something was going on, but were not allowed to fully comprehend all the details. The perils of miscomprehension were thus not limited to interactions across different languages, but also across geographical space, with distance as much a barrier as language.

Beyond its official correspondence with the French employees in Pondichéry, the Directors in Paris were contacted by various actors with knowledge of the Nayiniyappa affair, who wrote against the actions taken by Hébert and the Jesuits. A veritable documentary parade arrived in Paris, penned by Frenchmen in Pondichéry, including the trader Cuperly and the MEP missionary Tessier, who all agreed, according to the Company Directors, that “the procedure was the most irregular ever undertaken in a foreign language.”⁸⁵ The Directors also noted that when the merchants of St. Malo sent their appeal calling for Nayiniyappa’s release and Hébert’s dismissal, the Malouins supported their complaint with “various letters and certificates.”⁸⁶ The Company then

⁸⁵ “la procédure est des plus irrégulier que jamais a été faite en langue étrangère” CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 12.

⁸⁶ CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 12 verso.

admitted that when it composed its reply to the St. Malo merchants, it was sorely disadvantaged by not having the full documentation necessary – namely, a copy of all the records of Nayiniyappa’s trial. To rectify this situation, the Company requested that all the documents of Nayiniyappa’s investigation and trial be sent to it “by the first ship other than the one which will carry M. Hébert [back to France].⁸⁷ Clearly, the Directors were eager to gain access to the documents; but they were also worried about the ability of these documents to properly reflect reality. By voicing their concern that Hébert not be allowed to travel on the same ship that carried the documents, the Directors revealed a belief that documents were not fixed or communication immutable. In fact, the further away such documentary evidence traveled from its point of origin – in this case, making the long sea journey from India to France – the more likely it was that its semiotic integrity be compromised. Yet since such voyages were the only mean by which documents from Pondichéry could arrive in Paris, *all* knowledge gathered by the directors would necessarily be in danger of such muddling.

The testimonies by both French councilors who signed off on Nayiniyappa’s sentencing (having misunderstood one another’s intent) and the Directors of the Company in Paris (befuddled by goings-on in the far away colony, lacking the necessary documentary evidence) serve as an important reminder: misunderstanding and miscommunication were common among Frenchmen involved in the life of the colony, and not only between Frenchmen and Malabars. Communicative strategies of denial, obfuscation, and clarification could be used to great effect by actors in both colony and metropole. Professional intermediaries such as commercial brokers and catechists were able to use these strategies, and walk the communicative gap not only between French

⁸⁷ CAOM, FM, C²/71, f. 12 verso.

and Tamil, but also between the agendas and communicative methods of commercial and religious projects.

Chapter VI

Intermediaries on the Move: Mobility, Stability and the Foreign Condition

Introduction

Nayiniyappa was already dead when his eldest son, Guruvappa, made his way to Paris in an attempt to reclaim his father's reputation and riches. In the metropolitan capital Guruvappa encountered tremendous success, was baptized with the Regent of France serving as his godfather, and admitted into a French noble order. When he returned to India after his successful journey, he was made Pondichéry's chief commercial broker and *chef des malabars*, filling the post that had been taken from his father. But Guruvappa's triumphant trip to Paris is but one example an intermediary on the move.

A colony begins with a journey, made by settlers. But all too often colonial histories have focused on the mobility of colonial settlers, while paying less attention to the travels of other agents in the colony.¹ In Pondichéry, Tamil men employed by French traders and missionaries as professional go-betweens enjoyed uncommon opportunities to travel in India, across the Indian Ocean, and between India and France. This chapter examines both the mobility of local intermediaries and French reliance on this mobility. I

¹ For a representative example, see S.H. Clark's introduction to *Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit*, where he refers to colonists as belonging to "the mobile culture". S.H. Clark, *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit* (London; New York New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999). Mary Louise Pratt, in her definition of "contact zones", similarly refers to colonizers and colonized, or travelers and 'travelees'", a formulation that opposes the condition of being colonized to the act of traveling. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 7.

advance two related arguments. First, the concomitant presence of mobility and stability in the lives of colonial intermediaries helps explain the oversized role these men filled in Pondichéry's development in the first decades of the eighteenth century. I examine in detail some of the specific journeys undertaken by several of Pondichéry's commercial and religious intermediaries. Such journeys reveal that these Indian employees had the contacts, experience and ability to act as avatars for their French employers in far-flung locations, using their portable connections and skills, while also deploying travel to improve their own social position. I show that the mobility of go-betweens, their ability to move with relative freedom between ports, markets and associations was, perhaps paradoxically, enabled by their stability and relative enmeshment in long-standing social structures. In the lives of intermediaries, mobility and stability were mutually constitutive. Being known – as a neighbor, relative, creditor, co-religionist – opened up pathways of travel, making go-betweens accepted visitors. At the same time, the benefits accrued from traveling on behalf of French employers bolstered the position of go-betweens in their communities of origin. Movement was not only a physical practice in space, but could also contribute to movement of a different kind, up the social scale. Mobility and stability, coming together in the personal histories of Pondichéry's intermediaries, allowed intermediaries to participate in the constitution of a relationship between India and France. In the course of such voyages they wove together French empire, creating a world where Paris and Pondichéry jostled one against the other.

The second argument advanced here stems from an examination of French approaches and reactions to the fact of intermediaries' capacity for mobility. I suggest that the mobility of professional go-betweens provided yet another field in which the

divisions between French commercial and missionary projects could be identified and enacted. Traders-administrators and missionaries alike heavily relied on their intermediaries, since they were similarly hampered by their position as foreigners. For both traders and missionaries, travel was a crucial activity if their mission was to succeed.² For traders, this meant movement inland in India, in order to purchase the goods with which to fill the holds of ships heading back to France, as well as travel from port to port across the Indian Ocean, buying and selling as they went. European traders' lack of reputation, credit and history in the trading associations of the Indian Ocean were a major setback, limiting their ability to act effectively in new markets and deepening their reliance on local commercial brokers. For missionaries, journeying was physical, a demanding move away from the more Christianized coast to the "pagan" hinterland, where souls were not quite waiting to be harvested. But it was also a spiritual journey, since while they demanded that their converts undertake an epistemological shift from one set of practices and beliefs to another, they simultaneously traversed a similar path themselves. In so doing, they relied on their catechists to negotiate this unknown physical and spiritual terrain, with each Jesuit missionary employing as many as a dozen catechists. For both traders and missionaries, employing Indian intermediaries to act on their behalf, going where they were not known or welcome, offered a way to move their agendas while staying in place.

However, I suggest that French traders and officials of the *Compagnie des Indes* were willing to accept this dependence, which aligned with their general preference for

² This was not a uniquely French expectation: as Ines Županov has recently suggested, Europeans in India experienced and constructed "mobility as constitutive of expatriate life." Ines G. Zupanov, "'The Wheel of Torments': Mobility and Redemption in Portuguese Colonial India (Sixteenth Century)," in *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Cambridge UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 74.

sustaining the networks along which merchandise profitably flowed. French Jesuits, on the other hand, while they were reliant on their catechists to act on their behalf in towns and villages where European missionaries would not have been welcome, were often resentful of this dependence, and their conflicts with catechists demonstrated a desire to venture out without the mediation of their employees.

Taken together, the travels of professional intermediaries and French reactions to such voyages demonstrate that the initial voyage that created a colony was rendered meaningful by subsequent travel, by journeys and itineraries that cemented and complicated the connections and relationships between the various outposts of empire.

Mobility in France, Mobility in South India

Over the past several decades, scholars of both pre-modern India and Old Regime France have overturned perceptions of these societies as static realms, with a peasantry strictly bonded to a geographically restricted existence. Rather, historians have increasingly highlighted the opportunities of early modern Europeans and South Asians alike to travel outside their natal communities.³ In the Indian context, a recent work has

³ For a review of the *annaliste* tendency to occlude mobility in the study of French history, see the special issue of *French Historical Studies* devoted to mobility, especially Carla Hesse and Peter Sahlins, "Introduction," *French Historical Studies* 29, no. 3 (July 1, 2006): 347-357. Two influential works in the growing field of French mobility studies are Collins, "Geographic and Social Mobility in Early-Modern France." Daniel Roche, *Humeurs vagabondes: De la circulation des hommes et de l'utilite des voyages* (Paris: Fayard, 2003). Participating in the same field of analysis is Peter Sahlins, *Unnaturally French: foreign citizens in the Old Regime and after* (Cornell University Press, 2004), which attempts to demonstrate that immigration is not only a modern phenomenon. For a work that similarly attempts to overturn the assumption of stability in pre-modern South Asian history, see the introduction to Markovits, Pouchepadass, and Subrahmanyam, *Society and circulation*. David Ludden has offered useful reflections on the need to dis-attach the study of mobility in South Asia (and more generally, Asia) from the boundaries of modern nation-states, such that the territorial aspirations of the nation-state do not obscure the realities of earlier boundary crossings. David Ludden, "History Outside Civilisation and the Mobility of South Asia," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 17, no. 1 (June 1994): 1-23; David Ludden, "Presidential Address: Maps in the Mind and the Mobility of Asia," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 4 (November 1, 2003): 1057-1078. In South India more specifically, the mobility of agrarian and urban workers has been the subject of much debate, for examples see the discussion of the occupational mobility of weavers in Chapter 2. The study of mobility in South Asia also draws on the rich scholarship of Indian

suggested the category of “circulation” might adequately capture the vibrant exchange of goods, people and ideas.⁴ In the French context, a recent project devoted to the study of mobility has suggested that while “the abstract notion of mobility”⁵ as a category of analysis and state action only emerged in the French Revolution, the possibility for studying mobility, the movement of people through space, came into being early in the eighteenth century, following the emergence of instruments of the state used to track and observe individuals and populations (passports, identity cards, surveys on migration, registries of vagabonds).⁶ However, in the same project, the essays devoted to the eighteenth century are all firmly based in metropolitan France, thereby marginalizing the import of the concurrent overseas projects for the practice and early modern cognizance of mobility.⁷ Even as Sahlins and Hesse admit that Paris has been too privileged in studies of mobility,⁸ the very same tendency is reinscribed. This crucial link between mobility and imperial settings and horizons has been trenchantly highlighted in a recent volume, yet with an emphasis on the “high” imperialism of the nineteenth century.⁹

My focus on the category and practice of mobility in an early colonial context suggests that at the same time that metropolitan French men and women were enjoying increasing opportunities for mobile existence, the French actors who might have seemed to embody the epitome of mobility – those who travelled across the seas in pursuit of

Ocean networks, which has long emphasized the circulation and exchange that kept such networks vital and profitable.

⁴ Markovits, Pouchepadass, and Subrahmanyam, *Society and circulation*.

⁵ Vincent Denis, “The Invention of Mobility and the History of the State,” *French Historical Studies* 29, no. 3 (July 1, 2006): 360.

⁶ Denis, “The Invention of Mobility and the History of the State.”

⁷ The three essays are *Ibid.*; Stéphane Van Damme, “‘The World Is Too Large’: Philosophical Mobility and Urban Space in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Paris,” *French Historical Studies* 29, no. 3 (July 1, 2006): 379-406; Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire, “The Universal Republic of the Freemasons and the Culture of Mobility in the Enlightenment,” *French Historical Studies* 29, no. 3 (July 1, 2006): 407-431.

⁸ Hesse and Sahlins, “Introduction,” 357.

⁹ Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette M. Burton, *Moving subjects: gender, mobility, and intimacy in an age of global empire* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

commercial and religious agendas – were in fact forced to come to terms with the limits of and strictures to their own mobility. As the next section will demonstrate, colonial administrators and missionaries had a well-articulated vision of French projects as cosmopolitan and of transregional global reach. But this vision was undermined by the reality of Frenchmen’s limited ability to make room for themselves in these locales. Their position in Pondichéry was such that it was often their local intermediaries who were better situated to move from town to town, port to port, in the furtherance of this vision. Actors in Pondichéry, French and indigenous alike, were acting within a framework that encompassed multiple global and transregional networks, tying together the Indian Ocean, Asia, and the European metropole. Intermediaries nimbly traversed these multiple physical and imaginative pathways.

The focus on the place of mobile practices in the interactions between French missionaries and traders and their Tamil employees is further meant to draw attention to the very physical, embodied and non-ideational aspects of movement in space. As Stephen Greenblatt has suggested, this literal, physical aspect of mobility is a prerequisite for the cultural mobility of ideas, practices, and metaphors.¹⁰ In Pondichéry, this chapter demonstrates, professional intermediaries took full advantage of such opportunities. It was the contradiction between French ambition and French possibilities that led colonists

¹⁰ Stephen Greenblatt, *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* (Cambridge UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 250. Along similar lines, James Collins has pointed out that the physical (or as he terms it, geographical) mobility of historical agents is a condition for their social advancement. Collins has persuasively demonstrated that early modern Frenchmen and women, including peasants, had ties to market economies that allowed them a fair measure of mobility, such that “[s]ocial mobility was a direct function of geographic mobility.” Collins, “Geographic and Social Mobility in Early-Modern France,” 563. A similar point is made by Sahlins and Hesse, who insist on the links between “movement and social mobility,” and suggest that the slogan of a research agenda devoted to the theme of mobility should be “*il faut bouger pour monter*.” Hesse and Sahlins, “Introduction,” 356.

pursuing both commercial and religious agendas to rely so heavily on the physical transportability of the go-betweens who could travel on their behalf.

Imagining a Cosmopolitan Pondichéry

French and Indian actors who came together at Pondichéry's founding imagined it as city that should and could become diverse and cosmopolitan, a location that would be both port of departure and point of destination. In fact, they were convinced that only as a diverse, cosmopolitan city would Pondichéry have any chance of success. A proclamation issued in Pondichéry in 1708, on behalf of the Company's board of Directors, proclaimed in Tamil, French and Portuguese that merchants of every nation were welcome and encouraged to pursue commerce in Pondichéry.¹¹ On the occasions when Indian merchants could be persuaded to resettle in Pondichéry, French officials were anxious to make sure they would stay there, and assist the colony in creating regional connections.¹² Governor Dulivier, writing in 1714 to the Directors in Paris, was eager to bolster Pondichéry's prospects with such help. "A little time ago three merchants, more considerable than have ever settled in Pondichéry, came to live here," he wrote. "We brought them here in order to commence some commerce involving the sending of a little ship to Queda; they have apparently sent one to Legou. These are small beginnings that could have auspicious outcomes," he concluded optimistically.¹³

The French leaders of Pondichéry might have looked to other Indian cities when constructing this image of an ideally cosmopolitan town, with the commercial benefits

¹¹ Société de l'Histoire de l'Inde Française, *Procès-verbaux des délibérations du Conseil Supérieur de Pondichéry*, vol. 1, 46.

¹² For the endurance of such regional connections, Bhaswati Bhattacharya, Gita Dharampal-Frick, and Jos Gommans, "Spatial and Temporal Continuities of Merchant Networks in South Asia and the Indian Ocean (1500-2000)," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 50, no. 2 (June 2007): 91-105.

¹³ CAOM, FM C²/69, f. 90.

that such diversity could bestow. The French Jesuit Guy Tachard, who wrote an account of his journeys in the Indies late in the seventeenth century, was especially impressed by Surat, a port city in Gujarat, on the west coast of India. Describing Surat, Tachard admiringly wrote: “a more beautiful, richer and grander city of commerce I’ve not seen in the Indies, not even excepting Batavia or Goa.” Batavia and Goa, Tachard admitted, might have been better fortified and situated, but “one regularly sees [there] only Portuguese or Dutch ships. But in Surat, the city, the port and the roads are full of foreigners. It is a pleasant and inexpensive distraction, to a man newly disembarked, who has known only Europeans, to see this procession of men in the port and in the streets, of whom the dress and manners are as different as their languages.”¹⁴ The beauty of multiculturalism is explicitly linked to its commercial consequences: the variety of ships in port, the multitude of goods, the opening up of foreign ports (and this in the observation of a missionary, not a trader!). Not only were French colonists eager to create a city that would draw merchants and inhabitants from various locales – this was also a stated desire of local Indian rulers. In 1690, when Ram Raja (the Maratha ruler Rajaram) promised the French Governor Martin his support for the French colony, he stipulated that the French must in turn create an inclusive city, where all will be protected and treated well.¹⁵

¹⁴ “Je ne m’étendrai point à faire la description de Surate, parce que plusieurs relations imprimées en parlant dans un si grand détail qu’on ne peut rien y ajouter. Je dirais seulement que c’est la plus belle, la plus riche et la plus grande ville de commerce que j’aie vue dans les Indes, je n’en excepte ni Batavia ni Goa. Car dans ces deux dernières qui sont à la vérité mieux située et plus régulièrement fortifiées, on ne voit ordinairement que des vaisseaux Portugais ou hollandais. Mais à Surate, la ville, le port et la rade sont pleins d’étrangers. C’est un agréable divertissement et a peu de frais à un homme nouvellement débarqué qui n’a connu que des Européens, de voir ce concours prodigieux d’hommes sur le port et dans les rues, dont l’habit et les manières sont aussi différent que le langage.” BNF, Manuscrits français 19030, ff. 184 verso-185.

¹⁵ CAOM, Inde, série B, file #1.

French insistence on attracting Indian merchants needs to be understood in light of the regional and maritime pathways along which trade was conducted in the Indian Ocean. As newly-arrived players in a long-established field of commercial and confessional relationships, the French were at a distinct disadvantage.¹⁶ Employing Indian brokers, who were accepted participants in these pre-existing networks, was a way for French empire to find a place for itself in the region. Services provided by go-betweens were especially desirable in light of French ambitions for the region. The French overseas project had as an explicit goal the creation of French connections among outposts in Asia, encompassing the projects of both French traders and missionaries. French ships touched at ports in present-day Thailand, Indonesia, China and India, and although the distances between nodes of French presence were vast, the archives indicate that Frenchmen in the East repeatedly came upon one another. When the Jesuit Father Tachard arrived in Pondichéry, following a lengthy trip through the Indies that he undertook after being forced to flee the court of Siam, he was delighted to meet in the colony several of the Jesuits who had been his companions in the Siamese Court: of the 13 missionaries he had left in Siam, three were in Pondichéry (one other missionary found his way to the French outpost in Chandernagore, Bengal).¹⁷

A key component of French imperial strategy in the Indian Ocean was the founding of French colonies in Ile Bourbon and Ile de France (respectively present-day

¹⁶ For commercial reliance on centuries-long connections between communities across the Indian Ocean, see K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and civilisation in the Indian Ocean: an economic history from the rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Janet.L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European hegemony: the world system A.D. 1250-1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). For a recent and cogent review of maritime Indian Ocean scholarship, see Sebastian R. Prange, "Scholars and the Sea: A Historiography of the Indian Ocean," *History Compass* 6, no. 5 (September 1, 2008): 1382-1393.

¹⁷ BNF, Manuscrits français 19030, f. 148

Réunion and Mauritius).¹⁸ An unidentified French writer noted that Pondichéry's success or failure was irrevocably tied up with the state of other French interests in the region.

“Commerce in the Indies, by its nature as well as the current state of affairs, is connected to the operations of government, and the administration of our colonies and our factories in the Eastern seas is connected to the commerce of the Indies. In order to guarantee this commerce we must have a fulcrum in this region.” An example of the crucial interconnectivity of Indian Ocean presence was the case of Ile de France. “As long as we possess this important island, the door of the Indies will be open to us; if we lose this island, the door of the Indies will close forever”¹⁹.

But French desire for continuous presence and influence across the Indian Ocean region was thwarted at times. Where French officials imagined a spectrum of similarity, made coherent and cohesive by virtue of French governance, the reality of Indian Ocean dissimilarities was an unwelcome reminder of the fragility of this imperial imaginary. Here was another instance where the Directors in Paris were impervious to the complexities of local affiliations, of which Pondichéry's traders and officials were more keenly aware. When the Parisian Directors requested in 1719 that “a dozen young Christian Malabar girls, capable of spinning cotton” be sent to the Company's colony in Ile de Bourbon, the Pondichéry council had to explain that this was no simple matter, and

¹⁸ A survey of France's Indian Ocean island colonies lies beyond the scope of this work. A wonderful study of Mauritius' early history is Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Mauritius*. For an overview of early Réunion, see Daniel Vaxelaire, *Le grand livre de l'histoire de La Réunion*. (Sainte-Clotilde de La Réunion: Orphie, 1999). A discussion of French strategy in the region, albeit one that focuses exclusively of commercial dimensions, is Manning, *Fortunes a Faire*.

¹⁹ “le commerce des Indes, par sa nature, et par l'état actuel des choses, est lié aux opérations du gouvernement, et que l'administration de nos colonies et de nos comptoirs dans les mers orientales est liée au commerce des Indes. Pour assurer ce commerce il faut que nous ayons dans ces mers un point d'appui; Nous le trouvons dans l'Isle de France. Tant que nous posséderont cette Isle importante, la porte des Indes nous sera ouverte; si nous perdons cette colonie, la porte des Indes nous est fermée pour jamais.” AN, Ancien régime séries administrative, M/1026, “Observations sur l'Etablissement d'une nouvelle Compagnie des Indes”. ff. 4-5.

that complying with the Company's request would undoubtedly lead to violence and dire consequences.²⁰

Pondichéry was a nodal point for French empire in the East, sending and receiving news, personnel and goods. Pondichéry not only maintained close commercial and administrative ties with the island colonies in the Indian Ocean, but also with other French outposts in Indian subcontinent. The French Company made a concerted effort to cast a broad geographic web in India, founding satellite trading posts (*comptoirs*) to the colony in Pondichéry in Karikal, Yanaon, Mahé and Chandernagore, and lodges in Surat and Masulipatam. The *comptoirs* each had their own governing councils, but these were under the authority and supervision of the Superior Council of Pondichéry. When the Governor of Pondichéry Beauvillier de Courchant wrote the Parisian Directors in 1724 about the difficulty of retaining good French employees, he cast his eyes over the entirety of French presence in the Indian Ocean when taking stock of the situation: "We can easily find people capable of keeping the books, knowledgeable of fabrics, etc. But nothing is more rare than those who are capable of providing important services... like we have here [in Pondichéry] in M. Dumas, M. Desforges in Ile Bourbon, and M. Bourgault in Bengale."²¹

Being Paranguis

It was the condition of being a stranger that plagued French traders and missionaries, and compromised their ability to make their global vision a reality. Being a foreigner had clear disadvantages for the projects of commerce and conversion alike. For

²⁰ CAOM, FM C²/72, f. 10 verso.

²¹ "on peut assez facilement trouver des gens capables de tenir les livres, d'être garde magasins, de connaître les toiles etc.; mais rien n'est plus rare que ceux qui sont capables de rendre de grands services, d'avoir de grandes vues et justes, de savoir ménager les esprits, tel qu'est ici M. Dumas, M. Desforges à l'île Bourbon, et M. Bourgault en Bengale." CAOM, FM C²/73, f. 17 verso.

traders, being unknown meant lacking the reputation and credit that facilitated commercial exchange. Georges Roques, who arrived in India in the seventeenth century as an agent of the French Company and traded in Gujarat, was clearly bitter about the limitations imposed on trade by the condition of foreignness, and even more upset about the solution: the hiring of a local intermediary to serve as his commercial broker.²² Nevertheless, Roques advised fellow traders that a local broker was an absolute necessity: “whatever reputation and credit you might possess, nobody will deal with you unless you have a private broker. This is the custom of the country. You have to follow it and choose one... Hence, let us choose one and then close our eyes!”²³ Such a broker, explained Roques, was necessary to guarantee the promises made by a trader, thereby serving as a financial and social doppelganger, offering the security a foreigner would always be hard-pressed to supply. In return for his payment (two percent of all transactions, whether buying or selling, according to Roques) the broker assumed the risk to his own reputation, and thereby endangered all future business opportunities. For if a European trader reneged on a promise, finding himself unexpectedly short of cash, he had the option of setting sail and disappearing. His broker/doppelganger, on the other hand, had ties that were harder to break, and that is what enabled him to vouchsafe the transaction – he would be the one to pay the price of its failure. Roques recognized that

²² Roques’ seventeenth century treatise on trade in India was first published in 1996, as Georges Roques, *La manière de négocier aux Indes, 1676-1691*: *la Compagnie des Indes et l’art du commerce*, ed. Valérie Bérinstain (Paris: Ecole française d’Extrême Orient; Maisonneuve & Larose, 1996). The manuscript, titled *La manière de négocier dans les Indes orientales dédié à mes amis et confrères les engagés de la Royale Compagnie de France*, can be found at BNF, Manuscrits français 14614. For more on Roques, and a translation of portions of the manuscript, see Indrani Ray, “Of Trade and Traders in the Seventeenth-century India: An Unpublished French Memoir by Georges Roques” and “The Trade and Traders in Ahmedabad in Late Seventeenth Century: Extracts from Georges Roques’ MSS,” in Indrani Ray, *The French East India Company and the Trade of the Indian Ocean: A Collection of Essays* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1999).

²³ *Ibid.*, 33.

the service the commercial broker provides is not merely – or even mostly – a financial one. A trader might have all the capital in the world, but still lack a reputation, one forged out of familiarity and a history of successful joint ventures.

For French traders, the most newly-arrived among the European powers, the problem of reputation must have been especially acute, and correspondingly their dependence on local go-betweens all the more complete. A similar problem plagued the missionaries attempting to lure Indians into the fold of Christianity: they, as individuals, lacked the authority of a spiritual reputation. They were nothing more than foreigners, *paranguis*, and the salvation they promised was as questionable as the credit of their commercial counterparts. Jesuits were endlessly concerned with their low status in India, bestowed on them by virtue of being Europeans, or *Paranguis*. Father Calmette offered an etymological discussion of the term “Paranguis” in a letter of 1730. “Parangui is the name Indians initially gave to the Portuguese, and since they do not consider the different nationalities that make up our colonies, it is by this term that they designate all Europeans. Some say the word derives from *Para-Angui*, which means foreign clothes in the local language. It seems more likely that it is the word *Frangui*, which the Indians, who do not use the letter F, ordinarily pronounce with a P. Thus this word *Parangui* is nothing other than the word given to Europeans from Constantinople, and which it appears was introduced here by the Moors.”²⁴

The difficulties Jesuits encountered in India due to their *Parangui* status would have been frustrating to the missionaries, yet not unfamiliar. The global Jesuit project was, after all, premised on overcoming the hardships of being a foreigner, with the ultimate mark of success and God’s favor being martyrdom at the hands of those who

²⁴ Quoted in Vissière, *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses des jésuites de l’Inde au dix-huitième siècle*, 102.

refused to accept Jesuits into their world. The fact that Jesuits did not limit themselves to missions protected by European colonial powers (for example, their ambitious mission in China) made it all the more likely that they would be attacked as foreigners.

Intermediaries and Regional Connections

The ability of local intermediaries to forge connections outside of Pondichéry and act upon them, to the advancement of their employees' agendas, was one of the central services they provided. Intermediaries both created and bolstered their own relationships across a regional landscape, and deployed such ties on behalf of their French employers; often, the two activities were hard to distinguish. When Ananda Ranga Pillai served in the mid-eighteenth century as Pondichéry chief broker, he would receive daily reports from the *corps des marchands des malabars* and the *chefs des castes* on what had occurred in each of their districts the previous day.²⁵ By doing so, he both constituted himself as a central figure of authority in the region, and extracted information that proved his value as a go-between.

Serving as the clearing house for regional information also meant that Ananda Ranga Pillai was positioned to create commercial opportunities, drawing on wider resources than those available in the colony. Thus, when the French wanted to begin producing blue cotton in Pondichéry rather than importing it from Porto Novo, 60 kilometers away, it was Ananda Ranga Pillai who made this possible, through a series of complex political negotiations (and some strategic gift-giving) that resulted in the relocation of skilled laborers from Porto Novo to Pondichéry.²⁶ In compensation for his efforts the Superior Council of Pondichéry rewarded Ananda Ranga Pillai in such a way

²⁵ NAIP, 18th Century Documents, folder 20, ff. 11-12.

²⁶ NAIP, 18th Century Documents, folder 20, ff. 8-9.

that further strengthened his importance and influence in the region: he was given the privilege of supplying this blue cloth for ships headed for Europe, Ile de France and other places.²⁷ It is significant that Ananda Ranga Pillai provided this service to the French Company before he was appointed chief broker to the *Compagnie des Indes* in 1746; his ability to furnish such compelling evidence of his ability to manage the movement of people and goods in the region must have made it evident to French officials that here was a man who could get the job accomplished.

Ananda Ranga Pillai's daily regional reports were one example of how information could be transmitted efficiently, often ending up in the nodal points of knowledge that were filled by intermediaries. But even in cases where there was no set protocol for the transmission of information, words got around – and quickly. When the government of Pondichéry was wrested from the hands of Governor Hébert, as a consequence of his handling of the Nayiniyappa affair, it was a matter of mere days before Nayiniyappa's banished sons made their way back to the colony, eager to take advantage of the welcome shift in political power.²⁸ Thus, it was not only Indian matters that were digested as news bulletins for French ears, but the doings of the French were just as quickly disseminated and acted upon by the city's local population and the regional backdrop.

The story of Nayiniyappa's sons' banishment and subsequent return to Pondichéry also illustrates how intermediaries' acceptance in the local landscape could have more than mere commercial benefits. Being known, as Nayiniyappa's sons were, could make the difference between life and death. When Nayiniyappa was first convicted,

²⁷ NAIP, 18th Century Documents, folder 20, f. 9.

²⁸ CAOM, FM C²/71, f. 57 verso.

his sentence decreed that his entire family would be banished from Pondichéry.²⁹ Three days after their father died in his prison cell, Nayiniyappa's sons headed to the village of Naréour. But merely leaving Pondichéry, complained the sons in one of their appeals, was not enough to protect them from Hébert's wrath: "three *pions* were sent from Pondichéry to assassinate us," they claimed.³⁰ The sons' salvation from this alleged assassination attempt was based on their position in the region as men owed protection and assistance. The general of the province to which they escaped commanded the village chiefs to guard the sons day and night and assure their safety.³¹ One day, when a *pion* from Pondichéry arrived in the village, he was immediately identified as a stranger, and therefore as a threat (this is a reminder that not only Europeans were strangers in India; there are, after all, varying levels of "strangerhood"). When the man was interrogated, he could supply no satisfactory explanation for his presence in the village. In fact, it was the interconnectivity of regional knowledge that exposed him as a fraud: he claimed to be on his way to visit friends at a neighboring village, but was not able to supply their names. Finally, the man admitted he had come to see Nayiniyappa's sons. But when the sons arrived, they did not recognize the man (or rather, they recognized him as a stranger), whereupon he finally admitted that Pedro, the new head broker, had recruited him and others to kill the sons in return for cash, jewelry and lifetime employment in the service of the French Company.³² There is no way of knowing whether this alleged assassination attempt actually took place. But regardless of the story's truth status, it demonstrates the special benefits of being known, and the drawbacks of being unknown. Nayiniyappa's

²⁹ Nayiniyappa was to be banished as well, after completing a three year prison sentence, but he died while still in prison. His sons left Pondichéry three days after his death.

³⁰ CAOM, FM C²/71, f. 124.

³¹ CAOM, FM C²/71, ff. 124-124 verso

³² CAOM, FM C²/71, f.125.

sons, by virtue of their father's stature in the area, were guaranteed the protection of local leaders. When a stranger tried to breach this protective ring, his mission failed.

Pondichéry and Madras

Opportunities for French expansion, commercial or religious, was not limited to locales where Frenchmen had already achieved some semblance of hegemony, like the island colonies or the *comptoirs*. In fact, French officials viewed the British-ruled city of Madras, Pondichéry's largest neighbor, as an important hunting ground for such opportunities. Linguistic and historiographical specialization has often meant the study of Portuguese, Dutch, British, and French projects in India has been divided into separate realms of analysis, and those separate from Indian regional history. In the case of Pondichéry and Madras, this has led to one of two scholarly strategies: the cities were either examined separately, or in the context of European global national rivalry, with the two cities imagined as pawns in this larger struggle. But how would the history of Madras and Pondichéry's relationship look if it were inserted into a regional context, one that revealed both the benefits and costs that were the results of their lived proximity, and not only their strategic value in a global tussle? If a regional outlook is adopted, the two colonial cities become intimately intertwined in a variety of other ways. Pondichéry and Madras were woven together in ways that circumvented the divisions imposed by European rivalries, a fact recognized and deployed by both European and Indian agents. Once again, it was local employees, with familial and commercial connections in both cities, who allowed officials in Pondichéry to draw on this wealth of regional possibilities.

An example is the ongoing French desire for Madras's Indian merchants. Parisian Directors and Pondichéry-based traders-officials alike viewed Madras as a rich treasure trove for recruitment purposes, as members of the city's wealthy and credited merchant class were the most desired inhabitants for Pondichéry. To solve the problem of supplying merchandise to Pondichéry's ships, "there is only one solution, which is to employ every possible mean to convince the merchants of Madras, powerful and accredited, to come and settle in Pondichéry," declared the Council.³³ It was Nayiniyappa and his extended family that allowed the council to tap into this resource. Nayiniyappa himself relocated from Madras to Pondichéry as a young man, and once established there, at the urging of the French Governor, convinced his brother-in-law Tiruvangadan (a wealthy merchant in the city) to join him in the French colony.³⁴ Once Tiruvangadan moved to Pondichéry, he and Nayiniyappa worked in concert to lure a network of their associates to the French colony. "[Tiruvangadan and Nayiniyappa] wrote to their correspondents in the towns and villages of this province, who sent merchants, weavers, cloth painters and workers of all kinds of métiers and professions, and thus the colony took on a certain luster. They began to produce and paint fabrics here, and commerce opened up, by both sea and land," remembered a descendent of the two. Prior to these efforts, claimed this memoir, Pondichéry was little more than a tree-infested village, peopled only by petty shopkeepers and farmers, lacking a proper commercial class.³⁵

Tiruvangadan's network of associates in Madras – the same asset that allowed him to find shelter in the city when he was banished from Pondichéry – was precisely

³³ Pondicherry. Conseil superieur., Martineau, and Compagnie des Indes., *Correspondance du Conseil superieur de Pondichéry et de la Compagnie [des Indes]*, vol. 1, 33.

³⁴ CAOM, FM C²/70, f. 173.

³⁵ NAIP, 18th Century Documents , Folder 20, f. 2.

what made him an attractive recruit for the French, who were keen to partake of the riches made available by Tiruvangadan's regional connections, explicitly requesting him to arrange for the shipment of merchandise from various ports by using his friends.³⁶ The Pillai family's connection to Madras was by no means severed by their relocation to Pondichéry: when Tiruvangadan was arrested in the course of Nayiniyappa's trial and then banished from the French colony, it was to Madras that he returned (and there composed his first appeal to the French crown, using a French-speaking notary in Madras). According to the Pillai family memoir, when Tiruvangadan returned to Pondichéry after Nayiniyappa's exoneration, he was accompanied by the five richest merchants in Madras and their families. The merchants from Madras brought with them something more important than capital: the sought after Indian Ocean connections, so crucial if Pondichéry was to establish itself as an important trading center. As soon as these merchants were settled in the colony they began fitting out ships and sending them all around the Indian Ocean – to Manila, Aden, Moka and the eastern coast, “thus due to the intervention of my grandfather and the merchants he brought with him, commerce opened up and was linked to all ports.”³⁷

Intermediaries on the Move

French traders and missionaries both subscribed to a vision of themselves as mobile agents; but this mobility was severely circumscribed by their position in India as suspicious strangers. The following section moves to chart the mobility available to intermediaries, and examines how this mobility was deployed to enhance their status as professional go-betweens in the French colony. I examine the travels of two

³⁶ CAOM, FM C²/70, f. 173.

³⁷ NAIP, 18th Century Documents, Folder 20, f. 4

intermediaries in Pondichéry, both intimately connected with the Nayiniyappa affair. The first is Guruvappa, Nayiniyappa's eldest son; the second is Manuel Geganis, son of the Jesuits' catechist and the interpreter in Nayiniyappa's investigation. Taken together, the movements of these two men between India and France, alongside the travels of other commercial and religious intermediaries across the Indian Ocean region and within India, demonstrate that the travels performed by intermediaries enabled them to acquire and sustain the special skills and abilities that were so highly valued by French *colons* and missionaries.

Guruvappa's Travels

Guruvappa's story was an unusual one, to say the least. This son of an Indian broker undertook vast and transformative journeys – geographical, spiritual and social. Following his father's death, Guruvappa made his way to Paris, where he not only successfully petitioned for the reversal of his father's conviction, but also embraced Christianity and – most unlikely of all in this already unlikely tale – was inducted into a French order of knighthood. How did this stunning turn of events come about, from Guruvappa's banishment and attempted assassination in 1716, to his triumph in Paris in 1721?

It was Nayiniyappa's French supporters who first suggested that a representative from the family travel to France, to present the case for Nayiniyappa's exoneration in person. The earliest mention of this strategy appears in a letter written in 1718 by Denyon, a former engineer in Pondichéry who returned to Paris. Denyon, along with a man named de Sault (a relative of Hébert's rival Governor Dulivier), served as the Paris liaison for the appeals filed by the Indians before the French King. In a letter he wrote in

1718 to Tiruvangadan, Nayiniyappa's brother-in-law, Denyon argued that any effort he himself could undertake in Paris would have only limited success. "I believe that affairs that are important and of delicate consequences could not be decided in your favor and others before the departure of the ships for India; you would do well to engage Rama [Ramanada] to go to England to come here [France] and throw himself at the feet of the King."³⁸

Denyon's advice was soon acted upon (although it was not Ramanada who went, but Guruvappa). In a notarial document filed in Pondichéry in 1719, Guruvappa anticipated that this journey, and his stay in France, would prove expensive. He petitioned the Council to order the Héberts to pay his expenses, claiming that it was their evil machinations that necessitated his trip.³⁹ Leaving Pondichéry for Madras, Guruvappa embarked on a British ship that set sail for London, and from there made his way to Paris.⁴⁰ He was not arriving in the metropole as a stranger, however, for his French allies in Pondichéry had set the stage for his arrival. Father Tessier, the *missions étrangères de Paris* (MEP) missionary in Pondichéry, wrote to the directors of the MEP seminary in February of 1719, exhorting them to warmly welcome Guruvappa in their expansive rue de Bac headquarters. "I beg you, messieurs, to give this Malabar all the help you can offer him, in acknowledgment of the great services his deceased father provided to our missions here," wrote Tessier, and explained Guruvappa's mission in France.⁴¹ It appears

³⁸ Quoted in Yvonne Gaebelé, "Du nouveau sur la famille d'Ananda Ranga Poulle – Dubash de Duplex," *Revue historique de l'Inde française* 8 (1952): 129–131. "Du nouveau sur la famille d'Ananda Ranga Poulle – Dubash de Duplex" by Yvonne Robert Gaebelé, *Revue historique de l'Inde fran*, p. 129-131.

³⁹ CAOM, INDE N/61, f. 2

⁴⁰ For mention of Guruvappa's British-enabled itinerary, see CAOM, INDE N/61. ff. 1-2 and NAIP, 18th Century Documents, Folder 20, f. 3.

⁴¹ "Je vous prie, messieurs, de rendre à ce malabar tous les bons offices que vous pourrez en reconnaissance des grands services que feu son père nous a rendu ici et à tout notre missions. Nous avons beaucoup d'aumône et nous étions assurez de trouver toujours chez lui de l'argent en prêt et sans intérêt

Tessier's request was granted: when Guruvappa's widow herself wrote to the Directors of the MEP in Paris after her husband's death, she reminded them that "he had the honor of being received in your house and treated as your child."⁴²

Tessier required two things from his Parisian brethren: first, that they help Guruvappa in putting forward his claim before French officialdom; second, that they make every effort to convert Guruvappa to Christianity. "The greatest service you could give to Nainiappa's son would be to try to make him into a good Christian, and instruct him in his duties. I pray the Lord he will grant you this grace."⁴³ Presumably Tessier, close as he was to Guruvappa, attempted to bring about this conversion himself but failed. Conversion in India was difficult, but Tessier clearly hoped that a period of immersion in a Christian land might render Guruvappa more amenable. This, indeed, proved to be the case.

A search of the registers of the St. Eustache parish in Paris, where Guruvappa became a Christian, did not yield a copy of his baptismal record. Nevertheless, there are numerous reports, both from Guruvappa's own family and from French observers, that this conversion did indeed take place. On Sunday October 8, 1720, Guruvappa was presented by the directors of the MEP seminary, and baptized in the chapel of the Palais Royal. A nineteenth century account claimed that the Regent, Philippe d'Orléans, served as the godfather, and the godmother was the regent's sister, Elisabeth Charlotte.⁴⁴

pour secourir nos missions dans le besoin pressant. Son fils s'en va en France bien muni de toutes les pièces que le conseil de justice a faites contre M. Hebert. Il espère travailler officiellement à recouvrer les biens de feu son père." MEP, Lettres vol. 960, p. 115.

⁴² MEP, Lettres Vol. 992, p. 2.

⁴³ MEP, Lettres vol. 960, p. 116.

⁴⁴ Launay, *Histoire des missions de l'Inde*, vol. 1, xxxv. Launay is quoting from Jean Luquet, *Considérations sur les missions catholiques et voyage d'un missionnaire dans l'Inde* (Paris: Au bureau de l'Université catholique, 1853), 306. Luquet was an MEP missionary stationed in South India in the nineteenth century, and his book considers the history of the region. The Pillai family memoir in

Guruvappa was given a new name, one that traveled with him back to India: a 1724 registrar record from Pondichéry refers to him as “sieur Charles Philippe Louis Gourouapa.”⁴⁵

Guruvappa’s conversion was but the first of his Parisian transformations. The second, performed by *lettres patentes* of February 28, 1721, created him a *chevalier*, a knight of the French order of Saint Michel.⁴⁶ The order, founded in 1469, was initially a most prestigious honor, but its status had vastly changed by the eighteenth century, when it was regularly given to bankers, artists, members of the bourgeoisie who had performed some important service, and most pertinently, to visiting foreigners. Guruvappa would have cut a striking and unfamiliar figure – a young Indian knight – and a later French account refers to him as a man well-known in Regency Paris.⁴⁷ Back in Pondichéry, Guruvappa must have regaled his family with stories of his adventures at the metropole, and the Pillai family memoir, written late in the eighteenth century, fondly recalled how Guruvappa was “covered in honor” during his stay in France.⁴⁸ When Guruvappa’s relative, the mid-eighteenth century broker Ananda Ranga Pillai received a report of France from a Frenchman, he noted that this man’s “descriptions tallied with what we had heard before from other European gentlemen, and from Chevalier Guruva Pillai.”⁴⁹ Guruvappa’s travels, and the stories he told upon his return home, remained a benchmark of authority for all things French.

Pondichéry has the duchesse du Berry serving as the godmother. NAIP, 18th Century Documents, Folder 20, f. 3

⁴⁵ CAOM, DPPC, GR/675.

⁴⁶ Guruvappa is also referred to as a *chevalier* in multiple contemporary documents from Pondichéry.

⁴⁷ Luquet, *Considérations sur les missions catholiques et voyage d’un missionnaire dans l’Inde*, 306.

⁴⁸ NAIP, 18th Century Documents, Folder 20, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Pillai, *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai, Dubash to Joseph François Dupleix, Knight of the Order of St. Michael, and Governor of Pondichery. A Record of Matters Political, Historical, Social, and Personal, from 1736 to 1761*, vol. 1, 21.

There are other indications that Guruvappa's travels to France made a lasting impression on his relatives. In 1757, when Ananda Ranga Pillai was involved in a dispute with a senior official of the Company in India, Georges Duval de Leyreit, he wrote to complain to the current *générale de la nation*, de Soupire. After detailing a list of litanies, Ananda Ranga Pillai concluded by saying that if the matter could not be resolved promptly in India, he asked to be given permission to travel to France as soon as possible, and plead his case there.⁵⁰ Guruvappa was proposed as the explicit historical model for such a course of action. Ananda Ranga Pillai made mention of Nayiniyappa's arrest, and continued: "his son, Gourouvapapoullé, went to France to throw himself at the feet of Monseigneur the Duc d'Orléans, Regent of the Kingdom." The exoneration of Nayiniyappa and the honor bestowed on the knighted Guruvappa, continued Ananda Ranga Pillai, were matters of global renown: "all of France and all of India are familiar with this example of justice rendered unto an Indian."⁵¹

Crossing the Ocean back to India, successful in his mission of restoring his father's name and fortune, the Chevalier Charles Louis Philippe Guruvappa was appointed Pondichéry's chief broker – the post which had been his father's. Yet Guruvappa now posed a categorical conundrum: Indian or French? Pagan or Christian? Intermediary or noble? The archive reflects that these questions confounded Frenchmen in the colony for the remaining two years of Guruvappa's brief life (he died of an illness in 1724). The fact of Guruvappa's ennoblement would have been a delicate matter, since the only other knight in the colony was the Governor – now Guruvappa's employer. All French Governors of the colony, beginning with François Martin, were made knights of

⁵⁰ A letter from Ananda Ranga Pillai, dated November 17, 1757. Printed in "Enfance et Adolescence d'Ananda Rangapoullé," *Revue historique de l'état de Pondichéry* 9 (1955): 99.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

the order of *Notre dame de mont carmel et de St. Lazare de Jérusalem*.⁵² Guruvappa's confessional status was also confusing to French *colons*. According to the agreement made between the Jesuits and the Capuchins in Pondichéry, the Jesuits ministered to the Malabar Christian population, while the Capuchins were in charge of the parish for Europeans and Creoles. Guruvappa was, without a doubt, a Malabar convert. Yet, he was also a knight of the order of St. Michel, and as such was designated a member of the Capuchin parish.⁵³ After traveling to Paris Guruvappa no longer fit neatly into pre-existing categories that attempted to draw clear distinctions between colonists and Indians. There is another possible reason for the decision to attach Guruvappa to the Capucin parish: following Nayiniyappa's persecution by the Jesuits, his son surely would have been loath to submit to their religious authority, and his new liminal status made this possible.

How enduring was Guruvappa's conversion to Christianity? His widow described herself as a practicing Christian in 1726; his descendents in the nineteenth century were described by an observer as faithful Christians.⁵⁴ But French missionaries were discomfited by Guruvappa's comportment once he returned to India, nominally a Christian convert. "Upon his return to Pondichéry, Gourouappa persisted in the exterior profession of Christianity," wrote a later missionary historian, "but in his conduct, he unfortunately gave unequivocal signs of insincere faith."⁵⁵ An MEP missionary made another revealing observation about Guruvappa's post-Paris religious life: he "hardly exercised his religion," yet nevertheless he "lived in the European manner" (*il vivait à*

⁵² Two orders united in 1668.

⁵³ Luquet, *Considérations sur les missions catholiques et voyage d'un missionnaire dans l'Inde*, 307, fn. 1.

⁵⁴ For the widow Guruvappa's profession of faith, see MEP, *Lettres* Vol. 992, p. 2. For the discussion of Guruvappa's Christian descendents, see *Ibid.*, 306.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 307.

l'euro péenne).⁵⁶ Guruvappa's trip to Paris perhaps did not bring about any radical change in his religious practice, but it did make a lasting impression on his habitus.⁵⁷ When he died, the Capuchin Père Esprit de Tours signed his certificate of death.⁵⁸

Guruvappa, upon his return to Pondichéry officially an intermediary, posed a semiotic problem: he projected a confusing series of signs. With his Christian name, European clothes and stories of his triumphant trip to the center of French power, he should have been a shining example of the benefits of Christian conversion. Yet the message he gave potential converts was a mixed one, to the consternation of missionaries, as he continued to practice his former religion. Much like Nayiniyappa's distribution of rosaries to the Christian poor, Guruvappa's post-conversion behavior is an example of how shaky was the dichotomy the missionaries tried to enforce between "real" and "fake" conversion. Instead, Guruvappa added Christianity to his arsenal of religious practices, comfortably accommodating both the old and the new.⁵⁹

The Limits of a Global Imaginary: The Nayiniyappa affair and the Law Affair

Upon the death of Louis XIV in 1715, following decades of expensive wars, the French state was facing crippling debt. Phillippe d'Orléans, who was appointed Regent for the five-year old Louis XV, attempted various measures to resolve the financial crisis. In 1716, the Scottish banker John Law embarked on a series of innovations aimed at resolving the crisis, among them the formation of the *Banque Générale* (later *Banque*

⁵⁶ Ibid., 307, fn. 1. (quoting the eighteenth century missionary Mathon).

⁵⁷ Mention of Guruvappa's trip to Paris also appears in MEP, Lettres, vol. 991, pp. 783-785.

⁵⁸ H. de Closets d' Errey, *Précis chronologique de l'histoire de l'Inde française (1664-1816), suivi d'un relevé des faits marquants de l'Inde française au XIXe siècle* (Pondichéry: Librairie E. Léroux, 1934), 20.

⁵⁹ It is worth noting here that conversion to Christianity could have had adverse economic consequences in India, thereby making it prudent for Guruvappa not to appear *too* Catholic.

Royale) and reorganizing tax-farming.⁶⁰ Most relevant for the purposes of this discussion, Law founded in 1717 the *Compagnie d'Occident*, which became in 1719 the new *Compagnie Perpetuelle des Indes*, encompassing the trading ventures of both the east and west Indies. Speculation in the shares of the new Company was rampant and untenable, and the so-called “Mississippi Bubble” exploded, radically devaluing shares in the Company. While there is a vast literature on Law and the financial crises of the Old Regime, there is room for further investigation into the imperial foundations and ramifications of the bursting of the Mississippi bubble. A thorough examination of the ramifications of the Law affair on the French project in India lies beyond the scope of this work. But there is no doubt the administrators in India would have been rattled by the drastic changes which the Company was undergoing under Law, following his appointment as Controller General in 1720. The colonial uproar surrounding the Nayiniyappa affair should therefore be considered in light of these structural transformations to the edifice of French global trade. In 1724, when Guruvappa traveled to France, Law’s system had already shattered. A reprieve of Nayiniyappa, and the appointment of his son, would have been a powerful symbol of returning to the way things used to be. Nayiniyappa’s family might have come to represent a figure of stability in a rapidly-changing and upsetting landscape.

Guruvappa’s journey to Paris, his success there, and his subsequent elevation to the post of Pondichéry’s chief broker illustrate both the opportunities of intermediaries to travel among the outposts of empire, and the benefits that could be accrued by such travel. With the support of French and British accomplices, Guruvappa managed to make

⁶⁰ P.T. Hoffman, G. Postel-Vinay, and J.-L. Rosenthal, *Priceless Markets: The Political Economy of Credit in Paris, 1660-1870* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

his way to France, while his rival Governor Hébert was trapped in Pondichéry, his letters trailing Guruvappa in both speed and efficacy. Once in France, Guruvappa maintained his “exotic” appeal, while simultaneously embracing norms that would have made him better accepted. Returning to the colony, he kept the habits – in both sense of the word – that suited him, and shed those that did not. He returned to Pondichéry a force to be reckoned with, displacing the current chief broker, Pedro.

Significantly, Pedro himself was appointed to the post of chief broker, several years later, partly on the basis of experience he acquired while traveling across the Indian Ocean. When the Pondichéry Council wrote to explain to the Parisian Directors why they were adamant to retain Pedro as chief intermediary after Guruvappa’s death in 1724, it was Pedro’s maritime experience traversing the region which was highlighted.⁶¹ “Le S. Gourouapa having died last September of dropsy, we named as courtier in his place Pedro, who already was [courtier in the past],” reported the Pondichéry council. “He is wise and we were pleased with his conduct in the voyage he made to Manila on the *Soucourama* in the capacity of captain and supercargo.”⁶² Pedro’s sea voyage would have endowed him with desired commercial skills, and also would have enabled him to forge

⁶¹ Pedro was appointed chief broker after Nayiniyappa’s arrest, was removed from the post to make way for Guruvappa in 1722, but then reappointed to it in 1724. I can only hypothesize about the reasons for his dismissal, since it is not discussed in the Council’s correspondence. But it seems likely that following the reversal of Nayiniyappa’s conviction and Guruvappa’s successful trip to Paris, bestowing the post of chief broker on Nayiniyappa’s eldest son was part of the rehabilitation and reconciliation process.

⁶² “Le S. Gourouapa est mort au mois de septembre dernier d’une hydropisie, nous avons fait courtier à sa place le nommé Pedro qui la ci-devant été, il est sage et nous avons été contents de sa conduite dans le voyage qu’il a fait aux Manilles sur le *Soucourama* en qualité de capitaine et Subrécargue, nous verrons de quelle manière il servira la Compagnie, il nous a promis de le faire avec toute la vigilance et la fidélité possible, si vous l’approuvez et qu’il se conduise bien, nous le conserverons dans cet emploi.” CAOM, FM, C²/73, f. 40 verso.

personal connections in the important port of Manila (the supercargo on French voyages was always French, except on the voyage to Manila⁶³).

The highest-ranking brokers, like Guruvappa, Pedro and Ananda Ranga Pillai, all traveled in the region and beyond, thereby acquiring the connections and experience that rendered them effective brokers. But go-betweens at more humble stations were similarly mobile. A man named Arlanden, who served as the valet and broker of a French trader called Judde serves as an example of how brokers were both required and able to move about. Judde and Arlanden were implicated in a slave trafficking case, which was brought before the Pondichéry Council in 1743.⁶⁴ In the course of investigations (which resulted in the release of most of the slaves) it was revealed that Arlanden had traveled extensively throughout Tamil Nadu, abducting and ensnaring potential slaves through a network of local associates. The place origins of the enslaved revealed Arlanden's itinerary, for he captured slaves for his French employer in Tranquebar, Karikal and especially Arcot.

Commercial brokers had to establish both local and regional lines of credit and reputation, so as to draw on a wide array of commodities and ports. But travel – and its corresponding opposite, situatedness – was a central practice for the other kind of go-between examined here, the catechists. The following section will trace the movement of catechists on behalf of missionary employers.

Manuel's Travels

Guruvappa's travels to France were unusual, but not unique. It is significant that in another instance in the period where a Pondichéry native traveled to France, the man in

⁶³ Manning, *Fortunes a Faire*, 144.

⁶⁴ CAOM, INDE, série M/91

question was also a professional go-between (and like Guruvappa, the son of another go-between).⁶⁵ In addition to his employment as an interpreter for the *Compagnie des Indes*, previously discussed, there are two indications that Manuel might have been a Jesuit catechist at some point in his career, even though he is never explicitly referred to as such. First, his father Moutiappa was the head catechist in Pondichéry, and as a previous chapter has demonstrated, intermediary positions in the colony were often hereditary. Second, a Jesuit manuscript that relates the founding of the mission in Tarcolam mentions that two catechists were sent to pave the way for the Jesuits' arrival; in an unusual departure from most Jesuit writings, the catechists are mentioned by name, and one of them is referred to as Gigane – possibly Manuel Geganis.⁶⁶

Manuel's connection to the Jesuits was unusually strong, and resulted in his travel to France. The archive contains two mentions of this intriguing interlude in his life. Both appear in appeals filed as a result of Nayiniyappa's conviction, and are deployed to make the case that as a household member of the Jesuits, Manuel was not a trusted interpreter of Nayiniyappa's testimonies. In one of the appeals put forward by Nayiniyappa's sons, they mention that "the interpreter was a servant of the Jesuits, son of their catechist, and was once a valet to one of the Fathers in France, returned to India with Hébert in 1715."⁶⁷

Another appeal, presented by Ramanada, Nayiniyappa's business associate and doctor,

⁶⁵ I have found one other example from the period of an Indian traveling from Pondichéry to France. In a 1702 letter written, in French, by a young Indian convert to an unnamed Jesuit, the writer mentions seeing St. Cloud, on the outskirts of Paris, and the Notre Dame cathedral. See BNF, NAF 11168, *Rélations et lettres de Jésuites de l'Inde (1699-1740): Missions dans le Maduré Journaux de Voyages dans l'Inde par les P. Martin, Lalanne, Barbier, de Bourses [sic], de la Breville etc etc. [sic]. 1699 à 1740. Manuscrits et lettres autographes*, ff. 53-54 verso.

⁶⁶ Vanves, Fond Brotier, volume 80, f. 127

⁶⁷ "Le procès criminel est instruit dans une langue inconnue à l'accusé, l'interprète est un domestique des jésuites, fils de leur catéchiste, valet autrefois d'un de leurs pères en France, revenu aux Indes avec le sieur Hébert en 1715." CAOM, FM, C²/70, f. 254 verso. Clearly, Nayiniyappa had an interest in claiming that Manuel's return to Pondichéry was tied to Hébert's re-installment in the colony, but it is also possible the two events were unrelated.

contains a note in the margins that offers slightly more intriguing detail: “the son of the catechist is a Christian Malabar, that Father Petit took to France as his valet in 1705, and whom he presented in that kingdom as a man of quality in the Indies; he returned with M. Hébert in 1715. Since he spent almost ten years among the French, it is not surprising that this valet, who has aptitude and who is entirely devoted to the Society [of Jesus], speaks French as well as he does, having been taught [by the Jesuits].”⁶⁸

Why did Father Petit take Manuel with him to France, and keep him by his side for a decade? Surely, servants could be found in France, but were there services that only Manuel could provide, or a special connection between the two men?⁶⁹ The mention of Manuel being presented as a “man of quality in the Indies” offers a clue: a converted Indian, one of high social rank and fluent in French to boot, would have been an important fundraising tool for Jesuits, a living, breathing indication of their success in India. As the son of a Christian, Manuel probably arrived in France already a Christian (unlike Guruvappa); but on occasion Jesuit traveling companions only embraced Christianity once in the metropole, as did three “Siamese mandarins” who were baptized in Brest, according to a travel narrative by the Jesuit Superior Tachard.⁷⁰

Having spent a decade in France bestowed special status on Manuel, who was one of the few residents in the colony who could speak both French and Tamil fluently. Being

⁶⁸ “le fils de catéchiste est un Malabar chrétien que le Père Petite jésuite emmena pour son valet en France en 1705, qu’il a fait passer dans ce royaume pour un homme de qualité dans les Indes; il est revenu avec M. Hébert en 1715: de sorte qu’ayant resté près de dix années avec les français, il n’est pas surprenant que ce valet, qui a du génie et qui est dévoué entièrement à la société, parle aussi bien français qu’il fait, ayant été instruit par elle.” CAOM, FM C²/70, f. 197 verso.

⁶⁹ Unusual as was Manuel’s journey, there are other examples of Jesuits returning to France with colonial servants. In fact, Father Tachard not only took a gardener with him from Siam to Paris, but then brought this Siamese gardener with him to India. BNF, Manuscrits français 19030, f. 185. For contemporary British examples, see Michael H. Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain, 1600-1857* (Delhi: Permanent Black: Distributed by Orient Longman, 2004).

⁷⁰ BNF, Manuscrits français 19030, f. 139. See in Tachard’s narrative, 138 verso-139 verso for how these three Siamese men came to Christianity.

intimately familiar with the daily details of life in France would have been another uncommon attribute, and one that would explain how Manuel came to fill position of prominence in what were basically rival institutions: the French trading Company and the Jesuit mission.

Catechists at the Frontiers of Catholicism

Manuel's association with the missionaries took him to extraordinary distances, but all catechists traveled extensively in the course of their duties.⁷¹ Since only a handful of missionaries were responsible for a vast expanse of land surrounding Pondichéry, reliance on catechists was complete. Father Martin admitted that Father Bouchet did not have time to stay in one place for more than a few days, and relied on his catechists. The Jesuit missionaries each employed "eight, ten and sometimes a dozen Catechists, all wise men and perfectly instructed in the mysteries of our sainted religion. These Catechists precede the Fathers by several days, and predispose the people to accept the sacraments. This greatly facilitates the administrations of the missionaries."⁷²

The duties of a catechist, as they come across in the Jesuit letters, were myriad. In an exceptionally detailed and revealing description of these duties, Father Mauduit explains how crucial was the catechists' travel on behalf of the missionaries:

"A Catechist is a man whom we instruct in our mysteries, and who goes before us from village to village, to teach to others what we have taught him. He creates an exact register of those who ask to be baptized, those who may approach the sacraments, those who are at loggerheads, those who lead less than exemplary

⁷¹ The Danish Tranquebar mission provides an interesting analogous example to Manuel's global travels: Peter Maleiappen (1700-1730), who taught Tamil to the Protestant missionaries there, went with the head of the mission, Zeigenblag, to Europe in 1714-1716. Leibau, "Country Priests, Catechists, and Schoolmasters as Cultural, Religious, and Social Middlemen in the Context of the Tranquebar Mission," 87.

⁷² "Lettre du Père Martin, Missionnaire de la Compagnie de Jésus, au P. de Villette, de la Même Compagnie." Balassor, Royaume de Bengale, January 30, 1699. Jesuits., *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des missions étrangères*, vol. 1, 13.

lives, and generally the state of the place to which we send him. We arrive later, and nothing remains for us but to confirm with some instruction that which the Catechist has already taught, and carry out the functions which are proper to our ministry. From this you can understand the utility and indispensable necessity of the Catechists.”⁷³

In order to succeed, the missionaries depended on the advance force of the catechists to prepare the field and render the foreign familiar for the missionaries. In their attempt to stake out a position of power and authority, the Jesuits drew on the intelligence gathered by the catechists, and repeated instruction already undertaken by their employees. What this description does not explicitly state is that in order to succeed in their missions, catechists had to be accepted visitors in the villages they scouted, and that a warm welcome for the Jesuits themselves was by no means assured.

The very founding of new Jesuit missions proved to be more successful if undertaken by catechists rather than missionaries. The founding of the Tarcolam mission demonstrates how little missionaries had to do with venturing into new territories, depending instead on catechists to travel in their stead. The manuscript, by Jesuit Superior Jean-Venant Bouchet, recounts the history of the mission’s founding and shows how such projects could be a local, community-led effort.⁷⁴ The mission was the initiative of a young Indian man, Ajarapen, who converted to Christianity, and then convinced the Jesuit Father Mauduit to start a mission in his hometown of Tarcolam. Ajarapen’s story is one in which the oscillating forces of mobility and stability (moving away from one’s place of origin but retaining the ability to come back home) are the central narrative forces. “Eight or nine years ago a young boy born in the town of

⁷³ “Lettre du P. Mauduit, missionnaire de la compagnie de Jésus, au P. Le Gobien, de la même ompagnie.” Pouleour, les Indes Orientales, September 29, 1700. Ibid., vol. 1, 41–42.

⁷⁴ Vanves, Fond Brotier, volume 80, ff. 124-161.

Tarcolam left his parents and traveled to several places in these parts,” recounts the manuscript. “During his voyages to the coasts he was baptized and resolved himself to return to his land to see if his relatives, who were all idolaters, were still alive.”⁷⁵ The Coast here figures as a transformative and liminal space: a young boy goes to the water’s edge, immerses himself in the new practices borne over the seas, and then carries droplets of the coast back with him to his place of birth. Yet this watery transformation adheres to the bodies of converts and, later, catechists – not missionaries, who are not effective carriers for this change.

Although Ajarapen is not explicitly labeled a catechist, he is described as working as an assistant to Father Mauduit (presumably in Pondichéry, where Mauduit was stationed). When Father Bouchet, the Jesuit superior, arrived in the village, it was only after Ajarapen had prepared the ground for a one-day visit by Father Mauduit, and several catechists had already been sent to the village.⁷⁶ Ajarapen’s work was especially successful, for when he told his family stories about his guru, a relative offered to donate a plot of land on which the Jesuit mission could be built. When village opinion coalesced against this decision, it was not on religious grounds, but rather based on the fact that the missionaries were strangers (*gens inconnus*).⁷⁷ Father Bouchet believed the reason the potential donor was reconsidering his gift was because it had been revealed the missionaries were *paranguis*, European, and this paranguism was their undoing: “experience having already taught me several times that our missionaries were always

⁷⁵ “Il y a environs huit ou neuf ans qu’un jeune enfant né dans la ville de Tarcolam quitta ses parents et alla en plusieurs endroits des ces terres. Dans le voyages qu’il faisait de tous côtes il reçut le baptême et résolu enfin de retourner dans son pais pour voir si ses parents qui étaient tous idolâtres, étaient encore en vie.” Vanves, Fond Brotier, volume 80, ff. 124-124 verso.

⁷⁶ Vanves, Fond Brotier, volume 80, ff. 125-127 verso.

⁷⁷ Jesuit Archives at Vanves, Fond Brotier, volume 80, ff. 128 verso.

well-received before there was any suspicion that they were Europeans, but as soon as they were recognized [as Europeans], they were shamefully chased away, or they were treated with scorn.” On this occasion, Bouchet surmised, it was traders who had spent time on the coast who recognized the missionaries as Europeans, and hurt their chances in the village.⁷⁸ Knowledge acquired at the coast again proved pivotal. The Jesuits here remind us that contact was not merely an occurrence of so-called contact zones, but seeped deep inland.⁷⁹

Word traveled quickly, not only from the coast inland, but between neighboring villages. This was what most concerned Jesuits about their possible failure in Tarcolam: fail there, and their chances in the entire region would be severely compromised, their reputation sullied beyond repair. Word of mouth was what first gave them a chance at Tarcolam (as the convert Ajarpen talked them up), but word of mouth would also be their downfall, if they were branded as Europeans. As Bouchet admitted, “if we left here with infamy [attached to us], we would not easily find an occasion to return; word would spread to the surrounding tribes.”⁸⁰ Ultimately, the Jesuits were given the land for their mission at Tarcolam, but never admitted they were Europeans.⁸¹

Jesuit attitudes toward the travels of catechists oscillated between two poles: reliance and resentment. Scarcity of missionaries, the vastness of the mission field and the unlikelihood of Jesuits being welcome and respected visitors, all made it a mission

⁷⁸ “L’expérience m’a déjà appris plusieurs fois que dans les endroits où nos missionnaires ont été tous bien reçus avant qu’ont soupçonna d’être européens, dès qu’on a commencé à les connaître pour tels, on les a chassés honteusement, ou on les a traités avec mépris.” Jesuit Archives at Vanves, Fond Brotier, volume 80, ff. 130 verso-131.

⁷⁹ I refer here to Mary Louise Pratt’s formulation of “contact zones”. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*.

⁸⁰ “Si nous sortons d’ici avec infamie nous ne trouverons plus aisément l’occasion d’y retourner; le bruit même s’en répandra dans les peuplades voisines.” Vanves, Fond Brotier, volume 80, f. 131 verso.

⁸¹ Vanves, Fond Brotier, volume 80, ff.146 verso-147.

imperative that catechists travel on behalf of missionaries. Yet the ability of catechists to insinuate themselves into communities of potential converts meant that catechists took an outsized role in the life and direction of the mission, becoming stand-ins for the missionaries and thereby rendering the missionaries dispensable. For catechists, on the other hand, the opportunity to travel away from Pondichéry, an enclave of tenuous European authority, offered a chance to exercise these powers. In Pondichéry, it must have been clearer that the Jesuits were in charge and the catechists their employees. But what of a place like Tarcolam, where the Jesuits had to hide in order to further their cause? There the distribution of authority between Jesuits and catechists was even less clear-cut than in the colony. With Jesuits forced to stay behind, while catechists advanced in space as they advanced their cause, relations between the two groups of men were strained.

A Catechist Rebellion and the Cost of Being a Stranger

Even in India, Jesuit missionaries by no means limited themselves to the relatively safe European enclaves on the Coast. But once away from European-run colonies, Jesuit often lost their footing, in potentially dangerous ways. Such was the experience of Father Bouchet, who was later to become the Jesuit superior in Pondichéry, while he was stationed in the Indian city of Madurai. Bouchet was the target of an attack orchestrated by three of his own catechists, as described in a long letter by Father Pierre Martin.⁸² This catechist rebellion took explicit advantage of Bouchet's status in the city not merely as a foreigner, but a lowly subset of a foreigner – a *parangui*. The tale began

⁸² "Lettre du Père Pierre Martin, missionnaire de la compagnie de Jésus, au Père Le Gobien de la même compagnie." Aour, Madurai, December 11, 1700. Jesuits., *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des missions étrangères*, vol. 6, 107–228.

with the dismissal of the three catechists from Bouchet's services, since they had "forgetten the sanctity of their office, [and] caused great scandals." Yet rather than benefiting from the "sage advice" that they received from the missionaries and reforming their ways, they chose to throw off their "mask," became apostates and applied their talents to the task of ruining the missionaries and the mission.⁸³

In rising up against the Jesuits, it is possible that the catechists were influenced by public opinion. In one of the Jesuit letters, it is revealed that non-Christian Indians considered the catechists to be mistreated and misled by the missionaries. A prince who held a group of catechists in prison addressed them by saying: "You who are of the same caste as I am, why do you dishonor yourselves by following these strangers?" When one of the catechists responded that they have found the path to eternal happiness in heaven, the Prince laughed out loud. "What other happiness is there but that of this world? I, for one, know no other. Your Gurus deceive you."⁸⁴ It is noteworthy that the catechists were mocked for following strangers; the Jesuit ongoing attempts to belong were clearly not met with success.

The rebel-catechists made three accusations against the missionaries, which they brought before the local Prince. First, they claimed that the Jesuits were *paranguis*, those "infamous" and "abominable" people "reviled by all." Second, that despite their long-standing presence in the region, the Jesuits have never paid tribute to the prince; and third, that they had murdered a member of another order.⁸⁵ This set of accusations accomplished much work in very economic means. The first one is successful in its very

⁸³ Ibid., vol. 6, 131.

⁸⁴ "Lettre du Père Martin, missionnaire de la compagnie de Jésus, au Père de Villette de la même compagnie." Ibid., vol. 13, 65.

⁸⁵ Ibid., vol. 6, 132–133.

truth: the missionaries *were* Europeans. To be denounced as such would not only make them suspect, but also prove impossible to refute, thus imbuing the other accusations with an aura of veracity. The second accusation serves as a reminder of the subservient nature of Christian mission in Tamil Nadu outside of Pondichéry. Though the Jesuits were the former employers of the accusers, it is not on the Jesuits' turf on which this battle was played out, but on the prince's. The accusations were meant to call attention to Bouchet's foreignness, in an attempt to establish that Bouchet must be removed from a place in which he did not belong. Martin was perhaps aware of the force of the first two accusations, since it is only the third one, the murder charge, which he explicitly refuted, calling it an "atrocious and ridiculous slander."⁸⁶

Bouchet's response to the rebellion was described by Martin as an incredible diplomatic coup. Bouchet had been living in Madurai since 1688, and knew how to go about pleading his case. He went to the prince and requested his protection, in what was judged by Martin to be an extraordinarily bold move: no missionaries had before dared to expose themselves to the prince, for fear that the tone of their skin would betray them as the Europeans whom the prince abhorred.⁸⁷ This suggests that the missionaries were convinced they managed to pass for non-Europeans and successfully present a false identity. Whether or not they were justified in this belief, the catechists' accusation, denouncing the Jesuits as *paranguis*, would be especially damaging in light of this conviction. Bouchet armed himself with gifts, which (perhaps unexpectedly) pointed explicitly to his foreignness and cosmopolitanism, curios which clearly marked him as a traveler. He came to court bearing both European creations and evidence of his travels in

⁸⁶ Ibid., vol. 6, 133.

⁸⁷ Ibid., vol. 6, 134.

the East: a large terrestrial globe on which the names of the regions were written in Tamil, a small cut-glass globe, some Chinese trinkets, bracelets of jade and silver, a chicken made of shells, mirrors, and other unspecified “curiosities.”⁸⁸ The gifts provoked much excitement at court: the prince summoned his astronomer, to confer with him about the wonders of the terrestrial globe, sent along the gifts to his grandmother the queen (Rani Mangammal) who was similarly delighted, and concluded that a man who could bring such gifts must have left his own country by choice.⁸⁹ Clearly, while being a stranger was a disadvantage, there were gradations of status even within this category, and here Bouchet’s evidence of his travels served as a marker of power.

Bouchet’s ability to ingratiate himself at court should not, however, be seen as the norm, and might have had more to do with his special familiarity with the region, which was not the case for Jesuits who depended more heavily on their catechists. This is indicated by the writings of his superior, Father Tachard, who admitted that his knowledge of Indian religious practice originated with reports given to him by Father Bouchet. Tachard conceded that residence in and travel throughout India did little to improve his knowledge of the place: “even though I lived for several years in Pondichéry on the Coromandel coast, in Balassor in Orissa and Ougouli in the kingdom of Bengal and in Surat, where religion and mores are almost the same, and I had several discussions with infidels about their religion,” he did not consider himself an expert on the topic. “I can honestly declare that I have gained very little solid and certain enlightenment.

⁸⁸ On the purchase of the terrestrial globe in the early modern imaginary in India, see Sumathi Ramaswamy, “Conceit of the Globe in Mughal Visual Practice,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no. 4 (2007): 751-782.

⁸⁹ Jesuits., *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des missions étrangères*, vol. 6, 139–140.

Because the gentiles who live along the coasts, where Europeans live, hide from us and disavow as much as they can their fables and superstitions.”⁹⁰

In a work reflecting on the iconic power of the English printed book in colonial discourse, Homi Bhabha introduces a Protestant catechist named Anund Messeh, who worked in a mission in North India early in the nineteenth century.⁹¹ In May of 1817 Anund Messeh met a large group of Indians, in an encounter recorded in *The Missionary Register* of the Church Missionary Society of London.

“He found about 500 people, men, women and children, seated under the shade of the trees, and employed, as had been related to him, in reading and conversation. He went up to an elderly looking man, and accosted him, and the following conversation passed.

‘Pray who are all these people? And whence come they?’ ‘We are poor and lowly, and we read and love this book.’ – ‘what is this book?’ ‘The book of God!’ – ‘let me look at it if you please.’ Anund, on opening the book, perceived it to be the Gospel of our Lord, translated into the Hindoostanee Tongue.”⁹²

Bhabha reads this encounter as a moment as one of several colonial instances when the English book attempts to take on a wondrous mantle of imperial authority. He dismisses Anund Messeh’s involvement in this process of British authority embodied in the Word of the book: it was, writes Bhabha, a “lifeless repetition of chapter and verse, his artless technique of translation, [one that] participate[s] in one of the most artful

⁹⁰ “Car quoi que j’ai demeuré quelques années à Ponticheri sur la côte de Coromandel, à Balassor dans l’Orixa et à Ougouli dans le Royaume de Bengale et à Surate où la religion et les mœurs sont presque les mêmes, et que j’y aye eu plusieurs entretiens avec ces infidèles sur leurs religion. Cependant j’avoue de bonne foi, que j’en ai tiré peu de lumières sûres et solides: parce que les gentils qui habitent sur les côtes de la mer où sont les Européens, nous cachent et désavouent même autant qu’ils peuvent leurs fables et leurs superstitions.” BNF, Manuscrits français 19030, f. 137 verso.

⁹¹ Homi K. Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817,” *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (October 1, 1985): 144-165. Bhabha introduces this Protestant character as “one of the earliest Indian characters,” but Catholic Indian catechists were employed in India for several hundred years prior to Anund Messeh’s tenure.

⁹² Quoted in *Ibid.*, 145.

technologies of colonial power.”⁹³ Perhaps, but I wish to draw attention to another moment in this encounter between the catechist Anund Messeh and the throng of readers he approaches. The catechist appeared before an unknown group and interrogated them. Not only did they answer willingly as to their beliefs, but they immediately passed into his hands an object they identified as both sacred and rare, a most holy book. The missionary account glosses over this astounding exchange: we hear Anund Messeh asking for the book, and in the next instant he is opening the volume and perusing its pages with familiarity. But we should not take this moment for granted, despite the missionary account’s naturalizing of it. For in this easy handing over of a precious and beloved book from the reader to the catechist is embodied an assumption of trust, familiarity and acceptance. It was this ability to ask and receive which was the most important asset that catechists could deploy on behalf of their missionary employers. I suggest that a similar familiar access was also an attribute of the commercial brokers employed by traders-officials of the *Compagnie des Indes*.

French traders and missionaries in India both undertook projects that required them to be mobile, if commerce and conversion were to succeed. But there was a significant gap between this articulated vision of imperial mobility and the realities of their limited ability to move through colonial space. Lacking reputation, credit, local ties or moral authority, French *colons* and missionaries often found it difficult to venture beyond Pondichéry, or to transform Pondichéry into the busy and Christian hub they envisioned. It was professional intermediaries who filled this gap between ambition and reality, traveling on behalf of their employers, inserting Pondichéry into pre-existing Indian Ocean networks, and using the connections and skills accrued in the course of

⁹³ Ibid., 148.

travel to bolster their position as stable figures of authority in the colonial landscape. So while colonial history has put forth an image of mobile European agents and static indigenous populations, this chapter has argued that Pondichéry's intermediaries enjoyed uncommon opportunities to journey between outposts of empire, and in the course of this crisscrossing they constituted the empire as a connected entity, a well-traversed map of overlaid European and Indian itineraries.

Chapter VII: Conclusion

“I also like to think of the archives as an eruption... they burst bounds, break out, overflow. They are caprice, whim, tragedy – neither endorsing nor affirming. They neither summarize nor smooth over conflict and tension. They ruffle the feathers of the real with their inopportune sorties and sallies. From this the historian must tease both sense and nonsense and, from all the loose ends, contradictions and observations, knit together a text – a rugged text – in which each incident is presented in its own terms.”¹

Arlette Farge, *Fragile Lives*

In the summer of 2008, a descendent of the eighteenth century commercial brokers Nayiniyappa and Ananda Ranga Pillai, gave me a tour of his property.² A businessman, Anandaranga Ravichandran lived with his family at the center of Pondichéry’s “Tamil Town,” adjacent to the city’s central market. The house was a simple, well-maintained structure, no different from the others on the street. But a door leading from the kitchen opened into a small backyard, where a portal into a family’s glorious past was opened: for there was an ancestral home, the now-dilapidated but still striking mansion built by Ananda Ranga Pillai, Nayiniyappa’s nephew and the chief broker to Governor Dupleix in the period 1747-1761. If approached from the parallel street, vestiges of the house’s former glory were more easily discernible, though muted

¹ Arlette Farge, *Fragile Lives: Violence, Power and Solidarity in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 5–6.

² Few historians of the eighteenth century are so fortunate as to meet the descendents of their research subjects. I am immensely grateful to Dr. Parasuraman of the Pondicherry Institute of Linguistics and Culture for making the introductions.

by the clutter of the market street (figure 7; The sign, in Tamil, identifies the building as “Ananda Ranga Pillai’s mansion,” viewed here from Pondichéry’s central market).



Figure 7: Ananda Ranga Pillai’s mansion.

When the British razed Pondichéry in 1761, bringing a definitive end to French aspirations in the region, few of the colony’s mansions survived. Ananda Ranga Pillai’s house, built in the 1730s, was saved since it was situated further from the coast, not within the grid of so-called “White Town.” The mansion’s architecture is a clear mix of Tamil and French styles, with heavily carved wooden pillars in the Tamil style surrounding the ground floor’s main space, and white columns supporting the second floor veranda, in the French manner. A portrait of Ananda Ranga Pillai hangs in a place of prominence, next to photographs of Ravichandran’s parents (he is descended from the dubash through his mother’s side). When I asked to take a picture of a golden statue of Ananda Ranga Pillai he had commissioned, Ravichandran proudly stood next to it, his

body as close as possible to the pedestal, head tilted toward his illustrious ancestor (figure 8).



Figure 8: A statue of Ananda Ranga Pillai.

Behind the statue, on a back wall, hangs an eighteenth-century portrait of Ananda Ranga Pillai, painted by an unknown artist. The portrait (below, figure 9, and also partially discernable in the photograph above) was recently reproduced in a lavishly illustrated volume about the history of the *Compagnie des Indes*. The caption in the volume notes merely that it is held in a “private collection,” obscuring the spatial and familial specificity of the portrait’s survival from the eighteenth century.



Figure 9: An Eighteenth-century portrait of Ananda Ranga Pillai.³

Although the mansion stands empty most of the time, it serves as a memorial of the influence once wielded in the colony by members of the Pillai family. A conference hosted by Pondichéry's French Institute, devoted to the diaries of Ananda Ranga Pillai, was once held in the empty building. Ravichandaran said he was now hoping to receive funds for the mansion's restoration, so that he could convert it into a boutique hotel, servicing Pondichéry's robust tourism industry. Meanwhile, exactly 300 years after Nayiniyappa was first appointed to a position of prominence in Pondichéry, the carefully guarded yet darkened mansion is a potent reminder of the family's former power, and the memorializing of that power by subsequent generations.

³ Reproduced in Philippe Haudrère, Gérard Le Bouëdec, and Louis Mézin, *Les compagnies des Indes*, [Nouv. éd.]. (Rennes [France]: Ouest France, 2001).

The Pulse of an Archive

Walking through the mansion, with its imposing golden statue presiding over empty rooms, it was easy to imagine it as a repository of sorts, an archive of material sources for a biography of colonial power, its unexpected forms, and ultimately its decline. In maintaining the mansion and keeping the memory of Ananda Ranga Pillai relevant for Pondichéry's present and future, the family was making a claim for its own historical significance. Such acts of archive creation and sustained concerns with the conditions of possibility for crafting historical narrative, as Penelope Papailias has compellingly argued, are not the sole purview of professional historians.⁴ Nor is this a particularly modern endeavor. Similar efforts at historical memorialization and concerns about documentary archives were also apparent in the eighteenth century, when the Pillai family first made its mark on Pondichéry.

In the course of the Nayiniyappa affair, one of the charges leveled by the Pillai family at Governor Hébert and his son concerned the destruction of Nayiniyappa's personal archive. "Never was there a Malabar," wrote Nayiniyappa's sons in one of their appeals, "who had his affairs in better order."⁵ However, when Nayiniyappa was first arrested in 1716, all of his papers were seized. This extensive personal archive and other documents related to the Nayiniyappa affair, all written in Tamil on palm leaves (*olai*, or *olles* in French archives), were then stored in Pondichéry's fort, which was located on the waterfront. The dampness in the air, claimed the sons, spoiled the palm leaves, rendering

⁴ Penelope Papailias, *Genres of Recollection: Archival Poetics and Modern Greece* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). A recent volume that offers reflections from historians on the strictures placed by various kinds of archives on the telling of tales by both professional and "lay" historians, and advocates for a broader understanding of what counts as an archive, is Antoinette Burton, *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005).

⁵ "jamais malabare n'a eu un meilleur ordre que lui dans ses affaires." CAOM, FM C² 71, f. 101 verso.

them illegible. Nayiniyappa's sons vividly described the transformation from the legibility that bestows credibility and authority, to the useless illegibility of the ruined archive: "today [these documents] are in a horrible state, all eaten up, desiccated, broken, resembling litter more than account books."⁶ Governor Hébert had claimed that the ledgers from Nayiniyappa's home proved financial malfeasance on the broker's part. But with the fragile *olles* disintegrating in the humid heat, whether by design or the simple incompetence of Frenchmen used to more durable paper, Nayiniyappa's sons were deprived of the historical documents that would bolster the story they were trying to advance.

The repeated complaints in the Nayiniyappa appeals of an archive rendered illegible through mishandling had, to be sure, a pragmatic basis. Without the ledgers documenting Nayiniyappa's business dealings, the accounts owed and transactions paid, his family would have been deprived of potential income, and the ability to continue doing business.⁷ But the outrage over the destruction of an archive, I suggest, is more fraught, more multivalent. The obliteration of the archive tragically mirrors the annihilation of the man; like his archive, Nayiniyappa himself was destroyed and stripped of his ability to tell convincing tales, imprisoned in the very same fort where his documents were ruined. The archive here is a potent symbol of both the past-oriented careful accumulation of accounts and connections, and the future-oriented loss of opportunities. By bemoaning the destruction of their familial archives, Nayiniyappa's

⁶ "elles sont aujourd'hui dans un état effroyable, toutes mangées, décasais, brisées, pourries et ressemblent plutôt de la litière qu'à des livres des comptes." CAOM, FM C² 71, f. 113-113 verso. The sons also complained about the destruction of their father's *olles* in another appeal, of 1719. CAOM, FM C² 71, f. 164 verso.

⁷ Indeed, as late as 1725 French authorities referenced the seizure of Nayiniyappa's papers as a complicating factor when trying to sort out some local business dealings. CAOM, FM C² 73, f. 210

sons were also voicing regret for losing the archive as a foundation on which to base their own telling of events, and as source material bolstering their own claims to power.

Governor Hébert and Nayiniyappa, over the evolution of the Nayiniyappa affair, more than once found themselves as unlikely twins, twirling on a fateful carousel that put one on top as the other was down. So it was also in the matter of personal archives. As the investigation shifted course and focused on Hébert as subject instead of prosecutor, the disgraced Governor made very similar claims about the importance of his stash of documents. For like Nayiniyappa, Hébert's personal papers were seized by French authorities in Pondichéry, when he was taken into custody in 1718. As he recalled in a letter dated January 14, 1718, Hébert withdrew to a private residence, where two employees of the *Compagnie des Indes* arrived "to seize all of my belongings and my papers."⁸ Hébert adamantly refused to hand over his papers, claiming that the request was both damaging and shaming.⁹ When Hébert provided information in his own defense, the material was examined by his former subalterns, but, he wrote, "all my arguments were ignored, all my requests were dismissed as frivolous."¹⁰ He realized "that I was in the hands of my cruelest enemies," and none of the information he supplied would make the slightest difference, nothing would stop his adversaries from "oppressing" him.¹¹ The same words could have been said by Nayiniyappa, a couple of years earlier. In fact, they were used by Nayiniyappa's sons. In another instance of uncanny doubling and sonic

⁸ CAOM, FM C² 71, f. 255.

⁹ The officials of the *Compagnie des Indes* also sent a report to Paris in 1718, complaining about Hébert's refusal to hand over his papers. CAOM, FM C² 71, f. 19

¹⁰ CAOM, FM C² 71, f. 255 verso.

¹¹ Hébert was referring here mainly to his rival Prévostière, who replaced him as Governor. CAOM, FM C² 71, f. 255 verso.

reverberation, Hébert seems to be directly echoing the sons, who accused the Jesuits of “oppressing” their father.¹²

Hébert was then subjected to the same fate as Nayiniyappa was before him: “On the 15th of December, as I was returning from mass, I was taken from my house, dragged through the streets of Pondichéry, and taken by a troop of soldiers as if I were a scoundrel and a villain, and confined in a small prison alongside my son.”¹³ Hébert’s personal papers, which he had previously refused to surrender, were taken from his house and brought to the fort, along with all of his son’s papers.¹⁴ “Among my papers was a journal that I had kept, day by day,” wrote Hébert, in a moment of easy-to-identify-with writerly vulnerability. “This [journal] was a secret thing, it might as well have been my confession... no one had ever seen this journal, not even my son, and it should never have been revealed. Everyone knows that such things are sacred.” Yet the contents of the journal were made public, and the contents – unfortunately not preserved – were enough to turn Hébert’s former colleagues against him.¹⁵

On the day of his departure from India, ignobly removed in shackles from the town he had so recently ruled, Hébert made sure to deposit a copy of a written appeal in the Pondichéry *greffe* (court clerk’s office), insuring that a paper trail proclaiming his

¹² CAOM, FM C² 71, f. 117 verso.

¹³ “Le 15 décembre, comme je m’en revenais de la messe, on m’enleva de chez moi, je fus trainé par les rues de Pondichéry et conduit au milieu d’une troupe de soldats, comme un scélérat et un bandit, and confine dans une étroite prison.” CAOM, FM C² 71, f. 256.

¹⁴ CAOM, FM C² 71, f. 258.

¹⁵ “parmi mes papiers était un journal que je faisait jour par jour. C’était une chose aussi secrète que se pourrait être ma propre confession, je m’y expliquais en des termes peu avantageux de S. de la Prévostière et de plusieurs autres personnes dont quelques-uns des commissaires se trouvaient du nombre. Ce journal n’avait jamais été vu de quoique ce soit, pas même de mon fils, et il ne devait jamais voir le jour. Personne n’ignore que c’est une chose sacrée. Et tout homme qui fait profession de quelque probité se fait un scrupule de communiquer ce qu’il peut y avoir dans de tels écrits. Voici le trait le plus sanglant d’inimitié qui soit au monde, ce journal fut rendu public malgré la précaution que j’eus d’envoyer prier le s. de la Prévostière par des personnes respectables par leur âge et leur caractère de me le rendre ou de le bruler. Il est aisé de juger de l’effet que put produire sur certaines personnes les passages de mon journal qui pouvaient les toucher.” CAOM, FM C² 71, f. 256 verso.

innocence would remain in the colonial archive even after he was gone.¹⁶ A year later, in 1719, while he was held as a prisoner in Brittany after his removal from India, Hébert was still complaining about the seizure of his papers in Pondichéry, writing that the papers were taken from him at precisely the moment in which he most desperately needed them, if he was to defend himself successfully.¹⁷

Moving quickly between his outrage that some of his written claims were denied, and others wrested from him without permission, Hébert posed here a formulation of private archives as complex and multifaceted creations: some documents must be made public, yet their veracity is denied; others must remain private or be desecrated. In either case, the writing is the measure of the man.

With his multiple, lengthy appeals, preserved then and today alongside Nayiniyappa's calls for justice, Hébert was actively trying to create a documentary archive that would cast him – and not Nayiniyappa – in the role of both hero and victim. Historians have largely turned a deaf ear to the clamoring of Hébert's paper trail, preferring the version of events presented by Nayiniyappa and his supporters. Yet for both Hébert and Nayiniyappa, a personal collection of documents was conceptualized as the bedrock on which a truthful story could be mounted. For both men, this carefully curated body of texts was rendered ineffectual through the destruction, seizure, or denial of documents.

There does not exist, in France or in India, a formally constituted and indexed archival collection devoted to the unfolding of the Nayiniyappa affair. But as the discussion above suggests, the principle actors most affected by it actively tried to create

¹⁶ CAOM, FM C² 71, f. 262.

¹⁷ CAOM, FM C² 71, f. 262

and preserve such an archive. Their narrative efforts were so ambitious, coherent and passionate, that a more general story of Pondichéry in the early eighteenth century could be gleaned from this broadly distributed archive. While we tend to think of the creation and curation of archives as an act both institutional and metropolitan, Hébert and Nayiniyappa remind us, once again, of the intentional and often-successful agency of individuals in the colony. In reading the yearly records of the *Compagnie des Indes*, as well as the archive of the *Missions étrangères des Paris*, the Nayiniyappa affair emerges as a defining event of the period, the throbbing center of what Ann Stoler has termed “the pulse of the archive.”¹⁸ In constructing an account of the colony from the details of the Nayiniyappa affair, as I have done in the preceding chapters, I have tried to tell a history in the *courte durée* register: within the temporally concise framework of the Nayiniyappa affair, an elaborate, expansive and complicated webbing of affinities, commitments, animosities, rivalries and ideologies of French traders, missionaries, and the Tamil intermediaries they employed can be discerned. In addition, this dissertation’s close attention to the Nayiniyappa affair stems from a conviction that an interpretation of large-scale historical processes – an account of empire, transnational commerce, global projects of religious conversion – must still make room for the human-scaled experiences of vengeance, remorse, pain, loyalty, and love.

I have suggested that the work of intermediaries in general, and the ruckus over the Nayiniyappa affair specifically, allows us to expose and understand the internal divisions between the French projects of commerce and conversion in the context of colonial governance, and the extent to which these divisions defined the French overseas

¹⁸ Ann L. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

project in India in the first decades of the eighteenth century. The Introduction and Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrated that French traders and missionaries in South Asia were advancing projects that were conceived – in both metropole and colony – as being mutually dependant and cooperative. And yet, despite this symbiosis, the two projects were also often at cross-purposes, and representatives of commercial and religious projects at times pursued radically different agendas and means. This is vividly demonstrated by traders' and missionaries' responses to both the employee uprisings of 1701-1715 and the Nayiniyappa affair: the entangled imperial project was straining at the seams, ridden with contradictory ideologies and methods of pursuing success. At these moments of conflict, in interactions with Tamil employees and especially with professional intermediaries like the brokers Nayiniyappa and Pedro, the interpreter Manuel, the catechists Moutiappa and Ajarapen, and others like them, traders-officials and missionaries were forced to articulate their not-always compatible visions of French authority in India. By revealing the repeated conflicts among and between agents of the State, the *Compagnie des Indes*, and God, this dissertation has shown how early imperial formations could never fully achieve hegemonic authority, fracturing instead into factions and foes, and resulting in what I have termed distributed authority. By showing how these conflicts were articulated through and with colonial intermediaries, this project has also attempted to sketch a map of a colonial town that does not assume the colony's periphery, but places it at the center of the field.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 offered different entries into a discussion of internal French conflict between trade and mission and the role of local intermediaries. They collectively argued that semiotic instability, understood as a defining feature of colonial contact zones,

helps explain the crucial roles played by professional intermediaries in Pondichéry. Family, language, and mobility were all realms in which local and regional praxis and semiosis undergirded – and at times countermanded – imported forms and methods of authority. While French traders and missionaries, in particular the Jesuits, did not agree on the desirability of their reliance on local intermediaries and local forms, they were nevertheless similarly dependant on these intermediaries. The issue of archives briefly discussed above, their seizure, preservation and political efficacy, might have had a similar valence. The archive is a device for articulating and communicating memory. The competing archives of Hébert and Nayiniyappa relied on different semiotic systems and practices – French and Tamil, paper and palm leaves – yet both are constantly referring to one another, claiming authority in relation to the other.

Michael Dietler, in his archeological study of Iron age Massalia (today's Marseille), accuses historians of the colonial world of temporal myopia, focusing exclusively on the colonial modern to the exclusion of other, more ancient forms of encounter, exchange, and dominance.¹⁹ Not as extreme but nevertheless present is a geographical myopia, or at least a squint, that has designated some colonial locales as marginal, secondary, or insignificant. This has been, to a large extent, the historiographical fate of French presence in India, long overshadowed by the looming giant of the British Raj on the one hand, and French experiences in the Antilles on the other. Historians of French India have themselves contributed to this marginalization, by keeping alive the trope of failure, so common in accounts of French empire in Asia: it is a

¹⁹ Michael Dietler, *Archaeologies of Colonialism: Consumption, Entanglement, and Violence in Ancient Mediterranean France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

project that has repeatedly been described as a failed one.²⁰ Yet the dyad of “success” and “failure”, as it has been used to refer to French India, assumes that an empire *means* achieving hegemonic power. If that alone serves as the yardstick by which empire is measured and evaluated, the South Asian example would indeed be judged a failure. But moving beyond the trope of failure would entail a more complex vision of how colonists and local inhabitants can interact in a variety of power dynamics, where influence and authority may shift unexpectedly from one group to the other. If we move beyond failure, it becomes possible to uncover that which is made secret by a narrative of hegemony. But if the only acceptable binaries are success and failure, the powerful and powerless, the texture of life in a colonial city is flattened out. Yet the fact that Pondichéry’s history was not narrated as a success makes it easier to glimpse imperial fault lines, and identify moments when hegemony was elusive, perhaps unimaginable.

²⁰ Historical accounts that refer to the supposed “failure” of French empire in India abound. See for example Kaepelin, *La Compagnie des Indes Orientales et François Martin*, 1. Ray, *The merchant and the state: the French in India, 1666-1739*. Haudrère, *Les compagnies des Indes orientales*, 70–71. Manning, *Fortunes a Faire*, xiii. M. Smithies, *A Resounding Failure: Martin and the French in Siam, 1672-1693* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1998). For a recent work that aims to implicitly trouble the trope of failure, arguing for a strong post-1763 French trade in South India, see A. Sinha, *The Politics of Trade: Anglo-French Commerce on the Coromandel Coast 1763-1793* (Manohar Publ., 2002).

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